



The impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education and Care in England and Wales

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Presentation Outline

- Background – inequalities in work and care
- CDC19 project – Aim & methods
- Policy context of early years education and care in England & Wales
- Early findings – changes to childcare use & the impact on work
- Sustainability of the early years sector
- Summary
- Policy Implications
- Next steps



- **COVID-19 has amplified gender inequalities in work and care**
- Throughout the pandemic, women were more likely to:
 - Assume additional childcare (& housework) following nursery & school closures
 - Supervise home schooling – in the most recent lockdown (ONS 2021)
 - Be at risk of redundancy (& low pay) because of their precarious position on the labour market (Women’s Budget Group 2020).
 - Quit their job or be furloughed (IFS 2020).
- If mothers step back from paid work, they could face a long-run hit to their career & earnings prospects.
- This risks reversing progress that has been made on closing the gender pay gap

The Devaluation of 'Care'



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- **Care jobs are undervalued, underpaid & predominantly done by women**
 - 96% of the childcare workforce are women; 40% are aged <30; 13% earn <£5 p/hour (Social Mobility Commission, 2020)
- Care work involves tasks that women have traditionally performed in the household without pay so the skills required are systematically undervalued
- Care is linked with women's 'natural' abilities rather than skills acquired through education or training, which has led to the feminisation of care employment
- The devaluation of care is exacerbated by the fact that wages often decline where the female workforce increases.
 - Also attributed to a high rate of part-time work & cut backs to public spending



Childcare During Covid19 project



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- **Aim**

- To explore how the pandemic has disrupted the early years' education & childcare sector across England & Wales.
- To understand how providers and parents are managing these disruptions and what this might mean for the safety & sustainability of ECEC

- **Funding**

- ESRC - part of the UK Research & Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19

- **Website:** <https://childcare-during-covid.org/>



- **WP1:** Nursery managers and childcare practitioners
- **WP2:** Childminders and nannies
- **WP3:** Parents and grandparents
- **WP4:** Comparative policy framework case studies
- Two waves of longitudinal data collection
 - **Wave 1:** January-March 2021 (**completed**)
 - 4 surveys (+3,000 respondents across all WPs)
 - 185 in-depth interviews
 - **Wave 2:** August-October 2021

- **15 hours free early education** - 38 weeks of the year for all 3 & 4 year olds.
- **30 hours of free early education** - 38 weeks of the year for eligible 3 & 4 year olds. To qualify:
 - Parents must work at least 16 hours p/week & earn the NMW or Living wage.
 - Upper income limit of £100,000 per parent.
- **15 hours free early education for disadvantaged 2 year olds**
- **Tax free childcare (UK wide)** – eligible working parents receive 20% of their yearly childcare costs on fees up to £10,000 per child (under 12 years old).
 - Old scheme: childcare vouchers & directly contracted childcare.

- **Childcare Offer for Wales – 30 hours p/week** early education for eligible 3 & 4 year olds over 48 weeks of the year. This is comprised of
 - 10 hours universal early education (Foundation Phase Nursery)
 - 20 hours childcare
- To qualify:
 - Parents must work at least 16 hours p/week & earn the NMW or Living wage
 - Upper income limit of £100,000 per parent
- **Flying Start** – targeted early years programme for 0-3 year olds living in the most deprived areas of Wales.
- **Tax free childcare (UK-wide)**

WP3: Parents – Sample (YouGov)



- 1,020 parents across England & Wales with at least 1 child aged <5

	%
Wales	7
BAME	11
Mothers (as the respondent)	55.7
Social grades AB & C1 (upper-middle class)	67
In paid work	72.7
Keyworker households	58.1
Single parent households	8.2
Same sex parent households	5

How did formal childcare use change during COVID-19? (for children aged <5)?



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Type	Pre-COVID ¹ (%)	During COVID ² (%)
Nursery	48.5	44.8
Childminder	6.8	6.8
Nanny	1	1.1
Multiple formal	0.5	0.2
No formal childcare	42.4	47.1
N/A	0.8	--
Total	100	100
n	1,016	1,016

¹Pre-COVID defined as before the first national lockdown in March 2020

²During COVID defined as “during the COVID pandemic in 2020”

How did formal childcare use change during COVID-19? (for children aged <5)?



