

# Unique Challenges for Caregivers:

Insights from a qualitative study of STEMM academic women

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Caregivers Working in Science Engineering & Medicine

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**CONSENSUS STUDY REPORT**

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19  
ON THE CAREERS OF WOMEN IN ACADEMIC  
SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE**



# Overview

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- Identify unique overlooked caregiver challenges
- Share proposed patterns in coping responses
- Summarize recommendations from the broader literature

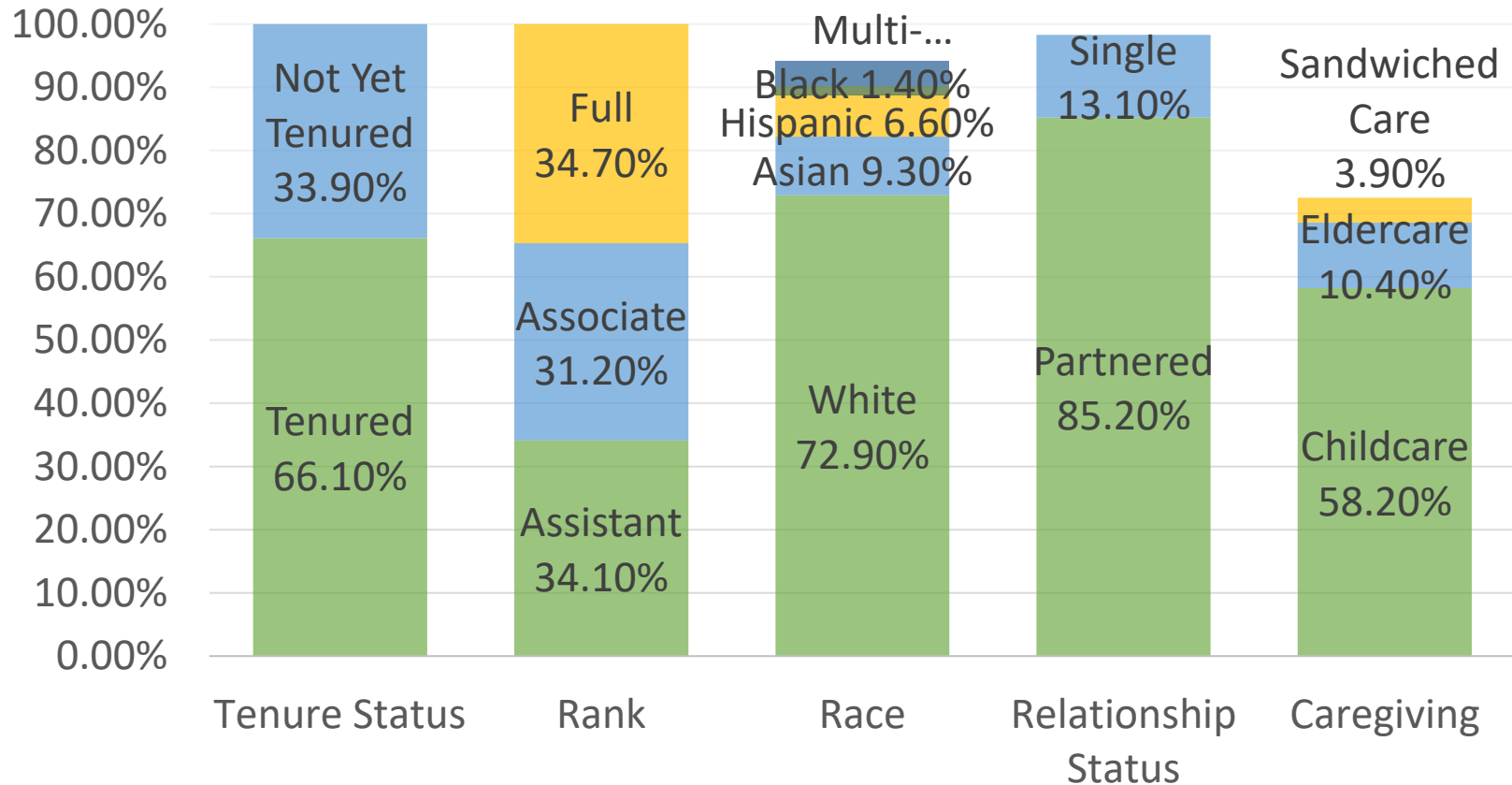


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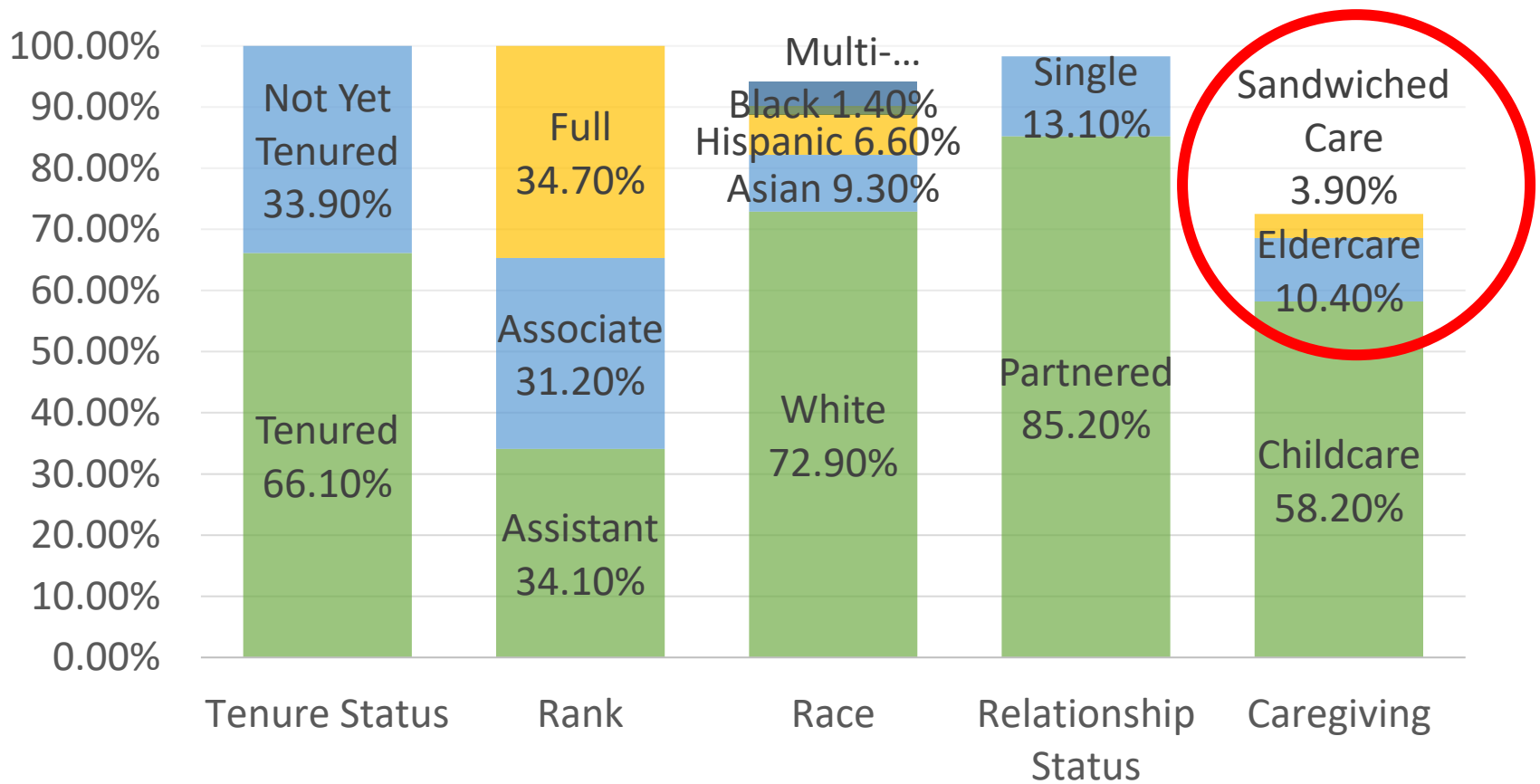
*“I think there's...this societal aspect of being female in STEM that I haven't even fully unpacked to understand how it impacts me on a day to day basis... Male mentors have advised me that it's okay if I shift my priorities to focus on my family right now and I let other balls drop, but that doesn't feel right. I've worked my whole career to prove that I belong, and working hard at my job is continuing to feed that dialog. Additionally, I love this job (not during the pandemic, but before). This job is part of my identity and who I am, so telling me to shift and refocus my priorities is devaluing my identity and my sense of self in many ways.” Assistant Professor (#308)*



# STEM Academic Women from 202 U.S. Universities (N = 763)



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# Non-Elder Adult Care

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- “It's not eldercare, but care of my adult developmentally disabled son. His care is more difficult because there are not as many services...”  
-Full professor (#203)
- “I don't do elder-care, but my husband is partly disabled and I help him with some tasks, such as driving, lifting and tasks that require fine motor skills.”  
-Associate professor (#773)



# Elder Care (often distant)

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- “I am the sole caregiver for parents w/ chronic conditions in different state”
  - Assistant Professor (#310)
- “While my mother and my aunt do not live with, us rather than live hundreds of miles away, I manage their grocery, bill paying, and help them get more online to become a little more self-sufficient.”
  - Assistant Professor (#523)
- "My father is terminally ill in another state. I cannot fly so the drive is 8 hours each way. Trying manage care, his affairs, and the constantly travelling is exhausting"
  - Associate Professor (#226)





