



## PAID WORK AND CARE WORK IN MEXICO CITY

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on social inequalities and conviviality

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### ABSTRACT

We analyzed the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on social inequalities and conviviality practices in paid work and care work areas in Mexico City. Through an original research and focus groups, we studied the differences between men and women and between women with different characteristics. Our main contribution is that the pandemic has deepened the gaps between groups of women to the detriment of disadvantaged ones who tend to have fewer material and symbolic resources to (re)negotiate convivial configurations inside and outside the home.

**KEYWORDS:** *Covid-19; Mexico City; paid work; unpaid care work*

### Trabalho remunerado e de cuidados na Cidade do México: os efeitos da pandemia da Covid-19 sobre as desigualdades sociais e a convivialidade

#### RESUMO

Analisamos os efeitos da pandemia de Covid-19 sobre as desigualdades sociais e as práticas de convivialidade nas áreas do trabalho remunerado e de cuidados na Cidade do México. Por meio de uma pesquisa original e de grupos focais, estudamos as diferenças entre homens e mulheres e entre mulheres com características diferentes. Nossa principal contribuição é que a pandemia aprofundou as lacunas entre grupos de mulheres em detrimento das menos favorecidas, que tendem a ter menos recursos materiais e simbólicos para negociar relações de sociabilidade dentro e fora de casa.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Covid-19; Cidade do México; trabalho remunerado; trabalho de cuidados não remunerado*

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### INTRODUCTION

Several studies have shown that the pandemic has deepened social inequalities and created new ones around the world and in Latin America (Chancel et al., 2022; Filgueira et al. 2020;

Fernández; Maurizio, 2022). In Mexico, the decline in employment levels resulting from the economic contraction caused by the global pandemic is associated with increases in income inequality. Furthermore, the loss of schooling and educational attainment caused by the pandemic may give rise to pressures on inequality in the future, as school-age youth enter the labor market (Acevedo et al. 2022).

There is a female face to this phenomenon, as women workers and caregivers have been particularly affected by job losses and increased caregiving responsibilities (OECD, 2021; Llanes Díaz; Pacheco Gómez Muñoz, 2021). Other studies have shown that the pandemic affected women differently depending on their characteristics. For example, occupations related to education, professional and other services, and higher levels of education favored greater wage and employment equity for women and men (Rodríguez Pérez; Castro Lugo, 2022), while women with less education had the lowest employment rates (Fernández; Maurizio, 2022). The pandemic revealed important differences among women according to their income: the poorest women lost their jobs and took on the burden of domestic work and care; middle-income women took on the burden of domestic and care work and continued to work online and receive their wages; and high-income women were able to delegate or transfer the burden of household work to hired workers (Flor et al, 2022). What factors help to explain why the pandemic has had a more pronounced impact on certain groups of women in the labor and family spheres? Is it all about the income differences?

This research is part of a new field of studies called *inequality-conviviality*. Conviviality is a term used by Ivan Illich that has spread into the language of the social sciences and humanities, becoming a polysemic word in the 21st century. Illich explains:

*I choose the term “conviviality” to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean the autonomous and creative relationship between people, and the relationship of people with their environment; and this in contrast to the conditioned response of people to the demands made by others and the environment created by human beings (Illich, 1973, p. 11, apud Costa, 2022, p. 34).*

The concept of conviviality-inequality is neither a normative concept nor a theory. It is an approach in development, whose goal is to understand the interactions and patterns of coexistence of actors and structures. Linking conviviality and inequality means looking at how the two concepts affect each other in everyday life. In other words, investigating inequality entails investigating conviviality, and vice versa.

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When the concepts of community and conviviality are considered together, it becomes evident that while community tends to deny differences due to its reliance on affinities with other individuals, conviviality is empathetic to difference and directs our attention to the everyday processes through which people coexist. In these encounters, individuals renegotiate their oppositions and disagreements (Heil, 2022, pp. 65-7). Thus, conviviality “refers to constellations constituted by bonds of solidarity and cooperation, but also by differences, conflict, violence, and domination” (Mecila, 2022, pp. 10-2).

The articulation of the notions of inequality and conviviality serves as the foundation for the multidisciplinary collaboration undertaken by the Mecila consortium. Both are relational and multidimensional categories that, when considered together, facilitate more nuanced analytical approaches and enhance their explanatory capacities. Inequalities may manifest in various forms, including material, power-related, access to natural resources, opportunities and rights, access to knowledge, and protection against risks such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

This study examines the dynamics of negotiations within families regarding the division of paid and care work during the pandemic in Mexico City. Of particular interest are the characteristics of women who, in the context of job losses and reduced incomes, have been able to successfully negotiate a fairer distribution of care work. The article is organized as follows. We start by introducing our theoretical lens, namely the nexus between conviviality and inequality, to illuminate the negotiations that occurred within and outside the home during the pandemic, and their consequences. Second, we examine the characteristics of the employment scenario prior to the pandemic, as well as the relationships between job losses and individuals’ age, gender, occupational status, and the size of their place of employment. Third, we analyze unpaid care work, including how families coped with school closures and who assumed responsibility for childcare. This study focuses on the impact of external and internal household decisions and negotiations on the distribution of tasks during the period of confinement.

We used a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach. Between July and August 2022, we conducted the “Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico” by telephone. The sample included 2,562 men and women over 18 residing in households of different socioeconomic levels. Of the total number of respondents, 42.5% lived in Mexico City and 57.5% in one of the municipalities of the State of Mexico. Additionally, four focus groups were conducted between November 2021 and June 2022, comprising women and men with diverse occupational, age, and caregiving responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

[1] The focus groups were conducted via Zoom with a duration of two hours each in two different periods. In the first period, we organized two groups with the participation of women with children: the first on November 29, 2021, with those who worked in the popular economy; the other on November 30, 2021, with those who worked as formal employees. In the second period, we conducted two additional focus groups: one on June 6, 2022, with young men who started university studies during the pandemic, and the other on June 9, 2021, with young men who worked in the popular economy.

## SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AND THE PANDEMIC IN MEXICO

Social inequalities and low upward social mobility characterize Mexico. People face severe obstacles to achieving higher levels of well-being, both because of persistent lags and new challenges to social justice. Legacies of inequality in education and health add to the differentiated patterns of opportunities to acquire decent jobs and income (Altamirano; Flamand, 2021). These asymmetries have been exacerbated by two relatively new phenomena that have deepened existing social gaps: return migration from the United States to Mexico and climate change (Masferrer, 2021; Sánchez, 2021). Citizen perceptions of inequalities have not mobilized political actors to reduce them; the heterogeneity of governmental capacities does not allow for reducing these social asymmetries (Somuano; Ortega, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic is an indisputable example of these threats and has had very severe health, economic, and social costs (CIDH, 2020). In Mexico City, government sources up to 2022 recorded 311,035 deaths cumulatively observed, while excessive mortality was estimated at 112,692 (Gobierno de México, 2022).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it might be assumed that the virus does not differentiate between social classes or groups, given that its transmission is dependent on biological factors. However, the circumstances of reception and the resources available to address and recuperate from it are distributed unequally within society. The measures implemented by governments and organized social groups to address the health and economic crises are also contingent upon a range of factors, including their initial positions and the resources at their disposal (WIEGO, 2021). The findings of this study demonstrate that the health and economic crises had disparate effects on public and private spheres. As in other countries, those in vulnerable situations were the most adversely affected (Berchet; Bijlholt; Ando, 2023).

Paid work is crucial because of its direct relationship with the economy, politics, and culture. Food, housing, health, education, transportation, and leisure depend on the characteristics of paid work, and they are directly related to levels of well-being and the satisfaction of psychological needs (Teruel Belismelis; Pérez Hernández, 2021). Care work is life support and the basis for economic, family, and social development from early childhood to old age. Care work refers to the cleaning and care work within the home that women perform preponderantly. Consequently, in this research, we start from the premise that care work is as valuable as remunerated work outside the home (Carrasco, 2006; Pérez Orozco, 2006; Bango; Coello; Scuro, 2020; CEPAL, 2020).

[2] Excess mortality is considered a more appropriate measure of the effects of the pandemic than the number of positive cases in scenarios such as Mexico where little testing was done. The cumulative excess mortality rate from January 2020 to September 2021 per 100,000 population was 281.0 in Argentina, 290.1 in Brazil and 472.5 in Mexico (*The Economist*, 2022).

Throughout this text, we show that during the pandemic, the hinge element between both types of work lies in the fact that, while paid work decreased due to confinement and reduced mobility measures, the burden of care work in households increased. Our findings align with those of other researchers in which women tended to bear these burdens to a greater extent than men (Stefanovic, 2023). At the same time, women experienced the most severe impacts concerning job losses, work hours, and earnings in both the service and manufacturing sectors (Mancini, 2022; Rodríguez Pérez; Castro Lugo, 2022). Thus, the interrelated effects of the pandemic on paid and care work are undeniable.

#### **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE DO THE PANDEMIC IN MEXICO**

At the federal level, as of August 14, 2020, the government has adopted 53 measures to respond to the pandemic's impacts on health, economy, and society. The first measure was that President López Obrador approved reallocating up to 0.7% of GDP to an emergency fund to address the pandemic. The federal government also adopted specific measures to strengthen the health system in order to control the disease, including adapting public hospitals to Covid-19 services, expanding the public network to include private hospitals, and importing essential equipment needed for effective patients care (CEPAL, 2020).

The federal government stated that it was necessary to be cautious when halting the economy and safeguarding low-income individuals, especially those living on daily subsistence incomes. This fact is especially relevant since about 60% of people work in the informal economy and therefore do not have access to contributory social security. The federal government neither extended social assistance nor deferred or reduced taxes (Lustig et al., 2020). Consequently, people in the informal economy, especially those dealing with cleaning, continued to work, thereby increasing the likelihood of being infected with the virus (WIEGO, 2021). In addition, people without social security only had access to poorly resourced sanitation facilities (Flamand; Naime; Olmeda, 2022).

#### **PAID WORK DURING THE PANDEMIC IN MEXICO CITY**

The labor panorama of the first two decades of the 21st century for the country, the context in which the Covid-19 pandemic arrived, was not optimistic. The key characteristics were deterioration and precariousness, differentiated according to age groups, being the young people the most affected one. The most obvious signs of the increase

in labor precariousness were falling income levels, stagnation in access to social security, and insecure employment.

First, the proportion of people earning less than a minimum wage increased by more than 50% in the first 17 years of the 20th century; second, the rate of insured population did not grow but remained at the same level; and finally, the proportion of people with temporary contracts, an unmistakable sign of insecurity, has increased for both sexes, although to a greater extent for women. The gaps between employers and subordinates, between men and women, and between people with more and less schooling have narrowed because the advantaged groups have lost income (Alba Vega; Rodríguez, 2022).

