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# **Academic Challenges in the Time of COVID-19: Arab Social Scientists and Humanists in Focus**

**Caroline Krafft**

**December 2020**

## **Academic Challenges in the Time of COVID-19: Arab Social Scientists and Humanists in Focus**

**By Caroline Krafft\***

**With Sydney Kennedy, Ruby Cheung, Solveigh Johnson, and Adriana Cortes-Mendoza  
St. Catherine University, Department of Economics and Political Science**

**December 2020**

**Please send correspondence to:**

Caroline Krafft

Associate Professor of Economics

St. Catherine University, Department of Economics and Political Science

2004 Randolph Ave

St. Paul, MN 55105

USA

[cgkrafft@stkate.edu](mailto:cgkrafft@stkate.edu)



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# 1 Introduction

The Arab region had reported lower rates of COVID-19 cases than most other world regions, as of fall 2020 (World Health Organization (WHO) 2020). Yet the Arab region has experienced disproportionate socio-economic hardships, including some of the world's most stringent mitigation (containment, closure, and lockdown) measures (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2020; World Bank 2020a). The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic and social crisis follow a decade that included major political and social upheaval yet entrenched social and economic challenges. Pre-existing regional difficulties, such as declining oil prices, conflicts, persistent economic struggles, and political tensions have been exacerbated by the crisis (Strategic Thinking Group Association 2020; World Bank 2020a). While 2020 is clearly a watershed moment for the world and especially the Arab region, the direction of the region remains uncertain.

The hardships and changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying crisis have had disproportionate impacts on women, children, and youth. Children have had their schools shut down and higher education has been disrupted for youth, as countries struggled to develop remote education options (Egyptian Center for Economic Studies 2020; World Bank 2020b; c). Sudden increases in caregiving responsibilities, as schools and nurseries shut down and lockdowns limited services, have disproportionately impacted women (CARE 2020; Economic Research Forum and UN Women; UN Women 2020). COVID-19 has had major effects within academia as well, affecting teaching and scholarship (Buttorff, Shalaby, and Allam 2020; Lassassi et al. 2020; World Bank 2020b).

This report specifically examines the effects of COVID-19 among Arab social science and humanities scholars. Educational institutions experienced an enormous shock to teaching, as universities were shut down, or switched to distance, online, or hybrid formats (Lassassi et al. 2020; World Bank 2020b; c). Research and scholarship, which already were limited and challenging in the region, have faced additional challenges (Buttorff, Shalaby, and Allam 2020; Das et al. 2013; El-Kogali and Krafft 2020). For example, there is anecdotal evidence that some countries stopped issuing permits for data collection efforts, particularly during lockdowns. Yet new opportunities have arisen, for example funding for research on COVID-19, or conferences that became more widely available as they went online. This report seeks to understand the shifting scholarly landscape for Arab social scientists and humanists in the

time of COVID-19, in order to understand the impact of this crisis, consider how to mitigate the challenges it has created, and leverage the opportunities offered by this latest crisis.

The results show the pervasive and potentially lasting impacts of COVID-19 on teaching, learning, research, and knowledge in the Arab region. The shift to online teaching presented a particular challenge to both teachers and learners. Research projects were canceled, delayed, or suffered issues with quality. Ultimately scholars' ability to publish and especially progress work suffered, hampering knowledge creation and careers. Yet scholars also started work on the pressing health, social, and economic effects of COVID-19. While planned conferences and events were delayed, cancelled, or shifted online, new opportunities arose for learning and scholarship in an online world. Yet these opportunities were not equally available, nor impacts equally felt. Those in countries with weak infrastructure particularly struggled, as did female scholars with children, who disproportionately were impacted by a sudden influx of caregiving responsibilities.

## **2 Research Design**

The Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS) and the study team designed an online survey to examine the effects of COVID-19. The survey focused on Arab social scientists and humanists with masters or doctoral degrees working in scholarly settings (universities or research institutes). Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. Catherine University. Data were collected from September 1, 2020 to October 1, 2020. The survey was sent to social scientists and humanists who either had engaged with ACSS previously or whom ACSS had identified as falling within the scope of their work (at research institutes or universities in the Arab region) (see details in the appendix). Respondents were eligible if their highest degree was master's level or above and if they were working in a university or research institute in the Arab region. The study defined social scientists and humanists per Table A-1, however, we did not exclude anyone responding to the survey who identified their degree as from another field, since they self-identified as social scientists or humanists in completing the survey. In this report, for the sake of brevity, we use the term "scholars" to refer to these respondents, but it is important to keep in mind their specific degrees, disciplines, geographies, and academic work. Ultimately, 616 respondents were eligible and completed the survey. See the Appendix for details on sampling, response rates, eligibility, and weighting.

Respondents answered questions on (1) their highest degree and academic affiliation (2) demographics (3) current work position (4) hours of work and the impact of COVID-19 (5) teaching and the impact COVID-19 (6) research and fieldwork/data collection and the impact of COVID-19 (7) professional development activities and the impact of COVID-19 and (8) work-life balance and the impact of COVID-19. This report presents a descriptive analysis of the self-reported impact of COVID-19 on scholars, with a particular focus on which scholars were especially affected.

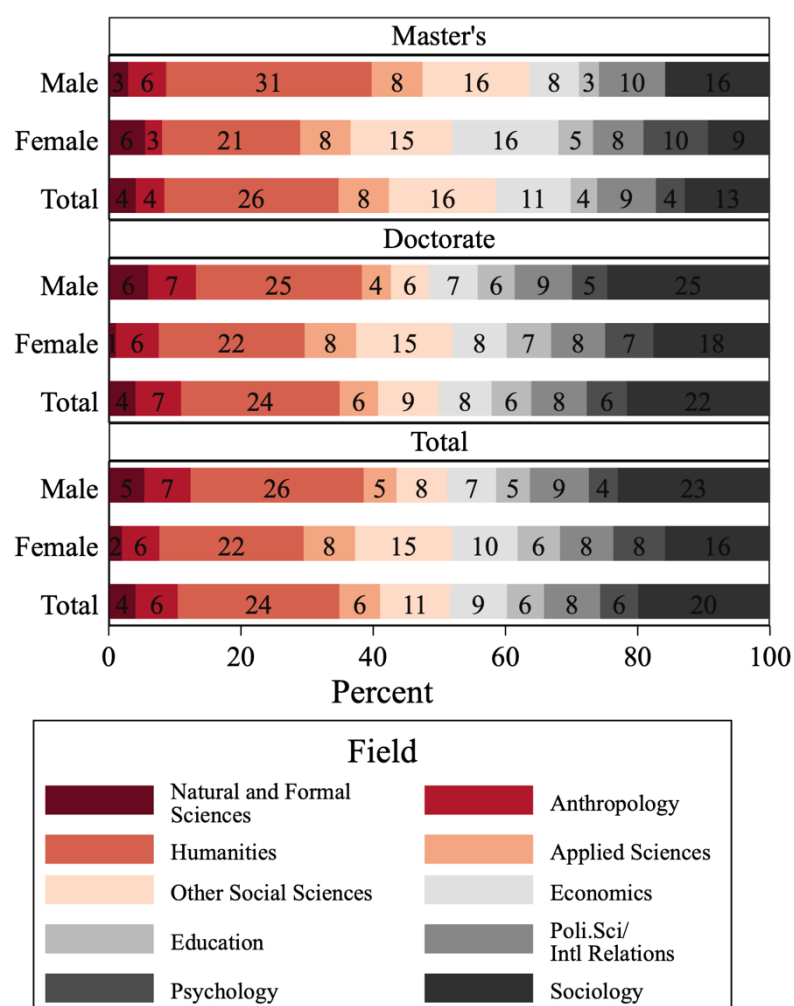
### **3 Findings**

#### **3.1 Fields of Study and Degrees**

Most of the scholars in our survey had obtained a doctoral degree (81%) although a substantial minority (19%) possessed only a master's degree. Those with master's degrees were often working on their doctorates. Respondents in the earlier stages of their career, depending on their field of study and nature of their research, may face different challenges in their academic trajectory. Figure 1 shows that across degrees and sex, scholars most often were working in the humanities (24% of all scholars). The next most common field of study, sociology (20% of all scholars) was substantially more common among men (23%) than women (16%), a result which held across both degree levels. In contrast, women were more likely to be economists, applied scientists, or other social scientists. These differences by degree, field, and sex may lead to different experiences of the impact of COVID-19 on scholars' careers.



**Figure 1. Field of study by highest degree obtained and sex (percentage)**

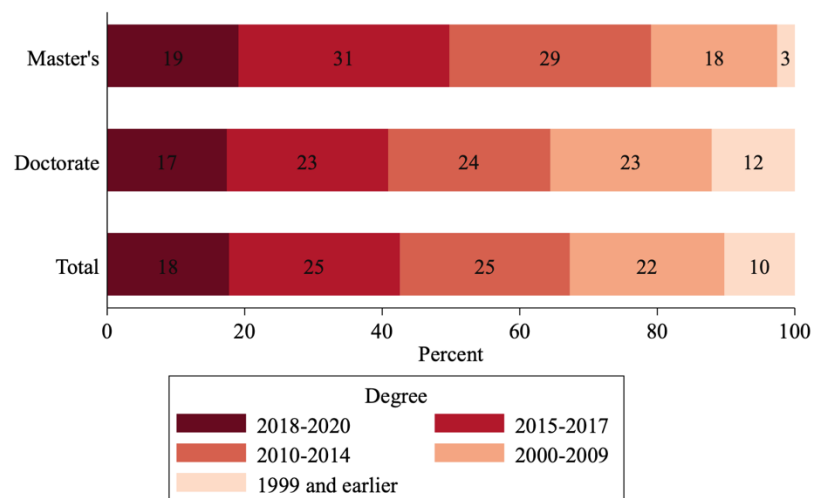


Notes: See appendix for details on fields and classification

Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Scholars in the study were disproportionately young and early in their careers (Figure 2). Notably 67 percent of scholars received their highest degree between 2010 and 2020. Among those with a master's degree, 50 percent of respondents received their degree since 2015. Many of these scholars may be working on their doctoral degree. Their career trajectories, this early in their career, may be particularly affected by COVID-19. Overall, the relative youth of Arab scholars means that COVID-19 is particularly likely to affect hiring, tenure, and promotion for a generation of early-career scholars.

