# Has COVID-19 had a greater impact on female than male oncologists? Results of the ESMO Women for Oncology (W4O) Survey 

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#### Abstract

Background: European Society for Medical Oncology Women for Oncology (ESMO W4O) research has previously shown under-representation of female oncologists in leadership roles. As early reports suggested disproportionate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, the ESMO W4O Committee initiated a study on the impact of the pandemic on the lives of female and male oncologists. Methods: A questionnaire was sent to ESMO members and put on the ESMO website between 8 June 2020 and 2 July 2020. Questions focused on the working (hospital tasks, laboratory tasks, science) and home (household management, childcare, parent care, personal care) lives of oncologists during and after COVID-19-related lockdowns. Results: Of 649 respondents, 541 completed the questionnaire. Of these, $58 \%$ reported that COVID-19 had affected their professional career, $83 \%$ of whom said this was in a negative way ( $85 \%$ of women versus $76 \%$ of men). Approximately $86 \%$ reported that COVID-19 had changed their personal life and $82 \%$ their family life. Women were again significantly more affected than men: personal life ( $89 \%$ versus $78 \%$; $P=0.001$ ); family life ( $84 \%$ versus $77 \%$; $P=0.037$ ). During lockdowns, women reported increased time spent on hospital and laboratory tasks compared with men ( $53 \%$ versus $46 \%$ and $33 \%$ versus $26 \%$, respectively) and a significantly higher proportion of women than men spent less time on science ( $39 \%$ versus $25 \%$ ) and personal care ( $58 \%$ versus $39 \%$ ). After confinement, this trend remained for science ( $42 \%$ versus $23 \%$ ) and personal care ( $55 \%$ versus $36 \%$ ). Conclusions: The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the professional and home lives of oncologists, especially women. Reduced research time for female oncologists may have long-lasting career consequences, especially for those at key stages in their career. The gender gap for promotion to leadership positions may widen further as a result of the pandemic.


Key words: gender, COVID-19, oncology, survey, woman, inequalities

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## INTRODUCTION

The gender gap in leadership roles in science and medicine is well documented, ${ }^{1-4}$ and early investigations of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns on clinicians, academics and researchers showed disproportionate effects on women. ${ }^{5-7}$ Reports showed a declining proportion of women posting studies on preprint servers in the early months of the pandemic, and women registering a smaller proportion of research projects on major registries than
previously. ${ }^{5}$ Gender bias was also reported to be affecting COVID-19 research, with women under-represented as authors of COVID-19-related papers. ${ }^{6,7}$

Concerns were raised that the pandemic could be perpetuating gender inequalities to the detriment of career progression for women. As lockdowns were imposed and workplaces, schools and childcare facilities closed, questions were raised over whether women were increasingly burdened with household and family demands, with less time for work-related activities.

The European Society for Medical Oncology Women for Oncology (ESMO W4O) Committee recognised the importance of investigating the impact of COVID-19 on the working and home lives of oncologists, a large proportion of whom are women.

A survey was therefore carried out between 8 June 2020 and 2 July 2020 to find out whether oncologists were spending more or less time than usual on a wide range of work and home activities during and after periods of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed to address the potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the working and home lives of oncologists during and after they were subject to relevant confinement regulations (lockdown, where people were asked to stay at home except to shop for food, and all but essential services were closed, and after lockdown, where restrictions to stay at home were at least partially lifted and more services were open). The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions (Supplementary Appendix 1 available at https://doi.org/10.1016/j. esmoop.2021.100131) and was designed to be completed in $<10 \mathrm{~min}$.

An email was sent to 11956 ESMO members which contained a link to the survey. Email recipients were not restricted from forwarding the link to colleagues, and the survey was also available on the ESMO website and via social media channels. All responses were anonymised.

Descriptive statistics (i.e. absolute and relative frequencies) were provided for all demographics and personal information collected, as well as for variables on the impact of COVID-19 and changes in time dedicated to activities during and after COVID-19 confinement, overall and by gender. Chi-square tests were used to assess the statistical significance (at the $5 \%$ level) of the differences between women and men for all variables of interest. All the analyses were conducted with the software SAS Version 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC).

