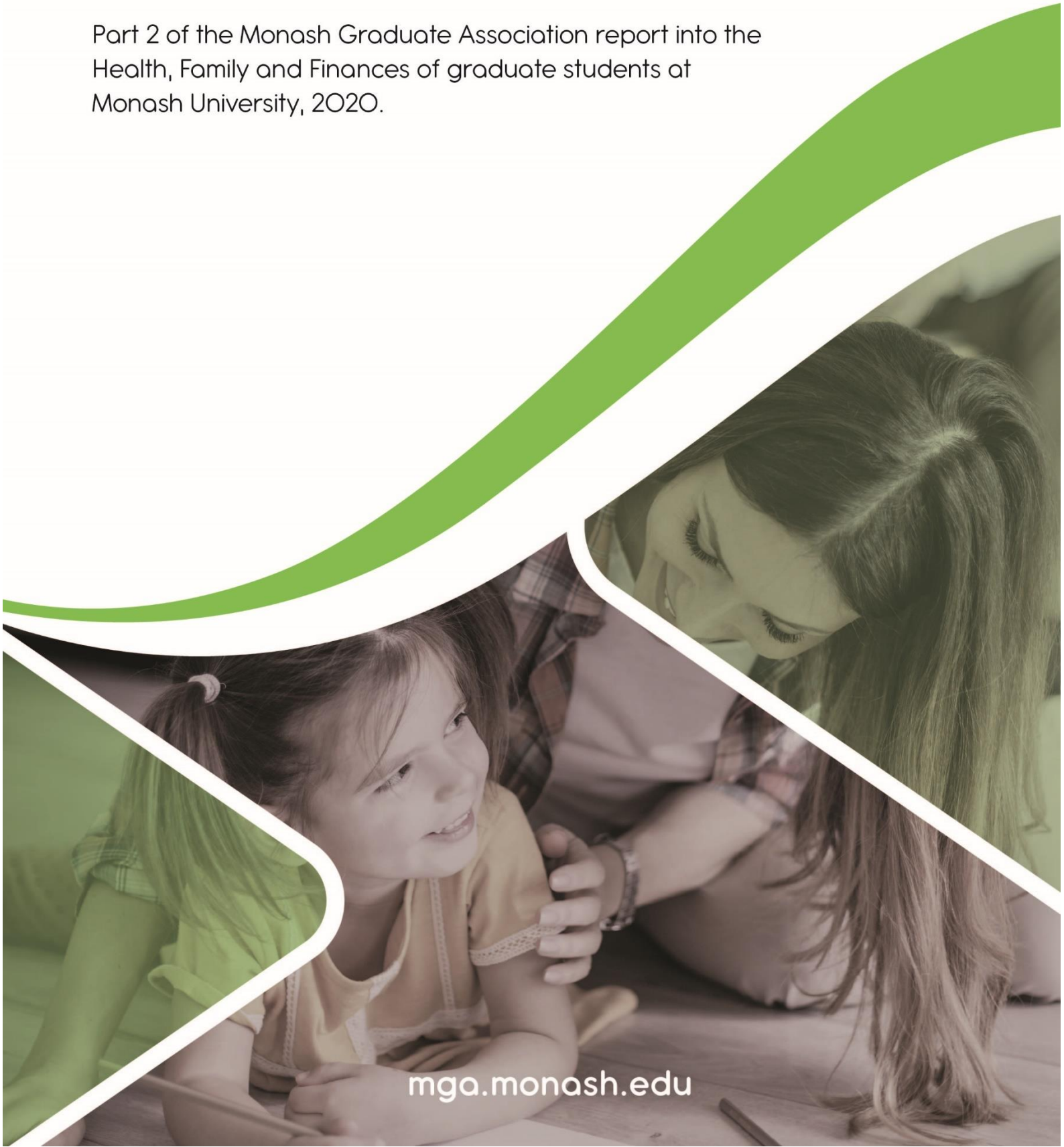



Parents and Carers

Part 2 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.





The MGA would like to thank the graduate students who participated in this survey. 2020 was undoubtedly a challenging and stressful year and we greatly appreciate you taking the time out to help us better understand your situation and needs.

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(i) Executive Summary

Like many professionals reconciling family and workplace roles, graduate student parents and carers of someone other than a child/children face logistical and ideological challenges.¹ For instance, this report shows that caring responsibilities adversely affect the ability of a graduate student to complete their studies and attend lectures, seminars and meetings.

Exploring and gaining an appreciation for these challenges allows the MGA and the university to better identify useful support services and effectively direct resources.

Perhaps the most significant change in the graduate student body over the past half a century is that women are now as numerous as men. Indeed, at Monash University in 2019, over 60% of graduate students identified as women.²

The challenges of graduate study are inflated when students are simultaneously parenting, with family responsibilities appearing to increase attrition rates among women.³ Indeed, the rise of attrition rates among graduate student mothers has been identified as one of the most serious problems in higher education today, with the imbalance it causes having serious repercussions for gender parity in both faculty hiring practices and career advancement.⁴

On the whole, Monash graduate student mothers tended to report experiencing academic, social and family stress to a greater extent than fathers, and were more likely to report that their mental health was poor; however, more research into retention and attrition of graduate student parents is needed to determine the extent to which this is a problem at Monash University – particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which led to long periods of school closure and increased parental load and responsibilities.⁵

Demographics

Just under one in every five (18%) graduate students were parents, with the majority of their children (67%) of primary school age or younger.

Older graduate students were more likely to be parents with 48% of those over thirty years of age identifying as parents compared to 3% of those under thirty.

Graduate students enrolled in a HASS course were more than twice as likely to be parents as those enrolled in a STEM course.

¹ Ziyu Long, Abigail Selzer Kind and Patrice M. Buzzanell, "Ventriloquial voicings of parenthood in graduate school: an intersectionality analysis of work-life negotiations," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* Vol. 46, Iss. 2 (2018): 223.

² "Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data," Australian Government: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, accessed 22 March 2021, <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2019-student-data>.

³ Megan Rae Theisen, Christi R. McGeorge and Ashley A. Walsdorf, "Graduate student parents' perceptions of resources to support degree completion: Implications for family therapy programs," *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2018): 46.

⁴ Karen Danna Lynch, "Gender roles and the American academe: a case study of graduate student mothers," *Gender and Education* Vol. 6 (2008): 585.

⁵ Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Families in Australian Survey: Life during COVID-19 Report no. 1: Preliminary findings* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2020), 1 https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/covid-19-survey-report_1_early_findings_0.pdf.

HDR students (19%) were more likely than coursework students (10%) to be parents.

Women were more likely than men to indicate that they were the primary carer, while mothers were almost four-times as likely as fathers to be enrolled part-time.

Meanwhile, 5% of Monash graduate students had carer responsibilities for someone other than a child.

Facilities and services

Just under half of Monash graduate student parents indicated that their children would, on occasion, accompany them to campus.

In regard to childcare, graduate student parents were least satisfied with the level of advice and direction provided to them by Monash regarding their childcare options, while they tended to agree that their supervisor or lecturer was supportive in relation to their childcare responsibilities.

The short, casual periods and meetings were identified by respondents as the most difficult time to organise childcare. As such, this was also the time when graduate student parents anticipated that they would most use a hypothetical on-campus casual childcare service.

In relation to perceptions of their academic, social and financial responsibilities, mothers were more likely to be impacted negatively by their childcare responsibilities than were fathers.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown in Melbourne, which involved day-care and school closures, severely increased the difficulty in coping with childcare responsibilities for Monash graduate student parents.

Those with carer responsibilities tended to find it more difficult to cope during the COVID-19 pandemic than before, while 48% agreed that their carer responsibilities impacted their ability to complete their studies.

Monash graduate student parents were proportionately more likely to agree with positive statements regarding their course progress and preparation than were graduate students without children.

Health and wellbeing

Graduate student parents indicated that their general wellbeing was worse off in May/June of 2020 than it was when they commenced their degree. For instance, having an *extremely poor* or *poor* work/life balance rose from 7% to 27%.

Graduate student parents tended to be in a better state of mind than graduate students without children and were more likely to be satisfied with their health and life than were graduate student who were not parents.

“Family responsibilities” were predictably more likely to be a source of stress among parents than non-parents.

Suggestions for support

The primary suggestion from Monash graduate student parents and carers regarding additional support related to improving the facilities and services that were available to them.

(ii) Introduction

The Monash Graduate Association (MGA) ran a survey of Monash graduate students in May-June 2020. The aim of the survey was to explore and measure the experiences of graduate students at Monash University, with a specific focus on three key areas: health, family and finances. The survey was advertised in the MGA newsletter, the MGA website, electronic posters across campuses and through contacts with Monash faculty groups and associate deans, many of whom agreed to forward the advertising of the survey to their entire cohorts. Participants were self-selecting, so an incentive scheme (comprising the opportunity to win gift cards worth up to \$100 in value) was used to assist in attracting a representative sample.

A total of nine-hundred and one partially and fully completed responses were received.⁶ The demographics of the respondents who were parents and/or carers are outlined in Chapter 1.

This report presents both quantitative and qualitative data from Monash University graduate student respondents as it relates to their positions as **parents and carers**. It is the second report of a four-part series detailing the results of the MGA's Health, Family and Finances Survey 2020. This series includes:

HEALTH, WELLBEING AND STRESS

Part 1 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.

PARENTS AND CARERS

Part 2 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.

FINANCES

Part 3 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.

SATISFACTION WITH MONASH

Part 4 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020.

Graduate students were asked to respond to a series of multiple choice and Likert-scale questions,⁷ with open-ended questions presented as an opportunity for participants to expand on their responses. Comments were analysed and coded into common themes with some responses coded under multiple themes, if relevant.

⁶ Not every respondent who commenced the survey went on to complete it, while those who did were not necessarily required to answer every question. As a result, the number of respondents to each question varies. Please see the individual graph/table for number of respondents to that specific question.

⁷ Where responses were under 5% (e.g. the total number of students responding 'extremely poor' to a question/statement was less than 5%), the figure has been removed from most tables to avoid that table becoming incomprehensible.

In order to better comprehend the quantitative and qualitative data and determine trends, a number of comparisons were run based on a student's characteristics, such as gender, or responses to certain questions e.g. I feel a sense of belonging to Monash University.

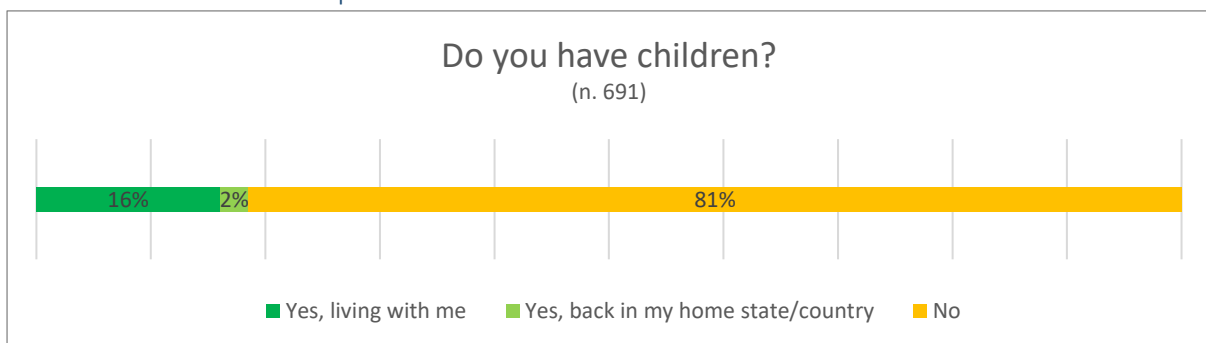
This research has been approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee.

