

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ALL OF WORK? ALL OF LIFE? ONTOLOGY OF SOUTH AFRICAN MOTHERS AND REMOTE WORK

by

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DECLARATION

I, Denika Lorraine Benton, declare that:

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Signed: Denika Lorraine Benton



Supervisor, Dr J Govender

Date: January 2026

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my son, Hazen Kayde Benton, who has been my ongoing beacon of hope and motivation, my pillar of strength and my biggest supporter throughout this journey. My boy, I hope that one day you look back on this and know that you, too, are capable of great things that at one point in time might have seemed impossible.

I love you with my entire being.

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Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my husband, Blake Simon Benton, for never questioning my ambitions and for caring for our son while I followed my passions, creating the sense of calm and trust I needed during my times away. Thank you for reminding Hazen that, even when I was away, my love never wavered. Your support, confidence and awe in my pursuit have been invaluable.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge my mother, Debbie Herbst. There truly are no words that could ever capture your influence on my every accomplishment and achievement. However, I know, through these few simple words, you understand the enormity of what I am trying to say. I am who I am today because of you.

Thirdly, my village. The strong women and mothers around me who constantly checked in, reassured me when I was in some of my toughest moments, read my work (despite having no idea what some of it meant) and for reminding me, especially as a mother, that this all served a much greater purpose than the title and degree that come with it.

Lastly, and certainly not least, my supervisor, Dr J Govender. Our journey has gone far beyond academic achievement, and the impact you have had on me, both as an academic and as a person, will always be deeply valued. You taught me resilience, pushed me past limits I never thought I could cross, and, through it all, you never stopped believing in me. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

For the first time since industrialisation drew women into the workforce, mothers are presented with an opportunity to protect their maternal identity while remaining economically active: remote work. However, in South Africa, a context marked by gendered inequality, cultural expectation, and a lack of formal protection, remote work currently presents as a paradox, providing both a means of survival and a site of strain. Mothers continue to carry a disproportionate load of domestic and caregiving responsibilities compared to fathers. For many this is not a preference or a privilege, but an economic and emotional necessity carried through resilience and adaptability shaped by historical gender inequality and oppression.

This study is guided by Work–Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000) and Intersectional Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000), which, through a complementary multi-theoretical approach, provide a lens through which to explore the lived experiences of South African remote-working mothers with children under five. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study leverages the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research: Phase 1 involved data from 93 remote-working mothers, and Phase 2 consisted of qualitative interviews with seven self-selected participants that deepened and humanised the results.

The findings revealed an undeniable strength in the motivation and benefit of remote work in preserving and protecting motherhood identity while continuing to work, whether due to economic necessity, career continuity, or both. However, the privilege of being a present mother often comes with the cost of guilt, stress, anxiety, and burnout, compounded by societal, cultural, religious, and organisational expectations that blur already fragile work–family boundaries. Moreover, despite these pressures, these mothers shouldered the responsibility of primary caregiver with great pride and belonging, showing resilience and adaptability that is admirable; however, this study cautions the glorification of these attributes. Instead, it positions them as the result of gendered expectations, oppression, exploitation and patriarchy. The results also highlight the critical role of family, domestic, and organisational support, and expose the near absence and lack of knowledge of legislative protection that leaves these mothers extremely vulnerable.

This study positions remote work as both a mechanism of empowerment and a reflection of structural inequality, calling for urgent policy, organisational, and cultural reform to ensure its sustainability and equity for South African mothers.

ISIFINGQO (ABSTRACT)

Okokuqala ngqa, selokho kwaqala ukuthuthukiswa kwezimboni, ithuba lokusebenzela ngaphadle kwendawo yokusebenza kunike abesifazane abanemindeni ithuba lokungalahlekelwa lokufeza uzidingo zemindeni futhi beqhubeka ukuba neqhaza kwezomnotho. Kepha eNingizimu Afrika, lapho kunesiko nenjwayelo yokungaphathwa kwabantu ngokulinganayo ngenxa yobulili babo, ukusebenzela emakhaya noma ngaphandle kwendawo yomsebenzi kunikeza abesifazane indlela yokusinda neyomzabalazo. Omama bayaqhubeka nokuthwala umthwalo ongaphezulu kuneyobaba ekunakekeleni izidingo zasekhaya. Kwabaningi lokhu akuyona into abayithandayo noma ilungelo, kodwa kuyisidingo sezomnotho nesomzwelo esithwalwa ngokubekezela nangokuzivumelanisa nezimo okwakhiwe ukungalingani kobulili komlando okuhlanganisa nokucindezelwa kwabesimame.

Lolucwaningo luholwa yinjulalwazi ebizwa nge-*Work–Family Border Theory* (Clark, 2000) kanye ne-*Intersectional Feminist Theory* (Collins, 2022). Lezi zinjulalwazi, ngokusebenzisa indlela ehlanganyele yemibono eminingi (multi-theoretical approach), zinikeza iso lokubuka nokuhlola amava aphilwayo omama baseNingizimu Afrika abasebenza bekude namahhovisi kanti baphinde babe nezingane ezingaphansi kweminyaka emihlanu. Ngokusebenzisa uhlelo locwaningo oluhlanganisile olulandelanayo noluchazayo (*sequential explanatory mixed-methods design*), lolucwaningo lusebenzisa amandla ezindlela zokucwaninga ngokobuningi (*quantitative*) nangokobunjalo (*qualitative*): Isigaba soku-1 (Phase 1) besibandakanya imininingwane eqoqwe komama abangama-93 abasebenza bekude namahhovisi, kanti Isigaba sesi-2 (Phase 2) besiqukethe izingxoxo zobunjalo nabahlanganyeli abayisikhombisa abazikhethele bona, okuyibona abajulise baphinde benza imiphumela yocwaningo ukuba ithinte imizwa yobuntu.

Imiphumela yocwaningo idalule amandla aqinisekile esisusa senzuzo yomsebenzi okude namahhovisi mayelana nokulondoloza nokuvikela ubuyena bobumama ngenkathi kuqhubeka ukusebenza, kungakhathaliseki ukuthi kungenxa yesidingo somnotho, ukuqhubeka komsebenzi, noma kokubili. Nokho, ilungelo lokuba umama okhona ekhaya livamise ukuba nomthelela wobunzima obufana necala (*guilt*), ukucindezeleka (*stress*), ukukhathazeka (*anxiety*), nokushisa amandla ngokweqile (*burnout*), okubhebhethekiswa yizidingo zomphakathi, zamasiko, zezenkolo, nezasezinhlanganweni ezifiphaza imingcele esivele ibuthaka yomsebenzi nomndeni. Ngaphezu kwalokho, naphezu kwalezi zingcindezi, laba omama bathwale umthwalo wokuba abanakekeli abakhulu ngezinga elikhulu lokuziqhenya nokuba yingxenye, bekhombisa ukuqina nokuzivumelanisa nezimo okutuswayo; nokho, lolu

cwaningo luxwayisa ngokukhazimulisa lezi zibaluli. Kunalokho, lubeka lezi zibaluli njengomphumela wezinto ezilindeleke ngokobulili, ukucindezelwa, ukuxhashazwa, kanye nobudlelwano obuqhutshwa ubaba (*patriarchy*). Imiphumela iphinde igqamise indima ebalulekile yosekelo lomndeni, lwasekhaya, nolwasezinhlanganweni, futhi iveze ukungabi khona nhlobo kolwazi lwesivikelo sezomthetho, okushiya laba omama besengozini enkulu.

Lolu cwaningo lubeka umsebenzi okude namahhovisi njengombili, indlela yokunikeza amandla kanye nokubonakaliswa kokungalingani okuhleliwe, lucela ushintsho oluphuthumayo lwenqubomgomo, lwenhlangano, nolwamasiko ukuqinisekisa ukusimama kwawo kanye nokulingana komama baseNingizimu Afrika.

RESEARCH OUTPUT FROM THESIS

1.1 Conference Presentations

- Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) Annual Psychology Congress 2025, Durban ICC. Presented an oral presentation in the Industrial Organisational Psychology session.
- International Symposium: Decent Work in Africa 2025, UCT Graduate Business School. Presented an oral presentation in the feminist category for decent work.

2.1 Publications

- Title: *Reclaiming Motherhood, Protecting Livelihood: The South African Remote Work Paradox*. Submitted for publication in the Journal of South African Review of Sociology, Taylor & Francis – in process.

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26 November 2025

To whom it may concern,

LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

This letter serves to confirm that I, Victoria Jane Ter Morshuizen, ID number 710125 0043 089, have provided proofreading and editing services on the Doctorate thesis entitled 'All of work? All of Life? Ontology of South African Mothers and Remote Work' by Denika Lorraine Benton, to be submitted to the University of KwaZulu Natal, School of Social Sciences.

My work included checking the English grammar, spelling and punctuation, flow and readability, consistency and basic formatting.

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UKZN AI DECLARATION

a) I did not use generative AI in this thesis.

Signed: 

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Sometimes the strength of motherhood is greater than natural laws."

- Barbara Kingsolver (2022)

People often say that mothers possess a 'superpower' that allows them to multitask like no other, but at what cost? As research has been conducted on superhero-like mothers navigating the loads that they carry, it has been uncovered that this ability is not something mothers just supernaturally gain; it is shaped by societal, cultural and self-expectations which stem from primitive patriarchally driven gender norms (Frizelle and Kell, 2010; Offer and Schneider, 2011). What is celebrated as a strength is, in reality, a response to stress, oppression and burnout.

The role of a mother has changed; it is no longer confined to the walls of the home, childbearing and fulfilling domestic responsibilities, mothers are now financial providers, too. Yet, despite their financial contributions, they still find themselves taking on the 'default manager' role within the household, due to gender expectations (Daminger, 2019). Thus, this dual burden that mothers carry has them searching for avenues where balance, relief and understanding are found. This balance is paramount for mothers who have babies or small children who are completely reliant on them. The difficulty in finding a balance between work and motherhood often leaves mothers in a position where they consider leaving their jobs, and ultimately, many do (Ciciolla and Luthar, 2019). However, given economic volatility, high levels of unemployment and many mothers now being sole or primary financial providers in their families, the option to exit the workforce is not as easy or possible as it once was (Ponce, 2023).

Remote work, packaged in its promise of flexibility and autonomy, has been highlighted as a possible solution for working mothers to balance this dual load of work and life (Pascual et al., 2024; Harrington and Kahn, 2025). However, the impact and implications of remote work in the South African labour landscape, especially as a solution for mothers, is significantly under-researched. Thus, this research seeks to uncover the lived experiences of remote working South African mothers with children under the age of five as a means to answer this question: Is remote work a liberating solution for South African working mothers seeking balance and opportunity, or does it instead reinforce inequities by enabling them to do more with less

support and protection? Furthermore, this research looks to make the changes which will allow remote work to become a viable solution for mothers.

This introductory chapter provides background and context for the overarching aim of the study. It explains the problem statement, outlines the objectives and questions that guide the study, gives the significance behind the study, traces the delimitations of the study and the justification for the theoretical frameworks chosen as a foundations for the study. The chapter then concludes with a brief overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Ontological Position and the Paradox of Remote Work

This study is grounded in an ontological position that recognises the lived realities of South African mothers as both objectively measurable and subjectively experienced (Ejnavarzala, 2019), reflected in the framing of an "ontology of South African mothers and remote work" in the title of this thesis. This means that while certain patterns, such as time spent on caregiving or access to organisational support, can be measured, mothers' identities, emotions, and lived experiences of balancing work and motherhood are equally valid, socially constructed realities that require interpretation. Central to this ontological stance is the recognition that remote work exists as a paradox for South African mothers: a labour model that holds genuine promise of flexibility and the protection of maternal identity and income, while simultaneously reinforcing gendered inequality and precarity in the absence of adequate policy and organisational support (Parry, 2024). This paradox, explored further in the literature (see Chapter Two) and interrogated through the study's theoretical frameworks (see Chapter Three), forms the conceptual thread running through this thesis.

1.2 Background and Context

Much of the existing scholarship on remote work and motherhood has been conducted in Global North contexts, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, where studies have shown that working mothers bore a disproportionate share of the intensified domestic and professional demands brought on by the shift to remote work (Adisa et al., 2023), often at the cost of job retention and well-being (Adisa et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2021; Zanhour and Sumpter, 2022). In Sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the Global South, similar pressures have been observed, but are compounded by additional structural barriers, including limited access to affordable and safe Early Childhood Development (ECD) facilities, unstable and costly internet infrastructure, and an absence of organisational and governmental policy

support (Horwood et al., 2021; James, 2022; Chomunorwa et al., 2023). Within this Sub-Saharan African landscape, South Africa presents a particularly complex case, shaped by structural inequality, digital exclusion, and enduring patriarchal norms (Gouws, 2017; Gradín, 2021; Makura, 2022).

According to Stats SA (2024), women make up 51% of the population, a demographic which includes those women who are mothers or working as caregivers, and who should not be ignored nor undervalued. Additionally, Stats SA (2025) reported that 35.9% of these South African women were economically inactive in the second quarter of 2025, and the main contributing factor to this economic inactivity was caregiving responsibilities. This highlights not only the social impact of caregiving, but the economic impact as well. In most cultures, women, especially those who are mothers, are expected to be the ones who take the primary responsibility of care for not only the children, but also others who are in need of care. Social norms, family traditions, and even personal beliefs, often reinforce the idea that caregiving is naturally a woman's role (Asuquo and Akpan-Idiok, 2021). This burden could be lessened by affordable, safe and well-regulated childcare; however, many studies have revealed that mothers in South Africa do not have the financial means to send their young children to crèche, pre-school or any other ECD caregiving facility (Jaggi et al., 2024). This is supported by the statistics produced by the South African Early Childhood Review (2024), which reported that a mere 36.8% of children under five are enrolled in formal Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes. In addition to financial constraints, mothers also fear for the safety of their young children, as these institutions are often not regulated, and the rising number of cases of kidnappings, as well as abuse of children in South Africa, is a significant and well-documented concern (Van Niekerk and Mathews, 2019).

New mothers also find themselves feeling victimised in workplaces and are often seen as incapable based solely on the fact that they are mothers (Chung and van der Horst, 2018). Moreover, new mothers feel heavy burdens of guilt and shame when they have to take time off to care for their small children (Delaney et al., 2023). Studies on sickness in children have revealed that children under the age of 13, more so under the age of 5, are more susceptible to illness than older children and will average between 7 and 24 sick days per year (Ball et al., 2002; Schuez-Havupalo et al., 2017). Thus making the three days of family responsibility leave granted to South African employees to care for sick children, inadequate (Smit, 2011). As a result, working mothers find themselves being pulled between the need to care for their child and earning and income and/or pursuing career aspirations. This creates considerable stress,

and ultimately mothers always put their children/ren first, resulting in them choosing to reduce working hours, turn down career opportunities or exit the workforce altogether.

The labour model that is often seen as a possible solution to anyone experiencing a crisis of work-life balance is remote work. Remote work is defined as a flexible type of employment arrangement in which job responsibilities are fulfilled outside conventional office environments through digital platforms (Donnelly & Johns, 2020). Thus, the flexibility of remote work should essentially allow an employee more freedom, autonomy and in turn provide better work-life balance as a result (Hunter, 2019). In South Africa, where infrastructure issues such as loadshedding, as well as expensive and unstable internet connections, are compounded by digital literacy issues and the lack of regulatory policy, remote work was not a widely utilised labour model, and therefore not a solution that was commonly highlighted when assessing the struggles working mothers face. However, the preconceived benefit and promise in which remote work was packaged, as well as its being an underutilised labour model, were changed when the COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly thrust the entire world into remote work (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (Kantroo et al., 2021) declared COVID-19 as a global health emergency, which led to the shutting of borders, restrictions on movement, total lockdowns and the widespread adoption of remote work (Matli, 2020).

The abrupt rise of remote work, which pre-pandemic was an uncommon and underutilised labour model, created confusion, panic and uncertainty for both employers and employees (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). This confusion, panic and uncertainty then opened new avenues of research within labour, gender, law, and sociology that uncovered some pressing issues regarding the load carried by working mothers and their experience of remote work. One finding that crossed borders was the uneven and intensified load that working mothers carried, despite the father, or other family members, being locked down at home as well (Dunatchik et al., 2021).

There are studies from high-income countries (including the United Kingdom and the United States) that show that working mothers, more than anyone else, bore the weight of heightened domestic and professional demands during this shift (Adisa et al., 2023). As a result of this disproportionate load these mothers were forced to reduce working hours, which had a negative impact on job retention, leaving them feeling stressed and burned out (Chung et al., 2021; Adisa et al., 2021; Zanhour & Sumpter, 2022). Similar findings emerged in lower-income countries

such as Brazil, India, and South Africa. However, factors such as limited formal, affordable and safe Early Childcare Development (ECD) facilities, unstable and expensive internet, and a lack of organisational and governmental policy support were identified as increasing the burden experienced by mothers in the Global South (Horwood et al., 2021; James, 2022; Chomunorwa et al., 2023).

The South African context revealed a landscape shaped by structural inequality, widespread digital exclusion, unreliable infrastructure, absence of legislation and policy and enduring patriarchal norms (Gouws, 2017; Gradín, 2021; Makura, 2022). Therefore, while working mothers in these regions experienced a disproportionate load of paid and unpaid labour in relation to men, as did working mothers in higher-income countries, their loads were made heavier by these additional struggles (Mahomed et al., 2022). In spite of these struggles and the uncovering of the skewed promise of remote work, the new labour model has continued to exist in the post-pandemic era (Munyeka, 2024). Many organisations saw benefits in productivity, reduced commuting costs and time, retention of employment, overall cost-cutting and better accessibility to skills. However, while remote work now exists as a widely used labour model in South Africa, legislation has not been adapted or implemented to accommodate it. Thus, remote work remains largely unregulated, underrepresented and with no legal protection (Pereira-Kotze et al., 2022). This grey area and gap in legislation are making remote work precarious rather than promising.

While the increase in the body of research on remote work through a gendered lens is undeniable, a major gap exists from the viewpoint of South African mothers in the post-pandemic era. As a result, there is a critical gap that exists in understanding how South African working mothers navigate remote work amid systemic inequalities in a post-pandemic world, balancing intense caregiving demands, confronting systemic inequalities, all without adequate legal or policy support.

1.3 Problem Statement

Remote work presents a paradoxical promise where mothers can preserve and protect their maternal identity while continuing to work and generate an income, but the true cost in the South African context remains underexplored. There is still limited, fragmented research, much of it pandemic-focused or not specifically centred on mothers of children under five, on the way in which remote work intersects with present and prevalent gendered expectations, systemic inequalities, and inadequate support structures that already situate working mothers

in vulnerable, unequal positions (Scholtz, 2023). This research study addresses these gaps by leveraging the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative phase will form a base understanding of the motivators, benefits, supports and experiences of South African remote working mothers with children under the age of five, and the qualitative phase will give these mothers a voice. The purpose of collecting this data is not only to understand and shed light on their lived experiences, but to provide insights that will help inform the changes needed to better support mothers navigating remote work, thus making it a reliable, stable and probable solution.

As mothers continue to carry the dual responsibility of financial provider and primary caregiver, a load that is compounded by limited access to affordable and safe childcare, entrenched patriarchal norms, and inadequate workplace protections (Gouws, 2017; Makura, 2022), it is imperative to explore any avenue that may provide relief. In saying this, while studies in high-income countries have documented the intensified pressures on working mothers during the rise of remote work in the pandemic, there is far less that is known about these dynamics in the South African context, where structural inequalities, unreliable infrastructure, and a lack of policy frameworks add further complexity, especially in the post-pandemic era. This absence of localised evidence makes it difficult to determine whether remote work serves as a genuine solution that can provide balance or whether it compounds existing inequities, just now in a digital form. These findings can therefore be used to harness the positives and rectify the negatives.

The post-pandemic era provides a completely different landscape, as not everyone is home all the time, which actually adds to the load of mothers as they have less present help, have to account for more commuting, and the mental load they carry of those they care for is far wider than it was during the confines of the pandemic (Tinker, 2024). Without pandemic restrictions there is also more demand from organisations as well (Savino and Foster, 2024).

This gap in knowledge is especially critical for mothers with children under the age of five, whose caregiving needs are more demanding; the responsibility a mother feels to care for a younger child is, as a result, more mentally and physically taxing (Nzima and Maharaj, 2023). Without a deeper understanding of their realities, remote work risks reinforcing inequities rather than alleviating them.

1.4 Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to explore the lived experiences of South African mothers with children under the age of five who engage in remote work, in order to understand how remote work shapes their ability to balance caregiving responsibilities and paid employment, and to generate insights that can inform organisational and policy interventions that support a viable, equitable and sustainable model of remote work for mothers in South Africa.

The study has the following objectives:

1. To explore South African mothers with children under the age of five's perceptions of how remote work affects their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.
2. To identify the specific challenges faced by South African mothers with children under the age of five in managing remote work arrangements.
3. To examine the key factors that influence work-life balance for South African mothers with children under the age of five in remote work settings.
4. To investigate the strategies South African mothers use to navigate remote work and motherhood.
5. To analyse how societal expectations and economic pressures shape South African mothers' decisions about participating in remote work.
6. To assess the adequacy of existing organisational and policy frameworks in supporting South African mothers engaged in remote work.

1.5 Research Questions

Guided by this aim, the central question driving this study is: *Is remote work a liberating solution for South African working mothers seeking balance and opportunity, or does it instead reinforce inequities by enabling them to do more with less support and protection?*

This study is structured around the following core research questions, which unpack this central question in relation to the specific objectives outlined above:

1. How do South African mothers with children under the age of five perceive remote work as enabling them to balance work and family responsibilities?
2. What are the specific challenges South African mothers with children under five encounter in managing remote work arrangements?
3. What factors influence the work-life balance of South African mothers with children under five in remote work settings?

4. What strategies do South African mothers employ to navigate the complexities of remote work and motherhood?
5. How do societal expectations and economic pressures influence the decision-making processes of South African mothers regarding remote work participation?
6. How adequate are existing organisational and policy frameworks in addressing the needs of South African mothers engaged in remote work?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The majority of research on remote work was conducted during the pandemic, which presented a very different experience for mothers working remotely than it does in the post-pandemic era. This research was also largely concentrated in high-income and developed countries, where unemployment, unstable and inaccessible infrastructure, historical oppression and other lower-income and developing country issues are not contributing factors. Thus, a gap was created in the understanding of the lived experiences of mothers engaging in remote work, not only in the post-pandemic era, but also through the lens of the unique South African landscape. Previous research has focused on high-income countries where factors such as digital infrastructure, formal childcare systems, and institutional supports are well established; this has excluded accounts of countries like South Africa, where realities are very different (Chung et al., 2021; Zanhour and Sumpter, 2022). While research on remote working mothers, notwithstanding the location of the study, has highlighted the well-documented disproportionate load that mothers carry in relation to fathers, in countries like South Africa these burdens are compounded by economic hardship, absent policy and logistical protection, entrenched patriarchal-driven gender norms, unreliable and inaccessible infrastructure, as well as unsafe and inaccessible childcare (Horwood et al., 2021; Makura, 2022). As a result, this study seeks to fill these gaps in the hopes of uncovering the triumphs and failures of remote work in providing South African mothers in the opportunity to protect their motherhood and livelihood, so that this understanding can be used to turn it into a viable, liberating and inclusive model of work.

Thus, the significance of this study lies in the contribution that it makes to the emerging body of feminist labour scholarship in the Global South through examining remote work not only as an employment model but as a site where care work, digital labour, and gendered power dynamics intersect. By uncovering how work–life balance is achieved, disrupted, or denied within socio-economic conditions that are very different to those on which much of the literature on remote work and motherhood is based, this study holds great promise in

uncovering that which will make remote work a viable, empowering and liberating option for South African mothers.

To support the study in achieving the objectives that it set out, the research makes use of a feminist theoretical approach, which integrates two complementary theories: Work–Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory. Work–Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000) is used in this study to help understand how the borders that are created to separate work and family become extremely permeable as a result of remote work, what this means and how it is managed. Intersectional Feminist Theory highlights how factors including identity differences, such as race, class, family/household structure, employment contexts or caregiving, intersect to shape access, opportunity, and labour expectations in the South African context of remote work (Gouws, 2017).

This study has real-world importance, as it speaks to everyday challenges faced by mothers who are trying to balance work and family life. In a country where caregiving keeps many women out of the workforce, remote work offers a way to stay employed while still meeting family responsibilities (Horwood et al., 2021; Nzima and Maharaj, 2023). However, as it stands the promise of remote work is a paradox due to the absence of societal, organisational and governmental support and policy frameworks that support South African remote working mothers, leaving this potential untapped. South Africa has not met the increasing number of remote workers in the post-pandemic era with proper policy and legislation to make this model of employment safe, regulated and viable (Munyeka, 2024). This absence of policy and legislation has left South African remote working mothers in situations of exploitation, instability, inequality, oppression and precarity (Scholtz, 2023; Parry, 2024). Thus, by bringing these realities to light, this study provides evidence that demands the immediate creation and implementation of organisational and national policies that provide protection through regulation, making remote work a viable, equitable and empowering option for mothers in South Africa. It highlights the opportunity remote work holds in allowing mothers to do it all, but it also uncovers the factors that are making it a new site of gendered inequality and oppression.

This research encourages organisations to move beyond surface-level flexibility and engage in a deeper, more intentional conversation about how to genuinely support remote working mothers, and to truly leverage the possibilities this model of work holds (Matli, 2020). There are many remote-working mothers who are taking on even more caregiving and household

duties while still meeting their work demands; organisations do not have compassion or make accommodation for this (Horwood et al., 2021). As it stands, organisations risk becoming part of the problem because remote work can reinforce inequality rather than reduce it.

Lastly, this study deepens the theoretical understanding of remote work by giving a voice to those who are living the struggles and triumphs - remote working mothers themselves. It sees remote work as a personal, gendered experience shaped by technology and motherhood, not just a structural or behavioural shift. It extends Work–Family Border Theory from the confines of traditional work where borders were easier to protect and into the future of work where these borders merge and permeability becomes higher. It also applies an Intersectional Feminist framework to explore how gender, care, class and race shape the lived experiences of South African remote-working mothers. This research brings a deeper understanding to feminist labour studies by framing remote work as both a site of struggle and a space of agency. It urges us to reshape our understanding of labour, grounding it in care, dignity, and strong systemic backing within postcolonial realities.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the lived experiences of South African remote working mothers who are caring for at least one child under the age of five. Each individual mother who fits these inclusion criteria serves as the unit of analysis.

The study accounts for all forms of remote work, which, in the case of this study, is understood as work that is performed partly or entirely outside of a traditional office environment and enabled by digital technologies (Donnelly and Johns, 2020). These remote working arrangements range from structured permanent roles to more casual contract or gig-based work, which often differ in terms of policy protections, availability, earning potential, job security, benefits and access to resources.

This study placed emphasis on mothers with children under the age of five, as this age requires significant caregiving which is normally shouldered by the mother (Nzima and Maharaj, 2023). The research is located in the South African context, characterised by structural inequalities, scarce affordable and safe childcare services, unstable digital infrastructure and patriarchal norms that influence how mothers experience remote work (Matika, 2022; Mtotywa, 2022). Additionally, the study adopts a post-pandemic lens, where patterns of labour, caregiving demands, and organisational expectations differ significantly from those observed during the

pandemic and where the large majority of research based on remote working mothers was conducted (Savino and Foster, 2024).

In alignment with the objectives of the study, the scope includes exploring the motivations, stressors, organisational supports, policy gaps, and caregiving demands that influence the work–life balance and the overall experience of remote-working mothers.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

This study places a primary and intentional focus on South African remote working mothers with children under the age of five. The reasoning behind this specific demographic is that remote work holds the possibility for mothers to continue working while raising young children; however, it is significantly under-researched in the South African context, and this study therefore aims to provide this understanding.

With caregiving being one of the main reasons that women in South Africa are exiting the workforce, it is important to consider alternatives, as the South African economic climate cannot afford for more people to be economically inactive. The fact that the children are under five is especially important, as children under the age of five in South Africa are not of formal school-going age. This has caused an ECD crisis, whereby mothers do not feel comfortable, and often cannot afford, to put their young children in ECD care facilities, leaving the burden of care on them (Matika, 2022; Nzima and Maharaj, 2023). In this study, fathers, other caregivers, and mothers who do not have a child under the age of five, have been excluded, as they do not meet the focus of this study. Another factor that led to the choice of this specific population is the fact that new mothers and mothers of young children often face greater workplace stigma and bias, as it is assumed that they have less time, are less committed and are more distracted because of being a mother to a young child (Correll et al., 2007).

Geographically, this study is limited to the landscape of South Africa. This choice is essential in capturing the intersection of remote work, motherhood, and socio-economic precarity within a context shaped by structural inequality, enduring patriarchal norms, and post-apartheid labour market dynamics (Frenkel, 2008; Moagi and Mtombeni, 2020; Mtotywa, 2022). To address the saturation of research conducted in developed contexts, where childcare systems, digital infrastructure, and policy environments differ substantially from those of South Africa, this study focuses on this unique and specific geographical context. The study includes all types of remote work, acknowledging that setups vary, from structured office roles to hybrid, freelance,

and gig work, each offering different levels of protection and support (Donnelly and Johns, 2020). The study also focuses on experiences of remote work within the post-pandemic period, where patterns of labour, caregiving demands, and organisational expectations differ significantly from those observed during lockdowns (Barigozzi et al., 2025; Harrington and Kahn, 2025).

Lastly, the study aims to create a broad understanding of this underexplored population, rather than generating generalisable findings. Through a sequential mixed-methods approach, the research seeks to uncover the motivators, benefits, struggles, and support factors from family, organisations, and government that shape these mothers' lived experiences of remote work and motherhood. The aim is to gain a richer understanding, to give light and a voice to the lived realities so that society, organisations and policy makers can turn remote work into a viable option that allows mothers to protect their livelihoods and their motherhood.

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides the background and context for the study, which establishes the social, cultural, and policy environment in which South African remote-working mothers navigate care and paid work. It presents the research questions and objectives which guide the study and fill the gaps that have been identified. It also explains the significance, scope and delimitations of the study, further outlining the relevance and need for this research to be conducted.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the reviewed literature, which revealed the research gaps, significance and direction, is presented. The method used to source and review the literature is also explained. The gaps in the literature are clearly outlined, further solidifying the relevance and direction of this study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This chapter shares the theories that were chosen to guide this study. It situates the theory in the relevance of this study and its context, as well as stating which research questions and objectives it serves to facilitate the understanding of. It also brings the theories together in a conceptual framework, showing how the two theories used come together to provide a complementary lens which assists in achieving the aim of the study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach used in the study. It defines, explores and explains why this approach was taken and how it complements the exploratory descriptive nature of this study. It also outlines the steps taken in both phases (Phase 1 Quantitative and Phase 2 Qualitative) providing a roadmap of the research process. The ethical considerations of the study are also outlined and explained in this chapter too.

Chapter 5: Quantitative Findings (Phase 1)

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative phase of the study. It outlines the response rate, demographic and contextual variables of respondents, tests of reliability and validity, as well as the descriptive correlation and inferential statistical results that were derived from this phase. These results guide the data collection done in Phase 2.

Chapter 6: Qualitative Findings (Phase 2)

This chapter builds on the results of Phase 1 through a qualitative data collection and presentation of results. It unpacks the findings from this phase under the relevant themes derived from the interviews, which were used to process the transcripts. It provides rich data that gives a voice to the statistical results derived from Phase 1.

Chapter 7: Integration and Discussion

This chapter synthesises findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study. It brings these two complementary phases together to answer and fulfil the research questions and objectives set out by this study. It draws on the theoretical framework as well as previous literature to further interpret the findings made by this study.

Chapter 8: Conclusion, Contributions and Recommendations

Lastly, this chapter summarises the study's contributions to theory, practice, and policy. It reflects on the theoretical implications for Work–Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory, and the practical implications for organisations and policymakers. The chapter also provides evidence-based recommendations for care-aware labour policies, equitable organisational practices, and flexible work models. Finally, it identifies directions for future research and returns to the study's central concern: whether remote work, in its current form, meaningfully supports South African mothers or simply redistributes existing burdens of care and labour.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the importance of researching the underexplored area of remote working mothers with children under the formal school-going age of five. It outlined the research objectives and questions which guide this study in achieving closing the research gaps which stand between making remote work a viable option for South African mothers or it just being another mechanism through which existing inequities are reproduced. The chapter has also briefly highlighted the theoretical frameworks guiding the analysis, including Work Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory, which provide an ontological lens for understanding how remote work reshapes mothers' daily routines, identity, and sense of agency. Additionally, this chapter highlights the gaps in the literature and support that have further embedded the existing situations of gendered oppression and inequality in the workforce into a digital site, as well as the precarious and exploitive nature of remote work that currently exists in South Africa. It has shed light on the absence of social, organisational and national policy and legislation, which is entrenching remote work as a further site of gendered inequality and oppression for working mothers, not one of choice and release. However, despite all the challenges, it has positioned remote work as a viable option, one that holds the potential power to make remote work an empowering, liberating and viable option for South African working mothers, but only if these issues are addressed with urgency. The next chapter turns to the existing literature that underpins this research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter proceeds to unpack the literature that was reviewed in preparation for this study. It highlights the path that gave rise to the inquiry to explore the lived realities of South African remote working mothers with children under the formal school-going age of five. As explained by Creswell and Creswell (2018) a literature review shares with the reader the results, theories and opinions derived from other research which is closely related to the study being undertaken. This chapter provides a background of information that helps the reader further understand the relevance of this study, as well as the existing research and documented experiences that led to the need for the study. The existing literature presented in this chapter will also assist in strengthening the interpretation of the results from the two phases of this study.

Additionally, this study employs Work-Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000) and Intersectional Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) as a complementary multi-layered theoretical framework, which further guides the understanding of the literature, the study and its findings. Work-Family Border Theory provides an understanding as to how remote-working mothers navigate the borders and boundaries between work and family, managing overlapping roles within the same physical and temporal spaces (Clark, 2000). Whereas Intersectional Feminist Theory highlights the overlapping identities such as race, culture, socio-economic standing, household/family structure and employment contexts that shape the unique challenges and opportunities mothers face in remote work arrangements, as well as what motivates them to choose to work remotely (Losleben and Musubika, 2023). When applied to remote work and motherhood in South Africa, these theories work together to give a deeper understanding of mothers' unique and often overlooked experiences. These theories are fully explored, explained and contextualised in Chapter 3.

This literature review explores the historical and structural context of motherhood and work, why work-life balance is so important to mothers of young children, remote work, the challenges and opportunities that remote work holds for working mothers, where organisation and legislative/governmental support stand in shaping these experiences and the gaps that have led to this study. However, before presenting the reviewed literature, the method behind how the literature was sourced is explained.

2.1 Methods of Searching

The researcher employed a narrative approach when conducting the literature review for this study to ensure that all viewpoints were considered. Ferrari (2015) highlights that one limitation of a narrative approach to a literature review is that it does not always include the process used to source the literature. As a result of this widely stated limitation, the researcher found it important to give a brief outline of the method that was used to source the literature for review in this study.

As a student of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) the researcher gathered literature using the UKZN Library Portal, Google Scholar, and a range of reputable academic databases and journals.

The researcher also used inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine which studies were relevant for review (Snyder, 2019). This included relevance, reliability and validity, context and date range. There were key themes that were used to guide the selection of search terms, and these were extracted through the process of inquiry into this field of research. These key themes include remote work, working mothers, dual roles, patriarchy, South Africa, feminist studies, gender inequality, COVID-19, work-life balance, industrial sociology, flexible work arrangements, hybrid work, working women, the digital divide, and others. The literature was further filtered through a conservative search range from 2000 to date, to ensure recent and relevant literature was drawn. This allowed for pre-, during, and post-pandemic research to be considered. Additionally, where there is literature that predates 2000, this was only used in cases where it was relevant and needed.

These measures were used to ensure that relevant, factual and credible literature was used to provide a strong foundation for understanding the study.

2.2 Review of the Literature

The traditional 8am to 5pm in-office work model underwent a dramatic shift when the global lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic thrust the world into remote work (Bilderback and Kilpatrick, 2024). Not all countries were ready for the abrupt and pervasive shift towards remote work that it brought about (Aksoy et al., 2022). What began as a crisis response quickly evolved into a new way of organising labour, and an untapped and under-researched field of study, which resulted in a boom of research centred on remote work (Jacks, 2021).

This growing body of literature uncovered both positive and negative impacts of remote work for mothers. A significant finding that emerged highlighted how mothers all over the world bore a disproportionate burden of work and domestic responsibilities in comparison to fathers and childless employees in remote working positions (Ayari et al., 2022). For many of these mothers, remote work did not simply represent flexibility or freedom as once perceived; it became a site where existing burdens were deepened and repackaged in digital form, often framed as personal choice (Brannon and Wiant Cummins, 2023; Martucci, 2023). However, several studies highlighted the positive effects of the removal of commutes, increased time at home, and the possibility of more flexible scheduling creating conditions for greater work–life integration and improved well-being (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020; Mtotywa, 2022). This duality, positing remote work as both a burden and a potential support system, shaped the focus of this study. By identifying the challenges mothers face, this research aims to highlight how remote work might be structured and supported to serve as a viable, equitable model of work for South African mothers, rather than another layer of inequality (Rosen et al., 2024).

The first section looks at the evolution of the role of a mother in society with a specific focus on the South African setting. This positions mothers in the world of work, explaining why they are required to juggle motherhood and employment.

2.3.1 Historical and Socio-Cultural Context of Motherhood and Work in South Africa

The role of a mother has never remained the same through history; it has grown in capacity, taking on more responsibility as generations pass the weight of collective failure on to those who birthed and nurtured them. Through these changes in the definition of 'mother', not only has the perception of broader society shifted, but that of mothers themselves (Moagi and Mtombeni, 2020). It is important to remember that it is not only the outward perceptions that define a mother's duties, but the ones that she experiences internally as well. When looking at the traditional role of a mother, it revolved solely around care for others, especially children, and the management and running of the home (domestic duties) (Fineman, 2019). These mothers were not paid a wage for their work, and this left their unpaid work undervalued, overlooked and expected rather than appreciated (Hanek and Garcia, 2022). After generations of oppression and expectation, these mothers started to internalise this thinking. This created a patriarchal mindset in society, leading many mothers to believe that their work was simply their duty, not something worth being paid for (Warren, 2011). In other words, caregiving was normalised as a 'natural duty', rather than being recognised as a form of labour with economic

and social value, which it was and still is. It is worth noting that earlier studies of motherhood focused almost entirely on biology and caregiving aspects. In contrast, contemporary perspectives recognise that motherhood is also shaped by culture, economics, and policy (Maher and Saugeres, 2007). Today, mothers are not only seen as those who birth and care for children, but also as individuals who are impacted by cultural, social and economic policies. This shift has allowed scholars to question not only what mothers do, but also how society defines and supports their roles. Additionally, it has made women question whether motherhood is still something made for all women (Deming, 2022). It is against this backdrop of gendered expectations that remote-working mothers in South Africa must negotiate their entangled roles of the unpaid caregiver and the paid worker.

Furthermore, this tension feeds directly into modern expectations that demand mothers to take on what social research calls a dual role. This dual role is explained as the balancing of paid employment with unpaid caregiving, and is disproportionately carried by mothers in relation to fathers (Wong et al., 2021; Lott and Wohrmann, 2022). Therefore, mothers today are not only raising children as they did in the past, but they are also doing this while being financial providers for their families (Tavero et al., 2018). This expectation grew out of the Industrial Revolution, which pulled women into the workforce out of economic necessity, but did not shift the expectations of their traditional roles to meet these new demands (Nchofoung et al., 2021). Despite this new role that women took on, like in their traditional roles, they were undervalued and unsupported, which left them in situations of extreme exploitation (Klasen et al., 2021). The research conducted by Barigozzi et al. (2025) claims that women carry more of the mental load in domestic tasks, feel less satisfied, and face greater emotional fatigue than men. This emphasises the negative effects that this dual burden has on mothers, the same effects that negatively impact their work, mental and physical health. Hong et al. (2025) argued that the disproportionate load that mothers now carry in terms of childcare also widens gender gaps that are already so prevalent and crippling. This argument stems from a study conducted on more than 5600 academics in the US and Canada, which collected data to show how childcare responsibilities mediate both career satisfaction and research productivity. Moreover, research by Madörin and Jacinto (2023) placed specific focus on the fact that mothers who enter the workforce and generate an income are still subject to gendered oppression, as the unpaid work which they take on remains undervalued alongside that of their paid work being subject to severe gender inequality in regard to wages, opportunities and choice. These perceptions shed

light on the fact that, despite having taken on the role of financial providers, mothers' unpaid gendered responsibilities remain undervalued, just as they were 20, 50 or even 100 years ago.

The continuing imbalance in care work led many scholars and feminist activists to rethink how society views and values it (Dengler, 2024). Throughout the 20th century, feminist movements have been fuelled by inequality, oppression, and exploitation to fight for fairer pay and greater opportunities in the workplace (Armentia). However, although there has been progress in regard to ensuring that women have better rights, it has not solved or lightened the load that mothers carry; it has merely provided more spaces for them to feel the burden of this load (Torres et al., 2024). The fact that gendered wage gaps and job segregation still exist shows that legal reforms alone cannot break down cultural norms (Ishizuka, 2021). The literature emphasises the support needed to protect working mothers in their dual roles. Research by Fitong Ketchiwou et al. (2022) further highlights that, in spite of organisational initiatives and workplace practices, women continue to face persistent barriers to career progression, proving that gender inequality is still a persistent problem in the workplace. This is additionally urged through research by González et al. (2022) who developed a theoretical framework that highlights the entrenched gender norms around caregiving, which keep wage gaps in place, since labour markets continue to undervalue care work. These bodies of research show that the pressures mothers face today are not only personal, but also social and structural, which echo the long-standing feminist economic debates over whether women's entry into paid work advances gender equality or simply adds new demands to old ones (Hornung and Comolli, 2025). Today, as we stand in the era of remote work, this pattern of gendered oppression, inequality and exploitation persists, and these challenges are faced to an even greater degree in the South African context.

In South Africa, global patterns are combined with deeply entrenched patriarchy, structural and social gendered inequality and economic hardship that has mothers shouldering a much heavier dual burden (Gradín, 2021; Nzima and Maharaj, 2023). Gender inequality started as far back as Colonialism and continued into the apartheid era in South Africa, where women were disproportionately concentrated in lower-paid jobs and underrepresented in managerial and professional roles, shaping the lived realities of South African women in the workplace today (Hassim, 2006; Gradín, 2021). While apartheid laws were primarily structured around race, all women faced oppression. All women, including those from different racial groups, suffered as a result of their gender, making gendered oppression a base identity when looking at any population of women to understand their experiences (Andrews, 2000). Furthermore, women

of colour were subjected to the combined effects of racial, gender, and class discrimination, showing the intersectional levels of suffering and challenges that shape their lives even today (Gouws, 2017). They were denied property rights, access to quality education, and opportunities for personal independence (Gradín, 2021). An intersectional perspective helps explain these layered inequalities, as women were not oppressed in a single or uniform way (Gouws, 2017). Their experiences were shaped by the intersecting influences of race, gender, culture, and religion (Gouws, 2017). In South Africa, we cannot generalise the experiences of mothers without accounting for their intersecting differences, which apply varying degrees of oppression above that on the basis of gender (Dawood and Seedat-Khan, 2022). As a result of these intersection levels of oppression, it is important that we do not assume that a white mother with access to stable internet, external childcare and economic stability will experience remote work in the same way as a black mother from a rural community where electricity is seen as a luxury. It is imperative to understand that, while apartheid ended decades ago, the effects of it are still felt today, and these effects influence which mothers have access to secure digital work, how they experience remote work, and the support that is available to them.

Moving into the present, a Rainbow Nation bursting with the promises of democracy, where racial barriers were formally abolished, we find South African mothers still suffering under the grip of gendered oppression (Andrews, 2000; Burger and Woolard, 2005). At this pivotal and monumental mark in history, a number of new laws were passed in South Africa to ensure that acts of discrimination would lead to legal repercussions and that the fruits of the land would be redistributed to all citizens. Some of these laws, including the Constitution of South Africa (1996), the Labour Relations Act (1995), the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997), the Employment Equity Act (1998), and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (2003) still stand strong today, but the degree to which they have made a positive impact in regard to the path they set to pave, is constantly questioned (Gouws, 2017). The questionable impact that these laws have had can be seen in the light of the fact that women currently earn about 30% less than men while doing the same work (Stats SA, 2024). While we cannot disregard the progress that has been made, it is important to note that this progress has only been made possible when the right conditions are in place, such as legal regulation and support (James, 2022). Supporting this, Gradín (2021) argues that occupational gender segregation persists in post-apartheid South Africa despite the implementation of these laws, with women still concentrated in low-income jobs. This pattern shows how long-standing social and cultural norms still shape women's economic roles, with many mothers steered into care-related work

(Hassim, 2006). Even in a democratic era, these structural inequalities limit women's choices about where and how they are able to work (Gouws, 2017), and it is no different in the era of remote work.

These historical patterns frame the context in which mothers now enter remote work. They do so within systems already shaped by these longstanding pressures, which challenge the idea that remote work is inherently flexible or liberating (Mtotywa, 2022). Some researchers question whether remote work disrupts traditional patterns at all, arguing instead that it often relocates them into digital spaces, repackaged as modern flexibility (Adisa et al., 2023).

2.3.2 Work-Life Balance and the Care Demand of Children Under Five

The idea of work-life balance is central to understanding how people manage the demands of work and family (Brough et al., 2020). This understanding is especially necessary when looking at a population of remote working mothers who are juggling work and family demands simultaneously and are hardly ever able to achieve balance. The concept originated when scholars tried to describe the strain that occurs when work and family needs clash (Guest, 2002). This conflict was later explained by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) as work-family conflict, where the duties from both areas pull against each other, making it impossible to meet the expectations of either. This term is now used by scholars doing research on family and work domains, including Brough et al. (2020) who share that this conflict is a type of inter-role stress that can make it difficult to perform well at work or at home. What we now mean by work–family balance has shifted over the years, growing out of new ideas as families and jobs have changed.

The earlier research that described and explained work-life tended to treat work and family life as separate domains instead of intersecting, and this led to the oversight of how deeply the two are actually connected (Greenhaus et al., 2003). However, newer studies have begun questioning this split, accounting for the overlap of work and life (Lott and Wohrmann, 2022). This disparity arose when the constructs of family and work started to shift, especially when mothers entered the workforce, and their primary responsibility no longer centred around birthing and raising children only. Building on this, more recent research by Brough et al. (2020) suggests that balance is not only about dividing time, but it is also about having satisfying experiences across different parts of life. In similar research, Fan et al. (2021) argue that work-life balance is about managing energy and involvement, not just hours. However, not all scholars agree that shifting the conversation to subjective satisfaction or 'energy

management' automatically improves outcomes for mothers. Some warn that it risks downplaying how structural conditions still dictate whose time and energy are most constrained (Adisa et al., 2022).

Diving deeper into the discussion on structural barriers in developing contexts, Hart et al. (2024) share that mothers from low-income settings like South Africa, who are caring for young children, often feel that programs which teach time or energy management do not really help, because their bigger struggles come from unstable jobs, poverty, and not having reliable childcare. Mothers in these contexts, who are shaped by harsh gendered struggles, do not have the luxury of complaining about digital infrastructure or training, as they are focused on survival. This idea was further supported by research conducted by Fielding-Singh et al. (2024) which found that mothers' experiences of balancing paid work and caregiving are shaped less by personal choice than by structural factors such as time scarcity, job insecurity, extreme dual demands and inadequate support. This is particularly true for mothers of young children, as the early years demand constant care and carry strong emotional significance.

This shows a need for studies that connect personal well-being with wider job and policy systems. Similarly, research by Isa and Indrayati (2023) highlights how digital tools and remote work have added new layers of pressure for mothers by blurring the boundaries that exist between paid work and unpaid caregiving, reinforcing existing gendered expectations. This gives rise to the concern that remote work is not fulfilling the promise of relief, but is instead creating a situation that offers mothers the flexibility to 'do it all', at a crippling cost. In stating that, these digital platforms and remote work were once perceived as tools that create balance; however, recent research has uncovered that they often collapse the lines between home and work (Seinsche et al., 2024). Work–Family Border Theory helps explain this dynamic by showing how highly permeable and flexible borders between domains may allow integration, but also increase conflict when constant childcare needs make it impossible to fully 'switch off' from family or work (Clark, 2000). Delaney et al. (2023) conducted an interesting study highlighting how caring for young children intensifies the struggles faced by remote working mothers. The heightened demands of care and attention-giving to young children make mixing motherhood and work a cycle of constant interruption that leaves mothers feeling as though they are not succeeding at anything. Adding to the impact of raising young children while engaging in remote work, a study by Mahamad et al. (2021) found that mothers raising children between the ages of 0 and 5 found it difficult to stay emotionally balanced or to separate work from home life. The constant demands of caring for young children made remote work feel

overwhelming, leaving little sense of balance. Thus, concerns are raised as to whether or not flexibility actually provides relief for working mothers or just repackages existing burdens.

These ideas highlight that work-life balance is more complex than simply having flexible working hours, as the understanding of remote work has previously been centred on (Kossek et al., 2022). In emphasising this, it is important to remember that there are scholars who identify flexibility as a way to reduce stress (Anwar and Graham, 2021), while others warn that it can heighten stress as a result of merging home and work without any reduction in the load that is carried across the two domains (Samuelsson et al., 2022). This paradox has been especially true for remote working mothers who are constantly juggling family and work.

The Dual Role of Working Mothers and the Intensity of Caring for Young Children

Being able to balance work and family demands is extremely important to working mothers, where work-life balance is not a want, but a means of survival (Chung and van der Horst, 2018). When working mothers are unable to manage or create balance and boundaries between work and life, it has a colossal impact on their health, job satisfaction, and whether these working mothers are able to remain economically active (Deming, 2022). There are many studies that highlight that when work demands and family needs clash, mothers often feel more stressed and less satisfied with their jobs (Parry, 2021). A notable study conducted by Maharaj and Dunn (2022) on 15 Black African mothers between the ages of 21 and 35 in South Africa, revealed that becoming a mother 'got in the way' of them remaining economically active and/or completing their education as caregiving demands took priority. Further adding to this, Pienaar et al. (2023) highlighted the pressures of care on mothers in the first 1000 days of their children's lives in their study on 18 South African mothers with children under the age of 2 and a half years. These studies put a spotlight on the intensifying demands of raising young children. Over time, this can lead to deeper problems like anxiety, burnout and depression (Camilleri and Spiteri, 2021). These impacts are amplified for mothers with children under five, whose care demands are especially intensive due to sleep disruptions, developmental milestones, feeding, emotional regulation and the overall intensified need for care of children in this age range (Saisto et al., 2008; Jaggi et al., 2024).

Many researchers agree that work–family conflict can be deeply harmful, and that the effects reach far beyond mothers themselves into work, family, friends and the community that surrounds them (Cooklin et al., 2015; Cha and Lee, 2024). This conflict often harms health, puts strain on relationships, and lowers productivity, so it is important to understand the

underlying factors that contribute to this. A study by Scholtz (2023) conducted on 22 South African parents, explored the balancing act between work and caregiving, showed how the line between home and work blurred. This blurring of the borders between work and family left these mothers with little-to-no room to breathe, as they leveraged off working early mornings and late nights in order to get uninterrupted worktime while their family slept. This constant adjustment created immense emotional strain on the mothers in this study. In a study by Balogun (2019) on 615 working mothers aged 20 to 35, it was found that work–family conflict was the biggest predictor of burnout, exhaustion, depression, and feeling unaccomplished. Solidifying this stark finding, a review that was compiled by Torres et al. (2024) on 52 articles published between 2010 and 2022 found that nearly one in four mothers leave work within a year of having a child, often because they cannot manage both paid work and caregiving. As a result, later studies propose that flexible work options could be an effective way to reduce these difficulties.

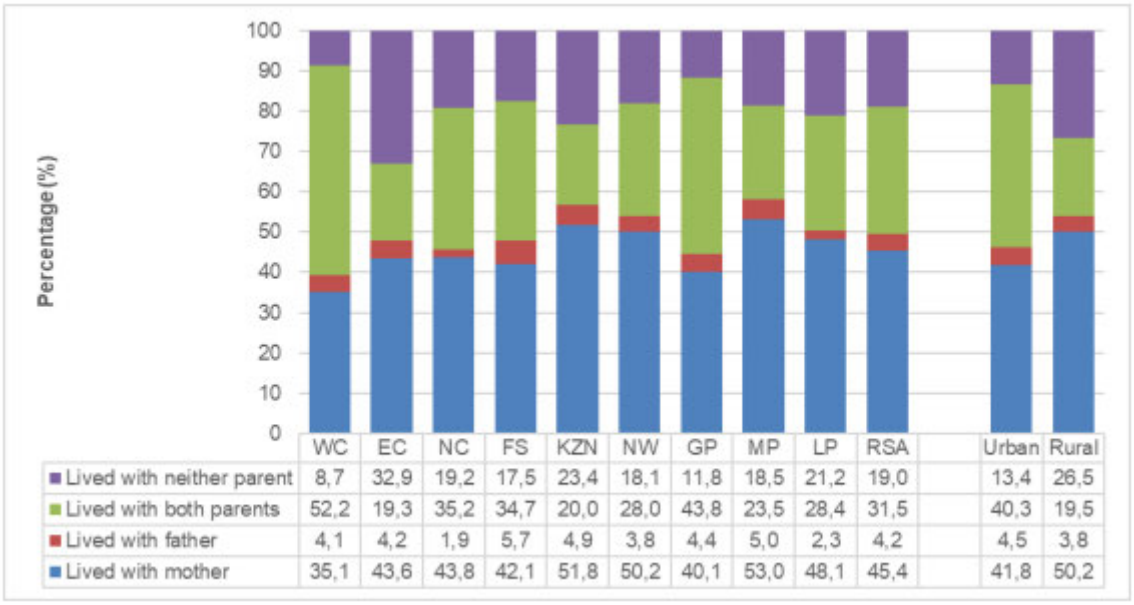
When looking at research that is centred on flexible working arrangements as a means of gaining balance, multiple studies highlight that the promise is not always fulfilled; however, positives were highlighted. Chung et al. (2021) guided a survey of over 3500 dual-income households in the UK during the pandemic and revealed that when fathers worked from home, the share of mothers carrying the main responsibility for housework and childcare dropped, showing a more equal division of these responsibilities. While this showed a positive impact on the load working mothers carried, in a post-pandemic era where fathers are less likely to still be working from home, the concern is raised regarding these gains being merely temporary and not a true reflection of the impact of remote work on working mothers. A study by Bernhardt et al. (2023) supports this concern as their study reflected a rapid decrease in the more equal distribution of childcare that was noted during the times of lockdown, when fathers returned to their traditional work patterns. This emphasises that sustained equal distribution relies on structural changes, not merely forced temporary shifts as seen during the lockdown. A study that was conducted by Kurowska (2018), just before the pandemic struck, found that remote work sometimes reinforces existing gender roles, as mothers were not situated in the spaces where domestic and caregiving tasks primarily took place and had the flexibility to engage in them. Additionally, more recent research by Echebiri et al. (2024) on 15 remote working mothers in Nigeria and South Africa, highlighted how this model of work intensified rather than eased pressures, as cultural norms left mothers shouldering both professional responsibilities and the main share of childcare and housework, as they now possessed the

flexibility to do so. While there is some promise of flexibility helping working mothers juggle work and motherhood, deeper structural change is needed, as flexibility alone is not enough.

Even as more mothers take paid jobs, they still do most of the caregiving at home (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020; Mahamad et al., 2021). This is not just a matter of choice but deeply rooted cultural ideas that continue to link mothers to home care, making it harder to share these duties equally (Saloshni and Nithiseelan, 2022). They argue that long-standing views about mothers' roles mean caregiving remains mainly on mothers' shoulders. In South Africa, these patterns are clear. Stats SA (2023) reports that only about 31% of children live with both parents, while almost half live only with their mothers. This means many mothers are responsible for both caregiving and earning an income. Moreover, the State of South Africa's Fathers 2024 report revealed that fathers spend only 11.7% as much time on childcare as mothers, with 2.5 times more mothers than fathers reporting over six hours a day of unpaid care work (MenCare South Africa et al., 2024). Additionally, Salami and Okeke (2018) highlight that absent fathers leave a larger financial burden on mothers. This overlap of economic and caregiving responsibilities is especially demanding in the first five years of a child's life, when costs of care are highest and the child requires near-constant supervision.

In Figure 2.1 below the stark levels of unequal distribution of primary childcare in South Africa are shown, making these imbalances visible across different provinces and between urban and rural areas. At the national level 45.4% of children live with their mother only, while just 4.2% live with their father only and 31.5% live with both parents. Both rural and urban areas show a stark disproportion, with 50.2% of children in rural areas and 41.8% in urban areas living with their mother only, compared to just 3.8% and 4.5% living with their father only. These realities make it much harder for mothers to achieve a healthy balance between work and family.

