

Complex Decisions between Care and Paid Work

A Qualitative Study on the Demand for Childcare Services
in Mexico City

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Abstract

This study aims to improve the understanding of the barriers and enabling factors determining the demand for childcare in Mexico City. The study is based on focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews with mothers and fathers (married or living in a union) of children ages zero to six years. The findings of this qualitative analysis confirm that for parents in Mexico City, decisions in favor of or against the use of childcare are based on: (1) the interplay between women's aspirations, the role of work in their lives, and the additional support they have; and (2) their perceptions of the care available, including convenience, overall quality, perceived opportunities for positive child development, and financial and non-financial costs (safety and risks to the child's well-being). The findings suggest that significant differences exist between women with higher

education and those with lower levels of education living in different parts of the city (and from different socioeconomic backgrounds: middle-class vis-à-vis vulnerable women). The observed gaps are due to differences in their ability to make informed choices, their aspirations and work opportunities, the alternative support options available to them, and their ability to adapt to the childcare supply. These results highlight the relevance of: (1) promoting a more balanced distribution of childcare responsibilities between men and women; (2) communicating more transparently the benefits of using childcare services and the measures taken to ensure the safety and positive development of children; and (3) adapting the childcare centers' functioning to the needs of working parents.

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Complex Decisions between Care and Paid Work: A Qualitative Study on the Demand for Childcare Services in Mexico City¹

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“It is a feeling - I could even say: of guilt. Because they tell you that it's not okay to leave him [in a center], but they also criticize you because you don't contribute financially to your home. It's a conflict.”^{4,5}

1. Introduction

There has been a significant rise in female labor force participation in the Latin America region over the past decades. Women’s participation in the region’s labor force rose by 25 percent between 1990 and 2018, in contrast with the global trend of a slight decline (Muller and Casabonne 2020). Access to education for women, the decline of fertility, and later marriage are drivers behind this increase in participation rates (Chioda 2016). Female labor force participation has had significant effects on poverty and inequality reduction in the Latin America region: The growth in female labor income in the region between 2000 and 2010 accounted for 28 percent of the reduction in inequality and 30 percent of the reduction in extreme poverty (World Bank 2012). Despite those gains, some countries in the region are still lagging behind in female labor force participation – Mexico is one of them. At 44.2 percent (women ages 15 and older, World Development Indicators, modeled ILO estimate, 2019) female labor force participation is particularly low in Mexico, among the lowest in the Latin America region and in the OECD.

Motherhood has an important impact on women's employment decisions. The disproportionate demand on women’s time associated with care is one of the key factors behind the significant gap in participation rates in the Latin America region (Mateo Díaz and Rodríguez-Chamussy 2013). That seems to be the case for Mexico as well: The likelihood of being employed declines among mothers with young children, increases when they enter pre-school, and then, decreases again as children start primary school (Inchauste et al. 2019). Among working age women 41 percent of low-skilled and 32 percent of high-skilled women report that their decision not to work is driven by the lack of reliable childcare (Inchauste et al. 2019).

Mateo Díaz and Rodríguez-Chamussy 2016 show that subsidizing childcare appears to increase child enrollment, which in turn increases female labor supply: The proportion of children 0–3 attending childcare and rates of female labor force participation are strongly correlated in Europe and Latin American countries, and interestingly, this relationship is stronger for children 0–3 than for children 3–5. However, use of formal childcare in the region is limited, and especially for younger children in Mexico: Only 5 percent of children below the age of 2 are in formal childcare, which is significantly below the OECD average of 35 percent (Inchauste et al. 2020 based on ENES, 2017).

A large body of international evidence documents the positive impact of improved availability of childcare on women’s labor force participation (Blau & Currie 2004, Lokshin 1999 and Fong & Lokshin, 2000 for Russia). Paes de Barros et al. (2011) find that access to free publicly provided childcare services led to a considerable increase in mothers’ employment (from 36 to 46 percent) in Brazil. Medrano (2009) finds that the expansion of early childhood education in Chile increased female labor

⁴ Individual interviews with woman with higher education, with access to a childcare center, working full time, resident in the East Zone (I-W-HE-WE-FW-E).

⁵ The nomenclature used to identify the characteristics of research participants who will be cited throughout this paper can be found in the annex.

force participation by 2.6-10 percentage points and Attanasio and Vera-Hernandez (2004) show that the probability of female employment increased from 0.12 to 0.37 as a consequence of a community nursery program in rural Colombia. Additionally, a childcare subsidy induced by a program aimed at expanding pre-primary school facilities in Argentina was found to increase maternal employment (Berlinski & Galiani 2007). Lefebvre and Merrigan (2008) show that the introduction of a new childcare policy in Quebec (Canada) (licensed childcare provision at reduced fees) had a large and statistically significant impact on the labor supply of mothers with preschool children. Gathmann and Sass (2012) analyze a reform that raised the prices of public daycare and find that parents respond by reducing public daycare and increasing childcare at home and subsequently, female labor force participation declines with effects strongest in low-income households. For Mexico specifically, Calderon (2014) demonstrates that the childcare subsidy program “Programa de Estancias Infantiles” substantially increased women’s probability of working.

