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Telework and women: perceptions of work and family life balance

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Abstract

This research discusses the satisfaction and conciliation of professional and family life of women who work in the General Management of Ports, Airports, Borders, and Customs Areas (GGPAF) of the National Health Surveillance Agency (Anvisa). We chose Anvisa for its pioneering role in implementing teleworking, adopted at the institution in 2016. It is a health-related institution, and a high proportion of women work remotely in the Management department- the focus point of the study. Although women working at Anvisa accumulated roles and domestic responsibilities during the pandemic, they opted for the potential of telework. The methodology that underpins the results presented in this article can be characterized as a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. During the analysis, five key categories gained substantial attention: quality of life, family life, productivity and motivation, personal organization, and perception of satisfaction with telework. After transcribing the interviews, we analyzed the data using content analysis. Results showed that women are satisfied with teleworking and perceive benefits and gains in quality of life with teleworking despite the disadvantages of social distancing and the accumulation of household tasks and obligations. The study offers a significant contribution to building the field of knowledge about teleworking before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the research may help to formulate people management policies that consider the importance of women in the world of work, focusing on the work and family life balance.

Keywords: Telework. Women and productivity. Work and personal life balance.

O teletrabalho e as mulheres: percepções da conciliação da vida profissional e familiar

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta resultados sobre a satisfação e a conciliação da vida profissional e familiar das mulheres em teletrabalho na Gerência Geral de Portos, Aeroportos, Fronteiras e Recintos Alfandegados (GGPAF) da Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária (Anvisa). Elegemos a Anvisa por ser pioneira na implementação do teletrabalho, adotado na instituição em 2016. Mesmo com o acúmulo de papéis e responsabilidades domésticas, durante a pandemia, as trabalhadoras optaram pelas potencialidades do teletrabalho. Em termos metodológicos, a pesquisa que subsidia os resultados apresentados neste artigo pode ser caracterizada como de abordagem qualitativa, conduzida por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas. Para a análise dos dados, foram consideradas cinco categorias centrais: qualidade de vida; convívio familiar; produtividade e motivação; organização pessoal; percepção de satisfação com o teletrabalho. Após a transcrição das entrevistas, os dados foram analisados tendo por base o método de análise de conteúdo por categoria. Como resultado, tem-se que, de modo geral, as mulheres estão satisfeitas com o teletrabalho. A maioria considera benefícios e melhorias na qualidade de vida com o teletrabalho, não obstante as desvantagens do isolamento social e o acúmulo de tarefas e responsabilidades domésticas. A contribuição do estudo consiste em ampliar o campo de conhecimento sobre o teletrabalho no período anterior e durante a pandemia, podendo projetar luz para o delineamento de políticas de gestão de pessoas que considerem a importância das mulheres no mundo do trabalho e contemplem o equilíbrio entre vida familiar e profissional.

Palavras-chave: Teletrabalho. Mulheres e produtividade. Equilíbrio entre trabalho e vida pessoal.

Teletrabajo y mujeres: percepciones del equilibrio entre la vida profesional y familiar

Resumen

Esta investigación discute la satisfacción y conciliación de la vida profesional y familiar de mujeres que actúan en la Dirección General de Puertos, Aeropuertos, Fronteras y Zonas Aduaneras (GGPAF) de la Agencia Nacional de Vigilancia Sanitaria (Anvisa). Elegimos a Anvisa por su papel pionero en la implementación del teletrabajo, adoptado en la institución en 2016. Aún con la acumulación de roles y responsabilidades domésticas, durante la pandemia, las trabajadoras optaron por el potencial del teletrabajo. La metodología que sustenta los resultados presentados en este artículo se puede caracterizar como un enfoque cualitativo basado en entrevistas semiestructuradas. Para el análisis de datos se consideraron cinco categorías clave: calidad de vida, vida familiar; productividad y motivación; organización personal; y percepción de satisfacción con el teletrabajo. Una vez realizada la transcripción de las entrevistas, se analizaron los datos con base en el método de análisis de contenido por categoría. Los resultados indican que, en general, las mujeres están satisfechas con el teletrabajo. La mayoría considera que el teletrabajo aportó beneficios y mejoras a la calidad de vida, a pesar de las desventajas del aislamiento social, la demanda de productividad y la acumulación de tareas y obligaciones del hogar. Una de las principales contribuciones de la investigación es la ampliación del campo de conocimiento sobre el teletrabajo en el período anterior y durante la pandemia, lo que podrá arrojar luz sobre el diseño de políticas de gestión de personas que consideren la importancia de la mujer en el mundo laboral y contemplen el equilibrio entre vida familiar y profesional.

Palabras clave: Teletrabajo. Mujer y productividad. Equilibrio entre vida personal y laboral.

