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## **Employers' Best Practices for Retaining Women Employees with Dual Responsibilities Post-COVID-19 Pandemic: A Multiple Case Study**

Wenoka E. Nieves  
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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Wenoka E. Nieves

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2025

Abstract

Employers' Best Practices for Retaining Women Employees with Dual Responsibilities

Post-COVID-19 Pandemic: A Multiple Case Study

by

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MPhil, Walden University, 2023

MS, Walden University, 2017

BA, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

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## Abstract

The challenges women face with dual responsibilities during a crisis often force them to take on additional or multiple responsibilities at home. The specific research problem is that although researchers have investigated job loss during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic of how employers can retain women with dual responsibilities, caring for their family members in their household and working during crises, has not been explored. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the best practices that employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. The affective events theory and leader-member exchange theory ground this study. The 10 participants included human resources (HR) professionals, hiring managers, and decision-makers in the Greater Milwaukee metropolitan area. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and job descriptions as external artifacts. Ten themes emerged from the thematic analysis: (a) workplace flexibility as a critical factor; (b) caregiving supports; (c) supportive leadership and mentorship; (d) well-being and mental health; (e) inclusion, equity, and culture; (f) rewards and career growth; (g) attendance and leave practices; (h) productivity and organizational outcomes; (i) turnover and absence drivers; and (j) post-COVID shifts. HR leaders can use these identified strategies to retain women with dual responsibilities during crises, supporting retention of women, reducing unemployment rates, and facilitating women's continued employment. The implications for positive social change include the potential for HR leaders to implement policies and practices that support caregiving employees for increasing productivity, morale, and retention.

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## Dedication

To my children, Sidney and Chance, this is your accomplishment as much as it is mine. You are my greatest inspiration, and your support and unconditional love sustained me through long days, nights, and countless battles. Every page of this work reflects my hope to show you the power of faith in God, perseverance, education, and faith in yourself. May you always know that my greatest achievement will forever be your mother.

To my parents, James and Mattie, I am because of you. Dad, I know you are looking from Heaven, smiling with pride. Thank you for pushing me to greater and always providing opportunities for me learn and grow. To my husband, David, thank you for your love, partnership, encouragement, and understanding.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Women with dual responsibilities during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond have experienced unprecedented demands between work and family, especially for working women (Phillips et al., 2022). In a 2021 Gallup analysis, it was reported that 500,000 more women exited the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. The U.S. Census Bureau reported (2021) between March and April of 2020, 3.5 million mothers living with school-age children left active work, either transitioning to paid or unpaid leave, losing their job, or exiting the workforce.

Women with dual responsibilities were impacted by job loss during the COVID-19 pandemic (Blundell et al., 2020; Mooi-Reci & Risman, 2021). The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) also reported that nearly 1-in-2 or 45% mothers of school-age children were not actively working in April 2020. Blundell et al. (2020) posited women have been particularly adversely impacted by the heightened dual pressures from childcare and work. As a result, there is a need for further research to explore employers' best practices for retaining women with dual responsibilities post-COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a need to gain insight into the best practices HR implements to keep women, especially during times of crisis. Knepper et al. (2023) posited that human resource management (HRM) structures and policies are pivotal links between organizational and individual levels, particularly during crises. Organizations must remain alert and flexible to unforeseen events, such as external crises, which create uncertainty among their workforce and pose immediate threats to their performance and viability (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, organizations

had to quickly navigate the unprecedented and find new solutions to challenges across many areas of their operations (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). The need for HR best practices to support the retention of women employees with dual responsibilities who care for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era suggests a research gap in understanding the perceptions of turnover intention with women with dual responsibilities during times of crisis and employers practices used to support retention of this population.

Chang et al. (2022) posited that the COVID-19 crisis required HR professionals and leaders to move above and beyond traditional tasks to address the complexities of uncertainties. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, women were forced to leave the workforce as they were unable to find or even afford childcare following school and daycare closures, and even due to the educational responsibilities of young children, which were necessitated by the forced shift to remote learning (Knepper et al., 2023).

This qualitative multiple case study explored best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. This chapter focuses on the connection between the framework and the nature of the study, including exploring the influence of HR practices and work environment on the perceptions of retention of women employees in the post-pandemic era. Supportive HR practices and work environments influence employee perceptions as they enhance employee commitment (Chatzoudes & Chatzoglou, 2022).

There is a knowledge gap where employers' best practices for retaining women employees with dual responsibilities in the post-pandemic era have yet to be explored

(Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021). For instance, Barhate and Hirudayaraj (2021) posited that future research is needed in a few areas, particularly exploring how the pandemic altered women employees' work/life boundaries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women battled more with job loss, stress, burnout, and overall well-being since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and current research and trends suggest a problematic future for working women (Gallup, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic created a challenging environment for human resource management (HRM), with managers having to quickly venture into areas of unknowns as they worked to support their workforce in adapting to and coping with changes that occurred not only in the work environment; however, the social environment (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Without notice, employees accustomed to working most of their time inside their organizations' physical boundaries had to quickly adjust to working in a remote environment (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research, an introduction to the concepts in the study and the research problem, and a description of why this study is necessary. Chapter 1 also includes the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research question, and a conceptual framework grounding the study. Furthermore, Chapter 1 covers the nature of the study, the definitions of frequently used terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance of the study to practice, theory, and social change, and a summary and transition.

### **Background of the Study**

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic that resulted in lockdowns, school and childcare closures, and an increase in

remote working conditions, which affected people's lives in different and challenging ways (CohenMiller & Izekenova, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic increased gender inequalities with income loss and unemployment among women (Blundell et al., 2020), primarily impacting women with dual responsibilities (Kabeer et al., 2021). Gender inequalities between men and women existed well before the COVID-19 pandemic. Fisher and Ryan (2021) posited that the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light both new and existing gender inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic affected women and men (mothers and fathers) differently, in addition to what happens to their jobs. Traditionally, mothers take a disproportionate share of the additional childcare and housework responsibilities, and their ability to do paid work and keep the levels of productivity they had pre-pandemic is limited, even if their jobs remain active (Blundell et al., 2020).

The gap in this study was based on a study by Elanda (2021), who explored how working from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 pandemic caused women to experience a double burden of caring for, managing their household, and being a wife. Elanda's (2021) study entitled, *The Construction of an Ideal Mother Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Gender Injustice Experienced by Career Women While Working From Home*, used a critical discourse analysis to dismantle the ideology behind creating the ideal mother figure during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Elanda's (2021) study intended to advocate for women who have been victims and are vulnerable to psychological, economic, cultural, and political violence to be aware of and make efforts to emancipate themselves due to the formation of an ideal mother figure. This study

focused on text analysis, which included representation, relations, and identity. Elanda reviewed 79 articles containing keywords of WFH mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those articles, Elanda found 19 articles published from May to June 2020 because the government had begun implementing the WFH policy during that timeframe (Elanda, 2021). My study filled the gap by exploring best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. Krstić and Matić (2020) indicated opportunities for future academic and practical exploration of employees' attitudes with the views of the employees' children as children are considered vital stakeholders.

The challenges women with dual responsibilities face during crises force women to take on additional or multiple responsibilities at home (Novita & Huwae, 2023). Novita and Huwae (2023) posited that further inequalities in and outside the home exist beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. In an effort for employers to prevent imbalances and retain women with dual responsibilities, HR leaders must focus on best practices that meet the employee's needs because COVID-19 created a health and socioeconomic crisis (Kabeer et al., 2021). For instance, women with lower income households and marginalized groups carried the burden of the COVID-19 crisis, and more women than men employed in sectors such as healthcare, education and hospitality were hit hardest by COVID-19 were equally negatively impacted with job loss in hard-hit sectors (Kabeer et al., 2021). Women's representation in those hard-hit sectors such as hotel, food, wholesale, retail, trade, arts, entertainment, business services, and labor-intensive manufacturing were especially high in Central America was 58.9% of all employed

women and in Southeast Asia was at 48.5% (Kabeer et al., 2021). While the COVID-19 pandemic has ended, this study was necessary because, during times of crisis, HR leaders must be able to continuously adapt to changing demands and adopt new policies and procedures that promote retention, employee engagement and motivation.

The adverse impact of women's dual responsibilities between work and home life decreased women's motivation and engagement. Ahmed et al. (2020) suggested that employee motivation and engagement changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. HR leaders experienced challenges in employee engagement, organizational performance, and knowledge sharing (Ahmed et al., 2020). HR leaders are responsible for managing and tracking whether employees contribute to organizational goals and objectives and having an ethical culture that meets employees, and organizational needs may create a win-win. Valecha (2022) noted that organizations work through their employees, and HR leaders have the most significant influence to align individual values with the organization's shared values to achieve an ethical culture and environment. In an effort for organizations to see consistent contributions from employees to organizational goals and objectives, HR leaders must implement best practices to maintain a solid employee engagement strategy that is inclusive of what matters to the employee to meet organizational goals and objectives, which is especially important during challenging times. Qin and Men (2022) suggested it is vital for organizations to strategically utilize internal communication at different levels to provide information and listen to employee concerns, strengthen the sense of belonging, and promote positive emotions, which all help employees get through challenging times.

Employee engagement may have dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic, which might have affected organizational productivity and is considered one of the most critical organizational HR initiatives to keep at the forefront to be successful through engaging employees who work from home effectively organizational performance (Ahmed et al., 2020). A lack of employee engagement impacts not only individual employee performance but organizational performance as well because goals and metrics may not be achieved by those driving such goals, the employee if the employee is not engaged and lacks the motivation to perform. Employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with burnout and turnover intent (Apaydin et al., 2023). Employee engagement involves higher individual performance, organizational financial performance, productivity, sales, and customer satisfaction (Andrić et al., 2023).

Effective HR practices can lead to positive turnover results and improved organizational performance. Employee engagement affects organizational performance and produces a higher sense of commitment. Al-Madi et al. (2017) proposed that committed employees with high job involvement are considered important assets to their organization. Committed employees with high job involvement present an opportunity for organizations to focus on employee well-being to overcome difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen innovative behaviors using intrinsic motivation based essentially on personal commitment (Muñoz et al., 2023). Employees can be empowered when they are moved into positions that provide opportunities for more responsibility and flexibility (Andika & Darmanto, 2020). Employers with strong employee engagement create opportunities for the employee's overall growth. For instance, employees who

were more engaged and motivated during the COVID-19 pandemic had opportunities where they were empowered to make decisions about their working conditions and even their workplace, which improved employees' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a component of social learning theory, and it is a valuable concept in understanding virtual (remote) employees who become self-empowered and rely on their cognitive abilities because they need to perform in the virtual (remote) work environment to ensure successful career outcomes (Yarberry & Sims, 2021).

As the physical workplace converted into a virtual workplace at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, HR leaders' awareness of engaging employees effectively to retain staff (Ahmed et al., 2020) increased. The COVID-19 pandemic brought new and different opportunities for organizations to leverage their strategic talent management. For instance, many organizations have transitioned primarily to a virtual work environment, and this creates an opportunity for HR leaders to manage the employees differently (Ahmed et al., 2020) and implement innovative and flexible best practices that help to meet the needs of their workforce, especially women with dual responsibilities.

Employees are a critical resource for organizations, and the organization's failure or success connects to the organization's ability to attract, retain, and reward talented and capable employees (Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2020) and the need for innovative and flexible best practices is necessary for organizations to thrive as well as retain women with dual responsibilities; specifically, those that are skilled and talented beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Retaining skilled employees can be a vital advantage source for organizations (Ahmed et al., 2020). Top talent is one of the most valuable assets that can lead an

organization to success, and losing good talent means losing knowledge. Retaining talent can help organizations retain knowledge and experience (Dirani et al., 2020), causing a shift for HR leaders to be more adaptive and flexible when considering strategies to implement effective HR best practices.

The need for effective HR best practices and implementation of strategies tailored toward employee attraction and retention is even more critical beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic presented complicated employee issues to organizations worldwide (Yu, 2022). COVID-19 impacted employee engagement, employee knowledge sharing, and overall employee work attitudes (Ahmed et al., 2020). Recognition of the impact of context on career development, a foundational aspect of sustainable careers, and career shock are necessary (Hite & McDonald, 2020) for HR leaders to consider. Recognition of the impact of context on career development, a foundational aspect of sustainable careers, and career shock are necessary (Hite & McDonald, 2020) for HR leaders to consider. Lee and Mitchell (1994) suggested that in the mid-nineties, the concept of career shocks resurfaced as individuals negotiate unpredictable events in the rapidly changed career environment due to the pandemic of 2020 (Hite & McDonald, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a paradigm shift in how organizations should rethink strategies to help retain knowledge and top talent (Howe et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic created uncertainties for many employees as they navigated work and family life challenges. These uncertainties include employment and employability, actual physical workspace configuration, and the future of some careers as employees

seek new opportunities and possibilities (Hite & McDonald, 2020) to meet their professional and personal needs. As such, organizations have needed help to retain some of their top talent.

Many organizations need help retaining top talent due to these challenges and competing demands for exceptionally talented and skilled employees from varied industries. As such, retention remains an ongoing concern for many Human Resource (HR) leaders, especially during times of crisis. The pandemic of 2020 caused by COVID-19 created uncertainty and a retention crisis for many organizations, and HR leaders were unprepared to handle the retention crisis. As a result, job retention should be a core practice of HRM (Stuart et al., 2021) so that HR leaders are always prepared and can manage through challenges using appropriate best practices such as strategic talent management to retain and attract top, quality candidates, even during times of crisis.

Talent management is necessary for an organization to thrive. Employee turnover has cost implications for the organization. The cost may be advertising expenses, head-hunting fees, loss of time and efficiency, work imbalance, and employee training and development expenses for recruits. Talent management is vital in recognizing competencies, motivating employees, and retaining organizational talent (Azizi et al., 2021). Employees are a critical resource for organizations, and the organization's failure or success links with its ability to attract, retain, and reward talented and capable employees (Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2020). Retaining top talent is a vital advantage for organizations (Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2020). During the 2020 pandemic, many organizations experienced trouble retaining talent due to issues beyond their control that

impacted employees' ability to remain in their positions. For instance, lack of childcare, burnout, homeschooling, fear of contracting the virus, and even increased workloads have forced many organizations' top talent to make difficult decisions regarding their employment and home life. COVID-19 has affected employees' work attitudes and psychology to a certain extent, and increased stress has led to turnover intention.

Turnover intention measures an employee's intent to search for a new job with another organization (Obuobisa-Darko & Sokro, 2023). Employee turnover is expensive for organizations. Employee turnover includes advertising expenses, head-hunting fees, loss of time and efficiency, work imbalance, and training and development expenses for recruits (Obuobisa-Darko & Sokro, 2023). High turnover intention can inhibit primary business goals which results in substantial organizational losses (Saufi et al., 2023). managers must identify and hire qualified candidates and anticipate the needs of their current talent; however, HR managers also manage transformation and change and work with employees in adapting to changing working conditions to help retain top talent (Hiltrop, 1999). This need is even more vital for working women with dual responsibilities in the post-pandemic era. As a result, this qualitative multiple case study explored best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. Family members may include spouses, children and even parents. This research focused on the connection between strategic talent management and talent retention, providing HR leaders with better insight into how to be more effective in retaining top talent, especially during times of crisis.

## **Problem Statement**

The COVID-19 pandemic caused school and daycare closures, which increased caregiving responsibilities for working parents, and many of those working parents needed to change their work hours to meet the demands of caregiving (Collins et al., 2021). Working mothers with young children were significantly impacted, reducing their work hours four to five times more than working fathers, causing the gender gap to grow by 20-50% (Collins et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people were impacted by job loss; however, women were impacted more than men. Between January and December 2020, women's full-time employment rate declined by 19.1% by July 2020, compared to January of that year, with a decline of only 11.6% for men (Villarreal & Yu, 2022).

The general problem is that a crisis such as the pandemic negatively impacts working women, causing higher stress levels, more significant increases in workplace burnout, and increased pressures on working mothers. This caused women to suffer more substantial job losses than men because working mothers experienced a significant increase in the burden of unpaid care and household responsibilities that women have long carried; however, these increased pressures forced many women to exit the workforce or search for part-time or hybrid work (Gallup, 2022). The specific research problem is that although researchers have investigated job loss during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic of how employers can retain women with dual responsibilities caring for their family members in their household and working during crises has not been explored (Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. A qualitative multiple case study requires in-depth consideration in a real-life context, as required in case study research (Yin, 2018). The qualitative multiple case study was appropriate for researching the best practices employers' use to retain women with dual responsibilities in the post-pandemic era. In qualitative multiple-case study research, the objective is to use several complementary sources of evidence to obtain multiple perspectives on a phenomenon (Quintão et al., 2020). Multiple-case study research involves a more in-depth understanding of the cases; comparing similarities and differences of each case in multiple-case research is a central component of multiple-case research (Heale & Twycross, 2018). A comprehensive understanding of the research concepts and the purpose of the case study is necessary for conducting an effective and efficient case study (Rashid et al., 2019; Yin, 2018).

For multiple case research, the cases should be similar, such as a set of teachers for the study of a program in many sites where the collection may include all existing cases (Stake, 2013). A qualitative understanding of cases requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its context and particular situation (Stake, 2013). The case study relies heavily on two sources of evidence not usually available as part of the conventional historian's repertoire: direct observation of the events studied and interviews of the persons who may still be involved in those events (Yin, 2018).

Although case studies and histories can overlap, the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a complete variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and direct observations, as well as participant observation beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study (Yin, 2018).

### **Research Question**

What best practices do employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study's conceptual framework included the affective events theory (AET) and leader-member exchange theory. AET is a reciprocation process where individual perceptions and emotional responses following organizational events may shape the individual's attitudes and behaviors (Itzkovich et al., 2022). LMX suggests that the quality of the relationship between the leader and employee directly influences individual and organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, turnover, and performance (de Oliveira & da Silva, 2015).

AET views affective work behaviors with the concepts of an employee's mood and emotions (Dugguh & Dennis, 2014). Affective events are a broad label of mood and emotion (Pirola-Merlo et al., 2002). A mood is a diffuse affective state that lacks a clear referent or cause, (e.g., someone may feel happy without attributing it to any reason). An emotion, in contrast, is a discrete affective state that the individual perceives to have an identifiable cause or referent (e.g., feeling anxious about today's exam). The affective

events theory is positive-inducing and negative-inducing emotional events that are identifiable in the workplace (Dugguh & Dennis, 2014). These emotional events have a significant psychological impact that results in internal and external affective reactions in employee's job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Dugguh & Dennis, 2014).

Leader-member exchange theory is concerned with the ability of a leader in groups to maintain the leader position through a series of tacit exchange agreements and dealings with their members (Saeed et al., 2014). The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory is the relationship between employee and leader. LMX consists of concepts of high-quality exchanges such as trust, mutual respect, understanding, job-related well-being, and the effectiveness of the employee (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015). These concepts are essential to the concepts in my study because these concepts help to shape and better understand the needs of the employee as well as the needs of the employer. Having an understanding of mutual needs may help to implement better HR practices that not only meet organizational needs but are also employee-friendly.

The leader-member exchange theory focuses on the two-way relationship between supervisors and subordinates (Saeed et al., 2014). As such, leader-member exchange theory directly impacts turnover intention (Saeed et al., 2014). There is also a direct impact of leader-member exchange theory on organizational commitment, where leaders and subordinates can develop a relationship of mutual loyalty. In exchange for the loyalty offered by the subordinate, the leader may reciprocate offerings that require higher judgment or responsibility (Keskes et al., 2018).

Within organizational commitment, employees with a strong relationship with their organization have less intention to move to another organization than employees who are not effectively and powerfully committed (Saeed et al., 2014). Additionally, the emphasis of the leader-member exchange theory on job performance is that high job performance encourages employees and leads toward reward; therefore, turnover intention decreases (Saeed et al., 2014). An admiration of affective events theory and leader-member exchange theory may help support a deeper understanding of how and what best practices can be implemented in organizations to focus on supporting and retaining women employees with dual responsibilities in the COVID-19 post-pandemic era. Organizations may reap the benefits of improved retention, further impacting the cost to organizations associated with unemployment insurance, backfilling, recruiting, and training new employees to fill positions due to turnover.

### **Nature of the Study**

The selected research method was used to explore how employers use best practices to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in the post-pandemic era. According to Yin (2018), qualitative multiple case studies should include original questions intended to explain a contemporary circumstance, for example, using “how” to study a social phenomenon. The phenomenon of interest was understanding employers’ best practices for retaining women with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID-19 era.

Case studies are identified by a “how” or “why” question asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control (Yin, 2018). Case studies are relevant when the researcher’s questions require an extensive and “in-

depth” description of some social phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Multiple case study research investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be evident (Yin, 2018).

Case studies are preferred when the relevant behaviors still cannot be manipulated and when the desire is to study some contemporary event or set of events (“contemporary” meaning a fluid rendition of the recent past and the present, not just the present) (Yin, 2018). Additionally, case studies have a unique strength where their ability to deal with a complete variety of evidence comes from documents, artifacts, interviews, direct observations, and participant observation beyond what might be available in a conventional historical study (Yin, 2018). In addition to the evidence, the questions that seek to understand how and why make the multiple case study the most appropriate design to answer the research question.

Sufficient access to data for a case study is needed, whether interviewing people, reviewing documents or records, or making field observations (Yin, 2018). A multiple case study approach was used to investigate organization’s current and past practices and employee experience. Participants were interviewed where a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was utilized. Most qualitative studies will evolve as (1) a general idea of where and with what population to start and by soliciting a few cases through convenience procedures, (2) successive sample units are selected based on what is selected, (3) informants are often used to help in the selection of sample members, (4) review data as it is gathered, (5) sampling continues until saturation occurs, and (6) the

final sample may include confirming or disconfirming cases (Landreneau, 2009 ). There are many business sector employers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This study solicited participants who could provide extensive insights into the HR practices of business sector employers. The sampling method is purposive sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). There are many different purposive sampling techniques. The technique that most applies to this research is the homogeneous sampling technique. The homogeneous technique aims to achieve a homogeneous sample with similar characteristics, such as ages, cultures, jobs, or life experiences (Etikan et al., 2016). This technique focuses on this precise similarity and how it relates to the researched topic (Etikan et al., 2016).

### **Definitions**

This section highlights the definitions of relevant concepts consistently found throughout the literature review. The definitions highlighted in this literature review appeared several times throughout the review. The literature review is not just the summation of the sources reviewed; however, it is essential to note the consistency of definitions found because the summary and synthesis of the definitions are critical to understanding the phenomenon.

*Employee motivation:* Motivated and committed employees with high levels of job involvement are essential assets to an organization (Denton, 1987; Al-Madi et al., 2017). Denton (1987) argued that keeping employee motivation, commitment, and job

involvement up is always rewarding to a business, as motivated and committed employees are more productive (Al-Madi et al., 2017).

*Empowerment:* Empowerment is the authority to make decisions in a particular area of operations without having to get the approval of others. Empowerment is vital to employee engagement (Andika & Darmanto, 2020).

*Human resources:* A part of the strategic planning process with a role in developing organizational policies, planning for the expansion of organizational lines, and the process of organizational mergers and acquisitions (Infante & Darmawan, 2022).

*Human resource management:* Combines tasks used for efficient and effective management of employees in the organizations (Wijesiri et al., 2019). Organizations use HR practices to manage employees and align with Human Resource Management (Wijesiri et al., 2019).

*Human resource management practices:* The management of people within organizations, comprising of activities, policies, and practices involved in planning, obtaining, developing, utilizing, evaluating, maintaining, and retaining the appropriate numbers and skill mix of employees to achieve the organization's objectives (Jeet & Sayeeduzzafar, 2014, Wijesiri, et al., 2019). HR practices help achieve organizational goals, have positive employer-employee relationships, and create organizational value (Marescaux et al., 2012; Wijesiri et al., 2019). Flexible and innovative HR practices are helping to gain a competitive advantage through employees.

*Retention:* Involves particular drivers of employee engagement and satisfaction, such as compensation, growth, environment, relationship, support, respect, rewards, and

recognition (Gorde, 2019). Employee retention is the top priority of organizations due to increasing competition. There are countless reasons for an employee to leave the job, including finding a different job, shifting to a different place, getting angry about something and deciding to quit, women getting married, entering motherhood, and so on (Rakhra, 2018).

*Strategic talent management:* Activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of critical positions that differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization (Collins & Mellahi, 2009).

*Turnover:* The "individual movement across the membership boundary of an organization;" however, turnover intent is not explicit, unlike actual turnover. Turnover intentions are conceptualized as intentional statements about a specific behavior, namely, an employee's conscious and deliberate willingness to leave an organization, which are recognized as immediate precursors to actual turnover behavior (Sun et al., 2025).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions in qualitative research involve describing what and why using understandings, beliefs, or prejudgments based on personal experiences (Peterson, 2019). The understandings, beliefs, and prejudgments aid in framing the research question (Peterson, 2019). In qualitative inquiry, the formulation of research questions is widely

recognized as a critical stage in shaping the overall direction, methodological choices, and analytic strategies of a study. Van der Waldt (2025) emphasized that well-crafted questions not only define the scope of investigation but also ensure alignment between the research design and its theoretical contributions (Van der Waldt, 2025).

This is because the research question guides the framework for the research and helps define what is being investigated. For this qualitative multiple case study, there are five assumptions: (1) hiring leaders and HR leaders still need to adopt innovative HR practices to attract and retain women with dual responsibilities beyond the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) the interview questions for the participants will provide a clear explanation to the research problem; (3) women with dual responsibilities who worked throughout the COVID-19 pandemic had an increased change in work attitudes as it relates to turnover intention, job satisfaction, and job commitment; (4) participants will demonstrate their organization did not already have existing HR practices to meet the needs of the new working environment produced by the COVID-19 pandemic for working women with dual responsibilities; and (5) through the data received from interviews and artifacts, these items will further add evidence of the problem. The above assumptions relate to a significant HR strategy (or practice). For example, all the assumptions correlate with the HR strategy of talent management.

Talent management is the primary global challenge facing most organizations worldwide (Sopiah et al., 2020). An inadequate talent pool encourages organizations to compete in attracting the same talent to maintain, develop, and achieve effectively and efficiently organizational goals (Sopiah et al., 2020). Talent management not only

recruits, strengthens, and evaluates talent but can also lead to personal growth, employee satisfaction, and improvement in employee performance (Sopiah et al., 2020). Talent management helps to achieve competitiveness, which is an area of concern for many organizations to manage and retain talent effectively (Sopiah et al., 2020), and talent management is also essential for employee development.

Employee development is another HR strategy aligned with the assumptions mentioned earlier. Employee development is one of the most critical functions of Human Resource Management (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). Employee development means developing an individual employee's and organization's abilities; therefore, employee development consists of the individual or employee and the employee's overall growth (Hameed & Waheed, 2011). There is a direct relationship between manager and employee and employee development and employee performance.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study explored HRM practices and implications to understand the gap in knowledge relating to HR best practices for retaining women employees with dual responsibilities in the post-pandemic era. This study revealed the experiences of women employees with dual responsibilities regarding turnover intention beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. An in-depth understanding of the actual experiences provided further opportunities for research on the impact of crisis and working women with dual responsibilities.

The population for this research was limited to a small number of subject matter experts selected through purposeful and convenience sampling. The intent was to

understand employers' best practices for working women with dual responsibilities and turnover within their organizations. Delimitations of a study are the limitations consciously set by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

### **Limitations**

Limitations represent weaknesses in a study that could influence the outcomes and conclusions of the research (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). The goal of presenting the study's limitations is to provide meaningful information to the readers; however, the goal is also to present an ethical element to scientific inquiry (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). An ethical element that could have arose in this study was personal bias. Personal bias was well controlled throughout this study. While personal bias could arise at any point, I recognized there was a potential bias from personal experiences working as an HR leader and working mother with dual responsibilities. Any beliefs regarding the research concepts that shaped the research questions could have influenced how participants' responses and study conclusions were interpreted. As mitigation strategies to remove such personal bias, I documented and sheltered personal experiences and beliefs. Documenting any personal biases helped to support identification and awareness. This study may also be limited if hiring leaders did not have full decision-making ability. As such, verifying the scope of participants' decision-making authority, setting boundaries, and noting delimitations before the interviews helped mitigate such limitations.

Delimitations are concerned with the definitions that the researchers decide to set as the boundaries, which are the limits of their work so that the study's aims and objectives are not impossible to achieve (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Delimitations

primarily concern the study's theoretical background, objectives, research questions, variables under investigation, and study sample (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The limitations of a study should leave the reader thinking about opportunities to engage in future improvements by presenting gaps in the current research and igniting other researchers' curiosity and interest in expanding the line of scholarly inquiry (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because the results provide HR practitioners and hiring managers a better understanding of how improved HR practices may help to retain women with dual responsibility, identified as those women who are caring for their families and working. The results of this study may aid employers in retaining women with dual responsibilities in times of crises, such as pandemics, supporting the retention of this population, avoiding higher unemployment rates, and assisting women in maintaining their dual responsibilities. Women have been particularly adversely impacted in the workforce by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research may support HR professionals and hiring managers' knowledge in effectively driving their employers forward in retention efforts of women workers post-COVID-19. This study may contribute to positive social change by improving the gender gap in the workforce, helping to keep women with dual responsibilities employed during times of crisis.

### **Significance to Practice**

This study is significant to practice because it provides a clear explanation of the implications of HR practices on the retention of women with dual responsibilities in the

post-pandemic era. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged employers to rethink their conventional HR practices (Zhong et al., 2021). For instance, flexible work arrangements (Zhong et al., 2021) are a common HR practice that many organizations have implemented throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to attract and retain their workforce.

### **Significance to Theory**

The findings of this study support employers in retaining women with dual responsibilities in times of crises, such as pandemics, supporting the retention of women, avoiding higher unemployment rates, and assisting women in maintaining their employment. The theories grounding this study were the leader-member exchange (LMX) and affective events theories (AET). The leader-member exchange theory was introduced in 1975 by Fred Dansereau, George Graen, and William Haga, and the affective events theory was introduced in 1996 by Howard M. Weiss and Russell Cropanzano. The LMX theory explains how the quality of relationships between leaders and employees influences motivation, satisfaction, and retention. High-quality exchanges, recognized by trust, mutual respect, and individualized support lead to stronger engagement and loyalty (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In this study, LMX provides a framework for understanding how empathetic and flexible leadership behaviors enhance retention among women employees managing both work and caregiving responsibilities in post COVID-19 workplaces.

