

The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on changes in perceived work pressure for Dutch mothers and fathers

Stéfanie André¹  | Roos van der Zwan² 

¹Department of Public Administration, Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

²Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI), KNAW/University of Groningen, Den Haag, The Netherlands

Correspondence

Stéfanie André, Department of Public Administration, Radboud University Nijmegen, Postbus 9108, 6500 HK Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

Email: stefanie.andre@ru.nl

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Abstract

As a result of the first COVID-19 lockdown in the Netherlands in March 2020, more than half of parents in the Netherlands had to work from home while also caring for their children. We found that work-related stressors and resources (working more hours, realistic manager expectations) particularly affect perceived work pressure. Perceived work pressure was higher among egalitarian fathers and mothers, especially compared to traditional fathers and mothers. Furthermore, egalitarian fathers were more negatively affected by arguments with their partners (home stressor) than traditional fathers. We found no differences between traditional and egalitarian mothers.

KEYWORDS

gender roles, homeworking, stressors and resources, work hours, work pressure

1 | INTRODUCTION

Female labor market participation has increased in recent decades, which means mothers *and* fathers now often have to juggle work and family responsibilities (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018). This leads to more work-family conflict, especially for mothers, and a rise in work pressure in European countries (Lopes et al., 2014). This increase in work pressure is negatively affecting mental and physical health, sometimes leading to emotional exhaustion (Riedl & Thomas, 2019), burnout (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004), sleep deprivation (Deng et al., 2020), and depression (McTernan et al., 2013; Stanley et al., 2007). Scholars found that the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated

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lockdowns in general had a negative effect on work-life balance and increased work-family conflict among parents (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Palumbo, 2020; Yerkes, André, Besamusca, Kruijen, Remery, et al., 2020). Although responses might be more nuanced, depending on occupation, not having to commute anymore was for instance named as one of the advantages of the lockdown by workers in white collar occupations in the Netherlands and the United States (Kruijen et al., 2021; Raabe et al., 2020). Moreover, Matković and Lucić (2021) found that work-life risks were different for workers who were furloughed or self-employed in Croatia. For those parents that still had work to do, this meant that they had to combine work and care responsibilities more than ever; for example, in the Netherlands, 88% of children were at home during the first lockdown starting in March 2020 and 56% of parents worked from home (Yerkes, André, Besamusca, Kruijen, Remery, et al., 2020).

We know that there is a relationship between work-life balance, work-family conflict, and work pressure (Demerouti et al., 2004; Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), but we do not know how the COVID-19 pandemic, with the increased stressors and resources at home and in the work environment, affected work pressure specifically. This is especially relevant today because working from home (for at least part of the time) seems to have become normalized since the pandemic.

Work pressure is defined in the literature as working hard and working under time pressure (De Jonge et al., 1996; Demerouti et al., 2004). It has been found to be both a cause and an effect of work-home interference, exhaustion, and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Peeters, & van der Heijden, 2012; Voydanoff, 2004). However, during the first lockdown in the Netherlands in March 2020, people were working hard and under time pressure not only due to their job, but also due to the stressors and resources caused by mandatory homeworking for a large part of the population. This means that the more general measure of work pressure, as defined earlier, is less applicable in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore propose to use perceived work pressure as a more fitting measurement instrument. This fits recent research on perceived work stress from a medical perspective (Bhui et al., 2016; Håkansson et al., 2020), as well as research on perceived work pressure from a psychological perspective (van Dam et al., 2013). This measure can better take into account that work and life have been intertwined during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, daycare centers and schools were closed, and only those parents who both worked in an essential occupation were able to use emergency daycare and schooling, as long as their child was free of symptoms, which amounted to 12% of children in the Netherlands (Yerkes, André, Besamusca, Kruijen, Remery, et al., 2020). This meant that the other 88% who were home had to be cared for. For the youngest children, this involved hands-on care and entertainment, while for older children, it included helping with school work and keeping them motivated (Bol, 2020). This intermingling of work and home has never occurred to the extent that it did during the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore studied how this affected perceived work pressure among parents and the extent to which stressors and resources may have had different effects on mothers and fathers.

In this paper, we focus on the changes in perceived work pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is an interesting case because full-time employment among men is often combined with part-time employment among women (Yerkes & Hewitt, 2019). Full-time employment is common among men (83%), and less among women (33%), while the opposite is true for part-time jobs (28–34 h), which 11% of men have and 27% of women (Van den Brakel et al., 2020). Furthermore, about 70% of Dutch mothers work and most of them work part-time (80%) (Statistics Netherlands, 2021). The level of defamilization—meaning the level of governmental support for families with respect to caregiving tasks (Leitner, 2003)—is moderate in the Netherlands (Cho, 2014). Moderate defamilization is characterized by moderate support of women's economic independence, that is, working, and partly freeing them from care responsibilities, that is, government involvement in formalized childcare. The closure of schools and daycare facilities meant that these caregiving tasks were given back to 'one-and-a-half-earner families', which may have experienced a larger increase in work pressure than parents in countries where formalized childcare is less extensive, fathers do more care work, or mothers are more likely to be homemakers. The research questions that we will seek to answer are: (1) *How do stressors and resources related to working and caregiving during the first COVID-19 lockdown in the Netherlands affect parents' perceived work pressure?* and (2) *To what extent are these effects moderated by gender and gender role attitudes?*

This research builds and improves on earlier research in three ways. First, it builds on existing studies using the stress process model to explain parents' well-being (e.g., Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Second, it provides a pivotal test case for the effect of home-working—and the role of partners—on perceived work pressure. The COVID-19 lockdown can be seen as a natural test case in which home-working was not necessarily a resource, although it is assumed to be a resource in the literature (Peters and den Dulk, 2003). Third, we use a representative sample of the population working a variety of jobs rather than a convenience sample in selected branches or cities, as in other COVID-19 studies in the Netherlands (Begall & Verbakel, 2021; Keijzer & Mepham, 2021; Kruyen et al., 2021; Snel et al., 2021). This enhances the likelihood of being able to generalize our findings.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 | The role of homeworking

Flexible working—the situation in which workers can control when and where they work—has increased in recent years (Chung & van der Lippe, 2018). In the literature on flexible working, work-life balance, and work-life conflict, we find that flexible working can have different effects on men and women and we expect similar mechanisms for work pressure. For men, flexible working is used to improve concentration and effectivity and so it is a performance enhancer (Lott & Chung, 2016). However, most women use flexible working as a means of combining work with their caregiving roles as a mother or informal caregiver (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Oldenkamp et al., 2018). So flexible work could either reduce or increase work pressure, or both, depending on the situation.

