

**PACT Covid-19 Audit Report**  
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23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020

**Abstract**

The 2020 lockdown in the UK, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, has highlighted vulnerabilities amongst populations living in social and financial deprivation. Women living in Southwark who would ordinarily be accessing support through the community organisation PACT (Parents and Communities Together) were interviewed over the phone. This report looks at the problems these women discussed, by way of (1) highlighting the biggest challenges experienced during lockdown, and (2) examining their main barriers to engagement in services they require. The top three biggest challenges raised were concerns over children, basic needs not being met and the management of Covid-19. Isolation and the consequences of staying indoors were also raised. Barriers to engagement with services included language barriers, confidence with using the internet and access to devices. Mothers preferred ways to stay in contact varied between individuals, but text and whatsapp appealed most due to their functional familiarity and efficiency, with phone calls and Zoom also appealing due to the interpersonal connection they give women.

**Background**

PACT is an intervention for mothers with young children, offering social support and health education, in an area of high deprivation. The lockdown imposed as a result of COVID-19 started on March 2020 dramatically affected this intervention. The social intervention was transformed to one that PACT offered remotely.

**Aims of the audit**

To examine the effects of the lockdown on mothers with regard to firstly, what they saw as their biggest challenges and secondly, what they saw as the biggest difficulties in communication and engagement, given the change to a remote intervention.

**Methodology:**

*Sample*

The sample included 100 mothers who were interviewed after having been identified as more vulnerable. Data was collected between April and August 2020 by phone as part of a wider community audit. They were identified according to the below criteria:

- domestic violence
- mental health and those who heavily rely on PACT for support
- no recourse to public funds, low or no income
- temporary housing, homelessness and/or overcrowding
- parents the PACT team felt/knew might be isolated socially/digitally
- parents of children with special/additional needs

*Data analysis*

The following methods were used for data analysis.

**I. Biggest challenges experienced during lockdown**

Thematic analysis was used here to pull out the main themes discussed as challenges experienced by mothers during lockdown.

## II. Barriers to engagement

There were two aspects: one was about access to the internet and the other was to do with preferred ways of being contacted.

Descriptives were run for this quantitative data to highlight the main engagement issues across the total sample. Base numbers are given at each figure, and where there is missing data (i.e. it is 'full sample' but  $n < 100$ ), this is due to incomplete answers given. Where significant differences are mentioned, chi-squared tests were run to compare subgroups.

Data on preferred ways of being contacted were also descriptively analysed.

### Results

#### I. Biggest challenges experienced during lockdown

This research is based on the self-reported biggest challenges of 100 of the most vulnerable of PACT's clients.

