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# Life out of Lockdown - Dads Survey Report

Preliminary findings from the Fathers Network Scotland survey of 175 dads which took place between 10 October - 7 November 2021

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# Context

In May 2021 the Fatherhood Institute (FI) reported on a survey of 2,045 fathers of under 12 children undertaken during June 2020 in the UK. It stated that:

*“Up until the nineteenth century, most fathers in Britain worked close to, or even in, their family homes. This changed as the later stages of the Industrial Revolution removed the majority from their households for all or most of the working day. By early 2020, most fathers of young children in the UK worked full-time and outside their homes, with many also undertaking long commutes. While they aspired to spending more time caring for their children, including their babies, their workplace responsibilities and the inflexibility of most workplaces inhibited this. Researchers hypothesised that fathers would remain ‘secondary’ caregivers at home (with most mothers remaining ‘secondary’ breadwinners) until ‘something big’ happened to alter the fathers’ engagement with the workplace.*

*Covid-19 has proved to be that ‘something big’, generating a massive reverse migration as – in their millions across the world – daddies came home. Many workplaces were transformed – and the transformation of workplaces transformed fatherhood.”*

Around the same time as the FI survey Fathers Network Scotland reached out to dads across Scotland to ask them to share their experience of the first lockdown. The results from our first lockdown survey largely mirrored the FI findings. Scottish dads had come home, and they had stepped up to do much more hands-on caring of their children. This increased involvement led 56% of the dads we surveyed to tell us they wanted to change the way they parent in the future to spend more quality time with their children.

The start of 2021 saw Scottish families once again stepping into a world of staying at home, school closures, home-schooling, video communication and social isolation. Fathers Network Scotland once again reached out to dads to find out how they were coping with the fresh challenges of Scotland's second national Lockdown. Our survey found dads struggling to balance work and family life and their mental health deteriorating. However the number of hours a dad spent playing with their children or supporting their learning had increased, as had their determination to change the way they parented in the future.

In this report we share preliminary findings from our most recent survey, which took place between 10 Oct - 7 Nov 2021. We wanted to find out how dads’ lives had changed now that COVID restrictions had eased and children were back at schools and nurseries. Are dads spending as much time with their children? Are they better able to balance work and home life? How is their mental health and wellbeing? What was causing dad's most distress? Have relationships with their children and co-parents been affected?

- [Dads Survey - Lockdown 1](#) - Fathers Network Scotland - June 2020
- [Dads Survey - Lockdown 2](#) - Fathers Network Scotland - March 2021
- [Lockdown Fathers the Untold Story](#) - Fatherhood Institute - May 2021

# Key Findings

There are well over 400,000 dads with dependent children in Scotland. Their wellbeing and level of positive involvement can have a profound impact on their children, their families and society as a whole. We hope that the findings from this survey and the voices of dads from across Scotland who took part will help services and employers understand and better support dads and their families. Below are the 5 key findings our most recent dads survey:

## **1. Dads' mental health has deteriorated significantly**

The percentage of dads describing their mental-health as bad or very bad increased from 23% during lockdown 1 to 37% in the most recent survey. 69% of all the dads surveyed told us that their mental health had deteriorated over the last 6 months. Those from the most deprived areas have been more acutely affected with 87% telling us that their mental health had deteriorated. Dads who have little or no contact with their children have also been particularly badly affected with 83% telling us that their mental health had deteriorated.

## **2. Relationships between dads & partners or co-parents have been badly affected**

The number of dads reporting that the relationship with their co-parent has been positively affected over time, has been declining from 27% during the first lockdown to 21% in our most recent survey. The number of dads reporting that their relationship with their co-parent has been negatively affected has almost doubled since the first Lockdown, 16% during lockdown 1 and 30% in the most recent survey. Lack of time and conflicting demands are putting pressure on couples relationships, this correlates to a 12% drop in the number of dads sharing how they feel about their mental health and wellbeing with their partners.

## **3. Family-friendly workplaces make a huge difference to dads ability to balance work & family life**

Dad's work/life balance has improved overall as COVID restrictions have eased with 40% rating it challenging or very challenging compared to 52% during lockdown 2. However, dad's ability to balance work and life is significantly impacted by their access to family-friendly working. Dads working long hours, away from home or on shift patterns are particularly badly affected.

## **4. Spending time with their children remains a priority for dads.**

Despite schools and nurseries re-opening after lockdown many dads are still spending a significant amount of time playing with their children or helping them learn. 54% of dads are spending 10 or more hours a week playing with their kids or helping with schoolwork and 29% of those are spending 25 hours or more. And dads don't want things to go back to normal. 58% of all dads surveyed said they wanted to change the way they parent in future 41% of those told us they wanted to be there more for their children.

# Dads who took part

175 dads completed the survey between 10 Oct - 7 Nov 2021.

## Age

- 0% younger than 25
- 58% were between 25-44 years old
- 42% were between 45-64
- 0% older than 64.

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## Location

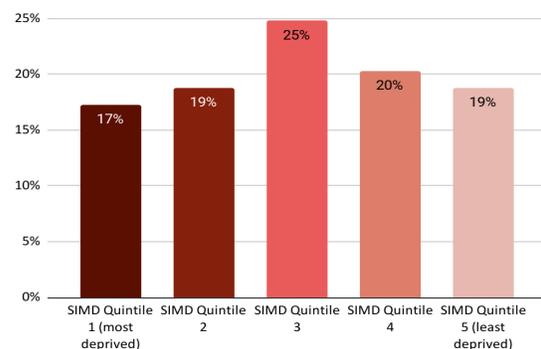
Dads from 29 of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland took part. Edinburgh (n=16), Fife (n=12), Scottish Borders (n=9), Glasgow (n=8) & Clackmannanshire (n=8) attracted the most participation.

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## Level of deprivation

Using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation it was established that dads were reasonably evenly distributed across a range of levels of deprivation.

