

***Report 02: Covid-19 worries,  
parent/carer stress and support  
needs, by child special educational  
needs and parent/carer work status***

***Results from the first 5000 participants***

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# The Co-SPACE Study

## Background

COVID-19 has caused major disruptions to families' lives, through social distancing, school closures and lock-down. This is also a rapidly changing situation where different pressures will arise for children, young people and their families over time. While research has provided valuable information about how parents can support their children's mental health in general, we know little about what is most effective in the current, changing context.

The Co-SPACE project is tracking the mental health of school-aged children and young people aged 4-16 years throughout the COVID-19 crisis. An online survey is sent out and completed on a monthly basis by parents/carers and young people (if aged 11-16 years) throughout the pandemic. The study has full ethical and data protection approval (ethical approval ref: R69060) and is fully GDPR compliant.

The findings will help identify what protects children and young people from deteriorating mental health over time, and at particular stress points. Findings will be shared directly with health and education services to inform the development and provision of effective support for children and families.

## Recruitment & Sample

The study sample has been recruited through a variety of means, including social media, distribution through partner organisations, networks and charities, the media and targeted online advertising. The self-selecting nature of recruitment means that *this will not be a nationally representative sample*. In the present report, 92% of all participants who completed the questionnaire were female, presumably mothers. Furthermore, the majority of the sample was employed, either part-time (41.8%) or full-time (25.5%), and had an average income of >30,000 (75%).

For the long-term, we are aiming to have good representation across a wide range of socio-demographic and health factors (e.g., income, ethnicity, pre-existing mental/physical health difficulties) to investigate the experiences for different groups that may be particularly vulnerable during and after the pandemic.

**We are keen to recruit as many families as possible to the study. Parents/carers can sign up and take part at any point: <https://cospaceoxford.com/survey>**

## Further information

For further information or to request specific analyses, please contact the research team at [co-space@psy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:co-space@psy.ox.ac.uk)

# Focus of this report

This report provides cross-sectional data from the approximately 5,000 parents/carers who have taken part, and completed the survey between 30/03/20 and 29/04/20. We aimed to report some preliminary findings from the first 5,000 participants who completed the survey<sup>1</sup> and this was reached on 29/04/2020 by when 5,028 parents/carers had taken part.

In this report, we focus on the following outcomes:

1. Parent/carer reported child worries related to Covid-19
2. Parent/carer sources of stress
3. Support and disruptions
4. Parent/carer need for support
5. Parent/carer preference for the medium of delivery of support

For questions related to sources of stress and support, we have also looked at responses for:

- a. Parents/carers whose child has special educational needs
- b. Parents/carers by different, current working status

## Key findings

- Among our sample, nearly half the parents/carers thought that their child was concerned about family and friends catching the virus.
- Around a third of parents/carers reported that their child was worried about missing school.
- Work is the most frequent source of stress for parents, followed by their child's emotional wellbeing.
- Parents of children with special educational needs and neurodevelopmental disorders (SEN/ND) report higher levels of stress across all areas.
- While child behaviour is rarely a stressor for parents of non-SEN/ND children, it was frequently a stressor for parents of children with SEN/ND.
- Parents working outside the home report particular stress around work, followed by their child's wellbeing and education.
- 80% of those who were previously receiving support from services have had this stopped or postponed during the pandemic.
- Parents particularly want support around their child's emotional wellbeing, education and coming out of social isolation.

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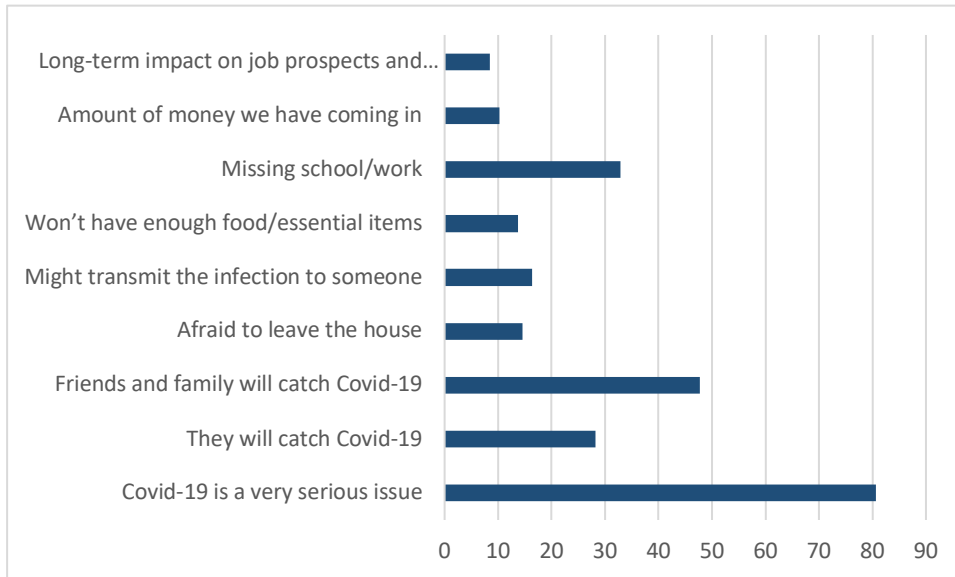
<sup>1</sup> 'Completion' of the survey is based on participants having completed items up to and including the pre-defined main outcome measure (the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire – parent reporting on child).

