



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

Secretariat Covid-19 Working Paper Series Gender and Covid-19 in Ireland

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National Economic & Social Council

Secretariat Covid-19 Working Paper Series

Gender and Covid-19 in Ireland

Órlaith Hennessy

(as part of an 8-week internship in Summer 2020)

Dr Anne-Marie McGauran

Research Series

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NOTE: The NESCS Secretariat Covid-19 Working Paper Series is to provide timely, concise analysis for policy-makers and other stakeholders. This research work, in normal circumstances, would be used to produce NESCS reports, which would be published following detailed deliberation by the Council. The Council has members appointed by the Taoiseach, comprising representatives of business and employers' organisations, trade unions, agricultural and farming organisations, community and voluntary organisations, and environmental organisations; as well as heads of Government Departments and independent experts. By putting it in the public domain earlier, it is hoped this research can help those now working on Ireland's response to Covid-19. It will also inform Ireland's discussion of its recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. These papers are un-refereed material and are a work-in-progress by the Secretariat. The Secretariat is solely responsible for the content and any views expressed therein, and welcomes any comment on these papers (email info@nesc.ie). Given the nature of the crisis, these working papers are likely to be updated on a regular basis. This will be done in as timely a manner as possible.

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Preface

This paper outlines data on a number of gender impacts of Covid-19 in Ireland in 2020. It describes the outcomes from the pandemic for women and men in the areas of employment, domestic work and childcare, finance and state income supports, well-being, health and decision-making. It also outlines ways in which some groups experience overlapping negative impacts.

Women and men of all ages and groups have been impacted by the changes wrought by Covid-19 in Ireland. However, there are a number of gender differences. Overall, men have been more affected by employment loss due to lockdowns, while women are more affected by the need to provide extra care in the home due to the closure of childcare facilities, schools, and services for vulnerable children and adults. Women have also experienced a greater decline in well-being since the beginning of the pandemic. Women are more likely to contract Covid-19, which can be related to the higher proportion of women in employment which involves close contact with others. However, men are more likely to die from Covid-19, which can be linked to biological and behavioural gender differences.

A range of supports have been put in place by Government to support those negatively impacted by Covid-19, but these are not listed here. However, the data in this paper showing where Covid-19 has had varied gender impacts can help policy to continue to provide targeted responses to address negative consequences of the pandemic on different groups.

A summary of the findings is given first, before more detailed data and findings are provided in the main part of the paper.

Executive Summary

Employment

- More men than women have received payments under the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) during the Covid-19 lockdowns.¹
- However, women were more likely than men to receive the PUP, and men were more likely to receive the TWSS. This has implications for future employment, as those on the TWSS retain a link with their employer, which should make it easier to return to work than for those on the PUP.
- The food and accommodation, wholesale and retail, and construction sectors have been worst affected by Covid-19 lockdowns. Men are more affected by the closures in construction, and women by the closures in the two other sectors.
- Women are more likely than men to work in essential roles during the pandemic. This is related to the concentration of women in retail and health sector employment.
- More women than men were able to work from home during the spring 2020 lockdown. However, more women than men report difficulties working from home, which can be linked to domestic interruptions.

Domestic work and childcare

- When schools and childcare provision closed due to lockdown, employed parents had to balance the conflicting demands of childcare, home-schooling and employment. More women than men reported difficulties with childcare at that time.
- During the spring 2020 lockdown, no childcare or education provision was provided in Ireland, unlike some other European countries. Childcare for essential workers and vulnerable children remained open during the January to March 2021 lockdown, but schools were not open for either of these groups.
- While care services were reduced during lockdowns, and older and ill people were cocooning, women were more likely to report taking on the care of dependent relatives and/or friends.

¹ References for the data outlined in the Executive Summary are detailed in full in the main section of this paper.

Income and State income supports

- More women than men reported low satisfaction with their finances during the spring 2020 lockdown period but an equal amount of men and women have reported financial difficulties.
- The PUP can be claimed in full by each member of a working couple who loses their employment due to Covid-19. This offers more individualised income support for couples than other welfare payments.
- The TWSS initially excluded certain employees on maternity leave but this has been addressed.

