Learning from the Pandemic

Possibilities and Challenges for Mothers and Families

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Quarantine Mothering and Working at Home: How Institutions of Higher Education Supported (or Failed to Support) Academic Mothers

This mixed methods study explores whether and how explicit policies, implicit practices, and internal communication from university administrators about academic mothers' work lives and expectations were impacted by the 2020 COVID-19 quarantine protocols. As this was a large study focussing on university policies addressing the presence of children on campus and the ways in which their enforcement or nonenforcement affected the personal and professional lives of faculty, we used purposive sampling (Palys) and snowball sampling (Patton) to distribute a survey in academic social media groups and to professional organization listservs (Palys). Among other things, the survey asked participants to report how well they thought their university was handling the COVID-19 pandemic and invited them to participate in an in-depth interview. As a result of the survey responses, we subsequently interviewed nineteen academic mothers from a range of academic disciplines, ages, and types of institutions, until we reached theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin). The semi-structured interview protocol included questions about the impact of COVID-19–related policies, practices, and messaging regarding children on participants' job satisfaction, mental and physical health, as well as work-life balance. We used open and axial coding (Strauss and Corbin) and the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss) to analyze the data. We then triangulated the data by comparing interview and survey findings, engaging multiple researchers in the analysis, and conducting peer debriefings (Denzin and Lincoln; Lincoln and Guba). Findings highlight institutional policies and practices that serve or fail to serve faculty in terms of supporting their professional advancement in teaching, research, and service.

Newspapers across the United States (US) documented the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic created a crisis for mothers. Some of the headlines include this one from the *Washington Post* in October 2020: "A Working Mom's Quarantine Life: This Mother's Day, Eight Women Balancing Careers and Kids Concede That Thriving Is Out of Reach. Surviving Is Enough." One from *The New York Times* in March 2020 reads: "'I Feel Like I Have Five Jobs': Moms Navigate the Pandemic." And another from the same paper from February 2021 exclaims: "America's Mothers Are in Crisis." These headlines capture the lived experiences of mothers across the US as they grappled with the complex changes in daycare, schools, work, healthcare, family arrangements, and a multitude of other social and economic issues brought about by the pandemic. Mothers disproportionately bore and continue to bear the heaviest burden of coping with the increased work, family, and economic responsibilities created by the pandemic (Racine et al.; Calarco et al.; Dunatchik et al.). Many women also bore the burden of providing childcare during the pandemic, taking the place of schools and daycares, while the trauma of the pandemic wreaked havoc on their physical and mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent work-from-home and e-learning protocols had a remarkable impact on women. According to Daniel Aaronson, Luijia Hu, and Aastha Rajan, the COVID-19 pandemic forced working mothers to exit the workforce (1). Approximately two hundred thousand working mothers exited the workforce during the pandemic because of job loss or to enter the role of unpaid primary caregiver (and sometimes teacher) for their own children or other family members (Dunatchik). The population that was most dramatically impacted by the closure of daycares, schools, and workplaces were Black, single, and high school educated mothers (Staniscuaski et al.). Before the pandemic, the employment rates of men and women were becoming closer to equal, but since COVID-19 hit, those rates have once again increased in disparity (Aaronson et al. 4). The body of research focussing on the impact of the pandemic on faculty at institutions of higher education (IHEs) continues to grow (Kirk-Jenkins and Hughey).

Four of the five authors are tenured academics; the fifth is a museum director. All are mothers who work or have worked as professors at public IHEs. We are also all white and cisgender. Some of us are married, whereas others are not. As we started our 2020 spring break in mid-March, we were preparing to disseminate a survey focussing on university policies that address the presence of children on campus and the ways in which their enforcement or nonenforcement affected the personal and professional lives of employees at IHEs. We were particularly interested in responses from men and women faculty with children. Once it became clear that we would not be returning to normal at the end of spring break, we sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to add questions to the survey to explore whether and how

explicit policies, implicit practices, and both internal and external com-munication from university administrators about employees' work lives and expectations changed during spring and summer 2020.

