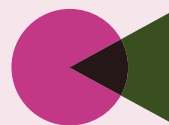


# Evidence



CENTRE FOR  
EVIDENCE-BASED  
PUBLIC  
SERVICES

## The Women's Edition

Overcoming discrimination

Fear of violence | A mother's work

Information and contraceptive use

Lives in lockdown | Discover Economics

Summer 2021

# 02



# Welcome to Evidence

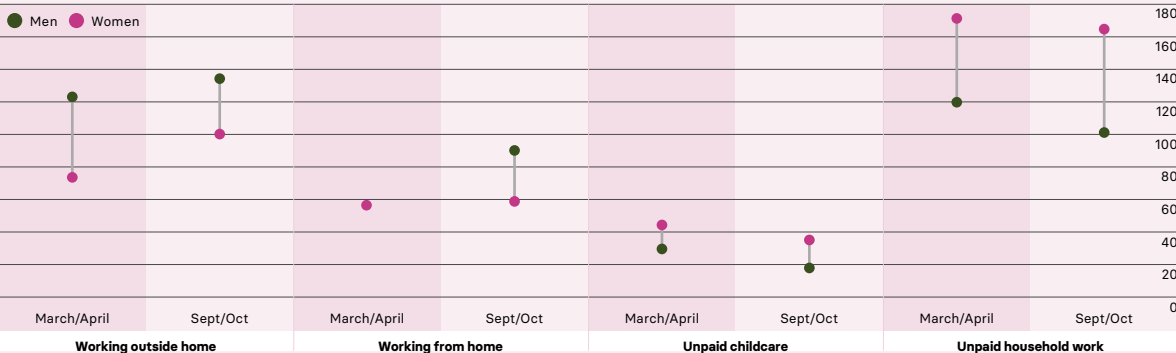
In our second edition we focus on women, and start by highlighting some of the ways the pandemic has affected men and women differently.



**Helen Simpson**  
Director of CEPS /  
Evidence Magazine editor

The Covid-19 pandemic, including the lockdown, furlough, working from home and home-schooling has affected the lives of men and women in different ways. **Figure 1** illustrates differences in time use in 2020 between men and women. This ONS survey covers adults who are working, not working and retired, and those with and without children in the home. The first lockdown in April saw a decrease in time spent at the workplace and an increase in time working at home. By September 2020, once schools had re-opened, both men and women had increased their time at work – with women seeing a larger increase outside the home, and men a greater increase in time spent working at home. As pre-pandemic, women spent more time on unpaid childcare and unpaid housework than men. The amount of time men devoted to childcare and housework actually increased during March/April 2020, but had fallen back by September/October.

**Figure 1: Time use during 2020 (minutes per day)**



These patterns in part reflect pre-existing differences in employment, unpaid childcare and household work across the adult population. One group hit hard by the lockdown and the need to juggle additional responsibilities were working parents with young children. Our first article by **Monica Costa Dias** explains how the burden of additional childcare and home-schooling was shared out within families where both partners were employed. In many cases the burden fell on women – it was more likely to be mothers who adjusted their working hours and had those working hours interrupted. These extra responsibilities re-enforced pre-existing inequalities in how housework and childcare are divided, even within working couples, and will very likely have ongoing effects on women’s careers.

Since Spring 2020 we have all upped our game in terms of interpreting the wealth of data, statistics and evidence emerging over the crisis, from the incidence of Covid-19 cases in the community and the concept of ‘excess deaths’ to understanding the benefits from vaccination versus any risks of side-effects (and for more stats see our Data Story by **Senay Sokullu**). The next three articles highlight the important role of statistics, information and media coverage in governing how we behave and make decisions.

**Zahra Siddique**’s research, set in urban India, examines how media reports of incidences of sexual assault can affect whether women choose to go out of the home to work, by changing their perception of the risks they face. She finds that increases in media reporting and hence awareness of sexual violence towards women can reduce the proportion of women willing to travel outside the home to work over the next few months. Her research suggests that initiatives to make travel for women safer in settings where legitimate fear of sexual violence is rife, can help keep women in the workplace.

The next articles provide insights into how accurate information can be used as a relatively inexpensive and effective policy tool. First, how giving people facts about the reality of discrimination in performance evaluation at work can help to overcome bias, unconscious or otherwise. And second, how providing information on pregnancy risk can help women who do not plan to get pregnant make more informed choices around contraception.

In the first piece, **Arnaud Philippe** discusses work that demonstrates how hard facts can be effective in overcoming discrimination in the workplace. In the university setting he examines, students are known to exhibit negative bias when evaluating female instructors, resulting in them receiving lower scores in teaching evaluations. Simply reminding students that they should not discriminate was not enough to change their behaviour. But giving them evidence that discrimination happens in practice and the consequences of it, did work to close the gender gap in performance evaluation.

