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► To cite this version:

Myriam Chatot, Julie Landour, Ariane Pailhé. Socioeconomic differences and the gender division of labor during the COVID-19 lockdown: Insights from France using a mixed method. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 2023, 30 (4), pp.1296-1316. 10.1111/gwao.12980 . hal-04386216

HAL Id: hal-04386216

<https://hal.science/hal-04386216v1>

Submitted on 10 Jan 2024

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Socioeconomic differences and the gender division of labor during the COVID-19 lockdown: Insights from France using a mixed method

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Abstract

The sudden and unanticipated shocks to employment and the almost total retreat into the domestic sphere caused by the COVID-19 lockdowns provide a unique opportunity to explore the resilience of the three classical theoretical paradigms of the gendered division of labor within couples, that is, the time availability theory, the relative resource theory, and the “doing gender” perspective. Accordingly, this article analyzes how socioeconomic differences shaped the gendered division of labor during the first lockdown in France. We use a mixed-methods approach that combines representative quantitative data drawn from the Epidemiology and Living Conditions (EpiCOV) survey of EpiCOV in France during the COVID-19 pandemic and qualitative data from in-depth interviews of French families collected throughout the spring 2020 lockdown. Over the period, the heavy domestic and parental workload and its division between partners were mainly determined by employment status. However, the influence of time availability on the division of labor was mitigated by the doing gender mechanisms, whatever the partners' relative resources. The gender

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division of housework and childcare persisted, and the tasks performed differed, parenting tasks especially. Even if highly-educated mothers were able to negotiate their partner's investment in domestic and parental work, the division of labor remained unequal. Mothers remained in charge of organizing housework and childcare, and this may have altered their subjective experience of lockdown, especially for those embedded in the most egalitarian configurations.

KEYWORDS

childcare, COVID-19, gender division of labor, housework, lockdown

1 | INTRODUCTION

The first measures to fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented disruption of daily life. In European countries most affected by the pandemic, all people who could work from home did so, while all other "non-essential" workers were placed on furlough. Schools and daycare facilities were closed in many countries, activities outside the home were prohibited, and parents had to manage practical childcare while also supervising the children's schoolwork and leisure activities. Faced with this retreat into the domestic sphere and the increased workload, parents had to reorganize the division of domestic and parental labor. This exceptional situation is a live laboratory for understanding the determinants of domestic work and its division between partners.

The lockdown changed individuals' time constraints differently across employment statuses: those on complete furlough were released from work constraints, those working from home saved commuting time, while some front-line workers saw an increase in working hours. From a time-availability perspective, some predicted that the increase in remote working and furlough might lead to greater gender equality, since this exogenous time shock gave couples the opportunity to reorganize the division of labor (Alon et al., 2020). Some studies have provided evidence that the division of domestic labor was closely linked to employment status during the pandemic (Carlson et al., 2022; Dominguez-Folgueras, 2021; Hank & Steinbach, 2021; Sevilla & Smith, 2020). But it also quickly became clear that COVID-19 is a "gendered pandemic" (Yavorsky et al., 2021). Not only did women more frequently reduce their working hours or become furloughed than men (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2021; Craig, 2020; Petts et al., 2021; Reichelt et al., 2021) but their unpaid workload also increased more sharply (Craig & Churchill, 2021; Sevilla & Smith, 2020), especially for childcare (Hipp & Bünning, 2021; Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020; Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021; Petts et al., 2021). Existing research agrees that time availability and gender perspectives both played a role during the pandemic, but evidence is more mixed on the effect of partners' relative resources on the division of labor. Some studies have shown a crucial role of education in couples' organization of paid work (Qian & Hu, 2021), while others have observed a much smaller effect of education on domestic work negotiations than in normal times (Fodor et al., 2021; Seiz, 2021; Verweij et al., 2021).

This article examines, in a shifting context, the resilience of the main theories of the gendered division of labor, that is, the time availability theory, the doing gender perspective and, as far as possible, the relative resource theory. To do so, it analyzes how socioeconomic differences shaped the gendered division of labor during the first lockdown in France, a time when restrictions were particularly strict: schools were closed and outdoor activities were limited to 1 h at most within a one-km radius. We focus on the effects of gender, employment status, and education in a country where female labor force participation is high thanks to public subsidies for childcare and housework and where women's average level of education is above that of men (INSEE, 2021). We distinguish between childcare and

housework as they have different levels of desirability and perceived worth and as individual resources may affect them differently (Killewald, 2011; Sullivan, 2013). Moreover, childcare could not be outsourced during this period. Separate analysis of these two components provides a better understanding of the mechanisms that produce gender asymmetries across the social spectrum.

Our contribution is threefold. First, we combine two types of data from two separate surveys conducted during the spring 2020 lockdown: A quantitative national survey provides representative data to examine the determinants of time spent on domestic and parental work and its division between partners during this exceptional period; and a qualitative survey of 18 respondents sheds light on how specific tasks were shared between partners. Second, we examine the effects of educational level, both on practices and on subjective experiences, by comparing these two complementary datasets. In the absence of quantitative couple-level data to examine the distribution of each partner's educational level, we use the qualitative data to test the relative resources theory. Third, in-depth analysis of the qualitative material makes it possible to construct a typology of couples that takes into account the characteristics of both spouses, the objective organization of the gendered division of labor and its subjective experience. This typology shows that the three theoretical paradigms are intertwined.

2 | BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Three main theoretical perspectives, more interconnected than competing, explain the gender gap in housework time (Davis & Greenstein, 2013; Risman, 2004). According to the first two perspectives, the division of total housework results from rational decisions made in the face of shifting opportunities and constraints. The time allocated by partners to domestic work depends on rational decisions based on their comparative advantages and their relative productivity in the domestic and professional spheres (Becker, 1981, 1985). For the time availability theory, this depends, in particular, on their employment status and prospects and their remaining time available for domestic and parental work (Bianchi et al., 2000). For resource bargaining or social exchange theories, the household division of labor is the result of a negotiation process that depends on the influence of each partner and the differences in their resources, such as earnings or educational level (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Shelton & John, 1996). These perspectives are gender-neutral: Changes in men's or women's time availability or relative resources produce a symmetrical effect. In the third perspective, on the other hand, decisions and individual preferences are a social product constructed in a context marked by gender. Not only are men and women socialized into different gender roles from childhood (Coverman, 1985), but the home is a gender factory (Berk, 1985), where total housework is a symbolic enactment of gender identities. Women and men express their masculine and feminine "natures" through daily practices and behaviors; they routinely "do gender" by participating—or not—in housework (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This process of producing masculinity and femininity also concerns the type of tasks performed. Women take charge of routine household chores, while men perform more discretionary tasks (Blair & Lichter, 1991) and are more willing to invest in the more rewarding activities of parenting (Killewald, 2011; Sullivan, 2013).

