

Managing work-life balance during the Covid-19 crisis

Results from a survey with 1500+ participants worldwide

Introduction. By Oct. 2020, Ruzin Ağanoğlu and co-authors published results from a survey (1) on the impact of the SARS-CoV19 pandemic schemes that were imposed on individuals by the authorities. The survey was conducted by the authors during the first months of **2020 (mid-April – end-June)**. It sought to collect information on the interferences in **work-life-balance** as related to closing down professional and public life. Responses from individual experiences on their COVID-19 situation were evaluated, with peculiar focus on gender related aspects. The survey based on a questionnaire distributed among STEM-related individuals & in Germany but was extended towards a larger public, national and international. Selected results from the full report (1) were published in an article of the Physik Journal, the monthly magazine of the German Physical Society (2).

Results. In total, 1524 / 2209 datasets were completed. All datasets were evaluated. Fig. 1 exhibits the **demographic setting** of the survey, addressing age and gender composition, and extent of internationalization. Fig. 2 reports on the **professional surroundings** of the interviewees, the professional age, and their affiliation background.

Fig. 1. Demographic details of the survey. Insert: extent of internationalization.

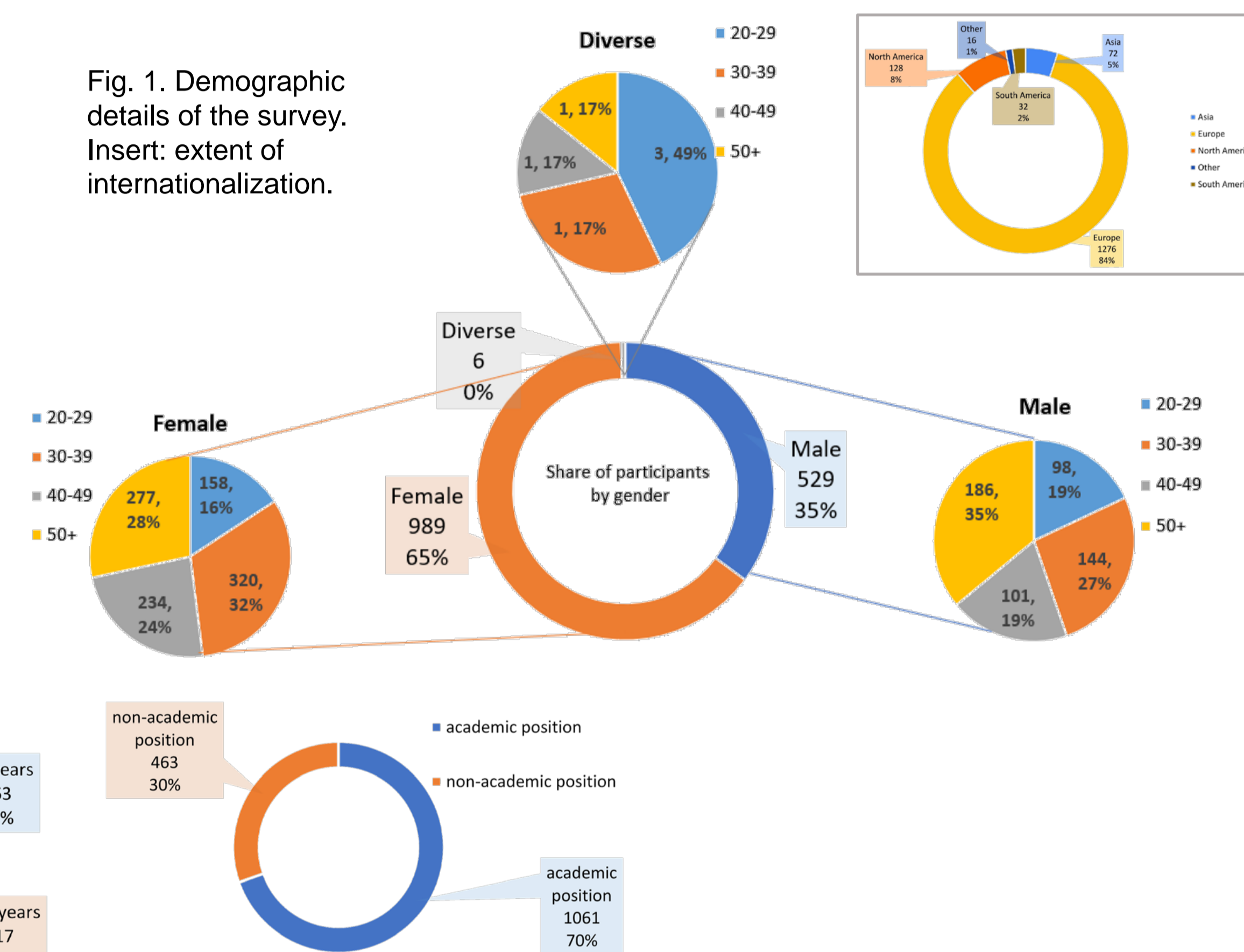
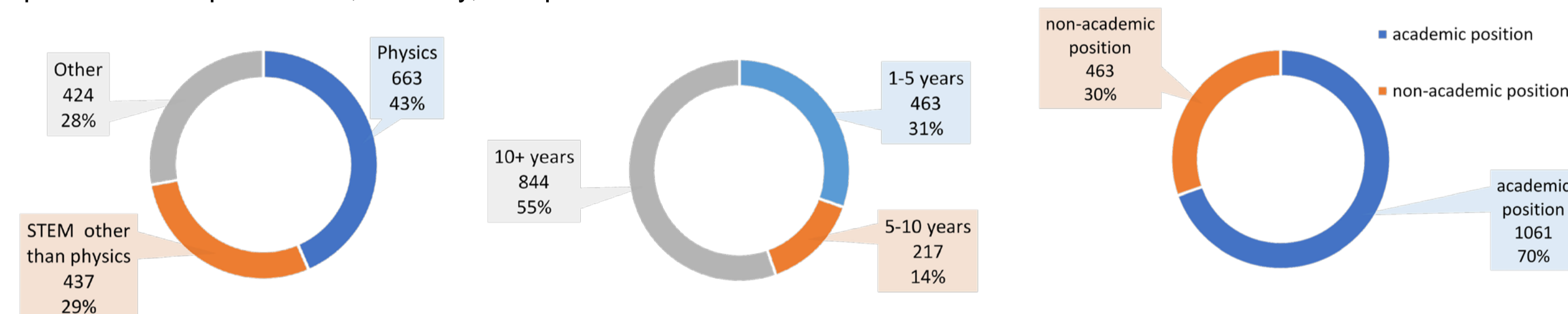


