

# Career Development of Working Mothers: Helping and Hindering Factors in Doing Well During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

Women's career development amid the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that we may be facing a 'female recession', where women are at significantly increased risk for dropping out of the workforce with the gender gap in the workplace likely to grow. However, the pandemic may have presented opportunities for working mothers to engage creatively in personal career decisions due to increased opportunities to work flexibly and pivot in a very quickly changing labour market. This qualitative study used the enhanced critical incident technique to explore the intersection of working mothers and career development considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants for this study were a sample of 18 working mothers in North America and Australia. Key factors that were identified as helping women do well in their career development during COVID-19 included: Supportive workplaces, social support, personal protective factors, job market factors, and resources (predominantly financial). Hindering factors to working mothers' career development included: workplace challenges, family challenges, personal stressors, job market factors, COVID-19 mandates

and restrictions, and childcare. The findings from this study help elucidate factors that contribute to a meaningful and productive career so that clinicians and other professionals can support, advocate, and encourage women who remain working during motherhood.

*Keywords:* working mothers, career advancement, COVID-19 pandemic, enhanced critical incident technique (ECIT), qualitative research

On the 11th of March 2020, The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that spread throughout the world a pandemic (WHO, 2020). As of the 23rd of May 2021, more than 166 million cases were confirmed and more than 3.45 million confirmed deaths were attributed to COVID-19, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in history (WHO, 2020). As a result of the pandemic, individuals, families, communities, and countries across the world self-isolated and socially distanced in ways never seen before to slow down the infection rate. Due to physical distancing guidelines associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses and employees transitioned to working

remotely from home often without adequate training and resources (Como et al., 2021). Many other workers lost their jobs due to the rapidly changing landscape of the labour market. Workers across all sectors simultaneously navigated the fear and uncertainty surrounding the virus, including their career trajectories and job security. For working mothers, evidence suggests they are at increased risk of dropping out of the workforce and the gender gap in the workplace may be at risk of growing despite the gains that have been made over the past few decades (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

## Motherhood, Career Development, and COVID-19

The association between motherhood and reduced or restricted career outcomes is well established (Mäkelä, 2009; McIntosh et al., 2012; Warren and Brewis, 2004). Combining career and motherhood can mean that women find it difficult to establish the degree of impact in their careers which they would hope for due to juggling paid work and family responsibilities. This juggling act directly affects the type of roles working mothers can obtain or are offered (McIntosh et al., 2012).

Waldfogel (2007) termed it the ‘penalties of motherhood’ related to women’s career progression. She noted that this penalty may last for a woman’s entire career, even after childcare has ceased, due to the negative effects of career breaks forming a negative shadow on their future careers, compared to men’s careers which suffer little to no disadvantage (Waldfogel, 2007). Although flexible employment, in terms of hours or part-time work, may be appealing to women due to their flexibility and ability to combine work and family responsibilities more easily, they can come at a cost to their long-term career (McQuaid et al., 2009). These constraints frequently force women to take less attractive employment which accommodate personal circumstances on reduced salaries and hours of work or both.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, working mothers had similar career ambitions compared to working women overall and had higher ambitions in some categories such as motivation for promotion and advancement (McKinsey & Company, 2021). In fact, in recent years, working women had made many gains in achieving equal opportunities and job prospects compared to men - Between January 2015 and January 2020, the number of women in senior-vice-president positions increased from 23 to 28 percent (McKinsey & Company, 2021). However, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, up to 33% of working mothers considered downshifting

their careers or leaving their jobs altogether (McKinsey & Company, 2021). In fact, women sustained a greater proportion of the job losses due to COVID-19 in part because they were overrepresented in occupations and sectors hit especially hard during the pandemic, such as accommodation, food, sales, and manufacturing (Catalyst, 2020). Women were also dropping out of the labour force due to growing responsibilities of unpaid work at home, including the responsibility for childcare and homeschooling children or caretaking for other family members, revealing the gendered nature of the mandatory imposition of home working during the pandemic (Ashman et al., 2022; Clark et al., 2021).

Mothers are also more than three times as likely as fathers to be responsible for most of the housework and caregiving during the pandemic. Latina mothers are 1.6 times more likely than white mothers to be responsible for all childcare and housework, and Black mothers are twice as likely to be handling these duties for their families (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Latina and Black women are more likely to be their family’s sole breadwinner or to have partners working outside the home during the COVID-19 crisis, so leaving the workforce or downshifting may not be a realistic option. Of mothers who have considered leaving the workforce, Asian and Latina mothers were more likely to say that their decision was related to domestic and childcare responsibilities

(McKinsey & Company, 2021). Most of the literature surrounding the pandemic and career development related to working mothers shows a bleak picture. Yet the pandemic may present opportunities for working mothers to engage creatively in personal career decisions considering increased opportunities to work flexibly and pivot with a very quickly changing labour market. Considering the uncertainty, loss, disruption, and anxiety presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the experience of precarity may evoke resilience and resistance (Grenier et al., 2020, p. 9) in working mothers, which may transform the circumstances that exacerbate vulnerability.

### The Current Study

This study aims to explore the intersection of working mothers and career development in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the study will focus on working mothers who self-report doing well in their careers since the COVID-19 outbreak began. The research aims to explore factors that helped and hindered working mother’s career trajectories, considering the global pandemic, to understand what these women perceive as contributing to a meaningful and productive career.

### Method

In this section, we describe the procedure, participants, and the enhanced critical incident

technique (ECIT) methodology utilized in the present study. The Research Ethics Board of the University affiliated with the research approved the study before it took place.

### Procedure

Working mothers, with children of any age, were invited to participate in the study through word of mouth and social media outlets, from North America and Australia. Inclusion criteria for the study included: a) Mothers with a living child at home; b) Mothers who are currently engaged in any type of paid work, whether self-employed or working for an employer; c) Mothers who report doing well in their careers during the COVID-19 pandemic and are willing to share about their experiences, and; d) have a minimum English proficiency. Mothers interested in participating were briefed on the research and screened for the inclusion/exclusion criteria. If participants indicated they would like to participate in the study, they completed the consent form, and a first interview was scheduled.

Formal semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted by LR and EO over Zoom between June 2022 – March 2023. Demographic data was requested to better provide a contextual frame for describing and interpreting the data. Each mother was interviewed individually on two separate occasions to facilitate the development of a

deeper relationship between the researcher and participant and, in turn, generate richer disclosure. The first interview invited each mother to share about doing well in her career during the pandemic and lasted on average 46 minutes (range: 23-90 minutes). During the second interview, each participant provided feedback on both individual and grouped participant factors and the categories in which each factor was placed. The second interview lasted approximately 15-30 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by LR and EO. Participants received a \$25 CAD gift voucher for participating in both interviews.

