

# COVID-19: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF CANADIAN

# WOMEN IN LAW ENFORCEMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 2020, inspired by our Canadian government's call for research on the impacts of COVID-19, we partnered with the Ontario Women in Law Enforcement (OWLE) to provide a gendered analysis of the impacts of COVID-19 by examining whether, how, and to what extent COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges, complexities, and inequalities -- both at work and at home -- experienced by women in law enforcement. This study employed two data collection methods including quantitative/qualitative surveys via Qualtrics (phase 1) and in-depth interviews via Microsoft Teams (phase 2) to: (1) understand how COVID-19 impacted the experiences of women in law enforcement at work and, by extension, how working during COVID-19 has impacted their experiences at home and (2) assess how law enforcement services responded to COVID-19, and the impact of these responses on the experiences of women in law enforcement.

At work, 89% (102) of the women surveyed indicated that their experiences had been affected by COVID-19, either very much (37, 32%), moderately (45, 39%) or minimally (20, 18%). In both the surveys and interviews, women saw limiting their exposure to COVID as being one of the largest challenges that they experienced at work, and this was especially the case for those on the front lines. Women also expressed concerns about putting their families at risk and/or having poor access to personal protective equipment (PPE). The majority (74, 64%) of women were satisfied with how their organizations had responded to the pandemic and emphasized the importance of access to high-quality PPE, frequent communications, and a sympathetic understanding from management. However, concerns were expressed about what officers saw to be threats to the continuation of safety precautions.

At home, the majority (89, 78%) of the survey respondents indicated that their experiences at home had been affected by COVID-19, either very much (36, 32%), moderately (33, 29%), or minimally (20, 18%). Women reported the use of decontamination practices when returning home, being isolated from family and friends, challenges related to remote working, and an exacerbation of childcare needs and domestic responsibilities. Women identified numerous ways in which their organizations provided support for at-home challenges, including shift modifications, special leave, time off, and the flexibility to work from home (although not available for front-line members). However, many women expressed concerns about whether these accommodations would continue.

In light of these findings, we have made five recommendations for law enforcement organizations. **First, ensure women are 'at the table' for pandemic planning.** We recommend that law enforcement organizations increase equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) representation among those who are doing pandemic and organizational planning. **Second, increase flexibility in accommodations.** We recommend that law enforcement organizations provide more flexibility to their membership, especially to those who are parents and those in frontline roles who are not permitted to work from home. **Third, prevent 'clawing back' of pandemic accommodations.** Our research suggests that organizations may be becoming less accommodating with respect to work-from-home and other types of 'leave' arrangements. We recommend that accommodations not be 'clawed back,' either during the pandemic or beyond. **Fourth, increase communication about COVID-19.** We recommend that those in positions of high authority in law enforcement organizations provide their membership with frequent updates on COVID-related policies and practices. **And fifth, provide high quality personal protective equipment.** We recommend that law enforcement organizations provide ample supplies of high-quality PPE to their membership including masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, safety glasses or face shields, and disinfectant sprays or wipes.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	04
<b>Research Objectives</b> .....	04
<b>Research Design</b> .....	05
<b>Phase One &amp; Two</b> .....	06
<b>Demographics</b> .....	07
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	08
<b>The Impact of COVID-19 At Work</b> .....	09
<b>The Scholarly Literature</b> .....	09
<b>Our Findings</b> .....	10
<b>Concerns about risk of exposure</b> .....	11
<b>Workload, staffing, and stress</b> .....	12
<b>Ethic of care &amp; shifting occupational culture</b> .....	14
<b>Coping with COVID-19</b> .....	15
<b>Organizations' Responses to Challenges at Work During COVID</b> .....	16
<b>The Scholarly Literature</b> .....	16
<b>Our Findings</b> .....	17
<b>Communication</b> .....	18
<b>Personal protective equipment (PPE)</b> .....	19
<b>The Impact of COVID-19 at Home</b> .....	20
<b>The Scholarly Literature</b> .....	20
<b>Our Findings</b> .....	22
<b>Protecting family</b> .....	23
<b>Impacts on social &amp; emotional health</b> .....	24
<b>Working from home</b> .....	25
<b>Childcare, homeschooling, and domestic labour</b> .....	25
<b>Organizations' Responses to Challenges at Home</b> .....	28
<b>The Scholarly Literature</b> .....	28
<b>Our Findings</b> .....	29
<b>Pandemic accommodations</b> .....	30
<b>Family accommodations</b> .....	30
<b>"Clawing back" accommodations</b> .....	33
<b>Recommendations for Law Enforcement Organizations</b> .....	34
<b>References</b> .....	37
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	40

## INTRODUCTION

In June 2020, inspired by our Canadian government's call for research on the impacts of COVID-19, we partnered with the Ontario Women in Law Enforcement (OWLE) to research whether, how, and to what extent COVID-19 has impacted the challenges - both at work and at home - experienced by women in law enforcement in Canada. Previous research on women police has shown that they are systematically disadvantaged in policing. They experience higher levels of stress than their male colleagues (Shelley et al., 2011; Yates et al., 2018), are more likely than men to provide frontline care to vulnerable populations (Rabe Hemp 2009, 2011), and also perform the bulk of domestic labour and childcare at home (Agocs et al., 2015). Recent research suggests that COVID-19 has the potential to increase women's workloads and exacerbate these systemic inequalities because the situations brought on by the pandemic make it impossible to divide work and home spaces (Bahn et al. 2020; Del Boca et al. 2020; Dunatchik et al. 2021; Enguita-Fernández et al. 2020; Langan, Sanders, & Girard, 2021; Mazzucchelli et al. 2020; Power 2020).

In the report that follows, we begin by outlining the research design, starting with the research objectives, and followed by a description of the two research methodologies used - Phase One (the online Qualtrics survey) and Phase Two (the qualitative in-depth interviews).

We then address our respondents' experiences of the impact of COVID-19 at work, beginning with a review of previous, related scholarly research on this topic, followed by our research findings. Next, we examine perceptions of organizations' responses to challenges at work during the pandemic, again beginning with a review of previous, related scholarly research, followed by our research findings.

