WORKING FROM HOME: WOMEN BETWEEN PUBLIC AND DOMESTIC SPHERES AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how working mothers negotiate her gender role and strategize in facing the condition when domestic and public sphere exist in one space called home after the outbreak COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The research questions are ”how far does working from home give an impact in changing patriarchal gender relation and distribution of work division at home?”, and “to what extends women modify their home functions in coping with COVID-19 pandemic condition and in minimizing patriarchal authority at their own home?” The research uses qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and questioner filling, and focuses on samples of 30 middle class working women, living in Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi) area. This study argues that as the impact of Covid pandemic condition, the middle class working mothers, who have been “forced to go back” to their homes, seemingly, use their homes as “struggling places” to renegotiate the old patriarchal role divisions and unequal gender/power relations. Moreover, it is argued that their homes, to some extends, are used as learning sites for gender equality values, and modified to fulfill their extended functions: as domestic, work, and social spheres.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19 pandemic, working mother, home, negotiation, Indonesian middle class.
INTRODUCTION

It can be said that the outbreak of COVID-19 (Corona virus disease-19), started in China around January 2020, has caused not only a global health emergency but also an abruptly radical change in our social and private life styles. Suddenly, “physical distancing”, “social distancing”, “lockdown”, “work from home” and “learn from home” have become the most frequently spoken words in our daily lives. In Indonesia, starting from March 15, 2020, the government has urged citizens to stay at home in order to minimize the spread of virus, as can be seen from President Joko Widodo’s statement that “It’s time to work from home, learn from home, doing religious activities at home.”(http://bebas.kompas.id/baca/gaya-hidup/2020/03/29/ketika-harus-sekolah-di-rumah/). Following Government’s policy, some companies have implemented shifting system between working from home (WFH) and working from office (WFO). But, there are some companies which still ask their employees to work from office every day. It can be said that stay at home is still the best choice to break the chain of virus. Because of that, Indonesian schools and universities have implemented learning from home systems.

The urge to work and learn from home is not as easy as it’s been said. Arguably, this stay at home lifestyle has impacted on Indonesian citizens’ daily life matters. One of the important issues, which tend to be slipped away because it is considered ‘normal’, is how working mothers cope with this situation, balancing their acts in conducting professional, caring and domestic works at the same places-their homes. We see the importance to address the working from home mothers’ issue as we see various engendered responses in mass media regarding to stay at home.

For example, the Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development urged working mothers to put makeup and dress nicely while working from home. They also been urged to not saying sarcastic things about house chores to their husbands, as the husbands often need to be told first how to do house chores (https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/03/31/ministrys-mco-advice-to-women-wear-make-up-while-working-at-home-speak-to-s/1851985). Eventhough this saying has been resisted by feminist activists in Malaysia, who also protested the Ministry for not raising issues on the increase of sexual violences in households during the pandemic time, we can read the dominant construction here. The dominant one is that a woman is strongly associated with domestic sphere, as she has become the one who must take an active initiative in doing house chores. Another example can be seen from a meme, spreading in the beginning of pandemic season. The meme is about two little kids who are speaking on phone. The kid on the left side asked, “How is learning from home going?” and the kid on the right side answered, “I can’t stand it. My mom is more fierce than my teacher at school….she always yelled at me…” We may laugh looking this meme, but it strengthens the premis that domestic sphere, including be responsible for your children homework or assessment is a woman’s job, not the man. Kompas online newspaper also featured
article about how parents and children cope with learning from home system (http://bebas.kompas.id/baca/gaya-hidup/2020/03/29/ketika-harus-sekolah-di-rumah/). Although the word “parents” is used here, if we read this article, we will understand that “parents” here stand for “mother”, the one who assist her children in adjusting with this new lifestyle.

