



COVID-19 Survey

BRIEFING NOTE

WAVE 2: MAY 2020

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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The *Understanding Society* COVID-19 study is a monthly survey on the experiences and reactions of the UK population to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey is an integral part of *Understanding Society*: the UK Household Longitudinal Study. Researchers can link the data from the COVID-19 survey to answers respondents have given in previous (and future) waves of the annual *Understanding Society* survey.

The survey is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Health Foundation.

Fieldwork

The COVID-19 survey is an online questionnaire.

The first wave of the COVID-19 survey was fielded in April 2020. Fieldwork for Wave 2 was from 27th May to 2nd June.

A telephone interview is offered to respondents who wish to take part but live in a household where no-one is a regular internet user. Fieldwork for the telephone interviews was in late-May to early-June 2020.

Fieldwork for the online survey is carried out by Ipsos MORI and for the telephone survey by Kantar.

The sample

All *Understanding Society* adult sample members aged 16+ invited to participate in Wave 1 of the web survey were invited to participate in Wave 2.

14,607 participants completed the web survey in the second Wave.

In addition to the sample invited to complete the web survey, 3,500 participants were included in the first telephone survey during May.

For researchers wishing to analyse the data, weights are provided.

For more information on the design, fieldwork and using the COVID-19 survey data please see the [User Guide](#).

The data

The COVID-19 survey data is available to researchers via the UK Data Service, Study Number 8644.

Citation

M Benzeval, J Burton, TF Crossley, P Fisher, A Jäckle, B Perelli-Harris and S Walzenbach (2020) *Understanding Society COVID-19 Survey May Briefing Note: Family relationships*, Understanding Society Working Paper No 13/2020, ISER, University of Essex.

Survey content

The 20 minute questionnaire includes core content repeated monthly to track changes through the pandemic, as well as rotating content.

In Wave 2 the survey carried questions on:

- Household composition
- Coronavirus illness
- Long-term health conditions
- Loneliness
- Housing
- Employment
- Finance
- Financial security
- Partnership changes
- Living Apart Together (LATs)
- Time use
- Parents and children
- Life satisfaction
- Mental health (GHQ)

In subsequent waves, core content will be repeated to track changes through the outbreak and rotating content will be added on new topics reflecting the changing social, economic and policy context, as well as question proposals from researchers.

Family Relationships

Michaela Benzeval
University of Essex
Understanding Society Director

Jonathan Burton
University of Essex
Understanding Society
Associate Director Surveys

Thomas Crossley
European University Institute
Understanding Society Associate Director
Scientific Content

Paul Fisher
University of Essex
Understanding Society
Research Fellow

Annette Jäckle
University of Essex
Understanding Society
Associate Director Innovations

Brienna Perelli-Harris
Centre for Population Change
University of Southampton
Understanding Society Topic
Champion Family

Sandra Walzenbach
University of Essex
Institute for Social and Economic Research
Senior Research Officer



