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Work-Life Balance Conflicts Parents of Early Adolescents Faced During COVID-19 Lockdowns

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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by

Rodney Smith

MS, Walden University, 2019

MA, Webster University, 2013

BS, University of Central Florida, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

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Abstract

Measures such as social distancing and lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic meant parents balanced their roles as educators, tech support, and employees in shared home offices. This qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the work-life balance conflicts parents of early adolescents faced during the COVID-19 lockdowns, focusing on how parents managed the challenges of pandemic restrictions and their strategies for coping with cognitive, emotional, and physical fatigue for themselves and their families. This study was guided by the transactional theory of stress and coping. Twelve female parents were virtually interviewed, selected based on their having early adolescent children at home, working either full-time or part-time, and experiencing work-life balance challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which generated eight themes to address the research questions: (a) navigating through challenges related to work-life balance during COVID, (b) existential challenges influenced psychological well-being, (c) family influence created work-life balance conflicts during COVID lockdowns, (d) social support played a significant role during periods of extended social isolation, (e) gender roles contributed to an imbalance in the home, (f) employment uncertainty and predictability added new challenges, (g) adapting to a new work environment-working remotely presented challenges, and (h) preexisting and unresolved relationship problems challenged work-life balance. The findings have potential for enhancing societal well-being by improving individual and communal conditions. Medical and other professionals can be trained to identify stress predictors.

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Dedication

To my dearest wife and cherished children, your unwavering love and support have guided me throughout my challenging journey of pursuing my doctorate. In moments of self-doubt, your comforting words and faith in my abilities lifted my spirits and reignited my determination. Each of you has been a source of inspiration, continually reminding me of the strength I possess. I am profoundly grateful for the countless sacrifices you made and the endless encouragement you provided. Thank you for being my steadfast allies, always cheering me on and celebrating each step of my accomplishments with joy and pride. Your belief in me has been the cornerstone of my success, and I cherish you all deeply.

I would like to dedicate this work to my extended family members, who have always championed the value of education and encouraged me to reach for greater heights in my life. Your inspiring words and unwavering support have been a guiding light throughout this project. Though many of you are no longer with us, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for your enduring examples, selfless sacrifices, and relentless hard work that have paved the way for the opportunities I cherish today. Thank you for your steadfast belief in my potential; your influence has shaped who I am and fuels my aspirations.

Acknowledgments

I am truly grateful for the unwavering support of my Committee Chair, Dr. Sally Zengaro. Your constant encouragement and insightful guidance have kept me focused and motivated throughout this challenging journey. Your thoughtful mentorship illuminated the path to success, instilling in me the confidence to persevere and finish strong, even when I faced numerous edits and revisions along the way. I cannot thank you enough for the dedication and effort you invested in helping me move forward.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my second committee member, Dr. Hertenstein. Your invaluable feedback and constructive criticism have been instrumental in refining my academic voice and improving my writing skills. Your keen insights have greatly enhanced my work, and I deeply appreciate your contribution to my development as a scholar.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the staff at Walden, the librarians, the writing center, and my fellow scholars. Your support has significantly enhanced my academic journey and contributed to my achievements. I also appreciate the communities that participated in this process. Thank you all for your invaluable support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic affected nearly every aspect of society across the globe, including overall health, the economy, and human behavior (Brown et al., 2020). The psychological well-being and financial security of working adults and their families were impacted by precautions such as social distancing and lockdown policies taken during the pandemic to avoid further spread of the virus. The restrictions brought on by the pandemic generated unforeseen consequences such as school closings and shifting the workplace from the office to home or loss of employment due to business shutdowns (Brown et al., 2020). Working parents were now faced with the difficult task of providing for their children, who were conducting virtual education from home, while working in the same space or trying to provide oversight while leaving home and going to the workplace.

This chapter discusses the impacts and restrictions the COVID-19 pandemic imposed on working parents and their families. It also includes a background section on various studies related to the study phenomenon. The other significant parts of this chapter are the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, limitations, and the significance of the study.

Background

During extended periods of the COVID-19 lockdown, some parents faced the difficult decision to leave their children home alone without supervision or adjust their work schedule and personal obligations. This situation affected work-life balance efforts

for parents as it presented a new set of trials for their households and ongoing concerns associated with COVID-19 (Romero et al., 2020). The severity of the issue differs depending on the state of residence; the age at which a child could be left home alone unsupervised for extended periods varies from state to state. Therefore, parents must consider their child's maturity and ability to handle responsibilities when left alone in the final decision. Early adolescents (11 to 14 years old) have unique challenges as they begin to develop formal operative thought but have not learned how to apply hypothetical and deductive reasoning skills (Gutgesell & Payne, 2004). This situation left parents contemplating difficult choices requiring them to consider their children's needs, which sometimes conflicted with work schedules, household tasks, and personal needs (Fontanesi et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2020). These conditions increase mental and physical demands on parents, but the extent is not fully understood.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this research study is the work-life balance conflicts parents of early adolescents faced during COVID-19 lockdowns. How parents with early adolescent children coped with work-life balance conflicts during COVID-19 lockdowns is not fully understood. COVID-19 lockdowns exposed parents of early adolescents to many unforeseen challenges to their work, family, and social lives (E. L. Adams et al., 2021). As restrictions related to the lockdown tightened, parents faced the potential of losing access to critical support systems they relied upon in their daily lives, such as friends, family, and childcare services (Weaver & Swank, 2021). This also affected the work-life balance as parents dealt with increased anxiety levels in their children as they

also dealt with changes to their daily lives (Brown et al., 2020). Their children faced disruptions to in-person education due to social distancing requirements, creating increased roles for parents as they supported their child's home-based education (S. J. Lee et al., 2021). These situations influenced household work-life balance conflicts as parents took on multiple roles, such as teacher, caregiver, and parent, while juggling disruptions to their daily schedules (Lawson et al., 2020).

Researchers report that mental health challenges following disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic are extensive, affecting both the individual and their families (Russell et al., 2020). According to Russell et al. (2020), highly stressed caregivers who experience negative experiences from natural disasters such as the pandemic are more than likely to affect others within their household negatively. Therefore, it is important to identify the needs of parents/caregivers and obtain a greater understanding of how parents addressed work-life balance conflicts through the phenomenon in order to expand pre-existing programs and develop additional ones to provide interventions to families during and after pandemics, such as COVID-19 (Romero et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the work-life balance conflicts parents of early adolescents faced during COVID-19 lockdowns. This study investigated how parents experienced and coped with the increased work-life balance challenges while subjected to COVID-19 related restrictions. Finally, the study examined strategies parents used to address cognitive, emotional, and physical fatigue experienced by themselves and their families.

Research Questions

I derived this study's research questions from identified literature gaps to help examine the phenomenon. The first question is based on the lack of understanding of how work-life balance was affected during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Furthermore, how parents experienced work-life balance conflicts is not fully understood, nor is there agreement on the severity to which they were impacted. The second research question is based on the lack of understanding of how parents impacted by work-life balance conflicts coped with them during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The second research question's basis is to understand parents' lived experiences as they appraised the stressors (work-life balance conflicts) and coped with the phenomenon.

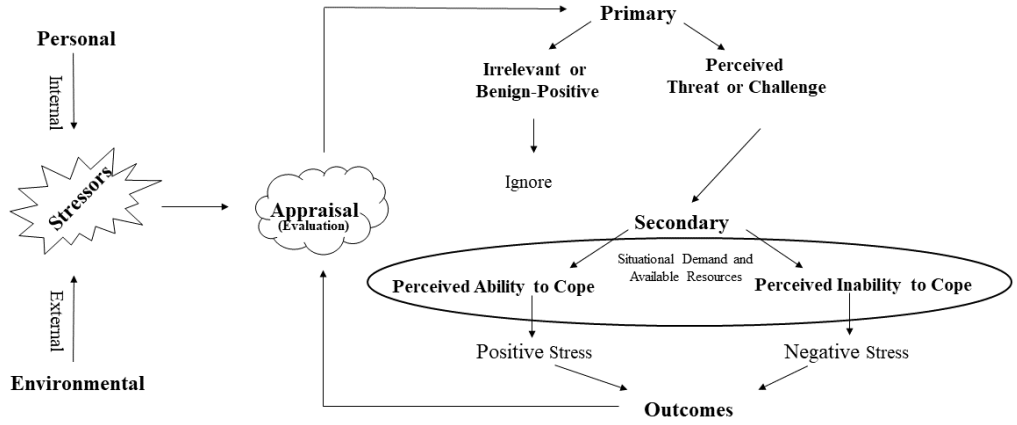
RQ 1: What work-life balance conflicts did parents with early adolescents experience in their lives during the COVID-19 lockdowns?

RQ 2: How did parents with early adolescents cope with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns?

Figure 1 depicts how individuals interpret or react to an event, such as work-life balance conflicts, and how their perceived ability to cope or not cope influences stress levels. This is a key aspect of this study as it explored parents' lived experiences and how they coped with the phenomenon.

Figure 1

Transactional Model of Stress and Coping



Note. This figure depicts the transactional process through which stress can occur as a person (including multiple systems: cognitive, physiological, affective, psychological, neurological) interacts with their environment (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Understanding how parents respond to stressful situations, such as those encountered during COVID-19 lockdowns, can provide insight and assistance to those in need of additional resources during times of crisis. The theoretical framework for this study was based on the transactional theory of stress and coping developed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman. The transactional theory of stress and coping provides a framework for evaluating how individuals cope with stressful life events, such as work-life balance (Junker et al., 2021). This theory subscribes to the idea that coping is a process where the outcomes are determined by how individuals assess stressful situations, the coping styles that the individual employs, and how mediating variables are applied (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The transactional theory of stress and coping is used to

examine the coping skills individuals apply in stressful situations through self-reflection to determine if they are appropriate and adaptive to the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theory is explained in greater detail within the Theoretical Foundation section in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the data was examined using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This type of analysis requires researchers to engage with subjects and interpret data to understand people's experiences (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). I interviewed parents of school-aged children between 11 and 14 years old. This age group was chosen because of the potential difficulties it may pose to parents facing work-life balance conflicts. In this stage of adolescent development, adolescents do not fully understand how to apply deductive reasoning and abstract thinking (Brubaker, 2016). Therefore, adolescents who do not possess the ability to conduct deductive reasoning or abstract thinking may further complicate decisions for parents during COVID-19 lockdowns. During the interview process, examining the lived experiences of parents helped to understand the impact of how parents addressed work-life balance conflicts. This study gathered various parental experiences based on the selected age group. This approach emphasized the parental challenges of coping with environmental stressors to understand the phenomenon during the COVID-19 lockdowns better.

Definitions

Key terms fundamental to a study have multiple meanings, are repeated

frequently in most sections of the study, and should be defined to provide context (Terrell, 2022). Terms can have different meanings to different reading audiences, thus leading to misinterpretation of the information in the research (Terrell, 2022). This study contains terminology that could be interpreted in a different context than its intended purpose. Therefore, key terms used in this study are defined to provide a fundamental understanding of the factors and add context to this study. The following provides brief definitions of those key terms used in this study:

Caregiver: This term refers to an individual adult above the age of 18 who is responsible for providing care to loved ones (children, parents, siblings) with disabilities, illness, or who are underage and unable to provide the necessary support for themselves (Dang et al., 2024; McWey et al., 2018). In this study, this term will encompass the broad spectrum of parents to include single parents, same-sex parents, foster parents, and grandparents.

Coping: This term refers to a process of cognitive appraisal to determine whether an individual has adequate resources to respond effectively to stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

COVID-19: This term is the abbreviated term for the Coronavirus Disease at the center of the global pandemic that was first identified in 2019 (Hansen, 2020)

COVID-19 lockdown: This term refers to the period between March 2020 and August 2020, after states in the United States began issuing stay-at-home orders (Koh, 2020), to the beginning of the fall school term. This period is highlighted by increased social distancing restrictions, business closures, school closures, and limited access to

support networks such as friends and family (E. L. Adams et al., 2021).

Early adolescent: This term refers to the stage in child development involving children aged 10 to 14 (Blum et al., 2014). This stage is characterized by concrete thinking, focused on what the individual can see, feel, and hear in the present (Parent et al., 2016). Toward the end of this stage, children begin to conduct abstract thinking and start understanding more complex issues that are not associated with concrete experiences (Parent et al., 2016).

In-person work: This term refers to work-related activities completed by or with an individual physically present at their traditional workplace (Mikkelson et al., 2023). In this study, this term refers to individuals who continued to physically report to their pre-pandemic work location during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Remote learning: This term refers to classroom education that shifted from a physical classroom to an online environment, allowing students to complete assignments and communicate with their teachers using electronic devices during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Vasquez & Straub, 2012).

Remote work: This term refers to the practice in which employees transitioned during the COVID-19 lockdowns and completed a portion or all their work hours performing their tasks using electronic devices away from their regular workplace (Mikkelson et al., 2023). In this study, the term is used exclusively for parents who were working from their place of residence during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Social distancing: This term refers to a restriction on social contact placed during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The restriction suggested that individuals maintain distances

of six feet or greater from others when possible to lower the transmission of the disease (Hansen, 2020).

Stress: This term refers to a response, stimulus, and transaction based on the relationship between an individual and their environment, which is deemed significant and exceeds their available resources for coping (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Work-life balance: This term refers to an individual engaging in their everyday work activities and personal life activities while experiencing minimal interference or disruption to their work and non-work related activities (Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Assumptions

The goal of this qualitative study was to understand the underlying meaning and experiences of individuals by recording and analyzing their beliefs, feelings, and perceptions. To achieve this goal, this study was conducted using certain assumptions. Assumptions are important in qualitative studies; they help formulate problems and research questions and determine how information is gathered to answer questions (Simon, 2011). They are accepted as accurate, typically not in your control, and necessary to complete the study (Simon, 2011). Assumptions are not just asserted in research; they must be justified to form a basis for the study (Simon, 2011).

Some aspects of this study required the researcher to operate under assumptions due to the inability to verify whether they were true. Some assumptions can be minimized, but there are areas within this study where this is not possible. For this study, I made assumptions about the population and the research design. First, I assumed that

those individuals who responded to the study invitation accurately represented parents who encountered work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. I also assumed that the information provided by the parents was true and accurate to the best of their knowledge. Additionally, I assumed that the phenomenological research design helped to understand how the study participants made meaning of their experiences and the essence of the phenomenon. These assumptions are discussed in greater detail in the Limitations section.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was conducted to explore the work-life balance conflicts that parents of early adolescents faced during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Parents with early adolescent children were selected as a population of interest due to the limited amount of research focused on that period of child development. According to Blum et al. (2014), researchers consider this the most neglected period of an individual's life. Therefore, little is known about the dynamics between parents and early adolescent children, specifically when it comes to situations such as those encountered during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In addition, exploring the work-life balance conflicts faced by parents with early adolescent children was selected as an area of interest due to the limited research that existed at the time, despite growing evidence that work-life imbalance might have affected mental and physical health in the long term.

This study explored the lived experiences of parents with early adolescent children (ages 10 to 14) who encountered work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Parents with children younger or older than the identified age group were

excluded from the participant pool. Furthermore, parents who were not employed during the period from March 2020 to August 2020 were excluded from the participant pool, as this did not align with the study's focus.

Limitations

This research study required excessive time to sort, code, and categorize collected data. The results of the interviews and all data collected from the participants were subjected to several reviews before concluding (Smith & Osborn, 2014). To help make the process manageable, the study focused on 12 research participants to interview and collect data. As data were reviewed, there was the potential for bias on the researcher's part due to similar experiences. To reduce the potential for bias during the study, I compared, contrasted, and analyzed data collected from surveys and interviews with the research participants. In the group of 12 participants, I attempted to include a diverse population to provide opportunities for various perspectives. The scrutiny of information in this manner helped to increase the credibility and validity of the research findings.

The interview process was emotionally challenging for some participants, requiring me to be prepared to provide additional resources at the end of the session. In addition, this study also presented challenges by exposing the researcher to sensitive information that might have required reporting to proper authorities. To address these concerns, I conducted a comprehensive introduction that included invites to participants detailing the rights and limitations to confidentiality. Discussions about confidentiality generated concerns among participants and potentially impacted their willingness to provide honest feedback. To ensure strict confidentiality and ease concerns, the research

participants' identities were masked, and any information gathered was safeguarded in password-protected, secure digital devices.

Significance

This study is significant as it provides insight into how parents experienced personal and family-related work-life balance challenges during COVID-19 lockdowns. The insight obtained from the research results of this study provides valuable information to individuals working with parents in need of coping skills to address increased stress levels during current and future pandemics. In school settings, faculty members could benefit from research of this type to increase their situational awareness of how prolonged lockdowns affect parents (Morelli et al., 2020). Burnout occurs when the rigors of parenting are not supported by adequate resources (Griffith, 2020). Finally, this study provides state and federal agencies with additional resources to mitigate long-term psychosocial effects on parents, such as burnout.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided the background of the study, problem statement, and purpose statement. Additionally, I outlined the research questions and the theoretical framework that guided the development of the model. A discussion of the assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations followed. Finally, I discussed the potential significance of the study as circumscribed by the population. A review of the literature follows in Chapter 2, which provides a more detailed examination of the study's theoretical framework and variables.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem addressed in this research study was the work-life balance conflicts experienced by parents of early adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the work-life balance conflicts experienced by parents of early adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns and to address gaps in existing literature. How parents with early adolescent children coped with work-life balance conflicts during COVID-19 lockdowns is not fully understood. COVID-19 lockdowns exposed parents of early adolescents to a plethora of unforeseen challenges to their work, family, and social lives (E. L. Adams et al., 2021). As restrictions related to the lockdown tightened, parents faced the potential of losing access to critical support systems they relied on in their daily lives, such as friends, family, and childcare services (Weaver & Swank, 2021). This also affected the work-life balance as parents dealt with increased anxiety levels in their children as they also dealt with changes to their daily lives (Brown et al., 2020). Their children were facing disruptions to in-person education due to social distancing requirements, creating increased roles for parents as they supported their child's home-based education (S. J. Lee et al., 2021). These situations influenced work-life balance conflicts in households as parents took on multiple roles, such as teacher, caregiver, and parent while juggling disruptions to their own daily schedules (Lawson et al., 2020).

During extended periods of the COVID-19 lockdown, some parents faced the difficult decision to leave their children home alone without supervision or adjust their work schedule and personal obligations. This situation affected work-life balance efforts

for parents as it presented a new set of trials for their households and ongoing concerns associated with COVID-19 (Romero et al., 2020). The severity of the issue differs depending on the state of residence; the age at which a child could be left home alone unsupervised for extended periods varies from state to state. Therefore, parents must consider their child's maturity and ability to handle responsibilities when left alone in the final decision. Early adolescents, aged 11 to 14, face unique challenges as they develop formal operational thought but have not yet learned to apply hypothetical and deductive reasoning skills (Gutgesell & Payne, 2004). This situation prompted parents to contemplate difficult choices that required consideration of their children's needs, which sometimes conflicted with work schedules, household tasks, and personal needs (Russell et al., 2020). These conditions increased the mental and physical demands of parents, though the full extent is not yet understood.

Research has revealed that mental health issues stemming from disasters, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are widespread and impact both individuals and their families (Russell et al., 2020). Additionally, highly stressed caregivers with negative experiences from natural disasters, such as the pandemic, are likely to impact others within their households adversely (Russell et al., 2020). It is crucial to identify the needs of parents and caregivers and to gain a deeper understanding of how they manage work-life balance conflicts. This understanding will help expand existing programs and develop new interventions to support families during and after pandemics like COVID-19 (Romero et al., 2020).

This study aimed to investigate how parents experienced and coped with

increased work-life balance challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown. Information in this study helped to explain how parents navigated through the extended periods of social distancing restrictions and examined strategies used by parents to address cognitive, emotional, and physical fatigue in themselves and their families. Furthermore, this study also sought to examine the phenomenon as it occurred through the lens of all parents, including grandparents, foster parents, single parents, and other caretakers responsible for providing care to adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In previous studies (Cheng et al., 2021; Del Boca et al., 2020; Demaria & Vicari, 2021), there was often a generalized view of how parents were defined, which overlooked the differences among various types of parents in their experiences of work-life balance conflicts during the lockdowns. Previous studies on parenting during the pandemic have focused on traditional nuclear families, individuals of middle-class socioeconomic status (SES), and those with moderate education levels. This study attempted to include a variety of parents, including economically disadvantaged families or low SES families, who experienced significant psychosocial impacts during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Manohar et al., n.d.).

