

Composer avec la relation famille-travail durant la pandémie de Covid-19 : domestiques familiales en région rurale au Limpopo, Afrique du Sud

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Résumé

Le travail domestique — source d'emploi majeure en Afrique du Sud — tire ses racines de l'ère coloniale et de l'apartheid, durant laquelle les femmes noires travaillaient comme domestiques pour des familles blanches. Dans L'Afrique du Sud contemporaine, par contre, le travail domestique est prévalent dans les familles noires, avec une tendance croissante au travail domestique familial, soit des parents ou amis travaillant comme domestiques pour des proches. Un défi typique du secteur du travail domestique est de composer avec les relations employeuse-employée, qui conditionnent la négociation d'autres conditions de travail. Le cadre de travail des domestiques familiales est alourdi par la pandémie et l'instauration du travail à domicile. Cet article s'appuie sur 15 entretiens semi-structurés menés auprès de femmes noires travaillant comme domestiques familiales. Les résultats suggèrent que le travail domestique familial est centré sur une sollicitude réciproque — les sœurs-domestiques (sister-maids) peuvent assurer un soutien financier à leur famille et les sœurs-patronnes (sister-madams) obtiennent de l'aide pour les travaux ménagers. La Covid-19 a toutefois eu un impact sur le travail domestique et les relations famille-travail, les sœurs-domestiques ayant des difficultés à faire leur travail en présence des sœurs-patronnes et de leurs enfants. Aussi, les sœurs-domestiques éprouvées par le travail en temps de Covid-19 adoptent le silence. La pandémie a toutefois aussi permis aux sœurs-domestiques et aux sœurs-patronnes de se rapprocher, ce qui a renforcé les relations famille-travail pour certaines.

Navigating Family–Work Relationships during Covid-19 Pandemic: Family Domestic Workers in Rural Limpopo, South Africa

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Abstract

Domestic work — one of the largest sources of employment in South Africa — is rooted in the colonial and apartheid era, during which black women worked as domestic servants for white families. In contemporary South Africa, however, domestic work is prevalent in black families, and there is a growing trend towards family domestic work: family members or close friends working as domestic workers for kin. Typical challenges in the domestic work sector include the navigation of employer–employee relationships, which shape the negotiation of other working conditions. In family domestic work, the setting is worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic and implementation of working from home. This paper draws from 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with black women working as family domestic workers. The findings suggest that family domestic work is centred in reciprocal caring — sister-maids are financially enabled to support families and sister-madams are assisted with domestic duties. Covid-19 has had an impact on family domestic work and family–work relationships, whereby sister-maids had difficulties working in the presence of sister-madams and their children. Hence, silence is adopted by sister-maids challenged by working during Covid-19. However, the pandemic also enabled some sister-maids and sister-madams to grow closer to each other, which strengthened family–work relationships.

Introduction and Background

Domestic work remains the largest source of employment and livelihoods for black women, and there are approximately 67 million domestic workers globally (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2011). The domestic work sector is a remnant of the colonial and apartheid era, whereby black women worked

as domestic servants for white families (Cock, 1989). In her book, Cock (1989) explains that during apartheid, domestic workers worked under exploitative conditions, including as long hours, low wages and verbal abuse, because the sector was not regulated by labour laws. However, the dismantling of apartheid resulted in formalization of the domestic work sector and regulation of domestic workers' conditions of work (Ally, 2009).

In post-apartheid South Africa, domestic work is considered as formal employment. Ally (2009) highlights the changes within the domestic work sector post-apartheid that turned servants into formal workers. The Department of Labour implemented and adopted the Labour Relations Act of 1995 to ensure that domestic workers have access to organizations such as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). The CCMA enables domestic workers to report unfair treatment and unfair dismissal by their employers. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) 75 of 1997 protects domestic workers' rights as employees. Meanwhile, Sectoral Determination 7 of 2002 strengthens the BCEA through regulating domestic workers' working conditions, wages, and the contractual employment relationship between domestic workers and their employers (Mbatha, 2003; Ally, 2009). Therefore, domestic workers have access to collective bargaining and unions, such as South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU), which assists with protecting and negotiating fair working conditions such as hours of work and wages (Mbatha, 2003). For instance, domestic workers' wages are regulated through the national minimum wage, implemented to assist employers with determining domestic workers' wages (Department of Labour, 2017).