AET focuses on how emotions generated by workplace events shape an employees' attitude and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The theory suggests that daily experiences, such as flexibility, recognition, or exclusion, evoke emotional

responses that influence job satisfaction and commitment. AET aligns with this study by explaining how organizational practices and leadership actions, specifically, those affecting work life balance, create emotional outcomes that impact women's well-being and their turnover intention.

This study is significant to theory because it offers a detailed qualitative insight into the experiences of employers' best practices in retaining women with dual responsibility in the post-COVID-19 era. The data from this research study should provide organizational decision-makers with opportunities for enhancing sustainable HRM practices in the post-COVID-19 era. HRM must manage an organization's workforce's acquisition processes, retention policies, and exit strategies (Mefi & Asoba, 2021).

### **Significance to Social Change**

This study had implications for employers that may fill a gap in understanding for hiring managers and HR practitioners on how improved HR practices may help retain women with dual responsibility, those caring for their families and working in the post-pandemic era. The results of this study could aid employers in retaining women with dual responsibilities in times of crises, such as pandemics, supporting the retention of this population, avoiding higher unemployment rates, and assisting women in maintaining their dual responsibilities. Women have been particularly adversely impacted in the workforce by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this research will assist employers – the HR professionals and hiring managers' knowledge in effectively driving their employers forward in retention efforts of women workers post-COVID-19. This

study may contribute to positive social change by improving the gender gap in the workforce, helping to keep women with dual responsibilities employed during times of crisis.

### **Summary and Transition**

Chapter 1 included an introduction to the study, exploring opportunities for employers to implement sustainable HR practices to retain female employees with dual responsibilities. The effectiveness of HR practices is critical for the sustainability and retention of the workforce and determines an organization's ability to respond to emergent HR issues (Zhong et al., 2021). Chapter 2 is the literature review, including the conceptual framework and theories that ground this study: the leader-member exchange theory and affective events theory, and a summary of existing literature related to the phenomenon.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The specific research problem is that although researchers have investigated job loss during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic of how employers can retain women with dual responsibilities caring for their family members in their household and working during crises has not been explored (Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era.

Women were primarily on the front lines against the COVID-19 virus, with 70% of the health workforce being women (Thibaut & van Wijngaarden-Cremers, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, in the United States, women held 78% of mostly hospital jobs, 70% of pharmacy, and at least 51% of grocery store positions (Thibaut & van Wijngaarden-Cremers, 2020). Working women on the front lines significantly impacted their lives, for instance, their health, security, personal and professional life, children, self-care, and relationship status (Basak & Akter, 2022). Women already did unpaid care work, such as childcare, before the COVID-19 pandemic (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). Power (2020) suggested that the crisis and its subsequent shutdown response dramatically increased this burden. Power asserted that the negative impacts on women and their families will last several years after the COVID-19 pandemic without proactive interventions (Power, 2020).

This chapter explored the current and pertinent literature on women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their family members and working after dramatic

events impacting society. Crises, including pandemics, have highlighted the impact on working women (Kantamneni, 2020). As a part of the affected population, women experienced a much harsher impact on work-related and economic factors (Kantamneni, 2020). This chapter includes a framework that guided the research and expand on concepts through theory and the literature review as a focal point of employer best practices to retain women employees with dual responsibilities and working post-COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature review included ProQuest, Google Scholar, and EBSCO Host to search for peer-reviewed publications between 2020-2023. The State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development website was also used. The databases identified and search engines used to support the conceptual framework and literature review included terms applicable to women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household family members and working after dramatic events that impact society.

The literature search included 52 peer-reviewed articles since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Search terms occurred in an interactive process from 2020-2023 during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other peer-reviewed publications within the last 5 years were also reviewed and the following search terms were used: *turnover, motivation, leadership, effectiveness, empowerment, talent, management, employee engagement, remote, performance, retention, pandemic, crisis, pandemics and working women, gender inequality and COVID-19, Human Resources (HR) talent strategy, employee lifecycle, rewards, work-life balance, work from home,*

*women workers, attract and retain, dual responsibilities of women in leadership during COVID, COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 negative impact on women, HR best practices after COVID-19, HR best practices for retaining women, HR retention post COVID-19, HR retention goals post COVID-19, working women COVID-19 pandemic, work productivity of women during COVID-19 pandemic, working women with multiple obligations, turnover of women, impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women, retention of women pre-COVID, retention of women post COVID, COVID-19 and turnover of women, COVID-19, and retention of working women, retention of women during COVID-19, dual responsibilities of working women during COVID-19, COVID-19, working and caregiving, the turnover intention of women COVID-19, and attracting and retaining women workers beyond COVID-19.* This search strategy helped to achieve current, relevant literature and provided information to support the gap found in the literature. The search terms used aided me in expanding on the framework needed to explore the topic.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theories that grounded this study were the leader-member exchange (LMX) and affective events theories (AET). AET is a reciprocation process where individual perceptions and emotional responses following organizational events may shape the individual's attitudes and behaviors (Itzkovich et al., 2022). LMX suggests that the quality of the relationship between the leader and employee directly influences individual and organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, turnover, and performance (de Oliveira & da Silva, 2015).

Exploring the impact of COVID-19 in the workplace and affective events theory includes employee performance, engagement, and satisfaction as crucial concepts (Sarfraz, 2022). The concepts mentioned earlier correlate with underlying factors and behaviors, such as feelings and emotions that employees experience while working (Sarfraz, 2022). Sarfraz (2022) noted that researchers explored affective events theory to help illustrate how feelings and emotions play a significant role in the employee experience. Batat (2022) posited that there is a meaningful relationship between employee experience and well-being, where the latter is considered both a driving force and an outcome of the overall employee experience. The employee's personal, social, and cultural backgrounds can affect the employee's well-being regarding functional and emotional support (Batat, 2022). The affective events theory states that individuals are emotional beings whose emotions influence their behavior (Sarfraz, 2022). While the affective events theory is more involved with individual perceptions and employee emotions, the theory is also connected to the leader-member exchange theory because leaders directly influence employees' feelings and perceptions. The affective events theory and leader-member exchange theories relate to the research questions because they may help better understand the turnover intention and the desires of working women with dual responsibilities needed by their employers to maintain employment. As a result, both the affective events theory and leader-member exchange theory helped to steer this research study.

## **Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

Leader-member exchange theory originated in the early 1970s and was initially known as a vertical dyad (Gottfredson et al., 2020). The underlying basic premise of the vertical dyad is grounded in what is known as role theory, which suggests that employees' roles develop more through informal rather than formal processes, such as a job description, and that employees' immediate leaders were influential in employees achieving clarity in their roles (Gottfredson et al., 2020). The leader-member exchange theory represents that leader-member exchange revolves around the notion that leaders interact differently with their members or followers, and some of their followers may have a great deal of personal involvement, trust, and long-term investment (Andersen et al., 2020).

The leader-member exchange theory also represents the foundation that leader-member exchange suggests with some members. There may be less investment, trust, and more formal quid-pro-quo transactions (Andersen et al., 2020). Various theorists have expanded on the leader-member exchange theory. The leader-member exchange theory asserts that the supervisor and the employee are in a continuous social exchange process that fosters positive work behaviors (Saeed et al., 2019). High-quality leader-member exchange associations involve a sense of belonging, loyalty, trust, and respect.

Low-quality leader-member exchange relationships involve low respect, a lack of loyalty, and mistrust (Morrow et al., 2005). Volmer et al. (2012) suggest that employees in high-quality leader-member exchange relationships have more of a leader's time and experience more guidance, information sharing, and emotional support than those in low-

quality leader-member exchanges. As a result, employees have an advantage because their leaders introduce them to key individuals in the workplace, managing further information and connecting the employees to critical social resources (Volmer et al., 2012).

### **Affective Events Theory**

The affective events theory is a framework suggested to predict employee emotional reactions to workplace events and environments (Christensen et al., 2023). The affective events theory originated in organizational behavior, providing a practical framework for understanding the influence of specific events on individual attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The affective events theory suggests that employees' behaviors do not always come from rational factors influenced by affective reactions, such as job promotion, layoff, and leadership turnover, and can lead to positive or negative affective responses (Mi et al., 2021).

There is a continuous focus on the psychological aspect of the affective events theory and its' connection to employees' emotions and behavior toward their work environment and the outcome of the work performed. Ohly and Venz (2021) suggest that affective events theory stipulates that the work environment affects behavior by making affective work events (defined as something that happens in the workplace) more or less likely. Woznyj et al. (2021) found that affective workplace events are related to discrete emotions (such as happiness and anger) and are significantly associated with fluctuations in perceived organizational support. Organizational events cause affective reactions, and work environment features predispose certain affect-producing events, which may lead to

positive or negative emotions (Basch & Fisher, 1998). Affective events theory also proposes that stable work environment features such as job scope predispose the occurrence of certain types of affect-producing events (Basch & Fisher, 1998). For instance, an enriched job might more often lead to discrete events involving feedback, task accomplishment, and optimal challenge, which may then lead to positive emotions such as pride, happiness, and enthusiasm

Affective events theory stretches beyond specific events and their extracted emotions and affective states (Stylos et al., 2022). Individual reactions contribute to an individual's well-being. Less attention on well-being from an emotional perspective and progress in gender equality and opportunities has become a priority (Campos-García, 2022). Workplace activities favoring physical well-being are necessary and of higher regard, with activities that contribute to the greater emotional well-being of employees, in general, and women, in particular (Campos-García, 2022).

This framework is well-suited for organizational hiring leaders and HR practitioners in developing best practices to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in the COVID-19 post pandemic era. Little research exists concerning employers' best practices to retain female employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their family members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic. The distinct attributes and retention needs of working women with dual responsibilities provided a framework for investigating why. The literature review further created the foundation to drive the research study.

## Literature Review

A review of the current literature provided the clarity that created the foundation and framework to drive the research process. The research on this topic clarified what other researchers found with working women with dual responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. By exploring various viewpoints, the viewpoints helped to examine the phenomenon of interest in depth. The diverse perspectives researched allowed for further development of the research process. The literature review started with exploring employee needs and what different employees need and want from their employer's pre-pandemic and post-pandemic. Team dynamics and team makeup were also necessary to review, which led to further investigation of the literature review of multicultural teams and the concepts of changes in multicultural work environments. These themes allowed for the exploration of leadership and management ideas and trends impacting employee engagement and retention. These ideas were expanded upon further and added further imperative themes for the study, which included change management, globalization and complex work environments, employee retention, talent acquisition and strategic talent management, COVID-19 and gender gaps, management trends, employee needs and sustainable work environments, employee engagement, management trends, unpaid care work of women, COVID-19 pandemic and gender inequality, single working mothers, women working dual responsibilities, COVID-19 and working women, employee productivity, empowered employees, employee well-being.

The themes identified in this literature review included all that was available relevant to the topic. Because the issue is relatively new, there was prior research within

the last 3 years that was helpful. However, the research needs to be more comprehensive regarding best practices that organizations should implement to support working women with dual responsibilities post-COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Multicultural Environment Changes and Virtual Teams**

Individual and team factors and knowledge characteristics are vital to multicultural teams (Zhou et al., 2023). Multicultural teams include individuals with different backgrounds, cultures, races, and demographics (Sogancilar & Husniye, 2018). The uniqueness of multicultural teams is even more imperative for organizations that have virtual teams, especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Virtual teams benefit employees and employers (Davidavičienė et al., 2020). Remote work has become a popular expression (Kaushik et al., 2019) and a popular concept that employees want due to its benefits. Employees tend to reap the benefits of the flexibility of working remotely, which facilitates work-life balance and increases employee satisfaction (Davidavičienė et al., 2020). Organizations use virtual teams to increase efficiency in vast activities domains, such as research and development, knowledge management, learning and training, manufacturing, marketing, and others (Duran & Popescu, 2014). The need for virtual teams significantly increased at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued even well after the pandemic has ended. Virtual teams can help to improve organizational efficiency and communication and increase organizational goals, especially in the post-pandemic era.

In the post-pandemic era, virtual teams are prevalent for many organizations, and the desire to have virtual teams may positively impact employee retention and

satisfaction. The increase in employee satisfaction and work-life balance from remote work also benefits leaders because the benefits of remote work can help improve employee engagement. According to a survey conducted by Gallup (2023), three in ten hybrid (working remote and in person) employees are likely to turnover in an organization if there is not an option offered to work at some degree of remote flexibility, and the same for six in ten fully remote employees.

Employees accustomed to remote work resist returning to their physical work environment due to the demands of home and family needs. The specific research problem is that although researchers have investigated job loss during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, there is limited understanding of best practices employers implement to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic (Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021). As a result, leaders should build support within the multicultural environment, address personal beliefs in an open and candid discussion, bring awareness to the resistance to change, and create autonomy within the environment to support change. For leaders to successfully execute change, support and guidance are needed from HR leaders to have effective leadership, especially for those leaders directly leading multicultural teams.

A significant challenge for multicultural management is employees' different cultural beliefs, needs, practices, and traditions (Castaneda et al., 2013, p.165). HR can play a critical role in supporting leaders through a lens of cultural and emotional intelligence to drive leaders forward in successfully leading multicultural teams. In

multicultural organizations, HR can play a critical role in supporting leaders through a lens of cultural and emotional intelligence to drive leaders forward in successfully leading multicultural teams. Leadership appears in many forms of organizational behaviors and performance outcomes (Box et al., 2015, p.24). Leadership intelligence is necessary in a multicultural environment to effectively manage teams of unique, diverse backgrounds and various needs.

Leadership intelligence exists in many forms and is developed mainly through experience and continued education (Box et al., 2015). Managers need to prepare organizations for the changes in the 21st century, which requires charismatic leadership skills to operate in dynamic environments (Box et al., 2015). Leadership competencies such as influence, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and ability to lead change management initiatives are basic leadership skills needed in the post-pandemic world as organizations continue to make changes and settle into new ways of working.

### **Change Management**

Change management is transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state (Parkes, 2016). Change is a part of the organizational process and occurs because there is a need to expand, improve, or transform (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic brought improvement and transformation for many organizations and caused leaders to make swift decisions in unprecedented times. Stefan and Nazarov (2020) posited that leading an organization in a severe medical crisis is a stressful action, as the role and influence of the leader acquire a decisive role in times of change.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations needed to make immediate changes to sustain their business; however, with change came resistance. The desire for increased focus on employee needs was at an all-time high. Much of that need from employees included enhanced or transparent communication so that employees could also make critical decisions necessary to meet their home and work lives. There is a correlation between transparent internal communication about organizational changes and reduced employee turnover intention during or after pandemic-induced organizational changes (Yue & Walden, 2023). Because COVID-19 emerged as a global health problem, drastic changes were needed to maintain effective leadership and communication to help employees navigate the crisis (Yue & Walden, 2023). Effective leadership and communication are necessary for any organization; however, these skills are even more critical in managing change and leading in a multicultural environment.

Apart from culture, members of multicultural teams need to contemplate known dynamics such as the drive of the team's existence, the impact of variations on personal behaviors, cultural background, variations on professional values, prominence for emotional intelligence, and even communication (Alemu, 2016). Cross-cultural differences are critical to consider because there is a range of issues varying from individuals' cultural backgrounds and characteristics in workplaces to their values and ways of doing things, which will influence their working style, interactions, and relationships in the workplace (Alemu, 2016). Moreover, communication styles, language, cultural background, perceptions of conflict, types, work methods, and decision-making will impact how individuals act and behave in the workplace (Alemu,

2016). Monteleone and Turner (Alemu, 2016) suggest that leaders should possess specific leadership characteristics to understand the employee better, especially when considering globalization and complex work environments.

### **Employee Retention**

Employees are a critical resource for organizations, and the organization's failure or success depends on its ability to attract, retain, and reward talented and capable employees (Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2020). Retaining skilled employees could be an essential advantage for organizations (Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2020). Moreover, organizations post-pandemic may benefit from refreshed strategic talent management initiatives to retain talent.

HR leaders are often concerned with retaining talented employees. Retention is a recurring part of an organization's strategic initiatives year after year. During the 2020 pandemic, many organizations experienced trouble retaining talent due to issues beyond their control that impacted employees' ability to stay in their positions. For instance, lack of childcare, homeschooling, fear of contracting the virus, and even increased workloads have forced many organizations' top talent to make difficult decisions regarding their employment and home life. During times of crisis, organizations must keep at the forefront their goal of retaining talented employees and reducing turnover by creating work environments that are attractive and meaningful to their workforce, especially the organization's top talent.

Top talent is one of the most valuable assets that can lead an organization to success (Dirani et al., 2020). Losing good employees means losing knowledge, whereas

keeping them can help organizations retain knowledge and experience (Dirani et al., 2020). Retention of top talent is indispensable, especially during times of crisis. During unprecedented times, deliberate goal planning is to retain high performers using their skills to preserve high productivity (Dirani et al., 2020). Effective goal planning keeps employees motivated and empowered during difficult times and supports organizations in maintaining normalcy in production, even during unparalleled times. Many organizations also try to reduce the number of employees to minimize costs during a crisis and expect greater resilience from remaining employees with increased workloads (Dirani et al., 2020). It is critical to keep employees motivated and engaged and ensure employee needs are met, especially during times of crisis.

Ahmed et al. (2020) explored four concepts related to keeping employees engaged and motivated during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet organizational objectives. The authors analyze how HR leaders have an increased responsibility and challenge to manage and monitor whether or not employees are contributing to the organizational goals and objectives, how to pursue the recruitment and selection process, employee engagement, and training and development activities (Ahmed et al., 2020). Ahmed et al. (2020) predicate the effect of employee engagement on organizational performance through mediating effects of knowledge sharing, specifically for employees of higher educational institutions.

Employee engagement is a concept that holds great significance in organizational performance (Ahmed et al., 2020). Additionally, sharing knowledge significantly and positively impacts organizational performance (Ahmed et al., 2020). The COVID-19

pandemic has brought new opportunities for organizations to leverage their strategic talent management. For instance, remote work created significant challenges for HR leaders to manage employees meaningfully and effectively (Ahmed et al., 2020) to produce a positive experience for the organization while attempting to meet the needs of employees to maintain retention.

Adeosun and Ohiani (2020) predicate the importance of key drivers in attracting, retaining, and recruiting top, high-performing, quality candidates and the correlation to the impact of labor, laws, and industry norms through understanding matching patterns and determinants of attracting quality talent. Organizations' recruitment strategies impact the sorting patterns in the labor market, which Adeosun and Ohiana (2020) suggest remains to be determined as research is limited. Adeosun and Ohiana (2020) maintain that organizations could leverage salary, brand name, referral, and job security to attract, retain, and recruit quality talent through robust recruitment strategies.

Harker and MacDonnell (2012) focused on remote or virtual work in the pre-pandemic working environment to retain employees. They posited those remote or virtual work environments as alternative work relationships demonstrating positive benefits for individuals and organizations. Remote work is an alternative work relationship with positive benefits for individuals and society, yet it has not been implemented enthusiastically by most organizations (Harker & MacDonnell, 2012); particularly, with the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, more organizations are creating a return to office strategies or even hybrid positions where employees work some days in the office and some days remotely. As organizations progress through changes in the work environment

forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, they will need to continue to implement and execute new practices, resulting in significant organizational change to improve their talent management initiatives to focus on sustained retention efforts.

### **Talent Acquisition and Strategic Talent Management**

Strategic talent management defines organizations' needs for future talent and the development of talent (Schreuder & Simon, 2019). Strategic talent management places HR leaders in a position to work with talent program leaders and hiring managers to think strategically about organizational needs and search for the right skills to meet those future needs. To find the right skills, leaders will need to consider the future needs of an organization; there must be a full implementation of strategic talent management activities.

Strategic talent management activities consist of stages implemented from strategic planning conversations with key leaders. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for organizations to be forward-thinking and innovative in attracting and retaining talent. Talent leaders and senior management must work together to determine the A-positions (places where top skills and strategic capabilities can reinforce each other) in the various (increasingly people-driven) strategic choices, check the feasibility of the multiple options, and commit to the best possible occupation of these positions (Schreuder & Simon, 2019). The stages of strategic talent management, according to Schreuder and Simon (Schreuder & Simon, 2019), include the following:

1. Develop an in-depth understanding of the corporate strategy and its product-market combination(s): strategic talent managers must get involved with the

strategy process – the what – and not just the how. Strategic talent managers must claim a role in strategy formulation.

2. Identify the fundamental processes that create distinctive added value for the organization and its customers or critical stakeholders. Once the strategy is determined, talent managers must be involved in defining the vital strategic processes that should accomplish the strategic goals.
3. Define the crucial organizational capabilities needed to realize these essential processes. Some abilities are more critical than others; therefore, a limited number will be decisive factors in winning the competition for customers or markets and will be disproportionately crucial for strategy realization.
4. Identify and clarify key positions in the organization that play a critical, strategic role, known as the A-positions: clusters of activities, tasks, or functions of most significant strategic importance merged into the concept of A-positions. An approach should start with where the employee should perform the work. Once identified, the strategic talent leader will know which (top) talents in the organization could form the driver for a desired strategic ability and desired result.

With key concepts of strategic talent management, it is necessary to consider gender gaps created by COVID-19 as organizations shift to improve strategic talent management strategies in the post-COVID-19 era.

## **COVID-19 and Gender Gaps**

Strategic talent management and the availability of qualified candidates, especially women, during the pandemic 2020 for open positions had become a fluid topic of discussion amongst many researchers. Craig and Churchill (2020) investigated the COVID-19 pandemic, the associated lockdowns, and what the lockdowns meant to many working parents: paid work and family care at home simultaneously (Craig & Churchill, 2020). Craig and Churchill (2020) studied parents in dual-earner couples from a national survey of 2722 Australian men and women conducted during the lockdown in May 2020 to investigate how working caregivers managed. The survey asked how much time respondents spent in paid and unpaid labor, including active and supervisory care, and about their satisfaction with work-family balance and how their partner shared the load (Craig & Churchill, 2020). Employers should provide more creative flexibility for caregivers working from home and thoroughly consider the increased workloads (Craig & Churchill, 2020), especially during unforeseen events and crises.

Blundell et al. (2020) posited, in terms of gender inequalities, that, unlike previous recessions, the current economic impact does not appear to be that impactful to men. Although more likely to be in jobs that are from home and critical workers, women are more likely to work in shutdown sectors and have been taking on most of the additional childcare required by school and daycare closures (Blundell et al., 2020). For the least-educated mothers, the impact is particularly severe (Blundell et al., 2020). Using person-level fixed effects models, Collins, Landivar, Ruppanner, and Scarborough (2020) found that working mothers with young children have reduced their hours four to five

times more than fathers. Additionally, the gender gap in work hours has grown by 20-50% since 2020, placing significant challenges on women's work hours and employment (Landivar et al., 2020). In an effort for organizations to prevent inequalities and attract and retain the best talent, HR leaders could work in conjunction with organizational hiring leaders to ensure the needs of candidates are a priority, whereas pre-pandemic, most organizations consider the needs of the organization first. As a result, strategic talent management is necessary for organizations to focus on recruiting strategies to attract and retain qualified candidates in the post-pandemic era, specifically women.

Feng and Savani (2020) researched gender gaps and inequality experienced by working men and women during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors hypothesized that the Covid-19 pandemic would create a gender gap in perceived work productivity and job satisfaction (Feng & Savani, 2020). When couples work from home the whole day and when schools are closed, women devote more time to housework and childcare. Feng and Savani contribute to the current literature by identifying work-from-home practices as a novel factor affecting gender gaps in work-related outcomes. Gender gaps formed during the COVID-19 pandemic when dual-career parents worked from home and schools were closed (Feng & Savani, 2020). Feng and Savani's (2020) study creates an advanced understanding of gender disparity in the workplace formulated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant component of gender disparity is the reality that the COVID-19 pandemic began a recession that impacted women so significantly that other researchers have named the pandemic recession the "She-Cession" due to the unequal and disparate economic impact women experienced (Bluedorn et al., 2022).

While employment gaps among parents of young children heightened, it is essential to note that the gender gaps for parents with young children expanded well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Research is limited in evidence of post-pandemic aid to support closing the gender gaps among working parents with young children (Qian & Fuller, 2020). Policymakers should focus attention on fostering an accessible, well-funded public care sector and implementing flexible leave policies beyond the period of infancy to support working parents in managing caregiving demands equitably (Qian & Fuller, 2020), specifically working mothers.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing inequalities among parents of children too young to be left unsupervised (Qian & Fuller, 2020) at various times throughout the day to remain productive while working. Supportive policies are needed in organizations to help working parents during a crisis. However, there is a more significant negative impact on working mothers than on working fathers. Working mothers' employment was hit far harder by the COVID-19 pandemic than fathers, which widened the gender employment gap among working men and women (Feng & Savani, 2020). Many working mothers suffered critical losses, not only in their jobs but in their overall well-being.

Carnevale and Hatak (2020) studied employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19 and offered recommendations to organizations on how to adapt to unexpected events, such as external crises. There is a critical need for organizations to make rapid changes due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic and bring to light many of the challenges employees face while focusing on the implications of COVID-19 for human

resource management as organizations support their workforce in coping with newly altered work environments (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Unexpected events and situations create increased uncertainty among an organization's workforce and pose immediate threats to the organization's performance and viability (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Unexpected events create a challenge for HR leaders, and most often, HR must make immediate changes that could impact an organization's workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic created a particularly challenging environment for HR leaders, forcing them to focus on the "unknowns" and help their workforce adapt to and cope with radical changes occurring in the work and social environment (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). HR leaders remain challenged in assisting their employees to adapt to the post-pandemic working era. Many changes and challenges faced during the pandemic are present well after the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers who formerly spent all or most of their time working inside their organization's physical boundaries had to adjust to remote work environments quickly. Remote work includes unique challenges such as alternative workspaces (i.e., library, home, coffee shop) (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Remote work may only benefit some workers, especially women with dual responsibilities. While working in remote positions may appear advantageous, remote working can also produce challenges.

For instance, some workers may experience an inability to unplug from work, creating conflict with personal time. The challenges may be shared more for single parents as paid work time throughout the day may often be interrupted by caregiving responsibilities. As a result, single parents may need to fill in the gap to meet productivity

goals, which creates longer workdays and increased paid work hours. Rather than a benefit, some employees may see longer working hours incubated by caregiving responsibilities because of remote working. The impact may be felt greater on single-parent families than on two-parent households.

Al-Habaibeh et al. (2021) found that the critical challenges of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic were psychological, such as loneliness and lack of daily face-to-face discussions and informal meetings. In addition to workload management, a lack of physical activities and childcare were also identified as challenges (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021). However, there were advantages to remote work, which was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue in the post-pandemic era.

The main advantages of remote working include reduced travel time and cost, which has made employees more productive, even though being more productive prevented effective work-home life boundaries for some (Habaibeh et al., 2021). HR leaders and hiring leaders must consider the advantages and challenges of remote work, create a plan to combat challenges, and encourage benefits during times of crisis and in the post-pandemic era. The family situation of employees must also be considered and incorporated into all aspects of the employee experience, particularly for those employees who work remotely. Family dynamics play an integral part in employee decision-making.

Because many employers quickly shifted their employees to remote work at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was not enough time to thoughtfully review the impact of remote work on the employee and the employee's families. The rapid transition to a culture of working from is new. It remains an opportunity for HR leaders and hiring

managers to implement and examine organizational strategies to support employees and their families. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a unique opportunity to learn the potential for remote working with more significant potential for future developments to allow for further advancements (Habaibeh et al., 2021) in employee and employment experience. The COVID-19 pandemic also provided a unique opportunity for organizations to implement strategic HR initiatives to support caregiving employees.

Caregiving employees should not have to suffer consequences simply because they have caregiving duties in addition to their work responsibilities, especially during times of crisis. Time of crisis presents an opportunity for HR leaders and hiring leaders to focus on the needs of their employees and provide support to help their employees effectively balance the challenges of work and family life, especially for those employees who work in a remote or virtual capacity. Leaders must possess emotional and transformational leadership when leading virtual or remote teams.

### **Management Trends**

Mysirlaki and Paraskeva (2020) posited the effects of leaders' emotional intelligence and transformational leadership on virtual team effectiveness, including three sub-factors of team effectiveness: (1) team performance, (2) viability, and (3) team member satisfaction. As organizations continue to make changes beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, global, virtual teams are increasingly prevalent (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020). Mysirlaki and Paraskeva (2020) discovered a significant predictive relationship between perceived leader emotional intelligence and virtual team effectiveness. Leader emotional intelligence and virtual team effectiveness are vital concepts to consider as

they are necessary in leadership capabilities, especially during times of crisis, to sustain employee retention and engagement.

Employee retention is an HR strategy at the forefront of many HR leaders' strategic planning. The COVID-19 pandemic created what is known as the "great resignation." The great resignation involved employees worldwide resigning from their workplaces to demand better working conditions, better employee compensation packages, work-life balance, and complete control over their employment experience. Factors such as increasing workplace demands, employee dissatisfaction, and a quest for better control of individual work lives are associated with employee turnover intentions (Ng & Stanton, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic just exacerbated these factors because employers made swift decisions with short notice due to the demands of remote working without considering when and how employees work.

Liu's (2023) study on organizational behavior and work arrangements found that individuals and organizations negotiate space and time arrangements for a more agile and resilient future. As the COVID-19 pandemic gradually improved, employees started to understand better what they needed to have a workspace and arrangement that could meet job and family needs. Employees also started to learn what support they needed from their organizations moving forward throughout the pandemic. During the pandemic and beyond, working caregivers must consider the needs and support required for their jobs and families. Organizations must view the needs from a work-life perspective.

Organizations will reap long-term benefits by focusing on human capital development (Forbes et al., 2018) by continuously offering support and ensuring tactics

are in place to support the whole being of the employee. Having a vested interest in allowing employees to thrive, professionally and personally, is essential in meeting an organization's needs as it relates to succession planning and long-term growth, and it is also crucial for employees' personal development and growth. Investing in the employee also creates a more engaged and high-producing employee (Forbes et al., 2018).

Important points to consider are the social and political issues created by COVID-19 as a discussion among leaders in the workplace. For years, social and political issues were not present in the workplace, and organizations would avoid political issues at almost any cost (Korschun & Smith, 2018). Fifteen years ago, corporate responsibility was no longer a question of whether to engage but how to do so (Korschun & Smith, 2018). Leaders must be able to manage and engage in the discussion on social issues because COVID-19 has increased social problems. Leaders must now engage in such discussions to meet the employees' needs in a post-pandemic world.

