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Exploring The Perceptions And Experiences Of The Work-Family Interface Among Single Mothers Working From Home At Contact Centre International South Africa During Covid-19 In Durban

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Submitted by Londeka Zulu

Student Number: 216073364

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Supervised by

Ms. Ntombekhaya Mtwentula-Ndlovu

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted in whole or in part for any degree or examination at any other university. All references, citations and sources used have been acknowledged throughout this dissertation. This study is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Masters of Social Science in Counselling Psychology degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Signed: [redacted]

Date: 20 November 2025

Name: Londeka Nozipho Zulu

[redacted]

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ABSTRACT

Many countries experienced a closure of businesses resulting in employees losing their jobs. For some, COVID-19 forced organisations to look to remote work as an alternative option to continue with business operations that would have otherwise been shut down by lockdown restrictions. Work moved from the office into the home, shattering previously separate domains alongside its boundaries. As eroding boundaries began to blur the line between work and family domains, it became important to understand the subjective experiences of single mothers. The study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers working remotely from home during the pandemic at CCISA in Durban, South Africa. The research consisted of 7 single mothers from the ages of 25 to 51 years. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit participants. Each participant took part in an online semi-structured interview using Teams and Zoom. The study is qualitative in nature and was guided by social constructionism. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

The work-family interface was viewed as a transactional relationship embedded in socioeconomic and gendered expectations of motherhood and employment. It was perceived both positively and negatively. Some of the benefits of working remotely included flexible work schedules and no commuting time, which increased work-family integration. The newly found flexibility was used for greater alignment with family responsibilities. This created an increase in family time and interpersonal relationships, leading to work-family enrichment. The following came up as negatively affecting work performance and quality in the home environment: working remotely for the first time, unfavourable workstations, noise interruptions, extra work hours, childcare and loadshedding issues, communication and disrupted work due to delays from the physical absence of managers, supervisors, ITC, and colleagues. These factors caused time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflict among single mothers. Autonomy and the development of new boundaries were coping strategies used to mitigate role overload. Organisational and community members came up as social capital used with family members having the greatest impact in alleviating work-family conflict among single mothers.

Keywords: Work-family interface, remote work, single mothers, COVID-19, South Africa, social constructionism

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Chapter One is the first chapter of this dissertation, introducing the reader to the research. It aims to provide a background and context of the study that was conducted. In addition, chapter one aims to provide a rationale for the study and establish its significance and give readers a preview of what to expect in the subsequent chapters.

1.2. Background and Context

Coronavirus disease -2019, commonly referred to as COVID-19, is an infectious illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus that is transmissible through contact and airborne particles (Yang et al., 2020). The virus originally came from Wuhan, China in late 2019 and it was declared an international health emergency in March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Ciotti et al., 2020; Jaga & Ollier-Malaterre, 2022). COVID-19 was the 6th time a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) was announced. According to Ghosh et al. (2020), previous declarations were made in 2009 for N1H1 influenza, Polio in 2014, Zika virus in 2016, Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014 and again in 2019 by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, fatigue, loss of taste or smell, headaches and diarrhoea (Ciotti et al., 2020). Alimohamadi et al. (2020) noted that while COVID-19 is typically mild in most individuals, those with underlying conditions may have experienced severe complications such as respiratory, kidney and liver failure, arrhythmias, shock or cardiovascular damage. In its early stages, COVID-19 had no effective antiviral treatment, and at the time, only supportive care was used to manage symptoms (Alimohamadi et al., 2020). Supportive care emphasised the importance of proper hydration, nutrition, exercise, identifying and monitoring co-infections for patients and family members (Haleeqa et al., 2020). Yang et al. (2020) also listed NK-based, Treg cell-based, MSC-based and convalescent plasma therapy as well as immunomodulators and blood purification as strategies that were used to control the spread of COVID-19.

The virus created global disruption, resulting in stress and uncertainty since it was announced (Lone & Ahmad, 2020). In response, governments around the world implemented strict lockdown measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. According to Haider et al. (2020),

lockdown measures are restrictions legally enforced to limit social and economic activities in critical situations. During COVID-19, stay at home orders, restrictions on public gatherings, and the closure of businesses, schools and hospitality venues were some of the lockdown measures used (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020). Some countries such as Norway and Finland adopted early COVID-19 restrictions but did not enforce strict stay at home orders while others including South Korea and Tanzania opted for less restrictive approaches (Robinson, 2021).

In contrast, South Africa implemented a nationwide Level 5 lockdown on March 27th in 2020, instructing all citizens to remain indoors, limit public movement and close non-essential businesses (Siedner et al., 2020). Additional measures such as the mandatory use of face masks, social distancing and hand sanitising protocols were put in place to avoid more transmissions of the virus (Ciotti et al., 2020). Several studies such as those of Brown (2022) and Martucci (2021), indicated that working remotely became a necessity rather than a choice for businesses. And that it would take some time to get back to normalcy, arguing that remote work is now the new norm. Remote work is defined as work conducted outside of a traditional office setting, often in the comfort of one's home (Goswami, 2022). The rapid adjustment to remote work, also known as home working or telecommuting, accelerated during the pandemic, prompting discussions around its long-term feasibility (Anderson et al., 2020).

Remote work is not a new concept; however, the COVID-19 pandemic marked its fastest global use during and post COVID-19 as it was made a possible solution for some businesses to continue to function under lockdown restrictions (Anderson et al., 2020; Ghislieri et al., 2023). The move towards remote work did not just affect full-time employees but part-time employees as well (Uddin, 2021). Shirmohammadi et al. (2022) state that most scholars have concentrated their research on the implications of home-based remote work and have overlooked the consequences of forced remote work arrangements caused by COVID-19. Nevertheless, research has highlighted the advantages of working remotely during the pandemic. These include flexible work schedules, reduced commuting costs and increased productivity (Beauregard et al*.,* 2020; Martucci, 2021; Uddin, 2021). Extant literature emphasises the negative impact of remote work. For example, when compared to men, women experienced increased working hours, social isolation and professional detachment (Çoban, 2021; Goswami, 2022; González Ramos & García-de-Diego, 2022).

The work-family interface is understood as the interplay and dynamic relationship between an individual's professional and family responsibilities (Beauregard et al., 2020). For employees who have younger children, the interplay of domains can be quite complicated. Research indicates that remote work often creates interruptions and distractions, coupled with increased childcare demands during the times of quarantining for workers (Martucci, 2021; Sandy et al., 2022). Challenges were said to vary for different groups, races, genders and occupations (Jaga et al., 2022; Marôco et al., 2022). Regardless of the challenges, research on the interaction of work and family domains has mainly focused on the general working force. Therefore, neglecting to account for the specific experiences of single mothers and how they coped as they worked remotely from home and tried to mediate between work and family domains. Ranchhod and Daniels (2021) discovered that COVID-19 disproportionately affected certain demographic groups in South Africa. Women, young individuals, and Black South Africans were among those who experienced higher rates of job loss and income reduction (Ranchhod et al., 2021).

Casale and Shepherd (2021) observed similar trends in their study. They determined that women accounted for two-thirds of net job losses between February and April 2020. In addition, they confirmed observations made by Martucci (2021) that many working parents faced added childcare duties even if they had to continue work as paid employees but specified that women instead of men experienced this pressure more (Casale et al., 2021). Similar to findings stated by Ranchhod et al. (2021), Casale et al. (2020) identified loss of employment to be higher among African individuals, low-income earners and those without post-matric qualifications. Interestingly, women were also the most affected demographic group across these categories (Casale et al., 2020; Casale et al., 2021). This body of knowledge reveals systemic issues that contributed to gender and social class disparities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The same could be said about single mothers working remotely from home at Contact Centre International South Africa (CCISA) however, little attention has been given to single mothers experiences despite the growing interest in the work-family interface and remote working in recent years.

According to Sandy et al. (2022), single mothers often did not have access to external support systems to manage childcare, making it more difficult to balance work and family responsibilities simultaneously in the same environment (Sandy et al., 2022). Outside of childcare duties, the demands of work and family also included maintaining work productivity amidst household distractions and addressing the psychological impact of social

isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions (Collins et al., 2021; Sandy et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes in how work was seen and conducted due to the rise of remote working. In line with the research questions, this study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of single mothers as they worked remotely during COVID-19 at CCISA in Durban. The main objectives of this study were to understand the meaning creation of the work-family interface when working remotely using participants' narratives of lived experiences, sources identified as social capital, as well as the coping mechanisms used during the PHEIC. The social constructionist approach which emphasises that individuals' experiences are shaped by social interactions and their cultural contexts was applied in line with the study's interest of providing a deeper understanding of how single mothers constructed and mediated the interaction of work and family responsibilities in the home.

1.3. Problem Statement and Need for Study

From a work-family interface perspective, work and family domains intersect and influence each other. In essence, literature on work-family research suggests that work and family roles mutually influence the experiences of working individuals who may seek to create a balance between the two domains (Beauregard et al., 2020; Marôco et al., 2022). The interaction between work and family domains can have both positive and negative outcomes, as suggested in research focusing on a systematic review of the literature (Marôco et al., 2022; Vitoria et al., 2022). Beauregard et al. (2020) note that most scholarly work on the work-family interface is quantitative in nature and tends to emphasise the interplay between work and two-parent households where both parents work as full-time employees. This neglects other populations who may provide valuable insights of the interface such as part-time workers for example. The study at hand aims to fill this gap in the literature by uncovering perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface specific to single mothers working remotely at CCISA in Durban, South Africa.

Extant literature on work-family interface informs structural views that aim to analyse the degree to which structural antecedents such as family traits, job qualities and organisational factors affect employees' work and family outcomes (Siu & Ng, 2021; Vitoria et al., 2022). Many studies argue that research has mostly highlighted the negative aspects of work and family domains with work-family conflict being the most documented in the history of empirical research interested in this dynamic relationship (Beauregard et al., 2020; Marôco et al., 2022; Vitoria et al., 2022). Earlier explorations of this phenomenon suggest that work-

family conflict occurs when work and family demands become incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). According to Deen et al. (2021), work-family conflict causes stress, burnout, and work-life imbalance. Interest has also been on work demands, job characteristics that require an individual's time, physical presence and commitment to roles, which can cause physical and psychological problems (Adisa et al., 2022; Marôco et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Despite overwhelming literature on the negative outcomes, a growing body of research has also highlighted the positive. For example, Kelley et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analytic review on the role of family and partner support in the interface. Their findings indicate that higher levels of perceived family and partner support contribute to increased work-family enrichment. They further indicate that there was less work-family conflict in a bidirectional relationship for working mothers in Hungary. The study suggested that family support was linked to lower chances of experiencing family-to-work conflict whilst no noticeable link was observed between partner support and its influence on reducing either work-to-family or family-to-work conflict though having an impact on work-family enrichment. Work-family enrichment occurs when an individual's experiences such as their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours positively influence activities in other roles (Sarfaraz & Khalid, 2015). Resulting in improved performance in work and family domains. An employee's behaviour, influenced by their emotions of family, for example, can cause positive effects to occur in the work domain and vice versa. This suggests that when individuals receive support from their families, they experience positive spillover effects with Haar and Bardoel (2008) defining it as the transfer of skills, emotional wellbeing, and motivation between work and family roles that enhances performance and satisfaction in the work-family interface.

Work-family enrichment, according to Siu et al. (2021) is instrumental in the development of a wide range of skills, knowledge, perspectives, and values. It has also shown to enhance attitudes and behaviours like job satisfaction and interpersonal relationships by promoting personal growth and emotional resilience (Sarfaraz & khalid, 2021; Vitoria et al., 2022). This helps facilitate the exchange of positive experiences and resources between work and family domains. A study examining positive spillover among single mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic asserted that organisations supported employees in achieving better work-life balance via remote work, and mothers benefited in being able to spend more time with their families and improving their overall wellbeing (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). Notwithstanding the recognition of work-family enrichment and positive spillover that is

published in scholarly research dating years of work, research still predominantly focuses on the work-family interface of dual-earner parents (Adams et al., 2022; Sarfaraz et al., 2015; Vitoria et al., 2022). This necessitates a need for more research exploring single mothers' experiences in this regard in the South African context to further broaden the literature. Research suggests that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had serious consequences for individuals who were already vulnerable like the elderly, women, the economically disadvantaged, displaced individuals, and those with limited access to digital resources (Andrada-Poa et al., 2022). Despite this, research has not thoroughly explored the experiences of single mothers balancing remote work, caregiving and other family responsibilities during the pandemic. Based on studies interested in the systematic review of literature, most research investigating single mothers' experiences of work-family interface has commonly used a mixed sample between partnered women who have children and single mothers and working women who do not have children (Marôco et al., 2022; Vitoria et al., 2022). Fewer research has explored the interface using a sample involving single mothers alone. Therefore, the study sought to bridge this gap by exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of single mothers working remotely at CCISA in Durban. Single mothers, in this context, are parents who have a child or children but do not have a partner to support them nor share the needs and upbringing of the children (Sandy et al., 2022).

Family structures were nuclear Western and European families no longer serve as the template of what family is, have been observed in work-family research (du Toit, 2012). A growing trend of new family structures whereby single mothers are the sole breadwinners responsible for the financial wellbeing of their households has been noted over the years (Brown, 2022; Lemos et al., 2021; Martucci, 2021). Earlier research also confirms this in recognising not only dual-income families but single parent families of working women from different ages and race groups who are responsible for the care of children and elderly family members (Mostert, 2008). Existing research suggests that time constraints, high job demands, and caregiving responsibilities contribute significantly to work-family conflict (Greenhaus et al., 1985; Sarfaraz et al., 2015) a trend that persists even in contemporary scholarly work (Anderson et al., 2020; Chung, 2022; Collins et al., 2020; Vitoria et al., 2022).

The more significant an individual's role is in one's work-family interface, the more time, pressure and energy is said to be given to perform that role (Lemos et al., 2021). Consequently, it can then be inferred that the performance of roles and respective responsibilities in the work-family interface of single mothers can have additional challenges

in the absence of an assisting partner. Nevertheless, research exploring the impact of work and family intersections among single mothers mediating the work-family interface independently in remote contexts is still few. This reinforces the need to explore and understand the type of coping strategies and support systems that single mothers resort to for help using narratives from their lived experiences.

According to Uddin (2021), past research in work and family dynamics has shown both quantitative and qualitative studies, highlighting the experiences of working women who have children and husbands who also earn an income. Childcare remains one of the most challenging aspects of the relationship between work and family responsibilities for working mothers, and single mothers tend to experience higher levels of work-family conflict than their married counterparts (Martucci, 2021). A body of research found conflict to be more common and frequent among couples who have children under the age of 18 years when compared to those who do not (Adisa et al., 2021). Approximately 13 million single mothers from various regions faced difficulties in caring for their children on their own while simultaneously working during the pandemic (Andrada-Poa et al., 2022).

Single mothers experienced physical and emotional exhaustion due to having multiple roles and responsibilities, resulting in stress, anxiety, depression, and substance use as coping mechanisms (du Toit, 2012; du Toit Britz, 2022; Ladňáková & Špániková, 2020; Lemos et al., 2021). Therefore, it is argued that as home care and childrearing are crucial to a family's existence, mothering duties, especially those of single mothers which were viewed as unpaid labour during COVID-19, should be viewed as a vital job requiring appropriate support from organisations. In recognising the value of mothering as essential work, businesses offering work-from-home arrangements such as telecommuting, flexible work hours, and remote and hybrid work conditions can develop better workplace policies and resources that ensure the wellbeing of employees, their children and families (Brown, 2022; Kossek et al., 2023).

According to Huang et al. (2019), family members can help alleviate the strain resulting from the work-family interface by assisting with childcare. During COVID-19, the option of outsourcing babysitters, housekeepers, and extended family assistance was not available (Martucci, 2021). As such, work-family conflict was exacerbated and made it increasingly difficult for working women to create a balanced work-family relationship within the home setting. (Martucci, 2021). And, contrary to women's increasing participation in the labour market, women continue to experience higher levels of work-family conflict, which in turn

restricts their ability to progress career-wise, as they are more likely to prioritise family demands over their careers (Beutell, 2010; Goswami, 2022). From the above, literature on the work-family interface, COVID-19 and remote work has explored motherhood through the lens of dual-parent households and the experiences of single mothers during the early onset of COVID-19. As time passed, COVID-19 restrictions were introduced and extended with various challenges being experienced and perceived differently based on the individual's background, culture and socioeconomic status. Therefore, it can be inferred that the extent to which working remotely can influence the experiences between work and family among single mothers could have changed from the early onset of COVID-19, during and post COVID-19.

Additionally, research has not exclusively explored the long-term psychological effects of remote work on the work-family interface among single mothers and how their coping mechanisms may have evolved throughout different phases of the pandemic. For this reason, the study at present aimed to explore and consider how single mothers perceived the work-family interface from the onset of COVID-19 to the post-pandemic period when working remotely from home. Single mothers may have faced unique challenges in creating a balance alongside increased childcare demands because they are also primary caregivers and sole providers. The lack of insight into their lived experiences may overlook critical support systems needed to improve their wellbeing and work performance in work-from-home arrangements.

Considering the negative outcomes outlined above, obtaining insight into the interaction of work and family domains among single mothers in Durban is important. The findings of this study could help inform interventions that encourage the overall wellbeing of women in the workforce. More specifically, the findings could help shape strategic interventions tailored to improving the work-family integration of single mothers with a similar cultural and economic status as those of the participants who participated in this research. Besides assisting organisations and policy makers with designing more inclusive workplace practices that recognise the subjective needs of single mothers, the findings could contribute to scholarly literature within a South African context. Using a qualitative approach, informed by the social constructionist approach, the researcher can obtain rich information on single mothers' subjective perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface during COVID-19 using their own language, interpretation and meaning to answer the research questions.

Psychological challenges were noted among working mothers in the review of the literature. As such, qualitative data from the participants may assist in having a comprehensive understanding of the psychological services required by single mothers working remotely from home, where work and family life were infused. Moreover, the study may inform socioeconomic strategies that may be unique to single mothers. For example, how single mothers managed resources at hand like money with daily needs while working remotely at home in the pandemic. This may be an important element to understand to lessen socioeconomic and gender inequalities in the workplace and shed light on the necessary support for vulnerable groups post-COVID-19. Using qualitative research methods, the study aimed to obtain rich data that could guide policymakers and support systems that promote work-family balance, particularly regarding flexible work arrangements such as remote work, telecommuting, and flexible work hours.

1.4. Research Objectives

1. To explore the meaning of the work-family interface as understood by single mothers working from home.
2. To explore how single mothers narrate their experiences about working from home and how they mediate the demands on paid work and their family responsibilities.
3. To explore what resources serve as social capital for single mothers working from home.
4. To discover what coping mechanisms are employed to mediate between remote work and other non-work and family responsibilities.

1.5. Research Questions

1. What does work and family mean for single mothers working from home?
2. How do single mothers narrate their experiences about working from home and mediate the demands on paid work and their family responsibilities?
3. What resources serve as social capital for single mothers working from home?
4. What coping mechanisms are employed to mediate between remote work and other non-work and family responsibilities?

1.6. Research Methodology Overview

The researcher used a social constructionist approach to guide the research. 7 call centre consultants from CCISA in Durban were selected in line with the sample criteria proposed for the study. The participants are single mothers between the ages of 25 to 51 years old who

worked remotely from home during COVID-19. The study used a qualitative research approach. Non-probability techniques, namely purposive and snowball sampling, were used to recruit single mothers. Each participant participated in a semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected. Ethical research principles were also adhered to and are discussed in-depth in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

1.7. Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation comprises five chapters. Chapter One: Introduction and Background, presenting the background, motivation, objectives, and need of the study. The methodological approach and research questions were also introduced in this chapter. Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework provides a review of the literature, highlighting previous research on the topic of interest and the theoretical framework guiding the study. Chapter Three**:** Research Methodology details the methodology used when conducting the research, including the research design, sampling procedure, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations**.** Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion presents the findings and discussion from the data analysis**.** Chapter Five: Conclusion highlights the summary of findings, limitations, recommendations, and conclusion of the study.

