



WAVE 1

National Income Dynamics
Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus
Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM)

Gender and the early effects of the Covid-19 crisis in the paid and unpaid economies in South Africa

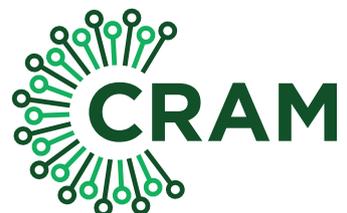
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N.i.D.S.
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CORONAVIRUS RAPID MOBILE SURVEY 2020

Gender and the early effects of the COVID-19 crisis in the paid and unpaid economies in South Africa

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Abstract

This policy paper analyses the early effects of the COVID-19 crisis and 'hard lockdown' period in South Africa on women's and men's work in the paid and unpaid (care) economies. Because women and men typically have different roles in both of these sectors, it is likely that they would experience the negative effects of the crisis unevenly, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities. Based on the first wave of the NIDS-CRAM survey, we find that women have been more severely affected than men in the early phase of the crisis in South Africa, namely the 'hard' lockdown period. Net job losses between February and April 2020 were higher for women than for men, with women accounting for two-thirds of the total net job losses. Among those who remained in employment, there was also a bigger fall in average hours worked per week for women than for men. Compounding these disproportionate employment losses were disproportionate increases in unpaid childcare as a result of the lockdown and school closures. While the majority of both men and women living with children reported doing large amounts of extra childcare in April, women were doing relatively more. Nearly 80% of women who were spending more time than usual on childcare were spending more than 4 extra hours a day on it, compared to 65% of men. This gender gap persists even among men and women who reported being employed in April. Understanding who bears the brunt of the crisis in the workplace and in the home is key to designing appropriate policy responses.

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Executive summary

This policy paper analyses the early effects of the COVID-19 crisis and 'hard lockdown' period in South Africa on women's and men's work in the paid and unpaid (care) economies. Because women and men typically have different roles in both of these sectors, it is likely that they would experience the negative effects of the crisis unevenly, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities. Based on the first wave of the NIDS-CRAM survey, we find that women have been more severely affected than men in the early phase of the crisis in South Africa, namely the 'hard' lockdown period, both in terms of job losses and in terms of the increased childcare burden.

Women's employment fell by relatively more compared to men's as a result of the crisis and 'hard' lockdown. In February 2020, or pre-crisis, 46% of women and 59% of men aged 18 and older reported being employed. In April 2020, or the month of the 'hard' lockdown, 36% of women and 54% of men reported being employed (or having a job to return to). This amounts to a 22% decline in the share of women employed compared to a 10% decline in the share of men employed between February and April. The gender gap in employment has therefore grown.

Among those working, women experienced a greater decline in the average number of hours worked a week than men. In February, women were working on average 35 hours a week and men 39 hours. In April, the average hours worked per week had fallen to about 23 hours for women and 29 hours for men. This constitutes a 35% decline for women and a 26% decline for men. As with employment, the gender gap in hours worked among the employed has therefore grown.

There was considerable churning between February and April. Where job losses occurred, women suffered more, and where job gains were made, women benefited less. The two points above describe the overall employment picture, but between any two time points, both job loss and job gain occurs. Among those who were employed in February, job losses were much larger for women than for men; 30% of women who were employed in February were no longer employed in April, compared to 20% of men. Among those without employment in February, job gains were much lower for women than for men; 7% of women who were not employed in February were employed in April, compared to 16% of men.

Of the approximately 2.9 million net job losses that occurred between February and April among all adults aged 18 and older, women accounted for two-thirds. Because women were more likely than men to have lost a job and less likely than men to have gained a job, overall, women accounted for the bulk of net job losses. Although women comprised less than half of total the employed in February (47%), they accounted for the majority (66%) of the net job losses between February and April.

The more vulnerable groups of women (and men) suffered greater job losses. The percentage of those employed in February who had lost their job by April was higher for Africans, those in the lower earnings brackets (based on February's earnings), and those without a tertiary education.

The COVID-19 crisis and lockdown destabilised work not just in the paid economy, but also in the unpaid (care) economy, with the childcare burden increasing substantially. During the hard lockdown period all schools, early childhood development centres (ECDs) and childcare facilities were closed, and domestic workers and childminders were unable to work in private households. This raised the provision of childcare in households with children considerably.

Because women are more likely to live with children than men, the relative increase in the childcare burden would be higher for women than men. At the time of the interview, 74% of women and 61% of men reported living with at least one child aged 0-17, and among those living with children, women lived with a larger number of children on average than men.

Among those living with children, a larger percentage of women than men reported spending more time than usual on childcare in April. About 73% of women and 66% of men living with children reported spending more time than usual looking after children in April. Of these, nearly 80% of women and 65% of men reported spending more than 4 extra hours a day on childcare. A gender gap in childcare persists even if we restrict the sample to men and women with a post-matric education or with employment in April.

Policy recommendations for the next 1-3 months:

While both men and women have suffered substantially from the initial effects of the crisis and the early lockdown, women have been affected more than men, both in terms of labour market outcomes and unpaid care work in the home. Policy responses should reflect this unequal effect. These could include:

- Supporting schools and ECD centres to reopen urgently and safely
- Reinstating the school feeding scheme for all children without further delay, even if schools or grades remain closed
- Increasing the length of UIF support for workers unable to return to work because of childcare constraints
- Providing the Child Support Grant (CSG) top-up per child, and not just per caregiver
- Ensuring women are equally represented in all fora related to the COVID-19 response

1. Introduction

Men and women experience the negative effects of health and economic crises unevenly because they typically have assumed different roles both in the labour market and in the home. For example, during the Great Recession of 2008, research showed that, at least in the short-term, men were more affected in terms of job losses than women, but women tended to bear the costs of increased austerity and cutbacks in public services due to their predominance in unpaid (care) work² in the home (Grown and Tas 2011; Khalil 2018). Studies on the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2013-2016) found that women were more severely affected and suffered worse subsequent health outcomes both because of their role in caregiving and their lack of decision-making power (Wenham et al 2020). As many have now pointed out, recognising that crises affect men and women differently is key to being able to design effective and equitable policy responses (United Nations 2020; Wenham et al 2020).

