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Title

Dual-earner Parent Couples' Work and Care during COVID-19

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Abstract

COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns meant many working parents were faced with doing paid work and family care at home simultaneously. To investigate how they managed, this paper draws a subsample of parents in dual earner couples (n=1,536) from a national survey of 2,722 Australian men and women conducted during lockdown in May 2020. It asked how much time respondents spent in paid and unpaid labour, including both active and supervisory care, and about their satisfaction with work-family balance and how their partner shared the load. Overall, paid work time was slightly lower, and unpaid work time was very much higher, during lockdown than before it. These time changes were most for mothers, but gender gaps somewhat narrowed because the relative increase in childcare was higher for fathers. More mothers than fathers were dissatisfied with their work-family balance and partner's share before COVID-19. For some the pandemic improved satisfaction levels, but for most they became worse. Again, some gender differences narrowed, mainly because more fathers also felt negatively during lockdown than they had before.

Keywords

COVID-19, Coronavirus, care, dual-earner couples, unpaid labour, gender equality

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the physical distancing and isolation measures enacted to contain it, profoundly affected both how people spent their time, and where they spent it. School closures and health fears increased the need for family care, and workplace lockdowns saw hundreds of thousands of people switch to working from home. This significantly blurred the temporal and spatial boundaries between paid work and caring for others.

Finding time for both paid work and family care is a significant challenge for contemporary households. The time demands are particularly pressing upon mothers who wish to maintain their attachment to paid work while their children are young (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Many parents are dissatisfied with the balance between their work and family lives but it is especially problematic for women (Craig & Brown 2017). The growth in women's employment was widely expected to have a corresponding effect on men's unpaid work (Bergmann, 2005). However, for reasons including inflexible workplace expectations and persistent masculine gender norms, most men still prioritize employment over home duties (Gornick & Meyers, 2009), and progress towards gender equality in paid and unpaid labour has been very gradual (Gershuny, Sullivan & Robinson, 2017). On average, men have increased the time they spend on housework only marginally and while fathers are spending more time on childcare, mothers still spend two to three times more daily time with children than fathers (Craig & Brown 2017).

Balancing work and family can be assisted by government and workplace policies such as subsidized childcare, paid maternity and paternity leave, the right to request part time work, flexible working hours and, centrally relevantly to this paper, options to work from home (Crompton, 2006; Lewis, 2009). However, many parents do not have access to 'family-

friendly' workplace measures, and even when they are formally available, there may be unwritten sanctions against accessing them, particularly for men (Bittman et al., 2004; Gregory and Milner, 2009). Men may be reluctant to take up family-friendly provisions in case they are regarded as uncommitted to their work (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2003). Reflecting longstanding role expectations of mothers as caregivers and fathers as breadwinners, it is usually mothers, not fathers, who adjust their work patterns to meet the care needs of the family (Ranson, 2012; Warren et al., 2009).

The COVID-19 restrictions temporarily removed a gendered fault line in external constraint, by requiring men and women alike to stay home, even if they were still employed. So, what happens when the spatial organization of paid work and unpaid domestic work and care is not so different for mother and fathers? This paper reports early results of a survey (N=2,772), conducted between 7th and 30th May 2020, on how COVID-19 affected paid work, domestic work and care in Australian households. The survey investigated how gender differences in objective time spent to these activities, and in subjective feelings about it, changed due to the pandemic.

As context for the survey findings, we first give a brief overview of the Australian response to COVID-19, and previous gendered patterns in working from home in Australia.

Australian experience and government response to COVID-19

Australia had a swift and aggressive government response to COVID-19. There were national and state border closures, and strict workplace lockdowns, which were supported with government income maintenance for many whose jobs were lost or threatened. Altogether, the government announced support packages amounting to over 10% of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Eligibility criteria for unemployment benefits were relaxed, and

the payment level to recipients doubled to $1100 a fortnight. A wage subsidy program to pay employers $1500 a fortnight for each employee they kept on the payroll was implemented. When it became apparent that many essential frontline workers were women who would be unable to work without childcare, formal childcare was made temporarily free to parents, through adjustments to the payment system such that services received a weekly 'business continuity payment' from the government (Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2020). This was a remarkable intervention, because Australian childcare is usually very costly; it is amongst the most expensive in the world, nearly five time the European average (Adamson & Brennan, 2017).

