



Júnia Aparecida Laia da Mata<sup>a</sup>  
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9062-8536>

Sayed Abdul Basir Samimi<sup>b</sup>  
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2474-2565>

## Academic mothers during and post-COVID-19 pandemic

### *Mães acadêmicas durante e após a pandemia de COVID-19*

<sup>a</sup> Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Escola de Enfermagem. Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

<sup>b</sup> Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Programa de Pós-graduação em Planejamento Urbano e Regional. Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

**Contact:**

Júnia Aparecida Laia da Mata  
**E-mail:**  
[junia.mata@ufrgs.br](mailto:junia.mata@ufrgs.br)

The authors declare that the article has not been subsidized and that there are no conflicts of interest.

The years 2020 and 2021 have been marked by an unprecedented pandemic that has powerfully impacted humanity. For women, the disease caused by the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has generated massive global social impacts on their lives<sup>1</sup>. Even if not contaminated by the virus, they suffer intensely from the social impacts caused by it. Many started to share their workplace with their home, family dynamics, and the pandemic. With physical distancing and the closing of daycare centers and schools, in addition to remote work, they have most likely engaged in the roles of taking care of the home, educating children, and caring for sick family members. This situation was aggravated even more due to the collapse of health systems. The presence of children at home increases the time women devote to unpaid care work<sup>2</sup>. For academic mothers, the contemporary health situation can significantly affect their careers and academic productivity. Gender inequality, historically present in the academic environment that marks women's careers, can be accentuated by the current crisis, generating short- and long-term impacts. Therefore, the central issue of this letter is the situation of academic mothers during and post-COVID-19 pandemic in terms of their careers and academic productivity. Motherhood impacts the productivity of scientists<sup>3</sup>; added to the pandemic, it can represent a propellant to undermine the fragile advances in gender equality acquired over time. The social situations triggered by the pandemic have materialized in academic mothers, who have struggled to reconcile their formal work and the responsibilities of unpaid care work at the risk of experiencing mental suffering, frustrations, guilt, exhaustion, and falling productivity. A survey conducted during a social isolation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, between April and May 2020, identified that black women (with or without children) and white women with children were the groups whose academic productivity was most affected in the pandemic. The productivity of men, especially without children, was the least impacted by the pandemic<sup>3</sup>. Motherhood is a key factor that impacts women's careers in academia, and, in this environment, mothers continue to struggle daily for their space. Scientists claim that, when analyzed from a gender perspective, remote work has been considered a way of perpetuating gender inequality, as women historically bear the burden of both paid work and domestic responsibilities<sup>4</sup>. Teleworking mothers report feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and depression more often than teleworking fathers<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the increase in teleworking, in response to the pandemic, can accentuate gender inequalities in the formal world of work and the domestic division of labor, especially with the closing of schools and daycare centers<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the impacts of the current health situation not only affect the present, as remote work will probably persist to some extent in the future<sup>5</sup>. It is essential that, as the crisis is faced, efforts are made to promote gender equality in the academic and scientific world. In view of the contemporary scenario, the need to create policies that contemplate academic mothers is emerging. This is

Received: July 13, 2021

Revised: October 20, 2021

Approved: November 4, 2021

an important horizon to look at and cover so that women are not left behind. In Brazil, the struggle for gender equality in the world of work is historic and marked by the investitures of women's and feminist movements. Recently, in the academic world, some advances have occurred, such as the inclusion of maternity leave in the Curriculum Lattes of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), in response to demands from representatives of women, the scientific community, and the Parent in Science movement (a group formed by mothers and fathers who are scientists that seeks to produce and spread knowledge on the issue of maternity/paternity and the academic/

scientific career); and the consideration of the period of maternity and/or adoptive leave in some research and innovation notices of some public educational institutions. In fact, there has been, for a long time, a need to invest in actions that address issues of diversity and gender at work within academia. With the COVID-19 pandemic, this demand takes on new traits with the accumulation of unpaid care work with formal work, the physical and mental burden of academic/scientist mothers, and the impact on their productivity, as well as on their health, deserving attention and measures that can be implemented during and after the pandemic.

## Authors' contributions

Mata JAL and Samimi SAB contributed equally to the elaboration of the manuscript and assume full responsibility for the published content.

## References

1. Turquet L, Koissy-Kpein S. COVID-19 and gender: what do we know; what do we need to know? [Internet]. New York: UN Women; 2020 [cited 2021 Jan 3]. Available from: <https://data.unwomen.org/features/covid-19-and-gender-what-do-we-know-what-do-we-need-know>
2. Dugarova E. Unpaid care work in times of the COVID-19 crisis: Gendered impacts, emerging evidence and promising policy responses [Internet]. New York: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs; 2020 [cited 2021 Jan 3]. Available from: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/09/Dugarova.Paper\\_.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/09/Dugarova.Paper_.pdf)
3. Staniscuaski F, Kmetzsch L, Soletti RC, Reichert F, Zandonà E, Ludwig ZMC, et al. Gender, race and parenthood impact academic productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic: from survey to action. *Front Psychol.* 2021;12:663252.
4. Sullivan C, Lewis S. Home-based telework, gender, and the synchronization of work and family: perspectives of teleworkers and their co-residents. *Gend Work Organ.* 2001;8(2):123-45.
5. Lyttelton T, Zang E, Musick K. Gender differences in telecommuting and implications for inequality at home and work [Internet]. Rochester: SSRN; 2020 [cited 2021 Jan 3]. Available from: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3645561>