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**DOI**

[10.1111/gwao.12875](https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12875)

**Publication date**

2022

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Gender, Work and Organization

**License**

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[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Steinmetz, S., Vandecasteele, L., Lebert, F., Voorpostel, M., & Lipps, O. (2022). The gendered consequences of the COVID-19 lockdown on unpaid work in Swiss dual earner couples with children. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 29(6), 2034-2051. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12875>

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

Gender and Employment: Recalibrating Women's Position in Work, Organizations and Society in Times of COVID-19

# The gendered consequences of the COVID-19 lockdown on unpaid work in Swiss dual earner couples with children

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## Funding information

Universite de Lausanne; National Science Foundation, Grant/Award Number: 51NF40-185901

## Abstract

This article assesses the gendered impact of COVID-19 measures on changes in time that Swiss dual earner couples spent on unpaid work during the pandemic, focusing on families with children. Overcoming some of the methodological shortcomings of previous studies, high-quality representative panel data allow us to examine the change in time invested in housework and childcare before and during the pandemic, and test theoretical assumptions as to the mechanisms underlying the observed patterns. Gender inequalities are explained by the couple's work division prior to, and at the onset of, the pandemic and interpreted in the light of key theoretical approaches (economics of the family, bargaining and time availability, doing gender). Our results imply that in particular changes in the time availability of the partner are relevant for changes in time spent on housework, while in case of care work, the own time availability matters more. Moreover, we also found that the respondents' economic bargaining power within the couple matters both for housework and care work. Finally, the implemented COVID-19 measures neither led to an increase in patriarchal power structures nor did they foster an increase in equality for unpaid work among women and men. Instead, the results

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show that changes in time availability due to short-time, remote or overtime working schemes determined changes in time spent on unpaid care to a larger extent than gender alone.

**KEYWORDS**

COVID-19, division of labor, family, gender, unpaid work

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The division of labor between women and men is often the result of a complex and challenging negotiation process in coupled households. With the underlying normative national context shaping perceptions of the appropriate role of women and men in society, the division of tasks is not an isolated process. Although research has identified a general trend toward a more equal division of labor among couples, inequality persists (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016; England, 2010; FSO, 2017; Leopold et al., 2018). Changes toward a more equal division take time. Even if women and men are willing to share tasks more equally, well-established habits, organizational practices and social policies might hinder progress. In this context, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 with its measures seeking to curtail the spread of the virus, transformed social and economic life in an unprecedented fashion within a few days. In particular, couples with children at home experienced massive and rapid shifts in their established division of labor. Sudden school and daycare closures led to increased childcare duties. Moreover, many couples faced reductions in working time and obligations for remote work (work from home). This disruptive effect was exacerbated by the unavailability of outsourcing options, such as the involvement of grandparents, nannies and domestic helpers who normally reduce the gender gap in labor division (e.g., Craig et al., 2016; Raz-Yurovich & Marx, 2019). Due to these major disruptions and new responsibilities, families were forced to adapt and renegotiate their work and family roles.

In the scientific and public debate, two contrasting hypotheses about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on couple's division of labor have emerged. The "*re-traditionalization hypothesis*" claims that the pandemic is a "patriarchal pandemic" (Allmendinger, 2020). It is assumed that the pandemic and its accompanying measures led many couples to regress toward traditional gender roles, whereby women, and in particular mothers, are more inclined to shoulder additional housework and childcare responsibilities (Chemaly, 2020; Meraviglia & Dudka, 2021; Ozkazanc-Pan and Pullen, 2020). In contrast, the "*equalizing hypothesis*" claims that the COVID-19 crisis promoted a more equal division of labor between men and women. On the one hand, this assumption rests on women's overrepresentation in essential occupations, which played a crucial role in society's response to the pandemic. On the other hand, it is pointed out that the pandemic forced many workers into short-time work<sup>1</sup> and required working from home. As a result, also men and fathers might have had more time at their disposal or may have spent more time at home. Considering this increased exposure to family life and the potential unavailability of the female spouse for additional domestic work, the involvement of men (and in particular fathers) in childcare and household tasks might have increased (Carlson et al., 2022; Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Yerkes et al., 2020).

While the body of research on this topic is increasing, the findings for unpaid work are inconclusive. There is some evidence that women's and particularly mothers' engagement in unpaid work has increased (Del Boca et al., 2020; Farré et al., 2021; Giurge et al., 2021; Shafer et al., 2020; Yaish et al., 2021; Zoch et al., 2021). At the same time, other studies showed that the gender gap did not increase or even narrowed. While women still took on the lion's share of unpaid work, men and particularly fathers became more involved in unpaid work during the first COVID-19 lockdown (Carlson et al., 2022; Chung et al., 2021; Craig & Churchill, 2020; Kohlrausch & Zucco, 2020; Kreyenfeld et al., 2020; Sanchez et al., 2021). These diverse and sometimes contradictory results may be due to various factors, such as

the exact population under study, the country's cultural context and its pandemic response, as well as the type of data used. The first year of the pandemic has instigated the collection of a huge amount of ad hoc data of varying quality, from highly selective convenience samples to probability-based panel data. A crucial point of critique is that a majority of the aforementioned studies do not allow for a thorough examination of the consequences of the introduced COVID-19 measures because they lack solid pre-corona information. In the absence of comparable pre-corona data, a retrospective measurement may suffer from recall bias (Scott & Alwin, 1998). Other studies lacked the data necessary to base their analyses on explicit questions about respondent's time use. Instead, they relied on relational and retrospective questions (who did/does more childcare/housework before and during the pandemic), which are more prone to bias due to their subjective nature. Finally, and importantly, previous studies often lack information to test underlying mechanisms in the light of theoretical approaches of economic bargaining, time availability and doing gender. These parameters, however, are crucial for a better understanding of gender (in)equality arising from COVID-19 and lockdown periods.

