



School For Mothers Special Report: Mothers & Covid-19

School for Mothers COVID-19 Survey Objective

Women are not a homogenous group. Just over 80% of UK women become mothers (*Office of National Statistics 2018*). Whilst countless memes about having *too much* spare time during lockdown are shared on social media, mothers are “spinning more plates” than ever before. Capturing the day to day realities and experiences of women, through the lens of mothering could potentially reveal the need to create targeted actions to support mothers with dependent children under 18 during the COVID-19 crisis, and beyond.

School for Mothers COVID-19 Survey Methodology

School for Mothers surveyed **286 UK mothers** between 28th - 30th April 2020 using a bespoke designed online survey to elicit previously unpublished data. Participants were encouraged to share honest and raw accounts of motherhood during COVID-19. A mixed methodology of both qualitative and quantitative data collection was used - in other words, participants were able to input subjective experiences within the survey framework as well as answer key demographic questions. Fathers were not included in this survey because a wealth of research confirms it is mothers (not fathers) that change their working arrangements to manage childcare responsibilities. The SFM Survey sought to explore the robustness of this prior data in the light of the pandemic

AND to allow mothers to articulate additional impacts of COVID-19. It could be argued that ‘measures in place and future ones’ have the potential to deepen gender and therefore, by virtue, can also degenderise life.

The following are emergent themes on how UK mothers are impacted by COVID-19:

In each section themes are presented with accompanying qualitative verbatim quotes to deepen understanding. The quotes offered here are a selection rather than full data. *School for Mothers welcome deeper discussion on the complete data & findings. Please email: hello@schoolformothers.com*

THEMES:

EDUCATION

Children are at home full time with expectations on parents that they will continue to be educated. There are disproportionate levels of access to laptops, online learning provision and attendance at online lessons where these exist, & access to the internet or phone. Other children have home circumstances that make home learning difficult. Questions about how children will catch up when schools return are rife. Much debate continues about when and how schools will open.

On top of this, mothers take the lion’s share of the “worry work” of parenting. This is hard to quantify as it takes place inside a person’s head. Research that has surveyed or interviewed parents about who takes responsibility for the managerial and organisational aspects of parenting indicate that mothers take greater responsibility than fathers. In other words, mothers are more likely to make child care arrangements, schedule doctors’ appointments and sign permission slips, **and** even homeschool. Mothers remember and mothers remind.

Key findings:

- Do you consider yourself solely responsible for homeschooling your child/children?
 - NO 40%
 - YES 60%
- What has been the biggest impact of homeschooling your children during COVID-19?
 - Key trends:
 - 27% choosing “life skills” over homeschooling
 - 19% concerned children are falling behind
 - 62% of children with SEN are struggling with reduced support and routine change
 - 7% have purchased new laptops to access online school work

Homeschooling

“I’m not homeschooling. It’s impossible. Will my children be disadvantaged? Probably.”

“Increased stress and detrimentally affecting my ability to work resulting in financial loss. No down time at all after homeschool/domestic duties/work so difficult to have the patience required for homeschooling junior school aged children. No time to exercise so impacting on physical and mental health.”

“I spend evenings preparing activities for them but since my work is so busy I can’t spend time with them (they are 4 and 6), so when I’m in a meeting they are watching TV (for up to 6h). I cannot keep this up.”

“The amount of work being set by the schools (I have 2 daughters, one in year 7 & one in year 4)! Both schools are good or outstanding but they have set virtually a full timetable every week day which is putting a huge amount of pressure on my children and myself.”

“I am at home, trying to work during a crisis whilst also schooling, parenting and taking care of my house..... I am definitely not homeschooling. Homeschooling is an active choice and as far as I'm concerned the obligation to teach my children is still actively with their school, with my support.”

“Overwhelming, frustrating, exhausting, stressful. Definitely the first words to spring to mind. I trained in the education sector and worked in a specialist school and nothing could prepare me for this.”

“Everyone talking about HOME SCHOOLING. This is not home schooling and it should be recognised. We cannot be expected to take the place for formal schooling and hold jobs down.”

