



CONVIVIALITY, FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS AND GENDER RELATIONS IN BUENOS AIRES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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JUAN IGNACIO PIOVANI*

LUCAS ALZUGARAY**

MARÍA LAURA PEIRÓ***

JULIANA SANTA MARÍA****

ABSTRACT

This article presents results for the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires, Argentina, from a survey on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on households, in relation to the distribution of domestic work and the use of spaces for teleworking. The study shows the persistence of gender inequalities in the distribution of domestic and care tasks, which even intensified during the pandemic, increasing the burden on women.

KEYWORDS: *Conviviality; inequality; gender; pandemic; Buenos Aires*

Convivialidade, arranjos familiares e relações de gênero em Buenos Aires durante a pandemia de Covid-19

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta resultados para a Região Metropolitana de Buenos Aires, Argentina, de uma pesquisa sobre os efeitos da pandemia de Covid-19 nas famílias, em relação à distribuição do trabalho doméstico e à utilização de espaços para teletrabalho. O estudo mostra a persistência das desigualdades de gênero na distribuição das tarefas domésticas e de cuidado, que inclusive se intensificaram durante a pandemia, aumentando a carga sobre as mulheres.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Convivialidade; desigualdade; gênero; pandemia; Buenos Aires*

[*] Universidade Nacional de La Plata, UNLP, La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina. E-mail: juan.piovani@presi.unlp.edu.ar

[**] Universidade Nacional de La Plata, UNLP, La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina. E-mail: lukialzu@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

This article presents results for the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA), Argentina, from a cross-national survey on the social consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, carried out in Argentina, Brazil, Germany and Mexico within the framework of a Mecila (Maria Sibylla Merian Center Conviviality Inequality in Latin America) research project.¹

The analysis focuses on the household and the housing, understood as spaces of conviviality. The objective was to investigate how the pandemic and the containment measures adopted by the government affected conviviality in terms of family arrangements and gender relations regarding the distribution of domestic and care tasks. Furthermore, along these same lines, we explored the fact that the family home became the locus of activities that typically take place in other spaces, namely: education and extra-domestic paid work. We analyzed who was responsible for school support at home and the distribution of spaces and equipment for remote working.

On the other hand, taking into account the inseparable link between conviviality and inequality (Mecila, 2017; Costa, 2019), and the fact that inequality is a structuring element of the patterns of co-existence (Nobre; Costa, 2019), we were interested in accounting for inequalities in the distribution of household tasks, care and school support within homes — with a main focus on gender — and between households, considering in this case not only gender but also social class, the educational level of the main breadwinner (MB) and the district of residence.

Following Mecila (2017), we understand conviviality as the usual interactions that take place in contexts of inequality and diversity, from a perspective that allows integrating the microlevel of everyday human relations with structural inequalities. This approach is based on the analysis of three dimensions: 1) structures, which among other issues refer to the physical spaces in which social interactions occur (in our case, private homes); 2) negotiations, which have to do with the dispute processes, bargaining and regulation in various spheres, and that we only observe in their visible consequences — the distribution of tasks within the home — as a result of arrangements based on such negotiations; and 3) representations, that is, the ways in which individuals and social groups represent conviviality in their respective social spaces. This question, widely researched in relation to the object of this article, allows us to understand historically situated family arrangements in the light of predominant social representations about the family and “gender roles”, among others.

In an analytical sense, conviviality is defined as a situational category that refers to the interactional element of everyday social relations, which includes not only those of a cooperative type, but also those characterized by conflict, competition and even violence (Nobre; Costa, 2019). In this context, the home, as a unit of analysis, is a specific convivial configuration, a primary space of conviviality marked by its cohesive character, but in which inequalities are also lived and negotiated daily (Rojas et al., 2024; Potthast, 2021).

[***] Universidade Nacional de La Plata, UNLP, La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina. E-mail: mlauropeiro@gmail.com

[****] Universidade Nacional de La Plata, UNLP, La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina. E-mail: jusantamaria@gmail.com

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THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Covid-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020. On March 3, the first coronavirus case had already been confirmed in Buenos Aires. A few days later, on March 12, the national government declared a health emergency, a measure that included the reallocation of resources for the organization of the healthcare network, the suspension of international flights as well as mandatory isolation for suspicious cases and close contacts. As of March 20, through Decree n. 297/20, Social, Preventive and Mandatory Isolation (ASPO) came into force, which fundamentally ordered the permanence of the population in their usual residences, suspending all face-to-face activities except those considered essential (healthcare; production and trade of food, medicines and health supplies; charity canteens; waste collection, etc.).

This measure, with some modifications in relation to the productive, recreational and educational activities depending on the evolution of cases in different areas of the country, was successively extended until the last months of 2020. In AMBA, on 9 November 2020, the transition from ASPO to Social, Preventive and Mandatory Distancing (DISPO) was established. This provision implied the gradual return to in-person activities in the productive, administrative, educational and recreational spheres, although with special conditions of distancing, limited capacity to occupy enclosed spaces and other preventive measures.

With regard to education and, more specifically, classes in primary and secondary schools, the total suspension of in-person attendance was maintained in AMBA until the end of 2020, when in some districts the “bubble modality” was put into practice, with protocols for partial attendance, distancing, personal care recommendations and reinforcement of hygiene and ventilation of spaces. The return to full presence was achieved in September 2021.

