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**“When the baby sleeps, I work” – Neoliberal motherhood in Latin America during the Covid-19 lockdown**

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## “When the baby sleeps, I work” –

### Neoliberal motherhood in Latin America during the Covid-19 lockdown

#### Abstract

##### Purpose

This paper explores working mothers’ coping strategies concerning paid and unpaid work in Chile and Argentina during the Covid-19 pandemic. We aimed to understand the influence of cultural norms on motherhood and neoliberal workplace practices on mothers’ sensemaking processes and coping strategies. This study focuses on mothers living in Chile and Argentina where governments established mandatory lockdowns between March and September 2020. Drawing on the notion of neoliberal motherhood, we analyse women’s demands when paid work and mothering duties collide in time and space.

##### Design/methodology/approach

We conducted open-ended interviews with 17 women in Chile and Argentina. All interviewees had at least 1 child below the age of 6 and were working from home during the lockdown.

##### Findings

Neoliberal workplace demands, and disadvantageous government policies greatly heightened the dual burdens of working mothers. Women were expected to fulfill the discourses of the neoliberal worker and the good mother, while also adopting additional strategies in the wake of the lockdown. Our data highlights mothers’ strategies to cope with care and work duties by adjusting to new routines involving their partners, relatives, and the wider community.

##### Originality

The Covid-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to reflect on care work and gender, collective versus individual responses to care and work demands, and the idea of organising.

##### Research limitations/implications

The generalisability of the results is limited by the small sample of 17 interviewees, all from middle to middle-upper class. The changing scenario due to Covid-19 makes the collected data not sufficient to grasp the impact of the pandemic, as during the interviewees (December 2020 and January 2021) the process was still ongoing.

## Practical implications

Organisations should assess their role in the management of paid and unpaid work for both genders, as the neoliberal discourse views the worker as masculine, full-time, always available and productive, ignoring women's additional care duties outside of the workplace.

## Introduction

As the advice goes, "try to sleep when the baby sleeps". Getting rest when having newborns and infants is recommended by pediatricians to reduce levels of stress. Working mothers during the pandemic expressed the opposite, "when the baby sleeps, I work". This paper explores the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on mothers with young children by looking at their sensemaking process (Weick, 1995), and coping strategies during mandatory lockdowns in Argentina and Chile. Both Chile and Argentina constitute a particularly interesting case as both countries have introduced some of the strictest measures in the Latin American region in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (BBC News Mundo, 2020, April 27).

In March 2020, Chile declared an emergency state in which confinement became mandatory for Santiago (capital city) and most of the cities around the country (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2020). The closure of childcare facilities due to the pandemic was one of such emergency measures (IFC, 2020). In response, an emergency parental leave was introduced which allowed both men and women with children under the age of 6 to apply for a paid parental leave of at least three months for the duration of the state of emergency (Senado, 2020a). Another important change has been the implementation of the law N°21.220 (*Ley de teletrabajo*) which regulates remote work. This change in the labor law specifies how employers must provide their employees with all the tools, security and safety measures to conduct paid work from home. Equally in March 2020, the government of Argentina introduced various measures in response to the Covid-19 crisis. These pandemic-related regulations included

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3 mandatory confinement, the closure of national borders for flights from overseas, and 14 days of  
4  
5 mandatory quarantine for those infected with Covid-19 (Argentina Gobierno, 2020). Due to the  
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7 pandemic, different feminist groups and politicians recommended the introduction of leaves of  
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9 absence under extraordinary circumstances for mothers and fathers since schools, kindergarten  
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11 and day-care facilities have been closed. According to a UNICEF (2020) Covid-19 survey, 51%  
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13 of women in Argentina perceived an overload of domestic and care work. Similar to Chile, the  
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15 Argentinian government discussed regulations concerning working from home during the  
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17 pandemic. Some of the points under the new regulations included the right of digital  
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19 disconnection (by establishing office hours from home that are compatible with care work of  
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21 children under 14 years of age), the provision of infrastructure (of hardware and software  
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23 according to the needs of the job), health and safety measures, and privacy regulations (Infobae,  
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25 2020). The government further established the regulation of telecommuting that came into effect  
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27 in April 2021.  
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33 Since the onset of the pandemic, studies on the Covid-19 pandemic focused on countries  
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35 such as the U.S. (Collins *et al.*, 2020), Australia (Craig and Churchill, 2020), Spain (Farre, *et al.*,  
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37 2020), and Italy (Del Boca *et al.*, 2020) and others (e.g. Fisher and Ryan, 2021; Güney-Frahm,  
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39 2020; Hennekam and Shymko, 2020; McLaren *et al.*, 2020). With this research, we add to the  
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41 discussion on how the Covid-19 pandemic affects women, and particularly mothers of young  
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43 children, by providing some voices of mothers within the Latin American context. Both Chile  
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45 and Argentina have experienced unique circumstances during the global Covid-19 crisis. The  
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47 interviews collected for this study therefore offer a particularly compelling testimony and  
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49 insights of mothers' sense making processes during crisis situations and the coping strategies  
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51 they developed as a result of the crisis.  
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3 On a global scale, the Covid-19 pandemic forced men and women to be confined to the  
4 home sphere, confronting them with the gender division of care and household duties, while at  
5 the same time engaging in paid work. We draw on the notions of neoliberal motherhood to  
6 capture the dual normative prescriptions posed upon women: to perform as workers as well as  
7 satisfy the cultural motherhood expectations (Ashman *et al.*, 2022; Güney-Frahm, 2020; Whiley  
8 *et al.*, 2021). Also within the Latin American context, cultural images of womanhood prescribe  
9 motherhood as a cultural ideal (Álvarez Minte *et al.*, 2021; Barrancos, 2007) within a neoliberal  
10 paradigm. This is further exacerbated during a crisis like the pandemic, which forces women to  
11 adopt new coping strategies brought about by work and care occurring simultaneously within the  
12 same special location (Fisher and Ryan, 2021; Hennekam and Shymko, 2021; McLaren *et al.*,  
13 2020).

14  
15 At the same time, the experiences of such ‘once in a lifetime’ global phenomenon is  
16 personal and revealing of the complexity of individuals’ socio-political and personal contexts.  
17 For example, in Latin American countries women spend three times as long as men on unpaid  
18 domestic and childcare work each day (CEPAL, 2020). Consequently, the closure of childcare  
19 facilities in that region as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic posed particular challenges for  
20 women with young children (IFC, 2020).