- **Parents of children with SEN/ND would also like support around managing their child's behaviour.**
- **Parents/carers would value online written materials and videos, while parents with children with SEN/ND would also like online support from professionals.**

# Findings

## 1. Child worries related to Covid-19

Figure 1. Parents/carers' reports of their children's worries related to Covid-19

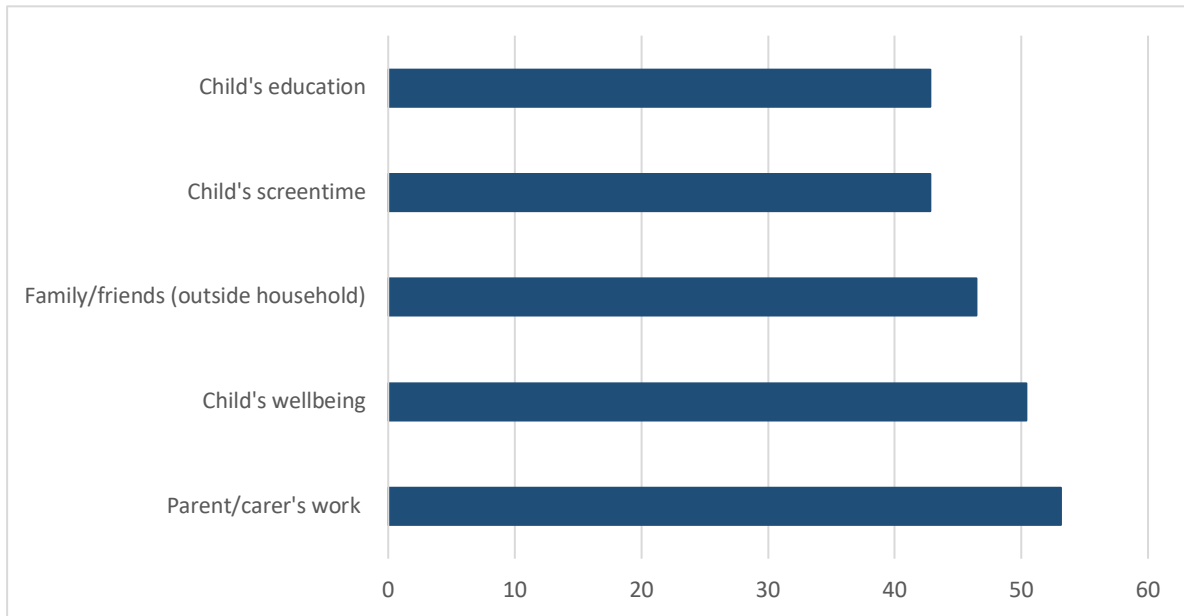


80.6% of parents reported that their child thought that Covid-19 was a very serious issue. Nearly half of the parents (47.7%) thought that their child was concerned about family and friends catching the virus, around a third (32.9%) thought that their child was worried about missing school/work and 28.2% believed their child was worried about catching the virus themselves. 16.4% of parents thought that their child was worried that they might transmit the infection to someone else, 14.6% thought that their child was afraid to leave the house, 13.7% that their child was worried that they wouldn't have enough food or other essential items, 10.3% about the amount of money coming in, and 8.5% about the long-term impact on job prospects and the economy.

## 2. Parent/carer sources of stress

Participants were asked about how stressed they had felt over the past week regarding a number of potential stressors, from 'not at all', 'a little', 'quite a lot' to 'a great deal'. Figures in this section present the five most highly rated stressors for each group and show the percentage of parents/carers who indicated that the stressor had caused them significant stress (i.e., they had responded 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal').

