

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Disabled parents

Summary

- **Half (49%) of Disabled mothers have been furloughed** compared to one-third (34%) of non-disabled mothers.
- **Three times the number of Disabled mothers than non-disabled mothers lost their main job** (20% of Disabled mothers compared to 7% of non-disabled mothers).
- **Six in 10 (58%) of Disabled mothers report struggling to make ends meet** compared to 36% of non-disabled mothers.
- **High levels of anxiety were reported by 62% of Disabled mothers** compared to 38% of non-disabled mothers.

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has compounded the different financial, social, and health barriers that Disabled people already faced, resulting in Disabled people being disproportionately affected by the virus and restrictions in the UK. Disabled people have lacked access to food and social care¹ and suffered higher death rates² compared to non-disabled people. In addition, research with parents of Disabled children has found that informal and formal support for families with disabled children has decreased and half of these families have lost income because of the pandemic.³

In their report, 'The Impact of Covid 19 on Disabled Women: Voices of Disabled women in the pandemic', Sisters of Frida shared the challenges Disabled mothers have faced: lack of access to health support for new mothers and their children, lack of access to childcare, and the stress of supporting children through the pandemic. Our latest joint survey between the Fawcett Society, UK Women's Budget Group, Engender and Close the Gap

¹ Women and Equalities Committee (2020) Unequal impact? Coronavirus, disability and access to services: full Report <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4068/documents/40461/default/>

² Ayoubkhani, D. and Bosworth, M. (2021) 'Updated estimates of coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by disability status, England: 24 January to 20 November 2020,' Office for National Statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbydisabilitystatusenglandandwales/24januaryto20november2020>

³ Family Fund (2020) The end of lockdown? The last six months in the lives of families raising disabled children. <https://www.familyfund.org.uk/the-end-of-lockdown>

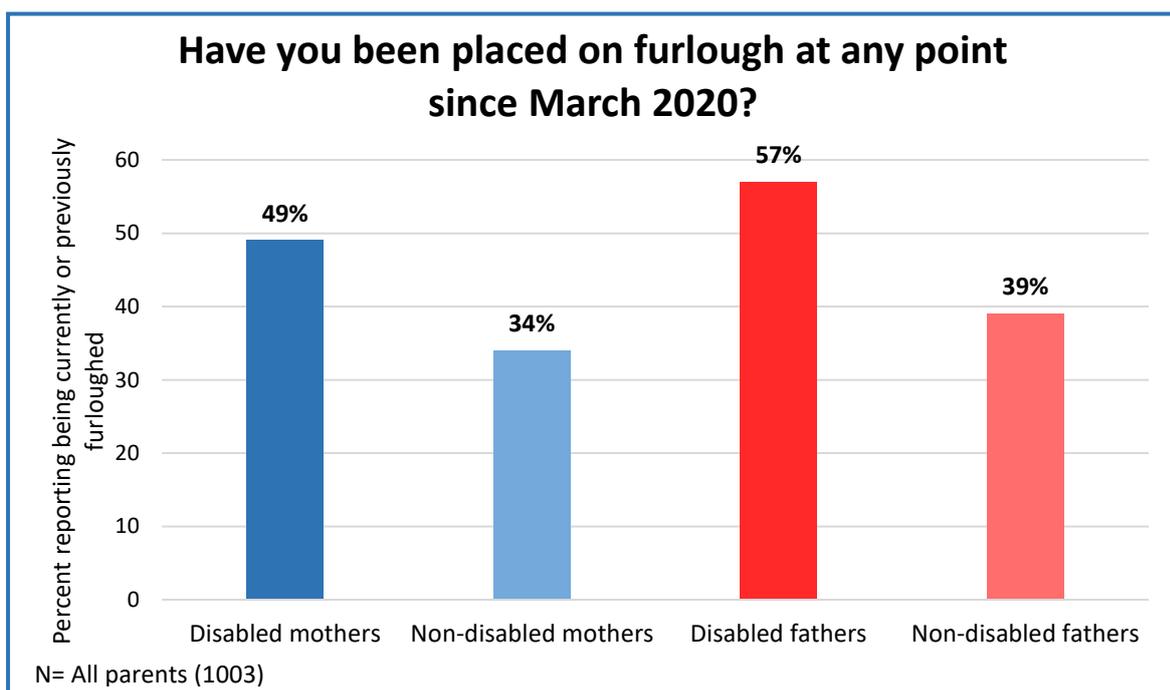
(Scotland), Women Equality Network Wales, and Northern Ireland Women’s Budget Group (NIWBG), conducted during the second lockdown in November, builds on this work. It shows that Disabled parents have lost income and work at higher rates than non-disabled parents. As a result, Disabled mothers in particular have struggled with their finances and wellbeing.