Higher female levels of education and employment are usually associated with lower participation in core housework (preparing meals, doing the dishes, grocery shopping, cleaning, washing, and ironing). According to the bargaining or social exchange perspectives, the higher their level of education, the more each partner should be able to influence marital negotiations and delegate the domestic "dirty work" to the other partner (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Shelton & John, 1996). Education is also a resource for earning a higher income, which can be used to purchase substitutes for domestic work or to delegate to a third party, without negotiation with the partner (Gupta, 2007). In the gender perspective, men and women do gender whatever their resources might be (Schneider, 2011), but attitudes about proper displays of gender vary across educational levels: Higher education leads to more gender-egalitarian ideology (Greenstein, 1996; Zhou et al., 2020). A specific version of this approach, the "compensatory gender display" explains the paradoxical situation whereby men who are not the dominant breadwinners do less domestic work than their partners: they compensate for this gender deviance by adopting a gender-traditional division of housework

(Brines, 1994). This negative relationship between educational level and housework is not observed for childcare, which is a more enjoyable and rewarding activity (Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). More educated parents who adhere to contemporary parenting ideologies that emphasize the importance of parental time and emotional commitment for optimal child development devote more time to their children (Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016; Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2011; Lee et al., 2014).

Research on time use during lockdown, when time constraints were largely lifted for individuals who stopped working or reduced commuting time, initially gave some support to the time availability perspective. Both men and women spent much more time on unpaid work (Craig & Churchill, 2021; Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021; Raiber & Verbakel, 2021; Sevilla & Smith, 2020), with employment status playing a major role in time availability (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Zoch et al., 2021). For men on furlough, time spent on unpaid work increased, especially when their partner continued working outside the home (Carlson et al., 2022; Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Sönmez, 2021). In France, nearly 11% of people in employment were unable to work during the first lockdown, the volume of hours worked fell by around 35% and working from home increased significantly (Bajos et al., 2020; Lambert et al., 2021). A French study on a non-representative sample shows that men's time availability was associated with more total housework (Champeaux & Marchetta, 2022). We thus hypothesize that in response to the time shock of the first lockdown, time availability became a stronger determinant of unpaid work and its division between partners. More specifically, we anticipate that the domestic and parental workload decreased with working time (H1a) was greater for those not working (H1b) and for those whose partner was working outside the home during the lockdown (H1c). We anticipate that domestic and parental time was higher for those working from home than for those working on-site, given the absence of commuting time (H1d).

However, even though the physical presence of fathers at home slightly shifted the gender division of unpaid work (Boll & Schüller, 2020; Craig, 2020; Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020; Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021; Raiber & Verbakel, 2021), women were confronted with a sharp increase in unpaid labor (Craig & Churchill, 2021; Sevilla & Smith, 2020), especially childcare (Hipp & Bünning, 2021; Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020; Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021; Petts et al., 2021). Men never spent as much time as women on unpaid work, even when they were the main caregivers (Sönmez, 2021), as gender-based theories predict. Working from home did not produce more equal arrangements between partners (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2021; Sönmez, 2021), despite, in some specific couple configurations, providing new opportunities to balance work and childcare (Garcia, 2022; Zoch et al., 2021). In previously more egalitarian arrangements, a substantial proportion of women were now more likely to take prime responsibility for everything (Hank & Steinbach, 2021). A study on a small French sample obtained similar results: While men's time availability, and especially their presence at home, was associated with a more egalitarian division of housework, gender inequalities persisted (Dominguez-Folgueras, 2021). Given the deeply rooted mechanisms of doing gender, we posit that the gender division of unpaid work persisted during lockdown, whatever the partners' employment status. We expect to observe an asymmetric effect of available time across gender. For a given working time or employment status, we expect mothers to devote more of their available time to unpaid work than fathers (H2a). Domestic tasks are seen as a burden whereas childcare might be more enjoyable (Gershuny, 2013; Sullivan, 1996, 2013) and even distinctive to some extent (Landour, 2016), so childcare is usually shared more equally between parents than housework. Given the inherently different nature of these tasks in ordinary circumstances, and as this was a major issue during lockdown, we expect gender differences to be smaller for childcare than for housework (H2b). We also expect the lockdown to shed light on the gendered nature of the tasks performed, with women more likely to perform the more routine domestic work, and men the more discretionary duties (H2c).

Under ordinary circumstances, highly educated women do less domestic work than the less educated since they hold more egalitarian attitudes and beliefs, negotiate housework responsibilities with their partner, and use more external help (Ruppanner, 2010). They also share childcare more equally, even if they perform more childcare than less educated women, as they invest more in their children's education (Sayer, Gauthier, & Furstenberg, 2004). But some initial studies show that education may have played a different role during lockdown, with a greater increase in childcare among low and medium educated men and women (Kreyenfeld & Zinn, 2021). In investigations mainly based on small samples of highly qualified women, education did not favor a non-traditional division of housework (Seiz, 2021). Highly educated

women's contribution to domestic work even increased considerably (Fodor et al., 2021). Perhaps these women were unable to renegotiate a more equal gender division of tasks, thus illustrating the "resilience of normative structures binding women to the household sphere" (Seiz, 2021). These highly educated women, more attracted to ideals of the egalitarian division of labor, also felt domestic inequalities and disruptions to their work-life balance more acutely (Verweij et al., 2021). Thus, we expect the division of labor during lockdown to vary by educational level, with more equal sharing in couples where the woman is highly educated (H3a). Given the domestic workload and perceived conflict of roles, the most educated women may have experienced acute subjective difficulty with the burden of unpaid work (H3b).

3 | DATA AND METHODS

3.1 | Quantitative data

We used data from the first wave of the Epidemiology and Living Conditions (EpiCOV) survey (INSERM-DREES) (Warszawski et al., 2021) designed to shed light on the main epidemiological, social, and behavioral issues linked to the COVID-19 pandemic in France. A stratified random sample of 350,000 individuals aged 15 and over was drawn from the tax database of the French statistical office (INSEE). A total of 134,391 people (38.4%) participated in the survey online or by phone from May 2 to June 2, 2020, a month that straddled the strict lockdown and the first phase of partial easing of lockdown measures. A sub-sample of randomly selected respondents (10%) answered the long version of the questionnaire, which included four questions on daily time spent on housework and childcare and its division between partners. They were asked how much time per day, on average, they had spent on routine domestic chores (cooking, shopping, cleaning, and laundry) in the previous 7 days and then on caring for their children under 18 years of age. They were also asked which partner was currently in charge of daily domestic chores and childcare activities, with the following response categories: always me/more often me/me and my partner equally/more often my partner/always my partner/always or most often another household member.

Among the 14,237 individuals who responded to the long questionnaire, our study sample selected individuals aged 18–60 ($N = 9314$) living with a partner ($N = 6284$) in mainland France ($N = 6101$) with at least one child under age 10 ($N = 2366$) not in shared custody ($N = 2168$) and without missing information. This provided us with 2158 individuals in total (Table S1). During the lockdown, 27% of fathers and 42% of mothers did not work (respectively, 8% and 21% were not working before the lockdown), respectively 22% and 27% worked entirely from home, while 52% and 32% worked partly or entirely outside the home.

