

Mothers' Wellbeing During COVID-19 in Singapore: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many families around the world and particularly so among parents and their children whose well-being have been tremendously affected. Emergent research suggests that mothers tend to experience greater level of distress and struggle more in trying to manage their well-being and that of their children. However, there has been less investigation on mothers' personal experiences during the pandemic period and particularly so a lack of research in terms of interviewing mothers in Singapore. The aim of this study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of working mothers and their well-being—how their well-being might influence and have a greater impact on their school-going children during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Singapore. Five working mothers of school-going children between aged 8 to 12 years were recruited and participated in semi-structured interviews. The verbatim transcripts of the interviews were analysed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The analysis revealed three superordinate themes: 1) The challenge of working from home, 2) Mother's perspectives on self-care, 3) Distinctive connections between mother and children. The overall findings revealed the authentic lived experiences of working mothers—with a key focus on their first pandemic lockdown experience in Singapore—the journey they have gone through while managing both their children and work from home. This study highlighted the importance of considering mothers' well-being that might affect their children through the way they approached them. Essentially, the need to raise awareness of mothers' well-being in times of crisis is critical and should be considered when designing interventions to support mothers during emergency situations, and to have future studies to take this study further.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, mothers' well-being, children's well-being attachment theory, mother-child relationship

The current COVID-19 pandemic, from the sudden outbreak to induced lockdown, has impacted many families around the world, particularly so among parents and their children whose well-being have been tremendously affected. While existing research has addressed and examined the impact of the pandemic on parents, children, and adolescents' well-being, emerging research suggests that mothers, who play a significant role in children's lives as a caregiver, have experienced greater level of stress and may potentially be struggling more in trying to manage their well-being and that of their children, as compared to fathers during the pandemic period (Babore, et. al., 2021; Hanetz-Gamliel, 2021; Martiny, et. al., 2021; Vandevivere, et. al., 2014). However, there has been less investigation on mothers' personal experiences during the pandemic period, particularly a lack of research in terms of interviewing mothers in Singapore. Hence, the goal of this study was to deepen the understanding of Singaporean mothers' role and their influence on children's well-being by exploring their lived experiences and perspectives on how they managed their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Mothers' Well-being in the Pandemic Period

The current COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the lockdown period, has significantly impacted many families causing radical changes in individual adjustment to adapt to new circumstances, family routines, rituals, rules, and

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communication among family members (Arslan & Yıldırım, 2021; Majercakova Albertova & Bolekova, 2022; Prime, et. al., 2020; Spinelli, et. al., 2020). Parents, particularly mothers, needed to cope with the demand and responsibilities of their jobs while shifting to working from home and managing their children simultaneously (Babore, et. al., 2021). As primary caregivers saddled with the worries of childcare, mothers may especially struggle to find ways to support and care for their children without external help during the lockdown period. Consequently, recent research shows that mothers tend to experience greater parental stress and a higher level of anxiety (Babore, et. al., 2021; Hanetz-Gamliel, et. al., 2021). Such maternal anxiety may cause mothers to exhibit negative parenting behaviours which might affect children's well-being during the pandemic period (Hanetz-Gamliel, et. al., 2021; Mak, et. al., 2020). In Norway, Martiny and colleagues observe that mothers' well-being was significantly related to children's well-being, where mothers' stress level increased, children's well-being decreased as well. Similarly, Babore, et. al., (2021) also found that Italian mothers' distress was related with their parenting distress, which was linked to children's depression. Hence, it highlighted the importance of mothers' role in shielding the negative impact of the pandemic on children psychologically. Finally, Hanetz-Gamliel et al. (2021) found the way Israel mothers perceived the COVID-19 situation and were lack of social support during this period to be more anxious. Such an anxiety has resulted mothers to become more hostile in their parenting behaviours, which caused their children externalizing and internalizing problems. Hence, one of the key objectives of this study was to get a deeper perspective from Singapore mothers on how they managed their well-being during the pandemic.

Children's Well-being in the Pandemic Period

With the unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, children have been susceptible to the pandemic impact that has inevitably changed their daily routine drastically and potentially affect their well-being significantly (de Miranda, et. al., 2020; Singh, et. al., 2020). From the mandatory lockdown, that means children being confined within the four walls at home with their parents 24 by 7, to being isolated from friends and familiar caregivers; to having to adapt to home-based learning, and being prohibited to be in the outdoor, whether to play or exercise—all these have potentially tremendous effect on children that caused them to feel helpless, emotionally stifled, restless, anxious, and stressed (de Miranda, et. al., 2020). In China, studies revealed that there has been an increase in children exhibiting signs of anxiety and depression (Duan et al., 2020; Xie, et. al., 2020). Additionally, children in the US and Ireland have displayed deteriorating behavioural and mental health (O'Sullivan, et. al., 2021; Spinelli, et. al., 2020). Given the long duration at home without the usual structure of the school, and being socially disconnected from their friends physically, children who have been confined at home may possibly experience the psychologically effect because of their anxiety, uncertainty, boredom, and lack of motivation in engaging themselves in any form of activities (Jiao, et. al., 2020; Lee, 2020). According to Steele & Steele (2005), children's attachment with father and mother is different in their perspectives—where fathers play a more important role in teaching emotional and social skills, mothers seem to be more involved in the development of children's emotional understanding and children articulating their positive and negative feelings.

Given the negative effect on children, it is inevitable for them to want to seek comfort and security by clinging on to their parents, particularly so on their mothers whom children often perceive as their primary caregivers, with stronger emotional bonding, to support and protect them (Lee, 2020; Lee, et. al., 2021; Singh, et. al., 2020). Children who feel securely attached to their parents are better able to regulate their emotion and tend to be more socially competent. In times of distress, such children tend to communicate their emotions more openly and flexibly and able to cope more constructively (Cassidy, 2008). Ultimately, the extent to which children turn to their parents in times of distress will largely depend on how securely they feel attached to their parents (Bodner, et. al., 2019). When children seek their parents, this might in turn increase mothers' parenting stress, who may already be struggling to balance their workload, take care of their children and helping children with at-home education during the pandemic (Lee, et. al., 2021). This research proposed to gain deeper insights from mothers to further understand the relationship between mothers and their children's well-being during the pandemic.

