

# Emociones y cuidados en el confinamiento hogareño durante la pandemia de covid-19 - Versión en inglés.

Pablo De Grande, Laura Frasco Zuker, Ana Cecilia Gaitán y Valeria Llobet.

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## CARE AND EMOTIONS IN HOME CONFINEMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Pablo De Grande**<sup>1</sup>, Orcid: 0000-0003-1245-1573  
**Laura Frasco Zuker**<sup>2</sup>, Orcid: 0000-0002-8328-7267  
**Ana Cecilia Gaitán**<sup>3</sup>, Orcid: 0000-0002-7972-9034  
**Valeria Llobet**<sup>4</sup>, Orcid: 0000-0003-0673-8260

**ABSTRACT.** This article addresses the emotions around different configurations of childcare in the Metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, Argentina, based on narratives about everyday care practices. In doing so, the article aims to contribute to a pluralistic view of childhood and parenthood in order to consider the vast repertoire of dispositions, of being and feeling that are intertwined in family arrangements and childcare. How did the interviewees rearrange domestic care during the pandemic? What emotions and ‘emotional norms’ does that new situation reveal? How did the changes in the limits of inside and outside affect families and personal and labor subjectivities? A first level empirical data analysis is performed on the modes of inhabiting a home –who lived with whom, in which type of house, and what use they make of the resources in their neighborhood — in order to reflect upon the emotional tensions, needs and strategies that emerged from the narratives.

**Keywords:** Emotions; parenthood; care; pandemic.

## EMOÇÕES E CUIDADOS EM CONFINAMENTO DOMICILIAR DURANTE A PANDEMIA DO COVID-19

**RESUMO.** O artigo problematiza, por meio de relatos de práticas cotidianas do cuidado, as emoções que organizam-se em torno das diferentes configurações do cuidado das crianças na Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires, (Argentina). Dessa forma, o artigo pretende contribuir a um olhar das infâncias, das maternidades e das paternidades no plural, com o objetivo de poder contemplar o amplo repertório de modos de experienciar, ser e sentir que perpassam o arco de experiências das dinâmicas familiares e do cuidado das crianças. Como os cuidados domésticos foram reorganizados durante a pandemia? Que emoções e regras do sentir isso trouxe à tona? Como as mudanças nas fronteiras do ‘dentro’ e ‘fora’ impactaram as famílias e as subjetividades pessoais e do trabalho? Um primeiro nível de análise da informação empírica é estruturado pelos modos de viver (quem conviveu com quem em termos do parentesco, em que tipo de habitação, qual uso da vizinhança), para apresentar tensões emocionais, necessidades e estratégias que surgiram nos relatos.

**Palavras-chave:** Emoções; mater-paternidade; cuidados; pandemia.

<sup>1</sup> Universidad del Salvador – Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas. Buenos Aires, Argentina.

<sup>2</sup> Laboratorio de Investigación en Ciencias Humanas -UNSAM/CONICET. Buenos Aires, Argentina.

<sup>3</sup> Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

<sup>4</sup> Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas. Buenos Aires, Argentina.



## EMOCIONES Y CUIDADOS EN EL CONFINAMIENTO HOGAREÑO DURANTE LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19

**RESUMEN.** El artículo problematiza, a través de relatos de prácticas cotidianas de cuidado, emociones que se organizan en torno a las diferentes configuraciones del cuidado infantil en el Área Metropolitana de Buenos Aires (Argentina). De esta forma, se trata de alimentar la mirada de las infancias, maternidades y paternidades urbanas en 'plural', con la meta de poder considerar el amplio repertorio de formas de disponerse, de estar y sentir que atraviesan el arco de experiencias de los arreglos familiares y el cuidado de hijos e hijas. ¿Cómo se reorganizaron los cuidados domésticos durante la pandemia? ¿Qué emociones y 'reglas del sentir' esto puso en evidencia? ¿Cómo impactaron los cambios en las fronteras del 'adentro' y el 'afuera' en las familias y en las subjetividades laborales y personales? Un primer nivel de análisis de la información empírica está estructurada por las formas de habitar (quiénes vivían con quiénes en términos de parentesco, con qué tipos de vivienda, haciendo qué uso del barrio), para presentar sobre ellas las tensiones emocionales, necesidades y estrategias que emergieron en los relatos.