21  
22 Considering the various social dimensions that interact to explain disadvantages in the  
23 workplace (gender, class, race, and ethnicity), identities such as mother and being female can be  
24 seen through the theoretical standpoint of intersectionality. Intersectionality (Cole, 2008;  
25 Crenshaw, 1991) posits that the patterns of disadvantage encountered by members of one  
26 historically underprivileged group (e.g. female) can be compounded when another  
27 underprivileged identity is added, such as becoming a mother. In this regard, Correll, Benard and  
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3 Paik (2007) studied how the workplace penalized mothers (“motherhood penalty”) making the  
4 labor market a space of double discrimination for women who are also mothers. In this paper,  
5 we draw attention to other identity markers that may be related to working Latina mothers  
6 experiences. We are here focusing on those aspects that appear most salient for the context and  
7 topic of our study (Misra et al., 2021), examining how issues of class, relationship status,  
8 employment type, and Latina identity interact with their working mother identity.  
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17 What follows is a discussion on the politisation process of gender and parenthood,  
18 particularly in the context of paid work and care work. We then describe our methodology which  
19 is based on Weick’s (1995) sense making processes in negotiating the different identities of  
20 worker and mother among the women interviewed. In our analysis section, we highlight the  
21 themes emerging from the interviews, discussing the challenges faced by our interviewees, the  
22 sense making process considering such a crisis, and the coping strategies developed as a  
23 response. In the discussion and conclusion section we draw on our theoretical framework of  
24 neoliberal motherhood in interpreting the interviewees’ coping mechanisms and sensemaking  
25 process as their response to mandatory confinement.  
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## 42 **Literature review**

### 43 ***Work and motherhood in the Latin American context***

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47 Already before the Covid-19 pandemic, societal norms and expectations towards women  
48 and mothers within the Latin American region impacted women’s experiences of being a parent  
49 and a worker (e.g. Undurraga, and Cornejo Abarca, 2021). For example, when analysing the  
50 household arrangements of working heterosexual couples in Chile, data shows that just 1 in 10  
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3 couples share domestic and unpaid care work equally, whereas among the vast majority of  
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5 couples women accomplish two-thirds of all household-related tasks as well as care work  
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8 (Comunidad Mujer, 2017).  
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10 The motherhood discourse within the Latin American context is understood at the core of  
11  
12 femininity (Álvarez Minte *et al.*, 2021; Barrancos, 2007) and deeply ingrained in societal and  
13  
14 cultural mandates towards women's role in childcare (O'Connor, 2014; Ramm, 2020; Yopo  
15  
16 Díaz, 2018). While the exact imaginations and expectations towards motherhood differ across  
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18 regions, social classes and ethnicities, the importance of mothers within society and the role of  
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20 motherhood in women's lives is shared within the Latin American context. According to Ramm  
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22 (2020), the contemporary motherhood discourse in Latin America is one that views motherhood  
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24 as a glorified role for women, often conflating womanhood with motherhood, "linking  
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26 motherhood with a superior morality" (p. 31). A study on public policy in Chile shows how  
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28 social programs targeting health, housing and the labour market are structured around the idea of  
29  
30 the exclusivity of a "women-caregiver" (Álvarez Minte *et al.*, 2021). This poses strict  
31  
32 expectations towards mothers about their duties and prescribed behavioral norms on how to  
33  
34 mother children. This results in a gendered division of labour within the home sphere, with most  
35  
36 home chores and childcare attributed to women (Yopo Díaz, 2018). In Latin America, mothers'  
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38 employment and working hours are positively affected on the occasion of living with a kin  
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40 member (Aragao & Villanueva, 2021).  
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47 One specificity of the context of our study is that traditionally, outsourcing care and  
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49 domestic work is common and affordable for middle class working mothers in Chile and  
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51 Argentina. In Chile, "the nana" is another person, always a woman, who takes care of the  
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53 children and in some cases, also cleans and cooks during the weekdays. For the middle to upper  
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3 classes, “nanas” are important individuals to receive support in balancing home life with their  
4 careers. Although beyond the scope of our study, a recent study on Latin American films  
5 regarding the nana archetype discusses how domestic labour perpetuates gender inequality  
6 (Osborne, 2020). In Argentina, nanas are usually called “domestic worker”, mostly informally  
7 employed, and their duties are mostly cleaning the household. However, during the pandemic,  
8 the use of nana’s was restricted due to social distancing restrictions.  
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17 The pandemic has further exacerbated previous challenges for women, such as  
18 unemployment, work suspensions, and psychosocial risks (Presidencia del Senado, 2020). A  
19 study from Chile focusing on time allocation and care duties revealed that 69% of female  
20 primary caregivers continued working during the pandemic (Micropolíticas del Cuidado, 2020).  
21 Women’s labour market participation in Latin America was 46% in 2020, while men’s was 69%  
22 (in 2019 they were 52% and 73.6%, respectively). Social distancing measures and the mandatory  
23 quarantine affected the gender gap in time spent on domestic and care work (Sanhueza et.al,  
24 2020). Gibbons et al. (2021) examined Guatemalan mothers experiences during the pandemic,  
25 and they found that even though mothers experienced daily stressors due to their increased care  
26 responsibilities, they relied on the traditional values of their culture as means of coping, where  
27 they were able to find positive agency in their circumstances by prioritizing the core values of  
28 family, faith and gratitude. A recent study conducted in Chile found that among bi-parental  
29 families, the mandatory quarantine decreased the gender gap regarding the time spent on care  
30 activities, however it increased the gender gap in times spent on unpaid housework (Sanhueza  
31 et.al, 2020). Overall, women were spending 21 hours more per week than men on domestic and  
32 care duties after the onset of the pandemic (Palma and Araos, 2021). Pama and Aaros (2021) also  
33 noted that ‘intergenerational solidarity’, such as grandparents helping with children, were  
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3 important coping mechanisms brought about by the pandemic. In Chile, during the first 3 months  
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5 of the lockdown, the percentage of older people living with their grandchildren increased from  
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7 25% to 32%. At the same time, a study in Chile shows that 70% of all children below age 12  
8  
9 were homeschooled by mothers or grandmothers, reflecting the feminine nature of care duties  
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11 (Álvarez Minte *et al.*, 2021). The slogan “stay home” (#*QuédateEnCasa*) that circulated during  
12  
13 Covid-19 in Argentina romanticised the ideal of spending time with children, decluttering the  
14  
15 home, and working comfortably wearing pajamas. However, studies on middle-class women in  
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17 Argentina show that women were almost always the primary caregiver whose emotional labour  
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19 was exploited because of the mandatory lockdown (Passerino and Trupa, 2020).  
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### 25 ***Neoliberal Motherhood***

