

# Early pandemic impacts on family environments that shape childhood development and health: A Canadian Study

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[Link to article](#)

## Background

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced the various environments that impact young children's development, including their homes, their access to programs and services, their families' employment and income, and society.

This study looked at how changes to employment and income influenced Family access to resources and social support, parenting Abilities and self-care at home, and home Routines and Environments through a FARE Change Scale.



## Methods

2158 families with a child aged 0-8 living in the Canadian Maritime provinces (NS, NB, PEI) completed a survey with both closed and open-ended questions.

- Most that experienced a change in employment and income had a household income > \$80,000 (60%).
- Most worked from home while balancing parenting responsibilities (77%).
- Less than half were employed in an essential service sector (42%).



## Key Findings

Scores on the FARE Change Scale found that having more time available during the pandemic (through reduced working hours) was a positive change to the family environment, even if there was less overall income through a reduction to salary.

The open-ended responses resulted in the following themes that describe the impacts of employment and income among Maritime families:

- Shifting employment demands & income loss;
- Difficulty finding time & capacity,
- Feelings of guilt
- Creating new routines to support a balance in family life.



Below are illustrative quotes from participants in the study:

"Our employer keeps telling us to take care of our mental health and our family, but the expectations for our jobs have not lessened."

"But if you spend lots of extra parenting time then you feel the guilt later on for not being as productive at work so I try to compensate with extra hours. So, in the end I'm working longer hours than normal and just really tired at the end of the day."



"My wife and I have condensed our work days to split child care so our boys have one parent with them all the time throughout the week."

## Conclusions

This study can inform the development of potential supports to alleviate the impacts of future events that rapidly change children's immediate environments.



As well as income support, policymakers should consider potential support that is offered through increased time (e.g., reduced work hours) and access to external resources and social supports that can strengthen family environments.