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INTRODUCTION

Dingel and Neiman (2020, p. 4) note that “the characteristics of its labor market indicate an average percentage of people who are willing to do telework of 22,7%, or 20,8 million people”. In view of these data, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the situation of the Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency (ANVISA) and the adhesion of its teleworking professionals, mainly women, during the period during the period leading up to and including the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the responsibility of regulating, ANVISA coordinates the National Health Surveillance System (SNVS), which involves government agencies directly or indirectly related to the health sector. In the federal public administration structure, ANVISA is linked to the Ministry of Health and is part of the Brazilian National Health System (SUS), following its principles and guidelines.

ANVISA employed 48 workers in teleworking, including 37 women (77,08%) during the study (Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária [ANVISA], 2020). This number is variable, as there are constant movements of employees changing the work regime according to the institution's necessity and measures to achieve the quarterly employees' productivity goals. The increasing number of women at ANVISA who prefer to work from home is evident, which suggests that the autonomy and advantages of telework outweigh the increase in care activities for women, considering the accumulation of unpaid household chores, demands for school attendance by younger children, and the attention required by elderly parents. Also, the presence at home allows women to adjust domestic routines with professional life or request a reduction in working hours, even if this implies reduced pay. Besides, teleworking has been considered an alternative for GGPAF/ANVISA's employees to circumvent absenteeism, improve the quality of life for young children, and reconcile women's professional and family life.

As a contribution, this study is relevant for ANVISA as well for our society in general, considering the role teleworking played during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is crucial to understand the perception of satisfaction from servers in this work genre. This is in order to improve the working environment and work management of virtual work, notably in public institutions, in order to protect the experience gained during the pandemic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According with Van Horn and Storen (2000), teleworking is a work carried out from home, away from the workplace, using information technology resources, such as the Internet, computers, or telephones. For Goulart (2009) it is the process of taking work to employees instead of taking them to work. It is a periodic activity outside the company one or more days a week, either at home or at another intermediate work area.

Teleworking, therefore, appears as an advantageous option for the worker in several aspects. The main benefits are more time spent with the family, reduced costs and risks of commuting, better management of working time, improved quality of life, and less stress and professional tension (Goulart, 2009).

The need for balance between professional and personal life has led organizations to develop alternative policies, such as telework, which has helped remove the labor pressure from employees, improve their well-being, and reduce work-family conflict (Darouei & Pluut, 2021; Delanoeije, Verbruggen, & Germeys, 2019).

A research led by Masuda, Holtschlag, and Nicklin (2017) highlighted that individuals that worked in organizations that offered the possibility of telework, were more engaged than those that worked only in presence. Additionally, the availability of telework was not only directly related, but also indirectly linked to the supervisor's support. In addition, the research identifies that the availability of teleworking is beneficial and advances on this theme when it identifies the relationship between teleworking and engagement.

The disadvantages of teleworking include the tension associated with the tension of living constantly in conflict situations, such as the combination of production and reproduction of space, physical presence and absence from family, temptation related to the flexibility of hours, and self-imposed pressure to produce effective results. In addition, the teleworker is an

individual that is constantly pressured by the subject positions and originated from the conflicting speech: when working, it is required that father/mother, son/daughter, husband/wife, brother/sister; when out of working hours, it is required its role as worker (Costa, 2017).

Furthermore, many authors draw attention to the advantages of this work modality, which, when well managed, can result in both a productivity increase and a reduction in expenses (A. M. S. Silva, 2015).

Of the eleven agencies in Brazil, only seven currently use teleworking. ANVISA was a pioneer among Brazilian regulatory agencies to implement permanent teleworking. Considering the staff deficit pointed out by the agency's report "Work Force Dimension" carried out in 2016 and the fact that ANVISA is not carrying out hiring processes to increase and replace staff, strategies were devised to promote people management oriented to results (ANVISA, 2017). Therefore, the teleworking pilot project was regulated, through Ordinance 2,170, of November 25, 2016 (Portaria nº 2.170, de 25 de novembro de 2016). Subsequently, teleworking was permanently regulated and open to other units (ANVISA, 2017).

According to Ordinance 1,152/2019, teleworkers were required to produce 20% more than the goal established for employees working in the office (S. F. B. Aguiar, Duarte, & Souza, 2019). It is clear that, at ANVISA, with the use of teleworking, the productivity and the decisions of import licensing become more rapid, resulting in a reduction in the medium term deadline for import analyses, cutting it from 40 to 2 days, and a reduction in operational costs of import - such as transportation and customhouse storage. There was more egalitarian distribution of the work load between servers that were working in health surveillance stations with high volumes of import. This was for example in Guarulhos, Santos and Campinas (S. F. B. Aguiar et al., 2019).

