



The impact of COVID-19 in the allocation of time within couples: Evidence for Argentina

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Abstract

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown policies on gender gaps remains unclear. While some studies point to equalizing factors (domestic work becomes more visible, flexible remote work arrangements expand) others highlight the potentially inequitable effects associated to women increasing their already disproportionate burden regarding housework and childcare. This paper provides evidence for Argentina. Based on a novel survey, we track changes in time allocation patterns of couples, before and during lockdown. Our results indicate that on average men allocate more time to paid work and less time to unpaid work (housework, childcare, educational support) than women. These within-couple gender gaps suffered opposite changes during lockdown: while the former reduces, the latter increases. However, given the fact that changes in paid work may be driven by more external forces linked to the labor market while modifications in unpaid work allocation probably reflect results of bargaining processes within couples, the latter may probably have longer lasting consequences.

Keywords: time allocation – unpaid work – within-couple gender gaps – COVID-19

JEL Codes: D10 – D13 – J16

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1. Introduction

In spite of the very relevant advances witnessed in recent decades, gender gaps in the labor market remain considerable (Goldin, 2014; Blau and Kahn, 2017). The Latin American region is no exception: differences in labor supply, both in the extensive and intensive margins, as well as gaps in wages are large (Marchionni, Gasparini and Edo, 2019). Recently, the literature has focused on motherhood and intra-household arrangements as the main drivers of the forces behind these gaps (Kleven, Landais and SØgaard, 2019; Kuziemko, Pan, Shen and Washington, 2018; Berniell, Berniell, De la Mata, Edo and Marchionni, 2019).

The effect of the recent irruption of the COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown policies on gender inequalities have been object of discussion (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey and Tertilt, 2020a). On the one hand, some studies point to the fact that the current situation may help reduce gender gaps inasmuch as domestic work becomes much more visible as well as work flexibility becomes the norm, rather than the exception. On the other hand, given the overload women bear regarding childcare and housework (OECD, 2020; UN, 2020; ILO, 2020), it is likely that the additional childcare and housework due to schools and daycare facilities closure as well as homeschooling will be disproportionately absorbed by women.

The recently emerging empirical evidence shows some mixed results. In the developed world, women are more likely to have stopped paid work during lockdown and the burden on housework and childcare still falls largely on them (Carlson, Petts and Pepin, 2020; Andrew et al., 2020; Sevilla and Smith, 2020; Hupkau and Petrolongo, 2020). Nevertheless, several studies provide evidence of an increased involvement of men in domestic chores and childcare, which in some cases even lead to reductions in the within-couple gender gap (Biroli et al., 2020; Mangiavacchi, Piccoli and Pieroni, 2020; Sevilla and Smith, 2020). In Latin America the empirical evidence on the impact of lockdown associated to COVID-19 is lagging behind. However, the few studies that explore the issue find in general that a disproportionate amount of the additional time imposed by the lockdown is being absorbed by women (Romero and Reys, 2020; Wanderley, Losantos and Arias, 2020; Dobrée and Cora, 2020). It is important to note that none of the papers providing evidence for Latin America focus on couples, but rather on women.

Analyzing the impact of lockdown through the lens of the couple, and not only through individuals' allocation of time, is very relevant. As stated before, recent literature points out to motherhood and intra-household arrangements as the main drivers in the labor market gender gap. This implies that for individuals in couples the allocation of time to different activities is generally the result of a bargaining process that may adopt different forms (Chioda, 2016). For instance, Goldin (2006) distinguishes couples in which labor force decisions (and therefore, housework and childcare

allocations of time) are made fully jointly or whether one of the members of the couple (generally the woman) optimizes his/her time allocation taking his/her partner's labor market decisions as given.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the literature by providing evidence of the within-couple reallocation of time during the pandemic for Argentina. Based on a novel survey, we track the changes produced by the lockdown regarding paid and unpaid work, as well as leisure time, with a special focus on the existing within-couple gender gaps in both activities. The length of the lockdown in Argentina (more than 130 days), that included school and day-care closure and homeschooling, provides a unique scenario to explore intra-household rearrangements regarding time allocation.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper to analyze changes in the within-couple time allocation changes due to COVID-19 and lockdown in Latin America. While some other studies have concentrated on the effect of the pandemic in gender gaps in time allocation in the region (Romero and Reys, 2020; Wanderley et al., 2020; Dobrée and Cora, 2020), the evidence provided focuses on men and women separately, without exploring the dynamics produced within the couple.

Our results show that the lockdown has reduced paid work hours and increased time allocated to unpaid activities for all individuals, irrespective of gender. When exploring the within-couple gender gaps we find that on average men perform more hours of paid work and less hours of unpaid work than woman. However, these gaps show opposite changes during lockdown: the within-couple gender gap regarding paid work reduces while the gap in unpaid work increases. The latter probably reflects more closely intra-household bargaining processes (changes in paid work may be due to external forces linked to the labor market) and thus may have longer lasting consequences. In particular, the largest increase found corresponds to the within-couple gender gap in time allocated to educational support of children associated to homeschooling, followed by the gap in housework. The within-couple gender gap regarding childcare shows a negligible increase, but it is important to bear in mind that it remains the largest gap both before and during lockdown. Finally, our evidence shows that some factors mitigate (age, man becoming unemployed) and others potentiate (relying on external help for housework before lockdown, woman becoming unemployed, education) the changes in the within-couple gender gaps in unpaid activities.

The paper is organized as follows: the next section describes the related literature while section 3 sets the COVID and lockdown context in Argentina. Section 4 describes the survey and the resulting sample. Section 5 presents our main results and is divided in two subsections: (a) general patterns; (b) time re-allocation within couples. While the former provides a general panorama of the time use patterns of individuals before and during lockdown, the latter focuses on the within-couple gender gaps, providing evidence on their magnitude and changes during lockdown as well as some reasons driving these changes. The last section concludes.

2. Related Literature

Since the beginning of the current pandemic,² there has been a growing number of studies which aim to analyze the different impacts that the pandemic itself, together with the lockdowns and consequent recession, has had on families' lives (Biroli et al. 2020; Andrew et al. 2020; Alon et al. 2020a; Mangiavacchi et al. 2020).