Kite in Worell (2001) mentions that some gender roles associated with women are cooking the meal, doing laundry, taking care of children, grocery shopping, and being fashion conscious. On the other side, some gender roles associated with men are the head of family, the financial provider, being responsible for house repairing, and the watchers of television sports programs. In other words, women are more actively involved in domestic spheres, while men are more actively involved in public spheres.

Eventhough nowadays women have more opportunities in participating in public spheres as they have empowered themselves, the division of gender roles between men and women has been still existed as a dominant construction. It can be said that gender and power relations are influenced by the dynamics of social, cultural, and political conditions, so we argue that it is important to carry out the study of the impact of stay at home program in changing gender and power relations at the household and in modifying home functions.

Studies on the gender roles division between women and men that both working have been done before. One of the significant studies is the research, conducted by Hoschchild (1989). Based on in depth interview to 50 married couples from 1980 to 1988, Hoschchild argues that eventhough both women and men are working, women still spend more time to do house chores than men. Hoschchild coins the word “second shift” to define this phenomenon. The first shift is women’s professional working shift between morning to evening, while second shift is a domestic works such as preparing the meal, doing laundry, grocery shopping that done by women in the evening or weekend after doing their working tasks.

In Indonesian context, some research on how women negotiate between domestic and public sphere has also been done, for instance, study carried out by Wahid and Lancia (2018), Zuhdi (2018), Indriani and Sugiasih (2018), Tjandraningsih (2018), Sigiro, Primaldi, Takwin (2018). Speaking of women as a home maker, Elfira (2016) has done a study about it, focusing on Minangkabau diaspora women. But these studies have been done before working from home became a new normal due to COVID-19 outbreak.

There is a study regarding the impact of COVID-19 outbreak to social life, for example, research conducted by Alon, Doepke, Olstead-rumsey, and Tertilt (2020). They argue that “the economic downturn caused by covid-19 outbreak has substantial implications for gender equality”. But this study focuses on economical matters. This study also looks the problem in general and not specific to Indonesia. Some studies that focused on working mothers during the pandemic time are studies done by Guney-Frahm (2020), Clancy (2020), Guy and Arthur (2020), but these studies also do not focus on Indonesia. We argue that we can not separate gender equality problem with
local culture and tradition internalized among people. Also, the negotiation done by women is not monolithic, because every region has its own patriarchy norms as argued by Kandiyoti (1988). Local traditions may give different impacts on the changes of gender equality values. Women’s negotiations may also differ as they may face different patriarchal norms.

Trying to fill the gap of these previous research stated above, this study will attempt to see how working mothers that “forced to go back to home” using home as a place to renegotiate their gender roles and reconstruct power relation at home in order to have more gender equality.

This study will focus on middle class working mothers in negotiating their roles in domestic and public sphere when they encounter that domestic and public sphere is brought together in a space called home. We choose middle class working mothers as our research subjects by considering these two things. Firstly, in term of economic capability, middle class are considered as more comfortable and stable than lower class working mothers in this pandemic season. They still have a stable income, and a house as their living place. They also share living place only with their own nuclear family, consisting of a wife, a husband and children. With all of these privileges they have, middle class working mothers often are considered as having no problem during this pandemic outbreak. But, if we look on this problem deeper, this negotiation issue between public and domestic sphere is only veiled by other problems, considered stronger urgencies, such as the needs of personal protective equipment, COVID-19 handling and management system, and economic downturn during COVID-19 season. Secondly, the COVID-19 outbreak has given an opportunity for middle class women to modify their homes not only as domestic spaces, but also as a social and economic ones. It is important to know more about this issue by using negotiation and strategy as the keywords to understand it.

Based on explanation above, the research problem is defined in these two questions:

1. How far does working from home give an impact in changing patriarchal gender relation and distribution of work division at home?
2. To what extends women modify their home functions in coping with COVID-19 pandemic condition and in minimizing patriarchal authority at their own home?

