

Ma'am Mom: An Autoethnography of Being a Teacher and a Mother during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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ABSTRACT. When the COVID-19 pandemic happened, people and sectors of society needed to adjust specific norms and standards to fit into the demands of the time. This paper is an autoethnography of my experiences as a mother-teacher during the peak of the pandemic. It is in the context of my experiences and other mother-teachers working from home, conflicts in the roles played by mother-teachers at home, the expectation of society, and social norms. It is about how I perceived my reproductive and productive roles. Moreover, I interviewed mother-teachers, and their stories served as counter and conforming narratives to my narratives. The following are emerging themes: the unprecedented time; a mother is born; off the rhythm; and silver lining. These themes discussed the various phases mother-teachers grappled upon and triumphed. Writing this autoethnography was a therapeutic experience for the high emotions I had to deal with during the pandemic.

1.0. Introduction

Pre-pandemic period led most women to cross the public sphere that men once dominated. With drastic developments, especially in education, women's access to quality education has significantly increased their career opportunities and work participation (Encila & Madrigal, 2021). Women are given more opportunities to harness their skills and potentials and therefore had breakthroughs in various disciplines and careers. These realities changed women's lives and are far different compared to women decades ago. Women of today have more work and life options.

As career women turn the next chapter of their lives, get married, and become mothers, they experience difficulties in juggling these multiple roles, especially when their children are still young and demand more time and attention. When a child is born, so is the mother. Reichel (2012) stated that being a mother for a woman is one of the most significant roles one can ever play. It is one of the most crucial and essential parts of her being. Chrisler (2013) also argued that becoming a mother is generally the "highest" level at which womanhood is fulfilled. Motherhood is the becoming of a woman. Ehsan and Jahan (2021) mentioned that motherhood also comes with overwhelming stresses and challenges. It also means numerous adjustments in a woman's intra and interpersonal facets (Molgora & Accordini, 2020).

The roles assigned and expected from women, especially those who became mothers, are unbounded (Villanueva & Gayoles, 2019). Since societal changes acknowledge women's capacities to do jobs not related to childbearing and child-rearing, women are now faced with complications in their day-to-day life. In modern societies, working women are expected to be parenting their children actively while staying focused on their careers. Significant advancements in women's lives offered countless possibilities and complications (Michaelian, 2005). As a result, women must balance multiple roles daily (Addison & Yankyera, 2015). These situations are consequently true for mother-teachers.

Women, especially mothers, must combine several aspects of life to have balanced work, career, and family life that consists of mental, physical, social, emotional, financial, and spiritual well-being. Dunahoo et al. (1996), as cited in Addison and Yankyera (2015), argued that work and family roles are the major life roles working mothers put so much value on. These are also the roles that most working



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women have trouble with and conflict managing because when one role becomes demanding of their time and attention, it would be very challenging to also give the same amount of time and attention to the other. This situation is generally true for a mother working as a teacher.

With all of these to consider, most working mothers face challenges, to name a few, like the never-ending works at home, taking care of children, working schedules that are flexible, and companies or offices that are not considerate of the situation of the mother. Complexities may occur if a mother-teacher attempt to balance career and motherhood, respectively, as most frequently, teachers give birth to their first baby after stabilizing their teaching career (Pflum, 2005). However, if they are knowledgeable enough about the nitty-gritty of their work or profession, the transition from being a mother to a teacher or a teacher to a mother would be unchallenging and less complicated.

In the first quarter of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic happened, which became a social phenomenon that has changed the interactions, relationships, human experiences, and behavioral and cultural patterns. The world witnessed a sudden swing in what was considered "normal lives". At the onset and during the global crisis, just like COVID-19, it is asserted that women are mostly affected in public and private spheres (Ehsan & Jahan, 2021). The transition to becoming a mother is not easy for women. In most cases, this phase may lead to changes in the established pattern of behavior and how these new mothers value life now that they have infants to look out for. Thus, the anxiety of new mothers may be amplified even more during this time of crisis (Chasson et al., 2021) and through which women are to balance their family and career affairs (Ehsan & Jahan, 2021).

Recent times have been very difficult for everyone around the globe because of the challenges posed by this global pandemic. In almost all aspects, people and institutions found various measures to strive and survive despite these challenges. One of the institutions that are highly affected by the pandemic is education. To answer the call of the current situations, teaching and learning have now shifted online and to the comforts of teachers' homes (Aldossari & Chaudhry, 2021; Clark et al., 2021). Because of the threats of the virus, the work-from-home (WFH) setup became the only viable option businesses had to take to continue operating (Thorstensson, 2020). Basic and higher education institutions have resorted to changing the traditional classroom-based pedagogies to a more updated, highly technological means to suit teaching-learning activities in distance learning education (Augustus, 2021).

