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Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Working Mothers in France

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9 The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial
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19 **Keywords:** COVID-19 and gender, family well-being, lockdown, housing and living conditions,
20 working mothers in France

21 *Abstract*

22 Beyond its devastating consequences for public health, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact
23 on gender inequalities, labour markets and families. Compared to many European countries, the French
24 approach to lockdown was among the more stringent, although the measures taken by the French
25 government to support employment, to some extent, mitigated the worst effects of the crisis on families.
26 This article analyses the implications of COVID lockdown restrictions on gender equality and well-
27 being for couples with children in France. The study adopted a multidimensional approach to gender
28 inequalities associated with paid work and various dimensions of living conditions, involving gender-
29 differentiated access to personal work spaces in the home, personal leisure time outside the home, and
30 local support networks during the first phase of lockdown (March–June 2020). Drawing on data from
31 the COCONEL survey, carried out by the Institut national d'études démographiques on a quota sample
32 of the French adult population in April/May 2020, the authors controlled for variables including socio-
33 economic status, age, family structure and place of residence. The survey data was complemented by
34 a longitudinal set of in-depth interviews enabling the research team to capture the differential effects
35 of the pandemic within couples. The main findings indicate that, despite the frequency of dual-

36 employment arrangements for heterosexual couple households with dependent children, French
37 mothers were nevertheless more likely to reduce their working time and/or withdraw from the labour
38 market. Within the households surveyed, mothers were less likely than fathers to leave the home during
39 the day, particularly for personal leisure activities. The presence of children in households increased
40 gender inequality in both employment and living conditions across all socio-economic categories. In
41 conclusion, the authors consider whether the pandemic might have a long-term impact on gender norms
42 and inequalities within families, and how the findings about changes in gender inequalities could be
43 used to inform public policy development.

44

45 *Contribution to the field*

46 Many authors have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced existing gender inequalities in
47 employment and unpaid work because the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying
48 lockdown measures restricted individual mobility and constrained social contact. To our knowledge,
49 the European literature on gender inequalities during the pandemic does not address its impact on
50 inequalities in housing and living conditions. The findings presented in this article drew on cross-
51 sectional data collected in the sixth round of a longitudinal online survey (COCONEL, COronavirus et
52 CONfinement: Enquête Longitudinale) to track the gendered impact of lockdown measures on living
53 conditions in French households, and especially on working mothers, during the first wave of the
54 pandemic in 2020. The authors complemented the quantitative data with the results from a set of 21
55 in-depth interviews carried out prior to and during the pandemic. By enhancing understanding of the
56 interactive relationship between employment, housing conditions and the well-being of working-age
57 mothers in different socio-economic groups, the study contributes to the evidence base that can be used
58 to inform policies designed to improve work–life balance strategies and prevent further deterioration
59 of gender equality.

60 *Ethics statement*

61 The Institut français d'opinion publique (IFOP), which conducted the COCONEL survey, has access
62 to a permanent panel of 750,000 French households and is authorised by the French national data
63 protection agency, Commission nationale informatique et libertés, to conduct surveys within this panel.

64 *Data availability statement*

65 Anonymised data from the analysis of the sixth wave of the COCONEL survey can be made available
66 by the corresponding author on request.

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7

8 **INTRODUCTION**

9 The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact across the world, not only on health, particularly for
10 older people and those with underlying health conditions, but also on social life and labour markets,
11 where it caused mass layoffs, job dislocation, and income loss. The effects of the crisis were highly
12 uneven both between and within countries, depending on working arrangements and workers'
13 characteristics (education, socio-occupational category, gender), as well as on the public policies
14 implemented.