Against this background, this article aims to assess the gendered impact of the first lockdown measures (March – May 2020) on the time spent on unpaid work in dual earner couples with children. More concretely, we examine the extent to which changes in time availability during the lockdown, and the bargaining position within the couple prior to the pandemic, impacted fathers' and mothers' unpaid working time differently. We focus on parents only, as they have been affected most severely in their division of paid and unpaid work due to school and childcare closures. The paper contributes to the literature in three ways: first, it assesses how heterosexual dual-earner parents have adjusted their unpaid working time during the first lockdown using high-quality representative panel data from Switzerland. The comparison of results from a pre-corona and a corona wave allows us to measure actual changes in time investment of respondents and their partners. Hence, we are able to overcome methodological shortcomings of previous studies. Second, from a theoretical perspective the research design allows us to test more rigorously the mechanisms that determine the extent of change in unpaid work due to changes in time availability and pre-existing bargaining power. Moreover, we are able to link those to pre-corona and corona work patterns and the division of labor in the household (see also: Carlson et al., 2022 for the US; Jessen et al., 2021 for Germany; Kulic et al., 2021 for Germany and Italy). Finally, this is the first study for Switzerland, a country that started only recently its shift toward a more egalitarian division of labor and might therefore be more volatile after the external shock posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic might destabilize the fragile progress made in terms of gender equality and trigger a backlash toward a more traditional division of labor. As people's usual working patterns had to be adapted quickly to public health measures and work-from-home requirements, however, it might also offer unforeseen opportunities for more profound structural changes toward a more gender-equal division of labor.

## 2 | SWITZERLAND – AN INTERESTING CASE STUDY

The first infection with the corona virus SARS-CoV-2 was detected in Switzerland on February 25, 2020. The government immediately decreed the first measures to limit the spread of the virus and, 3 weeks later, declared the "state of emergency". All but the most essential shops (such as grocery stores and pharmacies) were closed. Furthermore, employees were obliged to work from home unless the tasks made that impossible (Kuenzi, 2020). In fact, 50% of employees worked from home at least partially (Bosshardt et al., 2020). As an additional measure to limit the spread of the virus, all schools and universities were closed. Some cantons also shut down nurseries and daycare centers. As a result, the pandemic led to a strong recession, unprecedented levels of short-time work and increased unemployment (2.5% in January, 3.4% in September 2020 with women being more affected than men, SECO, 2020). Nonetheless, the decline of the gross domestic product by 10.5% in the first six months of 2020 was lower than the EU average (–16.5%, Eurostat, 2020).

Due to limited welfare state support for parents and work-family reconciliation policies (Bertozi & Gilardi, 2008), Switzerland is an interesting case to analyze the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on time spent on

unpaid work. After relatively slow progress toward gender equality, recent positive developments might more easily be affected, or even reversed, by an external shock, such as the pandemic. Switzerland still stands out with a rather traditional division of paid and unpaid work between men and women. Although the female labor force participation is amongst the highest in Europe (76% compared with 64% in the EU28, FSO, 2020a), a majority of women work part-time. In 2019, 59% of female workers against 17% of male workers were in part-time employment (FSO, 2020b). Amongst all OECD countries, this rate comes second only after the Netherlands (OECD, 2020). Though men and women slowly converge in their time spent on paid and unpaid work (FSO, 2021), to date the “one-and-a-half earner” model (Lewis, 2001) prevails in Switzerland and perpetuates a traditional work division within couples. Coupled mothers of children below the age of 15 spent on average more than 52 h per week on unpaid and 16 h on paid work, while fathers spent 32 h on unpaid and 35 h on paid work (FSO, 2021). As mentioned above, the burden of childcare was already high for Swiss parents before the pandemic. Many of them lack access to affordable formal daycare, especially those with lower levels of education and income (Stern et al., 2017), and rely on informal childcare provided by grandparents (before the pandemic, 33% of the children below the age of 13 were regularly looked after by their grandparents FSO, 2020c). Yet, the first COVID-19 lockdown made it impossible for many families to use their usual formal or informal childcare arrangements.

### 3 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

While research has already demonstrated that economic shocks, such as unemployment, can affect the division of paid and unpaid labor between women and men (Van der Lippe et al., 2018), the COVID-19 pandemic is rather special. In particular, the lockdown restrictions changed the demand for paid and unpaid work profoundly. Central modalities of paid work, such as the place and way of providing the work, were altered. A major shift was the unprecedented increase in work-from-home arrangements, which saved commuting time and freed up time for other tasks. At the same time, the demand for unpaid work increased substantially, particularly for couples with small and school-aged children. However, working from home was a mixed blessing for parents because children had to be home-schooled and cared for in parallel. While there is no doubt that the COVID-19 measures had a particularly strong impact on parents, the question remains whether the restrictions have reinforced or mitigated a pre-existing gendered division of unpaid work at the couple level. In this regard, empirical evidence consistently shows that although gender equality in the division of labor has increased over time (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016; Bianchi et al., 2012), women, and in particular mothers, remain the main providers of unpaid work (Doucet, 2015; Guppy et al., 2019; Moyser & Burlock, 2018; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020; Van der Lippe et al., 2011).

Drawing on the notion of rational time allocation, *time availability theories* would lead us to expect that the amount of time freed up due to the lockdown measures would be the most important determinant of whether a person increased domestic work, regardless of gender. Following this line of argument couples rationally allocate time in housework based on spouses' relative hours in the paid labor market and the amount of housework to be done (Bianchi et al., 2000; Coverman, 1985; England & Farkas, 1986). Therefore, the person with the most time available would increase the time spent on unpaid work. For some countries existing research points in this direction (Andrew et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2022; Chung et al., 2021; Craig & Churchill, 2020; Farré et al., 2021; Fodor et al., 2020; Hank & Steinbach, 2020; Hipp & Bünning, 2020; Kreyenfeld et al., 2020; Sanchez et al., 2021; Seiz, 2020; Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Zamberlan et al., 2021; Zhou & Kan, 2021). Against this background, we argue that working short-time, from home or overtime impacts the decision on an increase of unpaid work. We expect that short-time work and working from home will generally increase the time spent on unpaid work (H1a), while working overtime will reduce the time investment (H1b). Furthermore, we expect that a partner's switch to short-time work and work from home will generally decrease the other partner's time spent on unpaid work (H1c), whereas if one's partner works overtime this will increase the other partner's time spent on unpaid work (H1d).