Our examination of women's experiences of the impact of COVID-19 at home follows the same approach. We begin with a review of other related scholarly research on women's experiences of the pandemic at home, followed by our research findings. We then present previous scholarly research on organizational responses to the pandemic, followed by our research findings on our respondents' perceptions of their organizations' responses to challenges at home.

The report concludes with recommendations for law enforcement organizations based on the research findings.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

01

to understand how COVID-19 impacted the experiences of women in law enforcement at work and, by extension, how working during COVID-19 has impacted their experiences at home

02

to explore women's perceptions of how their law enforcement services have responded to COVID-19

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed two data collection methods including on-line surveys via Qualtrics (Phase One) and in-depth interviews via Microsoft Teams (Phase Two).

This research report provides an overview and summary of the key findings from both the survey and interview data.

In September 2020, after receiving approval from Wilfrid Laurier University's research ethics board, OWLE worked with us to circulate to their membership, the British Columbia Women in Law Enforcement (BCWLE) and the Atlantic Women in Law Enforcement (AWLE) recruitment materials that invited women from any Canadian law enforcement organization to participate in a survey about their experiences during COVID-19.

## PHASE 1: QUALTRICS SURVEY

The Qualtrics survey included both fixed and open-ended questions that focused on how women's experiences on the job and at home have been affected by COVID-19, the strategies they used to manage challenges, and their perceptions of the responses of their organizations to COVID-19. The survey was live online from 9 October 2020 to 12 November 2020 and was therefore administered after the first official wave when provinces were slowly re-opening and before the peak of the second wave when Ontario and British Columbia were declaring a second state of emergency. At the end of the survey, participants were given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in an in-depth interview that was conducted in November 2020 or December 2020.

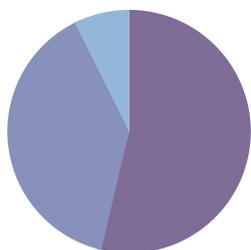
## PHASE 2: QUALITATIVE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Insights gained from the surveys informed the development of a semi-structured interview guide. Following Wilfrid Laurier University's COVID-19 restrictions on in-person research, all interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams, an online video conferencing tool approved by Wilfrid Laurier for data collection. In total, we conducted qualitative interviews with fifteen women about their experiences at work during the pandemic. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and explored women's experiences during COVID-19, the strategies they have employed to deal with the pandemic, and their perceptions of the responses of their organizations in light of the pandemic.

## SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

In total, **114** women in law enforcement completed the survey and of these participants:

**86%** of the respondents worked in police services, **6%** worked in Corrections, and there was **one** respondent from each of: Canadian Border Services Agency, Bylaw, and the Department of National Defence (see appendix A for complete survey demographics).



### GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

- 51%** Central Canada
- 37%** Western Canada
- 7%** Eastern Canada

**60%** were working the frontlines, **30%** were supervisors or managers, and **3%** were civilian members.

.....

**85%** identified as white, **85%** as heterosexual, **66%** as mothers, and **75%** as married or cohabitating.

## INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHICS

In total, **15** women in law enforcement completed the survey and of these participants:



**13** worked in police services

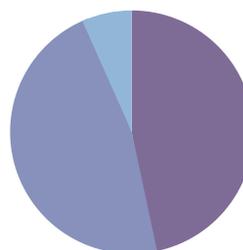


**1** in corrections



**1** in Canadian Border Services

**9** were working on the frontlines, **5** were supervisors or managers, **1** was a civilian member.



### GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

- 7** Central Canada
- 7** Western Canada
- 1** Eastern Canada

## SURVEY DATA ANALYSIS

All the data from the surveys were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet which was useful for the development of a descriptive summary of the survey sample. Descriptive statistics were performed on all closed-ended survey questions in order to gain an understanding of the most common or shared experiences amongst participants.

Then, as the qualitative data were open- and focus-coded to identify common themes (Charmaz, 2014), we wrote analytic memos that incorporated numerous quotes from the data to illustrate the themes, and for each quote noted the respondent's rank and survey identification number.

for the purpose of this report, and to ensure confidentiality, quotes from survey participants will include the following information: organization type (e.g., police), geographic location (e.g., West), and a survey identification number (e.g., survey 131). Reported survey statistics will include both a frequency out of 114 respondents and a percentage (e.g., 37, 32%).

Using writing as an analytic device, we developed a composite of themes that included participants' descriptive experiences (Charmaz, 2014) and generated additional analytic memos which informed later writing stages.

## INTERVIEW DATA ANALYSIS

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using NVivo-12, a qualitative data analysis software program. During the open and focused coding processes, gerunds or words in their action form (e.g., homeschooling) and in-vivo codes or participants' special terms (e.g., rolling with the punches) were utilized to preserve the meanings that participants ascribed to their experiences (Charmaz, 2014).

Memo-writing began early on in the research process to draw comparisons between data, develop codes, and inform analytic insights (Charmaz, 2014).

The researchers engaged in an iterative method during the writing phase that involved frequently returning to the data to ensure that the analyses were grounded in the data

Similar to the survey data, quotes from interview participants will include the following information: organization type (e.g., police), geographic location (e.g., central), and an interview number (e.g., interview 01). Reported interview statistics will follow the same format as the surveys and include both a frequency out of 15 participants and a percentage (e.g., 6, 40%). .

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 AT WORK

## THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

Law enforcement personnel are facing many of the same dangers as other “first responders” during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dubinski, 2020; Ogilvie, 2020) in that they are at a “heightened risk of exposure due to their close contact with members of the public” (Jennings & Perez, 2020, p. 690).

Recent research in the area of COVID-19 is in agreement that the impact of the pandemic on the health of frontline law enforcement personnel has been profound (Rooney & McNicholas, 2020; Stogner et al., 2020, p. 718) and includes: disorientation of working schedule, fear of being vulnerable to disease, pressure of maintaining law, increased stress levels and chronic stress (Dey et al., 2020), increased anxiety (Coelho et al., 2020), role overload (Zhou et al., 2020, p. 10), burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (Gomez-Galan et al., 2020, p. 8790), compassion fatigue and moral suffering (Mehdizadeh & Kamar, 2020).