15 France occupies an intermediate position in Europe regarding the socio-economic impacts of the
16 COVID-19 crisis. It was one of the EU member states hardest hit during the first wave of the pandemic
17 and was characterised by the stringency of the measures implemented (OxCGRT, 2020). From 6 March
18 2020, childcare services, schools and universities were closed, even though special arrangements were
19 organised for children with parents who were key workers. From 17 March to 11 May, national
20 lockdown measures were applied, and a state of health emergency was established on 24 March.
21 Enterprises closed except for essential services. The French economy contracted substantially in the
22 second quarter of 2020: GDP fell by 13.8%, which was more than the eurozone average. In the first
23 half of the year, 715,000 jobs were lost, most of them in the last two weeks of March (Barhoumi et al.,
24 2020). As in other European countries, the government implemented specific measures to support the
25 economy and employees, and to avoid mass layoffs. From 24 March, compensation schemes were
26 provided for employees forced to stay home and unable to telework, either because their enterprises
27 had closed or because they had to care for children under the age of 16 (Legifrance, 2020). This article
28 focuses on the impact that these lockdown measures had on working mothers and on their
29 consequences for gender inequality in France.

30 **Mechanisms Exacerbating Gender Disparities**

31 Three types of mechanisms have been highlighted in studies to explain the rise in gender inequalities
32 during the COVID-19 crisis and the diverse effects of the pandemic across and within countries. The
33 first is linked to the form and intensity of labour market segregation. In Europe, women are over-
34 represented in the public-facing service sectors (hospitality, tourism, retail, welfare) that were
35 disproportionately affected by closures due to social distancing and lockdown measures, and in cases
36 where they were less able to work from home (Blaskó et al., 2020; Fana et al., 2020). Moreover,
37 women, especially those with lower levels of education, are over-represented in non-standard work,
38 including temporary, part-time and agency employment, which are typically poorly paid and are

39 sometimes exempt from direct social security cover. In the UK and to a lesser extent in Germany (two
40 countries where real-time survey data on employment during COVID19 period are available), the
41 proportion of women in these types of jobs is relatively high, and women were on average more likely
42 to be adversely affected by the crisis. The smaller proportion of women in non-standard jobs in France
43 compared to Germany and the UK suggests that poorly educated women in France might have been
44 expected to be less adversely affected by the crisis than in these two countries . But some studies have
45 suggested that they were more likely to be affected than more highly educated women (Adam-Prassl
46 et al., 2020; Weinkopf, 2015).

47 The second mechanism refers to the social norms determining acceptable roles for women in society
48 and the household. Although the dual-breadwinner family model has become dominant in Europe, the
49 share of unpaid work within households remains largely unequal (Blaskó et al., 2020). In most dual-
50 earners couples, women had long been the lower-earning spouse, largely because more women than
51 men work part-time, and more women take parental leave (Morin, 2014). However, cross-country
52 disparities are observed within Europe. The “full-time dual-earning” model was more widely adopted
53 in France than in Germany or the UK, where the “one-and-a-half-earner” model long remained
54 dominant with one parent, usually the father, working full-time and the other, often the mother,
55 working part-time (OECD, 2017). In France, two-earners households accounted for 60% of all
56 partnered households in the early decades of the twentieth century. Before the pandemic, 75% of
57 women aged 25–49 with children under 15 were in employment, compared to 84% for those without
58 children (Bentoudja and Razafindranovona, 2020). The relative prevalence of the dual-earner model in
59 France compared to the UK and Germany suggests that the consequences of COVID-19 on gender
60 inequalities might have been mitigated to a greater extent in France than in other Western European
61 countries.

62 Third, cross-country gendered disparities depend on the public policies implemented, such as school
63 closures, and financial support for workers with children. Employees in Germany, which has a well-
64 established short-time work scheme (Kurzarbeit), were, for example, much less likely to be affected
65 by the crisis than in France or the UK, where furlough measure were widespread (Adams-Prassl et al.,
66 2020). Short-time work compensation and the “family bonus” increased child benefit for vulnerable
67 families in Germany (Cook and Grimshaw, 2020; Müller and Schulten, 2020). No significant
68 difference was reported in job loss between women and men in Germany, although time-use data
69 showed that women took on more childcare than men even when working from home (Adam-Prassl et
70 al., 2020). In the UK, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, introduced in March 2020, allowed firms
71 to furlough workers for up to three months. The scheme replaced 80% of employees’ wages up to a
72 maximum of £2,500 per month. The German Kurzarbeit scheme prevented furloughed workers from
73 undertaking any work for their employer, and childcare needs were not acknowledged in the provisions
74 made.