### Participants

The participants in this study were 18 working mothers who self-identified as doing well in their careers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most participants worked full-time (n=16). Four of the participants were self-employed while 14 participants were employees of workplaces and/or industries related to public health, education, non-profit, government, private sector, and small business. The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 48 years old, with a mean age of 35. The participants were located in Canada, Australia, and the United States. All participants were mothers of biological children. Most participants were married (n=16). One participant identified as Latina, six participants identified as

Black/African American, and 11 participants identified as White/Caucasian. Please see Table 2 for detailed demographic data for participants in the study.

Two participants had a pre-existing relationship with LR, and all participants were briefed on the researcher's reasons for doing the research. Four participants completed the consent form but withdrew before the first interview. One participant gave the reason that she was too busy; The other three participants did not respond. Five participants participated in first interview and not second interview; Three of these participants did not respond, one participant was too busy, and one person was not happy about the gift card amount (\$25 CAD).

### Enhanced Critical Incident Technique

The enhanced critical incident technique (ECIT), an adaptation of the critical incident technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954), was chosen for the present research because it is designed to capture helping and hindering aspects of a specific phenomenon—in this case, working women who report doing well in their career development during the COVID-19 pandemic—from the perspective of the lived experiences of the participants. Also, the ECIT has been expanded to capture “wish list” (WL) items, or what participants wished they would have known or would have had for the experience being studied. The ECIT framework

**Table 2***Participants' Demographics*

<b>P#</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Highest Education</b>	<b>Current Relational Status</b>	<b>Parental Status: No. Children</b>	<b>Occupational Status</b>	<b>Country of Residence</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
#1	30	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 2 children	Full-time; Customer Service	United States	Caucasian
#2	46	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 1 child	Full-time; Business owner	Australia	Caucasian
#3	40	Post-graduate diploma	Separated	Custody 50%: 2 children	Part-time, self-employed; Psychologist	Australia	Caucasian
#4	31	Post-graduate	Married	Shared parental care: 1 child	Full-time; Accountant	United States	African-American
#5	37	College	Married	Shared parental care: 1 child	Full-time; HR Administrative Assistant	Canada	Caucasian
#6	30	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 1 child	Full-time; Office assistant for retail company	United States	African-American
#7	27	College	Single, never married	Single parent: 1 child	Full-time; Business owner	United States	African-American
#8	32	Master's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 1 child	Full-time; Business owner	United States	Caucasian
#9	30	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 1 child	Full-time; IT Consultant	United States	African-American
#10	30	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 2 children	Full-time; Public Health expert	United States	African-American
#11	39	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 2 children	Full-time; Registered Nurse	Canada	Caucasian

**Table 2**  
*Participants' Demographics*

P#	Age	Highest Education	Current Relational Status	Parental Status: No. Children	Occupational Status	Country of Residence	Ethnicity
#12	38	Post-graduate diploma	Married	Shared parental care: 2 children	Part-time; Psychologist	Australia	Caucasian
#13	34	Master's degree	Common law partnership	Shared parental care: 1 child	Full-time; Policy Analyst	Canada	Caucasian
#14	32	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 3 children	Part-time, self-employed; Administrative, marketing services	Canada	Latin-American
#15	27	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 1 child	Part-time; Rabbi	United States	Caucasian (Jewish)
#16	34	College	Married	Co-parenting: 1 child	Full-time; Housekeeper	United States	Caucasian
#17	48	Master's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 1 child	Full-time; Research Administration	United States	Caucasian
#18	40	Bachelor's degree	Married	Shared parental care: 2 children	Full-time; Teacher	United States	African-American

is embedded within the post-positivist paradigm.

The ECIT protocol involves a semi-structured, qualitative interview about the experience of interest. In this study, participants were asked to describe what helped them most in their career development during the COVID-19 pandemic and what hindered or got in the way of them doing well in their career development. They were also asked to describe “wish list”

(WL) items, which represent retrospectively what they think would have been helpful to know or to have during the pandemic related to doing well in work. This semi-structured interview protocol focused on the subjective perspectives and insights of the research participants. Please refer to Appendix A and B for interview schedules 1 and 2 respectively.

**Data Analysis**

Inductive data analysis identified each event or aspect of the experience (each called a “critical incident”) the participants described. Transcribed interviews were used to determine critical incidents (separated into helping and hindering factors) and wish list items. According to the ECIT technique, critical incidents (CIs) and wish list (WL) items extracted are those supported by

examples (Butterfield et al., 2009). Two researchers (LR and EO) independently coded the data and formed categories from individual items using inductive reasoning, patience, and the ability to see similarities and differences among the CIs provided by participants.

Each CI was placed into a category, either by identifying a new category or placing the CI into a pre-existing category from earlier interviews in the study. The researchers (LR and EO) made decisions about the exclusivity of the categories, deciding which larger categories needed to be separated or if smaller related categories needed to be merged. This process was conducted one interview at a time until no new categories emerged. A minimum participation rate of 25% was required for category retention (Borgen & Amundson, 1984). Once final categories were established, key themes were identified to summarize and report the results effectively.

### Research Team

A research team was utilized in the present research and comprised: one assistant professor of counselling psychology with a PhD who identifies as female (LR), one associate professor of counselling psychology with a PhD who identifies as male (DM), one master's level researcher who identifies as female (EO), and several master's level research students all identifying as female. LR and DM have significant

experience in conducting qualitative research pertaining to the topics of motherhood and career development, respectively. The primary researcher, LR, became a mother during the COVID-19 pandemic and was eager to support working mothers who chose to stay in the workforce, despite the challenges. LR formulated the research study to encourage and equip mothers in their career development in light of the pandemic challenges that working mothers faced.

### Rigour and Validation

ECIT requires nine credibility checks as outlined by Butterfield and colleagues (2005, 2009), which were followed in this study to ensure validity and rigour (see Table 1). To fulfil the first credibility check, all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Second, interview fidelity was maintained by reviewing interview protocols and the principal investigator providing supervision of initial interviews. A member of the research team reviewed subsequent interview recordings to determine that the interview protocol had been followed. Third, independent extraction of the CI and WL items took place on all interviews, beyond the recommended 25% of interviews by Butterfield and colleagues (2005, 2009). Fourth, to ensure exhaustiveness was reached, a log of each interview was tracked as its CI and WL items were placed into the

emerging categories until new categories did not emerge. Fifth, the minimum participation rate (percentage of participants that endorsed a category) determined the strength of a category. A minimum participation rate of 25% is the standard established by Borgen and Amundson (1984). Although one of the categories did not meet this threshold (see Table 3), the research team, after in-depth consultation, considered this category significant enough to include. Sixth, the ECIT technique suggests an 80% match rate on categories by independent researchers (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964). The present study enhanced rigour by having two researchers conduct data analysis and interpretation together, ensuring 100% agreement across all categories. Moreover, an 88% match rate resulted from an independent judge's placement of CI and WL items into established categories. Coding discrepancies were addressed throughout the analysis and interpretation process between the two coders. Seventh, cross-checking by participants via a second interview allowed participants to confirm and review CI and WL items as well as categories. The eighth credibility check drew on opinions of experts in the field regarding the categories formed. Two experts were considered as part of the research team, and they provided their expertise concerning the data analysis process and provided additional insights about the categories/themes that were