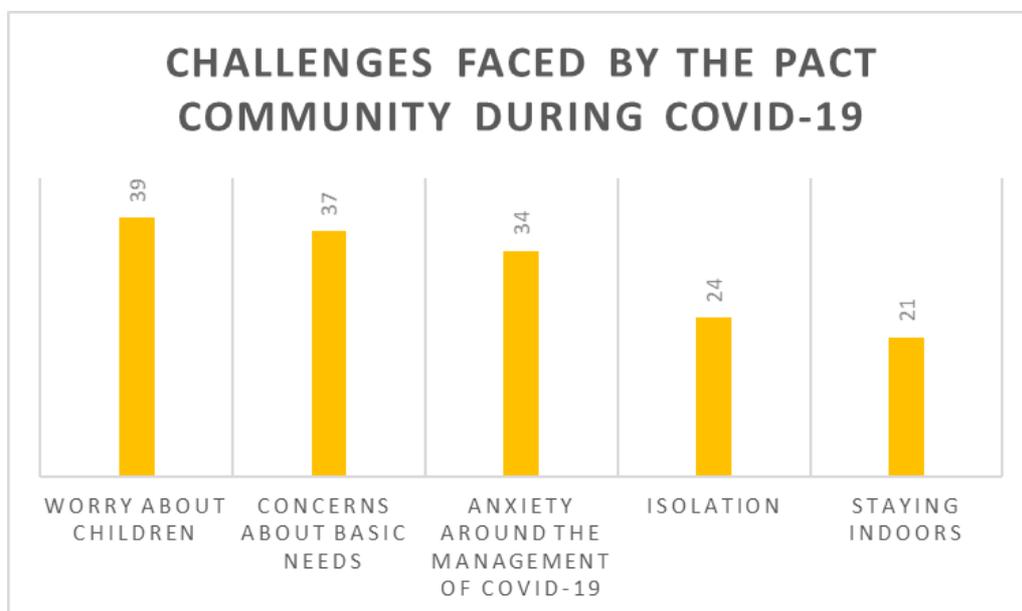


Figure 1. The main challenges faced by the PACT community during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The biggest challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying national “lockdown” reported by members of the PACT community were worries about their children (39 out of 100 participants reported this, that is 39%). The second biggest challenge reported were worries about basic needs not being met, such as food, financial problems, rent and housing as well as immigration status-related issues caused by the COVID-19 crisis (37% of members reported this). Thirdly, 34% of PACT members (34 members) voiced anxiety around them and their families contracting COVID-19 and 24% said their biggest challenge was the isolation they felt from their friends, communities, PACT groups and family members outside of their household during the “lockdown”. Finally, 21% of PACT members (so 21 members) interviewed reported struggling with staying indoors and not being able to go outside to enjoy parks and other elements of outside space other than for essential shopping and exercise. After outlining each theme, we have provided example quotes from PACT members to illustrate them.

##### I.i. Worries about children

Thirty nine out of 100 participants voiced they felt worried about their children. This theme was split up into 3 codes or categories: worries about occupying or entertaining the children, worries about schoolwork and

worries about children contracting COVID-19. Note that when themes are split into subcategories some statements will have been coded twice, hence there were 39 people where the theme of “Worries about children” came up, and when split up into subcategories, there were 63 instances of worries being mentioned within the statements of those 39 people.

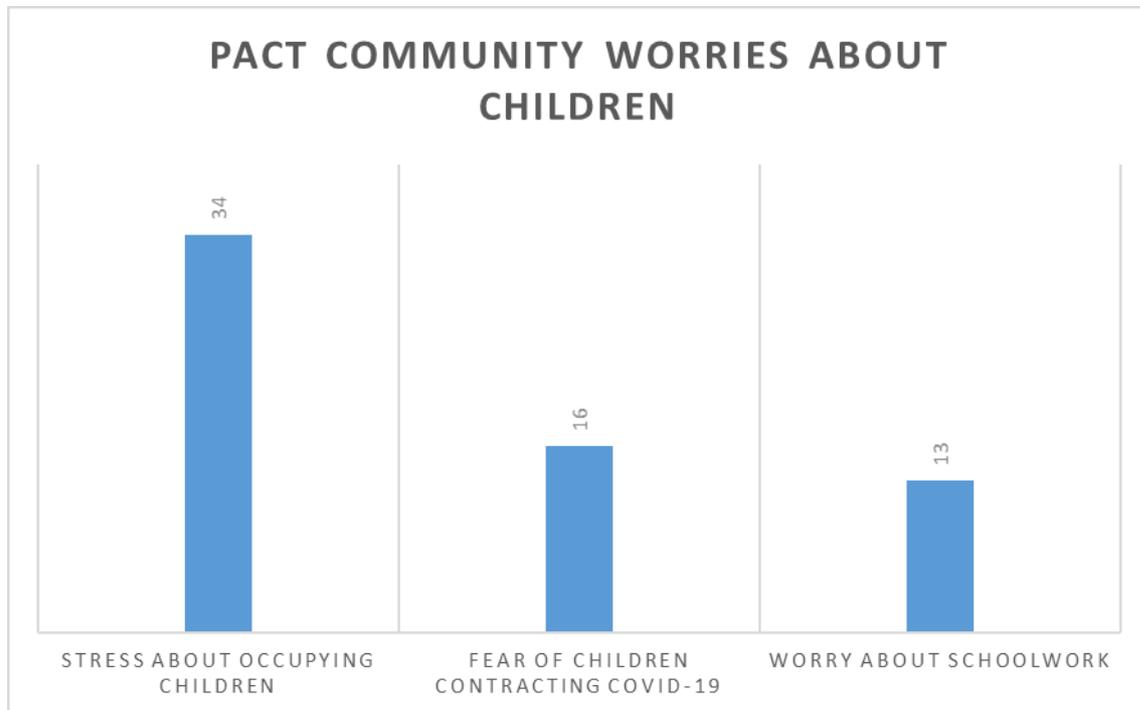


Figure 2. The particular worries mothers face during the Covid-19 pandemic around their children.

Worry about how to occupy their children was the biggest concern within this theme for the participants. 34 participants, that is 87% of people who indicated worry about their children were stressed about entertaining and occupying their children within the limited range of activities and spaces available during lockdown. Some quotes to illustrate this point were:

*“The other challenge is boredom, the kids are bored and I cannot take them outside as we live in a compound and if I take them out they will not be safe as they will be coming in contact with the other children.” (MumSpace)*

*“My biggest challenge has been keeping my children busy. We have isolated ourselves and have only gone outside once since the lockdown.” (MumSpace)*

Fear of the children contracting COVID-19 was also widespread among participants. 16 out of 39 participants who indicated worries about children voiced they were specifically worried that their children would contract COVID-19, that is 41%. Examples include:

*“Living in a hostel and sharing bathroom and kitchen with other families. This has been really challenging for me as I have no control in keeping my children safe.” (MumSpace)*

*“I am aware that we can go out but I don’t take them out as I am afraid, they will catch the virus” (MumSpace)*

The third most common code in the theme of worry about children was the worry about schoolwork. 13 out of 39 participants (33.3%) who voiced worries about children said they were worried about staying on top of their children’s schoolwork and being able to support their children to study while schools are closed. Some examples were:

*“Home schooling is difficult as we couldn’t get the work up on the tablet, we had to pick it up fortnightly, but the work we get offline is not the same as the work online, and it does not get marked or awarded house points.” (MumSpace)*

*“Struggles with homeschooling, no printer to print homework homework, she only has one tablet and nothing else and needs to travel from Bromley to Peckham to pick up the homework packs” (MumSpace)*

*“In terms of numeracy she can absolutely help him with the homework but everything related to language is becoming a struggle and she is afraid her son won’t be ready to go back to school with the proper level.” (Espacio Mama)*

*“Oldest child has no clothes. It is difficult for her to help her son with his school work, she struggles helping him. She finds this very hard, and it upsets her that she does not have the ability to help him properly and support his education enough” (MumSpace)*

**I.ii. Concerns about basic needs being met, such as food, rent problems:**

Out of 100 participants, 37 participants voiced significant worries about basic needs not being met, such as being able to afford food, rent, problems with their debt or benefits, job loss, immigration status-related worries and housing issues that were due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

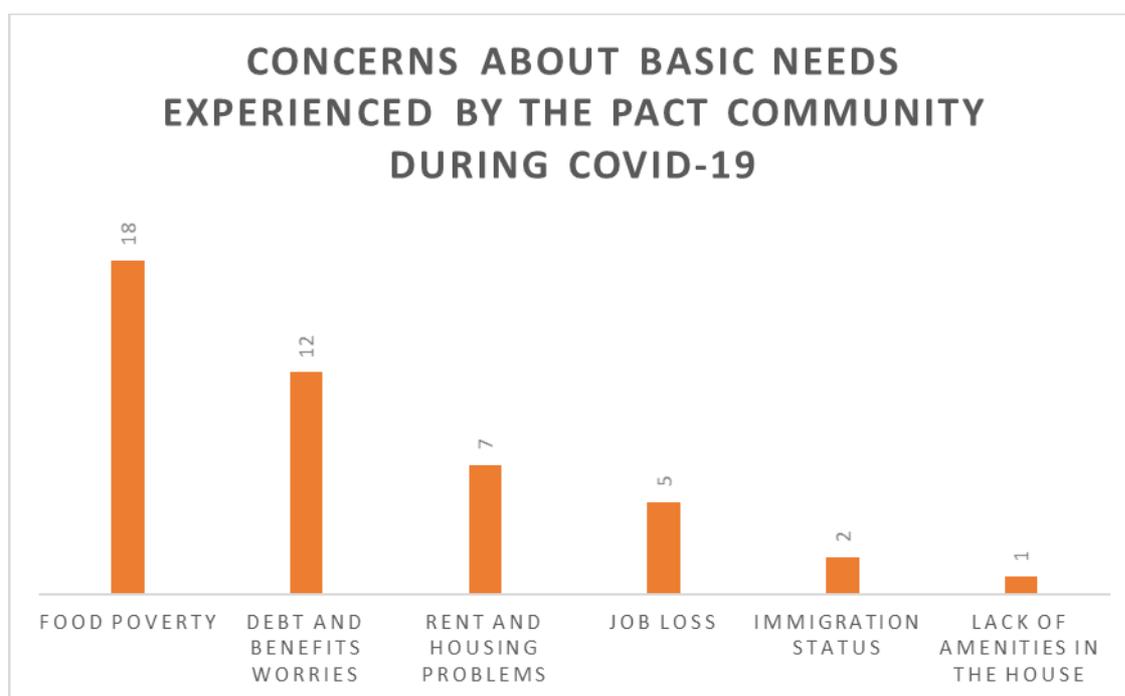


Figure 3. The basic needs not being met by mothers face during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Food poverty came up 18 times (49%), some example quotes include:

*“My biggest challenge has been feeding the kids. As they have been staying at home, they have been eating more” (MumSpace)*

*“No recourse to any funds, she is finding this all very challenging. She has not got enough food, she has to go to food banks and she goes to her daughter’s school to get food.” (MumSpace)*

Rent and housing problems were voiced 7 times (18% of the 37 participants who voiced worries around basic needs not being met). Problems in this area were wide-ranging, from insecure or short-term accommodation situations to problems being able to afford the rent. Examples include:

*“Paying rent is difficult now” (Espacio Mama)*

*“Housing issues – everything has stopped although she can start to bid on a house once this is over. They were moved out of London, so she had to give up her job so she is unemployed.” (MumSpace)*

*“Mould problems in the house have been getting worse since they have all been at home and they are breathing it in and need more allergy medication. Mould is getting everywhere even in wardrobes and under the sofa etc.” (MumSpace)*

*“My biggest challenges are accommodation and my immigration status. I am currently staying with a family who attend the same church I go to. As I am not working I cannot afford to rent my own place.” (MumSpace)*

Problems with debt and benefits and general financial issues were voiced 12 times by the members who voiced worries about basic needs (32%). Examples were:

*“She only receives a small amount of money from NRPF and it doesn’t stretch to the end of the month, feels like things are more expensive now.” (MumSpace)*

*“Not enough money for everything, we spend more than we have and that’s with spending more on electricity and more shopping and no help.” (MumSpace)*

Immigration status worries specifically linked to or caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were mentioned twice (5%). An example quote was:

*“I am worried about my immigration status that has been on hold since the COVID-19 crisis.” (MumSpace)*

Five of the members who voiced worries around basic needs mentioned that they lost a job during the COVID-19 pandemic (13%). An example was:

*“I used to earn my income by doing decorations for birthday parties but that has stopped due to the current pandemic. I applied for benefits but I have been refused.” (MumSpace)*

One PACT member expressed a lack of amenities in her house as being a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic:

*“No washing machine and handwashing with a little one.” (MumSpace)*

### **I.iii. Anxieties around the management of COVID-19**

34% of participants (34 participants) mentioned fears around contracting COVID-19 and that those were a significant challenge to them. There were four main topics within this theme, as detailed below:

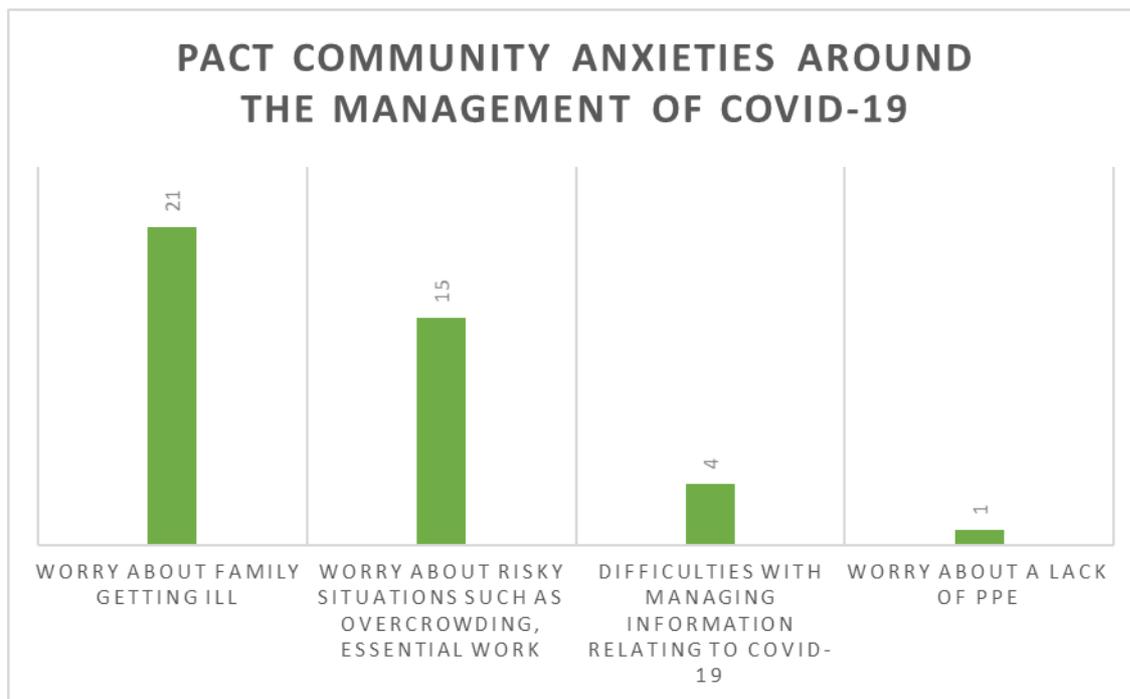


Figure 4. The particular worries mothers face around the management of the Covid-19 pandemic.