Empirical evidence documenting the impact that the pandemic lockdowns on men and women's allocations of time for developed countries is emerging. Based on evidence from real time data surveys, Carlson et al. (2020) for the US, and Andrew et al. (2020), Sevilla and Smith (2020), and Hupkau and Petrolongo (2020) for the UK, note that women are more likely than men to have stopped doing paid work since the pandemic began, and even if they still work, their burden on housework and childcare is still disproportionate compared to men.³

This increased bulk of most chores on women is also noticed by other scholars who highlight the special vulnerability of single and unemployed mothers (Zhou, Hertog, Kolpashnikova and Kan, 2020; Alon et al. 2020a; Alon, Kim, Lagakos and VanVuren, 2020b), working mothers with young children (Boca et. Al 2020), and less educated mothers (Farré, Fawaz, González and Graves, 2020). It is important to emphasize that in spite of this, all of these papers are in line with others suggesting an important increase of father's time on domestic labor (Biroli et al. 2020), which in some cases even led to an increase of children's wellbeing (Mangiavacchi et al. 2020) and helped to reduce within-household gender childcare gap (Sevilla and Smith, 2020). This increase in father's involvement during the crisis, is suggested by many of these scholars as a window of opportunity for shifting existing social norms, towards gender equality (Alon et al. 2020a and 2020b; Carlson et al., 2020; Boca et al. 2020; Andrew et al., 2020; Farré et al., 2020).

In contrast with this profuse emergence of literature in the developed world, research regarding the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns for women's lives and intra-household arrangements in Latin America is lagging behind. This is relevant inasmuch as cultural and social norms differ from more developed countries as well as institutional frameworks differ. Romero and Reys (2020) run a survey on Lima's (Peru) population in order to analyze the economic impact of the lockdown together with the effects of other measures taken by the government due to the pandemic. Results suggest that even though there is more participation of men on households (especially in the middle and upper class), this only applies for purchasing of food and other basic supplies, and women are still burdening all of the household responsibilities. Based on a survey carried out during the confinement in Bolivia,

² The World Health Organization classifies the start of the pandemic on March 1st.

³ For a compared analysis on developed countries please refer to Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin, and Rauh (2020); Biroli et al. (2020); Galasso et al. (2020).

Wanderley et al. (2020) point out that women showed greater depression, anxiety, stress and psychological impact than men, and suggest the deep relation with the fact that people who reported that household chores were not shared with a partner during quarantine were as twice as likely to have an impact on these dimensions. Dobrée and Cora (2020) use the time use survey carried out in Paraguay in 2016 to predict possible consequences of confinement measures. They suggest that this crisis will dramatically increase the burden of care on women, who already spent twice as much time as men on domestic tasks. In this same line, ECLAC (2020) warns about a possible exacerbation of the care crisis that was already affecting women in Latin America and the Caribbean, as they spend three times as much as men on unpaid domestic and care work each day. This effect magnifies in lower income households, given that they usually tend to have more dependent people to look after.⁴ In this same line, UN Women, together with UNICEF and Option consultants (2020), ran a survey on childhood, gender and time use in the context of the pandemic for Uruguay, and found a reduction of the relative gender gap in unpaid work on both high and medium educational levels. The opposite was found in low educational levels, as men in this segment were the only ones that did not increase the burden of unpaid work in context of COVID-19. They also point out that female work was the one that decreased the most as a result of the pandemic, and highlight that women are still shouldering most of the household chores. Regarding Argentina in particular, some recent surveys conducted by different agencies provide evidence that highlights that women are taking the larger share of the additional burden in unpaid activities posed by the lockdown.^{5,6}

The present work contributes to the emerging evidence on the impact of COVID and the lockdown policy on time use patterns in developing countries. We provide novel data covering time allocation patterns in paid and unpaid activities, before and during lockdown. Moreover, given that individuals living in couples provided information on their partner's time use patterns, we are able to provide evidence of within-couple reallocation of time during the pandemic. The length of the lockdown in Argentina (more than 130 days), provides an adequate setting to explore intra-household rearrangements regarding time allocation. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper in to

⁴ More available data on the care crisis in the region can be found in ECLAC (2018 and 2019).

⁵ Ahumada, Bonavitta and Bard (2020) draw on data from a survey taken for a week to analyze care, uses of time and quarantined work. They show that most of the women consulted (primarily high-educated and in formal jobs) felt a higher burden of childcare and housework, exhaustion, and tiredness than before the quarantine measure was imposed. Several consultancy agencies (a joint initiative by Bridge the Gap and Boomerang as well as Grow Agency) provide similar evidence based on surveys run during the lockdown. More recently, an official survey run for the City of Buenos Aires provides evidence of similar patterns (Consejo Económico y Social de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2020).

⁶ Other studies assess the impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown in Argentina on other dimensions: Arrosi (2020) investigates the psycho-social impact of COVID-19 and its related confinement policies; Carreras, Gibbons, Murphy, Perez-Vincent, Rossi (2020) focus on its impact on domestic violence.

analyze changes in within-couple time allocations due to the pandemic and lockdown policies in Latin America.

3. COVID-19 and lockdown in Argentina

As the rest of the Latin America region, Argentina was hit by the pandemic later than China and the European countries. The containment experiences taken by those countries, served the region to apply preventive measures earlier than Spain or Italy, which were surprised by the exponential increase in cases. Despite Brazil was the first country in the region to announce the first coronavirus case on later February, Argentina reported the first death in the region due to COVID-19 on March 7th, four days after reporting its first case.⁷

On March 16th, the government announced the closing of schools at all levels, all over the country, for 15 days,⁸ affecting more than 10 million students.⁹ That same day, closure of all borders was announced.¹⁰ By March 19th, the first lockdown measure was taken,¹¹ and the government ordered complete confinement of the population, declaring official quarantine. In order to protect the most vulnerable people, on March 23rd an emergency family income for unemployed people and unregistered workers was instituted as an exceptional non-contributory monetary benefit, intended to compensate for the loss or decrease of income of people affected by the health emergency.¹²

Although all of these initial measures were extended repeatedly on the following months, and certain activities still remain closed nationwide (such as schools, public events, recreational and touristic activities), since April 27th provincial governments had the authority to decide on exemptions to the national quarantine, if certain epidemiological criteria were fulfilled.¹³ In a first move towards reopening, the government announced the beginning of a new social distancing phase on June 4th, that eased quarantine restrictions for large portions of the national territory, including sport activities within certain hours and reopening of other non-essential businesses.¹⁴ However, driven by the increased rate of contagion, national government decided to back off with the measure.¹⁵

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-51787545>

⁸ https://www.cadena3.com/noticia/politica-y-economia/suspenden-las-clases-hasta-el-31-de-marzo-en-todo-el-pais_255004

⁹ 10,381,433 students in the educational system, of which 16.6% are at the initial level, 43.9% at the primary level, and 39.5% at the secondary level. <https://www.cippe.org/publicacion/educar-en-pandemia-respuestas-provinciales-al-covid/>

¹⁰ <http://s3.arsat.com.ar/cdn-bo-001/2020031601NS.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/227042/20200320>

¹² <https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/227113/20200324>

¹³ <https://www.zonanortediario.com.ar/25/04/2020/la-cuarentena-sigue-hasta-el-10-de-mayo-las-provincias-tendran-potestad-para-liberar-actividades-y-se-podra-salir-para-esparcimiento/>

¹⁴ <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/270347-alberto-fernandez-anuncio-la-nueva-fase-de-la-cuarentena>

¹⁵ <https://www.ambito.com/politica/cuarentena/la-estricta-comenzara-el-1-julio-y-solo-habra-comercios-esenciales-n5112647>

By the end of July (when our survey took place), Argentinians had been in lockdown for more than 100 days and the removal of restrictions was not still in the horizon. Among many other things, this implied a sharp increase in time spent at home for all individuals, as well as remote work for some adults and online schooling for children. Our survey, described in the following section, aimed at tracking if and to what extent these changes implied reallocations of time to different activities within the household, such as time spent on paid work, household chores, childcare, educational support associated to online schooling of children, as well as leisure activities.