On a personal level, it is necessary to understand better how the mode of teleworking impacts the relationship between work and family. Several authors, mostly dedicated to the study of work life quality (Sant'Anna & Kilimnik, 2011; Limongi-França, 2004) and the purpose of work (Morin, 2001), illustrate factors associated with the mode of work organization and work well-being management in this context.

Several authors investigate the effects and variations of modes of work achievement on the balance between the professional and personal lives and (Scanfone, Carvalho, & Tanure, 2008), between work and family life (Barham & Vanalli, 2012; Greenhaus, 2008; L. B. Oliveira, Cavazotte, & Paciello, 2013).

These researchers found that there is a complexity dimension and various levels of analysis, drafting changes in the format of how work is performed on the job market, including elements such as precarity, intensification of the phenomena of polarization among professions, and greater participation of women in activities that are less valued by the market, that bring significant consequences for longevity, affecting the necessity of caring for younger children, in the same home, or in separate homes, as well as for the relative elderly.

Also, the complexity of the work-family intersections exacerbated demands on the organizations for more-sophisticated and advanced monitoring and control of distance, reducing the level of privacy and, ultimately, making it more convenient for people to access professionals, no matter the time or place.

Thus, impacts on health, psyc and mental well-being drive us to extreme preoccupation. For many authors in stress occupational research, as well as health and safety at work, the next sanitary crisis will not come from a pandemic. Instead, it will come from a social epidemic associated with the psychic suffering caused by work. In the World Health Organization (WHO) database, the pathologies associated with behavioral disorders are those caused by both legal and illegal drugs as a second major cause of absence from work (Sant'Anna, Ferreira, & Santos, 2019).

The rapid evolution of COVID-19 combined with the trend of major work flexibility, impacted the family environment in a significant and intense manner indicating the importance of deeper understanding of the impacts of this process on the professional-work-organization relationship.

The pandemic COVID-19 and the importance of teleworking

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an emergency change in the transition to working from home, which occurred abruptly for most people as a measure to promote social distancing. The practice also resulted in the accumulation of roles and responsibilities that people had to assume at home (Pimenta, 2020). When adopting a teleworking regime, many people felt overwhelmed and required to deal with excessive domestic activities and work hours (Magnan et al., 2020).

The change in the work regime to increase social distancing led to an increase of activities related to other roles of life - father, mother, son, member of a family -, and those who previously counted on helpers at home, mainly women, now had to take on more of these tasks. The possibility of working from home can positively or negatively affect the task of reconciling work and family. Learning how to deal with professional and family obligations in the same environment is even more challenging when it may be common for the whole family to work/study in the same environment (Magnan et al., 2020).

In most studies on teleworking, the experiences of conflict work-family are compared with those of full-time office workers (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015). This approach is not representative of the actual way teleworking policies are implemented.

Due to the pandemic COVID-19, people began combining work at home with work at the office. As a result of the pandemic, many companies are organizing their staff and scheduling work at home to maintain social distance between them and their workers (Marin-Guzman, 2020). Analyzing the specific effects of telework, depending on the increasing number of workers rotating between the office and home office, increases understanding by employers and workers of how it is being used in practice (Darouei & Pluut, 2021).

Furthermore, employees and organizations need to be aware that teleworking poses a number of challenges, such as high levels of professional isolation and low levels of social inclusion in the workplace, compared to in-office workers (Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive, & Heelan, 2010).

We note that this is a moment to validate written standards, even though they are not yet fully implemented. Cultural factors and awareness of both the employee and the employer are paramount to experiencing this paradigm shift. Thus, the scenario marked by the pandemic may also be considered as an opportunity for employers and employees to reflect, adapt, and overcome difficulties (Venerai & Knihs, 2020).

Compromise between domestic chores, family life, and telework

Today's woman tries to reconcile personal life and work with social and cultural demands: motherhood, profession, and marriage. There is a pronounced gender difference in teleworking since men occupy managerial and professional positions while women are more frequently seen in salaried office jobs (Tremblay, 2002).

Most research on telework and workspace indicates that the family (and the roles played within it) is a significant source of identification, and it is also a potential source of resistance to telework, especially in the case of teleworkers with children at home (Costa, 2007). In addition, the lack of mobility and flexibility for women in the labor market may explain the prevalence of female workers in this regime. Other variables indicate an important relationship between the time spent during teleworking and the level of satisfaction. This also has a gender dimension, since women work full time at home (Tremblay, 2002), while men adopt teleworking for other reasons and mostly cite that teleworking can be an opportunity to "help" wives at home (Smaha, 2009).

