



# Social Justice in the Domestic Realm: Time Poverty and Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**ABSTRACT** *The concept of time poverty is useful for investigating the widely reported exacerbation of gender inequality in families during COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. I explore the nature and frequency of this situation in Ontario, Canada to assess domestic inequality, free time, and gendered wellbeing as issues of social justice. Between January and June, 2021, I administered online time use surveys to 100 self-identified women and 100 self-identified men who were living with a spouse and had at least one child learning remotely. The combined responsibilities for the household, childcare, and children's online learning were overwhelming for the vast majority of women. Consequently, their general experience in the context of the pandemic was one of intensified "time poverty," a condition I conceptualize as incorporating paid work, the "patriarchal dividend" in domestic task allocation, the endless nature of feminized care-related responsibilities, and women's consequent lack of recuperative leisure. I assess the nature of leisure, its importance to wellbeing, and the impact of its shortage on women's lives. Finally, I consider theories of social justice that can illuminate and rectify the imbalances entrenched in gendered divisions of labour within families. The study contributes to pandemic and time poverty literatures, and to the social justice literature by identifying time poverty as an aspect of social injustice in the pandemic context.*

**KEYWORDS** time poverty; gendered division of domestic labour; unpaid labour; COVID-19 pandemic; domestic distributive justice; leisure

## Introduction

The pressure-cooker environments created by COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in households with children present an opportunity to assess the justice of domestic task distribution. Parents needed to conform to public health measures and negotiate them in relation to the paid work of one or both partners, the loss of paid work, children's online education, preschool

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children's full-time care, the loss of paid domestic help, and the care of dependent adults. As the pandemic moved into its second year and evidence accumulated about the gendered imbalance of domestic labour resulting from these negotiations, I conceived this study to inquire into the specific conditions within families living in Ontario, Canada.

In this paper I assess the effects of Ontario's pandemic management measures on parental wellbeing and recommend policy reforms to improve family support during such emergencies in the future. Between January 30 and July 30, 2021, I surveyed 100 two-parent households (96 mixed gender; four same gender) with children learning remotely to determine domestic task distribution and time and stress allocations. The concept of time poverty allows me to quantify domestic inequality and argue for the analytical benefits of regarding discretionary time and gendered wellbeing as issues of social justice. I draw on the work of John Rawls and his feminist critics to identify the issues involved in domestic power and time use imbalances, and to provide a guide to their recalibration.

My analysis contributes Canadian data to the pandemic literature on household task distribution, the needs of children learning at home, the sheer number of hours required to keep the household running, the degree to which the labour overload cut into discretionary recuperative time, and qualitative descriptions of the limits to physical and mental coping capacity reached by household members. It also contributes to studies that assess the toll women experience as primary household caregivers, particularly during emergencies. Data on the four same-gender households add detail to the scarce pandemic literature on same-gender balancing of paid labour and unpaid domestic labour and care. Overall, time use survey data demonstrate the cumulative toll of the pandemic on parental mental health.

To capture that toll and its associated injustices, I deploy the concept of gendered time poverty, which has rarely been used in the pandemic literature. That time poverty was a significant problem for women and an occasional problem for men encapsulates how women overwhelmingly bore the brunt of pandemic restrictions. Their lives became more determined by family responsibilities and thus less flexible, but also less open to recuperative and creative periods during the day. I argue this situation is a social justice issue. As a way to think about the relationship among time, gender, and justice, my argument articulates domestic fairness, voluntarism, exigency, the character of care, free time/leisure and wellbeing.

I consider three theories of social justice to illuminate and rectify the imbalances entrenched in gendered divisions of labour in families: John Rawls's theory of distributive justice as it pertains to the family; Nancy Fraser's concept of parity of participatory; and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach to social justice. I conclude that Fraser and Nussbaum are best able to illuminate the dynamics and impacts of gendered domestic injustice, as well as of the leisure that forms the basis for recovery, societal involvement, and joy. Oriented toward social intervention, their theories are

also better able to provide justification and frameworks for state policies that support the equitable division of paid and unpaid work and household and child-rearing obligations.