75 In France, women and men who were unable to work owing to workplace, school and childcare service
76 closures, or other lockdown measures, could claim employment insurance or social security payments.
77 Short-time work compensation was high – at the rate of 84% of the previous net salary – and extended
78 to non-standard employment. More than a third of those employed prior lockdown were on short-time
79 work during this period (Givord and Silhol, 2020). Moreover, an emergency flat-rate solidarity
80 allowance was paid to low-income households by the Family Allowances Fund (Caisse d’Allocations
81 Familiales). This allowance applied to 1.4 million households (about 5% of French households) and 5
82 million children. However, despite a generous support policy during the COVID-19 crisis,
83 compensation for school and childcare closures was provided only to one parent, which may have
84 generated trade-offs between parents within couples.

85 **Diversity in the Impacts of Lockdown on French Households**

86 In spite of the socio-economic measures taken by the French government at national level to support
 87 employed workers, the impact of the pandemic on households varied according to age, socio-economic
 88 status (income, education and occupation) and gender (Lambert and Cayouette-Remblière, 2021). In
 89 France, one in three women in employment in March 2020 had stopped working in May 2020,
 90 compared to one in four men. Another French study, which does not provide information by occupation
 91 and education, revealed that women in employment were twice as likely as men to have stopped
 92 working to look after children during the first wave of the pandemic, and that they spent on average
 93 more time on domestic and parenting tasks than men (Albouy and Legleye, 2020). During lockdown,
 94 contacts with older people were banned as well as intergenerational family visits. Consequently,
 95 working parents could no longer rely on informal childcare by grandparents. Within couples, women
 96 took on a greater share of domestic tasks than their spouse, irrespective of their employment status
 97 during lockdown (Pailhé et al., 2020). An analysis of the disparities in material living conditions and
 98 well-being during lockdown in France showed that, on average, women suffered a greater loss in
 99 income (Lambert et al., 2020).

100 The research reported in this article explores the impact of lockdown on working-age mothers in two-
 101 adults households with the aim of understanding the interactive effects of gender and parenthood. The
 102 study contributes to the literature on COVID-19 and gender inequalities in two ways. After explaining
 103 why the French case is of interest for an analysis of the interactive relationship between COVID-19
 104 and the experience of working mothers during the pandemic, the research team sought new evidence
 105 demonstrating how the pandemic affected gender inequalities in heterosexual families in France. In
 106 contrast to much of the previous literature, the project team adopted a multidimensional approach in
 107 analysing developments in gender inequalities during the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis, taking
 108 account of paid and unpaid working and living arrangements, and social well-being.

109 The first research question considers whether, despite substantial public aid in France aimed at
 110 preventing mass unemployment and the exit of salaried parents from the labour market, working-age
 111 women with children were more adversely affected by the crisis and lockdown measures than men in
 112 the same situation, regardless of social category. The second question concerns the negative impact of
 113 lockdown on the family and social lives of mothers, and consequently on their well-being. It leads onto
 114 an analysis of the relationship between housing conditions, private space and activities outside the
 115 home, and the sharing of educational and domestic tasks between parents.

116

117 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

118 The study draws primarily on cross-sectional data collected in the sixth round of a longitudinal online
 119 survey (COCONEL, COronavirus et CONfinement: Enquête Longitudinale). This round of the survey
 120 was designed and conducted by the Institut national d'études démographiques (INED), focusing on
 121 housing and living conditions during the first wave of the pandemic. A sample of 2,003 adults living
 122 in metropolitan France were questioned online between 30 April and 3 May 2020, using a quota
 123 sampling method covering age, gender, education, occupation, and category of municipality. Data
 124 collected included socio-demographic characteristics, household composition, a detailed description of
 125 housing conditions, employment characteristics, and perceptions of well-being.