1.8. Conclusion

Chapter one provided an overview of the study's background and context. The problem statement and need of the study were also highlighted in relation to the work-family interface among single mothers working remotely from home during the COVID-19 pandemic at CCISA in Durban. The negative and positive impact of COVID-19 on the work-family interface, particularly for single mothers working remotely was introduced. This shed light on the research gap that this study sought to address. The research methodology was briefly outlined, emphasising the use of a qualitative approach and thematic analysis as a means to explore participants' experiences to answer the research questions. The next chapter, Chapter Two, aims to provide a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the work-family interface and discusses the theoretical framework informing the study at hand.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

Chapter Two aims to provide the reader with a synthesised review of the existing literature relating to work-life interface. The literature review of this dissertation discusses the following subtopics: an overview of the work-family interface, overview of the work-family interface within the South African context and the impact of COVID-19 on the work-family interface among working women. The positive and negative outcomes of remote work, mental health challenges, social capital, and coping mechanisms observed in work-family research are also outlined.

2.2. Overview of the Work-Family Interface

The manner in which work, and family interact has been a field of interest for the past decades and has been coined work-family interface, referring to the dynamic interplay between an employee's work and family life (Beauregard et al., 2020; Marôco et al., 2022; Mokomane, 2014). From earlier research, the main focus of this interface was to understand the integration of work and family domains using four main constructs to measure it namely: work-family conflict, work-family balance, work-family enrichment and spillover (Casper & Wayne, 2013). The work-family interface is also shaped by the demands, resources and expectations that are embedded in each domain (Kinnunen et al, 2006). Research has mostly explored the work-family interface under role strain theory. It posits that due to fewer resources being used in multiple demanding roles, employees experience strain and conflict as they are said to have a certain amount of resources that become depleted when overly used (Grzywacz & Marks, 1999).

The work of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) on time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflict helps to frame the conflicting demands. Using conflict theory, they suggest that when time spent on one role restricts success in another, or when stress in one role spills into another, employees are more likely to experience work-family conflict (Adisa et al., 2022; Greenhaus et al., 1985). Adisa et al. (2022) propose that a bidirectional relationship of behaviour-based conflict occurs when actions taken in one role disrupt the performance of other roles within the interface. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has also been employed to understand the work-family interface. From this perspective, the interface is shaped by multiple intersecting environmental systems in an employee's life (Grzywacz et

al., 1999). Various factors at the individual, relational, organisational, cultural, and broader social levels influence the interaction between work and family domains, where conflict and balance depend on the multi-level interaction of these domains (Grzywacz et al., 1999). Several theories, including compensation theory, facilitation theory, and congruence theory, among others, are highlighted by Adisa et al. (2022) as some of the foundational theoretical frameworks aimed at understanding the integration of work and family domains.

Work-family conflict holds the bulk of research conducted in work and family domains (Adams et al., 2022; Marôco et al., 2022; Vitoria et al., 2022). It is usually used interchangeably with family-work conflict. The latter refers to demands originating from family, and the former refers to conflict or demands arising from work (Curl et al., 2021). Other theoretical frameworks used by scholars to explore the work-family interface are boundary, enhancement and spillover theories. Boundary theory views the interaction between work and family through boundary work, a mental act and efforts used by employees to create and alter existing boundaries to restructure or enhance domains (Adisa et al., 2022; Nippert-Eng, 1996). The positive sides of the constructs and measurements of the work-family interface are work-family enrichment and positive spillover (Kinnunen et al., 2006). The former originates from role enhancement theory, whereby qualities of work-facilitation allow an individual to participate in multiple roles with hopes of learning and gaining resources such as energy expansion to enhance the function of said roles (Adisa et al., 2022). And the latter, which is in direct contrast with negative spillover, is derived from spillover theory that posits that skills, emotions, resources and experiences in one domain can benefit the other domain (Grzywacz et al., 1999).

Although research enquiry has taken interest on work-family enrichment, positive spillover and work-family balance as positive outcomes of a balanced work-family interface in recent years (Rahman & Ali, 2021), Kumar (2019) argues that research investigating the relationship between work and family domains has extensively focused on the associated negative effects. Fewer contributions have explored the positive outcomes like work-family enrichment and positive spillover. Research over the years has tried to close this gap by emphasising both the negative and positive effects of the interface in an individual's life. Research has found that the manner in which people perceive conflict is dependent on factors such as the presence and number of children, employment level and job benefits (Ebrahimi, 2021). Considerable research has also placed emphasis on work-family balance in relation to working hours, supervisor support within corporate organisations (De Villiers, 2020), and burnout, a

condition of extreme exhaustion caused by constantly feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities (Gribben & Semple, 2021). Research suggests that people who experience burnout resulting from an imbalance between work and family commitments tend to experience higher levels of emotional, physical, and behavioural pain, lack inspiration, and isolate themselves from others (De Villiers, 2020). Additionally, Gribben et al. (2021) indicate that most research on burnout and work-life balance has been quantitative and choosing to focus on the general working class.

Changes in technological advancements continuously influence the nature of work, and the recent pandemic culminated in increased use of alternative working arrangements such as remote work (van Rheede, 2023). Recent research has gained interest in exploring the impact of social capital and coping strategies for remote workers (Vitoria et al., 2022). It sheds light on the role that social capital and coping mechanisms play in reducing work-family conflict and improving work-family balance and life satisfaction (Biyela, 2023; Brown, 2022). A need for further qualitative research in this field that will focus less on generalisability and more on in-depth exploration and understanding of nuances in the work-family interface is required. This will assist in understanding the meaning assigned to it by single mothers in Durban in the context of forced remote work owing to the pandemic.

2.3. Overview of the Work-family Interface in South Africa

Cohabiting arrangements such as those of unmarried couples, extended family members, and single parent households are common structures of many South African families. And are different to traditional and Western two-parent structures observed in previous work-family research (du Toit, 2012; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). In recent years, single parent households, specifically those led by single mothers, for example, have seen a rise in prevalence globally (du Toit, 2012). This trend highlights the changing dynamics of family structures and the challenges faced by single parent families (Bockarie, 2018). A contributing factor to this trend in South Africa is not having a father figure present in the house (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). This results in a significant proportion of single mothers and creates more pressure on these women as sole providers for the family (du Toit Britz, 2022). Coert et al. (2021) state that a noticeable number of South African adolescents tend to be mothers before the age of 18 and have their first child by the age of 17, making over 30% of adolescents falling within this group. It is therefore argued that understanding the shifting structures of families is essential for a better exploration of the work-family interface. This is especially important with regards

to single mothers in South Africa who aim to balance multiple roles, roles that may be intensified by the attempt of balancing single parenthood with employment.

For some women, the struggles associated with single parenthood may extend beyond societal stigma and manifest in stressors such as economic hardship and mental health challenges (du Toit Britz, 2022). Earlier work from Brown and Moran (1997) investigated the relationship between marital status, poverty, and depression among inner-city women and found that single mothers were twice as likely to develop depression and financial constraints when compared to married mothers. Similarly, Cairney et al. (2003) examined the impact of stress and social support on depression among mothers. They found that single mothers were more likely to experience chronic stress, misfortunes, and childhood trauma compared to their married counterparts. Recent studies by authors such as Beauregard et al. (2020), Chung (2022), Martucci (2021), Radcliffe et al. (2022) and van Rheede (2023) with interest on remote work, work-family interface, its antecedents and impact of these constructs further support these findings as detailed later in this chapter below. The challenges experienced suggest a complex exchange in the interface that seems to be most evident in the context of unpaid labour performed by working women (Beauregard et al., 2020).

South Africa has shown a strong commitment to gender equality over the years. Some of the first representations of this commitment are seen in the country's endorsement of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1993 and the establishment of the Commission for Gender Equality in 1994 (Bockarie, 2018). These efforts aimed at supporting women's rights and work-family integration. It has since had a great impact on employment equity as seen in the increase of women in the labour force in recent years (Bockarie, 2018). Despite these progressive developments, the concept of work-care encapsulates the persistent and demanding challenges that women face in terms of juggling paid employment with unpaid childcare responsibilities (Du Toit, 2012). For single mothers, unpaid responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and bathing children seem to intensify the strain of balancing professional and personal obligations (Hunt et al., 2019). This makes it a significant challenge in social and economic policy discussions. In the South African context, little research has identified the unique challenges of single mothers with regards to work-family research in remote working, particularly when considering the rise of single mother households in South Africa.

A noticeable number of studies now recognise women as the primary caregivers who have multiple dependent relatives in South Africa (du Toit, 2012; Bockarie, 2018; Mokomane, 2014). To date, research suggests that in comparison to men, women are unlikely to have flexible work schedules leading to loss of employment in order to balance work and family dynamics (Beauregard et al., 2020). There is an escalating demand for employees, especially working mothers, to be able to mediate between multiple roles such as work, family, community involvement, religion, friendships, leisure, and self-development (Marôco et al., 2022). This concern is further intensified among young employees who must care for both their children and aging parents due to increased life expectancies and delayed childbearing (Hunt et al., 2019).

A qualitative study in South Africa found that factors such as work pressure, duties, expectations, leadership support, personal commitments or lack thereof are some of the elements that influence job satisfaction and unemployment (Jackson, 2018). Jackson (2018) also pointed out that participants who experienced exacting work and personal obligations reported frustration over reduced access to flexible work schedules. Similarly, one could assume that similar experiences were experienced by single mothers working remotely during COVID-19 in Durban. Empirical work-family research in South Africa among single mothers working remotely during the pandemic has not been of focus. Attention has mainly been on the employed and their perspectives of work and family dynamics (Marôco et al, 2022). As such, the experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers remain broad and need more exploration.

Research concerned with work-family interface has been criticised for focusing primarily on white women who come from a middle-class background and cisgender households who have children and therefore ignoring other populations such as the disabled, young, unemployed, single mothers and gay (Kumar, 2019; Marôco et al., 2022). As such, a research gap has been identified. There is a need for a more culturally diversified perspective of the work-family interface noted by Gay (2013) as the unique experiences and perceptions of individuals that collectively distinguish one population group from another. A diverse exploration takes into consideration factors such as race, gender, language, culture and location (Marôco et al., 2022). These factors are useful to take into consideration because most experiences are informed by them (Marôco et al., 2022).

2.4. COVID-19 and The Work-Family Interface Among Working Mothers

According to De Klerk (2014), the evolving nature of work has introduced international competition, mergers, outsourcing, management style changes and advancements in technology. Digital technology, for example, includes cloud computing that enables workers to work remotely using laptops and phones to name a few (Makena, 2013). It increases the possibility to work in different locations (Mostert, 2008). According to Zulaifah (2024), individuals who use technology to work from home are subjected to higher task variety, role overload, interference and stress compared to workers who do not. Work-family facilitation encompasses qualities like skills, attitudes, socio-economic gains and attention span that either hinder or encourage ease of participation in work and family domains (De Klerk, 2014). Such statements suggest an interaction between work and family life (De Klerk, 2014). Yet the combination of work and family life at home does not fit perfectly due to working parents having to juggle multiple roles with increased global competition and demanding customers in an environment where speed and cost are important (Mostert, 2008). The literature suggests that achieving a harmonious balance between work and family responsibilities is becoming increasingly difficult in a society where the nature of work is forever changing.

The move to remote work has significantly grown since 2019, with countries such as the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Germany and India among the first to use it (van Rheede, 2023). Many organisations recognised remote work as a solution for job continuity under the unprecedented circumstances of the PHEIC (Kossek et al., 2023) and were even seen as a global experiment in remote working (Ghislieri et al., 2023) with about 47% and 50% of workers in the UK and South Africa (SA) respectively working in fully remote or hybrid work conditions during the pandemic (Adisa et al., 2022; van Rheede, 2023). Approximately 26% and 79% of employees worked from home before and after the announcement of COVID-19 in South Africa (Brown, 2022). The statistics indicate that there has indeed been a noticeable increase in remote workers since the pandemic. This highlights the adaptability of employees and organisations in South Africa and supports the quick adoption of remote work noted in multiple studies (Biyela, 2023; Chung et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2022; Martucci, 2021; van Rheede, 2023).

According to Chun-Hoon (2021) (as cited by Martucci, 2021), there were slight differences in women who were likely to quit during the pandemic depending on how young their children were. For example, mothers of early childhood children accounted for 9%, middle childhood

9% and just 1% in working mothers who have adolescents (Martucci, 2021, p. 293). Martucci (2021) asserted that as mothers found themselves merging their responsibilities as parents and employees, most who had become essential workers were more likely to quit their jobs even though their jobs were still available (Martucci, 2021). Similarly, Lemos et al. (2020) stated that before and during COVID-19, women were more prone to reduce their working hours to meet family demands which negatively affected their careers in the long run when compared to men. Anderson et al. (2020) added that the reduction time in hours worked was about 5 times more for women when compared to men due to childcare responsibilities. Martucci (2021) notes that this was done as a safety measure resulting from the fear of exposing loved ones to COVID-19.

The findings are similar to research by Brown (2022) who conducted a quantitative enquiry of 173 employees working hybrid or remotely with specific interest in investigating the link between job demands and social wellbeing. The findings from the study noted fears around exposure to COVID-19, losing close relatives or one's life, uncertainty, drastic changes in daily life, and social isolation, all of which decreased wellbeing (Brown, 2022). From the studies above, it is reasonable to suggest that working mothers mostly put the interest of the family forward in prioritising safety and wellbeing over their careers. Perhaps in fear of harming the very same family members they are supposed to nurture and protect. The same could be said about single mothers working remotely for CCISA at home in Durban, South Africa. However, this location and sample group of women have not been explored much. This makes the proposed qualitative study crucial to gaining rich and contextual data about the work-family interface of single mothers in remote working during COVID-19.

The world of work and gender equality policies have seen many transformations over the years including the changing attitudes and normative expectations around parenting (Maqubela, 2013). With the increase of women's participation in the labour market around the world, Sandy et al. (2022) state that their employment can reduce the availability to perform household and childcare responsibilities. Slower transformations have been observed when it comes to the home environment and the impact it has on those responsible for childcare while working (Maqubela, 2013). According to Sarfaraz et al. (2021), societal norms enforce gendered roles that make women the primary homemakers responsible for providing for their husbands, children, relatives and doing household chores. The literature is consistent with research stating that flexibility significantly differs among men and women

and that gendered expectations play a crucial role in shaping the experiences of working mothers during the pandemic (Anderson et al., 2020; Lemos et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a great deal of disruption and instability for working women. With widespread lockdowns and social distancing rules, one of the biggest issues working women confronted was achieving a suitable role balance within the work-family interface (Uddin, 2021). According to Kossek et al. (2001), caregiving decisions are regarded as situational stressors in light of the environment an employee chooses to work in because employers may still function in non-flexible ways and expectations that encourage old ways of thinking about work. Chung et al. (2020) reported that surveillance-based remote work, whereby employees keep close tabs on remote workers, resulted in reduced autonomy. Spivack et al. (2018) suggest that surveillance-based autonomy has been a long-standing form of control used by managers. It causes cognitive overload and stresses workers instead of its intended impact of improving productivity and motivation (Spivack et al., 2018). Research suggests that gender inequalities in the workplace still exist in this regard (Uddin, 2021). Consequently, employers and institutions need to adapt to the employee's evolving needs when working from home, especially in times of crisis. From the literature, it is apparent that gendered and traditional expectations of the roles one can perform and the organisation's old ways of facilitating work, can hinder progressive change for employees. This can be a detrimental blow for working women who are automatically assigned childcare responsibilities by virtue of being female.

Since the home began to serve multiple functions including a place of work, school, playground, and entertainment, COVID-19 compelled most individuals to stay home and restructure their lives (Martucci, 2021). Being able to afford and have access to childcare services was viewed as another challenging concern for working parents during COVID-19 (Ghislieri et al., 2023). Work-family research with regard to remote work and childcare in COVID-19 has highlighted this concern. A systematic review of research by Vitoria et al. (2022) indicates that partnered or married women were afforded the privilege of being able to delegate and share household responsibilities like childcare with their partners. This significantly reduced work-family conflict, stress and burnout. In agreement with these conclusions, Martucci (2021), who also focused on partnered women who had children under the age of 5 years old, asserted that having a partner who is willing to split childcare duties increased positive experiences of work and family balance early on in the pandemic. Past research also shared similar sentiments. According to Grzywacz et al. (1999), having a

partner or spouse to talk to about work-related stress can serve a protective role against burnout. For this reason, the researcher can boldly say that it is important for workers, mostly working mothers, to have adequate access to appropriate support systems that can aid against the demands of the work-family interface.

In their study of 12 British mothers to children under the age of 12 years, Adisa et al. (2021) obtained findings contrary to Martucci (2021) and Vitoria et al. (2022). They suggest that working from home during COVID-19 resulted in increased childcare and household responsibilities for women even when they had a partner who worked remotely as well. Similarly, another study pointed out that although having a partner to help with responsibilities, married or partnered women become single parents in a sense that their partners are more likely to use flexible work hours in line with their gendered role of being a breadwinner to earn more money (Anderson et al., 2020; Beauregard et al., 2020), and escape sharing childcare responsibilities (Goswami, 2022). A quantitative study conducted with 319 Italian commercial sector employees also noted work-family conflict to be more pronounced for working mothers who accounted for about 55% of the sample due to increased involvement in family roles when working remotely (Pileri et al., 2024).

The above findings are also collaborated by earlier research. Marital status was linked to higher work-family conflict, suggesting that unmarried working women experienced it less (Mjoli et al., 2013). In their study consisting of Finnish partnered employees, Kinnunen et al. (2006) found that working long hours and the number of children act as risk factors influencing the degree of work-family conflict one experiences. At the same time, these factors contribute towards negative family-to-work spillover and positive work-to-family spillover (Kinnunen et al., 2006). Married women with children experienced significantly higher work-family conflict compared to both unmarried working women and married women with one or no children (Luhr et al., 2021). Similarly, in a study of 32 single mothers working in the private sector in Istanbul, Girisken (2021) stated that having more children in the home increased the chances of shifting focus from work to family responsibilities, resulting in more inter-role and family-to-work conflict. Compounding on this issue was the loss of access to schools and childcare services, leaving mothers with added responsibilities of childcare and education (Andrew et al., 2020; Mangiavacchi et al., 2021; Martucci, 2021).

Based on the literature, it is evident that the outcomes of women's participation in the workplace remains mostly negative for working mothers. For example, it seems that

historically and recently, work-family conflict, negative spillover and reduced life satisfaction are a result of childcare demands being in direct conflict with work demands for working mothers. As such, more research should be conducted on this phenomenon, especially with regard to single women who do not have a partner to share childcare responsibilities with. It is argued that a qualitative study exclusively focusing on single mothers experiences of the work-family interface could be useful in understanding the type of organisational and familial support required to make the transition into remote work easier for them and other women alike.

It is important to consider that some studies have observed contradicting results in the wake of COVID-19. For example, scholars who explored the distribution of household responsibilities and childcare in Italy found that fathers took on more childcare responsibilities compared to their partners (Mangiavacchi et al., 2021), while equal childcare duties were observed in the initial phases of the pandemic in England (Andrew et al., 2020). However, a similar study indicates that 27% of childcare was shared between parents, 6% accounted for fathers, and more than half of childcare was done by mothers (Boll et al., 2024). This empirical body of research does caution that such results were true due to fathers being out of work while women continued to work and earned a substantial income for the household during lockdown restrictions (Boll et al., 2024; Mangiavacchi et al., 2021). It seems that childcare duties remained in line with social and gendered norms around parenting. Noteworthy though, is that the differences in findings may be because the studies were conducted in different countries. Therefore, precipitating factors may vary even within the same sample of interest.

Managing inter-role conflict is said to be a challenge mainly because sustaining high-quality work is linked to an individual's commitment and passion for their role and can be exacerbated by managing home and work demands at the same time (Greenhaus, 1985; Adams et al., 2022). It is argued that work-family imbalance can decrease productivity, lead to emotional exhaustion and negatively impact the work-family interface when the essential support and motivation required is depleted. The literature suggests that even though women were working during the lockdown, they were still parents primarily responsible for childcare and household duties even if their partners were not working.