Mother-Child Relationship During the COVID-19 Pandemic

While parental support from both fathers and mothers are important, the mother-child relationship cannot be underestimated. Mothers tend to have special connections, i.e., stronger emotional bonds with children. They have always been seen as primary caregivers (since birth) whom children naturally feel more intimately attach to

(Bowlby, 1983; Kerns et al., 2006; Seek Lee, et. al., 2016). Even children in their middle childhood tend to lean towards their mothers as their pillar of support, especially so in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic situation—where they need more support from their primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). This triggers children's need for their mothers' support to help them regulate their anxiety, cope and overcome stress (Vandevivere, et. al., 2014). Parents and children may inevitably respond negatively in times of crisis. However, the way parents choose to respond to negative situations would potentially influence their children (Nelson, et. al., 2009). Emergent research suggests that the way mothers perceived the COVID-19 situation and a lack of social support impacted their anxiety level, which in turn was significantly associated with their children's externalizing problems (Hanetz-Gamliel, et. al., 2021). Hence, mothers may potentially exhibit greater influence over their children as compared with fathers (Arroyo-Borrell, et. al., 2017).

Current and emerging research papers are mainly from the European and US perspectives. Most papers cover mainly the impact of COVID-19 on parents and children's well-being (either individually or collectively) from various perspectives, and a few recent research on mothers' role and their well-being. There has been less research and focus on the impact of the pandemic on mothers' wellbeing specifically and how their wellbeing potentially impacts their children's wellbeing in Asia. In Singapore, there has been less investigation on mothers' personal experiences during the pandemic period and particularly so a lack of research in terms of interviewing mothers in Singapore. Hence, this research aimed to give mothers voice to their experience during the pandemic that possibly shed light on new insight into how this intimate mother and child bond may influence each other in times of distress.

Essentially, the specific objectives of this study were to report mothers' experiences of working from home and taking care of their school-going children simultaneously, examine how their well-being might influence their children and how they managed their well-being in order to cope with the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Methodology

The aim of this study was to understand the subjective homogenous experiences of working mothers of similar socioeconomic background and lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was chosen as the research methodology as it seeks to examine participants' perception of their experiences. Through the process of interpretative activity, this approach fits the aim of gaining and providing an in-depth, rich and detailed understanding of a small group of individual and collective participants' experiences (Alase, 2017; Creswell, 2013; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012).

Using the semi-structured interview approach, the aim was to give mothers voice about their lived experiences and perspectives on how they manage their well-being; and to find out how mothers' well-being might influence their school-going children during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Singapore.

Participants

A total of five participants of similar tertiary education level, socioeconomic middle-class background and lived experiences, currently living in Singapore with at least one child age between 8 to 12 years old, were recruited for this study. Participants were Singaporean Chinese, married, employed mothers (age 40 to 50 years old) who had to work from home, manage work and take care of their school-going children during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Participants were recruited primarily from a group of physically and emotionally healthy mothers from the parents of the private school the researcher works at. Recruitment was carried out mainly by word of mouth, and snowball sampling. There was no reward for mothers who participated in this study.

Materials

A semi-structured interview schedule and questions were designed to facilitate the interview session. The interview schedule was used flexibly as a guide where questions were adapted to the specific context and interesting issues that arose during the interview. The aim was to engage mothers deeply so to elicit their thoughts and feelings associated with their detailed lived experiences, including their perspectives on how they managed their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic period. With participants' consent, all interviews were conducted and video recorded using Microsoft Teams.

Table 1. Mothers-interview schedule and questions

1. Icebreaking/Warm up	1. Using the photos) What to you, is a meaningful relationship with your child?
	2. What is the meaning of being a mother?
	3. Tell me a little bit about what you do and how long have you been in your current job.
	4. How would you describe yourself as a mother?
2. Pandemic period	5. How do you feel about working from home during this pandemic period?
3. Mother's emotions	6. How do you take care of yourself?
	7. How do you feel about being with your children 24/7 per week during this period?
4. Mother-children relationship	8. How do you feel about your relationship with your children during this pandemic period? Which age group is he/she?
5. Prompting words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you tell me a bit more? • What happened? • How did you feel? • How did you manage? • Was there anything you could do? • Given a choice, what did you wish to have happened?

Procedure

Ethical approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of East London with approval dated November 2, 2021 (no number). The researcher then reached out to the respective mothers of her students. For interested mothers, a WhatsApp message was sent to confirm their eligibility criteria (i.e., participants need to be Singaporeans or Permanent Residents, employed mothers of age between 30 to 50 years old with at least one child age between 8 to 12 years old, and are currently living in Singapore); followed by a formal email invitation to participants, explaining the exact nature of the research study, including the use of video recording during interviews, prior to their participation and welcomed any questions they might have before the interviews. Participant invitation, information letters and consent forms (British Psychological Society, 2018, p.7; Oates et al., 2021, p.7) were also sent to them prior to the interviews. Upon participants' agreement on the proposed meeting dates and timing for the interview sessions over Microsoft Teams, all completed and signed consent forms were returned to the researcher prior to interviews. (Appendix A and B).

Interview Process

A 45 to 55-minute, video recorded semi-structured interview session, with each mother was conducted. The design of the interview questions remained open-ended with a key focus on participants' subjective experiences and to discover what it has been like for them and if there has been any impact on them (Appendix C). To warm up and engage participants more effectively at the start of the session, mothers were to bring or think of one meaningful photo of them with their children. The interview started by asking mothers "what is a meaningful relationship with their children?" and "what is the meaning of being a mother?"

All in-depth interviews were carried out virtually between 29 December 2021 and 13 February 2022. By the time of the data collection (from 2 January to 13 February 2022), children were back in their regular classes and some parents were back to office while others were still working from home. With participants' consent, all interviews were recorded using the Microsoft Teams that lasted between 34 and 53 minutes. Interview questions were intentionally kept broad and open-ended, allowing participants the space to speak freely and openly (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Key observations were made throughout the interview sessions, including the researcher's thoughts and assumptions (Oates et al., 2021, p.7; Smith & Osborn, 2007). After each interview session, the researcher debriefed the participant, and welcomed any feedback or questions, followed by sending the debrief letter to the participant.

During the interview process, all recorded video conversations were first transcribed using Streams. These collected data were subsequently downloaded and manually transcribed verbatim and edited by the researcher—to ensure all identifying information have been removed and that all interview content have been accurately transcribed to the original meaning of what the participants shared and checked for accuracy by the supervisor.

Data Analysis

This research employed the IPA thematic approach to give mothers voice about their pandemic experiences through an in-depth interview. The collected data was analysed in detail to uncover, analyse and interpret the lived meaning of participants' experiences (Alase, 2017). Prior to analysis, each participant's interview transcript was read and re-read several times to better understand and be familiar with what the participants were saying. The analysis for each transcript was subsequently employed by following the five stages outlined by Smith, et. al. (2009). Starting with initial noting, the researcher immersed herself with the first transcript by reading and re-reading it several times while recording her initial reactions to the text, focusing on three core areas: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual analysis.

