"Let's Not Pretend It's Fun": A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Increased Time with Children and Mothers' Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Draft: September 30, 2020

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic closed schools and childcare centers across the U.S., forcing many parents to care for children at home. While parents generally enjoy time with children and want more "family time," evidence also suggests that substantial, unanticipated increases in parenting time may negatively impact at least some mothers' well-being. We investigate this possibility using surveys (N=139) and in-depth interviews (N=65) with mothers of young children in Southern Indiana conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (April-May 2020). We find that mothers who have greatly increased the time they spend caring for their children also disproportionately report increased stress, anxiety, and frustrations with their children. Our qualitative data reveal that disruptions in childcare arrangements, particularly when coupled with intensive work pressures and/or intensive parenting norms, exacerbate the negative impact of increased parenting time on mothers' well-being. Meanwhile, other mothers are not experiencing increased parenting time as a substantial source of stress, and some are even experiencing increased parenting time a source of joy in otherwise difficult times. We discuss the implications of these findings for research on parenting and its impact on women's health and labor force participation, as well as for policies to support families during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding and Acknowledgements

This project was supported by the Networks, Complex Systems & Health Project Development Team within the ICTSI NIH/NCRR Grant Number UL1TR001108, as well as through Indiana University's Social Science Research Funding Program and Indiana University's Sociological Research Practicum. We are grateful to Ariel Khalil and Brea Perry for feedback and support in carrying out this project, as well as to Leo Banks, Katie Beardall, Grayson Bodenheimer, Kinsey Bromm, Caroline Brooks, Callie Cleckner, Max Coleman, Cara Davies, Rachel Desmarais, Emily Ekl, E. Frieh, Natalia Fuentes-Rohwer, Melissa Garcia, Elsie Gasaway, Benjamin Hartmann, Amelia Hawbaker, Monica Heilman, Shanita Hunt, Alisha Kirchoff, Yingjian Liang, Krystina Millar, Katie Orick, Shelly Rao, Nora Weber, Tabi Wilbur, and Chavonté Wright for their assistance with data collection and analysis.

INTRODUCTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the U.S., schools and childcare centers abruptly closed, forcing many parents to spend more time caring for their children at home (Carlson, Petts, and Pepin 2020; Collins et al. 2020; Krentz et al. 2020; Landivar et al. 2020). Given prior research on the benefits of "family time" (Flood, Meier, and Musick 2020; Meier et al. 2016; Milkie et al. 2004; Milkie, Nomaguchi, and Schieman 2019; Musick, Meier, and Flood 2016; Offer 2014), we might anticipate that pandemic-related increases in parents' time with children would improve parents' well-being. That said, and given the stress of balancing paid work and parenting in a country with weak family support policies (Christopher 2012; Collins 2019; Damaske 2011; Dow 2019; Gerson 1985; Glass, Simon, and Andersson 2016; Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003) there is reason to suspect that some parents may experience substantial, unanticipated increases in their time with children as detrimental to their well-being.

Using a mixed-methods study involving surveys (N=139) and in-depth interviews (N=65) with Southern Indiana mothers with young children, we examine how increases in parenting time are related to changes in mothers' stress, anxiety, and frustrations with their children. We then identify factors that exacerbate or alleviate the impact of pandemic parenting on mothers' well-being. Specifically, we consider the possibility that disruptions in mothers' childcare arrangements, particularly when coupled with intensive work pressures and/or intensive parenting norms, will intensify the negative impact of increased parenting time.

This study offers important insights for researchers and policymakers. Given that mothers' stress, anxieties, and frustrations have consequences not only for their own health (Pearlin et al. 2005; Read and Gorman 2010) but also for their children's health, relationships, behavior, and school outcomes (Augustine and Crosnoe 2010; Morgan, Shaw, and Forbes 2014; Turney 2011, 2012), it is critical to understand how substantial, unanticipated increases in parenting time are influencing mothers' well-being. By examining these processes, this study has the potential to inform policy interventions aimed at alleviating mothers' stress, anxiety, and frustrations with their children and better supporting families through difficult times.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 and Parents' Time with Children

The COVID-19 upended normal paid work and parenting routines, leading many parents to spend more time with their children (Carlson et al. 2020; Krentz et al. 2020). Some of these changes reflected disruptions in childcare and children's schooling. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 60% of children under age five regularly received childcare (from a preschool, childcare center, home daycare, extended family member, babysitter, or nanny), and schools were the primary source of daytime supervision for children aged five to fourteen. To support families through these disruptions, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act mandated extended family and medical leave for ten weeks (Modestino, Ladge, and Lincoln 2020). And yet, many schools and childcares

remained closed much longer, forcing many parents to find alternative childcare arrangements or assume primary supervision of their children (Garbe et al. 2020; U.S. Department of Labor 2020).

Disruptions in paid work also led many parents to spend more time at home. Following stay-at-home orders, some workers were allowed to work remotely (especially highly educated professionals), while others were left furloughed or unemployed (especially in the retail and service sectors) (Dey et al. 2020; Lyttelton, Zang, and Musick 2020).

These disruptions appear to be taking a heavy toll on parents, especially mothers. Many mothers are reducing their paid work hours (Collins et al. 2020; Landivar et al. 2020). Meanwhile, telecommuting mothers are also reporting increased anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Lyttelton et al. 2020). Such findings raise important questions about how mothers are experiencing pandemic-related increases in time with their children. Focusing specifically on mothers, we ask:

1. Which mothers have increased the time they spend caring for their children?
2. How is increased time with children related to changes in mothers' well-being?
3. What factors exacerbate or alleviate the impact of increased time with children on mothers' well-being?

While prior research has not explicitly answered these questions, it does offer insights into what we might find.

The Potential Benefits and Drawbacks of Increased Time with Children

Given prior research on the benefits of "family time," we might anticipate that pandemic-related increases in parenting responsibilities will positively influence mothers' well-being. For parents, spending time with children is generally an enjoyable activity associated with high levels of well-being (Flood et al. 2020; Meier et al. 2016; Musick et al. 2016; Nelson et al. 2013; Offer 2014). As a result, many parents (including roughly half of employed parents) want to spend more time with their children (Milkie et al. 2004, 2019). Based on these findings, we might anticipate that pandemic-related increases in parenting time would be beneficial for parents' well-being.

That said, research also suggests that the benefits of parenting time are neither automatic nor equally distributed. Parents (especially unpartnered parents) have higher rates of depression and anxiety than non-parents, reflecting the time constraints and economic costs parents face (Evenson and Simon 2016; McLanahan and Adams 1987). Mothers also benefit less than fathers from time with children and experience parenting time as more stressful than fathers do (Damaske, Smyth, and Zawadzki 2014; Musick et al. 2016). This reflects the fact mothers spend more time than fathers on "routine childcare" (Bianchi et al. 2012; Bittman et al. 2003; Ciciolla and Luthar 2019; Craig and Mullan 2011; Daminger 2019; Musick et al. 2016; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004). Childcare is less enjoyable than others forms of parenting time (Craig and Brown 2017; Musick et al. 2016; Offer 2014) and, when unequally distributed, is a key source of stress for mothers (Ciciolla and Luthar 2019). Thus, it is important to consider how the increased time demands of pandemic parenting may have negatively impacted mothers' well-being.