### **Employee Needs and Sustainable Work Environments**

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the needs of employees as it relates to the work environment and needs of the leader. The COVID-19 pandemic has also summoned hiring leaders to be flexible in their thinking and adopt different leadership styles.

Employee needs vary between men and women, and the COVID-19 pandemic appeared not to be as impactful to men (Blundell et al., 2020). Remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed many employees to feel increased autonomy; however, some employees also experienced new demands, which incorporated the strategy of adopting self-leadership (Babapour Chafi et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic created an

increased distance between managers and employees, which required managers to adopt a trust-based leadership style and remove the barrier of oversight (Babapour Chafi et al., 2021), especially with remote working.

Remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic created conflict between work and home life, necessitating assessing the long-term impact of adverse effects on employees' work-life experiences (Chan et al., 2022). Conflict management and interpersonal communication are issues within multicultural teams because emotions, beliefs, and assumptions are responsible for such problems. Norms for displaying emotions influence how individuals express their feelings and interpret the emotional expressions of others (Glikson & Erez, 2013).

In multicultural teams, diversity may attract attention toward differences rather than similarities among team members, resulting in mistrust, poor communication, and conflicts (Glikson & Erez, 2013). As a result, conflict and issues with interpersonal communication become a problem for leaders in multicultural teams. Conflict in multicultural teams can range from mild to very severe competition when present. Conflict can also be healthy as it allows leaders to implement and execute processes to strengthen team members further and provide necessary resources and tools to aid in the development of working together and understanding people. Conflict is often associated with issues of values and identity because conflict usually begins when an individual or a group perceives differences and opposition between the self and others about interests, beliefs, needs, and values (Mayer & Louw, 2013). Assumptions play a critical role in

team conflict, and it is necessary for leaders who oversee remote teams or have complex work environments to manage employee engagement appropriately.

### **Employee Engagement**

Ahmed et al. (2020) posited four concepts related to keeping employees engaged and motivated during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet organizational objectives. The authors analyze how HR leaders have an increased responsibility and challenge to manage and monitor whether or not employees are contributing to the organizational goals and objectives, how to pursue the recruitment and selection process, employee engagement, and training and development activities (Ahmed et al., 2020). As noted previously, the great resignation created an empowerment movement among workers. They have demanded support from employers that benefits their families and individual needs, benefiting working parents and women workers.

Çemberci et al. (2022) study investigated whether work engagement changes according to marital status, job experience, and whether or not having children among flexible workers in the post-COVID-19 era. The study found a difference in absorption from the sub-dimensions of work engagement, depending on whether employees are married or not, and that marital status among flexible workers after the pandemic is a significant factor in the absorption of work (Commerce et al., 2022). The study posited that managers should consider marital status as an essential factor while trying to increase the work engagement of the employees because married people are more concentrated on their work because their job experience increases in direct proportion to the possibility of

being older than singles and because they stay at the place they work for a long time (Cemberci et al., 2022).

Increased employee engagement requires employers to consider the whole employee, not just marital status; it also considers parental status, caregiving status, and personal family life needs. The COVID-19 pandemic and beyond has forced employers to assess family needs, which is critical to support initiatives for overall organizational performance. The contributions of Ahmed et al. (2020) provide a perspective on employee engagement and its significant and positive impact on organizational performance.

Additionally, knowledge-sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic has become more prevalent as organizations seek ways to enhance the employee experience and contribute to employee engagement. Ahmed et al. (2020) posited that knowledge sharing significantly and positively impacts organizational performance. Knowledge sharing can be a powerful HR initiative that supports strategic talent management advantages. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new and different opportunities for organizations to leverage their strategic talent management. Strategic talent management initiatives in the post-pandemic era must be employee-friendly, specifically for women with caregiving responsibilities and unpaid care work outside the home.

### **Unpaid Care Work of Women**

Women's Unpaid care work is critical to understanding the dual responsibilities of working women, and HR leaders need an understanding to support strategic talent management initiatives. Some of the women's unpaid care work includes raising

children, cooking, cleaning, caring for elderly relatives, overall household management, and mental tasks, including planning schedules, adhering to emotional labor, and managing the family relationship (Power, 2020). Women are generally responsible for 75% of unpaid care and domestic work in their homes (Moreira da Silva, 2019). Pre-pandemic, women performed a daily average of 4 hours and 25 minutes of unpaid care work against 1 hour and 23 minutes for men (Pozzan & Cattaneo, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated closure of schools, childcare, and other care facilities have heavily increased women's daily time spent in unpaid care work (Pozzan & Cattaneo, 2020).

Often, the unpaid care obligation on women limits their opportunities to earn income through formal employment (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). Women needed to choose between work and family life throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The possibilities for women to enjoy periods of rest and leisure, which is critical to their overall well-being, are limited due to dual roles and responsibilities (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). Working women tend to carry what is known as the second shift outside of their employment or paid work, and the second shift includes domestic and care work (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). Having these dual roles creates increased stress and burnout, and career progression is also limited.

These dual roles limit women's career progress and often result in underrepresentation in senior management positions (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). HR leaders are responsible for not overlooking gender inequality as both a social and economic issue, significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted women, in particular,

because they had to engage with and dedicate more time to household and care activities (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, women had been undervalued and underpaid for their roles. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on creating more inequity amongst women has increased the awareness that women are even more undervalued and underpaid for their work.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic and Gender Inequality**

Women experienced many inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the most critical inequality included the balance of dual responsibilities. It is crucial to understand the impact COVID-19 has on gender inequality. Pre-pandemic, gender inequality existed, and women continued to perform their roles in their families at a more remarkable stance—more time and effort imposed on women from a work and family perspective. The recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has often been labeled as a “secession” because many women experienced more significant adverse economic effects than men (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020). Unemployment rates increased more for women than men in the USA in 2020 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic forced women to make difficult choices between work and family life due to ongoing dual responsibilities, which further heightened the awareness of gender inequalities. Many women did not have a choice and knew that choosing their family was the only option, so they had to forgo paid work.

Gender inequalities emerge and worsen during crises (Fisher & Ryan, 2020).

Women had increased pressure to take on dual responsibilities – working outside and in

the home. The roles of men have remained aligned with expectations over time. In contrast, the role of women has expanded beyond the house, with more women working outside of the home (United Nations, 2020). With the evolution of the role of women, it is necessary to note that the gendered expectations are unchanged. It is the expectation that women continue to perform most of the domestic and care work (Fisher & Ryan, 2020) despite work performed outside of the home.

When considering the role and expectations of women, it is necessary to note that an added burden, with school and daycare closures, was forced on working women, creating enhanced dual responsibilities that linger well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the COVID-19 virus and pandemic has forever changed how many organizations respond to individual illnesses. For example, even after the COVID-19 pandemic, women with sick children can no longer send their children to school or daycare and must remain productive while working.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most critical inequality women experienced was the need to balance dual responsibilities. It is vital to understand the impact COVID-19 has on gender inequality. For example, unemployment increased more for women than men in the USA (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic forced women to make difficult choices between work and family life due to ongoing dual responsibilities, which further heightened the awareness of gender inequalities. The force of having to make difficult choices between work and family created an unfair burden for working women. Gender inequalities, with working women suffering the most, have heightened since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fisher and Ryan (2020) posited that gender inequalities emerge and worsen during crises. The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic shed light on both new and existing gender inequalities (Fisher & Ryan, 2020). Gender inequality has become more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic because the increased pressures on women have become more visible. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many women faced unequal gender roles and household inequities across many societies (Ahinkorah et al., 2021). Women have taken on increased responsibilities to meet their family's demands and work outside the home (Qutami & Hamdan, 2023).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the world, employers and leaders should not overlook gender inequality as a social and economic issue because women engage with and dedicate more time to household and care activities (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). With the evolution of the role of women, it is necessary to note that the gendered expectations remain the same, and women perform most of the domestic and care work (Fisher & Ryan, 2020) despite the work performed outside of the home. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, families experienced school and daycare closures, prompting an immediate response for women to not remain productive at work and fulfill caregiving duties (Fisher & Ryan, 2020).

When considering the role and expectations of women, it is necessary to note that there was an added burden with school and daycare closures for working women. As such, the increased load enhanced dual responsibilities for working women, which linger well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the COVID-19 virus and pandemic has forever changed how many organizations respond to individual illnesses. For

example, even after the COVID-19 pandemic, women with sick children can no longer send their children to school or daycare and must remain productive while working. Consequently, with the closure of many professional childcare services during COVID-19, working women were immediately expected to be the sole caregivers and continue working. Balancing these two expectations is very challenging at the best of times and almost near impossible during times of crisis (Power, 2020).

Because US schools and professional daycare services experienced widespread closures, this created upheavals for many parents with unprecedented care demands (Landivar et al., 2023). Working mothers picked up the additional caregiving demands and often chose between work or family at the expense of their employment (Landivar et al., 2023). The burden of care demands at home for working women is twice as impactful as that of women in homes with partners or spouses.

### **Single Working Mothers**

In September 2020, 6 months after the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, 67.4% of single mothers with young children under age 18 were working, employed, and on the job – compared with 76.1% in September 2019 (Barroso & Kochhar, 2020). According to Radey et al. (2022), some single working mothers reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they commonly found and benefited from emotional support, considered an informal support network. In contrast, single working mothers reported less available financial support (Radey et al., 2022). There was a lack of flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the shift to remote work increased the work and demands for many

single women between family and job. In many cases, even though children were at home, the expectations from employers remained the same.

The lack of economic and emotional support for single mothers creates an increased burden of stress on single working mothers (Taylor & Conger, 2017). Working mothers must do the bulk of domestic labor and childcare, as mothers run their households with little or no support (O'Reilly, 2020). Those mothers must choose between home and work during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the burden of care work has grown exponentially. This burden increases the stress on working mothers. Stress processes can disrupt parenting quality and the health and well-being of the mother (Taylor et al., 2022). Hertz et al. (2021) studied the dynamics of single-working mothers and proposed that they felt tired, stressed, and guilty because they could not compartmentalize paid work and family. Single mothers needed to balance work and children to keep up with the competing demands of work and family. They restructured their day so that their work obligations would not compete with their children's needs, mainly when they lived alone with their children.

Parolin and Lee (2022) recalled the immediate impact of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning with an influx of unemployment rates and how unemployment climaxed to 19% in the United States. The primary reason for the increase in unemployment was due to the closures of childcare centers and the fact that most schools turned to distance learning while levels of poverty and hardship threatened to rise (Parolin & Lee, 2022). Single-parent households experienced more significant challenges than two-parent households, and the strain was experienced mainly by single-working

mothers due to increased workloads. However, single-working mothers also needed to make critical decisions choosing between their job and family. Many single mothers were also impacted by unemployment, losing their jobs due to the demands of work, childcare, homeschooling, and even fear of contracting COVID-19 and safeguarding their families during the pandemic.

Unemployment among single parents steadily fell after April 2020; however, at a much slower rate than that of two-parent families (Parolin & Lee, 2022). Unemployment experienced by single women was far greater because single women carried the burden of paid and unpaid work the greatest. The burden of unpaid care work significantly impacted single working women throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Single working women experienced limited professional opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic and struggled to revert to the workforce.

The unpaid care burden on women has limited their earning opportunities through formal employment (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). Not only does the unpaid care burden impact opportunities for formal employment, but it further decreases their opportunities to enjoy periods of rest and leisure, which is crucial to secure their overall well-being (Sarrasanti et al., 2020). The dual responsibilities of domestic and unpaid care work are a double role many women carry, hindering their career progress. It can result in underrepresentation or more senior-level leadership, and poor representation of women in critical positions harms an organization's performance (Sarrasanti et al., 2020).

## **Employee Productivity**

As work from home is the world's new normal, Farooq and Sultana (2022) suggest there is a relationship between employees working from home (WFH) and a loss in productivity, and women who work from home can better manage their domestic and family obligations; however, doing so is a great expense of higher perceived work-family conflict. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations had already practiced WFH to offer flexibility to their employees as an added benefit (Farooq & Sultana, 2022). Since the COVID-19 outbreak, WFH has been the new and flexible way of working. WFH is a flexibility for employees and was adopted by many organizations well before the outbreak of COVID-19 (Farooq & Sultana, 2022). However, the autonomy and convenience of working in a personal space can be disruptive for working parents caring for family members, especially younger children. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have grown to offer WFH as a critical benefit in recruiting efforts. When employees work from home (WFH), they are less supervised and are trusted to be productive, meeting organizational goals and objectives as well as individual and team goals and objectives.

There are advantages and disadvantages to working from home. WFH, as a planned choice, requires a period of design, preparation, and adaptation to allow organizations to effectively support employees working from home to ensure continued productivity and a better work-life balance (Galanti et al., 2021). Because the COVID-19 outbreak forced organizations to shift to WFH immediately, many employees were left without the necessary skills to work remotely (Galanti et al., 2021). While WFH is a

flexible benefit for employees and attracts many candidates to the organization's open positions, WFH has affected the well-being and productivity of employees with no prior remote work experience. Specific work conditions can affect the WFH experience (Galanti et al., 2021), further impacting employee well-being and performance.

### **Employee Well-Being**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on everyday life for most of the world's population, and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present challenges in the daily lives of many people; for instance, economic and individual well-being (Schifano et al., 2021). Quarantine and isolation were critical factors associated with significant psychological impact (Tchounwou, 2021). Fawaz and Samaha (2020) suggest quarantine had a significant impact on employees' well-being and mental health, as it relates to post-traumatic stress disorder, increased stress, increased negative thoughts, and feelings of being distant and cut off from others. The impact of COVID-19 on employee mental health is significant as it has become a stressor and continues to be for many employees well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. These stressors include perception of safety, threat, and risk of contagion, stigma and social exclusion, financial loss, and job insecurity (Hamouche, 2023). From a human resource management perspective, many organizations should consider practices to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on employee's mental health during and after the outbreak.

HR leaders should consider the mental health and well-being of employees during times of crisis and provide support during unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic created isolation for many workers, and an immediate shift to remote work was

necessary for many. The isolation, lack of communication, and lack of human-to-human contact can harm an employee's mental health and well-being. Felstead and Reuschke (2020) studied the impact of mental health and working from home and found a negative relationship, especially for those working from home for the first time. Parents working during the COVID-19 pandemic reported worse mental health and jointly worse behavioral health for their children in the United States between March and June 2020 (Patrick et al., 2020). For many working parents, especially mothers and working caregivers, mental health impact is experienced more as there is limited opportunity for personal, leisure, and self-care time.

### **Challenges of Caregiving**

Russell et al. (2020) study suggests parents hold higher levels of depression and anxiety and their children have higher stress levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Exposure to a wide range of disasters negatively impacts the mental health of families and can lead to prolonged periods of increased anxiety and depression symptoms (Russell et al., 2020). Employer support and resources must be offered to employees during times of crisis to support employee's ability to navigate and cope. HR leaders can positively impact the employee experience and their families during times of crisis by recognizing the need for relief for informal caregivers.

Cohen et al. (2021) reported that informal caregivers provide unpaid care to family members consisting of children and an older adult, such as a parent or spouse with cognitive decline, a disability, or a chronic health issue (Cohen et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic complicated the practice of informal caregiving in unique and

unmatched ways (Cohen et al., 2021) and limited opportunities for caregivers to grow in their jobs and find relief and balance between work and family life.

Irani et al. (2021) conducted research using a descriptive study to describe family caregivers' experiences and changes in caregiving tasks and approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that caregivers experienced challenges due to the limited help they received from other caregiving sources, the added responsibilities they needed to manage, and the limited opportunities available to maintain their well-being (Irani et al., 2021). Lockdown restrictions and safety concerns about transmitting the COVID-19 virus limited opportunities for caregivers to receive additional support outside the home, causing an increased burden and responsibility on caregivers.

### **Family Caregiving Dynamics**

In general, caregivers in families are typically women – the daughters more than sons, which increases the care burden for working women, causing unequal involvement in caregiving work and may cause daughters to attempt to distribute care responsibilities more equitably and to negotiate the distribution of caregiving among families, which may result in family conflicts (Kwak et al., 2012). Unique caregiving situations within family dynamics can irreversibly alter relationships, especially during stressful situations (Archer et al., 2021). For instance, in families with sibling relationships, the siblings are usually involved in negotiating the delegation of caregiving responsibilities, which may result in disagreements and dissonance among family members (Kwak et al., 2012).

The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the effect on sibling cooperation and communication and the burden on the sibling who is the primary

informal caregiver (Archer et al., 2021). However, the impact on the primary caregiver's role with paid work needs to be included in the literature. HR leaders have an opportunity presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to include individual family resources to promote the overall health and well-being of employees to keep the employees well and promote a positive work-life experience.

Employee well-being and family dynamics are vital components to consider, and HR leaders can help positively impact the well-being of employees. Kundu et al. (2022) studied the relationship between challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and employees' stress through the mediating role of family-life disturbance and work-life imbalance. They found that COVID-19 challenges induced stress among employees due to family-life disturbance and work-life imbalance because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Wiemers and Bianchi (2015) found that while women may not give to parents and children concurrently, approximately 30% of women have supported both parents and children at some point.

Beach et al. (2021) posited that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected families, specifically caregivers. Caregivers experienced extreme difficulty balancing the demands of caring for a parent and their children while working. While the COVID-19 pandemic was already challenging, many working caregivers experienced intense, complex, and stressful undertakings with more negative impacts (Beach et al., 2021). Because the intensity of caregiving increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, it also impacted the overall family life of other members.

Prime et al. (2020) posited that many experienced a dramatic shift in the routines of family life during the COVID-19 pandemic. A drastic change in family life occurred when social (or physical) distancing rules were required, and all children were required to stay home from schools and daycares, coupled with many parents who have either been laid off or begun working from home created a drastic change in the family life (Prime et al., 2020). Families worldwide did not have time to adapt to the change and were required to make immediate decisions that impacted families. Family and job routines were interrupted at the onset of COVID-19, and alternative arrangements to continue with family care were not an option due to social distancing rules. As a result, there was a heightened experience of caregiver burden and, as previously mentioned, overall stress. Caregiver burden is an essential concept because caregivers experience an increase in caregiver burden; the COVID-19 pandemic has shed new light on the complexities of caregiving and the critical need to acknowledge the population of 41 million informal caregivers providing an essential service to their families, the healthcare system, and the national economy, often to the detriment of their own physical and mental health and quality of life (Cohen et al., 2021). The impact and effects of caregiver burden will be experienced well after the COVID-19 pandemic as many individuals. Specifically, informal caregivers who also work will take time to recuperate from the impact and effects. Informal caregivers who work a paid job could be impacted and still unable to perform at pre-pandemic levels as they begin to adjust and regain levels of well-being before the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Women and Employment**

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn much attention to women in the workforce. It has highlighted the importance of having women in the workforce and the unrecognized value of essential occupations such as care and education (Queisser et al., 2020). The multifaceted roles of women during the COVID-19 pandemic were impressive and to be applauded, especially in the care sector (Remery et al., 2022). However, this was a challenging feat. The COVID-19 pandemic increased inequalities among women, and women were also overrepresented in informal employment and service sectors hard-hit by the pandemic, resulting in more severe job loss for women (Corsi & Ilkkaracan, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic evaluated women's work, both paid and unpaid work. Women who were parents were nearly three times as likely as fathers to report that they took on the majority or all of the additional unpaid care work related to school or childcare facility closures: 61.5% of mothers of children under age 12 say they took on the majority or entirety of the extra care work. In comparison, 22.4% of fathers report that they did (OECD, 2021). The struggles and challenges women experienced during the pandemic with paid and unpaid work are necessary for discussion as the impact on working women is necessary for review with HR leaders to support working women and improve retention. There is a disproportionate effect of the early pandemic on women's employment due to increased caregiving responsibilities for working mothers; consequently, this created a gender gap in work hours for women (Collins et al., 2020). Even with the pandemic's early effect, mothers' work has not stopped. Post-pandemic,

there are still school and daycare closures as children cannot go to school with any signs of illness, whereas pre-pandemic children can still attend school. The lack of childcare support causes an increased workload for working mothers as they must remain home to assist their child(ren) with virtual learning, increasing their demands.

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted women because more women than men have lost their jobs; more women than men are in essential jobs that expose them to infection and psychological stress, and women have had more work disruption than men have had because of increases in childcare and other responsibilities (Carli, 2020). Many women continue to feel pressured to choose between work or family to meet family needs and obligations. However, the pressure is intensified amongst single working women in navigating work-family needs, and exacerbated pressures were experienced due to the sole financial responsibility experienced in conjunction with solo parenting (Radcliffe et al., 2022).

Rushing to meet family and work obligations can significantly impact parents in many areas of their lives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women have had to make decisions that affected their family and work lives, creating family conflict and increasing pressure on women. Some of the decisions women made during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted women, especially considering decisions made regarding work life. There is enough reason to think women will feel the effects of moving into part-time work long after the pandemic ends (Fortier, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic created inequity among women. With additional caring responsibilities, women reduced productivity, which means women could be more likely

to be furloughed or passed over for promotion – an impact that could negatively affect lifetime incomes, including pensions (Power, 2020). Women often have additional care responsibilities than men, partly because of the persistence of traditional gender roles and partly because of the structure of women's economic participation, which is more likely to be part-time, flexible, and less remunerative (Power, 2020). As a result, women must forfeit their income, forfeit job-related benefits, and alter their lives to meet the family's needs in a pandemic world. Women who return to full-time work, even well after the pandemic, will suffer adverse impacts due to the decisions they must make to meet their dual responsibilities between work and family life. Women who exit the paid labor market to meet the increase in care obligations also face significant reductions in well-being (Fortier, 2020) and not just financial reductions.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit women harder than men in various aspects of their lives. Women will suffer the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for many years to come, and women must receive support to rebound from the detrimental effects of the pandemic and help prepare women to avoid such impacts in the future when there is a crisis. It is essential to keep to the forefront that, as in all crises further intensified under COVID-19, women play a crucial role in keeping the household and family going, adjusting to reduced income, and managing caregiving needs (Rubery & Tavora, 2020). Employers need to understand the detrimental effects on women, especially as women transition from unemployment in the post-pandemic era. Extended periods of unemployment are associated with increased negative emotions and poor well-being (Hiswåls et al., 2017).

Both unemployment and underemployment threatened mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lee et al., 2021). Supportive employer-sponsored onboarding and training programs would benefit those transitioning back into the workforce after being away for a period. Unemployment, well-being, and transitioning back into the workforce are challenges in single-parent households, specifically single mothers. Single mothers rarely have an opportunity to focus on their well-being, and adding unemployment to that dynamic creates an even more significant hardship and pressure that will make rebounding and adjusting time-consuming and difficult.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, single-parent households, specifically single mothers, were just under 70% in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). A significant factor single mothers faced was choosing between having an income and providing childcare (Fortier, 2020) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lack of employer response and support when single mothers experienced this decision-making between work and family had a detrimental impact on the income of these mothers and employee retention for many organizations. Many single mothers, especially, had significant pressure and needed to make difficult decisions to meet their families' needs. Between February and May 2020, the unemployment of single mothers in the U.S. more than tripled, transitioning from 4.1% to 15.9% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Mooi-Reci and Risman's (2021) study found that people of color and women with caregiving responsibilities experienced the brunt of the pandemic the worst in the United States and around the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected women and expanded gender inequalities across the world (Mooi-Reci & Risman, 2021).

Women, particularly those with young children, had to increase their time in domestic work, childcare, and homeschooling (Mooi-Reci & Risman, 2021). The increase in domestic work, childcare, and homeschooling caused a significant reduction in paid work hours (Mooi-Reci & Risman, 2021). Women experienced a need for employers to respond to the needs of the employees, specifically women, to balance work and home life to remain in the workforce.

### **Employer Response**

Employers should be responsible for responding to their employees during times of crisis. Belstein et al. (2021) posited that during crises, the responsibility is the employers' as employers must offer as many resources and strategies as possible to support employees in increasing their resilience and coping strategies. Most employers must have a crisis response plan (Conn & Michaud, 2023). Many employers implemented work-from-home (WFH) policies to keep their businesses running smoothly and to retain their staff. In response to resources for employees to help retain their positions and continue business, work-from-home (WFH) policies established across many organizations were necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic. Smite et al.'s (2023) study found positive experiences regarding WFH from an employee lens. WFH opportunities have created a need for employers to implement and execute new organizational policies and employee benefits to meet the increasing demands of employees, keep them employed, and attract and retain new employees. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a disruption, and organizational leaders and policymakers have responded to the crisis by introducing new policies that allowed employees to work from

home until 2022 and switching to a hybrid organizational structure where employees can work some days at the office and some days at home (Giurge et al., 2021).

Smite et al.'s (2023) study found there is an increasing realization that the perception of "being employed" is strongly associated with working in the office and will change. Growing demand for flexibility from new hires during job interviews calls for new organizational policies regarding working from home (Smite et al., 2023). The degree of flexibility might now become the make-or-break point in many employment decisions (Smite et al., 2023), especially for women who have remained in the workforce and had the opportunity to work from home and meet the caregiving needs of their families. Working from home has many benefits, such as flexibility and work-life balance (Smite et al., 2023).

WFH is now many employees' workspace, and some may see better outcomes for their health, family, and overall well-being (Vyas, 2022). Many employees have adjusted to and enjoyed WFH; others have needed help distinguishing between working and non-working hours (Vyas, 2022). Woodbridge et al. (2021) posited that challenges to work-life balance fall into two categories: work-life conflict and life-work conflict. Women's work-life conflict experience negatively affects their personal lives, and life-work conflict is when their personal lives negatively affect their work (Woodbridge et al., 2021). When there is conflict at home, the conflict can impact an employee's ability to focus on their work. Women who have experienced family conflict, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, may have experienced increased life-work conflict.

## Challenges Experienced

Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt (2021) conducted a study. They found that challenges associated with remote working include lower work productivity, decreased self-motivation, increased stress, declined mental health, and an inability to disconnect from work, resulting in increased screen fatigue. Toniolo-Barrios and Pitt (2021) posited that employees who work from home should engage in a practice of mindfulness as it may be beneficial in three key areas: (1) mindfulness helps employees mentally disconnect from work when they need to; (2) improve individuals' attention to work tasks and therefore improve their performance; and (3) allow employees to manage screen fatigue better. While WFH practices may benefit employees, organizations must understand the challenges of working from home, develop policies, and incorporate resources to combat the challenges employees may experience.

Additional challenges associated with remote working included longer working hours, feeling "technostressed" or tied to the computer, and feeling isolated in the absence of physical presence of counterparts (Bolisani et al., 2020). Understanding these challenges from the employee lens may support HR leaders in developing robust organizational policies to practice during times of crisis and beyond. While there are challenges with the practice of working from home, there are also remote work practices that produce a positive employee experience.

Wang et al. (2021) posited that organizations that engage in remote work practices can significantly change job demands, autonomy, and relational aspects of work, which has a return that positively influences employee outcomes. Before the

COVID-19 pandemic, employees and employers had little work-from-home usage and experience, nor was the employee and employer prepared to practice the concept of work-from-home (Wang et al., 2021). Now, remote working is considered the new way to conduct business for organizations and the new way to work for employees. The COVID-19 pandemic increased employer awareness to focus on not only remote or WFH policies.

### **Lack of Government and Employer Policies**

The hardest hit by the effects of the pandemic are single mothers (Fortier, 2020). Recent literature suggests policies are necessary to address the most pressing trends and needs (Fortier, 2020). With schools and daycare closures, millions of single mothers must choose between having an income and providing their children with essential care (Fortier, 2020). Governments must provide support in high-quality childcare to all families (Fortier, 2020), especially during times of crisis. Women should not have the burden of choosing between work and family. With government response, this will be especially critical for the well-being of single parents as it will allow them to maintain their family's only source of income (Fortier, 2020) in many cases.

As unemployed workers continue to redeploy into work sectors where there is available work and where they are needed and retrained as necessary, it is also necessary for a government-led overhaul of policies to address the crisis (van Barneveld et al., 2020). The lack of resources and support for women during times of crisis is concerning and creates an undue hardship for women. The bulk of workers in the labor market are women, and millions lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased

poverty (van Barneveld et al., 2020). The government is responsible for decreasing and preventing poverty. Women suffer most, and effective policies are necessary to support working women during times of uncertainty and crisis. Governmental proactive implementation of policies and resources will be essential to reduce or avoid increased poverty for women.

Cagliesi and Hawkes (2021) advocate for using gendered economic policies to stimulate a post-COVID-19 recovery. There is a significant risk in ignoring the female dimension of the COVID-19 crisis and resorting again to more severe programs like those enacted after the 2008 recession (Cagliesi & Hawkes, 2021). Those programs passed after the 2008 crisis hit women and mothers disproportionately harder than many other groups (Cagliesi & Hawkes, 2021), much like the COVID-19 pandemic. There are dynamics to consider in how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted women. For instance, various welfare policy scenarios that address factors relevant to the COVID-19 crisis, which include childcare costs and personal and social nudges, could help women ease back into the labor market in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era (Cagliesi & Hawkes, 2021).

Webb et al. (2020) propose that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected informal employment, and many individuals often received less government support than formally employed. As women were disproportionately impacted the most during the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced a lack of government support with no policies to address such crisis, employers also lacked support absent policies to assist women. Hou et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative, thematic study to shed light on how

organizations respond to forces from the external environment (impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic) and how they modify their office workplace management strategically and operationally to suit the employees' needs and future development in the post COVID-19 era.

Krstić & Sladojević Matic (2020) conducted a descriptive methodological study and identified a gap between family-friendly workplace practices employers offer and children's needs regarding their parents' workplace. From their study, Krstić and Sladojević Matic (2020) suggest that employers confirmed that COVID-19 provides an opportunity to encourage family-friendly work practices during the virus outbreak and demonstrated responsibility towards employees but did not include family members. Employers should review the needs of employees in depth to better understand family dynamics and encourage family-friendly workplace practices in the post-pandemic era. Having such family-friendly workplace policies will prepare employers to support and offer resources during times of crisis, as well as maintain or improve employee job satisfaction.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Woodbridge et al. (2021) recall that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many women lost their jobs or left the workforce because of increased caregiving demands. Many women who remained employed during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic faced increased complexity in negotiating their roles as employees and caregivers (Woodbridge et al., 2021). Caregiving hours for children directly influenced work-family and family-work conflict, and social support partially mediated the relationship between

family-work conflict and job satisfaction (Woodbridge et al., 2021). Job satisfaction depends on employees' needs and lives outside of their jobs.