Descriptive analysis – the researcher focused primarily on understanding what the participants' experience were like through the words they shared, and by staying close to participants' apparent meaning of the way they perceived and talked about their experiences consciously (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith, et. al, 2009, p 83, 84). For example, *"We get bonded, and we really did a lot of things together that you know we learn from each other."* – Participant consciously used the word 'bonded' to illustrate how she had become closer to her children, through doing things together and learning from one another during the COVID-19 locked down period.

Linguistic analysis – the researcher observed and analysed the specific language— for example, metaphors and symbols—used by respective participants so to gain a deeper insight into the context of their concerns that relate to the world they experienced during the COVID-19 locked down period (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith, et. al, 2009, p 83, 88). For example, *"And you know, it's really like multi-tasking and then you have to be a maid, you have to be a cook, have to be everything."*—Participant used 'a maid', 'a cook' to symbolized her having to cope with playing multiple roles during the locked down period.

Conceptual analysis – The researcher engaged in an interrogative, critical questioning approach to infer, interpret and make clear of the participants' words and their meanings (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith, et. al, 2009, p 84, 88 to 90). For example, *"Values arise during conflicts. You see the values more when there's conflicts because that is where you will identify what kind of value is lacking in the child."*— To this participant, arising conflicts (between her and her children) were opportunities for her to know if she has imparted all the right values to her children – did she feel guilty about her children lacking certain values

Next, the researcher worked on developing emergent themes by focusing on capturing the meaning of participants' experience that emerged from the initial notes recorded. Then the researcher searched for connections across emergent themes by drawing together emergent themes that fit together to identify the superordinate themes. Researcher then moved on to the next case by applying same reading at pre-analysis, followed by the initial three stages for the next four transcripts. Finally, the researcher looked for connections across five cases, interpreted the findings within the context of the existing literature. While identifying evolving common themes, the researcher first looked at the connections between the themes before categorising and labelling them into meaningful clusters.

Reflexivity

A reflective journal was used throughout the entire study—recorded, analysed, made reflective notes that contained the researcher's observations, thoughts and assumptions during and after every interview, and during and after each data analysis. Given the preference for the better clarity of previous IPA version, the analysis was conducted following the stages illustrated in Smith, et. al., 2009. Through the interpretation of the data, the researcher leveraged on the reflexive journal that helped to minimise all her biases. Participants, despite being unfamiliar with research interview, were cooperative and forthcoming, though less so at the beginning of the interview, in trying their best to share their pandemic lived experiences authentically.

Considering this is a group of participants who participated first time in research interview and for some participants, it was also the first time the researcher met over online interview. The researcher could have established some form of a rapport with these individual participants (whom the researcher would be meeting first time) to prepare them ahead of the interview. Finally, to help these participants stay focus on answering the questions directly, the researcher should have shared the interview questions prior to the actual interview sessions so participants knew what to expect during the interviews.

Results

Three superordinate themes emerged from the IPA data analysis, all with subordinate themes, which yielded the lived experiences of participants (working mothers) during the COVID-19 pandemic period. The three superordinate themes include: 1) The challenge of working from home, 2) Mother's perspectives on self-care, 3) Distinctive connections between mother and children. The overall findings revealed the authentic lived experiences of working mothers—who naturally took a key focus on their first pandemic lockdown experience in Singapore—the journey they have gone through while managing both their children and work from home.

Table 2. Superordinate and subordinate themes and prevalence

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes	Prevalence
1. The challenge of working from home	1a. Challenging to manage work and children 24 by 7	4/5
	1b. Stressful to manage all the changes alone	5/5
	1c. Overcoming self	3/5
2. Mothers' perspectives on self-care	2a. Staying bonded and supported	4/5
	2b. Keeping a positive mindset	5/5
	2c. Ways to enhance well-being	3/5
3. Distinctive connections between mothers and children	3a. The mirror response	4/5
	3b. Impact of mother's influence	5/5
	3c. The special bonding	5/5

Theme 1: The Challenge of Working from Home

All participants expressed their struggles and anxieties in coping with the mandatory sudden pandemic changes stipulated as they and their school-going children transited to working and studying from home. With the sudden disruption to their usual routines, some mothers felt like they have to step up more as the primary caregivers as fathers tend to focus mostly on busy working to provide financially. Hence, most mothers felt heavily laden by the need to balance their role as a mother, in caring and supporting their children around their home education and as an employee, in fulfilling their work responsibilities from home.

1a. Challenging to manage work and children 24 by 7

Four out of five mothers struggled having to manage multiple responsibilities within the home, when their children were also learning from home during the lockdown period.

"It's actually the fear, the pressure, having to multitask... So, I went through that for the first two weeks. I really went crazy because the timetable just kicked in and like I said I'm working. I have my calendar as well, so when I have to handle my son, I have to handle myself as well." (Mother 1 – a full time working mother with one school-going child)

The first two weeks of the first pandemic lockdown has been the most daunting for Mother 1. She used the word 'fear' to describe her unsettled inner feelings about not knowing what to expect but she knew she had to go through the new changes. The phrase 'went crazy' magnified the 'pressure' she felt, knowing that she has to be the one to help her son adapt to his new home-based learning schedule, while managing her new working arrangement from home. She recognised that multitasking was the only way for her to manage both new schedules effectively. Similarly, Mother 3 described her unexpected experience of working at home as frustrating and tedious:

"...actually, can be quite frustrating because they are a bit noisy... sometimes they might have homework that they did not know from home-based learning. Then I have to guide them... at the same time I have to attend meetings, ... after that I have to do my work... have to be on par with the time to actually finish up all my work log. Yeah, so it's quite tedious." (Mother 3 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Mother 3 was irritated having to deal with her noisy children while working from home. She related the word "tedious" to her feeling stressed about having to cope simultaneously with guiding her children with their schoolwork, attending work meeting, and completing her work timely.

In contrast, Mother 4 had to work from office due to the nature of her job and she only got to work from home subsequently, when she changed to a new job during the second lock down in early 2021.

“...where I had the luxury of really working full time two months from home, I did enjoy the time because during that period, my kids were also doing home-based learning and then school holidays as well. So at least I got to spend time with them... I was actually enjoying that period.” (Mother 4 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Mother 4 appreciated her time of working from home where she related it as a ‘luxury’ period as this was also an opportunity for her to spend time with her children who were on home-based learning.