The potential impacts of COVID-19 are even more concerning for women in law enforcement because they are more likely than men to provide frontline care to vulnerable populations (Rabe Hemp, 2009, 2011) and experience higher levels of stress than their male colleagues (Shelley et al., 2011; Yates et al., 2018).

A recent study conducted by Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin, and Rauh (2020) found preliminary evidence suggesting that women, when compared to men, are experiencing a greater deterioration in their mental health during the pandemic.

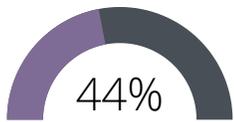
## OUR FINDINGS

89%

**(102) of the women surveyed indicated that their experiences at work had been affected by COVID-19, either very much (37, 36%), moderately (45, 44%) or minimally (20, 20%).**



Very much



Moderately



Minimally

Six (5%) respondents indicated that their experiences at work had not been affected, while six (5%) respondents did not answer this question. As such, for the women whose work lives had been affected by COVID-19, the majority (102, 89%) were experiencing at least some, if not many, changes at work. The following themes represent their primary concerns at work.

## 1 Concerns About Risk of Exposure

In both the surveys and interviews, women saw limiting their exposure to COVID-19 as being one of the largest challenges that they experienced at work, and this was especially the case for those on the front lines. With the exception of one correctional officer,

it was police officers who most often talked about a high risk of exposure. For example, 70% (42/60) of front-line police officers were concerned about sharing close quarters with other officers, and just over half (34/60) of the front-line officers surveyed said that they had been in close contact with other officers in a police cruiser when not wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). They were also concerned about putting their families at risk and dealing with members of the public who are at high risk of transmitting COVID-19:

*The places they are staying at are in a constant state of outbreak...and I'm very aware that my risk of contracting COVID is significantly higher than that of my friend groups (Police, Central, Interview 1).*

*[You are] always wondering if you are going to catch COVID at work (due to the increased number of contacts that we have within a day) and bring it home to your family and constantly wondering if we should isolate from every single person in our life as we never know if or when I will bring it home (Police, West, Survey 131).*

Women's concerns were also often related to poor PPE access, such that PPE had been "hard to come by" organizations had "hoarded" supplies, and in some cases, officers had to "demand a better supply of equipment." In these situations, women often assumed personal responsibility by providing their own PPE:

*I make the best out of the situation and come up with my own safety precautions such as having a garbage bag in police vehicle in order to dispose of gloves, masks, wipes in a safe manner. I was wearing clear sunglasses to every call, even at nighttime (RCMP, West, Survey 137).*

## 2 Workload, Staffing and Stress

Both the survey and interview data spoke to concerns around workload, staffing and increased stress. Yet, the ways these challenges were experienced differed among managers, frontline workers and civilians.

For a few supervisors (2/21, 10%), the workload had decreased because of a “slow down at work,” “things [being] much quieter on the streets,” and being able to “focus on items which were [previously] not addressed as [they] had more time.” For other managers (5/21, 24%), the pandemic had resulted in “extra responsibilities” due to social distancing and PPE enforcement as well as a “re-thinking of providing service by way of electronic or ‘virtual’ mediums.” These managers said that they were “extremely busy,” “working 50-60+ hour weeks” and did not have “a full weekend away from the office.”

This increase in workload was due, at least in part, to staff shortages. Yet, staffing shortages were not a result of increased sick-time, with 47% (16) of managers stating that this was not a primary issue. Rather, staff shortages were more commonly connected to the use of special leave due to childcare or other family related issues. Approximately one-third (11, 32%) of the managers surveyed reported that they had to balance the needs of the service with the needs of those requiring special leave. A shared perspective among managers who had to deal with staffing issues was that there was only so much that could be done and that their “people” needed to be cared for:

*I've built the best plan I can and am being flexible with staff (RCMP, West, Survey 115).*

*[I realize that] we can only do so much with the limited people we have, [and I need to ensure that] everyone who is still at work is taken care of to the best of my resources (Police, Central, Survey 125).*

For some managers, tending to the needs of their members was a source of stress:

*I finally looked at my boss and said [imitating talking to boss] okay I'm going to need, it was Wednesday, and I said look I am going to need to take the next two days off and I said my 'give a fuck is broken' and I need to take a couple days off to regroup...and what it was is just with everything going on, and managing the stress and anxiety of all of the members that worked with me... (RCMP, West, Interview 02)*

Similarly, front-line staff also discussed increased workloads which were often attributed to staffing shortages that resulted from officers refusing to work, working from home, or being in mandatory isolation. In fact, half of those on the front lines said they had to adjust to reductions in staffing. Such staff shortages meant that those left behind in the workplace had to assume the workload of those who were away, adding “stress to the remaining members on the platoon.”

Increased workload was also a concern for the civilian members of police services and was attributed to members taking time off due to childcare issues:

*...[I]t was only my responsibility at the time to make sure that everyone got the supplies that they needed on a day-to-day basis but I found once COVID hit, like my responsibility, like the work that I had to do was just, like I couldn't finish it. I was working 8, 9, 10-hour days with no breaks to try and, and get all this work done, and it was just, it was very, very stressful for me (Police, Central, Interview 06)*

Police officers sometimes attributed increased stress to the challenge of balancing operations with the impacts of COVID-19, as well as the public scrutiny that they experienced when, for example, they were not wearing PPE due to time constraints in emergency situations.