The provision of affordable childcare is not only showing effects on women’s labor participation, but research also documents its impacts on productivity and the quality of women’s employment. Sanfelice (2018) finds that provision of center-based childcare in Brazil increased the probability of maternal employment by 44 percentage points, and it enabled mothers to work full-time and their likelihood to be employed in the formal sector (Sanfelice 2018). In Vietnam, women who gained access to childcare services were able to extend their hours of work, increase their incomes and move from self into wage employment (Dang et al. 2019). Finally, Clark et al. 2019 find women shifting into the formal sector as a result of access to childcare in Kenya. For Mexico specifically, Calderon (2014) demonstrates an increase in income following the significant expansion of childcare in 2007.

Access to quality childcare also shows positive effects for children. Without adequate early childhood education, young children do not have the necessary skills to fully benefit from the education they receive at the primary level. Young children need sustained access to supportive, nurturing environments that provide a high degree of cognitive stimulation and emotional care throughout the early years. Compared to children who attend quality pre-primary programs, children who enter school without adequate preparation are more likely to have poor academic performance, repeat grades, and drop out of school. Quality preprimary programs are linked to life-long benefits for individuals and society at large. They reduce the need for remedial education or rehabilitative actions later on, including in terms of reducing the risk of incarceration and improving welfare in adulthood (Schweinhart et al 2005, Heckman & Masterov 2007, Reynolds et al 2001, Feinstein 2003, Currie and Thomas 1999). It must be noted, however, that children will only benefit from increased access to early childcare and education if the services being provided meet core quality standards (Schweinhart et al 2005).

Demand for childcare services may be limited by a number of factors, including affordability, accessibility and quality (Mateo Díaz & Rodríguez-Chamussy 2016). Mateo Díaz and Rodríguez-Chamussy (2016) cite evidence according to which the distance to a childcare center has been associated with the decision to enroll children (or not). At the same time, the demand for childcare services in Mexico does not seem to be exclusively determined by market variables (price, quality and quantity), but also by cultural factors and social norms. The notion that women are responsible for the care of children and the elderly is still widespread among Mexican households (Arceo Gómez & Santillán 2018). Arceo Gómez and Santillán (2018) analyze data from the ELCOS Survey (Encuesta

Laboral y de Corresponsabilidad Social – Labor and social co-responsibility Survey) 2012 and find that 79 and 71 percent of women with high and low qualifications, respectively, reported that their children (zero to five years old) are not in daycare because someone else takes care of them. The second most frequent response, however, is that the father prefers the mother to take care of the child (10 percent of women with low qualifications and 8 percent of highly qualified women).⁶ Indeed, data from the World Values Survey indicates that a significant share of the population believes that “when a woman works for pay, children suffer”: 32.6 percent agreed and 10.4 percent strongly agreed (2010-2014 wave). Importantly though, those beliefs are changing: The share of respondents agreeing and strongly agreeing was significantly higher in the 1990 WVS wave (50 percent and 25.9 percent respectively).

This paper presents the results of a qualitative study aimed at deepening the understanding of factors that determine the demand for childcare in Mexico City. The study aims to shed light on what is driving the decisions of Mexican mothers (and fathers) to send their children to childcare or not, with the ultimate objective of adequately informing policies aimed at addressing the existing gaps and imbalances. The paper is divided as follows: After this introduction, the methodological approach is presented. This is followed by the main results of this study, disentangling the decision process for accessing childcare services. This section ends with a discussion about differences in women's decisions to access childcare centers when comparing different social groups. The last section presents the main conclusions related to the complex decisions that underlie the demand for childcare services in Mexico City.

Methodology

The objective of this study is to deepen the understanding of factors that influence the demand for childcare services in Mexico using qualitative research. The study aims to better understand how women and men decide to use childcare centers for their children under the age of six or why and how they decide not to do so. It explores the factors that influence this decision – either positively or negatively. Qualitative research enables to obtain detailed information on motivations and personal barriers, and provides insights into subjective and sensitive topics, including on drivers of personal decisions and behaviors. Informants' individual experiences and perceptions are inductively explored based on a small sample. Informants can express their thoughts and reactions in their own words instead of choosing predefined alternatives. These characteristics made it especially suitable to explore what prevents and drives demand for childcare services, a type of information that cannot be easily obtained through surveys and quantitative studies.

Fathers and mothers of children six years or younger were included in the sample, with an effort to reflect heterogeneity through interviewees with different characteristics, as well as childcare center staff. The recruitment of participants was facilitated through personal contacts and entry-points such

⁶Only three of the offered reasons are supply-related: costs, conditions and distance to childcare centers and the fact that some children are not admitted due to illness or disability. Seven percent of low-skilled and 4 percent of highly skilled women mention lack of affordable childcare, and only 3 percent of women at each of these skill levels mention the other two barriers related to the offer to access childcare services. Therefore, for some households, lack of daycare attendance may be a demand-related phenomenon.

as acquaintances, university and work. Participants included mothers and fathers with or without experience in using childcare centers; mothers who are inactive or unemployed, who work part-time and those who work full-time; and mothers with different levels of instruction (basic and higher). All mothers interviewed were married or living in a union - given that the behavior of women without a partner in the labor market is different: Labor force participation among single mothers is generally much higher (Inchauste et al. 2019). Childcare center staff were interviewed as key informants. In total, 18 in-depth interviews with mothers, five in-depth interviews with fathers, six focus groups with mothers and seven interviews with key informants were included in the sample. Data collection started with a pilot, after which the research instrument was adjusted.