Free School Meals/Vouchers

“Just getting food is a huge stress as delivery slots are few and far between. Also school meal vouchers can't be spent online.”

“I need to be able to spend school meal vouchers online.”

“He no longer gets meals at school so my outgoings have increased. We don't qualify for the vouchers as my income was too high before maternity leave but this has reduced as I am now on mat leave.”

Access to IT/Laptops

“My children have saving accounts so we have used that money to purchase laptops and books for them”

“The biggest impact is having 7yr triplets and two laptops all stressed as can't do the work”

“We've done as much of the school work as we can. Lots of it is on the computer and we only have 1 so choosing what's to do when is tricky. Biggest problem is juggling three year groups of work.”

“only having one laptop and four children makes homeschooling a joke”

“All the work is set on-line and my sons secondary schools learning hub is not compatible with an iPad or phone so he has to use my laptop to be able to complete his work and that means while he is using it I cannot! I work but we can not afford to buy a second laptop.”

“Having to teach a 6 year old, 10 year old and 14 year old all at the same time, internet problems, no laptop, not enough phones or tablets for the kids to work from.”

Special Needs Children

“Psychology appointments have been put on hold”

“One moment we're being told not to put too much pressure on ourselves and give more cuddles and then the next we've been sent a 40 page ks2 study pack”

“My autistic son can no longer go to his specialised tutor. His sensory needs are now nearly impossible to meet and progress we were making with anxiety and socialising have gone backwards. Meltdowns are increased”

“My child has cerebral palsy. She needs a new splint for her leg but I can’t see anyone in orthotics or physio. This is causing massive stress when I am also a key worker and looking after a vulnerable parent who is being shielded.”

“My child has cystic fibrosis ...he also has autism and is aggressive ...he won't cope with people in masks”

WORK

75% of mothers with dependent children are in paid work (*Office of National Statistics, 2019*). Economically speaking, COVID-19 could have a disproportionately negative impact on working mothers. While working mothers make up a large chunk of part-time and informal workers in the UK we cannot conclude that this is because these women lack career ambition and/or career commitment. Childcare in the UK is costly and the education system (as structured currently) requires children to be on state school holidays for approximately 12/13 weeks per annum, while average UK employee holiday entitlement including public holidays is 33.5 days.

Part time roles are usually the first to get sliced in periods of economic uncertainty. And during prior global outbreaks, when women have to give up work and income to stay home, they often find it harder to spring back after the crisis. Equally, it will take systematic research to determine whether COVID-19 will signal a catastrophic degenerative move in women’s career progression. On first analysis of the SFM Survey data it’s possible that a generation of corporate women might not make the senior levels they were on track for. The unforeseen consequence of this will be that the diversity corporations have worked so hard to embed, might well disappear.

Key findings:

- Working mothers are coping by:
 - Working long days to fulfill their professional roles and care for children. That means waking well before the children and working through the evenings.
 - Moving in other family members to provide multi-generational child-care support during lockdown.
 - Deciding that homeschooling cannot be the priority. Maintaining their careers, and earning capability has to be protected for the financial safety of the family unit.

- 68% of working mothers are under more pressure to perform at work.
- 26% felt their professional development was frozen.
- 13% reported a positive effect of work on mental health.
- Only 3% mentioned supportive partners.

Work concerns arising include:

“This may destroy my career”

“My work is utterly changed by having a home full of children. My work has not reduced yet I have to deliver under entirely different conditions. I’m having to work from early morning to night to complete things or my livelihood will be gone. I will have worked for years in my career and it might go poof into the air.”

“I have to book time in to work so my partner can take the kids. He questions what I’m doing and I feel like I have to justify time away from the family...It’s driving me mad.”

“I along with many of my friends working in senior positions feel increased pressure to lean in at work during an economically difficult time whilst also feeling an overwhelming

pressure from 'society' to be a perfect mother and housekeeper – working women have never been so overwhelmed with expectation.”

“It is hard to juggle the demands of childcare alongside meetings and work but learning to balance with husband – it was assumed I would take on more childcare as my work was more flexible and husband earns more.”