**Figure 2. Year obtained highest degree by highest degree obtained (percentage)**

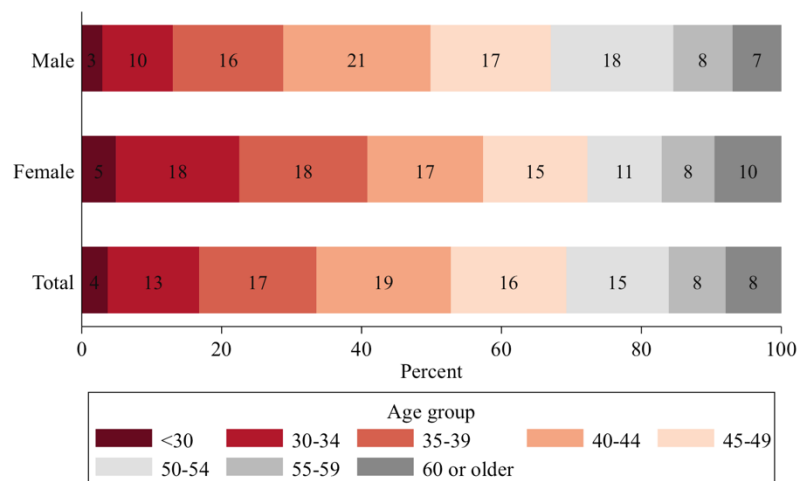


Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

### 3.2 Demographic Characteristics of Scholars

The majority of survey respondents were male (59% vs. 40% female).<sup>i</sup> The scholars responding to the survey represented a variety of ages (Figure 3). Female scholars were younger than male scholars. For example, 41 percent of women and 29 percent of men were under age 40. The most common age group for men was ages 40-44 (21%) compared to 30-34 or 35-39 (both 18%) for women. The feminization of the social sciences and humanities has been noted by other researchers as well (Assaad and Abdalla 2019; Sieverding 2020). One consequence of this trend is that female scholars are disproportionately earlier in their careers, and COVID-19 may have a larger impact on their career trajectories.

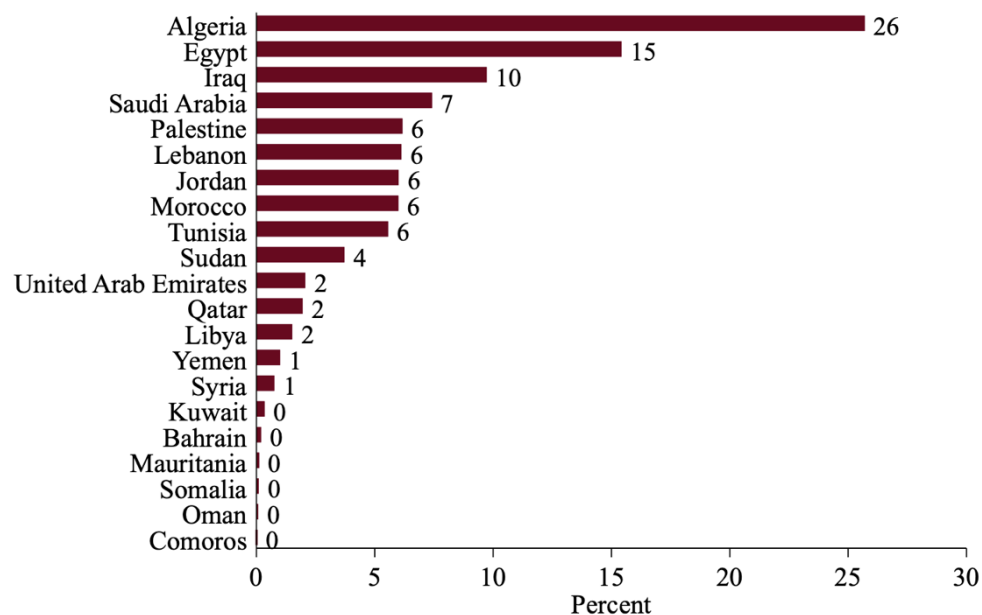
**Figure 3. Scholars' age groups, by sex (percentage)**



Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Although the respondents came from a variety of countries, several of the more populous Arab countries were a larger share of the ACSS sample frame (see Table A-2) and therefore the respondents (Figure 4). A quarter (26%) of the scholars were currently working in Algeria, 15 percent in Egypt, 10 percent in Iraq, and 7 percent in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia each were the countries of work for 6 percent of respondents. Only a small share (1-2%) of scholars were working in countries experiencing active conflict, such as Libya, Syria, or Yemen. The different economic, social, and political contexts of their countries, as well as their countries' COVID-19 response are important factors mediating the impact of COVID-19 on scholars and their work.

**Figure 4. Current country of work (percentage)**

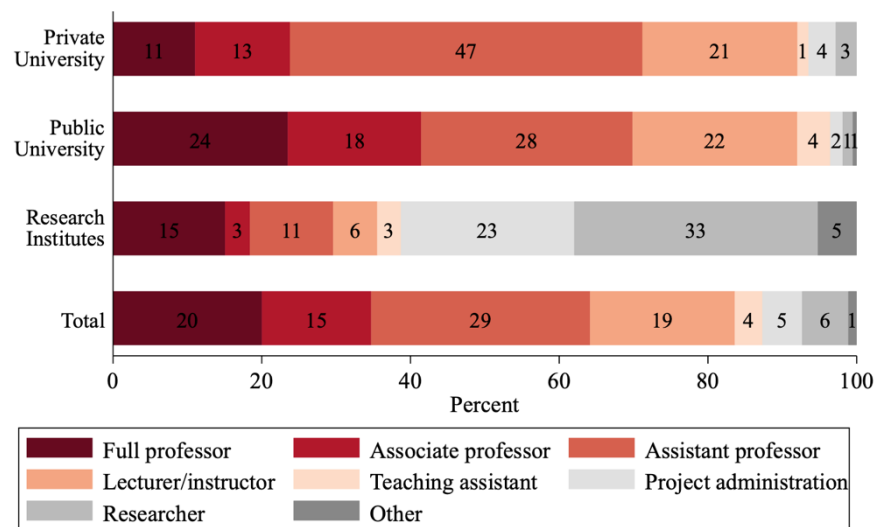


Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

### 3.3 Scholars' Current Positions and Responsibilities

Scholars were primarily currently working in public universities (68%), but some came from private universities (18%), or research institutes<sup>ii</sup> (15%). Figure 5 shows positions (job titles) by institution type. The vast majority of those within universities were in various professor roles, but there was a substantially larger share of assistant professors in private universities (47% versus 28% in public universities) and correspondingly fewer associate professors (13% versus 18% in public universities) and full professors (11% versus 24% in public universities). The relatively more junior workforce at private universities may be because in many countries these institutions themselves are newer (Abdessalem 2010; Barsoum 2014; Fahim and Sami 2010; Kanaan, Al-Salamat, and Hanania 2010). The share of lecturer/instructors (21-22%) was similar across university types. There were still a number of professors and lecturers/instructors within research institutes (35%), but far more project administrators (23%) and researchers (33%). The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing crisis may particularly affect the scholars working as assistant professors and early in their careers but may also present a profound challenge for those working in research institutes. Both assistant professors and research institute employees face particularly high risks that disruptions in their research will impact their jobs and career trajectories.

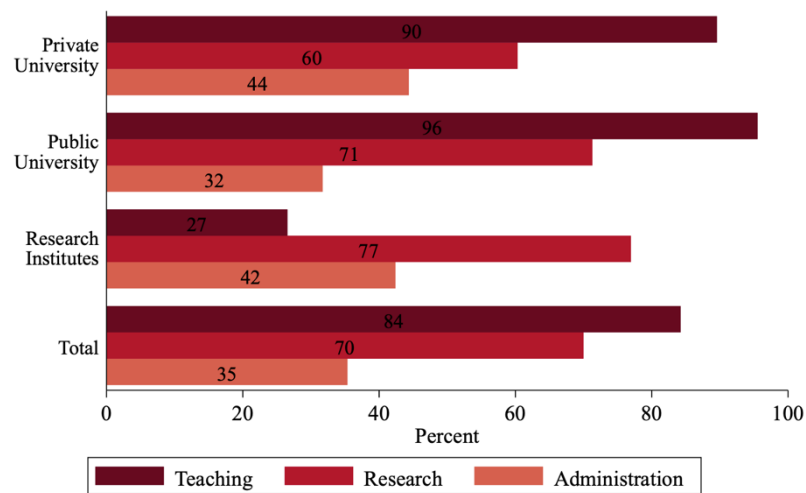
**Figure 5. Position by institution type (percentage)**



Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Figure 6 shows the percentage of scholars with responsibilities in teaching, research, and administration by their type of institution. At public universities 96 percent of scholars reported having teaching responsibilities, compared to 90 percent at private universities, and 27 percent of those at research institutes. Research responsibilities were most common at research institutes (77%) followed by public (71%) and private (60%) universities. Administrative responsibilities were more common in research institutes (42%) and private universities (44%) than public universities (32%). All these different aspects of scholars' responsibilities may have been differentially affected by the pandemic and crisis, a point we explore further in the next section.

