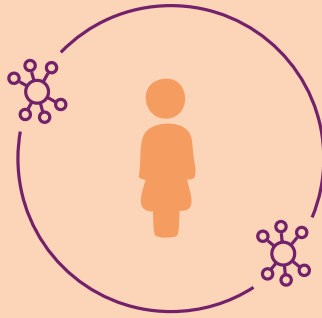


# COVID-19 AND



# THE DOUBLE BURDEN ON WOMEN IN JORDAN 2020



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands

KING HUSSEIN FOUNDATION  مؤسسة الملك الحسين  
مركز المعلومات والبحوث  
INFORMATION AND RESEARCH CENTER



**WE4L Hivos**  
people unlimited

## **INFORMATION AND RESEARCH CENTER – KING HUSSEIN FOUNDATION**

The Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) was initially launched in 1996 as part of the National Task Force for Children. Today, the IRCKHF mobilizes knowledge for positive social change. IRCKHF promotes the welfare of children, youth, women, families, communities, and vulnerable groups by providing objective, multidisciplinary research and analysis to practitioners and policymakers in Jordan and the region, enabling effective socio-economic planning and decision making.

For more information, see: [www.irckhf.org](http://www.irckhf.org).

## **HIVOS**

HIVOS was founded in 1968, inspired by humanist values. The founders held the conviction that development work should be secular, as true cooperation presumes respect for differing beliefs. HIVOS believes that human life in its many forms is valuable, and that people are filled with potential. Living a life in freedom and dignity, with respect for each other and the planet, leads to greater individual well-being and fair, vibrant societies.

## **WOMEN EMPOWERED FOR LEADERSHIP (WE4L) PROGRAM**

Women Empowered for Leadership (WE4L) uses a combination of advocacy, skills training, knowledge tools and coalition-building. The program works directly with potential women leaders, as well as with political parties, trade unions, civil society organizations, the media and the creative sector. In WE4L, Hivos and the local partners provide strategic, media and communication expertise. The focus is at the sub-national level where most practical issues that concern women are usually prioritized. The expectation is that a woman who starts her leadership journey at the sub-national level is likely to gather experience to enable her to lead at the national level.

## OVERVIEW

After the first few cases of COVID-19 were identified, the Jordanian National Defense Law No.13 of 1992 came into effect and the Government of Jordan took certain measures to contain the spread of the virus. This included a full lockdown that started on March 17 and lasted four days, followed by a partial lockdown that lasted six weeks. The partial lockdown included a ban on the use of cars, the closure of nurseries, schools, universities and non-essential goods and services, the closure of borders between governorates and the isolation of infected neighborhoods. Essential goods and services were open between 10 am and 6 pm. The majority of the private and public sectors were on leave during this period, unless they had a permit. On April 30th, the government moved to ease the restrictions by opening up certain sectors.<sup>1</sup> By mid-May, most sectors were allowed to resume work gradually, with the exception of nurseries, schools, universities, mosques and churches. Nurseries re-opened in early June, after women activists and civil society organizations advocated for their opening to help working mothers return to work.<sup>2</sup>

Several studies and rapid assessments have been conducted in Jordan to explore how the pandemic and lockdown impacted livelihoods, access to services, access to justice, vulnerable communities and gender-based violence, among other issues.<sup>3</sup>

As families were forced to stay at home during the lockdown, the Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) and Hivos, were keen to learn how and if gender dynamics were altered. Through an online survey with 3,555 men and women in Jordan, the aim was to explore if and in what ways the responsibility of unpaid work changed among respondents and their families, and for employed respondents, how that was balanced with paid work. This research is part of Women for Leadership (WE4L) Program, implemented by Hivos with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Women's labor force participation in Jordan has been persistently low over the years. It declined from 17% in 2010 to 13% in 2019.<sup>4</sup> The Jordan Job Diagnostics found that married women are 12.5% less likely to participate in the labor market and are also 9.6% less likely to be employed.<sup>5</sup>

Research shows that women's economic empowerment is not only central to realizing gender equality but directly impacts economic growth. Women's higher labor force participation means higher productivity, increased economic diversification and positive development outcomes. Additionally, the economic empowerment of women increases their access to and control over productive resources and enhances their economic decision making at all levels.<sup>6</sup>

Between 2000 and 2017, women in Jordan contributed 0.5% points of the 1.5% of annual growth rate. The government has set ambitious targets to increase women's labor force participation by 2025. If those targets are achieved and sustained for a further decade, they would have substantial positive impacts on economic growth – increasing it to 2.5% annually by 2035.<sup>7</sup>

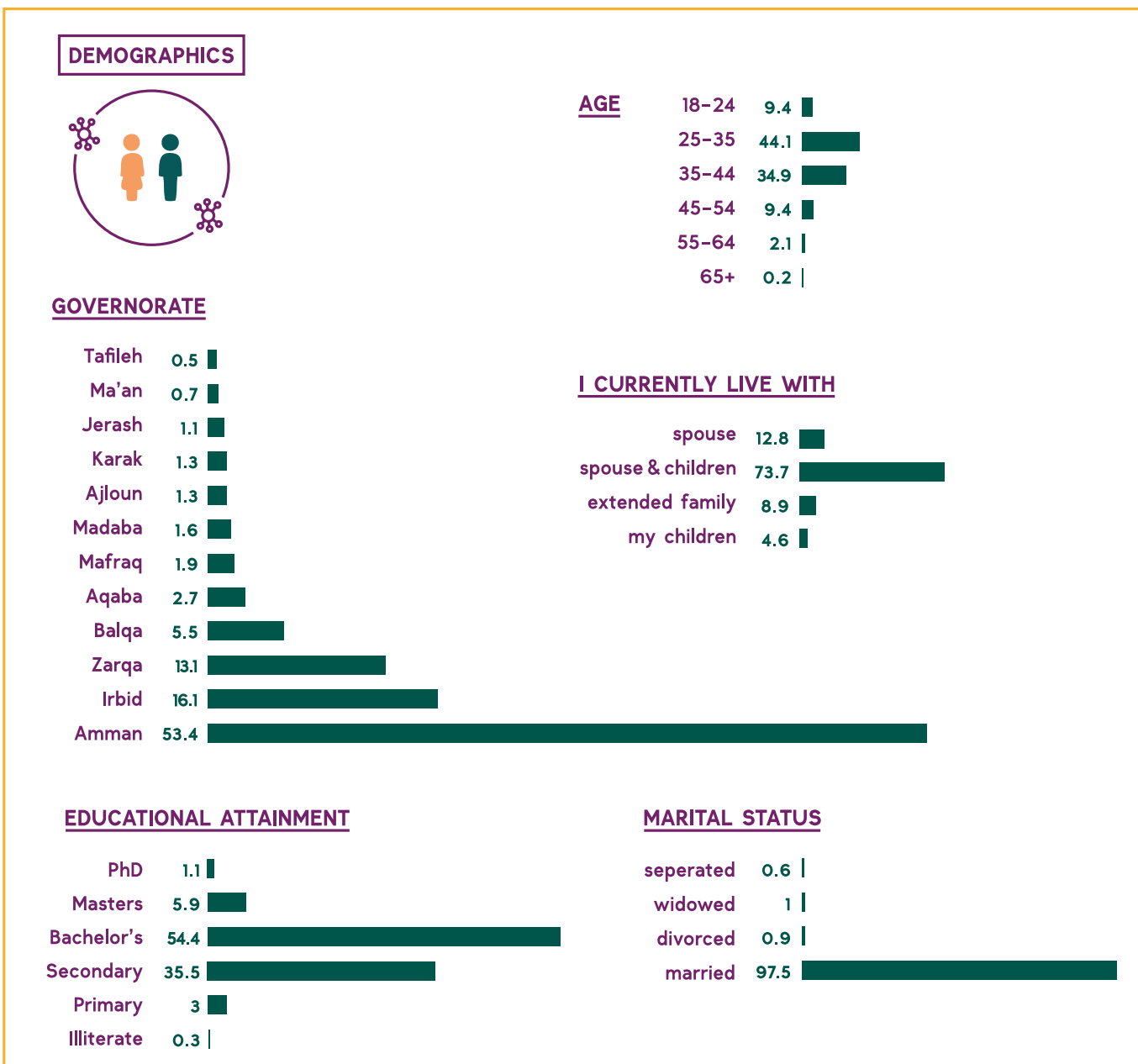
While there are several barriers to women's labor force participation, social norms and discriminatory gender roles remain primary impediments. Gender roles in Jordan clearly define men as breadwinners and women as mothers and caretakers.<sup>8</sup> For women to be fully able to participate and advance in the public sphere, stereotypical and discriminatory gender roles within the home must be understood and changed.

## METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

This research was based on an online survey titled 'Household responsibilities during the COVID-19 lockdown' distributed via Google Forms and filled out by respondents in May 2020. While the research sample is not a representative one, the survey was nevertheless completed by a large number of respondents from different governorates in Jordan. The research team recognizes the limitations of online surveys, namely the exclusion of certain groups including those who are illiterate or do not have access to internet, computers or mobile phones. Also, as a random online sample, and based on the type of questions asked, there are some who are more interested in responding than others.

The survey was completed by 3,555 respondents (79% women and 21% men). The majority were married (97.5%) and aged between 25 and 44 (79%). 35.3% of respondents have completed their secondary education and 54.4% have a bachelor's degree.

Most respondents resided in Amman (53.4%), Irbid (16.9%) and Zarqa (13.1%) at the time of the research. The majority of respondents (98.2%) did not have a disability. 66% had 1 to 3 children and most (73.8%) reported living in the same household with their spouse and children.



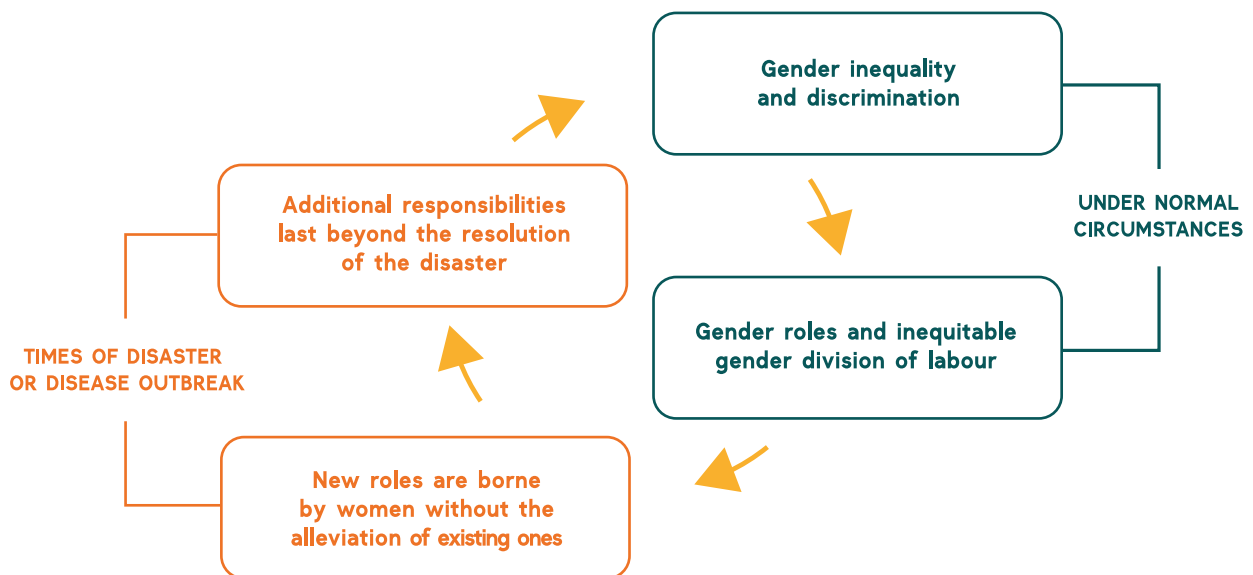
## THE DOUBLE BURDEN

Unpaid work within the home, sometimes referred to as reproductive work, includes a variety of tasks like childbearing and caring, preparing meals, cleaning, doing laundry, maintaining the house and taking care of an elderly or disabled family member, among others. While paid work is tied to a monetary value, unpaid work is usually not recognized as 'real work'.<sup>9</sup>

In most patriarchal societies, women's participation in productive work is lower than men's and is generally undervalued and less visible. Due to women's higher engagement in unpaid work, men are afforded with the opportunity to take up more senior management positions and consequently higher paying jobs.<sup>10</sup> When women are engaged in paid work, they often end up with a 'double burden'; meaning that while they take up the responsibility of bringing money into the household, they are still not relieved of any of their responsibilities at home the way men are.<sup>11</sup>

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that the value of unpaid work carried out by women is 9% of global GDP (around 11 trillion dollars).<sup>12</sup> While there are no estimates of the value of unpaid work in the Arab region, unfortunately, legislation and social norms in patriarchal societies entrench stereotypical gender roles by placing the responsibility of unpaid work on women.

In times of disaster, disease outbreak or war, it is reported that most women take up greater responsibilities and are often overburdened with paid and unpaid work, which impacts their overall wellbeing. New roles that are borne by women during such events usually come without the alleviation of their existing responsibilities. The gender division of labor, which is already inequitable, heightens women's vulnerability and the additional responsibilities can be long-lasting well beyond the resolution of the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>



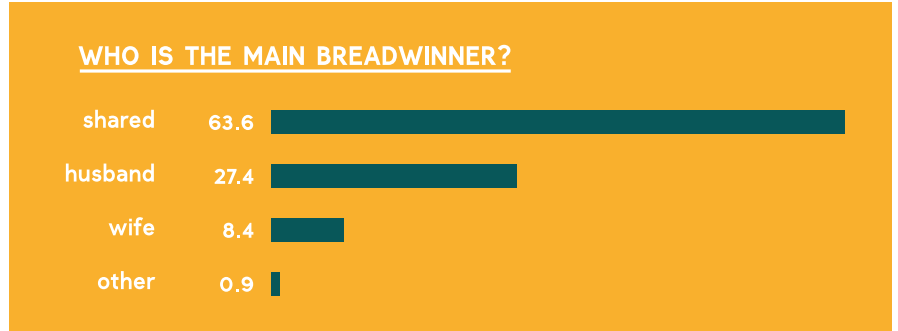
## FINDINGS

### Employment and finances

Of those who took part in the survey, 63.3% reported that both spouses generated income for the household. For 27.4% of respondents, the husband in the household was the main breadwinner, and for 8.4% of respondents, was the wife.