Nonetheless, scholars such as Tolla (2013) and Maqubela (2016) suggest that non-family domestic workers continue to work under exploitative conditions, such as lack of access to employee benefits and long working hours. Evidently, the domestic work sector retains the same conditions even after regulation and formalization by the Department of Labour (Magwaza, 2008). The employer–employee relationship remains a debacle and perpetuates exploitation in other working conditions. Bonnin and Dawood (2013) argue that the negotiation of employer–employee relationships is problematic in terms of space, because domestic workers perform their duties in employers' private spaces [the home]. As such, it may be difficult

for both employers and domestic workers to navigate the workplace as a space for work and for a home (for the employer). However, navigation of such relationships within family domestic work, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, remains under-studied.

In post-apartheid South Africa, domestic work is prevalent in black families, and there is a growing trend of black women working as domestic workers for their relatives or close friends (Bayane, 2021; Dilata, 2010). This raises intriguing questions of how family domestic workers navigate family–work relationships during the Covid-19 pandemic, with sister-madams² working from home. The Covid-19 pandemic penetrated South Africa through the first case reported in March 2020 and a State of National Disaster being declared by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases of South Africa (NICD). On 26 March 2020 the NICD implemented a national lockdown whereby businesses and companies resorted to online operations and working from home (Bayane, 2020).

Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic ultimately changed the way of working in multiple sectors, including domestic work. It is therefore significant to explore the negotiation of family–work relations within family domestic work during the Covid-19 pandemic. The primary research question of the study was: How do black women working as family domestic workers for their relatives navigate family and work relations during the Covid-19 pandemic? To answer the question, the study employed a qualitative research approach and intersectionality as a theoretical framework to contextualize the experiences of being a family domestic worker during the Covid-19 pandemic and having sister-madams working from home.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

Intersectionality is employed as a theoretical framework and lens to understand family domestic work and experiences of family domestic workers working during the Covid-19 pandemic and how family–work relations are affected by the presence of sister-madams and children at home. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality to comprehend and unpack the experiences of women of colour. Intersectionality considers women’s experiences as contextual and shaped by multiple identities and factors, such as gender, class, race, geographical location and many more (Collins, 2000; Williams, 2009). Hence, in this paper intersectionality is

employed to understanding family domestic workers' working experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to Collins (2000), women's experiences must be unpacked through considering the intersectional oppression influenced by multiple factors and identities. In other words, the experiences of women cannot be contextualized additively, but it is imperative to understand how social identities contribute towards such experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2006). Hence, intersectionality was a suitable framework to contextualize family domestic work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Family domestic workers' experiences of working during the Covid-19 pandemic are shaped by multiple factors, such as the nature of family–work relations prior to the pandemic, the age gap between sister-maids³ and sister-madams, and sister-maids' relationships with the employers' children. Maqubela (2016) echoes that intersectionality is a suitable theoretical framework as it helps with understanding the root of domestic workers' perceptions and what contributes towards their experiences of being domestic workers.

Methodological Approach, Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This study employed a qualitative research approach to understand the perceptions and experiences of family members working as domestic workers for their relatives. The qualitative approach enabled me to gain a detailed understanding of family domestic workers' experiences and negotiation of employer–employee relationships during the Covid-19 pandemic (Creswell, 2009; Sarantakos, 2005). The site of the study was Nkowankowa, which is located in Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality, in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The site was suitable because I reside in a nearby area and, through observation, noticed the existence of family domestic work, wherein family members are hired as domestic workers by their relatives. Such family domestic workers assist with domestic duties and chores while employers are absent.

Black women hired as family domestic workers in Nkowankowa were participants in the study. All participants resided in rural areas and travelled to work in their relatives' houses in Nkowankowa. A snowball sampling technique was used to gain access to a total of 15 participants — women working as family domestic workers for their relatives. Semi-structured interviews

were conducted with participants, whereby open-ended questions were used to gain in-depth insight into experiences and perceptions of working as family domestic workers during Covid-19.