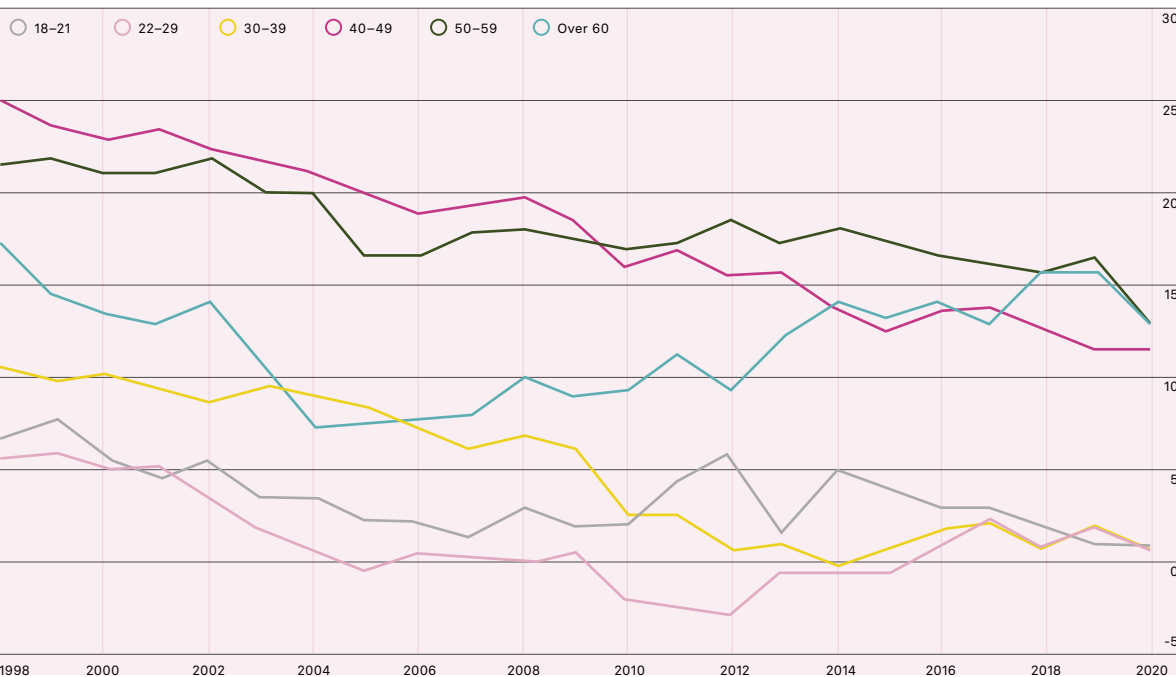
**Christine Valente** explores how information influences decision making around contraceptive use. In the first study of its type in a developing country setting, she collected information on women’s beliefs about pregnancy risk and contraceptive efficacy and looked at the relationship between what women believed and their actual contraceptive choices. Her findings suggest a relatively inexpensive and scaleable policy intervention – providing women with accurate information about the likelihood of pregnancy when not using contraceptives – would help those women who are actively seeking to avoid pregnancy make (literally) more informed choices and increase contraceptive take-up for this group.

We end with a Q&A with **Sarah Smith** who is co-chair of the Discover Economics initiative, which aims to increase diversity among those who choose to study economics at university, and ultimately within the economics profession. Occupational choice, and prior to



that, decisions about what subjects to study at school, college and university are one factor underlying gender pay gaps. (Interestingly, **Figure 2** shows that the gender pay gap in the UK has been decreasing over time, and at least among full-time employees at younger ages has been nearly eliminated, but jumps back to over 10% for over 40s). Discover Economics is aimed at 15 to 17 year-olds making decisions about their future education. One striking fact, and one that fits with the theme of this magazine, is that while one in six boys chooses to study economics at A-level, only one in seventeen girls does so. Sarah explains what drove her to establish Discover Economics and why the lack of diversity in economics is a problem.

**Figure 2: UK gender pay gap among full-time employees by age (%)**





# A mother’s work during lockdown

Lockdown and school closures placed huge additional pressures on families. In juggling childcare, home-schooling and the demands of employers, it was mothers who faced the greater disruption to their work.

Author: Monica Costa Dias



The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns of entire sectors of the economy imposed drastic changes to the work and domestic lives of many families. Among the most affected were families with young children. They not only faced the full disruption of the crisis on their jobs and their ability to carry out their daily professional activities, they were also left with the responsibility of caring for and educating their children from home during the extended closures of schools and childcare facilities.

Many worry that mothers were particularly vulnerable to the lockdown. For example, early evidence showed that women did a disproportionate share of the jobs in some of the most affected sectors, such as hospitality, putting them at higher risk of job loss. The time pressures of having to care for children with little help from outside the family home may also have fallen mainly on women, who in most cases were already the primary carer before the pandemic. In addition, couples where both partners were in work and who now faced pressing childcare responsibilities may have had to prioritise the paid work of one of the them, something that again may have followed a gendered pattern. If responses to the lockdown reinforced traditional roles within the household, they may weaken women’s positions in work and their careers in the future.

### Work and childcare during lockdown

To shed light on this and learn about decisions within the family, a group of **IFS and UCL researchers** collected data for families with school-aged children living in England. The data describe the employment, working status and time use of mothers and fathers in two-parent opposite-gender families during the first

lockdown in Spring 2020. The information also covered what parents used to do before the pandemic, the types of jobs they worked in and how much they earned.

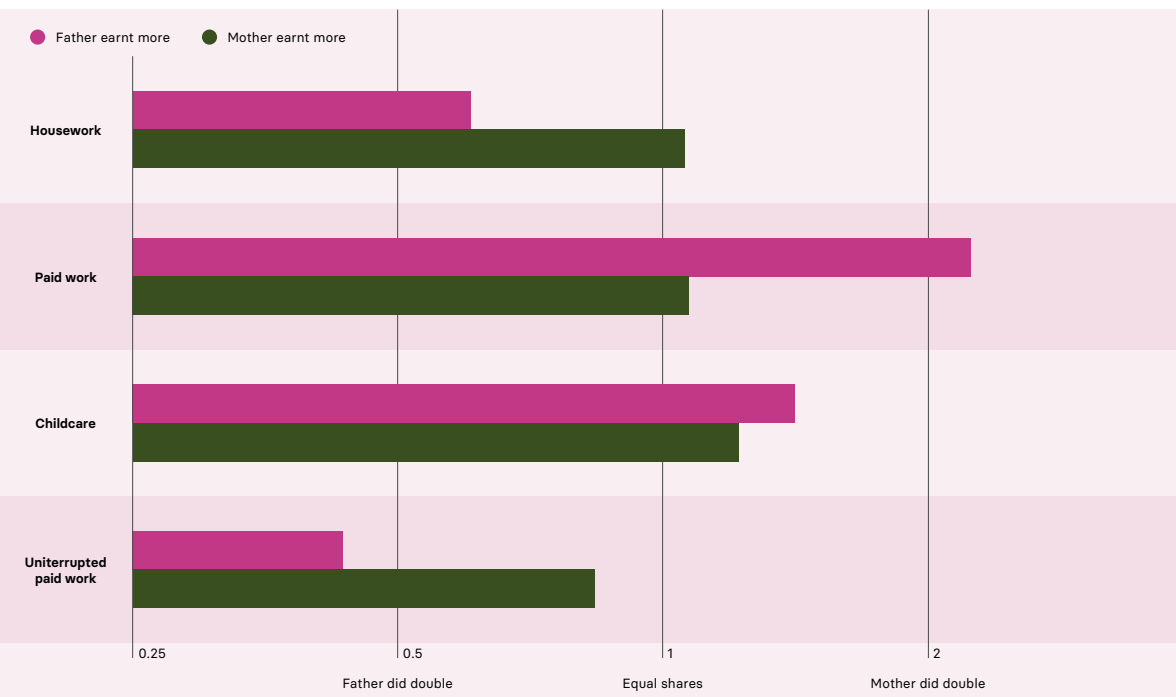
We found some striking results. Employment and hours of paid work fell dramatically during lockdown for both mothers and fathers, but more so for mothers. Among working parents in February 2020, mothers were 10 percentage points more likely than fathers to stop work during the lockdown. For those who continued working, the gender gap in working hours – which was already large pre-pandemic at almost 2 hours – increased by 15 minutes per day.

