

# ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL: POST-PANDEMIC CARE WORK DYNAMICS IN WORKING-CLASS FILIPINO HOUSEHOLDS WITH FULL-TIME WORKING MOTHERS IN METRO MANILA

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## **ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the socio-economic landscape in the Philippines, particularly for the low-income working class. This has led to transformative shifts in communities, blurring family roles and increasing the strain on employed mothers who face the double burden of paid and unpaid labor. Despite this, the bulk of current research often focuses on traditional breadwinners, usually men, neglecting the experiences of full-time employed mothers. This underscored the need to explore the evolving roles of men and women in the post-pandemic era and its impact on the domestic division of labor. Given this, the study scrutinized the lived experiences of full-time employed mothers in Metro Manila as they navigated the evolving dynamics of post-pandemic care work. Through the use of the hermeneutic

phenomenological approach, a total of 13 working mothers were purposefully selected to participate in this study. Individual interviews with photo elicitation and reflexive thematic analysis were used as data collection and analysis tools. The resulting data were interpreted through the feminist lens. These highlighted the persistent double burden experienced by working mothers and the prevalent notion that women are more suited for domestic work. Despite increased male participation in care work during the pandemic, men have reduced their involvement in these tasks as communities transition to the new normal with lenient protocols. This suggests that their increased participation was only a temporary response to the circumstances of the pandemic. Nonetheless, the participants' resilience in balancing caregiving and employment amid financial strains, gender norms, and societal pressures was highlighted, further emphasizing the need for systemic changes, support, and empowerment of working mothers.

**Keywords:** *Care work, New Normal, Pandemic, Double burden, Working mothers*

## **ABSTRAK**

Napakalaki ng epekto ng pandemya dulot ng COVID-19 sa kalagayang sosyo-ekonomiko ng Pilipinas, lalo na sa mga maralitang manggagawa. Buhat nito ang mga transpormatibong pagbabago sa mga komunidad, pagkabura ng mga nakagisnang tungkulin sa pamilya, at sa matinding pasanin sa mga nagtatrabahong ina na nahaharap sa dobleng pasanin ng bayad at hindi bayad na gawain. Sa kabila

nito, karamihan pa rin ng mga pananaliksik sa kasalukuyan ay nakatuon sa mga tradisyunal na tagapagtaguyod ng pamilya (kadalasan ay kalalakihan), dahilan para makaligtaan ang mga karanasan ng mga inang nagtatrabaho nang *full-time*. Ito ang pangunahing dahilan kung bakit nararapat at kailangang tuklasin ang mga nagbabagong tungkulin ng kalalakihan at kababaihan matapos ang pandemya, pati na rin ang impluwensiya nito sa pagkakahati ng mga gawaing pantahanan. Kaya naman sa pag-aaral na ito, siniyasat ang mga aktuwal na karanasan ng mga *full-time* na nagtatrabahong ina sa Metro Manila kaugnay ng nagbabagong dinamiko ng gawaing pangangalaga, pagkatapos ng pandemya. Ginamitan ang pag-aaral na ito ng *hermeneutic phenomenological approach* kung saan 13 na mangagawang ina ang pinili para lumahok. Indibidwal na mga panayam katuwang ng *photo elicitation* ang ginamit na metodo para sa pagkuha ng pangunahing datos mula sa mga kalahok. Ang resultang impormasyon ay ginamitan ng *reflexive thematic analysis* at binigyang kahulugan sa tulong ng peministang lente. Sa pangkabuuan, ang naging resulta ng pag-aaral ay nagpapatibay sa pagpapatuloy ng dobleng pasanin na nararanasan ng mga inang nagtatrabaho at ang umiiral na ideyang mas nababagay ang kababaihan sa gawaing pantahanan. Sa kabila ng pagtaas ng partisipasyon ng kalalakihan sa gawaing pangangalaga noong kasagsagan ng pandemya, mapapansing bumaba ito sa kasalukuyan dulot ng *new normal* at pagkakaroon ng mga mas maluluwag na protokol. Iminumungkahi ng datos na ito na ang pagtaas ng partisipasyon ng kalalakihan sa gawaing pangangalaga ay isang panandaliang tugon lamang sa sitwasyon noong pandemya.

Gayunpaman, ang malinaw na pagpapakita ng katatagan ng mga kalahok sa pagbabalanse ng kanilang mga responsibilidad sa trabaho at gawaing pangangalaga sa gitna ng pinansiyal na krisis, mga inaasahang asal ng bawat kasarian, at *pressure* mula sa lipunan ay binibigyang diin sa pag-aaral na ito, na siya ring nagtutulak para sa pagkakaroon ng sistematikong pagbabago, suporta, at pagsasakapangyarihan para sa mga nagtatrabahong ina.

**Susing salita:** *gawaing pangangalaga, bagong karaniwan, pandemya, dobleng pasanin, nagtatrabahong ina*

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed socio-economic landscapes worldwide. In the Philippines, this has led to a major economic shock that has severely affected household financial stability. This disruption is particularly felt by the low-income working class, whose livelihoods were compromised by reduced working hours and widespread job losses (Cho et al. 2021). In response, communities have adapted to a “new normal,” a term that now describes the broad changes brought about by the pandemic (Manuti et al. 2022). These changes have not only influenced professional identities, education, and work dynamics but also family roles and boundaries (Gao et al. 2022).

The overlapping of social roles during the pandemic has been especially challenging for households with employed mothers. These women face the dual burdens of paid jobs and unpaid care work (Mendonca et al., 2023). This phenomenon is often referred to as the “double burden,” which emphasizes the greater

responsibility shouldered by women in a given household, and a “second shift,” which describes the duality of work undertaken by women on a day-to-day basis. This highlights the significant responsibility women bear in balancing their work duties with domestic obligations (Chen et al. 2018).

Despite the increasing participation of women in the labor force, traditional gender norms continue to dictate that women do most of the unpaid household and caregiving tasks (Tronto 2013). This is particularly entrenched in patriarchal societies like the Philippines (Cerrato & Cifre 2018; Espartinez 2022). Moreover, the gendered distribution of unpaid care work is also highlighted by a large and persistent gap between men and women, wherein women around the world are essentially performing the majority of unpaid care and housework (Samtleben and Muller 2022). Hence, despite having additional hours of remunerated work, women do not experience reduced responsibilities at home, signifying men’s resistance to the redistribution of care work responsibilities within a household (Pocock, 2010). This consequently serves as a significant hurdle to achieving gender equality in relation to care work and domestic duties. On top of this, the gender wage gap also puts women from low-income working-class households in an even more disadvantaged position since women are compared to men from the same socioeconomic class (Samtleben & Müller 2022). Belghith et al. found that in low-paying jobs, women’s daily wage can go as low as 50% of a man’s daily wage (2022). High-paying positions, on the other hand, have women’s salaries at 20% more than men’s; however, achieving their full potential and job productivity tend to be restricted by their family responsibilities. This reflects how the gender division of labor reinforces economic inequalities and vice versa.

This division of labor benefits men economically and professionally, while women's efforts remain unrecognized and underappreciated (Elson 2017; Oksala 2016). These entrenched gender ideologies are upheld as cultural norms and present significant barriers to women's advancement in education and employment (Subrahmanian 2005). In the Philippines, traditional roles are emphasized through cultural norms and reinforced by religious beliefs, further complicating women's efforts to balance labor and domestic responsibilities (Medina 1992; Ramos-Shahani 1988). According to the International Labour Organization, "Women spend 4.1 times more time in Asia and the Pacific in unpaid care work than men" (2018). In the Philippines, women spend at least 16.4 hours a week on unpaid care work, highlighting the uneven distribution of labor within households (Karimli et al. 2016).

Unpaid care work, often seen as part of the domestic sphere and thus invisible, perpetuates gender inequality by undervaluing women's contributions while allowing men to focus on paid employment (Baldoz et al. 2001; Vogel 2013). While both care work and domestic work are kinds of labor performed within a household, the latter is oftentimes associated with the complementary aspects of labor done by both men and women within a heterosexual household. In the words of Gorman-Murray (2012), as adapted from Chapman (2004), these complements find themselves within the realm of feminine housework, including care work, as practiced by mothers, and the fathers' masculine performance of being the handyman in charge of do-it-yourself (DIY) home maintenance. Notably, with this definition, the mothers assume day-to-day chores while the fathers take on theirs sporadically. Similarly, domestic work can also be performed for remuneration by nonfamily workers – referred to as domestic workers – who enter into an employee-employer relationship with the members of a certain household (ILO 2015).

