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## Lockdowns and the home environment

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## Introduction

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## Employment and working arrangements of parents

The introduction of lockdowns in early 2020 had a considerable impact on the working lives of adults. In particular, a substantial share of adults who were in employment immediately prior to lockdown stopped working (they lost their jobs or were placed on temporary layoff or furlough) or, if they continued to work, worked fewer hours (in many cases zero hours) and/or worked from home. In this section, the evidence regarding loss of employment, change in hours of work, and change in the location of work among adults (including parents of school age children) during the lockdowns of March-June 2020 is examined. Annex B provides a summary of the restrictions related to employment and movement from home in the principal countries covered by this report over this period.

The changes to the employment situation and arrangements of parents flowing from lockdowns had an impact on the situation of children from several points of view. First, because they could not work or were required to work from home, a large share of working parents were present at home during lockdowns. This facilitated the task of caring for children and supporting their education at home for many, but not all, parents. Second, job loss and temporary layoff meant loss of income (even if this was offset by various forms of income support from governments) and psychological stress. Finally, the situation of those parents who continued to work at their normal place of work was complicated by the closure of schools and the need to organise childcare during school hours and support for their children's education (even if schools were open for the children of "essential workers"). For essential workers (essentially in the healthcare sector or in other occupations involving contact with the public), work involved a higher risk of infection for themselves and, as a consequence, their families.

### ***Loss of employment***

The scale of job losses during lockdowns depended to a considerable extent on the type of measures implemented to support workers and businesses affected by lockdowns in different countries. Most OECD countries adapted existing job retention/wage subsidy schemes to assist employers to retain employees on their payrolls during lockdowns and, in some cases introduced new schemes, thus limiting the numbers of workers losing their jobs (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>). A minority of countries chose to provide support primarily in the form of income support for workers who had lost their jobs or were on temporary layoff.

Unemployment rates remained relatively stable in the vast majority of OECD countries over the first half of 2020 despite the introduction of lockdowns (OECD.Stat, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>) with the exception of Canada, Colombia and the United States. The unemployment rate in Canada rose by over 5 percentage points from 7.8% to 13.1% between March and April 2020 and, in the United States, it rose by over 10 percentage points from 4.4% to 14.8% (OECD.Stat, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>). In both these countries, many workers who may have retained their jobs in other countries entered unemployment. For example, in May 2020, of the 42.5 million persons in the US labour force who were unable to work at some point in the previous four weeks due to the

Coronavirus pandemic, 31% were unemployed due to “temporary layoff” (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2020<sup>[3]</sup>, Table 5).

### Hours of work

The hours of work of many employed adults changed dramatically following the introduction of lockdowns. In many OECD countries, working hours fell between 10% to 20% between March and April 2020 (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>, Figure 1.9). The widespread use of job retention schemes meant that a large share of workers remained employed but worked zero paid hours (Table 3.1). For those who continued to work paid hours, hours of work fell (at the demand of employers or, alternatively, at the request of workers – e.g. to look after children or other family members) or, occasionally, increased.

**Table 3.1. Incidence of temporary inactivity: Australia, France, Ireland, United Kingdom and United States**

Country	Temporarily inactive (employed but worked zero hours)	Population	Reference period	Survey date
Australia	7-8%	Persons aged 18 and over	Previous 14 days	April 2020
France	37%	Employed Persons	Average week during confinement	Mid-March to mid-May 2020
Ireland	33%	Adults who indicated that COVID-19 had affected their work	Period of lockdown	8-23 May 2020
United Kingdom	30%	Employed adults	Previous 7 days	14-17 May 2020
United States	20%	Employed adults aged 16 years or over	Previous 4 weeks	May 2020

Sources: Australia: (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2020<sup>[4]</sup>); France: (Jauneau and Vidalenc, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>); Ireland: (Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2020<sup>[6]</sup>); United Kingdom: (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[7]</sup>, Figure 4); United States: (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2020<sup>[3]</sup>, Table 7, May 2020).

The scale of the impact of lockdowns on temporary inactivity can be seen in data from France and the United Kingdom. In France, the share of employed persons who worked zero hours in an average week over the period mid-March to mid-May 2020 (37%) was 25 percentage points higher than that observed in the corresponding period in 2019<sup>1</sup> (12%) (Jauneau and Vidalenc, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>). Most of this increase was due to the increase of the proportion of workers in furlough (“chômage technique”). A similar impact is observed in the United Kingdom. At the end of March 2020 (immediately prior to the introduction of lockdown measures), only 6% of employed adults reported that they had not completed paid work in their job in the previous week. Two weeks later, this proportion had increased to 29% (an increase of 23 percentage points) and remained at this level into June (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[7]</sup>, Figure 4).

The incidence of temporary inactivity varied considerably across occupational categories. In particular, persons employed in managerial and professional occupations were much less likely to be in this situation than workers in other occupational groups [see, for France, Givord and Silhol (2020<sup>[8]</sup>, Figure 2) and for the United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) (2020<sup>[3]</sup>, Table 7)].

For those employees who worked during confinement (i.e., excluding those who were temporarily inactive), some experienced changes to their hours of work. Of the 12% of Australian workers who indicated in mid-April that their job situation had changed in the previous two weeks, 51% stated that they were working fewer paid hours and 9% that they were working more hours (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2020<sup>[9]</sup>, Table 7.1). A month later, the shares of those workers whose job situation had changed who had increased (22%) or decreased (20%) their paid hours were much the same. In the United Kingdom, of the adults who indicated that COVID-19 had affected their work, 20% experienced a decrease in hours of work

and 17% an increase. In the case of working parents with dependent children 17% saw a decrease in their hours of work and 15% an increase (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[10]</sup>). In France, during the period of confinement (mid-March to mid-May), the working hours of employees who continued to work full-time decreased only by 4%, from 37 hours in 2019 to 35 hours (Jauneau and Vidalenc, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>).

