

# **GENDER & UNPAID WORK**

**THE IMPACT OF COVID - 19  
ON WOMEN'S CARING ROLES**



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# INTRODUCTION

The division of work between women and men is, and has long been, profoundly gendered. Women's access to paid work, leisure time and power remains heavily constrained by traditional social roles as carers and mothers even as they have increasingly entered and remained in the labour market.

The response to Covid-19 has seen a significant displacement of care and childcare from services to households throughout lockdown. Despite descriptions of crashing productivity in the 'real economy', women are busier than ever. Time-use data, survey data, and women's own accounts all chart an increase in home-schooling, childcare, care for disabled and older people, and other unpaid work predominantly done by women such as housework and household management.

The only policy response to this increase in unpaid work has been an ill-fitting 'furlough' scheme, which initially did not include any provision for employers to secure wage replacement for those doing caring roles.<sup>1</sup> Although the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme has now been expanded to include furlough for those providing childcare or care full-time,<sup>2</sup> this is not available on a part-time basis. Women who are in paid work are consequently juggling their employment and these larger care roles, with significant consequences for their wellbeing and mental health.

The extent and pattern of women's unpaid work is a key driver of their capacity to work in the formal labour market, participate in public and community life, and be well and healthy. It has implications for how women use public transport and other public services. It affects the ways in which both finances and wellbeing are managed within the household. Despite its centrality to discussions about women's equality and rights, unpaid care and reproductive labour is often marginal within policymaking processes.

<sup>1</sup> Engender, Close the Gap (2020) Women, caring responsibilities, and furloughing during Covid-19.

<sup>2</sup> UK Government (2020) Check which employees you can put on furlough to use the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. GOVUK Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-which-employees-you-can-put-on-furlough-to-use-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme> [Accessed June 17, 2020].

To avoid a rollback of women's equality and rights as Scotland emerges from lockdown, Scottish Government and other public bodies must consider the role of unpaid care as they plan the ways in which economic recovery and the safe delivery of transport, education, childcare, and other public services will be achieved.

This paper summarises the evidence on the gendered allocation of unpaid care for older and disabled people as well as childcare, housework, and household management. It describes how the Covid-19 lockdown has affected these patterns and analyses how they must be taken into account in planning for economic and social recovery.

# WHO DOES WHAT IN THE HOUSEHOLD?

Patterns of unpaid care and domestic work were unequally distributed between women and men long before the current Covid-19 crisis. The most recently available time-use data for Scotland shows that women in opposite sex couples were undertaking approximately 68% of the housework and 68% of the childcare.<sup>3</sup> UK-wide research from the National Centre for Social Research found that 25% women took part in childcare on any given day, compared to 15% of men.<sup>4</sup> This pattern of distribution is not specific to Scotland nor the UK; women across the EU spend 13 hours more than men every week on unpaid care and housework. The United Nations Development Programme estimates that women do 2.5 times more care than men globally.<sup>5</sup>

These gendered patterns are long entrenched and have been stubbornly slow to disrupt.<sup>6</sup> The 2017 British Social Attitude Survey found that two thirds of respondents thought that it was better for mothers to be at home or to work part time when children were under school age and a majority also thought that fathers should work full time.<sup>7</sup> In 2012 the survey found that 26% of respondents thought that most women would prioritise their caring role over having a job, falling by just 10% since 1987.<sup>8</sup> The presumption that care is a product of inherently 'female' traits and preferences continues to influence how we think care should be assigned, and what it is worth.<sup>9</sup>

The term 'second shift' was coined by Arlie Hochschild in the 1970s to describe the phenomenon of women doing the majority of the housework and childcare after coming

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government (2019) Centre for Time Use Research Time Use Survey 2014-15: Results for Scotland. Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/centre-time-use-research-time-use-survey-2014-15-results-scotland/pages/5/>

<sup>4</sup> Wishart R, Dunatchik A, Speight S, Mayer M (2019) Changing patterns in parental time use in the UK. NatCen. Available at: [http://natcen.ac.uk/media/1722408/Parental\\_time\\_use\\_report.pdf](http://natcen.ac.uk/media/1722408/Parental_time_use_report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2020) The Economic Impacts of Covid-19 and Gender Inequality Recommendations For Policymakers. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rblac/docs/UNDP-RBLAC-PNUD%20GENEROCOVID19ENGINAL.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Sullivan O (2006) Changing Gender Relations, Changing Families: Tracing the Pace of Change Over Time. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> The National Centre for Social Research (2018) British Social Attitudes 35 – Gender.

