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REMOTE WORK AND WORK–LIFE BALANCE FOR MOTHERS WORKING IN A LOCAL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTION DURING THE COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. All references, citations and ideas have been acknowledged by the original author. This study is submitted for the degree of Master of Social Science, Industrial Psychology Degree, University of KwaZulu-Natal. The work presented has not been submitted for any previous degree or examination in another University.

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ABSTRACT

The social and economic transformations across developing industrial economies have resulted in concerns about how working mothers manage their lives across the spheres of work and life, whilst still achieving a balance between work and life roles. This research focuses on understanding the work-life balance experiences of nine working mothers who hold full-time positions and were working remotely during the COVID-19 lockdown in a Local Government Institution in South Africa. The study employs a qualitative research approach, specifically the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) paradigm. It utilises thematic analysis and incorporates the theoretical frameworks of spillover theory and intersectionality to address the research questions. The findings reveal that working mothers faced challenges in mediating the demands of work and private life during the lockdown. The boundaries between work and home became blurred, leading to inter-role conflict and emotional stress. Working mothers also employed coping mechanisms such as self-care practices and time-management techniques. Socio-economic disparities, gender norms, and cultural expectations were found to shape the experience of the mothers. This study concludes by recommending support for working mothers, including affordable childcare, parental leave regulations, and adaptable work schedules.

Keywords: Work-Life balance, remote work, working mothers, COVID-19, spillover theory, intersectionality, South Africa, local government

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion pertaining to the introduction, background and significance of the study undertaken. In addition, it is also to outline the research problem, research objectives, and presents the summaries of the chapters.

1.2 Background

The expression 'working 24/7' has gained popularity as a way for employees to describe the lengthy hours they spend engaged in paid work. The demanding pressures of business in the world today has forced employees to spend more of their time engaging in their jobs than ever before (Crouch, 2019). This perception of time scarcity has led to the emergence of work arrangements like flexitime, remote working, and issues like work-life balance, in both the local and global arena (Adriano & Callaghan, 2020). The delicate changes in being experienced in advanced post-industrial economies has raised concerns about the workforce's capacity to successfully juggle professional roles while simultaneously maintaining a harmonious and healthy balance amidst numerous life role (Crouch, 2019). This interest comes at a crucial time, where many organizations and employees are faced with a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world in which to live and survive (Akanji et al., 2020). The backdrop of globalization, rapid technology changes, pandemics, and volatile markets has necessitated a work-and-life-balance framework that is multifaceted and considers the intrusions between the paid and non-paid responsibilities of the workforce, both on the local and international spectrum.

Businesses and organizations across western societies have implemented a range of initiatives to address how employees can successfully balance their personal and professional lives. Similarly, in South Africa, the interface of work and life has become as much of an interest in the public sector as it is in the private arena (Adriano & Callaghan, 2020). Numerous organizations have introduced resources and policies like flexitime, on-site day-care centres, and remote-working programs in efforts to solve some of the 'work-life balance' difficulties (Adriano & Callaghan, 2020). These policies are designed to help employees balance their personal and professional lives without interfering with their job obligations (Jackson & Fransman, 2018). These policies and programs may assist in alleviating difficulties in

managing multiple roles, thus enhancing employees' quality of life (Horwood et al., 2021). The success of such policies appears to be linked to both the organization and the employee (Adriano & Callaghan, 2020).

Sustaining a healthy work-life balance (WLB) is instrumental in mitigating stress and preventing burnout within the institutions of work. Chronic stress stands as a prevalent health concern in workplaces, as highlighted by Crouch (2019). Numerous bodily manifestations, such as hypertension, digestive problems, on-going discomfort, and cardiovascular difficulties, could result from this sustained stress. While the full list of WLB practises available to South African organizations are not fully utilized, many of these practises remain in the contents of management guides and textbooks (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020).

A healthier WLB can improve physical, emotional, and mental health (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020). Also, employees who have a healthier WLB express less stress, a decreased risk of exhaustion, and a higher sense of well-being (Begeny et al., 2021; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020; Delaney & Sullivan, 2021; Garcia, 2021; Wood et al., 2020). Employees who maintain a healthier WLB are more productive and have greater intentions of staying in the organization. Organizations can weigh in on the benefits of a healthier WLB by institutionalizing a workplace that encourages the maintenance of a positive WLB (Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022). It is also well documented that top talent tends to be attracted to organizations that nurture their employees (Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022).

While a healthier WLB is imperative to the livelihood of the South African workforce, much of the debate and subsequent policies are often derived from a quantitative and empirical data perspective, with misconceptions of employee attitudes derived from the employer's perspective negating the employee perspective (Van den Berg et al., 2020). What is needed, therefore, is an exploration of the phenomenon, taking into account the different sides of the debate and inclusive of all angles. Also, a multifaceted and research-based agenda focusing on the complicated links between work and life is required (Van den Berg et al., 2020).

1.3 Context of South Africa

The social and demographic transformations within South Africa have gained momentum ever since the dawn of democracy. As pointed out by Jackson and Fransman (2018), an interesting change that has occurred in the country is that of the socio-demographics within the labour

sector. South Africa's constitution and policies have articulated, in addition to other things, the need to rectify historical disparities, and to enhance the quality and potential of its people (Chitiga et al., 2022: Leibbrandt & Pabón, 2021). A method of doing this is through the vigorous drive towards including more female participation in the education and workforce spaces (Jackson & Fransman, 2018).

The enactment of the South African Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 aimed to uphold the constitutional principles of equality and democratic participation. Its primary objectives encompassed the eradication of unjustifiable employment discrimination, the rectification of discriminatory consequences, the fostering of workforce diversity, and the facilitation of economic employment opportunities. The purpose of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 is to mitigate workplace discrimination and address historical inequalities. Additionally, the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act 53 of 2003 has played a pivotal role in generating increased opportunities for previously marginalized individuals, including women (Chitiga et al., 2022).

Following the South Africa's 1994 inaugural democratic elections, the adoption of gender equality became entrenched as a constitutional right. Supplementing this right are more than 100 laws put in place to address gender discrimination, mostly targeted at women (Jackson & Fransman, 2018). Women are, however, making extraordinary strides in the public and private arena and they are taking up key roles shaping the economy and communities. Nevertheless, gender disparity remains a pertinent concern within both South African households and workplaces, representing a broader societal issue that is further compounded by the enduring impact of South Africa's apartheid history (Chitiga et al., 2022).

While laws and policies change over time, much remains the same, especially for the ordinary person. Gender roles and societal norms are amongst the most difficult aspects to change, and at times they seem unchangeable due to their slow pace of change. The ideologies and expectations which society places on women and men are consequential and often play themselves out in the work environment (Garcia, 2021). Social norms surrounding gender roles are often characterized as a male-advantaged gender hierarchy. For instance, how men are expected to use and appropriate time is different from how women are expected to use and appropriate time (Collins et al., 2021; Garcia, 2021; Parry & Gordon 2021). The expectation of women to still undertake most of the housekeeping and child-rearing functions while holding

down a career is still rife and is characterized in many family settings across the country (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021). In addition, it is no secret that the private life roles of women (and men) have a tendency of spilling over into the work sphere. Work-life balance often aligns with gendered role expectations, especially for women with children, as they are expected to demonstrate the act of 'juggling' and being a 'good working mother'. This kind of WLB balance challenge has been shown to increase occupational stress among women, consequently endangering their general health (Collins et al., 2021; Garcia, 2021; Parry & Gordon, 2021).

1.4 'Juggling' Mothers in South Africa

In light of the above, the term 'the juggling mother' is often used to describe employed females who have both work obligations and child-care responsibilities in South Africa (Horwood et al., 2021). The term has become popular in both literature and ordinary discourse, as it depicts the modern cultural ideology of the working mother striving to continuously juggle the conflicting characteristics of being a good employee and being a good mother, among other things, while still remaining a well-balanced wife, sibling, and community member (Horwood et al., 2021). The opportunities, as well as the many challenges, that have come with the twenty-first century have propelled women into a world where paid work outside of the home setting has become an essential part of their being. Drivers such as financial and monetary pressures, rapid changes in technology and policies, as well as globalization, are drawing more women into the workforce, as contemporary households require multiple sources of income to maintain their coveted way of life (Horwood et al., 2021).

The research field of WLB has provided a valuable avenue for exploring the challenges and conflicts encountered by South African women in managing their multiple roles within different domains of life and work. WLB is described by Sirgy and Wu (2009) as a condition that reflects contentment in the work domain and a number of significant life roles with little to no negative impact amongst the domains.

There is wealth of research supporting the contribution of woman in the workplace in almost every industry and in huge numbers (Chitiga et al., 2022). Gender diversity and the presence of women in the workforce are crucial for an organization's profitability, according to prior studies (Scheepers et al., 2018). When compared to organisations with a lower representation of women in board positions, businesses with a higher percentage of women on their boards typically perform better financially (Scheepers et al., 2018). Teams with a broad mix of genders

outperform teams with a male majority in sales and innovation profit margins. Women have also been noted to support innovation, making them a source for economic growth (Scheepers et al., 2018). Enhancing gender diversity within enterprises holds paramount significance in enhancing business outcomes.

While this may be an achievement for modern society, women, and especially working mothers, still face numerous impediments in their work environment (Chitiga et al., 2022; Scheepers et al., 2018). For instance, men are still more likely than working mothers to work in occupations that demand constant travel, physical exertion, and so forth. In addition, during the talent acquisition processes, some organizations ask openly about marital status and family planning to female candidates (as they cannot bear the cost of potential maternity leave and other flexibility advantages) (Begeny et al., 2021; Delaney & Sullivan, 2021; Garcia, 2021).

Despite these professional challenges, mothers who take on these roles frequently fall victim to the pernicious trend of having a poor WLB in which they only pay attention to work demands while ignoring their personal and private lives. This frequently results in a decline in their support system, which tends to exacerbate feelings of stress and being 'lost' (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021). Social support in the form of organisational management, friends, and family provides protection and safeguard individuals when dealing with life stress. Previous studies have indicated that social support plays a protective role against forces of threat (Garcia, 2021). While many contend that this is a self-imposed condition brought on by the blurring of work-life boundaries, organizations, policymakers, and society at large all have a part to play in helping working mothers attain a healthier WLB.

The open labour market in South Africa is less favourable in uptake of women when compared to men with regards to paid employment. In relation to the foregoing, it is also important to mention that working mothers often encounter additional discriminatory challenges at work, on top of demanding employment requirements (Scheepers et al., 2018). For example, working mothers and women at large still face the gender pay gap. According to the 2016 *Women at Work* report of the International Labour Organization (ILO), women appear to be earning substantially less than men. The ILO has noted that, without targeted action, at the current rate, pay equity between women and men will not be achieved before 2086 (ILO, 2016).

Even though South Africa has made considerable progress toward gender equality, women still make up less than half of the workforce in influential roles like executive and managerial positions (Steyn & Jackson, 2015). In the second quarter of 2021, women made up 43.8% of the nation's workforce, but only 32% of managers, according to Statistics South Africa (2021). This introduces another challenge for women and working mothers, who may have difficulty in finding other women in influential positions for role-modelling and mentoring purposes; it is far harder for women in South Africa to find leaders whom they can emulate and learn from. Women dominate feminised jobs which often include care, clerical and domestic work, while their male counterparts dominate the rest of the occupations, as well as top levels of organizations. Furthermore, the pervasive 'boys' club culture' makes it even harder for women and working mothers to climb the corporate ladder and assume leadership roles than their male counterparts (Scheepers et al., 2018). According to Scheepers and colleagues (2018) A culture known as a "boys' club" is one in which men rule and predominate, to the detriment of, or at the expense of, minorities and women. It often involves the exclusion of women and minority groups from corporate decisions and office operations.

The dramatic increase in women employees in the workplace over the decades has ignited an interest amongst scholars as to how women experience a balance between work and the rest of their life, which is formally known as work-life balance. For the increasing number of mothers in the work environment, the increments of social and monetary obligations tend to be inescapable (McGee et al., 2021; Steyn & Jackson, 2015). Whilst more mothers are accepting paid work, and furthermore assuming the primary-provider role in their family, the question remains of how their work experiences and private life expectations are impacting their sense of well-being. What is required, therefore, is an exploration of this concept of WLB. The results of such a study would aid researchers and practitioners in understanding the nature of WLB within an African context.

In light of the above, existing knowledge on WLB can be called to question in relation to the extraordinary current times - characterized by uncertainty, constant change, and chaos. The advancement of technology and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on both the workers and the work environment have called to question the previous understandings of WLB (Matli, 2020). Constant connectivity and the blending of work and personal spaces due to technology have made it difficult to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life. These lines are hazier as an outcome of the evolved remote-working centric business models adopted by

business as a response to the pandemic and its related legislative changes (Matli, 2020). A nuanced understanding of WLB is needed to narrate the realities of the many working mothers who are grappling with a new reality, as the boundary lines of work and life are blurred (McGee et al., 2021). Furthermore, a nuanced understanding of WLB is needed that looks beyond the individual and takes into account the context of multiple realities; this is in contrast with the existing understanding which has placed an emphasis on the individual as the sole bearer of managing work and life role complexities. The current linear understanding negates the interconnectedness of social categorisations such as gender, economic status, class, and ethnicity in shaping the different experiences of WLB (McGee et al., 2021). The current body of knowledge pertaining to WLB is constrained in both theoretical and practical aspects, partly because of underlying presumptions that limit its investigation to a narrow group of employees and traditional family structures. This limitation overlooks the diverse demography and evolving household structures, preventing a comprehensive perspective on WLB.

In response to the COVID-19 lockdown regulations, organisations across the globe were compelled to establish arrangements that allowed their employees to work remotely. The regulations restricted movement and entailed the temporary closure of workplace premises. Industries such as finance, insurance, information and technology, education, public administration government, and even scientific and technical services have embraced many components of remote working and incorporated them into their work structures; however, other industries have little or no opportunity for remote work due to work processes that require collaborating with others or using specialized machinery, or work that has to be completed on location (Manzoor & Hamid, 2021). For instance, the manufacturing, mining, construction, and agriculture industries rely heavily on specialized machinery and person power on the ground for tasks to be successfully achieved. As a result of widespread trends like automation and digitization, many of these positions offer little in wages payment and are more vulnerable to these trends (Manzoor & Hamid, 2021).

Before the COVID-19, South Africa did not have a large-scale adoption of remote work as a standard working practice, especially in the government and public sector (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). However, technological devices such cellular phones, tablets, and laptops afford employees the opportunity to work virtually, anywhere, at any time (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). While remote working has made it easier for employers and employees to connect and communicate without being restricted by geography and time zones, remote working still has

a negative often neglected feature. This is referred to as technostress and can find expression in the context of COVID-19, where there was a sudden and forced restriction of movement and an expectation of fast adaptability to new technology by the employee (DeSilver, 2020; Matli, 2020; Mayer & Mayer, 2020). According to Matli (2020), technostress can be interpreted as the adverse psychological relationship between employees and the implementation of new technologies, according to its definition. Technostress results from changing work processes and practices brought about by the employment of contemporary information technology in work and home environments. This strain response is extremely important from an organisational standpoint since it might result in high expenses for the employer (Matli, 2020).

In addition to the above, some research studies have noted the popular dilemma where employees feel that they do not have enough time each week to perform personal activities (Manzoor & Hamid, 2021). The capacity of employees to connect remotely to the office frequently causes employers to have higher standards for employee availability and requests for after-hours work (Manzoor & Hamid, 2021). According to Steidelmüller and colleagues (2020, p. 998), the "autonomy paradox" emerges when the utilization of technology intensifies job responsibilities, accompanied by the expectation of extended working hours, leading to increased organizational control over employees' personal lives. The perception of work-life boundary violations among employees has been associated with emotional exhaustion, symptoms of depression, and decreased life satisfaction and lower job satisfaction (Steidelmüller et al., 2020).

Managing the boundaries between work and life entails a skill set that employees need which most did not receive or develop before the pandemic. This is particularly relevant to the sudden and unplanned shift to remote work that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic (Manzoor & Hamid, 2021).

At times, private life roles such a childcare can spill over into the work sphere and vice-versa. In the same vein, work commitments that filter into the private life domain often lead to strain and work-life conflict. Work-life conflict is an inter-role conflict that arises from pressures emanating from work that perversely upsets the life domain, making the two domains mutually incompatible (Steidelmüller et al., 2020). The permeability of these domains is vulnerable and can be altered by COVID-19 movement restrictions and the practise of remote working (Garcia, 2021).

WLB is therefore a key interest in the lives of working mothers, as they are known to assume the primary caregiving responsibility for their offspring, on top of the many other responsibilities they already undertake. Moreover, the boundary between work life and private life becomes blurred when the workplace is inside the home. The natural boundaries often created by leaving work and traveling home are not there anymore to give the employees the time to unwind and 'decompress'. It is more difficult to set up boundaries if the work office is in the bedroom or at the sitting room table. It is easier to check one more email, add more details to a presentation, or return a phone call to a colleague after hours than it was before. It comes as no surprise, then, that many scholars and practitioners are interrogating the amount of time and energy that is necessary to keep the relationship between paid work and life outside of paid work mutually compatible, in the context of a global pandemic and a reliance on remote working to facilitate work completion (Manzoor & Hamid, 2021).

Prior to lockdown, with the help of nannies and domestic workers, working mothers could engage fully in paid work during the day and then take on personal and family roles for the remainder their time (Matli, 2020). However, daily routines for task completion are something of the past, as employees do not only account to one person during the day anymore. Many are additionally encountering an increment in parental obligations: confined with the child for continuous caregiving and also playing the role of educator while working from home may be a major source of stress for remote-working parents (Collins et al., 2021; Mayer & Mayer, 2021; Parry & Gordon 2021).

Work-life balance presents a distinct challenge in the South African local government sphere compared to the private sector, mainly due to the convergence of COVID-19's multifaceted impact, deeply embedded patriarchal dynamics, and constrained financial resources. As opposed to the private sector, local government institutions are responsible for critical public services and tend to face intensified workloads while grappling with limited funding, resulting in strained resources and heightened stress for employees. Moreover, patriarchal norms disproportionately burden women to balance traditional caregiving roles alongside demanding professional responsibilities. These factors collectively contribute to a unique work-life imbalance within local government, necessitating targeted interventions that address systemic inequalities.

The experience of WLB balance during COVID-19 movement restrictions for remote-working mothers can further be understood through the spillover theory. The spillover theory postulates that employees harbour emotions and attitudes established from the workplace into their personal lives and vice versa. (Piotrkowski, 1978). While spillover is commonly examined in the context of positive relationships, it is important to acknowledge the existence of negative spillover as well (Piotrkowski, 1978). To align with the goals of critical social science, which aims to foster inclusive and egalitarian power dynamics, an intersectional approach will be employed to further broaden this understanding. The intersectional approach is useful because it unpacks the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to individual or group experiences in the form of discrimination or disadvantage (De Clercq & Brieger, 2021).

Remote working during the COVID-19-induced lockdown can be seen as unique and often straining, because of the pressing demands of work and private life (Matli, 2020). Working mothers are often profoundly affected by this as they tend to assume additional roles relative to their personal and family responsibilities, apart from their paid work responsibilities (Garcia, 2021). The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of WLB of remote-working mothers in eThekwini Municipality during the COVID-19-induced movement restrictions. There is a scarcity of research conducted on this topic in South Africa, and moreover, there are limited studies of this nature conducted during the presence of a global pandemic. A greater amount of in-depth qualitative research on this topic could enrich the knowledge body that currently exists in both governmental and academic spaces (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021). Insights gained from this study can better inform policymakers about the WLB experiences shaping the realities during a global pandemic of many 'juggling', remote-working mothers and, indeed, of all employees.

Remote working during the COVID-19-induced lockdown can be seen as unique and often exceptionally straining, because of different factors that tend to affect an employee's productivity; these include increased distractions and interferences from the personal and family domain (Matli, 2020). Working mothers are often profoundly affected by this, as they tend to assume additional roles relative to their family and home-related responsibilities other than their paid work responsibilities (Begeny et al., 2021; Delaney & Sullivan, 2021; Garcia, 2021; Kim, 2020).

Although there has been a growth in studies examining WLB in the South African context over the past decade, the majority of research has primarily taken a quantitative approach to explore work-life interactions (Jackson & Fransman, 2018). Additionally, Adisa and colleagues (2019) have highlighted certain limitations in the current literature on WLB, including a prevailing emphasis on measuring negative outcomes of WLB rather than positive ones. Burnout, detrimental health effects, etc. are some examples. To address these limitations, the present research aimed to explore both positive and negative work-life interactions by providing female participants with the opportunity to share their perceptions of WLB. By drawing on both conceptual and empirical material, this study challenged existing assumptions and perceptions prevalent in the WLB discourse, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between work and life. As a result, it paved the way for future research that can further delve into this subject matter with improved insights.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of working mothers working remotely during the COVID-19 movement restrictions?
2. How does demographic variation, such as age group, number and age of children, and professional status, shape the experiences of being a mother working remotely in the context of COVID-19 movement restrictions?
3. What challenges do working mothers face in a local government that is male dominated?
4. What are the implications of these experiences on the remote-working mother's well-being and personal, relational, cultural, and social identities?

1.6 Study Aims

1. To understand the experiences of working mothers working remotely during the COVID-19 movement restrictions.
2. To understand how working mothers working remotely experience the challenges they are faced with across their demographic variation, such as age group, number and age of children and professional status.
3. To understand the challenges working mothers face in a local government that is male dominated.

4. To understand the implications of the experiences on the women's well-being and personal, relational, cultural, and social identities.

1.7 Delimitation

It is essential to establish the parameters of this study in order to shed light on the work-life balance of remote working mothers during the COVID-19 epidemic. The research scope was specifically focused on exploring the concept of WLB of remote working mothers in a local government institution in South Africa, particularly during an unprecedented time characterised by COVID-19 and technology allowing for remote work. The study aimed to understand the experiences of remote working mothers in their attempt to mediate the demands of work and private life during the COVID-19 movement restrictions.

1.8 Structure of Dissertation

Chapter One serves as the introduction to the research, highlighting its focus on work-life balance among working mothers in South Africa, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the context of gender dynamics and societal factors. It outlines the study's background, the specific context of South Africa, and the challenges faced by "juggling" mothers in the country. The research questions and aims of the study are also presented, along with the delimitations of the research scope.

Chapter Two delves into a comprehensive literature review, exploring concepts like work-life balance, working mothers, the impact of COVID-19 on the world of work, and remote working. It also discusses theoretical frameworks such as spillover theory and the intersectional approach, explaining their relevance to the study.

Chapter Three of this study details the research methodology, including the interpretivist paradigm, explorative research design, sampling methods, data collection, analysis procedures, and considerations for rigor and ethics.

Chapter Four presents the study results and organizes them into thematic categories including work-life balance challenges, the implications of remote working, and the complex interplay of identities faced by working mothers.

Chapter Five discusses and synthesizes the findings from the thematic analysis, provides recommendations, reflects on limitations, and offers insights from the researcher's perspective, concluding the study.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This summary chapter sets the stage for the subsequent analysis and findings, contributing to the existing knowledge on work-life balance and shedding light on the unique challenges faced by individuals in balancing their personal and professional lives. This chapter outlined the aims and problem statement of the study, specifically focusing on the work-life balance of remote working mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provided a concise overview of the research's scope and objectives. The chapter also outlines the scope of the research, emphasising the selection criteria for participants.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an in-depth account of the research on WLB of full-time employed mothers, as far as their professional and life roles are concerned. This will be achieved by outlining two empirical constituents: the literature review and the theoretical framework. The literature review will be the initial area of focus. The literature review presents the scholarly body of knowledge surrounding the WLB of working mothers in a time when technology and pandemics shape the context. Secondly, the theoretical frameworks utilized in the study will be presented. These include the spillover theory and the feminist intersectionality paradigms.

2.2 Work-Life Balance
2.2.1 Historical Context of WLB

The perception of WLB during the middle of the twentieth century was linear and uncomplicated. During this time, employment was primarily reserved for men; a woman, in contrast, was expected to be involved in childcare and domestic work, which often did not involve paid work outside of the home space. Also, the few women who worked outside the home during this era frequently had lower levels of education than their male counterparts and had low-paying jobs, such as factory assembly lines or in secretarial positions that required fine-finger dexterity (Dubin, 2017). Only during the late 1960s and 1970s did the term 'work-life balance' begin gaining much interest in western literature. From that period until now, extensive research has been conducted on the concept of WLB in the international arena; South Africa is catching up gradually (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019).

While there has been a vast focus on WLB internationally, an overview of international research indicates that the current body of knowledge is somewhat incoherent (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Considering this complication, the state of the WLB body of knowledge in South Africa is limited and tends to focus on a specific population, such private institutions, but neglecting government employees and public servants (Adriano & Callaghan, 2020). This situation, therefore, calls for further investigation and understanding of WLB, to assist in bridging the gap that currently exists.

2.2.2 Conceptualising WLB

An overview of the literature indicates multiple divergent views and definitions of WLB. The shift across time and space has led to there being no single understanding of WLB, but rather overlapping discussions that incorporate the perspectives of organizations, workers, decision-makers, and academic researchers (Lewis et al., 2017). An early definition of WLB postulated by Frone (2003) sees WLB within the premise of conflict and facilitation. Frone (2003) argues that WLB is the absence of competition and the existence of facilitation: "low levels of inter-role conflict and high levels of inter-role facilitation represent work-family balance" (Frone 2003, p. 145). The focus of the two constructs, conflict and facilitation, introduces a psychological dimension to WLB.