From late January 2020, COVID cases initially grew sharply. However, due to the closures and physical distancing measures, they levelled out at about 350 per day by late March, fell to under 20 cases per day by late April, and to fewer than 10 cases a day through May. As of 30 May, 7184 cases and 102 deaths had been reported in Australia. The relatively early strict lockdown has so far contained the spread of the disease. At the same time, economic impacts have been large, and early indications are that women have been the most affected in both job loss and reduced hours (ABS, 2020). Unemployment is at eight percent, and expected to go higher, and GDP is expected to fall by at least seven percent.

Working at home in Australia

The dominant work-family arrangement in heterosexual Australian households is that the male partner works full time and the female partner works part time (1 ½ earner family model). Childcare is expensive, and organizational work-family supports are thin (Adamson & Brennan, 2017). To balance work and family demands, most Australian women limit their paid work hours and move in and out of the workforce as family care needs change (Craig & Mullan 2009). Women are disproportionately likely to be employed in 'casual' jobs without

benefits such as sick and annual leave, to work variable and insecure hours and to be in positions which underutilize their education and skill levels (Charlesworth & MacDonald. 2015). Some seek to meet the challenges by becoming self-employed, often explicitly so they can work from home and care for children more flexibly (Foley et al., 2018).

Consistent with this work-family context, prior to COVID-19 the profile of at-home workers in Australia was gendered, with women more likely than men to work at home regularly (Powell & Craig 2015). It was most common amongst public sector employees, professionals, the tertiary educated and mothers with dependent children. For both men and women, working at home was associated with higher subjective time stress and did not facilitate better work-life balance in the sense of increasing time in leisure and personal activities (Powell & Craig 2015). For women, working at home was associated with less paid work and more domestic work and care, amounting to a higher workload overall. It also involved more multitasking, with many women blurring the boundaries between employment and family demands by performing paid work whilst supervising children at the same time. In contrast, men working at home did not do fewer paid work hours, more unpaid work or more multitasking than men working outside the home. They maintained more distinct boundaries between employment and domestic activities than home-working women did (Powell & Craig 2015). The implication is that women were motivated to work from home to maximize their care time, but that this was not the case for men.

Summary

Under COVID-19, working at home has spiked due to an abrupt external shock. The period of sudden state-supported lockdown provides a rare view of what happens when longstanding external constraints on how and where men and women work are removed. We take this opportunity to find out how the disruption has affected gender patterns in both time allocation

and in subjective feelings about it. We focus on dual earner couples with children, because this is the most time stressed demographic group (Jacobs and Gerson 2004), for whom work-family balance is a particularly major challenge.

Approach and method

To measure the impact of COVID-19 we developed the *Work and Care in the Time of COVID-19* survey, which was fielded over a three-week period during lockdown, from 7 May to 30 May 2020. We collected 2,722 responses from Australian residents. The survey asked respondents for demographic information, and about change in their employment arrangements, including their work status and work location before and after the advent of COVID-19. To examine how COVID-19 impacted parents in dual-earner couples, we restricted the sample to employed, partnered men and women with children under the age of 17 (n=1,536). See Table A1 for a sample description.

To capture time allocation, respondents were asked how many hours per day they spent in 1) paid work, 2) care of children, the elderly, sick and/or those living with a disability, and 3) housework and household management. Because care is often multitasked, and its magnitude is underestimated if simultaneous activity is overlooked (Craig 2006) we asked about both active and supervisory care. *Active care* was defined as 'hands-on activities such as bathing, feeding, dressing, teaching, playing, soothing, taking people to appointments, and similar activities where you are interacting directly with the other person.' *Supervisory care* was defined as 'time when you are not interacting with the person being cared for but are responsible for them and "on-call" should active care be needed. In other words, if you had to go somewhere else, you would need to get someone to fill in for you'. *Housework* included activities like cooking, cleaning, repairs and maintenance, shopping, lawn and garden care

and laundry, and *household management* activities like scheduling, planning, making shopping lists, and paying bills.

