

University of British Columbia

Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability Program

Student Research Report

# UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH CHILDREN AT UBC

## A CAMPUS PLANNING AND POLICY ASSESSMENT

Prepared by: Adriana Gaganis, Mikayla Gelz, Isabella Setyabule, Alvin To

Prepared for:

Course Code: GEOG 371

University of British Columbia

Date: 21 April 2021

*Disclaimer: "UBC SEEDS Sustainability Program provides students with the opportunity to share the findings of their studies, as well as their opinions, conclusions and recommendations with the UBC community. The reader should bear in mind that this is a student research project and is not an official document of UBC. Furthermore, readers should bear in mind that these reports may not reflect the current status of activities at UBC. We urge you to contact the research persons mentioned in a report or the SEEDS Sustainability Program representative about the current status of the subject matter of a report".*



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This study is commissioned by the Graduate Student Society (GSS) in collaboration with and through the Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability program, stemming from the need to explore the experiences of graduate student parents (GSPs) at UBC. Their voices are rendered invisible by insufficient institutional understanding. We began by conceptualizing the GSP experience along two interdependent axes, that of the social realm and that of the physical realm of university space. The physical realm, constituted by the built environment, both in terms of accessibility and family-related provisions. Our findings indicated that GSPs were generally satisfied with the existing infrastructure, yet there is room for improvement. The social realm includes social attitudes and stigma regarding GSPs and their position in the university. Our results show that this warrants more of a concern for them, as it also influences their ability to access accommodations such as extensions that rely on interactions with figures of authority (including supervisors, advisors, councils etc.) that may not be as empathetic to their special circumstances. This can also influence their ability to manage their multiple conflicting roles and negatively impact academic attainment.

The visibility of this group presented as a key element for the improvement of university space and tackling the wide variety of issues and could act as a catalyst for positive change. Based on these results, we made a few recommendations to the GSS, including the need for more visible family-friendly spaces in the heart of campus, such as child-friendly studies areas and a greater abundance of breast- and bottle-feeding areas. We also recommend steps for the improvement of the social conduct of faculty and staff, as well as a call for redefinitions within university policy. We aim to provide a foundation for the future direction in research on this topic, that will foster even greater understanding, as well as contribute to the discussion in the reform of social attitudes and physical configurations for improved inclusivity of the graduate student parent.

## CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
LIST OF FIGURES	4
LIST OF TABLES	5
INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 RESEARCH TOPIC	6
1.2 RESEARCH RELEVANCE	6
1.3 PROJECT CONTEXT	7
1.4 PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	9
2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS	10
2.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	10
2.2 RESEARCH METHODS	11
2.2.1 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION RESEARCH METHODS	11
2.2.2 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION RESEARCH METHODS	12
<b>2.3 Methods of Administration</b>	15
3. RESULTS	15
3.1 FAMILY ACCOMMODATIONS	15
3.1.1 HOUSING	15
3.1.2 CHILDCARE	17
3.2 CAMPUS SPACE	19
3.2.1 ACCESSIBILITY	19
3.2.2 SAFETY	20
3.2.3 BOTTLE AND BREASTFEEDING ON CAMPUS	22
3.3 UNIVERSITY POLICY & RESOURCES	22
3.3.1 ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS	22
3.3.2 SOCIAL RECOGNITION BY FACULTY	25
3.4 FINANCIAL POLICIES	26
3.4.1 WORK AND FINANCIAL WELLBEING	26
3.5 ROLE CONFLICT	28
3.5.1 TIME SPENT	28

3.5.2 COPING STRATEGIES	30
3.6 INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL STEREOTYPE	31
3.6.1 INCLUSIVE SOCIAL SPACE	31
4. DISCUSSION	32
5. RECOMMENDATIONS	35
5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION	35
5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	38
6. CONCLUSION	38
REFERENCES	39
APPENDICES	41
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUOTES	41
HOUSING	41
CHILDCARE	42
ACCESSIBILITY TO CAMPUS SPACE	43
ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS & RECOGNITION BY FACULTY	44
WORK CONFLICT & FINANCE	45
COPING STRATEGIES	45
INCLUSIVE SOCIAL SPACE	46
SELF-ADVOCATING	47
COVID	47
APPENDIX B: ETHNOGRAPHIC MOMENTS	47

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Survey respondent demographics (ethnic and gender identity)

Figure 2: Survey respondent demographics (marital status by gender identity)

Figure 3. Distribution patterns of children at preschool age or younger (under 5 years of age) among GSPs at UBC

Figure 4. GSP satisfaction with on-campus housing cost and waitlist time at UBC

- Figure 5. GSP housing and childcare arrangement patterns at UBC
- Figure 6. GSP satisfaction with on-campus childcare waitlist time, cost and time availability at UBC
- Figure 7. Childcare arrangements based on GSP marital status at UBC
- Figure 8. Avoidance of particular UBC campus spaces by GSPs
- Figure 9. GSP awareness of designated breastfeeding area locations on the UBC campus
- Figure 10. Ease of access to information of UBC resources and accommodations for GSPs
- Figure 11. Ease of extension attainment on parental grounds at UBC
- Figure 12. Ease of extension attainment on parental grounds at UBC by gender
- Figure 13. GSP satisfaction with academic extension duration at UBC
- Figure 14. GSP means for securing the fulfillment for family needs by marital status at UBC
- Figure 15. GSP feelings of acknowledgement by university faculty
- Figure 16. GSP funding and employment patterns
- Figure 17. GSP employment location and the status
- Figure 18. GSP feeling of level of conflict of multiple roles
- Figure 19. Hours spent on childcare by GSP gender
- Figure 20. Weekly hours spent on childcare and studies by GSP gender
- Figure 21. Frequency of inability to complete tasks due to responsibility conflict and the investment in personal wellbeing
- Figure 22. GSP feeling of inclusion at UBC
- Figure 23. Traditional expectations of parenthood impact on GSP treatment at UBC

## LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1. Literature Theme Chart
- Table 2. Ethnic and gender of respondents
- Table 3. Respondent marital status by gender
- Table 4. Top barriers to on-campus housing at UBC
- Table 5. Top barriers to on-campus childcare at UBC
- Table 6. Top barriers to accessing UBC campus space
- Table 7. Positive aspects of UBC campus accessibility
- Table 8. Family-friendly aspects that make the UBC campus safe

Table 9. GSP need for extensions on printer grounds

Table 10. GSP funding and employment patterns

Table 11. Effects of role conflict for GSPs

Table 12. GSP coping strategies to counter the effect of role conflict

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GSP - Graduate Student Parent

GSS - Graduate Student Society

SEEDS - Social Economic Ecological Development Studies

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 RESEARCH TOPIC

Graduate Student Parents (GSPs) are a relatively invisible demographic within the university, often burdened with multiple constraints while navigating an educational institution catered to young childless individuals. This presents challenges for which GSPs have created a host of coping strategies when balancing conflicting responsibilities and commitments, many of which compensate for the shortcomings of official university policy.

GSPs at UBC are underrepresented in both the university's physical and social space. Conducting an environmental scan of UBC GSP policy and gaining an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of GSPs provides the opportunity to identify UBC-specific policy gaps. This gap in the understanding of the parental experience of graduate students at UBC holds great potential for future shifts towards a more inclusive university space that considers a greater variety of positionalities and circumstances.

### 1.2 RESEARCH RELEVANCE

Social sustainability should be a major goal of any university. The inclusion of diverse groups of people, visible or invisible, is vital in decision-making around policy and campus space to create an equitable academic environment for all. Since research on GSPs in Canadian institutions is lacking, we recognize the importance of this opportunity to incorporate their experiences in the growing literature contributing to the understanding of their position, specifically for the UBC context.

The hardships that stem from GSP's conflicting responsibilities can have adverse effects on academic attainment and individual wellbeing. To foster a healthy academic community in which all individuals have the opportunity to thrive despite diverse circumstances, strategies must be put in place to counteract these constraints to cultivate an inclusive academic, social and physical environment. Understanding the coping mechanisms created and employed by GSPs, and their impacts are imperative to develop a system with their needs in mind.

While there is substantial literature on the GSP experience, comprehensive analysis of existing practical policies and campus planning, as well as policy recommendations, seems to be an afterthought for the more prevalent scholars on this topic. Moreover, much of the literature is also focused on European universities (Moreau & Kerner, 2015; Brooks, 2012). This creates space for additional scholarship on the GSP experience in Canadian higher education institutions, including UBC, allowing us to participate in the academic conversation.

Outcomes of this research are enhanced interest on this subject which can prompt more in-depth and comprehensive analysis and study of these particular experiences, thus reducing social stigma among faculty and peers and informing policy decisions in order to create more inclusivity and support for current and future GSPs.

### 1.3 PROJECT CONTEXT

#### The Gender Differential

A prevalent theme in scholarly research on the GSP experience centers on the gendered dimension. Due to normative expectations of motherhood, female GSPs' roles are disproportionately stigmatized. Concepts that connect to this unignorable aspect of pursuing higher academics are the 'leaking pipeline' and the "pathway" problem. Thiesen et al. define the 'leaking pipeline' as the "difference between the rates of women and men pursuing graduate degrees and careers in academia," and more specifically the decrease in the number of women as one moves higher up the academic ladder (Thiessen et al., 2018, p. 57; Kulp, 2020, p. 408). Contributing to the gender differential is the guilt surrounding a desire to conform to the "intensive mothering" ideology (Lynch, 2008, p. 602). In a similar fashion, the 'pathway' problem expresses the decrease of women in the progression to higher academic ranks, as barriers increase (Thiessen et al., 2018, p. 48). Yet, Kulp (2020) found that more mothers obtain "tenure-track jobs," than previous studies suggested (p. 422). However, these women often confine themselves to non-research institutions (p. 422).

Scholars have identified the academy as a highly "gendered-institution" and as such challenges faced by female GSPs, owing to their gender alone are compounded by their parental roles (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2018, p. 255; Thiessen et al., 2018; Leviten-Reid et al., 2009). Disparities in the division of domestic labour reveal that graduate student mothers "spend 102 hours per week on their paid and unpaid duties compared with 95 hours for graduate student fathers and approximately 75 hours for childless graduate students" (Leviten-Reid et al., 2009, p. 437). This pattern varies across countries and cultures with "different gender norms", as illustrated through Brook's comparative study on GSPs in England and Denmark (Brooks, 2012, p. 444). While the gender differential is undoubtedly a significant facet of the GSP experience, analysis through an intersectional lens is required to better understand how, beyond gender, other marginalized social identities contribute to the compounding of challenges faced by some GSPs compared to others.



## Institutional and Social Stereotypes

Social stigma is a key factor that shapes the university experiences of GSPs. Whether it arises from peers, supervisors or university administration, pressure to increase course loads or allot more time to academics exacerbates the challenges inherent to the parent role. Long et al. (2018) found that “ideal graduate student worker norms, gender ideologies of work and family, and cultural values of family and child-rearing responsibilities – intersected with one another in shaping the experiences for graduate student parents” (p. 223). Marie-Pierre Moreau (2016) has also drawn attention to “how institutional university policies regulate (the) student body/bodies through their normalization and/or their resistance to the figure of the childfree student” (p. 908). This is useful in providing a basis for our assessment of the impact of social expectations and stigma on the UBC GSP. There are “few formal institutional supports tailored to the needs of graduate student parents” (Leviten-Reid et al., 2009, p. 441). Many of their needs are being rendered invisible and are unaddressed through policy decisions, excluding GSPs from university space (Leviten-Reid et al., 2009, p. 441; Moreau & Kerner, 2016, p. 216;). The idea that social change is a requisite of increased inclusivity for GSPs is discussed based on evidence that the graduate students’ parental role is stigmatized among peers and faculty members.