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27 Despite gender equality measures and geo-specific gender equality policies, work and  
28  
29 motherhood continues to pose a particular burden on women. On a global scale, women are  
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31 responsible for 75% of unpaid care work and domestic work (Moreira da Silva, 2019).  
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34 According to the International Labour Organization, before the pandemic, women spent 4 hours  
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36 and 25 minutes on unpaid care work compared to 1 hour and 23 minutes of men (Pozzan and  
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38 Cattaneo, 2020).  
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41 Power (2020) employs the term ‘hypocrisy economy’ when discussing unpaid care work,  
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43 since within the current neoliberal discourse, women are now also participating within the paid  
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45 economy framework without structures that would alleviate their responsibilities at home. The  
46  
47 infamous terminology of the ‘second shift’ illustrates this double burden (Hochschild and  
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49 Machung, 2003). Newer discussions around women’s roles within the home and the workplace  
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51 utilize the terminology of the ‘third shift’, referring to the emotional labour, which is unpaid and  
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3 oftentimes unacknowledged, performed by women who take care of the emotional needs and  
4 well-being of family members (Chung, 2020).  
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8 Cultural images and expectations of mothers continue to pose a burden. At the same time,  
9  
10 neoliberal globalisation and its accompanying requirements to be an efficient and committed  
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12 worker impose particularly demanding roles towards mothers (Ashman *et al.*, 2022; Hilbrecht *et*  
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14 *al.*, 2008). Failing to comply with both imperatives is viewed as a failure of the individual  
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16 mother (Güney-Frahm, 2020). Güney-Frahm (2020) discusses the two powerful contemporary  
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18 discourses of the ‘good neoliberal worker’ and the ‘perfect mother’ as highly demanding roles  
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20 equally expected of women, combining “the patriarchal and neoliberal worldviews” (Güney-  
21  
22 Frahm, 2020, p. 5). Hence, the “neoliberal mom” (Lavee, 2016, p. 503) is one that is involved in  
23  
24 intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) while at the same time being a good neoliberal citizen  
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26 participating in the marketplace (Ashman *et al.*, 2022; Güney-Frahm, 2020; Hays, 1996).  
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31 According to Güney-Frahm (2020), neoliberal policies might seem to promote gender  
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33 equality because of the encouragement of women to participate in the labour force. Yet,  
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35 neoliberal policies disregard women’s unpaid labour outside of the workplace. Further,  
36  
37 neoliberalism does not address socio-political inequality based on gender, ethnicity, race, and  
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39 socio-economic status. Ultimately, neoliberalism and its blind eye towards hierarchical structures  
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41 contributes to the feminization of work, and the feminization of care work (Nilson, 2015).  
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### 47 ***Neoliberal Motherhood and Covid-19 Pandemic***

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49 For women, the neoliberal notions of motherhood were further exacerbated by Covid-19  
50  
51 and working from home. Women found themselves in the crossfire between being good  
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53 corporate workers and good mothers whose children now stayed at home, rather than being in  
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3 daycare facilities or at schools. The pandemic increased women's "vulnerability to a worsening  
4 of gendered burdens" (McLaren *et al.*, 2021, p. 1). Research shows that women perceived higher  
5 levels of stress, anxiety and psychological upheavals during the pandemic and found it harder to  
6 remain positive than men (Craig and Churchill, 2020; Fisher and Ryan, 2021; Whiley *et al.*,  
7 2021). This would speak to the 'third shift' of women to feel responsible for the mental and  
8 emotional well-being of their family members.

9  
10 Gendered expectations were exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. Women were now  
11 expected to also deal with the new challenges, while continuing to maintain the same standards  
12 of care and work like pre-pandemic. This further increased women's role strain while at the same  
13 time reduced external support (Fisher and Ryan, 2021; McLaren *et al.*, 2021; Hennekam and  
14 Shymko, 2021). This is illustrated by a study on British families during the Covid-19 lockdown.  
15 For every hour that fathers spent working without interruptions, mothers had around 20 minutes  
16 of uninterrupted worktime (Whiley, Sayer and Juanchich, 2021). Mothers' increased time spent  
17 on house and child duties during the pandemic is reflected also in studies done in Australia  
18 (Craig and Churchill, 2020), the USA (Collins *et al.*, 2020), Spain (Farre *et al.*, 2020) and Ghana  
19 (Akuoko *et al.*, 2021), among others. For example, Akuoko *et al.*'s (2021) study of Ghanaian  
20 working mothers found that their household and care duties steadily rose during the pandemic  
21 and the shift from office to homework. Similar findings have been reported also from the Nordic  
22 contexts, that are generally considered pioneers in gender equality. Hjalmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir  
23 (2021) show how women in Iceland experienced greater responsibility for childrearing and  
24 household labor during the pandemic, which caused them stress and frustration. Overall, during  
25 the lockdown, their time spent on domestic and care duties rose by 166% in mean hours,  
26 significantly increasing their overall workloads.

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Ultimately, the pandemic can be viewed as a particularly taxing burden for women around the world. While this once in a lifetime crisis has occurred, workers were expected to conduct ‘business as usual’ after a short transition period to home office. At the same time, working mothers took on additional burdens brought on by the crisis, such as increased care and domestic duties, home schooling, or keeping up with the ever-evolving health orders (Zanhour and Sumpter, 2022). This resulted in a form of double disaster, forcing women to develop new coping strategies within such a precarious scenario (Hennekam and Shymko, 2021; McLaren *et al.*, 2021).

## Methodology

This empirical study aimed to give voice to working women's experiences during Covid-19. We adopted a sensemaking approach (Weick, 1995), which allows us to capture how our interviewees’ construct and interpret their lives during the pandemic and how they develop meaning around these events, as sensemaking at large is retrospective and often initiated following uncertainty and shock. Researchers that use sensemaking like Weick (1993) study of the Mann Gulch disaster, are able to explore and understand group and individual behaviour in unusual situations (Paull, Boudville & Sitlington, 2013). Weick’s (1995) approach involves seven interdependent properties: 1) identity construction (the many identities that structure who we are and shape how we understand a particular event); 2) retrospection (past experiences contribute how we make sense of the present); 3) enactive of environments (we receive influence from the environment we have configured and operate within); 4) social (we make sense through interactions with others); 5) ongoing (the sensemaking process never stops); 6) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (what seems plausible matters more than what seems accurate);

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3 7) focused on extracted cues (we perceive cues backing up our notion of plausibility while  
4 discarding what doesn't support this). All properties are interdependent and while some might  
5 be more relevant than others, depending on the situation, they are all necessary in the  
6 sensemaking process (Weick, 1995). By following Weick (1995) approach we analysed  
7 interviewees' narratives. The women addressed the role of their employer regarding their care  
8 duties Regarding parenthood norms in the workplace, the interviewees viewed employers as  
9 providing the bare minimum. As almost all interviewees affirmed, employers only complied with  
10 the law. Most interviewees took paid parental leave before and after pregnancy, and they  
11 describe flexibility to breastfeed or leaving early for work as a negotiation with their boss –  
12 mostly a positive experience. When asked about special programs for caregivers or parents, they  
13 explained, like Carola (Chile, 1 child, 5-year-old): “There is no policy dedicated to motherhood  
14 and personal responsibilities, the “dual role” they only comply with the law”. Their experiences  
15 of paid and unpaid work during the Covid-19 lockdown resulted in a connection of actions by  
16 themselves and with others (partners, neighbours, family, online teachers). The sense-making  
17 approach allows us to emphasise the sense-making process of those women and the emerging  
18 coping strategies brought about by the global crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic.  
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### 42 *Sample*

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44 We conducted open-ended interviews to gain insights into the thought processes and  
45 experiences of working mothers with young children. The interviewees worked in a wide range  
46 of positions for employers and freelance. Through a blend of snowball and convenience  
47 sampling techniques (Miles and Huberman, 1994), we recruited 17 interviewees through  
48 personal contacts in Chile and Argentina. It was immediately noted that most women were eager  
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3 to share their stories almost as a cathartic way to process their experiences in what some referred  
4 to as the worst year of their lives. Between December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the lead  
5 author of this study conducted phone interviews with the 17 working mothers. The women were  
6 between 28 and 47 years old, with an average age of 37 years. A full description of the  
7 interviewees' demographic is provided in Table 1.