I begin by establishing that the COVID-19 pandemic was a gendered phenomenon, globally and nationally. I then theorize time poverty as the product of three component elements, shedding light on its cultural depth and the importance of its shaping and constraining of women's lives. I next detail my methodology and survey findings. After outlining policy recommendations leading from my findings and discussing three theories of domestic justice that provide policy guidance, I conclude by discussing the reciprocal nature of time poverty and social justice.

### **The Gendered COVID-19 Pandemic**

The gendered nature of the pandemic has been well documented. Women, for example, filled most essential jobs, a category that incorporates all forms of care (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2018; Stevano et al., 2021). Women comprised the majority of healthcare workers (World Health Organization, 2019) and were thus disproportionately exposed to some of the pandemic's greatest health risks, work stress, and rates of burnout (Prasad et al., 2021; United Nations [UN], 2020). In both formal and informal economic sectors women occupied many of the jobs that put workers at the highest risk (ILO, 2020a; UN, 2020). The situation for domestic workers in both sectors was particularly dire (ILO, 2020b).

Flor et al. (2022) published a study of the pandemic's social, economic, and health impacts across 196 countries. They found that women suffered the most severe of those impacts across all global regions with the "greatest and most persistent gender disparities ... [being] in workforce participation and uncompensated labour" (p. 2392). Researchers expressed concern that these disparities could reverse decades of gender progress. Two years later, Saxler et al. (2024) compared young adults' perceptions of gender norms before and after the onset of the pandemic in 15 countries rated on the Global Gender Gap Index from very high (Norway) to very low (Japan). They found a small but meaningful shift from egalitarian toward traditional, and suggest that the size of the shift may be underestimated. This supports evidence of women's greater role in unpaid domestic work, and that egalitarian perceptions of domestic labour will likely be pushed further back in future global crises.

In Canada, where COVID-19 management measures were some of the most stringent across G10 countries (Razak et al., 2022), an average of 30% of paid workers worked from home between April 2020 and June 2021, up from four percent in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2021, p. 1). Those who lost employment were concentrated in the service sector (sustaining 75.6% of Canadian job losses in April 2020) (Grekou & Lu, 2021) and were thus most likely to be women. Sector exigencies and domestic demands also meant that women were

more likely to lose weekly work hours (Collins et al., 2021; Grekou & Lu, 2021; Lemieux et al., 2020) and to leave employment voluntarily to address situations at home, such as care of sick children or dependent adults (Fuller & Qian, 2021; Krase et al., 2022).

Early lockdown surveys showed that Canadians were doing well: about 80% of parents reported excellent to good mental health and good mutual support. However, half, most of whom were women, also reported being worried about the pandemic and 10% said they risked the possibility of intimate partner violence (Spinks et al., 2020, p. 2). Later surveys of domestic work distribution in Canadian households aligned them with data reported globally; women were bearing a heavier burden than their men partners. While both men and women increased time spent on household tasks, women with children were left to take what Hochschild (1989) calls a second shift (Zolondek, 2022) and even a third or fourth (Krase et al., 2022) shift to manage household maintenance, homeschooling, increased care work, and pandemic stress. Time spent on childcare alone increased 39% for both parents (Johnston et al., 2020, p. 1132; Krase et al., 2022). For the average woman, however, this ran to “nearly 50 more hours per week ... than the average man” (Johnston et al., 2020, p. 1132), primarily because the care of preschoolers and schooling at home was most likely to fall on mothers (Fuller & Qian, 2021; Kristal & Yaish, 2020). Demands were particularly onerous for young mothers and those with young children, for whom there was no respite (Collins et al., 2021; Zolondek, 2022).