This article reports results from both the quantitative survey of men and women faculty with children and follow-up qualitative interviews of women faculty with children, sometimes also called academic mothers or even MotherScholars (Matias). This mixed-methods study sought to explore the following research question: In what ways were the work and professional lives of academic parents, and particularly academic mothers, impacted by their institutions' COVID-19 policies and practices relevant to working while quarantined at home with children?

Literature Review

Policies and culture are key environmental factors in the ability of faculty and staff to achieve a healthy, meaningful work-life balance (Ward and Wolf-Wendel). Researchers have studied work-family policies at IHEs for nearly three decades and have identified specific policies that encourage positive work-life balance, such as tenure clock pause/stop policies, flexible work scheduling, part-time work options, modification in job duties, and parental leave or childcare support (AAUP; Denson, Szelényi, and Bresonis; Hollenshead et al.; O'Mera et al.; Williams et al.; Ward and Wolf-Wendel). However, research findings related to the presence of work-family policies within IHEs are inconsistent. Although some research indicates that work-family support policies have a modest positive relationship with employee retention and job satisfaction (Butts, Casper, and Yang; Ward and Wolf-Wendel), Erin Kelly and colleagues did not find a positive relationship between employee attitudes and work-family policies. More research is needed.

According to Nida Denson, Katalin Szelényi, and Kate Bresonis, "Institutional support for making personal/family obligations and an academic career compatible was consistently the strongest positive predictor of perceived work-life balance for all faculty" (226). In a survey of 2,953 faculty members at sixty-nine different IHEs, findings indicate that universities must purposefully craft and cultivate a culture that supports a healthy work-life balance through explicit policies and direct departmental practices. Different researchers have affirmed the critical importance IHEs have in creating an atmosphere for faculty to pursue a supported work-life balance (Denson, Szelényi, and Bresonis; McCoy, Newell, and Gardner; Misra, J Hickes Lundquist, and Templer). The lack of support or even a perception of a lack of institutional support for a culture of healthy work-life balance can lead to decline in staff and faculty members' productivity, job satisfaction, physical,

emotional, and mental health, as well as advancement within the IHE.

Women faculty in higher education only represent about one-third of full professors within the US (Deryugina et al. 3), as women publish fewer articles, receive fewer grants, are cited less frequently, and are less likely to get tenure or promotion than their male counterparts (Catalyst; Huang et al.). This "motherhood penalty" stems from the societal expectation that mothers take on more responsibility for unpaid childcare and other family responsibilities (Ceci et al.). When the COVID-19 global pandemic began, the already documented gaps in support facing mothers in academia increased. Tatyana Deryugina, Olga Schurchkov, and Jenna E. Sterns sent out a survey about time commitments to academic work to nine hundred thousand men and women with jobs in higher education from May through July 2020; their results from 27,991 respondents indicate that women spent less time doing research during the pandemic and more time caring for children than male respondents.

Michelle Bell and Kelvin Fong examined the rates of manuscript submissions to a national peer-reviewed journal and found that submission rates of research articles were higher for men than for women during the pandemic. Although gender inequities already existed within academic households, especially those with children, these findings suggest that the changes in academic workloads and expectations necessitated by COVID-19 disproportionately affected women doing research. Women submitted research articles to the journal at an increased rate (compared to prepandemic) of 7.9 per cent, whereas men were able to submit research articles at an increased rate (compared to prepandemic) of 23.8 per cent. In a nutshell, men were submitting research at almost three times the rate of women during the pandemic. These findings have been corroborated by Ruomeng Cui, Hao Ding, and Feng Zhu as well as by Philippe Vincent-Lamarre, Cassidy R. Sugimoto, and Vincent Larivière and have also prompted some journals to call for increased attention to equity in publishing both during and after the pandemic (Pinho-Gomes).