Respondents were asked about their employment status before the lockdown. While most men were either employed (44.7%) or self-employed (17.4%) only 29.1% of women were employed before the lockdown. A higher percentage of women were un-

employed, 32.8% of whom were not looking for work and 26.7% were looking. 24.7% of male respondents were also unemployed and looking for work.



### EMPLOYMENT STATUS BEFORE LOCKDOWN

#### WOMEN



#### MEN



During lockdown, 26.7% of employed women were working from home for 2-5 hours, and 25.4% were working 6-10 hours, in comparison to 11.1% and 10.4% of employed men respectively. More men were on unpaid leave (13.2%), working from the office (18.2%), or became unemployed (28.2%).

**EMPLOYMENT STATUS DURING LOCKDOWN  
(EMPLOYED WOMEN VS EMPLOYED MEN)**

**WOMEN**



**MEN**



- worked from home 2-5 hours
- worked from home 6-10 hours
- worked from the office
- paid leave
- unpaid leave
- unemployed

When asked to reflect about their experience during lockdown, most men spoke about the financial hardship they experienced and the difficulty they faced in providing for their families, as the quotes below demonstrate:

**'I lost my job because of the lockdown, and I no longer have an income to feed my family.'**  
(Unemployed male, Amman)

**'I lost most of my income, and I am having real financial trouble since I am renting.'**  
(Employed male, Zarqa)

**'We lost our jobs because of online learning. They no longer needed our services because of this new system.. unfortunately, they destroyed us.'** (Unemployed male, Amman)

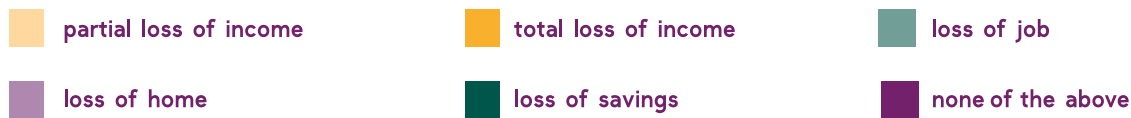
Respondents were asked about whether they experienced any loss of income, employment, savings or place of residence. Most respondents have lost either partial or total income, or savings. While this question was asked of them individually, some may have answered about the household in general.

**HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING DURING LOCKDOWN?**

**WOMEN**



**MEN**



While most women reflected on the burden of unpaid work and mental strains resulting from the lockdown, some women reflected on the effect of financial difficulties on their families, such as loss of income or unemployment:

**'I lost my customers. I have a home-based kitchen and my work was very strong before corona. My customers are now scared and I am unable to deliver to them because of the lockdown.'**  
(Female, home-based business, Amman)

**'During the lockdown, I became depressed and my husband and I were mentally exhausted; the financial situation was bad.'** (Unemployed female, Zarqa)

**'I live with my mother and child and I bear all responsibilities for the three of us. My work let me go because of the corona virus and I am now looking for work and don't have a source of income since April.'** (Unemployed female, Amman)



## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ARAB REGION

While the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to affect individuals and communities differently, it is argued that women will bear a disproportionate burden of the health, economic and social risks resulting from the pandemic and lockdown. This is especially true in the Arab region as social prejudices and gender norms increasingly discriminate against women in the public and private spheres.<sup>14</sup>

A policy brief by UN Women and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) outline how women in the Arab region are expected to be impacted by the pandemic:<sup>15</sup>

- As women dominate the healthcare and social fields in many countries in the Arab region, they are at higher risk of contracting the virus.
- Given that financial resources are directed towards containing the spread of the virus, less resources are put toward sexual and reproductive health services as well as services which address gender-based violence. Additionally, restrictions on movement during the lockdown makes access to such services even more challenging.
- In the Arab region, women spend 4.7 more time in unpaid work than men. During the pandemic and as a result of lockdown and school closure, the burden of unpaid work increases exponentially for women, affecting their physical and mental wellbeing.
- A total of 1.7 million jobs are expected to be lost in the Arab region as a result of the pandemic, including approximately 700,000 jobs held by women. More women are expected to fall into poverty during the pandemic, and especially female headed households. This is mainly because female intensive sectors such as manufacturing, services and the informal economy are expected to be the most affected.
- Limited access to technology is expected to impact girls' and women's remote education and employment. In many countries and communities, men's access to technology is prioritized partly due to discriminatory gender and social norms, but also because of women's unpaid work responsibilities.
- All forms of violence are being exacerbated by the pandemic. Violence increases because a victim is forced to co-exist with her abuser with very limited access to support due to this proximity as well as restricted movement. Women who lost their jobs and have no source of income find it difficult to leave an abusive partner and thereby domestic violence becomes 'the manifestation of unequal gender relations and an expression of power and control.'<sup>16</sup>