To capture subjective feelings about time allocation, respondents were asked a series of questions including *'how often do you feel rushed or pressed for time?'* with responses on a five-point Likert scale, from 'always' to 'never'. Respondents were also asked about '*how satisfied are you with how you divide your time between paid and unpaid work?'* and '*how satisfied are you with how you and your partner share housework and unpaid care?"*. Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale from 'extremely dissatisfied' to 'extremely satisfied'. We also asked respondents '*do you think you did your fair share of housework and unpaid care?'* with response categories ranging from 'much more than my fair share' to 'much less than my fair share'. All questions were asked first in relation to before the COVID-19-related restrictions were imposed, and then regarding the time while the restrictions were in place.

We present descriptive results for these measures. Results are weighted using estimates from the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics' Census of Population and Housing to be representative of Australian men and women based on age, sex and highest level of education. On the reports of time we conducted t-tests to determine whether gender differences were statistically significant before and during COVID. For the other variables we used chi-square tests of independence to see if there were significant gender differences before and during COVID-19.

Results

Table 1 shows the work status and location of fathers and mothers who had been employed before COVID-19 and whether they were different during the restrictions. We also asked them to report on their partner's employment details. There was no significant gender difference in having the same job either before and after COVID-19. About 92 percent of both fathers and mothers kept the same position, with less than ten percent of each gender losing their job, being stood down or finding work elsewhere. This was largely the same for their partners, although the figures were slightly higher for partners remaining in the same job since COVID-19 began.

Consistent with the dominant Australian pattern, there was a significant gender difference in full or part time status both before and during the pandemic. Before COVID-19, 84 percent of fathers and 49 percent of mothers were employed fulltime; conversely, 16 percent of fathers and 51 percent of mothers were employed part time. These gender differences narrowed during COVID, however, largely due to change amongst fathers. The proportion of fathers employed full-time was about 11 percentage points lower, and the proportion of fathers employed part time about 11 percentage points higher, during the pandemic. There was little change for mothers, suggesting that overall more jobs became part time. Fathers' and mothers' reports of their partner's employment status before and during COVID-19 largely mirrored their own changes in employment status over the period (see Table 1). The drops in hours were reflected in earnings. Fathers' average reported earnings were about $100 dollars per week less, and mothers' average reported earnings were about $75 dollars per week less, during the lockdown than they had been before.

Table 1 here

There were fewer gender differences in the location of work, particularly pre-COVID. Before COVID-19, 68 percent of fathers and 64 percent of mothers worked at a workplace away from home. There was a slightly higher proportion of mothers than fathers who worked at home (6% vs 4%), or both at home and away, than fathers (30% vs 28%). During COVID-19 most respondents were working at home. There were slightly more fathers than mothers doing so (72% vs 69%), but gender-similar proportions were working away from home (12%), or both at home and away from home (12-13%). Respondents reports of their partner's work location indicate that about 70 and 77 percent of fathers and mothers' partners respectively worked away from home before COVID-19. During COVID-19 almost two-thirds of fathers' partners were working from home compared to just 54 percent of mothers' partners. However, overall, most respondents were in households in which both they and their partner had gone out to work before the pandemic but were both working at home during it.

Time in paid and unpaid work before and during COVID-19

Against this background of moderate change in employment status and earnings, but substantial change in work location, we examined respondents' time allocation to paid and unpaid work activities (see Table 2). T-tests show significant differences between fathers and mothers.

Pre-COVID-19, fathers in dual-earner couples averaged more daily paid work hours than mothers in dual-earner couples (7.14 vs 6.62 hours, p. <.001). At the time of being surveyed, average work hours had gone down by 7.8 percent for fathers and 8.5 percent for mothers to 6.58 and 6.06 hours (p. <.001), respectively. Women spent significantly more daily hours in housework and household management than men (2.13 vs 1.66 hours, p. <.001) before

COVID-19-related restrictions. During lockdown, daily time in housework and household management was about 45 minutes higher for men and almost an hour higher for women. Notwithstanding that both fathers and mothers were doing more housework and household management, the relative gender gap in these activities remained constant at 22 percent across the period.