Research Design, Findings, and Discussion

We employed a mixed-methods research design that incorporated quantitative and qualitative data collection, which focussed on university policies addressing the presence of children on campus and the ways in which their enforcement or nonenforcement affected the personal and professional lives of faculty and staff. All portions of this project were approved by our university's Institutional Review Board, and all participants read and consented to participate in the study.

Quantitative Survey Design

Purposive sampling, based on preidentified group characteristics important to the study (e.g., groups of employees at IHEs), was used to distribute a survey in academic social media groups and professional organization listservs (Palys); snowball sampling, in which participants share the survey with others who they think might be interested in participating, was also used (Patton). Participants (n=278) were asked about their gender identity, their role on campus (i.e., faculty or staff), whether they had children, and whether they had a policy limiting or restricting the presence of children on campus. Additionally, participants were asked a series of job satisfaction-related questions and a series of questions regarding perceptions of institutional support during the pandemic. Only data from participants who were both faculty and parents were included in these analyses (n=157); however, not all qualifying participants completed all survey items.

Quantitative Survey Results and Discussion

The results indicated that compared to academic fathers (i.e., those identifying as men, holding faculty rank, and having children), academic mothers (i.e., those identifying as women, holding faculty rank, and having children) evaluated their institutions more poorly on measures of institutional COVID-19 response. On a scale from 1 (not well at all) to 5 (extremely well), academic mothers (M = 3.12) reported that their institutions did a worse job of communicating expectations to faculty during the pandemic than did academic fathers: (M = 3.72), $t(138)$ = -2.07, and p = .04. Men reported, at about half a scale point, their IHEs did a better job communicating expectations during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to responses from women. Using the same scale anchors, academic mothers (M = 3.00) reported that their institutions did a worse job of communicating that faculty were doing a good job despite the pandemic than did academic fathers: (M = 3.61), $t(138)$ = -1.98, and p = .05. Men reported, at more than half a scale point, their IHEs did a better job communicating that faculty were doing a good job compared to responses from women. Again, using the same scale anchors, academic mothers (M = 3.30) reported that their institutions did an overall worse job of handling the pandemic than did academic fathers: (M = 3.89), $t(138)$ = -2.41, and p = .017. Men reported, at more than half a scale point, their IHEs did a better job handling the pandemic compared to responses from women. Together, these results suggested that the lived experiences of academic mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic were significantly more negative than that of academic fathers. Academic mothers perceived less support from their institutions than academic fathers, which suggests academic

mothers and fathers have different expectations for what they need from their institutions, the support institutions are providing is more beneficial to academic fathers than academic mothers, or IHEs are not actually providing sufficient support to academic mothers. We sought to explore these experiences in our qualitative interviews with academic mothers.

Qualitative Interview Design

The last question on the quantitative survey asked respondents whether they were willing to participate in an interview. Those willing to participate were directed to another website where they could complete a short demographic survey and provide contact information, thus separating names from the quantitative survey data. Interview participants were selected from among those who volunteered to participate in the survey. We took steps to intentionally maximize the heterogeneity of the interview participants, choosing—to the extent possible—participants from a range of ages, professorial ranks (i.e., adjunct, assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor), academic disciplines, and institution types (e.g., research 1 universities with doctoral programs and high research activity, regional comprehensive institutions, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges). One reason we were not able to recruit more academic mothers of colour may be because they bore a disproportionate weight of the upheaval caused by the pandemic. The lack of diversity in our sample is not dissimilar to the lack of diversity among faculty at IHEs nationwide. With 45 per cent of faculty of all ranks being women, only 10.4 per cent are women of colour (Chronicle of Higher Education). In all, we conducted semi-structured interviews with eighteen academic mothers until we reached theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin 143). Table 1 below contains pertinent demographic information about the interview participants.