**Table 1***Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) Credibility Checks*

Credibility Check	Description
Audiotaping and Transcribing	The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in order to ensure that researchers work directly and comprehensively from the words of participants rather than from inferences or incomplete notes.
Interviewer Fidelity	Interviewer fidelity was ensured by using a structured interview protocol, and researchers reviewing each other's interviews periodically.
Independent Extraction	Butterfield et al. have recommended selecting 25% of the transcripts to give to an independent individual, following which the researcher would normally discuss possible discrepancies and calculate a concordance rate.  For this study, the authors enhanced the third credibility check of independent extraction by collaboratively extracting CI and WL, and placing them in categories by consensus with 100% of the transcripts.
Exhaustiveness	Exhaustiveness, the fourth credibility check, indicates the point at which no new categories are being identified. This criterion was reached after 13 interviews, after which no other interviews were necessary.
Participation Rates	Participation Rate (discussed in the text) not only provides a minimum requirement for retaining a category but also serves to establish relative strengths of each category.
Placing Into Categories by a Judge	In this credibility check, 25% of the CIs are assigned to an independent judge for category placement with a recommended match rate of 80% with the PI.  This credibility check was modified similarly to the check of independent extraction in that the researchers placed the incidents into categories collaboratively. The researchers achieved 100% agreement through discussion at the time of category formation and coding. An independent judge further confirmed category placement with a match rate of 88%.
Cross-Checking by Participants	After the participant's results were analyzed and incidents were elicited and placed into their respective emerging categories, participants were contacted to do a second interview (by phone, e-mail, or videoconference) and were provided with a copy of their incidents along with the categories that these incidents were placed to confirm whether they had been placed appropriately. This honours participants' voices as the final authorities in representing their lived experience.

Table 1. Continued

Credibility Check	Description
Expert Opinion Review	<p>The categories were submitted to two outside experts for an expert opinion review. The experts were asked, (1) do you find the categories to be useful?; (2) are you surprised by any of the categories?; and (3) do you think there is anything missing based on your experience?</p> <p>The categories in this study were submitted to a registered midwife, and a nurse practitioner, who is also qualified as a licensed lactation consultant and is currently working in perinatal care. Both experts confirmed that the categories were congruent with their expertise, and current research in the field.</p>
Theoretical Agreement	<p>Theoretical agreement involves reporting assumptions underlying the study, and comparing emergent categories with relevant literature.</p>

*Note:* These nine credibility checks were performed to enhance the rigour of the analysis, according to the guidelines of the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005; Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009), with specific project applications and/or modifications clearly noted under each description.

extracted. Finally, the ninth credibility check was to attain theoretical agreement for the emergent categories and themes, along with the assumptions of the study, concerning the existing literature. There was consistency between the literature and the assumptions and categories/themes, as elaborated in the discussion.

**Results**

There were 189 CI and WL items that were reported by the participants. Of these items, 82 (43%) were helping factors, 65 (34%) were hindering factors, and 42 (22%) were wish list items. These incidents were placed into 15 categories, as presented in Table 3. The categories are described below in descending order of number of CI and WL

items. Appendix C shows a detailed breakdown of the results categories.

**Helping**

*Work*

This category refers to elements of the participants’ workplaces or work situations that contributed to a positive career experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants spoke to helpful factors such as supportive management and colleagues, workplace culture that valued family and well-being, flexibility in the workplace, adequate workplace resources, and the ability to work from home. For many of the participants, having a workplace that understood and supported their lives as working mothers was essential for them to do well in their careers. An

example of this can be seen in one participant’s workplace culture:

The unique thing of where I work is that there is a very big focus on family. So even during the start of the COVID pandemic, when a lot of day-cares were closed and people did not have family support, there were a lot of policies that were put in place to allow for flexibility for parents. And two years down the road now, I think there’s even more of an expectation at the organizational level around flexibility when it comes to childcare. And an example is when [baby] is sick, and I can’t have childcare, I can work between the hours that she’s napping, which I don’t think a lot of other organizations would allow for (13).



**Table 3**  
*Categorization of Results*

Categories	P#	P%	I#
<b>Helping</b>			
Work	15	83%	35
Support	14	78%	23
Personal protective factors	6	33%	13
Job market factors	5	28%	6
Resources	5	28%	5
<b>Hindering</b>			
Work	17	94%	29
Family challenges	7	39%	8
Personal stressors	7	39%	8
Job market factors	6	33%	7
COVID-19 mandates/restrictions	5	28%	7
Childcare	6	33%	6
<b>Wish List</b>			
Work	10	56%	21
Resources	8	44%	10
Government preparation/policies	6	33%	7
Support	4	22%	4

Note. P#: Number of Participants; P%: Percentage of Participants; I#: Number of Incidents

Working from home not only increased flexibility with household and childcare responsibilities but also contributed to a sense of renewal and creativity around work. One participant described the inspiration she gained in accessing new online opportunities:

I don't feel limited anymore. I don't feel limited to where I'm at. There's a flow, there's

an expansion, and I'm excited about it... You can get creative influences without necessarily having to travel. And now there's all these online teachers. I could be in Michigan and learn techniques from this lady in Oregon... COVID has opened up or encouraged these channels (2).

**Support**

Incidents in this category pertain to social and domestic/childcare support that enabled the participants to do well in their careers. Many of the participants shared how support from family members allowed them to balance their domestic and work responsibilities. Most often, support came from mothers and spouses. One participant spoke of how her mother's support helped her, stating:

I had time for myself. My mum would just advise I go to sleep so I could go back to work the next day. It was really helpful, like the stress of cooking after work, making sure [my daughter] has gone to bed on time... My mom released me of that stress (4).

Spouses or partners were also helpful in sharing family responsibilities, with one participant stating, "I have quite a supportive partner, we divide and conquer the domestic responsibilities. We would take turns like it wasn't always all on me" (12). This applied for childcare as well: "with [my husband] being at home, we were able to share, I work two hours, and then you work two hours... being able to have two hours of uninterrupted work was helpful, as opposed to being on call with kids" (14). The participants also experienced emotional support

from family and friends as being helpful in overcoming work-related challenges. One participant described how social media allowed her to feel connected to others in the pandemic despite physical distancing and isolation measures.

### ***Personal Protective Factors***

The incidents in this category reflect aspects of the participants' personal characteristics that allowed the participants to manage or overcome career-related difficulties which, in turn, enhanced their career trajectories. The incidents related more specifically to their organizational and time management skills, perspectives, and sense of meaning or purpose. These factors allowed the participants to prioritize what was important to them and work towards their career and life goals. This could be seen in a practical sense, with one participant sharing, "what's really helped me is how I manage my time. I really needed to have a schedule and plan to manage my time" (8). Participants also reflected on deeper values and expectations.

According to one participant:

I don't need to be that top tier of excelling. I'll just go for the very basic. It's really important to me to have a healthy home life and not have too much stress during the day, that's almost more important to me than the extra money that I might make (5).