Employees need balance, emotional support, resources, flexibility, and the ability to create a working life that supports family life. Women who continued working and keeping their jobs during the pandemic faced challenges of household and caregiving tasks (Woodbridge et al., 2021) and bore much of the responsibility to continue managing the home and maintaining a job. Interventions and state and employer policies are necessary to help support working women with dual responsibilities as they navigate work and personal life. These interventions can further help support the health and well-being of women and produce an increased response in job satisfaction.

Frutos-Bencze et al. (2022) assert that job satisfaction has been extensively studied and is a universal workplace topic. Job satisfaction depends upon many factors, such as type of work, hours, age, and gender. Martin et al. (2022) study found that being a woman is negatively related to the growth of job satisfaction, and the pandemic lockdown intensified women's domestic workload and the role conflict they faced, which may be detrimental to their job satisfaction. The study also found that the intensification of relationships with employees' representatives is positively linked to job productivity growth and negatively to job stress growth (Martin et al., 2022). Employee representatives include HR, who also serve as employee advocates.

As employees' representatives act as guarantors of good working conditions and give voice to employees, strengthening the relations between upper management and employees' representatives is necessary to have a performant workforce (Martin et al.,

2022). The relationships with employees' representatives are positively linked to job productivity growth and negatively to job stress growth (Martin et al., 2022). HR leadership can partner with upper management to conjoin the employee and management relationship to help promote and improve efficiencies that impact the employee experience, which connects to overall job satisfaction.

The COVID-19 outbreak shed light on some industries' vulnerabilities, highlighting the urgency for businesses and society to be more resilient (Frutos-Bencze et al., 2022). Being more resilient means strengthening the employee and management relationship. To strengthen the relationship with employees, including employees in decision-making is essential in building relationships. When decisions impact an employee's personal and family life, causing them to choose between work and family, the employee must be a part of those decisions. Inclusion in decision-making may positively impact job satisfaction, especially for women. Women reported lower work productivity and job satisfaction than men during the COVID-19 lockdown (Feng & Savani, 2020). Women who are caregivers should have a voice when jobs impact their family life. It is critical for healthy work-life balance and well-being. It is necessary for HR leaders to consistently implement ways to increase job satisfaction to reduce turnover and employee burnout.

HR leaders are persistently evolving innovative, creative, and more effective ways to satisfy the employees healthier during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chanana, 2021). Organizations always remember that employees who are satisfied with their organization will lead to increased productivity in the workplace, and it will also generate a higher

customer satisfaction outcome (Chanana, 2021). Job satisfaction and increased productivity intensify when employers recognize the needs of employees and create employee-friendly policies; this will also aid in the support of preventing employee burnout.

### **Employee Burnout**

Mucharraz y Cano et al. (2023) study found that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted employee burnout levels, specifically amongst working mothers in leadership positions, and how income and pay schemes played a critical role in their burnout. Burnout levels among working mothers in leadership positions were far more significant than those among working fathers (Mucharraz y Cano et al., 2023). Stress and burnout were two common factors among many workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stress and burnout impacted women harder, especially women who were unpaid caregivers working in the home and held paid jobs. For instance, the increased workload of mothers of school-aged children created unprecedented stress and burnout, having to home-school their children due to school closures and still trying to maintain an income to help support their families.

Mucharraz y Cano et al. (2023) posited that hybrid work, where some employees work part of the time at home and part of the time in an-office, lessens burnout in working mothers. However, school or daycare closures increase burnout in working mothers as the mother must keep the child home and provide care while working. The COVID-19 pandemic created an example for HR leaders to review how they can better

support employees to avoid increased stress and burnout during times of crisis, especially for those employees who are working mothers with dual responsibilities.

Hayes et al. (2021) posited that a lack of remote work knowledge training, increased family care responsibilities, and issues with communication, collaboration, and time management were significant factors of work-related stress and burnout experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges of working from home during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic presented great stress for many employees, and there was an inability to navigate through those challenges. Many employees, such as women, spend many hours managing the family and working in the household during the day. As a result, women needed to remain productive with their paid jobs, and often, work-related tasks were completed after hours, causing longer working days. Moreover, this working situation created opportunities and additional sources of potential stress and conflict for employees amid concerns about the public health crisis (Hayes et al., 2021).

### **Turnover Intention**

Dewi et al. (2023) posited that the COVID-19 pandemic's stringent lockdowns, school closures, and travel restrictions significantly burdened women, particularly married women, who were balancing home and family life. Women likely develop turnover intentions because of family responsibilities such as marriage, children, or parents who need considerable care and attention (Dewi et al., 2023). The stress of family life can often filter through and carry emotions into the job. As a result, an employee may have many feelings and emotions that may impact how they feel about their work experience, and to find relief, it is often the job that is determined to find relief.

It is essential to consider the role of transformational leadership and the employee experience. Transformational leadership significantly impacts employee empowerment and taking charge of their work experience (Zhang et al., 2024). Yücel (2021) posited that organizations should pursue transformational leadership and focus on practices that make it attractive to retain employees. HR leaders and hiring managers who want to improve attitudes and behavior significantly can achieve this through the employees' favorable treatment and working conditions (Yücel, 2021). Gyensare et al. (2016) found transformational leadership to be a key variable in lessening turnover intention and enhancing employee wellbeing. Turnover intention can be lessened by how leaders lead in organizations, connect with the employees, and possess the leadership qualities and skills necessary to be a leader. As noted earlier, the Great Recession changed how employees think about job satisfaction and has greater demands from employers.

The nature of work has changed over the last few decades (Qureshi et al., 2013). Employee stress has increased, which has also increased turnover intention and this is a continuous concern for organizational leaders in retaining their workforce (Qureshi et al., 2013). Turnover intention increases when an employee is not satisfied with their employer and the employee has increased stress. Bakarich et al. (2022) noted stress and burnout's role on turnover intention. Results show that stress, burnout, and turnover intentions have increased significantly since remote work began (Bakarich et al., 2022). Additionally, the study found that women experience a significant increase in emotional exhaustion and turnover intention, while males experience a significant increase in feelings of depersonalization and role overload (Bakarich et al., 2022).

Providing resources and support to women to reduce turnover and turnover intention may help support working women with dual responsibilities. A lack of organizational support and work-family conflict is directly connected to employee turnover intentions, specifically for women employees (Rasheed et al., 2018). When HR leaders implement strategies to support their workforce, are transparent, and actively listen to understand the needs of their employees, they create a win-win situation. This study will explore employers' best practices for retaining women employees with dual responsibilities in the post-pandemic era.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The leader-member exchange theory establishes a framework for understanding how leaders directly influence the behavior and decisions of employees. The most significant outcomes of the leader-member exchange theory are performance, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, turnover intention, creativity, organizational commitment, and affective commitment (Mumtaz & Rowley, 2020). Coupled with the leader-member exchange theory, the affective events theory helps to establish a framework that may explain how situational factors impact the affective reactions of employees. Affective events theory maintains that daily interruptions in life trigger affective reactions that, in turn, influence attitudes, states, and behaviors (Silva, 2024). Chapter 2 contextualized the current literature, and although researchers have studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the dual responsibilities of women and turnover intention, little research exists involving the best practices employers use to

retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household family members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic.

The literature review included various forms of data from scholarly journals and articles. In Chapter 2, the conceptual framework is expanded further for this proposed study. The literature review highlighted the challenges of working women resurrected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 2 established various accounts of how the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted women, specifically single working women. Chapter 2 also offered multiple versions of how women suffered challenges with working remotely and caregiving; however, Chapter 2 highlights the overall difficulties of working women's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 3 will provide the specific research design and rationale for using the methodology for this study, discuss the data collection methods and procedures, discuss the framework grounding this study, and discuss the role of the researcher, participant selection, and ethical procedures.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The specific research problem is that although researchers have investigated job loss during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic of how employers can retain women with dual responsibilities caring for their family members in their household and working during crises has not been explored (Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. Chapter 3 presents the research design and rationale for exploring best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household family members and working in the post-COVID-19 era. The study aimed to understand the challenges working women with dual responsibilities faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and their ability to balance work and family obligations. The research design was a multiple-case study that engaged participants through semistructured interviews for data collection.

The role of the researcher is acknowledged in this chapter, along with potential researcher biases and how those biases are mitigated. The participant selection logic and intent of a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling were appropriate for this research. Chapter 3 also explains credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure the study's trustworthiness. An explanation of how ethical procedures protected the participants' privacy is addressed in this chapter. This study

may fill a gap in understanding for hiring managers and HR practitioners on what best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic. The study's findings contribute to a greater understanding of employers' actions in retaining women with dual responsibilities in crises, such as pandemics, supporting the retention of this population, avoiding higher unemployment rates, and assisting women in maintaining their dual responsibilities.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The methodology for this study is qualitative. With a qualitative methodology, researchers are interested in the beliefs and experiences of people, as well as meaning systems from the people's perspective (Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative research attempts to shape the understanding of how things came to be as they are in our social world (Hancock et al., 2001). Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because I explored best practices employers use to retain female employees with dual responsibilities caring for their household family members. A quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study because I analyzed interview transcripts, questionnaires, and other artifacts, such as job descriptions, which were also used as a source of data to answer the research question.

In quantitative research, a systematic and empirical investigation of a phenomenon is done through statistics and mathematics and the processing of numerical data (Basias & Pollalis, 2018). Qualitative research tends to be personal, and the researcher is the instrument of inquiry (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research does not

employ statistical procedures but instead focuses on inquiries into the stories of individuals to capture and understand their experiences (Patton, 2015). A quantitative methodology is inappropriate because this qualitative study will not rely on numerical data. Quantitative data was not needed to answer the research question, and the research question was best answered with a qualitative methodology, specifically using a multiple case study.

This qualitative multiple-case study explored employers' best practices for retaining women employees with dual responsibilities. In qualitative research, a multiple-case study involves comparing and contrasting two or more cases. In multiple case study research, each case is studied as if it is a singular study and compared to others (Starman, 2013). Case studies are appropriate because the researcher's questions require an extensive and in-depth description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2018).

Qualitative methodology is appropriate if the research questions explore how people experience something, their views, or a real-life context (Hancock et al., 2001). The research questions were developed to understand real-life experiences better. The research questions should describe real-life phenomena rather than developing normative statements (Rashid et al., 2019). A case study is a research strategy that involves a detailed study of the concerned unit of analysis within its natural setting (Priya, 2021).

This qualitative multiple-case study was the appropriate research method for this study not just because of the *how* or *why* questions that were used; however, the multiple-case study was also appropriate for this study because several cases were selected. This offers the advantage of allowing comparisons across several cases and replication (Crowe

et al., 2011). In quantitative research, the questions are direct, quantifiable, and often contain phrases such as *What percentage? What proportion? To what extent? How many? How much?* (Goertzen, 2017). The exploration of participant experiences in this study was needed. Case studies investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be evident (Yin, 2018), and this is most appropriate for the relevance of the research topic. Case studies are used extensively in various disciplines, particularly social sciences (Crowe et al., 2011).

The qualitative multiple-case study can help elucidate best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research is a common approach used to understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). A qualitative multiple case study is necessary to determine the research question in this study: what best practices do employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic?

In qualitative multiple case studies, the data collected from participants are derived from particulars to general themes, and the researcher interprets the meaning of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Developing themes is the heart of qualitative research (Mishra & Dey, 2022). Themes cannot be observed as they are perceptions, experiences, feelings, values, and emotions residing in the minds of research participants (Mishra & Dey, 2022).

A case study is generally a study of a single case or a small number of cases (Starman, 2013). Examining several individual cases that are selected so that their analysis will support the research with the most diverse information would be appropriate and is a plausible characteristic of the multiple-case study (Starman, 2013). Because this study included multiple cases, various perspectives with differences and similarities were obtained. The multiple-case study design was selected because it is most appropriate for this study. Multiple-case studies have a distinct advantage over a single-case study design (Priya, 2021). Multiple-case studies are more compelling, robust, and worthy of undertaking because a multiple-case study design has a greater chance of weeding out data collection errors and prejudices and producing a more acceptable result (Priya, 2021).

The case study is an illustrious category researchers use to dig out the characteristics of a particular entity and its critical distinguishable attributes, which includes a focus on a single unit, an in-depth description of a phenomenon anchored on real live scenarios and uses multiple data collection methods (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). The case study is intended to dig out the characteristics of a particular entity and its critical distinguishable attributes, including focus on a single unit, in-depth description of a phenomenon, anchored on real live scenarios, and can use multiple data collection methods (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). Using the qualitative multiple-case study for this study was appropriate because COVID-19 remains a reasonably new development where HR leaders are challenged to continue to find ways to retain their staff. Employee retention in

the post-pandemic era is a problem that can be solved using a qualitative multiple-case study.

Other qualitative methods reviewed as an option for this study include narrative inquiry, grounded theory, and hermeneutics. The narrative inquiry focuses on storytelling in a narrative format; however, the data collection process is similar to that of a case study and requires in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations (Pino et al., 2022). Narrative inquiry involves a historical context of participants past experiences. The narrative inquiry's stories become the raw data, and this approach has been used in many disciplines to learn more about the narrator's culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle (Butina, 2015). Narrative inquiry would have been appropriate if this research involved interviewing women employees with dual responsibilities. Narrative inquiry anticipates that the participants would use context to situate their own experiences using reflection (Sunday et al., 2020). Through participants' storytelling, they engage in a process based on reflection, structuring their reflections and narrating their life events in a particular order (Sunday et al., 2020).

Individual stories and reflections of the participant are similar in the grounded theory approach as in the narrative inquiry (Miller, 2015). Researchers seek to build a theory that explains the phenomenon of interest (Miller, 2015). The research aimed to understand employers' best practices for retaining women with dual responsibilities in the post-pandemic era. The data collection process for the grounded theory approach was used in this qualitative research, and data from semistructured in-depth interviews supported building theories. Foley et al. (2021) posited that the goal of a grounded theory

study is to reach the theoretical saturation of the data, where all key categories are fully contextualized and dimensionalized to greatly explain the emergent theoretical construct of the research. The interview data are transcribed and analyzed through coding and constant comparison, considering the constructivist grounded theory approach to building theory (Mfinanga et al., 2019). Grounded theory is a data collection approach in qualitative research methods based on data rather than trying to emerge a theory from data (Khan, 2014). Khan (2014) posited that studies incorporating this approach are a step towards conceptual thinking and theory building rather than empirical testing of the theory, which is appropriate in qualitative studies.

Hermeneutic phenomenology allows researchers to study how experiences, traditions, and culture shape ordinary, everyday practices, and it elicits stories from participants as a source of understanding (Oerther, 2020). The hermeneutic methodology is a research method used primarily in education, healthcare, and social work (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). Hermeneutics needs interpretation, which refers to the meanings derived from the analysis of the collected data, beliefs from the information, and meaning from evidence (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). Because hermeneutics is the study of interpretation, this methodology would not be appropriate for this study, which aimed to examine the participants' experience.

Of the various qualitative research methods, the phenomenological method was also reviewed and could answer the research question because the phenomenological method focuses on the experiences of participants. While the phenomenological method interprets and amplifies the experience stories of the participants, the researcher must

make sense of or interpret the stories to have a trustworthy and deeper understanding of those experiences of the participants in a logical analysis (Alase, 2017). With a case study, participants answer *how* and *why* questions in contextual analysis. As such, the phenomenological method would be less effective for this study because the exploration of best practices used by employers will occur by analyzing themes from the data collected.

With qualitative research, there is a common thread: the ontological assumptions. Ontology is how reality is viewed, where researchers tend to search for meaning. According to Lincoln and Guba (2013), ontology exists in two forms: physical reality and socially constructed realities that may deal with questions that will answer what is there to be known or the nature of reality. Based on these questions, ontological assumptions are derived. Ontological assumptions are born from research paradigms. Research depends on the paradigm the research assumes (Cooper, 1997). Research paradigms are a set of beliefs (Kamal, 2019). There are four significant paradigms in qualitative research: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Mittwede, 2012). For this study, the post-positivism paradigm was adopted because post-positivism joins theory and practice together—post-positivism balances positivist and interpretivist approaches (Panhwar et al., 2017). Post-positivism is a flexible approach that allows the researcher to use multiple methods to carry out the research according to the research questions (Panhwar et al., 2017).

## **Positivism**

Positivism assumes that reality exists independently of humans (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016) and appears more quantitative. Positivism relies on the hypothetic-deductive methods to verify hypotheses that are often stated quantitatively, where functional relationships can be derived between causal and explanatory factors, such as independent variables and outcomes, which are dependent variables (Park et al., 2020). In essence, positivism adheres to the concept of natural science, where the researcher believes there is a logical relationship between objects, which can be justified scientifically (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). As such, positivism is more involved in a quantitative nature, and this research paradigm is unsuitable for a qualitative multiple-case study.

## **Post-Positivism**

The post-positivist paradigm conceptualizes reality from multiple perspectives (Turyahikayo, 2021). The post-positivist paradigm reflects the need to identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes, such as those found in experiments. Researchers guided by the post-positivism paradigm rely on a combination of research approaches and methods (Panhwar et al., 2017). Post-positivism asserts the turning of empirical data of a neo-positivist/positivist result into knowledge through interpretative collaboration with other viewpoints (Panhwar et al., 2017). The post-positivism ontological assumption was the most appropriate for this study because there is the belief that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the turnover intention of working women with dual responsibilities,

and the outcomes could help to discover best practices organizations can adopt to retain women in the post-pandemic era.

### **Critical Theory**

Critical theory assumes an ontological stance that reality is shaped over time by structures such as social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender constructs (Paradis et al., 2020). Social structures are detailed, can determine one's thinking and behavior, and are often unconscious (Paradis et al., 2020). While one could assert that the COVID-19 pandemic is the reason for employee turnover, it is not the most appropriate ontological assumption for this study. Critical theory is flexible and can adopt any methodology that could help suggest betterment in an unbalanced social system (Asghar, 2013). Based on the gender constructs of the research, this study could be guided using the critical theory; however, the study aims to explore the best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household family members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Constructivism**

The constructivist approach, or the interpretivism paradigm, is inappropriate for this study. With constructivism, the paradigm seeks to understand a phenomenon using different data-collecting agents from the participants' experiences (Adom et al., 2016). Researchers construct meanings from the phenomena through their own experiences and the participants, and then, the researcher evaluates what is said to ascertain the facts (Adom et al., 2016). Unlike positivism, constructivism's interpretative stance on reality would state that 'meaning' does not exist without human consciousness; therefore, reality

is constructed by human consciousness where there are multiple realities, as many as individuals (Uzun, 2016).

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the sole researcher of this study, I was the recruiter for the participants, the data collector, and the data analyst. I recruited HR professionals, hiring managers, and other decision-makers, such as C-Suite leaders from the greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area. This study did not include participants with whom I have a personal relationship. Such relationships may involve and are not limited to family or friends. Not involving participants with whom I have a personal relationship protected the integrity of my research and avoided potential bias.

Bias can arise at any point throughout the research process (Florczak, 2022). Some biases could have influenced the outcome of the study; however, personal bias was well-controlled throughout the research process. As the researcher, I was always mindful and controlled personal biases to ensure that such personal biases did not conflict with the participants' viewpoints and did not interfere with the study's findings. Bias can occur in research planning, data collection, analysis, and publication phases (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). A keen understanding of and avoiding personal biases was critical to research objectivity. Personal thoughts and feelings were not interjected when listening to participants or interpreting the data because that could have negatively impacted the validity of the research. Qualitative researchers should understand their emotions, biases, and expectations, interjecting themselves, and should strive to minimize any bias to ensure the validity of the research (Pyo et al., 2023). Journaling my personal thoughts,

reactions, and opinions supported me in mitigating personal biases. Mitigating biases and not inserting personal thoughts and experiences ensured the trustworthiness and reliability of the research which remained intact. In qualitative research, guidelines are followed to ensure trustworthiness and reliability.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative multiple-case study was used to explore employers' best practices to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their family members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic. There were 10 participants which consisted of hiring leaders, HR professionals and decision makers who were experienced working with women with dual responsibilities who have encountered the phenomenon accompanying the study. The phenomenon of interest was understanding employers' best practices for retaining women with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID-19 era. The participants were recruited from Waukesha County or Milwaukee County, Wisconsin because they were in a local area and were easily accessible to me as the researcher. Participants were interviewed following Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, which consisted of the following steps:

- 1) complete Form A to enable IRB tailored guidance
- 2) prepare documents that the IRB requested in step 1 and work out any ethical issues
- 3) work with the IRB to close after proposal approval
- 4) official ethics review to take place

### **Participant Selection Logic**

Participants were recruited through social media: Facebook and LinkedIn as well as other professional connections such as the National Association of African Americans in Human Resources (NAAAHR). Following all IRB guidelines, I posted information regarding the study using the social media email template provided by the IRB to recruit participants. Further details and information about the study were provided to participants upon selection. Participants were notified immediately in the recruiting notice that the interview would be recorded with their consent. I attached copy of my IRB-approved consent form to each participant.

The data collection aimed for 15-20 participants; however, I received saturation much sooner at eight participants. However, I chose to interview more. Interviewing more participants will support rich or more insightful data (Saunders et al., 2017). Interviewing more participants to help stretch the diversity of the data as far as possible will ensure that saturation is based on the widest possible range of data on the category (Saunders et al., 2017). Participants included HR professionals, hiring managers, and other decision-makers such as C-Suite leaders from the greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area. A combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was used. Purposeful sampling involves the development of idiographic knowledge from generalizations from and about individual cases (Palinkas et al., 2015). Convenience sampling is a nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population that meet specific practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate, are included for the study from

generalizations from samples to populations (Etikan et al., 2016). All interviews were recorded using an audio recorder on my iPhone16 and transcribed using Atlas.ti an inexpensive data analysis software used to analyze qualitative data. The emerging themes from the interviews were triangulated with publicly available job descriptions. The participants were selected based on their decision-making ability and ability to implement HR practices to provide data triangulation.

### **Instrumentation**

In this qualitative multiple-case study, I described, interpreted, and analyzed the data collected. Researchers using a qualitative design seek to discover reasons for observed patterns, especially the invisible or surprising ones (Busetto et al., 2020). Data sources from a qualitative research design could come from various sources such as observations, interviews, or focus groups. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Then, codes were generated and emerging themes from the interviews were triangulated with publicly available job descriptions.

According to Yin (2018), case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in triangulation. There are four types of triangulation processes to establish credibility: (1) data triangulation, (2) investigator triangulation, (3) theory triangulation, and (4) methodological triangulation (Patton, 2015). For this study, data triangulation was used. Data triangulation uses multiple methods of data sources to increase validity and check findings (Patton, 2015).

Data triangulation was reached through semistructured interviews and the analysis of job descriptions as external artifacts. Table 1 below demonstrates how data

triangulation was achieved by comparing recurring patterns from participant experiences with content derived from job descriptions. Converging evidence across these independent sources strengthened the study's credibility by confirming the consistent themes regarding flexibility, supportive leadership, work life integration, mentorship, and inclusive culture. This cross-verification aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criterion of credibility, ensuring that findings reflect both participant perspectives and observable organizational practices.

**Table 1***Data Triangulation Between Participant Interviews and Job Descriptions*

Theme	Codes From Interviews	Supporting Evidence From Job Descriptions	Triangulated Interpretation
Workplace Flexibility and Remote Options	Flexible scheduling, hybrid work, remote access, trust in employees	Job postings emphasized “hybrid flexibility,” “remote work eligibility,” and “core hours”	Alignment shows organizational commitment to flexible structures that support retention of employees with caregiving roles.
Supportive Leadership and Empathy	Compassionate managers, emotional understanding, mentorship, open communication	Job descriptions noted “inclusive leadership,” “employee well-being initiatives,” and “coaching skills”	Both data sources indicate that empathetic leadership and relational engagement are central to employee satisfaction and retention (linked to LMX).
Work–Life Balance and Caregiver Support	Childcare challenges, burnout prevention, flexible PTO, family responsibilities	Job descriptions referenced “family-friendly benefits,” “dependent-care assistance,” and “wellness programs”	Convergence highlights how policy-level supports reinforce emotional and practical needs of dual-role employees (linked to AET).
Professional Growth and Mentorship	Desire for advancement, career pathways, mentorship opportunities	Descriptions included “leadership development,” “internal mobility,” and “mentorship programs”	Both sources emphasize organizational investment in career development as a retention strategy.
Organizational Culture and Inclusivity	Belonging, respect, open dialogue, representation of women and caregivers	Job descriptions mentioned “DEI initiatives,” “inclusive culture,” and “employee resource groups”	Themes confirm that inclusivity and representation are viewed as integral to sustainable retention.

**Interview Protocol**

The main research question to guide the participant interview questions was: What best practices do employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic? Semistructured interviews are necessary for researching more complex social-behavioral research questions (Adeoye-Olatunde et al., 2021). Semistructured interviews will allow the researcher to collect the data and observe the participants’ experiences.

The interview questions were derived from the themes discussed in Chapter 2.

The interview questions below provided insight into employers' best practices in retaining women employees with dual responsibilities caring for their family members.

1. What HR practices do you consider successful in supporting the retention of women employees with dual responsibilities?
2. What is the most significant driver for women employee turnover? Why? Please explain.
3. What is your experience with women employees with dual responsibilities and their work priorities? What do you think has changed with women and dual responsibilities post-COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What retention strategies post-COVID-19 pandemic do you believe would support women employees with dual responsibilities?
5. What retention strategies are critical to support the retention of women employees with dual responsibilities?
6. How does remote or hybrid work of women with dual responsibilities impact organizational goals and objectives?
7. What are common reasons for staff resignation or absences amongst women employees post-COVID-19 pandemic?
8. What work-life balance options have you implemented throughout your career during times of crisis?

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Data collection began once I received my IRB approval number 11-01-24-0465414. Afterward, participants will be invited using social media with a formal email invitation. The email invitation (see Appendix A: Invitation Letter to Participants) included information for the participants, such as an introduction, the purpose of the study, time expectations for the interview, an ask for voluntary participation, my contact information, an explanation of how participant information would be kept confidential and protected, along with an attached consent form provided by Walden University. Once participants agree to participate in the study, the researcher will send informed consent emails to each participant. Participants were provided with informed consent via email, and upon receiving a reply from the participant via email with their agreement and consent, I proceeded with setting up the interview's time, day, and location. For example, the participants should respond and say, "I consent," so I can proceed.

Invitations to participate in a virtual interview were sent via social media: LinkedIn and Facebook. While the participants interviewed virtually, their setting for the virtual interview was through Microsoft Teams or Zoom. They were either interviewing with me virtually while in their home or office locations. Interviews were scheduled based on a mutually agreed-upon time with the participant and the researcher. Participants who accepted the interview after responding with their consent, received reminders of the interview via email. There were participants who initially agreed to an interview; however, did not follow through in the process, I continued to repeat the recruitment process. Participants were selected based on their decision-making ability

relevant to answering the research question. The data collection included semistructured, audio-recorded interviews with participants.

The interview process was thoroughly explained to participants. I started with a formal introduction explaining the expected duration of the interview, providing details of how the participants can contact the researcher before and after their interviews, explaining that the interview will be recorded and transcribed, confidentiality, and how the information they provide during the interview will be used in the research. The emerging themes from interviews were triangulated with publicly available job descriptions.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The data was analyzed using Saldaña's (2021) multi-cycle coding model to ensure systematic, rigorous interpretation of participants' experiences. This method supported an inductive identification of themes emerging from the participants' voices and deductive interpretation through the theoretical perspectives of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Affective Events Theory (AET). Using Saldaña's (2021) analysis supported a greater understanding of how leadership behaviors, workplace flexibility, and emotional experiences intersect to shape retention outcomes.

I began the coding process manually and then used qualitative data analysis (QDA) software, ATLAS.ti, to enhance the efficiency and accuracy of the analysis. ATLAS.ti proved to be both cost-effective and time-efficient due to its automation, data management capabilities, and organizational features. The software facilitated systematic coding, retrieval, and comparison of text segments, allowing for quicker identification of

patterns and relationships. I also used ATLAS.ti to cross-check and validate the codes initially generated through manual coding to ensure consistency and alignment across both methods. The results from manual coding were documented in Microsoft Excel. In qualitative research, a code is typically a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, or evocative attribute to a portion of language-based data (Saldaña, 2021). There are two ways of turning the interviews into data: theory driven logic which is deductive coding and data driven logic which is inductive coding.

In qualitative analysis, coding could follow an inductive (data-driven) or deductive (theory-driven) logic. Inductive coding allows patterns and meanings to emerge naturally from participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Thomas, 2006), whereas deductive coding applies predetermined concepts derived from existing theories or frameworks (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2021). Many researchers employ a hybrid approach that begins with inductive coding and later incorporate deductive coding to interpret data through theoretical lenses (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

After recording the results with the manual hand coding and Atlas.ti, I analyzed the data using Yin's pattern-matching logic. Pattern matching focuses on processes and outcomes in a given case study and works as one way of initially forming the "how is" and "why is" to be pattern-matched (Yin, 2018). I coded using thematic coding. Thematic coding involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning, and thematic coding is appropriate for understanding experiences, thoughts, or behaviors (Varpio & Kiger, 2020).

Deductive coding allows the researcher to get closer to the participant's experience. For example, deductive coding is used by researchers with a well-defined set of interests to identify relevance in the passages or participant's experience (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Inductive coding through emerging themes allows the researcher to see potential patterns in categories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I reviewed transcripts of the participants' interviews, selected common themes and ideas, and noted them. Transcribing and organizing the data was done using Atlas.ti and color coded to retract common themes which were beneficial in better understanding the participants' responses.