It is not only the quantity but also the quality of work time that matters for getting your job done well, and research has shown that interruptions can be especially detrimental. With many parents working from home while their children are out of school, focused time was hard to find. We measured interruptions in paid work by recording multitasking during work time. We found that mothers’ who worked were interrupted substantially more frequently than fathers, by about an additional 45 minutes per day. Their uninterrupted work time fell to just about 2.5 daily hours, which compares to about 5 daily hours for fathers. Together, these differences in working hours and the degree to which parents could focus on work compound pre-existing gender inequalities in the labour market that, even after decades of progress, were still large before the pandemic.



Image: karyukav, Freepik.com

Figure 1: Sharing of paid and unpaid work during the pandemic, according to the main earner in the couple (hour ratio, mothers : fathers)



**Note:** Figure 1 shows how work time was shared. A ratio of 1 indicates work time was shared equally. 0.5 that the father did twice as much as the mother. 2 that the mother did twice as much as the father.

### A mother’s work is never done

The differences in time spent working were offset by unequal divisions of domestic responsibilities. Mothers did a greater share of housework and childcare than fathers, coming to 4 hours more per day in total. While this is a staggering gap, it may simply reflect pre-existing inequalities in the allocation of domestic work. To investigate how parents shared additional demands for their time during the pandemic, we measured time dedicated to activities that were outsourced in normal times. Childcare during regular school hours is generally met by schools and other childcare providers, but was left for parents to provide during lockdown. Likewise, home-schooling was not needed before the pandemic.

We found that, as compared to fathers, mothers did an additional 80 minutes of childcare during normal school hours and 50 minutes of home-schooling. Even among parents who remained active in paid work during the lockdown, mothers did almost one hour more of childcare during normal school hours than fathers did.

### Did it make a difference if mothers were better paid than fathers?

These findings suggest that the pandemic crisis fuelled an increase in gendered roles within the household. But it might be that these responses were financially motivated, as families attempted to protect their incomes. Since fathers are the primary earner in most families, it could make financial sense for families to prioritise their paid work over that of mothers when faced with an increased need for childcare and domestic work.

But our data did not support this view. Among those parents who worked both before and during the lockdown, mothers who were the primary earner pre-lockdown worked the same number of paid hours

during the lockdown as their lower-paid male partners. In contrast, fathers who were the primary earner worked almost double the number of hours as their lower-paid female partners, (as shown in the top two bars in Figure 1, where the bar for households where the father was paid more is close to 0.5, the point at which the father spent twice as much time as the mother).

The figures are even more striking for uninterrupted working time: no matter who was better paid before the lockdown, mothers always had less uninterrupted working time (as shown in the bottom two bars in Figure 1, where the numbers are both below 1, which would indicate equality). These differences in working time were more than made up for by differences in time doing childcare and housework. Mothers did more of these irrespective of their pre-lockdown relative pay, and they did much more if paid less than their partners (the bars for housework are both above 1). Just as for the overall population of parents, these differences remain sizeable when focusing only on childcare during the hours of the school day.

The crisis looks to be intensifying gender inequalities in market and domestic work along traditional norms. Our results suggest that mothers are more likely than fathers to adjust what they do and reduce their hours in paid work when families are faced with unexpected shocks that change, for example, their needs for childcare. What is crucial for women’s careers is that this does not weaken their position at work, for example through being perceived as less reliable by employers. It will be important to follow the balance of time use post-pandemic and the impact on women’s jobs, particularly if home-working becomes much more prevalent.

# Fear of violence and the decision to work

Rapes and assaults against women can get widespread media coverage. My study, based in India, investigates one hidden consequence of this. It shows that media coverage and the anxiety it creates about safety can actually deter women from going out of the home to work.

Author: Zahra Siddique



Media coverage of sexual violence against women can have powerful effects, creating stress and anxiety, and leading to a fear of public spaces. It can also potentially deter women from going out of their homes for work. A survey by the International Center for Research on Women carried out in Delhi in 2012 following the rape and subsequent death of a Delhi woman on a moving bus, (which was very widely reported in the media), found that over 70% of respondents stated that women face sexual violence or harassment in their neighbourhoods, and that more than 50% stated that these spaces were always unsafe. Almost 20% said that they were fearful when going out alone in the daytime and an additional 10% percent stated they would not venture out alone at all. These proportions increased to over 60% and 20% when respondents expressed safety concerns about going out after it was dark.

### Reports of violence and working outside the home

Using data from cities in India I examined the impact of media reporting of sexual violence on the likelihood that women choose to work outside their homes. To study this, I combined data on the Indian labour market with geographically linked data on media reports of physical and sexual assaults that occurred in Indian districts. I used this to investigate the effect of media-reported violence in the local area (i.e. the Indian district) during the previous three months on subsequent decisions of resident women about whether or not to take on work outside the home.

I found that an increase in media reported sexual assaults within the local area in which a woman lives leads to a reduction in the probability that she works outside her home. By contrast, media-reported physical assaults have no effect on women's work decisions. I also find that media-reported sexual assaults have no effect on whether men work outside the home, emphasising the importance of safety concerns for women only.

### Is the cause a fear of violence stemming from media reports, or is it the actual prevalence of violence in an area?

It is possible that women's reactions are not driven solely by media coverage, but also by changes in the underlying level of crimes against women, such as rapes, assaults and insults, occurring in their local area. To account for this in the analysis I add in data on crimes that are reported to the police in a district over the past year. This allows me to compare women who live in areas with the same underlying level of crimes against women, but who are exposed to different levels of media reported sexual assaults. This allows me to separate out the effect of the media from underlying levels of crime. Having done this, I continue to find that greater media reporting of sexual assaults leads to fewer women going out to work, indicating that women are adjusting their behaviour in response to media reporting of sexual assaults.



