

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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The National Academies of
SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE

CONSENSUS STUDY REPORT

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



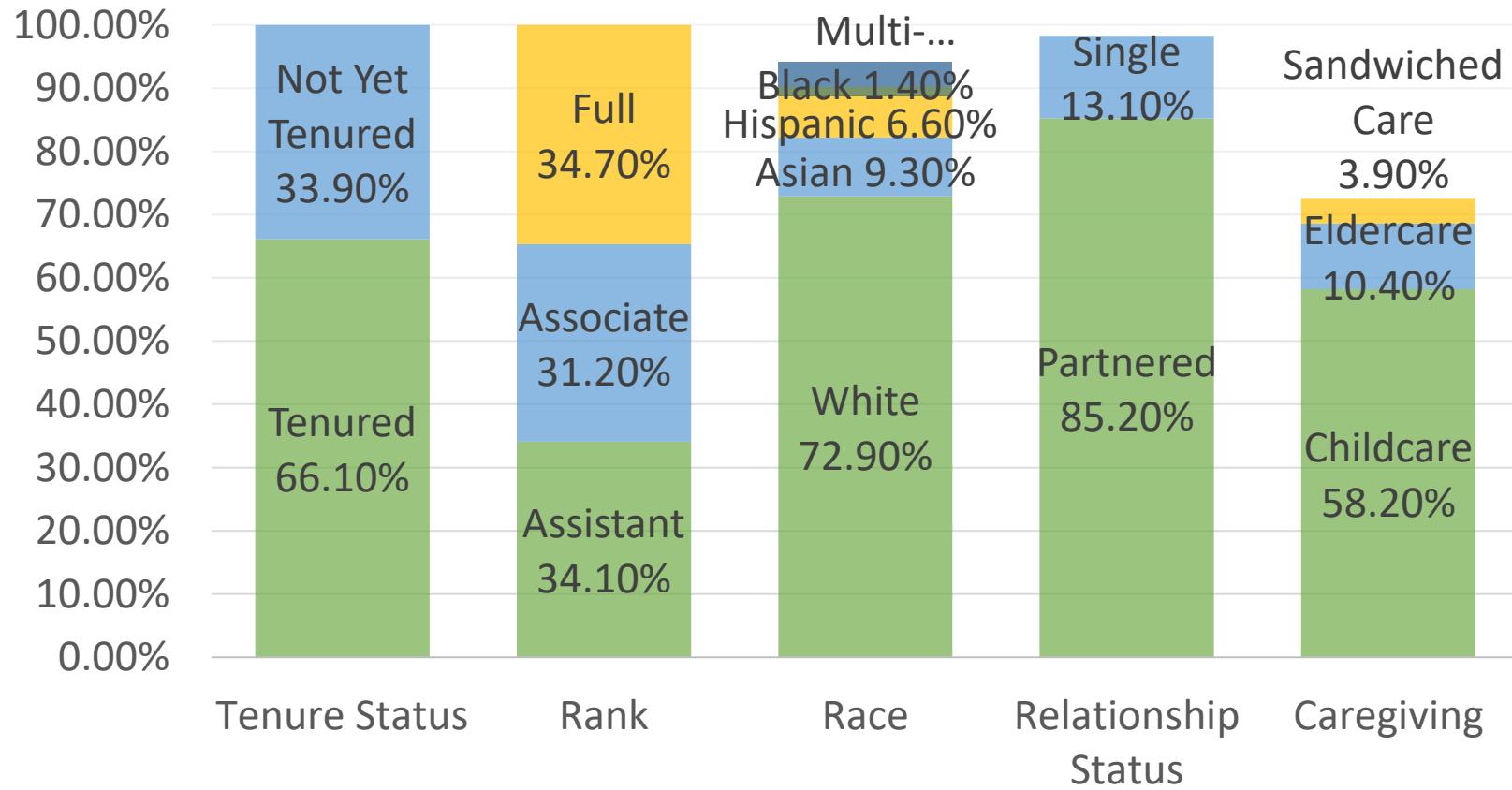
Overview

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

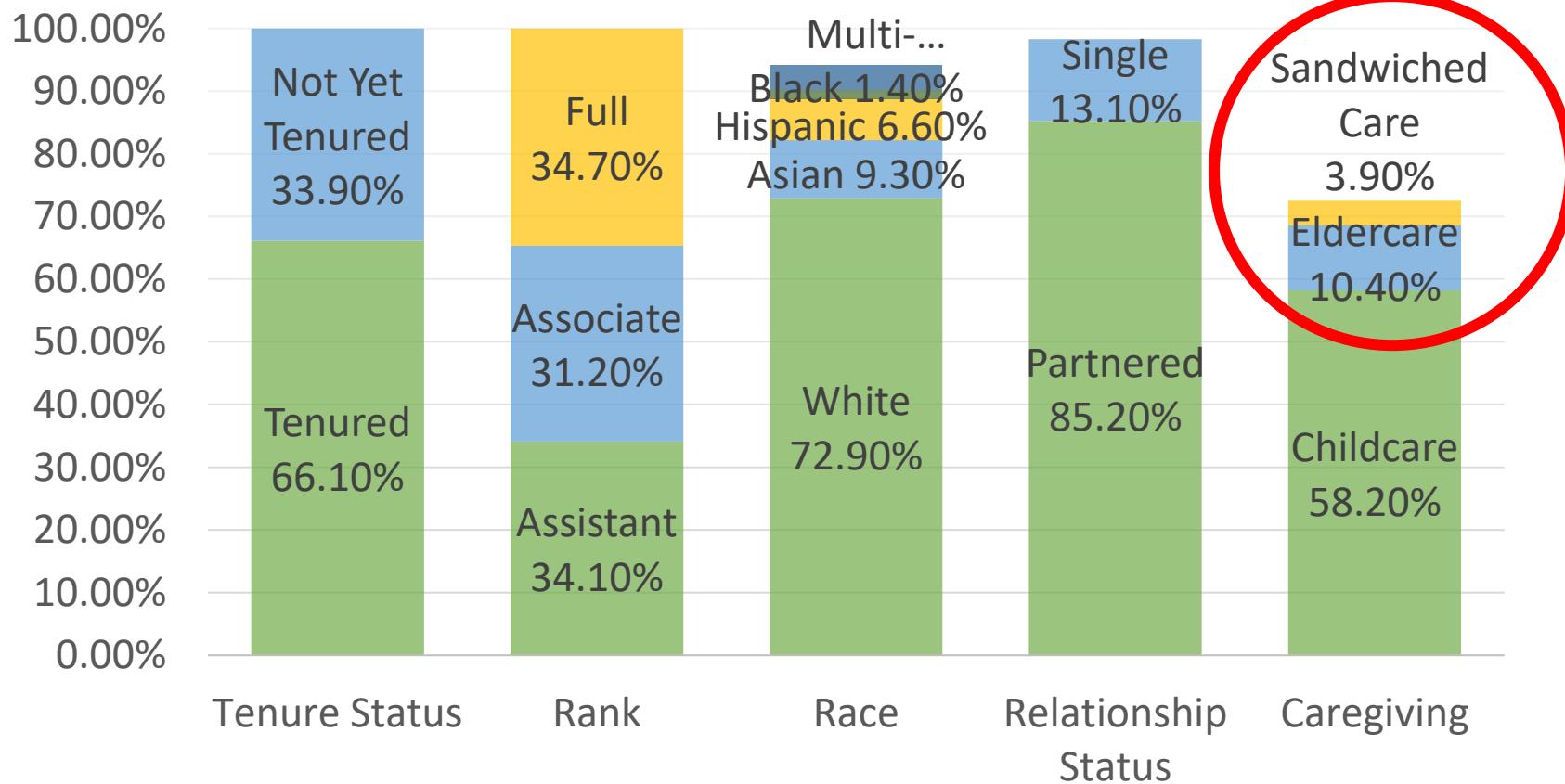
“I think there's...this societal aspect of being female in STEM that I haven't even fully unpacked to understand how it impacts me on a day to day basis... Male mentors have advised me that it's okay if I shift my priorities to focus on my family right now and I let other balls drop, but that doesn't 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

- “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)