Figure 2.1 Percentage (%) distribution of children's living arrangements by province and urban/rural status, 2023



	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA	Urban	Rural
Lived with neither parent	8,7	32,9	19,2	17,5	23,4	18,1	11,8	18,5	21,2	19,0	13,4	26,5
Lived with both parents	52,2	19,3	35,2	34,7	20,0	28,0	43,8	23,5	28,4	31,5	40,3	19,5
Lived with father	4,1	4,2	1,9	5,7	4,9	3,8	4,4	5,0	2,3	4,2	4,5	3,8
Lived with mother	35,1	43,6	43,8	42,1	51,8	50,2	40,1	53,0	48,1	45,4	41,8	50,2

Source: Stats SA General Household Survey (2023)

Moreover, the role which organisations and employers play in work-life balance has been noted as critical. A study by Matli (2020) on first-time remote workers in South Africa shared that companies expected the same levels of productivity from workers during the pandemic when they suddenly had to shift to remote work. It is important to note that the scarcity of policy and total absence of legislation in support of this new model of work left remote workers in this study suffering heightened levels of stress, reduced levels of productivity, and overall lowered satisfaction; this was most prominent in women. A further study conducted by Saurombe et al. (2022), which was conducted on 102 South African employees in remote work positions, highlighted that while remote work was seen as convenient and cost-saving, because of the lack of Human Resources intervention, it also left workers working longer hours, navigating blurred boundaries, all while feeling extremely isolated. In many South African workplaces, there are no formal remote work policies, and existing labour laws do not fully address issues like working hours, boundaries, or enforcement (James, 2022). A report by Center (2020) revealed that around 22% of women in the study left the workforce during the coronavirus pandemic because of their dual burden and caregiving having taken priority. Moreover, 42% of mothers with children under the age of two left work during the pandemic, finding the pressure of dual roles unsustainable and choosing to focus on their children's care. Scholtz (2023) added to this evidence from a South African lens, noting that remote-working mothers

faced unreliable support, blurred boundaries, and had to depend heavily on their own coping mechanisms. It was also Makura (2022) who argued that these gaps contribute to slower promotion rates for women, as employers continue to see mothers as risky or less committed workers. This leaves mothers of young children under five, who are already under heavy caregiving pressure, dealing with greater job instability.

It is clear that work-life balance is a complex issue that plays a crucial role in shaping mothers' experiences of remote work. Gragnano et al. (2020) note that balance is not just about managing time, but also about well-being across different parts of life. The literature shows that work-family conflict remains a persistent challenge, made worse by systemic gender inequalities and changing demands in the way work is structured (Sikandar and Asma Bibi, 2024). More studies reveal that the struggle to achieve balance has pushed increasing numbers of women out of formal work (Horwood et al., 2021). This makes the necessity of finding practical ways to support mothers in managing work and family responsibilities more pressing than ever. It is key to recognise that individual strategies, such as time management, have received a lot of focus in regard to work-life balance, but structural and systemic constraints that fundamentally limit genuine balance for mothers have largely been ignored.

Remote work is often seen as a way to help working mothers achieve a better balance, largely because it promises flexibility (Cho and Voida, 2024). Fully understanding this promise and its constraints means looking closely at how remote work has become an integral part of the global labour system.

2.3.3 Remote Work: Adoption, Promise and Reliability

Remote work has transformed modern labour structures and is now seen as a central feature of today's employment models and the future of work (Donnelly and Johns, 2020). Scholars, Anwar and Graham (2019) define remote work as work carried out outside a traditional office through digital technologies. It covers many forms, including hybrid arrangements, flexible schedules, gig economy jobs, digital work, and virtual work. Donnelly and Johns (2020) argue that remote work represents a fundamental shift in how work is organised, using technology to reshape workplaces and professional connections. However, some scholars argue this so-called 'shift' may be overstated, suggesting it mainly retools existing capitalist pressures for productivity under new digital systems, without truly reconfiguring power dynamics (Gray and Suri, 2019). Research by McPhail et al. (2023) advises that many of the expectations around remote work, such as flexibility and reduced commute time, are undermined by the increased

performance demands, ever-present digital connectivity, and persistent managerial oversight, which led to far greater negative impacts. For remote-working mothers, this raises important questions about whether digital flexibility truly empowers them or merely extends employers' reach into the home.

Remote work itself is a broad concept which covers various different models of work with unique features; however, they are all centred on the alleged flexibility which comes from the freedom to work in multiple places. When looking at hybrid work, this model of work allows employees to split their time between home and a physical office space, combining flexibility with some in-person interaction (Bloom et al., 2022). Flexible work goes beyond the location in which work is performed by also giving workers control over their hours, letting them align work with personal needs, and not squashing both into one space and time (Kossek et al., 2022). The gig economy, another facet of remote work, involves short-term or task-based jobs found through digital platforms (Friedman, 2014). In this model, workers often function as independent contractors, which offers flexibility but also brings job insecurity (Anwar and Graham, 2019; Graham and Anwar, 2019). For mothers, this instability often collides with household financial needs, making the celebrated 'freedom' of gig work a precarious survival strategy (James, 2022). Digital work more generally includes any job performed online, from software development to virtual assistants (Kwan, 2021). Moving the office from a physical space to a digital space, virtual work is a specific type of digital work that relies on online collaboration tools and cloud systems for teamwork across distances (Yang et al., 2021). These models have gradually spread across various industries, changing both the nature and location of work.

The history of remote work has been shaped by economic, technological, and social change (Donnelly and Johns, 2020). Before the rise of digital technology, many home-based labour roles, such as agriculture, crafts, weaving, and shoemaking, served as the dominant work models tied to households, rather than offices (Barrero et al., 2023). The industrial era brought a different reality as it created formal office jobs and reinforced the idea of centralised workplaces (Casey, 2012). It was in the late 20th century, when telecommunications and the rise of the access to computers and the internet, that this centralised workspace started to shift, and flexibility started to move the walls for more than just a few (Choudhury, 2022).

The spread of the internet and mobile technology in the 1990s and early 2000s made it even easier to work remotely (Barrero et al., 2023), and by the 2010s, telecommuting became

common in IT, finance, and consulting, as businesses noticed it could save costs and boost productivity (Ferreira et al., 2021). Despite this boom and the open access to hardware and software to facilitate this new form of work, the adoption of remote work was slow, and favoured those who could afford it, who possessed the skills to navigate it and who had the agency to engage in it. This was until the pandemic thrust the world into the unprecedented adoption of remote work as a means of survival.

As countries imposed lockdowns and health-related restrictions, companies all over the world had to switch to remote operations as a means of continuity (Chan et al., 2022). This led to a sharp rise in flexible work models, even though many of these organisations, as well as their employees, were not prepared to facilitate this digital form of work (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). As presented in Table 2.1 below, statistics provided by HR Stacks (2025), the global participation in remote work jumped from a conservative 15% in 2019 to nearly 40% by 2024. The rapid shift proved that widespread remote work was possible, prompting worldwide discussions on how to maintain and regulate it after the pandemic (Sonnenschein et al., 2022).

Table 2.1 Percentage (%) of the Workforce Working Remotely from 2019 - 2024

Year	% of the Workforce Working Remotely
2019	15%
2020	35%
2021	38%
2022	39%
2023	40%
2024	40%

Source: HR Stacks (2024)

The statistics in relation to the overall global rise of remote work are definitely eye-opening, but they are more interesting when examined from a regional perspective. Table 2.2 below, based on statistics provided by HR Stacks (2025), shows a breakdown of the adoption rates by region, and we can see just how uneven this implementation has been. In the report, Africa had the lowest adoption statistic of just 25%, which can be linked to weak infrastructure, economic pressures, cultural norms, uneven and absent government support, as well as long-standing

inequalities (Pereira-Kotze et al., 2022; Saurombe et al., 2022). It is important to note that continent-wide statistics such as this mask significant diversity across African countries in terms of infrastructure, economic development, and labour market structures, and should not be read as representative of any single national context, including South Africa's. When looking at this finding through an intersectional lens, the issue moves beyond a mere geographical difference and sheds light on the truth of the digital divide, prevalence of historical inequality and a nation that is failing to meet the demands of the future (Fan and Moen, 2021; Mwansa et al., 2025).

Table 2.2 Regional Adoption Rate of Remote Work from 2019 - 2024

Region	Adoption Rate
North America	45%
Europe	43%
Asia	35%
South America	28%
Africa	25%

Source: HR Stacks (2024)

These statistics highlight the deep level of inequality with regard to remote work that is experienced in the unique landscape of South Africa, moving the impression of the rise of the digital era from a global notion to that of a site of further inequality in countries that are not prepared for it. For remote work to work well in contexts like South Africa, the fundamental problems must be tackled first (Bloom et al., 2022). These include strengthening digital infrastructure, providing equal access to technology, developing the digital skills of the masses, and implementing clear policies and labour laws that protect remote workers (Hunter, 2019). In South Africa, the boom in digital work poses a great risk in regard to widening the digital divide and adding to the already very unequal society that exists there.

Remote Work Adoption: Developed vs. Developing Countries

The data above shows that remote work has spread unevenly, illustrating a stark divide between developed and developing nations. Developed countries have generally adopted it faster and more thoroughly. Still, some critics argue these ‘standard arrangements’ in the Global North

can obscure persistent gendered divisions of care within households, questioning how far workplace flexibility truly translates into domestic equality (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020). Research by Barrero et al. (2023) revealed that by 2021, roughly 40% of U.S. employees were working remotely at least one day a week. Additionally, Braesemann et al. (2022) analysed data from 1.8 million remote jobs on an online labour platform and found that demand was highest in North America and Western Europe, where nearly all countries had at least ten online projects per million people by 2020. This shows exponential strength in the adoption of remote work even pre-pandemic. Moreover, the OECD (2022) also notes that flexible arrangements are now standard in many of these regions, thanks to supportive policies and employee welfare programs. These countries often meet all the core requirements to make remote work stable and appealing (Sonnenschein et al., 2022), but these same conditions have not necessarily dismantled traditional expectations about who shoulders unpaid care … and it is still often the mothers (Delaney et al., 2023).

Developing countries face more hurdles when it comes to the implementation of remote work. HR Stacks (2025) reported that Africa had the lowest adoption rate at just 25%, and this can largely be seen as a result of limited infrastructure, costly internet, unstable power, and deep socio-economic divides (Saurombe et al., 2022). Additionally, a report by Lund (2020) presented that in many emerging economies, only 12% to 26% of work time could be performed remotely without reducing the effectiveness of the work being done in comparison to traditional operations. This further highlights the structural limits of job types, technology, and industries. However, it is important to note that while developing countries face struggles with the adoption of remote work, they are not excluded from reaping the benefits, but these benefits remain uneven because of who is able to access them. Research conducted by Viollaz (2022) revealed that while developing countries face structural limitations, improvement in work-life balance, reduced commuting time, and increased job satisfaction for those who can access it has been noted. Moreover, a study conducted in Albania by (Çera et al., 2022) supported the benefits despite the barriers, showing that virtual/remote work offered schedule flexibility, better work-family balance, and opportunities to work for international organisations, increasing career development and income opportunities. Thus, while most developing nations show promise in the adoption of remote work, and the benefits are present, there is still a stark presence of inequality in access that needs to be addressed.

Remote Work in the South African Context

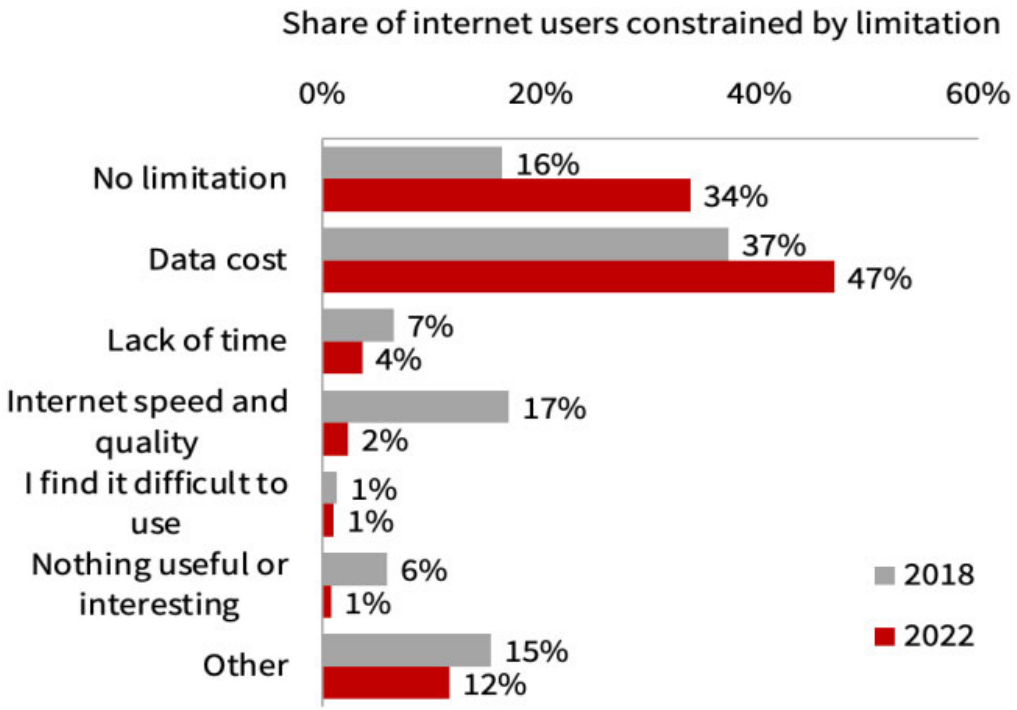
In South Africa, remote work holds promise, but as it currently stands, this promise is situated in a paradoxical context where possibility exists, but not without cost. The high unemployment rate, which sits at around 32.9% overall and 45.5% among young people, puts the South African people in an extremely vulnerable position (Stats SA, 2024). Added to this, South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world, with a Gini coefficient of 0.63 (McKeever, 2023). These pressures affect who is able to engage in remote work and truly leverage the possibilities that it promises.

Remote work is balancing on the rise of technology, on the stability, accessibility and skill sets that make this new model of work possible and, in contrast, the failure of it for those who do not. According to Arshad et al. (2024), digital infrastructure directly impacts productivity and satisfaction in remote work. Therefore, unequal access to technology, skills, and stable internet creates serious obstacles to those wanting to engage in remote work (Ndoya and Asongu, 2022). Matli (2020) conducted a study on 23 remote workers in South Africa and this research brought to light the challenges remote workers face trying to navigate this new model of work while battling infrastructure issues such as power outages (loadshedding), unstable and expensive internet, lack of digital skills, and high employer expectations. In the same light, research by Gillwald (2024) highlights that the digital divides are worsening the existing inequalities, the same inequalities that have failed to help those who would benefit from and want to engage in remote work, such as mothers struggling to juggle their dual roles. South African mothers are not able to fully leverage the benefits that remote work could give them, as they are already drowning in inequality without this new site that poses even further gendered oppression (Lubisi and Mwapwele, 2024; Mwansa et al., 2025).

For many people who are living in rural or low-income communities, the high cost of internet access and limited technology make remote work much harder to sustain (Dumako, 2023). Mwansa et al. (2025) raise the point that urban areas are better equipped to support remote work, as they have better infrastructure, and the general population normally possesses higher levels of digital literacy. However, in South Africa, high data prices, unstable internet connections, and unreliable power make remote work difficult, even in urban areas; this is a struggle that global debates often overlook (Gillwald, 2024). Strengthening this argument, South African-derived statistics reveal that only 28% of South Africa's workforce was working offsite in 2023, well below the global average of 40% (Stats SA, 2024). Figure 2.2 below shows the main barriers limiting internet use in South Africa, a critical factor for remote work. While

the share of people facing 'no limitation' rose from 16% to 34% between 2018 and 2022, high data costs remain the top challenge, far outweighing concerns like speed or quality.

Figure 2.2 Main Limitations Preventing Users from Using the Internet As Much As They Want To



Source: Internet use barriers and user strategies: South Africa Report (2023)

This means that even as digital literacy and infrastructure slowly improve, the high cost of data ties remote work participation to South Africa's broader economic crisis (Dumako, 2023). In a country where putting food on the table is a struggle, paying high costs for data to engage in remote work would mean not eating.

Additionally, the job market in South Africa, as a result of the crippling rate of unemployment, is competitive, and opportunities are scarce (Sibeko, 2024). This has opened the door for global companies to exploit South Africans, paying them 30% to 50% less than they would pay people in their own countries or other developed countries to do the same work (Munyeka, 2024). This raises ethical questions about whether remote work merely globalises precariousness, allowing transnational firms to exploit local inequalities under the guise of 'borderless opportunity' (Graham and Anwar, 2019). Adding to these pressing concerns, the absence of legal frameworks in South Africa leaves workers in situations where they are being exploited, working long hours, being paid unfairly and in a constant state of vulnerability (James, 2022). Work-Family Border theory (Clark, 2000) suggests that for mothers, where childcare

responsibilities overlap directly with work responsibilities in remote work settings the situation puts them in a heightened level of stress rather than reducing it (Rosen et al., 2024).

As remote work becomes a permanent part of the global economy, its effects go beyond technology and access. In South Africa, the issues of digital skills and connection are built on a history of inequality, coupled with economic pressures (Nwosu et al., 2023). This situates South Africa as a unique and pressing site of inquiry in the space of remote work as opposed to that of high-income countries, where the majority of research in this field in the post-pandemic era has been conducted (Echebiri et al., 2024). It is evident that remote work may act as both a motivator (through potential flexibility and income generation) and a barrier (through blurred domains, digital divides, and employer expectations), shaping the lived experience of mothers (Scholtz, 2023; Soares et al., 2023). The next section explores these issues in more detail.

2.3.4 Challenges of Remote Work for Working Mothers

There are many studies that emphasise both the promise and the pitfalls of remote work in relation to mothers who carry the combined weight of paid employment and unpaid caregiving (Lyttelton et al., 2022). While remote work is often promoted as a way to achieve a better work–life balance, and this benefit has been noted in multiple studies, across multiple nations, the reality for many mothers is far more complicated due to several compounding factors that are unpacked below.

Childcare and Domestic Responsibility

It is not a new finding that working mothers face the struggle of balancing paid and unpaid work on a daily basis with little support and a lot of expectation. This constant need to sacrifice and prioritise leads to what researchers describe as role spill over and work–family conflict, also referred to as work–life boundary conflicts (Lott and Wohrmann, 2022; de Laat, 2025). These concepts explain how work and life spill over, merge, blur and cross over into one another (Carvalho et al., 2021; Delaney et al., 2023). These concepts run especially true in the space of remote work, where mothers of young children are now preserving both their motherhood and livelihood in the same space, often jumping the borders between work and family, increasing the permeability of these borders, which eventually end up completely overlapping (Horwood et al., 2021). In a study conducted by Delaney et al. (2023) on 12 remote working mothers in several EU countries, it was noted that working from home led to heightened mental load as a result of the boundaries and borders between work and home

constantly crossing. Additionally, research by Horwood et al. (2021) on new mothers in South Africa, presented the challenges of returning to work as a result of limited childcare, unstable informal work, and poor quality or risky care which forced them to either exit the workforce entirely or reduce their working hours drastically in order to care for their young child. Moreover, Mahamad et al. (2021) conducted a study on 20 working mothers of children under five in Malaysia and found that remote work was often overwhelming, as constant childcare interruptions, emotional regulation challenges, and blurred boundaries left mothers struggling to balance paid work with the unrelenting demands of caregiving. Although these studies are situated in very different economic contexts, a consistent pattern emerges. EU mothers navigated boundary permeability, South African mothers contended with unstable and informal childcare provision, and Malaysian mothers managed constant interruptions. Across all three contexts, remote work did not resolve the tension between paid and unpaid labour but instead shifted it into the home. The South African findings, however, reveal an additional structural burden. The near absence of reliable, formal childcare infrastructure compounds the strain, making the challenges of balancing work and caregiving more acute than those reported in the EU and Malaysian studies.

Another challenge is what researchers call 'digital presenteeism', which is the pressure to be constantly online and responsive, even outside of normal working hours (Garcia-Iglesias et al., 2023). Oakman et al. (2020) place emphasis on the mental and emotional consequences that come with remote work and the pressure to always be available to both work and home demands. In support of this, Parry (2024) explores the flexibility paradox of remote work where the promise of flexibility promises control over time, but more often than not, breaks down the spatial and temporal borders between work and home. Moreover, an earlier study by Hilbrecht et al. (2008) on 18 Canadian teleworking mothers in professional roles, highlighted that the time saved from commuting was initially quickly turned from a positive promise of downtime and load lessening, to a reallocation in paid work, childcare, or household duties. Supporting these findings, the research by Delaney et al. (2023) solidifies the spill over of work and home, as mothers in this study found themselves working early mornings and late at night in order to meet the demands of their jobs while managing childcare.

Furthermore, Dugan and Barnes-Farrell (2020) notes that expectations for mothers to manage domestic duties on top of increased work demands creates an unsustainable load, deepening gender inequalities. Research conducted by Echebiri et al. (2024) on 15 mothers in the service sector who work remotely in Nigeria and South Africa, highlighted the intensification of

domestic responsibilities for these mothers when home became the primary site of work. Additionally, a survey of highly educated mothers in Finland and the Netherlands during the COVID-19 lockdown supported this intensification of domestic responsibilities, as these mothers found it extremely difficult to complete work when home and work became one space (Yerkes et al., 2022). Notably, this intensification of domestic responsibility is evident across diverse social and economic contexts. It is experienced by highly educated mothers in high-income European countries as well as by mothers working in the service sector in Nigeria and South Africa. This consistency suggests that the blurring of boundaries between work and home is an inherent feature of remote work rather than solely a consequence of infrastructural or economic disadvantage. However, for South African mothers, these challenges are amplified by economic precarity and limited policy protection.

This merging of work and life under one roof leads to what is called work intensification (Zanhour and Sumpter, 2022). The flexibility that remote work offers becomes an illusion, as this plasticity often turns into extended working hours, extending rather than reducing loads (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). There is debate as to whether the load intensification and blurred boundaries are a result of poor time management or if they truly reveal deeper structural problems in how remote work is designed and governed (Kossek et al., 2022). In remote work arrangements, workers do not have the physical borders of office walls as those in traditional workplaces do, and this leaves them unsure where one border starts and the other ends, resulting in unpaid working hours and many negative mental health effects (Shi et al., 2023). There are some scholars who argue that by framing overload as a matter of personal coping, organisations deflect responsibility for workloads and policies that structurally disadvantage mothers (Barigozzi et al., 2025).

In the South African context, access to affordable, reliable childcare is a key structural variable shaping whether remote work helps or harms (Scholtz, 2023). Where childcare is inaccessible or unaffordable, mothers must perform simultaneous paid and unpaid work in the same space, amplifying boundary permeability and increasing conflict. Moreover, research conducted by Bam et al. (2024) on 2029 female academics across South Africa during the pandemic, also put remote work in the position of heightened role conflict and the pressure to be ‘always on’.

One of the most presented findings across borders during the pandemic was the disproportionate cognitive, mental and domestic load that mothers carried in relation to fathers, despite fathers being home as well. In South Africa, Horwood et al. (2021) found that informal

working mothers reported being unable to perform their work as they had before, as they attempted to balance work with childcare under lockdown conditions, which led to heightened stress and reduced productivity. Similarly, a study conducted by Pillay and Struweg (2023) described how South African women faced a 'double-double shift' during the lockdown period, simultaneously acting as employees, caregivers, and home-school teachers while still having to carry the bulk of household labour. Craig and Churchill (2021) reported that during the pandemic, in homes where both parents worked, it was the mothers who saw a stark increase in unpaid domestic and caregiving work of an average of 2 hours and 30 minutes per day, compared to just over 1 hour and 30 minutes for the fathers. In another study, Petts and Carlson (2023) found that despite both parents being home and working remotely, it, again, was the mothers who spent on average 5 hours per week on cognitive labour such as planning and organising family needs compared to just 2 hours for the fathers. Additionally, this unequal division of unpaid labour was significantly associated with higher stress and more depressive symptoms among mothers in the study. Although drawn from different national contexts and using different measurement approaches, these studies converge on a strikingly consistent pattern: mothers working remotely alongside a co-resident partner absorb roughly 1.5 to 2 times more unpaid domestic and cognitive labour than fathers, regardless of whether the setting is South Africa, Australia, or the United States. This consistency suggests the imbalance is rooted in entrenched gender norms rather than being a by-product of any single country's infrastructure or policy environment.

These studies highlight the added pressures mothers in remote working positions face. This not only blurs the boundaries between work and home but also builds strain that leads to the mental and emotional consequences which these mothers face.

Mental and Emotional Consequences

Boundary management issues have been highlighted as the main cause for the severe mental and emotional consequences that remote working mothers face (Adisa et al., 2022). When looking at remote working mothers through the lens of Boundary Theory, these mothers set up mental and physical lines to separate their different roles and responsibilities; however, the load that they carry often makes this difficult (Melady, 2024). Carvalho et al. (2021) explain how managing boundaries is an important tool that often eases loads and reduces stress, but in the case of remote work, these boundaries blur and are difficult to maintain. Studying the experience of female academics in South Africa during the pandemic, Bam et al. (2024) noted how, when work and home became the same space, these women found it extremely difficult

to manage as caregiving caused great disruption to their work (Ziedelis et al., 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). These overlapping demands make it extremely difficult for mothers to draw boundaries between where one role begins and the other ends, leaving them in a state of constant availability and feeling as if they have never totally satisfied the responsibilities and expectations of any role (Brym et al., 2022; Garcia-Iglesias et al., 2023).

The pandemic uncovered a lot of the mental and emotional strains that mothers experienced when put in a remote working position while caring for their children. A study done by Delaney et al. (2023) highlighted the severity of the increased mental, cognitive, emotional, and domestic loads that mothers experienced during the pandemic. The mothers expressed being exhausted, feeling stressed, having anxiety that stemmed from the pressure to always be available, and guilt, all of which resulted in reduced personal well-being. Moreover, a study by Brym et al. (2022) on 452 working parents during the pandemic, of which 191 were mothers, reported that mothers experienced heightened levels of depression, with one in five of them falling into the range of minor or major depression. A broader study by Wells et al. (2023), who reviewed 34 empirical studies from 2020 to 2021 on remote work during the pandemic, further strengthened the findings that remote work has severe negative mental health implications. These studies highlight the emotional and mental consequences of remote work on mothers that were uncovered during the pandemic; however, it is important to note that these did not disappear with the pandemic.

Despite research slowing down when lockdowns lifted, the pressures that mothers who are working remotely face in the post-pandemic era are still prevalent and equally as concerning, if not worse Salcedo (2021). There is a large amount of research that links the combination of remote work and childcare with stress, guilt, exhaustion, and frustration as the mental load increases, but there is a major gap in post-pandemic era research (Delaney et al., 2023; Penna et al., 2023; Suarez et al., 2023).

The next section unpacks the battle between the ‘Good Mother’ and the ‘Ideal Worker’, a conflict that becomes especially visible in remote work settings where home and work boundaries are blurred.

The ‘Good Mother’ vs ‘Ideal Worker’

Another major issue that remote working mothers face is the clash between two powerful social expectations: that of being a ‘good mother’ and that of the ‘ideal worker’. Extensive research has explored how these conflicting ideas discriminate against, limit and oppress mothers

(Zanhour and Sumpter, 2022). The concept of the ideal worker is based on outdated norms centred on a man with little to no domestic responsibilities (Neely, 2020). It still largely reflects a male breadwinner model, where the worker is fully devoted to the job without being distracted by caregiving (Williams, 2001). Traditionally, men could focus on work because women were expected to handle the home. In contrast, being a 'good mother' meant prioritising caregiving above all else, without the competing demands of paid work (Zhou, 2020; Miller and Riley, 2021).

Motherhood alone demands enormous time as well as emotional availability. A study by Smith and Forrester (2013) revealed that exclusively breastfeeding mothers spent between 18 and 21 hours per week nursing, which adds up to roughly 1000 hours over the first year of the child's life, and is referred to in relation to that which is close to the workload of a full-time job. Beyond this maternal right to breastfeed and nourish one's child, mothers of young children experience debilitating sleep disturbances. There are multiple studies that show mothers of infants wake between two and three times a night to feed or settle their baby, thereby breaking their own sleep (Mindell et al., 2006; Tham et al., 2017). These night-wakings often continue beyond infancy, with up to 40% of toddlers and pre-schoolers still experiencing frequent sleep disturbances, which prolongs maternal sleep disruption into the early childhood years (Hash et al., 2020). Moreover, a South African study conducted by Cohen et al. (2015) highlighted the care demand placed on mothers of children under the age of five as a result of the high incidence of hospitalisation for acute lower respiratory tract infections among children under five, especially infants. These studies only touch on the demands that motherhood places on mothers of young children, without even factoring in the additional demands of paid work.

On top of all the pressures new mothers already face, traditional, cultural, and religious expectations add even more through harsh judgments. In many cultures, being seen as a 'good mother' is tied to self-sacrifice and constant availability, a belief reinforced by social norms and, in some cases, by religious teachings that place caregiving above all else (Knight et al., 2022; Wong, 2023). These expectations put mothers in a double bind. Those who focus on caregiving may be seen as less committed at work, while those who focus on their careers are often judged as neglectful or bad mothers (Cuddy et al., 2004; Correll et al., 2007). These findings highlight how the 'good mother' ideal collides with the 'ideal worker' norm, which sets an impossible standard for mothers and entrenches emotional, social, and economic penalties when they inevitably fall short.

There is a motherhood penalty that working mothers face in the workplace, where simply being a mother denies them career progression, opportunity, and heightens stigma and bias (Deming, 2022). Mothers find themselves in perpetual cycles of constant sacrifice and often have no choice in the sacrifices that have to be made. Research by Parry (2021) highlights that many South African employers do little to support working mothers, instead making it more difficult for them to succeed in the workplace. Additionally, earlier research by Meeussen and Van Laar (2018) highlights how these unrealistic, dual expectations leave mothers feeling depressed, doubtful, and burnt out. A report issued by Deloitte (2024) which drew from 5000 women across 10 countries, revealed that, despite remote and hybrid work increasingly becoming the new normal, 95% of respondents felt that asking for flexibility would harm their chances of professional advancement. This further strengthens the bias, stigma and judgment that mothers face in the workplace as a result of the battle between being a 'good mother' and an 'ideal worker'.

These issues reveal that remote work isn't automatically helpful for mothers; it depends on access to childcare, healthy boundaries, good workplace support, and more equal views on caregiving (Bernhardt et al., 2023). In South Africa, these realities are further complicated by socio-economic inequality, cultural expectations, and infrastructural challenges (Nwosu et al., 2023; Mwansa et al., 2025). Thus, understanding these contextual barriers and supports is crucial for assessing under what conditions remote work becomes not only possible but sustainable for mothers.

2.3.5 Contextual Barriers and Supports in South Africa

While there are numerous studies showing that remote work is challenging for all mothers, South African mothers deal with added barriers such as inequality, patriarchy, poor infrastructure, and little to no government support (Moagi and Mtombeni, 2020; Parry, 2021; Matika, 2022). This creates a group whose experiences in remote work differ from those of mothers in other parts of the world, and who need to be understood in light of their individual and unique circumstances (Rosen et al., 2024). A substantial body of research positions these barriers as a means to keep economic systems dependent on mothers' low-paid work and unpaid caregiving, raising questions about who really benefits when mothers struggle to find stable, fairly paid remote jobs (Chopra and Zambelli, 2017; Lyttelton et al., 2022). The most frequently cited barriers include digital exclusion, economic inequality, strong gender stereotypes, patriarchal presence, and a lack of access to ECD services (Dumako, 2023; Jaggi et al., 2024;

Lubisi and Mwapwele, 2024). Together, these issues influence mothers' chances of finding and keeping remote work.

Many South African mothers find it difficult to be productive in remote working positions, or even to engage in remote work, as a result of unreliable and expensive infrastructure (Lubisi and Mwapwele, 2024). A study conducted by Nel et al. (2024) reported that South African mothers working remotely during the pandemic noted difficulties with technology as a factor which made remote work harder and added to the stress of it. Additionally, Lubisi and Mwapwele (2024) reported that infrastructural problems like power outages were highlighted as one of the most pressing challenges and downsides of hybrid/remote work by the 11 women in the Information and Communication Technology sector from 8 telecom companies listed on the JSE who took part in their study. Furthermore, in a study by Scholtz (2023) on 22 remote-working child caregivers in South Africa, of whom the majority were mothers, technological resources were noted as uneven and huge contributors to stress. Notably, even participants in Lubisi and Mwapwele's (2024) study, despite working in the relatively well-resourced ICT sector, reported infrastructure as a significant source of stress. This suggests that infrastructural barriers to remote work in South Africa cut across occupational sectors rather than being confined to low-income or under-resourced contexts. The findings challenge the assumption that digitally intensive sectors are insulated from the infrastructural constraints that shape remote work experiences. These infrastructure issues made the experience of remote work less favourable and had a direct impact on the stress which these mothers face.

The digital divide extends past infrastructure, covering the skills and knowledge needed to use technology (Chomunorwa et al., 2023). As a result of the lasting effects of historical oppression through colonialism and apartheid, many mothers in low-income or rural areas lack the skills and training needed to navigate online platforms and remote tools (Barnard-Ashton et al., 2018; Van Rheede, 2024). This gap is not accidental but tied to South Africa's history of unequal education, which continues to disadvantage mothers of colour, highlighting the intersection of gender and race in regard to digital literacy and the accessibility of remote work (Shiferaw, 2024). Keating et al. (2022) highlight that many women rely on informal support from friends and family to learn how to use technology, and that very few have ever received formal training. Additionally, a study by Shiferaw (2024) found that in several South African municipalities, the estimated gender gap in cell phone ownership, tablet ownership, or internet use is over 30% in favour of men. These studies underscore the gendered disparities in technology use in South Africa, much of which stems from gaps in digital literacy.

Furthermore, gender disparities are one of the most pressing and crippling issues that South African mothers face, not only in regard to digital literacy and access, but in every sphere of life. As South Africa is still deeply rooted in tradition and culture, all of which are shaped by patriarchy, mothers' daily lives are still predominantly shaped by gender norms and expectations (Nel et al., 2024). While a large portion of literature from all areas of the globe showed a disproportionate load of domestic responsibility placed on remote working mothers, the severity of this is heightened in South Africa, where patriarchy has given rise to epidemics such as gender based violence (Republic of South Africa and Department of Women, 2024). Research by Miall et al. (2023) revealed that remote working women were 40% more likely to experience acts of domestic abuse than those working in offices. Similarly, Mahlangu et al. (2022) reported the increase of gender-based domestic violence in South Africa during the lockdown period. Moreover, there are multiple studies which highlight the intensified pressure remote working mothers in South Africa face with regard to the expectation of maintaining their traditional roles and gendered expectations, despite being an income provider (Scholtz, 2023; Nel et al., 2024). Remote work often reproduces these expectations rather than disrupting them, as it relocates paid work into the same physical space as unpaid labour, intensifying rather than relieving these pressures that mothers face (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020). Because of this, mothers are often expected to do it all: earn an income and keep up with caregiving at home (Nzima and Maharaj, 2023).

A further barrier lies in the lack of affordable and reliable childcare in South Africa. Access to quality, regulated, safe and affordable ECD services in South Africa are limited (Jaggi et al., 2024). The South African Early Childhood Review (2024) reported that only 36.8% of children under four are enrolled in formal ECD programs. This highlights that the majority of children under the age of five are therefore cared for by their mothers or through informal arrangements. Recent surveys of ECD centres in South Africa show that monthly fees average about R509 per child per month (Halli, 2024; Kika-Mistry and Wills, 2024). In relation to the average earnings of women in South Africa of R4800, it is clear to see how even the average amount for ECD care can take food off the plates of families (Stats SA, 2022).

South African mothers also face institutional pressure in the workforce. South African workplace cultures are still strongly grounded in patriarchy despite the multiple attempts by policy and legislation to lessen this gendered oppression (Matotoka and Odeku, 2021; Mabungela et al., 2025). Research shows that mothers who request flexible work arrangements are often perceived as less committed employees, reinforcing the ‘motherhood penalty’ and

limiting opportunities for career progression (Pienaar et al., 2023; Sibeko, 2024). Additionally, a report by Magadla et al. (2019) titled "Does a Motherhood Penalty Exist in the Post-Apartheid South African Labour Market?", reported that mothers in South Africa tend to earn less than similar women without children, especially in lower-earning and skilled positions. Moreover, South African research shows that hiring managers often perceive mothers returning to or applying for flexible or remote positions as less committed and less competent, frequently considering them suitable only for lower-level roles, a bias that is not equally applied to men (Tukani, 2023). Similarly, Fitong Ketchiwou et al. (2022) found in their study of 412 women working in the service sector in Gauteng Province, family responsibilities were noted as having a statistically significant negative effect on women's career progression. Taken together, these studies suggest that the motherhood penalty in South Africa extends beyond wage disparities alone. It is shaped by both economic inequality and perceptual bias, with each reinforcing the other. Mothers who are perceived as less committed or less productive are less likely to access higher-paying opportunities, and the resulting wage disadvantage further reinforces the motherhood penalty. These studies show the intersecting bias, stigma and oppression remote working mothers face in the South African workforce.

These barriers highlight the unequal ground on which South African mothers navigate remote work, making coping strategies and support systems not just helpful but essential.

2.3.6 Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems for Remote-Working Mothers

While systemic challenges remain, South African mothers continue to manage the demands of paid remote work alongside unpaid care and home duties. Research by Scholtz (2023) highlights the resilience mothers show when faced with overlapping demands. The study revealed that these remote working mothers tended to wake up early and get to bed much later so that they could get work done while their children were sleeping. Moreover, Nel et al. (2024) centre this resilience on the importance mothers place on raising their children and being able to be present in their lives despite the stressors, struggles and complications that come with working remotely. Many studies have revealed that instead of resorting to traditional office work or stopping work entirely, mothers employ coping strategies to manage remote work so they can retain the 'freedom' it gives them to work and raise their children.

One of the most cited coping strategies is time management. A lot of remote working mothers try to divide their days into blocks dedicated to work, childcare, and domestic tasks, a practice described as time-blocking (Alverina et al., 2024). However, Nel et al. (2024) note that in

practice these boundaries were often disrupted by loadshedding, unreliable internet, or immediate childcare needs. Thus, mothers resorted to working out of normal working hours, which many mothers describe as ‘quiet hours’, as a means to catch up (Scholtz, 2023).

Additionally, making a specific and dedicated area for work within the home has also been highlighted as a widely used coping mechanism. Research conducted by Crozier (2023) on Canadian remote working mothers showed a strong positive correlation with designated workspaces, lower interruptions and better integration of work into the home. While research is limited from the South African perspective, a study by Nel et al. (2024) revealed that only 38% of mothers participating in the study had access to a separate workspace, and those who did experienced lower stress and fewer interruptions. The mothers who did not have the luxury of a dedicated workspace experience more boundary and border crossing, leaving them multitasking, jumping between work, caregiving and domestic duties simultaneously. Moreover, in a related study of 15 South African and Nigerian mothers, Echebiri et al. (2024) highlighted how converting the home into the primary workplace worsened boundary crossing and role conflict, even when designated workspaces were set. Similarly, Nzima and Maharaj (2023) found that this blending of roles intensified cognitive strain, leaving mothers ‘always on’ and unable to disengage from either sphere.

Beyond time and space management, well-being practices are another coping mechanism that remote working mothers have been noted to employ. International studies have shown that activities such as exercise, mindfulness, and social connection reduce stress (Xiao et al., 2021; Dailey et al., 2022). While South African studies show practices of well-being, they are more from a perspective of survival rather than true well-being. Rosen et al. (2024) interviewed 18 working mothers, 8 from South Africa and 10 from the US, and this research highlighted resilience and self-motivation as the top factors which helped these mothers ‘manage’. These mothers turned to social connections and supports to protect their well-being rather than acts such as meditation and mindfulness. This resilience and self-reliance is not something to be admired, though; it is a coping mechanism that has been built on a mountain of gendered inequality as a means of survival. A similar trend appeared in a study by Ronnie et al. (2022) on 2029 South African women academics, who also depended on social connections and emotional regulation as coping mechanisms. These studies reflect how South African mothers function from a place of survival rather than self-prioritisation.

Looking at these social connection and support strategies, several studies reflect the importance of family and community support in the South African setting. According to Stats SA (2023) there were 6.7 million grandparents who care for nearly 9.7 million children under the age of 18, with grandmothers providing the majority of this support. This kind of family support helps reduce mothers' childcare burden, but it's not available to everyone. Moussié (2021) explains that South African mothers often turn to informal arrangements such as neighbours, church groups, or community-based childminders for childcare support in order to cope. Little research exists on these types of support in regard to remote work, as the large majority of research conducted on remote working mothers was collected during the pandemic, when lockdowns restricted these types of support from being available. The difficulty in accessing this support revealed its real value and importance. Casale and Shepherd (2020) reported that the closing of schools and ECD centres left mothers feeling extremely stressed and burnt out as they now had to not only take on additional childcare, but also support the education needs of their children as well. Similarly, Walters et al. (2023) highlighted how working mothers reported being burnt out as a result of having to shoulder work, caregiving, domestic responsibilities, as well as educating their children during lockdowns.

A social coping mechanism that was available and took rise during the pandemic was that of digital platform support. There were many mothers who turned to the community by joining support groups on WhatsApp, Facebook, and other social media platforms (Yamashita et al., 2022; Henton and Swanson, 2023). Research conducted by Hooper et al. (2022) revealed that these digital support groups were instrumental in providing emotional support as well as information sharing for remote working mothers. Skeen et al. (2023) found that after six weeks in a WhatsApp support group, participants reported better mental health, more confidence in their parenting, and a stronger sense of support. One South African-based study on digital support for South African mothers, while not remote work specific and skills-based, showed positive outcomes but also highlighted the preference to engage physically rather than digitally (Keating et al., 2022).

While there are many international studies that reflect the various coping strategies remote working mothers employ, as well as the benefits of them, limited research exists from the South African setting. South African-based research points to more of a means of survival as opposed to relief and true well-being. This further highlights the critical gap in the literature that exists in the understanding of the experience of remote working mothers in South Africa, leaving a gap between remote working being a means of survival versus a tool to support well-being.

2.3.7 Organisational Impact of Remote Work

While research has proven that coping mechanisms and support systems make a positive impact on the experience mothers have when working remotely, without support from the organisations, remote work cannot truly be a viable option for working mothers. Without proper organisational support, effective policy implementation and regulation, remote work risks increasing the burdens of working mothers by repackaging old inequalities rather than reducing workloads and promoting equality (Chinyamurindi, 2022).

There are multiple studies from developed countries that highlight an improvement in productivity, cost savings, and employee retention when flexible work is implemented effectively (Bloom et al., 2022). A significant number of organisations have seen a benefit in cost-cutting on office space, commuting allowances and other overheads, through the adoption of remote work, which has created opportunities to redirect those resources into staff development and innovation (Marino and Capone, 2021). Research shows that organisational support and flexibility can reduce burnout and increase job satisfaction, improving employee retention (Chong et al., 2020). While research is limited from the perspective of South African organisations, there is research that highlights the potential of remote work to create better options of inclusion by allowing mothers, people with disabilities and those living outside of urban areas greater opportunities to participate in the workforce (Hickox and Liao, 2020; Munyeka, 2024). This presents a powerful opportunity for South Africans and organisations in a country where skills shortage, unemployment and inequality are stark.

Although these improvements benefit organisations, Felstead and Henseke (2017) caution that they often do so by offloading costs and risks onto employees, who must fund their own data, electricity, and workspaces. In South Africa, poor infrastructure, costly internet, and limited digital skills make this risk especially concerning for remote work access and adoption (Chinyamurindi, 2022; Lubisi and Mwapwele, 2024). Moreover, research by Munyeka (2024) reveals that remote workers in South Africa are increasingly experiencing this shift of having to provide their own data, electricity, and suitable workspaces. This trend is raising concerns about exploitation and the deepening of inequalities in the remote work setting in South Africa, where inequality is already extremely rife.

Research from across the globe points to organisational culture as one of the biggest factors behind what truly makes remote work an inclusive employment option. There was a cross-national analysis done by Bilderback and Kilpatrick (2024) that showed how organisations with

cultures emphasising trust, transparency, and collaborative norms were more successful in building inclusive remote work practices. Even with the distance that can make remote work isolating, employees in this study reported feeling both equal and included. In a conceptual review, Raghuram (2021) showed that clear policies, supportive leadership, and effective communication help remote employees stay engaged, share ideas, and maintain productivity. Additionally, there was a study conducted by Savino and Foster (2024) in the post-pandemic era, which revealed that organisations where inclusion was promoted by tackling bias, recognising all staff equally, and supporting remote workers, employees were able to thrive. However, as stated in earlier sections, workplace culture in South Africa is still largely shaped by patriarchy (Mabungela et al., 2025). Munyeka (2024) notes that remote work can worsen wage gaps, as women are often pushed into lower-paid flexible roles, showing that the motherhood penalty in remote work is both cultural and financial. Research by Nel et al. (2024) supports this through their findings, which highlight how remote working mothers in South Africa experienced role conflict and guilt as patriarchal workplace cultures expected constant availability, while these mothers still held all of the weight of the primary caregivers.

The research has shown the impact of organisational culture with regard to the experience of remote work. However, in South Africa, the flexibility of remote work is often informal, inconsistently applied, and left to managerial discretion rather than guided by clear policy (Matli, 2020). This results in uneven conditions, where some mothers benefit from supportive managers while others are penalised for making the same requests. Research by Pienaar et al. (2023) and Sibeko (2024) show how South African mothers experience role conflict, guilt, and constrained capabilities as they balance paid work and caregiving within patriarchal social and organisational systems. These findings help explain why remote-working mothers may face similar biases and structural disadvantages when seeking flexibility in employment. The scholars express that these mothers are seen as incapable, less committed and not ambitious about their work purely because they are mothers. It is important to highlight how these stigmas and biases extend and negatively impacting areas such as opportunity, inclusion and career progression for remote working mothers (de Laat, 2023).

Beyond organisational culture, South Africa faces wider regulatory environmental issues that amplify these risks and facilitate the exploitation of mothers in remote working positions.

The pandemic compelled South African organisations into remote work, and this exposed gaps in managerial capacity, digital infrastructure, and labour protections (Chinyamurindi, 2022;

Mabaso and Manuel, 2024). Despite the continuation of the adoption of remote work in the post-pandemic era in South Africa, there is a crippling lack of clear, standardised policies to govern remote work, which has left workers uncertain about their rights and obligations, in situations of precarious employment (James, 2022; Munyeka, 2024). Without defined protections and meaningful organisational support, remote-working mothers are especially at risk of exhaustion, stagnant progress, and entrenched gender inequality.

2.3.8 The Legislative Loophole

In South Africa, the adoption of remote work has been slow, which has resulted in an equally slow reform in legislation to accommodate this growing model of work (James, 2022). Multiple studies conducted in South Africa in the post-pandemic era, and even those predicting what remote work would look like outside the confines of the pandemic, have highlighted the weak and practically non-existent legislative framework in support of remote work (International Lawyers Assisting Workers Network, 2023; Munyeka, 2024). This absence of legislative support can contribute to remote and platform-based workers being exposed to precarious and exploitative working conditions in the digital economy (Chigori, 2024). James (2022) expresses that this gap in the law risks deepening inequalities, as employers take advantage of outdated legislation that offers little to no protection for workers outside traditional contracts.

In South Africa, there are extensive labour rights that are often referred to as 'rigid', however, these were designed around traditional work and have created a gaping legislative loophole in the digital labour force that is now being exploited (James, 2022). One of the biggest contributors to this is the fact that the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) and the Labour Relations Act (1995), which form the backbone of South African labour protection, specifically leave out those classified as independent contractors which are the primary employment method of digital labour (James, 2022).

> *Labour Relations Act (LRA), Section 213:*
> *"(a) any person, excluding an independent contractor, who works for another person or for the State and who receives, or is entitled to receive, any remuneration; and*
> *(b) any other person who in any manner assists in carrying on or conducting the business of an employer,*
> *and 'employed' and 'employment' have meanings corresponding to that of 'employee'."*

BCEA – Section 1: Definitions
"employee" means—
(a) any person, excluding an independent contractor, who works for another person or for the State and who receives, or is entitled to receive, any remuneration; and
(b) any other person who in any manner assists in carrying on or conducting the business of an employer.

This divide creates a dual labour market where formal employees have legal protection, while independent contractors carry all the risk without any protection (James, 2022). Scholars Van Belle et al. (2023) identified South Africa as a key site for examining labour conditions in the platform economy because of its high unemployment, widespread mobile internet access which is making the gig economy boom, as well as its stark levels of inequality. Their research under the Fairwork Project revealed that many South African platforms fail to meet the basic standards of decent work, characterised by unequal pay, absent labour protection and representation, precarious contract work, and an overall unjust working environment. Similarly, research done by Nwosu et al. (2023) shows that during the pandemic in South Africa, it was predominantly those who were fortunate enough to have the means to work from home who were able to protect their livelihoods, while the vast majority fell behind. In South Africa, not everyone has internet access or devices that support remote work, nor do they have the skills to navigate it, especially under the circumstances of the pandemic.

The legislative gaps are particularly concerning when looking at remote working mothers who turn to remote work as a means of survival, both financially and practically (Chinyamurindi, 2022; Parry, 2024). Recent research by Van Belle et al. (2023) highlights that the flexibility of remote work often comes at the cost of income security, benefits, and career progression, a trade-off many mothers make in order to be there for their young children. Moreover, studies show that South African contract-based remote workers are often paid less than full-time employees performing identical roles, with employers exploiting the absence of legal protections (Coleman and Mpedi, 2023). This inequity compounds the 'motherhood penalty', as mothers disproportionately cluster in such precarious work due to the additional caregiving roles they shoulder (Ishizuka, 2021; Ervin et al., 2023).

This dual labour market exists worldwide, although the level of support for remote work varies from country to country. Even in developed and high-income countries, remote work is being abused as a result of failed legislation and proper regulation. Looking at one of the prime

countries in the world, the United States of America, Dubal (2021) expressed that independent contractors in the gig economy are excluded from federal labour protections such as minimum wage, unemployment benefits, and employer-provided health insurance. When we look at it in the Indian context, Rahul and Shaifali (2025) highlight that women's participation in the gig economy often takes place within informal and insecure arrangements that lack stable income and employment protections, which reinforces existing gender inequalities in care and paid work. These are the same lived realities for those remote workers in South Africa as Katiyatiya and Lubisi (2024) explain; gig workers are typically classified as independent contractors and are therefore excluded from social-protections such as the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), paid leave, and other statutory benefits, which leaves them in extremely precarious positions. In developing and low-income countries, working under these conditions is not a choice; it is a means of survival. For mothers, it is also a means to protect their maternal identity while ensuring a livelihood, a 'privilege' they have long been denied and are now not willing to part with.

Both South African and international examples show that weak labour laws, combined with caregiving demands, leave remote-working mothers vulnerable. To guide the urgent reforms that are needed, it helps to look at countries where policies have created stronger support for mothers working remotely.

2.3.9 Making Remote Work Viable for Mothers in South Africa

Despite the multitude of issues (especially in the South African setting) that remote work presents for mothers, there are countries where remote work has shown great promise. In these countries, their legal frameworks have been updated to accommodate remote and flexible work, and this is at the centre of their success (Sherman, 2020; Russo, 2024).

One of the prime examples we can draw from is that of the Nordic countries which are reported to be of the best countries in the world in terms of well-being, and two of the top contributing factors to their thriving are work-life balance and a high level of institutional support (Martela et al., 2020). A study by Lodovici et al. (2021) highlighted the positive effects of the Working Hours Act in Finland, amended in 2020, which makes provision for full-time employees to engage in flexi-work by having the option to decide when and where half of their work is carried out. The study highlighted how this flexibility allowed workers to better manage their paid and unpaid work, gaining a better work-life balance.

The UK adopted a Flexible Working Regulations policy in 2014, which entitles employees to formally request flexible arrangements after six months of employment (Bird and Brown, 2018). This allows employees, especially mothers, to request flexible working arrangements without having to fear the loss of their job, as their request is a legal entitlement. A study by Sanders and Karmowska (2020) reported that participants highlighted the freedom in when and where they worked and accommodations for family/personal commitments as the main positive driver of increased job satisfaction. Moreover, the study linked management's openness to accepting the requests of flexible working arrangements to strengthened commitment and productivity from employees. Another UK-based study by Agnoletto (2024) reveals that women who engaged in working from home report higher job satisfaction and better mental health, and also improved life satisfaction.

There are two developing nations that have prioritised legislative support for remote workers and have seen positive effects. Brazil rolled out the Telework Law in 2017, and the Philippines its Telecommuting Act in 2018 (Mello and Dal Colletto, 2019; De Jesus, 2022). Both of these countries have used these acts to recognise telework as a formal type of employment as a means of regulating it, as well as paving the way for how remote work is carried out. Research by Junior et al. (2020) among 67 employees of a large Brazilian organisation who were engaged in telework arrangements, found that workers consistently highlighted spending more time with children and family as the top benefit. Additionally, a study conducted by Dizon et al. (2022) to understand how the Philippine Telecommuting Act of 2018 has impacted both employees and employers revealed that an improvement was seen in work-life balance, productivity, employee satisfaction, and cost-saving for both the employers and the employees.

While it is understood that implementing entire policies and legislations takes time and a great deal of red tape, there are examples of amendments and minor legislative inclusions that have alleviated some of the challenges created by the rapid rise of remote work. For example, Australia has the right to disconnect, which allows employees to refuse to monitor, read, or respond to work-related contact (or attempted contact) from their employer or a third party outside their ordinary working hours (Josserand and Boersma, 2024). However, while this right is extremely beneficial, especially to remote workers who feel that they always have to be available, independent contractors are excluded (Golding, 2023). Several countries, including Spain, Australia, Switzerland, and the European Union, have fought for the inclusion of independent contractors, and some have already implemented measures, granting them access to basic labour rights such as fair wages, working conditions, representation, and benefits

(Fredman et al., 2025; Vieira and Mendonca, 2025). It is important to highlight that these have largely been industry-specific, focusing mainly on delivery drivers and ride-hailing services; however, this shows that protection through inclusion is possible if applied broadly.

While these examples and studies highlight the importance of legislative support in the success of remote work, legislation alone does not resolve all issues. In the study conducted in Finland, it was noted that the same flexibility which supports work–life balance can also blur boundaries between home and work, which leads to burnout (Lodovici et al., 2021). Moreover, UK-based studies highlight that while the legal right to request flexibility exists, many employees, especially mothers, experience anxiety about making the request, as they feel that they will be penalised and seen as less committed and capable (Chung and van der Horst, 2018; Sanders and Karmowska, 2020). Similarly, studies from Brazil and the Philippines highlight that while the telework laws have improved access to flexible arrangements, the implementation has been uneven and largely beneficial for those in higher-income jobs who have the means to access the infrastructure, skills and hardware needed to access these flexible arrangements (Mello and Dal Colletto, 2019; Dizon et al., 2022). These findings show that laws on their own aren't enough; without real enforcement, supportive work cultures, and broader social policies, remote work can end up deepening gender inequality instead of fixing it.

Thus, while South Africa's current absence of legislation and the legislative loophole that exists is allowing for remote work to exacerbate existing gender inequalities, that alone is not the only issue. However, addressing these policy gaps will be essential if remote work is to deliver on its promise of greater inclusion and flexibility rather than reinforcing the unequal structures of the past.

2.4 Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for This Study

This chapter has outlined the literature that is relevant to unpacking the topic of this study, as well as highlighting the gaps that exist in current research. Current scholarship on remote work remains limited in three critical ways. First, most evidence is drawn from pre-pandemic and pandemic studies and is largely from Global North contexts, which limits the understanding of how remote work has evolved in South Africa after the pandemic (IOL, 2022). Secondly, the experiences of mothers with children under five are largely absent from the literature or are very disjointed, despite their heightened care responsibilities and reliance on remote and flexible work as a survival strategy. Thirdly, existing studies rarely apply Work–Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000) or Intersectional Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) to examine how age,

race, household structures, and employer contexts interact to shape mothers' experiences of remote work.

Throughout this review, Global North evidence (e.g., the UK, Finland, and the Nordic countries) has been placed in dialogue with Global South and South African findings to situate the South African experience within broader global trends, while highlighting where local structural conditions, including infrastructure, childcare access, and legislative protection, produce distinctly different outcomes for South African mothers.

A further gap lies in the treatment of remote work under South African law. Remote workers are often classified as self-employed, excluding them from the protections of the various labour legislation (James, 2022). This legislative loophole undermines the potential of remote work by exposing mothers to insecurity and exploitation at the very point where flexibility should provide support.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on South African mothers of young children who work remotely. By combining Work–Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory to analyse data collected through a sequential explanatory mixed methods study, it seeks to capture both the opportunities and vulnerabilities of remote work. The rationale is not only to document challenges and triumphs, but to use them as a way to identify reforms needed to make remote work a viable and equitable form of employment in the South African context.