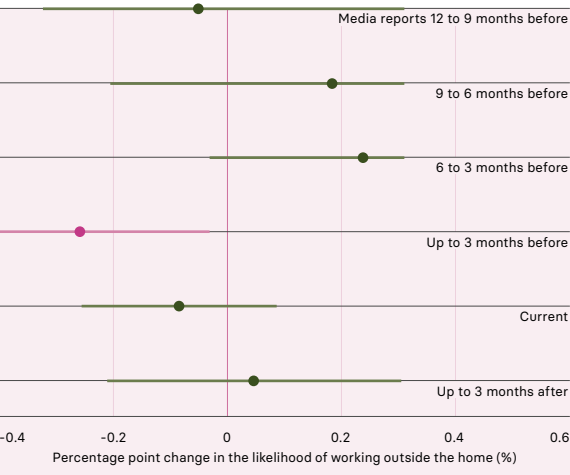
I also rule out other potential reasons for this fall in female participation in the labour force, such as employers who hire women being forced to close shop. Such closures would reduce women's opportunities to work outside the home and might even increase violence against them. But my data do not support this story.

### How long does the media influence last?

An important question is whether this effect on going out to work is short or long term. My results point to the effect being short-lived and that female participation in the labour force subsequently increases to catch-up the initial decline. This can be seen in Figure 1, which shows how female participation in jobs outside the home responds to reports of sexual assaults in the media at different points in time.

The only evidence of a negative response is to media reports of violence during the previous three months (shaded pink in Figure 1). The response to reports six months in the past is actually positive, reversing the more immediate decline. As a check that the results were picking up a genuine response to the media reports, it was re-assuring to see that there were no changes in the likelihood of going out to work in advance of an increase in reporting – something that women by definition could not respond to.

Figure 1: Effect of an increase in media reports of sexual assault on the likelihood that women work outside the home



Note: the squares show the central estimate of the effect on working outside the home and the lines the 95% confidence interval around the estimate. If the line crosses 0 we cannot rule out there being no response.

### Identifying with the victims?

In 2017, about 30% of police registered rape victims in India were women younger than 18, and 50% were between 18 and 30 years old. Since sexual assault victims are more likely to be younger women, I examined whether the response to media reports is stronger for women in this age group and found that the negative effect on leaving the home to work is indeed concentrated among young women aged between 18 and 25 years old. Among these women, the effect is more than twice as large that for all working-age women, with a smaller (although still negative) for older women alone.



## 20% said that they were fearful when going out alone in the daytime

### The need to work

It is also possible that the economic imperative of work leads poorer women to overcome their fear and continue to work outside the home. Consistent with this, I find suggestive evidence that the negative effect of local media-reported sexual assaults on female labour market participation is lowest among women from the poorest households – these women respond the least.

### Improving women's safety

The research highlights the importance of addressing the safety concerns of women in India, particularly young women. The obvious solution is to change the behaviour of those inflicting violence. Longer-term interventions could involve strengthening the policing and legal frameworks that protect women from sexual assaults.

Shorter-term interventions could include the provision of separate transport facilities for women. A recent study examined a policy that reserved subway cars for women in Mexico City and found that this reduced sexual harassment towards women. Another, in Rio de Janeiro, found that travelling in women-reserved safe spaces reduced harassment. However, both studies also found some negative effects - in Mexico City there was an increase in non-sexual aggression incidents among men, while in Rio de Janeiro there was stigmatisation of women who travelled in female-only cars. But initiatives to make travel to work safer should be a step towards reducing the risk of violence targeted at women and giving them the confidence to go out to work.

# Overcoming discrimination at work

Studies have shown that university students can be biased in their evaluations of female instructors. In a world where pay is performance related and gender pay gaps exist, overcoming this (unconscious) bias matters. To change behaviour, telling people that discrimination exists is not enough. Showing people direct evidence of discrimination and its implications will do more.

Author: Arnaud Philippe



Few people disagree that gender equality is important. A 2017 Eurobarometer report found that over 90% of men and women in Europe tended to agree that promoting gender equality is “important to ensure a fair and democratic society”, and nearly 90% that it is “important for companies and the economy”. Despite this apparent consensus toward egalitarian views, gender disparities remain high. In the same survey, some gender stereotypes remained very strong. For example, over 35% of those surveyed in the UK agreed that the most important role of a woman was to take care of home and family and that the most important role of a man was to earn money, (although a higher percentage, around 60%, disagreed in both cases).

And in the workplace, gender pay gaps persist. Before the pandemic, ONS analysis found that the gender pay gap in the UK stood at 8.9%. Research has highlighted multiple reasons for the pay gap, but one key question is whether or not there is evidence of discrimination at work.

Practice what you preach

There looks to be a discrepancy between what people say they value and what actually happens in practice, so public policy aiming to promote gender equality (for example in schools) should do more than just convince more people that it is an important issue. If discrimination is occurring, interventions need to change behaviour.

People might state that they hold egalitarian views, but not always behave according to their convictions, either consciously or unconsciously. Hence policy should focus on raising individuals’ self-awareness of their decisions and make the reality of discrimination more salient.

Does what you tell people about discrimination matter for changing behaviour?

To answer this question I ran a simple experiment, with my co-author Anne Boring, in a university setting where we knew that gender-based discrimination was occurring. The university in France where we conducted the study was one where Anne had already investigated gender bias. Her work had already shown that students’ evaluations of male teachers were much better than their evaluations of female teachers, and that this was particularly true for male students. It’s possible of course that the male instructors were, in fact, simply better than the female instructors. But the analysis showed the male instructor got a higher score whatever the students actually learned from the instructor in class. That is, differences in the instructors’ quality could not explain the different evaluation scores.

For the design of the experiment the French university we used had the advantage of being split across seven different campuses located in different cities. In addition, all first-year students across the campuses followed the same six main courses with lectures given by the exact same instructors.