Simply put, domestic work is a general term under which the more specific concept of care work falls. Nonetheless, both these notions share the idea that women are assigned to perform undervalued labors of love, which is founded upon the assumption that “women are ‘natural’ carers and nurturers” (Yeoh & Huang 2012). Furthermore, when undertaken for economic purposes, this line of work is given less attention and valuation than other forms of career that are considered less personal and more professional and, more often than not, prone to exploitation (Pocock 2010).

It should be noted, however, that for the bulk of this paper, the term “care work” shall be treated synonymously with “unpaid care work”. Thus, it should be assumed as the unremunerated or unpaid labor performed primarily for the benefit of the husband and children within the domestic setting and is commonly seen as a feminized undertaking unless stated otherwise. This study also sought to explore how the participants view the concept of care work and thereby attempted to come up with a more holistic definition for this term towards the culmination of this study.

Moving forward, during the pandemic, there have been indications that men have taken on more household chores and caregiving responsibilities, possibly signaling a shift in traditional gender roles (Larraz et al. 2023). However, it remains unclear whether this change is temporary or if it represents a lasting transformation in care work dynamics. As lockdowns ease and routines return to normal, gender disparities in care work may have re-emerged, particularly affecting working-class families who face economic constraints (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UN ESCAP] 2022). For these families, alternative care arrangements are often limited, placing additional burdens on mothers and constraining their opportunities

for labor force participation (Abrigo & Francisco-Abrigo 2019).

This study aims to explore how the gendered dynamics of care work have changed in the post-pandemic context, focusing on full-time employed mothers in working-class households. More specifically, by examining how these women navigate their dual roles, the study seeks to identify changes in gender ideologies and division of care work by analyzing how these women enact their dual roles in the 'new normal' arrangement. The paper also intends to examine how socio-economic class influences care work distribution and the broader implications for gender equality within the household.

## **Methodology**

**Study Design.** This study employed a qualitative approach, specifically phenomenology, to explore the post-pandemic gendered division of care work in working-class Filipino households. This approach allowed for the collection of rich, nuanced data through an in-depth exploration of the diverse experiences, attitudes, behaviors, interactions, coping, and adaptive strategies of working-class mothers during and after the pandemic (Neubauer et al. 2019; Alhazmi & Kaufmann 2022).

**Study Setting.** The study was conducted in Quezon City, one of the most prominent urban areas in Metro Manila, Philippines. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), Quezon City has the highest number of establishments and total employment in the region, making it an ideal location for the study (PSA 2022). The city's diverse population and high employment rates provided a sufficient sample size for the study. Furthermore, Quezon City was significantly affected by

COVID-19, with high case numbers and deaths, making it a relevant setting for exploring post-pandemic care work dynamics (UP Resilience Institute 2020). Over the years, among the 142 barangays comprising Quezon City, the population of Pasong Tamo has increased by 3.1 percent, reflecting the growing urbanization and employment opportunities in the area (PSA 2013).

***Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria.*** The study focused on full-time employed mothers in working-class Filipino households to understand the dual responsibilities they navigate in their work and caregiving roles. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) at least 18 years of age; (2) employed full-time in industry, contractual, or informal work; (3) engaged in post-pandemic work; (4) with at least one child under 18 living in the same household; (5) living with a nuclear family with an employed heterosexual partner; (6) belonging to a working-class socio-economic background, with a monthly income of at most P21,194.3 (Peña-Reyes 2022); and (7) residents of Pasong Tamo, Quezon City. Exclusion criteria included individuals currently studying, those with diagnosed mental health disorders, single mothers, and mothers who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer. Participants could withdraw from the study if they found the nature of the study sensitive or triggering, experienced physical or mental illness, faced emergencies, or were non-compliant.

***Study Participants.*** The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who would best fit the study characteristics and are likely to provide information that is relevant to the study (Nikolopoulou 2023). More specifically, homogeneous sampling was used to ensure that the participants shared similar characteristics relevant to the study's focus (Crossman 2020). The researchers, in close coordination with the Barangay Pasong Tamo

officials, located suitable participants for the study and took into consideration the age, employment status, engagement in post-pandemic work, family structure, socio-economic background, and place of residence of the potential participants in the recruitment process. Additionally, snowball sampling was utilized, which enabled the initial qualified participants to identify and refer other eligible participants for the study, enhancing the overall recruitment process. Intersectionality in the women's experiences was deliberately sought through this method by ensuring that referrals included mothers from diverse occupations, family structures, and cultural backgrounds, thereby reflecting the overlapping of various social identities.

A total of 13 participants were interviewed, allowing for comprehensive data collection and analysis. This sample size was consistent with recommendations for qualitative phenomenological studies and ensured a balance between depth of information and manageability of data (Creswell 2013; Tembo et al. 2013; Andersen et al. 2017). The participants' ages range from 29 to 57 years, and they have between 1 and 7 children. Most of the participants finished high school, and only two completed bachelor's degrees. They also held a variety of full-time jobs, representing diverse roles within the working class. The mothers are employed full-time in various occupations, including three storekeepers managing retail spaces, one canteen service crew providing food services, one caregiver offering elderly care, one saleslady working in retail, one street food seller running a small food business, one midwife and one health worker in the healthcare service, one administrative staff handling office tasks, one water station worker, one independent small business owner, and one customer service representative managing client interactions. Among the participants, eight are married, and five are in domestic partnerships. Through

self-reporting, all 13 mothers affirmed that their gender identity corresponds with the sex assigned to them at birth, which goes the same for their respective partners.

**Data Collection Procedures.** The study used semi-structured interviews, incorporating a photo-elicitation technique, to gather in-depth data on the lived experiences of full-time employed mothers. Photo elicitation, a visual methodology, helped uncover layers of meaning by prompting memories and emotions that might not surface through verbal questioning alone (Glaw et al. 2017). Elaborating further, each question in the interview schedule, excluding follow-up and probe questions, was accompanied by a photo image that demonstrated key elements and symbolisms relevant to the focus of the study. As such, while verbally reading the question to the participant, a photo is also simultaneously being shown (1 question: 1 photo). These illustrations depict real-life circumstances that are set before, during, or after the pandemic, with emphasis on unpaid care work duties and paid job responsibilities. These images included scenes of domestic chores, childcare, remote work, and moments of family interaction. By presenting these visual prompts, participants were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences, comparing them with the scenarios shown in the photos. This approach allowed the researchers to gain deeper insights into how the participants' caregiving responsibilities are shaped by societal norms and personal experiences, as well as how they evolved during and after the pandemic. Notably, all photo images used had subjects whose physical appearances were reflective of Asian, Southeast Asian, or Filipino features. This was done in an effort to elicit responses from the participants seamlessly as the photos depict contents to which they can relate and resonate. Overall, this method provided a rich source of data, enhancing the depth and quality of the interviews. The interview schedule and photo elicitation materials

were reviewed by experts in the fields of Anthropology, Sociology, and Psychology. The questions were then translated into Filipino to ensure comprehension and avoid confusion of concepts for the participants. Informed consent was obtained, and permission for field notes, photographs, and voice recordings was secured. Interviews were conducted in participants' homes or at the barangay hall, lasting 15 to 35 minutes.

**Data Analysis.** The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns and themes within the transcribed information (Caufield 2020). A reflexive approach to thematic analysis was adopted by actively engaging in the interpretation process (Terry & Hayfield 2020). Particularly, the interview data collected from the series of semi-structured interviews with the incorporation of a photo-elicitation technique were transcribed verbatim and translated from Filipino into English. The semi-structured interviews gave a verbal insight into the experience of mothers, while the photo-elicitation technique enabled the researchers to capture other emotional impressions not easily voiced during the interview process. Upon transcription, relevant responses and experiences from the mothers were highlighted and categorized based on concepts. These were then interpreted according to recurring patterns and codes. By using data coding, similar responses were grouped together and clustered with other related anecdotes from the participants. These were then designated overarching themes, providing a comprehensive description of their experiences.

