
The gendered effects of the ongoing lockdown and school closures in South Africa: Evidence from NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2

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The gendered effects of the ongoing lockdown and school closures in South Africa: Evidence from NIDS-CRAM Waves 1 and 2¹

Daniela Casale² and Debra Shepherd³

Abstract

The data from Wave 1 of NIDS-CRAM showed that women were disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 crisis and the first month of the lockdown period in South Africa. Not only were they much more likely than men to lose their jobs between February and April or to work fewer hours compared to the pre-crisis period, they also took on a greater share of the additional childcare as a result of school closures and the suspension of all childcare services. In this policy paper, we use Wave 2 of NIDS-CRAM to explore how women and men have fared as the economy started to reopen and lockdown restrictions were relaxed. The data suggest that with the move from Level 5 lockdown in April to Level 3 lockdown in June, there was hardly any change in employment levels overall. However, women may have gained slightly relative to men. Nonetheless, given the very large job losses recorded among women between February and April (women lost 2 million jobs and men 1 million jobs), women still remained well behind men in reaching their pre-Covid employment levels in June. In contrast, men benefited more from the reopening of some school grades and childcare services in June. Compared to April, the hours men reported spending on childcare in June fell by more than the hours women reported spending on childcare. The data also show that much higher numbers of women than men found childcare to affect their ability to work, to work the same hours as before lockdown, and to search for work.

Keywords: gender, employment, childcare, Covid-19, lockdown, South Africa

JEL codes. J10, J16



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CORONAVIRUS RAPID MOBILE SURVEY 2020

¹ This paper forms part of the NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 reports: <https://cramsurvey.org/reports>.

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1. Introduction

Unlike the Great Recession of 2008, where men were disproportionately affected by job losses, the Covid-19 crisis has affected women relatively more than men, with the crisis now frequently referred to as a ‘Shecession’.⁴ Early studies emerging from a range of countries such as the US, the UK, Israel and India found that women were more likely than men to lose their jobs or to work fewer hours during April and May lockdowns (Adams-Prassl et al 2020; Andrew et al 2020; Collins et al 2020; Deshpande 2020; Kristal and Yaish 2020).

One of the main reasons for this is that women and men continue to be concentrated in different parts of the economy, and many of the hardest-hit sectors have also been those that typically employ large numbers of women (Alon et al 2020; Joyce and Xu 2020). For instance, tourism and hospitality, personal care services, retail trade, and domestic and childcare services have been severely affected by the crisis. Many of the jobs in these sectors cannot be performed remotely, and in many countries, activity in these sectors has been prohibited, or at least limited, under strict lockdown regulations.

Another likely reason for the disproportionate effect on women is the crisis in childcare that has occurred concurrently. The closure of schools and childcare facilities has raised the childcare burden within households substantially, with few options available for outsourcing care during lockdowns. Given that women were more likely to care for children pre-Covid, the concern has been that they will bear the brunt of this additional unpaid care work, further limiting their ability to engage in paid work, or to work as many hours as before (Alon et al 2020; Cattan et al 2020; Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020). Indeed, in almost all the studies that have collected data on time spent on childcare during lockdowns, women were found to take on a greater share of the additional care work (Adams-Prassl et al 2020; Andrew et al 2020; Ilkkaracan and Memis 2020; Sevilla and Smith 2020).

Data from the first wave of the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS)-Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) survey showed that women in South Africa were especially hard-hit by the crisis during the first month of the country’s strict lockdown (Casale and Posel 2020). Although women accounted for less than half (47%) of employment in February, they accounted for almost two-thirds of the job losses that were recorded between February and April, and employed women experienced much greater declines in hours worked than employed men. In addition, women were found to have taken on more of the additional childcare work during the April lockdown. This was because women were much more likely to be living with children than men were, but also because, even among those living with children, women were spending longer hours on extra childcare than men. The overarching finding from the study was that the crisis, thus far, had exacerbated pre-existing inequalities between men and women (Casale and Posel 2020).

While there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the initial phase of lockdowns has been particularly devastating for women, there has been little work examining how women have fared as economies have started to reopen and people have slowly returned to work. In the US, there has been some limited reporting on gender outcomes based on the monthly jobs data released (IWPR 2020a; 2020b). These reports indicate

⁴ See ‘Why Some Women Call This Recession a “Shecession”’, New York Times, 13 May 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/unemployment-coronavirus-women.html> and ‘The ‘shecession’: why economic crisis is affecting women more than men’, The Guardian, 4 August 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/aug/04/shecession-coronavirus-pandemic-economic-fallout-women?CMP=share_btn_link

that women have been responsible for a greater share of the job gains that have occurred since mid-May, but that women still remain behind men in terms of reaching their pre-Covid levels of employment.⁵

In this policy paper, we use the NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 data to explore how women have fared relative to men as the South African economy started to reopen. The first wave of NIDS-CRAM focused on measuring outcomes in April, when South Africa was still in its first and strictest lockdown phase – Level 5 (L5). During this lockdown level (27 March to 30 April 2020) almost all activity was suspended except for the production of essential goods and services (mainly in the food, medical, and security sectors), although workers were encouraged to work from home if feasible. The second wave of NIDS-CRAM focusses on measuring outcomes in June, when South Africa was in a less restrictive lockdown phase - Level 3 (which ran from 1 June to 17 August 2020). While there was very little difference in the level of economic activity allowed under L5 and L4, the move to L3 meant that many businesses were allowed to reopen for the first time since 27 March.

Instead of specifying which sectors could operate, as had previously been the case, the government transitioned to listing which sectors *could not reopen* under L3. These restrictions included personal care services (if social distancing was not possible); all on-site consumption of food and alcohol in restaurants and bars (until alcohol was banned for the second time from 13 July); hotels/accommodation for leisure; international and domestic air travel except for essential work; conferences, events and gatherings; entertainment venues; and fitness centres. It is not immediately apparent if these changes would benefit women more relative to men. While many women are employed in these restricted sectors, for low-skilled women, a key change to the regulations was that workers employed by private households were allowed to return, the majority of whom are female domestic workers.

Because women are more likely to be the primary caregiver to children in SA, they rely more on childcare facilities and schools to be able to return to work or take up new work opportunities. While ECD centres and most school grades remained closed in June, Grades 7 and 12 were allowed back at the beginning of June (with a staggered return of additional grades planned for the beginning of July). Childcare work in households with children may have lessened somewhat with these grades reopening and with the return of domestic workers allowed. However, most children would have still been at home during the month of June, and for some households, the availability of childcare may have become more constrained if older children were caring for younger siblings while adults returned to work. Wave 2 of NIDS-CRAM allows us to examine changes in time spent on childcare between April and June, and the implications for women's and men's ability to work or search for work.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section we describe the NIDS-CRAM data. In Section 3, we present changes in labour market outcomes that occurred between April and June and compare these to the changes recorded between February and April. In Section 4, we analyse the time spent on childcare in April and June, and how these responsibilities affected people living with children. Section 5 provides a concluding discussion of the findings and Section 6 reflects on the policy implications.

⁵ In February in the US, women made up 50.2% of workers on payroll, but they accounted for 55.9% of net job losses between February and mid-May (IWPR 2020a). This figure fell to 53.6% of net job losses when measured between February and mid-July, indicating that women benefitted more from job gains than men as the economy started reopening. Women's payroll employment still remained 9% below February levels though, while men's remained 7.8% below February levels (IWPR 2020b).

2. Data description

NIDS-CRAM is a rapid assessment telephone survey which aims to track the socio-economic effects of the Covid-19 crisis during South Africa's ongoing lockdown. The interviews for the first wave were conducted between 7 May and 27 June 2020 among a sample of 7073 adults aged 18 years and older. In Wave 2, 5 676 of these individuals were successfully re-interviewed between 13 July and 13 August 2020, leading to a response rate of 80.2%.⁶ Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was employed, interviews were approximately 20 minutes on average, and the questionnaire was translated into 10 of the 11 official South African languages in Wave 1 and into all 11 languages in Wave 2.

While a number of rapid online or telephone surveys have been conducted in South Africa since the crisis began, the benefit of NIDS-CRAM is that it attempts to collect information on a nationally representative sample of adults, *to the extent possible under the circumstances*. This was achieved by using a sub-sample of individuals from the National Income Dynamics Survey (NIDS), a pre-existing nationally representative longitudinal survey last conducted in 2017.⁷ To be more precise therefore, the NIDS-CRAM sample is representative of individuals who were 15 years and older in NIDS in 2017 when weighted appropriately. All data presented in this paper are weighted, and standard errors are corrected for survey design features (namely clustering and stratification). For more detail on the NIDS-CRAM survey design and weighting approach, see Ingle et al (2020). All other technical and policy reports are also available at <https://cramsurvey.org/>.