4. Data

a. Survey characteristics

In order to analyze the re-allocation of time as of the COVID-19 lockdown we run an ad-hoc survey. It collected data on a sample of Argentinean families between June 12nd and July 25th 2020, reaching 2,101 families during the period of national lockdown. It was implemented online, and was voluntary and anonymous.

The survey gathered information on hours dedicated before and during the lockdown to the following types of activities: (i) paid work; (ii) household work (including general chores such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc.); (iii) children care (including general activities such as playing, supervising, bathing, etc.); (iv) education support of children (including all activities related to the remote learning imposed by the lockdown); and (v) leisure. Respondents in cohabitating couples were asked to report information regarding their own schedules as well as their partners'.¹⁶ In addition, the survey gathered data on socio-demographic variables, such as age, educational and income level, number and age of children, and on previous and current work status as well as whether the household outsourced domestic chores by relying on a domestic employee before the lockdown.

For the description of general patterns of how individuals adjusted their time allocation during the lockdown, we employed the full sample of 2,101 households. However, to address our main objective of interest (i.e. the re-allocation of time within couples) we focused on a subsample of families composed of 1,147 couples with and without children.

The survey was conducted without a sampling strategy. However, the design aimed at meeting relevant socio-demographic quotas in order to be in line with national statistics reported by the National Statistics Office in Argentina (INDEC). Table A1 in Appendix reports the comparison of

¹⁶ This raises the concern on whether the time allocation of partners' may not be accurately estimated. Andrew et al. (2020), however, provide evidence that gender of the main respondent is not associated to systematic differences on gender gaps for reported time use.

key variables with the nationally representative Argentinean Time Use Survey. In our sample, respondents are relatively younger while the average number of children mimics the national average. A better similarity in socio-demographic quotas was achieved in the sub-sample of couples, which represent our primary interest. In particular, our key variables (the structure of couples with and without children) are very much in line with national statistics. Our subsample consists of 1,147 observations of families, where 79.7% have children and 20.3% are childless. These quotas are very similar to national figures, where 75% of Argentinean couples have children. In addition, a successful effort was undertaken to reach low-income families, which constitutes a non-negligible proportion of the Argentinean population. Respondents to the survey had to self-report to which quintile their household belonged to. Quintiles were defined ex-ante, based on the national income distribution cut-offs, estimated using the Argentinean Time Use Survey carried out by the National Statistics Office in Argentina in 2013 (INDEC). In our sub-sample, 45.8 % of couples belong to the lowest two quintiles of the national income distribution, while in the INDEC sub-sample amounts to 46.6%. However, our survey slightly over-represents high income couples.

b. Descriptive statistics.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for both the full sample of respondents and the subsample for cohabitating couples. In both cases the majority of respondents were female: 82% in the full sample and 83% in the subsample.

Table 1 – Descriptive statistics

	Full Sample	Couples Sub-sample
Female respondent	82.4%	83.8%
Age of respondent	40.8	40.9
Children	69.8%	80.5%
Number of children	1.4	1.7
Education: primary	11.4%	9.9%
Education: secondary	46.4%	43.2%
Education: university	42.2%	46.9%
Low income households	53.0%	45.8%
Middle income households	13.5%	13.3%
High income households	33.6%	40.8%
Domestic employee	20.8%	25.1%

Note: female, age and education information are collected for the respondent. Education represents the maximum level achieved. Low (high) income families are those belonging to the lowest (upper) two quintiles of the national income distribution. Income quintiles were defined according to the full sample of the Argentinean Time Use Survey.

Regarding the full sample, the majority of respondents were women and the average age was around 41 years old. Around 70% of families had children and the average number of children was 1.4. In terms of education, more than half of the sample had finished secondary school (46.4% approximately), while 42.2% had finished university and almost 11.4% had primary or none education. Low-income families accounted for half of the full-sample, while around one third of households belonged to the two upper quintiles. 21% of the sample relied on a domestic employee before the lockdown to perform certain basic household chores and in some cases childcare activities, a fairly common practice among the middle and upper classes in Latin America.

The subsample of couples represents 55% of the full sample. In terms of gender and age this subsample resembles the full-sample, while it is slightly more educated and less concentrated in the lowest quintile. As expected, in this subsample the percentage of families with children increases as well as their number, because it is more common for families to have children and the average number of children increases. Also, the share of households relying on a domestic employee for household chores and childcare is 4 percentage points higher, probably related to the fact that this subsample is somehow richer and more in need of external help.