Moreover, data validation procedures such as data triangulation, member-checking, and peer debriefing were used to ensure that the findings accurately represented the participants' lived experiences. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing findings across different data sources—interview transcripts, researchers'

observations, field notes, and related literature—thereby enhancing the robustness of the analysis. Member-checking was employed to validate the findings, ensuring accuracy and resonance with participants' experiences (Alele & Malau-Aduli 2023; Birt et al. 2016). Peer debriefing allowed for a thorough review of the research materials and findings, adding more credibility to the study (Janesick 2007).

Ultimately, in the process of conducting the study, ethical considerations were strictly observed and adhered to. The recruited participants were given informed consent with a verbal briefing prior to the interview, which advised them of the purpose, methods, potential risks, benefits, and objectives of the study being conducted. This consequently served as an agreement that their involvement in the study is voluntary, and they were neither forced nor coerced to do so. The participants were also made aware that they have the option to decline or terminate participation in the study should they deem themselves vulnerable and unable to continue further at any time during the interview. Furthermore, the anonymity of the participants was maintained by being assigned a pseudonym, and some details relating to their personal information were omitted as deemed necessary. All information and data acquired during the interview were treated with utmost confidentiality in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, Republic Act 10173.

***Theoretical Paradigms.*** This study employed a feminist theoretical framework to critically examine the gender division of labor within working-class Filipino households, particularly focusing on the systemic power dynamics that perpetuate gender roles and inequalities (Few-Demo & Allen 2020). Specifically, Marxist feminist theory was utilized to address the economic dimensions of gender roles, challenging the undervaluation of

unpaid care work and advocating for its recognition as a vital economic component (Armstrong 2020). Moreover, the Marxist feminist theory emphasizes the oppression of women being linked to the gendered structures of capitalism, wherein unpaid care work and limited economic participation are associated with women's existence (Griffin 2017). Grounded in feminist theory, the research posits that gender roles are not merely static social expectations but are deeply connected to power dynamics that sustain the subordination of women and the valorization of male roles (Tamunomiegbam & Arinze 2024). The gender division of labor, as defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA) is the societal allocation of work between genders based on socially established roles (n.d.). This highlights that care work is predominantly assumed by women (Parrenas 2015). The pandemic has brought to light two contrasting perspectives: one suggesting that the bulk of care work reinforces gender inequalities and another proposing that the closure of care facilities has led to increased male participation in household tasks (Jessen et al. 2022). The framework scrutinizes institutional and cultural forces that maintain the gendered division of labor, such as legal structures, media representations, and educational systems, which collectively favor male dominance in the public sphere while relegating women to domestic roles. This study further integrates the concept of intersectionality to acknowledge that gender roles and socio-economic factors intersect with other identities and structures, such as class, race, and cultural norms, providing a comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences of Filipino mothers in both household and labor market contexts.

***Framing of the Problem.*** The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened pre-existing gender inequalities, especially in relation to unpaid care work within households. Working-

class households in the Philippines have been sharply affected, with women, especially mothers, bearing a disproportionate share of both paid and unpaid work. The present study is founded on Marxist feminist theory, which argues that gender inequalities are connected to capitalist systems that diminish the worth of care work, primarily carried out by women, by failing to compensate and acknowledge it despite its crucial contribution to the labor force and overall economy. This current concern pertains not only to the continuing existence of gender-based work inequalities but also to the manner in which these differences have been heightened or altered by the pandemic.

Since the objective of the study is to investigate the lived experiences of employed mothers in Metro Manila who cope with the changing dynamics of care work, the integration of gender and socio-economic class is crucial in this context. This is due to the fact that women from the working class may have unique obstacles in comparison to those from the middle or upper classes. Furthermore, this study utilizes an intersectional perspective to comprehend how these experiences influenced by gender are also manifested by other identities and systems, such as race, socioeconomic status, and cultural conventions.

The concept of intersectionality emphasizes that gender roles and socio-economic variables are not independent but rather interrelated, resulting in diverse experiences among women belonging to different socio-economic groups (Makhanya 2024). Through an analysis of these intersections, this study seeks to reveal the impact of economic class on the allocation of care work within a working-class community, namely in the post-pandemic landscape.

## Findings

The study revealed that full-time employed mothers in working-class Filipino households faced significant challenges in balancing paid work and domestic responsibilities, especially during the post-pandemic period.

### **Perception of Work at Home, Job, and Care Work.**

The findings reveal a multifaceted understanding of care work among the participants, as shown in Table 1. Participants' perceptions of care work varied significantly based on their individual circumstances, particularly in how they balanced household responsibilities with full-time jobs. First, work at home is perceived as the epitome of sacrifices, struggles, and boundless labor. Participants described care work as involving significant sacrifices and struggles, requiring balance to achieve positive family dynamics. These challenges were especially true for mothers juggling routine household tasks with the financial pressures that necessitated full-time jobs. For example, Lily mentioned, *"Pero syempre pag nanay ka na lahat kaya mong gawin. Hindi pwedeng tunganga ka lang... Kailangan natin maghanap-buhay kasi kailangan natin tulungan 'yung partner mo..."* ("But as a mom, you are able to do everything. You can't just sit around. We need to work because we need to help our partners..."). On a positive note, Liway emphasizes the advantages of having work as a mother and says, *"Sa totoo lang talaga, malaking tulong talaga ngayong nagtatatrabaho ako kasi hindi ko na inaasahan yung sahod ng asawa ko. Kasi doon na namin kinukuha yung pambayad ng tubig, (at) ng kuryente. Kung sa sahod ko naman ayun na yung pambaon nila, (at) pangkain namin. Ganun"* ("To be honest, having a job of my own is very beneficial for us because then I don't need to rely solely on my husband's salary. Because through his salary we get to pay our water and electricity bills and from

my salary, allowances of my children and our budget for food"). Hence, despite the struggles involved in balancing family and work, mothers still tend to go for the latter because they believe that caring for the family is not only confined to the home but also doing everything it takes to provide for the family, even if it means having to sacrifice personal time.

In addition, for working mothers, having a job is seen as a means of respite, autonomy, and empowerment. For these women, their jobs offered a break from the relentless demands of household chores. Lala noted, "*Ako mas gusto kong pumasok sa trabaho kasi pag nasa bahay ako nasi-tress ako eh... Kapag may baby ka kasi syempre nandun lang yung time mo sa baby mo, parang nakakapagod. Kaya parang 'pag nandito ka [sa trabaho], yun yung pinakapahinga mo. Ako ah, sa sarili ko. Kasi kapag may baby ka syempre 24 hours mo na ano yan – bantayan kaya kapag pumapasok ako parang nakakapagrelax ako dito.*" ("As for me, I prefer going to work more than I want to stay at home because I get stressed out there. When you have a newborn, of course all your time is dedicated to her, so it is tiring. So when you are at work, you get to rest. Well, that's for me, in my experience. Because when you have a newborn, you need to watch over her for 24 hours a day. As such, when I go to work, I take it as a time of relaxation"). Lala's preference for work outside the household underscores the role of having a job not only to ease her financial burden but also as a means of respite. Similarly, having a job is also viewed as a chance to exercise personal agency and a source of empowerment as a woman who performs both domestic and economic roles. Lala continued "...*Tingin nila kapag may trabaho ka [isang ina], na tinutulungan mo yung asawa mo -- 'di mo pinapabayaan... At saka hindi [na] kasi talaga kaya yung pagka kahit malaki yung sahod kung ikaw lang yung mag-isa nagtatrabaho. Yung mga expenses niyo sa*

*bahay - lahat ng bilingin, hindi siya kasya. Kahit anong tipid mo hindi talaga kakasya. Kaya gusto ko rin magtrabaho* (“People think that when you [a mother] are working, you are able to help your husband. [It means that] you are not neglecting him... And even if the salary is high, one income is not enough. The expenses at home - everything you need to buy, it’s [the salary] not enough. No matter how frugal you are, it is still insufficient. That’s why I want to work as well”).