# Under-Examined Caregiving Issues

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- Caring for other adults
  - Disabled adults (siblings, spouses, adult offspring)
  - Eldercare (parents, grandparents)
  
- Differences from conventional child care (Bardoel, 2019)
  - Psychological, emotional
  - Logistical
  
- Less established organizational responses
  - Acknowledgement
  - Policies
  - Cultural differences



# Overall Pattern Across Caregivers

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<b>WORK DEMANDS</b>	<b>Increase or No Support</b>	Overwhelmed	Family Compensates
	<b>Decrease or Have Support</b>	Work Compensates	Flourishing
		<b>Increase and/or No Support</b>	<b>Decrease or Have Support</b>
		<b>NON-WORK DEMANDS</b>	



# Professional Image Management

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- Concealing

“Research leaders on large projects do not acknowledge anything has changed with timetables and expectations. If you can't keep up, people who have fewer responsibilities at home will be able to do it. So I do not talk about it either.” (#290)

- Revealing

“I am more transparent than usual about how my family roles contribute to distraction or lack of availability.” (#1123)



# Role Sacrifice

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- Trading off

“I am prioritizing the mental health of my children as best I can and letting things get turned in late for work. Later than I ever have before.” (#490)

- Psychological Role Withdrawal

“I am currently burnt out and disconnected from academia. I think I need to disconnect in order to focus on what matters, my family, or I will fall into a depression because I feel inadequate in my faculty role.” (#881)

- Behavioral Role Exit

The expectations were so high that I had to agree to my children LEAVING my home (80%-20% time split) to be at their father's (20%-80% time split). I have sacrificed my family for work.”



# Work Contextual Factors

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- Structural support

“There was a reduction in meetings, which was appreciated.” (#883)

- Social support

“Everyone at every level is very understanding. No one minds when my kids interrupt a meeting.” (#842)



# Revealing for Advocacy

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- ***“Prior to the pandemic, I worked to make my personal life as invisible as possible to my work-life. I began the pandemic in the same spirit (use of virtual backgrounds, trying to schedule all meetings at times when my partner had the children out of sight/sound). **Eventually I realized this was a disservice to my community.** The reality is that with schools closed, my attention is split in order to assist them. Making my children ‘unseen’ does not make their needs go away and **hiding the pressure that female scientists and engineers are under ... is a disservice.**”***
- ***“In the interest of smashing the patriarchy, I elected to attend without a virtual background.”***



# Organizational Interventions

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- Ensure sufficient infrastructure
- Acknowledge employees' challenges
- Plan for “as-needs”/emergency care
- Focus on/clarify essential deliverables
- Consider workload reduction strategies
- Develop a protocol/plan for some on-site workers
- Explore child-care or other support options
- Respect employees' boundaries
- Consider multiple stakeholders in granting accommodations
- Role-model healthy work patterns