Qualitative researchers may analyze their research with hand-coding, text, or spreadsheet coding (Lichtenstein & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2023). However, to support the qualitative research coding process, researchers may use Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA). QDA includes software programs that researchers can use and serve as a valuable tool (Woods et al., 2016). QDA software is considered valuable to researchers because QDA software can support various phases of the qualitative research process (Woods et al., 2016). Because there are many different software programs for QDA, choosing the right QDA software takes work. Some key notes that should be considered are the type of analytical tasks the researcher may be involved in, the research's complexity level, and the desired outcome or experience the researcher needs (Gilbert et al., 2014).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Sound qualitative research must demonstrate trustworthiness and methodological rigor to be considered credible and meaningful (Nassaji, 2020). Trustworthiness

encompasses the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which collectively ensure the quality and authenticity of the research process and its outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve this, researchers must approach data collection and analysis with neutrality and transparency, striving to interpret findings without personal bias or undue influence (Singh et al., 2021). This includes implementing practices such as reflexivity and triangulation to validate the accuracy and integrity of the data. According to Singh et al. (2021), thick, rich description is essential in qualitative research because it offers comprehensive contextual details that enhance the trustworthiness of a study. By presenting vivid and layered descriptions of participants' experiences, researchers allow readers to better understand the setting and meaning behind the data, which supports the credibility and transferability of the findings.

### **Credibility**

Connelly (2016) posited an effort to determine a study's credibility, understanding and evaluating standard procedures or techniques used to establish credibility, such as reflective journaling or peer-debriefing. Additionally, the research must be fair, consistent, and realistically reflect the participant's experiences, not the researchers' opinions and biases (Connelly, 2016). Reflective journaling will be a crucial tool to ensure the credibility of the research, and reminding participants of their participation is not mandatory. Additionally, highlighting themes of the data collected will help to amplify the participant responses so there is no evidence of personal bias from the researcher.

**Transferability**

Transferability is the issue of generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer and is concerned with the researcher's responsibility for providing readers with sufficient information on the case studied such that readers may establish a degree of similarity between the case studied and the case to which findings might be transferred (Patton, 2015). The reader, or the potential user of the results, can better assess the relevance of the study's conclusions to the situation(s) studied (Maxwell, 2021). This qualitative study will explore the experiences and perceptions of the participants. As a result, my research may be applied to future research for similar populations or groups. I will achieve transferability through purposive sampling, which will be used in this study to help identify and confirm that participants are qualified and will ensure the validity of the findings.

**Dependability**

Dependability is the stability of the data over time, where a study of the phenomenon experienced by a participant is very similar from time to time (Connelly, 2016). Dependability was determined based on the participant's responses to their experiences. Documenting each step of the research and keeping a journal to document experience with the phenomenon, such as biases, setbacks, issues, and even thoughts, was useful in supporting the dependability of the research.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability concerns how others can confirm the researcher's interpretations and conclusions (Nassaji, 2020). Confirmability is a standard considered to be a parallel

to objectivity in quantitative research because quantitative research seeks objectivity by dissociating the researcher from the research process; however, qualitative research highlights the researcher's active role and engagement in the research (Nassaji, 2020). In qualitative research, confirmability is established by describing the data so that others can confirm their accuracy (Nassaji, 2020). A strategy that can be used to help determine confirmability is an audit trail in which the researcher records and rationalizes all steps taken and decisions made to determine the data coding and analysis (Nassaji, 2020).

I employed several strategies aligned with qualitative research best practices. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexivity, where I acknowledged my positionality and actively disconnected personal assumptions to prevent them from influencing the interpretation of data. I explored the participants' experiences only and not my own experiences or perceptions. I maintained a clear audit trail, including detailed records of interview transcripts, coding and theme development. The results were supported through data triangulation and the inclusion of verbatim participant quotes as evidence for each theme. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested inclusion of participant quotes further grounds the findings in participants' authentic voices. I also limited the analysis strictly to participants experiences, purposefully excluding my own perspectives to ensure that the interpretation remained participant-centered and free from personal bias.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Participants were advised of measures to protect their privacy and keep their statements confidential. One way to protect and maintain the participant's privacy is to identify each participant without using their name and company. Therefore, identifying

the participants using a letter and numbering system will be essential (Taquette et al., 2022). From an ethical perspective, conducting research with vulnerable populations requires protection because data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews with sensible themes, can transition into personal and politically charged matters, creating potentially conflicting situations (Peter, 2015).

The IRB approved the proposed study well before data was collected, approval number 11-01-24-0465414. Data can only be collected once the study is approved. Additionally, the IRB has a very detailed requirements checklist that will be used throughout this study. Following the checklist will ensure that the study is consistent with the expectations of Walden University's code of ethics policy. Sharing such details with the participants so they are clear on the purpose of the study, how the study will be used, and the researcher's role clearly outlined, their role as the participant, and possible risks and benefits will be communicated and documented. An invitation letter was used to ensure the consistency of the message for all participants (see Appendix A). A clear statement to participants to share how the data will be collected, stored, and retained during and after the research was necessary.

### **Summary**

The inequalities working women with dual responsibilities experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic is a problem that needs to be addressed, and this qualitative multiple case study seeks to explore best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. This chapter discussed a detailed explanation of the research

design and rationale for choosing a qualitative multiple case for this study as the most appropriate methodology to seek and understand the research problem. This chapter also identified the participant selection process, participant data collection, and analysis and explained how the trustworthiness of the research will be maintained. Chapter 3 also discussed how participant consent would be obtained before beginning data collection, maintaining participant confidentiality during and after the study, and protecting the data after the research was discussed. This chapter also discussed ethical considerations and the issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures, explaining how I will achieve and maintain trustworthiness. In Chapter 4, research results are discussed. I describe the data analyzed in further detail and assess the meanings of the interviews and data collected during the research.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. The research question for this study was as follows: what best practices do employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic? The specific research problem was that although researchers have investigated job loss during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the topic of how employers can retain women with dual responsibilities, caring for their family members in their household, and working during crises, has not been explored.

The qualitative multiple case study was essential to have an in-depth understanding of real-life context. The qualitative multiple case study provides real-life context (Yin, 2018). By employing a multiple case study design, this methodological approach facilitates a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the experiences of women employees with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID-19 context, while simultaneously analyzing the strategies that employers have implemented to support and retain this critical segment of the workforce. Chapter 4 presents a detailed overview of the research setting, participant demographics, and the procedures employed for data collection and analysis, coding, the structure for interview questions and interviews, theme development, discussion of trustworthiness, results.

### **Research Setting**

The data that were collected for this qualitative, multiple-case study came from semistructured interviews with HR professionals, hiring managers, or other decision-makers from the Greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area. Of the HR professionals, there was one operations manager and one operations supervisor, two HR business partners, one manager of talent acquisition and one talent acquisition manager, and one vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion. Of the decision makers, there was one program manager, one HR operations and one HR compliance manager. I was the sole data collection instrument for this study. Some participants were interviewed in their home or their places of work. Most of the participants were interviewed virtually over Zoom, and one interviewed via Microsoft Teams and interviewed via FaceTime. All except one operational manager were in their office at their workplace, interviewing from a secure location where they were able to speak freely and confidentially. The decision makers interviewed me from their home office. Their home offices was in a secure location where they were able to speak freely and confidentially. Finally, four of the HR professionals interviewed from their workplace office, also each individual were in a secure office where they were able to speak freely and confidentially. One HR professional interviewed from their home office where they were also able to speak freely and confidentially to me. All participants lived and worked in the Greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area. For each participant interviewed, there was no communication or a mention of any changes in personnel, no budget cuts or any identified trauma that may have influenced the study's interpretation results.

The standard procedures involved a greeting at the beginning of the interview, the interview structure, the purpose as outlined in the consent form and confidentiality warranties as described in the interview protocol. After each interview, the recordings were checked to ensure each interview was in fact, recorded and the audio was transcribed and secured. These recordings will be well-maintained in a secure location for 5 years. Participants were recorded using a secure voice recorder application.

Participation for each interview was voluntary, and participants were reminded that they could stop or decline their participation as noted in the consent form sent to them. Throughout the recruitment process, I observed a few HR professionals whose roles strictly involved oversight of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs. Based on the analysis of all 10 interviews, several themes consistently emerged regarding the experiences, challenges, and needs of women in the workplace, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities. Participants discussed their experiences in the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-COVID-19 period. There were no personal or organizational gains or promises that influenced the participants' experience at the time of this research.

### **Demographics**

To be eligible for voluntary participation in my research, participants had to meet the following criteria: (a) be HR professionals, hiring managers, or other organizational decision-makers, and (b) work within the Greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area. Although data saturation was achieved after eight interviews, a total of 10 interviews were conducted between December 2024 and mid-April 2025. On average, participants

had 20 years of experience in the human resources field or in leadership roles related to hiring. Of the 10 participants, one identified as male, and the remaining nine identified as female. All participants held positions in which they were hiring leaders, professionals with decision-making abilities, or executives in the HR industry.

Table 2 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the study's participants, which illustrates the composition of the sample used for data analysis. The table displays each participant's gender and total years of professional experience in the Human Resources field, highlighting the diversity of tenure and representation within the group of participants. This demographic summary establishes the context for interpreting the qualitative findings by showing the range of professional perspectives among the participants. The inclusion of both male and female participants, with experience levels ranging from 5 to 26 years, enhances the credibility and transferability of the study's insights regarding employer best practices for retaining women with dual responsibilities in post-COVID-19 workplaces.

**Table 2**

*Demographics of Participants*

Participant No.	Gender	Years of Industry Experience
P1	Female	6 years
P2	Female	15 years
P3	Male	21 years
P4	Female	26 years
P5	Female	8 years
P6	Female	10 years
P7	Female	15 years
P8	Female	10 years
P9	Female	5 years
P10	Female	5 years

## Data Collection

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval on November 1, 2024, with IRB approval number 11-01-24-0465414, I began the data collection process. Following all IRB guidelines, I employed a multi-platform recruitment strategy to identify and engage potential participants for this study. Specifically, I disseminated the study information through social media channels which included LinkedIn and Facebook, to maximize visibility among professional individuals likely to meet the inclusion criteria. These platforms were selected due to their broad reach and accessibility, particularly among working professionals. In addition to social media outreach, I utilized a standardized email recruitment template approved and provided by the IRB (see Figure 1). This template included a concise explanation of the study's purpose, eligibility criteria, confidentiality assurances, and a direct link to the informed consent form and screening questionnaire. All recruitment efforts were conducted in compliance with ethical research protocols to ensure transparency, voluntary participation, and the protection of participants' rights and privacy.

Using the IRB-approved recruitment procedures, I distributed direct invitations through social media platforms by utilizing an email template (see Figure 1). The initial outreach targeted a potential participant pool of 65 individuals and included a broader public post shared with over 500 professionals on LinkedIn and 10 professionals on Facebook. Each invitation included a link to the IRB-approved informed consent form (see Figure 2), which outlined the study's purpose, participation requirements, and

confidentiality measures. Individuals who expressed interest were instructed to respond via email with the statement “I consent,” signifying their agreement to participate.

Upon receiving consent, I coordinated individually with each participant to schedule interviews at mutually convenient times. Interviews were conducted virtually via FaceTime, Zoom, or Microsoft Teams, depending on the participant’s preference. A total of 21 individuals responded to the recruitment outreach, with 10 participants providing formal consent to participate in the study. All 10 participants were interviewed virtually. Of the 10 participants, eight completed their sessions using Zoom, one participant completed the interview via Microsoft Teams, and one participant completed the interview using FaceTime.

The 10 participants who responded to the interview for this study did not withdraw. However, there were a small number of participants that responded to consenting to the study and then became unresponsive. Further details and information about the study were provided to participants upon selection. Recruitment for this study began using my own personal social media pages on Facebook and LinkedIn. Data saturation was reached at eight interviews; however, 10 interviews were conducted between December 2024 and mid-April 2025. The average length of each interview was 13 minutes and 20 seconds and consisted of semistructured questions. Each of the 10 participants met the criteria needed for the study.

There were several candidates who expressed interest in the study; however, they reached out to me directly stating they felt they could not participate for fear of retaliation and were fearful of their jobs being cut for speaking out on this phenomenon due to the

immediate executive orders limiting the efforts of DEI programs. Because of the topic of this study potential participants also reached out to me directly with their reluctance to participate from HR leaders or hiring leaders who work specifically with DEI programs. Some variations, as presented in the data collection plan outlined in Chapter 3, included the number of participants interviewed. Data saturation was reached at the eighth participant; however, I interviewed 10 participants to ensure saturation was reached.

There were no private or sensitive information that was asked for or collected from participants. I made notes directly on the printed interview consent form for each participant. The notes will be kept in a private location to which only I will have access for 5 years. I observed that some of the participants had already prepared their answers to each question in preparation for the interview, and there was nothing unusual observed during data collection. In this qualitative multiple-case study, I proceeded with describing, interpreting, and analyzing the data collected as well as documenting emerging themes. There were several key trends and themes that consistently emerged regarding the experiences, challenges, and needs of women in the workplace based on the participant responses, especially those with caregiving responsibilities.

The transcripts collected from the 10 participants demonstrated variation in the depth and length of responses, yet they consistently addressed the research question. I engaged with each participant in a semistructured interview protocol, providing insights into best practices for retaining women employees with dual responsibilities post-COVID-19 pandemic. The relative brevity of interviews can be attributed to several interrelated factors which include the following.

### ***Professional Expertise and Familiarity with the Phenomenon***

The participants were experienced HR professionals and decision-makers who were deeply familiar with issues surrounding work-life balance, caregiving responsibilities, and retention strategies. Their insider knowledge enabled them to respond directly and efficiently to the research questions without requiring extensive elaboration or contextualization.

### ***Preparedness of Participants***

Many of the participants reviewed the interview protocol in advance and came prepared with answers already formulated. As a result, responses were delivered in a structured and concise manner, resembling policy statements or professional practices. This level of preparation reduced the time needed for each interview.

### ***Concise Communication Norms in HR Practice***

HR professionals often operate in environments that value precision and efficiency in communication. This cultural norm was evident in the interview data, where participants frequently delivered concise, solution-oriented responses rather than extended narratives.

### ***Use of Follow-Up Questions***

Although the core interviews were short, follow-up questions were asked when clarification or elaboration was needed. This helped to ensure the data collected was rich and aligned with the research question.

### ***Shared Understanding of the Phenomenon***

Because all of the participants were directly involved in implementing retention policies and practices, there was a shared professional language and understanding with the participants. This reduced the need for prolonged explanatory dialogue and allowed the interviews to remain focused.

The brevity of the interviews does not diminish the quality or credibility of the data collected. According to Malterud et al. (2016), the information power of a dataset, rather than the sheer length of interviews, determines the adequacy of qualitative sampling. In this study, information power was high because participants were highly experienced in the industry. Furthermore, the study employed semistructured interviews, which allowed for both consistency and flexibility in questioning (Patton, 2015).

Even though the interviews were concise, I ensured that each protocol question was addressed, and follow-up questions were used as necessary to produce additional information where needed. The combination of prepared participants and targeted probing ensured that responses were comprehensive. Shorter interviews are not uncommon in qualitative research when the participants are subject-matter experts. Yin (2018) emphasized that the depth of insight is not necessarily linked to the length of the interview, particularly when participants are highly knowledgeable about the phenomenon. Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that trustworthiness depends on credibility, confirmability, and dependability of data collection rather than interview duration.

In Table 3 the categorization of initial codes derived from participants' interview responses, accompanied by representative quotes that exemplify each code is presented. Following Saldaña's (2021) systematic coding process, first-cycle coding was employed to identify significant words, phrases, and concepts reflecting participants' experiences related to workplace flexibility, leadership support, and retention practices. These initial codes were then refined through second-cycle coding, in which similar or conceptually related codes were clustered into broader categories. This iterative process allowed for pattern recognition across cases and facilitated the emergence of higher-level themes aligned with the study's research questions. The inclusion of direct participant quotes in Table 3 provided evidentiary support for each category, ensuring transparency, rigor, and credibility in the data analysis process.

**Table 3***Categorization of Initial Codes With Participant Quotes*

Category	Codes	Label	Quotes
Work Design & Flexibility	Remote	Remote/Hybrid Work	“Working from home does not decrease productivity and performance.” (Participant 1) “The ability to work hybrid is a huge stepping stone.” (Participant 2)
	Hours	Flexible Hours	“Flexing work hours for balance and to avoid burnout.” (Participant 1) “The flexibility of working hours...allow the team to select the days they want to work.” (Participant 4)
	Case	Policy Individualization	“Employers need to know their employee. Very individualized based on the person in the position.” (Participant 2)
Caregiving Supports	Child	Childcare Assistance	“Childcare benefit...takes care of the concern of mothers worrying about where their child will be.” (Participant 2) “Turnover is due to attendance, caring for family, children or even themselves.” (Participant 5)
	Care	School/Medical Flexibility	“Flexibility around school schedules, medical appointments.” (Participant 8)
Supportive Leadership & Mentorship (LMX)	Empathy	Empathy	“Since becoming a manager and being a woman, I am more empathetic to my staff with flexibility.” (Participant 1)
	Mentor	Mentorship	“Mentorship programs, especially for African American women.” (Participant 1) “Having a mentor who has been in your space – a female or executive.” (Participant 9)
Well-Being & Mental Health (AET)	Recognition	Recognition/Advocacy	“Leader recognition for employees.” (Participant 4)
	Burnout	Burnout/Stress	“Women get burned out. Having an option to have hybrid or 100% remote, having a good wellness program for mental health.” (Participant 4) “The experience [COVID] led to burnout and making the decision to depart.” (Participant 9)
Inclusion, Equity & Culture	Wellness	EAP/Wellness Programs	“We have a mother’s room...a serenity room where employees can spend a few minutes before going back to work.” (Participant 7) “No working on vacation, encourage to take time off, provide emotional support.” (Participant 5)
	Bias	Bias/Microaggressions	“Bias. Harassment. Microaggressions. Lack of inclusion and understanding of what women go through.” (Participant 3)
	Culture	Inclusive Culture	“Organizations should not have a one size fits all policy. Create an inclusive culture and demonstrate it.” (Participant 3)
	Trust	Trust & Autonomy	“Remote and hybrid work...trust in employees.” (Participant 8)

*(table continues)*

**Table 3 cont.***Categorization of Initial Codes with Participant Quotes*

Category	Codes	Label	Quotes
Rewards & Career Growth	Leave of absence	Parental Leave	“Paid parental leave, wellness days, work-life balance.” (Participant 10)
	PTO	PTO Generosity	“Having a better maternity leave policy.” (Participant 1) “Generous PTO, some organizations have unlimited PTO.” (Participant 3)
	Compensation	Compensation and Healthcare	“Better healthcare, better pay, stabilization, leave opportunities.” (Participant 1)
	Career Growth	Growth/Reskilling	“Lack of growth opportunities for women. They feel like they were passed up for industries that are male predominant.” (Participant 10)
Attendance & Leave Practices	Policies	Attendance Leniency	“From a management perspective – to increase retention, HR has been lenient on disciplinary with regard to attendance.” (Participant 5)
		Leaves of Absence	“Women employee turnover – family leaves, leave of absences for caregiving.” (Participant 5)
Productivity & Organizational Outcomes	Productivity	Productivity	“Productivity has been higher with those individuals who are working from home.” (Participant 1)
	Talent	Talent Attraction/Retention	“Some agencies offer 100% remote and they leave to take that opportunity so they are home when their kids come home.” (Participant 7)
Turnover & Absence Drivers	Flexibility	Lack of Flexibility	“Lack of work-life balance... women with children do not have the support of their managers or organizations to have a flexible schedule.” (Participant 4)
		Childcare Breakdown	“Childcare challenges... childcare closing down, lots of stories in the news lately.” (Participant 1)
		Misalignment with Goals	“Misalignment of position with career goals, competing demands in their life – family, educational pursuit.” (Participant 9)
Turnover & Absence Drivers Post-COVID Shifts	Health	Health/Domestic Issues	“Dealing with mental health issues and children’s behavior that need to be managed differently after COVID.” (Participant 6)
	Caregiving	Increased Caregiving Load	“Post-COVID, women have taken on more responsibilities especially in Latino and minority communities.” (Participant 8)
	Normal Values	Normalization of Hybrid/Remote Re-prioritized Values/Time	“COVID has addressed this for many companies on what they can [do] hybrid or remote.” (Participant 1) “COVID-19 pandemic made us value how we spend our time and what really matters to us when you have children, husbands and what you do outside of work.” (Participant 9)

### **Data Analysis**

I began the analytic process by carefully reviewing each transcript multiple times to become immersed in the data to ensure accuracy. Immersion during transcription represents a foundational strategy in qualitative research, as it enables the researcher to engage closely with participants' words and meanings. While some scholars have explored alternatives to reduce the labor-intensive nature of transcription and devote more time to analysis (Vanover, 2021), I chose to transcribe and review each interview in detail to capture participants' exact language.

This approach allowed me to highlight and preserve specific quotes, which then informed the coding process, facilitated categorization, and revealed recurring patterns across participants. Through this iterative engagement with the transcripts, I laid the groundwork for the thematic analysis within a multiple case study design. The subsequent analysis was guided by Saldaña's coding framework, and I analyzed the data with the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory and Affective Events Theory (AET), in mind using them to explain why certain patterns or experiences appeared in the data, not just what was said by the participants.

The foundation of this study's model was a multiple case study design. Each participant was treated as a distinct case representing experiences and insights into the phenomenon of interest which was understanding employers' best practices for retaining women with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID-19 era. This design allowed for analysis of individual transcripts and a synthesis to identify convergent patterns and

shared strategies across participants. Multiple cases strengthen the robustness of the study by providing a richer basis for analytic generalization.

The data analysis process followed Saldaña's (2021) multi-cycle coding method, which provides a systematic and iterative approach for organizing and interpreting the qualitative data. This process enabled me to move from raw textual information toward conceptual understanding through multiple stages of review, reflection, and refinement. Beginning with transcript familiarization and progressing through coding, categorization, and theme development, each step built meaningful patterns and relationships within the participants' narratives. Following this structured approach ensured analytical rigor and maintained alignment with this study's theoretical frameworks.

In following, Saldaña's (2021) multi-cycle coding method, I first started with immersing myself in the data. I reviewed the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Analysis began with immersion in the data. Each transcript was read and re-read to understand participants' words, contexts, and meanings. During this stage, I focused documenting significant phrases, and situational cues (such as tone or emotions), while recording reflexive notes about connections. This deep familiarization established an interpretive baseline for subsequent coding and helped ensure that later analytic decisions were grounded in the participants' experiences.

In first-cycle coding, I searched for meaningful segments of text labeled with concise codes that captured both the content and interpretive significance. The codes functioned as analytic handles for data condensation and sense-making, summarizing actions, values, processes, or emotions expressed in the transcript. Coding was iterative:

initial labels were applied, compared, and revised across transcripts to preserve nuance while maintaining consistency. Analytic memos accompanied coding to document decisions, emergent ideas, and methodological reflections. I then added the categories. After a stable set of first-cycle codes was established, conceptually related codes were clustered into the broader categories. This second-cycle, pattern coding moved the analysis from descriptive labels to more interpretive groupings that explained regularities or relationships. Categories were refined through constant comparison, such as examining code meanings, frequencies, and overlaps.

Finally, categories were synthesized into overarching themes that expressed the central patterns of meaning across the participants' experiences. Themes linked multiple categories into explanatory insights that addressed the study's research questions and aligned with the guiding theoretical lens. Each theme was defined clearly, supported with representative quotations, and related back to prior categories and codes to show an auditable chain of evidence from raw text to interpretation.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended using thematic analysis to identify, interpret, and report recurring patterns within participants' responses. Following this approach, I applied a systematic coding-to-theme process that provided a transparent and logical pathway from raw data to final findings, ensuring both descriptive richness and interpretive depth. Following Saldaña's (2021) recommendations, the steps below summarize the procedures applied in this study.

### ***Familiarization with the Data***

The first step involved deep immersion in the data to achieve full familiarity with participants' experiences and perspectives. As Saldaña (2021) noted, effective coding requires repeated and deliberate engagement with the data: reading, rereading, coding, and recoding until the researcher achieves an intimate understanding of the dataset's details, subtleties, and nuances. True familiarity allows the researcher to recall verbatim participant statements and their corresponding codes, reflecting total immersion rather than analytic distance from the material.

### ***Generating Initial Codes***

After achieving familiarity, initial codes were generated to label and describe meaningful segments of data. Each datum was coded to capture its content and interpretive significance in relation to the research questions. Saldaña (2021) emphasized that coding serves as both a data condensation and sensemaking process, helping the researcher identify and label emerging patterns and meanings.

### ***Creating Analytic Memos***

Throughout the coding process, analytic memos were written to document insights, observations, and early interpretations. According to Saldaña (2021), memo writing is integral to coding because it captures reflections on possible themes, categories, or theoretical connections as they arise.

### ***Developing Categories***

Once initial codes were established, related codes were compared, grouped, and refined into conceptual categories that represented broader phenomena. Saldaña (2021)

described this stage as pattern coding, where the researcher begins to transition from descriptive summaries to interpretive explanations. Categories were formed based on similarity, frequency, and relevance to the theories grounding this study which allowed for clearer organization of emerging themes.

### ***Reviewing and Defining Themes***

In the next phase, categories were synthesized into overarching themes that captured the underlying meaning across participants' narratives. Themes represent extended, explanatory ideas that link multiple categories to form a coherent interpretation of the data (Saldaña, 2021). Each theme was clearly defined, supported by representative participant quotations, and aligned with this study's central purpose.

### ***Applying Themes to Research Questions***

Finally, the identified themes were interpreted in relation to this study's research questions and the theories grounding this study. This interpretive step involved constructing a comprehensive narrative that connected the empirical data to the theoretical concepts: Leader Member Exchange (LMX) and Affective Events Theory (AET).

### **Theoretical Interpretation**

The thematic findings were further interpreted through two theoretical lenses. The first was the Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) framed themes related to leadership practices, mentorship, and empathetic supervisory relationships. For example, codes such as LMX-EMPATHY and LMX-MENTOR were situated within the LMX framework, emphasizing the role of high-quality leader–

employee exchanges in retention outcomes. The second was the Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) informed the analysis of themes related to emotional experiences in the workplace. Codes such as AET-BURNOUT and AET-EAP reflected the impact of affective events. For example, workload stress, wellness initiatives, women's job satisfaction, engagement, and turnover decisions. By integrating LMX and AET, the analysis connected micro-level experiences to broader organizational practices, ensuring that the findings were theoretically grounded.

### **Trustworthiness: Lincoln and Guba's Model**

The trustworthiness of the analysis was evaluated using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework:

- Credibility was supported by member familiarity, follow-up probing where necessary, and triangulation across interviews, job descriptions, and field notes.
- Dependability was achieved by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions, category development, and theme refinement.
- Confirmability was ensured through reflexivity and transparent reporting of analytic steps.
- Transferability was supported by providing description of participant contexts and organizational practices.

Together, these strategies reinforced the rigor of the thematic analysis despite the brevity of individual interviews.

The research model blended case study methodology with thematic analysis to systematically move from raw participant narratives to themes, while LMX and AET

provided interpretive depth and Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criteria safeguarded the rigor of this study. This integration ensured that the findings were not only data-driven but also theoretically informed and methodologically sound.

### **Theme Development**

After coding and categorizing the transcripts, overarching themes were developed to address the research question: what best practices do employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic? As discussed in Chapter 3, the development of themes followed Saldaña's (2021) recommendations for moving from first-cycle coding to second-cycle pattern coding. The table below demonstrates how the raw data segments (quotes) were coded, grouped into categories, and synthesized into broader themes. This process of theme development illustrates how participant statements were first coded. For example, Table 4 illustrates the development which consisted of quotes, codes, categories and then themes organized into broader categories and then, synthesized into higher-level themes.

Table 4 demonstrates how systematic coding and theme development established a transparent analytic pathway from raw data to conceptual findings. It shows how multiple levels of interpretation, supported by participants' experiences converged to highlight flexibility, leadership empathy, inclusion, and well-being as the central organizational strategies influencing women's retention in post-COVID workplaces. The process reflects the study's alignment with LMX and AET, illustrating both the relational-leadership-based and emotional-affective dimensions of employee experience.

Through Saldaña's (2021) multi-cycle coding approach, initial codes were progressively grouped into categories and then synthesized into overarching themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences. This visualization illustrates how recurring codes, such as those related to flexibility, leadership empathy, caregiving responsibilities, and inclusion were conceptually connected to higher-ordered themes.

The theme development process followed Saldaña's (2021) systematic approach to coding, the initial analysis began by identifying concise codes that captured the essence of participants' statements. For example, these codes included, *FLEX-REMOTE* (working from home does not decrease productivity and performance), *CARE-CHILD* (childcare benefit concerns), *LMX-EMPATHY* (managerial empathy toward staff), *AET-BURNOUT* (well-being and burnout), *INC-BIAS* (bias and microaggressions), *RB-LEAVE* (paid leave and work-life balance), *ATT-LEN* (lenient attendance policies), *ORG-PROD* (productivity outcomes), *TO-MISALIGN* (career misalignment and competing demands), and *COVID-VALUES* (post-pandemic value shifts). During the categorization phase, these codes were grouped into broader conceptual clusters such as, *Work Design and Flexibility*, *Caregiving Supports*, *Supportive Leadership and Mentorship*, *Well-Being and Mental Health*, *Inclusion and Equity*, *Rewards and Career Growth*, *Attendance and Leave Practices*, *Productivity and Organizational Outcomes*, *Turnover and Absence Drivers*, and *Post-COVID Shifts*.

These categories represented intermediate patterns that linked multiple codes by meaning and context. Through pattern coding, the categories were synthesized into overarching themes that reflect the study's central findings: (a) *Flexibility as the Core*

*Retention Lever, (b) Integrated Caregiving Supports, (c) Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX), (d) Well-Being First (AET), (e) Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures, (f) Rewards and Career Pathways that Fit Dual Roles, (g) Attendance Practices that Recognize Caregiving, (h) Flexibility Enhances Productivity and Retention, (i) Turnover Drivers in Post-COVID Workplaces, and (j) Shifting Values and Normalization of Flexibility.* These emergent themes illustrate how initial descriptive codes evolved through iterative analysis into higher-order conceptual insights about the post-COVID-19 pandemic employment experiences of women with dual responsibilities.