Fig. 2. Details on the professional background of the respondents as special field, maturity, and position.



Summary. By summer 2020, the consequences of the pandemic on **private and professional life**, and the challenge to combine both, were still in an exploratory status: most individuals and employers, the public and the authorities in charge, they all had to face a first-time experience, and they were still struggling to find solutions and to establish **new routines**. Free text entries taken during the survey, at that point of the pandemic, provide snapshots on the diversity of opinions and give hints towards the **risk of falling back into routines of the past**, and social splitting within the society, in terms of gender roles and in terms of social permeability. Selected examples are given below.

Double burden because of working from home and children care (3-year-old child). No alternatives for children care during working time. No confidence that the children care can/will change in the next weeks. Alone at home with child, husband works full time outside.

Rediscovering slowness is positive for me, even though I lack social contacts. No hectic, no or only very few appointments

As a father, burden me especially the extended home-office, child-care and home-schooling. Trying to do all together results neither a sound child-care nor any occupational provisions at the same time. ... The feeling of being largely left alone as a family in Germany is an additional burden on us and on many families we know. But there is little my employer can do about it ...

As a woman and mother, I do not see my perspective represented by male politicians.

I'm really afraid that the society and government do not learn lessons from the pandemic (destruction of our planet, unbridled consumption, pollution, climate change, ...)

Only male oriented topics are discussed (how can the professional football can start again?). This crisis is carried out on the back of the women. In the background an alarming development is in progress a la Big Brother.

Compatibility of childcare and home office. As a result, 100% efficiency is not possible. Other colleagues (without children) work 130%, I 70-80%, therefore worse starting conditions for job search / career.

As one consequence of the pandemic situation, many individuals were forced or encouraged to move on with their **professional activities in remote conditions**, having to combine private life and professional obligations, e.g. doing home-schooling while working in their home-office. Accordingly, Fig. 3 presents peculiar **stressors of the remote working conditions** that impacted on the individuals.