Level of deprivation utilising The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (N=133)

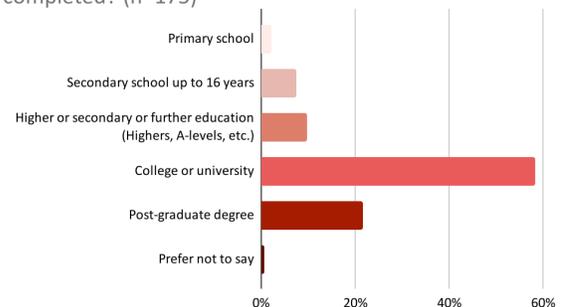


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## Level of education

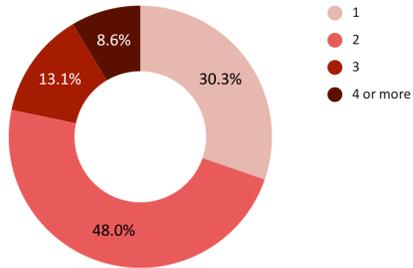
80% of dads were college or university educated or higher

What is the highest level of education you have completed? (n=175)

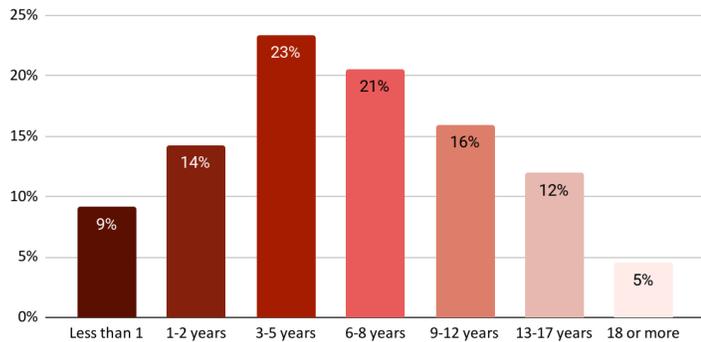


## Children

How many children do you have? (n=175)

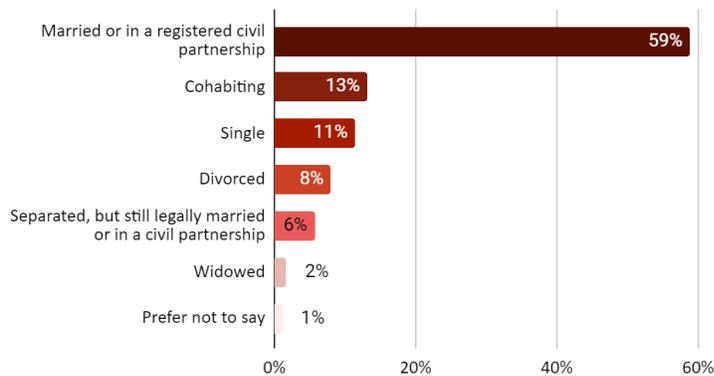


How old is your youngest child? (n=175)

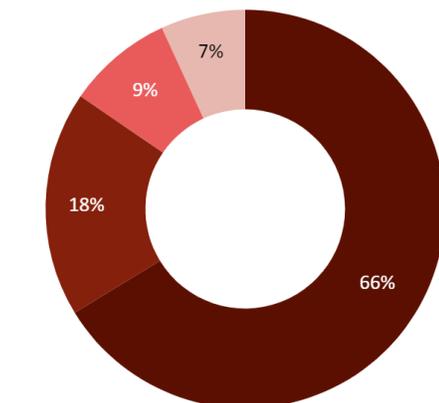


## Marital Status & Living Arrangements

What is your marital status? (n=175)



Can you tell us about your living situation? (n=175)



We asked dads who told us that they live apart from their child(ren) or have 'other circumstances' to tell us about the level of contact they have with their children. 18 told us they had "little or no contact with their children", which was 10% of all dads surveyed.

- I live with my child/children's other parent
- I live apart from my child/children's other parent
- I live alone with my child/children
- Other circumstances

# Home & Work Life

For many dads home and work life has changed enormously as a result of the COVID pandemic as the Fatherhood Institute Report from May 2021 points out:

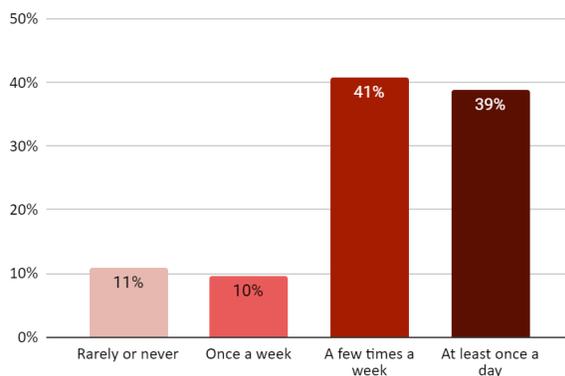
*Before the Spring 2020 lockdown mothers of young children in couple households in the UK were contributing at least twice as much childcare as fathers.*

*During the Spring 2020 lockdown, fathers in couple households stepped up to do much more hands-on caring of their children, and more housework. On average, the fathers almost doubled the number of hours each day during which they undertook childcare. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), fathers' childcare time rose from just over four to eight hours per day, while mothers' rose from almost seven to just over ten.*

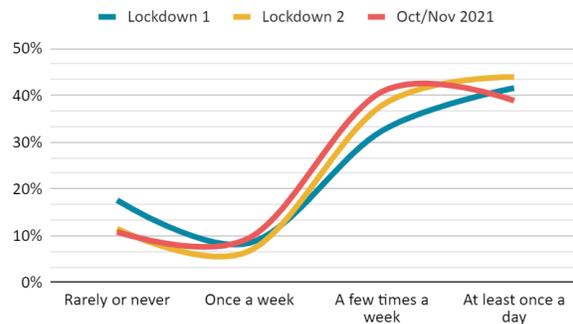
Although we can not benchmark against comparable data collected before the lockdown we can see trends emerging for dads at home and work from June 2020 onwards <sup>1</sup>.