### Working from home

For employed persons who continued to work paid hours, widespread reliance on working from home or teleworking was a feature of the period of lockdowns. In many countries, nearly half the workforce worked from home or teleworked during the lockdowns of March-June 2020 (Table 3.2)<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 3.2. Incidence of homeworking or teleworking**

Country	% working from home or teleworking at some point in the reference period		Population	Reference period	Date of survey
	Due to the Coronavirus	Any reason			
Australia		46	Employed adults working paid hours	Previous 14 days	29 April–4 May 2020
Finland		34	Employed adults	Previous 4 weeks	April 2020
France		47 <sup>a</sup>	Employed adults	Previous 4 weeks	16 March–10 May 2020
		58 <sup>b</sup>	Adults with job prior to confinement	Period of lockdown	2 May–2 June 2020
Ireland	45		Adults citing employment effects from COVID-19	Period of lockdown	8–23 April 2020
Switzerland	47		Employees and apprentices/interns	Period of lockdown	12 May–26 June 2020
United Kingdom		41	Employed adults	Previous 7 days	14–17 May 2020
United States	35		Employed adults (16 years and over)	Previous 4 weeks	May 2020

Note: Irish data refer to adults whose work was affected by COVID-19 and started to work remotely from home or increase their hours of remote work.

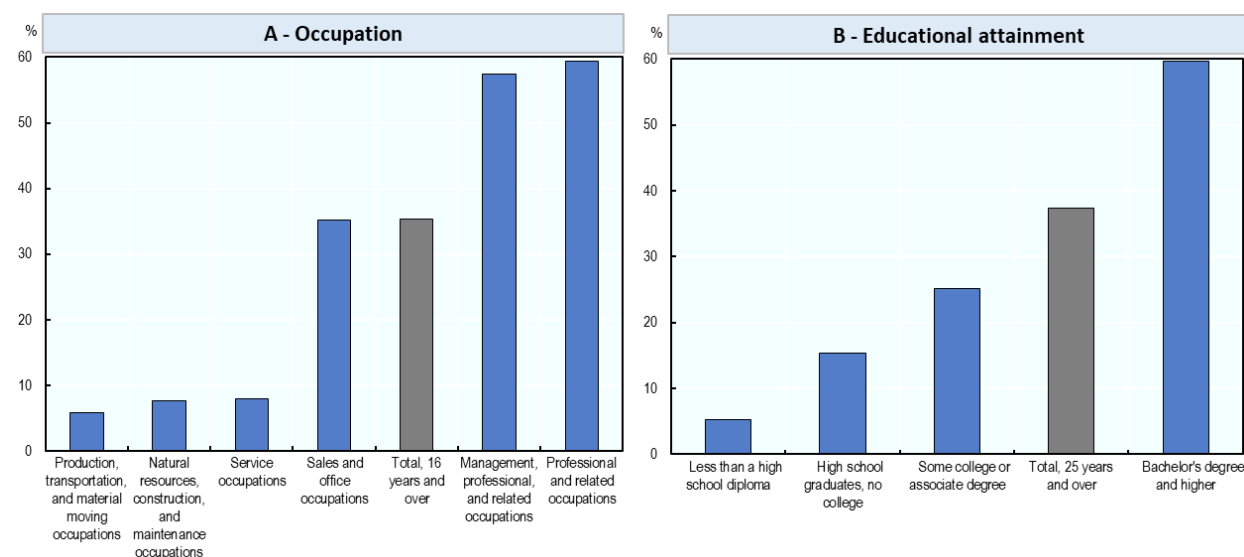
Sources: Australia: (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2020<sup>[11]</sup>, Table 2.1); France: (a) (Jauneau and Vidalenc, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>), (b) (Bajos et al., 2020<sup>[12]</sup>); Finland: Statistics Finland, Labor Force Survey cited by (Leskinen, 2020<sup>[13]</sup>); Ireland: (Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2020<sup>[6]</sup>); Switzerland: (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>, Table 4.1); United Kingdom: (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[15]</sup>, 22 May 2020); United States: (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2020<sup>[3]</sup>, Table 1, May 2020).

As in the case of temporary inactivity, lockdowns were associated with a large increase in the proportion of workers who worked some or all of the time from home. The increase was less dramatic than in the case of temporary inactivity as many employees and self-employed persons already worked at home or had pre-existing teleworking arrangements. For example, in Australia, nearly one-third (32%) of the workforce reported regularly working from home in August 2019 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2019<sup>[16]</sup>). Similarly in France, the proportion of workers working from home increased from 23% to 47% between March-May 2019 and March-May 2020 (Jauneau and Vidalenc, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>). In the United Kingdom, the proportion of workers using their home as a place of work in April 2020 compared to before lockdown increased by 31 percentage points from 29% to 60% (Felstead and Reuschke, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>).<sup>3</sup> In Ireland, only 12% of adults who stated that their employment had been affected by COVID-19 indicate that their hours of telework had increased (Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2020<sup>[6]</sup>).

Many workers alternated home/telework with in-person presence at their workplace during lockdowns. In France, slightly over a third (36%) of employed persons who worked from home did so for less than a full week (Givord and Silhol, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>) as did 22% of workers in Switzerland (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). In the United Kingdom, 8% of working adults worked both from home and from their workplace in the period 14–17 May (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[15]</sup>, Table 1).

The incidence of working at home/telework was closely related to the occupation of workers and, as a result, to their level of educational attainment (see Figure 3.1 for the United States). It was also related, though less strongly, to the presence of dependent children in the worker's household.

**Figure 3.1. United States: Employed persons who teleworked or worked at home for pay at any time in the last 4 weeks because of the Coronavirus pandemic by occupation (all adults) and by educational attainment (adults aged 25 years and over) (%), May 2020**



Note: Population for the occupational breakdown is persons aged 16 years and over and for the breakdown by educational attainment it is persons aged 25 years and older.

Source: (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2020<sup>[3]</sup>, Tables 1 and 2).

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Workers in white-collar occupations (managers, professionals and associate professional, administrative jobs) were much more likely to work at home than other occupational groups. Employees in managerial/professional occupations had particularly high rates of home/teleworking – 80% in France, 83% in the United Kingdom and 59% in the United States by way of example. This compared to 6% of production workers (“ouvriers”) in France, 21% of operatives in the United Kingdom and 6% of workers in production, transportation and material moving occupations in the United States (Jauneau and Vidalenc, 2020<sup>[5]</sup>; Felstead and Reuschke, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>; Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2020<sup>[3]</sup>, Table 2, May 2020)<sup>4</sup>.