1b. Stressful to manage all the changes alone

In addition to having to manage their children and work during the lockdown period, all participants reported their added stress of lacking support and having to manage all changes by themselves. Children also tend to seek more comfort and support from their mothers whom they perceive as their primary caregivers.

“... it's stressful. Yes, because they will be more demanding at home... because I'm quite close to them. So, whatever they want, they will need me to actually attend to them more, which is very frequent, and they need my attention more.” (Mother 3 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

To Mother 3, she described her children as being more demanding during the lock down period as they seek more of her attention. Being close to her children, she knew she has to be there for them, which also caused her lots of interruptions during her working hours at home.

“It's still me, it's still myself. There's no husband... my husband is not so involved in their studying thing... their day-to-day lives... to him is, he provides you with their things...other than that less problem to give, to stress him, that would be better,” (Mother 4 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Mother 4 struggled being alone by herself to cope with all the changes while having to work from office and managing her children concurrently during the first lock down period. Using the word ‘still’, mother emphasized the fact that she was managing everything entirely by herself as if she had no husband at all.

“It is a lot of struggles because I haven't been doing that at all. So suddenly I was thrown into a situation whereby I have to work from home and at the same time guide the kids...I was never prepared to work from home, my kids were doing home-based learning... I just cannot put in 100% because when I'm doing my work, I need to manage what's happening at home.” (Mother 5 – a full-time mother with two school-going child)

To Mother 5, she felt lost as she felt she had been thrown into a very unprepared situation—having to adapt to working from home. Using the phrase “cannot put in 100%”, she magnified her struggle having to split her attention for her work and helping her children to transit to home-based learning, while also adapting to new changes and arrangements at home alone.

1c. Overcoming self

In the midst of going through the challenge of managing both their work and children, some participants recognised that they have allowed their emotions to affect the way they approached their children.

“I'm quite an impatient person. I will do things to be, you know I want things to be fast, fast, fast so I cannot, I cannot tolerate when things it's like slow... I will start to nag a bit, and scream a bit after second time, after third time... “

‘And when my son asked me why I yelled at him, I would listen to him and self-reflect. But I know what I am, so when I do that, I will still do that, you know. Because I think this is something that is in me. I will still do that.’ (Mother 1 – a full time working mother with one school-going child)

Here, Mother 1 knew that her impatience has caused her to scream at her son. Yet, she struggled to change herself as she associated her impatience as being a part of her. Due to her personality nature, Mother 1 was not coping well as she had to repeat herself many times to her child when she faced him 24 by 7 during the lockdown period.

“I would say that during that period it was really, very stressful because of work stress. I tend to be impatient with my kids ... I was actually quite impatient with my children... yah I was aware but it's just something that it's beyond me that I could, I mean, sometimes I try to control myself but at times, I really cannot control you see.” (Mother 4 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Mother 4 was fully aware of her negative well-being state during the first lockdown period when she was much affected by her work stress. This triggered her to become impatient with her children. She knew she has to overcome her negative emotion but found it particularly challenging which she described it as beyond her control.

Theme 2. Mothers' Perspectives on Self-care

All participants acknowledged that it has been a very challenging time for them particularly during the first lockdown period. Although mothers were mindful that they should take care of their well-being, it was clear that making time for self-care was of secondary priority to them. While some mothers managed to squeeze in 'me time', others considered a different approach that helped them better manage and improved on their well-being.

2a. Staying bonded and supported

"...during this pandemic for myself, a lot of communication... as a family where we sat around at our dining table... because we have so much time that I really cooked, and we really shared a lot over the meals. This is for myself as well.... I really cherish that we have so much communication, so much so that I tell you this is priceless family times, family bonding." (Mother 1 – a full time working mother with one school-going child)

Mother 1 perceived the pandemic lockdown period as an opportunity for her and her family to become closer when they stay bonded and connected through lots of sharing over their daily meals. In doing so, mother related this 'priceless' bonding experience as something that is invaluable to her and 'for myself', a way where she could release her stress through frequent communication with her family members. Mother felt her well-being improved when she became closer to her family.

"...with my sister's support and then my husband as well... I overcame quite a bit...with family's support, I could just relax myself a bit for one hour or two hours by leaving my kids with my sister ... with family's support, like my sister's support then, we could take turns to rest, while still doing my work at the same time ... it's actually helped me to overcome the stressfulness.." (Mother 3 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Mother 3, who was mindful of her negative well-being state, seek her sister's help. She recognised the importance of family support and acknowledged that it was her family's support, i.e., her sister and husband, that helped her better cope to overcome her stress, despite having to continuously work from home, and where she could also squeeze in an hour or two for her 'me time'.

2b. Keeping a positive mindset

All participants agreed that despite the significant amount of stress and frustrations they experienced while going through the pandemic period first time, it was inevitably important for them to reframe and stay positive. For some mothers, their values have kept them optimistic which helped them to better navigate and overcome the pandemic crisis, as expressed by Mother 2 below:

"I always believe that when you have positive thoughts, the positive energy will surface around you. That is my belief as a person whether be it pandemic before pandemic or after pandemic..." (Mother 2- a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Other mothers recognised the importance of making a conscious effort to constantly remind themselves to reframe in order to stay positive as highlighted by Mother 1 and 5 below:

"...being positive is very important. I will tell myself I need to be very positive..." (Mother 1 – a full time working mother with one school-going child)

"...of course, we get frustrated. You know somehow because it's a new thing. Naturally you get frustrated, but you have to reframe. I think the reframing part is very important." (Mother 5 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Noticeably, during the interviews, mothers were fully aware of their well-being state and making every conscious effort to stay positive so to better able to sustain through the pandemic, be a strong support for their children, especially during the lockdown period.

2c. Ways to enhance well-being

In the midst of physical restrictions, and mothers struggling to manage better, some of them looked at various possible ways to help them better cope so to improve on their well-being.

“...having a me time...quiet moments to take stock of whatever that’s happening and then try to find new ways of doing something...I like to go to the to my balcony, sit down there to have a cup of coffee, look at the sky and read a book. Yeah. So that feels good.” (Mother 5 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

To Mother 5, ‘me time’ was a crucial, precious, and quiet moment for her to reflect and recharge. By doing so, mother recognised that her well-being has improved, and better able to manage her work and children especially during the lockdown period.

On the other hand, there are mothers, like Mother 2, who did not have the opportunity of having ‘me time’:
“...I still did my Zumba, it's just that it got cut down. It's not so routine...Priority actually, is more on the children...planning I think being able to plan out the day, educating your children to cooperate with you is very important.” (Mother 2 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Given that her young children are her priority, Mother 2 realised that as much as she tried but it was impossible to make ‘me time’ to exercise. She leveraged on her strength in planning out the day ahead and guiding her children to learn to cooperate with her, which helped her to better cope and manage during the pandemic lock down period.

