



From public to private: the gendered impact of COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance and work-family balance

Hind Elhinnawy, Morag Kennedy & Silvia Gomes

To cite this article: Hind Elhinnawy, Morag Kennedy & Silvia Gomes (11 Oct 2023): From public to private: the gendered impact of COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance and work-family balance, *Community, Work & Family*, DOI: [10.1080/13668803.2023.2265044](https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2023.2265044)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2023.2265044>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 11 Oct 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 939



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

From public to private: the gendered impact of COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance and work-family balance

Hind Elhinnawy ^a, Morag Kennedy ^a and Silvia Gomes ^b

^aNottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK; ^bDepartment of Sociology, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

ABSTRACT

This article provides insights into the ways flexible, hybrid and work-from-home arrangements have impacted women during COVID-19 lockdowns in the UK. Based on 10 in-depth interviews with women living and working in the East Midlands, England, who turned to work from home during COVID lockdowns, this study found that despite heightened care needs and the additional burdens women faced during the pandemic, one silver lining was that flexible and hybrid work has positively impacted some. All women spoke about how the pandemic and associated restrictions have altered their conceptualisation of space both positively and negatively. Life during the pandemic gave participants extra care needs and added burdens, but it also gave them more space to be with family and to manage their lives more effectively. This sense of increased space for social and family bonding and life and time management was reduced (again) after the pandemic due to the difficulties women had to bear in balancing the demands of work and family obligations. This article contributes to the studies on the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on women's work-life-balance (WLB) and work-family-balance (WFB), demonstrating the need to think of innovative ways to support women's flexible work in the long term.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 August 2022
Accepted 20 September 2023

KEYWORDS

Gender; COVID-19 pandemic; work-life balance; work-family conflict; social bonds

Introduction

The year 2020 had seen the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in lockdowns throughout the world in the following years. Government officials and celebrities, among many, referred to COVID-19 as 'the great equaliser', suggesting that it impacts everyone in similar ways (Mikael, 2021), but the reality is that pandemics do not only impact people differently but also create new uneven social and economic vulnerabilities (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Alfani, 2020; Asaria et al., 2021). The COVID-19 crisis has had interrelated impacts across multiple aspects of life, from health to jobs to family life, and more (Saladino et al., 2020).

CONTACT Hind Elhinnawy  hind.elhinnawy@ntu.ac.uk  Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham NG1 4FQ, UK.
 <https://hindelhinnawy.org>,  <https://nottinghamtrent.academia.edu/HindElhinnawy>  <https://www.linkedin.com/in/hinde/>  [@https://twitter.com/hinde](https://twitter.com/hinde)

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

In England, three full-scale lockdowns took place from March 2020 for over a year. The first and last of them included the closure of schools and childcare facilities resulting in a move to online home-schooling. With children in and out of school, and the elderly facing heightened care needs due to service overload, women faced additional burdens, even when both women and their partners were confined and expected to work from home (Chung et al., 2021). Data shows that the gap between women and men who felt burned out nearly doubled (Smith, 2021), and that disparity is driving more women to consider downshifting their career or leaving the workforce altogether (McKinsey & Company, 2021b). But for the first time, COVID-19 has elevated the importance of the physical dimension of work (ibid). During the pandemic, the virus most severely disturbed arenas with the highest levels of physical proximity; medical care, personal care, on-site customer service, and leisure and travel (Lund et al., 2021). But for those with lower physical proximity, COVID-19 may have been a blessing. One silver lining was that employers became more flexible in work-from-home and hybrid arrangements. This created a new work-life environment, which has affected women in varying ways, both positive and negative. And despite stress and overwork, many women still want to work from home (Molla, 2021).

Based on an exploratory study concerning 10 working women in the East Midlands, England, this article offers insights into the varied impacts (both negative and positive) of the COVID-19 pandemic for these women. It draws on primary research data alongside existing literature and an emerging body of empirical work on the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on women. It builds on the literature surrounding WLB/ WFB and gender issues during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns to discuss several dimensions in which these women were impacted. This study sought to explore the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on 10 working women in Britain. It aimed to find out whether flexible work can actually help women achieve a WLB and a WFB. Findings of the study reveal that despite the pandemic giving participants extra care needs and added burdens, it gave them more space to be with family and to manage their lives more effectively, which was one silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic (Abrefa Busia et al., 2023). However, participants expressed that after the ease of restrictions, they felt pressured to do extra work both at home and in the workplace. The article, thus adds a fresh perspective and a thorough narrative to the existing literature into the different contextual evidence of the gendered pandemic for working women, providing insights into the ways in which flexible work can help women achieve a WLB and WFB. The paper argues that it is not the flexible and hybrid work alone that could help achieve this, but the situation in which it is performed.

Literature review

Women in the workplace: work-family-balance and work-family-conflict (WFC)

Recently, studies on women in the workplace have been discussing the gender inequalities (Coleman, 2020; Deggans, 2018; Smith & Gayles, 2018), gender discrimination (Funk & Parker, 2018; Verniers & Vala, 2018), and sexual harassment (Fitzgerald, 1993; McLaughlin et al., 2017) women live and face in the workplace. Large-scale surveys suggest that 1 in every 2 women will be harassed at some point during their working lives (Fitzgerald, 1993). Additionally, gender discrimination seems to be based on the myth that women's work threatens children's wellbeing and family life, a myth facilitated by

sexist ideas that oppose a mother's career (Verniers & Vala, 2018). In fact, a strong body of research explores the difficulties of combining work and family life, particularly for women (Adisa et al., 2019; Coleman, 2020). Studies on WLB and WFB have brought greater attention to the difficulties women face in balancing the demands of their work and family obligations (Selmi & Cahn, 2006; Sundaresan, 2014).

Flexibility of work has been found to be associated with increased work satisfaction and increased family well-being (Blair-Loy, 2009; Clark, 2001), because employees are given the autonomy to control their working hours and the location where they carry out their work (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). For women, however, even with flexible work, WLB and WFB seem to be more difficult to achieve, resulting in WFC (Maertz & Boyar, 2011). Unlike men, women continue to take on multiple domestic roles such as house chores and caring responsibilities, and juggle these with work roles, which affects their ability to achieve WLB and WFB (Crompton, 2002; Grünberg & Matei, 2020). In many OECD¹ countries, equally shared care work among both partners is still the exception, and women, particularly mothers, spend less time in paid work and more time on household responsibilities (Abreu et al., 2021). As women are more involved in the upbringing and development of their children than men, they experience more WFC, consequently making it more difficult for them to combine work and family responsibilities (Thorntwaite, 2004; Wayne et al., 2017). Seierstad and Kirton (2015) argue that it is very challenging for women to 'have it all' – to be committed to their careers, spouses and children, even in one of the most gender equal countries in the world – Norway.