“Worrying about my career. I am not giving it up”

“I had a fairly sustainable 'juggle' prior to COVID-19 but now this has been turned upside down. I think finding the time to recharge has been my biggest challenge. Mothers have never had so much expected of them. For women in senior positions a significant challenge around time has been created – they were sold a myth that outsourcing was the solution. Now they are unable to outsource childcare and household responsibilities the burden of both is often falling on mothers, who already have significant responsibilities at work. These women are our next generation of board members and if they are overwhelmed right now this will impact their future prospects and overall female progression in the workplace.”

“We (mothers) will be the ones who have to work around staggered return to school, less childcare, mental health impacts on our children.”

“I am furloughed as I have literally been left “holding the baby” both grandparents being in vulnerable groups and shielding. Both myself and my husband need to work to live so this is affecting our income and paying then bills. Of course, it is the mother who is expected to take overall responsibility for childcare. Both I and my husband have jobs where we cannot work from home.”

“I may look unfavourable to my managers as I didn't do as much as colleagues during the lockdown and my career could be affected or gone as a result.”

“Whilst I celebrate that flexible working is now going to be an acceptable way to work, for a larger portion of people, I do worry about the long term prospects for women. I am currently prioritising my career but I see many women who are falling into a trap of deprioritising themselves, returning to 1930's housewives. I fear as the economic situation worsens mothers, who are juggle so much, will be the first to be made redundant and we will lose a generation of female progression in the workplace.”

“I feel that if I don't demonstrate how useful I am now and keep my skills up, I could be more at risk of redundancy as a part time worker who has had two periods of maternity leave on the past five years.”

“Mental fatigue stress and effects of having the responsibility of full time job and two year old twins to care for...Now 6 weeks in and burnout is imminent.”

“My career will suffer against my male colleagues.”

“I am considering quitting my job till the schools reopen. I work in oncology clinical trials so I cannot quit.”

“Many women become the de facto childcarer and it is their careers that take the hit, not the spouse.”

“The apparent solution is for one of us to ruin their career by stopping work. And then the pointer is always to the women. It seems beyond people to think that both your wages are needed.”

MONEY

Research during and after Ebola showed that while everybody's income was affected by the outbreak in West Africa, men's income returned to pre-outbreak levels much faster than women's income. Women, and especially mother's responsible for dependent children, will be thrust into poverty.

Key findings:

- 30% shared they are working mother breadwinners worried about their reduced earning power.
- 24% reported they are entrepreneurs not eligible for any financial support.

"Having to limit what myself and the children are eating due to finances. Not having the money to buy resources for the kids work, simply things like paper or craft equipment."

"Financial Stress (we had to buy laptops) Feeding 4 lunches x5 days a week. So 20 extra meals a week."

"I am looking after 2 toddlers and working from home, I am also a single mother. I work for myself as the sole director of a limited company so the government help available to me is £560 a month which means I have to try and keep making money. I am totally exhausted and very reliant on my mother and brother to help me with childcare (they also have full time jobs they're trying to do from home)."

"As a working mother that is the main breadwinner, with her own business, I worry about having enough time to devote to the job to keep the money coming in to keep us afloat. I don't fall into any of the categories that qualify for support, and whilst we are doing ok at the moment, depending on how long this goes on that will change."

"Pay me universal credit properly (they messed up the payments, and are taking weeks to investigate the issue...i had to use my overdraft, and borrow from family to pay rent and bills)"

“Financially it could be very tough to recover from. I will get a job but the bills could pile up and that will set us back financially. Our other worry is how to pay for childcare when this is all over depending when my daughter goes back to school.”

“I’m a single mother who is self-employed. I was slowly getting myself onto an even keel. Now I’ll be put back several years because of debt. I have a landlord who is still taking his rent, a council that is still taking council tax and bills that still need paying, with no income coming in until June. It will vanish instantly to pay off the bills and rent, but who knows how long it will last and how long it will take to rebuild my business.”

HEALTH

In addition to the obvious threat of contracting COVID-19, the mental health of mothers and their children is in grave danger. Single, pregnant, women of colour and disabled mothers are especially vulnerable. This could have profound and lasting impact in families, in the workplace, and in UK society.