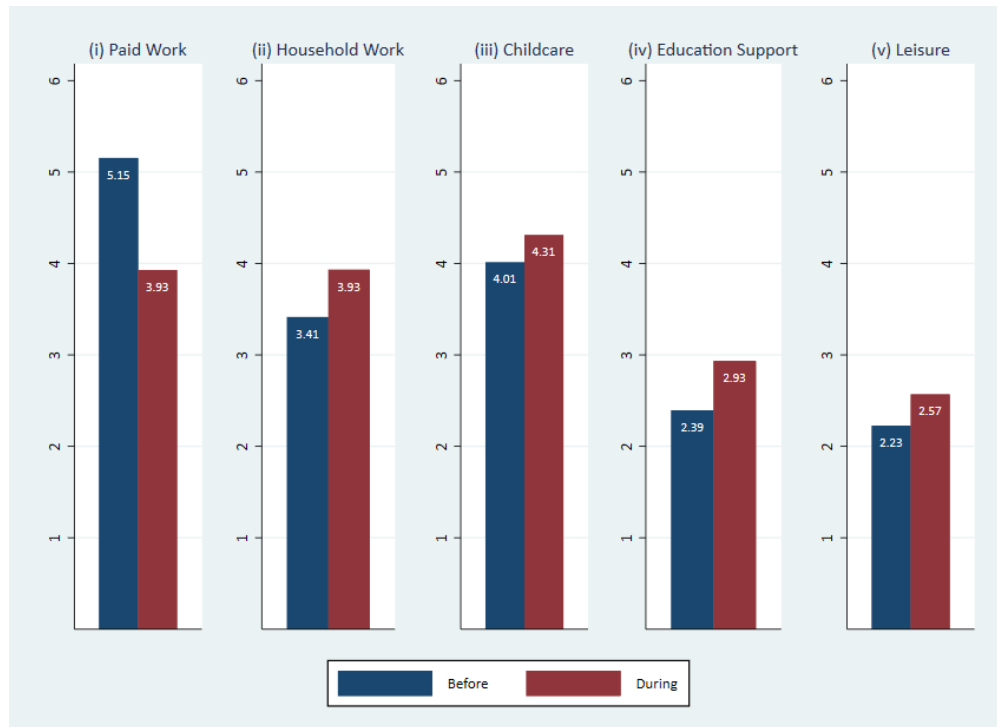
5. Results

In this section we analyze the changes in the allocation of time of Argentinians before and during the COVID-19 irruption and following lockdown. The survey registered time spent on five types of activities: (i) paid work; (ii) household work (including general chores such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc.); (iii) children care (including general activities such as playing, supervising, bathing, etc.); (iv) education support of children (including all activities related to the remote learning imposed by the lockdown); and (v) leisure. First of all, we conduct a general analysis, based on the full-sample of respondents. Secondly, we focus on the sub-sample of couples, in order to explore our main objective, i.e., the reallocation of time within couples.

a. General patterns

Figure 1 shows that time patterns changed for all activities. In fact, while time spent on paid work diminished, both time spent on unpaid work as well as leisure activities increased. On average, during lockdown individuals worked one hour and a quarter less for pay daily and increased in roughly 20 minutes the time devoted to each of the other activities (household work, childcare, educational support of children and leisure).

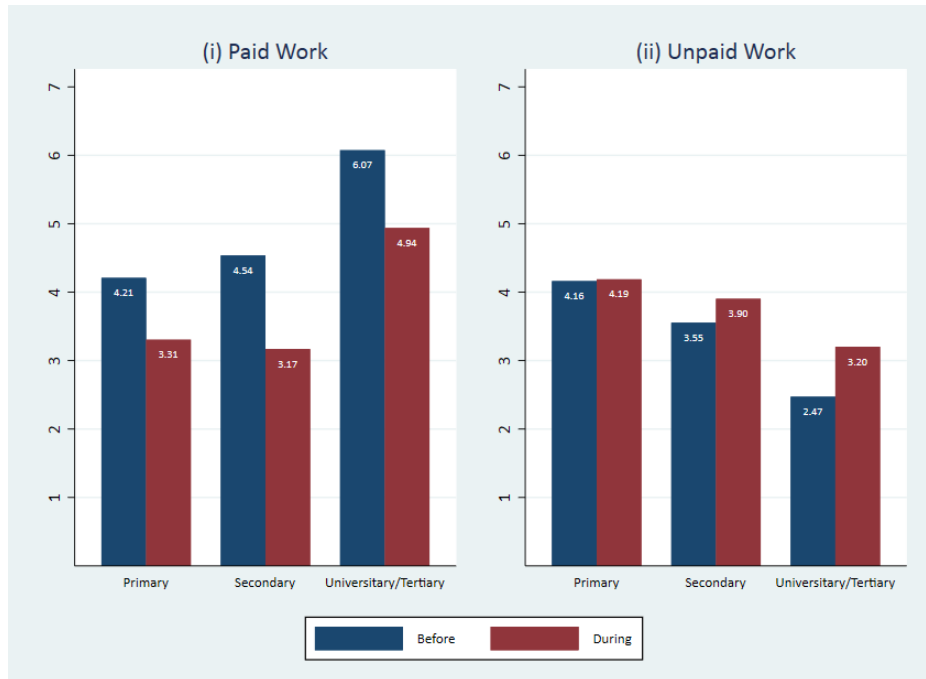
Figure 1. Average daily hours spent in different activities, before and during lockdown



Notes: each bar represents the average hours allocated by individuals to each activity, before and during lockdown. All individuals are included.

But these general patterns mask important heterogeneities. In the first place, changes in time use patterns show significant differences across educational levels. Figure 2 shows that time allocated to paid work increases with education, while the inverse is true for unpaid work, both before and during lockdown. However, the impact of the lockdown has been stronger among the more educated, who on average show a larger reduction in time allocated to paid work and a higher increase of time allocated to unpaid work. In particular, individuals with a university degree reduced daily paid work by 1.1 hours and increased unpaid work by 0.73 hours. In contrast, those with the lowest educational level decreased paid work by 0.9 hours each day and show almost no changes in unpaid work when comparing the periods before and during lockdown.

Figure 2. Average daily hours spent in paid and unpaid work, before and during lockdown, by education level



Notes: each bar represents the average hours allocated by individuals to paid and unpaid work. The latter includes time spent on household chores, childcare and educational support of children. All individuals are included.

A second very relevant heterogeneity is related to parenting. Figure 3 summarizes the results of our survey. First of all, as expected, men perform more hours of paid work and less hours of unpaid work than women, both before and during lockdown. The lockdown imposed a larger reduction of paid work for men (1.4 and 2 hours for fathers and men without children, respectively) than for women (1 and 1.4 hours for mothers and women without children, respectively). It is surprising, however, that in terms of unpaid work the additional time spent during lockdown by woman almost doubles that of men (0.5 and 0.3 hours respectively, irrespective of parenthood).

Even more surprising is the fact that men with and without children are undistinguishable: they allocated almost the exact same amount of time to both paid and unpaid activities before (6.5 and 2.1 hours respectively) and during lockdown (almost 5 hours and 2.4 hours respectively). In contrast, women show sharp differences across motherhood: before lockdown mothers assigned one hour less to paid work and 0.9 more to unpaid activities than women without children and this difference remained fairly stable during lockdown. The rise in unpaid work has been even more sharp among women living in households that relied on external help in performing household chores before lockdown (see Figure A1 included in Appendix).

Furthermore, combining paid and unpaid activities seems to have become more difficult during the lockdown, but especially so among women. In fact, Figure A2 in Appendix shows that even before lockdown women claimed to struggle more in combining their jobs with domestic activities: 45% declared that they found some to very hard to combine both activities, as compared to 32% of men. Moreover, during lockdown, men do not seem to have increased struggle: the percentage of agreement with the statement remains quite similar, while it rises up to 51.2% for women. Interruptions may be one of the most relevant obstacles in combining paid work and domestic activities. Regarding the statement “During lockdown I often need to interrupt my work to attend domestic issues”, 40.5% of men declared to agree in contrast with 55% of women (see Figure A3 in Appendix).