126 The COCONEL survey has three advantages compared to other national surveys. It contains
 127 information about the situation pre- and post-lockdown, meaning that changes in individual situations
 128 can be compared over time. Its approach to living conditions during the crisis was not limited to
 129 employment and the division of household work, which were the particular focus in the international
 130 literature and several ad hoc surveys in France, such as EpiCOv (Bajos et al., 2020). COCONEL
 131 collected separate information about the socio-occupational category of each partner in the couples to
 132 capture the household's social status in terms of lower, middle and higher socio-economic groups.

133 Supplementing the COCONEL survey, the article draws on in-depth interviews and qualitative
 134 longitudinal analyses of families in different types of housing arrangements and social class, enabling
 135 an analysis of the subjective experience of the crisis and the mechanisms leading to greater inequalities
 136 within couples. The interviews focused on the changes that occurred during the crisis in terms of
 137 housing, family, work, and day-to-day life. 21 in-depth interviews were carried out in April and May
 138 2020 by the COCONEL study group by telephone or online owing to the physical distancing measures
 139 imposed at that time. They were all recorded and fully transcribed. It is important to note that the
 140 interviewees had already been followed and interviewed in person as part of earlier qualitative surveys,
 141 which meant that their "regular" living conditions were well known and documented.

142 This mixed methods approach enabled the authors to reconstitute the dynamics of inequalities in the
 143 longer timespan of the life course. Furthermore, by focusing on the domestic sphere, they were able to
 144 gain a better understanding of family dynamics and a firmer grasp of the trade-offs made by families
 145 in confronting the gendered experience of lockdown.

146

147 **FINDINGS**

148 The analysis presented in this article shows that the deterioration in employment and working
 149 conditions during lockdown was more pronounced for mothers than for fathers, thereby confirming the
 150 observations made in some other countries. In addition, it shows that living conditions were more
 151 difficult for mothers than for fathers during this period, in particular because they spent less time
 152 outside the home during the day than did fathers. Working-age women with children also complained
 153 more often than fathers about their housing conditions. Similarly, experiences of teleworking differed
 154 by gender, particularly in better-off households where housing conditions were more amenable to home
 155 working.

156 **From Work Place to Living Conditions at Home**

157 The odds ratios from the COCONEL data analysis in Table 1 show that, among people in employment
 158 on 1 March 2020, women in couples with children were 1.456 times more likely than men to have
 159 stopped working by May 2020 when controlled for age, socio-economic category and residential area.
 160 This result suggests that mothers left the workplace more often than fathers to manage the increase in
 161 domestic and parenting tasks generated by the health crisis and lockdown measures, thereby further
 162 increasing pre-existing inequalities within families (Champagne et al., 2015).

163 INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

164 The additional household work was performed entirely within the home. Housing conditions and the
 165 ways in which domestic space is shared appeared to be decisive in the assessment made by mothers
 166 and fathers of the effects of lockdown on the well-being of family members. Overall, the women in the

167 sample population lived in smaller dwellings than the men, with an average of 45 square metres of
 168 living space compared to 51 square metres for men, factoring in the number of individuals in the
 169 household. This disadvantage was aggravated by the health crisis since more women than men were
 170 living with dependent children during lockdown: 36.7% of women lived with at least one dependent
 171 child during the period, compared to 29.4% of men. In addition, exposure time to poor housing
 172 conditions increased owing to restrictions on leaving the home.

173 The COCONEL survey showed that women in couples with children had more negative perceptions
 174 of their housing conditions during lockdown than men in the same situation. Whereas 13% of all female
 175 respondents said their home lacked space, compared to 9% of men, the percentage rose to 18% for
 176 women in couples with children, compared to 12% of men in the same situation. Among women and
 177 men in couples without children, gender differences are almost non-existent. This differing perception
 178 of housing conditions can be attributed to the fact that more women than men stopped work or reduced
 179 their working hours during lockdown. They took on greater responsibility for daily household tasks
 180 and the material aspects of daily life – cleaning, washing up, laundry, preparation of meals – which
 181 meant that they were more sensitive to the lack of living space in everyday life.

182 **Working from Home: Gendered Access to Personal Space**

183 The home became not only a place for leisure pursuits and family life, but also a place for paid work
 184 activities. While telework was not a widespread practice in France before the pandemics, it spread
 185 considerably during the first lockdown, but in a very unequal way according to the type of work and
 186 the level of education (OECD, 2021). The analysis of the COCONEL survey data also shows that
 187 conditions for teleworking are highly gendered.