However, it was also noted that the majority of the participants (eight out of 13) had more difficulty undertaking care work, which is perceived as more demanding than paid work. As noted by Els, *“Kasi kung halimbawa nag-wowork ka sa labas, mas parang, iintindihin mo lang yung work mo sa labas samantalang dito, ah, nagtitinda ka, nagluluto, nagsasaing, naglilinis so talagang mas mahirap yung dito sa loob ng bahay kasi lahat sayo gagawin mo... Napakahirap, bale ang kinakatawan mo eh, mga sampung tao yung kinakatawan mo. Kakayanin mo basta kailangan, basta kailangan* (“If, for example, you are employed, it’s more like, you’ll just focus on your work outside, whereas here, you’re selling, cooking, doing laundry, and cleaning, so it’s really harder here inside the house because you’ll be doing everything. It is very difficult, as if you are performing the role of 10 people. But you’ll push through it because you need to”). Participants also emphasized that adapting to evolving family dynamics was necessary during the pandemic. Liway shared, *“Pero nung dumating na siya [bunsong anak], ayun na, nauutusan ko na sila [mga panganay na anak] maghugas, magsaing, ganyan. Kasi ito talaga alagain siya kasi may sakit kasi siya sa puso kaya kailangan minsan talaga kailangan mo po silang turuan na para kahit papaano matulungan nila ako.* (“But when this one [points to baby] came, I started asking my older children to help with washing dishes and cooking rice. Because I really have to take care of this one since

she has a heart condition, so I have to teach them to help me out.”). This experience highlights self-reliance and the need to delegate tasks within the family due to the added pressures of the pandemic. The mothers were also compelled to adapt through multitasking and time management, as highlighted by Julz, “*Magbahagi ng oras para sa mga bata at para sa trabaho, challenge yun 'di ba, kailangang maaga gumising para bago umalis ng bahay ay nakapagluto na, o edi pupunta na sa trabaho*” (“To provide time for the kids and my job is a challenge, right? I need to wake up early so that before I leave the house, I have already cooked for them. Then I’ll go straight to work”).

Similarly, 6 of the 13 mothers found the pandemic period as most challenging as they juggled home and job responsibilities as compared to pre- and post-pandemic landscapes. Liezel recalled, “*Mas mahirap noong pandemic dahil limitado ang paggalaw noon. Marami ang pinagbabawal, kesyo ang mga quarantine na 'yan, mga pagkakasakit... nakakatakot*” (“It is harder during the pandemic because everything you do is limited by it. There are a lot of restrictions, there is the need for the so-called ‘quarantine’, there are a lot who get sick. I felt fear”). On the other hand, the remaining 4 mothers appealed that it was in the aftermath of the pandemic when they heavily felt struggles as working mothers. Cacay shared, “*Mas magastos ngayon. Ayun yung pinaka-stress ngayon eh. Ngayong panahon, biglang taas ng bilihan. So nung pandemic halos hindi ka pa hirap eh, hindi kami (masyadong) stress sa panggastos. So sa akin... mas mahirap ngayon kasi dahil sa budget na tumaas sa ano – sa bilihan*” (“It is more costly to live nowadays (after the pandemic). Right now, the prices of goods abruptly spiked. That’s what stresses me the most right now. During the pandemic, it was not that hard, and we were not very stressed about budgeting our expenses. So for me, it is really harder nowadays

since you have to budget your finances in the midst of inflation”). The remaining 3 participants either found the pre-pandemic as the most difficult period or did not find a specific period more challenging than the others.

The overlap of personal and work responsibilities is also a constant challenge, often requiring self-reliance. Lily illustrated this experience of juggling multiple roles simultaneously, *“Bata, asikaso sa bahay, laba, luto, at hugas, sayo lahat yun... Siyempre multitasking tayo ‘pag nanay pag nasa bahay – ganun kahirap”* (“You do all the household chores: taking care of the kids, cleaning the house, doing laundry, cooking, and washing dishes. Everything falls on you...You need to multitask when you’re a mom—that’s how hard it is”). Notably, it was evident for the mothers that the core of motherhood is the art of multitasking.

Lastly, care work is viewed as holistic labor, encompassing caregiving, prioritizing family, and addressing emotional and physical well-being. Lala shared her notion of this concept as *“... pag-alaga sa sarili at sa mga mahal sa buhay, lalo na sa panahon na meron silang sakit”* (“Taking care of oneself and loved ones, especially during times when they’re sick”). Similarly, for Michelle, care work is a concept that encapsulates all the responsibilities and expectations that a mother has. She expressed, *“Ang nanay, lahat nasa isip niya lahat ng gagawin niya – yung kakainin ng anak niya, yung isusuot ng mga anak niya, uniporme, lahat. Maglalaba ka, maglilinis ka, kahit anong trabaho mo, mga anak mo pa rin”* (“A mother is always thinking about the things that need to get done – her children’s meal, as well as the clothes and uniform they will wear. You will do the laundry and clean [the house], no matter what your job is, you still think about [the well-being] of your children”). Evidently, care work is viewed as prioritizing family and attending to their needs, whether it is physical or emotional.

**Lived Experiences of Care Work.** Participants' experiences were influenced diversely by the pandemic. Recurrent patterns of themes in participants' responses are shown in Table 2. In journeying through the pandemic and transitioning to the new normal, participants experienced financial strain, adaptation challenges, and varied benefits from remote work. These experiences highlighted both commonalities and differences in how the pandemic affected their roles. Kristina found remote work beneficial, stating, *"Well actually...mas napadali nga kung tutuusin kasi naging work from home na nga yung setup namin. So yun, hindi ko na kailangang magising ng maaga para magprepare ng pagkain, mag-travel...So mas madali siya para sakin"* ("It [work] was actually made easier because our setup was remote [during the pandemic], so I didn't have to wake up early, prepare food, commute... So it was easy for me"). However, not all participants found remote work to be advantageous; for some, it added to their burden by blending the boundaries between work and home life. Cynthia shared, *"Ako every day ko kasama yung anak ko. Ayaw magpabantay sa iba. Struggle is real talaga. Kasi minsan may online [classes] siya. 'Di ba 'no nag-aaway pa kami - sagot ka diyan, sagot ka diyan. Ganun, mahirap talaga kung iisipin mo. Ayan ang pinagsasabay ko: alaga at saka trabaho"* ("Every day, I was with my child. He did not want anyone else to look after him. The struggle is real, indeed. Sometimes, when he had online classes, we'd argue about it, and I would force him to participate in class. It's really difficult when you think about it. I did my work and looked after my child simultaneously").

Attitudes toward how unpaid care work responsibilities are being distributed also influence the unending cycle of gendered distribution of unpaid care work, which includes preference and flexibility. Eden mentioned, *"Pag lalaki kasi 'pagka gusto nila, gusto lang nila. Hindi katulad sa babae na nakikita nila yung mga dumi talaga"*

*sa bahay, mga gawain. Sila kasi parang may gusto lang sila. 'Pagka gusto nila malinis, ayun malinis. 'Pag hindi, hindi'* ("For men, [they only clean] if they want. It's not the same with women, who really notice the mess in the house and the chores that need to be done. Meanwhile, men only have preferences [whether they will clean or not]. If they want it to be cleaned, then it will be cleaned. If they do not prefer to do so, then they won't").

Notably, challenges in navigating care work responsibilities included resilience and coping, among the others. For Liezel, it takes a lot to be a mother, to which she expressed, *"Marami rin akong pagsubok na kinakaharap dito sa bahay. Kung 'di ka talaga magtatiyaga o hindi ka pasensyoso dahil mainitin ang ulo, eh mahirap. Kailangan talaga yung patience, pang-unawa, at talino bilang isang ina"* ("I face a lot of challenges at home. If you are not patient or diligent enough because your temper easily gets in the way, it is difficult. Patience is really needed, as well as understanding and knowledge as a mother"). Similarly, dealing with care work means having to deal with emotions such as fear and anxiety, especially regarding the health of the family. Liezel continues, *"Kapag nagkasakit ang isang miyembro ng pamilya, ayan na, mahirap na. Challenging na. Andyan na yung namomroblema ka, andyan na yung mapapaiyak ka, mag-iisip, mai-istress"* ("When a family member gets sick, it becomes very difficult. Very challenging. Consequently, you will be thinking about it all the time to the point that you will cry and stress about it").

It was also evident that the overlap of both responsibilities at home and at work has an impact on the well-being and stress of mothers. The mothers shared anecdotes about being unable to rest in the midst of these dual responsibilities, such as Lily, who shared, *"Kung tutuusin nga sa 8-5 mos sa trabaho mas*

*mahirap ang sa bahay. Kasi siyempre sa bahay walang pahinga*” (“In fact, considering your 8-5 job, it’s even harder at home. Because, of course, there’s no rest at home... When you’re at home, you are restless”). The same goes for Els, whose sentiments resonated with Lily, *“Napakahirap talaga kasi... maraming nagsasabi na wala silang ginagawa sa buong maghapon ako hindi eh, hindi ako humihinto hangga’t – ang hinto ko lang dito tulog eh*” (“It is very difficult... many people say that they don’t have things to accomplish the whole day but it’s not the same for me. I don’t stop attending to things [in the house] – the only time I get to stop is when I’m sleeping”).