## Financial Hardship

The plethora of hardships experienced by GSPs is widely researched. At UBC, the everyday realities of GSPs are under-documented and thus are not sufficiently reflected in policy decisions or in the level of support afforded to them. The central element of hardship reported by this student demographic is financial difficulty, which positioned financial assistance as their top priority when asked about university support (Theissen et al., 2018). Enrollment in graduate school is a major financial commitment. For GSPs, this is compounded by the high costs of childcare and housing. Financial hardship is a key contributor to students' poor mental health, many reporting sufferings from depression, anxiety, and feelings of guilt (stemming from feelings of perceived inadequate contribution to the family) (Gerrard & Roberts, 2006). The GSP’s “stress adversely affect[s] their children” as well (p. 393). Gerrard and Roberts (2006) identified that the subgroup most affected were single mothers. This identifies the need to examine the intersectional identities of GSPs, highlighting the role of differing positionalities resulting in different policy and campus planning needs, something our research seeks to explore. Previous research focuses primarily on the health and well-being of undergraduate students (Hyun et al., 2006, p. 247). Resources for graduate students are less prominent or promoted on campus, and by consequence, their needs go unaddressed (p. 247-248).

## Conflicting Roles

Within graduate studies, academic productivity is highly valued, overlooking the additional nurturing roles of GSPs (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2018, p. 255). At UBC, high academic attainment is crucial, which exacerbates existing pressure. Mirick and Wladkowski (2018) connect these struggles to globalization and the formation of social structures, established through historical, uneven capitalist development. Accordingly, the university is increasingly becoming a center of “corporatization” (Winant, 2012, p. 33). Thus, time is a central motivator in GSPs’ most widely sought-after accommodations. Thiessen et al.’s (2018) findings suggest that there is a strong desire for the ability to engage in part-time graduate studies and to be able to take a leave of absence. Many GSPs take on research or teaching assistant jobs to offset tuition and living costs (Winant, 2012, p. 32). Accordingly, seeking employment while studying

and parenting, while necessary, often results in time becoming increasingly scarce. Thus, as Wladis et al. (2018) suggest, time poverty may be the major explanatory variable for poorer post-secondary outcomes observed among GSPs. Particularly those with preschool-aged children or younger, that possess less quantity and quality time to invest in their studies compared to their peers with older or no children (Wladis et al., 2018).

An academic setting that values high speed over quality of work will almost certainly disadvantage the GSP (Manson et al., 2009), a large proportion of whose time is spent on childcare (Wladis et al., 2018). The affordability and availability of childcare specifically at UBC needs to be assessed in order to glean the extent to which childcare creates challenges for UBC GSPs. Manson et al. (2009) suggest a reassessment of where value is placed, necessitating both an ideological shift and a reconsideration of university policy. As of March 2020, UBC has been conducting online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic which has initiated a new set of challenges for the GSP. Lin et al.'s (2021) expansion of the literature, reveals the additional time strain on GSPs and its consequences amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and prompt universities to adopt a "holistic family wellness approach" (Lin et al, 2021, p. 4) to prioritize this segment of their student body in crisis situations, which is another important facet of the GSP experience that our research seeks to highlight.

The application of Role Conflict Theories, such as Goode's (1960) theory of role strain, would shed light on the difficulties in balancing student and family life (Sallee, 2015). The infringement of one role upon the other leads to the development of strategies by GSPs "to meet the demands of multiple roles" (Sallee, 2015, p. 402). The perceived incompatibility of the two roles can "problematize women's educational attainment" and hinder career advancement (Lynch, 2008, p. 585). Lynch also discusses the role conflict experienced by graduate student mothers in the US expressed through the practices of "maternal invisibility" and "academic invisibility" (p. 585). This, of course, differs spatially, meaning that a study needs to be conducted on the role conflict experienced by mothers and the wider GSP demographic at Canadian institutions. In her study, Margaret Sallee (2015) considered such practices and strategies and notes the adoption of strict scheduling, decreased effort in completing classwork, reduction of family time, and strategic choices in career path selection. For example, conferential requirements, necessary for career advancement, cause major disruptions to families (Bos et al., 2017). The struggle to achieve work-life balance for GSPs could begin to be addressed through policy analysis. Studies have analyzed the GSPs' work-life balance problem and proposed family-friendly policy solutions targeting research universities (Quinn et al., 2004, p. 33; Tower et al., 2014).

#### 1.4 PROJECT PURPOSE, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Our research report was completed in conjunction with the Social Ecological Economic Development Studies (SEEDS) Sustainability Program and the Graduate Student Society (GSS). We are interested in how the University of British Columbia's policies shape the experiences of graduate student parents. Additionally, are the intersectional identities of this demographic acknowledged, thus facilitating equitable access to resources?

As such we aim to draw on the lived experiences of UBC GSPs to bring attention to potential policy gaps and provide suggestions that may be useful in influencing university policy amendment and reconfiguration of physical campus space in the future, providing improved access and accommodations. The de-stigmatization of the GSP role and their increased inclusion in the university's social space is also an important goal of our study, which can be achieved through promoting a better understanding of their position and needs amongst peers and faculty.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

### 2.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In consideration of our methodology for this study, we formulated an approach that would align with the applied principles and ethics of Community-Based Research (CBAR). Our research is:

**Community-based:** It focuses on graduate students with children on the UBC campus. This study is grounded in the lived experiences, needs and concerns of GSPs in regard to physical and social campus space and policy.

**Participatory:** Our data collection methods seek the participation of GSPs in our study, by providing an insight into their realities influenced by their diverse positionalities. We also strove to provide space for their suggestions and ideas on the improvement they would like to see at UBC.

**Action-based and oriented:** We aim to provide actionable results to the GSS, their representing body, and hope to inform decisions involving GSPs made at the University of British Columbia.

Consideration of the CBAR ethics in conjunction with Iain Hay's chapter on Ethical Practice in Geographical Research (2010) was made on a few key themes:

**Accessibility of findings:** Results will be submitted to the GSS and published internally. We also will share our final report with our interviewees.

**Benefits to the participants:** Our participants have the opportunity to voice their experiences as graduate student parents and bring attention to any struggles they have faced and concerns they may have. This can foster understanding of their position among peers and faculty, as well as UBC's governance. Policy recommendations resulting from this study may impact the experiences of graduate students with children in the future.

**Community voice:** In this study, we strive to ensure that discussion of results and recommendations are grounded in the expressed concerns of GSPs. We anticipate that our sample may not be representative of our population, and in such a case, the different experiences of those who may face barriers in access and time availability for participation may not be represented.

**Data ownership:** Data collected from the survey is completely anonymous. All records of this study will be kept private and confidential. Any information that could reveal the identities of participants will not be included in any reports that we may publish. All research records will be stored securely on Canadian servers at UBC on a safe drive until October 2021, at which time, will be permanently deleted. Access to this information will be held exclusively by the researchers and the course instructor.

**Justice:** We recognize that due to the online nature of our participatory data collection methods, we are limiting access to those who may not currently have access to electronic devices, a connection to the internet or a quiet environment to do an interview or complete the survey.

**Privacy:** We have established measures to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants throughout the duration and completion of the study. Measures were also taken to ensure the presentation of results will not harm or cause offence.

**Respect:** Our survey allowed for the bypassing of questions that respondents preferred not to answer. We communicated their right to withdraw from the survey altogether at any time if they wished. We also included textboxes, with open-ended questions for respondents to elaborate more on some aspects of the survey or add a concern or aspect of their experience that as researchers, we had not considered.

**Rigor of research and fidelity to findings:** As researchers, we tried to understand our own biases in relation to this study. We aspired to keep our bias in mind as we interpreted our data, and critically assessed the conclusions at which we arrived.

## 2.2 RESEARCH METHODS

As this study focuses primarily on an assessment of current UBC university policy and the effect of campus planning on the experiences of GSPs, we designed and disseminated a survey. Additionally, to provide more nuance to this study and honour the experiences of these graduate students, we conducted a few semi-structured interviews to capture their stories.

### 2.2.1 SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION RESEARCH METHODS

To lay the conceptual foundation of our study and begin to identify the patterns within the academic discussion, we searched the UBC library and Google scholar for relevant articles and research on our topic. In the collection of our secondary data, we filtered our results to include scholarly and peer-reviewed articles.

Some keywords used for our search (employed in various combinations) include:

“student parents”, “graduate student parents”, “university policies”, “support”, “accessibility”, “breastfeeding”, “childcare”, “academia”, “physical campus space”, “family-friendly campus”, “single student parents”, “gender”, “experience”

Once we collected our sources, we coded them by the major themes discussed within each article and devised a theme chart to help guide the direction of research (see Table 1). Themes were used to develop survey and interview questions and later inform the assumptions in relation to our primary data.

Literature Theme Chart	
Theme	Author(s)
Gender	Mirick & Wladkowski, 2018; Long. et al., 2018; Leviten-Reid et al., 2009; Brooks, 2012; Thiessen et al., 2018; Manson et al., (2009); Kulp, (2020); Lynch, (2008)
Normative Student Ideals	Long. et al., 2018; Leviten-Reid et al., 2009, Moreau & Kerner, (2015)
Family Friendly Policy	Quinn et al., 2004; Tower et al., 2014; Moreau, 2016; Lin et al., (2021)
Coping Strategies	Brooks, 2012; Quinn et al., 2004; Tower et al., 2014; Sallee, 2015; Mason et al., (2009)
Financial Hardship	Thiessen et al., 2018; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Winant, 2012; Moreau & Kerner, (2015)
Time/Productivity (Globalized Capitalist World Order)	Mirick & Wladkowski, 2018; Thiessen et al., 2018; Manson, et al., 2009; Wladis et al., (2018); Moreau & Kerner, (2015)
Mental Health/ Wellbeing	Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Hyun et al., 2006; Lin et al., (2021); Moreau & Kerner, (2015)
Effects on Children	Gerrard & Roberts, 2006
Conflicting Roles	Sallee, 2015; Goode, 1960; Bos et al., 2017; Moreau & Kerner, (2015)

*Table 1. Literature Theme Chart*

### 2.2.2 PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION RESEARCH METHODS

Our selected methods of primary data collection consist of surveys and interviews as mentioned above. Questions included were derived from the major themes identified in our literature review, allowing us to compile information on GSPs’ experiences on campus and in their studies, the hardships they may face, the extent to which they are aware of current university policies that affect them, as well as their utilization of available university resources.

Data collection for our survey was completed using Qualtrics software, Version April, 2021 of Qualtrics. Copyright © 2021. Qualtrics is a registered trademark of Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA.

<https://www.qualtrics.com>. The same platform was used for the collection of interview consent forms. After our survey's closing time we downloaded and deleted the data off Qualtrics, and uploaded it into a secure file, to which only the research team and our course instructor had access. Data from both our survey responses and interview recordings and transcriptions will be safely retained there until October 2021, then permanently deleted.

Criteria for participant selection include any student currently enrolled in graduate studies at the University of British Columbia, who has at least one child under 18 years of age in their care. Initially, working along the patterns identified in the literature, we set the cap at 5 years of age, since this is the age bracket that usually requires access to childcare, but we expanded to include a greater variety of experiences.

Our sample size for the survey is  $n = 27$ . Our response rate was 84.4% ( $n = 27 / 32$ ). One respondent partially completed the survey, but due to the number of questions answered we decided to retain their responses, acknowledging that the sample size will fluctuate in the following report. Additionally, we conducted five semi-structured interviews, including three mothers and two fathers. What follows is a brief survey sample description:

Ethnic and gender identity of respondents			
	Female	Male	Total
White	9	2	11
Middle Eastern	3	2	5
South Asian	4	0	4
East Asian	2	0	2
Hispanic/Latinx	1	1	2
First Nations	0	1	1
Mixed	1	0	1
Prefer not to say	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>27</b>

Our sample is primarily comprised of women, with the predominantly represented ethnic identity being 'white' (see Table 2). See figure 1 for the distribution of the data.