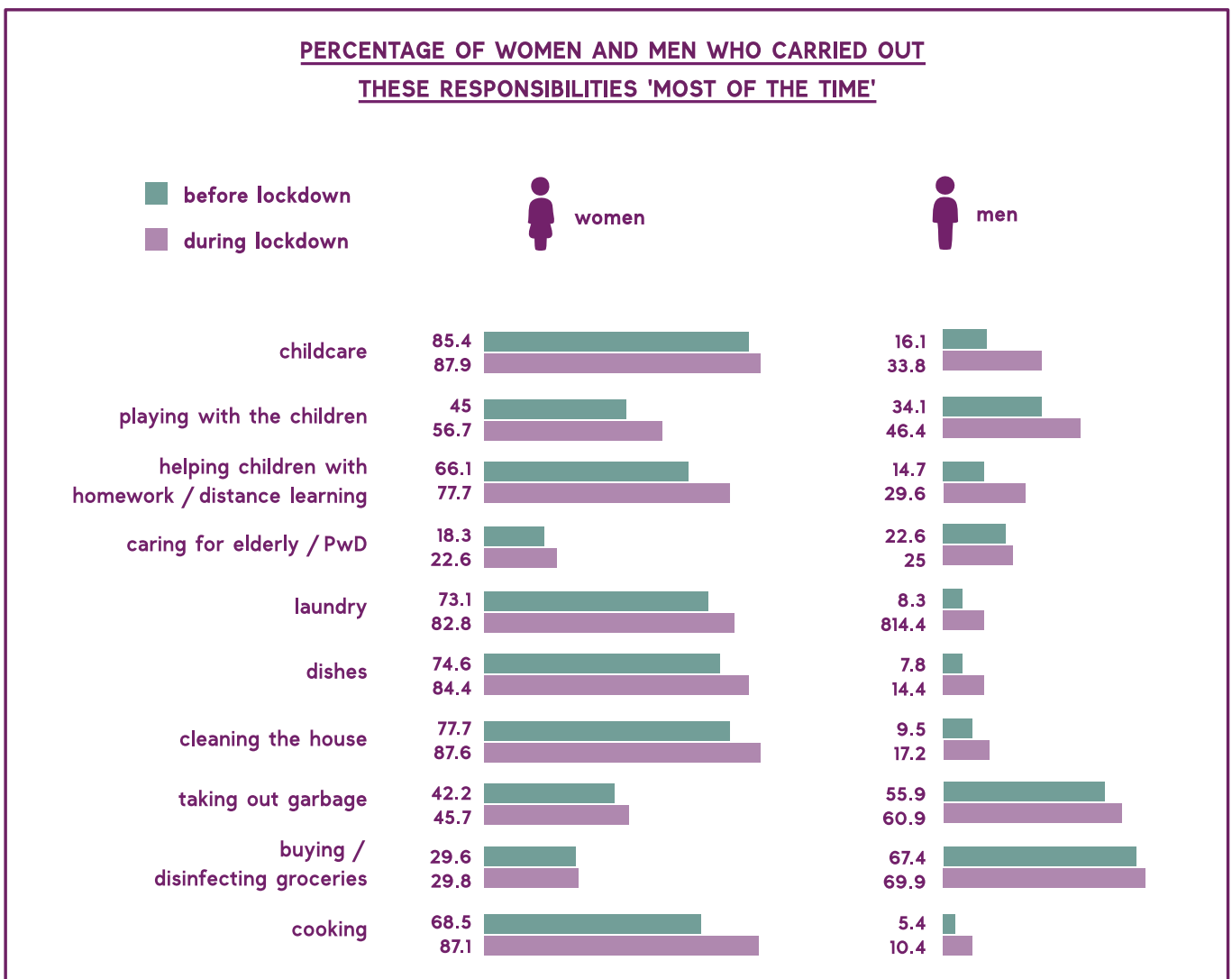
## FINDINGS

### Responsibilities at home

Men and women were asked about the responsibilities that they carried out at home before and during the lockdown. They were asked about the frequency (never or rarely; some of the time; most of the time) of carrying out direct care responsibilities including childcare, playing with children, helping children with homework/online learning and caring for an elderly or disabled member of the family, as well as indirect care including cooking, cleaning, doing the dishes, laundry, grocery shopping and taking out the garbage.

**'I swear the responsibilities increased. I became a teacher, a cook, a care taker of five children, the eldest is 14 and the youngest is 5.'**  
(Unemployed female, Amman)

The following figures show the percentage of women and men who carried out these responsibilities 'most of the time' before and during the lockdown. While the responsibilities of both increased during the lockdown, the charts show that the responsibility of unpaid work disproportionately fell on women.



When reflecting on the lockdown experience overall, many women spoke about the burden of unpaid work and the impact this had on their wellbeing, as the following quotes demonstrate:

**'There was great difficulty in balancing child care and delivering work on time.'**  
(Employed female, Irbid)

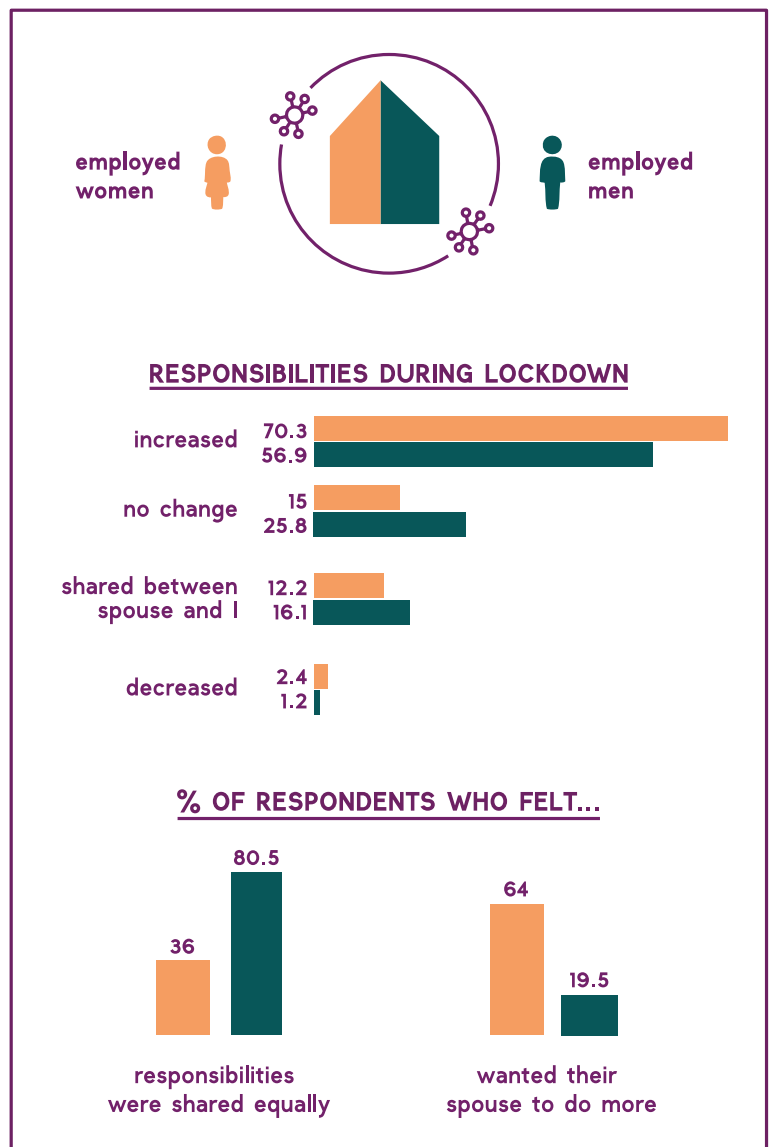
**'A mother became the teacher, there was a lot of pressure in terms of studying, she had to explain the lessons to children and help with homework.'** (Female, self-employed, Irbid)

**'A working mother should be appreciated; she didn't enjoy the lockdown like other women. I work in a company which was permitted to work.. I found it difficult to find childcare.. Thank God, I found a home nursery, but I worried about them.'** (Employed female, Zarqa)

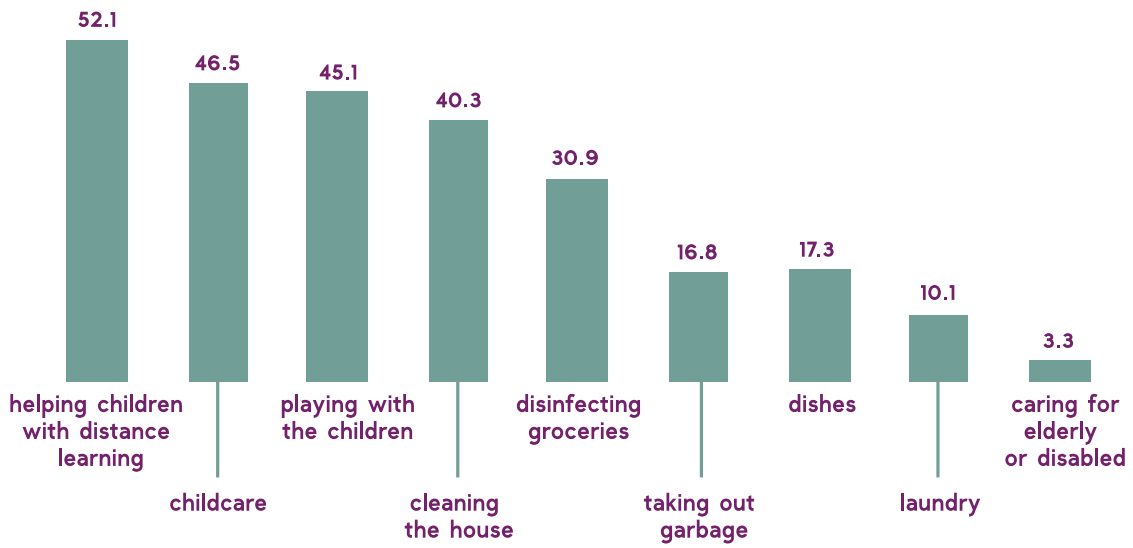
## Perception of responsibilities at home