3. Labour market outcomes

In this section, we use the first two waves of NIDS-CRAM to analyse the labour market outcomes of men and women at three time points: February (or pre-Covid); April (first full month of Level 5 lockdown); and June (first full month of Level 3 lockdown).⁸ Table 1 presents the total employment numbers and rates, the mean hours worked per week, mean and median monthly earnings, and the percentages reporting zero hours and zero earnings in these three months. For ease of viewing, Figures 1-3 graph the levels of employment, hours worked and earnings for February, April and June, as well as the percentage changes over three periods: February to April; April to June; and February to June (to show the overall change over the entire five-month period).⁹

⁶ The intention is for there to be a total of five waves of the survey conducted within a 12-month period from the start of the crisis.

⁷ For more information about NIDS, visit <http://www.nids.uct.ac.za/>. NIDS as well as the special NIDS-CRAM survey is conducted by the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town.

⁸ Note that the figures in this paper for February and April will be marginally different from those presented for the same months in the Wave 1 policy paper by Casale and Posel (2020). This is because a new version of the Wave 1 data has subsequently been released with updated weights which we use in this policy paper.

⁹ Table 1 and Figures 1-3 use the unbalanced panel (weighted appropriately) to be able to produce the most reliable labour market estimates at the cross-section. However, if the same statistics are calculated using the balanced panel of 5 676 individuals, the change in the figures is only marginal and does not affect the overall conclusions of the paper.

3.1 Employment

Between February and April, women experienced much greater job losses than men in both absolute and relative terms. Female employment fell by 23% and male employment by 10%. Of the roughly 3 million jobs lost between February and April, women accounted for 2 million or 67%, despite only accounting for 47% of total employment in February.

Even though the economy started reopening after April, there was very little change to overall employment levels. For the sample of adults aged 18 years and older, an additional 100 000 or so jobs were lost between April and June (although this change is not statistically significant). However, over this period, women gained slightly relative to men. Between April and June, women saw a 3.2% increase in employment or a roughly 220 000 net job gain, and men saw a further 3.5% decrease in employment or a 320 000 net job loss. Given the sample size (and the corresponding large standard errors) one does need to be cautious about drawing inferences from what are relatively small changes in observed numbers. It is therefore difficult to say with our data exactly why there was a relative gain for women with the move from L5 to L3. Some key changes with the move to L3 that might have benefitted women more include that there was more activity in the retail sector, restaurants could open for takeaways, domestic workers could return to work, and personal care was permitted if social distancing could be maintained.

Nonetheless, this relative recovery was nowhere near sufficient to make up the jobs lost since February. In June, women remained well behind men in terms of reaching their pre-Covid employment levels. The employment rate for women in June was 37% (down from 46% in February) and for men it was 52% (down from 59% in February). Another way to state this disproportionate effect is that while women accounted for 47% of employment in February, they still accounted for 58% of net job losses over the whole period – i.e. February to June.

3.2 Hours worked

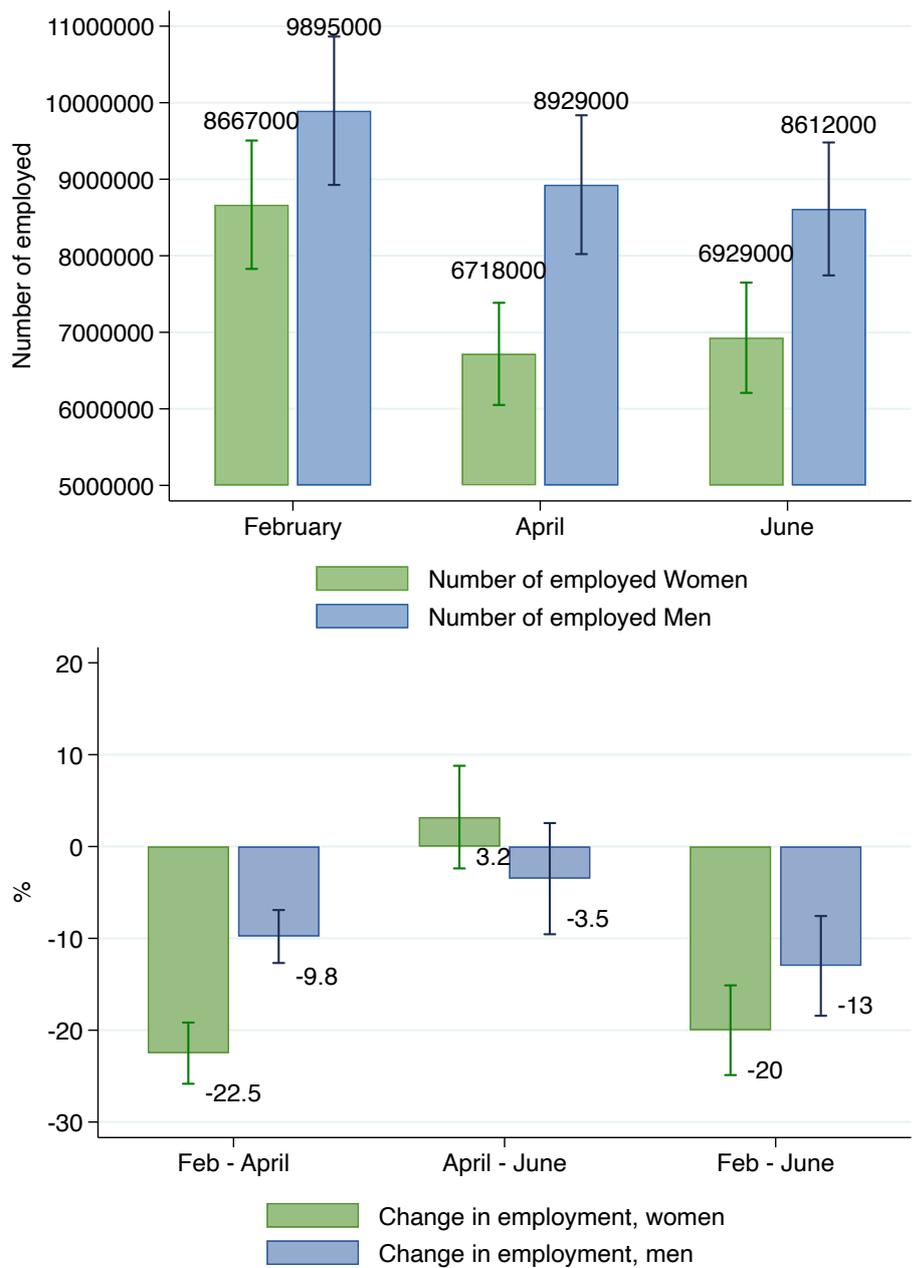
In addition to experiencing greater job losses than men, employed women also saw much bigger declines in mean hours worked in Wave 1. Between February and April, mean hours worked per week among the employed fell dramatically for both men and women, although the percentage decline for women (35%) was much greater than for men (26%). Part of this was being driven by the large increases in the number of people who reported having a job (or a job to return to) but working zero hours. This group of workers rose from 6% in February to 36% in April for women, while for men the corresponding increase was from 4% to 26% (see Table 1).

Between April and June, mean hours worked among the employed recovered substantially, and by more for women than for men - a 46% increase for women versus a 26% increase for men (Figure 2). By June, mean hours worked were almost back to their pre-Covid levels for both women and men, and the percentage of the employed reporting zero hours fell to 12% for women and 10% for men (still at least double their February rate, but much lower).

3.3 Earnings

There are two key points to note when analysing earnings data in NIDS-CRAM. The first is that the earnings data in February and April are not directly comparable because the methods of questioning differed. In W1, more detailed questions on earnings by period of pay (daily, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) were asked for the month of April, but not for February, due to time constraints. Changes between February and April should therefore be viewed with some caution. Earnings in April and June were collected using the same line of questioning, however.

Figure 1: Levels of employment, and percentage changes between time points



Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all employed adults 18 years or older. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately. 90 percent confidence intervals are shown.