21 members (84%) voiced a fear of them or their children contracting COVID-19 and falling ill. Examples included:

*"Fear of catching the virus has been our biggest challenge as a family." (MumSpace)*

*"I haven't been out other than once because I am fearful that I might get it and then what would happen to my children?" (MumSpace)*

*"She is worried and scared about getting out because her daughter might touch the floor or other surfaces." (Espacio Mama)*

*"She decided to take her 3-year old out of nursery. The nursery had a lot of Italian parents and she didn't know if they had been travelling. She had an infection and it was difficult to get to hospital as she couldn't go in with her newborn and she was still breastfeeding. Worried if she got sick she would not be able to breastfeed."(MumSpace)*

*"Son is very vulnerable and has to isolate, has had a recent allergic reaction and went to the hospital. She was very stressed about being in the hospital with him and she is alone looking after him and this can be a huge strain." (MumSpace)*

15 PACT members (44%) gave examples of overcrowded living conditions, working in roles that put them at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or being more vulnerable for any medical reasons (eg. asthma, pregnancy), such as:

*"I am afraid to go out and catch the virus, as I have medical conditions that make me more vulnerable." (MumSpace)*

*"I am scared of catching the virus as I am pregnant." (MumSpace)*

*"She stays in one room with her two children, they share one bed and they share a kitchen. She feels it is overcrowded and finds it difficult with her children" (MumSpace)*

*“Living in a hostel and sharing bathroom and kitchen with other families. This has been really challenging for me as I have no control in keeping my children safe.” (MumSpace).*

*“Her flat is too small, her family are all in the same room. There are conflicts, arguments, clashes of personalities and ideas.” (Espacio Mama)*

Four members (16%) expressed trouble understanding and managing the information they were receiving from multiple sources regarding COVID-19. Examples were:

*“Being able to manage the amount of information relating to COVID-19 [is her biggest challenge] as it makes her feel emotionally unstable.” (Espacio Mama)*

One member (4%) explained they were fearful of contracting COVID-19 specifically due to a lack of Personal Protective Equipment:

*“No protection, equipment, masks or gloves so scared to even go shopping. Struggling to get stuff from the shops as can’t get things from nearby shops and feels unsafe to be out long because of her little daughter.” (MumSpace)*

#### **I.iv. Isolation**

24 out of 100 participants (24%) said that isolation caused by the “lockdown” was one of their biggest challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the time these feelings of isolation and loneliness were caused by not being able to see friends and family or attend support groups such as PACT. Examples quotes of this were:

*“[I was] used to going to playgroups, swimming and other things, so it’s been very hard isolating with a 2-year old when you can’t go out and socialize as normal with friends and family, going from seeing them weekly to not at all.” (MumSpace)*

*“She doesn’t have the connections and interactions that make her feel safe” (MumSpace)*

*“Isolated, overwhelmed, sad because she stopped coming to Espacio Mama because of the crisis.” (Espacio Mama)*

*“For the past few weeks her phone hasn’t been working so she has had no internet or any way to stay connected which was really hard.” (MumSpace)*

#### **I.v. Staying Indoors**

Staying Indoors was another challenge that was voiced 21 times (21%) by PACT members. Staying indoors was presented as a different challenge to isolation as staying indoors was linked to feeling stuck inside, members feeling like they have no time to themselves and not being able to enjoy outdoor activities and other challenges posed by being confined to indoor space. Examples of this were:

*“We are being denied the chance to go out and have freedom. It feels like bondage.” (MumSpace)*

*“It affects her to be with her partner, psychological abuse (her partner humiliates her for her English and insults her)”. (Espacio Mama)*

*“Being at home all day, despite being with my family, sometimes it is difficult to manage all responsibilities by myself for my three kids.” (Espacio Mama)*

*“I have been staying indoors and my children have been acting up more as they are also frustrated by staying indoors all the time.” (MumSpace)*

“Being stuck indoors, not being able to be free and do what you like.” (MumSpace)

### Summary

- The biggest challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic so far as reported by the PACT community were:
- Nearly 40% of participants (39/100) stated worries about their children were some of their biggest challenges. These included worries about childcare, schoolwork and their children’s and family’s health.
- Close to 40% of participants (37/100) voiced concerns about their basic needs being met such as issues with food supplies, financial issues, housing problems, employment difficulties and immigration status worries, as well as a lack of amenities in their home and one of their biggest challenges during this time.
- Over 1/3 (34%) of participants shared anxieties around the management of COVID-19 as being one of their biggest challenges. Examples include: worry about their family becoming ill with COVID-19, worries about living in overcrowded conditions, problems managing information they receive about the pandemic and a lack of Personal Protective Equipment to protect themselves.
- Nearly ¼ (24%) of participants reported that isolation caused by the nationwide “lockdown” was one of their biggest challenges. Most of the time this centred around feeling isolated from friends, family or support groups such as PACT.
- Over 1/5 (21%) of participants stated that having to stay indoors was one of their biggest challenges. Examples of this are: difficulties being around their family all the time, not being able to enjoy outdoor activities and a general feeling of being stuck inside against their will.

