

School closings during pandemic affected parents' work schedules, finds German study

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A new study shows that the closing of education and childcare facilities in Germany during the coronavirus pandemic actually had an impact on parents' employment, as the opening of facilities led to a rebound in their

work hours. For example, parents whose children had at least partial access to care or schooling in attendance worked about 1.5 to 2 hours more per week than parents whose children still had to completely do without care or attendance. The researchers found no differences between women and men.

This study was conducted jointly by the Institute of Sociology and Social Psychology of the University of Cologne and the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) in Nuremberg, and examines the effects of reopening schools after the lockdown in March and April 2020. Dr. Lukas Fervers is first author, corresponding author is Professor Dr. Marita Jacob. Lina Tobler (University of Cologne), Veronika Knize and Bernhard Christoph (both IAB) also contributed to this study.

The article "Kids back to [school](#)—parents back to work? School and daycare opening and parents' employment in the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic" has been published in the *Journal of European Social Policy*.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, significant policy measures were taken to contain the spread of the virus, particularly in the spring of 2020. One of the drastic measures was the complete closing of schools and daycare facilities. As a result, parents were forced to stay home to care for their children, who were unable to attend school or daycare because of the closings.

In their study, the researchers relied on the different school and childcare policies of the German federal states (Laender) to compare the working hours of parents who were thus subject to different constraints regarding childcare. The aim of the study was to find out whether—and to what extent—the reopening of schools and daycare centers provided relief for parents from childcare and enabled them to increase their working hours again.

To do so, the research team reviewed two opposing premises. First: The generally observed reduction in working hours was in fact (also) due to school closings, as parents had to fulfill childcare obligations. Second: If employers have already reduced the working hours of their employees—with or without children—due to the lockdown or increased them again in the course of the relaxations, the opening of schools and nurseries should not lead to an additional increase in the working hours of parents.

"The findings of our study confirm the first premise and suggest that childcare and school policies appear to matter beyond other pandemic developments," Professor Jacob explained. Parents whose children had at least partial access to care or schooling in attendance worked about 1.5 to 2 hours more per week than parents whose children still had to completely do without care or attendance. This effect is adjusted for other influencing factors that may have been associated with the school closing.

"Somewhat surprisingly, the opening effect is not larger for mothers than for fathers, since mothers often bear a larger share of [childcare](#) responsibilities," said Dr. Fevers. "However, this finding is in line with previous research for Germany, which finds that the labor market effects of the pandemic were generally not stronger for employed women and mothers than for men and fathers."

The study is thus one of the first to quantify the economic and social impacts of containment and closing policies to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The researchers emphasize that health considerations obviously were a priority in the implementation of the coronavirus measures.

Nevertheless, consideration should be given to how effective health protection can be achieved with as few side effects as possible. The

study can thus be seen as a first step towards a basis for putting together the most effective and efficient package of measures possible in comparable situations. For such packages of measures, the results of other studies must of course also be taken into account, especially with regard to the effects on [children](#) and adolescents.

More information: Lukas Fervers et al, Kids back to school—parents back to work? School and daycare opening and parents' employment in the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, *Journal of European Social Policy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/09589287231176775](https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287231176775)

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