**Figure 6. Percentage with teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities by institution type**

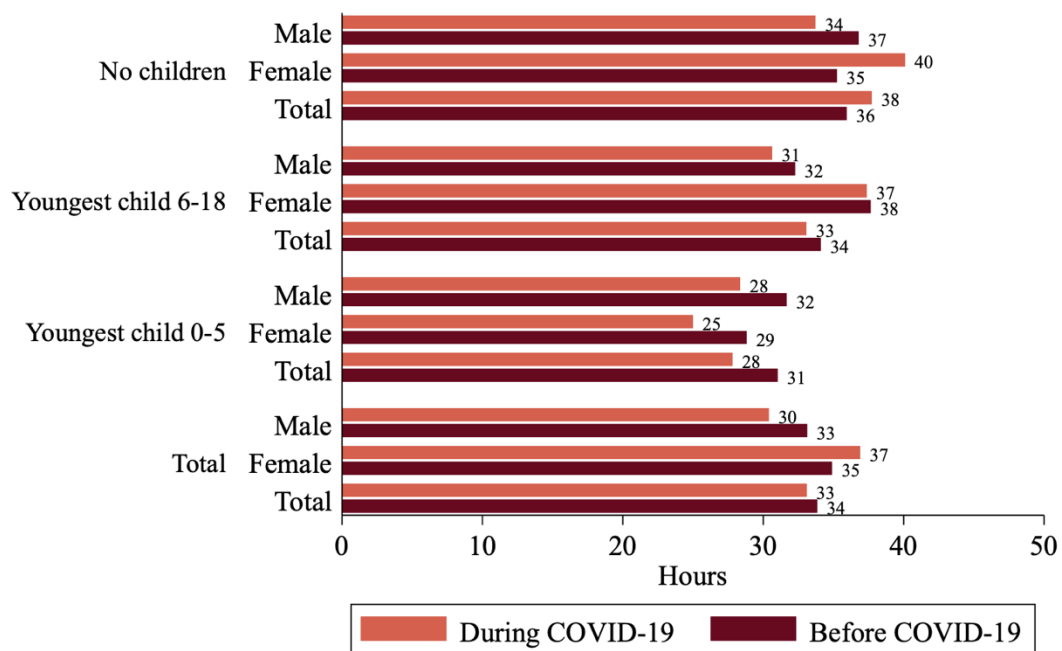


Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

### 3.4 Hours of Work: The Impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has reshaped the nature of scholarly work, but also created substantial additional work for those shifting their research and teaching into an online world or suddenly combining career with additional caregiving. Figure 7 shows the average hours worked per week among scholars before and during COVID-19 by sex and by the age of their youngest child. We distinguish between those with no children, those whose youngest child is between the ages of six to eighteen years old, and those whose youngest child is between the ages of zero to five years old. Men with or without children experienced a slight decrease in hours worked per week (from 33 to 30 hours overall and by 1-4 hours across subgroups), while changes for women varied by their caregiving responsibilities. Average hours of scholarly work for women without children increased from 35 hours to 40 hours per week, while women with their youngest child between the ages of six and eighteen experienced little change in hours (38 hours before and 37 hours during COVID-19). Hours of scholarly work for women with their youngest child aged zero to five decreased from 29 hours to 25 hours per week. Female scholars with young children may thus be at a particular disadvantage as COVID-19 has increased caregiving responsibilities and disrupted their careers. We explore the additional caregiving responsibilities facing scholars in further detail below.

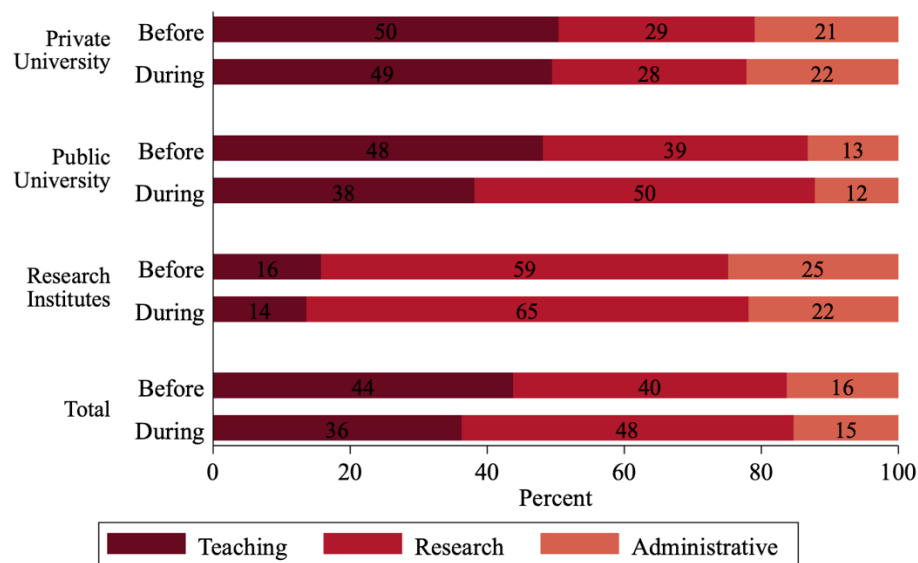
**Figure 7. Mean hours of work per week, before and during COVID-19, by sex and age of youngest child**



Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

COVID-19 shifted not only how much time scholars spend working, but also how scholars spend that time. Figure 8 shows changes in the distribution of time between teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities by institution type. Scholars working in private universities experienced little to no changes in the distribution of their time between teaching (50% before, 49% during COVID-19), research (29% before, 28% during), and administrative responsibilities (21% before, 22% during). Scholars working in public universities experienced a substantial increase in the share of their time devoted to research (39% before, 50% during), a decrease in teaching (48% before, 38% during) and a slight decrease in administrative responsibilities (13% before, 12% during). Similarly, scholars at research institutes increased the percentage of time spent in research (59% before, 65% during), and slightly decreased the amount of time teaching (16% before, 14% during) and administrating (25% before, 22% during). The increase many scholars experienced in the share of time spent on research may be a function of what happened to teaching, as well as the additional time it may take to do research in a COVID-19 world, points we explore further below.

**Figure 8. Percentage of time spent on teaching, research, and administration, before and during COVID-19, by institution type**



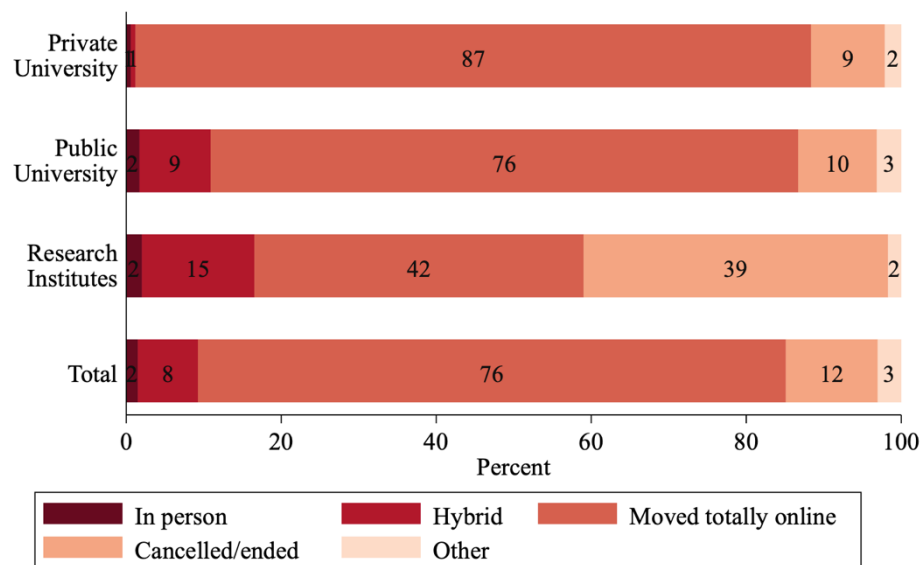
Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

### 3.5 Teaching: The Impact of COVID-19

The majority (78%) of scholars were teaching courses as of February 2020, prior to the start of the pandemic. However, COVID-19 caused courses to adopt new teaching formats or end altogether. Figure 9 shows that the biggest shift in instruction for spring courses was towards being totally online. For faculty at private universities, 87 percent shifted their courses online and for faculty at public universities, 76 percent shifted their courses online. Some faculty shifted courses to hybrid (mixed in person and online formats) at public universities (9%) and research institutions (15%). Very few faculty had courses that remained in-person (2%). Scholars at research institutions frequently cancelled or ended courses (39%) while faculty at public and private universities cancelled or ended their courses only 9-10 percent of the time. While the early end to courses may have freed up time for scholars, it may have done so at the loss of pay to academics and learning to students, while the shifts to new formats may have created new challenges, a point we explore further below.