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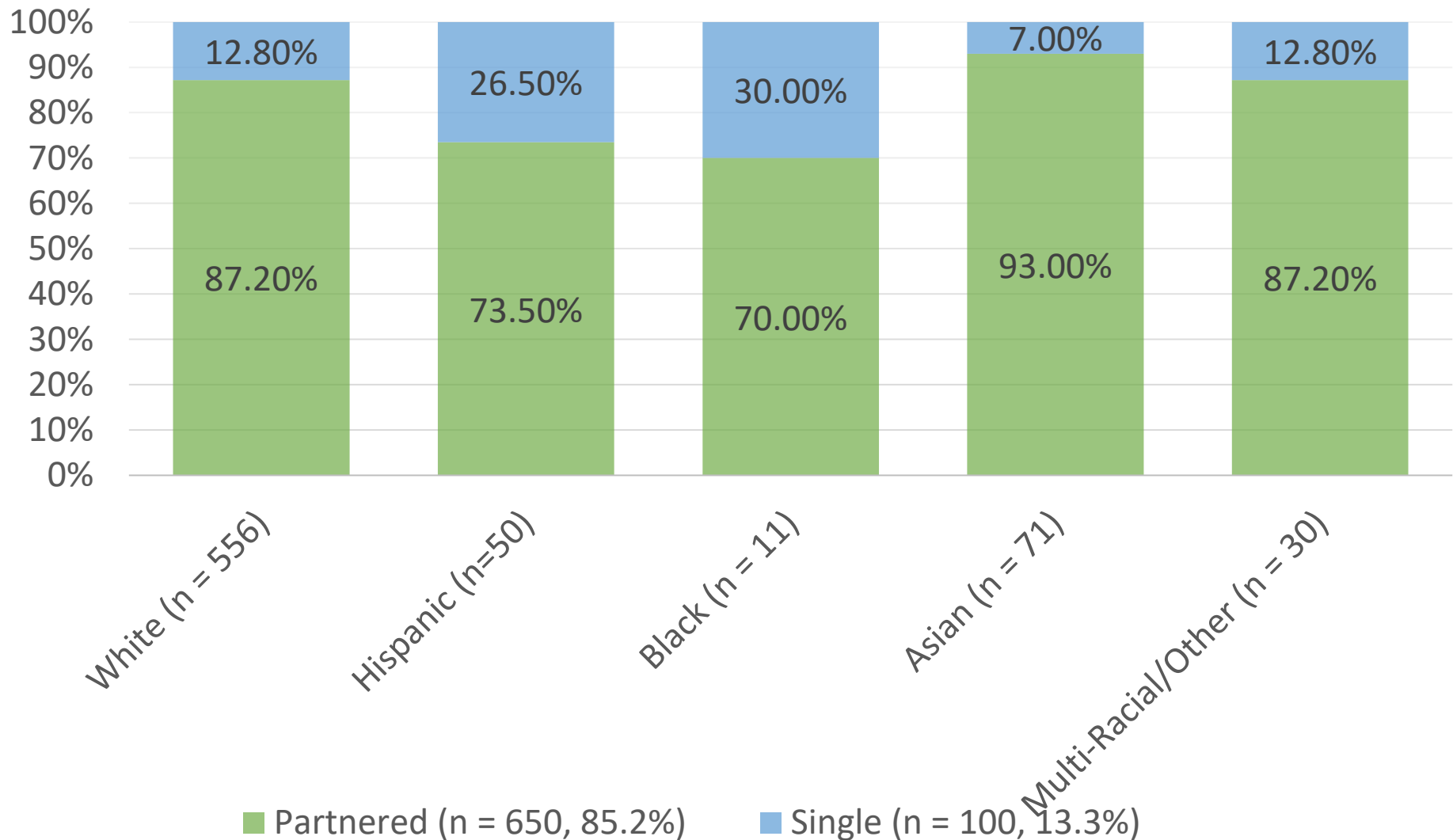
FISHER COLLEGE OF BUSINESS