Respondents were asked whether they felt their responsibilities at home increased and if they felt they were shared equally among them and their spouses. Looking specifically at employed men and women, we find that more women stated that their responsibilities increased and that they didn't feel responsibilities were equally shared. In fact, 75.4% of employed women said that they wanted their spouse to do more at home.

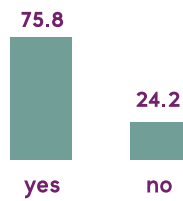
Women were asked what they wanted their husbands to do more of and the top three cited answers included direct care responsibilities involving children.



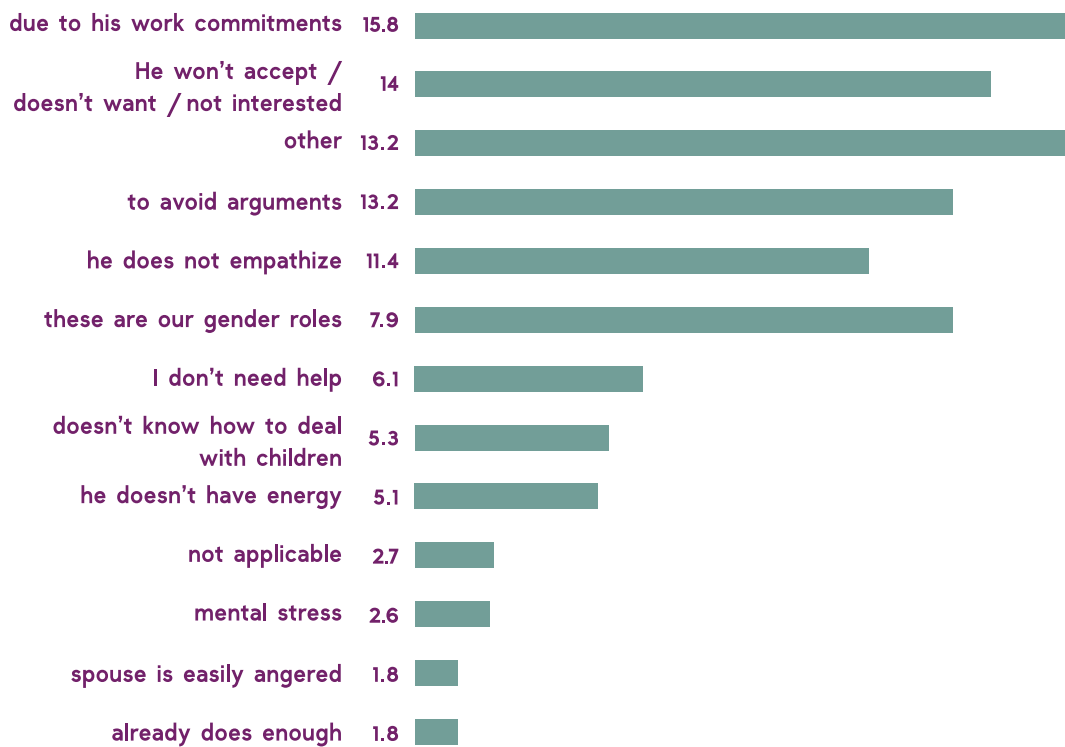
**WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE LIKED YOUR HUSBAND TO DO MORE OF?**



**DID YOU COMMUNICATE THIS TO YOUR HUSBAND?**



**WHY NOT?**



While the majority of women communicated this to their husbands, 24.2% did not for various reasons. Some women stated that their husbands did not care or empathize, or explained that this is the way in which responsibilities were divided between them:

**'He wasn't raised to help, he was raised to be served. He wanted to raise our children the same way, but I insisted that they should learn how to help, regardless of their gender.'**

(Unemployed female, Amman)

**'Because he is an irresponsible person who thinks that the responsibility of the house and the children must fall on the woman only.'** (Unemployed female, Karak)

**'Because it impacts his masculinity and dignity.'** (Unemployed female, Amman)

Some women did not communicate this with their husbands to avoid creating problems at home, explaining that their husbands were easily angered or had a temper, as one female from Zarqa explained **'he's angry and does not communicate with me. The lack of income is also making him more angry.'**

Other women felt that their husbands already had a lot to do and thereby did not want to overburden them, as one female from Amman stated **'it was an exhausting period for both of us, so no need to burden him.'** On the other hand, some women have resorted to carrying out a big load of household responsibilities, explaining that their husbands did not know how to do so.

**'He is unable to adapt to household responsibilities and ends up making a huge mess!'**

(Unemployed female, Amman)