Key findings:

- 25% - Concerned for their child/children’s mental health.
- 12% - Increased relationship troubles.
- 61% of single mothers are concerned about who will care for their children if they contract COVID-19.
- 56% - Overwhelmed by pressure to balance everyone's needs.
- 28% - Explicitly said their mental health was impacted negatively.
- 32% said they were failing everyone.

“The second shift is now all day, with continuous interruptions. We need to keep the children safe, well fed, educated and entertained, while also keeping a perfect house and

doing amazing work. This is mentally unsustainable and will have lasting impact on mothers mental health. If women have no opportunity for the mental space to recharge they are more likely to get ill, suffer from exhaustion, struggle at work. We need partners to really step into both the physical and mental space to support mothers.”

“Putting my daughter and myself at additional risk. Financial implications of additional childcare (had to move providers twice and pay double for some of that period, plus my parents usually help out with childcare so I'm now paying for more hours). Stress at work and bringing it home, no one to sound off to (solo mum). No support network. Mental health suffering massively. Finances suffering (used food bank). Exhausted. Toddler exhausted as now had to do longer days at nursery and additional travel. Zero understanding from employer (NHS).”

“I feel I bear the entire mental load for my family, young children, partner, elderly parents, in laws. But actually do very little to help them, either due to distance or my own total overwhelm.”

“My mental health was not in a great place before this...All the time for me has now disappeared. As has my support network in terms of extended family and paid childcare. I'm hanging on by my fingernails most days and swing constantly between rage and utter despondency.”

“Recognise that women are the ones bearing the brunt of being primary carer and this is likely to have career impacts as well as on their mental health.”

“Looking after everyone else's mental health before you are allowed to feel anything, rest, do what you need to.”

“As it is, I consider most mothers feel that they are the emotional litmus paper of their household and their mood has far more of an impact on everyone else than vice versa – I feel this is even more the case at the moment. There is a daily need to balance keeping my children and husband going as well as trying to find enough space (physical, emotional & time) to keep myself sane & rested. The mental burden is large & the worry regarding whether you are steering your family in the right direction feels very heavy some days.”

“The affect it has on my mental health. Being imprisoned within the same four walls day in day out is relentless. It’s exhausting spending 12 hours a day at home on your own with a child every single day and constantly having to think of ideas to keep them busy, entertained and focused.”

“The juggle of a hugely increased workload, less income and being a single parent to 6 kids is having a toll on my mental health and I try and keep positive for my kids”

“My children are finding it hard and supporting them when I am struggling too is a real challenge. My mental health is definitely impacted, some days I can’t help but cry. I feel lost and alone”

“I’m a single mum trying and failing to home school. Whilst working full time. Whilst looking after my team’s mental health and keeping my child sane, fed and in a clean home. I am completely mentally and physically exhausted”

“I am mentally exhausted there is too much weight to carry for one person and no respite”

“I have gone back on antidepressants after 10 years off as any of my usual coping mechanisms are now not there and the pressure felt is too much to handle at many points on many days.”

“Managing the mental health burden of feeling like you are failing on all fronts.”

“I am a solo mum (no second parent in the family). EVERYTHING is up to me. Food, safety, entertainment, schooling, earning money, everything. I am at breaking point.”

“The impact on my mental health is massive. I have stopped watching tv and listening to the radio as I can’t handle anymore over load. I am a key worker so I get enough pressure at work. It’s stressful and exhausting and sleep for everyone is affected which doesn’t help.”

“How do you think COVID-19 and the measures put in place to manage it will impact you in the long term?”

- 31% - fear reduced job security as employers may favour non-parent employees
- 14% - intend to spend more quality time as a family.
- 16% - concerned for children’s social and educational progress
- 10% - plan to make big life changes
- 17% - predict a reversal of women’s progress
- 29% - worry life will never return to “normal”

“What can the UK Government do to best support you?”

Key themes:

1) Open schools and nurseries

“Open schools as soon as safe to do so!”

“Ensure that schools are safely opened as soon as possible – for most parents working in senior roles this is their largest burden right now.”

“Listen to what we are saying... help schools & nurseries return...”