1. What does a Monash graduate student parent/carer look like?

Data on the parental status of graduate students is not regularly collected by universities, and is not a focus of higher education statistics in Australia. Similarly, little is known about the quantity of graduate students with carer responsibilities for someone other than a child.

This chapter aims to provide some insight into graduate student parents and carers at Monash University by looking into who they are and what they are studying.

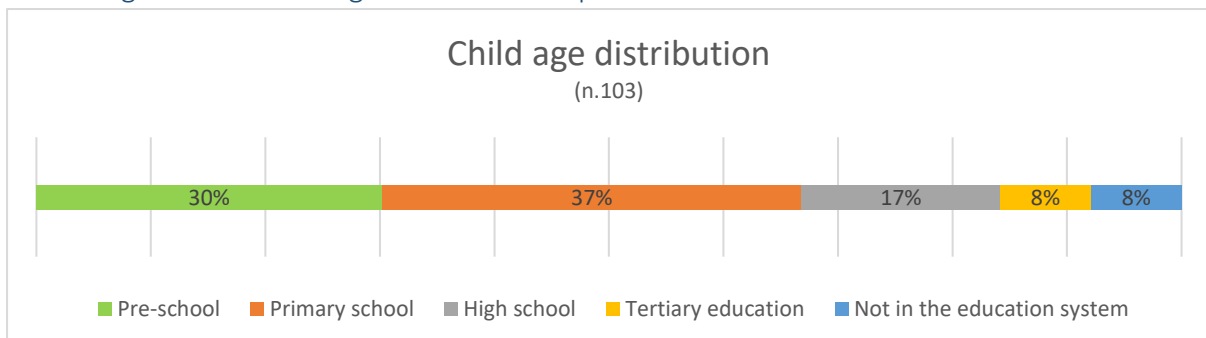
1.1 Graduate student parents at Monash



Just under one in five (18%) Monash graduate students were parents.

HDR students (23%) were almost twice as likely as coursework students (12%) to have children; however, the children of coursework students were proportionately younger.

1.2 Age distribution of graduate student parents' children



The majority of children of Monash graduate student parents were of pre-school and primary school age. The children of international graduate students were more likely to be younger than the children of domestic graduate students, with 46% of the children of internationals being in pre-school compared to 24% of domestics.

1.3 Gender of graduate student parents

	Total parents and carers	Total respondents	Percentage of respondents identifying as that gender who are parents and carers
Female	89	437	20.3%
Male	37	243	15.2%
Prefer not to answer	2	7	28.6%

Perhaps the most significant change in the graduate student body over the past half a century is that women are now as numerous as men. Indeed, at Monash University in 2019, over 60% of graduate students identified as women.⁸

The challenges of graduate study are inflated when students are simultaneously parenting, with family responsibilities appearing to increase attrition rates among women.⁹ Indeed, the rise of attrition rates among graduate student mothers has been identified as one of the most serious problems in higher education today, with the imbalance it causes having serious repercussions for gender parity in both faculty hiring practices and career advancement.¹⁰

On the whole, Monash graduate student mothers tended to report experiencing academic, social and family stress to a greater extent than fathers, and were more likely to report that their mental health was poor; however, more research into retention and attrition of graduate student parents is needed to determine the extent to which this is a problem at Monash University – particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which led to long periods of school closure and increased parental load and responsibilities.¹¹

⁸ “Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2019 Student data,” Australian Government: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, accessed 22 March 2021, <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2019-student-data>.

⁹ Megan Rae Theisen, Christi R. McGeorge and Ashley A. Walsdorf, “Graduate student parents’ perceptions of resources to support degree completion: Implications for family therapy programs,” *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2018): 46.

¹⁰ Karen Danna Lynch, “Gender roles and the American academe: a case study of graduate student mothers,” *Gender and Education* Vol. 6 (2008): 585.

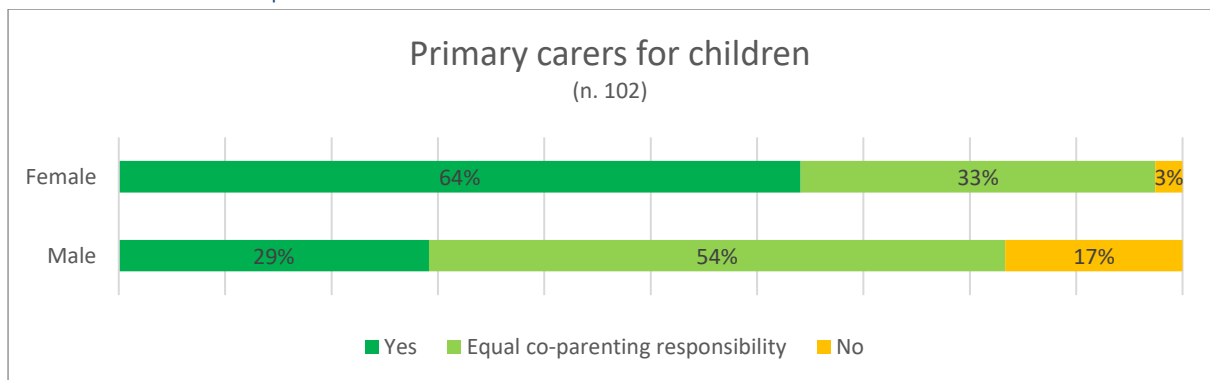
¹¹ Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Families in Australian Survey: Life during COVID-19 Report no. 1: Preliminary findings* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2020), 1 https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/covid-19-survey-report_1_early_findings_0.pdf.

1.4 Age of graduate student parents

	Total Parents	Total respondents	Parents as percentage of overall respondents in this age bracket
18-25	2	210	1.0%
26-30	9	237	3.8%
31-40	64	167	38.3%
41-50	33	46	71.7%
51-60	13	19	68.4%
60+	7	12	58.3%
	128	691	18.5%

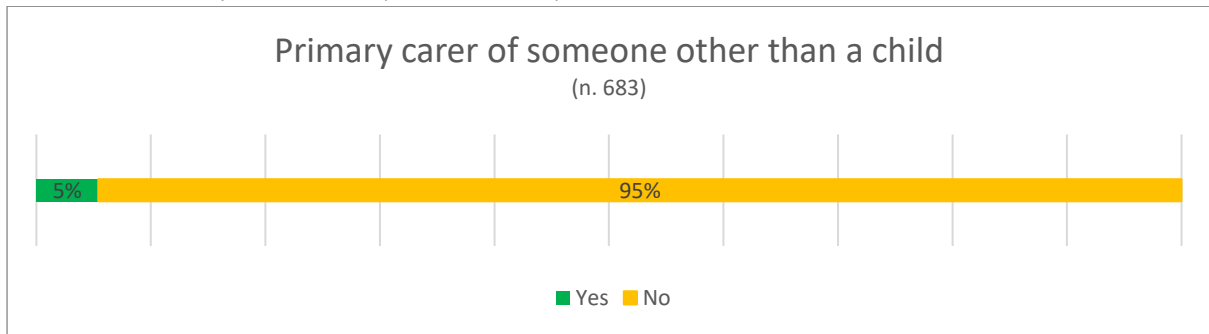
Graduate students over the age of 30 were far more likely to be parents than those under 30. Only 2.5% of graduate students under 30 were parents compared to 48% of those over 30.

1.5 Childcare responsibilities



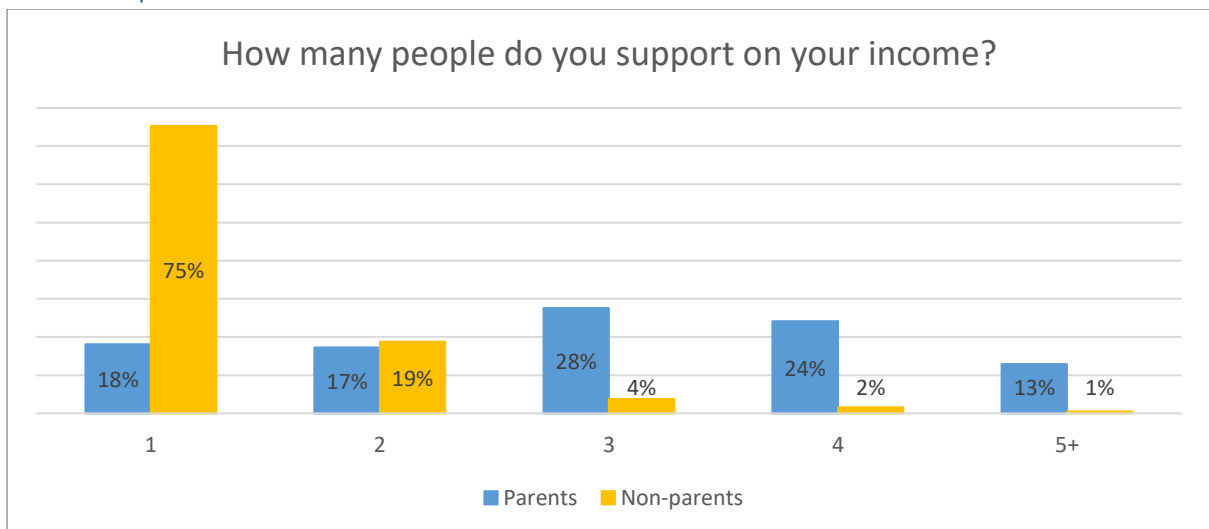
The overwhelming majority of Monash graduate student parents had carer responsibilities for their child or children; however, women were more likely than men to indicate that they were the primary carer.

1.6 Carer responsibilities (non-children)



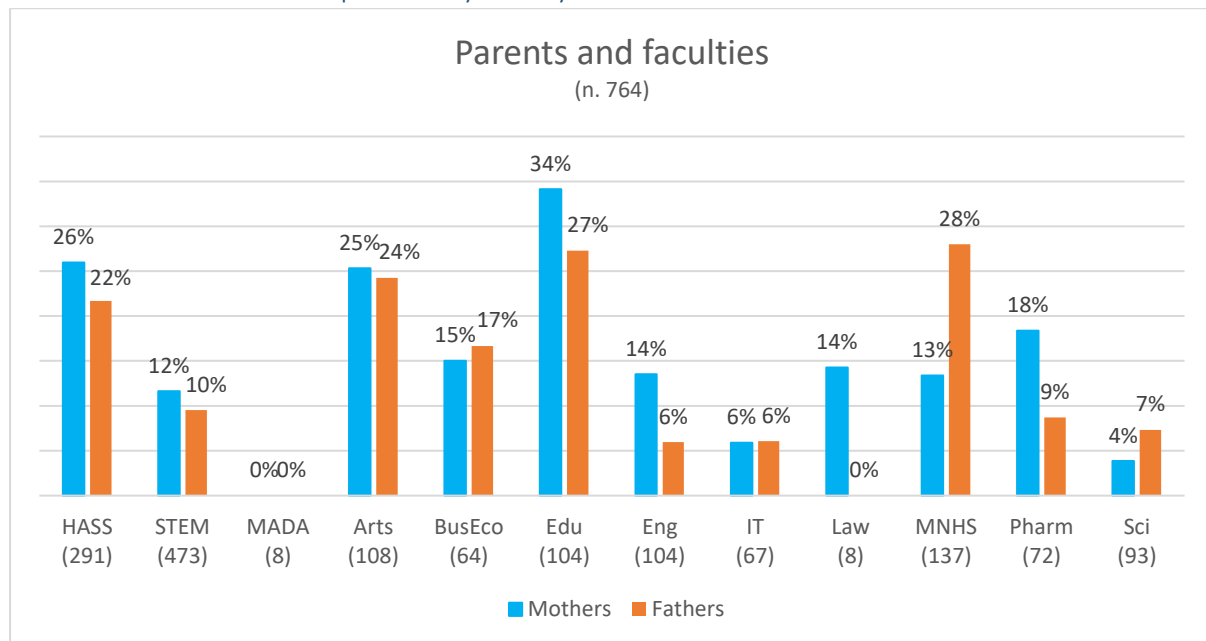
One in every twenty Monash graduate students had carer responsibilities for someone other than a child. International graduate students (8%) were more than twice as likely as domestic graduate students (3%) to be a primary carer for someone other than a child.