Table 1: Employment, hours worked, and earnings in February, April and June 2020, all adults 18 and older

	Women	Men
<u>FEBRUARY</u>		
Number of all adults (18 and over) employed	8 666 906 (511 253)	9 895 472 (590 937)
% of all adults (18 and over) employed	46.0% (1.21)	59.3%** (1.65)
<i><u>If employed:</u></i>		
Mean hours worked per week	35.3 (0.64)	38.8** (0.75)
% reporting zero hours	6.0% (1.0)	4.4% (0.9)
Real mean monthly earnings (Rands)	5 721 (360)	9 147** (793)
Real median monthly earnings (Rands)	3 000 (250)	4 200** (225)
% reporting zero earnings	7.1% (1.06)	4.2% (0.89)
<u>APRIL</u>		
Number of all adults (18 and over) employed	6 717 758 (406 757)	8 928 837** (552 606)
% of all adults (18 and over) employed	36.2% (1.18)	54.1%** (1.62)
<i><u>If employed:</u></i>		
Mean hours worked per week	23.0 (1.05)	28.8* (1.09)
% reporting zero hours	35.7% (2.2)	26.3%** (2.0)
Real mean monthly earnings (Rands)	6 569 (436)	9 570** (709)
Real median monthly earnings (Rands)	3 695 (275)	5 000* (340)
% reporting zero earnings	13.2% (1.35)	12.2% (1.38)
<u>JUNE</u>		
Number of all adults (18 and over) employed	6 929 450 (434 380)	8 612 316* (523 343)
% of all adults (18 and over) employed	37.4% (1.37)	52.3%** (1.74)
<i><u>If employed:</u></i>		
Mean hours worked per week	33.5 (1.03)	36.4 (1.07)
% reporting zero hours	12.1% (1.33)	10.3% (1.52)
Real mean monthly earnings (Rands)	6 332 (480)	10 497** (892)
Real median monthly earnings (Rands)	3 460 (210)	4 950** (393)
% reporting zero earnings	6.9% (1.15)	8.2% (1.46)

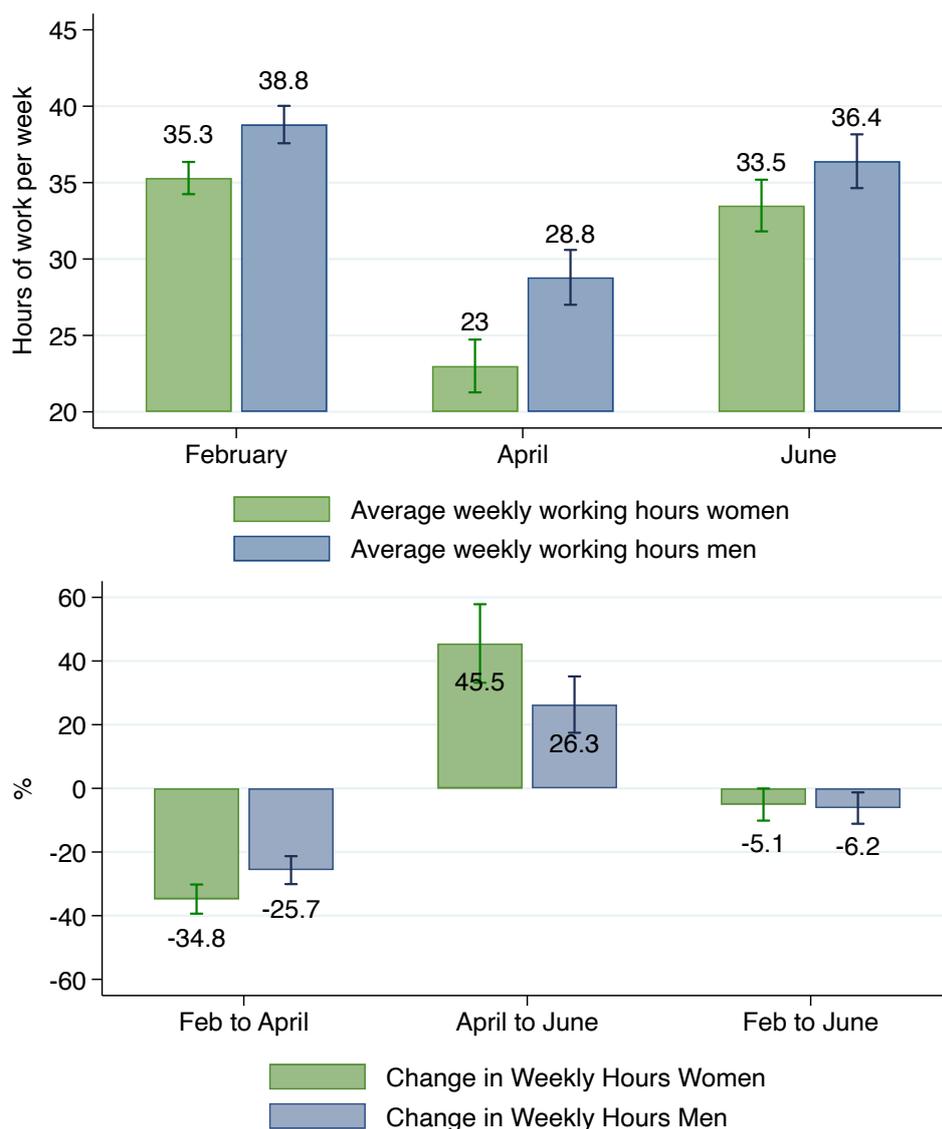
Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. Real monthly earnings in April and June are computed through deflating to February Rands. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

** Gender differences are significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

Figure 2: Average hours worked per week, and percentage changes between time points



Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

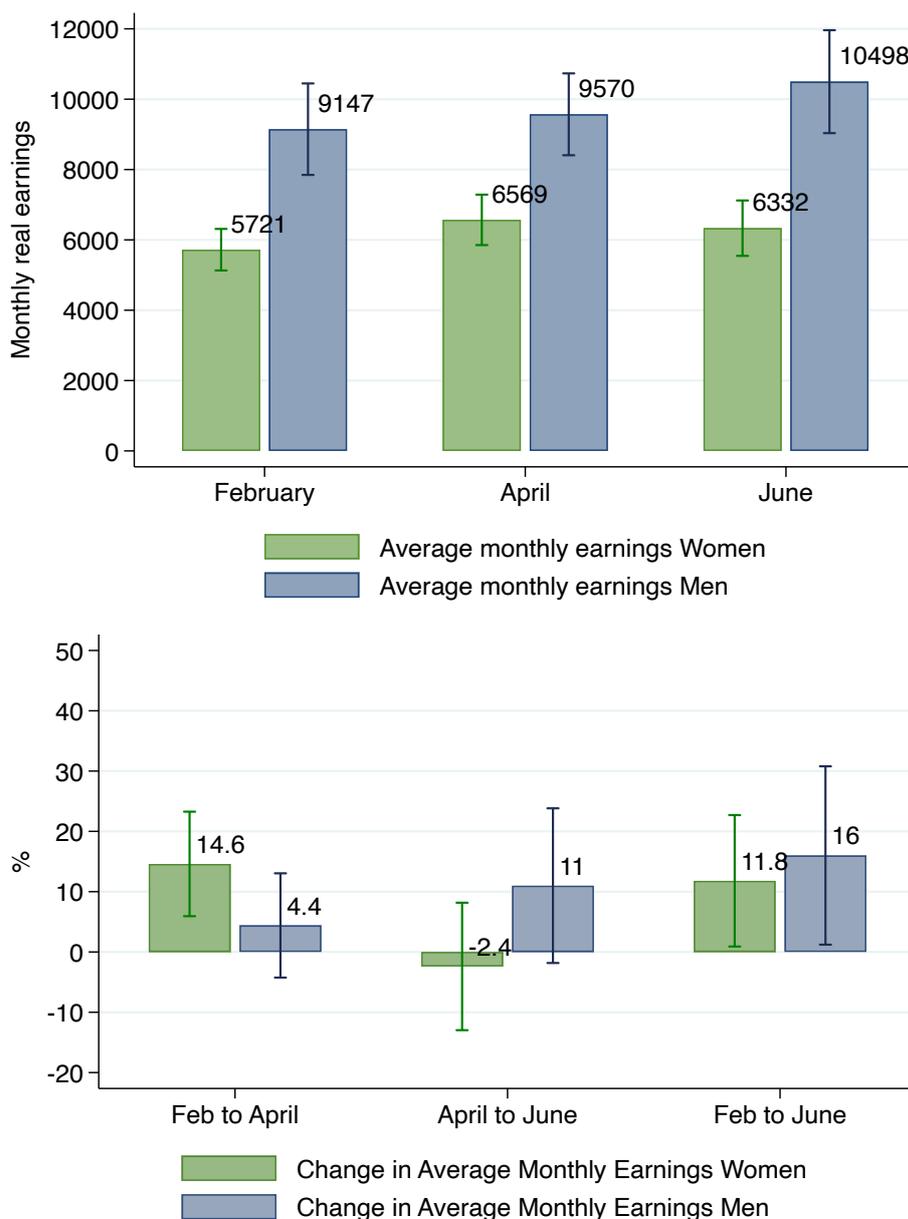
Notes: The sample is all employed adults 18 years or older. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately. 90 percent confidence intervals are shown.

The second issue is that earnings changes over time need to be understood in relation to the job losses that have occurred during these unprecedented times. Between February and April, real earnings¹⁰ (mean and median) actually increased for women and men, and more so for women. This is because the most vulnerable men and (especially) women lost their jobs over this period (Casale and Posel 2020)¹¹ – our sample of employed therefore became more select over time, particularly for women.

¹⁰ Real monthly earnings in April and June are computed through deflating to February Rands.

¹¹ Casale and Posel (2020) showed that a greater percentage of Africans, low-income earners, and those without a post-matric education lost their jobs between February and April, and that the percentages were higher for women than men in all categories.

Figure 3: Average monthly earnings (real), and percentage changes between time points



Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all employed adults 18 years or older. Real monthly earnings in April and June are computed through deflating to February Rands. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately. 90 percent confidence intervals are shown.