Pandemic-Related Disruptions and the Consequences of Increased Time with Children

First, increased time with children may be detrimental for mothers whose access to childcare (either through schools, centers, babysitters/nannies, or family members) has been disrupted by the pandemic. The U.S. lags far behind other countries in ensuring universal access to affordable childcare (Collins 2019; Glass et al. 2016). Affordable childcare is critical for mothers' employment (Cascio and Schanzenbach 2013; Collins 2019; Hofferth 1999; Ruppanner, Moller, and Sayer 2019; Steiber and Haas 2012) and beneficial for mothers' well-being (Glass et al. 2016). Thus, mothers experiencing childcare-disruption-related increases in time with children will be likely experience increased stress, anxiety, and frustration with children.

Second, increased time with children may be particularly detrimental for mothers engaging in "intensive" work while providing care for their children at home. Pre-pandemic, many U.S. mothers were already struggling to balance the demands of parenting and paid work (Christopher 2012; Collins 2019; Damaske 2011; Gerson 1985; Glass and Estes 1997; Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003; Stone 2007). Remote work is generally thought to reduce the challenges of balancing paid work and parenting (Munsch 2016). That said, research during the pandemic shows that telecommuting mothers are experiencing heightened anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Lyttelton et al. 2020). This may reflect the fact that pandemic-related shifts to remote work were most pronounced among workers in professional and managerial roles (Dey et al. 2020; Lyttelton et al. 2020). Even before the pandemic, professional and managerial workers were pressured to demonstrate high levels of commitment to their jobs (Clarkberg and Moen 2016; Glass and Estes 1997). Such commitments create considerable stress and time pressures for workers (Craig and Brown 2017; Damaske 2011; Kleiner 2014; Milkie et al. 2004, 2019; Ruppanner, Perales, and Baxter 2019), increase work-family conflict (Clarkberg and Moen 2016; Glass and Estes 1997), and push some mothers to scale back their work or opt out of the workforce entirely (Becker and Moen 1999; Cha 2010; Stone 2007). If

Third, increased time with children may also be particularly detrimental for mothers who hold themselves to the standards of "intensive" parenting, even while weathering substantial disruptions to their normal parenting routines. Mothers in the U.S. face pressure to engage in "intensive" parenting, which is "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive" (Bianchi et al. 2012; Hays 1998; Ishizuka 2018; Lareau 2011; Milkie and Warner 2014). Many U.S. mothers also blame themselves if they struggle to follow the norms of intensive parenting, either because of their paid work responsibilities or because they have limited financial resources to invest in their children (Christopher 2012; Collins 2019; Damaske 2011; Elliott, Powell, and Brenton 2015; Romagnoli and Wall 2012). As a result, mothers who ascribe to intensive mothering ideologies and mothers who struggle to meet the demands of intensive mothering also report higher levels of anxiety and stress (Henderson, Harmon, and Newman 2016; Rizzo, Schiffrin, and Liss 2013). During the pandemic, mothers who have lost access to childcare (through schools, centers, or individual care providers) may find it especially difficult to maintain the high standards of intensive parenting and may therefore experience increased time with their children as detrimental to their well-being.

Fourth, mothers whose employment has been disrupted by the pandemic may also be experiencing increased time with their children, and they may also be experiencing increased stress. For these mothers, however, the relationship between changes in parenting time and well-being may

be less straightforward. Unemployment creates tremendous stress for families, especially if families are struggling to make ends meet (Pugh 2015; Rao 2020; Villalobos 2014). Women, however, respond to unemployment (either their own or their partner's) by taking on more of the housework and childcare and investing more in their relationships with their children (Pugh 2015; Rao 2020; Villalobos 2014). Such findings suggest that while unemployment is likely to be a serious source of stress for mothers, some unemployed mothers may experience the resulting increases in time with children as a silver lining to their loss of paid work. That more positive experience, however, may be more common among mothers who feel financially secure despite disruptions to their employment, either because they have a partner whose salary provides sufficient income or because they are receiving support from the government (like the payments provided to families and unemployed workers through the CARES Act) that is sufficient to make ends meet.

Of course, it is important to note that parenting roles, norms, pressures, and disruptions may be experienced differently by mothers from different racial and ethnic groups as well as by mothers from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Collins 2005; Damaske 2011; Dow 2019; Elliott et al. 2015; Pugh 2015; Villalobos 2014). Research on middle- and upper-middle-class Black mothers, for example, finds that these mothers often resist hegemonic ideas about motherhood and experience their roles as workers and caregivers as more integrated than do white mothers (Blair-Loy and Dehart 2003; Dow 2016, 2019). Research also shows that lower-income mothers and mothers of color tend be more embedded in extended kin networks, which help mothers with childcare and other forms of support (Dow 2016, 2019; Gerstel 2011; Lareau 2011; Sarkisian and Gerstel 2004).

Despite these potential variations, however, evidence suggests that substantial, unanticipated increases in time with children may be harmful to at least some mothers' well-being. Specifically, we anticipate that unanticipated increases in time with children may be detrimental for mothers experiencing disruptions in childcare, particularly when coupled with intensive work pressures and/or pressure to follow intensive parenting norms.

METHODS

Data Sources and Samples

Our data come from Wave 1 of the Pandemic Parenting Study (PPS), a novel mixed-methods longitudinal study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The PPS builds off a pre-pandemic study of mothers of young children, the Social Networks and Parenting Study (SNAP). SNAP began in 2018, recruiting pregnant women through prenatal clinics in Monroe County, Indiana and following them from pregnancy for two years postpartum (N=250). All mothers from the SNAP study were invited to participate in the PPS, though a few are no longer living in Southern Indiana.

We use two types of data from PPS Wave 1: surveys and in-depth interviews. All mothers included in our analyses completed the survey; some also completed interviews. Participants received payments for each part. 139 mothers completed the Wave 1 survey, which was fielded between April 1 and April 15, 2020 and asked mothers about their experiences during the pandemic and the impact of the pandemic on their day-to-day lives, including employment, childcare, relationships, routines, decision-making, and well-being. In-depth interviews with 65 mothers were conducted from April

15 through May 7, 2020 and asked mothers to discuss in more depths their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies during the pandemic.

Data collection began in the early stages of COVID-19's spread across the U.S., when there had been only 30 confirmed cases in Monroe County (Indiana State Department of Health, 2020). At the time, however, Indiana's residents were already subject to stay-at-home orders, which remained in place until just before our last week of interviews (Chapman, 2020). As a result, businesses and services (including childcare centers) were closed as we conducted our research, and local schools were implementing remote learning (Thompson, 2020). While variations in state and local policies make it difficult to describe an "average" policy response to the pandemic, Indiana's policies do not appear notably different from other nearby states' (Moreland, 2020).