3.2 | Qualitative data

Initiated by nine researchers¹ (two of whom are the authors of this article) at the very beginning of the lockdown, the qualitative research aimed to better understand how the lockdown was experienced by families in practical and emotional terms (CAFC, 2021). Potential participants were selected from among the researchers' respective personal or professional contacts. While this recruitment method usually favors families from middle and higher socioeconomic groups, this limitation was controlled for by selecting lower socioeconomic profiles from past or ongoing surveys. The contacts were distributed among the interviewers to ensure that no-one was interviewed by someone they already knew. Eighteen families with various educational levels, labor market situations (excluding couples where both partners were working outside the home), and living conditions were interviewed (Table S2). With the exception of one recently divorced mother, all families consisted of a heterosexual couple cohabiting with dependent children aged 2–16 (with at least one child under age 10).

The interviews were conducted with one partner in each family, most often the mothers, as they were the main caregivers and thus most able to describe the effects of lockdown on family daily life. They were contacted every week from mid-March to mid-June 2020 by either videoconferencing applications or telephone. The first interview lasted about 1 h and collected general data about the situation of each family member before and during lockdown.

The following interviews were shorter and collected data on changes in family life as lockdown continued, thus revealing perspectives on how each family dealt with lockdown over time.

A common interview guide was used. The questions covered employment, the entire range of domestic tasks, and the children, especially schooling. They focused on both the material and affective dimensions of lockdown, in order to capture the emotional experience of this extraordinary period. Since we mainly recorded the experiences of mothers, who may have wanted to give a positive impression, our data might overstate women's involvement in unpaid work. Conflicts between partners or difficulties experienced by mothers may also have been omitted, since in some cases the mother was not alone during the interview.

3.3 | Methods

From the quantitative data, we first obtained descriptive statistics on time use. The results presented here were adjusted by applying INSEE weighting coefficients to produce figures that are representative of the population. To estimate the determinants of women's and men's domestic and parental time, we ran multivariate analyses. The dependent variable y is the time spent on household chores (resp. on parenting), measured in hours per day and reported via six bands: Different response categories were proposed: 0 min/<30 min/between 30 min and <1 h/between 2 h and <4 h/between 4 h and <6/6 h and more. Given the specific nature of our dependent variable (time reported in bands), we estimated the regressions for each interval.² If $A_0 = 0$, $A_1 = 0$, $A_2 = 0.5$, $A_3 = 1$, $A_4 = 2$, $A_5 = 4$, $A_6 = 6$ and $A_7 = 24 - T - C$, where A_j are observed thresholds of the bands in hours (with $j - 1$ the lower value and j the upper value), C is time spent parenting and T is time spent doing paid work. An ordered probit model (or an interval regression, Greene & Hensher, 2010) at known thresholds (with those thresholds being observed) assumes that there is a link between the range j and a latent, non-observed variable y^* taking the form $y_i = j \iff A_{j-1} \leq y_i^* < A_j$ and that this latent variable follows a linear model of type $y_i^* = x_i' \beta + \varepsilon_i$.

To analyze the effect of time availability, we used the respondent's employment status (furloughed; working entirely from home; working outside the home; not employed before lockdown) and whether or not the partner worked outside the home during the lockdown. In an alternative specification, we included the daily time spent doing paid work measured across the 7 days preceding the survey. Educational level (primary or basic vocational, secondary, one or 2 years of tertiary education, bachelor's degree or higher) is our fourth variable of interest. We added interaction terms between gender and these four interest variables to test whether their effect differs by gender. Unfortunately, the partners' educational level and detailed employment status were not recorded in the survey, so we cannot test the relative resources theory directly with these data. Models are controlled for socio-demographic characteristics, that is, gender, age (20–30/31–40/41–50/50+), number of children in the household (1/2/3+), age of youngest child (0–2/3–5/6–10), a dummy variable for presence of adults other than the partner in the household, standard of living³ deciles, and whether or not the interview took place during the strict lockdown. From these models we display graphs that represent predicted domestic and parental time by education, activity status, working hours, and partner's employment status. Full regressions are available in Supporting Information S1.

To analyze the gender division of domestic chores and childcare activities, respectively, we ran two sets of multinomial regressions. The dependent variable has four categories for the person in charge of these tasks: always the woman, more often the woman, equal, more often or always the man. The same set of independent variables was included. To simplify the interpretation of these models, we computed predicted probabilities for subgroups with all other variables at their mean value and produced graphs of the probability of equal division according to our four variables of interest.

From the qualitative research, portraits of each family, summarizing their living conditions and experience of lockdown, were constructed to give a collective grasp of the material from a grounded perspective (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and used to create a thematic analysis grid. Transcribed interviews were entered into the grid by using an inductive approach. As a complement to quantitative data, we then produced profiles of couples based on each partner's employment status and educational level. They describe the division of domestic and parental labor and women's subjective experience of them.

In this article, quantitative and qualitative data collected using a concurrent design (Creswell, 2011) are analyzed jointly. Triangulation and complementarity approaches used in the data analysis show a convergence of the results obtained using the two methods (Greene et al., 1989). We first explore both quantitative and qualitative data inductively, to highlight the main characteristics affecting the division of labor in both samples. We then compare those results to identify congruent components and to determine how qualitative data might account for quantitative findings. This process was particularly useful for exploring the relative resource theory: As the quantitative data did not provide information on the resources of each partner, we used the qualitative data to account for the effects of each partner's level of education on the gendered division of labor.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | A huge domestic and parental workload that depends on employment status

The quantitative data show a particularly high domestic workload during the first lockdown: A total of 40% of mothers spent between 2 and 4 h per day on housework, and 22% spent 4 h or more (Table 1). On average, fathers spent much less time on core housework, with 23% spending between 2 and 4 h and 11% spending 4 h or more. One third of men spent <1 h a day on housework, compared to 9% of women. Childcare was especially time-intensive, with 58% of mothers and 38% of fathers spending 6 h or more per day (the equivalent of a working day) looking after their children.

The amount of time devoted to domestic and parental work was strongly linked to employment status and working hours during lockdown (Figures 1a–c and 2a,b), as H1a and H1b predicted. For both women and men, non-working parents, whether they were furloughed or did not work before, spent more time on housework and childcare than those still working. All other things being equal, furloughed mothers spent 0.5 h more on housework and 1.4 h more on childcare than women working on site, and furloughed fathers 0.6 and 1.7 h more, respectively. Contrary to H1d, there is no significant difference between those who worked entirely from home and those who worked outside the home. Men's domestic time decreased linearly with working time, while for women it did not vary by working hours if they were working. Parental time decreased sharply with working time for both sexes, except for women who worked more than 8 h a day, who spent as much time as women who worked between 6 and 8 h. Men's childcare time was highly dependent on the (un)availability of their partner (Figure 2c). If their partner worked outside the home, men spent 0.7 h more per day caring for children, as predicted by H1d, while female childcare time did not significantly differ according to their partner's employment status.

This heavy workload was also reported by all families in the qualitative study. Having lunch at home more often than usual, keeping the house clean, and buying groceries under the new health guidelines were some of the contributing factors.

TABLE 1 Time spent in daily activities during lockdown.

