

Impact of COVID-19 on Parents/Guardians in the Library Profession: A Narrative Review and Shared Experiences

Stephanie Clare Roth, Elizabeth G. Hinton, and Bridget Jivanelli

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Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 was felt by everyone, and anecdotal reports from parents and guardians of young children have been shared widely in the news and on social media. Common experiences parents in the U.S. workforce face have included a lack of affordable childcare or paid parental leave policies. The pandemic brought many pre-existing workplace issues related to parenting to the surface, but to date, little is known about the impact of the pandemic on parents and guardians working in a library setting in the United States. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization classified COVID-19 as a global pandemic; in the United States, stay-at-home orders impacted over 50% of the U.S. population.¹ In 2020, a report of a U.S. national survey² on the well-being of parents and children during the COVID-19 pandemic stated that “more than 1 in 4 parents reported worsening mental health.” Reasons reported in the national survey for the substantial impact the pandemic had on parents and families in the United States included going without usual support systems like childcare or

¹ Jo Lauren Weaver and Jacqueline M. Swank, “Parents’ Lived Experiences With the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *The Family Journal* 29, no. 2 (April 2021): 136–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480720969194>.

² Stephen W. Patrick et al., “Well-Being of Parents and Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A National Survey,” *Pediatrics* 146, no. 4 (October 2020): e2020016824, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-016824>.

access to services, and food insecurity. In a Pew Research Center study in 2020,³ 35% of parents reported struggling with managing childcare tasks.⁴

The authors of this study experienced firsthand the hardships of parenting while working as librarians during the first two years of COVID-19, as well as learned from others in the library profession about burnout at home⁵ and in the workplace.⁶ After witnessing the impact of the pandemic on library workers, namely mental health issues, the authors were interested in how library administrators and institutions could better support the needs of parents and guardians. The team sought to answer the following research questions:

- What is the current and future impact of COVID-19 on parents and guardians working in the library profession in the U.S.?
- How can library administrators or institutions better support parent and guardian librarians during and after the pandemic?

Methods

From a basis of understanding the difficulties facing parents during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. workforce,⁷ this research study was designed to fill in the knowledge gaps

³ Pew Research Center, “Most Americans Say Coronavirus Outbreak Has Impacted Their Lives,” March 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/03/30/most-americans-say-coronavirus-outbreak-has-impacted-their-lives/>.

⁴ Trenton D. Mize, Gayle Kaufman, and Richard J. Petts, “Visualizing Shifts in Gendered Parenting Attitudes during COVID-19,” *Socius* 7 (January 1, 2021): 23780231211013130, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231211013128>.

⁵ Konrad Piotrowski, “Trajectories of Parental Burnout in the First Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Family Relations*, December 28, 2022, fare.12819, <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12819>.

⁶ Michael Holt et al., “Burning the Candle at Both Ends How and Why Academic Librarians Who Are Parents Experience and Combat Burnout at Work,” in *Academic Librarian Burnout: Causes and Responses (Forthcoming)*, ed. CE Holm, AB Guimares, and Marcano (ACRL, 2023), 107–24.

⁷ Haley H Beech, Amber Sutton, and Leah Cheatham, “Parenting, Privilege, and Pandemic: From Surviving to Thriving as a Mother in the Academy,” *Qualitative Social Work* 20, no. 1/2 (March 2021): 625–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325020973328>; Güzin Çakmak and Zeynel Abidin Öztürk, “Being Both a Parent and a Healthcare Worker in the Pandemic: Who Could Be Exhausted More?,” *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)* 9, no. 5 (May 11, 2021): 564, <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9050564>; Jessica McCrory Calarco et al., “By Default: How Mothers in Different-Sex Dual-Earner Couples Account for Inequalities in Pandemic Parenting,” *Socius* 7 (January 1, 2021): 23780231211038784, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231211038783>; Mark É Czeisler et al., “Mental Health Among Parents of Children Aged <18 Years and Unpaid Caregivers of Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic - United States, December 2020 and February-March 2021,” *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 70, no. 24 (June 18, 2021): 879–87, <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7024a3>; “Working Parents Are Angry. But What Can We Do?,” Greater Good, accessed January 28, 2022,

of how the pandemic impacted parents and guardians in the library profession. In January 2022, a literature search using the following search terms was conducted in PubMed (NLM), Business Source Complete (EbscoHost), Social Science Premium Collection (ProQuest) and LISTA (EbscoHost): COVID-19, parents, guardians, librarians, workplace, among others. Google searches were also performed to locate news articles, conference proceedings, and other media outlets such as blogs, podcasts, and webinars. The search was updated in January 2023. Due to the lack of literature in the library field, other disciplines were considered if found relevant to the complex issues parents and guardians have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research team also devised a survey to collect stories from librarians who were caregivers of children during the pandemic. An IRB waiver was granted by the Temple University Institutional Review Board (IRB) as the survey was not considered human subjects research. The literature search resulted in 90 references and though most were unrelated to the library profession, the studies did indeed demonstrate the collective experiences in the US workforce.

The research team placed a call for survey participants in November 2021, using REDCap for consent and survey data collection, including questions on demographics and open-ended writing prompts. The survey was shared over several listservs within and outside of

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/working_parents_are_angry_but_what_can_we_do ; Jessica Grose, *Screaming on the Inside: The Unsustainability of American Motherhood* (Mariner Books, 2022); Meghan C. Halley et al., "The Intersection of Work and Home Challenges Faced by Physician Mothers During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic: A Mixed-Methods Analysis," *Journal of Women's Health* (15409996) 30, no. 4 (April 2021): 514–24, <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2020.8964>; Loes H. C. Janssen et al., "Does the COVID-19 Pandemic Impact Parents' and Adolescents' Well-Being? An EMA-Study on Daily Affect and Parenting," *PLoS ONE* 15, no. 10 (October 16, 2020): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240962>; Mize, Kaufman, and Petts, "Visualizing Shifts in Gendered Parenting Attitudes during COVID-19"; Anna North, "The Problem Is Work," *Vox*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/22321909/covid-19-pandemic-school-work-parents-remote>; Jack S. Peltz et al., "Shocks to the System: The Influence of COVID-19-Related Stressors on Coparental and Family Functioning," *Developmental Psychology* 57, no. 10 (October 2021): 1693–1707, <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001206>; Tara S. Peris and Jill Ehrenreich-May, "The Parents Are Not Alright: A Call for Caregiver Mental Health Screening During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 60, no. 6 (June 2021): 675–77, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2021.02.007>; Leah Ruppner et al., "Emotional and Financial Health during COVID-19: The Role of Housework, Employment and Childcare in Australia and the United States," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. 5 (2021): 1937–55, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12727>; Fernanda Staniscuaski et al., "Impact of COVID-19 on Academic Mothers," *Science (New York, N. Y.)* 368, no. 6492 (May 15, 2020): 724, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abc2740>.

the Medical Library Association (MLA), including regional library groups and on social media (Twitter). The survey closed in January 2022, after the research team felt they had a manageable number to review, in total 51 stories were collected. Capping the survey also allowed the team to analyze one specific snapshot of time during COVID-19, a time before vaccines were approved for children under 5.

A volunteer assisted the research team in coding the stories using a pre-set code book, refining codes as themes emerged. In total there were 14 themes including flexibility, mental health/burnout, safety concerns, work/life balance, job performance, childcare issues and more. A full list of themes and their definitions can be found in Appendix A. Figure 1 depicts the frequency in which themes emerged from the participant stories. Each participant’s story can be found in Appendix B. The consent and story collection forms, including the REDCap survey instruments, can be found in Appendices C-F.

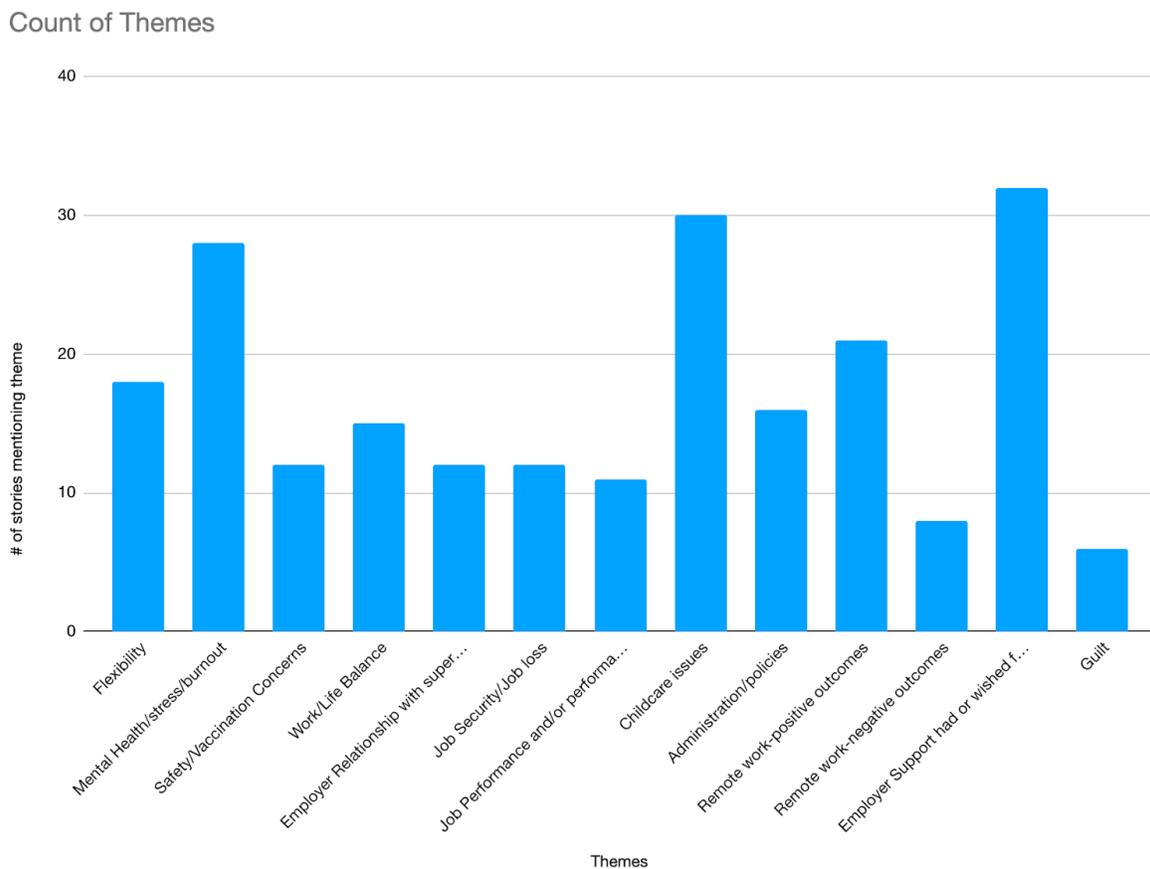


Figure 1. Number of Stories by Theme

Participants were librarians (31), library directors (8), library supervisors/administrators (8), library staff (3), or library assistants (1). When asked about institution type, participants said they were from academic libraries (26), with 15 from medical libraries, 8 from hospital libraries, 1 from a K-12 school, and 1 listed as “other.” The average number of children per participant was two.

Results

This study found that reports in the literature about working parents and guardians during the COVID-19 pandemic reflected the experience of library workers who responded to the survey. The COVID-19 pandemic was a “shock to the system”⁸ and to the workforce in the U.S. It brought on a new set of stressors such as fear of contracting the virus, limited vaccine availability and delays for children under the age of 5, work and parenting demands, and the disruption resulting from social distancing restrictions.

More than 50% (n=28) of survey respondents commented on mental health, stress, and burnout; 59% (n=30) on issues with childcare; and over 60% (n=32) on a lack of support or a wish for better support in both the workplace and home. 31% (n=16) of participants reported recommendations for administrative issues or policies related to working from home, flexible arrangements, safety, and work/life balance. Job security and performance were also important factors for the participants.

The three biggest themes that emerged from the stories were “employer support/lack of support,” “childcare issues,” and “mental health/stress/burnout,” with 32, 30, and 28 responses, respectively, followed by “remote work–positive outcomes” and “flexibility.”

Employer support/lack of support

“My university set up a special 80-hour block of pandemic leave employees could use to care for relatives. I used the time to provide home schooling cover[age] for when my wife needed to work part time.” (Story #74)

Library employers offered support to workers during the pandemic. One of the areas that employers adjusted in the early days of the pandemic was allowing employees to work remotely, and some employers offered additional pandemic leave or didn’t count COVID-19 sick days against PTO balances. Working from home allowed workers to remain safe without the risk

⁸ Peltz et al., “Shocks to the System.”

of exposure to COVID-19, yet as the pandemic went on, there was a movement in the United States for libraries to “return to normal.” This exacerbated anxiety for parents and caregivers since there was no vaccine approved for children under the age of 5 until June 18, 2022; furthermore, vaccine access was limited and difficult to obtain especially since it took 3 doses for children ages 6 months to 5 years to be considered fully vaccinated. By that time, many library workers had returned to the office, and this compounded stress and pressure for parents returning to work onsite, either fully or in a hybrid of in-office and in-home work. One survey respondent who had five children at home said they were given five COVID personal days; while this was more than some workplaces provided their personnel, the extra personal days didn’t come close to covering the time needed to take care of their children who were at home as a result of school quarantines. In order to take care of their children, this respondent took a month of Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which helped address this issue.

As librarians worked from home, some were provided with computers or allowed to take office equipment home. However, one parent stated the cost of the internet or a stipend to cover having an internet hotspot would have been helpful for families with children using the internet at the same time and experiencing low connectivity. One parent also found it difficult (Story #83) when their colleagues bragged about how the pandemic has been the most productive time of their life as a result of them working from home. They stated, “I am drowning!” Their advice for employers and colleagues is to “have realistic expectations of what we can accomplish, be kind, and know that we are burned out and struggling.”

Childcare issues

“Those first six months of COVID were so tough. I was trying to do my job while taking care of two little kids. It felt impossible, and it was all I could do to make it through the day.” (Story #75)

Parents and guardians were often given little support or were asked insensitive questions about childcare. A single parent (Story #11) stated, “at one point, my supervisor asked me what my childcare plans were, which I thought was insensitive because I thought many, if not most, parents didn’t know what their childcare plans would be.” Due to the pressures and anxiety of managing the child’s life and schoolwork, while working from home, the parent was prescribed an antidepressant, Lexapro. This same parent requested to work reduced hours, but that approval was not granted.

Work flexibility

“At first, my employer was sympathetic and allowed me to work from home and flex my schedule... As time wore on, however, my employer became less flexible and sympathetic, even though my childcare situation has not improved.” (Story #82)

While much was difficult during the pandemic, librarian parents and caregivers realized the benefits and flexibility of remote work when raising children. The findings from the stories matched what is published in the literature. During the early days of the pandemic (July 2020), a recommendation from the literature stated that employers should have flexible working hours [during the pandemic]⁹. According to this article, “by not accommodating working parents, employers may be sending a negative message to other employees” and “if the company is viewed as inflexible and unaccommodating to work-at-home parents, it can lead to negative employee morale.” Some of the respondents to the survey said they were given flexibility with their schedules and many parents reported a preference for a continued flexible work schedule beyond the pandemic.