Table 1. Interview Participants

Gender	Eighteen women
Race / Ethnicity	Seventeen white One biracial
Children	Range: between one and three
Marital Status	Seventeen married One divorced
Role at IHE	Seventeen full-time teaching faculty One doctoral student

Type of Institution	Five public regional comprehensive institutions Six public research 1 institutions One private research 1 institution Two research 2 institutions Four small liberal arts college
Academic Disciplines Included	Sociology, psychology, accounting, family studies, education, writing centre, communications, early childhood, educational policy, hospitality administration, and biology

All interviews were conducted via Zoom. Each interview lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes, and both audio and video recordings were captured. The semi-structured interview protocol included questions about the existence or absence of policies and practices regarding the presence of children on campus and the impact of said policies on the participants' job satisfaction, burnout, turnover intention, trust or lack thereof among colleagues and between faculty and supervisor, career advancement, and work/life balance. Once again, this paper focusses on the questions about the impact of their institution's policies and practices relevant to working from home and with children during the COVID-19 pandemic. We completed the interviews in July 2020.

The research team began the data analysis process by establishing an initial coding framework based on the literature and on our experience conducting interviews as part of the study. Then, three researchers independently read through one interview each, creating preliminary initial codes. Next, one researcher analyzed each coded interview transcript, splitting some codes up, merging some codes, eliminating some codes, and creating some new codes. Following the initial round of coding, two researchers in the team met to review the preliminary codes and to discuss the revisions to the coding framework suggested by the aforementioned single researcher. Next, the same three researchers coded each of the original three interviews so that three interviews were coded twice by two different researchers. After this second coding, the three researchers met to compare and contrast codes and to revise the codebook. After this process was completed, we considered the codebook established and uploaded the interview transcripts to Dedoose, a web application used for coding qualitative data, and entered the codes from the codebook into the project (Jabbar et al.; Ford et al.; Hebert).

Within Dedoose, we began open coding to sort the data into categories that represent emergent themes (Strauss and Corbin 102). These categories were subjected to the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 101-116). Unifying phrases and themes that emerge across categories were identified—a

process referred to as axial coding (Strauss and Corbin 123). These categories serve as the basis of the data analysis. To ensure credibility of the findings, the researchers engaged in data triangulation by comparing and contrasting the qualitative and quantitative data analyses, engaging multiple researchers in the coding process, and conducting periodic peer debriefings and member checks (Lincoln and Guba 17-20).

Qualitative Interviews Findings and Discussion

We identified one overarching theme and three sub-themes from the data analysis, which helped us begin to answer the guiding research question: In what ways were academic mother participants' work and professional lives impacted by their IHEs' COVID-19 policies and practices relevant to working while quarantined at home with children? The overarching theme is that the academic mother participants all struggled to reconcile their overlapping identities and roles. These struggles existed before COVID-19, but the pandemic exacerbated them. Before COVID-19, there were at least physical barriers and geographical distances that forced some boundaries between home and work. Once COVID-19 hit in March 2020, and IHEs closed down physically and transitioned to virtual learning, those physical barriers and geographical distances disappeared, and all these identities were enacted simultaneously and in the same space (Spradley et al.). Then, due to school closures, participants were suddenly forced to care for their children full-time —including spending so much time and mental energy working to keep themselves and their family members safe during a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic—while also struggling to maintain their employment as faculty. One participant, when asked whether workplace expectations having to do with managing family and work responsibilities had changed during the pandemic, summarized it well when she said: "Yeah…. I think that everything has changed, honestly."

Next, we explore the three primary subthemes identified through our data analysis: (1) struggling to interpret communication from their supervisors and IHEs as the pandemic timeline evolved; (2) tussling with heightened physical, emotional, and psychological stress and anxiety brought on by the COVID-19 quarantine; and (3) juggling dramatic changes in work expectations caused by COVID-19's impact on higher education.

First, participants shared the ways in which they struggled to interpret or emotionally handle communication from their supervisors and IHEs as the pandemic timeline evolved. Participants shared a wide variety of communication they received from their supervisors and IHEs about the drastic workplace and societal changes due to the pandemic. A few participants noted that their IHEs and/or their supervisors had communicated supportive,

sympathetic messages. One participant described the support that came from her IHE in response to the quarantine and shutdown: "Administration was really just vocally reassuring that they were aware of the challenges." Another described a more tepid administrative response: "It's been very informal. They're aware, but there's no encouragement or adjustment or anything because of it."