	Paid work			Core housework		Childcare	
	Women	Men		Women	Men	Women	Men
0	45.4	30.4	[0–30 min]	1.5	13.1	0.6	3.3
<2 h	1.2	2.1	[30 min–1 h]	8.0	20.1	1.6	5.2
[2–4 h]	5.4	2.7	[1–2 h]	28.2	32.2	4.4	13.2
[4–6 h]	8.3	6.8	[2–4 h]	39.8	23.2	17.1	25.9
[6–8 h]	20.7	27.3	[4–6 h]	11.5	6.9	18.3	14.9
[8–10 h]	12.2	19.5	[6 h+]	11.0	4.6	58.0	37.5
[10 h+]	6.1	11.0					
N	1143	1015		1143	1015	1143	1015

Source: Cohorte EpiCOV Inserm DREES (2020).

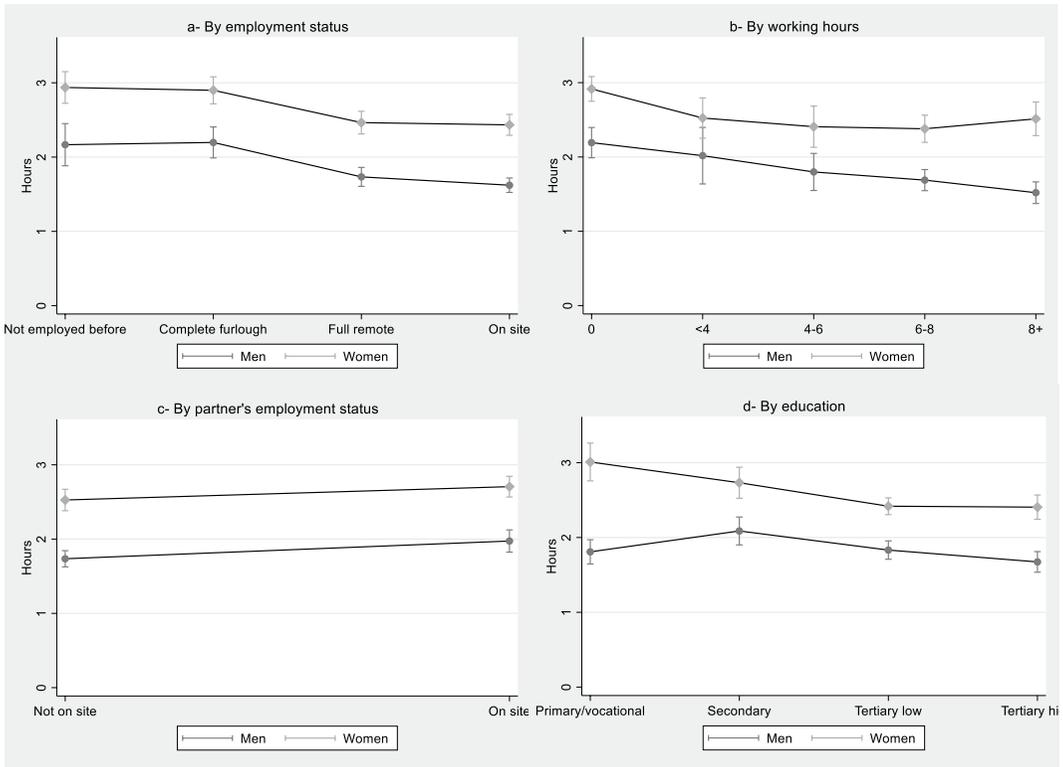


FIGURE 1 Predicted domestic time (hours by day). Interval regression model, controlled for gender, age, number and age of children, presence of other adults in the household, employment status (a, c, d)/working hours (b), level of education, decile of living standard, interactions between gender and employment status (a, c, d)/working hours (b), level of education. Source: Cohorte EpiCOV Inserm DREES (2020).

Parents explained that they had to care for children in addition to their other tasks:

For me, about the workload I have to do... It's more than when I just have to go to work and the children aren't home. If I add up all the things, the housework, the cleaning, the children, and my work, I work more than when I go out to work, when I commute.

(Audrey, mother, manager, working from home, with a partner working part-time outside the home, both with a higher tertiary qualification, and two sons aged 5 and 3)

Parents wanted to make sure their "kids are all right." Sophie, a mother who holds a higher tertiary qualification and, like her partner, is a manager, working from home, reported having to watch over their two children (aged three and one) and especially the youngest, at all times: "You leave him for 2 seconds, he climbs up a shelf and takes a tumble." Aside from this safety issue, parenting was a demanding occupation, involving substantial time and effort to organize the children's activities, as illustrated by Bernadette:

I'm trying to stimulate the girls. I don't want them to become like those kids who watch cartoons all day long. And sometimes it's tempting, especially during lockdown. [They would be] very happy if I just left them for two hours in front of a screen [...] and I could get lots of things done. But, well, I don't want to do this. So it's energy-consuming because I give them things to do.

(Bernadette, mother, administrator whose partner is an IT company manager, both with a higher tertiary qualification, working from home during lockdown, with two daughters aged 5 and 2)

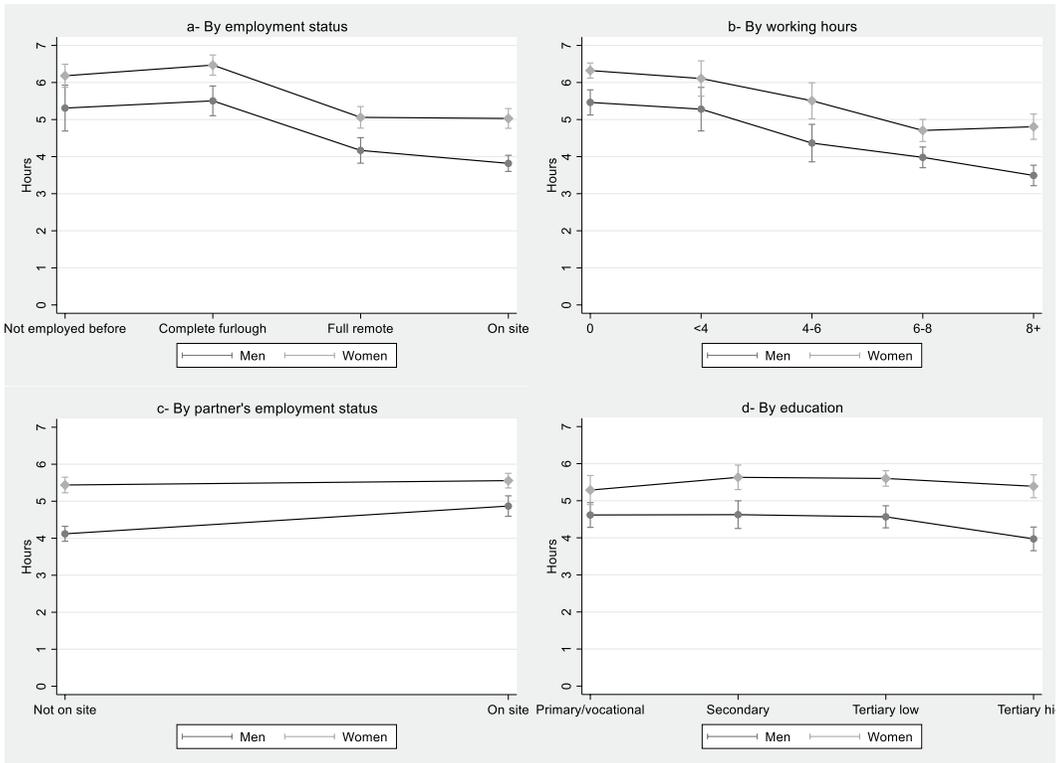


FIGURE 2 Predicted childcare time, hours per day. Interval regression model, controlled for gender, age, number and age of children, presence of other adults in the household, employment status (a, c, d)/working hours (b), level of education, decile of living standard, interactions between gender and employment status (a, c, d)/working hours (b), level of education. *Source:* Cohorte EpiCOV Inserm DREES (2020).