<sup>8</sup> The National Centre for Social Research (2013) British Social Attitudes 30 – Gender.

<sup>9</sup> E. Thompson (2020) Gender and Inclusive Growth. Engender and Close the Gap.

home from a day of paid work.<sup>10</sup> Over thirty years later, feminists are still struggling to make visible the persistent gender imbalance in who does the domestic and care work.<sup>11</sup> Childcare has only relatively recently made it into the policymaking space as an economic issue, rather than a social issue for families to manage within the household or a children's rights concern around early learning for young children.

As the novel coronavirus has disrupted childcare from extended family and nurseries, schooling and social care, these gendered patterns have crystallised further. Researchers from the London School of Economics (LSE) have highlighted the ways in which lockdown has reversed a slow and "secular process of marketization of childcare and home keeping" whereby more domestic and care work is mediated by the market and carried out by cleaners and paid social care workers.<sup>12</sup> (It should be noted that this process of marketisation both advances women's equality with men while simultaneously undermining it as it is highly contingent on the low-paid and undervalued work of minoritised and working class women.)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild (1989) *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*

<sup>11</sup> H. Chung (2020) *Return of the 1950s housewife? How to stop coronavirus lockdown reinforcing sexist gender roles.* The Conversation.

<sup>12</sup> C. Hupkau and B. Petrongolo (2020) *Work, care and gender during the Covid-19 Crisis.*

<sup>13</sup> See: Ehrenreich B, Hochschild A (2003) *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy.* London: Granta Books.; Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Research on Black and minority ethnic women's experiences of employment in Scotland.*

# WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO UNPAID WORK DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN?

Women's unpaid care work has been compounded by public policy and service delivery measures implemented in response to the pandemic. Work by Glasgow Disability Alliance and Inclusion Scotland has found that social care packages have been reduced and stopped.<sup>14</sup> The ALLIANCE highlights instances where Health and Social Partnerships have increased their eligibility criteria for social care, making it harder to access.<sup>15</sup> This undermines disabled women's rights to dignified care and has also displaced care responsibility onto female family members. As many as 39% of unpaid carers are providing more care due to local services reducing or closing due to Covid-19.<sup>16</sup>

Survey data published for Carers Week 2020 suggests that there are now as many as 1.1 million unpaid carers in Scotland, of which 61% are women.<sup>17</sup> This is an increase of 392,000 since the start of the crisis, with 78% of carers having to provide more care than they were prior to the coronavirus outbreak.

While many households have seen both parents working from home, data are showing that traditional gender divisions are even more pronounced when it comes to caring for children.<sup>18</sup> Research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that on average parents are doing childcare for nine hours a day, with housework taking up three hours of the day and paid work another three, partly due to increased unemployment and furlough. However, mothers are doing paid work for two hours fewer a day than fathers, and although both mothers and fathers are doing more housework than they were doing pre-Covid, mothers are still doing considerably more housework than fathers.

<sup>14</sup> Glasgow Disability Alliance (2020) GDA's Covid-resilience engagement and response: Interim report. Glasgow Disability Alliance.