***Navigating the Balance between Care Work and Job Responsibilities.*** The complex interplay between work duties and familial obligations was a recurring theme among participants (refer to Table 3). They emphasized the need to balance these responsibilities, often at the cost of personal time and well-being. For instance, Julz talked about how she manages to balance her day job as an employee and care work as the mother of their household. She shared, *“Kapag uuwi galing sa trabaho, pwede mong ituloy yung naiwang gawain sa bahay. At yung magagawa mo naman sa umaga, gagawin na bago umalis*” (“After you get home from work, you can continue the chores you left [before going to work]. As for the chores you can easily accomplish, you can do them in the morning before you leave for work”).

Furthermore, balancing work responsibilities and household care work involved various coping strategies for participants, including social media use, family bonding, and personal care. Lily detailed her leisure activities, stating, *“Pag-fe-Facebook. Magso-scroll muna ako sa Shopee pero kahit wala akong pambili. Add to cart na lang, add to cart kahit papaano nakakatulong din yung ano – social media, shopping, Facebook pero*

*siyempre panoorin mo lang yung mga positive kasi kapag negative wala ding mangyayari sayo. Madadala ka* (“Using Facebook. I’ll scroll through Shopee even if I don’t have money to buy anything. Just add to cart, add to cart. Somehow, social media, shopping, and Facebook – all help, but of course, you have to watch only the positive stuff because if it’s negative, it won’t do you any good. It will affect you”).

Support from family, spouses, and friends also played a crucial role in coping. For Cris, it was her husband’s emotional support that gets her through tough times, *“Yung asawa ko ang pinagsasabihan ko”* (“I confide in my husband”). Similarly, Els relies on her siblings for comfort, *“[Mga] kapatid ko. Nag-aano lang kami nag-vi-video call. [Sila] yung kinakausap ko at pinaglalabasan ko ng sama ng loob”* (“My siblings, we see each other via video call. They are the ones that I talk to and share all my problems with, especially my ill feelings”).

Furthermore, participants often relied on informal support systems to navigate work and household responsibilities, frequently delegating tasks to older children or nearby relatives. According to Cacay, *“Pero may ano kasi ako, may anak akong panganay so siya yung nagmamanage sa bahay. So kapag may kailangan, siya yung tatawag sa akin. ‘Ma’, ganyan kapag may kailangan yung mga kapatid niya ‘Ma’ basta tumatawag lang sila”* (“But I have an eldest child so she is the one who manages our home [when I’m not around]. So when they need something, she is the one who will call me. “Mom,” she will say when her siblings need something, so they just call me whenever”). Similarly, Kristina noted, *“Well, actually since may mga tao na malapit lang sa amin, may mapaguutus-utusan ako kahit papaano”* (“Well, actually, since there are people close by, I can ask for help. So, it’s convenient”).

Being guided by religious beliefs and family support has also proven valuable in the journey of motherhood. Liezel talked about how she finds wisdom in navigating the balance between unpaid care work and job responsibilities: *"Unang-una, nagdadasal ako. Humihingi ako ng gabay. Gabayan ako sa challenge na kinakaharap ko. Nagtatanong-tanong ako sa mga inay, sa mga kapatid ko. Natawag ako upang mapagpayuhan nila ako sa mga dapat kong gawin"* ("First of all, I pray. I ask for guidance. To guide me in every challenge I encounter. I also ask my mother and my siblings. I call for advice regarding what I should do").

It was also highlighted that voicing out concerns and having a support system were essential avenues in dealing with balancing the unpaid care work and job responsibilities, which include aspects of support, frustration, a safe environment, and communication. As shared by Cacay, *"Depresyon-depresyon ang pagiging working mom. Kung iisipin mo mababaliw ka. Kapag nagmeet na kami sa center [kasama ang mga katrabaho] - parang navo-voice out mo yung ano, problema mo ganun"* ("Being a working mom is depressing. If you think about it, you'll go crazy. Whenever we meet at the center [with my colleagues] – I am able to voice out my problems"). These anecdotes reflect how creating a supportive and safe environment at home was essential for participants to manage stress and responsibilities since the participants mentioned that they take on multiple roles, especially in the household, in addition to the fact that they still perform their respective duties at their jobs.

In terms of suggested interventions, the participants proposed livelihood programs, reduced costs of goods, and streamlined government processes to ease their burdens. Cheryl shared her frustration, stating, *"Wala, hindi ko nga alam bakit hindi ako nakuha sa 4Ps eh."*

*Siguro sabi nila hindi naman kasi halatang naghihirap kasi ang laki ng katawan ko* (“No, I don’t know why I wasn’t accepted into the 4Ps. Maybe they think I’m not struggling because I look well-fed”), referring to the economic support program of the government for indigent households. Michelle also shared her sentiments regarding her view of the government, saying, *“Alam mo, maraming pera ang gobyerno. Kung ilalagay sa tama... [Dapat] ibigay nila yung karapatan ng bawat tao. ‘Di ba? Kung tutuusin maraming pera ang gobyerno, kung walang kurakot”* (“You know, our government has a big budget. If it will be utilized appropriately. They should be able to provide for the rights of every citizen. Right? Indeed, if there are no corrupt officials in the government, there will be a lot more money available”). Reducing the cost of essential goods was also a common suggestion among participants, aiming to ease the economic burden on families. Kristina mentioned, *“Kung kaya nilang [gobyerno]...do something about sa bilihan, siyempre it will be beneficiary sa lahat naman”* (“If they [the government] could do something about the high market prices, it would benefit everyone”). Furthermore, advocating for salary increases to reflect the true cost of living and the added pressure of care work was another common suggestion, emphasizing the need for fair compensation and the acknowledgement of the dual roles many working mothers need to fulfill. Recognizing the value of household responsibilities through both social and financial support was deemed necessary by the participants.

**Factors Affecting the Division of Care Work within Households.** The division of care work responsibilities as reflected in the interviews also highlighted the shifting roles within the household. Michelle illustrated this by noting, *“Ay mga anak ko na, kasi medyo may edad naman na sila. Yung anak kong lalaki nagsasaing, ako nagluluto ng ulam, yung anak kong babae maghuhugas ng plato,*

*magma-mop, maglilinis. Si mister ko sya yung naglalaba sa washing* ("Ah, my children do that [chores] since they are already of age. My son cooks and prepares the rice, I cook the food, then my daughter wash the dishes, mop, and clean the house; my husband washes the clothes"). The same goes for Eden who shared, "*Oo, ako, dati [pero] ngayon kasi malalaki na sila. Nakakatulong na sila... sila na naglilinis, naghuhugas ng plato tapos sila na naglalaba ng kanilang mga damit ngayon. Dati, ako lahat*" ("Yes, before, I used to do it all but now, my children are already grown. They are already able to help... They clean, wash the dishes, and do the laundry. Before, these chores were all on me"). These anecdotes by Michelle and Eden note the consideration put on mothers who, more often than not, bear most of the weight of care work. As time passes by, they are able to share household responsibilities with family members who willingly undertake these tasks.

Similarly, the interviews emphasize the importance of shared care work responsibilities whenever the mothers are unable to attend to them. Cynthia explained, "*Ako, nasa trabaho kasi ako e buong araw. Kaya maganda rin na may partner ka kasi minsan yung partner mo yung gagawa sa bahay...*" ("I'm at work the whole day, that is why having a partner is also beneficial, because sometimes your partner is the one who is in charge of chores needed to be done in the house"). Liway also shared the same sentiments, clarifying that although the majority of the care work responsibilities are still on her, she has her husband to help her: "*Kahit naman may trabaho [din] siya, pag-uwi niya ng hapon, magluluto na siya, (at) maghuhugas, ganyan. Kapag alam niyang hindi ako nakapaghugas, siya talaga*" ("Even if he has work as well, once he comes home in the afternoon, he will already cook our meal and do the dishes after. When he knows that I will not be able to do the dishes, he will do it").

