

## Work-family conciliation with and without children, during confinement by COVID-19 in Mexico

### Conciliación trabajo-familia con y sin niños y niñas, durante el confinamiento por COVID-19 en México

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#### Background

As a health policy for COVID-19, the confinement's implementation transformed the home beyond family life into the workplace and school. By having the activities in the same space, the boundaries of the work and family spheres were blurred, generating conflicts to balance them in life. Since the sexual division of labor still prevails, women are the ones who are primarily in charge of unpaid domestic work, and those with rearing children are at greater risk of facing this kind of conflict. In this context, we analyze the work-family conciliation (WFC) based on gender and whether having children.

#### Aims

In this context, we analyze the work-family conciliation (WFC) based on gender and whether having children.

#### Method & procedures

The study has a mixed approach. We applied 578 online questionnaires and 50 interviews with Mexican workers.

#### Results & discussion

Amid the accelerated shift to virtual work, the professional and the private roles have blurred. The daily dynamics changed because of how (e.g., where, when, and with what frequency) and who was involved. Manifesting itself in two dimensions: paid work and family life, which involves unpaid work. Paid work on-site ceased to be the norm; only 15.51% of workers were on-site daily. Instead, reduced hours, staggered attendance, and forced breaks without pay or dismissals were implemented, impacting the income of 40.31% of families. For women with children, the risk of unemployment increased three times. Likewise, there was an accelerated transfer to the home office and greater exposure to screens (83.53%). Online work broke into personal life. This new context resulted in the entanglement of duties, grueling work hours, unfavorable institutional policies to reconcile work-family, and hostility from co-workers to parents using the flexible or online work, all of which triggered stress and frustration in workers, mainly fathers/mothers. Unpaid work also increased for parents because institutions and support networks for the care and education of children became unavailable.

## Conclusion

Without planning it, the COVID-19 confinement triggered a social experiment that allows us to see the difficulty that WFC implies in the abrupt and massive implementation of neoliberal policies. With the withdrawal of a large part of the social support, the individuals and their families received the blows of dismissals or salary reductions. During this period, workers supported education and work at home, besides being responsible for maintaining families' mental and physical health. The workers absorbed the costs of online work; having the necessary devices for home-office and home-schooling, preparing spaces in their homes, paying for internet and electricity, and training themselves to use new technology. The findings show that, during confinement, the intersectionality of being a woman, a mother, and being in conditions of poverty increases the vulnerability to aspire to the WFC. Although the flexibility of working hours and the home office are considered WFC policies, this study has made it clear that neither of them is viable if: 1) Lacks support networks for child care and education; 2) Implemented with high control systems, such as increasing verification reports; 3) Workers are asked to be "always available" to respond to working duties; 4) The sexual division of labor persists, diminishing women's professional development, rest, and health; 5) Lack of transversal and gender-sensitive implementation of WFC policies, and when they exist, are authorized according to managers' subjectivity. This study finds that, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the detriment of economic, emotional, physical, and relational have been very high for individuals and their families. The increased workloads originated stress for the workers, which subverted the possibility of reaching the WFC

**Keywords:** COVID-19, gender, sexual division of labor, work-family conciliation, working mothers

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