The foregoing developments and changes in the realm of education and teaching became the context of this present study. A woman, who is a mother and teacher, and how she perceives her reproductive and productive roles are imperative to understanding how women in the field of education perform their multiple roles in various working conditions, particularly during pandemics. Thus, this study aimed to address the gaps that arise from this phenomenon by writing my experiences and of other mother-teachers to discover conflicts in the roles we played, the expectations of society and the social norms that put pressure on us, and how we respond and handle these roles and pressures. This also examined the effects of having to work from home to work performance and academic competence, and productivity. The narratives here will afford relevant information to significant people surrounding the mother-teachers, such as the husband, children, and school administrators, and how to deal with and support these women during these challenging times.

2.0. Literature Review

Yildirim and Eslen-Ziya (2021) stated that the effects of the global pandemic on men and women are seen and felt differently because of the established expectations of society regarding gender roles. Before a global pandemic, mothers have a stronger presence of the meaning of life than during the pandemic, when mothers are now more in the pursuit of meaning in life (Chasson et al., 2021). In the shadow of a global health crisis, however, women, especially mothers, are placed in a more conventional spot where they are foreseen to still "man" the house even if they, too, tested positive for COVID-19. Consequently, if a family member got positive for the virus, mothers would not think twice about risking their lives to care for them. Not even the perils of the COVID-19 virus can stop a mother from being a mother. Mothers would not take rest even if it meant putting their lives in danger (Ehsan & Jahan, 2021; Guatimosim, 2020). Moreover, it is claimed that expectant and postpartum mothers have high tendencies to exhibit depression symptoms and increased traumatic experiences because of the restrictions during this global pandemic (Molgora & Accordini, 2020). It was also documented that children were severely affected by the closure of schools and restrictions on going outside or public spaces such as playgrounds. This circumstance altered the psychosocial

dynamics of the family and, as a consequence, increased the chances for a mother to face maternal psychological issues (Cluver et al., 2020; Meraya et al., 2021).

Pflum (2005) stated that mother-teachers are being placed in an implausible condition of managing what society expects from them, especially since both "jobs" require nurturing, attention, dedication, and love. Societal norms placed women at a disadvantage and put them on a pedestal where they are expected to perform all gender roles, especially motherhood, and become perfect mothers to their children (Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2021; Güney-Frahm, 2020, cited in Augustus, 2021). What adds more to this pressure and guilt (Meeussen & Laar, 2018) of being able to perform well in these jobs is the social norms and expectations claiming that these jobs cannot be performed perfectly without giving full 100% effort to one. If mother teachers give their 100% in teaching or their jobs, they will be deemed bad mothers. If mother teachers give their children their full attention, care, and love, they will be labeled bad teachers.

These societal expectations make it tougher for mother-teachers because they are placed in a gender convention role and are constantly forced and caught in a situation where they have to choose as to what societal expectations they will accomplish for them to be "good" for both reproductive and productive roles of being a mother and teacher. Dunahoo et al. (1996), as cited in Addison and Yankyera (2015), argued that work and family roles are the major life roles working mothers put so much value on. These are also the roles that most working women have trouble with and conflict managing because when one role becomes demanding of their time and attention, it would be very challenging to also give the same amount of time and attention to the other.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, people and sectors of society needed to adjust certain specific norms and standards to fit into the demands of the time. It has critically affected people's physical, economic, mental, and social aspects (Chasson et al., 2021). It can be noted in the study of Ehsan and Jahan (2021) that people's anxiety levels increased significantly, and they needed to generally adjust their routines from working competitively in offices to working at home. Teachers during the pandemic also had the biggest slice regarding work environment adjustments. Teachers are confounded with the accessibility of their students' connectivity and theirs while making sure that their students are learning through the online classes they conduct (Rahayu et al., 2022). Further, a study showed that teachers are also vulnerable and are showing symptoms of anxiety and depression exacerbated by increased demand for their work due to the pandemic (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).

When home now also becomes the office, the margins between domestic roles and work responsibilities become loosely determined, and the lines between home and work gradually appear to be blurred (Alon et al., 2020). Working from home influences employees (Breckmann & Rupietta, 2016). One, the work-from-home setup gives employees an increased opportunity of being autonomous. Second, the work-from-home arrangements influence the working environment and conditions of the employees. Despite these positive influences and benefits, the teachers who are mothers usually find it difficult to set clear boundaries between work and home conditions. Further, certain events at home may trigger stress for teachers or may also be a source of inspiration and support. These realities are not far from true at the tertiary and higher education levels (Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2021).