Role overload is another interesting risk factor documented in work-family research. Similar to work-family conflict, it is understood as conflicting roles but with accumulated pressure

manifesting from the incompatibility of responsibilities between different roles and tends to result in emotional exhaustion and a declining mental health in workers (Adisa et al. 2022). Recent research states that roles are mostly perceived positively when performed within the resources one has (Radcliffe et al., 2020). Blurring boundaries in the interface make it a persistent issue affecting all employees and organisations (Mostert, 2008; Biyela, 2023). Kossek et al. (2023) contribute to this in highlighting how individuals who have a healthy working space tend to experience an exchange of energy, emotion and skills between work and family domains when work demands are not excessive. Physical presence and readiness to perform tasks in the interface is influenced by the flexibility that employees have between work and family life and role boundaries can be mediated through the use of teleworking, reducing working hours and multitasking to adjust to the demands of work and family domains (Kossek et al., 2023). The opposite occurs for those without a healthy working environment as they may be prone to more emotional exhaustion and a compromised work performance (Petitta & Ghezzi, 2023; Vitoria et al., 2022).

Expanding on the challenges, within a mixed sample of partnered and single mothers, Biyela (2023) suggests that in comparison to partnered women, single mothers faced even more childcare demands such as homeschooling and household chores. Because of the blurring boundaries between work and family life in the home, Biyela (2023) also indicated that single mothers experienced more fatigue, time pressure, and emotional strain in a sample consisting of working mothers in a local government institution. Single mothers who had previously had housekeepers and nannies found themselves doing chores that they traditionally would not do while finding the time to comply to work deadlines (Anderson et al., 2020; Luhr et al., 2022; Radcliffe et al., 2022). Furthermore, working mothers struggled with having to make last-minute childcare arrangements due to unstable working hours (Luhr et al., 2022). Consequently, changing work hours during COVID-19 influenced the kind of childcare that the parents used and due to quarantine guidelines, parents had to rely on informal childcare assistance such as siblings taking care of each other (Luhr et al., 2022).

Radcliffe et al. (2022) stated that strategies such as role distancing were made difficult to implement for single mothers owing to a lack of partner or spousal support. Role distancing is described as an act of downplaying commitment to a role in order to reduce identity strain caused by heightened emotional and practical demands of navigating the work and family domains (Radcliffe et al., 2022). Researchers also suggest that while most parents had experienced a positive spillover due to a balanced work-family interface as they could spend

more time with their family and children, and that work-family conflict was only experienced when family time was affected (Sztányi-Szekér et al., 2024; Wakai et al., 2023), parents, especially single parents were more likely to experience work-family conflict (Rung et al., 2021). In this regard, single mothers are more prone to suffer triple the challenges namely poverty, gender inequality, and lack of support as they do not have the assistance of husbands or partners in sharing the workload and childcare when compared to women in relationships (Luhr et al., 2022).

Research emphasising the demographic causes of work-family conflict among female factory workers in South Africa shared the same sentiments but added that parents with children under the age of 6 years experienced more conflict compared to employees who did not have children (Mjoli et al., 2013). Martucci (2021) claims that working women who were without children during COVID-19 did not find the workload created by remote work to be challenging. The reason behind this, according to Martucci (2021), was because of the absence of children in the home. And contrary to much of the literature suggesting that single mothers experienced a crippling workload that not only challenged their work competency but also lessened the time spent with children during COVID-19; research found that some single mothers experienced remote work as bringing a balanced and satisfactory work-family interface as they could be with their children and take part in activities that conventional work wouldn't allow (Martucci, 2021). Hence, in noting the positive outcomes, it can be argued that if the employee shows to have discipline and resources to facilitate remote work, flexible work conditions can be a beneficial resource for work-family balance in the interface.

Research also showcased how working mothers during the pandemic were less likely to notice a balanced work-family interface due to the mother's perspectives of viewing their achievements as being routine despite challenges faced (Luhr et al., 2022; van Rheede, 2023). Luhr et al. (2022) and Vitoria et al. (2022) suggest that although being a stressful and challenging experience, most working women with children tend to expect work-family conflict. On a different note, a study focusing on the consequences of remote working among a sample of predominantly Black female public managers in South Africa reported that racialised perceptions of productivity and trust created pressure for Black women to prove their ability to complete work tasks which added an element of unnecessary emotional labour (Chinyamurindi, 2022). From the above studies, work-family conflict, spillover effects, work demands and resources play a role on life satisfaction. In this regard, it is argued that life satisfaction can also be understood as being dependent on one's ability to experience work-

family conflict, spillover, whether negative or positive, at a level suitable to maintain work-family facilitation.

2.5. Positive Outcomes of Remote Work

Quantitative research by Spivak and Milosevic (2018) focused on Perceived Location Autonomy (PLA), a form of autonomy that gives employees the option of choosing where to work from. PLA is said to improve employee wellbeing and productivity when working remotely from home (Spivak et al., 2018). Flexible work schedules, also termed flexitime or schedule autonomy, is defined in several studies as the ability for employees to choose their work hours based on the limits set out by the employer and was recognised as one of the key factors in improving work-life balance and job satisfaction in remote working (Bai et al., 2021; Vitoria et al., 2022).

The review of the literature shows that remote work has received much praise over the years. According to Makena (2013), remote working has allowed small and bigger companies to be able to compete at the same level because of advancements in digital technology. Remote work is associated with enhanced concentration in work, improved wellbeing, less office politics, confrontations and co-worker tensions and work continuation during pandemics (van Rheede, 2023), inclusion and diversity management, suitable work solutions for disabled employees, reduced environmental impact (Allen et al., 2015), reduction costs and commuting time (Beauregard et al., 2020; Martucci, 2021) increased employee retention and reduced employee absenteeism (Brown, 2022; Luhr et al. 2022). It is important to remember that these outcomes significantly depend on the motivations, demands as well as resources available to an employee's capacity to create conducive work-family facilitation (Adisa et al., 2022; De Klerk, 2014).

Beyond these, research has noticed the benefits that remote work has on the environment. For example, a study focusing on greenhouse gas emissions and remote work reported that pollution was reduced during the pandemic since workers travelled less and had access to company resources remotely (Sutton-Parker, 2021). Working remotely also prevented the spread of COVID-19, increased family time and overall work-life balance (Chinyamurindi, 2022). In addition, flexible work schedules, organisational and coworker support helped in reducing work-family conflict as suggested by multiple studies (van Rheede, 2023; Wang et al., 2021). This type of support is said to also improve work performance, reduce emotional labour and enhance life satisfaction (Wang et al., 2021). Remote work has many positive

implications for employees who use it. Limited research has explored whether these experiences mediate or hinder the work-family interface among single mothers in a South African context. Qualitative research could assist in outlining these benefits should they exist among single mothers who worked from home at CCISA in Durban.

2.6. Negative Outcomes of Remote Work

While working remotely from home has many advantages, it equally and may have more disadvantages. This section of the dissertation sheds light on some of the negative implications of working remotely. During the move to remote work in COVID-19 years, minority groups were left at a disadvantage due to a digital divide affecting many countries like South Africa (Biyela, 2023; Mahlaba & Sekano, 2023). According to Chinyamurindi (2022), an organisation's failure to successfully implement working remotely from home is due to a lack of technological investments as well as the culture and policies within said organisations to support this type of work. Similarly, a qualitative study by Ofosu-Ampong and Acheampong (2022) focused on the adoption of remote work systems during the pandemic in Ghana, the findings also support that organisational readiness to adapt to remote work may have a bigger and more negative impact on the implementation of remote work when compared to the organisation's ability to support remote working.

Makena (2013) contributed to this argument in saying that organisations with employees who have skills in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Kenya were better suited to work remotely when compared to workers who did not. Makena (2013) conducted 220 interviews, Ofosu-Ampong et al. (2022) had 353 participants from various sectors in Ghana using Questionnaires and Chinyamurindi (2022) recruited 23 female middle managers using Questionnaires to collect data. This body of knowledge used qualitative approaches to their enquiry. Although differences in samples, locations and data collection methods were noted, the literature reveals the same results with regards to organisational readiness for the growing use of remote work. In this regard, the literature indicates a need for more policies and interventions to provide guidance for better flow in incorporating remote work to accommodate the growing use of such working practices.

A long list of negative effects of the pandemic and remote work was reported by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (2023). Workplace stress was noted in 80% of employees in the United States of America and 50% expressed its negative impact to include: job security concerns, issues with access to necessary tools, fear of employer

retaliation, confrontations, adapting to new workspaces, learning new tasks, working longer shifts, physically demanding work, learning new communication tools, blurring work-life boundaries, childcare, work performance and productivity concerns, and safety concerns regarding public transportations (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2023). Long working hours, maintaining an online presence and use of digital workspaces were other challenges experienced by working mothers in the pandemic (Biyela, 2023; Chinyamurindi, 2022; van Rheede, 2023). In a mixed sample of over a 1000 employees from 204 organisations in Italy, Petitta et al. (2023) indicated that working from home increased feelings of isolation and detachment which negatively impacted on work-family facilitation due to poor employee productivity, wellbeing and more work-family conflict in the interface. Notwithstanding the positive outcomes noted in previous sections, remote work also intensified work-family conflict for single mothers who did not have external resources for support (Chung, 2022).

Working remotely has also been noted as having an unfavourable outcome on work productivity and performance due to electrical and power cuts in South Africa (van Rheede, 2023). According to Thembane (2024), load shedding refers to scheduled power outages and has a negative impact on several sectors like education, healthcare, and business. This issue is not unique to South Africa, as countries such as Pakistan, India, and Nigeria also experience electricity shortages resulting from inadequate infrastructure and mismanagement of energy resources (Thembane, 2024). The primary and most noticeable impact of loadshedding is inconsistent electrical supply (Mahlaba et al., 2023). It causes internet issues that make the use of digital tools such as computers, laptops and mobile phones difficult to use (Mahlaba et al., 2023). As a consequence, decreased productivity and financial losses are witnessed for both employers and employees (Biyela, 2023; van Rheede, 2023).

Kgarose et al. (2024) assert that loadshedding creates pressure for employees to invest in alternative power sources to ensure work productivity and that the home functions well. It also prevents most individuals from being able to study or work in academic settings (Kgarose et al., 2024). For example, students' and staff members' laptops that work only when plugged in did not operate when power was cut off. Disparities in technology infrastructure between urban and rural areas widen the digital divide and underserved communities tend to experience more barriers to remote working as a result (Matli, 2020). This scholarly work highlights contextual factors that may cause a negative impact on remote workers who do not have adequate technological and infrastructural access to mediate work

demands. The literature review points to deep social and economic exclusions of certain groups which requires further exploration in the growing use of remote work.

2.7. Mental Health and Work-Family Interface

Work-family conflict is a major stressor that can result in serious mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout when work obligations make it difficult for women to run a successful household (Uddin, 2022). Research has pointed out that prolonged exposure to work-family imbalance is linked to higher levels of psychological distress and may manifest as feelings of hopelessness, chronic fatigue, social withdrawal (Rung et al., 2021), and obsessive thoughts of failure which increase the imbalance in the work-family interface for working mothers (Uddin, 2022). Sandy et al. (2022) suggest that mental and physical exhaustion caused by work-family conflict could result to working mothers' self-harm or having suicidal thoughts as responsibilities become overwhelming. Moreover, long work hours and job-related pressures have been found to exacerbate stress levels for employed mothers resulting in increased frustration, emotional exhaustion, and strained family relationships (Bernhardt et al., 2022).

Women who earn low-income wages are said to be more susceptible to physical and psychological health issues and are subjected to higher levels of domestic violence (Curl et al., 2021). According to Bockarie (2018) single mothers are more likely to seek mental health services when compared to married mothers suggesting that they may face unique challenges. Furthermore, gendered roles and responsibilities associated with being a woman created a burden for working mothers in balancing a functional home and adhering to work deadlines even when engaged in full-time employment (Martucci, 2021). Čikić and Rajačić (2021) propose that working men experienced less physical and psychological issues in comparison to working women. Higher levels of work-family conflict were also associated with parents having mental health issues that could severely impact the children because parents may adopt a less responsive or strict parenting style (Luhr et al., 2022). This highlighted a gap in the literature indicating the need for further research on the effects of parenting and remote work during COVID-19 in relation to how these factors affect the work-family interface of single mother's as current research remains limited.

Single mothers in South Africa are among the poorest women (Bockarie, 2018). Nonetheless, there are fewer social policies and safety nets to support their wellbeing and development (Brown, 2022). At present, gender sensitive labour policies have shown to have an inadequate

understanding of single mothers struggles, including the juggling of paid work with unpaid childcare, low-income jobs, and working in hazardous conditions (Bockarie, 2018). This leaves single mothers with limited time to focus on their mental, physical, emotional, and educational development as well as that of their children's (Bockarie, 2018, Lemos *et al.,* 2020). During the COVID-19 crisis, work-family conflict was linked to various negative effects on the employees overall wellbeing including high work stress stemming from working after hours, low job satisfaction and job autonomy, reduced job performance, increased economic pressure, higher job insecurity, and increased turnover intentions (Vitoria et al., 2022). Conversely, lower levels of work-family conflict were associated with lower turnover intentions, more robust job autonomy, job satisfaction, and job commitment (Brown, 2022; Vitoria et al., 2022, van Rheede, 2023). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to address these issues to improve employee wellbeing and productivity.

2.8. Social Capital within the Work-Family Interface

According to Neneh (2018), the movement of more women in the labour force has in part been supported by governments and policymakers in order to reap the potential economic benefits. With the increase in the number of female entrepreneurs, researchers have become interested in the connection between work and family domains so that necessary measures can be provided to ensure the success of women entrepreneurs (Chan et al. 2020; Song, 2018). Without workplace support, both male and female employees can experience stressful work demands and an environment that can potentially harm the well-being of the employed (Chan et al*.,* 2020). Social capital refers to one's access to resources via mutually beneficial social networks which in turn assist individuals in coping with daily struggles (Khurshid et al., 2023). Social capital can be social and financial resources that can strongly improve an individual's life (Jayaratne, 2017). Research indicates that bonding social capital has been extensively documented in the literature concerning the work-family interface compared to bridging social capital (Balderman & Shamir, 2024; Zulaifah, 2024).

Bonding social capital refers to strong social ties within a community where members share similar demographic characteristics and attitudes (Neneh, 2018). It involves shared available information and resources among the members of a group (Neneh, 2018). Family members, friends, neighbours, spouses and parents become a driving support system for individuals who cannot cope with work and family responsibilities (Balderman et al., 2024; Neneh, 2018). Of these types of social capital, family is the most common form of support that individuals rely on for help (Pileri et al., 2024; Zulaifah, 2024). Bridging social capital is

another form of social support offered by distant relationships in times of need or when individuals' work and family obligations clash (Michael & Zamralita, 2024; Neneh, 2018). Distant relationships can include business associates, former employees and colleagues (Balderman *et al*., 2024; Pileri et al., 2024). For example, friends or colleagues can offer unpaid labour to colleagues who own businesses as a favour in case of emergencies to ensure that entrepreneurs do not lose a source of income while also being able to tend to family needs.

Research suggests that social capital is common among unmarried mothers and Black women; Black women are more likely to stay with relatives and receive free childcare and financial support (Song, 2018). Song (2018) further states that this type of living arrangement is believed to reduce work-family conflict and facilitate employment stability. Women in developing countries such as South Africa tend to rely heavily on their social circles for resources to reduce work-family conflict, for example, South African women tend to belong in saving organisations such as stokvels for which small scale loans are afforded to members (Neneh, 2018). Rural areas tend to have smaller chances for work opportunities and experience longer work commutes, lower levels of education and poverty which limits their access to social support (Bisschoff et al., 2018). Research suggests that men on the other hand, tend to reduce their social contacts even though they may have more leisure time compared to unemployed women (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). This can lead to depression, excessive drinking, and violence because men are more likely to feel social pressure than support due to societal perceptions and expectations for men to play the role of a primary provider (Chan et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that men are more likely to feel unsupported and to seek social support when compared to women.

Formal work support includes workplace policies and programs such as flexible time, childcare provision in the workplace and autonomy that aim to support workers in meeting family demands (Brown, 2022; van Rheede, 2023; Vitoria et al., 2022). Limited empirical research exists on the moderating role of social capital between family-work conflict and work performance (Abouelenin, 2021). Furthermore, less research has focused on the effects of the work-family interface of single mothers living in developing countries such as South Africa. Hence, there is a need to explore the impact of this interplay to gather an in-depth understanding of the role of social capital between the work-family interface and single mothers working remotely during COVID-19.

2.9. Coping Mechanisms within the Work-family Interface

Coping mechanisms within the scope of the work-family interface include autonomy, a coping strategy whereby individuals are given considerable authority and freedom to organise their work activities (Huang et al., 2019; Power, 2020). Therefore, individuals are provided with the flexibility to control where and how they work including the hours spent (Beauregard at al., 2020). Organisations utilise autonomy to show organisational support to workers, however, it is also highlighted that organisations concerned with profit are less likely to offer flexibility (Deen et al., 2021; Vitoria et al., 2022). It is believed that higher levels of autonomy can increase an individual's motivation, energy, skills, and attitudes which can be applied across domains to create work-family enrichment (Kelley et al., 2021).

Stephens et al. (1997) investigated the relationship between work and caregiving. Their study found that when workers acquire skills from work that can assist in caregiving vice versa, such as problem-solving and finding purpose, this can lead to positive spillover. They further state that this reciprocal relationship can foster emotional resilience, alleviate depressive symptoms and create a balanced sense of wellbeing. This is further supported by Hanson et al. (2006) who identified that positive spillover may occur in affective, cognitive and behavioural ways that can serve as protective factors against mental health issues and promote work-family balance. Additionally, Hammer et al. (2005), suggest that positive experiences at home such as fulfilment, skills development, and emotional enrichment can result in beneficial outcomes at work and vice versa.

Extant literature states that individuals often draw from personal strengths and resources to deal with stress associated with work and family dynamics (Ebrahim, 2021). Moreover, research shows that stress and psychological distress in single mothers can be mitigated by spending time with family and showing affection, finding meaning in spiritual activities like church attendance, celebrations as well as doing recreational activities (Bockarie, 2018). At present, limited insight is known about what personal resources are significant in helping single mothers in South Africa cope with the challenges associated with the work-family interface because research on this matter has predominantly focused on married or coupled women's experiences. Financial wellbeing can also be a useful coping mechanism to stress associated with work and family domains (Huang et al., 2019). For example, parents with sufficient financial resources can hire babysitters to manage childcare responsibilities so that they can focus more effectively on work demands (Huang et al., 2019). Individuals who have paying jobs are less likely to worry about household basic needs such as food, water and

housing and they have less strain, more energy and motivation to attend to work demands and responsibilities (Huang et al., 2019).

Further, coping mechanisms explored include segmentation, compensation, and accommodation. According to Jennings et al. (2007), segmentation is when individuals separate work and family demands by deliberately suppressing thoughts, feelings and behaviours connected with either domain. Zulaifah (2024) states that segmentation operates on the assumption that work, and family domains are separate and therefore their interaction is not fluid. Compensation is a coping mechanism whereby individuals immensely participate in one domain, family, within the interface to make up for the dissatisfaction in the other domain, work and vice versa (Michael et al., 2024; Pileri et al., 2024). For example, investing more effort and energy in the work domain to counterbalance unmet needs in the family domain. Accommodation is a coping mechanism that involves restricting ones psychological and behavioural involvement in one domain to satisfy the demands of the other: limiting participation in family-related activities to meet work obligations thereby prioritising work responsibilities over family ones (Balderman et al., 2024; Mokomane, 2014).