The sample was selected from three areas in the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City. These included Cuajimalpa in the Western Zone; Coyoacán and Cuahémoc in the Center; and Tláhuac and Iztapalapa in the Eastern Zone. The selection of those areas was motivated by the objective to access a socio-economically diverse sample. The East and North are extensive and socioeconomically homogeneous areas inhabited by working class sectors of the population. The Center, South and West are heterogeneous areas inhabited by different social sectors. While the middle-class was gradually inserted into the Western, Southern and North-eastern areas of the city, families with more limited financial resources were predominantly occupying the Northern and Eastern zones. Despite those patterns, working class sectors can be found in the entire metropolitan area, next to or around the areas inhabited by wealthy sectors (Parnreiter 2005).

Two criteria were used as a proxy to assign individual participants to socio-economically different groups: level of education and geographic area of residence. This led to the establishment of the following participants'-groups: a) those with basic education, i.e. completed secondary education or less, and who predominantly reside in the Eastern Zone (vulnerable group); and b) those with higher education who have completed University studies, postgraduate degrees, Master's degrees, and some with Doctorates who reside in the West and Central Zone (middle class). Those interviewed with basic levels of education are most often self-employed, or work in part-time or informal jobs, as sales staff, catalog vendors, artisans and craftsmen, piecework seamstresses, stylists, domestic workers, counter employees and babysitters. Participants with higher education worked in finance, business, design, art, cinema, or as teaching staff in higher education. More detail on sample composition, research protocols to ensure ethical standards, on data processing and analysis as well as research limitations is included in the Annex.

2. A complex set of factors influencing the decision to access childcare services

The results of this qualitative research show that the decision to use childcare is complex and influenced by a number of different factors. The analytical framework (Figure 1) that was inductively developed based on data analysis suggests that there are factors that are mediated by social gender norms and that have to do with the role of the mother in particular. Social gender norms affect: (i) a woman's own aspirations and identity and her desire to work and take care of her child; (ii) the opportunities that may or may not exist for women to work and generate an income; and (iii) access

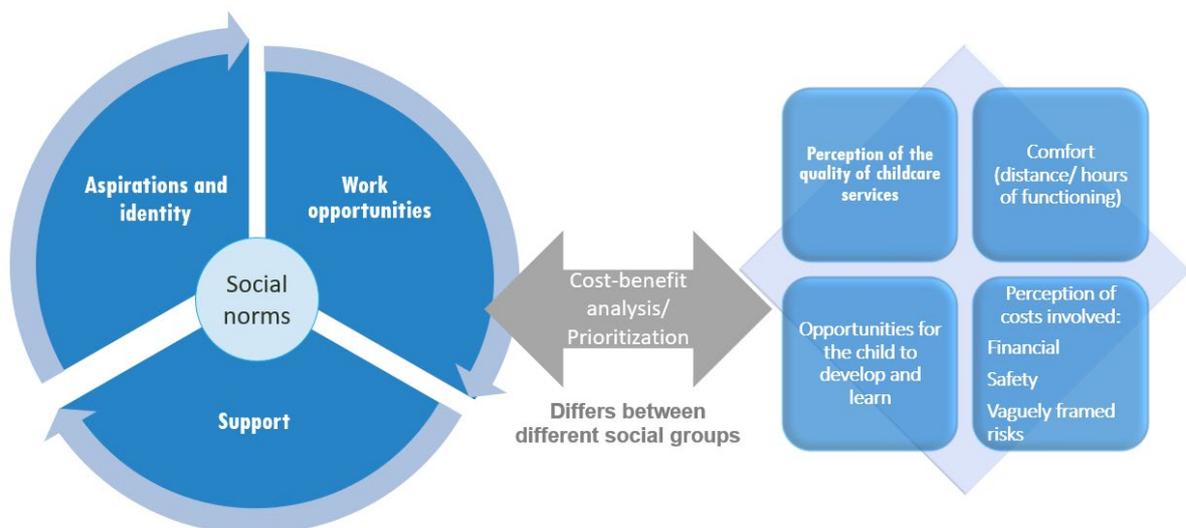
to other forms of care support (i.e. a partner who shares the care burden, domestic support, other family members) that a woman may rely on.

Social norms are shared expectations or informal rules based on beliefs about i) what others do and about ii) what others think should be done. Social norms are part of complex system of beliefs, attitudes and values (Bicchieri 2016). Social norms can alter people’s behavior or preferences through feelings of shame, exclusion, anxiety, or guilt (Elster 1989). They influence how others treat women and what they expect of them. Furthermore, social norms influence women’s self-concept by defining how they should act within their social group (internalization of external norms). In that sense, they have substantial impact on the ways in which women can participate in public, in the economy and in their communities and families.

In line with that, the analytical framework shows, on the one hand, that women’s aspirations and how they see themselves, what they wish for their futures, their ability to find jobs, and the support they have to care for their children, are all profoundly influenced by social gender norms that prescribe how women should behave. On the other hand, mothers (and fathers) must balance their aspirations, their opportunities to work and generate an income, and the support they can mobilize with what they know or think about the offer of childcare available. Their perceptions about the offer of care include aspects such as quality, convenience of the service (both in terms of distance and hours of attention), the opportunity for their child to benefit from the stimulation and learning, and expected costs (both financial and safety related ones).

