

Three in four parents of preschool children unable to balance work and childcare during lockdown

June 11 2020

A new study has highlighted the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on the wellbeing of families with preschool children. Of the 1728 parents and carers surveyed by researchers at the Universities of Oxford, Reading and Southampton, nearly three quarters felt that they are not sufficiently able to meet the needs of both work and their preschool children.

Key causes of stress for families in this situation were:

- Their Work (54% of participants reported that this was causing considerable stress)
- Their child's screen time (45%)
- Their child's wellbeing (45%)

COVID19 has led to major disruptions to families' lives, through social distancing, closure of childcare settings and lockdown. The [Co-SPYCE \(COVID-19 Supporting Parents and Young Children in Epidemics\) survey](#) is tracking [preschool children](#)'s mental health throughout the COVID-19 crisis to identify what advice, support and help families need to protect young [children](#)'s mental health.

Although participating [parents](#) and carers reported that the majority of their preschool children are spending over three hours playing each day, and getting [regular exercise](#), almost half of participating parents and carers reported that their preschooler was spending no time playing with

another child in their household. Over half are worried that they are not doing enough with their child.

Dr. Pete Lawrence, School of Psychology, University of Southampton, said, "This report captures daily life during lockdown, when childcare settings were closed. Without childcare for preschoolers, parents are supporting them much more with indoor and [outdoor play](#) and getting enough [regular physical activity](#) during the lockdown. The majority are trying to juggle this with work, which, in many cases, has become more demanding because of the pandemic. This appears to be taking its toll on parents—with them feeling unable to do a good job as a parent or at work."

Professor Helen Dodd, professor of child psychology, University of Reading, said, "Our survey findings demonstrate the challenges that families with young children are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents are stressed about their work and their child's screen time more than anything else. This paints a picture of parents who are trying their best but who feel that they aren't able to successfully meet the demands of their work whilst entertaining and caring for their child."

The findings from the Co-SPYCE survey will help researchers identify what protects preschool children from deteriorating mental health, over time, and at particular stress points, and how this may vary according to child and [family](#) characteristics. It also aims to identify what advice, support and help parents would find most useful.

Parents and carers are being invited to complete an online questionnaire each month during lockdown, and then a month after schools reopen. The first survey takes about 15-20 minutes, and subsequent surveys about 10 minutes. Participants are asked to answer questions about family life and relationships, overall health and well-being, parenting,

psychological symptoms and how they and their preschool child are coping during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey is still open to new families.

Regular summaries of key findings will be made available via the UKRI www.emergingminds.org.uk research network website throughout the study and will be shared directly with partner organizations in health and education services and the community and voluntary sector, to inform the development of effective support for children, young people and families.

More information: Co-SPYCE: [sotonpsychology.eu.qualtrics.c ...
m/SV_d6VcwC01wqhRxfn](https://sotonpsychology.eu.qualtrics.com/SV_d6VcwC01wqhRxfn)

UK Research and Innovation: www.emergingminds.org.uk

Provided by University of Southampton

Citation: Three in four parents of preschool children unable to balance work and childcare during lockdown (2020, June 11) retrieved 18 February 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-parents-preschool-children-unable-childcare.html>

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