2.10. Theoretical Framework: Social Constructionism

The study at present was informed by Social constructionism. Social constructionism asserts that knowledge and reality are shaped through social interactions using language, and cultural norms (Burr & Dick, 2021). It emphasizes that our understanding of the world is not inherent but is rather constructed through shared meanings between individuals and their surroundings (Burr, 2015). Gergen (1985) also challenged the idea that reality is objective and fixed. According to Gergen (1985) the ways that people view and relate to the world is influenced by social relations and language that people use in their circles. People's lived experiences play a central role in shaping meaning. Social and cultural contexts influence how individuals perceive and interpret reality (Butowski et al., 2021). Social constructionism is interested in exploring the processes that facilitate or hinder knowledge creation (Dombrowski, 2020). Social constructionism is suitable for this research as it offers a lens to explore how single mothers working remotely during COVID-19 at CCISA in Durban mediated several roles while being fully employed.

The application and usefulness of social constructionism is advocated for in several studies going back to work from Burningham and Cooper (1999) and Jacobs and Kemeny (2004). Burningham et al. (1999), in their study of environmental sociology indicated that

perceptions of environmental issues such as climate change, pollution and degradation of the environment are not fixed but are influenced by social interactions and the ways people interpret them. Jacobs et al. (2004) expanded on this in their enquiry of housing and policy issues. Drawing on case studies from the UK and Sweden, they argued that people's opinions around housing issues were co-constructed through discourse, institutional dynamics, and personal experiences which can be used to support decisions in policy making. Taken together, previous research highlights the role of social constructionism in centring people's lived experiences in understanding an area of interest in research enquiry.

In the context of single mothers working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, the principles of social constructionism are useful in guiding the extraction of meaning creation as it relates to the work-family interface. The social constructionist lens provides a critical foundation for exploring how participants constructed and understood the work-family interface. It can assist in identifying the coping strategies the single mothers used in response to the changing work and family dynamics. And as mentioned before, this level of insight could be beneficial for future policy development when considering the rise of working single mothers in South Africa. Under social constructionism, reality is seen as a product of multiple social processes (Burr, 2015). These include talking and writing and through these processes people can describe, explain, and account for the world in which they live in (Burr, 2015). Multiple realities or constructs of the world exist and there are no right or wrong viewpoints (Burr et al., 2021).

Given the diverse backgrounds of the participants in the study, a social constructionist perspective is appropriate as it values individuals' unique backgrounds and acknowledges differences in experiences shaped by historical and cultural events. Rather than viewing concepts as fixed, social constructionism posits that our categories for thinking and communicating with others are socially manufactured and historically and culturally specific (Burr et al., 2021; Dombrowski, 2020). It is fundamental to the study as it can help the researcher suss out descriptions, explanations and interpretations about work-family interface from participants through personal narratives.

Social constructionism also aligns with qualitative research methods. Qualitative methods such as those used in this study are ideal for obtaining linguistic and textual data (Butowski et al., 2021). The study sought to understand the narratives of single mothers by emphasising their perspectives of the work-family interface using their own language and context of

remote working obtained from semi-structured interviews and the thematic analysis of the data. Overall, social constructionism provided a framework that prevents from decontextualizing of participants' experiences in recognising that meaning is co-constructed within societies that individuals live in.

2.11. Conclusion

Chapter Two focused on unpacking the literature review relating to work-family research. Insights on the historical view of work and family interactions within the South African context emphasising the increased number of single women and need to understand the challenges faced by single mothers in balancing professional and personal lives were highlighted. The chapter further noted the experiences of women working remotely during COVID-19, highlighting both the positive and negative impact with regards to mental health, social capital, and coping mechanisms utilized. Additionally, Chapter Two provided an overview of the theoretical framework guiding the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Chapter Three outlines the research design used in the study. These include sampling, data collection techniques and the analytical procedure. This chapter also explores the methods used to ensure trustworthiness and ethical integrity throughout the research process.

3.2 Research Approach

A qualitative approach was used as it is best suited for collecting non-numeric and descriptive data (Neuman, 2014). As Neuman (2014) explains, qualitative research typically involves smaller and purposefully selected samples to facilitate an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and stories. Since the study is concerned with how single mothers interpret and make sense of the work-family interface in the context of remote work during COVID-19 at CCISA, a qualitative approach is relevant. It allows for the participants' voices, meanings, and realities to be captured in their own words and is also consistent with the interpretivist nature of the study. It allows for the use of open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews consisted with qualitative research methods used to gain insight about a topic of interest.

3.3. Research Paradigm

The research adopted an interpretivism paradigm which considers the differences in culture, circumstances as well as time when it comes to how reality is created. Unlike a positivist paradigm, interpretivism does not claim to have an absolute understanding regarding a phenomenon (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). It asserts that reality cannot be generalised as it is perceived through subjective meaning. This paradigm enabled the researcher to consider the uniqueness of information obtained based on the research context, topic of interest and the lived experiences of the participants involved. These qualities align with the social constructionist theoretical framework used to inform the study. It creates a platform for human exploration using qualitative research methods suitable to answer research questions for the study.

3.4. Research Design

According to Marczyk et al. (2010), a research design is a systematic plan of action that guides the researcher in selecting appropriate methods to address research questions. The

study used a phenomenological research design which originates its enquiry from philosophy and psychology (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Its aims to explore and describe participants subjective perceptions about a specific phenomenon experienced by all participants. Since the study is interested in single mothers lived experiences and perceptions regarding working remotely from home during COVID-19 in their own words, it is best fitted for the study. This design is also appropriate for qualitative research methods used in the study, discussed below.

3.5 Selection of Participants

A sample is a group of people or objects that are selected from a larger population for measurements (Crossman, 2019). CCISA is one of the biggest call centre companies in South Africa and is located in Umhlanga, Durban. CCISA hires employees from different backgrounds, races, genders and utilized remote work during COVID-19. The sample criteria for the study were single mothers who worked form home at CCISA in Durban, South Africa between the ages of 25 and 65. For representation purposes the researcher aimed to select an equal number of single mothers from each race of Black, Coloured, Indian and White individuals. The initial number of participants proposed for the study was 12 single mothers. Due to recruitment challenges explained in the data collection section below, only 7 participants were selected.

The researcher used purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used because it is a non-probability sampling method that selects participants based on the population's characteristics and the study's objective (Crossman, 2019). It enabled the researcher to intentionally choose participants who were best positioned to provide rich and relevant data in relation to the research aim. Using snowball sampling allowed existing participants to refer colleagues who met the inclusion criteria. Since the study aimed to explore the work-family interface among single mothers who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic at CCISA in Durban, it was important to speak to employees who had firsthand experience of this specific reality. These techniques became a practical choice for identifying and accessing a relatively small and hard-to-reach group of Black, Indian and Coloured single mothers between the ages of 25 and 51 years in the Durban area who worked from home at the time. Using these techniques ensured that the researcher did not recruit nor interview participants who did not provide valuable information to the study's objectives.

3.6 Data Collection

To gain access to the participants, the researcher emailed the supervising manager at CCISA. A gatekeeper letter was used to introduce the researcher, outlined the purpose of the study, and conveyed the intention to request permission to ask employees to participate in the research. Once approval via the letter of authorisation from the supervising manager was gained, the researcher was introduced to the employees and was able to explain the research purpose and desired sample. As mentioned earlier, the initial sample was 12 participants with an equal distribution across four racial groups to account for any differences in perception and experiences of the work-family interface.

Extensive efforts were made to recruit participants including liaising with two managers from CCISA. However, the researcher was unable to obtain the sample and number of participants desired. A lot of the individuals who worked from home at the time no longer worked for CCISA since COVID-19 occurred almost 5 years ago. Employees who remained with CCISA post COVID-19 did not meet the full criteria of the desired sample. And participants played a role in referring colleagues who met the sample criteria making a total of 7 participants. From the 7 participants, 3 were Black, 2 Coloured and 2 Indian single mothers. Although the proposed number of participants was not reached, the 7 participants gave in-depth and rich contextual data which was still valuable in addressing the objectives of the study until saturation was reached.

Participation was voluntary and participants were made aware of the recording tools used during the interview as outlined in the informed consent form. It also briefly discussed who the researcher was, what the research was about, and what was expected from participants. The participants were required to read and sign the informed consent form before the interview schedule was set. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview that comprised a set of open-ended questions. This enabled the researcher to guide the interview and not stray off topic while enabling the participants to answer using their own words. Interviews were facilitated online and audio recorded using Zoom and Teams. Zoom and Teams applications provided the researcher with a convenient and efficient way to transcribe the data collected via its in-built transcription tool.

The data collection process was not without any challenges. The first barrier to data collection was with regards to finding participants who met the sample criteria. Once participants were identified, finding the convenient time to conduct interviews was

challenging. This was due to participants' busy and alternating work schedules that made it difficult to align our times for the interviews. Flexibility was important during this period as participants regularly rescheduled interviews which delayed the data collection process. As such, the minimum time for interviews conducted was about 25 minutes and a maximum of about 45 minutes. Interestingly, single mothers who shared mostly positive experiences accounted for the minimum minutes during interviews whereas those who had both positive and negative experiences accounted for the maximum amount of time spent answering questions.

3.7. Data Collection Instrument

Reflexivity refers to the researcher's acknowledgment of their role in the research (Daniel, 2019). In qualitative enquiry, researchers tend to immerse themselves in the research and prior experiences and beliefs may influence the study. This was the first time the researcher conducted research independently and learnt a lot about the practical application of research methods and ethical research considerations. An interview schedule was used to guide data collection and encouraged reflection and detailed responses from participants. It consisted of open-ended questions with contextual cues to assist participants in recalling and organising memories aimed at answering research questions. The researcher ensured the reflexivity of the study by interacting with the data, transcribing and jotting down notes about the participants' comments throughout the data collection process. The researcher's thoughts and assumptions about the interviews, data analysis and writing of the final report were continuously detailed and edited in the process.

The researcher has also worked from home during the pandemic as an online English teacher and acknowledges that this may had influenced the phrasing of questions, data analysis and discussion of findings. Additionally, the researcher has multiple siblings who have children and has assisted with childcare in certain circumstances. However, the researcher does not have children of her own. At the time of conducting this research, the researcher identified as a single woman and is aware that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on all citizens of South Africa including the researcher. Nevertheless, the researcher's lack of personal experience with parenting a child of their own necessitated heightened attentiveness to the participants' narratives to ensure that interpretations of the information obtained remained grounded in the actual data collected rather than preconceived notions. The researcher also used probing questions to avoid recall bias considering that the study was interested in a

phenomenon that happened some time ago. By engaging in these reflexive practices, the researcher aimed to produce a more authentic and trustworthy account of the experiences of single mothers working remotely from home during COVID-19 in Durban at CCISA.

3.7. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a method used in qualitative research to identify, analyse, and report patterns in data sources such as interviews, focus groups and written narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used thematic analysis because it organized, described, interpreted, and provided a thick and meaningful description of the collected data. This made it possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the single mother's perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface when working remotely during COVID-19 in Durban.

Thematic analysis is also used when dealing with non-numeric data such as words or language, making it suitable for the study which focused on language and worded data transcribed for further analysis. In addition, thematic analysis was compatible with the theoretical framework that informs this study namely social constructionism. It facilitated the exploration of shared meanings and experiences that were essential for the understanding of socially constructed realities by the single mothers working remotely from home. Below are the six stages of thematic analysis that were followed in the study to analyse the data collected:

1. **Familiarizing**: This stage included the transcription of the data, reading and rereading the collected data and writing down initial ideas.

2. **Generating codes**: Interesting features of the data were coded systematically across the data set. The data relevant to each code was further collated in this stage.

3. **Searching for themes**: This stage involved collecting and combining codes into relevant themes. All the relevant data was collected into each potential theme and the themes that shared meanings, or similar patterns were combined to form a singular theme.

4. **Reviewing themes**: At this stage, the researcher ensured that all the themes fit into coded extracts and the overall data set creating a thematic map. The researcher re-examined and refined the work to ensure that codes shared similar opinions and grounds. If codes did not fit together, the researcher continued to review and adjust the analysis until the codes

were properly collated with relevant information and further refinement no longer yielded useful insights.

5. **Defining and naming themes**: The fifth stage involved an ongoing analysis to identify specifics within each created theme and to determine what the overall analysis suggested. This process also generated clear definitions and names for each theme that allowed the researcher to assign names that informed each themes meaning.

6. **Producing the report**: This was the final stage of thematic analysis involving the final analysis and writing of the report. The report was required to be concise, logical, and non-repetitive. It also needed to be coherent and provide a clear account of the story conveyed by the data. Sufficient evidence, direct quotes and examples from the data were included to support each theme.

3.8. Trustworthiness of the Study

It has been suggested that qualitative research should undergo the same criterion and standards used in quantitative research as potential universal guidelines, however, Daniel (2019) argues that there is damage associated with adopting a universal guideline in research enquiry. Instead, grounded by qualitative research, the concepts of validity and reliability were reconceptualised as trustworthiness to ensure that the findings are credible, dependable, conformable and transferable.

3.8.1. Credibility

According to Anney (2014), credibility is rooted in the confidence that research findings reflect participants interpretation in their own words. Before fieldwork, research instruments for data collection like the interview schedule were drafted, reviewed and refined alongside a supervisor. Through prolonged engagement with participants, use of verbatim quotes to support findings and member checking to verify accuracy of interpretation, the researcher was able to ensure credibility of the study. Reflexive journaling, peer and supervisor supervision and feedback from the Research Ethics Committee also helped the researcher to be aware of potential biases throughout the enquiry.

3.8.2. Dependability

Anney (2014) defines dependability as the study's ability to ensure stability of research findings over time. An audit trail keeping a comprehensive record of research activities such as interviews, transcriptions, coding decisions, and analytical notes was used to ensure

dependability of the study. Feedback from the supervisor on drafts regarding data collection and analysis assisted the researcher in refining analytical decisions to ensure methodological coherence.

3.8.3. Conformability

Conformability is understood as the degree to which research findings can be collaborated by other researchers (Anney, 2014). To ensure the conformability of the study, the researcher practised reflexivity and audit trail throughout the research process to show a clear link between raw data and themes derived from the analysis.

3.8.4. Transferability

Transferability is described as the extent to which findings can be applied to other respondents and contexts (Anney, 2014). While the focus of qualitative research findings is not generalisability, the study ensured transferability by providing thick, detailed descriptions of the participants experiences. The researcher also described the research setting, context methodology and participant demographics to enable the reader to determine the relevance of the findings to similar populations and contexts.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are principles that guide researchers in maintaining ethical conduct of research and the protection of participants (Neuman, 2014). The first step was ensuring that the researcher received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee to conduct research. An application for approval was submitted on the 9th of May 2024 and granted on the 24th of August 2024, reference number: HSSREC/00007010/2024. The researcher took into consideration that social research has the possibility of causing physical, psychological, legal, and economic harm to participants. The following ethical considerations were utilized to ensure safety of the participants:

3.9.1. Voluntary Participation

One of the most vital ethical principles of conducting research is to never force the participation of an individual; participation must be voluntary (Neuman, 2014). The researcher ensured this by clearly explaining to participants before and during data collection that participation is voluntary and participants can choose to terminate participation at any time. The participants were also made aware of the supervisor and Research Ethics Committee contact details to be able to report misconduct experienced, if any.

3.9.2. Informed Consent

The researcher distributed an informed consent form to participants who met the criteria, highlighting the purpose of the study, its discomforts and benefits, what was required from the participant, and a clause illustrating their right to terminate participation at any time during the research process. Before data collection, written informed consent forms were received, and consent was reconfirmed verbally before interviews.

3.9.3. Anonymity and Confidentiality

According to Arifin (2018), participants reserve the right to explicitly agree to participate in a study while their confidentiality and anonymity are still kept. Confidentiality referred to the researcher's obligation not to disclose sensitive information that could result to harm for the participants in any way (Arifin, 2018). In the same sense, anonymity was the researcher's responsibility to ensure that participants' identities were not compromised at any point of the study. The researcher preserved participants confidentiality and anonymity by utilizing fictional names and blocking out sensitive information to protect participants' identities. The researcher also ensured that participants knew of the video and audio recording option used during the interview and adhered to the participants selection of audio recording. Per the informed consent form agreement, transcripts of the recorded data are locked in the supervisor's office for five years after which they will be destroyed to protect participants.

3.9.4. Nonmaleficence

Nonmaleficence is the researcher's obligation to ensure that no harm came to participants before, during, or after the research (Taber, 2014). Researchers are also expected to not place participants at risk of avoidable harm (Taber, 2014). It is important to note that not all harm is physical. Qualitative research uses data collection methods that could lead to stress and exhaustion due to intense or insensitive questions during interviews (Neuman, 2014). These methods risk undermining the participants' experiences, understanding, and abilities, which could negatively affect their motivation and self-esteem (Taber, 2014). The researcher safeguarded participants from potential harm associated with sensitive data collection methods by building rapport, adopting a warm tone during interviews as well as briefing and debriefing them where necessary. Debriefings are important not only for addressing potential distress but also for enriching the research process. There were no participants who showed signs of distress during and after the data collection process. And as an intern counselling psychologist, the researcher was prepared to provide immediate support if necessary to

ensure adherence to the ethical principle of non-maleficence. Without distress, participants openly engaged with questions providing depth and authenticity to the data collection procedure.

3.9.5. Beneficence

Beneficence is the researcher's ethical obligation to ensure that the study was guided by commitments that maximized benefits for participants while minimizing potential harm. Qualitative research allowed participants to express their thoughts and feelings without interruptions during interviews which helped to develop an understanding of the meanings individuals ascribed to their experiences (Neuman, 2014). Sufficient time was allocated to each participant to ensure they could fully share their experiences. Participants were made aware that there were no monetary gains and their knowledge contributes to broadening understanding of the research aim.

3.9.6. Justice

According to Varkey (2021), justice is the researcher's professional responsibility to treat all participants equally and respectfully. To ensure that justice was maintained, participants were entitled to equal participation in the study as well as equal access to its benefits and questions. The researcher applied the above-mentioned ethical principles equally across participants to guarantee their fair and ethical treatment throughout the research.

3.10. Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology used in the study. It highlighted the research design, data collection and analysis used. Chapter three also highlighted the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and how ethical considerations were maintained.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

The research sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers who worked remotely at CCISA in Durban, South Africa, during COVID-19. A qualitative approach was used to conduct in-depth interviews to gain insights into participants lived experiences. This chapter aims to present the key findings from the data collected from the 7 single mothers who worked remotely from home as call centre consultants. The single mothers who participated were between the ages of 25 to 51 years old. The interviews were held online via Zoom and Teams.

In addition, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive discussion around the data by critically engaging and interpreting it, drawing connections between the findings and previous literature. The study was guided by four research objectives: (1) Exploring the meaning of the work-family interface by single mothers working from home (2) Exploring how single mothers narrate their experiences about working from home and how they mediate the demands on paid work and their family responsibilities (3) Identifying resources that functioned as social capital (4) Discovering the coping mechanisms used to mediate between remote work and other non-work and family responsibilities. Table 4.1 below provides the demographic criteria of the participants obtained.

4.2. Demographic Details

Table. 4.1: Demographic of participants

Participant	Race	Marital Status	Number of Children	Age of participants	Age of children
Participant 1	Coloured	Single	1	25	2
Participant 2	Black	Single	1	29	6
Participant 3	Coloured	Single	1	25	3
Participant 4	Indian	Single	1	27	3
Participant 5	Black	Single	1	29	5

Participant 6	Indian	Single	1	51	29
Participant 7	Black	Single	1	32	6

4.3. Thematic Analysis

Informed by social constructionism framework, thematic analysis was used as a means to analyse the data collected from the participants. The process involved the transcription of interviews, coding and grouping of similar codes in order to identify recurring patterns and themes that were relevant to the participants lived experiences. There were three main themes identified from the 6-stage process outlined in chapter three, namely: Theme 1 '*The Work-Family Interface and Its Complexities*', Theme 2 '*Challenges Associated with Remote Work During COVID-19*' and Theme 3 '*Coping Mechanisms and Social Capital in the Face of COVID-19*'. These themes were broken down into subthemes that offered insight into how the participants navigated their work and family lives while managing the challenges of remote work. The discussion throughout the chapter is supported by direct quotes from participants to support the thematic analysis findings. They represent commonly conveyed experiences and perceptions by the single mothers who participated in the study to maintain the authenticity of their voices and to offer a rich, contextualised understanding of their experiences.

