Is Teleworking an Opportunity for Male `Joint Responsibility´ at Home?: Egalitarian Men during the Pandemic in Spain

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Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis spurred a large increase in teleworking, with inherent consequences for the use and distribution of time spent on paid, domestic, and caregiving work. This article aims to contribute to the knowledge about the material and symbolic conditions that fostered joint responsibility among men who telecommuted during the lockdown period. A qualitative study of the Spanish case was conducted, based on 25 interviews with different profiles of men, in terms of life cycle and job category, who teleworked during the first months of the pandemic. The results showed a more egalitarian male profile, as telecommuting encouraged men to take joint responsibility within the household. These were fathers with a mid-category job who telecommuted and had young children at home while their partner worked outside the home. All these conditions fostered their greater involvement in domestic and caregiving tasks, which involved internalizing the daily management, organization and planning practices typical of the traditional female role.

Keywords

Teleworking, gender, domestic work, care, masculinities.

El Teletrabajo como una Oportunidad para la Corresponsabilidad Masculina?: Hombres Igualitarios durante la Pandemia en España

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Resumen

La crisis de la COVID-19 supone un aumento considerable de la modalidad del teletrabajo con consecuencias sobre el uso y la distribución del tiempo dedicado al trabajo remunerado, doméstico y de cuidados. El objetivo de este artículo es contribuir al conocimiento sobre las condiciones materiales y simbólicas que favorecen la corresponsabilidad de los hombres que teletrabajan durante el confinamiento. Para dar respuesta a esta cuestión, se presenta una aproximación cualitativa al caso español a partir de 25 entrevistas realizadas a distintos perfiles de hombres, según el ciclo vital y la categoría laboral, que teletrabajan durante los primeros meses de la pandemia. Los resultados captan un perfil masculino más igualitario en la medida que la situación de teletrabajo fomenta su corresponsabilidad dentro del hogar. Se trata de los padres con una categoría laboral media que teletrabajan con criaturas menores en el hogar estando su pareja ausente por motivos laborales. El conjunto de estas condiciones favorece su mayor implicación en las tareas domésticas y de cuidados interiorizando prácticas cotidianas de gestión, organización y planificación propias del rol tradicional femenino.

Palabras clave

W hile teleworking has existed since the 1980s and 1990s, it was not a common practice in the labor market. In Europe there has been a gradual increase of this kind of work, although unevenly implemented in different countries. Remote workers accounted for 4.5% of the employed population in the EU as a whole in 1999, whereas in 2019, they represented 11% of employees. However, this trend changed with the COVID-19 pandemic. The health emergency forced the population to be locked down and telecommuting became obligatory for all occupations that allowed it. Thus, by June 2020, the number of distance workers in the EU grew to 48%, although implementation still remained uneven across countries. In Spain, according to data from Eurofound's Living, Working and Covid-19 survey (EUROFOND, 2020), 30% of the employed population telecommuted at the start of the pandemic. In addition to this increase, a comparative analysis of the situation before the COVID-19 crisis shows a change in the trend in many countries: whereas in 2019 distance working was mainly found among men, in 2020 it was mostly seen among women (EUROSTAT-LFS, 2021). In Spain, the national Labor Force Survey data showed that 21.1% of women worked from home during the pandemic, while only 17.4% of men did so (INE-EPA, 2021). However, it seems that when caregiving tasks were most pressing, it was women who adapted their work demands to meet them.

This exceptional situation experienced by part of the working population entailed different and unequal remote work experiences, determined by structural (gender, job category, life cycle) and relational factors depending on each household's circumstances. The lockdown of the population, together with the closure of schools and the impossibility of outsourcing caregiving work, was an interesting scenario in which to analyze whether gender inequalities in the use and distribution of time increased, were maintained, or diminished. The aim of this article is to identity the material and symbolic conditions that fostered joint responsibility for domestic and caregiving work among men who telecommuted during the lockdown period in Spain.

To address this issue, part of the empirical evidence from two qualitative research studies (Moreno-Colom & Borràs, 2021) carried out during the first months of the pandemic (October 2020-March 2021) were analyzed. They included 25 interviews with different profiles of men that were defined by job category and life cycle.