Men were more involved in domestic chores, especially those who did not work during lockdown and spent more time at home than usual.

He's just starting to help out [in taking care of children] because basically, it's not his thing. Being in lockdown, he realised that I can't carry everything on my shoulders. So he helps out. [...] He's a great handyman so each one, they do DIY with their dad, they do some gardening. We do some planting. [...] He has always been involved in domestic chores. The thing that has changed is in relation to... homework.

(Nathalie, mother, civil servant, working from home, with a lower tertiary qualification living with a self-employed partner with a lower vocational qualification, and three children, a girl aged 7 and 5-year-old twins)

4.2 | A persistent gender division of domestic work, whatever the employment status

The quantitative data show that women spent more than 1 h per day than men on housework and childcare, whatever the partners' employment status or working hours (Figures 1a,b and 2a,b and Table S3), in line with H2a. Given the longer time spent on childcare, this 1-h gender gap is, in relative terms, higher for housework than for childcare, as expected (H2b).

The division of labor remained highly unequal during lockdown (Table 2). Couples where the man did the majority of housework were very rare (7% according to men) while 50% of men reported doing less than their partner. Around

42% of men (35% of women) reported that these tasks were equally shared. Childcare was shared slightly more equally (47% according to men). Once again, couples where the man provided more childcare than his partner were very rare.

The multivariate analysis shows that the division of domestic and parental labor depended on the employment status of both partners (Figures 3a–3c and 4a–c and Table S4). For on-site working women, the probability of more equal sharing of domestic tasks was somewhat higher than for non-working women (+9% points [pp] compared to furloughed and +15 pp compared to not employed before), and more so for parental tasks (resp. +14 pp). The division of labor was more sensitive to the man's employment status: Men were more likely to report an equal division of housework and childcare if they were furloughed (respectively +18 and +13 pp) or working from home (respectively +11 and +10 pp). Men were also more likely to report equal sharing of household tasks, especially childcare, when their partner worked outside the home (+12 and +14 pp). For women, on the other hand, the probability of equal task-sharing was higher when the partner did not work outside the home (+9 and +10 pp). Even though the employment status of each partner had an impact on the division of domestic labor, women did more housework, whatever the partner's status, even when they worked on-site and their partner did not.

Most respondents in the qualitative study said the division of total housework did not change much during lockdown. The qualitative analysis shows that the division of labor is also reflected in the nature of the tasks performed. As expected (H2c), women were mainly responsible for routine domestic duties (such as cooking), whereas occasional or outdoor tasks (like grocery shopping) were more often undertaken by men.

The house has never been so clean, but it's never got so dirty so quickly, because in fact, we're all here. [...] I vacuum every day because we've eaten, since we're here, kitchen and living room, the toilet every day, you have the impression that you don't do anything else.

(Coralie, mother, technician with a lower tertiary qualification on maternity leave, living with a partner with a secondary qualification working outside home, two daughters aged 6 and 3)

I have devoted myself to doing [grocery shopping] because it is harder during lockdown. [...] we really do make purchases for a week or 10 days. When I come back home, we disinfect everything carefully. [...] I wash my hands well, clean the items one by one, take a shower right afterwards.

(Damien, father, unemployed editor with a higher tertiary qualification living with a physiotherapy student with a higher tertiary qualification, two children aged 3 and 1)

The nature of the parental activities carried out by fathers and mothers was also different. Men regularly spent more time with their children on discretionary activities such as playing, taking a walk, gardening, or doing DIY. While women also shared in these types of activities, they oversaw hygiene and nutrition, by making sure that the family ate diversified and healthy meals. They also more often took charge of schooling and childcare activities which required a regular commitment and full attention:

TABLE 2 Gender division of housework and childcare (%).

	Core housework		Childcare	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Always woman	18	10	15	9
More often woman	41	40	36	35
Equal	35	42	42	47
More often man	5	6	7	7
Always man	1	1	1	1

Source: Cohorte EpiCOV Inserm DREES (2020).

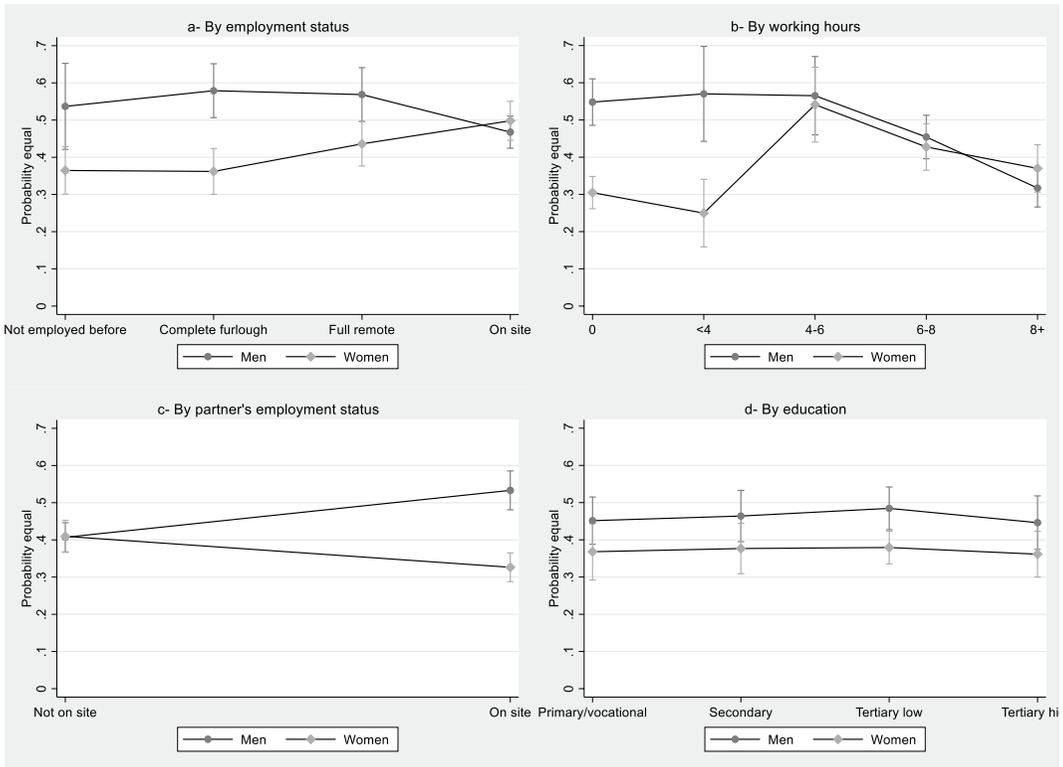


FIGURE 3 Predicted probability of equal division of housework. Multinomial model, controlled for gender, age, number and age of children, presence of other adults in the household, employment status (a, c, d)/working hours (b), level of education, decile of living standard, interactions between gender and employment status (a, c, d)/working hours (b), level of education. Source: Cohorte EpiCOV Inserm DREES (2020).