## Cooking :

How often do you cook meals for your child(ren)?  
(n=157)



How often do you cook meals for your child(ren)?



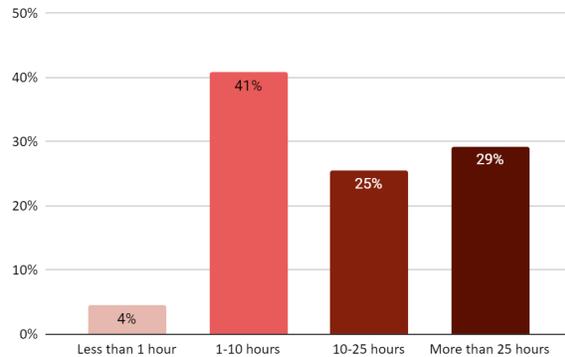
39% of dads are cooking at least once a day and a further 41% are cooking a few times a week. The line graph shows that the amount of times a week dads cook for their children has stayed fairly constant across all three surveys. Encouragingly the number of dads who are cooking at least once a day has only dropped by only 5% since its peak during the second lockdown and the number of dads who are rarely or never is the same as during lockdown 2 and 7% lower than during lockdown 1.

<sup>1</sup> Note: in the most recent study this section was not answered by individuals who answered that had 'little or no contact' with their children.

## Play and Supporting Children's Learning:

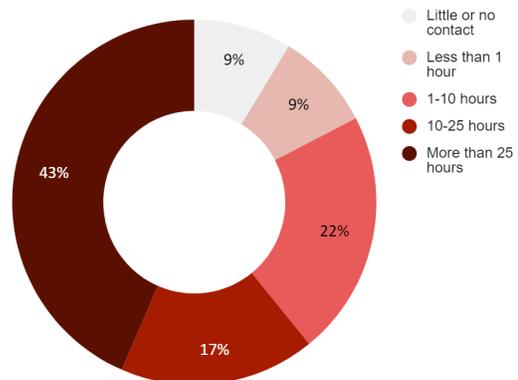
Despite schools and nurseries re-opening, after lockdown many dads are still spending a significant amount of time playing with their children or helping them learn. 54% of dads are spending 10 or more hours a week playing with their kids or helping with schoolwork and 29% of those are spending 25 hours or more.

How many hours per week do you spend playing with your children or supporting their learning? (n=157)



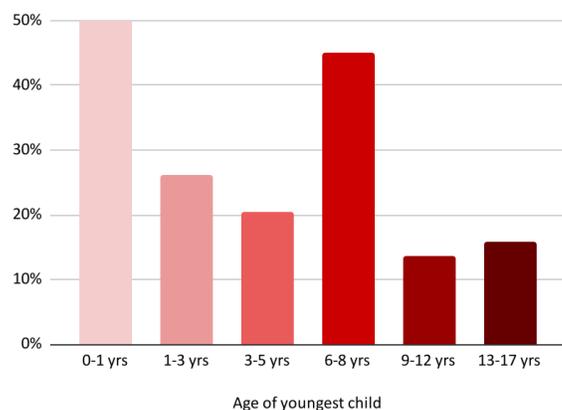
The survey also revealed that dads from the most deprived areas are doing the most, with 43% telling us that they spend 25 hours or more playing or supporting their children's learning.

How many hours per week do you spend playing with your children or supporting their learning? SMID Quintile 1 (most deprived) (n=23)



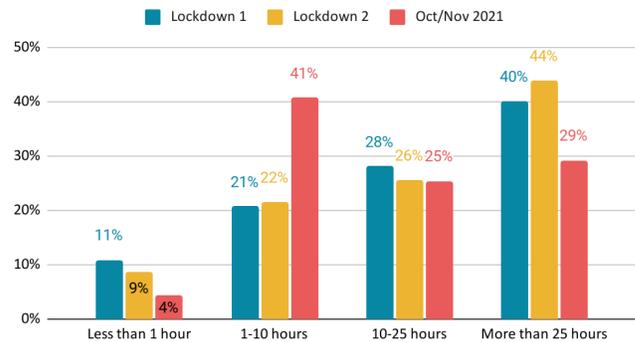
There also seems to be times when dads are more involved with their children's lives than others. Dads with very young children, under 1 year, and those between 6-8 years old seem particularly engaged. However there is a dip during the early years. This is concerning as we know that young children with involved dads do better at nursery and school. They make friends more easily and are better able to understand how other people feel. They have fewer behaviour problems and are more likely to get good school results.

Which dads spend more than 10 hours per week playing with with their children or



The previous two surveys carried out during the lockdowns showed, not surprisingly, that dads were spending more time with their children playing or helping with schoolwork. It is extremely positive to see that the dads surveyed are still spending a significant amount of time with their children. Not only that, but the number of dads spending less than 1 hour with their children has fallen from 11% during the first lockdown to 4% in the most recent survey.

How many hours per week do you spend playing with your children or supporting their learning?



What dads most LOVED doing with their children.

**27% just loved spending time with their children.** *“Just being around them....they’re bloody brilliant!”* as one dad said.