The article first presents the theoretical framework to outline the main theoretical debates on changes and continuities in men's involvement in domestic and caregiving work. The methodological strategy is then described and, following this, the results are presented. Finally, the theoretical discussion is resumed to underline the article's contribution to the debate on the conditions that foster male joint responsibility at home.

Theoretical Framework

The literature includes two major theoretical approaches to explain how domestic and caregiving work is distributed among women and men: the relative resources perspective and the gender perspective. The former considers that domestic responsibility depends on structural factors (level of education, employment situation, children, etc.) and individual preferences

that determine bargaining processes in couples (Becker, 1981; Coverman, 1985). The bargaining process is the starting point for analyzing how each member's resources and preferences are articulated to decide who does what (Lundberg and Pollak, 1996). It is argued that inequalities in relative resources lead to inequalities in intra-household bargaining. Employment situation is identified as a key factor in explaining task sharing insofar as it determines other relative resources such as income or working hours (Hiller, 1984).

In contrast, the gender perspective argues that relative resources, understood as individual aspects, determine the processes of socialization and internalization of gender roles (Agarwal, 1997; Pearse and Connell, 2016). It is held that women's greater dedication to domestic and caregiving tasks is not a consequence of rational decisions made according to individual resources, but of the influence of social identity, defined according to traditional gender stereotypes (Domínguez-Folgueras, 2012; Moreno-Colom et al., 2018). This mandate of gender norms, which is learned through socialization and institutionally reinforced (Cunninghan, 2001; Thébaud et al., 2021), links femininity to the specialization of the domestic sector (Treas, 2008). Thus, the productive sphere is constructed as masculine, and the reproductive sphere as feminine: domestic tasks are perceived as being women's responsibility as opposed to men's lack of responsibility (Ajenjo & García, 2014). Unlike the relative resources perspective, it is argued that the prevalence of gender roles also manifests itself in dual-earner couples. Bianchi (2011) showed how, in cases where both members are employed with similar income, women still spend more time on domestic and caregiving tasks than men. It has also been found that women with a high level of education, full-time employment and high salaries share household chores with their partners on a more equal basis (Hersch and Stratton, 1997; Bianchi et al., 2000; Coltrane, 2001; Balcells Ventura, 2009; Abril et al., 2015).

However, it has been shown that this egalitarian distribution conceals that the reduced gender gap is due to the decrease in the time women spend on domestic tasks and not by men spending more time doing household work (Borrás et al., 2012; Ajenjo and Garcia, 2014). It is argued that there has been a slow but sustained trend toward a reduction in the unequal use of time by women and men. Based on internationally harmonized statistics, comparative analyses carried out from a longitudinal perspective have shown that the trend in the reduction of the gender gap has become more prevalent over the years (Bianchi et al., 2006; Hook, 2010; Altintas and Sullivan, 2016). In particular, it points to the increase in the time that women spend in the labor market, a decrease in the time they devote to household work, and a general increase in the time they spend on children's caregiving. In contrast to the gender convergence argument, an argument holds that we are still in a stagnant revolution. It focuses on the persistence of inequalities despite the changes that have taken place in recent decades (Hochschild, 1989). One of the explanations provided is the social pressure of traditional roles: women's and men's behavior reproduces gender norms in order to gain social recognition among their peers (Coltrane, 2000; Jurado-Guerrero and González, 2009, Thébaud et al., 2021). On the one hand, women's domestic and caregiving responsibilities are part of the idea of femininity; on the other hand, the small share of responsibility for such tasks assigned to men reinforces the traditional idea of masculinity (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Sayer, 2005).

This perspective explains that life as a couple involves a decrease in the time dedicated to domestic work in the case of men and an increase in the case of women (Prieto and De Guzmán, 2013). Thus, cohabitation and children reinforce the weight of the gender mandate within dual-

earner households (Coltrane, 2000). It can be seen how all aspects linked to the labor market shape the privileged scenario of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Berdahl et al., 2018), while the aspects associated with the domestic sphere represent a family scenario where women have the main role. The different value attributed to the productive and the reproductive roles helps to explain men's behavior according to the norms of hegemonic masculinity, both in the labor market and in the domestic sphere (Connell, 2005; Borrás et al., 2012).

