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The Reshaping of Daily Time during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lone Parent's Work-Family Articulation in a Low-Intensity Lockdown

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions have triggered simultaneous changes across multiple life domains within a very short timeframe. This major shock has seriously challenged the ability of families to adapt to unanticipated changes over which they had little control. Switzerland instigated a low-intensity lockdown in response to COVID-19 in the spring of 2020. The resulting alterations to family life included changes to employment situations and working conditions (such as layoffs, temporary unemployment and home-based work) and the need to arrange home-schooling and childcare. This study examines how a sample of individuals with a trajectory of lone parenthood living in French-speaking Switzerland adapted their everyday lives to accommodate the shifting demands in the domains of employment and family responsibilities. Interviews were conducted between April and June 2020 for the longitudinal project “The multiple paths of lone parenthood”. Using this data, we analysed the COVID-related changes to work and family life, focusing on their time structuring. We found that parents who remained employed faced the greatest time pressures, although their experiences varied significantly depending on the adaptability of their work schedules, as well as the child(ren)'s age(s) and degree of autonomy. Home-based work and home-schooling resulted in more flexible schedules, although parents with the greatest work and family demands sought more time-structured organisation to facilitate their articulation. Social support was a crucial buffer for parents with conflicting demands across domains.

Keywords: COVID-19; lockdown; everyday time; life domains; work-family articulation; lone parenthood; home-based work; home-schooling; resilience



Citation: Sánchez-Mira, Núria, Laura Bernardi, Benjamin Moles-Kalt, and Cléolia Sabot. 2021. The Reshaping of Daily Time during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lone Parent's Work-Family Articulation in a Low-Intensity Lockdown. *Social Sciences* 10: 239. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10070239>

Academic Editor: María José González

Received: 21 February 2021

Accepted: 17 June 2021

Published: 23 June 2021

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived unexpectedly and spread rapidly across the globe, affecting countries and populations to different degrees. The consequences were a major shock to individual lives and social organisation. The pace at which these unravelled and their simultaneous impact on multiple domains of life (such as health, employment, family, social relationships) was unprecedented. The multifaceted crisis triggered by the pandemic will likely extend beyond the short-term effects we are still perceiving into longer-term vulnerability processes. Therefore, research on the individual and collective capacity for resilience in this context is crucial.

Under this frame, our article analyses how families have adapted to the sudden, multidimensional changes in their daily lives caused by the pandemic, focusing on a sample of individuals with a trajectory of lone parenthood living in French-speaking Switzerland. Switzerland underwent a relatively mild form of lockdown in response to COVID-19 in the spring of 2020, with no strict home confinement. The main alterations to family life involved changes in the employment situations and working conditions of adult household members (i.e., layoffs, temporary unemployment, home-based work), as well as the need to arrange home-schooling and childcare due to school closures.

Numerous studies have examined the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on time devoted to employment, divisions of housework and childcare, and perceptions of work-family conflict in both individuals and standard two-parent families (Andrew et al. 2020; Craig and Churchill 2020; Collins et al. 2020; Del Boca et al. 2020; Qian and Fuller 2020; Shafer et al. 2020; Schieman et al. 2021). However, there has been little research into the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of family diversity (Lebow 2020) and lone parents in particular (Iztayeva 2021). This is surprising given the higher vulnerability of lone parents and their greater dependence on formal and informal support (Balaji et al. 2007; Harknett 2006) to enable them to manage work and family responsibilities (Ciabattari 2007; Cook 2012). Hence, these families may have experienced more challenges adapting to changes in employment and schooling triggered by the pandemic, particularly in light of the contextual limitations on social interaction (and hence social support). At the same time, individuals with a trajectory of lone parenthood may be more resilient to family-related stressors, having already weathered the critical life transition of becoming the sole or primary caregiver and, often, economic provider for their child(ren). We address this gap in the literature by looking at the experience of families with a trajectory of lone parenthood in Switzerland during the first wave of the pandemic. The main goal of this study is to address how lone parents adapted their everyday organisation to accommodate the shifting employment demands and family responsibilities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We analyse whether COVID-related restrictions resulted in changing time pressures and different degrees of temporal structuring for these parents.

A brief example will illustrate the relevance of looking at non-standard family arrangements to capture the effects of COVID-19 on work-family conflict and the temporal organisation of everyday life. Gisela is employed at 80 percent of full-time hours in the professional services sector and a part-time student. She is also a mother of two children aged 11 and 13, and moved in with her latest partner after more than 5 years as a lone parent and other non-successful relationships. Gisela had to change to working from home due to the pandemic, while at the same time her children's school closed. Under this new configuration, she struggled to combine her work, her studies and home-schooling her children, particularly the younger child, who had some behavioural issues. At the same time, her children could not visit their father because his new partner is at-risk for COVID-19. Hence, they were constantly under her care, which further increased Gisela's burden. Gisela had already struggled to combine her precarious and unstable work trajectory and the care of her two toddlers after the separation from their father in 2010. Given that father's irregular financial contribution, she was forced to maintain a high employment rate while being the primary caregiver for the children. With COVID-19, she needed to cope once more with sudden, heightened work-family conflicts. She managed to do so by effortfully implementing a certain degree of time structuring and routine. However, this time she could also count on the crucial support with childcare and home-schooling from her current partner.

Gisela's story introduces two main questions about lone parent's work-family articulation during the pandemic that we aim to explore: (1) to what extent the pandemic's conditions resulted in a decreased structuring of schedules and increased conflict between work and family demands in terms of time pressures; (2) whether reorganisations of everyday life involved compensatory processes between these life domains and parents' attempts to provide time structuring and routine to new arrangements. Gisela's case also illustrates the factors that may have contributed to mitigating or heightening time pressures and affected the reorganisations of daily time. These include the extent of work demands, the children's degree of autonomy with home schooling, relationship status, child physical custody arrangements and available social support.

Gisela's case comes from the project "The multiple paths of lone parenthood" which has been following the trajectories of lone-parent families in Switzerland since 2012–2013. The fourth wave of fieldwork for this project included semi-structured interviews with the parents, conducted in spring 2020, as a first set of restrictions was being gradually lifted.

The families in the sample had all transitioned to lone parenthood before 2012–2013, so had histories of coping with stressors and may have built up resilience over time. The specificity of the sample presented a unique opportunity to analyse the coping mechanisms and resilience strategies of these families.

Sections 2 and 3 present the theoretical background and the specificities and timing of the restrictions implemented in Switzerland during the first wave of the pandemic. We then introduce the empirical data sources and the data collection process during the project's COVID-19 wave. Section 5 provides a brief descriptive overview of how our sample was affected by changes in employment, family responsibilities and social support during the pandemic. Then, in Section 6, we analyse how these shifting demands were linked to temporal pressures and a reorganisation of everyday life and its temporal structuring, by categorising the diversity of situations in our sample. In Section 7, we discuss increased time pressures and loosened structures during the pandemic as potential sources of vulnerability for parents in light of our findings. We also outline study limitations and future research directions.

2. Theoretical Background

Our theoretical framework mobilises a life course perspective, in which the multidimensionality of the life course is a central tenet, according to which life domains are seen as inherently interdependent. We also draw on a long tradition of studies analysing the role of employment and schooling in the structuring of everyday life and the effect of this on well-being. The original contribution of the paper lies in integrating both theoretical lenses to study the experiences of families with a lone parenthood trajectory in the specific context of shifting conditions for everyday life created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1. Conflicts and Compensations across Life Domains

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to simultaneous and unforeseen changes across multiple life domains (such as health, employment, education and training, family and migration) over a very short timeframe. The life course perspective emphasises the interdependence of different life domains. The resources and actions in one domain are interrelated with actions and resources available in other domains, with spill-over effects across domains particularly in relation to critical life transitions (Bernardi et al. 2019).

Spill-over processes and incompatibilities have been widely studied for the work and family domains (Hanappi et al. 2017; Craig and Sawrikar 2009; Grotto 2015; Schieman and Glavin 2008; Tammelin et al. 2017; ten Brummelhuis and Bakker 2012). These studies have shown how critical life events, such as the arrival of a child, trigger adaptations to the gender division of domestic work and to parents' employment arrangements. In such cases, changes in one domain spill over to other domains, and are likely to be anticipated and controlled, at least to some extent. While this literature has focused on the level of individual transitions, the COVID-19 pandemic brings to the foreground the intersection of individual trajectories and exogenous shocks. Moreover, the pandemic is specific in that it has provided very limited capacity for anticipation and control over the timing and development of simultaneous changes in multiple domains. Hence, the resilience of individuals and families in adapting to these unexpected, exogenous and multidimensional changes has been seriously challenged.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on multiple life domains, including social relationships, leisure, migration, mobility and health; especially, but not exclusively, for those who have suffered from the virus or were at risk (Settersten et al. 2020). However, in this paper, we concentrate on employment and family. Our interest is in the adaptations made by families to the organisation of everyday activities in response to changes to employment and schooling. The articulation of work demands and family responsibilities is central to the structuring of everyday life in contemporary Western societies (Saraceno 1986). During the pandemic, this centrality is likely to have gained even more salience

for employed parents with school-aged children—which is the case of our sample, as the demands of home-schooling shook families' everyday organisations.