According to Melo (2009), the positive point for teleworkers is having more contact with their family, a factor that goes against contemporary life, in which men and women, due to their professional activities, spend more time outside their homes than in contact with spouses or their children.

The main advantage highlighted by all teleworkers is flexibility, i.e., being able to carry out work activities at the best time for them. As a more relevant result, it is possible to infer that teleworking strongly influences maintaining women's social role in domestic care (Santos, 2016).

Caring activities involve personal services for others: activities that address the physical, intellectual, affective needs, and other emotional demands of spouses, children and the elderly, sick, or with disabilities. This includes tasks of daily life, covering the maintenance of the house - cooking, cleaning, washing, and shopping – and personal care – bathing, feeding, accompanying, transporting. Sex-affective production can be part of care. It need not be heterosexual or homonormative. According to feminist theorists, such labor requires, “‘caring for’ while ‘caring about’”. Taking care of the body or the home environment is to “care for” but perhaps also to “care about” (Boris, 2014).

There is no doubt that maintaining the family unit at home is still a responsibility that lies primarily with women. They are still the most present in their children’s education and who pause their careers or are absent when necessary. While men share longer working hours, women cannot neglect dedication to the home. Even though an increasing number of men are participating in domestic life, this is still a typically female environment (Miltersteiner, F. B. Oliveira, Hryniewicz, Sant’anna, & Mour, 2020).

It is highlighted that women’s need to divide the time between work and family can generate conflicts. In fact, the conflict appears, as stated by A. B. Silva (2005), when family and work start to interfere with each other. The fact that the woman leaves her family for work can result in demands such as complaining about her children, her husband, or even a self-pressure for the time not dedicated to what should be the most important thing in her life. Also, it is often the female daughter who takes care of elderly parents and the demands of doctors, making appointments, and appearance care, such as personal/beauty care, buying clothes, and buying food.

Teleworking is already challenging under normal circumstances. However, in a pandemic situation it becomes more challenging because it becomes integral and mandatory for everyone in the house (Cartmill, 2020). One of the most significant challenges people who telework face during a pandemic is balancing their personal and professional lives. People with children considered the combination of the closure of schools and kindergartens along with an extended period of telecommuting to be shocking to their routines and productivity.

An analysis conducted about the situation for teleworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that 1 in 5 people (22%) who have children under 12 years old had problems concentrating during work time, compared to only 5% of families without children and 7% of those with children between 12 and 17. Most of the parents and mothers of children with some deficiencies feel highly stressed. Other parents and mothers of children with certain deficiencies also reported feeling extremely stressed (Eurofound, 2020). On the other hand, the crisis of COVID-19 dismistifies the notion that paid work and personal life are two fields completely distinct from one another, as well as the myth of the ideal worker who is always available to develop any role at work.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodology, the research that explains the results presented in this article can be classified as qualitative. The study involves semistructured interviews based on the literature review of the study topic conducted through the data base Web of Science e Scopus.

Using a boolean formula, the literature review examined key words such as work-family conflict and teleworking, identifying 34 articles, published in the former data in the last six years. Analyzing the title and summary of the articles enabled us to eliminate those that did not match the objectives of the research, excluding duplication. Additionally, articles related to the proposed review were analysed in other databases, such as SciELO and Ebsco.

Considering the empirical data collected, it is relevant to mention that, after transcription, the recorded interviews were submitted to content analysis, according to the procedures listed for Bardin (2011). The research participants were female professionals at ANVISA, a pioneer public agency that implemented telework in Brazil (2016). In this study, we examined the experiences of nine female public service employees who were managers at GGPAF/ANVISA. During the research at ANVISA we noticed that the majority of the teleworkers were composed of women (77,9%) working in different cities in Brazil.

Box 1 Interviewees profile

Code	Profession/Education	Number of children	Age (years old)	Time working at ANVISA (years)
I01	Pharmaceuticals/Specialization	02	38	15
I02	Nurse/Master	00	54	15
I03	Pharmaceuticals/Specialization	00	39	15
I04	Pharmaceuticals/Specialization	01	38	05
I05	Pharmaceuticals/Specialization	02	39	15
I06	Pharmaceuticals/Master	01	43	15
I07	Pharmaceuticals/Master	01	48	16
I08	Pharmaceuticals/Specialization	02	42	16
I09	Chemistry/Master	01	48	15

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

At the time of the research, 37 women were working as teleworkers for ANVISA, as stated in Ordinance nº 241/GGPES/ANVISA on March 9, 2020. It is worth mentioning that *prior* to the pandemic, nine interviews were conducted in person. However, during COVID-19, we decided to send by email the same questions used when the interviews were face-to-face.