First, schedule control increases workers' control over the boundaries between work-time and caregiving time, which could reduce work-family conflict (Clark, 2000). However, the increased blurring of work-family boundaries could also increase work-family conflict and work pressure, especially for workers who do not feel comfortable about integrating their work and family roles (Demerouti et al., 2004; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Second, working from home reduces commuting time, leaving more time for other tasks and thus reducing work-family conflict (Hill et al., 2003). Third, it could even be the case that homeworking, like using other family-friendly benefits, actually increases work-family conflict and work pressure because women end up assuming more caregiving responsibilities when they start working from home (Hammer et al., 2007).

Mandatory homeworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and the first national lockdown not only meant that most people worked from a different location (Yerkes, André, Besamusca, Kruyen, Remery, et al., 2020), but it also increased boundary fluidity between work and family life. Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) posits that people cross the borders between the work and family domain on a daily basis and shape these borders, but are also influenced by their environment when creating these borders. The COVID-19 pandemic with mandatory homeworking can thus be expected to influence work-family borders and therewith perceived work pressure.

2.2 | Traditional gender role attitudes

At the national level, cultural expectations about the prescribed roles of mothers and fathers are known as national gender role attitudes, which differ between countries and groups within countries (André et al., 2013). For example, research shows that men hold more traditional gender role attitudes than women (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). Traditional gender role attitudes imply that the main role for fathers is the breadwinner role, while the main role for mothers is the caregiving role. Gartzia and Baniandrés (2019) argue that a lifetime of socialization in gender roles influences people's—and especially women's—ideas of how to behave at work and which traits are acceptable and preferable in working women. Furthermore, Gartzia and van Engen (2012) find that differences in the leadership traits of men and women were explained partly by gender role attitudes rather than by the employee's gender. This shows that gender role attitudes influence how we perceive work and leadership as well as care.

Gender role congruence implies that women and men experience normative pressure to conform to stereotypical gender roles in which women care and men work, and people may conform to these roles to avoid social disapproval (Konrad & Cannings, 1997). Although working women are no longer an exception, a caregiving role for men is far from accepted in the work environment (Schmidt, 2018). Failure to comply with the expected gender roles and thus not adhering to gender congruity could lead to disapproval from the social environment (Riggs, 1997). These expectations may have influenced how mothers and fathers perceived the extra tasks that the government placed on parents during the lockdown and the relative importance of unpaid care tasks and paid work tasks.

The Netherlands has a strong ideal of the mother as a caregiver first, and a worker second (Yerkes, 2009). On the basis of gender role theory, we would expect the extra care tasks created by the national lockdown in the Netherlands to be taken up mainly by mothers. This is confirmed by recent Dutch research on changes in the division of tasks between parents. Especially mothers reported a relative increase in care tasks compared to their partner (André et al., 2021). This could increase work pressure especially among mothers because they are more time-constrained to do their work. We therefore start with testing gender differences in the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown on perceived work pressure:

Gender hypothesis *the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown on perceived work pressure was greater among mothers than among fathers.*

2.3 | Perceived work pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic

We use a general conceptualization of work pressure, in which we asked mothers and fathers directly whether they were experiencing more or less work pressure compared to before the pandemic. This is important because work, in the first lockdown, was not only defined by the work environment, but also by the home environment and this is the case for perceived work pressure as well.

Work pressure can be a cause, as well as, an effect of work-family conflict. Working hard and under time pressure involves resources that cannot be used for caregiving or other tasks at home (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Nevertheless, when there are multiple demands at home, this could also lead to work-family conflict and therefore more work pressure. This has been found in the relationship between work-family conflict and job satisfaction, for example, Work-family conflict negatively affects job satisfaction, especially for women (Ergeneli et al., 2010; Grandey et al., 2005). This emphasis on demands and resources is paralleled in Pearlin's stress process model (Pearlin, 1989), which breaks down the causes of stress outcomes into stressors and resources. Resources can be used to balance stressors or demands, and can include personal factors as well as work characteristics (Sonnentag, 2015). Our general assumption here is that work pressure, as a particular form of stress, can be aggravated by stressors and mitigated by the availability of resources. In the next sections, we discuss four home-related characteristics and four work-related characteristics, which can act as stressors or resources. We propose that having (1) more and/or (2) younger children and (3) having more frequent arguments with your partner act as stressors during the lockdown, while (4) a partner who works from home can be a resource to counter work pressure. Similarly, we propose that (1) working from home, (2) working more hours and (3) working in an essential occupation all stressors, while (4) realistic manager expectations and will act as a resource.