By carrying out this study, we hope we can make the first step to see more clearly about the issue of gender inequality during the pandemic era in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will use qualitative method with a feminist perspective to approach the data. Lopez (2003:7-8) stated that qualitative method makes researcher able to see contextual experiences, a real daily live of our respondents. While Reinarz (1992:19) emphasizes the importance on doing interview to collect women’s stories that often overlooked in society where patriarchy norms became a dominant discourse, as stated:
“For one thing, interviewing offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote for centuries of ignoring women’s ideas altogether.”

Drawing from Reinharz’s statement, we take a position to listen to our respondents’ stories and not making them as “research object” but putting them as “research subject and participant.” We collect our primary data by doing semi structured in depth interview to 30 respondents with these criteria: a full time working mother, living in Jabodetabek areas, with a child or children that still live with her, whose spouse is working full time too. Due to pandemic condition, all interviews will be carried out online using online meeting tools such as zoom or google meet and these interviews will be recorded. Extensive segments of the in-depth interviews will be included in this paper. Respondents are chosen by snowball method. Their identities are disguised by using pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy. We codify our interviews then analyze the data to answer research questions.

To sharpen our data reading, we use Dowler, Carubia and Szczygiel (2005) concept about home. They argued “home is a dynamic site to reevaluate and meditate power relations”. We also use Hollow’s anti single stereotype of house wives critic (2007) “feminism ... needs to produce ways of conceptualizing domestic femininity that are not simply reduced to a singular and fixed image of housewife.”

Because this research focuses on how working mothers negotiate in society that still impose patriarchal norms, we also use Deniz Kandiyoti’s patriarchal bargains theory. She argues that “different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct “rules of the game” and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression.” (Kandiyoti 1988:274). Kandiyoti argues that patriarchal bargains are set of concepts that indicate the existent of set of rules and systems that regulate gender relations, by which both gender accommodate and agree with those bargains. Those rules and systems can be resisted and renegotiated (Kandiyoti, 1988:286).

IN DEPTH INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS’ PROFILES

Before analyzing the data, we will introduce our respondents’ profile. They are full time working mothers who have one or more children with age range 3 years old to 22 years old, with various professions: employee at multinational company, lecturer, school teacher, and civil servant. Their husbands are working full time too, with various system of working: working from home, shifting system between working from home and working from office, and working from office. They live in Jabodetabek area and have a minimum bachelor degree for their higher
NEGOTIATING TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES, AND STRATEGIZING IN DAILY LIVES

Listening to women’s narrations about working from home, we can clearly see that they do “patriarchal bargains” as Kandiyoti put it. They all admit that the first two months they become very stressfull because working place and living place exist in one space that called “home” and as women, using Hoschchild’s coined term, they also have “the second shift” to be done. But they try to bargain with those imposed patriarchal values that restrict their power with various tactics. For example, on doing house chores, they do not aim for doing the perfection, they develop the strategies to make work done efficiently, as can be seen from respondent’s answer below:

“Kalau pekerjaan rumah tangga…apalagi sejak ngga ada asisten, kita berbagi sih Bu. Anak saya juga sudah saya libatkan nih…yang cowok…bagian cuci piring. Suami saya juga sudah ada sih tugaskan…misalnya menyikat kamar mandi sekali seminggu…tetapi tetap saya paling banyak porsinya, mandatnya dari saya…. ”
(Respondent A)

Translation:

“About house chores…especially since we do not have an assistant, we share it. Bu. I asked my son to get involved…. washing dishes. My husband also has a task to do. for instance, he cleans the bathroom once a week…. but still, my portion of work is the most one, the mandate is from me…” (Respondent A)

“(Saat WFH dan tanpa PRT) Ya anak-anak dikaryakan jugalah. Untuk pekerjaan rumah saya cukup otoriter… anak yang pertama yang dah bisa diminta tolong nyuci.. Apapun yang saya suruh dia harus mau. Mau nyuci piring atau masak nasi, mau anak cowok atau anak cewek sama aja. Kendali berada di tangan saya, tapi juga sudah ada kesadaran sendiri, kalau pakaian dalamnya suami abis, ya berarti dia setrika dulu…” (Respondent B)