Reflecting the distribution of qualifications by occupation, employees with tertiary educational attainment were much more likely to work at home than those with lower qualifications. Across a group of 11 OECD countries, the proportion of workers with college degrees working at home (55%) was on average 36 percentage points higher than the proportion of workers with no high school qualifications (19%) at mid-April or end-April/early May 2020 (OECD, 2021<sup>[1]</sup>, Figure 5.16). Other surveys provide a similar picture. In Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, the proportion of workers with a bachelor level qualification or higher who teleworked in May 2020 was 71%, 82%<sup>5</sup> and 60% respectively. In contrast, 26% and 20%-31% of workers with less than upper secondary education teleworked in Switzerland and the United Kingdom and only 5% in the United States (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>; Felstead and Reuschke, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>; Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2020<sup>[3]</sup>, Table 1, May 2020).

The incidence of home/telework appears to have been slightly higher among adults with dependent children than among the rest of the population. In the United States in May 2020, nearly four out of ten (39%) employed adults with children 18 years or younger teleworked at some point in the previous

4 weeks. This was a slightly higher share than among adults without children of this age (34%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2020<sup>[3]</sup>, Table 1, May 2020). In Ireland, the incidence of telework was highest among 35-44 year-olds (an age at which family responsibilities are commonly high) (Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2020<sup>[6]</sup>). In the United Kingdom, workers working at least one hour a week in the week prior to the survey with children aged 5-15 years (65%) were more slightly likely to work at home than all workers (60%) (Felstead and Reuschke, 2020<sup>[17]</sup>).

### ***School closures and the working arrangements of parents/guardians***

A normal consequence of the closure of schools outside vacation periods is that parents have to find alternative arrangements for the care and supervision of their children as schooling takes place during the usual working hours of most workers. For working parents, one option is the re-organisation and, often, the reduction of hours of work (Viner et al., 2020<sup>[18]</sup>). How did school closures and the resulting need for parents to care for children and supervise their schooling during usual working hours affect the working arrangements of parents during lockdowns?

The impact of the closures in March-June 2020 on the working hours and organisation of working time of parents/guardians was moderated, to some extent, by the fact that many parents were at home due to the loss of their jobs, temporary inactivity or enforced home/telework associated with lockdowns. Nevertheless, balancing the demands of work and family responsibilities constituted a challenge for the parents of school age children who continued to work, especially mothers.<sup>6</sup> For parents in jobs that could not be performed at home (e.g. those working in sectors such as healthcare, retail sales, or transport) the issue was one of adjusting or reducing working hours (if possible) to fit in with parenting responsibilities or taking paid or unpaid leave. This was also true for some parents working at home, especially those who had limited autonomy regarding the organisation of their own working time during the day. Parents working at home who had the flexibility to organise their working hours to fit in with the presence of children at home also faced challenges. These included managing the lack of dividing lines between work, childcare/schooling and family life and the inevitable tensions generated in a situation in which family members were undertaking work and schooling under the same roof at the same time, often in close proximity.

An indication of the proportion of workers with dependent children who adapted their working arrangements to accommodate caring/schooling responsibilities is provided by surveys in Australia, Ireland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. With the exception of Switzerland, a significant minority of workers in these countries, adjusted their working arrangements for this purpose. In Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2020<sup>[4]</sup>, Table 4.1), 75% of parents with students or young children in their household surveyed in May 2020 reported that their children had stayed home because of COVID-19. Of these, 38% worked from home to care for children (suggesting that they had a choice regarding their working location), 22% reduced or changed their working hours and 13% took leave to care for children. Almost a quarter (24%) of persons aged 35-44 in Ireland reported having (unspecified) “childcare issues” in April 2020 (Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2020<sup>[6]</sup>, Table 4d). As not all persons in this age group are parents, the proportion of *parents* in this situation will have been higher. Only 6% of Swiss workers who reported changes to their work situation due to lockdowns indicated that they worked less hours due to care duties (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). In the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[10]</sup>), two-thirds (67%) of parents in employment who had at least one dependent child aged 5 to 18 years living in the household stated that the COVID-19 outbreak was affecting their work. Of these, 28% reported that they had to work around home schooling responsibilities with a further 3% reporting that they were unable to work at all due to home schooling responsibilities. The corresponding proportions regarding childcare responsibilities were 20% and 3%. In addition, 29% of employed adults who had home schooled their child/children in the previous week stated that home schooling was negatively affecting their job. In the United States, 20% of working-age adults said the reason they were not working was because COVID-19 disrupted their childcare arrangements (Heggeness and Fields, 2020<sup>[19]</sup>).<sup>7</sup> Similar conclusions were found in a study using data from the US Current Population Survey. School closures reduced weekly work hours

among fathers and mothers of young school age children between 11% and 15% on average (Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2020<sup>[20]</sup>). Overall, female parents were more likely than males to make adjustments to their working hours and arrangements [see, for example, Amuedo-Dorantes et al. (2020<sup>[20]</sup>) for the United States and Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2020<sup>[10]</sup>), for the United Kingdom]].

In terms of an overall appreciation of their situation, the available data suggest that the majority of parents who worked from home during lockdowns did not find balancing work and family responsibilities to be a major source of stress or problem, even if, in some countries, a significant minority experienced difficulties. Only 13%<sup>8</sup> of parents (with dependent children) in employment in May 2020 in the United Kingdom reported that they found working from home difficult (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[10]</sup>, Tables 6 and 8). In Ireland, 22% of working adults aged 35-44 years (the ages at which most commonly look after children) indicated that they had difficulties working with family around (Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2020<sup>[6]</sup>). Higher proportions of parents in Switzerland and the United States found balancing a job and family responsibilities during lockdown to be difficult. Around 40% of Swiss parents with a child under the age of 18 years (irrespective of whether they were in a couple or single parents) reported that it was harder to combine work and non-work life following the introduction of lockdown measures (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). In the United States, 43% of US parents in employment felt that having to balance a job and helping kids with school was a major challenge (Jones, 2020<sup>[21]</sup>), and, 39% of adults in households affected by school closures agreed that school closures had made it difficult for them to work or do other household tasks (University of Southern California (USC), 2020<sup>[22]</sup>).