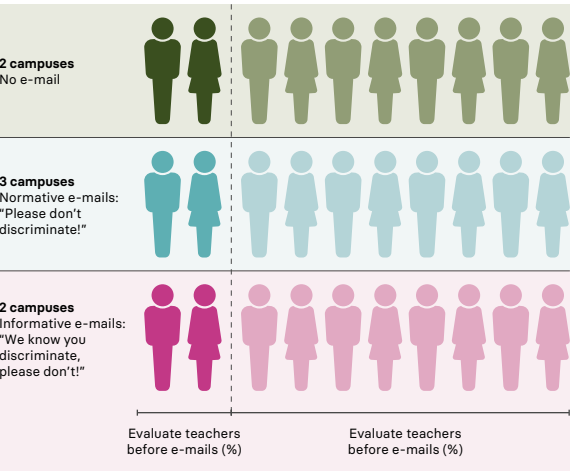
Telling students about gender bias

To implement the experiment we sent emails to students. These emails differed according to which campus the students attended. Before sending them we first let 20% of all students fill in the evaluation (to get a sense of what the evaluations would look like if we did nothing). Then:

- At two campuses the students received no email.
- At three, they received an email saying that “evaluations must exclusively focus on the quality of the teaching and must not be influenced by criteria such as the instructor’s gender, age or ethnicity”. We called this the “normative” email – it was setting some expected standards and norms of behaviour.
- At the final two campuses we sent the normative email as above, but we also added in a description of Anne’s previous study and highlighted that “the results of this study show that students tend to give lower ratings to their female instructors despite the fact that students perform equally well on final exams, whether their seminar instructor was a man or a woman.” We called this the “informative” email.

Figure 1 summarises the experiment. The design allows us to observe student evaluations both before and after the emails were sent. We can then compare how they change depending on which email students receive, and also compare how the evaluations change for male versus female instructors.

Figure 1: Design of the experiment



What did we expect? Let’s start with the simplest case: at campuses where no e-mails were sent, we expected to see no change in students’ evaluations of either male or female teachers. The more interesting questions are:

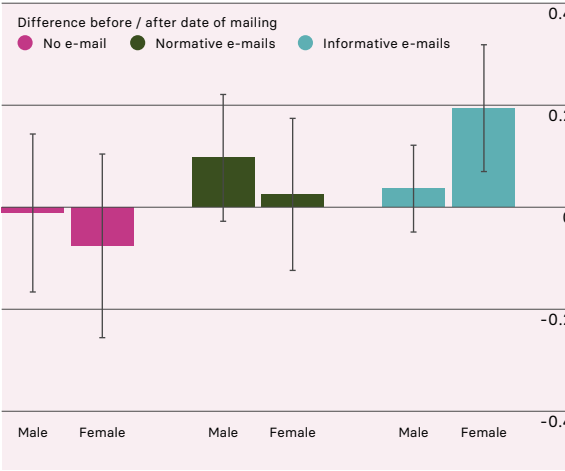
- 1 At campuses where e-mails were sent, did we see a change in evaluation scores afterwards?
- 2 Is any change directed towards an increase in the scores of female instructors?
- 3 Does it matter which email message the students received – the normative or the informative email?

The answer to all three questions is “Yes”, and it was the informative email that led to a change in behaviour.

Figure 2 illustrates the answers. It shows how evaluation scores increase or decrease following the emails, across the three campus groups and according to whether the person being scored was a male or a female instructor. As an example, the green set of bars are for the campuses where the normative emails – saying that students should not discriminate – were sent. The bar for evaluations of male instructors shows some increase in scores after the email was received, but we couldn’t rule out the possibility of no change (the black confidence interval line overlaps with zero, meaning we can’t rule out there being zero change). And there is certainly no increase in scores for female instructors. Overall, the normative email had no effect on gender bias.

But the informative email did. On the campuses where students were told that there was evidence that students gave lower scores to female instructors, the scores of female instructors increased (by on average 0.2 points, as shown by the orange bar on the right), and male scores remained unchanged. The informative email worked to decrease the gender gap. By digging further into the data, this change was mainly driven by male students increasing their scores for female instructors.

Figure 2: Change in evaluation scores



Note: the coloured bars show the average increase or decrease in evaluation scores. The black lines are confidence intervals around the estimates (if they overlap with zero then we can’t rule out that there was in fact “no change”).

Tackling discrimination with evidence

The main conclusion is that sending information about people’s own or their peers’ behaviour is, at least in this context, more effective than just sending statements about standards. This has implications not only for performance evaluations but any context in which discrimination occurs. Even when a norm is largely accepted, making people aware that it is violated in practice can make a difference in changing what people do. So, for example, when designing unconscious bias training it may not be enough to raise awareness and tell people that they should not discriminate – in situations where discrimination occurs, the message needs to be crystal clear, and people need to be shown evidence it happens in order to stop it.



# Information can increase contraceptive use

Overseas development assistance is at risk as a result of the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic. As an example, the UK government is set to reduce its aid to the UN Family Planning programme by 85%. But for many women seeking to avoid pregnancy, access to and use of contraceptives is crucial. Our research shows a route to increasing contraceptive take-up among some of the world’s poorest that is low-cost and easily scalable.

Author: Christine Valente



**T**he “unmet need” for contraception Despite longstanding efforts to improve both the supply of modern contraceptives and knowledge about them in developing countries, contraceptive use remains low. This is true even among women who express the wish not to become pregnant in the near future - often referred to, when not using contraceptives, as having an “unmet need” for contraception - and in settings where modern contraceptives are readily available at low or no cost. Indeed, the World Bank reports that about one quarter of married, fertile-age women in low-income countries state that they do not wish to become pregnant, but that they are not using contraceptives either.

Our research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the relative importance of various barriers to contraceptive use for women who want to avoid pregnancy. By doing this we hoped to identify innovative new family planning interventions that are both effective and cost-effective. The good news is that

simply giving women accurate information about the risk of pregnancy they face when not using contraception may help increase take-up.

**Women’s beliefs about contraceptive use**  
In work with Grant Miller and Áureo de Paula, I collected information on contraceptive use from women in Southern Mozambique. What is unique about these data in a developing country setting, is that they document women’s beliefs about the consequences of using or not using contraceptives expressed in precise probabilistic terms. For instance, we collected each woman’s perceived risk of pregnancy within 12 months when: 1) using no contraceptive method, and 2) when using each of the contraceptive methods of which the woman is aware. These risks were expressed using a scale – e.g. 14 out of 20 which translates to 70%.

