



# The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on American Working Mothers with Children Under the Age of 18

Cate Barrett<sup>1</sup>, and Barry Crawford<sup>2</sup>

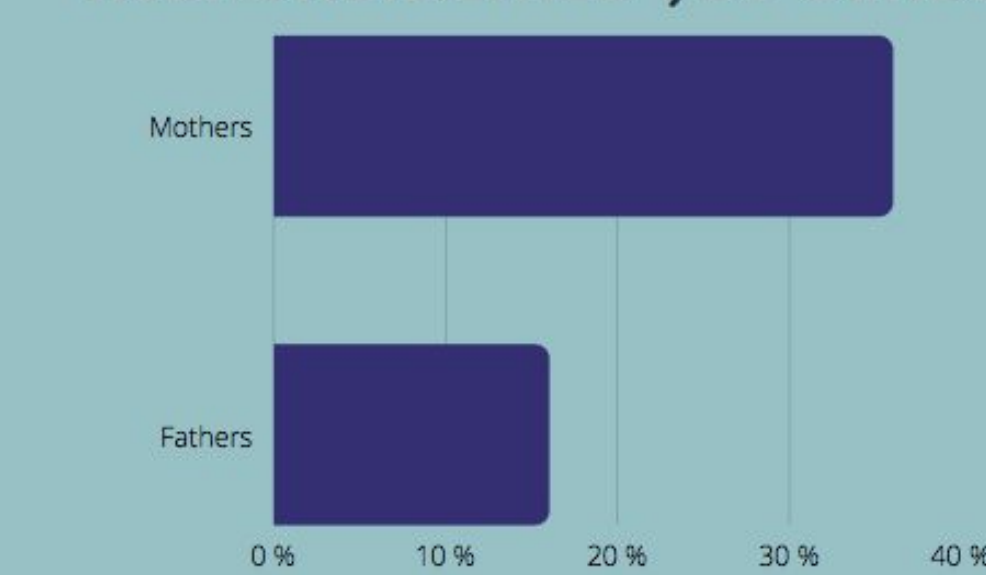
<sup>1</sup>Palo Alto High School, <sup>2</sup>British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists



## INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately new studies show that women, especially mothers, are experiencing unemployment and other negative career impacts at rates much higher than their male counterparts (Alon et al., 2020). The effect of closed schools and childcare centers have disrupted many working mother's lives. In a study conducted in September of 2020, 53.9% of mothers with children under 3 were employed and at work, compared with 70.4% of mothers whose youngest child was 14 to 17 years old. These shares have dropped since September 2019 for all groups of mothers, with the decrease among mothers with children ages 3 to 13 (6.7%) than among other mothers (Kochhar 2020). The issue of mother's unemployment has persisted even with the improvement of the pandemic, and it has become clear that without action, it could have a lasting impact on gender equity in the U.S. This research aims to answer the question: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted mothers with children under the age of 18 in the US (compared to pre-pandemic)?

### PERCENT OF PARENTS TO REPORT THEY HAD "A LOT OF CHILDCARE RESPONSIBILITIES", BY GENDER



Source: The Pew Research Center

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

This study is a combination of case study research, phenomenological research and needs assessment research. The data collection method was a comprehensive multiple choice and free response survey of local working mothers conducted through Google Forms. The survey was spread throughout the community using Nextdoor and Palo Alto Parents Facebook group. Through the questionnaire, data was collected on the impacts of Covid on the careers and responsibilities of Bay Area working mothers. The data from the survey is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative. This data was input into Google Sheets and was sorted based on relevance. The questions focused on the impact of the pandemic on domestic responsibilities, work-life balance, and the needs of the respondents. The data was analyzed through coding the free response answers and using descriptive statistics to analyze the qualitative data. The result is a series of graphs charting the respondents' experiences throughout the pandemic.