Working parents were subjected to changes in their work arrangements voluntarily and involuntarily. Some parents continued to work from their office or facility under severe restrictions, while others were allowed to work remotely from home. Previous studies (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; S. J. Lee et al., 2021; Putri & Amran, 2021; Ruzungunde & Zhou, 2021) examining the benefits of in-person work versus remote work during the COVID-19 lockdowns have yielded mixed results. Those who worked

from home reported benefits such as less time on the road commuting between home and work and increased time spent with family. On the other hand, those who worked from the office reported benefits such as continued socialization and connectedness during the lockdown. However, work-life balance is still difficult to achieve in either circumstance due to additional requirements in their daily lives.

Previous research on work-life balance conflicts focused on factors in parents' lives that impacted it and, to a lesser extent, coping strategies: very little research has been conducted on the emotional exhaustion encountered by parents and how they coped with work-life balance conflicts (Marchetti et al., 2020). Brooks et al. (2020) examined the psychological impact of parents exposed to limited social interactions outside the immediate family and constant proximity to family members while working from home during COVID-19 lockdowns. They found they were particularly vulnerable to increased stress. Wang et al. (2022) indicated in their study that over half of the parents interviewed experienced work-life balance conflicts amid the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Accordingly, this chapter extensively reviews the existing literature and how it relates to work-life balance conflicts experienced by parents of early adolescent children during the COVID-19 lockdowns. I conducted an extensive literature review using various Walden University Library and Google Scholar psychology databases. The literature review yielded themes related to work-life balance conflicts in the previous research that included (a) work-life balance conflicts, (b) gender, and (c) parents' psychological well-being. Finally, this chapter concludes with the strengths and limitations of the studies used in the literature review and a summary of critical findings

highlighted in this section.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy involved using various databases available on the internet. Research on the challenges related to work-life balance that parents of early adolescents faced during the COVID-19 lockdowns was conducted using a set of keywords. These keywords, individually or in combination, included: *work-life balance*, *parenting*, *stress*, *burnout*, *pandemic*, *COVID-19*, *cognitive appraisal*, *primary appraisal*, *secondary appraisal*, *coping*, *the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping*, and *the transactional model of stress and coping*. Two primary sources were used to conduct research that substantiates gaps and supports the research topic. To begin, I utilized the Thoreau multi-database search engine within the Walden University Library, specifically the EBSCO Discovery Service, to conduct an initial search for relevant and up-to-date information using specific keywords. The research database at Walden University included resources such as PsycARTICLES and PsycINFO.

The initial search in the Walden Library returned 70 results using the keywords *parenting*, *work-life balance*, and *COVID-19*. A subsequent search, which included the terms stress and burnout, yielded one additional article. Another search was conducted using the keywords *parenting*, *work-life balance*, *cognitive appraisal*, *primary appraisal*, *secondary appraisal*, *coping*, *Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping*, and *the transactional model of stress and coping*. The second search conducted in the Walden Library did not yield any additional results. Another search was conducted without the terms *parenting* and *work-life balance*, yielding 94 results. A final search was conducted

using the terms *work-life balance, stress,* and *coping*, which resulted in 602 findings. After narrowing down the years in which the studies were conducted from 1988 to 2020 and adding the term "COVID-19 pandemic," the search yielded 48 results.

Additionally, Google Scholar was utilized to perform further online research using the exact keywords to gather information from previous studies on the phenomenon. The initial search on Google Scholar utilized the keywords: parents, adolescents, work-life balance, and COVID-19 pandemic. The publication time frame was adjusted to articles published between 2020 and 2023, resulting in over 34,000 search results. Documents found on Google Scholar that did not meet the criteria for academic review were excluded. The extensive history of research on stress and coping required that articles related to work-life balance, parenting, stress, burnout, the pandemic, and coping be limited to the last three years (2020-2023 during the research period). However, searches on the transactional theory of stress and coping were not restricted to this timeframe.

Theoretical Foundation

A significant distinction in this study compared to its predecessors is the use of the transactional theory of stress and coping framework to explore how parents of early adolescent children managed work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The theory explores how individuals experience stress through appraisal, reappraisal, and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theory helped examine how parents of early adolescents experienced work-life balance conflicts and coped with the associated stress. The utilization of this theory helped to address gaps in the literature that

were identified in previous studies surrounding parental stress and coping related to work-life balance during the tumultuous time period.

Origin of the Theory

The transactional theory of stress and coping, developed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984, emerged from years of research on psychological stress. Both researchers conducted independent studies on stress and coping, leading them to propose that stress arises from the relationship between an individual and their environment. Specifically, they suggested that stress occurs when an individual's assessment of a situation exceeds their available resources and threatens their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The theory posits that psychological stress is a dynamic process shaped by one's cognitive evaluations and coping skills. Before the publication of "Psychological Stress and the Coping Process" in 1966 by Dr. Lazarus, stress was primarily viewed as a human condition, with limited focus on coping mechanisms (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

For years, the concept of stress was not fully understood; it was often used interchangeably with terms such as anxiety, conflict, frustration, emotional disturbance, trauma, alienation, and anomie by researchers (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Additionally, stress was defined as either a stimulus or a response to a stressful situation. Subsequently, this was also accompanied by the idea of a standardized effect across individuals and did not consider how individuals might have different interpretations of stressful situations. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued that individual characteristics are essential for understanding how stress is experienced. They suggested

that what one person finds stressful may not have the same effect on someone else (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As research into the concept of stress evolved, Lazarus and Folkman advocated that stress is a comprehensive framework rather than a singular variable, encompassing various variables and processes (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Integrating previous research on stress, Lazarus and Folkman developed their theory of stress and coping to explain the transactional aspects individuals encounter when faced with stress. Their transactional theory of stress and coping suggests that a person's perception of a stressful situation significantly influences their reaction and coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) work was shaped by many contributors whose prior research enhanced the understanding of stress and its effects. Notable influences included Dr. Hans Selye's *General Adaptation Syndrome*, Dr. Harold Wolff's studies on psychosomatic illness, and Dr. Walter Cannon's concept of the "fight or flight response" (Biggs et al., 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Robinson, 2018). These individuals were regarded as pioneers in the study of the body's physiological responses to stress. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Robinson, 2018). While their research contributed to understanding the impacts of stress, it was still considered a stimulus or a response rather than a predictor of what causes stress for individuals. Lazarus and Folkman proposed that objectively predicting psychological stress is challenging without considering the individual's characteristics. They concluded that stress results from the relationship between a person and their environment, based on how they evaluate the situation and whether it is perceived as taxing or exceeds their available resources. This led to the

development of their transactional theory of stress and coping, which provides a framework for exploring how individuals interpret stressful events through their interaction with the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Theory Concept

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed that stress arises from an imbalance between the demands of a stressful event and the individual's resources to cope with it. Consequently, based on the individual's demands and the resources available to meet those demands, a person may experience either positive or negative stress or completely avoid a stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Both researchers and practitioners recognized that coping could influence emotions, yet there was limited understanding of the actual coping process itself (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Cognitive appraisal is the method by which experiences are categorized along with their different features as they pertain to well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). During the cognitive appraisal process, an individual assesses whether the encounter jeopardizes their well-being and if their resources can meet the demands of the stressful encounter. There are two forms of appraisal: primary appraisal, an evaluation of whether the event is irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful to their well-being, and secondary appraisal, an evaluation of coping resources and addresses the question of whether an individual can cope with the demand (Chishima et al., 2018; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; E. H. Lee, 2012; Robinson, 2018).

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts of an individual to understand, manage, and accept the demands created by a stressful situation (Chishima et

al., 2018; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; E. H. Lee, 2012; Robinson, 2018). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping serves two main functions: managing the problem causing distress (problem-focused coping) and regulating the emotional response to the problem (emotion-focused coping). These two types of coping, problem-focused and emotion-focused, can facilitate and impede each other as they occur in tandem through stressful encounters (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 179).

Previous Applications of the Theory

The transactional theory of stress and coping has been utilized to study psychological stress across various fields. The theory suggests that reactions to stressful events are influenced by how we assess the situation and our capacity to cope with it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Previous studies (Afonso et al., 2022; Laubmeier et al., 2004; Sousa & Veronese, 2022) explored the psychological impact of stressful events and how individuals coped with them using the transactional theory of stress and coping as a template to examine the phenomenon. Afonso et al. (2022) conducted a series of studies using the transactional theory of stress and coping to investigate the phenomenon of stress. In one study, the researchers explored the relationship between stress, negative life events, coping strategies, and biological markers using this theoretical framework. Using the transactional theory of stress and coping as a guide, the researchers investigated coping strategies that acted as mediators between stressors and biological markers. Their study found very few mediations that provided any significance in their findings. Nonetheless, their research revealed that the coping strategy of venting positively impacted certain biological markers, such as red blood cells and hemoglobin, as well as

negative experiences.

The transactional theory of stress and coping was also employed by Sousa and Veronese (2022) to explore the trauma associated with major military operations. Their study focused on the experiences of female survivors of armed conflict in Gaza and how they coped with their traumatic experiences. By applying the transactional theory of stress and coping, Sousa and Veronese examined the cyclical nature of stress and trauma during combat, specifically looking at the appraisal and coping processes. This approach helped to better understand how female survivors of armed conflict processed their experiences.

The transactional theory of stress and coping was utilized by Laubmeier et al. (2004) to examine the role of spirituality in the psychological adjustment to cancer. The researchers investigated how spirituality mediates the effects of perceived life threats, distress, and quality of life in cancer patients. By applying the transactional theory of stress and coping, Laubmeier et al. assessed the perceived life threats experienced by cancer patients and analyzed their association with increased distress and decreased quality of life. The theory also helped in identifying that higher levels of spirituality acted as a coping mechanism, which mediated distress and symptom severity and ultimately improved the quality of life for the patients.

Rationale for the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping offers a framework to analyze how individuals assess and manage stressful situations, such as achieving work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdowns. A significant aspect of this theory is its

capacity to evaluate individual's responses to stressful situations, taking into account personal experiences and environmental factors. Furthermore, the cognitive appraisal process described in this theory highlights the evaluation of situations, determining whether an individual experiences increased or decreased stress during stressful events. Utilizing this theory enhanced the understanding of the transactional process parents with early adolescent children experienced and coped with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Relation to the Present Study

A comprehensive review of research literature on the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping revealed specific trends relevant to the phenomenon under study. Specifically, exploring the ways stress manifests within individuals based on the interactions between the environment and the individual. This study applied the theory to explore the following research questions:

1. What work-life balance conflicts did parents of early adolescents face during the COVID-19 lockdown?
2. How did parents with early adolescent children cope with work-life balance conflicts during this COVID-19 lockdown?

The theory provides a template for examining key demands and mediating resources related to work-life balance conflicts. The core principles of the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping facilitate an examination of the relationships between demands and the mediating resources available to parents, which vary across different groups. It is important to study a diverse population of caregivers, including grandparents, foster

parents, single parents, and others responsible for providing care to adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdowns, as this topic has not been thoroughly explored in previous research.

Literature Review Related to Major Variables

The COVID-19 lockdown presented significant challenges to work-life balance as parents attempted to allocate time between work and their families during an uncertain and tumultuous period (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011). Previous studies have revealed challenges in achieving work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdown. This section reviews relevant literature from previous studies, establishing a foundation for later discussions in this chapter. Six variables identified in previous studies have been found to influence work-life balance: (a) family influence on life-related decisions or choices; (b) multiple roles and responsibilities; (c) perception of self; (d) work-life balance challenges and strategies to address them; (e) organizational procedures and policies; and (f) social support. These variables were derived from previous research focused on the impact of work and family-related factors on work-life balance, the challenges encountered, and the coping strategies used to achieve balance. Therefore, these variables will act as a guide for research into understanding work-life balance conflicts and related coping strategies. Previous studies focused on work-life balance established the foundation for this study, guiding further exploration into the work-life balance conflicts experienced during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Work-Life Balance Conflict

Work-life balance is an individual perception that requires maintaining a balance

between one's professional responsibilities and personal life, while promoting and supporting individual priorities (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). During the COVID-19 lockdown, working parents were subjected to voluntary and involuntary changes to their work arrangements. Some parents continued to work from their offices under severe restrictions, while others were afforded the opportunity to work remotely from home. There is still no consensus on whether working from home versus working from an office proved to be more beneficial. Previous studies examining the benefits of in-person work versus remote work during the COVID-19 lockdowns have yielded various results (Alfano et al., 2023; Del Boca et al., 2020; Tavares et al., 2021). Individuals who worked from home reported benefits such as less time on the road commuting between home and work and increased time spent with family. Conversely, some studies have shown that remote work had a negative impact on working parents, specifically female parents (Alfano et al., 2023; Del Boca et al., 2020; Tavares et al., 2021). Several studies (Alfano et al., 2023; Del Boca et al., 2020; Tavares et al., 2021) found that remote work created an environment that increased gender inequality within the household by increasing the workload of the female parent while working from home, even in situations with both partners working remotely. Studies conducted on office workers during the pandemic revealed mixed results concerning work-life balance, while some workers experienced continued socialization and connectedness, others faced unpredictability and uncertainty during the lockdown (Cheng et al., 2021; Putri & Amran, 2021; Wolor et al., 2021).

Furthermore, previous assumptions have suggested that the term work-life balance refers to the struggles faced by only working parents. It has been thought that

their struggles revolve around non-work-related responsibilities, particularly in caring for their children and managing family life. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, this study explored the work-related and non-work-related domains that influenced work-life balance. This study examined work-related factors such as type of work, job satisfaction, and job performance. In terms of the non-work related factors, this study examined literature regarding the family's influence, gender roles and equality, and psychological well-being. By examining work-life balance conflicts holistically through both work-related and non-work-related domains, this study obtained a deeper understanding of the stressors and how parents managed them during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Work-Related Domain

The COVID-19 lockdown disrupted and transformed how parents approached their work. Some parents worked from home, while others continued to work at their workplace. The method by which parents managed their work responsibilities created unique challenges for work-life balance. Working from home and working from the workplace yielded mixed results on work-life balance. Further exploration into the experiences of working from home and working in the workplace was needed to fully understand how they affected the work-life balance of parents with early adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Working From Home

Working from home (WFH), also known as remote work, is a term that existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic but gained significance as lockdown restrictions

prevented person-to-person contact in the workplace. The term refers to individuals who, whether they are part of an organization or self-employed, perform their daily work functions from their homes using electronic media to interact with others both inside and outside their company (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022a; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022b; Wolor et al., 2021). Remote work during the COVID-19 lockdowns left some employees feeling overwhelmed as the boundaries between work and non-work were crossed throughout the week (Cannito & Scavarda, 2020). At the same time, individuals working from home reported benefits, as it allowed flexibility to manage work-life conflicts (Wolor et al., 2021).

While working from home offers benefits, it can disrupt the work-life balance if employees allows others in their home to demand more of their time (Wolor et al., 2021). This was often unavoidable, as individuals working from home during the lockdown experienced an increase in household chores such as cleaning, cooking, and laundry, due to family members spending more time at home (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022a; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022b). The lack of balance between work and personal life had a negative impact on their psychological well-being, resulting in deviations from work-related tasks while working from home (Chu et al., 2022). Although work performance did not decrease significantly, happiness decreased and stress levels increased (Chu et al., 2022).

Work-life balance conflicts were previously studied among Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022a). HRD practitioners shared their experiences regarding

work-life balance conflicts while working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic from a human resource development (HRD) perspective. Their study identified four themes that affected work-life balance: flextime versus work intensity, flexplace versus space limitations, technologically feasible work arrangement versus technostress and isolation, and family-friendly work arrangement versus housework and caregiving. Flextime and work intensity conveyed the concept that remote work enabled employees to have greater flexibility in accomplishing their work-related tasks working from home, thus improving their work-life balance. However, findings from their literature review suggest that remote work increased the intensity of work-related tasks assigned by their employers. Some study participants reported increased work hours as their employers expected them to remain online (i.e., always logged into their computer systems) during their shifts. Given the nature of this study and the absence of demographic information, it is uncertain whether the results are applicable across different cultures, genders, and socioeconomic statuses. Nonetheless, the findings from this study enhanced the understanding of remote workers' work-life balance experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study's limitations highlight a need for further exploration into the interactions between stressors and available resources, as well how these resources affect the relationship between stressors and work-life balance.

The impact of working from home on work-life balance during the pandemic was also studied using surveys with a descriptive verification research design (Putri & Amran, 2021). This study asserted that achieving work-life balance required prioritizing between work and personal life. This study found that working from home yielded both positive

and negative results for the employees, varying by individual. Some participants in the study enjoyed the freedom and flexibility of working from home, while others reported an increase in household tasks. This study also highlighted the key role of social support for individuals who worked from home during the pandemic. Participants also revealed they were dissatisfied with working from home when they felt disconnected by little or no communication with their coworkers. This study focused on the effects of working from home on a company's workforce, but it lacks information on the participants' demographics. Furthermore, this study lacked specificity in how to address or cope with the negative effects of working from home, indicating a need for further research.

Maintaining a work-life balance while working from home presented both challenges and benefits for parents with additional family members in the household. The presence of more family members at home for extended periods increased demands on parents, resulting in disruptions to their work-life balance (Wolor et al., 2021). Parents experienced additional tasks added to their daily routine and an increase in household chores such as cleaning, cooking, and laundry (Shirmohammadi et al., 2022a; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022b). These conditions caused parents to feel overwhelmed and experience heightened stress as the boundaries between work and family blurred (Putri & Amran, 2021). Finally, achieving a work-life balance while working from home required parents to set priorities between their work and family life. Nonetheless, parents' ability to prioritize and cope with the work-life balance challenges presented while working from home is not fully understood. Further exploration of parents' experiences working from home during the COVID-19 lockdowns was necessary to fully understand its impact

on their work-life balance.

Working in the Workplace

Some parents were unable to transition to remote work during the COVID-19 lockdowns due to the nature of their jobs. Essential services, including health services, manufacturing, transportation, and grocery stores, remained operational, with employees reporting to work daily, often at increased risk to their health (Como et al., 2021). These workers became increasingly concerned about their health due to ongoing exposure to other individuals. Despite the concerns, this situation provided ongoing contact with peers and supportive individuals during these difficult times. In the end, parents who continued to work at their original workplaces benefited from the support of co-workers and supervisors, which helped relieve psychological stress during the COVID-19 lockdown (Daks et al., 2020). The existing research on individuals working in the workplace during the COVID-19 lockdown is limited. This highlighted an important opportunity for further research to achieve a more in-depth understanding of how parents who continued to work in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic balanced their work with family responsibilities.

Measures implemented to protect workers' mental health and sustain work performance during the COVID-19 pandemic were studied worldwide. In Japan, a study examined the links between workplace measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and their effect on employee mental health and work performance (Sasaki et al., 2020). The study involved a cross-sectional analysis of 1,448 full-time employees using an online self-report questionnaire to assess their fears and concerns

related to COVID-19, psychological stress, and work performance. The study's findings indicated that workplace measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had a positive impact on employees' mental health and work performance. Nevertheless, the result of their study have limitations that hinder its application to broader questions pertaining to working in the workplace during the pandemic. The study was conducted at a single point in time during the early stages of the COVID-19 lockdowns in Japan. It is uncertain whether the same results would have been obtained if the study surveyed the same participants during the peak of the pandemic or towards its conclusion. Moreover, the study focused solely on Japanese nationals, which may limit its relevance to other cultures. At the conclusion of this study, positive associations were found between measures taken to protect workers and mental health and work performance. However, this study does not examine how an employee's mental health and work performance impact work-life balance. This emphasized the need for further research to understand better whether workplace measures during the COVID-19 lockdown helped parents achieve work-life balance.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business operations, work-life balance, and well-being was studied from the perspective of managers of micro-sized enterprises (Vinberg & Danielsson, 2021). The mixed-method study employed qualitative interviews and questionnaires with a sample of 105 managers from micro-sized enterprises in northern Sweden, conducted between October 2020 and February 2021. The researchers found that nearly all the managers in the study experienced disruption to their personal lives due to changes in their work requirements during the pandemic.