Given these existing realities, the multiple burdens confronted by teachers, who are also mothers, in managing the roles they have in life cause them stress. Numerous scholars have acknowledged the strong relationship between gender and stress, according to Addison and Yankyera (2015). Anspaugh et al. (2002) have recognized, based on the results of their study, that men and women have variations in terms of their responses and coping with stress. They also claimed that women are more likely to get stressed than men because women are more troubled with everyday life, whereas men's anxieties are restricted to family problems and illness, among others. The study of Duffy (1999), as cited in Addison and Yankyera (2015), strengthens the above perspective that women are more likely to deal with conflicts and stress because of the multitude of workloads and overlapping roles to execute. There are several means of handling and coping with stress. Nonetheless, we only learn to deal with what we face and acknowledge. Hence, On the bright side, not all stresses and strains bring negative effects. Some stresses can bring out the best in one person. It can be a reason for encouragement and inspiration to be more productive in life (Addison & Yankyera, 2015).

Another study by Feldman (2005) identified coping as the effort of people to manage, control, lessen and learn how to treat stress. According to Addison and Yankyera (2015), some means of

coping with stress can be very simple and practiced habitually by people. Having the right mix of attitudes, taking good care of oneself, eating healthy, and regular exercise are some ways for people to manage the stress they are challenged with. These ways can range from emotional and cognitive to physical and behavioral (Bernstein et al., 2003). Cognitive coping strategies involve how people deal with stress by being calm and logical about the situation. Cognitive coping strategies help a person deal with stress constructively and translate to positive emotions and feelings to make stress less destructive. Anspaugh et al. (2002) also mentioned knowing relaxation techniques to calm down and ease the troubles stress may bring an individual. Hoeger et al. (2018) added that physical activities such as playing sports and games could help alleviate the stress levels one feels. Addison and Yankyera (2015) showed that most female teachers get social support from friends, colleagues, and family members to deal and cope with the stress they are confronted with.

3.0. Methodology

A qualitative research approach was utilized in this study, particularly autoethnography as a research design was employed. At present, several researchers from various academic disciplines venture into writing their personal stories and anchor these experiences to events in society through evocative writing (Wall, 2006). According to Ellis (2004), autoethnography as a research design relates personal narratives and human experiences to understanding and explaining cultural, social, and political phenomena. It is, therefore, a combination of the standards of autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011).

Autoethnography offers a wide lens of the research process and a valuable tool for researchers to connect their personal experiences to dissect a certain phenomenon or culture that exists or has existed in society (Méndez, 2013; Ellis et al., 2011). The unfolding of the researchers of their own feelings, perspectives, and principles via self-reflection and self-retrospection enables the researchers to hypothesize on its relevance to the self, power, culture, and society in general (Jones, 2008). Moreover, writing your personal narratives can also pave the way in assessing critically the personal, professional, and social aspects (Bayer, 2021; Starr, 2010) and augment the existing body of knowledge (Adams et al., 2015) because identity, knowledge, and culture are socially constructed context and realities (Starr, 2010).

Moreover, reflexive autoethnography as a form of autoethnography was also used in this study. This type of autoethnography focuses on making the self a reference in the context of the researched topic (Davies, 2012). Olt (2018) stated that autoethnography comprises the first-person narratives as told by the researcher. Hence, my personal experience as an author will serve as the main source of data. The primary method of gathering the data will be through systematic sociological introspection. Ellis (1991) argued that there is a necessity to grasp the lived experiences of emotions felt by humans through sociological introspection. This method recognizes the emotions and experiences of the subject in relation to oneself and the participants or co-subjects of the study. In this study, self-introspection and interactive introspection were employed. Self-introspection involved an examination of my own experiences and emotions while also accounting for the experiences and emotions of identified participants or co-subjects of the study through interactive introspection.

The study participants were mother-teachers in the same working from home environment modality. There were five participants, of which three became new mothers during the pandemic while the other two mother-teachers were with children of pre-school and school age. The three among five participants have two children. Collectively, the participants were all Instructors 1 and two occupied administrative positions in the college. In terms of income, all five received the same amount. However, two mother-teachers had a side hustle to earn more. As of length of service, four participants have been working for four years in the college and are in their early 30s, while one participant has worked with the school for six years and is 36 years old.

A face-to-face interview was employed to document the experiences of the study participants except for one who opted for a virtual interview via Zoom. Open-ended questions were used to explore their experiences and stories, which yielded rich information on how the pandemic had affected them. The whole interview process was an interactive introspection that provided me the confirming and counter-narratives to cross-check my self-introspection. Ronai (1992) explained that consulting through comparison and contradictions with others can be significant in assessing personal narratives because, at times, a researcher might experience unsteady levels of emotions and work through which the process of introspection might be affected.