**Palabras clave:** Emociones; mater-paternidad; cuidados; pandemia.

### Introduction

The context of the covid-19 pandemic suspended the provision of institutional and social care support. Schools and nurseries interrupted their face-to-face activities; grandparents stopped being care resources; nannies and domestic workers could not access their workplaces during most of 2020. Except from people working in tasks deemed essential by the new regulations, most people started working from home or staying there as their jobs were suspended. This modification of labor and care provision dynamics materially and subjectively impacted caregivers and care-receivers. Everyday situations such as leaving the house with a child to run some errands caused scandal and was prevented, forcing women to sometimes leave their children at the entrance of stores to respect single admission rules to enter commercial establishments.

In this way, the moral judgement from family members, pediatricians and friends that many women face when deciding to when deciding to make use of childcare services outside of the home (Faur, 2012; Murray, 2015) was replaced by tensions related to social control during the pandemic. These situations lead to relating the moral aspect of care to the provision of support to make care feasible. Therefore, a relevant question may be whether the image of 'the care diamond'—which considers equivalent the poles of State, market, family and community—is, more than a heuristic tool, an oversimplification that hides more complex, unstable and provisional arrangements (De Grande, 2016). Exploring these experiences during covid-19 may improve the understanding of the tensions between the material, moral, social and subjective dimensions of care, especially of childcare at home. These children are not only the receivers of care but active participants in the different modes of family organization and their affective balances (Miller, 2005).

This article seeks to identify and understand these care arrangements and their impact on everyday life, considering the effects and inequalities that class and gender differences introduce in these practices. To achieve this goal, the relation between domesticity and extradomesticity will be taken as an analytical axis, as it corresponds to the specific axis for transforming the everyday reality introduced by the governmental measures

for reducing the risks of the pandemic. How are parents represented in the social field delimited by their home? What feelings do they express about 'the outside'? How are both spaces related? How is childcare managed based on this distinction? To what extent did the state and the market participate in the planning of childcare?

To this end, the accounts of 29 participants about their everyday life with small children during June and July are analyzed. Before presenting the results, the next section introduces a synthesis of the discussion and research pertinent to this work. Then, the methodology for data collection is explained. Subsequently, the main empirical findings of the work are presented. Finally, the results are discussed, and conclusions are drawn.

## The experience of care

The grid of spaces and social, institutional and material supports for care has been one of the everyday life dimensions most deeply affected by the covid-19 pandemic. Several analysts have proposed that this effect indicates the relevance of care as labor that ensures the continuation and support of humans in the world, which is allocated, in general, based on class and race (Lopez, 2020; Pautassi, 2020; Castilla, Kunin, & Blanco Esmoris, 2020). As indicated by Comas d'Argemir (2017), the disturbance of care arrangements makes evident the rationale behind them. In turn, the invasion of working from home into the domestic context, the efforts to adapt to that change and the positive and energy depletion consequences have been in the public eye throughout 2020 (Jaffe, 2021).

This relationship between care tasks in the domestic context work had already formed a classic axis in feminist studies, which was addressed in terms of both reproductive labor and motherization of women. Having time for productive work and care requires organization, a task and a continuous temporality that includes the provision of different supports, spaces and social relationships (Gutiérrez Sastre, 2002) as well as the transformation of the relationships between gender and generation.

The term 'caring' in Spanish comprises the subjective (preoccupation, availability, responsibility) and material dimensions (action or occupation) (Molinier & Legarreta, 2016). In other words, it refers to a practice and the perceptions, sensations and emotions surrounding it. Here, care will be understood as a series of activities and as the moral attitude to maintain, continue or repair the everyday world, as well as support for the reproduction of life (Tronto, 1993). Likewise, care, as a task performed in a social relationship, together with its protective and affective traits, often becomes asymmetrical, unidirectional, a physical and emotional burden for caregivers, and exposes care-receivers to the possibility of different forms of coercion and violence (Llobet, 2009; Castilla, 2017).