Figure 3. Average daily hours spent in paid and unpaid work, before and during lockdown, by gender and presence of children



Notes: each bar represents the average hours allocated by individuals to paid and unpaid work. The latter includes time spent on household chores, childcare and educational support of children. All individuals are included.

In summary, the evidence shows that on average the irruption of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown implied a reduction in hours of paid work and an increase in unpaid work for all individuals. However, the changes were not even across educational levels or gender. On the one hand, more educated individuals and men seem to have reduced more their time on paid activities. On the other hand, time allocated to unpaid activities has increased more for the more educated as

well as for women. Moreover, combining work and domestic activities has become even more difficult during lockdown, particularly for women.

b. Re-allocation of time within couples

In the previous section we described general patterns of how individuals adjusted their time allocation during the lockdown. We now focus on couples and analyse how they are redistributing their time allocation during lockdown.¹⁷ For this section we restrict our sample to couples with and without children.

We explore couples' time allocation adjustments as of lockdown in three dimensions. In the first place, we assess which member of the couple is the 'main provider' for each activity (i.e., allocates more hours than his/her partner) and compare arrangements before and during lockdown. Secondly, we explore the within-household gender gap in hours for each activity, measured as the difference between the number of hours spent by women and men. Thirdly, we assess the reasons behind the changes in the within-household gender gaps before and during the lockdown. We are able to compute these measures directly from our survey, exploiting the observation of allocation of time before and during the lockdown.

Main provider. Figure 4 summarizes the distribution of households according to who stands as the 'main provider' for each activity, defined as which member of the couple assigns more time than his/her partner to a certain activity.

Paid and household work emerge as the most unbalanced activities. Men take the lead in terms of paid work: in roughly half of households men work more hours than women, compared to around 20% of households where women work more hours than men. The converse is true when it comes to household work: in around 60% of households women allocate more time than men to domestic chores and only in around 10% of households men take the lead in this regard. In contrast, for around 30% of households paid work is provided equally by both members of the couple and in around 25% of families both contribute evenly to household chores.

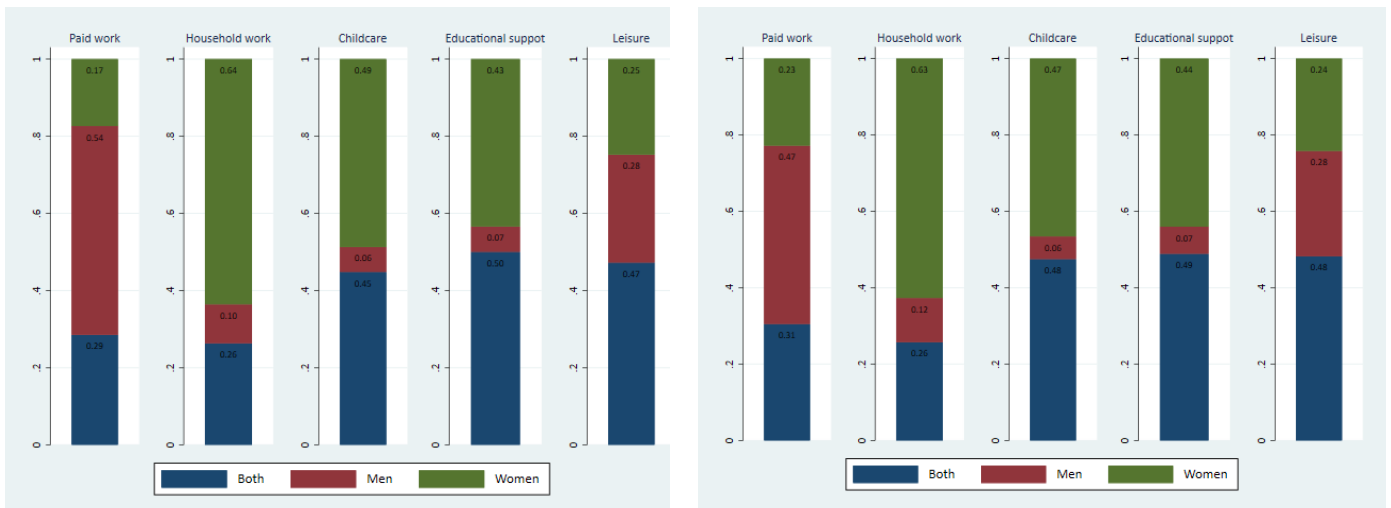
Time spent on child-related activities (both caring and educational support) is somewhat more balanced across gender: in around half of households men and women allocate the same amount of time. However, in the remaining families, these activities strongly rely on women (less than 7% of families show men taking the lead). These patterns are quite stable when comparing time arrangements within couples before and during the lockdown.

¹⁷ Our data only allows us to analyze the re-allocation of time of opposite-sex couples.

Figure 4. Distribution of households across ‘main provider’, by activity (%)

Panel A. Before lockdown

Panel B. During lockdown



Note: all couples are included. Each bar represents the distribution of households according to who the ‘main provider’ is in each activity (i.e., who allocates more hours than the partner). “Both” represents the percentage of households in which both members of the couple assign the same amount of time to certain activity; “Men” represents the percentage of households in which men assign a larger amount of time than women to certain activity; “Women” represents the percentage of households in which women assign a larger amount of time than men to certain activity.

Within-couple gender gaps. Table 1 shows average daily time allocation by gender and within-couple gaps for each activity, defined as hours allocated by the woman to a given activity minus hours allocated by the man. Before lockdown large within-couple gender gaps were present in all activities, with the exception of leisure. In fact, women spent per day almost 2 hours less of paid work than men while performed 2 more hours of domestic chores. Furthermore, childcare shows the largest difference across gender, with woman dedicating 2.3 more hours per day than men. Additionally, woman dedicated 1.3 more hours than men to educational support of children every day. These gaps are in line with results from the Argentinean Time Use Survey implemented in 2013, which indicate that women devote on average twice the time to unpaid work than men, including household work and childcare (INDEC, 2020).

The lockdown implied re-allocations in the distribution of time within the couple. In particular, while on average time assigned to paid work decreased for both couple members, unpaid work (including domestic chores and child-related activities) increased for both. Regarding paid work, men have reduced weekly hours by 7.6 hours and women by 5.4. In terms of unpaid work, each

week couples are enduring an additional 4.8 hours of housework, 3.4 hours of childcare and 6.2 hours and 4.4 hours of educational support activities.