The early provision of ASPO and its initial high level of compliance by the population, the subsequent transition to DISPO and the pace of the arrival of vaccines implied that the evolution of Covid-19 infections had a particular behavior, delaying and reducing the expected impact of the first wave, between early August and late November 2020, with a peak of 18,000 daily cases in October. Although the second wave — between mid-March and the end of July 2021 — was longer and more intense (with a peak of 40,000 daily cases in May), it had a lower fatality rate due to the implementation of the vaccination plan. The third wave was more limited in time, but the most important in number of cases: it extended between the end of December 2021 and the beginning of March 2022 and reached a

peak of 167,000 daily cases in January. However, its impact on the proportion of hospitalizations and deaths decreased substantially compared to previous waves, due to the high proportion of the population vaccinated with two doses.

The vaccination scheme began in December 2020, first reaching health personnel, and then expanding to strategic personnel, the elderly and people with comorbidities. In May 2021, it was added to the population between 18 and 59 years old, prioritizing those with risk factors and in August it was added to the population aged 12-17 years old. In the last months of 2021 booster doses began to be applied and, as of February 2022, pediatric vaccination (for children under 12 years of age) began. By April 2023, at the national level, Argentina had approximately 90% of the population with an initiated vaccination schedule (1, 2 or 3 doses) and more than 80% with a 3-dose scheme (Ministerio de Salud, 2023).

The epidemiological effectiveness of isolation has been widely demonstrated. But its serious economic, psychological and social consequences have also been documented (Patel et al., 2020). In Argentina, the first national report on the social impact of ASPO (Kessler et al., 2020), published at the end of March 2020, warned about the problems with its compliance, recorded some critical social and economic matters, and pointed out the main issues that demanded priority state intervention. In this context, prevention measures were accompanied by a variety of policies aimed at cushioning the economic effects of the suspension of activities. They can be classified into three large categories (Salvia; Poy, 2020): 1) social protection measures — reinforcements in food policy, social plans and the Universal Child Allowance (AUH); implementation of the Emergency Family Income (IFE); payment of bonuses to retirees, pensioners and AUH holders; 2) measures aimed at protecting employment and production — remote work in the public and private sectors; credits for payment of salaries, extensions of debt maturities; financing of micro, small and medium-sized businesses; prohibition of dismissals; implementation of the Emergency Assistance Program for Labor and Production (ATP); and 3) other socioeconomic measures — temporary suspension of the shut-off of public services due to non-payment; extraordinary payments to health personnel and security forces; rent freeze and banning of evictions; mortgage payments freeze and foreclosures suspension, etc.

When the fieldwork for this survey was carried out, between June and July 2021, Argentina was in a waning phase of the second wave of infections: at the beginning of June, approximately 25,000 cases and 600 deaths were recorded daily, and by the end of July these numbers dropped, respectively, to around 12,000 and 175 (Mathieu

et al, 2024a). On the other hand, by July 1, 40% of the population had received at least one dose of the vaccine (Mathieu et al, 2024b). The most restrictive measures to contain the pandemic were no longer in force, and daily life was slowly returning to pre-pandemic rhythms. DISPO was still in force and full school attendance would only be achieved a few months later, but the majority of children were already attending school, at least partially or in accordance with the bubble modality.

Beyond these “objective” situational data and in order to contextualize the survey results, it is also important to take into account the “social mood” and the state of public opinion. In this regard, it should be noted that the containment measures enjoyed high levels of approval, although these gradually declined over time. According to a UNICEF study from July 2020, 87% of the population throughout the country believed that containment measures would prevent the spread of Covid (UNICEF, 2020). Our study shows that, a year later — June/July 2021 —, more than 70% of AMBA residents agreed with the idea that ASPO was a necessary measure, and less than 20% thought that government policies had restricted individual freedom. But the opinions were not so overwhelmingly favorable in other dimensions. For example, the proportion of people who demanded school attendance (more than 40%) was higher than those who consider it necessary to extend the restrictions. There was also around 50% of respondents who manifested concern about the deterioration of the economy as a result both of the pandemic and the government measures to contain it.

STUDIES ON CARE, SCHOOL SUPPORT AND REMOTE WORK BEFORE AND DURING THE PANDEMIC

Latin American social sciences have a long tradition in the study of unpaid domestic work and care, fundamentally linked to research on gender and class inequalities. Beyond conceptual differences or disciplinary approaches, it is generally understood that care is a central component for the reproduction of life and the well-being of the population, since all people require care — with different intensities and modalities — throughout their life cycle (Faur; Pereyra, 2018; Batthyány, 2021; Rodríguez Enríquez, 2015; Faur; Jelin, 2013; Llanes Díaz; Pacheco Gómez Muñoz, 2021). In a broad sense, care includes tasks related to the direct provision of physical and emotional well-being for other people, to the establishment of the necessary preconditions for this to be carried out — for example: cleaning, purchasing and preparing food, etc. — and to the management and organization of the various activities involved.²

[2] In general, recent literature includes household chores within the concept of care, understanding it globally. Although we agree with this broad definition of care, for analytical purposes and in order to distinguish the weight of the different activities, we have chosen to disaggregate household chores (cleaning and maintenance of the home, preparing meals, washing, etc.) from those of care in the strict sense (feeding, bathing, preparing for bed, playing, supporting learning, etc.), as also done by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC). On the other hand, within the latter, we differentiate, in turn, school accompaniment due to the dimension it acquired during the health emergency.