Women (and men) compare the potential costs and benefits when deciding whether to use childcare or not. As indicated in the framework, this decision is also intrinsically linked to their decision to participate in the labor market. The conclusion of such cost-benefit analysis may be very different when comparing women from different social groups. The weight (and direction) of each individual argument differs between women from the middle class and with higher levels of education and women from vulnerable sectors, with lower levels of instruction.

Figure 1: Balancing work, family and care options



Source: Authors’ illustration

2.1 Social gender norms manifest themselves in three dimensions

As mentioned above, on one side of the analytical framework we find the factors that are influenced by social gender norms: (i) women's aspirations and identity, (ii) job and income opportunities for women, and (iii) available care support.

Aspirations and identity

Meaning and interpretation of motherhood

Women's interpretation of motherhood is fundamental for their definition of care and care responsibilities. Caring for children and the home is an essential part of the interviewed women's identity, which is often centered around traditionally feminine roles. This becomes obvious when the interviewees indicate that they should dedicate themselves mainly to the family. Although this idea is more prevalent among women from vulnerable groups (with basic education), it is also present in the case of middle-class women (with higher education),⁷ as reflected when they report considering quitting their jobs to care for their children.

"Being a housewife, right? If you already got married, you have to look after the husband, look after the children, and you sort of lose the right to work, to study, and you have to dedicate yourself to your family" G-W-BE-WE-IN-E

Both for middle-class women and for those from vulnerable groups, the figure of the mother is the most important and the most indispensable one for children. Both groups refer to the role that the mother represents with great appreciation and importance. Even among middle-class women who have agreements to share childcare responsibilities with their partners, the mother is perceived as the most important figure in parenting because mothers tend to be more present in the activities of their children, including those related to school, and they tend to take care of them when they are sick.

"In Mexico there may be many single mother homes, but it is still difficult to see single father families with children, that is very difficult because here in Mexico the main figure is the mother, right?" I-W-HE-WE-FW-C(c)

Men also emphasize the heavy pressure and sizeable responsibility that falls on women who are mothers. Although the interviewed men express that they share care duties to a certain extent, they also report that women are more comprehensively devoted to all aspects of care.

"In other words, I think they must feel very pressured as mothers because they have to (economically) raise their children, but they also have to give them the love, education, emotional and physical nurturing they need, and, well, you can't do both things." I-M-WE-E (a)

The traditional role of the mother is closely linked to the concept of "sacrifice" (in both groups of women, middle-class and those from vulnerable groups). A significant part of women express that

⁷ We will refer to the two different groups of women as 'vulnerable' and 'middle-class' from now on, though these classifications are not based on income but on the previously identified selection criteria (levels of education, location of residence as described in the Methodology section).

they were forced to change jobs from full- to part-time employment due to time constraints, which ultimately led to a reduction in their income. Likewise, for other women, dedicating their entire time to childcare means suspending other personal projects (studies, others) and implies greater economic dependence on their partners.

"I think that this is also a topic that is a taboo here in Mexico. In other words, I think that the figure of the mother is like "sacrifice yourself, abnegate yourself and everything" ... it is hard in all aspects and in all the stories because this part comes with a lot of weight, that is what is expected from you."
G-W-HE-WE-IN-E

The pressure to fulfill the traditional role of being a mother can generate feelings of guilt in women for leaving their children in the care of others or in childcare services. Middle-class women who do work - even when they try to create a balance between paid work and care duties - routinely find that their children demand more time than they can provide them. This generates tensions and even feelings of guilt for having to decide between paid work and a full dedication to "mothering" ("maternar" in the Spanish original citation from interviews).

"Yesterday I saw him for a little while at noon (...) he says to me: "Mommy, don't go back to work, stay with me, come and play with me", my son, it breaks my heart. I tell him: "Well, my love, I have to go back to the office, it's just for a little while." I-W-HE-WE-FW-W (b)

However, "guilt" can manifest itself in other forms among women who choose to dedicate their time to children. In the case of middle-class mothers who are dedicated to the care of their children, some affirm that they experience guilt for choosing a full-time care role and for abandoning other personal projects such as study or paid work.

The examples experienced by the interviewees in their own parents, the way they filled their (gendered) roles in the family and the society more broadly, become fundamental for the formation of their own behaviors and actions today. Women from different groups mention the influence that their mothers had in the construction of their vision of work and care. For example, the majority of middle-class women state that their mothers were engaged in paid work and were responsible for domestic activities and childcare at the same time. This, in turn, became an example, or even a role model for them. Importantly, the overall discourse around raising children seems to be directed primarily to women and not to men.