1.7 Dependants



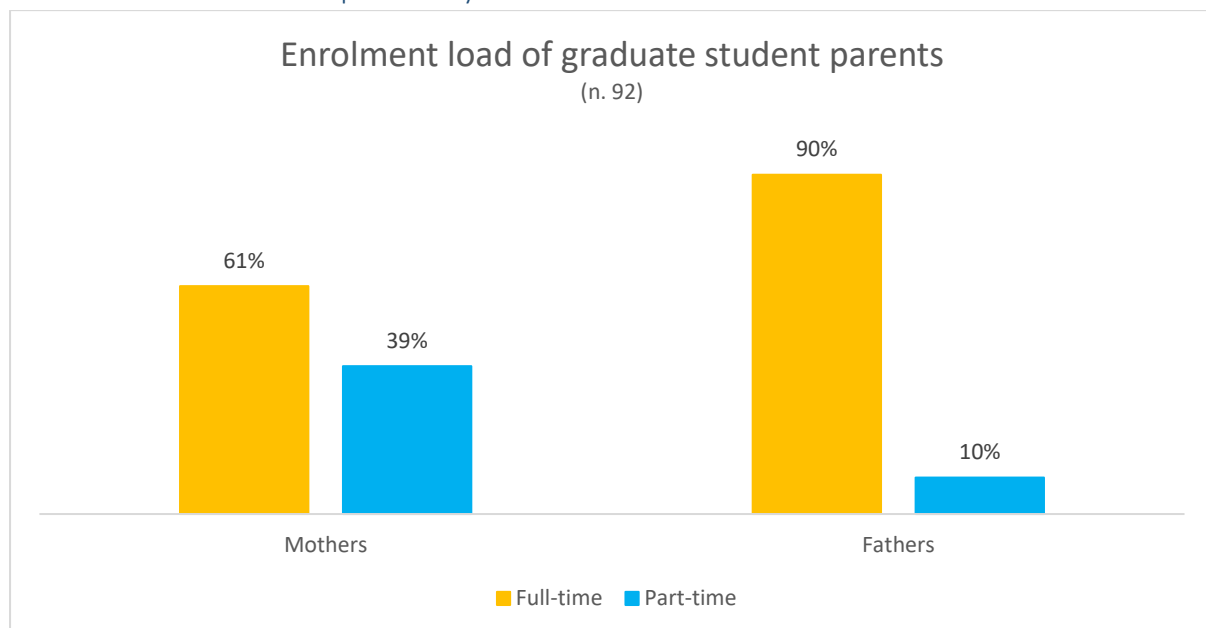
As is to be expected, graduate student parents were more likely than non-parents to be supporting someone other than themselves on their income.

1.8 Graduate student parents by faculty¹²



Graduate students from humanities and social sciences (HASS) were more than twice as likely as those from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to be parents.

1.9 Graduate student parents by enrolment load

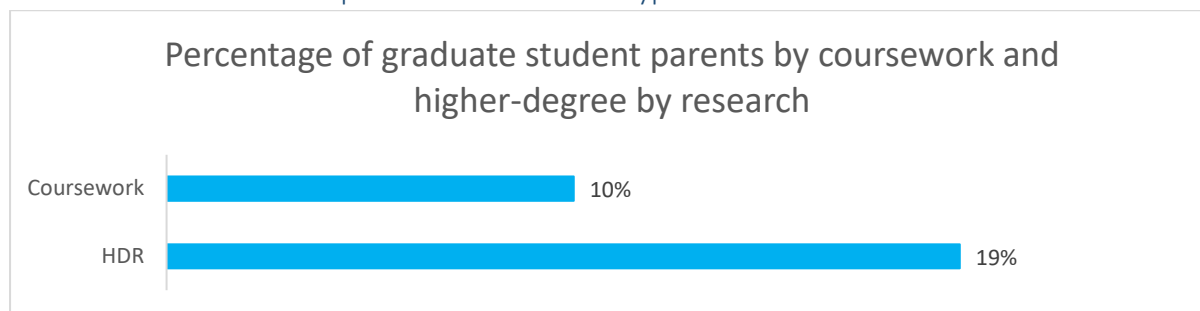


The majority of graduate student parents at Monash were enrolled full-time; however, mothers were far more likely than fathers to be enrolled on a part-time basis. Given the attrition rate of part-time students is far greater than full-time students,¹³ mothers are more at risk than fathers of leaving their course before completion.

¹² Number of faculty respondents in brackets.

¹³ Ittima Cherastidtham and Andrew Norton, *University attrition: what helps and what hinders university completion?* (Melbourne: Grattan Institute, 2018), 10.

1.10 Graduate student parents within course type



Higher degree by research graduate students were almost twice as likely to be parents as those enrolled in a Monash coursework degree.

1.11 Residential status of graduate student parents

	Total Parents	Total respondents	Parents as percentage of overall respondents in this category
Domestic	84	334	25.1%
International	44	357	12.3%

Australian or New Zealand citizens/permanent residents were more than twice as likely to be parents as international students.

Of the international student parents, 29.5% were not accompanied to Australia by their children.

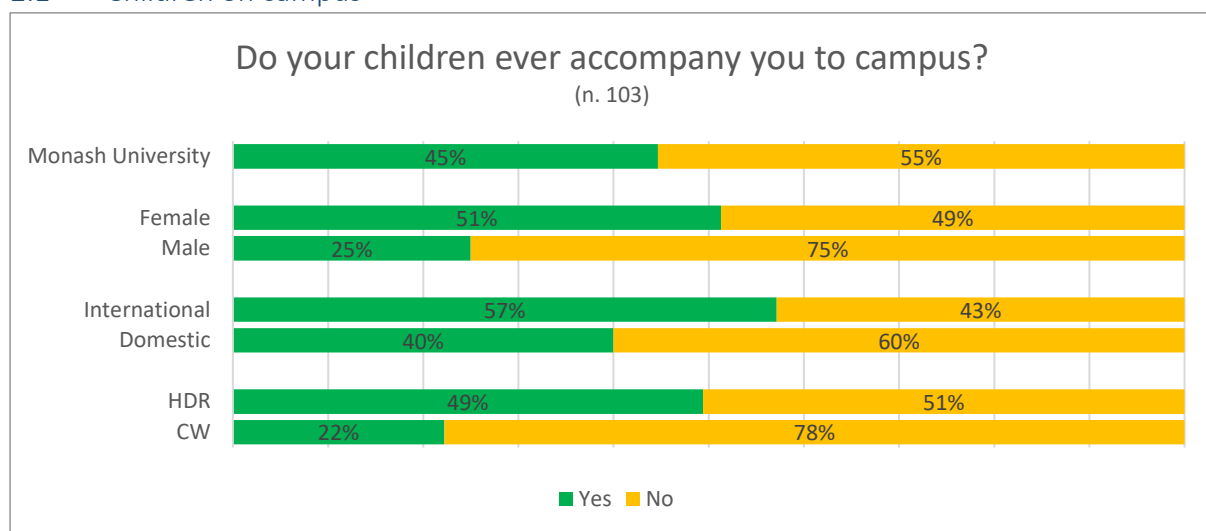
2. Facilities and Services

Work-family issues of graduate students are rarely visible, despite high numbers of men and women in graduate school being of an age where most-likely to bear children. Detailed studies analysing what services are available for parents on campus are rare.¹⁴

Work-family balance has been shown to be important to graduate students as they consider their careers. A 2006/2007 study of over 8,000 doctoral students at the University of California revealed that 84% of women and 74% of men registered that the family friendliness of their future workplace was a concern; yet more than 70% of women and over half of all the men surveyed considered careers at research universities as not family friendly.

This chapter explores the facilities and services for parents and carers at Monash University.

2.1 Children on campus

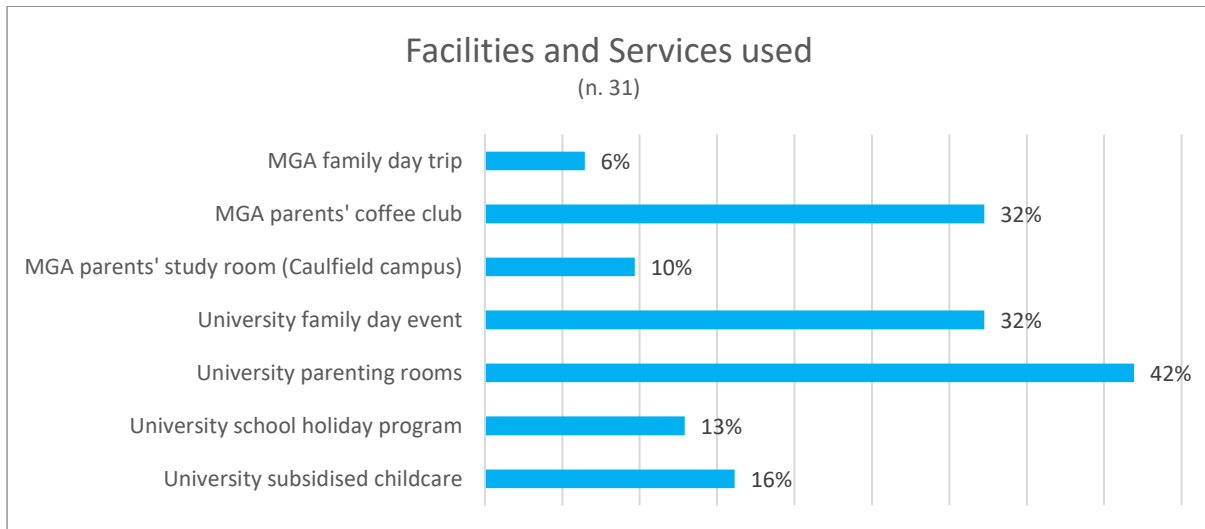


Just under half of Monash graduate student parents indicated that that their children would, on occasion, accompany them to campus.

International students were the most likely to have their children accompany them to campus, while mothers were more likely than fathers and HDR students more likely than coursework students to bring their children to campus.