### ***Job market factors***

This category refers to how the participants' careers were positively impacted by job market factors, particularly considering the job market changes that took place because of the pandemic. For instance, some participants worked in industries that experienced significant growth while others found new opportunities that opened to them. One participant noted:

The particular industry I was working with, it was digital marketing with e-commerce brands. So that actually grew a lot during the pandemic because everyone was buying online. Our industry actually benefited from it. So, we still had a lot of work (14).

There was also a positive impact of working in a field that had job security while others may have experienced less stability during the pandemic. For instance, one participant shared:

I think just having broad employability...that was really helpful at a time where there was a lot of uncertainty, people are losing their jobs, businesses are closing. I felt comfortable that should I choose to leave that I would still be able to get a job (3).

### ***Resources***

This category included incidents related to an access to resources that benefited the participants' careers, particularly financial resources. One participant described how financial resources allowed her family to live comfortably without facing significant challenges:

I would say having some amount of financial privilege, I don't take that for granted. Like being able to drive places and not rely on transit. Being able to afford help. And we could meet our own personal financial goals as a family (11).

Another participant described how she was able to rely on financial savings to start her business during the pandemic: "My savings did come in handy because no one was there to lend me money. So, my savings really helped" (7). Lastly, one participant mentioned how it was helpful to have proper technology to effectively work from home.

### ***Hindering***

#### ***Work***

This category reflects aspects of the participants' workplaces that impeded the ability to do well in their careers. Some of the participants noted additional challenges brought on by the pandemic, such as a diversion of resources towards addressing

the pandemic, an increase in workload, and delays in workflow or work processes. One participant shared:

COVID slowed everything down... It made new ideas and new initiatives hard to go ahead with. So, I might have been able to better advance my career and try and lead some new initiatives, but COVID hindered that and made things harder to do (5).

Similarly, another participant noted, "A lot of people were deployed to other COVID related duties. It was a hindrance in the deliverables that we were supposed to meet" (13). While many of the participants appreciated the benefits of working from home, they also struggled with it, particularly with technological issues and the lack of face-to-face communication. Working from home was distracting or less efficient in some ways, as expressed by one participant: "I think you do end up working less because you have housework staring at your face. Even if you don't have kids that's happening. So, I feel there's more interruptions in that way" (11). One participant noted how using virtual platforms for meetings slowed timelines:

It's a good tool for making decisions in small groups, but it's actually very difficult to make decisions and get work done in larger groups. I felt like the inability for people

to meet in person for like, two hours and have those side conversations with one another, I think it did hinder the timelines (13).

Notably, several participants named the ability to work from home as both a helping and hindering factor. This apparent contradiction between categories reflects that some factors have a dual nature of being both helpful and hindering. Participants who were self-employed also noted difficulties with starting or running a business during the pandemic, such as limited customer and product bases and moments of self-doubt as many businesses shut down.

### *Family Challenges*

The incidents in this category describe the challenges arising from family and home life that impacted the participants' career experiences. Participants reflected on the difficulty of balancing family and work demands which led to minimal time for themselves. According to one participant, "having a family to run makes me responsible for things going on in my family. If I'm not working, I'm thinking about my family. So, it's kind of distracting because there is no time to think about myself" (6). Some of the participants also shared how a lack of family support hindered their careers, especially when they lacked support from their spouse. In one participant's words:

It frustrated me that my husband didn't ask for flexible work arrangements. There was just that assumption that I was in a position to be more flexible. I really felt like it was all falling to me as the mum to manage (3).

One participant also noted the challenge of working while her son's school was closed, as she could see how he was struggling to cope.

### *Personal Stressors*

This category included incidents related to personal traits or struggles which created challenges in the participants' career lives. Participants experienced a mental health toll manifesting as burnout and anxiety amid uncertainty and additional demands on their energy and time. One participant shared about the anxiety she experienced during the pandemic as follows:

I experienced fear, that constant worry about if things would work out, or if they won't work out. I think it really affects even your output at work. Sometimes you feel demotivated like, why am I working? And when you see the environment around you, they are so negative, there are a lot of things that are going around the environment which can really discourage you (8).

### *Job Market Factors*

The incidents in this category reflected job market factors, particularly those precipitated by the pandemic, that had a negative effect on the participants' careers. Some participants noted how certain opportunities became unavailable due to the pandemic, while one participant lost her job. Several participants reported a perceived change in work attitudes, noting a lack of accountability on their teams and a labour shortage that impacted their ability to find suitable workers. According to a participant:

Nobody wanted to work. They put in place extra incentives on unemployment. We're trying to hire people, but they didn't want to work because the government was doing all these subsidies. And even though those subsidies stopped, we still can't really hire people. There's this whole different attitude to the workforce...so many more people say I only want remote work, but our work isn't remote. So, it's not a good fit (17).

### *COVID-19 Mandates/Restrictions*

This category represents the career-related difficulties that were caused by COVID-19 mandates and restrictions. Some of the restrictions impacted the participants' abilities to perform work duties or made it more

challenging to focus on work. One of the participants, a business owner, emphasized how they endured significant stress in trying to comply with the mandates, particularly because they were continuously changing. This participant shared:

It was the amount of time and effort and fear and stress. There was no return on investment with it. I could have lost everything on a fine. I could have lost my business because it could have been a COVID hotspot. Because someone didn't wash their hands or I hadn't followed a particular mandate, I could have potentially lost everything (2).

### *Childcare*

In this category, the participants described additional challenges with continuity of childcare during the pandemic that impacted their careers. The emphasis was on the closure of day-cares that created unpredictability and increased stress in managing childcare with work. For example, one participant explained:

I would say one of the hardest things about the pandemic has been the unpredictability of childcare, especially in the beginning. Because before, if you're just exposed to COVID, you have to isolate for two weeks, before vaccines were a thing. I remember even when

the younger one's day-care had an outbreak of COVID, and everyone had to isolate, and I had just started this new job (11).

One participant also noted that day-cares were stricter in prohibiting sick children from attending at that time, which created difficulty in finding childcare.

### *Wish List*

#### *Work*

The items in this category describe aspects of work that would have helped the participants have a positive career experience during the pandemic. One of the prevalent themes was a desire for increased flexibility and autonomy over work, such as decision-making over working hours and whether work can be done from home or in the office. One participant described this desire as follows:

We are moving back towards more time spent in the office. So, I do wish that there was a little bit more of an emphasis on flexibility, like, it wasn't so rigid. Like not just you have to go into the office on Mondays and Fridays. I do wish I could make that decision for myself (13).

This wish for autonomy over working hours was shared by another participant whose manager did not allow her to work from

home, even on days her children were sick, forcing the participant to use her own sick leave:

I think a little bit of flexibility and understanding from management goes a long way so that you are able to do your job. I'm falling behind on my deadlines, because my kids are sick and I had to stay at home with them, even though my daughter has a three-hour nap and there's a chunk of time I could be doing uninterrupted work (11).