## 3 Ethic of Care & Shifting Occupational Culture

The majority of the women interviewed (12, 80%) described a positive shift in the masculine culture of law enforcement organizations since the onset of the pandemic. One woman saw the opportunity for remote work to be normalized within law enforcement organizations (CBSA, Central, Interview 11). Others noted a softening of the “tough guy attitude” (Police, West, Interview 04) which made it possible to discuss more sensitive topics related to mental health and officer well-being:

*So, the first one is the more openness about talking about mental health, anxiety and stress specifically... but I think of it is a real positive thing and it's really actually opened the door for members to be able to talk about some of the deeper problems or deeper issues that affect police officers (Police, West, Interview 05)*

*So, there's more of an acceptance of if you're if you're sick, you really shouldn't be here. People have always said that but there's always been a pressure to come to work anyways... there's much more of an acceptance and understanding [of that] ... So, it is much more about looking after and looking out for one another and [there's] no underlying pressure to come in... So, there is that kind of a shift (Police, Central, Interview 15).*

In contrast, a smaller number of women (4, 27%) described how, at the beginning of the pandemic, their organizational culture had become increasingly masculine. Such concerns were also highlighted in the survey responses of some participants:

*[My organization] was [i]nitially fixated on a macho agency self-image to dismiss health concerns and endorse working in the office because we're "tough" - stupid machismo - for example by refusing to require enforcement officers to wear masks in office spaces (CBSA, Central, Survey 199).*

## 4 Coping with COVID-19

In the survey responses, participants described various strategies to deal with on-the-job challenges, which included exercising/staying active, meditating, counselling, venting, eating, drinking, and/or using drugs. But the most common theme in participants' responses reflected their acceptance of COVID-19 and their increased understanding of others' situations during these challenging times. They talked about how they worked to maintain a positive attitude and be patient, saying things like "I just take it day by day and know that some don't deal as well with stressors as others" (Police, West, Survey, 146), "[I am] remaining professional, and constantly reminding myself that people are under a greater amount of stress due to the pandemic" (Police, West, Survey 138), and "[I am] remaining calm and setting a calm example for an increasingly agitated public" (Police, West, Survey 119).

In addition, participants' responses reflected their resilience and perseverance as they 'took on' challenges during the pandemic, saying "...[A]s always, [I] suck it up and deal with it" (Police, Central, Survey 121) and "I put my head down and push through" (Police, Central, Survey 118).

The concern of supervisors for the members of their team was notable through their responses which focused on how they supported others:

*[I have been] trying to manage the morale of people who are scared to be at work re Covid or who feel slighted when senior members/command do not come to work or even acknowledge the impact this has on front-line officers that are at risk every day and putting their families at risk. (Police, Central, Survey 112).*

*Every day my team jokes that I need one of those number dispensers outside of my door as there is constantly a line up. As a sergeant with a large team, I have many HR related issues, some as a result of the anxiety associated with Covid and some just ongoing personal issues. Every day has been a challenge (RCMP, West, Survey 109).*

# ORGANIZATIONS' RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES AT WORK DURING COVID

## THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

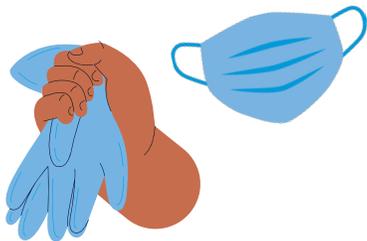
Research has highlighted a lack of pandemic planning in law enforcement agencies, arguing that there is “no existing ‘play book’...for managing a pandemic of this size and scale” (Jennings & Perez 2020, 699). Studies examining the organizational responses of police services during the pandemic have emphasized the risk of infection as a primary concern of officers (Frenkel et al, 2020), with the availability of physical resources such as PPE being critical for reducing the risk of contraction (Laufs & Waseem, 2020). Organizational measures that were “mainly aimed at reducing the risk of infection” were perceived by officers as being the most effective (Frenkel et al., 2020, p.11). Other concerns that have been identified by scholars include “a lack of clear and timely communication” (Maskály, Ivković, & Neyroud, 2021, p.11) resulting in the recommendation of improved communications regarding COVID-19 related changes and requirements (Papazoglou, Blumberg, Schlosser, & Collins, 2020).

Some scholars have called for the implementation of prevention and treatment measures for law enforcement workers, “especially given the risk of new pandemic waves” (Gomez-Galan et al 2020, 8790). Specific recommendations that have been made regarding pandemic planning include enacting unambiguous laws, increasing public compliance through media communication, being logistically prepared, and improving stress regulation through skills in police training (Frenkel et al 2020). Other researchers have recommended developing pandemic planning by looking to ‘lessons learned’ from prior pandemics and the responses enacted, as seen for example in the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 (Rice 2020, 421), and the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2003 (Jennings & Lush 2004).

## OUR FINDINGS

64%

of women (74) were satisfied with how their organizations had responded to the pandemic, describing them as taking a “robust,” “proactive,” and “serious” approach to managing the pandemic.



Fewer women (19, 17%) described their organizations' responses as either mediocre or negative (7, 6%) using words like “reactive,” “unprepared,” “disorganized,” “haphazard,” “inconsistent,” or “non-existent.”

Women saw good organizational responses that addressed the impacts of COVID-19 at work as consisting of two main characteristics: good communication and access to high-quality PPE.

# 1 Communication

In both the survey and interview data, women emphasized the need for quick, clear, and frequent communications during COVID-19 in the form of daily briefings, email updates, and newsletters from command, human resources, commissioners, and supervisors. They also valued communications from over-arching bodies at the divisional, provincial, and national level. In addition to these kinds of top-down communications, women saw a need to increase interpersonal communications even further to support women members by “opening the lines of communication,” “checking in” with members - especially those with small children - and “asking [members] what they need:”

*I think management could take the opportunity to reach out to the women in the organization (seriously, there aren't that many women here!) and ask how they are doing and if they need any assistance (Police, West, Survey 126).*

Supervisors pointed to how these kinds of discussions or “wellness checks” at work were like a “round table to talk about how everybody’s feeling” (Police, Central, Interview 13) and served to reduce stress levels among officers (RCMP, West, Interview 2).

Participants who described poor communication within their organization reported extremely slow response times or even a complete lack of communication from upper management: “Everything was just so scary because nobody had answers and I think that was the main problem at the very beginning...we needed some messaging...especially front-line patrol” (Police, West, Interview 09).