*Table 2. Ethnic and gender identity of respondents*

### Respondent demographics

Ethnic and gender identity

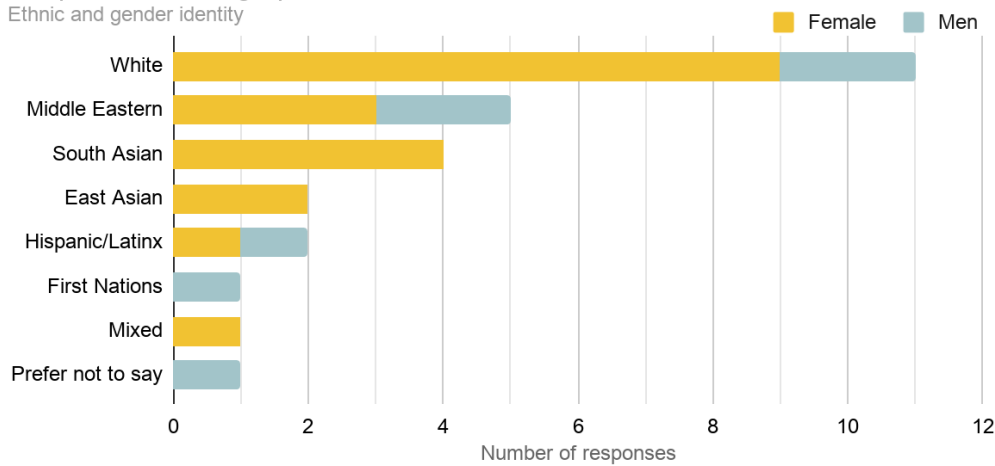


Figure 1. Survey respondent demographics (ethnic and gender identity)

Marital status of respondents			
	Female	Male	Total
Married or in a domestic partnership	16	6	22
Single Parent (divorced or separated)	2	1	3
Single Parent (never married)	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>27</b>

The vast majority of our respondents are married or in a domestic partnership (see table 3 and figure 2).

Table 3. Respondent marital status by gender

### Marital status of respondents

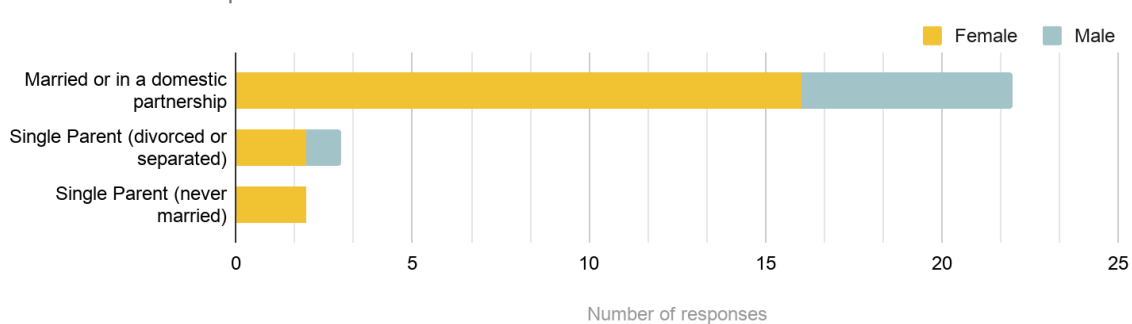
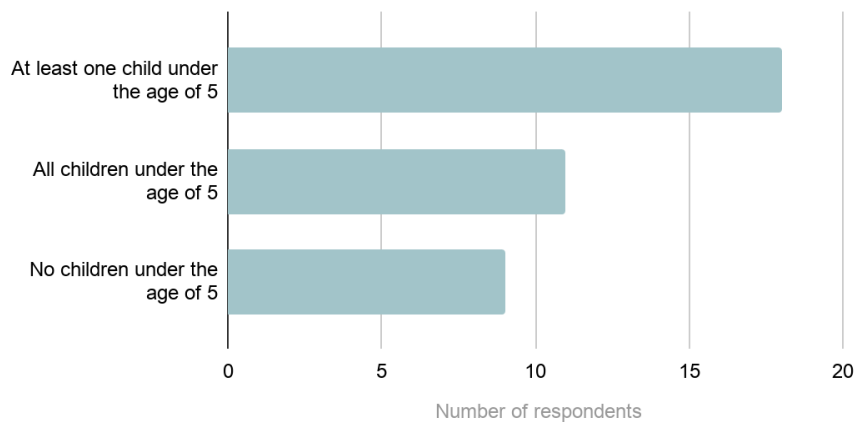


Figure 2. Survey respondent demographics (marital status by gender identity)

Distribution patterns of children at preschool age or younger among GSPs



Most respondents had at least one child under the age of 5, our initial target population. Nine respondents had children entirely within the 6-17 age bracket (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Distribution patterns of children at preschool age or younger (under 5 years of age) among GSPs at UBC

## 2.3 Methods of Administration

The administration of our survey was accomplished primarily through our collaboration with the Graduate Student Society (GSS) at UBC. A call for participation including the links for both the survey and the interview consent form was published in the weekly GSS newsletter on April 4th and remained open until April 15th. Outreach to personal contacts for interviews, began earlier, on April 1st.

For the recruitment of interviewees and survey respondents, our research group decided to use non-probability sampling, as we did not have a lot of flexibility in selecting our participants. We elected to rely primarily on voluntary response sampling, and also made use of snowball sampling for interviews. Through the latter, our survey was posted on a UBC graduate student parent Facebook group we previously were unable to access.

Due to the pandemic, social distancing orders and university closures, we discerned that an online survey would be much more fitting in respect for the participants' time and comfort. Our interviews were also completed through Zoom in accordance with safety guidelines.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 FAMILY ACCOMMODATIONS

#### 3.1.1 HOUSING

The majority of our respondents live off campus (18 out of 27). Our survey sheds light on barriers and reasoning behind this trend. The most cited explanation for living off campus was the lack of available spaces, followed by cost (see table 4).



Rank	Barriers to on-campus housing	Number of selections
1	Lack of available spaces	5
2	Cost	3
3	Prefer to live off campus	2
4	Have found a better housing arrangement	2

Other reasons provided by respondents include the insufficient space in campus housing, pet ownership, homeownership and living outside the province due to the pandemic.

Table 4. Top barriers to on-campus housing at UBC

Most GSPs interviewed live on campus in Acadia Park (family year-round residence). Generally, interviewees enjoy many aspects of Acadia Park, including housing affordability. A single student mother described the “prohibitive” cost of market housing near UBC and the infeasibility of a long commute. She would not have attended UBC without campus housing (Interview B).

There is also a sense of community fostered between residents. Parent E described it as: “like living on sesame street” as COVID has meant that children play together more frequently (Interview E).

A graduate student father of two waited approximately a year to receive Acadia Park housing yet was only given two weeks' notice to move once receiving an offer. Having moved in, his family enjoys the convenience and safety of accessing daycare across the street (Interview C).

“The proximity of UBC daycare to Acadia Park is a blessing.” (interview C)

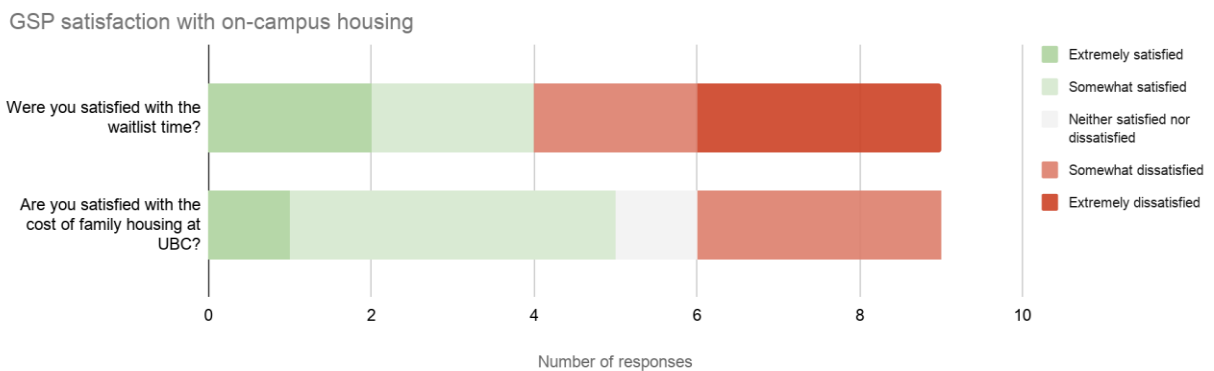


Figure 4. GSP satisfaction with on-campus housing cost and waitlist time at UBC

The survey responses echo these sentiments. Satisfaction rates among survey respondents currently living in campus housing, concerning cost and the waitlist time, follow the same trend (see Figure 4). Respondents indicate cost satisfaction, but most negatively reflect on waitlist time.

3.1.2 CHILDCARE

Most of our survey respondents do not use UBC childcare, (17 out of 27). This may be explained by their children’s age. Those with children over the age of 5, do not require access to the same level of care. This situation accounts for 7 out of 17 respondents’ non-use of campus childcare. For the remaining 10, the most cited reasons for not doing so were cost, waitlist time and lack of available spaces (See Table 5).

Rank	Barriers to on-campus childcare	Number of selections
1	Cost	5
2	Currently waitlisted	5
3	Lack of available spaces	5
4	Inaccessibility	3
5	Scheduling	2

Other reasons provided relate to the new circumstances created by COVID-19, such as online classes, lost UBC office space, living too far.

Table 5. Top barriers to on-campus childcare at UBC

Our interviewees using UBC childcare anticipated a long waitlist. A mother of three detailed her challenges when accessing UBC childcare for her daughter with a disability. She was told her daughter had to leave UBC childcare as the staff lacked the resources to provide for her. She planned on contesting this decision at the human rights tribunal but the stress that accompanied her dual role prevented her from following through; *“I did not have the mental stamina at that point, with also a newborn, to take on that, I just didn’t have that energy.”* (interview E)

Self-advocating was the only option in this situation; however, it had limited feasibility in this situation. The result was to enrol her daughter in a non-UBC-affiliated daycare.

### GSP housing and childcare arrangements

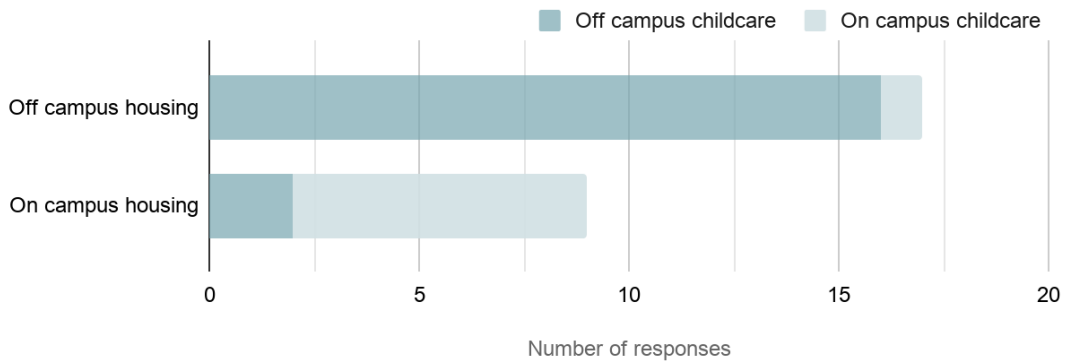


Figure 5. GSP housing and childcare arrangement patterns at UBC

GSPs living off campus are unlikely to access campus childcare (see Figure 5).

A graduate student father of two explained that had he been able to enroll his children in UBC childcare, his family would have moved closer to campus. He unsuccessfully pushed his case so resorted to accessing off campus childcare, near to his new home (Interview A).

### GSP satisfaction with on-campus childcare

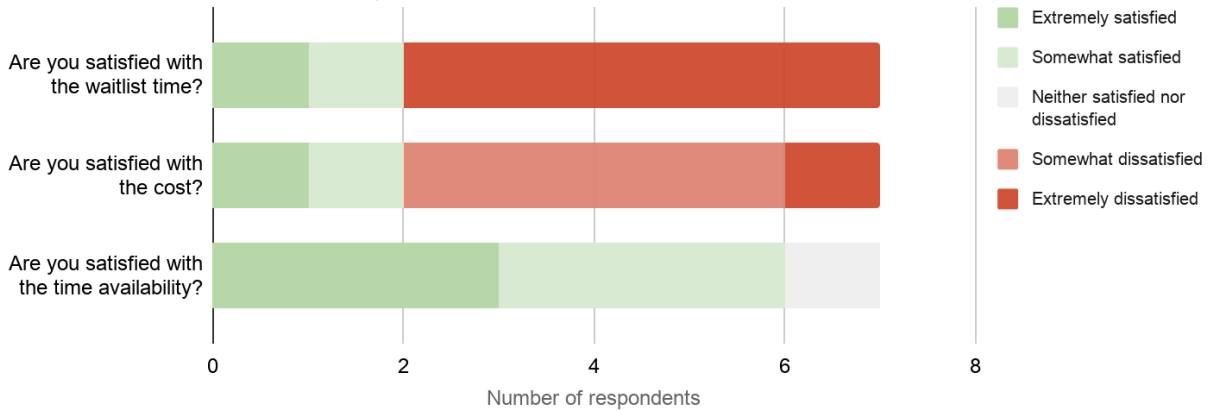


Figure 6. GSP satisfaction with on-campus childcare waitlist time, cost, and time availability at UBC

The levels of satisfaction with the cost, time availability and waitlist time for campus childcare reflected our interviewees' comments. Respondents were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with the waitlist time.