Dermott (2005) used this approach to describe the material and symbolic differences between the time that men spend on paid and caregiving work. Both responsibilities are considered important, but the time needed to be regarded as a good worker is qualitatively different from the time needed to be a good parent: the former requires continuous presence as proof of responsible behavior and commitment to the job; the latter requires discontinuous continuity and is limited to key moments of childcare. Beyond the symbolic aspects, Fernandez and Lozano (2019) suggested that fathers' involvement in the domestic sphere was determined by mothers' working hours: men take on the role of committed fathers when women are absent for paid work. The same is true for paternity leave, which seems to contribute to narrowing the gender gap when men take it in a period that does not overlap with maternity leave (Hagqvist, 2017).

In short, the different theoretical perspectives share the view that employment situation is important in explaining how domestic and caregiving work is distributed within the members of the couple. Based on the research discussed above, there is a need to enhance the knowledge of how the employment situation favors male joint responsibility. More specifically, there is an interest in analyzing to what extent teleworking explains a greater involvement of men in domestic and caregiving tasks. The literature contrasts the views of those who defend the transformative potential of remote working to promote the equal sharing of work (Mirchandani, 2000; Mayo et al., 2011), and of those who consider that telecommuting contributes to a greater exploitation of women, even though it may increase flexibility in employment terms (Sullivan and Lewis, 2001; Gálvez et al., 2020). This is a complex debate which, in addition to gender and work trend, requires other structural, relational, and contextual aspects to be considered.

Van der Lippe and Lippényi (2020) showed how, in general, telecommuting amplified work-family conflicts for both men and women. However, women experienced less conflict the greater the number of teleworking colleagues. Along the same lines, Kurowska (2018) related the level of gender equality of countries to the perception of remote work conflict: more egalitarian countries (e.g. Sweden), where men's participation and time spent at home was higher, experienced greater difficulty in separating the work and home spheres when telecommuting; while in countries with a more traditional role distribution (e.g. Poland), only women experienced this conflict.

The COVID-19 crisis introduced the novelty of telecommuting as a public health measure aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. It became a compulsory way of working, whenever possible, given that the population were in lockdown. This scenario was an opportunity to gain more knowledge about the conditions that fostered remote work as an opportunity to improve men's joint responsibility. In a Portuguese case study, Andrade & Petiaz Lousä (2021) showed how the experience of telework in general led to longer working hours, less autonomy and increased work-family conflict. Cannito and Scavarda (2020), in an Italian study, also pointed

to an increase in working hours and difficulties in reaching work and personal life balance. Although some men experienced greater involvement in fatherhood, in general they did not rethink their time spent on paid work; while women considered renegotiating their work situation given the constant interference between work and caregiving. In the case of Turkey, Çoban (2022) warned of the dangers of telecommuting during lockdown and pointed out how it could lead to an increase in female precarious situation, along with the strengthening of the traditional housewife role for women. All in all, the existing body of research shows the persistence of gender inequalities through the unequal use and distribution of time and space within the household. It has been found that men's paid work was prioritized in terms of space and time, while women lived a fragmented and dispersed spatial-temporal situation (Walsmel-Manor et al., 2021).

However, other research has pointed to some positive trends for male joint responsibility. In France, Domínguez-Folgueras (2021) showed how men who either telecommuted or were at home during lockdown because they could not go to work, increased their involvement in domestic tasks despite the persistence of gender inequalities in domestic work. Although this increased participation was considered to be a temporary effect of the pandemic. Van Tienoven Theun, Minnen Joeri, Laurijssen Ilse & Glorieux (2021) showed this in their study in Belgium, where they also noted differences according to family type, life cycle, and couple's employment situation. It seems that the more time men spent at home, the more their participation in domestic and care work increased. But as in the Spanish case, the greater involvement of fathers with their children did not lead to a decrease in the time spent by mothers (Moreno-Colom et al., 2018; Borrás et al., 2021). Based on this body of empirical evidence, the aim of this article is to improve knowledge about the material and symbolic conditions that fostered the joint responsibility of men who teleworked during lockdown, focusing on the case of Spain.