2.3.1 | Home stressors and resources during the first COVID-19 lockdown

The stress process model theorizes that stressors lead to increased stress, and thus in our case perceived work pressure, and resources will reduce stress (Pearlin, 1989). On the one hand, children can be seen as a resource for parents because they provide a positive distraction from work, helping parents to forget about work during their leisure

time, and reminding them that work is just one aspect of life (Sonnentag, 2001). Children are also a good reason for workers to go home and simply leave work behind them, and they can therefore function as a resource. On the other hand, children can also be a stressor because caring for them is another demand on parents' time (Gunthorpe & Lyons, 2004). Combining leisure time with childcare duties can reduce resilience and therefore potentially lead to an increase in work-family conflict (Wattis et al., 2013). The work-life balancing act became harder when parents had to take care of several children at home during the lockdown, while also working from home. Furthermore, younger children need more one-on-one care, support, and entertainment compared to older children (André et al., 2021). We therefore expect that having children of secondary school age will have a different effect to having children of primary school age, because the latter need much more direct supervision and care (Bol, 2020). Having multiple children and/or younger children are therefore defined as stressors. Arguments between partners are a final stressor. When the number of issues that parents might argue about is higher, this may lead to more perceived work pressure. We should, however, be cautious about making causal assumptions here, because perceived work pressure could potentially also cause arguments.

Although working from home in itself can be a stressor, a partner that works from home can be a true home resource, because care tasks can be shared more easily. Dutch research shows that an increase in relative caregiving tasks is mainly explained by the ability of homeworking of the parent (André et al., 2021). We expect this effect to be stronger for fathers, because they are, on average, less involved in childcare than mothers and therefore have more opportunities to increase their caregiving. When mothers work from home (or are homemakers), we expect them to take on the lion's share of the extra care tasks during the lockdown. By contrast, when mothers work outside the house, they will still do some of the extra care tasks because of pre-existing ideas about men, women, and care. However, because mothers cannot function as maternal gatekeepers when they are working outside the home, this leaves more room for fathers to step up and take on more care tasks (Gaunt, 2008). This leads to our home-hypothesis:

Home hypothesis *stressors at home (more children at home, younger children at home, arguments with the partner) will lead to higher perceived work pressure among parents, while resources (partner working from home) will lead to lower perceived work pressure among parents.*

2.3.2 | Work stressors and resources during the first COVID-19 lockdown

Work stressors and resources can also impact perceived work pressure. Home-based teleworking is one of the tools that employers use to improve their employees' work-life balance (Peters & den Dulk, 2003). It is used to enable employees to work quietly on tasks that require concentration, and employees report being more productive. Pre-pandemic research found that parents telework less often than non-parents and fathers do so less than mothers (Zhang et al., 2020). The fact that parents telework less often could be because having children at home means that it is more difficult to concentrate. Furthermore, home-working blurs the boundaries between work and private life, which can lead to a worse work-life balance (Crosbie & Moore, 2004). So homeworking during the lockdown can be seen as a stressor for parents that increases perceived work pressure. We expect that, on average, working on location is less disruptive than working from home with children present. Changes in work times are another potential stressor. Doing more or less work during regular working hours could have meant two things during the pandemic. First, it is possible that employees had more flexibility to plan their work around their home demands (homeschooling, entertainment, care), thus leading to lower perceived work pressure. However, if working less during regular working hours, and working in the evenings or during the weekends instead, was the result of people not having enough time to fit in all their regular work, this would lead to an increase in perceived work pressure. We think the latter is more likely and thus we include changes in work times as a stressor. A final stressor is working in an 'essential occupation'. The Dutch government created a list of essential occupations, and people working in these occupations were allowed

to go to work and use public transport during the first lockdown. Some of these worked in the front line of the battle against COVID-19 (e.g., healthcare) or worked around large groups of people (e.g., retail and logistics), and were thus at higher risk of being exposed to and infected with the virus. This increased risk can be seen as a stressor and is thus expected to lead to higher perceived work pressure.

Finally, we include realistic manager expectations as a resource. From the literature, we know that high job expectations and expectations concerning working outside normal office hours (due to digitalization) can lead to higher work pressure (Fenner & Renn, 2010; Peasley et al., 2020). This may have played an important role during the lockdown. Some managers adjusted their expectations and communicated this to their employees, which would have given parents on their team a resource to help counter perceived work pressure.

Work hypothesis *stressors at work (working from home, working at irregular hours, working in an essential occupation) will lead to higher perceived work pressure among parents, while resources (realistic manager expectations) will lead to lower perceived work pressure among parents.*

2.3.3 | Mothers, fathers, and gender role attitudes

Earlier research showed that mothers, in particular, experienced a deterioration in their work-life balance, while fathers who became more involved in childcare were also more satisfied with their work-life balance (Craig & Sawrikar, 2009). The increase in childcare tasks due to the lockdown can therefore have a gendered effect, but can also be influenced by traditional gender role attitudes. Traditional gender role attitudes would mean that care tasks—including extra care tasks—would automatically go to mothers, increasing their work pressure, because they would have less time to do their work due to the extra care tasks. Traditional fathers would feel less obliged to play a larger role in the extra care tasks and would prioritize their work. But if the work and care tasks do not change, their perceived work pressure will not change either. At the same time, we expect parents with more egalitarian gender role attitudes to experience more work pressure due to stressors and resources than parents with traditional gender role attitudes. Egalitarian parents want to focus on both work and caregiving, and they will experience an extra burden due to the home and work expectations that they want to meet. In contrast, more traditional mothers are expected to feel extra home pressure but to see this as their rightful role, which would lead to a neutral relationship with perceived work pressure.

Gender role attitudes hypothesis *The relationship between stressors and resources and perceived work pressure is stronger among parents with egalitarian gender role attitudes than among parents with traditional gender role attitudes.*

The home and work stressors and resources are shown in the conceptual model in Figure 1.

3 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

We used the LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences) panel to test our hypotheses. The LISS panel is a representative online survey panel administered by CenERdata (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). The panel is based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register. Respondents participate in monthly internet surveys covering a broad range of topics such as work, education, income, values, and personality.