Because they are carried out daily and mainly in the domestic sphere, care tasks remained invisible for a long time, considered a “natural” part of the division of labor by gender and strongly associated with the female condition. As Eleonor Faur and Francisca Pereyra (2018) argue, in line with the representational dimension of conviviality to which we have referred above, the assignment of care responsibilities reflects the cultural patterns of a society, materialized through the definition of rights and responsibilities attributed to men and women by welfare regimes. These patterns are reproduced through a social organization of care that is far from equitable, with inequalities between genders, and also between social classes (Folbre; Bittman, 2004; Vega; Gutiérrez, 2014; Thelen, 2015; Faur; Pereyra, 2018; Batthyány, 2020).

Studies from the social sciences and, fundamentally, in feminist economics, have contributed to making visible that care tasks produce or contribute to producing economic value. Likewise, they have shown that the way in which care is organized has negative implications for the economic life of women (Rodríguez Enríquez, 2015): empirical data show significant inequality between men and women — and between women themselves according to their possibilities of accessing public or paid care services. In Argentina, public statistics and studies on time use show that the participation of women in different forms of unpaid work is always greater than that of men. Before the pandemic, the ENES-PISAC 2014-2015 survey revealed the clear preponderance of adult women’s participation in domestic and care tasks, along with an unequal investment of time: women spent almost twice as much time that men in these activities (Faur; Pereyra, 2018). More recently, in the context of the pandemic/post-pandemic transition, the first National Time Use Survey (ENUT) showed (INDEC, 2022) that the participation of women exceeded that of men in both domestic work (90% compared to 69.1%) and in caring for household members (31.4% compared to 20.3%). On the other hand, the time commitment of women greatly exceeded that of men: 4 hours and 6 minutes average daily hours compared to 2 hours and 38 minutes in domestic work, and 6:07 average daily hours compared to 3 hours and 30 minutes in care tasks (INDEC, 2022).

In recent decades, specialized literature has called “crisis of care” (Pérez Orozco, 2006; Esquivel, 2011; Faur; Jelin, 2013) the structural tension that occurs in capitalist societies between the amount of time necessary to care for human life on a daily basis and the increasing difficulty in being able to count on that time. In the context of the pandemic, several studies took up this idea, but moving it from the structural level to the household level: social isolation policies, by disrupting the daily dynamics of work and schooling and, simultaneously, paralyzing

support networks and services, produced an unforeseen demand for care, which in households was distributed unequally between men and women, generating tensions in previous family arrangements (Bidas-ecca et al., 2020; Castilla et al., 2020; Arza, 2020; DNEIyG; UNICEF, 2021; Actis Di Pasquale et al., 2021; Torricella; Toyos, 2022; Boniolo; Estévez Leston, 2022).

In addition, the social isolation measures, which included the suspension of face-to-face school activities during 2020 and much of 2021, led to a very significant increase in tasks related to school support for children and adolescents. Pedagogical continuity involved the development of different teaching strategies and resources. Although digital resources and communication mediated by technology were protagonists in such pandemic scenario, the delivery of booklets and printed photocopies was also an strategy, considering different social situations. In this sense, the pandemic revealed — or made visible — the pre-existing historical inequalities of the educational system (Bocchio, 2020).

Domestic spaces had to be adapted based on the restrictions and the new demands for pedagogical continuity, which mainly affected women and the most vulnerable social sectors (López; Hermida, 2022). Indeed, in the specialized literature and in different surveys carried out in Argentina, women mothers appear as the main educational support of children and adolescents and as the mediators of communication with the school, assuming the greatest burden (Gómez; Laino, 2020; Lloyd, 2022; Ortale; Santos, 2020).

Finally, another dimension in which social isolation measures had a strong impact on the organizational dynamics of households was that of extra-domestic paid work. In this regard, we witnessed the impact of the pandemic in at least two central aspects: the abrupt fall in economic activity and the expansion of remote work, carried out from home, through the use of communication and information technologies.

Various studies indicate that, in economic terms, the pandemic involved the conjugation of a double crisis in Argentina: that of the pre-pandemic and that of the pandemic (Benza; Dalle; Maceira, 2022; Dalle; Actis Di Pasquale, 2021; Martín; Giampaolletti; D'Angelo, 2022). If the first is linked to economic stagnation and the deterioration of the labor market, the second — which was based on the previous crisis — is related to the effects of the mobility restriction measures, which generated an unprecedented reduction in economic activity, with a much more marked impact among unregistered workers.³

Due to their high participation in unregistered employment — explained by their incorporation into the labor market in sectors such as domestic service, commerce, hospitality —, women constituted

[3] Unregistered, or informal, employment refers to paid work that is carried out in precarious conditions, without the proper registration that the employer must keep in accordance with the law and without the consequent registration in the National Social Security Administration (ANSES). Unregistered workers do not enjoy any or some of the benefits established by law: health insurance, family allowances, retirement contributions, coverage for work accidents, unemployment insurance, etc.

one of the most affected groups in terms of job and income loss during the pandemic (DNEIyG; UNICEF, 2021; Maceira, 2021; Pol; Paz; Ledda, 2021). On the other hand, registered employees were those who had greater job stability. In this group, the main effect of the pandemic was the need to carry out the activity through teleworking, or through a mixed modality (Benza; Dalle; Maceira, 2022).