Translation:

“(When we are working from home and do not have an assistant) Well, my children also do house chores. I am quiet authoritarian for house chores…..my eldest child….can wash clothes…whatever I ask him, he must do it….washing dishes or
cooking rice, son or daughter, it is same. I am the one who controls it, but they also have awareness in themselves….like when my husband’s underwear is not ready yet…he must iron it by himself…." (Respondent B)

Here we can see some strategies implemented by respondents. First, they share the house chores with husband or children. Husbands and children, in various degrees, participate in doing domestic works. Another respondent named respondent C said “I prefer doing things that using my brain. To be honest, that’s what I feel. I do house chores only in Lebaran break. Besides Lebaran break, I always have assistant to do house chores…” She implements strategy by delivering the workload to her assistant. Based on three interviews above, we can see that women here are no longer tied to traditional gender roles in domestic sphere. House chores is a fluid work that can be done by anybody at home. However, our respondents still take the initiative and the most active part in managing house chores, as can be seen from respondents’ answers, “But still, I do the house chores most, the mandate is from me…” or “I am the one who controls it.” In other words, although they are not doing house chores alone, but still, these working mothers are the one who is in charge in managing house chores. They have to delegate the tasks to their children or husband or assistant. It seems that for the mothers delegating the tasks is more stressful than doing those house chores by themselves. It is because delegating tasks means the mothers have a responsibility to manage those house chores and make sure that everything is on the track. Thinking about what meals to serve for lunch or dinner, making sure that children’s school uniform is ready in the wardrobe, or seeing the dirty floor and asked the family member to clean it, are some examples of daily home managerial works that make these working mothers/wives feel stressful.

To certain extends, traditional gender roles between a man and a woman put a woman as a subordinate in her relationship with a man. Our respondents, living in urban areas, with Javanese, Sundnese, Bataknese ethnicity background have internalized those patriarchal values. But using economic power they have, at some point they resist to acknowledge their husband position as the head of the family,, as can be seen from the answer below:

“Nah..definisi kepala keluarga sendiri pun juga perlu diklarifikasi lagi sih ya….cuma yang pasti setiap keputusan itu aku dan suamiku….kita rembukan….kita membuat keputusan bersama terutama untuk hal yang apa ya….istilahnya….fundamental…atau kritis….itu pasti kita membuat keputusan bersama….Cuma memang kalau misalkan, I don’t know ya kalau misalkan di rumah tangga lain ya, tapi mungkin karena aku pun juga mandiri dari dulu ya..financially independent juga, jadi ya ada beberapa hal yang that I need to by something or apa ya, aku bisa membuat keputusan itu sendiri sih, bahkan kadang-kadang pun aku juga ngga tanya beliau..dan itu pun juga…tanya
suamiku maksudnya…dan itu pun juga menjadi teguran juga ya buat aku…bahwa eh aku kan mestinya diskusi dulu, meskipun diskusinya bukan minta izin ya, tapi lebih ke FYI…eh aku tadi beli ini…. “(Respondent D)

Translation:

“Well…we have to clarify again what is the definition of the head of the family, right….but one thing for sure, for every decision, my husband and I…we always discuss it…we make decision together, especially for …what do you call it….for fundamental…critical things….surely we make decision together. Well, but yeah…I don’t know in another family, but maybe because I am independent….and I am financially independent too, so there are some things….for instance I need to buy something…I can make my own decision, even sometimes I do not ask my husband first…and it became a wakeup call for me…ohhh I must discuss with him first, even though the discussion is not about getting permission from him, but more on FYI…I bought this…. “(Respondent D)