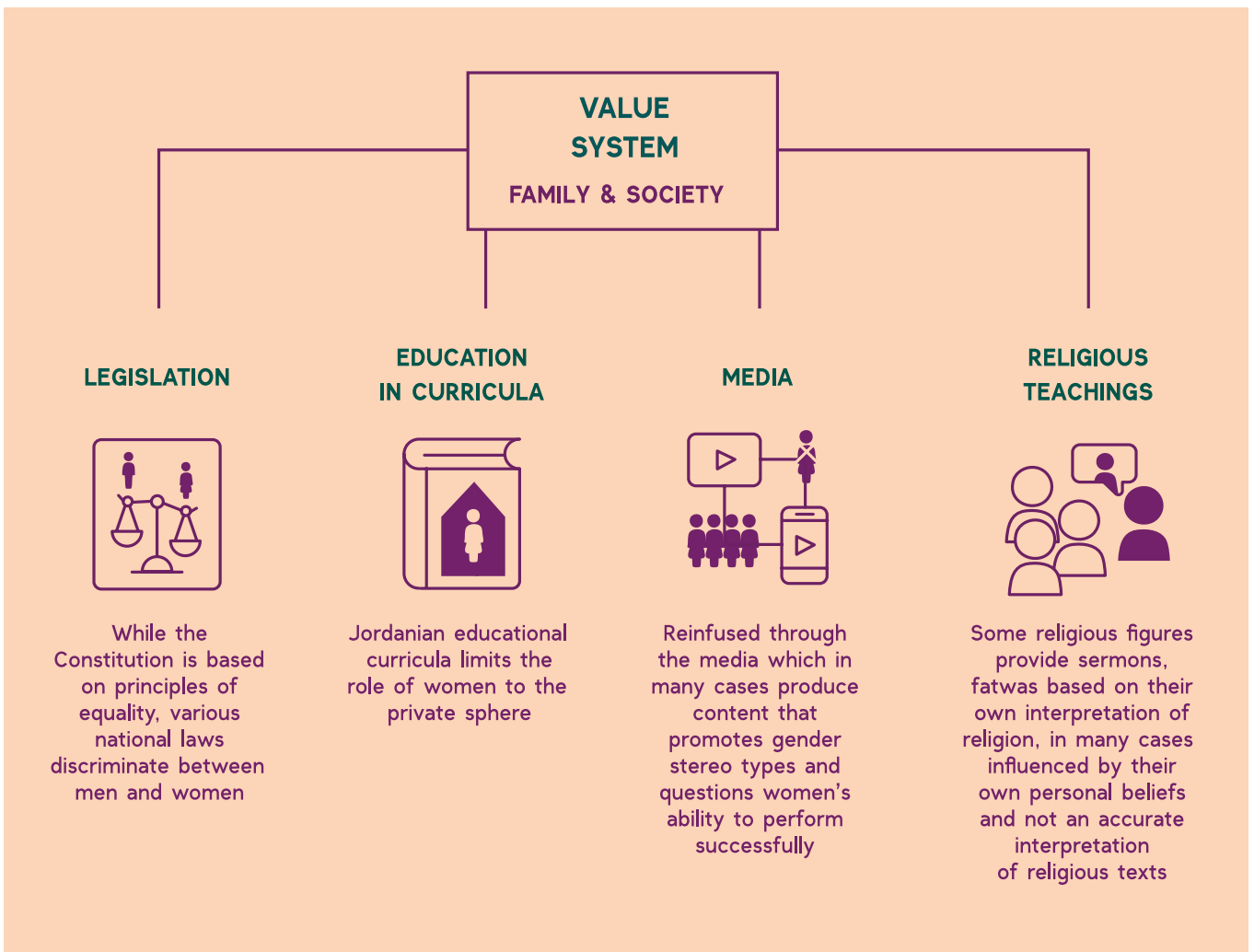
**'He wasn't raised to help, he was raised to be served. He wanted to raise our children the same way, but I insisted that they should learn how to help, regardless of their gender'** (Unemployed female, Amman)

## WHY ARE GENDER ROLES DIVIDED THIS WAY IN JORDAN?

For years, the Jordanian society has been based on rigid and traditional gender roles, where women are primarily responsible for reproductive work and men are expected to financially provide for the family. In fact, the CEDAW concluding observations on cultural stereotypes and gender roles have not changed in the last 20 years and the Committee has expressed concern over discriminatory social norms that undermine women’s ‘social status, autonomy, educational opportunities and professional careers’.<sup>17</sup>

Legislation in Jordan maintains the traditional role of women in the private sphere and clearly differentiates between the rights and responsibilities of men and women. In most cases, the husband is defined as the head of the household (unless he is deceased, missing or lost his Jordanian nationality). By law, the husband is responsible for the financial maintenance of his wife, in return for obedience. The Personal Status Law also requires a wife to obtain the permission of her husband to work outside the marital home. If she does so without his consent, she loses her right to financial maintenance.<sup>18</sup>

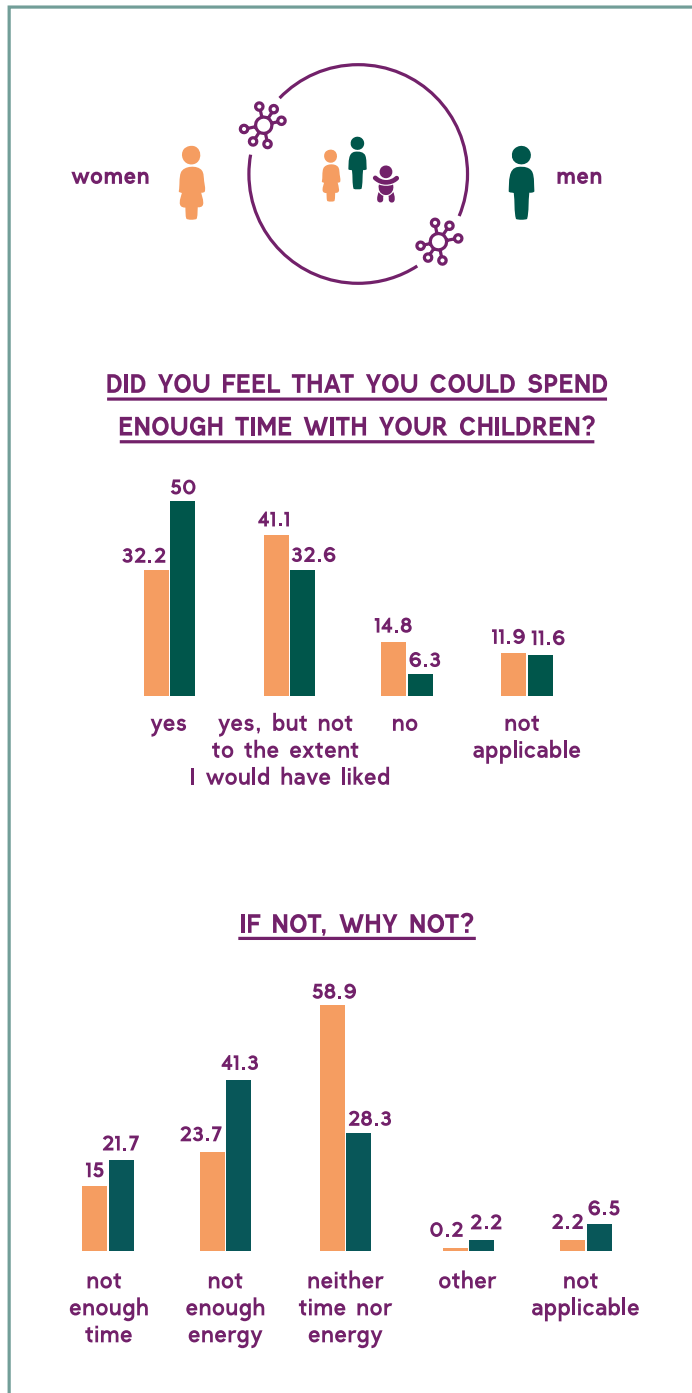
As gender roles are institutionalized in the law, they are also reinforced and reinfused through several mechanisms such as the Jordanian educational curricula, which emphasizes the role of women in the private sphere; the media which in many cases promotes gender stereotypes; and some religious teachings (fatwas) which are based on the personal interpretation and beliefs of some religious figures. As a result, this discriminatory division of labor becomes the norm and part of the everyday narrative and practice.<sup>19</sup>



## FINDINGS

### Time with children

Respondents were asked about the time spent at home with their children. Less women felt that they spent enough time with their children, mostly due to the lack of time and energy (58.9%).