188 COCONEL was one of few surveys in France to provide information about the conditions of
 189 teleworking at home during the pandemic. By May 2020, 29% of the population in employment before
 190 lockdown worked from home. This was the case for 86% of those in higher-level occupations.
 191 Telework was presented in the public debate as an advantage for well-qualified workers (Leclerc,
 192 2020). But it was also a source of gender inequalities. As already noted, women stopped working more
 193 often than men during the first lockdown, regardless of the reason for doing so. Where women
 194 continued to work, they did so from home as much as men. The COCONEL survey found that 39% of
 195 women working from home shared their workspace with other household members, compared to 24%
 196 of men. The gap widened when children were present, with 47% of teleworking mothers sharing their
 197 workspace compared to 20% of fathers. By contrast, 45% of fathers teleworked from a room
 198 specifically designated as their work space, compared to only 27% of mothers. This result would seem
 199 to reflect structural inequalities in employment and pay, especially in higher-level occupations
 200 (Georges-Kot, 2020).

201 In the interviews with respondents in higher and intermediate level occupations, men were found to
 202 have appropriated certain rooms in the home, for example a bedroom or study for their work, and
 203 sometimes for their leisure. This situation was observed, as anticipated, both among hypergamous
 204 couples, where the women did not work or had stopped working, and among homogamous couples,
 205 where the women worked in an occupation of a level similar to that of their partner, which was more
 206 unusual, for example in the case of a couple who were both teachers. The interviews showed that the
 207 re-distribution of domestic space, whether for work or leisure, often occurred informally, without prior
 208 negotiations, thereby revealing the internalisation of male precedence in the use of space:

209 I had to prepare for my job interview, but I had the opportunity to do so because my husband was
 210 at work. So I was able to prepare in the living room, comfortably installed at my desk. (Stéphanie,
 211 in a couple, one child)

212 He comes to see us at lunchtime; he pretty much has lunch with us, 20 minutes. My husband is
 213 mainly in his room and in general doesn't come out. I see him at 1 pm and then towards 9 pm.
 214 (Agnès, in a couple, four children)

215 He's started making sculptures, carving wood, so he spends almost all his time on the patio,
 216 morning to evening. Sometimes I tell him: "I need you here, cut that stuff out!" (Jeanne, in a couple,
 217 two children)

218 Some women were able to throw off the shackles of conjugal pressure by choosing not to live with
 219 their partner during lockdown, appropriating the entire domestic space for themselves and some of
 220 their children. But this option was exceptional, a result both of real-estate ownership and a shared
 221 understanding of equality within couples. Overall, these indicators show that mothers have a specific
 222 relationship to the home environment, which can be qualified as "domestic imprisonment". Lockdown,
 223 therefore, had a profound impact on living conditions for mothers, with negative consequences for their
 224 well-being.

225 **Well-being: Gendered Access to Personal Leisure Time and Activities**

226 The COCONEL survey addressed the subjective experience of lockdown for the well-being of
 227 working-age mothers. Respondents were questioned about the difficulties they experienced in
 228 everyday life. A regression model confirmed that women in couples were more likely than men to
 229 experience difficult moments in the day, after controlling for the effects of family structure, social
 230 milieu, working arrangement, and housing conditions. Whereas women and men in couples without
 231 children said they experienced few difficulties, and differences in gender perceptions were smaller,
 232 62.2% of mothers said they experienced a difficult period during the day, compared to 55.3% of fathers.