Participants commented on both the positive and negative outcomes while working remotely. For some parents, it was one of the hardest times balancing work and parenting, but many noted the advantages that the flexibility gave them.

Highlighted Story Excerpts:

Positive Outcomes of Remote Work

“One of the best things about working from home was the ability to use breaks to get household chores done or attend a midday telehealth appointment for the kids. We spent so much less time shuttling between work/school/home/doctors’ offices and had more weekend free time since it wasn’t all taken up with laundry & house cleaning. If I were job searching, that kind of flexibility would be something I would look for.” (Story #16)

“Eating all three meals a day, working from the yard so that they could play, and more was GREAT!!” (Story #34)

⁹ Kylie Ora Lobell, “Accommodating Working Parents During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” SHRM, July 30, 2020, <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/employee-relations/pages/accommodating-working-parents-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.aspx>.

“Remote working has had its challenges, but has given me an enormous amount of flexibility -- no more worrying about rushing home to pick up my son from school, worrying about his childcare, etc.” (Story #79)

Negative outcomes of remote work

“We had 3 kids trying to do e-learning while we were trying to work and be [in] meetings ourselves.” (Story #45)

“I did have a loss of ego when I realized I would not be able to present the flagship PubMed webinars because there were always kids and distractions happening. So instead, I worked hard on other projects and hoped my colleagues didn’t resent me.” (Story #50)

“For the first 6-9 months of the pandemic working from home -- and feeling like such an important part of the pandemic response team -- I had terrible boundaries between work and home now that I was working from home. I answered emails at all times of day and during the weekends, which I did not do prior to the pandemic when working in the office. [A]s the lines between work and home blurred, so too did my boundaries between worker and self/parent.” (Story #59)

Mental health

“As the fall 2020 school year approached, I had to beg my doctor for something to help me with my anxiety about my son starting 2nd grade at home ... so I started taking Lexapro, which did help.” (Story #12)

“Eventually, fatigue from all the online team building and somewhat pointless meetings made me resentful and introverted. I didn’t want to share my kids and pets on Zoom. I just wanted to do my work so I could get on to the other jobs. Juggling 2 different online school schedules and my husband co-working in the same tiny office was cognitive overload. I’m still recovering and will forever have PTSD about getting 2 kids on 2 different Microsoft Teams meetings at the same time.” (Story #50)

“If employers want to support and retain ... parents, then they need to show that their employee and their employees’ children’s safety, mental health and well-being are very important and factored into every decision.” (Story #81)

Burnout

“I am still trying to recover from the burn-out. I’m not really sure if that’s possible.” (Story #20)

“Too many women have been forced out of the workplace because of the pandemic, and those that are still working are burned out.” (Story #46)

“I ended up taking a medical leave recently because I was so burned out. I had been doing my job and another (the only other coworker in my department left after furlough), I had been saddled with extra projects, and I was exhausted and depleted from stress and anxiety.” (Story #77)

Stress

“... by June 2021, I had been so stressed I had to take a month’s FMLA leave to recover from burnout.” (Story #25)

“We have all proved that we can do the work virtually and it takes so much stress off of working parents.” (Story #30)

“I felt that I put more stress on myself, trying to make sure my daughter was off-camera and out of earshot when I had Zoom meetings. As much as he could, my husband would watch her during important meetings or online instruction. It was stressful for me trying to entertain a 3-year old, as she was of an age where she couldn’t be very independent.” (Story #98)

Discussion

“At this point, I would be very open to moving to another organization that provides flexibility and greater remote work options so I can better balance the challenges of raising children during a pandemic. I feel left behind as employers fail to recognize that, for those of us with children, we are not even close to our pre-pandemic lives.” (Story #82)

This research study set out to review the literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on parent and guardian workers in the library profession. Due to the lack of literature

in the library field, this paper included literature related to the larger U.S. workforce and invited participants consisting of parent and guardian library workers to share their stories and experiences during the pandemic. The high and immediate response to the call to participate in this survey demonstrates the widespread impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on parents and guardians in the library profession.

According to a Pew Research Study, parents had to balance childcare and work from home during the pandemic.¹⁰ The unsustainability of this balancing act made it more difficult to give 100% at work, therefore increasing the likelihood of burnout.¹¹ Mothers responsible for childcare and homeschooling¹² may have been hit harder by the pandemic than fathers, but we also acknowledge that fathers were impacted; several fathers who participated in our survey spoke to dividing childcare responsibilities with a partner. Employees working from home with their children struggled to be as productive as their peers. Some reported logging in extra hours after their children went to bed, and in one instance, a spouse left their job to become the primary caregiver. “As a full-time working parent, I already feel the stress and the pull of demands from both ‘worlds,’ and COVID highlighted how tenuous the balancing act between the two really is, and how quickly it can collapse.” (Story #11)

Respondents said that parents were not given many exceptions in terms of their workload or performance expectations. One mentioned receiving a lower performance review during the pandemic while balancing childcare for two young children. “A year later, when it came down to performance review time, my boss actually gave me a lower review than she had the year before. Even though she is a woman with a child, I had to explain to her how unfair this was.” (Story #76) Findings from the literature echoed the struggle of balancing work and childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant (Story #79), a single parent, was laid

¹⁰ Ruth Igielnik, “A Rising Share of Working Parents in the U.S. Say It’s Been Difficult to Handle Child Care during the Pandemic,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed January 28, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/26/a-rising-share-of-working-parents-in-the-u-s-say-its-been-difficult-to-handle-child-care-during-the-pandemic/>.

¹¹ “Women in the Workplace 2021,” *LeanIn.Org* and *McKinsey & Company*, accessed August 16, 2022, <https://womenintheworkplace.com/>.

¹² US Census Bureau, “Working Moms Bear Brunt of Home Schooling While Working During COVID-19,” *Census.gov*, accessed January 28, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/08/parents-juggle-work-and-child-care-during-pandemic.html>; Calarco et al., “By Default”; Claire Cain Miller, “Nearly Half of Men Say They Do Most of the Home Schooling. 3 Percent of Women Agree.,” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2020, sec. The Upshot, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/06/upshot/pandemic-chores-homeschooling-gender.html>.

off when the library decided to close during the pandemic. They have since found a new position that is 100% remote and said, “my hope is that employers will be much more flexible in their position on working from home. Before the pandemic, it was a challenge to even do it on occasion.”

Several studies suggest that women may prefer remote work more than men. According to a survey, “80% of women ranked remote work as a top job benefit, compared with 69% of men.”¹³ While each circumstance is different, childcare is still a responsibility that usually falls to women. The pandemic revealed how disproportionate this division of labor is. One study found that mothers justified taking on greater responsibility in caregiving during the pandemic ¹⁴ by pointing to structural and culturally accepted conditions that included, “(1) fathers’ status as primary breadwinners, (2) mothers’ disproportionate availability at home (because of pandemic layoffs and/or telecommuting), and (3) gendered norms and stereotypes regarding women’s roles as caregivers.” In addition to Calarco et al. findings, it is important to note that single parents had no partner with whom to share caregiving responsibilities before and during the pandemic.

A hospital librarian participant shared, “The pandemic led to significant changes in the work/school/home life for myself (a single mom) and my elementary school son. In the early days, it was very stressful trying to manage his schoolwork (all online) and continue working my full-time job” (Story #79).

A school librarian participant stated, “I was torn between working and quitting so my kids could have someone help them figure out how to navigate school.” (Story #33).

On the flip side, working mothers particularly learned how remote work, while difficult during the pandemic, has benefits not previously afforded to them. One mother stated in the *Washington Post*, “There’s just zero benefit in my mind now to return back into the office and give up all of those things that we gained over the past year.”¹⁵ She said that she was doing her job better from home and what improved was her personal life. She can be a more present parent and take care of herself, doing things like eating healthier and sleeping better.

¹³ Pandey, Erica, “The Gender Divide in Remote Work,” <https://www Axios.Com/>, May 13, 2021, <https://www.axios.com/2021/05/13/the-gender-divide-remote-work-men-women-childcare>.

¹⁴ Calarco et al., “By Default.”

¹⁵ Ellen McCarthy, “The Pandemic Gave Parents the Chance to Work from Home. Now They Don’t Want to Give It up,” *The Washington Post*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/04/19/work-from-home-parents-remote-flexibility/>.

Workplaces in the future must adapt as more parents, especially mothers, want to have more agency over how and where they work. The impacts on lifestyle, especially for those with commutes, are important factors for all workers, not just parents or caregivers. This shows how employers can try to support their employees, including those who are parents, to adopt healthy lifestyles and to support their work-life balance.

In addition to physical health, the mental and emotional health of employees was affected during the pandemic. This survey found that the mental health of library workers who are parents was negatively impacted during the pandemic and the impact is lasting. Many employers have acknowledged and begun more robustly supporting their employee's mental health as a top priority. This is important not just for parents, but for all employees.

Documentation of declining mental health in the United States shows the need for intervention and a response to a growing crisis.¹⁶ Many parents' mental health was undoubtedly affected. "Parents reported deterioration in their own psychological well-being since the start of the crisis."¹⁷ The library profession is a female-dominated field and our literature search and survey found that the pandemic increased the emotional strain of mothers particularly in the profession. According to Ruppner et al., "women, especially mothers, picked up more housework than men and reported worse emotional strain as a consequence."¹⁸ Some of this emotional strain was related to balancing the role of motherhood, picking up more responsibilities with housework, homeschooling and childcare while still maintaining a full-time workload during pandemic shutdowns with little support from employers to avoid burnout or a mental health crisis. Mental health was the third most reported theme in this study, which is indicative of this large-scale problem. Deeb et al. launched the Speak Up on COVID Survey in

¹⁶ Janice Hopkins Tanne, "Covid-19: Mental Health and Economic Problems Are Worse in US than in Other Rich Nations," *BMJ*, August 6, 2020, m3110, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m3110>; Chris Woolston, "The Problem Is Greater than It's Ever Been": US Universities Urged to Invest in Mental-Health Resources," *Nature* 590, no. 7844 (February 4, 2021): 171–72, <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-00229-2>; Patricia S. Yoder-Wise, "Why Mental Health Needs Will Be With Us for Years," *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing* 52, no. 12 (December 2021): 543–44, <https://doi.org/10.3928/00220124-20211108-01>.

¹⁷ Anna Gassman-Pines, Elizabeth Oltmans Ananat, and John II Fitz-Henley, "COVID-19 and Parent-Child Psychological Well-Being," *Pediatrics* 146, no. 4 (October 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-007294>.

¹⁸ Ruppner et al., "Emotional and Financial Health during COVID-19."

May 2020 and gathered data from 523 respondents with minor children in the home,¹⁹ with 91% of the respondents reporting stress, 70.3% overwhelm, and 41.2% anxiety.

Tips for supervisors and administrators

“Some trust, goodwill, and flexibility would go a long way towards retaining happy and productive employees.” (Story #70)

Supervisors and administrators can play an important role in supporting all workers, not limited to parents and caregivers, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. When applied to all workers, this support has an impact on overall employee retention, productivity, work satisfaction and/or work life balance. This support may have been previously underestimated; however, with the high employee turnover and the “great resignation”²⁰ since the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial not only for parents and caregivers but for all employees. The following tips for supervisors and administrators are taken directly from the stories submitted as part of this research study.

Stop micromanaging

“Managers need to take a step back and give some space for people and, just have some empathy for your staff.”²¹

Be flexible

“If there’s no reason to be in the building definitely consider telecommuting, this helps too when people are providing care because it gives them an additional bit of flexibility, it might give them

¹⁹ Stephanie Deeb et al., “Child Disruptions, Remote Learning, and Parent Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 11 (May 25, 2022): 6442, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116442>.

²⁰ Peter Buell Hirsch, “The Great Discontent,” *Journal of Business Strategy* 42, no. 6 (December 1, 2021): 439–42, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-08-2021-0141>; Kim Parker and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, “Majority of Workers Who Quit a Job in 2021 Cite Low Pay, No Opportunities for Advancement, Feeling Disrespected,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed August 16, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/>; Melva B. Robertson, “Hindsight Is 2020: Identifying Missed Leadership Opportunities to Reduce Employee Turnover Intention amid the COVID-19 Shutdown,” *Strategic HR Review* 20, no. 6 (December 1, 2021): 215–20, <https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-09-2021-0045>.

²¹ Emily Hurst, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Caregiving and Children,” PRESS, PLAY, CONNECT, accessed November 3, 2021, <https://pressplayconnect.libsyn.com/episode-005-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-caregiving-and-children>.

*back some time if you're getting back a half hour or an hour, that's a significant amount of time to do other things.*²²

"Flexible work options were and are vital. This includes working from home a couple of days per week, or when necessary; encouraging video calls for meetings; flexing hours during the day or week for doctor's appointments or other needs. These are important and convenient for people who aren't parents as well. Being respected as a professional adult is now a requirement."
(Story #48)

"I definitely think that employers should offer telework options as a permanent benefit. We have all proved that we can do the work virtually and it takes so much stress off of working parents."
(Story #30)

"I did set up alternative schedules with staff members with very young children, and that was a key factor in their success." (Story #92)

Shorten meetings

Meeting times can be valuable work time, and this was especially important during the pandemic for parents or caregivers balancing childcare responsibilities. Respondents noted that supervisors can help employees by having clear agendas, staying focused and on track, and by keeping meetings to under 1 hour.

*"I've tried to change one-hour meetings to 45-minute meetings. I'm trying to regain my time. And I recognize that some meetings, you know, people show up late or they have to go to other things, or we're just chit chatting. And for some people that's important at times, that's important for me, right now, in this season of my life, let's talk about what we need to talk about. And then let's be done. So I can do my work."*²³

²² M Farrell, TA Garcia, and B Newman, "How Employers Can Support Library Workers Who Are Caregivers During COVID-19 - Zoom," accessed April 8, 2022, https://ala-events.zoom.us/rec/play/RZoKRO8-7AuE6ZVm7w4515IIM5bTgWHR5R1q8q0fVvD7qVni0mmfw7-JIUAI4R1eKETRuVuzWiRJ5sMt.P54C5ER_EuHGGES1?continueMode=true.

²³ Hurst, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Caregiving and Children."

Focus on family and work-life balance

Every parent/guardian and their situation are different. Employers need to respect those differences, especially during the pandemic when many librarians were working from home with small children and were managing their time between family and work. While there were shared experiences of the challenges of working from home with small children, there were also some perceived benefits. One positive outcome that came out of the pandemic was the ability for parents and caregivers to spend more time with their children, time that was usually spent commuting to and from work. Giving up this “bonus” time with family was a sacrifice for some parents/caregivers when transitioning back to a “return to normal” in the workplace. For school-aged parents or caregivers, working from home may allow them to see their children before and after school, help get them to or from the bus stop, and still work uninterrupted during their school day. In a Medical Library Association (MLA) conference poster from 2021, *Mapping the Impacts of COVID-19 on the Work-Life Balance of Academic Librarians Who Are Parents of School-Aged Children*, a participant from the study shared, “In that sense, I felt like it was a gift to work from home and spend more time together”²⁴. For parents working at home with non-school age children, is there flexibility employers can allow? There isn’t one solution, but it is possible that allowing for flexibility within their schedules can help. If working with children at home is not an option, can policies be more flexible when occasional childcare needs occur? Even if not used often, knowing there’s flexibility can mitigate employees’ stress. As the survey respondents noted, many employees desire more agency in how they work and manage their schedules.