“... I didn't really actually take care of myself during that time. It was only when I resigned from the place itself then I became very de-stressed...so the key thing is don't bring work stress home...I must learn to really take care of my mental health being” (Mother 4 – a full time working mother with two school-going children...)

On the contrary, despite being fully aware of her negative well-being state, Mother 4 was so affected by her work stress that she could not take better care of herself except to resign from her stressful job. Through this episode, mother realised the impact of bringing her work stress home and that she should learn to take care of her well-being.

Theme 3: Distinctive Connections between Mothers and Children’s Well-being

All mothers recognised that as primary caregivers, their state of well-being during the pandemic lockdown period did have a direct effect on their children. Mothers witnessed how their respective approaches be it positive, or negative, through the way they communicated, elicited mirror responses from their children. They also realised the special connections between mother and children, i.e., the extend their children leaned towards them as their pillar of support during the pandemic crisis.

3a. The mirror response

Four out of five participants observed how their work stress has affected the way they approached their children, which elicited instant mirror responses from their children as shared by Mother 5 and 4 respectively:

“... they were quite frustrated. Yeah, because they really didn’t know what to do with home-based learning then ... at the same time, I also felt that ‘Oh why is it I cannot hep my kids throughout the whole day’. It’s not possible. Because I have my own work to do as well. So this frustration rollercoaster ... Sometimes you tend to flare up, especially when you don't get your things done. Yeah, you scold the kids for nothing. Or you scold the kids for everything, anything... I mean, of course it takes a toll on the kids as well. Yeah, emotionally... she also talked back.” (Mother 5 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Working commitment and stress have taken their toll on Mother 5 that instigated her to scold her children as away of letting out her frustrations. She noticed the significant impact on her children’s emotional well-being, particularly her 12-year-old, who responded defiantly towards mother’s negative approach.

Here, Mother 4 noticed how her lack of self-care and sleep has impacted her overall well-being, resulting her to be easily agitated by her children:

“... during my town council job, the workstyle was too stressful so I would say that I didn’t really have time for my children ... I hardly talked to them I totally couldn’t sleep because it's very stressed... when had trouble sleeping, you tend to get very impatient and very bad tempered... and started scolding my kids off, you know out of little things... my kids tend not to communicate with me that much during that period.” (Mother 4 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Mother 4 realised that she should have taken better care of her wellbeing and tried to manage her work stress and not allow her negative state to affect her and her children.

She witnessed how her negative responses, i.e., either no communication or being snappy at her children, have triggered a mirror negative response from her children where they avoided communicating with her so not to be scolded unnecessarily by mother.

3b. Impact of mother's influence

Despite mothers' work stress, all participants still tried to adopt different ways to influence their children positively during the pandemic, particularly during the lockdown period:

"I have always been holding this belief that you know you need to always think positive. That's where things will get better... when the kids told us that they are worried about what's going on, ...I would use positive message...trying to spin it into a positive way so that emotionally is managed, is never left alone." (Mother 2 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

To Mother 2, she believed that regardless of the truth about the pandemic situation, her optimistic influence was key to trigger off a positive impact on her children, enabling them to be emotionally stronger in overcoming this crisis period.

'... at night usually before their bedtime, we'll actually have small talks. Then my children would tell me about their whole day, how they felt and what happened during the whole day, how's their home-based learning ... we would say out our thoughts and then we were able to understand each other better – what we were thinking ... When I just tell them, mummy needs some rest or if I looked very stressed, they will just leave me and find their own things to do.' (Mother 3 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Despite the demand of working from home, Mother 3 made the conscious effort to initiate intimate talks with her children before their bedtime. This has not only provided her children with greater security, but her explicit sharing and influence have also helped her children understand her working situation at home and learned to be more independent.

"...I actually went through with them their timetable and actually nudge them a little bit, you know, push them along, guide them along, support them. I think this part plays a very important part. As a mother I need to guide them, nudge them... she opened up a bit more when I was doing that, so she actually shared her struggles and how she felt about HBL. She's more prepared yeah, after the nudging... she's more prepared to accept whatever that's coming." (Mother 5 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Mother 5's relentless efforts in nudging, guiding, and supporting through the lockdown period has been a positive influence on her daughter. This has helped her to eventually be more open and prepared to accept a new way of learning from home.

3c. The special bonding

Regardless of the impact of the pandemic lockdown, mothers and children have a unique, strong connection between them which cannot be underestimated. By engaging in open, intimate, heart-to-heart talks, all mothers witnessed how their intimate relationship with their children influenced one other and how mother-children relationship was inevitably strengthened in time of crisis.

"...my kids are always encouraged to have a talk before they sleep...we have been doing this most of the time, it becomes natural habit that the kids will voice up...when they become emotional at night, this is where they have talks and ... they want to share...they're closer to you for sure...more clingy... because you're always home." (Mother 2 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Mother 2 recognised that her intimate talks with her children every night before they sleep, which she cultivated in them since they were young, has helped address their doubts and insecurity—which garnered a stronger bonding between them especially during the pandemic lockdown period. Similarly, Mother 5, who believed in providing her children relentless support, initiated the same kind of open conversation over mealtime as a family, resulting mother and children to better understand one another:

"...I'm always behind to support them...whenever they have any problems or anything that they want to discuss...we will talk openly...during our family discussion...always happens during mealtimes... at least there's one in a day where all of us sit together and talk about what happened in the day." (Mother 5 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Admittedly, Mother 4 noticed that when her well-being improved, she became more toned down. Her daughter was sensitive to notice the change in her and subsequently her initiative in first engaging her in heart-to-heart talks and spending more time with her.

“...because there's a change in my job, I was more toned down...I was the one who made the first move. Talked to her and we had a face-to-face talk...after the heart-to-heart talk...spending more time with her, communicate more...she's happy that at least I'm trying...she's touched... she's very open up with me of what's happening in school...” (Mother 4 – a full time working mother with two school-going children)

Despite their prior hostile relationship, their heart-to-heart conversations had helped daughter recognised and appreciated her mother's efforts in trying to reconcile. She became less afraid of her mother and more willing to share with her mother—Mother 4 was happy that she has reconciled with her daughter.