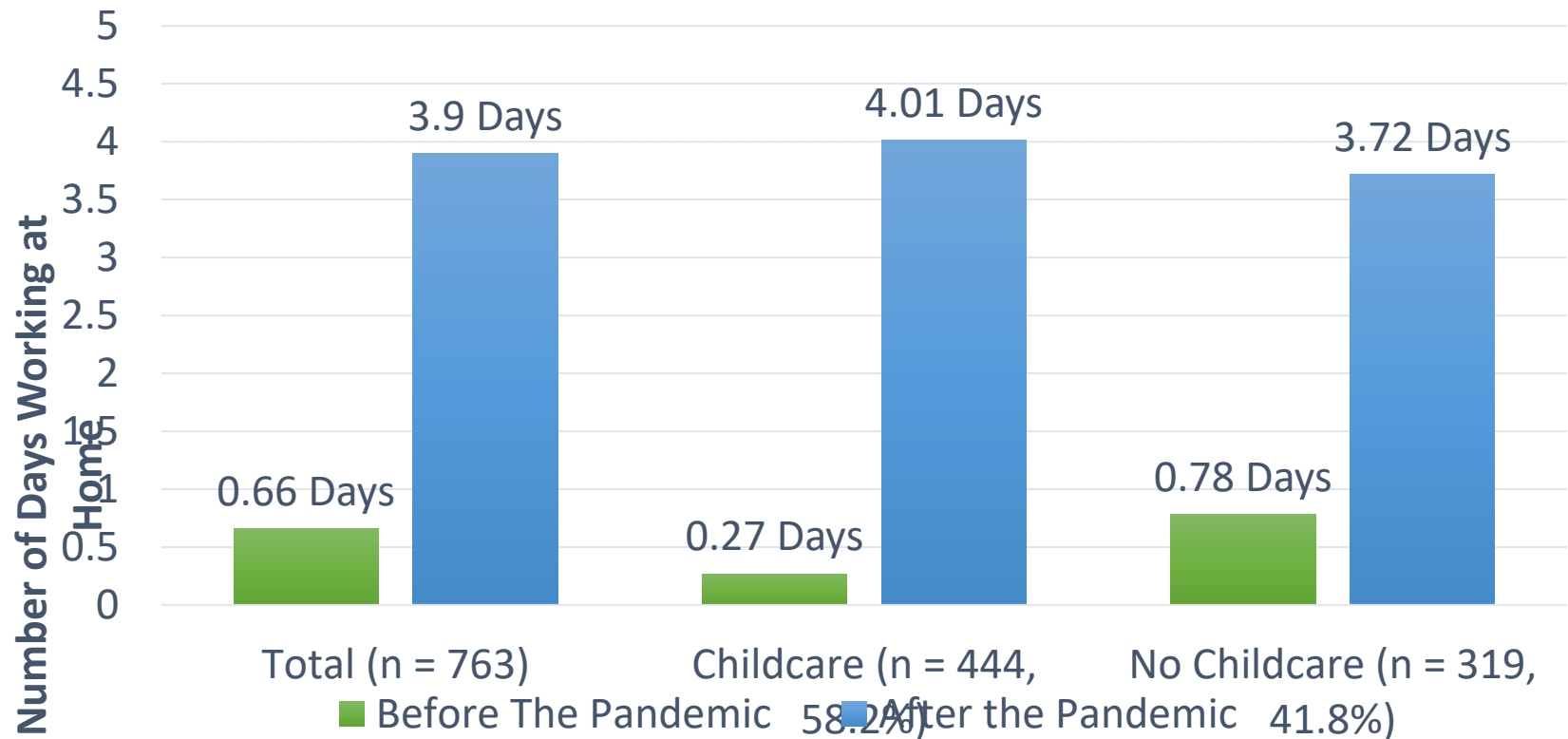
# Data Slides if needed



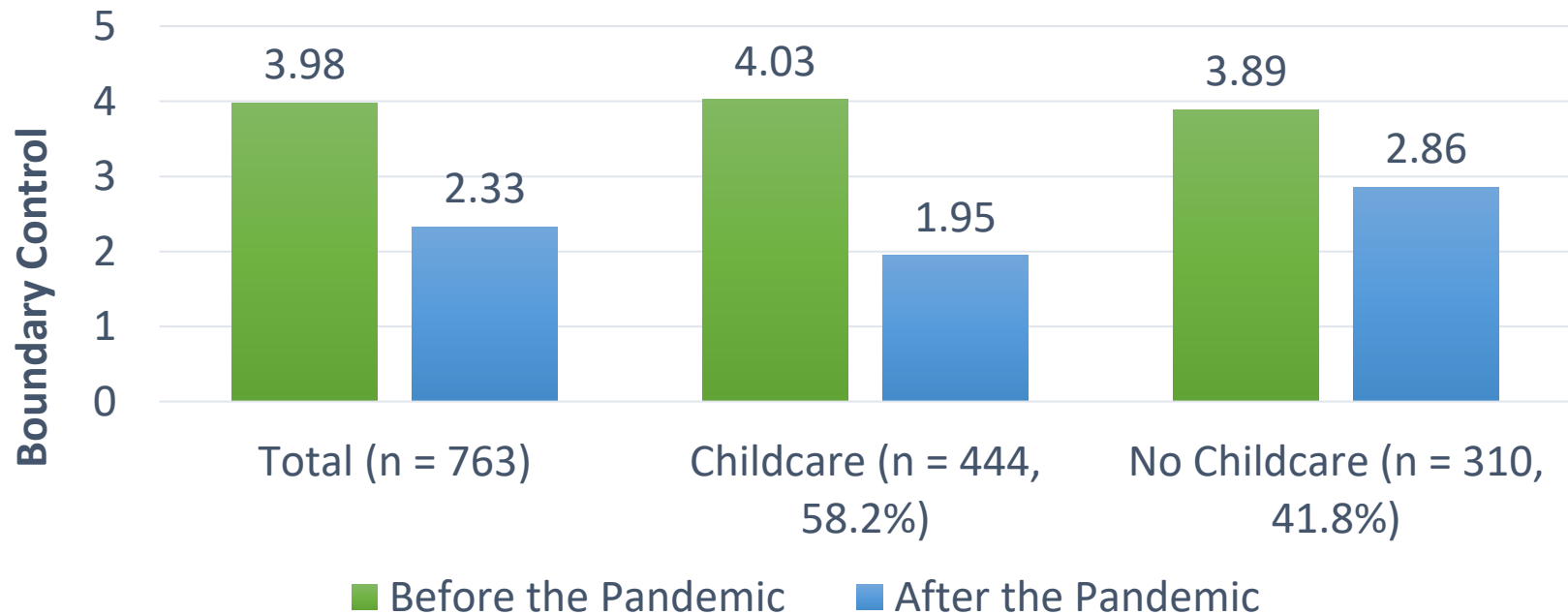
# Relationship Status by Ethnicity (%)