We also obtained similar information for a wide range of determinants of contraceptive use such as: the perceived risk of approval by different people in the woman’s social circle and, most importantly, their partner; the perceived risk of experiencing a range of side effects; the perceived risk of pregnancy after discontinuation; the expected cost of using contraceptives – both financial and other costs such as waiting times to obtain a particular contraceptive method.

**Beliefs and behaviour**  
We then combined this novel information on women’s beliefs with data on their actual contraceptive use to measure a wide range of potential barriers to contraceptive use that drive the unmet need for contraception.

For example, because the women did not systematically choose methods that they believed to be cheaper or to be more readily available, our findings suggest that very costly policies such as making contraceptives completely free and eliminating any access constraints such as waiting times or unreliable supply would only have modest effects on actual contraceptive use.

**Making general policy recommendations**  
Of course, every context is different, and the most effective strategies to increase contraceptive use among those with unmet need might well vary – that

is our results for Southern Mozambique may not be applicable everywhere. But a virtue of our approach is that by using our modelling in combination with data for other countries, it can yield tailored, context-specific insights. For example, we can work out how a wide range of policies or scenarios, such as removing all financial costs, waiting times, side effects, etc. affect contraceptive use.

**What might be most effective in increasing contraceptive take-up?**  
Our findings imply a ranking of different interventions in terms of the magnitude of their effect on the share of women using contraceptives among those who state that they do not want to get pregnant within the next two years. The most interesting part of this ranking is that a low-cost, easily scalable intervention targeting knowledge about the expected risk of pregnancy when no contraception is used compares favourably with much more costly or much less feasible interventions:

- Increasing women’s expectations that their partners will actually approve of the use of available forms of contraception by 25 percentage points, if feasible, would reduce the unmet need for contraception by 12%.
- Aligning the views of women and their partners about the desired number of children would, if feasible, reduce unmet need by 8%.
- Simply correcting beliefs about pregnancy risk in the absence of contraception by 25 percentage points among women who underestimate this risk is predicted to reduce unmet need by about 7%.
- Removing all remaining financial costs and availability constraints would reduce unmet need by around 4%.
- And coming up with new contraceptive technologies with no side effects would only decrease unmet need by 1%.

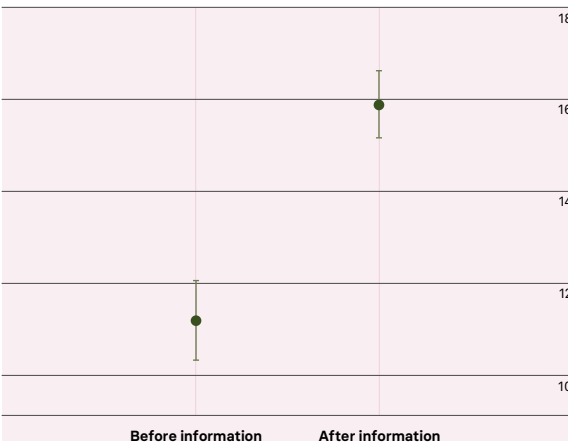
**Providing women with information on pregnancy risk**  
A second part of our study tested what would happen if we provided women with accurate information about the risk of pregnancy when not using contraception and demonstrated that correcting women’s beliefs about pregnancy risk is feasible.

When we informed women that studies show that, on average, 17 out of 20 sexually active women will get pregnant within 12 months if not using contraception, those women who, prior to receiving this information, believed this risk to be below 17 out of 20, substantially changed their beliefs in line with the information they receive. This is shown in **Figure 1**. On average these women change their beliefs about the likelihood of becoming pregnant from around an 11 out of 20 chance to nearly 16 out of 20.

This revision of their beliefs about the risk of pregnancy increases the share of this group of women who intend to use contraceptives by around 4.5 percentage points, as shown in **Figure 2**. Importantly this response is also in line with the findings from our modelling exercise, meaning that our model can be relied upon to yield accurate predictions for interventions we didn’t try out in practice.

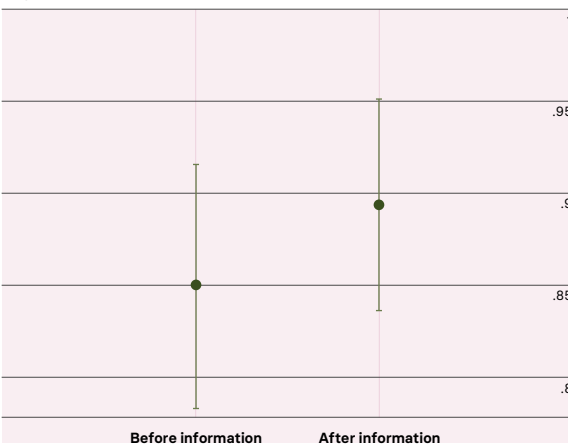
**Reducing unintended pregnancy**  
Our study suggests that interventions to reduce unintended pregnancy should no longer focus solely on the availability of contraceptives, but seek to influence demand among women who want to avoid pregnancy. For example, providing women with information allowing them to form more accurate beliefs about the risk of pregnancy when not using contraception is a novel, readily scalable, low-cost avenue for immediate positive change. Involving men in policy interventions to increase contraceptive take-up is another approach that we are keen to explore.  
But one important remark to make at these times of budget cuts, is that these conclusions were reached using data from a context where, as in many developing countries, modern contraceptives are readily accessible at low- or no cost. If levels of free or subsidised supply were to decrease, then availability and financial constraints may become much more important.

Figure 1: Beliefs about pregnancy risk



**Note:** Figure shows the change in beliefs about the likelihood of becoming pregnant in the next 12 months, for those with an initially low estimate, prior to and after receiving accurate information about pregnancy risk.

Figure 2: Intentions to use contraception



**Note:** Figure shows the change in intentions to use contraception, for those with an initially low perceived risk of pregnancy, prior to and after receiving accurate information about pregnancy risk.