- “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

- 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

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



Professional Image Management

■ 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

- 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

- 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

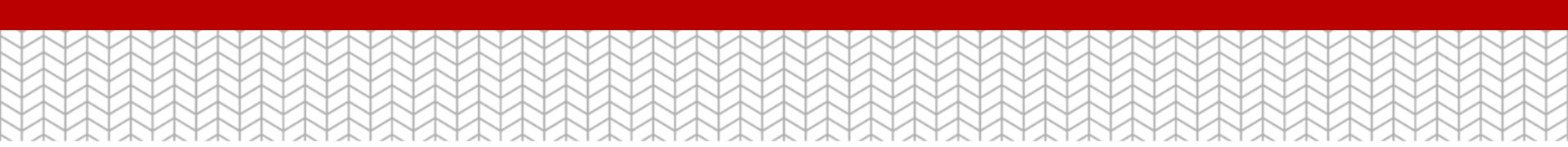
- ***“Prior to the pandemic, I worked to make my personal life as invisible as possible to my work-life.*** I began the pandemic in the same spirit (use of virtual backgrounds, trying to schedule all meetings at times when my partner had the children out of sight/sound). ***Eventually I realized this 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

- 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

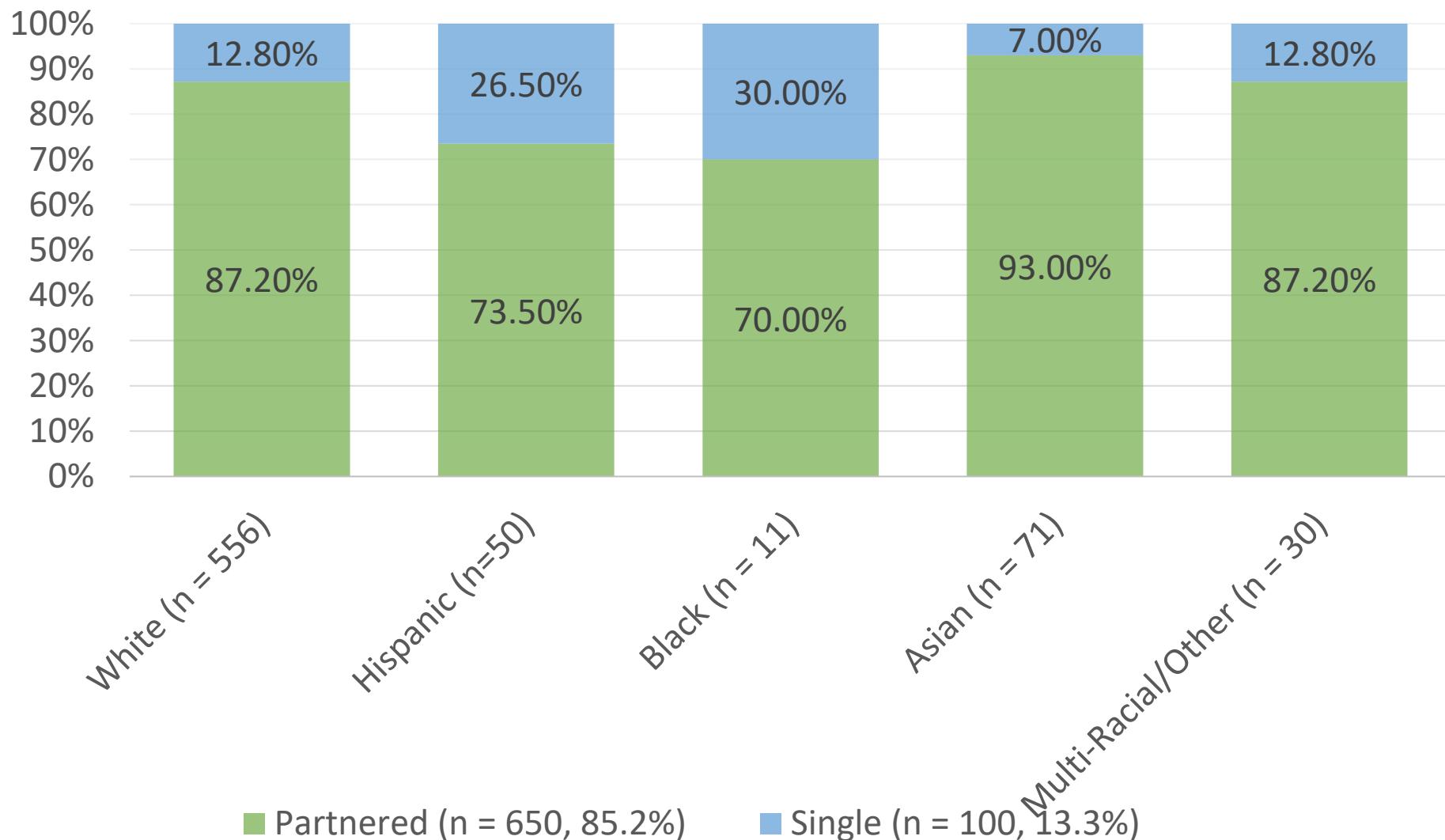


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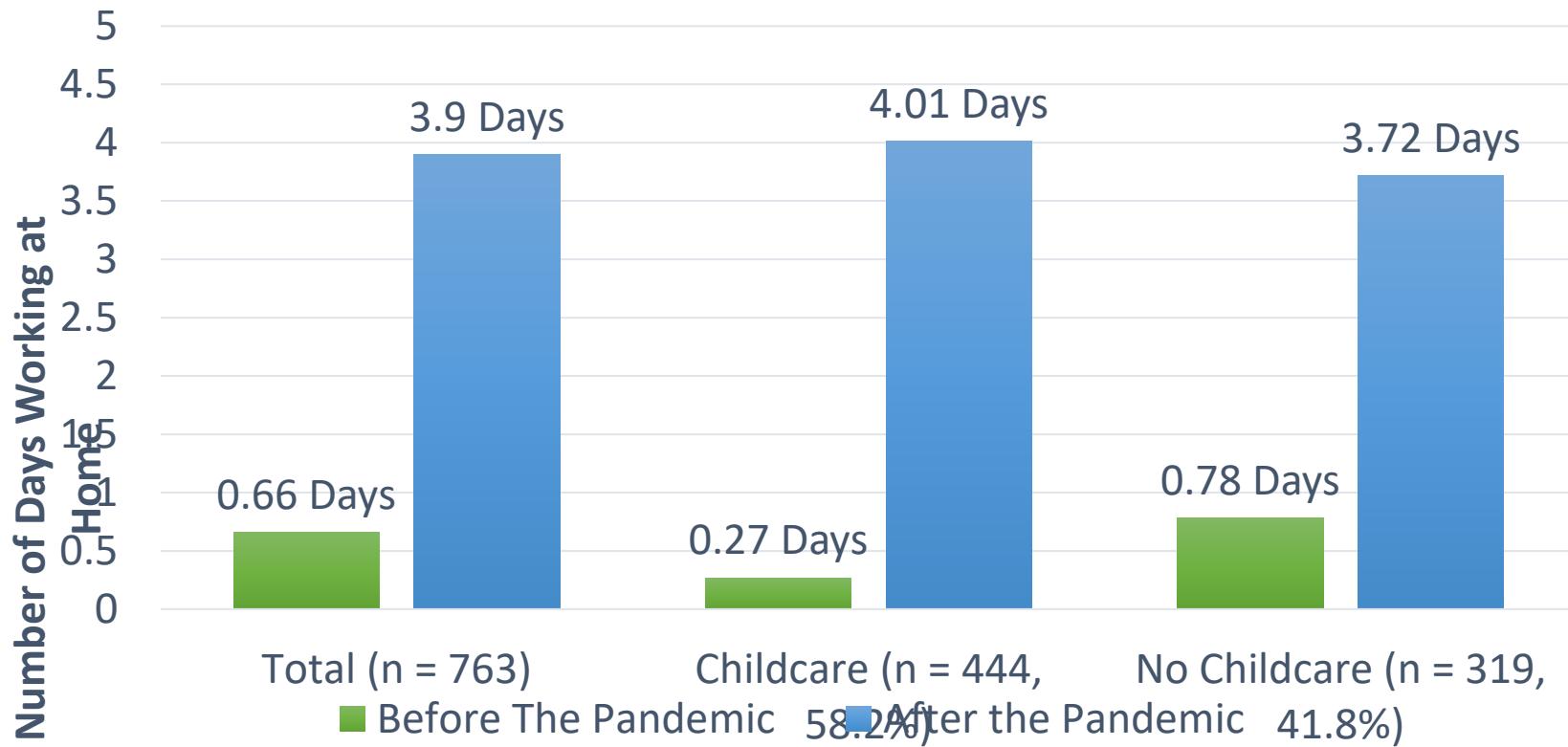