While the described changes in work status due to COVID-19 measures should in principle be gender neutral, a gender-biased precondition of society and the desire of individuals to reaffirm gender-conform behavior may imply different effects for mothers and fathers. According to the *doing gender approach* the gendered division of labor is profoundly embedded in the normative perceptions of appropriate gender roles in society (West & Zimmermann, 1987). In this regard, housework and care duties still confirm femaleness, while maleness is related to avoidance of those tasks and a focus on paid work (Berk, 1985). Moreover and more importantly, people react with gender-typical behavior in domestic work if they find themselves in a gender-atypical situation in the labor market (West & Zimmermann, 1987). In other words, individuals compensate for gender atypical behavior by displaying exaggerated gender adequate behavior. For instance, research on dual earner couples shows that men do fewer household activities even when they work less in paid employment than their partners (Hook, 2010), or are unemployed. In contrast, women with an unemployed partner tend to increase their time spent on unpaid work (Gough & Killewald, 2011; Van der Lippe et al., 2018). Also early research on shifts in unpaid work at the onset of the pandemic hint toward gendered effects of changes in work conditions (Sanchez et al., 2021; Yaish et al., 202; Zoch et al., 2021). For instance, Zoch et al. (2021) find for Germany that working in a system-relevant occupation or working longer hours does not translate in a higher likelihood of father's involvement in care. While Yaish et al. (2021) find in their study for Israel that working from home increases unpaid work more for women than for men. In that regard, and following the *doing gender approach* it can be expected that mothers will react to changes in their own but also their partner's time availability. More concretely, changes in mothers' time availability due to short-time work and working from home will increase the time spent on unpaid work to a larger extent than in case of fathers working from home or short-time (H2a). Moreover, following the overcompensation argument it can be expected that a mother's switch to overtime work will decrease her time spent on unpaid work to a lesser extent than in the case of a father changing to overtime work (H2b). However, the *doing gender approach* also supports the assumption that a mother's reaction to a change in the partner's time availability differs from the reaction of fathers. In this respect, we expect that if a mother's partner changes to short-time or remote work, her time spent on unpaid work will decrease less than in the case of a father whose partner changes to short-time or remote work (H2c). Moreover, if the partner of a mother changes to overtime, it will increase her time spent on unpaid work more than in case of a father whose partner changes to overtime work (H2d).

In addition, *bargaining theories* underline the importance of an individual's earning power in relation to their partner's. Bargaining theory assumes that (a) individuals regard domestic work as unattractive and will try to negotiate in order to reduce it, and that (b) the spouse or partner with the highest earning power is better able to negotiate out of unpleasant tasks, such as domestic work. More specifically, earnings provide a spouse bargaining power, giving the spouse more ability to exchange for what he/she prefers (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Kamo, 1988; Lundberg & Pollak, 1996). Therefore, we expect that the partner with higher earnings has the stronger bargaining position and will take up less of the additional unpaid work during the COVID-19 pandemic while the opposite holds for the partner with less economic resources (H3a). However, also in here we would expect, following the *doing gender approach*, differences between mothers and fathers. In this respect, in particular male secondary earners would decrease the hours of unpaid work, while women with either a lower (traditional task division) or higher contribution (overcompensation) to the couple's income would increase their time investment in unpaid work (H3b). In this context, a recent study by Kulic et al. (2021) for Italy and Germany finds that male main earners who reduced paid working hours at the beginning of the pandemic hardly increased their share of time in unpaid work. Whereas female main earners in the same situation increased the time spent on unpaid work, showing that the bargaining approach only fit male partners' behavior.

## 4 | DATA AND METHODS

### 4.1 | Data

We use data from the Swiss Household Panel (SHP; SHP Group, 2021; Tillmann et al., 2016). The SHP is a longitudinal multi-topic survey annually interviewing all members of sampled households aged 14 and older, predominantly by telephone. It is based on a probability-based, random sample, which is representative for the Swiss residential population. The SHP started in 1999, with refreshment samples added in 2004 and 2013. We rely on two waves of data: first, the regular 2019 annual wave of data collection that was conducted between September 2, 2019 and March 3, 2020. With 95% of individual interviews completed before December 17, 2019, this wave qualifies as the “pre-corona wave”. Second, the SHP embarked on a COVID-19 study which generated additional data on the consequences of the pandemic. This “corona wave” was conducted between May 12, 2020 and June 30, 2020, by means of web questionnaires with a paper version sent to web non-respondents. The fieldwork for the corona wave was carried out during the period when the strictest measures were slowly eased. Classroom teaching at primary and lower secondary school resumed and most shops reopened on 11 May, whereas a number of measures, such as the ban on large gatherings and the home schooling obligation for upper secondary and vocational schools, were still in place. Most measures had been lifted by 22 June.

All respondents from the pre-corona wave in 2019 were invited to complete the SHP corona questionnaire, except a few respondents who requested to be taken out of the study after completion of the individual questionnaire in 2019 ( $N = 8772$  from 5540 households; see Voorpostel et al., 2020 for more details on the SHP COVID-19 study). In total, 5843 individuals responded (response rate 66.6%, two-third by web, one third by postal interview). There was no evidence of strong selection bias (Voorpostel et al., 2020). Our analytical sample focuses on (i) respondents living with a partner and at least one child under 18 years, (ii) working in dual-earner households in both waves and (iii) where both partners completed the individual questionnaire. Item non-response on at least one of the independent variables accounted for 5.2% of the observations. Depending on validly reported independent variables, 13.5% of the observations were dropped in the analyses due to missing information on change in housework hours and 14.0% due to missing information on change in care work hours. The final analytical sample for the analyses of changes in housework hours included 377 respondents from 228 households. For the analyses of changes in care work we had 375 respondents from 230 households (see Table A1 in the annex on sample selection).