In light of Frone's postulation of WLB, Kalliath and Brough (2008, p. 323), in the same spirit, have mentioned that "despite the contradiction in the definition, a large part of the literature has defined WLB as being either the absence of work-life conflict or work-life spillover". However, according to Potgieter and Barnard (2010), WLB can be defined as the perception of sufficient time available for work *and* social life. They suggest that WLB can be understood as the push and pull between paid work and other life aspects. Greenhaus and Allen (2011) define WLB as an individual's assessment of how well they can balance multiple lives, while Lewis and Beauregard (2018) construe WLB as the amount of autonomy an individual perceives themselves to have over their numerous roles and demands. Importantly, Ollier-Malaterre and Foucreault (2017) note that the majority of literature focusing on the interface of work and life treats the 'life' aspect as a domain that is interchangeable with that of 'family', with an emphasis on caregiving responsibilities for the dependent children and the family at large.

Comparing the definitions above, most of the description of WLB still position work as an opposing role to life, while in actuality, the two domains are not always at odds with one another and occasionally do not even need to be 'balanced' (Lewis et al., 2017; Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). Critics also problematized the WLB framework, saying it is too simplistic and denouncing work as a life role. Indeed, if a social role such as parenting or being a community leader is considered a life role, then would it not be appropriate to incorporate work as a life role, ultimately changing the construct of WLB to work-role and non-work-role balance? Moreover, qualitative research is the most effective at capturing WLB since it is not a fixed state but rather a complex and conflicting collection of processes.

However, in line with the prevailing literature, this thesis will maintain the use of the term WLB.

The current conception of WLB is constrained by the assumption of individual responsibility for WLB. This is because individuals are solely responsible for managing the work and life roles within their lives. However, this view has proved to be very simplistic, as it negates the interconnectedness of social categorizations such as gender, class, and ethnicity in shaping the different outcomes of WLB (Bender et al., 2022). Furthermore, it ignores the power factor used to regulate work and workers, which ultimately lies within the control of the corporate and business entities, leading to the unequal balance of power relations between labour and business (Bender et al., 2022).

Work-family conflict is an important issue to comprehend while discussing WLB. The term 'work-family conflict' can be traced back to the 18th century and early 19th century, when remarkable transformations of work and family began taking shape and affecting the understanding of these institutions (Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017). Greenhaus, one of the prominent scholars in contemporary times, who has extensively explored work-family conflict, defines work-family conflict as an experience that arises once the demands of work and family responsibilities become excessive, causing participation in both domains to be perceived as complex (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). The attention to work-family conflict has shifted with time and evolved to WLB. The concept of 'family' is perceived as limiting in attempting to understand the impact of non-work functions on an individual's overall life balance. Other social domains need to be balanced with employment, such as studies, sports, exercise, hobbies, religious commitments, or care for the elderly or the community (Oyewobi et al., 2022). Social roles offer individuals with direction and structure in their lives, the same way that family responsibility does. This leads to a broader and more accommodating concept of WLB (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Oyewobi et al., 2022).

The WLB discourse overlooks certain critical aspects, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between work and life. To advance the field, it is imperative to develop a research agenda that surpasses the existing comprehension of WLB and explores uncharted dimensions. (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

2.2.3 Research on WLB

Today's world is characterized by persistent change, unpredictability, and extreme pressure to increase productivity (Bender et al., 2022). These variations affect employees' equipoise, causing confusion and stress in their lived realities. This is further exacerbated by high levels of competition in the work sphere, posing a threat to workers. Nevertheless, individuals are tasked with achieving a harmonious existence encompassing various aspects such as family, recreation, social responsibilities, wellbeing, and spirituality. While certain areas may demand more attention, others may necessitate less focus (Radtke & van Mens-Verhulst, 2021). By carefully prioritizing these fundamental human pursuits, a state of WLB can be attained (Radtke & van Mens-Verhulst, 2021).

The importance of WLB has made it one of the prioritized policies by the prominent international bodies that monitor public health (ILO, 2016). The lines separating work and life roles are becoming hazier as a result of globalization and the rapid advancement of technology, and the demands on employees and organizations are at an all-time high. Hence it should come as no surprise that WLB contributes to our understanding of employee well-being (Wayne et al., 2017). Many studies have focused on the numerous effects of WLB practices on companies and workers (Kim, 2022). A survey of previous research points to the importance of WLB in employees' lives. In addition, WLB has been linked to important employee insights such as higher organizational commitment, employee engagement and job satisfaction (Kim, 2022).

WLB impacts life satisfaction as well as employee satisfaction. In a study by Lester (2015), it was noted that tertiary education institutions that favoured WLB reported staff with higher morale, job satisfaction, and higher organizational commitment. Lester also emphasized the impact of cultural norms in influencing the use of policies that supported WLB. For example, universities with a stigma against family or medical leave (policies that supported WLB, but were stigmatized) often had a lower organizational commitment and staff morale. This supports the research in organizational psychology concerning the connection between policy usage and cultural norms, as well as the consequences resulting from the perceptions of these constructs. A study by Agha and colleagues (2017), which explored the relationship between WLB, teaching satisfaction, and job satisfaction of higher education teachers in Oman, Western Asia, concluded that work interference in the personal life domain had a negative relationship with job satisfaction.

The availability of WLB support mechanisms in organizations has numerous added benefits. For example, in a survey conducted by Feeney and Stritch (2019), which focused on life-friendly organizational policies, it was concluded that flexible work schedules positively impact state government employees' WLB and organizational outcomes such as turnover, productivity, and absenteeism. In addition, research conducted by Shin and Enoh (2020), which investigated the impact of the availability and use of WLB programs within organizations and the impact they had on organizational profitability, concluded that organizations that have and use WLB programs and policies had increased profitability compared to those that had but did not use WLB programs. Furthermore, Shin and Enoh (2020) noted that WLB programs signal to existing and prospective employees that the organization is an employer of choice, which is not just focused on the bottom line but also considers the overall well-being of its employees. The above studies corroborate previous research on WLB and organizational effectiveness. In addition, they further strengthen the argument of the valuable role WLB plays in organizations and its added benefits, such as employee retention and managerial perceptions.

In article released by Oxford University's Our World in Data, it was noted that South Africa had one of the world's highest working hours per annum. This is no surprise because South Africa, like many other countries, has been drawn into an interconnected global marketplace, where goods and services are traded at all times (Giattino et al., 2020). The intense pressure of competing in a globalized market is carried by business and, regrettably, eventually transfers to the employees. While detractors claim that doing this makes businesses more competitive, there is little evidence to back this up. In contrast, countries that work fewer hours are more productive and report healthier WLB and better mental health (Giattino et al., 2020).

In light of the above, a more significant portion of workers tend to engage in work for longer periods, reducing the time available for home or engaging in other meaningful life roles. Furthermore, the widespread use of the internet and mobile phones has enabled organizations to maintain constant contact with employees, while on duty and off duty (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). As a result, an increasing number of reports are shedding light on the rising occurrence of stress and work-life imbalance experienced by individuals (Matli, 2020).

Employees who are overly involved in their professional or personal lives may experience considerable stress, especially at particular times. Such periods may involve receiving a promotion or assuming additional responsibilities, resulting in heightened work involvement.

Likewise, milestones such as becoming a parent or taking care of elderly family members contribute to increased engagement in family life (Mayer & Mayer, 2021; Parry & Gordon, 2021). The repercussions of not having WLB include professional physical and mental medical conditions, health problems, and minimal work or life satisfaction (Mayer & Mayer, 2021; Parry & Gordon, 2021). Losing control over WLB is a slow but treacherous process. The adverse consequences of burnout extend across various domains of life, encompassing both personal and social aspects. WLB plays a vital role as it enables individuals to create a clear demarcation between work and home. This demarcation ensures that work-related stress remains confined to work hours and does not encroach upon personal life. Allowing work stress to permeate into home life serves as a prominent indicator of an unhealthy WLB.

Research within this area has tended to focus on WLB as an objective concept, which implies a static and fixed state fulfilled by particular criteria and measured quantitatively. The literature focusing on WLB in modern times has raised a number of additional challenges to the ones mentioned above. Some of the main issues include the changing nature of work, as well as longitudinal research. Traditional ideas of work and WLB are being questioned, as a result of the changing nature of work, the growth of the gig economy, and remote work. Making a distinction between work and personal life is getting more and more challenging. Furthermore, due to the dearth of longitudinal research on the topic, it is challenging to evaluate how WLB develops over time and how it affects individual and organizational results.

2.2.4 Does Age Matter?

With the progression of society and life-saving medical innovations, the global population is increasing, and so is life expectancy. Mortality rates are decreasing, and with advancements in healthcare and medical technologies, societies around the world have experienced an increase in life expectancy and a decrease in mortality rates contributing to an overall increase in the global population. Many societies worldwide are caught in a dilemma due to these changes in mortality and birth-rates. This dilemma involves dealing with an ageing workforce and a booming young generation (Lutz et al., 2022). While this may be anxiety-provoking for some, WLB scholars seem excited about this, as it may provide meaningful insights into our understanding of WLB and also probably shift it.

From an economic perspective, research on age and different generational perceptions is meaningful and has a substantial impact on the stability and sustainability of the labour markets

and the innovation and competitiveness of organizations. Issues related to the motivation of senior and junior employees (in terms of age) are said to be closely connected to the search for new retention methods (Jose & Mello, 2021). While western countries are dealing with the liability of an ageing workforce and issues of succession planning, as well as attracting and retaining younger employees, Africa, on the other hand, has a younger workforce and is grappling with transference of knowledge and skills (Jose & Mello, 2021).

Age is a fascinating topic of research across societies. Whether the age of employees affects the perception of WLB has been an area of contestation in literature for a while now. Early research on age and WLB suggests that older employees enjoy higher WLB than younger employees. However, little is known about the dynamics leading to this. Furthermore, current literature seems to fall short in adequately exploring how WLB issues develop throughout an employee's working life. According to a study carried out by Kim (2022), it was found that older employees exhibited a greater perception of work-life balance compared to their younger counterparts. In addition, more senior employees reported better maintenance of WLB due to flexible solutions, while younger employees may not have an equal opportunity to access these benefits. In support of this, older workers responded more frequently by suggesting that workers may not have equal opportunities to benefit from flexible solutions to ensure the maintenance of WLB. It is therefore imperative to understand the individual lived experience of WLB and create policies that allow younger employees to benefit from and maintain a healthier WLB.

A quantitative study by Ferdous and colleagues (2021), which focused on the impact of boundary management and WLB across different age groups, supports previous literature that older workers enjoy a greater WLB than young workers. The study established that older workers tend to have more robust boundary-segregating mechanisms for work and life spheres than their younger colleagues. The study's findings thus substantiate the current findings in research suggesting that older workers enjoy a greater WLB. Furthermore, the study corroborated evidence that boundary management seems more important in achieving a greater WLB than contextual factors or boundary preference changes.

Although there is sufficient literature that speaks to WLB and age, a limitation of this literature is that it mainly takes an imperative and quantitative perspective which negates the participants' lived experiences and does not necessarily paint a clearer picture of the WLB status quo

(Ferdous et al., 2021). Although there is available literature regarding WLB and age, a notable constraint of this literature is its primary emphasis on quantitative methodologies. This quantitative focus tends to neglect the subjective experiences and personal narratives of individuals, leading to an incomplete understanding of the real dynamics surrounding work-life balance. Therefore, a qualitative perspective in viewing WLB could provide a richer and more meaningful understanding.

2.2.5 Government Employees' Experience of WLB

Contemporary municipalities face the growing need to increase efficiency in products and services offered to their constituencies. To achieve this, municipal institutions must attract and diverse, and often technologically sound and high-performing employees. A review of literature illustrates a dearth in research accounting the experiences of WLB in municipalities. In a study by Oktosatrio (2018), employees' motivation and WLB were investigated in the public sector of Jakarat, Indonesia. Using a self-administered questionnaire, findings showed that personal life significantly affects work. Most respondents showed a preference for flexible work and operating from home. Females reporting higher motivation to work from home than their male counterparts.

In a distinct research endeavor, Akanji et al. (2020) delve into the experiences of female medical doctors within an African context, specifically Nigeria, a geographic region that has received limited scholarly attention. The study focuses on examining the causes of imbalances, perceived stress levels, and coping techniques employed by female medical doctors. Through thematic analysis, it becomes evident that the commonly observed factor of "time squeeze" prevalent in the medical profession intensifies negative work-home interference (Akanji et al., 2020). Additionally, patriarchal tendencies and discrepancies in task-pay allocation, factors that significantly impact female doctors but are often overlooked in work-life balance studies, emerge as sources of stress and work-family conflicts. Consequently, these circumstances prompt female medical doctors to develop their own coping mechanisms and strategies (Akanji et al., 2020).

A WLB study by Törnquist Agosti and colleagues (2017) came up with a list of five important key resources. This list includes: a positive life situation, recovery, a positive time experience at work, a positive time experience in private life, and well-being. The insights derived from

these findings can serve as valuable input for designing a supportive framework aimed at enhancing competence development for managers within HR departments.

In a similar study to the above, Wang and colleagues (2021) aimed to investigate the socio-ecological factors that influence WLB and found that relational, community, and societal factors were flagged as having a bearing on WLB perceptions. In another study conducted on women employees, which aimed to examine the prevalence of WLB among the female workforce in information technology (IT), a familiar complaint was raised that individuals were made to feel like a troublemaker if they raised the possibility of WLB arrangements (Francis & Rajesh, 2021). Furthermore, the study revealed various factors contributing to work-life imbalance among employees. These include excessive multitasking, juggling multiple roles both at home and work, inequitable workplace policies, discrepancies between expectations and actual contributions in both spheres, low income, unfavourable working hours, ineffective employment policies, high-pressure work environments, unfavourable working conditions, inadequate equipment and resources, insufficient training, health issues, lack of support from colleagues, and subpar job performance. These factors should be taken into consideration when examining work-life balance challenges (Wang et al., 2021).

From the aforementioned, it is clear why employee WLB is a problem for work psychologists and human resource managers, given its effects on productivity and organizational success. A whole host of activities has been shown to have a bearing on the WLB experiences of government employees. While some government environments have a detrimental subculture of not communicating when under an excessive amount of work pressure, some have inequitable policies at work and a mismatch between expectations and actual contributions. Finding a healthy balance between work and life has aspects of planning and prioritization as being key considerations (Wang et al., 2021). Planning and scheduling, time management, conversation tools, and productiveness strategies have been identified as being useful in manipulating the workday to suit private life activities and work activities. It is also important to educate managers to identify pressure and negative work-existence balance. Other useful interventions include inspiring breaks from work, either at some point in the operating day or by means of using annual leave, introducing robust WLB supportive policies, and providing access to flexibility in time use; these may have a positive impact for government workers (Wang et al., 2021).

2.3 Working Mothers

2.3.1 Women in the Labour Force

Not long ago, women, especially white women, did not work outside the home (Mayer & Mayer, 2021). The women who were often found in the workplace in the 1960s had little tertiary education and were not offered the same opportunities as their male counterparts to study certain disciplines (such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) or to occupy certain positions. There were typically designated professions in which women worked – such as teaching, nursing, and menial jobs in factory assembly lines or in an office, undertaking repetitive work.

The exclusion and discrimination of women in the workforce by the Apartheid government, at the time, was a common practice. This regime's institutionalization introduced laws that further sanctioned women to maintain male domination. This also included recruiting women for lower pay and occupational levels (Kim, 2020; Mayer & Mayer, 2021; Szastok et al., 2019). While the above accounts of subjugation were institutionalized in apartheid South Africa, these interconnected historical factors still result in women's alienation, especially for working mothers in prominent positions, in the workplace today (Mayer & Mayer, 2021).

In the chronicle of women's work in South Africa, even in contemporary times, how organizations view their ideal worker often disenchants women in terms of growth and promotional opportunities (Kaufman & Bair, 2021). The burden of unpaid work (in the form of care) detours employers from hiring and promoting working mothers because of the perception of their 'added' responsibility of being a primary caregiver and the uncertainty about when such caregiving will be needed (Kaufman & Bair, 2021; Kim, 2022). As a result, working mothers are mistakenly seen as less committed to their jobs, and the unconscious bias that women should be doing household activities tends to creep in (Kaufman & Bair, 2021). This contributes significantly to the gender pay gap and representation of females in high status roles. Furthermore, this often leads many women without caregiving responsibilities to delay having children or marriage, which often facilitates career progression (Alon et al., 2020; Kaufman & Bair, 2021).

In addition to the above, Kim and colleagues (2020) conducted a study that drew upon work-family research to explore the influence of work-family conflicts on women's decision to terminate their employment. Interestingly, the findings of the study indicated that the presence

of family policies alone did not have a significant impact on reducing work-family conflict among mothers. However, it was revealed that mothers experienced a decrease in work-family conflict when these policies were made easily accessible. Furthermore, unlike the woman in a dual-earning household, single-parent, breadwinning, working mothers have limited choices and must persevere regardless of work, life, and family complications (Kim et al., 2020).

Parry and Gordon (2021) conducted qualitative research that uncovered the fluctuating and elusive nature of the WLB process as experienced by women. According to Parry and Gordon (2021), these synchronic changes in work and private life need working mothers to constantly try to strike a good rhythm in their act of juggling. So often, work intrudes on family and social life, while family and private life pressures affect work performance. From the above, it is not surprising then that many organizational and industry scholars support the idea that WLB plays a significant role in influencing and maintaining perceptions about employment for working females, especially working mothers.

2.3.2 South African Demographics and Gender

Demographic trends also increase the likelihood of individuals facing simultaneous work and non-work pressures. The home setting, socio-economic and demographic characteristics affect WLB (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020). The social and demographic transformations within South Africa have gained momentum ever since the dawn of democracy. Research indicates that there has been a change in attitudes toward marriage and parenthood, a rise in single-parent households, and a wider gap between the wealthy and the poor (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2020). However, an exciting change that has occurred in the country is that of socio-demographics within the labour sector. South Africa's constitution and policies have articulated, in addition to other things, the need to rectify historical disparities and the need to boost the effectiveness of the workforce and improve the potential of the nation (Casale & Posel, 2002). A method of doing this is through the vigorous drive to include more women's participation in the education and workforce spaces (Casale & Posel, 2002). The demand for gender representation and equality from social movements and more significant international agencies have compelled governments and businesses to comply with transnational norms. The active and increasing presence of women in the labour market is not only a phenomenon promoted by South Africa's constitution, but also due to the absolute need for financial security, which many families are waking up to less and less of every day (Casale & Posel, 2002).

According to the South African Census (2015/16), it is estimated that there are about 14.5 million households in South Africa and about 41.4% of these are female-headed households. It is also estimated that 72.6% of South African households acquire income from work, and the average income (earned by working) is R100 246 annually. In total, households in South Africa typically generated revenue of R138 168. This therefore indicates that female-headed households earned less than male-headed households; while female-headed households had an average income of R98 911 per annum, their male counterparts attained a pay of R165 853 per annum (Thaba-Nkadimene et al., 2019; Statistics South Africa, 2017). The 2017 *General Household Survey* (GHS), an annual instrument for evaluating the progressions of South African households, also notes that men in South Africa still earn twice what women make for paid work. With such a high number of female-headed households in the country, to what degree does earning a substantially lower income than their male counterparts have on their lived realities? In understanding the WLB of working women with children, the impact of gender cannot be overlooked (Jose & Mello, 2021).

Social roles constitute a dominant role in the lives of people across the world. Social roles help define who people are and often create imposing self-definitional boundaries. The social role which accounts for gender is regarded as the gender role. Gender roles influence how individuals think, feel, and interact with other people. Gender roles, importantly, structure how individuals use and appropriate time. It is, therefore, crucial to understand gender roles as they have a substantive bearing in understanding WLB. According to Jonason and Davis (2018), 'gender role' is a term used to characterize the prescribed sociocultural features of being a man (i.e., masculinity) or a woman (i.e., femininity), and it is made out of various aspects of behaviours and attitudes that are considered 'appropriate' for each sex to establish or perform in a given society. Masculinity and femininity play an essential role in maintaining gender roles (Begeny et al., 2021). There are continuous debates concerning the extent gender roles and their variations are biologically determined and to what degree they are socially constructed. With the emphasis on gender difference, a distinct picture is often painted about WLB.

Social constructionists describe the social norms around gender roles as being hierarchical and as being skewed in favour of men (Garcia, 2021). According to Garcia (2021), the differences between gender roles often lead to different WLB experiences. WLB often aligns with gendered role expectations, especially for women with children, as they are expected to demonstrate the act of 'juggling' and to be a 'good working mother'. Historically,

housekeeping and child-rearing have primarily been the function of women, while their male counterparts participate in these functions partially, when needed (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021). In contemporary times, much remains the same, with women still undertaking the majority of housekeeping and child-rearing functions, with the added expectation of also juggling a career (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021). In addition, in the private sphere, women are expected to accept the consequences of having children, meaning they are perceived as the primary caregivers. At the same time, their male counterparts are privileged by being considered secondary parents, with fewer responsibilities in parenting. In connection to the above, private life roles similarly tend to spill over into the work sphere of working mothers.

Regrettably, the social fabric of the work environment tends also to be characterized by patriarchy (McGee et al., 2021). Historically, in western society, the workplace has not been the primary area for women; career and professional advancement were often deemed unimportant for women. The story for women in South Africa is the same. As mentioned previously, women experienced limitations on their possible work roles and career opportunities. These historical interconnected factors still result in women's alienation, especially for working mothers in executive positions within the work environment today. The idea of 'feminine jobs', lower workforce participation of women, lower women's education rates, and discrimination often allowed against women, such as pay and lower occupational levels, continue to subjugate women (McGee et al., 2021). From the above, it is not surprising then why many organizational and industry scholars support the idea that gender roles play a significant role in influencing and maintaining differences in WLB between employed men and women parents (Begeny et al., 2021; Jose & Mello, 2021; Mickey, 2019; Scheepers et al., 2018).

Differences exist among jobs regarding the level of career advancement they offer. Presently, women continue to receive fewer opportunities for high visibility, mission-critical roles, and international experiences (referred to as 'hot jobs') which play a crucial role in attaining top leadership positions (Garcia, 2021). The term 'glass ceiling' was coined in the 1980s to explain why women were not surpassing an invisible barrier and reaching top jobs. Furthermore, women of colour in the workforce encounter a distinctive array of challenges that involve the complex intertwined relationship of culture, gender, class and ethnicity. Consequently, many women of colour must navigate formidable barriers stemming from others' beliefs, attitudes,

and experiences (Garcia, 2021). As a result, they are less committed to the organization (Horwood et al., 2021).

2.3.3 Dual Couples versus Single Mothers

There are a significant number of dual-earner couples in the global workforce today, who struggle to balance the demands of the workplace, childcare, and elder-care issues (Berlato & Correa, 2017). Both nationally and internationally, dual-earner couples face an incessant challenge in finding a suitable balance between work and living. As a result of converging labor patterns, little work-life research has been conducted on dual-earning career couples in less industrialized countries, so it is imperative to understand the effects of work-life balance globalization on dual-earning couples (Berlato & Correa, 2017).

Interestingly, a study conducted by Bernhardt and Bünning, (2022) which focused on dual-earning couples, found that there tends to be a cross-over or a spillage of the experiences of both partners, contributing to the perceptions of marital satisfaction held by individual spouses. The effect of time demands, work pressure, and workplace social support impacted on the marital satisfaction of dual-earner wives and spousal (cross-over) effects for dual-earner husbands. Furthermore, besides job stressors, participants reported negative emotions or strain may spill over, with negative implications for general family-related well-being.

The balancing act of work-life integration without a partner is something single parents deal with every day, which can be challenging from both a parental and employee perspective. Not only are single parents juggling work and private life challenges, but they often have to do this alone. A look back at human progress over time presents a completely different outlook to contemporary times. In terms of families, the structure of families in modern society is different from families in the early twentieth century, where family responsibilities were divided amongst the various members (e.g., parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and also close relatives). This provided a plethora of adults to help. However, in the nuclear family structure, involving two married individuals providing care and stability for their biological offspring, traditional roles attached to each family member based on sex tend to prevail. Typically, women were understood to be homemakers and primary caretakers of children.

Single-parent households seem to be on the rise in modern society (García & Molina, 2017). The challenge often experienced in single parenthood is the added pressure of raising children

alone with little or no support from relatives, the community, or the state. At many times a single parent is solely responsible for handling a range of tasks, including staying up late with an unwell child, working overtime, managing unexpected emergencies, enforcing household rules, and making numerous everyday decisions. These responsibilities must be undertaken without the support or assistance of a partner.

Work-life research, looking at modern single parents, often cites trouble with conflicting priorities and low parent quality of life (Bernhardt & Bünning, 2022). Furthermore, single-parent families are more likely to be under significant financial pressure than dual-earning parent families. The growing concern here is the rising inequalities amongst family types. A single parent is solely responsible for handling a range of tasks, including staying up late with an unwell child, working overtime, managing unexpected emergencies, enforcing household rules, and making numerous everyday decisions. These responsibilities must be undertaken without the support or assistance of a partner. Furthermore, they are often met by the stress of earning enough money to sustain their family, their well-being, and the feelings of being fulfilled in their own career. Single-parenting WLB factors often present the risk of burnout.

In a study by Xue and McMunn (2021), which focused on gender differences in unpaid care work and psychological distress during the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, the researchers learnt that single women who spent long hours between work and childcare were more likely to report increased levels of psychological distress. Additionally, in qualitative research by Radcliffe and colleagues (2022), it was noted that conflicting work and family ideals are exacerbated in the context of working single mothers. They found that working single mothers were particularly influenced by progression opportunities and a supportive environment, in terms of their experience of WLB.

In a study which focused on the attitudes surrounding telework, it was noted that family responsibilities stemming from private life roles play a vital role in telework behavior (Zhang et al., 2021). Parents are more likely to work remotely than individuals without children as well as single individuals. Family responsibilities of single mothers were most likely to increase the family-to-work and work-to-family conflict. Furthermore, housework re-division and aggravated gender differences within couples were more prominent (Zhang et al., 2021). This raises the question of how single mothers manage household dynamics, as the pain of housework responsibility ultimately lies with them. Furthermore, due to the absence of a

partner, how does performing additional duties as well as role-defined activities influence their well-being?