### **Time Poverty and Social Justice**

The gendered nature of time poverty relates to distributive aspects of social justice and leisure time as vital to human wellbeing and flourishing. In terms of distributive justice, women’s disproportionate responsibility for household care (Cummins & Brannon, 2022; Flèche et al., 2018; Moyser & Burlock, 2018) is attributable to a “patriarchal dividend,” a “gain to men collectively from an unequal gender order” (Connell, 2011, p. 111) that is produced through the normative gendered division of labour and its inequitable material effects. The dominant framing of domestic labour as primarily women’s responsibility (Csikszentmihalyi & Graef, 1980) partially explains why the time women spend on unpaid domestic labour has not reduced as their hours of paid employment increases (Carlson et al., 2022; Cummins & Brannon, 2022; Moyser & Burlock, 2018). Men only undertake higher reward domestic tasks (e.g., child supervision, recreational activities) (Clark et al., 2021, p. 1353) and tend to settle conflicts between childcare and paid work in favour of the latter (Sevilla & Smith, 2020). Fathers also typically enjoy family leisure as a break from paid work because mothers disproportionately undertake the preparatory work for it (Firestone & Shelton, 1994). They also experience significantly more leisure than mothers, especially while their partners are engaged in

invisible domestic labour and management (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Kamp Dush et al., 2018).

These studies of domestic task distribution in mixed-gender households do not employ the concept of time poverty, although they document the condition and its gendered nature. However, scholars of time poverty apply it to describe the effects on working parents (e.g., Harvey & Mukhopadhyay, 2007; Kalenkoski et al., 2011) and women (e.g., Rodgers, 2023; Saqib & Arif, 2012) of combining paid and reproductive work. In the Canadian context, Harvey & Mukhopadhyay (2007) define time-adjusted poverty thresholds for double- and single-parent working families with school-age children and find 58% of single parents (mainly mothers) to be time poor (p. 73). Nichols (2018) finds that cultural expectations related to Pakistani-Canadian women's domestic responsibilities normalize time poverty for them, which worsens when they are full-time employees (Nichols et al., 2018).

Time poverty, originally coined by Vickery (1977) is “the chronic feeling of having too many things to do and not enough time to do them” (Giurge et al., 2020, p. 993), leaving little time for leisure or discretionary time for activities that build social and human capital (Kalenkoski & Hamrick, 2014; Williams et al., 2016). Rodgers (2023) clarifies its dynamics as “involving conflicting claims on people's limited time that restrict their freedom to allocate their time toward activities that maximize well-being” (p. 80). Studies conducted before and after the pandemic document the stresses associated with time poverty using mostly quantitative measurements (e.g., Chauhan, 2021; Giurge et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2022), although they fail to account for the time available for recuperation and the cumulative effect of time poverty on wellbeing. Time poverty induces self-neglect (Hyde et al., 2020), degrades sleep and mental health (Artazcoz et al., 2024), and reduces creativity and the quality of relationships and paid work (Giurge et al., 2020). Consequently, the gendered nature of time poverty also relates to the social justice dimension of human flourishing and its relationship to leisure.

Philosophers of leisure argue that discretionary time is key to living a good life (Bouwer & van Leeuwen, 2017; Dattilo & Lopez Frias, 2021; Mansfield et al., 2020). Scholarship on the importance of freedom from the need to work dates to ancient Greece (Dare, 1991; Sager, 2013). The Greek root of leisure is *skholē*, which translates as “a state of freedom from necessity” (Sager 2013, p. 5) or “freedom from work” (LeMoine, 2020, p. 90). Neo-Aristotelian views of leisure approach free time as opportunities to produce meaning through creative and social practices (e.g., Dattilo & Lopez Frias, 2021). Free time is crucial to human flourishing, but also to the concept of humans as thoughtful, value-driven beings. According to LeMoine (2020), “to rob human beings of leisure is to deprive them of the very thing that makes them human” (p. 90). Fancourt et al. (2021) identify over 600 pathways through which leisure builds physical and mental health.

Feminist studies since the 1980s document that women have a distinctive and often constricted experience of leisure compared to men (Henderson,

1990). Henderson (1990) documents the fragmented nature of women's leisure time as they combine it with other tasks; its lack of formal structure; its domestic nature; its importance in fostering social relationships; and its relative unavailability. Women have difficulty extracting time for themselves in a day filled with domestic and paid tasks, and unlike men they do not feel entitled to time apart from their partners (Henderson & Dialeschki, 1991).

Women's work and leisure tend to interpenetrate (Henderson, 1996), as do leisure and family time (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Firestone & Shelton, 1994). This interweaving of leisure with obligatory domestic tasks makes the common elision between leisure and free time irrelevant to most women (Aitchison, 2003). Due to time poverty, women experience few opportunities for recuperation, self-directed creation and mastery, developing social bonds, and joy that lifts the spirit (Newman et al., 2014).