Working from home has been prescribed as a solution to combine work with family life but van der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) show evidence of the contrary, particularly in regard to women. According to the authors, the literature presents two lines of thought on this matter – one argues that working from home reduces WFC and another argues that working from home increases WFC. The rationale behind the first is that working from home provides employees control and autonomy over the scheduling of their workdays, making them use time more efficiently, by using electronic communication and saving time usually spent on public transport. The second line of thought argues that working from home increases the permeability of boundaries between work and non-work domains, leading to longer hours of work to compensate for the lack of efficiency, thus increasing the probability of experiencing conflict between both spheres.

When considering flexible working, the scenario does not change as the same issues identified so far persist. Although flexible working provides workers with the control over the temporal and physical boundaries between work and non-work domains, allowing workers to adapt work to fit around family demands (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020), this relationship varies largely across gender lines (Chung et al., 2021). Men, on the one hand, tend to work longer hours when working flexibly and do not increase their household or childcare hours (Chung & van der Horst, 2020); and women, on the other hand, use the flexibility in their work to meet the household and family demands (Kurowska, 2020), resulting in their exploitation both at home and in the labour market as they carry out paid work without reducing their unpaid domestic work hours or intensity (Chung et al., 2021). It is clear that prevailing gender norms are embedded in these asymmetries (Curtice et al., 2019) and flexible working does little to disrupt gender-normative assumptions or the power dynamics within the households that determine who should be

responsible for housework and childcare (Chung et al., 2021), and maintain or increase the traditional division of labour within households (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Despite the variety of policies that have been initiated both by organisations and government with the goal of facilitating WLB and WFB (e.g. changes to working hours and conditions, compressed work hours, promoting a supportive organisational culture, creating the use of technology-assisted tools, paid maternity leave, adoption leave, or telecommuting) (Adisa et al., 2021), research has shown that women (more than men) continue to experience WFC either when working full time, part-time, or at home (Chung et al., 2021; Guillaume & Pochic, 2009; van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020). Despite that those policies have been found to contribute to an increased intimacy between women and their children, as well as to their partners, the levels of WFC were not reduced (Adisa et al., 2021; Rottenberg, 2019)

The pandemic: re-configurations of work-life balance and social bonding

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns in many countries across the globe in 2020, everything changed. Working dynamics entailed necessary reconfigurations as the traditional in-person mode of work was forcibly replaced by virtual work in most sectors (Adisa et al., 2021), done primarily from home. Although working from home is not a completely new concept, having the entire family and virtually the entire world working from home was unprecedented. COVID-19 restrictions also temporarily removed a gendered fault line in external constraint, by requiring both men and women to stay home, even if they were still employed (Craig & Churchill, 2021). As such, both work and family domains became interwoven and 'trapped' in the domestic space. These changes have completely reconfigured the WLB and WFB concepts (Adisa et al., 2021; Chapple et al., 2020).

Studies conducted during this period present contrasting feelings and experiences of lockdown (Bès et al., 2021; Chapple et al., 2020) with a wide diversity of experiences affecting social groups differently (Devine et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2021) across the world. For instance, New Zealanders felt mostly positive about the lockdown in terms of the benefit of spending more time with their families but expressed quite different and diverse experiences and feelings about their work (Chapple et al., 2020). The French experienced confinement either as a source of suffering (more often for young people and women) or as a time of relief (for older, more often men) (Bès et al., 2021).

Women and men have been differently impacted in terms of family dynamics and the household allocation of paid work and family care (Chung et al., 2021), with consequences for both physical and mental health (Abreu et al., 2021; Rajkumar & Sangeetha, 2021; Verhoeven et al., 2021). After all, many working parents were faced with doing paid work and family care at home simultaneously (Abrefa Busia et al., 2023; Craig & Churchill, 2021). During the peak of the first lockdown, Chung et al. (2021) conducted a study to evaluate the role of flexible work for gender equality. Their findings show that mothers were responsible for housework and childcare tasks before lockdowns, but the portion of this work was slightly reduced during the lockdown period, due to some support from their partners. In Australia, Craig and Churchill (2021) collected information on how dual-earner parent couples managed paid work and unpaid domestic work and care during the first lockdown. Findings mirror the previous study, showing that the gender

gap somewhat narrowed because of the relative increase in childcare for fathers who were also staying at home. Thus, the pandemic seems to have created a bubble where some of the traditional gender norms and roles were mitigated (Craig & Churchill, 2021). Abrefa Busia et al. (2023) also evidenced that, in Ghana, married working mothers, who had to juggle work and family demands, increased time spent with family, self-rated improved sleep health, financial security, reduced family demands, improved work performance and output, greater personal satisfaction and overall happiness.

Drawing on interviews conducted with working women in the UK, Adisa et al. (2021) found that the pandemic had not only intensified women's domestic workload during the lockdown (e.g. helping their children with remote schoolwork), but also the role conflict among women has escalated as a result of the increase in their work and familial duties. Their involvement in multiple roles at the same time and in the same place leaves their time and energy drained, increasing the WFC and posing challenges to role differentiation. As a result, the authors argue that 'the cohabitation of work and family duties within the domestic space undermines the ability to achieve WFB and role differentiation due to the occurrence of inter-role conflicts' (Adisa et al., 2021, p. 254). Nonetheless, they point out some positive experiences related to the increase in the quantity and quality of familial relationships in the household, achieved by better relationships with spouses, a sense of togetherness and increased parent-child closeness (Adisa et al., 2021, pp. 253–254).

Other studies validate these findings, showing that the quality time spent with family and the social bonding within the household played a very important role during lockdown (Okabe-Miyamoto et al., 2021; Peshave & Peshave, 2021; Rajkumar & Sangeetha, 2021; Somogyi et al., 2022). Rajkumar and Sangeetha (2021) show that the family bonding during the lockdown period was improved because of spending more valuable time together, which, according to Khalid and Singal (2022), led to the strengthening of the family as a unit. Somogyi and colleagues (2022) evidenced that the lockdown period was mostly positive among middle-class Hungarian mothers as women's caregiving role has increased in worth, allowing them to enact intensive mothering in a better accordance with social expectations than before the pandemic. Analysing how individuals spent their time during the lockdown in India, Peshave and Peshave (2021) found that the lockdown period was utilised in contributing with family members in household chores, enhancing family bonding and increasing consciousness in personal/work hygiene. However, it is worth mentioning that this is only one dimension to consider when looking at the impacts of the pandemic in family relationships. When analysing how the pandemic affected families in several dimensions, the reality may be more complex.

A study conducted by Evans et al. (2020) in Australia, showed that family experiences are multifaceted and entail both negative and positive experiences. The predominant experiences of families were of loss and challenges, with many reporting mental health problems and strained family relations. Yet some families reported positive benefits; from strengthening relationships, finding new hobbies, to developing positive characteristics such as appreciation, gratitude, and tolerance (Evans et al., 2020). In line with other studies presented so far, this study also argued that the pandemic impacted men and women differently. Men (fathers) reported positive pandemic-related changes, such as

increased quality time spent with children, but women were more likely to report being burdened with family responsibilities (Evans et al., 2020). A cross-sectional study conducted by Obioma and colleagues (2022) examined gender differences between male- and female-typed housework during the early COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 across Germany, India, Nigeria, and South Africa. They concluded that gendered housework persisted during the COVID-19 lockdown. Women have continued to take on a greater burden on female type of tasks during the lockdown (such as caring for children and cleaning) and even though men performed more of what is seen as male type tasks during the lockdown (such as car maintenance and yard work), the restrictions implemented to curb the spread of COVID-19 (such as closed schools and remote work) have burdened women more than men.