"My mother studied a short career ... and she says: I am not going to let this part of myself go, she says: I do not see myself at home, I do not, so I think that as a child one follows, one follows this." I-W-HE-WE-FW-C (a)

Traditional values and associated gender roles have a much stronger presence in women from vulnerable groups compared to middle-class women. Women who have not completed their studies and who live in vulnerable contexts have very little decision-making capacity as the number of different options available to them tends to be more limited. Often married at an earlier age, the jobs they can choose are very precarious in nature, hence, they prefer to invest time in care work rather than in those poorly paid opportunities. In those cases, the partners assume the role of providers. In other cases, job opportunities are not available at all – not even precarious ones. However, when the family expands and the existing income is not enough, those women are

sometimes forced to look for paid work to supplement the family income. In these cases, women tend to revert to their mothers or mothers-in-law for support in taking care of their children.

Envisioning one's role as a mother or as a professional

Middle-class women experience a conflict between the identity of being a mother and the identity of being a professional. Variations of this type of conflict are also found among the group of vulnerable women - but with less intensity and less frequency. In addition, women with lower levels of education and from vulnerable groups refer to jobs and paid work as something they consider due to necessity and not in relation with their own identity.

Middle-class women state that they were able to meet most of their academic goals and some of their professional ones prior to the experience of motherhood. Most of those interviewed with higher education mention that they postponed maternity until after age 30. Before experiencing motherhood, they were able to fulfill some of their goals or objectives, for example, they completed professional studies, developed work experience and achieved a certain level of economic stability. This level of economic stability is closely linked to the level of education attained. However, their focus on job satisfaction and growth then enters into tension and conflict when confronted with a necessary decision between paid work or caring for their children at home.

Some middle-class women do not feel prepared to quit their jobs despite having contemplated dedicating their time to caring for their children before motherhood. They refer to the difficulty of abandoning their jobs and to not build on their academic investment to dedicate themselves to the exclusive task of care. While they clearly express that their children are the most essential part of their lives, they consider that both their professional and their family lives are necessary and therefore look for ways that allow them to achieve a balance between them. In addition, some of the interviewees have reached a level of economic independence that they feel is difficult to give up. They also want to be able to guarantee certain living conditions for their children and, for that, one source of income is reportedly not enough to live in a middle-class area of Mexico.

"The truth is that, at some point before I got married, I came to think that when I'd get married and would have a family, I would stop working. I think things turned out differently. I have been living here in Mexico City for a while, but the situation is different, you sort of need two incomes, that is, two incomes to have a better quality of life." I-W-HE-WE-FW-W (b)

Some of the higher educated women who are inactive indicate that they had agreed with their partners that they would care for the children while their partners would be responsible for generating an income. As reason for this decision they state is their desire to closely accompany their children's development during their early years and, in addition, the expectation that it will be possible for them to rejoin the labor market later. Similarly, some others, when analyzing the costs and benefits of a decision to work or care for their children, argue that it is better to take care of children themselves than to go out to work and use their income to pay for someone else to be with them.

"Why work to be paying that person, especially since with two (children), they will obviously not charge me cheap." G-W-HE-WE-IN-C

Among the women with basic education who choose to prioritize the care of their child, there are some cases in which, despite the desire to dedicate themselves to the care of their children, economic needs force them to make an extra income and work outside the house. In low-income households, a single income is often not enough to cover the needs, particularly when there are multiple children and when taking into account that the main income generated by their partner stems from the informal economic sector. For several of these women the main motivation to work is the acquisition of certain assets such as their own house. Those women seek support from their mothers or mothers-in-law to go out to work and complement the household income. This extra income is then used for expenses such as clothing, assets or extra activities for the children.

“I think that for the, indeed now, for the necessity, because now what my husband earns is not enough for us, now yes, to satisfy the needs we have one hundred percent.” I-W-BE-WE-PW-C

Other interviewed women both from the middle-class and from vulnerable groups report that they planned the use of childcare centers to be able to continue with their jobs – sometimes because of their financial needs, sometimes because they were not willing to give up their jobs for other reasons, including the importance of their job for their own personal growth. Those mostly have access to childcare centers that are close to their residential areas or to their workplaces. They trust these services, and say they are familiar with how they operate through other people who have had direct experiences in using them.

The world of work

The decision to use childcare services is intrinsically linked to the decision to participate or not in the labor market. As previously mentioned, motherhood has a significant impact on the levels of labor participation among women in Mexico. The following section focuses on the importance of generating an income in the decision-making process to use childcare and, therefore, in the formation of the demand for childcare services.

Barriers and opportunities available to work and generate income

Despite recent progress in women’s inclusion in the labor market, barriers that affect their access to paid work and better work conditions persist. The scarcity of jobs and job insecurity affect women in general but mainly those with basic education. According to the interviewees’ perceptions, there are few job opportunities for women in general, but women from more vulnerable groups and those located in the East section of the city are more disadvantaged. Available jobs are further away, and tend to have inflexible schedules, besides also being poorly paid. Among those interviewed with basic education, their predominant jobs are self-employment or part-time jobs, and they work in informal commerce, as catalog vendors, artisans and craftswomen, seamstresses, stylists, domestic workers, counter employees and babysitters or education assistants. Middle-class interviewees also believe that, despite their academic training, they face certain difficulties in finding a good job. This is due to a combination of general economic challenges facing the country, low levels of demand and existing competition.