“If employers want to support and retain mothers and parents, then they need to show that their employee and their employees’ children’s safety, mental health and well-being are very important and factored into every decision.... We need to keep work itself in perspective because the work will get done and sometimes better if parents are given more agency in how they work.” (Story #82)

²⁴ Beth Auten, Mary E. Edwards, and Hope Kelly, “Mapping the Impacts of COVID-19 on the Work-Life Balance of Academic Librarians Who Are Parents of School-Aged Children” (Poster, Medical Library Association Annual Meeting, Virtual, May 2021), <https://www.eventscribe.net/2021/MLA/PosterTitles.asp?pfp=Browse%20by%20Title>.

“We need to move towards a more family-friendly approach to employment and provide more options for telework and flexible schedules. Too many women have been forced out of the workplace because of the pandemic, and those that are still working are burned out.” (Story #46)

“Support will look different for a parent of a young child versus a parent of older children. We need to support those who are caregivers for the elderly, too. Leaders should listen to individual employees and what matters to them.” (Story #84)

Develop a caregiver and wellness plan

Pandemic or not, parents and guardians are still caregivers when they go to work. Being a parent doesn't abate when children are dropped off at school or daycare. Workplaces need to respect the caregiver role and be confidential regarding what is shared about their employees' personal situations. It is important to be mindful of all the complexities that come along with balancing work and childcare. The pandemic was not the best time to enforce rigid or blanket policies/procedures. Parents and or guardians will remember the hardships they faced during the pandemic and will reflect on how and to what degree they were supported by their employers during this time. There's not a one-size-fits-all policy or procedure, and plans may need to be customized for employees. In an American Library Association (ALA) webinar, *How employees can support Library workers who are caregivers during COVID-19*, a panelist and the Director of the Long Branch Free Public Library in New Jersey, shared how they created custom caregiver wellness plans for their employees during the pandemic.²⁵ This is one effective way in which employers can make the workplace better for everyone during or after the COVID-19 pandemic.

A caregiver wellness plan can benefit many types of employees beyond parents and guardians. Caregivers could include parents, guardians, children caring for aging parents, or even employees with pets. Farrell et al. proposed the following elements for a caregiver and wellness plan:²⁶

- Respect the caregiver, create a caregiver/wellness plan.
- Develop a unique plan for each employee.

²⁵ Farrell, Garcia, and Newman, “How Employers Can Support Library Workers Who Are Caregivers During COVID-19 - Zoom.”

²⁶ Farrell, Garcia, and Newman.

- If we want to maintain the highest level of productivity, we must invest in our staff's mental health.
- Now's not the time to enforce rigid or blanket procedures and policies.
- Be flexible.
- Become comfortable with change.
- Be confidential.
- Ensure prompt, reliable, and transparent communication.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

One limitation of this study is that all three authors are parents who were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, thus creating the potential for bias such as confirmation bias. Another is that the researchers also submitted their own anonymous stories through the survey as part of this research study.

The research team did not collect data on the gender of the parents who responded. Many participants self-reported this information in their stories, most being women, with several men participating. More detailed demographic data was also not collected due to the limitations of this study. Issues such as race and racism, socioeconomic standing, and geography need to be further scrutinized in future studies. Marginalized groups have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications will likely be felt for generations.²⁷ Due to the limitations of this research study and since human research was not outlined in the research team's IRB submission, identifying demographic data was not collected as part of this research.

Conclusion

"Being respected as a professional adult is now a requirement." (Story #48)

In conclusion, this research study found correlations between the literature that reported on the complexities of parenting during the pandemic and the stories reported by parents and

²⁷ Elizabeth Badalov et al., "COVID-19 Double Jeopardy: The Overwhelming Impact of the Social Determinants of Health," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 21, no. 1 (December 2022): 76, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-022-01629-0>; Abigail H. Neely and Patricia J. Lopez, "The Differential Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Geography in the United States," *The Professional Geographer* 74, no. 3 (July 3, 2022): 430–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2021.2000448>; Aarya Ramprasad et al., "The Relationship between Structural Racism and COVID-19 Related Health Disparities across 10 Metropolitan Cities in the United States," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 114, no. 3 (June 2022): 265–73, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnma.2022.01.008>.

guardians in the library profession on a survey. The current and future impacts are rather similar. While organizations and individuals have learned to live with the pandemic and minimize risks of transmission, the pandemic highlighted existing and underlying issues that are specific to parents and guardians in the U.S. workforce. Those consist of a lack of employer support, increased demands, lack of work life balance, burnout, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. Returning to a new normal hasn't been easy for U.S. parents and guardians, and library workers are no exception, especially since librarianship is a service industry with expectations that services be delivered as they were pre-pandemic. However, how will we deliver when at low capacity? When stretched too thin? How can employers help to support parents and guardians to avoid burnout, mental health issues, or even crisis? This study suggests that employers have a responsibility to be more supportive in providing more flexible systems and policies that give parents and guardians agency in how and where they produce work. Treating employees with respect is essential. Performing fair performance reviews is expected. Allowing for flexibility in schedules and work locations must be part of the new normal. Supervisors need to be better advocates of and allies to their parent and guardian employees. Parents and guardians in the library profession have traits that make them valuable employees, such as the ability to multi-task, make executive decisions, and stay organized. They must be seen as assets and not liabilities to any organization.

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Data Availability Statement

Data associated with this article are available as an appendix to this article.

Author Contributions

Stephanie Clare Roth: Conceptualization; project administration, methodology; investigation; formal analysis; writing-original draft; writing-review and editing. Elizabeth G. Hinton: Methodology; investigation; formal analysis; writing-original draft; writing-review and editing. Bridget Jivanelli: Methodology; investigation; formal analysis; writing-original draft; writing-review and editing.

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Appendix A

Coding Sheet

Color Codes	Themes	Definitions of Themes	Story Number Where Mentioned	# of Stories Mentioning Theme
	Flexibility	Flexible working hours, schedules, flexibility in childcare arrangement (e.g. working at home with children)	7, 12, 16, 18, 19, 30, 34, 39, 41, 47, 48, 49, 54, 72, 74, 77, 79, 97	18
	Mental Health/stress/burnout	Experiencing the onset of anxiety, depression or other mental health disorders. Experiencing high levels of stress, fatigue or burnout or having to overcompensate for increased demands at work while dealing with childcare or parenting.	7, 10, 12, 20, 25, 30, 33, 39, 41, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 59, 70, 73, 74, 76, 77, 82, 83, 84, 86, 95, 97, 98	28
	Safety/Vaccination Concerns	Fear for the health and safety related to themselves, their family and/or their children (who were not vaccinated yet) while having to perform their job duties such as onsite work. Fear for themselves or their family, and/or children who were high-risk for COVID-19 serious symptoms.	7, 12, 45, 46, 50, 70, 72, 77, 81, 82, 86, 95	12
	Work/Life Balance	The ability to balance both family/childcare/parenting and work either positive or negative.	7, 11, 19, 20, 25, 39, 50, 59, 77, 79, 81, 83, 92, 96, 97	15
	Employer Relationship with supervisor or Employer	Having a better or worse relationship with their supervisor as it relates to parenting/childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic.	12, 39, 43, 46, 61, 75, 82, 83, 86, 94, 95, 98	12
	Job Security/Job loss	Worried about or experiencing the loss of security/stability of their employment (such as a furlough or layoff), taking a leave of absence or quitting a job as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It could also include the loss of hours or reduction in pay.	11, 12, 20, 41, 50, 71, 75, 79, 83, 84, 95, 97	12
	Job Performance and/or performance concerns/worry	Feeling worried or concerned about actually being or seeming to be a low performing employee as a direct result of trying to balance work and childcare, being told you are performing lower by	7, 17, 19, 25, 26, 46, 47, 83, 92, 93, 98	11

		a supervisor or receiving a lower performance rating than normal or in normal conditions (pre-pandemic).		
	Childcare issues	Anything directly related to childcare/parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic that was difficult or problematic.	7, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 25, 33, 39, 40, 41, 45, 46, 59, 61, 70, 71, 75, 76, 77, 80, 82, 83, 86, 93, 96, 97, 98	30
	Administration/policies	Anything related to workplace policies or administrative decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted working parents or caregivers.	7, 10, 11, 26, 30, 34, 39, 40, 41, 45, 46, 61, 70, 96, 97, 98	16
	Remote work-positive outcomes	Anything that was positive as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to remote work and childcare or parenting (e.g. having more time with their children before or after work)	7, 11, 16, 20, 34, 40, 41, 45, 49, 54, 59, 70, 72, 78, 79, 80, 81, 92, 94, 95, 98	21
	Remote work-negative outcomes	Anything that was negative as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to remote work and childcare or parenting (e.g. hard to balance work while homeschooling their children)	30, 39, 45, 46, 50, 59, 72, 84	8
	Employer Support had or wished for or lack of employer support	Ways in which employees felt supported or unsupported during the COVID-19 pandemic as a parent or caregiver. Ways in which employers could better support parents or caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic.	7, 10, 17, 19, 20, 26, 39, 40, 43, 45, 46, 49, 50, 59, 61, 70, 71, 72, 74, 76, 77, 81, 82, 83, 84, 86, 92, 93, 94, 96, 97, 98	32
	Guilt	Feelings of inadequacy or guilt specifically as a mom, or overall guilt experienced by parents/caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic.	11, 13, 33, 59, 70, 98	6

Appendix B

Participant Stories

Story Number	7	<p>I am still employed in the same position I had at the beginning of the pandemic. My childcare situation: My kids were both in daycare in March 2020. The daycare announced their closure on a Friday, and the following Monday salaried library staff went remote. The library support staff stayed on, full time, in the library. The idea was that we would all be returning in two weeks, and there was still some institutional hesitancy about hourly employees working off-site. As we are a hospital library, it was made clear that we may be called back to on-site work at any moment (including in non-library roles, such as patient transport). In Fall 2020, we resumed lending physical books and allowing minimal library computer usage. So, we began to add more staff back to the on-site schedule. People were working one or two days on-site each week. When we were told to return to work full-time in May 2021, we were given just two weeks' notice. This led to an overall sense of stress for the entire year. My husband was also working remotely and so between the two of us we cared for our kids (ages 1 and 5). We were basically always working, caring for my kids, cooking/cleaning, or sleeping for the first few months of the pandemic. I got so sick of cooking! Eventually we decided to include my mother and father in-law in our isolation group, so they babysat for us two days a week. I don't know what we would have done without their help. Occasionally they would watch the kids for a weekend as well. I simply could not have made the transition back to on-site work without this extra help. Thankfully, in early 2021 we decided to start looking at daycares now that adults would be vaccinated. So when I was called back to work in May, my youngest's care was covered. My oldest child started kindergarten in Fall 2020. Her schoolwork was online for most of the fall, with a few weeks in October in-person. The second half of the year was completed in-person. This was a huge help - we no longer had to keep her occupied and it brought routine back to her life. My in-laws helped out with after school care when I was working on-site. Support from work: The hospital provided resources for childcare in the form of contact lists of babysitters, nannies, and daycares available to healthcare workers. This was not helpful to me in that I wasn't interested in bringing an unnecessary person into</p>
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	

		<p>my family's list of contacts. If I were a frontline worker, this would have been a different story. But because I was fully able to work from home, it seemed like too great a risk. I am the only person in my library with small children. A few of my colleagues have older children (jr. high and older), but it was difficult to ask for any kind of exception or help without feeling like I was asking for too much. When a colleague, her husband, and teenage child contracted Covid, my department coordinated some meals and groceries to be delivered to them. It was good to know that if my family got sick, I could count on my coworkers to help me out. To be clear: this was not a formal work thing, just my coworkers deciding to help each other. Moving forward: Remote work is no longer an option for people in my department. (My sense is that office politics are involved in this decision.) It really would make a huge difference in my work/life balance. I love my current job and I am happy here, but I would seriously consider leaving for a remote position somewhere else, or even a similar local position that offered a hybrid model. In my mind, the pandemic demonstrated that we can produce good work outside the walls of the office - why aren't we using that information to promote a healthier work/life balance?</p>
Story Number	10	<p>My workplace sent everyone to work from home in March, 2020. It was extremely difficult to get anything done at first since school and preschool were also closed, but my husband was home as well and we basically just took turns trying to get work done while the other kept the kids at a dull roar. My supervisor was extremely understanding and there were very few firm requirements for productivity in the first several months--we were all just doing the best we could. In the summer, preschool opened again (with shorter than usual hours), and remote school picked up for my older child in the fall, so we were able to get into more of a routine and it became possible to do something like a normal day's work (though divided into pieces around dropping off and picking up children, checking in on schoolwork, etc.). When the library re-opened as a physical space, my supervisor worked with everyone's schedules, and I was only asked to come in once a week on the weekend, when my husband was home with the kids. (He went back to work in-person in the fall of 2020.) This was not my preferred schedule, but it did allow me to work from home and manage kid drop-</p>
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	

		<p>offs/pick-ups/school. Management has been flexible and supportive throughout, which definitely was key to my ability to continue to work--if I had been required to be back in the office during standard hours before school (and the related before and afterschool programs) resumed, I would not have been able to manage the schedule. As it was, I was able to be pretty productive since the majority of my work is on the computer anyway, so being at home was not a huge hinderance most of the time. (Though there are definitely collaborative aspects of being in the office that do not carry over well to Zoom.) It was very helpful that management was accepting of the need to work from home, and to work slightly off-standard hours (I would begin work earlier than technically scheduled, then take a break to take kids to preschool/school). Since we have so far been fortunate not to get sick or have sick family, childcare has definitely been the biggest issue of the pandemic for me.</p>
Story Number	11	<p>When in-person school closed abruptly after Mar 13, 2020, my three kids were in two different schools; the oldest was in 7th grade at a regional Catholic school, and the younger two were in 1st and 5th grade at our local public elementary school. I (and most other non-clinical staff) were either sent or given the opportunity to go home (depending on role) the following week, and I was drafted to help my Informatics team with setting up telemedicine. There was about a week when everyone was trying to figure out what was happening next, and then starting the week of March 23, school started to transition online and I began working remotely full time. I've always had the ability to work remotely, although I generally have only used it if one of my kids was home sick, and already being set up came in handy. Covering from home for a day or two is a very different thing, however, than sitting at my dining room table from 7:30am to 5:30pm every day for weeks on end, with endless Zoom and GoTo meetings about telemedicine, interspersed with my regular research/ILL/library duties, AND all three of my kids sitting at the same table getting on their various classes remotely and trying to do work. My oldest son's transition was the simplest - his teachers were super organized, and they already did a lot of communication and assignment work through Google classroom, so they just expanded what they were already doing, and scheduled short online sessions for instruction and to touch base with the kids. They told the</p>
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Director	
Number of Children	3	