Two interviewees stated that the long waitlist for on-campus childcare forced them to find alternative childcare solutions after maternity and paternity leave ended. One enlisted in-home daycare services, while the other extended maternity leave without pay (Interviews C & E).

In terms of cost, the majority of respondents are somewhat dissatisfied but view time availability quite positively (see Figure 6).

The differential childcare circumstances according to the marital status of GSPs are shown in figure 7. Notably, single GSPs in our sample do not access campus childcare.

Childcare arrangement based on GSP marital status

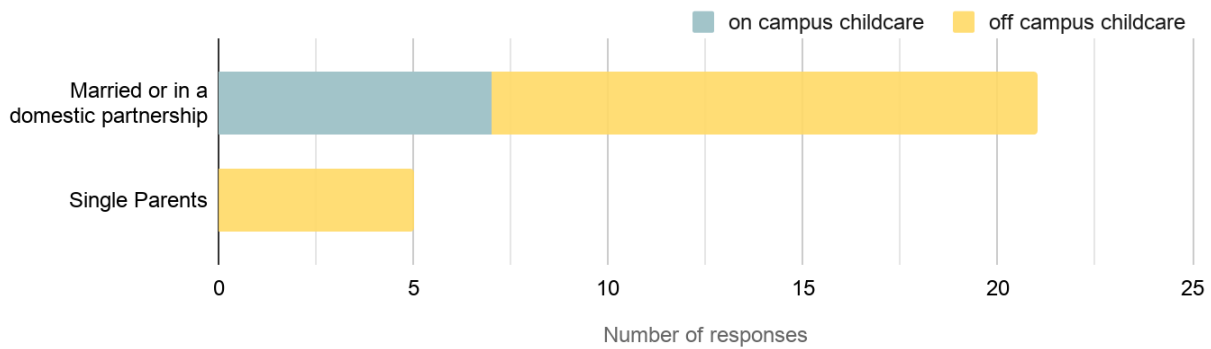


Figure 7. Childcare arrangements based on GSP marital status at UBC

### 3.2 CAMPUS SPACE

#### 3.2.1 ACCESSIBILITY

Rank	Barriers to accessing Campus Space	Selections per option
1	Expensive parking rates	14
2	Lack of family parking	11
3	Inadequate presence and distribution of washrooms with changing tables	10
4	Lack of child-friendly spaces	9
5	Lack of outdoor child play areas	6

Respondents were asked to rate (on a scale of 1 to 10) the ease of navigating UBC with their children (1 being very easy and 10 being extremely difficult). The average rating from 23 responses is 3.97. Though this is relatively positive, respondents indicated barriers to their access (see Table 6). The top selected includes expensive parking rates, lack of family

6	Absence of online maps and/or guides specifically tailored to parent navigation of the campus	6
7	Lack of priority waiting areas at on-campus bus stops	5

parking and lacking access to washrooms with changing tables.

Table 6. Top barriers to accessing UBC campus space

GSPs were also prompted to indicate the aspects that make campus space accessible.

The top selected options included outdoor child play areas, child-friendly spaces, and the presence of benches in outdoor spaces (See table 7).

Rank	Positive campus aspects	Selections per option
1	Outdoor child play areas	11
2	Child-friendly spaces	10
3	Adequate amount and distribution of benches in outdoor spaces	8
4	Automatic doors	7

Table 7. Positive aspects of UBC campus space accessibility

### 3.2.2 SAFETY

When asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being very safe and 10 being extremely unsafe) feelings of safety when walking with their children on campus, the average rating from 24 responses is 2.57 (excluding one rating, that seemed to be a misinterpretation of the question). Of the 24 respondents, 12 actively avoid certain areas of campus (see Figure 8).

Are there specific parts of campus that you avoid when with your children?

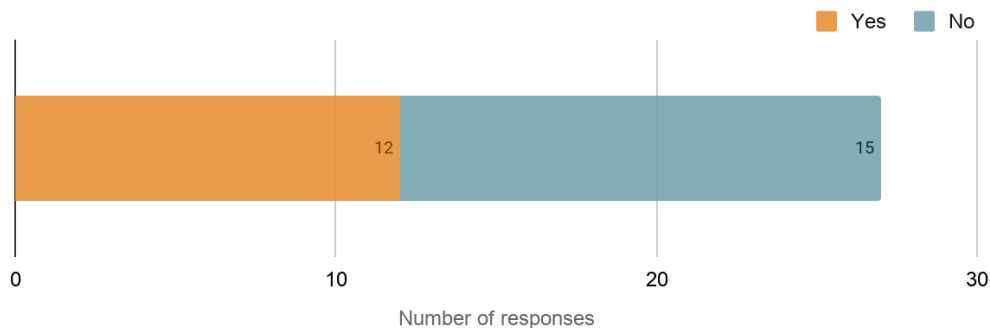


Figure 8. Avoidance of particular UBC campus spaces by GSPs

Rank	What makes UBC safe for families	Selections per option
1	Welcoming physical environment	15
2	Presence of grassy areas	14
3	Accessible infrastructure	14
4	Welcoming social environment	10
5	Crowds	7

The reasons for feelings of safety on campus selected by respondents are shown in table 8. The topmost cited were the welcoming physical environment, followed by the presence of grassy areas and accessible infrastructure. The social environment also had a high frequency of selection, however, was surpassed by the campus's physical dimension.

*Table 8. Family-friendly aspects that make the UBC campus safe*

Campus areas respondents actively avoid when with their children are libraries, areas near the bus loop frequented by homeless people, places with stairs or with inaccessible bathrooms, parts of university buildings where classes are taking place and fraternity houses. There are varying degrees and kinds of discomforts with these places. On one hand, GSPs are afraid of bothering those around them:

For a male interviewee, his children's disturbance of others in university space was a big concern, even though no one explicitly complained. It was clearly on his mind (Interview A).

GSPs were also concerned with others' behaviours:

Proximity to fraternities was also an important consideration in her selection of housing:

*"I saw that the frat houses were right behind the building right next to me and so I actually specified that I wouldn't have taken one in that building because I didn't want the parties, the noise and everything else and the whole atmosphere about that"* (interview B)

Similarly, a female interviewee with three children explained how party culture, particular substance use, leads to her having premature, conversations with her children:

*"We've seen needles in the bushes and people coming in and out of the bushes totally off their heads"* (Interview E)

Thus, the proximity of their residences to first year undergraduate accommodation and fraternity houses emerges as a significant safety concern for GSPs and informs their routing through campus (Interview B).

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### 3.2.3 BOTTLE AND BREASTFEEDING ON CAMPUS

Only 9 out of 26 respondents have bottle or breastfed their children on campus. Eight of these individuals identified as female and one as male. Most respondents that had not, have children primarily older than 5 years.

An overwhelming proportion of respondents are unaware of designated breastfeeding areas (see Figure 9).

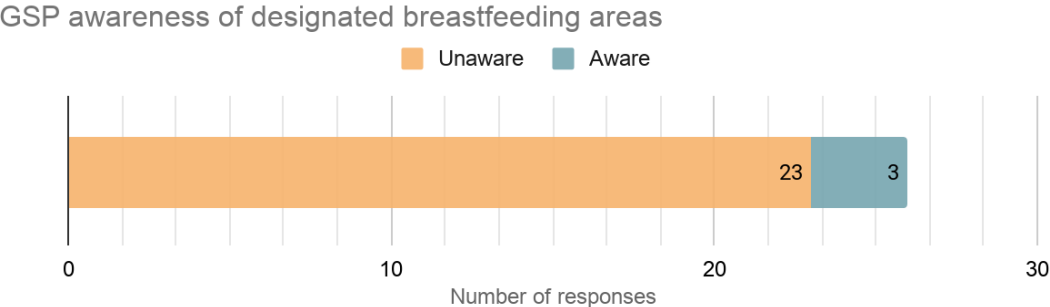


Figure 9. GSP awareness of designated breastfeeding area locations on the UBC campus

Space’s respondents used for feeding children include bathrooms, their offices, in meetings, designed milk pumping/breastfeeding rooms/areas in certain departments, at daycare and outdoor benches. Respondents noted that the spatial distribution of designated breastfeeding rooms is sparse.

A father mentioned that he was aware of designated breastfeeding spaces but, “there aren’t any in the neighbourhood of campus in which I exist” (Interview C).

## 3.3 UNIVERSITY POLICY & RESOURCES

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### 3.3.1 ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

GSPs find it relatively difficult to access information about UBC resources and accommodations (see Figure 10).

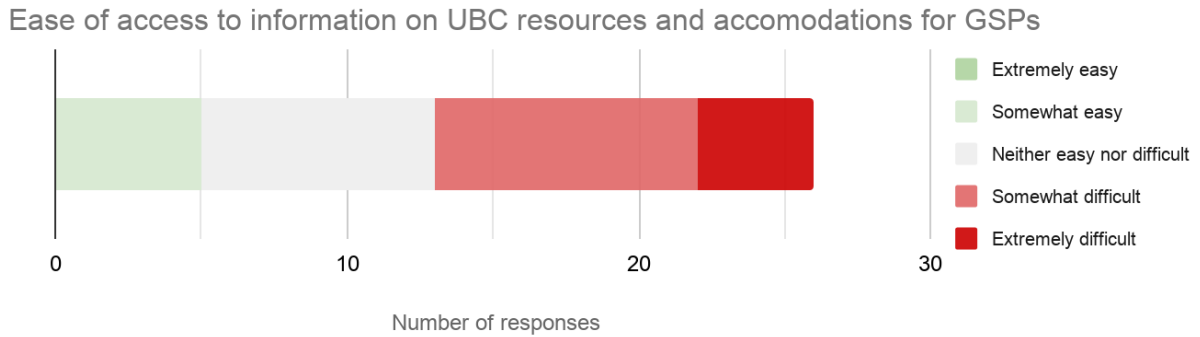


Figure 10. Ease of access to information of UBC resources and accommodations for GSPs

Conflicting responsibilities are commonplace in the lives of GSPs. Easier attainment of extensions on parental grounds may alleviate some pressure.

Have you ever needed an extension due to your parental role?	Number of responses
I have	19
I have not	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

Nineteen of 26 respondents have needed extensions on parental grounds (see Table 9). We asked them about the ease of attainment and their satisfaction with the duration. Most indicated that it was relatively easy to attain (Figure 11).

Table 9. GSP need for extension on parental grounds at UBC

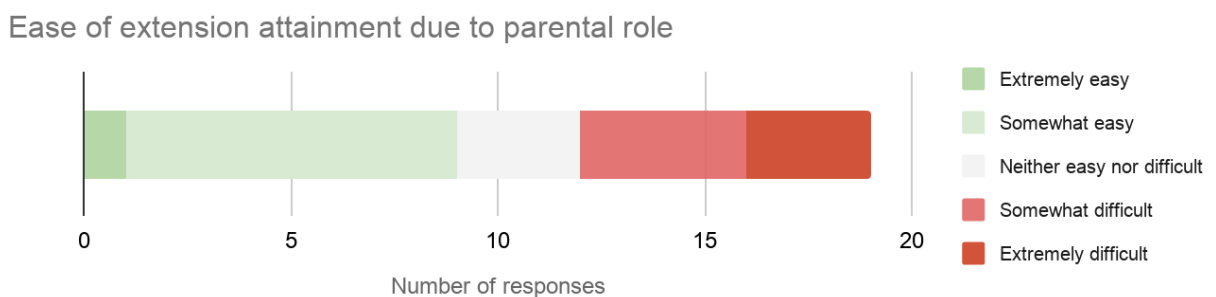


Figure 11. Ease of extension attainment on parental grounds at UBC

Ethnic identity did not seem to affect this outcome, with no pattern emerging (note the sample size may affect the appearance or the invisibility of certain trends). We decided to test against gender (see Figure 12). Men seemed to have greater ease attaining extensions, a pattern that may align with research on



the ‘fatherhood premium’ and the ‘motherhood penalty’ discussed in relation to workplaces (Luhr, 2020). Our sample is too small to draw any determining conclusions, and with a weak male representation, more extensive research is required.