The graphic suggests minor gender related differences during the first lock-down in Germany, much less than had been expected. However, in free text entries that everyone was encouraged to add, the responders expressed more adverse effects individually, including gender related roles.

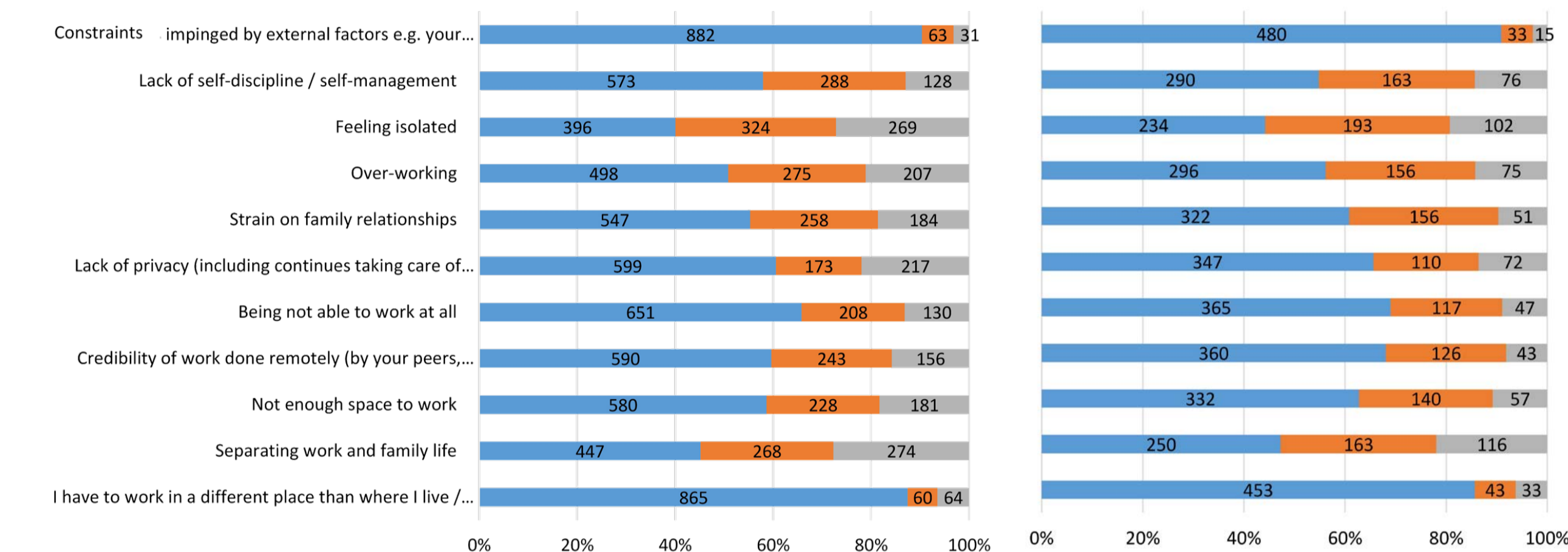


Fig. 3. Stressors induced by the home working conditions. responses from female (left) resp. male / diverse (right) gender respondents.

A similar pattern is obtained when conjectures on **post-pandemic concerns** were addressed : major differences among females and males were only expressed regarding **social anxiety** and **financial perspectives** when females had bigger concerns on the first and males on the other.

The responses reflect major differences mostly due to hierarchical (leader / non-leader) and occupational conditions (academic / non-academic). However, asking for **changes in daily routines** due to moving from shared office to shared workspace in home-office indicated a **gender bias**: females report (Fig. 4) significantly longer working hours as compared to their male peers, and more figured conditions of professional isolation and the challenge of having to share their home-office space with family activity rooms.