The literature review of other studies researching the work-family interface, remote work and COVID-19 has informed the naming and defining of the key themes and subthemes discussed within this chapter. The researcher is aware that the themes outlined and discussed below do not represent the absolute truth and does not dispute that other researchers may identify and focus on other aspects within this field of enquiry. Table 4.2 below provides a list of the themes and their respective subthemes.

Table 4.2: Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1	**The Work-Family Interface and Its Complexities**

- Subtheme 1: The Work-Family Interface During COVID-19
- Subtheme 2: Redefining the Work-Family Interface Through Flexibility
- Subtheme 3: Commuting Time and its Impact on the Work-Family Interface

Theme 2	**The Challenges Associated with Remote Work**

- Subtheme 1: Remote Work as a New Experience
- Subtheme 2: Redefining Workspaces During COVID-19
- Subtheme 3: Technological Barriers to Remote Work
- Subtheme 4: The Struggles of Juggling Multiple Roles
- Subtheme 5: Balancing Childcare and Remote Work
- Subtheme 6: Closure of Schools
- Subtheme 7: The Psychological Impact of Remote Work in COVID-19

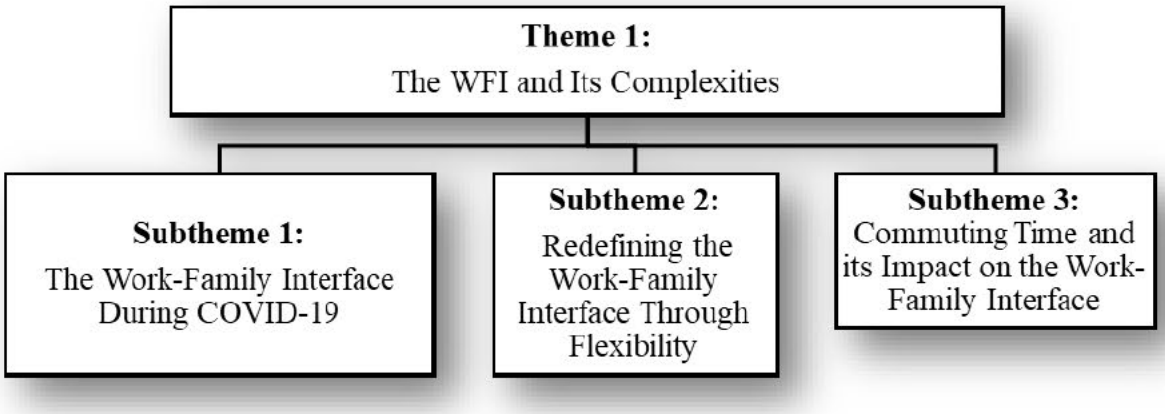
Theme 3	**Coping Mechanisms and Social Capital in the Face of COVID-19**

- Subtheme 1: Autonomy and Boundary Setting
- Subtheme 2: The Role of Social Support in Reinforcing Work-Family Boundaries
- Subtheme 3: The Role of Organizational Support During COVID-19

4.4. Theme 1: The Work-Family-Interface and Its Complexities

The *Work-Family-Interface and Its Complexities* is the first theme that emerged from the data analysis. This theme aims to answer the first research question of the study regarding how single mothers made sense of the work-family interface in the home context during COVID-19. Below are the subthemes that showcase the findings within this theme. Figure 4.1 below gives a visual representation of Theme 1 and respective subthemes:

Figure 4.1: The Work-Family Interface and Its Complexities



4.4.1. Subtheme 1: The Work-Family Interface During COVID-19

The Work-Family Interface During COVID-19 is a subtheme that provides the participants' understanding of the interaction between their work and family domains during the pandemic. When asked what work and family meant to them during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study found that participants often viewed work as a necessity for financial stability and basic needs for the family as a whole. And family was seen as a primary source of emotional fulfilment and belonging. Excerpts from participants highlight this transactional relationship between domains:

> "*Firstly, my family is most important. Everything that I do, I do it for them. And of course I was grateful, during the time that we were still able to work. I mean, most companies shut down. We still had the ability to continue working*" (Participant 6).

> "*In call centre in order for you to have money, you need to put in more hours in order for you to have the type of life you need for your son. But now, keeping in mind that when you're putting in more hours you are losing the other aspect of life, which is spending more time with the family so they both mean a lot. The happiness of the family makes you endure the work part. The more I see the family happy, the more I'm willing to work.*" (Participant 2).

> "*If I was not able to work at all I feel like that would have had a strain on the financial situation in my household. That would have definitely impacted my life in a*

lot of ways regarding me not being able to look after my son as well if I'm not able to pay rent." (Participant 1).

The data analysis indicates that single mothers spoke of the work-family interface as having roles that are connected and interdependent of each other similar to reports made by Adisa et al. (2022), Andrada-Pa et al. (2022) and Beauregard et al. (2020). Similar to views by Ebrahimi (2021) and Goswami (2022), participants did not only understand work as a source of income. Instead, work served a functional role of sustaining the family and contributed to creating a sense of balance between roles. This positive spillover between domains aligns with the benefits of remote work covered in chapter two highlighting how work-family enrichment can occur even under strain (Adisa et al., 2022; Haar et al., 2008; Rahman et al., 2019). In the context of the pandemic, working remotely seemed to hold a deeper sense of importance for the single mothers in this study as many individuals faced job insecurity and income loss.

Many of the participants were primary breadwinners, reflecting broader societal patterns showing a growing number of single mothers heading households in the family structure of South African families (Bockarie, 2018; Lemos et al., 2021). Their narratives show how financial constraints required them to work extra hours to earn more money resulting in work-to-family conflict and a poor work-family balance (Biyela, 2023; Luhr et al., 2022; van Rheede, 2023). Similarly, participants' experiences echo findings from Lunyungu (2025) who also focused on single mothers' work-family interface in Tanzania and found that their motivations to maintain employment, completing job tasks and working more hours stemmed from the sole responsibility of having young children that depended on them. Unlike men who seemingly can assume socially acceptable breadwinner identities or coupled mothers who have the privilege of reducing working hours due to having a supportive partner to share household responsibilities with (Goswami, 2022; Luhr et al., 2022; Martucci, 2021) the single mothers in this study did not have such a privilege. Their stories relayed an enforced duality of performing roles of caregiver and employee simultaneously during COVID-19 (Biyela, 2023).

From the lens of social constructionism outlined by Burr et al. (2021), the participants' perceptions of the work-family interface are co-constructed based on their lived realities, internal priorities and role expectations of single parenthood. The motivations driving each role performed was understood through socioeconomic and gendered principles governing

motherhood and employment that see women as primary homemakers (Adisa *et al.*, 2022; Marôco *et al.,* 2022). The statements made by the participants also echo the description of wellbeing defined by Michael and Zamralita (2024) as one's ability to evaluate their life satisfaction both positively and negatively in areas of personal development, feeling whole and being able to contribute to society (Michael et al., 2024).

In summary, the work-family interface was socioeconomically and culturally co-constructed as an interplay between work and family life driven by financial need and the effects of COVID-19.

4.4.2. Subtheme 2: Redefining the Work-Family Interface Through Flexibility

Redefining the Work-Family Interface Through Flexibility brings insight into how flexibility was used by participants in reshaping and negotiating the work-family interface at home during COVID-19. The integration of work and family domains within the home setting enabled many participants to have flexible work schedules during COVID-19. As result, participants could align work with family demands in ways that mutually benefited each domain. The following excerpts provide a description of how work schedules could be chosen during COVID-19:

> "*I usually preferred to work the night shift. Choosing to work at night allowed me to spend quality time with my family during the day, get some rest, do whatever I needed to do before I had to work again*." (Participant 3).

> "*I could do things like cooking, I could clean up, do little chores here and there. And it allowed me to bake more with my kid which was fun and spend a lot of family time together which we didn't get as often. So even now I would prefer working from home if I have to be entirely honest.*" (Participant 4).

> "*We at least got to see our neighbours during that period and have some conversations with people that we normally wouldn't talk with*." (Participant 6).

Participants understanding of flexible work schedules is consistent with research showing this type of working arrangement as one of the benefits of remote work (Ghislieri et al., 2023; Kossek et al., 2023). As noted in the literature review, control over one's time is a protecting factor for working mothers against experiencing work-family conflict (Luhr, 2022). This is most effective when employers provide autonomy over surveillance (Chung et al., 2020). Through remote working and flexible work schedules, participants could integrate previously

distinct domains as work and family life occurred in separate locations, minimising interactions with family members during work hours (Kumari, 2022). Similar to the work of scholars such as Kolo et al. (2021) and Martucci (2021), participants described the benefits of being able to spend time with their children and engaging in activities not possible under conventional work structures. Their adaptive use of flexible work schedules is indicative of accommodation, a strategy observed in research as being used by individuals to adapt one role to meet the demands of the other to create balance in the interface (Michael et al., 2024; Zulaifah. 2024).

However, many scholars caution the reliance on flexible work arrangements as they may not be a guaranteed solution to work-family balance and argue that it may even reinforce traditional gender roles (Beauregard et al., 2020; du Toit Britz, 2022). For example, research indicates that women usually use flexible work time to increase caregiving efforts while men tend to use it for personal activities. (Powell *et al.*, 2019; Uddin, 2022; Martucci, 2021). The findings highlight the importance of understanding that work-family balance is not solely determined by organisational policy. It is also a product of social discourse that defines what it means to be a good mother and a committed employee (van Rheede, 2023). The present research contributes to the literature by confirming these experiences from the perspective of single mothers who worked remotely at home as call centre consultants in Durban, a research gap observed within the South African context.

In summary, participants used flexible work schedules to choose working hours suitable to accommodate work and family needs.

4.4.3. Subtheme 3: Commuting Time and its Impact on the Work-Family Interface

Another significant finding that came from the data analysis was the role that travelling to work played in shaping the work-family interface, and how its removal during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the way for which participants managed their time, energy, demands and resources. Many of the participants stated that they worked remotely fully from home as seen in excerpts below:

> "*Your whole life goes into getting up early, traveling to work, coming home, getting stuck in traffic. You spend more hours of the day on your way to work and back than you actually do at home. For example, on the 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. shift, I wouldn't be on the road at 4 a.m. to get to work by 6 a.m. I wouldn't be stuck in traffic if my shift ended at 3 p.m. because I would be at home, so that was a plus*." (Participant 3).

> "*I was spending a lot of money travelling back and forth from work to home. So economically for me, it was a better option working from home because I could save that money.*" (Participant 7).
>
> "*It helped being at home because it cut at the time from traveling from work to the actual home and socializing with people, I never really got to have that when I was working at the office.*" (Participant 2).

The findings of this research are supported by Turcotte (2011), who reported that workers who live in larger metropolitan areas, just like Durban, experience longer commuting time, increased stress and reduced work-life balance caused by the buildup of traffic. Similarly, heavy traffic, early work, and late arrivals were noted by Beauregard et al. (2020) and Chung et al. (2020) as negatively impacting the mood of commuters and family life resulting in work-family conflict. As single mothers who often worked in a high demanding sector with little autonomy, not having to commute to work was perceived positively by participants. It enhanced family relationships and balance in the interface (Sarfaraz et al., 2021; Vitoria et al., 2022).

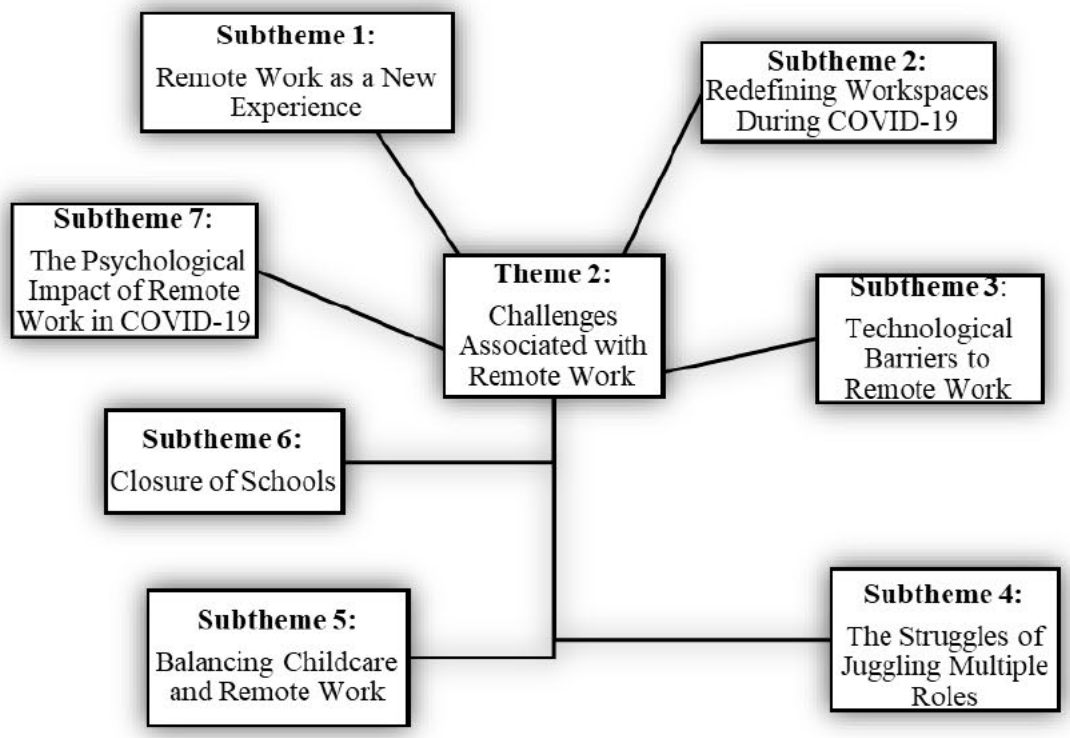
Social constructionism states that individuals view reality as being context depended with no absolute truth existing (Burr, 2015). Knowledge about reality can evolve over time based on social interactions and interpretations accepted within societies (Burr, 2015). Before COVID-19, commuting to work was socially understood as a boundary separating duties from work and family domains as being conducted in different settings. And travelling to work was perceived as limiting the time spent in the home domain. For the participants, travel routines like waking up early to prepare for work, getting children ready for daycare and preschool to working alternating shifts on a weekly basis, experiencing traffic congestion, and work demands like dialling, taking customer calls and extended working hours structured daily life and role transitions. Shifts worked ranged from working early mornings, midday or night. The transition to fully remote work from home blurred these boundaries. Hence when travelling was removed, time was reconstructed as fluid and open to negotiating the work-family interface as working conditions changed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Overall, working remotely at home enabled the single mothers to regain time that was lost to travelling before the pandemic and reinvesting it into bonding social capital.

4.5. Theme 2: The Challenges Associated with Remote Work

The theme *Challenges Associated with Remote Work* introduces the reader to the overall view of the challenges that participants experienced as a result of working from home during the pandemic. It aimed to address the second objective of the study to explore how single mothers narrated their experiences and mediated between the demands of paid work, and their family responsibilities in the home. The subthemes that follow provide a discussion of these challenges. Figure 4.2 below offers a visual presentation of Theme 2 and the supporting subthemes.

Figure 4.2: Challenges Associated with Remote Work



4.5.1. Subtheme 1: Remote Work as a New Experience

Remote Work as a New Experience is a subtheme that looks into the participants' subjective experiences of remote work. For most participants, working remotely from home was experienced as a first-time occurrence that affected the quality of their work performance as reflected in statements below:

> "*When we started, we were working six hours because everyone was trying to test it out and see if it's working...The quality of my work that I used to do, my delivery at work is no longer the same because I would easily get distracted.*" (Participant 2).

"*I think it was difficult for everybody. Nobody knew what to expect. And then it was the lockdown...you struggle to adapt to something that is introduced so quickly to you...you don't work with your kids at work with your family. You don't work with them at work, so you don't know what it is to do your job with them in the same space*." (Participant 3).

"*Unfortunately, my performance did take a dip because I had to deal with work in a new form*." (Participant 5)

"*It's a bit difficult to work because we were working in teams so as a group its easier sometimes when you are in the office to get things done. You can just shout across the room cause you are all in the same space.*" (Participant 7).

The single mothers in the study had no prior exposure to remote work in the home setting. This contributed to what work-family scholars refer to as role ambiguity which occurs when expectations around performance, work structure and boundaries between work and the home become unclear leading to uncertainty and stress (Allen et al., 2021; Lone et al., 2020). Similarly, Carillo et al. (2021) observed that ongoing environmental disruptions caused by the pandemic resulted in reduced job satisfaction and heightened burnout similar to participants experiences of transitioning to remote work during COVID-19. Extending on this, Allen et al. (2021) asserted that non-work friendly spaces in the home cause workers to constantly have to switch in between competing role demands in an environment not conducive for either function, resulting in reduced concentration, productivity and strain-based conflict. This negative spillover effect between domains is also observed in contemporary studies highlighted in chapter two (Brown, 2022; van Rheed, 2023; Vitoria et al., 2022). It reinforces that benefits of remote work are conditional to contextual factors within the home similar to the experiences noted by participants.

In addition, Waldrep et al (2024) utilized similar research methods to the current study among a mixed sample of 52 employees and drew similar results. Remote workers who had preference for working in the office post COVID-19 were individuals who experienced unfavourable working spaces due to COVID-19 restrictions, job descriptions being incompatible with remote working and disruptions from childcare related issues (Waldrep et al., 2024). Conversely, individuals who wanted to continue working from home attributed this to having increased control over working hours, feeling more productive and experiencing less interruptions in the home setting (Waldrep et al., 2024). These findings suggest that

without the experience of working from home and adequate resources, remote work may amplify challenges associated with work-family integration as noted by the participants in this study.

To summarise, working remotely at home for the first time coupled with COVID-19 restrictions resulted in less role clarity and productivity.

4.5.2. Subtheme 2: Redefining Workspaces During COVID-19

Redefining Workspaces During COVID-19 sheds light on the removal of traditional workspaces. Majority of the participants reported that they did not have suitable workspaces and used their bedrooms and any comfortable space to work from in the home environment. The following excerpts highlights the spatial limitations experienced by the participants:

> "*At the time we didn't have a separate room for me to work in. I had my own room which I shared with my son, and my parents had their own. There really wasn't another space to set up my workstation.*" (Participant 1).
>
> "*I don't afford the luxury of having a study room or an office where I could set up my equipment.*" (Participant 2).
>
> "*I don't live in a big house, so I used my room as my office*." (Participant 3).
>
> "*I had to basically move my son out of my room and into my parents' room for certain times of my shifts.*" (Participant 4).

Empirical research emphasising the negative effects of working remotely from home has indicated similar conclusions. For example, Biyela (2023) states that some working women found it difficult to find a space to work when working from home while those who did had to share the space with their husbands who worked remotely. Similarly, Carillo et al. (2021) found that during the pandemic, workers who did not have in home offices to work in significantly struggled with maintaining attention, structuring their workdays and setting clear boundaries due to blurred physical and temporal boundaries. They state that these issues were more pronounced for workers who stayed in multigenerational families and in smaller houses similar to concerns raised by the single mothers who participated in this research enquiry. Furthermore, Martucci (2021) supported the findings of the study, noting that working women were less likely to have a separate working office in the home compared to men who were also unlikely to be interrupted when working during COVID-19. This research extends the literature of work-family interface and remote working. It highlights spatial

limitations that hindered work productivity and concentration when working from home during COVID-19 from the perspective of single mothers in the South African context.

In summary, the home usually used as a space for family turned into an office creating inevitable conflicts in the work-family interface.