## RESULTS

Six hundred and forty-nine individuals responded to the survey, $72 \%$ of whom were women. Demographic and personal data for the 541/649 (83\%) respondents who completed the survey are shown in Table 1. Responses from the remaining 108 (17\%) respondents with incomplete surveys were excluded. Of the total respondents ( $n=541$ ),

|  | Total $\boldsymbol{N}$ (\%) | Women $\boldsymbol{N}$ (\%) | Men $\boldsymbol{N}$ (\%) | $P$ value |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Gender | 541 (100) | 387 (71.53) | 154 (28.47) |  |
| Age (years) |  | 5 | 6 |  |
| 21-25 | 11 | 30 | 9 |  |
| 26-30 | 39 | 48 | 14 |  |
| 31-35 | 62 | 37 | 15 |  |
| 36-40 | 52 | 20 | 6 |  |
| 41-45 | 26 | 19 | 8 |  |
| 46-50 | 27 | 11 | 3 |  |
| 51-55 | 14 | 217 | 93 |  |
| N/A | 310 |  |  |  |
| Ethnicity |  |  |  | 0.04 |
| White | 385 (71.16) | 289 (74.68) | 96 (62.34) |  |
| Black | 10 (1.85) | 9 (2.33 | 1 (0.65) |  |
| Asian | 91 (16.82) | 55 (14.21) | 36 (23.38) |  |
| Arab | 13 (2.40) | 7 (1.81) | 6 (3.90) |  |
| Mixed | 20 (3.70) | 14 (3.62) | 6 (3.90) |  |
| Other | 19 (3.51) | 11 (2.84) | 8 (5.19) |  |
| Prefer not to say | 3 (0.55) | 2 (0.52) | 1 (0.65) |  |
| Area |  |  |  | 0.0195 |
| Africa | 18 (3.33) | 13 (3.36) | 5 (3.25) |  |
| Americas | 45 (8.32) | 32 (8.27) | 13 (8.44) |  |
| Asia | 92 (17.01) | 52 (13.44) | 40 (25.97) |  |
| Australia | 8 (1.48) | 6 (1.55) | 2 (1.30) |  |
| Europe | 359 (66.36) | 268 (69.25) | 91 (59.09) |  |
| North America | 19 (3.51) | 16 (4.13) | 3 (1.95) |  |
| Place of work |  |  |  | 0.08 |
| Cancer centre | 88 (16.27) | 59 (15.25) | 29 (18.83) |  |
| General hospital | 131 (24.21 | 91 (23.51) | 40 (27.97) |  |
| Other |  |  |  |  |
| Missing | 38 (7.02) | 34 (8.79) | 4 (2.60) |  |
|  | 284 (52.50) | 203 (52.45) | 81 (52.60) |  |
| ESMO member |  |  |  | 0.04 |
| Yes | 462 (85.40) | 323 (83.46) | 139 (90.26) |  |
| No | 79 (14.60) | 64 (16.54) | 15 (9.74) |  |
| Children |  |  |  | 0.06 |
| Yes | 295 (54.53) | 201 (51.94) | 94 (61.04) |  |
| No | 246 (45.47) | 186 (48.06) | 60 (38.96) |  |
| Number |  |  |  | 0.008 |
| 0 | 246 (45.56) | 186 (48.19) | 60 (38.96) |  |
| 1 | 112 (20.74) | 84 (21.76) | 28 (18.18) |  |
| 2 | 126 (23.33) | 81 (20.98) | 45 (29.22) |  |
| $\geq 3$ | 56 (10.37) | 35 (9.07) | 21 (13.64) |  |
| Single parent |  |  |  | 0.17 |
| Yes | 29 (5.36) | 24 (6.20) | 5 (3.25) |  |
| No | 512 (94.64) | 363 (93.80) | 149 (96.75) |  |
| Live alone |  |  |  | 0.69 |
| Yes | 97 (17.93) | 71 (18.35) | 26 (16.88) |  |
| No | 444 (82.07) | 316 (81.65) | 128 (83.12) |  |

295 ( $54.53 \%$ ) had children ( $52 \%$ women and $61 \%$ men). Only $18 \%$ lived alone ( $18 \%$ women and $17 \%$ men). Of 231 respondents who provided information about their age, 164 were $<40$ years of age.