### 14 *Procedure*

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17 We were interested in hearing experiences and perceptions of working mothers during  
18 strict confinement and Latin America was the perfect opportunity for doing so. With this study,  
19 we do not aim to make comparable generalisations about working mothers on a global scale.  
20 Rather, we are interested to tell how mothers in Latin America experienced the pandemic  
21 concerning paid and unpaid work in the specific context of our study. Our open-ended interviews  
22 focused on three themes. First, interviewees were asked to talk about societal issues concerning  
23 motherhood, such as government initiatives, societal norms and women's roles as caregivers.  
24 Second, they were asked to describe what policies, initiatives or programs their employers (when  
25 was suitable) had in place pre-pandemic and during Covid-19 regarding gender and motherhood.  
26 Third, they were asked to explain how their parental responsibilities were arranged before and  
27 during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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33 Interviewees gave their consent verbally at the beginning of the phone interview, after the  
34 first author explained in detail the purpose, benefits and risks of a research of this nature. The  
35 names of the participants were changed for anonymity and confidentiality. Phone interviews  
36 have particular challenges, especially because non-verbal communication is not available.  
37 However, the tone of voice and the choice of particular linguistic expressions transmit valuable  
38 information that was noted by the interviewer for the analysis stage. Interviews lasted from 30  
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3 minutes to 1 hour and were held in Spanish. Transcripts were later translated into English by the  
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5 first author (Spanish-English speaker). The researcher took notes, an important aspect of each  
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7 interview. The first author, a female academic of Argentine origin, conducted the interviews,  
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9 because of her first-hand knowledge regarding Argentina and Chile's culture. During the  
10  
11 interviews, the first author also went through a sensemaking process herself, and later on with  
12  
13 her co-author, an academic and a mother as well.  
14  
15

16  
17 This research is qualitative in nature, based on open-ended questions (Denzin and Lincoln,  
18  
19 1994) which cannot be answered with a yes or no, thus increasing the possibility of collecting  
20  
21 rich, thick data. Software for qualitative data analysis (ATLAS.ti 9) was used to code and  
22  
23 manage the data collected. An inductive approach to data analysis was taken. We first examine  
24  
25 the 17 interviews as raw data by a process of reading and re-reading, and then proceed to coding  
26  
27 quotations based on similarities and differences among the narratives. This resulted in 22 codes.  
28  
29 Some examples of the codes include: “on the go” or “comply with the law”. These examples  
30  
31 capture women’s own expressions. Other descriptive codes include “help through Covid” or  
32  
33 “living on the edge”. The 22 codes were grouped according to three relationships: causality,  
34  
35 correlation and property of. By using the Atlat.ti network option and considering the  
36  
37 relationships beforementioned, we further grouped the 22 coded into four themes: 1. Coping  
38  
39 with Home-Children-Work; 2. Help during Covid-19; 3. Society; 4. Women's experiences during  
40  
41 Covid-19. After analysing the themes and grounded in our theoretical framework, we present our  
42  
43 findings through three conceptual ideas: 1. Society-Neoliberal Context; 2. Coping-Care work;  
44  
45 and 3. Intersectional experiences of women during Covid-19.  
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## Findings

Our analysis shows how the various societal, organisational and personal factors impacted the interviewees' perceptions on their lives brought on by the crisis, and their subsequent coping strategies. In line with research from other parts of the world (e.g. Collins *et al.*, 2020; Craig and Churchill, 2020; Del Boca *et al.*, 2020; Farre, *et al.*, 2020; Fisher and Ryan, 2021; Güney-Frahm, 2020; Hennekam and Shymko, 2020; McLaren *et al.*, 2020; and Miller, 2021), the Covid-19 pandemic created tension between productivity at work and care duties at home for our interviewees. As previously discussed, organisational responses were mostly in line with the legal measurements or programs provided by the government. Yet, in most cases no additional special programs or policies were enacted that could improve work-life balance in such unusual circumstances. This is evident in the interviewees' narratives on the heightening burden they carried as working mothers, now working from home.

In the following sections, we discuss our main findings. First, we describe the current neoliberal socio-cultural scenery for the Latina mothers of our data, second, we present our interviewees' experiences between their roles as workers and mothers and their coping strategies considering this unexpected crisis and their emotional sense making process concerning their heightened burdens brought about by the collision of home and work duties, and third, we offer an analysis of the intersectional inequalities for mothers with diverse backgrounds.

### ***Neoliberal context of middle-class Latina mothers: Revisiting the machista model for care work***

We begin by describing how the women we interviewed made sense of their socio-cultural environment. The women in our study distance themselves from the traditional division

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3 of care labor. For example, some interviewees describe the homes where they grow up as  
4 traditional – some will use it as a synonym of *machista* – meaning the mother is viewed as fully  
5 in charge of care work.  
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9  
10 I come from a family of traditional origin. Very macho. The woman takes care of  
11 everyone. We break that model. ... My mother admits I overloaded myself in relation to  
12 my siblings. She has changed (now). It is complex, [women] were not educated for that  
13 [working outside the home] ... I confronted that model” (Blanca, Chile, 1 child, 1-year-  
14 old)  
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21 As we see from Blanca’s narrative, she positions herself as a representative of the new  
22 generation, who “break” the traditional gender order. Her parlance also echoes an individualistic  
23 neoliberalist ethos as she emphasizes her own agency in “confronting the model”. In some cases,  
24 the interviewees explained that their mothers engaged with both paid and unpaid work. However,  
25 the interviewees’ responses concerning domestic and care work reflect research on Latin  
26 American gender roles within the household (Rodriguez Enriquez, 2015). Generally, domestic  
27 chores and care duties were the responsibility of mothers. Those interviewees who had been  
28 raised only by their mothers described a non-traditional household, where they had to grow up  
29 independently and do domestic work at an early age.  
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42 In all cases, interviewees differentiated themselves from their families of origin in terms  
43 of gender norms. This well reflects the colliding discourse of neoliberal mothering (Ashman *et*  
44 *al.*, 2022; Güney-Frahm, 2020). The interviewees viewed themselves as professional workers  
45 who were committed to their jobs and were as much providers as caregivers. As Javiera pointed  
46 out, her family of origin had a family arrangement different from hers:  
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3 It was a machista model, in which mom did not work, she was in charge of the household  
4 and the care work. My husband took the responsibility of our home. I say that the  
5 husband “help” but actually he is not helping, it is his responsibility. I never wanted to  
6 repeat the model lay out by my family of origin (Javiera, Chile, 3 children, 5, 9 and 19-  
7 year-old)  
8