**Figure 2. Parents/carers' main sources of stress**

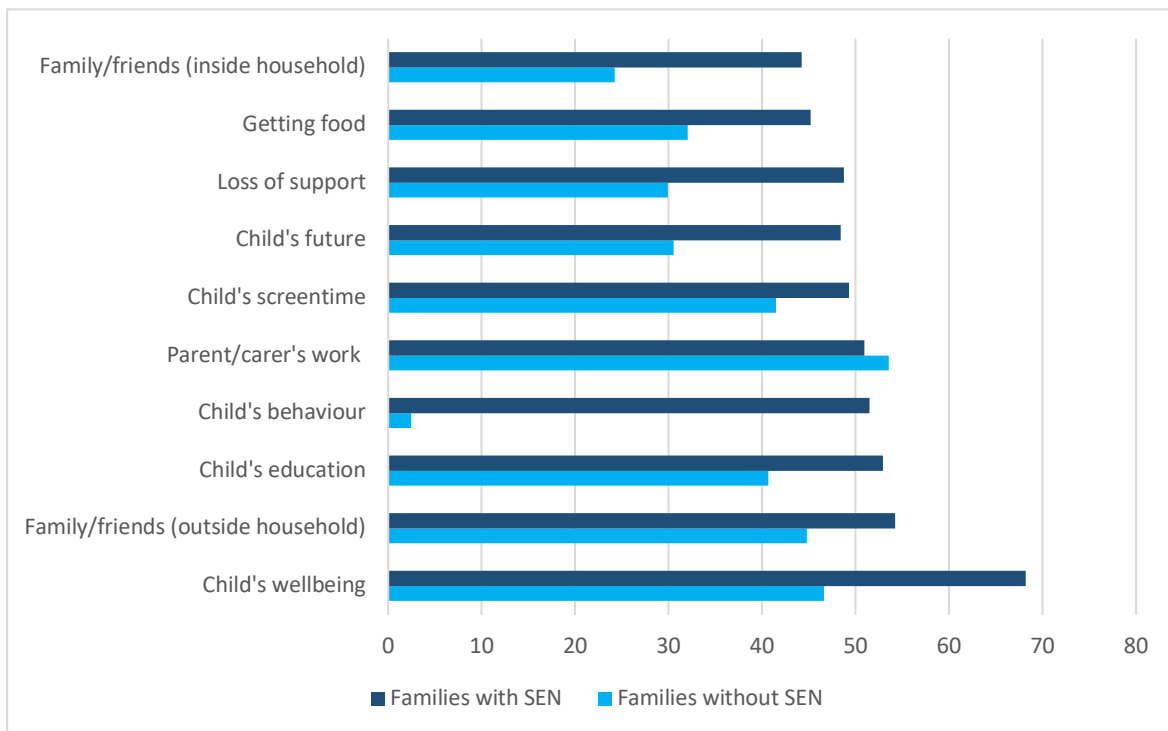


Within the total sample, work was the main stressor (53.1%) for parents, followed by their child's wellbeing (50.4%), friends and family outside the home (46.4%), the child's education (42.8%) and screen-time (42.8%).

### **(a) Child special educational needs**

Within the sample, 871 (17.3%) of the parents/carers reported on a child with special educational needs or a neurodevelopmental disorder (i.e., autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) (SEN/ND).