Data Slides if needed

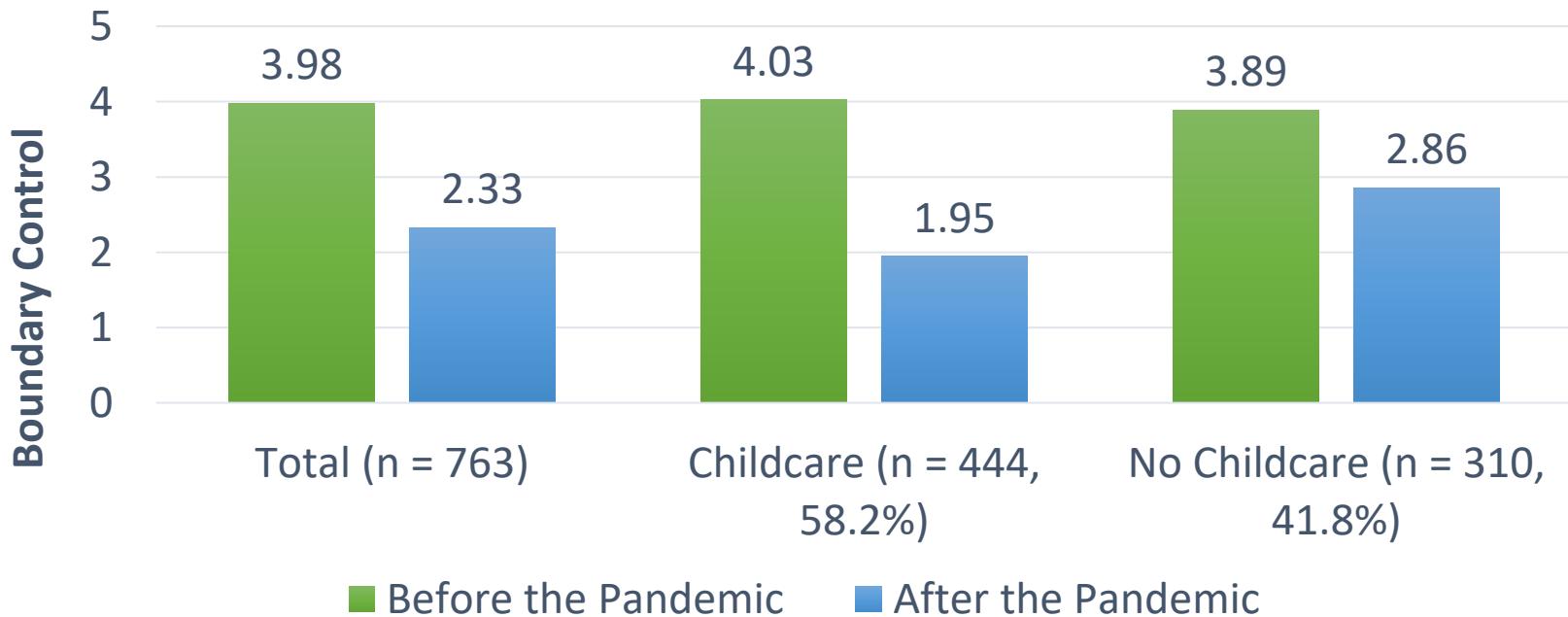
Relationship Status by Ethnicity (%)