A similar wish was for increased support and understanding from management on the challenges of being a working parent. Participants also wished for resources such as training and additional employees to help with managing heavy workloads. One participant identified how they missed in-person social opportunities and moments of connection with co-workers, sharing, "A big wish list thing would be more fun social opportunities with co-workers ... that's really been lost... COVID kind of separated everyone" (5).

### **Resources**

Items that indicate a wish for increased access to resources were included in this category. The incidents reflect a desire for increased financial resources, with many participants reporting that it would have been helpful to have financial support from

the government, their workplace, or family and friends. Some participants also wished for health-related resources such as access to therapy or wellness stipends from work to access fitness classes. One participant shared, "I feel like if the government distributed some of those grants to some people to help out... When I lost my job, no money is coming. You're only spending without having anything coming in" (1). Another participant spoke to the financial costs associated with working from home:

We did more online meetings. Anything that had to do with [being] online, which will warrant you removing money from your pocket to make sure you achieve it. I couldn't really do that because of finances. I failed once, I had to open up to my boss, and thank God my boss was supportive. He had to get it from his pocket to help me get it done (4).

### **Government Preparation/Policies**

The items in this category refer to a desire for government action that would have helped the participants' careers. These incidents communicate the participants' sense of frustration towards the government at its handling of the pandemic, with many participants wishing the government had been able to respond to the pandemic in a timelier manner. These statements also reflected how difficult the

pandemic was for the participants. Most of the participants did not have specific suggestions that they would have wanted to see implemented, but expressed a belief that the effects of the pandemic would not have been as devastating had the government responded differently:

I wish that our leaders would take this thing seriously. That's what I wish for. Because things are not the same since COVID. Things have not been the same. Food, inflation, family get togethers are different. The world is different. Everything's expensive (18).

Similarly, another participant shared, "It would have made the COVID-19 pandemic risks less impactful, there would be less dead. There would be less strain on us" (10). One participant said,

I hope we never, ever repeat what was done because it took a long time, but the state and the public education department finally acknowledged the harm that was done, the irreparable harm. I think we learned that for the families, for the kids, the shutdown was far worse than beneficial (17).

### **Support**

This category contains items that reflect the participants' wish for additional support with domestic or childcare tasks,

whether this was from family or hired help. For those who did not have consistent support, it would have been helpful for their careers. One participant explained this as follows:

I didn't have family here that the kids could go to. So, in an ideal world, someone else that could have looked after the kids. I think, then you can think of not just doing the minimum, but actually doing better work. I think if you want to keep growing in your career, you would want to be fully there and make the most of your time and think outside the box. And that creative side wasn't there, because your mind is trying to take care of other things (14).

## Discussion

As the pandemic continues to affect the global workforce and shape the careers of working women, the present research provides the opportunity to understand working mothers doing well in their career development in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature to date emphasizes a negative view of women's careers during the pandemic (Akanji et al., 2022; Catalyst 2020; Delaney et al., 2021; Dizaho et al., 2016; McKinsey & Company, 2021), but the current research showed that some women were able to respond, adapt, and do well in their careers considering the challenges that arose during the pandemic. Key factors that were identified as helping women do

well in their career development included: Supportive workplaces, social support, personal protective factors, job market factors, and resources (predominantly financial). Hindering factors to working mothers' career development included: workplace challenges, family challenges, personal stressors, job market factors, COVID-19 mandates and restrictions, and childcare. Participants wished for workplace support, resources, government preparation/policies, and general social support. The findings highlight that, despite the challenges of the pandemic, working mothers adjusted their expectations and prioritized what was important to them and worked towards their career and life goals.

### *Career-related Adaptation and Adaptability*

Career-related adaptation is arguably one of the most important attributes that working mothers displayed to both weather and thrive in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The capacity to cope with, and capitalize on, change, and the ability to recover when unforeseen events alter life plans, were resilience factors clearly highlighted in the lives of working mothers during the coronavirus pandemic. Although the pandemic presented career-related uncertainty, there was also the opportunity to capitalize on the changes that the pandemic produced. Adaptability in the face of uncertainty was important

because it allowed individuals to see the possibilities in unanticipated change. Working mothers were already well versed in adaptability and unanticipated change - they came into the pandemic equipped with these attributes due to the nature of balancing family and work responsibilities long before restrictions began. Working mothers are adept at quickly pivoting and adapting when unexpected events arise across the family and work domains. For example, when their child is sick and not able to attend day care, mothers are the ones who predominantly respond and take necessary action to ensure that the family is supported while simultaneously juggling work priorities.

Career adaptability, an internal resource that individuals adopt to cope with present and future developmental tasks, career transitions, and work needs (Savickas, 2005), is an important inner capacity that overlaps with career-related adaptation (Wang et al., 2018). According to career adaptability theory, work family strength occurs when an individual's work and family roles bring strength to each other (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006); That is, a positive experience in one role could be transferred to the other role to improve quality of life (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Many studies found that work family conflict experiences have a negative effect on work, family, and individuals, whereas work family experiences engendered a

mutual positive effect on others and helped individuals (Magee et al., 2012; Van Steenberg, Kluwer, & Karney, 2014; Wang et al., 2018). These positive experiences between work and family roles are a strength for working mothers and help to elucidate the findings of this study.

### *Precarity*

Working mothers' response and reaction to the overriding sense of uncertainty and threat evoked by the coronavirus crisis, including ongoing structural and systemic injustices, can also be viewed through the lens of precarity. Precarity refers to uncertainty, loss, disruption, and anxiety, which affects the lives of people across the globe (Grenier et al., 2020; Han, 2018; Kalleberg, 2018; Standing, 2011). Although precarity has been described as exposing the "fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency" (Butler, 2012, p. 136), the experience of precarity can also evoke "resilience and resistance" (Grenier et al., 2020, p. 9) which has the potential to transform the circumstances that exacerbate dissonance and vulnerability, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Using precarity as a conceptual framework helps us to deepen and broaden the understanding of how working mothers coped with the overwhelming sense of vulnerability that has defined the COVID-19 pandemic era (Lorey, 2015; Standing, 2011). Working

mothers showed resilience and resistance considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption and uncertainty it caused. Participants in the study highlighted personal protective factors such as keeping a positive mindset, exercising self-compassion, taking care of their mental health, embracing their personal determination, and adapting perspectives on priorities and life goals were ways that working mothers showed resilience and resistance during the COVID-19 era. Participants also revealed the deeply meaningful and purposeful way that they connected to their work and community throughout the pandemic. Many of the participants in this investigation were able to articulate forms of resistance that reflected critical consciousness. This was particularly notable in the many responses that called for more activist and family-friendly policies from the government, which reflects a possible pathway to resistance. The pandemic not only highlighted the strengths and capacities that working mothers possess, it also represents a way to elevate the voices and actions of working mothers who were thrust into a highly stressful and precarious life in the year 2020 as they balanced work and family spheres.