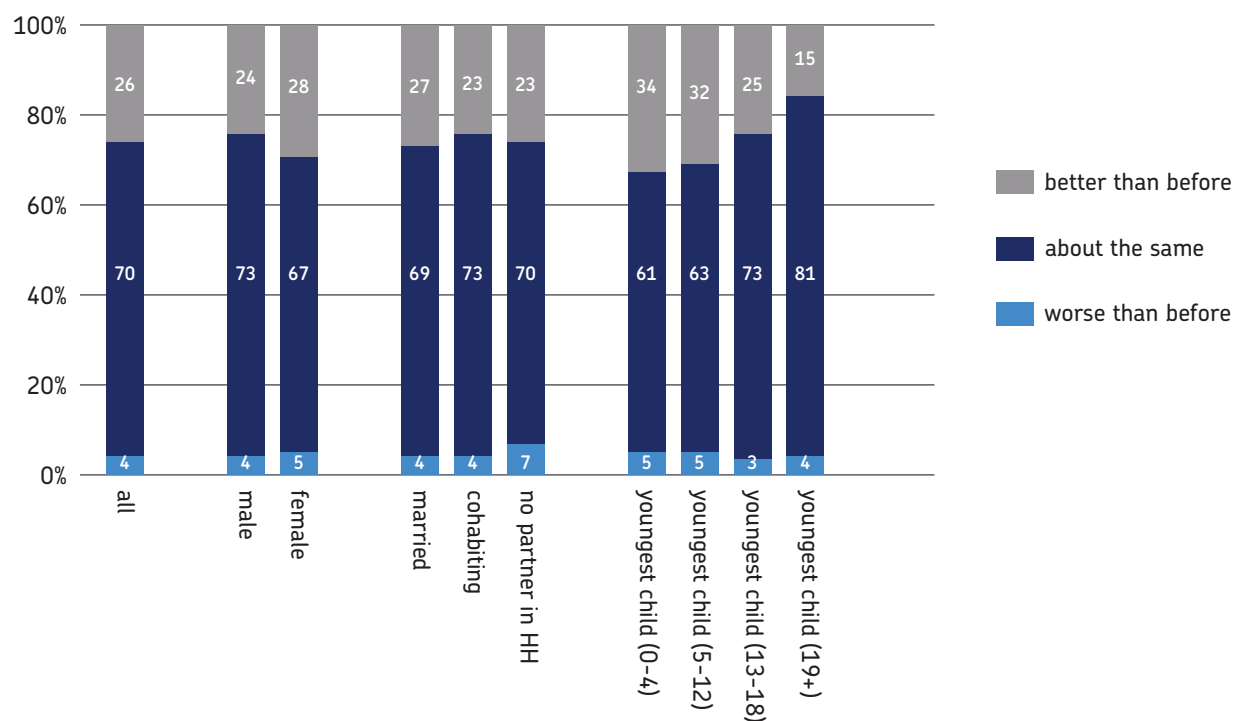
This survey was conducted at the end of May 2020, when the “stay alert” lockdown was in force, non-essential stores were closed, and anyone who could work at home was strongly encouraged to do so. Schools were still closed for all but vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers.

The questions on parent-child relationships in Wave 2 of the Understanding Society COVID-19 survey cover the following themes:

1. Relationships with children and whether they have become better or worse since the government’s “Stay at Home” policy.
2. Whether parents quarrel, talk with their children about important matters, or get on each others’ nerves.
3. Reduction of hours spent in paid job to care for children and time spent home schooling and caring for children.

These questions were answered by parents with children living with them in the household. The questions on time use include a question on hours spent per week on childcare and home schooling. All adults were asked the question if children were present in the household; below, we restrict this analysis to parents with children below the age of 18 living with them in the household.

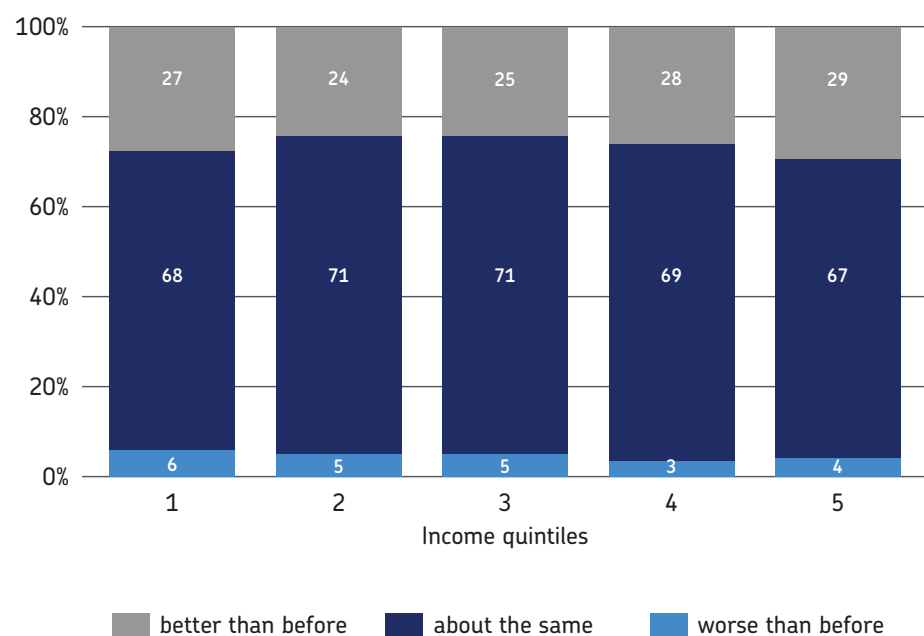
Have parents' relationships with their children become better, same, or worse since the Government introduced the "Stay at Home" policy?