Gilligan (1982) underscored the role of responsibility development by the moral stakeholders inserted in concrete interdependent relationships as central to the ethics of care. Ordinary care experiences make both dimensions, responsibility in its moral dimension and responsibility as care work, appear as constituting each other (Borgeaud-Garciandía 2020). But far from being a simple given intertwining, the responsibility for others may become a permanent battle, be problematic and lead to negotiations and agreements, especially in contexts where material restrictions to care are in conflict with the idea of adequate care (Han, 2012) and the social relationships where care takes place. In fact, moral conflict emerges from clashing relational responsibilities, which are located in the same root as the theorization of care (Gilligan, 1982). Looking at such conflicts in detail, through the magnifying glass of the pandemic, is one goal of this work.

Relevant bonds and forms of being present and creating, activating and renewing significant relationships are defined through how care is carried out (Murray, Bowen, Verdugo, & Holtmannspötter, 2017). Without them, providing care is not possible and, in that sense, these ways express the overlap between taking care of and love, placing interdependence and vulnerability in daily life as common characteristics that are not specific to a specific group labelled as vulnerable (Murray et al., 2017). In general, care theories have indicated the need for acknowledging vulnerability as a common condition (Tronto, 2013; Molinier & Legarreta, 2016). Therefore, the tensions between taking care, affect and morality, and the relevance these acquire for establishing bonds and the construction of the common aspects of life, are departing points for this article.

The debate on public policies has often neglected these dimensions, simplifying the perspective of family arrangements and their care needs, focusing on the need for or possibility of women participating in the labor market. In connection, part of the arguments in favor of the 'national care system' emphasizes the relevance of freeing up time devoted to care, considering care an obstacle to entering the labor market. This is a classical challenge to the 'the social organization of care' (Daly & Lewis, 2000) as one of the bases of gender and class inequality related to care responsibilities, which tends to be criticized while praising paid work (Molinier, 2013). In other words, the freeing up of time spent on care would result in a woman being able to enter the paid labor market, thus fulfilling the autonomy ideal. But the debate does not address the fact that without a transformation of the social organization of care, this autonomy is based on the commodification or institutionalization of domestic work, with the consequent reproduction of gender and class inequalities. In turn, satisfaction and emotional and social commitment associated with some care tasks are omitted by the debate as well.

Furthermore, it is necessary to rethink the productive workplace as a part of daily life in order to capture how it introduces rhythms, spaces and sociabilities. The domestic sphere, configured in Argentina at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been constructed as the sphere of full-time motherhood and appropriate child rearing in a process of privatization and nuclearization associated with demographic, economic, cultural and moral dynamics (Zelizer, 1989; Nari, 2002; Aguilar, 2013). In this way, the production of domesticity—both in the historical and everyday life perspective—is intertwined with the organization of care and emotional norms.

In this line, this work aims to draw attention to how the intersection between childcare, work and domesticity was perceived, and more specifically to what extent affect and care were categorized as practices and representations of 'the inside' and 'the outside' of the household family sphere based on the accounts of parents.

To achieve this goal, it is critical to consider the forms in which these emotions about childcare are related to the regulations from social groups, interaction contexts, class, gender, and more broadly, the historical moment and the parenting cultures and ideologies (Hochschild, 1975, 1979). These relationships thereby express and mediate what is considered adequate for children, as well as the representations of childhood, maternity, paternity and rearing. In this sense, the place of the home and parental care is preeminent in the configuration of the ideal childhood, especially from the discourse about childhood rights and the contemporary processes of care consumption and re-privatization of life. As opposed to the production dynamics of a domesticity strictly differentiated from the productive sector since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the home of post-industrial families is a scenario where multiple transactions occur. The lockdown produced by the pandemic

puts pressure on and exacerbates the visibility of these processes, which are starkly different by social sectors but also similar in several dimensions.

## Methodology

The methodology, as an element of the research process, is not composed of a classic repertoire of techniques developed once and for ever. On the contrary, social contexts, changes in theoretical paradigms and technology transformations are three key factors that guide successive reformulations and changes in the field of research techniques (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008).