9  
10 Javiera’s excerpt illustrates her understanding of a new family model. Women’s work is  
11 outside of the home as well, and men’s responsibilities within the home sphere are not viewed as  
12 ‘favours’ but as responsibilities equally shared.  
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24 ***Caught between neoliberal worker expectations and mothering duties: Making sense of, and***  
25 ***coping with care and work during times of crisis***  
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31 Our analysis shows that our interviewees’ experiences of combining motherhood and  
32 work during the pandemic entailed struggles. The pandemic, and as a result the introduction of  
33 mandatory confinement in both Chile and Argentina forced families to absorb care duties. As we  
34 will next show, the responsibility for this was predominantly laid upon women.  
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40 In this section of findings, we present the key struggles and responses as working mothers  
41 cope with care and work. These struggles notably revolved around the tensions caused by the  
42 neoliberal expectations of work on the one hand, and the persistence of traditional motherhood  
43 norms on the other. The time split among paid and unpaid work was a recurring topic among the  
44 interviewees. On one hand, there was the interviewees’ struggle with their worker-mother roles,  
45 as women “do it all”. On the other hand, employers’ demands towards workers provoked the  
46 reaction of ‘*sobre la marcha*’ – on the go – based on daily changes to rules regarding social  
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3 distancing, confinement, and curfews –from 9pm until 5am. Most women interviewed struggled  
4 with the expectancy to be as productive as usual. Our analysis of the interviews surface how the  
5 women struggled to maintain and live up to the requirements for neoliberal working mothers as  
6 they often experienced contradictory expectations to opt out and place their own work as  
7 secondary to the careers of their male partners and the needs of their children. Women felt  
8 obliged and did not see any other alternatives rather than continue to be the primary caregiver to  
9 their children, while at the same time being a full-time worker. Coping with care and work was  
10 even more complex for those interviewees whose partners continued to work outside the home.  
11 As health and safety duties were particularly necessary, the government provided special permits  
12 to those who needed to work outside their homes. This had a profound impact on the  
13 interviewees who stayed home alone from 9am until 5 or 6pm and had to combine paid and  
14 unpaid work. It was typical that women whose partners worked outside of the home, arranged  
15 their own work schedules around the care of children:

16  
17 My husband leaves home 9, 9.30am to 8pm. I thought I could sit down to work straight  
18 away... .it was impossible. I got frustrated, .... frustration .. then I realized my work  
19 schedule had to be different. In the mornings [I took care of the] children. In the  
20 afternoon, they play next to me. I [started] working with Olivia all the time. I had to  
21 "drop" the issue of cleanliness: clothes, bathrooms and food [that's the most important].”  
22 (Eva, Chile, 2 children, 3 and 5-year-old).

23  
24 In Eva’s narrative, we see how she narrates her pandemic experience from her own  
25 viewpoint, emphasizing the individualised nature of actions she had to take in order to cope.  
26 Rather than referring to a joint household, she positions herself as the key responsible for

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2  
3 running both the household, and adjusting her work schedule to accommodate the needs of her  
4 family. Eva's experience illustrates how the pandemic further enforces the gendered division of  
5 labor, as women become the sole managers of their households (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019;  
6 Hjalmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Based on the "superwoman syndrome," a social belief that  
7 perpetuates the idea that "women can do it all" (Hayes, 1986), women made sense of the many  
8 responsibilities at home brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and the struggles to manage  
9 these new challenges. For instance, Marcela (Argentina, 2 children, 11 and 2-years-old) says,  
10 "Shopping, there is more to clean. I receive orders from the supermarket. What you do on a daily  
11 basis: children, home, food, everything". Marcela's statement reflects her belief that it is her  
12 responsibility to take care of domestic and care duties.  
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26 The interviewees developed strategies to fulfill both their roles: mothers and workers. Paid  
27 and unpaid work become entangled, and the process of navigating that knot brought a great  
28 amount of tension. Some expressed emotions of living on the edge, which forced them –in some  
29 cases– to rise to the challenges without overthinking the situation. Eva's narrative (Chile, 2  
30 children, 3 and 5-year-old) started by her realizing the importance of prioritizing.  
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38 I'm doing everything I can. If I get sick, everything goes to hell. I shouldn't feel guilty  
39 when I am playing with Olivia at 3pm. At first I was from "here to there" (children-  
40 work). I learned to work in small spaces of time.  
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45 Eva's narrative shows how the "superwoman syndrome" emerges in times of crisis as getting  
46 ill is not allowed for mothers, as everyone comes before her. Eva's swearing illustrates the  
47 emotionally challenging effects of having to cope with competing responsibilities. Similarly to  
48 other interviewees, Eva felt guilty for not having enough time to play with her daughter due to  
49 work loads. In addition, to accomplish work tasks, she had to work in small gaps of time as a  
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3 way to simulate a “normal” work day. Also other studies during the pandemic have shown that  
4  
5 women’s time is more fragmented (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021). According to critical  
6  
7 sensemaking scholars (Helm Mills, Thurlow and Mills, 2010) we understand the world within  
8  
9 limitations in regards to established dominant social values. The neoliberal narrative that values  
10  
11 “productivity” above all, reinforces the ideal of the worker/mother archetype, which seems to  
12  
13 shape the women’s attempts to organise both their personal and work lives during the pandemic.  
14  
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16  
17 Ema’s narrative (Argentina, 1 child, 1 year-old) explains the impact of her husband working  
18  
19 outside, after having spent some months working from home.  
20

21  
22 When he started working [outside of home] everything went to hell. I had to distribute  
23  
24 work / care and study at night. We decided to go for walks at least 1 hour a day. I had to  
25  
26 work fewer hours [while caring for the children] and wait until 5pm when he will take  
27  
28 over [her husband]. I will get back to work ... Dante [her son] doesn't let me stay on the  
29  
30 PC much so I have to wait for when Juan Pablo arrives.  
31  
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35 Like Eva, also Ema narrates her experience using swear words, which signals the emotionally  
36  
37 laden situation of these women. Ema draws on individualistic narration of her coping strategies,  
38  
39 and her narrative portrays her as having sole responsibility with resolving the care duties at home  
40  
41 and represents her work-life agency as secondary to her spouse. Moreover, we can see in Ema’s  
42  
43 narration how women’s time is not only fragmented, but it draws our attention to aspects of  
44  
45 gendered control of time among parents (Bryson, 2016), as Ema organizes not only reduces her  
46  
47 work hours but chooses to study and work during the evenings and even during the night. While  
48  
49 Ema practices self-care in the form of taking a walk in the park (see also Gibbons et al. 2021),  
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3 her narrative is underpinned by a frustration in the adjustments she has to make to juggle with  
4  
5 the new realities.  
6