In the morning from 9 am to 10:30 am, I do an activity with the oldest. I do a bit of routine schoolwork and he [the father] is more on the fun side in the afternoons, where he makes playhouses, or he actually takes them out for a whole hour... things that do not have to be taken seriously.

(Julia, mother, manager, with a partner also a manager, both working from home and both with a higher tertiary qualification, two sons aged five and one)

4.3 | A different educational gradient than in normal times

Educational level affected the time spent on domestic tasks and the division of labor, with marked gender differences (Figures 1d and 2d). As in normal times, highly educated women spent less time on housework (0.6 h less per day everything else equal) than low-educated women. In contrast to domestic work, there was no educational gradient in terms of women's childcare time. For men, no educational gradient was found for housework, and the most educated men spent less time on childcare (-0.7 h than the less educated).

Contrary to H3a, the probability of equal sharing of housework and childcare was the same for the most and least educated (Figures 3d and 4d). For women, it was 36% and 37%, respectively, for housework and 44% and 47% for childcare. For men, the probability of equal sharing of housework was 45% for both the most and the less educated and 50% versus 51% for childcare.

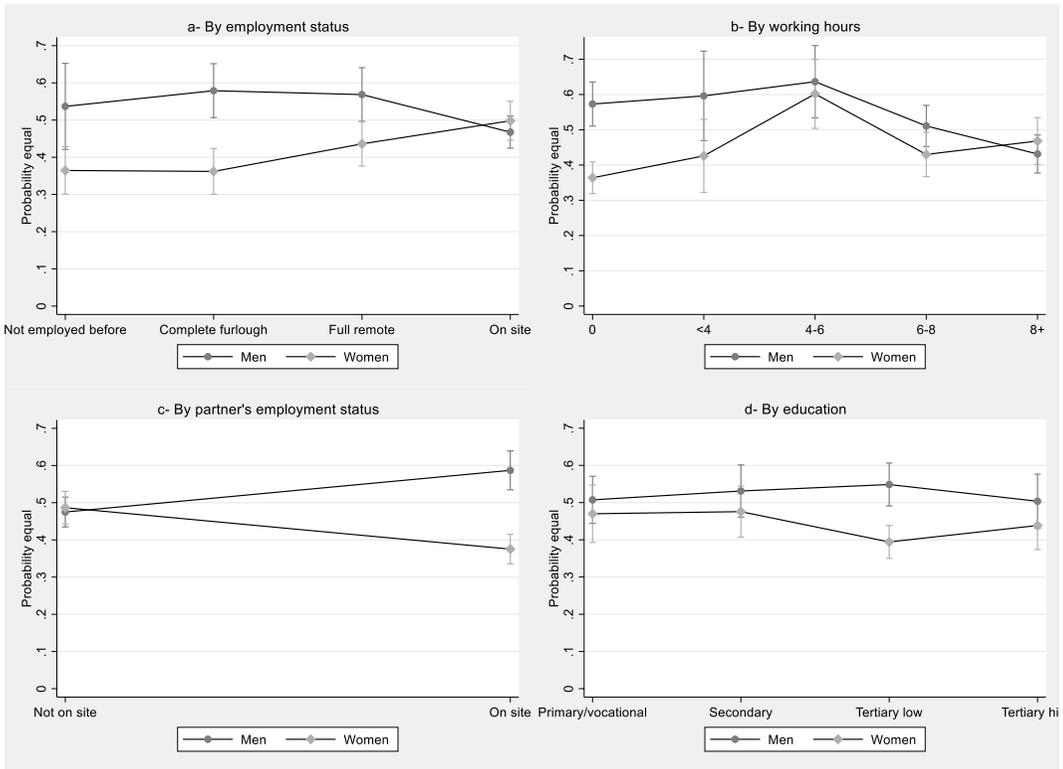


FIGURE 4 Predicted probability of equal division of childcare. Multinomial model, controlled for gender, age, number and age of children, presence of other adults in the household, employment status (a, c, d)/working hours (b), level of education, decile of living standard, interactions between gender and employment status (a, c, d)/working hours (b), level of education. *Source:* Cohorte EpiCOV Inserm DREES (2020).

While the amount of time spent on parental work and its division between partners do not depend on the mother's level of education, the qualitative analysis shows variations in the type of parental activities undertaken, especially in the balance of schoolwork and non-school activities. Highly educated mothers in higher-level occupations saw the schoolwork assignments given out by teachers and schools as an easy way to keep children busy, and they either took inspiration from them or ignored them if they felt they were "too easy." Sophie, for example, deleted the teacher's email after briefly reading through it. This confidence with regard to schooling also gave parents more time to focus on the children's other activities and play educational games with them, as suggested above by Bernadette's descriptions. For parents in lower socioeconomic groups, and especially mothers, schoolwork was a huge struggle, first because they had to oversee their children's lessons and homework with limited resources (e.g., Samira, a migrant student married to a nurse copied out by hand all the teachers' instructions sent to her three children because she did not own a printer). Second, these mothers attached great importance to schoolwork; some of the less educated mothers in our sample tried hard to ensure that their children did not fall behind. Jennifer, a hairdressing student (lower vocational qualification) married to a line manager (lower vocational qualification on furlough), watched videos with one of her children to help him understand his maths exercises. In that family, schoolwork consumed a lot of energy and the children's other activities were less closely monitored, especially their screen time. Jennifer justified this by exclaiming: "Otherwise, the kids will go nuts!".

4.4 | Four socioeconomic configurations

Four couple profiles were defined to build upon our initial results. They are based on the employment status and educational level of both partners and their subjective experience of the division of domestic labor during lockdown. They show variations in the division of overall housework according to the availability of partners, their gender norms and their level of education.

The first profile (“Couple working from home”) is that of highly educated dual-earner couples, mostly working from home and with a relatively equal division of the total domestic workload (especially when their working hours were reduced). These respondents usually reported having agreed at the beginning of lockdown on a system whereby each parent took charge of domestic and parental duties for half of each weekday. One example is Audrey (higher tertiary qualification) who, when lockdown began, organized her working hours around the times when her partner was home. She took charge of the two children every morning, and he did his parental shift in the afternoon. She explained:

I'm the one taking care of cleaning. My husband managed to shirk it. So I'm taking care of it. For the meals, we switch. There's no official cook. I usually do lunch. Usually I think ahead in the morning: what am I going to cook?