As with many aspects of COVID-19, there is much uncertainty about how the unfolding health, social and economic crises will affect men and women. While in previous recessions men have tended to suffer from greater job losses than women (hence the term 'mancession'), it is not immediately clear whether the COVID-19 crisis will produce similar outcomes. For example, many of the essential and frontline workers who were able to continue working during the lockdown period are women, but women also predominate in certain 'non-essential' retail and service occupations that have been severely affected, such as in the clothing, personal care, restaurant and hospitality sectors. The extent to which men and women will be differentially affected also depends on whether their jobs can be performed remotely – for example, compare personal care services to business services (Alon et al 2020; Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020; Kerr and Thornton 2020).³

Further, people's ability to work, or work the same hours as before, will be influenced by what is happening in the home. The COVID-19 crisis has clearly exposed both the extent and importance of the care economy, much of it unpaid and performed most often by women and girls. The unprecedented closure of schools and childcare facilities, the suspension of paid care-givers in the home (e.g. childminders and domestic workers), the scaling back of non-COVID-19 healthcare services, and the need to care for and protect the elderly given their vulnerability to the virus, would likely have resulted in a dramatic increase in the burden of care within households. How this additional care burden is distributed within households will depend on who was employed pre-crisis, who can continue with paid employment (either as an essential worker or from home), and the existing division of labour in the household (Alon et al 2020). Given uneven participation in the labour market and entrenched social norms around care work, we would expect that women would bear much of this additional care burden (UN 2020). Without anyone with which to share the double burden of paid work and care work, single mothers, and especially those not living with other adults in the household, would be most severely affected (Cattan et al 2020; Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020).

In this policy paper, we use data collected in the first wave of the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS)-Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) 2020 Wave 1 survey to explore whether men and women were affected differently by the crisis and early lockdown period in South Africa in two key areas - their work in the labour market and their work in the home. It is important to analyse the gendered effects of COVID-19 in South Africa given that men and women were already unevenly represented in the labour market and in unpaid care work pre-crisis, and the fallout from the crisis has the potential to exacerbate these existing vulnerabilities. Pre-COVID-19, women were less likely to be employed than men, and when they were employed, they tended to work significantly fewer hours and earn considerably less than men on average (Mosomi, 2019; Posel and Casale 2019). Many studies have documented that in South Africa (and globally), care work in the household remains work mostly performed by women (see e.g. Budlender et al. 2001; Charmes 2006; Hatch

2 The term 'unpaid work' is used widely in the feminist economics literature to draw attention to the unremunerated work that occurs outside of the labour market, but that is nonetheless highly productive and valuable to society, namely cooking, cleaning, fetching water and wood, caring for children, the sick and the elderly, etc.

3 Based on these two criteria - whether the job is deemed essential during lockdown and the ability to work remotely - Alon et al (2020) predict that, unlike in previous downturns, women will experience greater job losses than men in the US given the pre-crisis sectoral distribution. Joyce and Xu (2020) make a similar prediction for the UK based on men's and women's pre-lockdown employment distributions.

and Posel 2018). Moreover, given low marriage rates, the absence of fathers in most children's households, and the reliance on female relatives (particularly grandmothers) for childcare support, the majority of children in South Africa are cared for physically, and often financially, by women (Hatch and Posel 2018). The implications of this double burden are severe, with women and children more likely to live in poor households than men (Posel and Rogan 2009; 2012).

In the next section of the paper, we briefly summarise the evidence on the gendered impact of COVID-19 that is emerging from rapid data collection surveys in other countries. In Section 3 we describe the NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 survey which we analyse. Section 4 focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the labour market outcomes of men and women, while Section 5 highlights the effects on care work. The final two sections of the paper summarise the findings and present some policy recommendations.

2. What do the early assessments from elsewhere suggest?

Employment data from the US show that of the jobs lost in April, 55% were held by women, with women of colour disproportionately affected.⁴ Adams-Prassl et al (2020a) analyse data from real time surveys conducted in the US, the UK and Germany in April 2020. They find that women were seven and five percentage points more likely than men to have lost their jobs in the US and UK respectively (those without a college education also had a higher probability of job loss). Only about half of this gender effect could be accounted for by the different kinds of jobs women do and whether they can be performed from home. The authors suggest that part of the reason for the gap is that women spend more time on unpaid work in the home. They find that even among those employed, women spent more time on childcare and home schooling than men. In contrast, in Germany, women were no more likely to have lost their job compared to men, despite also spending more time on childcare than men. The authors point to cross-country institutional differences as potential driving factors in the post-crisis outcomes (Adams-Prassl et al (2020).

Andrew et al (2020) analyse data collected on the time use of men and women during the April-May lockdown in England in dual-parent families with children specifically. They find that mothers are disproportionately affected. Compared to February, women in the sample were more likely than men to have lost their job, quit or been furloughed. They also spent more time on housework and childcare during lockdown than men. Even among mothers and fathers who had paid employment, women were spending more hours on childcare than men, and they experienced a greater reduction in *uninterrupted* work hours than men.⁵

While the inability to conduct face-to-face surveys complicates the collection of representative data in developing countries, where telephone coverage is more limited, early evidence from India from on-the-ground reports and telephonic interviews conducted in April suggests the crisis may be intensifying pre-existing gender inequalities. Although these studies only analysed women, they found women to be severely affected both in terms of limited economic opportunities during the lockdown and in terms of increased care work, with some suggestion that the more vulnerable groups of women were being hit especially hard, such as those involved in informal activities, landless agricultural workers, migrants, those without proper documentation and minority groups (Chakraborty 2020; Dasgupta and Mitra 2020).

4 Reported in The Economist, 2 June 2020, 'Downturns tend to reduce gender inequality. Not under Covid-19', <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2020/06/02/downturns-tend-to-reduce-gender-inequality-not-under-covid-19>; and the New York Times, 13 May 2020, 'Why Some Women Call This Recession a "Shecession"', <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/unemployment-coronavirus-women.html>

5 One encouraging finding is that both women and men were doing more of the unpaid care work during lockdown, even though women were doing relatively more (Andrew et al 2020). In a related study also on the UK, Sevilla and Smith (2020) show that although women within couples were doing the bulk of the additional childcare hours during lockdown, the gender childcare gap for the extra post-lockdown hours was slightly smaller than the gap pre-lockdown, driven largely by fathers who were working from home or had been furloughed/lost their job engaging in more childcare. This could affect the longer-term division of labour as men 'learn' to do work they may not have done before, a point we will return to later.