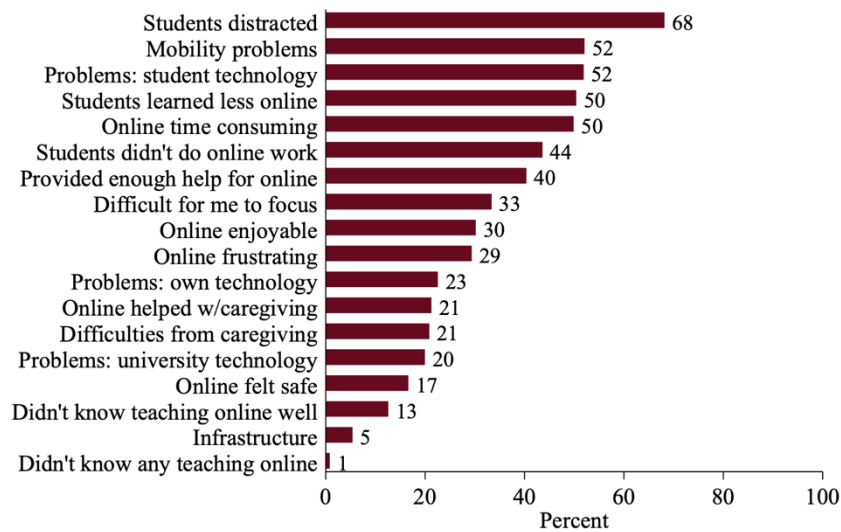
**Figure 9. What happened to courses as COVID-19 began by institution type (percentage), scholars who were teaching in February 2020**



Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Along with changes in course instruction method, the pandemic also brought additional difficulties to teaching. Figure 10 shows that the biggest difficulty experienced by scholars whose courses moved online was that students were often distracted (68%). Additionally, scholars reported having difficulties with mobility and lockdowns (52%), student technology problems (52%), students learning less online (50%), and online teaching being time consuming (50%). While online teaching led to a number of challenges, some scholars found it enjoyable (30%), that it helped with caregiving (21%) and felt safe (17%). While online courses allowed scholars to continue teaching, they did so with difficulty and clear challenges with students' learning. With the ongoing pandemic, ensuring improved access and quality for Fall 2020 remains an issue, which we discuss below.

**Figure 10. Difficulties experienced teaching during COVID-19 (percentage)**

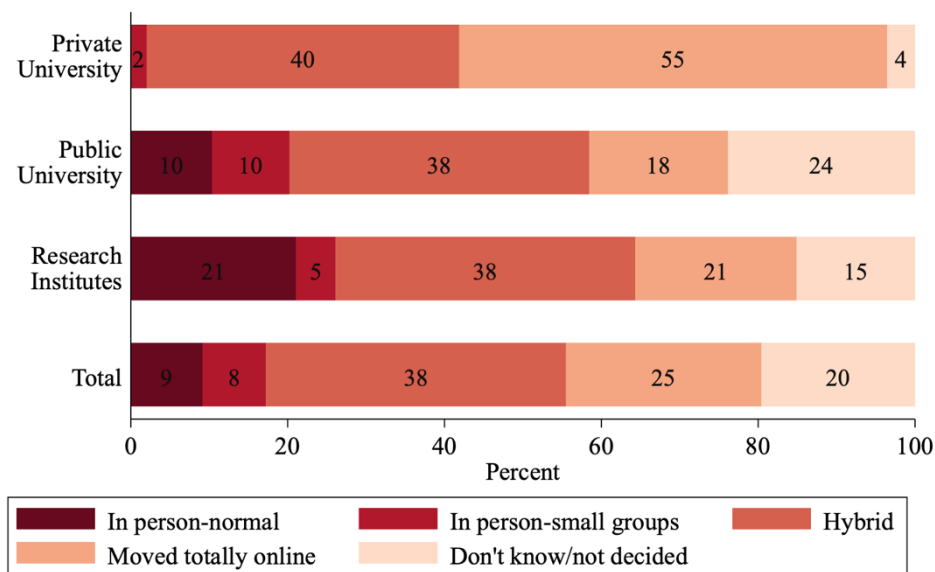


Notes: Multiple responses possible. Questions relating to teaching online only asked of those whose courses shifted online.

Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

As was the case for spring of 2020, the majority (78%) of scholars were teaching or were going to teach in the fall of 2020. The vast majority of those teaching in the fall were scholars who had also taught in the spring (90%), which may allow them to learn from and leverage spring teaching experiences. Figure 11 shows a substantial shift away from online teaching and towards hybrid and in person teaching in fall of 2020 compared to spring of 2020. Faculty at private universities had the highest rate of planning courses for online teaching (55%) while only 18-21 percent of those at public universities and research institutions planned on having their courses totally online. Hybrid instruction was planned at a similar rate for private university (40%), public university (38%), and research institution (38%) scholars. Some shift back to in person formats was made by scholars at public universities (20%) and research institutions (26%). Additionally, there were faculty with courses for which the instruction method had not been yet decided at private universities (4%), public universities (24%), and research institutions (15%). Whether these shifts in delivery modes will be safe, successful at ensuring learning, or efficient for teachers remains to be seen.

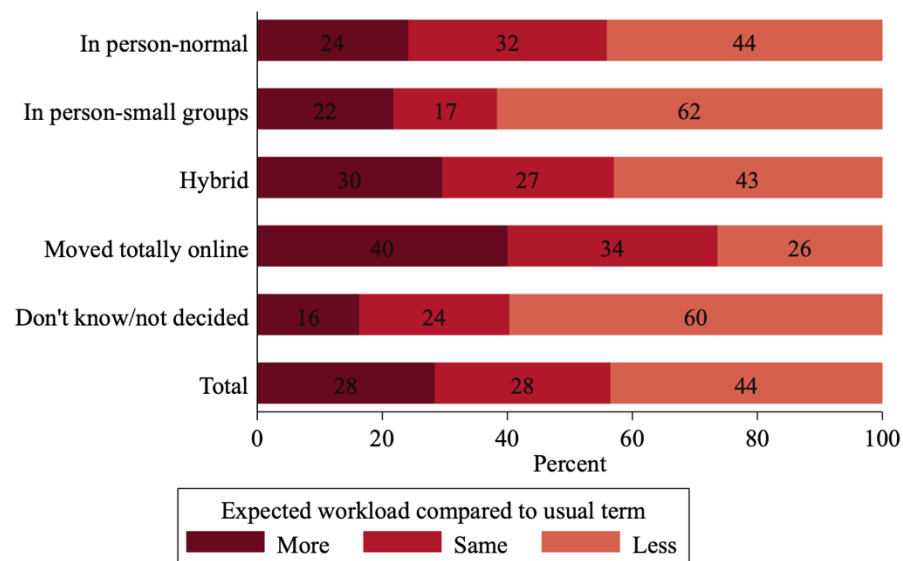
**Figure 11. Course format for fall term by institution type (percentage), scholars who are teaching in fall 2020**



Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Scholars' expectations of their Fall 2020 teaching workload, compared to their usual workload, varied substantially by the planned format (Figure 12). While some of those in-person expected more work (22% of those scholars with courses in person in small groups and 24% of scholars with courses in person like normal), more commonly they expected less work than usual (44% of scholars with courses in person like normal and 62% of scholars with courses in small groups). Those who didn't know also commonly expected less work than usual (60%), possibly anticipating that classes might be canceled or shortened if they did not yet know plans. Those switching to hybrid expected less work (43%) only slightly more often than more work (30%). However, those totally online in the fall, despite the experiences of the spring, expected more work (40%) more often than less (26%). Online teaching thus remains a challenge for scholars and one that may also negatively impact students yet may be necessary for safety.

**Figure 12. Expected workload for fall term (compared to usual term), by planned fall format (percentage)**

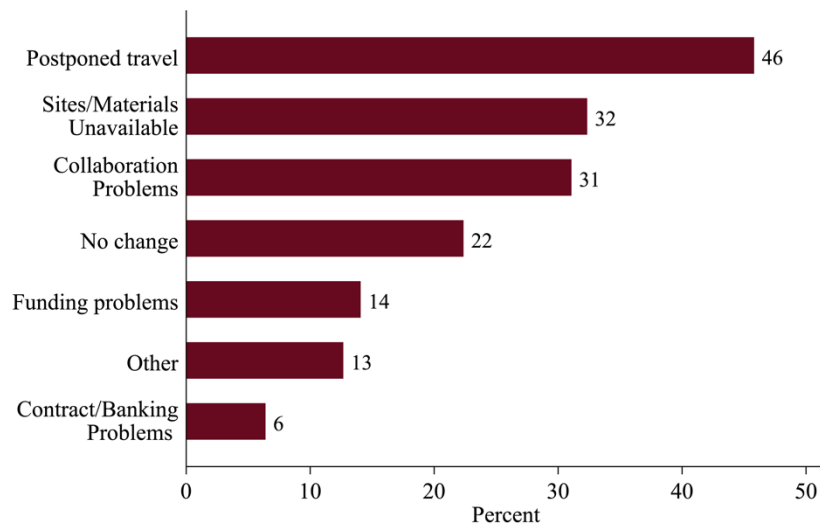


Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

### 3.6 Research and Fieldwork: The Impact of COVID-19

Almost all (91%) of scholars were working on research in early 2020, before COVID-19. When asked about the effects of COVID-19 on their research, only 22 percent of scholars reported no changes (Figure 13). Scholars reported numerous, often multiple, challenges. Most commonly, 46 percent of scholars postponed travel related to their research. Sites and materials became unavailable to a third of scholars (32%). A third (31%) of scholars experienced problems in collaborative work. A further 14 percent experienced funding problems, 6 percent contracting or banking problems, and 13 percent other issues. Other challenges ranged from increases in caregiving to delays in the peer review process due to COVID-19. Scholars often noted COVID-19 compounded a multitude of challenges, whether civil war in Libya or multiple crises in Lebanon. The multitude of challenges, such as inability to travel, collaborate, or difficulties with contracts and funding could impact scholars' career trajectories.