Several participants reported that their IHE and/or supervisors ignored the reality of the faculty's children being at home around the clock. In these cases, there was, quite simply, no official institutional acknowledgment of the sea change taking place across the globe or of the herculean task so many of their staff and faculty who are parents and caregivers had been forced to take on. One participant, in late May 2020, explained: "Last week was the first time anything from the university went out acknowledging that parenthood exists. We had a Zoom call set up by the office of work-life balance that was like, 'We're here to talk about parenting and working in the time of Covid.'" Some participants described a gap between the words and actions communicated from their institutions and supervisors. For example, as one participant explained, "The messaging is very positive. It's empathetic to how hard this is for a lot of people. But there's nothing structurally in place to further support people who have these complexities on their plate."

In fact, some (but not all) of our participants identified two ways in which their institutions were acknowledging the new realities faced by caregiving faculty and staff by advocating for and implementing institutional change. One way was by creating a policy through which faculty could request to extend their tenure clock by one year. Others, however, worked at institutions which did not create this tenure clock pause possibility, as this participant indicated: "We don't have a tenure extension. Faculty expectations have not been addressed at all."

Another way in which institutions acknowledged the pandemic's impact on faculty workload was by suspending student course evaluations for the spring 2020 semester only. Many participants expressed relief that they could not be penalized in course evaluations for the chaos that ensued in higher education as a result of COVID-19, as this participant explained: "It's really nice to know that we're not getting evaluated. We're held harmless for course evals." We conducted interviews through summer 2020, when quarantine conditions were still in place in much of the US, but by the time course evaluations rolled around for summer 2020 courses, course evaluations at our institution were back in place as per usual. For all our participants who mentioned these policy changes, they clarified that the changes were temporary and only in conjunction with COVID-19.

Another common refrain among our participants was frustration that their IHEs and supervisors (i.e., chairs and deans) expressed significant concern

about and requested lots of understanding and flexibility from faculty for students, but little concern or flexibility was extended to faculty. One participant explained: "It's been very student focussed. Faculty expectations have not been addressed at all." Another said: "The university switched to a pass-no-pass model…. I think we were really thinking of our students." Similarly, one participant noted that there had been "a lot of concern for students … there wasn't much concern for faculty, [as] administrators did a student wellness survey but never did one for faculty." One participant described some messaging from her dean that addressed both students' and faculty's challenges: "You [faculty] need to be very thoughtful about not just your capacity but our students' capacity as well. We're taking care of families, and students have moved home [and you] are working from home. We need to be really mindful of what our capacities are."

In terms of the second subtheme, participants described the myriad of ways in which they were dealing with heightened physical, emotional, and psychological stress and anxiety. One participant described the physical and emotional fatigue she was experiencing: "We're just exhausted. I try to get up early and do a few things, but by the end of the day, I just don't want to work at night. As this goes on longer and longer, the strain of that will be more apparent. It's impacting people's sleep and sense of wellness." Another described the ways she was attempting to keep things afloat at home: "I've tried to keep on a real schedule. I don't know if that's because I have kids." Still another explained the ways in which her children had been mimicking her attempts to establish boundaries between work and home and to mitigate interruptions: "It's fascinating to see the little ways that our children are adopting this [establishing boundaries]. My youngest has a sign on the door that says, 'You can come in' or 'I'm on a call,' which is exactly what I have on my door."

Heightened stress and anxiety were also caused by news of their institution's possible or actual financial exigencies caused by COVID-19. One participant said: "I am anxious right now because COVID has put our university into some financial straits. Our department's enrollment is stable, but if they start laying off faculty, I'm not tenured yet. It'll be me. And then what do I do… right?" Another similarly expressed: "There's probably going to be budget cuts. So instead of looking at which colleges perform better or which have more revenue, they'll probably, like across the board—everyone would have the same percentage cut." Only one participant mentioned the possibility of getting support from their campus faculty union: "We're in bargaining right now for our CBA [collective bargaining agreement], and everything imploded with COVID because of budget cuts." Thus, study participants (almost all of whom were full-time tenure track faculty) were now having to take on a new burden that they previously had not to carry: concern about the short- and

long-term viability of their positions.