## II. Barriers to Engagement

### II.i. Language barriers

The first barrier to engagement investigated was language. Only around half of the mothers interviewed stated that they were ‘very confident’ with using English (see *Figure 5*), with one in ten ‘not at all’ confident. As expected, most of the mothers who are ‘very confident’ (96%) were from MumSpace (see *Table 1*), and most of the mothers ‘not at all’ confident in speaking English were from Espacio Mama (80%).

When looking at the proportion of mothers at Espacio Mama who are confident speaking English, those ‘not at all’ confident accounted for a third (see *Figure 6*), with only 4% ‘very confident’ in speaking English.

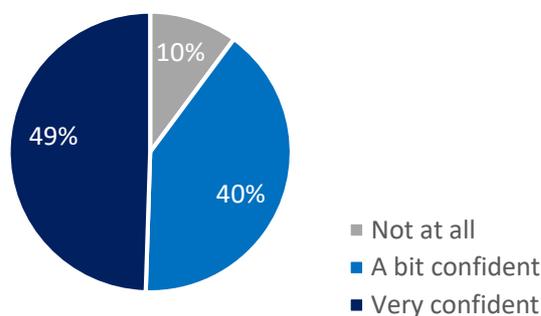


Figure 5. Confidence using English across all mothers interviewed (n=99)

Table 1. Confidence speaking English between the different PACT groups (n=99)

	Very Confident (n=49)	A bit confident (n=40)	Not at all (n=10)
MumSpace	96%	63%	20%
Espacio Mama	4%	38%	80%

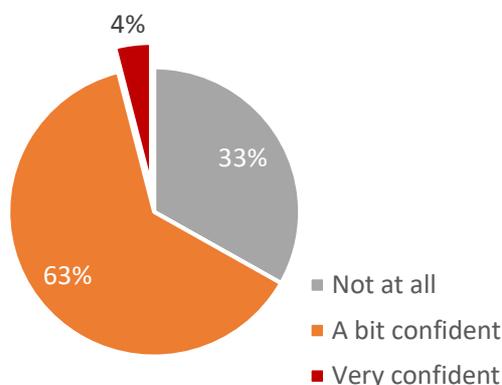


Figure 6. Confidence using English amongst mothers attending EspacioMama (n=24)

**Summary:**

- Only half of all mothers interviewed are 'very confident' using English.
- Mothers attending Espacio Mama are particularly vulnerable, with a third 'not at all' confident using English

**II.ii. Confidence using the internet**

Most mothers are confident when using the internet (60%, see Figure 7), with only 9% not confident. However, a group of further vulnerability was identified when looking at language confidence amongst those less confident using the internet. Significantly more mothers who aren't 'very' confident with English, are also not confident using the internet (see Figure 8).

Further to this, most mothers were not using the internet a lot before lockdown (53%; see Figure 9). The group of mothers were split at this question, with only 3% answering that they only 'sometimes' used the internet a lot before lockdown and 44% answering they did use the internet a lot. There is an indication therefore that there was either a high reliance on the internet, or a complete independence from it amongst mothers.

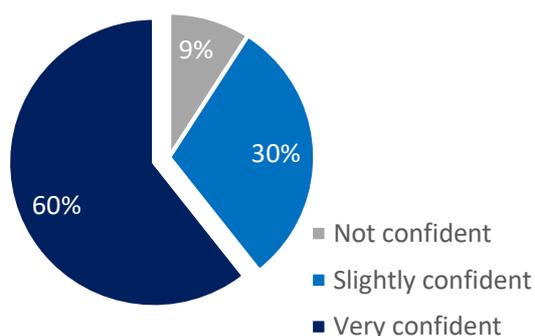


Figure 7. Confidence using the internet amongst all mothers interviewed (n=99)

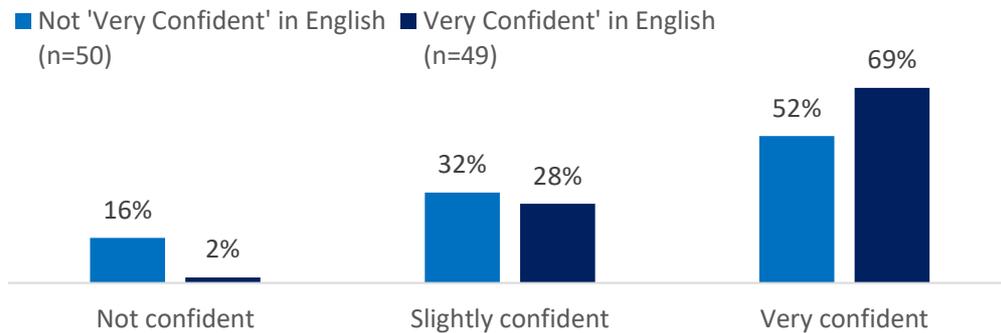


Figure 8. Confidence with using English amongst those at different confidence levels with using the internet.