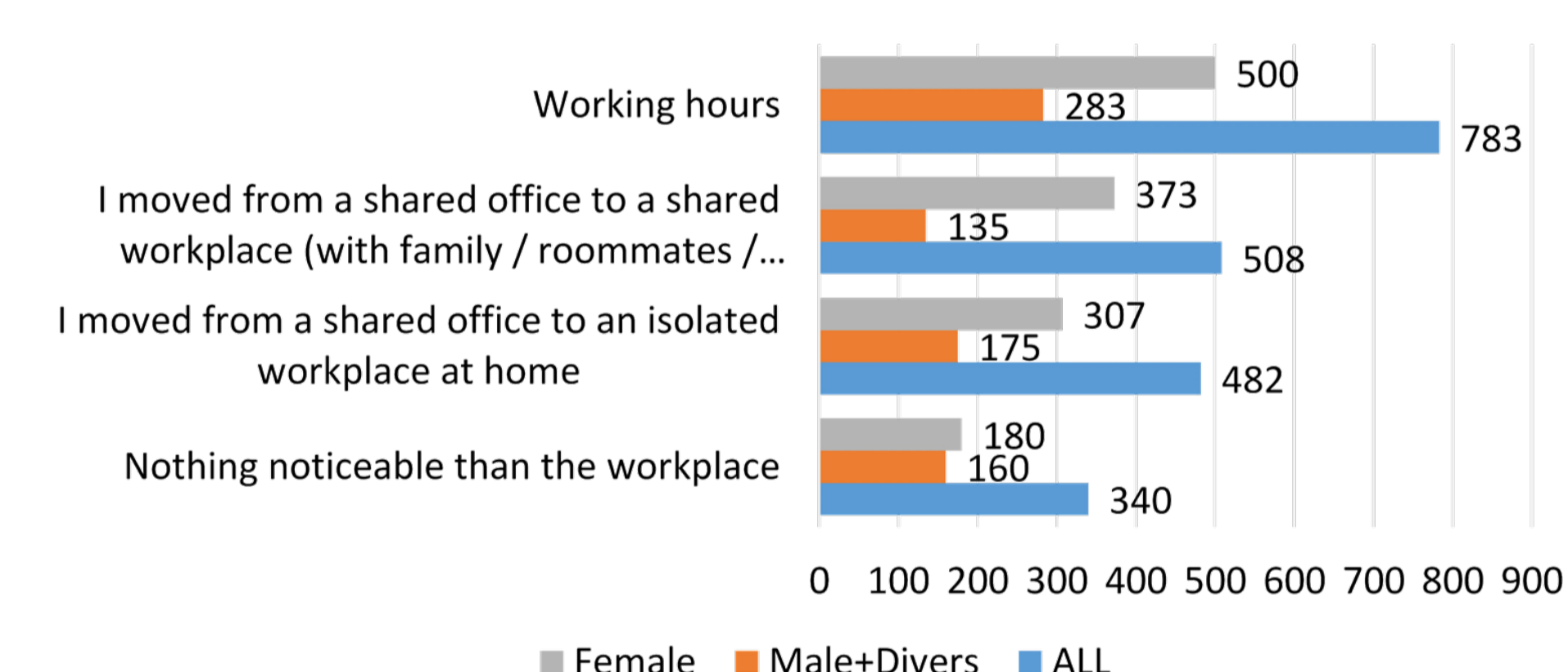


Fig. 4. Changes reported in daily routine working settings caused by remote working from home, combining private and professional life.

Conclusion / Outlook. The pandemic is going on, in waves developing depending on the local conditions. The diverse countries and sectors are continuing to adapt their schemes to the needs as they perceive and as they can afford them. Everywhere, **families are especially challenged** to cover their needs and to secure their financial situation, the **existence of children** might be turned into a decision disadvantage as it had been in the past. Securing the achievements of **work-sharing in private life**, and as well in the professional sector, is again a topic. Achieving responsibility- and work-sharing in private life and also in the professional sector may no longer be a priority for some societies. On the positive side, the pandemic has enhanced the **recognition of science**, and evidenced the success of fact-based decision making. Both aspects are especially relevant for scientists, and among them physicists. The survey conducted so far can only be the start: it is essential to

- **collect more data** on the situation and its perception, addressing a broader basis of interviewees and especially including more regions,
- **sharpen the questionnaire** based on the experiences gathered throughout the pandemic so far, such that
- the output can be usefully converted into the recognition of diverse options and priorities to be discussed, for the challenges to be met,
- with the peculiar aspect of **avoiding returning to old role models** that disadvantage females.

Science is a useful tool, and it needs scientists who can contribute. Women do not only need to be included here, their work as active scientists to the progress of the sciences is indispensable, and their contributions manifest a **door opening role model for all children**.

references:

- (1) <https://www.dpg-physik.de/vereinigungen/fachuebergreifend/ak/akc/covid-19-survey-results>
- (2) Pinar Bilge, Asım Can Alkan and Ruzin Ağanoğlu, **Arbeit und Leben in Balance?** Physikjournal 20, 2 (24), 2021