3. Description of the South African data and sample

To analyse the short-term impacts of the crisis on men and women in South Africa, we use data from the first wave of the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) - Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM). NIDS-CRAM is a rapid assessment telephone survey conducted among a sample of approximately 7000 adults (aged 18 and older) in South Africa. The intention is to interview the same individuals at least four times during 2020; however for this paper, we focus on data from the first wave which have recently become available. The interviews for Wave 1 were conducted between 7 May and 27 June 2020 and respondents were asked a range of questions on employment, household welfare, grant receipt and health knowledge and behaviour. Where relevant, information was collected on two key periods – February 2020 or ‘before the crisis’ (i.e. before the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in South Africa on 5 March 2020), and April 2020 or the first full month of ‘the hard lockdown’ (which began on 27 March 2020 and ended on 30 April 2020).

During the hard lockdown phase in South Africa (or Level 5 lockdown as it was officially labelled), only essential workers were allowed to work (predominantly those in healthcare, medicine and food provision), although non-essential workers who could work from home were encouraged to do so. During this period all schools, childcare facilities and domestic work were also suspended, although it should be noted that some of the better-off schools (although at most 10%) were able to provide learners with online schooling resources (van der Berg and Spaul 2020). The hard lockdown period in South Africa was noted for being one of the strictest in the world, with both the police and army deployed countrywide to ensure compliance.

While a number of rapid online or telephone surveys have been conducted in South Africa since the crisis began, the advantage of NIDS-CRAM is that it attempts to collect information on a nationally representative sample of adults, *to the extent that this is possible under the circumstances*. It does this by interviewing a sub-sample of adults from the NIDS Wave 5 survey conducted in 2017. The surveys for NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 were approximately 20 minutes on average and conducted in 10 of the 11 official South African languages.

NIDS began in 2008 as a nationally representative household survey, and every two to three years since then the individuals living in those households have been re-interviewed (along with anyone living with them).⁶ Strictly speaking therefore the 2020 NIDS-CRAM sample is not representative of the South African population in 2020 but, when weighted, of a representative sample of individuals who were 15 years and older in NIDS in 2017. All data presented in this paper are weighted appropriately, and standard errors are corrected for survey design features (namely clustering and stratification). For more detail on the survey design see Ingle et al (2020), for weighting and sampling see Kerr et al (2020), and for the questionnaire itself see Spaul et al (2020). The data are available for download from the Data First website (<https://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za/>) and all reports are available on the NIDS-CRAM website (<https://cramsurvey.org/>).

4. Gendered employment effects of the crisis and early lockdown

Due to the strict time constraints when collecting information through a telephone survey, a far more limited set of questions on labour market outcomes was asked in the NIDS-CRAM 2020 wave compared to the earlier NIDS survey waves (or the national labour force surveys), which were conducted through face-to-face interviews. In addition, not all the questions could be phrased in the same way as in the earlier NIDS waves. Given these comparability issues, this paper uses only the NIDS-CRAM 2020 wave and focuses instead on the ‘internal’ comparison between male and female respondents. Specifically, we compare the employment outcomes of men and women for the two periods on which data were collected in NIDS-CRAM, namely February (pre-crisis) and April (the first full month of the lockdown). A person is defined as employed in each of these months if

⁶ In NIDS 2017, information was collected on almost 40 000 individuals. For more information about NIDS, see the NIDS website: <http://www.nids.uct.ac.za/>. NIDS as well as the special NIDS-CRAM survey is conducted by the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town’s School of Economics.

they had worked in “any kind of job”, had done “work for any profit or pay, even if just for an hour or a small amount”, had been engaged in “any kind of business such as selling things - big or small – even if only for one hour”, or if they had a job/activity that they would return to in the next 4 weeks.

Table 1 shows that in February, before the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa, women were less likely to be employed than men (46% vs 59% of all adults aged 18 and over), and if employed, they were working fewer hours on average per week than men (35 vs 39 hours). These gender differences are expected given the well-documented gaps in labour market outcomes between men and women based on the earlier labour force survey data in South Africa (Mosomi 2019; Posel and Casale 2019).⁷

In April, the first full month of the lockdown, both employment and mean hours worked fell substantially for women and men, as expected. Only 36% of female adults aged 18 years or older were employed in April compared to 54% of men, and employed women were working 23 hours a week on average compared to 29 hours a week on average for employed men.

These declines in employment and mean hours worked between February and April were relatively larger for women than for men. Between February and April employment fell by approximately 1.9 million jobs or 22% for women, and by just under a million jobs or 10% for men. Put differently, of the almost 2.9 million net job losses between February and April in South Africa, two-thirds were lost by women (1.9 million) and one third was lost by men (1 million). Among those employed, mean hours worked fell by 35% for women and 26% for men. Gender gaps in employment and mean hours worked therefore increased in the early lockdown phase.

⁷ Note that these figures are not comparable to the national statistics as sampling frames and questionnaire design are very different in the NIDS-CRAM survey. Also, the figures here are for all adults 18 years and older rather than just the working-age population, defined typically as those age 18 to 59 years. A decision was taken to include the older group of workers in the statistics presented in this section to maximise sample size and because about 21% (weighted) of those over the age of 59 reported being employed in February. However, the gender gaps reported in this section are largely unchanged even if we restrict to the working age sample of 18 to 59 year olds.