		<p>students they were available anytime, and to PLEASE reach out to them. My son felt supported, and at 12, he was pretty self-sufficient. My middle son was another story. In a pod of three 5th grade teachers, one was planning retirement at the end of the year, and she simply dropped out. She refused to do anything online, and basically just stopped teaching. Another one of the teachers also refused to interact with students online, through email, in any way - said it wasn't part of his union contract and he wasn't doing it. (Our local teachers union supported him and all other teachers who chose to do this.) He would give occasional assignments to my son's teacher to post. My son's homeroom teacher basically took on the work of all three teachers and posted assignments in Google Classroom for the entire 5th grade, and would schedule virtual (not instructional) check-ins for her class. Parents of my son's friends in the other two classes said they never saw their teachers again. My son's assignments were never graded, so he had no idea how he was doing, or if he was getting the work right. I would look at his writing and math assignments, and correct them for him. His teacher did the best she could in a crazy situation, but we basically wrote off the last third of 5th grade. My youngest, in 1st grade, hated "home school" the most. She loves school, loves the routine, and missed her friends and her teacher. The 1st grade teachers were pretty much the opposite of the 5th grade teachers - they banded together, divvied up the instruction, and did a heroic job, I thought, of making the best out of a bad situation. But trying to get a 6 year old to sit and watch math videos and do worksheets when I'm on meetings at the same time, and she'd rather escape to the other room to watch tv...it was futile, especially after the novelty wore off after week 2 or so. We all breathed a collective sigh of relief when the school year ended. I returned to work in person full time in early June 2020, as soon as the kids were done school, and my kids had what I told them was a circa-1985 summer of boredom - just like mom and dad used to have! No camps, so entertain yourselves, kids! Going into the 2020-21 year, my husband (who works in administration in a public school district and never stopped going to work in person) and I made the decision that, based on the mess we were seeing the teachers union make in our local district (it got really nasty at school board meetings, and all scientific evidence was being completely ignored), we</p>
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		<p>were moving our younger two to join their brother at the Catholic school, where they had decided to have completely in-person instruction, with masks. Best parenting decision we've made so far. My kids had a healthy, happy, and productive year at their new school. We had no in-school transmission of COVID, and while it definitely wasn't normal (no singing, lunch in the classrooms, most extracurricular activities canceled, and masks all the time!), it was far far better than what their friends were experiencing locally, with remote schooling, then some hybrid school but optional masks at the sports they prioritized in the district, so then everyone's out again because of course there were COVID cases...etc. I feel INCREDIBLY lucky that we were able to give our kids the gift of school - and stability - last year. They have stayed at the same school for 2021-22, and again this year there are masks, and sanity (many school districts around us have made masks optional even as numbers increase in New England, with the expected resulting surge in cases), and I am hearing from my friends who are teachers in the finally-back-in-person public school about the completely abnormal behavior they're seeing from kids who are far less emotionally mature than their years, and the high rates of anxiety among them, after a year and a half of having their lives upended. As far as work impact, I hope never again to have to try to balance supporting kids remotely schooling with working - because it just doesn't work. As a full time working parent, I already feel the stress and the pull of demands from both "worlds," and COVID highlighted how tenuous the balancing act between the two really is, and how quickly it can collapse. I am lucky, I think, that the hospital I work for, and my immediate boss, are both very supportive. Many employees were furloughed when COVID hit - I wasn't one of them, mostly because I was being used as a resource by Infectious Disease, and because I jumped in to help with telemedicine. Some days I wished I HAD been furloughed! It would have made the whole remote schooling thing simpler; I could have provided more support especially to my 1st grader, which may have helped with some of the mom guilt I felt during that period. I felt very conflicted at the time - I actually ended up writing a poem about it for the staff art exhibit about COVID that I and some colleagues pulled together in June 2021, and it was pretty cathartic. I feel like I had the best support available from my workplace, with</p>
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		<p>complete approval to work remotely - and complete approval to return to work in June 2020 if I wanted to. They would have been fine with me working remotely too, but I missed seeing people...and it's way easier to be a hospital librarian in person. Connections are everything. I didn't have to worry about supporting my kids at home last year, since they were in school, but the hospital tried to be as flexible as possible with allowing flex schedules and temporary reduced hours for staff that needed them to support their kids. I will admit to the hospital librarian's prevailing fear that if I DID ask to reduce my hours at all, or request a furlough, that I would never get those hours back. My hospital has done nothing in particular to encourage that fear, but all you have to do is look around and see the hospital libraries closing (I know of two in my state of that closed permanently during COVID), and it does make you think twice about requesting to have anything reduced...even temporarily. I think that I gained a reprieve of sorts, by moving my kids to a different school. Had we chosen to (or had to) keep them in the public school system, with the varying remote/hybrid year, I likely would have had to reduce my hours, even with a supportive workplace, because I don't think the balancing act of full-time worker/full-time mom would have held. Something would have had to give, and for me, I would have chosen work to take the hit. And it would have hurt, because I absolutely love what I do, but I could live with that choice. Going forward, employers offering flexibility, like remote work and flexible hours (not just "8a-5p M-F") when possible is, I think, key, but remote work won't solve everything, and I think it can create other problems that we're only starting to identify. What I'd really like to see is more conversation around the bigger picture of what employers are expecting of us - and even more important, what we're expecting of ourselves - as working parents. Even having had what feels like the best possible of situations as a working parent over the last crazy year and a half, having the precariousness of that balancing act thrown in my face has made me question if it's something I want to continue. Are there better options? Should I cut back my hours, knowing I'll likely never regain them? Should I be doing something better or different to support my kids? I have three happy and relatively well-adjusted kids, who support me working; we've had conversations about it - they think my job is actually pretty cool. I've been a full-time</p>
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		working parent - by choice - for 15 years now, and I've never regretted it. But thanks to COVID, I am questioning it, more than I ever have.
Story Number	12	I am a single mother of a currently 8yo son (age 7 at the start of the pandemic). The initial feeling was fear because I knew that I would not be able to count on my regular childcare for any help at all, since I did not trust anyone to be COVID19-free. I also do not have any family members to help, but even if I did, I couldn't trust them to be COVID19-free either. Fortunately I have saved lots of \$ so I figured if the pandemic needed to take me off work for a couple of months (LOL) it would be ok. At one point my supervisor asked me what my childcare plans were, which I thought was insensitive because I thought many, if not most, parents alive didn't know what their childcare plans would be! I do appreciate working for a hospital because we took the virus situation extremely serious since February. That rubbed off on me, and I immediately stopped going out/being around people as much as possible. Finally in March the hospital told non-clinicians to go home and stay there, so we were all in the same position now. Then all schools sent children home for good. While I was so grateful to be at home safe with my son, the virtual school situation soon became a real challenge. Lots of tears (me, my son, and yes, his teachers) due to struggling with technology and communication. However, since my son was in 1st grade I tried to remember that 1st grade really isn't all that important in the grand scheme of things and tried not to stress too much, especially since I was also trying to work 8-5 everyday at that same time. I also remember feeling both anger and amusement at those ridiculous schedules that were being posted online that families could follow to have some structure in their day. We were literally in survival mode and a schedule was the farthest thing from my mind and definitely not helpful. During the summer I forced my son and me to get out every evening for scooter rides and walks in local parks. It was our only contact with society but I felt like we both needed to get out of the house as safely as possible. We also did lots of takeout and drive thru and I did curbside grocery for awhile, until I strategized in-store grocery shopping for Friday/Saturday nights when traffic there was light. As the fall 2020 school year approached I had to beg my doctor for something to help me with my anxiety about my son starting 2nd
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Library Staff/technician	
Number of Children	1	

		<p>grade at home with my still trying to work all day, so I started taking Lexapro, which did help. I also asked my supervisors if I could go from 40 hours/week down to 35 hours/week so I would have some extra time in the evening to help my son with his homework, and I was fully ready to take this financial hit. But I was told no because the worry was that if my position was reduced, they'd have a hard time getting me approved back to 40 hours. They did tell me to feel free to be as flexible as possible, and if I wanted to work 35 hours during M-F I could work the additional 5 hours on the weekend, an option which I appreciated (but did not take b/c weekends are for much-needed rest!). I heard of other libraries that had already re-opened in May 2020, and I was aghast at that thought and again, so grateful I didn't work at places like that because I literally had no safe childcare options. The local newspaper included me in a story saying that I couldn't send my son back to school in person in fall 2020 since it was just the 2 of us, and I worried he'd bring home the virus to me. Finally in Dec 2020 I was burned out from trying to work all day and help my son with his schooling, so I decided it was time to prioritize our mental health. My Lexapro Rx was increased, but I still sent him back in person in Dec 2020. My life immediately became better, saner, and more peaceful. We finally returned to our library in person at the end of June 2021. We are working onsite 2 days week and at home 3 days a week and it is truly wonderful. I am so grateful for this hybrid schedule. The benefits on finances, mental health, physical health, and quality of life are many, and so appreciated. In the future, I cannot envision wanting to work onsite full-time anymore. Hybrid schedules have GOT to be the future. It really does feel like the best of both worlds. I hope we workers of the world fight for this as a norm and that employers recognize they must allow this in order to retain good employees.</p>
Story Number	13	<p>Today I'm home with my kids because they have colds. My elder child is vaccinated against Covid, but my younger child isn't eligible yet. Any day now! But I'm 99% certain they just have colds. Still, the rules for their school system is that if you have any cold symptoms, or anything that might potentially be covid, you need to stay home. While I actually think this is a good thing, and I'm glad not to be spreading this cold to anyone else, it makes for a frustrating life because it is hard to plan. I</p>
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	3	

		need to be prepared to stay home on a moments notice at any time. Most of my colleagues are childless, so while they are trying to be supportive, I still can't help but feel guilty. It is also frustrating because my husband - who is also a librarian and works at the same library I do! - doesn't feel this guilt at all. He just goes in to work. I also think that while the Dean of Libraries and HR are vocally supportive of us who are home with kids, when it comes down to giving out bonuses they will forget about us because we literally aren't at the table.
Story Number	16	Fortunately, my children were 9 and 12 at the beginning of the lockdown and not babies or toddlers, so I was spared the need to leave the profession for caregiving duties. I was able to work from home with minimal distractions. The hardest part was assisting my younger son with virtual school and working at the same time. Both my kids stayed in virtual school through the 2020-2021 school year. My husband was 100% virtual until a few months ago, but I began coming back to the office part-time in July 2020. Working in-person was much easier than working at home, but I really appreciated the flexibility to stay home 2 or 3 days a week since my son struggled to stay engaged with online school. I was able to help him stay on-task when our desks were beside one another. One of the best things about working from home was the ability to use breaks to get household chores done or attend a midday telehealth appointment for the kids. We spent so much less time shuttling between work/school/home/doctors offices and had more weekend free-time since it wasn't all taken up with laundry & house cleaning. I was also able to do a lot more home cooking since I wasn't commuting. If I didn't have to staff a service point for 40 hours a week, I'd love to continue to have occasional work-from-home days. If I were job searching, that kind of flexibility would be something I would look for.
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	17	When COVID closed my library in Mar 2020, my wife and I had a 3 yo and were pregnant for our 2nd child due in May 2020. Our daycare closed immediately through May 17, so all three of us were stuck at home together for about 2 months. My wife worked remotely in the mornings; I worked in the afternoons. We were both able to work, though clearly at a reduced capacity. At work, there was no real support, just time to tend to kids mostly. There was no coordination among those with
Institution	Academic	
Position	Supervisor/administrator	
Number of Children	2	

		kids and admin. We were simply told to figure out our children's care situation. We were fortunate to be able to get the kids squared away. My immediate supervisor was great, but upper administration seemed apathetic to the struggles.
Story Number	18	Fortunately, my children were old enough to stay home alone by the time schools closed. During our state's relatively brief stay-at-home order, I was able to help them with the technical aspects of remote school. Once I returned to work, they still faced nearly an entire year of online learning, but they were largely able to handle it by themselves. My employer has always been generous and flexible with me, and I have tried to extend the same consideration to the employees who report to me.
Institution	Academic	
Position	Director	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	19	At the very beginning of the pandemic for 2-3 months I was working entirely at home with my 2-year-old. It was very hard, and I wasn't getting a lot of work done because I needed to be mommy more than work. My daughter spent a lot of time playing on my phone, playing with her Kindle, or watching tv. I was able to work while she napped and when my husband got home. One day I was talking with my parents and my mom encouraged me to come and work at their house and she would take care of my daughter. Before the pandemic my mom had been taking care of her so this wouldn't be anything new or different to my daughter, Caroline and my mom was missing being with her every day and getting to spend time with her. We were supposed to enroll her in daycare last summer (2020) but because of uneasiness about her going there and catching COVID we put it off. It's a good thing we did because they had to close the daycare the same week, she was supposed to start because of a COVID exposure. I continued to work at my parents until I came back to work. I am having trouble remembering but I don't think at the beginning of the pandemic my supervisor and dean were aware of my work/life situation. I know that later on they were because my supervisor and I started meeting weekly and we talked about it. I was able to continue my job even though it was hard, and I was struggling in a lot of different ways (physically, emotionally, mentally, etc). The former dean of the library started sending out check-in Google forms and that was really helpful because it gave us a chance to express needs or issues or anything that should be
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		<p>brought to her attention and addressed. I also liked it because it kept me from feeling like I was complaining and making a nuisance out of myself to her. My direct supervisor struggled a lot with communication so eventually we started meeting once a week to check-in with each other and have a dedicated time for direct communication. Those first 2-3 months at the beginning of being remote were horrible. I was trying to be both mommy and assistant medical librarian and it was exhausting me and hurting Caroline because she wasn't getting Mommy's full attention. It also hurt my work performance which hurt me professionally because professional goals I had from my last performance review weren't completed and this hurt me come performance review time 2021. One thing libraries can do is to provide more opportunity for remote work or more flexible schedules (allowing parents to come in later than others when needed, work later hours in the evening and then come in later the following day, etc.). There are so many days I would take advantage of the ability to work remotely except my university doesn't have a policy about it to allow me to do this. My direct supervisor also wasn't willing to be accommodating to my needs for a more flexible schedule when I asked about it. On-site daycares/preschools/after-school programs, etc. with reasonable pricing would be a blessing for parents that work in libraries no matter what type of library the parent works for. One other thing that would be helpful to parents is better parental leave policies though this is an issue nationwide and not just one specific to libraries and librarian parents. I am so glad someone is studying this.</p>
Story Number	20	<p>We kept our (at the time) 8-month daughter at home. She had previously been in daycare full time. My spouse and I began our day at 6am, and traded 2-hour blocks of time (e.g. one of us worked from 6-8, then watched our daughter from 8-10). After she went to bed, we usually worked another hour or two to catch up. This was absolutely grueling. I am grateful that my supervisor was generally supportive and flexible, but I am frustrated by the general sentiment from others that parents were lucky to be able to be home with their children for so long. I don't disagree - I love my daughter and the time I got with her is precious - but there is no acknowledgement of how hard it was. My husband has since quit his job to become the primary caregiver,</p>
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		which has allowed me to return to in-person operations. I am still trying to recover from the burn-out. I'm not really sure if that's possible. My institution has allowed hybrid WFH schedules which is now essential to me.
Story Number	25	When Covid closures began, our family was on Spring break and that break was extended at the kids school for another week and then another week as they tried to figure out how they were going to deliver content online at my kids schools. At the library, I am the only one with children (either empty nesters or no children) and so I was in a unique situation of trying to juggle our five kids with work and my wife's work (she is our primary breadwinner and I am in charge of the kids primarily,,). We transferred to home work pretty seamlessly in our department, the school was a little less organized. My kids school bought a chromebook for each child quickly and used the breaks to train the teachers Zoom 101. At, home, we had to hire two nannies to keep the kid focused. We created a curriculum for our preschoolers (our infant arrived in 2021). The preschool closed until June and reopened in June 2019. The school delivered online content, but it was a nightmare to keep my kids focused for even four hours. The kids all had different synchronous schedules and my youngest didn't know how to read, let alone type. The summer seemed to go well as we found the one camp that didn't close. The fall brought me stress and anxiety. I had one more in elementary school meaning even more disruption to my schedule. We hired two nannies again and waited for in class sessions to begin again in September 2021. My kids were in and out all year shuttling from in class to online classes like ping pong. At work, my desk was temporary and in my master bedroom. ATSU gave us 5 covid personal days. I felt my work quality slip and by June 2021, I had been so stressed I had to take a month's FMLA leave to recover from burnout. We have five kids now and the school quarantines are less frequent, but still stressful (i had three out on Friday) and every sniffle means a Covid test and a stay at home for that child.
Institution	Academic	
Position	Director	
Number of Children	5	
Story Number	26	I am a foster parent and during the pandemic I provided respite care to a fellow foster parent who was struggling. She had a physical altercation with the foster youth in her home and was getting ready to have him removed from the home. Since he was a teenager he would likely have ended up in a group home. Since I had a prior
Institution	Academic	
Position	Library Assistant	
Number of Children	1	