Therefore, the gender lines in which families are structured need to be acknowledged and considered when looking at the gender roles played by women and men in the household during the pandemic as the virtual absence of external constraints might not have significantly affected the existing gender norms. It is also important to consider that COVID-19 lockdowns might have led to work and family identity changes (Hennekam et al., 2021), resulting in new and reconfigured WFB or WLB enduring beyond the pandemic.

The research process

This study employs a qualitative, in particular, narratively-informed research, as the researchers believe it is best suited for studying 'personal transformations' which reveal how individuals and groups make sense of their experiences (Elliott, 2005). In this respect, the interview is designed so that it encourages the development of narratives, in which the narration form substitutes the question-answer form that defines most interview situations (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). This is informed by feminist theory and intersectionality that pays particular attention to layered forms of inequality. The rationale for this choice is that it supports the development of an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and provides a rich detailed narrative of their lived experiences. This research strategy, thus, highlights the everyday interactions and processes that create gendered and other identity categories; while at the same time, disrupting these categories and processes (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

The work presented here is part of a study that aimed to identify the ways in which the pandemic and government-led responses to it are deepening pre-existing experiences of social, psychological and economic inequalities, exclusion and vulnerability. Participants were recruited from the existing contacts of the researchers and the research assistants and with the support of Nottingham Women's Centre, who have put out a call for participation advert on their social media account(s). Purposive sampling was then employed; female participants willing to participate in the project and self-identifying as being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, who met the criteria for this research were chosen. Care was taken to make participants aware of the project but not actively recruited to ensure that they know they are in no way required to take part in the research and will face no negative repercussions if they choose not to participate.

The sample for this part of the study included 10 semi-structured qualitative interviews. Towards the last few interviews, no more emerging themes were found, which meant that

we achieved data saturation. In this project, due to COVID-19 pandemic measures, interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams. Risk assessments were conducted via a short pre-interview using Microsoft Teams video meeting, and in addition to written participant information sheets and consent forms conducted on Microsoft forms, information was obtainable via a 5-min video presented by one of the research investigators. The participants who took part in the interviews were aged between 31 and 62 years, working in low physical proximity sectors. Most of the participants worked within higher education as academics or administrators, except for three, one is unemployed and suffers mental health issues, one is a mature student, and one is an administrator in a different industry. All women had children of school age except four, three had none and one had children who left the home.

The following table shows participant demographics, i.e. ages (as they have mentioned or hinted), jobs, marital statuses and the number of children they have (if any).

Name	Age	Job	Marital status	Children
(L.)	Mid 30s	Reception role	Single	None
(P.)	Early 50s	Organisation developmental advisor at a college (four days a week)	Married	One child (son) aged 16 years
(E.)	Mid/Late 30s	Post-doc (health research)	Married	One child (boy) with mild cerebral palsy of primary school age
(I.)	Late 30s/ Early 40s	Post-doc Research technician	Cohabiting	One child (girl) 3 years old
(K.)	52	Administrator	Married	Two children (boys) aged 14 and 16 years old
(Ca.)	31	Student in Adult Education	Married	Three little children
(C.)	39	Project administrator at a University (part-time)	Married	Two young children (boy and girl) aged 7 and 3 years old
(M.)	58	Assistant facilities manager at university	Single	Two grown up daughters and four grandchildren
Paula (Pa.)	50s	Unemployed (Volunteering for Charity Organisations)	Single	None
(J.)	62	Associate Professor	Married	None
(R.)	Unknown	Secondary school maths teacher (part-time)	Married	Two grown up sons

The interview guide included an introduction and four chronological parts; before COVID, during COVID, after COVID and a discussion on what needs to be done to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on their WLB and WFB. Each interview lasted between 60- and 90-min and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All efforts were made to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.² Participants were asked to share their experience of the COVID-19 lockdown in relation to the quality of their work and family life. Within the interviews, the questions were broad, such as 'Could you describe your life before COVID-19? How has the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown affected you? What would you expect to help mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic? This allowed participants to tell detailed stories and include elements that are of significance to them, achieving compelling formulation of the central topic designed to trigger 'self-sustainable' descriptions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, thematic analysis was employed (initially via Nvivo software) to identify key emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). After a narrative summary of each interview, questioning the meaning and interpretation of

particular words and phrases, open coding was carried out. Coding categories were not imposed a priori; rather, we remained open to new insights by allowing new categories to emerge from the data. The main categories were further fine-tuned by frequent comparisons until a representative overview was achieved. Anonymised quotes from the participants are used to illustrate relevant themes. This article draws on primary research data alongside existing literature and an emerging body of empirical work already conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on women (Bourgault et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2021; Petts et al., 2020; Saladino et al., 2020; Wenham et al., 2020) to evidence the different dimensions in which women felt they were particularly impacted during the lockdowns, both the positives and the negatives. This is to find out whether flexible work can actually help women achieve a WLB and a WFB in the future.

Findings and discussion

The findings of this study are structured around three sections: (i) Life during the COVID-19 lockdowns; (ii) Life after COVID-19 and (iii) How Can Flexible Work be More Equitable for Women? This is to help address the two questions posed in this study: the ways in which the COVID-19 lockdown has impacted women, both positively and negatively, and whether flexible work can help women achieve WLB and WFB. Life during the pandemic gave participants extra care needs and added burdens, but it also gave them more space to be with family and to manage their lives more effectively. The time of lockdown was utilised in family bonding, forming support bubbles, getting closer to the community, and better managing of time. However, this sense of increased space for social and family bonding and life and time management was reduced after the pandemic due to the challenges women had to endure (again) in balancing the demands of work and family obligations. Participants expressed that after COVID-19 ease of restrictions, they felt pressured to do extra work both at home and in the workplace. As such, we argue that it is not flexible and hybrid work that is inequitable for women. Rather, it is the situation in which women are performing remote work that is unequal.

Life during COVID-19 lockdown(s)

Heightened home and childcare needs

An analysis of the participants' accounts during COVID-19 lockdown reveals that much of the burden of housework, childcare and home-schooling fell on women, even when men were also working from home. Three participants reported an increase in domestic work and home-schooling as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns:

I've had to work from home the entire time. I've had to home school. I had to look after the house. I had to support my husband because he's in a high-profile role ... my situation is just so common that I think, you know, by participating in this, I'm actually representing quite a big group of people, basically. (C.).