Accessing and interviewing participants was difficult due to Covid-19 restrictions. Participants were first called to set up an appointment and were promised that Covid-19 rules would be preserved during interviews. Hence, in all interviews, hand sanitizer was used and masks were given to each participant, and this eased their fear of participating in the interviews. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Institution A. Before the interviews, all participants were given information letters and consent forms to sign to confirm their voluntarily participation in the study. Interviews were conducted in Xitsonga, as participants were comfortable with their home language, and each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

Thematic content analysis was used to analyze and present data in themes and subthemes (Alhojailan, 2012). I followed the suggested steps of transcribing and translating, coding and interpretation (Rosenthal, 2016). I began with transcribing interviews verbatim from Xitsonga into English, using recordings and field notes to ensure that participants' raw meanings were captured. Coding was the second step, through reading and rereading transcripts to identify recurring themes and ideas. I then used colours to differentiate themes and subthemes. Interpretation was the final step, where I read and interpreted the themes and subthemes to address the objectives of the paper.

Findings

Domestic workers are hired to help primarily with domestic duties, such as cleaning, ironing, cooking and taking care of children and the elderly, for remuneration. In South Africa, domestic work is rooted in the colonial and apartheid period, when black women worked as domestic servants for white families. However, as mentioned above, domestic work in black families is prevalent in contemporary South Africa, and there is a growing trend of relatives such as sisters and cousins working as domestic workers for their family members (Bayane, 2019; Bayane, 2021). The working conditions of domestic workers have been debated extensively, with studies focusing on both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. For instance, Cock (1989) demonstrated that domestic workers'

working conditions were exploitative during apartheid. She suggested that conditions were exploitative because the domestic work sector was not formally regulated.

The domestic work sector was formalized during the transition to post-apartheid South Africa, and the BCEA and Sectoral Determination 7 (SD7) were adopted to regulate employer–employee relations. Furthermore, working conditions such as hours of work and wages are regulated through the national minimum wage and SD7. Tolla (2013), however, illustrates that domestic workers in post-apartheid South Africa continue to work under exploitative conditions such as long hours and are frequently paid below the national minimum wage. Negotiations over working conditions within the domestic work sector, therefore, remain a challenge. This paper addresses the lack of research in family domestic work during Covid-19 and presents findings on the situation of family domestic workers during the pandemic.

Family Domestic Work Is Reciprocal Care: “We care and support each other”

The primary reasons for black women to work as domestic workers include lack of employment and lack of the education and skills which would allow access to other employment opportunities to meet their responsibility of providing for children (Dinkelman and Ranchhod, 2012; Gama and Willemse, 2015). Therefore, non-family related domestic workers continue to work within the domestic work sector primarily to provide for their families and children (Tolla, 2013). However, family domestic work is more than work because it entails an act of reciprocal care between family members, who are helping each other to provide for families and also assist with domestic chores in absentia. Nikiwe, a 39-year-old black woman is working as a domestic worker for an elder brother and shared the following about being a family domestic worker:

Interviewer: Why did you choose to work as a domestic worker for a relative?

Nikiwe: The real reason for me to work as a domestic

worker for my brother and his wife is because I have been looking for a job for more than a year and could not find anything. Meanwhile, there is no one working at home and I have to provide for my children. Thereafter, my brother and his wife called me and explained that they need someone to help with domestic chores and proposed that I work for them since I was not employed anywhere. I then agreed to working and helping with household duties, while they pay me to provide for my children.

The story portrays how family domestic work is based on reciprocal care between sister-maids and sister-madams. Nikiwe explains that the primary reason for agreeing to work as a family domestic worker was to be able to support her children, but at the same time to help her brother's family with household duties. Nikiwe's narrative is echoed by other participants, such as Ntombi, a 40-year-old woman hired as a domestic worker by her sister:

Look, I decided to work as a domestic worker for my sister because I do not finish school which is required in most jobs nowadays. I was happy when my sister called me the other day and told me that she would like me to help with household duties and I will be paid. For me, this meant that I would be able to provide and support my family particularly and only help her with house work. So we care and support each other.

Nikiwe's and Ntombi's sentiments are supported by other participants' narratives, which confirmed that working as a domestic worker for relatives enabled them to support and provide for children. Reciprocal caring and helping each other are central in family domestic work, because sister-madams pay their sister-maids to help with household work, while sister-maids appreciate being family domestic workers as it brings food to the table for their families and children.