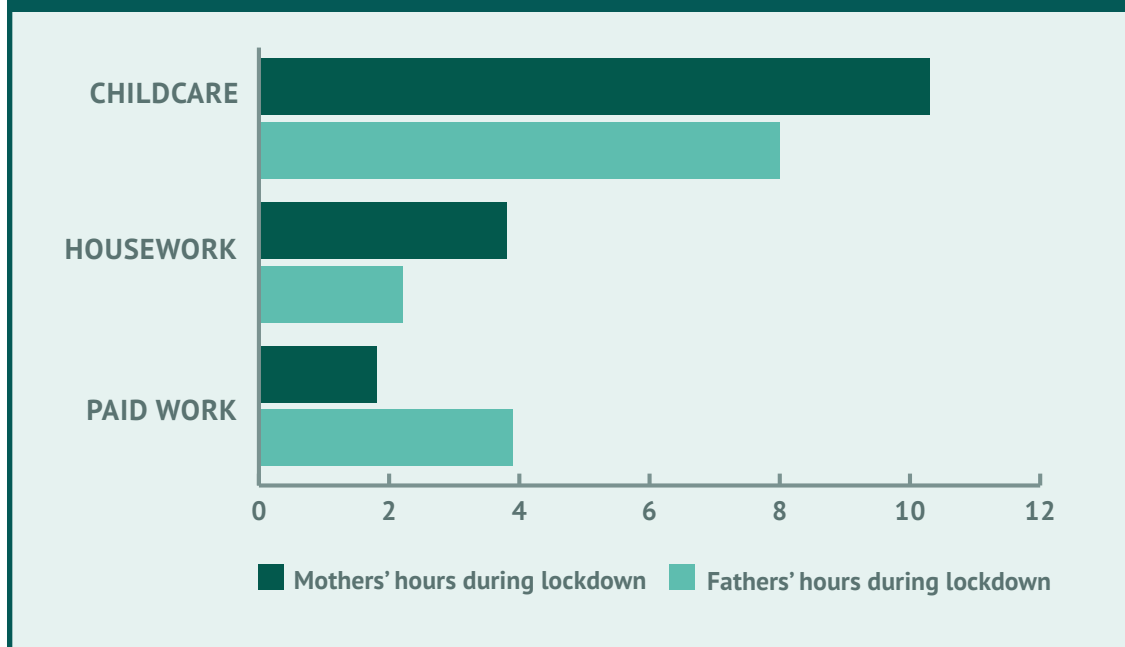
<sup>15</sup> The ALLIANCE (2020) Response to the Equalities and Human Rights Committee inquiry on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on equalities and human rights.

<sup>16</sup> Carers UK (2020) Carers Week 2020 Research Report.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> C. Sullivan and S. Lewis (2002) Home-based Telework, Gender, and the Synchronization of Work and Family: Perspectives of Teleworkers and their Co-residents. Gender Work and Organisation.

## MOTHERS' AND FATHERS' HOURS DURING LOCKDOWN



Previous data analysed by IFS showed that home-working mothers and fathers were interrupted during the same proportion of their paid work hours but during the Covid-19 lockdown mothers are interrupted over 50% more often than fathers. The incompatibility of paid work and home-schooling or childcare has seen mothers withdraw from paid work. Mothers in paid work previously averaged 73% of the hours worked by fathers, but this has fallen to 68%.<sup>19</sup>

Understanding the distribution of reproductive labour within the home is key to developing laws, policies and interventions which advance women's equality with men. We are concerned that a failure to understand the ways in which Covid-19 is entrenching gendered patterns and adding to the demands on women's capacity and time will have long-running unintended consequences on women's equality, rights and wellbeing.

<sup>19</sup> A. Andrew et. al. (2020) How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown? IFS.



# WHAT ARE THE IMMEDIATE RISKS FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY?

## Labour market

We are already seeing data that charts the impact of the significant increase in women's unpaid work. Pre-Covid women's labour market participation was contingent on juggling a number of factors, including the flexibility of paid work, the cost and availability of childcare, the location of available work, the volume of unpaid care and household management required by their household, and the availability of reliable and affordable transport. Work by Close the Gap, Scotland's expert policy advocacy organisation working on women's labour market participation, provides a comprehensive analysis of women's experience in the labour market, including that women are more likely to work in part-time roles at lower pay, are a higher and increasing proportion of workers on zero hours contracts, and are more likely to be 'second earner' in opposite sex couples.<sup>20</sup> All of these features of women's labour market participation are a product of gendered assumptions about women's roles and proclivities that are reinforced by the way in which our society has organised work and domestic life.