The second profile (“Working mother”) is an asymmetric situation in highly educated couples, where the man was temporarily not working (on furlough) but his partner was. These fathers spent a lot of time looking after the children, but their partners still spent a significant amount of time on domestic chores. Myriam (higher tertiary qualification) worked from home each day throughout the lockdown whereas her spouse Antoine (higher tertiary qualification) only had 1 h of work per day. She took care of all the meals and prepared the list of groceries for him to buy. They shared household tasks, but she gave instructions to Antoine, described as “a very good assistant.” Although her partner took care of their small son on a daily basis, she looked for activities each morning to keep him busy all day:

So [my son] made necklaces and bracelets. It was the activity of the week. Then, he cooked and gardened a little, as always.

Interviewer: You're always the one looking for activities? Where do you look?

I'm always the one looking, in a Facebook group, I find ideas there.

In these both the first and the second profile, the women's subjective perception of the total domestic workload depended on the degree of total housework delegation and on the division of duties before lockdown. Women accustomed to delegating housework to a paid housekeeper and who relied on daycare or nannies after school were particularly disconcerted by the increase in domestic work. Julia and her partner (first profile) shared overall housework, since each worked half a day and dedicated the other half to childcare and routine chores. Yet, she felt overwhelmed, always worried about her kids, feeling her work was never-ending, exhausted by the burden of cooking, and never able to take time off. She felt she was “*in a long endless tunnel*” and was distressed at being reassigned to the home, where she found little satisfaction. Myriam (second profile) also expressed dissatisfaction because even though her partner did not work much and was available for their child, she felt that he “*didn't do much*” in the house. After a few weeks in lockdown, she asked him to do the cooking 1 day a week, since she felt overwhelmed by the chores and resented having less time for herself than he did. These mothers expected unpaid work to be shared according to the availability of each partner, yet while the fathers spent as much time as them, or did more childcare and housework, they opted for the more discretionary tasks that were less demanding. The mothers were frustrated at having to take charge of the domestic “dirty work” and to organize the children's activity schedule, in line with H3b. By contrast, we also observed in these two first profiles that women accustomed to a more prominent role in the family sphere had a more relaxed and even positive experience of lockdown and reported a fair division of housework, since each partner maintained their previous responsibilities. They valued the parental time they were able to spend with children, devoted to play and bonding.

The third profile ("Couple with a reduced working schedule") concerns less-educated couples who were not working, or for only a few hours a day, and who shared housework and childcare relatively equally. This profile differs from the previous ones because the couples concerned set up completely new arrangements at the beginning of the lockdown after the mothers told their partners that they couldn't "*do everything*," as Nathalie points out:

Between 9 and 11:30 am, it is homework time. So we found a little system: Daddy takes care of the little ones for all the graphic exercises, while I do the maths and French with the oldest one. And then Daddy takes care of reading with our oldest girl. And I take care of writing with the little ones.

(Nathalie, civil servant, working from home, with a lower tertiary qualification living with a self-employed partner with a lower vocational qualification, and three children, a girl aged seven and 5-year-old twins)

These couples also spent more time on domestic and parental work than couples where both partners were working, even from home. In Jennifer's case, for example, she had to attend a few hours of classes per day while her partner was on short-time working. They set up the following arrangement:

As far as homework and schooling is concerned, I'm the one who handles that. My partner actually takes care of the housework, in other words the meals, the laundry, and the cleaning. He takes care of all that, and I take care of the children's and my own coursework.

(Jennifer, a hairdressing student with a line manager partner on furlough, both with a lower vocational qualification and four children aged 3 to 16)

In this profile, where task-sharing is a newly negotiated arrangement, tensions arose between the partners as the lockdown lengthened. Even if their partners agreed to take on new domestic tasks, women remained the main organizers of all domestic work and of the children's education, motivated by the concern that they might fall behind with schoolwork. Moreover, the women reported the growing irritation of their partners, who were not used to being at home all day. Jennifer even confided that she was on the verge of separation at the end of the lockdown, as her relationship with her partner had deteriorated so much.

The fourth profile ("Working father") describes couples in an asymmetric employment status where the man worked, on-site or at home, and the woman did not. Their total domestic and parental workload was much less equally shared. Whatever the educational level of mothers in this situation (including mothers who were students or on maternity leave), they devoted most of their time to housework, and above all to the children. Aline gave the most striking example of this "duty" shouldered by mothers. She is a financial advisor in a bank (higher tertiary qualification) and was on maternity leave during lockdown, while her bank manager partner (lower tertiary qualification) continued working outside the home as usual. Alone with their 3-year-old son, most of her weekdays revolved around keeping her son busy and entertained while also running the home. Women in this last profile often felt overwhelmed by all the unpaid work they had to do, but seemed to consider it as their duty, since they already assumed most of parenting and domestic work before lockdown:

[Our son] wants to take the opportunity to spend time with us, [so] he doesn't take a nap, so I don't have any me-time except in the evening. I'm very tired. I could have lie down, maybe... But, for example, [my husband] is taking care of him now and you and me, we wouldn't have been able to chat if [my son] wasn't asleep or if my husband wasn't home.

(Aline)

In these two last profiles, mothers devoted most of their available time to childcare and to a lesser extent to housework, whatever their partner's employment status. Furloughed fathers were more involved in unpaid work than

working fathers, but mostly as helpers of the mothers. Since mothers were already more involved in childcare and housework before lockdown, they kept the lion's share of unpaid work, especially activities with children. In these two profiles, most mothers were more qualified than their partner and they oversaw their children's homework. Afraid that their children might fall behind, keeping them engaged in schoolwork was a constant burden, even during weekends or holidays. Even though they often described growing exhaustion as lockdown continued, they usually described their parental and domestic involvement as a duty that they accepted willingly because it allowed them to spend time with their children. It does not mean they did not feel exhausted by this increase in their workload. Coralie, for example, resented being unable to have some me-time at the end of the day, recalling that one evening she had not even had time to take a bath. The only mothers in those two profiles who enjoyed the lockdown were the unemployed ones, who already did a lot of housework in normal times. They appreciated their partners' availability for the children, like Maud (fourth profile), who described her husband as much more involved with the children than before, since he helped her with their homework.

5 | DISCUSSION

The sudden and unanticipated shocks to employment and the almost total retreat to the domestic sphere during lockdown offer a unique opportunity to explore the resilience of the three classical theoretical paradigms of the gendered division of labor within couples, that is, the time availability theory, the relative resource theory, and the doing gender perspective. With that objective in mind, this study analyzed how socioeconomic differences shaped the gendered division of labor during the first lockdown in France by using a mixed-methods approach that combines a random population-based survey and in-depth interviews collected throughout the lockdown.

The results from the quantitative survey show that the huge shock on employment led to changes in domestic organization. In line with our first set of hypotheses, time spent on housework was radically affected by changes in employment patterns for men and women alike. As found in other national contexts (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020; Sevilla & Smith, 2020; Sönmez, 2021; Zoch et al., 2021), time spent on household labor and the division of tasks was mainly determined by working hours (H1a), employment status (H1b), and the partner's employment status (H1c). For both women and men, non-working parents spent more time on housework and even more on childcare than those still working, whether they worked entirely from home or outside the home. But contrary to our hypothesis H1d, on-site workers did not spend less time on domestic and parental tasks than remote workers, either because of an incompressible burden of domestic work or because of additional tasks related to their exposure to the virus.