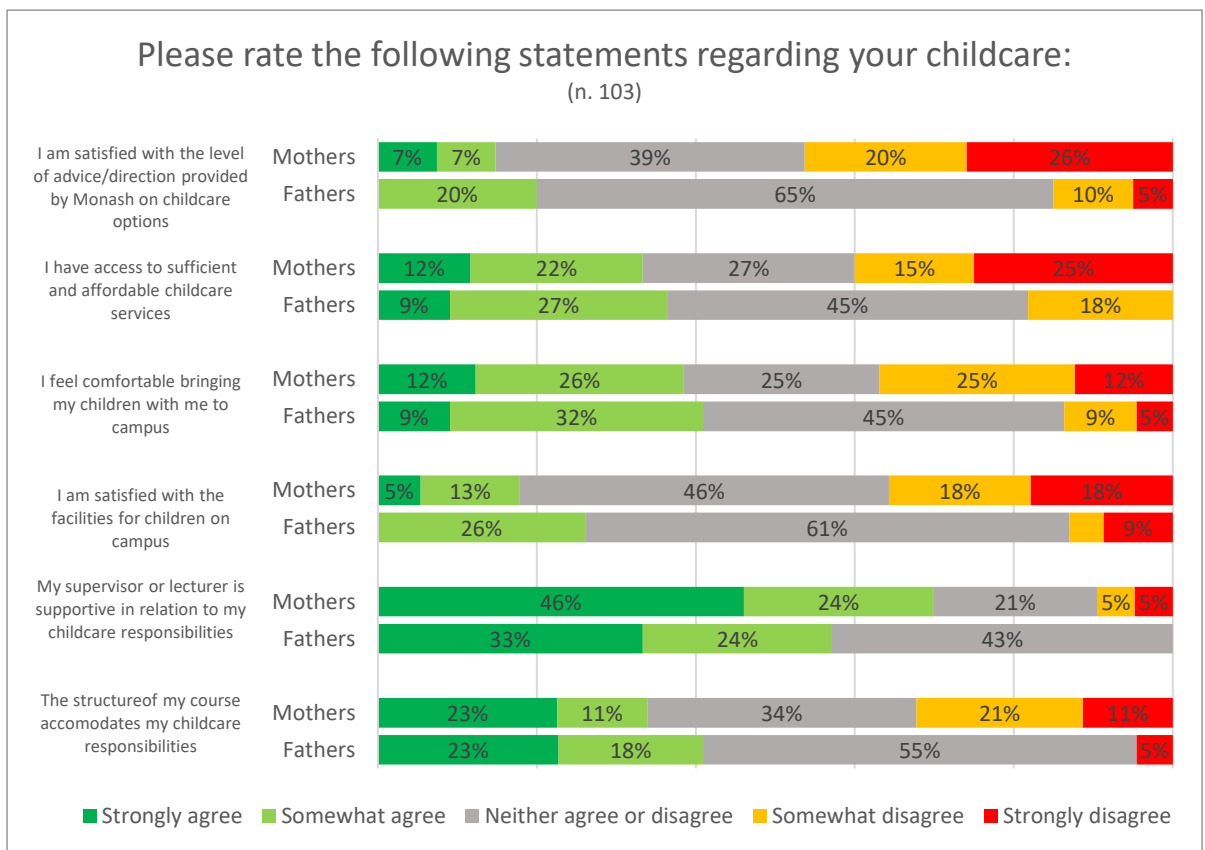
¹⁴ Kristen W. Springer, Brenda K. Parker and Catherine Leviten-Reid, "Making space for graduate student parents: Practice and politics, *Journal of Family Issues* Vol. 30, No. 4 (2009): 435.

2.2 Use of Monash facilities and services



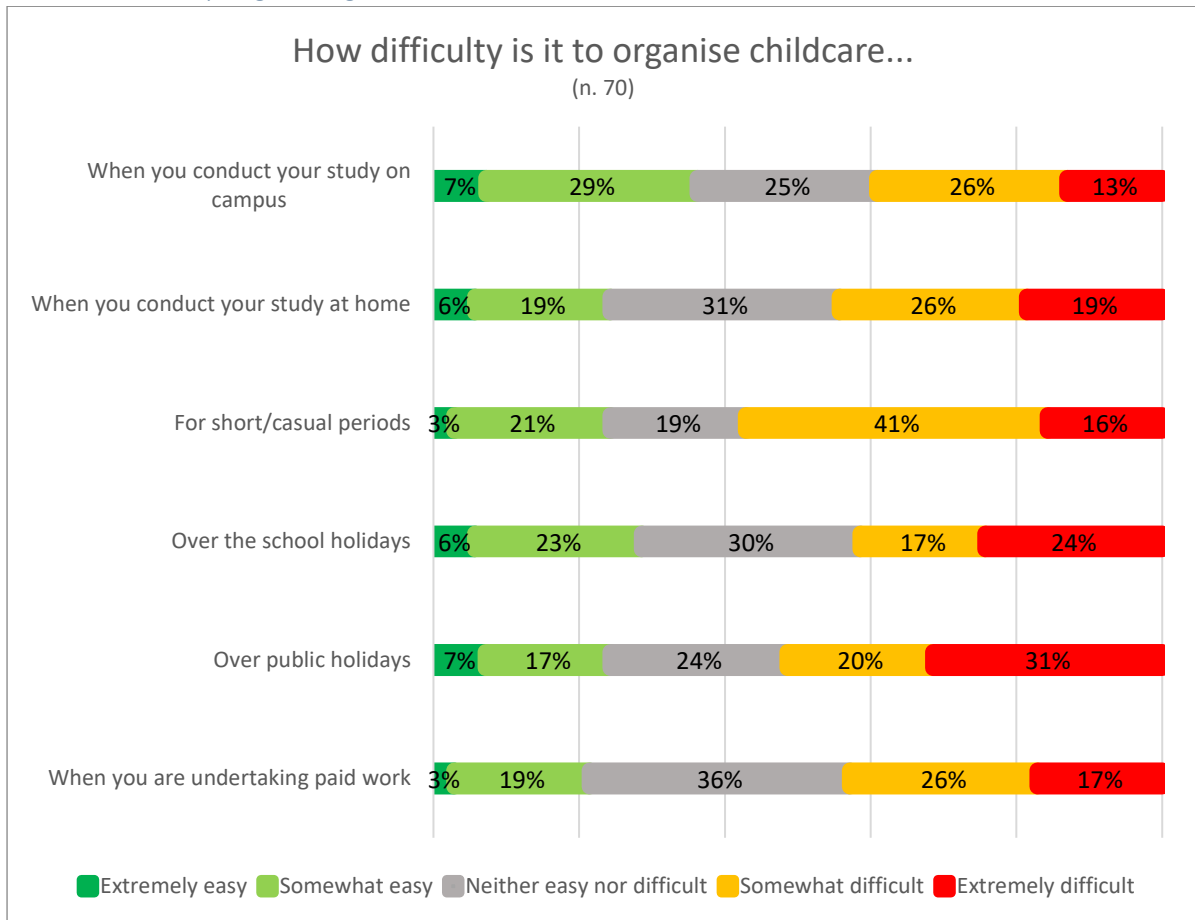
Of the parents who responded to this question, the university parenting rooms were identified as the most-used of the list of services provided.

2.3 Statements on childcare



Graduate student parents were least satisfied with the level of advice and direction provided to them by Monash regarding their childcare options, while they tended to agree that their supervisor or lecturer was supportive in relation to their childcare responsibilities. Meanwhile, mothers tended to be substantially more likely to disagree with the statements above than fathers – especially regarding access to sufficient and affordable childcare.

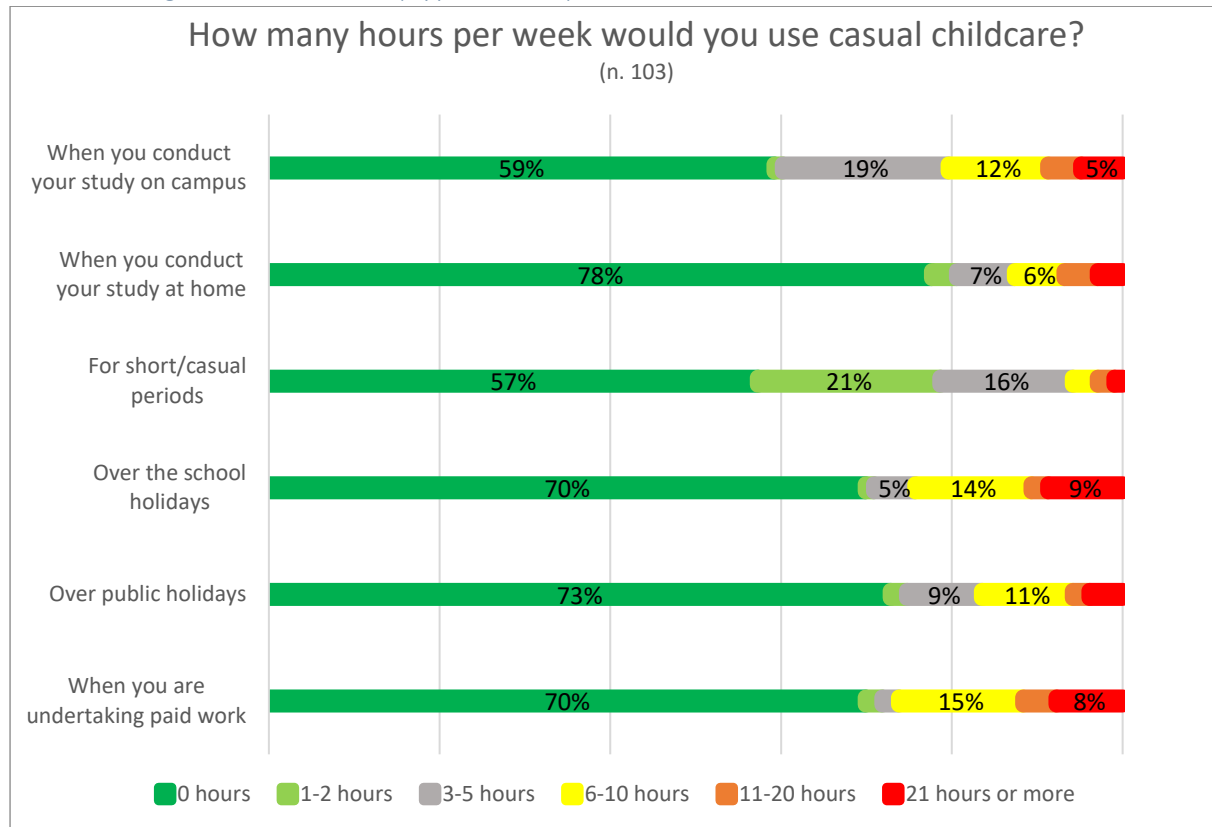
2.4 Difficulty organising childcare



The short or casual periods and meetings were identified by respondents as the most difficulty time to organise childcare.

Although it is not shown in the graph above, mothers also tended to have more difficult organising childcare than fathers.