The unequal distribution of domestic labour is a cause of unequal distribution of paid labour.<sup>21</sup> Women are more likely to report that they lack the opportunities to advance their careers compared to equally skilled men<sup>22</sup> **and are four times more likely than men to give up employment because of multiple caring responsibilities.**<sup>23</sup> Scottish time-use data from pre-Covid shows that fathers spent on average more than double the amount of time in paid work compared with mothers. This is because a significant proportion of mothers were not in paid employment, and of those who were, many were working part-time.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Close the Gap (2018) Women, work and poverty in Scotland: What you need to know.

<sup>21</sup> T. Alon et. al (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on Gender Equality.

<sup>22</sup> CIPD (2020) Working Lives in Scotland.

<sup>23</sup> Carers UK and Employers for Carers (2012) Sandwich Caring: Combining childcare with caring for older or disabled relatives

<sup>24</sup> Wishart R, Dunatchik A, Speight S, Mayer M (2019) Changing patterns in parental time use in the UK. NatCen.

Researchers examining real time survey evidence from the UK, US and Germany found that since lockdown, regardless of whether they are also doing paid work, women at home are spending six hours providing childcare and home schooling every working day while fathers are providing around four.<sup>25</sup> The studies also showed that the time women spent time home schooling compared to men was correlated with the income of the household. In higher-earning households, women were doing more home-schooling.<sup>26</sup> The researchers also concluded that women's greater propensity to be providing childcare related to their being more likely to have lost their jobs during lockdown. Women in both the US and UK were shown to be 5% more likely to lose their jobs than men since Covid-19 and were less likely to be able to work from home.<sup>27</sup>

However, although a lack of childcare underpins women's lesser access to the labour market and lower earning power,<sup>28</sup> earning disparity does not fully explain the distribution of care in opposite sex headed households. The IFS study shows that the **gender gaps in time-use persisted irrespective of whether a woman was in or out of paid work and even where mothers were the higher earner, they still did more childcare and the same amount of housework** as their male partner.<sup>29</sup>

With women's patterns of paid work heavily concentrated in sectors most at risk of economic contraction, **women are more likely than men to lose their jobs in a recession following the Covid-19 pandemic.**<sup>30</sup> The anecdotal evidence provided to Engender as well as the statistical evidence referenced so far suggests that the increasing demands within the home are acting as a an additional driver in women's withdrawal from the labour market. UK-wide charity Turn2Us estimates that women have experienced a 26% loss of earnings compared with 18% for men.<sup>31</sup> **Mothers are already 1.5 times more likely than fathers to have lost their jobs or to have quit their jobs over lockdown.**<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> A. Adams-Prassl, T. Boneva, M. Golin and C. Rauh, (2020) Inequality in the Impact of the Coronavirus Shock: Evidence from Real Time Surveys.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> 41% compared to 46%. *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Close the Gap (2020) Close the Gap briefing for Scottish Conservative Debate: Expansion of Funded Childcare.

<sup>29</sup> A. Andrew et. al. (2020) How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown? IFS.

<sup>30</sup> C. Hupkau and B. Petrongolo (2020) Work, care and gender during the Covid-19 Crisis.

<sup>31</sup> Turn2Us (2020) Coronavirus pandemic widens the gender gap.

<sup>32</sup> A. Andrew et. al. (2020) How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown? IFS.

There is a risk that as women lose or resign from their jobs that we will enter a negative spiral in which gendered patterns of care entrench labour market inequalities that then further entrench gendered patterns of care. The IFS data shows that mothers who have stopped working for pay over lockdown are continuing to do twice as much care and domestic work as their partners while when men stop working opposite-sex couples are dividing the childcare equally while the mother does five hours of paid work a day on top.<sup>33</sup> As more women are forced out of the labour market directly or indirectly by this pandemic, the greater risk to their future earning capacity and to women's equality in both the labour market and home. Lone parents, of which 91% are women, are likely to face particularly stark challenges managing childcare with employment.<sup>34</sup>

## Economy

The unequal impacts of care distribution pose wider problems for women's equality because of the ways in which economic and other policymaking is so separate from the concerns of the household. The conversation around 'reopening' the economy has surfaced the degree to which the wider economy relies on the paid and unpaid work that is principally done by women but it has not been adequately integrated into decision-making. Reproductive labour<sup>35</sup> is rarely (if ever) recorded in national accounting, despite being worth an estimated £1.1 trillion, or around 56% of GDP, in imputed economic value.<sup>36</sup>