Before the pandemic, teleworking in Argentina was a limited phenomenon. In 2018 it reached only 12% of employees and, of them, half actually worked under a mixed modality. Furthermore, these experiences were limited to people with a high educational level or involved in highly qualified activities (Ottaviano, 2020). According to Paula Boniolo and Bárbara Estévez Leston (2022), based on the results of the PISAC-COVID survey, almost 22% of the Argentine employed population maintained their job during the pandemic through teleworking or mixed modalities. They point out that most of the transitions to remote work occurred in the stage of greatest restriction (ASPO) and that teleworking began to decline as the vaccination plan advanced and further economic activities were permitted. It is also notable that remote work was more common among middle-aged adults — 30 to 49 years old — and among people with a higher educational level.

According to some estimates, in Argentina 29% of workers could perform their tasks remotely using communication technologies, especially in sectors such as education, public administration and financial intermediation (Albrieu; Allerand; De la Vega, 2021). These sectors are characterized by a high proportion of female employment, so it is possible to see two different effects of the pandemic on working women: on the one hand, for informal workers, a greater retraction towards inactivity; on the other hand, for formal employees, a higher incidence of teleworking, due to their predominant participation in economic activities convertible to this modality. Regarding this last point, and in relation to the distribution of domestic and care tasks, it is worth asking, as Juan Ottaviano (2020) does, if this bias did not cause a deepening of gender asymmetries, in the sense that women who teleworked, in turn, faced a greater overload of tasks.

METHODS

In this research, the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA) included the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA), the 24 districts of Greater Buenos Aires (GBA) and the city of La Plata (LP). The survey was applied to 2,501 people aged 18 years or older, who were interviewed by telephone — through landlines and mobile phones — with the support of Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)

technology, between June and July 2021. The selected individuals responded about themselves and about the minors in the home. In addition, they provided information about housing, the composition of the household and the main breadwinner (MB) in case they did not perform that function.

Sampling was based on a proportional stratified probabilistic design. To define the strata, five parameters were used: 1) total population and households per district; 2) household size; 3) distribution by sex; 4) distribution by age groups; 5) educational level. A percentage of individuals/households from each district equivalent to their weight in the total population of the agglomerate was randomly selected (see Table 1), as well as percentages that reflected the relative weight of the different household sizes (see Table 1), of men and women (see Table 2), of people from different age groups (see Table 2) and educational levels.

The questionnaire was modular and included sections about: sociodemographic profile (of the respondent and the MB); household composition; use of digital media and access to information; politi-

TABLE I
Total number of households by size in the population and in the sample

HOUSEHOLDS						
	POPULATION	1	2	3	4	5 ^o +
CABA	1,150,134	343,967	349,949	203,633	153,501	99,084
GBA	2,934,373	434,453	637,588	608,851	579,869	673,612
LA PLATA	221,313	48,801	58,118	42,546	37,357	34,491
TOTAL	4,305,820					

	SAMPLE	1	2	3	4	5 ^o +
CABA	637	190	194	113	85	55
GBA	1,743	258	379	362	344	400
LA PLATA	122	27	32	23	21	19
TOTAL	2,502					

Table designed by the authors. Source: Argentina's 2010 National Census and the Mecila Covid-19 Survey.

TABLE 2
Total number of individuals in the population and in the sample, by gender and age

		MEN			WOMEN		
	POPULATION	18-29	30-49	50+	18-29	30-49	50+
CABA	2,316,988	264,812	388,359	386,273	277,967	427,521	572,056
GBA	7,420,728	1,051,905	1,370,487	1,117,513	1,055,421	1,430,863	1,394,539
LA PLATA	480,222	68,896	86,047	71,005	71,005	89,086	94,183
TOTAL	10,217,938						

		MEN			WOMEN		
	SAMPLE	18-29	30-49	50+	18-29	30-49	50+
CABA	636	73	107	106	76	117	157
GBA	1,745	247	322	263	248	337	328
LA PLATA	123	18	22	18	18	23	24
TOTAL	2,504						

Table designed by the authors. Source: Argentina's 2010 National Census and Mecila Covid-19 Survey.

cal participation; opinions on government measures in relation to the pandemic; occurrence of disease and health services; support networks; state provisions; perception of government performance; impacts of the pandemic on consumption and household finances; social relationships, recreation and emotional well-being; household and care tasks; schooling, school support and pedagogical continuity; occupational status (of the respondent and the MB); housing; personal and total household income.

FINDINGS

First we investigated the domestic and care tasks that entailed greater work overload for the members of the households during the validity of the mandatory social isolation measures (ASPO) ordered by the National government during the first months of the pandemic.

As seen in Figure 1, all the tasks surveyed implied work overload

for at least some of the respondents. Nearly 50% of them stated that, in their homes, the burden of routine tasks such as cleaning and washing increased. Product sanitization, a not-so-common but widely recommended practice in the initial phases of the pandemic, ranks second in terms of the percentage of people who considered it an overload (more than 30%). The preparation of meals, the completion of paperwork, school support and childcare continue in order.

