

Schools reopen earlier in societies that provide equal opportunities to women

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Societies that are more supportive of working mums reopened schools sooner than societies that are less supportive, according to new research by the University of Cologne.

The study, conducted by Dr. Ansgar Hudde and Dr. Natalie Nitsche, shows that gender ideological beliefs have been a key factor in driving the decisions on reopening schools after COVID-19 lockdowns.

The authors argue that policy-makers who embrace gender essentialist values, which includes the ideal of a stay-at-home mother, perceive costs of school closures as lower.

In contrast, societies that support working mothers understand that in families where both parents work, and for working single parents, the cost of closures are higher because at least one parent may have to work less – and this often affects mothers more than fathers.

Previous studies have shown that fathers have shared domestic and childcare work during lockdowns, but a substantial gender imbalance in work division at the expense of mothers has remained.

“Shutting schools is a dangerously easy tool to use. It can be done quickly, and with no immediate economic costs, but, schools closures have far reaching, mostly destructive implications for children, mothers, and families that may not become obvious until more time passes,” says Dr. Hudde.

The researchers used information on school opening status from a UNESCO database; measures on gender ideology from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP); and Google mobility data as a proxy measure for a country’s general position on the lockdown-open continuum.

The study is in the review process at a high-ranking international journal and can be found here:
<https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/k7qe9/>

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