“I have not been able to find any job, especially because of my age at this moment and because I do not have any experience. So, they ask you to be of young age and they ask you for experience. I mean, how can you have both at the same time? That is always absurd.” I-W-HE-WE-FW-E (a)

Interviewed middle-class women also share experiences of prejudices and discrimination based on gender or motherhood. Overall, the interviewees perceive that there are more and better-paid job opportunities for men than for women. Some even were rejected when applying for a job because they had children. Others report having lost their jobs after returning from their maternity leave.

Despite the existence of a legal framework to protect women in the world of work, compliance is not always monitored. The lack of compliance, insufficient observance and poor enforcement of labor laws and rights increase the risk that women will experience discrimination in the world of work. Moreover, the legal framework is considered insufficient because it does not take into consideration some important mechanisms that can guarantee equity in access to opportunities for men and women. As an example, a more balanced provision of leave policies for both parents is suggested as a promotor of more equal involvement of men and women in child-rearing. In addition, interviewees suggest that such provisions could have an effect on the current advantage men experience in job selection processes. In the absence of parental leave, employers would automatically consider that women are absent more frequently to take care of their children.

“It coincided with the change of our boss and so, when I returned after my maternity leave, things were totally different. They moved me from my position, all my activities were taken from me, and later, little by little, they practically left me with no work up until the moment when I quit.” I-W-HE-WE-PW-C

What they work for: Income versus personal growth

Both middle-class and vulnerable women state that the main reason motivating their decision to work is to contribute to the financial stability and the well-being of their family. The economic contributions of women’s income to their household’s finances are mainly used to cover the expenses of their children according to the interviewees. In addition, as mentioned above, some interviewees among those with higher education emphasize that a single income is not enough to maintain a middle-class standard of living, due to the costs of housing, mobility, and others.

“The economy is not for a single person to be able to lift everything by her or himself, one cannot (...) it is very important for me to receive a salary and know that with that I am able to support the well-being of my family and also my own well-being.” I-W-HE-WE-FW-C (b)

Being financially independent and making independent decisions about this income are also motivators to sustain paid work. For women from both groups who have been engaged in work in the past, it is important to obtain their own income to make decisions with regards to how the family income is being spent, independent of whether these funds are spent for their own or for the family’s benefit.

“An adequate remuneration gives women a lot of independence to make decisions, to develop in other areas (...), it is as if it actually gives women a lot of empowerment to have an adequate remuneration and it gives us freedom, right? As women.” I-W-HE-WE-FW-C (c)

Professional development and growth are part of the motivations that some middle-class women refer to when asked about the reasons for engaging in paid work. Participants with higher education consider that work, in addition to generating income, is also important for personal development

and fulfillment, since it allows them to develop academically and perform professionally in areas of interest. This is something that provides them with satisfaction and happiness.

“For me, working is a form of independence and that is to my own satisfaction (...), I am in a place where I do what I like, I feel happy.” G-M-IS-SE-TP-P

Available care support

A major factor in the decision process is the existence of support alternatives available to mothers. The extent to which the father of the child is participating in care work as well as whether or not the mother can make use of other forms of support (in many cases the child's grandmother or domestic workers) has significant impact on her decision whether or not to work and whether or not to use childcare (and in which form).

Gender roles and the participation of male partners in care work

Less male participation and involvement and more detachment in childcare is observed among vulnerable families if compared to middle-class men. The family dynamics among vulnerable families interviewed seem to be more limited to women's role as caregivers and responsible for household activities, while the role of the economic provider remains on men. They indicate that some men “help” to carry out some household activities when they arrive from work or that they spend time with their children when they have days off from work, but agreements that promote more systematic support from men at home do not seem to exist.

“...he doesn't see them every day, sometimes he arrives and because they are already asleep, he doesn't take care of them anymore. Only the day he is here, on Sunday, and even then, just half (of it) because he is tired and stressed, and they want to play. What he does is that he takes them out for a walk and then again locks them up to watch television and he gets lost.” I-W-BE-WE-IN-E

Middle-class men or those with higher levels of education on the other hand seem to recognize the importance of being involved in household chores and caring for their children. This is evidenced in the agreement to more evenly distribute tasks among some of those couples. Some of the interviewed middle-class fathers claim to be aware of the effort and work involved in unpaid home and care work (something that was not as explicitly mentioned among fathers from vulnerable groups). In addition, they indicate that changing the vision of the role of men within the home persists as a challenge because not all are willing to distribute domestic tasks or childcare with their partners.

“Personally, it's not fair to me. It is a very heavy burden for women. I did not size it until I had my daughters and I saw that it is a lot of work, (...) it is not just cleaning the floor, the bathroom, the dishes, preparing the food, now it is taking care of the girls, take care of what they need, when they are hungry, when they are sleepy, entertain them, teach them, etc., so it is very, very heavy.” I-M-WE-E (a)

At the same time, and while there may be agreements to share care work in some way, other factors may affect those. Despite the agreements established by middle-class couples and those with higher levels of education to achieve a better balance in household chores and childcare distribution, there are job related issues that affect men's time, for example, more extensive work days or frequent trips

causing their absence from home more than originally envisioned. While in those specific cases men tend to prioritize their time for paid work and activities instead of assuming their care commitments, women are forced to make their work or other activities more flexible.