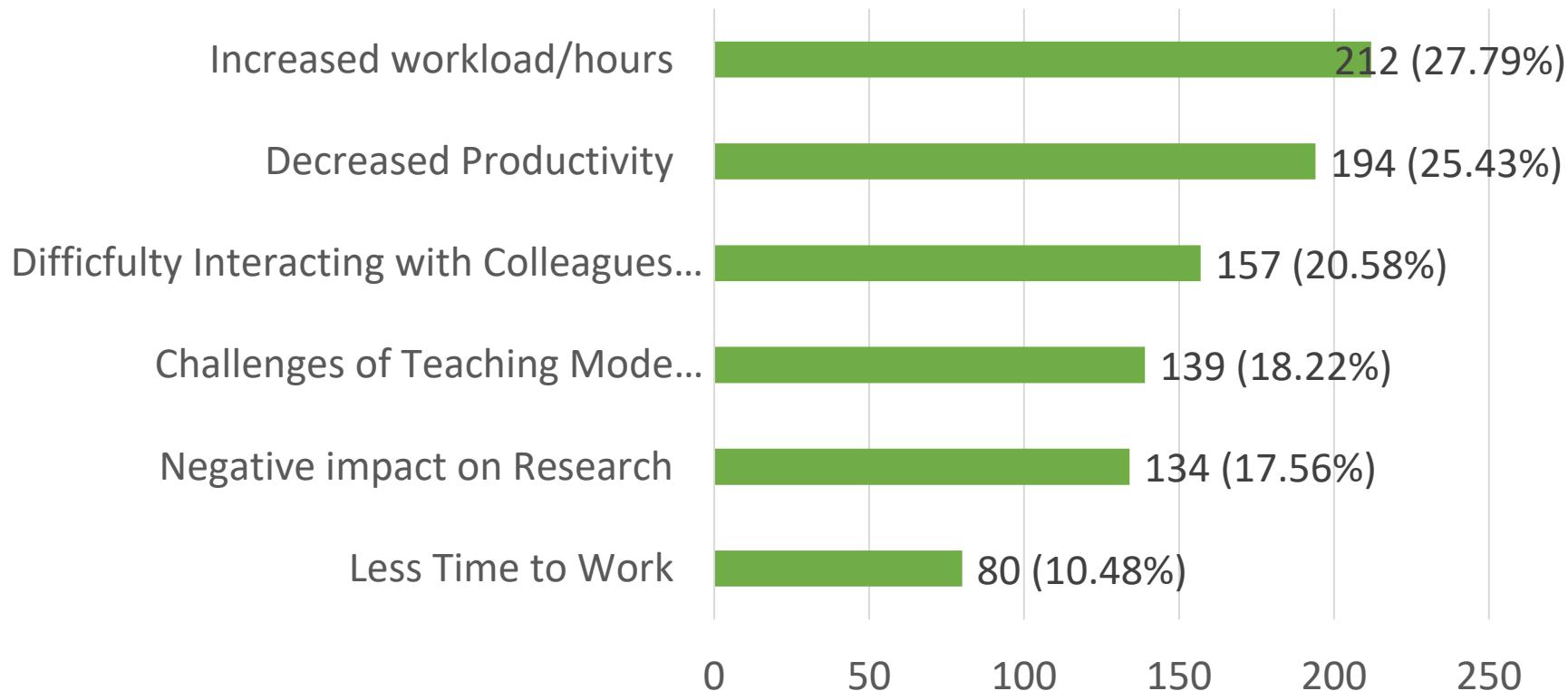
The Impact of Childcare Responsibilities on the Changes in the Number of Days Working at Home Before and After the Pandemic



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

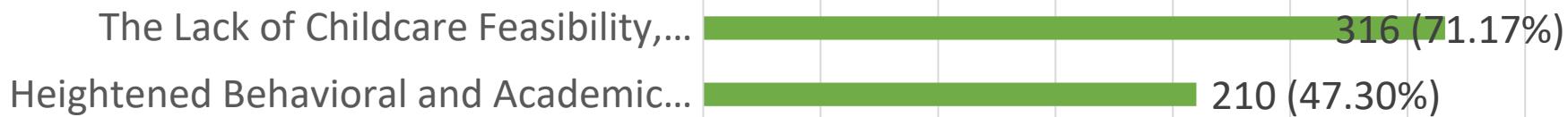


The Negative Impact of COVID-19 on Work (n = 763)