233 INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

234 The interviews showed that women felt more vulnerable for two main reasons. Firstly, because they
 235 were the principal caregivers for young children during the day, they felt overwhelmed by the situation.
 236 Secondly, during lockdown, female respondents who were teleworking or economically inactive found
 237 that their partners who continued working contributed little to housework and remote schooling. This
 238 was true for Agnès (in a couple, 4 children), who handled almost all the housework while her partner
 239 shut himself up in the bedroom to work. It was also the case for Jeanne (in a couple, 2 children), who
 240 finished her teaching work late at night after spending the day looking after her two young children.
 241 She explained: "We don't have the same daily lives". Her husband, also a teacher, reported not feeling
 242 fatigued at the time of the interview. The second reason for women on short-time work or unemployed
 243 with older children lies in their sense of domestic boredom. For example, Rosa (in a couple, 3 children),
 244 a checkout assistant, who was carrying out some household tasks to pass the time, said: "I try something
 245 new every day. My children are older and can take care of themselves." The men interviewed reported
 246 fewer cases of personal difficulties, because they were less involved in the additional housework and
 247 parenting tasks during lockdown, while also being constrained by gender norms from expressing
 248 emotions that might undermine their virile image (Connell, 2015).

249 Lockdown resulted in an increased feeling of social isolation, captured by the question in the
 250 COCONEL survey: "Do you currently (during lockdown) feel isolated in your neighbourhood or

251 home?" Table 5 presents the odds ratios for the new feeling of isolation taking into account the working
 252 arrangement, social milieu, housing conditions, the presence of children, and outings. On average,
 253 slightly more women than men felt isolated, but more fathers than mothers said they were experiencing
 254 a new feeling of isolation: 28% of fathers compared to 21.5% of mothers.

255 INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

256 Women were less likely than men to feel isolated during lockdown because they were living closer to
 257 family members and were able to provide mutual support. The COCONEL survey showed that 38% of
 258 women in couples with children had a relative living within one kilometre from their home, the
 259 authorised geographical limit for outings, compared to 27% for men in couples with children. This
 260 percentage was even higher for women with low socio-economic status: 48%, compared to 27% for
 261 women with high socio-economic status, confirming that the family played a key protective role among
 262 the lower socio-economic group.

263 The qualitative study underscored the importance of women's residential preferences in the
 264 organisation of daily life among families in lower socio-economic categories. This was the case for
 265 Marie-Claire, an employee and remarried, whose house had been rebuilt in part by her father, and for
 266 Séverine, 55, a farmer in Burgundy, who had inherited the family farm. Women were also more
 267 involved in maintaining local relationships and sociability (Authier and Cayouette-Remblière, 2021).
 268 The fact that social life was restricted during lockdown to a local neighbourhood meant that women in
 269 this situation were less affected by new feeling of isolation.

270 For men from all social class, lockdown caused a greater disruption in their lifestyle since the increased
 271 amount of time spent with children did not compensate for the lack of sociability outside the family.
 272 The combined findings from the survey and interviews confirmed that male sociability was more likely
 273 to be structured by professional life and work colleagues, whereas women more often maintained
 274 contacts with their relatives. Women were also more likely to receive friends and relatives in their
 275 homes or meet at private or semi-private venues.

276 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

277 One of the aims of the study was to explore whether the pandemic might have increased gender
 278 inequalities in France due to its impact on working arrangements and living conditions, including
 279 teleworking, access to personal space, leisure time and activities, and to family support networks. In
 280 seeking to achieve this aim, the researchers adopted two working hypotheses to frame their analysis.
 281 Firstly, they asked whether, despite substantial public support in France to avoid mass unemployment
 282 and the exit of working parents from the labour market, working-age women with children had been
 283 more adversely affected by lockdown measures than men in the same situation across socio-economic
 284 categories. Secondly, they, analysed the impact of lockdown on dimensions of social life other than
 285 employment, and asked how lockdown had affected the quality of life and well-being of working
 286 mothers.

287 COCONEL is among the few sociological surveys to be conducted using a random sample of national
 288 population that simultaneously takes into account working arrangements, living conditions and well-
 289 being, and allows for an intersectional analysis of social inequalities by gender and socio-economic
 290 status. The results presented in this article are based on the sixth wave of the survey documenting
 291 employment, living conditions and well-being during the first wave of the pandemic and lockdown.
 292 The findings showed that working-age mothers were more likely than their male counterparts to stop
 293 working during lockdown. When controlled by age, socio-economic category and place of residence,

294 belonging to the lower socio-economic groups was found to be associated with a higher risk of stopping
 295 work during lockdown. Highly educated women were less affected by firm closures than women with
 296 a low level of education, since they were more often able to work from home. These results are in line
 297 with findings from other literature about the gendered impact of COVID-19 on the labour market
 298 (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020).