Additionally, managers in their study expressed experiencing fatigue when they returned home at the end of the day, reduced opportunity for rest and recovery, and less time for family. The findings of this study revealed that experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the well-being and work-life balance of managers. However, this study does have some limitations. The sample population was small and not randomly selected, resulting in a 50% response rate. Thus, it is unclear whether the managers are accurately represented in the study. Furthermore, the researchers recommend future studies use larger samples across various sectors along with longitudinal studies that assess the impact of pandemics before, during, and after their occurrence. In relation to the present study, the research highlights the difficulties maintaining work-life balance while working in the office. However, this study does not explain how participants managed work-life imbalance during the COVID-19 lockdown. Therefore, further exploration is needed to better understand how working parents experienced and coped with work-life balance conflicts.

Non-Work-Related Domain

Non-work-related domains are aspects of an individual's life that impact their ability to maintain a work-life balance outside of work. During the COVID-19 lockdown, parents encountered challenges in various domains, regardless of whether their work location was at home or in the pre-pandemic workplace. My study examines three non-work-related domains identified through the literature review that influenced work-life balance: family influence, gender roles and gender inequality, and psychological well-being.

Family Influence

Parents working from home found the presence of family members heavily influenced their ability to balance work and family responsibilities (Schieman et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 lockdown, family members played a significant role in influencing decisions and choices made by parents. As employers shifted their workforce to home-based operations and schools simultaneously moved to remote learning, this sudden shift generated significant changes to the work versus non-work boundaries in the household (Demaria & Vicari, 2021; Putri & Amran, 2021; Schieman et al., 2021). The premise of restricted life presented in this study suggests that limits on an individual's social life outside the home during the lockdowns led to a reduction in work-life conflict in the early months of the pandemic. This reduction occurred primarily because employers, schools, and other entities did not have a plan in place to address the sudden stoppage, which resulted in less conflict between work and life. When remote learning for children and remote work or in-person work began, the extended presence of family, specifically children, in the household reversed the initial decrease in work-life conflicts. Further analysis showed that female and male parents experienced different levels of work-life conflict, with women encountering it more than men. Elderly extended family members often generated additional conflicts for parents trying to find work-life balance, as they wanted to help but were unable to do so due to work demands and other limitations.

The challenges faced by parents of children with special needs were examined to understand the family's influence on work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic

(Calderwood et al., 2022). The researchers examined the familial influence on work-life balance related to parenting children with special needs during the pandemic, utilizing Brummelhuis and Bakker's work-home resources model (W-HR). This study proposed that maintaining a work-life balance became increasingly difficult for parents managing work responsibilities while also supporting children with emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges. Additionally, the findings indicated that family challenges posed a much greater risk to work-life balance for parents than work challenges. The results indicated that mothers, more so than fathers who participated in the study, experienced difficulties with work-life balance at a higher rate. This was largely because mothers were often the ones most likely to try to solve conflicts within the household.

Several limitations were identified in this study that hinder the broader application of its findings (Calderwood et al., 2022). The study was conducted on a specific population expected to face difficult challenges during the pandemic. Self-assessments were conducted only once a day rather than being done multiple times throughout the day. This intentional decision to ease the burden on participants prevented the researchers from accounting for variations within the day that may have influenced daily satisfaction during the study period. The study concentrated on a specific population, which limited the selection pool of study participants. To address the limitations, the researchers recommended expanding research to include additional groups facing family challenges thereby providing a broader context relevant to work-life balance conflict.

Another framework for examining the influence of family on work-life balance was the examination of both the positive and negative consequences for parents resulting

from increased exposure and more time spent with family members during the COVID-19 lockdown (Weaver & Swank, 2021). The study surveyed 11 parents who worked from home with children ages 6 – 15 years old about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a qualitative phenomenological analysis of the data gathered from the participants, the researchers identified eight themes and five sub-themes. The study identified four primary themes, along with three subthemes, that are relevant to the present study: (a) educational experience; (b) navigating roles and responsibilities with two subthemes, spousal relationship and letting go of expectations; (c) recognizing privilege; (d) routine with a subtheme of priorities; (e) monitoring communication about COVID-19 (f) vacillating emotions; (g) connection with two subthemes, lost connection/ support, and changes in connections/relationships in the future; and (h) meaningful experiences.

The transition from in-person to online education was challenging, as most study participants noted it increased their involvement in their child's education while negatively affecting their work-life balance (Weaver & Swank, 2021). Parents who assumed increased roles and responsibilities during the pandemic found that it impacted their relationships, as some tasks were not equally distributed between husbands and wives. This situation led to struggles with letting go of their expectations. While some were able to accept the circumstances, others struggled to refrain from striving for perfection in both work-related tasks and household responsibilities.

Parents acknowledged their good fortune in having jobs during this time of social distancing restrictions, which allowed them to work from home and maintain their

income (Weaver & Swank, 2021). This alleviated stress for parents, as they were not fearful of losing employment and being unable to support their families during the pandemic. Parents discovered that adjusting their routines and reprioritizing daily activities due to COVID-19 restrictions brought both comfort and dissatisfaction. Discussing the pandemic with children reduced stress in the household, but it also required the parents to make time in their day for those conversations. Both Parents and children in the household reported experiencing increased fluctuations in their emotions due to COVID-19 restrictions. As social connections outside of the immediate family decreased due to working from home, parents noted an increase in connection with family members within the household.

The study concluded that parent-child relationships strengthened during the pandemic, but the absence of work-life balance negatively affected parents and caused distress (Weaver & Swank, 2021). This study has limitations in its applicability because it lacks diversity. The study involved primarily white female counseling professionals who transitioned to work-from-home status during the pandemic without fear of losing their jobs. The limitations of this study highlight the need for future research using a more diverse population sample to achieve a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

The impact of family influence on work-life balance was examined through existing research on teleworking and work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Elbaz et al., 2022). The study investigated the effects of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic on work-life balance, using literature published between January 2020 and December 2021. The results were mixed, revealing both positive and negative impacts.

Their study of current literature revealed that having dedicated workspaces at home increased work-life balance, but the presence of family members during work hours had negative effects. Additionally, the number of family members, such as children, elderly adults, or pets living in the house also affected the work-life balance; as the number of family members increased, the work-life balance decreased. Working from home provided greater flexibility; however, going into the office helped establish clearer boundaries between work and family. Moreover, the study revealed that women, specifically those with children, faced greater challenges in maintaining work-life balance.

Several limitations were identified in the study conducted by Elbaz et al. (2022) on teleworking and work-life balance. First, the methodology used did not allow for in-depth interpretations or synthesis of the data. Additionally, a significant limitation of the study was its lack of focus on individuals who were compelled to telework without the necessary means or skillsets to do so. In their conclusion, the researchers highlighted the need for future research to explore that population for a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

Adolescent adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic was another family influence studied to determine the impact on parental work-life balance conflicts (Wang et al., 2022). Notably, this research is one of the few that focuses specifically on adolescence; most studies on parent work-life conflicts typically concentrate on the period of early childhood. The researchers highlighted that adolescence is a developmental stage marked by increased vulnerabilities related to family dynamics and

mental health difficulties. During this time, adolescents seek greater autonomy but still require support from parents, which can affect the work-life balance for parents- especially those who worked from home while their children participated in remote learning.

The findings suggested that parents' ability to manage work-life balance is linked to their mental health and their adolescents' adjustment to changes in their daily routines. However, the study's results have limitations and must be interpreted within a cultural context. The study participants were Chinese from a middle Socioeconomic Status background living in an affluent area of Beijing, China. Therefore, their findings may not be applicable to other ethnic groups or socioeconomic backgrounds without further studies involving a more diverse population, as the family dynamic can vary significantly due to different hardships. This study highlighted the importance of increasing participant diversity and analyzing data from before the COVID-19 pandemic to make meaningful comparisons that reveal any true changes resulting from the pandemic.

The influence of family during the COVID-19 pandemic was linked to parental burnout and conflicts in work-life balance, and it also led to an increase in child maltreatment without proper intervention (Griffith, 2020). Parental burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic often occurred when an imbalance between parenting and remote learning while working remotely from home. This study indicated that stress levels increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic as parents managed the challenges of remote learning, work from home, and full-time parenting. While other predictive factors associated with parental burnout were identified in the study, the

influence of the family played a significant role in the phenomenon. Low levels of support or lack of social support from family and lack of leisure time were significant factors contributing to the risk of parental burnout. Parents who worked from home often had to postpone work-related tasks until a time when remote learning tasks were completed or family members were asleep. Self-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfectionism were identified as factors contributing to parental burnout. Parents often struggled with lofty expectations they placed upon themselves, along with deep concerns about potential negative perceptions of their parenting by others. The findings from this study are difficult to generalize across different cultures or populations due to the lack of specificity pertaining to data sources referenced. It is uncertain whether culture or socioeconomic status would alter the findings in this study because they are not referenced. Nonetheless, this study provides valuable insights into how family dynamics can contribute to work-life imbalance and parental burnout, which can have negative consequences for family members, especially during challenging conditions like those faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Familial influence significantly affected work-life balance for parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The burden of juggling between increased needs of family members and work tasks ultimately disrupted work performance, leading to a decline in work-life balance. While numerous studies have explored the concept of work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly concerning familial influence, this research has not led to a complete understanding of the phenomenon. The limited diversity among study participants limits the applicability of the findings to other

demographics. Furthermore, previous studies involving familial influence on work-life balance have often overlooked cultural differences and the varying restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 lockdown that can influence family dynamics (Spinelli et al., 2020). Notably, very few studies exist that examine households with adolescent children. Therefore, further research is necessary to examine familial influence on work-life balance, incorporating more cultural and socioeconomic diversity that includes families with adolescent children.

Gender Roles and Gender Inequality

Extensive studies have examined the conflicts related to work-life balance that parents faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies have highlighted the differences in gender roles and the issue of gender inequality. Current research on work-life balance indicates that women reported more difficulties with work-life balance than men, primarily due to traditional gender roles and inequality in the household (Griffith, 2020; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022a; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022b; Wang et al., 2022). Traditionally, women have been responsible for a greater share of household chores and caregiver tasks than men. This imbalance led to significant distress and hindered their ability to achieve work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic when families spent more time at home due to social restrictions.

Visual images of men and women were used to examine their impact on perceptions of gender roles and gender inequality related to work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ruzungunde & Zhou, 2021). The researchers analyzed images of men and women that appeared in internet search results for “work-life balance” to form

the basis for their study. The findings indicated that gender ideologies persist in modern-day society, and as a result, women continue to provide the majority of caregiver responsibilities. The researchers recommend that future workplace policies implement methods to address gender inequality and long-standing gender beliefs, helping women better achieve work-life balance.

A further examination of the effects of gender roles and inequality on work-life balance satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic was conducted in Italy during the second wave of the pandemic in October 2020 (Alfano et al., 2023). Researchers studied the impact of the pandemic on work-life balance satisfaction through a cross-sectional survey of 803 Italian workers. Their study focused on identifying various factors that influence work-life balance satisfaction: gender, education level, family characteristics, type of employment, work mode (remote versus in-person), and the average household size per resident.

Their findings indicate that women reported lower satisfaction with work-life balance compared to their male counterparts. Social norms and the division of household tasks resulted in a heavier workload for women, even with the increase in remote work opportunities during the pandemic. However, working remotely was recognized as a significant benefit, providing opportunities to increase work-life balance and satisfaction during the pandemic.

Their study highlighted important concerns about achieving work-life balance satisfaction, but it also had some limitations. First, the study did not account for the diverse work-family dynamics that exist beyond the general population studied in Italy.

The study focused on individuals shortly after the first wave of the pandemic, which limits its findings. The researchers recommend that future studies include a diverse population from various regions and time periods. While the study identified several negative influences affecting individuals, it did not explore the various coping mechanisms they used to manage these stressors. This highlights a need for a more thorough analysis of how individuals navigated these challenges to better understand their resilience and adaptive strategies.

Working women in Bangladesh were studied to determine if factors such as gender roles and gender inequality affected work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Basak, 2021). This study examined 105 working women in various professions across Bangladesh, such as teaching, banking, healthcare, and public and private sectors, using multiple regression analysis, ANOVA, and hypothesis testing. The researchers suggested that work-life balance involved more than a division between work-life and non-work-life; it requires addressing both areas as well as the associated roles and responsibilities.

Their comprehensive study concluded that the eight specific variables significantly impacted the experiences of working women in Bangladesh. These variables included job satisfaction, productivity, job stress, flexibility, workplace support, work-life balance policies, work-family conflicts, and health issues. Notably, the study emphasized that elements such as job stress, job satisfaction, flexibility, and work support were linked to a healthier work-life balance for working women in Bangladesh.

This study investigates the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, but

it is uncertain whether similar results would be observed in different cultural contexts or regions. Additionally, the study does not specify whether the participants were married or single. These limitations highlighted the need for research to address these gaps to obtain a deeper understanding of the effects on working women as a group.

A comprehensive study was conducted across four different continents to examine gender roles and gender inequality related to working from home while managing family responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jagganath & Singh, 2022). The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative strategies to explore how 34 women from Africa, Australia, Europe, and India balanced working from home with family responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study highlighted the unique strategies and adaptations each participant utilized to find balance during the pandemic.

The findings indicate that disruptions caused by COVID-19 had a more negative impact on women than on men, primarily because women took on a greater share of household chores and childcare responsibilities. Additionally, the study supports the theory that social support plays a crucial role in achieving work-life balance. As these women were working from home and faced the challenges of facility closures and schools transitioning to online formats, the lack of social support adversely affected their psychological well-being.

However, this study generalizes the term *women* without detailing specifics on their demographics, leaving uncertainty about whether the results can be applied to a broader population. These limitations highlight the need for further research in this area

to gain a deeper understanding of the impacts on women as a group. By incorporating a broader and more diverse population of participants, future studies could reveal critical insights regarding the experiences and challenges faced by women across different backgrounds.

In Italy, gender roles and inequality were examined by looking at the differences in work, household chores, and childcare responsibilities between Italian men and women before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Del Boca et al., 2020). The objective of this study was to examine changes in family roles since the social distancing restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic began. The researchers surveyed 800 working Italian women between April and July 2019 to examine work inequalities. In April 2020, they repeated the interviews and added a similar number of non-working Italian women. The interview questionnaires were designed to examine changes in their employment status, hours of work, childcare, income, and overall work and family satisfaction during the pandemic. The findings revealed that most of the increased housework fell on women, while childcare responsibilities were more evenly shared amongst couples. Only 23% of women compared to 33% of men continued working at their usual work locations, while 44% of women worked from home versus 30% of men (Del Boca et al., 2020). Ultimately, the study concludes that working women with children ages 0-5 were most affected and found it challenging to achieve work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results are not without limitations. This study were obtained using a sample population of Italian working women before and during the initial stage of the pandemic.

The partners of the study participants were not interviewed; the women interviewed; instead, the women interviewed answered questions about their partners, which may have introduced bias into the results obtained. Further research involving both parents is essential to better understand the effects of work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Psychological Well-Being

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant challenges for parents psychological well-being as they confronted new and unforeseen challenges, such as homeschooling, while simultaneously working from home (Clemens et al., 2021). Parents' psychological well-being was further impacted by the loss of essential social support resources, such as extended family members, friends, and coworkers due to social distancing restrictions (Clemens et al., 2021; Weaver & Swank, 2021; Wolor et al., 2021). Before to the COVID-19 pandemic, research on psychological well-being indicated that extended periods of quarantine and isolation could lead to post-traumatic stress disorder in individuals (Sprang & Silman, 2013). Research during the COVID-19 lockdowns has shown that parents' psychological well-being is directly linked to perceived stress and positive coping.

The effect of adolescents in the household on parents' psychological well-being and related stressors was examined during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Alonzi et al., 2021). The researchers asserted that stressors for parents with adolescents were heightened due to vulnerabilities and challenges associated with that stage of development. Their findings indicated four key areas that influence stress among parents

with children under the age of 18: family, work, personal well-being, and finances. The variations in stressors experienced by parents was attributed to gender, marital status, education levels, and physical health. The researchers recommend that future studies explore a wider range of populations to gain a better understanding of the processes that influence parents' perceptions of stress and their impact on family dynamics. The findings in this study are limited and may not be applicable to diverse populations, given that a substantial portion of the study participants were predominantly white (non-Hispanic), married, and identified as female. This lack of diversity in the sample limits the ability to generalize the findings to individuals from different racial, marital, and gender backgrounds. Further research with a more diverse sample is necessary to achieve a better understanding of the effect of adolescents in the household on parents' psychological well-being during the pandemic.

A study conducted in China explored the effects of perceived stress relievers for individuals working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chu et al., 2022). The researchers analyzed data from 500 full-time employees in Hong Kong, China at the onset of the pandemic. They examined three perceived stress relievers in the work-from-home environment, focusing on variables such as company support, supervisor's trust in subordinates, work-life balance, stress levels, happiness, non-work-related activities, and work productivity.

To reduce potential bias in responses, the researchers used a random response technique in their web-based survey design (Chu et al., 2022). The findings in their study acknowledge that working from home can yield different results depending on the

individual's unique circumstances within their home environment. Additionally, the study suggested that a healthy work-life balance did, in fact, have a positive influence by relieving stress for those working from home. However, the study had some limitations; since it was conducted exclusively in Hong Kong, China, these results may not be representative of the global population. Therefore, future research must include a heterogeneous sample to test the results of their study on a broader population.

In Canada, the psychological well-being of remote workers was examined during and after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Como et al., 2021). The researchers focused on work-life wellness rather than work-life balance, suggesting that the former term is more suitable for addressing the well-being of Canadian remote workers. The researchers suggested the term work-life wellness was more appropriate in addressing the well-being of remote workers rather than work-life balance. Their study suggests that understanding and focusing on work-life wellness contributes to improvements in remote workers' physical health, mental health, and productivity.

The study defined work-life wellness as "the ability to be well in different aspects of life and feel well about the connection between work and non-work lives" (Como et al., 2021). The researchers argued that the term work-life balance, which is often associated with conflict and the pursuit of a perfect equilibrium, does not align with the realities of their study. They theorized that work and life priorities are constantly shifting, and using the term "balance" creates unrealistic expectations.

Moreover, the concept of work-life wellness allows for the exploration of positive interactions between work and personal life, emphasizing well-being without suggesting

there needs to be a balance between work and life (Como et al., 2021). To gain a deeper understanding of work-life wellness, further studies that explore its relation to gender, parenting, and relationship status is necessary.

The relationship between children's emotional regulation, mindful parenting, parent stress, and how parents coped with parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic has been previously studied (Moran et al., 2023). The researchers studied a group of 217 caregivers of children aged 4 to 12. This population was identified due to the high probability that those children would most likely require more parental involvement and support with school closures occurring. The focus of their study was to understand how parental stress and coping abilities during the pandemic influenced children's emotional regulation. Additionally, they explored whether mindful parenting influenced the relationship.

The study results indicated that both mindful parenting and self-reported coping strategies positively influenced children's emotional regulation during the pandemic. However, while the study utilized the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to assess stress levels, it does not specify the exact stressors. Additionally, the sample population consisted mostly of white, upper-middle-class mothers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies pertaining to parental coping will require a more diverse population of participants to draw a firm conclusion. Nonetheless, this study does highlight the importance of parental coping and its impact on family dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another context in which psychological factors were examined occurred in the

exploration of psychosocial factors faced by individuals who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic (Tejero et al., 2021). The researchers studied how psychosocial factors and psychological well-being influenced the productivity of remote workers during this period. By analyzing data collected during this unprecedented situation, the researchers sought to uncover how the unique pressures of working from home influenced both the mental health of employees and their ability to complete tasks effectively.

This study revealed that to achieve work-life balance and increase productivity among employees working from home, social support and psychological detachment are critical (Tejero et al., 2021). In their study, the individuals who worked from home reported mixed results regarding work-life balance. Some participants experienced an improved work-life balance as they had more time to spend with their families and greater flexibility. However, others reported difficulties in establishing boundaries between work and family tasks.

The researchers propose that negative experiences may stem from low levels of self-discipline and struggling to psychologically detach from work (Tejero et al., 2021). Their findings highlight a troubling connection: individuals who experience chronic sleep deprivation and elevated stress levels often struggle to disengage from their professional responsibilities. This inability to shift focus can hinder them from fully engaging in and appreciating other important aspects of their lives, leading to a diminished overall quality of life.