A narrative-thematic analysis technique was employed to better understand the phenomenon. Sarantakos (2013) explained that narrative analysis is used to examine the shared stories of the study participants, especially how they perceived their own lives and how they also see the world they are living in. The analysis was based on transcribed interviews from which the narratives or the stories of the study participants came out. On the other hand, thematic analysis intends to highlight the contents of the narratives following certain steps: (a) studying and familiarizing with the narratives; (b) determining codes; (c) collating the codes and creating the themes, and (d) reviewing and revising the themes created as needed.

Ethically, the participants, upon invitation, were informed of the objectives of the study as well as the whole research procedure. They were given letters of consent and must duly sign them before participating in the study. Since their participation was mainly voluntary, they were informed that they could withdraw anytime. In writing the study results, any identifying information of the participants was not disclosed to protect their privacy. Meanwhile, all the transcriptions and videos used to collect data were saved on google drive and flash drive. I have sole access to these data, which were deleted after the completion of the study.

4.0. Results and Discussion

The unprecedented time

The shift. The world was caught off guard when the news broke out about a virus gradually spreading worldwide. The world was unsuspecting that this relatively new virus coming from China would soon force the people and countries to shut their doors for a certain period. The Philippines had its first-ever recorded case of COVID-19 on January 21, 2020. Eventually, the number of cases took off and was uncontrollable.

Two weeks after the declaration of the suspension of classes, we were all instructed to migrate to online teaching and provide students with offline and online tasks. Teaching-learning activities shifted from the four corners of the classroom to the comforts of our homes. At the start, it was a relief that we were not physically reporting to school, limiting our chances of contracting the virus. Another two weeks passed, and the whole country was placed in ECQ, synonymously meant hard lockdown. This all started my struggles and the feeling of emptiness. Before the pandemic, we had a stay-out house help who assisted us in caring for my then 6-month-old daughter. But because of my fear of getting the virus, I asked her not to report it until things get back to normal.

Life with an infant, especially for a new mother like me, was causing me stress. I hardly focus on work and dedicate my time to my baby with the fear that I might commit mistakes. At that time, I felt like I was the only one experiencing that until I could talk to my participants. One even mentioned:

"I was overwhelmed and set high expectation for myself. It came to a point that I comfort myself. When I realized that the pandemic is here to stay, it's either I drown in my misery or fight! As a mom I can't let myself drown because I have my little one to look after. It's no longer about self-preservation but taking care of that little human entrusted to you." (Mrs. Vee, personal communication, 26 May 2022)

This inside story holds to the idea expressed by Molgora and Accordini (2020) and Alon et al. (2020) that mother-teachers are disposed of in a situation where the boundary separates work and child-rearing is slim. Mother-teachers are challenged to address this situation without foregoing the other role. The restrictions forced my co-mother-teachers to look for other things and activities their children could do. One mother-teacher, in fact, said:

"I have to give my kids varied activities like cooking, baking, playing instruments and sports and painting. Then later, when the online and modular classes were introduced, they needed to shift from those physical activities to being hooked on gadgets such as tablets and cellphones. This added to my struggles of being a mother. They were not into physical activities anymore, and they do not socialize." She added, "It was a time when I was preoccupied with the things I needed to do. That is why I allow them to do what they want to do, like dwelling more on their gadgets and social media. This also allowed me to do things I wanted to do for the tasks I needed to accomplish at work. I was also going through the process of annulment. But despite this, I still make that conscious effort to care for them." (Mrs. Love, personal communication, 24 May 2022)

Cluver et al. (2020) affirmed that, indeed, thinking about how to keep children occupied and engaged with activities while they are safe at home is a grueling task amid a pandemic.

The unwanted visitor. The following days after March 16, 2020, were uncertain. But if there is one thing that I am sure of, I know that my life will be completely turned. During this time, there were reported cases of COVID-19 in some parts of the world, and our country already had its fair share of the numbers. When the reported news about the virus last December 2019 went out, my daughter was only three months old, and I was still on maternity leave. Being the first time, I was overly protective of my newborn daughter. The thought of the virus spreading around the world caused me to panic. Moreso, the stress I was feeling then became more intense because of the presence of my sister-in-law from Manila. My sister-in-law arrived on March 12, 2020. She did not inform us that she would be coming home. She headed home immediately without a single thought of being a potential carrier because, at that time, airports were not following protocols and were not strict about where the passengers were from and where they were going.