As my analysis shows, most families with school-aged children during the pandemic lockdown in Ontario experienced a lack of leisure time. However, because most mothers complied with gender norms related to domestic labour and care work, their time for leisure was particularly constrained. Consequently, they suffered chronic time stress and its associated effects, which is a matter of domestic distributive justice and wellbeing.

## **Methodology**

Using a survey methodology, I examined task sharing in 200 Ontario households containing at least one child learning remotely during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. My respondent profile required participants to be a parent or guardian who lives with a spouse and had at least one child undertaking virtual school. To find such respondents, in January 2021 I posted a link to a self-administered online Qualtrics survey on a Facebook page that connects parents who had children learning remotely. I also emailed a PDF version of the survey to social media groups and organizations across the province focused on this issue. Other participants were recruited through a snowball sampling technique. I stopped recruiting when the number of respondents reached 200, split evenly between men and women. I assume that respondents are not couples because a Qualtrics survey restricts more than one response from an IP address. Privacy and security considerations made that impossible to confirm. In terms of partnership composition, 98% of both women and men respondents live in heterosexual relationships while 2% live with a same gender spouse. The majority of respondents and their spouses are between 30 and 49 years old, correlating with primary childrearing years (Table 1).

Respondents signed consent forms and completed 58 survey questions (in about 30 minutes) that explore the gendered nature of task distribution inside and outside the home before and during the pandemic, the time devoted to each task, the time spent on childcare and the support of children's at-home

schooling, and respondents' satisfaction with their and their spouse's time use before and during the pandemic. The survey also included an open-ended section respondents could use to make additional qualitative comments. Surveys were completed between January 30 and June 30, 2021, and participants received a \$10 grocery store gift card in recognition of their time.

*Table 1.* Ages of respondents and their spouses by gender (%)

Age	Respondent		Spouse	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
18-29	3	1	5	0
30-39	57	48	58	35
40-49	32	44	32	52
50-59	6	7	5	13
60 and over	2	0	0	0

Men and women respondents have a similar number of children under 18, which correlates with the national trend toward smaller families (Statistics Canada, 2018) (Table 2).

*Table 2.* Number of children under 18 (%)

Number of Children	Men	Women
1	46	35
2	34	43
3	16	17
4	4	4
5	0	1

The employment status of respondents and their spouses (Table 3) also reflects Canadian trends, with young mothers frequently leaving the workforce to attend to family at home and working part-time. Men respondents and their women spouses were more likely to have flexible work arrangements.

*Table 3.* Employment status and type per respondent and spouse by gender (%)

Employment Status	Employment of Respondent		Employment of Spouse	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Employed	91	65	92	81
Not employed	9	35	8	19
Full-time	85	45	90	69
Part-time	6	20	2	12
Flexible Work	57	39	32	49
Nonflexible Work	33	26	60	32

Four men and three women respondents indicated that they or their spouse needed to isolate during the data collection period due to a positive COVID test. This situation posed particular labour challenges resulting from their need

to isolate from the rest of the household. Time poverty increased for the healthy parent who attends to domestic labour alone. The most common sources of COVID infection were frontline work in healthcare, social work, and teaching. Seven men and six women respondents also reported that they had adult care responsibilities during the lockdown, which all but two respondents or their spouses took on themselves.

Study limitations include (a) using internet access for recruiting respondents, which relies on their familiarity with online environments and social media sites; (b) the sample size, which was constrained by research funds and the time within which funds had to be used; (c) relying on respondents' memory of pre-pandemic arrangements, which might not be accurate; (d) relying on a Facebook group for recruiting that focussed on aiding parents in distress, which may have attracted parents whose struggles were more extreme; and (e) the timing of the study. As I administered the survey, the third wave of COVID was challenging the provincial management of lockdowns and school closures. Stay-at-home orders were interspersed with rolling regional lockdowns, and students were shifting between remote learning mandates and regional schoolboard decisions to get them back into classrooms until schools finally closed until end of term (Gonzalez & MacMillan, 2021). The study period occurred 11 to 15 months after the first school closures, during which time parents may have become more organized around remote learning while their anxiety about COVID management and lockdowns intensified.