Supervisor and peer support while working from home during the COVID-19

pandemic were beneficial resources in addressing work-life balance conflicts for remote workers. Conversely, low support from either or both could also have negative effects on the worker, such as tiredness and sleeping difficulties. This imbalance can adversely affect overall well-being and job performance, highlighting the importance of fostering a supportive remote work environment.

While the researcher highlighted the various advantages and drawbacks that working from home posed to work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic, the specific ways in which individuals managed these challenges remain unclear. To fully understand how individuals navigated this tumultuous time, further research is necessary. Future research should investigate individuals' perceptions of stressful events to gain insight into how they perceive and cope with these experiences.

Summary and Conclusions

The ability of parents to effectively manage the balance between work, family responsibilities, and personal well-being is crucial for both the parents themselves and their family members (Griffith, 2020). A review of the literature indicates that parents of early adolescents experienced work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. However, there is limited research on how these parents experienced and coped with the associated challenges. The findings underscore the need for further research to fully understand the experiences of parents and how they coped with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The term "parents" is generalized throughout the existing literature and studies examined during the literature review. A holistic exploration of parents, including a study

sample reflective of modern-day parents (i.e., foster parents, grandparents, single parents, and same-sex parents) found across the country, would provide a better understanding of how parents of early adolescents experience work-life balance conflicts. This study sought to examine parents in a broader sense to provide an accurate representation and holistic assessment of the parental caregivers and their experiences.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents were forced to change the way they performed their jobs, regardless of whether they were working from home or in the workplace (Griffith, 2020). Despite the type of work conducted by parents during the COVID-19 lockdowns, parents faced challenges as they attempted to balance their time between work and their family during an uncertain and tumultuous period (Wolor et al., 2021). Parents who were able to work from home found difficulties establishing boundaries between their work and family life. Simultaneously, those parents who continued to work at their workplace also found hardships as their children were now spending more time at home unsupervised due to school closures. The study results are mixed; parents working from home, as well as those who continued working in the usual job location, also reported benefits (Alfano et al., 2023; Del Boca et al., 2020; Tavares et al., 2021). What is not fully understood is how they coped with these unique circumstances when faced with increased stress.

Gender roles and gender inequality disrupted the work-life balance of many parents during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Households that struggled with work-life balance experienced unequal divisions of labor between men and women throughout the COVID-19 lockdown. Studies such as those conducted by Del Boca et al. (2020)

indicated that women were disproportionally affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns in comparison to men. However, most respondents in the studies were women who identified as white from a middle to upper-middle socioeconomic status. Shirmohammadi et al. (2022b) suggested that the imbalance in caregiver responsibilities had a negative effect on work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Therefore, it is imperative that a diverse study, including both parents, be conducted to understand how the phenomenon was experienced and coped with.

A review of the existing literature highlights the need for the present study to address the research gaps concerning the work-life balance conflicts parents of early adolescents experienced during COVID-19 lockdowns. There is limited literature discussing the work-life balance conflicts of parents during this difficult timeframe. Current literature focuses on parents from specific groups and does not include the broad spectrum of caregivers that filled the role of parents during the lockdowns. In addition, work-life balance conflicts are discussed in the current literature, but very little is known about the stress and coping experienced by parents during the pandemic. Additional studies are essential to gain insight into how this phenomenon was experienced by parents and how they coped with work-life balance conflicts.

Next, in Chapter 3, there are explanations of the choice of the qualitative methodology and design for conducting the dissertation study. This section outlines the various components of Chapter 3 of the doctoral study. including the role of the researcher, the qualitative research study participant role, the population recruitment process, ethical research rules and guidelines, interview data collection, and the

organization process. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the validity and reliability of the interview data. It provides a detailed description of the planning and execution of the study to examine the work-life balance conflicts faced by parents during the COVID-109 lockdowns.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the work-life balance conflicts those parents of early adolescents faced during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This chapter discusses the research methods and methodology used to examine the work-life balance conflicts those parents of early adolescents experienced during the COVID-19 lockdowns. To examine this phenomenon, the study focused on the subjective experiences of the parents who had early adolescent children (ages 11 through 14) living in the household during the COVID-19 lockdowns. As stated in Chapter 1, this study explored the lived experiences of the parents as they encountered work-life balance conflicts by utilizing two research questions. These questions focused on describing and understanding the parents' perceptions of the phenomenon in this study.

This chapter has a more detailed discussion of the qualitative research design and rationale for selecting the approach used to examine the phenomenon. In addition, this chapter defines and explains the role of the researcher in this study. Furthermore, this chapter provides more information on participation selection logic, including the process for selecting the specific population of the study, the selection criteria required for the participants, and the minimum sample size. The chapter concludes with an explanation of instruments and operationalization of constructs, data analysis, threats to validity, ethical concerns, and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

The research design provided a framework for the study and helped to ensure that the methods of conducting research were in sync with the research objectives (Creswell

& Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014; Sileyew, 2019). Moreover, this research design served as a guide for collecting and analyzing information while also ensuring consistency, reliability, and validity throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014; Sileyew, 2019). A comprehensive and thoughtful approach to selecting research design helped in understanding a key aspect of this study: the subjective experiences and beliefs at a conscious level (Qutoshi, 2018). This approach also assisted in answering the study's two research questions:

- RQ 1: What work-life balance conflicts did parents with early adolescents experience in their lives during the COVID-19 lockdown?
- RQ 2: How did parents with early adolescents cope with work-life balance conflicts during COVID-19 lockdowns?

This study focused on understanding how parents with early adolescent children experienced work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. A qualitative research design helped guide necessary decisions along the process of conducting the study and exploring the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014; Sileyew, 2019). Those key decisions consisted of research objectives and approach, sampling methods, and data collection procedures. When choosing an appropriate research design for a study, it is essential to consider all these factors. Each factor can significantly influence the overall effectiveness and relevance of the research outcomes. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014; Sileyew, 2019). As stated by Creswell and Creswell (2017), the choice of research design should be guided by the objectives of the study and what the researcher aims to achieve.

Research Traditions

In this study, a qualitative methodology was selected to examine the work-life conflicts experienced by parents during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Qualitative research methodologies are focused on exploring and understanding human experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Qutoshi, 2018). This methodology assisted in revealing insight into the human experience that other design methodologies, such as quantitative or mixed methods, may not be able to provide.

Quantitative research methods generally involve researchers entering studies with a clear understanding and expectations for outcomes, often taking the form of a testable hypothesis. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Quantitative research methods also employ experiments, surveys with close-ended questions, and numerical observations to test or confirm the hypothesis or theory that supports the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study was exploratory; it sought to understand the subjective lived experiences, and it was uncertain what findings might emerge from the research once it was completed. Quantitative methodology typically focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017); thus, it would not provide an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing the phenomenon found in exploring the lived experiences of the individual. This would have left out an in-depth understanding from the point of view of the individuals who experienced the phenomenon. Furthermore, the absence of a theorized hypothesis, in addition to this study's focus on an in-depth understanding of subjective experiences, made quantitative research methods not a good choice for this type of study.

Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in a single study. This methodology employs a mixed data approach that integrates numerical and textual data, along with statistical analysis, all within a single method (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A mixed methods approach involves the researcher employing qualitative research techniques for one phase of the study while utilizing quantitative methods for another phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In studies where neither qualitative nor quantitative methods alone are sufficient to address the subject, a mixed methods approach offers a viable solution. This study does not aim to test or confirm a theory or hypothesis, nor will it utilize quantitative data collection methods. Consequently, since there is no theory or hypothesis to examine and the focus is on understanding the subjective lived experiences, the use of mixed methods was ruled out.

Qualitative research employs various designs to explore the study's subject thoroughly through non-numerical data, aiming to understand concepts and experiences (Moen & Middelthon, 2015; Neubauer et al., 2019). Typical data collection methods employed in qualitative research include interviews with open-ended questions, observations described in words, and literature reviews to explore the subject of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014; Sileyew, 2019). Qualitative research methods carry inherent risks of biases that researchers need to address in their study design. These research biases include the Hawthorne effect (tendency to behave differently when the research participant is aware of the observation), observer bias (researcher's expectation, opinions, or prejudice influence the study), recall bias (inability of the participants to recall information accurately), and social desirability bias (participants provide responses

that they believe will make them look good, concealing their true experiences; Norris, 1997). Understanding these biases is crucial for researchers in designing studies and interpreting data in a way that acknowledges and mitigates their potential impact on research outcomes.

Phenomenology Research Design Rationale

A qualitative research design focuses on exploring and understanding complex phenomena and the meaning attributed to them by an individual or group (Patton, 2014). Research designs used in qualitative studies seek to go beyond statistical analysis and explore the human experience in-depth in ways that a quantitative study may be unable to uncover. There are several qualitative research designs, including grounded theory, ethnography, case studies, narrative research, and phenomenological research. While they share many similarities, they also emphasize different perspectives (Patton, 2014).

Grounded theory uses inductive methods for conducting qualitative research grounded in data collected from the field to derive a theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). This approach involves continuous comparison and analysis of gathered data as the researcher identifies categories, concepts, and relationships to formulate a theory explaining the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). As previously mentioned, grounded theory seeks to create a theory to explain the phenomenon of study; this study did not. This study aimed to explore the subjective lived experiences and the essence of work-life balance conflicts faced by parents of early adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Therefore, grounded theory was not selected as the qualitative approach for this study because there are existing theories that

are more appropriate, which will be discussed later in this section.

Ethnography examines the collective experiences within a specific culture with a focus on understanding a cultural phenomenon from the individual's perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). This research design enables the researcher to comprehend a group's shared culture, conventions, and social dynamics (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). Ethnography is commonly used to study distant or unfamiliar cultures and specific cultures (i.e., firefighters, police officers, medical professionals) within the researcher's very own community (Hammersley, 2006). This approach emphasizes the exploration of a specific group's culture and practices, which does not align with the purpose of this study.

A case study approach is often part of qualitative research; however, case studies can also be quantitative or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Starman, 2013). The case study approach aims to provide a detailed description and analysis of one or more cases (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014; Starman, 2013). The intensive study of one or more cases involving specific subjects—such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon—within their real-life context is a fundamental aspect of this approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014; Starman, 2013). This study aims to explore a new and emerging phenomenon; however, there are very few existing case studies related to it. Consequently, the case study approach was insufficient for studying this phenomenon and was considered inappropriate for this research.

Narrative research explores the stories individuals tell about their lives and creates

narratives based on their personal experiences (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). This method is effective for understanding culture, historical experiences, identities, and lifestyles from the perspectives of those sharing their stories (Butina, 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2014). Narrative research is not well-suited for studies aiming to achieve an unobstructed view of participants' lives (Butina, 2015). Instead, it is more appropriate for exploring the real-life experiences of individuals or small groups (Creswell, 2007). This study concentrates on how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences related to the phenomenon in question. A narrative approach focuses on specific groups or individuals, limiting the generalizability and representation of a broader population. Therefore, this approach was deemed inappropriate for this study.

Finally, the phenomenological approach aims to derive meaning from a specific situation by examining the phenomenon through individuals' perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Neubauer et al., 2019; Patton, 2014; Zahavi, 2003). In this type of study, researchers examine the subjective experiences of participants through interviews or observations to uncover underlying structures and patterns (Creswell, 2007; Neubauer et al., 2019; Patton, 2014; Zahavi, 2003). The objective of phenomenology is to directly investigate a phenomenon as participants consciously share their experiences without relying on theories to explain its occurrence (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Neubauer et al., 2019; Patton, 2014; Zahavi, 2003). This study aims to explore how parents of early adolescent children experienced and interpreted their work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Hence, a phenomenological approach was selected for this research due to its ability to delve deeply into and illuminate the essence of lived experiences, allowing researchers to grasp the nuanced and subjective realities of individuals (Zahavi, 2003). This methodology provides a rich and detailed understanding of how participants perceive and interpret their world, ultimately fostering a more profound comprehension of their experiences.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that delves into the rich tapestry of experiences related to specific events (Zahavi, 2003). It seeks to examine how individuals perceive and engage with these experiences, capturing the essence of their lived realities. By focusing on the nuanced meanings that individuals extract from their encounters, phenomenology aims to uncover the subjective interpretations that shape our understanding of the world around us. This investigation not only sheds light on personal experiences but also highlights the diverse ways in which people make sense of their lives and the events that define them. This study examines two key concepts within phenomenological research design: lived experiences and essence (Neubauer et al., 2019). The first concept, lived experiences, refers to individuals' first-hand accounts of their experiences related to a particular phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). The second concept, essence, pertains to the meaning that individuals derive from their experiences with that phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). Therefore, the phenomenological approach was deemed the most appropriate methodology for this study as it enables the researcher to gain comprehensive insights from participants by delving into their subjective experiences. This approach facilitates a nuanced analysis of how individuals

interpret and assign meaning to their lived experiences, thereby enhancing the depth of understanding regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

The ability to comprehend lived experiences and their essence is a crucial element that influenced the choice of a phenomenological research design. The phenomenological research design helped explore those parents of early adolescent children's lived experiences and their description of facts associated with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns and how they constructed meaning from their exposure to the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Frechette et al., 2020; Neubauer et al., 2019; Patton, 2014). The phenomenological research design provided a unique perspective of the phenomenon from the study participant's point of view and aided in understanding the universal essence of the phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in this study was to define the phenomenon being investigated, establish objectives, formulate appropriate questions, and choose suitable tools for data collection and analysis. Moreover, ethical considerations were addressed, and plans for reporting and disseminating the results were outlined. I engaged in direct contact with the participants as they openly shared their personal experiences related to the phenomenon, providing valuable context and depth to the data collected.

Researcher bias was a risk in this study due to my own experiences during the COVID-19 lockdowns. My preferences and beliefs could have influenced the study's outcome if measures had not been taken to eliminate or minimize bias. First, all results and interactions with study participants were carefully documented, ensuring that every

detail was recorded for accurate reporting and analysis. Next, the original context of the study participants' information was documented and shared with them for accuracy. Finally, the questions designed to explore the phenomenon refrained from guiding the participant toward specific responses and posed no conflict of interest.

Methodology

The research methodology serves as a crucial roadmap for conducting the study, outlining the specific strategies and techniques employed for both data collection and analysis (Patton, 2014). This section enables other readers to assess the reliability and validity of the research conducted in the study. It outlines the logic behind participation selection, including the population being studied, the sampling strategy, selection criteria, and the number of participants, Additionally, it details the instrumentation used to collect data, the procedures for recruitment, and the data analysis plan in significant.

Parents of Participant Selection Logic

This study focuses on understanding the lived experiences of parents with early adolescent children as they encountered work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Research on the relationships between parents and their early adolescent children has been extensive; however, studies specifically focusing on these relationships during the COVID-19 lockdown are limited. Previous studies on parents and work-life balance conflicts involved children who were either pre-adolescent or in mid to late-adolescence. Therefore, this study focused specifically focused on parents of early adolescent children who experienced work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdown to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The recruitment process

was designed to actively engage a diverse population of caregivers, including single parents, same-sex parents, foster parents, and grandparents, whenever possible. This approach ensured the inclusion of individuals with valuable lived experiences related to the phenomenon being studied.

The study was conducted with parents gathered from a combination of the Walden University research participation pool and social media. The emphasis was on obtaining parents of adolescent children who faced work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns for this study. This required a sampling strategy to select participants with experience most relevant to the research question who could provide valuable insight. Therefore, this study employed a combined strategy using convenience sampling and snowball sampling to select study participants. Convenience and snowball sampling are non-probability sampling techniques used to select participants with unique experiences relevant to the research question (Patton, 2014). Participants were intentionally selected due to their specific knowledge, skills, and experiences with the subject of the study.

Convenience sampling strategy was used to obtain volunteer participants from the Walden University participant pool and social media. According to Creswell (2013), convenience sampling refers to participants who are readily accessible to the researcher. In this study, the convenient access to research participants through the participant pool and social media made this a logical choice for the sampling strategy. Walden students had access to volunteer for the study using a link provided on the Walden University participant portal. Individuals on social media were selected from a volunteer pool using

an invite and link shared on social media.

The participant selection also involved recruiting additional volunteers through study participants, a method known as snowballing sampling. This method was necessary for this study to obtain a second parent, in case they decided to participate, as only one individual initially received the study invitation. Furthermore, participants were asked if they knew other parents who met the inclusion criteria for this study to help achieve a diverse population. This sampling method facilitated the quick selection of participants with similar or identical lived experiences, such as work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The inclusion criteria for the study required that parents be employed—either remotely or in the office—and also responsible for providing care for early adolescent children during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The target population included parents who experienced work-life balance conflicts while having early adolescent children living in their homes. Parents with adolescent children but were not the primary custodial parents or whose children did not reside in the same household during the lockdown were excluded. Additionally, parents who were not employed during the COVID-19 lockdowns were also excluded, given the nature of the study.

The targeted sample size for this study was approximately 12 participants, specifically consisting of parents who met predetermined selection criteria. These criteria were designed to ensure a diverse representation of backgrounds and experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issues being examined. According to Alase (2017), a phenomenological study can involve between 2 and 25 participants,

depending on the degree of homogeneity among them. Smaller, homogeneous sample sizes enable researchers to conduct a detailed analysis of the data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences related to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As noted by Creswell (2013), it is essential to select participants who share similar lived experiences of the phenomenon in phenomenological research. Therefore, this study included 12 participants to ensure a sufficient sample size for gathering relevant information about the phenomenon and achieving data saturation.

To identify, contact, and recruit participants for the study, a link was posted on social media and in the Walden University participant pool. The announcement included details about the study's purpose and the criteria for participation. Individuals interested in contributing to the study were encouraged to click on the link provided, which directed them to a website containing additional information. This site contained additional information about the study, as well as a brief survey to help determine eligibility. Before acceptance into the study, each participant was required to answer questions to confirm their eligibility.

After completing the survey and being deemed eligible, participants left their contact information so that they could be scheduled for interviews. Prior to conducting the interviews, informed consent was obtained via email. Once the participant provided consent, demographic information was collected, including gender, age, ethnicity, and work status. Additionally, participants were asked to provide a timeframe with their contact information that was most convenient for contacting them, to avoid delays in scheduling interviews.

In qualitative research, the goal is to reach saturation with a sample size that adequately describes the phenomenon of interest while reducing the risk of repetitive data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Saturation can often be achieved with a small number of interviews, particularly in studies focused on homogenous populations with a very specific objective. The point of saturation in an inductive study largely relies on the judgment and experience of the researcher (Guest et al., 2020). In this study, saturation was reached when further data collection became counterproductive and did not contribute additional information to the overall research. In a phenomenological study, in-depth interviews are conducted with participants, generating a substantial amount of data. Thus, a large sample size was not necessary in this phenomenological study to obtain saturation (Sarfo et al., 2021).

Instrumentation

To gather rich and insightful data, I utilized a semistructured interview approach. This afforded flexibility that not only allowed for an in-depth exploration of responses but also opened the door for engaging follow-up questions that deepened flexibility in conducting follow-up questions. Semistructured interviews are highly effective for this phenomenological study, as they helped to extract detailed insight by prompting participants to clarify, elaborate, or rephrase their responses if necessary (W. C. Adams, 2015). Semistructured interviews, while promoting clarity and deep meaning, revealed patterns by utilizing a flexible framework that allowed for comparisons among participants.

In this study, interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the participant's

geographical locations. All sessions were recorded using audio only, with the participant's consent, to ensure an accurate record of the interview. Throughout the interview process, no video recordings of participants were made, ensuring that their privacy and confidentiality were fully maintained. Prior to conducting the interviews, a tracking number, along with the date, time, and location of each interview, was documented to facilitate the organization of information.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were reminded of its purpose: to enhance their situational awareness. They were also informed that they could request the study results if they desired. Additionally, participants were reminded that they had the right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time, with no consequences for choosing to do so.

The interviews consisted of 45-minute to one-hour blocks, with only parents participating; no adolescent children were included in the interview process. During the interview session, the research participants were asked open-ended interview questions related to their experience with the phenomenon. Open-ended questions were presented to the participants to increase the likelihood that they would share their experiences. As the participants described their experiences related to the phenomenon, the information was recorded and later transcribed using Zoom. During the interview process, I was responsible for collecting, consolidating, and safeguarding the research participants' responses. Once the interview was completed, the data gathered was transcribed and categorized immediately to help formulate the study's results. Additionally, a thank-you email was sent to the participant, along with a small gift of appreciation for their

participation.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To recruit interested participants, information about the study was posted in the form of an electronic invitation on various websites, social media platforms, and the Walden University participant pool. The invitation included information on the type of study, its purpose, eligibility criteria, incentives, and contact details. Pertinent contact information was included to allow interested participants to ask additional questions if necessary.