Easy of extension attainment on parental grounds by gender

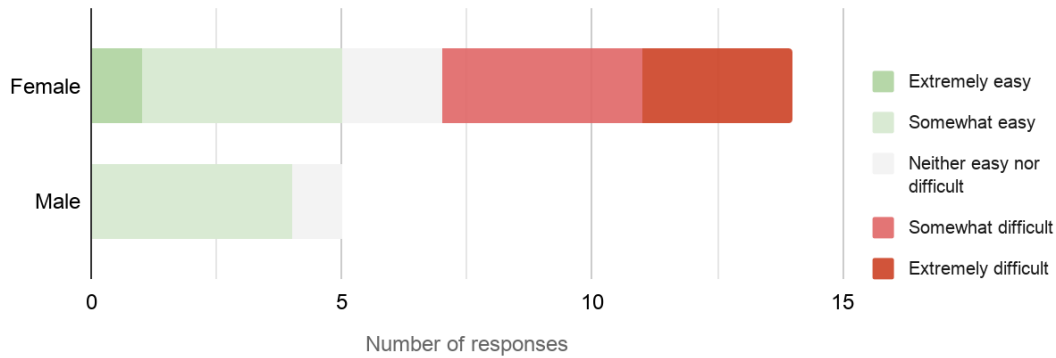


Figure 12. Ease of extension attainment on parental grounds at UBC by gender

A female, single parent interviewee with one child described her dual role as being respected by her advisor, but in order to reach this level of understanding, she had to make her limits clear (Interview B).

*“I do feel like they recognize my circumstances and there isn’t a lot of extra pressure to take additional courses for me which I really appreciate”* (Interview B).

GSP satisfaction with extension duration

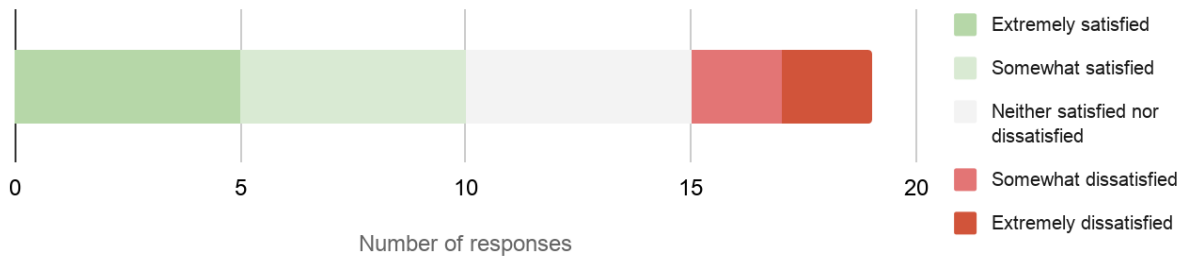


Figure 13. GSP satisfaction with academic extension duration at UBC

Overall, among survey respondents there seems to be general satisfaction with extensions received.

Only 3 out of 26 respondents have not sought accommodations and resources beyond the university. Many GSPs have engaged with self-advocating and turn to alternative non-UBC affiliated resources, in order to fulfill their needs (see Figure 14). In figure 14 we see that the proportion of single parents having to self-advocate and pursue alternative solutions is high.

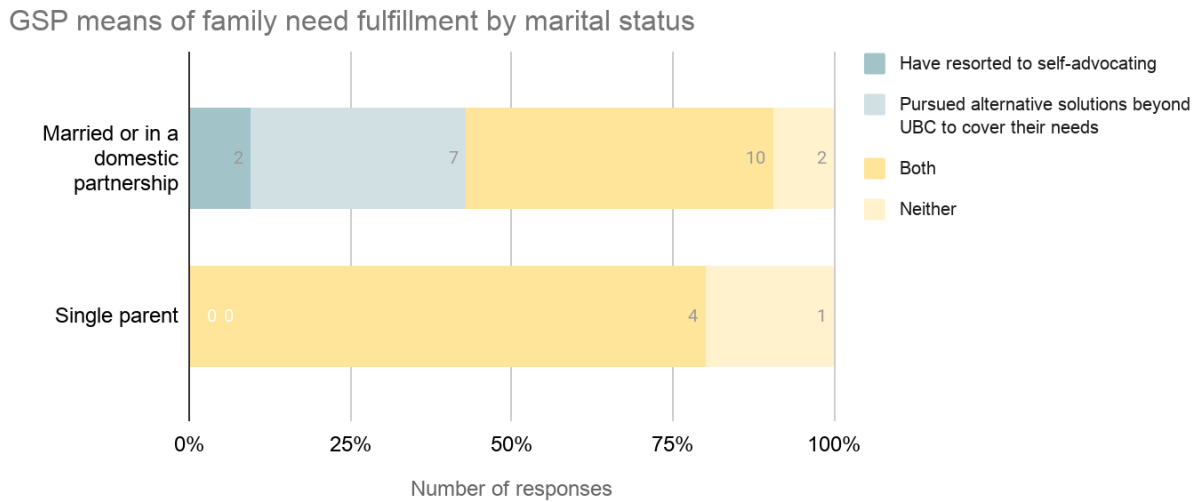


Figure 14. GSP means for securing the fulfillment for family needs by marital status at UBC

### 3.3.2 SOCIAL RECOGNITION BY FACULTY

A graduate student's relationship with supervisors and advisors is important in providing stability and support in the academic setting. An understanding of the GSP's multiple roles on the faculty's part can help alleviate stress and ensure necessary accommodations are given.

A mother of three experienced hardship owing to her supervisor's lack of consideration for her conflicting responsibilities (Interview E). Her husband played a key role in alleviating the impacts of her supervisor's shortcomings. This highlights how challenges are compounded for single GSPs, who, in a similar situation could not rely on the support of a spouse.

The survey results were overwhelmingly positive (see Figure 15). As highlighted by the interviews, drivers of different feelings of acknowledgment stem from their supervisor's previous experience with GSP.

Do you feel that your parent responsibilities are acknowledged and accounted for in your supervisors' and/or professors' expectations of you?

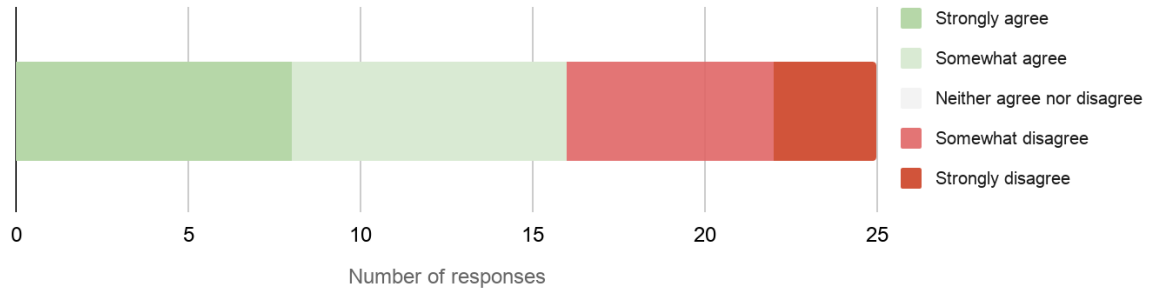


Figure 15. GSP feelings of acknowledgement by university faculty

### 3.4 FINANCIAL POLICIES

#### 3.4.1 WORK AND FINANCIAL WELLBEING

To explore financial circumstances and their effects on GSP experience, we asked our respondents to indicate whether they receive funding and/or government loans for their studies, keeping in mind that obtaining both may leave shortfalls. The majority of our respondents held at least one of the funding options. Those holding both or one are predominantly not in employment (See Figure 16 & Table 10).

#### GSP funding and employment patterns

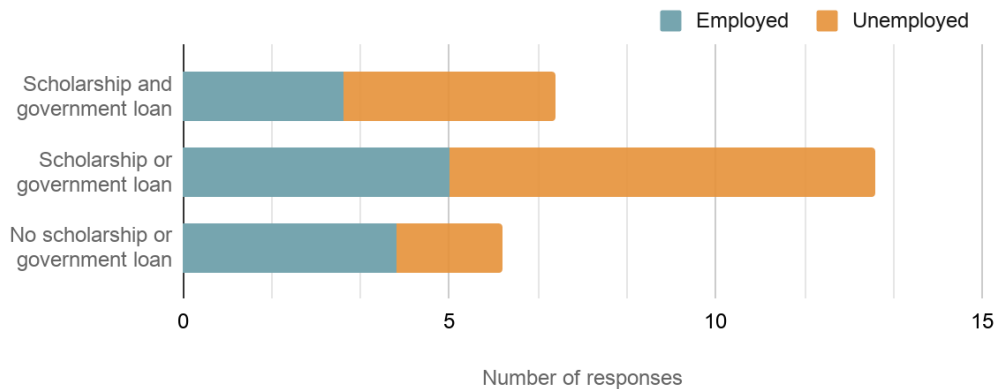


Figure 16. GSP funding and employment patterns

A father of two described receiving funding from the university; *“I do get a bursary from the university for childcare specifically”*. The funding was revoked when he went on leave, but his spouse’s job was sufficient in covering costs, showing how single parents would be disproportionately affected by this policy (Interview C).

Funding	Employed	Employed (%)	Unemployed	Unemployed (%)	Total
Scholarship/grant and government loan	3	42.9	4	57.1	7
Scholarship/grant or government loan	5	38.5	8	61.5	13
No scholarship/grant or government loan	4	66.7	2	33.3	6

Table 10. GSP Funding and employment patterns

Our survey respondents who are currently employed, primarily work part-time, and find employment off campus (see Figure 17)

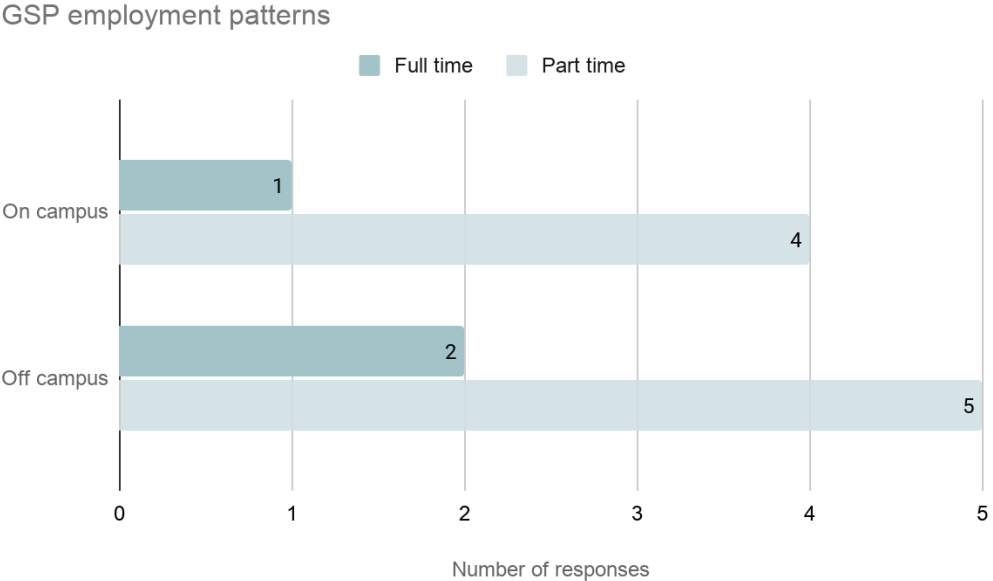


Figure 17. GSP employment location and the status

We were interested in exploring the effects of the conflicting roles of parent, graduate student, and employee (acknowledging that there may be additional responsibilities contributing to these experiences). The majority of respondents indicated that there is a moderate to great amount of conflict (see Figure 18).