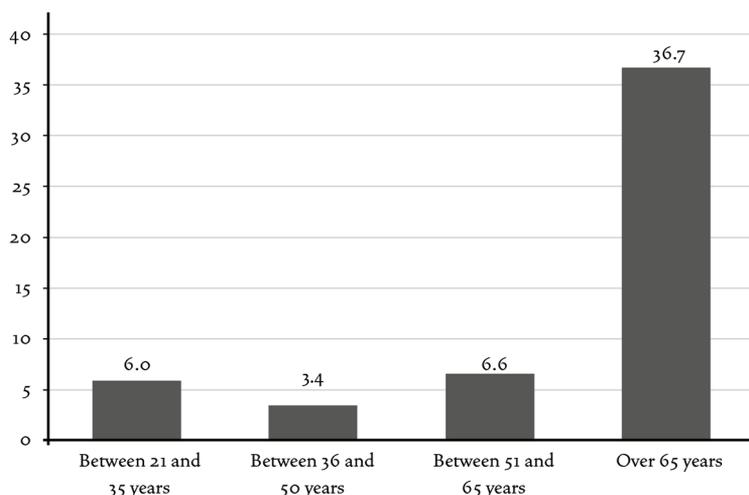
As expected, although the confinement measures managed to control the spread of the contagion in the population, the reduction in mobility meant a significant economic impact, especially in those jobs that depend on face-to-face interaction. The Covid-19 pandemic, in the case of Mexico City, had a differentiated impact on individuals. Transformations, inequalities, and conviviality in employment were configured differently, depending on age, establishment size, and sex.

People over 65 were the most affected, with one-third (36.7%) losing their jobs due to the pandemic (Figure 1). Moreover, the differences concerning the other age groups are very significant: people over 65 were unemployed six times more than the next most affected group and ten times more than the least affected group. The 36 to 50 age group lost half as many jobs (3.4%) as those aged 21 to 35 (6%) and 51 to 65 (6.6%). Consequently, younger people were a precious labor resource, as they responded with their work and effort to withstand the crisis. In contrast, older adults needed to protect themselves more because of their vulnerability to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this protection made it difficult for them to reintegrate into the labor market later on.

These elderly individuals, including those who engaged in the practice of packing goods at self-service retail stores in exchange for a voluntary gratuity provided by customers (Pérez-Fernández; Venegas-Venegas, 2021), were able to partially mitigate the impact of the situation through the receipt of a monthly payment of 1,925.00 Mexican pesos (approximately R\$ 100.00 USD), distributed nationwide through the program *Pensión para el Bienestar de las Personas Adultas Mayores*. By 2023, the program had reached its maximum potential, with 10,830,151 beneficiaries across Mexico.

Regarding establishment size, the most significant proportion of workers who lost their jobs during the pandemic came from companies with more than 50 employees, followed by those employing between 2 and 10 people (Figure 2). The companies that lost fewer personnel were those that employed between 26 and 49 people. These results

**FIGURE I**  
**Percentage of people who lost their jobs due to the pandemic, by age group**



Elaborated by the authors. Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

coincide with studies that analyze the effects of the pandemic on employment (Teruel Belismelis; Pérez Hernández, 2021, pp. 127-8). The initial hypotheses are as follows: larger companies have lost more jobs than smaller ones because they have less flexibility to change their line of business and thus adapt to the adverse environment. In contrast, the jobs lost in smaller units are probably explained by these economic units' greater precariousness and limited resources to pay wages and salaries if there is no work. Finally, the companies that resisted better and kept their personnel are probably those involved in the processing, sale, and distribution of essential final consumer goods, such as food and beverages.

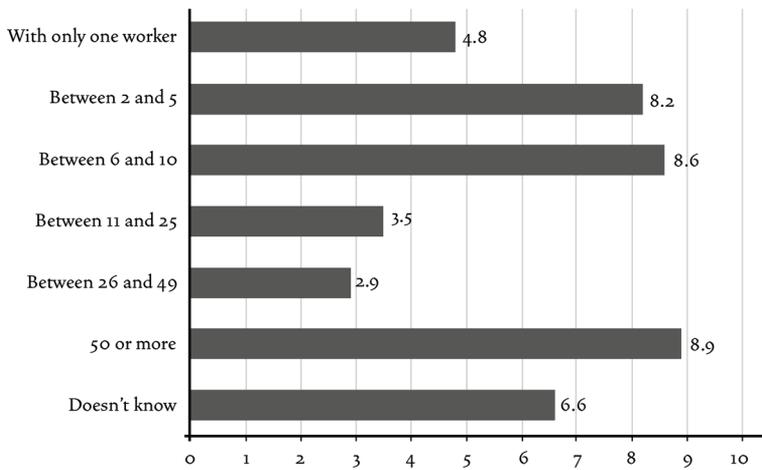
The case of Ana<sup>3</sup> illustrates the strategies that individuals with limited financial resources employ in response to job loss:

*There were big changes because the pandemic started here, and my employers dismissed me, as they did not take the risk because I went into their houses. So, I said: "Well, what am I going to do?". I had no income, so I started selling candy outside my house. I helped a neighbor sell coffee and bread. I have been working at another house for about three months now, but only two days in the afternoons, because that is how they can provide me work, in the afternoons. Our life has changed a lot because I used to come to work five days a week. The pandemic started, and the breaks came (Ana, 33 years old, domestic worker, November 29, 2021).*

[3] In order to preserve the privacy of the informants, we omit their real names.

**FIGURE 2**

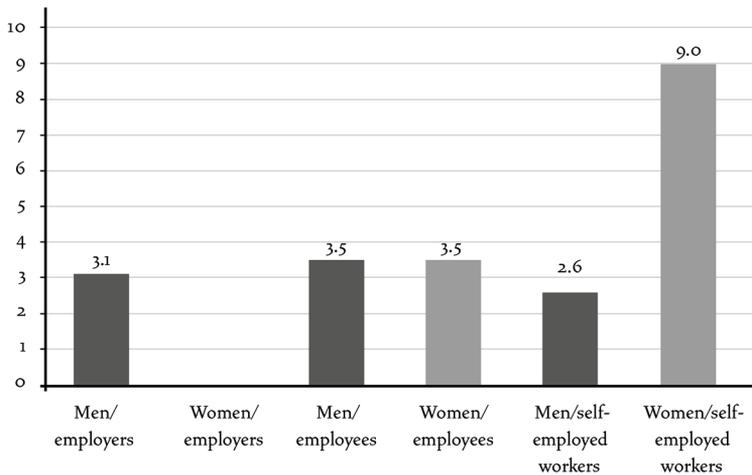
Percentage of population losing jobs due to the pandemic, by size of establishment and the number of people employed