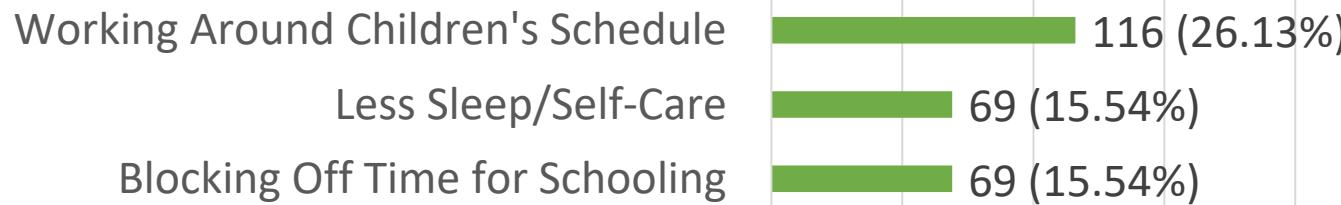
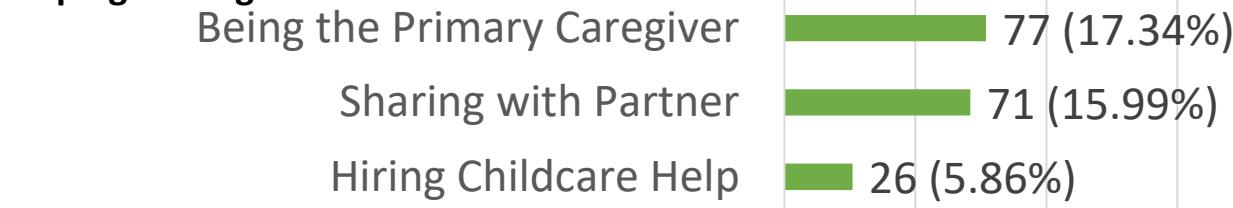


The Impact of COVID-19 on Childcare (N = 444)

Challenges (n = 316, 71.17%)



Coping Strategies



0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350

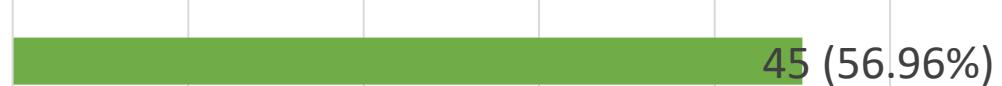


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The Impact of COVID-19 on Eldercare (N = 79)

Challenges (n = 45, 56.96%)

Increased Eldercare Demands  45 (56.96%)

Not being able to Visit  (22.78%)

Coping Strategies

Providing Emotional Support  15 (18.99%)

Providing Domestic Support  11 (13.92%)

0 10 20 30 40 50



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

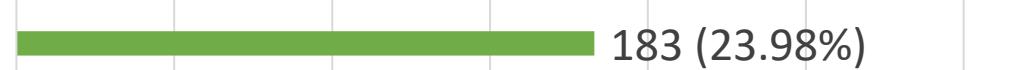
Challenges (n = 260, 34.08%)

Increased Housework Demands  260 (34.08%)

Stopped Using Help  63 (8.26%)

Coping Strategies

Sharing with Partner  208 (27.26%)

Mainly My Responsibilities  183 (23.98%)

Hired Help  24 (3.15%)

Lowering Expectations/Neglecting  53 (6.95%)

Delivery/Online Shopping  34 (4.46%)

0 50 100 150 200 250 300



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Boundary Management Tactics

Spatial Boundary (n = 343, 44.95%)

Separate Work Space  261

Video Meeting Background to Protect...  148

Temporal Boundary (n = 250, 32.77%)

Creating Schedule/Cordinating with...  123

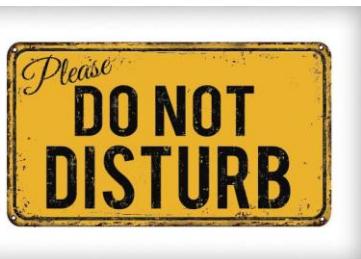
Recovery Time  143

Technological Boundary (n = 180, 23.91%)

Email Boundary Management  148

Separate Device  47

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Post-COVID University Support (N = 763)