		relationship with the child I offered to take him in for a week so the foster mom could have a cooling off period. Given that this was supposed to be a long-term to permanent guardianship home a removal would have been devastating for this child. I have a vague awareness that there is time off for foster parent duties, but the process for applying for time off is not clear. I wish my employer would make this process clear and be supportive of the time off. Given that we are short-staffed I usually hesitate to take anytime off.
Story Number	30	In 2020 my child's school and my workplace went full virtual at the same time. My workplace continued full virtual through the summer so I was able to be home with my son (my husband returned to the office). The only difficult part of the summer was trying to deal with my son's boredom; there wasn't much for him to do. I was able to flex time a bit in order to do things with him during the day. In the fall my son's school was in person every other day and I was able to telework to match his schedule. My husband returned to full virtual work in December 2020 and has remained at home since then. I still telework 2 days per week but now our son is in school full time. I definitely think that employers should offer telework options as a permanent benefit. We have all proved that we can do the work virtually and it takes so much stress off of working parents.
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	
Story Number	33	As a middle school librarian, I was expected to return to campus Aug 2020, while my children. Stayed home for virtual school. With enough complaints, campus leaders provided free childcare at elementary campuses for district employees. This was an utter failure, as the staff watching the kids did not help them access their devices. My children then did school work from home. I was torn between working and quitting so my kids could have someone help them figure out how to navigate school. I did not quit. Instead of being used as a librarian on campus, I am viewed as a substitute and my library is an extension of the cafeteria, last year and this year. I am expected to be both a sub and a librarian. I am told to keep the doors open, even when I am covering a class. I am doing everything by myself.
Institution	K-12 School	
Position	Library Staff/technician	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	34	My life was so much EASIER!!!. Going forward I would want flexible employment that has the same or more autonomy as I experience now. I really enjoyed getting
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	

Number of Children	4	to learn so much of what I wanted and could imagine because it was virtual and free. I even attended conferences way out of budget and libraries per view because they were free and virtual. COVID really provided a lot of opportunities for those who access it. My children are mostly in early education, for the most part, everything they do is learning as play, which is so much easier to schedule my job around. and they sleep later and longer. Eating all three meals a day, working from the yard so that they could play, and more was GREAT!! I hope more libraries could see the value in flexibility and virtual work- less "butts in seats" perspective.
Story Number	39	What was the impact of the pandemic on your caregiving/childcare situation? Went from having two children in daycare to then having them at home with us. I am privileged in that I have a spouse as well as other family support. Family was able to help with childcare so my spouse and I were able to work. We both were able to work from home. With family support (again, we are lucky), we had to adjust our work schedules a bit later than we were used to (bc family support was not up and functioning as early as we usually do). We could walk to and from the location for family support, which again, is incredible. This also meant that we lost "transition time" between work and transitioning into being at home with our children. Our older child did virtual kindergarten for a year--our younger one continues to be cared for by family support. Our kindergartener mostly did virtual K with us, mainly sitting next to me while I tried to do my job. Not only were they learning to be in a class, sit in their chair...they also had to learn very quickly how to use a computer and a mouse, how to move and click on a screen, how to log into Zoom, how to mute and mute, turn camera off and on. What support did you receive at work (or wished you would have received)? Work has been was fairly supportive. I think it may also help that my director has a small child. Were you able to continue your work or do your job? (or did you leave the profession due to caregiving/childcare responsibilities?) Yes, I was able to keep my job, continue to publish, etc. It was still incredibly hard and would have been harder without spousal support, family support, etc. Still felt that more of the housework, childcare, etc. fell on me as the female in our household. Some of that perhaps I put on
Institution	Medical	
Position	Supervisor/administrator	
Number of Children	2	

		<p>me, but also felt like traditional gender roles still play a part. I will add that my spouse & family helped to watch the children the few times I did "social" happy hours in the evening and just to connect with my professional colleagues around the country. It didn't happen very often (3 times?) but nice to have that support. Also, as much as our family has helped us, I still felt like I never had a "break". Yes, we had help with childcare, but that was because we were working. As soon as we finished, we had to go and get them and give family a break. Thankfully, we have been able to rely on them at a few points for longer "breaks" for us--like, 48 hours child-free. Again, this is a huge undertaking from family during this time and I don't want to sound ungrateful. But there were times when I just wanted some "me" time and felt like if I got it, it was...a 30 min chunk somewhere that then I squandered. What were some things that were helpful or worked well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? I think our library administration was very clear (repeatedly) about even though we are coming back in person now, all library meetings this Fall 2021 semester would be on Zoom. While we are expected to teach in person, all of our meetings are still virtual. This promotes equity with people in the library and people elsewhere, plus reiterates caring for one another's safety. If folks want to be in person they can decide that as a group, but our large meetings (all staff, liaison meetings) continue to be on Zoom. This is in contrast to what I'm hearing from other libraries on campus where it's either a mixed message from their administration or unwritten pressure to be in person, even if folks aren't comfortable with that.: What didn't work well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? This is something I wish we had more discussion about--the administration of the medical school said that we needed to be back 3x a week, so that's what we have been doing since August 2021. My older child is now in 1st grade in person, and my younger child is at PreK, also in person. I would like to be in the office 2 days a week, not 3, and wish there could have been a discussion about this. Partly it feels like it was out of their hands (& as a supervisor, I feel like I also should set a good example for the folks who report to me). But I also wish there had been a discussion/opening for that to be a little more flexible without me having to take it upon myself to have to advocate that for myself. More burden on me to have to</p>
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		do all the mental math and decide if it's worth it or not. As we move closer to a post-pandemic situation, how can library workplaces and/or administrators better support you as a caregiver or retain you, or attract you as an employee (if unemployed)? Continue work flexibility in our schedules. Make sure to have a discussion about what our needs, wants, desires are. Even when people don't have minor children, they may have pets or other living things for which they are caregivers. We have a work from home policy (that we had before the pandemic) and all places should have one, and it doesn't have to be black and white/everything all spelled out, but it is nice to know we have a policy to refer to, and that administration is willing to have the discussion to figure out how to best support their workers. As a side note, thanks for doing this research! In the future I'd be happy to collaborate with you. I think this is incredibly important for our profession.
Story Number	40	Having both my 5 yo and 10 yo home all the time for 18 months was difficult, but I was able to telework 100% and could continue to work productively and efficiently. I wish that my employer had partnered with an organization to provide high quality online enrichment for the kids during the summer and after school. Library workplaces and administrators can continue to be flexible with employees regarding work/life balance. If a job is able to be done remotely, support and allow that.
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	41	My husband lost his job during COVID, but I can't imagine what we would have done if we were both working. Our kids are in emergency remote schooling that we had to assist with. Then we went back to school physically, but we couldn't afford daycare anymore. So my husband was able to get the kids on and off the bus, but he couldn't work outside of the home unless it paid more than daycare, which is easily 20-30,000 a year. So our options were limited. I was able to work from home during the Spring 2021 semester and that helped with gas costs, not having to travel in snow, etc. I was able to be there for my kids more than I have ever been able to - and I still did my same job. In fact I was busier than ever before teaching online and doing consultations on Zoom. The quarantining for kids (and I'm not sure if vaccinations will end it for K-5 settings) is a constant, looming threat for families with young kids. Schools
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	

		<p>don't provide any instruction during individual quarantine and you can't send kids to a daycare, so then what happens? Libraries need to have conversations about what would happen if X number of the staff needs to work remotely and how to make that feasible. Connecting with other library workers with kids to share stories was a great emotional help. Being flexible to our staff workers who are grandparents and need to step away or change schedules to help with grandkids is part of that package. It takes a village! The college is sponsoring an official work from home pilot, but it is too conservative to meet the dynamic, changing schedules of library workers.</p>
Story Number	43	<p>My local admin has been understanding but the institutional as a whole has been more strict which is frustrating.</p>
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Director	
Number of Children	3	
Story Number	45	<p>-It is important to remember that the pandemic impacted 2 1/2 academic years for our children. It started when my 5th grader in 3rd grade, 9th grader was in 7th grade, and my college freshman was in 11th grade. So the impact on my family was different from the beginning of the pandemic to now, 2 years later. I also think there was A LOT of focus on workers w/ young children but workers with teenagers and the stressors we encounter with them and the pandemic are no less valid. In some ways the stressors with older children become less about childcare and more about care of child and their mental health. -Childcare for my then 3rd grader abruptly ended. Thankfully my spouse works for a software company that sent them all home right away. So he was able to be at home when childcare was disrupted. -However, just because he and eventually I worked from home doesn't mean that work got done. We had 3 kids trying to do elearning while we were trying to work and be on meetings ourselves. For example: All 3 kids were in different schools (grade school, middle school, and high school) so they had different start times, lunch times, etc. That made for balancing things inside the home difficult. Overlapping but different lunch times meant that the adults in the house were either dealing with lunches for over an hour and half time period. Or we were refereeing arguments over who is using the microwave when it is "their lunch</p>
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Director	
Number of Children	3	

		<p>time" or who ate my food. The stress of dealing with elearning was difficult because the parents in the house were not trained to teach grade school, middle school or even high school classes like math and other subjects. While the older children were more independent the youngest often called out for help which not only disrupted the parents' work but also the other two children in the house. For example: One day at the same time, the 3rd grader was yelling for technical help, the 7th grader was taking "virtual gym" with loud whistles, music and the gym teacher announcing loudly that she needed to see the kids on the screen doing the exercises, while the 11th grader was taking a time test that monitored outside activity and noise to prevent cheating. That was incredibly stressful managing the Monday-Friday work day with 3 kids school day as well. Work tried to be supportive, they provided lists of people who could watch children, but I didn't want to use them for several reasons. 1. Either me and my spouse were both working from home, so I didn't want to take somebody when the nurses and doctors who couldn't work from home needed them more. 2. I wasn't sure how I felt about somebody I didn't know coming into my house during a pandemic. Work also tried to be supportive to help with our mental well being but it felt like I needed more mental well being help while in the house. I was ok with the work stress even though it was high. The stress that was the hardest was the home stress and the stress of trying to help my children deal with the stress of the pandemic. I don't think many people mentioned the stress of trying to help your own stressed out children. We ended up getting lucky and finding a therapist who did Zoom appointments for my teenagers. This was very important because the the oldest was dealing with a lot of mental stress; the loss of his high school sports, applying to colleges, loss of homecoming his senior year, and the loss of classmates (one committed suicide). -We also were able to get my 3rd grader's student teacher to tutor my daughter over the summer. I don't know how we would have been able to help her retain what she learned AND get to grade level standards if we hadn't gotten a tutor. -I continue to work at my job. I did not leave or leave the profession. I needed the paycheck and with older kids I don't have the luxury to move during a pandemic and there are not a lot of virtual positions in medical libraries...especially at a supervisory level. I did however become very burnt out</p>
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		<p>engaging with staff who didn't understand the pressures I was under as a supervisor. I became envious of those retiring. I ended up increasing my retirement contributions so that even though I have a long while before retirement, it will be hopefully be less long. - Some of the things that worked well were taking walks during the day (when the weather was nice). Working different hours than when my children were doing online school. In the summer when my kids weren't in school I would go on food truck lunch dates with my spouse. That was incredibly mentally therapeutic. It was a nice break in the day to reconnect with my spouse outside of the stressors inside the house with kids and work. -What didn't work: The institution did not really provide a lot of help to supervisors like myself who had to balance staffing issues in a pandemic. For example helping us navigate the sticky conversations of why a librarian can work from home but the library assistant cannot work from home due to the nature of their job. We had a lot of staffing problems where people working inside the library were jealous of those working from home. It was very difficult handling that and I don't think the institution nor MLA helped us with those issues. MLA and the library community communicating about how "everybody" was working from home really upset those who were still working in the library. There was definitely an us vs. them feeling regarding the work from homes vs the work in the library. - I wish my organization would better support me by listening to us as a whole. Before the pandemic they made decisions and you just kind of rolled with it, but now it seems like the decisions hit a nerve more. Prior to the pandemic space was ALWAYS a problem, but now the concept of making hybrid workers share desks and reducing the space seems more frustrating.</p>
Story Number	46	<p>I returned from maternity leave only a few months before we were sent home to begin teleworking in March 2020. My child was very young at the time and I was terrified, so I pulled him out of daycare and kept him home with me while I worked. This went on until July when two things happened: I knew I would be required to return to in-person work soon, and I could no longer continue to juggle full-time parenting with full-time work. After childbirth, I began suffering from severe postpartum anxiety and postpartum depression, and the added stress of the pandemic was and is crippling. I</p>
Institution	Other	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		<p>found that some professional colleagues offered more grace than others; it was a learning experience, to be sure. My son has reactive airway disease, and it doesn't take much to set off an attack. Because of this, the possibility of my son getting Covid is always an immense worry for me. My family lives a full day of travel away from me, so the only support I have comes from my in-laws; however, they are not as reliable as they once were. The person I report to at work has been incredibly understanding and accommodating of my situation, which is not exactly in alignment with my institution's policies. We were granted "Covid" hours for childcare/testing/illness/mental health in 2020, but that is no longer a benefit. Additionally, we are forbidden from providing childcare if we are working from home; this is especially tricky since my son is in daycare and one case of Covid in his classroom can shut everything down for weeks. My husband has never been able to work from home and now has a new job, which means I am the only one who is able to stay home in the event of an outbreak. As a country, we need to move towards a more family-friendly approach to employment and provide more options for telework and flexible schedules. Too many women have been forced out of the workplace because of the pandemic, and those that are still working are burned out.</p>
Story Number	47	<p>In March 2020, my daughter was in 5th grade. Her last day of in-person 5th grade was March 5, 2020. She did distance learning for a year, until March 4, 2021, and finished 6th grade with in-person half-days. She also started a new, Middle school in 6th grade, a building which she had only been in on a brief tour. Fortunately, my employer was flexible and accommodating for the needs of parents and caregivers. I was juggling work and supporting her with school at the same time. In 5th grade she needed more daily support and in 6th-7th grade she started to transition to managing her schedule on her own. There were a few quarters where she fell behind and I needed to spend more time helping her come up with a plan to catch up. Emotionally the pandemic has taken a toll on her -- she's an only child and didn't have a lot of in-person interaction with kids at this time. Sometimes I needed to cancel a meeting or leave one because she was having a breakdown. Although my institution was supportive of caregivers, there was always this constant pressure that I was falling</p>
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian (Associate Librarian)	
Number of Children	1	