Wellbeing

- Women reported a greater decline in well-being than men during the Covid-19 pandemic, and younger women were more strongly affected.
- However, more women than men said that at least one aspect of their life had changed for the better since the pandemic began. Women were more likely to cite spending more quality time with those that they live with, as a benefit. Men were more likely to find a better work-life balance and reduced commuting to be beneficial.
- Women have tended to comply more with public health guidelines than men, but compliance rates overall and the gender gap between them have declined over 2020.
- Increases in alcohol, tobacco and junk food consumption have been higher among women than men since the onset of the pandemic.
- There has been an increase in domestic violence during the pandemic, with women more strongly affected by this. The State response to this has included additional funding for services, a Gardaí operation and the continued availability of some legal aid.

Healthcare

- Women are more likely to be infected with Covid-19, but the death rate is higher among men. Potential explanations are the high proportion of women working in healthcare, and behavioural and biological characteristics of men and women.
- A number of health screening services were halted during the spring 2020 lockdown, but resumed over the remainder of 2020. The closure of BreastCheck and CervicalCheck will have had more impact on women's health, and BowelCheck on men's health.
- Reproductive health services have been largely unaffected.
- Pregnant women have experienced mixed consequences as a result of the pandemic, with fewer very premature births, but also increased anxiety during

and after birth. Partners have not been able to attend ante-natal appointments during 2020, and there have been restrictions on their attendance at births.

Decision-making/leadership

- Ireland's National Public Health Emergency Team has a better gender balance than many other countries, although women's representation in Covid-19 decision-making fora comprising politicians remains low.

Overlapping inequalities

- Eastern European women are the group most strongly affected by job losses due to Covid-19 in Ireland.
- Women Travellers, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities are more likely to experience domestic violence and so are likely to have been particularly affected by its increase in 2020.
- Lone parents, who are mostly women, face a range of difficulties due to the pandemic, such as managing childcare, home-schooling and employment alone. However, one benefit of changes arising due to the pandemic is that the proportion of lone parent families in emergency homeless accommodation has declined over 2020.

1.1 Introduction

Women and men of all ages and groups have been impacted by the changes wrought by Covid-19 in Ireland. However, there are a number of gender differences, which are outlined in detail here. The impact on the employment of women and men is described first, followed by its gendered impact on domestic work and childcare, finance, wellbeing, healthcare and decision-making. A final section describes the impact of overlapping inequalities on some groups.

1.2 Employment

1.2.1 Employment

The impact of Covid-19 lockdowns on the employment of women and men has varied depending on the sectors required to close during different stages of the pandemic restrictions. Initially, in March 2020, a higher proportion of women than men were in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) (Citizens Information, 2020a) and the Temporary Covid-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS)(Citizens Information, 2020b)²(Citizens Information, 2021). Over the longer term, however, more men than women have received a PUP or TWSS payment. By the end of December 2020, 3,119,979 TWSS or PUP payments had been made to men, and 2,640,692 to women.³ Nonetheless, women have tended to be over-represented among PUP recipients, and men over-represented among TWSS recipients.⁴ This has implications for future employment, as those on PUP have lost their job, whilst those on TWSS are still on an employer's pay roll and so should find it easier to return to employment when restrictions ease.

The construction, accommodation and food services, and wholesale and retail sectors have been worst affected by Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, with some variation depending on the stage of lockdown. 87 per cent of employees in the construction sector in Q4 2019 were male, so closures in this sector (e.g. during spring 2020 and winter 2021) affected many more men than women. Employment in the accommodation and food sector was 55 per cent female in Q4 2019, and 49 per cent in the wholesale/retail sectors, so closures in these sectors would have affected women slightly more than men.⁵ The ESRI has found that the employment of Eastern European women has been particularly negatively affected compared to

² This was replaced by the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) on 1 September 2020. However data on EWSS take-up has not been disseminated by the CSO.

³ CSO PxStat Table LMR20, 15 January 2021. This data does not include Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme data from September 2020 on.