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	During COVID (in 2020)					
Pre-COVID	Nursery	CM	Nanny	Multiple formal	No formal	Total
Nursery	76.7	2.4	0.4	0.2	20.3	100 (n=493)
Childminder (CM)	13	59.4	1.4	--	26.1	100 (n=69)
Nanny	10	20	60	10	--	100 (n=10)
Multiple formal	60	--	20	20	--	100 (n=5)
No formal	14.6	3.2	0.2	--	81.9	100 (n=431)
N/A - child born in LD	12.5	--	--	--	87.5	100 (n=8)
Total %	44.7	6.8	1.1	0.3	47.1	100 (n=1,016)

Note: P-value for group-wise comparisons <0.001



Informal childcare use during COVID-19

- **34%** (n=351) of parents used informal childcare during 2020
 - The majority (**85%**) was provided by grandparents
- Of those using informal care (n=351)
 - 57%** (n=201) used this *alongside* formal childcare provision (i.e. nursery, childminder or nanny).
- = Many working parents continued to draw on grandparent care despite the increased risks from children mixing in formal childcare settings

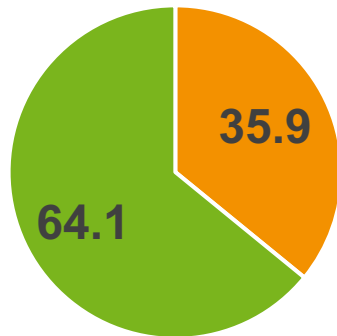
Returning to paid work following parental leave during COVID-19



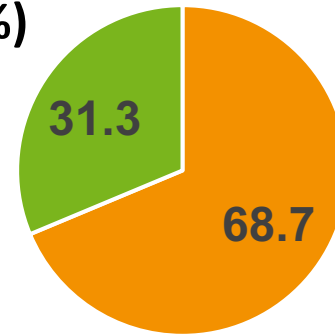
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- Just over a fifth (22%) of parents took parental leave between Mar-Dec 2020 (153 mothers + 67 fathers)
- *Of those (220) parents that took parental leave:*
 - 19% did not return to work because they chose not to or were not able to.
 - Over half (54%) said that CHILDCARE influenced their decision whether or not to return to work:

MOTHERS (%)



FATHERS (%)



■ No impact ■ Had an impact

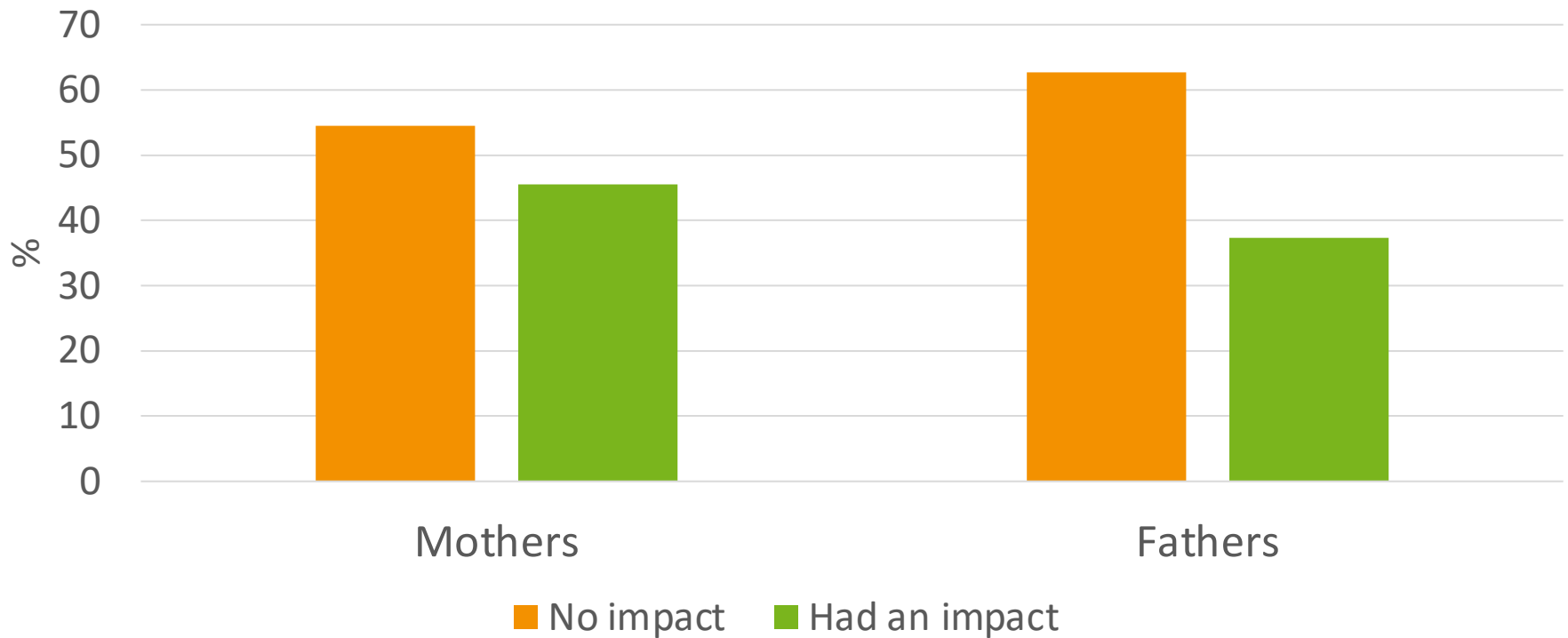
■ No impact ■ Had an impact

Access to childcare & ability to work



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Has access to childcare during the pandemic in 2020 impacted on your ability to work as usual?