Table 1. Daily time allocation within couples

	Before					During				
	Hours women		Hours men		Average Within- Couple Gap	Hours women		Hours men		Average Within- Couple Gap
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Paid work	4.71	3.30	6.60	2.96	-1.89***	3.63	3.50	5.08	3.46	-1.45***
Household work	3.68	2.45	1.75	2.03	1.93***	4.26	2.46	2.12	2.01	2.14***
Childcare	4.19	3.25	1.90	2.31	2.29***	4.55	3.35	2.22	2.47	2.33***
Educ. support	2.45	2.42	1.13	1.76	1.32***	3.10	2.66	1.36	1.94	1.74***
Leisure	2.20	1.91	2.31	1.98	-0.11*	2.55	2.23	2.67	2.30	-0.12*

Note: average number of hours devoted to each activity. Within-couple gaps are defined as hours allocated by the woman to a given activity minus hours allocated by the man. All couples are included. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

However, these changes in allocation of time within couples were not evenly distributed across genders. Surprisingly, while the within-couple gender gap in paid work reduced, the unpaid within-couple work gap increased. On the one hand, given that the reduction in working hours was larger for men than for women the gender gap in paid work has reduced. While before lockdown the within-couple gender gap in paid work amounted to almost two hours per day, during lockdown it reduced to 1.4 hours. On the other hand, the additional time spent by couples in unpaid activities has been disproportionately carried out by women. They are performing 61% of the additional hours of household work, 53% of the additional childcare and 74% of the additional educational support activities. Therefore, the within-couple gap in all unpaid work has increased. Educational support activities show the largest increase in the within-couple gender gap, from 1.3 to 1.7 daily hours' difference between woman and man, followed by the gap in household chores which increased by 22 minutes per day. The within-couple gender gap in childcare remained basically stable, increasing by a couple of minutes only. All in all, during lockdown the within-couple gender gap in unpaid work has increased by 6 hours per week.

Therefore, lockdown seems to have had opposite effects on the existing within-couple gender gaps in the allocation of time. On the one hand, an equalizing effect has occurred: even though during lockdown men still spend more time than women on paid work, this within-couple gap has reduced. On the other hand, the within-couple gender gaps regarding unpaid work have become even more pronounced during lockdown than before. In particular, the gap in educational support activities and household chores have increased.

Explaining the changes in within-couple gender gaps. Our evidence suggests that the within-couple gender gaps of hours allocated to paid and unpaid work have evolved in opposite directions. While the former shows a reduction during lockdown, the latter shows an increase. Explaining the reasons behind these opposite changes is relevant because it may reveal intra-household negotiations as well as shed light on the bargaining power of couple members.

It is important to note, however, that the drivers behind these opposite effects are quite different: changes in paid work may probably obey more to external events linked to the labor market while reallocations of time to unpaid work activities rely more on intra-household arrangements. If this is the case, the equalizing effect of the lockdown in terms of paid work may wither away once life goes back to normal, while the gap increase in terms of unpaid work may have long-lasting consequences.

Given both data limitations¹⁸ as well as the fact that our main interest relies on shedding light on the bargaining process within the couple,¹⁹ in this section we focus on exploring the changes in the within-couple gender gaps in terms of time spent on unpaid work. In particular, we perform a difference-in-difference analysis of the effect of lockdown on the within-couple allocation of time on unpaid activities. Our outcomes variables are the changes in the within-couple gender gaps in hours allocated to household work, childcare and educational support activities ($wc_gap_change_{ij}$). These variables measure the difference in the within-couple gender gap in hours in household i , allocated to activity j , when comparing before and during lockdown periods. The within-couple gender gap (wc_gap_{ijt}) measures the difference in hours across genders in household i , for activity j , in period t (before and during lockdown):

$$wc_gap_change_{ij} = wc_gap_{ij1} - wc_gap_{ij0} \quad (1)$$

where:

$$wc_gap_{ijt} = hours_w_{ijt} - hours_m_{ijt} \quad (2)$$

$hours_w_{ijt}$ = daily hours allocated by the woman in household i , to activity j ,
in period t .

$hours_m_{ijt}$ = daily hours allocated by the man in household i , to activity j ,
in period t .

¹⁸ Our survey does not provide information on many of the possible explanations behind the changes in allocation of time to paid work, such as job loss, job hours' reduction, furlough, resignation, etc.

¹⁹ Albeit acknowledging the fact that gender gaps in the allocation of time to paid work stem from the bargaining process within the couple, the short-run equalizing effect of lockdown on these gaps is probably more related to external forces linked to the labor market than to new arrangements of couples.

j : 1=household work; 2=childcare; 3=educational support

t : 0=before lockdown; 1=during lockdown

For instance, if $wc_gap_{110} = 2$ and $wc_gap_{111} = 3$ this means that the woman in household 1 performed 2 more hours of housework than her partner before lockdown and carried 3 more hours than her partner during lockdown. If this were the case, then $wc_gap_change_{11}$ should equal 1, meaning that the within-couple gender gap in housework increased by an hour during lockdown. Intuitively, the larger the value of $wc_gap_change_{ij}$, the higher the increase in the within-couple gender gap in time allocated to activity j when comparing the allocation during lockdown with the previous situation. Thus, the larger the within-couple gender gap change ($wc_gap_change_{ij}$) the larger the increase in the allocation of time of the woman in the household to certain activity during lockdown relative to her partner, compared to the difference that existed between partners before the lockdown.

Table 2 presents the results of OLS regressions on the three outcomes of interest: changes in the within-couple gender gap in the allocation of hours to (i) household work; (ii) childcare; (iii) educational support activities. First of all, it is important to note that all three changes are positive as shown in columns (1), (4) and (7). This indicates that, on average, during lockdown women have increased their allocation of time to unpaid activities more than their partners. As stated before, educational support activities show the largest gap increase (0.4 hours per day), followed by housework (0.2 hours per day), and both coefficients are statistically significant. In contrast, childcare shows a very small change in the within-couple gender gap (0.04 hours per day) –even if in the same direction- and is not statistically significant.

Secondly, the results show some interesting insights that may shed light on the reasons behind the increase in the within-couple gender gaps regarding unpaid work during the lockdown. In terms of housework, the two most relevant features are the presence of a domestic employee and the loss of jobs. On the one hand, couples that relied on a domestic employee for performing household work *before* the lockdown had to go without their help during the lockdown. In those households, the additional hours dedicated to housework have been absorbed largely by women. In fact, the within-couple gender gap change of housework in households that had a domestic employee before the lockdown is around 0.6 hours larger than in households that never outsourced household chores. In other words, the gender gap regarding domestic work –which was already large- increased even more in families where a domestic employee had been present before the lockdown. As suggested before, this may imply that it is the woman –not the couple- who is outsourcing domestic chores. On the other

hand, job losses seem also to have affected the changes in the within-couple gender gap in housework. It is important to note, however, that the effect differs according to the gender of the partner that loses the job. In fact, in households where the man lost his job the change in the within-couple gender gap in housework is one hour lower than for the rest of households. On the contrary, if it is the woman is the one losing her job during lockdown the within-couple gender gap change is one hour larger than for the rest of households.