Methodology

A qualitative methodological strategy was used to achieve the stated aim, namely, to identify the conditions that fostered greater involvement in domestic and caregiving work by men who telecommuted during the lockdown period. The empirical material was obtained from two qualitative research studies (Moreno-Colom & Borràs, 2021) carried out in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area. The combination of the empirical data collected in each of them offered additional richness to the analysis, as they used different samples for same object of study based on the Spanish case.

The first study (S1) analyzed the range of situations experienced by heterosexual couples in the context of the pandemic according to their employment situation, which included remote work, among others. It also incorporated a comparative perspective, taking into account the pre-COVID everyday life[1]. Both partners in the participating heterosexual couples were interviewed in order to capture the complexity of changes and continuities in relation to the use of time and daily habits. The second study (S2) analyzed the lockdown routines of men and women who telework during the first months of the COVID-19 crisis. The population universe

included different profiles of people employed by the Public Administration working remotely in the pandemic context.

In both cases, the theoretical segmentation criteria for the selection of informants included three variables identified as significant in the literature: gender, life cycle, and job category. Firstly, the starting point was the idea that the gender differential process entails that men and women experience the time spent on paid, domestic and caregiving work in different and unequal ways. Secondly, in relation to the life cycle, the presence or absence of children's caregiving (child under 12 years old) was seen as influencing the structure of daily routines in the household. Thirdly, job category was included because the ability to self-organize one's time in paid work and the degree of responsibility (leading work teams) vary according to whether one holds a high-level, mid-level or low-level job. These levels are defined based on the qualification and skills required. Moreover, this variable offers an empirical approximation to social class due includes information about educational level and socio-professional category.

In-depth interviews were used for data collection in both studies. The aim was to capture personalized discourses in order to understand the double (material and symbolic) dimension of the lockdown routines that marked the daily lives of telecommuters. This technique is not a simple record of discourse but rather a communicative construct which takes into account the social and temporal context in which the interview takes place (Wengraf, 2001).

The interviewees were recruited in the first case through the use of snowball sampling and, in the second case, with the help of people responsible for human resources in the Public Administration taken as a case study. Both sampling procedures were based on life cycle and job category as a criteria and they did not include active fatherhood in order to avoid any recruited bias.

Out of the total of 50 interviews conducted, this article is based on the results of the 25 interviews carried out with men who teleworked during the lockdown period. This empirical material includes a typological representativeness that it looks for to achieve discourse saturation from two or three interviews for each profile. Despite the potential limitations of the sample in terms of size and specific criteria, this dataset constitutes a relevant source of information to at least approximate an understanding of a time of historical relevance. In any case, the conclusions of this study would be better understood as hypothesis, to be contrasted with other data sources and to dialogue with complementary analytical results.

Regarding the procedure, the interviews were conducted from October 2020 to March 2021 and their duration were between 45 to 90 minutes each. In the first study they were carried out in person and in the second study virtually in compliance with Covid-19 health regulations. The previous experience of the research team with the virtual format guaranteed the quality of the data collect process. A script designed according to the analytical models of each study was used, although in both cases was obtained information on the participants' experience during lockdown in relation to paid work, domestic work and caregiving. The participants gave their informed consent for the interviews, which were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed following the guidelines for content analysis and using the *Atlas.ti* software.

The qualitative data were analysed through content analysis in order to collect both the context of the respondents' discourses and the symbolic meaning attributed to them, in the line

proposed by Ruiz Olabuénaga (2012). The path followed in the analysis of content began with the structuring of the text on the basis of two semantic fields: the experience of lockdown routine and the expectative around regulation telework in the future. Subsequently, units of analysis were selected according to objective criteria and the subjectivity of the informants (Krippendorff, 1997). To this end, the analysis focused on the material and symbolic dimension of the lockdown routines and expectations. The interpretation was based on a sociological rewriting of the main ideas expressed by the protagonists themselves, on a round trip between the selected units and the theoretical framework (Alonso, 1998; Hatim and Mason, 1995). The selected verbatims are mainly those that best represent the profile of egalitarian men that it corresponds to the mid-level job with children's caregiving.