## Financial stress

Reduced working hours, loss of employment, temporary lay-offs and temporary closures of businesses reduced income for those affected, even when there was substantial government assistance available. However, these effects were concentrated in a minority, even if a significant one, of the population. Overall, the majority of households did not experience negative consequences (at least in the short-term) on their finances as a consequence of the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Table 3.3 presents data from Australia, France and Switzerland from surveys using comparable questions regarding the reported impact of COVID-19 and the lockdowns on household finances.

**Table 3.3. Reported change in financial situation during lockdown: Australia, France and Switzerland (%)**

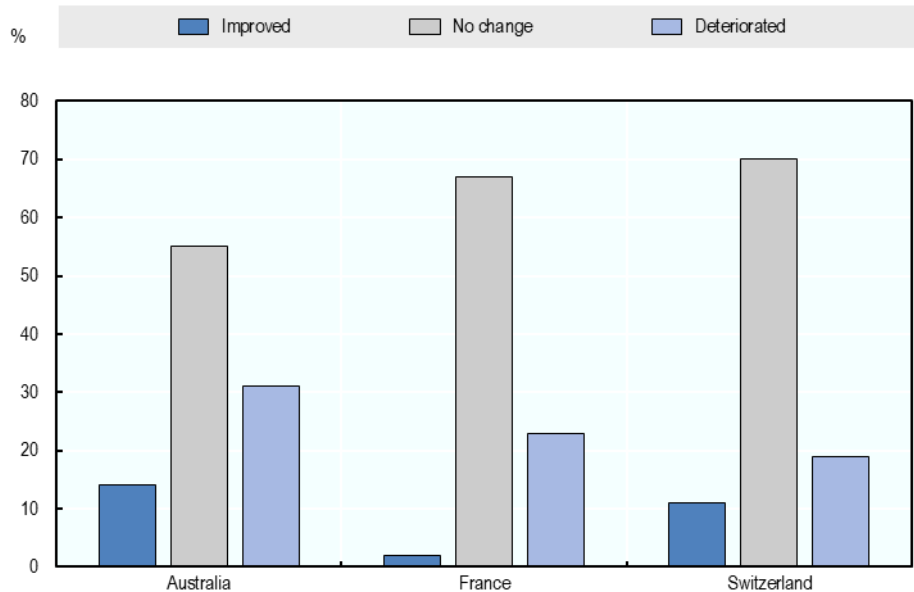
	Australia	France	Switzerland
Improved	14	2	11
No change	55	67	70
Deteriorated	31	23	19
Don't know	-	7	-
Population	Adults 18 years and older	Persons 15 years and older	Persons 15-99 years old
Reference period	Previous 4 weeks	Period of confinement	Period of lockdown
Date of collection	14-17 April 2020	May 2020	12 May–26 June 2020

Sources: Australia: (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2020<sup>[9]</sup>, Table 4.1); France: (Givord and Silhol, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>, Complimentary Figure 1); Switzerland: (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>).



**Figure 3.2. Reported change in financial situation during lockdown: Australia, France and Switzerland**

Percentage of adults reporting change in financial situation



Notes: In France, 7% of the population reported that they did not know whether their financial situation had changed.

Population: Australia: persons 18 years and older; France: persons 15 years and older; Switzerland: persons 15-99 years of age.

Reference period: Australia: previous 4 weeks; France: period of confinement; Switzerland: period of lockdown.

Date of collection: Australia: 14-17 April 2020; France: May 2020; Switzerland: 12 May-20 June 2020.

Sources: Australia: (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2020<sup>[9]</sup>, Table 4.1); France: (Givord and Silhol, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>, Complimentary Figure 1); Switzerland: (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>).

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As can be seen, the majority of adults in each of these three countries experienced no change to their financial situation with the proportion experiencing a deterioration outweighing that experiencing an improvement.

A similar picture is observed in other countries. In Ireland, extremely small proportions of the adult population reported financial difficulties as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, with 3% of the population aged 15 years and over reporting that they are unable to pay bills, 5% deferring bills and 2% reporting rent or mortgage payment difficulties. The highest rates were reported by the 35-44 years age group for the deferment of bills, rent, and mortgage payment difficulties (Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2020<sup>[6]</sup>). Some 25% of the UK population aged 16-69 years reported that their household finances were being affected by COVID-19 in May 2020 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[15]</sup>).

Unsurprisingly, the incidence of financial difficulties was negatively related to income. Low income households in France were more likely to suffer a worsening of their financial situation due to lockdowns than high-income households (Albouy and Legleye, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>; Bajos et al., 2020<sup>[12]</sup>; Givord and Silhol, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>) and, in the United Kingdom, adults with low incomes were more likely to report a decline in income since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic than those with high incomes (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[7]</sup>).

Parents in households with dependent children also appeared to be worse affected financially by lockdowns than other adults. In France, 33% of households with children reported a worsening of their



financial situation compared to 18% of other households (Givord and Silhol, 2020<sup>[8]</sup>). The finances of parents in the United Kingdom were more affected during the initial weeks of lockdown (3 April to 10 May) than those of other adults. They were less likely to say they are able to save for the year ahead (20%) than other adults (43%). In terms of meeting unexpected expenses, 45% of parents reported being able to afford an unexpected but necessary expense of GBP 850 compared to 61% of adults without dependent children in the household. This was around one-third less than were able to afford a similar necessary expense before lockdown in 2018 (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[7]</sup>). In Switzerland, over 30% of single parents indicated a deterioration of their financial situation, compared to 15% among those living only with their partner (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>).

## The health situation in families

### COVID-19 infections in the households of schoolchildren

The chances of a school age child either having the virus or living in a household in which someone was infected with COVID-19 were low. Even in those countries most affected, a small proportion of the population was infected during the first wave of infections. At the end of May 2020, 4.5% of the population aged 15 years and older in France were estimated to have been infected (Warszawski et al., 2020<sup>[24]</sup>). In Italy, 2.5% of the total population were estimated to have contracted COVID-19 by July 2020 (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Istat), 2020<sup>[25]</sup>). In the United Kingdom, 6.3% of the population aged 16 and over was found to have been infected as at 29 June 2020 (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[26]</sup>). In all three countries, the national average hides considerable regional differences (e.g. with high rates in the Île-de-France in France, Lombardy in Italy and London in the United Kingdom).

