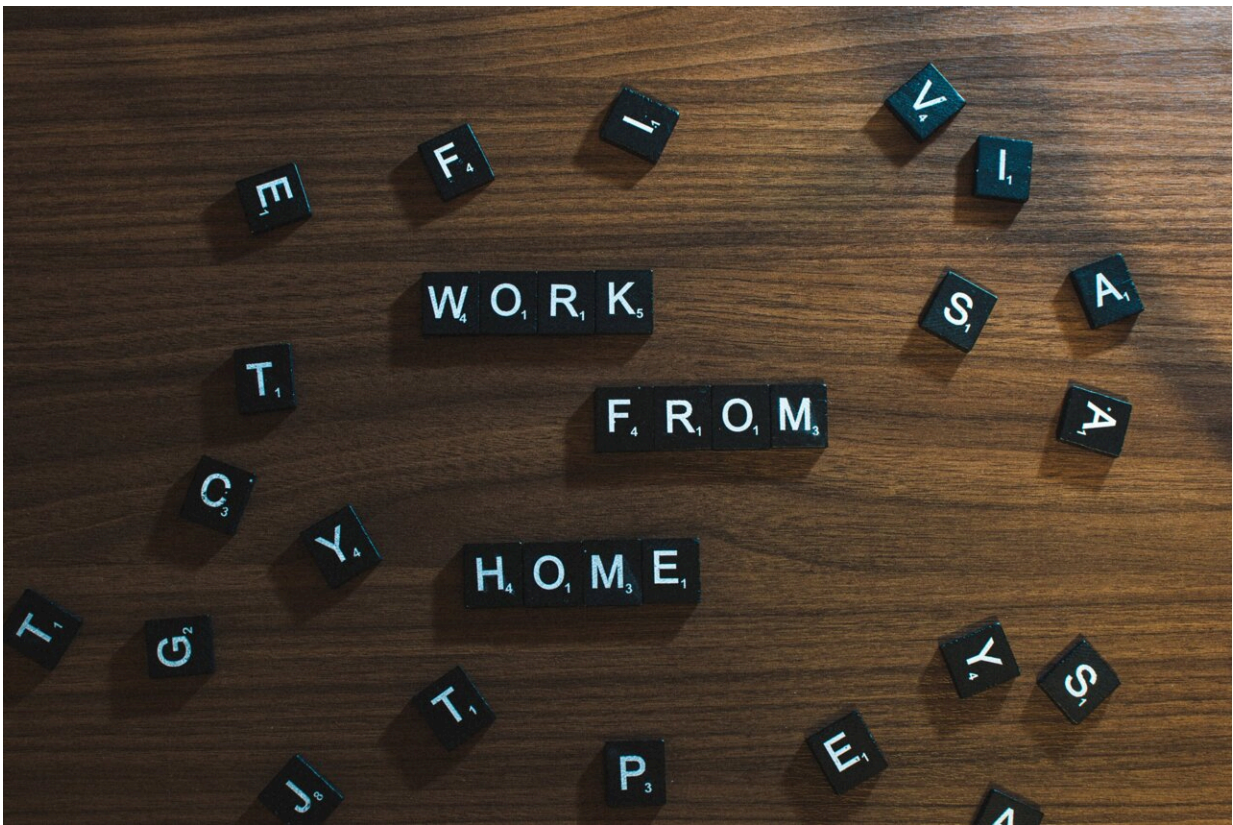


Differential effects of UK COVID-19 lockdowns tracked across social groups

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Work From home. Credit: Nelly Antoniadou, Unsplash, CC0
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As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in the UK, the virus and its related lockdown measures had unequal and varying impacts on people's

income, time use, and subjective well-being based on their gender, ethnicity and educational level, according to a new study of around 51,000 UK adults. The study is published this week in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Muzhi Zhou of the University of Oxford, UK, and colleagues.

Recent evidence has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic and related social and economic measures, such as physical distancing and business closure, have differential impacts on various social groups. These impacts were studied in the early phases of COVID-19 but little is known about the longer-term impacts and how the impacts might have changed since the first [lockdown](#) in the UK.

In the new study, Zhou and colleagues used data from the first eight waves of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) COVID study and the preceding two waves (2017/2018 and 2018/2019) of the UKHLS main survey. This household panel survey covers a representative sample of 51,000 adults aged 16 and above, from approximately 40,000 households. The sample analyzed includes individuals between the ages of 20 and 65 who participated in the UKHLS main study and at least one of the eight waves of the COVID study.

When the pandemic started, there was a clear reduction in average earnings and hours worked per week (among individuals who worked), an increase in weekly housework hours, and an increase in levels of distress. However, these effects differed between men and women, across ethnicities, and between degree and non-degree holders. During the first lockdown, for instance, the decline in paid [work hours](#) was smaller for [female workers](#)—explained in part by a higher proportion of women working in key sectors—but men's paid [work time](#) recovered faster than women's after the first lockdown. The initial growth in distress levels was much higher for women than men in the first month of the lockdown, but as women's subjective wellbeing recovered, men's

distress levels began to rise. With respect to earnings, BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) people were more negatively affected than white participants, with an earnings gap that persisted even after lockdown restrictions eased.

The authors write that the new data provides important insights into whether inequalities in changes in income, time use and wellbeing are likely to be long lasting or temporary. It remains uncertain when and whether earnings, working patterns, [family life](#) and wellbeing will return to pre-pandemic levels, they say.

The authors add: "One pandemic, multiple lockdowns, and diverging experiences."

More information: Zhou M, Kan M-Y (2021) The varying impacts of COVID-19 and its related measures in the UK: A year in review. *PLoS ONE* 16(9): e0257286. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257286

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