Table 1. Employment and hours worked in February and April 2020, all adults 18 and older

	Women	Men
February		
Number of all adults (18 and over) employed	8 520 000	9 706 000
	(504 000)	(583 000)
% of all adults (18 and over) employed	46.0%	59.4%*
	(1.21)	(1.6)
If employed:		
Mean hours worked per week	35.3	38.7*
	(0.6)	(0.8)
% reporting zero hours	4.5%	5.9%
	(0.9)	(1.0)
% reporting zero earnings	7.1%	4.2%
	(1.1)	(0.9)
April		
Number of all adults (18 and over) employed	6 639 000	8 716 000*
	(400 000)	(544 000)
% of all adults (18 and over) employed	35.8%	53.6%*
	(1.2)	(1.6)
If employed:		
Mean hours worked per week	23.1	28.7*
	(1.1)	(1.1)
% reporting zero hours	35.3%	26.3%*
	(2.2)	(2.0)
% reporting zero earnings	13.3%	12.1%
	(1.4)	(1.4)

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. Data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Included in these figures are workers who report having a job (or a job to return to), but who may not have been working any hours during the months of February or April. In February this group of workers we assume would be made up predominantly of those who were on leave, and so represented just under 5% of women and 6% of men with employment. However, in April, the percentage of those who report having a job (or a job to return to) but working zero hours almost increased eightfold for women to 35%, and a little over fourfold for men to 26%. These are likely workers who were unable to work during the first month of the 'hard' lockdown because they were not essential workers, or they could not work from home (a group we could refer to very loosely as 'furloughed' workers). In other words, women were about 35% more likely than men to report working zero hours.

A key issue is whether the employed who were unable to work during lockdown received any earnings, and if so, what percentage of February's earnings they received. Unfortunately, it is hard to say with any certainty how earnings were affected, as the earnings questions asked in NIDS-CRAM for February and April are not comparable. However, some indication is provided by the percentage of the employed who reported zero earnings, which increased from 7% to 13% for women and from 4% to 12% for men between February and April. Despite these large increases, this still represents a relatively small share of the total employed. It is highly likely, however, that this number will have grown in May and June as the crisis deepened and most businesses used up their cash reserves.

The estimates presented thus far in *Table 1* show the employment picture in February and April *on average* for men and women. It is also interesting to look at some of the figures conditional on employment status in February because there could have been churning in the labour market, resulting not only in job loss in April, but also job gain. *Table 2* shows that of those adults who were employed in February, 30% of women compared to 20% of men lost their job in April. And of those who were *not* employed in February, 7% of women and 16% of men gained a job in April. There is a net loss in jobs for both men and women, but the net loss is greater for women. In other words, where jobs were lost, women carried a heavier burden, and where jobs were gained, women benefitted less. Another way of stating this is, of the total job losses that occurred between February and April, of which there were roughly 4.6 million, women accounted for 2.6 million or 57% of these. And of the roughly 1.8 million jobs that were gained, women accounted for just over 700 000 or 40% of these. Overall, therefore, women accounted for 1.9 million (or two-thirds) of the approximately 2.9 million *net* jobs that were lost.

Table 2 also shows (in the lower frame) the change in hours worked for those who remained employed. Of those who reported being employed in *both* February and April, a large share reported working fewer hours in April compared to February. We would expect to see this in the data given the restrictions that were in place during the 'hard' lockdown phase. In terms of gender differences, again we find that women report worse outcomes. Of those who reported being employed in February and April, 48% of women reported working fewer hours per week, compared to about 42% of men (although this difference is not significant).

Table 2. Employment changes between February and April 2020, all adults 18 and older

	Women	Men
Of those employed in February:		
Number reporting job loss in April	2 577 000	1 973 000
	(224 000)	(165 000)
% reporting job loss	30.2%	20.3%*
	(1.7)	(1.5)
Of those NOT employed in February:		
Number reporting job gain in April	715 000	1 054 000
	(91 000)	(127 000)
% reporting job gain	7.1%	15.9%*
	(0.8)	(1.7)
Of those employed in February and April:		
% reporting fewer hours worked per week	47.9%	42.3%
	(2.5)	(2.7)
% reporting same hours worked per week	42.5%	48.7%
	(2.4)	(2.7)
% reporting more hours worked per week	9.7%	9.0
	(1.7)	(1.5)

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 (2020)

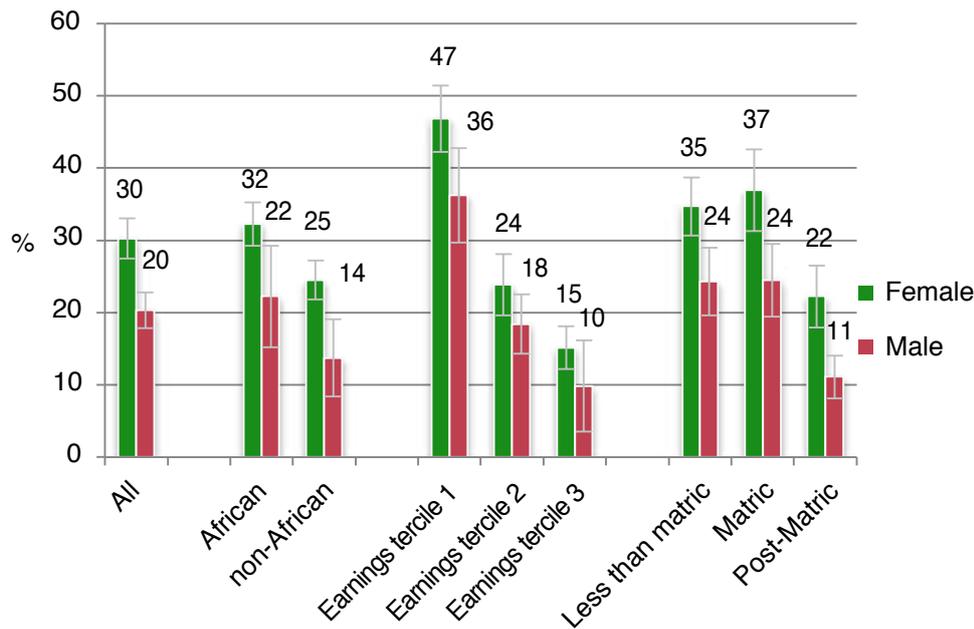
Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. Data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Finally, we look at which groups of women (and men) suffered most from the job losses that occurred between February and April. *Figure 1* below shows the percentage of those who were employed in February who were no longer employed in April. As expected, the most vulnerable groups are affected more, namely African workers, those in the lower earnings terciles (based on February earnings⁸), and those with a matric or less (compared to those with a post-matric education). Given the small samples sizes when we make inter-group comparisons, some of the confidence intervals are quite large, but the figures are still instructive. For example, it is extremely worrying that almost half of all employed women (47%) in the poorest tercile report losing their job between February and April 2020, compared to just over a third (36%) of employed men in the poorest tercile. This is significantly higher than the 15% of employed women and the 10% of employed men in the highest tercile who lost their job between February and April (*Figure 1*).