Table 2 here

Before COVID-19, mothers averaged 3.41 daily hours in active care of children compared to 2.21 daily hours for fathers. This difference was significant at the one-percent level and indicates that prior to COVID-19 restrictions being in place, the gender gap was about 54 percent. This decreased to 40 percent during COVID-19 because fathers' hours went up by 64 percent (to 3.64 hours per day) whereas mothers increased theirs by 50 percent (to 5.13 hours per day). On average, fathers and mothers spent similar, small amounts of time caring for others and the elderly before COVID-19. However, during COVID-19 fathers spent less time caring for the elderly and mothers spent more. Both fathers and mothers' average active care for someone who was sick or living with a disability rose slightly, from 0.14 to 0.21 hours per day.

Prior to COVID-19-related restrictions, mothers' average daily time allocation to housework and household management and active care combined was about 1 hour and 40 minutes more than fathers' (5.78 vs 4.09 hours per day, p. <.001). During the restrictions, mothers' combined time in these activities had increased by 2.8 hours to 8.58 hours per day, a rise of 48 percent. Fathers' reported increases in these activities combined to 2.2 hours per day, taking them to 6.28 hours per day, a rise of 53 percent. Thus, before COVID mothers were spending around about 1.7 hours more than men on these activities together, and during the lockdown this had increased to 2.3 hours per day. However, the *relative* gender gap narrowed

from 41 to 36 percent, largely because during COVID-19 fathers' active care for children was 64 percent higher than it had been before, compared to only a 50 percent increase by mothers.

As was the case for active care, prior to COVID-19 related restrictions, mothers spent more daily hours supervising children than men did (3.08 vs 1.88, p. <.001). This amounted to a gender gap of around 63 percent, which decreased to 44 percent during COVID-19, because the relative increase was about 72 percent for fathers compared to about 52 percent mothers. Fathers and mothers spent similar amounts of time providing supervisory care for the elderly, sick and disabled prior to COVID-19. There were small increases in fathers' and mothers' supervisory care of the elderly and sick or those living with disability during COVID-19, with mothers' increases relatively higher.

Prior to COVID-19, mothers spent 3.32 hours per day on supervisory care activities combined, significantly longer than fathers did (2.12 hours per day). During the lockdown, mothers' time in secondary activities was up 1.71 hours and fathers' time in supervisory care up 1.42 hours. This amounted to a 40 percent increase in supervisory activities by fathers, compared to a 34 percent increase by mothers. Again, although the absolute time increase was higher for mothers, the relative increase was higher for fathers. Thus, the gender gap in combined supervisory activities narrowed, from 56 percent to 42 percent.

In summary, during the pandemic respondents were averaging slightly less paid work, and substantially more unpaid work, than they had been prior to it. Absolute time increases in unpaid work were higher for mothers. However, compared to before COVID-19, the increases in childcare (though not housework/household management) were proportionally higher for fathers, which narrowed relative gender differences in care. We now explore whether these changes were reflected in respondents' subjective feelings about how they and their partners spent their time.

Subjective feelings about time allocation before and during COVID-19

In Table 2, Chi-square tests indicate that differences between fathers and mothers on all the subjective measures were statistically significant at the less than one-percent level. There were also substantial differences before and after the COVID-19 restrictions, with some contrasting patterns for fathers and mothers.

First, results indicate the COVID-related changes were associated with narrowed gender gaps in time stress. Just over 11 percent of fathers 'always' felt rushed before COVID-19, compared to almost 24 percent during the restrictions. Before COVID-19 almost 23 percent of mothers always felt rushed and this increased slightly to almost 27 percent during COVID-19. This indicates that for a significant subset of women, extreme time pressure remained constant regardless of the pandemic-related restrictions, and that for many fathers, extreme time pressure increased. As a result, the difference between men and women who always felt rushed closed from 11 to three percentage points during COVID-19.

However, for most respondents, subjective time pressure lessened. There was a significant drop of 27 points in the proportion of mothers who 'often' felt rushed, going from just over 51 percent pre-COVID to around 24 percent during the restrictions. The proportion of fathers who often felt rushed also decreased (by 17 points). The result is that during COVID-19 there was a greater similarity in the proportion of fathers and mothers who 'often' felt rushed or pressed for time. Pre-COVID, fathers were 12 points more likely to report 'sometimes' feeling rushed than mothers. During COVID, there was more gender similarity in feeling sometimes rushed (27-28% for both mothers and fathers). Correspondingly, we observed an increase in those who 'seldom' or 'never' felt rushed, particularly for mothers, for whom the proportion in these categories was 10 times higher during COVID than prior to it (2.1% vs

21%). As a result, the gender difference narrowed from over 10 points pre-COVID to four points during the restrictions.

