Initial studies show that the pandemic is disproportionately affecting female researchers, even if some have been at the vanguard of responding to the crisis.

**Less job security, less research time**
A report released in May by the Australian Academy of Science (AAS, 2020) found that job insecurity was more of an issue for women than for men, as a higher proportion of women were employed on short-term contracts.

Myers *et al.* (2020) surveyed 4,535 faculty or principal investigators in the USA and Europe, primarily. All else being equal, female scientists reported a 5% larger decline in research time than their male peers during the Covid-19 pandemic. For scientists with at least one child five years old or younger, the decline in research time was even 17%. The authors recalled that women tended to be the primary care-givers of young children.

Initial analyses also suggest that women’s publishing rate has fallen relative to men’s amid the pandemic and that women are posting fewer preprints and starting fewer research projects than their male peers (Vigione, 2020).

In the media, male voices have dominated scientific commentary on the pandemic in many countries. In the UK, there was an imbalance of 2.7 men for every female expert featured on the UK’s flagship television and radio news programmes on the political handling of the coronavirus outbreak across the country, according to data gathered by the Expert Women Project from the University of London.

**Survey finds widespread disruption to research**
In the developing world, the closure of universities and other institutions, along with the redirecting of funding in those remaining open, has brought ongoing research projects to an abrupt halt.

This was one of the findings of a survey conducted by the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD), a UNESCO programme unit, of its more than 5,000 members between March and June 2020.

Among OWSD members, the most commonly cited negative impact of the pandemic on work was the inability to travel to conferences or other important events (67% of respondents). This was followed by interruptions to experiments or field work (56%), teaching duties (31%) and course attendance (22%), as well as publishing delays (20%).

Members also regretted delays in, or the suspension of, ongoing funding and difficulty in finding collaborators (17% each), being unable to submit funding proposals (16%) or publications (14%), missing out on business opportunities or losing clients (13%) and being unable to take exams as scheduled (11%). Just under 5% of respondents reported directly losing their employment as a result of the pandemic.

**Women actively participating in pandemic response**
The survey responses also illustrated how scientists can find solutions even in the most challenging circumstances. There was the Sudanese molecular biologist leading an initiative to make ventilators using 3D printers, for instance, and the Sri Lankan biochemistry professor who had volunteered her lab for diagnostic testing, not to mention the professors at a Palestinian university who had organized a special course on Covid-19 to teach students the principles of epidemiology.

Many members reported being involved in the pandemic response. A small share (4%) were undertaking research directly on the Covid-19 virus itself, such as to develop treatments or vaccines, and 14% were studying the impact of the coronavirus on other health conditions, or its societal or economic impact. One in four scientists (26%) was raising awareness or disseminating information about the disease and a further 8% were involved in co-ordinating a policy response to Covid-19 at an institutional level.

With the pandemic having made policy-makers, governments and the general population actually aware of the importance of science, some respondents saw an opportunity in adversity to push for greater investment in research and in public health.

**Women have made the most of shorter working hours**
Although 44% of survey respondents have had to cut back their working hours to assume greater household or care responsibilities during the pandemic, other respondents reported some positive outcomes. Most notably, 54% said that they had enjoyed more flexible working hours. Four in ten (42%) had been able to expand their professional skills or experience, 27% had found more time to work on their research, 26% stated that their employer had invested in new technologies for telework or telestudy, 20% had found an opportunity to broaden their public engagement and 19% had augmented their scientific publications.

Over half of respondents reported spending much more time than usual on household chores (52%) and childcare (61%) during the pandemic. On average, respondents indicated that the share of childcare falling to them had risen from 51% to 66% during the pandemic. They also reported being responsible for 69% of homeschooling.

However, the vast majority (83%) appreciated spending more time with their families, with some reporting a closer relationship with their children (41%) or with their partner (37%).

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*Source: adapted from Johnson, Erin (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 on Women Scientists from Developing Countries: Results from an OWSD Member Survey, 20 June. See: https://www.owsd.net*

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