For this study, we used several core modules of the LISS panel (see www.lissdata.nl, where all data related to this study are available) and wave 1 of the “Gender inequalities in times of the COVID-19 pandemic” module (Yerkes, André, Besamusca, Kruijven, Beckers, et al., 2020). This module included items regarding paid work, perceived work pressure, and work-life balance and was collected among parents 1 month after the start of the first lockdown in the

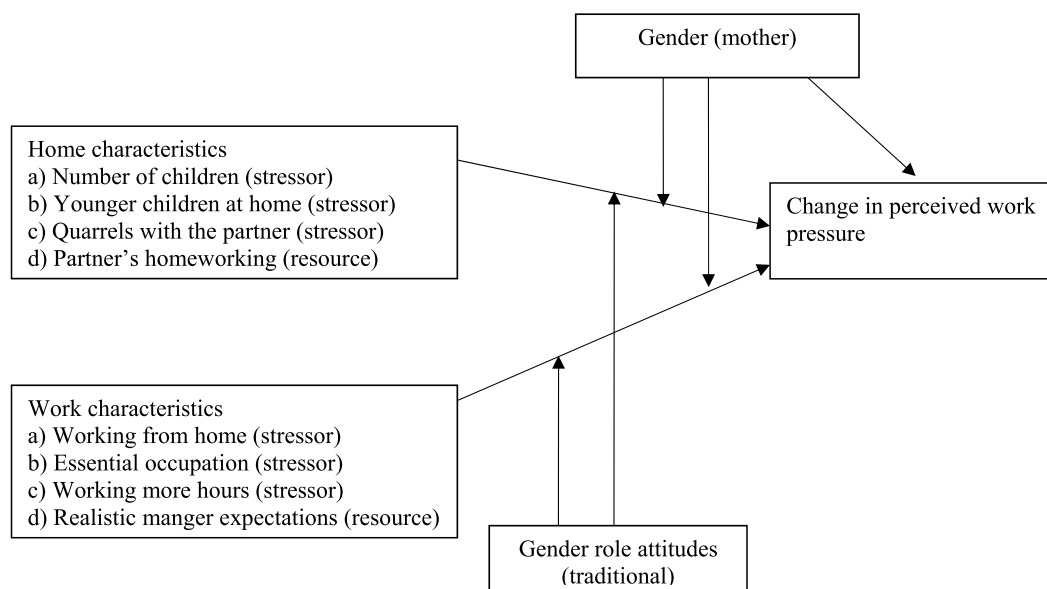


FIGURE 1 Conceptual model.

Netherlands (April 2020). The target sample consisted of all LISS panel members in a household with at least one member in paid employment and at least one child under the age of 18 living at home. The final sample included 852 respondents (the response rate was 71%). In total, 172 respondents were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria for our study (no partner or the respondent was not in paid employment). Furthermore, 86 respondents had a missing value on either the dependent variable (perceived work pressure) or independent variables. The final analytical sample consisted of 594 respondents. Analyses were run separately for mothers ($N = 302$) and fathers ($N = 292$), which was also important because some of the mothers and fathers belonged to the same household.

3.1 | Dependent variable: Perceived work pressure

The dependent variable measured the extent to which parents had experienced more or less work pressure since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Perceived work pressure was assessed using seven categories: (1) I am not experiencing any work pressure at the moment, but I did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) I am not experiencing any work pressure at the moment, and neither did I prior to the COVID-19 pandemic; Categories 3-7 were I am currently experiencing much less (3) /slightly less (4) /the same amount (5) /slightly more (6) /much more (7) work pressure than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. For our analysis, we recoded perceived work pressure into a five-point scale: much less perceived work pressure (category 1 and 3), less perceived work pressure (category 4), the same amount of perceived work pressure (category 2 and 5), more perceived work pressure (category 6), and much more perceived work pressure (category 7).

3.2 | Independent variables

3.2.1 | Home characteristics

First, parents were asked about the number of children under 18 living in their household. Second, the school status of children was classified using four categories: no children at school, children at primary school, children at primary

and secondary school, and children at secondary school. Since we only knew that the children were under the age of 18, and not their specific ages, the category “no children at school” could have included both children who were too young for school and children who had already left school. Third, we measured the extent to which respondents argued with their partner regarding five topics: working from normal workplace, working from home, care for children, household tasks, and leisure time. The answer categories ranged from “never” to “almost daily.” This was recoded as a sum scale, where a higher score indicated a larger number of topics that partners argued about. Finally, the partner’s work location was classified as works partly from home, works from home, works at workplace, or does not work/homemaker.

3.2.2 | Work characteristics

First, work location during the COVID-19 pandemic was classified using three categories: works at the workplace, works partly from home, and works from home. Second, we measured whether working times of parents changed during the COVID-19 pandemic using the question “Compared to prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I’m currently working on my normal workdays...” where the respondents could answer on a five-point scale from “a lot less” to “a lot more.” The higher the score on this item, the more parents were working on regular workdays compared to prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 25 respondents answered “not applicable.” Since all the respondents included were in paid employment, these were added to the “just as much” category. Robustness tests show similar results even without these respondents (see Appendix C). Third, we identified whether the respondent worked in a government-appointed essential occupation. Fourth, manager expectations during the COVID-19 pandemic were measured by asking: “What does your employer expect from you during this period, compared to the situation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic?” The answer categories included “My employer...: understands/accepts that I will get less work done, expects me to get the same amount of work done, expects me to get more work done, understands/accepts that I cannot do my job at all, I don’t know.” The categories “understands/accepts that I cannot do my job at all” and “I don’t know” were combined into one category.

3.2.3 | Gender role attitudes

Gender role attitudes were measured using a Likert scale consisting of seven items (Cronbach’s alpha is 0.735). The respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: (1) “A working mother’s relationship with her children can be just as close and warm as that of a non-working mother” (reversed (R)); (2) “A child who is not yet attending school is likely to suffer if his or her mother has a job”; (3) “Overall, family life suffers if the mother has a full-time job”; (4) “Both father and mother should contribute to the family income” (R); (5) “The father should earn money, while the mother takes care of the household and the family”; (6) “Fathers ought to do more in terms of household work than they do at present” (R); (7) “Fathers ought to do more in terms of childcare than they do at the present” (R). This scale ranged from 0 to 4, where a higher score indicates more traditional gender role attitudes.