The data showing us that women are undertaking the additional care and housework within the home on top of their paid work illustrates the argument made by feminist economists and many other heterodox economists that GDP is an insufficient measure of productive activity.<sup>37</sup> Data analysis carried out for Engender found that the loss of two hours of earnings per day for mothers with dependent children<sup>38</sup> amounts to a loss

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Close the Gap and Engender (2020) Women, Caring Responsibilities and Furloughing During Covid-19

<sup>35</sup> Reproductive labour (c.f. productive labour) is the unpaid activities in the home and workplace, including childcare, meal preparation, cleaning and other activities, which are vital to the continued functioning of a society. See K. Bahn, J. Cohen and Y. van der Meulen Rodgers (2020) A feminist perspective on COVID-19 and the value of care work globally.

<sup>36</sup> Office for National Statistics (2016) Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work.

<sup>37</sup> N. Folbre, (2015) Valuing Non-Market Work UNDP Human Development Report Office.

<sup>38</sup> A. Andrew et. al. (2020) How are mothers and fathers balancing work and family under lockdown? IFS.

of £33 per mother per day and if replicated across the UK, amounts to a **loss of £188,529,000 per day to the UK economy**.<sup>39</sup> The Scotland subsample of the Annual Survey for Hours and Earnings is not large enough to allow for national analysis, but on a population share basis (8%) we estimate that the impact of mothers' lost earnings or productivity would equate to **£15,082,320 per day in Scotland**. As lockdown extends and women exhaust the annual leave and temporary flexibilities that enabled them to maintain current levels of paid work, this figure will increase.

## Public life and decision-making

Of all of the policy areas of interest to women's equality advocates, we have the richest data about the impact on Covid-19 on women's labour market participation. However, there are multiple other domains in which women's equality will be undermined by the increase in unpaid work over time. For example, women's involvement in politics<sup>40</sup> and public life<sup>41</sup> are both attenuated by care and domestic work. Additional hours of housework and childcare are incompatible with the many unpaid hours political activists and prospective candidates must work on behalf of their parties. They are also an uneasy fit with serving as an elected member, particularly within council chambers, which are low-paid roles with limited support.

The lack of current adequate representation of women in decision-making roles may have serious impacts for women and women's equality as the crisis and recovery extend. It may also create negative feedback loops about the extent to which gender is an important analytical lens in policymaking and service design. For example, women hold only 30.4% of health service chief roles, despite 77% of the overall NHS Scotland workforce being women.<sup>42</sup> There is clear evidence from agencies working internationally on disaster and crisis response that equality is only adequately considered when marginalised groups are able to participate in emergency response planning.<sup>43</sup> Women

<sup>39</sup> UK figures taken from Table 12B of the main data reference tables from the ONS Families and Labour Market October 2019 based on the Labour Force Survey. Available at <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2019>>

<sup>40</sup> Engender (2016) Equal voice, equal power: The case for gender quotas in Scotland.

<sup>41</sup> Engender (2020) Sex & Power in Scotland 2020.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*

<sup>43</sup> Hoffman, Sharona (2008) Preparing for disaster: Protecting the most vulnerable in emergencies UC Davis Law Review 42:1491

need to be round the table as decisions are made about the post-Covid economic and social recovery, but unpaid care responsibilities remain a huge barrier to participation in public life and politics. Women are less able to be involved in important decisions about how gendered concerns should be integrated into short and medium run planning while they are having to undertake increased levels of childcare and other domestic work.

## Women's health

Globally, the increases in unpaid care and domestic work, loss of paid work and increasing levels of gender-based violence have been observed in tandem with worsening levels of stress and anxiety among women.<sup>44</sup> Polling from Fawcett / Ipsos Mori found that six in ten women are “finding it hard to stay positive”<sup>45</sup> and data from the ONS's Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain series shows that 32.9% of women reported high levels of anxiety compared with 27.4% of men. “Caring Behind Closed Doors” also shows that 53% of unpaid carers felt overwhelmed managing their caring responsibilities during the outbreak and are worried about experiencing burnout.

