



POLICY BRIEF

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

Gender and The Early Effects Of COVID-19

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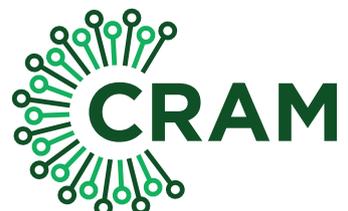
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The policy brief draws from the full paper:

Casale, D. & Posel, D. (2020) Gender & the early effects of the COVID-19 crisis in the paid & unpaid economies in South Africa.



N.i.D.S.
NATIONAL INCOME DYNAMICS STUDY



CORONAVIRUS RAPID MOBILE SURVEY 2020

Gender and the effects of COVID-19

Authors: Daniela Casale and Dorrit Posel¹

- **Both men and women lost jobs between February and April 2020; but the net job loss was greater among women than men:** Of the total net job loss between February and April (roughly 2.9 million jobs), women accounted for two-thirds.
 - **Both men and women experienced additional childcare responsibilities during the ‘hard lockdown’, but women carried more of these extra responsibilities:** Although both men and women were doing more childcare than usual in April due to closure of schools and childcare facilities, women were more likely to be doing extra childcare than men, and doing it for longer hours.
 - **Income relief and childcare support to women need to be prioritised:** Pre-crisis, women were already in a more precarious economic position relative to men in South Africa. The short-term effects of the crisis and lockdown have exacerbated this existing inequality.
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1. Introduction

This policy brief analyses the early effects of the COVID-19 crisis and ‘hard lockdown’ period 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 areas, we would expect them to experience the negative effects of the crisis unevenly. While in previous recessions men have tended to suffer from greater job losses than women (hence the term ‘mancession’), a number of researchers have predicted that women will be affected relatively more by the COVID-19 crisis. Not only have the sectors in the paid economy in which women are concentrated been severely affected (such as the retail, personal care, restaurant and hospitality sectors), but women will likely bear the brunt of school closures given their disproportionate role in childcare. Based on the first wave of the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS)-Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM), we find that in South Africa women have been more severely affected than men in the early phase of the crisis, namely the ‘hard’ lockdown period, both in terms of job losses and in terms of the increased childcare burden. 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 unequal employment effects were unequal increases in the extent of (unpaid) childcare provided during the lockdown and school closures. While the majority of both women and men living with children reported doing large amounts of extra childcare in April, this additional childcare was greater for women than men. Among women who spent more time than usual on childcare in April, nearly 80% spent more than 4 extra hours a day, compared to 65% of men. This gender gap is evident even among women and men 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.

¹ Authors: Prof Daniela Casale (WITS); Prof Dorrit (Dori) Posel (WITS). Corresponding author: daniela.casale@wits.ac.za Please see <https://cramsurvey.org/reports/> for the full policy paper informing this brief.

2. Gendered effects of the crisis and early lockdown in the labour market

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. (See Table 1)

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 (Table 1). 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 or net 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 (Table 2).

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 represented less than half of total employment 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.

“Our best estimate is that between February and April, about 2.9 million net jobs were lost, with women accounting for two-thirds of the total net job loss.”

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.

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.

3. Care work and the effects of COVID-19

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 childcare burden in households with children considerably. Pre-COVID-19, women were far more likely to assume childcare responsibilities than men. 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.

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.

Furthermore, among those living with children, a larger share 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 (Table 3). 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.

Table 3. 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 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.

“Women bore a greater share of the increased childcare burden during April. This is partly because women are more likely to live with children than men, and also because women are far more likely than men to provide childcare.

4. Conclusion

In closing, it is clear from the NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 data that women were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis during the early ‘hard lockdown’ phase. They represented only 47% of total employment in February, yet they accounted for two-thirds of the total net job losses between February and April. Even where they remained employed, women saw greater declines in average hours worked per week compared to men. Compounding these unequal employment losses were unequal increases in childcare as a result of school closures.

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 health. Because children are generally cared for physically (and often financially) by women in South Africa, women’s wellbeing will have knock-on effects for children. Although not the focus of this policy brief, 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 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.

It is important to point out that we are only measuring some of the *immediate* 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. If policy responses are evidence-based, then they should recognise these gendered effects and prioritise women in their relief efforts.

5. Policy options: What can policymakers do about this?

Policy options for the next 1-3 months (July-Sept 2020)

- 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 Spaull 2020²).
- 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 2020³). 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.

2 Van der Berg, S. and Spaull, N. (2020) 'Counting the Cost: COVID-19 school closures in South Africa & its impacts on children.' Research on Socioeconomic Policy (RESEP). Stellenbosch University. Stellenbosch.

3 Cattan, S.; Farquharson, C.; Krutikova, S.; Phimister, A.; and Sevilla, A. (2020) 'Trying times: how might the lockdown change time use in families?' Institute of Fiscal Studies, Briefing Note BN284, Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14814>

Policy options for the next 3-6 months (October-December 2020) and beyond

- 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.
- 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.

"The data suggest that top-ups to the CSG will help ameliorate the loss of income facing many women, as two-thirds of women who lost a job were living in a household where at least one CSG was received. Withdrawing additional support too early will leave many women and their children severely disadvantaged."

For further information please see cramsurvey.org