

Fall Assessment Findings in Sutter County: Supplemental Report

PURPOSE OF THE SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

In our report on kindergarten readiness, we found that four major factors that independently predicted a child's overall level of readiness. These included, in order of impact: reading with the child; child well-being; special needs; and whether the father worked at home during COVID-19. It was expected that the COVID-19 pandemic would bring novel, and potentially adverse, effects to the kindergarten readiness of children – especially children whose families already experience factors that put children at risk for low kindergarten readiness. The impact of fathers working from home was significant – even when controlling for other factors that were also related to readiness (e.g., early childhood education, mother's education). In this report, we examine the characteristics of households reporting that the father was working from home, and households reporting that the father was not working from home, in order to better interpret the contributions of this important factor in kindergarten readiness. We examined the association between father's work environment during COVID-19 and a range of characteristics, including demographics, use of services, kindergarten readiness activities, receipt of kindergarten readiness information, family routines, and family stressors. **Only significant findings are reported.**

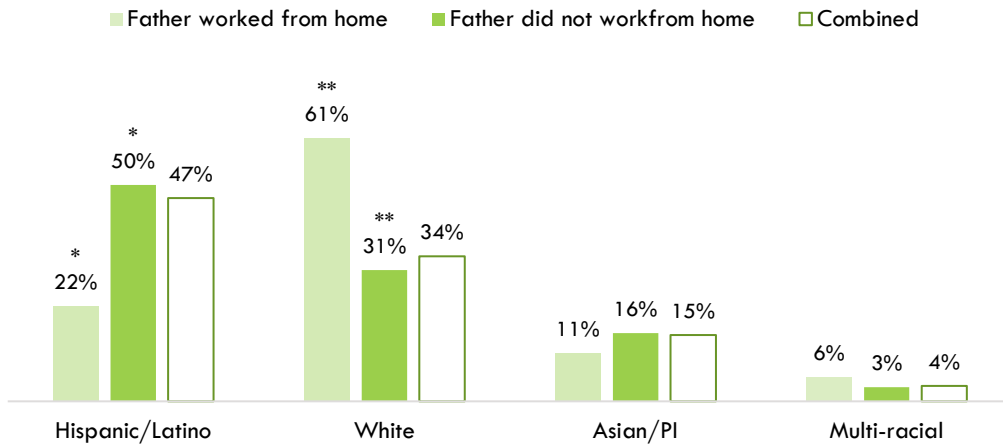
SAMPLE

Overall the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) involved the participation of 13 kindergarten teachers in Sutter County. There were 254 students assessed in these classes, representing nearly 14% of the total kindergarten population in the county. The families of the children sampled from these kindergarten classes completed the Parent Information Form (PIF). This survey was completed by 179 parents (70% of the sample). Of these 179 families, 169 (94%) answered a question about whether or not the father in the household had to work from home with children around due to the COVID-19 pandemic, constituting the subsample used for this report.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSES

There was no association between the father's working-from-home status and the child's age, spoken language, diagnosed special need or the school they attended, but whether or not fathers worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with their child's reported racial identity. Children whose racial identity was reported as White tended to have fathers who reported working from home, while children who identified as Hispanic/Latino tended to have fathers who did not report working from home.