In summary, this review shows that while remote work holds promise for improving mothers' participation in the labour force, especially in contexts with strong legislative support, significant gaps remain in South Africa. Research has yet to examine how mothers of young children experience remote work in the absence of comprehensive protections, and how age, race, family structures, and employer contexts shape these experiences. Addressing this gap requires an explicit application of Work–Family Border Theory and Intersectionality, as well as an in-depth mixed methods approach to understand the lived realities of remote-working mothers in order to pave the way for making it a viable and equitable employment model. The next chapter outlines the theoretical framework that guides this study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are a multitude of theories that a researcher can use to guide their research; however, it is extremely important to choose theories that complement, fulfil, and help answer the research questions and objectives set out by the study. In the case of this study, where the lived experiences of remote working mothers with children under five are being researched in the South African setting, the researcher understood the need for a multi-layered, complementary theoretical framework to be utilised. As highlighted by Tsang (2022), using a multi-theoretical approach serves five functions: 1. Capturing the essence of complex strategic decisions, 2. Providing a more complete explanation of outcomes, 3. Compensating for the explanatory deficiencies of a single theory, 4. Exploiting the complementarity of theories, and 5. Testing conflicting explanations. As this study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the multi-layered theoretical framework plays an important role in covering the wide range of data collected.

This chapter begins by situating the study in a multi-theoretical framework, showing the importance and relevance of making use of more than a single theory to guide the study, answer the research questions and achieve the objectives.

3.1 Situating the Study within a Multi-Theoretical Framework

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered one of the biggest global shifts in how people work since the industrial era. Overnight, people went from working in an office to working in the confines of their home; remote work became the 'new normal' (Vyas, 2022). This led to advocates of remote work praising the rapid adoption over the promise of flexibility, autonomy and balance (Pham et al., 2024). However, feminist scholars have long argued that structural inequalities determine who actually benefits from technological and organisational change, and therefore, from this perspective, the change rang alarm bells (Hochschild, 1989; Kabeer et al., 2021). This resonated for mothers all over the world, but especially for South African mothers raising children while still battling economic crisis, patriarchal-driven gender expectations and unreliable infrastructure (Matika, 2022; Nzima and Maharaj, 2023). For mothers in South Africa, the relief promised by remote work does not come easily (Mtotywa, 2022). When the home becomes both the centre of paid and unpaid labour, the boundaries become blurred and often collapse altogether (Horwood et al., 2021). The literature highlighted that South Africa

provides a unique landscape where remote working mothers are fighting a bigger battle than just the blurred boundaries between work and home.

Some of the challenges faced by remote working mothers in South Africa are intensified by contextual realities that make the South African case distinct:

- **Structural inequality:** South Africa is still one of the most unequal societies in the world, marked by sharp divides in income, job opportunities, and access to basic infrastructure (Stats SA, 2023).
- **Society grounded in patriarchy:** The presence of patriarchy is still prevalent in South Africa, where mothers, despite being financial providers, are still expected to fulfil all of their traditional gender roles/expectations (Mudau and Obadire, 2017).
- **Economic pressures and labour market constraints:** As a result of poverty and unemployment in South Africa, a dual-income household has become a matter of survival, not choice (Stumbitz and Jaga, 2020).

These intersecting factors make remote work for South African mothers a double-edged sword: on one side, it offers the promise of flexibility, balance and relief, where on the other, it entrenches patriarchal-driven gender expectations which heighten caregiving and domestic expectations. This makes South Africa a complex and unique setting to study the lived experience of mothers engaging in remote work, especially those who are caring for young children. It is because of this multi-layered and complex landscape that the researcher drew from a multi-layered theoretical framework to ensure that the realities of these mothers were fully captured, understood and presented.

The researcher selected two complementary theories that make up the multifaceted theoretical framework guiding this study. The two theories are: Work–Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory. These two theories were selected to create a bridge between the individual experiences of these mothers and the structural contexts which shape their experiences. Work-Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000) captures the individual experiences of these mothers, providing a lens through which the psychological, temporal, and physical boundaries that they create between paid and unpaid work can be seen, where Intersectional Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000) captures how the negotiations between these borders are shaped by overlapping systems of power such as gender, race, and class. Other theories, such as Role Conflict Theory or Gender Role Theory, which are often used in similar research and

would be useful, would not have had a broad enough lens to capture the complexities of the realities these South African mothers of young children experience while working remotely.

Work-Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory do not stand alone in this study; they stand together to create a clear, holistic understanding that accounts for all contributing factors to the lived realities of South African remote working mothers with children under the age of five. This multi-theoretical approach is consistent with the ontological position outlined in Chapter One, which holds that mothers' experiences of remote work are both measurable and subjectively constructed, and that the paradox of remote work, its capacity to liberate and to constrain simultaneously, requires more than one theoretical lens to be fully understood.

3.2 Work–Family Border Theory: Negotiating Blurred Boundaries

Work–Family Border Theory was developed by Clark (2000) in response to growing concerns over the competing demands of professional and personal life in modern economies. Earlier frameworks, including role conflict theory and spill over theory, highlighted the stress caused by clashing work and home demands, but viewed the two domains as largely separate and independent (Schuler et al., 1977; Lott and Wohrmann, 2022). The contributions made by Clark were aimed at reframing work and family as distinct yet interconnected domains, each with its own values, norms, and expectations, but separated or linked by what she called ‘borders’ (Clark, 2000). These borders are referred to under three types of borders: conceptual, temporal, and physical. People create and adjust these boundaries as they move between their work and home roles, something remote-working mothers do constantly (de Laat, 2025).

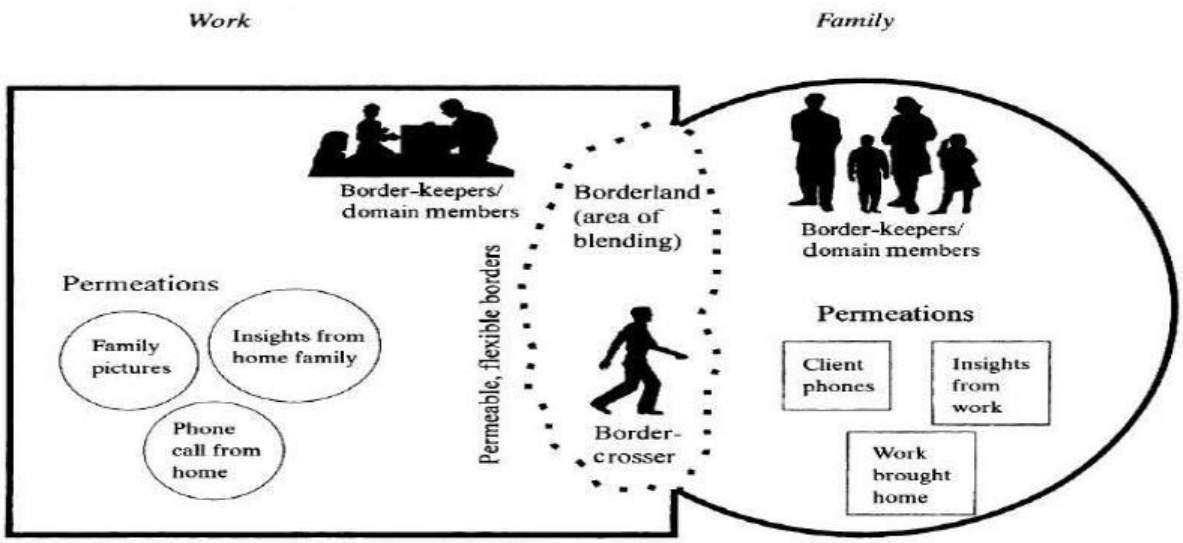
1. **Physical borders**, where work and family roles are enacted (e.g. office vs. home).
2. **Temporal borders**, when work and family roles are performed (e.g. work hours vs. caregiving time).
3. **Psychological borders**, how individuals mentally separate and transition between roles.

According to Clark (2000) Work-Family Border Theory explores the complex interactions between individuals, their work, and family lives, aiming to predict when conflicts might arise and provide a framework for achieving balance. The theory suggests that, despite the presence of physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries, work and family domains are deeply interconnected. Research by Aplin-Houtz et al. (2025) highlights how remote-working mothers

now face the challenge of doing their jobs and caring for their families in the same space, with almost no separation between home and work, making Work-Family Border Theory a vital lens in this area of research.

Clark (2000) argues that the flexibility and permeability of the boundaries between work and family significantly influence the degree of integration, the smoothness of transitions, and the potential for conflict between these domains. When borders are clear and respected, people can find a sense of balance, which has a positive impact on their overall well-being. In contrast, when the lines between work and home become blurred or frequently crossed, people often experience more stress and conflict between their roles (Isa and Indrayati, 2023). These overlapping roles are something that has been highlighted as a significant burden carried by many remote working mothers. Figure 3.1 below illustrates a visual representation of the theory.

Figure 3.1 Work-Family Border Theory



Source: Clark (2000, p. 754)

The concepts of border permeability and flexibility are central to this theory and are explored further in the following section.

3.2.1 Border Permeability and Border Flexibility

According to Clark (2000), flexible borders allow people to adapt their roles based on changing demands. For remote working mothers who are hopping borders between paid work and unpaid caregiving and domestic tasks, this flexibility is vital as these two roles are often competing.

Rau and Hyland (2006) describe two key forms of flexibility: temporal flexibility, which refers to when work is performed, and spatial flexibility, which refers to where it is performed. The flexibility remote work has given mothers has allowed them to juggle paid work (protecting their livelihoods) with caregiving (protecting their motherhood).

In contrast, border permeability refers to the extent to which elements from one domain cross into another (Clark, 2000). High permeability happens when work-related tasks and family demands overlap. For remote working mothers, this could mean responding to work emails during family time or managing childcare during scheduled work hours. While permeable borders can make transitions between roles smoother, they also increase the risk of work–family conflict when responsibilities overlap. On the other hand, when work and family domains are kept more separate and borders are less permeable, switching between roles can take more effort, but it usually helps reduce the chances of conflict (Cowan and Hoffman, 2007).

It is essential to understand these concepts of Work-Family Border Theory when applying them to this study, as remote-working mothers often operate within environments where work and family demands coexist. Therefore, flexibility can support integration and autonomy, but when coupled with highly permeable borders, it can also blur distinctions between roles and increase strain.

3.2.2 Work–Family Border Theory in This Study

When Work–Family Border Theory was first introduced, it assumed a world where work and family were separate spaces structured by predictable rhythms: the office was physically distinct from the home, and working hours were largely fixed and bounded. However, the rapid rise of remote work, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, has disrupted these core assumptions (Ziedelis et al., 2022). When your home becomes your office, it becomes extremely difficult to separate the two.

This disruption has been noted on a global scale, where digitalisation has blurred the lines between work and home (Kossek et al., 2022). With home becoming the place of both paid and unpaid labour, mothers are finding it difficult to compartmentalise, set boundaries and not do it all at once with no off switch (de Laat, 2025). In reality, online meetings overlap with mealtimes, emails arrive late into the evening, and the expectation to be ‘always available’ makes it harder to mentally switch off from work (Garcia-Iglesias et al., 2023). For mothers of

young children, these blurred borders bring greater emotional and mental strain, as they juggle multiple roles without time to rest or recover (Aplin-Houtz et al., 2025). Unlike other work-life balance-related theories, Work-Family Border Theory is a vital framework for this study, as it has a specific focus on the parent-child dynamic and how this affects a mother's ability to create work-life balance (Vodanovich et al., 2006).

In South Africa, these blurred boundaries are intensified by structural, economic, and cultural realities that make managing the work–family interface particularly challenging for mothers of children under the age of five. With limited access to affordable, safe and reliable ECD facilities, many mothers are forced to source help from family, friends, and the community; however, these are often unreliable and occasional (Horwood et al., 2021; Kumalasari and Alhasyimi, 2023). Moreover, even if help is available and reliable, South African mothers still feel a deeply entrenched responsibility to be the primary caregivers for their children and face crippling societal and internal judgment as a result. Additionally, the crisis of unemployment and poverty in South Africa makes retaining employment and a dual income imperative for survival (Horwood et al., 2021). This makes it extremely difficult for any mother to be privileged enough to be able to leave the workforce to care for their child. These overlapping pressures make it even harder for South African mothers to maintain clear physical, temporal, and psychological borders between work and family, which leads to greater stress and role conflict as described by Work–Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000).

Table 3.1 Work–Family Border Theory aligns directly with several objectives of this research

Objective	**Work–Family Border Theory's Contribution**
Objective 1: To explore South African mothers with children under the age of five's perceptions of how remote work affects their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.	Primary Contribution: Examines how blurred borders shape how mothers experience balance.
Objective 2: To identify the specific challenges faced by South African mothers with children under the age of five in managing remote work arrangements.	Secondary contribution: Shows how blurred boundaries contribute to the specific challenges mothers face when managing work and caregiving.

Objective 3: To examine the key factors that influence work-life balance for South African mothers with children under the age of five in remote work settings.	Primary Contribution: Explains how caregiving, work pressures, and home settings combine to shape the way mothers juggle their roles.
Objective 4: To investigate the strategies South African mothers use to navigate remote work while maintaining work-life balance.	Primary Contribution: Helps analyse coping strategies, including temporal structuring, role prioritisation, and boundary negotiation.
Objective 6: To assess the adequacy of existing organisational and policy frameworks in supporting South African mothers engaged in remote work.	Secondary contribution: Demonstrates how organisational supports like flexible schedules, childcare provisions, and workload boundaries can reduce role conflict and improve balance.

Source: Original

By examining how people navigate competing roles, Work–Family Border Theory provides a solid framework for understanding mothers' experiences in the day-to-day realities of their lives, which is the focus of this study. However, it does not come without its critiques and limitations.

3.2.3 Critiques and Limitations of Work–Family Border Theory

While Work–Family Border Theory give this study a critical insight into how these mothers manage blurred borders between work and family (Clark, 2000), it has notable limitations in the South African context. First, it assumes that individuals have the agency to negotiate these borders, yet for many mothers, systemic constraints, such as policy gaps, inadequate childcare, informal labour conditions, and entrenched gender norms, impact their ability to do this (Mudau and Obadire, 2017; Nzima and Maharaj, 2023). Additionally, the theory often overlooks structural inequalities, treating border management as an individual responsibility rather than recognising how economic disparities and social hierarchies limit what kind of 'balance' is possible (Osei Boakye et al., 2021). Moreover, Work–Family Border Theory was developed before widespread digitalisation, where traditional office work supported the theory's assumption that clear and stable boundaries between work and home existed (Carvalho

et al., 2021). Thus, in today's remote work context, where work and home constantly overlap, these assumptions are no longer as easy to apply.

These assumptions make Work–Family Border Theory unable to fully address the objectives of this study. Therefore, Intersectional Feminist Theory has been selected as it complements Work–Family Border Theory by revealing how structural inequalities and overlapping social identities constrain mothers' ability to negotiate these borders. By showing why some mothers face heavier pressures than others, Intersectional Feminist Theory works alongside Work–Family Border Theory to provide a deeper, more grounded understanding of remote-working mothers' lived realities within the unique socio-economic and cultural landscape of South Africa (Groenmeyer, 2011).

3.3 Intersectionality: Understanding Layered Inequalities

Intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the unique, compounded forms of discrimination and oppression that Black women in the United States experienced as a result of race and gender being seen as two separate factors (Losleben and Musubika, 2023). Thus, Crenshaw coined the term 'Intersectionality' and developed it into a feminist theoretical lens which accounted for the layered and intersecting factors of oppression and discrimination shaped by the identities of women. This theory moved feminist theories and advocacy beyond the single axis of gender and started accounting for race, religion, culture, sexuality, marital status, etc., which piled on top of gender, heightening the oppression and discrimination which different women experience (Carastathis, 2014). It opened the eyes of scholars and activists to the reasoning behind why women experience oppression and discrimination differently.

Intersectionality is now a widely used framework in feminist-centred research all over the world, across multiple fields of study. In recent times, Intersectionality has been examined by scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, who developed the 'matrix of domination', which recognises that systems of oppression are interconnected and mutually reinforcing (Limpangog, 2016). It shows that power and inequality overlap and influence each other, creating more complex experiences. Additionally, Yuval-Davis (2016) further emphasises that intersectionality is not only about identity but also about belonging, access, and power, the ability to participate fully in social, economic, and political life. In the case of this study, those advancements are important insights as they further explain why two remote working mothers with children under the age of five in South Africa could have vastly different experiences.

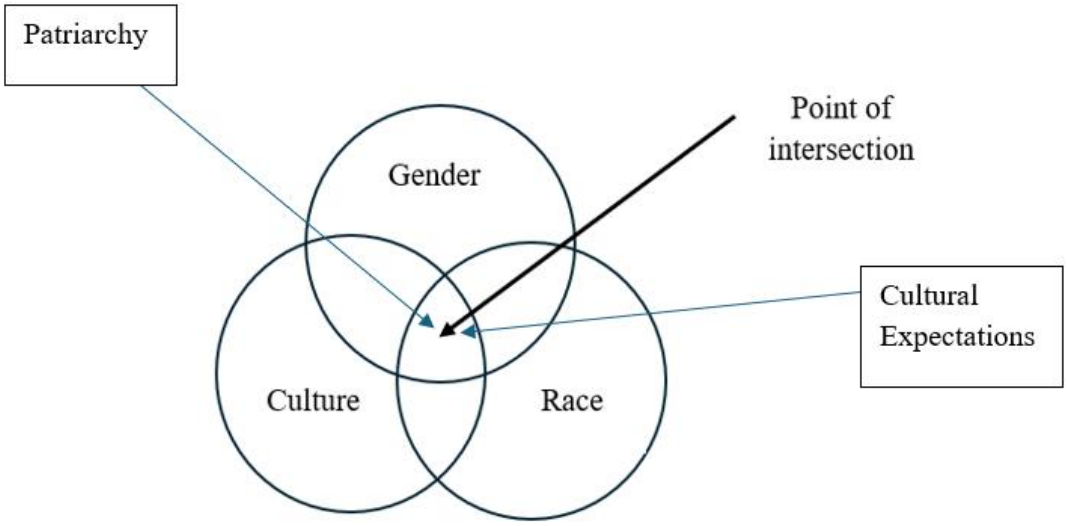
Intersectionality has evolved in different ways across feminist scholarship. The concept has been distinguished into two related but different strands: Feminist Intersectionality and Intersectional Feminist Theory. Crenshaw (1989) initially developed intersectionality in response to the gendered and racial overlapping oppression that was seen in feminist political activism, which scholars now refer to as Feminist Intersectionality. Collins (2000) then took the work of Crenshaw and developed it into a more formalised theoretical framework, which is now known as Intersectional Feminist Theory. This study makes use of Intersectional Feminist Theory because it offers a systematic way of analysing how institutional, economic, and socio-cultural inequalities shape the lived realities of mothers working remotely.

In South Africa, where legacies of colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy continue to entrench racialised and gendered inequalities, intersectionality provides a critical tool for understanding how mothers who work remotely try to navigate the layered challenges within their homes, workplaces, and society (Groenmeyer, 2011; Gouws, 2017). Intersectionality allows this study to look beneath the surface of remote work and uncover how structural inequalities and overlapping identities, such as race, gender, household/family structure, and employment context, combine to shape mothers' lived realities in ways that are unique to the South African context.

3.3.1 Intersectional Feminist Theory in This Study

Let us look at an example that fits the scope of this study - a Black South African mother who is working from home while looking after her young child. This mother would be expected to fulfil the role of her traditional gendered norms (domestic/caregiving) as well as that of her modern-day demands of being a working mother. This dual role that she will be juggling is strengthened by not only the strong patriarchal and cultural expectations that shape the South African landscape, but also the economic challenges. In addition to the patriarchal, cultural and economic forces, historical racial and gendered discrimination will most likely place her in a job where she is paid less, her career progression is slow and where she constantly feels inadequate purely because she is black, female and a mother. These factors shape how she experiences remote work because they reflect the combined influence of wider systems of power linked to gender, race, and culture. Figure 3.2 below shows how these forces intersect to create a layered, unequal lived reality and how Intersectional Feminist Theory helps unpack this.

Figure 3.2 Intersectional Feminist Theory Visual



Source: Original

Nash (2015) explains the importance of accounting for the intersecting structures and identities that expose the true reality of layered oppression and discrimination. This is especially important when researching a demographic of remote working mothers in South Africa, with children under the age of five, which is a complex, unique, and multi-layered one. The researcher, therefore, understands that oppression in the site of this study is experienced on multiple levels and that these levels must be acknowledged, accounted for, and understood.

In South Africa, this framework is especially powerful because the effects of colonialism and apartheid are still felt heavily today (Groenmeyer, 2011). These legacies of oppression continue to shape who has access to work, resources, and opportunities in a post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa (Moagi and Mtombeni, 2020). They are embedded in labour markets, urban planning, and social policy, influencing who benefits from emerging forms of work, like remote work, and who is left out. Intersectionality is therefore imperative in this study as it helps to look beneath the surface of remote work to understand why mothers experience it so differently as well as to highlight what these variable factors are.

Intersectionality also sheds light on the cultural expectations that shape mothers' daily realities in a culture-rich society like South Africa, where patriarchy is still prevalent (Smit and Tessendorf, 2021). In many South African households, caregiving is still viewed as a maternal responsibility, despite mothers also being financial providers. The promise of balance that was used to market remote work has not been the lived reality of remote working mothers; instead,

their loads have gotten heavier and even more imbalanced. With the home being both the site of paid and unpaid work, it has resulted in constant role-switching and heightened emotional strain for remote working mothers. Moreover, while studies from richer countries often show remote work offering flexibility, in South Africa, this flexibility often comes without stable pay and/or clear workplace rights (James, 2022; Munyeka, 2024).

Therefore, when looking at remote working mothers caring for young children in the turbulent, unique and under-researched landscape of South Africa, Intersectionality pushes us to ask tough questions about remote work, for example: who is able to leverage the flexibility that remote work promises, and at what cost?

By applying intersectionality within this study, the researcher is able to gain a clearer understanding of why remote work cannot be experienced the same way by all mothers, and, in doing so, uncover the unique, as well as the generalised variables that contribute to this inequality.

Table 3.2 Intersectionality aligns directly with several objectives of this research

Objective	**Intersectionality's Contribution**
Objective 2: To identify the specific challenges faced by South African mothers with children under the age of five in managing remote work arrangements.	Primary contribution: Explains that challenges are not the same for everyone but are shaped by overlapping racial, class, and geographic inequalities.
Objective 3: To examine the key factors that influence work-life balance for South African mothers with children under the age of five in remote work settings.	Secondary contribution: Highlights how access to resources and support is unequal, showing how structural inequalities shape mothers' ability to achieve balance.
Objective 5: To analyse how societal expectations and economic pressures shape South African mothers' decisions about participating in remote work.	Primary contribution: Explains how gender expectations and financial insecurity intersect to influence who can work remotely and how they experience it.
Objective 6: To assess the adequacy of existing organisational and policy	Primary contribution: Highlights how overlapping social and structural inequalities create diverse needs, ensuring

frameworks in supporting South African mothers engaged in remote work.	that organisational and policy interventions are equitable, responsive, and context specific.

Source: Original

By linking structural disadvantages to lived realities, Intersectionality shows that mothers' coping strategies and so-called 'choices' are shaped by broader systems of power, not just individual decisions. As with any theory, Intersectionality has its limitations.

3.3.2 Critiques and Limitations of Intersectional Feminist Theory

While Intersectional Feminist Theory provides an important framework for understanding how the overlapping social identities of mothers shape their lived experiences of either privilege or oppression, it also presents several limitations when applied in empirical research (Losleben and Musubika, 2023). Firstly, there is no clear agreement on how to define and measure intersectionality, especially in quantitative studies, which makes it harder to ensure that the results are reliable and valid (Bright et al., 2016). Truly measuring and understanding the combined impact of these multiple layers of oppression is not a clear-cut.

Additionally, the fact that Intersectional Feminist Theory is not limited to specific variables/aspects, but extends to the open-ended nature of the theory, has led to criticism. While some scholars celebrate its inclusivity and capacity to include and account for any contributing factor/layer, others argue that this openness can lead to ambiguity and inconsistent application across studies (Carastathis, 2014). This then risks the results either becoming too simple or too complex, as there is no possible way to account for every factor, and without boundaries to the theory, this slippage can occur rapidly.

However, despite these critiques, Intersectional Feminist Theory remains a valuable complementary lens in this study that enables a deeper understanding of why some remote-working mothers experience heavier pressures than others in the South African setting. By recognising that multiple and intersecting layers of inequality, such as gender, race, class, culture, household structure, etc., have an undeniable impact on how mothers are able to manage their home and work responsibilities, the framework enhances and extends insights drawn from Work–Family Border Theory.

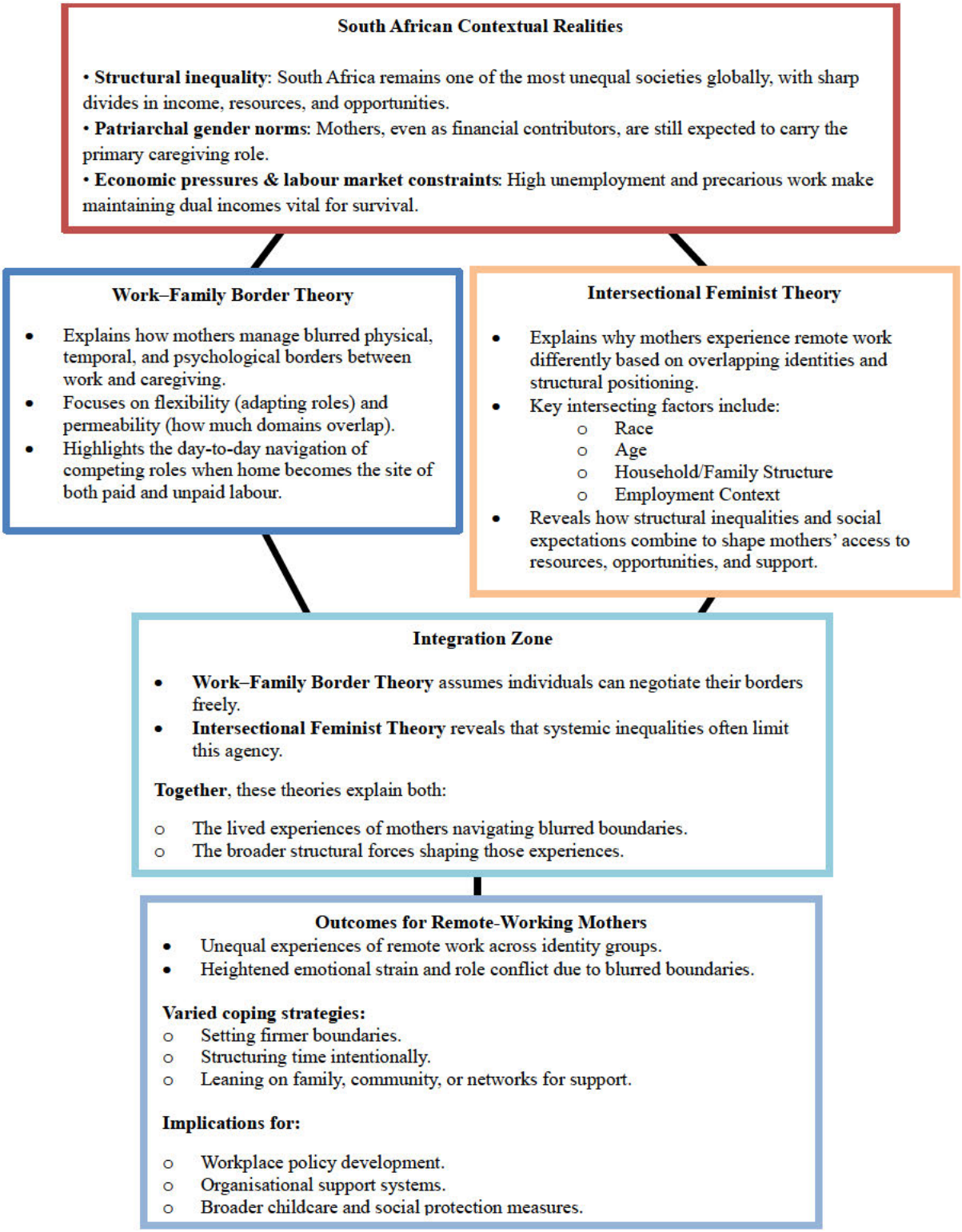
The chapter now moves on to explaining how these theories come together and complement one another in regard to achieving the objectives of this study through a conceptual framework.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is the structured way in which a study links theory, context, and research objectives. It provides both a roadmap for the analysis and a lens through which findings are interpreted (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In this study, the framework is particularly important because it highlights the intersections between personal experiences and structural inequalities, showing the relevance of the use of a multi-theoretical framework. Figure 3.3 below presents the conceptual framework that underpins this study, showing how these two theories come together in a complementary manner to provide a holistic framework to guide and interpret the study.

Work–Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory are not used as separate theoretical lenses in this study. Instead, they are brought together to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of South African remote-working mothers. Work–Family Border Theory explains how mothers navigate the day-to-day boundaries between paid work and caregiving. However, on its own, it assumes that individuals have relatively equal agency and flexibility in managing these boundaries. Intersectional Feminist Theory challenges this assumption by showing that a mother's ability to negotiate boundaries, whether by setting clear limits, delegating caregiving responsibilities, or accessing external support, is shaped by her intersecting social positions, including race, household structure, and employment context. Viewed together, these theories demonstrate that the blurred boundaries experienced by South African remote-working mothers are not simply the result of individual choices or logistical demands. Rather, they are produced and reinforced by broader structural inequalities. This relationship is captured in the Integration Zone shown in Figure 3.3, where the individual-level processes explained by Work–Family Border Theory intersect with the structural forces highlighted by Intersectional Feminist Theory.

Figure 3.3 Conceptual Framework for the Study



Source: Original

3.5 Conclusion

The framework guides every stage of the research. It shapes data collection by ensuring sensitivity to inequality and the pressure created by digitalisation, informs analysis by linking mothers' coping strategies to systemic constraints, and supports recommendations grounded in South African realities, such as childcare support, digital inclusion policies, and protections for informal digital labour.

By bringing the three lenses of Work-Family Border Theory, Intersectional Feminist Theory and Integration Zone together, the framework shows that mothers' experiences are not separate nor are they purely personal. Therefore, aspects such as taking on the responsibility of financial provider and primary caregiver, working late to balance caregiving and work, having your child present during an online meeting and feeling guilt or judgment for it, feeling the pressure to always be available for work and home, are shaped by broader economic, cultural, and technological realities.

This link between daily experiences and broader systems becomes the foundation of this study. It ensures the findings are rooted in context and highlights where real change is needed. It also informs the methodology by guiding a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design that captures both individual experiences and the broader pressures shaping them. This methodology will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

When beginning any formal research study, it is important to consider, map, and fully understand how the information needed to answer the research questions and fulfil the objectives of the study is going to be collected, processed and interpreted; this is known as the methodology (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Other considerations that need to be accounted for, and which shape this methodological process, are reliability, validity, and ethics. This chapter will explain the thought process behind the choice of research philosophy, approach, design, method, sample, data collection tool, data analysis, reliability and validity, and ethical consideration.

The first aspect of the methodology that will be discussed is the research philosophy that underpins the methodological foundation of this study.

4.1 Research Philosophy

All research is created through a thought process, an intention that allows the researcher to perceive the reality of the situation, understand how knowledge is generated, and how the research is ultimately designed and executed. This is known as the research philosophy (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The research philosophy guides the researcher in answering fundamental questions including: 'How is knowledge created and developed?' and 'What counts as valid evidence?'. The research philosophy needs to be clearly stated and understood for an appropriate research approach and design to be adopted.

This study, given the four philosophical worldviews in social science research, namely post positivist, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), adopts a pragmatic stance. Pragmatism emphasises the practical application of research and values the use of multiple methods to address complex research questions (Shah et al., 2018). It rejects the idea that one philosophical position or single method can capture the full scope of a phenomenon, in the case of this study, the lived experiences of remote working mothers in South Africa with children under the age of five (Hafsa, 2019). Therefore, when researching such a diverse but specific population as South African remote working mothers with children under the age of five, it is essential to use a broad research philosophy that considers all possible factors.

In the context of this research, which investigates the lived experiences of South African remote-working mothers with children under the age of five, pragmatism supports the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, also known as a mixed-methods approach (Shah et al., 2018). The quantitative phase identifies measurable patterns, relationships, and group differences, while the qualitative phase provides deeper insight into the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions underlying those patterns (Feilzer, 2010).

Furthermore, from an ontological perspective, which concerns the nature of reality, pragmatism accepts that reality is both objective and socially constructed (Ejnavarzala, 2019). This means certain aspects can be measured, while others are shaped by individual interpretation (Simpson, 2018). From an epistemological perspective, which concerns how knowledge is acquired and what is considered valid, pragmatism values knowledge that addresses real-world problems and integrates statistical evidence with narrative accounts (Feilzer, 2010).

Therefore, adopting a pragmatic philosophy is in line with achieving the objectives set out by this study in Chapter One and with the interpretive and critical perspectives underpinning the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Three. Together, these foundations support the use of a mixed methods approach, which will be explained, explored, and justified in the following section.

4.2 Methodological Positioning within Existing Literature

Studies examining remote work, motherhood and work-family balance have adopted a range of methodological approaches depending on their research aims and contexts. Several Global North studies have relied on large-scale quantitative surveys to identify patterns in the division of domestic labour during the shift to remote and hybrid work. Chung et al. (2021) surveyed over 3500 dual-income households in the UK, while Craig and Churchill (2021) drew on a national survey of Australian dual-earner parents, and Petts and Carlson (2023) used large-scale US survey data to examine how the cognitive load of running a household affected parents' well-being. While these studies provide valuable, generalisable evidence of broad trends, they offer limited insight into how mothers themselves experience and make sense of these patterns in their daily lives.

In contrast, studies conducted in the Global South, including South Africa, have tended to adopt qualitative approaches to explore the lived experiences of remote workers within contexts marked by greater socio-economic inequality and infrastructural instability. Lubisi and

Mwapwele (2024), for example, conducted qualitative research with 11 South African women in the ICT sector, highlighting how power outages and unstable connectivity shaped their experience of hybrid and remote work. Similarly, Echebiri et al. (2024) explored the experiences of 15 remote-working mothers across Nigeria and South Africa, illustrating how cultural expectations and unpaid caregiving responsibilities intensified, rather than eased, the pressures these mothers faced.

Although both traditions offer valuable insights, relatively few studies have combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the experiences of South African remote-working mothers specifically, especially those with children under the age of five. The sequential explanatory mixed-methods design adopted in this study builds on both traditions by first identifying broader, measurable patterns across a larger sample of South African mothers, before exploring the meaning and lived reasoning behind those patterns through a subsequent qualitative phase. This approach was particularly well-suited to capturing the complex interaction between gender, caregiving, employment context and socio-economic inequality that characterises remote work for mothers in South Africa.

4.3 Research Approach

As highlighted above, the pragmatic research philosophy supports the adoption of a mixed methods approach, which is important in this study as it is researching an under-researched group. Creswell and Clark (2017) underline that there are three primary approaches to research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. A research approach is the overall plan for a study. It outlines the assumptions, strategies, and methods used to collect, analyse, and interpret data. It also links the researcher's philosophical stance with the type of data collected and the steps taken to address the research problem (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Table 4.1 below outlines these three primary approaches to research.

Table 4.1 Characteristics of Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches

Characteristics	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed Methods
Scientific Method	Deductive	Inductive	Deductive and inductive
Common Research Objectives	Prediction, description and explanation	Explanation, description and discovery	Objectives and multiple
View of Human Behaviour	Predictable and regular	Social, fluid, personal and contextual	Predictable to a certain extent
Observation Nature	Study behaviour in controlled conditions	Study behaviours in (natural) environment and the context in which these behaviours occur	Study behaviour in multiple contexts and conditions
Reality Nature	Objective	Social construction is subjective and personal level	Realism and a pragmatic view of the world
Data Collection (form)	Uses precise, structured, and validated data collection tools	The researcher is the primary data collection tool	Multiple data collection forms
Data (Nature)	Variables	Word, images and categories	Mixed: Variables, words and images
Data (Analysis)	Statistical relationship derivation	Examine patterns, themes and features	Qualitative and Quantitative

Source: Creswell & Creswell (2018, p. 65)

As seen in the table above, the mixed methods approach to research provides the best of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, providing a dual approach to gaining data, making the process richer. Creswell and Clark (2017) explain that a mixed-methods approach involves collecting and/or analysing both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study. The data may be gathered either at the same time or in sequence, with one type often given priority, and are integrated at one or more stages of the research process. Thus, this approach is beneficial when studying under researched groups, as it is able to collect a large amount of data that can be analysed both through numbers and narrative interpretation. According to Creswell and Clark (2017), a mixed-methods research approach is one that employs its own philosophical assumptions and methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it incorporates philosophical presumptions to offer guidance for gathering and analysing data from various sources in one study. In other words, the use of mixed methods allows the researcher to answer research questions with sufficient depth and breadth (Enosh et al., 2014) and helps generalise findings and implications of the researched issues to the whole population. For example, the quantitative approach helps a researcher to collect the data from a large number of participants; thus, increasing the possibility of generalising the findings to a wider, underexplored population. Whereas the qualitative approach provides a deeper understanding of the issue being investigated, honouring the voices of its participants and enriching the statistics, while offering insights that quantitative methods alone cannot convey. Thus, quantitative data bring breadth to the study, and qualitative data provide depth.

For South African remote-working mothers, whose experiences are shaped by both measurable structural conditions (access to childcare, infrastructure, income) and deeply personal, often invisible negotiations of guilt, identity and role conflict, no single approach in the table above could adequately capture the full picture; this justified the need for a mixed-methods approach specifically, rather than a purely quantitative or qualitative study.

This supports a mixed methods approach in the case of this study, where the demographics of remote working mothers in South Africa with children under the age of five are largely under-researched. Additionally, this approach is supported by both the practical and philosophical considerations of this study. Building on the pragmatist stance which was outlined earlier, it applies an ontological view that recognises the mothers' realities as both measurable and subjectively experienced (Guetterman et al., 2020). The corresponding epistemological

position values combining quantitative breadth with qualitative depth to provide a more comprehensive, contextually grounded understanding (Bowen et al., 2017).

Based on the chosen mixed methods approach, the following section will focus on how the study has been designed to implement a sequential explanatory mixed methods research process in all phases.

4.4 Research Design

A research design can be explained as the structural plan for how a study will be conducted. This plan, or map, ensures that the data that is collected is able to address the research problem clearly and reliably (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In mixed-methods research, the design shows how the quantitative and qualitative parts work together to give a deeper and more complete understanding of the topic being studied (Creswell and Clark, 2017). Creswell (2017) identify four core designs in mixed methods research: triangulation, embedded, exploratory, and explanatory. Table 4.2 below summarises the different types of mixed method designs at a broader level and the variants associated with these categories.

Table 4.2 The Four Core Mixed Method Designs

Design Type	Variants	Timing	Weighting	Mixing	Notation
Triangulation	• Convergence • Data transformation • Validating quantitative • Multilevel	Concurrent: quantitative and qualitative at the same time	Usually equal	Merge the data during the interpretation or analysis	QUANT + QUAL
Embedded	• Embedded experimental • Embedded correlational	Concurrent or sequential	Unequal	Embed one type of data within a larger design using the other type of data	QUANT/ QUAL Or QUALT/ QUAL
Explanatory	• Follow-up explanations • Participants selection	Sequential: Quantitative followed by qualitative	Usually quantitative	Connect the data between the two phases	QUAN > QUAL

Exploratory	• Instrument development • Taxonomy development	Sequential: Qualitative followed by quantitative	Usually qualitative	Connect the data between the two phases	QUAL > QUANT

Source: Creswell & Clark (2007, p. 85)

While the table above outlines the full range of mixed-methods designs available, most are not suited to a population, such as South African remote-working mothers with children under five, where large-scale statistical patterns first needed to be established before the specific, contextual reasons behind those patterns (e.g., why single mothers report different motivations than married mothers) could be meaningfully explored. This made a sequential explanatory design, rather than a concurrent or exploratory one, the appropriate choice.

The debates around the value of mixed methods research are often centred on the lack of clear guidance in classifying its designs. In this context, clarity refers to knowing how to structure and implement the design. Thus, deciding which type of data takes priority, at what stage the integration should occur, and whether a theoretical framework should guide the process. To address this, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) propose six distinct mixed methods designs, developed around four key considerations: implementation, priority, integration, and theoretical perspective. These criteria are particularly useful for researchers who are uncertain about which approach best suits their study. According to Creswell and Clark (2017), the six designs are organised based on whether data collection occurs sequentially (explanatory or exploratory), concurrently (triangulation or nested), or through the use of a transformative lens (sequential or concurrent). In sequential mixed methods, data is analysed in a set order in which the data is collected, with one approach used to explain or build upon the findings of the other. In contrast, concurrent mixed methods involve collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously (Wipulanusat et al., 2020). A detailed presentation of these six strategies, along with the four guiding criteria, is provided in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Types of Mixed Methods Designs

Design Type	Implementation	Priority	Stage of Integration	Theoretical Perspective
Sequential explanatory	Quantitative followed by qualitative	Usually quantitative; can be qualitative or equal	Interpretation phase	May be present
Sequential exploratory	Qualitative followed by quantitative	Usually qualitative; can be quantitative or equal	Interpretation phase	May be present
Sequential transformative	Either quantitative followed by qualitative or qualitative followed by quantitative	Quantitative, qualitative or equal	Interpretation phase	Definitely present, i.e., conceptual framework, advocacy, empowerment
Concurrent triangulation	Concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data	Preferably equal; can be quantitative or qualitative	Interpretation phase or analysis phase	May be present
Concurrent nested	Concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data	Quantitative or qualitative	Analysis phase	May be present
Concurrent transformative	Concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data	Quantitative, qualitative, or equal	Usually analysis phase can be during the interpretation phase	Definitely present, i.e., conceptual framework advocacy, empowerment

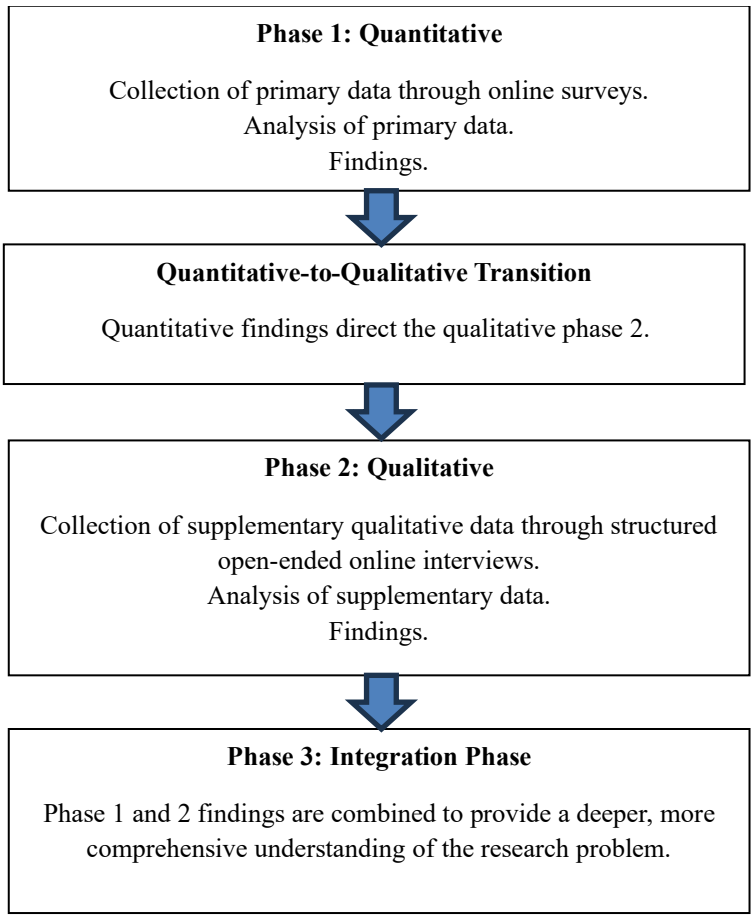
Source: Creswell et al. (2003, p. 179)

The researcher found the sequential explanatory design well fitted to this study as the primary data being quantitative allowed for a larger sample to be tested and a wider base of data to be collected and analysed, which could then be further explored through a smaller but more in-depth qualitative additional phase. In practice, this means the study begins with a quantitative phase that identifies statistical trends and measurable patterns, which then guides a qualitative

phase aimed at exploring and explaining the deeper meaning behind those initial results (Bowen et al., 2017). This approach is well-established in social science research, where numerical trends have been noted to require interpretive explanation through qualitative additions (Bowen et al., 2017; Hafsa, 2019). Bowen et al. (2017) highlights that a sequential explanatory design is not simply about collecting two types of data, but about intentionally sequencing quantitative and qualitative phases so that the second builds directly on the first, ensuring findings are both comprehensive and conclusive. This approach also supports a targeted focus on an under-researched demographic – South African remote-working mothers with children aged five years and below.

For this study, the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design is made up of three sequential, interlinking phases. Figure 4.1 below shows a visual representation of the research flow.

Figure 4.1 Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Design – Research Process Flow



Source: Original

Phase 1 (Quantitative) applies a deductive logic, guided by existing theory and prior research, to test relationships between variables and identify patterns within a broad national sample. The study employed an online questionnaire to gather data on six thematic areas, namely: motivation, perceived benefits, emotional burden, family/home support, organisational support and legislative/governmental support. Data analysis employed both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (t-test, ANOVA, Mann–Whitney U test, Kruskal–Wallis test, and Pearson correlations).

Phase 2 (Qualitative) applies an inductive logic, using findings from Phase 1 to inform the sampling and interview questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from Phase 1 who voluntarily left their contact information to be part of Phase 2 of the study. The findings from this phase were analysed thematically to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning from the qualitative data that was collected (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The method combined deductive coding, which utilised categories based on the study's constructs and inductive coding, which allowed the emergence of new themes and unexpected insights from participants' voices while retaining its primary purpose of adding depth to the findings from Phase 1.

Phase 3 (Integration) takes place during the interpretation stage, where qualitative findings help explain and add context to the quantitative results. Guided by Creswell and Clark (2017), the two sets of findings were integrated using side-by-side comparisons and visual displays to identify links, differences, and patterns. This process provided a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. However, it is important to understand that no research design is perfect and each has its own limitations that need to be acknowledged, outlined and understood.

4.4.1 Limitations

While using a sequential explanatory design strengthens this study by combining the wide overview offered by the quantitative analysis with the richer, more detailed understanding from the qualitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), and improves validity (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010), it does not come without limitations. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design is a demanding approach that takes time, depends on keeping participants involved across both phases, and requires skill in both statistical and qualitative methods (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006). When it comes to integrating the two phases this can be challenging as it is not always straightforward and the results from the two phase do not always join

seamlessly (Bowen et al., 2017). Lastly, this design requires significant time and commitment from both the researcher and the participants, which can make it harder to repeat. The researcher was fully aware of these limitations from the onset of the research and took careful consideration of them throughout the study.

The following sections unpack each phase as they each follow different approaches to instrument design, sampling, data collection and analysis. Phase 1, the quantitative stage, looks at relationships and group differences. Phase 2, the qualitative stage, explores the meanings and context behind those results. Phase 3 then brings the two data collection phases together, integrating them into a complete picture of the findings.

4.5 Phase 1: Quantitative Method

The first phase of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study was quantitative, providing an initial measurable picture of the experiences of remote-working South African mothers with children under five. The nature of this phase of the study was explorative and descriptive in order to gain a base understanding of the lived experiences of South African remote working mothers with children under the age of five, where a huge gap in research exists. Quantitative research is "an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationships among variables, which can be measured and analysed using statistical procedures" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). Bryman (2016) explains that it enables the systematic identification of trends, relationships, and differences across large samples, which is needed in the case of this study, as there is a major lack of research on this specific demographic and context.

This phase served as the foundation for the qualitative phase, offering a broad evidence base to guide purposive sampling and interview question design (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The questionnaire explored six thematic areas derived from prior literature, directly guided by the research questions and objectives of the study: motivations, perceived benefits, emotional strain, family and home support, organisational support, and legislative/governmental support.

The study adopted a deductive reasoning approach, moving from established theory and literature to the specific examination of the collected data (Neuman, 2014). A cross-sectional design was used, gathering data at a single point in time from a national online sample of remote-working mothers. This allowed the description of patterns, the examination of relationships, and subgroup comparisons without manipulating variables. The statistical findings from this phase were not intended to stand alone but to be interpreted and expanded

in Phase 2 to provide a deeper contextual understanding. To achieve this, Phase 1's sampling was designed to capture a broad and diverse representation of remote-working mothers across South Africa, allowing the findings to reflect national patterns while also guiding the purposeful selection of participants for the qualitative phase.

4.5.1 Sample

It is imperative to select the correct sample in order to collect data that is relevant to your study. Neuman (2011) defines a sample as a smaller representation of a larger population that a researcher uses to gain information on that specific population. When selecting the sample, it is important for the researcher to keep in mind the purpose, objectives, and questions of the study to ensure that the right sample is selected (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In the case of this study, South African remote working mothers with at least one child under the age of five.

4.5.2 Sampling Frame

A sampling frame is a list of the people in the population from whom the sample is selected (Lohr, 2021). In this study, there wasn't a formal sampling frame available, since South Africa doesn't have a national list of remote-working mothers. Because of this, the researcher turned to online spaces like Facebook parenting forums, remote-work groups, motherhood communities, and LinkedIn to find participants. These online groups provided an effective way to reach mothers who fit the criteria of the study, as the assumption was that these mothers would be digitally active as a result of their digital model of work.

4.5.3 Sampling Technique

Phase 1 of this study used the purposive non-probability sampling technique in order to gain a sample that reflected the needs of the study. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that means that participants were intentionally selected based on their characteristics which meet the requirements of the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This was done through inclusion and exclusion criteria that were stated in the data collection tool to ensure the appropriate population was targeted.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Identify as female and be a biological, adoptive, or legal mother.
2. Reside in South Africa at the time of the questionnaire.

3. Be engaged in remote work (full-time or part-time, permanent or contract) at the time of the questionnaire.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Mothers whose youngest child was older than five years.
2. Individuals not currently engaged in remote work.
3. Fathers, guardians, or other non-parental caregivers.

4.5.4 Sample Size

Determining an appropriate sample size for this study relied on sample size guidelines from other research rather than exact population sizes, as there is no reliable data which can be used to estimate the size of the population for the focus of this study: South African remote working mothers with at least one child under five. An appropriate sample size was set between 80 and 100 participants for this study. This decision was guided by Andrade (2020), who does not place emphasis on a definitive number but focuses on balancing resource constraints, effect size, variability and power. Additionally, studies by Mokoena and Kgatitswe (2023), "Evaluating the impact of working from home on employee productivity" (N=60) and Mailey et al. (2022) "Reducing occupational sitting while working from home: A randomised trial" (N=95), on similar demographics, but with even less specific demographic focus, utilised sample sizes < 100. This justified the use of the sample size range of between 80 and 100 for this study.

4.5.5 Recruitment Strategy

Bryman (2016) explains a recruitment strategy as the planned approach a researcher uses to identify, reach, and invite suitable participants to take part in a study. For this research, targeted outreach was conducted in South African online communities related to motherhood, remote work, and freelancing. Examples included Mamahood Natal, WFHM, Surviving Motherhood, The Mother Community South Africa, South African Work from Online Home Jobs, and Freelance South Africa.

A standardised recruitment post containing the questionnaire link, the aim of the study, and the inclusion criteria was shared manually by the researcher in these groups multiple times per week over a two-month period. This repeated exposure helped to maximise visibility and ensure the target sample size was met.

4.5.6 Data Collection Techniques and Tools

Data collection tools refer to the physical devices/instruments used to gather the information required for a research study, where the data collection technique is how this tool is used/employed to collect the data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). As the aim of this study is to capture broad but detailed insights into the lived experiences of South African remote-working mothers with children under the age of five, particularly the benefits, challenges, and contextual factors shaping their work–life balance, a tool known as a questionnaire was used. Neuman (2014) explains that questionnaires are a useful data collection tool when needing to gain a large amount of data from a broad and diverse sample. The technique used was online surveys, as the demographic was difficult to reach and worked remotely, so the researcher felt that this would be the most appropriate technique to target the demographic.

4.5.7 Construction of the Questionnaire

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a good questionnaire is built with two things in mind: 1. What the study is trying to find out and 2. What previous research already tells us. This approach helps ensure the instrument addresses key knowledge gaps, research questions, and themes that are most relevant to the topic under investigation. For this research, literature on remote work, work–life balance, gender dynamics, organisational support, and policy frameworks in South Africa was reviewed (see Chapter Two). This review, combined with the research objectives, informed the identification of six key thematic areas:

1. Motivations for choosing remote work
2. Perceived benefits of remote work
3. Mental and emotional strain
4. Family/domestic support
5. Organisational support
6. Legislative/governmental support

These themes were chosen to reflect both the opportunities and challenges experienced by South African mothers working remotely, while also considering the social and policy contexts that shape their experiences of remote work (see Appendix A for full questionnaire questions).

The questionnaire was compiled using closed-ended questions that were answered using a five-point Likert scale. Closed-ended questions allow for only a limited set of responses to be given, are convenient to interpret and are appropriate when seeking to gain broad and generalised findings on an under-researched population (Neuman, 2014). As this study aims to create a base understanding of the experience of remote working mothers in South Africa with children under the age of five that will guide the second phase of this study, using closed-ended questions was the best way to achieve this.

A five-point Likert scale, with one being strongly agree and five being strongly disagree, was used as the answering mechanism for the questionnaire. A Likert scale is explained by Jebb et al. (2021) as a scale that is often used in questionnaire research in which people express attitudes or other responses in terms of ordinal-level categories (e.g., agree, disagree) that are ranked along a continuum. Likert scales are useful when trying to obtain a base of information in order to gain a broad understanding of a certain phenomenon.

This structure made sure the questionnaire fully answered the research questions while staying true to the overall aims of the study. It also fit well with the quantitative phase of the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, where the questionnaire results shaped the focus of the follow-up qualitative interviews in Phase 2. This process strengthened the overall rigour of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

4.5.8 Pre-Testing for Validity of the Instrument

It is important to confirm the validity of an instrument before starting the actual data collection. In the case of this study and phase, the questionnaire went through two types of pre-testing to ensure that it was clear, relevant, and aligned with the study objectives. This was done to ensure the validity of the instrument, which refers to the extent to which the instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Heale & Twycross, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The first test of validity was done through what is called face validity. This is where a professional looks at the instrument and makes sure that it makes sense, seeks to measure what the study has set out to understand, and provides a professional overlook that ensures the instrument is correct (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Dr J. Govender, an academic and professional in this field, examined each questionnaire item to ensure that it was relevant, clearly worded, and appropriately aligned with the research objectives. He then provided the researcher with feedback that was used to make minor refinements to the instrument.

After the initial face validity testing and improvements, the instrument underwent what is called pilot testing. This involves the researcher recruiting participants who meet the inclusion criteria of the study, but do not participate in the actual study, to identify any issues that might make it difficult for the actual participants to answer the questions with honesty, clarity and confidence (Andrade, 2020). Five participants were recruited, all of whom met the inclusion criteria for the study, and the questionnaire was administered to them so that they could provide feedback. The feedback that was received from the pilot test proved the instrument to be clear, user-friendly and in line with what this phase of the study set out to achieve. Thus, no further refinements were made or needed.

4.5.9 Distribution of the Questionnaire

The online survey data collection technique was selected and used in this study to ensure that this hard to reach demographic could be researched. The researcher reviewed multiple online survey platforms and selected Sogolytics which is a secure cloud-based platform. This platform was chosen as the web-based platform to create, host and facilitate the collection of the data as the researcher found many favourable reviews and referrals from fellow social science scholars. It was also chosen as it is uncomplicated to use, has sound data protection measures, and is compatible with SPSS (the data analysis software that the researcher knew they would be using for this phase of the study). An online format was the most practical choice for this study as it allowed the researcher to reach the widely dispersed population of South African remote working mothers with children under the age of five, especially since there is no formal registry that could have been used to easily recruit participants.

The participants were invited through targeted posts in established South African online communities such as Mamahood Natal, WFHM, Surviving Motherhood, The Mother Community South Africa, South African Work from Online Home Jobs, and Freelance South Africa. Each post included a short description of the study and a link to the questionnaire. To avoid the posts being lost, the researcher posted the questionnaire link several times across all pages and platforms.