Regarding child-related activities, age seems to have a slight negative effect on changes in the within-couple gender gap. This is probably related to the fact that age of parents is related to age of their children, thus older ages imply older –and more autonomous- children. Regarding childcare, when it comes to job losses we find a similar pattern to the housework gap changes: if the man loses his job, the change in the gap is around 0.71 hours lower, while in households where the woman loses her job the change in the within-couple gender gap is an hour larger. Changes in within-couple gender gaps regarding educational support show some particularities. In the first place, more educated households are associated with larger increases in gender gaps. This means that the more educated the family, the more uneven the distribution of the extra burden caused by the need to offer children support in remote learning activities. In other words, more educated mothers seem to be carrying the lion's share of the homeschooling imposed by the lockdown. Furthermore, the number of children also affects the changes in the within-couple gender gap. As expected, the more children in the family, the larger the increase in the within-couple gender gap. Each additional child increases the daily gap by approximately 0.2 hours. This means that in larger families the extra burden imposed by homeschooling falls disproportionately more on mothers.

To sum up, COVID-19 and the subsequent quarantine have had effects on time re-allocation within couples. Even though no changes are observed regarding who the main provider of paid and unpaid work is, the lockdown has implied adjustments in the allocation of time within couples. In particular, the lockdown has reduced the within-couple gender gap in time allocated to paid activities, while it has increased the within-couple gender gap regarding unpaid activities. The evidence suggests that the latter is larger for households relying on a domestic employee and where the woman lost her job and lower where the man became unemployed. Regarding child-related activities, older ages are associated to milder effects, probably associated to the fact that they become more autonomous, while the gap in learning support activities becomes larger among more educated households.

Table 2. Regressions on within-couple gender gap changes

VARIABLES	HOUSEHOLD WORK			CHILDCARE			EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Constant	0.219*** (0.0842)	0.149 (0.422)	0.0778 (0.427)	0.0401 (0.103)	0.394 (0.542)	0.243 (0.548)	0.424*** (0.0822)	-0.0252 (0.428)	-0.0548 (0.437)
Age		-0.00697 (0.00801)	-0.00629 (0.00794)		-0.0219** (0.0111)	-0.0228** (0.0110)		-0.0147* (0.00875)	-0.0150* (0.00874)
Education		0.0241 (0.103)	0.0171 (0.103)		0.115 (0.135)	0.133 (0.134)		0.225** (0.106)	0.228** (0.107)
Number of Children		0.0751 (0.0648)	0.0886 (0.0643)		0.0759 (0.0912)	0.102 (0.0906)		0.175** (0.0720)	0.183** (0.0722)
Domestic Employee		0.659*** (0.234)	0.693*** (0.232)		0.298 (0.293)	0.337 (0.291)		0.374 (0.231)	0.383* (0.232)
Job loss Man			-0.822*** (0.246)			-0.709** (0.303)			-0.295 (0.241)
Job loss Woman			0.928*** (0.235)			1.175*** (0.290)			0.377 (0.231)
Observations	1,147	1,147	1,147	923	923	923	923	923	923
R-squared	0.000	0.012	0.033	0.000	0.007	0.029	0.000	0.023	0.027

Note: standard errors in parenthesis. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1 “Household work” is the within-couple gender gap change in hours allocated to household work; “Childcare” is the within-couple gender gap change in hours allocated to childcare; “Educational Support” is the within-couple gender gap change in hours allocated to educational support. All changes compare the within-couple gender gaps before and during lockdown. Within-couple gender gaps are defined as hours allocated to the activity by the woman minus hours allocated to the same activity by the man. For “Household work” all couples are included, for “Childcare” and “Educational Support” only couples with children are included.

6. Conclusion

Albeit strong advances in the role of women in the public sphere in the last decades, gender gaps remain considerable in terms of labor force participation, wages as well as the occupation of hierarchical positions by women. Motherhood and intra-household arrangements have been pointed out recently in the literature as the last hurdle in achieving gender equality. The Latin American region is not an exception in this regard (Chioda, 2016; Berniell et al., 2019).

The recent irruption of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as its subsequent lockdown policies may have an impact in this gender imbalances, specially within couples, given the additional workload posed by the increase in housework, childcare and educational support children need for online schooling. The effect, however is not clear. On the one hand, gender gaps could be reduced in as much as domestic work becomes more visible and flexible remote work arrangements become the norm rather than the exception (Alon et al., 2020a). On the other hand, it is also possible that gaps increase if the additional workload is distributed unevenly across genders. Empirical evidence for developed countries shows some mixed evidence in this regard, with findings in both the disproportionate increase of workload on women, while a higher involvement of fathers seems also to have taken place. (Carlson et al., 2020; Andrew et al., 2020; Sevilla and Smith, 2020; Hupkau and Petrolongo, 2020; Biroli et al., 2020; Mangiavacchi et al., 2020; Sevilla and Smith, 2020). For the Latin American region, the still scarce evidence points more into the direction of increasing gaps (Romero and Reys, 2020; Wanderley et al., 2020; Dobrée and Cora, 2020).

This paper contributes to the literature by presenting novel evidence of within-couple changes in the allocation of time to paid and unpaid activities (housework, childcare and educational support) as of the irruption of COVID-19 and lockdown policies for Argentina. To our knowledge, this is the first paper to address the effect of the pandemic on within-couple time arrangements.

According to our results, on average, the irruption of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown implied a reduction in hours of paid work and an increase in unpaid work for all individuals. However, the changes were not even across educational levels or gender. Regarding educational levels, even though the more educated spend more hours in paid work and less time on unpaid work both before and during lockdown, they experienced the largest reduction in the former and the largest increase in the latter. In terms of gender, men's reduction of paid work almost doubles that of women (2 and 1 daily hours respectively), but they increased unpaid work by half when compared to women (0.3 and 0.5 daily hours respectively). Even more striking is the fact that men with and without children are undistinguishable: they perform the same amount of paid and unpaid work both before and during lockdown. In contrast, women show sharp differences by gender: mothers spend around 1 hour less

in paid work and 1 hour more in unpaid work than women without children, both before and during lockdown.

When focusing on couples, the evidence shows that within-couple gender gaps before lockdown were large, with men performing more paid work than their partners (almost 10 hours more per week on average) and women carrying out more unpaid work (almost 10 more hours per week in housework, 11.5 more hours per week in childcare and almost 7 more hours per week on educational support). With the lockdown following the irruption of COVID-19, these within-couple gender gaps changed in opposite directions. On the one hand, gaps regarding paid work seem to have narrowed mildly (2 hours per week), following a larger reduction in hours worked by men than by women. However, this equalization has not translated into a more even distribution of unpaid work within couples. On the contrary, the data shows that the gap in unpaid work seems to have increased. In particular, the largest within-couple gender gaps increases are found in provision of educational support to children on remote learning activities (an increase of 2 hours per week in the gap) and household chores (an increase of 1 hour per week in the gap). Within-couple gender gaps regarding childcare do not seem to change significantly (an increase of 12 minutes per week in the gap) but it is important to bear in mind that childcare still shows the largest gaps among unpaid activities.