4.5.3. Subtheme 3: Technological Barriers to Remote Work

Technological Barriers to Remote Work highlights the challenges that participants experienced due to contextual issues which interfered with participants' ability to work effectively from home. Some of the participants reported that they experienced internet connectivity issues that often coincided with loadshedding as noted from excerpts below:

> "*The major problem would be when we have load shedding. Obviously, being in South Africa load shedding is something that's very popular here*." (Participant 4).
>
> "*And then you know the network because our country is not as developed or at that point we were not as developed, where we didn't have as much fibre*." (Participant 6).
>
> "*Once you are not in the same space and the only thing keeping you guys together is the internet connection, it becomes a bit difficult because there are times where the internet would be slow and there are times were the internet would just drop. So, in those times it was difficult to communicate effectively as a team*." (Participant 7).

A review of the literature supports the observation that loadshedding and reception issues interfered with completing digital-based work tasks. These challenges tend to result in reduced productivity, job insecurity, and psychological strain especially among underserviced communities similar to the experiences of the single mothers in this study (Biyela, 2023; Matli, 2020). The same negative impact expressed by the participants were noted regarding access to online learning in academic settings. Scholars indicate that internet disruptions during periods of loadshedding restricted students' access to live online classes, learning management systems, and the ability to download large files (Kgarose et al., 2024; Thembane, 2024).

Social constructionism can assist in understanding these experiences as it asserts that discourse shapes meaning and impact around a phenomenon (Butowski et al., 2021). For the single mothers in this study, disruptions caused by reception issues were not viewed as isolated technical issues. Their experiences reflect loadshedding as being socially constructed as a major social problem affecting many South Africans. For them, reception issues

represent deeply rooted structural inequalities whereby the areas they lived in did not have installed fibre and experienced frequent power cuts during the pandemic. As a result, loadshedding was constructed as a shared reality that impacted their ability to work remotely from home as their work tasks heavily relied on consistent electricity. This negatively affected their productivity and work quality.

All in all, loadshedding had a significant impact on working virtually from the home context.

4.5.4. Subtheme 4: The Struggles of Juggling Multiple Roles

The subtheme *The Struggle of Juggling Multiple Roles* is a section exploring the challenges of balancing work and family roles while working remotely from home with time management being the most challenging aspect reported by most participants during COVID-19. This is highlighted by responses below:

> "*The majority would be me having to work overtime. If I had to constantly give more time to the work, it gave me less time to deal with my responsibilities which is my son*." (Participant 1).
>
> "*I don't have enough time even though I'm supposed to have a lot of time...you can see all of these people, and you would like to engage and give them more of your time, but you really can't because this is a job that pays you.*" (Participant 2).
>
> "*Your workload does get more pressurizing in a home-based setting. They think because you're at home, you can do multiple things and then if there was something happening in our area, you were expected to be involved*." (Participant 4).
>
> "*Working from home definitely meant more responsibilities. The dishes would just pile up, cleaning, laundry, everything just increased because we were home all the time.*" (Participant 5).

Exploring the pressures that working mothers faced during the pandemic was pursued by Bobek et al. (2023) who supported the findings of this study. They found that due to role overload, the shift to remote work increased the emotional labour it takes to perform roles whilst reducing the time to recover from the strain. Similarly, a qualitative study looking into the work-family interface of 38 working women in Pakistan indicated that they experienced work-family conflict due to increased child and elderly care, an uncomfortable workplace, long working hours and extra work (Sarfaraz et al., 2021). The extra labour was exacerbated by gender and cultural beliefs observed in most Pakistani families (Sarfaraz et al., 2021).

While flexible work arrangements are praised for creating higher chances for work-family integration, scholars also consider it a double-edged sword (Beauregard et al., 2020; du Toit Britz, 2022). On one end, scholars support that working mothers enjoyed the advantage of being home and could spend more time with family and socialise with neighbours. At the same time, being home meant an increased expectation to assist with day-to-day household duties (Adams et al., 2022; Beauregard et al., 2020; du Toit Britz, 2022). Chung (2022) went as far as referring to remote work as the flexibility paradox where flexible work tends to result to more invisible and unpaid labour for mothers instead of creating real balance in the interface. Similar outcomes were reported in the literature review section by several researchers (Biyela, 2023; Greenhaus et al., 1985; Hunt et al., 2019; Lemos et al, 2021; Zulaifah, 2024). Cohesion in work and family life becomes less noticeable when demands exceed resources available to balance the work-family interface (Marôco et al. 2022). Hence, while the single mothers in this study showed remarkable initiative, they were still doing more often absorbing domestic duties and emotional labour. As a result, the blurring of work and family domains continued to increase. This study contributes to broader discourse in work-family research by highlighting the impact of being a single mother working from home during COVID-19 in the absence of a partner. The findings expand on the negative spillover occurring on both ends of the interface due to not having adequate resources to mediate the work-family interface in the home context.

According to Burr (2015) reality is derived from multiple social processes including ones surroundings. As such, the meaning of time was not interpreted only from the number of hours worked. The concept of time was co-created by how well the single mothers could negotiate work demands, family expectations, and social norms about motherhood and work productivity in the home setting. Similar to the participant's view, Radcliffe et al. (2022) suggests that individuals have a way of attaching certain meanings through identity work, a concept used to define the construction and negotiation of the self-concept. This could be anything from personal, socioeconomic and cultural beliefs around a specific role which makes it important along with its responsibilities in the individuals life (Radcliffe et al., 2022). These beliefs are used to justify the enactment of said roles and are usually positively aligned to yield benefits in the interface whilst the opposite outcome occurs when resources are depleted as seen in participants narratives (Radcliffe et al., 2022).

Overall, despite increased flexibility, time management issues made performing multiple roles such as being a worker, mother, caregiver, homemaker and a community member more complicated when roles converged in one setting, the home.

4.5.5. Subtheme 5: Balancing Childcare and Remote Work

Balancing Childcare and Remote Work is a subtheme that shared insight into the issue of childcare that the single mothers experienced when working in the home. Most participants expressed experiencing challenges regarding adjusting to remote working in the home for them and their children. This is pointed out in excerpts from Participants below:

> "*I need to be a mother that is here because I don't have a way of making this six-year-old understand that the mother is not available right now. That is not a language they understand because what do you mean you're not available, I can see you, you here*." (Participant 2).

> "*After work, my attention goes straight to spending time with him. So, bringing my work home and him constantly seeing me but not giving him that, that was also a hassle. Me struggling to stay focused on work while he was around, constantly trying to get my attention. So, it was a struggle for him and a struggle for me in some sense.*" (Participant 3).

> "*Obviously being a single mother, it does take more effort because your kid wants you constantly and he was of a small age that time. It was a demand of having me there all the time.*" (Participant 4).

In contrast, one participant a 51-year-old single mother with a 29-year-old son reported having no responsibilities pertaining to her son and household chores. When asked if she had any responsibilities to take care of in the home she stated:

> "*No, I was lucky in that my son is an adult. He was married by that time. So whatever responsibilities I'd had my son, and my daughter-in-law basically took over. In fact, they didn't even want to let me do like the shopping and stuff like that because of my age*." (Participant 6).

It's been noted by researchers that childrearing is the most concerning responsibility out of both work and family responsibilities for employed individuals (Casale et al., 2021; Sandy et al., 2022). While some researchers observed childcare to be shared between mothers and fathers during COVID-19, working women still took the bulk of the responsibilities similar to

the experiences of the single mothers in this study (Andrew et al., 2020; Boll et al., 2024; Mangiavacchi et al., 2021). According to Uddin (2021) being visible at home created expectations for maternal availability during the pandemic and usually clashed with work-related responsibilities similar to the challenges expressed by the single mothers in this research. Adisa et al. (2020) shared similar conclusions among partnered working women and Biyela (2023) indicated the same for some working mothers amongst a mixed sample of single and partnered working mothers during COVID-19.

As highlighted in the literature review, time constraints, job demands, and caregiving responsibilities were primary contributors to work-family conflict that resulted in strain-based and time-based conflict (Greenhaus et al., 1985; Luhr et al., 2022; Martucci, 2021; Sandy et al., 2022; Vitoria et al., 2022; Zulaifah, 2024). The findings of this study reflect the same outcome and is consistent with research by Adisa et al. (2021) and Martucci (2021), suggesting that parents who have younger children experienced higher levels of work-family conflict compared to working women who did not. The study contributes to the discussion in showing that single mothers working remotely from home during the pandemic at CCISA experienced similar challenges observed in recent literature pertaining to work-family research. Thus, necessitating a need for transformative change around childcare and household duties especially for single working mothers.

Social constructionism emphasizes that knowledge is cocreated through sociocultural interactions that are not objective but rather subjective using language (Burr, 2021). It is argued that the expectation for the single mothers to be constantly available was rooted in the co-construction of meaning by society attached to the roles of parent and worker before the pandemic. The intersection of work and family responsibilities in the home in COVID-19 therefore created confusion for the young children who still understood the home as having access to their mothers. As such, children were unable to comprehend the separation of work and family boundaries in the home setting making it challenging to create balance in the interface (Biyela, 2023).

Overall, balancing childcare while working from home was perceived as a distracting challenge for many of the single mothers.

4.5.6. Subtheme 6: Closure of Schools

Another concern expressed by many participants was the closure of daycare and preschool services during the pandemic. Restricted access to these structures was associated with more tasks regarding their children's education as seen in participant's detailed responses below:

> "*Before the pandemic, my son was in a creche. He started attending when he was about a year old. In the mornings, if I worked a certain shift, I would drop him off, or my father would. In the afternoons, he would either stay for aftercare, or we would arrange for my father to fetch him. When the pandemic hit it was a major adjustment. Especially because he had been in an environment where he was getting proper early childhood education. At his creche, they taught him new things every day. My parents are wonderful, but they weren't trained educators. I had to make extra effort after work to make sure he was still learning. I couldn't expect my parents to do everything. So, after working all day, I had to take care of him, bathe him, and make sure he was still developing and learning new things*." (Participant 1).

> "*I couldn't send my child anywhere, so it was just about figuring out how to keep her entertained but also engaged. She still had some schoolwork, so I had to fill up that time. But there wasn't a structured schedule because I was basically suddenly a homeschool mom which was quite an adjustment*. (Participant 5).

Researchers such as Luhr, (2021), Martucci (2021), Sandy et al. (2022) and Vitoria et al. (2022) support the finding that parents struggled to keep up with remote work and children's education during COVID-19 due to the closure of external services like babysitters and school. The findings also align with those of Haffejee et al. (2024) who explored the impact of school closures in a sample of 64 family members consisting of children and their parents. Their study indicates that home-based learning without the teacher's support created additional pressure on families (Haffejee et al., 2024). Qualitative research exploring the impact of COVID-19 in Turkey for preschool education among a group of 30 parents and 25 preschool teachers drew similar conclusions to the findings of this study (Yıldırım, 2021). Fewer resources, confidence to teach, communication issues, concentration and laziness were among the challenges that parents reported with regards to managing their children's preschool education (Yıldırım, 2021). Moreover, statistical data from StatsSA (as cited in Haffejee et al., 2024) noted a progressive percentage of children that did not go to school, almost 11% of children under the age of 5 years old in 2019 and about 38% in 2020 and a

drop to 19% by 2021. Collectively, literature and statistics further contextualise the impact of lockdown restrictions on parental roles and work demands during COVID-19 similar to the findings of this research.

Social constructionism suggests that reality does not remain fixed (Butowski et al., 2021). Reality changes as social and cultural contexts influence how people perceive and interpret reality (Butowski et al., 2021). The same applies with the roles of motherhood, worker and teacher. With the closure of schools and daycare options, these roles did not remain fixed to being performed separately by different individuals. The single mothers had to take on the role of an educator, caregiver and worker simultaneously. This resulted to more tasks on top of paid work, contributing to time-based conflict in the interface.

To summarise, the closure of schools resulted in experiencing unpaid labour for the single mothers in the absence of external services previously used before the pandemic.

4.5.7. Subtheme 7: The Psychological Impact of Remote Work in COVID-19

Subtheme seven offers insight into some of the mental health issues experienced by participants that were associated with being a working single mother mediating the work-family interface during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most participants expressed experiencing feelings of stress, burnout, anxiety, isolation, uncertainty and stagnant career-wise noted in excerpts below:

> "*I was constantly overtired because I tried to do everything at one time. I went from working straight to cooking, to cleaning, to getting the kids in bed, to getting up early, and there was never time to relax. It was overwhelming*." (Participant 3).
>
> "*I had COVID-19 twice. When I did get sick, my worry was what's gonna happen to my family. How are they gonna cope? Was I gonna die? It was very emotionally, a very scary time, very draining time*" she also shared "*I think what really stood out for me was the people buying out of fear, literally stocking up on a whole lot of stuff. And then when we ended up going into the shops some of the stuff was sold out*." (Participant 6).
>
> "*I was not on medical aid, and it wasn't something offered to me. So, then the fear of COVID-19 was real because you're just like if either of us were to get sick, what am I going to do. I don't have like a third person helping me and I don't have elsewhere*

where there's another income, I'm coming into so there were those two fears." (Participant 5).

"*Career wise, it made me feel stagnant. Like it was the same thing I did every single day. I just felt stuck at one spot*." (Participant 1).

Similar to experiences mentioned by the participants, research indicates that workers in roles that are typically structured, monitored, and customer-facing tend to struggle to meet professional expectations while tending to the immediate needs of their children, resulting in high levels of stress, burnout, and emotional fatigue (Power, 2020; Craig & Churchill, 2021). The fear around the impact of COVID-19 for workers and their families has been covered by many scholars supporting that remote work in COVID-19 years was used as a protective measure against contracting the virus, continuing work practices, and enhancing flexibility (Adams et al. 2022; Bernhardt et al., 2022; Brown, 2022; Chinyamurindi, 2022; Martucci, 2021; Wakai *et al*., 2023, Vitoria *et al.,* 2022). The participants' account also reinforce the findings from Curl et al. (2021), who argued that low-income women tend to experience greater health risks and fewer opportunities due to systemic barriers and a lack of access to developmental resources. While research from Sandy et al. (2022) noted that extreme exhaustion caused by having many responsibilities may contribute to self-harm or suicidal ideation, this was not reported by the participants in the study. The study adds value to the discussion, providing an exclusive focus on the psychological impact of navigating the work-family interface as understood by single mothers within the South African context during COVID-19.

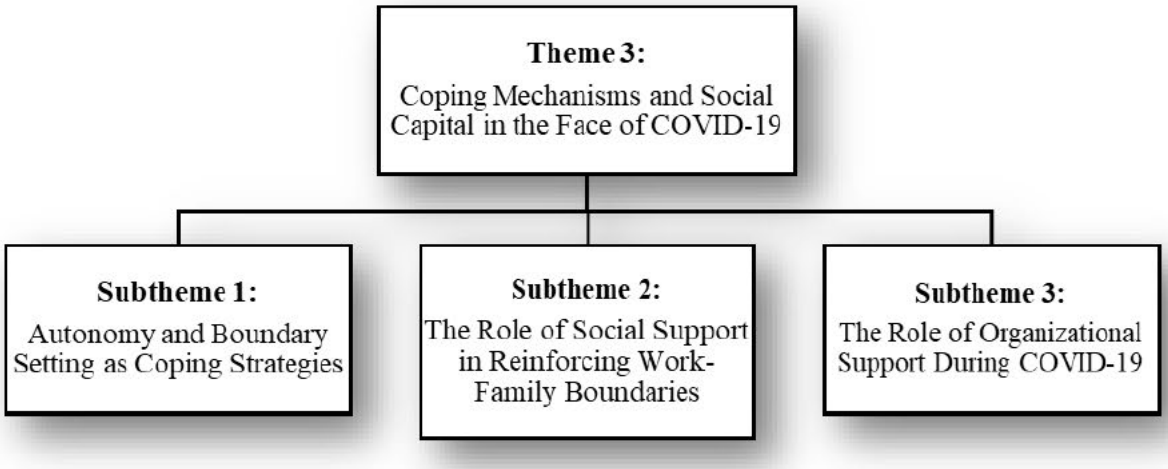
In summary, COVID-19 and working remotely from home contributed to a number of healthcare, career, and psychological issues.

4.6. Theme 3: Coping Mechanisms and Social Capital in the Face of COVID-19

Earlier themes and discussions focused on the single mothers experiences regarded as advantages and disadvantages of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with the study's objective to identifying and understanding the measures that single mothers took in order to mediate the work-family interface, this theme explored the various coping strategies used by single mothers as they navigated the demands of remote work and family life. Participants reported the use of agency, familial relationships, community networks, and perceived organizational support to manage the blurred boundaries of work and family life in

the home during the pandemic. The subthemes that follow expand on this. Figure 4.3 below presents a visual look of theme three and its subthemes.

Figure 4.3: Coping Mechanisms and Social Capital in the Face of COVID-19



4.6.1. Subtheme 1: Autonomy and Boundary Setting

Autonomy and Boundary Setting is a subtheme that explored the mental and structural coping strategies that participants used during COVID-19. Many participants emphasised the use of time scheduling, creating an office space and selfcare techniques to cope in response to time management, environmental and boundary issues. The following excerpts highlight the boundaries utilized:

> "*I didn't constantly check my messages. I wasn't always available for managers. I set that boundary, unless it was during my shift I wasn't responding. The same with my son and with my family.*" (Participant 3)

> "*Preparing food and making sure that my son is up and bathed. Those things I would prepare before I started working and close the door so that they could also see that I am working so that nobody is coming in and out or disturbing me during that time.*" (Participant 7).

> "*I would step out into the courtyard and find new exercises to do. I also set aside time to journal, spend time alone, and listen to music. I also made sure to set up healthy sleeping and eating patterns.*" (Participant 5).

"*Having a kid was very draining financially and everything just spiked up. Budgeting was rather important* (Participants 4).

These findings are supported by recent studies in work-family research. The participants establishment of boundaries during COVID-19 indicates the use of segmentation, a coping strategy in which individuals separate work and family domains to reduce interference and stress (Luhr et al., 2021; Zulaifah, 2024). Similarly, Allen et al. (2021) found similar results suggesting that remote workers who established physical and temporal boundaries tended to experience improved work-life balance in remote settings. The single mothers approach to time management, budgeting and boundary setting resonates with the work of Huang et al. (2019), who emphasised that autonomy and self-directed behaviour can enhance motivation and balance when working remotely from home. Marôco et al. (2022) echoed similar findings, stating that thinking positively, having initiative, and creating boundaries can positively influence change in how the interplay of work and family domains is perceived.

However, scholars like Allen et al. (2023) dispute that boundary setting alone can reduce role conflict between work and family responsibilities. They assert that when boundaries are backed by real respect for those boundaries, work-family conflict is reduced while work-family enrichment is enhanced. For example, segmentation works best when boundaries are not regularly violated (Ebrahimi, 2021). This is something not all the single mothers in the study experienced consistently due to working in the home amongst family members.

In summary, many participants used agency in different ways to construct new forms of order from within the home.

4.6.2. Subtheme 2: The Role of Social Support in Reinforcing Work-Family Boundaries

This subtheme explored the type of social support that participants had in their home and environment during the pandemic. Many of the participants reported that they sought the assistance of family members and neighbours for help as reflected by their statements below:

"*My parents who lived with me looked after him while I worked my shifts especially on the night shift. They would be awake or if he woke up, they would be there for him.*" (Participant 1).

"*I would give my list of groceries, and they would buy them for me and drop them off at my place which was such a stress reliever. My mom was able to come and stay with me once restrictions were lifted. That definitely helped because I was able to have*

someone who could supervise, help with household duties, and just be another adult in the house." (Participant 5).

"*As a single mother I had to ask my family or the neighbours sometimes. My neighbours has a daughter which is in a similar age. So they would go for games while I am still working...I was able to focus with no noise, no distractions and just do my work.*" (Participant 2).

"*I know when COVID just started, and the entirety of the stores were empty. But our area, they weren't as bad because whoever was getting bread, they'd come through, and they would give us loaves of bread as well. Flour was running out like crazy as well. So, whatever we had as neighbours we would share.*" (Participant 4).