This approach is in line with recommended practice for online questionnaire distribution, where maintaining visibility is important for reaching the target audience and ensuring maximum exposure and recruitment (Newman et al., 2021). The online format of the questionnaire also gave participants the flexibility to complete the questionnaire when they had time, as well as on a device that suited them, since the interface accommodated this.

4.5.10 Data Analysis

Quantitative research is expressed numerically, meaning that the findings are presented in different numerical forms, such as whole numbers, percentages and decimals, which are generally presented in the form of graphs, tables and charts (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). When analysing the data collected through the online questionnaires for Phase 1, an extensive series of tests was conducted. Phase 1 involved quantitative analysis of questionnaire data to address the research questions in this mixed-methods study and to inform the second phase (qualitative) of the study. The statistical approach followed recommendations from established social science methodology texts (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Field, 2024), beginning with data cleaning and assumption testing, followed by descriptive statistics, inferential group comparisons, correlational analysis, and multiple regression modelling.

All statistical analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29). SPSS is a statistical analysis programme which electronically analyses data and sorts it into relevant charts, graphs and tables for presentation and is widely used in social science research. It is important to note that only statistically significant results were presented in Chapter Five. Results were considered statistically significant at the conventional threshold of $p < 0.05$ (Lovakov and Agadullina, 2021), meaning there is less than a 5% chance that the findings occurred randomly. This strengthens confidence in the results. Alongside significance testing, effect sizes were also calculated and interpreted using Cohen's (1988) benchmarks: roughly 0.2 reflects a small effect, around 0.5 a medium effect and 0.8 or above a large effect. Looking at effect sizes as well as significance helped move beyond a simple 'yes or no' result, giving a clearer picture of the actual strength and practical importance of the relationships found.

Data Screening and Cleaning

Before conducting statistical analyses, the dataset was carefully checked for accuracy and readiness for testing. This process involved checking for missing data, outliers, and coding errors, in line with recommended best practices in quantitative research (Field, 2024). The researcher exported the data to Excel and did all of the checks, but no inconsistencies or missing information were found. The data on the Excel sheet was prepared and coded properly to ensure that importing to SPSS was easy and that no issues regarding coding would arise.

Reliability Testing

To ensure that each multi-item scale in the questionnaire accurately measured what it was intended to measure, we assessed internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha (α). This is a statistic that measures how consistently a set of questions measures the same underlying concept. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) Cronbach's alpha is a scale consistency test which tests the internal reliability of the data collection tool (questionnaire). This method was first introduced by Cronbach in 1951 and has since become one of the most commonly used reliability statistics in social science research. Field (2024) explains that this test gauges how closely related the items within a scale are and how effectively they work together to represent the same concept.

A score closer to 1, .7 – .9, is considered high and shows consistency, where a score below .7 is classified as low and shows that the data collection tool being used is not consistent and therefore not reliable. In this study, interpretation followed established benchmarks:

Cronbach's Alpha	**Reliability Level**
≥ .80	Strong
.70 – .79	Acceptable
< .70	Weak

The researcher chose to use Cronbach's alpha as it is a widely used reliability test when working with questionnaires that use a Likert scale. It provides a straightforward, interpretable measure of reliability that is a well-known and used reliability test (Kennedy, 2022). The researcher did not conduct Factor Analysis on the questionnaire, as the nature of this study is explorative and descriptive, and does not seek to develop or validate a new scale (Izquierdo et al., 2014; Knekta et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha was used as the main reliability test for the Phase 1 questionnaire.

Descriptive Statistics

In the data analysis of this first phase, the first level of analysis was the descriptive statistics. This gave a clear picture of the sample and highlighted any unusual patterns, such as skewed distributions or outliers, that could impact later analysis (Field, 2024).

For each one of the six thematic sections, scores of Mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and Rank were first presented in the form of a table. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that the mean reflects the average score, the standard deviation (SD) indicates how much variation there is around the mean, and Rank highlights the order of responses for easier interpretation. A bar graph showing a visual representation of the response frequencies was also provided. This gave a holistic overview of the main findings from each thematic section based solely on the results of the questionnaire and the overall sample.

An additional step in the descriptive analysis was taken where item-level responses were examined across key demographic and contextual groups (e.g., age, marital status, number of children, type of employment). For each thematic section, subgroup means were calculated for every item and compared to the ranking order of the overall sample outcomes. This procedure provided an initial descriptive mapping of how different groups tended to respond, without claiming statistical significance.

As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, such descriptive comparisons help to build a foundational understanding of trends in the data and offer context for interpreting subsequent inferential analyses. Summarising these group-level patterns across all thematic sections allowed for a more holistic overview of how contextual factors may shape mothers' experiences of remote work, before testing those relationships further through inferential statistical analysis.

Assumption Testing

According to Lindstromberg (2020), assumption testing refers to the process of checking whether the data meet the underlying conditions required for a chosen statistical test in order to give valid results. Therefore, it is common for parametric tests (such as t-tests and ANOVAs) to be chosen on the basis of the outcomes of assumptions of normality (Demir, 2022). The researcher therefore systematically tested these assumptions to ensure the correct inferential tests were selected for the study to ensure validity. When normality was not met, the researcher utilised non-parametric alternatives such as Mann–Whitney U, Kruskal–Wallis H (Sedgwick, 2012). These are nonparametric tests used when the data do not meet the assumptions required for standard tests such as the t-test or ANOVA. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, skewness statistics, and visual inspection of histograms.

Garson (2012) highlights the importance of assumption testing for several reasons:

- Validity of Results: Assumptions make sure that the math behind p-values and confidence intervals is sound. If assumptions are not met, the results may not be reliable.
- Choosing the Right Test: If the data doesn't meet the assumption tests, then you can use non-parametric tests (such as Mann–Whitney or Kruskal–Wallis) to ensure the analysis is accurate.
- Transparency and Rigour: By showing you checked the assumptions, you can have confidence in the tests you used, which in turn increases the reliability and validity of the results.
- Preventing Misinterpretation: The assumption checks ensure you did the right test and, therefore, the results are valid and reliable.

The researcher made use of assumption testing to ensure that the results of the quantitative phase were reliable and valid, and therefore able to inform the second phase of the study with confidence.

Correlational Analysis

A correlation analysis was done to examine how the main study constructs relate to one another. Before running the test, scores from each section were operationalised as a composite score by averaging its Likert items (1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree), so lower values indicate stronger agreement – this was done on SPSS.

The researcher then calculated Pearson's product–moment correlations (r) on SPSS among the six composite variables: motivations for choosing remote work, perceived benefits, mental/emotional strain, family/domestic support, organisational support, and legislative/governmental support. As explained by Cohen et al. (2013), the Pearson product–moment correlation (r) is a statistical test which measures how strongly and in what direction two continuous variables are related. It shows whether, as one variable increases, the other tends to increase (positive correlation), decrease (negative correlation), or stay unrelated (no correlation).

All correlations were run on complete cases (N = 93) using two-tailed tests with $\alpha = .05$. Results for each variable pair were presented in the form of a table, which showed the Pearson coefficient (r) and the exact p-value – only significant results were tabulated and presented. The researcher interpreted r using Cohen's (1988) guidelines: .10 = small, .30 = medium, and .50 or higher = large (in absolute terms) (Lovakov and Agadullina, 2021). It is important to

note that lower scores mean stronger agreement in this study's scales; thus, a positive r means that higher agreement on one construct tends to go along with higher agreement on the other (i.e. both composite scores are lower). Additionally, a brief narrative interpretation was done for each significant result; however, non-significant relationships were also noted in the narrative for transparency.

Inferential Testing (Group Comparisons)

To test for differences between subgroups of participants, group comparison tests were applied. These inferential tests broke down the demographic and contextual variables to uncover where the differences in experiences happened. Where normality was met and parametric testing was appropriate, the researcher used independent-samples t-tests to compare two groups and one-way ANOVA for three or more groups. Additionally, and as explained in the assumption testing section, if the assumptions for normality were not met, then non-parametric tests such as the Mann–Whitney U test for two groups and the Kruskal–Wallis H test for three or more, were used (Mann & Whitney, 1947; Kruskal & Wallis, 1952). Additionally, when a significant result was found between three or more groups, post-hoc tests were used to see which ones differed.

Results were shown in tables to make group means and differences easy to compare. Effect sizes were added alongside significance levels, so the findings could be understood not just as statistically significant, but also in terms of their real-world importance (Lindstromberg, 2020). This approach supported the study's aim of going beyond simple description by critically examining how factors like childcare access, employment type, and household structure influenced differences across the six thematic sections, which was also supported by the descriptive statistic group level differences.

4.5.11 Limitations of the Quantitative Phase

There is no type of research that produces results without limitations. The quantitative Phase 1 of this study provides valuable insight into the relationships between variables; however, it does not come without limitations.

The first limitation is that of the fact that this phase relied on self-reporting from participants. This can cause errors because respondents might forget details, also known as recall error, or answer in ways that make them look better rather than what is true, also known as social desirability bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Another limitation to consider is the fact that participation was voluntary and that the recruitment was done online. This risks the possibility

of non-response bias, which means that the sample may not provide a generalisable representation of all remote working mothers in South Africa (Bethlehem, 2010). While this is a limitation, it was also intentional, ethical and the study did not seek to generate generalisable findings, but rather to uncover understanding that fills gaps in research in this area of inquiry. The cross-sectional design of the study is another limitation that needs to be considered as it only allows for information to be collected at a specific time and not longitudinal data that can be generalised. In saying this, again, this was intentional as the aim of the study was of an exploring and descriptive nature and not that of a study which produced results that could be generalised. This means that even though the questions in the questionnaire were structured to gain an overall understanding of the participants lived experiences, the answers might have been specific to the time when the data was being collected rather than that of their entire experience (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

It is important to highlight the limitations of a study and to be transparent about them even if the choices were intentional and in line with the study as they can impact the way in which the results should be interpreted. Therefore, the results of this phase should be interpreted as meaningful patterns regarding the participants of this study, and not as generalisable results pertaining to all remote working mothers in South Africa. In saying this, the mixed-methods approach allows for the findings of this phase to be strengthened through qualitative interviews and, together, can be interpreted with more confidence in regard to generalisability.

4.6 Phase 2: Qualitative Method

The second phase used a qualitative approach to better understand and add context to the statistical patterns from Phase 1. While the quantitative phase provided measurable insights into the motivations, benefits, and challenges faced by South African remote-working mothers with children under five, Phase 2 was designed to uncover the deeper meanings and lived experiences underlying these numerical trends. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explain, the qualitative component in the sequential explanatory mixed methods design is there to assist the researcher in exploring the ‘why’ and ‘how’ behind the statistical relationships identified in Phase 1, transforming numbers into a deeper, more meaningful understanding.

4.6.1 Research Design

In this phase, an interpretivist approach is used in conjunction with the overarching pragmatist philosophy, recognising that the experiences of remote-working mothers are shaped by their

social context and are best understood through their personal perspectives (Creswell and Poth, 2016). A qualitative design was therefore chosen to explain and add depth to the statistical patterns identified in Phase 1. This phase was not intended to create more generalisable findings, but rather to give a deeper, richer explanation of the main findings from Phase 1 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, it connected measurable patterns with participants' lived experiences, fulfilling the requirements of a qualitative phase in a sequential explanatory mixed methods design.

4.6.2 Participants and Recruitment

As the nature of the design of this study is to build upon one another, the researcher retained participants from Phase 1 through voluntary self-selection. As defined by Etikan (2016), purposive, self-selection sampling is when participants from a previous phase of a study volunteer their participation in a further study or phase, thus voluntarily selecting themselves as participants. The researcher left a brief directive and a box at the end of the questionnaire where respondents were invited to indicate their willingness to participate in follow-up interviews by leaving their contact details. This allowed the same participants who contributed to the findings of Phase 1 to participate in the enrichment phase.

Of the 93 participants who completed the questionnaire, 20 expressed willingness to participate in the qualitative phase by voluntarily leaving their contact details. After phase 1 analysis was completed and the main findings were ready to guide the second phase of this study, the researcher then contacted the 20 willing participants by email and text (dependent on the medium of contact details provided). Over a one-month period, the researcher made multiple follow-ups with the willing participants in order to ensure they had seen the correspondence and that time was made for the arrangement of the interviews. Out of the 20 participants who left contact details, a total of 15 participants agreed to participate in the second phase; however, only 7 managed to participate in the interviews and contributed to Phase 2. This is further detailed and explained in Chapter 6.

4.6.3 Data Collection

As this study focuses on remote-working mothers and retained the sample from phase 1, the researcher continued to use the online method of data collection. However, in this phase, instead of questionnaires, data were collected through semi-structured interviews comprising 10 open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of the main findings from Phase 1.

The use of online interviewing reflects broader trends in qualitative research, particularly in studies of digitally mediated work (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed for the main findings from phase 1 to be the focus of the data collection, while still allowing some flexibility for rich insight to be drawn (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The questions were designed to explore the key themes from Phase 1 in more depth.

For this phase of the study, interviews were conducted on Zoom. This online platform was chosen as the researcher had access to the premium package through the university, which did not impose any restrictions in regard to time, as well as the capabilities it provided in regard to recordings and transcripts. Additionally, as Phase 1 was completed online, the researcher leveraged the accessibility of the platform in order to make participation in the Phase 2 interviews easier and more accessible for willing participants.

The interviews ranged between 15 and 45 minutes in duration. All interviews were recorded to the cloud, with consent from participants, and stored securely. The transcripts from these interviews were extracted directly from Zoom. This made the cleaning of the data and processing effortless and more reliable, as the researcher had both transcripts and recordings to ensure all information was recorded correctly and that nothing was missed.

4.6.4 Data Analysis

The raw transcripts were first manually cleaned and checked by the researcher. This was done by listening to the Zoom recordings while reading and editing the transcripts. Any jargon was removed, and accounts were positioned under the relevant questions to make it easier when moving onto the software-based processing. The researcher then made use of the NVivo 12 software provided by the university, which is computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. NVivo helped to organise, code, and retrieve the data in a clear and structured way, which made the analysis more transparent and reliable (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019).

Thematic analysis was employed, and the research followed the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure the analysis was done correctly. The six stages consisted of: 1. familiarisation with the data, achieved through repeated reading of transcripts; 2. generation of initial codes; 3. searching for themes across the dataset; 4. reviewing and refining themes; 5. defining and naming themes; and 6. producing the final report. Coding was done inductively

but guided by the main ideas from the questionnaire phase. This combined approach helped build on the quantitative results and also allowed new, unexpected themes to appear.

4.6.5 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative phase of this study, the researcher drew from the guidelines outlined by Nowell et al. (2017), which place emphasis on credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain trustworthiness as the qualitative equivalent of reliability and validity.

When collecting and processing the data from this phase, the researcher kept extensive notes, also known as an audit trail, to support the dependability of this phase. The researcher ensured the use of direct and authentic quotes from participants to provide credibility; furthermore, by doing so, conformity was promoted. Additionally, the aspect of transferability was addressed by providing rich, contextual descriptions of participants and their working circumstances, which allows the readers to assess how the findings might apply to other contexts. Together, these measures enhanced the rigour and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

4.6.6 Limitations

As in Phase 1 of this study, the limitations should be transparently highlighted to ensure interpretations consider them. The first limitation of this phase was the small sample size - 7 participants. This limits the ability of the accounts from this phase to be generalised, as well as being able to confirm or challenge all of the findings from Phase 1. In saying this, it is important to note that a sample size of 7 participants is considered adequate in a sequential mixed-methods design where the primary use of this qualitative phase is to provide rich human account (explanation/explanatory) for the findings of the latter phase of data collection (Creswell and Clark, 2017).

While formal saturation tracking was not conducted as a distinct step in this study, meaning that new codes were not systematically monitored across each successive interview, the sample size remains broadly consistent with established qualitative methodology literature. Guest et al. (2006) conducted an empirical study on thematic saturation and found that the basic elements of themes were already present within the first six interviews of a homogeneous sample, with fuller saturation typically reached by the twelfth. This aligns with what was observed in this study, as by the final interviews, participants' responses had become highly consistent with one another and closely reinforced the main findings already established in

Phase 1, with very few new themes emerging. In saying this, given that Phase 2 involved a homogeneous, purposively selected sample of seven South African remote-working mothers, and was designed to explain and enrich the findings of Phase 1 rather than generate new, independently generalisable themes, this convergence further supports the adequacy of the sample size for the purposes of this phase.

Another limitation was the decision to use self-selection as a means to gain the sample for this phase. By doing so, the researcher was limited to only those who voluntarily left their contact details at the end of Phase 1, which left only a small sample of willing participants and an even smaller sample who actually participated. The possibility of self-selection bias was also a conscious limitation that was acknowledged by the researcher; however, despite these limitations, strong, purposeful and rich accounts which strengthened the findings from Phase 1 were still generated through this phase.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

It is imperative for every researcher to make ethical considerations right from the conceptual phase of the study, right through until completion. As Creswell (2017) emphasise, social research requires careful attention to ethical guidelines to ensure participants are not harmed, exploited, or misrepresented. This PhD study followed the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Code of Ethics and complied with the requirements of the University Research Ethics Committee. In the proposal phase, before research was conducted, the researcher applied for ethical clearance and waited for confirmation before starting with the research (see Appendix C for Ethical Clearance Certificate).

The ethics department classified the nature of this research as low risk; however, there are still ethical guidelines that need to be followed. These ethical considerations are explained below.

4.7.1 Gatekeeper Permission

The researcher ensured that gatekeepers' permission letters were signed by any closed social media groups that they needed to access to collect data for Phase 1 of this study (see Appendix D for the gatekeepers' letter used for this study). Gatekeeper permission refers to gaining institutional or organisational approval to access participants (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). It is important to note that these gatekeepers' permissions only provide access to the site where data is being collected and do not give consent on behalf of the eligible participants that exist in that site.

4.7.2 Ethical Clearance

As explained above, the researcher gained ethical clearance before starting the research. All researchers at UKZN are required to obtain ethical clearance before any data collection is started. This study was reviewed and granted full approval (expedited application) by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the university (see Appendix C for Ethical Clearance Certificate).

4.7.3 Informed Consent

Aside from gatekeepers' permission where needed, the researcher ensured that every single participant in Phase 1 and Phase 2 gave signed and informed consent to participate in this study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that informed consent is imperative when conducting research with human beings as it ensures autonomy, respect and transparency in the research process. All of the participants in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this study were fully briefed on the aim, scope, and procedures that were taken in this study. A detailed information sheet was provided on the consent form that each participant was required to sign before participating in either phase of the study (see Appendix A and E). As data was collected on an online platform for Phase 1, participants were allowed to sign by typing their name but in Phase 2 they were required to submit a consent form with a handwritten signature.

4.7.4 Voluntary Participation

Participation in both of the phases of this study was completely voluntary. No participant was persuaded or forced to participate; they did so voluntarily, well informed and with absolute autonomy. All of the participants in both of the phases of this study were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty or disadvantage. This right was explicitly stated in both phases of the study through the consent form, and in phase 2, the researcher reiterated this at the beginning of each interview.

4.7.5 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the study, and the respect for this was communicated to participants with total transparency. In Phase 1, participants are never mentioned directly, the only identity markers are the demographic and contextual variables which they provided, of which none would ever be able to clearly give away their identity. For Phase 2 of the study, the identity of the participants was removed from the transcripts, and they were allocated a tag that did not give away their identity in any form

(i.e. Participant A, Participant B…). The only place where the participants' names appeared was in the consent forms, which have been stored separately from the questionnaire and interview data in password-protected files.

4.7.6 Data Storage and Dissemination

In Phase 1 of this study, the questionnaires remained private and protected through password access on the online questionnaire platform until the data collection was completed. The questionnaires were then downloaded for secure storage and removed from the platform. In Phase 2 of this study, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews that were conducted via a closed Zoom meeting. While the interviews were recorded, they were stored on the cloud in a password-protected folder until the transcripts were completed. UKZN Zoom only stores files for 30 days, and then they are permanently deleted. The typed, cleaned and processed transcripts were then stored in a password-protected folder. As per UKZN guidelines, the data will be retained for five years and then securely destroyed through permanent and trace-free digital deletion.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has clearly and in detail outlined the methodology that was followed in this study. It provided the reasoning and justification for the choices made in the methodology used in this study. This chapter has provided a detailed and clear methodological roadmap on which this study was conducted. It also explained the ethical considerations on which this methodology was grounded.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE PHASE 1 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of data collected during phase one, which addresses the research objectives and questions outlined in Chapter One. This phase of the study was used to gain bulk data on the target demographic: South African remote-working mothers with children under the age of five, to gain a broad understanding of the demographics' experience with remote work.

Data analysis was undertaken using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 29. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to describe and summarise information obtained from participants. Scale reliability (Cronbach's alpha) and construct validity testing were first conducted to ensure the robustness of the findings. Tests for normality were also carried out using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which was supported by histogram inspection and skewness values.

Based on the distribution of each construct, either parametric or non-parametric statistical tests were applied. Inferential analyses included independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVAs, Pearson's correlation coefficients, and, where assumptions of normality were not met, Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis tests were utilised.

To begin, this section outlines the survey response rate along with key demographic details of the participants.

5.1 Response Rate

A total of 93 responses were received, which fell within the planned sample size of 80–100 participants (See Chapter 4). Given the purposive sampling approach and the specific eligibility criteria, this response is considered appropriate and sufficient for the quantitative phase (Andrade, 2020). These findings then informed Phase 2 of the study, where the qualitative follow-up explored the patterns identified here in greater depth, as well as accounting for some of the gaps in achieving the objectives and answering the research questions.

5.2 Response Rate Distribution across Demographic and Contextual Variables

In addition to reporting the overall response rate, it is important to examine how responses are distributed across key demographic and contextual variables. This allows for a better understanding of the composition of the sample and highlights any potential imbalances that may shape the interpretation of the findings (Groves and Peytcheva, 2008).

Given the focus of this study on South African remote-working mothers with children under five, several demographic and contextual variables were examined. Table 5.1 below provides a summary of these characteristics, followed by short interpretive descriptions and bar graphs to provide a visual of the response rate distributed across key demographic and contextual variables for easier interpretation.

Table 5.1 Demographic and Contextual Characteristics of Respondents (N = 93)

Variable	Category	N	%
Age	20–29	16	17.2%
	30–39	63	67.7%
	40+	14	15.1%
Race	White	59	63.4%
	Black	19	20.4%
	Coloured	11	11.8%
	Indian/Asian	4	4.3%
No. of Children < 5	1	58	62.4%
	2	31	33.3%
	3	2	2.2%
	4	2	2.2%
Marital Status	Married	57	61.3%
	Single	26	28.0%
	Divorced	3	3.2%

	Other	7	7.5%
Living with Father	Yes	70	75.3%
	No	23	24.7%
Single Mother	Yes	24	25.8%
	No	69	74.2%
External Childcare	Yes	67	72.0%
	No	26	28.0%
Employment Type	Permanent	52	55.9%
	Contract	41	44.1%
Pre-COVID Remote Work	Yes	26	28.0%
	No	67	72.0%
Employer Type	South African	65	69.9%
	International	28	30.1%
Total Sample		**93**	**100%**

5.2.1 Age Distribution

Respondents from a broad age range participated in this study. Thus, for easier processing and understanding, the researcher split the ages into three age group categories. The researcher made these splits based on both biological fertility patterns and actual childbearing trends in South Africa; they were not just random lower, middle and upper range splits.

In South Africa, biological fertility typically peaks in the 20–29 age range (Stats SA, 2019), where national data show that the median age at first birth is lower, sitting at approximately 21–22 years (Stats SA et al., 2017). However, the median age of mothers overall has risen steadily in recent years, with it being 27.9 years in 2019 and 28.3 years in 2023, which was the highest since 2004 (Stats SA, 2023). These patterns show a gap between biological fertility potential and actual social and economic realities, where many women delay childbirth into their late 20s and 30s due to factors such as career progression, financial security, and lifestyle preferences.

Accordingly, the categories used in this study capture three relevant life stages:

1. 20–29: Younger mothers, often in the early stages of their careers and more likely to be experiencing motherhood for the first time.
2. 30–39: Women in their peak childbearing years who are typically balancing established careers with family responsibilities.
3. 40+: Older mothers, either having chosen to have children later in life or parenting through adoption, fostering, or blended families.

The large majority of participants (67.7%, n = 63) fell into the 30–39 years age category, reflecting the life stage where many women are raising young children while building their careers. A smaller portion of the participants fell into the 20–29 age range (17.2%, n = 16); these women typically represent younger mothers who are earlier in their careers. The age range of 40+ made up only a small portion of participants, 15.1% (n = 14), which was expected based on the data, which did not situate these women as typically having children under the age of five due to biological fertility factors.

Figure 5.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

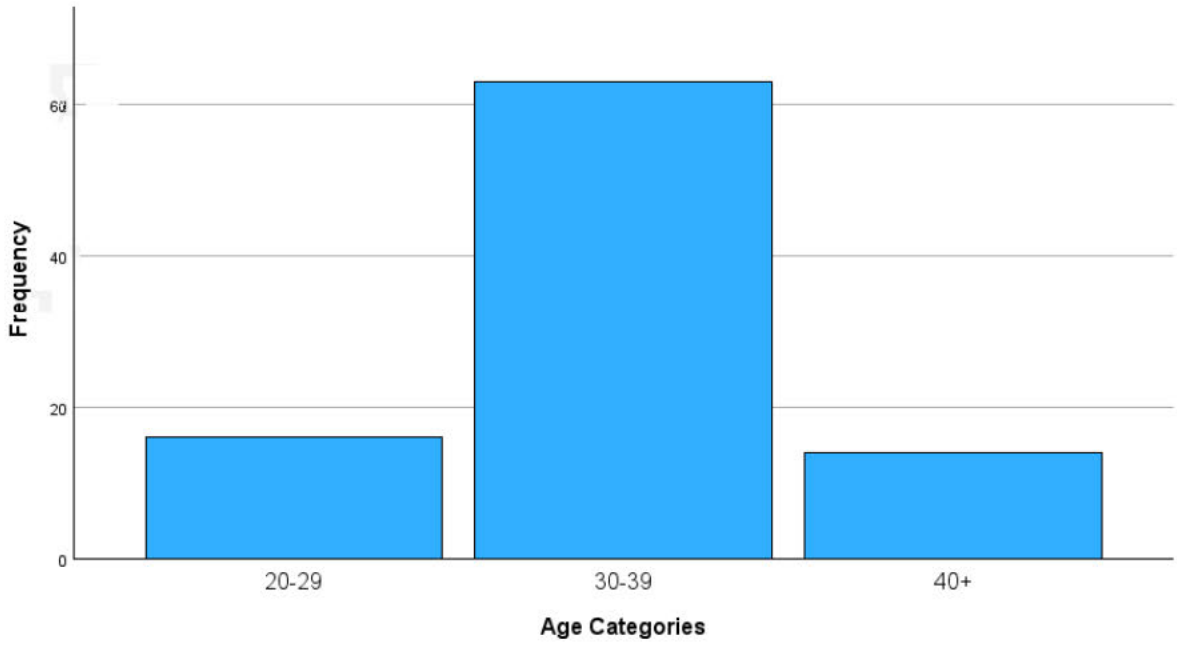


Figure 5.1 below shows a visual representation of the age distribution, where the dominance of the 30–39 years age category is easily seen.

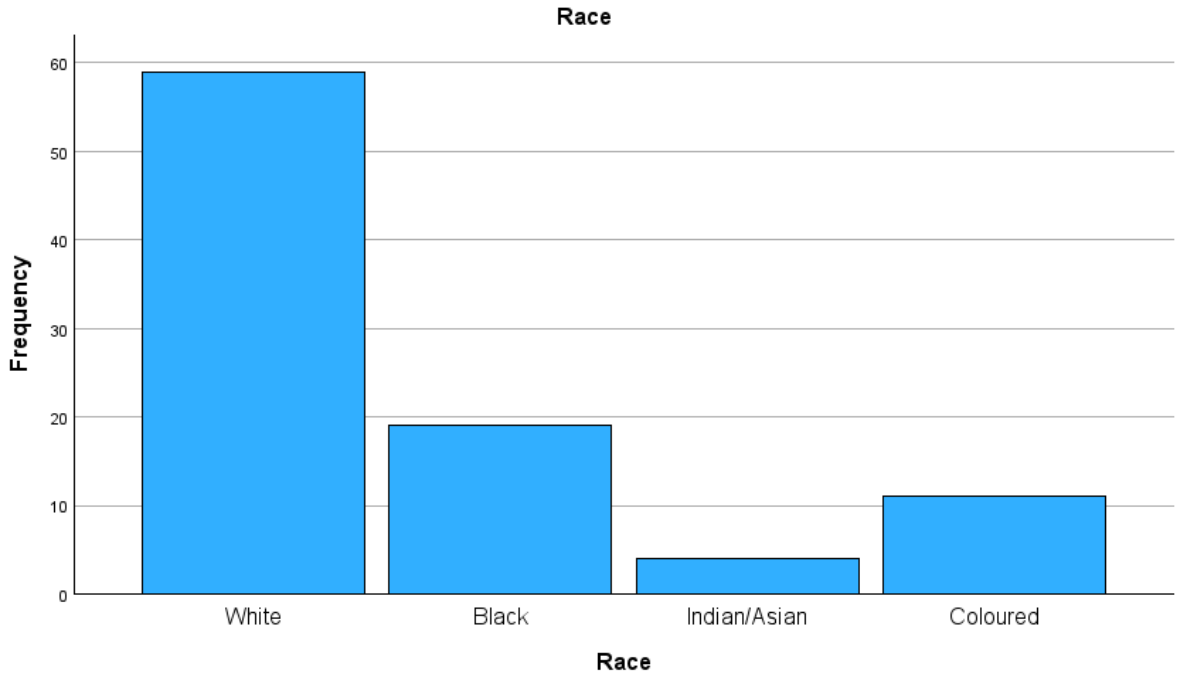
5.2.2 Race Distribution

When conducting any study in South Africa, a country where race plays a pivotal role in opportunity, experience, oppression and discrimination, it is an imperative demographic variable to account for. The majority of respondents identified as White (63.4%, n = 59), followed by Black (20.4%, n = 19), Coloured (11.8%, n = 11), and Indian/Asian (4.3%, n = 4). The higher number of White respondents can be attributed to factors such as the digital divide and higher representation in the social media groups where the questionnaire was shared.

However, while the sample is predominantly White, there is meaningful representation of respondents of colour (36.5% combined), which allows for limited but important comparisons across racial categories.

Figure 5.2 below shows a visual representation of the race distribution, where the dominance of the white race category is easily seen.

Figure 5.2 Race Distribution of Respondents



5.2.3 Number of Children Under Five

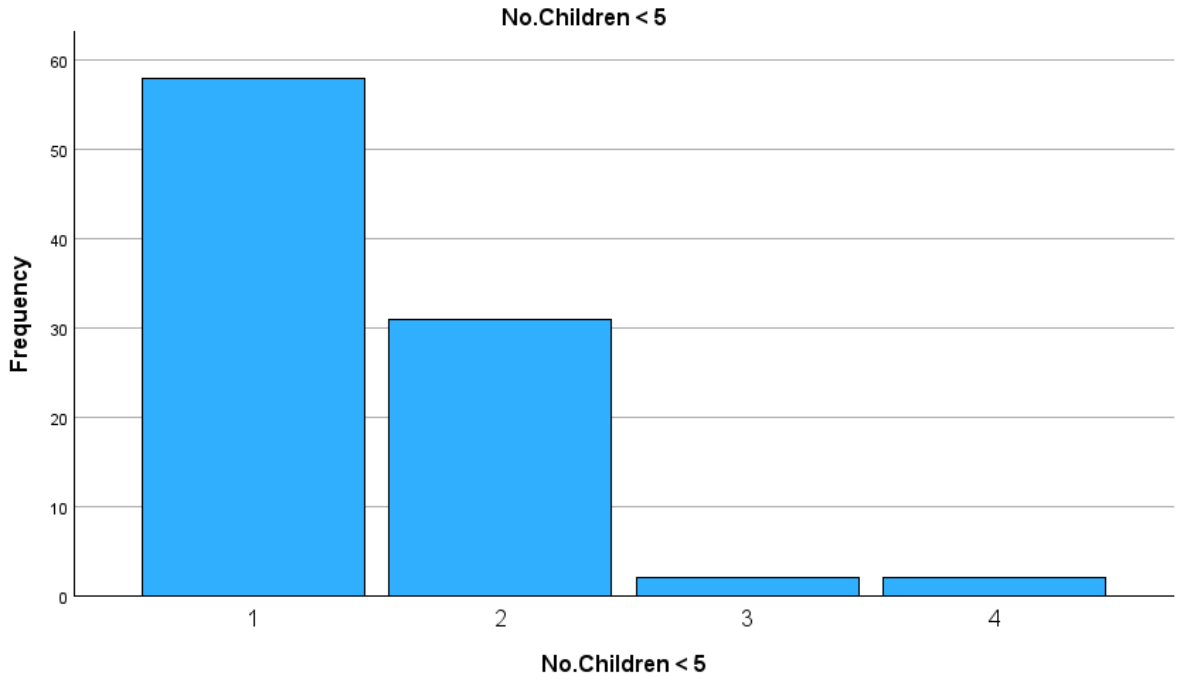
In the case of this study, caregiving intensity is extremely important. Most respondents reported having one child under five (62.4%, n = 58), while 33.3% (n = 31) had two children. A very small proportion reported three or four children under five (2.2% each). These response rates are expected when related to the age distribution and average age of women having their first

child in South Africa, which also accounts for the reduced number of children families are choosing to have due to financial struggles and increased workloads.

This variable is particularly relevant when examining stress levels, use of external childcare, and motivation for remote work in later chapters.

Figure 5.3 below shows a visual representation of the No. of Children < 5 distribution.

Figure 5.3 No. of Children < 5 Distribution of Respondents



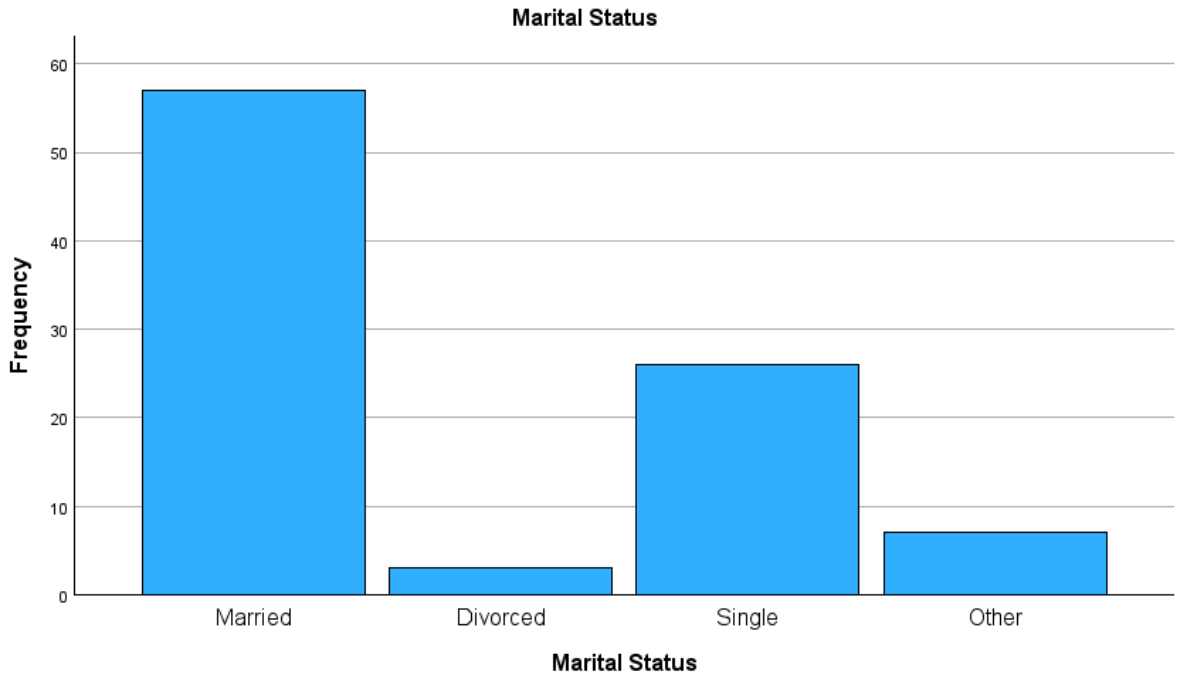
5.2.4 Marital and Household Structure

Marital and household arrangements were included because they often influence the division of caregiving responsibilities. There were three demographic and contextual variables that accounted for this in this study (the use of multiple is explained in the cross-tabulation at the end of this section).

Marital Status: The majority of participants were married (61.3%), while 28.0% were single, 7.5% reported 'other' (e.g., cohabiting or widowed), and 3.2% were divorced.

Figure 5.4 below shows a visual representation of the Marital Status distribution.

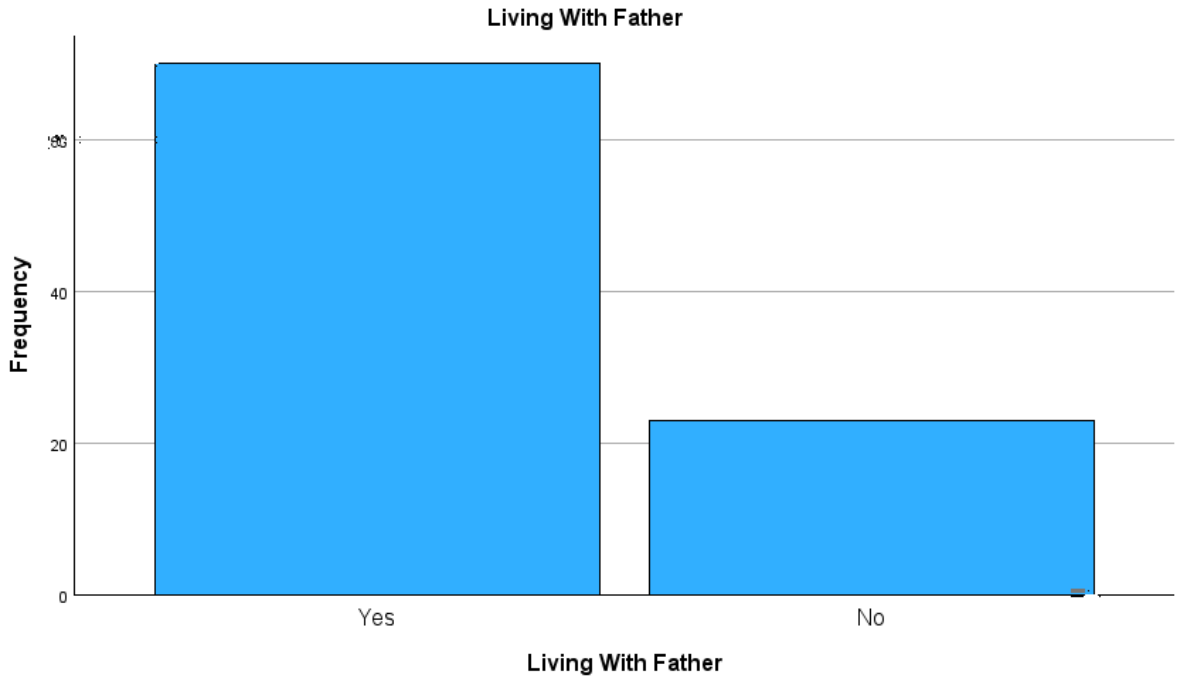
Figure 5.4 Marital Status Distribution of Respondents



Living with Father: While 75.3% of respondents live with the father of their child(ren), nearly one in four do not. This is an interesting finding as it has direct implications on the lack of support that these mothers have, which then leads to increased responsibility (financially, caregiving, or both).

Figure 5.5 below shows a visual representation of the Living with Father distribution.

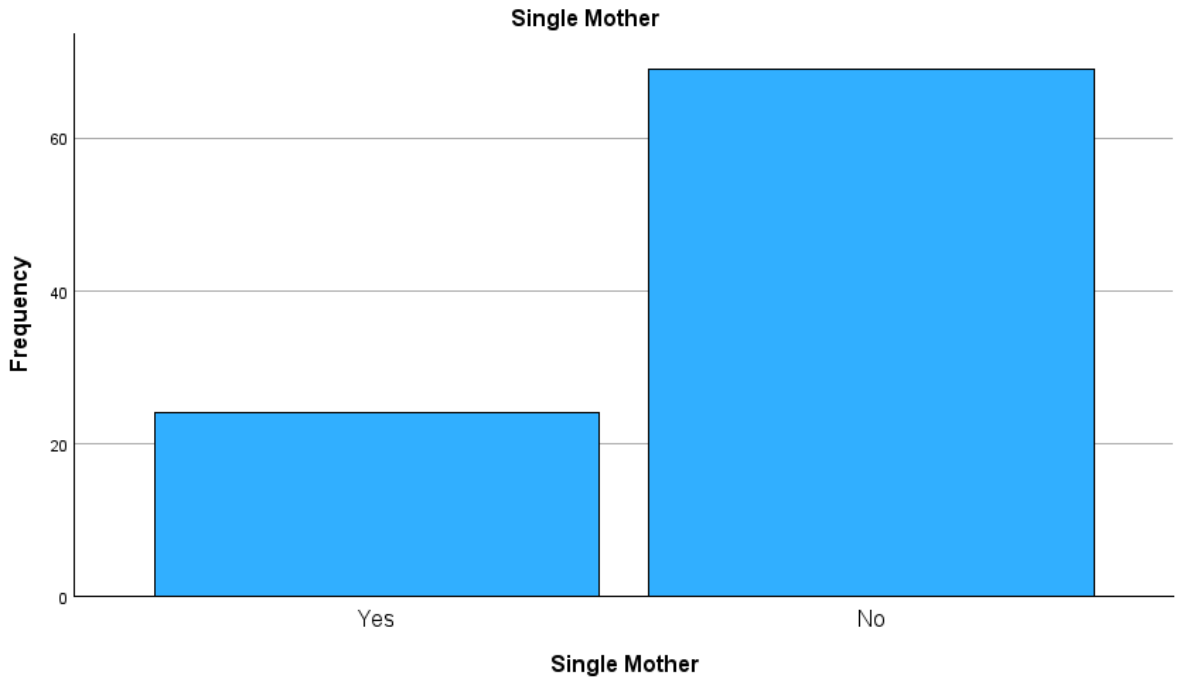
Figure 5.5 Living with Father Distribution of Respondents



Single Parent: A quarter of the respondents (25.8%) self-identified as single parents, suggesting they are likely to bear a greater share of caregiving responsibilities as opposed to those who did not (74.2%).

Figure 5.6 below shows a visual representation of the Single Parent distribution.

Figure 5.6 Single Parent Distribution of Respondents

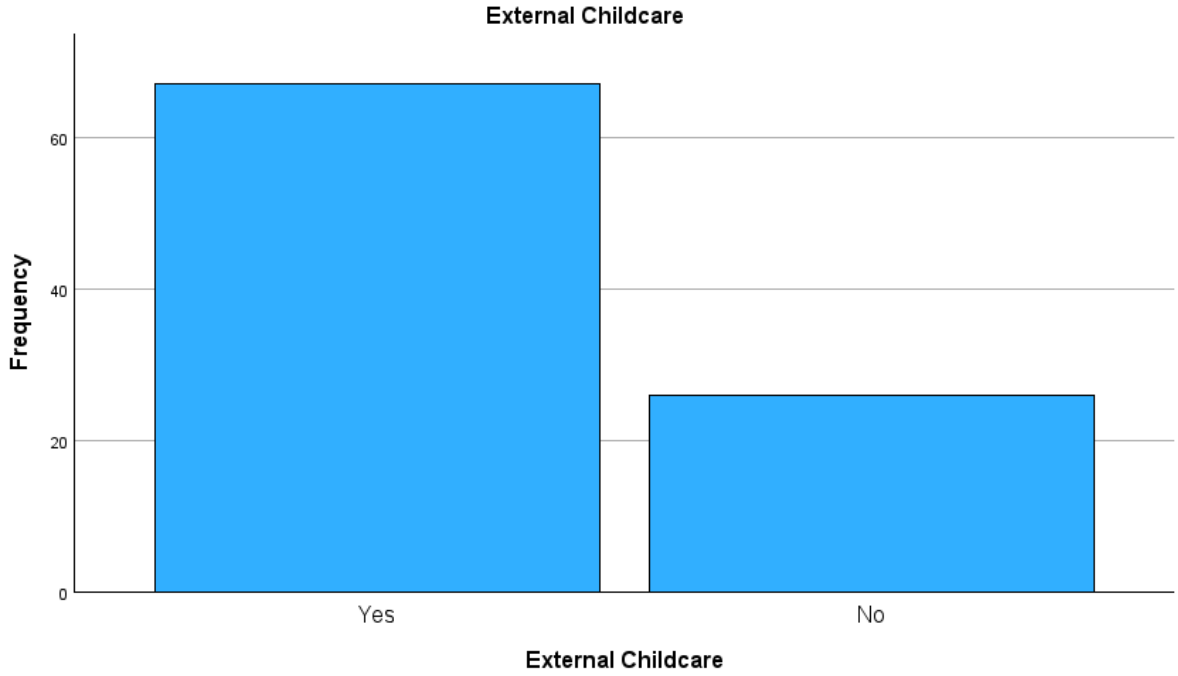


5.2.5 External Childcare Access

This factor plays a major role in assessing how the lack of safe and affordable ECD facilities affects remote working mothers in South Africa. It also sheds light on the possibilities remote work has for allowing mothers to juggle paid work and unpaid care work. Approximately 72.0% of respondents reported having external childcare arrangements, including preschools, nannies, or family support, while a small portion of respondents (28.0%) did not. This shows that while remote work might provide the promise of flexibility, external childcare is still being utilised by the large majority of this sample.

Figure 5.7 below shows a visual representation of the External Childcare Access distribution, clearly showing the dominance of those who do.

Figure 5.7 External Childcare Access Distribution of Respondents



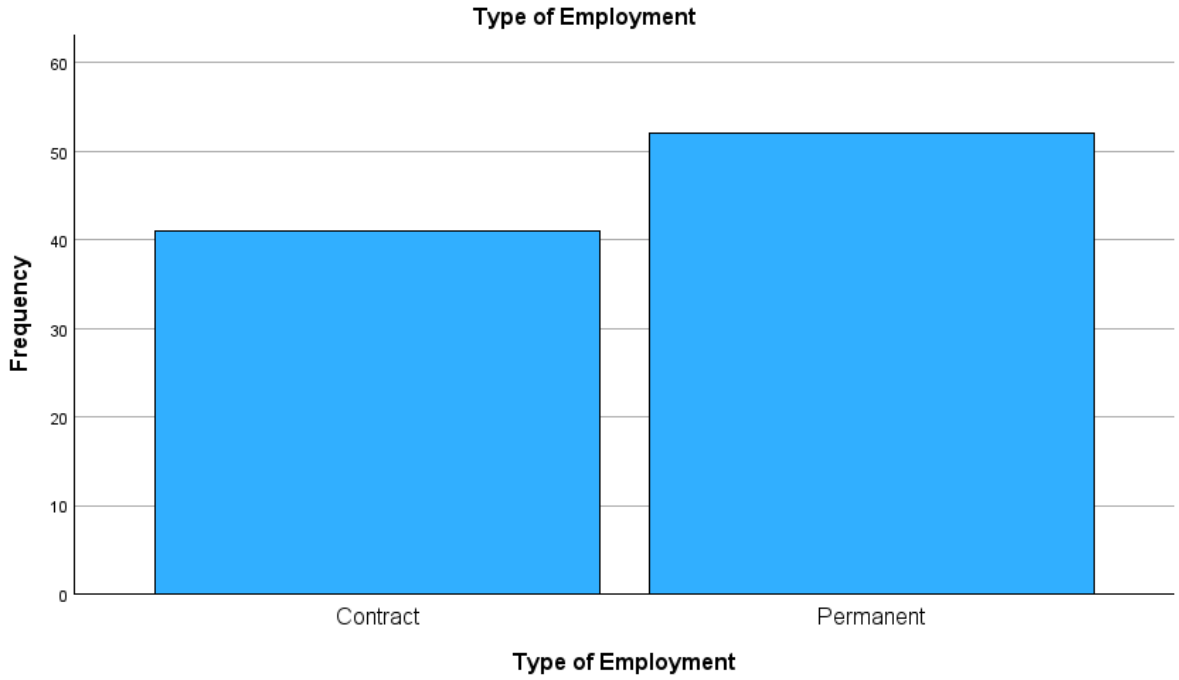
5.2.6 Employment Context

There were three variables that were included to understand the respondents' working arrangements.

Employment Type: Over half (55.9%) held permanent roles, while 44.1% were on contractual terms. This almost perfect split helps determine whether or not the legislative loophole has any direct effect on how these respondents experience remote work.

Figure 5.8 below shows a visual representation of the Employment Type distribution.

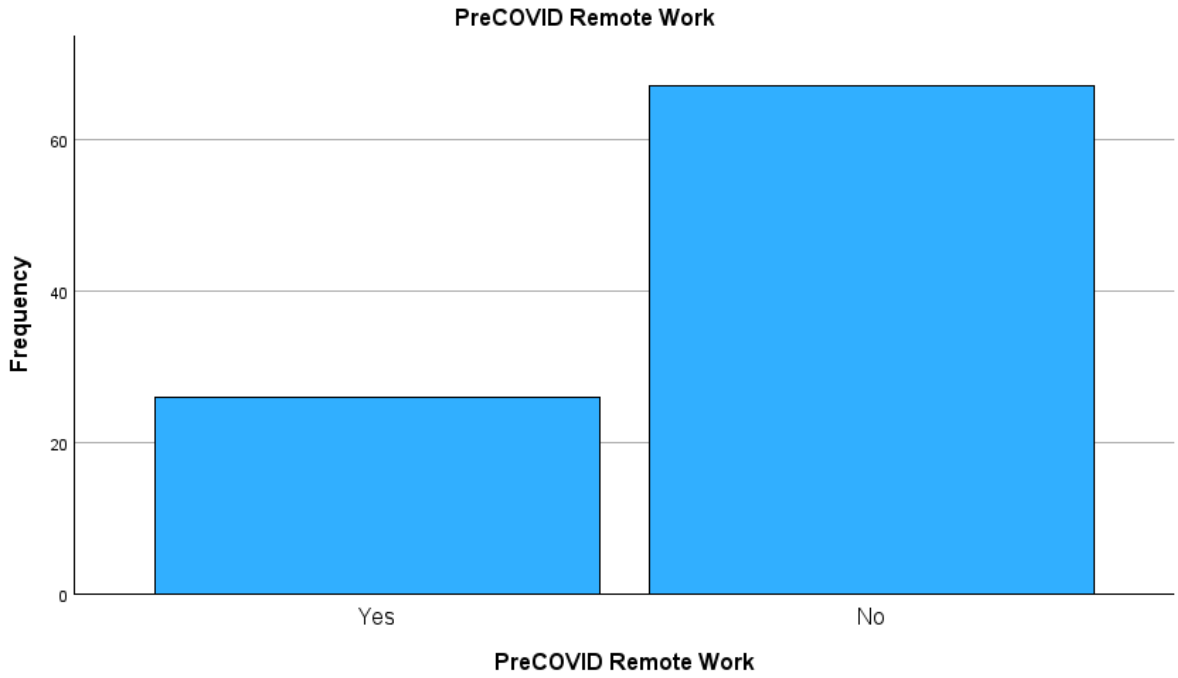
Figure 5.8 Employment Type Distribution of Respondents



Pre-COVID Remote Work: Most respondents (72.0%) had not worked remotely before the pandemic, highlighting that COVID-19 significantly reshaped their work arrangements. This finding supports the impact that the pandemic had on the acceleration of the adoption of remote work, even in the pre-pandemic era.

Figure 5.9 below shows a visual representation of the pre-COVID remote Work distribution.

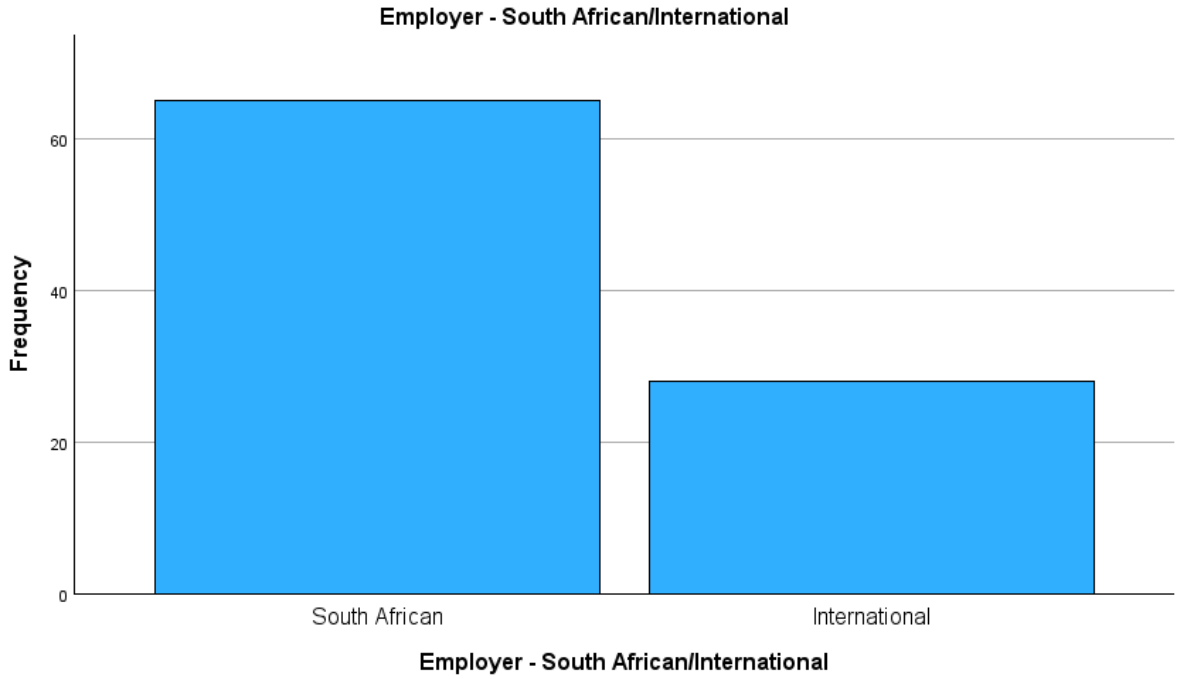
Figure 5.9 Pre-COVID Remote Work Distribution of Respondents



Employer Type: The majority of respondents (69.9%) worked for South African-based organisations, while 30.1% were employed by international employers. This finding is useful in seeing if international companies provide better experiences or if they leverage off and exploit South African mothers who were part of this study. Additionally, it helps access the experience that South African organisations are creating for the respondents.

Figure 5.10 below shows a visual representation of the Employer Type distribution.

Figure 5.10 Employer Type Distribution of Respondents



These response patterns across demographic and contextual variables provide a base understanding of those who participated in Phase 1 of this study. These patterns are important as they will inform the key findings in later analysis, giving explanations for how demographic and contextual variables shape the observed effects.

The next section tests the reliability of the scales to confirm that the questionnaire is consistent and reliable.

5.3 Scale Reliability

To assess how consistently the six thematic sections of the questionnaire measured their intended concepts, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each section. In general, an alpha score of .70 or higher is considered acceptable, although interpretation can vary depending on the context and complexity of the constructs. Table 5.2 below outlines the different levels of reliability.

Table 5.2 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Level

Cronbach's Alpha	**Reliability Level**
≥ .80	Strong
.70 – .79	Acceptable
< .70	Weak

Table 5.3 below presents the Cronbach's Alpha results for the six thematic sections of the questionnaire.

Table 5.3 Cronbach's Alpha Results for Questionnaire Sections

Cronbach's Alpha Results for Questionnaire Sections			
Section	**No. of Items**	**α**	**Reliability**
Section 1: Motivations for Choosing Remote Work	4	.555	Weak
Section 2: Benefits of Remote Work	4	.713	Acceptable
Section 3: Mental and Emotional Strain	6	.905	Strong
Section 4: Family and Domestic Support	6	.796	Acceptable
Section 5: Organisational Support	4	.751	Acceptable
Section 6: Legislative/Governmental Support	5	.763	Acceptable

Section One: Motivations for Choosing Remote Work

Section one of the questionnaire consisted of 4 questions which explored the reasons mothers chose to work remotely (Motivations for Choosing Remote Work). It scored a Cronbach's alpha of .555, indicating weak internal consistency. This likely reflects the individualised and emotionally driven nature of decision-making in maternal employment, a dimension that quantitative instruments often struggle to capture(Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

While the reliability is below the acceptable threshold, the section was retained due to its conceptual relevance and is treated as exploratory, with interpretations supported and deepened by qualitative follow-up in Phase 2. This section guides the study in understanding what motivates mothers to choose remote work. Measuring these kinds of choices using standard scales is not easy, as they are driven by deeply personal, emotional, and individual circumstances that cannot be standardised.