3.2.4 | Control variables

Models are controlled for age (centered on the mean), educational level (low, medium, high), and sector ([semi-]public, private, unknown). The descriptive statistics can be found in Table 1.

3.3 | Analytical strategy

We tested our hypotheses using linear regression analysis. Our models estimated to what extent perceived work pressure had changed compared to prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 2 shows the effects of home stressors

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics.

	Mothers					Fathers				
	N	%	Mean	Range	S.D.	N	%	Mean	Range	S.D.
Work pressure	302		2.14	0-4	1.23	292		2.09	0-4	1.02
Home stressors and resources										
Number of children	302		2.08	1-4	0.81	292		2.08	1-4	0.79
School status children										
No children at school	61	20.2				56	19.2			
Primary school	102	33.8				97	33.2			
Primary and high school	60	19.9				49	16.8			
High school	79	26.2				90	30.8			
Quarrels with partner	302		0.70	0-5	1.21	292		0.61	0-5	1.17
Work location partner										
Works at workplace	106	35.1				96	32.9			
Partly works from home	39	12.9				32	11.0			
Works from home	127	42.1				87	29.8			
No employment	30	9.9				77	26.4			
Work stressors and resources										
Work location										
Works at workplace	139	46.0				120	41.1			
Partly works from home	30	9.9				37	12.7			
Works from home	133	44.0				135	46.2			
Works more at regular workdays	302		1.76	0-4	1.0	292		1.80	0-4	0.89
Essential occupation										
No	128	42.4				194	66.4			
Yes	174	57.6				98	33.6			
Expectations employer										
No work	51	16.9				29	9.9			
Less work	110	36.4				122	41.8			
Same amount of work	121	40.1				128	43.8			
More work	20	6.6				13	4.5			
Gender role attitudes										
Traditional gender role attitudes	302		1.23	0-3.14	0.60	292		1.48	0-4	0.62
Control variables										
Age	302		41.81	25-58	6.87	292		44.08	26-61	7.30
Educational level										
Low	33	10.9				31	10.6			
Medium	91	30.1				92	31.5			
High	178	58.9				169	57.9			
Sector										
Public, semi-public sector	104	34.4				62	21.2			
Private sector	133	44.0				172	58.9			
Unknown	65	21.5				58	19.9			

TABLE 2 Linear regression on work pressure; home and work characteristics

	Model 1: Mothers <i>b</i> (SE)	Model 2: Mothers <i>b</i> (SE)	Model 1: Fathers <i>b</i> (SE)	Model 2: Fathers <i>b</i> (SE)
Home stressors				
Number of children	-0.0586 (0.105)		0.0388 (0.0854)	
School status children (primary = ref.)				
No children at school	0.164 (0.216)		-0.142 (0.181)	
High school	0.280 (0.226)		-0.223 (0.183)	
Primary and high school	0.329 (0.217)		0.0449 (0.198)	
Quarrels partner	0.115* (0.0637)		0.0981* (0.0537)	
Home resource				
Work location partner (works at workplace = ref.)				
Works partly from home	0.189 (0.171)		0.145 (0.157)	
Works from home	0.223 (0.244)		-0.0199 (0.213)	
No work	0.104 (0.261)		0.134 (0.160)	
Work stressors				
Work location (works at workplace = ref.)				
Works partly from home		0.335 (0.235)		-0.218 (0.199)
Works from home		0.00877 (0.169)		-0.0965 (0.150)
Works more at regular workdays		0.377*** (0.0709)		0.202*** (0.0704)
Essential occupation		0.464*** (0.148)		0.0592 (0.140)
Work resource				
Expectations employer (same amount of work = ref.)				
No work		-0.585*** (0.191)		-0.297 (0.204)
Less		-0.295* (0.160)		0.117 (0.140)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Model 1: Mothers <i>b</i> (SE)	Model 2: Mothers <i>b</i> (SE)	Model 1: Fathers <i>b</i> (SE)	Model 2: Fathers <i>b</i> (SE)
More work		-0.0898 (0.278)		0.892*** (0.297)
Controls				
Age	-0.0216 (0.0147)	-0.0291*** (0.00967)	-0.000285 (0.0114)	-0.0121 (0.00818)
Educational level (low = ref.)				
Medium	-0.182 (0.255)	-0.257 (0.232)	0.207 (0.216)	0.233 (0.209)
High	-0.211 (0.245)	-0.0391 (0.226)	0.246 (0.208)	0.340 (0.211)
Sector (private = ref.)				
(Semi-)public	0.0227 (0.167)	-0.254 (0.158)	0.188 (0.158)	0.0986 (0.162)
Unknown	-0.152 (0.189)	-0.178 (0.174)	0.0527 (0.159)	0.0413 (0.152)
Constant	2.073*** (0.332)	1.581*** (0.264)	1.700*** (0.288)	1.430*** (0.245)
<i>N</i>	302	302	292	292
<i>R</i> ²	0.047	0.218	0.047	0.109

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

and resources in Model 1 and the effects of work stressors and resources in Model 2. We included the significant stressors and resources in Model 3 in Table 3. Because of our relatively small sample sizes for mothers and fathers, we did not want to demand too much from or overcontrol our models. In Model 4, the effect of gender role attitudes was added. Table 4 shows the interaction effects between traditional gender role attitudes and home and work stressors and resources. To formally test gender differences for hypothesis 3, we ran additional analyses on a pooled sample, including interactions between gender and the variables of interest. To take into account that fathers and mothers may have belonged to the same household, we used robust standard errors at the household level. These models as well as a correlation table for the variables can be found in Appendices A and B.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Descriptive results

The descriptive results provide an initial indication of the changes in perceived work pressure among parents since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 2 shows that the majority of parents reported the same level of perceived work pressure (43%); however, this differed between mothers and fathers. While more than half of fathers reported perceiving the same amount of work pressure compared to before COVID-19, only a little over one-third of mothers did (35%). One interesting finding is that mothers more often reported experiencing both much less work pressure,

TABLE 3 Linear regression on work pressure; work and home characteristics and gender role attitudes.