### *Broadening our Understanding of Career Development for Working Mothers*

The traditional paradigm of career development, and its associated scientific and professional literature, was constructed with two separate and gendered domains of life in mind: The work domain (or paid employment, gendered male) which was supported by the family domain (gendered female; Richardson, 2012). These two domains, work and family, were once considered complementary to one another and even necessary for the other. However, over time, career development discourse has predominantly privileged paid employment or market work to the detriment of personal care work within the family, such as parenting. As a result, the bearing and raising of children, among other caring work such as unpaid or volunteer work in neighbourhoods and communities, is not acknowledged or valued as work, per se, by the language and discourse of career development and of work and family (Richardson, 2012).

Although there has been considerable change in the realm of women's participation in the workforce and men's participation in family-life, the genderization and marginalization of child-rearing continues to be devalued and the foundational structure of career discourse continues to constrain any forward movement. Furthermore, and most significantly, the devaluation of

personal care work contributes to social inequality, both materially in terms of economic resources and in relation to deficits of care (Richardson, 2012). As more women participate in market work, men and women with economic resources can afford to hire others, usually women, to help them perform their personal care work leading to further genderization and marginalization of women and personal care work.

Considering the research on the COVID-19 pandemic, and women's participation rates threatening to be reduced in favour of family commitments, this present research highlights what is already known in literature with regards to career encompassing both paid work and personal work. In fact, the definition of career, according to the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC) in conjunction with the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners, encompasses the sequence of occupations (paid and unpaid) in which one engages throughout a lifetime, including work, learning and leisure activities. Careers include how persons balance their paid and unpaid work and personal life roles (Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners). This conceptualization of career to include the care of dependent others, the care of self, relationships with others, and communities, enables care work to be considered more central in the political debate and the importance

of the making of liveable lives (Tronto, 2009, as cited in Richardson, 2012). This shift in vocational psychology is described by Richardson (2012) as one that transitions from helping people develop careers to helping people construct lives through work and relationship. Encompassing a social-constructionist perspective, informed by feminist and social justice values, this new approach advocates for more attention to be paid to care work being done in the personal domains of life, in addition to traditional paid or market work.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study presents many of the traditional limitations that characterize qualitative research. Namely, the study did not yield a sample that is diverse across all relevant contexts. Although we had diversity incorporating many participants from African American decent, our research is limited in its ability to speak to cultural and ethnic nuances in working mothers' career development during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, most participants were at minimum college educated, which impacts the types of jobs/careers they may engage in. Future research might benefit from more focused purposive sampling to contribute further to our understanding of this phenomena. A further limitation relating to sampling is that the experiences of working mothers varied according

to their geographical location, mainly due to the differing responses to COVID-19 based on sociocultural and political context. It may be helpful for future research to be limited to a distinct geographical region to understand the unique and nuanced experiences of working mothers in their context. Another limitation for this study pertains to the timing of interviews and pandemic status. Due to the lag between first and second interviews, some participants noted during their second member check interview that their responses (from the first interview) had changed primarily due to the continual and rapidly changing nature of pandemic restrictions. Some of these additions reflected the participants helping, hindering, and wish-list factors related to post-pandemic work-related trends. For example, one participant (#3) noted that she was worried that remote working opportunities, which enabled her to do well in her career during the pandemic, might cease and force her to return to the office. This comment reflected the ongoing nature of post pandemic-related changes rather than the specific research question that was sought to be answered in this study. Future research may seek to understand how working mothers continue to do well during the post-pandemic era. Single mothers faced even greater workloads during the COVID-19 pandemic - 10 percent more single mothers reported spending an additional three or more hours per day on housework and childcare than



mothers overall (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Our research recruited predominantly married women in heterosexual relationships which are more likely to experience a gendered division of labour compared to homosexual relationships (Murphy et al., 2021). Future research might focus on experiences of doing well in career development in non-heteronormative relationships. Lastly, the age of children and level of care required varies greatly in this study which may impact the time management of mothers.

### Implications

The results of this study have significant implications for counselling practice, policy, and advocacy efforts. As a response to the intersecting losses in the face of precarity, Blustein et al. (2022) proposed an integrative approach to counselling practice that is rooted in the unique challenges of the pandemic, encompassing work, nonwork, and social issues presented in a trauma-informed framework. The findings from this study affirm the importance of counselling interventions that validate the intersecting strengths and challenges that working mothers face to provide effective therapy that integrates work and nonwork issues. Career professionals can also help foster career-related adaptation in working mothers by helping them to embrace uncertainty and see the possibilities in unanticipated change. The results

from this study also provide useful ideas for policy. Many participants addressed wish-list factors pertaining to government policies and support throughout the pandemic, such as being better prepared or taking a different approach. The results present specific and practical ways individuals, families, workplaces, and governments can foster working mothers doing well in their careers considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Advocating for the broadening and expanding of the definition of personal care work will help the family domain be considered more central in people's lives and, in turn, help create harmony between work and family life. Conceptualizing career development through paid work and relationship will help to create broader systemic change in the labour market where personal care work and the family domain are given their rightful and central place, rather than remain in tension with paid labour market work. This new definition is also important in valuing the importance of personal care and family work in career trajectories of working mothers with which we serve.

### Conclusion

This paper explored career development in working mothers as a response to the worldwide coronavirus pandemic. Although the COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to the labour market for working mothers in the form of job losses and juggling the family domain, the mothers in

this study demonstrated ways that working mothers thrived in their career development throughout this unprecedented time. Mothers reported a supportive workplace, family, friends, job market factors, and resources which assisted them in being able to successfully juggle family and work needs. The research also revealed personal protective factors, such as organizational and time management skills, perspectives, and the sense of meaning or purpose women derived from their work, which allowed mothers to do well in the careers during the pandemic.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### First Interview Guide

Participant #: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

*Introductory Script: Thank you for choosing to participate in this interview. Before we proceed, I want to remind you that, at all times during the interview, you may choose to disclose or not to disclose any information, depending on how comfortable you feel. You also may request to take a break or to discontinue the interview at any time.*

#### 1. Contextual Component

Preamble: As you know, we are interested in working mother's experiences of doing well in their careers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background as to how I became interested in this study – hearing stories of mothers struggling to balance work and family life during pandemic, reading about lots of working mothers leaving the workforce, and YET I was hearing of mothers doing really well and adapting well to the pandemic (e.g., I was able to start business from home – a dream!)

This is the first of two interviews, and the purpose is to collect information about what you have experienced and how it has affected you.

a. As a way of getting started, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your career and work life (query for self-employed/work or employer, type of work, length of time in career, career trajectory prior to and after the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.)

b. Perhaps you could also tell me a little about your family life? (query for whether the mother is married/single/otherwise, number of children, living arrangement, type of care provider, if applicable)

#### 2. Critical Incident Component

Transition to Critical Incident questions: Summarize what has been discussed so far about work life and family life.

a. I'm going to start by asking you to think about factors that helped you most in your work life during the COVID-19 pandemic. **What helped you most in your career since the outset of the pandemic?** (Probes for each area: What was the incident/factor? How did it impact you? How did it help?" Can you give me a specific example where \_\_\_\_\_ helped? What are some other factors that were especially helpful?)