Interestingly, participant C suggests that she is part of a 'big group of people' or women who (continue) to pick up the additional responsibilities in line with traditional gender norms. These gender norms reinforce the idea of women having the primary duty of childcare and the additional burden that comes with this (Chung et al., 2021; Chung & van der

Lippe, 2020; Obioma et al., 2022). This shows that even during the COVID-19 lockdowns gendered expectations continue to prevail. Similarly, another participant complained that cooking and housework responsibilities fell back on her despite working from home during the first lockdown. This account was particularly intriguing as her husband worked as a farmer and was the one in charge of cooking before the lockdown. Another participant explained that the burden is not only physical but also psychological. She was the one expected to manage her daughter's anxieties while also juggling her own. Some participants also expressed that closures of nurseries and the unavailability of child-minders and carers made it even more difficult for them to have a WLB and WFB. In fact, one participant expressed a feeling of guilt for not being able to juggle everything:

I guess it's just ... it's just a bit disheartening when you know [sic] ... [pauses] [laughs] You try ... like you're trying to juggle so much and you think right let's do this and at the end of the day, you're not a teacher, and even my friends who are teachers, struggle to teach their own children because there's just no boundaries ... You know it [sic] ... it was just a very strange setup, and obviously everyone is doing their best. But sorry, I probably digressed again! (E.)

These accounts reveal that participants felt overwhelmed by the heightened home and child responsibilities. Working from home also made it more difficult for them to fully attend to their children and to work simultaneously. This is described by Adisa et al. (2021) as role conflict – i.e. the increase in demands from work and the new modes of work that took place online while juggling housework, children and home-schooling all in one place has exacerbated this role conflict.

Conversely, participant E downplays the additional burdens she has to take on and endure stating that 'everyone is doing their best' referring to both herself and her husband. Studies show that men, because their gender identity is traditionally marked by paid work, do not feel an obligation to be involved in the home as women do, and according to some cultural interpretations, women themselves do not want to fully share those chores because of the centrality to their gender identity and power within the family (cited in Cerrato & Cifre, 2018,). As such, there might be an absence of feeling of injustice or inequality among some women in terms of distribution of domestic and family responsibilities between men and women evidenced in the latter quote. So, in some cases, women may neither perceive injustice in their relationships nor are dissatisfied. This explains why gender inequalities persist within the family sphere. However, recent research argues that this unequal distribution does not generate distress among traditional women while it does among women with egalitarian gender role attitudes (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018; Yucel & Chung, 2023).

As women do not have the same boundaries in place as men to separate their careers and personal lives, there is a need for them to downplay childcare responsibilities from others (even their own children) to maintain the appearance of this 'ideal' mother image (Weidhaas, 2018). Guilt is also present in the above quote where participant E has concerns over her ability to home-school her children. This is not uncommon for women who are trying to negotiate several identities (Stalp, 2006; Weidhaas, 2018). This discussion adds to the sparse literature on parental experiences during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Khalid & Singal, 2022).

Space for social bonding

Despite the latter difficulties, most participants alluded to the notion of space or opportunity for social bonding, which was not present prior to the pandemic. This equated to four participants exploring this idea of social bonding during interviews. This social bonding occurred on several levels and across different informal networks. Family bonding, bonding via support bubbles and community bonding were mentioned during interviews:

So actually, the lockdown brought us as a little nucleus together again ... (E.)

... so within the family we became a sort of working unit and I think that probably benefited our son because he could see that we were both working and therefore he worked, he stopped when we stopped so, erm ... That's been a positive experience. Erm, I think one of the plus sides has been a shift in the family in terms of what I do and what others do. (P.)

In both quotes above, lockdown restrictions brought these families together allowing them more space and time to flourish as a family unit. In participant P's account, she describes her family being 'a little nucleus together again' which is echoed in the work of Somogyi et al. (2022), who argue that the volume of unpaid household tasks, the widespread of mothering ideals, and the limited access to flexible-work arrangements, all sound negative, have in fact created a context, in which participants could evaluate this positively during the first lockdown. Despite the negative applications, the COVID-19 lockdowns also fostered togetherness and better division of labour between couples to some extent. This supports other research conducted in this area (Abrefa Busia et al., 2023; Chapple et al., 2020; Peshave & Peshave, 2021; Rajkumar & Sangeetha, 2021). Flexible and hybrid work has also been linked to an increased sense of family well-being (Blair-Loy, 2009; Clark, 2001). This has been substantiated by Greenhaus et al. (2003) who suggests that those who spend more time with family than on work have a greater quality of life. This familial bonding extended to support bubbles³ where participants' informal networks with friends were strengthened by the pandemic:

And so I did find that I had more time to catch up with people, erm, and just sort of keep in touch with people a bit more ... Yeah, within friendships I've found the people that I've spent more time with we've got a lot closer and now ... (L.)

Erm, [pauses] no specific help I think keeping in touch with the network of friends that I've got so as soon as we were able to meet one other person for exercise I have three friends and on a sort of rota I would walk with one of them. (P.)

For the two participants above, the opportunity to spend more time with friends strengthened their existing relationships with others. For some of our participants, maintaining friendships was more difficult before the pandemic due to work and family commitments. However, support bubbles provided participants with more time to check in with others in their social circle, as also confirmed in other studies (Bès et al., 2021). With most of the world's population confined to their homes, these participants capitalised positively on this situation. Amin et al. (2020) emphasises the importance of having a socially supportive environment suggesting its association with positive psychological wellbeing. This extension of social bonding also connected participants to their communities in ways they had never connected before:

I ended up volunteering for Ashby (anonymised) City Council as part of their outreach for COVID-19 and I opened a job account with them, which meant you just went into an online rota and you just picked your shift whenever you wanted to do ... (L.)

You know, I think as a nation we kinda lost that neighbourly kind of thing ... I made friends on my street where I live. There's a couple of old age pensioners that are by themselves so I went knocking on their door and giving them the food instead and it's kind of you know ... (M.)

The first quote speaks to community cohesion and resilience during the pandemic. The lockdown provided a space for volunteering, a sense of belonging and togetherness within a community context. This can be linked to the 'sense of community' model outlined by McMillan and Chavis (1986), which outlines four key areas which need to be strengthened in order to engage community members in supporting vulnerable people in their community; a sense of belonging, an emotional connection, fulfilment of needs, and influence (Bermea et al., 2019), which were present among our participants. Research also shows that neighbour support is a vital part of everyday life and can positively contribute to a wide range of social groups (Cramm et al., 2013; Vyncke et al., 2013).

Better life and time management

Most of our participants showed a great deal of critical self-reflection during the pandemic, with this being reflected in four participant accounts'. They considered what was important in their lives and tried to maximise on the extra time the pandemic gave them. Participants considered topics such as time management, WLB, WFB and flexible working arrangements:

So the first thing I did was sign up to do a business course which was, erm, run via zoom and it was completely free. It was three days where you joined in with the classes you had assignments and write ups to do, erm and then you sent all your work away to have it marked ... I made sure that I would get up and go for a walk because the weather was nice so I would get up and go to my local park where I got into a routine of getting up in the morning, going quite early. (L.)