These percentages correspond to the total sample. But among respondents living in homes with young children, there is a sharp increase in the proportion reporting a burden of care and school support. For example, among respondents from households with children under 5 years old, 32.7% highlighted overload in care and 32.5% did the same with respect to school accompaniment. And among respondents from households with children up to 11 years old, 25.5% mentioned care overload and 38.9% reported an increase in school support.

When considering social class, defined based on the conceptual classification scheme of occupational categories developed by Robert Erikson, John Goldthorpe and Lucienne Portocarrero (1979), it is observed that an equivalent proportion of respondents from all classes highlighted the increased burden of cleaning and washing (approximately 50%). But, in comparative terms, more respondents from the upper-middle class pointed to overload in food preparation (35.6%, compared to 28.8% in the lower class); while in the middle class and, especially in the lower class, the percentage who highlighted the strong incidence of childcare and school support increases significantly (from 3.2% in the upper-middle class to 10% in the lower

FIGURE I
Overload of household chores, by type of task

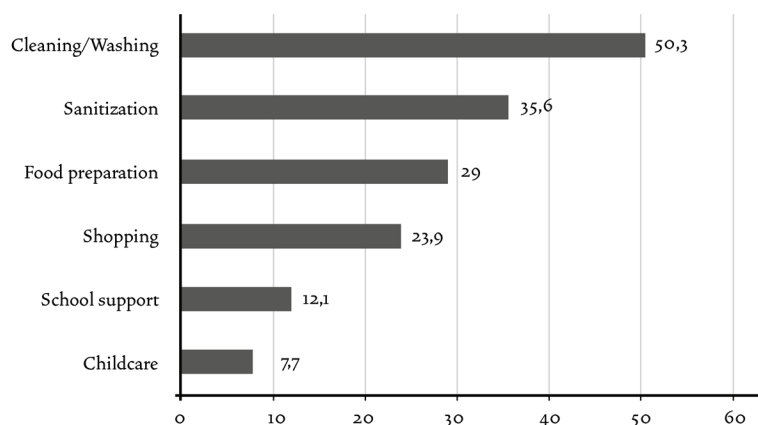


Chart designed by the authors. Source: Mecila Covid-19 Survey.

class in the case of childcare, and from 8.9% in the upper-middle class to 12.1% among those in the middle and lower classes in the case of school support). Moreover, a higher percentage of those with university degrees declared cleaning overload, while no important differences were observed in the percentages of those who stated an increase in the weight of care and school accompaniment, although the latter is mentioned a little more in households with MBs with low educational attainment.

How was this overload of tasks assumed? For 76% of the respondents, the distribution followed the same patterns prior to the pandemic; for 21% the overload was resolved more equitably among household members; and for 2.5% it was resolved less equitably. A higher percentage within the respondents with university education, from higher social classes, who live in households without children or with older children, who have both a MB and a spouse, and/or who reside in more integrated urban areas⁴ declared a more equitable distribution of chores during the pandemic. On the contrary, the idea of a fairer distribution of tasks was less prevalent among respondents who make up households with MBs with lower educational levels, who have a female MB without a spouse and/or who have a greater number of small children.

Excluding single-person households and those who declared a more equitable distribution of tasks, it is observed that for those who followed the same patterns prior to the pandemic and for those who registered even less equitable distributions of chores, in almost 90% of the cases it was the adult woman who assumed the greatest burden of all domestic and care tasks. On the other hand, as seen in Table 3, in households with a MB and a spouse, women took responsibility for most of the domestic work, even when they were the MB.

[4] In a context of residential segregation, we define the most integrated areas of the urban agglomerate as those neighborhoods with the highest quality of housing and the best provision of public and private services: transportation, parks, shopping malls, recreational areas, cultural and sports infrastructures, restaurants, medical facilities, etc.

TABLE 3
Household member who took the most responsibility for household chores, by household type

		Type of household according to MB			
		Male MB + spouse	Female MB + spouse	Male MB without spouse	Female MB without spouse
Member who does more housework	Man	9,7%	12,2%	54,9%	2,2%
	Woman	90,3%	87,8%	45,1%	97,8%
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%

Table designed by the authors. Source: Mecila Covid-19 Survey.

In addition, in households without the presence of a spouse, there is a strong contrast between male MBs (who took charge of the majority of domestic chores in 54.9% of the cases) and female MBs (who did so in 97.8% of the cases).

Although men are a minority in all social categories, the percentage of men who assume more of the burden of household tasks — compared to the average involvement of men — is higher among those belonging to higher social classes, with higher levels of education and living in more integrated areas within the agglomerate.

If we focus specifically on childcare, 60% of the respondents stated that during ASPO the mother was mainly in charge. Only 3.4% declared that the father took that responsibility at that time, while 22.1% said that mother and father took care of it jointly, and 14.5% indicated that another person assumed that task (older siblings, grandmothers, hired caregivers, etc.). But it is also worth noting the significant differences between people and households of different profiles. In the upper-middle class, the percentage of women who were the sole caregivers drops to 29.6%, while shared responsibility with the father increases to 43%. In lower class homes, the percentage of mothers who served as sole or main caregivers rises to 63%, and shared responsibility with fathers drops to 17.4%. Differences were also observed according to the educational level of the mothers: among those with university studies, 53% declared that they were the exclusive or main provider of care, compared to 63% of those who had elementary education. And the shared responsibility with fathers reached 28% among university graduates and 21% among those who only completed the primary level.