More than half of respondents (58\%) reported that COVID-19 had affected their professional career, $83 \%$ of whom said this was in a negative way ( $85 \%$ of women versus $76 \%$ of men) (Table 2). Respondents reported that COVID-19 changed both their personal and family life ( $86 \%$ and $82 \%$, respectively). Women were significantly more affected than men: personal life ( $89 \%$ versus $78 \% ; P=$ 0.001 ) and family life ( $84 \%$ versus $77 \% ; P=0.037$ ), respectively (Table 2).

The changes in time dedicated to activities during and after COVID-19 confinement are summarised in Table 3.

| Table 2. Impact of COVID-19, including by gender ( $N=541$ ) |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Total $\boldsymbol{N}$ (\%) | Women $\boldsymbol{N}$ (\%) | Men $N$ (\%) | $P$ value |
| COVID-19 affected your professional career |  |  |  | 0.0003 |
| Yes | 312 (57.67) | 242 (62.53) | 70 (45.45) |  |
| No | 229 (42.33) | 145 (37.47) | 84 (54.55) |  |
| How COVID-19 pandemic affected your professional career |  |  |  | 0.0003 |
| No change | 229 (42.33) | 145 (37.47) | 84 (54.55) |  |
| Positively in those reporting a change | 53/312 (16.98) | 36/242 (14.88) | 17/70 (24.29) |  |
| Negatively in those reporting a change | 259/312 (83.01) | 206/242 (85.12) | 53/70 (75.71) |  |
| COVID-19 changed your personal life |  |  |  | 0.001 |
| Yes | 464 (85.77) | 344 (88.89) | 120 (77.92) |  |
| No | 77 (14.23) | 43 (11.11) | 34 (22.08) |  |
| COVID-19 changed your family life |  |  |  | 0.037 |
| Yes | 444 (82.07) | 326 (84.24) | 118 (76.62) |  |
| No | 97 (17.93) | 61 (15.76) | 36 (23.38) |  |
| Participation in Advisory Committee/Group on COVID-19 |  |  |  | $<0.0001$ |
| Yes | 221 (40.85) | 138 (35.66) | 83 (53.90) |  |
| No | 320 (59.15) | 249 (64.34) | 71 (46.10) |  |
| If yes ( $>1$ answer allowed) |  |  |  |  |
| At hospital level | 143 (26.43) | 86 (22.22) | 57 (37.01) | 0.0004 |
| At regional level | 40 (7.39) | 25 (6.46) | 15 (9.74) | 0.19 |
| At national level | 60 (11.09) | 39 (10.08) | 21 (13.64) | 0.23 |
| At international level | 49 (9.06) | 31 (8.01) | 18 (11.69) | 0.18 |

Overall, respondents said that they spent more rather than less time on hospital tasks (e.g. patient care, meetings, administrative work, managerial tasks), science (e.g. selfstudy, preparing papers, preparing grants, teaching), household management, childcare and parent care during confinement than before COVID-19. Also during confinement, a similar proportion of individuals said that they dedicated more or less time to laboratory tasks (e.g. research, interpretation of results, meetings, managerial tasks), while a lower proportion said that they spent more time looking after themselves than those who said they spent less time.
After confinement, the proportion of respondents who said they spent more rather than less time on hospital tasks, laboratory tasks, household management, childcare and parent care remained higher than before COVID-19. However, this was not the case for science or for personal care.

During confinement, there were no significant differences in time dedicated to household management, childcare or parent care between women and men, but there were significant differences in time dedicated to hospital tasks, laboratory tasks (although of borderline statistical significance), science and personal care (Table 3). Women reported increased time spent on hospital and laboratory tasks compared with men ( $53 \%$ versus $46 \%$, respectively; $P=0.002$ and $33 \%$ versus $26 \%$, respectively; $P=0.056$ ). However, women were significantly less likely to report increased time spent on science ( $46 \%$ versus $55 \%$, respectively; $P=0.0015$ ) or personal care ( $28 \%$ versus $41 \%$, respectively; $P=0.0002$ ) than men. Less marked differences between women and men were found in responses after confinement.
During confinement, women were also significantly more likely to report less time spent on science ( $39 \%$ versus $25 \%$, respectively; $P=0.0024$ ) and personal care ( $58 \%$ versus $39 \%$, respectively; $P<0.0001$ ) than men (Table 4). After confinement, this trend remained for science ( $42 \%$ versus

23\%, respectively; $P=0.0001$ ) and personal care (55\% versus $36 \%$, respectively; $P<0.0001$ ).

