

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC-ENFORCED LOCKDOWN ON THE SCHOLARLY WORK AND PRODUCTIVITY OF WOMEN ACADEMICS

GENDER SUMMIT 21

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15 APRIL 2021

BACKGROUND

- Gender gap within scientific research and publication
- Studies within the life sciences and STEM fields further demonstrate a gender disparity in these fields
- Gap exists in South Africa as elsewhere
- Emerging evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this inequality

THE STUDY

- Large-scale survey of all female academic staff across South Africa's 26 public universities
- Completed over the period of the various stages of the lockdown, from the initial hard lockdown ("stage 5") in March through August (under "stage 2", since 18 August)
- Total of 2,029 full responses were received (of 8.3%)

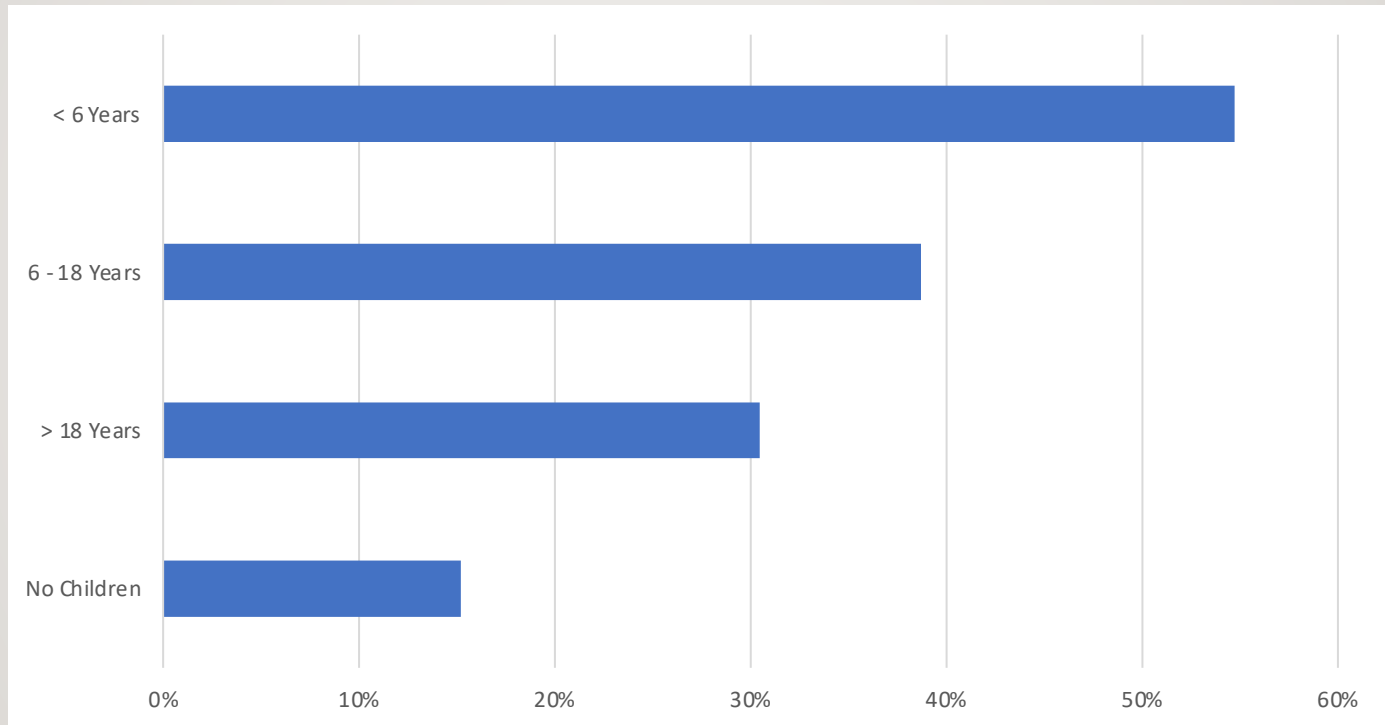
RESPONDENTS

- UNISA with 287 responses
- University of Pretoria (UP), with 185
- Stellenbosch University (SU), with 172
- University of Cape Town (UCT), with 111