Being a Family Domestic Worker during the Covid-19 Pandemic: "Difficult to work in the presence of sister-madams and children"

The National State of Disaster in South Africa was declared on 15 March 2020, after a Covid-19 case was reported in early March 2020. This involved implementation of measures and levels of lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19. Business operations were affected with work being performed online from home. Hence, contextualizing family domestic workers' experiences and perceptions of working during the pandemic is imperative and contributes towards understanding the impact of Covid-19 on family-work relations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, sister-madams were also working in the home, which affected sister-maids' way of performing daily tasks. The findings suggest that family domestic workers found working during Covid-19 difficult. Norah, a 41-year-old woman, explains:

My work before Covid-19 was good, because I did my chores freely and without interference from anyone. However, the pandemic [Covid-19] came and things changed, and work became a bit difficult because I could no longer pace myself and decide on when to clean, cook or do other chores. My sister began to interfere with my work by telling me when to do what and how it should be done, which made things tense between me and her. Sometimes, we ended going for days without talking properly like before.

Norah appreciated work prior Covid-19 because she could pace herself by deciding on when and how to perform household duties. However, working in the presence of her sister-madam affected their family-work relationship because the sister-madam interfered with her way of performing work. An example is given on how the sister-madam would tell Norah when to clean and cook, which is opposite to her experiences prior to the pandemic. As a result, Norah and her sister-madam would sometimes not talk to each other due the tension resulting from her sister-madam working from home. Such sentiments are echoed by Noma, a 40-year-old woman working as a domestic worker for her sister:

I enjoyed work before the Covid-19 pandemic and

lockdown, because I worked in an empty house — with children at school and my sister at work. In that way, I worked freely and completed household duties at any time. But things are now difficult with my sister and children being at home. I am always fighting with my sister and the children because they are disturbing me from cleaning and doing other chores properly. For instance, the other day, I fought with my sister as I told children to play outside but as their mother, she told them to stay in the house. This ultimately affected our relationship as I felt undermined.

Norah's and Nomsa's narratives illustrate how the Covid-19 pandemic had a strain on the family-work relationships of sister-maids and sister-madams. Both sister-maids and sister-madams had good relationships with minimal conflicts prior to the pandemic. However, working during the pandemic changed their family-work relations as it featured arguments/conflicts between sister-maids and sister-madams. This is further echoed by Samantha, a 42-year-old woman working as a domestic worker for her brother:

Since the whole family (brother, his wife and children) began to be at home full-time, things took a wrong turn because my sister-in-law forced herself into everything I do in the house. She told me how I need to firstly clean the bathroom before the other rooms and kitchen. This made me uncomfortable and angry because I felt like a little child who does not know her job and what needs to be done. As a result, we always clashed with everything and fought almost every day.

Samantha's story echoes points articulated in Nomsa's and Norah's narratives. What is noticeable is that conflicts within family domestic work were exacerbated by the new setting [sister-madams working from home] brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. This resulted in power debacle; on the one hand, sister-maids felt threatened by their sister-madams giving instructions on how duties should be performed in the home. On the other hand, sister-madams seem to have felt compelled to reclaim their position as the employer, instead of being a relative, towards family domestic workers.

However, other factors such as the age gap between sister-maids and sister-madams, seem to have contributed towards the increased conflicts/arguments. Nyiko, a 41-year-old woman working for her younger sister, shared:

My younger sister and I almost fought the other day because she was yelling at me like a child, and I told her to let me do my work as I know, which she did not take well and told other relatives. Thereafter, we only managed to solve the problem through a family meeting with other relatives present.

Evidently, the Covid-19 pandemic affected sister-maids' and sister-madams' family–work relationships, with sister-maids being forced to change their way of performing work because of the presence and involvement of sister-madams and children. Henceforth, conflicts/arguments between sister-maids and sister-madams are noted during the pandemic, while they were not visible prior to Covid restrictions. Moreover, conflicts within family domestic work were perpetuated by factors such as age because sister-maids working for younger siblings felt disrespected and belittled when told how to perform their jobs.

Domestic workers' common challenges in the workplace include being ill-treated and verbally abused by employers. Although family domestic workers had positive experiences of working closely with their sister-madams during Covid-19, some of them experienced conflicts related to sister-madams' and children's interference with their daily work. Such family domestic workers resorted to silence and patience as a way to deal with workplace predicaments to avoid being dismissed. Silence is the strategy family domestic workers employed in dealing with the difficulty of having their sister-madams and children interfering with their daily work. Joyce, a 43 year old woman hired by her sister, narrates how she keeps quiet whenever her sister-madam (relative) becomes too involved in work:

Ever since my sister started working from home, things drastically changed as her and the children disturbed me whenever I was working. For instance, I would sometimes get indirect questions and comments from my sister on

how I clean, and in such instances, I keep quiet to avoid fights, especially in front of the children.