Taken together, the results suggest that a substantial proportion of mothers, especially, were relieved of time pressure during COVID-19, generating greater equality between fathers and mothers in this regard. Post-hoc analysis showed that many of the mothers who were less time stressed during COVID-19 were working from away from home at a workplace while their partner was working from home. This suggests leaving the house to work lessened mothers' time pressure by allowing them to concentrate on their job and that, conversely, more fathers than before experienced the stress of juggling and/or multitasking paid work and unpaid care.

Table 3 here

Around three percent of fathers and just over five percent of mothers reported that before COVID-19 they were 'extremely' dissatisfied with how they divided their time between paid and unpaid work, compared to 11 and 24 percent, respectively, during the pandemic. The gender gap widened on this measure due to the much higher rise for mothers than fathers. There were also increases in the percentage of fathers who reported feeling 'somewhat' dissatisfied, moving from 27.6 percent before COVID-19 to 33.5 percent during, while conversely the proportion of mothers who reported feeling 'somewhat' dissatisfied decreased from 38 to 33 percent. This narrowed the gender difference in this measure. Overall, the proportion of fathers who reported being 'extremely' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied increased by 12 percentage points from 31 percent before COVID-19 to 43 percent during the restrictions. Across the two categories, mothers reported a similar increase of 14 points. As a result, the gap between fathers and mothers who reported feeling either 'extremely' or 'somewhat' dissatisfied remained substantial at between 10-12 percentage points over the period.

At the other end of the scale, we found that before COVID-19, almost 44 percent of fathers and 41 percent of mothers had been ‘extremely’ or ‘somewhat’ satisfied with how they divided their time between paid and unpaid work. During the restrictions, the proportions of fathers and mothers across these categories fell to 38 and 30 percent, respectively. Overall, results suggest the pandemic restrictions substantially decreased satisfaction with how people divided their time between paid and unpaid work, but did so most for mothers, and did not ameliorate pre-existing gender gaps.

Respondents were also asked about whether they felt they did their fair share of housework and unpaid care. Before COVID-19, there were significant gender gaps: 59 percent of mothers reported doing ‘much more’ or ‘more’ than their fair share compared with about 11 percent of fathers who reported the same, a gap of 48 percentage points. During COVID-19 this narrowed to 27 points because the proportion of fathers reporting doing ‘much more’ or ‘more’ than their fair share rose (14 points) while the proportion of mothers reporting the same fell (7 points). Notably, the proportion of mothers reporting that they were doing ‘much more’ went up much more for mothers (14 points) than for fathers (2 points). As a result, a third of mothers felt like they were doing ‘much more’ than their fair share of housework and unpaid care during COVID-19 and the gender difference had widened from 18 to 28 points. Fathers and mothers reporting doing their fair share remained steady and there was a nine-point drop in the proportion of fathers reporting doing less than their fair share, which narrowed the gender gap on this measure.

Doing more than one’s fair share may not in itself be a problem for people (Baxter 2002), so we also asked respondents how *satisfied* they were with how they shared their housework and unpaid care with their partner. Before the pandemic, just over 13 percent of fathers reported feeling somewhat dissatisfied and none reported feeling extremely dissatisfied. In contrast, 37

percent of mothers reported feeling somewhat dissatisfied and a further nine percent reported feeling extremely dissatisfied. This amounted to 46 percent of mothers, and there was thus a very wide pre-existing gender gap of around 30 points in those expressing dissatisfaction with partner's shares. The gender gap was similar during the lockdown, but the balance between the two sub-categories had changed. More fathers felt 'somewhat' dissatisfied (up 13 points) and fewer mothers felt the same (down five points). However, the proportion of mothers reporting they were 'extremely' dissatisfied almost doubled from nine to 18 percent. Overall, the results suggest that both fathers and mothers were more dissatisfied with how they shared housework and unpaid care with their partner during COVID-19, but the dissatisfaction was much more extreme amongst women, from a much higher base to start with. During the pandemic more than half the mothers felt either extremely or somewhat dissatisfied with their partner's share, compared to 21 percent of fathers.