**Figure 13. Effects of COVID-19 on research (percentage), scholars with research pre-COVID-19**

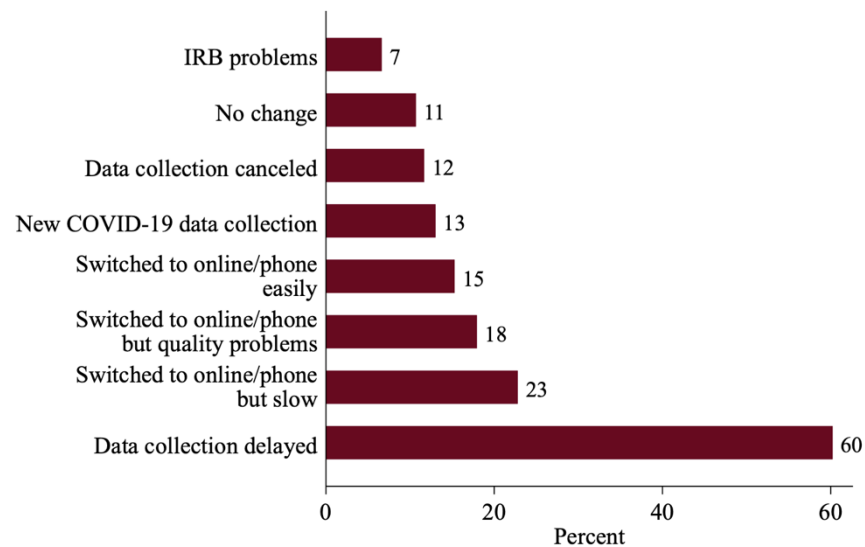


Notes: Multiple responses possible.

Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Among those doing research in early 2020, before COVID-19, the majority (71%) of scholars had work that they stated involved in-person qualitative or quantitative data collection (at least sometimes, by themselves or by their research collaborators). For those doing in-person data collection, a number of problems arose as a result of COVID-19 (Figure 14), with only 11 percent of scholars reporting no changes in data collection due to COVID-19. The most commonly reported problem was delays in data collection (60%), but 12 percent had data collection cancelled. Some scholars were able to switch from in-person data collection to using phone or online data collection. While 15 percent of scholars switched easily, 23 percent of scholars reported a switch but that it had slowed their research down and 18 percent experienced quality issues related to the switch. Scholars also reported problems with the institutional review board during this time (7%). The cancellations, delays, and quality challenges may affect scholars' careers and will also affect the state of knowledge in the region.

**Figure 14. Effects of COVID-19 on data collection (percentage), scholars with research pre-COVID-19 whose work (at least sometimes) includes fieldwork**



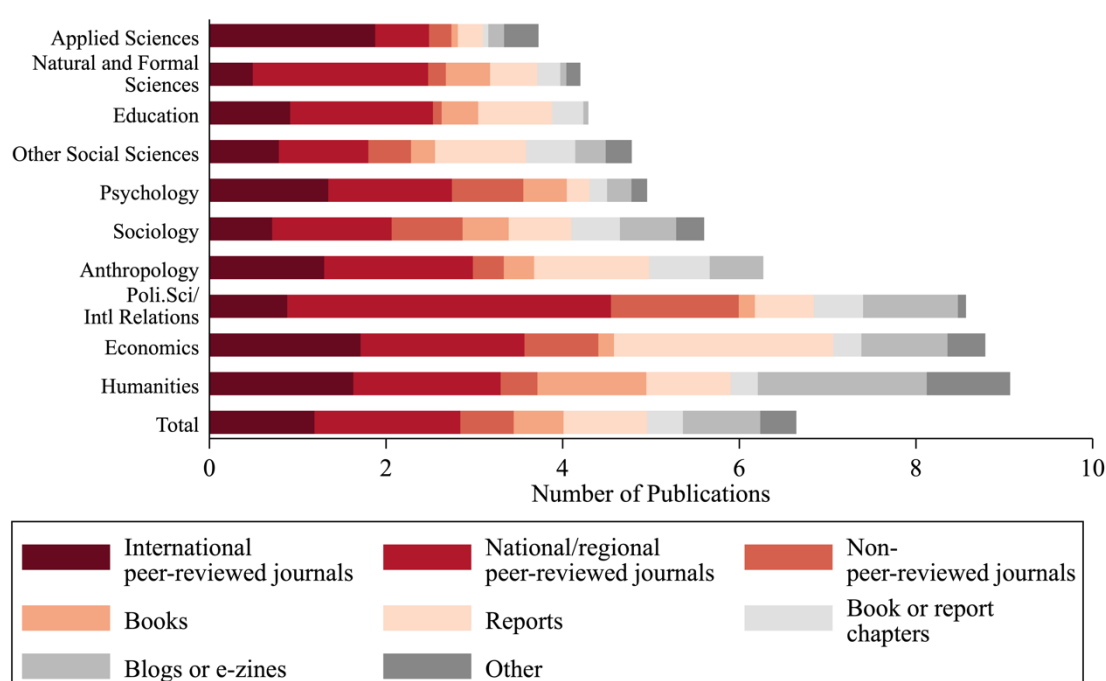
Notes: Multiple responses possible

Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

New COVID-19 data collection was initiated among 13 percent of scholars who did research in early 2020 and used in-person data collection methods (Figure 14). Furthermore, half of all scholars (51%) started research related to COVID-19 or its impact on society (not shown). The vast majority of those who started research on COVID-19 (89%) stated they did so because COVID-19 and its impact were an important issue. Only five percent started such research because they were unable to do their usual research and only 7 percent were motivated by funding being available for research on COVID-19. A few also noted other reasons, such as calls for papers or conferences about COVID-19 as a motivation.

Prior to COVID-19, scholars were actively publishing in a variety of formats. Scholars in every field reported four or more publications, on average, in a wide variety of scholarly formats, over 2018-2019. Figure 15 shows the average number of publications by field and type of publication. Scholars working in the fields of economics, humanities, and political science and international relations reported between eight to ten publications on average. Quantity and also format of publishing varied by field and may be differentially impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, a point we explore further below.

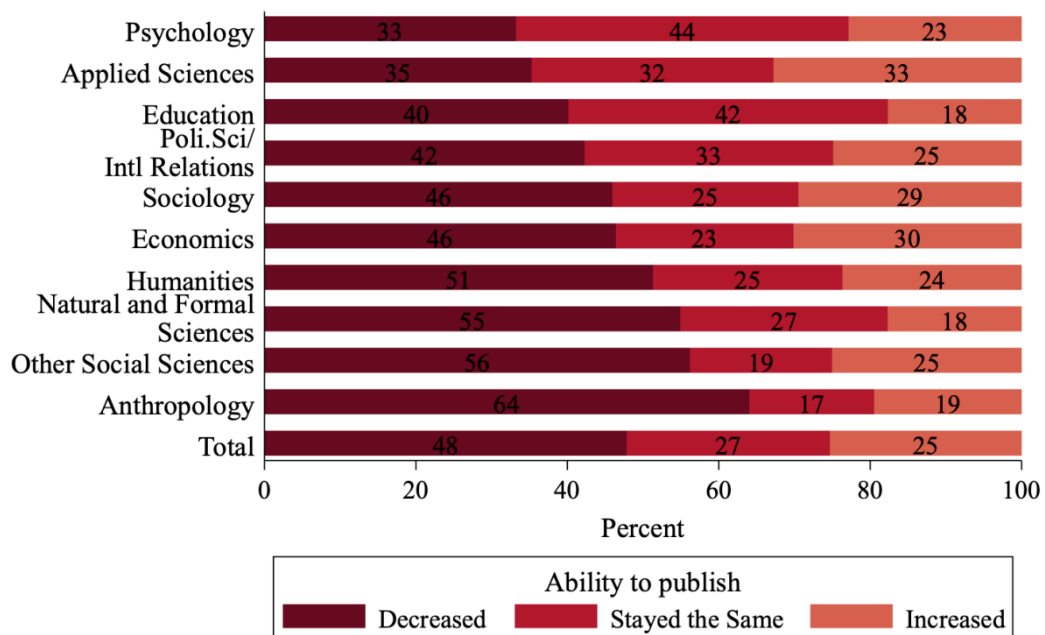
**Figure 15. Average publications over 2018-2019 by publication type and field**



Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

COVID-19 decreased scholars' ability to publish their work (Figure 16). While 48 percent of scholars had decreases in publication, 27 percent were able to publish at the same rate and 25 percent increased their publishing. There were clear differences by field; for example, those in the applied sciences reported nearly equal shares of decreased, same, or increased publishing (32-35%). Yet those in anthropology struggled to publish, with 64 percent experiencing a decrease, 17 percent the same, and 19 percent increased publishing. The need for in person versus other forms of data collection may play an important role in the ability to undertake and publish research in a COVID-19 context, a point we explored above.