### 4.2 | Measures

#### 4.2.1 | Dependent variables

In our analyses, we focused on two dependent variables to examine changes in unpaid work between the pre-corona and the corona wave: (a) *change in time spent on housework* and (b) *change in time spent on unpaid care*. We defined the change score as the difference between the corona wave and the pre-corona wave. Time spent on housework was measured based on reported hours spent on housework in a normal week (pre-corona wave) and a lockdown week (corona wave), mentioning washing, cooking and cleaning as examples. Time spent on care was measured based on the reported average hours per week spent “...to care for children, elderly or disabled people living in your own household”. Furthermore, we bottom- and top-coded all time-related change scores irrespective of original values in the interval ranging from  $-45$  to  $45$  h.

### 4.2.2 | Independent variables

To test our hypotheses in relation to time availability, we included the answers of the respondents and their partners to the following question "Were there any short-term changes to your work situation that are due to the Corona crisis?" We included the following three characteristics for the respondent and the partner: *short-time work*, *working entirely or partially from home*; and *working overtime*. The six variables were transformed in dummy variables with the categories 1 if the respondent/partner worked short-time, from home or overtime and 0 if that was not the case. Bargaining position in the couple was operationalized through an individual's earning power relative to their partners'. We operationalized this through the *relative contribution of the respondent to the couple's income*. This was measured at baseline (pre-corona wave) to avoid reverse causality. The corresponding variable was defined as the gross annual individual income divided by the sum of the individual and the partner's income. We used the gross salary before deduction of payroll taxes for insurances (old age, invalidity, unemployment, accidents) as well as compulsory pension plans. We used income values that were imputed during data processing (Lipps, 2010). The variable was recoded into three categories (respondent earns 0%–44%, >45–55% (ref.) or >56–100% of the couple's income). *Gender* was measured with a dummy variable (1 = female).

### 4.2.3 | Control variables

*Highest level of education* was measured with 11 categories and recoded into a dummy variable differentiating tertiary education from other types (higher education [1] versus no higher education [0]). We account for the *age of the youngest child* (measured continuously and ranging between 0 and 17) as well as for *where a respondent was born* (either in Switzerland [=0] or not [=1]). Finally, we also included a variable on the *language region* to control for possible cultural but also structural differences regarding female employment and childcare accessibility. This is based on the language of the interview (which could be either German, French or Italian speaking). This measure has been previously used to proxy regional differences in Switzerland (e.g., Coffe & Voorpostel, 2010; Grätz & Lipps, 2021; Kuhn et al., 2020). As a robustness check, we also tested additional control variables (such as outsourcing prior to the pandemic and survey mode (web vs. paper)). However, because our sample is rather small and none of these additional controls substantially changed the effects of our variables of interest we decided not to include any of them in our models. Table A2 in the annex presents the summary statistics of all variables.

## 4.3 | Method and analytical strategy

The analytical strategy consists of a panel design with score models (Allison, 1990; Morgan & Winship, 2015). We used OLS regression models of the change score of our dependent variables (Allison, 1990). To control for selective non-response and attrition, we used cross-sectional survey weights. As standard errors are correlated within couples, we applied cluster-robust standard errors. With respect to the analytical strategy, we tested our hypotheses for the two outcomes separately following the same logic: first, we examined how the lockdown measures related to short-time work, working from home and overtime, and how the individual's relative income contribution had changed the time spent on housework and care work (M1a–M2a). Second, we examined via the inclusion of interactions in how far those changes were more pronounced for mothers than for fathers (M1b–M2b). As our sample size was small, we limited the analyses to a minimal set of independent and control variables. Moreover, to ease the interpretation of the coefficients we use visualizations based on linear predictions.



## 5 | RESULTS

### 5.1 | How did unpaid work change during the lockdown for dual-earner couples with children? - Descriptive exploration

Figures 1 and 2 provide a first overview of how Swiss parents changed the division of unpaid work, that is, housework and care work, during the lockdown period. Starting with the change in housework (Figure 1), we observe strong gender differences before the pandemic. While fathers spent around 6 h per week on domestic tasks, mothers engaged for an average of 16 h per week in this type of work. With the lockdown, a modest increase can be observed for both fathers (by 1 h) and mothers (by 2 h), which was not statistically significant in both cases.

Turning to care work (Figure 2), we can observe that the strong gendered division known from the pre-corona wave persisted during the lockdown. While both partners increased their care time, mothers (from 28 to 35 h per week), mothers did this to a larger extent than fathers (from 15 to 16 h per week). The increase, however, was not statistically significant.

On balance, it seems that the gendered patterns for unpaid work persisted during the lockdown. While both - mothers and fathers - increased the average time spent on housework and care work, mothers remained the main provider of unpaid work.

### 5.2 | Multivariate findings

Starting with the question whether the observed changes in time spent on unpaid work are related to *changes in time availability due to the lockdown measures and whether this differs for fathers and mothers* Table 1 presents the OLS coefficients of our multivariate analyses for housework (Models 1a and 1b) and care work (Models 2a and 2b) separately. In this regard, we expected in accordance with time availability theories that changing to short-time or remote work would generally increase the time spent on unpaid work (H1a), while working overtime would lead to a time reduction (H1b). Moreover, we hypothesized that having a partner who changed to short-time, remote or overtime work would have the opposite effect (H1c and H1d). In addition and following the *doing gender approach* we hypothesized that the above-described effects would differ between fathers and mothers and that in particular mothers would be affected more than fathers (H2a-H2d).

Examining the results for housework (see Models 1a and 1b) we find only partial support for hypothesis 1a. M1b shows that fathers who changed to short-time work spent more time on housework than fathers who did not change to short-time work. Furthermore, our results do not reveal support for hypothesis 1b. Also working overtime during the COVID-19 pandemic did not lead to changes in the time investment in housework.