## **Results**

Study results for mixed-gender couples support those delineated in the literature on gender and time use, with household stress intensifying in the pandemic context. Women spent a considerably higher number of hours on household tasks (e.g., childcare, children's education, cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, home maintenance, landscaping) before the pandemic than men. Apart from grocery shopping, the hours women spent on domestic labour increased during the pandemic (Table 4). The toll of this increase in unpaid labour was experienced as a dearth of time for rest and leisure, and less satisfaction with the support provided by their spouse.

The daily time spent on household tasks pre-pandemic for most women (68 of 98) and almost all men (86 of 98) was "less than one" to four hours; 30% of women and 12% of men spent four to eight-plus hours (Table 4). During the pandemic, the daily time increased dramatically for both groups, but the absolute number of hours was significantly greater for women. Fifty-four percent of women reported spending four to eight-plus hours a day on household tasks, as compared to 31% of men (Table 4). In addition, women were more likely to report a full day of work (seven- to eight-hour shift or more) on unpaid labour than were men before and during the pandemic: 11%

of women and three percent of men before the pandemic; 28% of women and six percent of men during (Table 4).

*Table 4.* Hours spent by mixed-gender couples on household tasks (%) (rounded to the nearest whole number)

	< 1 hour	1 to 2 hours	2 to 3 hours	3 to 4 hours	4 to 5 hours	5 to 6 hours	6 to 7 hours	7 to 8 hours	> 8 hours
<b>Before the pandemic</b>									
Women	5	23	24	17	11	4	5	2	9
Men	11	39	22	15	4	4	1	1	2
<b>During the pandemic</b>									
Women	3	8	18	16	12	8	6	8	21
Men	7	22	22	17	15	9	2	0	6

Educating children at home involved logging onto remote learning platforms, addressing technical issues, finding supplies for activities, and meeting a range of other needs, including supplemental teaching. It fell primarily to women to add this time to their workload. Before the pandemic, support of children's education took less than one to three hours a day for 92% of women and 91% of men (Table 5).

*Table 5.* Hours spent by mixed-gender couples supporting child(ren)'s education (%)

	< 1 hour	1 to 2 hrs	2 to 3 hrs	3 to 4 hrs	4 to 5 hrs	5 to 6 hrs	6 to 7 hrs	7 to 8 hrs	> 8 hrs	NR*
<b>Before the pandemic</b>										
Women	42	40	10	2	1	1	2	0	0	N/A
Men	39	31	21	2	3	0	1	0	0	1
<b>During the pandemic</b>										
Women	2	11	24	14	12	15	9	6	7	
Men	18	20	28	16	10	2	2	2	2	

\*NR = no response

During lockdown, two percent of women and 18% of men spent less than an hour educating children at home; 36% of women and 65% of men were spending up to three hours; 26% of women and 12% of men were spending four to six hours; and 15% of women and four percent of men reported spending a full workday (seven- to eight-hour shift or more) ensuring their children were properly educated at home.

The increased time spent on household tasks and child(ren)'s education significantly increased parents' stress. When asked whether they felt overwhelmed, 80% of women and 46% of men said somewhat to significantly; 19% of women versus 52% of men said the pandemic had barely affected household activity. Gendered perceptions and material household differences could be responsible for the latter statistics. But the balance of data shows a high general toll on both parents and a greater impact on women.

This toll is reflected in the leisure or discretionary time that was available to parents, which was a problem for many of them before the pandemic. Pre-pandemic, 44% of women and 48% of men were somewhat to very satisfied with their time for leisure. During the pandemic, only 17% of women and 45% of men were somewhat to very satisfied. Indeed, 62% of women and 34% of men reported being somewhat to very dissatisfied with the time they had for themselves.