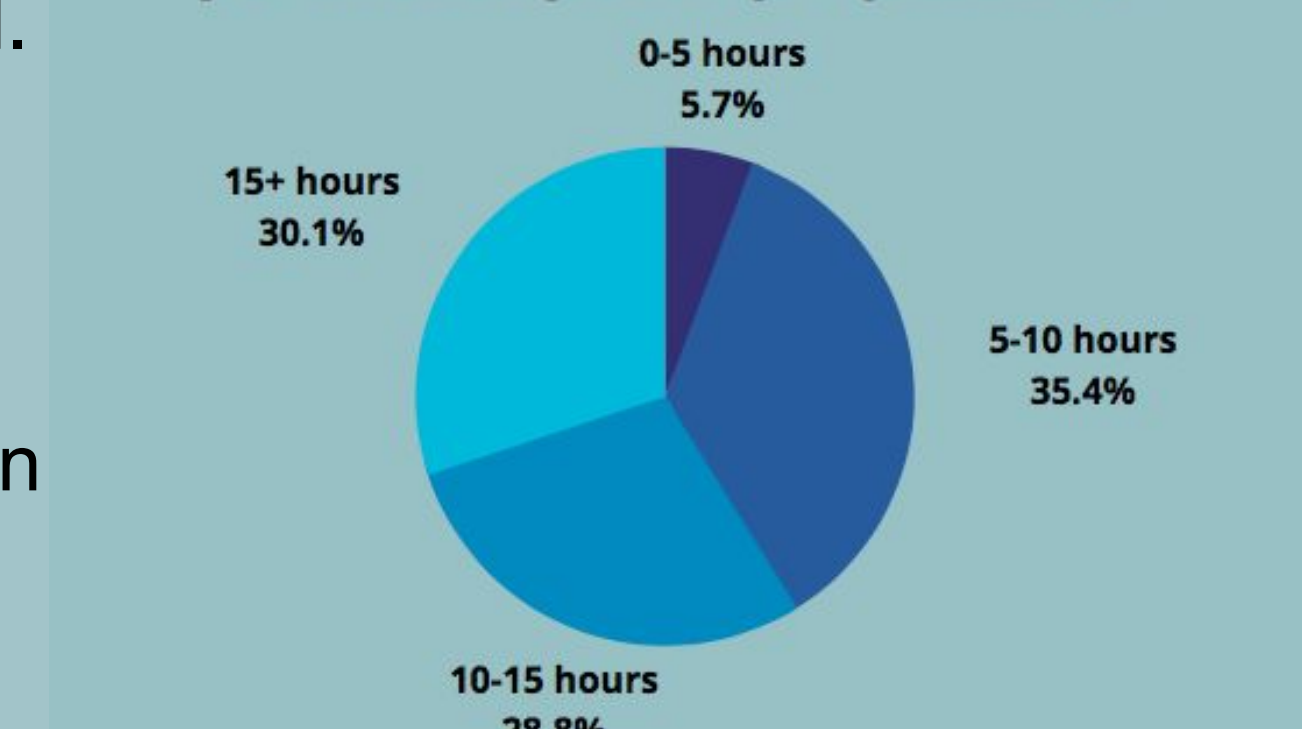
### THE RESEARCH PROCESS



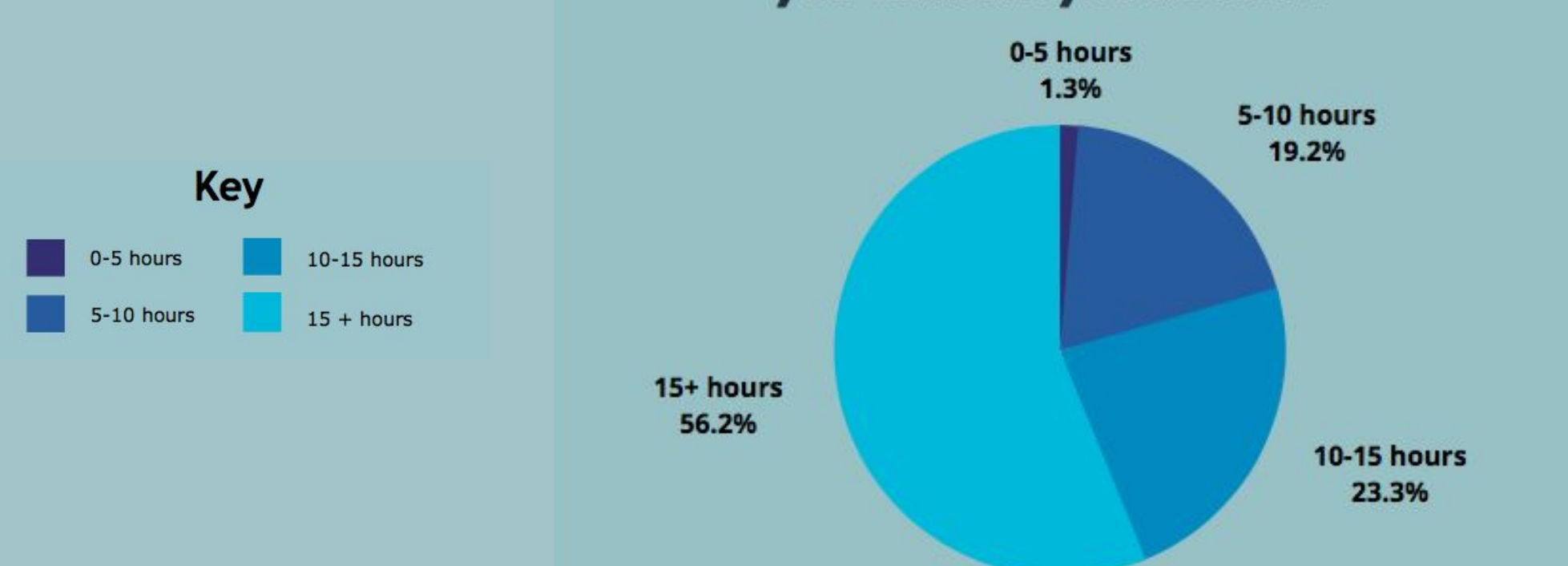
## DATA AND FINDINGS

- The average respondent of this survey was 45-50 years old with 2 children between the ages 13-18 years old.
- The most common career field of the respondents is Education, with the second most common being Business (ex. venture capital).
- 98.6% of respondents reported that they are currently employed, with 98.6% of respondents indicating they were employed pre-pandemic. 82.2% have maintained consistent employment (employment that has not been interrupted by a break in service exceeding 1 month) since March 2020.
- The domestic labor increase following the pandemic is staggering, with 56.2% of respondents reporting 15+ hours per week (+26.1%), 23.2% reporting 10-15 hours per week (+5.5% change), 19.2% reporting 5-10 hours per week (+19.2%) and 1.4% reporting 0-5 hours per week (-1.3%).
- The co-parent domestic labor data did not show such a significant change, showing 9.1% of co-parents doing 15+ hours of domestic labor a week pre-pandemic and 19.7% doing 15+ hours of domestic labor a week presently.
- Most (53.6%) of the respondents reported not having consistent access to childcare during the pandemic.
- In terms of personal impacts, respondents reported issues related to finances, schooling, work life balance, childcare, housework and more.