**General description:** The field work in this article was produced in a digital and distributed way. In other words, participants did not meet personally and their interaction with one another and the research team was mediated by a technological device that recorded their remote interventions.<sup>5</sup>

**Procedure:** Six 'groups' (similar to debate forums) were created in the application WhatsApp. All of them were composed of 2 coordinators and 5 participants. Participants could access the content of these groups from their computers or cellphones, being able to send and receive messages with images, text and audio.

The activity in each group lasted one week. During this time, early in the morning and in the afternoon, coordinators introduced discussion prompts to incentivize participants to comment. In this way, each group exchanged text and audio messages across seven days, narrating their daily experiences based on the prompts of the researchers, but also reacting to the comments of other participants and describing their perceptions, concerns, activities and daily care arrangements.

**Instrument:** The instrument was created considering the notion of technique hybridization or emergent techniques (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008). This implies the possibility of combining characteristics from different techniques in an instrument according to the needs of the research to be conducted. In this case, the instrument was based on participant observation; the notion of sharing a space with the research participants in a passive (and subsequently active) way. The timing of the field was mostly decided by the participants, who intervened in the moments of the day they deemed appropriate, while researchers listened attentively throughout the day. The semi-structured interviews maintained the role of the researcher who made some axes of interest explicit to the interviewees. This element organized the discussion material into dimensions, which aimed to be broad enough so as to allow the emergence of aspects unforeseen during the planning stage. The focus groups allowed for define the lens through which participants perceive themselves as members of a group, who are immersed in a thematic field about which they are expected to express their views and experiences. Finally, from the e-mail interviews, an idea that may benefit the expressiveness of the subjects was extracted, which consisted of letting them give their answers in a more intimate environment (without the interviewer), without restricting reflection time for the answers to the continuous exchange with the interviewer.

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<sup>5</sup> The application used, WhatsApp, is a cellphone and computer program that allows people to exchange messages with other people who sign up with their phone number. The interaction can take place in the form of 'chats' (message exchanges with a single person) or 'groups' formed by several users (similar to an online forum). The research was not based, as opposed to other 'digital ethnography' experiences (Pink et al., 2016), on analyzing existing WhatsApp groups, but on bringing together a specific sample of parents, using this tool as an interaction space for research.

The prompts for the seven days centered on the following topics: introduction (becoming familiar with the family, age, housing and work structures of participants); spaces and places (getting to know the uses and appraisals of the interior spaces of the house and neighborhood as a residential space); past (how care was organized before the pandemic); relationships (who is present in the care interactions); resources (objects and practices that are central to daily care); future (representation of the post-pandemic future made by each participant); and closure (open contributions based on the conversations and experiences of the week).

**Sample:** An open call was issued and disseminated through social media and contacts of the research team to find people who fit the parameters of the study. Fieldwork was conducted in the months of June and July 2020. For the first four groups (groups 1 to 4), the participation conditions established were to be a parent aged 18 to 60 years with at least one child between 0 and 6 years of age. For groups 5 and 6, from an analysis of the characteristics of participants in groups 1 to 4, criteria were established for compensating for the over-representation of women and people with university studies. In the case of group 5, the condition set was to be a male, while for group 6, it was not having university studies.

**Participants:** Twenty-nine people (24 women and 5 men) distributed in six groups. Ages ranged from 27 to 57 years, with 39 as the mean age. Ten people had either a master's degree or a PhD, 11 had completed tertiary education or had completed a university degree, four had incomplete tertiary or university studies and four only had completed primary or secondary education. Six families lived in a rented house, 5 did not provide this information and the rest live in a house owned by them. Five live in the province of Buenos Aires, and the rest in the city of Buenos Aires.

Regarding the occupations of participants, 14 worked as teachers at different levels, some of whom were researchers and grant holders; 3 worked as administrative staff in the private sector; 2 were administrative staff in the public sector; 4 worked in the judiciary; two worked in domestic services; 2 worked in an NGO and one was journalist. Five people expressed having more than one paid job or combining a part-time job with freelance activities. Two women declared having no income at the moment of fieldwork.