7  
8 To cope with this new reality, most interviewees came up with an explicit schedule of  
9  
10 responsibilities that was divided into childcare/domestic duties and home-office work. Most  
11  
12 negotiated their schedules with their partners, while single mothers relied on other mothers or  
13  
14 their own parents.  
15

16  
17 Most interviewees continued juggling with the Covid-19 situation the best they could. The lack  
18  
19 of external help to do the household or to take care of the children, in a social context that says  
20  
21 “women do it all”, required a re-organising of parental responsibilities. “As a woman, I try to do  
22  
23 it all, doctor, supermarket... it is more part of my life” (Eva, Chile, 2 children, 3 and 5-year-old).  
24

25  
26 Eva anchors her experience to her gender, where being solely responsible and juggling between a  
27  
28 full range of duties regains normalcy, being represented as something that is an interchangeable  
29  
30 part of a woman’s life.  
31

32  
33 As the months of mandatory confinement passed, some of the interviewees created new  
34  
35 routines tied to their children’s schedules: ‘when the baby sleeps, I work’ (Emilia, Argentina, 2  
36  
37 children: 1 and < 6 year-old), reflecting women’s heightened efforts to accommodate both,  
38  
39 neoliberal expectations of being a good worker and at the same time being the organising force  
40  
41 within their households. The following excerpt portrays this:  
42  
43

44  
45 I started getting up much earlier. For what it required concentration. I woke up at 6am. At  
46  
47 9am he had meetings. The boys get up at 9.30-10 with my husband. (Teresa, Argentina, 2  
48  
49 children, 7 and 5-year-old)  
50

51  
52 Child awake housework, child asleep intellectual work. (Rosa, Argentina, 1 child, 4-year-  
53  
54 old)  
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3 Putting the children to sleep and staying until 1 am/1.30am. When the baby sleeps, I do  
4 my work and homework for Juango [6-year-old son]. (Emilia, Argentina, 6 and 1-year-  
5  
6  
7 old).

8  
9  
10 Aside from the practicality of scheduling paid and unpaid work, the interviewees commented  
11 on the emotional burdens that heightened as a result of the pandemic and the lockdown. Many of  
12 the emotional processes to deal with the situation reflect research findings conducted on the  
13 emotional labor and burdens experiences by women during the pandemic (e.g. Álvarez Minte *et*  
14 *al.*, 2021; Energici *et al.*, 2020; Fisher and Ryan, 2021; Whiley *et al.*, 2021). Our interviewees  
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equally felt responsible for the functioning of everyday lives in their homes as well as for the emotional welfare of family members. Similar to other research, due to the new structures and heightened burdens resulting from the lockdown, women experienced high levels of stress, anxiety and burnout. The interviewees' narratives expose how the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact on their daily lives by using words like "hell" and "collapse". In terms of mental health, some interviewees, like Jacinta (Chile, 1 child, 3-year-old), had to take antidepressants.

It had a very terrible impact. The main one was the psychological one. I was used to working from home for 5/6 years. Not having domestic help...My husband and I separated for 6 months because he did not stop [working outside of the home], ...I had to ask for psychiatric help...they prescribed antidepressants. The anguish...what impacted me the most was the exhaustion and domestic demands. It is different to have small children... a baby... dress them... feed them. Without domestic help I could never have worked and still produce. I had a very bad time, very horrible period. My mother had to come to my house to help us [I had a lot of responsibility]. We didn't even see each other with my husband [the interviewee explains that she was scared of sharing the same space



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2  
3 with her husband as he had to leave home every day, so they decided to live apart during  
4 the pandemic]. My work ... they don't empathise "I couldn't handle anymore... I couldn't  
5 think... I cried while cooking... My mother also works so I appreciated her help. I  
6  
7  
8 always have her. Apart from being a domestic slave and still having to perform... both  
9  
10  
11  
12 things cannot be."  
13

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17 Jacinta later explained that "co-responsibility is incompatible with both parents working".  
18  
19 Through her emotional reflection she actually unravels what is wrong with the neoliberal mother  
20  
21 discourse, a system which overemphasises the virtues of a productive worker and a devoted  
22  
23 mother (in Latin American terms) simultaneously.  
24

25  
26 In this section, we have illustrated how the pandemic caused a backlash to women's work  
27  
28 life participation by normalising their responsibility for care and household. Next, we examine  
29  
30 the intersectionality of these women's experiences.  
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### 35 ***Intersectionality of Latina mothers during the pandemic***

36  
37 We now present and discuss the aspects of intersectional inequality for the women in our  
38  
39 data. First of all, the narratives we collected surface the heightened vulnerability of self-  
40  
41 employed single mothers. This is reflected in Rosa's narrative:  
42  
43

44 I needed time to prepare a game for my daughter. I had to solve work related matters.

45 One does not shield behind motherhood in order not to deliver. (Shield sounds "weak").

46  
47 As a freelancer they ask me "do you have time to do it?" "I always say YES, if I don't, I  
48  
49 won't be paid (Argentina, single mother, 1 child, 4-year-old).  
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3 Rosa's narrative offers a view into the contemporary socio-cultural requirements for  
4 mothers. Rosa's description of her coping mechanisms to resolve competing demands at home  
5 and at work signal an acceptance of the neoliberal requirements. We interpret her refusal to  
6 'shield behind motherhood' and consideration of such behaviors as 'weakness' as conforming to  
7 the neoliberal feminist ideology that calls upon women to demonstrate an ability to balance their  
8 work and home relations and refute from showing their vulnerability (Adamson & Kelan, 2019;  
9 Gill & Orgad, 2015, 2018). The narrative is also illustrative of the intersectionality of the  
10 experiences of working mothers during the pandemic. First, Rosa's narrative reflects how her  
11 choices in the job market are affected by the financial insecurity of self-employment. She is by  
12 far not alone in her acknowledgement of a need to be 'always on', as this is a familiar situation  
13 for both self-employed women and men (Hilbrecht & Lero, 2014). Second, Rosa experiences  
14 heightened vulnerability due to her position as a single mother as she struggles to cope with the  
15 requirements of her job and the increased daily care responsibilities at home.  
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33 The enacted context (Weick, 1995) shaped interviewees' experiences. Carmen (2  
34 children, 2-year-old and 3-months-old) is an academic and she feels in charge of her schedule, as  
35 "academic work is very flexible". Carmen's extract below reflects her experience.  
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37  
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40 You manage your time a lot. I worked months - I fulfilled the minimum. I did not reach  
41 my research agenda. It has consequences on my CV [yes], but they won't kick me out.  
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47 While Carmen manages to organize her work in a manner that allows her to maintain her job,  
48 nonetheless she acknowledges the negative impact of the pandemic on her career progress, thus  
49 shedding light on the less visible implications that the pandemic may have upon women's work.  
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Prior research has shown that mothers working in academia experience career disadvantages as