Time is a finite resource, which means that activities pertaining to different life domains are likely to compete for it, causing trade-offs in its allocation. Time pressures for lone parents are already high in ordinary circumstances (Strazdins et al. 2016). In the context of pandemic-induced increases to family demands due to school closures, such incompatibilities between life domains are likely to have shown corresponding increases, causing greater time pressures, particularly for those who remained employed. However, the age and related degree of autonomy of children can be expected to have affected how the burden of home-schooling was perceived by parents.

The interdependence of life domains also allows the possibility of compensatory processes between them. Adaptations in the employment domain may have compensated for the increases in family demands; for instance, in the form of reduced working hours, structuring of work around home-schooling, or permeable boundaries across domains. The implementation of one or other of these strategies is likely to depend on the amount of flexibility offered by employers.

Finally, social support may have acted as a buffer against increased time pressures. Our analysis focused on instrumental support, in particular, help with housework, childcare and home-schooling, as this kind of support is most directly related to the organisation of everyday life. While we know that, ordinarily, help with childcare is crucial for lone mothers to sustain employment (Ciabattari 2007; Cook 2012), severe restrictions to social interaction may have limited the availability of this kind of support in the context of the pandemic.

2.2. *The Temporal (Re)Structuring of Everyday Life*

A long tradition of studies since the classic research on Marienthal (Jahoda et al. [1933] 2002), has shown that employment is a fundamental contributor to time structuring and provides purpose to everyday life, resulting in decreased psychological wellbeing for those out of work (Demazière and Zune 2019; Paul and Moser 2009; Wanberg et al. 1997; Waters and Muller 2003; Zuzanek and Hilbrecht 2019). In the Marienthal community (Jahoda et al. [1933] 2002), which experienced mass unemployment when a large local textile factory closed down, loss of temporal references was especially true for men. Meal preparation and school schedules were a greater source of structure for women, who were responsible for getting younger children ready for school.

A parallel can be drawn between the Marienthal study and our research into the effects of the COVID-19 situation, since both samples were unexpectedly affected by an external and sudden shock with important implications for everyday organisation. However, pandemic-related restrictions did not affect all the (employed) population in the same way, and the need to organise home-schooling is also a specific characteristic of the COVID-19 context. Based on the findings of previous research, we expected school closures and changes into situations of non-work (unemployment, work leave for at-risk individuals) to have caused a loosening of temporal organisation and routines. Research has also shown that the way in which increased leisure time is experienced and used may vary significantly depending on whether or not the situation has arisen by choice, and whether it lasts for a shorter or longer time period (Zuzanek and Hilbrecht 2019; McKee-Ryan et al. 2005). Hence, we expected experiences of the period to vary significantly between those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic with poor employment prospects and those who were on leave but knew they would be resuming their positions in the short term. Research has also shown that maintaining some degree of time structuring helps the unemployed cope better with their situation and predicts higher psychological well-being (McKee-Ryan et al. 2005). Therefore, exploring whether non-working parents had other factors that contributed to the structuring of their time is relevant to understanding whether this may have helped mitigate the potential effects of vanishing work schedules.

Home-based work favours time flexibility and can create a blurring of boundaries across life domains, especially for women (Fonner and Stache 2012; Hilbrecht et al. 2008). Therefore, we expected the temporal organisation of parents who started working from home to be less structured than before the pandemic, although still more structured than for parents who stopped working. The sudden loss of structure and routine from employment may have been a stressor for families, especially those needing to simultaneously adapt to the organisation of home-schooling. At the same time, increased flexibility of employment schedules may have facilitated compensating for greater family demands for some parents, so it may have been perceived as positive. Hence, an open question was the extent to which non-employed parents may have attempted and managed to regain a part of the time structure lost due to the diminished role of work and school schedules.

In short, the main goal of this study was to address how individuals with a trajectory of lone parenthood adapted the organisation of their daily lives to accommodate shifting employment demands, working conditions and increased childcare responsibilities resulting from school closures and potential changes in physical custody arrangements. In this endeavour, we took a twofold perspective. On the one hand, we viewed changes in the domains of employment and family as external constraints that may have impinged upon the families' organisation of daily life. From this point of view, we analysed whether COVID-related restrictions resulted in a decreased structuring of everyday schedules and/or increased time pressures. However, parents are agents who shape strategies of work-family articulation and set boundaries across the two domains (Moen et al. 2013; Young and Schieman 2018). Under this perspective, we examined parents' adaptations to such changes, whether they involved compensations between the work and family domains, the extent to which parents had attempted to restructure time, whether time structuring was perceived as a constraint or a desired goal and in which situations it was more or less sought after and achieved. In doing so, we considered factors that may have contributed to mitigating or heightening time pressures and affected the reorganisation of daily time, namely: whether parents were working, whether they were working on-site or from home, their working hours, the degree of job flexibility and the intensity of job demands; the schooling situation, child(ren)'s age(s) and related level(s) of autonomy and whether parents received social support.

3. Context

In Switzerland, the first detected case of COVID-19 was declared on 25 February 2020, marking the beginning of unprecedented measures to restrict private and public life to control the spread of the virus. While recommendations for social distancing and bans on major events were already established in February, most country-wide restrictions were implemented three weeks later, on 17 March 2020, with the "Extraordinary Situation" declaration of the Swiss Federal Council. The decision represented an exceptional resolution in a federal country wherein the governance of public health commonly falls to cantonal authorities.

The declaration entailed the closure of all educational establishments, including nurseries and day-care centres, as well as all non-essential retail, bars, restaurants and other entertainment establishments. Although people were advised to stay at home, federal authorities did not impose an official state of lockdown. Working from home was encouraged but not enforced, and people were free to move around outdoors without masks, conditional upon respecting distances between people and gathering in groups of no more than five people. Restrictions on mobility included a partial border closure since March 13th. During the period of school closures, a minimum childcare service—known as "service d'accueil minimum" (henceforth SAM)—was set up in schools and some day-care centres. The service was reserved for children whose parents worked in essential sectors.

Most of these measures were in place for six weeks, and restrictions were gradually lifted from 27 April 2020. Teaching in primary and lower-secondary schools resumed on 11 May 2020, although in alternating groups. The resumption of classroom teaching in

upper secondary and tertiary education was delayed and varied notably between cantons and municipalities. Most non-essential commerce also reopened on 11 May, as did bars and restaurants, with certain restrictions. The state of necessity was lifted on 19 June 2020, and most of the remaining measures were lifted on 22 June 2020. Thereafter, the cantons regained most of their responsibilities regarding public health matters and specific measures were implemented at the cantonal level.

The measures implemented in Switzerland were less restrictive to mobility than those in neighbouring countries, with greater reliance on recommendations than formal bans or interdictions. Hence, Swiss families are likely to have experienced the first wave of the pandemic somewhat differently from families in other countries. For instance, the lack of limitations on mobility while schools were closed presented opportunities for parents to engage in outdoor activities with their children. Children of separated or divorced parents may have experienced less disruption to visitation and shared custody arrangements. At the same time, border control may have been a more critical circumstance in a country where cross-border residence is not uncommon for children of complex families. On the negative side, the fact that the measures relied heavily on individual responsibility may have created a burden and a sense of disorientation in many people. This added to the uncertainty generated by the short-term governmental decisions and frequent changes to rules and recommendations.

4. Data and Methods

We drew the data for this study from the fourth wave of the qualitative longitudinal research project “The multiple paths of lone parenthood” which has been studying the life trajectories and experiences of lone-parent families in French-speaking Switzerland for almost a decade. The project initially interviewed forty participants who were in a situation of lone parenthood in 2012–2013, and the same parents have been followed up at intervals of two to three years since that time, with the fourth wave of fieldwork taking place in spring 2020. With the onset of the pandemic, we adapted the design for this fieldwork to address the effects of the partial lockdown on the lives of the families in our sample. The interviews were conducted between April and June 2020, when most restrictive measures were still in place or gradually being lifted.

In this fourth wave of the project, the remaining sample consisted of 26 parents (24 mothers and two fathers). Participants had made the transition to lone parenthood between one and five years prior to 2012–2013, when the first wave of the project was conducted. Therefore, at this stage of the project, much had happened in the lives of these families, transforming our initial sample of lone parents into a more heterogeneous group. The sample now included a few stepfamilies and blended families: three parents had re-partnered and had another child (one having separated again since, another was not residing with the child’s father); three parents were cohabiting with new partners and the child(ren) from their previous partnership; one parent was cohabiting with the father of the child; seven had re-partnered but were not cohabiting; and thirteen were still lone parents who had not re-partnered (see Table 1 for a summary of sample characteristics). Therefore, at the fourth wave of the project, most of our sample (21 of 26) was still composed of lone parents, who were either not in a partnership or who were not cohabiting with their new partners.¹ The ages of the children in our families also reflected the complexity of family trajectories. These ranged from a four-month-old infant in one of our blended families to a 23-year-old, with the large majority (27 of 37) of children being between 10 and 16 years old.