8 Individuals were asked how much their “take-home pay or profit (after tax and deductions)” was in February, and if they refused or were unable to provide an exact amount, they were given the option to respond in brackets. The midpoint of the bracket was assigned to the bracket-responders before earnings terciles were calculated. Only about 6% of the employed in February did not respond to either the point value or brackets earnings question.

Figure 1. Job losses among those employed in February, by race, earnings tercile, and education (%)



Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. Data are weighted. The bars show the percentage of workers employed in February who were no longer employed in April. The earnings terciles are based on February earnings. 90% confidence intervals are shown.

5. Care work and the effects of COVID-19

In addition to severe disruptions in the labour market, the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown destabilised work in the home. Unique to this crisis has been the closure of all schools, early childhood development (ECD) centres and other childcare facilities (such as playgroups or day mothers). There were roughly 13 million children enrolled in Grades R to 12 in South Africa pre-crisis⁹, and of the approximately 6 million children under the age of 6 in South Africa, about 2.3 million were estimated to be enrolled in ECD centres¹⁰. Most families with children therefore would have had their children at home for an extra 5 to 9 hours a day from 18 March when school closures began. In addition, during the hard lockdown phase (27 March to 30 April) domestic workers and childminders, of which there were approximately a million in South Africa pre-crisis (De Villiers and Taylor 2019), were unable to continue working in private households. While most parents would have also been in lockdown from 27 March along with their children, some would have been trying to work from home and others would have continued to work outside the home as essential workers.

Pre-lockdown, women were responsible for more unpaid work than men in South Africa. Rubiano-Matulevich and Viollaz (2019) use the most recent South African Time Use Survey data from 2010 to show that women, on average, performed over 2.2 hours more unpaid housework and care work per day than men; and this figure rises to about 3.3 hours more if a child under the age of 7 is present in the household (see also Statistics South Africa 2013).¹¹ This is unsurprising given that a large share of children lives with their mothers only (43.1%) or with both their parents (33.8%), and only a very small percentage lives with just their fathers (3.3%) (Statistics South Africa 2019, based on 2018 General Household Survey data). Where children live with neither parent, they are often in the care of another female relative, often a grandmother (Hatch and Posel 2018; Posel and Grapsa 2017). The expectation therefore is that during the lockdown phase, women would carry much of the additional burden associated with having children at home all day, eating, playing and in some cases learning in the same space.

⁹ See statistics from Department of Education: <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/School%20Realities%202019%20Final%20.pdf?ver=2020-02-07-101051-330>

¹⁰ Reported in <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-28-who-will-look-after-the-little-children/>

¹¹ In household surveys, the overwhelming majority of people who report not being in the labour market because they specialise in full-time “homemaking” in South Africa, are women (Posel and Bruce-Brand 2020).

Although we do not have information on marital status or the gender composition of households, the NIDS-CRAM survey did ask respondents how many children were living in their household at the time of the interview. *Table 3* shows that, as expected, women are more likely to live with children than men. Approximately 74% of women reported living with at least one child aged 0-17 in their household compared to 61% of men. Among those living with children aged 0-17, women reported living with a higher number of children on average. Women are also much more likely than men to live with at least one very young child aged 0-6 (52% for women vs 37% for men).

Table 3. Percentage of adults living with children at the time of the interview, 2020

	Women	Men
% living with at least one child 0-17	74.4%	60.9%*
	(1.4)	(1.6)
Mean no. of children 0-17 (conditional on living with a child 0-17)	2.6	2.4*
	(0.07)	(0.06)
% living with at least one child 0-6	51.8%	37.4%*
	(1.5)	(1.5)
Mean no. of children 0-6 (conditional on living with a child 0-6)	1.6	1.6
	(0.04)	(0.04)
% living with at least one child 0-17 attending school pre-lockdown ^a	88.3%	88.4%
	(1.0)	(1.3)
Mean no. of children attending school pre-lockdown (conditional on living with an attending child) ^a	2.4	2.3
	(0.06)	(0.06)

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. Data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses.

^a Note that the question on how many children in your household were attending school in March before they closed was only asked of those living with children at the time of the interview.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Respondents who reported living with children were also asked how many of these children were attending formal schooling (Grades R-12) before they closed. The vast majority (88%) of both women and men reported living with at least one child who was attending school pre-lockdown, and among those with at least one child who was in school, the mean number of children in school was around 2.3. This suggests that for most households with children, there would have been a considerable increase in the provision of childcare during lockdown, as a large number of children would have been cared for outside the home pre-crisis.¹²

Collectively, these data suggest that the relative increase in the provision of childcare following school closures and the hard lockdown would be larger for women simply because of household composition, i.e. because women are more likely than men to live with children. However, as we show in the next table, even accounting for household composition (i.e. restricting to only those women and men who were living with at least one child at the time of the interview), women took on more of the additional childcare burden during the hard lockdown period.¹³

12 NIDS-CRAM asks respondents whether, at the time of the interview, there were more, less or the same number of children living in the household compared to before lockdown on 27th March. About 11% of respondents report a change (so either more or less children in their current household), but there was hardly any difference in the prevalence or direction of change depending on whether the respondent was male or female. Also, we do not know if the number of children in the household changed because the respondent him/herself moved households or because children themselves moved. The NIDS-CRAM data suggest that approximately 15 percent of adults moved into a different household during the first two months of the lockdown.

13 The findings on household composition and childcare reported in this section are robust to restricting the sample to those adults who did not report moving house or dwelling in either March or May (non-movers accounted for about 85% of the total sample of adults interviewed; Posel and Casale 2020).