Our research presents the findings of a COVID-19 survey carried out by Survation with 1,003 parents, including 196 Disabled parents, with children aged 14 and under between 18 November – 2 December 2020 across the four nations in the UK.

Changes to work

Disabled parents have faced greater disruptions to their work and income compared to non-disabled parents because of the pandemic. Half (49%) of Disabled mothers have been furloughed compared to one-third (34%) of non-disabled mothers and almost six in ten (57%) of Disabled fathers have been furloughed compared to four in ten (39%) of non-disabled fathers.

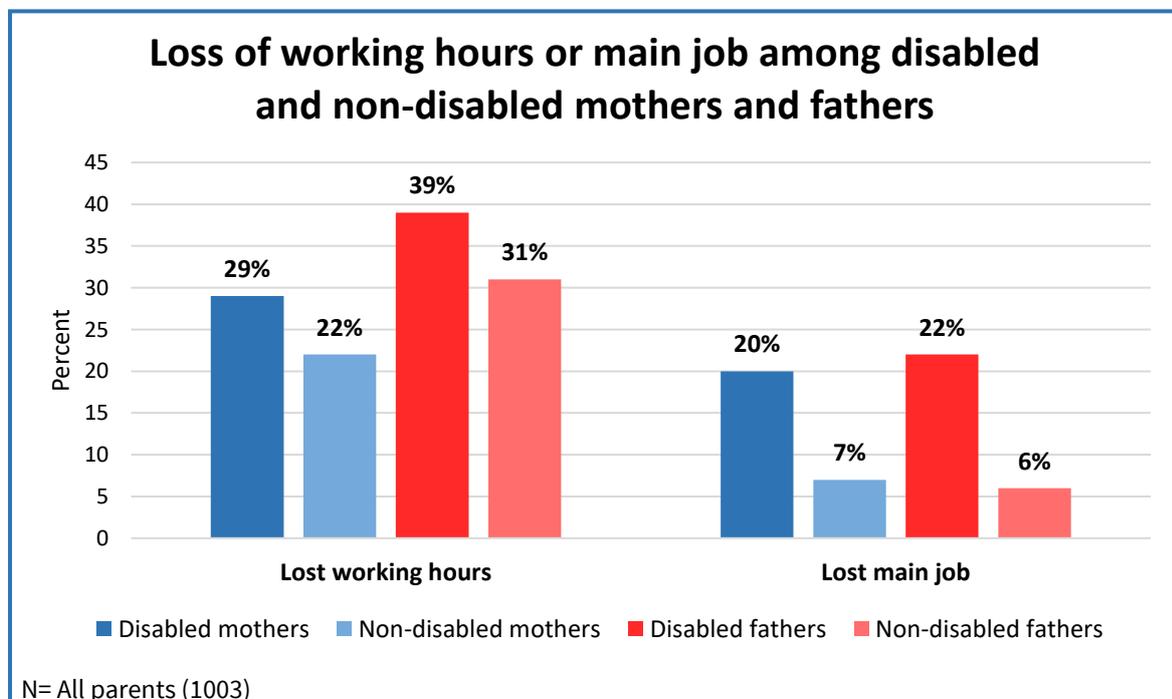
Among all parents, the most commonly reported reason for furlough was a lack of work at their workplace (reported by 43% of both groups). However, Disabled mothers and fathers also faced additional barriers to continue work as normal. Over one-quarter (27%) of Disabled parents reported they were furloughed because they were shielding, compared to less than one in ten (8%) of non-disabled parents. The proportion was similar among mothers and fathers (28% and 26% of furloughed Disabled mothers and fathers were shielding, respectively). Three times the number of Disabled mothers were furloughed because they had adult caring responsibilities compared to non-disabled mothers (18% compared to 6%). The ratio was similar among Disabled and non-disabled fathers (16% compared to 5%).