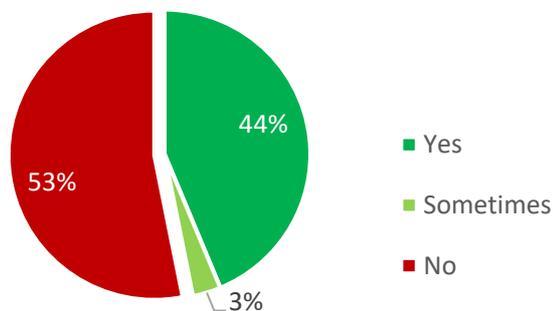


Figure 9. Proportion of all mothers who used the internet 'a lot' before lockdown. (n=96)

**Summary:**

- **Most mothers are confident using the internet**
- **Mothers who aren't 'very confident' with using English are less likely to be confident using the internet, highlighting a particular vulnerability**
- **Most mothers were not using the internet a lot before lockdown**

**II.iii. Access to devices/the internet**

A third of mothers don't have enough devices to meet their needs (34%; see *Figure 10*). The main device used to connect to the internet during lockdown was a mobile phone (96%; see *Figure 11*), with 28% of mothers having this as their only option to access the internet.

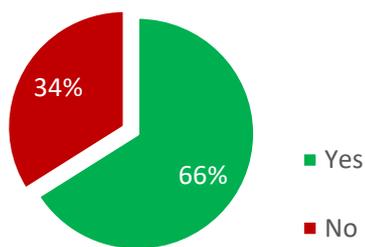


Figure 10. Whether mothers feel they have enough devices at home to meet their needs during lockdown. (n=99)

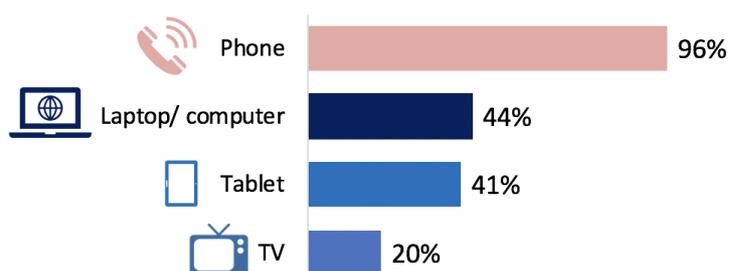


Figure 11. What devices mothers are using to connect to the internet during lockdown. (n=99)

Problems connecting to the internet are mainly faced due to financial issues (94%; see *Figure 12*), with a further 15% of mothers blaming accommodation restraints and 3% not understanding what it is they would need to get to access the internet. Where financial issues were mentioned, a quarter of these were specified as not being able to afford the devices themselves (26%) and 10% specified not being able to afford data plans. 13% specified the pressures not currently being in employment put on their financial situation, for example:

*“I have to choose between food or top-ups. With my baby, I will choose food.” (MumSpace)*

Examples of accommodation restraints preventing mothers from accessing the internet are given below:

*“Because in temporary accommodation so can’t put in cables or add anything to the property” (MumSpace)*

*“Although I have tried to get WIFI, the people who came to install it, informed me it would not be possible to install it in the hostel where we are currently staying.” (MumSpace)*



Figure 12. Reasons specified behind why mothers weren't able to connect to the internet. (n=34)

Amongst mothers who didn't have enough devices, most mentioned having to share devices between many family members at one time (61%). Most of these mothers then highlight this affecting their children's ability to get

schoolwork done (59%), with 24% specifying needing these devices to entertain their children. Examples of these issues can be found below:

*“As we do not have laptop or tablet my daughter has not been able to do the online education from her school.” (MumSpace)*

*“My children have to wait turns to do their learning or do another activities online as we only have one laptop for all of us to share.” (EspacioMama)*

*“Not having computer and enough data has made it impossible for my kids to do their online school work. Although i have increased my data from limited to unlimited i am still unable to connect the tablet to the internet.” (MumSpace)*

*“My son wants to have laptop to do his homework, currently he is managing to do this with iPad that he shares with his baby sister and sometimes she throws the device and wants to have it while he is doing his homework.” (MumSpace)*

*“She cannot do online school work and relies on her daughters school sending work on paper. Her daughter cannot join Zoom calls with school where they go over the lesson and explain the work.” (MumSpace)*

*“Before lockdown, she would go to the shop and buy things to keep her children entertained but now she cannot do this it is all on her phone.” (EspacioMama)*

**Summary:**

- **A third of mothers don't have enough devices to meet their needs, with a quarter only having their mobile phones to access the internet with**
- **Lack of devices or internet are largely explained by financial restraints**
- **Limited devices often means they are being shared between family members, compromising children's education as well as entertainment**

**II.iv. Preferred ways of staying in contact**

When asked how they would prefer to stay in contact with PACT, the top three ways mentioned were through text (44%), WhatsApp (39%) and Zoom (35%; see *Figure 13*). Email was the least popular option, with social media (Facebook and Instagram) the next least popular.

