

## **Women's Home Office: Pandemic and Family**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study investigated the implications for women from the coast of Paraná, Brazil in regard to the home office in life, family, and work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was conducted on 20 women, and 3 (three) categories of analysis were taken into consideration: woman, family, and work. For data analysis, the content of Bardin analysis technique was used. The study revealed that the imposition of the home office brought new challenges for women to reconcile home care, family, and work, which caused an overload of responsibilities leading to fatigue due to the multiple tasks performed; as well as the lack of preparation of companies to adopt the modality, which results in an environment that hinders the performance of their functions and affects the quality of life of workers.*

**Keywords:** Home Office. Woman. Pandemic. Family.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought numerous social and economic problems around the world with the loss of thousands of lives, the closure of many businesses, and an increase in the unemployment rate. Due to this situation, many companies have had to adopt the home office as a survival strategy. As a result, many professionals were required to adapt to the new professional environment in conjunction with their family environment.

From the company's point of view, the justification for the home office is to maintain productive activities and jobs, for researchers some questions arose, such as: What were the possible implications of the home office for women workers regarding their family life?

The study aimed to analyze the implications of the home office on the family of women workers from

the coast of Paraná, Brazil, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **THEORETICAL REFERENCE**

Due to the rapid growth of the new coronavirus pandemic, several measures to control and prevent the disease were taken by local health authorities in different administrative areas. Among the measures we can mention are social distancing, use of masks, use of hand sanitizer, and especially the cancellation of activities that promote agglomerations of people.

Many companies were unable to continue their activities because of the recommended social isolation, thus the increase in unemployment. All Educational Facilities had to be closed creating problems for working mothers and fathers.

In addition to economic problems, psychological problems have developed or manifested. According to Rosa (2020), the pandemic negatively affected family life with an increase in the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. Initially, the effects seemed to be only physical with the respiratory system most at risk, however the emotional effects of the dramatic lifestyle changes have also been harmful. Thus, the pandemic has ended up having physical and psychological sequelae in infected people and their families.

The practice of the home office has provided major changes to the way work is performed, becoming one of the main alternatives for companies during the pandemic. Several companies have adopted new ways of performing some activities due to social distancing, particularly in administrative sectors, where employees carry out their activities together and in a smaller environment, requiring the adoption of mitigating measures to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus.

Hence, the modality became a tool with beneficial results and quick solutions. Companies that seek to remain competitive are required to develop innovative processes, as well as adopt agile practices; implement a culture of excellence that is capable of producing more with less and overcoming unperceived moments (ASSIMI & MARQUES, 2019). Yet at what price for workers, especially women, was the home office method so abruptly implemented?

From this context, the objective of this research is to analyze any adaptation measures employed by women and decipher their capabilities as a result. Statements such as "an employee who works from home feels more at ease, expands their productivity, creativity and quality of life at work" leads us to some questions: how to organize family functions while in the home office mode? And how to manage to reconcile the tasks? According to Okada (2020), at first, working from home may seem an adventure, but then the professional activities (meetings, phone calls, writing reports, spreadsheets, contacting clients, etc.) are mixed with conflicts and domestic difficulties.

Furthermore, IBGE (2020) interviewed 8,402 employees, where 26% of the employees said they were working at home and alone, while 72% were working at home with other people, and 34.6% declared that they lived with some people who needed special or specific attention or care. In relation to remote work, the majority (88.6%) claimed to be the first time working in this modality.

Before the pandemic at the home office, women already had a greater workload than men with family duties. Also, due to the pandemic, which caused the closure of day care centers and schools, there was a greater burden of activities for women and their responsibilities were not shared among other family

members in most cases. Therefore, the proportion of home office duties performed by men and women is a topic that deserves to be discussed with responsibility, in light of the contradictions imposed.

The article 5, item I, of the Federal Constitution of Brazil of 1988 states that “*Everyone is equal before the law without distinction of any kind [...] Men and women are equal in rights and obligations*”; However, a critical view is needed, based on what the law establishes and what happens in the family environment. Although there is the participation of other family members, in some tasks, women still dedicate more time to domestic activities; and with isolation or social distance, inequality becomes even more evident. From this perspective, we present below some important data.

According to IBGE (2019), women dedicate themselves to caring for people or household chores almost twice as much as men (21.4 hours versus 11 hours a week) and to reconcile work with household chores and other care, these women accept occupations with reduced hours. In 2019, about a third of women (29.6%) were employed part-time (up to 30 hours a week of work), almost twice as much as men (15.6%). As a result of work overload, the rate of women suffering from stress, irritability, extreme tiredness, anxiety, and depression is only increasing.