		behind or being distracted by a parent with my work. This was something I encountered pre-pandemic and obviously and it was always there during the shutdowns and school closures. I also live nearish to where George Floyd was murdered and the constant helicopters were unnerving.
Story Number	48	My children are older and don't need hands on care, but they need someone present and some guidance when necessary. Flexible work options were and are vital. This includes: working from home a couple days per week, or when necessary; encouraging video calls for meetings; flexing hours during the day or week for doctor's appointments or other needs. These are important and convenient for people who aren't parents as well. Being respected as a professional adult is now a requirement.
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	49	My daughter was in third and fourth grade during the pandemic. She did online school from March of 2020 until May of 2021. My library allowed me to work from home every morning. My husband worked from home in the afternoon. I was able to conduct my work from home without any problem. I logged into LibAnswers and taught my classes online and via Zoom. Our Graduate Assistants who cover the Information Desk worked remotely in the Spring and Summer of 2020. It worked because we were closed or when open had very few face to face patrons. Our library was closed during the summer of 2020 and we had reduced hours the other months. We had a core group of staff and librarians who came to work every day, which we really appreciate, otherwise parents would not have been able to stay at home with their children. I think libraries can better attract employees if they can offer flex-time, job sharing, or remote work from home. Transitioning back to working in the library full-time has been difficult. We started back to physically being at the library full-time in May of 2021. Our hours during the weekends and Friday are still reduced from pre-covid hours.
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian (Research & Instruction Librarian, supervise G.A.s at Information Desk)	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	50	The pandemic was a guillotine on caregiving/childcare. We have grandparents living 2 streets away who we only saw through masks and car windows. They had plenty of advice on how to homeschool the kids though. Work was supportive - they provided multiple sessions for staff on mental health and even one specifically for parents. Our university provided these to all employees free of
Institution	Other: NNLM (Academic)	
Position	Supervisor/administrator	
Number of Children	2	

		<p>charge. Because I was already 100% teleworking since 2016, I was able to continue doing my job. I did have a loss of ego when I realized I would not be able to present the flagship PubMed webinars because there were always kids and distractions happening. So instead I worked hard on other projects and hoped my colleagues didn't resent me. Things that worked well: supervisor encouraged us to take time off. I took every Friday off from Aug - Dec 2020 - this really helped my mental health - to not have to do 1 job (my professional job), and focus on the other jobs (home school, maid, cook, grocery shopping). What didn't work: eventually, fatigue from all the online team building and somewhat pointless meetings made me resentful and introverted. I didn't want to share my kids and pets on Zoom. I just wanted to do my work so I could get on to the other jobs. Juggling 2 different online school schedules and my husband co-working in the same tiny office was cognitive overload. I'm still recovering, and will forever have PTSD about getting 2 kids on 2 different Microsoft Teams meetings at the same time. There were a lot of conflicting demands (school, work, family). I realized you just have to give up on some things. Library workplaces can better support caregivers by being flexible. Don't nickle and dime your staff about where they are for 8 hours. Make productivity project based. Treat staff like adults. Give space and time for staff to be quiet, to sit and reflect. And understand that caregivers/parents are not some arcane species. We are not precious. I think the biggest thing I learned about myself through the parental/professional pandemic experience is that I want to keep my professional and personal life separate. I want be known and treated like a professional in the library realm, and I want the #momlife to stay offline.</p>
Story Number	54	<p>I was fortunate because my institution allow us to work from home. I was provided with a working laptop. I continued to work and connect with my students and colleagues via Zoom. At the same time, my kid was doing school work online. To support my work, library administrators should adopt more flexible policy and new technology, to make sure we can work both face-to-face and remotely.</p>
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	
Story Number	59	<p>The pandemic dramatically changed our childcare situation. Pre-pandemic our child (2.5 at the time) was in part-time daycare, and cared for part-time by my</p>
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Director	

<p>Number of Children</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>husband. Then in March 2020 our daycare closed, my husband's jobs in restaurant/retail were paused due to lockdown restrictions and he became full-time daytime caregiver. At this time my employer provided crisis care childcare provider reimbursement funds which was helpful as we looked to find a solution when our child's daycare closed. At this same time I began to work from home. Working from home came with pros and cons in regards to parenting. On one hand it was a joy to get extra time with my young child. To be able to eat lunch with him, or sneak in some snuggles throughout the day. However, what it also meant was that my child was constantly asking me to take a break and play with him, and I had to constantly say no. So, while I spent far more time with him it also felt like now, to him, I was now the mother who was always on the computer and always saying no. That has been hard for me. For the first 6-9 months of the pandemic working from home - and feeling like such an important part of the pandemic response team - I had terrible boundaries between work and home now that I was working from home. I answered emails at all times of day and during the weekends, which I did not do prior to the pandemic when working in the office. as the lines between work and home blurred, so too did my boundaries between worker and self/parent. Eventually the stress and burnout became so much I needed to make a change in how much and when I was working. During the pandemic I also made the decision to transition to remote work permanently and relocate to a smaller community. This has been great for my family and I appreciate all the support I was given from my supervisor and the organization to do this. I personally think the fact that my direct supervisor has young children made her understand the situation we were all in as working parents during the pandemic. I feel that in our organization, and I would hope in others as well, the pandemic pushed us towards better work life balance through remote work and flexible hours. As a leader this is something that I emphasize for my direct reports, and I hope that even after my team goes back to in-person library work that we can remember the benefits to our colleagues of better work-life balance that can be achieved through remote work and flexible hours</p>
<p>Story Number</p>	<p>61</p>	

Institution	Other: Both academic and medical	<p>What was the impact of the pandemic on your caregiving/childcare situation? Our child was born during the pandemic months before vaccines were available. We were counting on family to help us with some of the childcare and pregnancy recovery period, but were instructed by our pediatrician not to have unvaccinated visitors enter our home. We also did not have access to nannies or babysitters that could assist for the same reason. This resulted in my partner and I being the sole caretakers until our child secured a spot in a local daycare (we were #52 on the waiting list) when they were about 6 months old. My partner who gave birth suffered serious complications during delivery which made recovery challenging. The isolation of her having to be a pregnant person during the pandemic and then the isolation we both experienced as new parents was very challenging. What support did you receive at work (or wished you would have received)? My work unfortunately had inaccurate and out of date information regarding federal and state family leave programs on their website which made our family planning process even more difficult. My work incorrectly prevented us from being able to utilize federal Coronavirus Family Medical Leave due to having a lack of in-home childcare help and reduced our total amount of leave as a result. This was a very stressful and unnecessary battle we had to have just days before our child's due date which caused a lot of stress and time away from concentrating on the arrival of our child. My HR department also provided incorrect information about whether or not we could use earned sick time to care for our newborn or if that time would have to run concurrently with our family leave days. Our workplace refers to themselves as "family friendly" but fights leave requests from its employees, has no sponsored or general information about local infant care, and does not have a local family leave policy. It also does not invest in providing training or up to date information on its human resources website about these topics in general. The burden is placed completely on the individual to locate and navigate this information themselves. While we were both able to use our family leave intermittently on alternating days to care for our newborn together, my work still contacted me on my scheduled leave days to respond to emails and complete work duties which was stressful. Were you able to continue your work or do your job? (or did you leave the profession due to</p>
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		<p>caregiving/childcare responsibilities?) Our state recently updated their family leave policy which allowed us to use it intermittently and not have to exhaust all of our sick and vacation leave first. If it wasn't for this law change, either or both of us would have had to take a leave of absence or leave our jobs altogether. I am a 12 month tenure track librarian that was part of several research teams and a PI on a federal grant during this time. All these projects had to continue during my intermittent family leave. My employer refused to hire a temp or an adjunct librarian to help cover some of my work duties while I was on leave. My employer also made it clear that it was not permitted to both care for a child and work during the same day. As a result, I (possibly illegally) continued to work sporadically on my leave days in order to keep these projects moving forward and make sure I have a good shot of earning tenure. While I was able to be very productive research-wise during this time period, I have regrets about not being able to completely focus on my family during this time. What were some things that were helpful or worked well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? My supervisor is hands-off and simply defers to HR on these issues. Having support from my library colleagues was very helpful though. What didn't work well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? Having to be the constant self-advocate was tiring and did not work well. I wish my supervisor would have advocated harder to hire a part-time temp or adjunct librarian to help cover some of my job duties during this time. As we move closer to a post-pandemic situation, how can library workplaces and/or administrators better support you as a caregiver or retain you, or attract you as an employee (if unemployed)? Have formal family leave policies in place. Have subsidized daycares and infant care available or at the very least a directory. Have trained HR professionals that act to help new parents and not just serve the interests of the institution's bottom line. Allow for flexible work schedules and locations. Have breastfeeding rooms available in multiple locations on all campuses. Hire temps or adjuncts to cover work of librarians on family leave.</p>
Story Number	70	In early March 2020, we started an IVF cycle to try to get pregnant. When shelter at home began, I was already taking hormones. I got a call from the doctor saying that
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	

<p>Number of Children</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>they would not be starting any new treatment cycles, but since I was already taking hormones, I could choose to move forward. She outlined the risks: I might not be able to travel to their office to have the embryo transferred, I might not have access to prenatal care, and the virus, if I got it, might affect fetal development. None of these things turned out to be true, but at the time nobody knew. I decided the risks were worth it; I was 43 years old and I didn't know when I would have another chance to get pregnant. Being pregnant during the pandemic was probably an advantage for me, as I didn't have the easiest pregnancy. Not leaving the house allowed me to rest and to satiate my unpredictable appetite. There was a mental burden, though, caused by the worry that my pregnancy-compromised immune system left me more vulnerable to COVID. My frequent trips to doctor appointments and labs produced great anxiety; I felt like I couldn't touch anything and avoided others far beyond the social distancing recommendations. Meanwhile, my 4 year old daughter was home 24/7. Preschool didn't have an online option, and she was left roaming the house while her parents tried to work. At least there were two of us. At least we were both working from home for the first year. At least grandma helped out with daily virtual story times, though our internet was often overtaxed with three of us trying to stream video simultaneously. My pregnancy got easier after the first trimester, and online transitional kindergarten started in August 2020. My daughter was thrilled to have something to do, and didn't mind spending time in front of the loaned Chromebook. She was happy to stay on task, but needed support using the computer and finding the right supplies. Working next to her, my attention was split between my own tasks and her class lessons on feelings or syllables. Despite the relative comfort of working from home, I went into labor a month before my due date. I had to drive myself to the hospital in the middle of the night while my spouse stayed home with our daughter, who under non-pandemic circumstances would have gone to a neighbor's house. I spent a stressful night alone in my hospital room, using my phone's tiny screen to write emails tying up loose ends at work. I had the first of many COVID tests at the hospital, and I met my baby for the first time with a mask on my face. It was November 2020, and nobody was vaccinated. I was lucky to have a long maternity leave (at least by the U.S.'s</p>
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		<p>lamentable standards): 6 weeks paid from my employer plus months of sick and vacation time that I had been hoarding for years. Sadly enough, I also felt lucky to have someone hired to cover my duties at work; with my first maternity leave, my coworkers were expected to pick up the slack. My return to work came soon enough, though, along with the stress of finding infant care. The lack of childcare availability made us feel that we had to take whatever we could get, regardless of the vaccination status or mask-wearing practices of the childcare staff. With a child in daycare and a child in onsite kindergarten, fall 2021 has been particularly laden with anxiety. Every notification from the school or daycare of a new COVID case means another gray hair. Strict policies about not attending school with any symptoms (runny noses included) has meant lots of missed work for me. Librarians at my university were able to negotiate a temporary contract to work from home when we don't have face-to-face obligations on campus, something that had not been afforded us previously and has been a life saver. I still feel guilty every time I have to ask my coworkers to cover my reference desk shifts because I'm home with a sick child. Maintaining the flexibility for parents to do our jobs at home and on our own schedule would go a long way toward creating a humane work environment that treats its employees as whole people, not just workers. Assuming that we need to be present in the building to stay on task is infantilizing and not borne out by the available evidence. We have recently learned that there is a lot of pressure to bring all workers back to campus next semester. There doesn't seem to be any justification for this effort other than the desire to keep workers under the administration's thumb. Some trust, goodwill, and flexibility would go a long way towards retaining happy and productive employees.</p>
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Story Number	71	<p>My children were 3 and 5 at the start of the pandemic and I was one year into a new position. Childcare evaporated and my toddler stopped napping as soon as her preschool closed. My kindergartner was completely unequipped to transition to online learning. We were without childcare for four months and had unpredictable childcare from the spring of 2020 until the fall of 2021. I was incredibly lucky and was able to continue to work thanks to a very compassionate and supportive</p>
Institution	Academic	
Position	Library Staff/technician	
Number of Children	2	