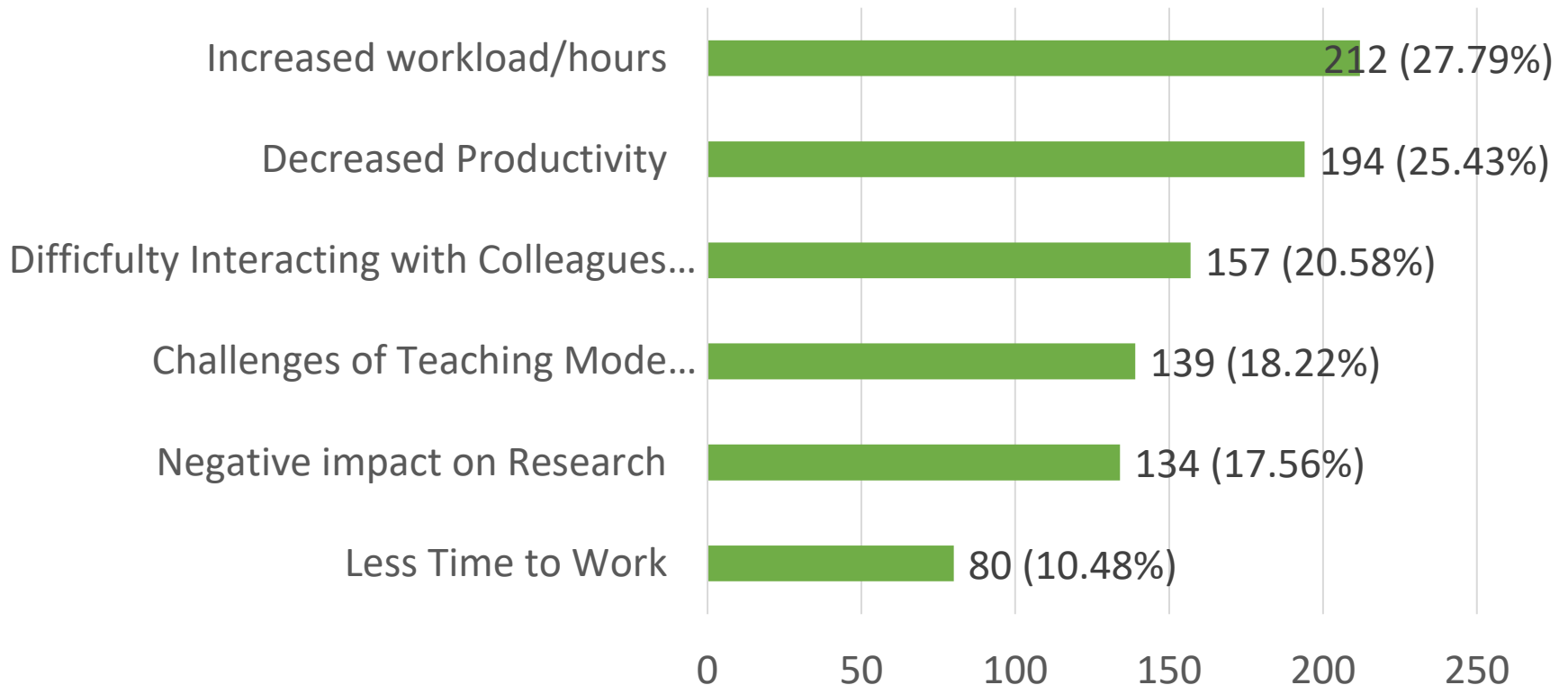
# The Impact of Childcare Responsibilities on the Changes in the Number of Days Working at Home Before and After the Pandemic