N=5566

- More than a quarter of parents reported that their relationship with their children has improved since the Government's "stay at home" policy, while less than 5% reported it had become worse.
- Mothers were more likely to report that their relationship had improved than fathers.
- Lone parents were slightly more likely to report that their relationship had become worse since lockdown.
- Parents of older children were less likely to report their relationship had improved recently; however, they were also less likely to report their relationship had become worse.

How have parent-child relationships changed according to income?



N=4619

- Few differences are observed by income.
- However, slightly more low income parents reported their relationships became worse, and slightly more high income parents reported their relationships became better.

How have parent-child relationships changed according to resources/household circumstances?

	Better %	Stayed the same %	Worse %
Work at home			
Yes	31.4	63.9	4.7
No	24.3	71.5	4.1
Reduced hours for childcare			
Yes	38.4	55.7	6.0
No	29.1	66.7	4.2
Has outdoor space			
Yes	25.9	69.7	4.4
No	27.8	69.7	4.4
Everyone has own desk			
Yes	26.0	70.7	3.4
No	25.9	67.0	7.1
Financial situation			
Finding it difficult	27.2	62.5	10.2
Just about getting by	26.4	68.7	5.0
Living comfortably	25.7	70.8	3.6
Financial future			
Better	34.3	60.9	4.8
Same	24.5	71.3	4.3
Worse	29.6	65.4	5.0

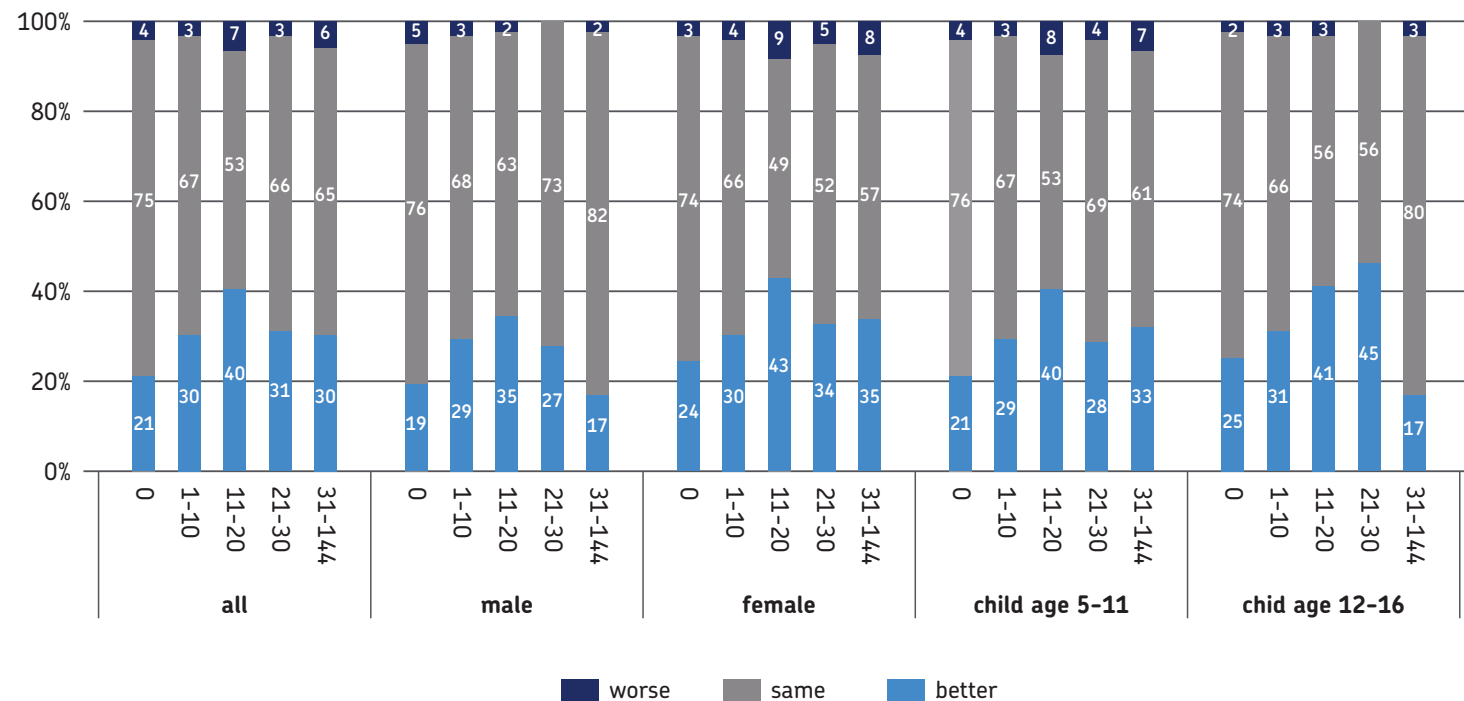
- Working at home during lockdown or reducing hours for childcare does not seem to have made parents' relationships with their children worse; if anything, working at home seems to have improved relationships.
- More parents who reduced hours due to childcare also said their relationships had become better, although about 6% said it had become worse.
- More parents who said they lacked desk space for everyone in the household reported their relationships had become worse, but there were few differences between those with and without outdoor space.
- Although about 10% of those who are having a difficult time financially have a worse relationship with their children, more than a quarter still said their relationship had become better.