HELPING		
Helping Factor & What it Means to Participant (What do you mean by ...?)	Importance (How did it help or impact you? Tell me what it was about ... that you found so helpful.)	Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of incident.)

b. Now I'm going to ask you about factors that made these experiences more difficult or hindered your career during COVID-19 in some way. **What kind of things happened that made it harder for you to do well in your career during the COVID-19 pandemic?** (Probes for each area: What was the incident/factor? How did it impact you? How did it hinder?" Can you give me a specific example where \_\_\_\_\_ hindered? What are some other factors that were especially difficult?)

HINDERING		
Hindering Factor & What it Means to Participant (What do you mean by ..?)	Importance (How did it hinder? Tell me what it was about .. that you find so unhelpful.)	Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of incident.)

c. Summarize what has been discussed up to this point with the participant as a transition to the next question: We've talked about factors that have helped you in your career during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as (name them), and some things that have made these experiences more difficult, such as (name them). **Are there other things that would have helped you (or that you would have wished for) to have a better experience in your career during the COVID-19 pandemic?** (Alternate question: I wonder what else might be or might have been helpful to you that you didn't/don't have access to?)

WISH LIST		
Wish List Item & What it Means to Participant (What do you mean by ..?)	Importance (How would it help? Tell me what it is about .. that you would find so helpful.)	Example (In what circumstances might this be helpful?)

3. Demographics Component

- i. Age
- ii. Education
- iii. Marital Status
- iv. Parental Status (note: single parent, guardianship/custody arrangements)
- v. Occupational Status (note: employed F/T, P/T, on leave, etc.)
- vi. Occupational Category (note: self-employed, employer)
- vii. Occupation Type (note: counsellor, doctor, teacher, etc.)

viii. Income level (household)

ix. Country of birth

If not Canada, (a) length of time in Canada; and (b) 1st language

x. Ethnic and Cultural Identification: \_\_\_\_\_ Query for any culture-specific perinatal practices (e.g., traditional Chinese confinement period): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

xi. Children's Information (ages, if with current partner?, and note if adopted)

Age: Child with Current Partner? YES  NO  Adopted? YES  NO  Age: Child with Current Partner? YES  NO  Adopted? YES  NO  Age: Child with Current Partner? YES  NO  Adopted? YES  NO  Age: Child with Current Partner? YES  NO  Adopted? YES  NO

Interview End Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**

*Second Interview Guide*

Participant: Name / #

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer(s): \_\_\_\_\_

CRITICAL INCIDENTS		
Helping	Hindering	Wish-List

**Follow-up/Clarification questions:**

Questions:

1. Are the helping/hindering incidents and wish list items correct? Y / N

2. Is there anything missing?

3. Is there anything that needs revising?

4. Do you have any other comments?

CATEGORIES		
Helping	Hindering	Wishlist
<b>Category name</b> Incident	<b>Category name</b> Incident	<b>Category name</b> Incident
<b>Category name</b>	<b>Category name</b>	
<b>Category name</b>	<b>Category name</b>	
<b>Category name</b>		

Questions:

1. Do the category headings make sense to you? Y / N

2. Do the category headings capture your experience and the meaning that the incident or factor had for you? Y / N

3. Are there any incidents in the categories that do not appear to fit from your perspective? If so, where do they belong? Y / N

**Wrap up question:**

1. From your experience, what is the most important thing for career practitioners to be aware of about mother's experiences of working during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. From your experience, what would you most like to share with other mothers about how to have the most positive career trajectory in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?



Appendix C

Results Categories

Helping	Hindering	Wishlist
<b>Work (35)</b>	<b>Work (29)</b>	<b>Work (21)</b>
<p>Supportive team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colleagues were helpful/supportive (P9) + (P3) + (P5)</li> <li>Welcoming team (P3)</li> </ul>	<p>Unsupportive management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsupportive manager (P3)</li> <li>Lack of support from employer/management around flexible working hours (P11)</li> </ul>	<p>Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supportive manager who understood challenges of being working mom (P3)</li> <li>Regularly scheduled feedback from manager (P5)</li> <li>Understanding boss (P9)</li> <li>For employers to focus on productivity rather than hours worked (P13)</li> </ul>
<p>Supportive management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers are mothers or parents (P13)</li> <li>Supportive/understanding manager (P16)</li> <li>Workplace was supportive and responsive about her need to balance family and work (P12)</li> <li>Management helped keep the team connected (P14)</li> </ul>	<p>COVID related issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bureaucracy of working in government office, COVID made things slower (P5)</li> <li>Absenteeism at work due to illness (P11)</li> <li>No raises or bonuses (P17)</li> <li>People had to focus on COVID-related duties rather than original tasks or projects (P13)</li> <li>Management wanted employees to work fewer hours so they could claim CERB, felt like a moral or ethical dilemma (P14)</li> </ul>	<p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility on work policies for using sick time (P11)</li> <li>Flexibility from management on working hours (P11)</li> <li>More flexibility and autonomy in whether to work from home or in office (P13)</li> <li>Less rigidity around in-person requirements (P15)</li> </ul>
<p>Workplace culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All-female staff who are flexible and accommodating around work-life balance (P15)</li> <li>Workplace culture has focus on family and mothers (P13)</li> <li>Company valued family life, values aligned with her own (P14)</li> <li>Wellbeing a priority in her company for employees (P12)</li> </ul>	<p>Workload</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being the only employee in her unit (P6)</li> <li>Multitasking and filling in for her boss - overworked (P6)</li> <li>Lagging behind at work (P9)</li> <li>High numbers of COVID patients (overworked) (P10)</li> <li>Increased workload due to COVID protocols (P16)</li> <li>Increased workload (P4)</li> </ul>	<p>Socializing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social opportunities with coworkers (P5)</li> <li>Small in-office treats, more food sharing (P5)</li> </ul>
<p>Flexibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility at work (P11) + (P17)</li> <li>COVID made people think outside the square, come up with new ways of working (P12)</li> </ul>	<p>Feeling safe at work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unvaccinated employees back in office (P5)</li> <li>Additional logistical planning around every aspect of work and life (P15)</li> </ul>	<p>Workload</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced workload (P9)</li> <li>Boss to provide fewer responsibilities (P6)</li> <li>More colleagues in unit to help with workload (P13) + (P9)</li> </ul>

