

Closure of schools during the COVID-19 lockdown could increase inequalities in primary and secondary education

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A new study has highlighted the impact that the closure of schools during the COVID-19 lockdown could have to children's education, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds most affected.

By comparing the average amount of time children have spent learning at home compared to attending [school](#), researchers have calculated that it could take six months for secondary school children from the most

advantaged families—where the main parent is at a large employer, or in a managerial or professional occupation, both parents work from home and the child has her own computer—to catch up with where they would be had schools stayed open. For secondary school children from the most disadvantaged families—where the main parent is not in a professional or managerial occupation, either parent does not work regularly from home and the child has to share a computer with other family members—this increased to a year.

They also calculated that [primary school children](#) from the most advantaged families would be approximately one year behind where they would be if schools had stayed open and those from disadvantaged families would be even further behind.

The researchers, Tony Kelly, Christian Bokhove, and Nic Pensiero from the University of Southampton, used the national [Understanding Society](#) study to analyze data collected on home-learning from the families of 1430 primary and 1595 secondary school children in the month of April.

According to the data provided, children in secondary education with the most advantaged circumstances spent nearly four hours per day on [school work](#), compared to just over two and a half hours for those from disadvantaged circumstances. For children in primary school education, the most advantaged spent nearly three hours on school work compared to less than two and a half for the most disadvantaged pupils.

Explaining the possible reasons for these results, Dr. Nic Pensiero of the University of Southampton, who led the study said: "Parents who work in professional and management occupations, which are suitable for home-working, are better able to assist their children's home learning. When you also consider that such parents are better able to provide children with their own computers and other [learning resources](#) as well as a suitable learning spaces, this puts their children in a significantly

better situation than those from non-professional, non-managerial families."

Dr. Pensiero continued: "The transition to distance learning is likely to increase inequalities in education because of differences in both the volume of school work provided and the abilities of some parents to support their children's learning. Parents with professional and managerial jobs have the advantage of being better able to assist with home-schooling and having more time to do so as they are more likely to be working from [home](#)."

More information: Pensiero et al., Learning inequalities during the Covid-19 pandemic: how families cope with home-schooling. (2020). [DOI: 10.5258/SOTON/P0025](https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/P0025)

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