Cooperation is essential under such circumstances. Men were more likely than women to report being satisfied with their spouse's support of household labour before the pandemic; 88% and 61% respectively. During the pandemic, women's satisfaction with their spouse's contribution dropped significantly, especially in relation to that of men's, which remained stable: 87% of men were satisfied with their spouse's contribution compared to 50% of women. This finding mirrors women's and men's satisfaction with their spouses' contribution to child(ren)'s education. Before the pandemic, 94% of men were satisfied with their spouse's support, compared to 63% of women. During the pandemic, men's rate dropped to 87% and women's to 52%.

Nothing representative can be said about the two women's and two men's same-gender spousal relationship in terms of task allocation and satisfaction with partner support. However, it is noteworthy that the pandemic added enough hours of household labour to the workload of each of these four couples that they all were "somewhat overwhelmed." One couple of each gender registered a full day of domestic work and a significant need for more support.

The optional open-ended question on the survey helped provide context for respondents' accounting of time use. Twenty-six women and 14 men commented on an absolute lack of time, time fragmentation due to constant interruptions, lack of time for themselves, and feeling overwhelmed. These respondents included two same-gender households. A significant problem was remote learning, the difficulties of which varied with the number and age of children and teachers' capacity to adapt to an online learning format. A stay-at-home mother with one child reported having "to be there at all times":

Lots of supplies needed with no notice. Lots of running around. Very little time to breathe or complete any other household tasks. Majority of her education falls on me. Understandably, as I am the one at home. However, the constant demands of the school day leave little time to do the meal planning, cleaning, other scheduling. I could use help keeping up with the housework that falls behind, but it doesn't happen.

A woman working full-time with two children in remote learning agrees that "it's very challenging juggling a full-time demanding job and focusing on our kids' education. A lot of running back and forth making sure everyone is on task."

A women respondent who has three children (two learning remotely and one with a learning disability) and works full-time describes her coping limit:

Impossible to homeschool and work full time. No resources in place for child with learning disability. Online school is not a viable option for younger kids who don't understand how to use computer. They lack focus. I'm burnt out. My husband's life has been impacted minimally. I'm left to figure out everything and take care of everyone and work full time.

Another mother with a same-gender spouse and five children learning remotely reflects on the pandemic's impact on her health and free time, contending that:

Before the pandemic, we both helped out with household tasks... [now] I feel that I am doing the majority of all chores, cooking, cleaning, helping with schoolwork, organizing assignments and due dates, making meals and snacks for the kids, and still trying to look presentable. My mental health is crashing to an all-time low and this is not sustainable.

A father of four in a same-gender partnership asserts that, "from extra meals to learning supervision and support there is less time in the day to do much else." Another father of four children who are learning remotely describes the pressures his wife faces: "my wife had a mental breakdown due to overwhelming demands on her for housework, children's education, being in school full time herself."

## **Discussion**

The severity of the work overload and time deficits brought on by Ontario's prolonged 2021 COVID-19 lockdowns is demonstrated both qualitatively and quantitatively in this study data. Parents with children in school were already pressed for time before the pandemic; less than half were satisfied with their leisure time. They were confronted with unfamiliar constraints during the pandemic and required to do more additional work than most could manage. Sixty-two percent of women and 34% of men in mixed-gender relationships were somewhat to very dissatisfied with the time they had for themselves; 80% of women and 46% of men felt somewhat to significantly overwhelmed. These data add to the Canadian and international literatures on the pandemic that document its challenges and disproportionate burden on women. Reframing women's pandemic time deficits as time poverty demonstrates the patriarchal advantage that associates women with reproductive labour, with effects on women's diminished time for recovery through leisure, their physical, psychological, and social wellbeing, and domestic injustice.

Respondent experiences reflect the dynamics of time poverty worldwide. Time poverty is typical for couples with exceptional workloads at home (e.g., more children, remote learning, adult care, special needs care), particularly when these workloads are combined with schooling or paid work. It can be a problem even in households in which gender disparity is not an issue (Craig & Churchill, 2021). However, time poverty poses a particular problem for women

with men spouses. My findings demonstrate that women in every circumstance spend more time on domestic tasks and children's education, and men are far more likely to be satisfied with that situation than are women with the time their men spouses devote to this work. Thirty percent more women than men struggled to manage the lockdowns; 46% of women versus 17% of men in mixed-gender relationships felt completely overwhelmed. A contributing stress factor in 13 households was the care needs of dependent adults. This care was provided in all but two households by the respondent or their spouse, and although the gender of the carer was not always recorded, it was most likely to be a woman (Graham, 2022; Nussbaum, 2000).