Also the interviews that were recorded in presence were transcribed and inserted into an Excel sheet as well as the data collected by email. To analyze the interviews we used procedures described by Bardin (2011) and we classified the results into four central categories: quality of life, family life, productivity and motivation and personal organization; they will be discussed in the next topic.

ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

Quality of life

This category is considered very comprehensive. For Mello (1999), the benefits of teleworking for quality of life are many, from working without having to dress formally - for example, putting on makeup or wearing specific clothes - to avoiding the stress of commuting.

L. B. Oliveira et al. (2013) mentions that according to a study by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA, 2010) the heavy traffic in large urban centers leads vehicles to travel at an average of 17 km/h. Considering this condition, how much energy could one save, avoiding the stress of commuting? How much would be gained in quality of life? Or, looking at the resources, how much would it be possible to save on fuel? Most interviewees praised saving time and money in commuting because it generated autonomy, financial savings, freedom, and mental balance. These factors reveal how much the issue of commuting affects the quality of life of women, especially for those who live in large Brazilian cities:

I don't waste more time on commuting and traffic jams that caused tiredness and annoyance, I have the flexibility to work so I can choose a more productive time for me, a feeling of autonomy (I06).

It allows me to better manage my time, not having to punch a clock. I can make my schedules and perform activities that I wouldn't manage if I had to complete a fixed and a routine workday (I01).

We are not imprisoned within the stiff hours of the headquarters [...] I can use this time to participate more actively in my daughter's activities and help my parents (I09).

At the beginning, it was more difficult to adapt, to reconcile [...] as time went by we became more adept at establishing routines and specific time for activities (I02).

The interviewees declared the financial benefits regarding expenses with clothing, makeup, eating out, full-time school/care for their children, fuel and car maintenance. On the other hand, working at home generated some fixed financial expenses such as housekeeper, electricity, improved broadband internet, ergonomic chair, and programmed maintenance for the computer. It appears that some elements pointed out by the employees to set up a home office can be considered an initial investment to enable a more pleasant work environment, making it comfortable and thus improving quality of life.

I prepared an exclusive workspace with table, chair, air conditioning, adequate equipment (I05).

I organized a pleasant and quiet environment that helps me concentrate. At the same time, I can take a break and disconnect from work taking care of my orchids! (I04).

My family respects my space and the time I have to dedicate to work. The fact that I have no children makes my family environment more peaceful (I02).

I have an office, which is the physical space for teleworking (I08).

Other consumption and maintenance expenses for work instruments were added to monthly expenses and became permanent. Interviewees directly correlate health and quality of life, emphasizing that the reduction of stressful elements and the possibility of dedicating more time to themselves, promoted their physical and emotional balance:

Nowadays I do daily physical activities (I01).

I already did pilates at night, there was no change, but now I am not missing as many classes (I04).

I started doing gymnastics three times a week (I07).

With discipline, I managed to adapt my time to do physical activities [...] (I03).

I can do physical activities three times a week [...] before I never could! (I08).

In this regard, many employees already did physical activity and continued to when teleworking. Some report that they often prioritize work over physical activities and for this reason, if they have not finished their work, they put aside physical activities. This fact is closely related to the personality of the employees, which influences the individuals' priorities such as preferring to spend more time with young children or hobbies over physical activity. Improving the well-being and the physical and mental health was a growing concern among the interviewees since some of them enjoy the time available for manual activities or hobbies instead of physical activities. According to Mendonça, Cordeiro, S. L. Silva, and Marins (2018), practicing physical and manual activities, spending time with family, and having a hobby are directly related to the set of concepts that contribute to the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of a person in their social circle:

The work's nature is quite monotonous, physically still, repetitive (I03).

Physical activity is necessary, as the routine becomes tiring, demotivating (I05).

The responses show that adherence to teleworking may have influenced the beginning or continuity of physical activity or even intensified its frequency, thus reducing the employees' sedentary lifestyle. The evaluation of this category suggests that the set of factors that collaborate with physical and emotional well-being, such as flexible hours, autonomy, financial savings, reduced mobility, influence the decision to work from home.

During the pandemic, the women stated that when they attempted to balance their work with personal care and childcare for their sons, their quality of life deteriorated. The physical activities took a back seat until the whole family got back into their regular routine outside the home, in particular the sons. The interviewed were emphatic:

Even though teleworking allowed me to combine work with childcare, their presence at home made it difficult to maintain a routine at work (E01).

I had to take care of my child - follow him to his virtual classes and care for him the whole day - there was no reduction in my work goals, which meant that I had to work at night after my son went to bed (E04).

According to the interviewer, productivity demands remained the same or increased, thus making double work necessary, even on nights when the sons were in bed, which really affected productivity. However, all the people in the house were a major security factor against the disease.