Section Two: Benefits of Remote Work

Section two of the questionnaire consisted of 4 questions, which examined how mothers experienced the outcomes of working remotely (Benefits of Remote Work). It scored an overall Cronbach's alpha score of .713, confirming the acceptable reliability of this section. The items collectively measured the practical and emotional advantages gained through remote work, including career continuation and improved work-life balance.

Section Three: Mental and Emotional Strain

Section three of the questionnaire consisted of 6 questions, which assessed the emotional and psychological challenges faced by remote-working mothers (Mental and Emotional Strain). It scored an overall Cronbach's alpha score of .905, confirming the strong internal reliability of this section. The items consistently captured key dimensions of mental burden, including stress, fatigue, and identity conflict.

Section Four: Family and Domestic Support

Section four of the questionnaire consisted of 6 questions which looked at the support mothers received from their household environment (Family and Domestic Support). It scored an overall Cronbach's alpha score of .796, confirming the acceptable reliability of this section. The items assessed both emotional and practical support from partners, family members, and domestic tools.

Section Five: Organisational Support

Section five of the questionnaire consisted of 4 questions which examined the institutional support provided by employers to accommodate motherhood in a remote working context (Organisational Support). It scored an overall Cronbach's alpha score of .751, confirming the acceptable reliability of this section.

Section Six: Legislative/Governmental Support

Section six of the questionnaire consisted of 5 questions which explored participants' perceptions of policy-level and legal protection (Legislative/Governmental Support). It scored an overall Cronbach's alpha score of .763, confirming the acceptable reliability of this section. The items measured awareness and trust in formal protections such as labour law, child support infrastructure, and workplace rights.

Despite Section One showing lower reliability (and retention being decided), the rest of the questionnaire showed that it was reliable. As a result, the researcher felt confident in proceeding to test and measure the descriptive statistics, which are presented in the following section.

5.4 Descriptive Statistics

Section One: Factors Influencing Your Choice of Remote Work

Section One of the questionnaire measured the motivations behind the participants' decisions to pursue remote work. It comprised four items designed to address Research Objective 1 and Research Question 1, which focus on understanding South African mothers' perceptions of how remote work affects their ability to balance work and family responsibilities. Additionally, this section also contributes to Research Objective 5 and Research Question 5 by examining the role of societal expectations and economic pressures in shaping decisions about remote work participation.

Table 5.4 Questionnaire Questions - Section 1

Section 1: Factors influencing your choice of remote work
1.1 It is important to me to also be a present mother while earning an income.
1.2 I have no alternative childcare arrangements and still need to earn an income.
1.3 I do not trust anyone else to look after my child/ren, but I still need to work.
1.4 Remote work allows me to balance my cultural expectations as a woman whilst earning an income.

Note: Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree. Lower mean values indicate stronger agreement.

Table 5.5 Descriptive Statistics for Motivations for Choosing Remote Work (N = 93)

Item	**Mean**	**SD**	**Rank**
1.1	1.12	0.36	1
1.4	1.82	0.94	2
1.3	2.65	1.32	3
1.2	2.76	1.32	4

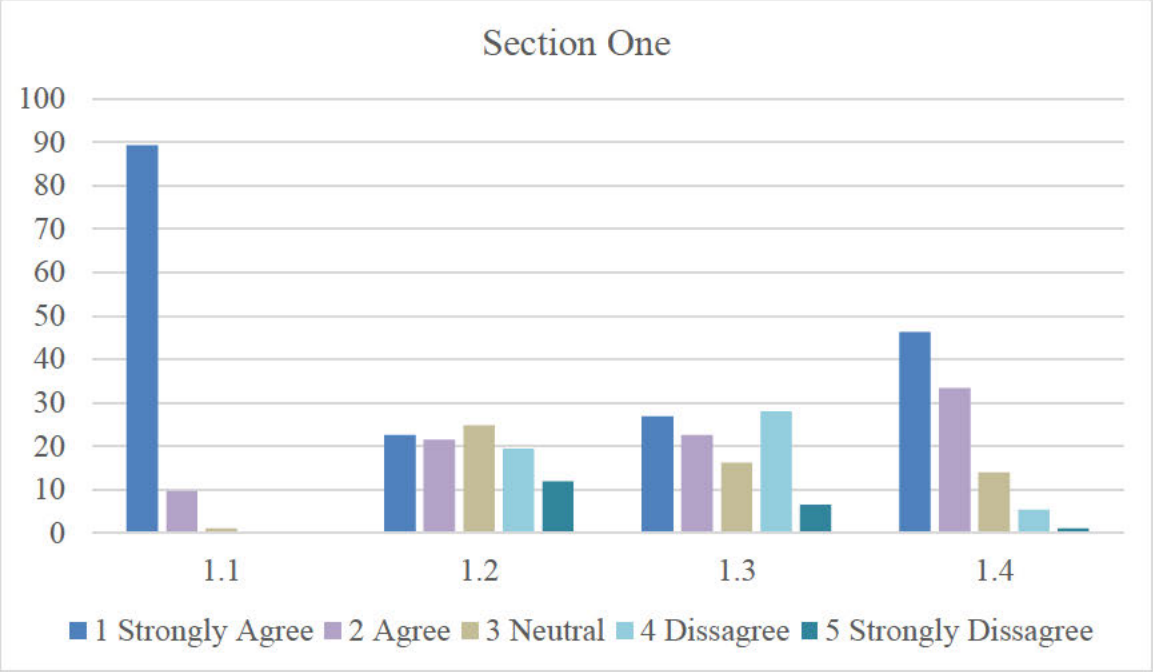
According to these stats, participants ranked the desire to remain a present mother while earning an income (Item 1.1, M = 1.12, SD = 0.36) as the strongest motivator to remote work. Almost nine out of ten respondents strongly agreed with this statement, showing a clear prioritisation of caregiving responsibilities while still needing to earn an income.

The second strongest motivation was the ability to balance cultural expectations with earning an income (Item 1.4, M = 1.82, SD = 0.94). This finding highlights the influence of gender roles and societal norms in shaping the employment choices of the mothers in this study.

The lowest two ranking items are 1.3 M = 2.65 (I do not trust anyone else to look after my child/ren, but I still need to work) and 1.2 M = 2.76 (I have no alternative childcare arrangements and still need to earn an income). While these items were less strongly agreed upon as motivators across the board, they remain relevant factors when considering what motivates mothers to choose remote work. Figure 5.11 below shows that while these two items

ranked lowest, there was still support in these being motivators for mothers to choose remote work.

Figure 5.11 Frequency Distribution of Responses for Section 1 Items (Motivations for Choosing Remote Work) N=93



Group Differences by Demographic and Contextual Variables

As motivations for choosing remote work are often shaped by personal circumstances, responses were compared across demographic and contextual variables to highlight any notable differences from the main findings of the overall outcome of the whole sample.

The outcome for the entire sample ranked Item 1.1 (It is important to me to also be a present mother while earning an income) first, Item 1.4 (Remote work allows me to balance my cultural expectations as a woman whilst earning an income) second, Item 1.3 (I do not trust anyone else to look after my child/ren, but I still need to work) third, and Item 1.2 (I have no alternative childcare arrangements and still need to earn an income) fourth. This ranking order stayed the same across most demographic and contextual variables; however, there were several differences that appeared.

No differences were noted in the age category for this section; all overall ranking orders were retained by the subgroups.

Under race, Coloured (n=11) mothers, ranked Item 1.2 (I have no alternative childcare arrangements and still need to earn an income) third instead of fourth, and 1.3 (I do not trust anyone else to look after my child/ren, but I still need to work) fourth instead of third.

In subgroups pertaining to household/family structure, Divorced (n=3) mothers ranked Item 1.2 (I have no alternative childcare arrangements and still need to earn an income) in second place, leaving Item 1.3 and 1.4 equal in weakness of agreement for this subgroup. This finding must be interpreted with caution due to the low number of participants.

Household/family structure showed no differences for this section; all overall ranking orders were retained by the subgroups.

Lastly, under employment contexts, mothers who were Permanent (n=52) employees, mothers who did not work remotely before the pandemic (n=67) and mothers employed by South African (n=65) organisations, ranked Item 1.2 (I have no alternative childcare arrangements and still need to earn an income) third instead of fourth and 1.3 (I do not trust anyone else to look after my child/ren, but I still need to work) fourth instead of third.

A consistent finding was that 1.1 (It is important to me to also be a present mother while earning an income) remained the strongest motivator for remote work across all demographic and contextual variables.

These preliminary descriptive patterns are further examined in Section 5.7 using inferential analyses to determine whether observed differences are statistically significant. Table 5.6 below shows full subgroup means for this section.

Table 5.6 Subgroup Means Section 1 (Motivations for Choosing Remote Work)

Variable	Category	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4
Age	20–29	1.19	2.75	2.44	1.44
	30–39	1.13	2.87	2.78	1.87
	40+	1.0	2.29	2.29	1.82
Race	White	1.10	2.78	2.78	1.88
	Black	1.16	3.16	2.42	1.74
	Coloured	1.18	2.18	2.45	1.73

	Indian/Asian	1.0	2.25	2.25	1.50
Marital Status	Married	1.07	3.05	3.05	1.89
	Single	1.23	2.31	1.85	1.54
	Divorced	1.33	1.67	2.0	2.0
	Other	1.0	2.57	2.43	2.14
Living With Father	Yes	1.11	2.93	2.89	1.86
	No	1.13	2.26	1.91	1.70
Single Parent	Yes	1.13	2.08	1.67	1.58
	No	1.12	3.0	2.99	1.90
External Childcare	Yes	1.13	2.99	2.85	1.84
	No	1.08	2.19	2.12	1.77
Employment Type	Contract	1.12	2.80	2.39	1.74
	Permanent	1.12	2.76	2.85	1.82
Pre-COVID Remote Work	Yes	1.08	2.81	2.31	1.85
	No	1.13	2.75	2.78	1.81
Employer Type	South African	1.12	2.58	2.66	1.83
	International	1.11	3.18	2.61	1.79
Number of Children < 5	1 child	1.14	2.81	2.67	1.88
	2 children	1.06	2.71	2.65	1.71
	3 children	1.0	3.0	1.50	1.0
	4 children	1.50	3.0	3.0	2.50

Section Two: Benefits of Remote Work

Section Two of the questionnaire explored the perceived benefits that remote work has provided to South African mothers. It comprised four items designed to address Research Objective 3 and Research Question 3, which focus on understanding the factors that influence work-life balance for mothers with young children in remote work settings. Additionally, this section contributes contextually to Research Objective 1 and Research Question 1 by highlighting mothers' perceptions of how remote work supports their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.

Table 5.7 Questionnaire Questions - Section 2

Section 2: Remote work has allowed me to…
2.1 Juggle the role of a mother and employee successfully.
2.2 Gain financial freedom and stability.
2.3 Continue to pursue my professional career while being a present mother.
2.4 Escape pressing societal crises such as situations of gender-based violence and poverty.

Note: Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree. Lower mean values indicate stronger agreement.

Table 5.8 Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Benefits of Remote Work (N = 93)

Item	Mean	SD	Rank
2.1	1.55	0.73	1
2.3	1.56	0.74	2
2.2	1.86	0.90	3
2.4	2.40	1.11	4

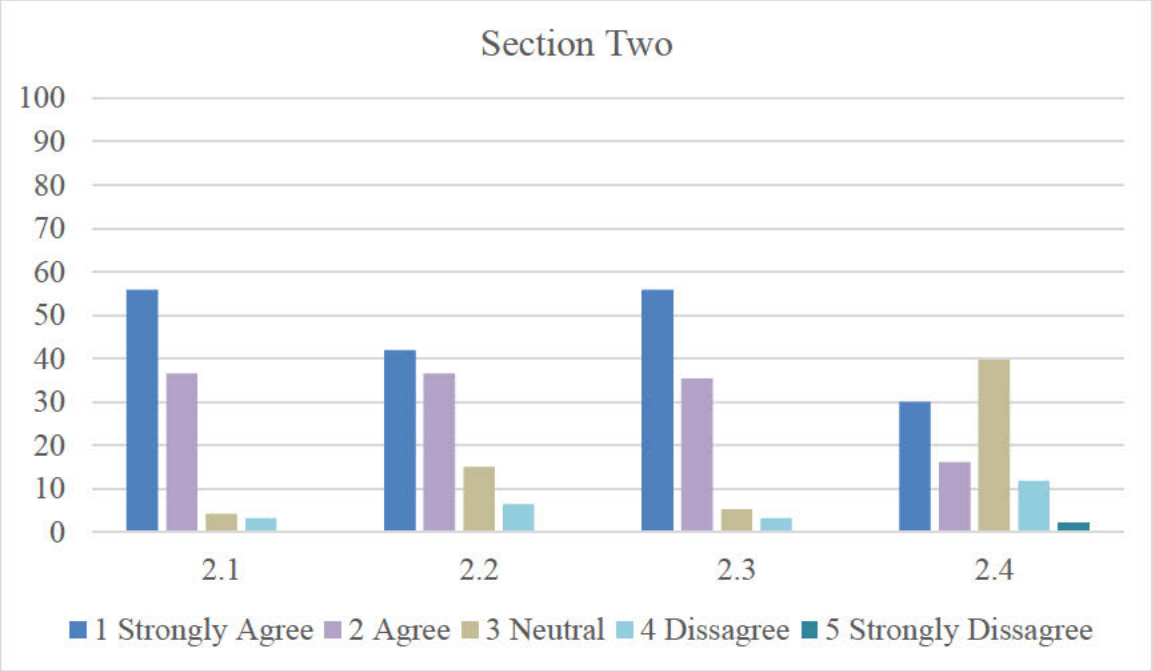
The ability to juggle the dual roles of being both a mother and an employee was perceived as the strongest benefit of remote work (Item 2.1; M = 1.55, SD = 0.73) in this section. Ranking second, the opportunity to continue pursuing a professional career while remaining present as a mother (Item 2.3; M = 1.56, SD = 0.74) showed as almost an equally strong benefit. Over

half (55.91%) of respondents selected this as Strongly Agreed for both 2.1 and 2.3, as seen in Figure 5.12 below.

Item 2.2 M = 1.86, SD = 0.90 (Gaining financial freedom and stability) followed closely in third place. This emphasises the important role which remote work plays in supporting financial security and freedom for many mothers in this study.

Finally, with a notably less strong agreement in benefit, Item 2.4, M = 2.40, SD = 1.11 (Escape pressing societal crises such as situations of gender-based violence and poverty), ranked lowest and showed the highest variability in responses. This result could be due to the fact that the support needed to escape these societal crises is more complex than just being of a financial nature.

Figure 5.12 Frequency Distribution of Responses for Section 2 Items (Perceived Benefits of Remote Work) N=93



Group Differences by Demographic and Contextual Variables

Accounting for the personal contexts that can shape the perceptions of the benefits of remote work, the responses were examined across the demographic and contextual variables to highlight differences among the outcomes of the whole sample.

The outcome for the entire sample ranked Item 2.1 (Remote work has allowed me to juggle the role of a mother and employee successfully) first, Item 2.3 (Continue to pursue my professional career while being a present mother) second, Item 2.2 (Gain financial freedom and stability)

third, and Item 2.4 (Escape pressing societal crises such as situations of gender-based violence and poverty) fourth. This ranking order stayed the same across a notable number of demographic and contextual variables and their subgroups; however, there were several differences that appeared.

Again, in this section, no differences were noted in the age categories; all overall ranking orders were retained by the subgroups.

In race, several differences were noticed. Coloured (n=11) mothers ranked Item 2.2 (Gain financial freedom and stability) second instead of Item 2.3 (Continue to pursue my professional career while being a present mother), which ranked third. For Indian/Asian (n=4), Item 2.2 (Gain financial freedom and stability) and Item 2.3 (Continue to pursue my professional career while being a present mother) showed equal and strongest agreement, moving Item 2.1 (Remote work has allowed me to juggle the role of a mother and employee successfully) into second.

For this section, most differences were seen in subgroups pertaining to household/family structure. For Married (n=57) mothers, mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status, mothers living with the father (n=70), those who are not single parents (n=69), and mothers with no external childcare (n=26), ranked Item 2.3 (Continue to pursue my professional career while being a present mother) as the strongest agreement, followed by 2.1 (Remote work has allowed me to juggle the role of a mother and employee successfully) and then Item 2.2 (Gain financial freedom and stability). Single (n=26) mothers and Single Parent (n=24) ranked Item 2.2 (Gain financial freedom and stability) second instead of Item 2.3 (Continue to pursue my professional career while being a present mother), which ranked third.

Regarding employment context, Contract (n=41) workers, mothers who did work remotely before the pandemic (n=26) and mothers working for South African (n=65) organisations, ranked Item 2.3 (Continue to pursue my professional career while being a present mother) as the strongest agreement, followed by 2.1 (Remote work has allowed me to juggle the role of a mother and employee successfully) and then Item 2.2 (Gain financial freedom and stability).

Overall, 2.4 (Escape pressing societal crises such as situations of gender-based violence and poverty) remained the weakest benefit to remote work across subgroups. This shows that very few mothers in this study experienced any benefit in this regard. Moreover, while 2.3 occasionally surpassed 2.1 (Remote work has allowed me to juggle the role of a mother and employee successfully) in the highest agreement of benefit, the benefits of both remain strongly

agreed across the sample. It is clear to see that the ability to juggle work and motherhood, as well as being able to continue to pursue a career when becoming a mother, are strong benefits of remote work for these participants.

These preliminary descriptive patterns are further examined in Section 5.7 using inferential analyses to determine whether observed differences are statistically significant. Table 5.9 below shows full subgroup means for this section.

Table 5.9 Subgroup Means Section 2 (Perceived Benefits of Remote Work)

Variable	Category	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4
Age	20–29	1.44	1.81	1.69	2.50
	30–39	1.67	1.92	1.57	2.30
	40+	1.14	1.64	1.36	2.71
Race	White	1.59	2.02	1.51	2.54
	Black	1.63	1.79	1.74	2.32
	Coloured	1.27	1.45	1.73	1.82
	Indian/Asian	1.25	1.0	1.0	2.25
Marital Status	Married	1.67	2.04	1.60	2.53
	Single	1.42	1.54	1.62	2.23
	Divorced	1.0	1.67	1.33	1.67
	Other	1.29	1.71	1.14	2.29
Living With Father	Yes	1.61	1.99	1.59	2.49
	No	1.35	1.48	1.48	2.13
Single Parent	Yes	1.38	1.54	1.67	2.17
	No	1.61	1.97	1.52	2.48
External Childcare	Yes	1.58	1.94	1.61	2.54
	No	1.46	1.65	1.42	2.04

Employment Type	Contract	1.56	1.93	1.54	2.27
	Permanent	1.54	1.81	1.58	2.50
Pre-COVID Remote Work	Yes	1.73	1.92	1.50	2.38
	No	1.48	1.84	1.58	2.40
Employer Type	South African	1.58	1.91	1.54	2.46
	International	1.46	1.75	1.61	2.25
Number of Children < 5	1 child	1.48	1.83	1.47	2.29
	2 children	1.71	2.0	1.74	2.61
	3 children	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0
	4 children	1.50	1.50	2.0	1.50

Section Three: Emotional Consequences of Remote Work

Section Three of the questionnaire explored the emotional and psychological impact of remote work on South African mothers who are the primary caregivers of their children. It comprised six items designed to address Research Objective 2 and Research Question 2, which focus on identifying the specific challenges faced by South African mothers with children under the age of five in managing remote work arrangements. Additionally, this section provides insight into Research Objective 3 and Research Question 3 by highlighting how emotional strain influences overall work-life balance.

Table 5.10 Questionnaire Questions - Section 3

Section 3: Working a remote position while being the primary caregiver of my child/ren has led me to moments/feelings of…
3.1 Burnout.
3.2 Anxiety.
3.3 I have no time for myself or rest.
3.4 My child/ren is/are suffering emotionally because I have to work.
3.5 Failing at everything, being a mother and an employee.
3.6 Disempowered as a woman.

Note: Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree. Lower mean values indicate stronger agreement.

Table 5.11 Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Consequences of Remote Work (N = 93)

Item	Mean	SD	Rank
3.3	2.28	1.19	1
3.1	2.30	1.21	2
3.2	2.43	1.23	3
3.4	3.16	1.26	4
3.5	3.01	1.29	5
3.6	3.53	1.20	6

The most emotional consequence of remote work that was most widely experienced in this study was Item 3.3; M = 2.28, SD = 1.19 (I have no time for myself or rest). This highlights the significant strain mothers face in balancing work and caregiving without sufficient time for self-care.

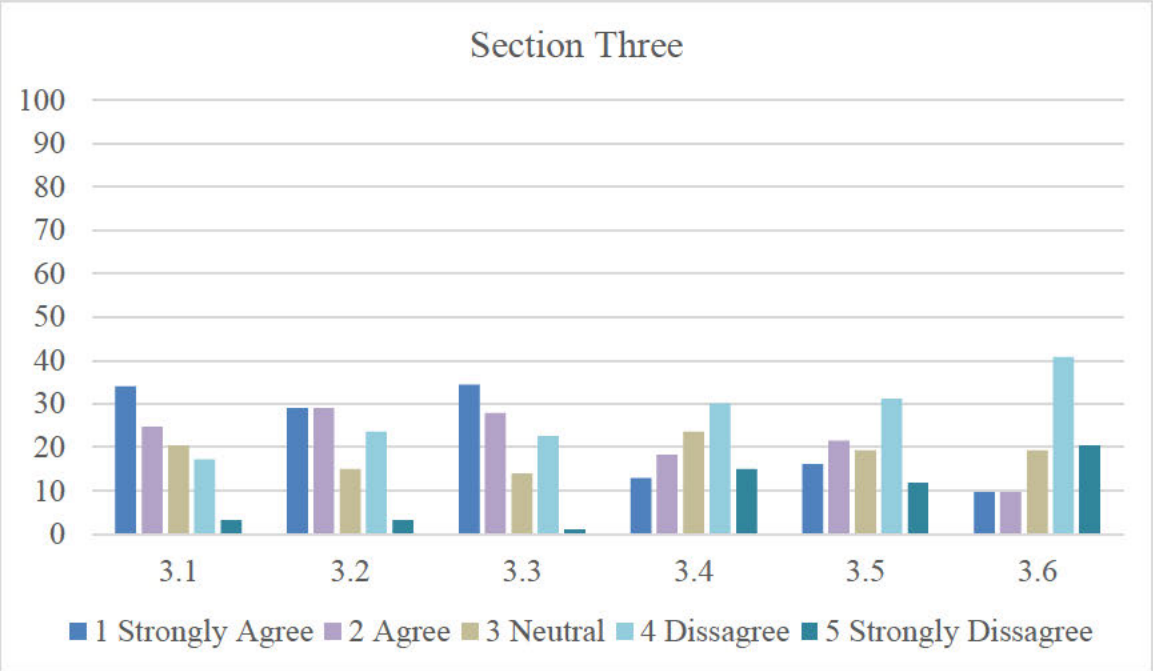
Item 3.1; M = 2.30, SD = 1.21 (Burnout) and Item 3.2; M = 2.43, SD = 1.23 (Anxiety) ranked second and third. These items reflect the intense emotional demands associated with managing paid and unpaid work. Together, Items 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 represent the most consistent emotional challenges linked to remote work for the participants in this study.

For the items ranking fourth, fifth and sixth, the agreement was a lot more varied, showing less strength in these items. Item 3.4; M = 3.16 (My child/ren is/are suffering emotionally because I have to work) and Item 3.5; M = 3.01 (Failing at everything, being a mother and an employee), ranking fourth and fifth, were experienced by a far lesser portion of respondents; however, still notable.

Item 3.6; M = 3.53, SD = 1.20 (Disempowered as a woman) showed the highest variability and weakest overall agreement across the participants in this study. This suggests that the feeling of being disempowered as a woman can be linked to specific contextual factors rather than a widely experienced consequence of remote work. Additionally, this finding may suggest that remote work has empowered these mothers.

This section showed a lot more variance in agreement levels across all questions, as seen in Figure 5.13 below. This shows that the degree to which participants experienced emotional consequences was extremely varied in both reality and degree.

Figure 5.13 Frequency Distribution of Responses for Section 3 Items (Emotional Consequences of Remote Work) N=93



Group Differences by Demographic and Contextual Variables

As a result of emotional consequences being shaped by personal context, responses were examined across the demographic and contextual variables to highlight differences among the outcomes of the whole sample.

The outcome for the entire sample ranked Item 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest) first, Item 3.1 (Burnout) second, Item 3.2 (Anxiety) third, and Item 3.4 (My child/ren is/are suffering emotionally because I have to work) fourth, Item 3.5 (Failing at everything, being a mother and an employee) fifth, and Item 3.6 (Disempowered as a woman) sixth. This ranking order showed a lot of variation across the demographic and contextual variables and their subgroups.

Age categories showed several differences in this section. Younger mothers in the 20-29 (n=16) age category ranked 3.1 (Burnout) as the strongest consequence of remote work over 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest), this age category also placed 3.2 (Anxiety) as the second strongest agreement of consequence. Additionally, younger mothers in the 20-29 (n=16),

mothers in the 30-39 (n=63) age category, mothers in the 40+ (14) age category all ranked 3.5 (Failing at everything, being a mother and an employee) fourth, shifting 3.4 (My child/ren is/are suffering emotionally because I have to work) into fifth place.

Several differences were noted in race subgroups as well. Black (n=19) mothers and Indian/Asian (n=4) ranked 3.1 (Burnout) as the strongest consequence of remote work, placing it above that of the overall number first-level Item 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest). Indian/Asian (n=4) mothers placed 3.2 (Anxiety) in second, and Black (n=19) mothers 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest) in second. Moreover, White (n=59) mothers and Indian/Asian (n=4) mothers ranked 3.5 (Failing at everything, being a mother and an employee) fourth, shifting 3.4 (My child/ren is/are suffering emotionally because I have to work) into fifth. Almost a whole order level ranking difference was noted in Coloured (n=11) mothers - this difference must be interpreted with caution due to the low number of participants.

At the household/family structure level, Single (26) mothers, mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status, mothers not living with the father (n=23), Single Parent (n=24), mothers with 2 children < 5 (n=31), and mothers with no external childcare (n=26) ranked 3.1 (Burnout) as the strongest consequence of remote work, placing it above that of the overall number first-level Item 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest). Additionally, Single (26) mothers, mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status, mothers not living with the father (n=23), Single Parent (n=24), mothers with no external childcare (n=26), and mothers with 2 children < 5 (n=31), ranked 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest) second, placing higher agreement on this item over 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest). Moreover, Married (n=57) mothers, mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status, mothers living with the father (n=70), mothers not living with the father (n=23), mothers who did not identify as a Single Parent (n=69), mothers with external childcare (n=67), mothers with no external childcare (n=26), mothers with 1 child < 5 (n=58), and mothers with 2 children < 5 (n=31) ranked 3.5 (Failing at everything, being a mother and an employee) forth, with 3.4 (My child/ren is/are suffering emotionally because I have to work) moved into fifth, being the weakest agreement of consequence. Almost a whole order level ranking difference was noted in mothers with 3 children < 5 (n=2) and mothers with 4 children < 5 (n=2) - these differences must be interpreted with caution, however, due to the low number of participants.

Differences in employment context subgroups were noted for Contract (n=41) workers, mothers who did not work remotely before the pandemic (n=67), and mothers working for

International (n=28) organisations who ranked 3.1 (Burnout) as the strongest consequence of remote work, placing it above that of the overall number first-level Item 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest). Additionally, Contract (n=41) workers, mothers who did not work remotely before the pandemic (n=67), and mothers working for International (n=28) organisations ranked 3.3 (I have no time for myself or rest) second. Moreover, Contract (n=41) workers, Permanent (n=52) workers, mothers who did work remotely before the pandemic (n=26), mothers who did not work remotely before the pandemic (n=67), mothers working for International (n=28) organisations, mothers working for South African (n=65) organisations, ranked 3.5 (Failing at everything, being a mother and an employee) fourth, shifting 3.4 (My child/ren is/are suffering emotionally because I have to work) into fifth, their weakest agreed consequence.

A consistent ranking through almost all subgroups was Item 3.6 (Disempowered as a woman) in sixth, with the weakest agreement. This shows that there was a low experience of disempowerment as a woman experienced as a result of working remotely for this group of mothers. Overall, as in the findings from the entire sample, even at the subgroup level, consequences are unique and experienced at varied levels.

These preliminary descriptive patterns are further examined in Section 5.7 using inferential analyses to determine whether observed differences are statistically significant. Table 5.12 below shows full subgroup means for this section.

Table 5.12 Subgroup Means Section 3 (Emotional Consequences of Remote Work)

Variable	Category	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	3.6
Age	20–29	2.63	2.94	3.0	3.25	3.06	3.50
	30–39	2.14	2.24	2.03	3.17	3.02	3.56
	40+	2.64	2.71	2.57	3.0	2.93	3.43
Race	White	2.03	2.07	1.93	3.0	2.75	3.42
	Black	2.74	3.11	3.0	3.58	3.89	4.11
	Coloured	2.82	3.09	2.64	3.18	3.0	2.91
	Indian/Asian	2.75	2.75	3.0	3.5	2.75	4.0

Marital Status	Married	2.19	2.26	2.12	3.02	2.82	3.35
	Single	2.62	2.85	2.73	3.31	3.31	3.65
	Divorced	3.33	3.33	3.0	4.33	4.67	4.67
	Other	1.57	1.86	1.57	3.29	2.71	4.0
Living With Father	Yes	2.11	2.24	2.09	2.94	2.76	3.31
	No	2.87	3.0	2.87	3.83	3.78	4.17
Single Parent	Yes	2.71	2.88	2.71	3.38	3.38	3.67
	No	2.16	2.28	2.13	3.09	2.88	3.48
External Childcare	Yes	2.31	2.39	2.28	3.09	3.03	3.51
	No	2.27	2.54	2.27	3.35	2.96	3.58
Employment Type	Contract	2.32	2.59	2.46	3.34	3.32	3.61
	Permanent	2.29	2.31	2.13	3.02	2.77	3.46
Pre-COVID Remote Work	Yes	2.0	2.12	1.85	2.81	2.77	3.58
	No	2.42	2.55	2.45	3.30	3.10	3.51
Employer Type	South African	2.38	2.49	2.32	3.12	2.97	3.46
	International	2.11	2.29	2.18	3.25	3.11	3.68
Number of Children < 5	1 child	2.22	2.41	2.19	3.21	3.02	3.60
	2 children	2.19	2.29	2.26	3.0	2.81	3.29
	3 children	4.50	3.50	3.50	4.0	4.50	4.50
	4 children	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.50	4.50	4.0

Section Four: Family/Home Support

Section Four of the questionnaire examined the extent to which South African mothers working remotely receive support within the home and from family members. It aimed to understand the balance of domestic responsibilities, caregiving support, and access to resources that alleviate household demands. This section included six items primarily designed to address Research Objective 3 and Research Question 3, which focus on understanding the factors influencing work-life balance for mothers with young children. Additionally, it contributes to Research Objective 4 and Research Question 4 by providing insights into the strategies mothers use to maintain balance while navigating remote work.

Table 5.13 Questionnaire Questions - Section 4

Section 4: Family/Home Support
4.1 The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me.
4.2 I receive consistent support from family members in caring for my child/ren.
4.3 My family is supportive of my remote work arrangements.
4.4 The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our child/ren is/are unwell.
4.5 Both the father and I share parental responsibilities for our child/ren equally.
4.6 I have access to equipment such as a washing machine and dishwasher, which alleviates some domestic tasks.

Note: Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree. Lower mean values indicate stronger agreement.

Table 5.14 Descriptive Statistics for Family and Home Support (N = 93)

Item	Mean	SD	Rank
4.6	1.66	1.03	1
4.3	1.81	0.88	2
4.2	2.57	1.29	3
4.5	2.84	1.40	4
4.1	2.86	1.38	5

4.4	2.92	1.36	6

The strongest form of support reported by participants came from practical resources rather than shared caregiving responsibilities. The highest level of agreement was recorded for Item 4.6 M = 1.66, SD = 1.03 (I have access to equipment such as a washing machine and dishwasher, which alleviates some domestic tasks), which indicated that most mothers in this study had access to domestic appliances such as washing machines and dishwashers. This helps lighten the domestic load, serving as a tool/mechanism for managing the load.

Item 4.3 M = 1.81, SD = 0.88 (My family is supportive of my remote work arrangements) ranked second. This support from family was widely agreed by participants, highlighting the importance of external support for mothers engaging in remote work.

Item 4.2 M = 2.57, SD = 1.29 (I receive consistent support from family members in caring for my child/ren) ranked third. This item showed that a lot of participants had consistent help from extended family members in regard to looking after their child/ren; however, the mean was a lot higher, showing that this level of support was not experienced consistently by all participants.

Item 4.5 M = 2.84 (Both the father and I share parental responsibilities for our child/ren equally) and Item 4.1 M = 2.86 (The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me), ranking fourth and fifth, showed far hair variability along with much lower agreement. This suggests that while some participants had support from the father, most did not. This low agreement in support from the father further highlights the disproportionate load mothers carry.

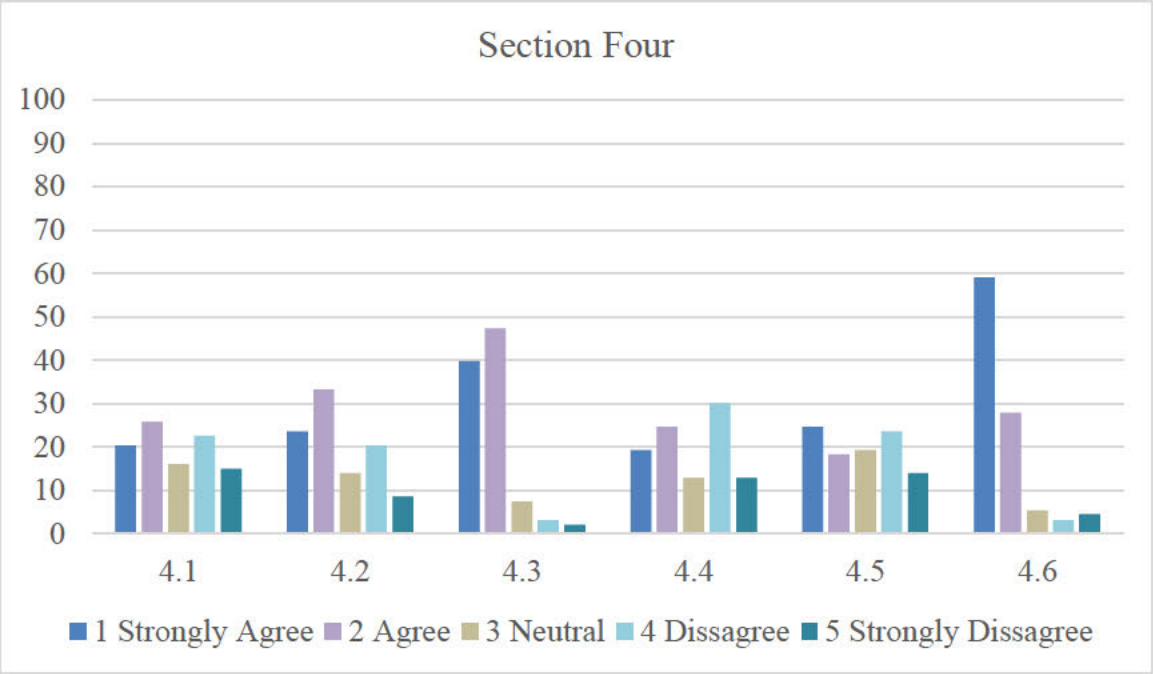
The lowest level of agreement was for Item 4.4 M = 2.92 (The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our child/ren is/are unwell), which ranked sixth. Again, this shows how the responsibility of caregiving falls on the mother. Additionally, it speaks to the societal/cultural expectations of mothers being the default caregivers of children. It is also important to note that while this expectation has a negative impact on mothers, placing primary care responsibility on her, it also leaves willing/supportive fathers facing stigmatisation.

These findings show that the support mothers in this study receive is mainly from extended family and equipment rather than from the father of their child/ren. This supports the findings, which state that mothers shoulder a disproportionate share of caregiving responsibilities in

relation to fathers. The results also highlight ongoing gendered patterns in household roles, showing that mothers often rely more on structural support than on equal parental participation.

This section showed a lot more variance in agreement levels across all questions, as seen in Figure 5.14 below. This shows that the degree to which participants experienced family/home support was extremely varied and a lot weaker overall.

Figure 5.14 Frequency Distribution of Responses for Section 4 Items (Family/Home Support) N=93



Group Differences by Demographic and Contextual Variables

The support one receives from family and in their home is often dependent shaped by personal context. Therefore, responses were examined across the demographic and contextual variables to highlight differences among the outcomes of the whole sample.

The outcomes of the entire sample ranked Item 4.6 (I have access to equipment such as a washing machine and dishwasher, which alleviates some domestic tasks) first, Item 4.3 (My family is supportive of my remote work arrangements) second, Item 4.2 (I receive consistent support from family members in caring for my child/ren) third, Item 4.5 (Both the father and I share parental responsibilities for our child/ren equally) fourth, Item 4.1 (The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me) fifth, and Item 4.4 (The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our

child/ren is/are unwell) sixth. Significant variance was seen in ranking order when looking at the demographic and contextual variables and their subgroups.

Age categories showed minimal difference in this section. Older mothers in the 40+ (n=14) age category ranked 4.6 (I have access to equipment such as a washing machine and dishwasher, which alleviates some domestic tasks) third instead of first. Additionally, mothers in the 20-29 (n=16) age category and older mothers in the 40+ (n=14) age category ranked 4.3 (My family is supportive of my remote work arrangements) first instead of second. Moreover, older mothers in the 40+ (n=14) age category ranked Item 4.2 (I receive consistent support from family members in caring for my child/ren) fifth and 4.5 (Both the father and I share parental responsibilities for our child/ren equally) as their lowest agreement of family/home support in sixth, two ranking levels lower than the overall - Mothers in the 30-39 (n=63) age category presented the same sixth ranking item. For Item 4.1 (The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me) and Item 4.4 (The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our child/ren is/are unwell), which ranked fifth and sixth in the overall sample, mothers in the 30-39 (n=63) age category and older mothers in the 40+ (n=14) age category ranked it higher in either third or fourth place.

In the race subgroups, Coloured (n=11) mothers and Indian/Asian (n=4) mothers ranked 4.6 (I have access to equipment such as a washing machine and dishwasher, which alleviates some domestic tasks) second as opposed to first, and Black (n=19) mothers ranked it third. Additionally, Coloured (n=11) mothers and Indian/Asian (n=4) mothers ranked 4.3 (My family is supportive of my remote work arrangements) first instead of second, where Black (n=19) mothers ranked Item 4.2 (I receive consistent support from family members in caring for my child/ren) first. Moreover, White (n=59) mothers, Black (n=19) mothers and Indian/Asian (n=4) mothers ranked Item 4.5 (Both the father and I share parental responsibilities for our child/ren equally) lower in fifth and sixth and Item 4.1 (The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me) and Item 4.4 (The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our child/ren is/are unwell) higher in either third or fourth place instead of fifth and sixth as per the overall.

Household/family structure showed several subgroup differences. Single Parents (n=24) ranked 4.6 (I have access to equipment such as a washing machine and dishwasher, which alleviates some domestic tasks) second instead of first, and Divorced (n=3) mothers, mothers not living with the father (n=23), and mothers with 4 children < 5 (n=2) ranked it third.

Additionally, Single (n=26) mothers, Divorced (n=3) mothers, mothers not living with the father (n=23) and Single Parents (n=24) ranked 4.3 (My family is supportive of my remote work arrangements) first instead of second. Moreover, mothers with 4 children < 5 (n=2) ranked Item 4.2 (I receive consistent support from family members in caring for my child/ren) first, Divorced (n=3) mothers and mothers not living with the father (n=23) ranked it second, mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status, ranked it fourth, and mothers living with the father (n=70) and mothers with 3 children < 5 (n=2) ranked it fifth. Moreover, Item 4.5 (Both the father and I share parental responsibilities for our child/ren equally) was ranked higher by mothers living with the father (n=70), who ranked it third where Single (n=26) mothers, Divorced (n=3) mothers, mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status, mothers not living with the father (n=23) and Single Parents (n=24), mothers with no external childcare (n=26), mothers with 2 children < 5 (n=31) and mothers with 4 children < 5 (n=2), ranked it lower in fifth and sixth. For Item 4.1 (The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me) and Item 4.4 (The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our child/ren is/are unwell), which ranked fifth and sixth in the overall sample, Single (n=26) mothers, Divorced (n=3) mothers, mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status, mothers living with the father (n=70), mothers with no external childcare (n=26), Single Parents (n=24), mothers with 2 children < 5 (n=31), mothers with 3 children < 5 (n=2) and mothers with 4 children < 5 (n=2), ranked it higher in either third or fourth place as opposed to fifth and sixth as seen in the overall.

Lastly, several subgroup differences were noted in the employment context. For Item 4.2 (I receive consistent support from family members in caring for my child/ren), Permanent (n=52) employees and mothers working for South African (n=65) organisations ranked it fourth, two ranking levels lower than the overall. Additionally, Item 4.5 (Both the father and I share parental responsibilities for our child/ren equally) was ranked higher by Permanent (n=52) employees and mothers working for South African (n=65) organisations, who ranked it third, where Contract (n=41) workers, mothers who did work remotely before the pandemic (n=26), and mothers working for International (n=28) organisations ranked it lower in fifth and sixth. Moreover, for Item 4.1 (The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me) and Item 4.4 (The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our child/ren is/are unwell), which ranked fifth and sixth in the overall sample, Contract (n=41) workers, mothers who worked remotely before the pandemic

(n=26), mothers working for International (n=28) organisations, ranked it higher in either third or fourth place.

This section showed a lot of variance between subgroup rankings and those of the overall sample results. However, Item 4.6 (I have access to equipment such as a washing machine and dishwasher, which alleviates some domestic tasks) and Item 4.3 (My family is supportive of my remote work arrangements), which ranked first and second overall, showed the strongest continuation of ranking. This suggests that these two items remain the strongest agreement items of family/home support for the mothers in this study.

These preliminary descriptive patterns are further examined in Section 5.7 using inferential analyses to determine whether observed differences are statistically significant. Table 5.15 below shows full subgroup means for this section.

Table 5.15 Subgroup Means Section 4 (Family and Home Support)

Variable	Category	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6
Age	20–29	2.94	2.25	1.75	2.75	2.56	1.75
	30–39	2.84	2.57	1.86	2.97	2.87	1.63
	40+	2.86	2.93	1.64	2.93	3.0	1.64
Race	White	2.95	2.86	1.81	3.14	2.95	1.46
	Black	2.84	2.11	2.11	2.79	3.11	2.26
	Coloured	2.36	1.91	1.45	2.18	1.91	1.64
	Indian/Asian	3.0	2.025	1.25	2.50	2.50	1.75
Marital Status	Married	2.63	2.56	1.75	2.81	2.56	1.37
	Single	3.27	2.62	2.08	3.27	3.31	2.38
	Divorced	3.33	2.33	1.33	4.0	4.0	2.33
	Other	3.0	2.57	1.43	2.14	2.86	1.0
Living With Father	Yes	2.61	2.69	1.76	2.80	2.54	1.43
	No	3.61	2.22	1.96	3.30	3.74	2.35

Single Parent	Yes	3.42	2.42	1.92	3.25	3.46	2.38
	No	2.67	2.62	1.77	2.81	2.62	1.42
External Childcare	Yes	2.88	2.63	1.78	2.97	2.78	1.69
	No	2.81	2.42	1.88	2.81	3.0	1.58
Employment Type	Contract	3.0	2.46	1.95	3.10	3.12	1.78
	Permanent	2.75	2.65	1.69	2.79	2.62	1.56
Pre-COVID Remote Work	Yes	2.56	2.42	1.73	2.58	2.73	1.46
	No	2.94	2.63	1.84	3.06	2.88	1.73
Employer Type	South African	2.71	2.68	1.83	2.77	2.65	1.66
	International	3.21	2.32	1.75	3.29	3.29	1.64
Number of Children < 5	1 child	2.97	2.57	1.84	3.02	2.83	1.69
	2 children	2.65	2.61	1.77	2.74	2.84	1.65
	3 children	3.50	3.0	1.50	2.50	2.50	1.0
	4 children	2.50	1.50	1.50	3.50	3.50	1.50

Section Five: Organisational Support

Section Five of the questionnaire examined the extent to which employers support South African mothers working remotely. This section consisted of four items and was designed to address Research Objective 6 and Research Question 6, which focus on assessing the adequacy of organisational policies and interventions in supporting mothers who balance caregiving responsibilities with remote work. It also contributes to Research Objective 4 and Research Question 4 by providing insights into the strategies mothers use to maintain balance while navigating remote work.

Table 5.16 Questionnaire Questions - Section 5

Section 5: Organisational support
5.1 My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need.
5.2 I have equal opportunity for growth and promotions in relation to male employees who do not have children.
5.3 My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position.
5.4 I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee.

Note: Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree. Lower mean values indicate stronger agreement.

Table 5.17 Descriptive Statistics for Organisational Support (N = 93)

Item	Mean	SD	Rank
5.4	1.95	0.94	1
5.1	1.98	0.91	2
5.3	2.02	0.96	3
5.2	2.58	1.23	4

The highest ranking item for this section was Item 5.4; M = 1.95, SD = 0.94 (I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee). This shows strength in the mothers in this study, who feel prepared and equipped to fulfil the expectations of their roles in their remote work positions.

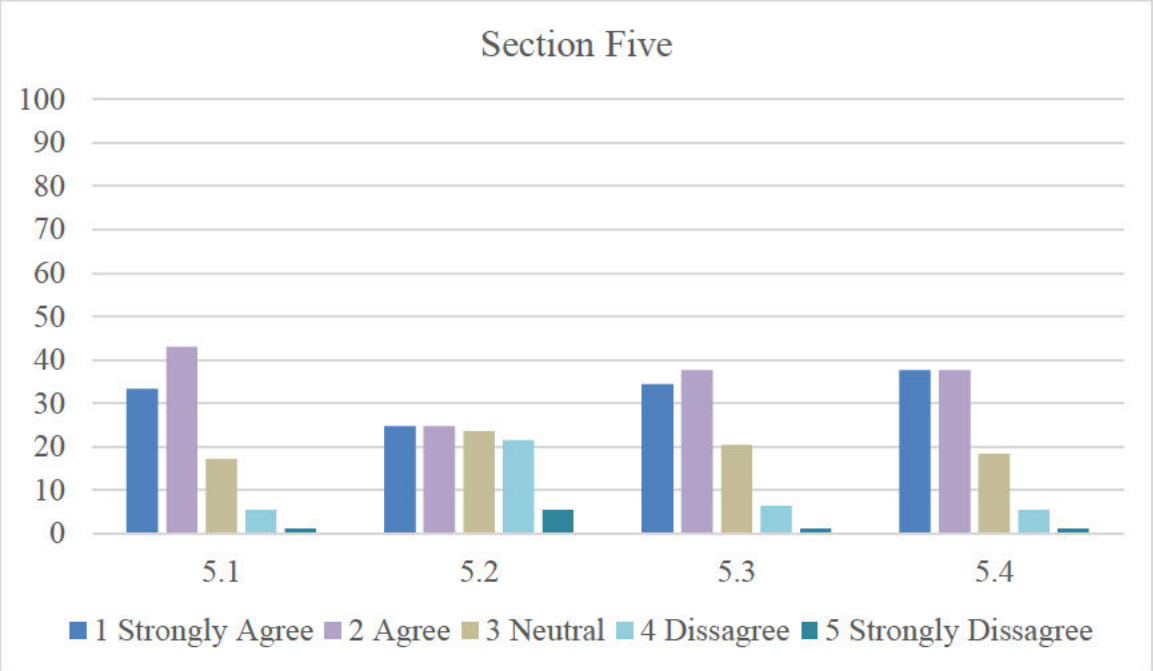
Ranking closely in second, Item 5.1 M = 1.98, SD = 0.91 (My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need), mothers who feel supported by their employers. Additionally, Item 5.3 M = 2.02, SD = 0.96 (My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position), ranking third, showed further confidence in the support organisations are giving these mothers to manage work and motherhood.

In contrast, Item 5.2 M = 2.58, SD = 1.23 (I have equal opportunity for growth and promotions in relation to male employees who do not have children) ranked fourth, with the weakest agreement and most variability. This highlights that while some support exists, many mothers still feel that they lack equal opportunities for growth compared to male colleagues, highlighting the spill-over of gender inequality/oppression into the digital workspace.

Overall, these findings show a positive result in terms of organisations supporting mothers in remote working positions; however, the presence of gender inequality still persists in the digital workspace.

Figure 5.15 below shows that there were not many cases in this section where items were rated with Strongly Disagree; the ratings for this section were largely Strongly Agree and Agree. This shows strong agreement for items in this section.

Figure 5.15 Frequency Distribution of Responses for Section 5 Items (Organisational Support) N=93



Group Differences by Demographic and Contextual Variables

As organisational support can be shaped by personal and workplace contexts, responses were examined across the demographic and contextual variables to highlight differences among the outcomes of the whole sample.

The outcome for the entire sample ranked Item 5.4 (I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee) first, Item 5.1 (My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need) second, Item 5.3 (My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position) third, and Item 5.2 (I have equal opportunity for growth and promotions in relation to male employees who do not have children) fourth. While strength in agreement was consistent, a lot of variation in item ranking order was noted across the demographic and contextual variables and their subgroups.

Several differences were noted in this section regarding age. For older mothers in the 40+ (n=14) age category, 5.1 (My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need) ranked first. Additionally, younger mothers in the 20-29 (n=16) age category ranked 5.3 (My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position) as their strongest agreement regarding organisational support, first and Item 5.4 (I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee) in third. Moreover, Item 5.1 (My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need) took a different ranking order for older mothers in the 40+ (n=14) age category who ranked it as their strongest item of organisational support, they also put Item 5.3 (My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position) in second and Item 5.4 (I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee) in third.

Race also presented numerous differences. For White (n=59) mothers, 5.1 (My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need) ranked first, where Coloured (n=11) mothers ranked it third. Both White (n=59) mothers and Black (n=19) mothers ranked Item 5.4 (I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee) second. Additionally, Black (n=19) mothers ranked 5.3 (My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes

me feel secure in my position) as their strongest agreement regarding organisational support, where Coloured (n=11) mothers ranked it second.

Difference in household/family structure was seen in Divorced (n=3) mothers, mothers with external childcare (n=67) and mothers with 1 child < 5 (n=58) who ranked 5.1 (My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need) first instead of 5.4 (I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee) as seen in the overall, where Single (n=26) mothers, mothers with no external childcare (n=26), and mothers with 2 children < 5 (n=31) ranked it third. Item 5.2 (I have equal opportunity for growth and promotions in relation to male employees who do not have children) ranked higher by one level, ranking third for Divorced (n=3) mothers, mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status and mothers with 4 children < 5 (n=2). Additionally, Single (n=26) mothers, mothers not living with the father (n=23), and Single Parent (n=24) ranked 5.3 (My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position) as their strongest agreement regarding organisational support where Divorced (n=3) mothers ranked it second, and mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status it fourth. Moreover, Item 5.4 (I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee) was ranked second by Single (n=26) mothers, mothers with external childcare (n=67), third by mothers not living with the father (n=23), Single Parent (n=24), mothers with 1 child < 5 (n=58), and lastly, fourth by Divorced (n=3) mothers.

Employment context showed differences in Contract (n=41) workers, mothers who did not work remotely before the pandemic (n=67), and Mothers working for South African (n=65) organisations, who ranked 5.1 (My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need) first, where mothers working for International (n=28) organisations ranked 5.3 (My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position) as their strongest agreement regarding organisational support. Item 5.2 (I have equal opportunity for growth and promotions in relation to male employees who do not have children) ranked higher by one level, ranking third by mothers working for International (n=28) organisations Moreover, 5.4 (I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee) ranked second for Contract (n=41) workers, mothers who did not work remotely before the pandemic (n=67),

third for Mothers working for South African (n=65) organisations and fourth for mothers working for International (n=28) organisations.

While the third-ranking item for the overall sample was Item 5.3 (My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position), for the subgroups, a lot of variation was noted across items. Items 5.1, 5.2 and 5.4 received a third-level ranking across various subgroups. This shows great variation, where every item was placed in third by at least four subgroups.

These preliminary descriptive patterns are further examined in Section 5.7 using inferential analyses to determine whether observed differences are statistically significant. Table 5.18 below shows full subgroup means for this section.

Table 5.18 Subgroup Means Section 5 (Perceived Organisational Support)

Variable	Category	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4
Age	20–29	2.06	2.38	1.81	2.06
	30–39	2.03	2.75	2.13	1.95
	40+	1.64	2.07	1.79	1.79
Race	White	1.97	2.69	2.08	2.03
	Black	2.16	2.47	2.05	2.05
	Coloured	1.73	2.09	1.55	1.45
	Indian/Asian	2.0	2.75	2.25	1.50
Marital Status	Married	1.91	2.74	2.09	1.86
	Single	2.23	2.42	1.92	2.19
	Divorced	1.0	2.33	1.67	2.33
	Other	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.57
Living With Father	Yes	1.96	2.64	2.04	1.90
	No	2.04	2.39	1.96	2.09
Single Parent	Yes	1.96	2.21	1.87	2.08

	No	1.99	2.71	2.07	1.90
External Childcare	Yes	1.97	2.64	2.06	1.97
	No	2.0	2.42	1.92	1.88
Employment Type	Contract	2.12	2.73	2.20	2.17
	Permanent	1.87	2.46	1.88	1.77
Pre-COVID Remote Work	Yes	2.04	2.35	2.12	1.88
	No	1.96	2.67	1.99	1.97
Employer Type	South African	1.95	2.75	2.03	2.06
	International	2.04	2.18	2.0	2.68
Number of Children < 5	1 child	1.98	2.57	2.07	2.07
	2 children	1.94	2.55	1.90	1.74
	3 children	2.0	3.50	2.0	1.50
	4 children	2.50	2.50	2.50	2

Section Six: Legislative/Governmental Support

Section Six of the questionnaire examined mothers' perceptions of the legislative and governmental frameworks that shape their experiences of remote work. This section consisted of five items and was designed to address Research Objective 6 and Research Question 6, which focus on assessing the adequacy of policy protections and government-supported interventions in supporting mothers who balance caregiving responsibilities with remote work. Additionally, this section provides contextual insights relevant to Research Objective 5 and Research Question 5 by exploring how societal expectations and the availability of affordable government childcare influence mothers' decisions about remote work participation.

Table 5.19 Questionnaire Questions - Section 6

Section 6: Legislative/governmental support
6.1 I feel protected by government legislation in my remote working position.
6.2 I know my rights as a remote worker in South Africa.
6.3 My employer follows guidelines set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (e.g. leave, lunchtime, remuneration) as if I were an employee working in an office.
6.4 South African legislation supports/protects working mothers.
6.5 If there were more affordable government ECD (Early Childhood Development) centres that were well regulated, that I could send my child/ren while I work, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position.

Note: Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree. Lower mean values indicate stronger agreement.

Table 5.20 Descriptive Statistics for Legislative and Governmental Support (N = 93)

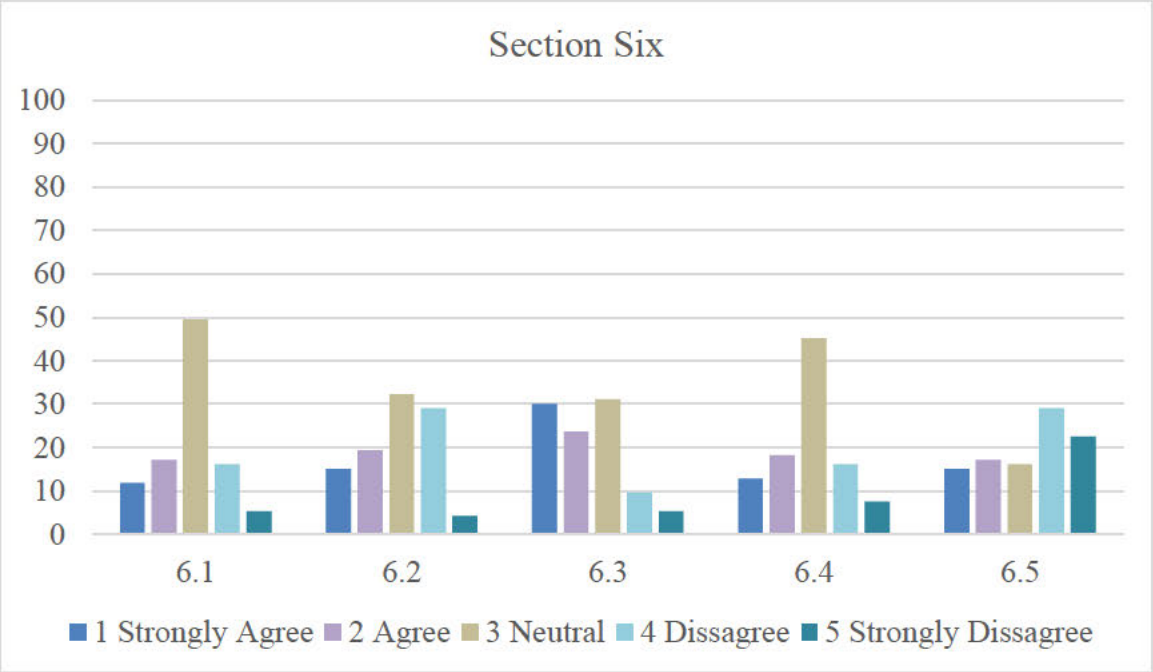
Item	**Mean**	**SD**	**Rank**
6.3	2.37	1.17	1
6.1	2.86	1.01	2
6.4	2.87	1.08	3
6.2	2.88	1.12	4
6.5	3.27	1.38	5

The results suggest that the mothers in this study hold mixed perceptions of legislative and governmental support. Figure 5.16 below shows a visual representation of these varied perceptions. Item 6.3 M = 2.37, SD = 1.17 (My employer follows guidelines set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act [e.g. leave, lunchtime, remuneration] as if I were an employee working in an office) was the highest-ranked item. This indicates that many participants believe that their employers follow the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA). However, Figure 5.16 shows that the agreement in this was both varied and not exactly strong, which shows uncertainty.