Table 1. Sample characteristics and changes in main life domains triggered by the pandemic.

No.	Pseud.	Age of Children	Type of Job (Last Job If Unemployed)	Employment Situation (Before COVID-19) *	Change in Employment Situation (with COVID-19)	Schooling Situation during COVID-19	Relationship Status	<i>De facto</i> Physical Custody (before COVID-19)	Changes in <i>de facto</i> Physical Custody (with COVID-19)	Social Support with Childcare or Schooling (by Whom)
1	Sylvie	10	Extra-curricular school service employee	Employed 40%	On leave due to COVID-19 (service interrupted)	Home-schooling	No partner	Sole custody	No change	No support
2	Antoinette	20 and 23	Social Worker	80% fixed-term contract (six months)	Fixed-term contract not renewed due to the pandemic	No home-schooling to manage (younger child not in school; older child's schooling interrupted)	No partner	Sole custody	No change	No support
3	Arthur	10 and 12	Public administration professional	Employed 100%	Sick leave due to COVID-19 (at-risk)	Home-schooling	No partner	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	No change	No support
4	Martine	10 and 16	Social Worker	Unemployed and under social assistance	No change	Home-schooling	No partner	Formal shared custody of both children, but she sees little of the older child	No change	No support
8	Béatrice	14	Director of environmental sector organisation	Sick leave (previously 70%)	No change	Home-schooling	No partner	Sole custody	No changes	Institutional (lunch for child at school twice a week)
9	Gisela	11 and 13	Consultant	Employed 80%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	Re-partnered, cohabiting	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	Interruption of visitation arrangements	Current partner, family, children's father
11	Marie-Jo	3 and 12	Executive Assistant in the education sector	Employed 90%	Home-based + on-site work	Home-schooling	Remarried, had a second child, and separated again	Sole custody of older child + primary custody of younger child with visitation arrangements	No change	Family
14	Viviane	14	Teacher	Employed 50%	Home-based work + sick leave	Home-schooling	No partner	Sole custody	No change	Family
15	Judith	18 and 20	Project Manager in the IC sector	Employed 100%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	No partner	Sole custody	No change	No support
16	Tania	9	Administrative Manager in public administration	Employed 100%	Home-based + on-site work	Home-schooling + SAM	Re-partnered, not cohabitating	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	No change	Child's father
18	Rachel	16	IC sector professional	Employed 70%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	Re-partnered, not cohabitating	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	Interruption of visitation arrangements	No support
19	Leila	4 and 12	Public service professional	Employed 90%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	Re-partnered, cohabiting, child with new partner	Primary custody for other parent with visitation arrangements for older child	Interruption of visitation arrangements	No support—Loss of grandparent support
20	Aline	13 and 16	Psychotherapist	Self-employed	Interruption of activity due to sanitary measures	No home-schooling to manage (children temporarily with father)	Re-partnered, not cohabitating	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	Sole custody of other parent with visitation arrangements	No support
22	Vanina	16	Educator	Employed 90%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	No partner	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	Interruption of visitation arrangements	No support
23	Delia	16	Dental Hygienist	Sick leave (previously employed with fluctuating%)	Inability to return to work due to COVID-19 (at-risk)	Home-schooling	No partner	Sole custody	No change	No support
24	Léonie	7	Director of Service in health sector	Employed 80%	On-site work	SAM	Re-partnered, cohabiting	Sole custody	No change	Current partner—loss of grandparent support
25	Anouk	11	Social Worker	Employed 80%	Home-based work + reduced hours	Home-schooling	No partner	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	Interruption of visitation arrangements	No support
26	Natacha	12	Psychologist	Employed 80%	Home-based + on-site work	Home-schooling + SAM	Re-partnered, not cohabitating	Shared custody	No changes	Current partner
27	Alizée	newborn and 16	Secretary in healthcare sector	Employed 60%	Maternity leave + On-site work	No home-schooling to manage (children not in education)	Re-partnered, had a second child with her new partner, not cohabitating	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	Interruption of visitation arrangements	No support
28	Paule	13	Executive Assistant	Employed 90%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	Re-partnered, not cohabitating	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	No change	Child's father—loss of grandparent support
29	Céline	11 and 13	Psychiatric Nurse	Employed 90%	Home-based + on-site work	Home-schooling	Re-partnered, not cohabitating	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	No change	No support—loss of grandparent support
32	Sophie	16 and 18	Dean of education programme in the social sector	Sick leave (previously employed 100%)	No change	Home-schooling	Re-partnered, not cohabitating	Primary custody with visitation arrangements	No change	No support
36	Alexandra	10	Teacher	Employed 63%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	Re-partnered with the child's father, cohabiting	Cohabitation with child's father—joint custody	No change	Current partner
37	Sarah	15	Education sector professional	Several jobs amounting to almost 100%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	Re-partnered, cohabiting	Sole custody	No change	No support
39	Elisa	10	Educator	Employed 80%	Home-based work	Home-schooling	No partner	Sole custody	No change	Family (sporadic)
41	Olivier	16	IC sector professional	Employed 90%	Sick leave due to COVID-19 (at-risk)	Home-schooling	No partner	Sole custody	No change	No support

* Percentages are based on participant's self-definition, and thus the actual number of working hours may vary depending on the sector of activity.

The limited number of pre-school-aged children in our sample is likely to have significantly affected how the partial lockdown was experienced by these families. It should also be noted that, although the sampling at the outset of the project aimed to be representative of the socioeconomic distribution of Swiss society, participants of lower socioeconomic status were underrepresented and the majority of the parents that remained in the sample in the fourth wave could be broadly classified as middle-class. The participants all had a mid-to-high educational level and a current or last job in a skilled, white-collar occupation. The large majority were professionals or administrative employees in the public administration, healthcare, education, or information and communication, all sectors that have been sheltered from the worst effects of the pandemic on employment. This will have significantly shaped their experiences of the period.

To comply with social distancing measures, interviews were conducted using video-conferencing technology and, in two instances, by telephone. The interviews comprised two parts. The first set of questions addressed the changes participants had experienced since the previous wave of fieldwork in 2018 in the main life domains: employment and financial situation, custody and visiting rights, residential situation, health, relationship status and family composition, parent-child relations and children's well-being. The second part of the interview addressed the effects of the pandemic on these life domains, with a specific focus on the organisation of daily life and the adaptations that had been made to deal with changes in employment, home-schooling, custody arrangements, relationships and health. We enquired whether participants had been directly or indirectly affected by the pandemic and in which domains. We asked about any difficulties they had faced and the strategies and reorganisation of routines and activities that they had implemented in response. We also asked about any institutional support our participants had received as well as any form of social support they had received or given, and to or from whom. Finally, we discussed their expectations for the future.

Interviews lasted 45–90 min, and were video or audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Our content analyses focused firstly on identifying the different types of reorganisation to the domains of family and employment, their articulation and the restructuring of time in the daily lives of our participants. Then, through the constant comparison of the different cases, we were able to identify common patterns and group cases accordingly.

5. Changes to Main Life Domains Triggered by the Pandemic

The pandemic and related restrictions affected the families in our sample in two main ways. Firstly, through changes in the parents' employment situations and working conditions. Secondly, through school closures and the ensuing need to home-school children and reorganise their care and, to a much lesser extent, through changes in child custody arrangements. The aim of this section is to provide a brief descriptive overview of how our sample was affected by these changes (see Table 1 for a summary), before moving to the findings.

5.1. Employment

The families in our sample were little affected by the restrictions in terms of job losses or partial unemployment, and for most participants employment changes did not have any financial consequences. Over half of our sample (14 parents) moved from on-site work to working from home (either completely or partially) or significantly increased their share of home-based work. Three parents were put on leave, either because they were part of the at-risk population (Olivier, Arthur) or because the service they worked for underwent temporary closure (Sylvie), but their wages were guaranteed. Only one mother, Antoinette, lost her job as a consequence of the restrictions (non-renewal of her fixed-term contract). Another, Aline, saw her independent work temporarily interrupted. Neither experienced particular financial issues, as they had access to an unemployment benefit amounting to 70 percent of her previous wage (Antoinette) or the income fluctuation lasted for a short

period during which they could claim government subsidies (Aline). Moreover, it should be noted that most parents in the sample have had to deal with the uncertainties associated with reduced or fluctuating income in the past and hence COVID-related changes did not represent a particular challenge.