In general, men do not seem to contemplate the possibility of having to leave or quit their jobs to dedicate themselves full time to caring for their children. Contrary to middle-class women who leave their paid jobs to dedicate more time to their children, men do not experience these conflicts between work and family to the same extent. They may end up changing jobs or modifying their working hours, but they never give up jobs entirely. Having to sacrifice their income, their professional development, and to dedicate themselves full time to parenting, a solution quite commonly resorted to by women, is not an option for men according to interviewees of both sexes.

There was not one couple interviewed in which the woman assumed the economic burden and the man the main responsibility for childcare and unpaid housework – and not even for limited amounts of time. This seems to be linked to social norms, on the one hand, and to the perception that men have advantages in the labor market on the other, either in terms of better salaries or better job opportunities. Together, this makes for an assumption among participants that there are more advantages for the family to rely on the father's salary instead of the mother's - although these decisions are sometimes made almost implicitly and without much discussion or reflection.

“Due to my husband's profession, he has a much better chance of having a higher income and perhaps with jobs that do not take him so long, for example, he – in his stable job – has a very high income. Me instead, even with the highest salary I had, I could not reach half of what he earns now.” I-W-HE-WE-PW-C

Other support options available (grandmothers, domestic workers)

Alternative care options such as domestic support are only available to middle-class women. Only the better educated women can afford to hire a person (domestic worker) to support them every day with the care of their children or hire babysitters for specific hours or days. Some also combine support services, leaving their children in childcare centers during the morning and later in the afternoon rely on the support from grandmothers or domestic help. There are also alternative care center options, which offer babysitting for young children for a few hours while mothers can use their physical space to work.

“For example, I have my baby in a place which I think is one of the alternatives that should grow, where I can work, and my baby is in an adjoining room where they are taking care of him. This allows me to have a time for myself and at the same time I am still in reach to care for my baby ... ” I-W-HE-WE-PW-C

In summary, the set of aspirations, women's own identity, their perspectives, needs and their desire to participate in the labor market, as well as the potential support available to them, already greatly determine their disposition vis-à-vis the use of childcare services. Another crucial factor in the decision-making process related to usage of childcare service is the assessment and evaluation of the services offered.

2.2 Childcare services: Perception of the offer of care

In their decision to use a childcare service, the mother (and the father) analyze the available offer. According to the interviews conducted, the predominant factors in this analysis have to do with: (i) the distance and opening hours of the centers (factors that can become insurmountable barriers for mothers and fathers); (ii) the perception of quality of the services available; (iii) the perception of costs involved in the use (including financial costs, security costs and other risks involved); and (iv) the development and learning opportunities for the child.

Fundamental barriers: Distance and opening hours incompatible with the mother's reality

The lack of convenient opening hours both in public and private childcare centers is a limitation for working women, regardless of their background. Those factors fundamentally influence their decision to use those services. Both factors can become insurmountable barriers, especially when their working hours are not compatible with the hours of the centers. For some interviewees who work full time and do not have flexible hours, it can become impossible to pick up their children on time. Those factors can lead families to have no other option but to leave their child with a domestic worker – in the case of middle-class women – or with a grandmother or to stop working all together (both middle class and vulnerable women).

"(...) If I cannot have the flexibility in the work schedule, to say my son attends from 7 in the morning to 2 in the afternoon, then what do I do? In other words, if my work is full-time, what do I do from 2 in the afternoon until 8 at night or at 4 in the afternoon when I have to be at work?" G-W-HE-WE-IN-E

Distance is also a factor that determines the use and access to childcare services. Ideally, one can access a childcare center close to the parental home or to the workspace of one of the parents. Some interviewees with fewer resources do not have options in the proximity of residence, which makes it even more difficult for them to move around, and to be on time for entry and exit hours. Also, mothers express their concern about not being around their children in case of an emergency. Along those lines, distance becomes a factor to consider when deciding to use a childcare center.

Perception of the quality of childcare services

In general, a negative perception of childcare services predominates, both for mothers and fathers from different social strata who do not have experience in the use of these services. Fear and insecurity increase among those fathers and mothers when they imagine their children will be under the care of unknown persons, and without any surveillance mechanisms. The issue of insecurity, fear and the apprehension of child abuse is transversal in non-user mothers. They also express uncertainty or mistrust about the capacity of the centers' staff, and about the caregiver-infant ratio within care centers. These fears are expressed when interviewees share anecdotal experiences of neighbors, friends, family members – the most common sources of information interviewees refer to. Negative perceptions can also be derived from the media. In general, participants have not been formally informed about childcare services.

On the other hand, mothers who are users of childcare centers comment that mistrust and fear can be overcome once one has direct access to the functioning of the centers and to their staff. But they

also express that they supervise their children very closely to identify any negative situation that may arise.