Discussion

This paper drew on results of an online survey fielded in May 2020, to probe how COVID-19, and the restrictions requiring people to stay at home, affected paid work, unpaid domestic work and care in Australian households. Even in dual earner households, before the pandemic Australian fathers were much less likely than Australian mothers to take the major responsibility for housework and care in the home (Craig and Powell 2012). By mandating that people work at home unless employed in an essential service, the lockdown and restrictions temporarily removed an important and longstanding spatial constraint on men's domestic participation, potentially facilitating more gender-equal divisions of labour. We examined whether either gender differences in objective time spent in paid and unpaid work, or in subjective feelings about it, changed due to the pandemic.

As expected, there was significant disruption to work patterns during COVID-19. Both fathers and mothers were much more likely to be working from home during the lockdown. Relatively few respondents had lost their jobs, but some had been stood down and a significant minority of fathers had transitioned from full to part time status. Respondents were averaging slightly less time in paid work, and earnings had dropped, suggesting pay cuts commensurate with shorter or lost hours (see Table 1). Most respondents' partners were also working from home, suggesting that the most common experience amongst our sample was both partners doing so. Unsurprisingly with more people at home, the burden of unpaid work across households was significantly higher during the lockdown. This was the case for both fathers and mothers. Across the board, there was an increase in unpaid domestic work and care, that added substantially to household workload overall. In addition to more people at home creating more housework, amongst our sample the purchase of domestic services such as cleaning, laundry and childcare had plummeted (results available on request). Against this backdrop, our results indicate a substantial transfer of productive labour from the paid sector back to households.

In combination, active care and housework/household management rose by just over an hour and a half for fathers and by two hours and thirty minutes for mothers. If supervisory care (usually multitasked as 'secondary activity' while doing something else at the same time) is taken account of, men's daily unpaid work effort rose by over three and a half hours, and women's daily unpaid work effort rose by over four and a half hours a day. Prior research on working at home in Australia found that for women, but not men, home-working was associated with more multitasking, and more domestic work and care, amounting to a higher workload overall (Powell and Craig 2015). The current results suggest that during the pandemic, both fathers and mothers experienced these effects. This is unsurprising when so

many couples' work and care was now concentrated into the same place at the same time, with many trying to do both at once.

Absolute increases in unpaid labour were higher for mothers than for fathers, but compared to their average input prior to the pandemic, the proportional differences were higher for fathers. This narrowed *relative* gender differences in care time. Thus, during COVID-19, Australian fathers significantly narrowed the gender gaps in both active and in supervisory care of children. Notably, however, gender gaps in housework and household management remained over the period of analysis and thus did not become relatively more equal. The implication is that men prefer to increase their time with children than to increase their shares of housework and household management, likely because the former is more rewarding than the latter. The result is consistent with long term trends worldwide, which find that men's time in childcare has grown more substantially than their time in housework (Gershuny et.al, 2017). Mothers retained even more disproportionate responsibility for the often more boring and burdensome tasks of housework and household management (Craig 2016) than they did for care.

Also, the relative increase in men's care time was enough to narrow the gender gaps, but not to remove them. This ongoing absolute difference, as well as the sustained relative disparity in housework and household management, may explain why the same proportion of mothers (around 25 percent) always felt rushed both before and during the pandemic. Notable, however, was that during COVID-19 more fathers also felt similarly to women on this measure, suggesting that for some, their increased involvement in unpaid work was resulting in subjective time strain to match that felt by mothers.

However, for most respondents, subjective time pressure was lower during the pandemic than it was before. A substantial proportion of women, especially, reported less time pressure during COVID-19, and there was much greater equality between men and women on this

measure than before the pandemic. This is likely at least partly because external schedules for work, school and commuting were relaxed, so some parents could be more flexible in how they managed their time. 'Normally', time stress on working parents arises not only from how much they do, but also from when it must be done (Craig & Powell 2013). For many employed mothers, particularly, the morning and early evenings were narrow time window at each end of their paid working day, into which time-critical unpaid work activities had to be concentrated. For example, the deadline-filled time crunch of the evening 'family rush hour' involved leaving work, picking up children from school or day care, cooking dinner, helping children with homework, bathing, feeding and readying them for bed (Craig & Brown 2017). Rigid schedules are an additional time stressor, and our results suggest that for most parents, and particularly mothers, during the lockdown external constraints were looser. So notwithstanding higher overall workloads, and doing more activities at the same time, feelings of being rushed broadly fell. Going forward, lower time stress could continue if workplaces allow more employees to continue to work more flexibly from home.