The employment situations of seven parents remained unchanged despite the pandemic. Two parents (Léonie and Alizée) were employed in the healthcare sector and continued to work on-site during the period of restrictions (although Alizée was on maternity leave at the beginning of this period). Tania's employer did not allow her to work from home, even though she did not work in an essential service. Three participants (Béatrice, Delia and Sophie) were already on sick leave for non-COVID-related reasons before the onset of the pandemic. Finally, one participant (Martine) was already receiving social assistance benefits before the outbreak of the pandemic.²

Overall, 19 of the 26 parents in our sample experienced employment changes, primarily shifts from on-site to home-working, while there was little evidence of economic vulnerability. Nonetheless, the heterogeneity of situations observed meant a diverse range of employment demands to be accommodated. Our sample included working and non-working parents; parents working on-site, from home or combining the two; and parents working a range of 40 to 100 percent of full-time hours. The sample also included several parents with diminished energy to face heightened family demands, due to health issues.

5.2. Family

School closures defined the major shifts in family demands. Most parents in our sample (22 of 26), were required to home-school their children for at least part of the period of school closures and were primarily responsible for this due to sole or primary custody. Of the 22, 20 parents home-schooled their children for the whole period. Tania and Natacha initially home-schooled but then sent their children to the SAM. Only Léonie's child attended the SAM for the whole period. Three parents did not have to perform any home-schooling, because their children were not in education (Alizée, Antoinette), because their schooling was cancelled due to the restrictions (Antoinette) or because the children were staying with their father during the period (Aline).

The other, less crucial, change to family demands experienced by parents in our sample was alterations to physical custody and visitation arrangements. These changes affected only seven of the 26 families. These limited changes to custody arrangements must be understood in the light of the comparatively mild restrictions on mobility in Switzerland during the first wave of the pandemic. Had there been the strict home confinement implemented in other countries, maintaining child visitation and custody arrangements would have been more challenging.

Five families (Gisela, Rachel, Alizée, Vanina, Anouk) temporarily halted their children's visits with the other parent, giving them sole custody during the period of restrictions. Visits from Leila's older daughter, who resides with her father, were temporarily halted. Aline's children went to live with their father for a few weeks, reversing her prior primary custody of the children for a time. Decisions about changes to custody and visitation arrangements were reported to be consensual and conflict-free, and resulted less from externally-imposed restrictions than the parents' attempts to protect family members in the at-risk population (Gisela, Rachel, Alizée, Vanina) or other conjunctural reasons (Aline, Anouk, Leila). Besides affecting a minority of families, changes to custody arrangements did not fundamentally alter the parent's everyday organisation, with few exceptions (Aline, Leila). In the remaining cases, changes altered the parent's daily life minimally. This is presumably because parents with primary custody of their child(ren) were already mainly responsible for their everyday routines and supervision of schooling before the pandemic so the other parent's subsidiary support in these tasks was not a major loss. Moreover, in several cases where custody and visitation changes occurred, the children were autonomous adolescents (Rachel, Alizée, Vanina). The only parent in our sample affected negatively in the organisation of daily life by changes to the visitation was Gisela,

who had more difficulties focusing on her work and was deprived of the time needed for her studies.

5.3. Social Support

The majority of parents went through the period of partial lockdown without additional help. The instrumental support received was primarily help with childcare and home-schooling (9 of 26 parents), more sporadic support with shopping and other household tasks and administrative procedures (Anouk, Viviane, Aline).

Support with childcare and home-schooling was central to parents' ability to sustain new arrangements for those with simultaneously high employment and family demands. Most parents who received this kind of help were employed for 80 percent or more of full working hours (Gisela, Marie-Jo, Natacha, Tania, Elisa, Paule; Alexandra worked 63 percent of full-time hours) and had children aged 12 or younger who were being home-schooled. The only exceptions were Viviane, whose 14-year-old child went to live with her sister for two weeks during Viviane's hospitalisation, and Béatrice who was on sick leave and had a 14-year-old son who ate at his school twice a week. Those parents who were employed for 80 percent or more of full working hours but did not need support with childcare (Judith, Vanina, Sarah) had adolescent children who were relatively autonomous. Alizée hired a childminder to look after her newborn child when she returned to work after maternity leave.

As is often the case, close family ties provided support with childcare (Igel and Szydluk 2011; Uttal 1999). This may include the child's father (Gisela, Tania, Alexandra, Paule), new partners (Gisela, Natacha), and sisters (Marie-Jo, Viviane). However, elderly family members were not mobilized to help out with their grandchildren, Gisela being the one creative exception, whose grandmother watched over the children "virtually" through Skype. The role of grandparents as childcare providers was purposefully reduced in several families during the period to protect them from contracting the virus. Leila, Léonie, Paule and Céline interrupted regular childcare (weekly, often on several days) provided by the grandparents (most often the maternal grandmother) for this reason.

6. Findings

For almost every parent in the sample, changes in employment and family demands led to the adaptation and reorganisation of everyday life and its degree of temporal structuring. As expected, the reduced influence of employment and/or school schedules as organising forces meant that everyday time became more flexible and unstructured for most parents. However, perceived time pressures varied greatly depending on the extent of demands across both domains.

Unsurprisingly, parents who remained employed for longer hours faced the most time pressure, although there was significant heterogeneity depending on whether they worked on-site or from home, the degree of flexibility offered by the employer, the type of job, the child(ren)'s age and related degree of autonomy, and access to social support. Parents working from home were required to make the most adaptations to articulate conflicting demands and strategies ranged from reducing working hours, working around children's needs, and heavily resorting to informal support. Among our out-of-work participants, there was little perceived time pressure or conflict between domains.

We also observed the predicted structuring effect of employment. Parents who continued to work on-site maintained regular working schedules, while most who moved to working from home (fully or partially) had to adjust their daily time and lost some degree of structuring. The everyday lives of parents who were not working or stopped doing so were the most unstructured.

Experiences of time (re)structuring differed a great deal between parents in different situations. Among parents who remained employed on-site, too much rigidity in employment schedules was occasionally perceived as an impediment to balancing employment and family demands. Many, particularly those working from home, sought to regain

routine and structure in their work time, especially when family demands were elevated. Achieving such a goal was not always feasible and often required a period of adaptation. While some degree of flexibility was required to articulate work and family demands, there was a general tendency to favour structure and organisation when demands from the two domains conflicted. This allowed parents to maintain some control and minimise the extent to which the two domains encroached on each other. For parents not working, the lack of work-imposed structure was perceived as an advantage by some and a disadvantage by others depending on the specificities of the situation. Parents who had lost the time structuring previously provided by work did not substitute this with an equivalent degree of organisation in other domains (e.g., leisure). A lesser degree of structuring was created by meal times and home-schooling activities, especially for those with younger children. Parents of older children able to undertake schoolwork more autonomously tended to have looser schedules.

Parents with younger children tended to experience a greater increase in family demands as home-schooling took up more of their time than that of parents with older children able to work more independently. These tasks conflicted with employment demands for many of the working parents. As expected, schooling was a major contributor to the structuring of everyday time. This was especially true for those families whose children attended the SAM, but was also evident among parents who home-schooled their children. Among the latter, we observed significant heterogeneity depending on the child(ren)'s age(s) and level of autonomy (these were not always correlated). Families with younger children (up to the age of 12) tended to have more structured schedules, while those with adolescent children adopted looser family routines. Since teenagers were able to fulfil more of their school work alone, the organisation of their time was more independent from that of their parents'. In those families where adolescent children were not in education or had reduced workloads, the parents struggled to shape their children's time and provide a sense of structure and purpose.

In the remainder of this section we illustrate the complex interactions involved in the articulation of the parents' changing demands from the employment and family domains. As expected, employment situations crucially affected the centrality of the different domains to the reorganisation of everyday life and the degree of structuring, as well as the amount of time pressure experienced and the degree of conflict between life domains. For this reason, we distinguished between three broad categories of parents (working on-site, working from home, not working) and examined how other elements of work and family interacted to shape the organisation of everyday life for parents in these three employment categories. In the employment domain, the most relevant factors were the number of hours worked, the level of work flexibility and the intensity of job demands. In the family domain, factors that stood out included the schooling situation, age(s) of child(ren) and their related autonomy, and whether support (institutional or social) with childcare or home-schooling was available.

The different situations were classified into eight groups to illustrate such interactions (Table 2). We then mapped the different cases and corresponding groups along our two main axes of analysis: the intensity of time pressures between life domains and the degree of time structuring in everyday life (Figure 1). The presentation of the findings follows the grouping of the cases.

Table 2. Synthesis of findings—Classification of parents according to main patterns of work-family articulation and time-structuring.