Another recurring theme among women was that organizations should be more compassionate, sympathetic, and understanding regarding members’ unique situations during the pandemic. Many noted how recognizing that women had “a lot on their plates” would be helpful:

*Just the simple acknowledgement that we juggle a lot on our plates. When I am at work, I work with mainly men who go home to a house where their wives take care of everything. At work, they don't realize, that I am that wife who needs to get home to take care of everything as well. Although my husband is very helpful, it is still left to me to manage the household. Because we work with a male dominated job, this point is always left out. The boardrooms and decision makers are mainly men, and they often overlook the juggling act that women must take on. Not because they don't care, but because they have never had to think of it (Police, West, Survey 133).*

## 2 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Respondents who had experienced positive organizational responses (74, 64%) emphasized the importance of being provided with enough high-quality PPE including masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, and disinfectant sprays or wipes so that they “never had to worry if there was going to be PPE available.” High-quality PPE was described as being “supplied [with] masks of a variety of levels” so that the type of PPE used is appropriate for the situation at hand.

Approximately half of the surveyed women who were working on the front lines (29/68, 43%) stated that they had not been given enough PPE, with one being told to “use them sparingly, but don’t not use them” (Police, Central, Interview 15). Approximately one-fifth (12/68, 18%) of the front-line officers surveyed described the PPE that they had been given as being of poor quality:

*So, the mask thing really kind of ticked me off... they didn't have any initially and then they were limiting them to one mask per shift and saying – try to choose the best time to wear it...kind of thing, and then, [imitating service] you'll get a new one if they get saturated but otherwise this is kind of your allotment for the day. And they were only the surgical masks, they weren't N95s. (Police, West, Interview 03)*

*We work closely with our paramedics, and they had N95s, face shields, gowns – the works and we were told not to worry about it. So, that was kind of weird going to a call with them and you're like – well, you're fully protected and here I am not. (Police, West, Interview 03)*

It is important to note that concerns were expressed about what officers saw to be as threats to the continuation of safety precautions. These concerns can be seen through the follow survey responses:

*Most safety precautions have gone out the window now as (inmate) numbers go back up and the facility gets back to normal routine. Staff's mental health and safety falls second to operations” (Corrections, East, Survey 142).*

*In the beginning (March to June) they were very proactive and smart. Made lots of great changes and accommodations. By July they were almost tired of dealing with it. Many things reverted back to the old ways and expected officers to take the brunt of safety from COVID on themselves (Police, West, Survey 216).*

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 AT HOME

## THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

A growing body of international research has found women to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19 (Chandler et al., 2020) in that the pandemic has exacerbated “the gendered differences in labour... within the household” (Hupkau & Petrongolo 2020, p. 623; see also, Alcadipani 2020; Del Boca et al., 2020; Enguita-Fernandez et al., 2020, p. 263; Mazzucchelli et al., 2020, p. 706; Power, 2020). As Bahn et al. (2020) explain:

COVID-19 exposes how the usual functioning of the labour market combines with gender roles to require more work from women than from men. Although many of the challenges for women are not unique to this time, COVID-19 has exacerbated their impacts, making this an important moment to advocate for policies that support their wellbeing, and that of the society their work sustains (p. 697).

Research on the pandemic’s impact on mental health has also highlighted the unique experiences of women. Hennekam and Shymko (2020) gathered qualitative data through 85 surveys and 20 diaries to explore the coping strategies of women in France at the beginning of the lockdown. They found that:

Female participants... tended to have a more emotional reaction to the COVID-19 crisis and frequently mentioned feeling overwhelmed, anxious, stressed and on edge. They explained that their multiple identities as professional, mother and wife now overlapped, leading to feelings of inadequacy, ineptness and failing on all fronts. One participant related such feelings most acutely: ‘I’m a bad mother, a bad wife, and a bad worker’ (p. 796).

## THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

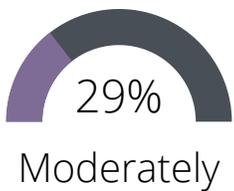
The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of law enforcement workers has also been connected to the fear of bringing the virus home due to their constant contact with the public. According to Papazoglu, Blumberg, Schlosser, and Collins (2020), such fear may cause individuals to “further isolate themselves (physically and emotionally) from family members to avoid infecting a loved one” and further increase distress levels (p.39).

These findings are particularly concerning for women in law enforcement, as previous research has found women to exhibit higher stress and worry about the health and wellbeing of their families during the pandemic (Fleming & Brown, 2021) and perform the bulk of domestic labour and childcare at home (Agocs et al., 2015; Langan et al., 2017; Langan et al., 2019; Sevilla, & Smith, 2020; United Nations, 2020).

## OUR FINDINGS

78%

**(89) of the survey respondents indicated that their experiences at home had been affected by COVID-19, either very much (36, 32%), moderately (33, 29%), or minimally (20, 18%).**



Ten (9%) survey respondents indicated that their experiences at home had not been affected, while 15 (13%) respondents did not answer this question. All 15 of the women interviewed were experiencing at least some, if not many, changes at home.

The following themes represent their primary concerns at home.

# 1 Protecting Family

Many of the women interviewed expressed concerns about bringing the virus home to their families due to their high risk of exposure at work:

*And we heard a lot about the family stuff and how the risk of being infected at work and taking that home just changed dynamics at home dramatically for a number of people who had family members who had physical elements and were at greater risk. (Police, West, Interview 05)*

It was common for women to engage in decontamination practices upon returning home from work in an attempt to protect their families.

*So, we had our own little protocol where I would come in – regardless of the shift – I would come in through the garage and I had what I called COVID corner. So, I had a Rubbermaid bin and anything that left with me would go in that bin and stay in there or go in the washing machine. And then we share a vehicle so I would have to wipe down the car and kind of be aware of that. Then, everything would go in the wash and I would dart upstairs. I had the middle bathroom, so what would be our like guest bathroom. I just took it over and we told our son that he wasn't allowed to use it and not to do anything. And then I was sleeping in one of our spare rooms. (Police, West, Interview 03)*

The survey responses also highlighted this concern of exposing their family and many women decided to not see family and friends either inside or outside of the home. They reported keeping their “bubble small” to “not potentially infect [their] friends and family” or sleeping in a spare bedroom in order to keep their family “as safe as possible.” Women were found to stay connected with friends and family who were outside the home through things like “daily check ins,” “phone conversations,” “Zoom dinner dates,” and physically-distanced visits.