During the interviews, we didn't ask the women with children if they were married to men, but just assumed so by the way they described care of the household. It illustrates a typical gender stereotype that men regard public work as productive and women as private and reproductive. Since the schools were closed, the reproductive behavior of the women became more evident. The challenge for them was to conciliate the family routine with the pressure of some companies and institutions for the maintenance of their professional development (Porto, 2020; Siqueira, V. O. B. Silva, Pereira, Guimarães, & W. R. Silva, 2020).

Family life

According to Melo (2009), different from the traditional condition of contemporary life, where men and women spend more time performing professional activities outside their homes, teleworkers have more contact with their families. The woman is considered the "queen of the home." Society understands that the mother has to take care of the family, especially the children, and her absence can impair the children's growth and development. According to Favaro (2007), today women are the heads of the household, not only a participant in the family economy. However, women in teleworking are apparently living in another era. They know that professional and domestic and family demands overlap. They manage their time and routine to align both activities to the particularities related to having a family. It is a matter of finding a balance between the professional and family lives, which is evident in the speech of some interviewees.

I can work close to my son, observing his activities while I work (I06).

With the flexibility of schedules, I can be more present at the times when my children are most active (I08).

This was the main reason for opting for teleworking because I was able to breastfeed my daughter for longer (I05).

It is not and has never been an easy task to reconcile all domestic, family, personal activities with work, especially for us women who have always had a double burden. The difference I feel in teleworking is that because I am more available at home, I take on more demands (I02).

In all the speeches, the family occupies an essential space in the teleworkers' lives who strongly dedicate to manage and organize the household's routine, children, and, in some cases, elderly parents.

Favaro (2007) argues that, in the current context, motherhood is the women's main role, and it is part of their identity. The woman is placed as an essential aggregating element, without which the family unit cannot survive. This argument is aligned with the statement that women's decision to work from home is often motivated precisely to improve family life and their young children's quality of life. Many choose to work in alternative periods such as at night, when the child is sleeping, which is reported by some women, mainly mothers of young children:

I organize myself to work at the quietest times in the domestic environment [referring to the children] (I05).

I choose to work when they are at school, when I am alone at home (I01).

I work when my daughter is at school, in extracurricular activities and every day at night (I09).

Particularly discussing the issue of women in the labor market, Mendes (2015) argues that the need to manage the complexity of human nature and the interests of the organizations requires tools to harmonize or make compatible the different demands of the professional sphere and family/personal life. For the author, the organization is also benefited when workers manage to combine professional responsibilities and family commitments.

The interviewees also commented in the same direction. They felt that when the family most needed their presence at home, they spared no effort to manage both sides in the domestic environment, even while taking on a workload aiming to produce 20% more than the expected from employees working at the office.

My demands have increased, but I am satisfied to be able to participate more in my family's life (I05).

I can give more attention to my son [...] I consider that the domestic demands remain the same (I06).

Before joining teleworking, I left in the morning, and my son was still sleeping [...] now I can have breakfast with him, take him to school and pick him up (I04).

As the pandemic progressed, familiarity intensified in the homes of those interviewed. In their case, there was not only the problem of living together but also the lack of a network, mainly the ones they used to have to help care for young children and elderly relatives:

The presence of the children in the house for long periods of time under my supervision, due to the pandemic, raised the familiarity. At the same time, I had to exert more effort to achieve my goals in my work (E05).

Conciliation is not an easy task. The main challenge with sons are the online classes. Considering elderly parents, there are actions that require immense mental effort, leading to intense emotional distress (E08).

In their role as caregivers, the husbands participated in a very peripheral way.

Since I didn't have this network support, I had to take turns with my husband, also working full-time, experiencing in many situations long hours without sleep and reducing weekend rest (E01).

As the women lived with their families at home, the familiarity intensified, but also became fragile, competing with care, leisure, school, and work. The overload of tasks combined with social distance, as well as other issues brought on by the pandemic, negatively impact the mental health of the workers. This contributes to family tensions and stresses (Losekann & Mourão, 2020; Martins, C. V. N. Aguiar, & Bastos, 2020).

Productivity and motivation

According to Mello (1999), productivity is a convenient and widely used term. However, it does not describe the totality of an employee's work, no matter where they are working. In several cases, teleworkers are working harder, doing a better job, meeting their deadlines effectively, and are better able to decide on multiple priorities and deadlines.

The interviewees reported that they sometimes work during holidays and weekends to complete their work demands and productivity targets. They manage and optimize working hours in favor of the family routine, and often this adaptation makes women work more than when they worked in the office. However, most of them perceive this increase in work as a burden for choosing to work from home. Although satisfied with their choice, some consider the productivity goal set for telework to be overvalued, which makes them anxious, tired, stressed and feeling overwhelmed:

In practice, I work a lot at night and EVERY day, including weekends and holidays to meet the goal [...] the burden of teleworking is 9.6h/day! (I05).