Rates of infection and COVID-19-related deaths varied across different social and occupational groups. In particular, infection and death rates were higher among the population living in areas of high as opposed to low socio-economic deprivation in England and France and among certain ethnic groups, e.g. Blacks and Asians in the United Kingdom, first and second generation non-European immigrants in France and Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos in the United States [see for England, Public Health England (2020<sup>[27]</sup>); for France, Warszawski et al. (2020<sup>[24]</sup>); and for the United States, United States Center for Disease Control and Preventions (USDCP) (2021<sup>[28]</sup>)]. Evidence from England and France indicates that workers in frontline healthcare occupations experienced particularly high infection rates (Warszawski et al., 2020<sup>[24]</sup>; Ward et al., 2021<sup>[29]</sup>). “Essential workers” in other sectors also experienced higher than average infection rates in the United Kingdom, but not in France. In addition, in both England and France, the incidence of infection was higher for persons living in households with 3 or more members (a category including most families with school age children) than those living in a household with 2 or less members (Warszawski et al., 2020<sup>[24]</sup>; Ward et al., 2021<sup>[29]</sup>).

**Table 3.4. COVID-19 among household members and relatives, colleagues and friends: France and Switzerland**

Status	France	Switzerland
Respondent infected	3%	1%
Household member infected	4%	<1%
Close relatives or friends infected	24%	9%
Work Colleague infected	n/a	8%
Member of wider circle of friends and acquaintances infected	n/a	26%
Person close to respondent died	3%	n/a
Population	Persons aged 18 and over	Persons aged 14 years and over
Date of data collection	7-10 May	May-June 2020

Sources: France: (Coconel, 2020<sup>[30]</sup>); Switzerland: (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>, Table 3.1).

The probability of infection among household members' wider circle of family and friends was far greater than that of infection of surveyed persons or other household members (Table 3.4). For instance, in Switzerland, only 1% of respondents in the Swiss Household Panel COVID-19 study declared that they had contracted the virus by May/June 2020. Nine percent reported that a family member or close friend has been infected, whereas 26% reported that there was a COVID-19 case in their circle of friends and acquaintances (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>).

### ***Mental health and well-being among adults***

Mental and psychological health and well-being was a focus of many national level surveys of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the adult population. Measures of psychological well-being such as anxiety, depression, and problems with sleep and life satisfaction have been collected on a regular basis since the start of the pandemic in a number of countries. While related, the exact concepts measured and the measures used differ between studies. Direct comparisons of levels are therefore difficult. However, trends can be compared.

The rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus, together with the lockdowns of March-June 2020, was associated with reductions in psychological well-being across the adult population. In countries in which data are available, broadly similar patterns are observed over the period of confinement/lockdown and the subsequent removal or reduction of restrictions on movement and social contacts. The levels of psychological well-being among adults as measured at the start of confinement were far below those measured pre-confinement but tended to improve with time as lockdowns continued and eased (though not for all problems or in all countries) (Table 3.5).

Data from France and the United States indicate that the levels of anxiety and depression were highest for adults in low status occupations, with low levels of education, low incomes and suffering financial hardship during lockdowns and after (Santé publique France, 2020<sup>[31]</sup>) and (United States Census Bureau, 2020<sup>[32]</sup>, Health Tables 2a and 2b). It is not, however, possible to determine whether the psychological well-being of adults from disadvantaged social backgrounds was disproportionately affected by lockdowns compared to that of their advantaged peers.

Evidence from Canada, France and the United Kingdom suggests that the psychological health of parents of school age children may have been affected more by lockdowns than that of other adults. A study in Canada conducted in the second half of May 2020 (Gadermann et al., 2021<sup>[33]</sup>) found that a higher proportion of parents (44%) reported a deterioration in mental health since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic than did their counterparts without children of less than 18 years at home (36%). In France, at the start of the period of confinement (23-25 March), 37% of parents with children aged 16 years or less reported high levels of anxiety compared to 22% of the rest of the population. The gap between the level of anxiety of parents of infants and school age children and other adults declined over the next months. However, it remained between 4 to 8 percentage points higher among parents with school age children than among other adults. In contrast, there was little difference in the incidence of depressive symptoms between parents with children aged 16 years and less and other adults (Figure 3.3). Finally, in the United Kingdom, the proportion of adults with at least one child under the age of 16 years displayed depressive symptoms during the pandemic increased by 15 percentage points (from 6% to 20%) compared to an increase of 10 percentage points among the adult population on as a whole (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[34]</sup>).