Between April and June, women’s real earnings decreased (although marginally), and men’s earnings increased further. This is in part related to some lower-paid women gaining jobs over the period whilst lower-paid men lost more jobs (see the next section). This result generally holds for both mean and median real earnings (Table 1), although we only graph mean earnings in Figure 3. In June, both employed women’s and men’s real earnings were still well above February levels, probably because there was so little change in the net employment figures between April and June and not many of the low-paid jobs were recovered.

Another measure of interest is the percentage of the employed who reported having a job (or a job to return to) but zero income (Table 1). In February, 7% of women and 4% of men reported being employed but

receiving zero earnings, and these figures increased to 13% and 12% respectively in April. What this suggests is that most people affected by the crisis lost their jobs altogether, and those who remained employed mostly continued to earn an income. The group of zero-earners likely comprises workers still constrained by lockdown regulations whose employers could not afford to pay them, or the self-employed not able to turn a profit. By June, the percentage reporting zero earnings fell back down to 7% for women (pre-Covid levels) and to 8% for men (still above pre-Covid levels). This was probably driven by lockdown levels being relaxed, allowing more people to go back to work physically, and the UIF-TERS becoming more efficient at disbursing funds by June.

3.4 Who was most vulnerable to job losses and who benefited more from gains?

In this section we try to unpack the job losses and gains over the period to see who was most vulnerable to job losses and who benefited most from job gains. While the data in Table 1 and Figure 1 show net job losses or gains between the three time points, the figures in this section highlight the substantial churning that occurs in the labour market. For example, Figure 4, which disaggregates job losses and gains by gender and race, shows that while there were job losses *and* job gains for each sub-group between February and April (left frame) and April and June (middle frame), overall, between February and June (right frame), all groups experienced a net job loss. Of interest in this section is which groups suffered the greatest loss (or the greatest gain) between lockdown levels.

Before continuing a key caveat must be made, namely, that the NIDS-CRAM sample size is too small to support a rigorous treatment of this issue. The confidence intervals in the figures below suggest that very few of the gender differences within groups are significant. Significant differences can be identified across or between some of the categories; for instance, with respect to Figure 4, we can say that Africans suffered greater job losses than non-Africans, but within the African or non-African sub-groups, differences between men and women are not significant. The figures below should be treated more as illustrative of potential shifts, rather than presenting accurate numbers.

Figure 4 shows that between February and April, the job losses outweighed any job gains that were made for each group, but that the net job losses were greatest among Africans, and especially African women. In contrast, between April and June, we see that for African women the job gains outweigh the job losses. The same holds for non-African women and men. Only African men experienced another round of net job losses in the move from L5 to L3. These net movements were very small, however, which explains why, for the economy as a whole, there was barely any change in jobs recorded between April and June. Looking at the right frame of the figure, what is interesting is that over the whole period, the group least affected was non-African men, who recorded only a very small net loss in employment when we compare February to June. In other words, non-African men are almost back to pre-Covid employment levels.

Figure 5 highlights that the less educated (women and men), particularly those without a matric or a tertiary education, were affected most by job losses between February and April. Between April and June, most groups saw some small net job gains, except for men without a matric who continued to see job losses outweigh gains. Looking at the changes over the whole period from February to June, all groups were still well below pre-Covid employment levels, except for tertiary educated men who were almost back to February employment levels.

Figure 6 shows that the lowest-earning workers, or those in the bottom third of the February earnings distribution (R0-R1400), were affected most by the net job losses that occurred between February and April. Women in this lowest category were particularly hard-hit. Between April and June most of the net job gains were among women in the lowest (R0-R1400) and middle (R1400-R4400) categories of the earnings distribution, while for men, there were only net gains in the top category (R4400 and over). However, when the net change is analysed for the whole period, it is clear that all groups remained below

their pre-Covid levels, except for men in the highest earnings category.

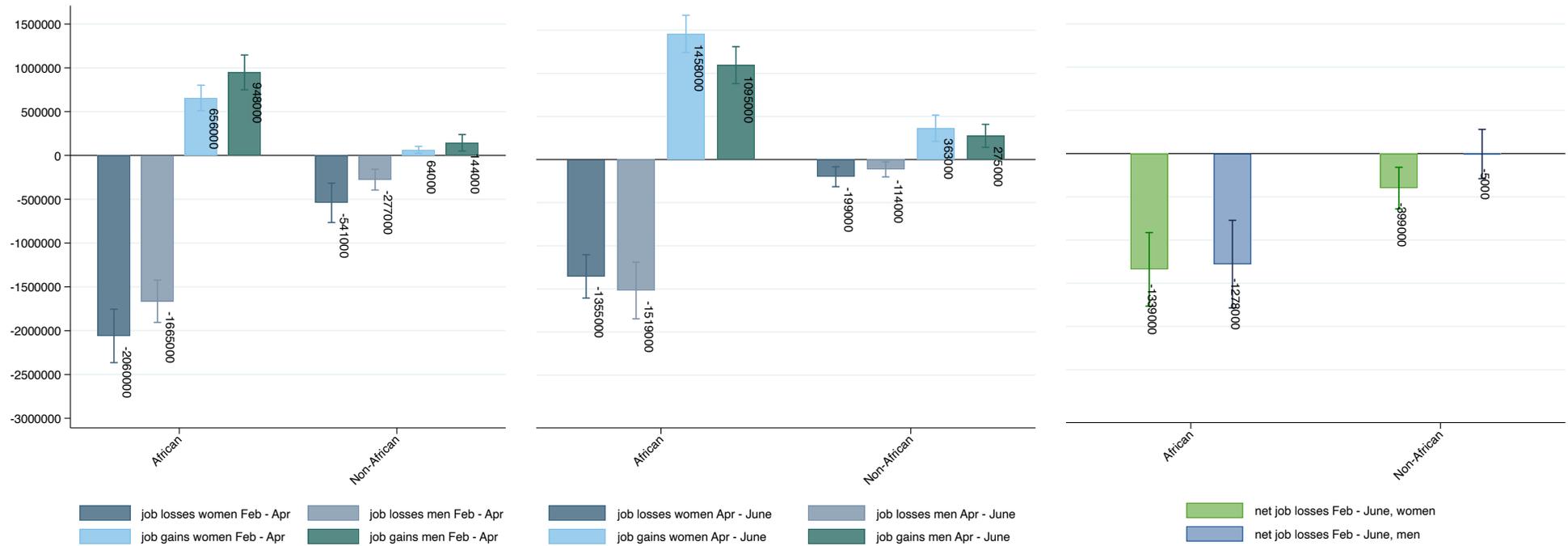
In summary, African women and men, those without a matric education, and those in the bottom two-thirds of the earnings distribution were most affected by the net job losses over the entire period. The least affected were non-Africans, those with a tertiary education and those in the top earnings category, and within these better-off groups, men were almost back to pre-Covid employment levels.

Ideally, we would like to be able to report on which sectors saw job losses and job gains over the period, as we have done above for race, education and earnings tertile. Unfortunately, data on the sector of employment was only captured in Wave 2. This means that we can only analyse job gains by sector between April and June. In other words, we can show the sector of employment for the group of workers who were employed in June, but not in April - see Figure 7.¹² The job gains shown in Figure 7 should be viewed with caution, however. They reflect the gross increase in jobs in each sector between April and June. Each of these sectors would also have recorded job losses which we cannot pick up with our data. Therefore, we cannot say which sectors experienced net job gains versus net job losses overall. Further, because of small sample sizes when disaggregating gains by ten sectoral categories, the changes we show can only be viewed as broadly illustrative of shifts in the economy.

Nonetheless, what we find is largely consistent with our expectations given how lockdown regulations changed. As we noted earlier, some key changes with the move to L3 that would be expected to benefit women include that there was more activity in the retail sector, restaurants could open for takeaways, domestic workers could return to work, and personal care was permitted if social distancing could be maintained. Between April and June, the sectors in which women experienced the largest job gains were private households (domestic workers), wholesale and retail trade (which would include the restaurant and hospitality industry) and community, social and personal services (which includes education, health, social work and personal care services). The increase in this latter category might also reflect increased employment opportunities for women related to the Covid-19 health response. For men, the biggest job gains were in the construction sector which was also allowed to resume work in L3. However, we will have to wait for subsequent waves of NIDS-CRAM to be able to say which sectors experienced net job gains or losses.

¹² In Wave 2, the unemployed were also asked for their usual sector of work. From this we could try to infer job losses between April and June. However, because we do not know the usual sector of employment for the not economically active, the job loss data would be incomplete (and a not insubstantial number of the employed in April, approximately a quarter, moved into the not economically active category in June).