NIDS-CRAM asked respondents who were living with at least one child 0-17 years at the time of the interview: “*In April, did you personally spend more time than usual looking after children?*” If they responded yes, they were asked “*How much more time did you spend per day?*”, with response options “*Nearly an hour more*”, “*1-2 hours more*”, “*3-4 hours more*” and “*Over 4 hours more*”. As predicted, the data in *Table 4* show a higher percentage of women than men reported spending more time than usual on childcare during the April lockdown (73% vs 66%). In terms of the additional time spent on childcare, interestingly the majority of both women (79%) and men (65%) responded that they had spent over four extra hours per day on childcare than before the lockdown (conditional on spending more time than usual on childcare). This very skewed distribution among those doing more childcare is evident in *Figure 2*. In the remaining tables below therefore, we only report on the highest category, i.e. the percentage doing over four hours more a day.

Table 4 also shows the data disaggregated by whether or not adults were living with children who were attending school pre-lockdown. As we might expect, a higher percentage of women (74%) and men (67%) living with children who were attending Grade R-12 pre-lockdown report spending extra time on childcare in April, compared to women (69%) and men (62%) living with children who were not attending school pre-lockdown. Although one needs to be wary of smaller sample sizes as one unpacks the data further, what is interesting is that the gender gap in *the extra hours spent* on childcare is smaller for the former group, i.e. men and women living with children who were attending school pre-lockdown. So while men are doing more childcare during lockdown if they live with *any* children at home, where they seem to have stepped up most is where children who were at school are now at home, perhaps helping them with their school work. This might also be pointing to the willingness of men to take on (and report doing) childcare in atypical circumstances and possibly because helping with schoolwork is not seen to be highly feminised work.

Table 4. Percentage of adults living with children who report spending more time on childcare in April 2020

	Women	Men
All adults living with children		
% reporting spending more time on childcare	73.2%	66.5%*
	(1.2)	(1.8)
% reporting over 4 more hours a day ^a	79.3%	65.1%*
	(1.3)	(2.2)
Adults living with children who were attending GrR-12 pre-crisis		
% reporting spending more time on childcare	73.8%	67.2%*
	(1.2)	(1.8)
% reporting over 4 more hours a day	79.1%	66.5%*
	(1.4)	(2.4)
Adults living with children who were NOT attending GrR-12 pre-crisis		
% reporting spending more time on childcare	68.7%	62.4%
	(4.0)	(5.5)
% reporting over 4 more hours a day	80.7%	55.9%*
	(3.7)	(8.1)

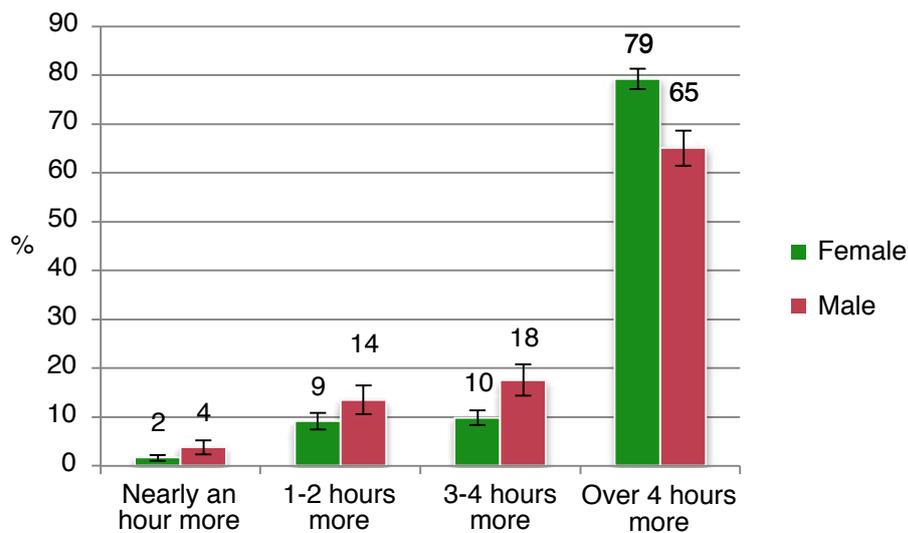
Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 (2020)

Notes: Sample is all adults 18 years or older who reported living with at least one child 0-17 years at the time of the interview. Data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

^a The % reporting spending over 4 hours more on childcare is conditional on having said yes to the previous question on whether they spent more time looking after children in April.

Figure 2. Extra hours spent on childcare per day (conditional on spending more time than usual on childcare in April)



Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 (2020)

Notes: Sample is all adults 18 years or older who reported living with at least one child 0-17 years at the time of the interview, and who had reported spending more time on childcare than usual in April. Data are weighted. 90% confidence intervals are shown.

We can disaggregate the data further by some of the relevant individual characteristics of the respondents, namely their level of completed education and their employment status (*Table 5*). What is quite striking from this table is that, among those living with children, women and men were doing substantial amounts of extra childcare regardless of whether or not they had higher levels of education or employment. Women’s involvement in extra childcare is particularly insensitive to individual characteristics. However, the main message here is that within categories, a higher percentage of women still reported doing extra childcare than men (although because of small sample sizes, some of these differences are not significant). So, to take one example where there is a significant difference, among those who were employed in April and who reported doing more childcare than usual, 80% of women compared to 64% of men reported doing over four hours extra.¹⁴

¹⁴ Keep in mind that some of the employed in April were not actually working because of the lockdown. If we disaggregate the employed sample further into those who report zero hours of work in April and those who report working some positive number of hours in April, we find that a gender gap in extra childcare persists in both cases, although it is smaller among those working positive hours (and as expected, those working positive hours reported doing less extra childcare than those reporting zero hours).

Table 5. Percentage of adults living with children who report spending more time on childcare in April 2020, by key education and employment status

	Women	Men
Adults with a matric or less		
% reporting spending more time on childcare	72.2%	68.8%
	(1.2)	(1.8)
% reporting over 4 more hours a day ^a	78.7%	63.7%*
	(1.5)	(2.5)
Adults with a post-matric		
% reporting spending more time on childcare	77.2%	58.4%*
	(2.4)	(4.2)
% reporting over 4 more hours a day	80.5%	71.5%
	(2.8)	(4.5)
Adults not employed in April		
% reporting spending more time on childcare	74.1%	65.0%*
	(1.5)	(2.5)
% reporting over 4 more hours a day	78.9%	67.3%*
	(1.7)	(3.4)
Adults employed in April		
% reporting spending more time on childcare	71.5%	67.5%
	(2.2)	(2.4)
% reporting over 4 more hours a day	79.6%	64.2%*
	(2.2)	(3.0)

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 (2020)

Notes: Sample is all adults 18 years or older who reported living with at least one child 0-17 years at the time of the interview. Data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

^a The % reporting spending over 4 hours more on childcare is conditional on having said yes to the previous question on whether they spent more time looking after children in April.