A graduate student mother of two described the challenges that accompany being in employment while studying:

*“We need three parents because I work ten-hour shifts and my husband works full-time [...]I think we would need more childcare if we didn’t have my mum here” (Interview D)*

## GSP feeling of amount of conflict of multiple roles

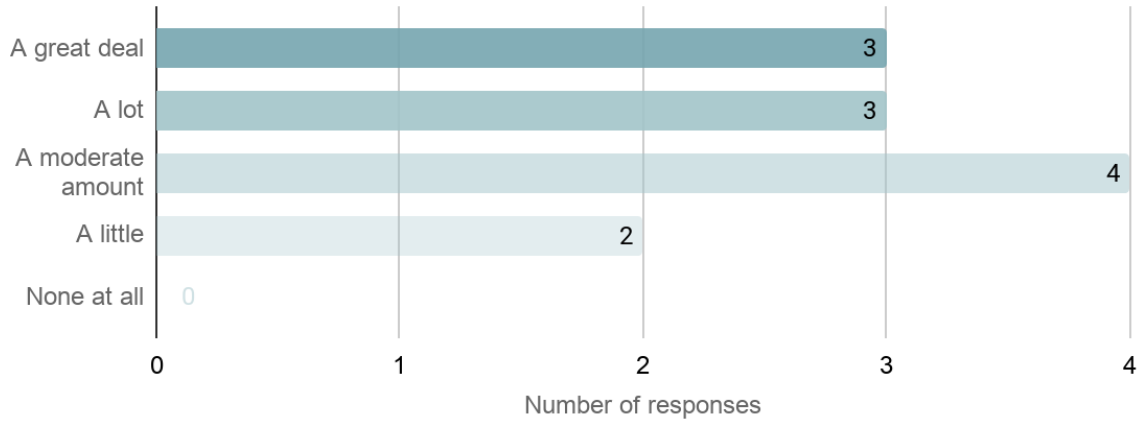


Figure 18. GSP feeling of level of conflict of multiple roles

Effects of role conflict for GSPs	Selections per option
Stress	11
Exhaustion	11
Lack of sleep	9
Insufficient family time	8
Insufficient time for studies	7
Lower quality of academic work	6

Table 11. Effect of role conflict for GSPs

With a more detailed dive into the effects of this conflict on GSPs, the top-cited include stress and exhaustion, followed by a lack of sleep (see Table 11). The average number of selections per respondent was 4.6, but the majority of respondents selected all of the options presented in the table.

## 3.5 ROLE CONFLICT

### 3.5.1 TIME SPENT

We asked our respondents to estimate the time they spend weekly on childcare and their studies. Reflecting on normative gender roles in society, we thought it would be interesting to explore the gendered dimension of the division of childcare labour. The number of male respondents is however very small, so we can only look at the patterns in our sample but hesitate to make any conclusions about the greater population.

The average time spent on childcare was 45.6 hours weekly, and 30 hours on studies.

### Hours spent on childcare by GSP gender

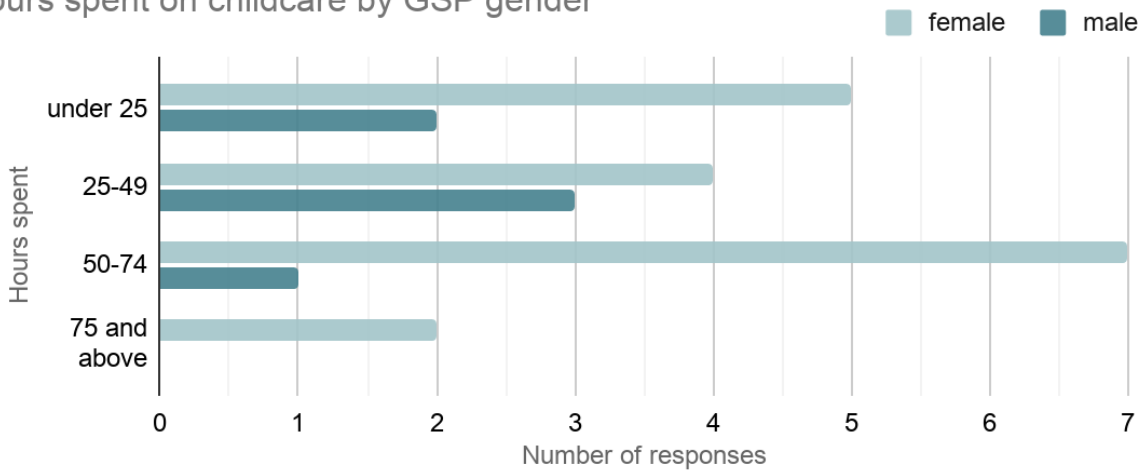


Figure 19. Hours spent on childcare by GSP gender

The patterns revealed above, enforce variability of the GSP experience. Student situations fluctuate and are dependent on a plethora of external influences that extend beyond the scope of this study. Overall, we can see that male GSPs spend less time on childcare (finding themselves more often in the under 25, and 25 - 49 hours brackets), than female GSPs (see Figure 19).

### Weekly hours spent on childcare and studies by gender

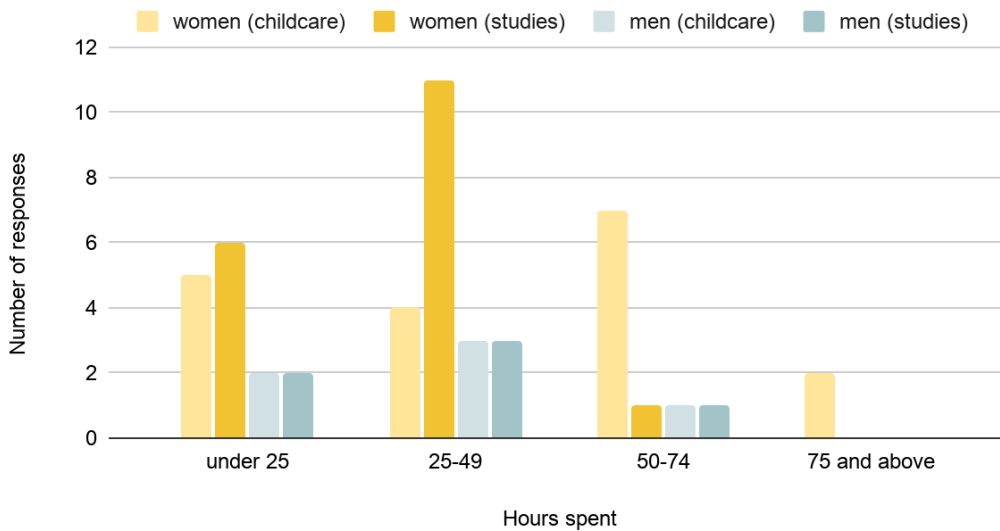


Figure 20. Weekly hours spent on childcare and studies by GSP gender

The majority of female GSPs spend between 50-74 hours on childcare weekly, while they overwhelmingly spend between 25 and 49 hours on studying. Results shown in figure 20, align with the findings of Leviten-Reid et al. (2009), who asserted that graduate student mothers carry out more domestic and paid labour than graduate student fathers. These patterns are, however, highly subjective to the social and cultural practices and beliefs between and across countries (Brooks, 2012).

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### 3.5.2 COPING STRATEGIES

Sallee (2015) in the development of her thesis on role conflict theory, supports that the infringement of one role on other leads to the development of coping strategies to alleviate pressure and meet demands. Top coping strategies employed by the GSPs in our survey include frequently studying late into the night and less time devoted to assignments (see Table 12).

GSP coping strategies	Selections per option
Frequently studying late into the night	20
Less time devoted to assignments	18
Purposeful choices made or will be made about career path	17
Strict time management/scheduling	16
Skipping class due to conflicting familial responsibilities	3

Other strategies mentioned by the GSPs themselves include prioritizing family, school, and work over social activities, reassessing priorities when children get sick, relying on their partner, waking up very early to work and booking library space for undisturbed work.

*Table 12. GSP coping strategies to counter the effects of role conflict*

A married female respondent with two children and a grandparent living with her discussed the need to meticulously plan her days “*weeks in advance*” to ensure she is able to have quality time with her children (Interview D).

We consider some of the impacts on GSP time conflict in the figure 21 below.

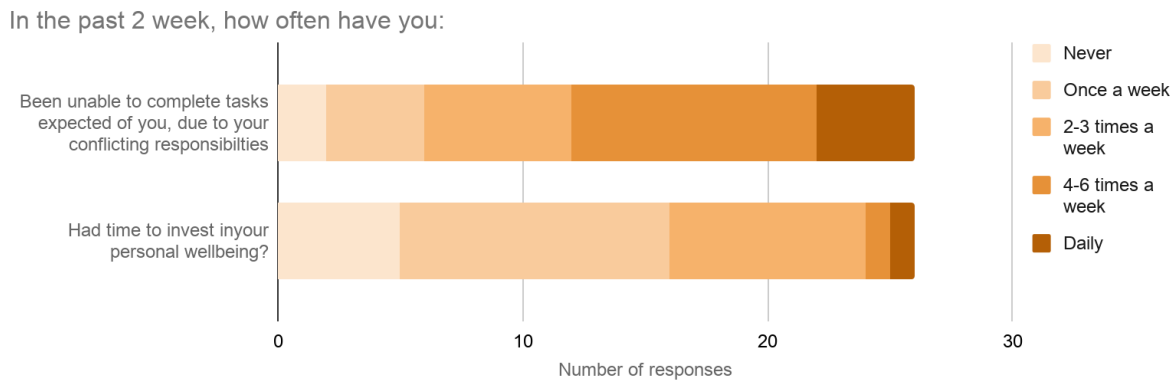


Figure 21. Frequency of inability to complete tasks due to responsibility conflict and the investment in personal wellbeing

Adjusting personal academic expectations and expectations for the duration of their degrees was another important strategy that emerged from interviews with two mothers. “To me, a B+ is an A+” (Interview B).

### 3.6 INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL STEREOTYPE

#### 3.6.1 INCLUSIVE SOCIAL SPACE

Feelings of inclusion in campus space varied slightly, but overall, reflected a positive sentiment (see Figure 22). GSPs were also asked to express the degree to which they feel understood and acknowledged for their position as GSPs by peers and faculty. Here, the results were a little more varied, with almost half of respondents disagreeing with the statement.

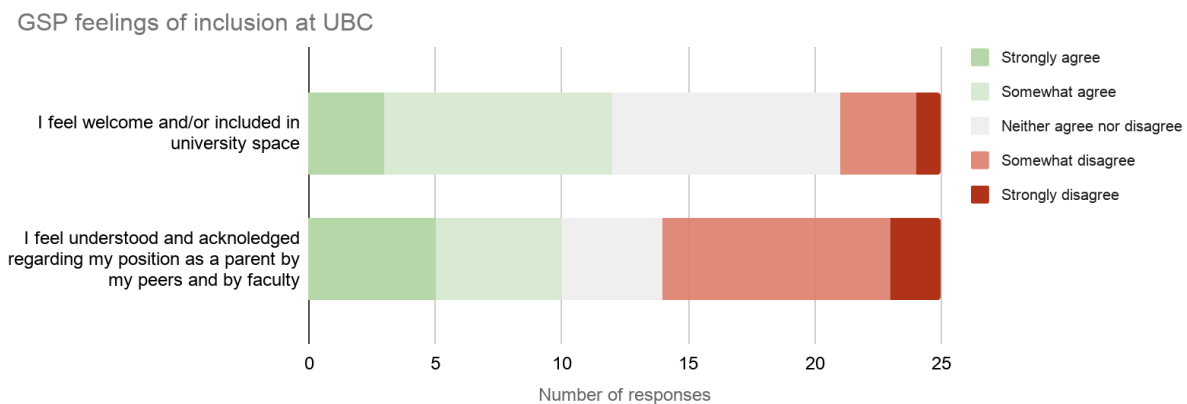


Figure 22. GSP feeling of inclusion at UBC

Based on the perceived standard of the ‘normal’ university student (Long et al., 2017), as well as understandings of what constitutes a ‘good parent’ (mother or father, each holds its own set of social



implications), we were interested in learning whether GSPs feel that their treatment as student parents is impacted by traditional expectations of parenthood. Female and male GSPs both feel their treatment as students are impacted by these traditional views (see Figure 23).