As a result of the pandemic, $41 \%$ of individuals reported participation in an Advisory Committee of Group on COVID19, although the proportion of women was also significantly lower in comparison to men ( $36 \%$ versus $54 \%$, respectively; $P<0.0001$ ).

Significant associations between changes in time spent on work and personal activities and personal characteristics during and after COVID-19 confinement are summarised in Supplementary Tables S1 and S2, available at https://doi. org/10.1016/j.esmoop.2021.100131.

## DISCUSSION

Our survey showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the professional and home lives of survey respondents during and after confinement, especially women. Women spent more time on hospital and laboratory tasks and had less time available for scientific research and for personal care both during and after COVID-19-related confinement.

Our findings are supported by other studies reflecting under-representation of women in research during the pandemic. ${ }^{6-8}$ A systematic search of PubMed showed that, as of 1 May 2020, 34\% of authors of 1370 COVID-related publications were women. ${ }^{6}$ The percentage of women as first and last authors was $29 \%$ and $26 \%$, respectively. These findings are reinforced by the results of an analysis of female authorship of COVID-19 papers in The Lancet which showed overall, first, last and corresponding female first authorship was $30.8 \%, 24.2 \%, 25.8 \%$ and $22.9 \%$ respectively. ${ }^{7}$

In another study, of US authors of 1893 papers related to the pandemic, there was a $19 \%$ fall in female first authors compared with female first authors of papers published in the same journals in 2019. ${ }^{8}$ Female first authorship of