Results

This section presents the material and symbolic conditions that fostered a greater involvement of men in domestic and caregiving work, as well as the ways in which this was expressed, based on the subjective experience of telecommuting during the first months of the lockdown period. Firstly, it describes the conditions that help to explain men's increased joint responsibility; secondly, it outlines men's experiences of remote work when it leads to more egalitarian behavior; thirdly, it explains the transformation of daily routine as a lever for change; and finally, it points to the expectation of teleworking as an indicator of the opportunity for intensive fatherhood.

Conditions that Encourage the Joint Responsibility by Male Telecommuters

Different elements were identified in the interviews that come to characterize the most egalitarian male profiles: men for whom the experience of telecommuting during lockdown involved greater participation in domestic and caregiving tasks. Conditions that encouraged joint responsibility included: teleworking without the presence of their partner at home, fatherhood of young children, mid-level job, egalitarian gender ideology, and family socialization disruptive to traditional roles. All these aspects identified the most egalitarian profile, which corresponds to parents with a mid-level job category who telecommuted and had young children at home while their partner was absent for work reasons.

> I mean, within the traditional male/female role, the classic one, I have the more..., more traditionally female role, in this case, regarding taking care house... I might even dare to say that I am partly in charge of organizing things at home. I mean, every day I'm thinking: 'What do I have for lunch, what do I have for dinner, what do I do, what not, what's in the fridge? That's what I do, that's what I do (Male, mid-level job, children _S2_1).

Firstly, the absence of the woman from the household was identified as a key aspect in accounting for the man's greater involvement in the domestic sphere. In this sense, one interviewee explained that when his partner was at home, he stopped doing the household chores that he was responsible for when she was absent.

> ... and I don't know why, but I'm sure now that we're both together in the evenings with the kids, Maria will definitely make dinner, definitely. Even though I've been doing it for three years, when she's around, she'll definitely do it now (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_1).

Secondly, being a parent of young children was also a factor that helped to explain the men's greater involvement. Basically, because their responsibility for caregiving entailed that paid work was less central in terms of time organization and participation in the domestic sphere was greater. Where this situation existed before the pandemic, it already acted as a lever for change, while teleworking during lockdown served as an accelerator. In both cases, the care responsibility reinforced the interrelation between time disponible to productive and reproductive spheres.

> She worked from 2 to 10, not from 2.30 to 10, so, I had to be here at *10 to five* or something like that, because I had to pick up the children, because Maria was working, doing something. I would often leave when Maria and the children were sleeping, so I would do my whole working day and when I came back, basically, I would arrive and pick up the children. Depending on the day, [there were] more or fewer extracurricular activities, more or less homework, more or less bathing, more or less dinner, more or less... (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_1).

Thirdly, with regard to employment, it was seen that the mid-level job category encouraged male joint responsibility, as it entailed less paid work responsibility. This was evidenced by the story of this man in a high-level job who, despite telecommuting, continued to prioritize the production side without being available for domestic tasks in the home:

> From my point of view, it was a presence/absence. I mean, I was there, but I didn't... I mean, I was there, but as if... I was more at home, I mean, suddenly I was at home whereas before I wasn't so much at home, er..., but I was hardly present at all for... because of what my job required (Male, high-level job, children_S2_1).

Fourthly, it can be seen how the various aspects outlined above identify those fathers who conceived of care as a responsibility to be shared with their partner. In this sense, gender ideology, understood according to social values, identified those men whose narrative showed the existence of an egalitarian discourse prior to the lockdown period.

> Besides, I feel really bad if one day you're fucked up and sick and she starts to do the work and I'm here on the couch, no, no, if she starts to work I have to do something too (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_2).

This egalitarian discourse in some cases was a consequence of the socialization process characterized by points of reference different from traditional gender roles. These included childhood in large families, families with a significant presence of men and absence of women, or models of fathers who participated in the domestic sphere.