Several factors are associated with these changes in within-couple gender gaps. Regarding housework, relying on a domestic employee *before* the lockdown increased the change in the within-couple gender gap, implying that woman absorb the chores that were outsourced previously. Furthermore, if the woman lost her job, the change in the within-couple gender gap increases while it narrows if it is the man that loses his job. In childcare activities, increases in age of parents mitigate the change in the gap, probably associated to older –and more autonomous- children. Childcare follows a similar pattern to housework in term of job losses: if the man becomes unemployed, the evidence shows some redistribution of time allocated to childcare, while if it is the woman, the gap increases. The within-couple gender gap in educational support activities increases with education, implying that the more educated the mother the more uneven the distribution of the homeschooling activities imposed by the lockdown. In the same line, each additional child increases the change in the within-couple gender gap, meaning that the larger the family the more unequal the distribution of the additional time allocated to educational support.

To sum up, the effect of COVID-19 and lockdown in Argentina on within-couple gender gaps remains unclear. On the one hand, it has implied a reduction in paid work within-couple gender gaps. On the other hand, gaps regarding unpaid activities have increased. Given that the former may be more related to external factors linked to the labor market and the latter probably reflects the results

of bargaining processes within the household, it is probable that this negative effect on gender gaps prevails in the long run.

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Appendix

Table A1. - Comparison of key variables with the Argentinean Time Use Survey (INDEC)

	Full Sample		Couples Sub-sample	
	Our Survey	INDEC	Our Survey	INDEC
Age of the respondent	40.8	50.6	40.9	47.6
Number of children	1.4	1.3	1.7	1.6
Couples with children	52.1%	44.8%	79.7%	75.0%
Couples without children	12.5%	14.5%	20.3%	25.0%
Low income households	53.0%	40.0%	45.8%	46.6%
Middle income households	13.5%	20.0%	13.3%	19.7%
High income households	33.6%	40.0%	40.8%	33.6%

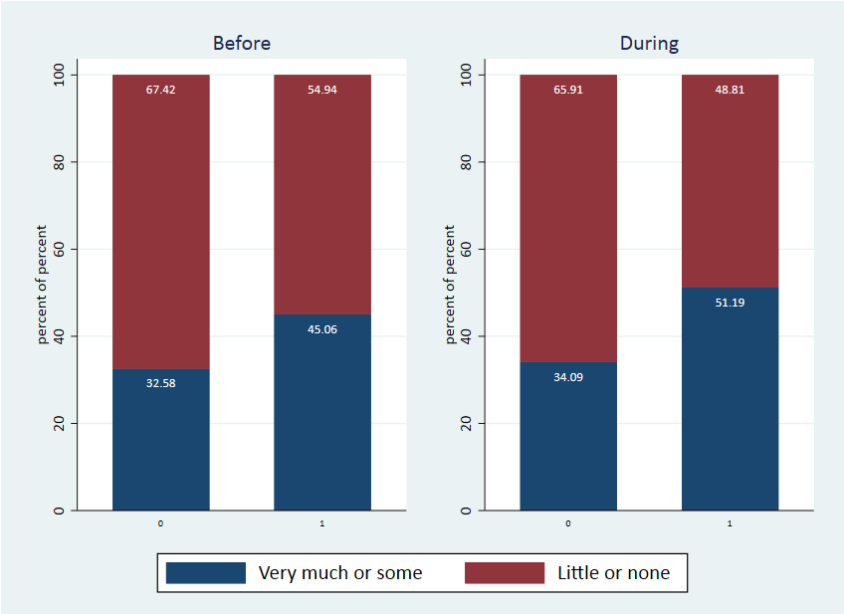
Note: Reference population values and shares are drawn from the nationally representative Time Use Survey 2013 implemented by the National Statistics Office in Argentina (INDEC). Low (high) income families are those belonging to the lowest (upper) two quintiles of the national income distribution. Income quintiles were defined according to the full sample of the Argentinean Time Use Survey.

Figure A1. Average daily hours spent on different activities, before and during lockdown, by gender and external help.



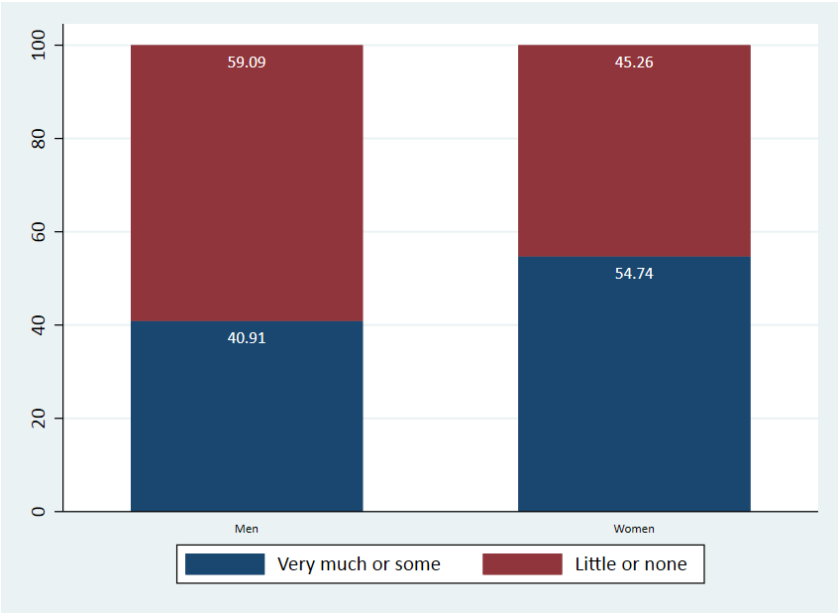
Notes: each bar represents the average hours devoted by individuals the different activities. “External help” refers to households that relied on a domestic employee to perform some household chores and/or childcare activities before the lockdown. All individuals have been included.

Figure A2. Agreement with statement “Do you find it difficult to combine paid and unpaid work?”, before and during lockdown, by gender (percentage)



Notes: each bar represents the percentage of agreement and disagreement with statement. Only individuals working during lockdown have been included.

Figure A3. Agreement with statement “During lockdown I often need to interrupt my work to attend domestic issues”, by gender



Notes: each bar represents the percentage of agreement and disagreement with statement. Only individuals working during lockdown have been included.