In order to minimize the harmful effects of the home office, authors such as Tachizawa and Mello (apud SMAHA, 2009) encourage the experience of new experiences to preserve physical and psychological well-being, reinforcing the need to know how to manage time well, separating the moments to start and finish activities, as well as the importance of breaks for walking, cycling, or working in the garden, essential details for the rest of the body and mind. However, it is important to emphasize that such necessary attitudes become more complex in pandemic periods with social distancing and isolation. The emphasis is given to authors who consider some positive consequences of the home office such as women's longer time with their families, physical exercise, and healthy habits.

Regarding positive consequences based on Trope (1999) “The virtual organization shows to be a powerful tool by providing ways to improve the quality of life of people whose nature of work allows the adoption of this technology, in the sense of not placing work as the central axis of their daily lives and achieving greater personal fulfillment in their other activities. (...). The greater availability of personal time for teleworkers makes room for the emergence of new, more authentic community spaces with less hypocrisy” (p. 79-80).

Morin (2021) discussed that “the isolation was a reclusion, but it was also an inner liberation from the time clock, the workers' driving, work, bed rhythm, the overload of working hours in the liberal professions” (p. 44). According to the author, our existence is governed by an increasingly accelerated time; by then, it could once again be organized, decelerated.

In this sense, Doherty *et al* (apud SMAHA, 2009) affirmed that the home office is connected to a decision process that involves good administration, organization, adaptation, and the execution of economic activity, regarding the temporal and spatial conditions of the home environment. Everyone is different, then everyone should adopt the style of time management that best suits their own needs. Some principles apply to most of us (such as setting priorities, planning, delegating responsibilities), but others need to be adapted, considering individual demands (MANCINI, 2007, p.19).

Furthermore, we also have the routine of many women who play various roles: worker, mother, and wife. Thus, the adoption of this type of work, women need to establish limits, self-discipline, dialogue and

share domestic activities with other family members. In this way, it is possible to reduce the overload of activities, building an adequate and favorable family and professional environment for everyone.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The objective of the research was to analyze the implications of the home office in life, family, and work regarding work for women from the coast of Paraná, Brazil, during the COVID-19. For this, a qualitative approach by MERRIAM (2009) was considered of a descriptive nature, since it does not interfere or manipulate (SELLTIZ, COOK and WRIGHTSMAN, 1987).

In order to obtain the necessary information for the study, field research was structured with 20 (twenty) women from the coast of Paraná, Brazil, which contributes to the understanding of the implications of home office in the family. In respect of the social distancing guidelines established by the health agencies to contain the pandemic, to maintain communication with the interviewees, communication, e-mail, and telephone contact applications were used. Therefore, a virtual questionnaire was developed, where the research participants completed in the second semester of 2021; the questionnaire was structured in 3 (three) open questions.

To collect the fundamental data for the research, 3 (three) categories were established to choose the women interviewed. The first refers to women who have never worked in a home office before the pandemic and were forced to work due to the pandemic. The second refers to women who work in different professional activities (teacher, administrative assistant, human resources assistant, executive analyst). The third refers to the interviewees' ease of access. In addition, the identification of the people was not required towards the collaboration and maintaining confidentiality.

After data collection, the content analysis of Bardin (2016) was applied. For the author, content analysis is a set of methodological tools that are constantly being improved and applied to extremely diverse contents. The common aspect of these multiple and multiplied techniques - from the calculation of frequencies that provides encrypted data, to the extraction of translatable structures into models - is a controlled hermeneutics based on deduction of inference. Bardin structures content analysis based on three steps. The first step is intended to perform a pre-analysis in order to identify which paths should be followed regarding the data collected and whether a new collection of information is necessary. The second stage is aimed at exploring the material, which is divided into coding and categorization. Finally, the last step is originated the treatment of the obtained results and interpretation.

## **DISCUSSION**

The research investigated the implications caused in the life, family, and work of women after the adoption of the home office during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Additionally, 3 (three) key questions were asked:

- What was your life before and after home office? What has changed?

- What are the challenges as a woman when trying to reconcile personal, professional, and family life in the same environment?

- Based on your experience, do you consider working in the company or home office more appropriate in your case? Justify.

After analysis, organization of themes, coding, classification and categorization, the classification into blocks that express the categories is presented.

As seen in Figure 1, it is noticed the overload of activities which, after the adoption of the home office modality demanded even more from women. “Before, I had a routine with schedules and managed to keep my life more organized. Nowadays it is quite hard due to the overload of chores and fatigue from the current routine” (E6). It is necessary to discuss the specifications of working from home.

It is notorious for the amount of extra activities to which women are committed. “Taking care of the home, daily duties and at the same time working” (E5). Therefore, "psychological and mental fatigue increase even more" (E13). The home office “overloaded greatly” for some women (E3), because in the case of mothers “maternity requires a lot of attention, and it is a challenge for a single mother with two children every day” (E11). Although some women claim, “that being at home creates comfort” (E9), the obligation of home office for them “makes everything more difficult” (E9).