The research conducted by Andrada-Poa and colleagues (2022) reveals shifts in the interpretations, responsibilities, and execution of single motherhood amid the COVID-19 era. In this study, fifteen mothers recounted their experiences using photovoice in capturing their daily home and work life highlights. Findings demonstrate changes in the meanings, roles, and performance of single mothering during the COVID-19 era (Andrada-Poa et al., 2022). Four themes emerged from the analysis which include: "an increased presence at home; shared motherhood during confinement; work and work management as an act of mothering; and single mothers as second teachers" (Andrada-Poa et al., 2021, p. 275). Some of these theme areas were associated with high levels of strain and tension for the mothers (Andrada-Poa et al., 2022). In relation to the important points raised, a need for the investigation of WLB and remote-working mothers was emphasized.

In contrast to the above, analysis conducted by Craig and Churchill (2021) reports a different outlook. Unlike their partnered counterparts, more single mothers reported feeling satisfied with their balance of paid and unpaid work and how they spent their time overall during the pandemic, perhaps because they avoided partnership conflicts and particularly benefited from relaxed commuting. However, from several of the above studies, it has been established how much single mothers need to carry out a delicate juggling act between their work and home lives as opposed to their coupled counterparts.

2.3.4 WLB Moderators

According to studies, employees who have the ability to work from home (WFH), time flexibility, and social support are more likely to experience a healthier balance between their work and home lives (Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Gottlieb et al., 2020).

2.3.4.1 Working from home (WFH)

Working from home (WFH) can be understood as paid work carried out primarily from home (Gottlieb et al., 2020). The trends around WFH and remote working have been made achievable largely due to technological advancements, where it is possible to conduct business activities outside of the traditional office environments (Gottlieb et al., 2020). The WFH trend was established long before the COVID-19 pandemic in contemporary western societies. In an

earlier United Kingdom study by Crosbie and Moore (2004), the researchers interviewed people from various socio-economic backgrounds and explored whether or not working from home improves the ability to balance work and life commitments. The study found that the integration or separation of work and home spheres is determined by how well individuals navigate the boundary between them; thus, WLB was found so be subjective in contemporary western societies (Crosbie & Moore, 2004). Their findings suggest that not all people who work from home are able to successfully traverse social, personal, temporal, and physical transitions between the boundaries of work and home/family domains. This causes difficulties in the attempt to juggle work and family schedules/activities and may negatively impact WLB (Crosbie & Moore, 2004).

The socio-economic and political contexts of non-western, developing countries differ significantly from modern western societies, and thus, the experiences that people had with WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic differed significantly (Gottlieb et al., 2020). Many occupational structures in developing countries are incompatible with WFH and remote work, unlike in more developed countries. Access to internet at home in developing countries is very limited and so the experiences of WFH and remote working during the pandemic posed difficulties in the lives of individuals in this context (Gottlieb et al., 2020). Therefore, this suggests that the impact of the WFH model on WLB during the COVID-19 pandemic is a highly subjective and contextual matter (Crosbie & Moore, 2004).

2.3.4.2 Time flexibility

As more women entered the workforce, workplace and home environments changed. In many organizations, flexible working hours are available because flexibility benefits employers as well as employees (Rahman, 2016). Among the most common benefits are an increase in employee productivity and an increase in profitability for an organization. Also, flexible working hours promote and facilitate WLB. A healthier WLB can reduce employee stress and increase employee well-being (Tajigharajeh et al., 2021).

Remote work is not immune to distractions and disruptions. The presence of frequent interruptions from children, family members, friends, and neighbors can complicate the separation between work and home life, as boundaries become blurred (Gupta, 2021). De Clercq and Brieger (2021, p. 180) noted that "more than 70% of participants experienced heightened stress due to the need to manage family responsibilities during work hours.

Consequently, balancing work and family obligations has emerged as one of the most significant challenges faced by employees working remotely from home". However, Amankwah-Amoah and colleagues (2021), argue that working from home offers flexibility to decide when and how the work is to be done, how to allocate time, attention, and energy resources to fulfil different role responsibilities. Wang and colleagues (2021) support Amankwah-Amoah and colleagues (2021) as they concur that working remotely provides mothers with the freedom to control the pace and timing of work in more individually efficient ways and allows them to take care of their personal and family needs, to take care of their children and other dependants, to be available for their dear ones, and to spend quality time with them.

However, the outbreak of COVID-19 presented many fresh challenges in terms of reaching additional dependants, with the care burden facing especially the working women, in the absence of paid domestic helpers or caretakers. Moreover, working mothers acting as parent-teachers by attending online classes with young children contributed to role conflict (Gupta, 2021). An attempt to manage multiple roles satisfactorily by mothers working remotely demands more balance between life and livelihoods.

2.3.4.3 Social support

It is possible to understand WLB as a measure of well-being. Social support is one of the most important aspects of well-being. Support from a social network provides individuals with psychological and material resources to cope with stress. The impact of workplace stress or life stressors can be moderated by social support (Türker, 2017). Whenever social support initiatives are integrated into social systems, individuals are protected from possible effects of stress, according to Chung and colleagues (2023). This may indicate that social support buffers the negative health effects of stressful occurrences. In addition, increased social support has been related to an upsurge in general life fulfilment (Chung et al., 2023).

A social support system is commonly mentioned as being crucial for happy relationships and psychological health. According to Barnett and colleagues (2019), having social support reduces the likelihood of developing depression and increases psychological stability, which lessens anxiety. When workers are overburdened, support from their employer and family members goes a long way toward avoiding the development of depression. Support raises the threshold at which someone views a circumstance as stressful, promotes healthy connections

between co-workers and family members, and improves physical and emotional well-being (Barnett et al., 2019). In their study, Barnett and colleagues (2019) noted that satisfaction with work-life balance and the presence of social support lowers the impact of stress on hospice nurses leading to an improvement in life and feelings of fulfilment. The study concluded that social support in the workplace and satisfaction with work-life balance play a role in supporting the mental health of nurse employees.

Social support, according to Munyeka and Maharaj (2022), is a significant predictor of career success, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Due to the favourable effect that social support has on WLB, improvement is seen in the employee's execution of tasks (Tavassoli & Sunyer Torrents, 2018). Workplace and family-related support are examples of social support (Basak & Akter, 2022). Support from colleagues and superiors is regarded as social support related to the employee's place of employment, whereas support from parents, spouses, children, friends, and other close family members is regarded as social support related to the employee's private life (Basak & Akter, 2022).

The consequences of organizational WLB policies and practices, as well as the psychological, physiological, and behavioural repercussions of stress, were studied by Oyewobi and colleagues (2022). They found that helpful behaviours, in particular flexible scheduling and supportive management, improved how employees felt they had control over their work and personal lives. In general, social support – whether it is related to work or family – has a positive effect on roles in WLB because it encourages contemplation on and discussion of challenges brought on by professional and personal commitments. The establishment and revision of variants relating to WLB are also the responsibility of the employer and family support system, according to Munyeka and Maharaj (2022).

2.3.5 WLB Implications for the Experiences of Working Mothers
2.3.5.1 Anxiety and high stress levels
The physical manifestations of stress, anxiety, fatigue, and burnout should be a shared concern for both employers and employees. A compromised WLB can contribute to exhaustion, stress, and anxiety, which, in turn, may give rise to more severe long-term mental health challenges (Sharma & Vahini, 2022). Most working mothers agree that a lack of WLB contributes to increased stress and anxiety levels in their lives. In a study conducted by Adhikari (2022), the objective was to examine the variations in the levels of experienced depression and anxiety

between working and non-working mothers. The findings revealed significant differences in the degree of depression and anxiety among the group of working mothers. However, no notable differences were observed in the anxiety and depression patterns among the group of non-working mothers.

Similarly, research by Uddin (2021) noted that lack of available time, socio-cultural and family norms, and gender stereotypes are key challenges working mothers face, which affect their anxiety levels and coping mechanisms. Many working mothers seek guidance on how to balance the conflicting demands of work and home from their networks of friends, family, and coworkers. However, Uddin (2021) suggests that effective time management, stress management, sustainable management of professional and personal lives, and listing out priorities are useful techniques some working mothers can adopt when integrating work and life commitments.

2.3.5.2 Discord within the family

Numerous working women believe that work and life conflict results from an unhealthy WLB (Somlata Sharma & Vahini, 2022). Garcia (2021) argues that some working mother may decide to place higher emphasis on their career growth as opposed to certain private roles including family role. When this occurs, feelings of guilt may arise as family time is sacrificed. This places the working woman in a challenging situation where a tough compromise is made which can evoke worry and stress negatively impact on their health.

In many parts of the globe, women are still associated as the main persons to engage in family and domestic responsibilities and South African women are no exception. In a survey conducted by Liam and colleagues (2021), it was noted that working women spent less time on domestic work or private life roles due to work duties. This was mentioned to create discontentment amongst family members as the general societal perception of being a good mother who is hands on domestic chores while and other family responsibilities was not fully met. Similar findings were noted in Munyeka and Maharaj's (2022) study. In addition, other studies have alluded to the notion that working mothers are under additional strain, as other family members may not be as sympathetic and willing to participant and assist in household chores and responsibilities as should (Irene et al., 2022; Liani et al., 2021; Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022)

2.3.5.3 Inability to attain full potential

Sharma and Vahini (2022) previously observed that most women are encouraged to prioritise their families. As a result, they often pass up professional development opportunities while still in the early phases of their working life. A considerable amount of literature shows that they miss out on many possibilities as a result. By the time they are in a position to take on more responsibility, there may not be any positions available that fit their qualification. In addition, Vishwakarma and Lakhawat (2019) further state that working mothers given repetitive or mundane tasks are more likely to have their creative abilities unsatisfied, limmiting them from reaching their full potential.

The result is that the working mothers become more frustrated, which has a ripple effect on their numerous responsibilities and causes an imbalance (Vishwakarma & Lakhawat, 2019). As a result, one may conclude that an unhealthy balance between work and personal life makes it more difficult for working women to reach their full potential.

In a recent study by Tajigharajeh and colleagues (2021), it was reported that a majority of those surveyed reported having feelings of irritability and resentment, even though less than half of them felt guilty about neglecting either their family or their job. Consequently, one might conclude that working women face job burnout and high levels of stress and anxiety, since their work and personal lives are not well balanced (Tajigharajeh et al., 2021)..

2.3.5.4 Employment termination

One of the reasons given as to why working mothers left their jobs due to the pandemic was that their child's day-care or school was closed (Horwood et al., 2021). Due to the closure of traditional schools, women had to shoulder a variety of additional duties, such as providing more childcare than usual, helping with distance learning, and in some cases completely home-schooling their children (Horwood et al., 2021). Even before the pandemic, working mothers with young children have been juggling both of these responsibilities, while attempting to hold down their job.

2.4 World of Work during COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the daily lives of many working adults in South Africa. The pandemic has had many direct and indirect implications for individuals, businesses, and institutions alike. When South Africa enforced the lockdowns restrictions, non-essential

businesses were called to halt. Businesses, schools, and day-care centres had to send staff and children home (Parry & Gordon, 2021). While some non-essential businesses closed, many opted to adapt their models to incorporate a remote-working option, ensuring the continuation of work. Almost overnight, the unprecedented outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 made working remotely the 'new norm'.

The consequences of the above is a new world of work characterized by a gradual shift in power from the organization's executive management to the employees. In an era remote work and an agile world of work, employees have a heightened degree of control over where they can conduct occupational tasks. Work can now be conducted in less traditional establishments (Puspitasari & Darwin, 2021). This shift requires both the employer and employee to adapt and transform to thrive in the new environment that is now characterized by adaptability and flexibility as opposed to standardized and structured environments (Puspitasari & Darwin, 2021). It also applies to intangibles such as social and cultural changes in our experiences, expectations, and norms (Puspitasari & Darwin, 2021).

Regarding the aforementioned, many corporations prioritised centralization until recently. The process through which an organization's operations, particularly those related to planning, decision-making, formulating strategy, and policies, become concentrated within a specific geographic area group is known as centralization (Zhou, 2020). However, when lockdown was implemented during the COVID-19 epidemic, organizations were forced to change their strategy. This means working remotely whenever possible for many employees. Workers were forced to embrace a whole new manner of work with very little advance planning due to the COVID-19 epidemic (Tomohiro, 2021). Having to support children's at-home learning during the pandemic additionally complicated the experiences of working parents with WFH and remote working (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

Shirmohammadi and colleagues (2022) recently published a research that looked at 40 empirical studies that focus on WLB while working from home during the COVID-19 epidemic. Prior to the pandemic, research on remote working and the Person-Environment Fit model provided the basis for their analysis. Four themes that indicate the discrepancies between the intended expectations and the unfavorable realities of WFH and remote working emerged from their investigation (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). The four themes include: (a) flexible time vs. work intensity, (b) flexible space vs. spacial limitations, (c) technologically feasible

work arrangements vs. technological stress and isolation, and lastly, (d) family-friendly work environment vs. housework and care intensity (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). The study findings highlight the role that human resource practitioners could play in helping employees manage their expectations and experiences of remote working and WFH (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022).

Many different aspects of WFH and remote working play unique roles in an individual's ability to balance work and life activities (Chen, 2021). Contemporary, western societies' experiences with WFH differ significantly in comparison to non-western, developing countries (Gottlieb et al., 2020). From the review of literature above, it is evident that the impact that WFH/remote working has on WLB is extremely subjective and contextual. WFH may be more desirable if one is able to flexibly combine work and daily life, to accommodate current circumstances (Tomohiro, 2021). For others, WFH may blur the boundaries between working and non-working hours, thus, hindering WLB (Tomohiro, 2021). A suggestion may be that organizations could control working hours by implementing policies that ensure WLB is maintained in the lives of the employees (Putri & Amran, 2021).

Researchers have recently looked into the impacts of working on-site continuously and being more vulnerable to COVID-19 exposure. In contrast to health professionals, being able to work from home is a luxury that allows for social isolation as a preventative precaution against the spread of disease. Additionally, working from home while concurrently caring for the kids who won't be attending on-site sessions gives the impression of greater protection. Contrarily, the feeling is one of tension and overburden for families with several family arrangements or who require specialized care (Omotosho, 2017). This is the case as a result of the fact that duties like as cleaning, grocery shopping, and child, clothes, and food care also add up during free time and in the classroom.

2.5 Remote Working
2.5.1 The Fourth Industrial Revolution
The world's leading economists believe that we are entering the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Shaturaev, 2022). With the rapid increase in innovation and technology, the way we live and work is expected to be transformed drastically as we enter this new era. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is a new epoch that builds and expands on the properties of digitization in a novel and unprecedented manner (Shaturaev, 2022). It represents an entirely new and

unconventional way technology becomes embedded within society and possibly in the physical human body. The breakthroughs in research conducted on genome editing, blockchain, cryptography, cyber-physical systems, artificial intelligence, and machine learning, and the 'Internet of Things', is said to alter our understanding of life and work (Shaturaev, 2022). This situation is further complicated by the fact that, from 2020, there was expected to be a workforce comprised of five generations. Not only will employees be expected to work and live side by side with colleagues from different generations, but they also need to learn, adapt, and respond to technological advances and maintain a healthy balance between work and life (Shinu, 2016). As a result, WLB in the 4IR looks different from what it did in the past decades. Not only is it looking different, but experts in the WLB fraternity expect a change in the understanding of WLB (Shaturaev, 2022).

Modern technological advancements allow workers to work remotely and at a faster pace. Communication technology tools such as cellular phones, tablets, and laptops allow the employer to reach the worker at any time of the day (Matli, 2020). Establishing rules and boundaries for the use communication tools is very important from a WLB perspective. Lack of boundaries can lead to unintended intrusion of work activities, infringing on life activities or vice versa.

2.5.2 Digital Connectedness

Prior to the pandemic, remote working was not a widely used practice of working in South Africa, especially in the government and public sector (Kossek & Lautsch, 2018). The use of technology in many local government institutions has not fully achieved maturity level, especially in the smaller and rural local government institutions, despite the big push from national government and the ushering in of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Matli, 2020).

According to the literature, the initial term employed to describe the arrangement of working remotely was 'telecommuting', which referred to individuals working from their homes and utilizing technology to communicate with colleagues at the workplace (Nilles, 1975). However, the terminology has evolved over time. As a result, Kirk and Belovics (2006) introduced the term 'e-workers' to denote individuals who work outside the traditional workplace setting and primarily rely on electronic communication, with minimal face-to-face interaction with fellow workers.

Remote work has diversified, and it continues to change the working environment. Modern technological advancements offer employees the chance to complete work remotely and at a quicker pace (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). Technological devices such cellular phones, tablets, and laptops afford employees the opportunity to work virtually anywhere and at any time (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021).

It might be difficult to use digital tools to distinguish between personal and work time when working from home. The development of information and communications technology has made it possible for workers; particularly working mothers, to stay in touch at all times and is accessible for work whenever it is needed. Employees may become frustrated as a result of this "always on" culture, which requires them to be continually "on call" to respond to emails from the office (Matli, 2020). Home remote workers during the COVID-19 epidemic found themselves working longer hours and unable to fully disconnect from work in practice due to digital connectivity, which worsened work-family problems.

While working remotely has made it easier for employers and employees to connect and communicate without being restricted by geography, remote working, especially in the context of COVID-19, where there was a sudden and forced situation, can have negative features, one of which is technostress (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021; Caringal-Go et al., 2021; DeSilver, 2020; Matli, 2020; Mayer & Mayer, 2022). The term "technostress" refers to the unfavorable psychological relationship that exists between people and the adoption of new technology. Technostress results from changed work and cooperation practices brought about by the usage of contemporary information technology in work and home environments. This strain response is extremely important from an organizational standpoint since it might result in high expenses for organizations (Matli, 2020).

A study conducted by Wang and colleagues (2021), which focused on achieving effective remote-working patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggests that social support may have the potential to lower levels of remote working challenges such as work-life spillover. The results of this study draw attention to the concept of social support in assisting with remote working and managing work-home interference. This is consistent with an experimental study conducted by Pflügner and colleagues (2021), which aimed to investigate the role played by social support in mitigating the negative impact of technostress. This study came to the

conclusion that social support improved worker performance while lowering exhaustion related to technology use. Particularly, employee performance, techno-exhaustion, and physiological arousal were all directly influenced by instrumental support, whereas only techno-exhaustion was influenced by emotional support, which refers to assistance from coworkers and supervisors to finish a job assignment (Pflügner et al., 2021).

In addition to the above, an earlier study conducted by Nam (2014), which explored the influence of the utilization of internet and mobile technology on the perception of WLB amongst workers in large and small corporate organizations, concluded that technology shapes the manner in which individuals perceive flexibility and permeability regarding the balance between work and life spheres. Technology use also affected the type of WLB; people who inclined to employ technological artifacts were more likely to suffer the effects of work-life infiltration. To clarify, technological artifacts, particularly mobile and virtual technologies, are found to blur the lines separating work and personal life because they improve trans-temporal and trans-spatial communications and the blurring of the lines between work and personal life. This often happens when people can access their work and personal lives whenever they choose, which unavoidably makes work-life barriers more permeable (Nam, 2014).

In light of the above, by extending actual work hours and overlapping domestic and professional duties, remote working can contribute to WLB disturbance. Additionally, it can lead to increased conflict between work and nonwork roles, negatively affecting WLB (Palumbo, 2020). As remote working is shown to negatively affect WLB, it is important to identify the factors that affect it. It has been found that several factors contribute to the satisfaction of remote workers with their WLB. The first one is related to organizational factors. WLB is likely to be much influenced by supervisors' care and appreciation, as revealed by Haar et al. (2019). WLB is also positively impacted by work autonomy, which refers to employees' freedom to self-manage their work without excessive supervision (Haar et al., 2019).

In addition to the above, research conducted by Franken and colleagues (2021) sought to understand how knowledge workers in New Zealand make choices about work and life, within an organizational context that permits the liberty of working at home and having access to company resources outside of the work premises. This study noted that such workers tended to move the equilibrium between work and life to accommodate more work and less time on

private-life aspects. This suggests that productivity gains seem higher for organizations with knowledge workers who are given this opportunity (Franken et al., 2021). However, the authors also warn against this, indicating that despite the short-term productivity gains, employers that provide employees with this freedom have a responsibility to ensure that these well-motivated workers remain productive in the long run without experiencing adverse well-being implications.

2.6 Relevance of the Literature to the Study

The literature discussed above is relevant to the study because it has revealed the historical context of women in the South African labor force. The idea of feminine jobs, lower workforce participation by women, lower education rates of women, as well as discrimination were common practices perpetuated against women by the apartheid regime; this is relevant to the study because it helps understand the WLB experiences of those who were working remotely amid COVID-19 lockdown. It also helps us to understand the work roles of working mothers in modern South Africa and to note if there have been significant changes historically.

Literature has also managed to give us an understanding of the effects or challenges associated with being unable to balance work and life demands. Hence, it also justifies carrying out this study so that the growing family demands do not influence working mothers to quit their jobs, especially when they are the dominant financial provider to the family. The literature has also revealed the challenges experienced by working mothers working remotely. Revealing these challenges is relevant to the study because these challenges give an understanding of the adverse effects of working remotely amid COVID-19 and the implications of the experiences on women's well-being. Due to a study of related literature, the importance of WLB was shown, including to both personal and social life.

The studies above indicated the gap that exists in the literature concerning WLB and working women. The studies indicated a dearth of population-specific research in the context of South Africa. It shows scarcity in WLB research focusing on mothers in the public sector. In addition, it also emphasizes the dearth of literature focusing on the time period, in this case a global pandemic that has halted the world with regard to scientific research and understanding (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). The bulk of the studies focus on WLB prior to the onset of the COVID-19, but there are few so far from COVID-19 period.

Literature has also shown the importance of separating work and home, and the benefits thereof. This is also relevant to this study because working mothers will know how important it is to separate work and life, even without a pandemic. The alignment of this study's objectives is consistent with the objectives of previous studies; thus, the literature used in this study is relevant to the investigation.

2.7 Theoretical Approaches of the Research

2.7.1 Spillover Theory

The experience of WLB during COVID-19 movement restrictions for remote-working mothers can further be understood through the spillover theory. Employees harbour emotions and attitudes that are established in their private roles and infiltrate into the work roles and vice versa (Bernhardt & Bünning, 2022; Piotrkowski, 1978). As suggested by Staines (1980, p 119), "positive work experiences are associated with positive life experiences, and negative work experiences are associated with negative life experiences". In the spillover discourse the term 'positive relationships' and 'negative relationship' are popular terms to explain the occurrence of spillover (Bernhardt & Bünning, 2022; Piotrkowski, 1978). Therefore, all the negative and positive instances in the workplace or home may be spilling over and influencing other domains of someone's multifaceted life.

According to literature that focuses on the spillover theory emphasis is placed on understanding the permeability of the private life domain and the work domain. Blurred boundaries are often associated with work-life conflict which can be attributed to work-life spillover (McDaniel et al., 2021). Despite the fact that some research claim that the spillover of work-to-private life domains is beneficial and may enhance the two worlds (Ghislieri et al., 2022), most of the studies in this niche supports the idea that spillover from persistent occupational aligned tasks into the life domain is accepted as negative spillover and may have similarly negative outcomes (Schlachter et al., 2018).

In relation to the above, some research studies have focused on the influence of technology-related work-to-life spillover and its impact workers. In a study conducted by Chesley (2005), it was noted that workers who had increased spillover associated with the utilization of communication technology were also more likely to report lower family satisfaction and increase personal distress. Similarly, a recent study by McDaniel and colleagues (2021), focused on working mothers and fathers who experienced technostress, which at the time was

attributed to work. Conclusions drawn from this study is that technostress related to work-life spillover resulting in greater feelings of overload, lower life satisfaction and lower job satisfaction.

In addition to the above, employees and employers may differ in their perception of work-life boundaries. For example, numerous research studies have noted the popular dilemma come across by employees where there is a perception of limited time to fulfill personal activities because of the extended hours they have incorporated during the transition to remote work. In some instances employees have reported feeling obliged to being available throughout the day even when off duty due to the ability to easily connect to work resources offsite and work demands put forth by some employers (Mellner, 2016).

The phenomenon commonly referred to as the "autonomy paradox" is characterised by the increased use of technology that intensifies job responsibilities and simultaneously raises expectations for extended working hours (Steidelmuller et al., 2020). This can lead to a situation where remote-working employees experience heightened organizational control over their personal lives (Steidelmuller et al., 2020, p. 998). The perceived work-life boundary violations is often linked reduced life and job satisfaction, exhaustion and depressive symptoms, (McDaniel et al., 2021). Spillover can facilitate understanding because, according to Bernhardt and Bünning (2022), stress or strain can transfer from one domain to another. However, this is more robust when the employee working from home has no clear borders between their work and life contexts.

2.7.2 Intersectional Approach

The social constructionist approach in work-life research attempts to scrutinize the positivist dealing with the subject. It provides a method for investigating WLB that gets around the shortcomings and blind spots of the literature in the mainstream. Social constructionists emphasize how people describe, explain, and perceive reality (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Social constructionists allow for the various characteristics which constitute one's identity to be explored simultaneously (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). In particular, feminist researchers have a history in uncovering and critical documenting inequalities in occupational research. Feminist scholarship forms the foundation for the emancipation of women from both work and domestic struggles. The inclusion of women into the workforce and work sectors is now an undeniable advantage across board. Although the nature of employment has changed, feminist

literature has shown that gender relations in the home have remained largely unchanged because domestic work has largely been done by women (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Additionally, there has been a minor change in the way paid employment is organized, despite the fact that long working hours and other structural aspects of the workplace that were originally created to accommodate men's lives continue to limit women's ability to succeed in their careers and achieve WLB (Akinbobola, 2019).

In the context of the work-life interaction, there have been numerous attempts to analyze life and work (Lendák-Kabók, 2022). However, there is a dearth of material in the existing literature that offers fresh methods to conceptualize and frame the nexus of work and life (Akinbobola, 2019). The researcher suggests an intersectional approach in this section to counteract the exclusionary tendencies described in the preceding sections and to provide more inclusive work-life research, in keeping with the theme of critical social science research, which seeks to reveal and transform relations of power for an inclusive and egalitarian perspective.