One in five (20%) of Disabled parents believe they were unfairly chosen for furlough because of their race, sex, age, disability, or health condition compared to about one in ten (9%) of non-disabled parents. More Disabled fathers (25%) believed they were unfairly chosen than Disabled mothers (16%).

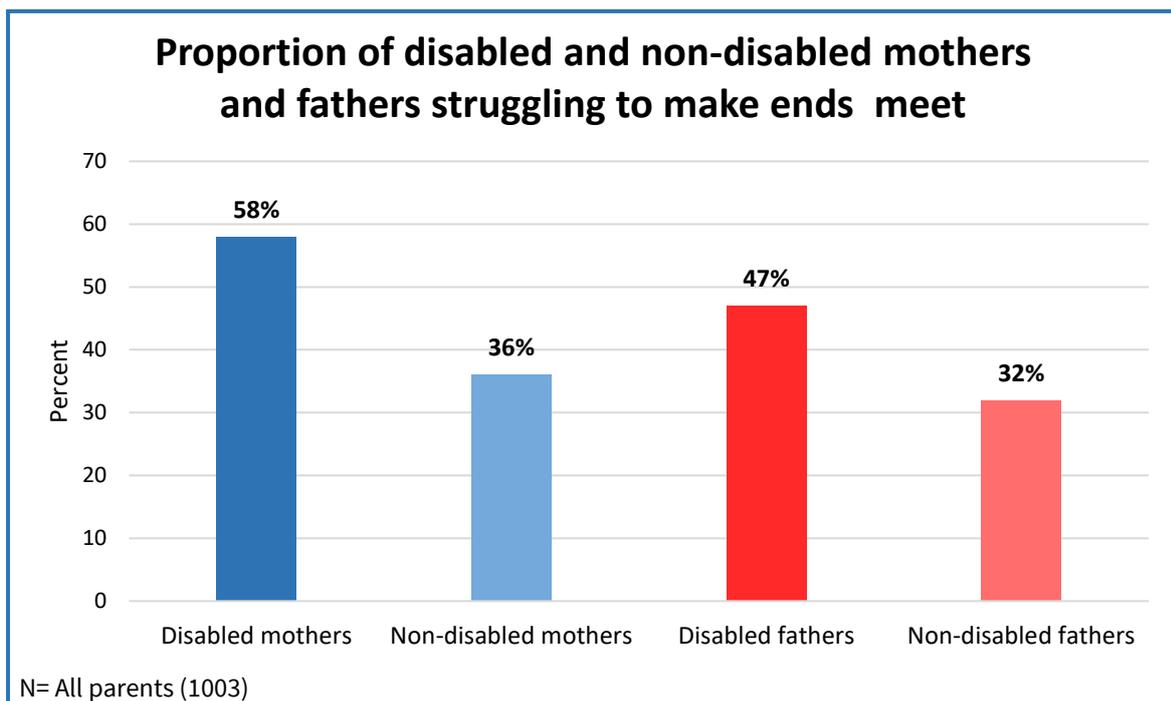
Job loss and loss in working hours is also greater among Disabled parents compared to parents without a disability. Three times the number of Disabled parents lost their main job than non-disabled parents (21% of disabled parents compared to 7% of non-disabled parents). The rate was similar among mothers and fathers – 20% of Disabled mothers and 22% of Disabled fathers lost their main job, compared to 7% and 6% of non-disabled mothers and fathers, respectively.

In addition, over one third (34%) of Disabled parents lost working hours compared to about one quarter (26%) of non-disabled parents. Fathers (39% of Disabled and 31% of non-disabled) lost hours at a higher rate than mothers (29% of Disabled and 22% of non-disabled). One quarter of Disabled mothers (24%) and fathers (23%) believe they lost work or hours because they were unfairly chosen due to their race, sex, age, disability, or health condition compared to less than ten percent of parents without a disability (10% of non-disabled mothers and 7% of non-disabled fathers). A further one quarter (23%) of Disabled parents reported they lost work or hours because they were shielding for medical reasons.