I've rethought how I want my daily life to be ... I'm just finding ways to uh [clicks tongue] just have more time and space to myself I suppose. (J.)

The first quote considers some of the positives of flexible working. Despite the drawbacks, this flexibility in working allowed for more productivity. It also 'empowered' participant L to arrange her priorities based on what was important for her. This is also reflected in participant J's account whereby she 'rethought how I want my daily life to be'. She discusses this idea of prioritising herself and her needs which translated into positive identity changes (Hennekam et al., 2021). In the same vein, participants thought more consciously (mindfully) about their own mental health knowing they needed more headspace at times. They also had more time for interests, which were previously neglected before the pandemic. In addition, this time allowed for caring responsibilities to seem less of a chore. This supports other research conducted on wellbeing during the pandemic (Büssing et al., 2020). Furthermore, it shows that reflection was a key part of women's everyday experiences during the pandemic.

Life after COVID-19 lockdowns(s)

Disproportionate workload for women

Several of our participants discussed a decrease in productivity and an increase in the care burden after the ease of lockdown. This was highlighted by four participants. With the

expectation of people returning to work after the lockdowns, many women involved in this research were concerned about their commute to work and how this would impact their productivity as it did before the pandemic. Others suggested that the care burden would be/was already redistributed to them as the 'home maker':

They go into the office, I feel like you'll come home do your kind of evening routine ... and then probably will feel that you have to mop up some stuff ... cuz your to-do list still looks the same as it did during lockdown, but ... you've actually had ... travelled there travelled back ... so your minimum is 37.5 h, but actually it's open ended so you can work all week-ends. (E.)

[Deep breath] Well, it means I will definitely have to stay home [laughs] I think he needs to make some kind of adjustment to work, and I think that work have to understand. (I.)

Erm, you know I'm sure a lot of women, the mental load, the looking after the house disproportionality falls on them anyway, erm, [sighs] so I don't really know what could have been done to help that because it's gotta be done [laughs]' (K.)

In the first quote above, the participant is struggling to build a picture of what work life would look like after the pandemic. She is anxious about a lack of control over time and working expectations with an onus on working additional hours, where the impact of commuting frequently depends on gender and the parental status of employees (Carli, 2020). Additionally, women with children who commute report more time pressure than women without children (Thulin et al., 2019). Participant E highlights this concern by stating 'your to-do list still looks the same as it did during the lockdown' emphasising that society has learnt very little from the increased time the COVID-19 lockdowns allowed. If anything, the burden on women has increased demonstrating that gender-normative assumptions associated with the traditional division of labour within the household have not been disrupted or changed by the lockdowns (Abrefa Busia et al., 2023; Chung et al., 2021; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). This is followed by other participants in the latter two quotes using laughter to mask and downplay the burden expected of them by society; not only being taught to desire having a family but also to manage their working responsibilities alongside this (Weidhaas, 2018). In a society which continues to separate childcare and work responsibilities, women are constantly receiving opposing messages about social norms and the importance attributed to being a 'good mother' and 'good worker' (Pfeffer, 2010; Turner & Norwood, 2013).

Despite that working from home has in some ways increased men's contributions to childcare and other domestic duties, women continue to carry the main responsibilities of home duties and childcare, which disrupts their work commitments and reduces their working hours, negatively impacting their performance and productivity in comparison to men (Abrefa Busia et al., 2023; Grünberg & Matei, 2020). The quotes above show an acknowledgement of women's roles post-pandemic as reverting back to the 'caregivers' in society – albeit in a flippant manner: '... falls on them [women] anyway ...'. This corroborates previous research carried out in this area (Chung et al., 2021; Summers, 2020). Such a backward shift will negatively impede women's involvement in the labour market (Hipp & Bünning, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2021a).

How can flexible work be more equitable for women?

As has been evident through the first two sections above, it is not the flexible and hybrid work that is inequitable for women. Rather, it is the situation in which women are performing remote work that is unequal. In this study, flexible work has shown to have enabled women to bond with their family and to manage their time more effectively, which has resulted in better WLB and WFB, echoing recent research findings (Adisa et al., 2021; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). But this varies across gender lines. Evident here and echoing existing studies, during COVID lockdowns, gender disparity has narrowed down a little (Chung et al., 2021; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Going back to the workplace, thus, may widen this gender disparity gap once more. Based on suggestions made by the participants of this study, there are several initiatives the government and employers can do. Firstly, employers need to provide ‘appropriate’ work from home environments, as one participant explained:

...as an employer you have to ensure that you have the equipment and a safe working environment ... Now that you're saving on office space and fuel heating and electricity, WI-FI ... you should be passing back these savings to your employees, so I think the government has to be very strict ... Either we get tax breaks for workers to carry on or we get additional payment to cover the fact that we're working from home. (R.)

To respond to the above quote that suggests compensating those who work from home, one must acknowledge that this may not help those who do not have appropriate space for working from home. Thus, keeping the flexibility and hybridity of working arrangements may help those who cannot work from home. But those who wish to continue working from home, like most participants of this study, could benefit from organisational support in the Post-COVID era, echoing recent research that argue that employers should re-examine their approach to employee support to better prepare for future crisis; this includes ensuring a safe environment for those who wish to continue working from home among other recommendations (Errichiello & Pianese, 2021). Another suggestion from participants is the creation of employment policies that would encourage men to take part in household and childcare responsibilities. One example several participants asserted is providing men with the same amount of parental leave that women are allowed to take:

There needs to be room to allow for men to have time out ... to have time out for their children and to support their wives' careers ... So, I think it ... an employment review or an actual support for men and a bit more talk around that so that they feel that they can take that time off ... and more than the two weeks paternity leave. (E.)

Looking from the angle of women's lives, there needs to be policies that, um, enable women to come, or at least encourage fathers to take on more of a fathering role, because at the moment, policy is not that family friendly. So a man who wants to take extended paternity leave is seen as lacking commitment rather than being family oriented. (J.)

The two quotes above echo what has been discussed in the literature review of this paper, which argue that despite the variety of policies that have been initiated to facilitate WLB and WFB and found to contribute to an increased family bonding, flexible working, in reality, does little to disrupt gender-normative assumptions within the households (Chung et al., 2021). What the participants suggest above, in terms of allowing men to

have ‘time-out for their children’, may in fact be crucial for changing societal norms around gender roles and removing the stigma around flexible work for men, which has been discussed by many for a while now (Blair-Loy, 2009; Chung & van der Horst, 2020).

Finally, the following quotes speaks of the ongoing issue of gender equity that the world continues to face despite huge changes for women in terms of employment in the past decades, compared to their grandmothers and even their mothers. ‘Invisible Women’ by Caroline Criado Perez (2020) is a case in point that exposes the gender data gap – the hidden ways in which women are excluded, from government policy and medical research, to technology, workplaces, urban planning and the media, which has created a pervasive but invisible bias with a profound effect on women’s lives.