**For confidentiality reason, all names have been represented by a numeric.*

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on working mothers and their well-being, and how their well-being might influence and have a greater impact on their school-going children in Singapore. Detailed IPA analysis resulted in three superordinate themes: 1) The challenge of working from home, 2) Mother's perspectives on self-care, 3) Distinctive connections between mother and children. The overall findings suggest that there is a direct relationship between mothers and children's well-being. Additionally, this study also suggests that mothers tend to be more involved with their children and play a pivotal role in influencing their children's well-being in times of crisis. The present results are consistent with previous literature on the negative impact of COVID-19 on mothers, having to cope with the demand of their work and responsibilities of taking care and managing their children simultaneously (Babore, et. al., 2021; Hanetz-Gamliel, et. al., 2021). Nevertheless, this study also highlighted how working mothers, during the lockdown restriction period, looked beyond adopting different approaches that enabled them to better adapt, manage and improve on their well-being.

The first main theme that emerged from this study involved mothers' attempt to overcome their challenge of working from home. Being out of their normal routine especially at the beginning of the first lockdown, all participants felt apprehensive and found the drastic disruption and the loss of their usual support, with children not being at school and in after school student care center, affected their ability to focus on their work while working from home. Despite most Singapore schools stepping up to prepare children ahead of the transition to home learning, it remained a challenge for these working mothers. Children became clingy and very dependent on their mothers not only in guiding them through online learning from home but also in helping them with their schoolwork. Most mothers also described working from home during the lockdown period as most disruptive as their children tend to seek more of their attention, comfort, and support through the day while they were working. These findings were consistent with recent research that suggests the negative effects on children being confined at home. This resulted them wanting to seek comfort and security by clinging on to their parents, particularly so on their mothers whom children often perceive as their primary caregivers, with stronger emotional bonding to support and protect them especially in times of crisis (Lee, 2020; Seek Lee, et. al., 2016; Singh, et. al., 2020).

As mothers learnt to cope with the lack of structure and loss of routine due to the pandemic, they recognized that it has been the most daunting period for them, where they experienced greater parental stress and a higher level of anxiety (Babore, et. al., 2021; Hanetz-Gamliel, et. al., 2021). All mothers in this study reported feeling uncertain, fearful, pressured, irritated, overwhelmed and stressed by the sudden changes and lonely, having to manage all the changes and the transitions alone. Recent research also shows that maternal anxiety might cause mothers to exhibit negative parenting behaviours during the pandemic period (Hanetz-Gamliel, et. al., 2021; Mak, et. al., 2020). In line with these findings, most participants described that when they were distressed by having to concurrently manage both their work and their children alone, and increased work stress, they have inevitably become more irritable and impatient with their children. Despite trying hard to overcome their negative emotions, most mothers struggled, finding it beyond their control, which affected the way they approached and communicated with their children. This is in line with recent research that suggests that mothers' negative parenting behaviours was likely to affect children's well-being during the pandemic period (Hanetz-Gamliel, et. al., 2021; Mak, et. al., 2020). This was clearly seen in the way children negatively responded to mothers, a mirror reflection of mother's well-being state.

Mother 4, however, was the only participant with a different perspective where she preferred to work from home so she could spend more time and be there with her children during the initial transition to home-based learning. Compared to the rest of the participants, Mother 4 had much less support. Almost like a single parent, her husband had left her to manage the transition alone when she was also in a demanding job during the first pandemic lockdown. Mother 4 was under tremendous stress that she had unintentionally let her negative emotions out on her

children. Yet, she was also frustrated that she could not be there with her children during the initial transition due to the nature of her job. When Mother 4 finally got to work from home after she moved on to a new job, she was happy that she could then spend more time and had the opportunity to reconcile with her children.

The second finding encapsulated mothers' perspectives on how they managed their well-being during the pandemic. Given the pandemic restrictions and having to cope with multiple responsibilities at home, all participants admitted that it had been almost impossible for them to engage in self-care activities. Furthermore, to these mothers, children are their priority. Mothers admitted that their self-care has become of secondary importance to them. Nevertheless, mothers have looked beyond the conventional ways of self-care and identified various coping strategies, particularly during the lockdown period, that helped them better manage and improved on their well-being.

In the current study, all participants discussed the importance of keeping a positive mindset so to sustain and overcome the crisis. In making a conscious effort to stay positive, some mothers chose to perceive the pandemic lockdown period as an opportunity for family to spend more time at home that helped to enhance family bonding. Due to the lack of usual and social support, some mothers considered their family members as their primary source of social support. For example, one mother initiated frequent communication over meals as a way for family members to connect, understand and support one another, which subsequently garnered greater family cohesion and functioning (Lewandowski, et. al., 2010). Mother rejoiced when her family became more united during the pandemic crisis, as she cited, "This is for myself as well." – To this mother, she found her well-being improved when she became more bonded with her family. This study was also in line with recent research that illuminated the idea that mothers' perception of the COVID-19 pandemic was positively associated with their state of well-being (Hanetz-Gamliel, et. al., 2021).

While some participants reported seeking family and extended family members for support as a means of helping them alleviate their stress and anxiety, others considered pragmatic actions to enhance their well-being. Given the blurred work-life boundaries and having spent a great deal of time at home during the pandemic period, some mothers reported the great need for alone time. Aligned with previous research, mothers who managed to have time by themselves expressed that they could focus on themselves, reflect through the pandemic challenges, and even able to find new ways to better manage their existing pandemic home situation which helped to alleviate their stress (Cherry, 2021). For another mother, she decided to focus on her strength in planning when going for her regular Zumba exercise was no longer an option for her. Leveraging on her strength has not only helped this mother add structure and created a new routine, but also enabled her children to get into a new routine through the lockdown period. This could be interpreted as mother being in better control of her managing her schedule and children. Notably, this participant seemed to have experienced less stress and increased confidence in managing through this trying period (Rashid & McGrath, 2020).

Contrary to Mother 4, her decision to resign from her stressful job was probably the best option that helped improve her overall well-being. Having to cope with multiple responsibilities alone at the beginning of the first pandemic lockdown, mother was already drained by her work demand while trying to meet her children's needs after she returned from work. Despite being aware of her negative well-being state, mother could not see self-care as an option for her to improve on her well-being. With her resignation, Mother subsequently realized the negative impact of her bringing work stress home, letting her stress out on her children and the importance of taking care of her well-being in times of stress.