**Figure 16. Impact of COVID-19 on publications by field (percentage)**

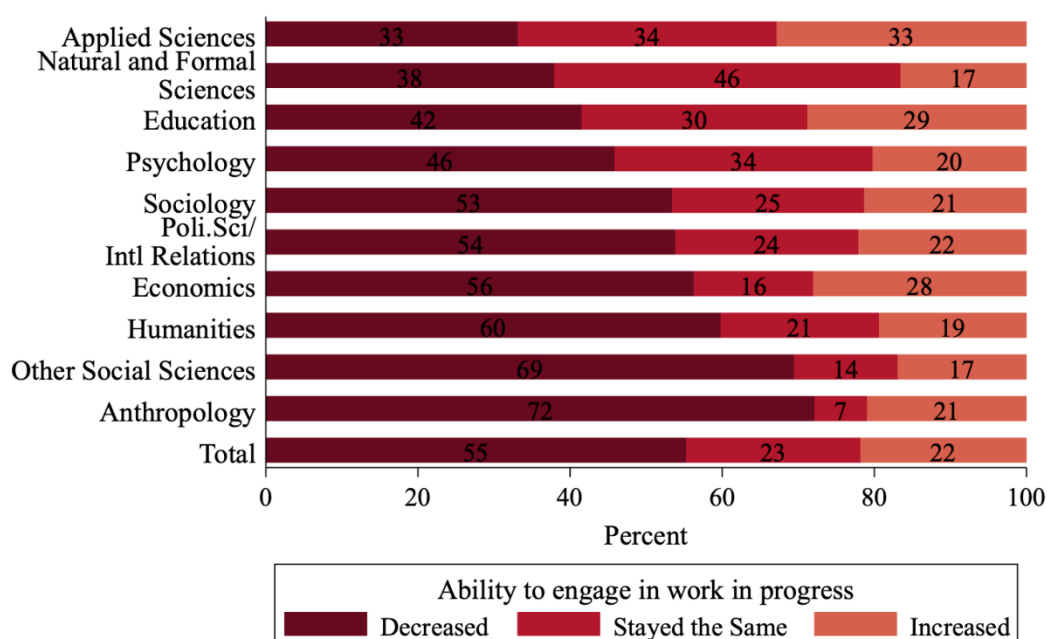


Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

In early 2020, before COVID-19, the vast majority of scholars (89%) had research works in progress. Scholars with works in progress prior to COVID-19 reported how the crisis impacted their ability to engage in their research work in progress (Figure 17). Scholars overall reported a decrease in their ability to progress their research work (55%) that exceeded the difficulties in publishing (Figure 16), although for some their ability to do such work remained the same (23%) or even increased (22%). Those in the sciences (applied or natural and formal) experienced the smallest decreases (33-38%) while those in anthropology experienced the largest decreases (72%), likely due to the differing nature of their research and data collection. That works in progress were disrupted even more so than publishing means the impacts of COVID-19 on scholars' careers are ongoing and under-estimated by effects on current publications.



**Figure 17. Impact of COVID-19 on works in progress by field (percentage), scholars with works in progress pre-COVID**

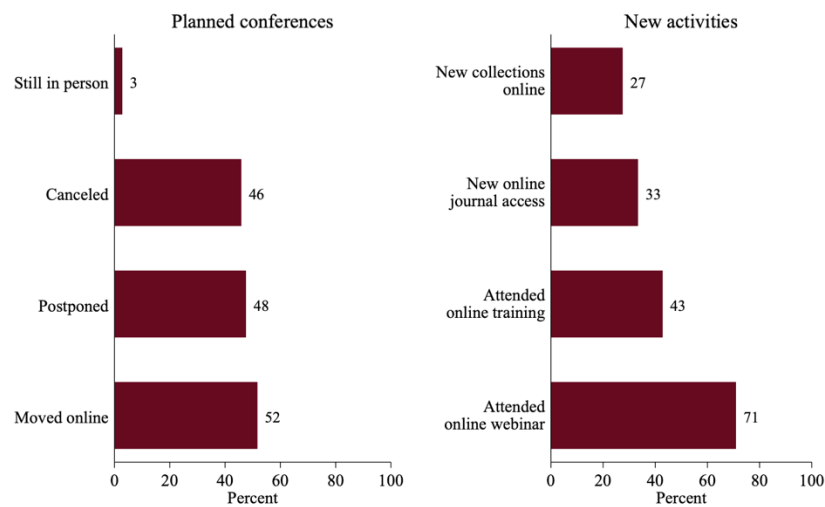


Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

### 3.7 Professional Development: The Impact of COVID-19

The majority of scholars (77%) had planned to attend workshops or conferences that were supposed to happen since March 2020. Almost no scholars (3%) reported that these events happened in person as planned (Figure 18). While half (52%) reported a workshop or conference moved online, quite commonly respondents had an event postponed (48%) or canceled entirely (46%). Although events did not happen as planned, there were some professional development advantages to the online world, also shown in Figure 18. New collections were available online for 27 percent of scholars, and 33 percent had new online journal access. Further, 43 percent attended online trainings and 71 percent attended online webinars. The online format may have increased accessibility of events for some scholars, so long as they had reliable electricity and internet to avail themselves of new opportunities.

**Figure 18. Conference outcomes (percentage), scholars planning workshops/conferences since March 2020, and new professional development activities since COVID-19 (percentage)**



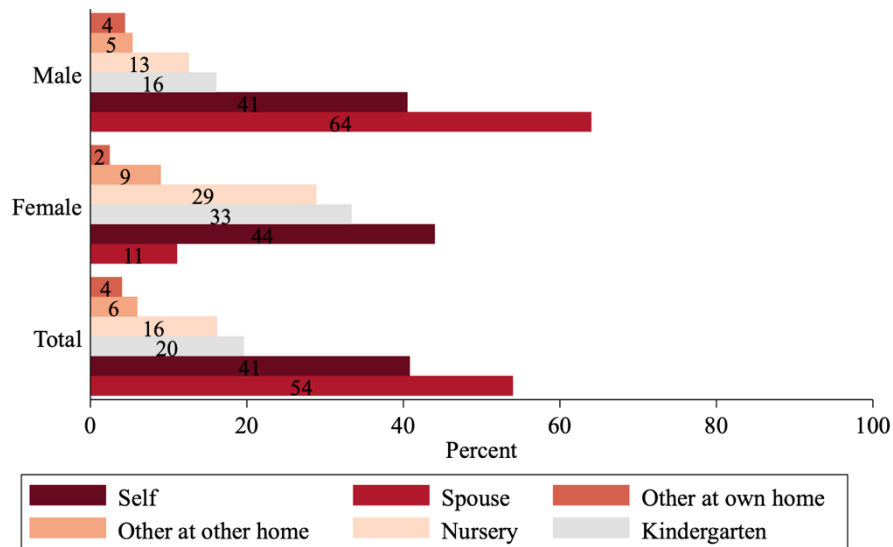
Note: Multiple responses possible

Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

### 3.8 Work/life balance: The impact of COVID-19

The majority of scholars were currently married (75%) or previously married (5%) rather than single (20%). Among those currently or previously married, three-quarters (74%) had children 0-18 years old. More than half (52%) of the parents with children aged 0-18 had a young child, aged 0-5, and almost two-thirds (66%) had school-aged children (aged 6-18). COVID-19 shut down schools throughout the Arab region, and often shut down nurseries or made other caregiving unfeasible due to restrictions (CARE 2020; UN Women 2020). Figure 19 explores pre-COVID-19 care arrangements of young children (aged 0-5) for the parents of young children, by scholar's sex. Prior to the pandemic, around 41 percent of male scholars and 44 percent of female scholars identified themselves as one of their children's primary caregivers. Male scholars more often noted their spouse (64%) as a caregiver than female scholars (11%), emphasizing a disproportionate care burden for women. Moreover, female scholars were much more often relying on other caregivers at their home or out of their home, particularly nursery (29%) or kindergarten (33%). Female scholars' arrangements were particularly vulnerable to disruption due to COVID-19.

**Figure 19. Pre-COVID-19 care arrangements of young children (aged 0-5) (percentage), parents of young children, by scholar's sex**

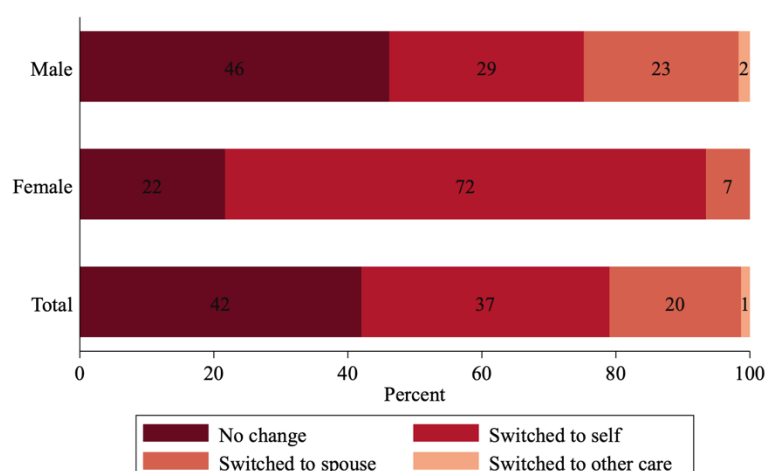


Note: Multiple responses possible

Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

During the COVID-19 lockdown, there were enormous disparities in how changes in care arrangements for young children affected male and female scholars (Figure 20). For male scholars with young children, almost half (46%) experienced no change in child care arrangements and less than a third (29%) switched child care arrangements so that they themselves were caregiving. For female scholars, almost three fourths (72%) became the primary care givers in their households and less than a fourth (22%) experienced no change in previous child care arrangements. Only a small fraction (7%) of female scholars reported their spouse took over care. COVID-19 related disruptions to child care arrangements disproportionately impacted female scholars.