Figure 1. What was your life before and after home office? What has changed?

Category: Woman	
<b>Definition:</b>	The implications of the Home Office; overload of activities, tiredness, division of tasks, double shifts and childcare have changed women's lives.
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Examples of verbalizations</b>
<b>The implication of the Home Office in the woman's life</b>	E2: The journey became extremely doable; don't forget about yourself. E3: It has been very overloaded. E5: Taking care of the home, daily duties and at the same time working. E6: Before, I had a routine with schedules and managed to keep my life more organized. Nowadays it is quite hard due to the overload of chores and fatigue from the current routine. E7: Everything changes. E8: To reconcile everything in one environment. E9: Inserting the professional "mandatory" makes everything more difficult, while being at home creates comfort, being able to handle all three demands even more from the woman at the same time. E10: I don't have children, but I have some brothers who stay with me all day, it's a big challenge to reconcile everything. I've thought about giving up college several times. effective on both sides. E13: Psychological and mental fatigue increase even more. E17: I work at home more. E20: Everything more accurate, the work doubled.

Source. The Authors.

According to Morin (2021) “everything indicates that the digital propagation already ongoing and amplified by isolation (work at home, videoconferences, emails, social networks) will endure” (p. 48). According to the same author, digital devices are instruments of freedom and servitude at the same time. In this regard, for many women the greater demand made the home office a physically and psychologically exhausting activity for planning, self-control, and dedication, in a totally new and abrupt reality.

The interviewees were asked about the challenges as a woman when trying to reconcile personal, professional, and family life in the same environment, the rationalization of time calls attention. “Reconciling everything at the same time” (E2).

In the work called Confessions, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) better known as Saint Augustine writes, “What is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to whoever asks me the question, I don't know” (AGOSTINHO, 2015). The intention of the theologian and philosopher of the first centuries of Christianity was to propose discussions about the relationship between human beings and time.

For the Greeks the expression “Chronos” refers to chronological time. In other words, the rational way of measuring time in hours, days, months, years, and centuries. The expression “Kairos” refers to the indeterminate time, it means the qualitative form, which is connected to the quality of life.

According to Morin (2021, p. 63), a “barn company” is servitude for those who work there, but a company that recognizes its workers and employees in their full humanity would be recognized as something that shares the same destiny as them, “which would improve both the performance of the company and the living conditions of those who work in it”. In this sense, it seems to us that during the pandemic and using Morin's expression, the barracks company changes geographically, usurping the family environment. “Combining work, household chores, food, taking care of the children, helping with their schoolwork and even studying is not easy at all” (E6). And all this to meet “Chronos” through “discipline to keep everything in order” (E1).

Figure 2. What are the challenges as a woman when trying to reconcile personal, professional, and family life in the same environment?

Category: Family	
<b>Definition:</b>	Rationalize time is one of the biggest challenges as a woman when trying to reconcile personal, professional, and familiar life in the same environment
Topic	Examples of verbalizations
<b>The implication of the Home Office in the family</b>	E1: Discipline is needed to keep everything in order. E2: To reconcile everything at the same time E4: To work, take care of my child, and housework.  E6: Reconciling work, household chores, food, taking care of the children, helping with their schoolwork and studying is not easy at all.  E10: I don't have children, but I have some brothers who stay with me all day, it's a big challenge to reconcile everything, I've thought about giving up college several times. E11: maternity requires a lot of attention, and it is a challenge for a single mother with two children every day, and no help at all. It takes a lot of self-control and dedication to be effective on both sides.  E12: There is greater difficulty in maintaining a routine due to the large amount of things to do on a daily basis, I end up accumulating some activities. E16: Taking care of home, child and students full-time was very exhausting at first. I didn't have the student's contact to be able to explain the tasks and clarify doubts, which made the work exhausting. Recording videos, downloading, editing and having to learn to use apps and tools that I didn't even know the names. Parents have had to learn how to teach, I believe it has been an arduous and hard adaptation for everyone.  E19: I realize the importance of participating more in my daughter's life, however, living with her husband was difficult because he couldn't understanding that I needed to work at home.

Source. The Authors.

There is “greater difficulty in maintaining a routine due to the large number of things to do on a daily basis” (E12), while attending to “Chronos” through discipline ends up sacrificing “Kairos”, because in the case of one of the interviewed, “to handle the house, child, and students full time was very exhausting” (E16). Thus, the home office ends up revealing the companies' concern for “Chronos” through the usurpation of the family environment by the barracks company; it also reveals the importance of the “Kairos” family at the same time, as according to one of the interviewees “more participation in the daughter's life is important” (E19).

Even though it is humanly impossible to explain what time is, as Augustine well pointed out; the time was revealed from the Greek expressions “Chronos” and “Kairos” for the women interviewed in this study, which is a challenge subjugating the family's qualitative time to the detriment of the rational time of the companies.