Even though intersectional analysis is now frequently employed in social science domains, the work-life literature has largely been unaffected by these advancements. Intersectionality, for instance, is described as the "mutual reproduction of class, gender, and racial relations of inequality" by Acker (2006, p. 443). Similarly, Mahalingam (2007) emphasizes that intersectionality allows for an understanding of the ways in which power operates, acknowledging that individuals occupy different positions within the matrix of power based on their intersecting identities. This perspective offers a comprehensive framework for examining the multidimensional nature of power and privilege, enabling a more nuanced analysis of social inequalities and facilitating efforts toward social justice and equality. Recognising how diversity and influence are ingrained and interconnected in every social occurrence is the main benefit of utilising intersectional analysis. It is further said that the intersectional method is well-suited to solve the limitations of existing work-life research and to offer up an effective and meaningful route ahead for future study in the sector (Akinbobola, 2019).

In order to conceive the work-life interface and the category of "worker," it is crucial, according to the intersectional approach, to reconsider how life, diversity, and power are treated. The intersectional method clarifies what this implies in terms of operationalizing concepts and

constructions, using sample techniques, and interpreting and analysing qualitative data (Akinbobola, 2019).

Working mothers' experiences of WLB can be undesirably impacted by their race, particularly when considering COVID-19. According to previous research, working women from various racial and ethnic backgrounds frequently encounter special difficulties and hindrances when attempting to balance their obligations to their families and their careers. Black and Asian working mothers are more likely than White working mothers to encounter work-family conflict, which can be attributed in part to variables including higher job demands, less workplace accommodation for family responsibilities, and lower levels of social support (Leo et al., 2022). Black working mothers may further experience prejudice or discrimination at work, which exacerbates the difficulties they already experience. The pressure to adhere to traditional gender roles and cultural expectations of motherhood has also been linked to Black, Asian and Coloured working mothers, which can lead to increased stress and conflicts between work and family obligations (Rubin & Parker, 2022).

In connection to race, there may also be differences in the experiences of WLB by women in terms of their class and socio-economic status. Class and socio-economic circumstances may limit access to resources such as a nanny or day-care, as well as support from family and organization, and flexible work schedules. This was reported to be the case for many single working mothers in Leo and colleagues' (2022) study. Pre-existing pervasive inequalities harvested and regenerated new ones; because of the closure of schools and day-care centres, single mothers – who are the children's primary caregivers – had to balance both childcare and employment obligations. Individuals with jobs that require a strong internet presence might find this particularly challenging. Due to supply concerns, it was difficult to find quiet workspaces, reliable internet connectivity, technology, and telecommuting equipment.

2.8 Relevance of the Theoretical Approach to the Study

This study has adopted the Spillover theory and the Intersectionality Approach as its theoretical approach to form an understanding of the lived experiences of remote working mothers during a precarious period. Both these theoretical concepts serves as a roadmap that guides the research process, shapes the research design, and provides a theoretical lens through which the research problem is examined and understood.

The relevance of the Spillover theory to this study lies in its ability to capture the impact of both positive and negative instances in the workplace and home, which can spill over and influence the multiple roles assumed by mothers. By incorporating this theory, the study can address inquiries related to WLB and the specific challenges faced by remote-working mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the Spillover theory facilitates the exploration and comprehension of the experiences of working mothers, shedding light on both positive and negative aspects. Through the lens of this theory, a deeper understanding of how various factors spill over into different domains of a mother's life can be gained, offering valuable insights into the complexities and dynamics of their work-life balance.

In addition to the above, the application of intersectionality as a theoretical framework in this study is highly relevant due to its recognition of how individuals' experiences are influenced by the interplay of various social identities, including gender, race, socioeconomic status, and more. Within the specific context of remote working mothers, intersectionality brings attention to the interconnections and intricacies inherent in their experiences. It offers a valuable perspective for exploring and comprehending the multifaceted aspects that shape the experiences of remote working mothers. By adopting this framework, the study gains insight into the diverse dimensions that contribute to the experiences of this group, enabling a comprehensive understanding of their work-life balance dynamics.

2.9 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter has looked at the historical context of women in South Africa's labour force, the definition of WLB, research on WLB with a particular focus on the age and gender of employees, and how the Fourth Industrial Revolution has influenced the way people work in various organizations. Literature on how working mothers mediated the demands of work and private life during COVID-19 was revealed as well as the challenges experienced by working mothers. The chapter also looked at the implications of mothers' experiences of working remotely. Finally, the intersectional and spillover theories were discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The emphasis of this chapter is on outlining the research design that best suited the investigation. This chapter also highlights the research questions and outlines the sample demographics, the sampling procedure that was utilized in the study, and the position of the researcher in relation to the research topic. Furthermore, the data collection process and the methods of data analysis are discussed in this chapter. An explanation of how rigor was upheld in this study is also provided. To conclude the chapter, the ethical considerations that were adhered to are outlined.

3.2 Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of working mothers working remotely during the COVID-19 movement restrictions?
2. How does demographic variation, such as age group, number and age of children, and professional status, shape the experiences of being a mother working remotely in the context of COVID-19 movement restrictions?
3. What challenges do working mothers face in a local government that is male dominated?

3.3 Research Paradigm (Interpretivism)

This study is informed by the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, and will examine the experiences of working mothers using a qualitative research design. In Smith's (2003) view, IPA is mainly interested in understanding an individual's subjective experiences and how they interpret their social surroundings. As people understand their reality based on their personal and social contexts, IPA aims to explore an individual's experiences of a specific phenomenon in great detail to uncover the meanings associated with it.

Qualitative research with an emphasis on the IPA approach focuses on illuminating and understanding the human experience, as opposed to explaining and predicting behaviour using statistics (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). The IPA qualitative approach is appropriate for the aim of this study, which involves providing a subjective account of working mothers' experiences with remote work during the COVID-19 lockdown. Qualitative interpretations are constructed

by the researcher, and thus, it is important to acknowledge the central role of the researcher in this study (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). Qualitative researchers have to constantly examine their role and impact in order to be aware continuously of how their values and life experiences influence the research process and decisions (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). This chapter also includes a discussion of the author's reflexivity, where the author highlights the need for the researcher being self-aware and reflecting on personal biases, assumptions, and values that might have affected the research methodology and conclusions.

Qualitative data is collected by the researcher through engaging with individuals in interviews, and observing their behavior in their natural setting (Creswell, 2003). This type of research design requires the researcher to gather information about their participants without relying on questionnaires or psychometric instruments (Creswell, 2003). The researcher interprets the information provided by interviewees, and these interpretations cannot be separated from the researcher's own values, history, and prior conceptions (Creswell, 2003). Multiple views of the research problem are created through the different interpretations of the researcher, the participants and readers of this thesis (Creswell, 2003). The qualitative research process involves reporting a holistic account of the interviewees' experiences and the research problem under study. This includes identifying various components involved in the interviewees' experiences (Creswell, 2003). These elements of qualitative research have shaped the entire research process, including the data collection procedure and analysis used in this study.

The interpretive philosophical foundation emphasizes the nature of reality as a subjective experience, where context is essential in shaping the meaning behind individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2003). The interpretive approach values people's lived experiences, as it proposes that multiple perspectives should be seen as knowledge, suggesting that there is no absolute truth (Dickson et al., 2016). The interpretive researcher tends to rely upon the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p. 8) and recognizes how their own background and experiences influence the research process. Studies that utilize an interpretive framework often highlight and examine the experiences of highly marginalized groups, and this is key to the present study, as women have been historically marginalized in South Africa (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006).

3.4 Research Design (Explorative)

According to Ghauri and Grnhaug (2010), one can generate the data required to address the problem statement within the boundaries of the study's research design. Thus, it is crucial that the research strategy adopted be in line with tackling the study's aim and problem statement. To ensure that the problem statement and the research design are aligned, a qualitative exploratory research design was selected for this specific research study. This choice was made due to the unstructured nature of the research problem. Mohajan (2018) suggests that an exploratory research design is suitable when the research problem is under-researched, which is relevant to the research topic at hand.

Although Mason and colleagues (2010) believed that an exploratory research design is closely linked to a qualitative research design, it is widely acknowledged by research scholars that other research methods such as literature reviews can also be employed in exploratory studies. To gain insight into the relevant theoretical concepts in the field of study, this particular study included a literature review (located in the second chapter), which served as secondary data, thus forming the basis for empirical primary data collection through qualitative research methods. However, for this study, the primary data was obtained through face-to-face interviews with mothers who were working remotely from their local government employer.

3.5 Sampling of Research Participants

The significance and validity of the data gathered are directly affected by the appropriate selection of participants, making it a crucial component in qualitative research. Qualitative research seeks to obtain a thorough comprehension of a phenomenon through the eyes of those involved, and therefore, identifying appropriate participants is of utmost importance. The sample should represent a range of perspectives and life experiences while remaining adequate to allow for in-depth analysis of particular situations. A meticulous method of participant selection was used in order to assure trustworthy and applicable research outcomes.

3.5.1 Convenience Sampling

According to Terre Blanche and colleagues (2006), convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy in which samples are chosen from the community solely because the researcher can access them easily. The researcher has chosen this method of sampling because the population must be diverse, which may be difficult to achieve with other sampling methods. The researcher selected a sample that captures as many nuances as possible that the working

mothers in the population may be experiencing during this period of constant change (Matli, 2020).

Ideally, in research, it is good to test a sample that represents the population (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). South Africa is diverse; therefore, having a diverse sample may provide better representation, as a minority group within our diverse country. Furthermore, convenience sampling is appropriate for this research, given the challenges of the COVID-19 restrictions and time constraints.

3.5.2 Sample Characteristics

This study recruited a diverse group of participants to make up the sample of the study. Furthermore, the requirements for the sample included: full-time working mothers who are the primary caregiver of their child/children and must be living with the child/children. Participants must be currently employed by eThekwini Municipality and should have a minimum duration of one year working in this organization. This will assist in gauging how their tenure has been in the municipality prior to COVID-19 and with the sudden change to remote working. Furthermore, participants were to be diverse in terms of age, occupation, occupational level, and marital status.

Previous research prior to the pandemic supports age as a factor influencing how employees maintain WLB (Kim, 2022). Employees representing older age groups are more likely to indicate the maintenance of WLB. However, the context of COVID-19 movement restrictions and remote working presents a gap in literature focusing on these contextual nuances (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). This research aimed to gather a perspective of how mothers between the ages of 25 and 45 years old experience WLB during the initial era of remote working and lockdown restrictions. Typically, this is the child-bearing age for many woman, and this age group is suitable for this study as it may uncover some of the dynamics that impact on WLB (such as position, tenure, and span of control). This age group in local government typically occupies operational and middle-management positions. This aspect of the organization is responsible for the daily operations of the organization and is characterized by the limited ability of delegating tasks, which may colour their experience of balancing work and life demands. This added demand impacts on work-life balance. However, the participants differed with regard to the length of service, varying from one year to ten years.

In addition to the above, a diverse cohort of women from different racial and cultural backgrounds may shed light on how differences in cultural context may aid or impede the maintenance of a healthier WLB. Both dual- and single-parenting mothers are represented to ensure a holistic view. Moreover, women with children ranging from seven months to 16 years of age were targeted, as they mainly function as the primary caregivers for these dependents because the children are too young to fend for themselves, and are highly dependent on their mothers (Akanji et al., 2020).

3.5.3 Sample Size and Access

The sample size is ought to be large enough to effectively describe the phenomena in question, so as to address the research question, however, in the same breathe, an enormous sample size poses the risk of supplementing repetitive and redundant data. The achievement of saturation was the researcher's objective. When additional participants are added to the study but fewer opinions or pieces of data are gathered, saturation has occurred. The intended sample size for this study was around 13 individuals. In order to approach data saturation, a minimum sample size of 12 has previously been proposed for qualitative investigations (Fugard & Potts, 2015). In line with the latter, only 9 participants formed part of the sample group, this is due to saturation being met. In addition, the decision to choose this sample size was influenced by the perspective of Smith and colleagues (2009), who suggested that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research studies should have smaller and focused samples. Coyle (2014) also mentioned that the typical sample size for an IPA study ranged from one to twelve participants. After thoughtful deliberation, the researcher decided to opt for a sample size of six, allowing for thorough attention to each individual case (Clarke, 2010).

Population refers to a collection of well-defined individuals or objects perceived to be possessing similar characteristics (Creswell, 2013). The sample for this study comprised remote-working mothers in the Corporate and Human Capital cluster of a local government organization in KwaZulu-Natal. This local government institution is responsible for governing and managing an area that spans 2 300 square kilometres. The Corporate and Human Capital cluster houses the departments from which the participants were selected. This cluster is comprised of the Human Resources, Skills Development, Management Services and Organizational Development, and the Occupational Health and Safety Unit. Together, these units ensure the attraction and development of the organization's employees, their upskilling, and their safe working conditions. This division is well suited for the study because it consists

of four sections in which employees were previously office based, but have readjusted to a blended approach, incorporating both remote work and on-site work.

The cluster places an emphasis on employee centricity in their mission statement. The cluster strives to be recognized as a caring and a significant contributor to the success of the organization. Additionally, the cluster strives to promote diversity and inclusion, and to foster a collaborative work atmosphere. This information was gathered using information from the organization's newsletters and biweekly newspaper. These platforms highlight the activities and programs created to encourage inclusion, equity, and diversity in the workplace. In addition, some of these news items provide illustrations of effective partnerships across various departments and with outside stakeholders. Insights about the cluster's and organization's overarching priorities and culture are provided through this.

As a researcher, the writer recognizes the value of maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of the study participants. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the research study by the author to ensure this. Therefore, a different name was given to the participants instead of employing their true names. By doing this, the writer is able to mention the research participants without jeopardizing their privacy or identification. This approach is especially crucial when dealing with sensitive information or subjects because it helps to protect the participants' rights and preserve their anonymity. It is common practice in research to use pseudonyms or a naming convention, which is essential for respecting ethical standards and keeping participants' trust.

3.5.4 Demographics of Participants

As the focus of this research was on social phenomena, a diverse sample was appropriate. Diverse samples provide commonalities and differences amongst groups which often provide richer insights into the participants' nuanced lived realities (Creswell, 2014). The demographics of the remote-working mothers will be further explained below.

All the women who participated in the study were remote-working mothers in the Corporate and Human Capital cluster of the eThekwini Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. This diverse sample (see Table 1) consisted of nine remote-working mothers with different racial backgrounds including: one Coloured, two Indian, two White, and four Black African remote-working mothers. The remote-working mothers were from various age groups and had different

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levels of experience (in years) in their careers. The lengths of the remote-working mothers' careers ranged from one to ten years in their chosen field. The sample consisted of four married mothers, one widowed mother, and four single mothers. They had between one and five children. These remote-working mothers were selected to ensure variability and diversity in the sample. It should be noted that pseudonyms participant naming is used in Table 1, to uphold anonymity and protect the identities of the participants in the sample (Creswell, 2003).

Table 1: Demographics of Participants

Participant	Race	Relationship Status	Number of Children	Length of Career (in years)	Age
Participant 1	Black	Single	1	1	27
Participant 2	Coloured	Single	2	6	33
Participant 3	White	Married	4	25	55
Participant 4	Black	Married	2	5	34
Participant 5	Indian	Married	1	9	45
Participant 6	Black	Widow	2	8	46
Participant 7	Black	Married	5	20	57
Participant 8	White	Single	1	4	42
Participant 9	Indian	Single	1	2	30

3.5.5 Position of the Researcher

The researcher in qualitative inquiry acts as the key instrument for collecting data, observing behaviour and interviewing the participants (Creswell, 2003). The only commonality between the participants and the researcher is the field of work in which the remote-working mothers are involved. The researcher is male and has no dependants, and thus, has not experienced the challenges that these remote-working mothers have faced. Therefore, when analysing the narrations of the remote-working mothers, the researcher constantly engaged in a process of critical reflection. Critical reflection is an important activity as it entails stepping back from the evidence and giving it a thorough, methodical, and analytical examination. The writer took into account the context in which the data were collected, identified biases or assumptions that

may have affected the data collection process, and interpreted the meaning of the data in light of the research question or objective.

By engaging in critical reflection, the research community ensures that findings are trustworthy and meaningful, and that a valuable contribution is achieved. This was achieved through the use of a research journal. Additionally, during the interviews, the researcher would paraphrase and summarize the information shared by the interviewees to clarify any discrepancies.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Research Procedure

The researcher selected the local government institution as the research location due to their previous employment there and their familiarity with the organisation. The choice was made because the researcher had a keen interest in exploring the dynamics between employers and employees. Consequently, the researcher communicated their intention to conduct research at this particular institution to the HR Head, who granted them complete permission to proceed. The researcher therefore shared his intentions to conduct research at this organisation to the HR Head who gave him full permission to do so. The researcher was permitted to access this sample through the means of a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers are essential mediators allowing the researcher access to the study settings and participants within research focusing on people. The gatekeeper in this instance is the Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE), which is a department that has the power to grant or withhold access to people or situations doing research in eThekwini Municipality. This department is invaluable for gaining access, primarily due to their knowledge, connections with, or membership in a research population.

Permission was obtained through a proposal letter that was sent to the manager of the MILE Department for approval. Once an agreement was reached, an employee who had already been identified as a potential participant was invited to a meeting where they were informed of the research, its purpose, and their rights as a participant. The employee was identified as a potential participant because they matched the sample characteristic of being a working mother who works remotely and has been with the institution for more than a year. In addition, the employee and sampling technique aligned. They were then asked to consent to participate in the study. The participant then shared the information with other potential candidates, and the participants were thus recruited through snowball methods. Communication with new recruits

to the study was conducted over email. This was done within the ambit of ethical practice, with the consent and purpose of study being mentioned upfront.

3.6.2 Instrument

In relation to collecting data, a biographical data sheet (Appendix E) and a semi-structured interview (Appendix A) were used. Biographical information is personal data that distinguishes one individual from another. Although this data is brief and succinct, the intent of collecting it is not to be reductionist or to label clients. Rather, it is meant as a brief overview, making meaning and creating a sense of personal experiences on the given topic, and to tend to the participants in a caring manner.

Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was used as a tool for eliciting information from participants. A semi-structured interview includes some series of open-ended questions based on the topic areas the researcher wants to cover; it may include a series of broad questions to ask, and it also may have some prompts to help the interviewee (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The open-ended nature of the questions defines the topic under investigation but provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to have in-depth discussions about certain notions (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The advantage of this method, in terms of the present study, was that it gave the researcher the freedom to probe the interviewee, and to elaborate or to follow a new line of inquiry introduced by what the interviewee was saying, therefore enhancing and enriching the depth of the research itself (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The questions that were asked were directed to the participant's experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the theme in question (Groenewald, 2004).

The interview questions were developed using the larger research questions of the study. The outlined broad areas of research form part of the domains guiding relevant interview questions to be asked. The goal here was to tap into the experiences and expertise of remote-working mothers. The body of research on WLB and remote work has been thoroughly reviewed, and this analysis has revealed what has been investigated previously and what knowledge gaps there are. This disparity is additionally exacerbated by the COVID-19 environment. Together, these factors provided guidance for the creation and criteria of the research questions. Furthermore, the guidance of previous studies informed the development of the interview questions. This assisted in asking relevant questions but also in aligning the research with the existing body of knowledge. In addition, before proceeding with the interviews, the interview

questions underwent a pilot test to ensure their language appropriateness and alignment with the interview objectives. This preliminary testing aimed to confirm that the questions effectively captured the desired information and were easily comprehensible for the participants. The pilot test served the purpose of identifying any possible issues or ambiguities in the questions, enabling the researcher to make necessary modifications or refinements prior to conducting the actual interviews. By piloting the interview questions, the researcher sought to improve the overall quality and reliability of the data gathered during the study (Sampson, 2004).

As stated by Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 69), "Memoing is another key strategy in qualitative inquiry that has been employed in this study. It contains the investigator's specific field notes, which serve as a record of what the researcher hears, observes, encounters, and thinks while gathering data and considering the procedure. The process of gathering data can easily draw researchers in, preventing them from pausing to consider their actions (Groenewald, 2004). Additionally, the researcher's field notes are essential in qualitative research because the human mind has a propensity to forget information rapidly (Groenewald, 2004). An audio-recorder was utilized in all the interviews in this study, with the permission of interviewees (Groenewald, 2004). Each interviewee was assigned a code, for example 'Participant 1' to ensure anonymity and safeguard their privacy (Groenewald, 2004).

3.7 Data Collection

Zoom was utilized as a mode to collect the qualitative interview data. Zoom is a cutting-edge video conferencing software with several distinctive characteristics that increase its efficacy appeals to qualitative investigators. Zoom is feasible and protects both participant and researcher from further exacerbating COVID-19 infections. Zoom was a very suitable mode for the current study's data collection process simply because the participants under study were already full-time remote workers. Thus, there were no meeting venue inconveniences for the participants. This data collection method also aligned with the theme of using virtual technology to get work done in the context of COVID-19. The Zoom video-call interviews helped to remove any form of ambiguities that arose, as the researcher was able to ask for clarity if there were perspectives that were unclear. The interviews were in-depth in nature. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

3.8 Data Analysis Method

3.8.1 Thematic analysis

An inductive data analysis method was followed, where patterns and themes evident in the data are categorized and organized into abstract pieces of information (Creswell, 2003). This inductive process involves constantly evaluating the data to establish a sound pattern of themes. It may also include involving the interviewees in an interactive process to give them the opportunity to shape and construct the themes collaboratively with the researcher (Creswell, 2003).

To conduct a thematic analysis, the interview recordings are transcribed into a written format. This enables the researcher to be more involved in the findings gathered before conducting an analysis of the data obtained, and allows for the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A thematic analysis organizes and describes data in rich detail, which allows for the interpretation of different aspects of the research problem at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It is one of the benefits of thematic analysis that it is flexible, allowing a variety of themes to emerge that did not fit into the original topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that a researcher must decide whether to identify themes semantically or latently. The data in this study were analysed on the basis of the explicit statements made by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The goal was not to find anything beyond what had been said.

Data drawn from the interviews were analysed using the six steps or phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The following steps were taken in analysing data from the interviews and secondary data: i) the initial phase involved the researcher familiarizing them self with the data, ii) followed by generating initial codes, iii) then searching for themes, iv) reviewing themes, v) defining and naming themes, and vi) then producing a report that analysed the themes. These steps are explained in detail below.

Phase 1: The first stage of familiarizing oneself with the data involved transcribing verbal data into a written format. Once the data were transcribed, the researcher actively read the data and took notes in order to generate ideas and create meaning out of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 2: Once the researcher gained a deeper understanding of the ideas that were formulated, initial codes were generated. These codes identified different elements of the data that were interesting and could be assessed in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were organized into lists of significant groups by analysing the ideas that were generated in phase 1. This analysis involved manually coding the data by using highlighters to indicate potential patterns that could be recognized as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 3: The third phase involved searching for themes within the data. The codes (identified in phase 2) were analyzed, and it was found that different codes combined to form overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, some of the coded data were sorted into sub-themes and broader themes, while other initial codes were discarded due to irrelevance to this study. The use of visual representations (i.e., mind maps) helped sort the initial codes into these various sub-themes and broader themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 4: In order to form clearly identifiable distinctions between the themes (and sub-themes) identified in phase 3, a review process took place. The researcher refined the themes by merging some of the sub-themes into one, in order to create suitable themes for the data. The transcribed data and themes on the mind map were analyzed to ensure that they formed a coherent pattern, and that they accurately reflected meaning from the entire dataset collected. During this phase, the validity of the various themes in relation to the dataset was considered (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 5: The fifth phase involved writing up an in-depth analysis of each theme, to identify how it fitted into the broader research topic. The names of the themes and sub-themes were established and considered in relation to each other. The labels given to the themes and sub-themes were informed by the story that each theme tells and the underlying essence of the data that the theme captures (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 6: The final stage of the thematic analysis involved producing a report, where the researcher generated an argument in relation to the research questions. This allowed the researcher to convey the data collected in a concise and coherent manner, creating an analytic narrative of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.9 Ensuring Rigor

Rigor in qualitative research is defined as a way to ensure that the findings of a research study are true and valid (Adler, 2022). Due to the complex nature of qualitative research, it is crucial for rigor to be ensured throughout the research process. Quantitative researchers rely solely on statistics to determine the rigor of their studies, but this method is not applicable in qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). Additionally, ensuring rigor throughout the research process establishes the validity and reliability of the study, and these aspects are usually proven using the following four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Cypress, 2017).

Credibility. Credibility is the first criterion that is established to prove the trustworthiness of a study using qualitative research methods. Credibility involves the interpretation of the data, and whether the interviewees' narratives have been accurately interpreted and depicted by the researcher (Anney, 2014). Qualitative validity is established when the researcher analyzes the accuracy of their findings, and this was done through the documentation of the different steps that were taken in the research process, and through triangulation (Creswell, 2003). Although there are various ways of ensuring credibility and establishing validity in qualitative studies, triangulation was used in this study as a form of credibility. The researcher triangulated different sources of data by examining evidence gathered from the sample and building a coherent justification for the themes that emerged in the data (Creswell, 2003). This method is used to reduce biases the researcher may have, and this was achieved by the inclusion of a diverse sample consisting of remote-working mothers of different backgrounds, ages, and racial groups. A diverse sample allowed for the documentation of multiple perspectives, thus lessening researcher bias (Anney, 2014).

Transferability. Transferability is seen as the extent to which the research findings can be transferred to a similar context (Anney, 2014). The researcher employed two methods to enhance the transferability of their research. The initial approach involved ensuring that the study sample was diverse and representative of the population central to the research, thereby increasing the probability of the findings being applicable to other contexts. Although this study made use of convenience sampling methods, the diverse sample selected is a relative reflection of the population of the study. Thus, the diversity of the sample allows for the researcher to gain insight about the research topic through many different perspectives. Furthermore, if another researcher used a similar sample that consisted of diverse remote-

working mothers, the research should generate similar results if it were transferred to a different setting within the South African context (Anney, 2014).