**Table 4**

*Theme Development Process: From Codes to Categories to Themes*

Sample Quotes (Data Segments)	Codes	Categories	Themes
“Working from home does not decrease productivity and performance.” (Participant 1)	FLEX- REMOTE	Work Design & Flexibility	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever
“Childcare benefit...takes care of the concern of mothers worrying about where their child will be.” (Participant 2)	CARE- CHILD	Caregiving Supports	Integrated Caregiving Supports
“Since becoming a manager and being a woman, I am more empathetic to my staff with flexibility.” (Participant 1)	LMX- EMPATHY	Supportive Leadership & Mentorship	Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX)
“Women get burned out. Having an option to have hybrid or 100% remote, having a good wellness program for mental health.” (Participant 4)	AET- BURNOUT	Well-Being & Mental Health	Well-Being First (AET)
“Bias. Harassment. Microaggressions. Lack of inclusion and understanding of what women go through.” (Participant 3)	INC-BIAS	Inclusion, Equity & Culture	Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures
“Paid parental leave, wellness days, work-life balance.” (Participant 10)	RB-LEAVE	Rewards & Career Growth	Rewards and Career Pathways that Fit Dual Roles
“HR has been lenient on disciplinary with regard to attendance.” (Participant 5)	ATT-LEN	Attendance & Leave Practices	Attendance Practices that Recognize Caregiving
“Productivity has been higher with those individuals who are working from home.” (Participant 1)	ORG-PROD	Productivity & Organizational Outcomes	Flexibility Enhances Productivity & Retention
“Misalignment of position with career goals, competing demands in their life.” (Participant 9)	TO- MISALIGN	Turnover & Absence Drivers	Turnover Drivers in Post-COVID Workplaces
“COVID-19 pandemic made us value how we spend our time and what really matters.” (Participant 9)	COVID- VALUES	Post-COVID Shifts	Shifting Values and Normalization of Flexibility

## **Coding**

For this qualitative multiple case study, I used coding to organize, interpret and synthesize the data from the interviews and used supporting documents such as job descriptions. A systematic coding process was executed to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and meanings within the participants' narratives and the textual data from artifacts. Initially, open coding was used to break down the data into discrete parts, closely examining participants' responses line by line to identify significant statements and expressions relevant to the research questions (Saldaña, 2021). These initial codes were then grouped through axial coding, which allowed me to identify relationships among the codes and to cluster them into broader categories and emerging themes. Axial coding focuses on how categories relate to subcategories through conditions, context, interactions, and consequences, essentially building a conceptual framework that explains the phenomenon under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

I organized participant responses according to the structured interview protocol, which consisted of eight open-ended questions. Each participant's response was labeled by both interview number and question number, allowing for precise traceability of quotes back to specific questions. Each interview question served as a unit of analysis, and codes were initially applied within the context of the specific question asked, see Table 5 where I looked for recurrence of the codes. I also looked for recurrence of emerging codes. See Table 6, for example, for question one: What HR practices do you consider successful in supporting the retention of women employees with dual responsibilities?

**Figure 1**

*Frequency of Codes*

Codes	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10	Frequency
Flexibility (remote/hours/case)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	10
Caregiving supports (child/elder/appts)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			7
Supportive leadership & mentorship (LMX)	✓			✓					✓		3
Well-being & mental health (AET)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Inclusion & culture (bias/individualization/trust)			✓					✓	✓		3
Rewards & growth (leave/pay/pathways)	✓		✓							✓	4
Turnover/absence drivers (lack flex/childcare/misalignment/health)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9

**Figure 2**

*Analysis of Emerging Codes 1*

Participant	Question	Participant Verbiage	Codes	Category	Theme	Notes
Participant 1	Q1	Compassion, flexible work hours, ability to work remote or hybrid.	LMX-EMPATHY; FLEX-HOURS; FLEX-REMOTE	Supportive Leadership & Mentorship; Work Design & Flexibility	Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX); Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Names empathy and flexibility as core practices.
Participant 1	Q1	If children are ill, the woman can have an opportunity to still work and not have to use PTO.	FLEX-REMOTE; FLEX-HOURS; RB-PTO	Work Design & Flexibility; Rewards & Career Growth	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Remote/flex prevents PTO depletion for caregiving.
Participant 1	Q1	Having a better maternity leave policy.	RB-LEAVE	Rewards & Career Growth	Rewards and Career Pathways that Fit Dual Roles	Calls for stronger paid leave.
Participant 1	Q1	Mentorship programs, especially for African American women.	LMX-MENTOR; INC-CULTURE	Supportive Leadership & Mentorship; Inclusion, Equity & Culture	Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX); Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures	Mentorship with equity emphasis.
Participant 1	Q1	Better career advancements for African Americans or persons of color.	RB-GROWTH; INC-CULTURE	Rewards & Career Growth; Inclusion, Equity & Culture	Rewards and Career Pathways that Fit Dual Roles; Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures	Advancement pathways with equity lens.
Participant 1	Q2	Lack of worklife balance.	TO-NOFLEX	Turnover & Absence Drivers	Turnover Drivers in Post-COVID Workplaces	Identifies inflexibility as turnover driver.
Participant 1	Q2	A lot of women take on more than they should.	AET-BURNOUT	Well-Being & Mental Health	Well-Being First (AET)	Overload links to burnout.
Participant 1	Q2	Ability to balance work and home.	FLEX-HOURS; FLEX-REMOTE	Work Design & Flexibility	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Balance via flexible design.
Participant 1	Q2	Work remote when you need to so you can be there for your children or be a caregiver to your loved ones when you need to.	FLEX-REMOTE; CARE-CHILD; CARE-ELDER	Work Design & Flexibility; Caregiving Supports	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever; Integrated Caregiving Supports	Remote supports caregiving roles.
Participant 1	Q2	Flexing work hours for balance and to avoid burnout.	FLEX-HOURS; AET-BURNOUT	Work Design & Flexibility; Well-Being & Mental Health	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever; Well-Being First (AET)	Flex time as anti-burnout strategy.
Participant 1	Q3	Flexibility in work, increased demand in childcare support, empathy.	FLEX-REMOTE; CARE-CHILD; LMX-EMPATHY	Work Design & Flexibility; Caregiving Supports; Supportive Leadership & Mentorship	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever; Integrated Caregiving Supports; Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX)	Post-COVID needs: flex, childcare, empathy.
Participant 1	Q3	Especially African Americans or persons of color who are single mothers do not have the same support as other races.	INC-CULTURE	Inclusion, Equity & Culture	Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures	Equity gap recognition.
Participant 1	Q3	Women are probably more productive working from home than in the office due to less interruptions.	ORG-PROD; FLEX-REMOTE	Productivity & Organizational Outcomes; Work Design & Flexibility	Flexibility Enhances Productivity & Retention; Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Productivity benefits of WFH.

Figure 3

## Analysis of Emerging Codes 2

Participant 1	Q4	Working from home does not decrease productivity and performance.	ORG-PROD; FLEX-REMOTE	Productivity & Organizational Outcomes; Work Design & Flexibility	Flexibility Enhances Productivity & Retention; Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Reaffirms productivity under WFH.
Participant 1	Q4	COVID has addressed this for many companies on what they can hybrid or remote.	COVID-NORM; FLEX-REMOTE	Post-COVID Shifts; Work Design & Flexibility	Shifting Values and Normalization of Flexibility; Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Normalization of hybrid/remote.
Participant 1	Q4	Empathetic workplace cultures.	INC-CULTURE; LMX-EMPATHY	Inclusion, Equity & Culture; Supportive Leadership & Mentorship	Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures; Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX)	Culture of empathy as retention lever.
Participant 1	Q5	Mentorship, career paths.	LMX-MENTOR; RB-GROWTH	Supportive Leadership & Mentorship; Rewards & Career Growth	Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX); Rewards and Career Pathways that Fit Dual Roles	Mentorship + advancement.
Participant 1	Q5	Understanding the responsibility of those working from home and being a caregiver.	LMX-EMPATHY; CARE-CHILD; CARE-ELDER	Supportive Leadership & Mentorship; Caregiving Supports	Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX); Integrated Caregiving Supports	Leader empathy toward dual roles.
Participant 1	Q5	Childcare benefits to stabilize their lives without having to pay childcare.	CARE-CHILD	Caregiving Supports	Integrated Caregiving Supports	Financial childcare support.
Participant 1	Q5	Better healthcare, better pay, stabilization, leave opportunities, career advancements, empathy & leaders who understand.	RB-COMP; RB-LEAVE; RB-GROWTH; LMX-EMPATHY	Rewards & Career Growth; Supportive Leadership & Mentorship	Rewards and Career Pathways that Fit Dual Roles; Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX)	Bundle: comp/leave/growth/empathy.
Participant 1	Q6	Childcare challenges. Lack of flexibility. Mental health issues that do not get addressed.	CARE-CHILD; TO-NOFLEX; AET-BURNOUT	Caregiving Supports; Turnover & Absence Drivers; Well-Being & Mental Health	Integrated Caregiving Supports; Turnover Drivers; Well-Being First (AET)	Barriers when policies are rigid.
Participant 1	Q6	Productivity has been higher with those individuals who are working from home.	ORG-PROD; FLEX-REMOTE	Productivity & Organizational Outcomes; Work Design & Flexibility	Flexibility Enhances Productivity & Retention	Empirical claim on productivity.
Participant 1	Q6	Women have a place outside of work and important things outside of the office.	COVID-VALUES	Post-COVID Shifts	Shifting Values and Normalization of Flexibility	Re-prioritization of values/time.
Participant 1	Q7	Childcare challenges, childcare closing down.	TO-CHILD; CARE-CHILD	Turnover & Absence Drivers; Caregiving Supports	Turnover Drivers in Post-COVID Workplaces	Childcare fragility causes absence/exit.
Participant 1	Q7	Burnout, women trying to burn candles at two ends.	AET-BURNOUT	Well-Being & Mental Health	Well-Being First (AET)	Dual-role strain and fatigue.

**Figure 4**

*Analysis of Emerging Codes 3*

Participant 1	Q7	Flexibility of not being able to care for children, mental and physical health.	TO-NOFLEX; TO-HEALTH	Turnover & Absence Drivers	Turnover Drivers in Post-COVID Workplaces	Inflexibility + health lead to absence/exit.
Participant 1	Q8	As a manager I am more empathetic to my staff with flexibility.	LMX-EMPATHY; FLEX-HOURS	Supportive Leadership & Mentorship; Work Design & Flexibility	Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX); Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Managerial empathy + flex.
Participant 1	Q8	If there is a crisis, open door.	LMX-EMPATHY	Supportive Leadership & Mentorship	Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX)	Open-door support in crises.
Participant 1	Q8	Mental health day â€” self care for yourself.	AET-BOUND; RB-PTO	Well-Being & Mental Health; Rewards & Career Growth	Well-Being First (AET)	Boundary norms and rest time.
Participant 2	Q1	Policies, childcare; have not recently seen practices catered to women â€” more of a deficit to women.	CARE-CHILD; INC-CULTURE	Caregiving Supports; Inclusion, Equity & Culture	Integrated Caregiving Supports; Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures	Notes policy gaps affecting women.
Participant 2	Q1	Childcare benefit, pulling funds out of your paycheck, takes care of the concern of mothers.	CARE-CHILD	Caregiving Supports	Integrated Caregiving Supports	Describes dependent care benefits.
Participant 2	Q2	Lack of worklife balance; employers forget employees have families; be employee friendly.	TO-NOFLEX; INC-CULTURE	Turnover & Absence Drivers; Inclusion, Equity & Culture	Turnover Drivers; Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures	Inflexibility + unsupportive culture â†’ exits.
Participant 2	Q3	Single mom employee with two autistic, nonverbal kids; high-level role; set expectations around schedule.	FLEX-HOURS; FLEX-CASE; CARE-CHILD	Work Design & Flexibility; Caregiving Supports	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever; Integrated Caregiving Supports	Individualized scheduling for caregiving.
Participant 2	Q3	Women are more aware of what assistance is available; protect family while fulfilling career goals.	COVID-VALUES; RB-GROWTH	Post-COVID Shifts; Rewards & Career Growth	Shifting Values; Rewards and Career Pathways	Awareness of supports and goals.
Participant 2	Q4	Hybrid avoids losing pay when caring for a sick child; remote work.	FLEX-REMOTE; CARE-CHILD; RB-PTO	Work Design & Flexibility; Caregiving Supports; Rewards & Career Growth	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever; Integrated Caregiving Supports	Hybrid preserves income during caregiving.
Participant 2	Q5	Hybrid work is necessary; after COVID, turnover risk is high without it.	FLEX-REMOTE; TO-NOFLEX	Work Design & Flexibility; Turnover Drivers	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever; Turnover Drivers	Necessity of hybrid to retain.
Participant 2	Q6	Impact depends on the individual; employers need to know their employee; back-office roles most impacted.	FLEX-CASE	Work Design & Flexibility	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Individualized policy effectiveness.
Participant 2	Q7	Health and welfare of family drive absences; flexibility allows make-up hours.	TO-HEALTH; CARE-CHILD; FLEX-HOURS	Turnover & Absence Drivers; Caregiving Supports; Work Design & Flexibility	Turnover Drivers; Integrated Caregiving Supports; Flexibility	Health/family needs + flexible remedies.
Participant 2	Q8	Access to work remotely.	FLEX-REMOTE	Work Design & Flexibility	Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Remote access as crisis option.

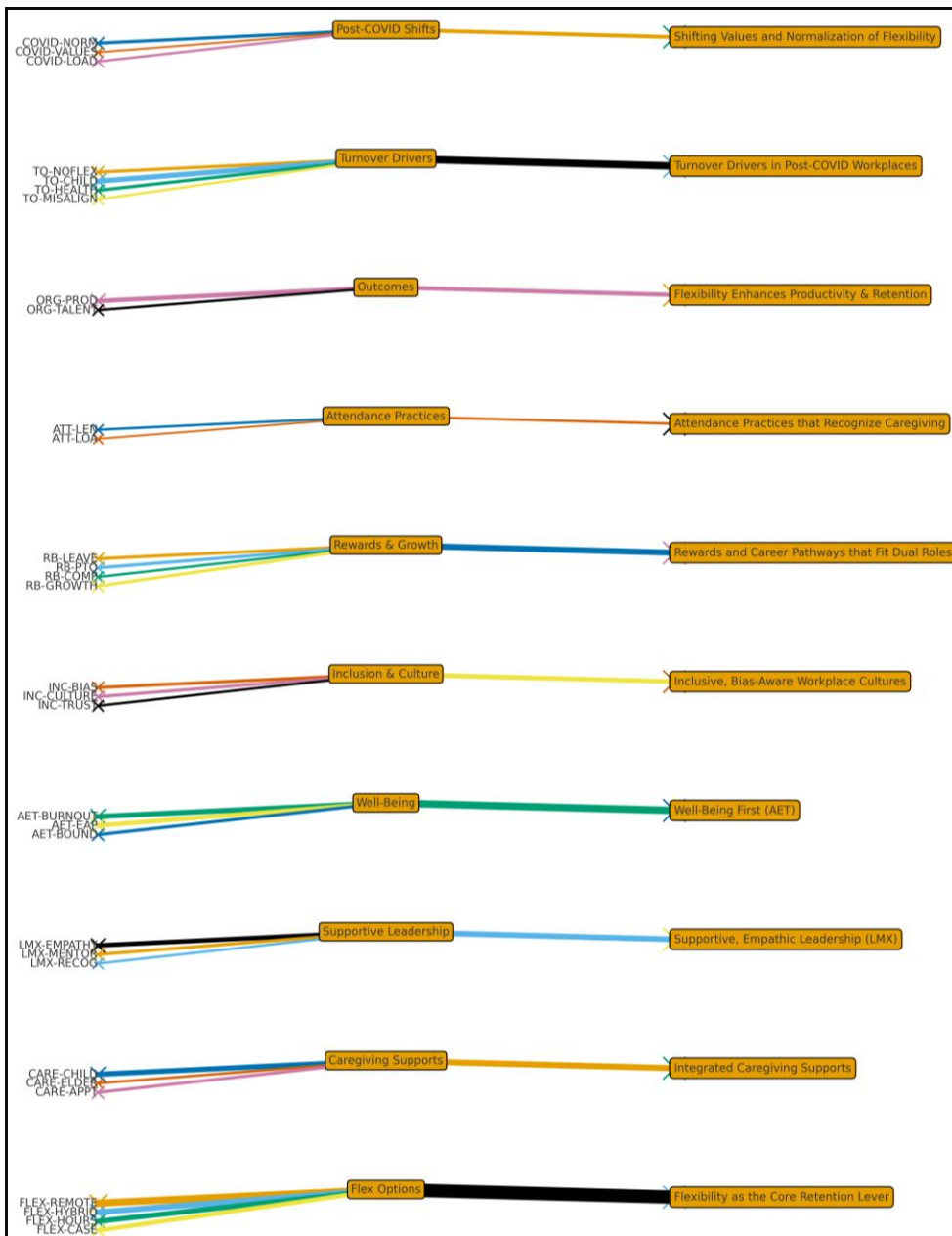
After initial coding, I conducted pattern matching. The figure below evidences the pattern-matching step where recurrent codes were grouped and synthesized into overarching themes. Table 7 demonstrate the pattern matching by aligning frequently recurring codes across interviews with conceptual categories and synthesizing them into overarching themes. Coverage counts indicate the number of participants who referenced the codes associated with each cluster. Participants listed reflect explicit mentions during the interviews.

**Table 5***Pattern Matching Alignment*

Overarching Theme	Category	Subcategories and Codes	Participants (P) Referencing	Coverage (n of 10)	Pattern-Matching Rationale
Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	Work Design & Flexibility	FLEX-REMOTE; FLEX-HOURS; FLEX-CASE; FLEX-JSHARE	P1–P10	10	Codes co-occur across nearly all interviews linking remote/hybrid, flexible hours, and individualized scheduling.
Integrated Caregiving Supports	Caregiving Supports	CARE-CHILD; CARE-ELDER; CARE-APPT	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8	7	Childcare/eldercare and appointment flexibility recur in a majority of interviews and cluster conceptually around stabilizing care.
Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX)	Supportive Leadership & Mentorship	LMX-EMPATHY; LMX-MENTOR; LMX-RECOG	P1, P4, P9	3	Leadership empathy, mentorship, and recognition appear together where leaders tailor work to dual-role needs.
Well-Being First (AET)	Well-Being & Mental Health	AET-BURNOUT; AET-EAP; AET-BOUND	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10	9	Burnout, EAP/wellness, and boundary-setting repeatedly co-occur when participants discuss stress mitigation.
Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures	Inclusion, Equity & Culture	INC-BIAS; INC-CULTURE; INC-TRUST	P3, P8, P9	3	Bias/microaggressions and calls for inclusive, trust-based policy clusters identify culture as a retention lever.
Rewards and Career Pathways that Fit Dual Roles	Rewards & Career Growth	RB-LEAVE; RB-PTO; RB-COMP; RB-GROWTH	P1, P3, P10 (±P5 salary)	4	Paid leave, PTO, compensation, and pathways appear together where advancement and stability are discussed.
Attendance Practices that Recognize Caregiving Flexibility Enhances Productivity & Retention	Attendance & Leave Practices	ATT-LEN; ATT-LOA	P5	1	Attendance leniency and caregiving LOAs are explicitly tied to retention in management narratives.
	Productivity & Organizational Outcomes	ORG-PROD; ORG-TALENT	P1, P7	2	Claims of higher productivity with WFH and talent attraction to remote roles cluster under outcomes.
Turnover Drivers in Post-COVID Workplaces	Turnover & Absence Drivers	TO-NOFLEX; TO-CHILD; TO-MISALIGN; TO-HEALTH	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10	9	Inflexibility, childcare breakdowns, misalignment, and health stressors repeatedly co-occur in exit narratives.
Shifting Values and Normalization of Flexibility	Post-COVID Shifts	COVID-LOAD; COVID-NORM; COVID-VALUES	P1, P6, P8, P9	4	COVID-driven value shifts, normalization of hybrid/remote, and increased caregiving load cohere conceptually.

**Figure 5**

*Pattern Matching Graph: Codes, Subcategories and Themes*



### **Semistructured Interviews**

The interviews reveal ten recurring themes concerning the experiences of women with dual responsibilities in the workforce, particularly regarding work-life balance, flexibility, and support systems. The interviews collectively highlight that for women with dual responsibilities to thrive in the workplace, organizations must adopt flexible work arrangements, provide supportive leadership, and implement policies that consider family responsibilities and mental health. By fostering an inclusive and empathetic work environment, employers can enhance employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, and support the professional growth of women with dual responsibilities.

Table 9 summarizes the key themes that emerged through the multi-cycle coding process, showing how patterns across participants' experiences were organized from initial codes into cohesive thematic concepts. Each theme is supported by representative codes and direct participant quotations that exemplify its core meaning. The inclusion of quotes from multiple participants enhances the credibility and transferability of the findings, demonstrating that each theme was consistently represented across different perspectives. Collectively, themes ranging from flexibility and caregiving supports to empathetic leadership, inclusion, and post-COVID value shifts capture the multifaceted strategies and cultural dynamics influencing the retention of women with dual responsibilities in the workplace.

Theme	Key Codes Feeding Theme	Quotes (2–3 participants)
Flexibility as the Core Retention Lever	FLEX-REMOTE; FLEX-HOURS; FLEX-CASE	“Working from home does not decrease productivity and performance.” (Participant 1)   “Hybrid work is necessary... after COVID.” (Participant 2)   “The ability to work from home... gives me flexibility to pick up my youngest from school.” (Participant 5)
Caregiving Supports	CARE-CHILD; CARE-ELDER; CARE-APPT	“Childcare benefit... takes care of the concern of mothers.” (Participant 2)   “Turnover is due to... caring for family, children or even themselves.” (Participant 5)   “Flexibility around school schedules, medical appointments.” (Participant 8)
Supportive, Empathic Leadership (LMX)	LMX-EMPATHY; LMX-MENTOR; LMX-RECOG	“Since becoming a manager... I am more empathetic to my staff with flexibility.” (Participant 1)   “Leader recognition for employees.” (Participant 4)   “Having a mentor who has been in your space – a female or executive.” (Participant 9)
Well-Being First (AET)	AET-BURNOUT; AET-EAP; AET-BOUND	“Women get burned out... having a good wellness program for mental health.” (Participant 4)   “No working on vacation, encourage to take time off... mental health is important.” (Participant 5)   “We have... a serenity room where employees can spend a few minutes before going back to work.” (Participant 7)
Inclusive, Bias-Aware Workplace Cultures	INC-BIAS; INC-CULTURE; INC-TRUST	“Bias. Harassment. Microaggressions.” (Participant 3)   “Single mothers... do not have the same support as other races.” (Participant 1)   “Remote and hybrid work... trust in employees.” (Participant 8)
Rewards and Career Pathways that Fit Dual Roles	RB-LEAVE; RB-PTO; RB-COMP; RB-GROWTH	“Paid parental leave, wellness days, work-life balance.” (Participant 10)   “Having a better maternity leave policy.” (Participant 1)   “Generous PTO... some organizations have unlimited PTO.” (Participant 3)
Attendance Practices that Recognize Caregiving Flexibility Enhances Productivity & Retention	ATT-LEN; ATT-LOA	“HR has been lenient on disciplinary with regard to attendance.” (Participant 5)   “Unexcused absences do not become an attendance issue... allowing people to leave early with pay.” (Participant 6)
Turnover Drivers in Post-COVID Workplaces	ORG-PROD; ORG-TALENT	“Productivity has been higher with those individuals who are working from home.” (Participant 1)   “Some agencies offer 100% remote and they leave to take that opportunity.” (Participant 7)
Shifting Values and Normalization of Flexibility	TO-NOFLEX; TO-CHILD; TO-MISALIGN; TO-HEALTH	“Lack of work-life balance.” (Participant 1)   “Lack of work-life balance... employers forget employees have families.” (Participant 2)   “Lack of flexibility... women with children do not have the support of their managers.” (Participant 4)
	COVID-LOAD; COVID-NORM; COVID-VALUES	“COVID-19 pandemic made us value how we spend our time.” (Participant 9)   “COVID has addressed this for many companies on what they can [do] hybrid or remote.” (Participant 1)   “Women... more privy to leave an organization if remote work is not present.” (Participant 6)

### **Discrepant Cases**

In the course of analyzing the data, I paid attention to any discrepant cases, those case in which participant responses did not fully align with the emerging patterns or dominant themes. These cases should be critically examined and integrated into the interpretation of a study's results to ensure analytic rigor, credibility, and transparency in line with best practices in qualitative research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). No significantly discrepant cases were identified during the analysis; however, participants expressed varied emphasis on the importance and implementation of flexible workplace practices.

For the first question, *what HR practices do you consider successful in supporting the retention of women employees with dual responsibilities?* Most of the participants answered with a response of flexibility, remote or hybrid work. However, Participant 5 stated, "Women employee turnover contributes to family leaves. Women with children and attendance concerns is critical. It would be nice to take into consideration the children of women. Turnover is due to attendance, caring for family, children or even themselves" and Participant 9 stated, "Mentorship, having a mentor who has been in your space, such as a female or executive."

By including discrepant cases, this study adhered to the methodological guidance offered by Creswell and Poth (2018), who recommend incorporating conflicting perspectives to enhance the validity of qualitative findings. Discrepant perspectives were not framed as errors or contradictions but as valuable counterpoints that prompted critical reflection and theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2014). These cases also supported

reflexivity, which reminded me to remain aware of personal assumptions and remain open to multiple truths emerging from the data.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

As outlined in Chapter 3, all procedures were followed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Participant responses were recorded and documented and not modified at all. To determine the relevancy of research, the research must be trustworthy (Adler, 2022, p.598). To confirm the trustworthiness of this study, I used sufficient interviews to display increased credibility. While the interviews ranged between 10 and 12 minutes, the data collected in this study are characterized by substantial informational richness and thematic depth. This outcome can be attributed to several methodological factors grounded in qualitative research best practices. First, the study employed purposeful sampling to recruit participants who were highly knowledgeable about the phenomenon. The participants, comprised of HR professionals, hiring managers, and organizational leaders with an average of 20 years of industry experience, were strategically selected for their information power. The more relevant the participants are to the study aim, the fewer participants are required to obtain meaningful data (Malterud et al., 2016).

Second, although the interviews were concise, the semistructured format allowed for focused, in-depth exploration of key themes. This is consistent with Rubin and Rubin's (2012) assertion that in responsive interviewing, the richness of the data is determined not by the length of the conversation but by the relevance and clarity of the participant's insights. The questions were deliberately crafted to elicit specific responses

related to workplace policies, leadership practices, and organizational support structures affecting women with dual responsibilities.

Third, thematic saturation was reached after the eighth interview, with no new codes or themes emerging, indicating that the sample size was sufficient to capture the range of perspectives relevant to the research question (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Although data collection continued through 10 interviews to ensure thoroughness, the lack of emergent codes beyond this point confirms that data sufficiency had been achieved (Morse, 2000).

Fourth, methodological triangulation was used to strengthen the study's credibility. In addition to interviews, the research incorporated document analysis of organizational job descriptions and field notes, which were compared to interview data to ensure internal consistency and validate findings (Patton, 1999). This triangulation process enhances trustworthiness and confirmability, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Finally, the analytical process followed Saldaña's (2016) recommendation of pre-coding, by circling, highlighting, bolding and underlining significant participant quotes that were noteworthy or stood out. Despite the brevity of interviews, more than 35 unique codes emerged, reflecting a rich matrix of organizational challenges, support systems, and cultural dimensions impacting working women with dual responsibilities. Together, these strategies affirm the rigor, credibility, and richness of the data, demonstrating that interview length alone is not a determinant of qualitative value. Instead, the relevance of

participants, the focus of the interviews, the depth of the coding process, and the use of triangulation all contribute to robust, insightful findings.

I illustrated details of the data collection procedures with the participant interviews, quotes, codes and themes. In qualitative research, trustworthiness is comprised of these key components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024, p.1). Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were validated for this study.

### **Credibility**

To establish credibility, multiple strategies were executed in this study, including purposeful sampling, triangulation of data sources, and reflexivity. Participants were selected based on criteria such as years of experience, current position, and industry relevance to ensure that the sample had sufficient information power (Malterud et al., 2016). The study utilized triangulation through multiple data sources, including multiple semistructured interviews and job descriptions where available to enhance the validity and depth of the findings (Patton, 1999). Participants were recruited through an email invitation, and only those who met the outlined inclusion criteria were selected. The informed consent form disclosed that some participants might know me through prior professional connections, but it clearly delineated the boundary between my role as a human resource professional and my role as a researcher.

As an experienced HR professional, my familiarity with the field allowed me to interpret responses with contextual accuracy and identify key themes efficiently. However, I also recognized the potential influence of my professional background on

data interpretation. Therefore, I engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the study to document thoughts, decision-making processes, and any potential biases.). This practice of reflexivity is necessary in maintaining self-awareness and ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' perspectives rather than my own. To further reinforce ethical rigor, participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

### **Transferability**

This qualitative study explored the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Recent guidance frames transferability as multi-dimensional, including applicability (enough contextual detail to compare), resonance (findings feel recognizable to similar audiences), and theoretical engagement (clear links to concepts that travel beyond the original case) and urges researchers to make these dimensions explicit in reporting (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). Transferability was supported by a contextualized description of sites and participants; transparent coding and theme development; and triangulation across interviews, job descriptions, and a reflexive journal analyzed with the same procedure and codebook. This study supplies sufficient detail, pattern-matching matrices, and an audit trail for readers to judge applicability to settings that share similar post-COVID work designs, caregiving demands, and leadership practices. While the sample size and sector composition place natural limits on transferability, the convergent patterns across sources indicate that the themes identified are likely relevant in comparable organizations.

Transferability in qualitative research is not generalization. Transferability is a concept used to apply information gathered from specific persons, settings, and eras to others that have not been directly studied (Drisko, 2025, p.103). This qualitative study explored the experiences and perceptions of the participants. There was no deviation from this strategy as outlined in Chapter 3.

### **Dependability**

Dependability in this study was demonstrated through extensive documentation and triangulation using appropriate data sources. I conducted data triangulation using two independent sources: (1) the interviews and (2) available job descriptions. I analyzed the sources with the identical procedure used for the interviews: first-cycle semantic coding with the shared codebook, second-cycle category and theme development. The reflexive journal/log was coded to document decisions and reflexivity, but it was excluded from triangulation counts and was not used as a third evidentiary source. As discussed in Chapter 3, documenting each step of the research and keeping a journal or log to document experience with the phenomenon, such as biases, setbacks, issues, and even thoughts, will support the dependability of the research. There was no deviation from this strategy.