## 2 Impacts on Social and Emotional Health

In the surveys, women talked about how the social restrictions imposed by the pandemic protocols had left them feeling very isolated from family and friends:

*I was isolated and sick for several weeks. communicating with my husband through FaceTime when I could. We no longer have a house cleaner, as she did not want to risk being in my home. While I was at work and when I return to work, I must then limit my son's interactions with friends because if I bring it home, he can catch it and take it to his school, friends, family. My husband works from home, and because of my job, he too has to limit his contact when I am at work, and will when I return to work. We have to shut down almost entirely simply because I work the front lines in [a city] where COVID is rampant (Police, West, Survey 127).*

These concerns were also reported during the interviews, and many women also described having to manage the distraught emotions of their children in addition to their own:

*It was awful, awful, really, really awful, [and] really stressful. When my parents came by, we had to do it outside. Mom I can't hug you. Dad I can't hug you. My daughter is crying because she wants to hug her grandma. Lots of really huge stressors and then I would have to go to work, because you got to go to work. (Police, West, Interview 09)*

For participants who lived alone, not seeing friends and family made the pandemic an especially isolating experience, as was the case for one participant who reported becoming “very depressed because [she] came home to a dark apartment and had no one to support [her].” Other participants reported similar effects on their mental health, with pandemic protocols resulting in, as one member stated, an “exacerbation of pre-existing depression and anxiety.”

## 3 Working from Home

While the pandemic created situations that were isolating for women officers, alternatively - or often simultaneously - it resulted in situations in which they were in closer proximity with their family members on a daily basis. For those who were working from home, and/or had children whose schools/daycares had been closed, the home environment changed significantly; isolation from family was no longer the problem, arguably too much 'together time' was. While women appreciated being granted the accommodation to work from home, they recognized that it ushered in new challenges. They faced internet and office space challenges, as well as the difficulties of getting work done when a spouse and/or child(ren) were home. In the interviews, many women reported high stress due to their remote working situations and pointed to "increased relationship stress," "huge strain[s] on [their] marriage [relationships]," and stress caused by the inability to perform their jobs to "the level [they] expect."

*[E]arly on, especially [in] April, May, and June, actually trying to do my work [while] my two kids are doing zoom school every single day and one is in kindergarten. So, it wasn't - yeah, it was a struggle - because in my mind, I consider myself a hard worker and so I'm thinking I've got to put in my 10-hour shift here at home, so, yeah. (RCMP, West, Interview 14)*

## 4 Childcare, Homeschooling, and Domestic Labour

With the advent of COVID-19, one-third (37, 32%) of the women surveyed described how their childcare needs were exacerbated by the closures of schools and daycares. Those who had previously relied on their children's grandparents for childcare lost this support as well because they did not want to potentially expose these older adults to the virus. Even parents who were able to arrange childcare experienced challenges when their children exhibited COVID symptoms, with one woman's son missing "over two weeks of daycare because he had a cold."

In both the surveys and interviews, women reported being “tasked with the schoolwork” when schools were shut down during the pandemic, increasing their workload at home and extending the length of their workdays even further.

*Home schooling is a fulltime job in itself that presented many challenges. The mental health of the children was also challenging as they were isolated from their friends (Police, Central, Survey 221).*

*... Unfortunately, the fairies don't come and help me... because my daughter was 11 at the time of the pandemic when they closed down the school, and my son was 5... I ignored my son's schooling as he was in kindergarten. I thought, you know, you're in kindergarten, you'll get over that, but had to focus on my daughter who is in grade five. So, that was a huge impact because she's not the type to say okay go and do your schoolwork. I literally had to sit down with her and hold her hand... but it was really difficult, and if I have to deal with both of them, I don't know how I'm going to do that. (Police, Central, Interview 15)*

The challenges of increased childcare are captured in women's descriptions of “juggling children, shiftwork, homeschooling and no childcare” and “having to divide [the] workday” between remote work and their children's schooling.

*Not just childcare, everything increased ten-fold, with the kids being home all the time the house cleaning, laundry, scheduled grocery shopping windows of opportunity, meal preparation plus full-time work responsibilities (Police, Central, Survey 204).*

In the interviews, many women talked about the challenges of managing all the home duties with a full-time work schedule during COVID-19. They felt that they were “expected to put in a full day's work, then they were coming home...making dinner, and... doing reading, and their days were going from five o'clock in the morning to ten at night” (RCMP, West, Interview 02). The resulting stress is evident in these quotes:

*I've just noticed that people are coming in and they're visibly expressing their anxiety, crying, and also saying I'm fed up. I just need a break (Police, West, Interview 05).*

*Me, trying to work shift work... you should see our calendar, it's a fuckin disaster. It's far harder for women in policing because we essentially have two jobs all the time, if you're a mom... You know I always say to everybody at work, okay well this is my one shift and then I go and do my second shift, and I've got 2 other moms on my team and those 2 ladies are cranky all the time because they're trying to do 11 hours of policing, 11 hours of parenting, and I don't know when they get their sleep. (Police, West, Interview 09)*

For women who were working from home during COVID-19, many had taken on some or all the responsibilities previously done by their partner.

*My husband would be the one to cook, but really since becoming a mom and since COVID, I've taken on a lot more cooking... And he's done certain things to kind of pick up where I haven't or whatever... I mean, sure, maybe I'm taking on a bit more. But I found that, for my husband at least, with his service, it's a lot easier for him to work overtime... but I've been doing a lot more housework. (Police, Central, Interview 07)*

*...[B]ecause I was home, there [was] an expectation that things would be ready. It was always like a lot of questions about – well what are we having for dinner? – or whatever. Whereas before, I would be at work and he would come home with the kids and he would just get going on something for dinner (RCMP, West, Interview 14)*

# ORGANIZATIONS' RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES AT HOME DURING COVID

## THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

The scholarly literature on organizational responses to COVID-19 highlights the positive impact of organizational support for at home challenges including those related to childcare or caring for a parent or vulnerable person.

According to a recent study by Fleming & Brown (2021), police staff that were able to work from home reported experiences less stress and better working conditions when compared to those who worked from home part time or remained at their workplace. Women composed the majority of home workers, with men being more likely to remain at work throughout the pandemic (Fleming & Brown, 2021).