Dependent Variables. Our quantitative dependent variables measure changes in mothers' well-being during the pandemic. To measures change in stress, we asked: "Compared to how much stress you felt before the COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic, how is your stress level now?" For anxiety, we asked: "Compared to how often you felt worried or anxious before the COVID19/Coronavirus pandemic, how often do you feel worried or anxious now?" And for mothers' frustrations with their children, we asked: "Compared to how often you felt frustrated with your child(ren) before the COVID-19/Coronavirus pandemic, how often do you feel frustrated with your child(ren) now?" With each of these questions, mothers had five possible responses ranging from much more to much less than pre-pandemic.

Independent Variables. Our key independent variables include measures of changes in mothers' time with their children and measures of pandemic-related disruptions in mothers' employment and childcare that might produces those changes in time. To measure changes in mothers' parenting time, we use the question "How, if at all, has the Coronavirus pandemic affected the amount of time you spend caring for your children?" Mothers could indicate that they are spending a great deal more time, somewhat more time, the same amount of time, somewhat less time, or a great deal less time caring for their children than they were before the pandemic.

To measure paid work disruptions, we asked how the pandemic has affected mothers' paid work and income and whether they have worked remotely during the pandemic. We recode these answers into five categories: 1) employed, same income, working remotely; 2) employed, same income, not able to work remotely, 3) employed, income reduced because of the pandemic (e.g., furloughed or hours reduced), 4) unemployed, and 5) stay-at-home parent (pre-pandemic). Due to small cell sizes, we do not differentiate between remote and non-remote workers among those who are still employed but whose incomes have been reduced during the pandemic.

To measure childcare disruptions, we asked whether mothers had children attending school or receiving childcare pre-pandemic and whether their children were attending school or receiving childcare during the pandemic. We recode these responses into two categories: 1) childcare not disrupted (no loss of care), and 2) childcare disrupted (loss of care).

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis. Using mothers' responses to Wave 1 survey questions, we first examined which mothers have increased the time they are spending caring for their children, focusing on differences related to disruptions in mothers' employment and childcare. Next, we examined how increased time with children is associated with changes in mothers' stress, anxiety, and frustrations with their children. Given the sample size, we present a series of crosstabulations identifying the proportions of mothers reporting each level of frustration. For some key comparisons, we also calculated and present z-scores to test the statistical significance of differences between groups.

Qualitative Analysis. Using our interview data, we ask why increases in mothers' time with children influence mothers' well-being and what factors may exacerbate or alleviate that influence. We coded transcripts using Excel. Each respondent represented a row in the spreadsheet. While reading each transcript, we entered codes in the spreadsheet for the presence/absence of relevant themes (e.g., frustration with increased parenting time, enjoyment of increased parenting time, frustrations with lack of childcare, frustrations with remote work, frustrations with remote learning). We also included relevant portions of each transcript in the spreadsheet to illustrate coded themes. After coding the transcripts, we then sorted coded entries by disruptions in childcare and paid work arrangements. We then reread the grouped, coded entries and wrote memos describing the patterns, illustrating those patterns with examples, and discussing key exceptions to the patterns.

Sample

Our sample includes all mothers who participated in the PPS Wave 1 Survey (N=134). Some of these mothers also participated in in-depth interviews (N=65). Demographic data for the Wave 1 PPS participants are included in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of mothers in the PPS Wave 1 sample, by participation type

	Wave 1 Survey	Wave 1 Interviews
	N	N
Total	139	65
Male partner (April 2020)	132	60
Female or non-binary partner (April 2020)	2	1
No partner (April 2020)	5	4
White, non-Hispanic Mothers	125	59
Mothers of other races/ethnicities (including multiracial)	14	6
Advanced Degree	49	29
Bachelor's Degree	48	21
No Bachelor's Degree	42	15
Employed pre-pandemic	82	40
Not employed pre-pandemic	48	25
Sufficient funds for bills (April 2020)	114	59
Insufficient funds for bills (April 2020)	16	6
More financially secure now than pre-pandemic	11	7
As financially secure now as pre-pandemic	58	28
Less financially secure now than pre-pandemic	61	30
Receiving government assistance	29	13
Not receiving government assistance	101	52

PPS demographics are consistent with those of Southern Indiana, where initial recruitment took place (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Monroe county is roughly 83% white, non-Hispanic; surrounding counties, where some respondents live, are up to 95% white, non-Hispanic. 46% of Monroe County residents ages 25 and over have at least a Bachelor's degree, and 60% of women ages 16 and over are in the labor force. 21% of Monroe County residents live in poverty, and the median household income (in 2018 dollars) is $47,075. Monroe County is home to Indiana University, with other major industries including healthcare, medical device manufacturing, military, and mining. While the PPS is not representative of the U.S. population, its mixed methods data and its focus on mothers with young children makes it useful for understanding how some mothers are experiencing increased time with children and for identifying key factors that may exacerbate or alleviate the influence of that added time on mothers' well-being.

Changing Time with Children in the Wake of COVID-19

In our sample, 42% of mothers reported spending a great deal more time with their children during the pandemic than pre-pandemic, 25% reported spending somewhat more time, and only 2% reported spending less time. These changes appear to be driven, at least in part, by disruptions in mothers' paid work and childcare arrangements. Looking first at mothers whose incomes were not disrupted and who were able to work remotely during the pandemic, and as shown in Table 2, we see that the proportion reporting greatly increased time with children is significantly larger ($p<.05$) among those whose childcare access was disrupted (85%) than among those whose childcare access was not disrupted (50%). Similarly, among stay-at-home mothers, the proportion reporting greatly increased time with children is significantly larger ($p<.05$) among those whose childcare access was disrupted (33%) than among those whose childcare was not disrupted (7%). Regardless of care disruptions, a large proportion of unemployed mothers reported greatly increased time with their children (55%). Similarly, and regardless of care disruptions, a large proportion of employed mothers whose incomes were disrupted (e.g., because of furloughs or reduced work hours) reported greatly increased time with children (52%). Meanwhile, among mothers whose incomes were not disrupted and who have not been able to work remotely, only a small proportion reported greatly increased time (9%). Taken together, these patterns suggest that mothers whose access to childcare was disrupted by the pandemic are now spending a great deal more time with their children, especially if they are also working from home or spending more time at home because of unemployment or reduced work hours.