Classification		Demands			Work-Family Articulation			
Main Employment Situation	Subgroup	Pseudonym	Employment Demands	Family Demands	Adaptations to Employment	Institutional and Social Support with Family Demands	Time Pressure *	Time Structuring
(A) working on-site	-	Léonie	High. Employed 80% with limited flexibility.	High (child 7)	None	SAM + current partner —Loss of grandparent support	Low	Structured around employment and SAM schedules
		Tania	High. Employed 100% with limited flexibility.	High (child 9)	Bringing child to work; absences to be compensated	None	High	Employment rigidities hindering work-life articulation
		Alizée	Moderate. Employed 60% after end of maternity leave.	High (newborn + child 16)	None	Paid childminder	Moderate (difficulties finding a childminder)	Structured around employment schedules
(B) working from home	WFH1	Natacha	Moderate. Reduction of high demands. Employed 80%.	Moderate (shared custody of child 12)	Reduction of working hours	SAM + current partner.	Low	Flexibility
		Rachel	Moderate. Reduction of high demands. Employed 70%.	Low (child 16, autonomous)	Reduction of working hours	None	Low	Flexible schedules (already before COVID-19)
		Leila	Moderate. Reduction of high demands. Employed 90%.	Moderate (shared care of 4-year-old child; older child with other parent)	Reduction of working hours and alternation to work with partner	None. Loss of grandparental support.	Low	Structuring around alternation with partner of work and childcare
	WFH2	Céline	High. Employed 90% and working partially on-site	High (children 11 and 13), loss of grandparent support	Adaptation of working hours around family demands	None. Loss of grandparent support.	High—Moderate after adaptation period	Structuring and routine to facilitate articulation
		Elisa	Moderate. Reduction of high demands. Employed 80%.	High (child 10), difficult home-schooling	Adaptation of working hours around family demands	Sporadic	High—Moderate after adaptation period	Structuring and routine to facilitate articulation
	WFH3	Gisela	High. Employed 80%. Elevated job pressure.	High (children 11 and 13), younger has behavioural issues	Limited	Crucial support from current partner. Sporadic support from ex-partner.	High	Structuring and routine to facilitate articulation
		Marie-Jo	High. Employed 90% and working partially on-site.	High (children 12 and 3) younger diagnosed with autism	Adaptation of working hours around family demands	Crucial support from sister.	High	Structuring and routine to facilitate articulation
		Alexandra	Moderate. Employed 63%. Difficulties with home-based work.	High (child 10) lack of motivation for schooling	Limited	Crucial support from current partner and child’s father.	Moderate	Structuring and routine to facilitate articulation

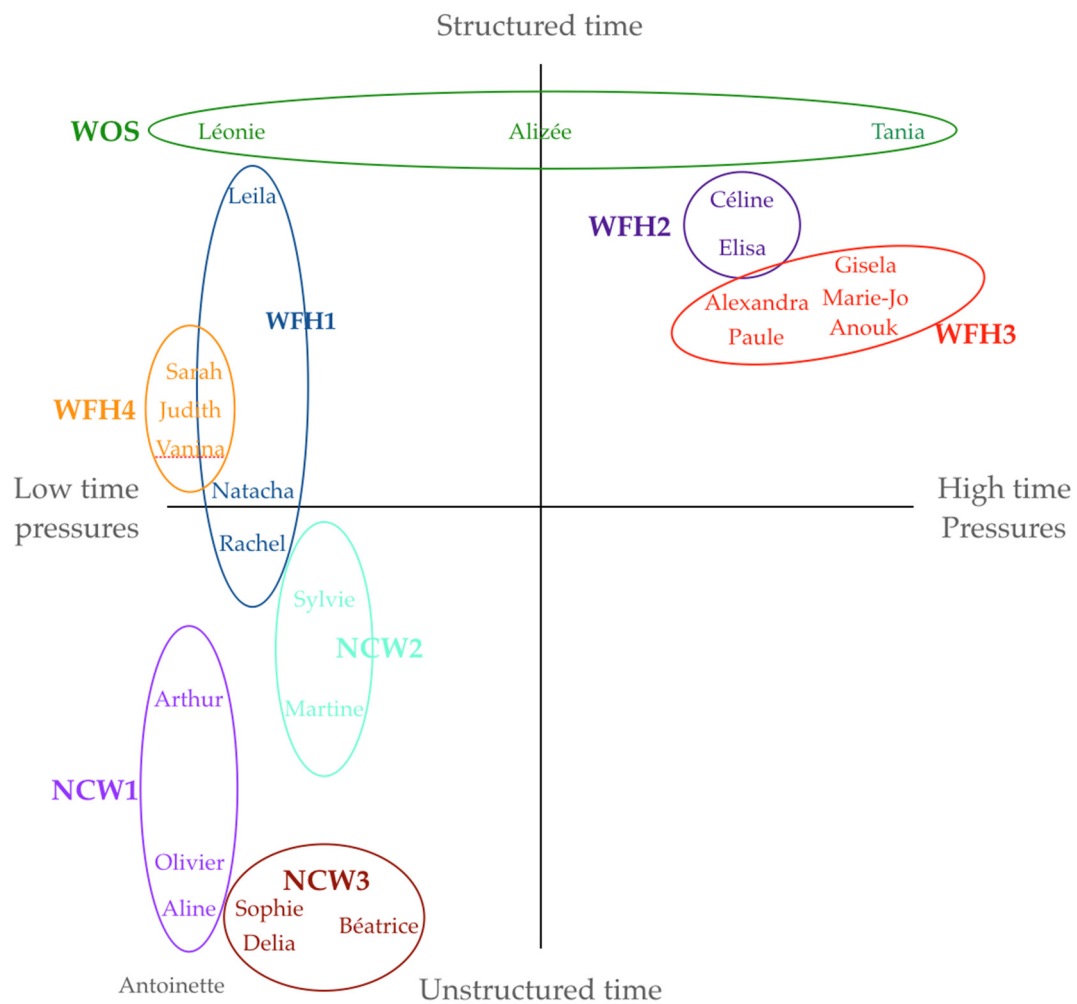
Table 2. Cont.

Classification		Demands			Work-Family Articulation				
Main Employment Situation	Subgroup	Pseudonym	Employment Demands	Family Demands	Adaptations to Employment	Institutional and Social Support with Family Demands	Time Pressure *	Time Structuring	
(C) not currently working	-	Paule	High. Employed 90%.	Moderate (child 13)	Limited	Important support by Child's father. Loss of grandparent support.	High—Moderate after adaptation period	Structuring and routine to facilitate articulation	
		Anouk	High. Employed 80%.	High (child 11)	Limited	Lack of social support.	High—Arrangement unsustainable	Failed attempt at structuring and routine	
		Viviane	Moderate. Employed 50%. Difficulties with home-based work.	Low (child 14)	Limited	Crucial support from sister during hospitalisation.	High conflict (*family and health)	Flexibility while home-working, unstructured while sick	
		WFH4	Judith	High. Employed 100%.	Low (children 18 and 20)	Limited	None	Low	Flexibility around employment demands
		Vanina	High. Employed 90%.	Low (child 16)	Limited	None	Low	Flexibility around employment demands	
		Sarah	High. Multi-employed about 100%	Low (child 15)	Limited	None	Low	Flexibility. around employment demands	
	NCW1	Arthur	-	Moderate (children 10 and 12), but autonomous with home-schooling	-	None	Low	Some structuring around children's schooling, meals and sport.	
		Olivier	-	Low (child 16)	-	None	Low	Mostly unstructured	
		Aline	-	Low (children 13 and 16) with other parent	-	None	Low	Mostly unstructured	
	NCW2	Sylvie	-	High (child 10)	-	None	Low	Some structuring around home-schooling and sport	
		Martine	-	High (child 10)	-	None	Low	Failed attempt at structuring and routine.	

Table 2. Cont.

Classification		Demands			Work-Family Articulation			
Main Employment Situation	Subgroup	Pseudonym	Employment Demands	Family Demands	Adaptations to Employment	Institutional and Social Support with Family Demands	Time Pressure *	Time Structuring
	NCW3	Delia	-	Low (child 16)	-	None	Low (*family and health)	Mostly unstructured. Efforts to structure children's time.
		Sophie		Low (children 16 and 18)		None	Low (*family and health)	Mostly unstructured. Efforts to structure children's time.
		Béatrice		Moderate (child 14) but limited autonomy autonomous with home-schooling initially		Institutional (child's lunch twice a week).	Moderate (*family and health)	Mostly unstructured
		Antoinette	-	Moderate (children 20 and 23) with intellectual disability	-	None	Low	Mostly unstructured. Efforts to structure children's time

* This refers to conflicts between work and family unless otherwise indicated.



LEGEND	
Parents working on site	
■	WOS - Parents who continued to work on-site
Parents working from home (completely or partially)	
■	WFH1 - Parents able to significantly reduce their working hours
■	WFH2 - Parents able to adapt their employment schedules to meet family demands without reducing their working hours
■	WFH3 - Parents with high work and family demands and drawing importantly on social support
■	WFH4 - Parents with lower family demands (older and autonomous children)
Parents not currently working	
■	NCW1 - Parents on temporary leave or work interruption due to COVID with low family demands
■	NCW2 - Parents on leave or social assistance with higher family demands (young children)
■	NCW3 - Parents who were already on sick leave before the partial lockdown for non-COVID-related reasons

Figure 1. Mapping of cases and groups according to the level of temporal pressures and degree of temporal structuring. Viviane’s case is not classified due to the specificity of her situation, which changed significantly during the period and was affected by her health conditions.