	Model 3: Mothers	Model 4: Mothers	Model 3: Fathers	Model 4: Fathers
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)
Home stressor				
Quarrels partner	0.139** (0.0566)	0.135** (0.0565)	0.0917* (0.0513)	0.0844* (0.0510)
Work stressors				
Works more at regular workdays	0.389*** (0.0704)	0.392*** (0.0702)	0.208*** (0.0699)	0.204*** (0.0694)
Essential occupation	0.470*** (0.141)	0.459*** (0.141)	0.0598 (0.138)	0.000174 (0.139)
Work resource				
Expectations employer (same amount of work = ref.)				
No work	-0.573*** (0.189)	-0.555*** (0.189)	-0.289 (0.203)	-0.307 (0.202)
Less	-0.280* (0.153)	-0.311** (0.154)	0.0758 (0.136)	0.0511 (0.135)
More work	-0.122 (0.275)	-0.123 (0.274)	0.862*** (0.295)	0.920*** (0.294)
Traditional gender role attitudes		-0.186* (0.111)		-0.224** (0.0973)
Controls				
Age	-0.0224** (0.00990)	-0.0235** (0.00990)	-0.00812 (0.00825)	-0.00950 (0.00821)
Educational level (low = ref.)				
Medium	-0.287 (0.231)	-0.339 (0.232)	0.206 (0.207)	0.139 (0.208)
High	-0.105 (0.221)	-0.181 (0.225)	0.250 (0.199)	0.161 (0.202)
Sector (private = ref.)				
(Semi-)public	-0.243 (0.155)	-0.226 (0.155)	0.102 (0.161)	0.0941 (0.159)
Unknown	-0.207 (0.170)	-0.192 (0.169)	0.0400 (0.151)	-0.00448 (0.152)
Constant	1.548*** (0.258)	1.839*** (0.311)	1.363*** (0.242)	1.822*** (0.312)
<i>N</i>	302	302	292	292
<i>R</i> ²	0.228	0.235	0.115	0.132

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

****p* < 0.01; ***p* < 0.05; **p* < 0.1.

TABLE 4 Linear regression on work pressure; interaction effects.

	Model 5a mothers	Model 5b mothers	Model 5c mothers	Model 5d mothers	Model 5a fathers	Model 5b fathers	Model 5c fathers	Model 5d fathers
Traditional gender role attitudes (TGRA)	n.s.	-*	-*	n.s.	-**	-**	-**	-*
Home stressor								
Quarrels partner	+				+			
Quarrels partner × TGRA	n.s.				-**			
Work stressors								
Works more at regular workdays		+++				n.s.		
Works more at regular workdays × TGRA		n.s.				n.s.		
Essential occupation				n.s.			n.s.	
Essential occupation × TGRA				n.s.			n.s.	
Work resource								
Expectations employer (same amount of work = ref.)								
No work				n.s.				n.s.
Less				n.s.				n.s.
More				n.s.				n.s.
No work × TGRA				n.s.				n.s.
Less × TGRA				n.s.				n.s.
More × TGRA				n.s.				+

Note: In these models we controlled for age, educational level, sector, and all significant home- and work characteristics included in model 3; full models can be found in the Table B2 in the Appendices. n.s. = not significant, + positive effect, - negative effect.

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

and much more work pressure than fathers. This confirms our gender hypothesis that mothers were more affected by the lockdown than fathers, although they also experienced more diverse effects than fathers. The multivariate analysis should reveal to what extent perceived work pressure was affected by both work and home stressors and resources.

4.2 | Multivariate results

Table 2 shows the linear regression analysis of the effect of home and work stressors and resources on perceived work pressure. The higher explanatory power of Model 2 for both mothers and fathers compared to Model 1 shows that work stressors and resources are more important in explaining perceived work pressure during the pandemic than home stressors and resources, which is in line with pre-pandemic literature (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). According to our *home hypothesis*, we expected home stressors to increase and home resources to reduce perceived work pressure during the pandemic. Of home resources, number of children and school status of children showed no effect on perceived work pressure. However, among both mothers ($b = 0.115$, $p < 0.1$; Model 1) and fathers ($b = 0.098$, $p < 0.1$; Model 1), we found that arguing about more topics with a partner is significantly related to increased perceived work pressure. Our home resource, partner works from home, does not seem to have affected perceived work pressure since the pandemic, even though we expected that being able to share care responsibilities

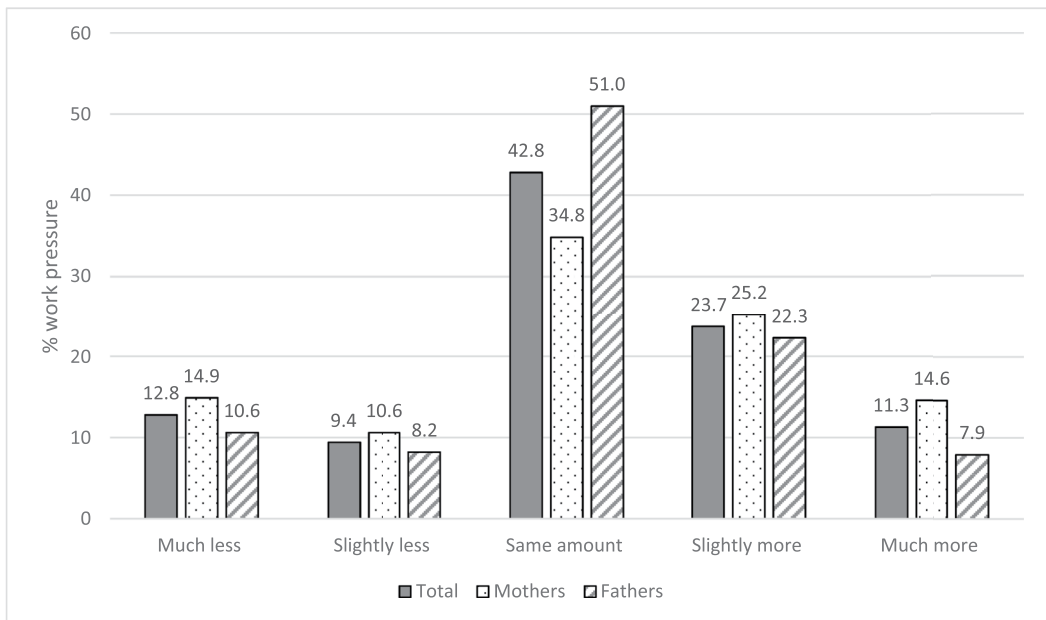


FIGURE 2 Perceived work pressure by gender.