The second strategy entailed practising reflexivity throughout the research process, which bolstered the study's credibility and potential transferability by guarding against the researcher's own biases and assumptions, and taking measures to address them where they were apparent (Anney, 2014).

Dependability. Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2003). The researcher established reliability through checking the transcribed data for any errors made during the process of transcription, and by making sure that there was no change in meaning in the codes developed in the thematic analysis (Creswell, 2003). After conducting the interviews, the researcher listened to the audio-recordings of the interviews on Zoom and began the transcribing process. Once the recordings were transcribed, the researcher re-listened to the recordings of the interviews and compared them with the transcriptions to determine any missing cues or important information. This aided the researcher to get a better understanding of the data in the analysis stage of the research. A mind map was created to highlight and code the re-occurring patterns in the data, from which themes and sub-themes emerged. This allowed for the researcher to successfully analyze the various narratives and perspectives of the interviewees and solidify the themes that emerged from the data. The themes and sub-themes were analyzed further to determine their applicability to the research topic (Krefting, 1991).

Confirmability. Confirmability indicates how the conclusions of the research study stem from the research findings (Creswell, 2003). In order to determine how the researcher derived the conclusion of the study, a research journal was kept by the researcher. This enabled the researcher to make notes during and after interviews, which were incorporated into the results section. The research journal acted as a self-reflexive tool throughout the research process, which allowed the researcher to eradicate any biases. The transcribed interview recordings and the notes made by the researcher in the research journal provided an audit trail, which was used by the researcher from which to deduce their conclusions (Moon et al., 2016).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal approved the study after receiving ethical approval from the university (HSSREC/00004920/2022) (Appendix A). Every participant was asked for their approval to participate in the study, and they each gave it by signing an informed consent form (Appendix B).

Each participant received a clear explanation of the research study's goals and objectives before the interview even began. The participants were informed of their right to leave the study at any time during the investigation. Each participant received a guarantee of confidentiality and the preservation of their anonymity. The participants were advised that just their comments would be published in this paper, and that their names would be altered to pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy. The participants were interviewed on Zoom, which allowed for flexibility regarding the time and space for the interviews to take place.

3.11 Conclusion

The researcher aimed to use qualitative research methodologies to document the experiences of remote-working mothers and gain an understanding of how their socially constructed gender roles and work roles intersect and impact their lives. This methodology chapter explained the qualitative research design and provided a justification for the applicability of this design to the research topic and study. The sample characteristics have been discussed, and the snowball sampling procedure has been outlined. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, and justifications were provided to explain why it was the most appropriate data analysis method for this study. The manner in which rigor was upheld in this qualitative study was outlined, and the ethical considerations for the study were discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The aim of the current study was to better understand the WLB experiences of working mothers working remotely amid COVID-19 lockdown movement restrictions in a local government organization. Additionally, this research aimed to understand the methods these women employ in achieving and maintaining a healthier WLB. In this chapter, data collected through a virtual single-session interview with each mother are presented and analyzed. The interviews utilized semi-structured and open-ended questions to enable the mothers to offer insights into their reality. This study interviewed nine married or single working mothers, of diverse race and class, who were occupying various human resources roles in the local government organization. The researcher aimed to provide a comprehensive perspective by comparing and contrasting the individual accounts of the participants, and a discussion of the resulting themes is included.

It is assumed, based on the interpretivist premises found in the qualitative research approach, that each working mother's perspective and interpretation of a certain topic may vary; they all, nonetheless, offered a comprehensive insight into their experiences of the constructs. In addition, various life events that occurred over time impacted the meanings and experiences that each working mother faced.

The findings are presented as themes that emerged after meticulous thematic analysis of how the working mothers experienced WLB while remote working during a peculiar time under unfamiliar conditions. The unique experiences of the working mothers were depicted in the themes. The themes that emerged in this study do not represent the 'absolute truth', as they are shared through the lens of my unique perspective. In fact, I am aware that a different researcher might perceive or identify different aspects.

How the themes are named, as well as the classification of the data in this thesis, are the product of the knowledge gained from literature research and research studies that have been conducted on WLB, remote working, and the COVID-19 global pandemic. The themes that emerged in this study are arranged in a two-level network which consists of the main or primary themes and sub-themes. The sub-themes are outlined, explored, and then supported and

substantiated by a number of quotes from the mothers. The themes and sub-themes are then described and explained in relation to an existing body of knowledge. The final part of the chapter includes a summary of the results found in the participants' narratives.

4.2 Themes

Thematic analysis was used to find, examine, and present patterns and themes from the data, as previously discussed in Chapter Three (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using the data, the researcher developed a thematic model, which contains the main themes and sub-themes. This study has identified three main themes. The first theme focuses on the diverse experiences of remote-working mothers in their quest to achieve and maintain a work-life balance during an unprecedented time: *Work-life balance in the midst of chaos*. The second theme showcases how the study participants tried to comprehend and adapt to the new normal of remote working: *The new norm of remote working*. The third and final theme delves into the experiences of working mothers who encountered multiple identities intersecting while working from home: *Negotiating the intersection of multiple identities under one roof*. Table 2 below provides a graphic representation of the thematic network representing the main themes and sub-themes. The thorough and critical analysis and discussion provided new insights into the experiences of employees in achieving WLB while working remotely and grappling with movement restrictions.

Table 2: Summary Table of Main Themes and Sub-themes

Theme 1	Work-Life Balance in the Midst of Chaos
	Sub-theme 1: WLB is diverse and multifaceted
	Sub-theme 2: Blurred boundaries
	Sub-theme 3: Difficult to demarcate separate workspace at home
	Sub-theme 4: The negative experiences in WLB during COVID-19 and health concerns
	Sub-theme 5: Coping mechanisms of remote-working mothers
Theme 2	**The New Norm of Remote Working**
	Sub-theme 1: Technology management
	Sub-theme 2: Organizational and ITC support
	Sub-theme 3: Distractions
	Sub-theme 4: Longer work hours experience
	Sub-theme 5: Favourable outcomes from remote working
Theme 3	**Negotiating the Intersection of Multiple Identities Under One Roof**
	Sub-theme 1: Gendered expectations and influence
	Sub-theme 2: Ideal mother
	Sub-theme 3: Race, religion and culture
	Sub-theme 4: Socio-economic status
	Sub-theme 5: Number of children
	Sub-theme 6: Sense of guilt

4.2.1 Theme 1: Work-Life Balance in the Midst of Chaos

As discussed above, Theme 1 engages with the various experiences of WLB in the midst of chaos. It can be difficult to establish a healthy WLB, particularly during times of disorder and confusion. In a time when pandemics and technology have changed the landscape, a nuanced account of WLB is narrated by the working mothers in the local government institution. Each woman had unique demands, responsibilities, and priorities that affected how she experienced WLB. Establishing a healthy WLB was noted to be not a one-size-fits-all endeavour, since it varies depending on personal situation, job type, workplace, access to technology, and family structure. Work roles and private life roles were now confined to one space, the home; this presented physical and mental difficulties for some of the remote-working mothers.

Discussed at length in the literature review is the variation of life circumstance that shapes the experiences of WLB. The experiences of the remote-working mothers, as reflected by this theme, confirms some of this dominant discourse in the WLB literature. It can be particularly

challenging to achieve and maintain a healthy WLB when one's personal and professional responsibilities overlap and become chaotic (Tomohiro, 2021). This further presents the deeper issue in WLB research, which touches on the definition of work-life balance (Lewis et al., 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting shift to remote work have made this challenge even more prominent for many workers (Uddin, 2021). As emphasized previously by McDaniel and colleagues (2021), this theme draws attention to the complex and multifaceted nature of WLB.

According to the spillover theory, the experiences in one area of life can have an impact on experiences in another area, such as work and private life. This theory is relevant to working mothers' WLB, since they encounter different work-life balance challenges influenced by factors like work requirements, caregiving duties, and societal gender expectations.

4.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1: WLB is diverse and multifaceted

As discussed above, *WLB is diverse and multifaceted.* This sub-theme refers to the complex and varied nature of WLB, as it involves several different aspects, including personal preference, cultural norms, and organizational regulations, all of which affect the equilibrium between a remote-working mother's work and her personal life experience. Similarly to Tomohiro's (2021) report findings, this study also noted the different manner in which each mother interpreted her experiences uniquely. Participant 3 commented that: "*I define balance as providing my husband and kids with the time, love, and attention they need. The rest of the time is for me to fulfil my career aspiration, including performing at work*". This comment demonstrates how the participant defines WLB as providing her husband and children with the time, love, and attention they need, while also pursuing her career aspirations. The participant prioritizes the needs of her family, while also valuing her career goals. She sees both her family and career as important, and seeks to find a way to fulfil her responsibilities in both areas.

In contrast, Participant 7 commented that the attitudes associated with gender increase the responsibilities of both her family and her social obligations. This makes it even more challenging to continue working, as the participant is responsible for all household chores. She stated that: "*Gendered expectations and duties really increase my family- and community-based responsibilities, and continuing to work is even tougher as I am responsible for all household chores*" (Participant 7).

Participants focused on spousal and family support as key aspects of role balance. The statement below serves as an example of how each mother in this study had a different experience:

> *We think it's about being able to work a few days a week and affording our family the opportunity to being with us. It's about finding the right rhythm as we keep one foot in the door for my career aspirations and one foot out to engage with other people for a wholesome life experience. As I said, extra hands in the family allows for balance.* (Participant 4)

Considering this excerpt, it appears that the experiences of WLB of the mothers were unique, according to circumstance and situation. It is interesting to note that all the mothers believed that WLB entails being able to separate work- and family-related problems, maintaining a balance between job, caregiving, and life, and making sure to spend some quality time with family. The WLB issue, which was previously covered in Chapter Two, emphasized the lack of an agreed-upon definition of WLB, as each human interprets it differently, as evidenced from the above (Lewis et al., 2017). The perspectives expressed by the mothers are consistent with the existing body of knowledge presented in the previous chapters. There is no universal method for establishing WLB, because it might differ depending on an individual's personal circumstances, family set-up, job type, and work environment (Bender et al., 2022).

Through the interviews, it also became clear how working mothers who are in the same sorority and organization still understood WLB as their responsibility. The below excerpts are aligned with what many authors have criticized with regard to WLB research. WLB research tends to place a major emphasis on individuals when it comes to the responsibility of maintaining a healthier WLB. The view that individuals are solely responsible for managing work and life roles negates the interconnectedness of social categorizations such as gender, class, and ethnicity in shaping the different outcomes of WLB.

> "*Work-life balance has to do with me more than it has to do with my family and work. After the birth of my daughter, I noted that I could complete tasks that would take me four hour in two hours so I could incorporate more in the day, like spending time with my new born.*" (Participant 7)

This quote represents the WLB experience of a working mother who believes that achieving balance is primarily her own responsibility. The participant emphasizes that WLB depends on

her own actions and decisions, rather than on external factors such as family or workplace policies.

Participant 7 makes an assertion that WLB is an individual experience; however, some participants, such as Participants 2 and 5, interpret WLB as the relationship between conflict and facilitation of the two domains (work and life). Participant 2 states that: "*I have also understood it as keeping the two worlds from meeting. Work things stay work things and what happens outside, well, that also stays outside*". Participant 5 weighs in by highlighting that: "*Each mother has their own experiences, and we differ in how we view and experience WLB. Much of it lies on our lap unfortunately. I would like to say that switching off is an option for me but I am unable to, so I choose to be fruitful at home and at my work life*".

The participants in the interviews clearly had different interpretations of WLB. While Participant 7 viewed it as an individual experience, some other participants such as Participants 2 and 5 saw it as a relationship between conflict and facilitation of work and life domains. Participant 2 believed that work and personal life should be kept separate, while Participant 5 acknowledged that each mother has her own experiences and views on WLB. For Participant 5, switching off was not an option, so she chose to balance both work and home lives. The above discussion reflects the diversity of perspectives on WLB among remote-working mothers. The differing views among the participants in the discussion illustrate that WLB is a complex and multifaceted issue that can be approached in various ways (Tomohiro, 2021). This diversity is a key theme in WLB research, which recognizes that the experience of balancing work and personal life is shaped by individual factors such as gender, caregiving responsibilities, job type, work demands, and personal preferences (Lewis et al., 2017; Tomohiro, 2021; Uddin, 2021).

As discussed earlier, the spillover theory highlights the interconnectedness of work and personal life and the need for employers, and communal, and family structures to consider and support the unique needs of working mothers. Furthermore, societal expectations and gender norms contributed to the spillover effect, as working mothers are often expected to maintain a high level of productivity at work, while also fulfilling caregiving responsibilities; this can lead to polarized feelings, as well as feeling pulled in multiple directions.

In summary, WLB remains a diverse phenomenon. WLB means many things to many different people. Furthermore, today's unpredictability and fast-paced world are making it even harder to define the boundaries and constraints that make life roles different from work roles, which may bring to life the ideas of the spillover theory.

4.2.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Blurred boundaries

The *blurred boundaries* sub-theme 2 refers to the blurring of lines between work and personal life that can occur when remote working from home. While many mothers have previously worked and achieved a healthy WLB in previous years, the COVID-19 lockdown movement restrictions may have influenced how mothers were successful in creating physical and temporal barriers between work and home. These boundaries became blurred, and participants pervasively experienced inter-role (work-life) conflict as a result. A high integration of work and non-work domains is often associated with this conflict (Gupta, 2021; Jaiswal et al., 2022).

Role conflict was often referred to in the lockdown context of our study by the simultaneous fulfilment of multiple role-related responsibilities, as compared with typical pre-pandemic home-working arrangements, in which work and on-work duties were rarely concurrently conducted in one situation. Participant 5 comments by stating that: "*I cannot tell you how many times it has happened that I am in a meeting or training session while at the same time responding to other emails,* [and] *attending to my baby, as well as my husband*".

As highlighted above by Participant 5, blurred boundaries between work and personal life can exacerbate role conflict by making it difficult to distinguish between work and personal responsibilities. This is supported by previous research and was also flagged by the other working mothers. For instance, Participant 3 notes that: "*It's very difficult separating private life from work life. I work all the time and at the same time attend to other non-work-related obligations when at home. For example, I work through my lunch. The other day, I was in a meeting and at the same time dressing my child. It's just complicated now with everything happening all at once*".

In addition to the above, Participant 1 shares the same sentiments by emphasizing that: "*I find myself in the kitchen preparing food for my family while my laptop is on the counter besides me responding embarrassingly in a meeting*".

From these accounts, it is clear to see that blurred boundaries can make it challenging to disconnect from work or private life, which can result in work-life imbalance, and stretching and intensifying the demands on the remote-working mother. Additionally, employers and employees may not always perceive work-home boundaries similarly. Numerous previous studies have noted the common dilemma faced by the participants in this study, where they feel they do not have enough time per week to perform personal activities, because of the extended hours they have incorporated during the transition to remote work. Often, the mothers' ability to remotely connect to the workplace leads to increased expectations of availability and after-hour work demands by the employer (Mellner, 2016).

Regardless of their childcare status, every mother who participated in this study's interviews gave an example of how she balances her obligations at home and at work during the COVID-19 movement restrictions. Participant 7, a mother of two and a manager in the organization, gave one of the most striking accounts. Participant 7 was scheduled to meet with other managers from different departments, but she discovered just before the appointment that her last born was crying, as she had hurt herself playing. Being alone in this situation, she had to postpone the meeting.

In connection to the above, the quote below demonstrates an enforced shift that is occurring in contemporary times where life and work roles are being amalgamated into one realm, therefore challenging already existing understanding of WLB. In previous times, work meetings, schooling, nurturing, and cooking often occurred in different places and at different times. However, during the lockdown measures taken to curb the spread of COVID-19, many of these activities were taking place in the same space (home), at the same time. Such a physical and temporal integration of domains created strain, resulting in some of the participants suggesting that their understanding of WLB has shifted.

Participant 3 presents a common case that shows how previous segmented life and work roles had become amalgamated. According to her: "*I am always busy with work and attending* [to] *a son in his terrible twos* and *non-work-related things at home. It's like living in multiple bodies doing everything happening all at once. Capacity* [is] *at its peak as everything is happening in one place and under one roof happening at the same time*". This frequently happens when work-related responsibilities and activities begin to invade remote-working mothers' personal time and space or when their personal issues begin to have an impact on their ability to execute

their tasks. For instance, many of the mothers had to balance working and being the primary caregiver with other responsibilities like teaching their children. Being at home under one roof and balancing so many obligations made it difficult for mothers to switch between their many tasks and roles. This supports previous findings in the literature (Jaiswal et al., 2022). Furthermore, Uddin, 2021 describes the difficulties experienced by working mothers as having a significant impact on their lived realities and experiences.

Participant 7's case is just one of many that demonstrate how mothers who work full-time from home deal with their children and other domestic diversions. Participant 7 relates:

> "*I had one very terrible day towards the end of last year's financial quarter. I had not seen this senior official in almost as long as COVID, and they were a very significant individual in assisting projects to be successful. Therefore, putting up a good show and such is crucial. Just before the meeting, my daughter came rushing in the kitchen door and was bleeding as she had a cut on her cheek from being scratched by the tree. I had to ask for the meeting to be postponed, citing other issues. It* [was] *a very difficult situation I found myself but my baby needed aid."* (Participant 7)

As per the spillover theory, events occurring in a particular domain of life can have an impact on events in other domains of life. The ability of mothers to maintain a healthy balance between their work obligations and personal life roles, such as family responsibilities, may be obstructed by the absence of boundaries. The lack of a physical barrier between the two environments makes it challenging to switch off from work and be present for family and other obligations. Additionally, as caregivers, the necessity of attending to children's demands while carrying out professional responsibilities can result in scheduling conflicts and decreased productivity, which adds to the stress associated with the job.

As women increasingly partake in more demanding professions, the distinction between these two spheres may become obscured, posing a challenge for them to disconnect from work and fully devote themselves to their families. The indistinct boundaries between work and private life can trigger negative spillover effects that hamper work-life balance. When work-related duties and responsibilities spill over into personal time, individuals may feel like they are constantly on standby, unable to disconnect fully from work, thereby leading to heightened stress and burnout.

4.2.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Difficult to demarcate separate workspace at home

In relation to the blurred boundaries sub-theme, the third sub-theme talks to the *difficulties endured in demarcating a separate workspace at home*. This was expressed vividly by Participant 2 when she said: "*I feel like my home has become my office, and there's no separation between work and personal space*". The remote work practice is often associated with the challenge of demarcation of workspace and home space. Many participants recall 'closing/marking off' parts of their homes as their new office space, and school in small sections of their home. Many of the working mothers found it difficult to establish boundaries between the many domains and functions that were mutually incompatible, which frequently forced mothers to plan routines and habits to manage (Uddin, 2021).

Participant 8 contributes by expressing her frustration, stating that: "*Although I have a designated office space close to the living room, at times, I have to work in my bedroom, which is not the most favorable location. The challenge is finding a serene spot in my home with my two kids running around all day*". Similarly, demarcations between different sections may not be clear cut for all family members, especially children. This was noted in the experience shared by Participant 5:

> "*It is not possible for me to hire a domestic worker. So by waking up early in the morning, I try to complete my cleaning and laundry. I must keep my daughter by my side when I am attending meetings or making important phone calls. The activities I engage in with her include fulfilling her pre-school education requirements from home, playing with her, and engaging her in creative activities*".

Likewise, Participant 9 finds herself in a similar situation to Participant 5. The family of Participant 9 consists of eight members. Participant 9 and her husband both work remotely; she must share a small room of their house that has been converted into an office with him. According to her, she has encountered the following problems:

> "*Since we communicate virtually as a team, I have a lot of meetings and calls to manage from home. There isn't a dedicated area where I can have calm virtual meetings. Especially my girls, family members frequently interrupt me. I keep asking my husband to take our smaller daughter somewhere else so I can concentrate on my work and also assist my elder son with his online learning. My husband and I attempt to balance taking care of our kids with carrying out our individual professional*

obligations. But it's insufficient! In order to reach my deadlines, I must endure restless nights" (Participant 9).

The above emphasizes the challenges working mothers are often confronted by. Despite her efforts to balance work and parenting responsibilities, she is struggling to meet her deadlines and is sacrificing sleep to do so. This passage highlights the challenges that many working parents face while working remotely, especially when it comes to juggling professional obligations with caring for young children. Many studies on WLB emphasize the importance of boundaries, and demarcation of work and family space, as well as support from both employers and family members to help individuals manage their work and personal responsibilities effectively. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique challenges for working parents, who are now expected to balance their professional obligations with caring for their children, particularly with school and day-care closures. Furthermore, when mothers work remotely, some children may struggle to differentiate between the times when their mothers are working and when they are available for family time. Consequently, this could have led to increased stress for both the mothers and the children, making it challenging for the mothers to balance their work and family commitments effectively.

The spillover theory can help explain the experiences captured in the above instances. As suggested previously, spillover theory suggests that experiences in one area of an individual's life can affect their experiences and behaviours in other areas (Adisa et al., 2022). It applies to the above, as the remote-working mothers' responsibilities, such as caregiver, especially in relation to her children's remote learning, could affect her ability to concentrate on work tasks during virtual meetings and calls. This situation is complicated when there is no support for the mother (Lott & Abendroth, 2023).

In conclusion, this sub-theme highlights the challenges that remote-working mothers face in creating a clear separation between their work and personal lives. As the line between work and home blurred, remote-working mothers struggled to find dedicated workspaces, free from interruptions and distractions. At times, this resulted in negative spillover effects, with work-related stress and responsibilities spilling over into personal life and vice versa.

4.2.1.4 Sub-theme 4: The negative experiences in WLB during COVID-19 and health concerns

In relation to the blurred boundaries sub-theme, the fourth sub-theme discusses the *adverse effects on WLB during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated health concerns*. Some of the working mothers interviewed as part of this study expressed feelings of anger, sadness, concern, numbness, or frustration and emotional stress. Due to the pandemic restrictions, they faced difficulties juggling work and home life during the precarious times. They also struggled with the unsuitability of home workspaces and their inability to physically attend site meetings, workshops, and other social events.

Fundamentally, these remarks exemplify how COVID-19 challenges are endangering and taxing. Indeed, at times, they may exceed personal resources within the aspirational contexts of psychological conditions (such as positive experiences), professional journey (such as productivity and travel), quality of life (such as work-life balance), physical environment (such as good home-office with minimal distractions), and individual characteristic qualities (i.e. finding happiness and life role fulfillment). Participant 8 said: "*I'm frustrated that I can't seem to find a work-life balance while working from home*", while Participant 4 related: "*I got angry that people around me and* [my] *employer were not doing more to support this difficult time*".

The quote mentioned above highlights a mother's frustrations in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and remote work. It points to the difficulties that working mothers faced during this time, such as managing home-schooling and childcare responsibilities, while not receiving sufficient support to balance their work and family responsibilities. This excerpt is relevant to the theme, particularly during the pandemic, as many parents were confronting challenges in balancing their work and family lives due to school closures, remote learning, and other pandemic-related disruptions.

Previous research on working mothers confirms the experienced feelings mentioned above. These negative feelings have been caused by difficulties in balancing work and life, unsuitable home workspaces, and even sometimes the inability to attend in-person meetings and events. These remarks illustrate how the challenges posed by COVID-19 put a strain on personal resources, sometimes exceeding psychological capacities (Andrada-Poa et al., 2022). For example, in connection with above sentiments expressed by Participant 8, Participant 4 weights

in by stating: "*I'm tired of the constant changes and adjustments that come with remote work especially in the pandemic*".

The challenge of adapting to the constantly evolving situation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect of remote work on WLB is highlighted above. The continual adjustment to new work arrangements, remote technologies, and pandemic-related restrictions can be mentally and emotionally taxing. This theme is particularly relevant during the WLB pandemic, where individuals and organizations have had to adapt quickly to new ways of working and living, often with little notice or preparation. The above excerpts underscore the need for support and resources to help individuals cope with the ongoing changes and the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic life.

As a result of COVID-19's unpleasant effects on working mothers, such as the forced new method of work while also adhering to caring and family responsibilities, the findings in this study also indicate energy depletion which was presented as insufficient physical, mental, and emotional resources for responding to childcare pressures as well as to professional work demands occurring almost at the same time. Drawing on the spillover theory, the working mothers' feelings of depletion flow from one domain to the other. This argument is especially pertinent because of the lockdown's increasing blurring of the lines separating personal and professional obligations. Given the finite nature of resources (such as mood and emotions), recurrent pressures in one area reduce the mothers' emotional availability, leaving fewer resources available for optimal functioning in other areas, as highlighted by some participants' remarks.