⁴ Women make up 46 per cent of those in employment overall, but have comprised more than 46 per cent of those in receipt of the PUP in 3 of the 9 months of PUP administration between March and December 2020. They made up less than 46% of TWSS recipients for three of the six months during which TWSS was in existence from March to September 2020 (Calculations based on data from Table LRM20, at <https://data.cso.ie/>)

⁵ Based on analysis of sectoral employment by gender, and proportion of employees in various sectors in receipt of PUP and TWSS. See tables QLF03 and LRW05, at <https://data.cso.ie/>.

that of other groups during the pandemic lockdowns (Enright *et.al.*). This reflects the sectors in which they are most likely to work.

Women are more likely than men to work in essential roles during the pandemic. This is related to the concentration of women in retail and health sector employment (Redmond & McGuinness, 2020). The stress of caring for those with Covid-19 during the pandemic therefore falls more heavily on women than men. Men make up a high proportion of workers in essential manufacturing, agriculture, utilities management and transport work. However, these groups comprise a smaller proportion of essential roles.⁶

Women are also much more likely than men to work in occupations which have high contact–intensity. Work carried out by NESC in 2020 found that such occupations predominate in the caring, teaching, health, personal services, food preparation and hospitality, leisure and travel service sectors (FitzGerald, 2020).⁷ Women make up over 70 per cent of those at work in these occupations. This increases their risk of contracting Covid-19.

1.2.2 Working from Home

Fewer men than women are in jobs that facilitate working from home, but a higher proportion of women (38 per cent) than men (31 per cent) began working from home during the spring 2020 lockdown (CSO, 2020a: Table 2b). In spring 2020, slightly more women than men reported a negative impact from the presence of family members when working from home (11 per cent vs 9 per cent), and more women than men reported childcare difficulties (9 per cent vs 6 per cent) (*ibid*: Tables 4a & 4d). By November 2020, women were slightly more likely than men to say that working from home had become more difficult (30 per cent vs 26 per cent) (CSO, 2020c: Table 4.4). International data shows women working from home have more fragmented work patterns, due to being interrupted more often and balancing more tasks, than men (Nuffield Foundation, 2020).

Although in April 2020, 49 per cent of women and 32 per cent of men wanted to return to working in the office, by November 2020, both the gender difference and proportion wanting to return to the office were much lower (19 per cent for women, and 15 per cent for men). Only 5 per cent of those aged 35-44 and 9 per cent of those in households made up of adults and children wanted to return to the office. These groups had the strongest preference for a blended form of working, indicating that parents preferred a situation which allowed a better balance between work and home (CSO, 2020c: Table 4.5).

⁶ The definition of an essential worker has varied depending on the level of restrictions in place over the past year. At certain times, construction workers, most of whom are men, were also included among essential workers.

⁷ See footnote 10; and *Census 2016, Profile 11: Employment, Industry and Occupations*, Table EB065: Population Aged 15 Years and Over, Employed or Self-employed 2011 to 2016 .

1.3 Domestic Work and Childcare

Changes generated by Covid-19 in employment and work practices have inevitably elicited changes in the domestic sphere, due to the greater overlap between work and home in current conditions. The closure of schools and childcare provision during various periods of lockdown means employed parents need to actively combine childcare, education and employment during working hours. The spring 2020 and winter 2021 lockdown measures around cocooning and social distancing also removed the option for many of grandparents providing childcare.⁸ ⁹(CSO, 2017)

Before the Covid-19 outbreak, women in Ireland spent on average over twice as many hours as men every week carrying out unpaid care and housework, and partnered women did more care and housework than single women (Russel *et al.*, 2019). International data has shown that women have continued to spend more time on domestic work during the pandemic, including childcare. However, the gender gap in this area has narrowed somewhat, with men taking on more domestic labour as they work from home or become unemployed (Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Nuffield Foundation, 2020; Jessen & Waights, 2020).

In relation to home-schooling, data from some initial Irish surveys indicates that mothers were far more likely to take the main responsibility for home-schooling than fathers. 73 per cent of parents of both primary and secondary school students in one large on-line survey said that the child's mother or female guardian was the primary home support for most students during this period (Flynn *et al.*, 2020).¹⁰

ESRI data shows that, in spring 2020, approximately 52 per cent of essential workers had children, and two thirds of these had a youngest child aged less than 14. Most were living with a partner, and 80 per cent of these partners were working (Redmond & McGuinness, 2020). Ireland's childcare policy response to Covid-19 during the spring 2020 lockdown contrasted with a number of European countries, such as the UK and France, where some schooling and childcare remained available for children of essential workers. A scheme to offer similar services in Ireland during the spring 2020 lockdown was cancelled after low uptake among service providers (DCEDIY, 2020). The lockdown from January to March 2021¹¹ allowed childcare for children of essential workers (and for vulnerable children) to continue to be provided (Department of The Taoiseach, 2020a). However it did not allow schools to remain open for the children of essential workers. This meant on-going difficulties with childcare for parents among this group of workers.