Notwithstanding the lower time pressure, however, both more fathers and more mothers were dissatisfied with the way they divided their time between paid and unpaid work during the lockdown than they had been before. This is more consistent with the higher unpaid workloads they were taking on and with having to do more simultaneously, like supervising children while trying to work. However, there were gender contrasts in how this influenced their perceptions of fairness and satisfaction with their partner's contribution. Many more men reported doing 'much more' or 'more' than their fair share of housework/management and unpaid care during COVID-19, compared to very few thinking so before the pandemic. At the same time, there was an even bigger rise in women feeling this way, from a very much higher pre-COVID-19 base. Consistent with this, dissatisfaction with how housework and unpaid care was shared with their partners went up for fathers from a very low base, but went

up more for mothers, and from a much higher starting point. Since the increases in mothers' workload were objectively higher than fathers, men were less likely than women to be actually doing more than their partner. So, these results suggest that men doing more unpaid care than they used to and narrowing but by no means closing the gender gap, made more of them feel it was unfair, and that their partner was not carrying their weight. Mothers were already doing more and added more to their workload during the lockdown than fathers did, and this further negatively affected their perceptions of relative fairness and compounded their already-high dissatisfaction with their partner's share.

There were exceptions to this general finding, which could be related to whether both partners were there to pitch in. Having a partner working at home was reported by 54 percent of mothers compared to 65 percent of fathers. Post-hoc analysis found that mothers with partners who continued to go out to work were nine percentage points more dissatisfied than mothers with partners who worked all or some of the time at home. This suggests greater satisfaction for some mothers was linked to the presence of a partner in the home to share the extra burden of unpaid work and care during COVID-19 more evenly.

Conclusion

In summary, results on how the pandemic restrictions affected gender equality in the home were mixed. In some ways the findings confirm what many have been saying for decades; men need to do more at home to improve gender equality. Enforced restrictions during COVID-19 were associated with increases in fathers' time with children and somewhat narrowed the gendered childcare gap between parents in dual earner households. On the other hand, mothers' unpaid work time went up even more, and a significant proportion of them still reported feeling that they were doing much more than their fair share and were even more dissatisfied with how they and their partners shared unpaid work and care during

COVID-19. However, here again there was more gender equality, of a sort. With everyone's workload higher, more fathers than hitherto reported the high levels of subjective time stress, unfairness and dissatisfaction with actively juggling (too much) paid work and unpaid domestic labour and care, that women have long felt.

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Table 1 Changes in employment status and location before and during COVID-19 (employed men and women)

	Respondent				Respondent reporting of partner			
	Pre-COVID		During COVID		Pre-COVID		During COVID-19	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Employed in same job since COVID-19 began								
Yes, and still working			92.99	91.24			96.92	94.76
Yes, but stood down			1.91	3.19			1.54	3.50
No, out of work			3.18	2.82			0.00	0.39
No, have different job			1.91	2.75			1.54	1.36
Chi-sq test			n.s				n.s.	
Employment status								
Employed, full-time	84.29	48.91	73.38	46.98	51.64	86.36	47.93	79.30
Employed, part-time	15.71	51.09	26.62	53.02	48.36	13.64	52.07	20.70
Chi-sq test	***		***		***		***	
Location of paid work								
At home	3.82	6.45	72.87	68.98	7.69	6.02	64.62	54.06
At a workplace away from home	67.52	63.60	11.63	12.27	70.00	76.70	20.77	26.98
Both at home and away	28.03	29.65	11.63	13.83	20.00	16.99	13.08	17.40
Neither	0.64	0.30	3.88	4.92	2.31	0.29	1.54	1.56
Chi-sq test	***		***					
Average weekly earnings	1402.05	1189.90	1305.47	1114.02	913.113	1014.76	923.90	971.16
T-test	***		***		***		***	

Source: Work and Care in the Time of COVID-19 (2020)
Note: *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001.