**Figure 3. Main sources of stress for parents/carers with and without a child with SEN/ND**

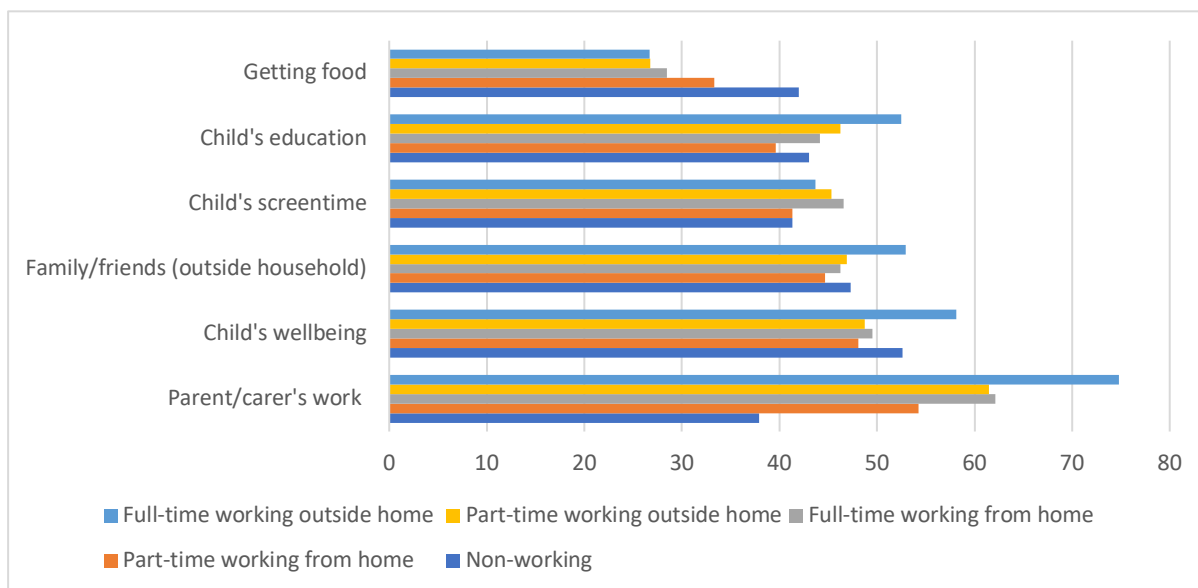


Parents of a child with SEN/ND reported feeling more stressed about all potential stressors, with the exception of work, compared to those without a child with SEN/ND. For parents of a child with SEN/ND, over two thirds (68.2%) rated their child’s wellbeing as being the most significant stressor, followed by friends and family outside the home (54.2%), their child’s education (52.9%), their child’s behaviour (51.5%) and then work (50.9%).

**(b) Parent/carer working status**

Over the previous week, 1,593 (33.0%) of participants had not worked, 1,619 (33.5%) had worked part-time at home and 1,004 (20.8%) had worked full-time at home, 392 (8.1%) had worked part-time outside the home and 224 (4.7%) had worked full-time outside the home.

**Figure 4. Main sources of stress for parents/carers by work status over the past week**



The main sources of stress were in the same rank order for parents/carers working full-time and part-time *outside* the home, with the highest levels of stress among those working full-time outside the home rather than part-time. Specifically, the main stressors for those working outside the home *full-time* were work (74.7%), their child’s wellbeing (58.1%), family and friends outside the household (52.9%), their child’s education (52.5%) and their child’s screen-time (43.7%). The main stressors for those working outside the home *part-time* were work (61.5%), their child’s wellbeing (48.7%), family and friends outside the household (46.9%), their child’s education (46.3%) and their child’s screen-time (45.4%).

For those working *in* the home, work and their child’s well-being were the top two stressors but the third stressor for parents working full-time was their child’s screen-time, whereas for parents working part-time it was family and friends outside the household. Specifically, the main stressors for those working in the home full-time were work (62.1%), their child’s wellbeing (49.6%), their child’s screen-time (46.6%), family and friends outside the household (46.3%) and their child’s education (44.2%). For those working in the home part-time, they were work (54.2%), their child’s wellbeing (48.1%), family and friends outside the household (44.7%), their child’s screen-time (41.3%) and their child’s education (39.6%).

The main sources of stress for parents/carers who were *not working* over the past week were their child’s wellbeing (52.6%), family and friends outside the household (47.3%), child’s education (43.0%), getting food (42.0%) and their child’s screen-time (41.3%).

### 3. Current support

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 18.5% of parents reported that their child was receiving support (for mental health, emotional or behavioural difficulties, support from social



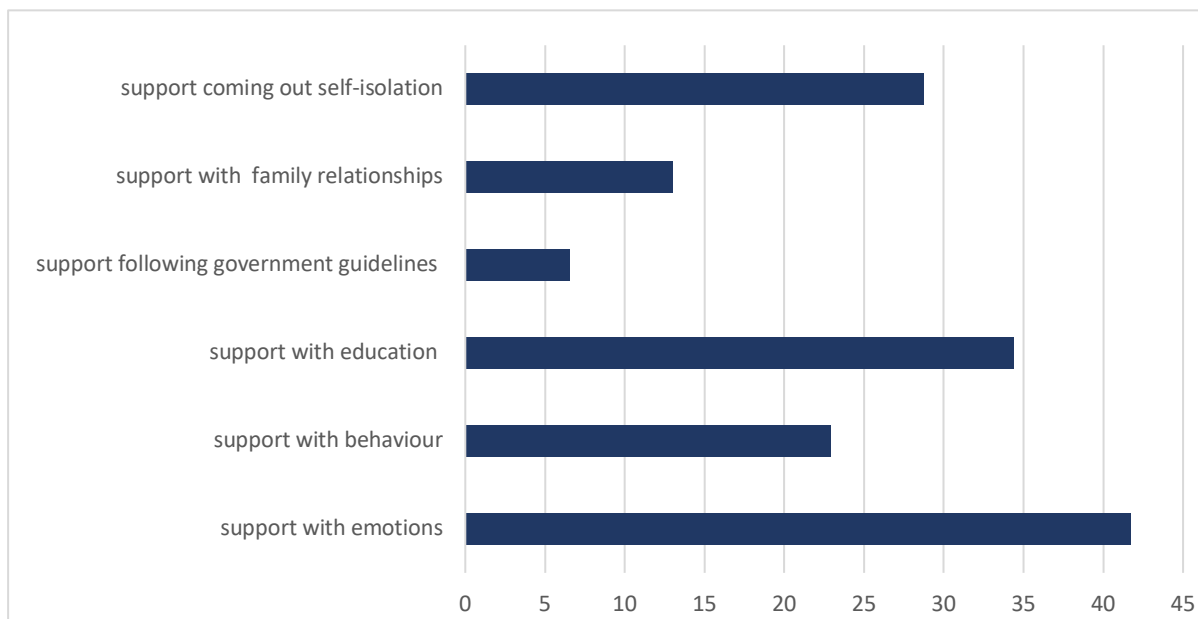
services or educational support). Of parents with a child with SEN/ND, 69.7% of children were receiving support.

