

# Less Work, More Labor: School Closures and Work Hours during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Austria

Lisa Hanzl & Miriam Rehm\*

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent increase in caregiving demands threaten to reverse decades of progress in integrating women into the labor market. This paper explores the gendered impact of school and day care closures on paid work hours during the COVID-19 pandemic in Austria. We use data from the Austrian Corona Panel Project (ACPP), which covers the period from March 2020 to March 2021, augmented by unique data on school closures for under 14-year olds, as well as data on school and workplace closures from the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OCGRT) data base in order to study the differential adjustments in work hours by gender and parental status over the course of the pandemic. Austria is a particularly interesting case for investigating the links between school closures and the labor supply, since school closures constituted one of the main pillars of COVID-19 pandemic policies, and these in turn were highly volatile. Descriptive data show that both women and men severely cut their working time especially in the first months of the pandemic in spring 2020. However, after work hours stabilized around July 2020, mothers reduced work hours more than fathers in periods with mandatory school closures. Controlling for socio-economic as well as work time variables, an OLS model shows that mothers reduced their work time *on top* of being female and a parent. A fixed-effects model indicates that women in general reduced their working hours more than men during school closures. This effect is predominantly driven by mothers, whose weekly work hours fell by an economically and statistically significant 22 percent on average, or approximately 5.8 hours, when schools were closed. In contrast, we cannot confirm a statistically significant change in work hours for fathers. Since we also find an effect of school closures on the work time of childless women and men, the variable may in fact capture indirect policy effects and thus represent the tightness of COVID-19 measures. This hypothesis is confirmed by a robustness check: School closures for over 14 year-olds now only affect childless individuals, whereas school closures for under 14 year-olds mainly affect their mothers. The results are robust to model choice. Finally, a logit model for the labor force participation shows robust gender and parental effects, but fails to confirm the effect of school closures. This may be due to the pandemic policy in Austria, which was aimed at maintaining employment mainly through short-time work. These findings suggest that (post-) pandemic policy should focus on counteracting this potential weaker labor market attachment of mothers, in particular by restoring safe and reliable school service.

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\*Contact: lisa.hanzl@uni-due.de