with a partner working at home would help. The results in Table 2 only partly support our *home hypothesis*—that is, that parents who have arguments with their partner about more issues than they did before the pandemic also experience more work pressure. Although most parents did not argue with their partner (74%), those that did also appear to experience more work pressure.

In our *work hypothesis*, we expected work stressors to increase perceived work pressure among parents, and work resources to reduce it. Table 2 in Model 2 shows two significant effects for work stressors among mothers, and one among fathers. First, mothers who were working more hours on regular working days since the COVID-19 pandemic experienced more work pressure ($b = 0.377, p < 0.01$). Similarly, fathers who were working more hours on regular working days also perceived an increase in work pressure ($b = 0.202, p < 0.01$). Second, mothers working in an essential occupation perceived significantly more work pressure than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic ($b = 0.464, p < 0.01$). We also found significant effects for manager expectations as a work resource. Mothers whose managers expected them to do no work ($b = -0.585, p < 0.01$) or less work ($b = -0.295, p < 0.1$) compared to prior to the COVID-19 pandemic perceived less work pressure than mothers whose managers expected the same amount of work done. The results are slightly different for fathers: perceived work pressure increased among fathers whose managers expected them to do more work ($b = 0.892, p < 0.01$).

Hence, among mothers, increased hours on normal working days and working in an essential occupation appear to be particular work stressors that increase perceived work pressure. Additionally, increased hours on regular workdays are also a work stressor for fathers. Among both mothers and fathers, expectations at work play a role in perceived work pressure, and can be either a work stressor or a work resource. This partially supports our *work hypothesis*.

In Table 3, we show the significant home and work stressors and work resource in one model (Model 3). The significant effects presented in Table 2 remain significant. Additionally, to test whether the effects differed significantly between mothers and fathers, we ran the analysis on a pooled sample that included interactions between genders and the significant home and work characteristics (see Table B.1 in the appendices). The results of this analysis show that the effect on perceived work pressure of working in an essential occupation is significantly stronger among mothers than among fathers. Moreover, we found that when the manager expects less work to be done,

perceived work pressure is significantly lower for fathers. In summary, the effects of home and work stressors and resources are largely the same among mothers and fathers.

Our last hypothesis focuses on the effect of traditional gender role attitudes. The main effect of gender role attitudes on perceived work pressure since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic is shown in Model 4 in Table 3. Although the effect is only marginally significant among mothers, it is significant for fathers. Fathers (and to a lesser extent mothers) with more traditional gender role attitudes experienced less work pressure than fathers (and mothers) with more egalitarian gender role attitudes. This confirms our expectation that more egalitarian parents feel that they have to do more on both fronts (work and home) and experience more work pressure as a result, because they have to do that work in the same amount of time. The pooled analysis shows that the association between traditional gender role attitudes and work pressure does not significantly differ between fathers and mothers (Appendix B).

Table 4 examines whether the relationship between work and home stressors and resources and perceived work pressure is indeed weaker among parents with more traditional gender role attitudes. We added interaction effects for the stressors and resources that had significant effects on perceived work pressure in Models 1–3. The full models and coefficients can be found in Appendix Table B2; here, we present a summary of the interaction effects.

The first interaction effect concerned the number of arguments between partners, shown in Model 5a (the coefficients can be found in Appendix Table B.2). The main effect of arguments between partners was significant for both mothers ($b = 0.226, p < 0.1$) and fathers ($b = 0.294, p < 0.05$) and is therefore a stressor. The main effect of traditional gender roles was significant and negative for fathers ($b = -0.246, p < 0.05$), but not significant for mothers. Among fathers, the interaction effect between number of arguments and gender role attitudes was also significant ($b = -0.159$). This implies that among traditional fathers, the relationship between arguments with the partner and perceived work pressure was weaker than among egalitarian fathers. Second, the effect on perceived work pressure of working more on regular workdays and of working in an essential occupation was the same for traditional and egalitarian parents.

Lastly, regarding manager expectations, the results in model 5d showed a negative and significant main effect of traditional gender role attitudes for fathers ($b = -0.275, p < 0.05$) and no significant main effects for manager expectations. We found one significant interaction for fathers. Traditional fathers whose managers expected more work from them compared to fathers whose managers expected the same amount of work from them perceived greater work pressure ($b = 0.891, p < 0.1$) than egalitarian fathers in the same position; however, only 13 fathers reported that their manager expected more from them, meaning that we should interpret this result with caution. This shows that the association between higher manager expectations and perceived work pressure is stronger among fathers with more traditional gender role attitudes. The expectations of the manager are therefore a stressor for fathers with more traditional gender role attitudes, in particular, that is, those fathers who are likely to be the only breadwinners in the family. We found no differential effects for manager expectations among mothers. The results in Table 4 show that whether the relationship between stressors and resources on perceived work pressure depends on parents' gender role attitudes differs between the different stressors and between mothers and fathers. We therefore partially reject our *gender role attitudes hypothesis*.