That, you know women’s employment is a huge issue and I think it’s assumed that women’s equality is now dealt with and no longer an issue. And that is so blatantly not the case ... statistics show that actually women are underpaid, uh, perhaps you know their career progression is stifled. They’re still taking the majority of responsibility for childcare ... unless policies are in place that allows the shift to happen, it’s not going to change in the near future. (J.)

Despite being beyond the scope of this article, echoing the latter quote by one of the participants, Criado Perez (2020) argues that for gender equity to be achieved, we must close the female representation gap in all spheres of life. Studies have shown that when gender norms are more progressive, flexible working is less likely to lead to traditional gender roles being reinforced (Kurowska, 2020).

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on women’s work and family lives. The findings highlight some of the pressures that women have faced as a result of their heightened home, childcare needs and home-schooling as well as the increase in their workload. The findings also highlight that women found more space for family and social bonding, asserting that flexible and hybrid work arrangements helped them with better ability to manage their life and time efficiently.

Based on the findings of this study, this research among others, expects that there will be a surge of interest and demand in flexible work arrangements (Chung et al., 2021; McKinsey & Company, 2021a). According to the findings of this study, this research provides insights into the ways in which flexible work can help women achieve a WLB and WFB. However, we argue that it is not the flexible and hybrid work alone that could help achieve this, but the situation in which it is performed. We must be careful that work-from-home and flexible arrangements do not reinforce traditional gender roles. Promoting remote and flexible work policies for both genders is key to combating the triple burdens faced by women (McLaren et al., 2020). By making flexible work options more readily available for all workers, both men and women, a more equitable workforce which reduces the friction between work and life that usually affects more women than men may be created. Yet, we must be careful, as Chung and van der Lippe (2020) argue, if normative views about gender roles do not change, the perception of flexible work is also unlikely to change, which means that flexible work may in fact enforce traditional gender roles. Additionally, the protection of workers when work–family boundaries become blurred due to flexible work arrangements is essential, where the culture

of the workplace helps ensure that employees feel comfortable and supported in their life outside of the workplace. It goes without saying that further research is needed to discuss who is responsible for these arrangements and to what extent; the employee, the organisation, or the welfare system? And finally, to support those who wish to continue their flexible work arrangements, they should be provided with appropriate work environments at home (laptops, internet, IT support, a focus on deliverables rather than logged hours). A good example is the Queensland legislation in Australia which extends the employer's duty of care to 'anywhere' work is performed.

Research has shown that men and women use flexible working in different ways, producing different outcomes for wellbeing, WLB and WFB (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Thus, gender needs to be studied within the context of the organisation, country, family as well as class differences (ibid). To expand on these associations, further research on the ways in which men and women with different gender-role associations behave differently when working from home. This pandemic has given us a chance to reflect on what we value most and what enables us to achieve a better WLB and WFB. As such, tailored approaches that attend to such differences rather than a one-size fit all should be the way to go (Daniels et al., 2022), and more robust insights from longitudinal studies to assess and follow changes in the future is essential.

Limitations

The findings of this study have been gathered online due to COVID restrictions, primarily through Microsoft Teams. We acknowledge that the perceptions of those with access to the Internet may differ from those without access. Further, we acknowledge that the sample size in this research may appear small. Therefore, perceptions may be biased and not generalisable. Finally, data were collected between mid-April and mid-May 2020. While the country was gradually reopening its economies toward the end of this period, most responses were collected when stay-at-home restrictions were in place and only essential businesses were operating. As more employees return to the workforce, if this research is to be replicated, the findings may vary.

Notes

1. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a group of 37 member countries that discuss and develop economic and social policy.
2. Ethics application was approved by Nottingham Trent University, The School of Social Sciences.
3. As a reminder, support bubbles were the process that allowed the easing of social distancing to facilitate close contact with those from another household (Leng, et al., 2021).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by QR Funding (March 2021) based at Nottingham Trent University.

Notes on contributors

Hind Elhinnawy, a dedicated feminist, activist/academic with an interdisciplinary research agenda focused on gender activism, intersectionality, social justice & social change. Hind's work for over a decade has led to law and policy reform in Egypt. Her current projects include the publishing of a monograph entitled; *Secular Muslim Feminism: Contesting Fundamentalism and Gender Equality* (2024, Bloomsbury).

Morag Kennedy, a feminist researcher with over 10 years of experience in victimology, intimate partner abuse & homicide; and technology-enhanced abuse. Her current projects include considering the mental health impact of PhD researchers and its synergies with vicarious trauma.

Silvia Gomes, assistant professor at the University of Warwick. Her main areas of research are crime and media, prison studies, social inequalities, and intersectional approaches. Her published work includes 'Prisons, State and Violence' (2019, Springer), and 'Incarceration and Generation', volumes 1 and 2 (2021, 2022, Routledge).

ORCID

Hind Elhinnawy  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3960-3138>

Morag Kennedy  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6771-9608>

Silvia Gomes  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5503-0037>

References

- Abrefa Busia, K., Arthur-Holmes, F., & Chan, A. H. N. (2023). COVID-19's silver linings: Exploring the impacts of work–family enrichment for married working mothers during and after the COVID-19 lockdown in Ghana. *Journal of Family Studies*, 29(4), 1923–1945. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2022.2103018>
- Abreu, L., Koebach, A., Díaz, O., Carleial, S., Hoeffler, A., Stojetz, W., Freudenreich, H., Justino, P., & Brück, T. (2021). Life with Corona: Increased gender differences in aggression and depression symptoms due to the COVID-19 pandemic burden in Germany. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 689396. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.689396>
- Adams-Prassl, A., Boneva, T., Golin, M., & Rauh, C. (2020). Inequality in the impact of the coronavirus shock: Evidence from real time surveys. *Journal of Public Economics*, 189, 104245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104245>
- Adisa, T. A., Aiyenitaju, O., & Adekoya, O. D. (2021). The work–family balance of British working women during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 13(2), 241–260. doi:10.1108/JWAM-07-2020-0036
- Adisa, T. A., Gbadamosi, G., Mordi, T., & Mordi, C. (2019). In search of perfect boundaries? Entrepreneurs' work-life balance. *Personnel Review*, 48(6), 1634–1651. doi:10.1108/PR-06-2018-0197
- Alfani, G. (2020). *Epidemics, inequality and poverty in pre-industrial and early industrial times* (CAGE Working Papers). November, Issue 520, pp. 1–54.
- Amin, K. P., Griffiths, M. D., & Dsouza, D. D. (2022). Online gaming during the COVID-19 pandemic in India: Strategies for work-life balance. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 20(1), 296–302. doi:10.1007/s11469-020-00358-1
- Asaria, M., Costa-i-Font, J., & Cowell, F. (2021). *Pandemics make us more averse to inequality*. <https://voxeu.org/article/pandemics-make-us-more-averse-inequality>
- Bermea, A. M., Lardier, D. T., Forenza, B., Garcia-Reid, P., & Reid, R. J. (2019). Communitarianism and youth empowerment: Motivation for participation in a community-based substance abuse prevention coalition. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 47(1), 49–62. doi:10.1002/jcop.22098
- Bès, M.-P., Bidart, Claire, Defossez, Adrien, Favre, Guillaume, Figeac, Julien, Grossetti, Michel, Launay, Lydie, Mariot, Nicolas, Mercklé, Pierre, Milard, Béatrice, Perdoncin, Anton, Tudoux, Benoît. (2021). Living conditions and turn-over in personal networks during the first COVID-19 lockdown in France. *SSRN*, 1–21.