The interested participants were able to follow the posted link in the recruitment invitation to a SurveyMonkey questionnaire, which included questions to help determine whether the individual met the inclusion criteria. Once participants were deemed eligible and agreed to participate in the study, the informed consent form was emailed to them. The informed consent described the study, what the gathered data would be used for, and who the researcher planned to share the results with to help the participants make an informed decision about using their personal information in the study. The identity of the research participants was kept confidential throughout the process. They were not identified personally in the research or to other participants to protect confidentiality. All information related to the study was secured using proper storage devices to protect the data collected. In addition, appropriate disclosure was discussed with the participants, as well as re-traumatization during interviews. Research participants were advised of their options to discontinue the interview if the memories became too stressful. Participants were also provided with the national hotline number for additional support.

The interested individuals who met the inclusion requirements were contacted via email. After identifying the participants, notifying them, and confirming their agreement to participate in the study, the process continued until 12 participants were selected. After identifying the 12 participants, other interested individuals were informed of the study's participation goals. If 12 participants were not identified, additional recruitment efforts were planned by distributing invitations to neighbors and posting study invites on bulletin boards in public venues such as libraries and grocery stores, with consent if necessary.

Each verified study participant was contacted using their contact information, which was submitted on the link following the Survey Monkey eligibility questionnaire, to obtain a timeframe for when they were available to conduct interviews. During the interview scheduling process, the informed consent was reviewed with the participant to include the anticipated length of the interviews (45 minutes to an hour). This timeframe afforded sufficient time for any follow-up questions or clarification if necessary. Once the interview was scheduled, a follow-up email was sent to each participant, reaffirming their interview's date, time, and location. Research participants were also informed of the expected window to complete all interviews related to the study if rescheduling became necessary.

Data collection was conducted using several methods to help understand the individuals' experiences during the interviews. Semistructured interviews were used as a guide to assist the researcher in collecting data from the participants related to the research questions. During this process, I took notes and recorded the transcription sessions using transcription software. All sessions were conducted virtually using Zoom

meetings. Every interview session was recorded, and the audio was transcribed using Zoom's audio transcription services. The transcripts and written notes taken from each session were used as data to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences.

Data collection took place over several weeks; therefore, each participant was asked to conduct one interview with the possibility of a follow-up interview if necessary. Although a follow-up interview was not required, if needed, I would have reached out to the participants and scheduled a time convenient for them within the interview timeframe. Once the individual completed their interview, a debriefing occurred immediately afterward. The purpose of the debriefing was to ensure the individual understood what took place during the interview, how their contributions would be used, and to answer any questions they may have had about the study. Additionally, participants received a small gift via email as a token of appreciation for their participation in the study. Data collection was completed within the twelve months allotted after the IRB application was approved.

Data Analysis Plan

In this study, it was important to understand the phenomenon through the "lived experiences" of the participants and how they made meaning of it. IPA was used to explore what was significant to the research participants and how they understood and perceived their own lives and experiences (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). To analyze qualitative data, Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers begin by creating a comprehensive description of their own experiences with the phenomenon. This approach helps avoid interjecting one's own experiences into the participants' narratives. The first

step in the data analysis plan was coding. This involved the researcher reviewing participants' responses to identify common themes, repeated words, and phrases (Alase, 2017). In this study, interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim into a document and then analyzed using color coding and categorization to highlight common themes. To achieve the best results, I read and listened to the material at least two or three times. This repetition reinforced my understanding and retention, allowing me to grasp the key concepts more effectively. Every review offered new insights that enhanced the understanding of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). This repeated exposure not only clarified concepts but also helped me understand nuances and intricacies that might have been missed during a single reading. This gave a clearer understanding of the participants and the messages they were conveying. After completing the review, I created a list of significant statements based on the participant's interview responses to establish a foundation for understanding the phenomenon.

After compiling the list of significant statements from the coded data, the information was organized by grouping it into themes (Alase, 2017). During that period, I carefully documented the experiences of the research participants regarding the phenomenon by crafting a detailed written description based on their statements. I focused on capturing the essence of their feelings, perceptions, and reactions, ensuring that their voices were authentically represented. By delving into the nuances of their narratives, I provided a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences, highlighting common themes and individual variations that emerged from their accounts. This was referred to as the "textural description" (Creswell, 2013) of the participants'

experiences, which included a verbatim account of their experiences from the transcripts related to the phenomenon.

The next step in the phenomenological analysis involved describing how the participants' experienced the phenomenon, which is known as the “structural description” (Creswell, 2013). At this stage, I provided a detailed account of the settings that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon, based on the analyzed data. This was referred to as the “structural description” of how things happened to the participants. During this stage, I provided a detailed description of the settings that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon based on the analyzed data.

A composite description that combines both textural and structural elements was created to convey the essence of the participants’ experiences. This approach provides the audience with insight into "what" the research participants experienced and "how" they experienced the phenomenon in a rich, contextual manner (Alase, 2017). Understanding the phenomenological significance of these experiences and their impact on the participants was the final step in the data analysis process.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness builds trust and confidence in the findings while accurately reflecting the participants' experiences. In qualitative research, four criteria are essential for assessing a study’s trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Frey, 2018). Together, these criteria form a comprehensive framework that enhances the integrity and reliability of qualitative research outcomes.

Credibility is the first criterion that must be established; it is considered the most

important aspect of establishing trustworthiness. Credibility in a study is achieved when the researcher can demonstrate that the participants' experiences have been accurately reflected to readers (Slevin & Sines, 1999; Stahl & King, 2020). When readers with the same experiences as the participants can read the study and easily identify with them, then it is considered credible. This study established its credibility through data saturation and triangulation of research findings. This involved a thorough review of individual interview transcripts, researcher notes, and recordings while identifying and comparing themes across the study participants. Additionally, it included exploring the data until no new themes or information emerged from the research participants.

Transferability is achieved when the study's findings can be applied or generalized to other populations or situations (Slevin & Sines, 1999; Stahl & King, 2020). In qualitative research, transferability refers to the judgment made by either the reader or the researcher, based on the evidence presented and the similarities between the settings involved in the study. To establish transferability, it is recommended to use a technique such as thick description, which includes a detailed account of the researcher's experiences during data collection (Stahl & King, 2020). This study employed a detailed description during data collection to provide a clear understanding of the research participants within their cultural context and living environment. The focus was on accurately describing the event and its significance to the participants, thoroughly capturing their thoughts and emotions. As a result, readers can assess their connection to this study and consider applying the findings from this research to other contexts.

Dependability ensures that the findings of the study are consistent and can be

repeated (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Stahl & King, 2020). The key to achieving reliability is providing a study that allows another researcher to review the findings and arrive at similar conclusions, interpretations, and results. To establish dependability, the steps taken from the start of the study to the final findings were transcribed in detail, creating an audit trail for this study. This included a complete set of notes on decisions made during the process, which encompassed reflective thoughts, sampling, emergence of findings, and data management. This provides another researcher with the ability to audit this study, follow the steps taken, and determine similar findings.

For the findings of this study to be validated by other researchers, an objective reality must be present in the results. Confirmability ensures that the collected data and interpretations are based on the data itself rather than the researcher's imagination. (Stahl & King, 2020). This indicates that the findings are based on participants' responses, free from any potential researcher bias. Additionally, recognizing my role in the research, along with my previous experiences, assumptions, and beliefs about the phenomenon, helped me understand how they might have influenced the research process. This awareness was crucial in addressing potential bias in the study. This process is referred to as reflexivity, which involves a critical consideration of the researcher's influence and the possible effects they may have on the outcomes of the study. This concept emphasizes the importance of recognizing and reflecting on one's own biases, perspectives, and emotional responses throughout the research process. To improve confirmability, this study included an audit trail that documented every step of the data analysis process, offering a clear rationale for the decisions made.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical principles guiding this study are based on the Belmont Report. This report outlines crucial ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, emphasizing the protection of their rights and welfare. It highlights three key principles: respect for people, which acknowledges individual autonomy; beneficence, which focuses on enhancing benefits and reducing harm; and justice, which promotes fair distribution of research benefits and burdens (Kazdin, 2016; Nagai et al., 2022). These principles help ensure ethical practices and build trust in the research community.

The first ethical principle, respect for people, consists of two key requirements. First, it is important to recognize that individuals are autonomous and possess the right to form their own opinions and make choices freely (Kazdin, 2016; Nagai et al., 2022). Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge that not all individuals possess the capacity for self-determination and may require protection. This principle highlights that participants in research studies should participate voluntarily and with adequate information. This study focused on the fundamental principle of the Belmont Report related to informed consent. Participants were provided with this information before research interviews began. Furthermore, at the start of the interviews, participants were made aware that they had the right to terminate their participation at any time without facing any penalties.

Beneficence is the second ethical principle, which emphasizes treating individuals ethically by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm. The Belmont Report outlines two general rules related to beneficence: "do no harm" and "maximize

possible benefits while minimizing possible harms" (Kazdin, 2016; Nagai et al., 2022). In this study, prioritizing the emotional responses of participants during the interview process was considered more significant than the advantages of collecting their information. Participants had the right to terminate the interview at any time and could choose not to answer questions that may cause discomfort or trigger painful memories.

The third ethical principle, justice, emphasizes the crucial importance of equality within the realm of research ethics. It asserts that no individual should be unjustly denied access to the benefits of research, nor should they be subjected to undue burdens without valid justification (Kazdin, 2016; Nagai et al., 2022). In adherence to this ethical standard, this study implemented a careful participant selection process that deliberately excluded considerations of socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity. By doing so, the study focused on creating a diverse participant pool, ensuring that individuals were not chosen merely based on their easy accessibility, vulnerable situations, or potential for manipulation.

The Informed Consent document provided to research participants was meticulously crafted in accordance with the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards established by Walden University. This comprehensive document included a thorough explanation of the research procedures, outlining each step of the process in clear and accessible language. It provided an in-depth description of the potential risks involved, ensuring that participants fully understood any adverse effects that could arise. Additionally, the document outlined the anticipated benefits of participation, highlighting how the research

might contribute to the broader field of study.

Moreover, participants were encouraged to ask questions about the procedures or any aspect of the study, fostering an open and transparent dialogue. Importantly, the document included a clear statement reassuring participants that their involvement was entirely voluntary, emphasizing their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. This emphasis on participant autonomy was designed to create a trusting and respectful environment for everyone involved in the research.

The results of the study were made available to the participants during the member-checking process. The research data is stored on my personal, secure computer and a portable hard drive, which serves as a backup. Access to this computer is restricted to the researcher, and both the computer and the hard drive are protected with strong passwords. This study ensured that no identifying information was linked to any specific participant, maintaining their anonymity. All research data, including handwritten notes, audio recordings, transcripts, and other study-related documentation, are safeguarded and maintained on the password-protected portable hard drive. This data will be retained for a minimum of three years after the study concludes.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the work-life balance challenges faced by parents of early adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This chapter outlined the research methods used to address the study's research questions. It also included a detailed explanation of the research methodology used in this study, along with a thorough overview of the participant recruitment process.

I detail the criteria used to select individuals who contributed to the research. Furthermore, I described the data collection process in depth, specifying the techniques and tools utilized to gather meaningful information.

Additionally, this chapter outlines the data collection process, which involves several methods. Specifically, it includes the methods used in this research, such as semistructured interviews, audio recordings, transcriptions, and notes taken during the study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis, along with a detailed discussion of the findings and their implications for social change.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and understand how parents with early adolescent children experienced work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In most cases, parents were forced to adjust their normal routines to accommodate the changes brought on by COVID-19 restrictions. This study addressed the specific problems of how parents with early adolescent children experienced work-life balance conflicts and coped with them during COVID-19 lockdowns.

I interviewed parents of early adolescent children to explore their lived experiences related to work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In this chapter, I describe how the study was conducted, the data collection procedures administered, and the data analysis techniques performed. In addition, Chapter 4 explains the results of the analyses conducted to answer the research questions.

Setting

This research study was conducted using individual interviews with participants through video conferencing software. This method was selected as it provided ease of access and convenience for research participants. Study participants conducted their interviews recalling their experiences with the phenomenon of study. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, the participants experienced changes in their lives, both physical and psychological, that affected their lived experiences during the pandemic. These experiences ranged from changing jobs to providing academic assistance to their early adolescent children. Overall, their experiences influenced their perception of work-life

balance during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Demographics

This study included a sample of 12 parents with adolescent children who were interviewed using a semistructured interview protocol. Participant demographics such as age range, gender, and race were documented to provide a comprehensive understanding of their backgrounds. In order to ensure the confidentiality of all participants, informed consent was given, and interviews were completed in accordance with the consent form. A unique identifier (P1-P12) was assigned to each study participant to help maintain their confidentiality and protect their privacy. Table 1 contains the participant's demographics, including age range, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Table 1

Study Participant Demographics

Participants	Age Range	Gender	Race	Ethnicity
P1	31-33	Female	Black	African American
P2	45-47	Female	White	Non-Hispanic or Latino
P3	31-33	Female	White	Non-Hispanic or Latino
P4	30-32	Female	Black	African American
P5	32-34	Female	Black	African American
P6	42-44	Female	White	Non-Hispanic or Latino
P7	39-41	Female	White	Non-Hispanic or Latino
P8	34-36	Female	Black	African American
P9	34-36	Female	White	Non-Hispanic or Latino
P10	37-39	Female	White	European
P11	44-46	Female	Black	African American
P12	43-45	Female	White	Non-Hispanic or Latino

Data Collection

Upon receiving approval from the Walden IRB, I began recruiting potential study participants using the process outlined in Chapter 3. Study participants were informed of their right to discontinue involvement with the study at any time without negative

consequences. Data collection took place from August 1, 2024, to September 10th, 2024, for the participants who volunteered for this study. Participants were recruited using social media, the Walden participant pool, and snowballing techniques. Individuals who volunteered for the study were invited to complete a brief questionnaire to determine eligibility for the study. Once the questionnaire was completed, individuals who met the inclusion criteria agreed to conduct interviews after receiving pertinent information about the study, such as purpose, procedures, and means of maintaining confidentiality. All notes recorded during and after the interviews were securely stored in a locked cabinet or on an encrypted hard drive in the researcher's home office.

Using IPA, it is essential that the experiences of the study participants guide the narration of the study (Alase, 2017). Therefore, the data collection was done using semistructured, in-depth interviews. Semistructured interviews are useful in situations when the initial open-ended question requires follow-up questions or inquiries (W. C. Adams, 2015). This method of conducting interviews allows the participants to elaborate on their experiences and clarify responses, thus helping to gain a better understanding of how the individuals made meaning of their experiences with the phenomenon.

After reviewing the purpose of the interview and preliminary ground rules, such as avoiding as much as possible the mentioning of people or places that may reveal their identity unintentionally to readers, the interview began with open-ended questions pertaining to the individual's perception of work-life balance. The initial open-ended questions helped to establish a baseline for subsequent interview questions. These questions were predetermined and identical across study participants. The questions were

designed to allow the participants to talk about their experiences with work-life balance before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the conversations evolved in response to the questions, the study participants were prompted with specific questions about their personal experiences. This allowed participants to reflect specifically on their lived experiences and provided a more in-depth perspective of their world as it related to work-life balance during the pandemic.

Each semistructured interview was conducted using video conferencing software, with the study participant choosing timeframes that worked with their schedules. Study participants conducted their interviews using video conferencing tools from their home locations within the United States. This method of data collection helps to create a non-threatening and comfortable environment, which provides greater ease for the research participant to discuss sensitive issues (Creswell, 2013). The duration of interviews varied, lasting between 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the level of feedback from the participant, amount of follow-up questions, and the need to clarify responses. Throughout the interview process, I used techniques such as open-ended questions, rephrasing, summarizing, and probing to help the participant share their story while achieving a deeper and richer understanding of their lived experiences. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were given the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences and share any additional insights related to the phenomenon of study obtained during the interview process. To ensure the actual words of the participants were used, the audio recording of the participant's responses to each interview question was recorded and saved in a secure and encrypted location along with the transcript of the conversation

using transcription software embedded in the video conferencing program.

Data Analysis

Researchers are advised to begin data analysis by describing their own experiences with the phenomenon. This helps the researcher distance themselves from the lived experiences of research participants (Alase, 2017). By describing their own experiences first, the researcher can reduce the likelihood of committing researcher bias by injecting their own personal experiences into those of the participants.

Recognizing that I shared a close connection with the topic in this study, I kept a reflective journal to document my personal experiences during the data analysis process. Although I was a parent of early adolescent children during the COVID-19 lockdown, I was fortunate to have experienced minimal impacts on my work-life balance. I shared roles and responsibilities with my spouse that did not change, nor did they increase during the lockdown. I also recognized that my interpretation of the phenomenon was through the lens of a male; therefore, female participants may have a different perspective from my own. As I worked through the process of transcribing, coding, and analyzing the interviews, I continued to reflect through journaling to help avoid researcher bias.

IPA is concerned with the experiences that are of existential importance to an individual that they try to make meaning of (Nizza et al., 2021). Meaning is critical; the goal is to understand the content and complexity of those meanings and not focus solely on the frequency of statements (Osborn & Smith, 2008). This involves engaging in an interpretative relationship with the interview transcripts to learn about the respondents' mental and social world. During data analysis, the researcher attempts to make sense of

the participant's making sense of his or her experience (Nizza et al., 2021). The analysis in this study was conducted in a continuous process, moving from individual interview transcripts to group analysis to identify themes and make meaning of the participant's experience from the data. I utilized the seven-step IPA method to examine data collected from study participants described by Smith et al. (2009):

1. Read and re-read the original data from the interview transcripts to immerse oneself in the data.
2. Make initial notes by free-associating and exploring content from the data collected.
3. Develop emergent themes by focusing on chunks of transcript and analysis notes made into themes.
4. Search for connections across emergent themes.
5. Move to the following transcript and try to bracket previous themes while maintaining an open mind. This will allow each transcript to remain autonomous.
6. Search for patterns across transcripts, noting any unusual instances.
7. Take interpretations to deeper levels importing additional theories and temporal referents to view the analysis.

Prior to beginning the analysis, the interviews in this study were transcribed immediately and shared with the study participant within 24 to 48 hours after the interview concluded to ensure accurate recording of the participants' experience. In the first step, each participant's transcript was read multiple times to understand the

individual's experiences conveyed in their own words. This consisted of reading, reviewing, and highlighting statements from their interview transcript. This process was conducted at least three times in addition to listening to the audio recording multiple times to help gain further context of their lived experiences.

The next step consisted of making initial notes by free-associating and exploring content from the data collected. I assigned initial codes to the previously highlighted statements identified in the participant's transcripts. This was conducted by reading the statement again and associating single words that helped to identify the initial interpretation of the statement, as shown in Table 2. I compared all codes across all participants using a manual process in Microsoft Excel. After I completed coding all the participants' transcripts, 546 notes were identified and coded, citing the important accounts of the participants that emerged from the analysis.

Table 2

Sample Initial Code

Participant's Transcript	Interview	Initial Code
Just to like to have that community. We did church online during that time.	10	Community
At times, it took a toll on me. I was really confused. Sometimes at times, I didn't know what to do, but with time, I think I got to really adjust to everything, and it was okay.	8	Confusion
A couple of things that I did. I developed some friendships that were mainly text message based friendships.	7	Friendships

The third step in the process involved developing emergent themes by focusing on chunks of transcript and analysis notes made into themes. The 546 initial codes were grouped into 12 emergent themes created sequentially as they appeared in the individual's transcript. Table 3 provides a sample of the process of moving from initial codes to emergent themes. By closely analyzing codes derived from the participant's interview transcripts, I was able to identify essential themes from their experiences.

