

**COVID-19's Impact on Inequality in the Academy**  
A Summary of Sociological Research Prepared by Christina Simko

**Documented differences in research productivity during the pandemic threaten to widen existing gender inequalities for a generation of young faculty.**

- The gender gap in submissions to arXiv and bioRxiv—preprint servers covering STEM fields that remain among the most gender unequal areas in the academy—has widened during COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>
- In the social sciences, women's research productivity dropped by 13.2 percent compared to that of their male counterparts, measured by submissions to the Social Science Research Network. Gender differences were even more pronounced among assistant professors.<sup>2</sup>
- According to a survey of 4,500 PIs in the United States and Europe, there was a sharp decline in time spent on scientific research in general following pandemic lockdowns. Women and laboratory scientists were disproportionately impacted. The largest disruptions, however, were connected with childcare responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>
- In a global survey of academics across disciplines, women with children reported a disproportionate reduction in the amount of time they were able to devote to research, compared to both men and women without children.<sup>4</sup>
- Preliminary evidence suggests a gendered shift in professional visibility during the pandemic. On Twitter, male political scientists became more focused on career-related topics—such as showcasing their professional accomplishments—while women disproportionately increased their focus on topics related to family.<sup>5</sup>

**The pressures that impinge on women's research time derive from both the home and the workplace, since women continue to take on a disproportionate share of care work in both realms. The burdens are highest for women of color.**

- Mothers have performed a disproportionate share of pandemic parenting. In response to school and daycare shutdowns, survey research shows that mothers increased their parenting time by more hours than fathers.<sup>6</sup>
- Women have long performed a disproportionate amount of academic service: one recent (but pre-pandemic) study describes women as “taking care of the academic family.”<sup>7</sup> Women are more likely to engage in less visible “secret service” that carries fewer rewards in promotion and tenure evaluations.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, faculty of color often engage in more teaching, mentoring, and service, with women of color facing “unusually intense mentoring workloads.”<sup>9</sup> Preliminary data show that the care work associated with college and university teaching has increased during the pandemic. For instance, the Work and Care

Study at Indiana University found that about 60 percent of faculty had increased the amount of time they spent on teaching, mentoring, and service, even as their responsibilities increased at home.<sup>10</sup> Preliminary studies also suggest that this increased care work has been disproportionately shouldered by cisgender women and gender-non conforming faculty as well as by faculty of color of all genders.<sup>11</sup>

- Women’s increased care responsibilities have had a deleterious impact on their overall well-being. On the home front, negotiating constant disruptions to school and childcare arrangements led to increased stress, anxiety, and frustrations with children.<sup>12</sup> Women faculty’s disproportionate service burden in the workplace was also associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety.<sup>13</sup> As colleagues who helped to lead the pandemic response at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst point out, faculty of color have shouldered additional burdens due to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, including higher rates of unemployment, illness, and death.<sup>14</sup>

## References

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<sup>2</sup> Ruomeng Cui, Hao Ding, and Feng Zhu, “Gender Inequality in Research Productivity during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1287/msom.2021.0991>.

<sup>3</sup> Kyle R. Myers, Wei Yang Tham, Yian Yin, Nina Cohodes, Jerry G. Thusby, Marie C. Thursby, Peter Schiffer, Joseph T. Walsh, Karim R. Lakhani, and Dashun Wang, “Unequal Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Scientists,” *Nature Human Behavior* 4 (2020): 880-883.

<sup>4</sup> Tatyana Deryugina, Olga Shurchkov, and Jenna E. Stearns, “COVID-19 Disruptions Disproportionately Affect Female Academics,” National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 28360 (2021), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w28360>.

<sup>5</sup> Eunji Kim and Shawn Patterson Jr., “The Pandemic and Gender Inequality in Academia,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 55 (2022): 109-116.

<sup>6</sup> Matt Krentz, Emily Kos, Anna Green, and Jennifer Garcia-Alonso, “Easing the COVID-19 Burden on Working Parents,” Boston Consulting Group (2020), <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2020/helping-working-parents-ease-the-burden-of-covid-19>. For a discussion of how different-sex couples often rhetorically naturalized gendered inequality in care, see also Jessica McCrory Calarco, Emily Meanwell, Elizabeth M. Anderson, et. Al., “By Default: How Mothers in Different-Sex Dual-Earner Couples Account for Inequalities in Pandemic Parenting,” *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 7 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F23780231211038783>.

<sup>7</sup> Cassandra M. Guarino and Victor M. H. Borden, “Faculty Service Loads and Gender: Are Women Taking Care of the Academic Family?,” *Research in Higher Education* 58 (2017): 672-694.

<sup>8</sup> Lisa K. Hanasono, Ellen M. Broido, Margaret M. Yacobucci, Karen V. Root, Susana Peña, and Deborah A. O’Neil, “Secret Service: Revealing Gender Biases in the Visibility and Value of Faculty Service,” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 12 (2019): 85-98.

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<sup>9</sup> Joya Misra, Alexandra Kuvaeva, Kerryann O’Meara, and Dawn Kiyoe Culpepper, “Gendered and Racialized Perceptions of Faculty Workloads,” *Gender and Society* 35 (2021): 358-394.

<sup>10</sup> Jessica McCrory Calarco, “Universities and the Crisis of Care” (presentation, Williams College, Williamstown, MA, April 6, 2021), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pipTE\\_TxT6E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pipTE_TxT6E). See also coverage of the IU Work and Care Study in Michael Reschke, “Survey Finds IU Caregivers Overworked during Pandemic,” *The Herald-Times*, March 24, 2021, <https://www.heraldtimesonline.com/story/news/2021/03/24/survey-finds-iu-caregivers-overworked-during-pandemic/116216048/>.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine White Berheide, Megan A. Carpter, and David A. Cotter, “Teaching College in the Time of COVID-19: Gender and Race Differences in Faculty Emotional Labor,” *Sex Roles* 86 (2022): 441-455, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-021-01271-0>.

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<sup>14</sup> Joya Misra, Ethel L. Mickey, and Dessie L. Clark, “Addressing and Documenting Pandemic Impacts,” *The ADVANCE Journal* 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.5399/osu/ADVJRN.2.2.1>.