Elaborated by the authors. Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

**FIGURE 3**

Percentage of people who lost their jobs due to the pandemic by occupational status and sex



Elaborated by the authors. Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

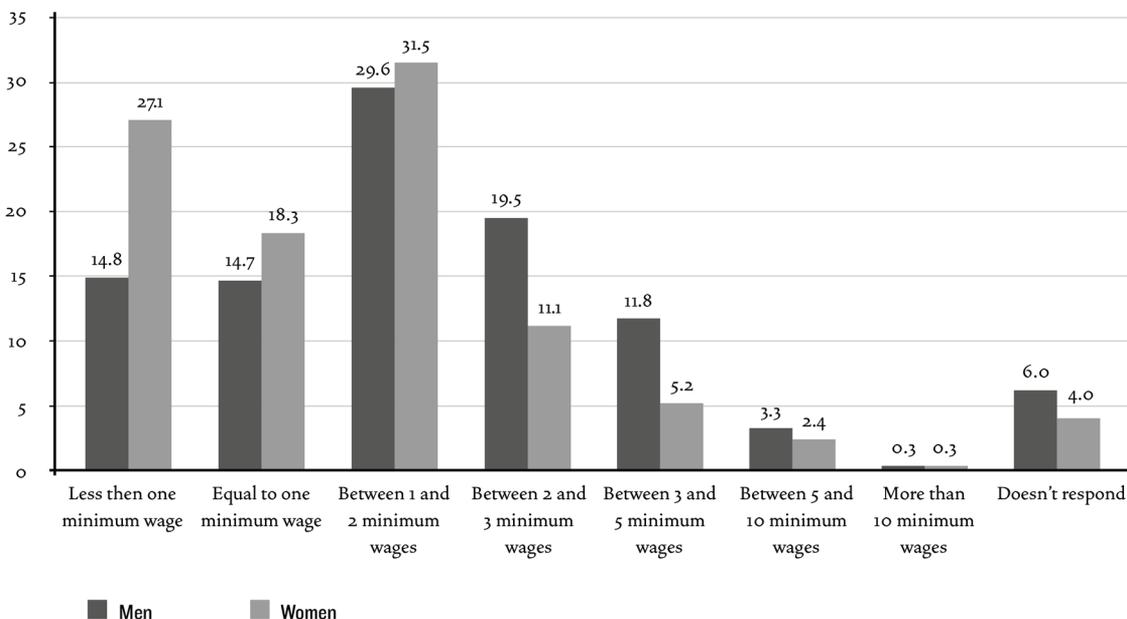
If we look at the position in the occupation and sex (Figure 3), those who lost the most were self-employed women (9%). This proportion is more than triple that of self-employed men (2.6%) and almost triple that of subordinates or employees (3.5%) and employers (3.1%), of which the vast majority are minimal. A significant proportion of the women who lost their jobs and incomes work as street vendors.

[4] The figure presents the income of the main breadwinner in the household. Considering that for some it had already been affected by the pandemic, most of the time it decreased perhaps due to the reduction in salary that occurred in several companies and businesses or due to the loss of employment.

Income is a critical indicator of well-being. During the pandemic, household income in Mexico City, measured by the minimum wage in effect at the time of the survey, showed precariousness and inequality (Figure 4).<sup>4</sup> In one-third of the households, income barely reached the equivalent of one minimum wage, 4,230 pesos in 2021 (approximately 200 USD), while another third only earned between one and two minimum wages. Significantly, only a few households earned more than five minimum wages (between 2.4% and 3.5%). While it has been pointed out that there was very little support for the working class during the pandemic, it should be noted that there were significant increases in minimum wages before, during and after the peak of the disease: 16% in 2019, 20% in 2020, 15% in 2021, 22% in 2022, and 20% in 2023 (CONASAMI, 2024).

Looking at the variable income by sex, we find another inequality: the income of the principal breadwinner differs between men and women (Figure 4). The proportion of households with the lowest income (less than a monthly minimum wage) is almost twice as high when the principal breadwinner is a woman (27%) than when it is a

**FIGURE 4**  
Income of the primary breadwinner in the household according to the minimum wage in 2021, by sex\*



Elaborated by the authors. Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

\*Income was measured based on the minimum wage at the time of the Survey, i.e., 4,230 Mexican pesos per month (approximately R\$ 200.00 USD).

man (14.8%). This pattern persists to the detriment of female-headed households at low-income levels, i.e. between 1 and 2 minimum wages. However, the gap is much smaller, as shown in Figure 4. In contrast, the share of male-headed households becomes dominant for primary breadwinners earning between 2 and 10 minimum wages.

The pandemic had unequal effects on employment, depending on the age and sex of individuals and the size of the establishments where they work. Regarding establishment size, job losses are concentrated at two extremes: in the largest and smallest companies, except for self-employed individuals. Concerning sex, self-employed women have lost more, especially those working in the public space, an aspect that echoes the findings of a similar study (Teruel Belismelis; Pérez Hernández, 2021, p. 147). We also confirmed these effects in the focus groups. As we can see from the testimony of María, a trader who sold various goods in the Metro cars.