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3 their family leaves may lead them to lack behind the publishing requirements (Langin, 2021;  
4 Lutter, & Schröder, 2020; Minello, Martucci, & Manzo, 2021), and following Carmen's narrative,  
5  
6 the pandemic seems to establish a similar motherhood penalty.  
7  
8  
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10 Children, as many expressed, required attention, and many interviewees needed at least a  
11 couple of hours –in ideal circumstances- to focus on being productive. The difference in  
12 women's experience with toddlers or babies emerged in the narratives. Emilia comments  
13  
14 (Argentina, 2 children, 6 and 1 year-old):  
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18

19 Today, I work remotely. Complicated experience. The school puts classes from Monday  
20 to Friday (gymnastics, math ... etc.) via Zoom. I attended the 5 year old in the process. I  
21 wallpapered my house with cardboard, the alphabet to help him. When Juan (the 5-year-  
22 old) was in class I gave him my new PC and I used an old one.  
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31 Coping during the pandemic was particularly challenging for those women who lacked a  
32 support network of family members. This forced women to rely on their next door neighbors or  
33 the surrounding community. Marta, Eva and others living in community buildings expressed that  
34 as a last resource. They were allowing their children to play with other children from around the  
35 neighborhood. Reliance on neighbors and relatives in addition to close family members has been  
36 identified as a coping strategy in other Latin American contexts during the pandemic also  
37  
38 (Gibbons et al. 2021).  
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47 By contrast to the experiences of single mothers and mothers who did not receive  
48 considerable support from their partners or extended support network, our data also included  
49 stories that show the availability of neoliberal, productive motherhood for some of the mothers.  
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51 This seemed to be conditional upon the availability of equal spouse participation as well as  
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3 external hired help, emphasising the relationality between partnership status and class in  
4  
5 constituting a different type of experience:  
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10 My case is an exceptional one. Sometimes I think my husband does more than me.

11  
12 During summer holidays, January, my eldest son went to the kindergarden until 13.30.

13  
14 The NANA picked him from kindergarden.

15  
16 16.00 I will take care of the children.

17  
18 17.30 my husband take care of the children

19  
20 The nana does deep cleaning, she comes from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. everyday and she is  
21  
22 fundamental [before pandemic]. I take care of the clothes. My husband does the cooking  
23  
24 and shopping.  
25  
26

27  
28 During covid we were 3 to 4 months alone. I will do the deep cleaning, my husband  
29  
30 cooked (everything with the kids).  
31  
32

33 I never stopped, I was writing a book...very frustrating. Now, my nana came back, (and)  
34  
35 everythings is much better. (Carmen, 40 year-old, 2 children: 3 months and 2 year-old)  
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40 Carmen's situation was not a typical case among our interviewees - however, it is important in  
41  
42 highlighting further layers of intersectionalities at play in the lives of working mothers. In  
43  
44 contrast to the other women in our data, Carmen describes how the arrangement for care in her  
45  
46 family seemed to follow a distribution of work between her and her spouse. In addition to  
47  
48 highlighting Carmen's case as illustrative of ongoing change in household chores, Carmen's  
49  
50 story illustrates the privileged situation she experiences as a middle-class professional woman.  
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52 The availability of nana allows her to concentrate on her work during regular work hours. Some  
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3 of the narratives we have discussed earlier, show that unlike Carmen, most of the women in our  
4  
5 sample were dependent either on the help of extended family, or in the unavailability of such an  
6  
7 extended network, were left to struggle on their own.  
8  
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## 10 11 12 **Discussion and Conclusions** 13

14  
15 The pandemic has been a setback for women related to health, paid work, unpaid work,  
16  
17 and gender violence among others (Álvarez Minte et al., 2021). More so, it highlighted a long  
18  
19 standing paradigm of “women do it all” based on the superwoman syndrome. The pandemic left  
20  
21 individuals with the burden of dealing with the crisis at home; and those with wider social or  
22  
23 economic capital suffered less. The pandemic did not seem to transform the hypocritical  
24  
25 economy (Power, 2020). In our study, the neoliberal motherhood discourse was further  
26  
27 heightened. All interviewees remained primary caregivers while continuing to work. Instead of a  
28  
29 second shift (Hochschild and Machung, 2003) or third shift, there were many shifts and no break  
30  
31 from work or parenting. Interestingly, while our interviewees ascribed themselves as  
32  
33 representing a new generation for whom care duties are more equally distributed among men and  
34  
35 women, the narratives of their pandemic worklife foregrounded largely individualised coping  
36  
37 strategies, which seemed to be underpinned by taken-for-granted regress to the traditional gender  
38  
39 order. Similar backlash has been reported in societies that represented high gender equality  
40  
41 (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021).  
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49 Various institutions failed to adequately address the interviewees’ pandemic realities  
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51 regarding care work. As Álvarez Minte et al. (2021) explain, by shifting care work to families,  
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53 the government indirectly transfers care work to women, not families, because women, not  
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55 families, are in charge of that duty. Although an emergency postnatal leave in Chile was  
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3 enforced rapidly by the Chilean government, it only served women with babies up to 5,5-  
4 months-old. In Argentina, women had no choice but to go back to work with small babies (2,1  
5 month-old baby) as the law mandated (World Bank, 2020), except public sector employees who  
6 were able to apply for an exceptional leave of absence. Government help wasn't available for  
7 women in this study whose children were above 1.6-years-old.  
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16 Employers and the market were in line with the neoliberal worldview as organisational  
17 policies, according to our interviewees, disregard women's unpaid labour outside of the  
18 workplace. Among family-friendly policies, data shows that flex-time (which included home-  
19 office) was the main choice. Formal workload reorganisation was not commented on among the  
20 interviewees, yet the workload reorganisation was intuitively enacted by women to perform and  
21 "do the work"; making sense of their neoliberal worker identity. As coping strategies, women  
22 drew on others to accommodate work and care, such as moving in with their in-laws or bringing  
23 their mother to live with them. This would speak to Pama and Aaros' (2021) concept of  
24 'intergenerational solidarity' as a coping strategy during the pandemic.  
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38 Latin American women went through a "qualitatively different" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245)  
39 experience of the pandemic, due to the intersection of gender, motherhood and class in the  
40 context of a historical construction of gender norms (Stevens, 1972/1998; 1973; Stobbe, 2005).  
41 Our interviewees' lived experiences reinforce the sensemaking process of Latin American  
42 working mothers, one in which the religious syncretism -between Christianity and Indigenous  
43 beliefs - and the social mixture- between Europeans and indigenous - influences notions of  
44 motherhood (Montecino, 1990). Drawing on the notion of intersectionality in our interviewees'  
45 experiences allows us to show the voices of the women interviewed as unique experiences,  
46 occurring at a historically unique time at a particular place, shaped by its unique socio-historical  
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3 power relations. In our study, the mothers interviewed become a disadvantaged group in light of  
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5 the pandemic. Our interviewees from Chile and Argentina shared similar experiences due to their  
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7 cultural heritage, described by Montecino (1990) as the identity of the *latinoamericana* (Latin  
8  
9 American). The patriarchal society in Latin America draws on particular cultural elements from  
10  
11 Europe and America, in terms of norms and religion. As a result, the cultural ideals of the Virgin  
12  
13 Mary represented in the Latin American ethos and the construction of femininity greatly impacts  
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15 contemporary understanding of gender. Femininity is anchored in the private sphere of  
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17 reproduction, care, breastfeeding, and loving ones' children, above anything else (Montecino,  
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19 1990). This idea is reflected in the language used by our interviewees. Our finding of new ways  
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21 of organising work meant re-doing old routines and creating new ones with others. Still, the  
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23 formative context (Helms Mills, et al, 2010) limits how interviewees make sense of the world.  
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25 Their decision-making process was constrained: paid and unpaid work arrangements were  
26  
27 evidence of that. During a time of a crisis like the pandemic, our interviewees' narratives showed  
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29 how motherhood and worker identity has been such an overlearned behaviour that it was  
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31 inevitable not to do it (Weick, 1996). The problem with that is the consequences they have, and  
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33 over whom: working mothers.  
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40 Of particular interest was the notion that among the interviewees the risk of losing their  
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42 job or the possibility of quitting the job was not plausible. The explanation might be that we  
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44 studied middle-upper class professionals whose jobs were more secure than of women who work  
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46 in lower-level jobs, such as the service industry which was the most affected by Covid-19 related  
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48 layoffs. Class created a particular power situation of status that provides them with economic,  
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50 cultural, and knowledge resources; explaining why work performance dominated the  
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52 interviewees' concerns, rather than unemployment. The discourse of the ideal worker (Acker,  
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3 1990) had an important impact on the ideal of the working mother. The pandemic reinforced the  
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5 “women do it all” expectations, because they actually did it all.  
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8 This study contributes to the research pursuing an intersectional analysis of Covid-19 to  
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10 further explain the gender implications beyond gender-based analysis (Bowleg, 2020; Hankivsky  
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12 and Kapilashrami, 2020; Maestriperi, 2021). Crenshaw’s (1991) approach focuses on  
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14 pinpointing power dynamics differentiating women’s experiences. By drawing on structural  
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16 intersectionality, our study shows that the geopolitical context (Latin America), class and gender  
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18 (middle-class working mothers) reinforce the contextual constraints in the process of  
19  
20 sensemaking. We argue that Argentina and Chile present similar experiences because of the  
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22 similar intersections (women, workers, mothers, middle-class), and sharing a socio-cultural  
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24 background (latinamerican). What Covid-19 did was to expand those already existent gaps  
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26 (Berniell *et al.*, 2022). Our study continues with this line of research, focusing on neoliberal  
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28 motherhood within the context of Latin America.  
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### 35 ***Limitations***