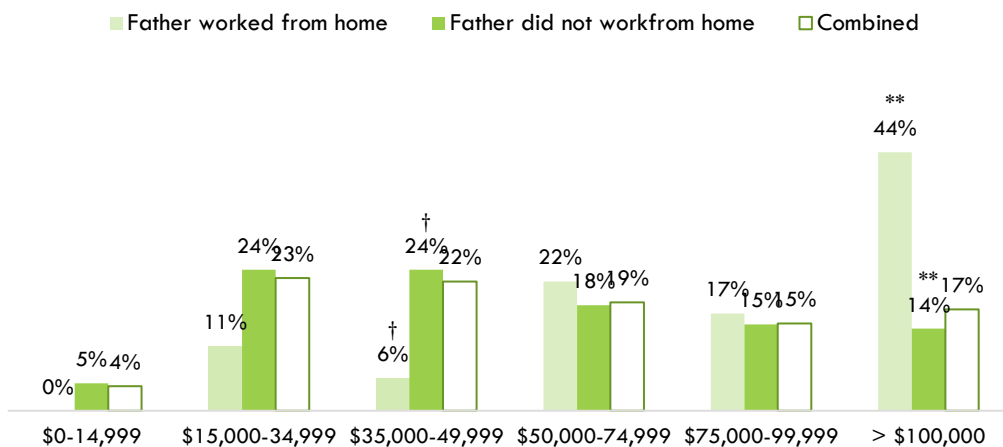
Figure 1. Race/ethnicity of child, by father's working-from-home status



Source: Parent Information Form (2021). N = 169. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Whether or not fathers worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic was also significantly associated with household income. Families reporting that the father did not work tended to be lower income than families in which the father worked from home.

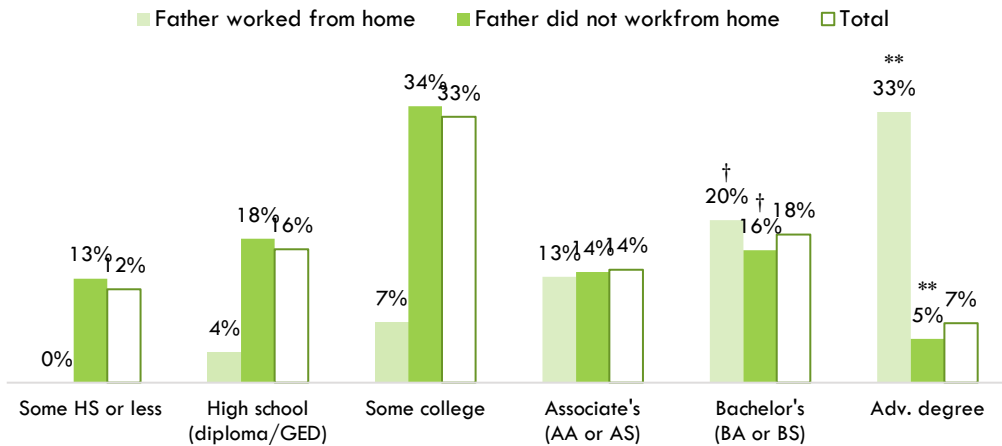
Figure 2. Annual household income, by father's working-from-home status



Source: Parent Information Form (2021). N = 167. † $p < .10$, ** $p < .01$.

Whether or not fathers worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic was significantly associated with the mother's educational attainment (see Figure 3). In families where the father worked from home, very few mothers had a high-school level of education or less. On the other hand, families where the father did not work from home were characterized by a larger share of mothers who had no more than a high school education.