⁸ Apart from some cases concerning the children of essential workers (Department of The Taoiseach, 2020a)

⁹ In 2016, 19 per cent of children were minded by a relative or family friend (CSO, 2017: Table 1).

¹⁰ However, 91 per cent of those who answered this survey were female. It is possible that this has influenced the high proportion of respondents who report that mothers were the main support for their child's home-schooling. See also (Cain Miller, 2020)

¹¹ Ongoing at the time of writing.

1.3.1 Childcare Provision

Although pandemic restrictions meant childcare was not provided during the spring 2020 lockdown, at the time Government recognised the strategic importance of the sector in supporting parental employment, and provided significant financial support to keep childcare businesses afloat. This included the introduction of the enhanced TWSS for childcare workers (the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme, TWSCS), and a subsidy towards the overhead costs of childcare providers, calculated at 15 per cent of gross weekly costs for eligible staff. This overhead subsidy was unique to the childcare sector and it is notable that it was made available to the sector when it was not providing a service, albeit in the context of public health guidelines. The TWSCS was closed on 28 June 2020, when childcare services re-opened, and has not been re-introduced, but childcare workers can avail of the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) during the winter 2021 lockdown.

Those who had to leave employment to take care of their children were also able to apply for the PUP during the spring 2020 and winter 2021 lockdowns, when childcare facilities and schools were closed (Miley, 2021). In August 2020, 17 per cent of women and 4 per cent of men felt that they might have to give up work if primary schools closed again, so this issue affects women more strongly than men (CSO, 2020d: Table 4.1). While the payment is useful for those faced with unresolvable childcare difficulties during childcare and school closures, it does not support them to maintain a link to their employer.

1.3.2 Other Care

Some 21 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men were caring for a dependent relative or friend when surveyed during the spring 2020 lockdown (CSO, 2020a: Table 4d). Some homecare services were cancelled by providers, in a number of cases as staff were redeployed to other parts of the health service, and in others because staff were self-isolating (Home and Community Care Ireland, 2020). Approximately 25-30 per cent of home care recipients were reported to have cancelled formal home care (RTÉ, 2020), linked to fears that staff working in a number of homes could transmit the virus to their vulnerable relative. Day care services for adults with a disability were also closed from March to August 2020 (HSE, 2020a), and many ran at reduced capacity after re-opening (Conneely, 2020). This is likely to have led to some precarity for staff, (Delaney, 2020) as well as requiring family carers to take on some of the care responsibilities usually carried out by formal carers.

1.3.3 Future impact?

There is some optimism that a number of changes necessitated by Covid-19 will be continued, which could help make work more flexible in future and shift norms around domestic labour. Employers have seen that productivity remains high while staff work from home, and allowing this to continue could also reduce commercial property costs. Men may continue to participate in more domestic work and childcare than prior to the pandemic. These trends may be helpful to both women and men in creating a better balance between life at work and life at home.

On the other hand, if formal childcare facilities have greater running costs, with fewer children and more space needed for social distancing, it may become more expensive, and lead to more children being minded by their parents in the home. In a large portion of Irish households, women earn less than their male partners (CSO, 2016c), and so families may decide that higher earner will continue in employment, which could lead to lower female participation in the labour force. In addition, a higher proportion of women than men have had their connection to their employment severed during Covid-19 lockdowns. This again may contribute to lower female participation in the labour force. However, at the current time, it is not possible to tell which situation will prevail in future.

1.4 Finance and State Income Supports

More women than men reported low satisfaction with their finances in spring and Autumn 2020 (CSO, 2020c: Table 2.3a); although the majority of people were satisfied with their financial situation (CSO, 2020a: Table 4c). In June 2020, 70 per cent of both women and men reported no changes in their finances, although one fifth of each reported a decline in income (CSO, 2020e).