For the vast majority, this support had been stopped or postponed due to the pandemic; 80.2% of those in the whole sample and 85.5% of those with SEN/ND who had previously been receiving support from services were no longer receiving this support.

## 4. Parent/carer need for support

Participants were asked if they felt they would benefit from advice, support or help in relation to their child’s response to Covid-19 and/or isolation. Possible responses were ‘not at all’, ‘yes – a bit’, ‘yes – a lot’ and ‘yes completely’. Overall, 71.8% of parents/carers felt they would benefit from advice, support or help (i.e., responded ‘yes’ at bit, a lot or completely).

*Figure 5. Parents/carers’ reported need for support around specific areas*

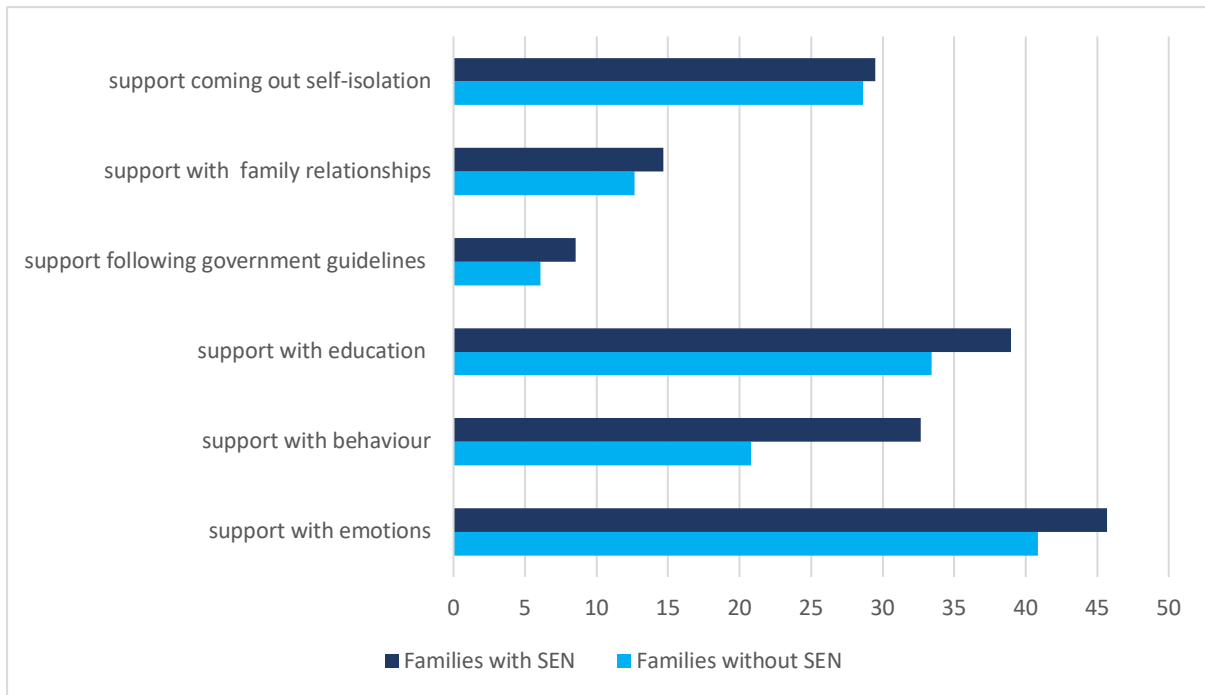


Parents/carers were asked what areas they would like help with. 41.7% felt they would benefit from support around managing their child(ren)’s emotions, 34.4% from support around managing their child(ren)’s educational demands, 28.8% from support around their child(ren) coming out of self-isolation, 22.9% from support around managing their child(ren)’s behaviour, 13.0% from support around managing family relationships and 6.5% from support around ensuring that their child followed government guidelines (e.g., handwashing, staying at home).