Table 2 Respondents' hours a day in paid and unpaid work

Activity	Pre-COVID			Now		
	Men	Women	Sig diff	Men	Women	Sig diff
Paid work	7.14	6.62	***	6.58	6.06	***
Housework/household management	1.66	2.13	***	2.4	3.09	***
Active care						
Children	2.21	3.41	***	3.64	5.13	***
Elderly	0.08	0.10		0.03	0.15	**
Sick/disabled persons	0.14	0.14		0.21	0.21	
TOTAL AS PRIMARY ACTIVITY	**11.23**	**12.4**	***	**12.72**	**14.64**	***
Supervisory care						
Children	1.88	3.08	***	3.25	4.69	***
Elderly	0.10	0.10		0.11	0.16	*
Sick/disabled persons	0.14	0.14		0.18	0.18	
TOTAL SUPERVISORY CARE	**2.12**	**3.32**	*******	**3.54**	**5.03**	***

Source: Work and Care in the time of COVID-19 (2020)
Note: *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001.

Table 3 Respondents' subjective time pressure and satisfaction (%)

	Pre-COVID		Now	
	Men	*Women*	*Men*	*Women*
I feel rushed or pressed for time				
Never	2.76	0.33	4.23	2.92
Seldom	10.34	1.84	21.13	18.36
Sometimes	35.17	23.71	26.76	27.96
Often	40.69	51.25	23.94	23.96
Always	11.03	22.87	23.94	26.79
Chi-sq test	***		***	
Regarding how I divide my time between paid and unpaid work, I am				
Extremely dissatisfied	2.76	5.51	11.19	24.37
Somewhat dissatisfied	27.59	38.10	33.57	33.25
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	26.90	14.95	16.78	13.07
Somewhat satisfied	36.55	35.84	27.27	24.46
Extremely satisfied	6.21	5.60	11.19	4.86
Chi-sq test	***		***	
Do you think you did your fair share of housework and unpaid care?				
Much more than my fair share	2.42	20.86	4.07	32.36
More than my fair share	9.68	39.02	21.14	30.86
My fair share	65.32	33.83	62.60	31.26
Less than my fair share	16.94	4.29	7.32	3.71
Bit less than my fair share	4.03	1.30	3.25	0.90
Much less my fair share	1.61	0.70	1.63	0.90
Chi-sq test	***		***	

How satisfied were you with how you and your partner share housework and unpaid care				
Extremely dissatisfied	0.00	9.48	0.82	18.54
Somewhat dissatisfied	13.71	36.73	20.49	31.96
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	27.42	15.77	23.77	14.03
Somewhat satisfied	38.71	27.35	36.07	24.75
Extremely satisfied	20.16	10.68	18.85	10.72
Chi-sq test	***		***	

Source: Work and Care in the time of COVID-19 (2020)
Note: *p <.05, **p <.01, ***p <.001.

Table A1 Sample description (means and proportions)

Variable	Men	Women
Household composition [a]		
Living with an opposite-sex partner	95.15	92.65
Living with a same-sex partner	8.00	9.67
Living with trans or non-binary partner	4.44	0.28
Living with other family members 18 years or older	45.83	44.63
Living with housemates	2.44	7.34
Living with children aged between 0 and 4	77.27	75.23
Living with children aged between 5 and 12	90.43	87.25
Living with children aged between 13 and 17	57.75	64.44
Have persons in household who are sick	4.07	3.81
Have persons in household who need assistance with activities	12.28	18.53
Average number of people in household	3.60 (.1)	3.68 (.1)
Average weekly earnings before COVID-19	1623.42	1324.13
Average weekly earnings during COVID-19	1563.01	1276.67
Average age of respondent	44.8 (.8)	42.7 (.2)
Country of birth		
Australia	76.57	81.59
Other	23.43	18.41
Location		
Urban	84.09	80.41
Regional	10.80	14.55
Rural	5.11	5.03
Highest level of educational qualifications		
Bachelor's degree or higher (incl. Masters, PhD)	81.61	88.46
Graduate diploma, graduate certificate	8.62	6.18
Certificate I, II, III	5.75	3.50
Year 12 or below	4.02	1.86

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Status		
Does identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin	0.00	0.62
Does not identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin	100.00	99.38

Notes: [a] Percentages do not add up to 100
Source: Work and Care in the time of COVID-19 (2020)