Figure 4: Job loss and gain by gender and race, February to June 2020

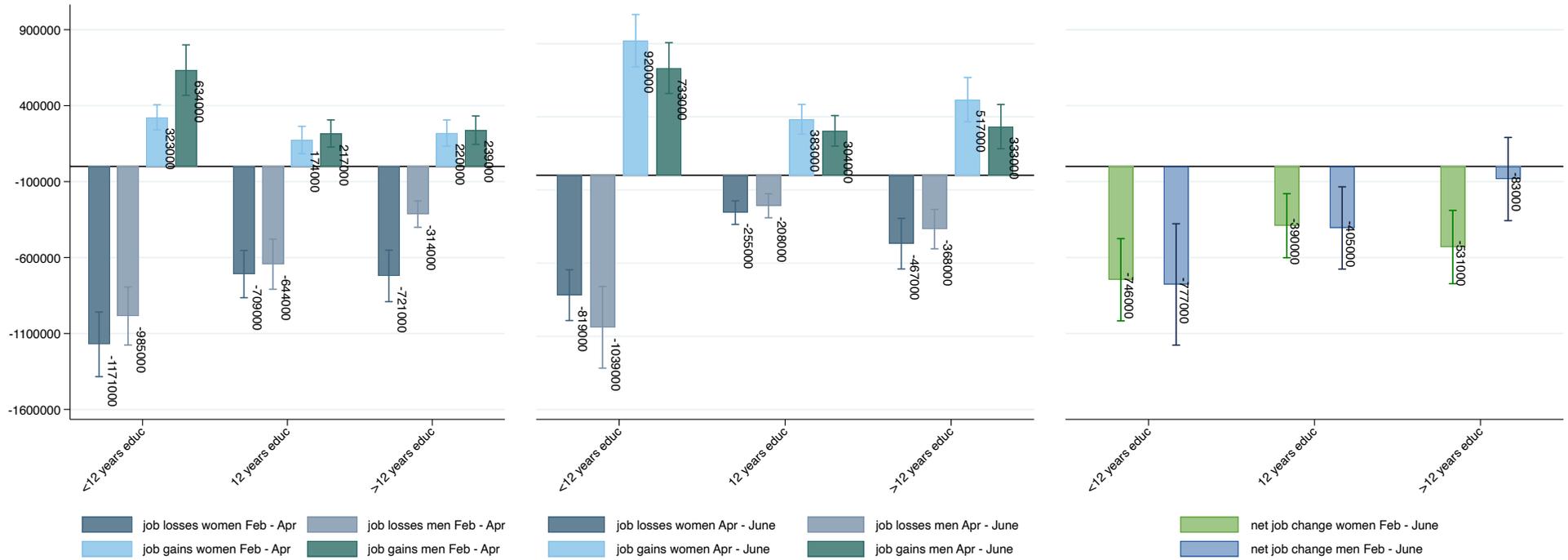


Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately.

90 percent confidence intervals are shown.

Figure 5: Job loss and gain by gender and education, February to June 2020

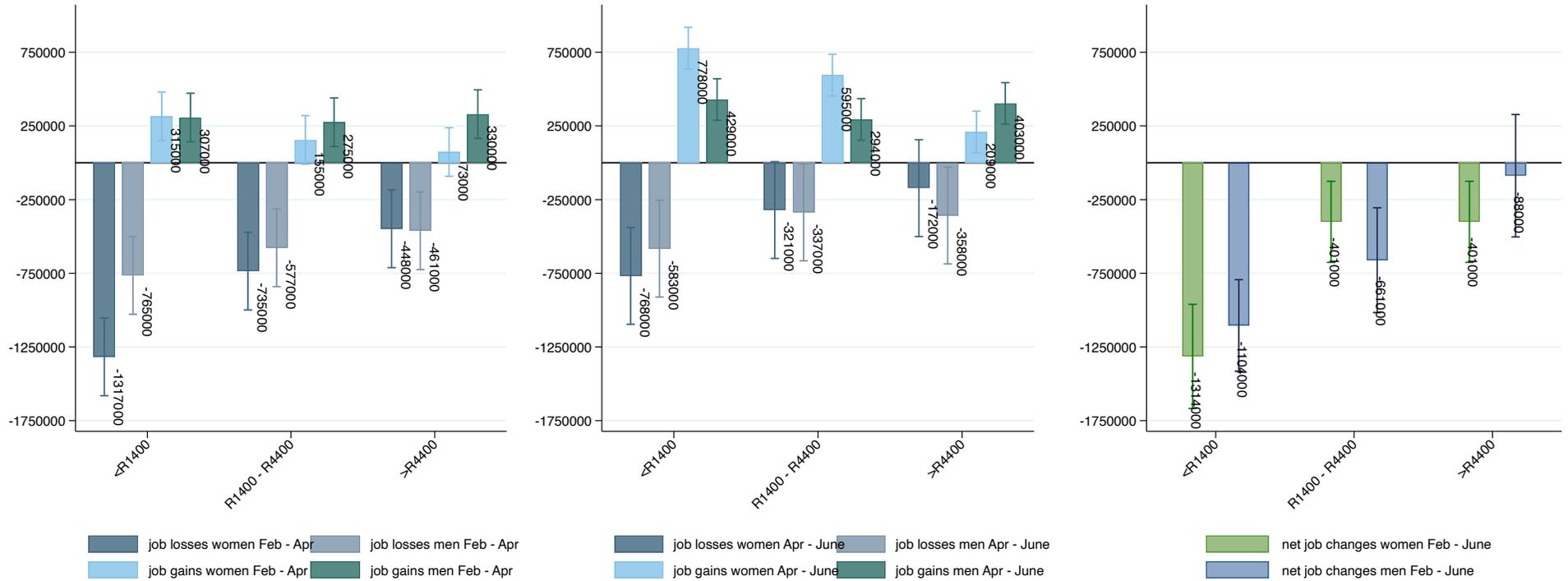


Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately.

90 percent confidence intervals are shown.

Figure 6: Job loss by gender and earnings tertile, February to June 2020



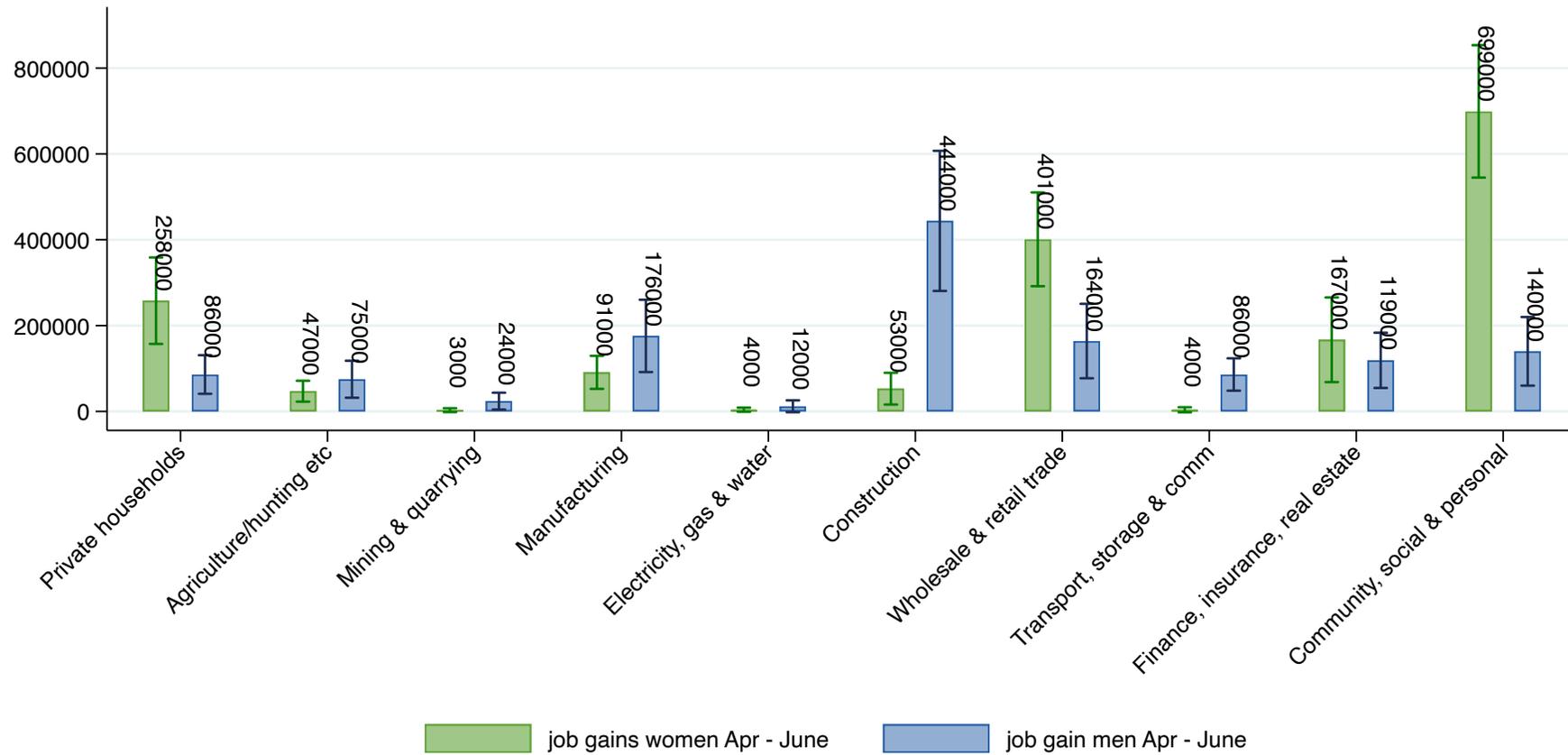
Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately.