How Universities are Helping

The Options of Remote Work 76 (9.96%)

Tenure Clock Extension 73 (9.57%)

Support for Remote Teaching 48 (6.30%)

What Faculty Want

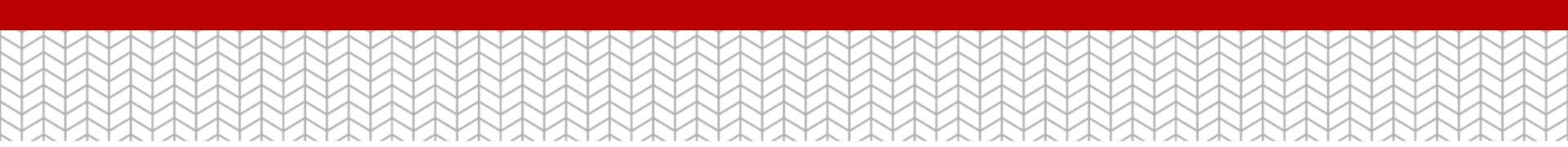
Support for Caregiving and School Support 42 (5.50%)

Support

Workload Reduction 36 (4.72%)

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80





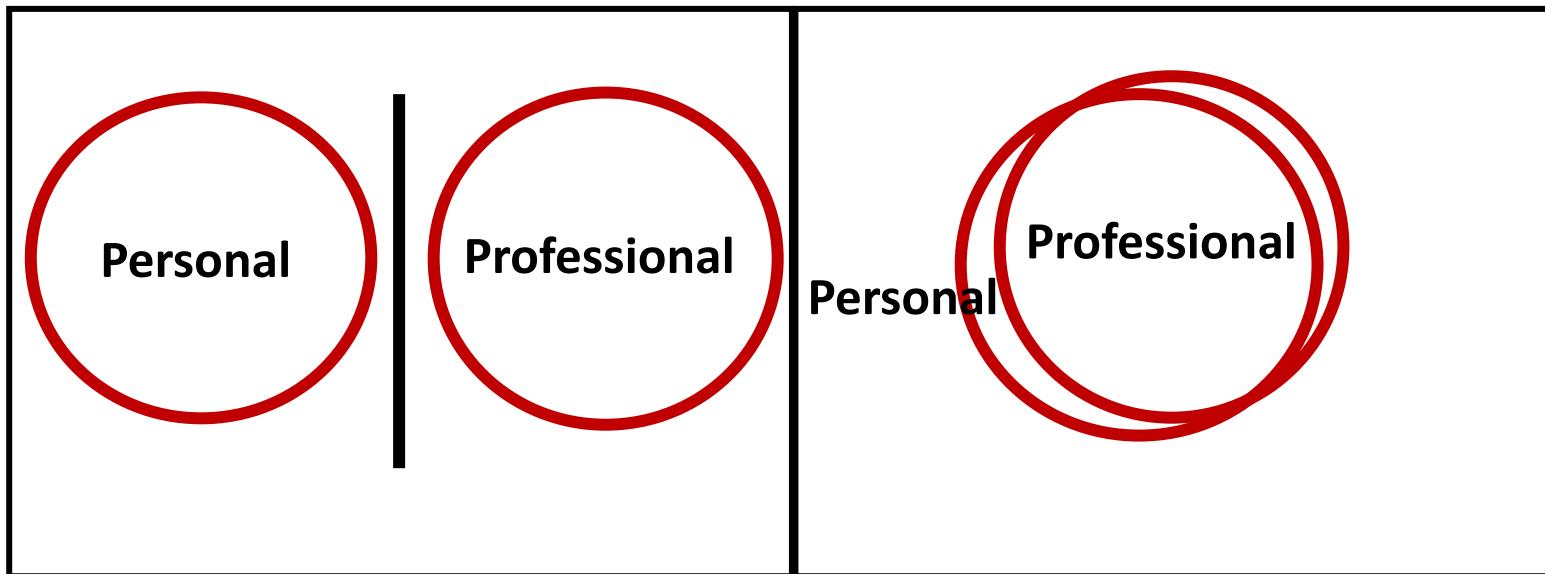
EXTRA

Research Question

- 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



For Employees

- 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