However, changes in the partners' work status to short-time work or work from home reduced the own involvement in housework significantly, as can be seen from the significant negative effects for the partner's change to short-time work and to home office. Figure 3 shows the linear predictions of changed hours of housework based on Model 1a separately by gender. Here we can see that both male and female respondents increased the time spent on housework if their partner did not change to short-time work or work from home. The picture is different if the partner's time availability increased due to working from home or short-time work. More concretely, if a male (father) respondent had a partner who changed to short-time work, the average time he spent on housework decreased by around 2.5 h, while mothers in the same situation did not significantly change their time spent on housework. For both fathers and mothers, the predicted values in Figure 3 show no significant changes with respect to the time invested in housework for respondents whose partner shifted to remote work (the confidence intervals include the 0 point of no change). However, it becomes visible that the average time spent on housework significantly increased by 1.4 h for fathers and 2.5 h for mothers when the partner did not change to remote work. Overall, this is partly in line with our hypothesis 1c stating that a partner's switch to short-time work and work from home would generally

TABLE 1 Change scores for housework and care work of parents, OLS coefficients

Variables	Change HOUSEWORK		Change care WORK	
	M1a	M1b	M2a	M2b
Shorttime_Resp. (ref. no)	1.83	2.35 <sup>a</sup>	-2.00	-1.75
Homeoffice_Resp. (ref. no)	1.80	0.77	0.19	3.06
Overtime_Resp. (ref. no)	-0.58	-1.22	-4.91 <sup>a</sup>	-2.71
Shorttime_Partner (ref. no)	-3.49**	-1.93 <sup>a</sup>	2.40	0.50
Homeoffice_Partner (ref. no)	-1.81 <sup>a</sup>	-1.91 <sup>a</sup>	-1.98	-0.07
Overtime_Partner (ref. no)	0.02	0.94	3.89	2.83
<i>Ref. Rel_Income_45%-55%</i>				
Rel_Income_0%-44%	-1.85	-5.98*	-4.08	-8.37 <sup>a</sup>
Rel_Income_56%-100%	1.55	-0.11	-4.12	-5.64 <sup>a</sup>
Women (ref. men)	3.88*	0.22	3.84	5.28
<i>Interactions</i>				
Women#Shorttime_Resp.		-0.89		-0.86
Women#Homeoff_Resp.		2.36		-6.72
Women#Overtime_Resp.		2.37		-7.20
Women#Shorttime_Part.		-3.53		4.22
Women#Homeoff_Part		-0.40		-3.78
Women#Overtime_Part		-2.16		2.40
Women#Rel_Income_0%-44%		6.36 <sup>a</sup>		6.85
Women#Rel_Income_56%-100%		-0.89		7.68
Higher education (ref. low/med.)	-1.26	-0.78	-2.21	-1.76
Not born in Switzerland (ref. born in CH)	-1.10	-0.77	-1.21	-1.72
Age of the youngest child in HH	0.07	0.06	-0.50**	-0.45**
<i>Language region (ref. German)</i>				
French	3.01*	3.22*	-0.31	0.04
Italian	-2.10	-1.50	6.88	7.87 <sup>a</sup>
Constant	-0.45	1.34	11.26**	9.74*
Observations	377	377	375	375
R-squared	0.12	0.15	0.09	0.12
LI	-1281	-1273	-1554	-1548

<sup>a</sup> $p < 0.1$ .

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Two SHP waves (pre- and corona wave), own calculations, weighted.

decrease the other partner's time spent on unpaid work. Finally, our results indicate with respect to overtime that having a partner who worked overtime during the COVID-19 pandemic had neither a significant impact on changes in hours spent on housework in general nor did it affect fathers and mothers differently (rejection of H1d).

Turning to the question whether the lockdown measures affected mothers and fathers differently, Model 1a in Table 1 shows that mothers increased the time spent on housework significantly more than fathers. Yet, the results based on the interaction effects reveal that most of the above-described effects did not significantly differ between mothers and fathers (Table 1, Model 1b) which leads us to reject hypotheses 2a – 2d.