**Table 3.5. Psychological well-being: prior to, at the start of and following lockdowns in March-June 2020**

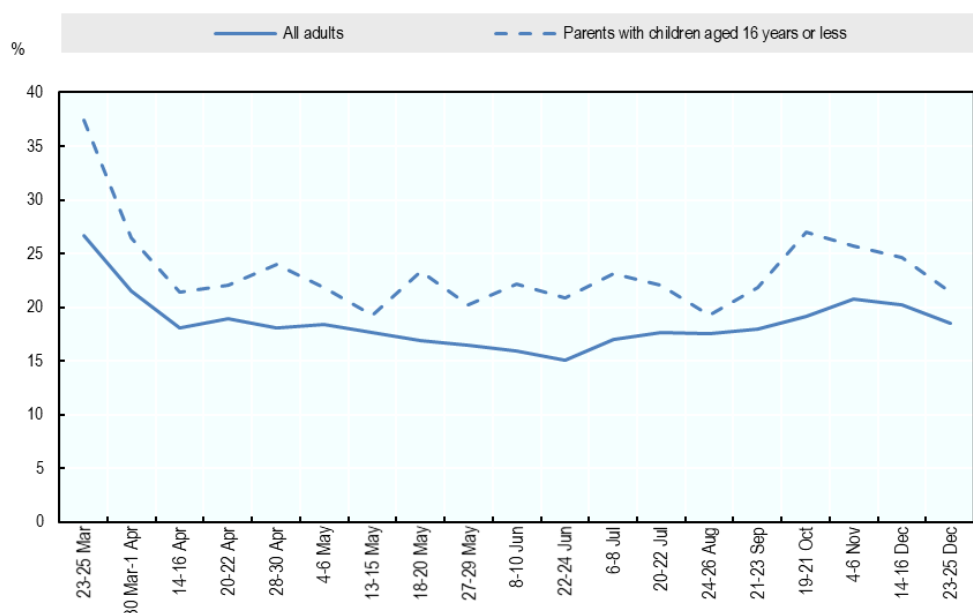
Country	Measure	Pre-confinement % of population or average scale score (*)	During lockdown % of population or average scale score (*)	After lockdown % of population or average scale score (*)
Australia	Nervous	20	35	25
	Hopeless	9	11	8
	Restless or fidgety	24	42	25
	Everything was an effort	22	26	19
Canada	Life satisfaction (scale 0-10)	8.1*	n/a	6.7*
Finland	Stress	n/a	51	46
France	Life satisfaction	85	66	81
	Anxiety	14	27	15
	Depression <sup>1</sup>	n/a	20	11
	Depression <sup>2</sup>	11	14	n/a
	Sleep problems	49	61	62
Germany	Loneliness (scale 0-12)	3*	5.4*	n/a
	Depression or anxiety (scale 0-12)	1.9*	2.4*	n/a
	Life satisfaction (scale 0-10)	7.4*	7.4*	n/a
Ireland	High life satisfaction (scale 0-10)	8.1*	6.5*	7.0*
	Feeling downhearted or depressed (all/most of the time)	2.8	5.5	11.5
	Feeling Lonely (all/most of the time)	3.5	6.8	13.7
New Zealand	Depression or anxiety related symptoms	n/a	13	6
Switzerland	Life satisfaction (scale 0-10)	8*	n/a	8*
United Kingdom	Depression (moderate to severe symptoms)	10	19	19
	High anxiety	21	50	28
United States	Symptoms of anxiety disorder	8	31	31
	Symptoms of depressive disorder	7	24	36

\* Average scale score.

Sources: Australia: (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2020<sup>[35]</sup>); Canada: (Helliwell, Schellenberg and Fonberg, 2020<sup>[36]</sup>); Finland: (Statistics Finland, 2020<sup>[37]</sup>). Dates: 2-5 April 2020, 11-14 June 2020; France: (1) (Santé publique France, 2020<sup>[31]</sup>). Dates: Pre-confinement: January-July 2017, Confinement: 23-25 March 2020, 22-24 June 2020; (2) (Hazo and Costemalle, 2021<sup>[38]</sup>); Germany: (Entringer et al., 2020<sup>[39]</sup>). Dates: 2019 (2017 for loneliness), April 2020; Ireland: (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2021<sup>[40]</sup>). Dates before: 2018, during lockdown: April 2020; after lockdown: August 2020 (life satisfaction), November 2020 (depression and loneliness); New Zealand: (Ministry of Health New Zealand, 2020<sup>[41]</sup>). Dates: week ending 5 April 2020, week ending 14 June 2020; Switzerland: (Reffe et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). Dates: 09.2019-03.2020 (95% of interviews completed before 17 December 2019), May/June 2020; United Kingdom: (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[34]</sup>); United States: (National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), n.d.<sup>[42]</sup>). Dates: Pre-confinement: January-June 2019, confinement: 23 April-5 May 2020, 18-23 June 2020.

**Figure 3.3. Proportion of total population aged 16 years and over and of parents with children aged 16 years or less experiencing high anxiety**

March to December 2020, France



Source: (Santé publique France, 2020<sup>[31]</sup>).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/psz42u>

Two other French studies provide a more nuanced insight into the relationship of mental health difficulties with parenthood during lockdown. In particular, the experience of single parents and parents living as a couple may have been very different. For example, adults living in a couple with children (24%) were less likely to have found confinement hard to deal with (“pénible”) than single parents (29%) (Albouy and Legleye, 2020<sup>[23]</sup>). Similarly, parents living in a couple with children at home (9%) were much less likely than single parents (21%) to report symptoms of a depressive syndrome in May 2020 (Hazo and Costemalle, 2021<sup>[38]</sup>).

The burden of caring for children and supporting their education in circumstances in which they did not necessarily feel they had the time, resources or expertise to do so may have been one factor contributing to the greater levels of psychological problems among parents than among other adults. As noted above, many parents did not feel well prepared or confident in their ability to assist their children with their education at home and a significant minority of parents found it difficult to balance work and childcare/homeschooling responsibilities during the period of school closures. There is evidence that their children and their children’s education was a source of stress and worry for some, though far from all, parents during lockdowns. In second half of May 2020, among the possible stressors resulting from COVID-19 in the previous 2 weeks, 52% of Canadian parents cited worry about their children’s education, 52% cited worry about how the mental health of their child(ren) was being affected and 37% reported being stressed about looking after children while continuing to work (Gadermann et al., 2021<sup>[33]</sup>). Among Swiss parents, 19% felt overwhelmed sometimes by having their child(ren) at home and 21% reported more tensions when everyone was at home (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). Some 28% of the UK parents who had home-schooled their children in the previous week felt that home schooling was negatively affecting their own well-being (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[10]</sup>, Table 1).

