

Covid-19 has reduced the gender working hours gap

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The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the gender gap in the number of hours worked in paid employment, according to new research by the University of Cologne.

“The study, conducted by Professor Marita Jacob and her team together with the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), looked into the reduction in working hours for both men and women during the COVID spring lockdown.

They found that working hours decreased considerably for both men and women but that women – in particular, mothers – recovered more quickly and returned to their pre-crisis employment level in summer 2020.

However, fathers did not recover as fully as mothers did and were seen to reduce their hours even after the lockdown ended. This was particularly apparent for those who used childcare before the pandemic.

“The research reveals that fathers may have scaled back their working hours to meet the new and greater caregiving demand as a result of the closures of schools, nurseries and other childcare facilities. They may have also maintained this arrangement after these facilities reopened, which could explain the slow recovery for fathers,” says Professor Jacob.

These results challenge concerns about temporary or potentially persistent ‘re-traditionalisation’ of gender roles and question the idea that the recession caused by the pandemic mainly comes at the expense of women.

The research suggests that if the possibility to work from home after the pandemic persists, it could have lasting effects on gender equalities in couples, work, and childcare arrangements – with both parents balancing responsibilities.

However, they add that it is important to remember that it is hard to predict whether the COVID-19 crisis will lead to persistent change in gender roles and altered conditions but, if we carry on as we are, it could.

The research was published in the Journal of Family Research.

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