According to Putri et al. (2024) having self-compassion means that an individual is able to unconditionally accept their imperfections in the face of adversity. As seen in the single mothers ability to seek assistance, it is a way to positively respond to difficult times without self-condemnation. It highlights the importance of acknowledging one's own limitations in order to keep a healthier work-family balance and avoid burnout (Putri et al., 2024). Previous research supports that family and neighbours are forms of social support systems and family happens to be the most commonly used (Greenhaus et al., 1985; Adisa et al., 2021; Pileri et al., 2024; Zulaifah, 2024). By taking care of the children, cleaning and other non-work activities, grandparents played a big role in alleviating stress, anxiety, burnout and ultimately strain-based conflict similar to other studies outlined in chapter 2 (Luhr, 2021; Pileri et al., 2024; Zulaifah, 2024). From the lens of social constructionism, meaning creation is socially agreed upon from members of a community through interactions (Burr, 2015; Butowski et al., 2021). For the single mothers, support was therefore created and leveraged through already existing relationships within their communities to assist with challenges around childcare and household duties when external resources became unavailable due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In summary, social capital emerged as a significant determinant in how participants managed the work-family interface under remote and uncertain conditions due to COVID-19 restrictions.

4.6.3. Subtheme 3: The Role of Organisational Support During COVID-19

The Role of Organisational Support During COVID-19 is a subtheme that brought about participants own perception regarding the organisations support in mediating the transition

from the Durban office buildings into working remotely from home. Majority of the participants expressed mixed feelings about the support they received from the organisation. For example, participants acknowledged that they received essential resources such as laptops, routers, and headsets necessary to work virtually as expressed in their excerpts:

> "*Equipment was all provided by the company...They would give us courses to complete in the sense of Excel then receive certifications*." (Participant 4).

> "*I live in Phoenix, so we had to rely on the routers that the company provided us with*." (Participant 6).

On the other side of things, many of the participants expressed challenges with the physical absence of managers, supervisors and ITC staff when working remotely from home noted in statements below:

> "*The challenge I had was not having a team leader with me. We had to communicate on Teams or WhatsApp, but if the team leader didn't respond, the customer had to wait which affected my quality scores.*" (Participant 1).

> "*Your manager is also at home. Generally, they're there on the floor monitoring you observing any problems...You just walk up to them and say this is the issue that I'm facing. However, at home you need to call, you need to send out multiple emails, and everything had to be documented. I feel like that was where the delay occurred.*" (Participant 4).

> "*When you work from home you don't have immediate access to IT support or your supervisor. I had to wait for assistance and sometimes I didn't have the luxury of time.*" (Participant 5).

The findings of the study are similar to that of Lunyungu (2025) and Wang et al. (2021) who both explored the role of support systems and structural conditions in determining the work-family interface during the pandemic. Wang et al. (2021) supports that a combination of organisational, supervisor, and coworker support alongside flexible work schedules can alleviate work-family conflict and improve employees performance and emotional wellbeing. In contrast, Lunyungu (2025) found that unsupportive leadership and institutional limitations result in a restricted ability for employees to share tasks, leave opportunities and contributed to unstable routines. Similarly, Marôco et al. (2022) observed that managers who actively supervise their workers by increasing flexibility, reducing workload and providing work task

clarity lessened the interference of work demands in family life. These findings collectively suggest that organisational supportive structures have a critical role on mediating the effects of remote work on employee's wellbeing, an experience reported by many of the participants in the current study.

The findings are also reminiscent of what Petitta et al. (2023) in their quantitative study examining the effects of psychological cynicism on employees, coined cognitive failures and workplace disconnectedness. They describe the latter as feelings of disconnection and isolation experienced by employees with regards to their place of work and the former as the disruption of cognitive functions that are responsible for processing and executing work tasks (Petitta et al., 2023). The sudden transition to working from home created similar outcomes for the participants and removed their perceived support from the organisation. Carillo et al. (2021) supports the findings that adjusting to remote working becomes difficult when there is no contact or casual talks and feedback among workers, managers and the organisation. When working from home van Rheede (2023) states that support mechanisms must be proactively re-established by employers to compensate for not being physically present. The findings of this study confirm that the organisations readiness to support working remotely is important to mediating the work-family interface especially when working from home similar to recent research highlighted in the literature review (Bai et al., 2021; Kossek et al., 2023; Ofosu-Ampong et al., 2022).

Majority of the participants expressed concerns pertaining to the lack of a physical presence of managers and supervisors in the home since every worker worked from the comfort of their home. As a result, one can infer that communication breakdowns, delayed responses, and the absence of real-time feedback from managers, and supervisors were among the noted barriers to effective performance that contributed to a decline in their work. From the lens of social constructionism, the meaning created around the organisations support was compared to the support previously experienced when working in the traditional office whereby employers and employees shared the same physical environment and could provide immediate assistance in case of urgency and uncertainty.

Overall, equipment used to facilitate virtual work was provided by the organisation. And perceptions of supervisor and manager support impacted negatively on work performance and work-family balance.

4.7. Conclusion

The chapter concludes with a focus on the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely. While global literature often focused on dual-parent households and higher-income earners, this research highlighted how single mothers working remotely from home as call centre consultants in Durban, South Africa adapted and made sense of their dual roles during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the lens of social constructionism, socioeconomic and gendered contexts of the single mothers' background influenced the work-family dynamics noted in the study. Participants viewed work as essential for the financial wellbeing of the family and family remained central to their emotional wellbeing. Participants benefited from flexible work schedules and not travelling to work. Challenges experienced included time management, childcare responsibilities, inter role conflict, noise disturbances, workspace limitations, electricity outages and internet issues as well as the psychological impact of working remotely from home. Agency was identified as an internal resource used by the single mothers to cope with the stress and challenges. Parents, siblings and neighbours were used to enforce new boundaries that were established by the single mothers to mediate the work-family interface. And the role of the organisation in providing equipment used to work remotely was often overlooked by lowered perceptions of support on the managerial and supervisory levels.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

Chapter Five is the final chapter of this dissertation. It provides the reader with an overview of the findings discussed in the previous chapter. These include the benefits and challenges of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, the means of coping and support used to mediate the work-family interface. The chapter also outlines the limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with a conclusion for this research enquiry.

5.2. Summary of Findings

The study aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers working from home at CCISA in Durban, South Africa. Grounded in the theoretical foundations of social constructionism, the study explored four research questions: (1) What does work, and family mean for single mothers working from home? (2) How do single mothers narrate their experiences about working from home and mediate the demands on paid work and their family responsibilities? (3) What resources serve as social capital for single mothers working from home? (4) What coping mechanisms are employed to mediate between remote work and other non-work and family responsibilities? Because the study focused on depth of understanding and context using a qualitative approach, thematic analysis was used to organise, analyse and interpret the data collected with attention to how meaning was jointly constructed from participants' own voice, language and perspective.

Social constructionism was useful in guiding the exploration of how lived accounts of the work-family interface in the pandemic were created when working from home. Discourse around single mothers' experiences, the coping strategies and social capital used showcased how the single mothers co-constructed and mediated the work-family interface. The process revealed a shared reality bound by their place of employment, working from home and socioeconomic and gendered expectations of the work-family interface. From their stories three themes were identified namely: (1) The *Work Family Interface and Its Complexities* which represented the redefining of the work-family interface under lockdown restrictions in which flexibility became a mediating factor (2) *Challenges Associated With Remote Work* presented the different struggles that single mothers experienced when working remotely from home and (3) *Coping Mechanisms And Social Capital in the Face of COVID-19*

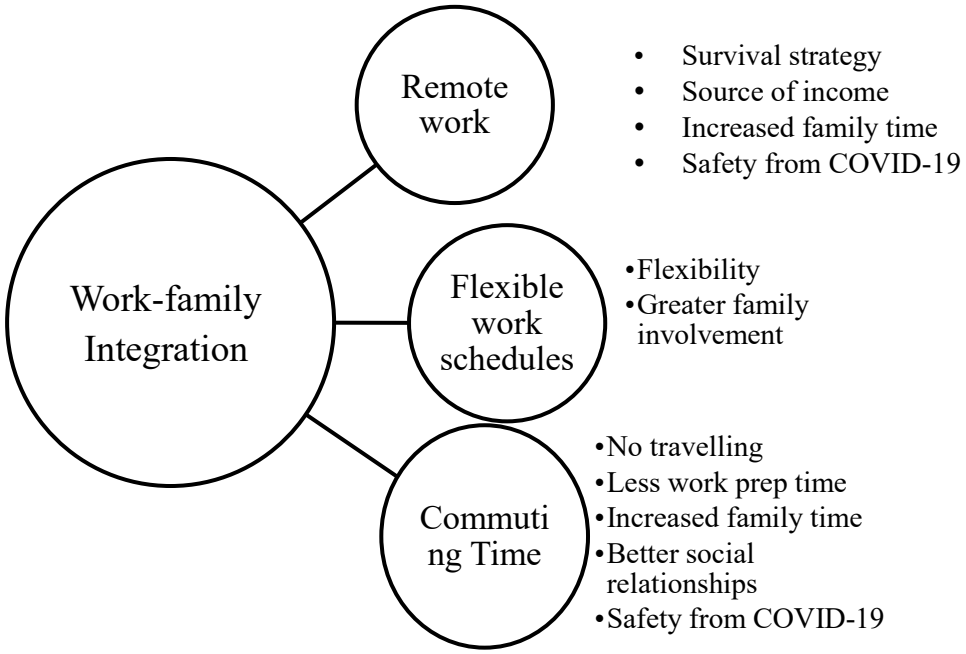
highlighted new established work and family boundaries as well as social capital used in the home setting. A summary of the study's findings is provided in the discussion below.

5.3. Summary of Thematic Analysis

5.3.1. The Work-Family Interface and Its Complexities

The onset of COVID-19 marked a significant change in working arrangements all over the world. It compelled organisations and employees to rapidly adapt to remote work (Vitoria et al., 2022). Similar to other studies outlined throughout this dissertation, the work-family interface was perceived as interconnected and not separate to each other. This became more evident in the context of remote work where work and family responsibilities coexisted in one environment. Prior to the pandemic these domains were treated and performed separately. The sudden lockdown restrictions aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 meant that these domains converged into the home reconstructing the meaning of work as having the ability to work digitally from home. A visual summary of *The Work-Family Interface and Its Complexities* is presented in Diagram 5.1 below.

Diagram 5.1: Work-Family Integration



Many of the single mothers expressed preference for remote work from a few angles. Majority of the participants experienced salary reductions during the pandemic. This created a financial concern where money was needed to buy basic needs for survival in an economy

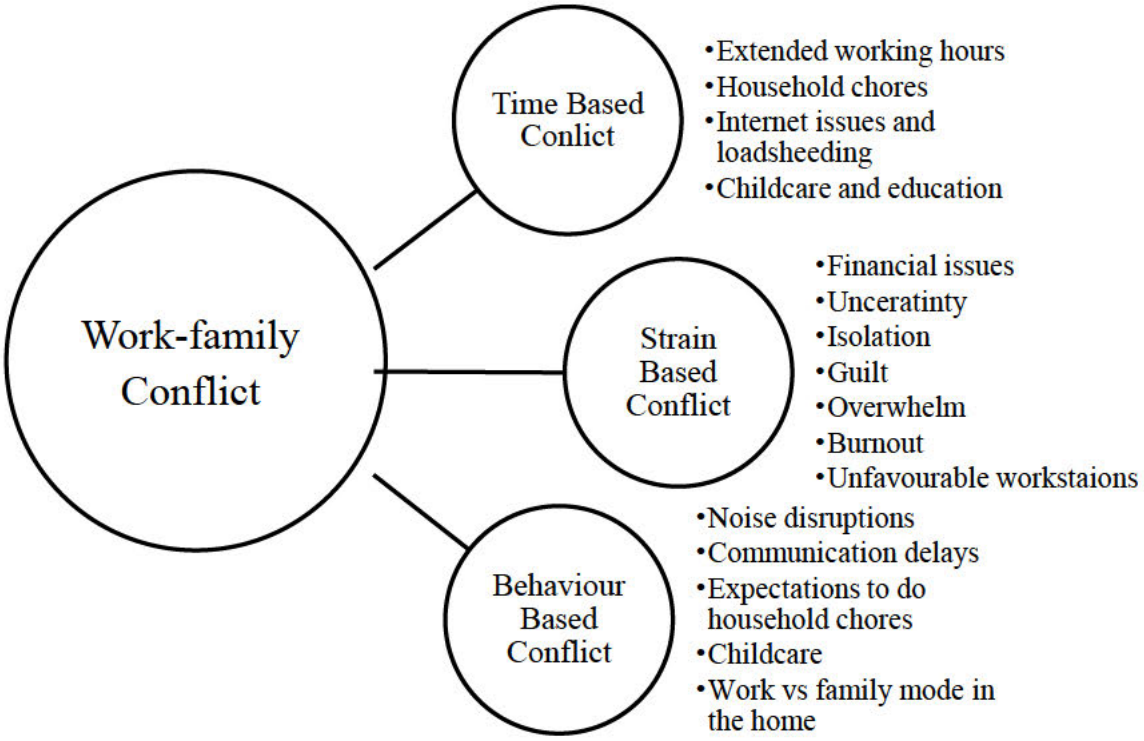
whereby prices had increased. The research found that family members did occasionally assist the single mothers financially and emotionally. However, as sole parents and breadwinners in COVID-19, remote work was a welcomed option for which extra work hours were used as a financial strategy to earn money to spend on the family domain. The study found that the meaning assigned to the work domain was derived from its ability to create functionality in the home through the income earned by the single mothers. Contrary to Beauregard et al. (2020) who indicated that women were unlikely to receive flexible work arrangements, this study showed that single mothers experienced increased flexibility via remote working, flexible work schedules and not commuting. These experiences were constructed as a gain though the actual saved time and money previously spent from travelling relied on how the single mothers narrated and used it. Working remotely also reduced the potential of contracting COVID-19 and spreading it to family members.

Participants could also manoeuvre around alternating work schedules and off days more seamlessly and maximise time with their children as they were already at home. Together, these experiences reduced feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, overwhelm and stress. Most of the time gained was used with family members and to socialise with neighbours. These experiences represent a positive spillover from the work domain into the family domain. Flexibility was found to be more of a mediating factor for the family domain than it was for the work domain. Though allocating time to different roles was challenging due to working extra hours to earn more money. Overall, working remotely from home during the pandemic resulted in work-family enrichment when compared to working at the office and facilitated a better balance and integration of domains and responsibilities in the interface.

5.3.2. Challenges Associated with Remote Work

Several factors were identified as placing the single mothers at a heightened risk of experiencing work-family conflict. A visual summary of the *Challenges Associated with Remote Work* is presented in Diagram 5.2.

Diagram 5.2: Work-family Conflict



Working remotely from home was understood as a new experience for the single mothers. The joint environment, hosting both family and work responsibilities resulted in higher family-to-work conflict compared to having separate locations to facilitate duties of the interface. As a result, boundaries were blurred, and role ambiguity was experienced. Contextual factors like loadshedding imposed by the South African government impaired reception, made it difficult for the participants to work in virtual spaces and reduced team morale. Compounding on this issue is that none of the single mothers had built-in work offices in the home. Participants reported that family members would walk in and out of the bedrooms and living space used as workstations. This stemmed from challenges relating to sharing bedrooms and the house with young children and family to not affording to build a home office. As a result, increased chances of experiencing interruptions and distractions from conducting work were noted by the single mothers.

The autonomy to choose one's own work schedule and time saved from not travelling to work and back home was not enough to accommodate the time the single mothers required to adequately perform multiple roles they had. Role overload was a constant concern among participants. For example, work-family conflict was observed more with participants who had a young child compared to one single mother who had an adult son. Being a single mother to

an older child significantly reduced childcare responsibilities that are typically given to younger children as well as household chores. The same single mother did not share her bedroom with anyone which made it easier to adapt the bedroom to a workstation in comparison to single mothers who had younger children. These challenges were more heightened for one participant who struggled with enforcing boundaries because of living alone with her daughter compared to participants who delegated household chores, childcare and non-work responsibilities to family members who already lived with them from the onset of COVID-19.

Having family present in the home was experienced as a double-edged sword by the single mothers. The single mothers experienced increased interpersonal relationships, however, being physically present created expectations from family members, mostly children, to be constantly available for maternal and household responsibilities. This included juggling childcare with other competing demands like washing dishes and cleaning, cooking, laundry, children's education and entertainment. While financial constraints during the pandemic provided motivation to work to earn money, it also increased chances of working overtime and reducing the flexibility obtained from flexible work schedules and not travelling to work along with the benefits it came with. Furthermore, COVID-19 restricted access to external resources such as daycare resulting in increased childcare responsibilities. Factors such as the age of children, hours worked, and access to alternative childcare and closure of schools influenced the outcome of single mothers mental status, ability to adjust and perform multiple roles in the home setting. Time-based conflict commonly occurred due to role overload and little resources being available to cope with the pressure of trying to balance the work-family interface.

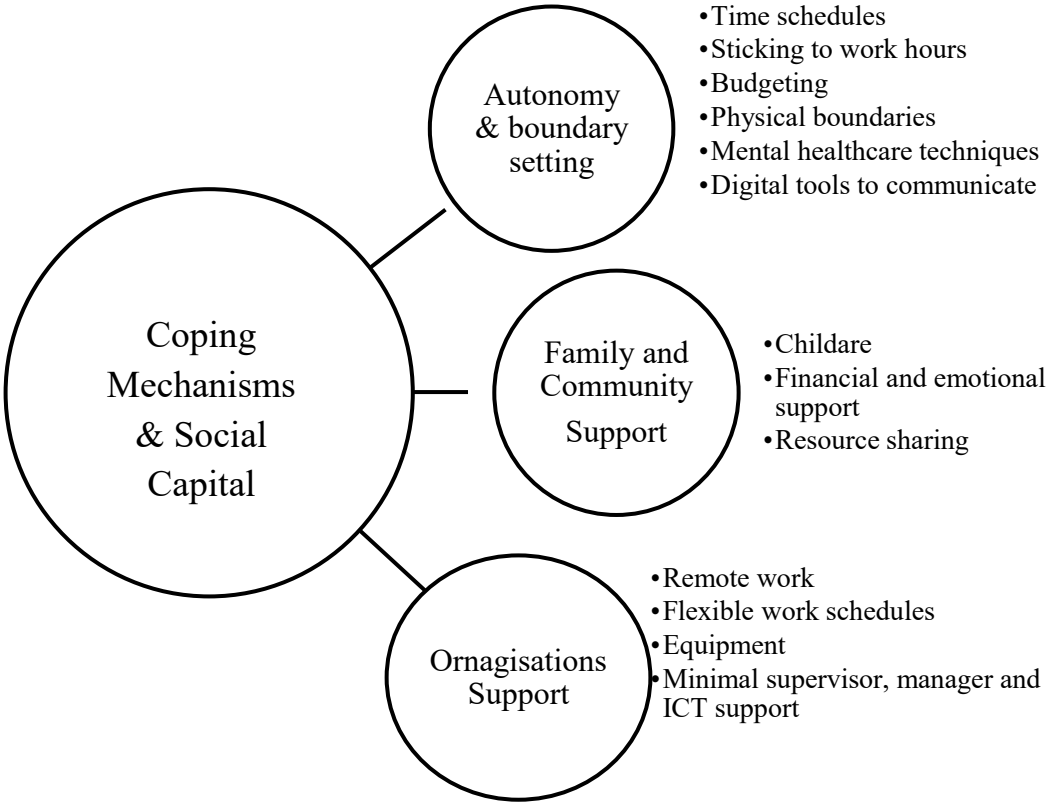
Feelings of uncertainty, stress, anxiety, overwhelm, burnout, frustration, guilt, isolation, emotional and physical fatigue were common psychological risk factors that resulted in poor work-facilitation. As a result, concentration was impaired, and work productivity was affected negatively. These represented the most reported strain-based conflict expressed by the single mothers and tended to increase with more childcare duties, household chores and financial issues. All these factors became daily barriers affecting the livelihood and ability to balance work and family responsibilities in one way or the other. Negative spillover was seen throughout the negotiation of these responsibilities with fewer resources available internally to successfully overcome these barriers. These factors alone, increased work-family conflict and taken together they created a domino effect against the successful mediation of work and

family domains in the home context of working remotely. The challenges were mostly recognised by participants early on into the national lockdown in South Africa and started to ease as lockdown restrictions were lessened.