# The Impact of Childcare Responsibilities on the Changes in Boundary Control Before and After the Pandemic

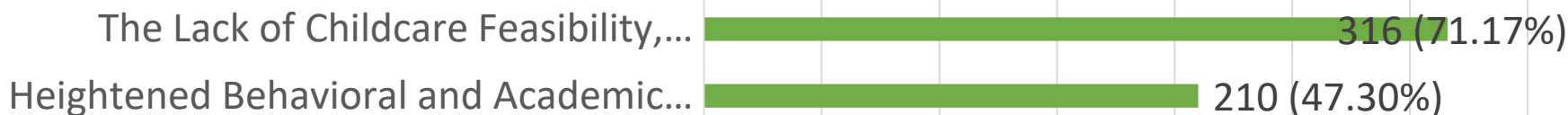


# The Negative Impact of COVID-19 on Work (n = 763)

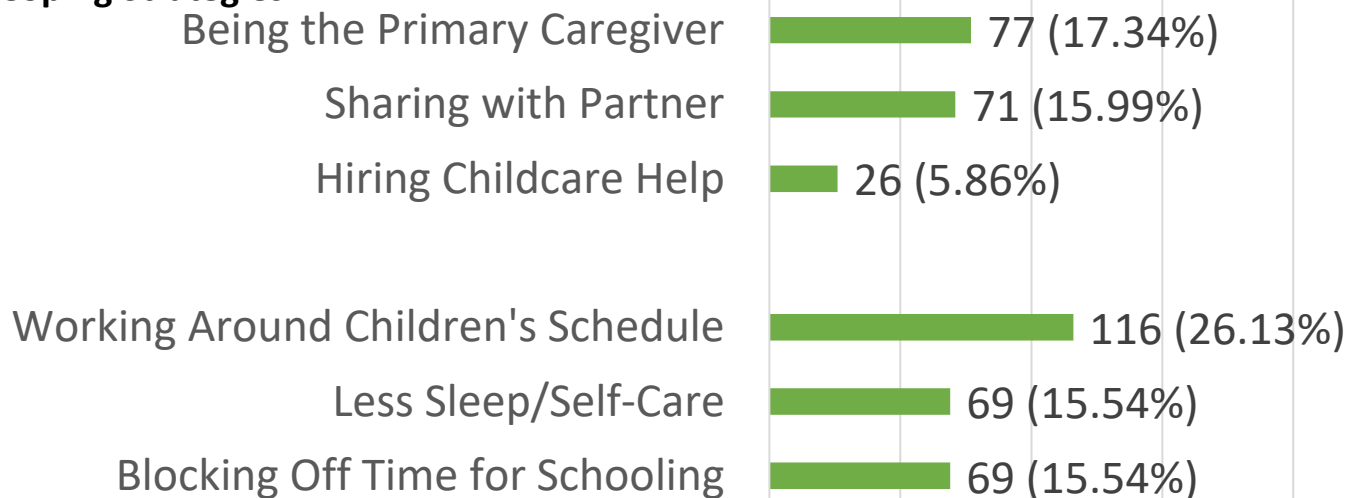


# The Impact of COVID-19 on Childcare (N = 444)

## Challenges (n = 316, 71.17%)



## Coping Strategies



0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350



# The Impact of COVID-19 on Eldercare (N = 79)

## Challenges (n = 45, 56.96%)

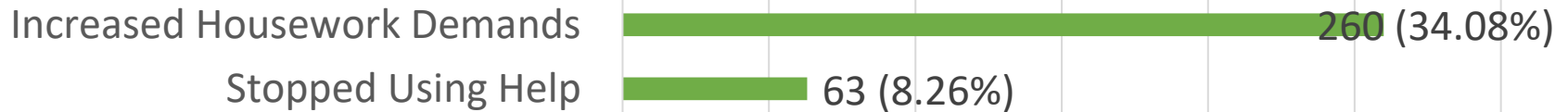


## Coping Strategies

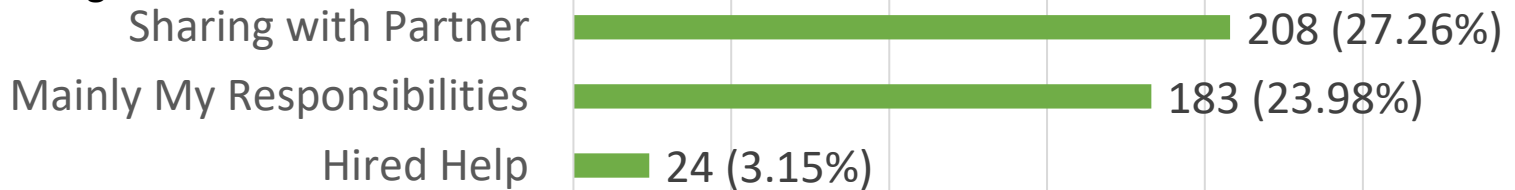


# The Impact of COVID-19 on Housework Demands (N = 763)

## Challenges (n = 260, 34.08%)



## Coping Strategies





# Boundary Management Tactics

## Spatial Boundary (n = 343, 44.95%)

Separate Work Space



Video Meeting Background to Protect...



## Temporal Boundary (n = 250, 32.77%)

Creating Schedule/Cordinating with...