90 percent confidence intervals are shown.

The earnings brackets are based on February earnings tertiles. For the employed who lost jobs between February and April and April and June, February and April earnings respectively were used to assign them to earnings categories. For the not employed who gained jobs between February and April and April and June, April and June earnings were used respectively to assign them to earnings categories.

Figure 7: Job gains by gender and sector, April to June 2020



Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older who were not employed in April, but who had a job in June. The data are weighted appropriately. 90 percent confidence intervals are shown.

3.5 Income support for the unemployed and ‘furloughed’

A key concern emerging from the NIDS-CRAM data is that even though women are over-represented among those who lost their jobs or who experienced reduced or zero hours over the lockdown period, they are under-represented in income support for the unemployed and ‘furloughed’ workers (those with employment, but unable to work because of lockdown restrictions). In Table 2 we show the numbers of women and men in the labour force who reported receiving either the UIF or UIF-TERS in June (note that here we are combining the responses of the employed and the unemployed in case there was confusion on behalf of respondents as to which scheme they were benefitting from). While women made up 50% of the labour force in June, they made up only 41% of those receiving the UIF or UIF-TERS in June.

It is possible that women are less likely to be registered for UIF because of the kinds of jobs they are employed in relative to men, and therefore fewer would be able to claim. But we even see a ‘bias’ against women in the new Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRDG) for R350. This special grant was announced in May 2020 and is targeted at the unemployed who are not claiming from the UIF system or receiving any other social grant. Pay-outs were very slow initially, but by June it appears from Table 2 that around 2.4 million of the NIDS-CRAM respondents had been paid out, 34.4% of whom were women (896 862 women and 1 486 120 men).

These figures are very close to those reported by SASSA in their monthly grant report to Nedlac on 30 June 2020. According to that report, as at 27 June 2020, a total of 2 712 963 successful applicants had been paid, 35.1% of whom were women (951 972 women and 1 760 991 men). This figure does not compare favourably with the fact that women’s share in the job losses recorded between February and June was 57.5% and women’s share of total unemployment in June was 57.2% (based on the broad definition of unemployment in NIDS-CRAM Wave 2; data not shown here).

Table 2 also shows that while the success rate among applicants was similar for men and women, fewer women were applying in the first place. They made up 43% of all applicants, and 45% of successful applicants, at the time of the interview. SASSA also presents the number of successful applicants by gender in their report to Nedlac, and their numbers are lower than in NIDS-CRAM. SASSA reports that as at 27 June 2020, 3 252 424 individuals had successfully applied, 35.3% of whom were women (1 147 902 women and 2 104 522 men). In NIDS-CRAM W2, 4 317 324 individuals reported having successfully applied, 45% of whom were women (1 924 764 women and 2 392 560 men). The differences in these figures probably relate to different reference periods. While the data on actual grants paid out in NIDS-CRAM (reported in the paragraph above) specified June as the reference period (the same as the SASSA data), the question in NIDS-CRAM on whether the respondent had applied and whether the application was successful, did not specify a reference point and was probably interpreted as ‘at the time of the interview’ (which took place between July and August).

Regardless of the source, the bias against women is consistent. This is likely due to working-age women not being able to hold the grant concurrently with the Child Support Grant (CSG). This would deter women, who make up the majority of CSG recipients, from applying. As Spaul, Casale and Posel (2020)¹³ write, this eligibility criterion is inadvertently penalising unemployed women for also caring for their children. The CSG of R445, while paid out to the caregiver, is to support the child, and on its own is not even sufficient to raise one child above the food poverty line of roughly R580 in South Africa. The top-up to the CSG of R500 a month per caregiver, rather than per child, in place until October, would not be sufficient

¹³ See Spaul, Casale and Posel (17 July 2020) for further commentary: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-17-covid-19-women-are-bearing-more-costs-and-receiving-fewer-benefits/>

to raise a mother with one child above the food poverty line, let alone a mother with more than one child (the typical household in South Africa has between 2 and 3 children).

Table 2: UIF/TERS and Covid-19 SRDG June beneficiaries

	Women	Men
UIF/UIF-TERS amongst labour force (employed and broad unemployed):		
Did not receive UIF/UIF-TERS in June	11 319 286 (723 039)	11 301 315 (654 054)
Received UIF/UIF-TERS in June	1 013 848 (127 400)	1 488 337 (180 384)
Share of labour force in June women	49.9%	
Share of UIF/UIF-TERS recipients in June women	40.5%	
Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress grant (SRDG)		
Application unsuccessful/pending	2 899 352 (240 052)	4 108 918** (331 225)
Application successful	1 924 764 (190 492)	2 392 560 (278 970)
% applicants successful	39.9% (2.41)	
Numbers reporting having received the SRDG in June	896 862 (121 678)	1 486 120* (188 395)
Share of applicants women	42.6%	
Share of successful applicants women	44.6%	
Share of Covid-19 SRDG recipients in June women	34.4%	

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. Data are weighted appropriately. Standard errors are in parentheses.

4. Childcare constraints

In addition to the shock to the labour market caused by the crisis and lockdown, households with children experienced a ‘childcare shock’ in the home. The data from NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 showed that in April, under Level 5 lockdown, women were affected more than men by the suspension of almost all externally provided childcare (Casale and Posel 2020). The reason for this is twofold. First, as has been well-documented elsewhere for South Africa, women are more likely to live with children than men are. This is because the majority of children are cared for by their mother rather than their father, and where the mother is absent, often by a grandmother or another female relative (Hatch and Posel 2018; Moore 2020; Posel and Grapsa 2017; Statistics South Africa 2019). Second, even where men and women live together, women do more of the unpaid childcare work (Budlender et al 2011; Rubiano-Matulevich and Viollaz 2019; Statistics South Africa 2013).

4.1 Living arrangements

Gender differences in living arrangements were confirmed in the Wave 1 data, reproduced in the upper panel of Table 3 below. Around 74% of women and 61% of men reported living with at least one child aged 0 to 17 years at the time of the Wave 1 interview, and 52% of women and 37% of men reported living with at least one child aged 0 to 6 years specifically. The majority of both women and men living with children (around 88%) reported that at least one of these children was attending Grades R-12 pre-lockdown (ECD figures were not available in Wave 1), suggesting that most households with children would have experienced a considerable increase in childcare work during the April lockdown. These figures were almost unchanged in Wave 2, shown in the lower panel of Table 3.

In Wave 2, individuals living with children aged 0 to 6 years were also asked if any of these children were in an Early Childhood Development (ECD) centre or preschool prior to the lockdown. Just over a third of men and women living with young children said at least one of these children had been attending an ECD centre/preschool before the crisis. When asked who was looking after these young children now at home, 67% of women versus 25% of men said they were looking after these children themselves (Table 3). This significant difference shows how women are bearing the brunt of the additional care work, particularly related to the care of young children.

Table 3: Percentage of adults living with at least one child at the time of the interview

	Women	Men
Wave 1		
% living with at least one child 0-17	74.1% (1.4)	60.8%** (1.6)
% living with at least one child 0-6	51.5% (1.5)	37.3%** (1.5)
% living with at least one child 0-17 attending school pre-lockdown ^a	88.2% (1.0)	88.2% (1.3)
Wave 2		
% living with at least one child 0-17	74.8% (1.6)	59.1% (1.8)
% living with at least one child 0-6	52.3% (1.7)	35.6%** (1.7)
% living with at least one child 0-17 attending school pre-lockdown ^a	86.4% (1.1)	87.4% (1.3)
% living with at least one child 0-6 attending an ECD centre/preschool pre-lockdown ^b	37.7% (2.0)	37.8% (2.5)
% looking after these children 0-6 home from an ECD centre/preschool themselves ^c	67.1% (3.4)	24.8%** (4.7)

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

** Gender differences are significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

a Conditional on living with children aged 0-17

b Conditional on living with children aged 0-6

c Conditional on living with children aged 0-6 who were in an ECD centre/preschool pre-lockdown

4.2 Time spent on childcare

The gender gap in care work during the lockdown is further highlighted in the time use data collected in the NIDS-CRAM survey. In Wave 1, individuals living with children were asked if they had spent “more time than usual looking after children” during the April lockdown. The clear majority of men and women living with children said they were, and the rate was higher for women than for men as expected (73% versus 66%). When asked how much additional time was spent per day on childcare (nearly an hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, or over 4 hours more), 80% of women and 65% of men reported that they spent over 4 hours more per day on childcare (upper panel of Table 4). Given that there would have been between 15 and 16 million children home from school or an ECD centre in April for anywhere between 5 and 9 extra hours a day (Casale and Posel 2020), these high numbers are not surprising.¹⁴

As the economy moved from L5 lockdown in April to L3 lockdown in June, there were some changes in regulations that would have affected childcare. Grades 7 and 12 were re-opened, and domestic/childcare workers in private households were allowed back to work. We would therefore expect to see a small decrease in hours spent on childcare in June. This is because less than two million children would have been allowed back to school (in 2019, there were just over a million learners in Grade 7 and about 640 000 in Grade 12)¹⁵. Further, a relatively small percentage of South African households employ domestic workers. In NIDS-CRAM Wave 2, only 4.8% of respondents (4.0% for women and 5.6% for men) reported employing a domestic worker/childminder in June, higher than the April figure of 3.3% (2.5% for women and 4.2% for men), but still down from 7.8% in February (7.3% for women and 8.4% for men) (own calculations; data not shown here).