Joyce illustrates how working during Covid-19 was challenging in terms of the sister-madam and children interfering with her work. She therefore resorted to keeping quiet to avoid conflicts. Thus, silence was adopted as a strategy to maintain peace and preserve family–work relations between her and her sister-madam. Likewise, Nkateko, a 45 year old woman working as a domestic worker for her brother, shares how silence is employed to avoid being dismissed from work:

Covid-19 made things worse for me, as my brother's family [wife and children] were always at home and I could not do my work properly. But even though as I was told how to clean, iron and do other things, I decided to keep quiet because of not wanting to lose my job — which helped me to provide for my family.

Nkateko's and Joyce's narratives demonstrate that family domestic workers survived working during Covid-19 through being silent whenever challenges arose. In her story, Nkateko highlights how the pandemic made things worse through her sister-madam and children giving her tough time. However, she kept quiet to protect her job, which assists in providing for her family.

Covid-19 Pandemic Also Strengthened Family–Work Relationships: “We became very close”

The Covid-19 pandemic also brought positive experiences to family domestic workers, which included sister-maids and sister-madams becoming closer and caring for each other. Some of the factors which contributed towards the positive experiences involved sister-maids working for their younger siblings and having a good relationship with their sister-madams prior the pandemic. Grace, a 37-year-old woman working for a younger brother, shares her positive experience of working during Covid-19:

I was sceptical at first when my younger brother and his wife began working from home, and thought that things would be difficult in terms of being told how to do my

job. However, the opposite occurred as both my younger brother and his wife were very nice towards me, and we used every opportunity to spend more time together and advise each other about family matters and personal problems. I enjoy my work even more now.

Grace's narrative illustrates how working during the Covid-19 pandemic has borne positive fruits for her and her brother and his wife, because they became very close. This is demonstrated by Grace and her brother and sister-in-law spend time talking and advising each other on family and personal matters.

This experience is echoed by Jeaneth, a 38-year-old woman working for her younger sister:

My younger sister and I became very close during the Covid-19 because she was working from home. So we spent time talking about general things such as life, children and even work, whereby she would ask me how I find working for her and if ever there are any challenges. This practice helped us in knowing how to treat each other as employer and employee but most importantly as siblings.

Jeaneth's story supports how being a family domestic worker during the Covid-19 pandemic also resulted in sister-maids and sister-madams caring for and loving each other even more. However, the age difference between sister-maids and sister-madams also contributed towards the positive experience, because Grace and Jeaneth are working for younger siblings, who they can relate to about life and other things, unlike other participants. Moreover, sister-maids explain how they had a close family-work relations with their sister-madams [younger siblings] prior to the pandemic, and this contributed to the positive work experience. Although Covid-19 increased conflicts, sister-maids and sister-madams became very close as family members/siblings than employers-employees, as demonstrated in Jeaneth's story.

Discussion: "Being a Family Domestic Worker during the Covid-19 Pandemic"

In South Africa, domestic work is one of the largest sources

of employment, with approximately one million black women working as domestic workers (Bayane, 2021). Notably, domestic work in post-apartheid South Africa is not restricted to black women working for white families (Cock, 1989), but now includes black women working for family members as domestic workers (Bayane, 2021; Dilata, 2010). This raises questions of how work and family relations are negotiated within family domestic work (Bayane, 2021). Given the high rate of unemployment in South Africa, the lack of skills and education, and the responsibility of providing for families, women primarily resort to working as domestic workers (Phillips, 2011; Zungu, 2009; Bayane, 2019). However, we suggest that reciprocal caring and helping each other are central within family domestic work. Family domestic workers see working for their kin as a way of caring for and supporting each other, as sister-madams are assisted with domestic duties in their absence. Meanwhile, family domestic workers are enabled through wages received to financially support their families and children.

Caring within black families is rooted in the apartheid era, where family members such as aunts and uncles were exposed to the pressure of looking after children while their parents migrated to work in the city (Bozalek, 1999). Mosoetsa (2011) concurs that helping and supporting each other is normal in black families, especially during tough times, such as periods of unemployment. Likewise, family domestic work consists of relatives supporting and helping each other for survival. Thus, although family domestic work is a wage labour, it consists of humane and caring principles, unlike in non-related domestic worker and employer settings.