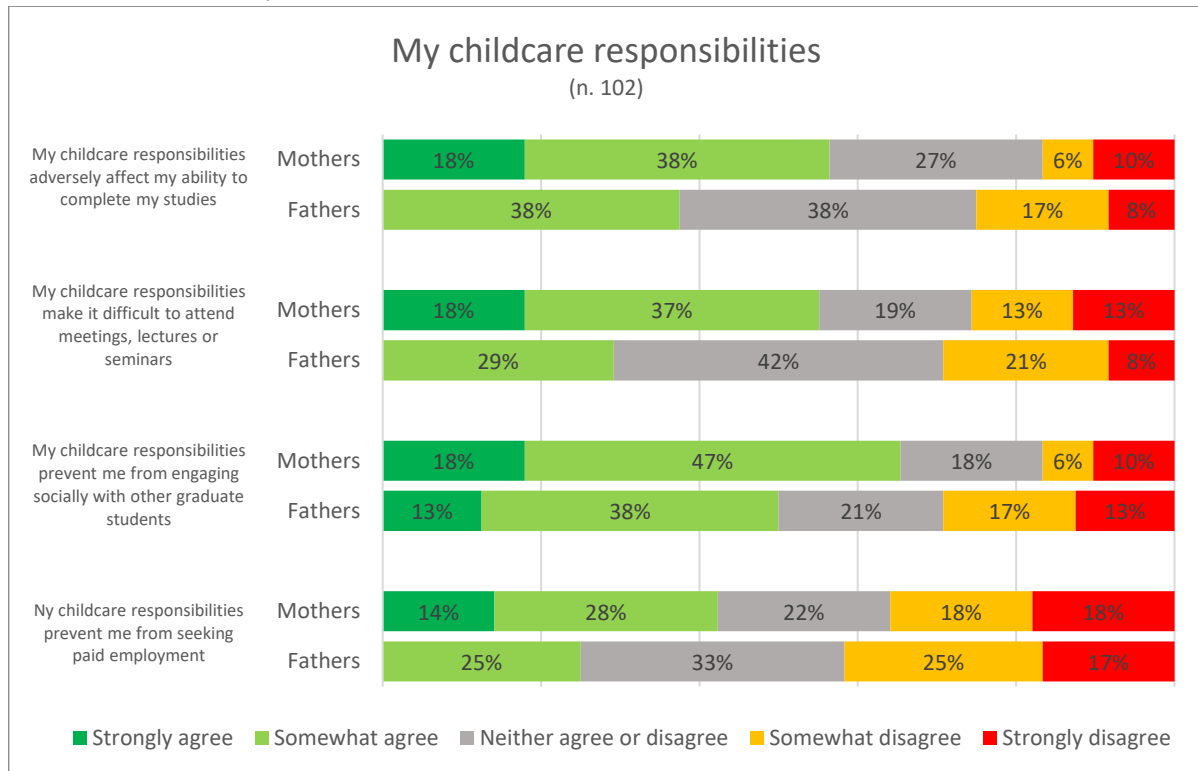
2.5 Using casual childcare (hypothetical)



If a casual childcare service was offered at Monash University, parents would be most likely to use it during short or casual periods, followed closely by when they studied on campus (although these two categories are likely to overlap).

Childcare services offered over the school holidays would be the service that would be most-likely to get used for the greatest duration.

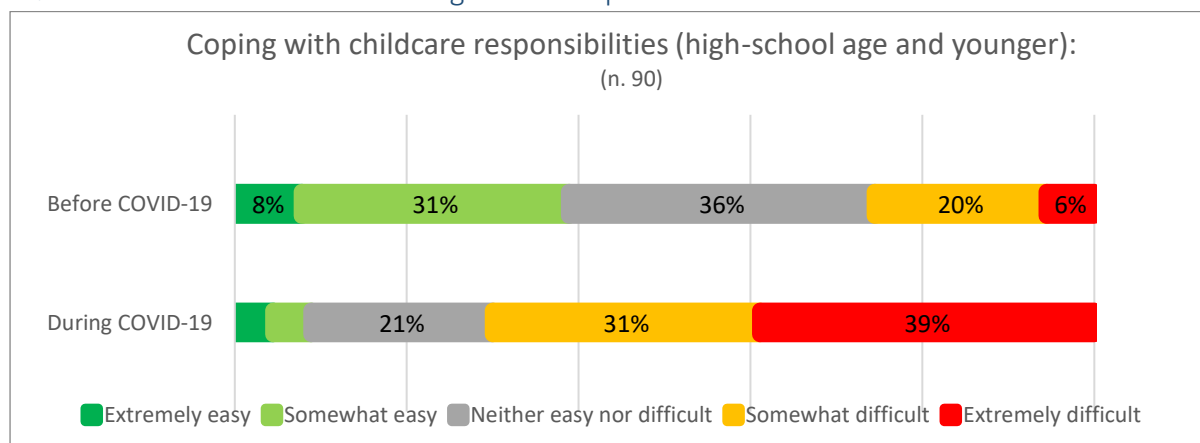
2.6 Childcare responsibilities



In relation to perceptions of their academic, social and financial responsibilities, mothers tended to be more likely to be impacted negatively by their childcare responsibilities than were fathers. This was especially prevalent in relation to attending meetings, lectures and seminars.

Meanwhile, over three-fifths of graduate student parents (62%) agreed that their childcare responsibilities prevented them from engaging socially with other graduate students, while over half (53%) agreed their parental duties adversely affected their ability to complete their studies.

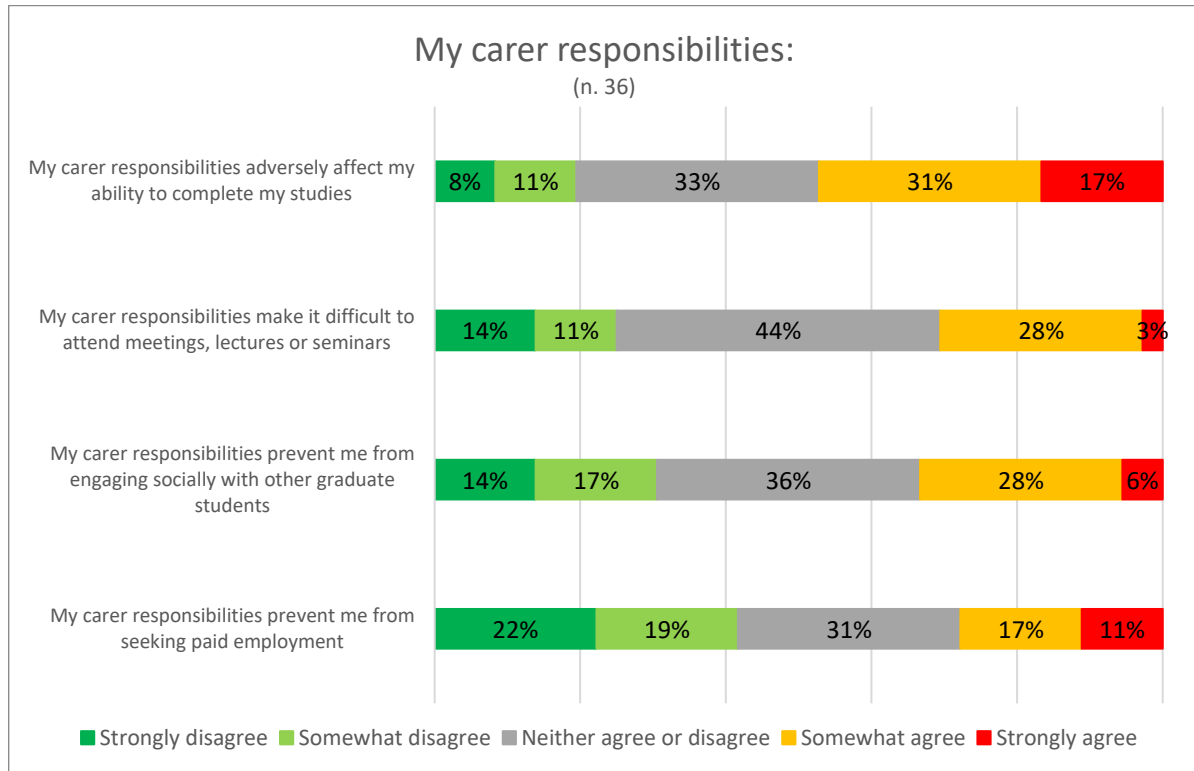
2.7 Childcare before and during COVID-19 pandemic



The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown in Melbourne, which involved day-care and school closures, severely increased the difficulty in coping with childcare responsibilities for Monash graduate student parents.

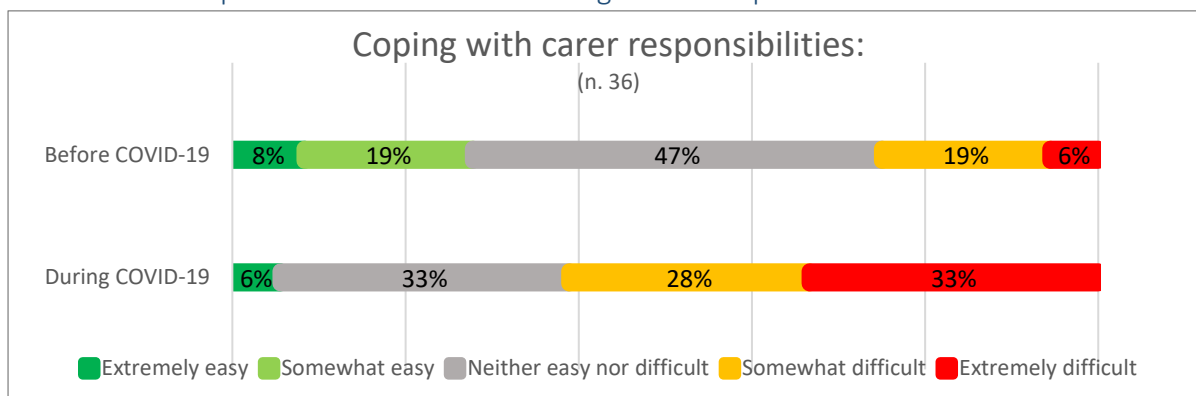
Mothers were significantly more likely to indicate that they were impacted both before and during the pandemic; however, the number of fathers indicating that they were finding it difficult to cope more than tripled as a result of the pandemic.