|  | During confinement |  |  |  |  |  | After confinement |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Overall |  | Women |  | Men |  | Overall |  | Women |  | Men |  |  |
|  | $N$ | \% | $N$ | \% | $N$ | \% | $N$ | \% | $N$ | \% | $N$ | \% |  |
| Hospital tasks |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.020 |
| More time | 277 | 51.20 | 206 | 53.23 | 71 | 46.10 | 269 | 49.72 | 196 | 50.65 | 73 | 47.40 |  |
| Less time | 133 | 24.58 | 93 | 24.03 | 40 | 25.97 | 56 | 10.35 | 40 | 10.34 | 16 | 10.39 |  |
| No change | 94 | 17.38 | 55 | 14.21 | 39 | 25.32 | 152 | 28.10 | 97 | 25.06 | 55 | 35.71 |  |
| N/A | 37 | 6.84 | 33 | 8.53 | 4 | 2.60 | 64 | 11.83 | 54 | 13.95 | 10 | 6.49 |  |
| Laboratory tasks |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.074 |
| More time | 169 | 31.24 | 129 | 33.33 | 40 | 25.97 | 157 | 29.02 | 110 | 28.42 | 47 | 30.52 |  |
| Less time | 169 | 31.24 | 119 | 30.75 | 50 | 32.47 | 113 | 20.89 | 87 | 22.48 | 26 | 16.88 |  |
| No change | 105 | 19.41 | 65 | 16.80 | 40 | 25.97 | 157 | 20.02 | 102 | 26.36 | 55 | 35.71 |  |
| N/A | 98 | 18.11 | 74 | 19.12 | 24 | 15.58 | 114 | 21.07 | 88 | 22.74 | 26 | 16.88 |  |
| Science |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.0002 |
| More time | 262 | 48.43 | 178 | 45.99 | 84 | 54.55 | 167 | 30.87 | 109 | 28.17 | 58 | 37.66 |  |
| Less time | 186 | 34.38 | 147 | 37.98 | 39 | 25.32 | 182 | 33.64 | 147 | 37.98 | 35 | 22.73 |  |
| No change | 81 | 14.97 | 50 | 12.92 | 31 | 20.13 | 154 | 28.47 | 98 | 25.32 | 56 | 36.36 |  |
| N/A | 12 | 2.22 | 12 | 3.10 | - | - | 38 | 7.02 | 33 | 8.53 | 5 | 3.25 |  |
| Household management |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.085 |
| More time | 335 | 61.92 | 243 | 62.79 | 92 | 59.74 | 170 | 31.42 | 126 | 32.56 | 44 | 28.57 |  |
| Less time | 78 | 14.42 | 61 | 15.76 | 17 | 11.04 | 130 | 24.03 | 101 | 26.10 | 29 | 18.83 |  |
| No change | 118 | 21.81 | 78 | 20.16 | 40 | 25.97 | 206 | 38.08 | 135 | 34.88 | 71 | 46.10 |  |
| N/A | 10 | 1.85 | 5 | 1.29 | 5 | 3.25 | 35 | 6.47 | 25 | 6.46 | 10 | 6.49 |  |
| Taking care of children |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.73 |
| More time | 183 | 33.83 | 127 | 32.82 | 56 | 36.36 | 126 | 23.29 | 90 | 23.26 | 36 | 23.38 |  |
| Less time | 32 | 5.91 | 22 | 5.68 | 10 | 6.49 | 52 | 9.61 | 36 | 9.30 | 16 | 10.39 |  |
| No change | 68 | 12.57 | 48 | 12.40 | 20 | 12.99 | 96 | 17.74 | 65 | 16.80 | 31 | 20.13 |  |
| N/A | 258 | 47.69 | 190 | 49.10 | 68 | 44.16 | 267 | 49.35 | 196 | 50.65 | 71 | 46.10 |  |
| Taking care of ageing parents |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.67 |
| More time | 111 | 20.52 | 83 | 21.45 | 28 | 18.18 | 88 | 16.27 | 64 | 16.54 | 24 | 15.58 |  |
| Less time | 68 | 12.57 | 47 | 12.14 | 21 | 13.64 | 60 | 11.09 | 42 | 10.85 | 18 | 11.69 |  |
| No change | 160 | 29.57 | 109 | 28.17 | 51 | 33.12 | 178 | 32.90 | 122 | 31.52 | 56 | 36.36 |  |
| N/A | 202 | 37.34 | 148 | 38.24 | 54 | 35.06 | 215 | 39.74 | 159 | 41.09 | 56 | 36.36 |  |
| Taking care of yourself |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.0008 |
| More time | 172 | 31.79 | 109 | 28.17 | 63 | 40.91 | 95 | 17.56 | 58 | 14.99 | 37 | 24.03 |  |
| Less time | 286 | 52.87 | 226 | 58.40 | 60 | 38.96 | 256 | 47.32 | 202 | 52.20 | 54 | 35.06 |  |
| No change | 83 | 15.34 | 52 | 13.44 | 31 | 20.13 | 161 | 29.76 | 104 | 26.87 | 57 | 37.01 |  |
| N/A | - | - | - | - | - | - | 29 | 5.36 | 23 | 5.94 | 6 | 3.90 |  |

In bold those tasks where changes in time dedicated to activities during and after COVID-19 confinements were significantly different between women and men.

COVID-19 papers was particularly low for those published in March and April 2020. Comparisons of overall female authorship and female last authorship were inconclusive, with reductions of $8 \%$ and $5 \%$, respectively. The authors of the paper suggested that research productivity of women,
especially those at an early stage of their career, had been affected more than that of men.

Significant disparities in academic productivity during the early stages of the pandemic in US science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM) faculties