299 Data on living conditions and social well-being were included in the analysis as potential factors
 300 exacerbating gender inequalities. The authors measured the gendered access to personal spaces for
 301 women and men working from home, gendered access to personal leisure time and activities, and the
 302 legitimacy of this differential access, and gendered and class-based access to family support networks
 303 during lockdown. The study found that men left the home more frequently during the day than women
 304 during lockdown, and that these differences increased when children were present. When controlled
 305 for employment, household composition, age and socio-economic status, men were found to be 1.6
 306 times more likely to go out during the day than women. The same pattern was observed for well-being.
 307 Working age mothers more often than their male counterparts reported difficulties during the day, but
 308 they less frequently felt isolated. These findings suggest that mothers' difficulties during confinement
 309 were more likely to be related to the additional domestic and parental work at home and less to
 310 psychological distress, while fathers' new difficulties were related to the disruption of social contacts
 311 with family and colleagues.

312 The design of the COCONEL survey did not allow a textured analysis of all the variables of interest to
 313 the researchers. Like all national population-based surveys, the data failed to capture the experience of
 314 highly vulnerable groups such as lone mothers who were particularly affected by the pandemic. In
 315 addition, the analyses were based on cross-sectional data limited to the period April–May 2020 rather
 316 than longitudinal data. Nor did COCONEL enable comparisons to be made of the situation between
 317 men and women within couples. The authors used the findings from in-depth interviews carried out
 318 during the first lockdown to address some of these limitations and better understand the mechanisms
 319 that contribute to the deterioration of the situation of working-age mothers. They were able to use a
 320 panel of respondents who were already being followed prior to the pandemic to complement the
 321 quantitative analyses by providing biographical and longitudinal data.

322 The respondents' narratives suggest two main mechanisms – socio-economic and employment status
 323 – that contributed to the deterioration of the situation of working-age mothers. Among the higher socio-
 324 economic groups, with their more spacious dwellings, women mainly kept their jobs and worked from
 325 home, generating a dual domestic–occupational workload that eroded their well-being, given that the
 326 customary outsourcing of domestic work was no longer possible. They tended to feel overwhelmed by
 327 the lack of time for themselves or their leisure activities. However, they did not reproach their spouses
 328 for appropriating the domestic space and for their limited contribution to domestic work. It seemed that
 329 the crisis delegitimised any expression of female protest.

330 In the lower socio-economic groups, where housing conditions are less amenable to homeworking,
 331 more women stopped working or were put on reduced hours. Despite the loss of income, the impact
 332 on the deterioration of individual and family well-being appeared to be mitigated by their closer family
 333 networks and their lesser reliance on paid housework and childcare services before the pandemic.
 334 Women with a lower level of education complained less about additional domestic and parenting tasks
 335 and more about being bored at home after being required to stop working for several weeks. They were
 336 eager to return to work for the benefits of socialisation and social identity that it conveyed.

337 The findings from the study shed new light on the dynamics of gender inequality and its underlying
 338 mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic. While most of the available economic literature

339 emphasises the role of sex segregation on the labour market and public policies, this study highlights
 340 the importance of gender norms and their impact on the appropriation of space and family resources
 341 by men in the private sphere (Bessière & Gollac, 2020). It also reveals the role of access to personal
 342 support networks during lockdown, which was found to vary across socio-economic groups and
 343 gender, and served to mitigate the impact on individual well-being.

344 By calling into question the gender inequalities that occurred in the private sphere, and not only
 345 employment outcomes, these findings about changes in gender inequalities during the early stages of
 346 the pandemic have broader policy implications beyond the current pandemic. They suggest the
 347 importance of reconsidering and value of the major role of women in creating and maintaining close
 348 ties with the family and in the neighbourhood, and more broadly their role in providing emotional
 349 support to the family during the health crisis. It also suggests the need for enterprises to strengthen
 350 professional equality policies that fully recognise parenting time and the support for dependants. They
 351 touch on how society supports women's autonomy and well-being in the longer term, through childcare
 352 facilities and work–life balance policies, and are, therefore, important in informing future public policy
 353 development.