The interviewees were asked if they considered it more appropriate to work in the company or in a home office and the answers were diverse.

A greater concern with the home office was noted in some mothers of young children who needed to adapt to the family environment, “[...] the conflicts of sharing the care with the child and being able to handle the daily work leads to complications at the home office” (E9). On the other hand, although other women manage to reconcile their professional and domestic activities and consider the home office a good alternative, the issue of time was highlighted once again: “home office work has the facility for being close to the family, because you don't have to face the traffic, you can sleep a little more, but working in the company can separate things, which provides adequate time for each one” (E6). “Exhausting, I had to learn to manage my time without forgetting to take a break to rest” (E16).

Figure 3. Based on your experience, do you consider working in the company or home office more appropriate in your case? Justify.

Category: Work	
<b>Definition:</b>	Home Office work requires greater adaptation, discipline and dedication.
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Examples of verbalizations</b>
<b>The implication of the Home Office in the work</b>	<p>E1 : The home office work needs a lot of discipline and dedication. our children.</p> <p>E3: In the company, the concentration is on a single activity and commitment.</p> <p>E4: My focus is 100% on the service at the company, but I would prefer to work at the home</p> <p>E5: I really liked it, but I prefer to work at the company.</p> <p>E6: home office work has the facility for being close to the family, because you don't have to face the traffic, you can sleep a little more, but working in the company can separate things, which provides adequate time for each work</p> <p>E8: We have entry and exit times at the company, which is different from the home office.</p> <p>E9: Work is less exhausting, because you don't have to go outside to work, there is no traffic, which is often stressful and you don't need to dress up to face the 8 hours of work. However, the conflicts of sharing the care with the child and being able to handle the daily work leads to complications at the home office, even though there is time to advance the day-to-day tasks at home, the fact that you are not fully focused on work hinders the performance.</p> <p>E9: I have a better professional performance working in the company, because I concentrate and pay attention more to just one task, without disturbing my family environment and my personal life.</p> <p>E10: Teaching remotely is very difficult, I know that students often do not have technological resources, which makes our work very difficult. On the other hand, when it comes to teaching in person, we notice when students have difficulties, we can also better accommodate those who are not succeeding and many different ways. The results are definitely better in person.</p> <p>E13: To resolve a pending issue ends up being a little more complicated and exhausting.</p> <p>E15: It's been very stressful routine, my work requires attention, and reconciling all functions has not been easy.</p> <p>E16: Exhausting, I had to learn to manage my time without forgetting to take a break to rest.</p> <p>E17: I work at home more.</p> <p>E19: you have to make people who live with you understand that you have a profession and need to fulfill your responsibilities in addition to taking care of household chore.</p> <p>E20: At home, you have to split into two or three due to the housework and taking care of the children, consequently you can't focus only on the home office work.</p>

Source. The Authors.

In general, there is a dubious feeling of accepting and rejecting the home office work to the interviewees' speech: "I really liked it, but I prefer to work at the company" (E5).

Physical exhaustion is a recurrent aspect at home of working women who seek to handle all activities, whether professional or personal; on second thoughts, psychological stress occurs due to the lack of collaboration and equal distribution of domestic activities among family members (husband and older children) in many cases. As seen in the reports: "you have to make people who live with you understand that you have a profession and need to fulfill your responsibilities in addition to taking care of household chores" (E19). In the same sense, "At home, you have to split into two or three due to the housework and taking care of the children, consequently you can't focus only on the home office work" (E20).

Therefore, the home office requires greater adaptation, discipline, and dedication considering the interviewees' statements.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The epidemic has hit the world unevenly. Although everything has still been in constant fluctuation, some regions in the affected countries and some countries in the world seem to be relatively spared, such as Iceland and some African countries. On the contrary, other countries go through terrible waves of contamination and deaths, as in the Brazil.

If from a geographical point of view the epidemic occurs unequally, from the point of view of labor relations, the analysis of the home office and, especially, the home office for women need to be made in



light of specificities due to the inequality of roles with the family unit: working women (mother, wife) versus working men (father, husband).

The study pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of the home office through the speech of the women interviewed. Likewise, the priority of companies in relation to rational time (Chronos) was emphasized along the analyses, to the detriment of time that is related to the quality of life of women workers (Kairos).

The lack of a depth analysis of the other family members of the interviewed women (husband and older children) was highlighted as a limitation of the study, which could collaborate in the housework and thus alleviate the women's burden.

Therefore, further studies are considered pertinent to deepen the theme of women regarding home office, in order to better qualify the relationships that permeate them, as well as to question abrupt changes at work. Not only against certain procedures, as in the case of the home office, but in the sense of reconsidering work for women.

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