In regard to the confidence participants have in state protections, as well as their awareness of their legislative rights, showed even greater weakness and uncertainty. Items 6.1 (I feel protected by government legislation in my remote working position), 6.2 (I know my rights as a remote worker in South Africa), and 6.4 (South African legislation supports/protects working mothers) all had mean values near the scale midpoint (~2.8). This suggests that a lot of uncertainty exists around the adequacy as well as the existence of legislative protections for remote-working mothers in South Africa.

Item 6.5 (If there were more affordable government ECD (Early Childhood Development) centres that were well regulated, that I could send my child/ren while I work, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position) showed strong overall weakness in agreement. This suggests that even if affordable, regulated, safe and accessible ECD centres were available, these mothers would still choose to work remotely.

Figure 5.16 Frequency Distribution of Responses for Section 6 Items (Legislative/Governmental Support) N=93



Group Differences by Demographic and Contextual Variables

To better understand differences in perceptions of legislative and governmental support, responses were examined across key demographic and contextual variables.

For the total sample, Item 6.3 (My employer follows guidelines set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act as if I were an employee working in an office) ranked first, Item 6.1 (I feel protected by government legislation in my remote working position) ranked second, Item 6.4 (South African legislation supports/protects working mothers) third, Item 6.2 (I know my rights as a remote worker in South Africa) fourth, and Item 6.5 (If there were more affordable government ECD centres that were well regulated, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position) ranked fifth. While the overall pattern of agreement was relatively consistent, several variations in the ranking order of these items were noted across the demographic and contextual variables and their subgroups.

Age presented a lot of differences in ranking order. The top ranking, Item 6.3 (My employer follows guidelines set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act as if I were an employee working in an office), remained the strongest agreement in these subgroups. However, for Item 6.1 (I feel protected by government legislation in my remote working position), which ranked second overall, younger mothers in the 20-29 (n=16) age category and older mothers in the 40+ (n=14) age category ranked it third, and mothers in the 30-39 (n=63) age category ranked it fourth. This item was overall lower in these subgroups. Item 6.2 (I know my rights as a remote worker in South Africa), which ranked fourth overall, ranked weakest in fifth by 20-29 (n=16), third by 30-39 (n=63) and even higher by 40+ (n=14) in second. Item 6.4 (South African legislation supports/protects working mothers) was ranked stronger by 30-39 (n=63) in second, and weaker by 20-29 (n=16) and 40+ (n=14) in fourth. Item 6.5 (If there were more affordable government ECD centres that were well-regulated, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position) went from overall fifth and weakest, to second for 20-29 (n=16).

Race subgroups also showed several differences. The top ranking, Item 6.3 (My employer follows guidelines set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act as if I were an employee working in an office) ranked lower in second for Black (n=19) and Indian/Asian (n=4) mothers. For Item 6.1 (I feel protected by government legislation in my remote working position), Indian/Asian (n=4) mothers ranked it higher in first, and Black (n=19) and Coloured (n=11) mothers ranked it lower in third and fourth. Item 6.2 (I know my rights as a remote worker in

South Africa), ranked weakest in fifth by Indian/Asian (n=4) and Coloured (n=11) mothers, but higher in third by White (n=59) mothers. Coloured (n=11) mothers ranked Item 6.4 (South African legislation supports/protects working mothers) one place higher in third, and White (n=59) mothers ranked it one place lower in fourth. Item 6.5 (If there were more affordable government ECD centres that were well-regulated, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position) went from overall fifth and weakest to third for Coloured (n=11) mothers and fourth for Indian/Asian (n=4) mothers.

Far less difference was noted in household/family structure subgroups, with several subgroups retaining the overall ranking order. Item 6.3 (My employer follows guidelines set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act as if I were an employee working in an office) ranked three places lower, in fourth for Divorced (n=3) mothers. For Married (n=57) mothers, Divorced (n=3) mothers, mothers, and mothers with no external childcare (n=26), Item 6.4 (South African legislation supports/protects working mothers) gained one level in strength of agreement but lost one for Single (n=26) mothers, Divorced (n=3) mothers, and mothers with external childcare (n=67). Item 6.5 (If there were more affordable government ECD centres that were well-regulated, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position) went from overall fifth and weakest to third for mothers who selected Other (n=7) in marital status. For mothers with 1 child < 5 (n=58), items 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4 ranked equally in second, the same was seen for mothers with 4 children < 5, with the addition of 3.3 ranking equally, placing the first four items on equal level at first.

Lastly, looking at the employment context, several one-level differences were noted, with only three two-level changes. The top ranking, Item 6.3 (My employer follows guidelines set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act as if I were an employee working in an office), remained the strongest agreement in these subgroups as well as the overall weakest ranking, Item 6.5 (If there were more affordable government ECD centres that were well-regulated, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position). However, for Item 6.1 (I feel protected by government legislation in my remote working position), which ranked second overall, Contract (n=41) workers and mothers who worked remotely before the pandemic (n=26) ranked it two places lower in fourth and mothers employed by International (n=28) organisations in third. For Contract (n=41) workers, Permanent (n=52) employees, mothers employed by South African (n=65) organisations, Item 6.2 (I know my rights as a remote worker in South Africa) gained strength in third and even greater in second for mothers who

worked remotely before the pandemic (n=26). Item 6.4 (South African legislation supports/protects working mothers) moved up to second for Contract (n=41) workers, and down into fourth for Permanent (n=52) employees and mothers employed by South African (n=65) organisations.

Overall, while there was a notable difference in ranking order, the highest and lowest ranking items remained dominant. These preliminary descriptive patterns are further examined in Section 5.7 using inferential analyses to determine whether observed differences are statistically significant. Table 5.21 below shows full subgroup means for this section.

Table 5.21 Subgroup Means Section 6 (Legislative/Governmental Support)

Variable	Category	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5
Age	20–29	2.44	2.81	2.19	2.63	2.37
	30–39	3.03	3.02	2.48	3.0	3.49
	40+	2.57	2.36	2.07	2.57	3.29
Race	White	3.03	3.05	2.42	3.20	3.56
	Black	2.53	2.58	2.42	2.32	3.05
	Coloured	2.27	2.36	1.73	2.0	2.18
	Indian/Asian	2.50	3.25	3.0	3.0	3.0
Marital Status	Married	2.96	3.0	2.40	2.91	3.46
	Single	2.54	2.46	2.08	2.58	2.62
	Divorced	3.0	2.67	3.67	2.67	5.0
	Other	3.14	3.57	2.57	3.71	3.43
Living With Father	Yes	2.93	3.0	2.39	2.97	3.26
	No	2.65	2.52	2.30	2.57	3.30
Single Parent	Yes	2.50	2.33	2.29	2.42	2.83
	No	2.99	3.07	2.39	3.03	3.42

External Childcare	Yes	2.94	2.96	2.39	2.99	3.34
	No	2.65	2.69	2.31	2.58	3.08
Employment Type	Contract	3.07	2.93	2.76	2.88	3.34
	Permanent	2.69	2.85	2.06	2.87	3.21
Pre-COVID Remote Work	Yes	2.92	2.88	2.38	2.88	3.38
	No	2.84	2.88	2.36	2.87	3.22
Employer Type	South African	2.82	2.83	2.25	2.85	3.17
	International	2.96	3.0	2.64	2.93	3.50
Number of Children < 5	1 child	3.03	3.02	2.48	3.02	3.29
	2 children	2.58	2.65	2.19	2.61	3.06
	3 children	2.50	3.0	1.50	3.0	4.50
	4 children	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50	4.50

With the broader descriptive statistics presented, giving an expansive understanding of the patterns, as well as some group-level differences, the patterns in this section need to be tested further to highlight which are significant. Before doing any further testing, it is important to assess the normality of the data to ensure the correct tests are done.

5.5 Normality Testing and Data Distribution

Before running correlation or inferential analyses, the distributions of the six thematic constructs were examined to determine the most appropriate statistical tests. Normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test, skewness statistics, a statistical test that checks whether data follows a normal, bell-shaped distribution, and visual inspection of histograms (see Appendix F). Multiple tests/assessments were used to ensure that the correct inferential testing was done on the individual constructs (see Chapter 4).

Table 5.22 below summarises the normality assessment results, including skewness values, Shapiro–Wilk significance levels, visual inspection of the histograms and the type of test that was applied for each construct. Parametric tests (t-tests, ANOVAs) were selected when the

normality tests/assessments for the thematic section showed approximately normal, where this was not the case, non-parametric alternatives (Mann–Whitney U, Kruskal–Wallis) were selected.

Table 5.22 Summary of Normality Testing for Thematic Constructs

Section	Skewness	Shapiro–Wilk Sig.	Visual Normality (Histogram)	Test Type
Motivations for Choosing Remote Work	.058	.001	Approx. normal	Parametric
Benefits of Remote Work	.567	< .001	Non-normal	Non-parametric
Mental and Emotional Strain	–.061	.041	Approx. normal	Parametric
Family and Domestic Support	.318	.034	Approx. normal	Parametric
Organisational Support	.594	.001	Non-normal	Non-parametric
Legislative/Governmental Support	–.413	.013	Slightly skewed	Parametric

The Shapiro–Wilk results showed that most thematic constructs deviated statistically from normality ($p < .05$). However, given the ordinal nature of Likert data and the sensitivity of the Shapiro–Wilk test when a moderate sample size is used ($N = 93$), the researcher inspected the skewness values and did visual inspection of the histograms in making the final decision on selection of parametric or non-parametric testing for each thematic section (Norman, 2010; Mircioiu and Atkinson, 2017; Demir, 2022).

After inspection, several constructs displayed approximately symmetric distributions, showing bell-shaped distributions with acceptable skewness ($|skew| < 0.5$) (George, 2011). Therefore, these constructs were treated as sufficiently normal and parametric testing was selected.

In contrast, Benefits of Remote Work and Organisational Support showed substantial non-normality, skewness > 0.5 and multi-peaked histograms. For these, non-parametric tests were selected to ensure analytical accuracy.

Parametric tests were considered appropriate for the remaining constructs despite statistically significant Shapiro–Wilk results. The justification of this choice was grounded in three factors:

1. Visual distributions were roughly symmetric.
2. Skewness values indicated only minor departures from normality.
3. The sample size (N = 93) is adequate to support parametric robustness under the Central Limit Theorem (Field, 2024).

In addition, the qualitative insights from Phase 2 will complement these results and provide a deeper understanding of the findings. This further accounts for any gaps or limitations that might appear in the outcomes of Phase 1.

The following section examined how the six thematic constructs relate to one another, before group-level inferential testing was conducted. This step helps highlight meaningful connections between constructs and provides deeper insight into how these factors interact.

5.6 Correlation Matrix

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between the six thematic constructs: motivations for choosing remote work, perceived benefits, emotional strain, family and domestic support, organisational support, and legislative/governmental support. Composite scores were calculated by averaging item responses within each construct, where lower values indicate stronger agreement. With the composite scores showing approximately normal distributions and having been measured on interval-like scales, Pearson's r was used to assess the strength and direction of the associations. Additionally, correlation coefficients (r), which range from −1 to +1, were interpreted using conventional thresholds, where values around .10 are considered small, around .30 moderate, and .50 or above large, to assess the strength of relationships between variables (Neuman, 2014). The results that are presented in Table 5.23 below show several significant associations between different thematic constructs of the questionnaire. *Note:* Only statistically significant results are presented, as the analysis was exploratory in nature.

Table 5.23 Pearson Correlations Among Thematic Constructs

Variable Pair	Correlation (r)	Significance (p)
Motivations for Choosing Remote Work & Benefits of Remote Work	.286	.005
Motivations for Choosing Remote Work & Legislative/Governmental Support	.281	.006
Benefits of Remote Work & Family and Domestic Support	.253	.014
Benefits of Remote Work & Organisational Support	.367	< .001
Benefits of Remote Work & Legislative/Governmental Support	.298	.004
Family and Domestic Support & Organisational Support	.310	.002
Family and Domestic Support & Legislative/Governmental Support	.304	.003
Organisational Support & Legislative/Governmental Support	.487	< .001

The correlation analysis revealed several meaningful relationships between mothers' motivations, perceived benefits, and different forms of support. It showed that mothers who were more motivated to work remotely also tended to experience greater benefits ($r = .29$, $p = .005$) from remote work. These mothers also felt better supported by policies and legislation ($r = .28$, $p = .006$), which serve to support and protect remote working mothers. Thus, mothers in this study who were strongly motivated to engage in remote work also had a more positive overall experience in terms of benefits as well as greater trust in policy and legislation, which are designed to support remote working mothers.

Similarly, mothers who experienced more benefits from remote work were also more likely to feel supported in other areas of life. The results showed that these mothers were more likely to report stronger family and domestic support ($r = .25$, $p = .014$), greater organisational support from their employers ($r = .37$, $p < .001$), and higher confidence in legislative/governmental support ($r = .30$, $p = .004$). This suggests that in order to have a positive experience of remote work, a mother needs a broader network of support from home, in the workplace, and through government policies. This suggests that having strong support in various areas plays a crucial role in how mothers experience remote work.

Moreover, family and domestic support were also positively linked to both organisational support ($r = .31$, $p = .002$) and legislative/governmental support ($r = .30$, $p = .003$). The mothers in this study who received more help at home often felt that their employers were more accommodating and that laws and policies protected them more effectively. This result may be because the mothers who had access to additional support at home reduced their overall load, which in turn has a positive impact on their mental health and how they felt in regard to organisational and legislative/governmental support.

The strongest relationship in the correlation matrix was between organisational support and legislative/governmental support ($r = .49$, $p < .001$), which highlights the close connection that exists between employer-driven initiatives and broader policy frameworks. This highlights the important role that legislative/governmental support plays in shaping the support that organisations provide, as it serves as a guideline in terms of equity, fairness and protection.

Lastly, unlike the other factors, emotional consequences showed no significant links with any of the remaining constructs. This indicates that the stress mothers experience while working remotely may be influenced more by personal coping strategies and/or external pressures, which may extend beyond the scope of this study.

Overall, these findings show how motivations, perceived benefits, and support systems often work together in shaping the experience mothers have when working remotely. It further solidifies the need for multiple levels of support in order for remote work to be a positive and viable option for mothers.

The following section now tests for significant group-level differences/patterns to highlight any notable descriptive and/or contextual variables in this study.

5.7 Inferential Statistics (Group Comparisons)

This section presents test results to see if the group patterns from the descriptive analysis are meaningful. Depending on the nature of the data and the distribution assumptions, parametric (t-tests and one-way ANOVAs) and non-parametric (Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H tests) methods were employed (see Section 5.5). These tests were conducted to compare mothers' experiences of remote work across key demographic and contextual variables. Only findings with statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$) are reported below.

Section One: Motivations for Choosing Remote Work

To explore whether motivations for choosing remote work varied across demographic and contextual variables, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted. Only statistically significant results ($p < .05$) are reported below. Lower mean scores indicate stronger agreement with motivational factors.

The inferential results from this section revealed that mothers are more motivated to work remotely when they have less support in terms of childcare and family structure. In addition, mothers without access to external childcare reported significantly stronger motivations for working remotely ($M = 7.15$, $SD = 2.65$) compared to mothers who had external childcare arrangements ($M = 8.81$, $SD = 2.70$; $t(91) = 2.66$, $p = .009$, Cohen's $d = 0.61$). This suggests that when reliable, accessible, safe childcare is not available, mothers are more likely to turn to remote work as a practical way to balance their jobs and caregiving responsibilities.

Similarly, a significant difference was seen in mothers who lived with the father of their children. Those not living with the father reported a stronger motivation to work remotely ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 2.70$) than those who did ($M = 8.79$, $SD = 2.68$; $t(91) = 2.77$, $p = .007$, Cohen's $d = 0.67$). This finding highlights how household structure shapes perceptions of remote work,

with mothers who are the default and primary caregiver placing more value and motivation in working remotely.

An additional difference was also seen when comparing marital status groups. A one-way ANOVA indicated a statistically significant effect ($F(3, 89) = 4.30$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .13$). Highlighting the two subgroups in this section where the significance appeared, a Post-hoc Tukey test showed that single mothers reported a significantly stronger motivation to working remotely ($M = 6.92$, $SD = 2.61$) as opposed to married mothers ($M = 9.09$, $SD = 2.67$; $p = .004$), while other group comparisons were not significant. The effect size was medium, indicating that marital status has a significant impact on how motivated a mother is to engage in remote work. This lends to the idea that single mothers carry greater financial and caregiving responsibilities as opposed to married mothers who have a partner to share some of these responsibilities with.

Lastly, when comparing single-parent households with dual-parent households, the gap was particularly noticeable. Single parents reported a far stronger motivation for choosing remote work ($M = 6.46$, $SD = 2.30$) compared to mothers living with a co-parent ($M = 9.00$, $SD = 2.64$; $t(91) = -4.20$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.00$). This reflects a very large effect size, showing that the lack of shared caregiving, as well as financial responsibility, strongly increases the need for flexible work arrangements.

These patterns are consistent with Work–Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000), which holds that mothers with fewer resources to draw firm boundaries between paid work and caregiving are more likely to turn to remote work as a strategy for managing highly permeable borders between these domains.

These findings show how sole caregiving and financial responsibility increase the motivation a mother feels to engage in remote work. Table 5.24 summarises these results, including group means, significance levels, and effect sizes.

Table 5.24 Significant Differences in Motivations for Choosing Remote Work

Variable	Group Comparison	Mean (SD)	t / F	p	Effect Size
External Childcare	Yes vs. No	8.81 (2.70) vs. 7.15 (2.65)	t(91)=2.66	.009	Cohen's d = .61 (medium)
Living with Father	Yes vs. No	8.79 (2.68) vs. 7.00 (2.70)	t(91)=2.77	.007	Cohen's d = .67 (medium)
Marital Status	Married vs. Single	9.09 (2.67) vs. 6.92 (2.61)	F(3,89)=4.30	.007	η^2 = .13 (medium)
Single-Parent Status	Yes vs. No	6.46 (2.30) vs. 9.00 (2.64)	t(91)=-4.20	<.001	Cohen's d = 1.00 (large)

Section Two: Perceived Benefits of Remote Work

To explore whether the perceived benefits of remote work differed across demographic and contextual variables, non-parametric tests (Kruskal–Wallis and Mann–Whitney U) were conducted. Only statistically significant results ($p < .05$) are reported; in the case of this thematic section, there were no statistically significant results to report.

Section Three: Mental and Emotional Strain

To explore whether experiences of mental and emotional strain varied across demographic and contextual variables, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted. Only statistically significant results ($p < .05$) are reported below. Lower mean scores indicate stronger agreement with experiencing mental and emotional strain.

The results revealed a significant difference based on living arrangements. Mothers living with the father of their child/ren reported significantly stronger agreement with experiencing strain ($M = 15.46$, $SD = 5.66$) compared to those not living with the father ($M = 20.52$, $SD = 5.85$), $t(91) = -3.69$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.89$. This represents a large effect size, indicating that living in a shared household with a co-parent may contribute to greater emotional strain, possibly due to navigating complex caregiving roles and expectations within the home.

A further significant difference was noticed across racial groups. A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant effect, $F(3, 89) = 4.19$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .12$, which indicated a medium effect size. A Post-hoc Tukey test was then done and showed that White mothers reported significantly stronger agreement with experiencing strain ($M = 15.20$, $SD = 5.90$) compared to Black mothers ($M = 20.42$, $SD = 4.87$), $p = .005$. No other racial comparisons were statistically significant.

These findings suggest that both household structure and cultural context influence how strongly mothers experience mental and emotional strain while working remotely. Sharing a household with a co-parent can bring added emotional pressures, possibly because cultural and societal norms often place the expectation on mothers to care not only for their children but also for their partner. The difference observed across racial groups may also reflect cultural and societal norms, as caregiving responsibilities are often more culturally expected among Black mothers, which could make these roles feel less stressful or less disruptive to them. Table 5.26 summarises these results, including group means, significance levels, and effect sizes.

This racial difference may be read through an intersectional lens (Collins, 2000), which cautions against interpreting lower reported strain among Black mothers as an absence of burden. Existing literature suggests this may instead reflect a resilience shaped by historical oppression and patriarchally-driven gendered expectations (Leath et al., 2023).

Table 5.25 Significant Group Differences in Mental and Emotional Strain

Variable	Group Comparison	Mean (SD)	t / F	p	Effect Size
Living with Father	Yes vs. No	15.46 (5.66) vs. 20.52 (5.85)	t(91)= -3.69	< .001	Cohen's d = 0.89 (large)
Race	White vs. Black	15.20 (5.90) vs. 20.42 (4.87)	F(3,89)=4.19	.008	η^2 = .12 (medium)

Section Four: Family and Domestic Support

To explore whether perceptions of family and domestic support varied across demographic and contextual variables, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted. Only statistically significant results ($p < .05$) are reported below.

The results revealed a significant difference based on living arrangements. Mothers living with the father of their child/ren reported significantly stronger agreement with having family and domestic support (M = 13.83, SD = 4.82) compared to those not living with the father (M = 17.17, SD = 5.73), t(91) = -2.76, p = .007, Cohen's d = 0.66. This represents a medium effect size, which suggests that shared caregiving arrangements lighten the load of household and childcare responsibilities, whereas mothers without a co-parent may experience less access to practical support.

A further significant difference was found across marital status groups. A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant effect, F(3, 89) = 2.96, p = .037, η^2 = .09, which indicated a medium effect size. A post-hoc Tukey test showed that married mothers reported significantly stronger agreement with having family and domestic support (M = 13.68, SD = 4.41) compared to single mothers (M = 16.92, SD = 6.13), p = .041. No other subgroup differences were statistically significant.

Similarly, a significant difference was observed between single-parent and dual-parent households. Mothers in dual-parent households reported stronger perceptions of support (M = 13.90, SD = 4.52) compared to those in single-parent households (M = 16.83, SD = 6.51), t(91)

= 2.43, p = .017, Cohen's d = 0.58. This medium effect size reinforces that household structure plays an important role in the level of caregiving and domestic assistance a mother has access to.

These findings show that mothers living with a co-parent or in dual-parent households tend to feel more supported, while single mothers often face less access to family and domestic help. Table 5.27 summarises these results, including group means, significance levels, and effect sizes.

This finding reflects the precarious position of contract-based remote workers within South Africa's dual labour market, where those outside formal employment structures often lack access to the legal protections and structured organisational support available to permanent employees (James, 2022).

Table 5.26 Significant Group Differences in Family and Domestic Support

Variable	Group Comparison	Mean (SD)	t / F	p	Effect Size
Living with Father	Yes vs. No	13.83 (4.82) vs. 17.17 (5.73)	t(91)= -2.76	.007	Cohen's d = 0.66 (medium)
Marital Status	Married vs. Single	13.68 (4.41) vs. 16.92 (6.13)	F(3,89)=2.96	.037	η^2 = .09 (medium)
Single-Parent Status	Yes vs. No	16.83 (6.51) vs. 13.90 (4.52)	t(91)=2.43	.017	Cohen's d = 0.58 (medium)

Section Five: Organisational Support

To explore whether perceptions of organisational support varied across demographic and contextual variables, Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted due to the non-parametric nature of the data. Only statistically significant results ($p < .05$) are reported below.

Mothers in permanent roles reported significantly stronger agreement that they had been given adequate support from their organisations in regards to training, opportunity, understanding and standard policy (Mean Rank = 41.95) compared to those in contract-based roles (Mean Rank = 53.40), $U = 803.50$, $Z = -2.04$, $p = .041$. While this suggests that mothers in permanent positions feel better supported by organisations in remote working positions than those on contracts, the effect size was small ($r = 0.21$).

These findings highlight the role of organisational context in shaping mothers' perceptions of support, particularly regarding equitable career opportunities and access to resources that enable productive remote work. Table 5.28 summarises the results for perceived organisational support by employment type, including group mean ranks, Mann–Whitney U statistic, and significance level.

Table 5.27 Significant Group Differences in Organisational Support

Variable	Group Comparison	Mean Rank	U	p	Effect Size (r)
Employment Type	Permanent vs. Contract	41.95 vs. 53.40	803.50	.041	0.21 (small)

Section Six: Legislative and Governmental Support

To explore whether perceptions of legislative and structural protection varied across demographic and contextual variables, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were conducted. Only statistically significant results ($p < .05$) are reported below. Lower mean scores indicate stronger agreement with legislative and structural protections.

The results revealed a significant difference across racial groups. A one-way ANOVA showed a statistically significant effect, $F(3, 89) = 5.72$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$, indicating a large effect size. Post-hoc Tukey comparisons revealed that Coloured mothers reported significantly stronger agreement with legislative and structural protections ($M = 10.55$, $SD = 5.07$) compared to

White mothers (M = 15.27, SD = 3.62), p = .002. No other subgroup differences showed any statistical significance.

A further significant difference was found based on the single-parent status. Single mothers reported significantly stronger agreement with legislative and structural protections (M = 12.38, SD = 4.85) compared to mothers in dual-parent households (M = 14.90, SD = 3.70), t(91) = -2.65, p = .010, Cohen's d = 0.63, representing a medium effect size.

These findings highlight that both race and household structure shape perceptions of legislative and structural protections. Coloured mothers and single mothers report stronger agreement, which may reflect greater reliance on legislative safeguards due to less access to structural or familial support. In contrast, White mothers and those in dual-parent households may experience relatively fewer perceived barriers, making such protections feel less essential. Table 5.29 summarises these results, including group mean ranks, significance levels, and test statistics.

This finding aligns with an intersectional understanding of vulnerability (Collins, 2000), whereby race and household structure combine to shape mothers' reliance on, and confidence in, external legislative protections where personal or familial resources are less available.

Table 5.28 Significant Group Differences in Legislative and Structural Protection

Variable	Group Comparison	Mean (SD)	t / F	p	Effect Size
Race	Coloured vs. White	10.55 (5.07) vs. 15.27 (3.62)	F(3,89)=5.72	.001	$\eta^2 = .16$ (large)
Single-Parent Status	Yes vs. No	12.38 (4.85) vs. 14.90 (3.70)	t(91)=-2.65	.010	Cohen's d = 0.63 (medium)

This section has presented the significant results from the inferential group comparison testing done on the six thematic sections of the questionnaire, which were in line with the group-level differences noted in the descriptive statistics section (5.4).

The analyses showed that mothers' experiences of remote work are not the same across the board, with clear differences emerging across key demographic factors (such as age, race, marital status, and single-parent status) and contextual factors (such as access to childcare, type of organisation, and employment contract). A notable finding was that having or lacking childcare and household support played a significant role in shaping mothers' motivations, the benefits they experienced, their emotional well-being, and the help they had at home. Additionally, cultural background and race were identified as variables that influenced how mothers perceived their financial stability and how much confidence they had in legislative protections. Differences were also observed across organisational settings, highlighting inequalities in training, career opportunities, and structural support.

These findings show how the balance of caregiving, cultural expectations, and organisational factors combine to influence mothers' experiences of remote work. It shows that this experience is not linear nor is it simplistic; it is multi-layered and complex. Moreover, it highlights areas that need deeper exploration, particularly the reasons behind these group-level differences. These findings provide a strong foundation for the second, qualitative phase of the study, where these patterns will be examined in greater depth to better understand how and why these factors influence work-life balance for South African mothers.

Beyond these practical patterns, these findings also speak directly to the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The consistent finding that mothers with fewer personal or structural resources, whether through childcare access, co-parenting arrangements, or organisational protections, report stronger motivations, strain, or reliance on legislation reflects Work–Family Border Theory's core premise: that the flexibility and permeability of borders between work and family are not equally available to all mothers. Similarly, the recurring influence of race, marital status, and household structure across nearly every thematic section illustrates the explanatory value of Intersectional Feminist Theory in accounting for why mothers' experiences of remote work diverge so significantly. These theoretical threads are explored in greater depth in Chapter Seven, where the quantitative findings are integrated with the qualitative results and situated within the broader literature.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results of Phase 1, the quantitative stage of the study, which explored the experiences of South African remote-working mothers with children under the age of five through data which was collected through questionnaires and analysed statistically. The research used descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and inferential group comparisons to highlight both broad patterns and meaningful variations across demographic and contextual factors to provide a broad but informative base of data to address the objectives and questions of this study.

The results from this phase revealed that while mothers across demographic and contextual differences often share similar motivations for choosing remote work (being a present mother while earning an income), the way in which they experience remote work is not so similar. Key factors shaping mothers' views on the pros and cons of remote work include childcare access, household dynamics, cultural expectations, workplace practices, and knowledge of relevant laws. Single mothers and those without external childcare showed higher motivation for remote work and greater dependence on flexibility, in contrast to dual-parent mothers who reported stronger organisational backing and balance. Additionally, differences also surfaced in perceptions of financial stability, employer support, and the confidence that the mothers in this study showed in legislative protections.

These findings were used as the basis for the design of the qualitative Phase 2 interviews. The interview questions were developed to probe deeper into the patterns and group-level differences that were observed in Phase 1. By moving beyond measuring patterns to understanding the 'why' and 'how' that shaped these statistical results, the second phase of this study gives a voice to the numbers through documented human accounts.

CHAPTER SIX: PRESENTATION OF QUALITATIVE PHASE 2 RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of Phase 2, the qualitative phase of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study. The purpose of this phase was to expand upon the quantitative findings by capturing the lived experiences of South African remote-working mothers with children under the age of five through personal accounts. This Phase 2 provides a deeper narrative account for the statistical results that were presented in Phase 1. It gives a human voice that reflects on how mothers perceive and navigate the dynamics of motherhood and remote work in the South African context.

The data for this phase were collected through seven semi-structured interviews with participants identified as PA through PG. Each interview explored mothers' motivations for remote work, the ways in which it shaped their family lives and careers, and their perspectives on organisational and policy support. A qualitative thematic analysis process was carried out by the researcher using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo V12. This thematic analysis followed a six-step process theorised by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1. data familiarisation, 2. generating initial codes, 3. searching for themes, 4. reviewing themes, 5. defining and naming themes, and 6. reporting themes. This process allowed for themes to surface organically, allowing new information to surface without being limited by the findings of Phase 2.

After extensive review, analysis, coding, refining and merging, eight main themes were utilised: 1. motivation to work remotely, 2. balancing motherhood, work, and finances, 3. mental and emotional consequences, 4. childcare and domestic responsibility, 5. organisational support, 6. career progression and stigma, 7. confidence in laws and policies, and 8. influence of affordable childcare availability. These themes are presented descriptively, with rich quotations to illustrate participants' voices. Interpretation and integration with Phase 1 findings will be presented in Chapter 7.

6.1 Participant Overview

The sample for this phase of the study was made up of 7 mothers who had initially participated in Phase 1 quantitative questionnaires and voluntarily left their contact details to participate in this phase. This self-selection recruitment strategy ensured that participants met the study's inclusion criteria and were original contributors to the initial findings being examined in greater depth. However, while this recruitment method ensured that original participants were retained, it limited the influence that the research had in regard to demographic and contextual variables that presented significant differences in Phase 1.

Out of the 93 participants from Phase 1, there were 20 who provided their contact details to participate in this phase. All of the 20 willing participants were contacted to participate at least three times by the researcher, and 15 responded by agreeing to participate. However, when it came to the interviews, there were only 7 participants who actually managed to participate in the interviews. This was due to several reasons, all of which had to do with some form of caregiving-related demand that just did not allow them the time to engage in an interview - even if it was just an hour that they needed to set aside. While the low number of respondents was not ideal, the researcher drew a finding from this, noting the demanding lives that these mothers lead. Even though they were willing to volunteer and often extremely apologetic for cancelling, they simply did not have the time to participate due to all the responsibilities that their roles demanded of them. This demand was even seen for those who did participate, as 5 out of the 7 participants either had their children with them during the interview or had their children require their attention at some point, despite the father or external caregiver being present. These are the real, lived realities of the nonstop, overlapping lives that these mothers lead.

For confidentiality, the 7 participants are identified as PA, PB, PC, PD, PE, PF, and PG in the study.

This recruitment approach, a form of self-selected purposive sampling, is consistent with qualitative research on hard-to-reach or time-constrained populations, where researchers must balance methodological rigour with the practical realities of participants' capacity to engage (Palinkas et al., 2015). It is worth reflecting critically on what the attrition process itself reveals: mothers repeatedly wanting to participate but unable to find the time is, in itself, a finding, illustrating the time poverty and caregiving demands central to this study's focus. This also means the final sample of seven may not be representative of all South African remote-working

mothers; those facing the most severe time constraints or caregiving burdens may be systematically underrepresented, as they were the very mothers least able to participate. The transferability of these findings should therefore be understood as illustrative of a demographic already somewhat resourced enough to make time for participation, rather than fully representative of the most overburdened remote-working mothers in South Africa.

6.1.1 Demographic and Contextual Variables of Participants

As the participants provided demographic and contextual details in Phase 1, this was not required from them in Phase 2. The researcher used the data from Phase 1 to extract the demographic and contextual variables of the 7 participants. Due to the small sample size in this phase, the diversity is low. However, most of the variables identified as significant in Phase 1, such as marital status (married vs. single), single parent status, external childcare, employment type, employer type, race (White vs. Black), and living with the father, were accounted for in this sample. Age was the only demographic variable for which no variation was observed in relation to the significant findings from Phase 1. Nonetheless, the age range of this sample did align with the primary demographic of the study (30–39 years).

In the age categories, 6 out of the 7 participants fell into the 30-39 age category, and one into the 20-29 age category. There were 4 White participants, 2 Black and 1 Asian/Indian. Most of the participants (n=4) had 1 child < 5, and 2 participants had 2 children <5. Under marital status, 5 participants were married, 1 was single, and 1 selected ‘Other’. All but 1 participant were living with the father; this was the same for the Single Parent category. Most participants had external childcare (n=5), with only 2 participants not having any external childcare. Employment Type was almost equally distributed, with 3 participants being permanently employed and 4 being contract workers. The same was noted for having worked remotely before (n=4) and having not (n=3), as well as Employer Type, International (n=4) and South African (n=3). Table 6.1 below shows the demographic and contextual categories into which these 7 participants fell.

Table 6.1 Participant Demographic and Contextual Variables Phase 2

Participant	**PA**	**PB**	**PC**	**PD**	**PE**	**PF**	**PG**
Age	30	37	37	29	31	32	31
Race	Black	White	White	Indian/ Asian	White	Black	White
No. of Children < 5	1	1	1	2	2	1	2
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Married	Other	Single	Married
Living with Father	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Single Parent	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
External Childcare	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Employment Type	Permanent	Permanent	Contract	Contract	Permanent	Contract	Contract
Pre-COVID Remote Work	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Employer Type	International	South African	International	South Africa	International	South African	International

The following section presents the results from the 8 themes, which were used to analyse the data collected in this phase.

6.2 Themes and Sub-Themes

This section presents the eight main themes used in the thematic analysis. Under each theme, sub-themes will be presented along with direct quotes pertaining to the themes and sub-themes, as well as frequency tables, which show the frequency with which these themes were noted when coding the transcripts on NVivo.

The 8 main themes are: 1. motivation to work remotely, 2. balancing motherhood, work, and finances, 3. mental and emotional consequences, 4. childcare and domestic responsibility, 5. organisational support, 6. career progression and stigma, 7. confidence in laws and policies, and 8. influence of affordable childcare availability. Each of these themes has additional sub-categories which focus on certain variables that were presented in the interviews.

6.2.1 Motivation to Work Remotely

A central theme emerging from the interviews was the strong motivation mothers had to engage in remote work as a means of being a present mother. This central theme strengthens findings from Phase 1, which presented 'It is important to me to also be a present mother while earning an income' as the strongest motivation for the choice to engage in remote work for these participants. All of the participants in this phase showed great value in choosing to work remotely, as it allowed them to protect both their motherhood and their livelihood, not needing to sacrifice one for the other. This section is split into three sub-categories: 1. being a present mother, 2. flexibility and autonomy, and 3. financial necessity.

Table 6.2 below shows the frequency of this in the sample, with counts of how many participants raised each sub-theme (Participants) and how many times it was mentioned across the dataset (References). The participants' results further strengthen the motivation of being a present mother, as this sub-theme was raised by all 7 participants.

Table 6.2 Frequency Motivation to Work Remotely

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants (N=7)	References
Motivation to Work Remotely	To be a present mother	7	37
	Flexibility & Autonomy	6	20
	Financial Necessity	5	13
	Total		**70**

Being a Present Mother

Like Phase 1, this phase highlighted the ability to be a present mother as the most important factor in regard to the motivation to work remotely. This motivation was often expressed in contrast to traditional employment models, where mothers felt that long hours away from home would prevent them raising their children as they hoped to and break the bond they worked so hard to build, especially during these formative years. Remote work presented them with an option where they could preserve both their motherhood and livelihood.

PA explained:

> *I want to have and create a bond with my daughter, and for her to know that I am her mother and not the nanny… Hence, the remote work, so that I can be more flexible in being there for her.*

Her account reflects the broader fear expressed by participants of 'missing out' on critical developmental moments in their children's lives. Several mothers in this study explicitly noted that they did not want to hand over day-to-day caregiving to external figures. A strong sense of responsibility and pride was noted in participants' need to fulfil their maternal rights of being able to raise their children and be the primary caregiver, despite having to work.

Similarly, PG described how the presence of her children had shaped her career trajectory over the past eight years. She emphasised that being a mother had directly influenced her decision to remain with the same company and to continue working remotely:

> *I didn't want to miss anything, but I also didn't want to give up the opportunity to have a career, and I feel like remote work kind of gives me that … freedom to have a career, but also be a present mother.*

Her reflection illustrates how remote work was perceived as a way to hold onto two identities, professional and maternal, without sacrificing one to maintain the other. This was a common benefit for participants.

For PB, who attempted to balance breastfeeding her infant with a demanding professional role, the choice was framed in terms of caregiving continuity:

> *I was working full-time … and I wanted to continue breastfeeding, which made remote work the only viable option. Otherwise, I would have had to stop earlier, and that wasn't something I was willing to do.*

This comment illustrates how the desire to protect maternal practices, such as breastfeeding, serves as a motivation to engage in remote work. Remote work has presented itself as an opportunity to preserve maternal rights and responsibilities for these participants.

These accounts reflect what Hays (1996) terms the ideology of 'intensive mothering', the culturally dominant expectation that mothers should be the primary, ever-present caregivers, personally responsible for their children's emotional and developmental needs (Hallstein, 2006). Remote work, in this sense, does not liberate these mothers from this ideology; rather, it offers a mechanism through which they can more fully perform it alongside paid employment, reinforcing rather than challenging the assumption that intensive, hands-on mothering is a mother's personal responsibility rather than a shared or socially supported one.

Flexibility and Autonomy

While being a present mother showed no wavering across both phases, it went hand-in-hand with the flexibility and autonomy that remote work provided. The mothers in this study value remote work because it allows them to craft schedules around school runs, children's routines, and household responsibilities, essentially, providing them the chance to be present. For many, flexibility was described less as a luxury and more as a necessity. Again, this shows how centred the choice of remote work is around motherhood.

PF described how remote work gave her the autonomy to manage competing demands:

> *I would say, for me, it's just being a present mother. It would work for me, because when I have enough time with my kids, it's quite a good thing to do. And working remotely, it would help me just to manage my time and balance work at the same time as … as my personal life.*

Her emphasis on balance underscores the extent to which remote work was understood as a structural solution to competing demands, rather than simply a preference. This finding further solidifies the outcome from Phase 1, where 'Juggle the role of a mother and employee successfully' was noted as the strongest agreed-upon benefit of remote work.

PC, who had been in a demanding corporate role, similarly valued the freedom of control that remote work provided:

> *One is the flexibility of being able to offer some level of child care while working. Although I don't do that a lot of the time, if my son is sick and happens to be home, I can still continue working and care for him ...*

Flexibility was also linked to agency. Several participants described how traditional employment left them feeling powerless to manage daily routines, whereas remote work offered the possibility to manage work around life and vice versa.

Financial Necessity

While caregiving and flexibility were dominant themes, financial necessity was also an important motivator. In Phase 1, 'Gain financial freedom and stability' ranked as the second most agreed-upon benefit of remote work. For some mothers, remote work represented the only viable way to contribute to household income while still maintaining caregiving responsibilities.

PD explained how she had reorganised her working hours around her twins' schedule:

> *Whatever work I am doing, I do during the evenings when they sleep. So perhaps that's my balance. I couldn't afford not to work, but I also couldn't afford full-time childcare for two babies.*

Her account highlights how financial necessity and caregiving demands intersect, and how remote work provided a solution to meet both needs.

PE described the precarious nature of freelancing but also acknowledged its role in sustaining her family from a financial point of view:

> *I just feel like it's not stable enough … It's always changing, but I need to keep some money coming in. Working online at least means I can earn something while I'm home with my kids.*

These accounts illustrate how financial necessity intersects with class, employment type, and access to childcare to shape mothers' relationship to remote work. For mothers in less financially secure or freelance arrangements, remote work is less a matter of preference for flexibility, and more a structural necessity shaped by economic precarity; for others in more

stable, well-resourced employment, the same arrangement is framed instead as an empowering lifestyle choice. This distinction reflects a broader pattern in the literature, whereby the language of flexibility and empowerment can obscure the reality that women, particularly those in less secure economic positions, are absorbing caregiving costs that would otherwise fall to employers, the state, or be shared within the household (Fraser, 2016).

For others, financial stability was not the primary driver, but it remained an underlying factor in the decision to pursue or sustain remote work.

This theme revealed three interlocking motivations for remote work: the desire to remain present as a mother, the need for flexibility and autonomy in daily routines, and the necessity of maintaining income. For most participants, remote work was not framed as a choice made purely out of preference, but as a response to structural and personal pressures which were, in all cases, centred around being a mother and an employee. The narratives emphasise how remote work enabled these mothers to resist the perceived trade-off between motherhood and work, while also acknowledging that financial realities could not be ignored. These findings raise the question of whether remote work genuinely creates balance, or whether it simply provides a more private setting in which mothers continue to shoulder paid and unpaid labour simultaneously. Rather than redistributing the caregiving load, remote work appears in these accounts to relocate it into the same physical and temporal space as paid work, blurring rather than resolving the tension between the two.

6.2.2 Balancing Motherhood, Work, and Finances

The second theme highlighted how remote-working mothers negotiated the balance between their work responsibilities, caregiving roles, and financial needs. The participants in this phase of the study consistently described this balance as tenuous. Having to balance and manage work and motherhood was not a linear process, and it required these mothers to constantly adjust and come up with creative ways to ‘manage’. This further reinforces the findings from Phase 1, which showed that remote work has undeniable mental and emotional consequences that leave these mothers with little to no time for themselves. It is here where we clearly see the paradox that remote work presents, flexibility compounded by constant pressure, guilt, stress, self-doubt and oppression. Critically, the coping strategies mothers describe, adjusting sleep schedules, working through the night, integrating children into meetings, are not organisationally supported solutions; they are individualised, invisible adaptations mothers are left to devise on their own, in the absence of institutional recognition of caregiving as a legitimate constraint on

the working day. This reflects a broader critique in the literature that flexible work arrangements, without accompanying structural support such as subsidised childcare or protected caregiving hours, often simply shift the burden of accommodation from employer to employee (Chung and van der Lippe, 2020).

This section is broken up into four sub-categories: 1. coping strategies, 2. the constant juggle, 3. financial trade-offs, and 4. negotiating personal well-being.

Table 6.3 below shows the frequency of this in the sample, with counts of how many participants raised each sub-theme (Participants) and how many times it was mentioned across the dataset (References). It is interesting to note that almost all sub-themes were raised by all 7 participants. The frequency of reference to these sub-themes is also large, showing the strength of these sub-themes in regard to how often participants made reference to them.

Table 6.3 Frequency Balancing Motherhood, Work, and Finances

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants (N=7)	References
Balancing Motherhood, Work, and Finances	Coping Strategies	7	136
	The Constant Juggle	7	180
	Financial Trade-Offs	6	110
	Negotiating Personal Well-Being	7	219
	Total		**645**

Coping Strategies

Across the sample, participants employed a variety of coping strategies to manage the dual demands of work and motherhood. These strategies often involved temporal adjustments such as shifting working hours to early mornings, late evenings, or during children's naps.

PA explained how her work was structured around her toddler's sleep schedule:

> *I would just find time to do work while my daughter was sleeping … so it has helped a lot. I'm able to slot in tasks here and there without having to leave her.*

Similarly, PD, who was raising twins, described how her evenings became the most productive time:

> *Whatever work I am doing, I do during the evenings when they sleep. So perhaps that's my balance. I can't do much in the day when they are both so demanding, so the night becomes my work time.*

For some mothers, balancing meant literally integrating children into their work times and tasks. PE reflected on how she often attended virtual meetings with her child present:

> *I've had to take meetings with my little one on my lap. People just had to accept that this was the reality. I can't separate being a mother and being a worker.*

PA described a similar challenge, noting that at times she had no choice but to participate in calls with her child visible:

> *There were days where I would be in an online meeting, and my daughter would climb onto me. I just had to carry on, everyone could see I was working and mothering at the same time.*

PG also highlighted the constant overlap, explaining that even when she tried to structure her day, the children's presence was unavoidable outside of preschool hours:

> *We send them to preschool half-days, which gives me some focus time. But once they are home, I'm often answering emails or even on calls with them in the background or on my lap.*

Other participants expressed that having a designated or external (out-of-home) workspace made it easier to create boundaries between home and work. Some created designated working spaces at home to maintain boundaries, while others went to external spaces like coffee shops in order to get work done.

PC showed a strong belief in and need for a designated working space:

> *I just think it's important that, at least for me, you can't be working and then doing dishes and then coming back to work and stuff. I think the time that you're being paid to work is the time you should be dedicating to your work.*

For a lot of the participants, their kids going to school for a portion of the day was the most consistent, reliable and accessible coping strategy. PG explaining how half-day preschool created windows of productivity:

> *This year we started sending our kids to a preschool, only half a day. That gives me a few uninterrupted hours to get things done before they come home.*

PE echoed this, reflecting on how preschool provided structure for both her children and her own working rhythm:

> *Having them in preschool gives me a clear block of time to get work done before the afternoon chaos starts.*

This theme shows the multiple ways in which these mothers are able to manage work and motherhood, with external childcare being the strongest means. While these coping strategies exist and were shown as positive means to cope by the mothers in this study, the researcher noted that these mothers presented a lot of resilience and often just managed despite what was loaded onto them.

The Constant Juggle

Despite these coping strategies, many participants described the experience of balancing motherhood and work as overwhelming. PB gave a truthful and raw reflection on her experience:

> *So I found it really difficult, actually, to … to work remotely, I thought it would be a lot easier to work remotely, and be a mom than what it actually was. I just felt like … I found the juggle was a lot more intense.*

PG echoed this sense of relentless juggling, noting how the supposed flexibility of remote work often translated into a lack of rest:

> *There's never a time when I feel like, okay, I can just relax now. If I'm not busy with the kids, I'm busy with work, and vice versa.*

For PC, the difficulty was not only the juggling itself but also the absence of a clear boundary between work and home:

> *I did have some stress and ended up in a mental health clinic, because realistically, in a normal working environment, you know, you kind of decompress on your way home, or to work, while driving or travelling, you decompress. And I didn't have that, so I had to learn to do things that are better for my mental health in between, jumping from work straight into home life. So, that was tough.*

These reflections highlight that balance was often more aspirational than achievable. This finding strengthens that from Phase 1, which highlighted 'I have no time for myself or rest' as the highest agreed consequence of remote work. These mothers juggled multiple responsibilities without downtime, leading to exhaustion and feelings of inadequacy; however, despite this, the value of being with their children consistently outweighed any struggle.

Financial Trade-Offs

In this study, mothers revealed that the choice to work remotely was not only a means of balancing motherhood while maintaining a career; financial considerations also played an impactful role. For some, remote work reduced costs associated with commuting and childcare. For others, however, the flexibility of remote work came at the expense of income stability.

PE, who worked on a freelance basis, emphasised the precariousness of her financial situation:

> *I wouldn't say it's given me that much financial stability. I'm not making as much as I thought I would, and sometimes the work just isn't there.*

At the same time, some participants reported that remote work allowed them to avoid expensive, long commutes and associated costs. PG explained:

> *If I had to go into an office, I'd lose so much more time with my kids, and it would cost me petrol and toll fees. Working remotely cuts those costs completely.*

These financial dynamics reveal the inconsistency of remote work. It reduced certain expenses but introduced income instability for those in freelance or precarious arrangements.

Negotiating Personal Well-Being

Mothers in this study found it extremely difficult to prioritise their own well-being as they felt such a strong sense of responsibility to their maternal identities as well as that of their work. Several participants admitted that they had to sacrifice rest and personal time in order to meet the demands of work and motherhood.

PE similarly explained:

> *It's exhausting. Even when I'm technically not working, I'm thinking about the next deadline or the kids' schedules. There's no real break.*

Moreover, PG shared how remote work blurred all boundaries, leaving no opportunity to rest:

> *The flexibility gives you the opportunity to be a present mom and have that balance with motherhood, but it also leads to absolutely no downtime. If I'm not busy with the kids, I'm busy with work, and vice versa. There's never a time when I feel like I can just relax. It has led to multiple moments of burnout and feeling overstimulated.*

PD highlighted how the lack of separation between workspace and home made her feel like work never ended:

> *Sometimes you do feel like the walls are closing in, and you know, it would maybe be better to have a nine-to-five and go into an office and come home, and when you come home, work is, you know, behind you.*

This highlights not only that remote work has led to severe mental and emotional strain for these mothers, but also how they still persevere despite this. The resilience of these mothers and the value they see in being able to be present for their children is noted throughout the findings of this study.

Several participants' framing of office-based work as lacking the flexibility to be a mother also warrants critical reflection. This framing reflects a broader institutional and cultural assumption that caregiving and standard workplace productivity are inherently incompatible, an assumption that itself reflects gendered workplace norms rather than an immutable truth about where or how caregiving and paid work can coexist.

6.2.3 Mental and Emotional Consequences

This phase of the study showed that there is an undeniable impact on the mental well-being of mothers who work remotely. It is important to highlight that there was positivity expressed in the accounts from the mothers in this phase; however, the negative outweighed the positive. The resilience and adaptability that these mothers presented were admirable; however, it was also a mask that could easily disguise the immense trade-offs that they make to engage in remote work to be present for their young children. This theme is presented in four sub-sections: 1. stress and burnout, 2. blurred boundaries and role overlap, 3. guilt and emotional strain, and 4. positive emotional outcomes.

Table 6.4 below shows the frequency of this in the sample, with counts of how many participants raised each sub-theme (Participants) and how many times it was mentioned across the dataset (References). For all 3 of the negative related mental and emotional consequences, all 7 participants raised these sub-themes, where only 3 participants raised the positive related sub-theme. The substantial number of references, together with all participants reporting negative mental and emotional effects, underscores the undeniable impact of remote work on the mental and emotional well-being of these mothers.

Table 6.4 Frequency Mental and Emotional Consequences

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants (N=7)	References
Mental and Emotional Consequences	Stress and Burnout	7	197
	Blurred Boundaries & Role Overlap	7	56
	Guilt and Emotional Strain	7	144
	Positive Emotional Outcomes	3	4
	Total		**401**

Stress and Burnout

The overlapping demands of remote work and motherhood left many participants experiencing heightened levels of stress that, in a lot of cases, led to burnout. PB reflected on the intensity of trying to balance her professional role with breastfeeding her young son:

> *My stress levels and my anxiety levels were just sky high through the roof. I was short-tempered with my husband, I was short-tempered with my son, and I would burst into tears at the drop of a hat.*

Her account highlights how the expectation of 'doing it all' contributed to emotional volatility and self-perceived inadequacy.

PG, who had remained with the same company for nearly a decade, similarly described feeling that there was no pause in her day:

> *If I'm not busy with the kids, I'm busy with work, and vice versa. So there's never a time when I feel like, okay, I can just relax now… it has led to multiple burnout moments.*

PC courageously shared how the absence of 'wind-down time' between work and home life contributed to burnout that led to admission into a mental health facility:

> *I did have some stress and ended up in a mental health clinic, because realistically, in a normal working environment you know, you kind of decompress on your way home, or to work …*

Even participants who did not explicitly use the word 'burnout' still described ongoing strain. PD explained how remote work, coupled with caring for twins, left her feeling trapped:

> *Often I feel like my work day doesn't end because you're working from home … it never really stops, and there's always something to do. Sometimes you do feel like the walls are closing in.*

These narratives demonstrate that for several mothers, stress was not episodic but a daily feature of remote work, compounded by the absence of external buffers such as commuting or office separation. This outcome is supported by Phase 1, where 'Burnout' presented as the second strongest agreed consequence of remote work, and this can all be attributed to blurred boundaries.

Blurred Boundaries and Role Overlap

The absence of clear boundaries between home and work life was a recurring issue for the mothers in this study. The participants frequently described the difficulty of switching between professional and parental roles, often within mere minutes, if not at the same time.

PA explained how the age of her child affected her ability to step away from work, as toddlers are more mentally aware and require more direct attention, even when additional care/support is present:

> *Now that she's a toddler, it's kind of hard for me to work from home, because she constantly wants my attention. So, that has been difficult, and I've had to find other workspaces to work in.*

PC elaborated on the mental strain that is experienced when having to cross the borders of work and home. She expressed how having no time to decompress landed her in a mental health clinic:

> *I did have some stress and ended up in a mental health clinic, because realistically, in a normal working environment, you know, you kind of decompress on your way home, or to work, while driving or travelling, you decompress. And I didn't have that, so I had to learn to do things that are better for my mental health in between, jumping from work straight into home life. So, that was tough.*

For PG, the lack of downtime was exacerbated by unpredictable workloads and caregiving demands:

> *Depending on what time of year it is, like the end of the quarter, the workload increases, and you still have to balance motherhood. Not only do you not have downtime, but it feels like you don't even have enough time to do what you're supposed to do.*

PE described similar challenges, noting that while she enjoyed the flexibility, she often felt she could never mentally "sign off":

> *Even when I finish a project, I'm still thinking about the kids or what else I need to prepare. I can't separate things the way I imagine people in offices can.*

These reflections underscore that remote work often collapses boundaries, leaving mothers continuously oscillating between roles without the mental space to reset.

Guilt and Emotional Strain

Another powerful sub-theme was guilt, something that is noted as an expectation, a 'normal' part of motherhood. The mothers in this study experienced it on both sides of the fence. Either they felt guilty for not being a good mother, or for not fitting the ideals of the ideal worker. This guilt stemmed mainly from international expectations but was further worsened by cultural, religious and societal expectations, as well as organisational pressures. Several

participants articulated a sense that, despite physical presence at home, they were not providing the kind of quality attention their children deserved.