For the third subtheme, participants described the difficulties of juggling the ways in which their work expectations and norms were changing and their work-life boundaries were clashing or even disappearing due to the pandemic quarantine. Although there was a narrative in the media early on in the spring 2020 quarantine timeframe about how the pandemic was shutting things down and causing a slowdown in work productivity and expectations, most participants in our study said that there was a marked increase (rather than a decrease) in meetings—all of which were happening via Zoom, which was fatiguing in a new way. One participant did remark, though: "It's been really nice … meetings have been cut down significantly." But the majority of participants experienced the opposite. One participant from a large research institution noted, "Meetings have ramped up because people know all I have to do is go upstairs and turn on Zoom."

Some speculated that the ubiquity of Zoom made colleagues and supervisors feel as if everyone could be available at all hours of the day and able to jump on a Zoom meeting with little to no notice. As one mother explained: "There's the sense that I'm now available for all these other meetings … [but] I can't jump onto a meeting that starts in five minutes." Our academic mother participants were simultaneously juggling their children's needs, their students' needs, and their coworkers' and supervisors' needs and expectations. As one participant explained: "Unless your kids are teenagers, there's just no way your kids aren't going to be interrupting you and distracting you." During one interview, a little girl popped up in the Zoom screen and kept vying for her mother's attention. The participant shook her head a bit and said, "Speaking of children who are part of your work all the time…" Her daughter excitedly said, "Mom! I'm making a tea party for me, dad, and you." And the mother responded: "You may use my fancy china for the tea party, but daddy has to get it out for you." And then she smiled and brought her attention back to the interview.

Similarly, when asked to describe how her work expectations were changing as a result of the quarantine, one participant exclaimed: "Nothing! There has been no change in expectations. It's wild! We're like, 'You know what's happening, right?' And they're like, 'You'll be fine. You got this. We trust you.'" However, for our participants, their schedules had just become exponentially more complex, as they had children at home attempting to do virtual schooling and babies and toddlers at home without childcare. Although some childless people may have had increased availability due to being at home, our participants experienced the opposite.

Scholarly Significance and Implications

Findings from our interviews suggest that support for academic mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic came largely from colleagues and, in some cases, direct supervisors (Ward and Wolf-Wendell). All our interview participants spoke either implicitly or explicitly of their commitment to their work as well as their desire to be actively engaged and present in their children's everyday lives. Many expressed dismay and disappointment with the way in which their supervisors and institutions largely ignored their health and wellbeing during COVID-19 and expected them to simply press on in the face of cataclysmic global events. Interview participants identified few, if any, ways in which their institutions supported them, which parallels our quantitative findings. Together, these results add to the large body of extant literature suggesting that IHEs have significant work to do to become more family-friendly workplaces capable of supporting women faculty, particularly those who are raising children and/or juggling other caregiver responsibilities (e.g., aging parents) while working to attain tenure and/or academic promotion.

Although a pandemic of this magnitude may not cause such sizable disruptions in the future, it is important for IHEs to redouble their efforts to create work environments that are supportive of all faculty. For decades, IHEs catered to an elite class of employees—mainly white men from middle- and upper-middle class families (Kennelly et al.). As the professoriate diversifies, policy, procedures, and workplace cultures need to be reexamined, retooled, and rebuilt to accommodate the heterogeneity of the faculty. Specific attention ought to be paid to intersectional identities, such as those of caregivers, women, and people of colour.