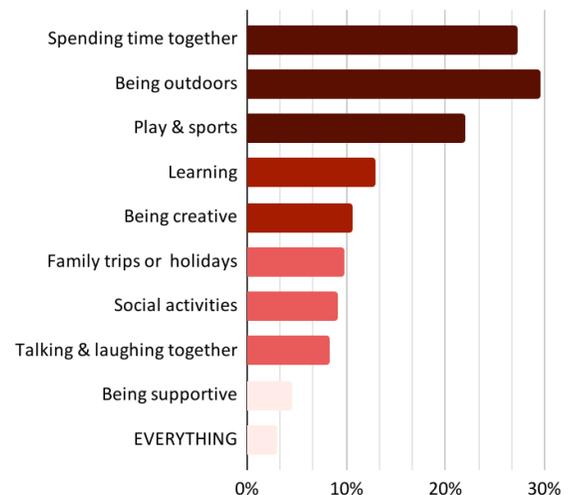
**30% loved being outdoors.** *“Exploring outside - in the woods, adventure play parks, beaches etc and watching the children grow more confident and imaginative as a result”* or simply *“walking with them to school every day.”* One dad even told us how he loved *“Shearing sheep. The kids love helping out, it’s a proper family day.”*

**22% loved playing or taking part in sport.** Whether that is *“Building dens and playing with lego.”*, *“Kitchen discos with my youngest daughter...trying to stop her dancing on the table.”* or *“Walking, cycling & playing in the garden”*.

**13% loved helping their children learn.** The last 6 months had allowed one dad, *“the opportunity to support the wee man with homeschooling”* another told us he *“loves reading and singing songs”* to his son.

**And 3% loved everything!** As one dad said about his daughter *“She has been a shining light during these difficult times. Watching her curiosity grow and watch as she learns new things has given me so much joy.”*

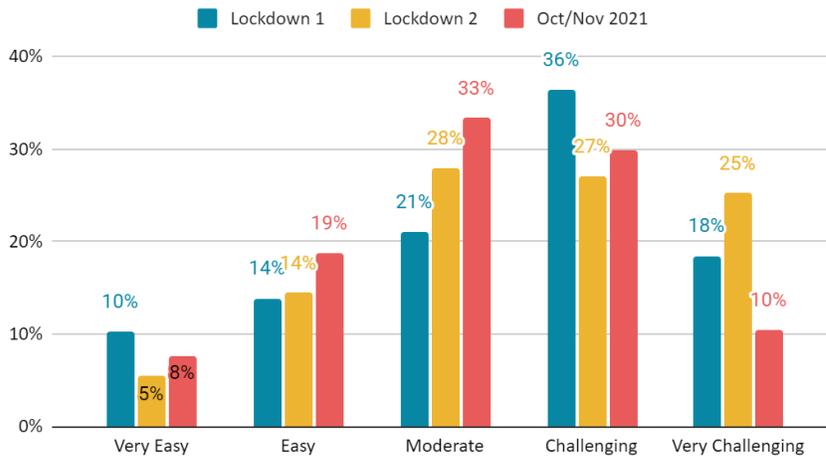
What is the thing you have LOVED doing most with your children in the



## Work Life Balance

Dad's work/life balance seems to have improved somewhat as COVID restrictions have eased with 40% rating it challenging or very challenging compared to 52% during lockdown 2.

How easy are you finding balancing work and family life?



When asked to tell us more about their experience of balancing work and family life (n=144) the reason why some dads were finding it very easy or easy (27%) and those finding it challenging or very challenging (40%) became clearer.<sup>2</sup>

### **27% expressed their struggle to balance making money & being there for family or children:**

*“More time working = no time with family.*

*More time with family = money issues and struggling financially“*

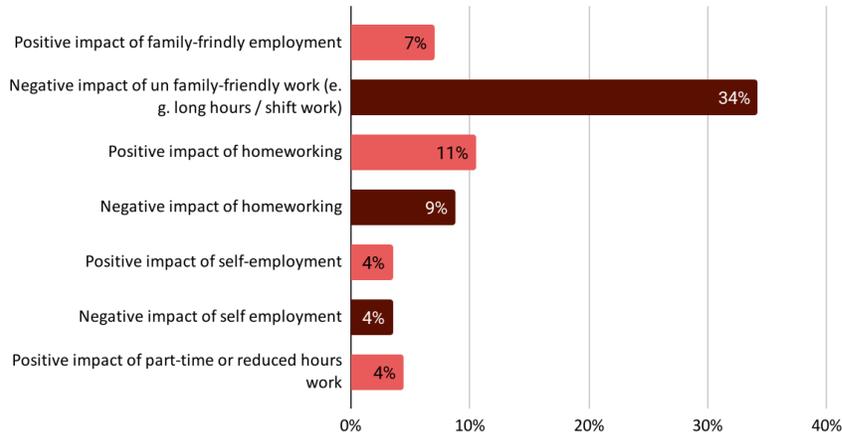
*“I feel guilty if I spend time at work away from my children. I feel guilty if I spend time with my children when I could be earning money. I feel really guilty if I do anything “for myself”.*

*“I’d prefer to have more time with my kids than I do. That said I want them to have the option of experiencing as much as possible, to provide that I work pretty long days. I’ve stepped back from working weekends which is beneficial for both me and my kids”*

<sup>2</sup> This section of the survey was not answered by individuals who had ‘little or no contact’ with their children or those who were not currently working.

There was also a clear divide between dads who benefit from work which allows them to be at home more and those that do not:

Can you tell us a bit about your experience of balancing work and family life? (n=144)



**34% of dads told us that negative impact of long hours, shift work or lack of family-flexible working:**

*“I work long and unusual shifts so it is challenging. I also travel for work for multiple days at a time. I often think that the balance isn’t right, however without travelling and working long shifts I wouldn’t be able to afford a lot of my family’s needs.”*

*“Wife currently recovering from postnatal hospitalisation I work on call and often away at short notice. Life has been hard since work from home stopped!*

**Although homeworking has its downside as 9% told us:**

*“Working from home with the baby downstairs leads to a LOT of guilt and feeling like not a very good worker or dad.”*

**22% of Dads told us about the positive impact of understanding, flexible employers, the ability to work from home or reducing their hours:**

*“Working from home with flexible working and good line management makes it much easier as there is no commute.”*