It is interesting to see the answer above, when respondent been asked about who is the head of the family. Respondent does not want to say clearly who is the head of the family, as can be seen from her statement “we have to clarify again what is the definition of the head of the family, right…” and she goes on saying that they make decision together, indicating that there is equal partnership here. She feels proud for being independent and she even has stated that she can make decision by herself. But here comes another interesting part, that every time she showed her power, she then balanced it by saying a statement making humble herself such as “ohhh I must discuss with him first…” but again, she reclaimed her power by saying “the discussion is not about getting permission from him, but more on FYI…I bought this…”

This dynamics about lowering and elevating one’s position in the relationship between husband and wife is also found in another respondent (respondent E). At first, she said that her husband is the head of the family, but after digging deeper to respondent’s answer, she said that she is the one who takes control in doing the family business, managing all and also asked her husband to help her. Generally putting their husband as “the formal head of family”, in daily practices some of these women are the ‘de facto” leaders. It can be counted as one of woman’s strategies to secure the power, and, at the same time, to maintain the harmonious relationship with her husband. In other words, women, to certain extents, renegotiate patriarchal gender and power relations by minimizing their husbands’ “single hand” authority. It is in line with what Dowler, Carubia and Szczygiel (2005) said “home is a dynamic site to reevaluate and meditate power
relations.”

**BONDING BUT STRESSFULL: MOTHER-CHILDREN RELATIONSHIP IN TIME OF COVID-19**

One of the most challenging job for working mothers, who are forced to go back to their home, is taking care of their own children while, at the same time, doing their own office work. Most of the respondents said that they are the one who is taking care of the children mostly, while their own husbands function jus as “the helpers”. In short the husbands ‘s involvement is not as much as our respondents’ one. Based on the interviews, there are many factors that make these conditions have happened. The first factor is that, respondents themselves feel oblige to take care of their children. They also believe that they can assist their children better than their husbands do. The husbands must work from office more than their wives, and the children want to be assisted or taken care by their own mothers more than by their fathers are the other factors raised by some respondents.

Respondent F said that the positive side of being at home is that she can have more quality and bonding time with her three years old daughter. Before COVID-19 breakout, she put her daughter at daycare everyday, so the time to interact with her daughter was limited. On the other hand, another respondent (respondent D) said that “I feel stress because my daughter is very clingy to me. I can not work and I hope my husband can be more active in taking care of her. He tried but I always feel that his effort is not enough.” Respondent C also said that her bonding with her daughter is much closer since working from home. Before COVID-19 outbreak, she called a private tutor to her home to teach her daughter, but during this pandemic time, she must stop all tutor’s lessons and take a responsibility to assist her daughter in studying. By assisting her daughter in doing homework, she has a quality time and strong bonding with her daughter. But, on the other side, it has made her daughter depending too much on her. The trouble rises when her daughter wants to be with her while at the same time she has to work.

Most respondents have said that working from home have made the line between working and taking care or doing domestic things has not been clear anymore. Interestingly, while for some respondents working from home have given a space to have more bonding with their own children, there are also some respondents voice having stressed out in navigating working and taking care of their own children, as expressed:

Work pressure affects my relationship with my children. My eldest one said to me, “Mama is very grumpy now.” Hmmm…his saying made me think. When work from home, it is almost 24 hours the work pressure is on me. The line between work and home as a place to give attention to my children is gone. It makes me sometimes being very emotional when dealing with my children. The impact is that my children spend more time with their gadgets. Well, my husband has tried to help, but he is not working from home. I also understand that besides working at his office, my husband also works at night for another project from another office.” (Respondent G)

The respondent’s statement above describes her condition, working from home with children and home need to be taken care of. His husband can not help her because he must work from office every day. From the respondent’s answer above, the keyword is “line.” It is needed to separate working from home, so there is an exact amount of time dedicated for working, and dedicated for taking care of children and home. But now this strict line has been gone because of pandemic situation. As a result, all has to be existed in one place called home. Before the COVID-19 breaking out, home functioned as a place to release stress after working. But, nowadays, to certain degrees, it has shifted as a stressful place because working and living basically exist in one place. It affects emotionally to some respondents and at this point, there is no quality time or more bonding between mother and children. Otherwise, the quality of mother-children relationship decreased and as a solution, some respondents tended to give more gadget time to their own children.