Table 2: Number and proportion of mothers reporting changes in their time with their children, by mothers' employment and childcare disruptions (Wave 1 Survey)

	N	Great deal less time now		Somewhat less time now		Same time now as before		Somewhat more time now		Great deal more time now	
Employed, same income	N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Working remotely, childcare not disrupted	14	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	7	.50	7	.50
Working remotely, childcare disrupted	26	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	4	.15	22	.85
Not working remotely,[1] childcare not disrupted	8	1	.13	2	.25	3	.38	1	.13	1	.13
Not working remotely, childcare disrupted	3	0	.00	0	.00	3	1.00	0	.00	0	.00
Employed, less income[2]											
Childcare not disrupted	6	0	.00	0	.00	2	.33	1	.17	3	.50
Childcare disrupted	15	0	.00	0	.00	3	.20	4	.27	8	.53
Unemployed											
Childcare not disrupted	1	0	.00	0	.00	1	1.00	0	.00	0	.00
Childcare disrupted	10	0	.00	0	.00	1	.10	3	.30	6	.60
Stay-at-home parent											
Childcare not disrupted	27	0	.00	1	.04	18	.67	6	.22	2	.07
Childcare disrupted	21	0	.00	0	.00	7	.33	7	.33	7	.33
Total	**131**	**1**	**.01**	**3**	**.02**	**38**	**.29**	**33**	**.25**	**56**	**.43**

CHANGING TIME WITH CHILDREN AND MOTHERS' WELL-BEING

Having established that the pandemic led many mothers to spend a great deal more time with their children, we consider how substantial, unanticipated increases in time with children may have impacted mothers' well-being.

As shown in Table 3, mothers experiencing increased time with children disproportionately report increased stress. The proportion of mothers reporting much more stress during the pandemic is significantly greater among mothers spending a great deal more time with their children during the pandemic than among mothers whose time with children was unchanged (42% vs. 16%; $p<.05$). The same is true for mothers spending somewhat more time with their children (36% vs. 16%; $p<.05$).

Table 3: Number and proportion of mothers reporting changes in their stress level, by mothers' reports of changes in the time they are spending with their children (Wave 1 Survey)

	N	Much less stress now		Somewhat less now		Same now as before		Somewhat more now		Much more stress now	
		N	Prop	N	Prop	N	Prop	N	Prop	N	prop
Great deal less time	1	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	1	1.00	0	.00
Somewhat less time	3	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	1	.33	2	.67
About the same	38	0	.00	1	.03	13	.34	18	.47	6	.16
Somewhat more time	33	0	.00	3	.09	2	.06	16	.48	12	.36
Great deal more time	55	0	.00	1	.02	10	.18	21	.38	23	.42
Total	**130**	**0**	**.00**	**5**	**.04**	**25**	**.19**	**57**	**.44**	**43**	**.33**

We find similar patterns with respect to mothers' anxiety. As shown in Table 4, the proportion of mothers experiencing much more anxiety is moderately significantly greater among mothers spending a great deal more time with their children than among mothers whose time with children was unchanged (36% vs 18%; $p<.10$).

Table 4: Number and proportion of mothers reporting changes in their anxiety, by mothers' reports of changes in the time they are spending with their children (Wave 1 Survey)

	N	Much less anxious now		Somewhat less now		Same now as before		Somewhat more now		Much more anxious now	
		N	Prop	N	Prop	N	Prop	N	Prop	N	prop
Great deal less time	1	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	1	1.00	0	.00
Somewhat less time	3	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00	1	.33	2	.67
About the same	38	0	.00	0	.00	16	.42	15	.39	7	.18
Somewhat more time	33	0	.00	1	.03	8	.24	15	.45	9	.27
Great deal more time	55	0	.00	1	.02	14	.25	20	.36	20	.36
Total	**130**	**0**	**.00**	**2**	**.02**	**38**	**.29**	**52**	**.40**	**38**	**.29**

We also find similar patterns with respect to mothers' frustrations with their children. As shown in Table 5, the proportion of mothers experiencing much more frustration with their children is significantly greater among mothers spending a great deal more time with children than among mothers whose time with children was unchanged (11% vs. 0%; $p<.05$). More broadly, the proportion of mothers reporting any increase in frustration with their children is significantly higher among mothers who are spending more time (either a great deal or somewhat more) with their children than among mothers whose time with their children was unchanged (50% vs. 27%; $p<.05$).

Table 5: Number and proportion of mothers reporting changes in their frustration with their children, by mothers' reports of changes in the time they are spending with their children (Wave 1 Survey)

	N	Much less frustrated now		Somewhat less now		Same now as before		Somewhat more now		Much more frustrated now	
		N	Prop	N	Prop	N	Prop	N	Prop	N	prop
Great deal less time	1	0	.00	1	1.00	0	.00	0	.00	0	.00
Somewhat less time	3	0	.00	1	.33	1	.33	1	.33	0	.00
About the same	38	0	.00	6	.16	23	.61	9	.24	0	.00
Somewhat more time	33	0	.00	5	.15	15	.45	11	.33	2	.06
Great deal more time	55	1	.02	4	.07	19	.35	25	.45	6	.11
Total	**130**	**1**	**.01**	**17**	**.13**	**58**	**.47**	**46**	**.35**	**8**	**.06**

How Childcare Disruptions Amplify the Negative Impact of Increased Parenting Time

Building on these quantitative findings, our qualitative data reveal that childcare disruptions amplified the negative impact of increased parenting time. This was especially true for mothers whose disrupted childcare arrangements were coupled with intensive work pressures and/or pressure to follow intensive parenting norms.

"I'm not doing a good job of either": Working Remotely without Childcare

In the wake of the pandemic, some mothers in our study were pushed into telecommuting without childcare. Consistent with national trends (Dey et al. 2020; Lyttelton et al. 2020), these were primarily highly educated mothers in professional or managerial roles. Thus, these mothers also faced pressures to demonstrate high levels of commitment to their jobs (Clarkberg and Moen 2016; Glass and Estes 1997) and also typically held themselves to intensive parenting standards (Collins 2019; Damaske 2011; Gerson 1985; Hays 1998; Lareau 2011).

For these mothers, increased time with children was often a tremendous source of stress and anxiety. Gina (white, advanced degree) works full time in university administration and her husband (white, bachelor's degree) is a teacher. Both Gina and her husband worked from home during the pandemic while caring for their 17-month-old daughter, whose childcare center closed. Asked what the biggest challenges have been for her during the pandemic, Gina pointed to the challenges of balancing paid work with parenting:

> I think that's been the hardest thing, is just suddenly feeling I'm not getting any work done. Somehow I'm not getting any work done, but also [my daughter] is not getting the best mothering she could be getting. It's like wait a second. Where did all that

> energy go, if it's not going into work and not going into her? All of a sudden I'm not doing a good job of either.

Gina went on to describe the toll that this sense of failure has taken on her well-being, noting:

> [My mother-in-law] is very much a "Oh, you have to cherish these special times." And it's like, okay, but let's not pretend it's fun... Our lives, the quality of all three of our lives would get better if daycare opened.

Mothers like Gina, who were pushed into telecommuting without childcare, often described feeling as though they were failing at both work and motherhood. They also worried about how those failures might impact their children's well-being. As a result, these mothers tended to experience increased time with children as a source of stress and anxiety, not a source of joy.