The twin side of time poverty is a paucity of leisure. Without sufficient time for recovery, the stress experienced by working parents accumulates (Håkansson et al., 2016). Sleep is difficult, physical health is neglected, creativity is degraded, and relationships and mental health break down. For 34% of women respondents, lack of time apart from work was a serious problem; for the 46% who were completely overwhelmed, leisure time was critical.

The hardships highlighted by this study suggests the need for a realignment of gendered domestic responsibilities and policy change. I discuss here the most straightforward first step of policy change and leave the more challenging and long-term strategy of achieving domestic justice through a reshaped gendered division of labour to the following section. The pandemic laid bare a widespread need for family support from all levels of government. Following Fortier (2020) and Heilman et al. (2020), that support should include: (a) federal childcare assistance, including adequate paid parental leave, affordable childcare, and emergency childcare funds during personal and natural disasters; (b) nationally-mandated improvements to the conditions of part-time and precarious employment, including advance releases of work schedules, supports for transition to full-time employment, and access to social supports like Employment Insurance; (c) pay structures that limit the gender wage gap across all labour market sectors; (d) workers' access to sick and family leave, irrespective of their status and position in the labour market; and (e) the legal recognition of care work as work so it can be accounted for in workers' benefits and pensions. To improve future disaster planning and emergency responses, we need a better understanding of a requisite baseline level of household support, and processes and difficulties associated with remote learning, which can be delineated through research on gendered household task time and allocation that specifically references time poverty. Longitudinal analyses of the transition to post-pandemic conditions containing rich qualitative data on gendered time use is also required. In the remaining paper section, I turn to three theories of distributive justice that provide guidance for redistributing power, unpaid labour, and leisure time in the domestic realm to achieve greater gender justice.

### Conceptualizing Domestic Justice

John Rawls's (1971) theory of justice focuses, in part, on distributive relations between men and women within the household. However, the family sits uneasily in his distinction between public "basic structure" and the voluntary organizations of private civil society. It – "monogamous, heterosexual, or otherwise" (Rawls, 1997, p. 788) – is among society's key public institutions, while simultaneously also forming part of the private realm. Individuals in both spheres use their rational capacity to pursue goods of their choice, but the family is unhindered by the coercive power of the state (Rawls, 1997, p. 50; Young, 2004, p. 3). Consequently, Rawls does not "consider the justice of institutions and social practices generally [as the principles of justice] may not work for the rules and practices of private associations" (Rawls, 1971, pp. 7-8).

The inconsistent application of the principles of distributive justice across spheres demonstrates Rawls's blindness to the power relations, including "sex role socialization," that prevent liberal pluralism from achieving the equality it seeks (Okin, 1989, 1994). In cleaving public from private, women are situated in the private realm, without recourse to the principles of distributive justice, thereby entrenching their inequality. Patriarchy so established in the private realm increases the difficulty of eliminating it in the public realm.

Feminist response to Rawls takes two forms (Abbey, 2013). First, many, like Lloyd (1994), resolve Rawls's justice inconsistency across spheres by demonstrating the family's public aspect and responsibilities that qualify it for his principles of distributive justice, as he later acknowledged (Rawls, 1997). This position underpins such policies as "equal access to equally good jobs, which would require public or publicly subsidized provision of adequate childcare, flex time, and family leave... [and the requirement for employers] to split paychecks between employees and their homeworking spouses" (Lloyd, 1994, pp. 1331-1332). McKeen (2006) also points out that economic penalties involved with divorce can be resolved using Rawls's difference principle.