The third theme identified in this study captured mothers' experiences of how their state of well-being influenced their children's well-being, and the distinctive connections between mothers and children. Mothers self-reported witnessing a direct association between the way they interacted with their children and children's responses, which was moderated by the extent mothers were affected by their work stress. With the unexpected changes to work, school, and children's day care routines associated with the pandemic, especially during the first lockdown period, most participants notably experienced higher stress—coping particularly to balance their work and helping their children with home-based learning and their schoolwork, while ensuring that they met their employment demands. In line with recent research, mothers who experienced a higher level of stress tend to exhibit more dysfunctional interactions with their children as they found it tough to communicate with their children

sensitively. When mothers became harsher in their parenting, it resulted children to feel less understood and potentially emotionally affected negatively, that led to them feel less close to their mothers (Babore, et. al., 2021; Chung et al., 2020). This was clearly illustrated by Mother 4, when her well-being was tremendously affected due to her work stress, she became impatient, easily agitated and turned snappy at her children that elicited an instant negative response from her children, who avoided communicating with her—which was also in consistent with existing research that suggests that primary caregivers' emotional reactions play a significant role in children's response (Masarik & Conger, 2017).

While recent research has investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, the impact of mothers' influence on children during the pandemic cannot be underestimated. Despite a negative pandemic situation, mothers' optimistic influence—whether through exhibiting a positive perspective of the pandemic situation or continuous nudging, guiding, and supporting the children through this time of crisis has triggered a positive impact on children that helped them to be emotionally stronger (Steele & Steele, 2005)—more readily to accept changes and overcome the pandemic period more effortlessly. This finding was in line with existing research that suggests parents' choice in responding to negative situations potentially influences their children (Nelson, et. al., 2009). This study parallels with the attachment theory, which suggests that the emotional bonding between children and their parents is vital for children's psychological health development (Bowlby, 1969 & 1973). Mothers, being perceived as the primary caregivers, play a vital role in this attachment, as it is believed that mother-child bond is the essential force behind children's development (Bowlby, 1983). Even during middle childhood, mothers remain their pillar of support, especially so in times of crisis, where children need more support from their primary caregivers so to better co-regulate their emotions and behaviours (Bowlby, 1969, 1982; Grossmann et al., 2008).

The special bonding moments between mothers and their children—where some mothers in this study engaged in open, intimate, heart-to-heart talks with their children alone, before bedtime and during mealtimes—have helped to enhance mother-children relationship especially when such intimate conversations helped children feel more securely attached to their mothers, they were better able to share their feelings openly in times of distress. This finding may be explained by the idea that families that engaged in such intergenerational communication (i.e., the exchange of verbal and non-verbal communication between two different generations), in this case between parent and child, enables them to express their concerns and especially children to share their needs that resulted mother and children to feel closer (Bodner, et. al., 2019; Tam, et. al., 2021; Williams & Nussbaum, 2013). This might also imply that mothers in this study influence (on the way to cope with a stressful situation) by treating their middle-age children as partners when they communicated with them (Movahed Abtahi & Kerns, 2017). Emergent research reveals that children in China, the US and Ireland have experienced the psychological effect of COVID-19 pandemic (Duan et al., 2020; Jiao, et. al., 2020; Lee, 2020; O'Sullivan, et. al., 2021; Spinelli, et. al., 2020; Xie, et. al., 2020). However, this has not been the case for the children in this study.

Overall, this study highlighted the importance of considering mothers' well-being that might affect their children through the way they approached them. It has been a challenge for stressful mothers to communicate with their children sensitively, which impacted children to respond negatively. However, when mothers took efforts to warmly engage with their children through regular heart-to-heart talks, mothers witnessed how their intimate relationship was inevitably strengthened in time of crisis.

Limitations

This study has some limitations that are recommended to be addressed in future research. Firstly, this study was limited to a particular and specific group of working mothers residing in Singapore. Given the nature of qualitative research, the small sample size of five was not necessarily representative of other working mothers with middle-age children in Singapore (Smith et al. 2009). Therefore, it is recommended in future research to increase sample size in number and diversity, to include other ethnic groups so to have a comparison across different ethnic groups in Singapore. Nevertheless, this research will be informative to those practitioners who work with or are interested in working with parents, children, and families.

Secondly, the current sample was made up of a group of physically and emotionally healthy mothers, who may have a greater sense of well-being. In order to gain a broader perspective and understanding of working mothers' well-being, it is recommended to have a sample group of both thriving and struggling mothers.

Next, this being the first time for all participants to join a research interview, most mothers, especially those whom the researcher met first time over online interview, were feeling slightly nervous and less forthcoming with their answers. Hence, it took them a while before sharing more confidently about their lived experiences during the interviews. Furthermore, some of the participants also came across as being less articulate in elaborating their experiences which resulted giving brief answers for most of the interview questions that required many additional prompts. It is suggested for the researcher to establish some form of a rapport with individual participants (whom the researcher would be meeting for the first time) and prepare them ahead prior to the interviews over a face-to-face conversation (either online or physically should the COVID-19 situation allow) so these participants may feel more familiar and ready for the interview.

Finally, some participants tend to deviate from answering the questions directly, which called for more prompting questions to direct them back to the original questions. Additional rounds of analysis were required to ensure that important information related to this study has not been omitted from deviated answers. For some participants, their inability to articulate their thoughts fluently in English, in addition to using Singlish (referring to an informal colloquial form of English that is used in Singapore) has been a challenge to the researcher—having to verify constantly to ensure the participants' answers have been correctly and accurately understood and interpreted. This resulted the analytic process of reaching findings to take longer than expected to finalise. It is therefore recommended to prepare participants ahead by sharing the interview questions prior to the actual interview session.

Implications for Future Research

Despite its limitations, the present study has important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study shed light on the impact of the attachment theory as reflected through the children's reactions during the pandemic. The rise in the children being clingier to their mothers suggests that their anxiety was not just their own, but they also picked up from their mothers' anxiety as well. The data suggests that relevant practical considerations are needed in future for promoting mothers' well-being that would have a direct influence on their children's well-being as well in times of crisis. Practically, the findings revealed the importance of helping mothers to manage better in times of crisis. Given the stressful impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this group of mothers, they have struggled vastly in coping with both the demand of their work and supporting their children from home alone. As much as mothers tried keeping a positive mindset and considered ways to enhance their well-being, there is still a possibility of suicide that might arise for them as well. From a well-being perspective, it is vital to prevent mothers from becoming clinically ill. Hence, family practitioners and professionals working with parents should consider ways to support mothers in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic—for example, having coaches to start programmes that help enhance mothers' well-being, exploring ways for mothers to be supported and better parenting practices in times of distress. Essentially, the better support the mothers are, the better equipped and confident they would feel to deal with the pandemic, and the easier it would be for mothers that they could even short-lived the pandemic.