6.1. Parents Working On-Site

Two of the parents who continued to work on-site during the pandemic were subject to the strong structuring effect of employment on everyday schedules but had radically different experiences of this due to their differing possibilities to tend to family demands. On the one hand, Léonie, who is employed in the health sector, continued to work in the same conditions. Her child was able to benefit from the SAM, so there was no need for home-schooling. Her partner works in the same sector (also on-site) and would take the child to school. In this case, schedules were clearly structured by employment but the articulation with family demands was unproblematic since a schooling solution was in place.

In contrast, Tania experienced difficulties as a result of her employer's lack of flexibility and the inadequacy of the SAM. Although Tania works in public administration, her role was not initially classed as part of a priority service and she was therefore denied access to the SAM for her daughter. Although it would have been technically feasible for Tania to work from home, her employer did not allow this and she therefore had to take her nine-year-old daughter with her to work.

Although she was only required to be at work once or twice a week in the first few weeks, the situation became more complicated in April when a new regulation was put in place requiring hours of absence to be made up for by the employees. As a result, Tania ate through her holiday time and lost a number of extra hours she had previously accumulated. At the time of the interview, she owed more than 75 h of work. A further policy change deemed her service essential and she was then able to leave her child at the SAM, easing her organisational issues. The difficulties encountered in combining her daughter's care and her work and the constant fluctuations in measures requiring new adaptations were particularly stressful for Tania. At the moment of the interview, she was still uncertain about how she would manage to compensate for her due hours:

"Of course they were deducting my hours, I was getting negative hours to make up for later, which they took away from my overtime hours that I had done before. [. . .] so I'm super-ultra in negative. I have 75 h to make up for by the end of the year huh! That's super hard! So let's see . . . " (Tania)

Tania's case illustrates the problems in articulating work and family demands created by employer rigidity during pandemic restrictions for parents with no childcare. It also reveals the inadequacy of the SAM provision, and the failure to articulate public policy with employer requirements.

The comparison of Leonie's and Tania's experiences demonstrates that the structure created by employment can be beneficial to work-family balance when there are sufficient resources available to meet family demands. In their absence, rigid employment demands and schedules can easily become disadvantages.

Alizée was still on maternity leave when restrictions were imposed. The arrival of her second child altered her everyday life and routine more than the effects of the pandemic during this period. When she returned to work (on-site), a neighbour looked after the baby as circumstances of the pandemic made it difficult to arrange childcare.

6.2. Parents Working from Home (Completely or Partially)

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of the parents in our sample switched, either partially or completely, to working from home, necessitating the reorganisation of schedules. However, there were significant differences in the degree of structuring and routine that the parents attempted to put in place and/or were able to achieve, as well as in the extent to which different life domains determined the organisation of everyday life. There was also a great deal of variation in the extent to which changes in one domain were compensated for by changes in another, and in the amount of conflict that occurred between domains. Among the group of parents working from home, we distinguished four subgroups, plus an additional non-classified case.

The first subgroup (WFH1), includes parents able to significantly reduce their working hours and adapt them flexibly (Leila, Natacha, Rachel). This reduction in work demands facilitated the articulation with family demands, which varied between cases. Leila's family demands were moderate. Care of her younger child was shared with her new partner (the child's father), while her ex-partner had custody of her older child. Natacha also had moderate family demands as she shares child custody with her ex-partner and had access to the SAM. Her new partner also assists with childcare.

For Leila and Natacha, the increase in family demands caused by home-schooling requirements was compensated for by their reduced working hours. This adaptation occurred after an initial period where they attempted to continue working full-time, and was facilitated by the flexibility and limited demands of their jobs:

"In the beginning we thought that we were still going to work eight hours every day each of us [Leila and her partner]. So we had organized completely crazy schedules and then, very quickly, we realized that, in fact, we were going to work half-days, so this helped a lot." (Leila)

"I didn't manage to do the work and, in any case with the children it was not possible. I had to let go of things a bit, by saying 'Well, you do what you can'. And so, now, I am at ease with this." (Natacha)

Rachel experienced the lowest family demands because her child was 16 and very autonomous with school activities. Hence, home-schooling did not demand a substantial compensation from Rachel's employment, and her flexibility facilitated a positive experience of the period:

"It was nice, it was not bad at all in fact. It was a nice break, especially because, well, I have a very flexible job where I manage how I want in any case." (Rachel)

In Natacha's case, the limitation of work demands combined with the flexibility of her schedule, while for Rachel flexible working hours (and home-based work) was already part of her everyday life before the pandemic. In contrast, Leila's schedule was more structured. This was due to the presence of a young child and the sharing of childcare with her partner. Both partners worked from home and reduced their working hours to allow them to alternate looking after their four-year-old son.

Overall, parents in this subgroup were not subject to conflicts between life domains and their experiences of the period were neutral or positive, as illustrated by the excerpts.

The second subgroup (WFH2) includes parents able to adapt their employment schedules to meet family demands without significantly reducing their working hours (Céline, Elisa). In contrast with the first subgroup, for whom adaptations were quantitative, changes made by this second subgroup were mostly qualitative and involved a reorganisation of time while maintaining a degree of structure to facilitate the articulation of both domains. Céline combined on-site and home-based work and reorganised her schedule to begin work earlier in the morning. Elisa worked from home, initially for a few hours a week but, as these hours increased, she settled into a routine around her child's schooling. For both Céline and Elisa, it was important to develop a routine following a stressful initial period of adaptation.

Such arrangements were not as relaxed as those of the previous subgroup since these parents were not able to reduce their working hours as much and family demands were somewhat greater. Céline's children were not able to have lunch with their grandparents during the week as they used to and this added hours of housework and childcare to those spent home-schooling, increasing Céline's domestic burden. For Elisa, home-schooling was particularly difficult, and preparing meals thrice daily became demanding. In this subgroup, there was more perceived conflict between life domains and parents managed to juggle their responsibilities with significant effort:

“So, uh, at the beginning it was complicated, we had to find a rhythm, uh, set up a routine and then after well we, we ... [...] we had a bit of schedules. We went back into [...], things were back into frame [...]. In the beginning it was hard because he did not understand that it was not holidays. And so it was complicated because he was complaining, he said he didn't want to do his homework, so we were stuck there, and then once he understood after many crises, well then there was the need to manage the meals, it seemed like nothing but suddenly having three meals a day [...] that was a lot of time spent making meals [...]. Sometimes I would be working from home and then either he had finished his schoolwork, [...] or either he had questions, and so I would say to him 'But do something else while waiting or ... '. Well, sometimes it was complicated to have such energy, how much to invest where? Do I leave him alone for a while and then it's okay? [...] I have the impression that it was very intense [...] It was really too much.” (Elisa)

The third subgroup (WFH3) includes parents who experienced both high work and family demands and for whom social support was vital in sustaining their new arrangements (Gisela, Alexandra, Marie-Jo, Paule). New organisations collapsed when such support was lacking (Anouk). Like the second subgroup, these parents also attempted to structure time and create routine to articulate work and family demands. However, the demands on this group were somewhat greater, with a correspondingly greater need for social support for practical assistance and as a buffer against stressors. Perceptions of time pressure were particularly elevated in this group.

Gisela's case, which was presented in the introduction, and that of Marie-Jo were the most typologically representative of this group. Marie-Jo had elevated work demands, working 90 percent of full-time hours and was required on-site twice a week. This added to the significant family demands created by her three-year-old's recent autism diagnosis. To meet these demands, Marie-Jo adapted her working hours (by working very early in the morning or late at night) around the children's needs and was supported by her sister, who spent the lockdown with the family, assisting Marie-Jo with childcare so she was able to work partially on-site.

“It was precisely the fact that my sister was here. My sister, throughout the lockdown, my sister stayed with us. So it's her who stayed with the children [...] I think that if my sister, my sister had not been here, it would not have been possible to go to work for two half days, yes, indeed.” (Marie-Jo)

A contrasting example from this subgroup was Anouk. This case also illustrates the crucial role of social support but by showing the consequences of its scarcity. Anouk attempted to combine working from home at 80 percent full-time hours with the home-schooling of her child in as structured a manner as possible but the conflicting demands rendered the situation unsustainable. Anouk could not receive instrumental support from her parents because they were at risk and endured marked social isolation during this period. She developed depression (of which she had a history) and had to reduce her hours to 30 percent of full-time and resume treatment with her psychologist. Anouk's case illustrates the danger the pandemic posed as a trigger for latent vulnerabilities, in this instance due to a trajectory of chronic depression:

“In the beginning I was really stressed out. Everything I did, I did under stress. I was mailing, Lucas would interrupt me three times to ask me things. I would get annoyed, then I would go help him, uh, [meanwhile] I was thinking about my email later. [...] I was going nuts, I said: “Well bah ... I have Lucas at home now. I'm going ... it's 5 h of work with Lucas every day that I did [...] And in addition I did the shopping for them [her parents] [...] Yes, yes, I went nuts. So going nuts for me means that I do not manage my emotions anymore, I, I get stressed over everything, and that was very hard for me eh (light laughs). Uh pfff as you know I'm a chronic depressive and [...] All of a sudden, I said: 'Shit, it's coming back'. And so I put my pride aside and then called my

shrink again. It was a bit hard because I had just stopped the monitoring after three and a half years of monitoring.” (Anouk)

Viviane’s case is somewhat particular and hence difficult to classify. Although she only worked at 50 percent of full-time hours, the move to working from home was very demanding. As a member of the at-risk population, she attempted a series of arrangements with her child but they were not easy to implement. Moreover, Viviane suffered from health issues during this period. For three weeks she had (undiagnosed) COVID-19 and was subsequently hospitalised due to symptoms that were likely the consequences of this. Her 14-year-old child at first had dinner with neighbours while she was hospitalised but eventually went to live with her sister for two weeks. Viviane shares the moderate-to-high work demands of subgroup WFH2 and the need for social support of subgroup WFH3, although not to articulate work and family demands, but to provide childcare while she was unwell.