I consider the workload to be very high, which prevents me from carrying out activities to improve my work process [...] (I04).

I am satisfied, although I think the workload is above capacity, today I have more quality of life than when I worked in the office (I01).

I feel motivated, mainly because it is a pioneering project that is still under construction, allowing improvements with the participation of the employee [...] (I07).

It depends on the processes sent, sometimes I feel it is appropriate to the workload, other times I think it exceeds and I feel exhausted [...] I would like to have a lower load (I02).

The interviewees suggest the workload is excessive, including frequent work on weekends and holidays. However, most of the interviewees stated to use these days to compensate for the time dedicated to personal issues during the week. Although this flexibility is perceived as something positive in teleworking, night and weekend work brings the concern with overload and the difficulty of establishing a balance between personal and professional life, which can negatively affect health in the medium and long term.

Even considering the hard work, this is the best option for many women at the present moment of their lives, whether due to the demands of young children, dependent elderly parents, or other particular needs:

The moment I live in is the best way to stay active professionally [...] without teleworking, I would have to give up ANVISA and take unpaid leave (I08).

I think teleworking at ANVISA is not highly valued, as if it were a service of inferior quality (I06).

The target is high, and productivity has to be high and constant [...] in many cycles reaching the target requires much effort (I02).

At this time, for personal reasons (the schedule of my younger son's therapies) I understand that the workload is greater than my capacity (I01).

Few interviewees mentioned social isolation, described in the literature as one of the biggest cons of teleworking. Some consider that teleworking does not interfere with and even improves the relationship with co-workers, since they now only visit the office and are always well received. However, many complain that the decrease in contact with co-workers leads to greater social isolation and also to the decrease in the feeling of belonging to the organization:

I think work at ANVISA is not highly valued [...] (I06).

The absence of socializing with colleagues and the interpersonal relationship I miss a lot [...] (I02).

I can say that I have a feeling of isolation [...] (I01).

For others, teleworking does not cause a feeling of isolation since they have demands with their children, such as school and extracurricular activities where they are always in contact with other mothers. We believe that, especially for those who worked for many years in the office, teleworking brought the feeling of being isolated, which is aggravated when the family is small such as a mother/child or wife/husband. Allied to the impacts on personal life, some interviewees report socializing online with other teleworkers as a way to reduce the feeling of social isolation because there is online contact with co-workers.

In the midst of the pandemic, women suffered not from the workload or pressure for daily productivity. Instead, they suffered from demotivation and emotional balance due to the changes in their routine:

Due to the constant changing of my routine during the pandemic, I was not motivated to perform my work at home. This affects my mental health and that of my family (E01).

The number of established goals did not decrease. I needed to work night/overnight, because during the day I had to look after my 4 year old son. This affected my efficiency in my work and my mental and physical health (E04).

The interviewees also reported that the changes in their neighbors' routines affected their productivity, since they were also required to stay at home with their families:

The presence of children without classes during the pandemic disrupted my concentration, as well as the noises from neighbors in similar situations (E08).

For the interviewees, before the pandemic, there was better integration of their work and home life; there was a daily routine – domestic assistance, schools, etc. – Integrating work and home life. In the home office, work was affected by the coexistence of family and work not only at home, but also elsewhere in the neighborhood. Everything was interspersed, compromising concentration. The presence of the family in the house intensifies all domestic activities, causing tension and negatively affecting the conciliation of all demands (Martins et al., 2020).

Personal organization

According to Mello (1999), reconciling home and work requires a high degree of organization and personal time reassessment. It also implies knowing how to plan the work at home and continuously monitor the workability, that is, the professional capacity to perform good services for the market. This category's analysis showed that teleworkers seek to reconcile their personal and professional lives in the best possible way. The interviews show many women can only organize themselves with all professional, family, and domestic demands since they rely on collaboration from their husbands, family members (fathers and mothers), babysitters and housekeepers, full-time schools, and extracurricular activities for their children. If they did not choose to hire a nanny or housekeeper, they emphasized that they worked at alternative hours such as at night and during weekends/holidays when their husband was responsible for the routine with the children and the domestic duties:

Initially, there was an increase in domestic demands, I had to intervene with my family members to change this situation (I07).

To reconcile work with family activities, I have been working at alternative hours (at night). I chose this option so that my son only goes part-time at school and not full time as before (I04).

I have a housekeeper who performs domestic activities [...] (I01).

Some activities that were previously delegated or even not performed at home started to be carried out there [...] people also see you in a more available way and ask for your attention and participation (I02).