In connection to the above, the pandemic has brought about health concerns related to the virus itself, as well as concerns about access to healthcare and mental health resources. Overall, the negative emotions, WLB issues, and health concerns are interconnected and have had a reportable impact on mothers during the pandemic era (Sharma & Vahini, 2022). Both before and after the pandemic, women have borne the bulk of the burden of family caregiving. The stress and fear of the pandemic, according to a large number of working mothers, has negatively impacted their mental health. Participants 3 and 6 shared their experiences:

> "*COVID-19 brought about tension in me. Seeing people dying and being so focused on trying to protect your family from this virus was the worst time of my life at that moment. But above it all, we were all faced with uncertainty. We had to learn and adapt quickly,*

be less anxious and be strong for everyone around you and also be hopeful of the future, as a mother and employee. We were between being a mother, being strong, and still being productive." (Participant 3)

"*My biggest struggle was trying to keep my head afloat in the midst of the pandemic. Falling critically ill was my biggest fear because it would mean that no one would cook and clean after my family because I took on that role.*" (Participant 6)

Additionally, most mothers reported feeling they felt helpless, even in the comfort of their own homes. One of the participants remarked as follows:

"*I felt very vulnerable and powerless. When my husband got sick, I had to provide him with care, cook for the kids and ensure that they were also safe. I took leave during this period because I was not coping. Balancing it all was quite strenuous for me.*" (Participant 4)

In addition to the above, many women who have the additional responsibility of caring for elderly people may experience more stress than those who solely look after their children (Basak & Akter, 2022). This is due to the possibility that elderly people are coping with other illnesses, limitations in movement, and other underlying health conditions that call for both emotional and physical support. Participant 7 mentioned that she had the additional responsibility of providing care to her elderly mother. She expressed how strenuous her busy schedule had recently become because her mother fell sick and needed higher levels of care. These unforeseen circumstances made managing daily responsibilities very difficult for Participant 7:

"*When my mother became ill, I had to look after her throughout the night and then a nurse would come in and look after her during the day, so my sleep pattern was completely disrupted. I also had to figure out how to manage taking care of my children, doing my professional work and all the other things I'm responsible for. Usually, I'm able to adapt to cope with daily challenges but when something disturbs the flow of my routine, it throws me off completely.*" (Participant 7)

Despite finding it difficult to combine both duties, Participant 7 was handling the difficulties that come with being a full-time employee and mother very well before her own mother became ill. Participant 7 mentioned that she has "*encountered role conflict when her mother fell*

unwell", which occurs when the requirements of one function conflict with those of another role or position. Due to work stress, the demands of their private role and their domestic responsibilities, mothers who struggle with role conflict are more likely to develop mental health problems.

In summary, the pandemic has brought about negative emotions, WLB issues, and health concerns that are closely interconnected and can have a significant impact on individuals during the pandemic era.

4.2.1.5 Sub-theme 5: Coping mechanisms of remote working mothers.

In contrast to the above themes, sub-theme 5 provides an account of *coping mechanisms* that remote-working mothers use to juggle work and personal responsibilities. This theme refers to the various strategies and practises that mothers who work remotely use to manage the challenges of balancing work and personal life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented change for working mothers, particularly those who are working remotely. Coping mechanisms are essential for remote-working mothers to manage these challenges and maintain a healthy WLB. Participants 2, 5, and 9 elaborate on the practices they engage in to manage:

> "*I always made sure to take breaks throughout the day and step away from my computer, even if it was just for a few minutes, to help me recharge and refocus.*" (Participant 5)

> "*To help with stress management and improve my general well-being, I started meditating and practiced mindfulness.*" (Participant 2)

> "*It was easier for me to maintain a better work-life balance when I established clear boundaries between work and personal time, by refusing to read my work email after a particular hour.*" (Participant 9)

Interestingly the working mothers interviewed expressed how they developed and altered their balance as a result of shifting work and/or life demands, as well as their own personal preferences over the course of their lives:

"*I try to schedule my day and prioritize tasks so that I can balance my family responsibilities with my work obligations, such as caring for my children or preparing meals.*" (Participant 7)

The strategies indicated by the working mothers, such as setting boundaries, establishing routines, and practising self-care can help working mothers reduce stress and anxiety, improve productivity and job satisfaction, and ensure they have time for family and personal interests; these strategies are consistent with previous studies (Akanji et al., 2020; Törnquist Agosti et al., 2017). The importance of coping mechanisms cannot be overstated, especially during these challenging times when remote working has become the norm for many.

In summary of the above, it can be inferred that remote-working mothers in this study employed a range of coping strategies to deal with the difficulties of striking a balance between their professional and personal lives. These coping strategies consist of taking breaks frequently throughout the day, staying active by taking breaks for stretching, managing stress by meditating and practising mindfulness, and creating distinct boundaries between work and personal time. These coping strategies aid remote-working women in recharging, refocusing, clearing their brains, and generally improving their health – all of which are crucial for preserving a healthier WLB. Overall, remote-working mothers were proactive in managing their work and personal life, and were willing to take steps to ensure their well-being while working remotely.

4.2.2 Theme 2: The New Norm of Remote Working

The theme of the *new norm of remote working* refers to the significant shift in work culture that has emerged in recent years, as organizations have adopted a remote-working methodology. Remote working, also known as telecommuting or working from home, is a work arrangement where employees work outside the traditional office environment, often from home or another remote location. The theme of the new norm of remote working is important, because it represents a significant shift in work culture that has the potential to impact the way people, especially mothers, work and live. As seen in current research, this shift towards remote working has been driven by various factors, including advances in technology that make remote work more feasible, changing attitudes towards WLB, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the trend towards remote working.

In connection the above, the spillover theory would explain the theme of the new norm of remote working by highlighting how work and personal life can spill over into each other, particularly for remote workers. Working mothers who formed part of this study have had polarized experiences of remote working. Some have experienced positive spillover effects, such as having more flexibility and control over their work schedule, which improved their well-being and satisfaction in their lives. However, some experienced negative spillover effects from work-related stress, family stress, issues with technology, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life. Setting clear boundaries between work and personal life and implementing effective stress management techniques were noted as important components of WLB, as is also noted by De Clercq and Brieger (2021).

The COVID-19 epidemic has made remote working a crucial component of organizations' contingency plans. Although there are many advantages, there are also a number of difficulties that must be overcome if remote working is to be successful over the long term.

4.2.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Technology management

As discussed previously, extending from the main theme of the new norm of remote working is the sub-theme of *technology management*. This sub-theme touches on the essential role technology plays in supporting WLB in remote-working conditions, as well as on both the negative and positive experiences it may have invited.

Technology management is especially beneficial for remote-working mothers, as it could help them to overcome some of the unique challenges as they navigate the world of remote working. Being able to manage and manipulate technology is crucial for remote working, as it enables workers to communicate, collaborate, and complete tasks effectively from a remote location. However, as indicated by Matli (2020), a stress response, with different physical, emotional, and mental symptoms, can be caused by information overload and continual contact with digital technology gadgets and applications.

Some participants reported that their biggest challenges were technology-related, such as a malfunctioning computer, internet interruptions, or not possessing the necessary technological knowledge, which often resulted in technostress. This was noted in one participant's remark about her difficulties with technology management. She remarked: "You *need a high-quality internet connection because you are working on your laptop, yet sometimes I find the*

connection bothersome, the machinery slow and unresponsive, especially when I have something important due" (Participant 9).

The obstacles encountered while remote working were made worse by these technical difficulties. The majority of the participants reported this with a degree of concern, as reflected in the following:

> "*The internet is not stable and connecting to the intranet is even worse. The delay has a significant impact on our productivity and meetings. Meetings were much quicker face to face with no distractions. Our technology is a major challenge.*" (Participant 7)

> "*Without a doubt, the ability to work from home requires digitally supported technology, such as information and communication technology systems. With the added stress of the deadlines and meetings, having tech issues can really make your experience as an employee unpleasant.*" (Participant 8)

In the given excerpts, Participants 7 and 8 emphasize the crucial role of technology in facilitating remote work. They acknowledge that the ability to work from home requires digitally supported technology, such as information and communication technology systems, to enable effective communication and collaboration with colleagues and to complete tasks efficiently. Additionally, the participants highlight that having technology issues, such as system malfunctions or poor internet connectivity, can cause stress and negatively impact on the remote-work experience. Therefore, the above reflects the significance of technology in enabling remote work and the importance of reliable and well-supported technology to maintain productivity and a positive remote-work experience. This is consistent with an experimental study conducted by Pflügner and colleagues (2021), which aimed to investigate the role played by the negative impact of technostress. In this study, it was concluded that social support increased employee performance as well as reduced techno-exhaustion and physiological arousal.

Technostress has been defined as the negative psychological link between employees and the introduction of new technologies (Matli, 2020). As there was a sudden and forced situation leading to the remote-working environment, the working mothers were thrust into this situation with limited warning and no preparation. This has exacerbated the feelings associated with technostress (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021; Caringal-Go et al., 2021; DeSilver, 2020; Matli,

2020; Mayer & Mayer, 2022). As mentioned in Chapter Two of this thesis, technostress is a result of altered habits of work and collaboration that are being brought about due to the use of modern information technologies in the office and home situations. From an organizational perspective, this strain response is quite crucial, because it can result in substantial costs to organizations (Matli, 2020).

In relation to the above, Participant 2 describes her experiences in dealing with technology: "*As a remote worker, emotional frustration with technology can arise due to various reasons. One of those reasons for me is when technology fails or does not work as expected, which can cause delays and interruptions in work* [and cause] *a lot of frustration*". The experiences articulated by Participant 2 tie in well with the understandings of the spillover theory, which suggests that stress from one domain of life can spill over into other domains, affecting overall well-being. In the case of remote-working mothers, technostress as a result of interacting with technology spilled over from work into their personal lives, touching on their WLB. Remote work blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, making it difficult for mothers to disconnect from work and attend to family responsibilities. This often created a sense of overload and reduced their ability to recover from stress, leading to negative impacts on their WLB. Thus, the spillover theory applies, as it explains how technostress affects the WLB of remote-working mothers by highlighting the interconnectedness of various domains of life and how stress can transfer between them.

In conclusion, concerning technology management, a valuable lesson can be concluded, emphasizing that employees experienced heightened stress due to increased reliance on information and communication technology in a remote-work setting. Technological failures, particularly during critical deadlines or meetings, can lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and helplessness, echoing sentiments expressed in Matli's (2020) research. Therefore, this highlights the importance of providing adequate technological support and resources to help employees cope with technostress while working remotely. Furthermore, technostress can compound this challenge by making it difficult to disconnect from work-related technology and job demands.

4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Organizational and ITC support
In connection to technostress, *organizational and ITC support* emerged as a sub-theme within the ambit of the new norm of remote working main theme in this research study. This theme

talks about the importance of providing support to remote workers when they encounter information technology and communication (ITC)-related issues, as well as social support in general (Cho et al., 2020). This support can come in the form of management support, co-worker support, and access to organizational ITC agents. This kind of support was a pervasive challenge for many of the participants.

A study conducted by Wang and colleagues (2021), which focused on achieving an effective remote-working pattern during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggests that social support may have the potential to lower levels of remote-working challenges such as work-life spillover., In the study conducted by Wardaningsih & Putri (2022), it was also noted that access to Information Technology and Communication (ITC) support and assistance was crucial for remote workers to effectively navigate the challenges of remote work, maintain productivity, and overcome technical barriers. Similarly in our study, we also conclude with the same sentiments. This is captured in the excerpts from Participants 5 and 9, as they discuss the influence of support on how they reconciled their experiences aligned to support and technology use from a WLB perspective:

> "*ITC is never available. But my husband is in IT, so I just use our infrastructure sometimes when connectivity is down.*" (Participant 5)

> "*It's difficult to get hold of ITC when we have network or systems issues. Frequently, there are instances when the computer software stops working or malfunctions, and getting assistance is challenging. My laptop is not in the best of state and it takes for ever for the machine to start and restart.*" (Participant 9)

When remote workers experience network or system issues, it can be difficult to get assistance, which can lead to frustration, stress, and a sense of helplessness. In addition, a poorly functioning laptop or other technological issues can make it difficult for remote workers to complete their work efficiently, which can lead to longer work hours and increased stress (Matli 2020).

In line with the above, remote-working mothers often face unique challenges when it comes to balancing work and family responsibilities, and managers can either help or hinder their ability to manage these challenges effectively. The comments captured below depict various

experiences with management that had a bearing on the overall experience of WLB for mothers:

> "*I sometimes feel like the organization does not help its employees enough and the same applies to direct management. We have not had resources – we had to find our own computers, own modem, own headsets, beg and struggle ... when network goes during meeting or delays are experienced, management and organizational support would mean the world.*" (Participant 3)

> "*Management and resources are stretched and cannot cater for everyone.*" (Participant 5)

In contrast to the above, Participant 1 reported a supportive management example: "*I call on my manager when ITC department is not answering. He assists where he can. That support alleviates my stress*". This is in line with the observation of a previous study conducted by Basak and Akter (2022), which indicates that having a supportive manager is critical for remote workers. Access to support from management or other organizational departments, such as the information communication department, can help reduce stress and improve job satisfaction. In addition, prioritizing WLB and offering flexible work arrangements can help address the unique challenges posed by remote work. Other research has also emphasized the importance of supportive managers in maintaining employee well-being and mental health during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Munyeka & Maharaj, 2022; Oyewobi et al., 2022).

The spillover theory suggests that both stress and support can spill over from one domain of life to another, affecting overall well-being. In the case of remote-working mothers, social support and ITC support can have positive spillover effects on their WLB and well-being. Social support from family, friends, and colleagues can also provide emotional and practical assistance to remote-working mothers, reducing their stress levels and helping them manage their work and personal responsibilities. This can spill over into their work domain, making them more productive and engaged in their work.

Similarly, ITC support from the organization can provide remote-working mothers with technical assistance and resources to manage technostress and navigate the challenges of remote work. This can spill over into their personal domain, reducing their stress levels and allowing them to better attend to their family responsibilities. Thus, the spillover theory can

help explain how social and ITC support can have positive spillover effects on the WLB and well-being of remote-working mothers, by highlighting the interconnectedness of various domains of life and how support can transfer between them.

In conclusion, the interaction between remote-working mothers, well-being, and organizational and ITC support is a complex and multifaceted issue.

4.2.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Distractions

The sub-theme *distractions* pertains to the difficulties and hindrances that remote-working mothers encounter in managing their work and life role obligations. Although remote work provides flexibility and convenience, it also presents distinct distractions that can impede productivity and disrupt the balance between work and personal life.

Some interview participants reported distractions, which had a negative effect on their levels of concentration and productivity. The necessity to multitask and mix work with non-work responsibilities (such as childcare and household tasks) was primarily blamed for the distractions:

> "*The difficulties I had were finding a way to integrate my family life with my career, while still attempting to succeed in all of it ... My kids come in while I'm working, which is a distraction, but I have to take care of them because if I don't, I won't get any work done.*" (Participant 3)

The above account relates with a similar finding that was noted in a study by De Clercq and Brieger (2021), which found that over 70% of remote-working employees felt increased stress from having to deal with family interruptions during work hours. Sometimes frequent interruptions by children, family members, friends, and neighbours while working at home make it difficult to draw the line between work and home life in light of the blurred and permeable boundaries (Gupta, 2021): "*Family obligations divert attention, which causes problems...*" (Participant 6).

The struggle to combine work and non-work responsibilities can be taxing for women, particularly in an environment where distractions are a constant. This affects employee engagement and productivity. Furthermore, consistent with literature, patriarchal matters may present a threat to the WLB and general well-being of women; this is covered in more details

in the discussion on intersectionality. Overall, remote-working mothers must address these distractions to optimize their productivity and well-being.

In light of the above, according to the spillover theory, experiences from one domain can spill over into another, and this is the case for remote-working mothers dealing with distractions. Work distractions can spill over into personal life and cause stress, reducing well-being. As remote-working mothers attempted to balance work and family responsibilities, they encountered obstacles such as distractions. It is crucial for remote-working mothers to manage boundaries and the minimize spillover effects of distractions, in order to maintain WLB.

4.2.2.4 Sub-theme 4: The longer work hours experience

The sub-theme of *longer work hours experience* in the context of remote-working mothers refers to the challenges the mothers faced in their attempt to achieve and maintain a healthy WLB. The practise of remote work can lead to significant challenges, such as an increase in actual time spent in front of a computer, more pronounced role conflict, and the burden of technology overload.

With remote work, the boundaries between work and personal life can become blurred, leading to an expectation of being available for work at all times. This can lead to longer work hours, making it difficult for mothers to juggle their professional responsibilities with their family commitments. This dynamic was reported by the remote-working mothers, and it relates to the term 'autonomy paradox'. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this describes a technology-enabled intensification of job responsibilities, which, coupled with expectations of longer working hours, results in greater organizational control in employees' personal lives (Steidelmuller et al., 2020).

While remote-working mothers may interpret WLB differently, depending on their personal circumstances and priorities, some prioritized spending time with their children and managing household responsibilities, while others may have prioritized advancing their careers and achieving professional success. However, regardless of their individual interpretations, all the participants reported extending their working hours at some point during the pandemic, as reported by Participants 8 and 9:

"*I am on call at all times and find it hard to switch off from work. I find myself working longer hours, attending more meetings, and maintaining contact through more channels.*" (Participant 8)

"*I find myself working longer hours than ever before, between my work life and my home life. One minute I am in a meeting and the next I am cooking, and then I need to catch up on reports, which can drag* [on] *through the night.*" (Participant 9)

In light of the above, remote-working mothers faced the challenge of longer work hours, with the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life. This can lead to a feeling of being constantly on call and difficulty in switching off from work. These mothers found themselves attending more meetings and maintaining communication through various channels, resulting in burnout, fatigue, and stress. Moreover, there was no clear separation between their work and home lives, leading to juggling of work commitments with household responsibilities. These challenges show the difficulty in achieving a healthy WLB for remote-working mothers, as the pressure to maintain productivity and attend to family responsibilities can result in longer work hours and the risk of burnout.

In relation to the above, Participant 3 expresses surprise at the extent of her work hours while working from home, indicating that it is not what she had anticipated: "*I never imagined I'd be working such long hours from home, and it's making it difficult to be present for my family and take care of my own needs*". Thus, the longer work hours made it hard for remote-working women to be present for their family and attend to their own needs, which could lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and stress.

In relation to the Spillover theory, an understanding can be facilitated because, according to Bernhardt and Bünning (2022), stress or strain can transfer from one domain to another. However, this is more pervasive when an employee remote works and presents with permeable or no clear borders between work and life. This work-life conflict is associated with lower levels of well-being and higher levels of stress and exhaustion. The feelings of frustration and the exhaustion can spill over into the family domain and vice versa.

Considering the above, through prolonged work hours and overlapping domestic and professional duties, remote working can contribute to WLB disturbance. Additionally, it can

lead to increased conflict between work and non-work roles, negatively affecting WLB (Palumbo, 2020). As remote working is shown to negatively affect WLB, it is important to identify the factors that affect it.

4.2.2.5 Sub-theme 5: Favourable outcomes from remote working

The fifth sub-theme that emerged from this study refers to *favourable outcomes from remote working*. The sub-theme refers to the potential benefits that remote work can bring to remote-working mothers, in terms of improving their WLB and overall well-being.

Despite the difficulties encountered when remote working, as previously discussed, the participants also noted a few benefits. The main finding was that many of the remote-working mothers had greater work flexibility as they navigated the telework space. Remote work has provided mothers with greater flexibility in managing their work schedules, reduced the need for long commutes, and created opportunities for a more customized work environment. Consistent with previous research, work flexibility is an important achievement of a healthier WLB (Gupta, 2021). The participants' positive sentiments are reflected in the comments that follow:

> "*A benefit of working from home is the flexibility in working hours, which allows us to extend working hours while doing other activities not linked to work.*" (Participant 6)

Participant 6 notes that the ability to extend working hours while doing other non-work activities is a benefit of working from home, while in the excerpt below, Participant 2 also emphasizes the convenience of working from home, which allowed her to spread out her activities comfortably while still meeting her work goals:

> "*You're in the convenience of your house, and you're not getting ready to leave ... at home, I'm free to do whatever I want as long as I can accomplish my daily or weekly goals and spread out my activities as comfortably as possible*." (Participant 2)

These excerpts suggest that some remote-working mothers may view longer work hours as a trade-off for the flexibility and convenience that remote work provides, rather than a negative aspect of their work. This raises the issue of polarity, as widely investigated in the WLB literature. The polarity of constructs at play in the above quotations is ambivalent or mixed. On one hand, remote-working mothers perceive longer work hours as a potential benefit of working from home, as it provides them with greater flexibility to manage their work schedules

and do other non-work activities. On the other hand, longer work hours can also lead to difficulties in switching off from work, and may impact the remote-working mothers' well-being, work performance, and personal life. Therefore, the polarity of constructs is not completely positive or negative, but rather a mixture of both, depending on each mother's perspective and situation.

In connection with the above, for some of the interviewees, the ability to work comfortably from home was related to their preference for flexibility. Additionally, several of the respondents stated that their favored benefit of the remote working strategy was the chance to spend quality time with family. The remarks that follow serve as examples of this experience:

> "*Even though they bother me, being with my kids while working from home makes me happy. I find enjoyment in being close to them.*" (Participant 3)

> "*The great aspects for me are spending time with* [my] *kids and monitoring their academic progress, as well as having time to sit down with the family and talk about pressing matters.*" (Participant 6)

Participant 3 notes that being with her children while working from home makes her happy, even though it can sometimes be bothersome. Similarly, Participant 6 emphasizes the positive aspects of being able to spend time with her children, monitor their academic progress, and have family discussions. These inserts suggest that remote-working mothers can find a sense of fulfilment and enjoyment in being able to work from home and spend time with their children, despite the potential for longer work hours.

Some of the working mothers interviewed also mentioned how working from home saves on the significant cost of paying for childcare services and getting nannies to look after their children, which also comes with some security and trust issues. The mothers also mentioned the ability to spend time with their families, while working and fulfilling their caregiving roles at the same time. The experiences are described in the following quotes:

> "*By taking care of my children on my own, I am saving a lot of money ... I pay a significant quantity of money to hire a babysitter, but I can also be afraid that one day the nanny will harm my kids.*" (Participant 6)

"For me, it's the knowing that my children are safe because I pay so much for day care when I am at the office or before COVID-19." (Participant 9)

The majority of the remote-working mothers highlighted that working from home assisted in the prevention of contracting the coronavirus. In their view, remote work avoids health challenges that may also negatively affect the organization's productivity and staff. Responses were summarized as follows:

"The organization asked us to work at home due to [the] *coronavirus, to keep us safe ... if we get sick, it will affect production and they may need to find replacements quickly."* Participant 8

"In order to ensure our safety and health, the organization asked us to work from home." (Participant 2)

From the above, the participant emphasized that working from home was necessary to ensure the safety and health of employees. It was perceived that organizations wanted to keep their employees safe from the virus and minimize the risk of infections. By working from home, employees were less likely to contract the virus, which could negatively affect their health and the productivity of the organization. The remote-work policy has been positively received by the working mothers as they have been able to spend a little extra time with their families, while working at home in the safety of their own private space, while avoiding the virus. The organization benefited from cost reduction as a result of fewer employees falling sick and staying away, facilitating higher staffing levels and productivity.

The participants in this study highlighted several favourable outcomes associated with remote working and WLB. Remote working was seen as a means of protecting the health and safety of employees, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants also emphasized the positive effects of remote working on the lives of working mothers, who were able to spend more time with their children while also fulfilling their work responsibilities. Remote working was also viewed as offering increased flexibility and autonomy, allowing working mothers to structure their work in a way that fitted their individual needs and priorities. Other benefits included the ability to monitor children's academic progress, increased opportunities for family time and engagement, and the convenience and comfort of working from home. Overall, the participants in this study saw remote working as having the potential to improve WLB for

working mothers, offering them greater control over their schedules and enabling them to balance their work and family responsibilities more effectively.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Negotiating the intersection of multiple identities under one roof

As previously discussed in the introduction of this chapter, an intersectional perspective was adopted in the interpretation of the mothers' experiences. In line with this, the third theme that emerged in the research study was the *intersection of multiple identities under one roof*. This theme highlights the complex challenges that arise from the intersection of various aspects of identity, such as gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and the caregiving responsibilities that remote-working mothers faced.

In light of the above, our study noted the concept of intersectionality, which holds that diverse facets of an individual's identity, such as race, gender, class, and religion, interact and overlap to produce distinctive experiences of discrimination or privilege. Intersectionality has a variety of effects on the WLB of mothers who engage in remote work. Intersectionality has a bearing on people's lived experiences, and it manifests in different ways (Leo et al, 2022).

During the interview sessions, the working mothers described their multiple identities. The remote-working mothers described how having a difficult time balancing her professional and personal lives during COVID-19 lockdown was impacted by the mutual reproduction of class, gender, racial, cultural, and religious relations of inequality. The identities that are recorded are not all the same; rather, they interact with one another to create complexities and a variety of experiences in the lives of the females. As a result, the women have additional identities other than their gender, all of which have an effect on how they experience WLB as employees for the local government institution. The working mothers discussed how their social, parental, personal, and cultural identities, as well as their professional identity, interacted with one another.

The participants' narratives formed a pattern in which their personal identity would influence their professional identity and vice versa. The stories of the working mothers shared a common element that showed how they would need to devise strategies in maintaining a healthier WLB. Several mothers claimed that, in order to survive and succeed in their new working workspace, they needed to learn how to adapt to their surroundings. This suggests that certain traits or tactics must be used in order to succeed.

Five of the participants also assessed the effect of the practise of working remotely on their sense of self, saying that the setting had "*toughened*" them and "*developed a thicker skin for them*", demonstrating how their personal identity is influenced by their professional identity. This was demonstrated in Participant 2's story when she discussed the necessary qualities for success and said:

> "*Switching to telework proved to be somewhat expensive for me, I guess particularly those from, those in junior roles and maybe disadvantaged backgrounds. It has toughened me up.*" (Participant 2)

From an intersectional perspective, the statement that 2 participants reported that remote working had "toughened" them suggests that working from home may have had different impacts on participants, depending on the intersection of their various identities and experiences.

On the balance of the above, understanding the intersection of multiple identities is crucial for comprehending the experiences of remote-working mothers, as it influences their priorities, needs, and challenges, as well as opportunities, in managing their professional and personal responsibilities. This was captured in the sub-themes described below.

4.2.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Gendered expectations and influence

The first sub-theme that touches on the intersection of multiple identities under one roof is *gendered expectations and influence*. This sub-theme can be understood as including the unique challenges and expectations about the remote-working mothers in relation to their assumed gender roles and responsibilities. In particular, gendered expectations and influences shape how remote-working mothers are perceived by others, as well as their own sense of identity and priorities in balancing their work and life responsibilities. A popular concept, which was pervasive in the conversations with the working mothers and which touched on this, is mothering.