- Blair-Loy, M. (2009). Work without end? Scheduling flexibility and work-to-family conflict among stockbrokers. *Work and Occupations*, 36(4), 279–317. doi:10.1177/0730888409343912
- Bourgault, S., Peterman, A., & O'Donnell, M. (2021). *Violence against women and children during COVID-19-one year on and 100 papers in: A fourth research round up*. Center for Global Development.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Büssing, A., Recchia, D. R., Hein, R., & Dienberg, T. (2020). Perceived changes of specific attitudes, perceptions and behaviors during the Corona pandemic and their relation to wellbeing. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 18(374), 1–17.
- Carli, L. L. (2020). Women, gender equality and COVID-19. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 35(7/8), 647–655. doi:10.1108/GM-07-2020-0236
- Cerrato, J., & Cifre, E. (2018). Gender inequality in household chores and work-family conflict. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1330. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01330
- Chapple, S., Fletcher, M., Prickett, K., & Smith, C. (2020). What people said about life under lockdown. *Policy Quarterly*, 16(3), 53–57. doi:10.26686/pq.v16i3.6556
- Chung, H., Birkett, H., Forbes, S., & Seo, H. (2021). COVID-19, flexible working, and implications for gender equality in the United Kingdom. *Gender & Society*, 35(2), 218–232. doi:10.1177/08912432211001304
- Chung, H., & van der Horst, M. (2020). Flexible working and unpaid overtime in the UK: The role of gender, parental and occupational status. *Social Indicators Research*, 151(2), 495–520. doi:10.1007/s11205-018-2028-7
- Chung, H., & van der Lippe, T. (2020). Flexible working work-life balance and gender equality: Introduction. *Social Indicators Research*, 151(2), 365–381. doi:10.1007/s11205-018-2025-x
- Clark, S. C. (2001). Work cultures and work/family balance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 58(3), 348–365. doi:10.1006/jvbe.2000.1759
- Coleman, M. (2020). Women leaders in the workplace: Perceptions of career barriers, facilitators and change. *Irish Educational Studies*, 39(2), 233–253. doi:10.1080/03323315.2019.1697952
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Polity Press.
- Craig, L., & Churchill, B. (2021). Dual-earner parent couples' work and care during COVID-19. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(S1), 66–79. doi:10.1111/gwao.12497
- Cramm, J. M., van Dijk, H. M., & Nieboer, A. P. (2013). The importance of neighborhood social cohesion and social capital for the well being of older adults in the community. *The Gerontologist*, 53(1), 142–152. doi:10.1093/geront/gns052
- Crompton, R. (2002). Employment, flexible working and the family. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 53(4), 537–558. doi:10.1080/0007131022000021470
- Curtice, J., Clery, E., Perry, J., Phillips, M., Rahim, N., et al. (2019). *British social attitudes : The 36th Report*. London: The National Centre for Social Research.
- Daniels, R. A., Miller, L. A., Mian, M. Z., & Black, S. (2022). One size does NOT fit all: Understanding differences in perceived organizational support during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Business and Society Review*, 127(S1), 193–222. doi:10.1111/basr.12256
- Deggans, J. (2018). Gendered inequalities in the workplace revisited: Masculinist dominance, institutionalized sexism, and assaultive behavior in the #metoo era. *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, 10(2), 43–49. doi:10.22381/CRLSJ10220182
- Devine, B. F., Foley, N., & Ward, M. (2021). *Women and the economy briefing paper number CBP06838*. House of Commons Library.
- Elliott, J. (2005). *Using narrative in social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Errichiello, L., & Pianese, T. (2021). The role of organizational support in effective remote work implementation in the post-COVID Era. In D. Wheatley, I. Hardill, & S. Buglass (Eds.), *Handbook of research on remote work and worker well-being in the post-COVID-19 Era*. Hershey (pp. 221–242). IGI Knowledge.
- Evans, S., Mikocka-Walus, A., Klas, A., Olive, L., Sciberras, E., Karantzas, G., Westrupp, E. M. (2020). From “it has stopped our lives” to “spending more time together has strengthened bonds”: The varied experiences of Australian families during COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 588667.

- Fitzgerald, L. F. (1993). Sexual harassment: Violence against women in the workplace. *American Psychologist*, 48(10), 1070–1076. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.48.10.1070
- Funk, C., & Parker, K. (2018). *Women and men in STEM often at odds over workplace equity*. PEW Research Centre.
- Greenhaus, J. H., Collins, K. M., & Shaw, J. D. (2003). The relation between work–family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 63(3), 510–531. doi:10.1016/S0001-8791(02)00042-8
- Grünberg, L., & Matei, Ş. (2020). Why the paradigm of work–family conflict is no longer sustainable: Towards more empowering social imaginaries to understand women’s identities. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(3), 289–309. doi:10.1111/gwao.12343
- Guillaume, C., & Pochic, S. (2009). What would you sacrifice? Access to top management and the work–life balance. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 16(9), 14–36. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0432.2007.00354.x
- Hennekam, S., Ladge, J. J., & Powell, G. N. (2021). Confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic: How multi-domain work-life shock events may result in positive identity change. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 130(103621), 1–18.
- Hipp, L., & Bünning, M. (2020). Parenthood as a driver of increased gender inequality during COVID-19? Exploratory evidence from Germany. *European Societies*, 23(Sup 1: European Societies in Time of Coronavirus Crisis), S658–S673.
- Jovchelovitch, S., & Bauer, M. W. (2000). *Narrative interviewing*. LSE Research Online.
- Khalid, A., & Singal, N. (2022). Parents as partners in education during COVID-19-related school closures in England: Challenges and opportunities identified by parents with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. *Journal of Family Studies*, 1–25.
- Kurowska, A. (2020). Gendered effects of home-based work on parents’ capability to balance work with nonwork: Two countries with different models of division of labour compared. *Social Indicators Research*, 151(2), 405–425. doi:10.1007/s11205-018-2034-9
- Lund, S., Madgavkar, A., Manyika, J., Smit, S., Ellingrud, K., Meaney, M., Robinson, O., et al. (2021). *The future of work after COVID-19*. McKinsey & Company.
- Maertz, C. P., & Boyar, S. L. (2011). Work-family conflict, enrichment, and balance under “levels” and “episodes” approaches. *Journal of Management*, 37(1), 68–98. doi:10.1177/0149206310382455
- McKinsey & Company. (2021a). *Seven charts that show COVID-19’s impact on women’s employment*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/seven-charts-that-show-covid-19s-impact-on-womens-employment>.
- McKinsey & Company. (2021b). *Women in the workplace 2021*.
- McLaren, H. J., Wong, K. R., Nguyen, K. N., & Damayanthi, K. N. (2020). COVID-19 and women’s triple burden: Vignettes from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia. *Social Sciences*, 5(9), 1–12.
- McLaughlin, H., Uggen, C., & Blackstone, A. (2017). The economic and career effects of sexual harassment on working women. *Gender & Society*, 31(3), 333–358. doi:10.1177/0891243217704631
- McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1), 6–23. doi:10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6::AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I
- Mikael, T. (2021). *COVID-19: The great equaliser or magnifier of inequality?*. <https://rstmh.org/news-blog/blog/covid-19-the-great-equaliser-or-magnifier-of-inequality>
- Molla, R. (2021). *For women, remote work is a blessing and a curse*. <https://www.vox.com/recode/22568635/women-remote-work-home>
- Moore, S. E., Wierenga, K. L., Prince, D. M., Gillani, B., & Mintz, L. J. (2021). Disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on perceived social support, mental health and somatic symptoms in sexual and gender minority populations. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(4), 577–591. doi:10.1080/00918369.2020.1868184
- Obioma, I. F., Jaga, A., Raina, M., Asekun, W.A., Hernandez, Bark A.S. (2022). Gendered share of housework and the COVID-19 pandemic: Examining self-ratings and speculation of others in Germany, India, Nigeria, and South Africa. *Journal of Social Issues*, 1–28.
- Okabe-Miyamoto, K., Folk, D., Lyubomirsky, S., & Dunn, E. W. (2021). Changes in social connection during COVID-19 social distancing: It’s not (household) size that matters, it’s who you’re with. *PLoS ONE*, 16(1), e0245009. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0245009