Many respondents spoke about their negative experience with distance learning, explaining that parents had to spend a lot of time ensuring that their children were learning and following up on their school work. Some parents were worried about the future of their children's education. The closure of schools and nurseries created an additional burden for working parents who had to find childcare solutions while they went to work. Interestingly, the majority of respondents who spoke about nurseries, schools and distance learning were women:

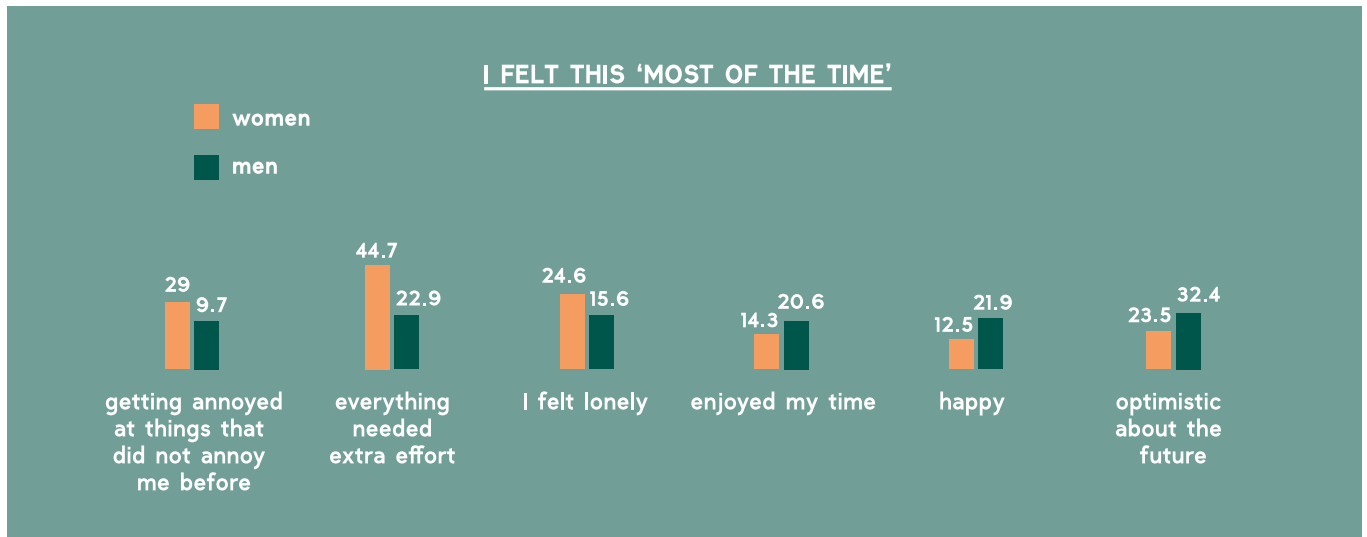
**'Returning to work without opening nurseries was a burden on us. We had to drop off the kids every day at one of our parents.'**  
(Employed female, Amman)

**'A bad experience in terms of being cut from the outside world. It was a mentally difficult experience on the children, which made the adults more tense. Also a bad experience financially; my husband's work stopped, but family relations became stronger.'**  
(Unemployed female, Irbid)

**'Mental exhaustion, increased burden and the fear of what's coming, and my fear over my children's education and future.'**  
(Unemployed female, Amman)

**'Distance learning was unsuccessful and needed parents to be completely available.'**  
(Employed female, Amman)

## Impact of lockdown on wellbeing



As shown in the chart above, the lockdown affected the mental health of men and women differently. More women than men felt agitated by things that normally wouldn't bother them. Also, they felt lonely during this period, and felt that everything needed extra effort. Additionally, less women felt optimistic about the future.

**'The required work is more than the available time. An employee is now required to be available all the time since he/she is at home. For me, the personal space became non-existent.'**  
(Employed female, Amman)

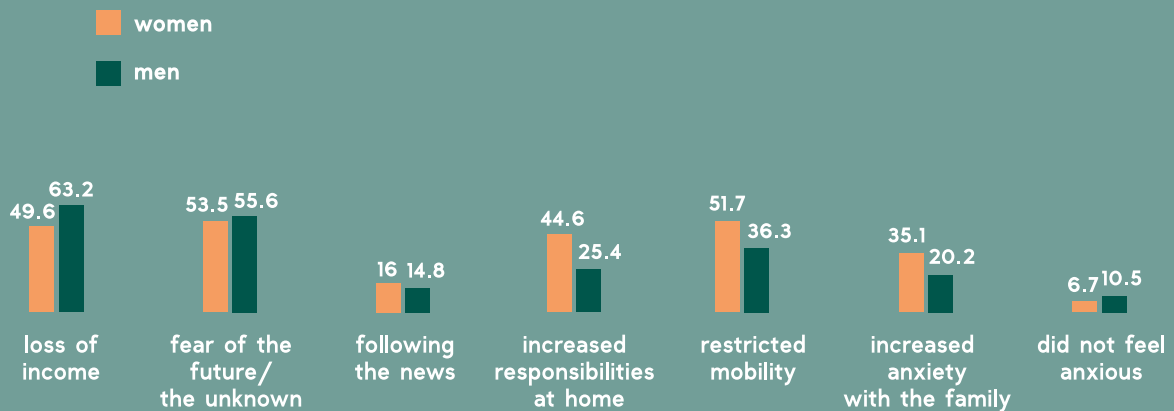
**'I wasn't able to see my children since they were with their divorced mother in another governorate.'**  
(Male, Irbid)

**'The cases of anger and depression kept on rising the longer the lockdown period extended.'**  
(Unemployed female, Amman)

Respondents were asked about their sources of worry during lockdown. It was clear that the lockdown took a toll on individuals and families and impacted them financially, emotionally, mentally and physically. The chart shows that for both men and women, the financial situation and fear of the unknown constituted major sources of concern. Additionally, increased responsibility at home and restricted movement added to the anxiety levels of women.



## SOURCES OF WORRY/ANXIETY DURING LOCKDOWN



The following are some quotes that reflect the experiences of men and women during the lockdown:

**'A new born at the beginning of lockdown, moving to another governorate to stay with my parents while my wife and children are at her parents. Average working hours was more than 14 hours.'**  
(Employed male, Tafilah)

**'Hats off to married women, mothers and working women because they suffered a lot during the lockdown. I have four children, the eldest is 10 and the youngest is 2, I wasn't working and I didn't have enough time to carry out my duties, help them study and look after the baby. It was exhausting... I felt that I was their servant.. it's an exhausting and sad feeling. Even though it's the same amount of work, but before the lockdown I had some personal space when the children were at school or in summer camp.'**  
(Unemployed female, Amman)