Another factor affecting the division of unpaid care work within households can be attributed to inherited behaviors and responsibilities, as well as inculcated gender roles and stereotypes. As mentioned by Julz, *“Dahil noong unang panahon, ang mga babae ay laging sinasabing pambahay lang at ang mga lalaki ang maghahanapbuhay. Kaya mas laging mga babae ang nasa gawaing bahay”* (“Because in the past, women were always perceived as being in charge of domestic work while men are in charge of working. Hence, women are mostly assigned to household chores”).

The role of men in domestic settings revealed significant gender dynamics. Many participants noted that their partners became more involved in care work (eight of 13 participants) during the pandemic but became less involved post-pandemic. For Cris, however, this is not the case, as she shared that her husband does not contribute to any care work activity at all. She highlighted this by sharing, *“Hindi.. hindi siya natulong. Kasi siya ay ano na siya.. Basta’t siya ay dumating sa pagmamaneho, wala. Kakain na lang yan, ako na ang bahala sa lahat”* (“No... he doesn’t get to help [with the household chores]. When he gets home from driving [work], he’s done. He will just eat, then I’m the one who will have to do everything afterwards”). Similarly, Els resonated with this as she frustratingly said, *“Sa iba–inggit nga ako eh, kasi ang ibang mga lalaki tumutulong sa loob ng bahay, akin kakaiba [kasi hindi tumutulong] - kakaiba ako”* (“I am actually jealous of others because the men in their households help with the chores, but the men in our house do not. Our household is different”). Notably, despite increased male participation in care work, this is not the same for every household.

Societal perceptions and expectations placed on women in the household further exacerbate the burdens of gender stereotypes. This is an added weight that the

majority of the participants carry within themselves. Cris shared, *"Dahil ang iniisip kasi ng tao eh babae ako... Nanay ako, kailangan ko tong gawin. Kasi kung hindi ko to gawin, sinong gagawa"* (Because people think that I am a woman, a mother, so I need to do this [chores]. Because if I don't do it, then who will"? Similarly, Kristina expressed, *"Pag babae ka parang, [sinasabihan ka na] 'babae ka pa naman, ang kalat-kalat ng bahay!...' So ayun bilang babae, obligasyon mo maging malinis ang bahay... Kailangan anak mo mataba. [Kapag] mapayay, 'di niyo pinapakain, kapag mataba, sobra-sobra pinapakain niyo. Kahit anong sabihin [at gawin mo] mo, may masasabi sila sa 'yo"* (If you are a woman, [you get told that] 'for a woman like you, the house is very messy!' So as the woman of the household, it is your obligation to keep the house clean... Then your child should be healthy because if not, people will say that you do not feed your child. But if he gets a little fat, people will still criticize you for feeding him a lot. No matter what you say and do, people will always have something to say about you").

In contrast, for Cynthia and Lala, despite these expectations, they are still able to voice out their beliefs and do what they want to do. Cynthia proudly stated, *"Meron kasi minsan, may lalaking sasabihin 'babae ka, dapat wala kang trabaho'; 'babae ka, dapat nasa loob ka ng bahay'... Ako, malakas loob ko, kaya kong sagutin eh. Basta kapag sinabi ko sa asawa kong nagtatrabaho ako wala siyang angal eh"* ("Sometimes, there are men who will say 'you are a woman, you should not work' or 'you should be inside your home because you are a woman'... But me, I am confident and courageous so I can respond to them. So when I told my husband that I am working, he does not argue with me anymore"). Lala also shared her experience: *"Ano yun... nag-usap kami. Gusto niya magbuntis ako, edi pinagbigyan ko siya. Sabi ko kasi sa kanya, magbubuntis ako pero ayokong matengga sa*

*bahay. Gusto kong magtrabaho*” (“We talked about it. My husband wanted to have a child so I got pregnant. [But] I told my husband that I will get pregnant but I will not stay at home all the time. I want to have a job”).

Overall, the findings highlight deeply entrenched gender norms, with women still bearing a disproportionate burden of care work despite having full employment outside the home. These findings suggest that within the post-pandemic landscape among working-class households, most of the care work responsibilities still fall upon the majority of the participants, even with the reported support from their families. Additionally, it was noted that the increased male participation within households was a rather temporary response to the circumstances brought upon by the pandemic. The changes and struggles the participants underwent as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis were also highlighted as they called for interventions that necessitate systemic changes to support equitable distribution of household duties and alleviate financial burdens.

## Discussion and Analysis

***Entrenched gender roles.*** The findings on the concept of care work among the participants highlight the deeply entrenched gender roles and expectations within Filipino households, especially during and post-pandemic. This is consistent with the feminist framework emphasizing the persistent undervaluation and invisibility of women’s unpaid labor and the need for policy shifts to acknowledge and value these contributions (Himmelweit & Plomien 2014). The participants’ experiences exemplify this dual burden, showing how societal expectations mandate that mothers take on an extensive range of responsibilities without respite.

Despite increased male participation in care work during the pandemic, men have reduced their involvement in these tasks as communities transition to the new normal with more lenient protocols. This shift back to traditional roles illustrates the temporary nature of the changes brought by the pandemic. Studies suggest that the unique circumstances, such as lockdowns and the shutdown of educational institutions and childcare facilities, required a fairer distribution of household duties (Jessen et al. 2022). Nevertheless, once these external pressures diminished, the conventional gender roles were promptly re-established, resulting in a decline in male involvement in caregiving responsibilities (Gravel 2023). This indicates that the increased male participation was merely a reaction to the exceptional conditions brought about by the pandemic rather than a permanent shift.

The persistence of patriarchal norms in Filipino society continues to enforce gendered expectations around care work. These norms dictate that caregiving is an intrinsic duty of women, while men contribute relatively little to caregiving tasks, reinforcing an unequal division of labor (Stefanova et al. 2023). This inequity is rooted in socio-cultural and religious expectations that view women as primary caregivers (Villar 2022), which the participants' experiences corroborated. The findings of this study are consistent with Karimli et al. (2016), who noted that Filipino women spend significantly more time on unpaid care work than men, and Parreñas (2015), who argued that gender norms and power relations deeply influence household labor divisions.

As a result, women often face a disproportionate burden of unpaid labor, reinforcing the gendered division of labor (Razavi & Staab 2012). This burden not only affects their physical and mental well-being but also limits their opportunities for professional growth. The pandemic's

disruption of traditional gender roles, particularly in households where women took on breadwinner roles, has led to a re-evaluation of care work dynamics (Cera et al. 2024). The increase in responsibilities and stress experienced by the participants exacerbates the “double burden” phenomenon. This shift highlights the need for a more equitable distribution of care responsibilities and reflects broader changes in societal norms (Brannen & Wilson 2023).

### ***Balancing Work Duties and Familial Obligations.***

The study’s findings highlight the significant challenges that full-time employed mothers face in balancing work responsibilities and household care work, especially in the post-pandemic context. Participants’ narratives reflect the dual burden that these women bear, revealing how deeply entrenched gender norms and expectations shape their daily lives. This underscores the urgent need for policy interventions that support working mothers, such as flexible work arrangements and accessible childcare services. According to feminist theory, particularly the works of West and Zimmerman (1987) and Lupton (2017), these gender roles are reinforced through societal and cultural norms that prioritize women’s responsibilities in the domestic sphere over their work duties. The ongoing struggle to manage these dual responsibilities underscores the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures, which often leave women with little support in navigating their dual roles. Espartinez (2022) highlighted the dissatisfaction among working mothers regarding the dual burden they bear, confirming the theory that societal expectations contribute to gender inequality in both home and workplace settings. Such biases not only reinforce traditional gender roles but also hinder women’s labor advancement (Badgett 1999; Forbes et al. 2020). Addressing these biases requires a multi-faceted approach, including educational campaigns and workplace policies that promote gender equality.

Participants in this study reported significant stress and challenges in balancing increased caregiving duties with work responsibilities. This stress is compounded by the lack of institutional support and the expectation to maintain high performance in both roles. This supports Lindau et al. (2021), who found that the pandemic intensified the socioeconomic burdens on women, particularly mothers, who faced heightened caregiving demands alongside job-related pressures. While balancing paid and unpaid work is challenging, having a job provides financial independence and personal empowerment. Paid jobs reduce women's reliance on their husbands' salaries, reflecting the dual benefit of economic support and self-worth. Work serves as a form of empowerment and autonomy for these women, allowing them a temporary escape from the relentless demands of domestic labor (Munte & Monica 2023). This aligns with feminist perspectives that argue for the recognition of women's economic contributions as essential for their empowerment (Muniz 2023). The shifting of traditional roles during the pandemic further illustrates how being employed can challenge and redefine gender norms (Espartinez 2022).