		administration. Even with this support however, there were many days it felt as though it would have been much easier to leave my job to juggle care demands. In retrospect some sort of multi-institutional support structure for parents may have been useful since many librarians that I work with either don't have children or have older children. Moving forward, workplace flexibility (both in terms of hours and remote work) is a continued asset to those of us who are still juggling the impacts of the pandemic on children.
Story Number	72	When the shut-down occurred my son was in Pre-K (age 5) and his spring break was due to start on March 13. I was planning on taking my son's spring break off work - we had planned on visiting my mom (which would have been a 4 hour flight to and from) but we cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns about 2 weeks prior to the shut-down. I was concerned about the coronavirus and dubious that the shut-down would be the 2 weeks that everyone was saying so I prepared to be home for a month or two. I never expected to be working remotely and trying to facilitate remote learning for my Kindergartnerer for 3/4 of the school year. My work was extremely flexible and accommodating. I was able to shift my hours to work around the schedule needed to help my kid do his online classes. I was able to keep up with my work though I felt very stretched throughout the year plus. My spouse was also working remotely during this time so I feel very fortunate that we were able to work, care for our son, continue to earn our incomes and stay safe and healthy during the pandemic. My library was closed from March 2020-late July 2020 with no staff on-site. In July 2020 we opened with only the scantest of staff on-site. In September 2021 the majority of the staff returned to work on-site at least part of the week. I feel very lucky to have had this kind of work situation. I do miss the collegiality that working onsite brings and the workplace culture has suffered. I do wish that parents or caregivers had been given some additional release time during the pandemic. I feel fortunate but it was still extremely difficult.
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	
Story Number	73	Fortunately, I was working from home approximately 10 hours per week prior to the pandemic and that helped me in the transition to work from home full time. However, the period of time when we worked from home full time was still difficult and I believe
Institution	Medical	
Position	Supervisor/administrator	
Number of Children	2	

		unnecessary. Teaching from home, competing for wifi, and trying to keep a positive attitude were the biggest challenges I faced. My greatest concern about the impact of the pandemic on my children is that they learned how to be less disciplined. They are recovering though and I do think our difficulties were mild in comparison to those who were at work during online school. It is imperative now for library administrators to consider allowing employees, caregivers or not, to use flexible scheduling, including some work from home when it is possible for the position and the employee. I am thankful that the pandemic has had a positive impact on scheduling in libraries. It was long overdue!
Story Number	74	In March 2020 our 4 year old daughter was finishing her wonderful preschool. We were fortunate to be living close to my wife's father who provided daycare support at lunch times. My library switched to working from home and I came to work in person 1 day per week for most of the 2020-21 academic year; we returned to working in person 4 days a week by Fall 2021. My literature search consults moved online and I was able to do so because my University provided the technology to me: a loaner laptop I could take home, and they subscribed to the webex platform for virtual meetings. My University set up a special 80 hour block of pandemic leave employees could use to care for relatives, I used the time to provide home schooling cover for when my wife needed to work part time. Virtual public school kindergarten lessons online were a disaster for our daughter who has autism. The teaching responsibilities fell mostly on my wife who taught our daughter to read. Between my pandemic leave, father-in-law daycare, and my wife's part time job, we were able to make it work homeschooling and caring for our daughter while I worked full time and my wife was able to keep working part time. My University's health insurer United Healthcare was a complete nightmare to deal with over an issue of coding 3rd party medical claims. We found an OT therapist willing to come to our home and provide outdoor sensory integration therapy, but as a 3rd party provider UHC fought us during the entire pandemic year refusing to count the considerable expense towards the 60 therapy sessions per year they are supposed to provide for children with autism. We were not asking the insurer to pay for anything, we paid entirely out of pocket, we just needed them to accept these were
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		legitimate medical expenses. My University provides a Health Advocate service for employees so I tried using them to negotiate with United Healthcare to accept the claims, but they were repeatedly given the brush off. As a Medical Librarian, I have access to the AMA's CPT coding manual (source: CPT 2021. Professional edition. American Medical Association; 2020), I looked up the list of billing code Modifiers in Appendix A and found the codes we were using were correct. It wasn't until I contacted my University HR Department, explained our predicament, and got them to contact United Healthcare directly that we were given accurate information about how to code the claims. Apparently the insurer had changed their claims coding procedure during the pandemic and either the insurer or the HR Department had not communicated the fact to the employees. Finally after 14 months, after the direct intervention of my University HR Department, United Healthcare did eventually count the money we had paid towards our family out of pocket amount for that plan year, but without an apology for their disgusting behavior. I was worried our family's health insurer was deliberately refusing to own the problem and I lost trust in them, the experience adding considerable stress to me personally during the pandemic year. The University could have helped more by communicating the medical insurers revised coding schedule to employees when it was changed in June 2020.
Story Number	75	I had a baby right before the pandemic started. I never went back to the office. When my maternity leave ended, I just worked from home. My husband and I had one kid home doing remote school, and an infant who we didn't feel comfortable taking to daycare considering all that was going on. Those first six months of COVID were so tough. I was trying to do my job while taking care of two little kids. It felt impossible, and it was all I could do to make it through the day. People at work knew about my situation, but support was pretty minimal. A year later, when it came down to performance review time, my boss actually gave me a lower review than she had the year before. Even though she is a woman with a child, I had to explain to her how unfair this was--how there was no possible way my performance could have been as strong as the year prior. She eventually changed her rating, but I will never forget that meeting. I made a promise to myself that
Institution	Academic	
Position	Supervisor/administrator	
Number of Children	2	

		even when my kids grow older and the memories of these times fade, I will always be an fierce advocate for and supporter of working moms.
Story Number	76	My daughter was born in the middle of the pandemic. While childcare was open by the time I was to return to work, I was not able to get a place in a daycare. Typically, one needs to secure a spot months in advanced, and I was unable to do so without knowing the status of the pandemic. My work was flexible with me, and I was able to work from home without childcare from the time my daughter was 12 weeks old until she was 5 months old. People were understanding and accommodating when my daughter made appearances on Zoom meetings. There were a few moments that were more difficult than others (blowouts, crying, etc. during one on one calls). I did my best to have someone else at home (e.g. flying family members out to help out if I had a big teaching week). Overall, I was impressed by how accommodating everyone was. The most challenging aspect was the lack of clarity about when we would return to campus. It was very difficult to plan when answers about our return plans weren't readily available. I was able to make an arrangement to work remotely full time, which I now do with the help of in-home, full time childcare. I feel more confident in this arrangement for my infant's health, and I am able to not worry about the "when" and "if" of the pandemic situation. Moving forward, I do not see myself working another position that is not remote-optional.
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	
Story Number	77	Throughout the pandemic, I've been struggling with the feeling that I should be more grateful for my luck and privileges, for having it better than others. And I am! Me and my family haven't gotten infected, we didn't lose our jobs, we haven't lost any loved ones. I am so grateful for these things. But living through this has been so hard, especially with a toddler. I am surviving, not thriving. We pulled our 14 month old out of daycare as soon as our employer sent us to work from home. I lasted about a week and a half alternating between caregiving and working in our third floor walk up in a crowded Chicago neighborhood before deciding to hole up in my parents' house in the country. Life there was easier with a bigger house and lots of space outside, and it very much gave the feeling that "this is hard, but it will pass; this is temporary." We were lucky enough that our daycare reopened relatively quickly, and we trusted them to
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		<p>enact good COVID precautions--plus they're a small outfit. So far, there hasn't been a COVID exposure at daycare, and it isn't even an anxiety for me. But work is. I know that we can't drop everything--the world goes on--but there hasn't been much balance. Work-life balance has always skewed more towards work, and you'd think that during a global pandemic, the balance would tilt more toward life, but it really hasn't. My library administrators have tried to fight for us--for keeping us remote longer, especially those who don't need to work onsite, and against an uncompromising furlough of our library assistants, the lowest in the hierarchy. But ultimately university administration thinks we need to get back to normal, even though our lives are not back to normal. I ended up taking a medical leave recently because I was so burned out. I had been doing my job and another (the only other coworker in my department left after furlough), I had been saddled with extra projects, and I was exhausted and depleted from stress and anxiety. Add to that parenting an active toddler who I can take hardly anywhere due to risk of exposure to COVID-19--I just couldn't think anymore and I was an emotional wreck. I think that in this global situation of anxiety over getting sick, stress of non-normal life, our works hours should be reduced by default. If people want to work more, great for them! But for those of us who are on a repeat burnout cycle, I really wish we could reset our institutional priorities. I need less time working, more time taking care of my family, and most importantly, more time to take care of myself so I can do the former. I feel this so, so strongly. And I'm one of the lucky ones who didn't lose their job, lose their childcare, or lose someone. I apologize if this rant doesn't help your research!</p>
Story Number	78	<p>A few weeks into the job, my spouse started a new job, which required her to be available during normal business hours (8am-5pm). My daughter's daycare was closed, so prior to the job change we would split the day up, one of us taking her in the morning and then work in the afternoon, or vice versa. With the job change, I was with her all day and worked when I could (during naps, after she went to bed, etc). My library and my supervisor were very understanding but I was exhausted, essentially either working or with a toddler from 6am until 10 or 11pm. Post-pandemic, it would be nice to have this kind of flexibility and understanding from</p>
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		employers if, say, I'm working from home with a sick child. The ability to telework is a fantastic privilege.
Story Number	79	The pandemic led to significant changes in the work/school/home life for myself (a single mom) and my elementary school son. In the early days, it was very stressful trying to manage his school work (all online) and continue working my full time job. Unfortunately, my library decided to close and lay me off at the height of the pandemic, which added further to my stress. But by that time, my son's school had gotten much better at online teaching, so managing the rest of our lives at home got easier. After finding a new position that is 100% remote, I find it much easier to manage my work than in the past. Remote working has had its challenges, but has given me an enormous amount of flexibility -- no more worrying about rushing home to pick up my son from school, worrying about his childcare, etc. Given that so many of us have now proven we can successfully and productively do much of our work at home, my hope is that employers will be much more flexible in their position on working from home. Before the pandemic, it was a challenge to even do it on occasion.
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	
Story Number	80	Because of COVID, my child's full-time daycare coverage has been very unstable. Although she had a place reserved at a facility, the facility had to close temporarily for 2 weeks with less than 24-hours notice due to staffing shortages. 4 months later, the location closed indefinitely and sent all children to an affiliated location 2 miles away, again citing a lack of staff. This also required a week for preparations when our daughter had to stay home. There generally has been a lot of turnover at both facilities, and staff have to work long hours as a result to fill any gaps in their operating schedule. Although I have family nearby, we were not able to get backup care for all of the days that daycare was unexpectedly closed, and as a result we had to take time off work. Generally my workplace has been very understanding when these issues come up.
Institution	Medical	
Position	Director	
Number of Children	1	
Story Number	81	During the pandemic, I was fortunate enough to work from home. I am grateful that I was able to as I know not everyone could do so. I am also grateful that I was able to keep my job and didn't have to worry about being furloughed or have to go through a job loss. My employer also allowed us to work from home with our
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		<p>children and while this was a challenge I was thankful for the opportunity to be home with my children and not have to commute. Safety was a huge concern for me because we had a baby at home who was born a few months prior to the pandemic. I was also thankful for this. I can't imagine being in the hospital during a pandemic. I am thankful that I could keep my child home with me when safety was a concern. During the time at home I was very busy, the workload was not reduced. The work that I do was in demand during the pandemic and I was overloaded with work while watching a baby at home. My husband was not working from home so I didn't have anyone to switch off duties with. Work did not replace positions that could support me due to budget restraints. I compared myself to feeling like a hamster in a wheel and I just kept spinning and spinning and churning out work. I was working beyond my work hours. I've had difficult seasons in my life and I recognized this as one of those seasons. However, there was also a lot of beauty in this time at home too. I started learning how to maximize my time and during the the time my child took naps. I realized that the pandemic could be an opportunity for me. I ended up accomplishing more during this time than I ever had. I went back to school to further my education and I took on interesting projects. I realized that the time I used to spend commuting could be productive time. I could have the best of both worlds--be with my children and still have a very thriving and productive career while immersed in the goals and things in life that matter most to me. Then once we were vaccinated, I was called back into work a couple of days a week but was told that I could no longer work with my baby who was now a toddler at home. My toddler is very good and I felt I still had a handle on balancing both her care and my work. I was very upset not just for me but for any mom or dad and/or caregiver of a child during the pandemic that rose to the challenge and was able to demonstrate they could balance caregiving and work. To just be told that things had to go back to normal, to pre-COVID days just didn't seem right to me. I changed. I grew. The pandemic changed me. The world changed. If we were happier, still productive and had a better quality of life, why would we want to go back to before? Also, what about the safety of my child? The first week I returned back to work, we all caught the flu, luckily not COVID. But to the day of writing this, there still isn't a vaccine for my child.</p>
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		<p>I feel like the safety our children is being ignored by forcing them into care outside of our home. I have been unhappy at work since this happened and returning to a hybrid work schedule. I am exhausted from the commute and it is more tiring to me than watching my child and working. This made me realize I don't think I could return to a full schedule in person. I need to continue hybrid or become fully remote. I never want to go back to the pre-COVID work schedule. I used to do too much for my job. COVID taught me what matters to me most and if my job isn't invested in my child and my own well-being and safety, then I am not as interested in doing more again. If employers want to support and retain mothers and parents, then they need to show that their employee and their employees children's safety, mental health and well-being are very important and factored into every decision. They should help to take some of the strain off of them in terms of commuting, workload and giving them choice over their schedules with work from home, flex time and more if the position enables them to. We need to keep work itself in perspective because the work will get done and sometimes better if parents are given more agency in how they work.</p>
Story Number	82	<p>My entire childcare situation (babysitters, after school care, school) was upended due to the pandemic. All services and support literally stopped. At first, my employer was sympathetic and allowed me to work from home and flex my schedule. I was extremely productive during this time, bringing in funds and grants and completing large projects. I really felt I needed to prove myself and all of my reviews were excellent. As time wore on, however, my employer became less flexible and sympathetic, even though my childcare situation has not improved. At this current point in the pandemic, I still lack adequate childcare or support services but my employer's flexibility has worn thin. My youngest child is still not vaccinated and I also have a high-risk child. I am now required to come into the office, even though all of my meetings are still on-line and I am literally doing the same job in the office as I am doing at home. The added stress of inadequate childcare is greatly adding to my overall sense of stress and job dissatisfaction and burnout. I have no idea what I will do this summer if summer camps fail to open once again. At this point, I would be very open to moving to another organization</p>
Institution	Academic	
Position	Director	
Number of Children	2	

		that provides flexibility and greater remote work options so I can better balance the challenges of raising children during a pandemic. I feel left behind as employers fail to recognize that, for those of us with children, we are not even close to our pre-pandemic lives.
Story Number	83	Thank you for giving me an opportunity to share my story. The impact of the pandemic on childcare: My children went remote after spring break of 2020 as I did. It was a flurry of getting them computers (provided by their school district) and setting up a work space. My spouse and I were sent to work from home. So initially there was no for day care as the childcare and getting them ready for school fell to us. What support did I receive from work? They didn't expect to come, understood that my children were also at home. Staff was expected to come in, to distribute computers, pull holds, assist patrons in a modified manner and I assisted students solely online. They provided me with a computer, encouraged me to take any extra equipment I might need. I wish I would have been provided with a stipend for internet or a hot spot, as four people on at the same time really bogged down our internet connection. Were you able to continue your work? Yes, I still have my job but what I have been able to put out for work, specifically my scholarship, has been impacted. What were some things that were helpful or worked well? My supervisor was supportive and my library put employees' safety first and I appreciated that. What didn't work well? My spouse was well meaning at the beginning and helped but soon, both of us were expected to do more. With me earning about half of what he earns, his job took priority leaving most of the childcare/schooling needs of my kiddos of my own. There was no life work balance as Work was at home. The time that I spent helping my kids get settled for school, I would then make up in the evenings and weekends. Now there's some pressure to have completed scholarship at the levels before covid, but we are still dealing with covid. It's so hard when my colleagues state that this has been the most productive time in their career (insinuating that because they are working from home). I am drowning! As we move closer to post-pandemic...? Have realistic expectations of what we can accomplish, be kind, know that we are burned out and struggling.
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	