In the Introduction, we mentioned the fact that, during the first phases of the pandemic, homes with school-age children and adolescents became virtual school classrooms. Therefore, the accompaniment by adults, particularly parents, acquired unprecedented characteristics, both in terms of intensity and frequency, and in the set of tasks involved. Figure 2 shows that in 63.9% of the homes the mother was in charge of school support, a percentage even higher than that declared in relation to child care. Fathers were in charge only in 5.4% of the cases, while in 13.5% of the households this task was carried out both by fathers and mothers, and in the remaining 17.3% by other people, mainly older siblings and/or grandparents.

As with other issues previously addressed, differences between households were also recorded in this case. Mothers were mainly or exclusively responsible in 41% of upper-middle class homes and in 64% of those of lower-class, while fathers and mothers were equally responsible in 25% of the upper-middle class homes and 11% of lower-class households.

FIGURE 2
Person in charge of school support

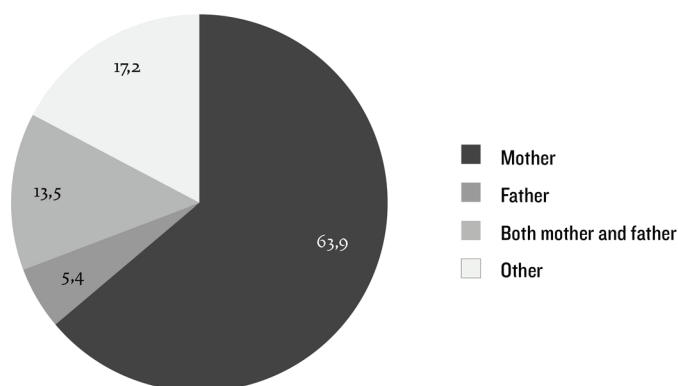


Chart designed by the authors. Source: Mecila Covid-19 Survey.

It was also observed that, as the educational level of the mother increases, the percentage of cases in which she deals exclusively with this task decreases, and the proportion of shared responsibility with the father increases. Among women with university studies, 57% were in charge of school accompaniment, compared to 68% of those with primary education. In addition, among the former, 19% shared the task with their male partner, compared to 12% of the latter. The shared task between mother and father reached the highest level among households of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (24% of the total) and the lowest among those living in the most impoverished peripheries and with the poorest quality of public services, including education (7%). On the other hand, the proportion of mothers who served as the sole or main person responsible for school support was higher in homes without access to technological devices (PC, laptops, etc.), which played a fundamental role in pedagogical continuity during the pandemic.

These data are not the result of direct observations of what “really happens” in homes, but rather of the responses of those surveyed. In this sense, it may be enlightening to contrast the responses given by adults who occupy different positions in the home. As seen in Table 4, regardless of their “role” (whether MB or spouse), both men and women tend to highlight their own responsibility to a greater extent. Thus, 9.8% of male MBs declared that they have taken care of school support, while only 2% of female spouses indicated that the father (MB) was the main responsible for this task. The contrast is even more extreme in the case of male spouses and female MBs: while the

TABLE 4
Parent who took care of school support

Who was in charge of school support?	MALE MB	FEMALE SPOUSE	MALE SPOUSE	FEMALE MB
FATHER	9,8%	2%	17,8%	2,2%
MOTHER	56,4%	73%	36%	78,1%
BOTH	22,3%	9%	20%	7,1%

Table designed by the authors. Source: Mecila Covid-19 Survey.

[5] It should be noted that the data presented in this paragraph do not refer to adult men and women who form marital unit, in which they play different "roles" (MB or spouse), but are derived from the independent responses from men and women who occupy these roles in their respective households.

proportion of female MBs who acknowledge the primary role of their male partners is almost the same as that of female spouses when talking about the male MB of their homes (2.2%), the percentage of male spouses who report having taken care of school support is almost double that of male MBs (17.8%). Regarding women, 73% of the spouses and 78.1% of the MBs declare being the main provider of school accompaniment. But this main role is recognized by only 56.4% of male MBs and 36% of male spouses. The perception that school support is a shared task is much more prevalent among men, regardless of their role as MBs or spouses in their homes. In both cases it is around 20%, compared to less than 10% among women.⁵

Finally, we address the other consequence of ASPO mentioned in the Introduction: housing as a place for carrying out extra-domestic paid work in unprecedented proportions. Before the pandemic, a fraction of the employed population (approximately 5%) was already working from home, and this was somewhat more widespread among women. But starting with ASPO, nearly an additional 20% of employed women and just under 15% of men joined those who worked exclusively from home, and another 20% of women and 15% of men did so alternating between home and the usual place of work. Only a percentage slightly less than 40% of men and 34% of women worked all the time outside the home, even during the mobility restrictions.

As seen in Figure 3, although the proportion of women who were already teleworking before the pandemic was higher, in the context of ASPO a significantly higher percentage of men (close to 65% of those who worked from home) had spaces for exclusive use (compared to just over 50% of women). In contrast, more women had to work in shared spaces within the home (close to 40%, compared to less than 30% of men).