### How many hours of domestic work per week do you estimate you did pre-pandemic?

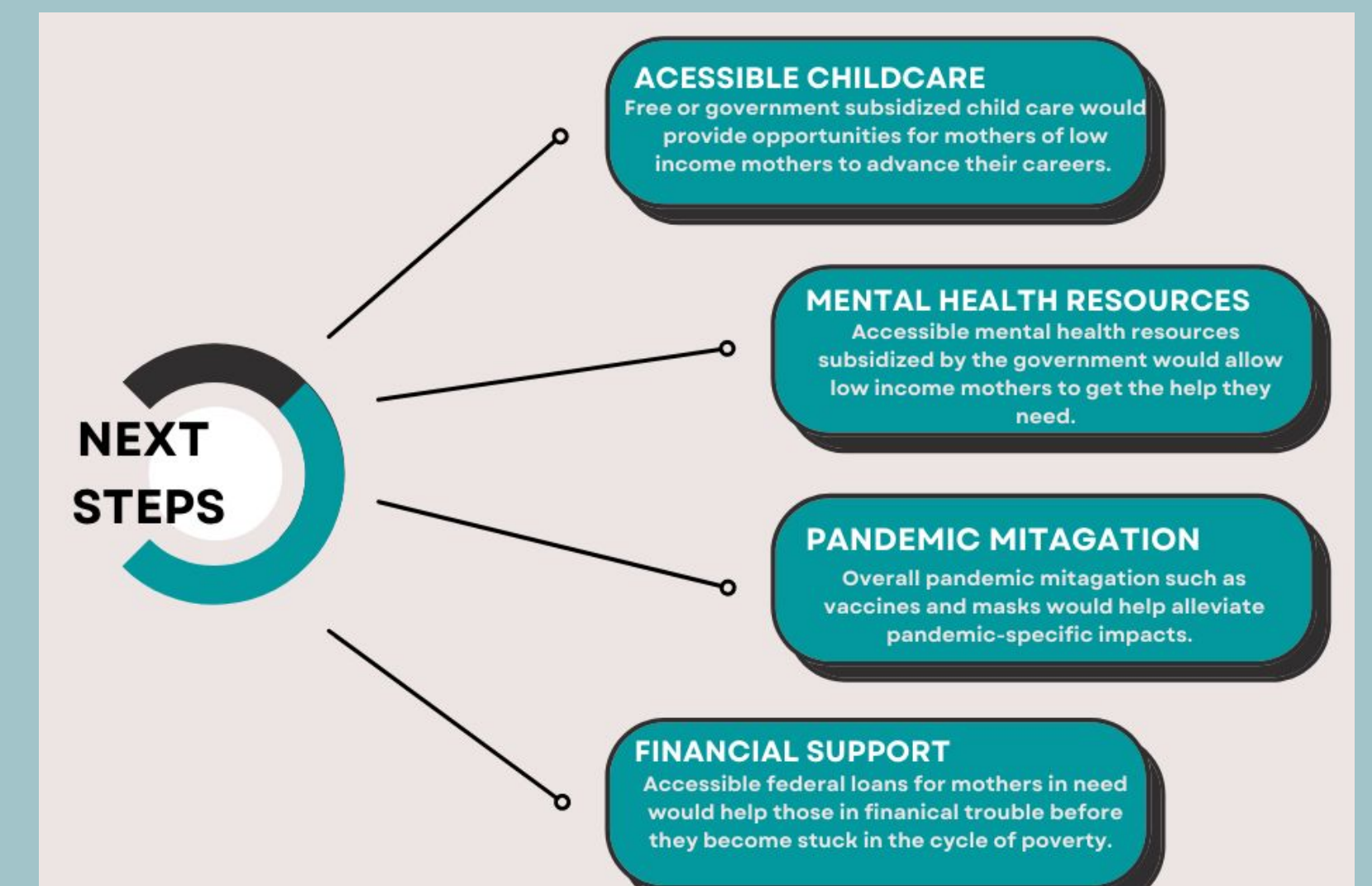


### How many hours of domestic work per week do you estimate you do now?



## IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall, the data in this study is in line with prior knowledge on the issue as it indicates a pre-existing unequal split of domestic labor within 2 parent households and points to a significant increase in domestic labor tasks being taken on by mothers throughout the pandemic. A 2020 study of gender inequalities during COVID-19 found that traditional gender roles are a main motivator of gendered gaps in domestic labor division which lines up with the data collected in this study (Fisher & Ryan, 2020). Similar to this survey, The Pew Research Center found that women were more likely to report issues balancing parenthood and their careers (Horowitz, 2019). Although this study for the most part is in line with previous data on the issue, it is likely that the results would have been more significant without certain biases. One of the most major biases that affected this study is the location and sample demographic in which it was conducted. The demographic of respondents was skewed towards the predominant Palo Alto culture: people who are white, wealthy, work in fields such as technology or business, are older and established in their careers etc. Due to these factors, a large portion of the predicted impacts based on previous research do not apply. In general, this study has an overall weakness when it comes to getting to the core of the issue of unemployment and negative career impacts on working mothers. The survey unfortunately did not reach an adequate number of people who are actually impacted by unemployment and other serious pandemic-influenced career outcomes. When asked to describe how the stresses of the pandemic have impacted them, major themes of negative mental health impacts, overall stress with increased demand being put on mothers to 'wear all the hats' appeared in the answers. In terms of aid, the biggest requests from respondents were care for their children (accessible child-care/schooling), a change in finances (loans, secondary income, affordable housing), self care, and consistent WFH abilities.



## CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

17.8% of respondents said that they have not maintained consistent employment throughout the pandemic, which points to a larger problem of unemployment, fueled by the current global economic recession. Presently, 32.9% of the employed respondents report working 40-50 hours per week, 27.4% working 30-40 hours a week and 21.9% working 50+ hours a week, indicating a shift downwards in hours per week for most. Majority of the Co-parents (if applicable) are employed as well, working a bit more than the mothers, with 32.3% working 50+ hours a week, 43.1% working 50-40 hours, 16.9% working 30-40 hours a week, and 7.7% working 20-10 hours. The overall domestic labor hours of respondents appears to have increased for many, while it decreased for some of the respondents. But overall, the post pandemic domestic labor data among these mothers showed a very significant trend: 56.2% of respondents reported spending 15+ hours per week on domestic labor activities (+26.1%), 23.2% reported spending 10-15 hours per week (+5.5% change), 19.2% reported 5-10 hours per week (+19.2%) and 1.4% reported 0-5 hours per week (-1.3%). The staggering 26.1% increase of mothers spending 15+ hours on domestic labor per week clearly indicates that the demand on these mothers has increased greatly. The amount of domestic labor reported on behalf of the co-parents is staggeringly less than that reported by the mothers - both the pre and mid-pandemic domestic labor data averages reported on the behalf of the co-parents was 0-5 hours per week. Not only are many of the respondents regularly working 40 hour work weeks, but they are also working overtime as the main source of domestic labor in their households.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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