Figure 3. Mother's educational attainment, by father's working-from-home status

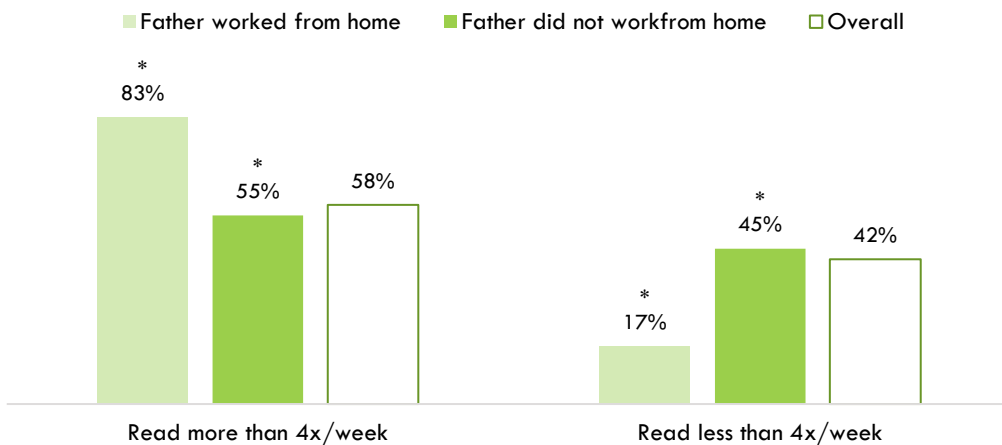


Source: Parent Information Form (2021). N = 165. † $p < .10$, ** $p < .01$

FAMILY ROUTINES AND ACTIVITIES

Family routines, like screen time limits or bedtimes, did not differ as a function of whether or not fathers worked from home, nor did the overall frequency of typical family activities. However, when the father worked at home, adults read to children on significantly more days, than was the case when fathers worked outside the home. No other types of family activities showed these differences, but the association between father work environment and reading is significant given that reading at home was strongly associated with school readiness in the 2021 KRA.

Figure 4. Weekly reading to child, by father's working-from-home status

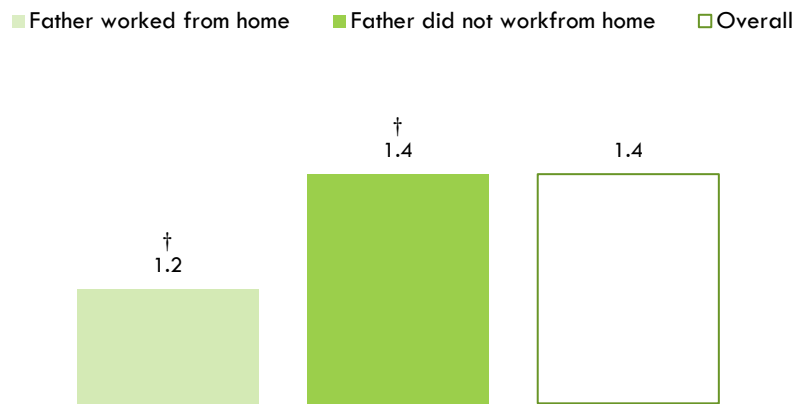


Source: Parent Information Form (2021). N = 164. * $p < .05$.

FAMILY STRESSORS

The overall level of parenting stress (1 = *Rarely*; 4 = *Almost always*) differed marginally ($p < .10$), between these two groups of families. In families where the father worked from home, reported parenting stressors were slightly lower than in families where the father did not work from home.

Figure 5. Parenting stress, by father's working-from-home status



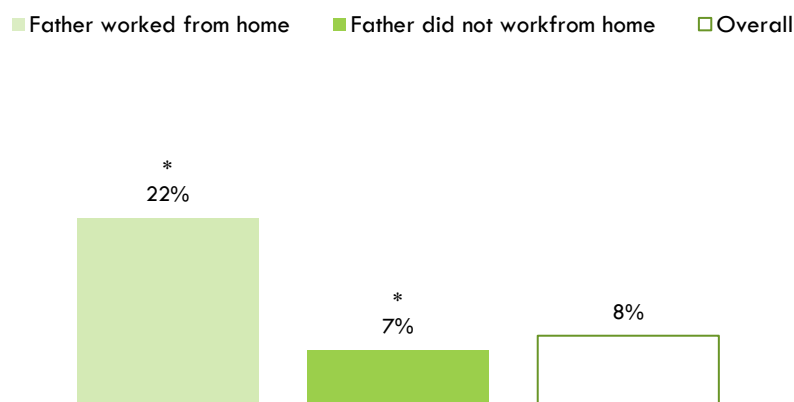
Source: Parent Information Form (2021). N = 176. † $p < .10$.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED FAMILY STRESSORS

The COVID-19 pandemic added new potential stressors for parents, such as losing their job, being laid off, working fewer hours, or having their wages reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unexpectedly, respondents reported that families actually experienced significantly more of these stressors overall if the father worked from home, than did families in which the father did not work from home. Fortunately, it does not appear that the experience of these stressors negatively impacted children school readiness.