Mothering is a concept largely shaped by gendered societal expectations. These expectations stem from patriarchal systems that determine how labour is distributed within a home (Akanji et al., 2020). Essentialist views of mothering have largely been impacted by the cultural and socio-political visions of what should constitute 'good mothering'. Essentialist thinking

suggests that all women have innate (female) qualities that motivate them to pursue maternal objectives above all else (Jonason & Davis, 2018). This notion implies that women should be responsible for providing care to their children, alongside other domestic duties. The essentialist assumption perpetuates this idea that mothering comes naturally to women; however, this can be oppressing for women, and implies that the structures around mothering cannot be modified (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021). However, a dominant theme in the study was that mothers provided significantly higher levels of primary care to their children than their male counterparts (Begeny et al., 2021).

Participant 3 reflected on the ways in which women are oppressed by socially constructed notions of mothering, and how men benefit from this:

> "*I think that the working world functions according to this male model, where men, who are usually the breadwinners of the household, go to work and women are expected to stay home, look after their children, make dinner and clean the house … but, this is not the case for many working women, including myself. I am the breadwinner of my household; I am mother of two, and a remote working manager. Throughout my career, I have worked with male managers and senior leaders that often take time off to engage in recreational activities, and use weekends to make time for themselves and their self-interests. I spend my weekends providing care for my children; I do house chores, laundry, and prepare all the meals. My weekdays are filled with work-related tasks; my weekends are also jam-packed with household chores and taking care of my children. Most week nights I also take care of family and household commitments. Juggling family responsibilities, work, and household chores is very demanding and not everyone would be able to cope with all these demands the way I do. I must say that every woman has different experiences, and so the expectations placed on them differ as well.*" (Participant 3)

As a "remote working mother manager", Participant 3 often works extended hours and therefore, she struggles to take on family and household responsibilities during the weekdays. However, she mentions that, in the evenings and during weekends, she takes on family and household duties. Her husband is involved in part-time employment, and so he takes on responsibilities for the domestic duties during Participant 3's work hours. Although her husband is willing to take on home duties, Participant 3 feels obligated to support and be there for her family after work, in ways that differ from her male manager counterparts.

As previously mentioned, societal ideologies of household structures are highly gendered and patriarchal; they divide men and women, with men fulfilling the role of 'economic providers' and with women being 'affective nurturers', mainly concerned with mothering (Begeny et al., 2021). For example, many of the mothers maintain the perception that their male colleagues often take time off for themselves and "engage in recreational activities", leaving women to deal with household and family duties:

> "*I suspect that some males in the organization that hold senior and high-status jobs without having to take on household and family responsibilities, unlike female managers ... unlike my manager who is female and has children like me and has to juggle it all.*" (Participant 1)

In connection with the above, some of the women who participated in this study mentioned that they are expected to be primary caregivers for their children by default. In a modern society, women expect fathers to be equally involved in parenting; however, as research has highlighted, many still regard women as the natural providers of care, which results in fathers stepping back and remaining as secondary caregivers (Horwood et al., 2021):

> "*I've missed a lot of days from work prior to COVID-19. Now that everything is happening in the house, I still have to take more leave to look after everyone, especially when it was peak sick season.*" (Participant 5)

The above excerpt accords with previous research that found that women are more likely than men to miss work when urgent childcare is needed. Gendered societal expectations and structures attached to parenting inhibit the normalization of equal parenting. This makes the manifestation of equal parenting in society very difficult to attain (Horwood et al., 2021). In in addition to the above, Participant 3 supports the latter by stating:

> "*It baffles me to think that my partner has all the time in the world to watch movies or series and read lots of books. I can never find time to do things I truly enjoy. My partner feels entitled to his 'me-time', something I never get to experience. I'd say I am definitely still the default caregiver in my home.*" (Participant 3)

From the above, Participant 3's lived experience as a default caregiver who works a high status, full-time job, does not allow her leisure time like her partner who has "all the time in the world" to engage in activities he enjoys. She uses the word "baffles", which indicates perplexity about

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how her partner has time for leisure, when she is unable to fit in time for herself. Participant 3's sense of the unequal sharing of parenting and household work could be frustrating to her (Jones et al., 2020) because it represents a societal gender-biased ideology, which weighs heavy on Participant 3's lived reality. Furthermore, the persistence of gendered norms and societal expectations, which disproportionately burden women with caregiving and domestic responsibilities, has been extensively addressed in literature (Begeny et al., 2021). This gender bias often leads to feelings of frustration and inequality for women who shoulder the majority of these duties while their partners enjoy leisure time. The participant's acceptance of this situation may be influenced by the normalisation of such gender roles in society, making it challenging to challenge these norms without facing resistance (Akanji et al., 2020; Delaney & Sullivan, 2021.

Moreover, various social and cultural factors contribute to the participant's acceptance. Societal pressures to conform to traditional gender roles, fear of disrupting established relationship dynamics, and a lack of awareness about alternative models of responsibility sharing all play a role (Akanji et al., 2020). Additionally, the participant may internalize gender biases, further inhibiting her from challenging the prevailing status quo (Akanji et al., 2020; Delaney & Sullivan, 2021).

Participant 3's experience can be attributed to gendered norms and structures of caregiving that impose childcare as a woman's responsibility (Garcia, 2021). It could be said that Participant 3's partner assumes that Participant 3 is naturally responsible for the childcare, which gives him the time to engage in leisure activities, and further perpetuates the idea of women being natural mothers (McGee et al., 2021).

Gendered, societal expectations and structures around parenting are evident in other family situations. For example, although Participant 3's husband does not have permanent work and is available to provide care for their children, still Participant 3 takes on family and household responsibilities after work hours. Unconventionally, Participant 3 is the breadwinner in her household, but she still experiences the 'second shift' as she provides care to her children in her spare time. Participant 3 views both her professional and caregiving responsibilities as "jobs", and she explained what her week usually looks like:

> "*I think I was working way above what the average person worked. On weekends, I was busy with kids' stuff, and most evenings throughout the week, I had a couple of other*

things going on too with them, like a bit of home schooling. I definitely worked over 100 hours a week, if you considered work and parenting both jobs. I was literally always trying to balance my own health and well-being, but it was really tough. I guess I just had to find or make time for myself as a working mom. Being a mom was a job on its own and it was a 24/7 shift." (Participant 3)

Participant 7 describes a very similar scenario, which resonates with Participant 3's lived experience. Participant 7 explained how she completes household chores, sharing her daily morning routine prior to work and her evening schedule after switching off from work:

"*Yes, it really is! I literally don't stop until nine or eight-thirty because I do the laundry, tidy up, prepare all school bags and lunch boxes ready for school, then hang out the washing before preparing breakfast for everyone. I like to check off some chores as soon as I wake up in the morning, then I go to start my day at the office.*" (Participant 7)

To further emphasize how unpaid domestic work permeates the lives of remote-working mothers, Participant 7 explained how her partner associated her remote-working role with leisure time and not work. Each time Participant 7 was in a meeting or on a call, her partner would regard it as her work time, because she would have her headset on. Upon taking it off, Participant 7 would be pressured into resuming her 'second shift' of household work and childcare: "*Every time I ended a meeting and saying goodbyes, I would start hearing the kids again*", while Participant 5 said: "*That's true; you just have to keep everything moving*".

The experiences described by the women demonstrate how they have to endure domestic, 'unpaid', work before and after their professional work, in order to maintain order within their family and household structures (Jose & Mello, 2021). The aforementioned assumption, that providing care to children is a natural female responsibility, feeds into larger social discourses and places pressure on women to be 'ideal mothers' (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021).

In addition to the above, previous research has highlighted that the long-held traditional gendered structures of the home, which are normalized in society, have resulted in men viewing household duties as a woman's responsibility. The intersections of these assumptions and societal expectations placed on women make it challenging for equal distribution of labour

within homes and childcare. It is possible that women refrain from asking their male partners to contribute equally to domestic work and childcare, because they fear that it may result in conflict, disrespect or criticism from their partners and family members (Xue & McMunn, 2021). The researcher interprets the act of advocating for an equitable distribution of labour as an illustration of multiple intersectional factors. These factors encompass societal expectations regarding gender roles, power dynamics within relationships, cultural and social influences, and internalised biases based on gender (Akinbobola, 2019). Previous studies have shown that these factors can limit mothers' agency in challenging the existing norms and structures. The narratives provided above are examples of how women are expected to follow gendered, constrictive, structural rules that force them to take on household and caregiving responsibilities that their male partners are not expected to do (Akinbobola, 2019; Xue & McMunn, 2021).

4.2.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Ideal mother

Another sub-theme that emerged (as indicated above) was the *ideal mother*. This speaks about the societal expectations and pressures related to the working mothers' roles as mothers, which can shape her experience and well-being while engaging in work activities and life role responsibilities. As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, being an 'ideal mother' or 'good mother' refers to a cultural construct of motherhood that places high expectations on mothers to prioritize their children's needs and well-being above their own, and to be constantly present and available for their children.

The absence of mothers from their families is viewed as a departure from the ideal of a mother. These mothers occasionally must contend with the worry that failing to live up to society's expectations of motherhood may have an adverse effect on their mental and emotional well-being (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021). In light of the above gender-associated theme, the theme of ideal mother or good mother was pervasive throughout the discussion with the working mothers and touched all mothers interviewed. Cultural norms often impose expectations on working mothers, leading to feelings of guilt due to the perception that they should prioritize and dedicate more time to nurturing and caring for their families (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021; Kaufman & Bair, 2021).

The expectations of the 'ideal mother' reinforce gender stereotypes and limit women's opportunities to pursue their career goals without sacrificing their responsibilities as mothers.

Participant 1 remarked that it was difficult: "… *having to juggle it all in the middle of a pandemic. I stretch myself from being a good mom, a good employee, and a good wife. Everybody wants to dictate as to how it should* [be]. *On media we see it.*" (Participant 1)

The societal construct of the ideal mother creates unreasonable expectations for working mothers. It assumes that mothers have the sole responsibility of caring for and nurturing their children, in addition to being high achievers in their professional pursuits. Consequently, the stress of being a perfect mother and excelling at work can lead to anxiety, making it arduous for working mothers to balance their responsibilities at home and work. From an intersectional perspective, working mothers are burdened by unreasonable expectations due to the social construct of the ideal mother. This construct, influenced by traditional gender roles, places immense emphasis on women's domestic labour and nurturing roles within the family. The researcher views the construction of the ideal mother as a societal mechanism that upholds the existing status quo. These expectations are reinforced by gendered norms, power dynamics in relationships, cultural and social influences, and internalised biases related to gender (Kaufman & Bair, 2021). Previous studies have highlighted how these factors restrict mothers' agency and prevent them from challenging established norms and structures (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021; Kaufman & Bair, 2021).

In summary, the sub-theme of ideal mother highlights the need to recognize and address the societal expectations and pressures that remote-working mothers may face, and to develop practises that support their ability to balance their work and life responsibilities in a way that aligns with their own needs and priorities.

4.2.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Race, religion and culture

Another sub-theme emerging from the study is *race, religion, and culture*. In the context of motherhood, this theme emphasizes societal expectations and pressures based on factors such as race, religious affiliation, and cultural heritage. Their experiences as they navigate their maternal roles while juggling work commitments and other life responsibilities are influenced by these expectations. It is important to note that these expectations vary based on race, religion, and culture (Oyewobi et al., 2022). For example, cultural and racial groups may differ in their interpretation of an "ideal mother" that place considerable emphasis on particular practices or behaviours. Similarly, religious beliefs and practices intersect with societal expectations, shaping the roles and responsibilities assigned to mothers within their respective

religious communities. The consequence is that these societal constructs create a sense of pressure among parents to prioritise their children's needs over their own, affecting their wellbeing and life experiences as a whole.

When it comes to remote-working mothers, their experiences are not uniform and can be shaped by multiple factors. When questioned about the influence of race in their experiences of WLB, the working mothers described in detail the intricate and complicated ways in which race influenced their lived realities.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, racial discrimination is a major obstacle faced by women African, Asian and Coloured working mothers. This often limits advancements in their careers and the ability to attain good WLB. Participant 1 said:

> "*Racial stereotypes are often used against us. As* [an] *African mother, I feel like I have to work twice as hard to prove myself to my colleagues and managers. I often feel like I am not given the same opportunities as my counterparts not in the same race group as me, and I am constantly worried about being seen as not dedicated enough to my job, if I need to take time off to care for my children. I also feel like I have to be more productive and efficient to meet the same standards as my white colleagues, which can make it challenging to balance my work and family responsibilities. It's frustrating because I know that my race shouldn't matter, but it does, and it can feel like an extra burden that I have to carry as a working mother.*"

The above aligns with another conspicuous influence of race on remote-working mothers and how it affects their realities. In support of the above, previous research focusing on Africa, Asian and coloured working mothers has raised the issues of accessibility of resources to help working mothers balance work and life; these include affordable childcare, flexible working arrangements, and job training programs (Rubin & Parker, 2022).

In addition to the above issue of race, it has been noted how religion affects the opportunities and choices available to remote-working mothers, thus bearing on their experiencing of WLB. Some religious beliefs and values may place an emphasis on how mothers should spend their time and energy, for example, family and child-rearing, which can make it harder for remote-

working mothers to balance their work and family responsibilities. Religion also structures people's roles:

> "*As a woman during the lockdown, having to take time off work to attend religious services such as family funerals affected our work-life balance. Women play such a crucial role in the burial in Zulu culture, having to cook, clean, and sit on the mat. I needed to arrange a lot to my work schedule, domestic role, and religious cultural role around these times.*" (Participant 4)

> "*The organization is very accommodating when it comes to religious practises, because I could take time off work for religious observances. I was also allowed flexibility in* [my] *work schedule and work output.*" (Participant 5)

For some mothers, their religious beliefs influenced their sense of identity and self-esteem. Some mothers believed that their sense of identity and self-esteem stems from their beliefs. For these mothers, while it is difficult balancing work and private life, the gift of family was worth the highs and lows of striving for work-life balance:

> "*The comfort and support I received from my faith helped me better manage the anxiety and stress brought forth by COVID-19.*" (Participant 7)

In light of the above, religion and culture are shown to have an influence on the WLB experiences of remote-working mothers in various ways. For instance, certain religions or cultures placed a greater emphasis on traditional gender roles and the cultural expectations around childcare and family support; these have affected the resources available to remote-working mothers while managing their WLB (Garcia, 2021). The findings of this study confirm previous research that suggests that the intersection of race, religion, and culture can impact the experiences of individuals in various ways (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018; Ollier-Malaterre & Foucreault, 2017; Oyewobi et al., 2022). The interconnected dimensions of identity shape working mothers' lives in complex ways.

Working mothers often experienced guilt as a result of cultural expectations that they should devote more time on nurturing and caring for their families (Delaney & Sullivan, 2021; Kaufman & Bair, 2021).

To conclude, in relation to the intersectional perspective, the experiences of remote-working mothers was influenced by various factors, including race, religion, and culture. The aspect of race was a crucial component to consider as one of the multiple identities and factors that intersect to shape these women's experiences. The mothers' race meant that strategies had to be developed to enable them to balance work and life effectively.

4.2.3.4 Sub-theme 4: Socio-economic status

This study also revealed a socio-economic sub-theme based on the intersections mentioned above. Socio-economic status emerged as a theme in this study, as multiple mothers made reference to how it intersected with other aspects and shaped their experiences. While there is limited literature that delves into socio-economic status and WLB for remote-working mothers, studies that exist suggest that socio-economic status plays a significant role in shaping the WLB experiences of working mothers, in general, and this also applies to remote-working mothers, as shown in the excerpts from the participants.

In light of the above, in this study, working mothers from low-income status are reported to face greater challenges in achieving WLB than those from higher-income families. This difference was also prominent amongst managers and frontline employees. This is because they may have limited access to affordable childcare, healthcare, and other resources that can support them in managing their work and family responsibilities. Access to resources and opportunity was prominent in many of the interviews. Generally, the working mothers were concerned about the nature of accessibility to resources and opportunities, both in the organization and in their private roles:

> "*Occupying a junior staff position as a mother means that there are certain things I cannot afford. Transitioning to remote working and getting the resources ready from my side was a huge struggle. I had to buy my own laptop because I was only given a desktop which is at work and was impossible to fetch during the hard lockdown. This took money out of my family's pocket.*" (Participant 1)

In addition, Participant 6, who is a junior staff member and a mother of two, also alludes to the issue of resources:

> "*We have less access to educational resources as lower-level staff. If I had the chance, I would study and maybe get the kind of job that would allow for flexibility of my work, work-life balance, and earning potential.*"

As a single mother, Participant 2 was also concerned with limited resources:

> "*I don't have a husband to share this responsibility with. When I go to the grocery store, I pay the same amount that every person pays; there is no discount for single mothers doing it on her own.*"

The financial burden experienced by remote-working mothers, especially those occupying operational positions, made it hard for them to balance work and life, by procuring resources such as quiet workspaces, affordable childcare, and necessary equipment for telecommuting as the supply from the employer was limited. The above were described as factors making it harder for them to afford the resources they need to balance work and life.

In conclusion, the above accounts from the participants highlighted the challenges faced by working mothers in the lower income brackets in achieving WLB, particularly with reference to affordable childcare, technology equipment, healthcare, and other necessary resources. These challenges were more prominent amongst frontline employees, with the financial burden being a significant factor in their ability to procure necessary resources, such as quiet workspaces and equipment for telecommuting.

4.2.3.5 Sub-theme 5: Number of children

In line with the previous discussion, this study also found that the *number of children* was a pervasive and important topic discussed by remote-working mothers when it comes to their WLB experiences. The mothers expressed concerns about the challenges of balancing the needs of multiple children while managing their work responsibilities. They also discussed the impact that having children of different ages can have on their ability to achieve WLB, particularly when it comes to managing childcare needs.

Research suggests that the number of children a remote-working mother has can have an impact on her WLB experiences, especially when viewed through an intersectional lens. Remote-working mothers with more children may need to multitask more, such as caring for children while working, which can make it harder to focus on work and can lead to feelings of strain when there are no additional hands supporting her (Wang et al., 2021):

> "*My experience of work-life balance is complicated, but also rewarding. I have a lot of childcare responsibilities and that it can be difficult to balance work and family*

responsibilities. I sometimes [have] *to spend more time on child-rearing and less time on work. When I had my second son, things got really tough. The most difficult though was my third child during COVID-19. His birth required me to seek extra help from extended family. So I had a relative staying with us to provide extra hands for me.*"
(Participant 7)

Achieving a suitable equilibrium between family and work can be arduous, and there are instances where mothers prioritize their childcare obligations over their work duties. This can be challenging, all alone with multiple children:

"*Having more than one child means for me that time management is crucial and that I need to plan her day carefully to make sure that I am able to meet all of my responsibilities.*" (Participant 6)

The accounts given above indicate that managing multiple children may demand additional effort and organization, but also imply that effective management is achievable with proper planning and time management. Coping with the responsibilities of caring for several children can be challenging, underscoring the importance of prioritizing and planning activities to fulfil all responsibilities. In addition, the above also highlights the importance of social support as it may suffice mothers in their quest to achieving a healthier WLB

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the significance of acknowledging the number of children as an important determinant in comprehending the WLB experiences of remote-working mothers.

4.2.3.6 Sub-theme 6: Sense of guilt

A common phenomenon experienced by working mothers was a persistent sense of guilt. The WLB experiences of remote-working mothers have been found to be influenced by a pervasive sense of guilt, as indicated below. This guilt usually arises from having to juggle competing demands between work and family, and can be affected by intersectional factors like gender and culture. Guilt at not being good enough was a repeating theme expressed by some remote-working mothers. The dynamics of gender and gendered expectations often made it difficult for mothers to strike the right balance in their work and private life roles during the pandemic. Participant 2 said that:

"*The time I spend engaging in online lengthy meetings somehow has taken me away from my family. I work diligently and at times I have allowed that to take precedence over my family. My eldest daughter said to me: 'You haven't been an available mom' and those words echo in my mind ever since. I try to strike a balance. It doesn't matter how successful I become professionally, if my motherly side is not in shape. It just won't matter while my family suffers.*"

The above excerpt highlights the intersectionality of work and life responsibilities in the experience of remote-working mothers. The mother raises the issue of grappling with a sense of guilt that arises from feeling pulled in different directions between her work and family obligations. This is also observed below in the remark made by Participant 4:

"*I have been a victim of shame and self-pity far too long. In fact, I have been angry at myself, angry at their father, angry at the universe. But then I realized this is what it's all about for us as women. In order for me to shine, I have to dim the female aspects of me. For instance, I'm less active in my children's lives; I need to go the extra mile. If there is a meeting at 7, I need to choose whether to attend or be a mom. It's easier for a male to say the meeting can run after hours, but me as a female, if I were to excuse myself, it would raise eyebrows because it would justify men's issues with women in the workplace looking less committed because they are choosing family rather than work.*"

Participant 6 added: "*Balancing work and family responsibilities can be challenging, and I often feel guilty for not being able to give my full attention to my children or my work.*"

From the above sentiments, it is clear to see how benefited males tend to be in comparison to working mothers. The lived realities of working mothers are shaped and bound by their race, gender, and class. Not only do these constructs structure and provide guidelines in the lives of these females, but they are also pervasive and oppressive in nature, in the sense that it overwhelms them with guilt and pushes them on to the edge of questioning their identity.

In light of the above, it is therefore not surprising why many working mothers left the working world, thus adding on to the numbers of 'the great resignation'. The psychological violence resulting from the multiple sources of oppression perpetuated by systems of inequalities may cloud and dampen mothers' lived realities. This often results in guilt and ultimately leaving working mothers with a difficult choice between their private life and work life.

On the balance of the above, the sense of guilt experienced by remote-working mothers is a pervasive phenomenon that has an impact on their WLB. This guilt often stems from conflicting responsibilities between work and family, and is influenced by intersectional factors such as gender, class, religion, culture, and race.

4.3 Conclusion

Having to balance work responsibilities and private life responsibilities, such as childcare, in the midst of a pandemic and movement restrictions can be difficult, especially when this must be done under one roof. This chapter concluded with a focus on the privileges and social injustice experienced by the remote-working mothers during the lockdown movement restrictions. The nature of WLB was shown to be diverse and multifaceted. The mothers' experiences of WLB can be described as unique, according to circumstance and situation.

Drawing on the spillover theory, blurred boundaries around technology and the work and private domains contribute to interference between the domains. However, flexible working arrangements, IT support, and social support were beneficial, as they can allow the remote-working mother to have freedom over her schedule, as she manages her work and family responsibilities at times that suit her. Antagonistic feelings and experiences, such as health concerns, distractions, technostress, and longer work hours were often cited as destabilizers in the pursuit of mothers in maintaining a healthier WLB.

In addition, this chapter concluded with the participants' narration of the intersection of various identities and roles. Diverse facets of the remote-working mother's identity, such as her race, gender, class, and religion, interact and overlap to produce distinctive experiences of discrimination or privilege. As shown in the study, patriarchal societal gendered expectations continually determine how labour is distributed within a home; furthermore, societal ideology divides men and women, with men still mainly fulfilling the role of 'economic providers' and with women being 'affective nurturers', mainly concerned with mothering. Previous research focusing on black and other non-white working mothers have raised the issues of accessibility of resources to help working mothers balance their work and life, such as affordable childcare, flexible working arrangements, and job training programs.

The socio-economic situation of the remote-working mother can also influence the WLB of remote-working mothers in ways such as access to resources and opportunity. In addition, remote-working mothers with more children may have more childcare responsibilities, which can make it challenging for them to balance work and family responsibilities. They may need to spend more time on child-rearing and less time on work. For some mothers, their religious beliefs influenced their sense of identity and self-esteem. Some remote-working mothers believed that their sense of identity and self-esteem stems from their beliefs, which made the experience of working from home even more meaningful, and giving them a religious appreciation of the highs and lows of WLB.

Overall, depending on how their identities interact and the prejudice or privilege they experience as a result, remote-working mothers may perceive WLB differently. When considering WLB and offering support to remote-working mothers who could be encountering additional obstacles, it is crucial to keep this intersectionality in mind.

CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

An overview of the findings is given in this chapter of this thesis. This is accompanied by recommendations for additional and future research, as well as the solutions put forth by the working mothers as they balanced work and private life in the unforeseen situation of COVID-19. This chapter will culminate with a discussion of the study's findings, limitations and conclusion.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The objective of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of work-life balance of mothers working remotely amid COVID-19 lockdown in a South African local government institution and how these experiences intersect and spill over in diverse and complex ways.

Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of the spillover theory and intersectionality, the study aimed to investigate four broad research questions: 1) What are the experiences of working mothers working remotely in their attempt to mediate the demands of work and private life demands during the COVID-19 movement restrictions? 2) How does demographic variation, such as age group, number and age of children, and professional status shape the experiences of being a working mother working remotely in the context of COVID-19 movement restrictions? 3) What challenges do working mothers face in a local government that is male dominated? 4) What are the implications of these experiences for the working mothers' well-being and personal, relational, cultural, and social identities? Owing to its adaptability to analyse qualitative data, thematic analysis was the best method to employ to interpret the data and assist in answering the research questions, given the overlapping theoretical frameworks of this study.

The central concepts of adaptability, technology, race, and gender in relation to the spillover theory and intersectionality were investigated in the study. The spillover theory explains how work and non-work experiences of employees, such as their emotions, attitudes, skills, and behaviours, which are experienced in one domain, can have an influence on the other. The theory of spillover was utilized to explain how working mothers' experiences of role strain, time-based conflict, emotional spillover, and positive spillover influenced their experiences

during the lockdown movement restrictions. The satisfaction, stress, and demands that stem from the responsibilities and roles each working mother assumed had an impact on how they described their experiences during COVID-19 lockdown and movement restrictions. Therefore, all the negative and positive instances in the 'workplace' or home may be spilling over and influencing other domains of someone's multifaceted life.