In terms of gender, the composition of the academy is changing. According to data from 2020-2021, the most recent data available, women constitute more than 52 per cent of those holding assistant professor positions. Moreover, women hold more instructor and lecturer positions than men (US Department of Education). Conversely, men hold nearly 60 per cent of the associate and professor positions, positions that are likely to come with tenure and lifelong job security. Although this general increase in the hiring of women into the academy is consistent with many IHEs' diversity initiatives, in times of financial strain or exigency, those in lowest academic positions are the most vulnerable during reduction-in-force decisions. Changes like this are disproportionately likely to affect women and academic mothers.

Gender differences exist not only in faculty rank but also in parenthood status. Of those over the age of forty, significantly more men (82.2 per cent) than women (71.0 per cent) reported having children; however, across genders, more than 78 per cent of faculty over the age of forty reported being a parent (Morgan et al.) These data, however, do not speak to other forms of caregiving

—care of partners, parents, siblings, and niblings—in which many faculty engage.

Tangible steps must be taken by IHEs to support women and to support parents and caregivers. Policies that recognize and respect faculty members' (particularly women's) roles as caregivers are likely to be viewed by academic mothers as supportive, although future research should examine whether this is empirically true. Based on our interviews and our own experiences as academic mothers during the pandemic, we encourage other women faculty who are caregivers to organize for action, either by creating their own unique institutional organization or by joining an existing union or advocacy organization (e.g., the American Association of University Professors and the American Association of University Women). Faculty women and caregivers should also consider partnering with existing entities and organizations on campus to identify where interests converge so that they can work together to achieve shared goals. Another possible action step is to nominate women and caregivers to university committee and leadership positions and communicate to them their expectations so that they can advocate for family-friendly workplace policies.

Some tangible steps institutions and administrators can take to support and empower academic mothers and faculty with caregiving responsibilities, which were discussed during our interviews and during the data analysis and writing processes, are listed on the next page in Table 2. We also wish to amplify the work of Michelle Cardel et al., whose article includes examples of specific programs and initiatives at institutions of higher education across the country.

Table 2. Specific Action Steps for Higher Education Administrators to Consider

Administrators
Revise and/or eliminate institutional policies that limit or restrict the presence of children on campus in favour of policies that support flexible scheduling and work environments.
Actively recruit more women and people of colour in the faculty ranks but perhaps particularly in administrative roles (chair, dean, provost, etc.).
Accurately quantify gender inequities in terms of service obligations and take active steps to ameliorate the inequities.
Conduct an audit of all existing policies to determine which are more or less family/parent/caregiver friendly and revise the less friendly ones (e.g., tenure and promotion policies, lactation support, and paid parental leave).
Align campus academic calendars with local school calendars to minimize scheduling conflicts.
Consider forming an office or committee to ensure that salaries, internal funding, professional development, as well as mentoring opportunities are distributed equitably between women and men.
Identify internal funding sources to support faculty who are parents or caregivers and who need to present their work at conferences in faraway places (e.g., implement childcare or adult care stipends for faculty).
Involve faculty in course scheduling so that courses are scheduled around family / caregiving obligations or so that distribution of courses at challenging times is shared equitably.
Involve faculty in course modality assignment so that face to face and online courses are assigned equitably.
Involve faculty in determining when events (e.g., meetings, commencement, receptions, networking events, and candidate interviews) are scheduled. Events scheduled outside the normal workday should welcome participation from whole families, provide childcare, and/or provide reimbursement for childcare costs incurred.
Provide Zoom links for meetings to accommodate challenging schedules.
Allow faculty to hold office hours online.
Give faculty the autonomy to quickly move a class online when necessary (e.g., extended illness, global pandemic, and natural disaster).

Our findings indicate that issues related to parenthood and caregiving must be addressed within the workplace culture of IHEs. Training is desperately needed for many in leadership positions in higher education, particularly regarding supporting the dual identities of some faculty as caregivers and academicians and understanding how the work-life balance of those faculty can be affected by such events as pandemics, natural disasters, long-term illnesses, or other crises. Administrators are implored to identify and implement tangible solutions that can be afforded to faculty who are parents and/or caregivers. We hope this article can serve as a launch point for action to improve the lived experiences of academic parents, particularly mothers.

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