Other scholars have suggested providing law enforcement professionals with additional days off and/or vacation days to avoid fatigue or exhaustion experienced as a result of the increased workloads and staff shortages (Papazoglou, Blumberg, Schlosser, & Collins, 2020).

## OUR FINDINGS

67%

(10) of women interviewed were satisfied with how their organizations had responded to challenges at home, describing their approach as “reasonable,” “supportive,” and “accommodating.”



Fewer women (5, 33%) described their organizations' responses as either mediocre or negative using phrases like “fine,” “not top of mind,” “don't care much,” “no thought or assistance,” and “haven't gone out of their way.”

Women saw good accommodations that addressed the impacts of COVID at home as being flexible, diverse, and ongoing.

## 1 Pandemic Accommodations

In the surveys and interviews, participants identified numerous ways in which their organizations provided support for increased stress and other at-home challenges. Some of the organizational supports provided to participants included assistance from peer support teams, the implementation of wellness days, the provision of “emotional health supports,” and/or the extension of member programs to family members.

Shift modifications, being provided with special leave, and being granted time off were other common forms of accommodation and decisions on these tended to be made on a case-by-case basis. While special leave was always paid, time off often required members to utilize banked hours and vacation time.

Many women spoke of their service’s flexibility in “allowing and facilitating working-from-home accommodations whenever possible” (RCMP, West, Survey 115). However, the option to work from home was most often not available to front-line patrol officers and those who required this accommodation typically had to submit a formal application or be transferred to a position that was suitable for remote working. This was often a source of tension between units that could work from home and those that could not.

*I guess the other problem too was there was a real inequity amongst work where if you could work from home, you were working from home. So, patrol, we can't work from home. There was a large discord amongst patrolled operations and the detective world. (Police, West, Interview 09)*

## 2 Family Accommodations

When an organization had been willing to provide family accommodations, working from home was the most common accommodation (40, 35%).

Over half of the women surveyed had received family accommodations that were related to childcare needs. 13% of participants stated that their organization did not provide family accommodations related to caring for older parents or other vulnerable populations. Many of the participants surveyed reported being unaware of any family accommodations provided by their organizations during the pandemic. 17% (19) of participants were unaware of accommodations for childcare related challenges and 35% (40) of participants were unaware of accommodations to assist with caring for parents or other vulnerable populations.

22% (25) of survey participants who were unable to work from home were able to request shift modifications to provide family accommodations, as seen, for example, when an officer was able to modify her schedule completely so that she could work around her son's schedule. Our participants also identified the 'reserve schedule' (blocks of being at work, off work, and on call), as beneficial for providing additional time at home. Some participants who were unable to manage their home life by working from home or modifying their schedules, were able to take time off (17, 15% of participants) or take a special leave of absence (16, 14%) when no other option was available. These accommodations were described in more detail during the interviews:

*A special leave was taken in circumstances where no other option was available. So, this was for the person whose daycare shut down and who's partner is also a police officer that has to go to work. So, you know, it's basically that you can't come to work and because of what is going on, you're not able to take work home with you, so you put in [for a] leave which basically meant – I am going out to the park with my kids today because I can't do anything else. (RCMP, West, Interview 02)*

Time off and special leave that were paid were often only available when a child had COVID symptoms. Frequently, participants had to take sick days, banked days, vacation days, or unpaid leave for child-related issues.

Approximately one third (37, 33%) of the survey respondents reported that their organization had taken steps to address at home challenges caused by COVID-19. The impact that this had on these participants was evident in some of their responses. As one officer who was off work due to at-home COVID-19 related challenges disclosed:

*I'm pretty sure they wonder why I'm not at work. They understand being sick, but they have no understanding of the potential for one person to be so sick compared to another. They rely heavily on a positive test, completely ignoring the many who likely have had it, or had it as asymptomatic. They are out of touch with the realities of the mental and physical challenges of working the front lines, and even more so if you get sick (Police, West, Survey 127)*

Some organizations did not provide any accommodations to assist with childcare challenges, and it was frequently patrol members who were not accommodated. In addition, a number of Correctional Officers noted the lack of support or accommodation.

*Staying at home due to not having childcare wasn't an option. At times I struggled finding someone to come to the house and another woman was told sick benefits do not cover you to stay home because you can't find a childcare provider. Day Cares in our town closed, Day Homes closed (Corrections, East, Survey 140).*

*I believe there could have been options for single moms. I think the organization could have had case workers interview employees to assess where some may be struggling and require supports (Corrections, East, Survey 140).*

Moreover, some interview participants felt that their organizations became less accommodating with the onset of the pandemic.

*... if it's related to the pandemic then I think that whole nonchalant-ness comes out, you know? Where you get – oh my kid has a cold and the school wants him to go home... then you get the whole eye-roll reaction, you know? So, I think in normal circumstances you get the “I care, let's get what you need” or whatever and I have experienced that with the department. But in pandemic circumstances, I think if you even remotely hint at any sort of pandemic related issue, it's just kind of dismissed. (Police, West, Interview 03)*

*Even though it was encouraged by treasury boards... this is simply not true that this paid leave is actually available, therefore we need to treat it as if it's not real and if that means people suffer, you know, sorry, they will have to use their own existing personal leave options... [so] strongly discourage it. Like nag people to consider – is it really bad enough to be taking this? Is there is some other arrangement you could make? (CBSA, Central, Interview 11)*

## 3 'Clawing Back' Accommodations

Survey participants who received accommodations expressed concerns about whether these options, when needed, would continue. At the beginning of the pandemic, or at times when the schools were closed, accommodations had been granted, but women often reported that these were being “clawed back.” For example, reserve schedules were implemented for only a short period of time and were often lifted once COVID-19 cases began to decline, and special leaves were given out less “liberally” than they were towards the beginning of the pandemic.