For mothers pushed into telecommuting without childcare, increased parenting time also led to increased frustration with their children. Erica (white, advanced degree) works part-time as a computer scientist, and her husband (white, bachelor's degree) is a full-time office manager. They both telecommuted during the pandemic, with Erica also providing care for their first-grader, preschooler, and toddler whose schools and childcare centers closed. As Erica explained:

> My husband's job is very demanding, and they talk a lot about flexibility, but at the end of the day if [his boss] sets a meeting, he sets a meeting. You can't not go, even during a pandemic, if you want to keep your job…. [So] it's primarily me.

Although she only worked two hours a day during the pandemic, being the primary caregiver made it difficult for Erica work:

> Those two hours [a day], my [one-year-old] son is into everything. He climbs, so you're up and down and up and down, and he's really fast. So, today I was nursing him and trying to read something at the desk, and he swung his leg, and it somehow landed in my tea, and it kicked the teacup over. Tea all over both of us, all over the desk, all over the chair, all over the wall, and then he bit me at the same time because I went "Ahh!" when he [kicked the cup]… And then I had to get us both cleaned up, clean up everything and then keep nursing him. So, definitely those two hours, they feel like an eternity.

For Erica, pandemic parenting also led to more frustrations with her children:

> I think I've definitely been the one that's been more frustrated and a little less patient with the kids. I know they get up early, so by 8:00, that's hour 13 nonstop togetherness, and I think at that point I'm done.... I feel like my patience with the kids, there's been days where it's really good and days when it just hasn't been great at all, and I just feel like oh my gosh, I can't believe we have to do this for how many more months. It's that every day the house gets destroyed, toys everywhere, and then we've got to clean it all up.

Reflecting on why she has been so frustrated, Erica added:

> Doing it without childcare is really hard, even if it's just part-time…. I can't imagine the families where both parents are working fulltime, and the kids are at home. The kids just must be so bored and the parents so frustrated. It's a hard time and so hard on working parents.

During the pandemic, families like Erica's have faced intensive work demands that make it difficult to combine telecommuting with full-tie caregiving, and those difficulties often led to increased frustration with children.

For mothers pushed into telecommuting without childcare, increased parenting time was also a source of guilt. Laura (white, advanced degree) works full-time in marketing, and her husband (Hispanic, bachelor's degree) is a PhD student and instructor. They have a six-year-old, a three-year-old, and a one-year-old whose schools and childcare center closed. Asked about the biggest challenges she has faced during the pandemic, Laura noted: "The biggest thing really is just trying to work from home with kids." Elaborating, she explained:

> It's a day by day thing, trying to get it figured out, having to work in the evenings, on the weekends. I mean, it definitely does stink. On the one hand, it's kind of fun being home and being around the kids more often, but yeah, like I said, it's tough. You use childcare for a reason so that you can get things done. I don't know. It's just difficult. It is difficult to get it figured out. I mean, maybe you feel like you're a little bit less patient or that you have to do a little bit more of compartmentalizing your time, I guess, to be able to get your work done. You kind of have to send kids off to do their own thing more often than you would want, but that's the thing though. As parents, you always feel guilt about when you're with your kids, not spending time with them, doing stuff with them.

Like Laura, many mothers pushed into working from home without childcare felt guilty both for being "less patient" with their children and for not spending more time actively engaging with their children at home.

To alleviate their guilt, some mothers telecommuting without childcare tried to plan fun-filled activities for their kids. In many cases, however, those extra activities became a source of stress in themselves. Vanessa (white, advanced degree), who has been working from home as a mental health counselor while caring for her one-year-old daughter, noted: "I would love to just take [my one-year-old daughter] out of the house and go do something fun, instead of trying to Pinterest all of these ideas, and they're always epic fails." While mothers like Vanessa wanted to enjoy the added time they were spending with their children, the pressure they felt to make that time fun and engaging ultimately seemed to reinforce the disappoint they experienced when that time was not as joy-filled as they planned.

"She's Been Challenging my Authority Left and Right": An Intensive Approach to Remote Learning

During the pandemic, some mothers' children transitioned to remote learning. Consistent with prior research on intensive parenting (Collins 2019; Damaske 2011; Hays 1998; Ishizuka 2018; Lareau 2011), many of these mothers approached remote learning with a high level of intensity. That

meant doing the work (if any) required by their children's schools and supplementing that work with additional instructional activities.

For these mothers, increased time with children was often a source of stress and anxiety. Sabrina (white, advanced degree) works in sports medicine; her husband (white, bachelor's degree) is a non-profit manager. The preschool/childcare center Sabrina's four-year-old and one-year-old attended remained open during the pandemic, but Sabrina kept them home because of the health risk. That meant helping her preschooler learn from home:

> Sabrina: So I get up and get the kids ready for the day. And it depends on the day. If I do morning or my husband does the morning school with our daughter... So we'll do little lessons for 45 minutes or whatever and then she'll do art, she'll play.… And then we'll switch after lunchtime. And like I said on Sundays, sometimes even mid-week we have to sit down and reassess our schedule. But we really try to map it out and make sure we know who's with the kids and who's working.
>
> Interviewer: Is [four-year-old]'s school providing resources for you?
>
> Sabrina: They did. They gave her, gosh, maybe 25 worksheets or something, but she sat down and just flew through them. So we have some other workbooks and things that we have for her too. We got two preschool books that she's doing.
>
> Interviewer: And how is your daughter doing with all this?
>
> Sabrina: She actually is struggling… She had a little bit of a breakdown Friday morning about, "I don't know what my preschool looks like and I don't remember what my teacher looks like."… She'll say, "This isn't fair and I don't understand." And so that's been hard and it's kind of heart wrenching.

Like many mothers, Sabrina was anxious about the impact that transitioning to remote learning would have on her daughter. Sabrina dealt with that anxiety, in part, by trying to make home as school-like as possible, even when that meant doing more than what the school required. That pressure to do more, in turn, created stress for Sabrina and her husband in trying to balance their daughter's schooling with their work.

Being pushed into remote learning also led to increased frustrations with their children, particularly when mothers took an intensive approach. Janice (Asian/white, bachelor's degree) is a stay-at-home mom with a one-year-old and a seven-year-old. Her husband (white, bachelor's degree) is a digital artist who worked from home during the pandemic. When Janice's seven-year-old's school closed, Janice was dissatisfied with the quality of remote instruction provided by her daughter's school and thus began providing supplemental instruction and activities:

> [My daughter's] school district was not doing any kind of e-learning at first. They just kind of took the 20 days waiver from the state and just said "we're not going to be doing anything." The e-learning through her school just started a week ago. And since her teacher is a substitute… and the work he was assigning the kids, it's been really boring. I don't want her entire school day to be just what he's assigning…. [So]

> I've just still been trying to have her engage in fun things for school... I feel like what I'm doing is the main thing and what he's assigning is some supplements stuff.