Financial status

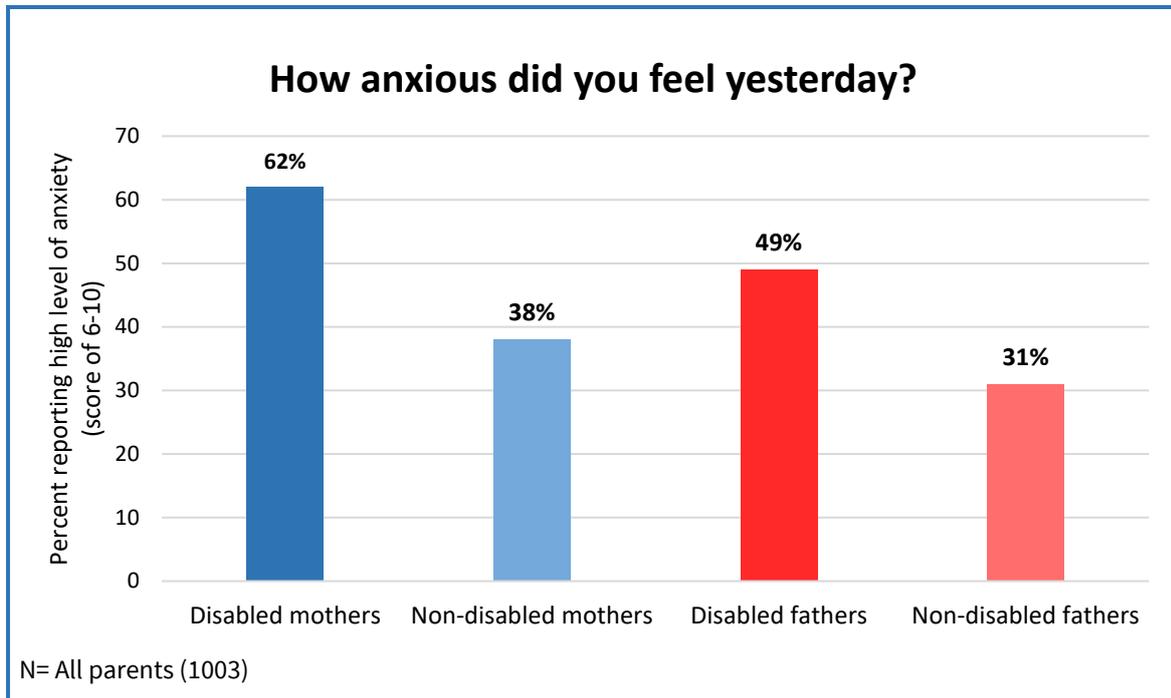
Disabled parents report struggling to make ends meet at considerably higher rates than non-disabled parents, and Disabled mothers are struggling at the highest rate. Six in 10 (58%) of Disabled mothers report struggling to make ends meet and almost half of Disabled fathers (47%) report struggling. In comparison, 36% of non-disabled mothers and 32% of non-disabled fathers report struggling to make ends meet.



Given the higher rates of furlough and job loss among Disabled parents, it is unsurprising that almost six in ten of Disabled parents report a lack of confidence in their financial security, with 57% of Disabled parents (54% of Disabled mothers and 62% of Disabled fathers) reporting they are worried about their job prospects in the next 12 months compared to 49% of non-disabled parents (50% of non-disabled mothers and 47% of non-disabled fathers).

Anxiety

Disabled mothers report the highest levels of anxiety among any group included in the sample. Mothers with a disability reported an average anxiety level of 5.98 compared to an average of 4.24 among mothers without a disability. High levels of anxiety (an anxiety level of 6 to 10) were reported by 62% of Disabled mothers, compared to 38% of non-disabled mothers, 49% of Disabled fathers and 31% of non-disabled fathers.