At this point, some respondents have done some compromises in term of taking care of children and doing whatever to make them survive in working and taking care of their children. Seemingly, gadget has become one of solutions for this situation. While others respondents have solved this situation by asking their eldest children to help them in taking care of the younger ones. Spending more time at home does not mean that the mothers will automatically have a quality
time with their children. It can be said that this stressfull condition is experienced more by the mothers rather than by the fathers. At least we can conclude this based on our interviews. Eventhough both husband and wife are working, still a wife or a mother is conditioned to take more responsibility in caring work.

MODIFYING HOME AS A PLACE FOR BUSINESS AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

COVID-19 pandemic have made most activities done from home. Despite of stressfull condition experienced by some mothers, there are some respondents who take opportunity in this pandemic season to start a new business or involve in social activities.

“Kalau aku sih pengen berkreasi juga kan, jadi cari-cari kesempatanlah apa yang bisa dilakukan di saat seperti ini. Di satu sisi aku mencoba lebih bonding juga dengan anak aku…Keuntungannya menurut aku justru setelah covid bisa exploring bisnis baru…jadi aku ada juga proejct bersama beberapa sahabat aku dari Prasetya Mulia…teman-teman kuliah aku dulu....untuk bikin satu produk kecantikan. Jadi itu sih yang lagi aku explore untuk isi waktu-waktu yang bisa kita explore juga…karena kan mungkin kalau kita kerja kan sudah terbatas dari sisi waktu, transport, dan segala macam gitu….jadi karena sekarang ada lebih waktu luang..ya aku coba explore di situ….kita serius bisnis, sudah masuk tahap business plan, udah bikin logo….” (Responden F)

Translation:

“Well, I want to do or create something too, right….so I am trying to find an opportunity in this kind of season. On the other hand, I try to have more bonding with my daughter too…well the good thing is…during this covid time, I can explore new business….so I have a project with my best friends from Prasetya Mulia….my college friends….business to make a beauty product. So I am exploring on that thing now….also to use my time…because you know, when we are working from office, we are limited in our time, transportation, and all things…right….now I have more time, I try to explore more…we are serious on this business, we’ve already made our business plan and logo…. (Respondent F)

“Pas awal covid, nyaris semua kegiatan sosial sabtu minggu, seperti pelatihan guru dan lain-lain terhenti. Setelah beberapa lama baru kemudian lebih banyak
kegiatan pelatihan dan diskusi via online. Bisa sampai 3 kali seminggu bahkan lebih selama covid, tapi online. Rangkaian lokakarya juga diubah jadi online, dan kemudian tetap hari sabtu ada lokakarya online. Jadi ngak perlu berangkat ke bandara subuh-subuh atau jumat malam. Awal covid, ritmenya sempat susah. Pas udah terbiasa, jadi malah tambah sibuk pelatihan guru, ada berbagai kelompok guru yang tidak terlalu banyak anggota yang berbeda-beda, via online.” (responden H)

Translation:

“In the beginning of covid, almost all social activities done on weekend, like teacher training, and other activities are stopped. After some weeks later, we have made more training and discussion sessions on online platform. Three times a week or more than that during this covid season, but online. We also have changed workshop to online platform and every Saturday we have online workshop. So I do not have to go to airport early in the morning or on Friday’s night. On the beginning of covid, I had a difficulty to find the rhythm in these social activities. But after a while I have got used to it, I am getting busier doing teacher training, there are many groups of teachers, I give online workshop for them.” (Respondent H)