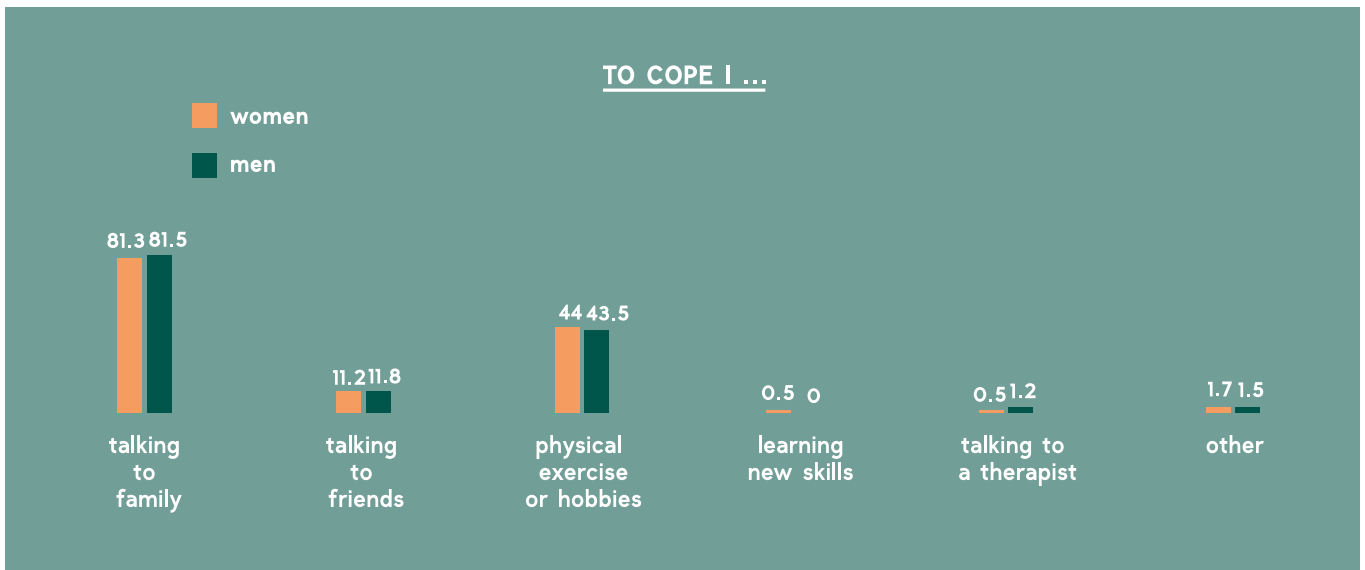
**'I didn't have cash to spend on my family and they refused to give me money from the daily workers fund because I own a new car, which is my only source of income!'** (Male, Zarqa)

**'The mental strain was huge. I sometimes felt that I wanted to leave the house to visit my father, especially during the full lockdown.'**  
(Unemployed female, Amman)

**'I am a mother and university student. I am under a lot of pressure with lectures and homework and projects. My husband is outside the country and I was caring for my mother.. this lead me to a nervous breakdown more than once.'**  
(Unemployed female, Amman)

**'They should have taken people's circumstances into consideration. My father passed away a while ago and my mother lives far away from us. I wasn't able to visit her for 40 days which is unfair. This made me depressed and I worried about her.'**  
(Employed female, Amman)

**'The most people who suffered injustice are the children and their mothers, especially when the husband is a dictator, dominating and easily reacts to important and unimportant things. I wish that this lockdown ends well on me and my children.'**  
(Unemployed female, Zarqa)



In order to cope with feelings of worry and anxiety, most men and women resorted to their family, and some practiced hobbies or exercised. A few respondents also spoke to friends. Very few respondents resorted to mental health services, as one employed female from Karak stated: **'Mental health services which should have been provided, should have been better.'**

Finally, few respondents reflected positively on their lockdown experience stating that it brought their family closer together and taught them new skills.

**'It was a wonderful experience. It organized my time and life. I don't want it to end.'**  
(Employed female, Mafraq)

**'As a mother and housewife, working from home was suitable and comfortable for the most part.'**  
(Employed female, Zarqa)

**'Lockdown was great, a strong family atmosphere, thanks to God. It was the best Ramadan because we were able to concentrate on prayer and family.'**  
(Unemployed female, Amman)

**'I got to know my teenage sons and daughters, and we became closer than before.'**  
(Unemployed male, Amman)

**'The lockdown taught me patience, self-reliance and how to manage fear and stress.'**  
(Unemployed female, Irbid)

## DISCUSSION

Research shows that gender roles in Jordan have not changed over the years and are in fact based on discriminatory stereotypes which overemphasize the role of women as mothers and wives and men as breadwinners and protectors. These gender roles have become part of the societal value system as they are institutionalized in the law and reinfused into society. The persistence of these gender roles means that women remain under-valued and under-represented in the public sphere.<sup>20</sup>

Under normal circumstances, research shows that many working women in Jordan face challenges in maintaining a 'work-life' balance, especially those who are still expected to carry out most of the care responsibilities within the home. The lockdown presented a unique opportunity for gender roles to shift, as men and women were both forced to stay at home. This research aimed to capture whether this shift happened. Through an online survey with 3,555 men and women in Jordan, the research generated several important findings:

First, the lockdown impacted the livelihoods of many families and placed great financial strain on them, impacting the emotional and mental wellbeing of many.

Second, the responsibility of unpaid work disproportionately fell on women during the lockdown. Even though the responsibilities of most men increased, the share of women who carried out direct and indirect care responsibilities 'most of the time' was significantly larger. Looking specifically at employed women, 64% of them felt that household work was not shared equally between them and their spouses, and 75.4% wanted their spouses to do more. Around 24% of women wouldn't or couldn't communicate this to their husbands. Some stating that their husbands did not care or empathize, or explained that this is the way in which responsibilities were divided; others didn't to avoid creating problems at home, explaining that their husbands were easily angered or had a temper; some recognizing that their husbands already had a lot to do and thereby did not want to overburden them, and finally some explaining that their husbands did not know how to carry out many household responsibilities, be it child care or cleaning and as a result did it themselves to same time.

Third, for both men and women, the financial situation and fear of the unknown constituted major sources of concern and anxiety during the lockdown. For women, increased responsibility at home and restricted movement added to their anxiety. Besides speaking to family members and practicing exercise or hobbies, it was clear that mental health services were very limited during the lockdown.

In order to understand the reasons behind women's low participation in the public sphere, women's experiences within the home and their connection with their ability to participate outside of the home must be researched and understood. For women to be fully able to participate and advance in the community, economy and political life, stereotypical and discriminatory gender dynamics within the home must change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### To change discriminatory gender roles

- Remove Article 61 of the Personal Status Law to protect women's constitutional right to work without the consent of the husband.
- Remove all articles in the Personal Status Law that address the issue of 'obedience'.
- Remove the articles in the Civil Status Law that define the head of the household.
- Review national educational curricula to ensure that men and women are equally represented and to remove all gender stereotypes relating to their role in the private and public spheres.
- Promote collaboration between civil society and religious institutions such as the Supreme Judge Department to correct misconceptions around religion and discriminatory social norms.
- Provide gender training to media organizations and journalists in order to correct gender stereotypes and equally represent men and women in the media. Capacity building and awareness raising programs should be followed up with a monitoring system to ensure gender sensitivity in reporting.
- Introduce legislation to prohibit gender-based discrimination in employment.
- Amend legislation to increase paid parental leave.

### To respond to the impact of COVID-19

- Collect sex-disaggregated data on the impact of COVID-19 on individuals, families and households.
- Ensure that men and women, especially vulnerable women, have access to counselling, psychosocial support and gender-based violence services.
- Continuously enhance and develop distance learning methods to ensure that they are effective and do not add a significant burden on working mothers and fathers.

## END NOTES

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