*In my case, I believe that we have been quite affected. It affected us economically and morally. Now, it turned our world upside down because I lost my job and my rented apartment. The landlord was very strict with the rent and asked me to leave because I did not have enough to pay for the second month of the pandemic. So, I lost my apartment, I lost my job. I went back to the Metro. The Metro cars had no safe working conditions because too many of us were there. Yes, you could say there were too few people, too few sales, and too many car drivers. There was no other way to earn money (María, 33 years old, wagon trader, November 29, 2021).*

The pandemic forced isolation, restricted mobility and caused thousands of job losses. For this reason, it generated strong incentives for the expansion of work on digital platforms. A study conducted during the pandemic on a sample of 1,008 delivery workers employed by digital platforms (Alba Vega; Bensusán; Vega, 2024) showed that almost nine out of ten delivery workers in Mexico City in 2020 had joined the platforms in the last three years, three quarters in the last two years, and four out of ten in the last year (2020). These new jobs have been heralded as an opportunity in the face of the crisis. However, insecurity, danger and night shifts have led to their monopolization by men, especially young men, who occupy more than 80% of the jobs. Women entered these jobs at an older age due to the reproductive life cycle and care work. Although flexibility to decide when and how much to work as well as ease and speed of access to employment were presented as advantages, in practice they were very relative.

These are precarious jobs with low and unequal incomes by gender: women earn almost 20% less than men because they spend less time on this work due to care responsibilities. In addition, these incomes

are generally below the threshold for Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS) contributions. These are jobs with a high risk of accidents and harassment for women. The lack of recognition by companies of their labor relationship with these workers, results in a lack of protection and loss of labor rights.

#### **UNPAID CARE WORK IN MEXICO CITY**

In this second section, our analysis shows, first of all, that the difference between the time men and women spend on care work widened during the period of confinement; second, that there are significant differences in the time women spend on care work according to their income level, whether they are married or not, and whether they have children; and, in addition, the most revealing finding of our study is that the distribution of tasks becomes more equitable in households where there is no male head of household.

Feminist theory also helps us to understand what happened during the pandemic if we reflect on the sexual division of labor and how it has influenced the way in which responsibilities within the household have been shared, mainly affecting women. These activities are also less socially valued, while men have historically been associated with the public space, where they can perform paid work and have greater social value (Benería, 2019; Cielo et al., 2016; Federici, 2018; Mies, 2019). For Silvia Federici (2018), the sexual division of labor is not natural but socially constructed; the author argues that this division has relegated women to the domestic and reproductive sphere, while men are considered in productive spaces. For feminist economists, the maintenance of life, or social reproduction, is fundamental because it guarantees the level of well-being necessary for the functioning of the capitalist economic system (Carrasco, 2006; Guzmán, 2019; Pérez Orozco, 2005, 2006; Pérez Orozco; Gil, 2011; Arruzza; Bhattacharya, 2020).

In Latin America, care work is increasingly recognized as a source of gender inequality (Cielo et al, 2016; Batthyány, 2020; Aguilar et al., 2022). Several studies analyze the need to implement a national care system in which public participation is dominant in terms of financing and regulation (Rodríguez; Cooper, 2005; Esquivel, 2012; Ceballos Angulo, 2013; Federici, 2013; Pedrero; Pacheco Gómez; Florez, 2013; Guzmán, 2019).

In the care area, the most critical advance, in addition to its measurement, has been to recognize and value the time people devote to care work: cleaning the house, preparing food, and caring for children, the elderly, or people with some disability. From a very early age, women offer their caring capacity and time to their families,

generating significant asymmetries that explain the unequal opportunities they experience throughout their lives in school and paid work. Consequently, it is necessary to anticipate two types of redistribution: between people who make up the household, on the one hand, and between the family, the market, the community, and the government, on the other. In both cases, this redistribution may be achieved through interpersonal negotiations, which are the foundation of conviviality.

Nathaly Llanes Díaz and Edith Pacheco Gómez Muñoz (2021) show that at the beginning of the pandemic, women almost doubled the time they spent on domestic and care work, from 340 to 600 minutes per day. Other studies also show the impact of the pandemic on gender inequalities, for example, Reyna Rodríguez Pérez and David Castro Lugo (2022) analyze how the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the gender wage gap in Mexico. Ana Laura Fernández and Roxana Maurizio (2022) show the changes in some labor indicators between men and women in Latin America and, like our study, highlight the disadvantages experienced by some women compared to others, as women with less education had the lowest employment rates.

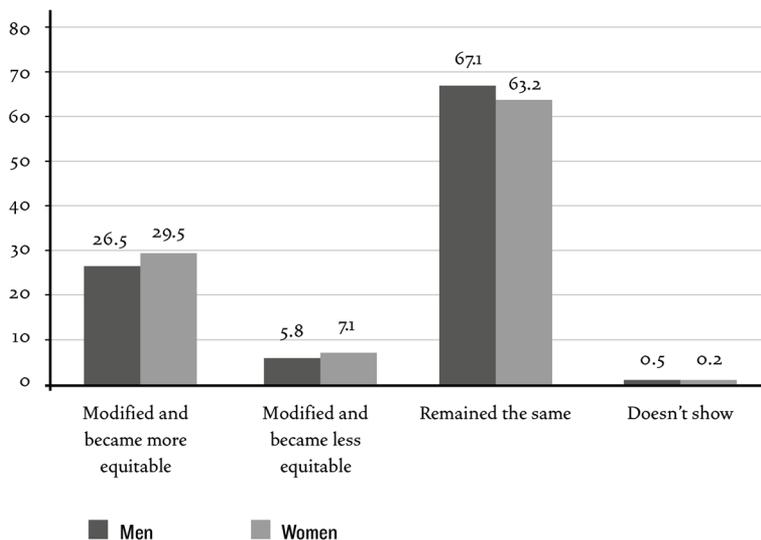
### *Distribution of household chores*

Several studies have shown that the burden of care work from the pandemic mainly fell on women (Llanes Díaz; Pacheco Gómez Muñoz, 2021; Stefanović, 2023). However, what is the perception of the distribution of these chores? In the survey, when we asked about the distribution of household chores during confinement, two-thirds of the total respondents answered that it had remained the same as before the pandemic. In contrast, only one-third answered that it changed to become more or less equitable (Figure 5).