When my husband and I went home, I saw her carrying my then six-month-old daughter, and that picture of her holding my daughter crushed my heart into pieces. It was when I started worrying and panicking deep down. I felt so helpless. I felt so sorry for my daughter that even her genuine and innocent smiles could not stop me from being anxious and thinking of the worst. One small cough-like sound made my heart pound like it would go out of my chest. What if, unknowingly, my sister-in-law was already infected by the virus during her flight? What if my daughter gets sick? What if my whole family is in danger? I had sleepless nights, and I endured it for two weeks because that was the time frame for the symptoms to come out, according to experts. I lived for two to three weeks in suppressed panic mode. I cannot go and tell straight to her face what I am feeling. My fears, anxiety, my cries deep inside were all mine to suffer and suppress as I cuddled my daughter and protected her with my embrace. I pray ardently to God that He will spare my whole family from the virus and steady my anxious heart and mind. Those two to three weeks were such an ordeal as I was starting to juggle office and teaching responsibilities at the same time dealing with faculty's concerns because at that time, I was still the coordinator for Social Science Teachers and General Education subjects and the Vice-Chair for Curriculum and Instructional Materials Development.

A mother is born

Motherhood mystiques. I am a first-time mother, and because of this, I want to be the best person I can be. When I became a mother, I felt like there was anticipation from everyone that I would be adhering to the "ideal" character of a mother. Society already sets a standard of what a 'perfect' mother is and what is not. Ideally, a mother must be selfless, patient, nurturing, energetic, strong, etc. If you fall and do not exhibit even just one of these characteristics, you will already be judged as a 'bad' mother. I went through the scrutiny of all people around me. Those malicious and discouraging looks people gave me when they learned that I was not able to breastfeed my child. That I was not the 'hands-on' mother they presume me to be and that it was my husband who would stay until wee hours to look after and feed our child. All of these added more weight to ensure that I would be that 'perfect and best' mother my daughter would have and deserve.

The pressure is even higher because I am a career woman. Society has this notion that women can have the best of both worlds—career and motherhood. But it was really difficult. These words were also the words of the mothers I was able to talk to. Difficult is even an understatement to describe what we, mother-teachers go through as we consciously try to achieve a central identity that greatly contributes to our sense of being a woman. One young mother-teacher participant who occupies a position in the school revealed:

"I feel like I'm failing as a mom because I have not prepared myself to becoming a mom. Before giving birth, I was too occupied of work and post graduate studies. I feel stress when I can't make my daughter stop from crying." (Mrs. Vee, personal communication, 26 May 2022)

Various literature related to this study agreed that the gravity of nurturing a child lies heavily on mothers' shoulders. More so for teachers who are also mothers at the same time since both "jobs" entailed giving enough time, affection, attention, and nourishment. Demanding social norms and expectations set for women like me, who became mothers, are high, adding more tension to us.

It is as if there is a 'switch' that I will press to turn on and activate motherhood mode, and (ta-da!) automatically, I will be able to execute everything that society expects of me. For me, motherhood and being an educator are two significant roles valuable to my being. These are the same roles that put me in a situation of choosing which has more weight and which role I want to be more successful in.

Struggles in mothering. Being a first-time mother during the height of the pandemic is not a good place a mother would want to be. I do not want to be in that situation (nobody does!). Additionally, having to deal with the postpartum, pandemic, working from home, and having take care of a needy child is not the perfect formula for my being, especially mentally and emotionally. The routinary activities that were once established wobbled because of the switch caused by the spread of the virus. For most of the time, when I was working from home, I struggled a lot in managing my time, particularly with the submission of pertinent papers needed, household chores, and child-rearing.

In contemporary times, women are faced with varied life-changing opportunities, and they have more options in life as to "what" and "whom" they will become. This idea echoes the studies of Michaelian (2005) and Addison and Yankyera (2015). Moreover, since women have more life options, they face adversities, especially in managing their time and society's expectations. Most of the mothers I interviewed also struggled to navigate various roles they had to play, especially since most of the mother-teachers I interviewed were first-time mothers like me. A mother-teacher who gave birth to her first child during the pandemic also said:

"Motherhood was new to me. It was hard because being a first time mother and a teacher who is also a first time in this set up (flexible learning modality adapted by the school during the pandemic)...you have to prepare for modules while at the same time taking care of my four-month old baby...I remember that time when was about to write for the subject I am to teach I was in a state of confusion because I don't know what to do and there was no proper channeling of instruction and because of the long maternity leave, I was used to only give my attention to my baby. It was hard to focus and I can't find any inspiration to work. The struggle for me was how to finish the task because when my son is asleep I will also look after him. I was at the verge of breaking down because I wasn't able to finish my task and I was not used to it before...there's really a need to juggle all the roles and responsibilities." (Mrs. Eilana, personal communication, 29 May 2022)

However, one participant mentioned that her time management was not an issue. She said,

"I was not having difficulty managing work and my responsibilities as a mother." (Mrs. Nirmz, personal communication, 27 May 2022).