Second, unpersuaded by the value of Rawls's theory of distributive justice (and its later clarification) for resolving gender inequality in the family, other feminists argue that it ignores the processes that entrench patriarchy and undercut women's autonomy and choice within families. If the domestic sphere, as Rawls argues, is ostensibly characterized by relations of love, trust and fair play, then why are they rarely exercised in negotiations over who does what and when? Nancy Fraser's theory of justice addresses this oversight by foregrounding principles of justice (recognition and redistribution) that are focussed on "parity of participation" across "a multiplicity of interaction arenas, including labour markets, sexual relations, family life, public spheres, and voluntary associations in civil society" (Fraser, 2001, p. 11). Parity is a process of self-determination whereby individuals secure "reflexive, collective, democratic and dialogical control over the forces that surreptitiously affect their lives" (Ferrarese, 2014, para. 46). Women and men should enjoy

parity of participation in relation to paid and unpaid labour in the home, which entails men adopting and valuing women's current domestic burdens, including care work. Parity of participation also entails eliminating institutionalized distributive disparities in wealth, income, and leisure time and providing equal opportunity "for achieving social esteem" (Fraser, 1996, p. 54).

Robeyns (2003) critiques Fraser's notion of participatory parity and its implications for distributive justice in the domestic realm for including "those capabilities that are the *doings* of people, and not their *beings*" (p. 17, emphasis added), which excludes people with disabilities and those who cannot fully function due to their life circumstances. Martha Nussbaum's (2000) capability approach more fully attends to the "idea of truly human functioning" (p. 13). Nussbaum (2000) proposes 10 "central human functional capabilities" (pp. 78-80): life; bodily health and integrity; senses, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's political and material environment. Her view that capabilities are multiple, irreducible, and universal and necessary to the flourishing of life in contexts of power is an intersectional approach to wellbeing in which processes that limit these human capabilities are rendered unjust and the focus of social governance.

Fraser and Nussbaum develop richer theories of the structures that stabilize women's subservience in the family and of domestic justice than does Rawls. Both concern themselves with women's full social participation and expression of human capacity across social spheres. And both advocate for the equitable gendered distribution of domestic labour, paid work, and leisure, which leads to maximizing opportunities for economic equality and eliminating the patriarchal dividend. In terms of the argument I develop here, they collectively support an agenda for domestic justice that rectifies patriarchal privilege in the household by simultaneously improving women's economic situation and ameliorating their inequitable share of domestic burdens at home (Breen & Cooke, 2005), which will have beneficial effects on women's time poverty and overall wellbeing. I conclude by reflecting on the social justice implications of gendered time poverty.

## **Conclusion**

This study addresses the wellbeing of Ontario parents with children learning at home during the province's 2021 COVID-19 lockdowns. The results mirror those detailed in the wider pandemic literature: many parents were overwhelmed with the increase in domestic labour and mothers carried the greater burden, resulting in significantly more unpaid hours of work and severe time stress or time poverty. I clarify the structures that uphold women's time poverty – patriarchal privilege, the normative association of women with caregiving, the generative capacity of discretionary time – and argue for an

expanded understanding of time poverty and its framing as an issue of distributive justice.

In household situations that require high levels of care, time poverty is the result of women's conscientious adherence to gender norms. Time poverty objectifies patriarchal advantage in the domestic realm, illuminating the urgency of change, and adding weight to feminist critiques of liberal theories of justice. Rawls's notion of a maximally just liberal pluralism fails to contend with the self-sacrifice required of women caregivers. Time poverty places such pressure on women in the private realm, and such limits to the scope of their participation in the public realm, as to obviate a "world in which [citizens], as free and equal, can cooperate with others" (Rawls, 1993, pp. 50-51). Although it can be a recurring problem in households where parity between partners is held as a good, time poverty is an intransigent problem in households where, on cultural or religious principle, it is not (Nichols, 2018). Policy that intends to promote and support women's equal participation in the public realm will fail unless it simultaneously addresses their time poverty and the gender norms that structure interactions between partners in the private realm.

Fraser's framework of equalizing self-determination through parity of participation across social spheres rests on the wholesale dissolution of gender norms. Nussbaum's capabilities approach foregrounds human functional capabilities that define the flourishing of a human life and set parameters for the comparative assessment of wellbeing. Because she developed this list of capabilities to reimagine, revitalize, and empower the lives of women constrained by poverty and unequal gender norms, her work is particularly salient for time use studies that lay bare the life sacrifices women make resulting in significant time stress. Full expression of each capability demands and creates a fulfilling life balanced between necessary work and discretionary time.

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