2.8 Carer responsibilities (non-children)



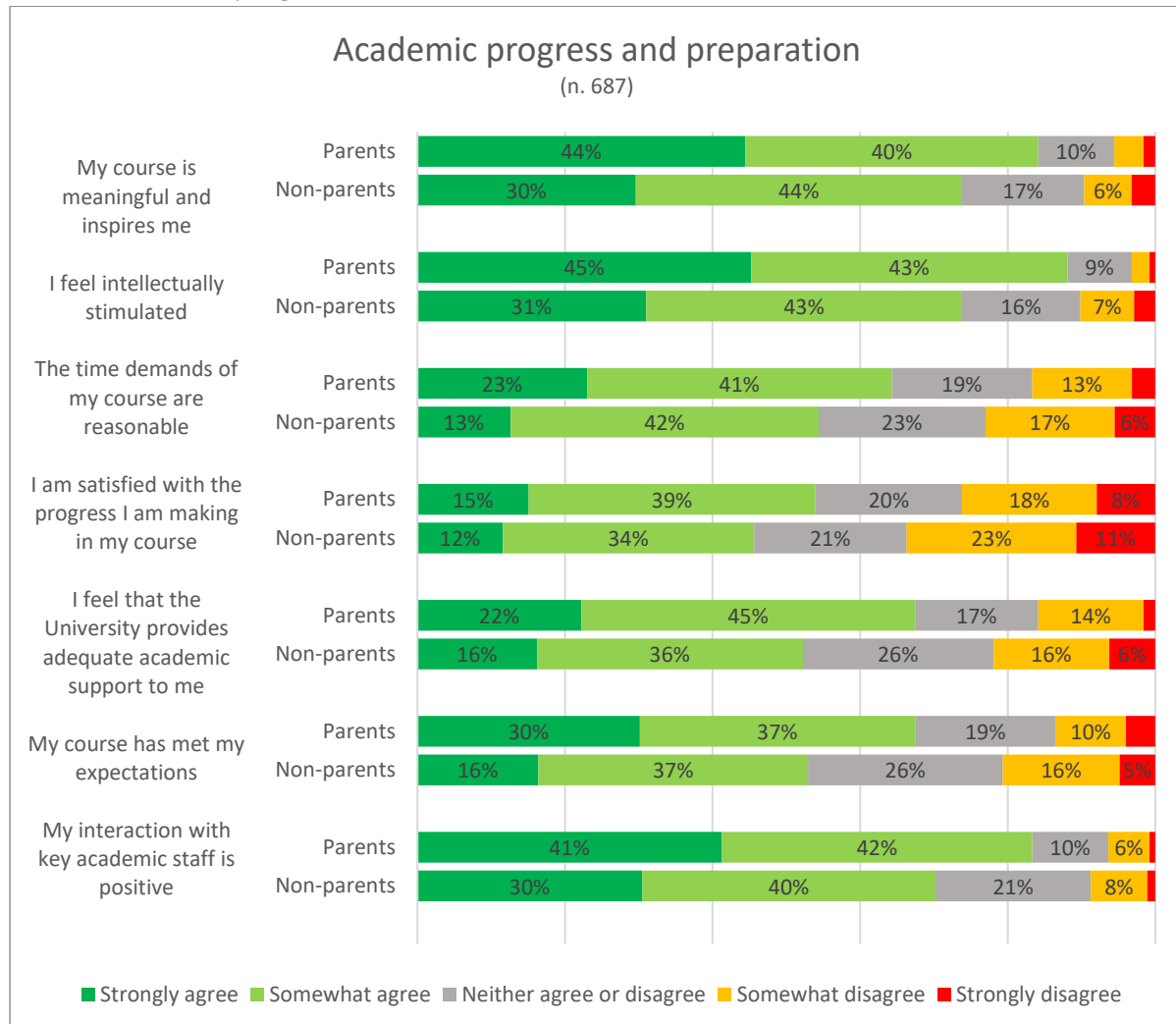
Carers were most likely to agree that their carer responsibilities impacted their ability to complete their studies.

2.9 Carer responsibilities before and during COVID-19 pandemic



Similar to those with childcare responsibilities, those with carer responsibilities tended to find it more difficult to cope during the COVID-19 pandemic than before.

2.10 Academic progress



Across the board, Monash graduate student parents were proportionately more likely to agree with positive statements regarding their course progress and preparation than were graduate students without children. For instance, 64% of parents agreed that the time demands of their course were reasonable compared to 55% of non-parents. This is despite Mason *et al.* finding that between study, childcare and employment responsibilities, graduate student mothers worked an average of at least 25 hours more a week and graduate student fathers 15 hours more a week than their non-parent counterparts.¹⁵

¹⁵ Mary Ann Mason, Nicholas H. Wolfinger and Marc Goulden, *Do Babies Matter? Gender and Family in the Ivory Tower* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

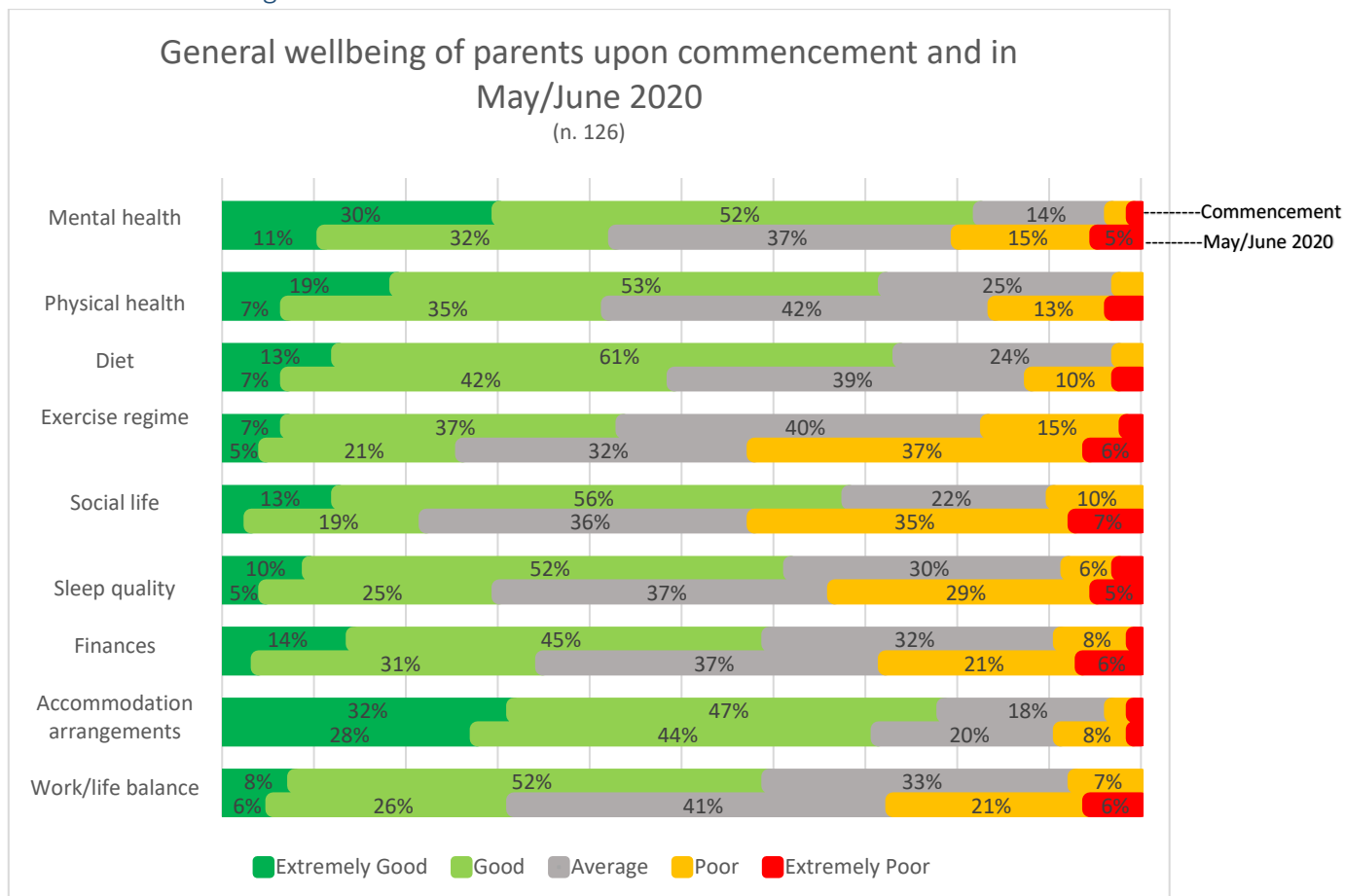
3. Health and Wellbeing

When it comes to the health and wellbeing of parents and carers, the expectation may be that they are more likely to be worse off than those without these responsibilities. However, while previous research suggests that parents are less happy than non-parents, the opposite trend is now emerging and suggests that children appear to protect parents against social and economic forces that may be reducing happiness among parents.¹⁶

Concurrently, it has been suggested that the parental happiness gap (the difference between the happiness of parents and non-parents) is sensitive to the time-period analysed.¹⁷

This phenomenon may help explain why graduate student parents at Monash, in the midst of a global pandemic, were more likely than non-parents to express greater satisfaction with their health and life, and more likely to report having a better state of mind. Although, as this chapter will indicate, the wellbeing results of parents were still a concern.

3.1 General wellbeing



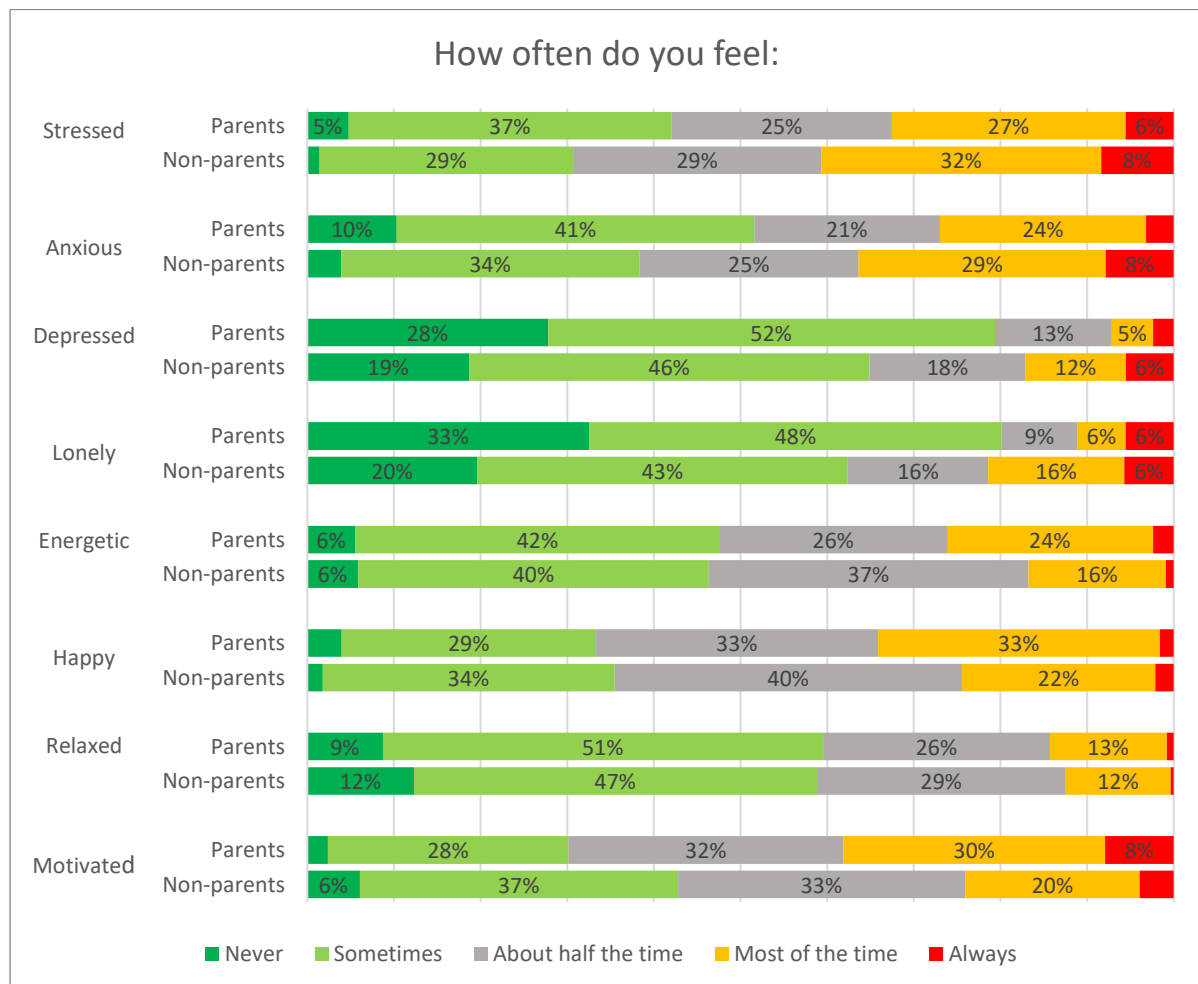
¹⁶ Chris M. Herbst and John Ifcher, "The increasing happiness of US parents," *Review of Economics of the Household*, No. 14 (2016): 529.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Graduate student parents at Monash indicated that their general wellbeing was worse off in May/June of 2020 than it was when they commenced their degree. Those indicating that their mental health was either *extremely poor* or *poor* rose from 4% at commencement to 20%. Meanwhile, having an *extremely poor* or *poor* social life rose from 10% to 42%, sleep quality from 8% to 34% and work/life balance from 7% to 27%.