FIGURE 3

Availability of spaces for teleworking within the home and exclusive or shared use by men and women

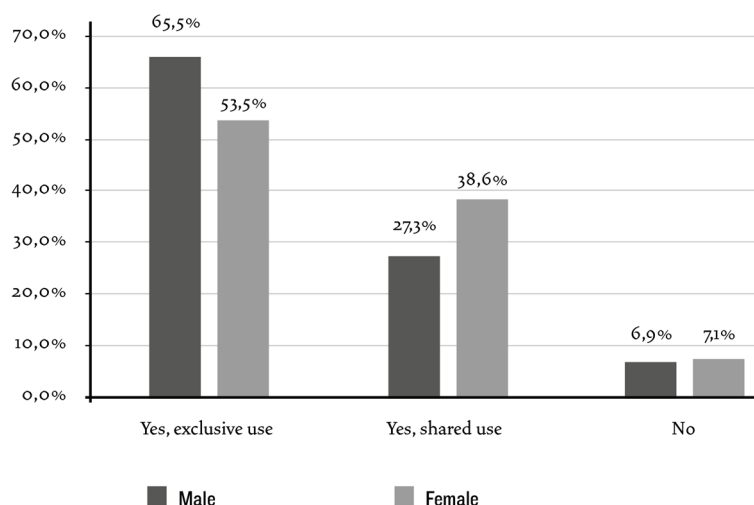


Chart designed by the authors. Source: Mecila Covid-19 Survey.

Although this does not specifically refer to family arrangements, it is worth mentioning, in line with the analysis of gender inequalities, that the proportion of men who received the necessary equipment for teleworking from employers almost doubled that of women (20% and 11% respectively).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings regarding the overload of domestic and care tasks are consistent with those of other studies carried out at different times of the pandemic and in various areas within Argentina and the region. Although it is possible to find nuances in the types of tasks that represented the greatest burden, both in quantitative research (UNICEF, 2020; Ortale; Santos, 2020; Bidasca et al., 2020; Arza, 2020; UNICEF, 2021; DNELYG; UNICEF, 2021; Actis Di Pasquale et al., 2021; Llanes Díaz; Pacheco Gómez Muñoz, 2021; Boniolo; Estévez Leston, 2022) and in qualitative ones (Aliano et.al., 2022; Torricella; Toyos, 2022), cleaning, care and school support are those that required the most attention, and it was women-mothers who performed them in a greater proportion or dedicated more time to them in their homes.

At least in part, the high proportion of respondents who highlighted the overload of cleaning and food preparation is related to the significant presence of single-person households and two adults

without children (or without dependent children), especially in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, whose members, before the pandemic, worked outside the home. Both due their occupations and to the travel times within the agglomerate, these people did not usually eat at home. It also cannot be ignored that a significant portion of families, especially those with higher incomes, hired domestic service to clean the house and, in some cases, also prepare food. The impossibility of keeping these contracts during ASPO implied, for these households, an overload of these previously outsourced tasks.

The structure of households in the agglomerate also helps to explain why there is a higher percentage of respondents from lower class households who declared an overload of care and school accompaniment. In this regard, it should be taken into account that low-income households have, on average, a larger size and a greater number of children and adolescents. But when we control for the effect that single-person households and childless couples have on the upper-middle classes, it is observed that, as other studies show (López; Hermida, 2022), individuals in this class reported having had even more overload of school accompaniment than those in the lower classes. Among other factors, this may be due to the forms that pedagogical continuity assumed during the pandemic, which also highlighted differences between social classes, with greater frequency and weight of synchronous activities and complementary training tasks among children from homes with higher incomes, with greater access to technological devices and better connectivity, and who attended institutions with more resources to face the new teaching modalities.

In line with the results of this study, other research has also shown that complying with home schooling was one of the main difficulties experienced by households in the most restrictive phases of the pandemic, a situation that was exacerbated in the more impoverished sectors, especially due to the shortage of devices and limited or unstable access to the internet (Ortale; Santos, 2020; Bocchio, 2020; Tuñon; Sánchez, 2020; Prince Torres, 2020; López; Hermida, 2022). The concept of digital gap, taken up in several of these works, refers to inequalities in access and use of technology, which worsened during the restriction period (Lloyd, 2022; Cardozo et al., 2023; Ducoing Watty, 2020). In addition, some authors have highlighted the problem of insufficient information for the use of these devices, linked to the educational level of the parents (Urbano; Albuja, 2020; De la Cruz Flores, 2020).

In relation to family arrangements and conviviality within the household, Gabriela de la Cruz Flores (2020) points out that the situation of isolation has exacerbated a series of tensions, including that between the development of work activities by parents

and school tasks by children. Keeping up with school activities was practically impossible for adults who maintained a presence at the workplace, and it became an overload that generated high levels of stress as well as physical and emotional exhaustion for adults who worked from home. These situations were aggravated in households with informal jobs, in which there was also — in general terms — a reduction in income.