This is due to the fact that the participant already has two children, and both are already school-aged kids. She was not having trouble with submission and the constant nagging of her children when doing her work or class, unlike me and the rest of the mother-teachers I have interviewed. Padios et al. (2022) noted that employees should show resiliency despite the challenges they face, one of which is balancing work and family roles.

Off the rhythm

Life in quarantine. During the high point of the pandemic, I have so much on my plate. I was the Social Science Coordinator, handling teachers' and subjects' concerns from loading to making syllabi and checking the quality of questions in term examinations. I was also overloaded, handling eight sections with three preparations. I had just returned from maternity leave. I also accepted an offer from USLS-Bacolod to be one of their part-time teachers. My husband and I also ventured into online business. I was in a state of adjusting to my new role as a mother, and I was also dealing with postpartum stress and dealing with a roller coaster set of emotions. Our home became the school, and personal room space became the classroom. I thought I could all do all work entrusted to me because I was used to multiple responsibilities and still deliver what was expected from me, and pressure was my cup of tea. But I was wrong. It was too hard for me to handle. These multiple roles I had eventually turned into burdens. The happy thoughts of staying home while earning and caring for my child became a nightmare.

In the earlier part of this paper, a study conducted by Yildirim and Eslen-Ziya (2021) stated the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on men and women, in general, are different because of the apparent conventional roles assigned to these genders by society. This is the reason why the women that participated in the study mentioned that they too were confronted by multiple loads of work, and these works were demanding and ate most of their time. Since mothers are anticipated to do more of the household chores and child-rearing. Added to this, one mother had to side hustle managing an online business, while the other mother had to do community work as a mental health advocate. Thus, these additional jobs impinged their quality time for their family and kids as well as their main job, which is teaching. One explained:

“The fact that I was dealing with postpartum and being a first-time mom and experiencing the height of the pandemic, made me turn emotional. Like postpartum and covid 19 pandemic do not go well with one another. It made me anxious, emotional and my mental health suffered.” (Mrs. Vee, personal communication, 26 May 2022)

The blurring lines. The pressures of online class, mothering, and being a wife and daughter also took me to the test until such time that I was just taking hold of myself because one wrong move or one additional worst situation would really lead me to break down. All of this I had to deal with myself. I could not show my vulnerability to my family as they were also taking their strength from me. I could not show my true feelings. I am in fear. I am weak. I was confused. I doubted myself and what I could do. At a certain point, I was angry at myself for feeling all these overwhelming emotions. I was in a situation where I was teaching, and my daughter would cry. I was torn to make a decision if I would feed her or continue my class because, for that time being, I was working and getting paid? I would carry her while checking the syllabus. I am attending to her needs and looking after her while conducting online classes. I had to work until 8:00 PM for my part-time teaching job while getting pressured about what to eat for supper because we had no helper at home. At some point in that whole experience, I also felt like I was disconnected from my relationship with my husband. Sometimes, I would shut him off because I was already thinking of ways to finish my tasks and deliver my outputs. I did not want him nagging or talking to me.

When home now becomes the new office, the margins between domestic roles and work responsibilities become loosely determined, and the lines between home and work gradually appear to be blurred (Alon et al., 2020). Conversely, one participant mentioned that she, too, almost experienced an emotional breakdown during the peak of the pandemic. She was composing herself even if she was undergoing an annulment process with her husband while ensuring that her kids would still get the best out of her. She also explicated, “One thing that keeps me less focused for work is the fact that my kids need my assistance in answering their module. So instead of having to do my own task as a teacher, I still have to attend to the needs of my kids.” This only shows that mothers will put the welfare of their kids on top of their priorities, even sacrificing their own careers and job performance. With the pressures of juggling work and family life, one participant admitted:

“I can say that I don’t give my best. I don’t teach them all the things I have. I was just adhering of what is required of me. When I decided to teach fulltime, I thought it would help me go back to focus but It’s still the same. It did not happen. I saw that I was able to cope but I am not yet well adjusted. I saw my week points and deal with it. From there, I was improving and I’m trying that I do them not only for compliance.” (Mrs. Love, personal communication, 24 May 2022)

Further, the outlook on the life of other women interviewed in this study is relatively positive because they hoped the pandemic would not last longer than a year until it actually did. This, however, turned their positive perspective into torment, especially for the health of their family and financial status. Nonetheless, most participants claimed that they remained cognizant and composed while figuring out a better way of addressing the challenges they were facing every day. This circumstance affirmed the study of Breckmann and Rupietta (2016) and Yildirim and Eslen-Ziya (2021), which noted that working from home provides positive opportunities to employees, such as having a stable source of inspiration and emotional support because of the presence of their loved ones.