Table 4. Associations between changes in times (less time versus more time/no change) spent on various activities and gender during and after COVID-19 confinement ( $N=541$ )

|  | Number and percentage of individuals spending less time |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Hospital tasks | Laboratory tasks | Science | Household management | Taking care of children | Taking care of parents | Taking care of yourself |
|  | $N$ (\%) | $N$ (\%) | $N$ (\%) | $N$ (\%) | $N$ (\%) | $N$ (\%) | $N$ (\%) |
| During confinement Gender |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Women | 93 (26.27) | 119 (38.02) | 147 (39.20) | 61 (15.97) | 47 (19.67) | 22 (11.17) | 226 (58.40) |
| Men | 40 (26.67) | 50 (38.46) | 39 (25.32) | 17 (11.41) | 21 (21.00) | 10 (11.63) | 60 (38.96) |
| $P$ value ${ }^{\text {a }}$ | 0.9266 | 0.0930 | 0.0024 | 0.1824 | 0.7796 | 0.9104 | <0.0001 |
| After confinement |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Gender |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Women | 40 (12.01) | 87 (29.10) | 147 (41.53) | 101 (27.90) | 42 (18.42) | 36 (18.85) | 202 (55.49) |
| Men | 16 (11.11) | 26 (20.31) | 35 (23.49) | 29 (20.14) | 18 (18.37) | 16 (19.28) | 54 (36.49) |
| $P$ value ${ }^{\text {a }}$ | 0.7790 | 0.0594 | 0.0001 | 0.0714 | 0.9908 | 0.9337 | <0.0001 |

[^1]have also been related to gender and child age, highlighting the potentially greater impact of the pandemic on women at an early stage of their career. ${ }^{9}$ Women, but not men, submitted significantly fewer articles in the first 2 months of the pandemic than previously, and faculty members of both sexes with children 0-5 years of age reported working significantly fewer hours compared with other groups. Women in the study reported providing significantly more childcare than men, suggesting that the impact of care responsibilities for very young children during the pandemic may be falling disproportionately on women, exacerbating the gender imbalance and pushing women back to their traditional roles.

In our survey, only one-third of female oncologists reported taking a leadership role through participation in a COVID-19 Advisory Committee or Group. Among these, participation was generally at a hospital level rather than at a regional, national or international level. Such underrepresentation mirrors that seen on the world stage. For example, just 2 of 27 members of the US White House Coronavirus Task Force were women. ${ }^{10,11}$ This occurred despite recommendations from the World Health Organization earlier this year to include women in decision making for outbreak preparedness and response to health emergencies. ${ }^{11}$ On the UK's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) which provided COVID-19 advice to government, $\sim 30 \%$ of members were women. ${ }^{12}$

Previous ESMO surveys have shown underrepresentation of female oncologists in leadership roles, ${ }^{2,3}$ as did a recently reported, similar survey carried out among oncologists in India. ${ }^{13}$ In addition, a recent analysis of more than half a million graduates from 134 US medical schools showed fewer women are promoted to senior faculty ranks (and much more slowly). The gap was not narrowed in the 35 -year time frame of the study. ${ }^{4}$

During the pandemic, women have paid a high price. In addition to the high welfare burdens, they have had to care for children and elderly parents more often than men. This may have further reduced the time for research activities and their personal well-being. Any setbacks in career progression occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic may have long-lasting consequences, especially for those at key stages in their career and also highlight the fragility of earlier gender achievements. If female oncologists have to delay scientific research due to family or household tasks, they may fall behind in submitting their research for publication, potentially with a loss of subsequent funding and/or visibility opportunities linked to invitations to present their findings at influential meetings. This in turn may adversely affect their ability to compete for more senior roles, confirming that in times of crisis women are more vulnerable.

The impact of the pandemic on time available for personal care for female oncologists is also concerning. If women are making time to respond to the increased demands of their work and home lives at the expense of taking time for themselves, this is likely to impact on multiple aspects of their performance and risks leading to burn-
out. It would therefore be a significant backward step if they now feel pressured into previous stereotypic roles or are encouraged to take on an unrealistic workload as a result of the pandemic.

The findings of our survey have immediate implications for how the oncology workforce moves forward over the next 12 months. Diagnostic and treatment delays for patients with cancer during 2020 were common ${ }^{14}$ and oncologists will be doing all they can to expedite patient care. Every effort must be made to ensure that 'catch up' initiatives do not adversely affect the work or home lives of any sector of the oncology community.

Our findings have important implications for the oncology workforce in terms of preparedness and response to future health and other crisis situations. They underline the importance of gender balance in considering how best to maintain patient care while minimising detrimental effects on activities related to research and personal time. Gender balance in leadership roles can facilitate collaborative decision making that recognises both shared and contrasting challenges facing female and male oncologists at different stages of their career, especially during the most stressful scenarios.