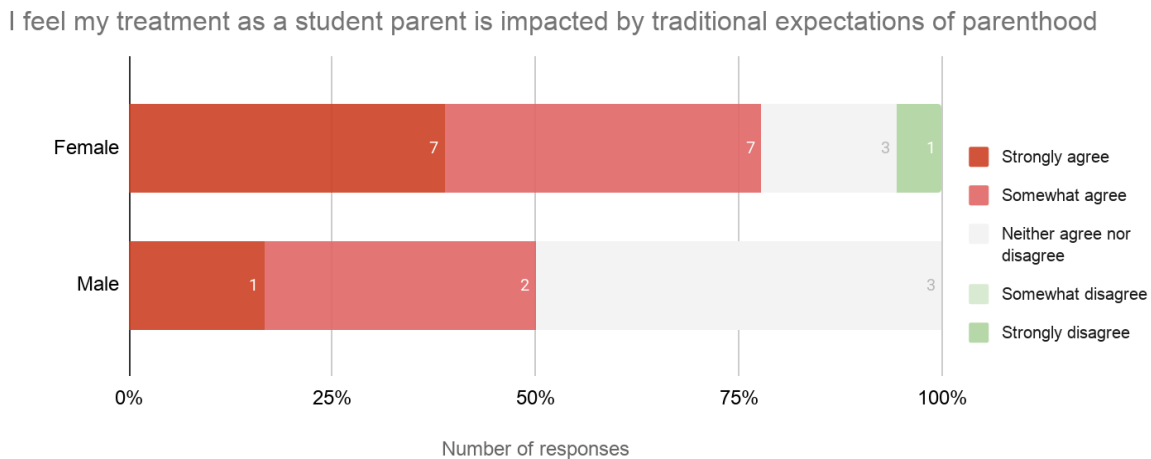


Figure 23. Traditional expectations of parenthood impact on GSP treatment at UBC

#### 4. DISCUSSION

##### Housing and normative expectations of family

Housing on campus and namely the Acadia Park residence is opportune for community building among individuals with similar lifestyles and responsibilities. However, housing is offered based on the normative family structure (nuclear family model). One interviewee had to go to great lengths to be granted permission for her mother to live with her. She stated: *“I don’t think we would be able to do this without my mum living with us because she is quite involved with taking care of the kids.”* This ultimately successful process involved persistent emailing over a span of months (Interview D).

Since GSP circumstances are so unique, there needs to be a redefinition of what a family can be, to allow people to position themselves as resilient in the UBC community.

##### Campus space

In an interpretation of results concerning physical and policy barriers on campus, we must acknowledge that they are informed by the type of access and interaction these individuals have with campus space. For example, if a graduate student parent does not own or rely on a car for transportation, they are very unlikely to indicate that expensive parking rates and unavailability of family parking are of any importance to them. Another instance would be the interaction with a limited part of campus. This would necessitate the examination of the differing circumstances of GSPs and design an approach that either aims at departmental improvements or covers GSPs in certain positions (e.g., whether they live far from campus).

When looking at the results for the aspects of campus space that GSPs most enjoy, it may pose a contradiction to barriers discussed. We argue that the definition and standards for separate individuals vary. For some, UBC's open grassy areas are sufficient but for others, a designated child area, such as a public playground would be preferable as it would allow children to release energy without having to travel far from classes or study spaces (Interview A).

The issue of accessibility for children with disabilities was also raised. The fact that UBC did not have "*accessible play spaces for people who can't do wood chips*" prompted a mother to put a lot of personal effort into attaining one for her child with mobility issues. "*It was a huge fundraising effort to make that happen,*" she says (Interview E). Self-advocacy played an important role in securing an accessible playground.

### **Departmental level acknowledgement**

In their interactions with faculty and staff, survey results were generally positive. This was confirmed by our interviews as well. A common theme in their remarks was the department's previous contact with graduate student parents, as well as the individual professors, many of whom are female, with children being able to empathize with GSPs and therefore are more inclined to accommodate their needs (Interview D). The idea that individual professors and supervisors are only accommodating because they are parents or previously have interacted with a GSP highlights an opportunity for the university to work towards a better understanding of the role and needs of GSPs on an institutional level.

### **Invisibility outside of neighborhoods**

As discussed in the literature review, an important facet of the GSP experience is their perceived invisibility in campus space. We found this came through in both our survey responses and our interviews. Marie-Pierre Moreau's (2016) discussion of how university policy and its normalization of childless students "*regulate (the) student body/bodies*" (p. 908) was echoed by a female respondent living on campus with three children.

She expressed a desire for more events that include children and accommodate the schedules of GSPs, "*just so we feel like we are part of the world on campus*" (Interview E). Other female interviewees expressed that their feelings of inclusion are limited to their UBC family housing neighborhoods. This highlights room for institutional improvements to create a welcoming environment in which GSPs are more visible.

GSP inclusion is conditional on their adaptation to the schedule of the childless graduate students. Their absence from academic events, such as conferences, may also have future implications for GSPs in their careers and may contribute to the 'leaky pipeline' (Bos, 2017)

### **Student identity subsumed under the parental identity**

Another theme that emerged in the survey and interview data is for a GSP, student identity is subsumed under parental role and obligation. Survey responses revealed that fifty percent of male respondents

and over seventy-five percent of female respondents feel that their treatment is impacted by normative expectations of parenthood.

For many, studying is a form of personal time. A graduate student mother of three, emphasized the importance of retaining student identity and individual identity amid parenting: *“you need to have something for yourself outside of being a parent”* (Interview E).

To manage role conflict, GSPs must engage in intense scheduling and time management (Sallee, 2015), an assertion verified by all our survey respondents. GSPs also reinforce mental resilience by adjusting expectations of themselves, in terms of their academic attainment and degree duration (Interview B & E), as well as allowing themselves to focus on the task at hand, whether it is playing with their children, studying, or working, in order to live in and enjoy the moment (Interview A).

### **Self-Advocating**

Self-advocating appears to be inherent to the GSP role, whether it is aimed at covering one’s own needs or general university reform. It presented a commonality between most interview experiences and a majority of survey respondents. This, in turn, may be due to the high responsiveness of those who actively seek to improve their circumstances to our participation call for this study, also indicated by the high enthusiasm in filling out the text boxes in our survey. There may be some voices that are missing. Yet, based on our findings, this may still allude to a significant facet of many GSP experiences at UBC.

However, the differing circumstances in which GSPs find themselves affects their ability to self-advocate. One of our female interviewees was not able to self-advocate because of her daughter going in and out of surgeries, as well as being pregnant at that time (Interview E).

### **COVID-19 pandemic**

COVID 19 presented a host of challenges in terms of childcare. During the initial six months during which schools and daycare services were closed, GSPs were tasked with homeschooling and occupying their children as well as continuing with their studies. Concentration became very difficult (Interview E). Another mother noted difficulties in completing coursework when her children are home (Interview D).

An added implication worth mentioning, described by one of our male interviewees, childcare’s discontinuation of the provision of snacks for children in light of the pandemic: *“I’m under the impression the daycare director wants this to become the new status quo”* (Interview C). This would add to the time spent on domestic labour and increase financial strain.

## Limitations

Due to the embedded format of this study in the timeline of a 13-week undergraduate course, and the online nature of current university proceedings, we were limited to a brief period, and restricted to online operation. The nature of this study required the voluntary participation of a group of individuals known for their lack of available time. Though outreach online was beneficial for reaching more people and enabling them to participate in their own time and in their own space, in person recruitment and advertising in spaces where graduate student parents usually meet, would have been more fruitful.

Our survey was made live, towards the end of term, a very busy time for any university student. This timing may have posed a barrier for many to find time or energy to complete our survey. As such, though our response rate was quite high, the number of complete responses was severely small for study, such as this one. Graduate student fathers were underrepresented in our sample, for this reason, any result and We acknowledge that our results are highly speculative, and the topic would need to be explored in more depth in the future.

In terms of our survey structure, the university experience of the graduate student parents has many facets. In hindsight a shift in focus to a particular aspect would have been a more appropriate scale for a study of this nature. A smaller survey size and simpler, more direct questions may have warranted a greater number of responses and allowed for more depth in analysis.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Based on our findings, recommendations follow along with the major themes identified in our analysis, mainly GSP visibility, social inclusion, and policy reform. The primary focus of these steps for action is the breakdown of social stigma of the GSP within the university, and the increase of their visibility in the student body. We support that small changes, accompanied with general and institutional mindfulness of their position in the childless university model, should aid in decision-making around the GSP experience on any scale to create wider social change over time.

For each of our major recommendations, action steps transition from short-term to long-term through the rest of this section. Our proposed action for the GSS and the wider UBC governance is:

Step 1. Tackling the Problem of Invisibility

➤ **Child-friendly graduate student events:**

Due to the expressed feelings of exclusion from the wider graduate community, steps could be taken to foster a connection between GSPs and their peers, increasing their visibility and acceptance.

Consideration:

1. GSPs alternative schedules: holding events during the day so as to not conflict with evening parental duties, thus breaking down barriers to participation.
2. Creating a digital “child-friendly” stamp, to signal that children are welcome without explicitly targeting parents in the event descriptions.

Immediate

➤ **Study spaces with child play area**

GSPs described an absence of child-friendly public study spaces, where children can be occupied and there is a social acceptance of natural child behaviour. This would foster a sense of ease and comfort; in that they won't feel pressured to keep their children quiet.

Considerations:

3. This could entail a simple change to an already existing space (the addition of space for play and re-establishing area rules to allow for this).
4. Ideally, establishment will occur in proximity to the major campus area for ease of access.

Weeks - Months

➤ **Changing tables and Breast- or bottle-feeding areas**

Although this is a pre-existing provision, greater quantity, distribution, and visibility are necessary to fully cater to GSP needs as well, as contribute to the breakdown of social stigma.

Considerations:

5. Additions of changing tables and family accessibility to bathrooms

Months

across campus

6. Visible breast- and bottle-feeding areas, suitable for pumping and milk refrigeration (refrigerators and of importance for mothers to store breastmilk)
7. All areas suggested above must be clearly marked for ease of access and greater visibility for GSPs and the wider UBC community

➤ **Outdoor family-friendly pace**

The UBC campus is a wonderful place for children. However, there needs to be an increased consideration of the diverse population residing on campus and their varying mobility not just as adults.

Considerations:

8. Accessible playgrounds in closer proximity to graduate student study and class areas (a reassessment of the use of wood chips may be needed).
9. The addition of more picnic tables throughout campus.

Months

## Step 2. Departmental Acknowledgement

➤ **Code of conduct for faculty and staff**

In this step, we aim further the understanding among those with whom the GSPs interact on an academic level. This will allow for the breakdown of social stigma and allow for communication, and more effective problem solving on a case-to-case basis.

Considerations:

10. Promote the expectation that students will inform their advisors, professors, and supervisors at the beginning of their program, and allow for the assertion of their limits.
11. Preparation of a code of conduct regarding informed communication with GSPs to be applied campus wide.

Months

## Step 3. Policy reform

➤ **Re-evaluation criteria**

More research is needed for an in-depth understanding of the policy surrounding GSP funding, parental leaves, and degree complications. As of now, we have identified some smaller issues that may help alleviate pressure for the GSP.

Considerations:

12. Redefinition of 'family' in acknowledgement of different circumstances.
13. Need for the addition of parental grounds as a legitimate option in applying for academic concessions.

Months - Year

In summary, we would like to see small changes in the built environment that signal the presence of parents within the UBC community, thus contributing to a steady expansion of the definition of a university student, beyond the normative understandings and assumptions.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Recommendations for future research include a more in-depth study on the experience of graduate student parents at UBC. We would suggest that research builds upon the emerging patterns we have identified and outlined in this report. Some most prominent aspects would include single parents' experience and the gender differential in terms of negotiating extensions and expectations within their departments.