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- 439

440 **Table 1.** Logit: work stoppage

441

Variables	Odds ratios
Men without children vs. men with children	0.723**
Women without children vs. men with children	1.131
Women with children vs. men with children	1.456**
Middle vs. higher socio-economic groups	1.688
Lower vs. higher socio-economic groups	3.074***
18-25 vs. 25-49	4.850***
50-64 vs. 25-49	1.236**
Small and medium-sized towns vs. rural areas	1.122
Cities vs. rural areas	1.147

442

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

443 Note: Economically active in employment at 1 March 2020, in a couple, aged under 65 (n=1077)

444 Source: COCONEL survey, April/May 2021.

445

446

447 **Table 2.** Outings according to sex and family composition (as a %)

448

	No outings	One outing	Two outings or more
Men in a couple without children	42.2	40.2	17.6
Men in a couple with children	36.7	36.6	26.7
All men in a couple	40.1	38.8	21.1
Women in a couple without children	54.3	35.0	10.6
Women in a couple with children	53.5	27.4	19.1
All women in a couple	53.9	31.3	14.8
Couples without children	47.6	37.9	14.5
Couples with children	46.1	31.5	22.5

449 Coverage: Individuals in a couple (n=1233)

450 Source: COCONEL survey, April/May 2021.

451

452

453 **Table 3.** Logit: leaving the home in the day (all reasons)

454

Variables	Odds ratios (model 1)	Odds ratios (model 2)
Men vs. women	1.597***	1.557***
Single-parent families vs. single people	1.244	1.352
Couples without children vs. single people	1.139	1.105
Couples with children vs. single people	0.961	1.048
Middle vs. higher socio-economic groups	0.925	0.938
Lower vs. higher socio-economic groups	1.160*	1.215**
Overpopulation vs. no overpopulation	1.027	1.081
Work continuity vs. economically inactive	3.772***	4.405***
Telework vs. economically inactive	1.683	1.973
Work stoppage vs. economically inactive	1.238***	1.412***
25-49 vs. 18-25		0.940
50-64 vs. 18-25		1.057
Over 65 vs. 18-25		1.374***
Small and medium-sized towns vs. rural areas		1.316
Cities vs. rural areas		1.267

455 *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

456 Coverage: all households (n=1967)

457 Source: COCONEL survey, April/May 2021

458

459

460

461

462 **Table 4.** Logit: experiencing a difficult period during the day

463

Variables	Odds ratios
Women vs. men	1.181*
Single people vs. couples without children	1.581**
Single-parent families vs. couples without children	1.049
Couples with children vs. couples without children	1.646***
Middle vs. higher socio-economic groups	1.223
Lower vs. higher socio-economic groups	1.157
Overpopulation vs. no overpopulation	1.600***
Telework vs. work continuity	1.707
Work stoppage vs. work continuity	1.976***
Economically inactive vs. work continuity	1.419

464 *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

465 Coverage: all (n=1966)

466 Source: COCONEL survey, April/May 2021.

467

468

469 **Table 5.** Logit: new feeling of isolation

470

Variables	Odds ratios
Men with children vs. men without children	1.632*
Women with children vs. women without children	1.511
Women without children vs. men without children	1.042
Middle vs. higher socio-economic groups	1.282
Lower vs. higher socio-economic groups	1.245
Overpopulation vs. no overpopulation	1.630***
Telework vs. work continuity	1.117
Work stoppage vs. work continuity	1.396
Economically inactive vs. work continuity	1.195
18-25 vs. over 65	0.994
25-49 vs. over 65	0.861
50-64 vs. over 65	0.886
Small and medium-sized towns vs. rural areas	1.096
Cities vs. rural areas	1.407***

471 *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

472 Coverage: all individuals in a couple (n=1233)

473 Source: COCONEL survey, April/May 2021.

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475