Indeed, from the lower panel of Table 4, we see that only 14% of women versus 18% of men said they spent fewer hours on childcare in June compared to April. The majority said they spent the same amount of time on childcare, and around 6% (of men and women) said they were spending more hours on childcare in June.

In Wave 1, respondents were asked if they had spent more time on childcare in April and if so, to report additional hours per day in ranges (with most people choosing the highest category of over 4 hours more a day, as explained above). In Wave 2, respondents were asked to provide the actual hours they spent on childcare on a typical weekday in April and June.¹⁶ These data are reported in Table 5 for all women and men living with children and disaggregated by employment and marital status.

The first thing that is clear from the data in Table 5 is that women and men living with children were spending significant amounts of time on childcare in both April’s Level 5 lockdown and June’s Level 3 lockdown, with women’s average hours always higher than men’s. In April, women reported spending on average 10.2 hours a day on childcare, while men reported spending on average 7.3 hours a day on childcare.

¹⁴ Similarly, in the UK, Sevilla and Smith (2020) found that in households with children, parents were doing the equivalent of an extra 40 hours a week on childcare, almost a full work week’s worth of extra care.

¹⁵ See data from Department of Basic Education: <https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/School%20Realities%202019%20Final%20.pdf?ver=2020-02-07-101051-330>

¹⁶ Specifically, individuals were asked “Think about a typical weekday, Monday-Friday during April’s level 5 lockdown, when schools and childcare facilities were closed. How many hours a day did you spend looking after children?” and “Now think about a typical weekday, Monday-Friday during June’s Level 3 lockdown. How many hours a day did you spend looking after children?”

In June, as expected, these figures fell marginally to 9.7 and 6.4 hours per day for women and men respectively.

Table 4: Changes in time spent on childcare among adults living with children in Waves 1 and 2

	Women	Men
Wave 1 – Among adults living with children:		
% reporting spending more hours in April (compared to pre-lockdown)	73.2% (1.2)	66.2%** (1.8)
% reporting over 4 more hours a day (conditional on spending more time on childcare in April)	79.5% (1.3)	65.0%** (2.2)
Wave 2 – Among adults living with children:		
% reporting spending more hours in June (compared to April)	5.8% (0.8)	5.6% (1.1)
% reporting spending fewer hours in June (compared to April)	13.6% (1.1)	18.3%* (1.6)
% reporting spending same hours in June (compared to April)	80.7% (1.3)	76.1% (1.8)

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 1 and Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older living with children aged 0-17. The unbalanced panel is used and data are weighted appropriately. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

** Gender differences are significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

It is possible that women and men overstated the hours they spent on childcare based on the one-shot question asked over the phone (whereas in typical time use surveys individuals are asked to keep a time diary and to respond in half-hour slots).¹⁷ Assuming women and men have similar reporting biases, rather than placing too much weight on the actual hours reported, we therefore focus on the percentage declines between April and June (Figure 8) and the differences between women and men within categories (final column of Table 5).

Figure 8 shows that there was a decline in hours spent on childcare between April and June for all categories of men and women, and especially among those who were employed in June. The percentage declines were generally much larger for men than for women, however. While many men reported doing additional hours of childcare in April compared to the pre-lockdown period, it appears that as time passes and some external childcare is made available, men are reverting back to pre-crisis levels faster than women. In other words, men are benefitting more from the increased availability of childcare. This is reflected in the gender gap in hours spent on childcare among those living with children (final column of Table 5). While women were spending 2.9 more hours a day on childcare than men in April, they were spending 3.3 more hours a day on childcare than men in June (and this gender gap would be even larger if we factored in that women are more

¹⁷ Indeed, a number of respondents in NIDS-CRAM gave the value 24 hours, interpreting the question as responsibility for childcare, rather than actual waking hours spent on childcare. These values were pegged at 16, possibly still an overestimate.

likely to live with children). As lockdown regulations are relaxed, the gender gap in childcare hours is therefore rising.¹⁸

Table 5: Mean hours spent per day on childcare in April and June, conditional on living with children

	Women	Men	Difference (W-M)
APRIL			
All adults living with children	10.2 (0.26)	7.3** (0.31)	2.9** (0.43)
Adults employed in April	9.5 (0.46)	6.9** (0.44)	2.6** (0.65)
Adults NOT employed in April	10.6 (0.24)	7.8** (0.42)	2.8** (0.51)
Married adults	10.3 (0.35)	8.3* (0.39)	2.0** (0.48)
Unmarried adults	10.2 (0.27)	6.0** (0.47)	4.2** (0.57)
JUNE			
All adults living with children	9.7 (0.24)	6.4** (0.30)	3.3** (0.40)
Adults employed in June	8.3 (0.47)	5.7** (0.44)	2.6** (0.59)
Adults NOT employed in June	10.5 (0.23)	7.2** (0.39)	3.3** (0.47)
Married adults	9.8 (0.35)	7.2** (0.42)	2.6** (0.46)
Unmarried adults	9.7 (0.25)	5.5** (0.46)	4.2** (0.55)

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2 (2020)

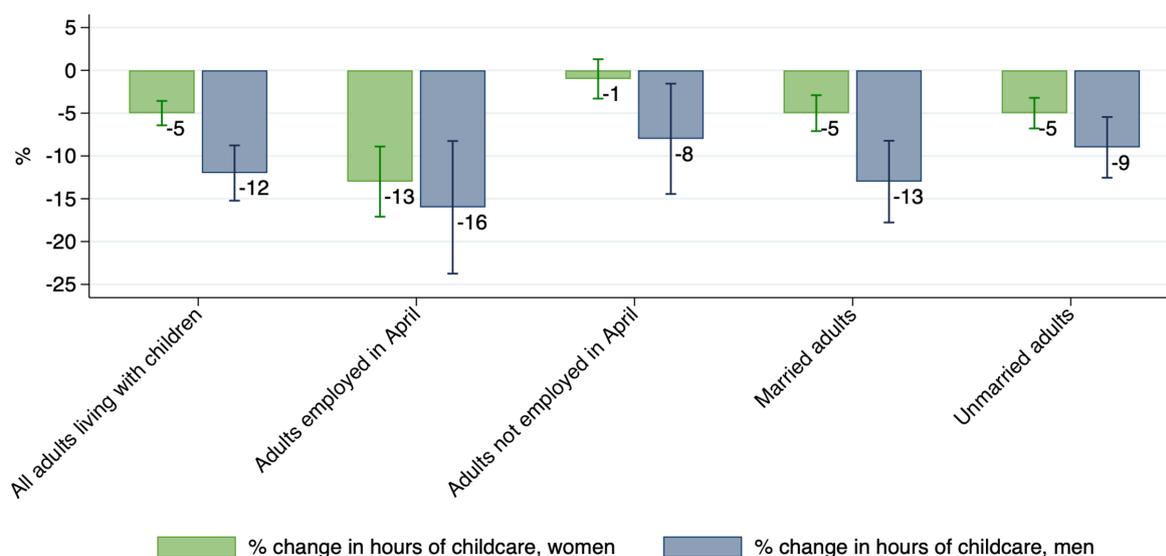
Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older living with children aged 0-17. Data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

** Gender differences are significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

¹⁸ Although the data from the last South African Time Use Survey conducted in 2010 are not at all comparable to the NIDS-CRAM data (because of time period, sampling and definitions), it is reassuring that the results produce gender gaps in childcare hours in the same range. Rubiano-Matulevich and Viollaz (2019) found that in 2010 women spent on average just over 2.2 hours more per day than men on unpaid housework and care work; this figure rose to about 3.3 hours more if a child under the age of seven was present in the household (see also Statistics South Africa 2013).

Figure 8: Percentage change in hours spent on childcare between April and June, conditional on living with children



Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older living with children aged 0-17. Data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses. 90% confidence intervals are shown.

The predicted patterns emerge when analysing childcare by employment status and marital status in Table 5. The employed spend less time on childcare than those who are not employed, and married individuals spend more time on childcare than unmarried individuals. Within all these categories, women spend more hours on childcare than men. However, the gender gap in childcare hours is smaller among the employed and among those who are married.¹⁹

4.3 Implications of childcare responsibilities

Finally, in Wave 2, adults living with children were asked directly about the effects of this childcare. Specifically, respondents who reported spending non-zero hours on childcare in June were asked “Did looking after children during lockdown in June cause any of the following: Prevented you going to work, or made work very difficult? Prevented you working the same number of hours as before lockdown? Prevented you searching for work? Negatively affected your health or wellbeing?”