The me I lost. In every story, there is always the other side. This is the bright side of my story. I strived so hard to “be” that ideal mother society is superimposing to all women, especially to all

career-driven-first-time moms. I pushed myself to be that person. I celebrated my child. I enjoy motherhood. In fact, I enjoyed it so much that I forgot about my profession, my career goals, and my path. I never thought motherhood could be so pleasurable even though tiring, but it is rewarding and fulfilling. But along the way, I lost me. This was the interesting and opposing side of the whole journey. I feel like I was devoting and giving every inch of me to my child. It was a constant tug of war in my head. A part of me is telling myself that this is the life I dreamed of, and a part of myself feels like there is something missing, and I cannot identify that. Gradually, that perfect image of home and mothering in my head was replaced by a needy and nagging child. A wife who could not attend to her husband's needs. A daughter, sister, and friend who cannot make time like before. Unexpectedly, it was a life full of cannot. I was afraid. Disoriented. Doubtful. Severed. It was not me.

Most women would say that motherhood is the culmination of their womanhood. The weight on this claim is heavy. Along the way, when women transition to becoming mothers, they lose their old selves only to be amazed by a new version of themselves whom they have not foreseen. Nevertheless, the struggles I faced were mostly on a personal level, as more on my unstable emotions and mental balance. Surprisingly, this idea was consistent with the answers of other mothers I interviewed. One even contended:

"I see posts from people in social media that they were doing well as moms and my daughter was crying all the time, she would also be constantly hospitalized. I have to admit to myself that I am no longer the cool person I project to be because you are dealing with all the stresses of being a mom. I also feel like I'm ugly, fat, sweaty. I am not anymore that well-maintained individual which affects my self-esteem that I don't want to look at myself in the mirror. I fought with those insecurities." (Mrs. Vee, personal communication, 26 May 2022)

Molgora and Accordini (2020) emphasized that mothers are more prone to developing depression and mental health issues. This mother-teacher added:

"It helped me because I also know about the importance of my mental health and I needed to protect my mental space in order for me to be physically healthy and make sound decisions because I have my kid. I did this with the help of my family as my strong support system and reminding me not to be stressed because I just gave birth." (Mrs. Vee, personal communication, 26 May 2022)

The deserted role. If there is one statement that my co-mother-teachers and I uttered similarly is—I love teaching. When I was younger, becoming a teacher was all I ever yearned for. When that moment came, I said to myself that I would do all I could so I could be able to teach the best way I knew how. I desired to be an efficient and effective teacher so that my students could get inspiration. Suddenly, I was that mediocre teacher who could not perform and teach as she would have had it not been in work from home set up. I was just doing work for the sake of doing what was required of me. It was a feeling of being dragged into something that you did not like doing. There is that sentient endeavor of putting myself back on track and regaining that rhythm I lost, but it was really tough. I was having trouble with managing my time at home and work while my other co-mother-teachers were able to adjust quite well, considering that they also sacrificed their time for sleep and leisure. It is very easy to lose focus while doing work at home because the realities of family life haunt you every second, every minute of the day.

According to mother-teachers I have interviewed, they also feel less like a teacher when the workplace becomes their personal space at home. Being a teacher was the last role they were thinking about during the pandemic. Having to do household chores and caring for their children were on top of their priorities. One articulated,

"Being a teacher, you are required to render your hours. I have other side hustle. When it comes to teaching, whether you like it or not, you have to dedicate certain hours to it because you have students waiting for you. It is very difficult because everyone is adjusting." (Mrs. Vee, personal communication, 26 May 2022)

Additionally, one participant also shared,

"I enjoyed staying at home so much that I forgot my work responsibilities." (Mrs. Kie, personal communication, 27 May 2022)

But, one participant said that despite all the challenges she had at home, she was able to place all roles in balance and considered every role as her priority. She said,

"I make it to the point that I can cater students' needs and my children by simply doing it one at a time. Time management is the key." (Mrs. Nirmz, personal communication, 27 May 2022)

The silver lining

Coping with strain. The COVID—19 pandemic put a charge on almost all aspects of every human being, but the emotional, mental, and financial aspects got the most stress. Abruptly, every individual needed a way to cope with these stresses brought about by the pandemic. Similarly, mothers like us also found our own ways of making sure that we can protect our emotional and mental health and secure that we remain sane despite what we need to cater to. During the pandemic, mothering unleashed a new set of skills. This pandemic allowed them to improve their passions or talents and learn new skills (Ehsan & Jahan, 2021). Myself was a revelation. I learned how to cook and bake because, of course, I intended to provide nothing but delicious and healthy foods for my baby. Apart from that, I am able now to make money out of my baking skills. However, for low-income families, mothers became more stressed because of their unstable financial status (Ehsan & Jahan, 2021).