This survey was completed during May and June of 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and during what has been described as Melbourne’s “first-wave” lockdown. It is worth noting that mental health and wellbeing issues increased for students during Melbourne’s “second-wave” lockdown between July and October.¹⁸ The pandemic had a substantially negative impact on the health and wellbeing of Monash graduate students. For more information on the extent to which COVID-19 specifically impacted Monash graduate students, please see *The COVID-19 pandemic and Monash graduate students: MGA 2020 Survey on Health, Family and Finance*.¹⁹

3.2 State of mind

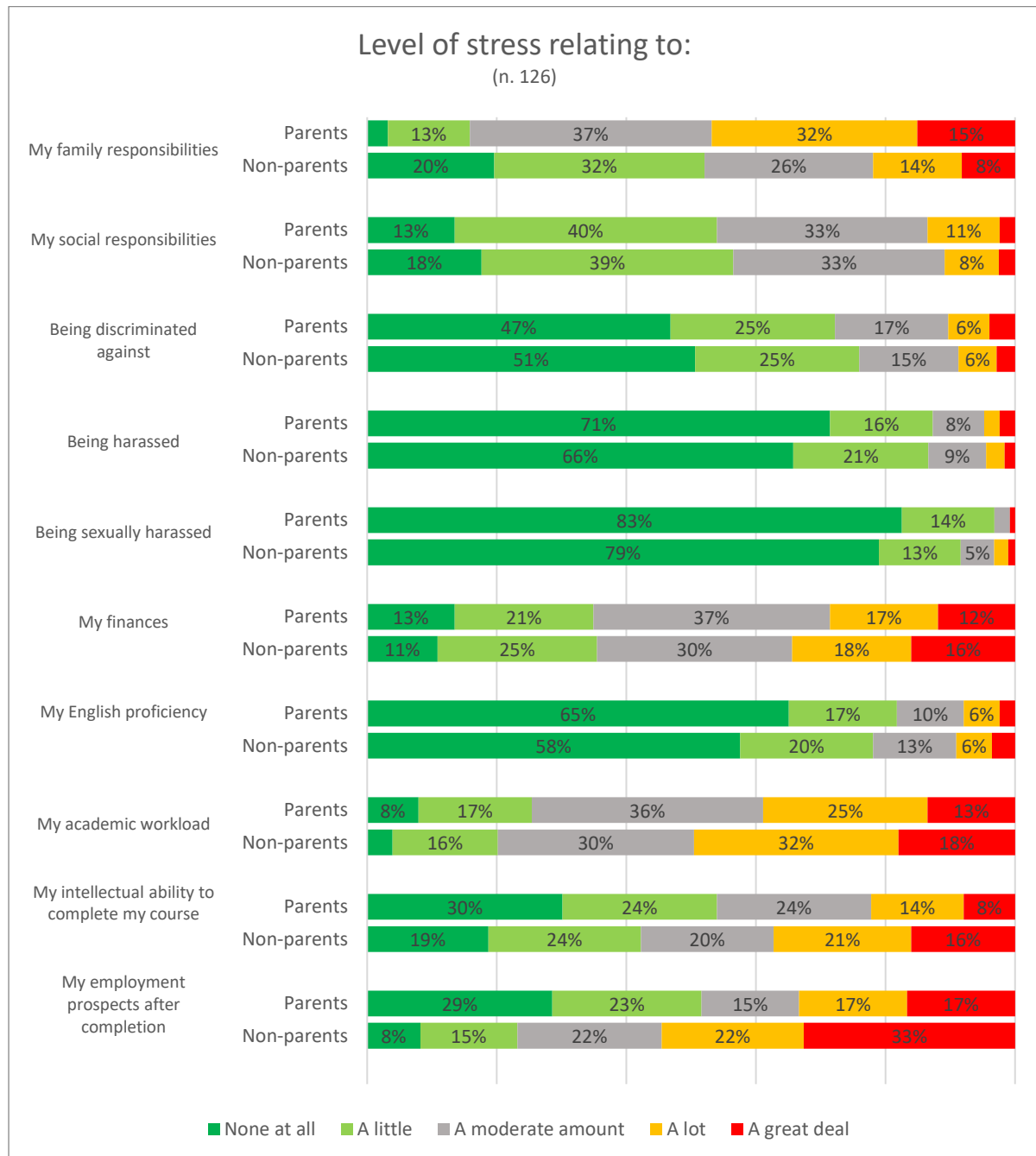


¹⁸ Jeremy Cass. “International Students: Mental Health Impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic 2020-21 and beyond,” *Live, Learn, Thrive: IEAA Student Life Forum 2021 (Conference), Melbourne, 24 February 2021*.

¹⁹ <https://mga.monash.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/COVID-19-Pandemic-and-Monash-University-Graduate-Students.pdf>

Graduate student parents tended to be in a better state of mind than graduate students without children. For instance, 38% of parents said that they were motivated *always or most of the time* compared to 24% of non-parents.

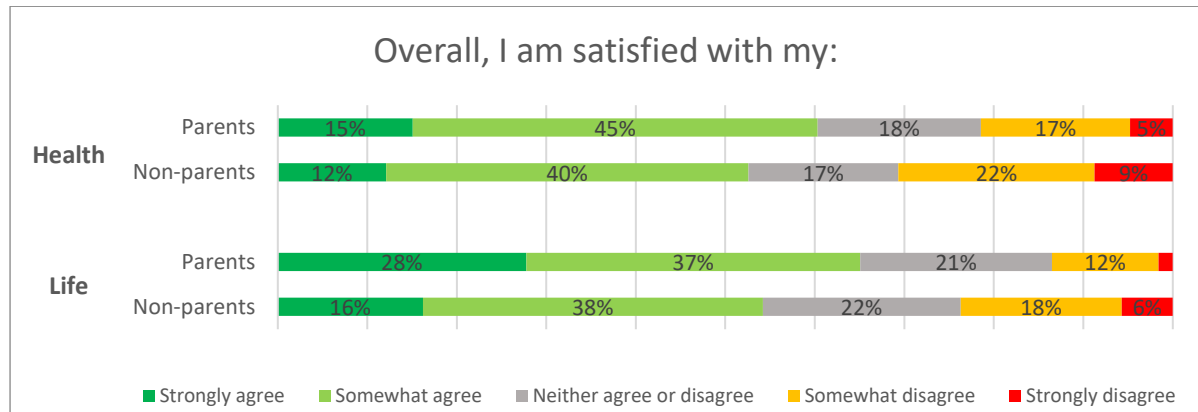
3.3 Level of stress



For the majority of the categories explored above, the difference between the level of stress of parents and non-parents was negligible; however, parents were less likely to have either *a great deal* or *a lot* of stress in relation to their academic workload (38% to 50%), intellectual ability to complete their course (22% to 37%) and their employment prospects upon completion (34% to 55%).

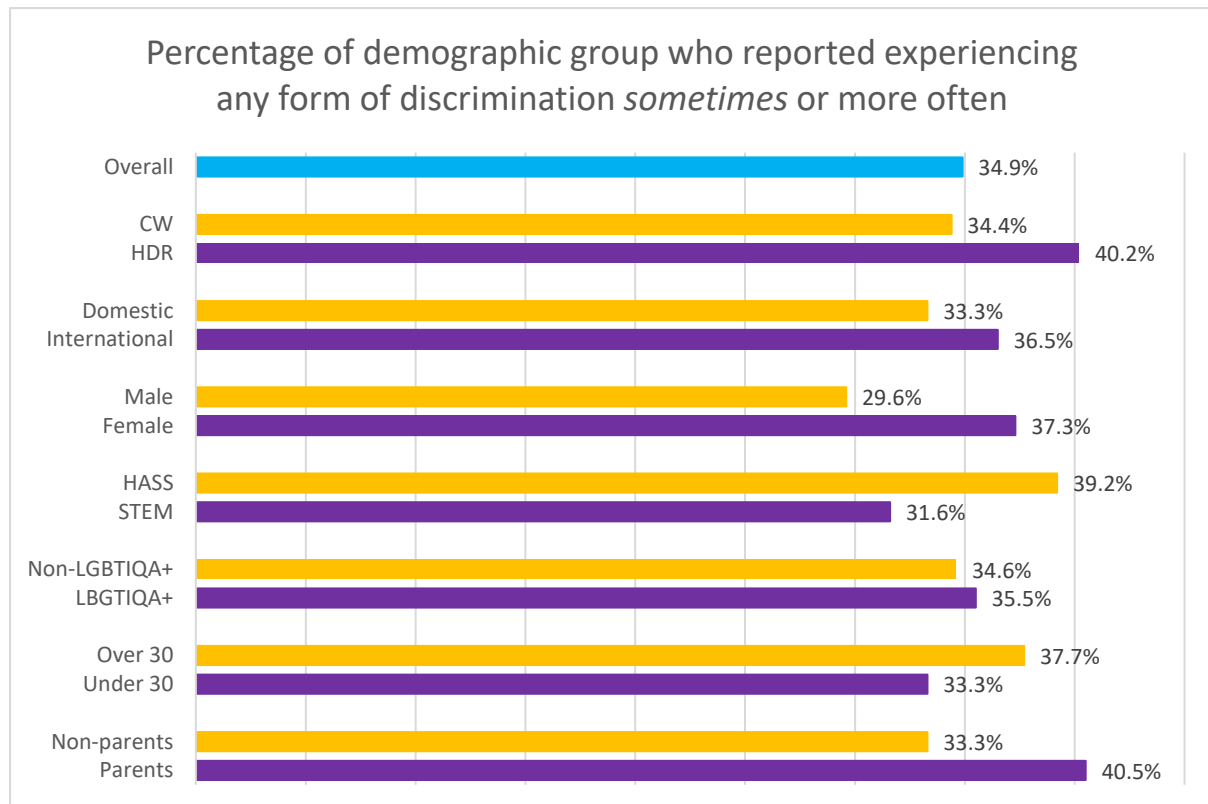
“Family responsibilities” were predictably more likely to be a source of stress among parents than non-parents.

3.4 Satisfaction with health and life



Graduate student parents were more likely to be satisfied with their health and life than were graduate student who were not parents.