However, when analyzing the distribution of activities by sex and income level, it was high-income women who perceived changes. Nearly half of them reported that the distribution had become fairer (44.2%), while this perception was less common among middle-income (28.1%) and low-income (30.3%) women. A larger proportion of high-income women (21%) also noticed a worsening in the division of labor. In contrast, only 5.3% of middle-income women and 7% of low-income women felt this way. These differences suggest a strong relationship between bargaining power and income, which seems to have allowed women with higher incomes to negotiate better with others in their households than women with lower incomes.

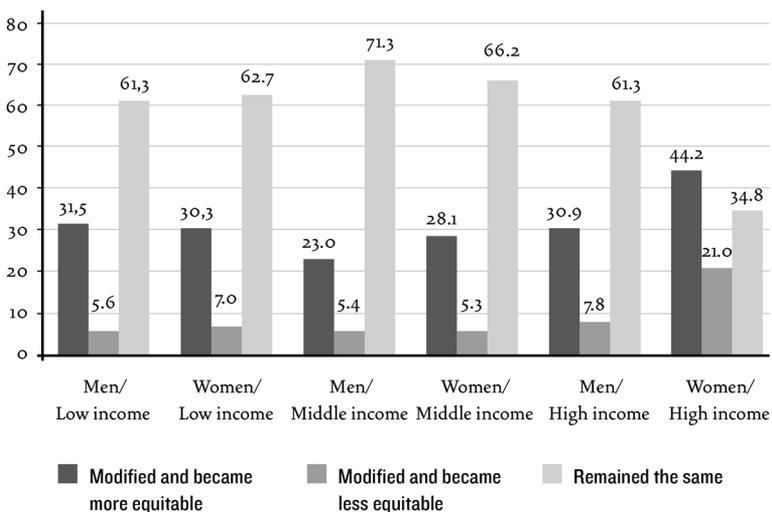
When we analyze the survey results, considering households with and without children, we notice that respondents reported a more equalitarian distribution of care work in households headed by single women with children (53.3%) (Figure 7). One plausible

**FIGURE 5**  
Perceptions of sharing household tasks during the pandemic, by sex



Elaborated by the authors. Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

**FIGURE 6**  
Distribution of household chores by sex and household income level



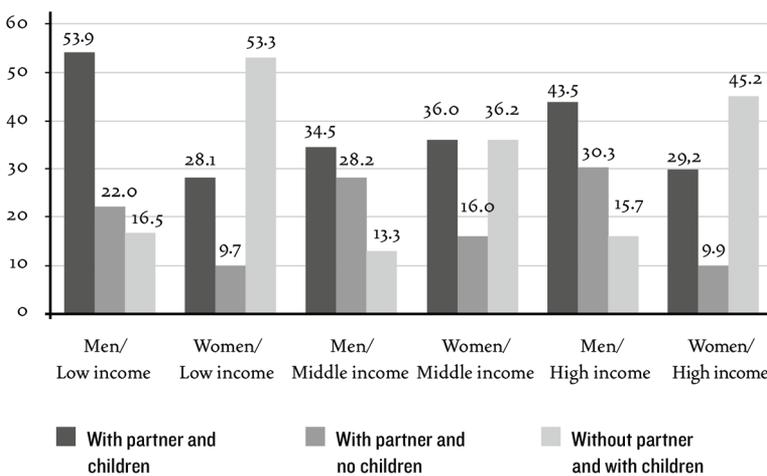
Elaborated by authors. Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

explanation is that single or divorced female heads of household can more easily negotiate the distribution of activities with daughters, sons, and other household members, such as grandparents. This is in contrast to male-headed households, where women's redistribution negotiations do not appear to be as effective. In addition, almost half of the women in single-parent households with children reported that the distribution of household chores remained the same (45.2%). For men, the distribution of chores became more equalitarian when their partner was present in the home, and when they had children (53.9%) (Figure 7). In summary, it seems that it is easier for men to negotiate and share activities when their partner is present. At the same time, women find it easier to negotiate in single-parent households, i.e. when they are single or divorced.

In order to illustrate how single women organized the tasks at home, we can use the testimony of Luisa as an example.

*I am a single mother; I don't have a husband. So, in reality, I only live with my daughters. We used to live with my mother, we had already left my mother's house for quite a while and now I live with my two little daughters. It was the older one who helped me with her sister. So, then, I am the one who supports my house. Now I don't really have anyone to share the obligations with. The obligations are practically mine, because when my daughter started to need more things, that is what I am telling you, she even started working for a while, and that is what helped us too. Some*