Summary and recommendations

Our research highlights the major disruptions to work and finance that Disabled parents have experienced because of the coronavirus pandemic. Disabled mothers and fathers have been furloughed and lost hours and jobs at significantly higher rates than non-disabled parents – including three times as many Disabled parents losing their main job compared to non-disabled parents. This is partly a result of more Disabled parents being identified as ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ by the Government, and therefore required to shield during the pandemic; over one in four Disabled parents were furloughed because they had to shield compared to less than ten percent of non-disabled parents. Disabled parents were also twice as likely to say that they were unfairly chosen for furlough and two and half times as likely to say they lost their job or working hours unfairly.

The precarity of Disabled parents’ employment is reflected in their responses to questions about their financial and emotional wellbeing. Well over half of Disabled parents said they were worried about their job prospects in the next 12 months and were struggling to make ends meet – including almost six in ten Disabled mothers. Levels of anxiety are considerably higher among Disabled parents, with Disabled mothers significantly more likely to report high anxiety levels than all other groups.

The findings of this research make clear that Disabled parents have found their lives dramatically altered because of the coronavirus pandemic. The financial and mental health challenges faced by parents during the pandemic have been felt acutely by

Disabled mothers and fathers. The Government and local councils must acknowledge the disproportionate impact and should take the following steps:

- **Support disabled people in work:**
 - Make clear to employers that a failure to make reasonable adjustments for Disabled workers, such as providing PPE or allowing home working where possible, is a form of unlawful discrimination
 - Ensure Disabled people are not being unfairly chosen for redundancy by requiring employers with more than 250+ employees to report redundancies due to the pandemic by protected characteristic including sex and disability
 - Require all jobs to be made flexible, unless there is a legitimate business requirement not to, in order to continue to support Disabled people to work once the pandemic is over

- **A stronger safety net:**
 - Increase Employment Support Allowance payments in line with the rise in Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit: at present, up to 2 million⁴ Disabled people have been left behind by the necessary and welcome increase in payments for other benefits, for no reason other than that they have the misfortune to be on legacy benefits.
 - End the two-child limit and make advance payments of Universal Credit grants instead of loans. Abolish the benefits cap to ensure households with Disabled people claiming benefits get the support they need.
 - Ensure that all workers have access to statutory sick pay and increase the level it is paid at.
 - Increase Local Housing Allowance to the 50th percentile to support Disabled renters.

- **Support for parents and children:**
 - Work with local councils to assess and provide sufficient support for those Disabled parents facing increased pressures as a result of school closures and other effects of lockdown.
 - Work with schools to support shielding families to continue their children's education.

- **Oversight of Care Act easements:**
 - Require any councils enacting Care Act easements to release a document showing how they are continuing to deliver their duty of care to Disabled

⁴ DWP (2020), DWP benefits statistical summary <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dwp-benefits-statistics-february-2020/dwp-benefits-statistical-summary-february-2020>

people and how they made the decision to take that option and when it will be reviewed.

- The government should review the suspension of Care Act duties no less than every three months, reviewing its impact for Disabled people who receive care funded by social services. This should also assess how the suspension is impacting those who have multiple protected characteristics, such as Disabled BAME women.
- **Address the accessibility needs of Disabled people:**
 - Ensure information is available in accessible formats, Easy read, Large print, and in British Sign Language (BSL) and in different national languages.
 - Ensure all essential public broadcasts are simultaneously translated into BSL.
 - Ensure people are aware of the alternative services, volunteer programmes, and how to access them including for those not able to access the internet.
 - Increase funding to both women's and parents' organisations and mental health service providers working directly with Disabled women and parents, and provide training on their complex needs, to help Disabled women and parents access the support they need at this psychologically challenging time.

About us

This research was conducted by the [UK Women's Budget Group](#), [Fawcett Society](#), [Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group](#), [Women's Equality Network Wales](#), [Close the Gap](#) and [Engender](#).

Standard Life Foundation has supported this as part of its mission to contribute towards strategic change which improves financial well-being in the UK. The Foundation funds research, policy work and campaigning activities to tackle financial problems and improve living standards for people on low-to-middle incomes in the UK. It is an independent charitable foundation registered in Scotland (SC040877).

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