5.3.3. Coping Mechanisms and Social Capital in the Face of COVID-19

The coping mechanisms and social capital that single mothers had access to during the pandemic were identified. Diagram 5.3 below shows a visual summary of the key findings.

Diagram 5.3: Coping Mechanisms and Social Capital



The participants were given the liberty to choose to work fully remote from home during the early phases of the pandemic. From the narratives shared, they were provided with equipment such as laptops, routers, and headsets to be able to conduct work digitally from home. Participants also highlighted the use of WhatsApp groups to strengthen connections, share updates and lessen isolation and detachment from the workplace and co-workers although sometimes experienced as being ineffective due to the fast-paced nature of their jobs, loadshedding issues and not having team members physically present. Learning opportunities in the form of Excel training and receiving certification were also highlighted.

The organisation also allowed for the single mothers to choose their own schedules to help with the integration of work and family domains in the home. However, from the single mothers point of view, the organisation did not factor in the home and its ability to facilitate work tasks in terms of structural and contextual factors reported. Working in a call centre environment where collaboration and rapid managerial, supervisor and ITC support are vital, the abrupt shift to remote work took away formal and informal sources of workplace support despite being provided with the equipment to conduct work virtually in the home. Participants made sense of an office environment as an area whereby managers, supervisors and ITC support were readily available to provide guidance and assistance whereas the completion of work tasks in the home setting was perceived negatively, a space requiring them to solve problems on their own. Without co-workers who are associated with working in teams and meeting daily targets meant that participants would be delayed in being able to do their jobs. These factors were associated with poor work productivity and quality scores.

Although participants had the assistance of family members and neighbours, the assistance received was dependent on whether the single mothers could reduce the feelings of guilt and expectations of being a superwoman in order to ask for help especially concerning childcare whilst working overtime. All the single mothers had one child and there were no significant differences between the age of the single mothers and the coping strategies they used. Mental healthcare tips such as the psychological and physical separation of work and family time through closing bedroom doors, time schedules, journaling, exercise, healthy eating habits and budgeting were some of the boundary management techniques used to cope on an individual level. Participants who mimicked work boundaries early into the transition to remote work were able to experience increased work-family balance.

Social capital was seen as a crucial player in facilitating work-family integration. Grandparents were commonly mentioned as caregivers for the children when the single mothers were working. They had the biggest role in reinforcing new boundaries that were created and reduced time, strain and behaviour-based conflict. Other relatives such as siblings as well as neighbours further lessened the burden of taking care of children as well as helping with sharing basic needs like information and grocery runs during a chaotic time in their lives. Overall, family and communal social capital was associated with less work-family conflict when it came to support while perceived support from the organisation pertaining to ITC, supervisors and managers was connected to more work-family conflict although both had a hand in work-family enrichment in their own ways.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

The study represents the researcher's first experience conducting research independently. Hence, the use of thematic analysis and the scope of discussion were guided by the researchers level of exposure to qualitative research methodologies. The research used a qualitative approach and participant selection methods, namely purposive and snowball sampling, which focus on smaller sample sizes. Moreover, the sample size was limited to single mothers from one organisation, CCISA in Durban. As a result, the researcher struggled to find participants who met the selection criteria. The proposed number of participants that the researcher aimed for was 12 and due to recruitment challenges only 7 participants were obtained. The researcher acknowledges that the 7 participants provided valuable data for the study. And although the study was interested in depth of information provided about the topic, the sample size and location restrict the generalisability of the findings. The research findings were also obtained from a predominantly young sample of single mothers whose occupation was call centre consultant positions and were limited to the participants' perceptions as data collection relied on self-reported data via semi-structured interviews. Thus, the results obtained may not accurately represent the experiences of a larger population of single mothers who worked remotely from home during COVID-19 in South Africa.

The use of online platforms such as Teams and Zoom allowed the researcher and participants to save on travelling costs. It also allowed for convenience in rescheduling interviews. It is important to note that using online platforms also meant that some information was not clear and required the researcher to repeat questions. Internet connections caused untimely cut off times during interviews which may have disrupted trail of thought and missing important information from participants. Participants also opted to not show their faces during the recording of interviews. This made it difficult to pick up on nonverbal cues from participants.

5.5. Practical Recommendations

Like many studies before this one, workplace readiness to support remote work was a challenging experience that single mothers experienced with regards to ICT, manager and supervisor support. In this regard, supportive supervision for employees working remotely proved to be an important determinant of effective work in the pandemic. Training managers, supervisors and employees will be useful in providing family and remote supportive behaviours such as understanding and separating family time and work time. Creating a workplace culture and employer sensitivity that recognises struggles of working women like

single mothers when working from home can create awareness on the impact of intersecting roles. This can be detrimental in changing the assumption that flexibility alone is enough to resolve the deeply embedded tensions within the work-family interface. From this, tailored interventions can be developed with regards to childcare responsibilities in the absence of a partner.

Realistic workloads should also be put in place to avoid ‘always available’ expectations that blur work and family boundaries. Workers can continue to use agency to educate family members about remote working and the importance of respecting set boundaries. In addition, organisations can incorporate access to mental health services such as industrial psychologists and counsellors to help employees cope with managing stress, burnout, isolation and work-family conflict. Such interventions could include time and stress management workshops, strategies to enhance boundaries, normalising and developing anxiety coping mechanisms. Family and community members were recognized in the study as the most impactful forms of social capital. Initiatives on a communal level could include opening local childcare services to assist working mothers and lessen the burden of single parents.

The study found remote work to increase greater involvement in family responsibilities and activities for single mothers. Work policies should encourage the use of flexible work-from-home arrangements and subsidised childcare programmes in the future to assist working mothers such as the single mothers in integrating work and family domains to ensure that they do not miss out on either life aspect. This can also assist in retaining working mothers in the workplace. On a governmental level, better safety nets for workers such as single mothers could be developed to mediate financial constraints during difficult times similar to that experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic. This could take the form of targeted relief programmes, subsidies and social grants. Lastly, the effect of loadshedding when working from home on work-facilitation was evident. Organisations interested in providing remote work should aim to provide its employees with backup power sources like Mini UPS (Uninterruptable Power Supply), solar powered lights and power efficient laptops to facilitate a better integration. In this way both employers and employees develop crisis response strategies for future purposes that will align with employee wellbeing and business continuity.

5.6. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could build on the findings of this research either qualitatively, quantitatively or a mixed approach. Focus could be more on a cross-sectional comparison of the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface in different races among a bigger sample of single mothers and other occupations and organisations to capture a broader and more nuanced range of experiences.

The transition to remote work did not affect just the single mothers. It also affected their families and children. Considering that the study explored the perceptions of single mothers, the support detailed in the study is limited to their interpretation of support from family and community members as well as the organisation itself. Further research could extend interest to understanding the impact in more depth from the perspective of all stakeholders involved like the family members, neighbours and organisation who provided support. And the children who may not understand the scope of working from home based on their age especially in the single parent household.

One single mother had an adult child which largely contributed on the findings that single mothers with younger children experienced more time pressure with regards to childcare and household chores when working from home. It would be interesting to see if similar results would be found in research among single parents with an equal representation of young and older children. This suggests a gap for future research interested in the work-family interface in the South African context among a commonly underrepresented sample of single mothers.

Structural and contextual factors such as loadshedding issues, using bedrooms for offices and proximity of work and family domains were some of the factors that created an unfavourable experience of the work-family interface among single mothers in the remote context. Future research could focus on exploring these factors using a larger sample size to better understand the impact it has on remote workers within the South African context. A larger sample could highlight other factors that support or hinder the interaction of work and family domains in the home and highlight recommendations to cope with these challenges.

One single mother lived away from immediate support systems like family while working remotely from home during COVID-19. This resulted in heightened work-family conflict in the form of childcare, household and work duties in comparison to other single mothers who lived with parents, siblings and their children. Future research could extend on this finding by

exploring this aspect in more detail within the South African context using a bigger sample of single mothers to support or dispute this observation.

5.7. Conclusion

The study sought to explore the experiences and perceptions of the work-family interface among single mothers who worked remotely from home during COVID-19 at CCISA in Durban, South Africa. Guided by the principles of social constructionism, the study found that single mothers understood the work-family interface as being interconnected. While remote work offered greater flexibility it also intensified role overload increasing chances of anxiety and burnout. Autonomy, family and community members served as the most effective sources of coping. The findings highlight that to date; socioeconomic and gendered norms continue to influence single mothers' perceptions and experiences of intersecting work and family responsibilities. It indicates fewer transformations within caregiving and household responsibilities despite women's growing participation in the workforce. The findings present a template to advocate for the mental healthcare needs and understanding of the challenges that working women endure in light of infused roles in the home. Institutional leaders, policymakers, academia and stakeholders involved should aim for policies and interventions that incorporate work-family balance by taking into consideration community involvement, employee growth and workplace culture. Practical recommendations were highlighted to guide workplace policies and organisations interested in remote work. The limitations and suggestions for future research were also laid out.

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7. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule



1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What do work and family mean to you?
4. Can you describe your work and family situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. How did working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic influence your work and family?
6. How did you transition to working from home as a single mother during the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. What challenges did you face while transitioning to working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. What measures did you take to balance work and family demands as a single parent during the lockdown?
9. How did working from home during COVID-19 impact you personally and professionally as a single mother?
10. How were your home and community responsibilities influenced by working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?
11. What role did your family and community play in helping you manage challenges associated with being a single mother working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?
12. How did socio-economic factors influence your perceptions and experiences of working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?
13. What challenges prevented you from balancing work and family responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
14. What strategies did you implement to cope with those challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participant: You are invited to take part in a research study that will commence in 2024. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand what the research is about and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

• Part 1 tells you the purpose of this study and what will happen to you if you take part.

• Part 2 gives you more detailed information about the study's conduct. Feel free to ask questions if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

1. **What is the purpose of the study?**

In this study, I will explore the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers working from home at CCI South Africa during COVID-19 in Durban.

2. **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because the research is interested in exploring the impact of single mothers who are Call Centre consultants and worked from home during COVID-19 in Durban, South Africa. You will be asked to participate in a 40-minute interview, which will be recorded and stored for later use with your permission.

3. **Do I have to take part?**

No. It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you do, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign an informed consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

4. **What will happen to me if I withdraw?**

If you decide to withdraw, you will not be penalized in any way.

5. **What will happen to me if I take part?**

Participants who voluntarily participate in the study should expect to be interviewed for 40 minutes. The participant has the right to choose the appropriate time and location for the interview. Data collected from the participants will be kept confidential.

6. **What do I have to do?**

As the participant, you do not have to do anything you do not want to do. As the researcher, I will ask you questions about the research topic. The data collected from you will be kept confidential and anonymous. The participant's name and location will not be disclosed.

7. **What are the other possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

Potential risks include emotional stress resulting from having to confront painful memories and experiences due to the scope of the questions related to the study. There are no further foreseeable dangers associated with the study.

8. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There are no immediate benefits to taking part; however, you will be helping research to understand how the work-family interface impacts single mothers working from home during COVID-19. The results can help inform policies and interventions.

9. **What if there is a problem?**

Any complaint about your treatment during the study or any possible harm you might suffer will be addressed immediately. Please contact the researcher in the first instance. Contact Details: Londeka Zulu (email: 216073364@stu.ukzn.ac.za), Phone (0[redacted]) or contact the supervisor; Ms. Ntombekhaya A. Mtwentula on 031 260 1087, email: mtwentulan@ukzn.ac.za.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent Form

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study. The researcher will answer any questions you may have before you sign this form.

Principal Investigator:

Principal investigator: Ms. Londeka Zulu

Email: 216073364@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Phone no.: [redacted]

Institution: University of KwaZulu Natal

Supervisor

Supervisor's name: Ms. Ntombekhaya A. Mtwentula

Email: [redacted]

Phone no.: 031 260 1087

Study Title:

Exploring the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers working from home at CCI South Africa during COVID-19 in Durban.

What is the purpose of the study?

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers working from home at CCI South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic in Durban.

Procedures:

All participants will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview. The interview will involve a set of open-ended questions and will take approximately 40 minutes to complete. All participants will be interviewed individually and will be conducted face-to-face or using any secure online platform such as Zoom or Teams. The interview will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you. During the interview, you will be asked about your

experiences and perceptions related to balancing work and family responsibilities while working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to capture your responses in detail. The recordings will be transcribed for analysis and permanently deleted after the transcription process to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants is maintained. The transcriptions will be stored securely in the supervisor's office and will be retained for five years before being destroyed.

Potential Risks of Participating:

There are minimal to no physical risks associated with the study. However, emotional stress could be a potential risk and participants are reminded that they are not obligated to answer any questions unless it is voluntary.

Additionally, onsite aid will be provided. The researcher is as an intern counselling psychologist who is trained to recognize signs of distress, how to respond appropriately and will offer immediate support were needed. The researcher will also offer debriefing sessions after each interview to help participants process their emotions. Participants will also be given crisis hotline contact information for mental health resources such as SADAG and Lifeline.

Benefits:

There will not be direct incentives for this study. However, while there may be no direct benefit to you, your participation will contribute to a better understanding of the work-family interface among single mothers during the Covid-19 pandemic. This will broaden and add to the body of research regarding the work-family interface within the South African context. It may also lead to improved support and policies for individuals in similar situations.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential at all times. Your information will be assigned a code number instead of any personally identifying information. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file in the supervisor's office. When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, the list will be permanently destroyed. Your name or any identifying factors will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There will be no penalties for choosing not to participate. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may refuse to answer any of the questions asked. Additionally, you are reminded that you can also withdraw your participation from the study at any time before and during the study.

Audio /Video Recording Consent:

Please indicate your consent for the use of audio/video recording during the interview by checking the box below:

☐ I consent to the audio/video recording of my interview.

☐ I do not consent to the audio/video recording of my interview.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence.

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001, Durban, 4000, KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the research, and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your time, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours Sincerely,

Londeka Zulu

Appendix D: Gatekeeper Letter of Authorisation

CCI
SOUTH AFRICA

The University of KwaZulu-Natal
Howard College Campus
238 Mazisi Kunene Rd,
Glenwood, Durban,
4041

Re: Letter of Authorization to Conduct Research at CCI South Africa

Dear UKZN Research Office

Please note that Ms. Londeka Zulu, a Master of Social Science in Counselling Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus has been granted permission by CCI South Africa to conduct the research project entitled "Exploring the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers working from home at Contact Centre International (CCI) South Africa during Covid-19 in Durban" under the supervision of Ms. Ntombekhaya Mtwentula-Ndlovu.

CCI South Africa acknowledges that it has reviewed the protocol presented by the researcher. CCI South Africa authorizes the research project to proceed, and the research project may be implemented at the facility upon approval from the UKZN Research Office. CCI South Africa has appointed Ms. Naledi Donovel to assist Ms. Londeka Zulu with the recruitment process of participants at the facility upon approval.

If we have any concerns or require additional information, we will contact the researcher/supervisor and/or the UKZN Research Office.

Sincerely,

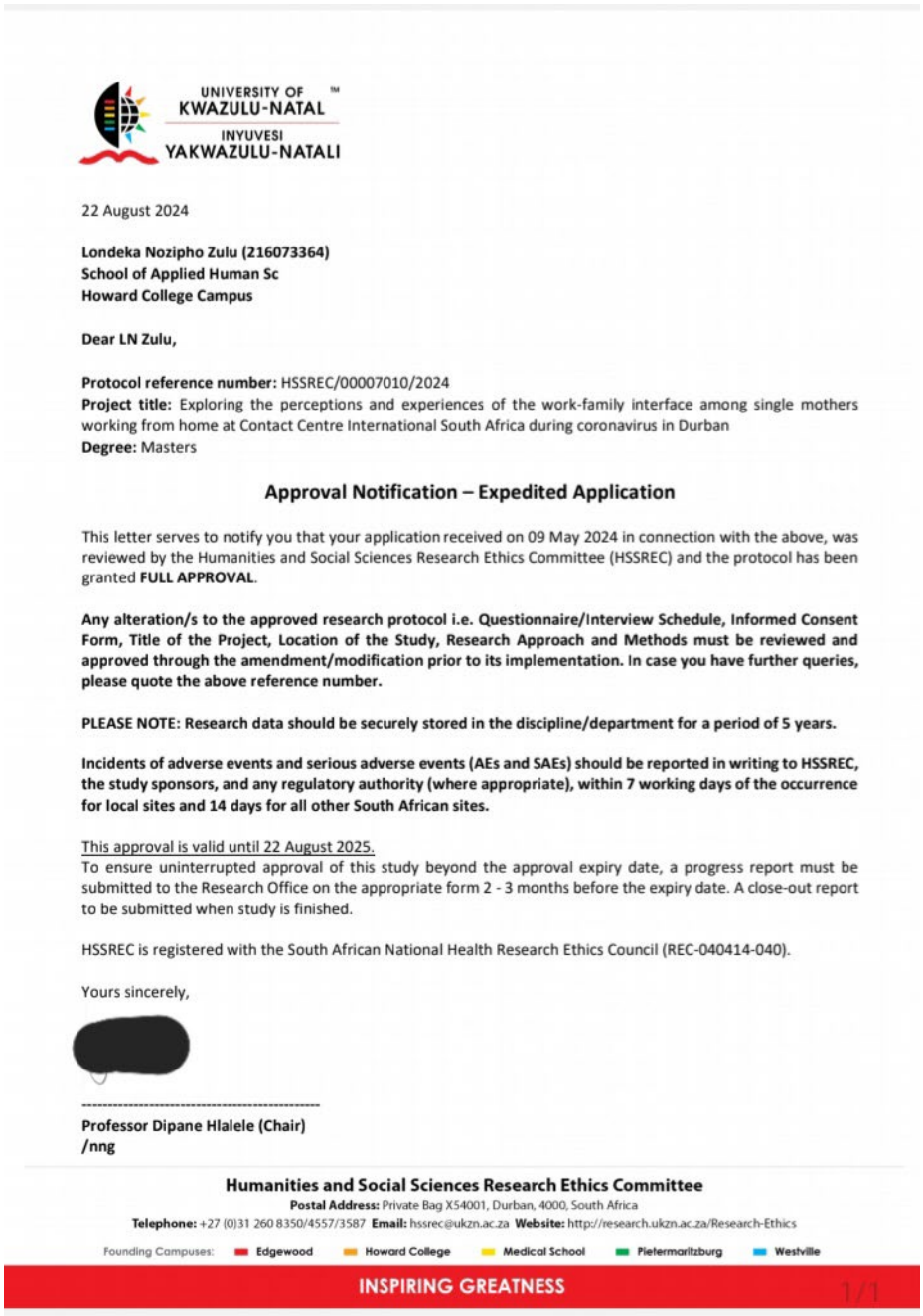
[redacted]
Facility's Authorized Signatory

[redacted]
Date

[redacted] Chief People Officer
Printed Name and Title of Authorized Signatory

CCI South Africa (Pty), 3 High Street, Umhlanga, Durban 4319
T: +27 (0) 31 286 0904 E: enquiries@cci-sa.co.za W: www.cci-sa.co.za
Registration No: 2009/016499/07 VAT No: 4600254793
Directors: Mark Chana | Anusha Ramraj| Peter Andrew

Appendix E: HSSREC/00007010/2024 ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

22 August 2024

Londeka Nozipho Zulu (216073364)
School of Applied Human Sc
Howard College Campus

Dear LN Zulu,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007010/2024
Project title: Exploring the perceptions and experiences of the work-family interface among single mothers working from home at Contact Centre International South Africa during coronavirus in Durban
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 09 May 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 22 August 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)
/nng

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hssrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

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