Since the transition to the post-apartheid era, the employee–employer relations within the domestic work sector became regulated through contractual agreements and in other formal ways (Ally, 2009; Bayane, 2019). However, negotiating formal and informal relations remains a challenge due to the dynamics of space and power (Magwaza, 2008; Tolla, 2013). Bonnin and Dawood (2013) assert that because the domestic worker’s workplace is the employer’s private home and space, balancing formal and informal relationships in non-related domestic work is challenging. Equally, navigation of family–work relationships in family domestic work, particularly during Covid-19 pandemic, became challenging for some sister-madams due to power and space dynamics. This paper suggests that sister-madams working from home demonstrated

power through being too involved in family domestic workers' daily work. As such, family domestic workers, especially ones who were older than their sister-madams, felt belittled and disrespected by the interference and disturbance of both the sister-madams and children at home: "I felt like a child, and told her to let me do my work as I know." The presence of sister-madams and children at home compromised family-work relationships as conflicts and fights arose between relatives: "We are always fighting."

Nonetheless, family domestic workers navigated the challenges of working during Covid-19 by being silent to in order to avoid risking their jobs and to maintain family-work relations. This paper illustrates how family domestic workers resorted to keeping quiet to preserve peace between themselves and sister-madams (relatives). Tolla (2013) concurs that silence is the prevalent strategy of navigating and surviving working as a domestic worker, even in non-related domestic work settings. Nevertheless, for others, the family-work relationship in family domestic work was positively affected by Covid-19. Family domestic workers commended having sister-madams working from home as it enabled a very close relationship: "[We] spend more time together and advise each other on family matters and personal problems." Such experience, however, was primarily influenced by the age gap between family domestic workers and employers. Our findings illustrate that family domestic workers working for younger employers could relate to one another and even advised each other about personal and family matters. Thus, working during the pandemic resulted in sister-maids and sister-madams becoming closer as family members/siblings, but conflicts were noted in some narratives.

This paper therefore indicates how being a family domestic worker during the Covid-19 pandemic, on the one hand, threatened family-work relations for family domestic workers whose relatives (employers) stripped them of their power to decide when and how household duties were performed. Having sister-madams (employers) working from home led to power and space debacles, as demonstrated through family/work conflicts between sister-maids and sister-madams. On the other hand, the pandemic also enabled family-work relationships because both sister-maids and sister-madams were able to spend time together and support and show care for each other.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper asserts that family domestic work is a waged labour based on reciprocal care and support between relatives as sister-maids help with domestic responsibilities, with sister-madams financially enabling family domestic workers to support their families and children. However, the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the way the sister-maids and sister-madams navigated the family–work relationship. On the one hand, being a family domestic worker during Covid-19 was difficult as employers interfered with work by giving instructions about how to complete daily tasks. As such, during the pandemic, older family domestic workers felt disrespected by employers’ and children’s involvement in their working routine, resulting in conflicts/arguments. Such family domestic workers resorted to silence to keep the peace as family members and protect their jobs as workers. On the other hand, sister-maids working for younger sister-madams commended working during the pandemic because it strengthened their family–work relationships. Sister-maids were able to engage their sister-madams in personal and familial matters. Thus, the intersectionality of power, space and age gap between sister-maids and sister-madams influenced the experiences of family domestic workers and the way the family–work relationship was navigated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This study does not generalize about family domestic work and navigation of family–work relationship during Covid-19, but contributes to research focusing on balancing family–work relations during the pandemic. Future researchers may also conduct a comparison study of how family–work relations during the Covid-19 pandemic is navigated within non-related domestic work setting, as this study was limited to family domestic work, which consists of family members working as domestic workers for their relatives. Moreover, studies can further investigate strategies adopted in non-related domestic work relationship to survive working during Covid-19 pandemic.

Endnotes

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2. Sister-madams refers to family members who hired their relatives as family domestic workers. The term madams is borrowed from Cock’s (1989) work and used during the colonial and apartheid eras to refer

to employers of domestic workers, but significantly highlighting the dominance and unequal relationship between white employers and black domestic workers.

3. Sister-maids refers to family members working as domestic workers for their relatives. Maids is traced back to Cock's (1989) work whereby during colonial and apartheid era, white employers referred black domestic workers as servants.

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