Regarding family structure, 17 families cohabit with a single child, one with a grandson, ten with two children and one with three children. In 7 cases of families with an only child, this child was less than one year old. Thirteen families have children aged 1 to 5 years, and out of these, 3 also have children aged between 6 and 12 years. Seven families only have one 6-to-12-year-old, and one family has children aged 6 to 12 and 13 to 17 years. One family lives with 13-to-17-year-old children and only one family lives with a grandparent.

## Results

To analyze the information collected, the group transcripts were coded openly. Based on this labelling, 55 codes were obtained, and analysis memos were created considering the topics and labels in each group.

Fieldwork coincided with a period of exponential growth in positive COVID-19 cases in the country. Restrictions for 'non-essential' work activities, suspension of recreational activities and remote teaching at educational establishments were in place starting at the end of March, along with a prohibition on using urban public transport for the population in general. As a consequence of these measures, schools, public transport and a significant part of work life were suspended or transformed by the imposition of remote activities.

In the following section, the dynamics of family care will be characterized in five levels: transformations in temporality—especially in relation to the past; emotions in terms of positive and negative emotions related to the space where daily life goes on (home and external world); concerns and anxiety linked to the pandemic; tensions, negotiations and the place of labor and productive work in everyday life; relational dimensions and the ways of conceiving, imagining or projecting the future. The domestic experience and the extradomestic daily life of each participant will be analyzed.

### **Past and present**

One of the most mentioned changes that occurred during lockdown was renovating the daily habitat. This comprised aesthetic interventions that originated from spending more time at home to undertake them and consider them, as well as some rearrangements to make the intradomestic spaces more functional. Some of these improvements were related to adding or changing furniture to adapt some space in the house to a new function derived from remote working. In other cases, they referred to enabling changes in lifestyle, such as using more time to cook, introduce organic consumption or recycling and composting. Finally, other alterations were related to renovating or finishing the house.

The interpretations of participants about the transformations that happened recently showed a stark contrast between 'inside' and 'outside'. While 'inside' these changes were positive, in the 'outside' almost all of them were perceived negatively, for example, closing of shops, difficulty accessing services, impossibility of sharing time with loved ones, and disruption of education.

Prohibition to work from spaces outside of the home was mentioned by most female participants as a loss, while the physical space of their homes appeared in many cases as excessively uniform.

The unplanned fusion of activities from outside and inside the home produced a new hybrid space that was not always satisfactory. Some women, for example, expressed not being able to continue with their paid activities when all the inhabitants of the house started the day. D, mother of two children, indicated:

I get up early at seven in the morning, so I can be relaxed and work. The girls get up and so does my partner [...] a bit later, at nine thirty or ten, so I have a couple of hours of peace to work. [...] Obviously when activity starts in the house I stop working. Because I just can't. If the girls are here, I need to be there with them, attending to their needs.

M, a judiciary professional with two children, one in preschool and other in primary school, also expressed having this experience, which was shared by most participants, in which the construction of time and space for intimacy at home requires the deployment of specific strategies.

It's a bit insane, that my escape was the kitchen, and I also used it to have therapy. I set a very dim light, bring a chair to the kitchen and I have therapy there. And well, another great escape room now, for example, to send this audio, is the bathroom.

Pandemic restrictions impeded expected changes, which were experienced with particular distress among women with smaller children. A 37-year-old professional summarized the plans she had but could not accomplish as follows:

In March I was happy because care tasks are mostly on my side, and I had finally decided to start a small garden, I was going to spend 4 hours there, and on March 2<sup>nd</sup> we decided to hire a nanny to

come every day [...] and then I was going to have more autonomy over my work, which sometimes entails travelling.

Although this was an exception, the care provided by domestic staff was eventually restored, although at a lower frequency during the ongoing restrictions.

### Emotions inside and outside the home

Exhaustion, distress, anxiety, guilt, helplessness, irritability, fear, longing, sadness, loneliness, resignation, vulnerability, boredom, hatred, discomfort and depression form the group of negative feelings, while joy, enjoyment, relaxation, spoiling yourself, well-being and peacefulness were the positive emotions expressed.