In the case of the mother-teachers I talked to, their ways of coping were through planting and selling plants. One even shared,

"I enjoyed planting, and it was my stress-reliever." (Mrs. Love, personal communication, 24 May 2022) Another mother-teacher asserted her ways of dealing with stress, "I identified my triggers because I am highly emotional and I absorb whatever energy my surroundings gave me. There is a mindful effort to lessen my exposure to my triggers like watching the news." (Mrs. Vee, personal communication, 26 May 2022)

Additionally, our own family became our number cheerleader and supporter. I, for one, have a supportive, understanding, and loving husband, and I was able to sort things out on my own. He allowed me to be at my worst or to feel empty and down because he knew I would bounce back even stronger. Consequently, one mother-teacher also claimed,

"I did cope this pandemic with the help of my family as my strong support system." (Mrs. Nirmz, personal communication, 27 May 2022)

Coping with success. Above all the struggles and negative emotions to deal with, the quarantine also brought me closer to my family. Communication improved from my whole lockdown experience for three to four months, and it has been the longest time I was not able to see my parents and siblings. And the best part of it all? I saw my daughter growing right before my eyes. If there is one thing, one thing I was grateful for this pandemic is the fact that it gave life to my prayers of seeing my child grow and hit her every milestone. I was there. I am there. I saw it all unfolding. They became my solid rock. I held on because of them. The pandemic gave me life. She gave me life. I never saw life the way my then-less-than-a-year-old daughter did. It was all I could ever think and pray of. I was blessed. I AM STILL BLESSED. Just me thinking of becoming the best mother to my child is already a sign that I am already. Collectively, the people I interviewed subscribed to the idea that having a strong support system will help you see through the dark phases of life and will guide you in seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. According to Ehsan and Jahan (2021), the pandemic is an indirect blessing for mothers because, during the numerous lockdowns and restrictions, family bonds and relationships are strengthened.

5.0. Conclusion

Mothering will always entail loses and wins. Further, motherhood offers certain emotions that only mothers are privileged to feel. My experiences as a mother-teacher during the pandemic hijacked my identity as a person. The alteration of having to work at home instead of going to school has invaded my personal space and taken a toll on almost all aspects of my being. Within this paper, I expressed the realities of mother-teachers during the pandemic and in a working-from-home setup through the lenses of my own experiences.

This autoethnography gave life to my narratives and my co-mother-teachers, who shared their

own stories that provided conforming and counter-narratives. Most participants claimed that the pandemic really affected them in the light of their mothering, handling of their emotions, mental health, and their performance in relation to their careers. Nevertheless, their being mothers also allowed them to bounce back from the drawbacks caused by the pandemic. Moreover, it paved the way for emerging themes to be identified as the main context of my whole experience. The following themes emerged from our experiences: the unprecedented time; a mother is born; off the rhythm; and the silver lining. These themes discussed the various phases mother-teachers grappled upon and triumphed.

Further, most of the mother-teachers I interviewed adhered to the idea that when they became mothers, they too experienced the “loosing themselves” phase by trying to be the best mother to their children. What added more pressure to this feeling and wanting to be the best mother is the expectation of people that the transition from being single to motherhood. There is no off button in motherhood, and women face daily challenges of channeling all their energies into home and work responsibilities. The social norms set too high challenged me so much, but I was able to juggle motherhood and being a teacher. The pandemic blurred the lines of the various roles I played. The journey may not be easy but having a solid core and support system is crucial to maintain balance and keep you going. The whole journey made me realize that my story is not an isolated case and that my own account is also experienced by others.

Writing this autoethnography allowed me to come to terms with such high emotions I had to deal with during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a therapeutic experience having to converse with other mother-teachers and seeing the world with a renewed and positive outlook. All of these are part of a bitter-sweet process of motherhood. There are no certain guidelines or steps for becoming the *best* mother to our children. What matters most is the unconditional love we feel the moment we know we are pregnant and the time when they are born. Our unconditional love is already more than enough as we set sail toward our motherhood journey.

The limitation of this study is its scope and heavy dependence on qualitative research methods. Thus, it is recommended that quantitative research be conducted to further shed clarity on the existence of this phenomenon in connection to motherhood and its implication for various life aspects of the mother. The results of this study have contributed to the dearth of existing literature and will encourage future researchers to conduct further related studies on this topic.

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