**Appendix C...continued**

*Results Categories*

<p>Workplace resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training from work on how to manage COVID 19 (P10)</li> <li>• Workplace provided financial support and/or healthcare (P4) + (P10)</li> <li>• Company hired additional employees to help with workload (P14) + (P10)</li> <li>• Workplace was able to respond quickly to the pandemic (P17)</li> <li>• Financial incentives for extra work (P14)</li> </ul>	<p>Additional challenges in working from home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching over Zoom (P18)</li> <li>• IT issues (P5)</li> <li>• Using Zoom technology (P13)</li> <li>• Communication issues due to lack of in-person conversations (P14)</li> <li>• Inability to see people face to face (P12)</li> <li>• Working from home (P14)</li> <li>• Limited or discontinued in-person work opportunities/ activities (P15) + (P13)</li> </ul>	<p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional training on how to manage pandemic (P10)</li> <li>• More time for training courses (P5)</li> </ul>
<p>Feeling safe at work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protective equipment (P10)</li> <li>• More sensitivity to illness (P15)</li> <li>• Daily wellness check before employees come into office (P13)</li> </ul>	<p>Business/self-employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moments of hardship in starting her own business (P7)</li> <li>• Limited source of products (P7)</li> <li>• Limited customer base (P7)</li> <li>• Self-doubt about business succeeding (P8)</li> <li>• Lack of support from community (P2)</li> <li>• Didn't have processes in place as business grew too fast (P2)</li> </ul>	<p>Feeling safe at work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued emphasis on public health protocols within the workplace (P13)</li> </ul>
<p>Working from home (P5) + (P18)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance for using Zoom technology as part of work and school (P15)</li> <li>• Ability to work from home (P2) + (P13) + (P14)</li> <li>• Ability to do new things online (P2)</li> </ul>		<p>Business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business advisor or mentor (P7)</li> <li>• To have had policies and procedures in place with business (P2)</li> <li>• Trained and qualified staff (P2)</li> <li>• Confidence to shut down certain work activities, learn how to say no (P2)</li> </ul>
<p>Highlighting of workplace challenges (P3)</p>		
<p>Didn't have to worry about lesson plans (P18)</p>		
<p>Reconnecting with parents (of her students) (P18)</p>		

Appendix C...continued

Results Categories

Support (23)	Family Challenges (8)	Resources (10)
<p>Social support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Words of encouragement from family (P1)</li> <li>Social support from best friend(s) (P1) + (P9) + (P16)</li> <li>Social support from social media (P1)</li> <li>Mom provided financial and/or emotional support (P7) + (P16)</li> </ul> <p>Support with childcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mother helped with childcare (P9) + (P16) and household tasks (P4)</li> <li>Mother in law was able to come and help, family support (P14)</li> <li>Nanny (P10)</li> <li>Mother and mother in law both available to help with childcare (P13)</li> <li>Living in complex with other kids and a playground (P14)</li> <li>Kept daycare open more than schools (P14)</li> </ul> <p>Supportive partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay at home partner who was a full-time caregiver (P5)</li> <li>Financial support from husband (P8)</li> <li>Husband helped with taking care of daughter (P9)</li> <li>Supportive partner who divides family responsibility (P11) + (P17)</li> <li>Encouragement from husband (P1)</li> <li>Supportive husband who had a shift work schedule (P12)</li> <li>Husband worked from home (P14)</li> </ul>	<p>Unsupportive husband</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Husband assumed she was responsible for family duties (P3)</li> <li>Husband wasn't supportive of career and not financially supportive (P4)</li> </ul> <p>Balancing family and work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Additional responsibilities and stress from having a family (P6)</li> <li>Family demands (P9)</li> </ul> <p>Limited school activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools and school activities being closed (P17)</li> <li>Homeschooling and managing kids (P12)</li> </ul> <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not having family support (P2)</li> <li>Car difficulties (P6)</li> </ul>	<p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources to access therapy (P8)</li> <li>Employers to provide wellness stipends (P13)</li> <li>No health issues (P6)</li> </ul> <p>Financial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial support from government (P1) + (P2)</li> <li>Having more finances (P4)</li> <li>Increased credit limit to get loans (P7)</li> <li>Financial support from government and/or family/friends (P8)</li> <li>Financial aid/support from work (P1) + (P10)</li> </ul>

**Appendix C...continued**

*Results Categories*

Personal protective factors (13)	Personal stressors (8)	Government preparation/policies (7)
<p>Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizational skills (P5)</li> <li>Strong boundaries between work and home (P5)</li> <li>Organized and compartmentalized day (P12)</li> <li>Time management (P6) + (P8)</li> </ul> <p>Perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive attitude (P5)</li> <li>Self-compassion (P5)</li> <li>Personal determination (P8)</li> <li>Positive mindset (P12)</li> <li>Changing perspective on priorities and life goals (P2)</li> <li>Taking care of mental health (P8)</li> </ul> <p>Sense of meaning or purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sense of meaning/purpose from son (P7)</li> <li>Sense of contributing to community driven by people wanting to connect in the aftermath of COVID (P2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perfectionistic attitude which causes burnout (P9)</li> <li>Burnout from balancing family and work life (P10)</li> <li>Uncertainty of how long COVID would last, holding pattern (P12)</li> </ul> <p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor health (P6) and sleep patterns (P9)</li> <li>Mental health crisis (P15) + (P2)</li> <li>Constant fear/anxiety (P8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government more prepared to deal with COVID (P8) + (P10)</li> <li>Free transportation (P16)</li> <li>Help with getting essential items (P16)</li> <li>Government would have taken a different approach to dealing with COVID (P17)</li> <li>Government would have taken COVID more seriously (P18)</li> <li>Continued telehealth options (P3)</li> </ul>
Job market factors (6)	Job Market Factors (7)	Support (4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job security (P17)</li> <li>Broad employability (P3)</li> <li>Fast-growing business (P7)</li> <li>Increase in sales and business really picked up (P2)</li> <li>New opportunities that arose from travel restrictions (P3)</li> <li>Field of work/industry grew during pandemic (P14)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer opportunities because people not interested in online classes (P1)</li> <li>Possibility of impacted student internship opportunities (P15)</li> <li>Difficulty finding people to work, limited staff options (P16) + (P2)</li> <li>Workforce attitude change and labour shortage (P17)</li> <li>People seemed less accountable about work (P13)</li> <li>Losing job (P1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family close by to help (P3)</li> <li>Nanny (P7)</li> <li>Retired grandparents who could care for children on short notice (P11)</li> <li>Alternative options for childcare (P14)</li> </ul>

Appendix C...continued

Results Categories

Resources (5)	COVID Mandates/Restrictions (7)	
<p>Financial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial savings (P7)</li> <li>• Access to resources, financial privilege (P11)</li> <li>• Putting herself on a budget (P18)</li> </ul> <p>Greater flexibility around homeschooling (P12)</p> <p>Proper technology to facilitate working from home (P5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID impacted ability to see clients (P4)</li> <li>• Travel restrictions highlighted unhappy living and working arrangement (P3)</li> <li>• Requirement to wear a mask impacted ability to perform work tasks (P16)</li> <li>• Letter requirement to commute to jobs (P16)</li> <li>• Rigidity of government mandates (P17)</li> <li>• COVID rules continuously changing (P2)</li> <li>• COVID mandates from government (P2)</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Childcare (6)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking after the kids impacted ability to look for job (P1)</li> <li>• Au pair leaving quickly after restrictions (P3)</li> </ul> <p>Daycares</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closure of daycares (P7)</li> <li>• Unpredictability of childcare (P11)</li> <li>• Increased difficulties of finding suitable childcare (P15)</li> <li>• Daycare difficulties with sickness (P14)</li> </ul>	