2) Keep schools closed longer

“Continue to reassure me that schools will not open until it is safe to do so”

“Not reopen schools before it is safe and teachers can have PPE.”

“Don’t lift this lockdown too soon.”

3) Give clear guidance on next stage and support for parents

“Give clear, measured and timely advice, based on medical and scientific findings. Have an empathy with the impact of their decisions on wider society.”

“Provide more transparent guidance, and share thinking so that parents can start to prepare, i.e. if schooling will likely resume but only on a part time basis will there be additional support or protection for employees who find themselves with long term additional childcare responsibilities? I feel that there is an assumption that parents will just absorb this somehow, and I believe women would be disproportionately impacted”

“Mark single mothers as vulnerable so we can access support from supermarkets”

“Provide more clarity over the plans. Have a clear strategy that they communicate through a number of official channels that allows parents to properly anticipate and plan for the coming months.”

“The government could support me by requiring employers to support parents providing childcare and stop them sacking staff due to lack of childcare.”

“Solo parents need more support, priority online shopping slots are a start. Being able to have one family that we can visit and join up with for childcare and company, for the children and the adults. Food prices have gone up and energy costs will be a lot higher with everyone being at home all the time so some financial help would be appreciated.”

“Consider a New Zealand type policy that allows families in separate houses to ‘join bubbles’ if they have all been isolating for 2 weeks before hand”

“Create more virtual learning for the kids to ease work of their parents”

“Allow us to choose small groups to support and be supported by”

4) Protect mother’s work rights

“Provide the right for “child sick days” like in many european countries – I can’t balance any more working from home plus looking after kids”

“Invest in women’s and children’s services, fund domestic violence services so we know we have somewhere to go if we need it. Make gender equality training mandatory for all men who are locked down/ on furlough, so unpaid care work is redistributed. Show us the scenarios for end of lockdown. Investigate whether children can play on playgrounds again. Pay virtual play workers to help us help our kids learn through play. Come and live in a small social housing flat, with no outdoor space, before you make your policies. Listen to women, listen to mothers. Make sure the cabinet has loads of mothers in it – how do you make decisions otherwise?”

“Create a basic income for mothers as a temporary 12 month solution.”

“Ensure women who have had mat leave in the last 3y and are self employed are fairly treated in considering financial loss of earnings.”

“Finally realise what women give to the economy! Make changes to encourage flexible working and home working. Consider the school year and if it still works”

“Ensure women will not be fired in organisations in veiled performance reviews”

5) Recognise the unpaid labour of mothers (now and always)

“Recognise that women are the ones bearing the brunt of being primary carer and this is likely to have career impacts as well as on their mental health.”

“Recognise mothers, working outside of the home or not, and our contributions to the economy and wider society. We are keeping the country going and maintaining some semblance or normality for the adults who will decide how we live in the future.”

“We (mothers) will be the ones who have to work around staggered return to school, less childcare, mental health impacts on our children. ”

6) Provide financial support

“Grants for small business owners rather than loans that will damage us long term.”

“Provide meal vouchers to all out of school children that would have been provided them at school”

“Increase child benefit as extra cost in buying materials usually provided by school such as reading books and craft items and food.”

“Be clear about measures and why they are necessary; reinforce the benefits system for carers to give them greater security; reevaluate who are the key workers in society and reward them financially”

“Remove the benefit cap for private renters so families are not drowning in debts for years to come.”

7) Corona-led

“By doing as much as they can to support development and manufacture of a viable vaccine, and to support NHS staff and facilities.”

“Provide PPE to protect key workers”

“I feel strongly that the government should advise people to wear masks.”

“Ensure the health of our children and elderly/ vulnerable is at the forefront of their decisions.”