The necessity for mothers to adapt to evolving family dynamics during the pandemic highlights the additional pressures placed on women to ensure family well-being amidst crises (Holmes 2023). This adaptability, often requiring self-reliance, underscores the resilience of women but also points to the lack of systemic support for caregiving responsibilities (Tendero 2023). This lack of support is a critical issue that needs to be addressed through comprehensive social policies that recognize and redistribute caregiving responsibilities. Feminist theory critiques the societal structures that perpetuate the invisibility of such labor and advocates for policies that recognize and redistribute caregiving responsibilities more equitably.

Moreover, the need to balance work responsibilities and familial obligations often comes at the cost of personal time and well-being. This intersectionality aligns with Crenshaw's (1991) framework, acknowledging that multiple identities and structural constraints influence decisions about care work. Similarly, literature shows that working-class parents struggle to balance home and work duties (Anderson & Kelliher 2020). To add to this, according to Shockley et al. (2021), cultural norms strongly impact women's key duties in domestic tasks and childcare, indicating a gendered division of labor in households. The socioeconomic impact of the pandemic underscores the external factors that exacerbate these challenges (Aglipay-Villar 2022).

***Changes in Household Dynamics During the Pandemic.*** The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered household dynamics, compelling Filipino families to adapt to a new normal where work, school, and home life intersected. This transition was particularly burdensome for women, who traditionally bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities (Corsi & Ilkharacan 2023). The pandemic exacerbated existing gender disparities in household labor, as highlighted by feminist perspectives, which argue that crises often reinforce traditional gender roles (Lupton 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the entrenched gender norms influencing the division of household labor, with women continuing to shoulder a disproportionate share of caregiving and domestic duties. The findings of this study resonate with Kwaśniewska & Lebeda's (2017) assertion that traditional gender roles significantly dictate the allocation of household responsibilities. Despite incremental progress in gender equality, societal expectations still largely position women as primary caregivers, thereby perpetuating an unequal distribution of domestic labor. This persistent imbalance

is evident in the accounts of the study participants, who highlighted the challenges they faced in balancing work and caregiving roles. Tronto (2013) provides a historical context for these norms, illustrating how patriarchal systems have long designated women as the main caregivers, reinforcing their role in domestic settings.

### ***Mental and Emotional Toll and Coping Mechanisms.***

The COVID-19 pandemic also intensified the mental and emotional toll on working mothers as they juggled increased domestic responsibilities with work demands (Seedat & Rondon 2021). The mental strain of this dual burden was evident in participants' experiences, emphasizing the need for mental health support and recognition of the emotional labor involved in care work. According to studies, many working-class mothers used adaptive techniques to reconcile employment and caring, demonstrating their resilience and capacity to overcome pandemic problems (Wood et al. 2020; Roslan et al. 2021).

Women employed various coping mechanisms to manage the increased pressures during the pandemic. These included seeking social support from family and friends, utilizing time management strategies, and engaging in mindfulness practices to alleviate stress (Seedat & Rondon 2021). However, the reliance on such strategies also underscores the lack of institutional support for working mothers, a gap that feminist theory critiques as a significant barrier to achieving gender equality (Armstrong 2020).

**Economic Dimensions of Gender Roles.** This study's analysis further connects to Marxist feminist theory, particularly in addressing the economic dimensions of gender roles. The undervaluation of care work, predominantly performed by women, is a critical issue highlighted by Armstrong (2020) and England (2005).

Contemporary society fails to recognize the essential nature of domestic labor, thereby perpetuating women's financial dependence and limiting their economic and professional opportunities. The narratives from the participants reveal the stark reality of this undervaluation, where the lack of institutional support and the persistent wage gap exacerbate the pressures on working mothers. The pandemic has intensified these issues, making it even more challenging for women to balance their work and personal lives.

***Intersectionality and the diverse experiences of mothers.*** Intersectionality plays a crucial role in understanding the diverse experiences of these mothers. The overlap of gender with class significantly influences how care work is distributed and managed within households. Women are outright exploited by capitalism, where power dynamics in play extend beyond the private sphere, as the professional world is also influenced by these gendered expectations, often leading to occupational segregation and wage gaps (Lee & Adair 2007). Statistically speaking, women in the Philippines earn a significant percentage less than what men receive, highlighting the pay disparity that amounts to a 78% total pay reduction among women as compared to men (ILO 2018). This gap is remarkably heightened in areas that do not conform to urban standards, such as rural and remote areas with smaller wage and pay guides (PSA 2018). This is despite the fact that on a global scale, the Philippines has long been considered a gender-equal nation, ranking 8th among the ASEAN countries (World Economic Forum 2021). Hence, such a situation puts women at a disadvantage when it comes to valuing labor rendered as compared to men. Consequently, this becomes a clear indicator of the unequal value that society places on women, who endlessly navigate such oppressive forces reinforced through societal and cultural norms that prioritize women's responsibilities in

the domestic sphere over their professional lives. The ongoing struggle to manage these dual responsibilities underscores the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures, which often leave women with little support in navigating their dual roles as a mother first and as a worker second.

Thus, while employment provides financial independence and personal empowerment, it also imposes a dual burden on women, who continue to shoulder the majority of caregiving responsibilities. This is exacerbated by entrenched gender norms and societal expectations that prioritize women's roles in the domestic sphere and alienate them in professional settings. Forbes et al. (2020) also discuss how prejudices against women support traditional gender norms by pushing women out of jobs. It implies that societal expectations and views keep gender inequality in both professional and home care work reinforced. For instance, in the local setting, before the passing of the Expanded Maternity Leave (EML) Law, which seeks to provide female workers with prolonged time for recovery and nurturing their newborns, there was rampant opposition from employers, proving the institutions' bias to protect their profits at the expense of their female workers (Raquiza et al. 2024). Consequently, this perpetuates gender discrimination in the workplace as employers have been consciously avoiding hiring new female employees to evade the payment of maternity benefits (Senate of the Philippines, 2019).

In summary, the economic valuation of care work, or the lack thereof, is a critical factor in understanding the burden placed on women in the household (England 2005). Despite the critical nature of care work for family well-being, it remains mentally and physically exhausting yet economically unrecognized. This reflects Dodds' (2007) and Folbre's (2001) discussions on the invisibility

of care work in economic metrics and the need for policy shifts to acknowledge and value these contributions.

***Strengths and Limitations of the Study.*** The strength of this study lies in the participants' lived experience accounts, which provide insight into the phenomenon of the double burden and the second shift, as well as the pressures women have doing paid and family care work. By adopting this concept together with intersectionality, where gender is combined with other social categories such as class and culture, it becomes easier to explain how all these aspects interact and shape care work environments. The qualitative data were also essential for narrating and assessing the detailed accounts of the experiences of working mothers by capturing their lived experiences and personal challenges and examining the issues in detail and in-depth (Anderson, 2010).

Similarly, by shedding light on mothers' experiences of juggling work and caregiving duties, the study finds its social value in acknowledging the difficulties these women confront and emphasizing the necessity for societal support that will enable their full involvement and potential in the workforce. Lastly, considering that developing targeted interventions and policies require an understanding of the institutional and informal support systems as well as the coping strategies adopted by full-time working mothers, the possibility of reforming policies through the findings of this study is where its academic relevance ultimately lies. Such relevance makes the study highly significant, especially regarding the fluid changes in gender dynamics influenced by the COVID-19 health crisis and its implications for future social relations.