Eligibility for the TWSS required an employee to be on an employer's pay roll on 29th February 2020. This meant that a number of groups who were not on a pay roll at this time, such as those on unpaid maternity leave and seasonal workers, were not eligible for these payments (CIB, 2020; Martyn, 2020; Murphy, 2020b).¹²¹³ The situation of those on maternity leave was addressed in late May 2020, and those affected were also eligible for backdated TWSS payments (Revenue, 2020). (The Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme, which replaced the TWSS in September 2020, does cater for seasonal employees.)

The PUP can be claimed by each worker in a household as an individual. This means that co-habiting partners, or a husband and wife, who were both in employment until losing their job due to Covid-19 restrictions, can each claim a full PUP in their own right. This is the first individualised welfare payment for households with a couple (married or cohabiting), which can be seen as a progressive step towards gender equality in relation to welfare payments (Murphy, 2020a). However the PUP does not provide any payments for dependents, so in some cases it can be more financially advantageous for a person with dependents to apply for Jobseeker's Allowance. Jobseeker's Allowance provides payments for dependents, but not on an individualised basis (Citizens Information, 2020a).

Some child maintenance payments have been interrupted by unemployment or financial difficulties due to Covid-19. This leaves a number of lone parents, the majority of whom are women, with reduced income. The DEASP offered

¹² They also excluded some other workers who were not on an employer's pay roll directly before the payments were introduced, e.g. some apprentices.

¹³ These workers were able to remain on any jobseeker payment they were on at the time, but the payment rates were lower than those available under PUP and the TWSS.

compensation for child maintenance that cannot be paid, during the spring 2020 lockdown (DSP, 2020).¹⁴

1.5 Wellbeing

Changes generated by COVID-19 can have a negative effect on the well-being of individuals. Some of the negative impacts of staying at home, such as social isolation, family tension and change in routines can trigger stress, loneliness, domestic violence, eating disorders, etc (NCBI, 2020; Rodgers *et al.*, 2020). There are some gender differences in these behaviours and impact on well-being.

1.5.1 Mental Health

CSO surveys show that women have reported poorer wellbeing during the pandemic, whereas previously male and female wellbeing was at equal levels (CSO, 2020c). In November 2020, some 62 per cent of men reported feeling very happy most or all of the time, compared to 53 per cent of women. Women were more likely to feel down during the pandemic than men (16 per cent vs 7 per cent), and were more likely to feel lonely nearly all the time (17 per cent vs 10 per cent). A range of international research also confirms that young women have suffered more anxiety during Covid-19 than young men (Unicef, 2020; Rodríguez-Hidalgo *et al.*, 2020). Younger people in particular seem to be anxious, with CSO data indicating higher levels of wellbeing among older people than younger people during Covid-19 (CSO, 2020c: Table 2.5). The HSE has provided guidelines on how to mind your mental health during the pandemic, with specific guidance for younger and older people on the managing the particular stresses they are dealing with (HSE, 2020b). The Government has also established the Keep Well campaign, which aims to support people and communities to mind their physical and mental health over winter 2020/spring 2021.¹⁵

More women than men are 'extremely' concerned about the health of others (24 per cent vs 15 per cent) (CSO, 2020c: Table 3.3), and feel that they are at risk of infection with Covid-19 (*ibid.*: Table 3.7), which may reflect women's occupations in more exposed sectors. In spring 2020, women also showed a higher level of nervousness around shopping – 32 per cent as opposed to 20 per cent of men (CSO, 2020a: Table 4b), and were less comfortable than men about going to a pub, but more comfortable going to a hairdresser (CSO, 2020b). Compliance with government guidelines around social distancing reflects the greater concerns among women, with 68 per cent of women and 62 per cent of men rating their compliance with Government restrictions as high in November 2020. However, this

¹⁴ Information was not available at the time of writing on the approach to be taken during the winter 2021 lockdown.