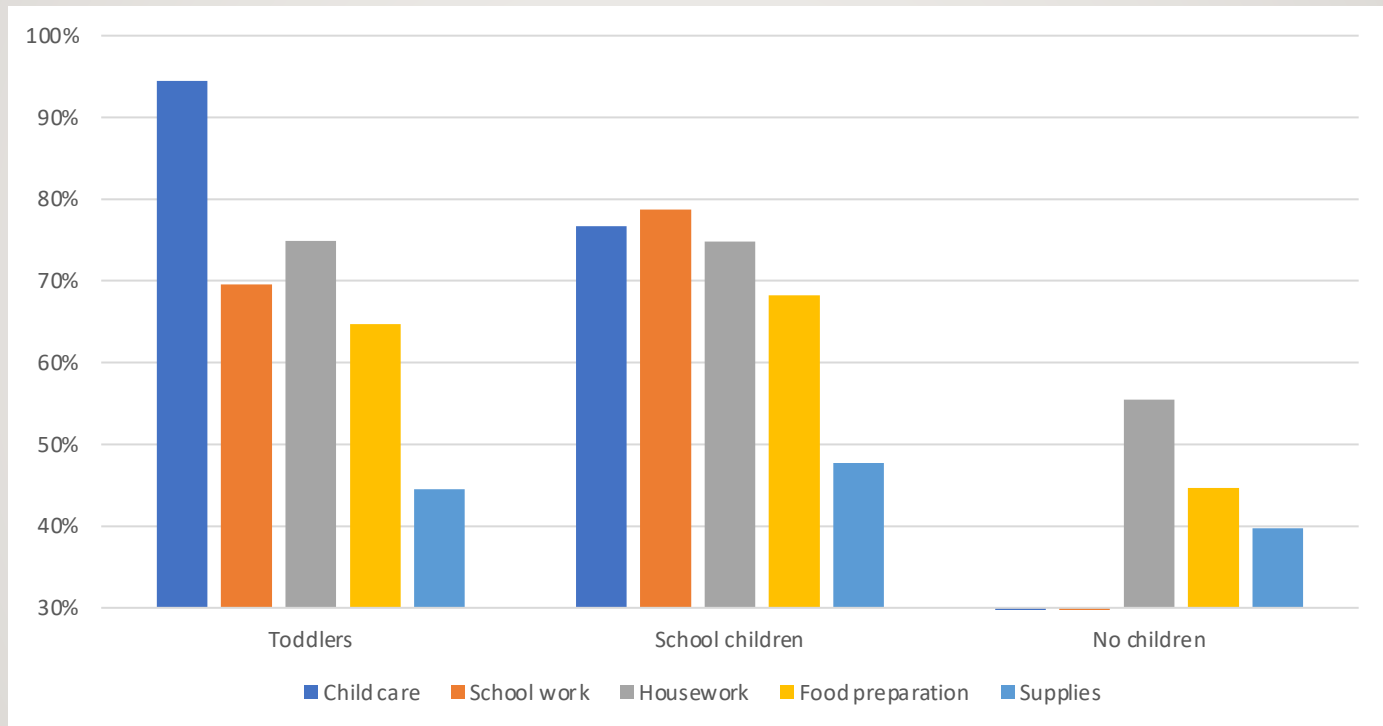
RESULTS

- Younger or multiple dependents in the home
- 54% of respondents having children living at home