## (a) Child special educational needs

Over ¾ (76.6%) of parents/carers of children with SEN/ND felt they would benefit from support.

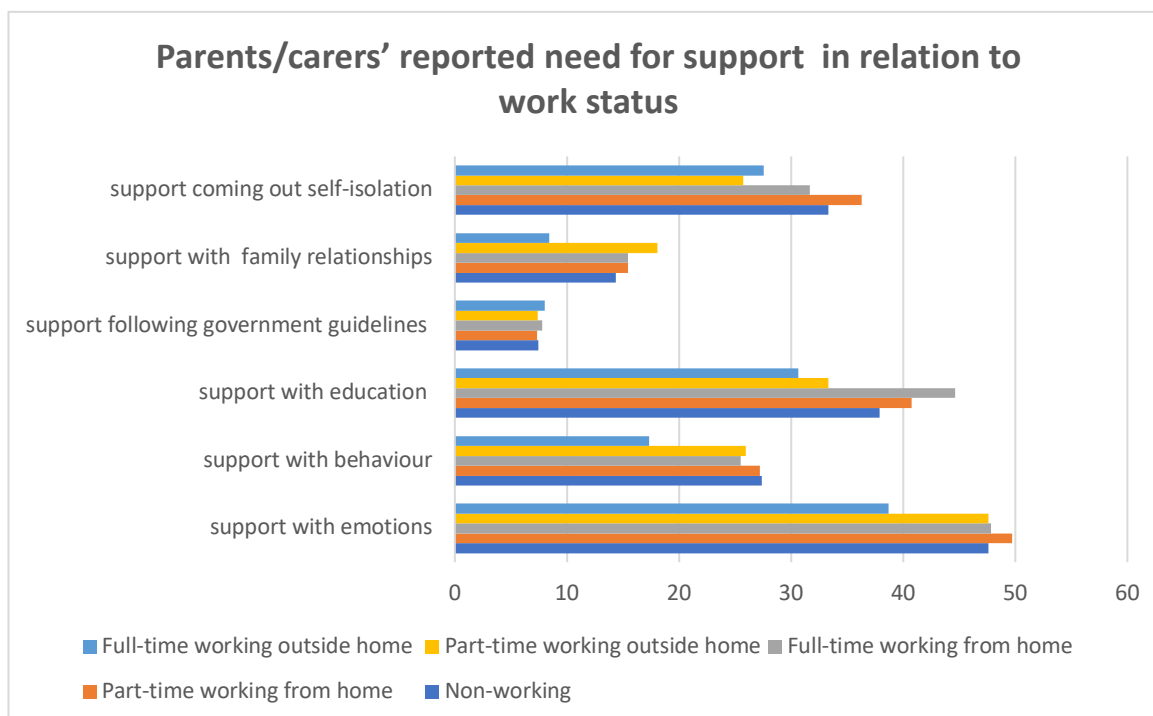
**Figure 6. Need for support around specific areas for parents/carers reporting on a child with SEN/ND**



Of the parents/carers of children with SEN/ND, 45.7% felt they would benefit from support around managing their child(ren)'s emotions, 39.0% from support around managing their child(ren)'s educational demands, 32.7% from support around managing their child(ren)'s behaviour, 29.5% from support around their child(ren) coming out of self-isolation, 14.7% from support around managing family relationships and 8.6% from support around ensuring that their child followed government guidelines (e.g., handwashing, staying at home).