¹⁵ Ireland's young adults have also come together to create an #antiviral movement during Covid-19. The aim of the #antiviral movement is to motivate young people to live their lives within the current guidelines and keep each other safe. See antiviralireland.com.

gender difference (and compliance in general) has declined since April 2020, when 88 per cent of women and 73 per cent of men rated their compliance as high (CSO, 2020c: Table 3.1).

1.5.2 Consumption

Although most men and women report no change in consumption of alcohol, tobacco and sweets/junk food since the start of the pandemic, where there were changes, these showed a gendered pattern. By November 2020, slightly more women than men reported increased consumption of alcohol (24 per cent of women and 18 per cent of men), tobacco (30 per cent of women and 24 per cent of men) and junk food (47 per cent of women compared to 35 per cent of men), since the beginning of the pandemic (CSO, 2020c: Tables 4.6-4.8). There was also a higher incidence of reported weight gain among women than men (47 per cent vs 32 per cent), as well as among households with children (48 per cent) (CSO, 2020e: Table 2.5). This data contrasts with that from 2015 which showed slightly higher alcohol and tobacco consumption among men (CSO, 2015: Table 11). These patterns suggest that responses targeted at different genders might be helpful.

1.5.3 Domestic Abuse

There was a 17 per cent rise in reports of domestic violence to the Gardaí between April and December 2020 (Burns, 2020), while other crimes have fallen during this period. Women's Aid also reported a 41 per cent increase in calls from mid March to end November 2020, compared to the same period in 2019 (Women's aid, 2020). This will have affected women more than men, as the majority of domestic abuse victims are women.¹⁶ The increase in domestic violence is attributed to the impact of 'stay at home' restrictions, limited interaction with others, and financial insecurity from job losses on some groups, as well as other tensions and problems exacerbated by COVID-19 (Evans *et al.*, 2020).

During the pandemic, women and children were allowed to travel to refuges outside the geographic limits set by Covid-19 restrictions. However, people in refuges can be more exposed to Covid-19, as there is little room for social distancing (Safe Ireland, 2020). This has led to reduced capacity in many refuges (McDermott & O'Halloran, 2020)

The Gardaí response to the risk of domestic violence has come in the form of Operation Faoiseamh. Previously identified victims are being checked in with, with a higher call back rate than usual. Extra funding was allocated to help support organisations provide assistance to counter the impacts of domestic violence during the pandemic (O'Sullivan, 2020). The Legal Aid Board kept a Dublin office open for urgent private family law matters during the spring 2020 lockdown, and established a Legal and Mediation Information Helpline and Video Mediation Service

¹⁶ 1 in 7 women in Ireland compared to 1 in 17 men experience severe domestic violence. Women are over twice as likely as men to have experienced severe physical abuse, seven times more likely to have experienced sexual abuse, and are more likely to experience serious injuries than men (Watson & Parsons, 2005).

(Department of the Taoiseach, 2020b). An Emergency Rent Supplement was also made available to those at risk in their own home (Citizens Information, 2020c). There are also plans to allow some barring orders to be applied for remotely, in domestic violence shelters (Gallagher, 2020).

1.6 Healthcare

There is a higher rate of infection with Covid-19 among women, but the death rate for is higher for men (HSE, 2021). Explanations for the higher death rate among men include biological, behavioural and psychological gender differences (Griffith *et al.*, 2020). The higher rate of infection among women can be linked with the high percentage of women who are essential employees in close proximity to others, such as nurses, and carers. Additionally, as nursing homes have a higher percentage of female residents, the cluster outbreaks of Covid-19 in these establishments are expected to have affected more women.

A number of cancer screening services were closed during the 2020 lockdowns, including BreastCheck, CervicalCheck and BowelCheck. The closure of the two former services puts women at greater risk of developing cancer without early detection. For example, no breast exams occurred in April 2020, compared to 13,736 in April 2019. The CervicalCheck programme carried out 937 smear tests in April 2020 compared to 21,037 in April 2019 (Ní Aodha, 2020). BowelCheck screenings were also paused, which will affect men's health to a greater extent (NCRI, 2017). CervicalCheck re-opened in July, Bowelcheck in August, and BreastCheck in September 2020 (Clarke, 2020). However, many of those invited for screening tests had not attended, due to fear of contracting Covid-19 in healthcare settings (Wall, 2020). During the initial phase of the winter 2021 lockdown, BreastCheck closed again, and CervicalCheck depended on individual GP surgeries offering the service (National Screening Service, 2020).