My father, he worked making beds and cleaning bathrooms, there wasn't much difference between... between the man and the woman in this sense. They both worked, period. And, well, I remember, there were things that my mother liked less and that he liked less... I don't know what my father liked very much, and there were things that my mother didn't like, and my father just did (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_3).

However, this socialization process did not involve one hundred percent egalitarian masculinity. This was evidenced by the discourse of an interviewee who, despite acknowledging the influence of his egalitarian family, also upheld the importance of traditional gender roles:

I think so, but that equality... well... I think, for example, that... my family has always been very egalitarian but that there are some internalized roles apart from... the traditional component that this is there... (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_1).

Male Experience of Telework: Halfway Between Hedonism and Technification of Care

After identifying the conditions that contributed to fostering joint responsibility among men who telecommuted, some differences were observed among them according to their subjective perception of their experience of teleworking during lockdown. There was a difference between those who had virtually no responsibilities within the household before the pandemic and those who did. The former attributed a hedonistic meaning to their increased involvement in domestic and caregiving work; far from representing an additional workload, they experienced it as a pleasurable situation of family enjoyment, as this interviewee described:

... just as I was saying before, I enjoyed mopping the floor because I put some music on and I was cleaning and stuff... (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_4).

However, in these cases, hedonistic joint responsibility was a conjunctural situation which did not represent a structural change. It is precisely the knowledge that this is a temporary situation that explains the playful nature of domestic and caregiving work. In this sense, telecommuting was experienced as a one-off opportunity for fatherhood and lockdown as a vacation-like situation.

Well, then, they managed, and also I... the truth is that they made my day. They were just totally unaware of things... (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_3).

The experience of teleworking for these men was not problematic in comparison to women. The absence of conflict was also found among men who were more involved in caregiving tasks before the pandemic; but in their case, hedonism disappeared and was replaced by the technification of care also far from structural change. These parents were organized based on a fragmented timetable with a diachronic logic characteristic of the productive environment: telecommuting and caregiving were linked sequentially to avoid overlapping and the presence of both partners at the same time. This technification was especially visible in the accounts of

men in high-level job category and with more of a productive focus. They adopted a pragmatic attitude that prioritized paid work demands and found solutions to meet caregiving responsibilities without feeling guilty when children could not be cared for.

> Ok, it wasn't a drama for them. I mean, when I got really overwhelmed or I had... I really needed to concentrate, or I had a very important meeting, well, I would put them in front of a screen and... and that was it. Or the TV, cartoons… they watched ... cartoons or were in front of screens. And when they were calmer, I said: 'So how about playing whatever…? (Male, high-level job, children_S2_2).

As they resorted to either a hedonistic approach or to the technification of care, men's greater involvement in caregiving work did not result in a conflict between work and life, given the lower self-demands in terms of looking after the children. However, it is also worth noting the conflictive experiences identified among men in the mid-level professional category, due not leading work teams, where having less job responsibility gave way to an experience of conflict. This was shown in the account of this interviewee with three children under the age of six, for whom the intensity of caregiving during the lockdown period made telecommuting difficult and led to daily discomfort.

> ... when they sent us all home, my partner too, well, the kids, I have three children, six, four and two years old… My wife was also sent home. She doesn't work at the Town Hall. For the first two weeks it was a total drama, we could say, to get... Well, she went to bed at two, I got up at five in the morning, you counted the hours you had, and we still didn't even get to do six each...The forty-three days that the children were at home were very hard. Let's not fool ourselves, the kids are very small, and it was hard for us (Male, mid-level job, children_S2_2).

Men who experienced this kind of conflict reported the need to negotiate an equal sharing of the total workload with their partners, including work, domestic and family responsibilities. In these cases, beyond hedonism and the use of technologies, their experience of teleworking resembled the female experience of teleworking.

> He was one year old then, almost one year old. And he was at home, day-care centers were closed and being in contact with other people was problematic because there was total lockdown. So, we had to look after the child on our own and at the same time take care of the work. And there were times when it was difficult, but my partner and I tried to get organized to find a balance and to be able to reconcile both things (Male, mid-level job, children_S2_3).