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37 The generalisability of the results is limited by the small sample of 17 interviewees,  
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39 making it difficult to develop any patterns from the data. The changing scenario due to Covid-19  
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41 makes the collected data still not sufficient to grasp the impact of the pandemic, as during the  
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43 interviewees (December 2020 and January 2021) the process was still ongoing. Sampling a  
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45 group of working mothers might not be representative of working mothers that actually are no  
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47 longer in the labour market. This could be further developed in future studies. The same applies  
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49 to sampling working fathers’ experiences to compare the gender experiences of Covid-19.  
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### ***Recommendations for policy and practice***

Family-friendly policies have come to be viewed as potential opportunities for mothers to overcome organisational barriers to career advancement (Gatrell and Cooper, 2016; Hennekam *et al.*, 2019; Lewis and Cooper, 1999). This however, might also produce the side effect that employers have the assumption that it is still women who bear the additional burden of childcare. When interviewees were asked about employers' initiatives for workers with care responsibilities, especially mothers, all but one said that no other policies beyond law compliance were in place. The Covid-19 pandemic forced equal time spent at home for both genders, and organisations should learn from the experience to create interventions that rebalance unpaid childcare among the genders after the pandemic (McKinsey Global Institute, 2020). Finally, despite the burden of care duties and household chores, more time spent with the family was appreciated, which should be taken into account for policy making. Initiatives like the reduction of work hours from 45 to 40 per week in Chile (Senado, 2020b) is one good example.

Organizations should assess their role in the management of paid and unpaid work for both genders, as the organisational discourse views the worker as masculine, full-time, always available and productive. The perceptions that employees have towards time and physical presence should be reevaluated by Human Resource departments.

The pandemic presents a unique, unforeseen situation which serves as an opportunity to re-designing organisations around care work. Since work now is done through virtual platforms, technology and robotisation might reduce redundancies and help a process of care work reorganisation. We argue that the pandemic has changed the nature of work permanently. Hence, this is a good time to put in place practices and set guidelines that assume community (collective

mindset) responses to care (unpaid work) rather than the traditional division of (paid and unpaid) labour. In practice, this will encourage putting care at the center of the organisation.

### ***Future research***

Studies on post-pandemic life should address comparisons between mandatory confinement versus non mandatory confinement contexts and its influence on working individuals. Further, studies should assess how work-life balance policies might be outdated as the way of working and the organisation of time has changed permanently. Further, there is a need to examine working mothers' experiences beyond middle-class women. For example, during the pandemic, nana's experienced temporary loss of employment because of the lockdown, which opens up other types of questions for the intersectionality inquiry that distinguishes the impact of covid-19 among working-class informal female workers (domestic workers and homestay workers).

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## Tables

**TABLE 1** Participant information

#	Pseudonym	Age	Children	Employment	Relationship Status	Country
1	Rosa	47	1 child: aged 4	Freelance Editor	Single Parent	Argentina
2	Maria	37	2 children: aged 6 months & 3	Commercial Planning Manager	Male Partner	Chile
3	Carla	32	1 child: aged 2	Academic	Divorced	Argentina
4	Carola	37	1 child: aged 5	Archival Researcher	Divorced	Chile
5	Carmen	40	2 children: aged 3 months & 2	Academic	Male Partner	Chile
6	Ema	37	1 child: aged 1	Administrative	Male Partner	Argentina
7	Emilia	40	2 children: aged 1 & 6	Administrative	Male Partner	Argentina
8	Javiera	37	3 children: aged 5, 9 & 19	Public Servant	Male Partner	Chile
9	Jacinta	40	1 child: aged 3	Freelance Journalist	Male Partner	Chile
10	Marta	30	1 child: aged 6	Arquitect	Male Partner	Chile
11	Marcela	37	2 children: aged 2 & 11	Administrative HR	Male Partner	Argentina
12	Ines	35	1 child: aged 2	Account Manager	Male Partner	Argentina
13	Teresa	41	2 children: aged 5 & 7	Innovation quality manager	Male Partner	Argentina
14	Victoria	40	1 child: aged 3	High School Teacher	Male Partner	Argentina
15	Eva	40	2 children: aged 3 & 5	Administrative	Male Partner	Chile
16	Blanca	28	1 child: aged 1	Quality Manager	Male Partner	Chile
17	Simona	39	1 child: aged 4	Academic	Male Partner	Chile