At a general emotional level, the domestic space circumscribed by one's own home concentrated all that was referred to as safe. The outside appeared not only as a place for the contagion of the pandemic, but also as a predominantly unstable space. At the same time, positive emotions such as enjoyment, relaxation and joy were associated with the inside of the home, whereas most of the negative emotions had the outside as their source. For example, O, administrative staff and new mom with an only child indicated:

The first month of quarantine I cried every day. Sometimes several times a day. Today, talking to my partner, I discovered that I don't cry anymore, I don't have that terrible feeling of not seeing my family and friends. I miss my nieces a lot, but I got used to not seeing my loved ones.

In some cases, the enjoyment of full-time motherhood or fatherhood was constructed as a shelter against the uncertainty of the outside and the social pain caused by the pandemic. For some men, the contrast was attributed to the possibility of following more closely the growth of their children, in a way that would have not been possible if they were working out of the house full-time. For example, R, aged 31 years, administrative staff and father of a girl, expressed:

My daughter started this lockdown at six, seven months old and is going to end it most likely when she's older than a year. And the growth process I witnessed, I would have absolutely missed it [...] thinking about how that was normal in life seemed terrible to me, and the short time, like we have to raise such small children, let's say, babies, with work and stuff. So, I tried to gain something positive from this and now the reverse situation is abnormal to me.

L, a 36-year-old teacher with a daughter under one year of age, indicated:

I think pretty much the same. And what you say about having a good time. And that it's going to be weird when we aren't together all day long here. It has its things, but family economic stability allows me to enjoy daily life. More than missing or needing someone else to be with my daughter sometimes.

In the same line, J, a school principal with two kids in primary school, expressed that her feeling when considering the context was of guilt about enjoying being at home. "I don't regret being home. I understand the complex situation and the distress and everything, but compared to other situations, I'm glad that I can be home in peace".

In this way, the daily care tasks were separated between those related to the children and those related to cleaning and feeding, but even the latter were in many cases re-signified as play, interaction and learning spaces for the children and therefore permeated by positive emotions. F (34 years old, teacher, mother of a 2-year-old girl) exemplified this transformation in the following way:

The other day I dropped some beans and well, L. got absorbed in picking them up and things like that. Before I'd probably have said to her: 'oof, no... I have to sweep all this, I don't have time', or something like that. And now it's like we're giving priority to play, to sit on the floor with her and play, and have that moment together.

In sum, it is possible to draw two emotionally opposite spaces, where the home contained the most intense feelings and the general sensation of safety and shelter, with the outside as a source of uncertainty and concern.

### **Fears, anxieties and transformation of the everyday life**

However, it should not be assumed that the events that occurred during this period were free from worries inside and outside of the home. Quite the contrary, specific and nebulous fears, anxiety due to changes and a perception of fragile stability are the feelings that were found in accounts of everyday lives filled with negotiations and organizational efforts.

In the 'inside', participants identified an intense field of interactions and needs that were managed daily and could lead to extreme tension or fatigue. Several practices that participants admitted to allowing themselves to take part in due to the context (such as less restrictions for 'screen use' in the case of children, or drawing on the floor, or loosening up schedules) were seen as a response to the perception of living under more demands that should be compensated for with the reduction of other pressures or constraints. Fear in this case revolved around the loss of emotional and relational balance, as well as a perception—especially in women—of spatial and temporal invasion within the framework of loss of non-domestic spaces, times and relationships. Overcoming these imbalances, when possible, demanded time, creativity and dialogue within the household to find satisfactory changes in daily routines, transformations in the use of spaces and the emergence of new private spaces.

In the 'outside' space, concerns were more centered on risk of infection; uncertainty about the re-establishment of work sources; closure or continuity of spaces and stores visited before, and generalized sadness and anxiety about the social situation. For example, M, 41-year-old administrative staff with two children of school age, indicated: "Most stores, closed. It makes me really sad. I can't stop thinking about the reality of those people today and tomorrow".