Janice went on to describe the schedule she created for her daughter:

> We did a homeschool schedule. And it works around my baby's nap schedule so I can give attention to both of them and make sure everybody knows what they're supposed to be doing at any given hour. One of the first things I did was teach her how to read a clock so that she knows what is going on at what time… All in all, she gets four-and-a-half hours of school time. And it's broken in between a lot of different things. We don't have a printer, so there's no worksheets in our house. Most of it's online or journaling or different art projects…. We never told her it was spring break. We just kept on doing homeschool.

While this intensive schedule worked well at the beginning, Janice told us that her daughter ultimately began resisting Janice's authority as a teacher, which then led stress, frustration, and anxiety for Janice:

> She was doing really well with homeschool for a few weeks. And I was like, wow, I'm really on top of it. This is awesome. And then I feel like the last week she's been challenging my authority left and right…. [Like] when she doesn't want to do something or she keeps on talking and she's not getting anything done. I tell her she needs to be silent until she finishes writing. Today it was the months of the year. I was like, "No, you're going to have to raise your hand if you have anything to say." She just was like giving the, "Mo-om." I was like, "Nope. Not your mom, teacher." I just left the room and had her do that. But yeah, it's things like that which happens every five minutes.

Janice worried that her daughter's resistance to learning from home might have a long-term negative impact on her daughter's desire to learn.

> I feel like for a long time I was coping with everything really well. Now, I'd say honestly the biggest [challenge] is just arguing with [my daughter]. Trying not to argue too much that she gets burnt out. I want her to still want to learn. So, it's mostly just coming up with new fun ways to engage her and learning without tiring her out…. I know it's challenging for her in ways that she doesn't even know how to verbalize. I think she is missing her friends and it's starting to affect her even though she doesn't know it.

Essentially, and as for other mothers who took an intensive approach to remote learning, Janice's increased time with her children created not only anxiety and stress but also frustration with her daughter, as well.

Faced with the stress, anxiety, and frustration of remote learning, mothers like Janice and Sabrina often described turning to food or alcohol to cope. Sabrina, for example, noted:

> My group of coworkers that all have little girls, we kind of send each other little messages like… What was it the other day? Oh, I said 'Yeah, I just locked myself in

> the bathroom and ate an Oreo cookie. How's your day going?' You know? Because we have those moments. This isn't all perfect.

Similarly, when asked about coping, Janice noted:

> I have a lot of friends with young kids and we try to mostly make light of it just because humor is how most of us get through our days with little kids, babies and everything. It's just a lot of meme sharing and joking around about our wine supplies and things like that.

Food and alcohol were common coping mechanisms for pandemic parenting stress. As Betsy (white, bachelor's degree), who has been working from home without childcare and helping her preschooler transition to remote learning, noted: "We'll say probably alcohol consumption's up a little bit."

How Some Mothers Avoided the Stress of Increased Parenting Time

While some mothers experienced the time demands of pandemic parenting as a source of increased stress, anxiety, and frustrations with their children, others managed to avoid those outcomes. That includes mothers whose childcare was not disrupted, either because their pre-pandemic caregivers remained accessible or because they were already providing full-time care at home. It also includes mothers experiencing less pressure toward intensive work and intensive parenting. And it includes mothers for whom time with their children offers a welcome distraction from other stresses, anxieties, and frustrations they are experiencing in their lives.

"I like being with them more": Remote Work/Learning with No Disruptions in Childcare

Some mothers in our study were able avoid disruptions in childcare, even while they transitioned to remote work. As shown in Table 2, many of these mothers (50%) still reported spending a great deal more time with their children than they did pre-pandemic. And yet, these mothers tended not to experience increased time as a substantial source of stress, anxiety, or frustration with their children. Lauren (white, advanced degree), for example, is a university professor, and her husband (white, advanced degree) works in healthcare. As she did before the pandemic, Lauren's mother-in-law continued to provide childcare for Lauren's four-year-old daughter and one-year-old son. Even with childcare, telecommuting still created some stress for Laura, but she ultimately appreciated the extra time at home:

> I enjoy staying home and working so I can see them grow and do new things that I would miss when I'm at work in the office environment. My son is starting to talk more, so I get to hear him say new words and try new words out. Going to get the mail, my daughter will ride her scooter, and she's doing more advanced tricks on it, and it's fun to see her gain more confidence. I like being home. I like being with them more. Even if I'm working, just being around them is great. It's challenging to work though when they want me. [But] I think I'd rather have that challenge than be in the office environment.

Like Lauren, Ruth (white, bachelor's degree) also transitioned to remote work (as a researcher), while her husband (white, high school diploma) continued working outside the home as a truck driver. Ruth's nanny continued to provide full-time childcare and remote learning support for her one-year-old, three-year-old, and six-year-old. As a result, Ruth has had time to find and enjoy activities with her children. As Ruth told us:

> We're not doing our extracurriculars that we normally would do, like we're not doing swim class or dance class or anything like that. So we've been trying to do some of that stuff at home with the kids. Like, we have a little dance class where we do TikTok dances together. And I'm trying to work on kind of more school work stuff with my 6-year-old. We do her e-learning but we're trying to do other learning stuff throughout the day too like if I find a fun science experiment on Pinterest then we'll do that in the evening when I'm off work or something like that.

For mothers like Lauren and Ruth, maintaining access to childcare allowed them to enjoy their increased parenting time, even with the added stress of telecommuting with children at home.

Even before the pandemic, some mothers were telecommuting without childcare or homeschooling their children. Many of these mothers still reported increased parenting time (i.e., because their children were no longer participating in extracurricular activities or playdates), but they tended not to experience that increased time as a substantial source of stress. Pre-pandemic, Lisa (Hispanic, advanced degree), was homeschooling her kindergartner and preschooler and working remotely part-time without childcare. She continued doing so during pandemic:

> I'm the one that's primarily at home. I'm the one that's educating the children and things like that, doing most of that work. It hasn't changed a whole lot. In fact, that's good in general, and on purpose to kind of keep the routine and keep the structure and not just turn everything upside down for the kids. In some ways, it's nicer having my husband at home because if there is something, then he's right there. I do teach online on Mondays and so it's been really nice. Before I had to be like, "Okay, let's set up a video for the kids to watch," or put the kids down for a nap so that I can go teach my class, and now it's like, [to my husband]: "Okay, you got them? You can do whatever you want. I'll see you later."

The increased time demands of pandemic parenting did create some stress for Lisa, but the added support she received from her husband (white, advanced degree) was enough to help her cope:

> Without having things like play dates and things like that, where I would get out of the house more, I think maybe two or three weeks in and there was one day where I was just like, "Ahh! I need to have some space!" And so since then [my husband has] been really conscious to [step in]. Like, there was one or two nights where he was like, "You know what, I'll just take the kids out for a walk and then you can have some time alone, things like that." Like I said, in general I'm used to it and it's fine, but still, nevertheless, not having those normal outlets that I do to have small breaks from the kids, yeah, after a couple of weeks that kind of builds up. You're like, okay, I need a little break, just little one.