¹⁹ Because NIDS-CRAM is not a household survey, we cannot analyse the within-couple or within-household distribution of childcare. Ideally one would be able to explore what happens to childcare responsibilities within a couple when say both partners are employed. Andrew et al (2020) analysed the time use of dual-parent families with children during the April-May lockdown in England and found mothers disproportionately affected. Even among mothers and fathers who had paid employment, women were spending more hours on childcare than men, and they experienced a greater reduction in *uninterrupted* work hours than men. In a related study also on the UK, Sevilla and Smith (2020) found that although women within couples were doing the bulk of the additional childcare hours during lockdown, the gender childcare gap for the extra post-lockdown hours was slightly smaller than the gap pre-lockdown, driven largely by fathers who were working from home or had been furloughed or lost their job engaging in more childcare. However, neither of these studies analysed childcare responsibilities as the economy started to reopen.

As shown in Table 6, a slightly larger percentage of women than men *living with children* said that childcare during the June lockdown affected their ability to work, work the same number of hours as before lockdown, or search for work.²⁰ In contrast, a slightly larger percentage of men said it affected their health or wellbeing. However, because women are more likely to live with children and to report non-zero hours of childcare, this translates into much larger absolute numbers of women than men affected by childcare, across all the categories. For example, roughly twice as many women than men (3.4 million women versus 1.7 million men) said that looking after children in June prevented them from going to work or made work very difficult, with similar results for the other two labour-related categories.

Table 6: Self-reported effects of looking after children in June

	Women	Men	Women	Men
Prevented you going to work, or made work very difficult?	30.1%	26.1%	3 386 296	1 655 252**
	(1.7)	(2.3)	(296 926)	(172 785)
Prevented you working the same number of hours as before lockdown?	30.4%	27.2%	3 412 662	1 722 809**
	(1.5)	(2.4)	(266 846)	(180 421)
Prevented you searching for work?	27.8%	26.9%	3 148 392	1 677 513**
	(1.5)	(2.4)	(254 842)	(184 485)
Negatively affected your health or wellbeing?	30.3%	33.7%	2 469 454	2 155 521
	(1.5)	(2.5)	(256 111)	(205 828)

Source: NIDS-CRAM, Wave 2 (2020)

Notes: The sample is all adults 18 years or older living with children aged 0-17 and who reported non-zero hours on childcare in June. Data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses.

* Gender differences are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

** Gender differences are significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

5. Concluding discussion

Wave 1 of NIDS-CRAM identified a large and disproportionate effect on women's labour market outcomes as a result of the Covid-19 crisis and strict lockdown in South Africa. Roughly 3 million jobs were lost between February and April, with women accounting for 2 million, or two-thirds, of these job losses (Casale and Posel 2020). In this policy paper, we used Waves 1 and 2 of NIDS-CRAM to track how women have fared as the economy started to reopen and some lockdown restrictions were relaxed. The data suggest that with the move from Level 5 lockdown in April to Level 3 lockdown in June, there was very little change in employment levels overall. However, women gained slightly relative to men. Women experienced a 3.2% or 220 000 net job gain, while men reported a 3.5% or 320 000 net job loss. Nonetheless, given how

²⁰ Restricting to the employed for the first two response options, we find that the percentages negatively affected are significantly higher for women (40-41%, statistically significant at the 5% level) and marginally higher for men (33-34%, not significantly different from the full sample statistic of 30%). This represents a statistically significant doubling of the gender gap from 3-4 percentage points to 7 percentage points. Similarly, restricting the third response option to the broad unemployed, percentages are higher for women (34.4%) and men (32.4%), although this does not represent a statistically significant change.

large the job losses were for women between February and April, women still remained well behind men in reaching their pre-Covid employment levels in June.

Of great concern is that even though women were over-represented among the unemployed in June (57% of the unemployed were women, using the broad definition) and among those who lost their jobs over the entire period from February to June (58%), they are under-represented in the income support provided. Only 41% of the UIF/UIF-TERS beneficiaries and 34% of those who had been paid the Covid-19 SRDG in June were women. That fewer women have received the SRDG is likely because it cannot be held concurrently with another social grant such as the CSG. Unemployed women are effectively being penalised if they are also the main caregiver to children.

Another noteworthy finding from the Wave 2 data is that men have benefitted more from the reopening of some school grades and childcare services in June. In earlier work which found that women *and men* were spending more time on childcare during the first phase of lockdowns, the question was raised whether this might result in a longer-term shift in the distribution of childcare (Alon et al 2020; Casale and Posel 2020; Hupkau and Petrongolo 2020). In other words, this unprecedented ‘social experiment’ within households might have a transformative effect if men formed new attachments with their children or became more accustomed to childcare work. The results in this paper cast doubt on this prediction however.

Among those living with children, the hours men reported spending on childcare fell by more between April and June than the hours women reported spending on childcare. As a result, the gender gap in childcare hours grew between April and June. In June, women living with children were spending on average 3.3 more hours per day on childcare than men living with children, up from 2.9 more hours in April (and this gap would be even larger if we were to factor in that more women live with children). This suggests that as time passes men are reverting to pre-Covid childcare levels faster than women.

Finally, the Wave 2 data show that the self-reported effects of childcare on labour market outcomes during the lockdown were more severe for women. Twice as many women than men found childcare to negatively affect their ability to work, to work the same hours as before lockdown, and to search for work. Together, these findings suggest that the Covid-19 crisis and ongoing lockdown have disproportionately affected women and their prospects in the labour market.

6. Policy implications

Understanding who is affected more by the Covid-19 crisis is key to designing appropriate responses that are both effective and equitable (United Nations 2020; Wenham et al 2020). The Covid-19 crisis is undoing the gains in employment women have made over the last two decades in South Africa (Mosomi, 2019; Posel and Casale 2019).²¹ Over the longer-term, appropriate policies will need to be put in place to grow employment, and to help women regain their jobs. Until then, women will need to be provided with income support to help compensate for earnings losses as a result of hemorrhaging in the labour market. In addition, because women are also the primary caregivers to most children in South Africa, and childcare

²¹ Although the levels of employment in the South African labour force survey data are not directly comparable to those captured in NIDS-CRAM (or NIDS) because of different sampling and questionnaire design, it is instructive to compare the broad changes over time. Based on the Labour Force Survey and Quarterly Labour Force Survey data, between 2001 and 2019, employment among working-age women (15 to 65) grew by roughly 2.2 million jobs. Based on the NIDS-CRAM data, in the space of less than five months in 2020, women’s employment was eroded by just over 1.7 million jobs. For men, the gain in employment between 2001 and 2019 was in the region of 2.9 million jobs, and between February and June 2020, they lost 1.3 million jobs.

responsibilities have risen during the lockdown, women should be adequately supported in caring for their children. Below are a number of short-term policy suggestions:

Ensure the UIF system is operating fairly and efficiently: With the UIF-TERS scheme suspended on 15 August 2020, there is the possibility that more workers will be laid off as employers can no longer claim on their behalf. This will place additional pressure on the standard UIF scheme. Pay-outs will need to be paid timeously, as most workers will not have savings to tide them over until pay-outs are made.

Extend the CSG top-up beyond October: Given the extent of the job losses recorded between February and April and the fact that the economy did not see any appreciable recovery between April and June, it is hard to imagine how households will cope when the additional income support is withdrawn after October. In April, 49% of women (compared to 44% of men) said their household had run out of money to buy food. By June, this had fallen to 38% for women (and 35% for men). The fall likely reflects that the UIF-TERS scheme was paying out by June, the grant top-ups had been received (they were only paid from May onwards) and some people previously outside of the social protection system were receiving the new Covid-19 SRDG (see Bridgman et al and Köhler and Borat in this policy paper series for more detail). With the closure of the UIF-TERS scheme on 15 August, and still over a third of households running out of money to buy food, the grants and the grant top-ups will be even more important. Given that women are responsible for the bulk of childcare in South Africa, they should be supported through the CSG to provide for their children while the labour market recovers.

Allow the unemployed to hold the Covid-19 SRDG concurrently with the CSG: The child support grant is to support the child, and the top-up to the CSG, while paid *per caregiver* rather than *per child* from June onwards, is presumably intended to support the child/children in the household (especially given the very low value of the standard CSG of R445 to begin with). Unemployed women (and men) should be supported in their own right. Because women are much more likely to receive a CSG on behalf of a child, unemployed women are being disadvantaged for caring for children. The eligibility criteria should be revised so that the SRDG can be held concurrently with the CSG.

Support ECD centres to reopen urgently and safely: While all grades are back at school as at beginning of September, most ECD centres remain closed. These centres were grossly underfunded pre-Covid, and now with strict new regulations on operating under Covid-19 (and after months of receiving little or no income), they will be in an even more precarious position. Ramping up efforts to fund and support ECD centres will help women who rely on this form of childcare to return to work. It will also lead to improved job gains for women (as most ECD workers are female).

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