Story Number	84	<p>What was the impact of the pandemic on your caregiving/childcare situation? Since both of my children are teenagers, the schools closings did not impact my childcare situation. They were both able to transition to remote learning smoothly. Were you able to continue your work or do your job? (or did you leave the profession due to caregiving/childcare responsibilities?) Yes, I was able to continue working. All librarians were given telecommuting options. What were some things that were helpful or worked well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? Although I had the proper "set up" at home (a dedicated home office with high speed internet and a comfortable desk and chair), I found that working from home was much more difficult that working from my office in the library. I was able to fulfill my job duties, but completing tasks took longer. There were constant distractions and interruptions at home. My children were upset about in-person school canceling and not being able to see friends. They were also anxious about the virus and if they would get sick. There were many conversations to comfort them and to listen. I am grateful that I was able to work from home to share in those conversations, but the interruptions did make it take longer to complete tasks. What didn't work well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? Two adults working full-time jobs and two teenagers in remote school....all under one roof, all the time...we got on each other's nerves! As we move closer to a post-pandemic situation, how can library workplaces and/or administrators better support you as a caregiver or retain you, or attract you as an employee (if unemployed)? Support will look different for a parent of a young child versus a parent of older children. We need to support those who are caregivers for the elderly, too. Leaders should listen to individual employees and what matters to them.</p>
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	86	<p>Early in 2020 daycare shut down. We initially managed with help from neighbors and family watching the kids. Eventually the daycare re-opened, but we didn't feel comfortable sending them back since most of the additional help we had was from older, high-risk people. So we hired a series of nannies, which was really expensive and cut into our savings. By the time vaccinations were available it was difficult to find available spots in daycares again, so we had to continue</p>
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	

		to use a nanny until the Fall of 2021 when we finally got them back into daycare. All of that has been super stressful and expensive. However, it allowed me to continue to work at about the same level as usual. Now that they are in daycare they are sick often which means my schedule can change at the last minute. Thankfully, my supervisor is very understanding and I can flex my time when needed. Overall people have been very understanding of my kids interrupting meetings and my needing to make adjustments. Probably the biggest thing I think employers can do is offer flexibility in as many ways as possible, including generous time-off; the ability to work remotely; the ability to have non-standard schedules; the ability to re-arrange schedules as needed. Even better would be for an employer to provide childcare support through in-house childcare or vouchers! My employer does covid-19 testing, and prioritizes employees and their family members who need testing, which I've appreciated.
Story Number	92	When the pandemic hit, my daughter was just on the cusp of becoming independent - being able to navigate the world on her own or with her friends. Instead, she became wholly dependent on her parents for physical and emotional support. Of course we rose to the occasion, but it was still very challenging to be the best parents we could be but also continue to be productive at work. For months, we were all at home - my daughter was in virtual classes, my wife was teaching via Zoom, and I was attending meetings virtually as well. I'm happy to say everyone at work was very understanding of my situation (including the number of times my daughter Zoom-bombed my meetings!). I was given a lot of latitude, which was very helpful. As a supervisor, I was also responsible for communicating an understanding to my staff and making sure they knew that they were not expected to maintain the same levels of productivity that they had before. Gradually, our productivity went up as we got used to the new normal and things started to open up again. I did set up alternative schedules with staff members with very young children, and that was a key factor in their success. For me, I kept the same hours, more or less. I'd say the other big change for all of us was to figure out how to do virtual and hybrid meetings, which were a reality before and are definitely a reality now. We're still working on it. I'm continuing to
Institution	Academic	
Position	Supervisor/administrator	
Number of Children	1	

		enjoy flexibility in my work locale and that's a huge factor for me. I offer the same flexibility to my staff.
Story Number	93	Supporting kids with virtual elementary school -- particularly for young children with very little experience using computers -- was very challenging initially. Our family had no childcare for most of the pandemic due to Covid concerns and the limited availability of PT childcare providers. With two full-time working parents, managing two children round-the-clock was very difficult. A childcare grant was essential and that enabled us to seek some care once the vaccine was available; it was still very difficult to find a suitable provider but the additional financial support was welcome. Flexibility and understanding from supervisors is essential Well-meaning colleagues who compared their challenges of finding a dog walker to the very different challenges of feeding, caring for, educating, and stimulating children in the 3-7 age range were discouraging Never feeling like you're "done" with anything due to interruptions, pauses, and continuous partial attention
Institution	Academic	
Position	Supervisor/administrator	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	94	We're a home of two working adults with two school-aged children. Our employers were INCREDIBLY generous and allowed us to work from home not only during the Spring 2020 shut down event, but as it lingered the next Fall and our kids were only attending school in person two days a week. My role at the library is reference and instruction. Our instruction program flourished; we've been offering online instruction options for years, although many did not take us up on it - we suspect that our confident offer was welcome to professors trying to figure out what to do next in their courses. Some of our online instruction formats and resources were very well received and usage remains high now. Silver lining! Our department of four librarians voted to meet briefly, daily over Teams. We even met in person outside a couple of times which was wonderful for morale. I have only good things to say about our department chair's leadership during Covid. Our university, a Christian institution, was covered in prayer by our alumni and families and the faculty and staff, and God was so gracious to us. Our administration made decisions that were just the right balance of careful and pragmatic, a hard feat to accomplish. Our budget stayed healthy and we've emerged from the last two years with record retention and entering freshmen numbers. I
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	

		personally felt the support of my supervisors and was thankful for the trust they placed in me to perform two roles simultaneously - library faculty and mom!
Story Number	95	I was pregnant and gave birth during the pandemic. It was a bizarre and very horrible experience. Bizarre because in some ways it may have been easier. For example, everyone including me was/is working from home more and I did not have to travel for conferences, etc. It was very depressing and scary because I did still have to go physically into work. I was very worried about my health because pregnant people are at greater risk of severe COVID and death. I spoke to a healthcare provider and based on who my employer is she did not think there was any use to try to seek an accommodation to be fully remote while pregnant. The institution I work for is extremely retaliatory was one reason she did not think I should try for an accommodation.
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	96	My caregiving situation did not change much during the pandemic, excepting for the first 6 months, when we were all sent home. During that time, I would work with my daughter and my husband would work with my son during the day on homework. I was able to keep working during this whole pandemic mostly because my husband works at home. We were called back to the library in August 2020 since it was felt we were a service point and needed to be on site. It was also decided that all positions would be either on campus or teleworking, no in between or occasional teleworking. I had expressed my concerns to my Director that if the kids were sent home to school virtually again, I would need to quit in order to help, since my husband could not work at home and school the kids and his salary is higher. I believe our Library Administration supported us telecommuting, but higher administration did not. Luckily, the kids were only quarantined a few times and the schools were not shut down at any point. I think the Library administration would have supported me as much as possible, if I had to work from home, since internally we have allowed non-sick individuals, who are waiting on testing or have one symptom keeping them off campus to telecommute.
Institution	Medical	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	2	
Story Number	97	In March of 2020, the daycare for my 2 year old child closed and instruction went virtual. Simply put, online instruction for toddlers doesn't work well for a multitude
Institution	Hospital	
Position	Director	

Number of Children	2	of reasons, and requires in person adult supervision. My spouse and I did not have any local family to help with care, so we had to care for our child during the day and work at night, leaving little time for sleep. It was absolutely exhausting, but fortunately working a modified schedule and working from home for most (but not all) of our hours was allowed by both of our employers, otherwise one of us would have had to leave the workforce. That person would have been me, since as a librarian I get paid significantly less than my spouse, who is in the tech industry. Fortunately in the summer, daycare reopened with limited hours. Having flexible hours and the ability to work from home continues to be important to me later in the pandemic, as after school and school break care continue to be limited compared to what was offered pre-pandemic. We have after school care secured for 4 days of the week for my 4 year old child next year, but we need to arrange transportation for her and figure out what to do on the half day Wednesdays that their school district has. I'm not sure what we will do, since having both parents work a standard 40 hour Monday through Friday schedule leaves us without coverage, and we are already spending more than my entire take home salary on childcare for our infant. A longer/more humane maternity leave that mirrors what is offered in other countries would partially alleviate that problem.
Story Number	98	My daughter's daycare shut down from mid-March 2020 until maybe mid-June 2020. It was a very stressful time in the world but I felt safer knowing she was home. My supervisor and library director were understanding, as everyone was in this position of children being home. I felt that I put more stress on myself, trying to make sure my daughter was off-camera and out of earshot when I had Zoom meetings. As much as he could, my husband would watch her during important meetings or online instruction. It was stressful for me trying to entertain a 3-year old, as she was of an age where she couldn't be very independent. It was a lot of up-and-down for me in front of my computer, but I still managed to get a lot of work accomplished during that time. I actually think I worked harder, since I wasn't chatting informally with colleagues, running from meeting to meeting, etc. My work ethic was praised by my supervisor and I was proud of the work I produced during the shutdown. It's been harder ever since the 'return to normal.' I've still been
Institution	Academic	
Position	Librarian	
Number of Children	1	

		<p>mostly remote over the past two years. I've proved that I can work with my daughter at home, who is older now and is a little more independent. Yet, it seemed like my university's / admin attitude ever since has been one of, You have to figure out childcare off of the clock. We've been told explicitly that 'work from home time is not childcare time' and I feel like I've had to explain myself if my daughter happened to be home. I've kept her home on quiet days when I knew that nobody would catch me with her at home. I still accomplish all of my work and more, but it does seem that being a parent is frowned upon. It would just be nice if more empathy was shown to working parents. I fear what will happen when my daughter goes to kindergarten next year and may have more virtual school days, days when school is closed, etc.</p>
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Appendix C

Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in research that may be presented anonymously at the upcoming MLA '22 meeting and/or similar research paper/presentation. Your experience is important to our research.

Title of the research study: Impact of COVID-19 on Parents and guardians in the Library Profession

Reasons for the study: Medical librarians who are participating in this research project are interested in your experiences related to the impact of COVID-19 as a parent and guardian working in the library profession. The following areas are of interest to our research project.

- Do you have children and their ages, what was the impact of the pandemic on your caregiving/childcare situation?
- What support did you receive at work (or wished you would have received)?
- Were you able to continue your work or do your job? (or did you leave the profession due to caregiving/childcare responsibilities?)
- What were some things that were helpful or worked well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)?
- What didn't work well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)?
- As we move closer to a post-pandemic situation, how can library workplaces and/or administrators better support you as a caregiver or retain you, or attract you as an employee (if unemployed)?

What you will be asked to do: Your participation in this research involves sharing your short story about your individual experiences.

Benefits and Risks: There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. You may experience benefits in the form of increased insight and awareness into your experiences during the pandemic. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the research process at any time.

Data Treatment: You will not have the opportunity to review the portion of your story we will share before it is presented unless you provide an email for us to follow up. No personally identifying information is shared outside the research team, including your participation in the project. Personal names of you and your colleagues and/or children/spouses/family members and/or workplaces will be removed or changed from your story to protect your identity.

Questions? You may contact Stephanie Roth (stephanie.roth@temple.edu), Principal Investigator, at any time if you have additional questions about the study.

The Temple University Institutional Review Board has been informed of this research.

Appendix D

Story Collection Form

Story Collection

Please complete the survey below. Thank you!

What is your library setting?

Academic Medical Hospital Public K-12 School Other

If other, please provide an explanation of your library setting. _____

What is your role?

Library Assistant Library Staff/technician Librarian Supervisor/administrator Director Other

If other, please explain your library role. _____

How many children do you have? _____

How old are your children? Infant Toddler Pre-K K-5 6th Grade-8th Grade High School Other

If other, please explain: _____

Share your story! (All identifying information and names will be removed)

Here are some possible prompts to help you develop your story: What was the impact of the pandemic on your caregiving/childcare situation? What support did you receive at work (or wished you would have received)? Were you able to continue your work or do your job? (or did you leave the profession due to caregiving/childcare responsibilities?) What were some things that were helpful or worked well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? What didn't work well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? As we move closer to a post-pandemic situation, how can library workplaces and/or administrators better support you as a caregiver or retain you, or attract you as an employee (if unemployed)? _____

Optional Share your email address if you wish to review your anonymous story in our draft research paper or presentation before it is shared. _____

Appendix E

Consent Form Fields (REDCap)

Variable / Field Name	Form Name	Section Header	Field Type	Field Label
record_id	consent_form		text	Record ID
consent_pdf	consent_form		descriptive	Please read the below consent form. You can download a copy of the form here as well.
consent_yn	consent_form		yesno	Have you read and understood the above consent form?
dates	consent_form		text	What is today's date?

Appendix F

Appendix 6: Survey Instrument: Story Collection (REDCap)

Variable / Field Name	Form Name	Section Header	Field Type	Field Label	Choices, Calculations, OR Slider Labels	Field Note	Text Validation Type OR Show Slider Number	Text Validation Min	Text Validation Max
library_setting	story_collection		radio	What is your library setting?	1, Academic 2, Medical 3, Hospital 4, Public 5, K-12 School 6, Other				
other_setting	story_collection		text	Please provide an explanation of your library setting.					
library_role	story_collection		radio	What is your role?	1, Library Assistant 2, Library Staff/technician 3, Librarian 4, Supervisor/administrator 5, Director 6, Other				
role_other	story_collection		text	Please explain your library role.					
number_children	story_collection		text	How many children do you have?					
child_age	story_collection		checkbox	How old are your children?	1, Infant 2, Toddler 3, Pre-K 4, K-5 5, 6th Grade-8th Grade 6, High School 7, Other				
age_other	story_collection		text	If other, please explain:					

share_story	story_collection	notes	<div class="rich-text-field-label"> <p>Share your story! (All identifying information and names will be removed)

Here are some possible prompts to help you develop your story:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was the impact of the pandemic on your caregiving/child care situation? What support did you receive at work (or wished you would have received)? Were you able to continue your work or do your job? (or did you leave the profession due to caregiving/childcare responsibilities?) What were some things that were helpful or worked well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? What didn't work well (self or from employer/supervisor/administration)? As we move closer to a post-pandemic situation, how can library workplaces and/or administrators better support you as a caregiver or retain you, or attract you as an employee (if unemployed)? </p></div>			
email	story_collection	text	Optional Share your email address if you wish to review your anonymous story in our draft research paper or presentation before it is shared.	email		

Stephanie Clare Roth (stephanie.roth@christianacare.org) is Medical Librarian at Christiana Care, Helen F. Graham Cancer Center **Elizabeth G. Hinton** (ehinton@umc.edu) is Associate Professor and Library Director at University of Mississippi Medical Center **Bridget Jivanelli** (jivanellib@hss.edu) is Medical Librarian at HSS Education Institute, Hospital for Special Surgery

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