In particular, in families where fathers worked from home, the mother was *more* likely to have lost her job than were mothers in families where the father did not work from home. No other reports of COVID-related employment stressors showed any significant associations with working from home.

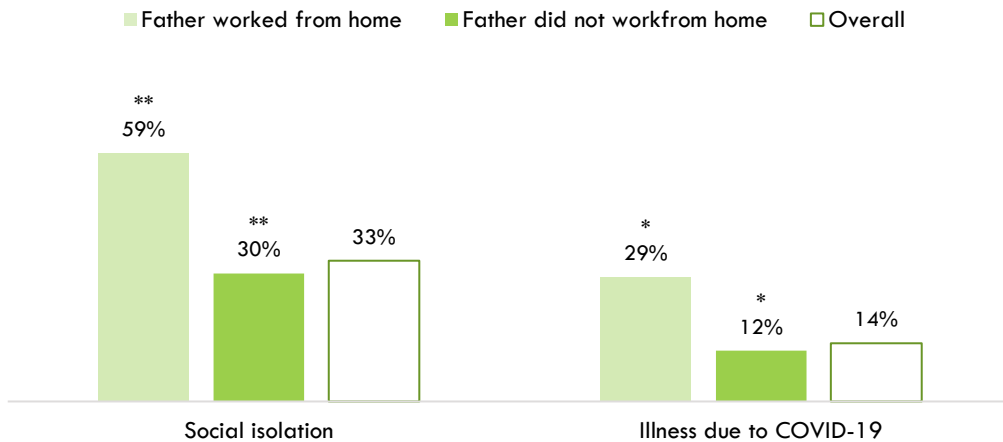
Figure 6. Mother lost job due to COVID-19 pandemic, by father's working-from-home status



Source: Parent Information Form (2021). N = 169. * $p < .05$.

When fathers worked from home, families tended to report increased feelings of social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas families where the father did not work at home reported isolation less frequently. Unexpectedly, when fathers worked from home, families were more likely to report illness due to COVID-19. It's possible that families who had a father working from home were less likely to regularly engage with other people outside of the home, leading to feelings of social isolation, but this isolation was not enough to prevent all cases of COVID-19 in families.

Figure 7. Family stressors due to COVID-19 pandemic, by father's working-from-home status



Source: Parent Information Form (2021). N = 169. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this report was to generate a better understanding of the characteristics of families where the father worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this understanding is critical due to the contributions of the father's working-from-home status to the school readiness of children. In general, it has long been known that a father's involvement influences his child's readiness for school.ⁱ In addition, fathers participate more in activities that specifically promote school readiness when they live in the home.ⁱⁱ Perhaps additional time spent in the home with their children during the COVID-19 pandemic promoted paternal participation, resulting in higher school readiness for children whose fathers worked from home.

Endnotes

ⁱ Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' influence on their children's cognitive and emotional development: From toddlers to pre-K. *Applied Development Science, 11*(4), 208-213.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network. (2004). Fathers' and Mothers' Parenting Behavior and Beliefs as Predictors of Children's Social Adjustment in the Transition to School. *Journal of Family Psychology, 18*(4), 628–638.

Parke, R. D. (2002). Fathers and families. In M. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting, Volume 3: Being and becoming a parent* (pp. 27-73). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Shannon, J. D., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., London, K., & Cabrera, N. (2002). Beyond rough and tumble: Low-income fathers' interactions and children's cognitive development at 24 months. *Parenting: Science and Practice, 2*(2), 77-104.

ⁱⁱ Downer, J. T., & Mendez, J. L. (2005). African American father involvement and preschool children's school readiness. *Early Education and Development, 16*(3), 317-340.