Fertility treatments were also halted in the spring 2020 lockdown, but began a phased return from May, and were not initially closed during the winter 2021 lockdown (SIMS IVF, 2021). However, the delayed treatment can have consequences for couple's fertility options and add to their stress. Access to contraceptive and abortion services has been largely unaffected by the pandemic (Abortion Rights Campaign, 2019), although those seeking abortion services in the UK would have been affected by travel and childcare restrictions, and the number of abortions sought by Irish women there halved in the first six months of 2020, compared to 2019 (Holland, 2020).

Government measures and lifestyle changes over the pandemic period seem to have positively affected the health of new-borns, with less premature babies born during the spring 2020 lockdown (Preston, 2020; Philip *et al.*, 2020). Pregnant women are not at particular at risk of contracting Covid-19; however, babies who contract the disease are vulnerable to more severe illness (Mayo Clinic, 2020). Meanwhile, stress due to Covid-19 and related restrictions has increased anxiety during and after birth for many (Molgora & Accordini, 2020). Partners are restricted in the amount of time they can spend with mothers during labour and birth, and often not allowed to attend ante-natal appointments (Finn, 2021). In addition, social

distancing and travel restrictions has led to less social support from outside the immediate family, although some new mothers have stressed the benefits of their partner being at home due to remote-working (O'Connell, 2020). There is a possibility that having both parents in the home with a new baby may lead to a better gender balance in care and housework in future, as international research has found that where fathers take parental leave, they give more time to childcare and housework, and this pattern persists after fathers return from leave (Tamm, 2018).

1.7 Decision Making and Representation

Globally, the proportion of women involved in decision-making on Covid-19 is low, which can exclude perspectives and expertise that contribute to well-functioning health systems. 83 per cent of 115 national task forces focused on managing Covid-19 have mainly male membership, and only 4 per cent are gender balanced. 82 per cent of these task forces were headed by men (van Daalen *et al.*, 2020). In Ireland, the position is much better than the international average. The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) has 31 individual members, 13 of whom are women. Eleven subgroups operate under it, with five chaired by women. The expert group advising NPHE is made up of 23 members, 14 of whom are women (Government of Ireland, 2020). The Chair of the Senior Officials Group on Covid-19 is a woman. However, while women frequently attend its meetings, the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Covid-19 comprises only men, which reflects the high proportion of men among politicians and the Cabinet in Ireland (McGee & Bray, 2020). On the Vaccination Taskforce, 3 of 14 members are women (Department of the Taoiseach, 2020c).

1.8 Overlapping Inequalities

Finally, this section of the working paper outlines some cases where the gender impacts of Covid-19 overlap with other inequalities. This can help pinpoint the most vulnerable groups, allowing policy responses to be targeted at them.

ESRI research has shown that Eastern European women are the group that have been most strongly affected by job losses due to Covid-19 in Ireland. Africans and Asians working in healthcare in Ireland also have higher rates of Covid-19 infection, due to the exposed nature of this work. Given the gender balance in these occupations, most of those so affected are likely to be women (Enright *et al.*, 2020).

Domestic abuse poses a particular risk for marginalised groups such as women who are disabled, Travellers and migrant women. Disabled women may face physical barriers in leaving the abuser or may rely on them for care (Martin, 2014). Meanwhile, ethnic minority women make up 13 per cent of those seeking help on domestic violence, although they represent only 5 per cent of all women aged 15 years and older in Ireland. Barriers faced by migrant women in reporting abuse included economic dependence, isolation from support systems of family and community, and their legal status being dependent on the abuser (O'Conner, 2006).

Traveller women were 15 per cent of domestic violence service users, despite comprising 0.5 per cent of all women aged 15 years and over. Traveller women have reported discrimination from services and isolation from their community when reporting abuse.¹⁷ Prior to the pandemic, there was also a higher level of domestic abuse experienced by members of the LGBT community than among the general population (HSE, 2007), so they also may be at particular risk from domestic violence during the pandemic lockdowns.