How has access to childcare impacted on work?

I had to take extended/extra periods of leave to manage childcare (13.6%)

I had to reduce my paid work hours because I could not access suitable childcare (6.6%)

My current access to childcare has prevented me from finding or securing a new job (2.8%)

The difficulty in accessing suitable childcare is affecting my career progression (7%)

Changed work patterns/ I worked more unsociable hours

I lost business (I am self-employed)

Work productivity reduced /less able to focus

Experiences of working parents (WP3)



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- Every month I get the bill and I'm like; "ugh!" If you compare it to other European countries that have so much more subsidised early years childcare... some kind of subsidised childcare up until the age of three would be helpful.
- This is like so incredible how expensive childcare is in this country. And there is no equivalent aside from the US I think... It's absolutely insane, the cost of it.
- Subsidise it more, seriously! Make it cheaper and help support nurseries to actually pay their staff a bit more... they are undervalued so much
- Maybe it's just a simple – we need to invest more in early years. ...the stress of working and having young kids and the expense of it. And the reason we do it is so we can keep our foot in the door, so that in five years time once the kids go to school we can stay in the workplace as a valued member of the workforce (P50)



Experiences of working parents (WP3)

- My employers expected me to work from home with the children. And after about a month of trying to do this [I had] a near mental breakdown... trying to home school and do my job and have my boss in my living room (P28)
- We mapped out our sort of schedule for childcare, work, eating, feeding Alex, feeding ourselves... it's just an absolutely insane schedule (P23)
- I think my main frustration was that, you know, that informal childcare was, kind of, not considered as important as, you know, paid childcare
- There's an assumption that women are responsible for raising children and we're absolutely not ... it should be a family, a community that raises children. (P28)
- The people in those key decision-making roles when they've been looking at [EY] policies, I think it's very obviously that women weren't in the room. (P45)



Sustainability of settings (WP1)

Concerns about sustainability of settings

‘So, we were already in difficulty and that’s been a mixture of things, that’s the kind of change in early years funding, that’s early years per pupil amount not keeping up with the increases in expenditure, staffing cost, pension contributions... so that was already a massive squeeze.’ *Head, Maintained Nursery School, West Yorkshire*

‘our early setting is in crisis in terms of funding. COVID is probably pushing a lot of settings over the edge, I know quite a few closed at the end of last year and probably in this situation now it's probably going to be the same...’

Manager, Private Pre-School, London

‘I think for the team, uncertainty about their roles I think has been quite difficult, because since we’ve returned we have gone through staff redundancy as well...Because we did have a staff team of twenty-three and we’re now down to eleven.’ *Nursery Manager, national nursery chain, West Yorkshire*



Sustainability of settings (WP1)

Shifting roles and responsibilities, and work intensification for both workers and managers in early years settings

‘and you don't get a break from it because it's 20 odd hours a day, because people are having test results at all times of the day and they're informing you and right over the Christmas break, even though we've closed for a week at Christmas, we had to set up helplines and contacts, so that there was somebody always available. I actually worked Christmas Day.’

Nursery Owner, small nursery chain, West Yorkshire

‘I could feel myself getting emotional now because it's massive, the thought that I'm responsible for the health and safety of the children and staff in the school when there's a real, real threat, how will I ever get over losing anybody? The responsibility for that is huge, and also, it's very lonely being in this role because everyone expects you to have the answers’

Manager, Private Pre-School, London

- **Disruptions to how formal (& informal) childcare is used**
 - But both forms have provided critical support for working parents throughout the pandemic
- **Challenges to parents' work & working patterns**
 - For some, returns to work after parental leave have been hindered
 - Working from home has led to heightened work conflict
 - Lack of childcare affected career progression for some
- **Impact on household finances & employment opportunities, especially for women & sole parents**
- **Concerns about the sustainability of some settings**
- **Impact on child development & isolation**

- **Funding care systems needs to be prioritised as part of COVID-19 recovery measures**
 - Supports working parents reconcile work & family
 - Stimulates employment & gender equality
 - Enhances children's early education & development
- **Enhance quality of childcare provision**
 - The workforce is crucial for delivering high quality provision.
 - Include opportunities for career progression, upskilling & improvements in pay
- **Address the cost/affordability of childcare**
 - A couple with two young children earning the average wage devote **35.7%** of their pay to childcare costs (OECD 2017/18)
 - Particularly supports low income working women or those working PT

- **Second wave of data collection: July/August**
 - Follow up interviews with participants & repeat 4 surveys
- **Multivariate analysis of survey data**
 - Which settings are most at risk of closure and why?
 - What factors are associated with these risks?
 - How has the organisation of childcare changed as we move out of the pandemic
 - What the future of EY might look like?
- **Further research dissemination events**
 - Roundtables, seminars/workshops
 - Final report



Website: <https://childcare-during-covid.org/>

Twitter: [@ChildcareCovid](https://twitter.com/ChildcareCovid)



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