RESPONDENTS WHO FOUND ACADEMIC WORK “EXTREMELY DIFFICULT” BY AGES OF CHILDREN IN THE HOME

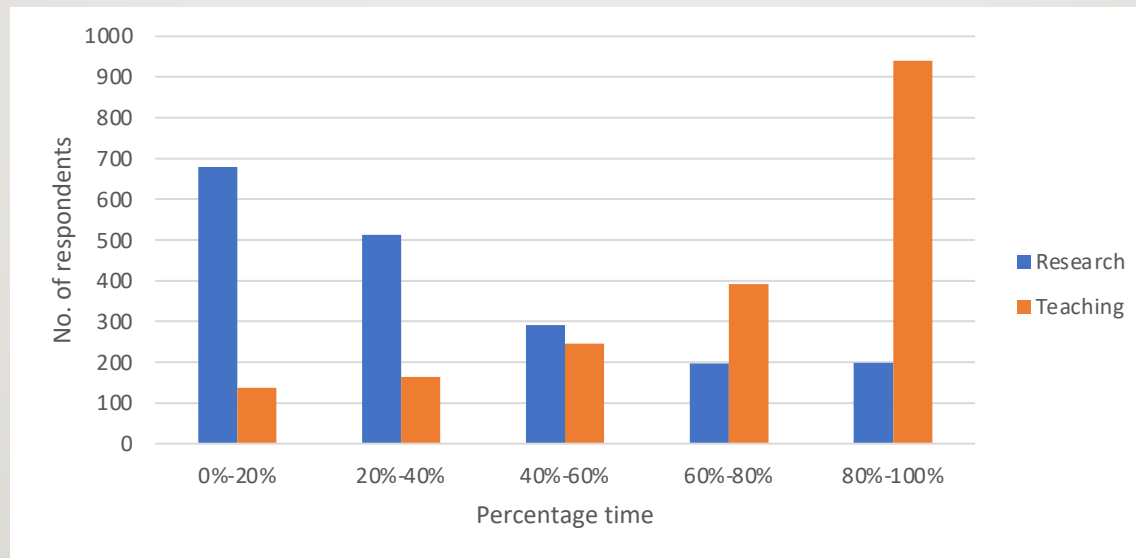


RESPONSIBILITIES WHICH HAD *HIGH/VERY HIGH* IMPACT ON ACADEMIC WORK

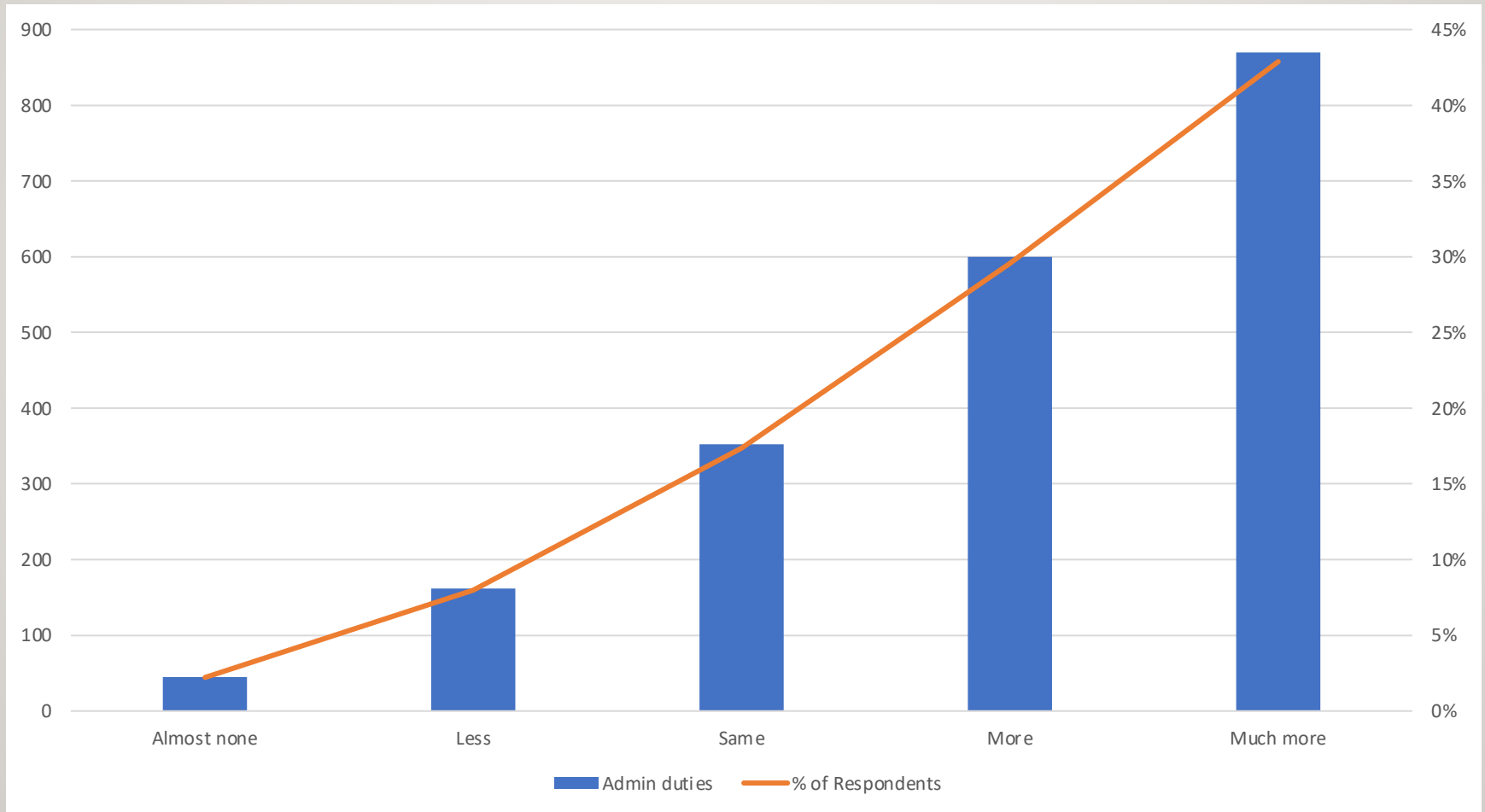


KEY FINDINGS