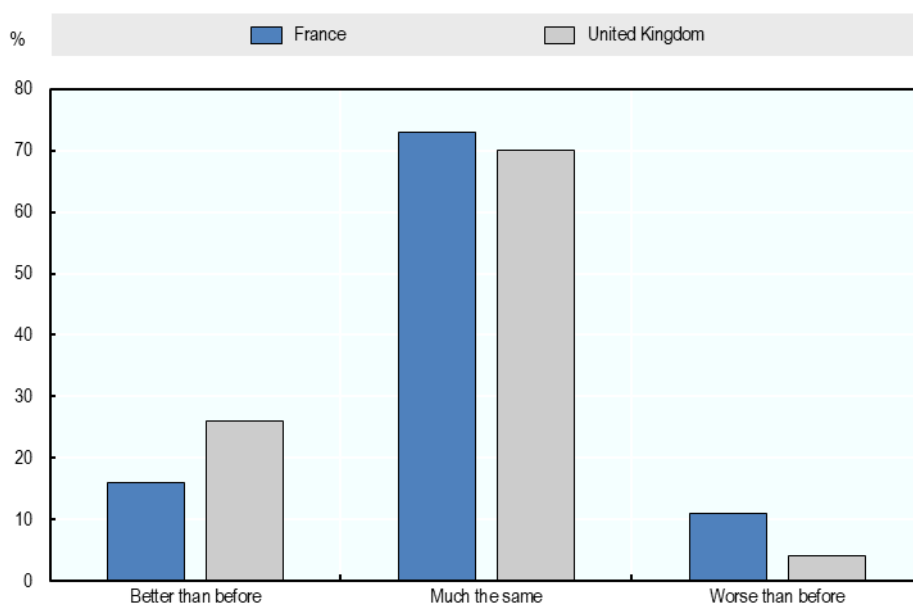
## Family relationships

Lockdowns and school closures had mixed consequences for parent/child relationships with both negative and positive effects reported. On balance, however, the impact seems to have been more positive than negative. The information available covers both general and global evaluations of the state of family relationships and assessments of specific aspects of relationships and interactions with children and other household/family members.

### *The general picture*

In both France and the United Kingdom, the majority of parents of school age children reported that their relationships with their child(ren) had remained unchanged during lockdown (Figure 3.4). Among the parents reporting changes in their relationships, an improvement was more often reported than a deterioration. In one French study, 73% of respondents confined with children (less than 18 years of age) stated that their relationships with their children had remained the same compared with the pre-confinement situation, 16% that they had improved and 11% that they had worsened (Lambert et al., 2020<sup>[43]</sup>). In another French study of the parents of a cohort of children born in 2011 (i.e. who were 8 - 9 years old in May 2020), very similar results were found: 61% of parents indicated that their relationships with their children had not changed, 23% that they had improved and 16% that they were more tense than normal. This was also true for relationships between siblings (Thierry et al., 2021<sup>[44]</sup>). Likewise, in the United Kingdom, 70% of parents surveyed at the end of May reported that their relationships with their children (aged under 18 years) had remained “about the same”, 26% that they were “better than before” with only 4% reporting that they were “worse than before” (Benzeval et al., 2020<sup>[45]</sup>). Another study of 5-16 year-olds in England (NHS Digital, 2020<sup>[46]</sup>) found no change in family functioning between 2017 and 2020 based on parents’ reports.

**Figure 3.4. Parents’ relationship with children during confinement compared to before: France and United Kingdom**



Sources: France: (Lambert et al., 2020<sup>[43]</sup>); United Kingdom: (Benzeval et al., 2020<sup>[45]</sup>).

Positive global evaluations of family experience were expressed by adults in Ireland and Italy. Nearly half (46%) of Irish adults stated that they had experienced an increase in positive family time in April 2020 with the proportions being highest (54%) among 35-44 and 45-54 year-olds, the age groups most likely to have dependent children (Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2020<sup>[6]</sup>). When asked to define the family climate prevailing during the first period of lockdown, three out of four Italians used positive descriptors. Less than 15% chose neutral descriptors and only 8% used terms with negative connotations (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Istat), 2020<sup>[47]</sup>, Figure 1).

### ***Relationships in more detail***

Parents and children identified a range of negative and positive aspects of family relationships and interpersonal interactions during lockdowns. For the most part, the negative aspects were reported as being experienced by smaller proportions of respondents than the positive aspects.

Many studies report that the period of lockdowns was accompanied by an increase in family tensions and strains on relationships, generally in a minority of cases. Canadian parents reported more negative interactions with their children due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including more conflicts (22%), yelling/shouting (17%), disciplining (16%) and using harsh words (11%) (Gadernann et al., 2021<sup>[33]</sup>). Dutch 8-18 year-olds reported a worse atmosphere at home during the COVID-19 lockdown than before COVID-19 (Luijten et al., 2021<sup>[48]</sup>). Some 28% of the parents of French secondary school students agreed that living in confinement had created family conflicts (Direction de l'évaluation de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP), 2020<sup>[49]</sup>, Figure 5-6) and one out of five French adults (19%) had experienced a particularly difficult moment due to a conflict with another person with whom he/she had been confined either once (9%) or several times (10%) (Lambert et al., 2020<sup>[43]</sup>). In Germany, 28% of children and adolescents reported that arguments had increased in the family and 30% of parents stated that disputes escalated more often (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2021<sup>[50]</sup>). This matches results from another survey where 28% of parents with school age children reported to have argued more with their child(ren) during school closures (Wößmann et al., 2020<sup>[51]</sup>). In Israel, 23% of adults who did not live alone reported a moderate to great degree of tension among members of their household in the wake of the pandemic, with the level rising to 27% among members of households with four or more persons (those most likely to include school age children) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020<sup>[52]</sup>). Among Swiss parents, 21% agreed that there were "more tensions when everyone was at home" and 19% agreed that that they were sometimes overwhelmed by having the children at home (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>). Finally, 36% of adults in the United Kingdom who home schooled children agreed that home schooling was putting a strain on their relationships with others in the household (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2020<sup>[10]</sup>, Table 1).

While spending more time together than in normal circumstances may have increased tensions among family members in some families, it also had its positive side. Canadian parents reported that they experienced increased positive interactions with their children during lockdowns, including having more quality time (65%), feeling closeness (50%), showing love or affection to their children (45%) and observing increased resilience and perseverance in their children (38%) (Gadernann et al., 2021<sup>[33]</sup>). Nearly three-quarters (74%) of the parents of secondary students in France felt that living in confinement had allowed them to have new relationships with their children and 69% that it had allowed them to undertake different activities as a family (Direction de l'évaluation de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP), 2020<sup>[49]</sup>, Figure 5-6). As previously noted, French parents spent more time than usual with their children undertaking educational activities in the period of confinement. This was also true for leisure activities though to a much less marked degree. Some 40% of the parents of secondary students stated that they spent more time than normal in leisure activities with their children with 28% spending less and 25% spending as much time as usual (Direction de l'évaluation de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP), 2020<sup>[49]</sup>). A high proportion of Swiss parents (73%) also agreed that the period of school closures constituted an opportunity to spend more time with their child(ren) (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>).