For Lisa and other mothers who were already homeschooling or working remotely without childcare, the pandemic has made parenting more difficult, but the added time they are spending with their children has not been a substantial source of stress, particularly if they have partners who are now more able to help at home.

"The Most Important Thing is Just Not to Stress About It": Rejecting Intensive Parenting to Reduce Pandemic Stress

Given the added time demands of pandemic parenting, and to reduce the stress of those demands, some mothers have rejected pressures toward intensive parenting and scaled back the intensiveness of their approach. That includes mothers who are now allowing their children more screen-time than pre-pandemic. Denise (white, advanced degree) and her husband (white, advanced degree) found that being "laxer" with screen-time allowed them to more easily meet their work demands (as university professors) while caring for their one-year-old son::

> Denise: Screen time, I have been laxer with screen time, but he still is a little too young. He doesn't seem to care all that much, so I don't know to what extent that's actually affecting him.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you think you're more lax about it?
>
> Denise: Because I just feel everyone's in survival mode, and if what I need is 15 minutes of downtime… and the way that that comes is by him staring at Moana, then that's fine.

Like Denise, some mothers reported scaling back the intensiveness of their parenting to reduce the stress of increased parenting time.

Some mothers also scaled back the intensity of remote learning to reduce the stress of pandemic parenting demands. Heather (white, some college) is a stay-at-home mom with five kids ranging from one year old to sixteen. Her husband (white, some college) works in construction. Pre-pandemic, Heather was homeschooling all her children, and when the pandemic hit, she decided to take an even more relaxed approach to at-home instruction:

> I've kind of just eased up on school stuff for a while because I know that they're worried about what's going on right now, and I figure we have time to worry about all of that…. The most important thing is just not to stress about it. The biggest mistake I made when I first started homeschooling was to try to make home like school, and homeschool isn't really like school. It's hard to explain, but I tried to be very on a schedule and do all the different subjects. Now, we do more of the child-based learning. Whatever they're interested in, we'll let them learn that. Let them just read books for fun and play outside…. We have chickens and goats, and [after feeding the animals] they come in and pick up and do all of their chores, and they kind of are just free to do what they want to do until lunch. Then sometimes they choose a time to play video games or watch TV. Sometimes they'll color or do art projects, especially the little ones. My older two, they have Khan Academy, so they

> get online and do some lessons and stuff. We're planting a lot of stuff like seeds and planting seasonings and stuff. We're working on our garden.

Like Denise and Heather, some mothers recognized that intensive parenting might be untenable in the wake of pandemic-related disruptions. Thus, they opted to scale back the intensity of their parenting to reduce stress.

"I didn't have enough time to be with my son": Pandemic Parenting as a Welcome Distraction from Other Stressors

For some mothers, time with children has been a welcome distraction from other pandemic-related stress. That includes mothers who could not work remotely. Jillian (white, advanced degree), for example, works as an ICU nurse, and she has seen patients die from COVID-19. Jillian's in-laws continued providing regular childcare for her one-year-old daughter while she and her husband (white, high school diploma) worked. Parenting, however, has not been a primary source of stress for Jillian during the pandemic. Instead, when asked about the most difficult challenges she has faced, Jillian talked at length about her job and her fears of getting her family sick:

> I'm exhausted, just mentally and physically exhausted and trying to just stay awake so I can spend time with [my husband and my daughter]. Now that we've got showers at work I at least can shower before I come home and pick up [my daughter] because before it was like "I don't want to really pick you up here right now."

Essential workers like Jillian faced tremendous stress during the pandemic, but with childcare in place, mothers like Jillian did not always experience time with their children as a source of strain. Instead, many looked forward to time with their children at the end of a long day.

For some mothers unemployed during the pandemic, added time with children also served as a respite from the other stress they faced. Sierra (Black, high school diploma) is a single mother with a one-year-old son. Pre-pandemic, Sierra worked full-time in retail—she never got to take time off, even after her son was born. Just before the pandemic, however, Sierra had moved away from Indiana to live closer to (though not with) her baby's father (Black, high school diploma). Sierra had just found a room in a shared apartment and was looking for work when the pandemic hit. Because of the pandemic and its impact on the local community (COVID-19 outbreaks at a local factory led to widespread layoffs), however, Sierra could not find a job. As a result, Sierra was finally able to spend time with her son:

> I'm enjoying it because when I used to work a lot, I used to complain how I didn't have enough time to be with my son. That's one of the good things about it that I can spend a lot of time with him now. We do finger painting. I got the big white boards, and we just color. I just let him scribble and stuff, and we play Connect Four. I taught him how to play that. We do that and watch TV.

Sierra went on to explain that she has only been able to spend more time with her son because of the financial assistance she has received during the pandemic, including economic relief through the CARES Act, WIC benefits, and rent waivers.

> The only thing that was helping me lately was the stimulus check, so that helped a lot. At first, I didn't believe it. I did not believe it because I'm like that's not true for them to give us money, but when I got it, I was just so happy. I paid my car insurance, and I had got my son a lot of clothes because he's growing, and he needs some more shoes. I put some in my savings account. I'm just not trying to touch it because I never know what will happen if, I don't know. I'm just using the money as a backup. [And] where I'm at, they stopped us from paying rent for right now, because they know a lot of people lost their jobs and stuff like that [when a local factory laid off workers], so I'm really okay about my utility bills and my rent because the place where I'm staying at, they just waived it. They said until further notice, so every month they'll let us know if they want us to pay something off or they're just going to work with us. That's a good thing. [And when I first heard it] I didn't believe that either. When that happened, I was just a happy person. I don't have a job right now, so that was a blessing.

Without that financial support, the pandemic would likely have taken a much bigger toll on Sierra and her son. When asked how things would have been different without the Economic Relief payments and the rent and utility waivers she received, Sierra explained:

> It probably would have been even harder because I know I can't really ask a lot of people for money because a lot of people that I know, their jobs laid them off, so I don't know. It's getting hard out there for a lot of people. I know a lot of people that were working at the chicken plant. They lost their jobs. So, it was a lot of cases of the coronavirus in it, and those are like the good paying jobs, and they have kids, so I know that was hard for them. And they used to get paid every week, and now that they don't get paid, and they already got their last check, now they've got to apply for unemployment. You never know how long that will take.

Of course, even with the economic relief payments and the rent and utility waivers, Sierra has found that, without income from a paid job, it is difficult to meet all her son's needs. Sierra, for example, receives support with groceries through WIC, but because people are stocking up on supplies, she has not always been able to find the products she can purchase with her benefits. As she explained:

> Not having a job, it's not easy to get all of the products that I need. Trying to get food from the grocery stores. A lot of people buy all the meat, all milk and cheese and eggs, and it's been hard to get stuff like that lately. When we eat breakfast, we eat in every day, and [my son] needs milk because he drinks whole milk, and I get it from WIC, but it's been hard because a lot of people's just been buying it up. [And] my son is only one, so he needs the Pampers and wipes, and it'll be hard to get it because a lot of people go in, like I feel like they're sending all their family members out to go get all the supplies. Then when it's time for us to go in at 9:00, there won't be no Pampers, no wipes. So, I have to order online, and then when I try to go online, it's out of stock because people are just stocking up. That's been the hard part for me and my son. There's a church that's giving out products or whatever. They'll be giving out Pampers, but sometimes they don't have his size, so I don't know. I'm just trying to work it out.

