

Five things we learned about Dutch parents during the pandemic

December 15 2020, by Mara Yerkes and Chantal Remery



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The Netherlands has entered into its [strictest lockdown](#) to date, with a new round of school and daycare closures. This will undoubtedly have an impact on parents around the country, who must once again juggle home

schooling with work and childcare.

We have seen this before. Like many countries in Europe, the country first entered lockdown in March 2020. One month later, together with a team of researchers at three Dutch universities, we [began](#) following a representative group of parents, asking them [questions](#) about paid work, the division of care and [household tasks](#) and their quality of life during the [pandemic](#).

Our findings are based on a national probability sample, which means we're following a nationally representative group of parents with children under 18 at home. This allows us to accurately track the impact of the pandemic on parents across time.

This data is providing an important evidence base for evaluating the suspected impact of the pandemic on [long-lasting gender inequality](#) among parents. Based on our most recent [results](#), here are five things we have learned.

1. Many parents are working more

In June, 45% of parents adjusted their working hours: 15% worked fewer hours than before the pandemic while 30% worked more. Parents in essential occupations tended to work longer hours than parents in non-essential occupations (36% versus 25%).

The Netherlands is known for its [part-time working model](#). Before the pandemic, two thirds of Dutch women [worked part-time](#) (less than 30 hours a week). [Among mothers](#), part-time work is even more common. However, our study doesn't suggest the extra working hours are just [part-time](#) working [mothers](#) "catching up." Weekly working hours prior to the pandemic had no influence on parents' likelihood of working longer hours.

2. Decreased leisure time for mums

Half of mothers reported having less leisure time in June than before the pandemic and this was true for 31% of fathers. The situation in June is slightly better than it was in April, when 57% of mothers and 36% of fathers reported a decrease in leisure time. But the decrease in [leisure time](#) remains substantial, particularly for mothers.

The decrease could be problematic, particularly given the [lower quality of women's leisure](#) prior to the pandemic. Leisure time is crucial for physical and mental health. Having insufficient time to relax and recover from work can eventually lead to health problems, like burnout.



Credit: Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

3. More arguments

The need to find new ways to work and care for children appears to be causing friction for some parents. Both mothers and fathers reported an increase in weekly arguments about their working hours (from 4% pre-pandemic to 17% in June) and their partner's working hours (from 3% pre-pandemic to 13% in June).

Childcare remains the biggest cause for disagreement among Dutch parents, similar to reports in other countries. Prior to the pandemic, 9% of parents reported having weekly arguments about childcare, whereas 25% of parents reported weekly arguments on this in June. This is surprising, as primary schools and childcare centers partially reopened in May and then fully reopened in June. This reopening does not appear to affect the frequency of disagreements about childcare.

4. Shifting gender roles

The pandemic could be causing a small but steady [shift in gender roles](#). Our study shows that 31% of fathers took on a greater share of childcare tasks, compared to before the pandemic. This is a larger group of fathers than in April, when 22% reported doing more. Although the division of care for children remains highly unequal in many households, the pandemic has led to a closing of the gap.

But we have not seen the same shift in household tasks. In April, the division of household tasks had become slightly more equal among Dutch parents than before the pandemic (36% versus 32%). In June the percentage of parents equally sharing household tasks returned to the pre-pandemic levels of 31%.

5. Parents are reasonably satisfied

Fathers rate their satisfaction with the division of care tasks at 7.4 on a scale from 1 to 10 while mothers rate their satisfaction at 7.1. Mothers are less satisfied with the division of household tasks, rating their satisfaction a 6.8. Fathers rated their satisfaction with the division of household tasks at 7.3.

The satisfaction with the current situation suggests neither mothers nor fathers may be motivated to challenge unequal divisions of care or extra time spent on care tasks. [Previous research](#) suggests that mothers' acceptance of unfair situations as fair can be a crucial barrier to decreasing gender inequality.

The pandemic is far from over. To decrease the long term impact of the pandemic on parents' quality of life, there needs to be more policy support (like well paid leave and flexible work arrangements) from [governments](#) and employers. [Research](#) shows that carefully designed policies make it easier for parents to combine paid work with care responsibilities, thereby reducing gender inequality. Such support is needed now more than ever, as [parents](#) face the newest lockdown measures.

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