Table 3

Sample Emergent Themes

Participant's Transcript	Interview	Initial Code	Emergent Themes
Just to like to have that community. We did church online during that time.	10	Community	Social support
At times it took a toll on me. I was really confused. Sometimes.at times I didn't know what to do but with time I think I got to really adjust to everything and was okay.	8	Confusion	Psychological Well-Being
So, you know, we'd have Internet problems at home. Now, all of a sudden, I'm IT support for not only me being able to get back online for my work, but I'm Internet support for my kids as well.	7	Technology	Working Remote

In the next step, I searched across emergent themes for connections between research participants. During the comparison, I noted similar associations and combined them when applicable, ensuring each study participant's significant phrases were highlighted and documented. The themes unique to one study participant were added to a

separate participant group file from the individual's transcript, and those that were similar in nature were merged, creating the first list of themes through comparison. During this step in the analysis, I separated previous themes and made every attempt to keep an open mind and view each subsequent interview transcript as an individual document.

As I looked for patterns across transcripts, I also looked for any unusual instances that may have occurred but were previously unnoticed. No notable unusual instances were found within the transcript or audio recordings. During this step in the data analysis, I moved back and forth, reviewing the previous themes. I also constantly revisited the original data to ensure that participant's experiences were accurately described. After reviewing the emergent themes using an in-depth analysis of the transcript text and audio recording, super-ordinate themes were developed using language from the participants (Table 4). The goal at this stage is to capture the essence of what is happening in the data within each theme, how participants relate to that experience, and ultimately, how they are making sense of it (Osborn & Smith, 2008).

Table 4

Sample Superordinate Theme

Participant's Transcript	Interview	Initial Code	Emergent Themes	Super-Ordinate Themes
Just to like to have that community. We did church online during that time.	10	Community	Social support	Social support played a significant role during periods of extended social isolation.
At times, it took a toll on me. I was really confused. Sometimes.at times I didn't know what to do but with time I think I got to really adjust to everything and was okay.	8	Confusion	Psychological Well-Being	Existential challenges influence psychological well-being
So, you know, we'd have Internet problems at home. Now, all of a sudden, I'm IT support for not only me being able to get back online for my work, but I'm Internet support for my kids as well.	7	Technology	Working Remote	Adapting to a new work environment-working remotely presented challenges

The final step involved using the transactional theory of stress and coping by analyzing the participants' individual responses further and developing them to better understand their experiences. I used this theory to examine the participants' words and how they conceptualized and coped with stress. This final step was conducted after the initial list of superordinate themes was created to achieve this study's final list of themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

This section will outline the strategies and plans used to ensure trustworthiness. This study used the qualitative phenomenological research design, which is better suited to examining the lived experiences of the study participants. Establishing trustworthiness is a key element in qualitative research, which is necessary to substantiate the legitimacy and accuracy of the findings (Ahmed, 2024; Drisko, 2024). Trustworthiness includes elements such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which research findings are accurate and trustworthy. To establish credibility, the study findings should be consistent with the data collected and the personal experiences of the study participants (Ahmed, 2024). A variety of techniques can used to establish credibility, such as triangulation, member checking, and peer review. In this study, the technique of member checking was used to ensure the researcher accurately represented the lived experiences of the study participants. Member checking can be conducted during the interview process, at the conclusion of the study, or both. This method was used during the interviews to help summarize and clarify

information received from the participants. Upon completion of each individual interview, member checking was used to affirm that the interview transcripts reflected their views and experiences. Each participant was emailed a copy of the transcript from the interview to review and make corrections if necessary.

Transferability

Transferability refers to providing evidence that the study findings could apply to other situations and populations. In this study, to establish transferability, a thick description of the phenomenon was used. Thick description provides a rich and deep interpretation of the meanings and context of the phenomenon (Drisko, 2024). It requires an examination of the researcher's own assumptions and biases as well as a deep understanding of the participant's experiences and perspectives (Ahmed, 2024). In this study, direct quotes from the participants were used to illustrate their views and experiences in their own words to help generalizability and transferability. This reduces the chance of implicit biases by allowing the reader to construct the scene surrounding the participants' responses.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the degree of consistency, reliability, and stability of findings and interpretations throughout the research process. To ensure it could be replicated by future researchers, a detailed description of the study was outlined. During the study, an audit trail was established to ensure consistency in data collection and analysis. Finally, audio recordings of the research participants, along with their verbatim transcripts, further aid in establishing dependability (Ahmed, 2024).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the data collected in the study is based on actual data and not influenced by the researcher's biases. This was achieved in this study through member checking and reflexive journaling. I used a reflective journal in which thoughts and opinions were annotated to assist with bracketing my potential biases, preconceived notions, and prejudgments within this study. Furthermore, to help ensure conformability, a detailed description of the processes used for data collection, data analysis, and interpretation was provided.

Results

This study examined the lived experiences of work-life balance conflicts faced by parents of early adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns in the United States. Themes were developed by separating the context of the participant's story and how participants phrased what they expressed. This allowed the process to evolve with naming themes, moving back and forth from my words to the words of the study participant and from the study participants to the group participants' voices. The semistructured interviews provided detailed information and invaluable insight from the participants' experiences. The process of using semistructured interviews helped to provide answers to the research questions as it allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences with the phenomenon. I used two central research questions to provide focus and help obtain a deeper understanding of the participant's experience with the central phenomenon at the center of this study. These research questions were:

RQ1: What work-life balance conflicts did parents with early adolescents

experience in their lives during the COVID-19 lockdowns?

RQ2: How did parents with early adolescents cope with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns?

Eight experiential themes emerged after rigorously reviewing the participants' interview transcript from the semistructured interviews: (a) navigating through challenges related to work-life balance during COVID, (b) existential challenges influenced psychological well-being, (c) family influence created work-life balance conflicts during COVID lockdowns, (d) social support played a significant role during periods of extended social isolation, (e) gender roles contributed to imbalance in the home, (f) employment uncertainty and predictability added new challenges, (g) adapting to a new work environment-working remotely presented challenges, and (h) preexisting and unresolved relationship problems challenged work-life balance. Table 5 presents the final list of themes and the associated participants.

Table 5

List of Superordinate Themes

Themes	Participants
1. Navigating through challenges related to work-life balance during COVID	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12
2. Existential challenges influenced psychological well-being	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12
3. Family influence created work-life balance conflicts during COVID lockdowns	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12

4. Social support played a significant role during periods of extended social isolation.	P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12
5. Gender roles contributed to imbalance in the home	P3, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12
6. Employment uncertainty and predictability added new challenges	P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P11
7. Adapting to a new work environment-working remotely presented challenges	P3, P7, P8, P9, P11, P12
8. Preexisting and unresolved relationship problems challenged work-life balance	P6, P7

Research Questions

The two research questions of this study were addressed through responses obtained during semistructured interviews with study participants. The study participants shared their memories of the COVID-19 lockdown and how they experienced the phenomenon in this study. As the participant responses were analyzed, their answers were organized into themes. These themes were grouped under the research question based on their ability to help identify the essence of the individual's experience and answer the question. Table 6 presents the research question, and the corresponding themes used to answer them.

Table 6

Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes	Theme Meaning
What work-life balance conflicts did parents with early adolescents experience in their lives during the COVID-19 lockdowns?	Navigating through challenges related to work-life balance during COVID	Encountering challenges that create an imbalance between two domains in life, work and personal, during the COVID lockdown.
	Family influence created work-life balance conflicts during the COVID lockdown.	Family members' impact on an individual's attitudes, behaviors, and decisions related to work-life balance during the COVID lockdown.
	Gender roles contributed to imbalance in the home	Culturally and socially determined set of behaviors, attitudes, and characteristics based on concepts of masculinity and femininity that influenced the participant's work-life balance
	Employment uncertainty and predictability added new challenges	Any issue or problem an individual experienced or perceived impacted maintaining employment during the COVID lockdown.
	Preexisting and unresolved relationship problems challenged work-life balance.	Any preexisting issue or unresolved relationship problem that an individual experienced or perceived influenced work-life balance during the COVID lockdown.
How did parents with early adolescents cope with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns?	Existential challenges influenced psychological well-being	The psychological toll on an individual's emotional health and overall functioning as a result of work-life imbalance during the COVID lockdown.
	Social support played a significant role during periods of extended social isolation.	Having friends and other people, including family, to turn to in times of need or crisis to give support while providing a buffer against adverse life events during the COVID lockdown.
	Adapting to a new work environment-working remotely presented challenges	Adjusting to a new work environment (e.g., their home) where the workspace is located in their home and the area is either shared or in the vicinity of other family members.

Research Question 1

The study's first question sought to explore the experiences parents with early adolescents encountered as it relates to work-life balance in their lives during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This research question was answered using various inquiries while conducting semistructured interviews. This method afforded a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and assisted in evaluating the parents' lived experiences with work-life balance during the COVID lockdown. During the analysis, five themes were identified that helped answer the research question using the participants' feedback in the collected data. Those themes that emerged from the participant's experiences that aligned with the first research question were navigating through challenges related to work-life balance during COVID, family influence created work-life balance conflicts during COVID lockdowns, gender roles contributed to an imbalance in the home, employment uncertainty, and predictability added new challenges and preexisting and unresolved relationship problems challenged work-life balance.

Theme: Navigating Through Challenges Related to Work-Life Balance During COVID

The interviews highlighted the significance of work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdowns, with 100% of study participants acknowledging some disruption. P1 found it challenging to maintain a work-life balance and recounted the following: "When you're supposed to be working, and you also have children and yourself to take care of, you have to do meals, and you have no help around." Other participants had difficulties establishing healthy boundaries during the COVID-19 lockdowns to help maintain work-life balance, such as P2, who said: "I guess at times it could be

challenging for work-life balance. Personally, I have a problem saying no or drawing a line at the end of the day." P7 said, "I think at the time I kind of ignored my own needs and was just focused on responding both at work and at home to make sure that everybody else was taken care of." P12 also found it difficult to keep work and personal life separated during the COVID lockdowns. P12 said, "completely different during COVID because there was no switch back and forth. It kind of all mingled together."

The sudden changes to daily routines that occurred during the COVID-19 lockdowns influenced work-life balance for many parents with adolescent children. P3 shared, "I was working, and they (family) were home, and then suddenly I was a teacher, I was an employee, and I was a mom, and I was a wife." My life was changed suddenly and drastically." P4 experienced work-life balance conflicts due to significant adjustments to their work schedule that occurred during the COVID-19 lockdowns. P4 said: "I had to adjust my sleeping schedule, and work later hours, and also learn to take time whenever I felt fatigued to rest." For P5, this parent found being at home during the COVID-19 lockdowns presented challenges to their work-life balance. P5 said: "it was really difficult to be at home and being that I also have children and also having to take care of bills, it was not easy for me."

In the case of P6, they found that trying to achieve a work-life balance while simultaneously starting a business during the COVID-19 lockdowns was challenging. P6 said, "There wasn't no real work, life balance, for me. Opening a new business during COVID was kind of a double whammy on maintaining or finding work, life, balance." P7 found it difficult to attend to the needs of others along with their personal needs during

the COVID lockdowns. P8 said, “So we had to make sure that we were doing everything according to a set time schedule. So that way, when we were fixed on the time schedule, it was easier to like do things without any conflict.”

The challenge of facing multiple roles during the COVID-19 lockdowns created tension for parents, such as P9, who were striving for work-life balance. Homeschooling while simultaneously working remotely from home created work-life balance tension for P10 during the COVID lockdowns. P9 said, “You’re working from home, and you suddenly become, you know, you’re still mom. Now you’re their teacher, and you’re still, you’re, you know, doing your profession all at once.” P10 said, “It was brutal, and I wish to never go back to that time again, and I’m sure you probably heard that plenty of times, but I had to homeschool four children and still work full time.” Work-life balance was a challenge for some parents as it created tension between their work requirements and providing oversight of their children. P11 said, “So that was a challenge, just the fact that when you had to go to work physically, and your children couldn’t leave the house because of COVID.”

Parents with early adolescent children faced new challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown. The results of the semistructured interviews underscore the impact on parents' ability to maintain work-life balance during the lockdown. All parents in the study reported some sort of disruption to their normal routine and challenges to maintaining a work-life balance during the studied timeframe.

Theme: Family Influence Created Work-Life Balance Conflicts During COVID Lockdowns

During the interviews, study participants were asked about the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on their family life and how it affected work-life balance. For some parents, the family influence on their ability to maintain work-life balance was manageable, and they were able to reduce conflict during the COVID-19 lockdown. P1 said, “I think in terms of family life, we got to spend more time together in terms of being a family. We’ve learned each other better, and we learned to live with each other.” P4 said, “I did try as much as possible to delegate some of the activities to my children, and at times I also had to do them myself.” P8 said, “We had to work in collaboration with each other. So we work together. You’ll find that most of the time, you are doing things together, and when we were doing them together, they would get done easily and fast.” P9 said, “My youngest actually has a very serious medical condition. So we were super hyper, vigilant about keeping her protected, and we did our best to not scare the children. We really did want to keep them away from the news as much as possible.”

For some parents, the influence of family caused challenges to their ability to maintain a work-life balance. P2 said, “Well, at times, it was too much together time. Um, cause we, we weren’t used to it.” P3 said, “We spent a lot more time together, but the other side of it was, we also had a child that is, living with a mental health disorder, and is very physically aggressive. It increased the amount of conflict in the home. P5 said, “It was quite unfortunate for me because I had to resign, actually resign from work because I had no one with the kids at home.” P6 said, “It was really hard. We really had

to completely reset our family expectations." P7 said, "Just a lot of bickering, I mean, we were previously a family that was going in 15 different directions at all times." P10 said, "I just remember being very overwhelmed by the demands of four children at different developmental stages." P11 said, "So it's like even my husband and I were seeing each other in passing. At one point, I felt like we were roommates because we were just on the go." P12 said, "So trying to keep a normal school structure and doing assignments and working with them. There were a lot more distractions because we were at home."

Parents experienced some level of work-life imbalance in the initial stage of the COVID lockdown due to family influence. Some were able to find ways to mitigate the negative influences and achieve a positive outcome. Others found the family influence difficult during the lockdown. The family had a significant influence on whether parents of adolescent children could achieve work-life balance during the lockdown.

Theme: Gender Roles Contributed to Imbalance in the Home

Gender roles influenced some parents' ability to maintain work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Seven of the twelve parents shared experiences during their interview that pertained to an increase in roles for one parent during the lockdown, typically the mother. This lack of shared roles in the household contributed to a work-life imbalance in the household. P3 encountered increased stress during the lockdowns that required more input from the spouse. P3 also shared, "There was a psychological toll that impacted the rest of the family, and they didn't really see some of the stuff that I saw. That left my spouse needing to take over." P6 experienced a shift in roles due to less time at home during the lockdowns. Additionally, P6 mentioned, "I spent a lot of time out of

the house, and that put responsibility on our older kids and even my husband. It put responsibility on him to help with the kid that he hadn't been doing before." P9 felt that a lack of understanding of the many roles contributed to work-life imbalance. P9 shared, "You know when he got home from work, I don't think he truly understood, like, the full scope of the different hats that I was wearing throughout the day because, for the most part, his life's kind of remained normal."

In certain households, the allocation of responsibilities during the pandemic remained unchanged, mirroring the dynamics that existed before COVID-19. Tasks like cooking, cleaning, and childcare continued to follow familiar patterns, with each family member adhering to their roles as if the world outside had not shifted dramatically. While many aspects of life underwent significant transformation, the rhythm of daily chores and responsibilities persisted. P7 shared, "I mean, I was the one kind of doing all the things around the house, and all that kind of stuff beforehand, and it stayed that way afterward. It's just there was more of it."

For some parents, the lack of work flexibility led to an imbalance in the roles performed in the household during the lockdowns. P10 shared, "It was impossible, and my husband had a job that wasn't as flexible. He wasn't staying home. He was still going into the office, so it all fell on my shoulders." In addition, P11 also encountered an imbalance in roles performed in the household due to a lack of flexibility in the other parent's work schedule. P11 shared, "and then my husband, of course he was at his job, and it's one of those things, you know. You just can't leave when you want to on the Government's dime, so we had to try to work that out." P12 shared, "My husband went to

work most of that time on a regular basis, so it was just me and the kids, and we needed some time apart."

Gender roles in the household did not change for mothers who participated in this study. In most cases, the mother assumed additional roles on top of the roles previously performed in the household prior to the COVID lockdown. Based on the study participants' responses, the roles in the household contributed to conflicts in the parent's ability to maintain a work-life balance.

Theme: Employment Uncertainty and Predictability Added New Challenges

The uncertainty and lack of predictability surrounding employment created new challenges for some parents during the COVID-19 lockdown. Seven of the twelve parents interviewed reported challenges associated with employment uncertainty and predictability. The uncertainty of whether or not they would maintain employment, as well as the lack of predictability in some households, influenced work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdown. The uncertainty made life challenging as some parents were faced with new challenges, such as their financial future. P3 shared, "How am I going to provide for my kids? And it was wonky the time off. So, I started out volunteering." P6 experienced new challenges related to their employment during the lockdown in establishing a new business. Furthermore, P6 shared, "We really found ourselves stretched ridiculously thin, and the business had been in the works long before COVID."

Some participants, unfortunately, lost their jobs during the lockdown, thus creating additional challenges. P4 shared, "And it is that time, I lost my job. So I was relying on savings and on my partners because he still worked." P5 faced a similar

experience, losing their job in the midst of the lockdown and facing financial uncertainty that created additional challenges. Additionally, P5 shared, “Losing my job was not something that I was prepared for. Then, having to be at home throughout and having to take care of the children and being that the bills kept on piling, and you have less income.”

The unpredictability caused challenges for some parents as they lacked a clear understanding of what was expected of them from their employers during the lockdown. P8 shared, “I think I experienced conflict in that we were supposed to be at work the first days, but when people saw it was serious for us, and we were not given immediate, like an immediate letter to tell us to be home. So, we just sat at home sometimes, and sometimes you get called in to work.” The rapid changes within some parents’ jobs due to policy shifts (social distancing) in how the job was performed created a lack of predictability and subsequently influenced their work-life balance. P9 shared, “I work in law enforcement, and I was in law enforcement at the time. So, the courts had shifted, and a lot of my job and my duties had changed nearly overnight.” Some parents found themselves facing unpredictability as a result of working multiple jobs during the lockdowns. P11 shared, “I started off initially with one job, but I ended up with two jobs. So, I was working physically in a clinic, seeing patients, but I was also working as an online, remote professor.”

Employment uncertainty and unpredictability created new challenges for parents of early adolescent children during the COVID-19 lockdown. In several situations, the parent lost their job during the lockdown and faced financial uncertainty and increased

work-life imbalance. In other cases, the parents in the study found that rapid changes and lack of clear guidance from employers during the lockdown created additional challenges for them. In one situation, the parent was trying to establish a new business as the lockdowns were being instituted, generating challenges for them and their family. The employment uncertainty and unpredictability experienced during the lockdown influenced the work-life balance of parents in this study.

Theme: Preexisting and Unresolved Relationship Problems Challenged Work-Life Balance

Some parents experienced challenges to their ability to achieve and maintain work-life balance as a result of preexisting and unresolved relationship problems. During the interviews, two of the twelve parents revealed relationship concerns that influenced work-life balance in their household. In some cases, the perceived attitude of the partner influenced the personal relationship between parents and their ability to work together to achieve work-life balance during difficult times, such as the lockdown. P6 shared, “Of course, you know, when you have adults and partners who are frustrated with life in general, it does tend to impact that personal relationship as well.” For one participant, the unresolved preexisting problems were exacerbated during the lockdown, complicating their ability to work together to achieve a work-life balance. P7 shared, “But then, also, you know things that were unresolved before you just really couldn’t hide from them anymore.”

Some parents in the study were challenged during the lockdown by preexisting and unresolved relationship problems. These parents found that those preexisting and

unresolved relationship problems made navigating the difficult situations encountered during the lockdown harder due to deficits in their communication in the relationship. This situation influenced their ability to work together to achieve work-life balance during the lockdown.

Research Question 2

The study's second research question sought to answer how parents with early adolescent children coped with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Similar to the first research question, this research question was answered using various inquiries about the individuals' personal experiences during the semistructured interviews. The goal was to evaluate the parents' lived experiences to understand how they coped with any work-life balance conflict they encountered during the lockdown. Three themes were identified that helped answer the research question by analyzing the data collected from the research participants. These themes were: existential challenges influence psychological well-being, social support plays a significant role in demanding times, and adapting to a new work environment- working remotely.