However, the study does have its own set of limitations, especially with regard to the generality of the findings and the extent of the methodology used. The details

presented in the findings may be culturally bound, especially given the Filipino cultural background of the study and participants. Bias in the sample selection in relation to attracting only mothers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds may lead to the omission of the experiences of women from diverse or other less privileged backgrounds. In addition, the analytical framework of the study leans evidently on the feminist perspective, which, as enlightening as it is, can still be enriched by a variety of other theories. It also only considers the difficulties and undesirable consequences of stereotyped male and female roles and, consequently, may overemphasize negative findings and omit potential positive changes, awareness of the gender problem during the pandemic, or shifts in the household division of labor. As for the methodological considerations and restrictions of this study, since the focus of the research was full-time employed mothers in working-class households, the exclusion of the perspectives of other pertinent family members was at risk. Thus, while there is a given emphasis on the challenges and changes in the double roles mothers play in this setup, the study may not be able to fully capture the nuances of gendered care work in Filipino families due to the limited number of family members purposefully selected for this endeavor. Additionally, while this research specifically considered including dual-earning households (i.e., both the mother and her partner are employed) in the inclusion criteria, the nature of the job of the husband was not taken into consideration (e.g., full-time or part-time). Moreover, the criteria set only required a mother to have at least one minor or dependent child in the household but did not take into consideration if the same household is characterized by other children who may be financially independent already. In the same way, this study was done without considering the age of the mother when she had children and started her own family. Lastly, this study did not employ lesbian,

gay, transgender, and queer mothers or single mothers, which are complexities that could be further looked at in subsequent studies.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

Despite progress in gender equality, patriarchal views and traditional gender norms still influence the unequal division of household labor, with women performing much of the caregiving. The lived experiences of the participants during and after the pandemic shed light on the different factors that influence the amount and division of care work responsibilities in a household. While the majority of the participants evidently pointed to their lives during the pandemic as the hardest they have experienced as compared to before and after the pandemic, the increased responsibilities and stress they have reported while balancing work and life at home during this period visibly displays the “double burden” phenomenon. Different factors, such as the increase in the cost of living, gender roles, and the emotional and psychological impacts of the pandemic, have contributed to the challenges that are faced by these individuals. Although there are participants who share the responsibilities of care work with other members of the household, a number of participants still suffer from the lack of adequate partitioning of care work in the household. The findings of the study also highlight that the increased involvement of men in domestic work was largely due to this phenomenon being rather temporary. The return to pre-pandemic norms in the aftermath of COVID-19 once again reduced male participation in caregiving duties. Thus, as noted in the experiences of the study participants, the strain of balancing work and caregiving responsibilities remains largely unmitigated by male involvement in the post-pandemic setting.

This study also uncovered the intricate strategies participants employed to balance work responsibilities with household care work as they struggled with increased tension and conflict in relationships, exhaustion from juggling multiple roles, and the constant need for effective time management. The shift to remote work and the blending of professional and personal spaces also emerged as an issue that working mothers face, which often led to frustration and a feeling of being overwhelmed. Women employed various coping mechanisms to manage the increased pressures during the pandemic. Primarily, support systems played a crucial role in navigating these responsibilities. Social and emotional support from spouses, siblings, and friends, as well as a positive environment, were essential in helping participants manage their dual roles. The importance of communication and delegation of tasks within the family were also highlighted as some of the effective strategies that alleviate the burden of working mothers. The mothers also underscored the value of time management and budgeting, which allows them to get through multiple hours of work both in and out of their households. Engaging in religious exercises and use of technology such as mobile devices for leisure and entertainment have also been their go-to activities to alleviate stress. However, the reliance on such strategies aptly underscores the lack of institutional support for working mothers. Hence, while the study highlights the resilience and adaptive strategies employed by the participants, it also emphasizes the necessity for formal government support to relieve the overwhelming pressure surrounding the everyday lives of working mothers in the new normal.

To put it succinctly, the integration of feminist and intersectional frameworks provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and facilitates the development of more equitable solutions for working

mothers in the post-pandemic era. Similarly, the findings underscore the need for systemic change to address these deep-rooted inequalities, denoting a call for policies that support shared caregiving responsibilities and promote gender equity in both workplace and domestic contexts. Looking further beyond post-pandemic care work, this study offers new insights into the socio-economic and cultural contexts of Metro Manila's working-class households, revealing how these factors intensify the challenges faced by working mothers. It was also derived from the study that the patriarchal structures are persistent and resilient, considering how they reasserted themselves as pressures eased during the post-pandemic. Men's uptake of care work rose during the pandemic and, however, failed to remain a reality when conditions went back to normality. On the other hand, the "dual burden" experienced by working mothers could also be a topic to elaborate further as it underscores the implications of undervalued domestic labor. Hence, the study linked the lack of remuneration for care work back to the structural factors that hinder women's economic rights and also varied the degree to which care work is valued by class, color, or cultural standards that the concept of intersectionality implicates.

Overall, the experiences of the participants in this study highlight the need for more robust support systems, both at the workplace and in broader societal structures, to address the gendered impacts of caregiving responsibilities. By acknowledging the invaluable contributions of care work to household survival and well-being, both policymakers and society can strive for a more equitable division of labor and the empowerment of working mothers. Encouraging supportive work environments and community-based initiatives can help alleviate some of the burdens on working mothers, enabling them to thrive both

personally and economically. Ultimately, achieving a fair balance between work and personal lives requires collective efforts to challenge deeply ingrained gender norms and create supportive, inclusive environments for all.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1. Themes and Codes

**Table 1. Participants Perception of Work at Home, Job, and Care Work**

Themes	Codes
Work at home as the epitome of sacrifices, struggles, and boundless labor	Parental sacrifice and struggles Gender and societal pressures Motherhood and domestic work Financial challenges Balance and family dynamics Routine and attention
Job as a means of respite, autonomy, and empowerment	Empowerment and autonomy Work and respite Value and motivation in work
Overlap of personal and work responsibilities	Family and priorities Multitasking and self-reliance Gender dynamics Emotional labor Division of labor Social engagement Financial strain Adaptation Challenges in work environment Work-life balance and conflict Fortitude
Care work as holistic labor	Caregiving Prioritizing family Household responsibilities Routine and Self-care Emotional Aspects and Well-being Role Expectations Responsibility Gender dynamics inside a household
Multitasking at the core of motherhood	Impact on well-being and stress

<p>Adapting to the evolving family dynamics</p>	<p>Need for support and structure                  Adaptation and teaching                  Multitasking and time management                  Role and circumstances</p>
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**Table 2. Participants' Experiences of Care Work Responsibilities**

Themes	Codes
<p>Journeying through the pandemic and transitioning to the new normal</p>	<p>Financial strain brought about by the pandemic                  Benefits of remote work                  Adaptation and sacrifice                  Resilience and determination                  Perception of restrictions                  Vaccine hesitancy                  Community bonding                  Economic inequality                  Resilience amidst hardship                  Health and safety measures</p>
<p>Challenges in navigating care work responsibilities</p>	<p>Resilience and coping responsibilities                  Sacrifice                  Financial strain                  Adaptation to new circumstances                  Importance of support systems                  Fear and anxiety                  Impact of health on family dynamics</p>

**Table 3. Navigating the Balance between Work Responsibilities and Care Work at Home**

Themes	Codes
Balancing Work Responsibilities and Household Care Work	Motherhood Family responsibilities Adaptation Flexibility Exhaustion Time management Support Persistence
Support from Family, Spouse, and Friends in Coping	Leisure Use of social media Family bonding Entertainment Personal care and rest Work schedule Time management Frustration Prioritization Challenges in relationships
Support systems available to participants in navigating work and household responsibilities	Delegating tasks to nearby people Emotional support Support from spouse Support from siblings Supportive and safe environment Self-reliance at home Advice from friends

<p>Suggested interventions by working mothers for working mothers</p>	<p>Positive use of social interaction                  Communication                  Financial assistance                  Government privileges                  Livelihood programs for additional income                  Desire for reduced cost of goods                  Streamlined government processes                  Education program                  Recognition of mother's household responsibilities                  Debt support                  Sustainable support                  Issues with government assistance programs                  Salary increase                  Scholarship                  Healthcare                  Financial strain of tertiary education                  Call for government accountability                  Benefits and discounts</p>
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**Table 4. Division of Care Work Responsibilities**

Themes	Codes
<p>Rationale for household care work division</p>	<p>Shared responsibilities                  Decision making                  Support and assistance                  Prioritization                  Inherited behaviors and responsibilities                  Household duties                  Division of Labor                  Consideration                  Acceptance</p>

<p>Role of men in domestic settings</p>	<p>Commitment and support Gender dynamics and perceptions Adaptability Practicality Household management Income disparity Parental roles Shared responsibilities in marriage</p>
<p>Societal perceptions and expectations placed on women in a household</p>	<p>Expectations in household maintenance Gender roles and stereotypes Importance of household skills and independence Supportive partner Work-life balance and juggling obligations</p>