Remember that:

1. Suspending ambition is not the trend - it's the conditions that are holding women back

2. Shelving/leaving careers through "logic" may bring long-lasting career regression, individually and collectively
3. Engaging tangible support from partners is a game-changer
4. Powering up resilience by not upholding impossible standards

SCHOOL FOR MOTHERS, CEO Danusia Malina-Derben - following her PhD scholarship, Danusia rose from ESRC Research Fellow to Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Development in British & USA Business Schools. After leaving her tenured academic post she secured reputation as an authority on C-level execs and Boards. The company she founded, DMD Global, influences the way industry leaders strategise through analysis (and development) of the behaviour of board/senior level individuals and teams. This is focused on their organisational roles in relation to psychological principles that govern leadership, negotiation and decision-making. Danusia is a veteran specialist in teamwork, group dynamics, organisational culture and personal identity. As author of more than 30 articles and book chapters, she is a frequent feminist commentator on workplace trends and women's careers. In 2018 Danusia additionally founded School for Mothers, a movement supporting working mothers as they build their careers while raising families. She's host of top rated *School for Mothers Podcast* as well as *School for Fathers Podcast*. She is also mother of ten.

You can email Danusia on: hello@schoolformothers.com



SCHOOL FOR MOTHERS

SPECIAL REPORT: MOTHERS & COVID-19

School for Mothers surveyed 286 UK mothers between 28th - 30th April 2020 using a bespoke designed online survey to elicit previously unpublished data on Mothers & COVID-19. We've turned the qualitative responses into quantitative data and summarised below.

EDUCATION

Do you consider yourself solely responsible for homeschooling your child/children?



BIGGEST IMPACT OF HOMESCHOOLING?

- 27% - Choosing "life skills" over home schooling
- 19% - Concerned children are falling behind
- 62% - Children with SEN struggling with reduced support & routine change
- 7% - Purchased new laptops to access online school work



"I'm balancing every job - parent, teacher, employee, cleaner, cook and more"

WORK

HOW ARE WORKING MOTHERS COPING?

- LONG DAYS - up early + late to bed
- OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS MOVED IN TO SUPPORT
- HOMESCHOOLING CAN'T BE #1 PRIORITY

68% under more pressure to perform at work

3% mentioned supportive spouses

26% professional development is FROZEN

"Increased pressure to lean in at work plus overwhelming pressure from 'society' to be a perfect mother and housekeeper - working women have never been so overwhelmed with expectation"

13% reported positive effect of work on mental health

MONEY

THE PRICE OF LOCKDOWN WITH KIDS

- No childcare means reduced ability to work
- Increased food bills
- Extra expenditure on resources
- Loss of free school meals + voucher issues
- Laptops bought



30%

WORKING MOTHER BREADWINNERS WORRIED ABOUT THEIR REDUCED EARNING POWER

24%

ENTREPRENEURS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR ANY FINANCIAL SUPPORT

HEALTH & RELATIONSHIPS

25% concerned for children's mental health

56% overwhelmed by pressure to balance everyone's needs

12% increased relationship troubles

28% explicitly said their mental health was impacted negatively

61% of single mothers concerned who will care for their children if they contract COVID-19

32% said they were failing everyone

BEING ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE TAKES IT TOLL

LONG TERM IMPACT?

31% fear reduced job security as employers may favour non-parents

10% plan to make BIG life changes

17% predict a reversal of women's progress

14% intend to spend more quality time as a family

16% concerned for children's social + educational progress



12% hope WFH will mean more chance of flex at work in the future

29% worry life will never return to "normal"

SUPPORT NEEDED



Mothers asked the government to:



- PROTECT WORKING MOTHER'S ABILITY TO WORK
- RECOGNISE THE UNPAID LABOUR OF MOTHERS (now and always)
- SUPPORT PARENTS (and acknowledge the strain)
- BETTER FINANCIAL SUPPORT
- DEAL WITH COVID-19 effectively + transparently
- OPEN SCHOOLS 17% // KEEP SCHOOLS CLOSED 8%

REMEMBER THAT

- Suspending ambition is not the trend - *it's the conditions that are holding women back*
- Shelving/leaving careers through "logic" may bring long-lasting career regression, individually and collectively
- Engaging tangible support from partners is a game-changer
- Powering up resilience by not upholding impossible standards

WWW.SCHOOLFORMOTHERS.COM

School for Mothers is a movement supporting working mothers as they build their careers while raising families. Click to listen to: [School for Mothers Podcast](#) & [School for Fathers Podcast](#).