## (b) Parent/carer working status

Figure 7. Need for support around specific areas for parents/carers by work status over the past week

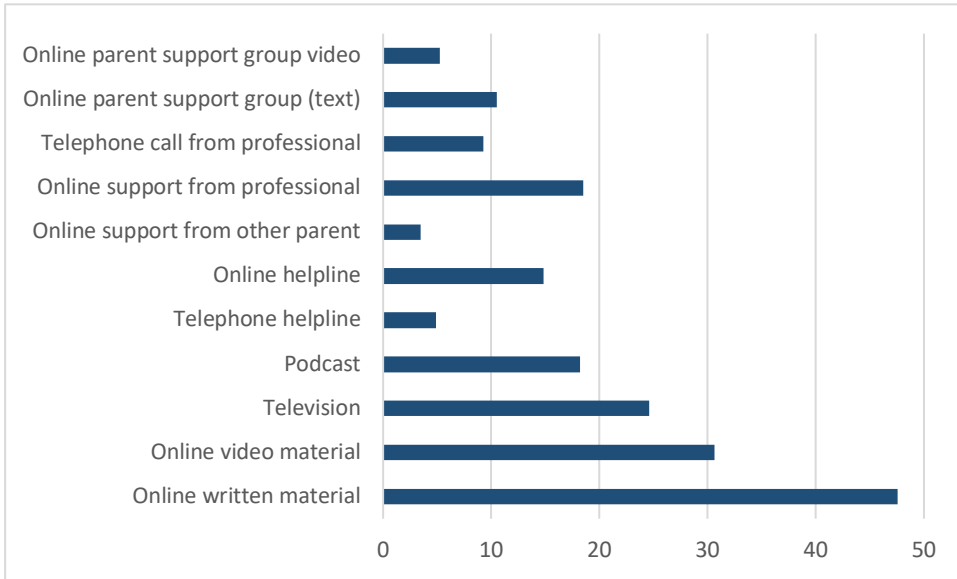


All groups felt that the area that wanted most support/advice around was managing their child's emotions, followed by support around managing their child(ren)'s education, then support around coming out of self-isolation, support around managing their child(ren)'s behaviour, support around managing family relationships and then support around ensuring that their child(ren) followed government guidelines. The parents/carers working full-time outside the home reported the lowest need for support in 4 of the 6 areas.

## 5. Parent/carer preference for delivery of support

If participants indicated they would benefit from advice, support or help in relation to their child's response to Covid-19 and/or isolation, they were then asked how they would like to receive this help. Options provided were: online written materials, online videos, television programmes, podcasts, telephone helpline, online helpline, personalised online support from another parent, personalised online support from a professional, personalised telephone call from a professional, online parent support group (text) or online parent support group (video).

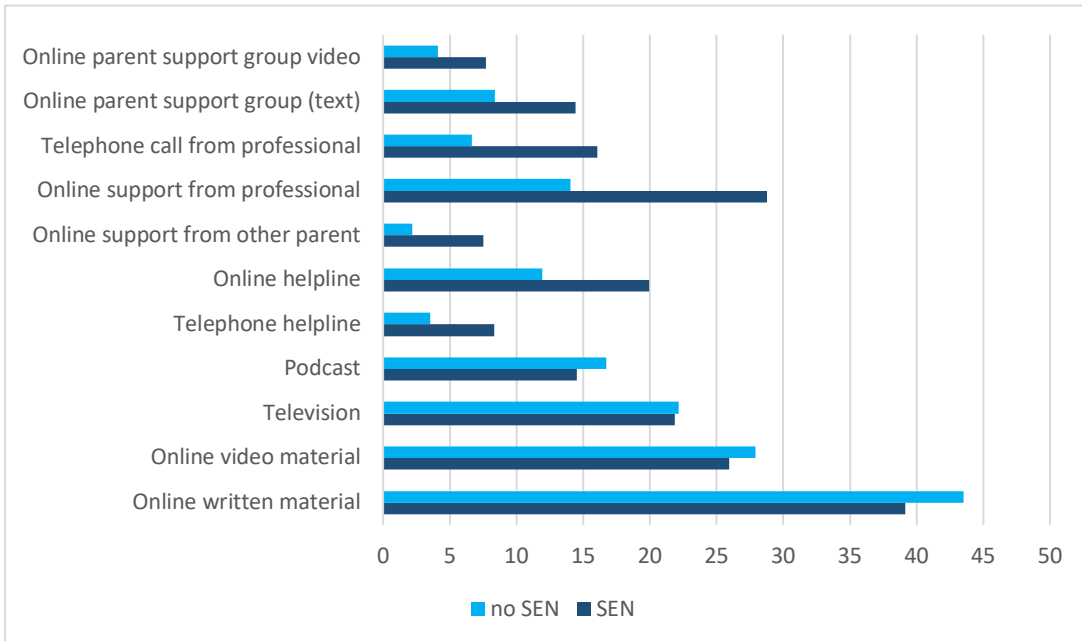
**Figure 8. Parents/carers' preference for how support should be delivered**



The most popular ways to receive this advice/support were through online written materials (47.5%), online videos (30.7%), TV programmes (24.6%), personalised online support from a professional (18.5%) and podcasts (18.5%).