The fourth subgroup (WFH4) included parents whose family demands were lower because the children were older (15 or over) so mostly autonomous (Judith, Vanina, Sarah). Therefore, while all of the parents in this subgroup were employed at 90 percent or more of full-time hours and some faced increased employment demands adapting to working from home (Vanina, Sarah), they were able to accommodate this because of their limited family demands. Perceptions of conflict between domains were low in this group and the employment domain was central to everyday organisation but in a rather flexible manner. We can infer that the need for structure in everyday life is reduced when family demands are low, regardless of heightened work demands.

“[. . .] I could suddenly work 8–9 h non-stop on my computer [. . .] and then the next day nothing. So it was, it was more of a, a time division or schedule management that was, that was completely disjointed and not very stable. But it worked well for me because I could make my choices [. . .] And say to myself, ‘Ok, today I’m doing a lot. Tomorrow I will do less.’ And so, it worked well for me.” (Vanina)

A main finding that emerged from a comparison between the different subgroups of parents working from home was that, when the pressure to articulate of work and family demands is limited, whether because employment demands are reduced (subgroup WFH1) or because family demands are low (subgroup WFH4), there is less need for temporal structuring and routine.

6.3. Parents Not Currently Working

As anticipated, everyday life was significantly less structured for non-working parents. Moreover, there were the lowest perceptions of time pressure from competing life domains and a generally positive experience of the period of restrictions. However, there were also some differences, depending on the reasons for being out of work and how demanding home-schooling was. Consequently, we classified non-working parents into three subgroups, with an additional non-classified case.

The first subgroup (NCW1) includes parents who were on leave because they were in the at-risk COVID-19 population (Arthur, Olivier) and those forced to interrupt their independent work due to social distancing restrictions (Aline). Parents in this subgroup had low family demands and there was no perceived conflict between life domains. Everyday organisation was not a concern and time was mostly unstructured.

For Aline, the time she enjoyed by herself in her chalet was mostly unstructured, marked only by sporadic telephone consultations with her patients. The situations of Arthur and Olivier were similar in that they were on leave as members of the at-risk population and lived with their children, who were mostly autonomous with respect to home-schooling. However, Olivier’s time was unstructured and more independent from that of her adolescent daughter. Arthur’s time was more structured, with the structure coming from his younger children’s (10 and 12) schooling and from family meals. Arthur’s

daily physical activity, aimed at improving his health condition, also provided some routine to his daily life:

“Uh no apart from sport, quite frankly, uh . . . I didn’t do much. Well, I did the big cleaning at home, like everyone else I think [. . .] Yes, I run twice a week and then I do weight training Monday to Friday, every day. [. . .] We have a garden at [name of the village] so, uh, we would go there from time to time, to do a little sport or to read with the girls [. . .]” (Arthur)

The second subgroup (NCW2) was composed of two parents. One of these was temporarily on work leave (Sylvie), the other was unemployed and receiving social assistance benefits (Martine). Both parents had a 10-year-old child at home and the organisation of time was more centred around their children than in the previous subgroup, revolving around the children’s home-schooling. Sylvie’s experience of the period was positive in that she enjoyed the more relaxed rhythm of home-schooling compared to the rigidity of ordinary life schedules.

“Every morning there is no need to get up and hurry, and discuss whether or not to get up, or get dressed. In the evening, there is no stress with homework that . . . if he hasn’t done it, he actually has all day to do it. [. . .] Yes, there are a lot less constraints and . . . well the time, I would say the time is the same but it’s just that we are less in a hurry.” (Sylvie)

For Martine, the loss of school as a reference for structuring her child’s time was perceived as a disadvantage, which made home-schooling, and everyday life in general, difficult. While Sylvie structured daily life around home-schooling and shared sporting activities with her child, Martine struggled but failed to establish a similar routine.

“It [home schooling] weighed on me because it also impacted my own, my own sense of discipline. Uh . . . uh . . . [. . .] So I had work to do. Well, I was given work, but, but, but it was like a pile of worksheets and then “Go fend for yourselves!” So structuring, so me, me, I already have problems structuring my own time, my life, doing it for someone else, that was a hell of a challenge. But it forced me to confront that too, even more.” (Martine)

These two cases illustrate how less structure can be perceived as an advantage by some and a disadvantage by others despite similar circumstances in terms of time pressures. Sylvie experienced the period as a break from an otherwise stressful life that she would be resuming sooner or later. In contrast, the diminished structuring from school was perceived as a loss by Martine, who was already enduring the negative psychological effects of long-term unemployment before the onset of the pandemic. The school closures only added to her previous struggles to structure and give purpose to her time.

The third subgroup (NCW3) includes parents who were already on sick leave before the partial lockdown for reasons unrelated to COVID-19 (Delia, Sophie, Béatrice). Like subgroup NCW1, family demands were limited for this subgroup as their children were adolescents—so mostly autonomous, and their time was largely unstructured. The main difference from the NCW1 subgroup was that these parents were on sick leave and the period was therefore intended to be for rest and recovery, although experiences diverged in this regard. Delia and Sophie viewed the period positively, in that it allowed them to recover from their illnesses:

“So uh in fact I, I live the lockdown very well and I needed to be able to rest, to refocus, er . . . I had a particularly exhausting year at work and so I had very little contact with my children, so it [the lockdown] allowed me to reunite with them and then, to tend the garden, it may seem silly but . . . ” (Sophie)

Delia and Sophie did not perceive conflict between life domains, although both made efforts to provide structure and purpose to the time of their children, who did not have much schoolwork to occupy them. In contrast, family demands were somewhat higher for Béatrice, whose 14-year-old son initially required help with home-schooling. Béatrice struggled with having her son at home all day, finding it a hindrance to her rest and recovery. She therefore asked him to become more autonomous and to try and solve his doubts with his teacher, and asked the school to have him at lunchtime twice a week.

“It [the lockdown] marked me in relation to home schooling. [. . .] the first two weeks, it was hell [. . .] I, I couldn’t take it anymore because my son was completely leaning on me, I realized. [. . .] And then I thought to myself, I thought about it and I said to myself: ‘This is not going to do it!’ So I thought to myself and then I told him. I first contacted his, his, his teacher and said, ‘Look, I’m not going to be able to take care of it, so uh . . . [. . .] I can’t take care of it, it’s impossible’. I gave up completely.” (Beatrice)

Antoinette was unclassified as she did not fit into any of our subgroups. She became unemployed because her temporary contract was not renewed when restrictions were implemented. Although her children were 20 and 23, their autonomy was limited because both have intellectual disabilities. As the younger child was not in school and the oldest had her schooling interrupted due to the restrictions, both were at home and unoccupied for the whole period. Coexistence was somewhat difficult as Antoinette struggled to provide structure and purpose to her children’s activities and tensions were palpable.

“It was difficult for them and then, since there were a lot of crises at home, sometimes they are with a friend in Geneva, sometimes they are with me. So they alternate every other weekend like that to clear up the conflict a bit, yes and the family suffocation, eh. [. . .] They complain ‘Mom, I don’t know what to do’ [. . .]. So I tell them, ‘Listen, take the time to read, make a plan.’ So, the second [child], she puts on music and dances with the music. I tell her, ‘There you go, it’s like fitness, fitness dance. Do something’. Then they tend to sleep during the day and then at night, they are up, they chat until 2 am, sometimes until 3 am, a completely shifted rhythm.” (Antoinette)

7. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper has analysed how parents with a history of lone parenthood adapted the organisation of their everyday lives during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic to accommodate the shifting employment and family demands triggered by the restrictions. Different configurations of demands across both life domains were reflected in the parents’ diverse experiences of the period.

A first set of findings concerned conflict between life domains experienced as time pressures. As expected, parents who remained employed faced the most time pressures, although their experiences of work-family conflict varied significantly depending on the specifics of their employment situation (on-site or home-based work, hours worked), the degree of employment flexibility and the extent of their family demands. Since younger children were less able to complete school work at home unaided, parents required to home-school younger children experienced the most conflict between employment and family demands. Strategies to articulate the demands from both domains included compensating for heightened family responsibilities by reducing working hours, reorganisation of working time around family needs and heavy reliance on informal support. Conflicts between life domains were lowest among non-working parents, although experiences of the period varied depending on their health situation and the demands of home-schooling.