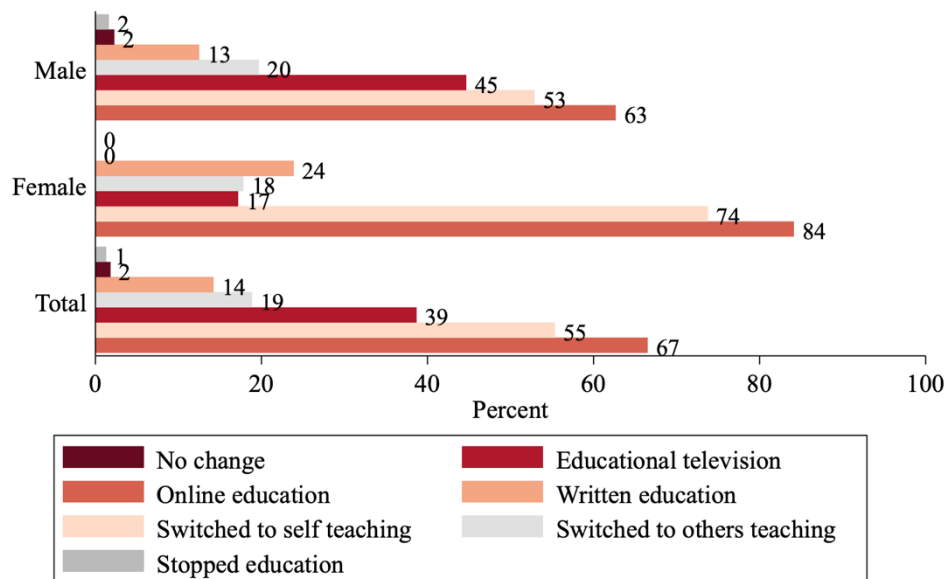
**Figure 20. Changes in care arrangements of young children (aged 0-5) during COVID-19 lockdown (percentage), parents of young children, by scholar's sex**



Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Among the parents of school-age children (ages 6-18), 96 percent had at least one child in school pre-COVID-19. Almost all scholars with school-age children (98%) reported a change in educational arrangements since COVID-19 (Figure 21). While a small share had their children stop schooling (1%), the switch to other forms of teaching particularly added to the responsibilities of female scholars. The vast majority (74%) of female scholars reported they started teaching their children, often in conjunction with online education (84%), while male scholars took a role in teaching half (53%) of the time and relied on online teaching 63 percent of the time, along with more commonly using educational television (45% versus 17% for female scholars).

**Figure 21. Changes in educational arrangements for parents of older children (aged 6-18) (percentage), parents of older children who were in school prior to COVID-19, by scholar's sex**

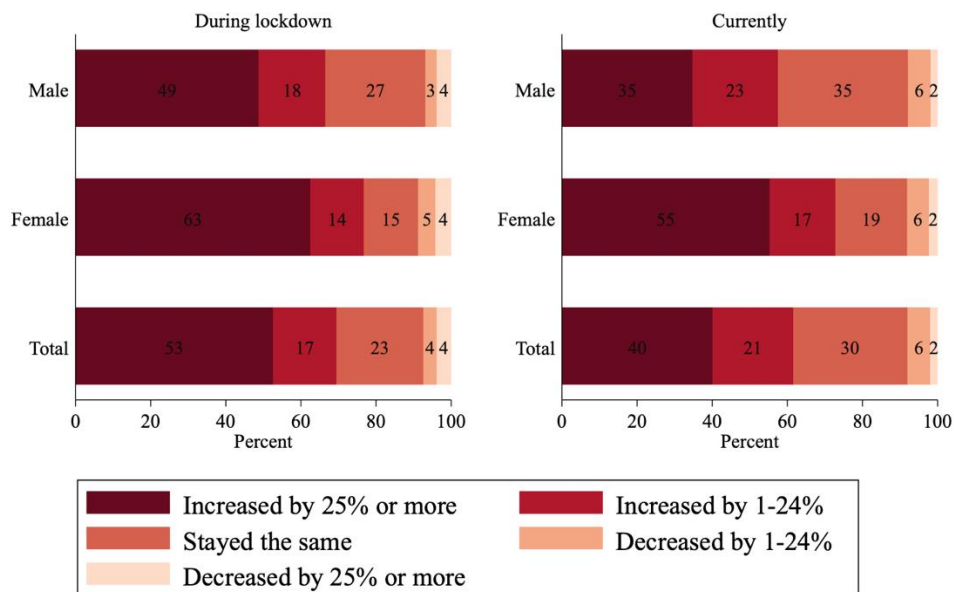


Note: Multiple responses possible

Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Shutdowns in schools and nurseries as well as lockdowns and mobility restrictions reshaped the time scholars spent on caregiving. The majority (70%) of scholars with children 0-18 experienced an increase in caregiving hours during the lockdown compared to before COVID-19 (Figure 22). During the lockdown, about half (49%) of male scholars and roughly two thirds (63%) of female scholars experienced an increase of 25% or more in their hours spent caregiving. At the time of the survey, about a third (35%) of male scholars experienced an increase of 25% or more while slightly above half (55%) of their female counterparts still faced substantially higher caregiving. As women pre-COVID were more often caregivers than men (Figure 19), this data reinforces that COVID-19 exacerbated gender disparities. Additionally, while COVID-19 added more caregiving hours to both sexes, female scholars still had larger increases in caregiving and longer-lasting ones.

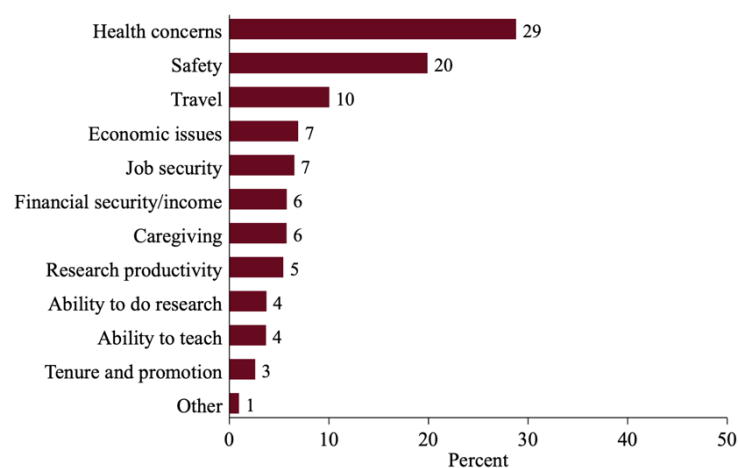
**Figure 22. Changes in hours of caregiving during lockdown and currently compared to before COVID-19 (percentage), parents of children 0-18, by scholar's sex**



Source: Authors' calculations based on ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19 on Arab scholars

Scholars were asked their greatest concern about COVID-19 (Figure 23). Health was the top concern (29%) about COVID-19. Safety (20%) and travel (10%) concerns were the other two highest concerns. Economic issues (7%), job or financial security (7-6%), caregiving (6%), and research productivity issues (5%) were relatively less frequently scholars' greatest concern. While COVID-19 has undoubtedly disrupted scholarship, the health threat remains foremost in scholars' minds.

**Figure 23. Greatest concern about COVID-19 (percentage)**



## **4 Discussion and conclusions**

COVID-19 represents an enormous threat to health and safety; even for the scholars whose careers have been disrupted, the health and safety threat is foremost in their minds. Yet the pandemic is also having immense economic and social effects. In the Arab region, these challenges come at a watershed moment for a region that has faced a number of challenges over the past decade, ranging from political change to ongoing civil unrest and economic crises. The pandemic has underlined the challenges facing education and higher education systems in the region, which abruptly shifted online (CARE 2020; UN Women 2020). The teaching, research, and careers of scholars have been severely disrupted (Buttorff, Shalaby, and Allam 2020; Lassassi et al. 2020; World Bank 2020b). This report investigated the impact of COVID-19 and the ensuing crises on Arab social scientists and humanists in universities and research institutes, using a new online survey from ACSS.

The survey captured the diverse experiences of scholars across a variety of disciplines, institutions, and countries. The scholars were disproportionately young, and although majority male, increasingly feminized, as other researchers have noted as well (Assaad and Abdalla 2019; Sieverding 2020). While scholars all faced new challenges, women with young children experienced enormous increases in caregiving during the pandemic. While men worked slightly fewer hours overall and regardless of their children's age, women with no children increased their hours of scholarly work, those with only school-age children experienced little change, and those with young children worked substantially fewer hours. Women disproportionately became their children's primary caregivers for young children and were supporting education for school-age children, facing substantial increases in caregiving hours overall.

Scholars spent less time teaching – which may be driven by those whose schools and classes simply ended in the spring – but more time on research. The quality and effectiveness of teaching was an enormous challenge, affecting students' learning as well, and remained a challenge in the primarily hybrid and online format for fall. While on the surface the additional time on research seems like a silver lining, scholars experienced decreases in productivity. Research delays were common, as well as difficulties in data collection. While some research could be shifted online, slower progress and quality issues were common even

in online research, and the ability to shift depended very much on discipline. The ability to publish decreased, and even more so making headway on works in progress decreased, although this varied by field. These decreases in teaching, learning, and research will affect the careers of a generation of scholars and also the state of knowledge in and about the Arab region.

One positive development was half of researchers starting work on the pressing issue of COVID-19 and its impact on economies and societies. Collaborations became more difficult and conferences and workshops were postponed, cancelled, or moved online. Yet the online environment did create new opportunities to access materials, journals, trainings, and webinars that might previously have been unavailable. However, these opportunities were only available to those with time and reliable internet and electricity, which are by no means universally available.

Overall, COVID-19 presents steep challenges to scholars in the region, particularly for those in countries already facing a surplus of challenges, and especially for those already facing disadvantages, such as female scholars juggling care for young children. Although the course of the pandemic and the region's response remain uncertain and evolving, there is the potential to motivate and create changes to address long-standing challenges and disparities, or for the pandemic and regional response to further exacerbate inequality and pre-existing problems.



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## 5 Appendix: Survey Design and Weighting

### 5.1 Survey Sample Frame

The intended survey sample frame was Arab social scientists and humanists with graduate (masters) degrees or higher. The Arab region was defined as the members of the League of Arab States: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The sampling frame drew on two key databases held by ACSS (Sieverding 2020):

- ACSS contacts and grantees: This database, established in 2012, includes all individuals who have applied to ACSS activities or events, including membership, grants and fellowships, working groups, trainings, conferences, or other events.
- Arab social science and humanities educators/researchers: ACSS created and regularly updates a database of institutions in the Arab region that engage in social science/humanities education and/or research (universities, research centers, professional societies etc.). Data are available at [dataverse.theacss.org/dataverse/assm](https://dataverse.theacss.org/dataverse/assm). These institution lists were used to compile lists of faculty and staff at these institutions, for those who had such lists and contact information available.