- Increase in the demands on teaching time during lockdown has effectively displaced the available research time among female academics in the pandemic



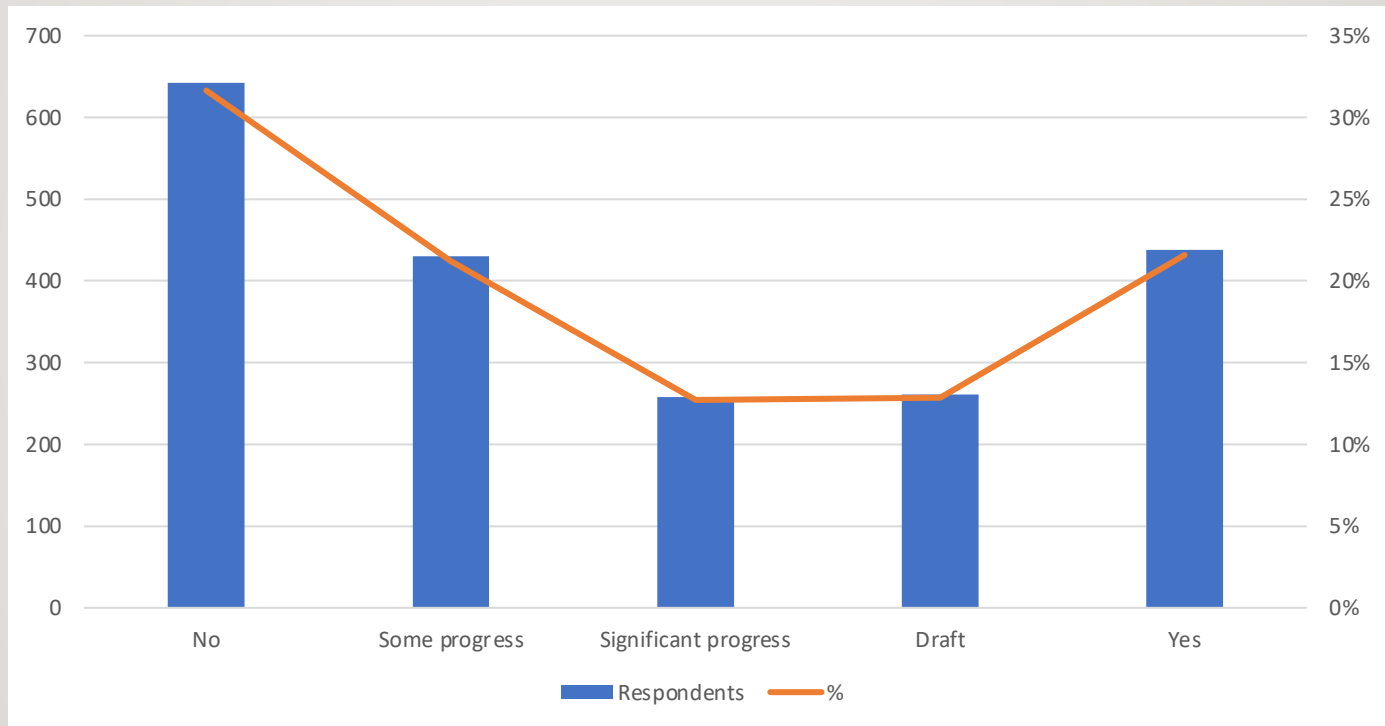
ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES DURING THE LOCKDOWN