Mental health experiences differ between men and women; more women experience anxiety disorders, and depression in women is significantly higher among those with caring responsibilities.<sup>46</sup> Both conditions are likely to be exacerbated by uncertainty, fear and long periods of isolation. Additionally, women providing care in home and clinical settings seem highly likely to be exposed to extended trauma, with consequential depression and lower levels of wellbeing during and after the crisis. Carers tell Engender consistently that they feel under intense pressure as a result of the challenges of caring in conditions where they have limited practical support, an inadequacy of information, a lack of clarity about how national and local processes are supposed to work to ensure access to food and other necessities, and the loneliness of having to shield to protect their loved ones.

<sup>44</sup> UN Women (2020) Surveys show that COVID-19 has gendered effects in Asia and the Pacific. UN Women Data Hub.

<sup>45</sup> H. Siddique (2020) UK women bear emotional brunt of Covid-19 turmoil – poll. The Guardian.

<sup>46</sup> The Mental Health Foundation ‘Women and Mental Health’. Available at <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/w/women-andmental-health> [Accessed June 10, 2020].

Women's isolation may not significantly ease during the earliest stages of emergence from lockdown. Women's reliance on public transport and comparatively lower levels of access to private transport may make getting out the house difficult or impossible for as long as the virus is in circulation. Rural women, who often have to consider broken journeys and overnight stays to access 'local' health and other public services, are likely to be even further disadvantaged. Suggestions that the public stagger journey times away from peak commuting hours adds a further layer of complexity for women trying to manage the potential for disrupted school and nursery times within journeys that normally involve connecting multiple short trips, or trip-chaining.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Department for Transport (2015) National Travel Survey: Trip Chaining: 2002-2014. Department for Transport. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/509447/nts-trip-chaining.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509447/nts-trip-chaining.pdf) [Accessed February 18, 2020].

# DATA

Good policymaking is driven by data and evidence. Scottish Government and its agencies are currently failing to gather and analyse sufficient information on gendered patterns within care and then bring these to bear on policymaking. A key gap is the lack of reliable data that tells us how domestic and reproductive labour is actually being distributed between opposite sex couples, both before and since the start of lockdown in Scotland. The time-use data that provides the most accurate picture of household task distribution is time-consuming, complex and expensive to collect. There are large gaps between the time-use surveys that Scottish Government commissions and the publication of its analysis. This means that we have had to rely on time-use data from other sources in determining the impact of Covid-19 on patterns of care.

There is also a general lack of gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data which could provide an accurate picture of how men and women are experiencing life during the pandemic. Gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data is broken down by sex, so that it is possible to compare and contrast differences between men and women. It is not just counting women and men, though, and comprises statistics and other information that adequately reflect gendered differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men.

For example, data published in April by ONS showed that men and women were equally likely to report increased childcare responsibilities once schools closed and the lockdown began. Data showing that 73.9% of women and 66% of men with children in the home are doing some home schooling now that their children are not in school does not tell us about the type of education activities, the hours of schooling each parent is providing, nor the extent to which those hours are balanced with paid work outside or inside the home. The result is therefore inconsistent with other early data and evidence which considers the gendered nature of care and reproductive labour and tells us little of practical application.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> The Office for National Statistics (2020) Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 23 April 2020

In the case of self-reported survey data, there is reason to be sceptical that perceptions of distribution of reproductive labour match accurately with the time invested by each partner. The New York Times found that nearly half of the US fathers surveyed reported spending more time on childcare than their female partner, but just 3% of women thought that their male partners spent more time on childcare than they did.<sup>49</sup> While there is some evidence that more childcare is being done by both men and women, the types of work each is doing seems to also fall into gendered patterns. Research from UN Women looking at Asian and Pacific states found that women were more likely to be in charge of physical care of the children, as well as cleaning, cooking and serving meals while men were more likely to provide teaching and administrative support.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Claire Cain Miller (2020) Nearly Half of Men Say They Do Most of the Home Schooling. 3 Percent of Women Agree, New York Times.