PG reflected:

> *At the end of the day … I feel more guilty towards my kids when I'm overstressed and overstimulated. I'm more snappy, and I feel like I'm not enjoying motherhood the way I should.*

PG further shared how her family's traditional mentality furthered her guilt:

> *When I get to a point where I'm very overwhelmed, and I share that frustration with them, it's always the, like, but why are you working? Like, why don't you just stop? Like, that type of, you know, kind of feeling that it's not important, and, like, not understanding why I would … why am I picking a career over my kids?*

PB described how guilt, on both sides, persisted even during the times that she set aside for herself:

> *Or … and I just didn't get that downtime that he was getting. Also, because … and then he would want to, he would want me to go out or cycle with him, or go … go out for the morning and leave AA with my parents, but then I would feel like guilty, because now I haven't seen my son the whole week. I've been working the whole week, even though I'm at home, and I haven't really spent good quality time with him, so I'd feel guilty taking the morning off. To go out and do something, because I feel like I should be soaking up that time with him, because it's the only time I really get. So yeah, that's it.*

For PF, guilt came from working too much and other family members pointing out that she is neglecting them and her child for work:

> *Yes, I have, because most of the time, I would be working more, and then they would say, I don't give my kids enough time, I don't give everybody time, I'm always working, and then I'm always missing out on my kids' time. So, negatively, that has impacted me there.*

PF further shared how her family make her feel like she is working too hard and not spending enough time with her children:

> *Hence, I go to time management, that I realized it could lead to that point, because that's how my partner and my family would be like, now, if you're gonna have to manage working remotely, you're going to be always working, even when you're around everybody, or even when you have a little bit free time to bond with the kids. Now you'll be taking that time to just work more, so yeah that has impacted … impacted me in that way.*

This shows that these mothers do not only feel guilty on one side, but on both. These mothers feel a strong responsibility to succeed and adequately fulfil the demands and responsibilities of being both a mother and a worker, while still facing pressures and judgment from family, friends and society. This compounded guilt, with little to no means of being able to perfectly fulfil the expectations of a 'good mother' or 'ideal worker', further intensifies the emotional strain which they experience.

Positive Emotional Outcomes

While negative consequences were dominant, there were participants who did describe remote work as having some positive emotional benefits, which were largely centred around being a present mother. PE expressed gratitude for the opportunity to remain at home:

> *I wouldn't say a negative emotional well-being, probably more a positive one, just being able to be at home … though it comes with frustration, it hasn't led to burnout.*

PF, who felt she had clear boundaries in place, reported satisfaction:

> *I wouldn't say I have experienced any burnout, because I've always managed to balance my workout, and I know that this is enough; this is how I can take it. So, for me, I haven't reached a point where I've experienced burnout, but I have noticed that life and work get into one another, and that can be challenging emotionally.*

Even PB, despite describing overwhelming stress, acknowledged the emotional reward of being physically present for milestones:

> *Yeah, it was just an extremely stressful time. But, I would never trade being there for my son's first steps or things like that, you know. That outweighed the stress, even if it nearly broke me at times.*

This theme reveals how deeply ambivalent the emotional consequences of remote work are. For most of the mothers in this study, as in Phase 1, stress, burnout, blurred boundaries, and guilt were recurring realities which were exacerbated by constant role-switching and the absence of rest. However, a small but notable positive impact was seen with regard to autonomy and not having to commute. Mothers in this study highlighted the ability remote work gave them to be a present mother as the most widely experienced positive emotional benefit. This duality underscores that remote work is not inherently positive or negative; rather, its emotional impact depends on the support systems, job structures, and personal coping strategies of the participant.

This finding is well explained through Work–Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000), which holds that the psychological impact of managing work and family is shaped less by the domains themselves than by how permeable and flexible the borders between them are, and by the level of support available to the individual negotiating them.

6.2.4 Childcare and Domestic Responsibility

The mothers in this study expressed a disproportionate load of childcare and domestic responsibilities, which they carry on top of working remotely. While many expressed having present and involved fathers, they still remained the primary caregiver and utilised external childcare and extended support to lighten their loads. This section is made up of three sub-

categories: 1. external childcare, 2. alternative childcare supports and 3. maternal load relative to fathers.

Table 6.5 below shows the frequency of this in the sample, with counts of how many participants raised each sub-theme (Participants) and how many times it was mentioned across the dataset (References). The sub-theme which showed the most references and which was raised by all participants was he maternal load relative to fathers. This finding further solidifies the disproportionate load that mothers carry despite the father being present and supportive.

Table 6.5 Frequency Childcare and Domestic Responsibility

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants (N=7)	References
Childcare and Domestic Responsibility	External Childcare	3	8
	Alternative Childcare Supports (partner, family/friends, nanny/domestic worker)	6	30
	Maternal Load Relative to Fathers (solo parenting / insufficient support)	6	67
	Total		**105**

External Childcare

Where possible, mothers made use of preschools or playgroups to carve out dedicated work time. These were often half-day arrangements, providing short but valuable periods of focus. Many participants often expressed that they did not want to put their children in extended external care, as they wanted to be the ones raising their children.

PG described:

> *This year we started sending our kids to a preschool, only half a day. That gives me a few uninterrupted hours to get things done before they come home.*

PE also noted how preschool gave structure to her day:

> *Having them in preschool gives me a clear block of time to get work done before the afternoon chaos starts.*

Alternative Childcare Supports

Beyond formal childcare centres and preschools, several participants relied on informal or alternative arrangements to manage their dual roles. These included support from grandparents, nannies, and domestic workers. While these additional support systems lightened the load, mothers often highlighted that they remained the default primary caregiver.

PA described how her partner and nanny provided backup, but that the bulk of responsibility still fell on her:

> *I take care of my daughter most of the time, but my partner assists here and there when he comes back from work … so I'm the main caregiver if my nanny is not available.*

PG highlighted the importance of spousal support alongside shared household duties, explaining how responsibilities were negotiated when circumstances demanded it:

> *I'm still at home, so I would still be the primary caregiver to our kids, and he does have to travel overseas … he shares the responsibility of cooking … If I'm cooking, he's doing that … If I'm sick, he's doing everything. So, I definitely feel like the support helps a lot.*

PC also noted the role of her husband, while acknowledging that his work travel sometimes left her managing alone:

> *He's a very involved father, so we split responsibilities … He also travels for work, so there are times when I'm solely responsible for those things, which is sometimes challenging.*

PF pointed to broader household help as an important layer of support, while contrasting the load mothers and fathers typically carry:

> *We have a lot on our plate … Compared to men, where their responsibilities most of the time are just being at work … working remotely … I can be a provider … and I can still do the normal chores as a mother.*

Maternal Load Relative to Fathers

A consistent finding across the sample was the unequal division of childcare between mothers and fathers. Mothers identified themselves as the 'default parent', carrying the mental and practical load of daily care even when fathers or partners were described as supportive.

PB gave a particularly detailed account:

> *I was working full-time from home … But when my son was sick, or when something needed to get done, I was the one who had to do it … my husband would help, but I always had the mental load of it. I always had to be like, okay, what's next? What do we need to make sure of? … he would be like, okay, well, he needs to relax, he's been working all week … I just didn't get that downtime that he was getting.*

PA also emphasised her role as the main caregiver:

> *I take care of my daughter most of the time, but my partner assists here and there when he comes back from work … so I'm the main caregiver if my nanny is not available.*

PG noted that, despite a supportive husband, she was still the primary caregiver due to her work situation and his travel:

> *I'm still at home, so I would still be the primary caregiver to our kids, and he does have to travel overseas… he shares the responsibility of cooking… If I'm cooking, he's doing that… If I'm sick, he's doing everything. So, I definitely feel like the support helps a lot.*

PC described an involved father, while also recognising that his work travel often left her solely responsible:

> *He's a very involved father, so we split responsibilities … He also travels for work, so there are times when I'm solely responsible for those things, which is sometimes challenging.*

PF explicitly compared her experience with men's roles:

> *We have a lot on our plate … Compared to men, whose responsibilities most of the time are just being at work … working remotely … I can be a provider … and I can still do the normal chores as a mother.*

The high cost of formal childcare played a factor in these mothers relying on family, nannies or domestic workers for help with childcare, and this support factor played a vital role in how these mothers were able to manage. However, it is important to note that despite the absence of additional support, these mothers got on with it and juggled work and motherhood. Across the sample, however, mothers consistently described themselves as the default parent, responsible for both the mental load and daily caregiving, even when fathers contributed. This is supported by the findings in Phase 1 where 'The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me' and 'The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our child/ren is/are unwell', the only two factors in the domestic and childcare related support section that involved the father, ranked as the two lowest agreed items. This unequal distribution reinforced the need for flexible working arrangements and underpinned the factors motivating these participants to work remotely.

This persistent positioning of mothers as the 'default parent', regardless of a father's presence or contribution, reflects the core premise of Intersectional Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000): that gendered caregiving expectations operate as a structural norm that individual household dynamics rarely disrupt, even where fathers are described as willing or involved.

6.2.5 Organisational Support

This theme showed varied experiences from participants. For some, employers demonstrated flexibility and understanding, particularly when children interrupted work or when family duties required adjustments to their working schedules. For some of the other mothers in this phase, the organisational cultures in the companies they worked for were rigid, unsympathetic,

or even hostile to them as remote working mothers. For the mothers who were freelance workers, a great sense of isolation and loneliness was noted as they had no direct contact or interaction with their employer, which left the onus of support on them, something that was often hard to navigate. This theme is presented under three sub-sections: 1. supportive employers, 2. unsupportive or hostile contexts, and 3. freelance precarity.

Table 6.6 below shows the frequency of this in the sample, with counts of how many participants raised each sub-theme (Participants) and how many times it was mentioned across the dataset (References). Both the frequency of participants who raised these sub-themes, as well as the reference, was particularly low. This result reflects the lack of support from organisations in relation to remote working mothers, as well as the lack of emphasis or importance that these participants placed on organisational support.

Table 6.6 Frequency Organisational Support

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants (N=7)	References
Organisational Support	Supportive Employers	5	18
	Unsupportive or Hostile Contexts	3	19
	Freelance Precarity	2	5
	Total		**42**

Supportive Employers

When looking at the aspect of supportive employers, there were several participants who shared that they did have managers and colleagues who showed support and understanding of the dual load that they carried as a remote working mother of a young child. These mothers felt that their employers acknowledged their dual roles and offered flexibility when they needed it. However, it is also important to note that these mothers displayed a strong sense of responsibility and accountability in completing work tasks outside of working hours when they had to take time out of work for life-related matters.

PA explained that her organisation normalised the presence of children in the background during meetings:

> *They understand that … if there are meetings, I might have background noise, I might have a child crying, so that's not a matter of frustration to them. They allow that flexibility, and as long as I get my work done, it's not a problem.*

PC also highlighted the benefit of having an employer who respected her need for defined working hours:

> *If I have to take my son to the doctor … I have a hard stop, typically at 4.30, and I'm 100% okay with that. My employer supports that and doesn't question it.*

Additionally, PG explained that her company demonstrated understanding during a family emergency:

> *My daughter was admitted to the hospital … and even though the doctor only booked me off until Wednesday, my employer told me to take the rest of the week off as well. That kind of understanding makes it easier to balance everything.*

Unsupportive or Hostile Contexts

In contrast, other participants described having employers who showed little understanding of their caregiving needs or who actively undermined them as working mothers. PB shared an incident that she experienced as dismissive and intrusive:

> *My boss told me my son was old enough to wean now … who are you to tell me when to wean my son? That was the kind of 'support' I got.*

This example highlights not only the absence of empathy but also the presence of inappropriate interference in deeply personal parenting choices, and the innate right of a mother to breastfeed her child.

PE, who had worked for several different organisations, described a similar lack of consideration:

> *I've had employers who didn't care if the kids were sick or if I needed time. It was always about the deadlines, no matter what. There was no real support, only pressure.*

Freelance Precarity

For those working freelance or on contract, the absence of a direct employer meant that institutional support was virtually non-existent. PE, who worked through an online platform, explained:

> *If I make one mistake, they kick me off the website … I can't say I have any support from my employer, because I don't even know them. It's just me and the deadlines.*

PD, who also freelanced, highlighted the lack of formal support:

> *The work that I do is on a freelance basis … as long as I'm meeting my deadlines, I'm fine. But it also means there's no safety net. Everything depends on me, and if something happens with the kids or at home, I just have to manage.*

These findings show that the support that these mothers received from their organisations was extremely varied. Additionally, the findings suggest that organisational culture and employment type significantly shape the lived experiences of remote-working mothers.

This variation reflects Work–Family Border Theory's concept of 'border-keepers' (Clark, 2000): the organisations and managers who hold significant power over how permeable or rigid the border between work and family is allowed to be for an employee. For freelance and contract-based mothers in this study, the absence of a formal border-keeper left them entirely responsible for managing this boundary alone.

6.2.6 Career Progression and Stigma

The stories shared by the mothers in this phase revealed the raw reality of how remote work, coupled with motherhood, has not only changed the structure of their days but also their career progression. There were many participants who described how working from home was perceived by employers and colleagues as a sign of lesser commitment, which created barriers to advancement. While there were others who felt that motherhood itself remained a source of workplace stigma, irrespective of working location. However, there were a few of the mothers who reported positive or neutral experiences where their career progression was unaffected by remote work. This theme is presented under three sub-sections: 1. barriers to progression, 2. stigma associated with motherhood and remote work, and 3. equal opportunities and positive cases.

Table 6.7 below shows the frequency of this in the sample, with counts of how many participants raised each sub-theme (Participants) and how many times it was mentioned across the dataset (References). For this theme, 6 out of the 7 participants agreed that stigmas and barriers existed in regard to career progression as a remote working mother; however, they did not place too much emphasis on it, which is reflected in the low number of references.

Table 6.7 Frequency Career Progression and Stigma

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants (N=7)	References
Career Progression and Stigma	Barriers to Progression	6	27
	Stigma / Bias Against Mothers	6	22
	Equal Opportunities (positive cases)	1	1
	Total		**50**

Barriers to Progression

There were several participants who expressed frustration in relation to how remote work limited their visibility and opportunities for promotion. PG explained how, despite having worked for the same organisation for almost a decade, she perceived a 'ceiling' in her career:

> *I've been with the company for almost ten years, but I don't see progression happening for me. I feel like because I'm remote, I'm not considered for certain projects or promotions.*

These examples highlight how physical absence from traditional office spaces was often linked to a lack of ambition or how seriously their roles in remote work were taken. This resulted in barriers to career progression for these mothers.

Stigma Associated with Motherhood and Remote Work

There were many participants in this phase who highlighted that motherhood itself was frequently stigmatised in the workplace, with participants describing being perceived as unreliable or distracted. For some, remote work intensified this stigma by reinforcing the assumption that mothers were 'half-working' while caring for children.

PE described discriminatory attitudes which she has encountered in her working environment:

> *In interviews, the moment I mentioned I had kids and worked from home, the tone shifted. It was like they saw me as less capable or less committed.*

For PG, the stigma was particularly stark in the recruitment processes in the organisation in which she works. She shared an incident which she had witnessed against a new mother-to-be who had just joined the company without disclosing her pregnancy, something she does not legally have to do, and for this very reason:

> *We recently hired a woman, and we found out that she's pregnant after she signed the contract. And for me, it was like, oh, you know, good. Like, I mean, yay for her, like, it's her first pregnancy. But my project manager was like, Did you know about this? Like, oh, she slipped this past us. I'm like, why does this matter? So, the fact that it's, like, just, oh, you know, this is a red flag; she should have told us, like, would that have influenced the decision to give her the job? And I do think, even though companies don't admit it. It definitely does, and that's just with pregnancy.*

This shows how motherhood and remote work intersect, and how stigmas are created, which put these mothers in a dull light of incompetence purely as a result of being a mother.

Equal Opportunities and Positive Cases

It is important to note that not all of the participants reported negative experiences in regard to equality. There was a small number of mothers in this phase who felt that their employers provided equal opportunities for advancement, regardless of working location or parental status.

PC reflected positively on her current role:

> *In my job now, I don't feel like I've been held back. My boss measures me on results, not hours in the office. That's made a huge difference.*

PF also felt that her career had not been negatively impacted:

> *I think with us women, the challenge is that we have a lot on our plate to have to take care of our kids, we have to … we have so much to do. Compared to male, where their responsibilities most of the time are just being at work, so with this, it helps me, especially when I work remotely, I can be in two places at once. I can be a provider at the same time, and I can still do the normal chores as a mother and all that. Because we live in a world of stereotypes, to say men can provide better, or can do the job better than Women, or women who don't have kids, they can actually achieve, or they can perform better than a woman who has kids, because they have so much responsibility. But with working remotely, it actually gives us an opportunity as women to be able to do both and excel in both.*

The findings suggest that remote-working mothers often encounter significant barriers to career progression, shaped by both the visibility gap inherent in remote roles and broader stigma associated with motherhood. This is supported by the findings in Phase 1, where 'I have equal opportunity for growth and promotions in relation to male employees who do not have children'. Was the weakest agreed support factor pertaining to organisational support. For remote working mothers, career progression is directly impacted as a result of organisational culture, managerial attitudes, and persistent gendered assumptions about caregiving.

This reflects what the literature identifies as the 'motherhood penalty' (see Chapter Two), whereby caregiving responsibilities are read by organisations as a marker of reduced competence or commitment, illustrating how gendered assumptions intersect with organisational structures to constrain mothers' career trajectories (Collins, 2000).

6.2.7 Confidence in Laws and Policies

This theme presented a notable finding, which highlighted the lack of knowledge the participants in this study have of the national laws and policies pertaining to remote work in South Africa. This was first noted in Phase 1, where scores under the Legislative and Governmental Support section of the questionnaire revealed very weak agreement for any of the items. The confidence in law and policy that the mothers in this phase showed and shared was extremely low. This theme is presented under three sub-sections: 1. absence of confidence in laws, 2. limited awareness and uncertainty, and 3. partial reliance on organisational or informal protections.

Table 6.8 below shows the frequency of this in the sample, with counts of how many participants raised each sub-theme (Participants) and how many times it was mentioned across the dataset (References). This theme showed a notably low number of references, despite Limited Awareness & Uncertainty being raised by all seven participants. This further highlights the concerning lack of awareness, education, and emphasis placed on legislative and governmental support for these mothers.

Table 6.8 Frequency Confidence in Laws and Policies

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants (N=7)	References
Confidence in Laws and Policies	Absence of Confidence in Laws	2	3
	Limited Awareness & Uncertainty	7	13
	Partial Reliance on Organisational / Informal Protections	3	1
	Total		**14**

Absence of Confidence in Laws

There were only two participants who stated that they had no confidence in existing labour laws, showing slight, but not clear, acknowledgement that some laws must exist.

PB reflected on how she did not know much, and even if she did, she would not trust it:

> *I don't really have any confidence in it. I mean, I'm not even sure what the laws and policies are. I know that maternity leave is unpaid, so I mean, that doesn't really help. I don't think it really, you know, I don't have much confidence in it at all. I think even if there were really good policies. I think it would be really difficult for them to enforce them. So, yeah, no, not much confidence at all.*

PG also described feeling unprotected:

> *Like, if I had to rate it, I would give it a 2, not even.*

Limited Awareness and Uncertainty

One of the most pressing and alarming findings in this phase was that all seven of the participants expressed limited to no understanding of what legal protections or policies existed to support remote-working mothers. Every participant acknowledged either that they were unaware of their rights or that they believed such protections did not exist.

PA explained:

> *I honestly don't know what the laws are when it comes to working from home. I wouldn't know where to start if something happened.*

PB similarly stated:

> *I can't say I know of any law that protects me as a mother working remotely. It's not something anyone explained to me.*

PC reflected on her uncertainty:

> *In all honesty, I am not familiar with any laws and policies in South Africa that protect remote working mothers.*

PD described her lack of awareness:

> *So I actually, I don't feel like in South Africa, maybe I haven't done enough research on this topic, but I don't feel like there's enough, like it's not a strong enough thing where, like, you know, there's laws to protect a working from home mother, and I think it also depends on the company you're at in their policies. So, yeah, I'm not too informed here with the laws.*

PE admitted to feeling exposed because of this gap:

> *Oh, I don't believe anything would protect me at this point. So, yeah, I'm not aware of anything that would protect me, let me say that. Not really aware of the laws in general.*

PF also noted her uncertainty:

> *I would say there's a little bit of change that still needs to be there. Because, yes, it does protect us, but I feel like it needs to be in more depth. To accommodate us, especially as women who are mothers. In the law, it's just as basic…*

PG confirmed this lack of clarity:

> *I don't think I even know any laws that protect moms at all. Like, I don't even know if there are any.*

Partial Reliance on Organisational or Informal Protections

Although participants lacked confidence in national legal frameworks, a few did express trust in their employers' internal policies. While no direct policies were mentioned, participants did make reference to some procedures/formalities which showed policy-related support from their organisations. PC, for example, described her workplace positively:

> *In my current job, I do feel supported because my boss has policies in place for parents. But I know that's not law, it's just the culture of this company.*

PG described how her manager allowed her to take leave when her child was sick, noting this was treated as part of organisational norms, even if not mandated by law:

> *...if you have something where you have to be at your kid's school at 10 am, you just communicate that with them and say, like, hey, I'm not gonna be online for 2 hours from 10 to 12, because this and this and this is happening at my kid's school, or I am going to miss a meeting at 2 pm today, because I have to take my sick kid to the doctor again. So there is that understanding, and that, you know, kind of allowing the flexibility, and as long as the communication is there. So I definitely do have that.*

PE further noted that flexibility in her schedule provided a form of support, enabling her to balance work and caregiving demands more effectively:

> *I think they understand that, though I'm working remotely, if there are meetings, I might have background noise, I might have a child crying, so that's not a matter of frustration to them. And also, when they call or require assistance, there's leeway in terms of my availability. So I think that's how they support me.*

These examples show that mothers relied primarily on the goodwill of the organisation they work for, rather than on laws or formalised policies.

This theme reveals a profound absence of confidence in laws and policies protecting South African remote-working mothers. All seven participants expressed limited to no awareness of any governmental law or policies, making this a general finding across the participants.

This reliance on organisational goodwill rather than enforceable legislative protection reflects South Africa's broader legislative gap for remote and precarious workers (James, 2022) and underscores how mothers in less secure employment arrangements are left particularly exposed, with the border between work and family policed informally rather than protected structurally.

6.2.8 Influence of Affordable Childcare Availability

Lastly, the participants were asked how the availability of affordable childcare might influence their choices about remote work. Not a single participant showed any interest in returning to traditional in-office work, nor did they wish to give up any time they had with their children, even if additional, external childcare was readily available to them. This supports the findings of Phase 1 which ranked 'If there were more affordable government ECD (Early Childhood Development) centres that were well regulated, that I could send my child/ren while I work, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position' the lowest agreed in the category of Legislative/Governmental Support, a section which already had an overall all low agreement. While the majority of the mothers in this study made it clear that they would still prefer to work remotely, there were some who did express interest in hybrid employment. The theme is presented under three sub-sections: 1. preference to remain remote, 2. openness to hybrid arrangements, and 3. reconsidering return to office.

Table 6.9 below shows the frequency of this in the sample, with counts of how many participants raised each sub-theme (Participants) and how many times it was mentioned across the dataset (References). The low number of references highlights the limited emphasis placed on childcare affordability and availability in shaping these mothers' decision to engage in remote work.

Table 6.9 Frequency Influence of Affordable Childcare Availability

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants (N=7)	References
Influence of Affordable Childcare Availability	Preference to Remain Remote	5	12
	Openness to Hybrid Arrangements	2	5
	Reconsidering Return to Office	2	4
	Total		**21**

Preference to Remain Remote

When presented with the situation where affordable, safe and well-regulated childcare would be available, the participants in this phase showed no interest in returning to full-time traditional forms of employment. These mothers emphasised that physical presence and direct caregiving were central to their maternal identity, and there was no trade-off imposed by remote work that was too great in protecting that.

PB similarly noted:

> *Even without kids, I liked the idea of being in my own comfort zone and stuff. But being a mom is important and I have really appreciated being there for my son even though it has been tough at times.*

PC understood that she had benefits such as a nanny that most do not, however, she would never giving up working remotely:

> *So if it were better regulated and had the same standards, regardless of where you stay or what you pay. I think a lot of mothers would be better off. Either way, I would always work remotely.*

PD showed no interest in leaving her twins for traditional work:

> *I definitely would. Because, like I said previously, I want to be present, and I don't want to miss these small moments, especially because it was a struggle to have kids, and now that I finally have them, I don't really want other people to raise them. I would like to raise them myself, especially during these foundational years.*

PG echoed this stance, describing her decision as rooted in values rather than finances:

> *Affordable childcare wouldn't change my decision. I want to raise my kids myself. That's why I chose to work remotely in the first place.*

These perspectives highlight how remote work was motivated by more than cost considerations of childcare, but rather by the intentional choice that these mothers made in regard to their beliefs and feelings around their responsibilities and rights as mothers.

Openness to Hybrid Arrangements

There was one participant who showed some interest in hybrid models if childcare were affordable and reliable. They shared how they would benefit from splitting time between the office and home, using childcare to gain uninterrupted work time and industry exposure, while still having the flexibility to be a present mother.

PA shared her interest in sending her daughter to school and engaging in a hybrid set-up:

> *I would go for that option because I would like my daughter to go to school now. So that she can learn more or interact with other kids. So if it was more affordable and well-regulated, then I would have even sent her to school earlier, and I would continue in a hybrid job, now that I've worked remotely most of the time, but I would consider a hybrid… a hybrid job where I actually go to work physically, and sometimes I can work remotely. That way, I could still be present for my daughter while I am working.*

Reconsidering Return to Office

The high cost of childcare was a defining factor in the employment choices of several mothers in this phase of the study. However, there was one participant who expressed partial interest in returning to in-office work if they had access to safe and affordable childcare, but their accounts were still uncertain and did not show any desperation.

PE similarly noted that her reliance on freelancing was shaped by childcare constraints:

> *If I had affordable childcare, I'd feel more free to look for stable jobs. Right now, I stay with online work because at least I don't have to pay for someone to watch the kids.*

This section reaffirmed the findings from Phase 1, which did not show a strong factor of the affordability and access of childcare in relation to the choice of working remotely. While childcare costs play a part in the choice for mothers to work remotely, being present for their

children remains the highest contributing factor across the board; therefore, making the return to in-office work with no flexibility to be a mother, was not even a consideration.

This finding reinforces the earlier discussion of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996): even when a structural barrier such as childcare cost is removed, participants' commitment to personally providing care remains largely unchanged, suggesting the underlying motivator is less a practical constraint than an internalised ideal of what 'good' mothering requires.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented the qualitative results from Phase 2, deepening the Phase 1 survey patterns with mothers' own accounts. Across seven interviews (PA–PG), the findings converged strongly on three ideas: remote work is chosen to be a present mother, the day-to-day balance is effortful and often exhausting, and formal protections are unknown and minimal, with support hinging largely on employers and personal networks.

Motivation to work remotely is centred on presence, flexibility, and (for many) financial necessity. All mothers described remote work as the only realistic way to keep caregiving at the heart of daily life while sustaining an income. Presence was not framed as a "nice-to-have" but as an identity-defining priority that remote work uniquely enables.

Balancing motherhood, work, and finances required constant adjustment. Mothers described practical coping strategies (shifting hours to naps/evenings, carving out workspaces, and leaning on half-day preschool or brief playgroup windows). Even so, the constant juggle, rapid role-switching and overlapping demands left many feeling they could never properly switch off. Financial trade-offs were visible in two directions: savings on commutes and childcare for some; income precariousness for others, especially freelancers. Mothers also described negotiating their well-being, acknowledging sacrifices of rest and personal time and the emotional stamina it takes to 'just manage' despite the load.

The mental and emotional consequences were clear: high and recurring reports of stress, blurred boundaries, and guilt (toward both work and children). While a few mothers reported positive emotional outcomes (mostly satisfaction from being present and avoiding commutes), the dominant pattern was cumulative strain associated with continuous availability and minimal downtime.

On childcare and domestic responsibility, mothers consistently positioned themselves as the default parent, even when fathers were described as present and supportive. External or

alternative childcare (e.g., half-day preschool, help from grandparents, nannies, or domestic workers) eased pressure but did not displace the primary caregiving and mental load mothers carried. This unequal distribution, also visible in Phase 1, was a key driver for preferring remote arrangements.

Organisational support was mixed. Some workplaces normalised children's presence during meetings and accommodated time-bound caregiving needs. Others were rigid or intrusive, and freelancers faced structural precarity with little recourse when family emergencies arose. These differences in organisational culture and employment type shaped mothers' everyday experiences as much as the work itself.

In career progression and stigma, several participants perceived a ceiling linked to visibility and assumptions about mothers' commitment, with pregnancy and caregiving still treated as 'risk factors' in some organisational processes. A minority reported equal opportunities where outcomes were measured by results rather than physical presence, showing that culture and managerial stance are pivotal.

A notable finding was the low confidence in laws and policies relevant to remote-working mothers. All participants reported limited awareness of applicable protections; most perceived that support (when it existed) flowed from employer goodwill rather than enforceable frameworks.

Finally, affordable childcare availability would not meaningfully shift most mothers away from remote work. While a few were open to hybrid models, the prevailing preference was to remain remote because their choice is values-based, rooted in being physically present, more than merely cost-based.

The following chapter moves on to integrate Phase 1 and 2 results in terms of an in-depth discussion referring back to previous literature and tying the main findings to the theoretical framework that guides this study, showing how these two phases have contributed to fulfilling the objectives of this study as well as answering the research questions.

CHAPTER SEVEN: INTEGRATION AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter integrates the results of the two phases of this study to understand how each contributed to achieving the objectives and answering the questions set out by this study. It draws on the theoretical framework as well as previous literature, which guided the study. Analysing the results through the lenses of Work–Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory allows for the interaction of structural inequalities, cultural expectations, and blurred work–family borders, which shape the lived realities of South African remote working mothers with children under the age of 5, to be uncovered.

The purpose of this study was to explore how South African mothers with intense caregiving demands utilise remote work as a tool to balance work and motherhood. It sought to do this by revealing and understanding motivators driving mothers to work remotely, the perceived benefits and emotional consequences of doing so, as well as the extent to which family/home, organisational, and legislative/governmental support influence their experiences.

The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, which used two complementary phases of research to address the objectives and answer the questions of this study:

Phase 1 (quantitative): This phase gathered data from 93 participants via an online questionnaire, which provided measurable insights into six core constructs: motivation, benefits, mental and emotional strain, family/domestic support, organisational support, and legislative/governmental support.

Phase 2 (qualitative): This phase followed that of Phase 1 and explored the patterns through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 7 participants. This allowed for a richer and more nuanced understanding of how mothers experience, interpret, and navigate the demands of remote work alongside motherhood.

This chapter brings the results from Phases 1 and 2 together, looking at the findings side by side and interpreting them through the theoretical lenses as well as the previous literature that guided this study. It takes the results presented in Chapters 5 and 6 and unpacks them in order to answer the research questions and objectives that were set out at the beginning of this study, to bring awareness to and an understanding of the lived experiences of South African remote

working mothers with children under the age of five. Through this integration, the chapter highlights the ways in which remote work has both empowered and constrained these mothers, revealing how remote work can be both a means of flexibility that creates relief as well as a site of continued gendered pressure.

The researcher unpacks the findings under the research questions and objectives, showing how each phase of the study contributes to answering and fulfilling them.

7.2 Integration of Findings by Research Objectives and Questions

This section integrates the findings from Phases 1 and 2 under each research objective and question that was set out by the study. It draws on previous literature to support the findings, providing a clearer picture of how these two phases worked together to ensure that the objectives were met and that the questions were answered.

7.2.1 Mothers' Perceptions of How Remote Work Affects Work and Family Balance

RO1: *To explore South African mothers with children under the age of five's perceptions of how remote work affects their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.*

RQ1: *How do South African mothers with children under the age of five perceive remote work as enabling them to balance work and family responsibilities?*

This objective and question help us to understand how mothers see remote work in relation to being able to balance motherhood and work. In the case of this study, remote work was perceived to have a positive effect on mothers' ability to manage this dual role. One of the most prominent findings across both phases was the positive perception mothers showed with regard to the effect remote work had on enhancing their ability to juggle motherhood and work successfully. There was a strong correlation between motivations for remote work and perceived benefits, which supports the strong results that mothers chose remote work primarily for flexibility and presence in caregiving.

Phase 1 showed a strong positive agreement in how working remotely allowed participants to juggle motherhood and work. A large majority of participants (n=86, 93%) showed a strong positive perception regarding the flexibility that remote work has provided them, which in turn allowed them to juggle being a mother while working. Additionally, a further 91% (n=85) showed strong agreement with career continuation while still being a present mother. These findings all led to a positive impact of remote work on mothers' ability to manage work and

family responsibilities. Research by Mtotywa (2022) aligns with these findings as it highlights how remote work provided South African mothers with the flexibility needed to meet the dual demands of work and family. Furthermore, these findings were strongly reinforced in Phase 2, with all 7 participants stating that remote work has provided them with the flexibility to manage being a mother while working.

PC:

> *One is the flexibility of being able to offer some level of child care while working. Although I don't do that a lot of the time, if my son is sick and happens to be home, I can still continue working and care for him…*

PF:

> *I would say, for me, it's just being a present mother. It would work for me, because when I have enough time with my kids, it's quite a good thing to do. And working remotely, it would help me just to manage my time and balance work at the same time as… as my personal life. Also, at the same time, make… creating an extra income that will help, because in this day in life, we all need to… 56You know, have a little bit more just to survive.*

PG:

> *I didn't want to miss anything, but I also didn't want to give up the opportunity to have a career. Remote work gives me that freedom.*

These accounts solidify the perception of balance that remote work provides the mothers in this study, and how important it is to be able to work and raise their young children. Research in this area has consistently highlighted the importance of work-life balance for mothers with young children (Chung and van der Horst, 2018). As noted by Deming (2022) work-life balance plays an important role in the mental and physical health of mothers, as well as their job satisfaction, and whether they remain in the workforce.

Work–Family Border Theory by Clark (2000) helps explain the importance mothers place on this flexibility as a positive means to manage their dual role. It explains how individuals

continuously negotiate and manage the boundaries between their work and family borders to protect their maternal identity. Mothers in this study often referred to milestones, breastfeeding and caring for sick children as some of the top reasons why this flexibility was so important, lending to the need for flexibility in order for them to cross between work and family boundaries with ease. Thus, remote work, in this sense, becomes a mechanism for achieving balance across the borders of paid work and unpaid family life responsibilities. Similar reports have been published internationally, showing how flexibility is noted as a critical element for mothers of young children in enabling them to continue participating in the workforce (Chung and van der Horst, 2018; Craig and Churchill, 2021). While these international findings provide a valuable benchmark, this study extends the discussion within a South African context, where limited access to affordable childcare and persistent gendered expectations around caregiving make flexibility not just desirable but essential. Remote work has offered South African mothers the opportunity to protect their maternal identity while still bringing in an income, a choice that they have not had for a long time. These mothers have been able to protect their motherhood and livelihood, and the value seen in this by these mothers is undeniable.

Together, these findings emphasise the possibility remote work holds in being a viable option for new mothers, and those of young children, to maintain their careers, remain economically active and protect their maternal identity by being able to raise their children. Thus, in the case of this study, remote work is shown to be an extremely powerful enabler of work-life balance for these mothers. In a country like South Africa, where dual-income households are a necessity for survival, and where many mothers are forced to leave their young children to return to work (Stumbitz and Jaga, 2020), or leave the workforce to care for their children (Ciciolla and Luthar, 2019), these findings position remote work as an extremely valuable model of work. Overall, the findings show that South African mothers see remote work as a way to balance work and family demands, protecting their livelihood and motherhood. It allows them to stay connected to their role as mothers while continuing their careers, providing financially and feeling more in control of both.

7.2.2 Challenges Faced by Mothers in Managing Remote Work Arrangements

RO2: *To identify the specific challenges faced by South African mothers with children under five in managing remote work arrangements.*

RQ2: *What are the specific challenges South African mothers with children under five encounter in managing remote work arrangements?*

While it has been noted that remote work offers flexibility that holds great value, the mothers in this study reported significant challenges. Here, the stressors, challenges and barriers that South African mothers of young children face when engaging in remote work are explored. The focus is on the emotional, relational, and practical barriers that shape these mothers' everyday experiences of balancing work and family life within the home environment.

In Phase 1 of this study, more than half of the mothers showed a strong agreement with statements such as 'I have no time for myself or rest' (n=58, 62%) and the experience of burnout (n=55, 59%) and anxiety (n=54, 58%). It is interesting to note that while a large majority of the mothers in this study reported high levels of mental and emotional strain, there was no correlation between this thematic section and any other in Phase 1. This suggests that even though mental and emotional challenges are common, they are not defined or driven by any single factor. Instead, mental and emotional strain seems to be an inherent part of the remote work experience that is shaped by the personal pressure of juggling multiple roles simultaneously.

The qualitative Phase 2 deepened this picture with mothers frequently describing their day-to-day experience as a 'constant juggle' between tasks, with several referring to themselves as having to be 'always on' or 'trying to be everything at once' with little to no relief or downtime to rest and recover. Furthermore, Phase 2 strengthened the impacts of these blurred boundaries and constant border crossing, where every participant shared that they experienced some form of constant emotional consequence, with one mother even admitting that she was institutionalised as a result.

PC:

> *I did have some stress and ended up in a mental health clinic …*

Moreover, several participants shared statements regarding the emotional consequences of working remotely.

PE:

> *I will say it comes with frustration, because I'm having to meet deadlines. And often, at that point where I have to meet a deadline, probably the kids are acting up and not, you know, playing independently. So, I think it has piqued frustration at times.*

PG:

> *There's never a time when I feel like, okay, I can just relax now. If I'm not busy with the kids, I'm busy with work, and vice versa. So, there's never a time when I feel like I can just rest… It's like I'm suffocating, and I'm just not getting anything done or not doing anything right, not at work and not at home.*

These findings are consistent with those of Delaney et al. (2023), who reported that remote working mothers experience heightened mental loads as a result of constant border crossing between work and family domains, leaving them feeling as if they are 'always on'. This language shows how multitasking has been internalised as a norm instead of a choice. It was also noted during the interviews that mothers seemed to take challenges in their stride as if they were almost used to just having to manage on their own. This echoes the findings of multiple scholars who have highlighted how mothers have internalised multitasking and gendered expectations as personal responsibilities rather than being optional or something that is shared (Warren, 2011; Barigozzi et al., 2025). Several accounts noted during the interviews further added to the constant disruptions mothers faced, whether it was a child sneaking past a nanny, unable to attend school due to sickness, or just needing extra care.

PA:

> *It can also be hard when you have a sick child or the nanny is off…*

PE:

> *It comes with frustration, because I'm having to meet deadlines. And often, at that point where I have to meet a deadline, probably the kids are acting up and not, you know, playing independently.*

PG:

> *Even though the nanny was here, one kid would, like, slip past her and come in while I'm having a meeting, and like, if she was sick or couldn't come, it just threw out the whole day and made it impossible to get through stuff, like meetings especially.*

These mental and emotional effects were made worse by social, cultural, and religious norms that placed the main caregiving responsibility on mothers. Such expectations caused mothers to doubt their efforts and decisions, resulting in increased guilt, feelings of inadequacy and a general deterioration of mental health. Some mothers had relatives who accused them of abandoning their children by working, and others just brushed off their feelings and directed responsibility and guilt to their decision to work while raising young children. The feeling of guilt was overwhelming for these mothers, so much so that they sacrificed rest and downtime in order to put the little that they had left into quality time with their children. These findings show that gendered expectations around caregiving interact with factors like social class, race, and religion, which means that mothers from different backgrounds feel guilt and pressure in different ways. Intersectionality explains this dynamic by showing how the combined identities of mothers often place them under even more emotional and moral strain to fulfil the gendered societal norms of caregiving. Such experiences are consistent with existing literature, which highlights how deeply rooted gendered and cultural expectations continue to position mothers as the central caregivers within the home, often leading to guilt and self-blame when they attempt to juggle motherhood and work (Power, 2020; Mokomane, 2021). Moreover, these gendered expectations also left several of the mothers in this study facing stigma and bias where their positions in remote work were not taken as seriously as traditional employment would have been. The mere location of where they did their work, as well as the fact that they were able to care for their young children at the same time, made their paid work look weak.

PD:

> *So often, like, I'll be working, but it's like, not serious enough, like, it's not considered real work. So I think that misconception becomes a bit frustrating at times, you know.*

These accounts highlight the limited understanding of remote work in South Africa. This can be tied back to the slow uptake of remote work, as well as the cultural stigmas that place very little value on the paid work that mothers do (Lund, 2020; Madörin and Jacinto, 2023).

In addition to the mental and emotional consequences, this study also revealed that a lack of and/or unequal levels of support from fathers was a major challenge for many mothers. Phase 1 results show extremely low agreement in relation to three support-related items regarding the father. Less than 50% (n=43) of participants agreed that the father shared the load of domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, 43% (n=40) showed any agreement with equal shared caregiving with the father, and 44% (n=41) showed any agreement that the father exhibited willingness to take time off work to care for the children when they were sick. This emphasises the disproportionate burden of domestic and caregiving responsibilities that these mothers carry in comparison to the fathers. This finding is supported by Ayari et al. (2022), who found that mothers often carry a disproportionate share of domestic and caregiving responsibilities compared to fathers and even employees without children, making remote work particularly challenging for them.

The accounts gathered by the participants in Phase 2 reinforced these findings by sharing that the fathers had an easier time prioritising work and downtime over time spent with their children than they did. Overall, the fathers tended to have it easier in every regard where the children needed to be considered.

PD:

> *I do think it's harder because, you know, working remotely, you're not completely present. And I've seen this with my husband. He goes to work, and his work times are respected, you know. So like, you know, doing from eight to five o'clock, that's his time to work, and that's his time away from being a dad, not to, like, you know, throw shade at him or anything.*

PE:

> *My husband, baby daddy, whatever you want to call him, is actually also remote, so he's not with me during the week … So there is no sharing, if that makes sense. I am kind of hands-on, solo parenting from Monday to Friday, and then the weekend comes, and that's when baby daddy's turn to take over.*

PG:

> *Obviously, I'm still at home, so I would still be the primary caregiver to our kids, and he does have to travel overseas, so that went from … initially last year, when we moved, we went to Cape Town, we had a nanny, a couple of times a week. But I still had troubles, especially with meetings …*

These accounts highlight the challenges these mothers face in regard to being the default or primary caregiver. This is consistent with existing evidence, which shows the unequal load South African mothers carry in regard to caregiving versus that of fathers (Horwood et al., 2021; MenCare South Africa et al., 2024).

There were also intersecting variables which contributed to heightened levels of mental and emotional strain of the participants in this study. Firstly, the inferential results showed a significant difference between mothers living with the father of their children and those who did not. The mothers who did live with the fathers of their children experienced greater mental and emotional strain than those who did not, an interesting and notable finding. This is a unique and interesting finding, as it would be assumed that there would be more support in a dual-parent household and, as a result, less mental and emotional strain on the mother, as she would have support. However, research by Echebiri et al. (2024) highlighted how remote work intensified rather than eased pressures, as cultural expectations left mothers carrying the dual weight of professional duties and primary responsibility for childcare and housework. Moreover, Bernhardt et al. (2023) found that working from home can increase work–family conflict for mothers, as blurred boundaries and unequal caregiving roles often lead to higher stress and emotional strain. In particular, in South Africa, traditional gender norms result in fathers being largely absent from domestic and care work, and mothers being placed not only

in the position of caring for the home and children, but also for the father (Hatch and Posel, 2018; MenCare South Africa et al., 2024). It is essential to recognise that these unequal caregiving dynamics are not the same for all mothers, as they are shaped by cultural traditions, financial circumstances, and family structures, which affect how much mothers can push back against or adapt to these expectations (Gouws, 2017; Power, 2020). While having the father in the same house would seem like another set of hands, it is often just another body to care for.

Secondly, a moderate but significant difference was noted between White and Black mothers. White mothers in this study showed significantly higher levels of mental and emotional strain than Black mothers. Existing literature, which explains the resilience Black mothers possess as a result of historical oppression, exploitation and patriarchally-driven gendered expectations, may help account for this difference (Leath et al., 2023). However, this finding should be interpreted with caution. Lower reported strain does not necessarily indicate a lower actual burden; it may instead reflect differences in reporting practices, where a coping socialisation of 'strength' discourages the open expression, or even recognition, of distress (Leath et al., 2023), or differences in access to extended family and community support systems that may buffer strain without reducing the underlying caregiving load. Framing this difference solely as evidence of greater resilience risks normalising an unequal burden, rather than questioning why that burden exists and persists along racial lines in the first place.

When we look at these findings through the theoretical lens of Work–Family Border Theory, it provides an imperative insight into the source of this strain. The mothers in this study had to navigate highly permeable boundaries between home and work, with minimal separation of space, time, or personal identity. As earlier research shows, when these boundaries break down, it becomes hard for mothers to rest or recover, which then often leads to heightened levels of stress and guilt (Lodovici et al., 2021; Seinsche et al., 2024). In South Africa, patriarchal norms further compound this pressure, positioning mothers as primary caregivers regardless of employment status (Mokomane, 2021). This suggests that although remote work provides flexibility, it can also intensify workloads instead of reducing them. Viewed through an intersectional perspective, this suggests that the difficulties of working from home are shaped by the convergence of gender, class, race, and culture, rather than being determined solely by occupation. This complexity is important to understand because it shows that the stress mothers face is not simply about personal choice or strength, but about deeper social inequalities.

Overall, these findings make it clear that while remote work may provide mothers with the flexibility needed to stay employed while raising their children, it comes with significant mental and emotional consequences. The emotional labour of constant multitasking, guilt, and self-monitoring represents an added layer of gendered work that remains largely invisible and unsupported. The challenges found in this study, such as burnout, blurred boundaries, and guilt, show that more support is needed so that flexibility does not come at the expense of mothers' emotional well-being.

7.2.3 Factors Influencing Mothers' Work–Family Balance in Remote Work

RO3: *To examine the key factors that influence work–life balance for South African mothers with young children in remote work settings.*

RQ3: *What factors influence the work–life balance of South African mothers with children under five in remote work settings?*

Remote work presents both opportunities and challenges for mothers of young children in South Africa; however, these are largely shaped by the levels and types of support available to them. This study identified two main sources of support that influence mothers' ability to achieve work–life balance while working remotely: 1. domestic and family support, and 2. organisational support.

A large emphasis was placed on domestic and family support systems. The results from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this study revealed that the degree to which these mothers were able to achieve some work-life balance relied heavily on domestic and family support systems. These support systems include help from nannies, domestic workers, family members, partners, and access to tools or resources like household appliances and childcare facilities. The correlation analysis showed a strong positive correlation between family/domestic support and perceived benefits of remote work, highlighting the importance of this support in regard to accessing the benefits remote work holds for mothers.

The descriptive statistics from Phase 1 highlighted family support from direct and extended relatives and friends as the most valued form of assistance, with two questionnaire items showing that this form of support was strongly linked to mothers' ability to manage both work and caregiving duties effectively. This finding aligns with existing research that underscores the vital role extended family and social networks play in helping South African mothers juggle their dual role (Moussié, 2021; Ronnie et al., 2022). While this research notes the resilience of

mothers to ‘do it all’, a community of support is an evident factor in relation to these mothers' ability to find some sort of balance in this juggle. When engaging in the Phase 2 qualitative interviews, many mothers expressed a deep sense of gratitude, and almost relief, when sharing the impact of their support systems.

PB:

> *My dad used to come through when he could. And help if I had a meeting or a Zoom meeting, just to make sure that my son was out and not making noise.*

PD:

> *What we've done is we've also moved in with my husband's parents for additional help so that I can work. So that's also been a great help.*

PF:

> *Yeah, luckily for me, I still have my mother around to assist me if I have to put in extra time on my work, so my mom is there, and also my partner is there. In most cases, they are more … more helpful, because I would say I'm more on … I'm almost … I'm the one who's actually busier with my work. And they've got a little bit of time there and there, but we share, so I have at least two people who assist me with that.*

These findings underscore the central role that family and extended family support play in helping mothers with young children sustain remote work. In many cases, family members served as informal safety nets for these mothers, providing safe support for their children that allowed them the time and space to work. Mokomane (2021) supports these findings from a South African perspective, highlighting how family and kinship networks play a key role in childcare, and often fill the gap that exists as a result of the lack of affordable or reliable formal childcare options. Interestingly, the inferential results revealed several differences relating to family/household structure in regard to family/domestic support. Those living with the father, married and parenting in a dual-parent household, reported significantly greater

family/domestic support than single, unmarried mothers who were not living with the father of their children. This highlights how family/household structure plays a role in access to family/domestic support, possibly as a result of financial means, as well as closer and larger extended family support systems.

Beyond family and domestic support, external support systems such as schools and nannies were also discussed as important enablers of balance in Phase 2. Many mothers shared that they turned to nannies and schooling for support in finding some balance.

PA:

> *Having a nanny really helps. She looks after my daughter when I have meetings or tight deadlines, and that gives me a bit of breathing room to get my work done.*

PE:

> *When I'm in town during the week, and the kids go to school until 12 every day, that's where I get most of my work done.*

PG:

> *This year, in April, we started sending our kids to a preschool, only half a day. I don't want to not see my kids for the entire day. So, they're going half-day, and that helped a lot, because I can get things done in the mornings before picking them up.*
>
> *When we moved to Cape Town, we had a nanny a couple of times a week, and that helped me get through meetings and focus properly without worrying about the kids for a few hours.*

These accounts highlight how these multiple levels of support enable mothers to work remotely and gain some sort of work-life balance. Moreover, the correlation results from Phase 1 further strengthen this interpretation by showing a positive association between family/home support and perceived benefits of remote work ($r = .25$, $p = .014$). This suggests that mothers who received greater family and domestic assistance were more likely to experience remote work as beneficial to their overall well-being and work–life balance. Inferential results further supported this pattern, showing that single mothers reported significantly higher levels of family support compared to mothers living with the father of their children ($p = .017$ and $p =$

.007, respectively). This highlights that shared caregiving in dual-parent households cannot be assumed, and that single mothers often rely more effectively on extended family networks for practical help and emotional support.

While family and domestic systems were found to be central to balance, organisational support also emerged as an important influencing factor. This form of support directly influenced how effectively mothers could manage both work and family demands, reinforcing that organisational understanding and flexibility are key determinants of work–life balance in remote settings. A large portion (n= 71, 76%) of participants showed strong agreement to an item pertaining to the support their organisations displayed in regard to their needs as a working mother. This finding is important, as the needs of a mother differ greatly from those of a worker without children and even those of working fathers. While organisational support was present in Phase 2, it did not show as great an impact as it did in Phase 1. Several mothers did agree that their organisations would accommodate them when they needed to fetch their children or take them to the doctor, but it was one participant (PC) who worked for an international company who spoke strongly of the organisational culture as having a huge impact on her experience.

PC:

> *I'm fortunate I have a company that's quite understanding, because they're UK-based, and they… they don't rely on child support. So, it's a tough one. Like I said, it's got its pros… I'm working remotely, but then in the same sense, it's influenced me by having to be available for my son and work at the same time… The company culture where I work is great… So, if I had to say, oh, I have to take my son to the doctor, or I have to go pick him up from school, I have a hard stop, typically at 4:30, and I'm 100% okay with that… I have not experienced that kind of support in South Africa, or at least with South African companies.*

This aligns with existing research, which shows that organisational culture, management support, and workplace policies strongly influence mothers' experiences of remote work (Bilderback and Kilpatrick, 2024; Nel et al., 2024). In the South African context, this points to a clear gap in how local organisations support working mothers, with global companies appearing to offer more progressive and family-friendly practices.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings align closely with Work–Family Border Theory, which explains that people are constantly managing the boundaries between their work and family lives (Clark, 2000). The mothers in this study relied on family and domestic support systems as 'border keepers' that allowed them to maintain the borders between work and family, which, without these supports, did not exist. For example, having a grandparent or a nanny around often made it easier for these mothers to maintain focus during work hours, even though they were still present if their child needed them or if their workload allowed. These supports helped the mothers manage the overlap between work and home life, allowing them to maintain a sense of balance between their work and maternal roles without feeling stretched. Having the option to hand over care to someone they trusted and could rely on made it easier to get paid work done with less guilt and strain, making the time that they did have with their children less stressful and more fulfilling.

Moreover, the findings can also be interpreted through the lens of Intersectionality, which helps explain how differences in socio-economic position, household structure, and access to resources create unequal experiences of balance among mothers. This is supported by Gouws (2017) and Power (2020), who highlight how intersecting factors such as gender, class, and family dynamics shape mothers' daily experiences of work and caregiving. In this study, the mothers who came from higher-income households who were able to access domestic help were able to manage the dual pressures of work and childcare more effectively than those who did not have the luxury of such support. Similarly, the mothers who had extended family living with them or close by, who were able to help with childcare and other domestic responsibilities, were able to manage better than single mothers or those without extended family support. This intersectional reality reveals that while remote work provides flexibility in principle, its success in practice depends on the type and level of support available to each mother.

Overall, both phases of the study demonstrate that the presence of strong family and domestic support structures, as well as the presence of supportive organisations, significantly enhances mothers' ability to balance work and family responsibilities in remote work settings. While remote work offers the temporal flexibility that allows these mothers to be able to care for their children while working, it is the relational and practical forms of support that turn that flexibility into a sustainable and notable means of balance. These findings position the ability to achieve balance through remote work as a collective result achieved through extended support systems and networks, not something that mothers can achieve alone.

7.2.4 Strategies Used by Mothers to Navigate Remote Work and Maintain Work–Life Balance

RO4: *To investigate the strategies South African mothers use to navigate the complexities of remote work and motherhood.*

RQ4: *What strategies do South African mothers employ to navigate the complexities of remote work and motherhood?*

Moving beyond perceptions and structural supports, this section explores the concrete strategies mothers employed to navigate the daily demands of remote work and motherhood. This study revealed that South African mothers used a combination of practical, relational, and psychological strategies and navigations to manage the dual demands of work and motherhood. These strategies were mostly centred around flexibility, planning, and the creative use of available support systems and improvised adaptations to cope and avoid complete role overload. However, it is important to note that while these mothers always found a way to navigate these complexities, they did not always result in balance.

An interesting and more practical finding that surfaced in the descriptive statistics from Phase 1 was that a large portion of participants (n= 81, 87%) showed strong agreement with making use of appliances like dishwashers and washing machines as a tool to lighten the load of domestic-related tasks. This finding reflects how mothers draw on practical, modern tools to manage the gendered household responsibilities traditionally expected of them. For mothers without access to paid domestic help, these technologies acted as silent forms of support that made the demands of remote work more manageable.

Another prominent coping mechanism that emerged was time management. Alverina et al. (2024) support this through their research, which positioned time management through time blocking as one of the most common strategies used by remote working mothers to divide their days between work, childcare, and domestic tasks. Many mothers in the qualitative Phase 2 expressed how they used the time when their kids were in the care of someone else (school, nanny, family) and/or when children were sleeping to get uninterrupted time to work.

PA:

> *With me working remotely, I didn't have to necessarily take leave or request special treatment at work. I would just find time to do work while my daughter was sleeping, or during the day, when she's not in need of my care. So, it has helped a lot. Even when my nanny is on leave, I'm able to still work, but also take care of my daughter.*

PD:

> *Whatever work I am doing ... I do during the evenings when they sleep.*

PE:

> *When I'm in town during the week, and the kids go to school until 12 every day, that's where I get most of my work done, and then in the afternoons, I make sure that I've got enough time in my deadline ...*

PG:

> *I get to wake up early and do some of the work before I get the kids ready for school. Then work while they're at school, and when they're at home, I can be present with them, and then in the evenings after they go to bed, I can have to work again.*

These accounts show how mothers make use of the flexibility remote work provides in order to structure the times in which they cross between the borders of work and family domains (Clark, 2000). By managing their time, these mothers were able to control the permeability of these borders, reducing the possibility of total crossover. These behavioural adjustments reflect the core idea of Work–Family Border Theory, showing how mothers act as 'border keepers', who constantly manage when and how to move between work and family roles. This study extends the theory by showing that boundary management is not only practical but also emotional and cultural, shaped by maternal identity and caregiving expectations.

Additionally, it highlights the ranking order of which mothers prioritise their domains. These management strategies are centred around the children's schedules, not around work or the mother's own personal needs. This intensifies the demand that young children place on mothers as they require heightened levels of caregiving (Mahamad et al., 2021). Research by Milkie et al. (2009) further strengthen this finding by placing emphasis on the fact that self-sacrifice and prioritising the needs of others are central to the social construction of motherhood.

Following those time management strategies, many mothers presented great resilience, accountability and creativity in regard to managing the complexities of remote work and motherhood. While the need to be present for their children remained the central driving factor of any decision these mothers made, it therefore served as a motivation to take on any challenge while presenting an admirable resilience. The mothers in this study used psychological and improvised strategies to manage the complexities of remote work and motherhood. During the interviews, it was clear that mothers placed little blame and or responsibility on anyone other than themselves in regard to making this situation work, often making statements like ‘as a mom, you just manage’. There were also a few mothers who experienced interruptions and unplanned caregiving while working and simply took it in their stride.

PG:

> *The kids slip past the nanny and have joined in on my meeting.*

Several participants shared psychological coping strategies and creative plans which they came up with in order to manage. It is also important to note that these strategies were not static; they were ever evolving, further highlighting the resourcefulness of these mothers.