With this in mind, the ESMO W4O Committee continues to raise awareness of gender inequalities in oncology and promotes equal access to career development opportunities for female oncologists. Through discussions and debate, mentoring and leadership training, we are supporting female oncologists at all stages of career progression and implementing gender balance strategies across all our activities-during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. But this will not be enough unless we all work together as one global community. As well as developing gender transformative policies, we need the personal commitment of all those currently in positions of influence to drive real change for the future.

## Limitations

More than two-thirds of those who completed the survey were women and this may have introduced some bias into the findings. However, the greater female response may reflect contrasting experiences of the impact of the pandemic; those most affected by lockdown may have felt more motivated to complete the survey. The age of respondents may have affected responses, but as age was known in only 231 participants the study was not powered to explore the association between age and activities during and after lockdown.

There were small numbers in some response groups, e.g. single parents, so we have not attempted to draw conclusions from these data. It will be important to broaden the range of participants in future studies, including a significant proportion of male oncologists, single parents and those living alone.

Although place of work was collected as part of the demographic data for respondents, the questionnaire
did not ask whether participants changed their role, e.g. moving to a COVID-19 ward, during the pandemic. This could be taken into consideration in future research.

While our research extended understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the professional and home lives of oncologists, further research could explore additional aspects of the complex and multifaceted issue of gender in relation to roles of leadership and influence at a time of such unprecedented risk and uncertainty.

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## DISCLOSURE

PG: Advisory Board: Abbvie, Amgen, AstraZeneca, Bayer, Boehringer Ingelheim, Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS), GlaxoSmithKline, Janssen, Lilly, Merck Sharp \& Dohme (MSD), Novartis, Pfizer, Roche, Takeda. Invited Speaker: AstraZeneca, Boehringer Ingelheim, BMS, Janssen, MSD, Novartis, Pfizer, Roche, Takeda. Research funding: Novartis, Janssen, AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Blue-print, Apollomics, Amgen, Array Biopharma. SB: Research grants: AstraZeneca, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK). Honoraria Amgen, Astrazeneca/MSD, GSK, Clovis, Genmab, Immunogen, Merck Serono, Mersana, Pfizer, Roche, Tesaro. ASB: Anna Sophie Berghoff has research support from Daiichi Sankyo ( $\leq € 10000$ ), Roche ( $>€ 10$ 000) and honoraria for lectures, consultation or advisory board participation from Roche, BMS, Merck, Daiichi Sankyo (all $<€ 5000$ ) as well as travel support from Roche, Amgen and AbbVie. EF: Advisory Board: Abbvie, Amgen, AstraZeneca, Bayer, Blue Print Medicines, Boehringer Ingelheim, BMS, Eli Lilly, GlaxoSmithKline, Janssen, Merck, Mabxience, MSD, Novartis, Pfizer, Puma Biotechnology, Roche, Sanofi, Genzyme. Invited Speaker: AstraZeneca, Boehringer Ingelheim, BMS, Eli Lilly, Medscape, MSD, Novartis, Peervoice, Pfizer, Prime Oncology, Roche, Springer, Takeda, Touchime, Cme Outfitters. Research funding: Merck Serono. AJSF: Speaker Fees from BMS, Ipsen, Esai. Consultancy Fees from Sangamo Therapeutics. EG: Speaker: MSD, Roche, Thermo Fisher, Lilly. Advisory Board: Genentech, Roche, Ellipses Pharma, Neomed Therapeutics, Boehringer Ingelheim, Janssen, SeaGen, TFS, Alkermes, Thermo Fisher, BMS, MabDiscovery, Anaveon. Research funding: Novartis, Roche, AstraZeneca, Thermo Fisher, Taiho Oncology. JH: Advisory Board: BMS, Achilles Therapeutics, BioNTech, Immunocore, Gadeta, Ipsen, MSD, Merck Serono, Pfizer, Molecular Partners, Novartis, Neogene Therapeutics, Roche, Sanofi, Third Rock Venture. Stocks/Shares: Neogene

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[^1]:    ${ }^{\text {a }} P$ value for the difference between women and men.