Theme: Existential Challenges Influenced Psychological Well-Being

During the interviews, participants were asked about their psychological well-being and how it may or may not have influenced work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In addition, participants discussed their psychological well-being when describing other aspects of their lives during this period also. P1 said, "I felt like I was taking too much care of other people's welfare and at the end of the day, I was not even

able to care for myself properly." P2 said, "At first things were really nice, but then, you know, it's like being stuck on an Island with someone." P3 said, "So I was drained by the time I came home. I didn't want to. I was having to cry."

Some parents found ways to cope with the existential challenges experienced during this period. P4 said, "I just took a day at a time. I took some online classes for yoga and meditation, and I also took time to interact with other parents who are going through the same." P9 said, "I did kind of just try to process it on my own, and then there were times where I would break down and I would get pretty emotional, and I would have to reach out to, you know, like a family member, and my grandmother specifically."

P5 said, "I fell into a sort of some sort of depression, increased depression, especially during the onset." P6 said, "I didn't take time for myself. My list of things to do was too long." P7 said, "If there had been some sort of guidebook ahead of time, that would have been great, but there wasn't. So, I mean, it was trial and error. A lot of trial and error." P8 said, "I feel like it made me feel disorganized at times, it made me feel like I was overly stretched, and at times it interfered with my well-being." P10 said, "You felt guilty, or I felt guilty going out in the community. So there was no personal time." P1 said, "It placed not just a physical weight on you. It's like an emotional weight as well." P12 said, "Because the home was not necessarily where you came to relax. Home is where everything was going on. Like the dining room table, you'd look in the dining room, and there it all is. Kind of like you never really got away from it."

Parents encountered existential challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown that influenced their psychological well-being. Some parents discovered ways to cope with

the challenges and navigate through difficult times experiencing reduced levels of stress. Conversely, some parents faced challenges to their psychological well-being during the lockdown due to a lack of positive coping skills. The transactional theory of stress and coping informs us that individuals will experience increased stress when there is a perceived gap between the demands of a situation and the individual's ability to cope with those demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Theme: Social Support Played a Significant Role During Periods of Extended Social Isolation

During their interviews, several parents shared experiences related to social support during the COVID-19 lockdown. These parents discussed both the presence of social support in their lives and the impacts of lacking social support during the lockdown. Nine of the twelve parents interviewed in the study shared experiences related to social support that influenced their ability to cope with work-life balance conflicts during the lockdown. P3 shared, "We couldn't go and see our grandparents. We couldn't go and so see my parents, and you know my stepchildren's grandparents were a high risk if they were to be exposed as well."

Some parents utilized other ways to communicate with family and friends during the COVID lockdown. Participant Four shared, "It was really stressful in the beginning. People started meeting up through Zoom and through video calls, and that made life better." P7 shared, "a couple of things that I did. I developed some friendships that were mainly text message based friendships." P11 shared, "I was still able to keep contact with it, but only through telephone conversations, Zoom or Facetime, and things like that, but

nothing physically, you know, face to face with anybody because of the COVID."

Religion played a key role in terms of social support for some parents during the COVID-19 lockdown. P10 shared, "Just to like to have that sense of community. We did church online during that time." P12 shared, "We would sit in our cars and listen to church or sit out on the grassy field and listen to church. So that really changed for them (children); they were not able to go to their dance lessons and different extra activities they had throughout the week."

For some parents, having family living with them or being able to contact them when times were difficult played a vital role. P5 shared, "I was very overwhelmed but fortunate enough, I got some support from a friend to live with us." P6 shared, "We really had a lot of conversations. You know. I tried to make sure that line of communication was always open with them." P9 shared, "So she heard me cry a couple of times when I was like, I just don't know that I can do this. How am I supposed to navigate this? How am I supposed to protect them?"

Social support played a significant role in helping parents cope with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdown. During the lockdown, parents found different ways to maintain contact with their immediate family, distant family members, and friends. Seeking social support during challenging times is an emotion-focused coping strategy that helps individuals manage problems more effectively and builds resilience.

Theme: Adapting To a New Work Environment: Working Remotely Created Challenges

During the COVID lockdown, some parents had to adjust to a new method of conducting their jobs: working remotely from home. This experience brought on new challenges for parents as they navigated working remotely during the lockdown. Six of the twelve study participants discussed experiences related to working remotely that influenced work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdown.

For some parents, the transition to working remotely posed little challenges to their work-life balance. P3 said, “It was also an opportunity for me to be very innovative because that is when we transferred everything to telehealth.” P8 said, “Oh, most times, I think work was easy because we are doing it online. So, I didn’t have a lot of complaints with the work, and no pressure was from the work.”

Parents found themselves navigating the challenges of balancing their professional responsibilities with the needs of their adolescent children, all while working from the confines of home. Juggling video calls and project deadlines, they also had to manage their children’s technology-related issues, ensuring their kids were staying focused on online classes or solving tech glitches. This multifaceted struggle often created a chaotic yet relatable scene in households, where the boundaries between work and family life blurred significantly. P7 said, “So you know, we’d have internet problems at home. Now, all of a sudden, I’m IT support for not only me being able to get back online for my work, but I’m Internet support for my kids as well.”

P9 said, “Working from home was very challenging. I think, if I understand, like

work, specifically, it was definitely very challenging to do my job and look after the children at the same time." P11 said, "So I had them downstairs instead of in their rooms working on school because if I was downstairs working, I couldn't keep an eye on them doing their work upstairs in the room." P12 said, "Being at home, we again tried to say the dining room is where we are going to work, and we're going to stay in there and work. If we need a break, we're able to go outside."

The shift to remote work brought about significant changes in the daily routines and home environments of parents. Suddenly, they found themselves navigating a complex landscape where professional responsibilities intertwined with household duties, creating a delicate balancing act that required constant adjustment. Homes were transformed into makeshift offices, often with laptops perched on kitchen tables or dining room counters and workspaces cluttered with a blend of business materials alongside their children's schoolbooks.

Summary

The focus of this study was the exploration of the work-life balance conflicts experienced by parents of early adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdowns. In Chapter 4, I detailed the study's methodology, providing a thorough overview of the data analysis process and the conclusions that emerged from this analysis. The insights and perspectives drawn from the literature presented in Chapter 2, combined with the recruitment strategies and data collection methods discussed in Chapter 3, provided a strong foundation for the analysis and subsequent findings of the study. Key themes surfaced from the lived experiences of 12 parents, each navigating the unique challenges

that arose as they attempted to balance their professional responsibilities with the demands of home life during an unprecedented period. Their narratives made it clear that the lockdowns significantly impacted their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance, leading to increased stress and conflict.

In Chapter 5, I delve deeper into the findings and comprehensively interpret the study's results. This chapter will also address the limitations encountered during the research process, offer practical recommendations for parents and organizations, and discuss the broader implications of these findings for future research. By integrating these elements, I provide a clearer picture of parents' challenges during this time and contribute to a growing understanding of work-life balance in crisis situations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore how parents with early adolescent children experienced work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdown. My goal for this study was to gain a deeper understanding and insight into the lived experiences of parents during this challenging period of time. I conducted this study because there was a lack of understanding of how parents with this specific age group of children dealt with challenges associated with achieving and maintaining work-life balance during the COVID lockdown in the current literature. The results of this study indicate ways to inform future generations of parents with early adolescent children on how to address work-life balance conflicts during pandemics and natural disasters involving extended periods of social isolation.

During this study, I conducted 12 semistructured interviews with parents who resided with their early adolescent children. Data from the interviews were analyzed to provide meaning to their experiences. Key findings included eight themes generated from the data related to this topic: navigating through challenges related to work-life balance during COVID, family influence created work-life balance conflicts during COVID lockdowns, gender roles contributed to imbalance in the home, employment uncertainty and predictability added new challenges, preexisting and unresolved relationship problems challenged work-life balance, existential challenges influenced psychological well-being, social support played a significant role during periods of extended social isolation, adapting to a new work environment-working remotely.

The levels of stress and confusion increased for most parents of early adolescent children during the COVID-19 lockdown. Furthermore, their ability to maintain a work-life balance was disrupted during this timeframe. This led to challenges in balancing different roles and responsibilities, establishing healthy boundaries, maintaining reasonable expectations, and decreases in psychological well-being. Parents who found themselves shifting to remote work during the lockdown faced challenges with new roles and responsibilities that impacted their professional and home lives. While the family caused increased concerns for parents during the lockdowns, the family was also influential in providing social support for early adolescent children during periods of extended social isolation.

Chapter 5 summarizes the value of the study and its implications for this study. I also discuss the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations. Furthermore, I discuss the potential implications for positive social change and the recommendations for future studies, followed by the conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

This qualitative study utilized phenomenology as the method for understanding the lived experience of parents with early adolescent children as they encountered work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdown. The major findings within this study align with previously published literature pertaining to parenting and work-life balance during COVID. Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping was the theoretical lens used for this study. This theoretical approach examines the way significant life events affect the emotions and well-being of individuals (Lazarus &

Folkman, 1984). The focus of this approach is on the individual's cognitive assessment and how the individual copes with stress.

During this research study, 12 participants shared their lived experiences and perceptions of parenting early adolescent children while addressing work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdown in response to interview questions. These interview questions were directly related to the two following research questions:

RQ 1: What work-life balance conflicts did parents with early adolescents experience in their lives during the COVID-19 lockdowns?

RQ 2: How did parents with early adolescents cope with work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdowns?

The results highlighted information relevant to the lived experiences of parents with early adolescent children who faced work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdown. Eight prominent themes emerged from the data analysis of this study, helping to answer the research questions and highlight key findings.

Navigating Through Challenges Related to Work-Life Balance During COVID-19

The COVID-19 lockdown caused significant stress for families worldwide, disrupting work-life balance (E. L. Adams et al., 2021). This study examined the challenges faced by parents as they confronted work-life balance issues. During the research process, individuals expressed increased concerns related to their ability to address new challenges brought on by the sudden and unexpected shifts in their daily lives during the lockdown. These shifts occurred in both work and personal life domains, making it difficult to maintain the same level of focus between the two domains.

Parents expressed genuine concerns about balancing the preexisting and new responsibilities simultaneously during the lockdown. This aligns with the findings in the study conducted by Wolor et al. (2021), which suggested household tasks increased significantly during the lockdown, adding additional stress. The initial impact of the lockdown caused many parents to juggle responsibilities, which led to the mingling of personal and professional roles. This led to challenges focusing on work, children, and themselves equally. All the parents in this study reported in some form that the inability to establish good boundaries contributed to their increased stress during the lockdown. This confirms findings in studies conducted by Cannito and Scavarda (2020) and Daks et al. (2020) that suggested boundaries between the two domains were often crossed during the lockdown, leaving individuals overwhelmed with emotions.

During the lockdown, expectations and time management were also key contributors to work-life balance. Parents who lacked time management skills reported experiencing a learning curve coping with the adjustments to their daily lives during the initial stages of the lockdown. In addition, parents who could not manage their expectations during the initial stages of the lockdown also experienced increased stress and disruption to their work-life balance. This finding parallels the results from the study conducted by Weaver and Swank (2021), who suggested that work-life imbalance had a negative effect and led to increased parental distress during the lockdown.

The transactional theory of stress and coping proposes that individuals evaluate situations to determine whether they are benign or relevant during the primary appraisal before feeling and responding to stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Most study

participants appraised their ability to maintain a work-life balance during the primary appraisal as a relevant concern. Those who felt overwhelmed moved into making a secondary appraisal. At this stage, the parents decide if they can cope with the situation by examining the situational demand and the resources perceived to be available to them. For those who perceived the demands necessary to achieve work-life balance outweighed resources, they experienced negative stress. During the study, parents discovered that as the lockdown continued, prioritizing tasks and maintaining those priorities helped manage work-life responsibilities and create a daily routine, which resulted in reduced stress.

Existential Challenges Influenced Psychological Well-Being

Parents of early adolescents faced significant existential challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown. Amid this period of uncertainty, many parents struggled to define their sense of self, questioning who they were and what they ought to be. This introspection had a detrimental impact on their psychological well-being, particularly as they attempted to maintain a work-life balance. Some effects on their mental health included depression, anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, frustration, insomnia, emotional exhaustion, grief, and symptoms of traumatic stress. These findings are consistent with earlier studies on parenting during the pandemic conducted by Clemens et al. (2021), Manohar et al. (n.d.), Weaver and Swank (2021), and Wolor et al. (2021). These studies suggest that parents' psychological well-being declined during prolonged periods of social distancing.

A prevalent psychological response to the COVID-19 lockdown among the

parents in this study was their anxiety regarding the virus and their perceived inability to protect their families. This added complexity for parents who left home to work and those whose spouses also had outside jobs. Many reported feelings of disconnection and isolation due to their additional precautions, such as temporary quarantining and limiting physical contact upon returning home. This concept of feeling isolated has been prominent in previous research examining the effects of prolonged social isolation on psychological well-being (Clemens et al., 2021; Weaver & Swank, 2021; Wolor et al., 2021).

Parents frequently felt overwhelmed and bewildered as they juggled the competing demands of their work and personal lives. Most participants expressed that prioritizing their psychological well-being during the lockdown was not their focus; instead, they concentrated on their professional responsibilities and family needs. All the study participants turned to compartmentalization at the outset of the lockdown in some form as a coping mechanism for the immediate challenges they faced. However, this approach often led to additional problems, such as emotional exhaustion, reduced stress tolerance, and heightened frustration. The most effective way participants learned over time was to address their psychological well-being by devoting time to themselves. This was done through meditation, prayer, exercise, or quiet time.

This study confirms previous findings that psychological well-being is directly linked to perceived stress and positive coping. Stressors for parents with adolescent children at home during the lockdown intensified due to the adolescent's vulnerability and challenges at that stage of development. The effects of social distancing, lockdowns,

and restricted outdoor activities led to many children experiencing anxiety, boredom, sadness, and aggression, which in turn affected their parents' psychological well-being. In summary, the findings in this study support the transactional theory of stress and coping by proposing that parents' primary appraisal during the initial stages of the lockdown assessed the stressors as a threat, and as they moved to the secondary appraisal process, they deemed insufficient resources were available to address the stressor. Over time, parents who prioritized taking time for themselves confidently evaluated that they had sufficient resources available during the secondary appraisal. This led to less perceived stress among those parents and positive coping during the lockdown.

Family Influence Created Work-Life Balance Conflicts During COVID Lockdowns

The widespread "stay-at-home" orders during the lockdown strictly imposed limitations on families, affecting their activities both inside and outside their homes (E. L. Adams et al., 2021). These limitations significantly affected how families interacted and influenced the work-life balance experiences of parents with early adolescent children. Key areas of family influence identified in this study included academic support for children, daily household routines and tasks, emotional support, adolescent isolation and well-being, adolescent maturity, and communication.

During the lockdown, adolescent family members experienced a shift from in-person education to online learning conducted from home. This transition added an unexpected burden on parents, many of whom were not prepared for it. Parents had to take on new roles as teachers and tech support for their adolescent children, which proved stressful. They faced challenges in teaching subjects, learning to use communication

software, troubleshooting hardware issues, and maintaining the home internet simultaneously. The situation was even more difficult for those parents who received little guidance from their child's school. This disruption led to an imbalance in their lives, as it demanded more of their time than other areas during the lockdown. These findings were consistent with the previous study on parental burnout and work-life balance conflicts during the lockdown (Griffith, 2020). That study surmised that parental burnout resulted from family influence and a work-life imbalance.

There were positive and negative family influences on household routines and tasks. In half the households in this study, family members adhered to strict routines established by one or both parents. While this required additional effort from the parents, it positively contributed to keeping the home organized and allowed the family to spend more quality time together. Conversely, some parents reported that household routines and tasks suffered as they were under significant stress during the initial phase of the lockdown. This resulted in chaos at home, disrupted work-life balance, and a decrease in the parents' overall mood. This key finding aligns with prior studies indicating that parents experience heightened stress when dealing with family-related issues, such as academics and household chores, while balancing their own work responsibilities (Demaria & Vicari, 2021; Griffith, 2020; Putri & Amran, 2021; Schieman et al., 2021; Weaver & Swank, 2021).

Early adolescents notably require emotional support due to their feelings of isolation from friends and family and the uncertainties they encounter in their lives. This need affects their well-being and challenges their parents to maintain a work-life balance,

as it calls for increased attention from them. The study further revealed that the extent of family influence varied based on the adolescent's level of maturity. Adolescents who demonstrated greater maturity required less intervention from their parents.

Throughout the study, parents expressed deep concern for their adolescent children during the lockdown. They were apprehensive about their children's education, the lack of social interactions, potential exposure to COVID-19, and their children's personal anxieties. Parents recognized that effective family communication was essential during these challenging times. Families organized regular meetings to bring all members together to discuss the circumstances inside and outside the home. While this initiative required additional time and occasionally disrupted other responsibilities, it positively impacted both the adolescents and the family. Examining family influence through the framework provided by the transactional theory of stress and coping, the parents' primary appraisal determined the event to be significant. Family meetings provided the resources necessary to mitigate negative stress as their assessment progressed to the secondary appraisal process.

Gender Roles Contributed to Imbalance in the Home

Although the findings pertaining to gender roles do not represent the experiences of every parent involved in the study, a significant majority indicated that their work-life balance was notably disrupted during the lockdown. Many participants reported struggling to navigate the challenges of maintaining traditional gender roles that were established before the pandemic while simultaneously adapting to new responsibilities that emerged during this unprecedented period. This clash of roles not only heightened

stress levels but also complicated their ability to manage both work and family obligations effectively. In comparing this study's findings to the study conducted by Wang et al., (2022), who examined the role of parent work-life conflict on adolescent adjustment during COVID-19, similar results were found pertaining to gender roles. During this study, it was observed that when parents maintained their pre-pandemic roles in addition to new roles in the household without assistance from the other partner, work-life conflicts occurred. This study also aligns with findings from studies conducted by Griffith (2020) and Shirmohammadi et al. (2022b), who also examined how increased burdens and stress on parents during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced work- life balance.

The findings differ slightly from the findings in the study conducted by Del Boca et al. (2020), who examined the differences in work, housework, and childcare between Italian men and women before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study proposed that housework accumulated and became the responsibility of the mother, but childcare responsibilities were shared. Conversely, the findings in this study showed that housework became the responsibility of the female parent, but they did not receive additional help from their partner. In some cases, this was due to a lack of availability of the male parent due to employment outside of the home.

During the lockdown, school closures and the transition to remote learning caused parents to take on new roles in their adolescent child's education. However, most study participants reported that those responsibilities were completed by the female parent with little to no assistance from their spouse. Consequently, it was noted that household chores

and caring for the children's education and well-being fell mainly on the female parent. Traditional social norms or cultural beliefs may have been responsible for the lack of sharing responsibilities between parents in the household. However, this did not mitigate the influence it had on work-life balance for the female parent during the lockdown.

The performance of these tasks without assistance while still attending to their personal responsibilities caused significant distress and impeded their ability to achieve work-life balance during the lockdown. A significant correlation between stress and cognitive appraisal was identified in the study participants' experiences with gender roles. During the cognitive appraisal stage of the transactional theory of stress and coping the individual determines whether the event is a stressful threat and assesses whether the resources are available to minimize, tolerate, or eradicate the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the initial stages of the lockdown, female parents did not feel they possessed the resources to address the stressors brought on by the roles being performed. However, over time, as they developed routines and adapted to the new norm, their cognitive appraisal of the stressor shifted, and it was seen as less stressful to them.

This study confirms previous research on gender roles in work-life balance conflicts, showing that female parents faced increased household responsibilities during the lockdown. Initially, these new stressors were seen as challenges. However, as the lockdown continued, 50% of female parents interviewed developed routines to cope, while the others remained overwhelmed due to insufficient resources, resulting in ongoing high stress levels. It is unsure whether the other parent's presence would have decreased stress for the female parent. Future studies on parenting during the COVID

lockdown should focus on the mitigating factors related to stress in a two-parent household.

Employment Uncertainty and Predictability Added New Challenges

Employment uncertainty and unpredictability were significant concerns that disrupted the work-life balance for 60% of the study participants. They faced considerable challenges related to childcare, income stability, consistent scheduling, and rapidly changing, sometimes conflicting guidance. These findings align with previous studies that highlighted how workplace measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic affected employee mental health and work performance, particularly regarding the level of communication and protections implemented by their organizations (Como et al., 2021; Sasaki et al., 2020; Vinberg & Danielsson, 2021).