PA:

> *It can also be hard when you have a sick child or the nanny is off, but as a mom, you just manage.*

PG:

> *I had to come up with various different plans in order, like especially this year, focused more on coming up with ways to not get to that point where I'm burned out and just emotionally drained and stressed.*

These statements highlight just how resilient mothers are. This resilience was also noted in existing studies by Scholtz (2023) and Nel et al. (2024), who highlighted that remote working mothers presented a resilience that allowed them to seamlessly adapt and cope in remote work settings where they had to balance caregiving simultaneously. Moreover, this resilience also needs to be seen through an intersectional lens, as it reflects not just personal strength but the social pressure that is put on South African mothers to manage these complexities in a patriarchal society that expects so much from them (Gouws, 2017). This resilience is not just an innate character trait; it is something that has been shaped by historical oppression and intersectional layers of inequality. This resilience, however, warrants further critical interrogation. While these coping strategies undoubtedly reflect mothers' agency and resourcefulness, they also illustrate a broader neoliberal pattern whereby individuals, and particularly women, are expected to independently resolve structural and systemic failures in care and labour policy through personal adaptability, rather than these failures being addressed through institutional or state-level intervention. In this sense, the resilience celebrated in this study can also be read as evidence of an ongoing structural abdication of responsibility, where the burden of solving a societal problem is quietly placed onto individual mothers. These findings highlight the strength of these personal qualities in the success of navigating the complexities of remote work and motherhood.

Overall, these findings show that while structural challenges persist, South African mothers demonstrate high levels of self-regulation and resourcefulness in managing the demands of remote work while maintaining their maternal identity. Furthermore, the importance that these mothers place on raising their young children appears to be a significant driving force behind their capacity to manage a substantial and often disproportionate caregiving and domestic load. There is no trade-off that these mothers were not willing to make in order to protect their maternal identity while earning an income, a 'privilege' they were not willing to lose again. Moreover, these strategies reveal the paradox that exists in remote work for mothers: flexibility allows them to manage both work and family, but it also leaves the weight of balance on their shoulders. This capacity for adaptation should not be uncritically celebrated; rather, the structural conditions that make such a heavy load necessary in the first place warrant closer scrutiny. Mothers should not be required to carry such a disproportionate caregiving burden in order to exercise their right to care for their children while remaining economically active.

7.2.5 Societal Expectations and Economic Pressures Shaping Remote-Work Decisions

RO5: *To analyse how societal expectations and economic pressures shape South African mothers' decisions about participating in remote work.*

RQ5: *How do societal expectations and economic pressures influence the decision-making processes of South African mothers regarding remote work participation?*

This section draws us closer to understanding the why of these mothers' choice to engage in remote work in the first place. Throughout this study, respondents' unwavering focus on the ability to raise their children, be a present mother and protect their maternal identity has been prevalent. This section is no different. Almost all the participants from Phase 1 (n= 92, 99%) showed strong agreement that it was important to them to be a present mother while still earning an income, and remote work allowed them to fulfil this need. In addition, and relating to this finding, the ability to balance their cultural expectations as a woman while earning an income also showed a strong agreement as to why they chose to work remotely (n=74, 80%).

This recurring emphasis on personally raising one's children, rather than relying on external caregivers, warrants further critical reflection. It reflects what Hays (1996) the ideology of 'intensive mothering', wherein mothering is culturally constructed as inherently self-sacrificing, individualised, and irreplaceable, positioning any reliance on external care as a moral compromise rather than a legitimate or valuable form of shared caregiving. Understood this way, participants' resistance to using more formal or extended childcare, even when accessible and affordable, reflects not simply personal preference, but an internalised moral expectation placed disproportionately on women to embody this ideal.

While being a present mother can be an internal motivator, it is often shaped by cultural norms and expectations. Existing research by Warren (2011) and Fineman (2019) highlights how the role of a woman is traditionally centred around caregiving and domestic work, which positions the role of motherhood as a core element of the feminine identity. Furthermore, Gouws (2017) explains how mothers see their worth in their ability to achieve these expectations, which are reinforced by intersecting cultural and gendered norms. This reflects the intersectional nature of their experience, where gender, culture, and socio-economic position converge to shape how mothers negotiate their roles. Through the lens of Work–Family Border Theory, remote work becomes a strategy to control the permeability of these borders, allowing mothers to meet both paid work and caregiving demands without fully crossing into one domain at the expense of

the other. Adding to this, Nzima and Maharaj (2023) explain that South African mothers prioritise their role as a mother over work as a result of strong cultural expectations.

Furthermore, results from the inferential statistics highlighted that mothers with no external childcare, not living with the father, and single mothers all reported significantly stronger motivators to working remotely. These effects confirm that economic necessity and solo caregiving jointly drive the decision to choose remote work. This aligns with existing research that highlights how South African mothers' choice to work remotely is strongly influenced by social norms and unequal divisions of labour within the household (Stumbitz and Jaga, 2020). Accounts from the qualitative Phase 2 further validated these findings.

PA:

> *I want to have and create a bond with my daughter, and for her to know that I am her mother and not the nanny.*

PB:

> *I wanted to continue breastfeeding, which made remote work the only viable option.*

PC:

> *One is the flexibility of being able to offer some level of child care while working. Although I don't do that a lot of the time, if my son is sick and happens to be home, I can still continue working and care for him ...*

PD:

> *So I think it's played a huge role. I you know it was, I was on a fertility journey, so having finally had kids, I wanted to be present, and I put work sort of as a second priority, and being a present mom is my first so, yeah, I think it's played quite a huge role, and it's a decision that I don't regret making.*

PG:

My biggest reason is being able to be with my daughter, to see her grow, and still earn an income. I didn't want to miss her firsts.

These accounts place a central focus on preserving the rights and responsibilities of motherhood, but also show the financial relevance and need of choosing to work remotely. The benefit of gaining financial freedom and stability through remote work was presented as a strong factor in the choice to work remotely (n=73, 79%). Research by Maharaj and Dunn (2022) support this sentiment that South African mothers prioritise caregiving over work, but also reinforce the necessity of generating an income. A dual-income household in South Africa is not a choice; it is a necessity. There were several accounts in Phase 2 which placed direct focus on the financial benefit, as well as the fact that mothers felt a responsibility to provide financially, even if it was not much.

PE:

Yeah, I'm gonna say the family responsibilities is a big one. Just being able to also bring some money to the table, even though, you know, the breadwinner is not me. No, I wouldn't say anything about organisational support. I'm lucky I have the technology to work remotely … I also need my own money …

PG:

I wanted to still be able to earn, even if it's just something small, but still be around my child.

While these accounts show a strong sense of independence and responsibility in regard to being financial providers on top of the primary caregiver, these mothers also showed a strong pull from career continuation as a reason to work remotely. While being a present mother is undoubtedly the central factor, and the economic climate in South Africa makes earning an income a necessity for survival, these mothers also wanted to maintain a career and some of their individual identity outside that of motherhood. Career continuation while being a present mother was a strong benefit of working remotely for 91% (n=85) of participants in Phase 1. In the qualitative interviews, one mother made an explicit account which reinforced this compounding reasoning for her choice to work remotely.

PG:

> *I didn't want to miss anything, but I also didn't want to give up the opportunity to have a career. Remote work gives me that freedom.*

These findings show the dual responsibility that modern-day mothers feel to be both the primary caregiver and a financial provider, even if they are not the breadwinners. This aligns with existing research that has proven the dual load mothers carry of paid and unpaid work (Wong et al., 2021; Lott and Wohrmann, 2022). Despite the fact that mothers are now actively working while still remaining the primary caregiver, little change in gendered expectations from culturally rich societies like South Africa has been noted (Nzima and Maharaj, 2023; Scholtz, 2023). It is evident that mothers shoulder a great responsibility in maintaining both their modern-day expectations as well as their traditional ones.

An interesting finding, which, at the beginning of this study, was anticipated to have a notable effect, was the inaccessibility of affordable, safe and regulated ECD facilities. The results from this study showed that this played a very minimal role in these mothers' decision to work remotely. Not trusting anyone else to look after their children and not having alternative childcare held very little weight in the influence of choosing remote work in Phase 1 of this study. Additionally, when presented with the scenario of affordable, safe and well-regulated ECD facilities being accessible, a mere 32% (n=30) of participants showed any agreement that this would make them reconsider their choice in remote work. It was in Phase 2 where this finding was undoubtedly reinforced, with almost all mothers saying that this access to ECD facilities would not change their choice in working remotely. This was for a combination of reasons. Many mothers highlighted that extended childcare would take time away from being with their kids and that was not what they wanted, while others shared that working remotely gave them freedom and autonomy that they were not willing to give up.

PD:

> *I definitely would still work remotely. Because, like I said previously, I want to be present, and I don't want to miss these small moments, especially because it was a struggle to have kids, and now that I finally have them, I don't really want other people to raise them. I would like to raise them myself, especially during these foundational years.*

PE:

> *No. I mean, yes. I would. I would. Definitely. I aim to be a remote worker for as long as I possibly can be. In saying so, I'm just maybe part of a lucky … few that have a baby daddy who is responsible for medical and education costs, whereas the rest of the costs fall on me. So I think about that. In that case, they do go to … they do go to char … to nursery. My youngest is 3, and she is at nursery every day until 12, and then my oldest is in School, she's in double zero. And she's there until about 12 … half past 12 every day as well. So I think it is also a double-edged sword. I mean, I think … If there were an option, a cheaper option for them to be there until 5 every day, I don't think I would send them either, because I just think they are too young. So … Yeah, I think in the future, 100%, but at this age, no.*

PG:

> *Yes, I would still work remotely. For me, it's about spending quality time with my kids and not having someone else raise them on my behalf. I don't want to work just to pay someone else to take care of my children. I wouldn't change that, even with proper childcare available.*

These findings reflect how deeply rooted South African mothers' choice to work remotely is in cultural expectations, financial necessity, and caregiving responsibilities. Work-Family Border Theory provides a lens that highlights how mothers actively manage the permeability of work and family borders to meet the competing demands within the constrained social and economic systems prevalent in South Africa. Thus, it is clear that remote work is a means of negotiating structural inequalities and enduring gendered expectations, and not a privileged choice.

7.2.6 Organisational and Policy Support for Remote-Working Mothers

RO6: *To assess the adequacy of existing organisational and policy frameworks in supporting South African mothers engaged in remote work.*

RQ6: *How adequate are existing organisational and policy frameworks in addressing the needs of South African mothers engaged in remote work?*

In regard to organisational support, this study noted that support was seen primarily through informal accommodations rather than policy. The quantitative Phase 1 results showed relatively high agreement across items relating to organisation support, with every item receiving over 70% agreement. There was one item from a separate section regarding organisations abiding by basic labour regulations, such as leave and lunch breaks, and this received a lower 54% (n=50) in agreement; however, it still reflected strength in support and compliance in regard to organisations. Matli (2020) highlights this weakness in legislative compliance and adaptation, explaining that many South African organisations expected employees to keep up the same levels of productivity during the pandemic, even though no formal policies were put in place to guide or support remote work. Work-Family Border Theory provides a lens which uncovers how, in this instance, mothers were left to manage the permeability of borders between work and family domains, as no organisational policy existed to guide their management. Interestingly, the Phase 2 qualitative interviews presented mixed opinions and experiences. While most participants did state that the organisations which they worked for accommodated them as mothers in regard to school pick-ups and doctors' appointments, the sense of it being a favour rather than something that the organisation willingly accommodated was evident.

PA:

> *I think they understand that, though I'm working remotely, if there are meetings, I might have background noise, I might have a child crying, so that's not a matter of frustration to them. And also, when they call or require assistance, there's leeway in terms of my availability. So I think that's how they support me.*

PB:

> *They would let me go, so I could tell them, look, I'm taking my son to the doctor, and they would give me that time, but I would have to work it in. They did say that I could take half an hour to*

> *fetch my son in the afternoons from school, but there was no real support as such. Everything felt like they were doing me a massive favour.*

The flexibility organisations allowed participants in regard to managing work and motherhood was evident. The correlation matrix showed strength between the benefits of remote work and organisational support ($r = .367$, $p < .001$), highlighting how mothers who had greater organisational support tended to perceive greater benefits in remote work. Additionally, Phase 1 inferential results showed that mothers who were employed by international organisations tended to feel more supported by their organisations, especially in regard to promotion and opportunity. This finding aligns with existing research, which highlights the effects that organisational culture and management practices have on how mothers experience remote work (Raghuram, 2021; Bilderback and Kilpatrick, 2024). Studies also show that international organisations in countries where remote work policies and legislation have been updated to accommodate remote work offer greater support (OECD, 2022; Savino and Foster, 2024). One participant from Phase 2 interviews who works for a UK-based organisation made accounts that strengthen this finding.

PC:

> *I'm fortunate I have a company that's quite understanding, because they're UK-based, and they … they don't rely on child support… The company culture where I work is great … I have not experienced that kind of support in South Africa, or at least with South African companies.*

The inferential results support this finding, showing that mothers employed by international organisations perceived greater equality in promotion than those in South African organisations. Furthermore, these accounts reveal that the support expressed was of an informal nature rather than something that was structured and supported by policy and guided by legislation. The correlation matrix showed a strong connection between organisational support and legislative/governmental support, and it was actually the strongest correlation in this study. This solidifies the fact that organisations need to be guided by government legislation in order to correctly support remote working mothers (Munyeka, 2024). These patterns presented strongly when looking at legislative/governmental support.

This section revealed one of the most notable and urgent findings of this study. The quantitative Phase 1 showed extremely weak agreement in any of the five items which related to legislative/governmental support. The second highest ranking item, which posed the statement 'I feel protected by government legislation in my remote working position', had only 29% (n=27) participants showing some agreement. Additionally, the statement pertaining to South African legislation protecting working mothers presented agreement from a slightly higher but still a very small portion (n=29, 31%). The strongest finding from both sections was the knowledge mothers possessed in regard to their rights as remote working mothers in South Africa. The quantitative results showed that 66% (n=61) of participants had little to absolutely no agreement with them being aware of what legal rights they had, and this was strengthened irrefutably in the Phase 2 qualitative interviews, where almost every mother stated that they had no knowledge of any right, with only one mother expressing some, but was very unsure.

PA:

I'm not even sure of the current laws that are there in South Africa that protect me as a working mother, so I'm not sure how to respond to this question."

PB:

I can't say I know of any law that protects me as a mother working remotely. It's not something anyone explained to me."

PC:

In all honesty, I am not familiar with any laws and policies in South Africa that protect remote working mothers."

PD:

> *So I actually, I don't feel like in South Africa, maybe I haven't done enough research on this topic, but I don't feel like there's enough, like it's not a strong enough thing where, like, you know, there's laws to protect a working from home mother, and I think it also depends on the company you're at in their policies. So, yeah, I'm not too informed here with the laws.*

PE:

> *Oh, I don't believe anything would protect me at this point. So, yeah, I'm not aware of anything that would protect me, let me say that. Not really aware of the laws in general.*

PF:

> *I would say there's a little bit of change that still needs to be there. Because, yes, it does protect us, but I feel like it needs to be in more depth. To accommodate us, especially as women who are mothers. In the law, it's just as basic …*

PG:

> *I don't think I even know any laws that protect moms at all. Like, I don't even know if there are any.*

This lack of awareness stems from intersecting inequalities that leave mothers both uninformed about their rights and doubtful that existing legislation can offer them real protection. The literature widely recognises that deep-rooted gender, class, and educational inequalities in South Africa continue to limit mothers' knowledge of legislation, which reinforces their exclusion from protection (Gouws, 2017; Shiferaw, 2024). These accounts show an undeniable gap that exists in the understanding these mothers have of legislation. Thus, these mothers are left in situations where they are not sure what is right or wrong, or if they have any legal backing to support them in standing up against any precarity, exploitation and discrimination.

This stark and alarming finding echoes the concerns of James (2022) and Munyeka (2024), who highlight the absence of South African legislation in support of remote workers as a major contributor to the vulnerability remote working mothers are experiencing. Furthermore, this absence of clear policy and legislative structures removes the protective 'borders' that help mothers separate and safeguard their work and family domains. Remote working mothers in South Africa are left without protection, accepting situations of exploitation and discrimination as a means to protect their maternal identity and rights as mothers.

7.3 Summary of Integrated Findings

The findings across all six of the research questions and objectives of this study strongly show that remote work holds great opportunities for mothers in South Africa, but it also uncovered the cost that they currently pay for these opportunities. Where remote work currently stands in South Africa, it cautions more towards a new site of gendered oppression and inequality rather than an avenue of liberation, autonomy and possibility. The flexibility that comes with working remotely in South Africa is less a result of protection and understanding, and more of resilience and adaptability. Through the complementary lenses of Work-Family Border Theory and Intersectionality, this research highlights the paradox of the promise of remote work and makes clear that the ability these mothers possess to manage is not something to be glorified, but a far-reaching implication of historical gendered inequality, oppression and expectation coupled with economic necessity and entrenched by the absence of legislative support.

The integration of results and the discussion around them in this chapter has underscored that meaningful empowerment for remote-working South African mothers depends not only on personal adaptation but on collective, organisational, and legislative transformation. Remote work has given mothers back their motherhood while protecting their livelihood, but at a great cost. We just need to recognise the possibility and harness it, not exploit the desperation of these mothers to protect their families from both a financial and caregiving perspective.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter concludes the study by revisiting the purpose and objective of this study, and summarises the key findings drawn from Phases 1 and 2 of the study to reflect on their significance within the South African context. Furthermore, it presents the theoretical, methodological and practical/policy-related contributions which this study has made through its findings and processes. Lastly, it acknowledges the limitations of the study, presents recommendations for policy and practice and for future research.

This study set out to create an understanding of an underexplored area which holds a paradox of potential and limitation. By studying the lived experiences of South Africa remote working mothers with children under the age of 5, this study aimed to create an understanding which would guide the proper, ethical and empowering potential of remote work for mothers in South Africa who are trying to maintain and protect both their identity as a worker and a mother. Using a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach, the study drew from the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of an under-researched demographic in an area of research which is at the forefront of the future of work. Guided by Work–Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000) and Intersectional Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000), the study was able to unpack the why, what and how of South African remote working mothers with young children. This approach led to an enriched understanding of how structural inequalities, gendered norms, and blurred work–family borders intersect to shape how these South African mothers experience paid remote work and unpaid work in the same physical space and time. It positions remote work as both a mechanism of empowerment and a site of persistent inequality that requires urgent attention, understanding and revolution.

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study revealed that the lived realities of South African mothers who work remotely while caring for children under the age of five are complex and often paradoxical. The six research objectives set out by this study each contributed to a unique finding in the overall aim of this study. Below, these unique findings will be briefly highlighted under the research objective to which they pertain.

RO1: To explore South African mothers with children under the age of five's perceptions of how remote work affects their ability to balance work and family responsibilities.

The mothers in this study showed a strong and constant positive perception of remote work in regard to the ability it allowed them to balance motherhood while working. The flexibility that allowed these mothers to be physically and emotionally present for their young children while they still able to generate an income and pursue a career was highly valued. This finding solidified the potential that remote work possesses to enable South African mothers to manage and maintain their role as both a worker and a mother.

RO2: To identify the specific challenges faced by South African mothers with children under the age of five in managing remote work arrangements.

While the findings of this study showed a lot of positive outcomes for these mothers through engagement in remote work, it also uncovered pressing and crippling physical, mental and emotional challenges that come with juggling working remotely while caring for children under the age of five. The blurred boundaries between home and work, and the permeability of the borders that try and separate these two domains, often leave mothers feeling stressed and burnt out. The pressure to be a good mother while trying to live up to the patriarchal ideology of the ideal worker, all at once, under the same roof, results in feelings of intense guilt, inadequacy and failure. Interestingly, the Phase 1 quantitative results showed that mothers living with a co-parent experienced higher levels of emotional strain than those parenting alone, pointing to the invisible pressures within shared households. Moreover, a lot of mothers expressed that their work was not taken seriously, often undervalued and subject to bias, especially in relation to fathers. These compounding stressors contributed to an alarming negative impact on the well-being of these mothers.

RO3: To examine the key factors that influence work-life balance for South African mothers with children under the age of five in remote work settings.

Support from family, friends, external sources (nanny, domestic workers and school) as well as that from organisations, played a significant role in the ability these mothers had to create some form of balance. Extended family support networks, mainly grandparents, nannies and schooling, presented as important support mechanisms which allowed these mothers time to work. Additionally, supportive workplace cultures were also highlighted as a factor which had a positive impact on these mothers' ability to balance their dual role. Statistical analyses confirmed this link, with mothers reporting greater family and domestic support also perceiving stronger benefits from remote work, particularly among single and married mothers compared to those living with the father. However, these types of support and their availability were

uneven across the sample, which highlighted intersectional inequalities that are shaped by factors such as income, employment aspects, and family structure.

RO4: To investigate the strategies South African mothers use to navigate remote work and motherhood.

One of the most admirable and alarming findings in this study was the sheer resilience and adaptability of these mothers. There was no trade-off too big, or struggle too large, in comparison to the gift they had been given of regaining their maternal identity while still being able to provide financially for their families. The mothers in this study employed both practical and psychological strategies to ensure that they were able to juggle work and family under the same roof. These included time management, the creative use of support systems, and an unmatched ability to adapt and cope despite the crippling loads that they carried. While the adaptability and resilience of these mothers were unwavering and often shouldered with great dignity, it uncovered the deeper gendered structural inequalities which had been masked by this 'superpower'.

RO5: To analyse how societal expectations and economic pressures shape South African mothers' decisions about participating in remote work.

The choice to work remotely for the mothers in this study was primarily guided by societal and cultural expectations as well as economic necessity. These mothers were not only concerned about earning an income, but also about a deep and pressing responsibility to raise their children. The maternal identity that these mothers fought so strongly to protect is shaped by social and cultural expectations, as well as the internal expectations of motherhood responsibilities. The Phase 1 quantitative data further supported this by showing that single mothers, those without childcare, and those not living with the father reported the strongest motivation to work remotely, largely as a strategy to manage both financial necessity and caregiving demands. Thus, in this study, remote work was positioned as both an economic strategy and a means of protecting maternal identity.

RO6: To assess the adequacy of existing organisational and policy frameworks in supporting South African mothers engaged in remote work.

One of the most significant and alarming findings of this study was the severe and outright lack of knowledge and trust that these mothers had regarding legislative and governmental support. While organisational support, mainly present in those working for international organisations,

was expressed, it was largely informal and dependent on managerial goodwill. The Phase 1 quantitative results reflected this pattern, as mothers employed by international organisations reported significantly greater equality and support than those in South African organisations. The near-total absence of awareness regarding legal rights, alongside the scarcity of formal organisational policy, underscored a major policy gap in the South African labour landscape.

Overall, these findings position remote work as a means of great potential for South Africa mothers in to navigate work and motherhood, protecting their maternal identity while still being able to provide financially, fulfilling the economic necessity under the turbulent socio-economic South African landscape. However, as remote work currently stands, situated in systematic neglect, it risks entrenching and deepening the historical gendered inequalities which South African mothers shoulder with such admirable resilience. Therefore, these findings highlight an urgent need for policy and legislative intervention that not only protects and supports remote-working mothers but also positions remote work as a sustainable and equitable form of employment in South Africa.

8.2 Contributions of This Study

This study made several contributions to knowledge, theory and methodology, as well as making practical and policy-related contributions. These contributions are explained below.

8.2.1 Knowledge Contribution

By giving South African remote working mothers who are raising young children a voice, this study has contributed to the growing body of knowledge on gender, work, and care in the post-pandemic digital era. While global research has begun to unpack the gendered issues surrounding remote work, this study provides research on South African mothers with young children in a post-pandemic world, a demographic and era that is largely unexplored in research. The unique landscape of South Africa, shaped by cultural, economic, and legislative particularities, coupled with the unwavering drive of the maternal identity, provides a site of research that holds enormous potential.

This study extends the current understanding of the lived realities of remote work for mothers and positions them under a paradoxical lens of empowerment and oppression. On one hand, it offers valuable flexibility that enables mothers to earn an income and maintain a career while protecting their maternal identity. On the other hand, it exposes them to heightened emotional

strain, burnout, and gendered expectations that are perpetuated through unequal household divisions of labour and a lack of formal protection.

Moreover, this study contributes a new dimension to feminist and work–family scholarship, particularly within developing and unequal societies like South Africa, by highlighting the resilience and adaptability of the mothers in this study. They demonstrated adaptability and resilience under situations of heightened emotional and workload strain, all in the name of protecting their maternal identity. The researcher admires and respects these attributes but does not glorify them. The research outcomes shed light on the persistent gendered inequalities and legislative loopholes that force these mothers into positions where employing adaptability and resilience is a form of survival, not empowerment. This strength arises from a place of necessity rather than choice, reflecting the unequal structures that shape the lived realities of South African working mothers. This finding calls for the reframing of resilience, not as a celebration of endurance, but as an urgent cry for systemic, organisational, and policy change that supports mothers beyond their capacity to cope.

This study advances knowledge in four distinct and original ways:

1. It documents the dual nature of remote work as both an enabler of balance and a reproducer of inequality.
2. It draws attention to intersecting identities, including class, culture, and family structure, as factors which shape and differentiate the experience mothers have of remote work.
3. It exposes the absence of legislation and policies in South Africa, which leave remote-working mothers in vulnerable positions without protection, proper information, or support.
4. It highlights the paradox of maternal resilience, showing that while mothers' strength and adaptability can be empowering, they also hide the deeper inequalities and emotional strain that come from doing care work without proper support.

Together, these insights expand our understanding of how remote work connects with issues of gender, caregiving, and inequality in the context of a developing country.

8.2.2 Theoretical Contribution

This study advances theory by applying Work–Family Border Theory and Intersectional Feminist Theory together for the first time to this population, refining both in the process. It

uses these theories in the unique and turbulent landscape of South Africa to understand the complex and distinct demographic of remote working mothers with children under the age of five. The researcher had not previously seen these two theories used together in this field; however, their integration strengthens and adds relevance to the multi-theoretical framework enabling a fuller exploration of the complexities faced by remote working mothers with children under the age of 5 in the unique and challenging South African landscape.

Through Work–Family Border Theory, the study demonstrates that remote work intensifies border permeability between the domains of work and family. The findings reveal that while mothers actively negotiate these borders to preserve both work and maternal identities, the lack of formal structures and support often leaves them unable to rest, recover, or detach. This contributes to the theoretical refinement of Work-Family Border Theory by showing that, in contexts of limited organisational and legislative support, border management becomes not merely a psychological or practical task, but a form of emotional and moral labour. Moreover, while Work-Family Border Theory was not created in relation to remote work, the use of it in this study extends its applicability to this field of research, especially when there is a gendered focus.

The study also extends the application of Intersectionality within the field of work–family research, specifically with regard to the future of work. It shows how intersecting systems of gender, culture, family/home structure, employment context and socio-economic status shape how mothers experience and navigate remote work. In contrast to studies conducted in high-income countries, where remote work is often framed as a lifestyle choice, this study positions it as a structural necessity, a strategy of survival within an unequal labour and social landscape. This broadens the theoretical understanding of remote work as a gendered and culturally embedded phenomenon rather than a neutral mode of employment.

8.2.3 Methodological Contribution

This study advances methodology by demonstrating the value of a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design for researching hard-to-reach, time-constrained populations in a developing-country context. By using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, this study demonstrated the value of combining quantitative and qualitative methods when studying underexplored and complex social contexts.

The study used the quantitative phase to identify broad trends and relationships which formed a foundational understanding; this was then humanised and strengthened through the qualitative phase. This allowed for foundational research to be conducted on a population and area of study that had little to no direct information, while still respecting and embodying the depth and relevance of the qualitative research, which social sciences value so highly. A mixed methods approach to research provides the opportunity to collect data from under-researched populations that provides both bulk statistical results as well as in-depth human accounts. Additionally, it highlights how online platforms and virtual spaces can be used to target under-researched and hard-to-reach populations like remote working mothers, who are often isolated and would be not easily accessed directly. Together, these contributions reinforce the strength and value of mixed-methods designs for advancing gender and labour research in developing-world contexts, where research often piggybacks off that of developed countries and risks weakening the truth and uniqueness of these sites.

8.2.4 Practical and Policy Contributions

Being centred on a demographic whose realities are largely shaped by society, culture, organisational support and legislative/governmental support, this study makes several contributions in this regard. These contributions will be meaningful and contribute to organisations, policymakers, and society as a whole, in regard to the understanding, as well as the role they play in making remote work viable for South African mothers of young children.

The contribution made at a practical or social level highlights the important role which social support systems play in making the juggle between work and motherhood possible. In this study, these support networks (extended family, nannies, domestic workers and schools) made remote work a sustainable option for many mothers and, without them, it imposed heightened mental and emotional strain. By recognising the vital role these informal support networks play, it highlights the need to strengthen them through community initiatives as well as formalised policy as a means to enhance the possibility that remote work provides in terms of balance.

For organisations, this study highlights the need for supportive workplace cultures as well as formalised policies and frameworks that support mothers in their remote working positions. By formalising frameworks and policies, it will assist in removing stigmas, minimising bias, as well as reducing the guilt and burden these mothers carry. When expectations and flexibility are clear, uncertainty is reduced for everyone and this results in a healthier, more equitable working environment.

Additionally, one of the most important contributions of this study is the gaping legislative loophole which exists in South African labour legislation. This study highlights the urgent need to address this so that not only remote working mothers, but also all South African remote workers are protected from exploitation and precarity, which form the foundations of remote work in the current South African remote work landscape.

Lastly, this study makes a vital contribution in regard to social discourse by reframing remote work as a necessity rather than a choice founded in luxury. South African mothers have chosen remote work as a structural necessity, a means to survive the crippling load of paid and unpaid work, while protecting their maternal identity.

Through these contributions, this study invites policymakers, employers, and civil society to view remote work as a legitimate and vital mode of employment that deserves structural protection, rather than a temporary arrangement or informal favour.

8.3 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insight into the lived experiences of South African remote working mothers with children under the age of five, several limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations do not weaken the value of the research but instead help define the boundaries within which the results should be understood. The study placed a lens over a very specific population: South African remote working mothers with children under the age of five. While this was intentional and in line with the objectives of this study, it limited the inputs from mothers with older children, other remote workers, fathers, organisations and policymakers. Additionally, the sample sizes for both phases were relatively small, which limits the ability of the results to serve as generalisable to all South African remote working mothers with children under the age of 5. Moreover, the cross-sectional design limited the data that was collected to be shaped by feelings, perspectives and experience at the point in time at which the data collection took place. However, despite these limitations, the credibility and confirmability of the findings were strengthened through methodological triangulation between the two phases of the study and supported by existing literature and a robust multi-theoretical framework. The findings from this study add meaningful insight to an area that remains largely unexplored in the South African context, even with its limitations.

8.4 Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Further Research

This study clearly highlights that remote work holds both potential and challenges for working mothers in South Africa who are raising young children. The challenges are largely a result of absent and informal policies and legislation, and thus, this study makes recommendations in this regard. Furthermore, the limitations of this research have also been highlighted, which inform recommendations for future research.

8.4.1 Policy Recommendations

With regard to policy, this study makes two recommendations, which are centred on the absence of legislation as well as the legislative loophole that exists in current South African labour legislation. The study makes the recommendation of the formal recognition of remote workers in South African labour legislation, accounting for the explicit exclusion of independent contractors, which current legislation makes. This will provide immediate protection for remote workers, allowing them to leverage existing law, seek support and representation in trade unions, and it will also compel those employing these workers to implement proper frameworks and policies at the organisational level. Additionally, it makes the recommendation of the implementation of direct gender-sensitive and care awareness policies to account for the caregiving responsibilities of working mothers. By accounting for these unique needs, these policies will reduce discrimination, provide legal protection and allow working mothers the flexibility and understanding they both deserve and need in order to balance paid and unpaid work.

8.4.2 Practical Recommendations

This study has highlighted that organisational support relied largely on informal accommodations and favours and therefore recommends the implementation of formal frameworks and policies. This will help make remote work an equitable, manageable and viable option for South African mothers, even in the absence of national policy and legislation. Moreover, awareness training with regard to maternal workloads, pressures and expectations needs to be seen as a vital tool in reducing bias and stigmas. This study recommends that organisations, communities and policymakers come together to strengthen social support networks, create awareness and educate the broader society on the lived experiences of South African remote working mothers who are shouldering disproportionate loads of paid and

unpaid work while fighting bias and stigmas, in order to create an environment of inclusion and support.

8.4.3 Recommendation for Future Research

Guided by the findings and limitations of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations for future research:

- Inclusion of broader stakeholders to gain a deeper insight into the challenges, how and why they exist and what their perceptions are in regard to what has been highlighted in this study.
- Conduct longitudinal and comparative studies to track what factors may contribute to or alter the perceptions of South African remote working mothers under different and varied circumstances/times. Additionally, comparing different types of employment models, such as remote work and hybrid work, will provide an invaluable insight into navigating and constructing employment models that serve the best overall interest of working mothers.
- Expand research into diverse groups of remote working mothers to see how their experience might differ from that of this specified population.
- Conduct a study on remote working fathers in South Africa with children under the age of 5, where the mother works a traditional in-office job, to see if care is transferred to the father as a result of remote work, or if it remains gender heavy.
- Future research could examine the intersection of socio-economic status and disability with remote work and motherhood in the South African context, as these factors were not directly measured in this study.
- Comparative research within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region would help situate South Africa's experience within a broader regional context, given the limited availability of SADC-specific literature on remote work and motherhood identified in this study.

The world of work is changing rapidly, and remote work sits at the centre of this transformation. While this study has created focus for future research in this underexplored area of inquiry, it has also made a call to action. This issue demands urgent attention, reform and the implementation of policy and legislation that ensure remote work becomes an empowering, liberating, and viable option for South African mothers, rather than another site of gendered oppression.

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Appendix A Phase 1 Online Questionnaire (as presented to participants on www.sogolytics.com)

***1. Participant Consent Form**

Research Title:
All of work? All of life? Ontology of South African mothers and remote work
Brief insight into the research study aims:
This research project investigates the changing roles of South African working mothers in remote work, emphasising the pre-pandemic trend of remote work as a popular choice among mothers. Due to the country's limited Early Childhood Development facilities, it focuses on mothers with children under the age of five. The study aims to understand how remote work impacts work-life balance and challenges traditional gender roles, advocating for workplace diversity and inclusion. Additionally, it addresses the economic challenges South African women face, particularly those leaving the workforce due to work-family balance issues. Exploring the positive effects of remote work and advocating for supportive policies, the research aims to empower women, combat gender-based violence, and promote gender equity, potentially reshaping South Africa's socio-economic landscape.
Consent to take part in research
I (**fill in your name below in the answer box as proof of consent to voluntary participation**) voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data obtained from the questionnaire within two weeks after submission, in which case the material will be discarded.
I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
I understand that participation involves filling out this questionnaire to the best of my ability and with the most honest answers.
I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
I understand that all information I provide for this study will be confidential.
I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous.
I understand that signed consent forms and completed questionnaires will be retained in the residential premises of the researcher until they are no longer needed.
I understand that under freedom of information legalisation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
If you have any questions, please contact my supervisor – Jayanathan Govender (details below) or the HSSREC Tell: +27 31 260 8350/4557 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

Fill in your name below as a record of your voluntary consent to participation:

Characters Remaining: 50

*Required Information

Dear Participant,

Thank you for considering taking part in my research. My name is Denika Benton, and I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

To participate, you must:

1. Be a South African mother.
2. Have a child/children under the age of five.
3. Work remotely.

Your responses are greatly appreciated!

2. Age

Characters Remaining: 100

3. Race

--Select--

4. Number of children under age 5

--Select--

5. Marital status

--Select--

6. Are you living with the father of your child/ren (Yes/No)

--Select--

7. Are you a single parent (Yes/No)

--Select--

8. What type of employment is your remote-working position (Permanent or Contract)

--Select--

9. Does/do your child/ren under age 5 go to external childcare (school, nanny, family) while you work (Yes/No)

--Select--

10. Are you employed by a South African or an International company?

--Select--

11. Were you employed in a remote working position before the COVID-19 pandemic (Yes/No)

--Select--

12. Section 1: Factors influencing your choice of remote work

	1 – Strongly Agree	2 – Agree	3 – Neutral	4 – Disagree	5 – Strongly Disagree
(a) It is important to me to also be a present mother while earning an income.	○	○	○	○	○
(b) I have no alternative childcare arrangements and still need to earn an income.	○	○	○	○	○
(c) I do not trust anyone else to look after my child/ren, but I still need to work.	○	○	○	○	○
(d) Remote work allows me to balance my cultural expectations as a woman whilst earning an income.	○	○	○	○	○

13. Section 2: Remote work has allowed me to...

	1 – Strongly Agree	2 – Agree	3 – Neutral	4 – Disagree	5 – Strongly Disagree
(a) Remote work has allowed me to...Juggle the role of a mother and employee successfully.	○	○	○	○	○
(b) Remote work has allowed me to...Gain financial freedom and stability.	○	○	○	○	○
(c) Remote work has allowed me to...Continue to pursue my professional career while being a present mother.	○	○	○	○	○
(d) Remote work has allowed me to...Escape pressing societal crises such as situations of gender-based violence and poverty.	○	○	○	○	○

14. Section 3: Working a remote position while being the primary caregiver of my child/ren has led me to moments/feelings of...

	1 – Strongly Agree	2 – Agree	3 – Neutral	4 – Disagree	5 – Strongly Disagree
(a) Working a remote position while being the primary caregiver of my child/ren has led me to moments/feelings of... Burnout.	○	○	○	○	○
(b) Working a remote position while being the primary caregiver of my child/ren has led me to moments/feelings of... Anxiety.	○	○	○	○	○
(c) Working a remote position while being the primary caregiver of my child/ren has led me to moments/feelings of...I have no time for myself or rest.	○	○	○	○	○
(d) Working a remote position while being the primary caregiver of my child/ren has led me to moments/feelings of...My child/ren is/are suffering emotionally because I have to work.	○	○	○	○	○
(e) Working a remote position while being the primary caregiver of my child/ren has led me to moments/feelings of... Failing at everything, being a mother and an employee.	○	○	○	○	○
(f) Working a remote position while being the primary caregiver of my child/ren has led me to moments/feelings of... Disempowered as a woman.	○	○	○	○	○

15. Section 4: Family/Home Support

	1 – Strongly Agree	2 – Agree	3 – Neutral	4 – Disagree	5 – Strongly Disagree
(a) The father of my child/ren shares domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and cleaning, equally with me.	○	○	○	○	○
(b) I receive consistent support from family members in caring for my child/ren.	○	○	○	○	○
(c) My family is supportive of my remote work arrangements.	○	○	○	○	○
(d) The father of my child/ren is willing to take time off from work when our child/ren is/are unwell.	○	○	○	○	○
(e) Both the father and I share parental responsibilities for our child/ren equally.	○	○	○	○	○
(f) I have access to equipment such as a washing machine and dishwasher, which alleviates some domestic tasks.	○	○	○	○	○

16. Section 5: Organisational support

	1 – Strongly Agree	2 – Agree	3 – Neutral	4 – Disagree	5 – Strongly Disagree
(a) My employer supports my needs as a working mother and gives me the support I need.	○	○	○	○	○
(b) I have equal opportunity for growth and promotions in relation to male employees who do not have children.	○	○	○	○	○
(c) My employer has a remote-working policy in place that is fair and equal and makes me feel secure in my position.	○	○	○	○	○
(d) I have been given adequate training and tools/equipment to ensure my productivity as a remote-working employee.	○	○	○	○	○

17. Section 6: Legislative/governmental support

	1 – Strongly Agree	2 – Agree	3 – Neutral	4 – Disagree	5 – Strongly Disagree
(a) I feel protected by government legislation in my remote working position.	○	○	○	○	○
(b) I know my rights as a remote worker in South Africa.	○	○	○	○	○
(c) My employer follows guidelines set out by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (e.g. leave, lunchtime, remuneration) as if I were an employee working in an office.	○	○	○	○	○
(d) South African legislation supports/protects working mothers.	○	○	○	○	○
(e) If there were more affordable government ECD (Early Childhood Development) centres that were well regulated, that I could send my child/ren while I work, I would not choose remote work over an in-office position.	○	○	○	○	○

18. Please provide your contact details (email address or contact number) if you are willing to participate in a brief qualitative interview via Zoom (camera off if preferred). All interviews will remain confidential, and your identity will not be disclosed. Your consideration and time is greatly appreciated.

Characters Remaining: 100

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in my research. Your contribution is invaluable and will help drive positive change for mothers in South Africa.

Appendix B Phase 2 Interview Questions

1. What role, if any, has being a present mother played in your decision to work remotely?
2. How, if at all, has working remotely influenced your ability to balance motherhood and work and gain financial stability?
3. Have you experienced stress, burnout, or changes in your emotional well-being from working remotely?
   If so, how would you describe those experiences?
4. What has your experience been with sharing childcare and household responsibilities while working remotely?
5. What kinds of support, if any, have you received from your employer as a remote-working mother?
6. How would you describe your opportunities for career growth compared to male colleagues or those without children?
7. How would you describe your confidence in the laws and policies in South Africa to protect remote-working mothers?
8. If affordable, well-regulated childcare were more available, would you still work remotely? And why?
9. What factors have most influenced your experience of working remotely (e.g., family responsibilities, organisational support, technology, social and cultural factors)? Both positive and negative.
10. Is there anything about your experience as a remote-working mother that we haven't talked about yet that you feel would add value to this research topic?

Appendix C Ethical Clearance Letter

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

17 December 2024

Denika Lorraine Benton (211548505)
School of Social Sciences
Howard College Campus

Dear DL Benton,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007755/2024
Project title: All of work? All of life? Ontology of South African mothers and remote work
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 09 September 2024 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.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 17 December 2025.
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 Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)
/dd

Appendix D Gatekeepers Letter

RE: Permission to access participants for PhD research study

Research Title:

All of Work? All of Life? Ontology of South African Mothers and Remote Work

Dear [Gatekeeper Name],

I hope this message finds you well. I am Denika Lorraine Benton, a doctoral candidate in Industrial Organisational and Labour Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In the pursuit of my doctoral research, subject to the approval of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee, I am embarking on a study that will employ questionnaires to investigate pertinent aspects pertaining to South African mothers who are engaged in remote work while raising children under the age of five, as well as the organisations that employ such mothers in remote work roles.

The purpose of this communication is to respectfully seek your permission to access your [organisation or social media group] for the purpose of recruiting research participants who will be invited to complete an online questionnaire. I wish to emphasise that this request solely involves sharing a link to the online questionnaire with individuals who voluntarily express their willingness to participate.

It is important to underscore that all responses and research findings will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. The outcomes of this research endeavour will be disseminated through a scholarly research paper, which will be made available to all participants upon its completion.

Please consider endorsing this correspondence if you are amenable to granting me access to your [organisation or social media group]. Your signature will serve as a formal acknowledgement of consent to approach potential participants. I would like to clarify that this consent solely authorises me to extend invitations to potential participants and does not imply any obligation or endorsement on your part concerning eligible candidates. Every individual approached will retain full agency and the freedom to decide whether or not to participate in the research.

I am sincerely grateful for your time and consideration in this matter and eagerly anticipate your response. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. Your support is invaluable to the success of this research endeavour, and I look forward to the prospect of your collaboration.

If you have any questions, please contact my supervisor – Jayanathan Govender (details below).

Yours sincerely,

Denika Lorraine Benton

Doctoral Candidate (211548505)

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Denika Lorraine Benton
Researcher
BSocSi (UKZN); BCom Hons (UNISA); MSocSi (UKZN)
211548505@stu.ukzn.ac.za
[redacted]

Jayanathan Govender
Supervisor
BA (UDW); BA Hons (UDW); MPA (UWC); DAdmin (UKZN)
Govender1@ukzn.ac.za
031 206 1409

Appendix E Phase 2 Participation Consent Form

Participant Consent Form
Research for Doctorate Industrial Organisational and Labour Studies — University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

Research Title:

All of work? All of life? Ontology of South African mothers and remote work

Brief insight into the research study aims:

This research project investigates the changing roles of South African working mothers in remote work, emphasising the pre-pandemic trend of remote work as a popular choice among mothers. Due to the country's limited Early Childhood Development facilities, it focuses on mothers with children under the age of five. The study aims to understand how remote work impacts work-life balance and challenges traditional gender roles, advocating for workplace diversity and inclusion. Additionally, it addresses the economic challenges South African women face, particularly those leaving the workforce due to work-family balance issues. Exploring the positive effects of remote work and advocating for supportive policies, the research aims to empower women, combat gender-based violence, and promote gender equity, potentially reshaping South Africa's socio-economic landscape.

Consent to take part in research

I..... (Full Name) voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data obtained from the questionnaire within two weeks after submission, in which case the material will be discarded.
I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
I understand that participation involves a recorded online meeting in which I will answer questions to the best of my ability and with the most honest answers.
I understand the interview will last approximately 30–60 minutes and that I may decline to answer any question or stop the interview at any time.
I understand that the meeting is recorded solely for the purpose of data collection, and that I have the right to participate without my camera on.
I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
I understand that all information I provide for this study will be confidential.
I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous.
I understand that anonymised data may be used in academic publications, conferences, or presentations.
I understand that all data (including recordings and transcripts) will be securely stored on a password-protected device and deleted after five years or once the research is complete.
I understand that signed consent forms and recorded interviews will be retained on the researcher's residential premises until they are no longer needed.
I understand that I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage, in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and university research policy.
I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
If you have any questions, please contact my supervisor – Jayanathan Govender (details below) or the HSSREC Tell: +27 31 260 8350/4557 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

.....
Signature of Participant

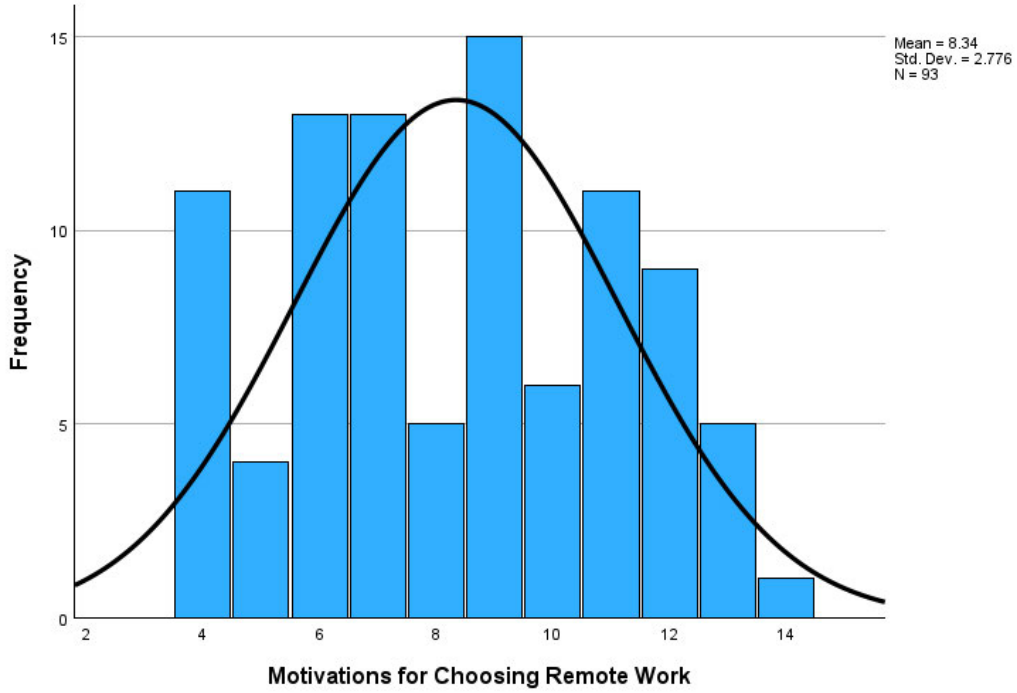
.....
Date

Denika Lorraine Benton
Researcher
BSocSi (UKZN); BCom Hons (UNISA); MSocSi (UKZN)
211548505@stu.ukzn.ac.za
[redacted]

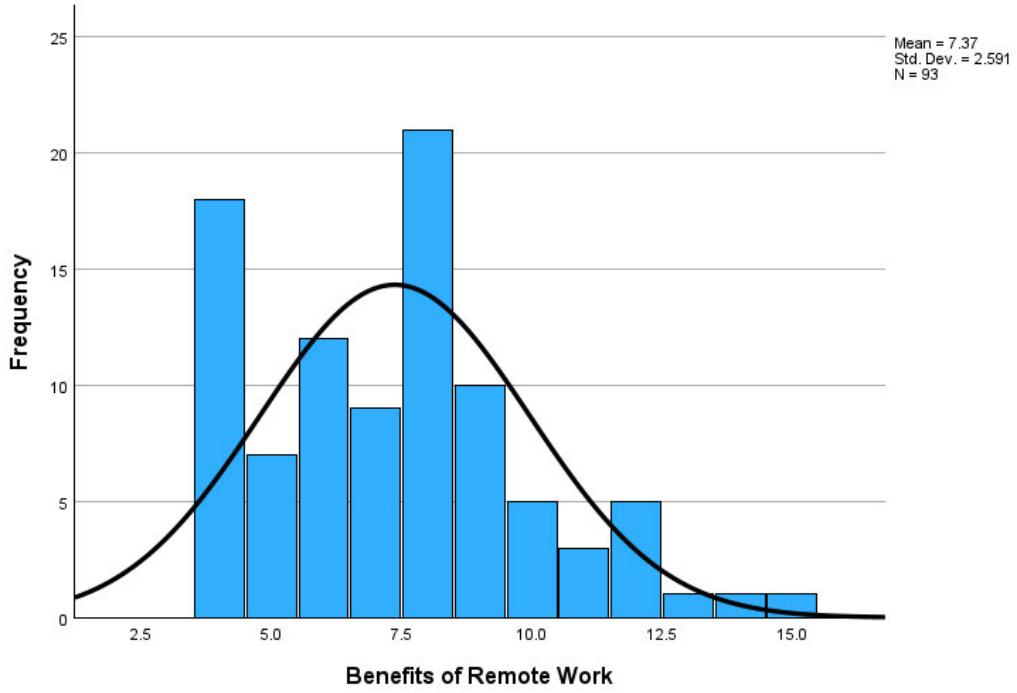
Jayanathan Govender
Supervisor
BA (UDW); BA Hons (UDW); MPA (UWC); DAdmin (UKZN)
Govender1@ukzn.ac.za
031 206 1409

Appendix F Normality Testing – Histograms

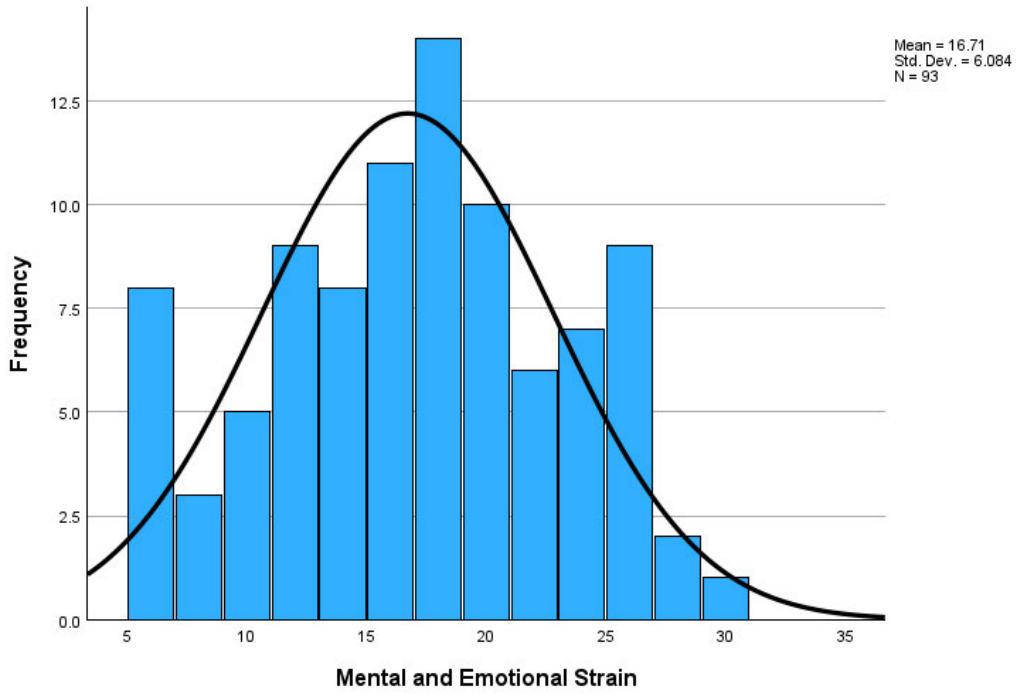
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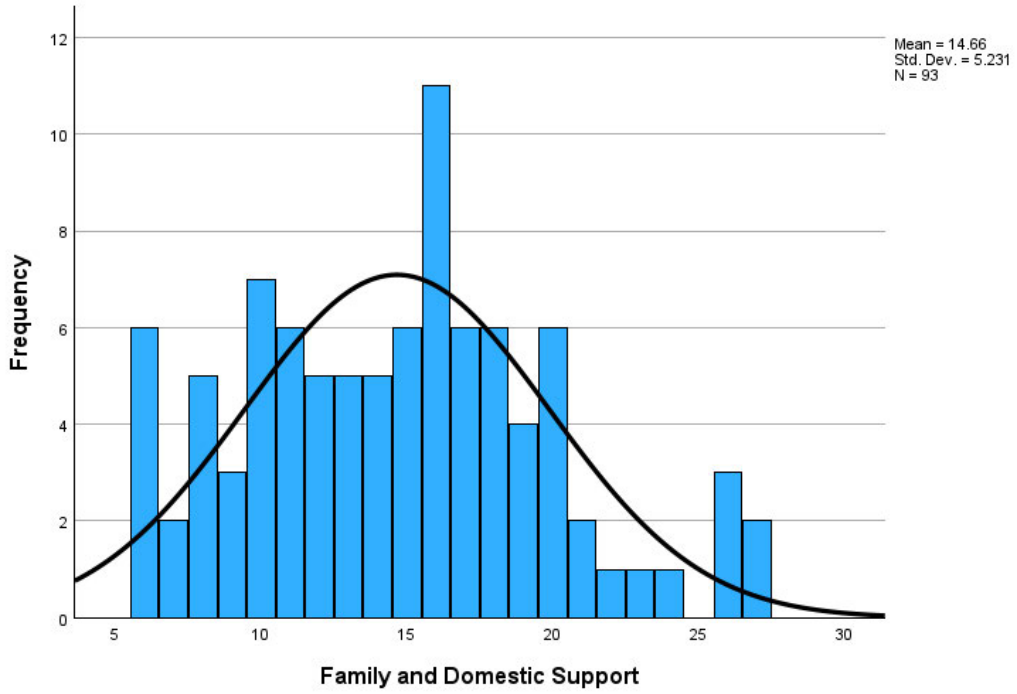
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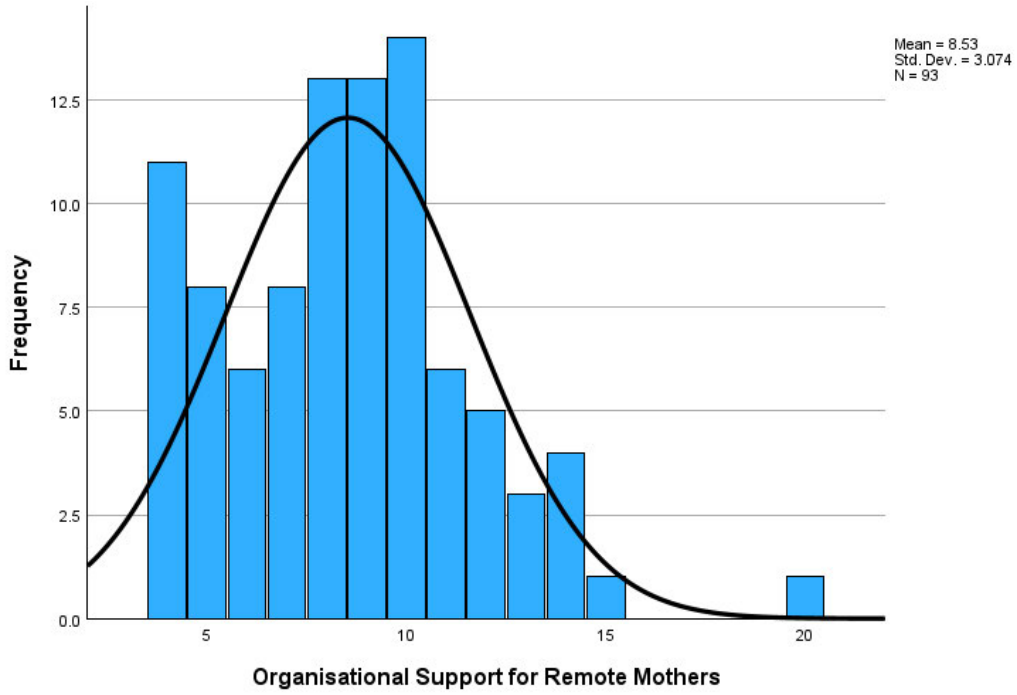
Section 3 (Parametric)



Section 4 (Parametric)



Section 5 (Non-Parametric)



Section 6 (Parametric)