Changes in Daily Routine, Changes in Gender Roles

The need for daily planning involved a change in routines compared to the situation before the pandemic, even if there was some shared responsibility for household and caregiving tasks. It can be seen how telecommuting during lockdown could act as a lever of change in gender roles: beyond merely carrying out tasks, some men also internalized and assumed the daily management for them.

> I take the girls to school in the morning. As they are of different ages, you have to wait about 20 minutes between one going in and the other. When I get home, I sometimes have breakfast or other times I have it later and then I log on and see what's going on in my day.... well, at the end of the day is when it all piles up, all the work...plus my daughters get out of school relatively early, around four o'clock. I finish work around three o'clock, I make lunch. Depending on the day, my wife comes or not, sometimes she arrives at four or four thirty, and I don't see her, because I have already gone to pick up the children (Male, mid-level job category, children_S2_4).

These men had internalized the tasks that they might have performed before the pandemic but were not perceived as being their individual responsibility. It seems, therefore, that the remote work experience led them to live and think about everyday life in a different way, as they had become more aware of and responsible for domestic tasks. Beyond hedonism or technification, taking care of household chores also means thinking about them. This is what this interviewee noted, as he described a common metaphor among women: having house stuff on one's mind.

> Shit! Maybe one day, I was going to bed and suddenly, at eleven o'clock at night (we'd go to bed early some days because we've also watched a lot of movies, Lisa and I, we were never together watching one...) so as I was going to bed I suddenly opened my eyes... 'oh shit! the chickpeas, I forgot to soak the chickpeas!, for example. So I get up and... 'Where are you going?' and I say, 'the chickpeas!' and she stays. And I say, 'don't worry, just one of my things'. 'Tomorrow we're having chickpeas, but if I don't soak them, we won't... we won't have anything for lunch (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_4).

This account shows how men were becoming aware of the need to plan and organize domestic and caregiving work. Far from improvising, they internalized a daily logic that was close to women's experience within the domestic sphere. There was a continuum where caregiving also involved cooking, washing and managing things, among other tasks. Ultimately, the lever of change for routines somewhat entails a feminization in the way of living and thinking about the domestic sphere. In this sense and as evidence, this interviewee actually expressed satisfaction when he carried out the tasks:

> ...man, and the feeling of having things clean... shit, I like that for a moment, I mean, this feeling of having things... these fits of cleanliness... oh shit! That's cool.... isn't it? I mean, a little bit of... a bit of music, one of those days when you're feeling energized. .... A bit of music and .... when you finish you say, wow, that's amazing. [emphasizing]. And you say, well, [I'll] do this every week (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_3).

However, the interviews also showed that when the situation of male telecommuting and female presence at work was reversed, the previous routines where women assumed the role of main household manager may return. In this case, the traditional gender role was reinforced.

> There was one day with the children, everything was very good and very well... and then... a curious thing that happened is that... when she... when she came back she wanted to change

things... she changed things to be more comfortable... and I say, wow, I mean... now that I'm used to it, you come to change everything again... (Male, mid-level job category, children_S1_1).

An Opportunity for Intensive Fatherhood

Going beyond the nature of the change, teleworking was an opportunity for intensive fatherhood which involved adopting the traditionally female way of thinking about the domestic sphere. Telecommuting fathers positively assessed the situation where paid work became less central, and caregiving became more important for them. As this man reported, flexible working hours compensated for atypical working hours because they allowed care to be provided.

Let's see, I do recognize that I'm more tired, OK? Because... in the end, well, yes, I do have the feeling that my working day is longer… in terms of time. But, on the other hand, I'm telling you, I really appreciate it. This flexibility means I don't have to spend the whole day worrying about whether or not I'm going to make it in time. You know? I mean, if there is something to do for work that I can't finish it now, well, I'll finish it later, OK? So I can take care of my family, which I value very much right now, especially because my children are small (Male, mid-level job, children_S2_2).