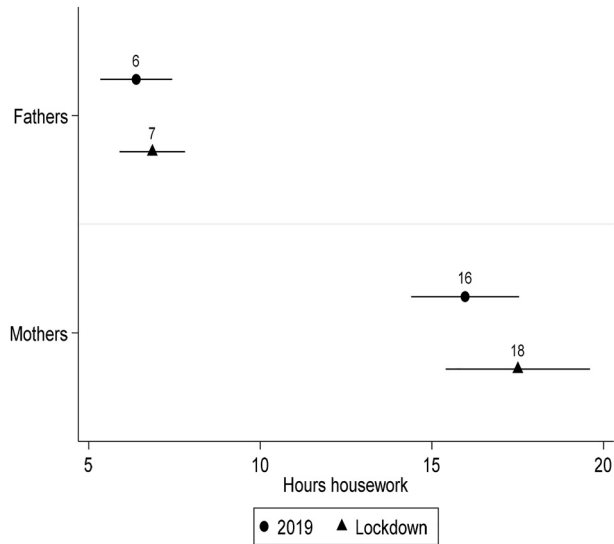


FIGURE 1 Weekly housework

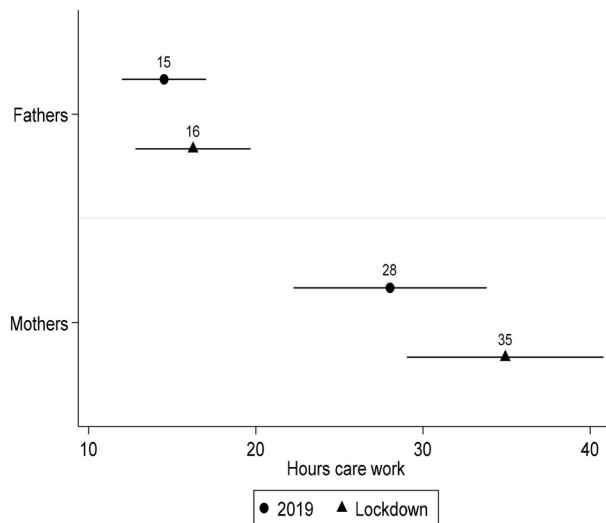
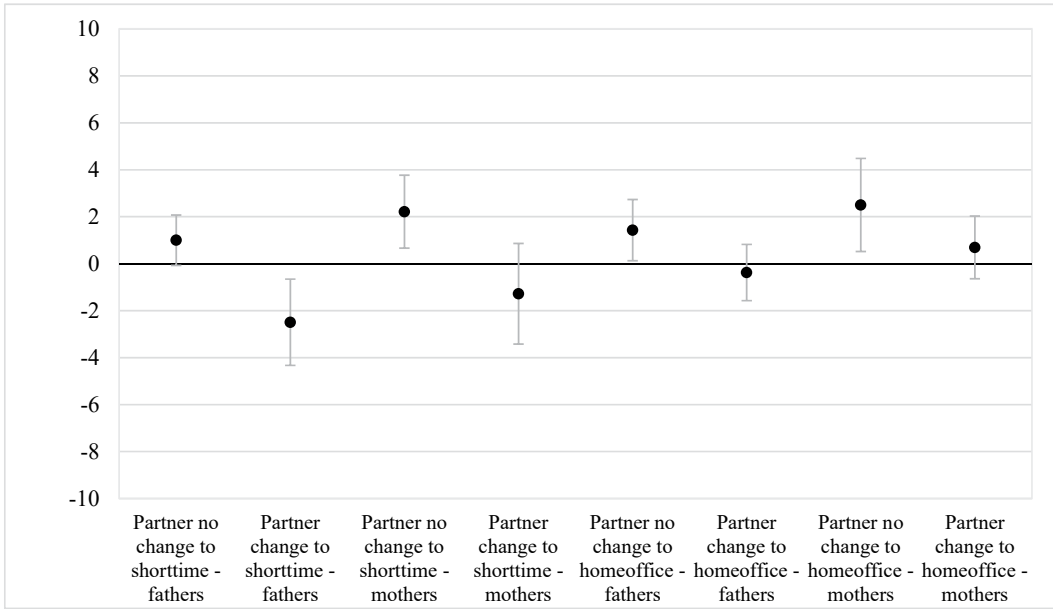
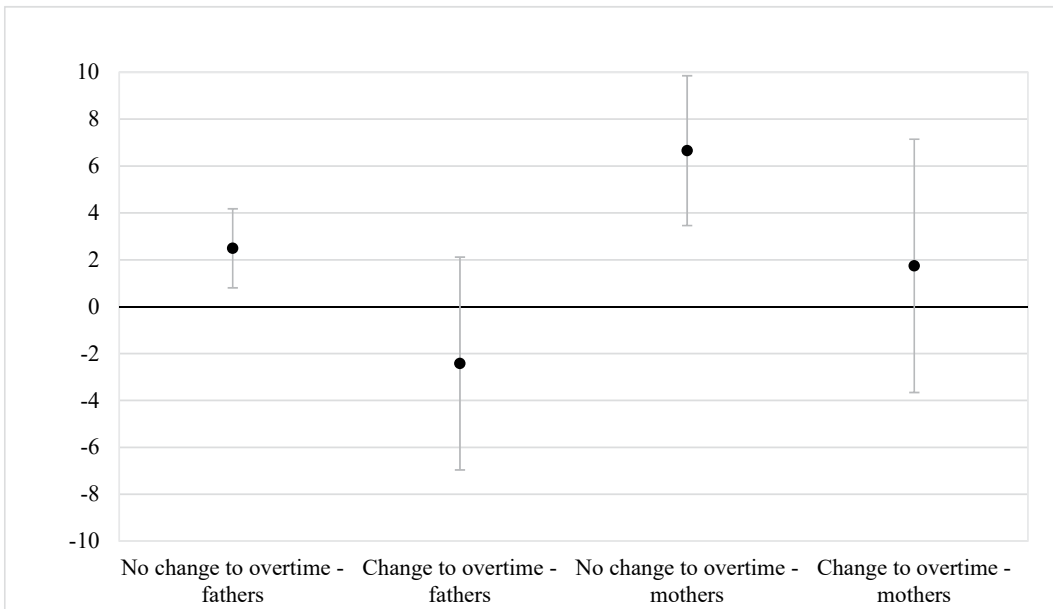


FIGURE 2 Care work hours of dual-earner couples with children by gender, before and during the lockdown. Source: Two SHP waves (pre- and corona wave), own calculations, weighted

The results for changes in care work (Table 1, Models 2a and 2b) reveal that the increase in care work was much larger than for housework (based on the intercept comparison). We do not find strong evidence for hypothesis 1a stating that changes in time availability due to short-time or remote work would considerably change the investment of Swiss couples in care work. However, we find some support for hypothesis 1b. While the main effect for overtime in Table 1 (Model 2a) shows a borderline negative effect, it becomes apparent in Figure 4— where we display the linear predictions for mothers and fathers separately – that working overtime hours during the lockdown did not significantly change mothers' or fathers' time spent on care work. However, respondents (both mothers and fathers) who did not work overtime displayed a significant increase in time spent on care work (on average 6.7 h for mothers and 2.5 h for fathers). In addition, the effect of overtime work did not significantly differ between fathers and mothers. Therefore, we reject the gender-specific hypothesis 2b (based on Model 2b).