Regarding this topic, L, aged 36 years, commented:

I'm very scared about the future. There are people who are having a hard time. And what is gonna happen when coronavirus is gone? How do you keep going? How do people who lose their jobs keep going? Sometimes I detach from my reality, but there's strong distress there.

This 'outside' had different connotations for participants from different social classes. Non-professionals pointed to the neighborhood as a space where it's more possible to manage their needs compared to other participants. Family networks are spread around the neighborhood, and therefore daily management implied mobilizing that support in some cases. C, a 42-year-old domestic employee with an 8-year-old son, explained:

My sister is my neighbor, but we don't get together. We only see each other through the fence. But we still are watching out for each other in case we need anything, as she also has children, or if she goes out to buy something, she asks me if we need anything, and we do the same.

The political and socioeconomic dimensions of the pandemic were expressed as social suffering in this way, while institutions such as schools or hospitals either suspended face-to-face activities or managed them in a patchwork fashion and, in general, did not act as stable and predictable supports for everyday life. Although the absence of onsite activities at schools was relevant, this relevance increased due to the increased workload that home schooling implied.

### **Interpersonal relationships**

Regarding the daily organization of care and life in general, the home was the most decisive criterion for delimiting a 'we'. This 'we' was the basis from which health measures and strategies for ensuring the money necessary for daily expenses were conceived and put into practice. In intersubjective terms, accompaniment and major conflicts and their solutions were restricted to these aspects.

It should be noted that relationships outside the home, when they did not refer to strictly functional relationships (work, business relationships), significant losses were mentioned that derive from respecting the health restrictions in place. Children could not see their grandparents, while participants themselves could not visit friends and family either. Nevertheless, while these statements demonstrated their symbolic importance, they also partly showed their practical redundancy.

The symbolic and affective relevance of these bonds shape the concepts of care and rearing shared by the interviewees. This implied, for example, that limits on the use of technology by children were relaxed to maintain and recreate family bonds. In turn, the loss of shared time and the relevance of 'seeing children grow up' as a central dimension of the experience were underscored as the biggest sources of distress and sadness.

Corporal closeness, another relational aspect lost, was mentioned among the mothers of younger children. Regarding this topic, L said of her baby girl: "We used to go out a lot before, she spent time with all types of people. Now it's been three months since she's touched other people. I supposed that we will need to adapt when this ends".

For their part, some female participants mentioned that they integrated the childrearing groups they frequented into the virtual space. G expressed it as follows: "Spaces, tribes. I was going to a childrearing group that for me was lifesaving. Motherhood alone is terrible. It was before the pandemic and now it's even more as you can't see anyone".

These opportunities offered a relevant emotional support, functioning as informal networks for assistance and emotional support.

### **Work**

Different work-related activities of the participants and other members of their homes were mentioned to explain their daily practices and coordination with the care needs of each family. Working was present both inside and outside the house, with a difference between participants who needed to deal with all or part of their obligations at home and those who 'went out'. In other words, work created a substantive axis for anxiety, identity perceptions, expectations about the future, perceptions of change and organization of daily life.

When the work was done at home (due to new or preexisting remote work practices or freelance work at home), everyday life combined alternation and simultaneity with close relationships and care responsibilities. In the case of participants who continued their work

routines outside of the home, such activities resulted in scheduled absences, and therefore care and daily interactions in the house were undertaken by the people staying in.

The problem of not separating remote workspaces as well as the housing conditions of participants was also expressed as a lack of time boundaries derived from work conditions. P, administrative staff in a company and mother of two children in primary school, expressed:

One positive thing about days I go to the office, I have a schedule... otherwise at home everything becomes blurry. In my case, there is some need to show that one is connected and available, because the management of the company have in their minds that people do not work much at home.

In this way, the time/space of home was invaded by labor under certain work circumstances. Being overwhelmed, tired and irritable were sensations and emotions derived from the increase in activities and the withdrawal of support for care and reproductive tasks.

### **Present and future**

As part of the work conducted in the groups, participants were asked how they imagined their future. On this last point, it is curious that references to the future were mostly in relation to the outside. In other words, that change or continuity expectations did not refer to the intradomestic space despite its central role in the other analyzed levels. If the outside was seen as a place in crisis, risky and unpredictable, future prospects focused on the desired results in that space instead of personal, intimate or private consequences for participants.