**(a) Child special educational needs**

**Figure 9. Preferences for how support should be delivered for parents/carers reporting on a child with SEN/ND**

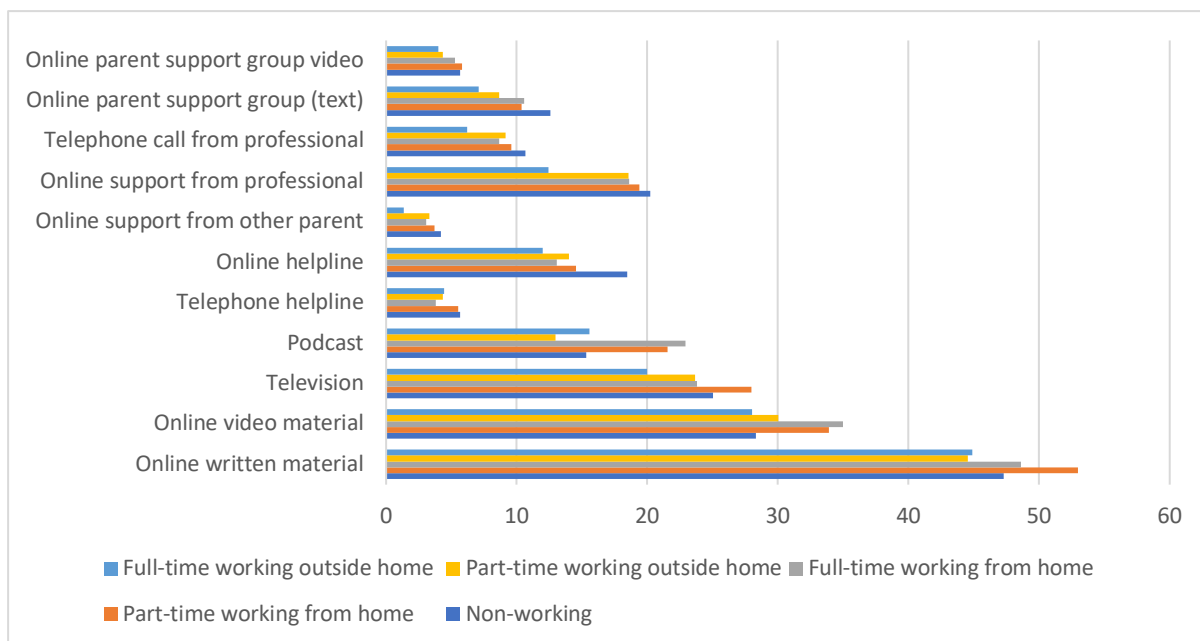


For parents/carers of a child with SEN/ND, the most popular ways to receive this advice/support were through online written materials (39.2%), personalised online

support from a professional (28.8%), online videos (25.9%), TV programmes (21.9%), and podcasts (19.9%).

### (b) Parent/carer working status

Figure 10. Preferences for how support should be delivered for parents/carers by work status over the past week



The pattern of findings by parent/carer working status did not differ from the pattern in the overall sample in terms of the top three preferred ways of receiving support (online written materials, online videos and then TV programmes). For parents/carers not working or working part-time outside the home, this was then followed by personalised online support from a professional and then podcasts, whereas for parents working part-time or full-time in the home or working full-time outside the home, it was podcasts followed by personalised online support from a professional.

# Appendix A

## Participants' demographics

|                                |                               | Number of observations | %    |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|------|
| <i>Parent/carer</i>            | Parents                       | 4,904                  | 97.6 |
|                                | Carers                        | 122                    | 2.8  |
| <i>Gender</i>                  | Female                        | 4,629                  | 92.1 |
|                                | Male                          | 377                    | 7.5  |
|                                | Other                         | 20                     | 0.4  |
| <i>Work</i>                    | Working full time             | 1,234                  | 25.5 |
|                                | Working part-time             | 2,020                  | 41.8 |
|                                | Not working                   | 1,583                  | 32.7 |
| <i>Annual household income</i> | < £30,000                     | 885                    | 17.6 |
|                                | > £30,000                     | 3,785                  | 75.3 |
|                                | Prefer not to say             | 356                    | 7.1  |
| <i>Child age</i>               | Child (aged 4-10 years)       | 3,169                  | 63   |
|                                | Adolescent (aged 11-16 years) | 1,857                  | 37   |
| <i>Child gender</i>            | Female                        | 2,415                  | 48.1 |
|                                | Male                          | 2,578                  | 51.3 |
|                                | Other                         | 33                     | 0.7  |