A second set of findings concerned the temporal structuring of everyday life. Also consistent with our expectations, employment was confirmed to be a fundamental source of structure in everyday life. When employment changes diminished the contribution of work to time structuring, other domains did not provide substitute structuring. Schedules remained most structured for those who continued to work on-site, were more flexible for those working from home and were largely unstructured for those currently not working.

Schooling was also an important source of time structuring, especially for those with younger children. Parents of children who attended the SAM experienced greater time structuring due to specific hours of attendance, but home-schooling was also experienced as a source of time structuring to a lesser extent.

The experiences of temporal structuring varied between parents and their efforts to structure time for themselves and their children also differed in degree and success depending on their situations. At one end of the spectrum, Tania found too much rigidity in her employment schedule and work demands an obstacle to work-family articulation. Most of the non-working parents perceived the lack of time structuring as an advantage that decreased pressure and stress, aided rest and allowed more time for enjoyable activities. This perception of the lockdown as an opportunity to enjoy more relaxed schedules or recover their health applied to parents who were on temporary hiatus from work for various reasons but expected to resume their normal routines reasonably soon. Martine represents the other end of the spectrum in her perception of temporal structure. As Martine had been unemployed and receiving social assistance for a long period before the COVID-19 outbreak, the loss of school schedules as her only source of time structuring was experienced as a disadvantage. Overall, we found that experiences of reduced time structuring during the pandemic did not have the negative consequences observed in research on the effects of unemployment on psychological wellbeing (Paul and Moser 2009; Wanberg et al. 1997; Waters and Muller 2003) provided that the experience of being out of work remained within a short-term time horizon.

The majority of our sample were parents who were both working at home and home-schooling their children. These parents experienced the loss of structure from employment and school schedules as a stressor and most required an adaptation period to adjust to the new situation. Many parents, especially those with younger children, struggled to balance the need for flexibility in work schedules that could facilitate adapting to family demands with enough structure to successfully meet the demands from both domains. Parents with the most conflict between work and family made greater efforts to create structured schedules that might facilitate their articulation. They were also most reliant on social support (or most desirous of it when it was unavailable). Reduced time structuring tended to blur the boundaries between life domains for parents working from home. Hence, re-establishing time structure and routine allowed parents to regain some control over work and family demands and limit their encroachment upon one another.

As with all studies, there were limitations to this research. First of all, our sample does not represent the diversity of circumstances that may have affected lone parents in French-speaking Switzerland during the first wave of the pandemic. There are at least three reasons for this. Most parents in our sample were economically sheltered, being employed in skilled jobs that offered a degree of flexibility, which is likely to have facilitated the articulation of work and family demands. We had no front-line workers in unskilled jobs in our sample, for whom temporal demands are likely to have been elevated and highly structured. We had only one case of a parent who became unemployed due to the pandemic. Experiences of unstructured time are likely to have been fundamentally different for those who faced potential long-term unemployment, although Martine's case offered some insight into this situation. In addition, few of our parents had pre-school children and, despite the challenges of home-schooling, most could rely on their children to work independently to at least some extent. Finally, the participants in our study had been lone parents for several years already, whether or not they had now re-partnered. This had provided them with time to adjust to this major shift away from the standard family form norm and to learn to deal with the challenges of being often primary providers and caregivers. The experience of the period may have been more challenging for parents still adjusting to more recent lone parenthood and, again, this demographic was not represented in our sample. Future research should further explore the different contributors and obstacles to successful work-family articulation experienced by those across the social spectrum, by

those with children of different ages and by those with differing periods of experience as lone parents.

The second limitation of this study was that our sample mainly comprised lone parents, with only a few step-families. Therefore, we had little foundation to address the challenges to work and family time structuring across different family configurations. Evidence from the few re-partnered mothers and blended families in our sample suggested that families with two parents may have been more inclined to establish routines, or more able to do so. This may have been necessary when two employed parents must arrange their employment schedules such that both can provide a share of the childcare and home-schooling. Lone parents with no support from close family ties would not have the option to alternate work and childcare, so they may have experienced greater boundary permeability across domains. It would also have been relevant to explore the challenges faced by parents with different custody arrangements, notably those with shared custody since the majority of our sample had sole or primary custody of their children. One may also wonder whether the poor articulation between the SAM design and employers' policies regarding on-site versus home-based work may have been more damaging for lone parents than for two-parent families. Future research could explore these and other issues pertaining to differences in work-life articulation patterns across different family types.

A third limitation was that our study addressed work-family articulation and the temporal structuring of everyday life from the perspective of parents. However, another angle on this issue would be the (a)synchronicities between the time of parents and children and parent's efforts to structure their children's time. Indeed, our preliminary analyses hinted that there may be considerable differences between families in this respect depending on the children's degree of autonomy and independence. One could even take the analysis further by contrasting the parents' structuring efforts with the children's perceptions of this structuring, along with their own time management strategies.

Fourth, despite our data coming from a longitudinal project, this paper drew only on interview material from its fourth wave. Our future endeavours will use the biographical material obtained during the previous stages to contextualise the changes triggered by the pandemic within the parents' broader trajectories.

Lastly, this study analysed the dynamics of work-life articulation over a limited period, covering the phase of most restrictive measures during the first wave of the pandemic. These were gradually being eased when we conducted the fieldwork. It would be pertinent to examine the longer-term adaptation of families over a period of fluctuating restrictions, while taking into consideration that the temporal horizon of the pandemic's end has extended. For instance, the diminished support with childcare that grandparents were able to offer because of COVID-related risks made everyday organisation more difficult for several of our families. Future research could explore whether the interruption of such arrangements to protect older family members was maintained over time, or whether this caution diminished as the pandemic persisted and perceptions about the risks involved in social interactions shifted. Several parents reported demanding more autonomy of their children during this period. It would be interesting to explore whether changes to children's autonomy had a long-lasting effect on the families. One may also wonder whether parents who enjoyed the diminished structuring role of employment maintained these positive perceptions as home-based work became the norm for many.

Despite the limitations, our study has shed light on the increased time pressures and loosened structures resulting from the pandemic and their potential to act as stressors and sources of vulnerability for parents in complex families. Our findings suggest that the extent to which this has been the case depended on multiple factors, including socioeconomic status, the intensity of employment and childcare demands, family configurations and access to social support. As lessons for policy, our findings point to the importance of flexibility in the demands and schedules of employers, which should aim to facilitate work-family articulation for parents with elevated care demands. There is also a need to re-evaluate public care service solutions for parents, particularly those for whom such em-

ployer flexibility was lacking. On a positive note, for parents who were able to experience the period as a break from intense and stressful schedules, there was an opportunity to take a step back and reflect on the organisation of their everyday lives. The challenge before us is to bring such reflection from the individual to the societal level.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, N.S.-M. and L.B.; methodology, N.S.-M., L.B. and C.S.; validation, N.S.-M. and L.B.; formal analysis, B.M.-K. and N.S.-M.; investigation, N.S.-M., L.B. and C.S.; resources, L.B. and N.S.-M.; data curation, B.M.-K., N.S.-M. and C.S.; writing—original draft preparation, N.S.-M. and C.S.; writing—review and editing, N.S.-M., L.B., B.M.-K. and C.S.; visualization, N.S.-M.; supervision, L.B.; project administration, N.S.-M.; funding acquisition, L.B. and N.S.-M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This publication benefited from the support of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES—Overcoming vulnerability: Life course perspectives (NCCR LIVES), which is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant number: 51NF40-185901). The APC was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, because they were not required according to relevant legislation.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data analyzed in this study will be made publicly available in the FORSbase repository: <https://forsbase.unil.ch/project/study-public-overview/16990/1/> (accessed on 22 June 2021).

Acknowledgments: The authors are grateful to the study's participants for their continued commitment. The authors would like to thank Kevin Roulin for his involvement in the fieldwork and Noémie Vanoli for her participation in the transcription and anonymisation of the interviews.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Although the inclusion of repartnered, cohabiting parents may introduce some heterogeneity into the current sample, these participants have in common with the remaining cases a period of lone parenthood in their trajectory. The experience of lone parenthood makes them comparable with the participants who are still lone parents in many relevant characteristics (such as their primary responsibility in managing the household and the children). Strictly speaking, the sample is also heterogeneous in other respects (age of the children, work on site or at home, employment flexibility), which would appear to be more determinant of the parents' temporal pressures and adaptations than their relationship status. In fact, the five cases of repartnered, cohabiting mothers cluster into four different groups, suggesting that this aspect did not systematically bias our findings. Besides, they are only a small minority (5 of 26 cases). For all these reasons, we believe that it is acceptable to keep these cases in the sample.
- ² Social assistance benefits are welfare payments that cover the basic needs like food, clothing and personal care, housing and health insurance, amounting to approximately CHF2100 for a single person.

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