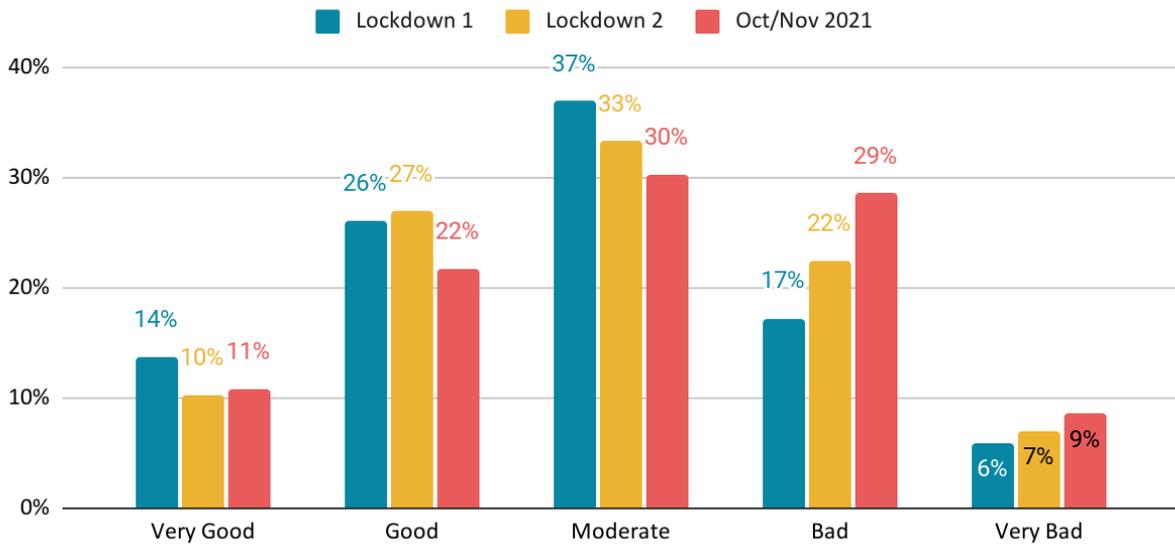
*“I used to travel for work a lot before the pandemic and be office based. I have been working at home and travelling much less in the last 18 months which has allowed me to take the kids to school almost every day, which has been amazing.”*

# Mental Health & Wellbeing

## Mental Health Rating

One of the most striking findings from the survey is the deterioration in dads' mental health. Over the last 18 months we have seen the percentage of dads describing their mental-health as bad or very bad increasing from 23% during lockdown 1 to 37% in the most recent survey.

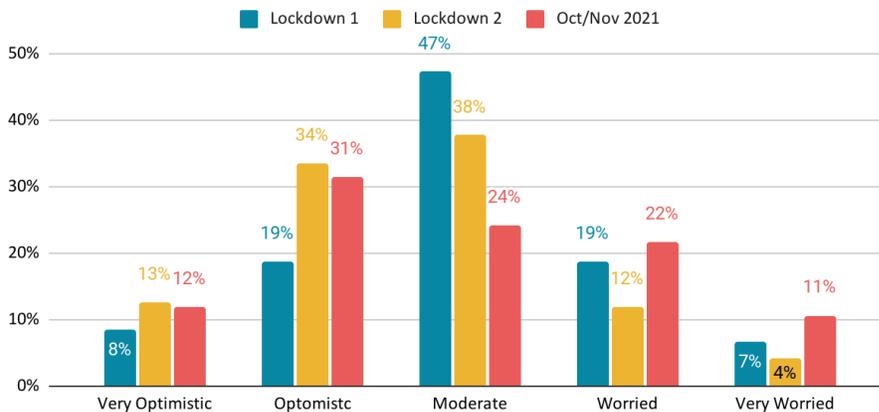
### How would you rate your mental health right now?



## Optimism

Concern about the future has more than doubled since the second lockdown earlier this year when only 16% of dads were worried or very worried about the next 12 months compared to 33% in the most recent survey.

### In general how optimistic do you feel about the next 12 months?



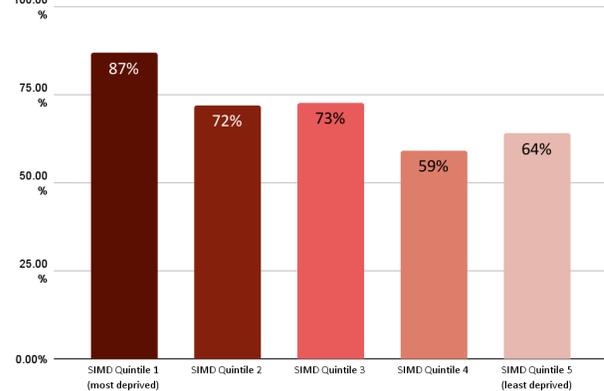
## Deterioration in mental health & causes

Overall 69% of all the dads surveyed told us that their mental health had deteriorated, this is the same as it was during Lockdown 2.

Those from the most deprived areas have been more acutely affected with 87% telling us that their mental health had deteriorated.