Conclusion

The present work makes an important contribution to the understanding of how working mothers experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and the key factors that increase their vulnerability in times of crisis. The pandemic does have a huge impact on everyone. The aim of this study is particularly to raise the awareness of mothers' happiness and well-being—that inevitably has a direct impact on their children, especially in times of crisis—to prevent mothers from becoming clinically ill and help them be better supported to overcome unprecedented challenges more effortlessly, potentially to help them be more mindful and take better preventive self-care. Additionally, no policies have been written to give people a set of guidelines on what to do in times of crisis. Hence, the importance of having such a policy to guide people on what they should do the next time the same crisis situation happens again in future. Finally, the findings in this study that eventually led to raise awareness of mothers' well-being in times of crisis is critical and should be considered when designing interventions to support mothers during emergency situations, and to have future studies to take this study further.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Standards

All study procedures involving human participants followed institutional and/or national research committee ethical standards and the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethical approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of East London with approval dated November 2, 2021 (no number).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Mary-Lynn H J Lim reviewed the literature and created the drafting of the manuscript. Mary-Lynn H J Lim and Glynis Freeman together provided the critical revision of the manuscript.

Received: October 4, 2022

Accepted: December 10, 2022

Published Online: January 2, 2023

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Appendix A: Mother – Participant Invitation/ Information letter



PARTICIPANT INVITATION/ INFORMATION LETTER

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree, it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

1. Who am I?

I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a Masters in Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology. I am particularly interested in children's well-being, and as part of my studies I am conducting research into exploring the relationship between mothers' and children's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Singapore. This is the research study which you are being invited to participate in.

2. What is the research?

I am conducting research into exploring the relationship between mothers and children's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Singapore. I am particularly interested in finding out how mothers' well-being influence school-going children during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Singapore.

The goal of this research is to deepen the understanding of mothers' role and influence on children's well-being; as well as to shed further light from mothers' perspectives on whether their role and influence may have a greater impact on their children.

The title of my research is: Explore the relationship between mothers and children's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of their experiences. This research seeks to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of mothers on how they manage their well-being; and to examine how do mothers' well-being influence school-going children during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Singapore.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

3. Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate in my research as someone who meet the criteria I have developed to help me explore my research topic. I am looking to involve a homogenous group of working, married mothers who are

either Chinese Singaporeans or Chinese Permanent Residents, currently living in Singapore with at least ONE child age between 8 to 12 years old.

I emphasise that I am not looking for ‘experts’ on the topic I am studying. You and your child will not be judged on anything you share, and I commit to treating your sharing respectfully and confidentially.

Additionally, I recognise that sharing of the COVID-19 pandemic experience may potentially touch on sensitive topics that may trigger negative emotions and negatively impact the wellbeing of some participants. You can choose not to answer certain questions if you are uncomfortable.

For this reason, I am looking for healthy (physically and emotionally) working mothers to participate in this research study.

Lastly, when you are deciding whether to participate in this research, you should not feel coerced.

4. What will your participation involve?

If you agree to participate, please take note of the following points:

- You will join me to a 60-minute session, semi-structured interview session via the Microsoft Teams.
- The interview session will be conducted in the form of an informal chat facilitated by several open-ended questions, where there are no right or wrong answers. The goal is to better understand your sharing of your personal experience of the topics covered in this research study.
- The conversation will be video recorded, which will be transcribed for analysis purpose. You will be pseudonymous and any identifying information will be omitted from the written transcript.

Kindly note that there will be no payment offered for participation in this research study. However, your contribution will be invaluable in helping to create awareness, develop knowledge and understanding of my research topic.

5. Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times.

- All collected data (i.e., your personal information and the audio recorded conversations) will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.
- Mothers’ names will not be identified by the data collected, on any written transcripts or in any write-up of this research.
- Participants do not have to answer all questions.
- Participants can withdraw their participation at any time, up to three weeks post-interview, and will have opportunities to review transcripts for accuracy.
- All collected data and participant information will be kept on UEL cloud and to be accessed by password-protected computer.

6. What will happen to the information that you provide?

What I will do with the material you provide will involve:

- Your personal and contact details will be securely saved in a password-protected Excel file and kept on UEL cloud, to be accessed by password-protected computer.
- No personal and contact information will be revealed or used in the final research report.
- All information collected during the interview will remain anonymous.
- All participant names will be changed, and all identifiable individual information will be omitted during the transcription process.
- All collected data can only be accessed and seen by my course leaders, supervisors and UEL examiners for assessment purposes.
- Once the research study has been completed, all collected data and participant information—personal and contact details, recorded **videos** will be deleted after transcript has been completed and degree achieved. The written transcripts of interviews – will be kept for a maximum of three years on UEL cloud in a password-protected computer. After which, they will be destroyed completely.
- If the research is successfully being accepted for publication in an academic journal, you will be provided a copy of the anonymised final report— which may also be used for publication in the media, as a resource in talks, lectures, and online discussions.

7. What if you want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the research study and your data at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence, up to three weeks post-interview.

After three weeks post-interview, it will not be possible to withdraw data from the research study as the analysis of the data will have begun. Hence, the researcher reserves the right to use your anonymous data once the analysis of the data has begun.

8. Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Mary-Lynn Lim – email address: U2112150@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Ms Glynis Freeman, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,
Email: g.freeman@uel.ac.uk

or

Deputy Research Director/Chair of School Research Ethics Committee: Dr Trishna Patel, School of Psychology,
University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Email: t.patel@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix B: Mother - Consent form



Consent to participate in a research study

Explore the relationship between mothers and children’s well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of their experiences.

I have read the information details in the invitation letter relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed, that my conversation will be **video recording**, and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the course leaders, supervisors and UEL examiners (for assessment purposes) and the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to **video record** my conversation, participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun.

Participant’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant’s Signature

.....

Researcher’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher’s Signature

.....

Date:

Appendix C: Mothers - Interview schedule and questions*

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. Icebreaking/
Warm up | 1. (Using the photos) What to you, is a meaningful relationship with your child?
2. What is the meaning of being a Mother?
3. Tell me a little bit about what you do and how long have you been in your current job.
4. How would you describe yourself as a mother? |
| 2. Pandemic period | 5. How do you feel about working from home during this pandemic period? |
| 3. Mother's emotions | 6. How do you take care of yourself?
7. How do you feel about being with your children 24/7 per week during this period? |
| 4. Mother-children relationship | 8. How do you feel about your relationship with your children during this pandemic period? Which age group is he/ she? |
| 5. Prompting words | Could you tell me a bit more?
What happened?
How did you feel?
How did you manage?
Was there anything you could do?
Given a choice, what did you wish to have happened? |
-

**These are only proposed questions which may be subject to change following further research and discussion with supervisor.*