The struggle to meet her son's needs has taken a toll on Sierra. And yet, because of the financial support she received, Sierra was able to enjoy extra time with her son that she previously desired but was unable to afford.

DISCUSSION

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools, childcare centers, businesses, and services closed, forcing many U.S. parents to spend more time with their children. These disruptions raise questions about how unanticipated increases in parenting time might impact mothers' well-being. We answer these questions using a mixed-methods study involving surveys (N=139) and in-depth interviews (N=65) with Southern Indiana mothers, conducted in the early stages of COVID-19's spread across the U.S. (April-May 2020).

We find that, because of pandemic-related disruptions to paid work and childcare routines, many mothers greatly increased their time with their children. These increased time demands were also associated with increased stress, anxiety, and frustrations with their children. Our qualitative data reveal that childcare disruptions amplified the negative impact of increased parenting time. This was especially true for mothers whose disrupted childcare arrangements were coupled with intensive work pressures and/or pressure to follow intensive parenting norms. Meanwhile, other mothers did not experience increased time with their children as a substantial source of stress, and some even experienced increased parenting time a source of joy in the face of other pandemic-related stresses.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that pandemic-related disruptions in mothers' childcare and paid work routines led many mothers to experience increased stress, anxiety, and frustration with their children. Thus, there is reason to believe that pandemic-related disruptions are threatening not only mothers' health (Pearlin et al. 2005; Read and Gorman 2010) but also children's well-being, as well (Augustine and Crosnoe 2010; Morgan et al. 2014; Turney 2011, 2012).

Limitations

Of course, this study is limited in that the data are not nationally representative, including a disproportionate share of white mothers, mothers with partners, and mothers with bachelor's and advanced degrees. Because of how COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting communities of color (Pirtle 2020), and because of how women of color have been disproportionately impacted by pandemic-related unemployment (Moen, Pedtke, and Flood 2020), there is reason to suspect that Black mothers, Indigenous mothers, and other mothers of color may be experiencing different pandemic-related challenges than white mothers. These different challenges, in turn, may shape how mothers experience substantial, unanticipated increases in time with their children.

Another limitation of this study is that it relies on mothers' reports of changes in the time they spend caring for their children. Time diary data would offer a more accurate picture of changes in mothers' parenting time (Belli, Stafford, and Alwin 2009). That said, perceptions of time use may matter more than actual time use in determining mothers' experiences of that time (Christopher

2020). Furthermore, and as we see here, perceptions of changes in parenting time may matter for mothers' well-being, regardless of the actual magnitude of the change in mothers' time.

Implications

By revealing the added stress, anxiety, and frustrations that some mothers are experiencing during the pandemic, and by linking those changes in mothers' well-being to changes in mothers' parenting time, this study offers important insights for research and policy. First, these findings clarify our understanding of the consequences of parents' time with children. Prior research finds that "family time" is beneficial for parents (Flood et al. 2020; Musick et al. 2016; Offer 2014) and that most parents would prefer more time with their children (Meier et al. 2016; Milkie et al. 2004, 2019). As we see here, however, and consistent with research on the impact of parenthood on parents' mental health (Glass et al. 2016; Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003), substantial, unanticipated increases in parenting time can, at least for some mothers, be detrimental to well-being. Such findings highlight the importance of considering not only the amount of time parents spend with their children but also changes in parenting time and the contexts in which those changes occur.

To that end, and consistent with research on the link between childcare and mothers' well-being (Glass et al. 2016), our study emphasizes the importance of childcare access for mothers' enjoyment of time with their children. Childcare disruptions amplified the stress, anxiety, and frustration that mothers experienced in managing increased pandemic parenting demands. To avoid those outcomes, many families had to rely on nannies or grandparents for care. These options, however, are not universally accessible, given the high cost of professional care (Malik 2019) and the risks that COVID-19 poses to elderly individuals (Jordan, Adab, and Cheng 2020). From a public policy and public health perspective, then, these findings illustrate the need for universal access to affordable professional childcare centers (Hofferth 1999; Ruppanner, Moller, et al. 2019). And they emphasize the necessity of funding these facilities to safely remain open, even amidst public health threats.

Our study also reveals how intensive work and parenting demands can lead mothers to experience more stress, anxiety, and frustration in navigating disruptions to normal routines. These findings are consistent with pandemic research linking telecommuting to stress for mothers (Lyttelton et al. 2020) and with previous research showing how intensive work demands exacerbate work-family conflict (Clarkberg and Moen 2016; Collins 2019; Damaske 2011; Gerson 1985; Glass and Estes 1997) and hurt workers' well-being (Craig and Brown 2017; Damaske, Zawadzki, and Smyth 2016; Kleiner 2014; Milkie et al. 2004, 2019; Ruppanner, Perales, et al. 2019). They are also consistent with research showing how intensive parenting norms generate guilt and stress for mothers who (because of paid work responsibilities or limited resources) struggle to meet those demands (Christopher 2012; Collins 2019; Damaske 2011; Elliott et al. 2015; Gerson 1985; Hays 1998; Nelson 2010; Rizzo et al. 2013; Romagnoli and Wall 2012).

Mothers, however, should not be blamed for attempting to remain engaged in intensive work or intensive parenting. For mothers working remotely during the pandemic, a failure to meet intensive work demands could put their careers at risk (Munsch 2016). Meanwhile, and because of strong normative pressures toward intensive parenting (Ishizuka 2018; Romagnoli and Wall 2012), mothers who struggle to follow intensive parenting norms may experience the kind of scrutiny (Edwards

2004; Elliott and Bowen 2018; Elliott et al. 2015; Romagnoli and Wall 2012) that further undermines well-being (Link and Phelan 2001).

On a policy level, then, our findings highlight the need not only for universal access to affordable childcare but also for interventions reducing intensive work and parenting pressures and ensuring that all mothers have the resources they need. Thinking of mothers like Sierra, our study reveals how having sufficient financial resources allows mothers to enjoy time with their children. Without the support Sierra received through the CARES Act, WIC benefits, rent and utility waivers, and diapers and wipes from a local church, and as Sierra was quick to acknowledge, it would have been far more difficult to enjoy that time. Ultimately, then, our study supports calls to extend the expanded federal unemployment benefits put in place during the pandemic and to ensure that all families have access to sufficient financial resources, regardless of their ability to find work and regardless of whether we are in crisis or in "normal" times.

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