**FIGURE 7**  
Distribution of household chores by union status and with or without children



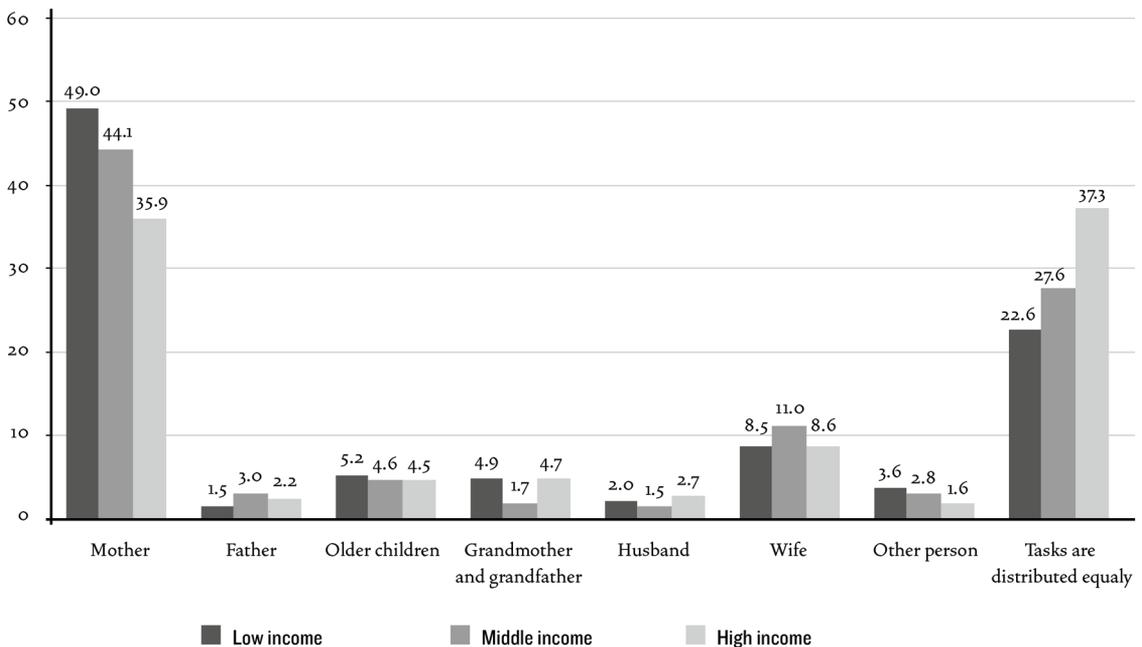
Elaborated by the authors, Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

time later I had my younger daughter and she does know her father and everything, but he is not present in the chores (Luisa, 33 years old, shop-keeper. November 29, 2021).

### Care during confinement

Caring for children was a significant activity during the pandemic because, with the closure of schools and daycare centers, someone in the household had to take care of their well-being and look after them throughout the day. “Defamiliarizing” care was complex, especially in the poorest and single-parent households (Partenio, 2022). According to our survey data in Mexico City, mothers were primarily responsible for childcare. This distribution represented a triple workday, as they had to care for their children, perform domestic work, and work remotely. Figure 8 reveals significant gaps among women according to their income level: almost half of the women with low incomes (49%) reported caring for their children. In contrast, this proportion dropped to 44.1% among middle-income women and to 35.9% in the high-income group. It can be assumed that women in higher income households could share this care work with other household members or paid workers.

**FIGURE 8**  
Household member who dedicated more time to childcare



Elaborated by the authors. Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

This situation is evident in the testimony of Carmen, a shopkeeper who describes the triple workload of being a mother, a “teacher”, and a worker:

*It was very complicated because they no longer went to school. So, I had to play the teacher, mother, and worker roles. So, yes, you got home stressed because there was no work, and when you arrived, the children said, “I did not do my homework.” You had to do their homework with them. Then, something else came up: the stationery store was already closed, or you did not have enough money for photocopies. So, it wasn’t easy to be the mother and the teacher. And everything because, in the virtual classes, you had to explain things to them and teach them, and if you didn’t do it, the girls really didn’t learn. So, they were scolded and yelled. “Pay attention and don’t get distracted. Hurry up because it is time to make lunch!” (Carmen, 28 years old, domestic worker, November 29, 2021).*

We can return to the testimony of Ana, a domestic worker, as an example of how the distribution of domestic and care work can become at least a bit more egalitarian. The testimony suggests a perception that men are “helping” women who are actually responsible for caring for children and the home:

*Well, my husband supports me a lot. So, I think I don’t have any problems, well, the four of us do our housework together, we organize ourselves: one of us sweeps, another one picks up the garbage, I take care of the clothes and the food and he is in charge of checking the homework or feeding them. (Ana, 33 years old, domestic worker. November 29, 2021).*

### *School assistance*

During school closures, accompanying girls and boys was essential to promote their learning, especially with the beginning of the “Learn at Home” strategy, proposed by the federal government through the Ministry of Public Education, as of March 23, 2020. It was essential to provide electronic devices (computers, tablets, cell phones) with internet access to attend classes, receive homework, and communicate with teachers. These activities, as mentioned by Landy Sánchez and Ana Escoto (2020), required these mothers to work the equivalent of two or even three shifts per day.

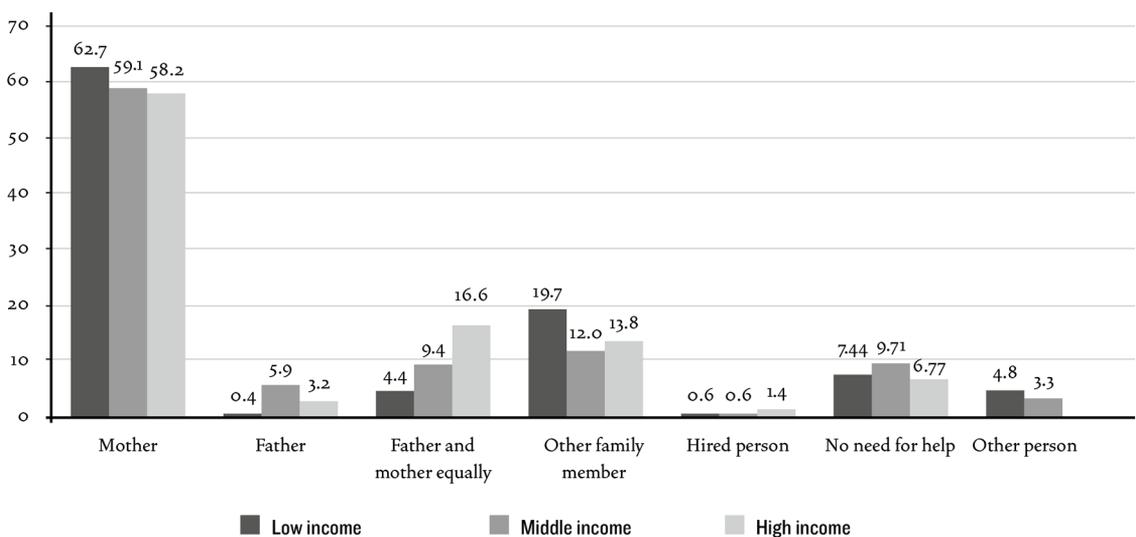
When the analysis is carried out only for women, and their income level is also considered, we observe gaps that show inequalities worsening the situation of women with lower incomes (Figure 9). In low-income households, mothers were the ones who helped their children with chores most frequently (62,7%), with a very notable

difference between fathers and other members of the household. In comparison, in these same households, the participation of fathers was almost nil (0.4%). The low participation of lower-income fathers may be explained by the fact that they had to go out to work or look for work to support the family. At other income levels, fathers participated a little more in school accompaniment, although always modestly compared to mothers: in middle-income households, 5.9% of fathers were involved in school accompaniment; in high-income households, 3.2% of fathers helped their children with homework.