The influence of the employment status is mitigated by the mechanisms of doing gender, as our second set of hypotheses suggested. The division of labor was more influenced by the man's employment status than the woman's and on the unavailability of his partner (H2a), as some studies had already noted (Boll & Schüller, 2020; Craig, 2020; Petts et al., 2021). Even when working full-time, women continued to organize most of the domestic work, follow schoolwork, and take charge of other domestic chores often considered as "dirty work," and the division of housework remained very unequal. For all parents, childcare was time-intensive during the first lockdown, taking the equivalent of a working day, and was more equally shared than domestic chores. As delegation of childcare was impossible, parents had to take full responsibility for their children's care and schoolwork, without any outside help. Our qualitative analysis revealed that childcare was a major concern for all families, as recent studies have highlighted (Garbe et al., 2020; Thierry et al., 2021). This finding illustrates that most parents, whatever their educational level, give priority to children in time allocation (Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016; Pailhé et al., 2021), echoing the growing child-centrism observed in Western countries over the last 20 years (Gauthier et al., 2004; Lareau, 2011; Lee et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis revealed, as elsewhere (Cannito & Scavarda, 2020; Manzo & Minello, 2020), that this focus on the children during lockdown was primarily a female concern. While men generally continued their outdoor and leisure activities with children (Dermott, 2008; Miller, 2011) while enjoying greater flexibility and more time for relaxation, all the women in our qualitative survey felt duty-bound to follow contemporary parenting norms. These findings demonstrate the persistence of the gendered nature of activities, childcare especially (H2b).

The influence of educational level on the division of labor was modified by the extraordinary circumstances of lockdown. As in normal times, highly educated women spent less time on housework than low-educated women, despite the absence of domestic substitutes. For time spent on childcare, we observed that the educational gradient among mothers was smaller than for housework, but did disappear totally. Among men, the most educated even spent less time on childcare than the less educated. So, contrary to our expectation (H3a), and contrary to what is observed in normal times (Pailhé et al., 2021; Sayer, Gauthier, & Furstenberg, 2004; Sullivan, 2010), childcare was not shared more equally by highly educated parents during lockdown. Despite the absence of couple-level quantitative data to examine the distribution of each partner's educational level and employment status, the relative resources theory could be tested with the qualitative data. Even if highly educated mothers were able to negotiate their partner's investment in total domestic work, the division remained unequal, as demonstrated by our typology. This unbalanced division might be due to the difficulty of discussing parenting and of accepting that certain parental tasks may have to be neglected. Childcare may also remain strongly associated with gender identities and thus perpetuate a powerful gender division of labor.

Even though women of all educational levels spent an equal amount of time on childcare, what they did with the children varied. Low-educated mothers focused on schoolwork and supervised it closely; their children's problems and their own difficulties in assimilating the norms and demands of home schooling led to overinvestment in schoolwork (Kakpo, 2012). They were more relaxed about the way children entertained themselves, especially through screen activities. On the contrary, the ordinary parenting practices of highly educated mothers anticipate school demands and include not only academic learning but also the soft skills needed to be a good student (Lutz & Jayaram, 2015). This reflects the privileged social status of those mothers compared to mothers with a less advantaged social background (Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016). Mothers with tertiary qualifications favored more structured activities that combined learning and play (Sayer, Gauthier, & Furstenberg, 2004), and did their best to avoid screens. Thus, the level of education played a very significant role in the way parents engaged with their children's care and education and the social and economic investment they represent in the longer term (England & Folbre, 1999).

The four profiles we constructed revealed some unexpected effects with respect to women's expectations of equality. Women already embedded in configurations where most of the domestic and parental work was their responsibility and did not exhibit any particular unease during lockdown, especially since they had already reduced their working hours and established routines to alleviate their daily workload. Conversely, in the most egalitarian configurations of more equal task-sharing, associated with higher-educated couples (Zamarro & Prados, 2021), we found high levels of mental strain (Champeaux & Marchetta, 2022; Craig & Churchill, 2021), especially among women who, prior to lockdown, relied on external help for much of the domestic work and some of the childcare tasks. Suddenly, these women found themselves burdened with these unrewarding chores. They also continued to assume the invisible but challenging task of anticipating and organizing domestic work and childcare. Their efforts enabled men to find time for rest or relaxation, while these moments of respite were precisely what these women missed. These results, corroborating our last hypothesis (H3b), point to the hidden costs of equality, brought sharply into focus by the lockdown and exemplified in the unequal sharing of responsibility for domestic life: Women in so-called egalitarian arrangements have certainly achieved greater gender equality in task-sharing, but they remain entirely responsible for its organization and planning (Glaude & de Singly, 1986; Medved, 2004). The lockdown-induced rise in parental demands exacerbated this imbalance, imposing a particularly heavy mental burden on mothers (Hjálmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021).

Finally, this article, based on a mixed-method study of the division of labor during lockdown, provides insights into the mechanisms whereby the three theoretical paradigms of gender combine. Employment status plays a major role in time allocation for each member of the couple. But the division of labor is also strongly determined by the gender factory, whatever the partners' relative resources, as the qualitative results showed. Even in the most egalitarian configurations, men and women do not invest in unpaid work, and especially parental work, in the same way. Women remain socialized to take on the more invisible tasks, especially the ongoing work of running the household, while men are more likely to invest in the more agreeable aspects of unpaid work and act as auxiliaries with varying

degrees of initiative. Depending on each partner's resources, negotiations within couples may be more productive for women when focused on time spent rather than on types of tasks, as demonstrated by Julia and Myriam's examples in the qualitative study: Their partner spent about as much time with the children as they did, but these mothers performed the tasks that required more planning and concentration. This gendered nature of domestic labor makes equal division difficult to achieve. The level of education did not substantially reduce the gender differences in unpaid work during lockdown, suggesting that it is not so much education per se that serves as a vector of equality, but rather women's ability to delegate domestic and parental work to an outside party. Educational capital also affects types of investment and mothers' experiences: While both parents invest heavily in parental work, it is primarily women who step up to meet increasing demands, the most highly educated among them being the best equipped to handle schoolwork or other educational activities. Their desire to be "good" mothers devoted to stimulating their children's minds leads them to feel overwhelmed, guilty, and sometimes almost resentful toward their partner. Future research should investigate more fully how these socioeconomic variations in parental work shape gender identities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was made possible thanks to two different research projects: the EpiCOV survey and the "Familles Confinées" survey. We would like to thank all team members involved in both projects.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Myriam Chatot, Julie Landour and others.
- ² As a robustness check, we performed linear regressions using the center of each interval as a value for time use. Results are the same.
- ³ Tax files were used to divide the household's disposable income by the number of consumer units.

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How to cite this article: Chatot, Myriam, Julie Landour, and Ariane Pailhé. 2023. "Socioeconomic Differences and the Gender Division of Labor during the COVID-19 Lockdown: Insights from France Using a Mixed Method." *Gender, Work & Organization* 30(4): 1296–316. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12980>.