**FIGURE 3** Linear predictions of changes in housework due to changes in partner's time availability (working short-time or from home) separately by gender. Source: Two SHP waves (pre- and corona wave). Note:  $N = 377$ , calculations are based on weighted OLS regressions, confidence intervals are set at 90%



**FIGURE 4** Linear predictions of changes in care work due to changes in respondent's time availability (overtime) separately by gender. Source: Two SHP waves (pre- and corona wave). Note:  $N = 375$ , calculations are based on weighted OLS regressions, confidence intervals are set at 90%

Turning to the role of the partner's work situation, we do not find any indication that changes in the partner's time availability - either due to short-time, remote or overtime work - had a significant effect on the respondent's involvement in care work. In addition, we also did not find any significant difference in those effects between fathers and mothers. Therefore, we must reject hypotheses 1 c and 1 day as well as 2c and 2d.

As to changes in time investment in unpaid work, we argued that *economic bargaining power* could change the equation. In this respect, we assumed that the partner with more earning power would invest less, while the secondary earner would invest more time in unpaid work (H3a). The results for changes in hours spent on housework (Models 1a and 1b) and care work (Models 2a and 2b) show that there was no uniform gender-neutral effect in which relative earnings within the couple influenced the changes in hours spent on housework or care work (rejection of hypothesis 3a). Instead, the role played by relative earnings differed for fathers and mothers. We expected, following the *doing gender approach*, that in particular male secondary earners would decrease the hours of unpaid work, while women with either a lower or higher contribution to the couple's income would increase their time investment (H3b). Based on Models 1b and 2b, the observed changes seem to be partly gender-related. For housework (see Figure 5 based on Model 1b), they show that secondary earner fathers significantly decreased their time spent on housework on average by 4.7 h, while secondary earner mothers increased their time by 2.1 h. This is in line with our hypothesis 3b. However, we could not observe an "overcompensation effect" for primary earning mothers, which might be due to the fact that this is a rather small group in our data.

With respect to the findings for care work (see Figure 6, based on Model 2a), the main effects for relative income did not reach significance. However, linear predictions separated by mothers and fathers for Model 2a show that in particular equal earners (fathers as well as mothers) significantly increased their average time spent on care work by 5.3 h (fathers) and 9.7 h (mothers). In addition, also secondary earning mothers increased their time on care work by 5.6 h. However, when turning to Model 2b, the non-significant interactions indicate that the observed differences between fathers and mothers are not significant. This leads us to reject hypothesis 3b in case of care work.

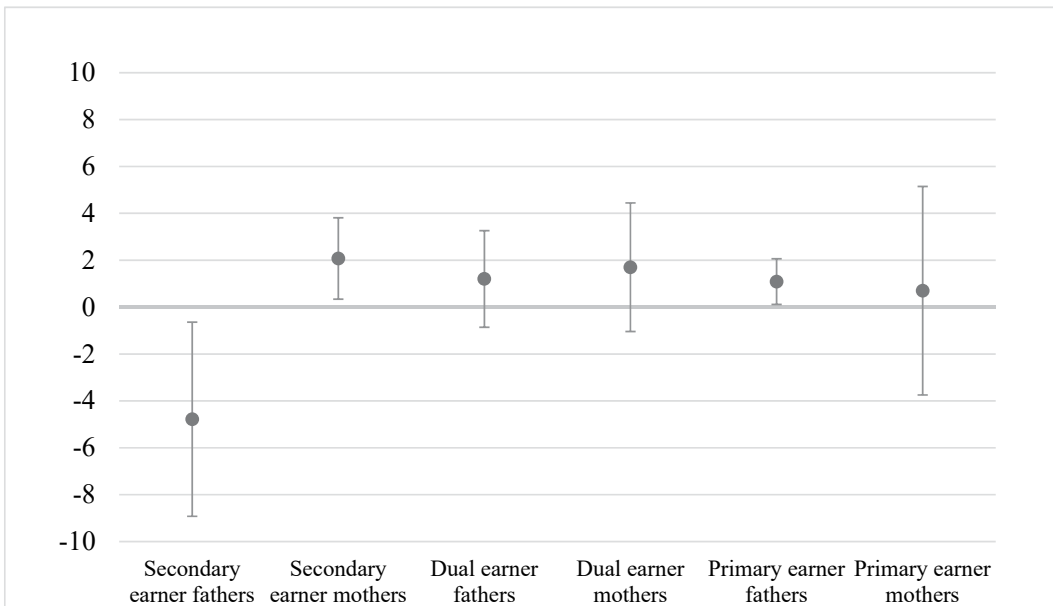
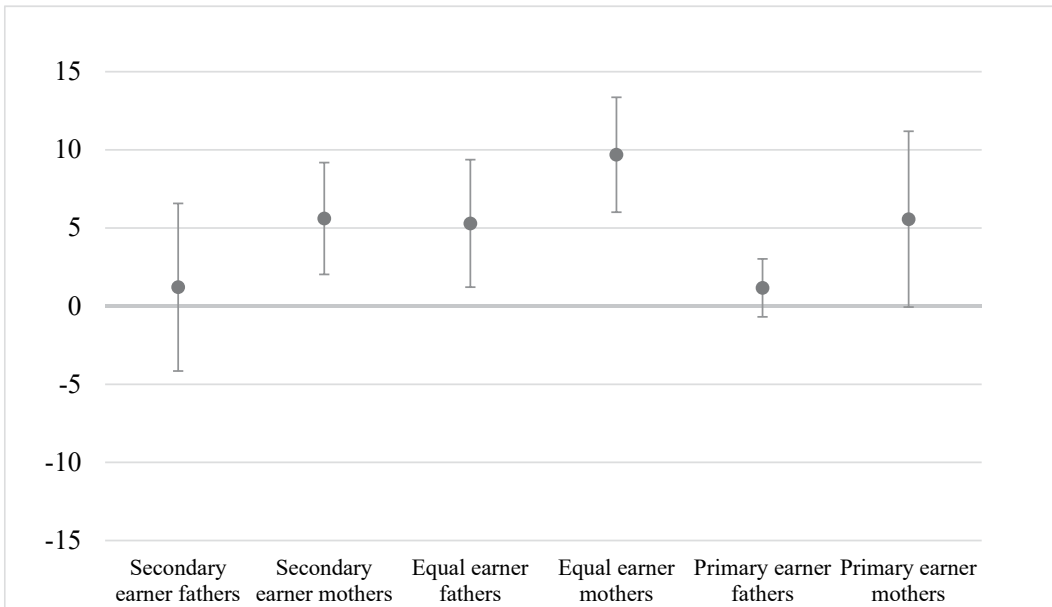