In this way, fear of a 'pandemic' future, without vaccines, or having to go out and use public transportation with the presence of infection, dominated the accounts of some female participants. Other fears about the future derive from the socioeconomic situation and a predicted potential crisis. Many perceptions about the future referred to the situation of children, for example, the fear of and expectations for the return to school and the reopening of socialization spaces, as well as anxiety surrounding the processes of change in the case of older children (such as finishing high school and leaving home).

### **Discussion**

Fieldwork showed that participants made a distinction between their domestic spaces and events outside them. Emotions, relationships and ways of perceiving and relating to the elements within the boundaries of their own house exhibited a stark contrast with the domain of the 'outside'. This separation cannot be attributed to health restrictions derived from the pandemic, but rather it can be pointed out as a way in which participants processed and organized new needs and problems arising from them.

The contrast between family and childrearing and the productive sphere, as well as that of the available space and family bonds with privacy and individuality, articulated diverging emotional spheres. This implies an effort expressed especially through domestic arrangements of care but also through 'internal conciliations', subjective adjustments that each participant had to make to face the challenge of being at home all the time.

Lockdown implied the loss of relationship networks 'between women' or their substitution for virtual networks. The limitation of gatherings with friends, the overlap of work and life spaces and also the suspension of going out for work are topics shared across the experience of being a mother and the experience of isolation.

Professional women mostly developed narratives about the experience that were marked by a feminist lexicon in which motherhood, care and partner arrangements are put into perspective. The topic of struggles for women's autonomy appears expressed as dimensions for pondering the daily experience and designing personal expectations.

In turn, and especially in middle-class professionals, the need emerged for attributing pedagogical and emotional value to daily reproductive activities. In this way, a form of building emotional balance in the context of lack of the usual supports for care tasks implied some sort of 'gamification' of daily chores with the active inclusion of children, building enjoyment spaces that implied both being flexible about the own ideas on appropriate care, especially regarding meals and screen time—like following a culturally valued script for fulfillment, transformation of food consumption and connection with 'oneself'.

For some males, spending more time at their homes was related to a positive appraisal of participating more actively in the care and rearing of their children. In this way, 'seeing the children grow', the leitmotiv of permanent cohabiting, gave a sense of fulfillment to care that would otherwise be experienced as minor or less valuable.

## **Final considerations**

The complex and unstable family and home arrangements to address daily care derived from lockdown and the suspension of networks and services revealed the nuances people deal with on a daily basis. These supports are incorporated through appraisals not only of organizing care but also of the value care adopts to give meaning to multiple aspects of everyday life and also based on its relevance for emotional management.

Reviewing the controversies, conflicts and emotional practices surrounding childcare in the context of the pandemic allows for assessing the relational dimensions in the dynamics of care, inserting childhood care experiences in the production of senses about childhood, motherhood and fatherhood, and discovering the diversity in childcare practices and relationships.

This does not necessarily imply a conservative reevaluation of care tasks but aims to show the nuances adopted by such tasks depending on the relationships in which they take place, and also the relevance of the diverse emotional and sentimental rules displayed in the process. As indicated by Tronto (2013), caring occurs within the framework of specific relationships and therefore its analysis should be contextualized and relational.

Tensions related to the burden of productive and reproductive tasks and the conditions in which they are realized appear displaced and distributed in the spatial and social dimensions of their realization. Care is a central task in the formation of bonds and relationships, and childcare offers emotional and identity compensations. In the socially extreme context of the pandemic, childcare enabled the construction of spaces and moments of enjoyment and protection, which were experienced as shelters from the social pain and uncertainty that characterized the researched period.

In this sense, the value of daily care increases and becomes relevant when interpreted in relation to the upbringing of children. In this way, it is not only responsibility

that shapes care tasks, but above all, the possibility of providing it with a dimension of pleasure and an increase in emotionality, which derive from the relationship in which they take place; that is to say, motherhood or fatherhood and all the affective relationships in play.

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