4.3 | Robustness tests

Several additional analyses were run to test the robustness of the results. First, we used ordered logistic regression as an alternative to the linear analyses (see Tables C2–C4 in Appendix C). The results led to similar conclusions, with only minor differences. Additionally, we tested which specific topics parents had arguments about as a result of increased perceived work pressure. The results, presented in Tables C5 and C6 in Appendix C, showed mothers who reported more arguments about working at their regular workplace experienced more work pressure. Among fathers, more arguments about caring for their children led to an increase in perceived work pressure. Lastly, parents were not only asked whether they worked more hours outside regular workdays, but also if they did so on free days, evenings, and weekends. Additional analysis (Table C7 in Appendix C) showed parents who worked more hours on free days, evenings, and fathers who worked more hours at weekends experienced more work pressure.

5 | CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The first COVID-19 lockdown in the Netherlands in March 2020 meant that parents had to deal with two major changes in their work and home situations. The closure of daycares facilities, schools, and offices for a large part of the population meant that over half of the parents had to work from home, while most of them also cared for and homeschooled their children. Because hybrid working and homeworking seem to be becoming part of the 'new normal', our study is very relevant in showing how work and home stressors and resources can affect perceived work pressure.

First, we found that perceived work pressure remained stable for 51% of fathers and 35% of mothers when we asked them to compare the situation before the pandemic and the situation during the first lockdown. We also found that mothers experienced both a larger increase in work pressure and a larger decrease in work pressure than fathers. This may partly relate to traditional ideas about work and caregiving in the Netherlands, especially since egalitarian mothers and fathers experienced more work pressure, while traditional parents experienced less work pressure. Second, explanations for this change from a stressors and resources perspective showed that work stressors are more influential than home stressors, as found in pre-pandemic research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). It also shows that Pearlin's stress model can explain work pressure in a crisis situation (Pearlin, 1989; Sonnentag, 2001). So even in a global pandemic, when home stressors rose, work stressors are still more important to perceived work pressure. Third, we tested whether the effects of home and work stressors and resources differed between traditional and egalitarian parents. We found two possible interesting interaction effects. First, the effect of arguments between partners on perceived work pressure seemed to be weaker among traditional fathers than among egalitarian fathers. This is consistent with the general notion that traditional fathers are less affected by home stressors than work stressors, and with the idea that traditional fathers see themselves as breadwinners (André et al., 2013). Second, we found that the effect of manager expectations seemed to be stronger among traditional fathers than among egalitarian fathers. This finding was in line with our expectation that parents with egalitarian attitudes would feel pressure to perform both in their work and at home.

When we consider the overall gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Netherlands, we see that effects are more varied for mothers than for fathers, and that traditional gender roles partly affect the relationship between work and home stressors and resources on perceived work pressure. Recent studies have found that the COVID-19 pandemic was negatively related to gender equality; mothers took on the lion's share of the extra care tasks (Carlson et al., 2022; Fisher & Ryan, 2021; Reichelt et al., 2021; Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2021; Yerkes, André, Besamusca, Kruijven, Remery, et al., 2020), hampering the road to gender equality. In particular, egalitarian fathers and mothers seemed to struggle with combining the shared load of work and care during the first lockdown, while more traditional parents shared the load in a traditional way and did not feel extra pressure. This variation asks for more theorizing. Why do egalitarian mothers (and partly fathers) divided extra tasks mainly in a traditional way? It could be the case that a crisis situation throws couples back into history and makes them rely on traditional norms and values.

A useful avenue for future research to explore would be to investigate the impact of organizational characteristics: if an organization is more family-oriented, this could help egalitarian fathers and encourage traditional fathers to combine work and care (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). This would also help mothers struggling to combine their roles in the pandemic and in post-pandemic times. Another avenue would be to track perceived work pressure over time. Whether parents get used to working from home and whether it has got easier since schools reopened are important questions. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see what other explanations can be found to explain the larger variation in perceived work pressure among mothers than among fathers.

Limitations to our research are that we used cross-sectional and partly retrospective data in which respondents were asked to compare their current work pressure with their work pressure before the COVID-19 pandemic, which, especially in the context of a pandemic, could lead to recollection bias. Furthermore, we do not use a validated measure for work pressure, but a perception measure. However, this could also give us more insight when it comes to combining work and care in these special times, in which work was not only "paid work" but also "household and care tasks."

What lessons can employers learn from this research? For employers, it is important to be aware of the direct and indirect expectations that are communicated to employees. For mothers as well as fathers, we found this to be a contributor to perceived work pressure. Furthermore, it is important to keep sight of the number of hours people spend on regular (and non-regular) workdays, as increased working on regular workdays is associated with higher perceived work pressure. This could be the case due to the greater amount of work that has to be done or because work is more spread out over the day with children at home, which gives the employee less chances to rest and recover. This is important when it comes to resilience and a healthy work-life balance. Furthermore, employers and the government could encourage (extra) care tasks to be shared more fairly within families by giving fathers the ability to care and mothers the ability to work.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from LISS. Restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under license for this study. Data are available from <https://www.lissdata.nl/> with the permission of LISS.

ORCID

Stéfanie André  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5343-0667>

Roos van der Zwan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2624-2705>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Stéfanie André is a political sociologist working as assistant professor of Public Administration at Radboud University (the Netherlands). She is part of the COGIS-NL research team that investigated the consequences of COVID-19 on Gender Inequality in the Netherlands. Her research focuses on the (un)intended consequences of policy, with family policy and housing policy at the core of her research agenda. At the moment she works with a NWO-VENI talent grant on the project 'Fathers combining work and Care' on how organizational and national structures influence the work-care attitudes and work-care behavior of fathers.

Roos van der Zwan is a sociologist working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute. Her research focuses on gender and the labor market from an interdisciplinary perspective. She is part of the COGIS-NL team, examining gender (in)equalities during COVID-19. In 2020 she received the Instituut Gak-KNAW grant to examine to what extent life course events affect the position of female refugees on the Dutch labor market.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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