# Data story: effects of the pandemic for women and men

Authors: Helen Simpson and Senay Sokullu

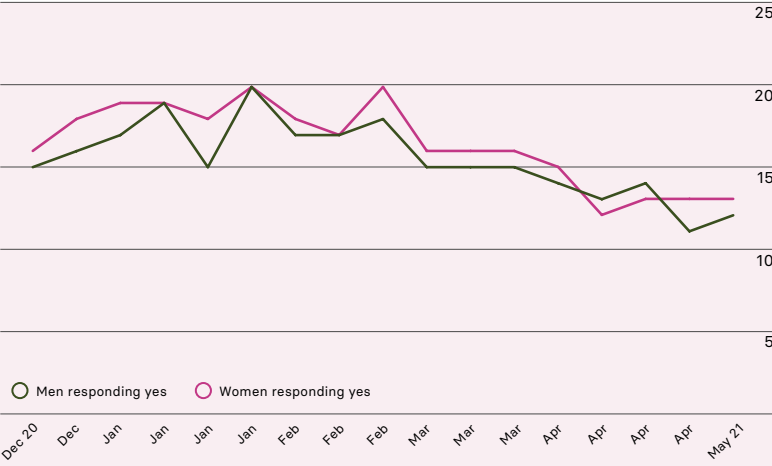
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## Who was more likely to report an effect on their health?

Covid-19 led to a higher death rate among men than women. But men and women are equally likely to have reported that the pandemic has had an effect on their health; declining from nearly 20% of people at the start of 2021 to 10-15% by May.

Source: ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module)

COVID-19 affected my health (%)



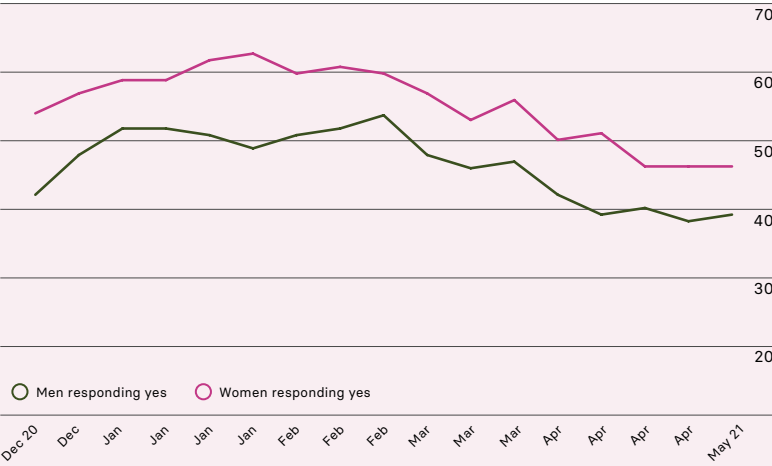
2

## And on their well-being?

But women are consistently more likely to report that the crisis has affected their well-being, for example through loneliness, stress and anxiety. That said, the figures are high for both at over 40% of people.

Source: ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module)

COVID-19 affected my well-being (%)



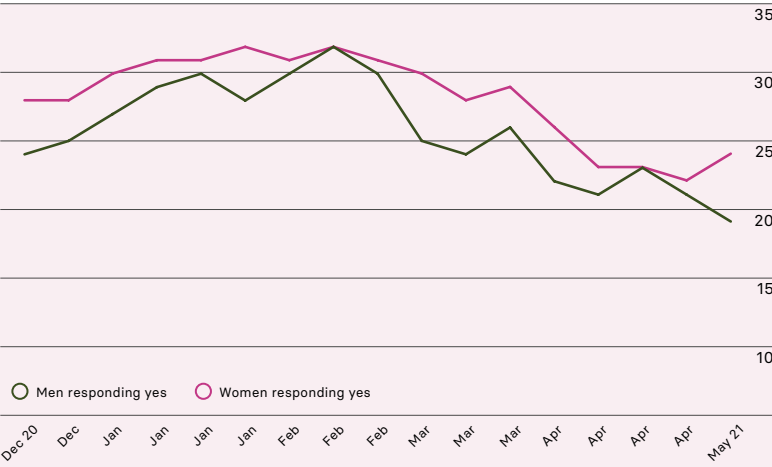
3

## And on their relationships?

Women are also slightly more likely to report that the pandemic affected their relationships, but again the figures are high for both groups, and are higher during lockdown.

Source: ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module)

COVID-19 affected my relationships (%)



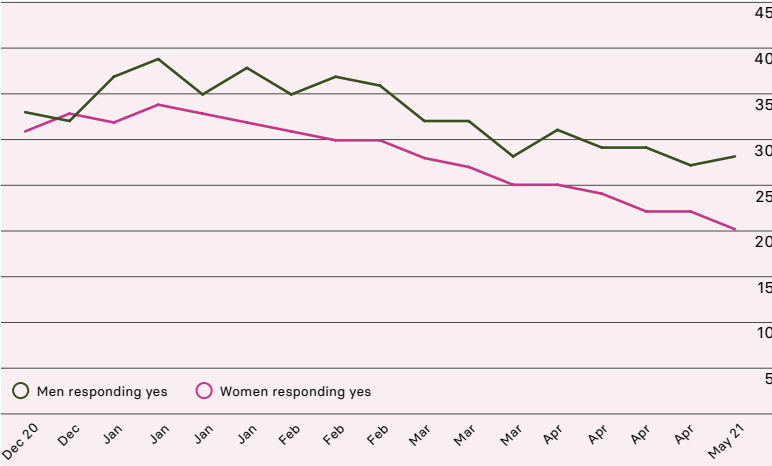
4

## Who reported an effect on their work?

Since the January 2021 lockdown men are more likely to report that the pandemic is affecting their work. But note that the data underlying this figure include people both in and out of work.

Source: ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module)

COVID-19 affected my work (%)



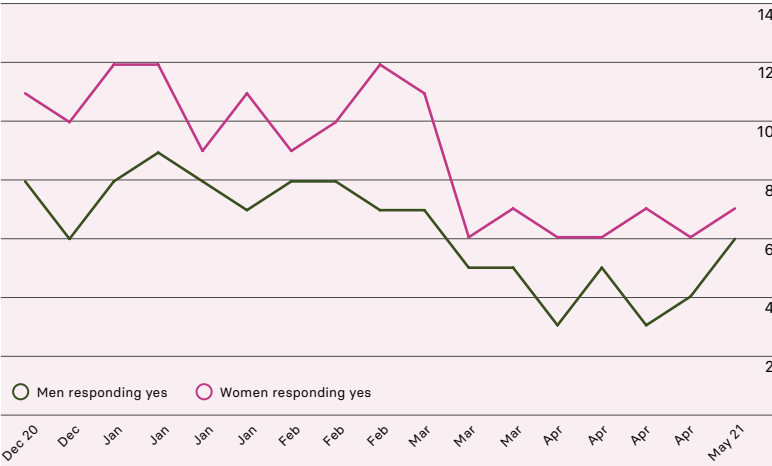
5

## And on their caring responsibilities?

And as discussed in our first article, women are more likely to report effects on their caring responsibilities.