Overall, the results suggest that among adults living with children, the majority were doing extra childcare, and at least four extra hours a day, and women were doing this more often than men. It is possible that individuals may have over-reported their *additional* childcare burden, perhaps because the question did not specify what counted as 'looking after children' or because some people interpreted the question as the *total* hours spent on childcare (as opposed to only the extra hours).¹⁵ It is interesting to note though that similar results were found in a rapid assessment study conducted in the UK, where parents were also asked how many extra hours they spent on childcare in a typical day during their lockdown period (Sevilla and Smith 2020). The study found that in households with children, parents were spending the equivalent of almost a full working week (40

¹⁵ Because of time constraints on the telephonic interview, there was not space in the questionnaire to ask respondents for the number of hours they usually spent on childcare pre-lockdown as well as the hours spent on childcare during lockdown. By asking how many more hours they spent per day during lockdown, respondents would have had to make this calculation themselves which may have been cognitively onerous.

hours) on extra childcare that previously would have been performed by external providers.¹⁶

Finally, it is worth noting that there are other kinds of unpaid work (aside from childcare) which are likely to have been affected by the crisis, and about which no information was collected in the first wave of the NIDS-CRAM survey. These are important to at least acknowledge, because, as with childcare, women typically tend to carry the burden for this work (Charmes 2006; Posel and Bruce-Brand 2020). For instance, the housework burden (cleaning and cooking) would have increased in many households, as the options for outsourcing these were severely limited during the hard lockdown phase (with domestic workers unable to work, restaurants closed, and take-aways/ hot food sales prohibited). Also, adults and children who worked/schooled/ate outside the home pre-lockdown would have been at home all day during lockdown, adding to the overall housework load. The fact that the elderly are particularly vulnerable to the virus, and have been urged to isolate at home, could pose an additional burden of care on women of prime age. This is because the elderly themselves might need more care (which has been less available through clinics and hospitals since lockdown began), and those who used to provide childcare for their grandchildren may be less available to help given the need to isolate (especially if living in different households from their children/grandchildren). Lastly, there are reports of women in South Africa engaging in more volunteer work and unpaid community outreach given the scale of the humanitarian crisis¹⁷.

6. Summary of results and discussion

Due to the lockdown and school closures, the COVID-19 crisis has destabilised work in both the paid and the unpaid economies. Understanding who is affected more by these changes is key to being able to design appropriate responses. The findings from the first wave of the NIDS-CRAM survey suggest that while both men and women have suffered substantially from the crisis and the early lockdown, women have been affected relatively more than men, both in terms of labour market outcomes and unpaid care work in the home.

Net job losses between February and April were higher for women than for men; and of those who retained employment in April, women saw a bigger decline in hours worked than men. As has been found elsewhere, among women, the more vulnerable have experienced the biggest job losses, namely African workers, those with lower earnings, and those with a non-tertiary education.

Furthermore, women have taken on a greater share of the additional childcare responsibilities resulting from the lockdown and school closures. This is partly because women are more likely than men to be living with children. But even when we restrict our sample to only those living with children, we find that women were more likely to report doing extra childcare in April than men, and when they did, they spent relatively longer hours on it than men. This is not being driven by the fact that women were less likely to be working in the labour market, because among those who *were* employed in April, women were still more likely to report doing extra childcare than men.

The implications of these effects for women and their households are likely to be dire. Women were already in a more precarious socio-economic position than men pre-COVID-19, and the loss of work and the increased burden of care will place additional pressure on women's economic wellbeing as well as their physical and mental health¹⁸. Because children are generally cared for physically (and often financially) by women, women's wellbeing will have knock-on effects for children. Although not the focus of this policy paper, some of the household-level data collected in NIDS-CRAM already point to this. For instance, a higher percentage of women than men report that their household had

16 The potential over-reporting of childcare would only be problematic for the gender analysis of childcare if men and women have different reporting biases. A qualitative study by Montgomery et al (2006) on a small sample of 20 households in northern KwaZulu-Natal, found that both women and men tended to under-report the time men spent on childcare given norms around who should be responsible for care work in the home. The inclusion of home schooling in childcare work during lockdown may have encouraged men to report more fully on their contribution, but we cannot explore this further with the data we have available.

17 Reported in <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-05-21-in-the-communities-the-sa-covid-19-ground-response-is-mostly-female/>

18 An interesting study by Adams-Prassl et al (2020b) based on survey data collected in March and April in the US, shows that state-wide stay-at-home orders had a significant negative effect on mental health, and that the effect was driven almost entirely by women.

run out of money for food in April, and that a child had gone hungry because there was not enough food in the previous seven days.¹⁹

It is important to point out that we are only measuring some of the *short-term* impacts of the crisis and the early lockdown period in the first wave of the NIDS-CRAM survey, and future work should explore whether or not the gendered effects we see here intensify or ameliorate as the crisis unfolds. However, we would predict that any disproportionate effect felt by women in the short-term will likely result in longer-term inequalities. People who have lost their jobs, or who cannot work due to childcare responsibilities, may struggle to get them back. Fewer hours worked now can affect future pay and promotion opportunities. And short-term household income cuts can have long-term and maybe irreversible effects, for example, through the sale of assets or increased indebtedness, or through the effect on malnutrition among children. Sadly, we run the risk of seeing reversals to some of the hard-earned improvements in gender equality documented over the last 25 years in South Africa (Posel and Casale 2019).

On a more positive note, in the longer-run, the crisis might also have a transformative role through changing behaviour and norms. Firms have had to allow employees to work from home, which may translate into greater flexibility in work arrangements in the future. This would benefit both mothers and fathers, but particularly mothers for whom flexibility has been shown to be very important as they try to juggle childcare and work responsibilities (Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020). The extent to which women in lower-income jobs could benefit from this, remains to be seen.