This question about family arrangements also leads us to consider which household member took responsibility for household tasks, care and school support during ASPO, and who assumed the greatest overload. In this regard, the results, in line with those of other studies (Ortale; Santos, 2020; Bidaseca et al., 2020; Arza, 2020; Actis Di Pasquale et al., 2021; Díaz; Pacheco, 2021; Boniolo; Estévez Leston, 2022), are conclusive: beyond nuances according to social class, the educational level or the area of residence — factors that tend to be relatively convergent — adult women and, in particular, mothers, assumed the greatest workload. Although 21% of the respondents have mentioned that the distribution of chores became more equitable among household members during the pandemic, this does not necessarily mean parity. On the other hand, in the vast majority of households in which the share followed pre-pandemic patterns, or in which it became even less equitable, women took charge of most of the domestic tasks, especially the ones related to care. In more than 90% of all types of households, with the exception of those with male MBs without a spouse and with dependent children, there was an adult woman that assumed the greatest burden. And even in households with male MBs without a spouse, it was found that in more than 45% of cases there was an adult woman who was mainly responsible for domestic tasks. In spite of possible recent changes in gender stereotypes within families (Ospina Botero; Montoya Pavas, 2015), the evidence suggests that, when it comes to the distribution of household tasks, the idea that women are better able to care for children and take responsibilities within the home still prevails in the imaginaries of most men (García Osuna, 2018).

As already mentioned, the proportion of women who are exclusively — or predominantly — in charge of domestic and care tasks is lower among those who have completed university studies, belong to the upper-middle classes or live in more integrated urban areas with better housing conditions and public services. It is worth asking whether these differences respond to “real” situations or are affected by “social desirability”, that is, the propensity to respond to what is considered socially desirable or correct, under the assumption that the ideas regarding gender equality could be more prevalent among the urban middle classes. However, and although there is disagreement between

the responses of men and women in all social classes, women from upper-middle classes tend to recognize greater involvement from their male partners compared to those from lower classes.

The distribution of school accompaniment responsibilities followed the same traditional patterns of household tasks in general, but with an even higher rate of feminization. As a hypothesis, this higher rate of feminization could be related to a series of not mutually exclusive factors: 1) the social representation of the educational task — especially at kindergarten and elementary school — as eminently feminine, due to the many years of predominance of women teachers; 2) a possible greater flexibility of the extra-domestic work activities usually carried out by women; 3) the fact that unusual or unexpected tasks, which were not the subject of prior negotiations by household members, may have been resolved in accordance with society's traditional cultural patterns about gender (Faur; Pereyra, 2018); 4) in line with the aforementioned, the fact that women are usually the ones who take charge of emergency situations within the home (Esquivel et al., 2012). On the other hand, our research showed, like those of the ODSA-UCA (2020) or Julieta López and Mariano Hermida (2022), that this increased burden of school accompaniment was especially arduous, and with almost no involvement from men, in the case of poor women, with low educational levels, with less access to devices and connectivity, who live in peripheral urban areas and whose children attend schools with fewer resources.

Finally, regarding the teleworking during the pandemic, the results of our study are largely consistent with those of other researches carried out in Argentina. Social isolation measures produced a significant increase in teleworking, with greater intensity among women. These findings confirm what Ottaviano (2020) stated about gender bias — due to the weight of transitions to remote work in highly feminized activities such as education and administration — and the consequent risk of deepening gender asymmetries in terms of task overload within the household.

On the other hand, our study points out disadvantages of women who teleworked compared to men. Firstly, a negative gap of 15% in availability of spaces for home office. In addition, the proportion of women who received teleworking equipment from employers was almost 10% lower than that of men. As showed by Pablo Molina Derteano (2022), the presence of children and adolescents — in the context of interruption of face-to-face classes — and the lack of physical space at home were the two main difficulties identified by women as obstacles to remote work. In summary, following the analysis of gender inequalities, it was found that women teleworked to a greater extent and in worse conditions than men.

JUAN IGNACIO Piovani [<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8774-3258>] has a Phd in Methodology of Social Sciences from the University of Rome — La Sapienza, full professor of Research Methodology at the National University of La Plata (UNLP) and principal researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) at the Institute for Research in Humanities and Social Sciences (IDIHCS-UNLP/CONICET) and Mecila. Analyzed the data presented and wrote the article.

LUCAS ALZUGARAY [<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5311-1994>] has a degree in Sociology from the National University of La Plata (UNLP), head of practical work in General Sociology (UNLP) and associate professional of the Personnel Career of Research Support of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) at the Institute for Research in Humanities and Social Sciences (IDIHCS-UNLP/CONICET). Analyzed the data presented and carried out a critical review in the text editing stages.

MARÍA LAURA PEIRÓ [<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0819-2249>] has a degree in sociology from the National University of La Plata (UNLP), head of practical work in General Sociology (UNLP) and assistant professional of the Research Support Personnel Career of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) at the Research Institute in Humanities and Social Sciences (IDIHCS-UNLP/CONICET). Analyzed the data presented and carried out a critical review in the text editing stages.

JULIANA SANTA MARÍA [<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0733-6433>] has a degree in Sociology from the National University of La Plata (UNLP), assistant professor of Special Mathematics (UNLP) and associate professional of the Research Support Personnel Career of the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) at the Research Institute in Humanities and Social Sciences (IDIHCS-UNLP/CONICET). Analyzed the data presented and carried out a critical review in the text editing stages.

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