KEY FINDINGS

- Key finding of the study is that the lockdown has had a profound effect on women's academic productivity, with 31.6% reporting having made "no progress" and 21.2% having made only "some progress" towards completing a significant academic product

PROGRESS ON COMPLETING A SIGNIFICANT ACADEMIC PRODUCT



FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA

PROF JONATHAN JANSEN

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING: FINDINGS

- The effects of the pandemic took a toll on the emotional wellbeing of many women in the academy who expressed a sense of frustration, weariness, and being overwhelmed.
- We refer to this as ‘emotional taxation’. The three sources:
 - home life,
 - their social milieu,
 - and their work environment.

“You have to be the emotional rock for everyone and meet the demands of work and in the end your tank is running on empty. But you must smile. You cannot debrief yourself from work on your way home so that you can nurture your family. Work and home life are blended, and neither is getting the attention it needs. Your family asks you why you are grumpy all the time. Because the new normal is not normal at all. The uncertainty is psychologically taxing, and this affects home life and work life.”

HOME LIFE (I)

- “I had to cope with my own anxieties and help my children cope with theirs. Both my children, one at school and the other, first year at university, had their own online learning challenges to deal with. We had to cope with home space becoming office spaces, classrooms, and lecture halls.”
- “I have drawn up a roster with regard to the housework which needs to be done but this hasn't worked out satisfactorily and I find that I have to first clean the house before I can get started on my university work. I have also experienced resentment towards my husband and children because of this.”

HOME LIFE (2)

- “As a single mom, at home with two small children it is impossible to pretend it’s business as usual. I have a very good work from home set up but doing academic work with little kids interrupting me is impossible. Taking care of their emotional and physical needs is obviously my priority.”
- “The emotional stress/trauma of the hard lockdown was very, very difficult to cope with. I was relatively new to the university and to the area so had absolutely no local support system. It is very difficult to concentrate on academic work when you're stuck at home and have to cope with all of this all alone.”

SOCIAL MILIEU – RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS OTHERS (I)

- “to ensure all those we know who need help are taken care of and also to support those who help others. This care took two to three days of the week”.
- “had to take responsibility for my elderly mother who lives on her own, and whom we have told not to go out at all. All her account payments, grocery shopping, and other responsibilities have become mine”.

SOCIAL MILIEU – *RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS OTHERS* (2)

- “I feel completely emotionally spent but I cannot be; there is no room in our life for me to unravel. I have to maintain my cool and keep going. There is no chance for me to clock out of this situation; so, like so many other women, I have to put everything else before myself and it is making me deeply miserable.”
- “had to defer my own course to finish at a later date. I feel defeated and yet I feel guilty about it – like I should be able to cope. I've always felt strong and resilient, until now”.

WORK ENVIRONMENT (I)

- “I work with a dynamic team. We have continued to meet using online platforms but most of the meetings are supportive discussing how everyone is feeling, addressing the isolation, providing support for our clinical colleagues who are treating COVID patients.”
- “Support from fellow colleagues in the form of WhatsApp messages/groups and online Google meetings were a saving grace. We were able to talk about the new way of working, support one another professionally and personally.”

WORK ENVIRONMENT (2)

- “I was not prepared for the emotional toll it would have. It is challenging when you have to maintain an online presence for students, responding timeously to queries. And providing support to students that extends beyond academic work.”
- “The stress of trying to help our disadvantaged students is taking an extreme toll on staff. I don't know how we are going to manage completing this year without suffering with burnout or having a mental breakdown. There is no physical, emotional, or psychological support for what we are having to endure.”

CONCLUSIONS

- Universities need to be aware of the adverse impacts and the severe implications for families, students, colleagues, work, and wellbeing
- Alleviate the emotional labour burden:
 - find other avenues to support students
 - extend deadlines and adjust requirements
 - lower demands on academics with young children, and
 - provide emotional support through regular communication and engagement
- Women can:
 - practice emotional regulation through active discussion of positive events with family members and colleagues
 - adopt an adaptability mindset toward change/s at work

QUESTIONS?