Working from home has given some women, in certain degrees, some good opportunities such as starting a second job and developing self-actualization through social activities. Argually, they have adapted with this condition, and have modified their home function as a place to do everything. Seemingly, because of facing this pandemic situation, those new opportunities and ideas have come out. An example can be seen from another respondent’s confession, respondent I. She said that because of this pandemic, she decided to restart a culinary business and asked all her family members to get involved in this business under her supervision. She said:

“This business has already started four years ago. But there’s up and down in it. Before covid, we took the order for wedding parties. But, since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, we have engaged into this business more seriously, so we have added another new menu. Before COVID-19 outbreak we only had soto Padang and soto iga, but now we have also had dendeng balado rice bowl.”
Her saying has proved that COVID-19 outbreak has opened the new opportunity for some working women and mothers. Moreover, these women have became more creative in using this chance to get a second job, as respondent I have done. She saw the opportunity that because of this pandemic season, people need more food delivery service. She, then, created an easy to eat menu such as rice bowl *dendeng balado*.

With all activities done from home, places at home have also been shifted in function. Home has no longer been a domestic sphere only. For example, some respondents said that they have modified living room or children room for a classroom where their own children, and, some times, their friends can study. Another respondent reported that she has functioned her bedroom as a working room too, so she has a space for working from home. Because of this pandemic season, even kitchen and dining room, have been used as a centre of family business space. Rooms at home have been used for more than one function. One of the respondents (respondent B) said that if her office agree to give her working from home permit this week, she will open a kind of private tutorial lesson for her elementary school child and. Her child’s friends can also participate in it. She will organised it at her home, with free of charge. Her main motivation is that her child can have friends to study together. Based on this respondent’s explanation, it can be said that a home in the time of pandemic has been functioned as an education and social place.

One of the respondents said that she has occupied one special desk to work and this desk has been placed between kitchen and living room. She said that she has chosen that place in order to have a special place to work, and, at the same time, she can easily go to kitchen and also watch her three years old daughter playing in living room. From where she has positioned herself at home, we can read that a woman as a wife, and a mother is conducting her professional work, and, at the same time, she also in charge in her domestic and nurturing roles.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Covid-19 pandemic, to some extend, have changed the lifestyle of working mothers. When working space and living space exist in one space called home, it creates stressful situation but also opportunity to self-actualization. The narratives of the respondents have showed that there is no single narrative about woman in domestic and public sphere. It is in line with Hollows’ (2007:45) statement: “feminism ... needs to produce ways of conceptualizing domestic femininity that are not simply reduced to a singular and fixed image of housewife.” Based on respondents’ stories, it can be said that in their daily lives women have negotiated and strategized in order to cope with this pandemic situation. Compared to men, women have still taken the bigger portion to do house chores and taking care of their children, since the traditional patriarchal norms have still been internalized in the respondents’ lives. But they have negotiated the traditional norms by delegating the house chores to their husbands,
children, and assistants with all of its dynamics. Some of our respondents also make this pandemic time as a time to find new opportunities. They have started the new business or social activities, all from their home. Home as a domestic sphere shifted as a public sphere. Women conduct business and social activities at home, while also doing domestic works at the same time. In short, by using Kandiyoti’s patriarchal bargaining concept (1988), Hollows’ anti single stereotype of housewives critic (2007), and the argument of Dowler, Carubia, and Szczygiel (2005), who stated that home is ‘a dynamic site to reevaluate and meditate power relations”, as analysis tools, it can be concluded that as impact of Covid pandemic condition, the middle class working mothers, who have been “forced to go back” to their homes, in various degrees, have used their homes as “struggling places” to renegotiate the old patriarchal role divisions and unequal gender/power relations. Moreover, their homes, to some extends, are used as learning sites for gender equality values, and modified to fulfill their extended functions: as domestic, work, and social spheres.

This study needs further exploration on this issue as it has a limitation. The limitation of this study is that it is only focus on middle class working mothers. In order to get a complete picture how working mothers struggling in this pandemic situation, study on lower and upper class working mothers are needed. A study about working mother who is a single parent is also an interesting topic to be developed in further research.

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