- Perez, C. C. (2020). *Invisible women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for men*. Vintage.
- Peshave, M., & Peshave, J. (2021). COVID-19 lockdown – A blessing or curse? *Kaylan Bharati*, 36(VI), 289–295.
- Petts, R. J., Carlson, D. L., & Pepin, J. R. (2020). A gendered pandemic: Childcare, homeschooling, and parents' employment during COVID-19. *SocArXiv Papers*, 28(S2), 515–534.
- Pfeffer, J. (2010). *Power: Why some people have it-and others don't*. Harper Business.
- Rajkumar, K. V., & Sangeetha, S. (2021). Association between lockdown and family bonding. *Annals of the Romanian Society for Cell Biology*, 25(3), 1282–1296.
- Rottenberg, C. (2019). Women who work: The limits of the neoliberal feminist paradigm. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(8), 1073–1082. doi:10.1111/gwao.12287
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Saladino, V., Algeri, D., & Auriemma, V. A. (2020). The psychological and social impact of COVID-19: New perspectives of well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 577684.
- Seierstad, C., & Kirton, G. (2015). Having it all? Women in high commitment careers and work–life balance in Norway. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 22(4), 390–404. doi:10.1111/gwao.12099
- Selmi, M., & Cahn, N. (2006). Women in the workplace: Which women, which agenda? *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*, 13(7), 7–30.
- Smith, K. N., & Gayles, J. G. (2018). "Girl power": Gendered academic and workplace experiences of college women in engineering. *Social Sciences*, 7(1:11), 1–23.
- Smith, M. (2021). 1 in 3 women are considering leaving the workforce or changing jobs—Here's why. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/27/1-in-3-women-are-considering-leaving-the-workforce-or-changing-jobs.html>
- Somogyi, N., Nagyb, B., Geambaşuc, R., & Gergelye, O. (2022). The children, the family, the household, and myself, these made the quarantine up for me, and I was really happy with it'- positive evaluations of the first COVID-19 lockdown among middle-class Hungarian mothers. *Journal of Family Studies*, 1–19.
- Stalp, M. C. (2006). Hiding the (fabric) stash: Collecting, hoarding, and hiding strategies of contemporary US quilters. *TEXTILE*, 4(1), 104–125. doi:10.2752/147597506778052449
- Summers, H. (2020). UK society regressing back to 1950s for many women, warn experts. <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2020/jun/18/uk-society-regressing-back-to-1950s-for-many-women-warn-experts-worsening-inequality-lockdown-childcare#:~:text=The%20coronavirus%20pandemic%20is%20threatening,%25%20to%2045%25%20during%20lockdown>
- Sundaresan, S. (2014). Work-life balance – implications for working women. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 7(7), 93–102.
- Thorntwaite, L. (2004). Working time and work-family balance: A review of employees' preferences. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 42(2), 166–184. doi:10.1177/1038411104045360
- Thulin, E., Vilhelmson, B., & Johansson, M. (2019). New telework, time pressure, and time use control in everyday life. *Sustainability*, 11(3067), 1–17.
- Toffoletti, K., & Starr, K. (2016). Women academics and work–life balance: Gendered discourses of work and care. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 23(5), 489–504. doi:10.1111/gwao.12133
- Turner, P. K., & Norwood, K. (2013). Unbounded motherhood: Embodying a good working mother identity. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 27(3), 396–424. doi:10.1177/0893318913491461
- van der Lippe, T., & Lippényi, Z. (2020). Beyond formal access: Organizational context, working from home, and work–family conflict of men and women in European workplaces. *Social Indicators Research*, 151(2), 383–402. doi:10.1007/s11205-018-1993-1
- Verhoeven, J. I., ten Cate, T. J. F., & de Leeuw, F. E. (2021). The COVID-19 lockdown: A curse or a blessing for acute cardiovascular disease? *Netherlands Heart Journal*, 29(4), 188–192. doi:10.1007/s12471-021-01560-z
- Verniers, C., & Vala, J. (2018). Justifying gender discrimination in the workplace: The mediating role of motherhood myths. *PLoS ONE*, 13(7), e0201150. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0201150
- Vyncke, V., De Clercq, B., Stevens, V., et al. (2013). Does neighbourhood social capital aid in levelling the social gradient in the health and well-being of children and adolescents? *BMC Public Health*, 23(65), 1–18. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-13-65

- Wayne, J. H., Butts, M. M., Casper, W. J., & Allen, T. D. (2017). In search of balance: A conceptual and empirical integration of multiple meanings of work–family balance. *Personnel Psychology, 70*(1), 167–210. doi:[10.1111/peps.12132](https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12132)
- Weidhaas, A. D. (2018). Female business owners hiding in plain sight. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship, 10*(1), 2–18. doi:[10.1108/IJGE-07-2017-0032](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-07-2017-0032)
- Wenham, C., Smith, J., & Morgan, R. (2020). COVID-19: The gendered impacts of the outbreak. *The Lancet, 395*(10227), 846–848. doi:[10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30526-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30526-2)
- Yucel, D., & Chung, H. (2023). Working from home, work–family conflict, and the role of gender and gender role attitudes. *Community, Work & Family, 26*(2), 190–221. doi:[10.1080/13668803.2021.1993138](https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2021.1993138)