### **Confirmability**

To ensure confirmability, I adopted varied strategies to manage personal biases and enhance the trustworthiness of the study. As the primary research instrument in this qualitative study, I recognized the need for reflexivity, which is the continuous process of self-awareness and critical reflection on how my identity, experiences, and assumptions

could influence the research process (Berger, 2015). I practiced reflexivity by maintaining a reflective journal throughout the study, in which I documented my thoughts, decisions, and potential preconceptions. This allowed me to bracket my positionality as a working woman with dual responsibilities and to ensure that my interpretations of the data remained grounded in the participants' perspectives rather than my own experiences.

Additionally, I recorded each interview and reviewed the audio alongside transcriptions multiple times to ensure that the analysis remained faithful to the participants' intended meanings. I also kept detailed methodological notes and analytic memos to support transparency and traceability in the coding and theme development process. These strategies align with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for confirmability, which emphasize the importance of maintaining an audit trail and minimizing researcher influence on the data. By clearly articulating the research methodology, coding decisions, and data interpretation process, I enhanced the objectivity and dependability of the findings. Engaging in reflexive practice not only strengthened my study's integrity but also supported the development of ethical, responsible interpretations that prioritize the participants' lived experiences (Darawsheh, 2014).

Describing the data in qualitative research so that the accuracy can be confirmed is how confirmability is established (Nassaji, 2020). The data was coded, an audit trail was maintained, and based on my own industry expertise, I was able to determine the

data coding and analysis. To ensure confirmability, I explored the participants' experiences only and not my own experiences or perceptions.

### **Study Results**

The research question in this study was: what best practices do employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities in caring for their household members and working post-COVID-19 pandemic? I used multiple data sources to answer the research question, which included semistructured interviews with professionals that met the criteria as outlined in the email invitation and consent form. Where available, I explored external artifacts about best practices which organizations use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities caring for their household family members. The results of the study yielded the most frequently mentioned themes across the interview data. A robust description of the emerging themes supported the organization of the study's results.

#### **Theme 1: Workplace Flexibility as a Critical Factor**

A predominant theme across the interviews was the necessity for flexible work arrangements. Many participants emphasized the importance of hybrid or remote work options to manage family responsibilities, including childcare and caregiving for relatives. Across interviews, participants consistently framed flexibility, such as remote or hybrid work, flexible hours, and adjustments around school or medical appointments as foundational to the retention and well-being of working women with dual responsibilities.

These perspectives align with research indicating that flexible work models can empower women by offering greater control over their schedules and reducing the stress associated with managing dual roles (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020; Lott & Abendroth, 2020). The participant's responses amplify that flexible work is not only a matter of convenience or empathy but a strategic consideration in enhancing employee performance and organizational outcomes. Several participants also explicitly linked workplace flexibility to improved productivity. Participant 1 shared,

Compassion, flexible work hours, ability to work remote or hybrid. If children are ill, the woman can have an opportunity to still work and not have to use PTO.

Having a better maternity leave policy. Mentorship programs, especially for African American women and better career advancements for African Americans or persons of color.

Participant 2 stated, "The ability to work hybrid is a huge stepping stone. Hybrid avoids women from having to lose pay when caring for a sick child, remote work."

Participant 4 added, "Flexible work schedule. Either fully remote or hybrid." Participant

5 commented, "COVID taught us, you don't have to be in the office to do your job."

Additionally, Participant 7 noted, "We offer flexible work hours. We also have a hybrid model. It reduces stress and provides a better work-life balance. We also offer part-time positions."

Notably, Participant 8 stated, "Flexibility around school schedules, medical appointments, access to employee resource groups, mental health resources." Participant 10 added, "Accommodating, flex scheduling, paid parental leave, more paid programs

where women have time to focus on their family.” Next, Participant 1 said further, “Women are probably more productive working from home than in the office because of less interruptions.” Then, Participant 7 stated, “Remote and hybrid work can help to increase productivity—having the opportunity to do both.” Lastly, Participant 10 noted, “Flexibility of working from home will enhance productivity and engagement, decreases travel time.”

## **Theme 2: Caregiving Supports**

Several participants described the challenges of maintaining a healthy work-life balance, particularly for women with caregiving responsibilities. These difficulties became more pronounced post-COVID-19 as organizations transitioned back to in-person or hybrid work arrangements. One participant emphasized the stress and mental load associated with managing both work and home demands: “When you are a single mother with children, especially with special needs, there’s a constant juggling act. Employers don’t always understand that your day doesn’t end when you log off work” (Participant 2).

Another participant described how the lack of workplace support exacerbates this stress and creates an emotional negative toll. “There’s no empathy. I’ve seen women get written up for attendance issues when they’re dealing with real family problems. It makes people want to leave the job,” Participant 3 stated. They went on to say, “After COVID, many women were expected to jump back into the office like nothing had changed. But their home situations had changed dramatically, and it caused a lot of burnout.”

Participant 4 discussed the consequences of insufficient leadership support for women, particularly regarding advancement, “There is no leadership support, no one is asking, ‘What do you need?’ That’s why some women just stop trying to move up—they’re already exhausted.” Participant 5 emphasized the broader implications of poor work-life balance for women’s career trajectories, “Women are leaving or scaling back their careers, not because they lack ambition, but because the system is inflexible and punishes them for having caregiving roles.

These perspectives illustrate how structural limitations, rigid organizational cultures, and unsupportive leadership can severely undermine women’s well-being and long-term career sustainability. The data suggest that addressing work-life balance requires systemic, policy-level changes rather than expecting individual women to manage these challenges on their own.

### **Theme 3: Supportive Leadership and Mentorship**

Mentorship and empathetic leadership emerged as vital components for women’s advancement in the workplace. Participants consistently emphasized the need for leaders who foster trust-based, supportive relationships and advocate for the advancement of women with caregiving responsibilities. These findings align strongly with Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, which posits that high-quality, dyadic relationships between leaders and followers lead to increased job satisfaction, performance, and retention (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The quote below from Participant 1 reflects a desire for differentiated, high-quality leader-member interactions, as emphasized in LMX theory. Women who are given individualized developmental support are more likely to

feel valued, remain engaged, and advance professionally (Ilies et al., 2007). Participant 1 stated, “Mentorship programs, especially for African American women, are important. We don’t always get the same opportunities or visibility, so we need people who will help us grow professionally.” Participant 3 expressed frustration with leadership that lacks emotional intelligence and fails to accommodate diverse employee needs: “Some leaders are just not understanding. They think everyone should operate the same way, but they’re not considering what women go through outside of work.”

This emotional discord points directly to Affective Events Theory (AET), which emphasizes how workplace events, such as a lack of support from supervisors trigger emotional responses that influence attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Leaders who neglect the emotional realities of caregiving women may unintentionally foster dissatisfaction, disengagement, and turnover. Participant 4 elaborated on how insufficient leadership support stunts women’s career progression: “There’s no leadership support. When women are going through something, it’s like, ‘You figure it out.’ That’s why they get stuck and don’t move up.” Participant 9 added that mentorship is most effective when grounded in empathy and experience: “It makes a big difference when your mentor has been where you are—they get it. They know what it’s like to be a woman trying to lead while still being the caregiver at home.”

Such relational mentoring fosters trust and psychological safety which are two outcomes predicted by high-quality LMX relationships. Moreover, it reduces emotional labor and aligns with AET by serving as a positive affective event that contributes to well-being and job satisfaction. Participant 6 concluded with a broader call for strategic

leadership and human resource advocacy: “HR needs to be strategic and push leadership to think about flexibility, career development, and emotional support especially for women with families.”

The statement from Participant 6 echoes a key principle of both LMX and AET: when leaders engage with employees meaningfully and recognize their emotional and practical needs, organizations benefit from stronger commitment, reduced burnout, and improved retention outcomes (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Basch & Fisher, 2000).

Nevertheless, participants’ perspectives reinforce the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. High-quality relationships between women employees and their leaders, marked by empathy, mentorship, and individualized support are essential for overcoming systemic barriers. When leaders demonstrate emotional support and champion equity-based practices, leaders create affective events that positively shape the workplace experiences of women with dual responsibilities.

#### **Theme 4: Well-Being and Mental Health**

Childcare and family responsibilities emerged as pivotal themes in understanding the workplace challenges faced by working women with dual responsibilities. Across interviews, participants detailed how caregiving, especially for children with unique needs, affects women’s retention, productivity, and engagement. I found these findings to align closely with the LMX and AET theories. LMX suggests that when leaders demonstrate personalized understanding and trust, they foster stronger employee commitment and retention (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Meanwhile, AET, asserts that

emotionally salient events, such as the stress caused by balancing caregiving and work significantly influence employee attitudes and performance (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Participant 2 shared a vivid account of how caregiving obligations intersect with high-stress leadership roles: “We have a woman leader who’s a single mom with two autistic children, and she still manages a team of 30. But without flexibility, she would’ve quit. It’s understanding that matters.”

This account reflects the emotional strain associated with dual responsibilities and reinforces the importance of workplace accommodations. Under AET, the absence of such accommodations constitutes a negative affective event that may lead to dissatisfaction or withdrawal behaviors. From an LMX perspective, when leaders demonstrate empathy and make space for flexible arrangements, employees feel more supported and are likely to remain in their roles. Participant 5 emphasized the consequences of lacking accommodations: “A lot of our attendance issues are with women who are caring for someone, kids, elderly parents and eventually, they leave. It’s not that they want to, but they feel like they have no choice.”

This insight demonstrates how rigid attendance policies can inadvertently penalize women who carry the bulk of caregiving responsibilities. In the absence of high-quality leader-member exchanges that acknowledge these pressures, women may disengage or exit the workforce, contributing to turnover. These departures not only disrupt continuity but also reduce diversity and talent retention in organizations. Participant 10 also addressed the compounded effects of caregiving and work stress:

“Sometimes women are afraid to say they need help because they don’t want to be seen as less committed. That pressure builds up.”

This sentiment points to the emotional toll of workplace cultures that penalize caregiving. AET suggests that such internal conflicts between professional expectations and personal obligations create cumulative affective strain, leading to burnout or reduced morale. Participant 6 added a policy perspective: “We need more than just verbal support. Things like childcare stipends, on-site daycare, or backup care services would make a huge difference.”

Concrete policies supporting caregivers transform organizational environments into spaces where positive affective events occur, events that signal support, foster trust, and improve job satisfaction. From the LMX viewpoint, leaders who advocate for and implement such policies build stronger, more loyal relationships with their employees. These findings indicate that caregiving duties, particularly in families with special needs or eldercare, have profound implications for women’s workforce engagement. Leaders who acknowledge and adapt to these challenges build higher-quality exchanges, while supportive events and policies mitigate emotional stress and promote organizational loyalty. The interplay between personal caregiving roles and professional expectations underscores the need for empathetic, policy-driven leadership aligned with both LMX and AET frameworks.

### **Theme 5: Inclusion, Equity, and Culture**

Across interviews, participants consistently identified mental health and well-being as critical concerns for women balancing professional and caregiving

responsibilities. Many spoke to the emotional toll resulting from a lack of flexibility, empathy, and structural support in the workplace. Participant 1 emphasized the importance of “flexing work hours for balance and to avoid burnout,” while Participant 3 noted that single mothers of color often “do not have the same support,” highlighting the intersectional challenges faced by marginalized women. The lack of organizational attention to mental health was echoed by Participant 7, who stated, “mental health issues that do not get addressed—that is the mindset of organizations.” Several participants linked burnout directly to rigid policies and inadequate support, with Participant 6 stating, “most often mental health is sacrificed,” especially for single mothers navigating caregiving without support. Similarly, Participant 4 stated that “women get burned out,” and stressed the need for “a good wellness program for mental health.”

Workplace initiatives like mental health days, wellness programs, and emotional support were cited as valuable, yet inconsistently offered. Participant 8 described positive efforts including, “mental health days, virtual wellness check-ins, and support groups,” while Participant 5 noted that as a manager, they “provide emotional support, letting them know mental health is important.” The COVID-19 pandemic heightened awareness of these issues, with several participants sharing personal experiences of burnout and its consequences. Participant 9 stated, “the experience led to burnout and making the decision to depart,” while also highlighting the benefit of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and coaching. Finally, Participant 10 drew attention to the long-term strain, observing that “women have long-term side effects” from pandemic-era responsibilities and are now prioritizing wellness and work-life balance over advancement. Collectively,

these insights illuminate the urgent need for empathetic, flexible, and well-structured organizational policies that center mental health as a pillar of retention and equity for women with dual roles.

### **Theme 6: Rewards and Career Growth**

While navigating the complexities of dual roles, many women continue to express a strong ambition for career advancement and professional recognition (Chung et al., 2021). Several participants highlighted the persistent barriers women face in climbing organizational ladders, particularly in male-dominated sectors. Participant 4 remarked that women “do not have the support of their managers or organizations,” resulting in stagnant careers despite evident potential. Echoing this concern, Participant 10 emphasized a “lack of growth opportunities for women” and noted that many feel “passed up for industries that are male predominant,” which contributes to disengagement and attrition.

However, the interviews also reflected a shifting perspective among women in the workforce, many are beginning to prioritize workplace cultures that value work-life balance, inclusion, and empathy over traditional notions of career climbing. As Participant 8 observed, “women are prioritizing employers that respect their dual roles,” even if that means turning down promotions or advancement. This sentiment was reinforced by Participant 3, who commented on the need to “create an inclusive culture” rather than impose one-size-fits-all leadership paths. Participant 9 added that for many women, personal alignment and mental well-being are becoming just as important as professional recognition, stating, “the experience led to burnout and making the decision

to depart and choose what was more important to me.” Taken together, these insights indicate that while career advancement remains a key motivator, many women are redefining success through a broader lens, one that balances growth with sustainability, inclusion, and wellness.

### **Theme 7: Attendance and Leave Practices**

The interviews revealed a widespread call for organizations to implement policies that more effectively accommodate the unique challenges faced by women, particularly those managing both work and caregiving responsibilities. Participant 6 emphasized the critical role of human resources in shaping supportive environments, stating, “it’s important for HR to be a strategic partner with all levels of management and make sure there is a work-life balance for women with families, burnout and stress is inevitable.” Similarly, Participant 7 highlighted the organizational benefits of adaptive scheduling, explaining, “we offer flexible work hours and a hybrid model where they rotate into the office every 4–6 weeks. It reduces stress and provides a better work-life balance. We also offer part-time positions.”

Other participants reinforced the value of flexibility in preventing burnout and improving retention. Participant 1 noted the necessity of “compassion, flexible work hours, and the ability to work remote or hybrid,” while Participant 4 added that “increased flexibility and wellness programs for mental health are essential because women get burned out managing household duties and work.” Participant 8 pointed out the effectiveness of intentional flexibility, stating, “flexible start and end times, mental health days, increased PTO, virtual wellness check-ins, and support groups make a big

difference.” Participant 10 further recommended, “flex scheduling and paid parental leave,” suggesting that policies should allow women to focus on their families without sacrificing professional standing.

Participants also stressed that supportive policies must be backed by empathetic leadership. Participant 5 shared, “As a manager, I provide a lot of support even with company expectations. Where I can assist my staff, my section is benefited, my staff are happy.” This was echoed by Participant 3, who advocated for inclusive, individualized practices stating, “organizations should not have a one-size-fits-all policy. Create an inclusive culture and demonstrate it.” Collectively, these perspectives highlight the importance of tailoring workplace policies to the experiences of women with dual roles. Flexible schedules, empathetic leadership, hybrid or remote options, and accessible wellness programs emerged as essential tools in promoting equity, mental well-being, and retention.

### **Theme 8: Productivity and Organizational Outcomes**

Participants consistently linked formal flexibility—remote/hybrid options and adjustable hours—to stable or improved performance and stronger retention. As one participant put it, “Working from home does not decrease productivity and performance” (P1); in fact, “Productivity has been higher with those individuals who are working from home” (P1). Another emphasized the retention effect on talent choices: “Some agencies offer 100% remote and they leave to take that opportunity” (P7). For managers, flexibility translated into day-to-day output: “The ability for women to work in a remote environment... they tend to perform at a higher rate... my section is benefited... high-

performing team, very little turnover” (P5). Flexibility also protects income and continuity—”Hybrid avoids [women] losing pay when caring for a sick child” (P2)—which reduces friction that otherwise interrupts performance.

Participants described three ways flexibility supports productivity and retention: (1) fewer interruptions and better focus windows (“more productive working from home... less interruptions,” P1); (2) schedule–role fit (aligning core hours with school/appointment demands), which lowers absenteeism and preserves output; and (3) labor-market pull, where visible flexibility broadens the talent pool and reduces voluntary exits to fully remote competitors (P7). In short, when flexibility is codified and credible, caregivers remain engaged, output is maintained or enhanced, and avoidable turnover drops.

### **Theme 9: Turnover and Absence Drivers**

When flexibility was limited, conditional, or inconsistently applied, participants pointed to specific, recurring drivers of absence and exit. The most common was inflexibility/work–life conflict: “Lack of work-life balance” (P1); “Employers forget employees have families” (P2); “Lack of flexibility... women with children do not have the support of their managers” (P4). A second driver was fragile caregiving systems—childcare closures or costs and elder-care demands—leading to attendance problems and separations: “Turnover is due to... caring for family, children or even themselves” (P5); “Childcare challenges... childcare closing down” (P1). A third cluster involved health and well-being pressures (burnout, mental health, post-COVID effects): “Women get burned out” (P4); “Dealing with mental health issues and children’s behavior” (P6).

Participants also highlighted role–life misalignment and stalled growth as exit triggers: “Misalignment of position with career goals” (P9); “Lack of understanding, growth opportunity and clear pathways” (P10). Finally, punitive attendance designs amplified risk: “HR has been lenient on disciplinary with regard to attendance” (P5)—implying that where leniency is absent, discipline and turnover increase.

These drivers convert post-COVID value shifts (Theme 10) into concrete attrition when organizational responses fall short. In Affective Events Theory terms, rigid schedules, childcare breakdowns, and health strains function as negative events that accumulate into intent to quit; without supportive leadership or policy relief, strain becomes separation. Conversely, when organizations neutralize these drivers (e.g., credible flexibility, caregiver leave, attendance exceptions), the same pressures do not manifest as exits.

### **Theme 10: Post-COVID Shifts**

Participants described a post-COVID reframing of work that elevates flexibility from perk to baseline expectation, especially for women with dual caregiving responsibilities. The pandemic crystallized new value priorities (time, family, health) and legitimized hybrid/remote as credible, productive modes of work. As one participant noted, “COVID-19 pandemic made us value how we spend our time” (P9). Another observed that “COVID has addressed this for many companies on what they can [do] hybrid or remote” (P1), signaling a shift from ad-hoc accommodations to institutional norms. This values shift also sharpens employee choice: “Women... more privy to leave an organization if remote work is not present” (P6). In sum, Theme 10 provides the

contextual driver for Themes 8 and 9: when organizations embrace flexibility as a normalized design principle, participants link it to productivity and retention; when they withhold it, the same post-COVID priorities surface as concrete turnover risks.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 detailed the data analysis for this qualitative multi-case study which also included the research settings, the participants' demographics, data collection and analysis and the results of the study. The responses received from the participants provided a detailed and clear representation of the themes and key trends. The themes and key trends are helpful to explain how women have been particularly adversely impacted in the workforce by the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this research could improve employers' knowledge in effectively driving their employers forward in the retention efforts of women workers post-COVID-19. Chapter 5 will include an interpretation of findings, study limitations, recommendations, and implications for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. A qualitative multiple case study requires in-depth consideration in a real-life context, as required in case study research (Yin, 2018). Because women have been particularly adversely impacted in the workforce by the COVID-19 pandemic, the information found in this study could improve employers' knowledge in effectively driving their employers forward in the retention efforts of women workers post-COVID-19 by implementing necessary actions to retain women post COVID-19. The findings in this study could contribute to positive social change by helping to keep women with dual responsibilities employed during times of crisis. The result of this study also highlights the particular needs of women in the workforce as it relates to employer support not only with retention; however, key areas such as flexibility, work-life balance and burnout, childcare and family support, mental health and wellness support, equity, inclusion and representation, and policy gaps and leadership support, as well as employee engagement. I conducted the study by collecting data through recorded, semistructured interviews with 10 participants who were HR professionals, hiring managers, or other decision-makers working in the Greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area. My findings yielded 10 themes that describe best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era. In this final chapter, I present

the findings and limitations of the study, recommendations and implications as well as conclusion.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

To gain a deep understanding of how employers retain women with both caregiving and employment responsibilities during crises, I used conceptual frameworks. I employed the leader-member exchange theory and affective events theory (Itzkovich et al., 2022; de Oliveira & da Silva, 2015). This study explored the views of HR professionals and decision-makers who have employed such women, presenting participant experiences without my own interpretation or bias.

#### **Theme 1: Workplace Flexibility as a Critical Factor**

Chung et al. (2021) show that access to flexible working arrangements during the pandemic had measurable positive associations with women's experiences of well-being; specifically, flexibility, which helped reduce some of the caregiving burden and resultant stress for women, thereby improving their overall health outcomes. My study aligned with a growing body of literature that explored how employers can effectively support and retain women with dual responsibilities as employees and caregivers, particularly during periods of crisis with flexibility and remote work. This was discussed in Chapter 2, remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed many employees to feel increased autonomy; however, some employees also experienced new demands, which incorporated the strategy of adopting self-leadership (Babapour Chafi et al., 2021). Existing research emphasizes that crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated gender disparities in the workplace, with women, especially those with

caregiving responsibilities, experiencing increased stress, burnout, and pressure to exit the workforce (Collins et al., 2021; Power, 2020). Other researchers such as Kossek and Lee (2021) have called for a rethinking of workplace structures to better accommodate the needs of caregiving employees, emphasizing the importance of flexible work arrangements, supportive leadership, and inclusive policies. I discuss many of these themes in Chapter 4 for working women with dual responsibilities. These themes highlight the characteristics of the theories that grounded this study.

For instance, the leader member exchange (LMX) explains how the quality of the leader, the employee dyad grounded in trust, respect, and mutual obligation shapes access to latitude, resources, and support. High-quality LMX typically entails individualized arrangements such as, mentoring and a supportive climate for voice, which are associated with stronger commitment, better performance, and lower turnover intentions; conversely, low-quality, transactional exchanges provide less flexibility and support and are linked to withdrawal and exit (Urbach & Fay, 2021). Affective events theory (AET) posits that routine work events, such as policies, schedule changes, interruptions, microaggressions, and recognition could trigger affective reactions that accumulate into job attitudes, such as satisfaction or burnout and behaviors; thus, designs that reduce negative events and increase positive uplifts shift the emotional balance toward more favorable outcomes (Williams et al., 2024).

## **Theme 2: Caregiving Supports**

Another key finding of my study was that working women with dual responsibilities experienced a lack of work-life balance and increased burnout. During the

COVID-19 pandemic many women experienced acute stress related to paid and unpaid labor, childcare, children's academics, and family mental health (Sanders, 2025).

Participants explicitly linked policy to relief. Participant 7 stated, "we offer flexible work hours, it reduces stress and provides a better work-life balance." Participant 2 stated, "hybrid avoids women losing pay when caring for a sick child." Participant 1 stated, "working from home does not decrease productivity and performance."

In Chapter 2, I discussed how Hayes et al. (2021) posited that a lack of remote work knowledge training, increased family care responsibilities, and issues with communication, collaboration, and time management were significant factors of work-related stress and burnout experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also discussed how Woodbridge et al. (2021) posited that challenges to work-life balance fall into two categories: work-life conflict and life-work conflict. Women's work-life conflict experience negatively affects their personal lives, and life-work conflict is when their personal lives negatively affect their work (Woodbridge et al., 2021).

My study aligns with the affective events theory (AET), which posits that workplace stressors, particularly those that are chronic and emotionally taxing, contribute to negative affective reactions such as burnout. My study also aligns with the perspective of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, the quality of the relationship between employees and their supervisors can significantly influence how supported women feel when attempting to navigate dual roles. This corroborates existing literature, which consistently identifies work-life imbalance as a central challenge for women, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when caregiving responsibilities intensified

and workplace flexibility remained inconsistent (Alon et al., 2020; Power, 2020). These findings emphasize the urgent need for organizations to adopt more inclusive and empathetic leadership approaches, alongside flexible policies that recognize and accommodate the experiences of women with dual responsibilities.

### **Theme 3: Supportive Leadership and Mentorship**

Another key finding of this study was the challenge of childcare and family support gaps for working women with dual responsibilities. Childcare gaps not only disrupted professional productivity but also contributed to heightened stress, absenteeism, and, in some cases, career stagnation. Time availability was identified to be one of the major contextual barriers to working mothers' career progression, resulting from the dual responsibilities of paid employment and unpaid caregiving (Torres, 2024). The absence of organizational support mechanisms intensified the strain which led to decreased productivity and delayed advancement (Torres, 2024). My study's findings align with post-pandemic literature documenting a decline in institutional childcare availability and an unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities, which disproportionately affected women in the workforce (Collins et al., 2021; Malisch et al., 2020). The absence of robust family support further intensified this strain. Through the lens of the affective events theory (AET), the ongoing pressures and unpredictability associated with managing childcare responsibilities serve as negative affective events that diminish job satisfaction and emotional well-being. Moreover, LMX theory suggests that when organizational leaders fail to recognize or accommodate these caregiving realities, employees are less likely to experience high-quality leader-member relationships, thereby

decreasing perceived support and increasing turnover intentions (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015).

#### **Theme 4: Well-Being and Mental Health**

A decline in mental health and overall wellness among women with dual responsibilities was also emphasized in Chapter 2 and is further supported by the current study's findings. This aligns with the work of Cohen et al. (2021), who highlight the growing challenges faced by informal caregivers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept of caregiver burden is especially pertinent, as the pandemic amplified the emotional, physical, and psychological demands placed on caregivers—most of whom are women. Cohen et al. (2021) emphasize that the approximately 41 million informal caregivers in the United States provide critical, unpaid support to their families, the healthcare system, and the broader economy, often at the expense of their own health and quality of life. These findings are consistent with Thébaud et al. (2024), who reported women had a larger increase in caregiving time because of the pandemic, as well as higher levels of work and family stress, and lower levels of institutional support. These findings emphasize the urgent need to address caregiver well-being as a core component of workforce sustainability and public health policy.

#### **Theme 5: Inclusion and Equity Culture**

Equity, inclusion, and representation emerged as another key finding of this study. As discussed in Chapter 2, existing research highlights that women reported lower levels of work productivity and job satisfaction than men during the COVID-19 lockdown period (Feng & Savani, 2020). The pandemic exacerbated existing gender inequities in

the workplace, disproportionately affecting women due to the increased burden of caregiving responsibilities. Gender inequality in family and work is connected, and, in many cases, COVID-19 deepened the already existing gender inequalities in both domains (Yavorsky et al., 2021). This imbalance led to a measurable decline in productivity for many women, which in turn heightened their risk of being furloughed, overlooked for advancement, or excluded from key professional opportunities. As Power (2020) noted, these outcomes have long-term implications for women's economic stability, potentially affecting lifetime earnings, career progression, and retirement security. These findings emphasize the need for organizations to prioritize gender-responsive policies and equitable leadership practices that address systemic barriers to women's full participation in the workforce.

#### **Theme 6: Rewards and Career Growth**

Another key finding that emerged in my study aligns with the work of Elanda (2021), who examined the effects of government-implemented work-from-home (WFH) policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. For women with dual roles as employees and primary caregivers, the WFH mandates often intensified preexisting challenges, as the physical boundaries between work and home life disappeared. Elanda (2021) argued that while the WFH policy offered flexibility for some, it simultaneously placed disproportionate strain on women, particularly those with young children or elderly dependents, by embedding caregiving responsibilities into the same space and timeframe as paid employment.

This phenomenon was supported by other scholars who found that women carried a disproportionate share of domestic labor and caregiving during the pandemic, which negatively affected their ability to fully engage in paid work (Craig & Churchill, 2020; Yavorsky et al., 2021). These findings align with the current study's participants, many of whom reported declines in productivity, increased stress, and difficulty maintaining a sustainable work-life balance. These outcomes reflect broader systemic issues in how workplace policies are designed and implemented, often without a gender-sensitive lens (Zamarro & Prados, 2021). The more caregiving women performed during the lockdown, the more negative their self-reported career outcomes were (Stefanova et al., 2021).

#### **Theme 7: Attendance and Leave Practices**

Retention and employee engagement emerged as another key finding, consistent with themes explored in Chapters 1 and 2. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted organizational dynamics, contributing to declines in employee engagement, knowledge sharing, and overall work attitudes (Ahmed et al., 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021). From a career development perspective, Hite and McDonald (2020) emphasized the necessity of recognizing how external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic serve as career shocks, which disrupt career trajectories and influence decisions about retention and advancement. This is particularly salient for women, whose career paths are often shaped by both organizational context and caregiving demands. The sustainable careers framework advocates for a holistic view of career success, one that integrates individual agency with environmental factors such as organizational support and work-life integration (De Vos et al., 2020; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Moreover, employee turnover decisions are multifaceted and influenced by a variety of personal and professional factors. Rakhra (2018) identified reasons for turnover ranging from geographic relocation and workplace dissatisfaction to major life transitions like marriage and motherhood. Research further indicates that women disproportionately experience career interruptions and “opting out” phenomena due to caregiving responsibilities and organizational inflexibility (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2019; Williams et al., 2013). The absence of strong leave policies and organizational support for employees who experienced COVID-19 pandemic related absences; especially women balancing dual responsibilities faced significantly higher risks of not returning to their jobs or movement into inactivity (Goda et al., 2023).

#### **Theme 8: Productivity and Organizational Outcomes**

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) reported a rise in remote work and total-factor productivity (TFP) growth and noted they are positively correlated. This research highlights workplace flexibility (remote/hybrid work, flexible scheduling, or leave accommodations) as a critical best practice for retaining women with dual responsibilities post-COVID-19. By reducing work–life conflict and enabling employees to manage caregiving duties alongside professional obligations, organizations can minimize absenteeism and presenteeism, thereby enhancing overall productivity. Employees who feel supported in balancing responsibilities are more likely to remain engaged, focused, and committed to their work.