3.5 Discrimination



Of the seven demographic groups analysed,²⁰ parents reported experiencing some form of discrimination more than any other group. There are multiple reasons that graduate students can feel discriminated against, including insufficient leave entitlements, lack of flexibility, alienation

²⁰ The included, coursework/higher degree by research, domestic/international, male/female, non-LGBTIQA+/non-LGBTIQA+, HASS/STEM, over 30 years of age/under 30 years of age, English as a primary language/language other than English as primary, and parents and non-parents.

through lack of visibility and so on – see *Parents on campus: A research report from the Graduate Student Association of the University of Melbourne* for a more in-depth analysis.²¹

3.6 Comments on stress regarding family

In the Health, Family and Finances survey, respondents were asked to comment on the origin of their stress. *Family* was the third most popular theme commented on, behind COVID-19 and academic stress, with 32 references across the 246 comments (see *Part 1 of the Monash Graduate Association report into the Health, Family and Finances of graduate students at Monash University, 2020*). These included:

“Limited childcare during COVID and feeling guilty that my 3yo has a lot of screen time.”

“Responsibility for my elderly mother. A sibling with mental health issues.”

“Covid-19 has brought my parents here living in same home as my immediate family for an extended period of time.”

“Being apart from family (which is in Brazil) + pregnancy in the current circumstances (COVID).”

“I am a young single mother [and] I have a 2 year old son and sole custody.”

“Financial worry to maintain a family while doing PhD.”

“Overseas stress with family.”

“Developed a health condition; worried about my kids schooling and outcomes for my kids, one of which has a disability.”

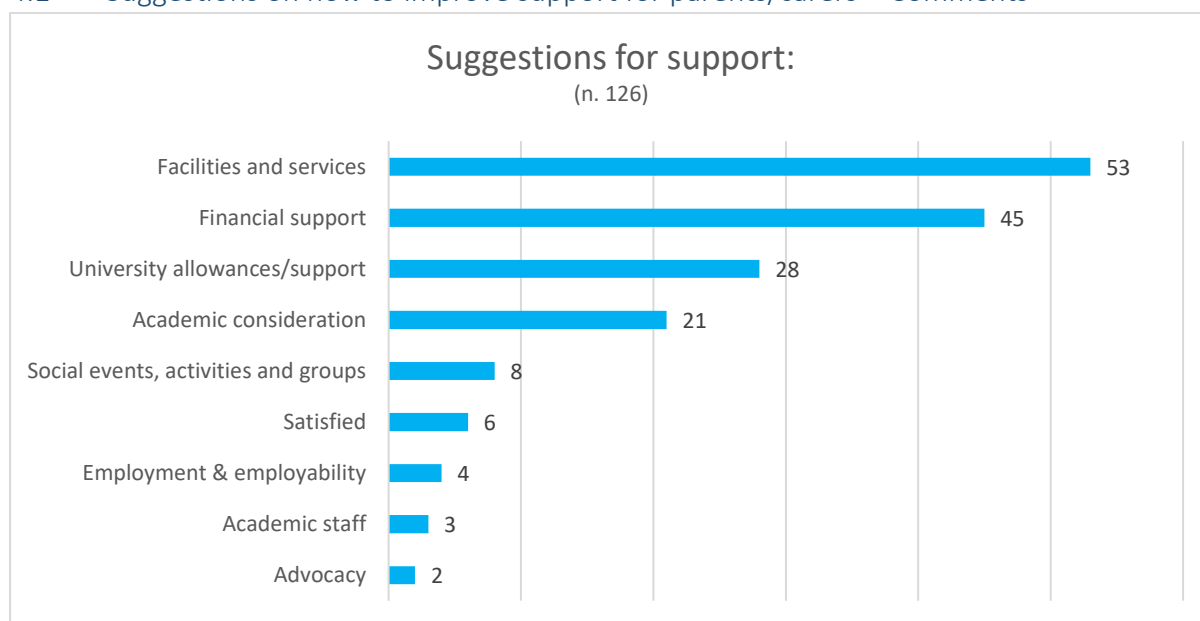
²¹ Graduate Student Association (University of Melbourne), *Parents on campus: A research report from the Graduate Student Association of the University of Melbourne* (Melbourne: GSA, 2020).

4. Suggestions for Support

In order to determine what improvements graduate student parents and carers wanted, relevant participants were asked to respond to the question: *What could the university do to support graduate students who are also parents and/or carers? Do you have any further comments regarding childcare and/or carer responsibilities?*

Their answers are summarised in this chapter.

4.1 Suggestions on how to improve support for parents/carers – Comments



The primary suggestion from Monash graduate student parents and carers regarding support related to improving **facilities and services**. Comments included:

"I would ... bring my children if there was more of a community/village feel to the campus (and other people brought their children so that my children could see there were places and spaces which took their needs into account and welcomed them etc.)."

"Plenty of areas for changing nappies etc., plenty of areas for breast-feeding, positive attitudes towards bringing children to work when needed, equal parental leave for each parent regardless of gender."

"Give tips about how to balance study and care for the child or other people."

"Virtual or physical activities/games and making kids part of Monash community where both parents and kids foster a strong sense of belongingness."

Meanwhile, many parents and carers also called for **financial support** from the university. These included:

"University should make free/affordable childcare available at multiple locations."

“Subsidised care for students, casual care, more scholarship supports and awards/fellowships for single parent families and other families with caring responsibilities.”

“Extra scholarship money for childcare/petition government for more childcare subsidies.”

Several parents requested **university allowances and support** that acknowledged that their situation varied from other students. Insightful comments included:

“Don’t assume that students can spontaneously come to campus for meetings and social events. Allow students to work from home if they need to and don’t pressure them to work at a work station on campus 5 days a week. Remember that every time they have to come in to campus they have to pay for child care.”

“To me, no one has ever acknowledged carer duties outside of children.”

“Monash Offered \$7,000 to people affected by COVID-19. As a mother of 3 young children home-schooled for months I did not need money, I needed time.”

“I would like to thank the MGA for the efforts to help parents and carers, especially in relation to getting the uni to help individuals on their second bout of maternity/paternity leave in their candidature (PhD). Perhaps more lenience in periods of extension would be beneficial for parents of pre-school aged children.”

Other interesting comments included:

“I like the idea of having university social events that provide opportunities for students to bring their children and family members on campus and to meet academic staff/see the research that is happening.”

“I am doing an online course, so far I can study around my children's needs.”

“I plan to bring my family to Australia, but my children [are] at school age. International students by coursework do not get the tuition fee waiver for their children's school like the research students. Hope the university propose to the government to give the school tuition fee waiver to children of international students by coursework. Thanks.”

5. Conclusion

The results of the MGA Health, Family and Finance Survey 2020 have provided a valuable insight into the make-up and prevalence of graduate student parents at Monash. It has allowed us to better understand how parental and carer responsibilities impact a Monash graduate students' ability to conduct and complete their studies, as well as relay and consider suggestions for improving the collective experience of parents and carers at Monash to ensure that they are best placed to make a valuable contribution to the university community.

Key findings

Approximately one-fifth of Monash graduate students are parents or carers

Just under one in five (18%) Monash graduate students are parents, with HDRs almost twice as likely to be parents as coursework students. Meanwhile, 5% of graduate students were the primary carer for someone other than a child.

Two-thirds (67%) of the children of Monash graduate students were of primary school age or younger, while the median age of a graduate student parent was 31-40.

Domestic graduate students were more than twice as likely as international graduate students to be parents, as were those from humanities and social sciences (HASS) in comparison to those from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Mothers are almost four-times as likely as fathers to be enrolled part-time

The majority of graduate student parents at Monash were enrolled full-time; however, mothers (39%) were far more likely than fathers (10%) to be enrolled on a part-time basis. This has implications for the attrition rate of mothers as those enrolled part-time are more likely to drop-out of their course before completion than those enrolled full-time.

Mothers were also twice as likely as fathers to, on occasion, have their children accompany them to campus, while they were substantially more likely to be dissatisfied with the facilities for children on campus, the level of advice on childcare options from Monash and the affordability of childcare in general.

Graduate student parents and carers were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown in Melbourne, which involved day-care and school closures, severely increased the difficulty in coping with childcare responsibilities for Monash graduate student parents.

Mothers were significantly more likely to indicate that they had difficulty coping with these responsibilities both before and during the pandemic; however, the number of fathers indicating that they were finding it difficult to cope more than tripled as a result of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, 56% of parents and 48% of carers said that their carer responsibilities adversely affected their ability to complete their studies.

Short and casual periods, such as meetings with supervisors or attending a tutorial, are the hardest times for graduate student parents to organise childcare

Well over half of the graduate student parents at Monash agreed that it was difficult to organise childcare during these times, with mothers having more difficulty than fathers.

As such, it was for these short periods that parents were most likely to use a hypothetical casual on-campus childcare service.

The general wellbeing and state of mind of parents tended to be better than for non-parents

Graduate students with children tended to report a better quality of wellbeing and healthier state of mind than their colleagues without children. This was true both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parents experienced discrimination at the university more than any other group

Of the demographic groups analysed, parents reported experiencing some form of discrimination more than any other group, while men were the group which experienced discrimination the least.

Those respondents who had never experienced some form of discrimination at the university were more likely to have better mental health outcomes than those who had experienced discrimination at least sometimes.

(iii) Recommendations

Based on the findings of the 2020 *Health, Family and Finances* survey, the MGA has recommended actions for the University that would improve the experience and increase satisfaction among graduate student parents and carers. There are also specific areas where the Monash Graduate Association could improve their services and representation.

Recommendations for Monash University

Improve childcare services

- Introduce on-campus casual, short-term childcare for Monash students and staff.
- Improve the communication and direction provided regarding childcare options – especially information provided to international students.

Introduce family friendly spaces on campus

- Build fenced playgrounds and activity spaces.
- Create family-friendly on-campus meeting rooms.

Ensure parental representation on university committees

- Create a family friendly committee²² to sit as a subcommittee of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

Track attrition, retention and success rates of students with carer responsibilities

- Add ‘students with carer responsibilities’ as an equity group and evaluate their performance.
- Lobby the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) to add ‘students with carer responsibilities’ as an equity group.

Lobby the Federal Government

- In line with the recommendations of the Graduate Student Association of the University of Melbourne,²³ the University should lobby the Federal Government to:
 - Remove or reduce the one-year waiting period of accessing maternity leave;
 - Establish paternity leave for primary carers as a standard entitlement; and,
 - Create a leave category for caring responsibilities.

²² See the “Terms of Reference” for the Australian National University’s Family Friendly Committee: <https://www.anu.edu.au/files/committee/Family%20Friendly%20Committee%20TOR%20%28Draft%29.pdf>

²³ Graduate Student Association (University of Melbourne), *Parents on campus: A research report from the Graduate Student Association of the University of Melbourne* (Melbourne: GSA, 2020), 26.

Recommendations for the Monash Graduate Association (MGA)

Ensure representation of parents and carers

- Consider adding a Parent or Carer Officer to the Monash Graduate Association Executive Committee to ensure that parents and carers have consistent representation within the leadership of the MGA.
- Encourage the establishment of an advisory committee of graduate student parents to inform the MGA of the changing needs of this cohort at the university.

Events for parents

- Introduce a series of educational seminars and workshops for graduate student parents.