<sup>50</sup> UN Women (2020) Surveys show that COVID-19 has gendered effects in Asia and the Pacific. UN Women Data Hub.



# WHAT NEXT? THE ONGOING IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The lockdown period has resulted in major disruption to the delicate balance of paid work and reproductive labour that many women manage daily. This disruption is likely to persist during the phased easing and long after the lockdown is eased in Scotland, based on plans that are currently in the public domain. The return to work and school is anticipated to be an incremental process,<sup>51</sup> with increased care for children at home and home schooling required on at least a contingency basis. Women who depend on paid or familial childcare and/or social care alternatives to enable them to remain or stay in paid work may not have full access to them. The Scottish Government has thus far placed paid childminder provision before familial care in its staged journey out of lockdown, which is likely to have a greater negative impact for women with lower earnings.

Although plans now predict a faster return to school and childcare than initially presented, this is of course dependent on an uncertain disease trajectory. A return to blended learning or even another full lockdown cannot be definitely ruled out for the foreseeable future.

The furlough scheme has provided a much needed but uneven safety net. It was extended to cover parents and carers who cannot work due to care responsibilities, although this was both belated and badly publicised. Furlough has been an inflexible intervention, and in the medium-run we may need to seek alternatives such as part time, flexible furlough that could offer women employment protection and reduce their levels of stress and anxiety.<sup>52</sup> It has now been announced that the furlough scheme is set to wind down in the autumn of 2020, not long after children return to schools, which will create a future crisis point for women unless the transmission of the virus has reduced sufficiently to enable children to be at school full-time.

<sup>51</sup> Scottish Government (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision making - Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis.

<sup>52</sup> Close the Gap and Engender (2020) Women, Caring Responsibilities and Furloughing During COVID-19.

It is vital to consider how part time and shorter school days, delayed nursery opening, and indefinite reductions in social care packages align with expectations around restarting the economy. Where women are unable to work from home, it is difficult to see how they will be able to balance commuting, workdays and short school days without wrap around flexible childcare. Even where women can work from home, it is impossible to do childcare and paid work at the same time. Staggered workdays have the potential to conflict with women's greater reliance on public transport, particularly as transport providers have told customers that they may have to wait at stations or bus stops for some time before there is space for them onboard to start their journeys. Plans disseminated by local authorities and the Scottish Government have thus far failed to take into account these complications thrown up by women's disproportionately large caring roles.<sup>53</sup>

At the start of lockdown, the Scottish Government took the decision to pause its work to deliver 1140 hours of funded childcare from August 2020.<sup>54</sup> Intelligence gathered by Close the Gap from early learning and childcare providers suggests that this decision has created significant uncertainty around short and medium-term funding in the sector. Some local authorities have already withdrawn the 1140 hours delivery commitment this year, while others have yet to announce whether they will progress as planned to deliver the 1140 hours. This will have a severe impact on women and their families, who have planned their paid work and unpaid work around the provision afforded by the 1140 hours model. It will also cause significant financial pressure on providers, particularly those which have already been delivering the 1140 hours and have based future business planning on receiving the increased funding for the hours from August. Reduced funding means that providers will either have to increase fees, which will make the service unaffordable for many families, or reduce the service which both creates accessibility challenges, and also risks the jobs of an overwhelmingly female workforce. The change in policy also makes it less likely that employers in the sector will be able to realise ambitions to deliver the Living Wage.

This crisis must see Scotland take meaningful steps to rebalance the gendered distribution of care within the household. It must also factor its value to the state and

<sup>53</sup> Scottish Government (2020) Initial Impact Assessment on the Strategic Framework for Reopening Schools and Early Learning and Childcare Settings in Scotland.

<sup>54</sup> Scottish Government (2020) Early Learning and Childcare expansion.

to the economy into economic and social policymaking. There was previously some evidence that the gender gap in paid work was narrowing, albeit slowly.<sup>55</sup> We can also see that fathers are now doing more childcare and domestic work than they were pre-Covid, but still far less than their female partners.<sup>56</sup> In other contexts, fathers doing more childcare as a result of specific interventions or circumstances has been shown to create a virtuous cycle by which fathers continue to do more in the medium term.<sup>57</sup> With women and men working from home, the visibility of the care and domestic work that needs to be done is heightened and employers may be sensitised to it as never before. Finally, surveys show that 79% of the public in Scotland think the government should increase support for carers.<sup>58</sup> All of these create the context for work to evaluate and revalue the way that childcare and social care is delivered in Scotland, and the support that is provided to unpaid carers.