I ended up accumulating domestic duties with work [...] (I09).

These statements corroborate the need for initial adaptation to organize family dynamics to the teleworking regime to avoid constant interruptions or excessive requests from family members, which could lead to a decrease in concentration and productivity.

The interviews also demonstrated that, currently, women are still seen by most family members as responsible for the home, either for their way of acting, or for culture. The disparities between the roles of father and mother commanding the routine may be related to some factors that strongly relate women and family; to society's perception of female values; and the supposed preference of women for a balance between personal life and work, which differs from the male vision of seeking better professional positions. These expectations corroborate the culture that defines men as the provider and women as caregivers for their offspring. The interviewees are forceful in demonstrating that one of the reasons that lead them to choose to work from home is precisely to be closer to family members, such as children, spouses, and elderly parents. Some subtly reveal the feminine values that are most evident:

I find it easy to concentrate [...] I can work while my son is resting or doing other activities at home, and he can count on me when he needs at any time (I06).

Before I started teleworking, I felt very distressed about not being able to dedicate more time to him and for having to leave him for a very long period (9 hours) at school [...] (I04).

I personally take care of my mother and another elderly woman in the family (I02).

With teleworking I was able to breastfeed my daughter for a longer time [...] my demands have increased a lot, but I am satisfied to be able to participate more in my family's life (I05).

These reports correlate with Freitas (2008) statement that teleworking is an alternative for people whose responsibilities with children would restrict participation in localized conventional work. Therefore, for some professionals, combining working from home with child care is not a choice, but the only way to overcome the high cost and low availability of child care services. Managing personal activities already demanded a high level of control. During the pandemic, both domestic and professional activities became dynamic, causing those interviewed to see a lack of balance between work and care in the company during this challenging time:

There is no receipt (laughs). It is a daily challenge which each of us adapts in our own way (E05).

There was a distance between the maid and the house. As a result, I had to devote more time to domestic tasks while simultaneously caring for my sons without face-to-face classes. All that compromised my time devoted to teleworking (E08).

The interviewees in this category did not mention the care of the body (physical activity) or their minds (emotional support) even though they were overwhelmed by the responsibilities of their home because of the conditions imposed by the pandemic. As Bitterncourt (2020) argues, during social isolation, control of human life prohibits subjectivities, which require each person to sacrifice their freedom for the benefit of others. A large part of the effort originates from internal networking of familiar cooperation, rather than from a single source.

However, from what has emerged from what has occurred through the discourse of the women in teleworking, we can accurately state that the experience of the pandemic was characterized by pain, stress, and illness, which primarily resulted in the naturalization of the women as caregivers, in the absence of external domestic support. This leads to exhaustion, as the care demanded of all family members must be taken into account. Because of the power relations in society, women often internalize that it is their responsibility to care for their families. Furthermore, they do not spend much time taking care of themselves, exercising, resting the body, or finding leisure activities (Porto, 2008).

CONCLUSION

As a result of the analysis of all the data obtained in this research, we can conclude that women at ANVISA are generally satisfied with teleworking. In the majority's opinion, the benefits and the improvements in quality of life outweigh the disadvantages of isolation, increased productivity, and increased household responsibilities. Family life is one of the most prominent aspects of teleworking. The presence of small children and aging parents, as well as the freedom of time and the proximity to big cities, is essential to the permanence of teleworking.

Research bias related to the adoption of teleworking by interviewees was a reflection of the significant tendency for excessive availability of the teleworker, which negatively impacts their health. The explanation may be corroborated if we consider that the interviewees work unusual hours in order to accomplish their professional tasks, as well as the feeling of overcharging and of not knowing when to quit.

During the pandemic, however, when interviewing these same women about teleworking, the majority identified that the excessive burden of even the most basic roles and responsibilities, without the support of family or domestic workers, was creating difficulties in maintaining a balance between personal and professional lives.

According to the interviewees, dealing with professional and family responsibilities in the same environment was more difficult, while products in regards to health were essentials for the country - respirators, thermometers, masks, garments, and COVID-19 detection kits.

With the data obtained, we have been able to observe the importance of women's presence in individual and social aspects of the profession and family, while illustrating how they perform multiple roles (mother, work, women) simultaneously in such difficult times.

This study contributes academically as long as amplify the field of the knowledge about teleworking, its benefits and challenges, in special during the time that anticipates the pandemic COVID-19 and during it, focusing on women.

The article presents some trends that emerge during post-pandemic, based on literature analysis. The trends can be useful for the development of policies in people's management that can reconcile the engagement of workers, quality of life, and productivity, since both individuals and organizations strive for a balance between work and personal life.

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