The rapidly changing guidance contributed to this unpredictability, making maintaining a stable work-life balance challenging. Parents working remotely or in the office often received new instructions regarding their tasks, leading to feelings of burnout. Their ability to cope with this situation was further diminished by their perceived lack of resources to manage stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This uncertainty also triggered financial concerns; some parents worried about job stability while others took on additional work due to reduced hours.

During the lockdown, two parents in this study unfortunately lost their jobs. Prior to the termination of their employment, they endured a significant increase in stress levels, driven primarily by the unrelenting uncertainty that loomed over their employment. They faced unpredictable situations where, on some days, they were

expected to go to work, while on others, they were told to stay home. This instability severely impacted their mental health and, indirectly, the well-being of their adolescent children. The parent-adolescent relationship also became strained as parents required extra help from their children around the house.

These additional challenges made it difficult for parents to achieve a healthy work-life balance during the initial stages of the lockdown, leaving them feeling overwhelmed and overburdened. However, as the lockdown continued, the stress experienced by parents decreased as they achieved more consistency and certainty in their lives. This improvement positively affected the parent-adolescent relationship, enabling parents to engage in positive parenting due to reduced stress. Studies have shown that positive parenting during pandemics can benefit both parents and children (Moran et al., 2023; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022b; Wolor et al., 2021).

The strain from employment uncertainty and unpredictability generated fear and instability for parents as they cared for their families. Two participants who were essential workers in health services were unable to transition to remote work, which added to their employment concerns as they constantly worried about exposing their families to infection. These individuals also experienced increased stress as they implemented additional protective measures, such as quarantine and isolation, in their homes to protect their families. This key finding aligns with previous studies exploring work-life wellness during the pandemic, which suggested that workers faced concerns about their personal and psychological well-being due to continued exposure to others in the workplace (Como et al., 2021).

Preexisting and Unresolved Relationship Problems Challenged Work-Life Balance

During the interview process, 15% of study participants reported challenges related to work-life balance stemming from preexisting and unresolved relationship issues. The COVID lockdown significantly strained marriages as couples faced financial difficulties, a lack of privacy, stress over health concerns, and worries about family and work (Bullinger et al., 2021). This situation further intensified existing communication problems, resulting in a higher frequency of disagreements within the household. Additionally, the unresolved issues meant that spending more time together had a negative impact, as parents struggled with a lack of personal space and the inability to engage in normal activities, such as going to the gym and socializing in person with friends. In this situation, the perceived stress from the stressors was caused by the lack of resources to aid with coping.

Unresolved relationship issues had a significant adverse effect on adolescent children within the household. Parenting behaviors were crucially linked to the adjustment of adolescents during the lockdowns, highlighting the importance of parental involvement. The lack of effective communication and collaboration between partners often led to confusion and dysfunction in their involvement. As a result, participants tended to manage most matters regarding their adolescent children independently to prevent further conflict. This, in turn, created an imbalance for the parent and strained the parent-adolescent relationship as the parent confronted their emotions simultaneously.

These findings contribute to the existing literature on marital relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous research has primarily focused on how work and

household responsibilities affect couples' work-life balance (E. L. Adams et al., 2021). However, these studies often overlook the impact of preexisting and unresolved relationship issues, particularly their role in coping during challenging times.

Social Support Played a Significant Role During Periods of Social Isolation

84% of study participants reported issues related to the impact of social support during extended periods of social isolation. The social distancing and stay-at-home policies also led individuals to rely more on household members for feelings of closeness and belonging. During the lockdown, parents encountered situations that exacerbated these stressors, such as loss of personal time, restricted access to peers, and disruption of daily routines. The lack of social support influenced the client's personal life, harming other domains, including work-life balance.

The adolescent children in the household experienced a sense of social support deficiency similar to that of their parents. During the lockdown, they lost access to outdoor activities, youth groups, school events, and other social engagements. This lack of physical interaction and emotional support largely fell upon the parents during the period of social distancing. The increased burden of providing emotional support added to the strain on parents, who were also grappling with their own personal issues. This aligns with earlier research indicating that parents experienced increased stress levels as they took on additional roles while losing essential social support networks (Alonzi et al., 2021; Chu et al., 2022; Clemens et al., 2021). Additionally, this study identified partners as an important protection against loneliness and other negative consequences related to social support, especially when compared to being a single parent or living alone.

Four participants reported creative ways to continue with church, a source of social support during the lockdown. These parents utilized online church services and church services performed in cars to maintain community connection, a critical social need. This allowed their families to maintain a sense of community and helped to mitigate the effects of extended social isolation. Several parents included their adolescent children in tasks around the house to help them feel connected. One parent devised the creative idea to allow their children to pick meals and things that accompany whatever they were cooking. When they chose Italian cooking, the family would discover online resources, such as an interactive digital gondola ride, they could enjoy together. Additionally, two parents in this study conducted routine meetings with the family to help cope with the symptoms of social isolation. This proved to be very helpful as it created more cohesion among family members.

These strategies highlight a key part of the process of coping with stressors outlined in the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Initially, the stressors related to social isolation were appraised as harmful; however, once parents found resources to offset the influence of the stressors, less stress was experienced. Social support was essential in mitigating the impact of stressors like social isolation during the lockdown. However, it negatively impacted the work-life balance of some parents with early adolescent children, as it demanded additional time from other areas of their lives.

Adapting to a New Work Environment: Working Remotely Presented Challenges

At the onset of the pandemic, many employees faced significant challenges in

adapting to digital tools while managing their work schedules alongside daily routines and family responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a dramatic increase in the demand for remote work, transforming the traditional work landscape. This unforeseen crisis forced individuals and organizations to quickly adjust by implementing extensive training sessions to equip employees with the necessary skills for online collaboration. As everyone adapted to this new reality, the goal was to replicate the productivity levels typically achieved in a traditional office setting while navigating the complexities of professional duties and personal commitments. During the early stages of the lockdown, parents found remote work to be challenging. However, over time, as systems were put in place, they developed the ability to cope with the situation.

In this study, half of the parents reported experiencing challenges adjusting to a new remote work environment. The presence of spouses and teenage children working and attending school from home and disruptions to childcare and educational services during the pandemic significantly impacted their remote work experiences. Furthermore, the expectation to manage household chores alongside remote work added to these difficulties. These findings are consistent with prior research on remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted that while remote work can provide certain benefits, it may also be overwhelming for parents as they navigate the blurred boundaries between their professional and personal lives throughout the day (Cannito & Scavarda, 2020; Chu et al., 2022; Daks et al., 2020; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022a; Wolor et al., 2021).

Parents encountered the challenging dilemma of balancing their professional

responsibilities while sharing workspace with family members. This was particularly pronounced for those with partners working from home and school-age children participating in distance learning. The close proximity often led to distractions and noise, making it difficult for parents to maintain their focus and productivity. Additionally, coordinating schedules and creating a conducive environment for both work and learning added to the complexities of home life during this time.

Parents established specific work areas within their homes to provide a structured environment where they could monitor their children's academic activities. These dedicated spaces not only allowed for efficient work functions in an online setting but also enabled them to keep a close eye on their children's progress, fostering a supportive and productive atmosphere for both work and learning. However, this also had drawbacks, as parents quickly became technology support and internet managers for themselves and their children while performing work-related tasks at home. These factors influenced parents with adolescent children's ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance while working remotely.

Limitations of the Study

In the first chapter, the anticipated limitations of the study were clearly outlined. While the research led to valuable discoveries and profound revelations, these shortcomings became evident through the interviews conducted with participating individuals. This study offered significant insights into the work-life balance experiences faced by parents raising adolescent children during the unprecedented COVID-19 lockdown. However, it is important to note that despite these insightful findings, several

limitations were present that could affect the overall interpretation and applicability of the results.

Participant Demographics

In qualitative, phenomenological research, smaller sample sizes are standard. However, this can limit the generalizability of the findings. Generalizability can still be achieved if the samples share similar demographic characteristics. Invitations were sent to male and female parents who met the eligibility criteria for this study. Unfortunately, only one male parent responded to the study invitation and completed the eligibility survey. This male participant reported no work-life balance conflicts during the COVID-19 lockdown and chose not to participate in the study. As a result, the findings of this study solely reflect the perspectives of female parents with adolescent children during the lockdown. The lack of male participants limits the generalizability of the results to both male and female parents, as detailed in Chapter 3.

Additionally, age differences among participants present another limitation. The ages of the 12 research participants ranged from 30 to 47. Assumptions, beliefs, and perceptions regarding work-life balance vary by age group, and it remains uncertain whether the results would differ had the sample included individuals within a closer age range.

During the interview, two participants shared that they lost their jobs due to the lockdown. Although they were not excluded from the study, it is essential to note that they had been employed for at least part of the lockdown period. This partial employment may have influenced their experiences, leading to different perspectives and challenges

compared to those individuals who remained employed throughout the entire duration of the lockdown. Understanding these nuances is crucial for gaining a comprehensive view of the impact of the lockdown on employment and individual experiences.

Type of Interview

One notable limitation of this study was the reliance on audio-only participant interviews. This approach restricted the researchers from observing the essence of nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions, gestures, and body language, which can provide essential context and depth to verbal responses. While member checking was employed to enhance the accuracy of interpreting the participants' statements, it is essential to acknowledge that this method also comes with challenges. Consequently, the absence of visual cues may have influenced the interpretation of the participants' words, potentially leading to misinterpretations or a lack of nuanced understanding of their perspectives.

Temporal Gap

Another notable limitation of the study was the timing of participants' reflections on their work-life balance experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown. This significant event occurred several years before the study, creating a considerable temporal gap. Such a delay may have impacted on the accuracy and intricacy of their recollections, as the challenges and emotions they faced during that tumultuous period could have faded or become obscured over time. Consequently, this might have led to less reliable and nuanced accounts of their experiences, ultimately affecting the richness and depth of the data collected.

Participant Bias

Participant bias occurs when individuals in research adjust their responses to align with what they think the researcher wants or avoid making themselves appear negatively to others, potentially skewing results. Some participants may have framed their narratives around societal expectations rather than their own experiences with work-life balance, sidestepping personal struggles to discuss those of others. This potentially compromises the level of their insights.

Researcher Bias

A potential limitation inherent in a qualitative phenomenological study is the possibility of the researcher unintentionally infusing bias into the study's outcomes. Although I employed bracketing techniques to consciously set aside preconceived notions and foster an attitude of open curiosity, my professional background as a mental health therapist, along with my experiences as a parent of adolescent children during the lockdown, could have subtly shaped my interpretation of the data and the identification of significant themes. We must understand that we cannot separate a phenomenon from its broader context and people's experiences. Furthermore, the essence of qualitative research and the nature of phenomenological inquiry relies heavily on subjective interpretations of the data, which may inevitably introduce a layer of subjectivity into the study's findings.

Social Media Recruitment

The employment of social media as a tool for recruiting parents eligible for participation in the study presents certain limitations worth considering. Primarily, this

approach targets parents who actively engage with specific social media platforms, excluding those who do not use these platforms or are not reachable online. This oversight may result in the omission of valuable perspectives and lived experiences from individuals who could contribute significantly to the diversity and richness of the study. Even though saturation, the point at which no new information is being obtained, was achieved, it is essential to note that the findings are derived from a relatively homogenous sample of participants. This lack of diversity may restrict the generalizability of the results and diminish the comprehensive understanding of the phenomena investigated.

Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of parents who lived with adolescent children and faced work-life balance conflicts during the COVID lockdown. Although present literature contains similarities about parenting and work-life balance during COVID, the population identified in this study must be recognized and researched further. There is a lack of literature describing the lived experiences of parents with early adolescent children during the COVID lockdown. Therefore, a need exists for an expanded study focusing on the challenges identified by individuals parenting early adolescent children during pandemics and natural disasters such as those caused by the COVID-19 virus. Findings from this study can be used to inform parents and improve chances for a successful encounter for this population.

Future research endeavors should prioritize the diversification of the participant pool to encompass a wider array of perspectives and experiences. Drawing from the

insights gained during this study, which focused on parents grappling with work-life balance conflicts amid the COVID lockdown, several key recommendations for further investigation emerge. First, it is vital to explore the impact that preexisting and unresolved interpersonal relationships may have on an individual's ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Understanding these dynamics could reveal important factors that influence parents' experiences. Additionally, incorporating male parents into the study population is essential. By including fathers, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how work-life balance challenges are perceived and managed differently across genders. Finally, future studies should examine how varying numbers of adolescent children affect parents' work-life balance. The differences in demands and responsibilities depending on the size of the family unit could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by parents in different circumstances. Collectively, these recommendations aim to enhance the understanding of work-life balance dynamics within diverse family structures during trying times.

Implications

The results of this study hold significant promise for promoting positive social changes at multiple levels. They provide a thorough framework for understanding the challenging experiences encountered by parents during the lockdown. By gaining deeper insights into the lived experiences of parents with early adolescent children concerning work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdown, we can better equip parents and organizations to offer effective support during future natural disasters or pandemics.

Implications for Positive Social Change

Positive social change constitutes a transformative process that alters behaviors and social relationships, yielding advantages for individuals, organizations, and society at large. These benefits extend beyond the initial gains realized by those who initiate the change, fostering a broader impact on the community. This research can potentially enhance societal well-being by improving both human and social conditions. Changes can manifest at multiple levels, influencing a range of entities, including individuals, families, and communities. Additionally, these shifts can extend to organizations and local, state, and federal government structures. Each level may experience unique challenges and opportunities, reflecting the complexity and interconnectivity of societal dynamics. Understanding the implications of these changes can provide valuable insights into how they affect both personal and collective lives, governance, and policymaking.

Implications of Theory

The transactional theory of stress and coping provides a valuable framework for understanding how parents of early adolescent children managed the challenges of work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdown. This theory emphasizes the dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments, highlighting how personal and social resources can mitigate the effects of chronic stressors encountered in daily life. The foundational principles of the stress and coping process model involve several key elements: social status, the context of daily life, exposure to stressors, and the available response mechanisms. These elements are interconnected; for instance, an individual's social status can influence their access to resources—both tangible and emotional—that are critical in managing stress.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, parents faced a unique set of challenges as they juggled remote work responsibilities while also engaging with their adolescent children. This situation created a complex web of stressors, as parents had to navigate work deadlines, family dynamics, and the heightened emotional needs of their children during a time of uncertainty. The interconnectedness of these stressors resulted in a chain of effects, where one factor influenced another. For example, the stress of managing work commitments could lead to increased frustration at home, thereby affecting parenting practices and the overall family environment. Conversely, a supportive family environment could help buffer the stresses faced at work.

Increased stress levels during the lockdown were evident among all participants. Future studies utilizing this model should concentrate on examining this critical aspect of the process. Severe stressors seldom occur in isolation. Parents, in particular, experience compounded stressors stemming from their unique lifestyle and the challenges of parenting an adolescent child, which subjects them to significant adversities. Programs designed to support these families should consistently assess for primary, secondary, and emerging stressors. By identifying these stressors, we can clarify the causal connections between exposure to life challenges and their subsequent effects. In summary, the transactional theory of stress and coping examined the multifaceted nature of work-life balance conflicts in this specific context, offering insights into the ways parents restructured their roles and resources to foster resilience during a particularly challenging period.

Recommendations for Practice

Addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by parents of adolescents, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 lockdown, requires significant and thoughtful effort. A comprehensive review of current research findings has yielded a series of recommendations aimed at improving practices and support for these families, highlighting the necessity for further investigation into their unique experiences. Parents' journeys through the complexities of raising adolescent children warrant continued attention and rigorous research to uncover deeper insights. By conducting in-depth investigations, we can gather crucial data that will serve as a foundation for enhancing both policy and practice. It is paramount to establish policies that are equitably and consistently implemented across all support agencies. Inconsistencies in policy application can create barriers that hinder families from receiving the tailored support they desperately need.

Moreover, adopting a collaborative approach among stakeholders can ensure the implementation of optimal practices. Such cooperation has the potential to foster improved outcomes, ultimately enriching the lives of families navigating this challenging parenting period. By prioritizing these efforts, we can pave the way for a supportive environment that acknowledges and addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by parents of adolescents coping with work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Conclusion

The extensive data gathered from parents of early adolescent children during the COVID-19 lockdown revealed profound insights into their experiences navigating work-

life balance conflicts. This rich dataset encapsulated the multifaceted challenges these parents faced while juggling self-care, managing household responsibilities, and fulfilling their work obligations—whether remotely or on-site. Parents described the emotional toll of balancing their children's needs with their professional demands, highlighting the intricate dynamics of shared space and time in a home transformed by the pandemic. These experiences uncovered valuable knowledge about their coping strategies, the impact on family relationships, and the shifts in priorities and routines that emerged during this unprecedented period. Overall, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the resilience and adaptability of families facing similar challenges in times of crisis.

The findings provided significant insights into the critical role parents play in preparing to address future challenges, particularly those reminiscent of the obstacles faced during lockdown periods. These insights emphasize the necessity of fostering a positive and nurturing environment for adolescent children during such unprecedented times. The study also highlighted its limitations, carefully outlining aspects that warrant further exploration. Recommendations for future research were presented, suggesting avenues to uncover additional findings within the discipline that could better inform parents and raise awareness among individuals who may encounter similar situations in the years to come.

The study's implications are profound, indicating that positive changes can be implemented not only at the individual level but also within organizational contexts. Furthermore, the findings open numerous possibilities for future research on topics

related to parenting early adolescent children, achieving work-life balance, and navigating the unique challenges posed by natural disasters or pandemics. This multifaceted approach underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics of parenting during turbulent times, ultimately aiming to equip families and communities with the tools they need to thrive amidst adversity.

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Appendix A: Eligibility Questionnaire

Thank you for offering your time to participate in this study! If you are feeling overwhelmed or in distress, you may stop the survey at any time. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available by telephone at 1-800-273-8255 24 hours a day or by web chat at http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/gethelp/lifelinechat.aspx if you would like to speak with someone. These services are confidential. These questions help identify the scope of your experiences during the COVID-19 lockdowns, which will help determine eligibility for the study.

- Were you employed either remotely or in-person from March 2020 to August 2020?
- Did you have early adolescent children ages 10 to 14 years old at the time living in your household during the COVID-19 lockdowns (March 2020 to August 2020)?
- Did you experience work-life balance conflicts due to the COVID-19 lockdowns (March 2020 to August 2020)?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How would you describe work-life balance?
2. What were your experiences with work-life balance prior to the COVID-19 lockdowns?
3. What was your life like when you first experienced the COVID-19 lockdowns?
4. Can you share some examples of encountering work-life balance conflict during the COVID-19 lockdowns?
5. What effect did work-life balance conflicts have on your personal life?
6. How did you address challenges brought on by work-life balance conflicts to your personal life?
7. What was the impact of work-life balance conflicts on your family life?
8. How did you address challenges brought on by work-life balance conflicts to your family life?
9. What was it like when your early adolescent child/children experienced disruptions to their normal routines during the COVID-19 lockdowns?
10. How did changes to your child's life contribute to work-life balance conflicts?
11. How did you address challenges posed by changes in your child's daily routines?
12. What was the impact of work-life balance conflicts on your psychological well-being?
13. How did you address challenges to your psychological well-being during the COVID-19 lockdowns?
14. How effective did you feel you addressed the imbalance between work and life activities?
15. What would you do differently if you were to experience this situation again?

Appendix C: Recruitment Documentation

Recruitment Social Media

Dear Parents,

I am a doctoral student with Walden University, conducting research on the work-life balance conflicts parents of early adolescents faced during COVID-19 lockdowns. I am writing to ask for your participation in a research study of views of work and family stress and coping during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Your participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous. No identifying information will be collected in the eligibility survey, and individual data will not be shared with anyone, including agency heads or supervisors. The benefit of participating in this study is that you will help provide valuable information needed to understand the stresses of parents with early adolescent children experiencing work-life balance conflicts during pandemics or other major crises. There are no foreseen risks to participating in this study; however, if you find you are overwhelmed or in distress, you may contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by telephone at 1-800-273-8255 or by web chat at http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/gethelp/lifelinechat.aspx. These services are confidential. The link that follows will take you to a website where you will be provided with informed consent details and directed to the study eligibility questionnaire, if you decide to participate.

If you are interested in additional information or in taking part in the study, please visit this website: https://www.surveymonkey.com/X/XXXXXXX

Thank you for your consideration, and if you have any questions, I may be reached via email at XXXXX.XXXX@waldenu.edu or via telephone at XXXXXXXXXX.

Very respectfully,