Considering the evidence around women's unpaid work is the first step to designing adequate childcare and care services during the recovery and beyond. There is also an urgent need to change norms about how unpaid work is allocated within the household. It is vital that Scottish Government and its delivery bodies commit to credible equality impact assessments, as required by law,<sup>59</sup> where data and analysis on unpaid work is applied to policy development and opportunities to advance women's equality are taken as we step into the so-called "new normal."

Engender and Close the Gap have produced 'Gender & economic recovery,' a paper exploring foundational principles for a post-Covid economy. These demonstrate the scale at which Scotland needs to shift its understanding of the economy to ensure that economic growth includes women. Without this shift, the post-Covid recovery is very likely to see a net loss of jobs and income from women to men, reversing the slow narrowing of the gender pay gap that Close the Gap has charted in recent years.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Wishart R, Dunatchik A, Speight S, Mayer M (2019) Changing patterns in parental time use in the UK. NatCen.

<sup>56</sup> UN Women (2020) Surveys show that COVID-19 has gendered effects in Asia and the Pacific. UN Women Data Hub.

<sup>57</sup> A. Patnaik (2019) Reserving time for Daddy: the consequences of fathers' quotas.

<sup>58</sup> Carers UK (2020) Carers Week 2020 Research Report.

<sup>59</sup> EHRC Scotland (2016) Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty: Scotland.

<sup>60</sup> Close the Gap (2019) Close the Gap Working Paper 20: Gender pay gap statistics.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's unpaid reproductive labour has been ignored and marginalised within our economic and social policy for generations, but Covid-19 has at once made our reliance on care for others obvious and has intensified its demands. Although the state depends on it, it largely fails to count it, reward it and manage it, shifting the implied responsibility onto women for its delivery because of highly gendered assumptions and expectations. As a result, with public provision temporarily interrupted or withdrawn, women who had until now managed to balance unpaid care and paid work are coming to a crisis point. Unless we take this opportunity to recount, reward and reallocate unpaid work, we will see women's progress in the labour market, in political representation, and in public lives, roll back decades.

## We make the following recommendations:

- Develop a mechanism for medium to long-term security for unpaid carers for disabled people and older people in the form of a payment equivalent to at least the real living wage. The payment should be flexible and capable of being combined with paid work and education or training while compensating for hours delivered.
- The Scottish and UK Government should work up options to ensure an income for women unable to combine paid work and childcare for as long as needed, and which minimises the risk of exclusion from the labour market, possibly based on elements of the furlough scheme, carers leave and/or shared parental leave.

- The Scottish Government should commission time-use survey data specific to Scotland to provide early data on how households are managing unpaid work and other activities during the Covid-19 period and recovery phases.
- The Scottish Government should ensure that data collection that is pan-GB or pan-UK, including that gathered by ONS, has a sample size sufficient to have sex-disaggregated Scotland-specific data.
- The Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies involved in the reopening of education and childcare facilities must commit to robust equality impact assessment before they confirm their plans for reopening and contingency learning. Recent EQIAs have been inadequate and without meaningful gender analysis, including of evidence specific to women's experience of care.
- The Scottish Government should carry out a gender-competent refresh of the Mental Health Strategy in light of the impact of Covid-19, including specific measures to address the mental health of those who have delivered paid care work and unpaid care throughout the crisis.
- The Scottish Government should intensify its activity in response to the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls' recommendation to create 'Daddy Months' of use-it-or-lose-it unpaid leave in Scotland. It should also consider delivering attitude-change work to encourage men to do their fair share of childcare and domestic work.



Engender is Scotland's feminist organisation. We work for women's economic, political, and social equality with men.

Engender is a Scottish charity (SC029053) and a company limited by guarantee (SC 286639).



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