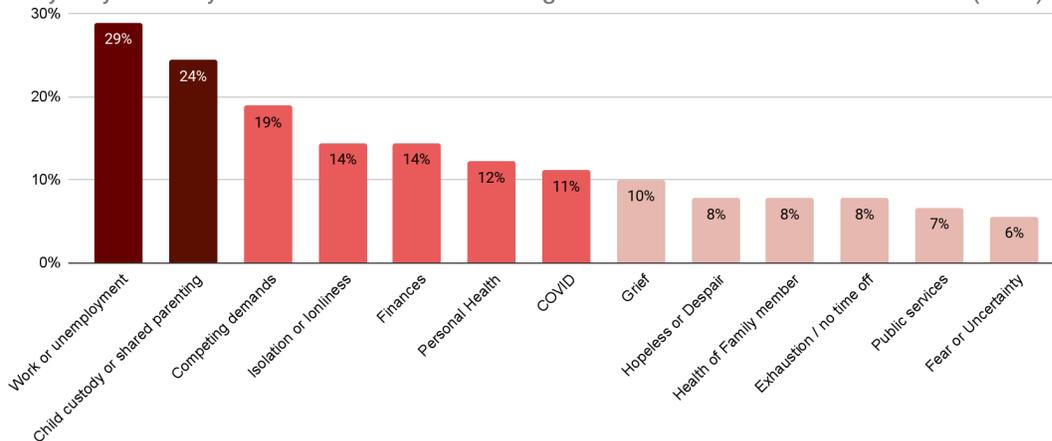
Dads who have little or no contact with their children have also been particularly badly affected with 83% telling us that their mental health had deteriorated.

Has your mental health or well-being deteriorated over the last 6 months? (N=133)



When asked why their mental health had suffered, dads told us about a range of issues affecting them. However, particular work or unemployment (29%) and child-custody or shared parenting issues (24%) were the highest.

why do you think your mental health or well-being has suffered over the last 6 months? (n=97)



### Work or Unemployment

Almost 30% of dads told us that work & unemployment were contributing to the deterioration in their mental health:

“Had a difficult year - took time off from work due to mental health, only just getting back to work this month. Pressure of work and family took its toll.”

“My work as a parent holds great meaning in contrast to paid employment, which is utterly draining.”

“Stresses at work with no-one to talk to about them.”

## Child Custody & Shared Parenting

56% of all dads who live apart from their children's other parent told us about the impact it is having on their mental health. And for dads who have little or no contact with their children this is even higher at 83%.

*"My time with my daughter has been gradually eroded to the point that is destroying my relationship with her."*

*"No contact with my daughter. Dealing with ex through lawyers - difficult to find out information about my children."*

*"Worrying that I won't get to see my kids as much if the shift pattern doesn't work out and my ex uses it against me in court."*

*"Longer it goes without seeing my kids the harder it gets"*

## Managing Competing Demands

The deterioration in mental health also seems to be correlated to the number of issues an individual is facing at once, with 45% of dads mentioning 3 or 4 separated issues affecting their mental health.

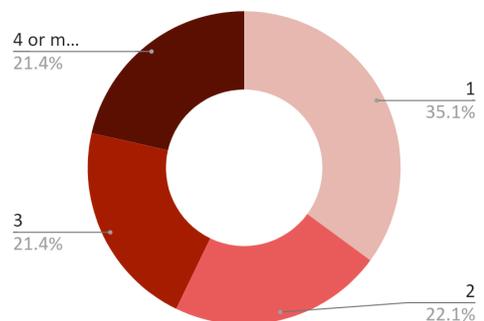
*"Workload is a big factor as I don't have time to myself. Also lost my mum to cancer in April and just had a baby girl 7 weeks early after a difficult pregnancy."*

*"Being a shielder and having a 4 year old little girl whose mum passed away at the start of covid, life has become so difficult. I feel ignored and forgotten about in life. We just lost money through benefits and reduction on pip. I don't know how they are expecting us to live anymore. It's so hard just getting through a day and with Christmas coming I just wish the world would swallow me up."*

*"My wife has postnatal depression since our eldest was born. Covid has hit her hard which in turn makes everyday tasks harder. I've tried to pick up the slack but with three kids under 5 it's challenging to stay up beat especially when my wife's mood dips. Also 2 of my children are very active and are at the stage of testing boundaries."*

*"Unhappy with work and concerned for the future, plus our eldest child is learning disabled and getting help for him as he approaches adulthood is proving difficult. I'm struggling with the prospect of a lifetime of red tape and fighting for the services he needs."*

Number of reasons dads gave for the deterioration of their mental health or wellbeing

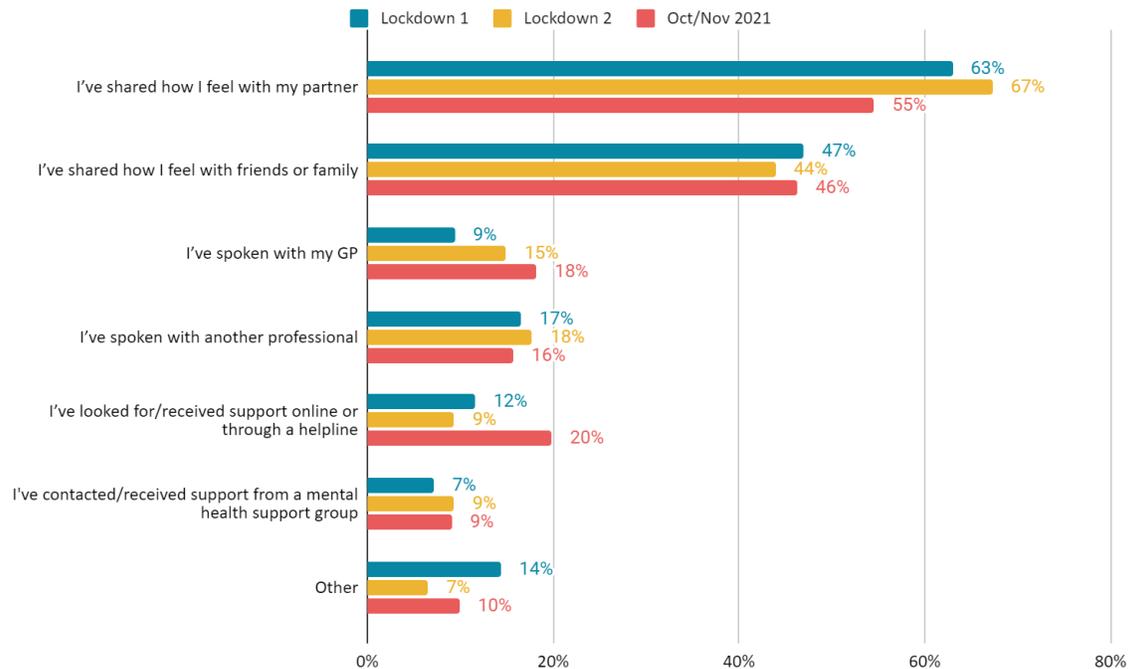


## Support

86% of the 121 dads who told us that their mental health had deteriorated had looked for or received support, a 2% drop from the last survey.