Source: ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (COVID-19 module)

COVID-19 affected my caring responsibilities (%)



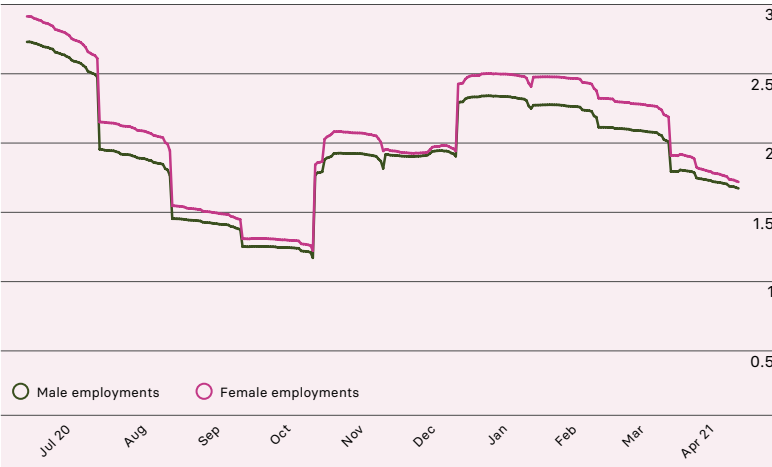
6

## How will the end of furlough affect men and women?

HMRC has reported a 'furlough gap' - that higher numbers of women have been furloughed than men. The gap is decreasing as the number of people on furlough falls. But as people move off furlough, it will be important to monitor any gender gap in return to employment.

Source: HMRC, CJRS Statistics June 2021

Number of jobs furloughed (million)





## Q&A – Sarah Smith

Co-Chair Discover Economics and Professor of Economics, University of Bristol

### Q1. What is Discover Economics?

Discover Economics, which I co-chair with Arun Advani at the University of Warwick, is a Royal Economic Society campaign to diversify undergraduate economics students. We have long been aware that many groups are under-represented in economics (women, state school students and some ethnic minority groups). Our vision is for economics to attract the brightest and best irrespective of their background. To achieve that, we believe we need to reach out and communicate with 15-17 year olds what economics is about – and what economists do.

### Q2. Why did you set up the Discover Economics campaign?

Many students lack opportunities to find out about economics. A recent UCAS report identified economics (along with medicine and dentistry) as a subject that students can find hard to access at university because they don't know enough about it and sometimes find out too late that they don't have the right A levels/ Highers. Economics isn't part of the national curriculum and isn't taught in all schools, particularly state schools (this partly reflects a shortage of economics teachers). If they think about it at all, many students see economics as just about money and finance and they picture economists as suit-wearing, number-crunching men. We want potential students to see economists as being people just like them and to be excited by the idea of studying economics because it talks about the big issues of our time, like inequality and climate change.

### Q3. Why is greater diversity in economics important and how might it benefit policymaking?

Increasing diversity in economics is essential for good policy-making. Economists occupy key roles in Government and in the Bank of England and so need to reflect the society they are shaping. The mix of economists really does matter – there is evidence, for example, that male and female economists hold different views on key issues, such as whether the labour market is currently fair.

### Q4. What projects has Discover Economics been involved in so far?

We started 18 months ago and launched a website and newsletter, and Twitter and Instagram accounts to promote our messages. We have run mini campaigns, for example, for Black History Month, LGBT history month and International Women's Day, to amplify the voices of under-represented groups. We have launched a podcast series in which a diverse range of economists – from the (now ex) chief economist at the Bank of England to current students – talk about their personal journeys. And we have set up networks of academic champions to share ideas about how to engage students. There are now many more economics outreach events taking place at different universities around the country, which is really exciting.

We are also setting up a network of professional champions. We are working with organisations that already run mentoring programmes to create opportunities for students to be mentored by economists. We would love people working as economists to become professional champions – we need economists to talk about their work and their journeys, so that young people see economists as being just like them, and are excited by what economists do.

### Q5. And what are your future plans?

There will be a Pride in Economics event in June and a careers event in July. We also hope to launch a student champion programme in the next year to create opportunities for current university students to run taster sessions in schools and colleges. Our aim is for 15-17 year olds to have many more opportunities to find out about economics – and that means going into schools as well as bringing together students from many schools for events, and targeting groups like careers advisers. Longer-term we would love to see economics taught in more schools – and even on the national curriculum. But that is probably some way off!

### Discover more:

[www.discovereconomics.co.uk](http://www.discovereconomics.co.uk)

Twitter: @DiscoverEcon

Instagram: discoverecon



## Publications



### Why are the east sides of formerly industrial cities more deprived?

*East Side Story: Historical Pollution and Persistent Neighborhood Sorting* by Stephan Heblich, Alex Trew & Yanos Zylberberg (*The Journal of Political Economy*)  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/713101>



### How can we reduce gender discrimination in student evaluations of teaching?

*Reducing discrimination in the field: Evidence from an awareness raising intervention targeting gender biases in student evaluations of teaching* by Anne Boring and Arnaud Philippe (*The Journal of Public Economics*)  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104323>



### How do safety concerns affect the work decisions of urban women in India?

*Media reported violence and female labor supply* by Zahra Siddique (*Economic Development and Cultural Change*)  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/714009>



### Does an overconfident perception of one's health drive risky habits such as smoking and eating junk food?

*Biased health perceptions and risky health behaviors—theory and evidence* by Patrick Arni, Davide Dragone, Lorenz Goette, & Nicolas Ziebarth (*The Journal of Health Economics*)  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2021.102425>



### How does disruption to full-time employment after childbirth affect women's wages over their lifetimes?

*The gender pay gap in the UK: Children and experience in work* by Monica Costa-Dias, Francesca Parodi, & Robert Joyce (*Oxford Review of Economic Policy*)  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/graa053>

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