*The longer the pandemic continues, the less latitude these middle management are given - there is a push to resume business as usual (Police, Central, Survey 215)*

Family accommodations were also seen to be less likely as the pandemic continued:

*Other paid leave was provided to some employees to accommodate childcare issues for approximately 3 months. This has since been terminated (Corrections, East, Survey 142).*

*In the beginning [there were special leave codes]. The expectation now is to make alternate arrangements like school, daycare or family and friends. (RCMP, Central, Survey 214)*

One of the factors that contributed to the “clawing back” of childcare accommodations was a lack of trust by organizations, a skepticism that the accommodation was not really needed or being used properly:

*[I did] some work from home initially, but then management wanted all staff back in the office as they did not trust that people were working from home, it created pretty bad morale (Police, West, Survey 176)*

*Executive messaging has focused on weeding out cheats and slackers rather than enabling them to balance work and life needs (CBSA, Central, Survey 199).*

*[We are] made to feel that any assistance in requiring a remote schedule is meant as a weakness and told we cannot work overtime on frontline due to increased exposure (RCMP, Geographic Location Unknown, Survey 192).*

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

## ENSURE WOMEN ARE 'AT THE TABLE' FOR PANDEMIC PLANNING



We recommend that law enforcement organizations increase equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) representation among those who are doing pandemic and organizational planning. Because less than 19% of women hold administrative leadership positions in Canadian policing organizations, their perspectives and understandings are significantly underrepresented in the (re)imagining of organizational practices and processes for both pandemic response and operations more generally. In order for law enforcement organizations to address and effectively accommodate the diverse needs of its members, they must be inclusive in the room where decisions – such as those regarding pandemic planning and accommodations – are made. Further, organizations should avoid the use of a ‘blanket approach’ and be mindful of the importance of understanding and accommodating the diverse experiences of their membership. Policing scholars stress the importance of strong “liminaires,” or agents of change, who are “capable of breaking masculine norms and encouraging progressive tendencies” (Brown et al. 2020, p. 19). They argue that women senior officers are well positioned as liminaires “to promote the needed cultural changes...by their engaging and empowering style, based less on command and control principles and more on [emotional intelligence]” (Brown et al., 2020).

## INCREASE FLEXIBILITY IN ACCOMMODATIONS



We recommend that law enforcement organizations provide more flexibility to their membership, especially to those who are parents and those in frontline roles who are not permitted to work from home. Schools and daycares have tightened their policies surrounding illness symptoms and consequently parents are often required to leave work with limited notice to pick up their children from school. Even those working from home have difficulties completing a full day’s work due to the distractions that occur when working remotely.

Silvestri (2018) notes the importance of “doing time” in policing and the organizational expectation that workers possess a full-time, uninterrupted career – an expectation that is likely applicable to other law enforcement occupations. She critiques the idea that “time” served is an indicator of leadership suitability and argues that “men have more access to the resource of time and thus are more likely to be able to work full-time and without interruption and ... fulfill the “ideal” criteria” (p. 317). Organizational flexibility and an understanding of how time availability differs for men and women are even more crucial during pandemics, when women are taking on even more responsibilities at home and consequently having even less access to the resource of time. Organizations should give their members the flexibility to leave work when necessary, shorten their shifts, and/or change their working hours to fit their realities. Members should also be given the opportunity to ‘make up’ missed hours at times when their demands at home are not as arduous.

## PREVENT 'CLAWING BACK' OF PANDEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS



Our research suggests that organizations may be becoming less accommodating with respect to work-from-home and other types of ‘leave’ arrangements. We recommend that accommodations not be ‘clawed back,’ either during the pandemic or beyond. Women’s domestic labour and the need to provide childcare have increased, and schools and daycares have often been closed during COVID due to lockdowns or virus outbreaks. The longer that COVID persists, the greater the likelihood of reversing the gains that women police have made over the years with respect to accommodations, retention, and promotion.

## COMMUNICATION ABOUT COVID-19



We recommend that those in positions of high authority in law enforcement organizations provide their membership with frequent updates on COVID-related policies and practices. Such communications may take the form of daily briefings, email updates, or newsletters/information boards. Additionally, over-arching bodies, at the divisional, provincial, and national levels, should also provide COVID-related information that is easily accessible to both the leaders within organizations and their membership

In addition, we recommend that law enforcement organizations foster and support interpersonal communications among their members for the purpose of discussing COVID-related questions and concerns. This can take place through “check-ins” or informal discussions between supervisors and colleagues, both one-on-one and in small groups. Such forms of interpersonal communications provide women in law enforcement with the opportunity to discuss the impact of the pandemic and serve to alleviate stress, boost morale, and strengthen collegial relationships.

## PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY PPE



We recommend that law enforcement organizations provide ample supplies of high-quality PPE to their membership including masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, safety glasses or face shields, and disinfectant sprays or wipes. In addition, law enforcement agencies should ensure that there is no “clawing back” of PPE supplies and other safety precautions throughout the entirety of the pandemic.

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# APPENDIX A

## Combined Survey and Interview Demographics Table

Demographic Data	Survey (n=114)	Interviews (n=15)
<b>Age:</b>		
% Did not answer	2.6%	0.0%
% 30 or under	7.0%	13.3%
% 31 to 40	32.5%	40.0%
% 41 to 45	20.2%	6.7%
% 46 to 50	23.7%	20.0%
% 51 +	14.0%	20.0%
<b>Geographic location:</b>		
% Did not answer	5.3%	0.0%
% Central	50.9%	46.7%
% West	36.8%	46.7%
% East	7.0%	6.7%
<b>Organization Type:</b>		
% Did not answer	4.4%	0.0%
% Police	73.7%	73.3%
% RCMP	13.1%	13.3%
% Corrections	6.1%	6.7%
% Canada Border Services Agency	0.9%	6.7%
% Bylaw	0.9%	0.0%
% Department of National Defence	0.9%	0.0%

<b>Position Type:</b>		
<b>% Did not answer</b>	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>% Frontline</b>	<b>59.7%</b>	<b>60.0%</b>
<b>% Supervisor/manager</b>	<b>29.8%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>
<b>% Civilian</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
<b>% Single</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>
<b>% married/living with a partner</b>	<b>74.5%</b>	<b>66.7%</b>
<b>% Widowed, divorced or separated</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>
<b>% Other</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Parental Status</b>		
<b>% With no children</b>	<b>34.2%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>
<b>% With 1 child</b>	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>
<b>% With 2 children</b>	<b>34.2%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>
<b>% With 3 or more children</b>	<b>11.4%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>