The contact details of 17,074 faculty members were gathered from the official websites of 151 Arab universities that listed some or all of their social sciences and humanities faculty online (see Table A-1 for list of social sciences, humanities, and inter- or multi-disciplinary programs). A further 1,591 email addresses were added from the websites of 48 Arab research centers (both university and non-university based) and professional societies. From the ACSS grants management system, 3,925 email addresses were added. From the ACSS mailing list, 1,064 email addresses were added. From a survey of early career researchers, an additional 278 email addresses were added. Out of the total of 23,932 email addresses, duplicates were removed and addresses screened for invalid emails using an email verification and cleaning service. Emails that bounced back in a previous survey were also removed. Ultimately, the survey was sent to 14,254 email addresses.

## 5.2 Survey Recruitment

The survey was programmed into SurveyMonkey in Arabic, English, and French. It was launched with emails going out through SurveyMonkey to the 14,254 email addresses on September 1, 2020. Two reminder emails were sent, on September 15 and 28, to all recipients. The survey was posted to the ACSS social media outlets (website, Twitter, and Facebook) in all three languages on September 2, 2020. Three reminders went out through social media on September 14, 24, and 30. The survey closed October 1, 2020 at 5pm Beirut time.

## 5.3 Eligibility and Completion

A total of 1,457 individuals started the survey. Of these, 44 declined to continue at the consent statement. A further 47 respondents had less than a bachelor's degree and 76 a bachelor's degree (or equivalent). These individuals were disqualified from continuing in the survey, given the focus on the impacts on scholars. Likewise, a further 211 individuals worked for neither a university (or higher education institution) nor a research institute and were disqualified. A further 103 individuals did not answer any questions from the university or research institute question onwards and most likely stopped due to being ineligible at that question and were dropped from the sample. A total of 79 individuals either did not give a country for their current work or were working outside the Arab world and thus were dropped from the sample as ineligible, leaving 897 respondents.

We allowed individuals who began the survey but did not wish to complete the survey to withdraw at any time. Of the remaining 897 respondents, 281 did not answer the last question (greatest concern about COVID-19) that everyone was supposed to answer; we consider these responses incomplete and drop them from our study. Among the remaining 616 respondents, 89 had degrees that were not from a social science/humanities or interdisciplinary social science/humanities adjacent field (see Table A-1 defining social science/humanities, interdisciplinary, and non-social science/humanities disciplines). However, since they self-selected into a survey on social scientists and humanists, we retained them in our sample. These respondents were primarily those with degrees in: Law (N=22); Business, management, administration, marketing, and advertising (N=18); Journalism, media, and communications (N=12); Languages (N=7); Health (N=6); and other fields (N=24).

The respondents to this survey have completed their degree in a variety of different fields of study (see Table A-1). For our analysis we combined reported fields of study with less than 30 observations into related groups. These categories are humanities, natural and formal sciences, applied sciences, and other social sciences. Humanities includes: Archeology, Arts, Cultural Studies, History, Journalism/Media, Languages, Linguistics, Law, Literature, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. Natural and Formal Sciences includes: Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Veterinary, Biological and Related Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Geography, Mathematics, and Statistics. Applied Sciences includes: Architecture, Business, Management, Administration, Marketing and Advertising, Engineering, Manufacturing and Processing, Health (Dental/Medicine/Nursing/Pharmacy/Public Health), Information and Communication Technologies, and Library and Archival Science. Other Social Sciences includes: Demography/Population Studies, Development Studies, Gender Studies, Regional and International Studies, and Urban Studies.

**Table A-1. Social Science and Humanities Disciplines**

<b>Social Sciences and Humanities</b>
Anthropology
Archeology
Economics
Education
Geography
History
Linguistics
Literature
Philosophy
Political Sciences/International Relations
Psychology
Religious studies
Sociology
<b>Inter- or Multi-Disciplinary</b>
Cultural Studies
Demography / Population Studies
Development Studies
Gender Studies
Regional & International Studies
Urban studies
<b>Not Social Sciences or Humanities</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Veterinary
Architecture
Arts
Biological and Related Sciences
Business, Management, Administration, Marketing & Advertising
Engineering, Manufacturing, Processing

Environmental Sciences
Health (Dental / Medicine / Nursing / Pharmacy / Public Health)
Information & Communication Technologies
Journalism / Media / Communication
Languages
Law
Library & Archival Science
Mathematics & Statistics
Physical Sciences (Astronomy, Chemistry, Geology, Physics, ...)
Theology

Source: Creation of ACSS based on ISCED fields of education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2014).

## 5.4 Response Rates and Weights

Table A-2 shows the distribution of our survey sample in terms of the questionnaires sent, responses, and ultimately sample weights, by country. Country for questionnaires sent is country of institution for those from the educators/researchers database and country of citizenship from the ACSS database; we treat this as equivalent to our question on the country where you currently work since the vast majority of the sample frame is from the educators/researchers database. The table defines as non-eligible those who were working outside the Arab world, had less than a master's degree, and who worked outside an academic setting, as well as those who did not consent (since we have no further information on their eligibility), or dropped out by those questions (since the questions stated the eligibility criteria). We assume that the sample of eligible respondents is distributed the same as the overall sample. We assume that the sample of individuals with unknown countries is distributed the same as known countries when weighting; countries are given in all our complete and eligible responses. Those from non-Arab countries were excluded from our analyses as all non-eligible.

The response rate (% of questionnaires yielding complete and eligible responses) overall for the survey was four percent. This response rate is, however, an underestimate of the true response rate of eligible individuals since a substantial fraction of individuals were ineligible. The response rate varied across countries, with a high of 50 percent in Comoros (which received only two questionnaires, one of which was completed). Among larger countries, response rates were lowest in Saudi Arabia and Syria (2% each) and highest in Morocco (11%). For all countries with complete responses, a weight was created so that complete responses represent the original universe of questionnaires sent; this weight is the inverse of the response rate (as a fraction). Thus, countries with low response rates, such as Saudi

Arabia, have relatively larger weights (53.118), while those with higher response rates, such as Morocco, have relatively smaller weights (9.012). Weights are used throughout the analyses to accurately represent the different countries. However, weights cannot overcome unobservable selection bias; whether individuals more or less affected by COVID-19 or with different backgrounds and experiences answered the survey is unknown.

**Table A-2. Distribution of survey sample, response rate, and weights, by country**

	Questionnaires sent	Ineligible responses	Eligible responses	Complete responses (among eligible)	Response rate: % of questionnaires yielding complete and eligible responses	Weight (inverse of response rate)
Algeria	3128	0	228	160	5	19.550
Libya	184	0	12	8	4	23.000
Mauritania	14	0	7	4	29	3.500
Morocco	730	1	128	81	11	9.012
Tunisia	677	1	40	29	4	23.345
<b>MAGHREB REGION</b>	<b>4733</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>6</b>	
Comoros	2	0	1	1	50	n/a
Djibouti	0	0	0	0	n/a	2.000
Egypt	1877	0	80	56	3	33.518
Somalia	12	0	2	1	8	12.000
Sudan	452	0	29	24	5	18.833
<b>EGYPT-SUDAN REGION</b>	<b>2343</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>3</b>	
Bahrain	24	0	3	3	13	8.000
Iraq	1184	1	85	58	5	20.414
Jordan	731	0	42	27	4	27.074
Kuwait	42	0	4	4	10	10.500
Lebanon	746	0	59	46	6	16.217
Oman	9	0	2	1	11	9.000
Palestine	751	0	98	70	9	10.729
Qatar	238	0	9	6	3	39.667
Saudi Arabia	903	0	36	17	2	53.118
Syria	92	0	3	2	2	46.000
UAE	251	0	14	10	4	25.100
Yemen	122	0	15	8	7	15.250
<b>MASHREQ REGION</b>	<b>5093</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>5</b>	
Non-Arab country	117	52				n/a
Unknown	1987	505				n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>14273</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>897</b>	<b>616</b>	<b>4</b>	

Source: Data on questionnaires sent from ACSS sample frame. Data on complete, eligible, and non-eligible responses from ACSS survey on the impact of COVID-19. Response rate and weight calculated by authors.



## 5.5 Questionnaire

The questionnaire covered nine topics:

1. Consent
2. Highest degree (level, field, year, country) and current academic affiliation
3. Demographics (age, sex, country of work, nationality, nationality of birth, languages, marital status, children of various ages)
4. Current position (type of institution, job title, position responsibilities)
5. Hours of work (across teaching, research, and administration pre-COVID-19 and currently)
6. Teaching (Teaching pre-COVID; challenges teaching during COVID-19, online teaching, teaching (plans, format, workload) for Fall 2020)
7. Research and fieldwork (Research and fieldwork/data collection pre-COVID-19 including publications in 2018-19; Effects of COVID-19 on research, fieldwork/data collection, publications, and works in progress; new research on COVID-19)
8. Professional development (Workshops or conferences planned pre-COVID-19; impact of COVID-19 on professional activities)
9. Work/life and COVID-19 impact (pre-COVID children's schooling and care arrangements; impact of lockdown on care and education of children; hours devoted to caregiving pre-COVID-19, during the lockdown, and currently; greatest COVID-19 related concern)

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<sup>i</sup> One respondent (0.16% of the sample) selected prefer not to say and five respondents (0.81% of the sample) did not answer this question. Given the small size of these groups when analyzing other outcomes by sex we only present results for male and female respondents.

<sup>ii</sup> Other types of institutes were combined with research institutes and include a variety of governmental and non-profit organizations, ranging from ministries (e.g. ministry of education) to international agencies (e.g. UNHCR).