In our focus groups, Ana explained the difficulties faced by the mothers during the accompaniment of the online classes:

*To this day, I still don't understand anything about the phone; it is how I communicate with my parents who live in the State [of Mexico]. Then, we had applications such as Classroom or Telegram. I had to learn to use them because that is how the children took the classes. So, they are very important because nowadays, when we communicate with teachers, it is through those applications and video calls, and we must be aware of them. But that, as I tell you, I don't understand it because everything is through there, and I get confused with the keys; I wasn't used to it (Ana, 33 years old, domestic worker, November 29, 2021).*

**FIGURE 9**  
Who took care of the children during the school closures?



Elaborated by the authors. Source: Survey on the Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conviviality and Inequalities in the Metropolitan Area of the Valley of Mexico, 2021.

Distance learning, as a result of confinement, changed the relationships established in the home on at least two levels: first, it increased women's responsibilities in caring for their children with the role of "teacher"; second, it changed the relationships they and their families had with technology and digital media.

The pandemic also modified interactions with teachers and daily coexistence with technology. This digital coexistence depended on the unequal distribution of material resources in families, age, and knowledge of how to use these technologies. This coexistence could be smooth for families with enough resources and skills; however, for those with scarce resources, the need for computer equipment and enough money to pay for internet access added to the anxiety they endured during the pandemic.

## CONCLUSIONS

The structural and historical conditions of gender inequality in Mexico City in terms of employment conditions and the distribution of domestic and care work were exacerbated during the pandemic. In addition, the crisis highlighted a significant inequality between the welfare conditions of formal and popular work: on the one hand, concerning jobs that could be done remotely and those that could not; and on the other, regarding the social security protections (e.g., health insurance, medical leave or disability) enjoyed by the insured and the uninsured. Differences were also observed between groups of women, particularly according to their income, education level, union *status* and motherhood status. Our research unveils an additional layer to understanding these differences: the negotiations that occur within households to accommodate the excessive burden of care and domestic work resulting from the confinement measures associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pre-pandemic context already revealed a precarious labor market, as the first two decades of the 21st century saw a decline in income levels, a slowdown in the incorporation of formal work with social protection, and an increase in precarious and temporary contracts, which was particularly detrimental to young people and women. When the gaps in decent work between groups of different ages, genders, levels of education, or between employers and subordinates narrowed, the explanation was a decline in conditions for those in a better position, not an improvement for those in a worse one. In short, it was a case of convergence through deterioration.

When it comes to differences between men and women, the women who were self-employed were the most affected ones, presumably as vendors in public spaces. Specifically, they were more than three times as likely to have lost their jobs as men in the same

occupations. An important reason for this is the increase in care work due to the confinement of other family members, especially children, who had to be cared for their basic well-being and also needed help with online schooling.

The data showed that household income appears to influence negotiations among household members. It seems that women in higher income households are able to negotiate and construct a more equitable distribution of domestic and care tasks: 44.2% responded that the distribution of these activities in their household became more equitable. In contrast, only 30.3% of women in low-income households and 28.1% of those in middle-income households reported a more equitable distribution during the pandemic. According to our focus groups, when households have sufficient income to meet their basic needs, relationships are more convivial, there is less tension, and it is easier for women to express dissatisfaction and negotiate a more equitable distribution of care work.

Another critical finding from our survey analysis is that the union status of the family provider influences the distribution of domestic and care work. Among women with children who reported a different and more equitable distribution of these tasks, 28.1% live with their partner and 53.3% do not. It appears that female heads of household can negotiate a more equitable distribution of unpaid care work with older children or grandparents than with the partner living in the same household.

Our research has shown that in the face of school and daycare closures, mothers devote more time than fathers to caring for, accompanying to school, and generally looking after the well-being of the children in the household. However, there are differences by household income level in the proportion of people who say that it was the mother who spent more time caring for the children: 50% in low-income households, 44% in middle-income households and 35.9% in high-income households. In high-income households, there is more parental involvement and, in turn, they are more likely to be able to afford the services of a caregiver.

Mothers were also most often involved in school monitoring and facilitating contact with teachers and classmates. As the focus groups show, this accompaniment posed a technological challenge for many mothers, who were not always familiar with electronic devices other than mobile phones or distance learning platforms. For many women, being a caregiver meant up to a triple workday, as they had to juggle domestic and caregiving responsibilities, their paid jobs, if they still had them, and school support.

One of the major challenges for society in the post-pandemic era is to reduce social inequalities and rethink the relationship between

paid and unpaid care work. First, the importance of care work as a sine qua non for paid work outside the home and the gender inequalities associated with its distribution must be recognized. Moreover, paid work must regain its predominant role as a means of ensuring the well-being of working people and their households.

Social, political and economic efforts in the post-pandemic society should aim at building structures in which both types of work can guarantee people's health, material security, development and well-being, regardless of their social status, type of occupation, gender and age. Building a more egalitarian, equitable and convivial society around paid work and unpaid care is one of the most important issues we need to address in an agenda to ensure people's well-being.

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