With much of UBC's focus diverted to inclusivity of space for students, faculty and staff with disabilities, future research may aim at uncovering discrepancies in the university's planning around the accessibility for children (both to child spaces as well as access to spots within the on-campus childcare system).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Overall UBC can be a wonderful place to study and raise children, however, the welcoming of GSPs into the physical and social realms of the university would enhance their experience of campus space. Making parents widely acknowledged through the increased visibility of their community and the spaces that they need, will contribute to destigmatization and normalization of their presence within the student body.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUOTES

HOUSING

Interview with parent B (Mother of one)

*"I think it's better than market housing for sure, I was looking at market housing because I was thinking OK well if I don't get in, I don't want to be living far away from campus where I'll be commuting for hours, and anything available near campus was just prohibitive cost-wise, there was no way I could have been able to be a student and pay market rent"*

*"if there wasn't going to be housing, I'm not sure I would have been able to accept the offer for my program"*

*"Our neighbourhood has really gelled during COVID, lots of people outside, lots of people standing at their gates, people recognize the kids, the kids aren't programmed so much and so they're all running around the neighbourhood in little gangs on the weekend"*

*"I actually applied before I applied to my program because I knew there would be a long wait and I wanted to make sure that there was going to be housing because if there wasn't going to be housing, I'm not sure I would have been able to accept the offer for my program. If I'm not on campus then if I have to commute, then I'm looking at before and after school care, I'm looking at more time away from my child because I'm spending say an hour each way getting to and from campus."*

Interview with parent C (father of two)

*"I remember when we did get this call that said we could move, it was sudden, right, it was like: you need to move in the next two weeks, and that was not convenient. I remember it happened towards the end of term"*

*"The proximity of UBC daycare to Acadia Park is a blessing."*

Interview with parent D (Mother of two)

*"I don't think we would be able to do this without my mum living with us because she is quite involved with taking care of the kids. So, my husband works full time and I work and I'm a student."*

*“We had to keep emailing higher and higher to get my mum on the contract to live in student family housing. I had to say: listen she’s a part of our family, and they were like no, parents don’t count you can’t be on the contract. I just kept asking to talk to the next person up and then finally they said ok, fine your mother can live with you, so we were able to get the size townhouse that we needed but it was stressful, and it took months and I had to talk to multiple people.”*

*“families look so different, so it would’ve been great to have a policy around student family housing”*

#### CHILDCARE

##### Interview with parent A (Father of two)

*“we try to get our sons, in one of the childcares there. Ah, so we are staying on the waiting list... So, I don't know exactly how that works. Many people told me there is a wait list, then you have to go and push them a little bit to get them the spot and all this stuff. But, I mean, we tried at the beginning and... And also, at the beginning... So, when we arrived here, our oldest son was 10 months old. So, we tried, and we didn't get it, because we were planning... Oh, maybe it's easier for us if we live inside UBC then it is going to be easier. We didn't get it and that's another reason why we look for outside was also because... In terms of budget, it was cheaper to live outside UBC. So, we found a spot outside UBC”*

*“So, um, I went, and I registered my son at that moment, um, put in the waiting list. My second son came, we put him on the waiting list. So, we waited there um, we didn’t get, so we were suspecting that maybe at some point we were going to get it, maybe we can move closer to UBC or into UBC, or something like that, but no. No, we didn’t get any response or whatever. So, I don’t know if we didn’t push it or something, we didn’t ... ah... stay in contact anymore. So, like, ok, that’s fine.”*

##### Interview with parent E (Mother of three)

*“Once my eldest had a diagnosis, she was around the age of two and a half and they said we had to leave UBC childcare, and we were really close to doing a whole thing and going to the human rights tribunal.”*

*“We did get involved with the equity office and they were kind of begging us not to make a big deal about it and I understand it from two sides, because the staff, while they’re wonderful, were not trained and didn’t have the resources necessary to provide for a student with a mobility issue.”*

*“If a kid is diagnosed with autism, they’re not told to leave, so we were like ok, why are we being told to leave, it just luckily happened that I did not have the mental stamina at that point, with also a newborn, to take on that, I just didn’t have that energy.”*

*"We signed them all up before they were born... and because we did that, they all had offers of childcare around the age of eighteen months and because I was a teacher in public school, I was able to extend my mat leave as unpaid parental leave for a little bit of extra time until I could get them in"*

#### ACCESSIBILITY TO CAMPUS SPACE

Interview with parent A (Father of two)

*"Sadly, on the campus you don't have like a playground and it would be like cool if you have a playground there"*

*"And uh... [laughs] and because there are so many other students or faculty that also have children, and sometimes we don't have options... you think... there's a day-care! That's fine, but for example, in our case we didn't get it."*

Interview with parent E (Mother of three)

[on establishing a barrier free playground for her daughter with a disability]

*"It was a huge fundraising effort to make that happen"*

*"We had pushback from people who were like: well, why would you do that for just one kid, and I think barrier-free play is just really important for everybody"*

#### SAFETY ON CAMPUS

Interview with parent B (Mother of one)

*"I had rigged up a lock, as I was concerned, being on the main floor and being a single parent, that there wasn't really a safety aspect with the windows, just the way they open. I've since had the maintenance people come and fix the windows so that they can't be opened"*

*"I would never take my child through there"* [referring to fraternity houses].

Interview with parent E (Mother of three)

*"As the kids are getting older, we are trying to explain what's going on."*

*“In the sense of meeting with advisors, just letting them know where I’m at is definitely my max. Maybe I’m not getting that pressure to do more because I’ve been clear that I’m doing all that I can. Part of that is definitely me having to put that out there”*

#### ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS & RECOGNITION BY FACULTY

Interview with parent E (Mother of three)

*“Professors and my supervisor at that time were like: is there any way we can make this work for you? Like what can we do to help you, can we lighten your load somehow, is there a way? In that particular moment, because I had one daughter being diagnosed in the hospital and we were there several times a week for like a year, and I had horrific nausea with my pregnancy with the second one, I was like, no I’m done. But definitely people reached out and it wasn’t seen as a weird thing and like that’s just for you to deal with. It was seen as like a very normal situation”*

Interview with parent B (Single mother of one)

*“I do feel like they recognise my circumstances and there isn’t a lot of extra pressure to take additional courses for me which I really appreciate”*

*“Just letting them know where I’m at is definitely my max. Maybe I’m not getting that pressure to do more because I’ve been clear that I’m doing all that I can. Part of that is definitely me having to put that out there”*

*“I take what I have to take to be considered full-time and to move through my program, I could take more but I literally feel like just taking what I’m taking is more than enough, being a single parent, I’m technically in two courses and that’s a lot”*

Interview with parent D (Mother of two)

*“because a lot of them have kids, because a lot of them are women and have been mothers, that I feel, individually, that they have been quite accommodating. From an organisational level, I haven’t heard too much. I feel like, more on a prof-to-prof basis, I have always felt supported on asking for extensions or with them being considerate of the fact that I am a mum”*

Interview with parent E (Mother of three)

*“My supervisors awesome. He’s a single young dude, so we definitely had to have a talk at one point where I really needed this reference letter for my scholarship and it was due at three pm and at noon on that day he said can you just write it for me and I’ll sign it, luckily my husband was home and he’s a professor, he’s written a million of these, he knows me very well, he knows my academic background, I gave him my CV, I’m like: please write me a letter because I had an awake toddler, like I can’t just sit down and do work right now, that’s not happening”*

*“Then afterwards I was like, I need twenty-four to forty-eight hours’ notice if you’re gonna do something like that. He just had a totally different lifestyle. The plan was always to have him over for dinner so that he could see my chaos”*

*“That was a sort of misunderstanding situation I think, and he was also a brand-new professor”*

*“After that he’s been super understanding”*

#### WORK CONFLICT & FINANCE

Interview with parent D (Mother of two)

*“I’ve had a lot of obstacles getting non-UBC funding because of my [maternity] leaves and when my kids were small, it really impacted my research productivity”*

*“I always feel a little bit at a disadvantage, my peers, I don’t think a lot of them have kids and I always feel a little bit on an uphill battle”*

Interview with parent C (Father of two)

*“Then I announced I was going on leave and soon that funding went away”*

#### COPING STRATEGIES

Interview with parent D (Mother of two)

*“I have to be super highly organised. I have a schedule with all the tasks I have to do. I have my days broken up including tasks. So, I really need to plan ahead, weeks in advance, about what I need to get done and when so that I’m not working at night or working when the kids get home. And I don’t like to work on weekends because I like to be with my kids”*

Interview with parent B (Mother of two)

*“In terms of being a single parent, how I manage to get through it, is to just allow myself to not have, maybe the highest expectations in terms of the course marks. While other people might be getting that*

*A+, they're also not dealing with that sick kid, dealing with bedtime routines. Instead of doing all of those things, they're working on their project or they're doing their assignment, and I'm parenting, and so I only have what's left to do the rest. So, I just forgive myself for that, I don't give myself that added pressure too. To me, a B+ is an A+”*

Interview with parent E (Mother of three)

*“I originally said, like most master's it's like a two-year degree and I always said OK, I need one year per kid to start off, like it's gonna be a minimum of three years”*

Interview with parent E (Mother of three)

*“It's a choice...why do you choose to do school, you need to have something for yourself outside of being a parent, I think, and parenting is like, it's a beautiful thing, but when most of the time your feedback is like: what is this dinner ew I don't like this, it's not the same as when you're doing something engaging with other adults and it's intellectually stimulating and people are giving you great feedback for something you've done”*

*“Usually, I need just a little bit of time to recalibrate and get some coffee and figure out what family stuff has to be done right away and then now that I'm booking the library. I usually have the library booked from ten o'clock to twelve o'clock as many days as I can, and I'll work in the morning, have lunch and then after lunch it's really a mixed bag. Sometimes things for my daughter if she requires upgrades to her equipment or I have to coordinate with physios so that they can go into the school to train the school staff on how to use her equipment or help her with something post-surgery. There's up to maybe twenty hours a week of that kind of work. Sometimes the only work I get is that two-hour chunk in the library, often.”*

INCLUSIVE SOCIAL SPACE

Interview with parent E (Mother of three)

*“I feel welcomed in my community, but I wouldn't say that's a student parent community, I'd say that that's the neighbourhood that I live in”*

*“It definitely feels like we're in a different space, you cross Thunderbird and you're on campus, that's the student world and when you come to the south side of Thunderbird, you're in the family zone”.*

*“I know other student parents because I know people who live at Acadia, but when we talk it's just about parent stuff*

*“2 or people are talking about ‘gosh my supervisor really wants me to do this PhD, you're doing your PhD, what do you think about that, is this even possible?’ It's so cool if there was some kind of mentoring*

*program matching established student parent with new student parent on campus or even some kind of speed dating babysitter situation”*

Interview with parent D (Mother of two)

*“I think Acadia Park is great for that because everyone is a student parent, we haven’t been able to be as social as we would’ve liked but within this physical community it has been very supportive”*

Interview with parent A (Father of two)

*“I felt a little strange that somebody else is working and he [referring to his son] was just maybe... he is not noisy at all, but this kind of thing, its terms of being inside. Most of the people or faculty or even co-workers or other students, they never complained”*

#### SELF-ADVOCATING

Interview with parent C (Father of two)

*“I was the one who got the changing table put in our department by complaining about it” “eventually they put one changing table in this enormous building in the bottom front lobby” “if i’m actually sitting in my office with my one-year-old at some point i’ll probably just change her diaper on my desk”*

#### COVID

Interview with parent D (Mother of two)

*“Just being at home can be difficult because if my son has a day off school, then I really don’t get a lot of work done, like I can’t leave the house to do work or I’m not in a classroom. He’ll be walking back and forth, so it can be hard to get work done at home”*

*“I don’t know if it was just because of the pandemic or the fact that I’m a parent but a lot of the profs, in my program anyway, are really accommodating. I don’t know if that would be the case if we weren’t in a pandemic, I just think that they’re student-centred right now, so it’s been beneficial in that way”*

#### APPENDIX B: ETHNOGRAPHIC MOMENTS

The multiple commitments and time constraints of GSPs were evident in the interviews. For example, two interviewees rescheduled. At one time, one of our interviewees needed to be called back in 5 minutes, on account of having just woken up from a nap. Another interviewee pushed back the interview five minutes in order to book a COVID vaccine, while another finished cooking and ate breakfast during the interview.

During most of the interviews, there were a lot of things occurring in the background: family members entering the room, spouses joining in briefly and answering questions and audible baby noises. One



interviewee was waving at a two-year-old neighbour through the window. This moment provided us with a small glimpse into the busy lives of GSPs.