The concept of intersectionality was used to explore the complex interactions and overlaps that occur when multiple facets of an individual's identity, such as race, class, gender, marital status, family structure, and religious beliefs, come together to produce individual instances of discrimination or privilege, and these intersections in the lives of the working mothers were explored. According to the narratives derived from this study, remote-working mothers have diverse WLB experiences, depending on how their identities and the privileges or disadvantages they encounter overlap. As a result, the study investigated the many aspects of the women's identities and how they intersected. The intersectional approach is well suited to respond to the blind spots in work-life research and to open a robust and meaningful way forward for understanding WLB in modern context (Akinbobola, 2019). When considered collectively, this study's results imply that race, gender, technology, and adaptation continue to play a significant role in structuring the experiences of remote-working mothers in this study.

From a holistic standpoint, the participants' experiences established a variety of themes, some with features of comfort and tensions, while others had features of possibilities and limitations as the mothers explored the novel arena of technology, work, and a global pandemic. These experiences are not seen as distinct entities, but rather as fluid, dynamic systems that interact with one another to shape the experiences of the participants. Three fundamental themes emerged from the study; these included: 1) Work-life balance in the midst of chaos; 2) Navigating the era of remote working; and 3) Negotiating the intersection of multiple identities under one roof. As the women in the study navigated their roles, the theme of tension emerged due to the disparate treatment between genders. The working mothers learned that the current landscape of work and life presents numerous challenges that affect their lived experiences. Finding a work-life balance in the midst of chaos has become increasingly crucial, especially with the rise of remote work. As mothers transitioned to working from home, they had to navigate unfamiliar territory in terms of their work environment and productivity. This shift has also resulted in the need for negotiations at the intersection of multiple identities, as individuals balance their personal and professional

responsibilities under one roof. The findings from the study, together with its themes and sub-themes, are summarized in the discussion that follows.

5.2 Thematic Analysis Findings

5.2 1 Work-Life Balance in the Midst of Chaos

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided a new understanding of how mothers experienced and responded to sudden changes in employment and childcare. The pandemic that occurred in late 2019 changed economic and social structures all around the world. It changed where mothers work, learn, shop, and dine, as well as who they may see and how they envision their futures. While there may not be an agreed term to describe work-life balance, the experiences of WLB of the interviewed mothers suggest that there is uniqueness according to personal circumstance and situation. While some mothers believed that WLB entails being able to separate work- and family-related problems, others were more concerned about maintaining a balance between their jobs, caregiving, and life, and making sure to spend some quality time with family. The pandemic has forced mothers to adapt and employ various strategies to deal with the stresses and demands stemming from personal responsibilities and work roles.

Prior to the pandemic, boundaries were easier to manage for working mothers, due to the physical space between home and work. However, creating physical and temporal barriers between their work and home lives was highlighted as a challenge for many mothers in the study. These boundaries were blurred and participants experienced pervasive inter-role (work-life) conflict as a result. The pandemic and technological advancement has made this more complex. Feelings of fear, anger, sadness, concern, numbness, frustration, and emotional stress were expressed, due to the difficulties in juggling work and life in these unprecedented times, the unsuitability of home workspaces, and their inability to physically attend site meetings, workshops, and other social events. Findings in this study also indicate energy depletion, and insufficient physical, mental, and emotional resources for responding to childcare pressures.

In contrast to the above, coping mechanisms were reported by the participants used to ward off stress and dissatisfaction. In their interviews, working mothers expressed how they actively adapted and changed in response to the changing requirements of their new normal. Some working mothers use self-care practises like exercise, meditation, or indoor hobbies to reduce stress and keep their physical and mental health in check, so as to maintain a balance between their job and personal lives. Several women also used time-management techniques, scheduling

both their work and personal obligations to keep a healthy balance. They also indicated that their needs and restrictions were communicated to and supported by family, friends, and their line manager.

It is imperative to emphasize that working mothers have had to make substantial compromises throughout the pandemic to manage work and private life obligations. The pandemic has emphasized the need for more assistance for working mothers in the form of affordable childcare, parental leave regulations, and adaptable work schedules.

5.2.2 The New Norm of Remote Working

The COVID-19 epidemic has made remote working a crucial component of organizations' operational strategy. While it has offered many advantages, there have also been a number of difficulties that have been cited by mothers as they try to juggle private life and work roles. Some mothers pointed to software and hardware malfunctioning, internet interruptions, and technostress as areas of concern, as they navigated their new normal. This often had a bearing on their task completion rate which had a spillover effect that would impinge on their personal time, as work completion would take precedence over family care. This would elicit a negative emotion reaction.

Another pervasive challenge with remote working is management support and access to organizational information technology (IT) agents when IT-related issues were experienced. Mothers reported feelings of frustration, anxiety, and stress when they had technical difficulties while working remotely. Mothers who have access to IT agent support can focus on their work tasks and reduce these unfavourable feelings. Having access to IT assistance can aid staff in resolving problems with technology more quickly and effectively. This promotes productivity, as more tasks can be completed. Furthermore, mothers with this support are more likely to feel confident and secure. In addition, increased job satisfaction, motivation, and output may result from this. Tamunomiebi and Oyibo (2020) also noted a positive spillover of this nature in their recent study.

In connection with the above, remote working was linked to distractions that affect employee engagement and productivity, which was noted by some interviewees in this study. Distractions often have a negative effect on the working mothers' levels of concentration and productivity. The necessity to multitask and mix work with non-work responsibilities (such as childcare and

household tasks) was primarily blamed for the distractions. The aspect of blurred boundaries made distractions ever more often experienced.

In this study, remote working was linked to fuzzier boundaries between work and private life roles, making it easier for the working mother to put in more hours without even recognizing it. Several working mothers felt a greater sense of responsibility to prove their worth to the government institution, especially because this situation was novel, unprecedented, and worries about job security were at an all-time high. Also, mothers had more time because of the absence of commuting to and from work, which they used to complete more work or handle personal errands, encouraging them to work longer hours.

Considering the above, through prolonged work hours and overlapping domestic and professional duties, remote working can contribute to WLB disturbance. Additionally, it can lead to increased conflict between work and non-work roles, negatively affecting WLB (Palumbo, 2020). As remote working has the potential to negatively affect WLB, it is important to identify the factors involved.

Despite the challenges associated with remote work, which were previously highlighted, the participants also identified a few advantages. The key finding was that most working mothers had more job flexibility. Remote working, according to several of the working women who were interviewed, saves them money since they do not have to pay for childcare or hire nannies to watch their kids, both of which come with security and trust concerns. Furthermore, the mothers felt cared for, as they were less likely to catch the virus when working from home, whereas becoming ill with COVID-19 could have a severe impact on both their personal and family health, as well as productivity, when considering their work roles. Less absenteeism and sick leave result in lower costs for the employer, which is beneficial when considering staffing and productivity.

5.2.3 Negotiating the Intersection of Multiple Identities under One Roof

Facets of intersectionality such as gender, financial background, and marital status, number of children, and race are now being experienced at first hand in the home settings of the working mothers. The working mothers frequently discussed their many identities during the interview sessions. The identities that were documented are not all the same; rather, they interact with one another to complicate and produce a range of experiences for each working mother. Hence,

in addition to their gender identity, the women also identify with other identities, all of which affect how they feel about working remotely for the local government institution. The working mothers discussed how their social, parental, personal, and cultural identities, as well as their professional identity, interacted with one another.

Single parents, especially single mothers, represent an economically and socially vulnerable demographic who run the risk of developing issues (Radcliffe et al., 2022). While this may have not been the case during the analysis of the themes that emerged when interviewing the mothers who identified as single parents, it is a major concern that cannot be overlooked. For example, it is more difficult for single mothers to be productive when remote working if they are in a low-income scenario, where nanny or day-care is too costly. In addition, because of the closure of schools and day-care centres, single mothers – who are the children's primary caregivers – must balance both childcare and employment obligations. This is particularly a challenge for mothers who need a visible online presence. This is a situation where pre-existing inequalities continue to impact on the remote-working mothers.

The allocation and utilization of time are significantly influenced by gender roles and their impact on societal expectations. Gender-based societal norms have a significant influence on the concept of mothering, influencing housekeeping and child-rearing activities. These expectations are a result of patriarchal systems, which control how labour is divided in a household. Some of the women who took part in this study indicated that they are by default expected to be the children's primary caregivers. For instance, when an urgent childcare situation arises, women are more likely than male counterparts to miss work. Furthermore, the women interviewed in this study want fathers to participate equally in parenting; however, the dominant ideology about gender roles is still supported and maintained by patriarchal institutions in contemporary society. While mothering has its challenges, many of the participants did indicate the facet of fulfilment brought by this identity.

In addition to the above, race also came under scrutiny in the process of this study. Working mothers' experiences of WLB can be undesirably impacted by their race, particularly in the COVID-19 situation. According to the narratives of the working mothers, black African working mothers noted higher job demands and less workplace accommodation for family responsibilities as an overarching issue. Furthermore, single-parent African mothers highlighted lower levels of social support as a hindrance to achieving a healthier WLB. The

pressure to comply with traditional gender roles and cultural expectations from family of the working mothers in relation to motherhood has also been linked to aspects of stress and conflicts between work and family obligations.

The socio-economic situation of mothers was also discussed. The WLB of mothers who work remotely can be impacted by socio-economic position in a variety of ways, including access to resources and opportunities in both the work domain and private life. In general, working mothers were worried about access to opportunities and resources in their professional and personal lives. It was difficult for remote-working women, especially those in operational jobs, to find resources like quiet workspaces and the technology they needed to telecommute, because the supply from their employers was scarce. In addition, day-care and access to nannies was nearly impossible if not too expensive.

The experiences of working mothers and their WLB may also be significantly influenced by religion and culture. The support a working mother receives from her community and workplace, as well as her beliefs and values regarding family, work, and gender roles, can all be influenced by these circumstances. Motherhood and family may take precedence over a job or work outside the home in various religious and cultural traditions. Working women may feel under pressure to balance both sets of obligations and may encounter judgment or criticism for putting their careers ahead of their families. This can lead to stress and conflict both in their homes and in the workspace. This was revealed in several of the working mothers' accounts. Cultural expectations of gender roles create pressure on women to balance their job and family commitments, and they may be less likely to get the help or adjustments they need at work. The local government institution is overwhelmingly male dominated, and culture and religion are highly valued. Mothers are impacted by issues such as attending after-hours meetings and taking time off to care for sick family members. Occasionally, these variables may not assist or accommodate women in their attempt to achieve a healthier WLB.

Finally, a resurfacing topic stated by some remote-working mothers was guilt over not being 'good enough'. During the pandemic, it was frequently challenging for mothers to manage the demands of their jobs in the home and at work. This was due to gender, cultural, and religious factors. As a result, their circumstances and livelihood are shaped by this.

5.3 Practical Recommendations

Work-life balance is often regarded as one of the most crucial wellbeing characteristics both in the workplace and in the private life domain. Therefore, it is essential that additional research be done on this subject. The study's findings contribute to the body of knowledge on WLB, particularly considering unique phenomena – the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the COVID-19 pandemic era.

Based on the findings of this study regarding remote-working mothers in a South African local government institution, there are various practical recommendations that encompass both general guidelines for remote-working mothers and specific recommendations for the local government institution. Working mothers can factor in activities such as time management strategies; boundary implementation, self-care practices and, establishing clear and open communication to support a healthier WLB. Furthermore, the local government Institutions can also contribute by implementing Flexible Work Policies, IT Support and providing awareness, training, and resources

Time Management Strategies is one of the practical recommendations that can be considered by both the employer and employees of local government organisations. This can be done by encouraging remote-working mothers to establish clear daily schedules that allocate specific time slots for work, family, and personal activities. This can help prevent work from spilling over into personal time and vice versa.

Remote working mothers can also begin by introducing boundaries, both physical and psychological within their day-to-day activities to prevent spillover between work and personal life and vice versa (Nam, 2014). One of the findings of this study was related to the lack of a designated workspace. By creating a designated workspace and establishing clear times for work-related tasks may assist in preventing spillover and chaos within the home space (Uddin, 2021).

In addition to the above, self-care practices are an additional avenue that can be tapped into by the working mother. Emphasis should be allocated on the importance of self-care for mental and physical well-being. Mothers can be encouraged to engage in regular exercise, meditation, hobbies, or social activities to reduce stress and support the maintenance of a healthy WLB.

By opening communication channels with employers, family members, and support networks about their work and family availability and challenges experience may help with managing expectations and preventing misunderstandings which tend to exacerbate the imbalance of work and life roles. Further, both the employer and support systems of the mothers should come to the table and assist where they can for instance childcare or provide emotional support to alleviate some of the challenges of remote working. Management support was noted as a crucial aspect of aiding working mothers to maintain a healthier WLB (Cho et al., 2020). Encouraging regular check-ins between supervisors and remote-working mothers to discuss work progress, challenges, and potential solutions may also ensure that employees feel supported.

In relation to Local government institutions, these organisations can contribute by creating and communicating clear policies that promote flexibility for remote-working mothers. This could include flexible work hours, compressed workweeks, or the option to work from home on certain days as seen in other studies (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020).

Technostress and lack of IT support was flagged as an area of concern by many working mothers. Providing adequate IT support to remote-working employees to address technical issues promptly as well as providing employees with access to the necessary technology and resources to perform their tasks effectively may assist in avoiding the experiences of technostress and encourage a better control and balance of work obligations (Matli, 2020).

Local government institutions can also start offering training sessions and resources to help employees, including mothers, adapt to remote work. Training initiatives targeting time management, setting boundaries, and utilizing technology for effective remote collaboration could be considered in assisting employees with maintaining a healthier WLB.

Due to the patriarchal culture that dominates many social spaces, WLB is often made to appear as a naturally occurring phenomenon that is mainly the responsibility of the employee, whereas there are multiple elements that influence how mothers balance their professional and private lives. Thus, it is advised that organizations, policymakers, workers, trade unions, and academics share viewpoints on how to improve the conditions of working women' WLB and society at large. By taking a holistic approach, it may be possible to define more clearly what

each institution means by 'work-life balance' and develop and implement stronger policies that address contemporary issues.

As for the intersectional impact of WLB on vulnerable groups like working mothers, it is likewise recommended that the organization adopt an objective stance in this regard. This can only be put into practice if organizations take an objective look at their processes and procedures and are aware of the negative effects that certain environments may have on the experiences and retention of women employees. Obstacles like health issues, diversions, technological stress, and longer work hours were frequently highlighted as destabilizers in the efforts of mothers to establish and maintain a good WLB.

By implementing these recommendations, both remote-working mothers and local government institutions can work together to create a more supportive and conducive work environment that prioritizes WLB and overall well-being. A good WLB has numerous positive effects, including less stress, a lower risk of burnout, and a greater sense of well-being. This not only benefits employees but employers, too. However, the journey towards achieving a healthy WLB is complex and not straightforward.

5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

In general, qualitative research was able to offer insightful information on how working mothers experience WLB, but its limitations must be taken into account when interpreting the results. In considering the limitations of this study, lack of generalizability is one of the limitations. Due to the limited sample size, and participant selection methodology, this hampers the generalizability of this study to all mothers working remotely in South Africa. As a result, it might not be representative of the larger population or workforce. Yet, substantial information did develop from the narratives which the mothers offered, which can be acknowledged. The significance of this study still stands considering the paucity of research of this kind in the South African literature, particularly research that focuses on women in local government institutions and during a pandemic. Further research can be undertaken to support or refute the study's findings.

Qualitative studies which involve interviewing are often time consuming and require a wealth of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This can limit the reliability of such studies, as large amounts of in-depth, rich data has to be analysed, condensed, and construed for a certain

audience. This raise's reliability concerns, as most of the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the data is carried out from within their own lens and perspective. Another limitation of the study was that the researcher had little experience with conducting interviews; moreover, due to time restrictions, follow-up interviews were not undertaken. A cross-sectional analysis would allow for information to be obtained from more participants, which could inform holistic interventions.

In addition, as the study aimed to uncover facets of intersectionality such as race, gender, and socio-economic influences, as the researcher is a 29-year-old African male with no dependants such as children, this may have implications for the insights gained from mothers' narratives, as gender and race are still sensitive issues in South Africa. The researcher was also substantially younger than most of the participants, which may have affected the narrations of the working mothers. In addition, the researcher has only a minimal understanding of what is truly means to be a parent, married, or being a woman. Subjective interpretation and a bias towards the researcher's preconceptions, leading to a lack of objectivity in the analysis, can be considered a limitation.

Finally, future studies can provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between working mothers and working fathers, including married and single parents. The power dynamics which are formed due to the patriarchal systems in society can be exposed, and the emancipation of the underprivileged strengthened.

5.5 Researcher's Reflection

The onset of this research occurred in the backdrop of a global pandemic. While this is a rare phenomenon, it also called for investigations to be conducted so as to document the human experience during this psychologically nuanced era. My interest in the participants' narratives grew as the research progressed, particularly the parallels and discrepancies that emerged compared to the body of prior research. My initial confusion over the stories I was given led to a greater level of engagement, as more and more of the participants shared tales that were essentially the same, with a few minor twists.

These narratives puzzled me, with both positive life experience and negative life experience spillovers occurring through the medium of technology in an already hostile and complex societal system characterized by patriarchy and gender norms. Thus, in regard to the current

study, the dynamics relating to race, gender, economic position, and family environment were quite interesting. Contradictions between the existing literature and the participant narratives appeared when the existing literature was analysed, which was intriguing because it revealed a variety of information that was not necessarily obvious in the participants' narratives.

As an emerging industrial psychologist, this research has influenced my perspective because race, gender, and economic position are still delicate subjects in South Africa; however, the findings from the narratives also showed some signs of progress. Nevertheless, because this was not generally true for all ethnic groups, there are still aspects of the workplace that need to be examined for improvement, particularly in significant structures that have historically been dominated by men, like the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

For several of the participants, it was interesting to observe how racial, socio-economic, and gender dynamics have transformed in South Africa. Nonetheless, double marginalization is still an issue in modern organizations, as demonstrated by the literature that has already been written and is obvious in day-to-day life. As a result, these issues can be acknowledged as areas that organizations need to develop in order to provide an equitable working environment for men and women.

5.6 Conclusion

The pandemic has emphasized the invisible and under-appreciated nature of unpaid home care work, which is borne disproportionately by women. The COVID-19 pandemic and remote working, according to the study, have clearly caused significant difficulties for working women employed by the Metropolitan Municipality of eThekwini in Durban, South Africa. The severity of these difficulties varied depending on their work-related obligations, workstation (home), and social support networks.

The experiences of working women throughout this exceptional crisis lead us to draw numerous conclusions and intensify our efforts to create an egalitarian society in order to prevent our economy from incurring serious long-term setbacks after COVID-19. As a result of the pandemic, we have the chance to challenge gender norms and drastically alter our behaviour, helping us to let go of the notion that providing unpaid domestic care is exclusively the domain of women. Instead, it is a shared obligation that both men and women in the community must fulfil. It is time for our educational system, domestic cultural norms, and

organizational policies to educate society to the unfair distribution of the burden of unpaid care work that has historically been carried females.

On the balance of evidence brought forth, the material gleaned from the participants' narratives was rich and diverse and has been compared to the body of existing literature. Comparing the study's results to the existing literature produced several intriguing findings, which were then addressed in relation to the literature, giving the data a critical analysis. On the basis of the information that was revealed by the participants' narratives, recommendations have been put forth. Additionally, there have been limitations noted and suggestions made for future studies. Lastly, a researcher's reflection is provided, based on the experiences that the researcher had throughout the research process.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. **Introduction**:

    a. Welcome interviewee; and

    b. Introduce interviewer.

2. **Overview of the study**:

The purpose of this study is to understand the work-life balance experiences of working mothers working remotely amid COVID-19 lockdown in a Local Government Institution in South Africa.

3. **Anonymity**:

Your personal information and identity will remain confidential and will not be shared or revealed in any way. Discrimination against any individual or group will not be tolerated.

Please be aware that if you feel uneasy or uncomfortable during the interview, you have the right to stop the process and end the interview.

Recording and recordkeeping: To aid in the analysis of the interview, I will be utilizing an audio recorder. Is there any concern or objection regarding the use of an audio recorder?

4. **Interview Schedule**

1. Please tell me more about yourself (probe: marital status, age etc).

2. What other roles do you play in society (mother, wife, girlfriend etc.)

3. Have you experienced challenges regarding the different roles you play as a woman (mother, girlfriend, wife)?

4. How many children are currently under you care as a mother?

5. How do you balance your work and personal life effectively?

6. If you had to complete projects at home, how would you balance your personal and professional lives in one space?

7. What does your company do to help its employees maintain work-life balance?

8. How does your family environment assist in helping you maintain a healthier work-life balance

9. What's your company's policy on telecommuting? How frequently do people work from home?

10. What do you think will be your biggest challenge as a remote worker?

11. What tools have you used in the past to work effectively while remote?

12. Can you tell me about your organisational culture? What makes it unique?

13. How has your role changed ever since the dawn of COVID19?

14. What unique challenges do you face as a working mother in a male dominated local government organisation?

15. When there a sick family member who take care of them?

16. How has COVID19 shaped your experience as a mother working at home.

17. What are the effects of these challenges to you as a woman? (Probe: your social role, your identity as a woman, your well-being)

18. What are the effects of these challenges to you as a woman in relation to culture and identity as you remote work?

19. How is your well-being affected by these challenges (anxiety, depression, demotivated etc.)?

20. How do you overcome these challenges in the workplace?

Appendix B: Gatekeepers Letter

Head: Human Capital Unit   27 September 2022
EThekwini Municipality
Shell House Building,
221 Anton Lembede Str
Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.
4001

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY IN THE HUMAN CAPITAL UNIT

Dear Mr Mkhize,

My name is Thando Biyela (student number: 215080108) and I am currently completing my Master's degree at the University of KwaZulu Natal. A requirement of my degree is to complete a research study.

I am conducting a study that seeks to understand the work-life balance experiences of remote working mothers amid Covid-19 Lockdown regulations. I'm writing this email to seek permission to conduct my research on your staff and unit.

This research initiative is expected to not take more than 2 months starting from the beginning of October and ending in November 2022. This study will be conducted at a convenient time and date to be arranged with the participants (not more than 12 participants) since the initiative will be done online using Zoom.

The findings of the research will be kept in the School of Psychology for a period of five years. The findings will be made available to you upon completion of the study.

If you have any queries please feel free to contact me Thando Biyela (0764023964/ 215080108@stu.ukzn.ac.za) or my supervisors (Ms. Shaida Bobat: Bobats@ukzn.ac.za and Dr. Shanya Reuben: Reuben@ukzn.ac.za).
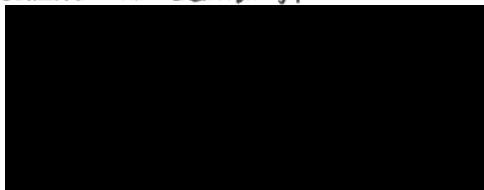
Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,
Thando Biyela
Durban, University of KwaZulu Natal

Permission Granted   : Head HC

Signed

Name Date

Appendix C: HSSREC/00004920/2022 Ethical Clearance Letter

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL ™
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

23 November 2022

Mthunzi Sanele Biyela (215080108)
School Of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear MS Biyela,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00004920/2022
Project title: Understanding the work-life balance experiences of working mothers working remotely amid coronavirus lockdown in the eThekwini Municipality
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 20 October 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 23 November 2023.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL ™
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal
DURBAN
4041
SOUTH AFRICA

Informed Consent Form

My name is Thando Biyela (student number: 215080108) and I am currently completing my Master's degree at the University of KwaZulu Natal. A requirement of my degree is to complete a research study. My study is about understanding the work-life balance experiences of remote-working mothers amid Covid-19 Lockdown regulations in eThekwini Municipality.

You are invited to participate in this research as you are a working mother employed at eThekwini Municipality and can contribute immensely in the understanding of remote-work and work-life balance during the Covid-19 Lockdown movement restrictions. There will be no direct benefit to you if you participate in this research, but your participation is likely to help generate knowledge and greater understanding of employees' experience during these unprecedented times.

The research will take the form of semi structured interviews and I will arrange a time that is suitable to you. You can be assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality will be ensured through the interviews being available to the researcher and his supervisor only. Anonymity will be ensured by omitting any identifying characteristic, such as your name, or department. Your permission to record the interview is also requested. The findings of the research will be kept in the School of Psychology for a period of five years. The findings will be made available to you on completion of the study.

Nothing that is said to me during interviews will be shared with anybody outside of the research team. If you have any queries please feel free to contact me Thando Biyela (0764023964/ bylmth002@gmail.com) or my supervisors (Ms. Shaida Bobat Bobats@ukzn.ac.za or Dr. Shanya Reuben Reuben@ukzn.ac.za). You can also make contact with the Humanities & Soc. Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) which is responsible for all research involving human subjects on HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za & 031 260 3587/4557/8350

Please sign below as confirmation of your consent in this research.

I…………………………………………………………………………

(Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

_____   _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

Please sign below as confirmation of your consent to this research being recorded (audio).

I…………………………………………………………………………

(Full names of participant) give permission to video/audio record (Skype/MS-Teams) my interview for research purposes and to be accessed solely by researcher. I also acknowledge that my permission to audio record my interview is completely voluntary. I understand at any point during the recording, I can request the recording device be turned off.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

_____   _____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

Appendix E: Biographical Data Sheet

Biographical Questionnaire
The purpose of this study is to investigate female experiences of work-life balance of remote working mothers in a local government institution during the COVID-19 restrictions In South Africa. Please mark with an X in the appropriate box to indicate your response. If asked to specify write the answer on the line provided. Thank you.

What is your age? _____

What is your race?

African	Coloured	Indian	White	Other

If other, please specify:
_____

What is your home language?
If other, please specify:

IsiZulu	IsiXhosa	English	Afrikaans	Other

_____
Are you a South African citizen?

Yes	No

 If no, please specify:
_____

What is your present marital status?

Divorced	Married	Single	Widowed

What is the number of children and house hold family members do you live with?

Number of children under your immediate care	Household member

148

Appendix F: Turnitin Digital Report

turnitin

Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author:	Ms Biyela
Assignment title:	Thesis
Submission title:	Master's Research
File name:	Thando_Biyela_-_Turnitin_Submission_2023.docx
File size:	204.17K
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