Recovery Time



## Technological Boundary (n = 180, 23.91%)

Email Boundary Management



Separate Device

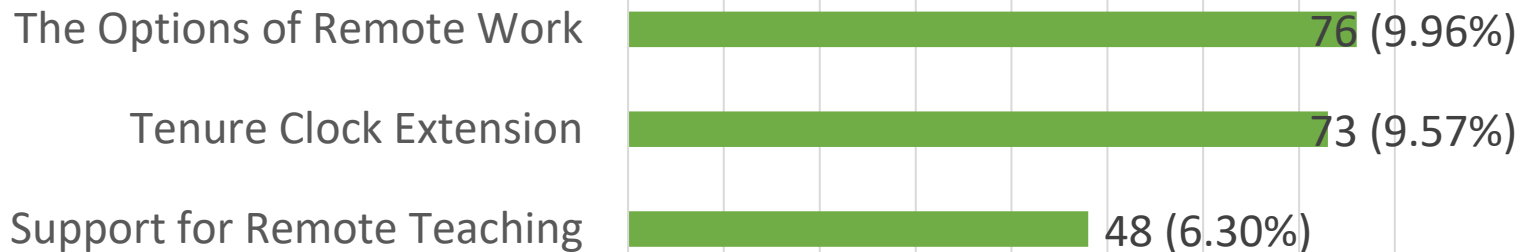


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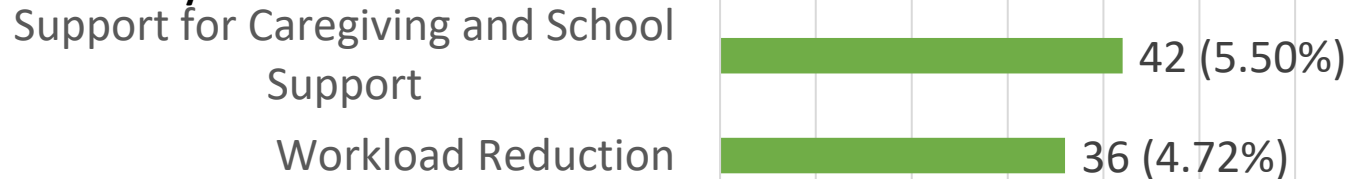


# Post-COVID University Support (N = 763)

## How Universities are Helping



## What Faculty Want



# EXTRA



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# Research Question

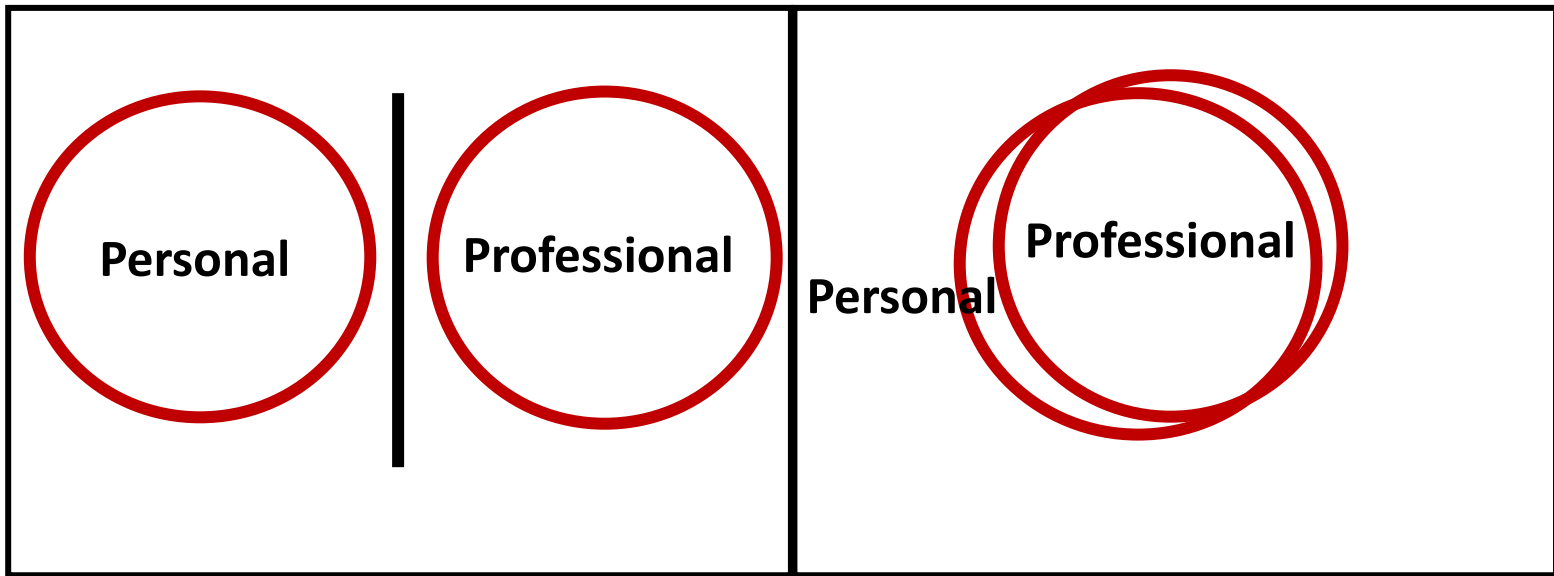
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- How did women in STEM adapt to disrupted work-nonwork boundaries during the COVID-19 pandemic and how were work contextual features associated with these adaptations?
- *During the COVID-19 pandemic, what are you doing differently to manage your work and family roles?*



# ...Clear

## Personal-Professional Boundary



**Segmentation**

**Integration**



# For Employees

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- What is your style/preference?
  - Integrator
  - Segmentor
- Set temporal and spatial boundaries
- Dress for work
- Disclose needs/challenges
- Consider the value of your nonwork obligations, carry over the resources