**Theme 9: Turnover and Absence Drivers**

Retention directly impacts organizational outcomes by reducing costs associated with recruitment, onboarding, and training. The findings of this study show that empathetic leadership and supportive HR practices foster loyalty and decrease voluntary turnover among women employees, particularly those with dual responsibility. Employees with high levels of empathetic communication from their leaders develop greater trust in leadership and stronger relationships with their employer, which consequently lowers their intention to leave; even amid pandemic-related organizational change (Yue, 2022). By strengthening leader–member exchange (LMX) relationships, organizations preserve team cohesion and avoid disruptions in workflow caused by frequent staff exits.

**Theme 10: Post-COVID Shifts**

This research situates itself squarely in the context of the workplace transformations accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Bloom et al. (2022) demonstrated that hybrid work arrangements, such as allowing employees to work from home part of the week, significantly reduced turnover and improved job satisfaction while maintaining productivity levels. Their findings emphasize that hybrid and flexible models not only support immediate workforce stability but also promote long-term organizational resilience in the post-pandemic era. These insights reinforce the stance that inclusive and adaptive work practices benefits both employee well-being and organizational performance.

The rise of remote and hybrid arrangements, once seen as exceptions, became normalized during the pandemic. The findings of this research highlight how employers' continuation of these practices post-COVID directly impacts the retention of women with dual responsibilities. By adopting inclusive and flexible practices, organizations not only address immediate retention challenges but also build adaptive capacity for future disruptions.

This research captures a strategic lesson for organizations: adaptability and empathy are not temporary crisis responses but enduring practices that shape sustainable organizational success. Post-COVID shifts also refer to how employers facing future pandemics, catastrophes, or natural disasters can benefit from this study, which offers evidence-based strategies to retain and support employees; particularly women with caregiving responsibilities, through flexible work design and empathetic leadership. The results of this study can inform proactive policy development, enabling organizations to better balance productivity with employee well-being during future crises, implementing strategies instead of temporary responses.

### **Leader Member Exchange Theory (LMX)**

Grounding this research in Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory provided a valuable lens for understanding how high-quality relationships between leaders and employees: characterized by trust, mutual respect, and individualized support can influence the retention of women with dual responsibilities. Prior studies (such as Itzkovich et al., 2022) have shown that strong leader-member relationships are particularly vital for employees facing personal and structural challenges, as they can

foster a sense of psychological safety, flexibility, and inclusion. My study has highlighted that these characteristics in employers and leaders are invaluable for the retention of women with dual responsibilities.

This lens is particularly salient in post-crisis contexts such as the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic where employees were confronted with sustained levels of stress, organizational uncertainty, and increasingly and unprecedented, complex caregiving responsibilities. These outcomes are even more pronounced among employees, particularly women with dual responsibilities. Moreover, LMX theory helps to explain why formal policies alone may not be sufficient enough if not reinforced by supportive relationships between the leader and employee. For example, flexible work schedules may exist on paper in policies, but the effective implementation and flexibility in leader thinking often centers on the discretion of immediate leaders. When leaders demonstrate genuine concern and relational investment, women with dual responsibilities are more likely to feel empowered to utilize such policies without fear of stigma.

In this regard, the findings of my study indicate that leadership behavior functions not as a peripheral or background variable, but as a central mechanism in fostering inclusive and responsive workplace environments that support the long-term retention and success of women with caregiving responsibilities. As Participant 2 observed, “If leaders don’t show empathy for caregiving responsibilities, then women feel like they are disposable. That’s when turnover happens.” Similarly, Participant 9 emphasized, “Having a mentor who understands the dual roles women have makes all the difference in career growth. Leadership really sets the tone.” These perspectives highlight that

leadership behaviors, especially empathy, recognition, and mentorship operated as the cornerstone connecting policy intentions to experiences of inclusion and retention.

Through the application of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, this research emphasizes the pivotal role of relational leadership in shaping equitable and supportive workforce experiences, particularly in the context of the post-pandemic employment landscape.

### **Affective Events Theory (AET)**

Similarly, Affective Events Theory (AET) adds a useful emotional dimension to this study by emphasizing how workplace events, such as crisis responses, policy changes, or interpersonal interactions could trigger emotional reactions that will certainly shape employees' attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In this study, it is recognized that women with dual responsibilities carry more of an emotional response to organizational practices, such as feeling unsupported, undervalued, or inflexible which all can significantly impact their decision to stay or leave an employer. Additionally, AET adds a critical emotional and psychological dimension as seen in themes during the data collection phase that highlighted how specific events in the workplace, such as crisis management strategies or the absence of crisis management strategies, lack of policies to address crisis, leadership decisions, or day-to-day interpersonal interactions can provoke strong emotional responses that influence employees' attitudes, motivations, and long-term organizational commitment (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). AET suggests that workplace events are not isolated incidents but are emotionally charged experiences that

shape how individuals perceive their roles, relationships, and value within the organization.

This study explored best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities caring for their household family members in the post-COVID-19 era., AET serves as a powerful lens to understand how women with dual responsibilities may emotionally interpret and respond to organizational actions or even lack of actions. Women managing both professional duties and caregiving responsibilities are often highly sensitive to perceived signals of support or disregard. Lee et al. (2025) found that caregiver-employees reported the absence of leadership support and an unsympathetic organizational culture added substantial emotional strain. Inflexible scheduling practices, lack of empathy from supervisory personnel, and inadequate accommodations during periods of crisis may be perceived not simply as logistical hurdles but as emotionally dismissive actions that lead employees to feel marginalized, devalued and disposable. These emotional reactions can accumulate over time and significantly influence important work-related outcomes, including job satisfaction, engagement, burnout, and, ultimately, retention.

The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing research by demonstrating that employers and leaders who intentionally foster high-quality relationships with women employees; characterized by empathy, personalized accommodations, and consistent communication are more effective in retaining those women with dual responsibilities. As presented in Chapter 4, participants consistently emphasized that relational elements, such as feeling heard, receiving flexible arrangements responsive to

their caregiving obligations, and experiencing emotionally intelligent leadership, contributed to a heightened sense of organizational loyalty and belonging. These leader-member dynamics and affective events may serve as a buffer against common challenges faced by working caregivers. Such challenges include feelings of isolation, marginalization, or inadequacy, particularly during and following periods of crisis.

Furthermore, by centering the voices of HR professionals, hiring managers, and decision-makers, who are directly responsible for shaping the conditions of women with dual responsibilities' employment, my study adds a practical dimension to prior research. My study aligns with more recent evidence showing that organizational leadership and institutional support are central in reducing career penalties experienced by women with caregiving responsibilities. For example, Hong et al. (2025) demonstrate that in academia, women who have access to supportive policies, such as flexible scheduling and childcare assistance report fewer parenthood penalties in terms of both perception and professional achievement.

My study reinforces the belief that relational leadership and emotional intelligence are not marginal but central to employee retention, particularly for women with dual responsibilities during times of crisis. For example, Chevalier et al. (2025) found that in high-stress healthcare settings, emotionally intelligent leaders who also practice transformational leadership were significantly more able to adapt their leadership style, using participatory strategies, such as debriefings and team reflection tools which thereby enhance staff satisfaction and retention under crisis conditions.

Furthermore, my study contributes to a growing body of literature that critically examines the intersection of gender, caregiving, and workforce participation, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. The pandemic amplified the longstanding structural inequalities faced by women in the workplace, especially those with dual responsibilities, defined here as simultaneously managing employment and caregiving duties for dependents, including children, elderly family members, or individuals with special needs (Alon et al., 2020; Power, 2020). Many studies have emphasized that women were disproportionately impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing increased rates of job loss, reductions in work hours, and elevated stress levels due to the collapse of formal and informal care supports (Collins et al., 2021; Gerson, 2021). Scholars such as Kossek and Lee (2021) and Shockley et al. (2021) argued that without intentional organizational strategies, these disruptions risk reversing decades of progress in workplace gender equity. The findings in this study emphasize the need to explore best practices that employers can adopt to retain women employees with dual responsibilities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Intentional efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness of this multiple case study through specific qualitative strategies such as triangulation and reflexive journaling. However, I also noted some limitations which emerged during the execution of the study. First, the participants' bias may have influenced the data, as HR professionals and decision-makers may have presented their own desirable responses as an employee as well or they may have presented their own desirable responses as a

leader, particularly when discussing their own organizational practices. This potential for bias could have limited the depth or candor of responses related to leadership inflexibility or organizational inflexibility. Second, my own personal bias as a woman employee with dual responsibilities could have influenced the way I interpreted participants' responses and engaged with the data. However, to address this potential bias, I engaged in reflexive practices throughout the research process, such as maintaining a researcher journal, bracketing my assumptions, and employing triangulation of data sources to ensure that interpretations were grounded in participant perspectives rather than my own experiences. Peredaryenko and Krauss (2022) noted, human beings are uniquely capable of generating meaning through their inherent sensitivity, adaptability, and responsiveness and these qualities position individuals as the most suitable instruments for inquiries that seek to foster deeper understanding, promote critical consciousness, support emancipatory goals, and challenge dominant or colonial narratives.

The findings of this study may limit transferability because the sample size (10 participants) and geographic concentration in the Greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area reflect organizational practices within a specific regional and cultural context. While appropriate for a multiple case study, these boundaries mean that the results may not fully represent the experiences of women employees or employers in other industries, regions, or countries. Consequently, transferability depends on whether readers perceive similarities between their own contexts and those described in this study. Further, limited diversity among participants, in terms of gender, race, or organizational size may constrain the extent to which the findings reflect a broad range of employer experiences.

These limitations emphasize the importance of interpreting findings within the contextual boundaries of the study while offering opportunities for future research to expand on and validate the results across broader settings.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and limitations acknowledged in this study, there is a set of recommendations for future research grounded in my study. Given the methodological strengths and limitations in this study, a few opportunities exist for future research to extend and deepen understanding of employer best practices for retaining women employees with dual responsibilities post-COVID pandemic. First, conduct comparative or cross-regional studies. Given this study was geographically bound to the Greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area, future studies should investigate whether the themes identified are consistent across varied regions. Comparative case studies or cross-regional designs would enhance the transferability of findings and illuminate regional, cultural, or economic differences in how organizations respond to the dual-role challenges of women employees (Patton, 1999).

Second, it is critical to explore gender and racial diversity amongst decision-makers. The limited demographic diversity in this study's participant sample presents an opportunity for future researchers to investigate how gender, race, and organizational power structures shape leadership perceptions and retention practices. Studies that engage more racially and gender-diverse decision-makers could offer critical insights into how inclusive policies are conceptualized, communicated, and implemented (Crenshaw, 1989; Malterud et al., 2016). A third recommendation for future research is to utilize a mixed

methods design to combine qualitative interviews with quantitative metrics such as turnover rates or employee satisfaction surveys. This could strengthen findings and enhance credibility through methodological triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

A fourth recommendation for future research is to examine organizational implementation gaps. Future studies should investigate potential gaps between policies and practice. Leaders may be able to communicate supportive policies; however, the practices should be investigated. This may involve case studies of specific organizations to evaluate how well stated policies are implemented and experienced by employees. Observational research or internal document audits could provide additional data for assessing alignment between rhetoric and reality (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The final recommendation for future research consists of assessing the role of the organization's culture in policy review and implementation. Further research should explore how organizational culture influences the adoption, effectiveness, and longevity of policies meant to support working women with dual responsibilities. As this study suggests, flexibility and empathy are key factors; however, how these values are embedded and operationalized within different cultures which remains underexplored (Schein, 2010; Saldaña, 2021).

### **Implications**

My study explored the perspectives of HR professionals, hiring managers, and organizational decision-makers on the retention of women employees with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID era, could offer contributions to positive social

change. The findings illuminate critical needs and practical strategies that can support working women who simultaneously fulfill caregiving roles at home. Grounded in both the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory and Affective Events Theory (AET), my study provides implications that could impact positive social change at the individual, family, organizational, and policy levels.

### **Individual Level**

At the individual level, the findings of my study offer practical insight into how improved workplace structures and leadership attitudes can enhance the well-being, retention, and career paths of women employees with dual responsibilities. Participants highlighted the importance of flexibility, empathy, and access to hybrid or remote work as key factors that directly impact individual stress levels, job satisfaction, and perceived value within the organization. Emotionally intelligent leadership characterized by empathy, effective communication, and responsiveness combined with flexible work policies (such as remote/hybrid arrangements or flexible scheduling) can help working women experience lower role strain.

Recent empirical work by Punjabi et al. (2025) demonstrates that emotionally intelligent leadership, in conjunction with emotionally intelligent followers, significantly improves job attitudes and performance, and is associated with reduced negative emotional strain. By incorporating similar leadership behaviors and supportive policies in my study, the findings mirror this pattern: supportive leadership interactions and flexible work conditions acted as affective events that helped lessen role strain among working women. These supportive events help interrupt or reduce negative spillovers such as,

stress, conflict and burnout that otherwise accumulate when job demands and caregiving demands overlap. The positive social change is that this could translate to lower burnout rates, increased motivation, and sustained workforce participation for working women with dual responsibilities.

Additionally, mentorship programs and recognition initiatives, which participants frequently mentioned can also provide working women with dual responsibilities with professional support networks, enhancing their self-efficacy and leadership development. Participant 9 stated, mentorship is having a mentor who has been in your space, such as a female or executive. Participant 1 mentioned mentorship programs are needed, especially for African American women. The positive social change in these initiatives demonstrates that organizational investments in inclusive practices yield measurable improvements in individual employee outcomes. This could be especially beneficial for working women with dual responsibilities.

### **Family-Level**

Supportive workplaces also extend to the family unit. When working women with dual responsibilities are offered flexibility, mental health resources, and reduced workplace pressure, their capacity to manage caregiving responsibilities could improve. This also supports improved family dynamics, parenting quality, and emotional availability. Likewise, hybrid work policies, childcare assistance, and increased paid time off (PTO) are among the most significant needs of working women with dual responsibilities cited by participants. For example, when mothers can work remotely during family health crises or manage school pick-up schedules without penalty, the

family stress is reduced, and quality of life improves. These accommodations can foster healthier family environments and improve child development outcomes. The implications for positive social change at this level include tangible improvements in family cohesion, increased household financial stability (due to keeping women with dual responsibilities employed), and reduced emotional exhaustion within caregiving households of working women.

### **Organizational-Level**

At the organizational level, my study's findings provide direct guidance on how to retain and even advance women employees with dual responsibilities by fostering inclusive and adaptable workplace cultures. Leaders can implement policies and practices that support caregiving employees, thereby increasing productivity, morale, and retention. The LMX theory highlights the importance of supportive leader-employee relationships in fostering commitment and performance (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). When leaders provide individualized support and implement equitable policies, as described by participants, women employees who have dual responsibilities are more likely to feel valued, resulting in improved engagement and reduced turnover.

Organizations can draw from these findings to develop flexible scheduling models, expand wellness and mental health initiatives, review and update policies that are employee friendly, designed especially for working women with dual responsibilities. Organizations could design employer resource groups designed to focus on parenting and caregiving. Finally, organizational training for all leaders on empathetic communication and inclusive management would be essential for positive impact to social change. These

strategies could represent actionable changes that align with employee needs and reflect best practices in organizational development.

### **Societal/Policy**

Although the study did not directly examine policy advocacy, the organizational practices discussed in the aforementioned have broader implications for societal norms and policy development. As more organizations adopt practices such as flexible work arrangements, expanded leave policies, and support for single-parent employees, these changes may inform larger conversations around labor equity and parental rights. Participants' demands for enhanced childcare benefits, hybrid work options, and mental health support align with national concerns about declining women workforce participation post-COVID (Goldin, 2021). Over time, the widespread adoption of these organizational practices may support societal shifts that normalize caregiving accommodations and encourage policy makers to institutionalize equitable labor practices.

### **Methodological Implications**

Triangulation was achieved by integrating three data sources: semistructured interviews, organizational job descriptions, and a review of relevant literature. These three data sources intersect to support the findings of the study. Together, the three data sources created a multi-layered understanding of the phenomenon. Interviews offered insider perspectives, job descriptions revealed formal organizational practices, and the literature provided scholarly validation and identified gaps.

Areas of overlap confirmed consistent themes, while divergences highlighted gaps between organizational policy and employee experiences. This multi-source approach enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Additionally, by strategically selecting HR professionals, hiring managers and other decision-makers, the study demonstrated how smaller, focused samples can yield data that are sufficiently aligned to support credible and meaningful findings. This methodological choice highlights the importance of purposeful sampling and theory-aligned questioning in qualitative theory.

**Table 6**

*Triangulation of Data Sources and Contributions to Findings*

Data Source	Type of Evidence	Contribution to Findings
Semistructured Interviews	First-hand accounts from HR professionals and decision-makers	Provided narratives on flexibility, caregiving, leadership empathy, and retention strategies; grounded themes in organizational experiences.
Job Descriptions	Formal organizational documents outlining responsibilities, competencies, and policies	Validated themes while exposing gaps between written policies and participant experiences, highlighting areas for improvement.
Literature Review	Peer-reviewed research on gender, caregiving, equity, and organizational practices	Provided theoretical and empirical benchmarks; confirmed relevance of themes while highlighting limited scholarship on post-COVID retention strategies.

*Note.* This table illustrates how three distinct data sources: interviews, job descriptions, and the literature review were triangulated to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of this study's findings.

**Theoretical Implications**

My study affirms the utility of both LMX and AET in examining working women with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID-19 era. LMX helps explain how relational quality with supervisors affects retention, while AET contextualizes emotional responses to workplace policies and leadership behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). I used both

theories to demonstrate how emotional and relational workplace dynamics intersect with structural policy issues, particularly for women with dual responsibilities. Future research may explore these frameworks in tandem to further investigate workplace disparities among women with dual responsibilities.

### **Empirical Implications**

My study adds empirical value by centering the employer perspective on post-pandemic retention strategies, a review of several peer-reviewed studies highlighted that few investigations have centered on how employers actively design retention practices for women managing dual caregiving responsibilities after COVID-19. This gap underscores the need for organizations to adopt evidence-informed policies. Although much research has focused on how COVID-19 disrupted women's workforce participation (Power, 2020), this study highlights what organizations can do to mitigate attrition and support re-engagement, especially for women with dual responsibilities. As a novice researcher there are opportunities to generate thick accounts and meaningful data regarding the topic. The emergence of 29 unique codes (see Table 11 below), illustrates that structured, theory-aligned questions can still generate detailed accounts and yield meaningful data regarding the topic of this study when engaging strategically selected participants using structured, theory-aligned questions. The findings of this study can inform both future research agendas and immediate workplace reforms, impacting positive social change.

**Table 7***Codes Identified in Atlas.ti Analysis*

Category	Code	Description
Flexibility (FLEX)	FLEX-REMOTE	Remote/hybrid work arrangements
Flexibility (FLEX)	FLEX-HOURS	Flexible scheduling and hours
Flexibility (FLEX)	FLEX-CASE	Case-by-case flexibility decisions
Flexibility (FLEX)	FLEX-JSHARE	Job sharing practices
Caregiving (CARE)	CARE-CHILD	Childcare responsibilities
Caregiving (CARE)	CARE-ELDER	Elder care responsibilities
Caregiving (CARE)	CARE-APPT	Medical/school appointment needs
Leader–Member Exchange (LMX)	LMX-EMPATHY	Empathetic leadership
Leader–Member Exchange (LMX)	LMX-MENTOR	Mentorship opportunities
Leader–Member Exchange (LMX)	LMX-RECOG	Recognition from leaders
Affective Events Theory (AET)	AET-BURNOUT	Burnout and stress
Affective Events Theory (AET)	AET-EAP	Employee Assistance Program use
Affective Events Theory (AET)	AET-BOUND	Work–life boundaries
Inclusion (INC)	INC-BIAS	Bias/discrimination
Inclusion (INC)	INC-CULTURE	Inclusive culture
Inclusion (INC)	INC-TRUST	Organizational trust
Rewards & Benefits (RB)	RB-LEAVE	Leave policies
Rewards & Benefits (RB)	RB-PTO	Paid time off
Rewards & Benefits (RB)	RB-COMP	Compensation
Rewards & Benefits (RB)	RB-GROWTH	Professional growth opportunities
Attendance (ATT)	ATT-LEN	Employee tenure/length of service
Attendance (ATT)	ATT-LOA	Leaves of absence
Organizational (ORG)	ORG-PROD	Productivity
Organizational (ORG)	ORG-TALENT	Talent management
Turnover (TO)	TO-NOFLEX	Lack of flexibility
Turnover (TO)	TO-CHILD	Childcare-related turnover
Turnover (TO)	TO-MISALIGN	Misalignment with employer values
Turnover (TO)	TO-HEALTH	Health-related turnover
COVID-19 (COVID)	COVID-LOAD	Increased workload
COVID-19 (COVID)	COVID-NORM	New norms established by COVID
COVID-19 (COVID)	COVID-VALUES	Value shifts post-COVID

*Note.* This table presents the 29 codes identified through Atlas.ti analysis, organized by category.

As such, future research agendas may include conducting studies that directly capture the voices of women employees with dual responsibilities to complement employer perspectives, examining the long-term outcomes of flexible and hybrid work arrangements on career advancement, and investigating the role of leadership styles, such as supportive or transformational leadership in fostering retention and well-being. Researchers may also explore intersectional experiences, such as how women of color or single mothers uniquely navigate dual responsibilities, to expand the applicability of retention strategies.

Such immediate workplace reforms may include flexible scheduling policies that allow employees to adjust start and end times, expand remote and hybrid work options where feasible, and establish childcare support initiatives such as subsidies or partnerships with local providers. Employers may also invest in mentorship and leadership development programs specifically designed for women balancing caregiving and professional roles, while incorporating mental health and wellness resources to reduce burnout. These reforms align directly with this study's findings and offer actionable strategies to strengthen retention and support for women with dual responsibilities post COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The findings indicate that retention of women with dual caregiving and work responsibilities requires employers to center flexibility as a core retention lever. Practically, this entails adopting a default-hybrid stance where feasible, specifying transparent core-hour bands (e.g., 10 a.m.–2 p.m.) and instituting a formal “right-to-

request” flexible work with clear and equitable criteria. Managers should be trained to negotiate individualized arrangements, for example, flexible start/stop times, compressed weeks, and where appropriate job share while shifting performance management toward outcomes rather than physical presence. These practices could reduce scheduling conflicts and signal institutional trust, directly addressing the primary driver of turnover identified across interviews.

Given the prevalence of caregiving demands, employers should implement integrated caregiving supports that stabilize employees’ home–work interface. Recommended practices include employer-subsidized or vendor-provided backup childcare and eldercare, employer contributions to dependent care flexible spending accounts, short-term caregiver leave, and policies that accommodate routine school and medical appointments. A curated resource guide for local caregiving services and proactive scheduling that acknowledges school calendars could further reduce avoidable absences. Such supports not only lower stress but also translate into improved attendance and retention among working women with dual responsibilities.

At the managerial level, the study underscores the importance of supportive, empathic leadership consistent with Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory. Organizations should equip leaders with micro-skills in empathy, boundary-setting, and negotiated flexibility; institutionalize quarterly stay interviews focused on barrier removal; and expand formal mentoring and sponsorship pathways, particularly for women with dual responsibilities. Parallel culture-level actions are needed to cultivate inclusive, bias-aware workplaces: implement “bias interrupters” in hiring, evaluation, and

promotion; fund caregiver-focused employee resource groups; and normalize the use of flexible options so that women with dual responsibilities are not stigmatized. These actions foster psychological safety and equitable access to opportunity.

Consistent with Affective Events Theory (AET), the data supports a well-being-first posture. Employers should set boundary norms, for example, “no-meeting” windows and delayed send for after-hours email, add mental-health days, actively promote Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) and counseling resources, and monitor workload allocation to prevent chronic over-assignment to hybrid/remote staff. Explicit norms and accessible resources mitigate burnout, which was the most frequently cited well-being concern and contribute to sustained engagement and lower turnover among women with dual responsibilities.

Compensation and advancement structures must also be aligned with caregiving realities. Rewards and career pathways should include paid parental and caregiver leave, pay transparency through published salary bands, generous and predictable PTO, and promotion criteria that are demonstrably neutral with respect to work location and schedule. Introducing sustainable career paths, part-time leadership roles, and re-entry or upskilling programs could ensure progression without penalizing flexible arrangements. These measures could counter the perception of stalled advancement that often precipitates exit.

Attendance policy is a pivotal, high-impact lever. Organizations should redesign attendance practices to recognize caregiving, replacing rigid point systems with documented caregiver exceptions, enabling partial-day remote work when disruptions

arise, and offering “family disruption days” during school or community health closures. Such policies prevent avoidable discipline and separations, directly addressing the turnover drivers identified in the study (e.g., inflexibility, childcare breakdowns, and health-related constraints).

Importantly, flexibility is not at odds with performance. The findings link flexible design to productivity and retention outcomes. To implement this, teams should adopt outcome-based goals (e.g., OKRs), establish team charters that specify meeting cadence, documentation norms, and response-time expectations, and expand asynchronous workflows. These mechanisms preserve coordination while protecting flexibility, thereby sustaining performance and expanding the talent pool, particularly among experienced women caregivers.

Implementation should be staged and evaluated. A pragmatic 90-day roadmap begins with a cross-functional task force (HR, Legal, Benefits, IT, and pilot business units) to baseline metrics (retention, absence, promotion). Weeks 3–6 focus on drafting and vetting policies (flex work, attendance exceptions, caregiver leave), selecting benefits vendors (backup care/EAP), and building manager toolkits. Weeks 7–10 launch targeted pilots with training and enabling IT features (calendar norms, delayed send, shared documentation). Weeks 11–13 emphasize evaluation and iteration prior to scale-up. Throughout, organizations should monitor a concise metric slate: retention of women caregivers, unscheduled absences and PTO spikes, promotion and internal mobility rates for flexible-schedule employees, EAP and caregiver-benefit utilization (aggregate,

privacy-safe), engagement survey items on workload/flexibility/inclusion, and offer-accept rates for roles advertised as hybrid/remote.

Finally, equity guardrails are essential to ensure that flexible policies deliver fair outcomes. Quarterly parity reviews should examine access to flexibility, pay and promotion outcomes, and performance ratings by flexibility status, with corrective action where disparities are detected. Organizations should prohibit “flexibility stigma” in evaluations by requiring evidence-based performance criteria, and provide clear, transparent appeals for denied flexibility requests. Integrating these guardrails with the recommended practices above institutionalizes fairness, strengthens trust, and sustains the retention of women with dual caregiving responsibilities.

Collectively, these recommendations operationalize the study’s ten themes into a coherent practice agenda: they embed flexibility, caregiving support, empathic leadership, inclusion, well-being, aligned rewards, fair attendance policies, and outcome-focused performance systems within a disciplined implementation and evaluation framework. In doing so, organizations can meaningfully improve the retention and advancement of women with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID era.

### **Conclusions**

My study affirms that meaningful social change can begin within the workplace. Organizations that adopt empathetic leadership practices and flexible policies not only improve retention and productivity, but they also support broader societal goals of equity and inclusion for all. By focusing on the experiences of working women with dual responsibilities, organizations can create environments that enable women to thrive at

work and at home. The findings of this study highlight the pressing need for organizations to implement leadership models that intentionally support women with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID-19 era as seen in each of the ten themes: (1) flexibility as the core retention lever (remote/hybrid options and flexed hours) allows caregivers to meet family needs without career penalties, (2) integrated caregiving supports (child/elder-care benefits, backup care, and appointment accommodations) stabilize attendance and reduce stress, (3) supportive, empathetic leadership (LMX) equips managers to negotiate individualized arrangements and provide mentorship, (4) well-being first (AET) addresses burnout through mental-health resources, EAPs, and boundary-protecting norms, (5) inclusive, bias-aware workplace cultures confront microaggressions and build trust so caregivers are not disadvantaged, (6) rewards and career pathways that fit dual roles align paid leave, PTO, fair pay, and advancement with caregiving realities, (7) attendance practices that recognize caregiving responsibilities will replace punitive policies with caregiver-sensitive leave and flexibility to prevent avoidable exits, (8) flexibility enhances productivity and retention which shows that flexible design sustains performance and widens talent pools, (9) turnover drivers in post-COVID workplaces (inflexibility, childcare failures, health pressures, misalignment) clarify where to target retention remedies, and (10) shifting values and the normalization of flexibility acknowledges post-pandemic reprioritization of time and legitimizes hybrid/remote as standard practice. The findings of this study highlight the pressing need for organizations to implement leadership models that intentionally support women with dual responsibilities in the post-COVID-19 era. The qualitative data gathered from

experienced HR professionals and decision-makers across the Greater Milwaukee Metropolitan area reveal compelling insights into how flexibility, empathy, and inclusivity in organizational practices can improve retention outcomes for women with dual responsibilities.

This study's focus on women with dual responsibilities offers valuable insight for men in leadership because it highlights systemic workplace challenges that affect overall team productivity, retention, and organizational culture. By understanding the barriers women face, men in leadership can develop inclusive policies and leadership practices that enhance engagement and equity for all employees, even men who may have dual responsibilities. This knowledge supports positive social change by encouraging empathy, collaboration, and shared responsibility in creating balanced, high-performing workplaces.

Ultimately, my study affirms that meaningful, measurable social change begins within the structures of the workplace. Through intentional policy design, emotionally intelligent leadership, and responsive organizational culture, employers have the power to retain women. Moreover, my study attributes that employers have the power to support women with dual responsibilities and model equity-driven approaches that inspire broader societal transformation.

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## Appendix: Invitation Letter to Participants

Dear Ms./Mrs./Mr./Dr.,

My name is Wenoka Smith, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University and working on my doctoral dissertation research to complete a Doctor of Philosophy Management degree. I am conducting this doctoral research study to explore and gain an improved understanding of *Employers' Best Practices for Retaining Women Employees with Dual Responsibilities*. I am requesting your kind participation in the study. I respect your time and ask you to please read this email and attached consent form to decide whether you will participate in the study. Your participation in the study will help advance new insights into the purpose of this study which is to explore best practices employers use to retain women employees with dual responsibilities who are caring for their household family members in the post COVID-19 era.

Your participation in the study will consist of a 45-60 minute interview. The research is purely for academic purposes and all information discussed or shared with me will be treated as confidential and protected. If you feel you understand the study well enough to decide, please review the attached consent form before deciding to participate in this study. If you would like to participate, please follow the instructions at the end of the consent form. I am looking forward to answering any questions or concerns that you may have and discuss further details of my research. You can contact me at (phone redacted) or via email (redacted).

Thank you for your time,

Wenoka Smith  
Doctor of Philosophy Management Candidate  
Walden University