Lone parents, who are mostly women, (CSO, 2016b) have faced a range of difficulties during the pandemic. Childcare and school closures impact them more than others who have greater opportunity to share care within the home. ESRI data also shows that the rate of lone parenthood is higher among essential workers (Redmond & McGuinness, 2020). Many of those in essential occupations cannot work from home, generating more childcare difficulties (and data shows that couples with children were more likely to work from home than lone parents) (*ibid.*). There is already an overrepresentation of lone parents in consistent poverty (One Family, 2017), and such difficulties with childcare may prevent lone parents from remaining in employment. If so, this would negatively impact their financial security, future labour market prospects and well-being.

Lone parents are also over-represented among homeless families. In September 2020, they were half of all homeless families, although they constitute one quarter of all families (One Family, 2021; Focus Ireland, 2019). However, the number of lone parent families in emergency homeless accommodation fell by a quarter during the first six months of 2020. This is attributed to fewer evictions and the availability of more private rental accommodation for social housing during the pandemic restrictions (Focus Ireland, 2020).

Other impacts of Covid-19 included some lone parents being asked not to shop with their children, which assumes that another adult from the same household is available to mind them. Some lone parents reported being questioned repeatedly before being able to enter stores (Pope & Cosgrove, 2020) or being turned away if they insisted on bringing their child with them. Many have the extra worry of wondering who would mind their children if they contracted Covid-19 (One Family, 2020).

Those with disabilities also are likely to have experienced compounded disadvantage. This affects both genders, with disability more common amongst males up to the age of 24, and more common among women from the ages of 25 and 59. From the age of 70 onwards, significantly higher proportions of disabled persons were female (CSO, 2016a). Closures of day care services and schools, and reductions in homecare affected individuals with a disability during the spring 2020 lockdown; while others have found their employment and access to transport severely restricted. The restrictions are difficult for those with intellectual disabilities to comprehend; and there were outbreaks of Covid-19, and associated deaths, in a number of residential care centres. However some supports have been

¹⁷ Women's Health Council (2009) *Translating Pain Into Action: A study of Gender-based Violence and Minority Ethnic Women in Ireland*

put in place, such as accessible guidance, online supports, summer education programmes, and childcare and schooling for a range of vulnerable children during the winter 2021 lockdown (NDA, 2020).

The impact of Covid-19 on older people living in residential care, who are mainly women, has also been strong. High rates of infection in nursing homes led to many deaths, while those who were not ill experienced stressful conditions due to the death of friends and the absence of familiar staff who were ill or quarantining. Restrictions on visitors during 2020 has reduced the quality of life of older people in these homes (HIQA, 2020). Negative impacts have also been experienced by residents' families, and staff.

For prisoners, rehabilitative activities may have been interrupted and contact with visitors has been moved online (Department of the Taoiseach, 2020b), changes which will have affected quality of life and future prospects. This affects mainly men, as 88 per cent of prisoners in Ireland are male (Irish Prisons, 2019). Rates of Covid-19 infection in prisons have however been low, at the time of writing (Deegan, 2020). This is related to screening, social distancing and quarantining measures put in place by the Irish Prison Service (Department of Justice and Equality, 2020).

Data on the impact of the pandemic on the LGBTI population is limited, although one survey of 300 participants showed that 93 per cent of young LGBTI+ people have been struggling with mental health during the pandemic. Some have had to move to households which do not accept their sexual orientation, and they also lack the support they would usually find in LGBTI clubs and venues which have been closed during the pandemic lockdowns. However, several such services have moved to provide on-line supports and interaction (Im, 2020).



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National Economic and Social Council Publications

No.	Title	Date	No.	Title	Date
			16.	Some Aspects of Finance for Owner-Occupied Housing	1976
1.	Report on the Economy in 1973 and the Prospects for 1974	1974	17.	Statistics for Social Policy	1976
2.	Comments on Capital Taxation Proposals	1974	18.	Population Projections 1973-86: The Implications for Education	1976
3.	The Economy in 1974 and Outlook for 1975	1974	19.	Rural Areas: Social Planning Problems	1976
4.	Regional Policy in Ireland: A Review	1975	20.	The Future of Public Expenditure	1976
5.	Population and Employment Projections: 1971-86	1975	21.	Report on Public Expenditure	1976
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