FIGURE 5 Linear predictions of changes in housework due to the relative income position of mothers and fathers within the household. Source: Two SHP waves (pre- and corona wave). Note:  $N = 377$ , calculations are based on weighted OLS regressions, confidence intervals are set at 90%



**FIGURE 6** Linear predictions of changes in care work due to the relative income position of mothers and fathers within the household. Source: Two SHP waves (pre- and corona wave). Note:  $N = 375$ , calculations are based on weighted OLS regressions, confidence intervals are set at 90%

## 6 | CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this paper, we discussed the extent to which COVID-19-induced measures, such as changed working patterns and school and daycare closures, affected the time that parents used for housework and care tasks. Two contrasting scenarios featured prominently in the media. Optimistic views suggested an increase in gender equality because men, and in particular fathers, had more time to engage in household and childcare tasks. Pessimistic views stressed that the lockdown did not alter the traditional task division in a household and that women had to shoulder extra care tasks due to school and childcare closures. The discussion has intensified research in this area. The findings, however, have remained inconclusive, not least because of data quality issues. Using three main explanatory dimensions related to time availability, bargaining power and doing gender, our findings for Switzerland are based on high-quality panel data, which allow us to examine in a more systematic way changes in time spent on housework and care tasks before and during the first lockdown. In this way, we can overcome some of the methodological shortcomings of previous studies.

Overall, our multivariate findings reveal that the implemented lockdown measures in Switzerland affected the time investment in unpaid work, but to a lesser extent than expected. The observed modest increase in time spent on unpaid work among dual-earner parents in Switzerland does not confirm the image of parents portrayed in the media. For housework, our results imply that in particular changes in the time availability of the partner were relevant. If the spouse changed to short-time or remote work, the time investment of the respondent in housework increased less. This is partly in line with time availability theories assuming that the spouse with the most time available would increase the time spent on unpaid work. With regard to findings for changes in time spent on care work, we find hardly any support for our hypotheses. It seems that based on our analyses, the own time availability matters. In particular, parents who worked overtime did not increase the time spent on care work as other parents did. This is also in line with other studies (e.g., Bell et al., 2021) showing that the involvement in, for instance, essential occupations (which often required an increase in working time) was accompanied by less time investment in unpaid work.

Importantly, neither for housework nor for care work did we find any significant differences between fathers and mothers in the effects of time availability factors.

We also tested for both outcomes the relevance of respondents' economic bargaining power within the couple. In this regard, our results show that the observed changes in time spent on housework are partly gender-related. In particular, secondary earner fathers significantly decreased their time spent on housework, while secondary earner mothers increased their hours. This is partly in line with the doing gender approach and previous findings regarding secondary earner fathers and their limited involvement in unpaid work (in particular when they are unemployed, see Gough & Killewald, 2011; Van der Lippe et al., 2018). However, we did not find an "overcompensation effect" with regard to primary mothers, which might be due to the fact that this was a rather small group in our sample. With respect to care work, the results show - in contrast to our expectations - that equal earning mothers increased care work most, more than other groups. The result for secondary earners is also noteworthy. They did not increase care work more than the other groups, which goes against our hypothesis of bargaining. A possible explanation could be that secondary earners were outsourcing childcare less prior to the pandemic and, hence, experienced no strong increase in care work at the onset of the pandemic. In addition, we did not find any clear indication with regard to care work that the lockdown measures affected mothers and fathers differently.

Reflecting on the results in general, it seems that the small sample size and lacking statistical power, as well as the small overall observed change in time spent on unpaid work, may explain part of the null findings in our analyses. In addition, it must be noted in particular with regard to the findings for care work that the data have been collected during a period where the most severe lockdown measures had been partly released and the schools had re-opened. While the question wording referred to the time during the lockdown, the effects may nonetheless reflect part of this reopening effect, even though not all children could immediately return to a normal school routine.

In sum, this paper offers some novel evidence regarding the gendered impact of the lockdown measures in Switzerland. While the results are not generalizable to other country contexts, at least for Switzerland the implemented COVID-19 measures did neither lead to an increase in patriarchal power structures nor did they foster an increase in equality for unpaid work among women and men. Instead, the results show that changes in time availability due to short-time, remote or overtime working schemes, of both the respondent and the partner, determined changes in time spent on unpaid care to a larger extent than gender alone. Overall, it seems that the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was less pronounced than in other countries, particularly in the area of care work. This might be partly because, in a society with a strongly gendered division of labor, for the majority of couples, the changes did not affect the pre-existing gender division of unpaid work, which strongly shaped the division of housework and care tasks already before the pandemic.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported as a part of NCCR LIVES, a National Centre of Competence in Research, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant number 51NF40-185901)

Open access funding provided by Universite de Lausanne.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

This study has been realized using data collected by the Swiss Household Panel (SHP), which is based at the Swiss Center of Expertise in the Social Sciences FORS. The project is supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The SHP data are deposited at SWISSUbase and available at <https://www.swissubase.ch/en/catalogue/studies/6097/18018/overview>.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Short-time work (furlough schemes) – also called short-time compensation – is a subsidy for temporary reductions in the number of hours worked in firms affected by temporary shocks. Short-time work programs allow employers who experience temporary drops in demand or production to reduce their employees' hours instead of laying them off. The government compensates for 80% of the loss of pay due to reduced work hours.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

**How to cite this article:** Steinmetz, Stephanie, Leen Vandecasteele, Florence Lebert, Marieke Voorpostel, and Oliver Lipps. 2022. "The gendered consequences of the COVID-19 lockdown on unpaid work in Swiss dual earner couples with children." *Gender, Work & Organization* 29(6): 2034–2051. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12875>.