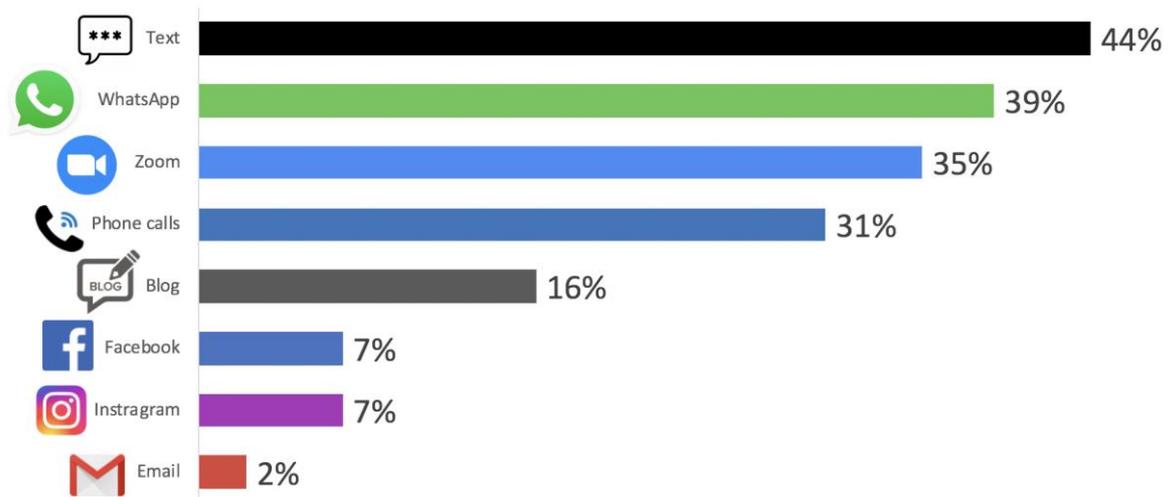


Figure 13. Preferred ways to stay in contact with PACT. (n=97)

Reasons behind the preference for text, WhatsApp, Zoom or phone calls by way of communication range.



Texting was often mentioned as the easiest and most convenient method:

*"Text and WhatsApp as no other ways to contact as no internet access and not comfortable to use the internet" (MumSpace)*

*"Text Messages, I prefer the text messages more as I have a toddler and is quite busy with her the text messages allow me to read and respond when I have time." (MumSpace)*

*"I have more confidence using text messages, phone calls and WhatsApp" (EspacioMama)*



WhatsApp was often mentioned for its simplicity, accessibility and familiarity:

*"WhatsApp because I can use it . it is simple and straight forward. " (EspacioMama)*

*"WhatsApp - knows how to use it better than zoom, easier for calls" (MumSpace)*

*"WhatsApp, because it is better to check the messages and access them, it is more useful" (EspacioMama)*

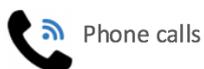


Zoom was described as a key way to feel more interpersonally connected to other families, both for the mothers themselves and their children:

*"Zoom is more for seeing others, letting the children see other children, they haven't left their house since the lockdown" (MumSpace)*

*"I prefer Zoom the most as I am able to join the Tuesday MumSpace on it and it is also lovely to see the other parents and Mena." (MumSpace)*

*"My favorite is the Zoom calls as I join the babies group and it is lovely to see the other mum and babies and my baby also enjoys the activities." (MumSpace)*



Phone calls

Phone calls were valued for the interpersonal connection, directness, and provided an easy option for those less confident with articulating themselves through writing:

*"My second choice would be phone calls as it is lovely to hear their voice" (MumSpace)*

*"My second preference is phone calls as they are more direct contact , like when they call to inform me about my food delivery." (MumSpace)*

*"I have found the phone calls i received from Layla and Mena to be very helpful as they were able to help me get the food my family needs delivered to the right address." (MumSpace)*

*"Phone calls as then able to talk to others not confident in writing responses or reading without help." (MumSpace)*

**Summary:**

- Preferred methods of contact ranged from the more familiar and efficient text and WhatsApp to the more interpersonal Zoom and phone calls
- Social media and email was the least preferred form of communication

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23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2020