In these cases, the experience of teleworking during the lockdown period was valued because it allowed positive aspects of fatherhood to be experienced, as well as an awareness of the importance of shared time with children.

I now have the opportunity to pick up the children from school, to bring them here, to have them eat here with me. And I have the opportunity to be with my children more, which is something that... that I value and that I'm interested in (Male, mid-level job, children_S1_2).

Discussion and Conclusion

The literature has agreed that employment situation is an important factor in explaining how domestic and caregiving work is distributed among parents. Based on the research carried out to date, this article has explored in greater depth how teleworking fostered joint responsibility by men at home. It inquires the extent to which telecommuting during the pandemic led to greater male involvement in domestic and caregiving work. The main results identified several material and symbolic conditions that encouraged male joint responsibility: teleworking without the presence of their partner in the home, fatherhood of young children, a mid-level job category, an egalitarian gender ideology prior to the pandemic and family socialization that disrupted traditional roles. All these aspects identified a more egalitarian male profile, insofar as teleworking fostered shared responsibility within the household. These were fathers in the mid-level job category, with young children, who telecommuted during the first months of the pandemic while their partners were working away from home.

These results for the Spanish case were consistent with those reported in studies carried out in other countries (Domínguez-Folgueras, 2021; Van Tienoven et al., 2021). Moreover, in line with Kurowska (2018), it was found that increased male joint responsibility was not exclusively due to telecommuting during the lockdown period but was also influenced by previous attitudes and behaviors. Remote work was therefore seen to act as a catalyst for the pre-pandemic situation, as it made men who were already engaging in more equal practices in the household more egalitarian, while it reinforced the gender inequality brought about by the hegemonic masculinity of men in traditional gender roles. At this point, the experience of the men analyzed allows to highlight two aspects as a contribution to the theoretical discussion.

Firstly, the evidence presented in this article shows how men's involvement is greater when women are not in the household. In agreement with Fernandez-Lozano (2019), it was found that men who adopted the strongest shared responsibility attitude in the context of telecommuting were those whose partners worked outside the home. It can be seen that the temporary conditions of the employment situation did indeed influence men's engagement in domestic and caregiving work. Thus, the absence of their partner from the home encouraged joint responsibility among telecommuting men in the mid-level job category, who had less responsibility and greater work flexibility compared to those in the high-level job category. These results also reinforced Hagqvist's (2017) argument regarding paternity leave and its potential to reduce the gender gap when used individually without overlapping with maternity leave.

Secondly, it was seen how teleworking can be a lever of change for hegemonic masculinity by transforming routines. The greater shared responsibility found among men who met all the conditions outlined above included daily practices of management, foresight, and planning of domestic and caregiving tasks typically found in the traditional female role. It was also found that the use of technification of care as a strategy was consistent with Dermontt's (2005) description of non-confrontational involvement in care, because greater demands are placed on good employees than good fathers. However, thinking about household chores means overcoming the socio-cultural obstacle of the gender mandate, as well as breaking the social pressure of hegemonic masculinity. On this point, it seems that intensive fatherhood (Faircloth, 2014) contributed to this shift among fathers who saw telecommuting as an opportunity for adjusting their work-life balance. In short, it emerges two empirical aspects that seem to question hegemonic masculinity. First, the men's participation and responsibility in the domestic sphere because break with the total availability male labor presence. Secondly, the intensive fatherhood as a way to (re)construct the new hegemonic masculinity.

In summary, following current theoretical discussions, this article helps to identify some of the elements that seem key to furthering the transformative potential of teleworking beyond the pandemic. It is also an invitation to think about the need to design public policies aimed at promoting this work modality trend among fathers, along the lines of individual and nontransferable paternity leave.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1.This study started before the pandemic and sought to analyse changes in the use of time and daily habits. However, the Covid-19 crisis meant that the qualitative fieldwork had to be halted due to the impossibility of carrying out in-depth interviews in the private homes of the people who formed part of the design typology. For this reason, it was decided to adapt the initially planned methodological strategy and to re-interview the profiles that had been covered before the state of exception in order to capture the changes experienced in their daily lives.

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