There has been a significant decline in the numbers of dads sharing how they feel with their partners, a 12% reduction from the last survey. There has also been a sharp increase in the number of dads looking for/receiving support online or through a helpline, an 11% increase from the last survey.

Mental Health & Wellbeing - What kinds of support have you looked for or received in the last 6 months?

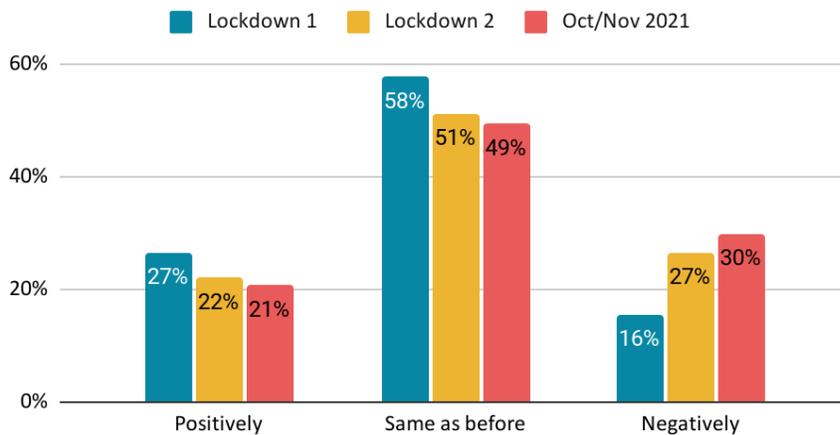


# Family Relationships

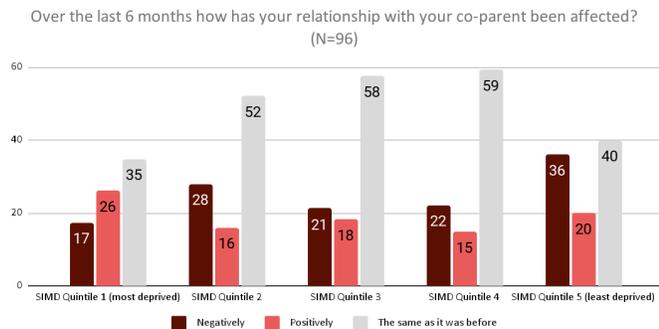
## Partner / Co-parent

Dads' relationships with their partners or co-parents have been gradually deteriorating since the start of the pandemic. Our survey results show a steady decline in the number of dads reporting that the relationship with their co-parent has been positively affected over time, from 27% during the first lockdown to 21% in our most recent survey. The number of dads reporting that their relationship with their co-parent has been negatively affected has almost doubled since the first Lockdown, 16% during lockdown 1 and 30% in the most recent survey.

Over the last 6 months how has your relationship with your co-parent been affected?



Once again levels of deprivation seem to have a significant impact on the dads relationship with their co-parents. 17% of dads from the most deprived areas said that their relationship had been negatively impacted over the last 6 months compared to 36% from the least deprived areas - more than double!



We asked dads who reported changes in the relationships with their co-parent over the last 6 months either positive or negative to tell us more about what had caused these changes:

### **Positive**

17 dads told why they had reported positive changes with their partner or co-parent. 59% talked about the importance of good communication and mutual support and 24% spoke about spending time together:

*"We have been able to talk more and spend time together that normally we couldn't do."*

*"Being able to juggle work better has meant we've been able to support one another when things are difficult or when we need help."*

*"We support each other well. There are strains but talking about these helps."*

*"We're strong together and have had to be - we have so little time to enjoy each other's company. But again I feel we have learned a lot about each other and how to parent, and we've done that together."*

### **Negative:**

37 told us about why the relationship with their co-parent had been negatively affected. Of this group 14 were no longer living with their child(ren)s other parent this group spoke about issues around negotiating child access or shared parenting.

*"4 years on - the relationship with their mother unfortunately remains acrimonious for a number of reasons including matrimonial assets being unresolved and shared parenting."*

*"Have not spoken much since she walked out but have not had any communication in the last 3.5months despite trying to organize some mediation."*

For those living with their child's other parent a range of issues affecting their relationships. Most prevalent was the pressure families were under which often led to stress or frustration:

*"We are both exhausted by life and constant pressures."*

*"Less money, less time and more stress leads to more arguments than before."*

*"No Time to ourselves to fix any issues, plan for the future or relax."*

*"I am easily annoyed and they bring up how little I am at home."*

*"We both have a bit less patience than we used to and get more frustrated more quickly."*

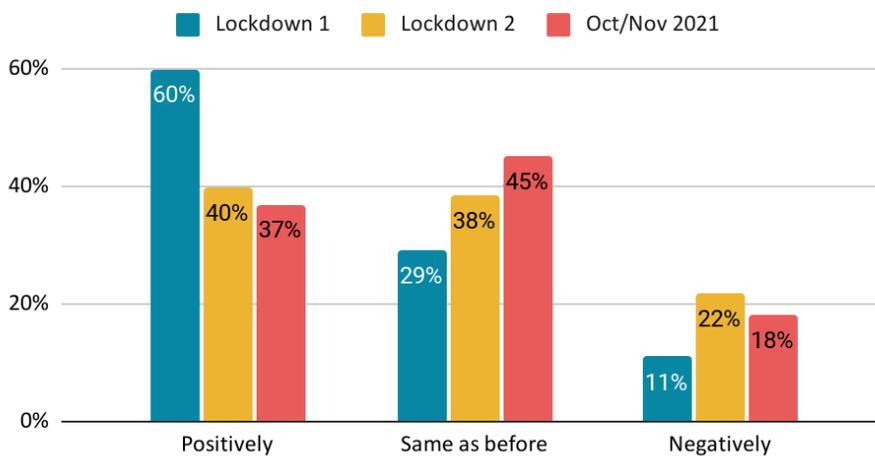
Poor communication was also raised by many:

*"We don't talk as much as we used to and when we do, we always seem to avoid dealing with important stuff. I feel we are getting a bit more distant."*

## Children

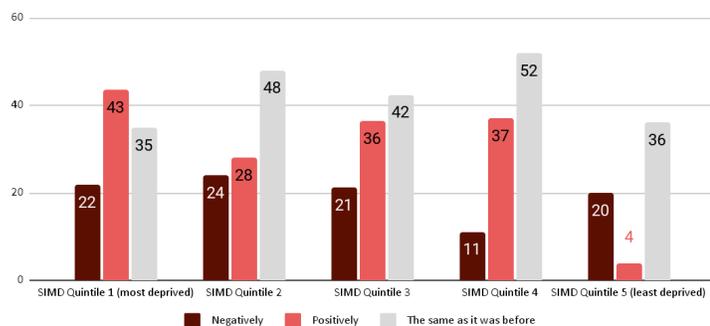
In our 2020 survey 60% of dads reported their relationship had been positively affected by the lockdown. This correlates with the finding from the Fatherhood Institute Lockdown survey of which took place at around the same time . During the second lockdown however this figure had dropped to 40%. Although this has dropped again by 3% in the most recent survey, the number of dads reporting that their relationship had been negatively impacted over the last 6 months has also dropped by 4%. As a result, the relationship between dads and their children seems to be stabilising over time with 45% of the 171 dads who answered the question reporting their relationship is the same as it was before.

How has your relationship with your child(ren) been affected in the last 6 months?



Levels of deprivation seem to have a significant impact on the dads relationship with their children. 43% of dads from the most deprived areas said that their relationship had been positively impacted over the last 6 months compared to just 4% from the least deprived.

How has your relationship with your child(ren) been affected in the last 6 months? (N=133)



We asked dads who reported changes in their relationships over the last 6 months either positive or negative to tell us more about what had caused these changes:

### **Positive**

Two thirds (67%) of the 39 dads who told us about the positive changes talked about spending time with their children:

*"We have spent quality time together which has strengthened our bond"*

*"One positive thing about covid is it gave me an opportunity to see the kids develop and grow into their characters. I would say my relationship with each of the kids has positively strengthened over the last six months. They've been my sunshine on the hard days."*

For many this has been as a result of family-friendly working:

*"With working from home I've been able to spend more time with my toddler. My work also provided a very generous paternity leave policy which meant I had even more time with her."*

*"I work compressed hours which allows two afternoons each week just with the kids. I go to ballet with them giving 1 to 1 time with each"*

A small number of dads told us about the positive effect childrens return to school had on them or the improvement in their mental health:

*"Being back to school has reduced my stress levels"*

*"Due to improving mental health and understanding it I have become more patient and less angry with the kids. Which has improved our relationship."*

### **Negative:**

Over half (57%) of the 28 dads who told us about the negative changes in their relationships spoke about that lack of time spent with their children issues in their relationship.

*"I don't know - I don't feel like I had especially that great a relationship with her before and I don't feel like I have a great one now. I don't feel like I gave her enough time before and it feels like I don't give her time now. Am I being selfish to be focusing on my own career and ambitions in order to pay the mortgage and put food on the table...?"*

Of that group 70% reported that the lack of time was as a result of issues around shared parenting or child contact

*"The reduced contact has obviously had an impact on how my relationship with my children is currently and deeply distressing."*

14% talked about the effect of stress or frustration

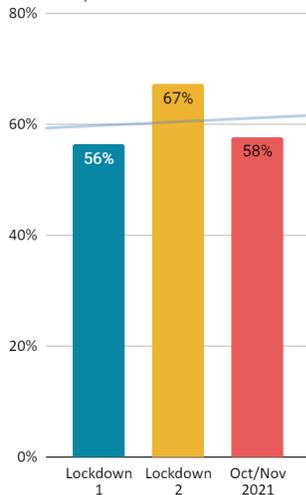
*"I am easily annoyed and they bring up how little I am at home."*

*"We both have a bit less patience than we used to and get more frustrated more quickly."*

## Parenting in the future

58% of all dads surveyed said they wanted to change the way they parent in future, a slight upward trend since the first lockdown.

Yes the experience of living through the pandemic has changed the way I would like to parent in the future



When the 71 dads who answered 'Yes' were asked how they wanted to change 41% told us they wanted to be their more for their children:

*"I want to be there for my son a lot during the week, as I've been working from home and seeing him in the morning and evening has been great."*

*"I want to be around more, definitely. My kids need me to support and help them grow."*

To achieve this 11% said they want to ensure work is family-friendly

*"I want more time with my kids. Shorter working days/hours, more time with them."*

*"I work from home and aim to be more flexible so I fit work around my family commitments rather than visa versa."*

But some dads are trying to balance making money with making a difference:

*"I am considering not working full-time in future once my child attends nursery. I will need to work more to be more financially sound, but have enjoyed supporting my daughter myself throughout this."*

18% told us they wanted to be outside or travel more with their children

*"I would like to get out more and travel with my son."*

10% want to support their children's learning

*"I'd like to be more involved with their education."*

11% want to change themselves to be better parents

*"I always strive to be the best dad I can, but don't always meet my own expectations. I want to be calmer and more patient."*