Relationship quality with children

	Very or quite close to children %	Get on each others' nerves %	Quarrel %	Talk about important matters %
All	96.6	17.9	34.4	76.9
Gender				
Female	97.8	19.6	33.6	80.7
Male	95.2	15.7	35.3	72.2
Partnership type				
Married	96.9	15.8	34.4	78.0
Cohabiting	96.0	33.3	45.3	79.0
Lone parent	96.1	16.4	27.4	71.4
Number of children in household				
1	95.1	12.2	21.9	69.5
2	98.6	20.8	41.5	82.8
3+	96.0	25.7	45.4	79.6
Age of youngest child in household				
0-4	98.6	26.2	60.4	85.4
5-12	97.8	25.3	50.3	85.8
13-18	96.4	13.5	28.2	79.1
19+	94.3	7.3	11.7	62.8
Employment status				
Continuously employed	96.9	18.1	36.5	79.1
Not continuously employed	95.7	17.1	27.4	69.9
Reduced hours due to childcare				
Reduced hours	98.6	17.9	35.0	79.7
Did not reduce hours	96.5	17.9	36.6	78.6
Education				
degree	97.5	16.5	38.7	82.7
a-level	96.2	19.7	36.8	77.0
GCSE or lower	95.7	18.7	27.6	69.5

- 97% of parents report that they are close or very close to their children. This differs little by most background characteristics.
- Compared to married parents, more cohabiting parents reported that their children were likely to get on their nerves or quarrel, but 80% still talked about important matters with their children.
- Parents with older children or a single child in the household are less likely to quarrel or say their children get on their nerves, but they are also less likely to talk about important matters with their children.
- Parents with GCSE or lower education have slightly worse relationships and are less likely to talk about important matters with their children, but are also less likely to quarrel with their children.

How is home schooling and care related to changes in parent-child relationships since lockdown?



- Greater investments in time spent home schooling and caring for children is associated with improvements in parent-child relationships.
- However, this is not the case for those who spent over 30 hours per week home schooling or caring for their children, especially for men and parents of older children.
- About 40% of parents who spent between 11 and 20 hours home schooling their children reported their relationships had become better.

For more information and to contact the Study

Email: info@understandingsociety.ac.uk

Twitter: [@usociety](https://twitter.com/usociety)

Find out more about the Study online at
www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/themes/covid-19

Acknowledgements:

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