Furthermore, this crisis has shone a light on how much unpaid care work takes place in the home, and how important it is to sustain employment in the paid economy (UN 2020). As the early evidence from NIDS-CRAM (and from other studies) has shown, while women are still taking on more of the additional childcare work during lockdown, a very large percentage of men also report doing more childcare. We do not have data on marital status or the distribution of care within households, but in households with men and women, it is highly likely that men have had no choice but to take on some of the unpaid work (especially where women have been able to, or have had to, leave the home to work). This 'forced experiment on social norms' may lead to changes in behaviour over the longer-term through men 'learning by doing' or forming new attachments with their children (Alon et al 2020; Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020). And even if the distribution of childcare reverts to pre-crisis levels, at the very least it may change the way families value unpaid care work relative to paid work²⁰. These longer-term effects are not measurable here, and may be less meaningful in the developing country context where there are fewer dual-parent households, but nonetheless they are important to flag for future work.

7. Policy implications

Given that the negative effects of the crisis and early lockdown have affected women more than men, what policy instruments can be used to help reduce the gender gaps in economic wellbeing and the childcare burden?

In their April policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on women, the UN (2020) recommends the following three as important policy responses: '[1] ensure women's equal representation in all COVID-19 response planning and decision-making; [2] drive transformative change for equality by addressing the care economy, both paid and unpaid; and [3] target women and girls in all efforts to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, including fiscal stimulus packages and social assistance'. In the spirit of these suggestions, the following recommendations are made for South Africa:

19 There are other potential gendered effects of the COVID-19 crisis which we do not explore here. Key amongst these are the health impacts. Women may be more at risk of infection given their predominance in healthcare and other frontline services; they may be more prone to the mental health effects of the crisis given that they are bearing a disproportionate share of the early job losses and childcare burden; and as a number of reports have suggested, they may be at greater risk of gender-based violence while in lockdown. These factors are important to analyse as more data become available.

20 Within paid work, there has also been much discussion around the 'revelatory function' of the COVID-19 crisis. The value generated by (and society's dependence on) paid care workers (such as nurses, doctors, teachers, domestic workers) and other essential workers (such as grocery store and pharmacy workers) has been very clearly exposed by the crisis.

Over the next 1-3 months:

Support schools and ECD centres to reopen urgently and safely: All schools and ECD centres should be allowed to reopen as soon as possible, and the government needs to ramp up efforts to support them with the resources required to operate in a safe way. Lockdown levels have been relaxed (on the 1st of May and again on the 1st of June), with many workers expected to return to work, but only Grades 7 and 12 had returned to school by the end of June (with others grades scheduled to start in July and August). The reopening of the economy needs to be synchronised with the reopening of schools and childcare facilities, otherwise it can hinder people's ability to return to their jobs or work adequate hours, and it may lead to children's safety being compromised as they are at higher risk of being left home alone (van der Berg and Spaul 2020).

Reinstate the school feeding scheme for all children without any further delay: To help alleviate household hunger and malnutrition among children especially, and to reduce the pressure on caregivers of children, the school feeding scheme needs to be reinstated urgently in all provinces and for all children, even if schools or grades remain closed for learning.

Increase the length and value of UIF support to workers unable to return to work: Until all schools and childcare facilities are reopened, allow caregivers of children, who are unable to work because of their childcare responsibilities, to continue claiming from UIF, or to claim for reduced hours of work, as has been suggested in other countries (Cattan et al 2020). There is also a clear need to expedite UIF applications and payments.

Pay the Child Support Grant (CSG) top-up per child, and not just per caregiver: Women are responsible for the bulk of childcare in South Africa and should be supported in this role. Instead of only giving an additional R500 to each caregiver receiving a CSG (i.e. irrespective of whether they have one child or four), caregivers should receive an additional R500 per child, or at least some amount determined on a sliding scale per additional child. Given that women have been disproportionately affected in the labour market, and are also the main recipients of the CSG, any top-up to the CSG is likely to have immediate spill-over effects and will help ameliorate the loss of income facing many women. The NIDS-CRAM data suggest that over two-thirds of women who lost their job between February and April were living in a household where at least one CSG was received.

Ensure women are equally represented in all fora related to the COVID-19 response: Increase efforts to ensure that women are equally represented in all COVID-19 response planning and decision-making, both related to health and to the social and economic impacts of the crisis. Research elsewhere suggests that where women are well-represented, outcomes for women are better (Duflo 2012).

Over the next 3-6 months, and beyond that:

Increase the length of time the CSG top-up is available: Not only should the government consider paying the CSG top-up per child rather than per caregiver, but the length of time that the additional support is available should be re-assessed as the crisis unfolds and the extent of job losses is revealed. If the rationale for introducing top-ups was to alleviate suffering among children and families from job losses, then it would be remiss to withdraw the support while employment remains well below pre-crisis levels.

Strengthen social care infrastructure: If women are ever going to be able to participate equally in the paid economy, social care infrastructure needs to be strengthened. Daycare and ECD centres need to be adequately funded and supported so that safe and quality childcare is available to all. This sector is grossly underfunded and will require much more public-funded support over the medium to longer term.²¹

21 See <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-05-28-who-will-look-after-the-little-children/> for reporting on the precarious state of this crucial sector.

Improve public messaging on the value of care and the importance of men's contributions:

Longer-term structural change is needed so that the responsibility of care is not always feminised. Men should be encouraged through public messaging to participate and share in care work and housework both during the extended lockdown(s) and afterwards. This should run concurrently with gender sensitive inputs at schools, tackling preconceived ideas about who is "meant" to do this kind of work.

Make the provision of electricity, water and sanitation a priority in poor communities: This will help to reduce the (time and economic) costs of care and domestic work, and at the same time reduce the risk of spreading the disease.

In closing, it is clear from the NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 data that women in South Africa have been disproportionately affected by the crisis and early lockdown phase. They accounted for two-thirds of the total net job losses between February and April, and even where they remained employed, they saw greater declines in average hours worked per week than men. Compounding these disproportionate job losses were disproportionate increases in unpaid childcare as a result of school closures. If policy responses are evidence-based, then they should recognise these gendered effects and prioritise women in their relief efforts.

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