



Committee on the situation
of women in economics

Newsletter 2020: Research report

Gender inequality in COVID-19 times: Evidence from UK Prolific participants* Climent Quintana-Domeque (University of Exeter, GLO, HCEO and IZA)

After the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, the COVID-19 pandemic is the most important global negative shock in the last century, a shock that is exacerbating socioeconomic and health inequalities among various demographic groups. Research is needed to understand the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on inequality and what can be done to ameliorate its consequences.

In “Gender inequality in Covid-19 times: Evidence from UK Prolific participants”, Sonia Oreffice and I study differences between men and women in the UK along several dimensions, including mental wellbeing, Covid-19-related health and economic concerns, and time allocation patterns, during Covid-19 times, after collecting an online sample of approximately 1,500 Prolific respondents residents in the UK in June 2020, three months after the first UK lockdown of March 2020. Conditional on participating in our survey, participants were chosen to be representative of the UK along age, ethnicity and gender, and in the paper we compare our participants with respondents to the Understanding Society Covid-19 study of June 2019.

We quantify both the mean gender gaps along multiple dimensions between men and women at one point during the pandemic (June 2020), and how gender gaps in time allocation changed between the pre-pandemic period (January-February 2020) and during the pandemic period (June 2020).¹ We find that women were 12% more concerned than men with getting the virus, and 8% more with spreading it. Moreover, women’s perceived virus prevalence was 31% higher than that of men, and their perceived virus lethality 39% higher. Women’s perception of the economic situation was more negative than that of men, forecasting unemployment rates for June 2020 which were 7.6% higher than that of men, and 15.4% higher for June 2021. Accounting for standard sociodemographic characteristics does not explain these gender gaps in either Covid-19-related health or economic concerns: women were more concerned than men regarding both Covid-19-related health and economic issues.²

In terms of wellbeing, women’s mental health scores were lower than men across the board: women’s generalized anxiety score (GAD-7)³ was 25% higher than that of men, women were 12% more likely to report having had an anxiety attack (suddenly feeling fear or panic) in the last 2 weeks,

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<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-demographic-economics/article/gender-inequality-in-covid19-times-evidence-from-uk-prolific-participants/C3D9A7C2A2BC6B90DC2EB708A18FDE99>

1 Unadjusted mean gender gaps were computed as the coefficient on a dummy for the indicator female (=1 if woman, 0 if man) in a linear regression of the outcome of interest on a constant and a female indicator. Adjusted mean gender gaps were computed in the same way but after adding a vector of control variables.

2 Standard sociodemographic controls: ethnicity, age, education, living in a couple, living with others, log of income in 2019, employment status, rural/urban, geographical location of residence. See the paper for details.

3 The questions asked in the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale (GAD-7) can be found here: https://www.phqscreener.com/images/sites/g/files/g10060481/f/201412/GAD7_English.pdf

and the depression indicator (item 2 of the PHQ-9)⁴ was 22% higher among women than men. While sociodemographic characteristics cannot explain these gaps either, we find that the Covid-19-related health concerns, rather than economic ones, can account for some of the gender gap in these measures: from 1.04 to 0.55 units in the GAD-7 score, from 0.148 to 0.087 units in the depression score (item 2 of the PHQ-9), and from 10.8% to 8.5% in the prevalence of anxiety attacks.

Finally, when looking at changes in time allocation patterns, we find that the gender gap in hours of childcare increased by 3.9 (with standard sociodemographic controls) or 3.4 hours (with additional controls) between before and during the pandemic.⁵ We also find an increase in the gender gap in hours of housework of between 2.8 (with standard sociodemographic controls) and 2.3 (with additional controls).

The paper contains additional findings and comparisons with existing studies. Future research should analyze to what extent the documented gender gaps in our article are stable and persistent. We hope that this and future inequality research will be able to inform the design of public policies to help the most affected demographic groups by the pandemic.

4 The PHQ-9 is the depression module of the PHQ (Patient Health Questionnaire). The second item of the PHQ-9 asks: "Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless? Not at all (0), several days (1), more than half the days (2), and nearly every day (3)."

5 Additional controls: number of children living in the house, number of seniors living in the house, full- vs part-time, healthcare worker, furloughed because of COVID-19, lost job because of COVID-19. See the paper for details.