

# PANDEMIC Research News

## Gender Differences in Mental Health during Covid-19 in Luxembourg

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our world. In one way or another, everyone across borders, race and gender is affected by the pandemic—though not equally. The aim of this brief is to document the gender differences observed in mental health and time allocation during the COVID-19 outbreak in the Grand Duchy.

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### Questions

- How much time did you spend caring for and studying with your children on an average weekday?
- How much time did you spend doing household chores on an average weekday?
- How much time did you spend working on an average weekday?
- How much time did you spend doing leisure activities on an average weekday?

In order to understand the consequences of COVID-19, the subsequent confinement measures on individuals' social, financial and health outcomes, and to track people's experiences during the pandemic, the University of Luxembourg launched a longitudinal survey in Luxembourg and the Greater Region: The COME-HERE-2 (COVID-19, MEntal HEalth, Resilience and Self-regulation) panel survey.

The first wave of the survey was online in the months of April and May 2020 (and responded to by 1007 individuals). This period corresponds to the first wave of the pandemic and the immediate lockdown measures.

The second was collected in July and August 2020 (filled in by 782 participants). This period covers the phased reopening of Luxembourg's lockdown measures. The third round was available online in October and November 2020 (completed by 541 participants). In this period new measures were implemented to combat the spike in COVID-19 cases.

### The Gendered effect of COVID-19 on Time allocation

Gender disparities appear to have been accentuated during the pandemic as women are disproportionately responsible for the bulk of unpaid tasks, including childcare and household chores while doing their share of work in the labour market.

During the first lockdown in March and April, women have spent on average 2 more hours on childcare and one more hour on household chores per day (see Figure 1).

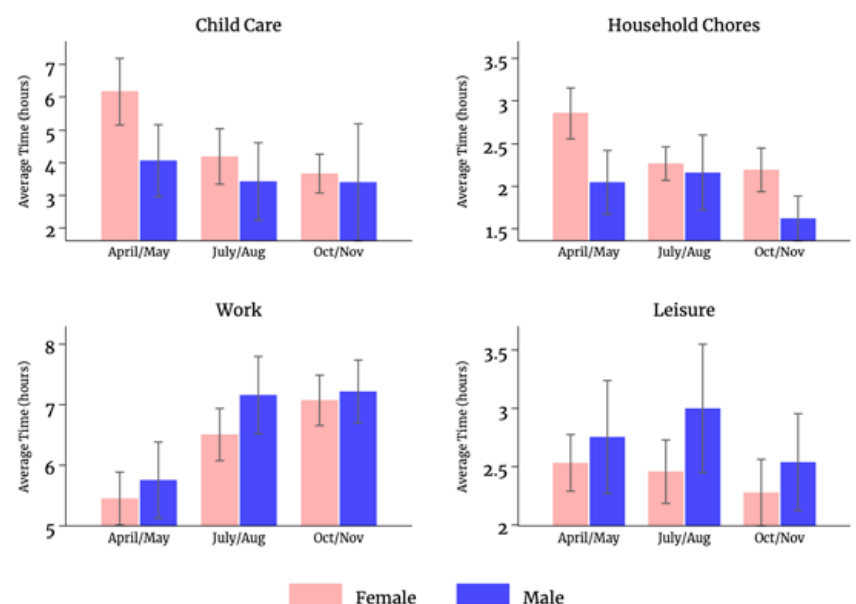


Figure 1: Average daily hours spent on domestic tasks, work and leisure, by gender

These differences are statistically significant. Over the course of the year, and with the easing of the lockdown measures, time spent on unpaid domestic work decreases, but the disparity with men remains intact.

Despite the increasing domestic responsibilities, women also participate in the labour market and work almost as much as men while enjoying less leisure time.

However, women are at a disadvantage if childcare services and schools remain closed, as they will be less likely to return to the labour force. Of the participants who took leave for family reasons during the pandemic, 78% are women. Similarly, women account for 75% of the participants who lost their job due to COVID-19.

## The mental health toll of COVID-19 on women

Women experienced higher levels of stress than men, higher level of depressive symptoms than men, higher level of anxiety symptoms than men, and felt higher levels of loneliness than men. The differences persist throughout the survey period. Even though, stress and loneliness levels decrease during the summer period when confinement measures were relatively relaxed, women still express higher unease than men. All these differences are also statistically significant.

**Perceived stress** over the last two weeks comes from a 10-item measure, capturing responses via a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 not at all to 4 very often; **depressive symptoms** over the last two weeks measures symptoms such as depression, sleep problems, and concentration problems on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 not at all to 3 nearly every day; **anxiety disorder symptoms** is a 7-item measure based on the last two weeks for example feeling nervous and not being able to stop worrying, with 0 not at all to 3 nearly every day; **loneliness** is an 8-item measure referring to feelings of lacking companionship and related concerns over the past two weeks, with 1 never to 4 often.

All responses are summed up to form a total score, for which higher values indicate more severe stress, anxiety and loneliness.

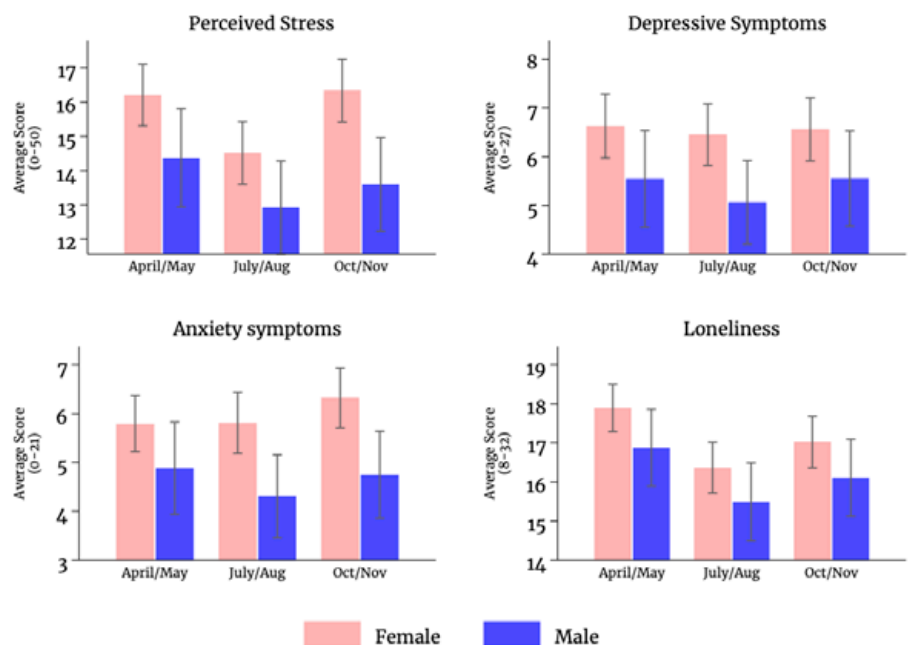


Figure 2: Average scores of mental health symptoms, by gender

Of the participants in our sample that are employed in key sectors, women constitute 68%. Studies have shown that working as a frontline worker during the crisis is a risk factor for worse mental health outcomes. Our data shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected women much more profoundly than men, both mentally and in terms of time use. The results outlined here imply that recovery policies will need to explicitly address gender gaps in the workplace and at home. A major caveat to our findings here is that the COME-HERE sample is not a nationally representative sample, and results need to be interpreted with caution.

### Research sponsors