The evidence regarding the associations between socio-economic background and family relationships is relatively limited and, where it exists, contradictory. In France, one study (Lambert et al., 2020<sup>[43]</sup>) found that the parent/child relationships improved more for parents in low status than high status occupations and that parents who were teleworking were more likely than those working outside the home to report a worsening in their relationships with children. Another (Thierry et al., 2021<sup>[44]</sup>) found the reverse: relationships more often improved among households headed by persons in professional or managerial occupations and for parents who were teleworking, independent of their occupational status. In the United Kingdom, no relationship was observed between family income and change in parent/child relationships due to lockdowns. However, parents spending more time with their children tended to be more likely to report that their relationships had improved (31% of parents working at home compared to 24% of those who were not) (Benzeval et al., 2020<sup>[45]</sup>).

### ***Use of leisure time***

Several studies offer an insight into how children spent their leisure time during lockdown. Given that students spent on average less time on educational activities compared to the pre-pandemic period (and did not spend time travelling to school), they had more “free” time at their disposal. However, the types of activity that could be undertaken during this free time was severely constrained by restrictions on movement, social contact and the time that could be spent outside one’s place of residence. In particular, activities such as organised sports were and spending time in the physical presence of friends were impossible. How did child-age children use this time? What was the balance between physical activities such as sport or playing outside and sedentary behaviours such as watching television or using their smartphones?

Surveys from France, Germany and Switzerland provide information on the changes in the time spent on physical activity and screen-based activities during lockdown compared to life pre-lockdown. Both the time spent on screen-based activities and time spent on physical activities appears to have increased with the increase being greatest for screen-based activities. According to their parents, French secondary school students were more likely to have increased the amount of time spent on screen-based activities such as watching series and films (71%), playing video games (54%) and using the Internet for work (81%) or leisure (60%) than on either reading (23%) or physical activity (23%). Girls were more likely than boys to increase the time spent on reading and physical activity. Boys were far more likely than girls to have increased the amount of time spent playing video games. In Germany, the time spent by school children on sports activity declined by on average 10.8 minutes per day due to the closure of organised sports (Schmidt et al., 2020<sup>[53]</sup>). Nevertheless, this decline was more than offset by an increase in other physical activities such as playing outside, walking, cycling, housework and gardening. Recreational screen time increased during lockdown compared to the pre-lockdown period. Time spent gaming and watching TV increased by 21 minutes per day, while recreational Internet usage increased by 18 minutes (Schmidt et al., 2020<sup>[53]</sup>). In Switzerland, some aspects of physical activity increased during lockdown. For example, the number of days during which adolescents practiced a physical activity that made them slightly breathless for at least half an hour increased from less than three days to almost four days during lockdown (Refle et al., 2020<sup>[14]</sup>).

## **Summary**

Lockdowns affected the home environment of school children in many ways. Restrictions on movement outside the home and on social contact limited in-person social interaction essentially to members of the household. A large proportion of parents were at home with their children due to loss of employment, the temporary closure of their workplaces or because they were required to work at home all or some of the time. Schoolchildren were, on average, very unlikely to live in a household in which a household member



had been infected by the virus (acknowledging the wide variation in infection rates across regions within countries), but were much more likely to know someone who had caught the virus among their wider social and family network. The psychological well-being of adults declined dramatically with the start of lockdowns but progressively improved as lockdowns continued and restrictions were reduced and eventually, removed, with the parents of school age children and infants being affected more severely than the adult population as a whole. Overall, income support and job retention schemes appear to have buffered the negative effects of the administrative closure of businesses and workplaces on incomes. However, parents with dependent children appear to have been worse affected than other adults.

School closures meant that parents had to take on responsibilities for childcare and the supervision of schooling that were normally undertaken by schools and/or other persons (e.g. family members, paid carers) or organisations. The impact of this on the working hours and working arrangements of parents was mitigated by the fact that many parents were, themselves, at home due to lockdowns. Nevertheless, a significant minority of parents had to stop working or reduce working hours to look after young children and to provide support for their education. Women were more likely to do this than men. Overall, it appears that most parents found ways of managing the situation and did not find balancing work and family life and/or working from home to be a source of difficulty or stress.

Lockdowns and school closures do not appear to have had a significant negative or positive impact on family life and parent/child relationships. On the one hand, tensions between family members may have increased but, on the other, the opportunities to spend more time with children and to undertake new activities also increased.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In 2019, most of the employed persons who worked zero hours in France were taking annual leave or sick leave.

<sup>2</sup> See also (Foucault and Galasso, 2020<sup>[55]</sup>, Table 3). In a survey conducted in 12 countries, between 29% and 60% of adults usually employed in January 2020 were working at home in mid-April or end-April/early-May 2020.

<sup>3</sup> The source is different to that used for the UK data in Table 3.2.

<sup>4</sup> (Foucault and Galasso, 2020<sup>[55]</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> UK figures for May 2020.

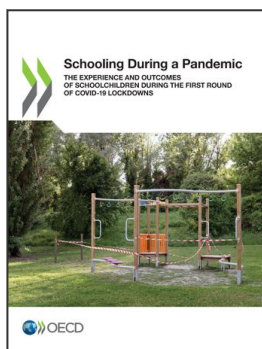


<sup>6</sup> The proportion of mothers of secondary school students in France who reported that they had increased the frequency of educational activities with their children during the March-June lockdown compared to normal times (62%) was more than double that of fathers (28%) (Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP), 2020<sup>[54]</sup>, Figures 7 and 8).

<sup>7</sup> The data comes from the Household Pulse Survey.

<sup>8</sup> This represents 19.8% of the 67.3% of parents in employment who had at least one dependent child aged 5 to 18 years living in the household for whom the Coronavirus was affecting their work who stated that they were finding working from home difficult.





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