"... Every day I checked him, to make sure he had nothing, I asked every time he would arrive: How was it? What happened? So, paying attention to the way they explain and to the way they tell things and he, himself, the way I saw my son over that time, it gave me peace of mind because I saw him well, I saw him calm, I saw him happy, up to where he could express it." I-W-HE-WE-FW-E

In this context, a recent reform of the childcare system referred to by research participants is worthwhile discussing: With the creation of the Secretaría de Bienestar (Secretary of Welfare) in 2018, previously called the Secretariat for Social Development (SEDESOL), the resources administered by this institution were granted directly to mothers of families. Although the changes in these public policies are not a direct part of the study, it emerged as an important issue during the interviews and focus group discussions. Interviewees expressed that: (1) Payments are still irregular and inaccessible to many beneficiaries; (2) the childcare centers increased their monthly fees or stopped working due to lack of demand; (3) the population of the East was particularly affected, since centers that belonged to SEDESOL were closed or privatized in February 2019, reducing access to these services for people with limited resources in those areas. (4) When the centers stopped receiving the subsidy, they were also no longer monitored, therefore, the fear of users grew that the service would not be of good quality. Finally, (5) the remaining free daycares (DIF, Centro de Desarrollo Infantil, etc.) face overpopulation since some of them took on children who were in the SEDESOL centers before.

Perception of costs

The use of childcare services involves costs for mothers and fathers. Those costs include: (i) financial costs and (ii) costs related to child safety. Public services are (financially) low-cost, but the overwhelming perception expressed by non-users is that they are of low quality. Middle-class interviewees and those from vulnerable groups who are not users of these centers consider that these sites do not have enough capacity and trained personnel, which is among the main reasons why they are wary of using those services.

On the other hand, users of Comprehensive Development Care Centers, hereinafter called CADIs (*Centro de Atención y Desarrollo Integral*), have a positive perception of the service received despite the low cost. The proximity to their area of residence, the recommendation and the positive evaluations that they received from friends and acquaintances were arguments that worked in favor of using the centers. However, they argue that the service should improve their level of coverage, since the demand seems greater than the existing capacity.

Private childcare services involve high (financial) costs and are therefore not accessible to all groups. They can only be accessed by middle-class women and those who have the resources to pay the costs of these services. Some interviewees indicate that there are childcare centers they are aware of that offer good care but that are not within the reach of the entire population. The lack of access is also reflected in the fact that they seem predominantly located in higher income areas such as the Western sectors of the city.

Security and risks

For mothers and fathers, it is important that childcare centers have all the safety measures and capacity in place to respond to an emergency. One of the important desires expressed among mothers who use childcare centers and others who do not is the appropriate infrastructure and training of personnel in the center to respond to emergencies such as fires or earthquakes that have occurred in the recent past and that have caused significant trauma in the population.

"Yes, it would be like trust and also security. Because I very much remember the case of the fire that happened in a kindergarten, that sticks as a shock with you. In other words, something could happen at any moment, and imagine your child was there." G-W-HE-WE-PW-E

User and non-user mothers and fathers experience insecurity, uncertainty and mistrust when thinking of leaving their children in the care of other people without being able to monitor them directly. Those feelings are shared among mothers who use centers and those that do not. One factor that seems to be very strong in the imagination of the population is the urban violence present in Mexico City, especially in the poorest areas, such as the East sector and to a certain extent in the Center. This violence takes on various forms and includes experiences that occur in public spaces, but also those that happen in the private sphere. Likely related to this, mothers distrust childcare services, especially when their information and understanding of how they function is limited. This fear only dissolves when mothers who decide to use the services (or find themselves in need of using them) gain direct knowledge and own experience of the services. Some mothers who have used the services point out that after initial difficulties to leave their children, an adaptation process relieved those original fears. At the same time, they state they are always very cautious and mindful of what may be happening within the center.

"We are in Mexico, and we are in a time when violence against children is ...is totally overwhelming, and that is something that scares me a lot. I don't know ... that's why I told you a bit ago that I admire the mothers who make this decision to leave their children in a center because the kids are young. Children who do not speak cannot tell you if someone touches them, if someone yells at them, if someone mistreats them, they cannot tell you..." G-W-HE-WE-IN-E

Opportunities for children to develop and learn

Middle-class mothers perceive private childcare facilities as spaces for stimulation and development for their children. Some of those who use the services state that they are satisfied with the experience they had in these centers, since children are treated comprehensively and according to their developmental stage. Despite the high costs of the service, the satisfaction and benefits they see for their children in the form of language, physical, intellectual, social and emotional development makes them favor the use of these services.

"The truth is that I believe that, I do believe that nurseries are necessary, I mean, that they are a necessity (...), the development that I have seen through it, that is, how they stimulate the child, how they help her grow her vocabulary, it is impressive..." I-W-HE-WE-FW-W (b)

For vulnerable mothers, the ideal would be to have a place where their child is being cared for that is close to their home, that provides them with food and education and that is of low financial costs. Unlike middle-class mothers, mothers from vulnerable groups use childcare centers largely out of

necessity rather than due to a decision related to increase the child's early development and stimulation. This is also related to the fact that they consider that ultimately, they can provide their children with the best care.

2.3 Social differences in practice: Middle-class women and those from vulnerable groups and their different choices and decisions

There are significant differences in terms of: (i) aspirations, (ii) decision-making capacity and (iii) support systems available to middle-class women and those from vulnerable groups (see also the emblematic stories in table 2). Regarding aspirations, mothers from vulnerable groups see detaching from their child as a failure to fulfill their role as a mother, hence their hesitation to use childcare centers. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the precariousness of work among this low-income sector leads women to value caring for their child more than working for pay, since wages and work conditions may not be adequate. Some middle-class mothers decide to stop working to dedicate themselves full time to their roles as mothers. They indicate that they have this right, which entails ensuring the comprehensive care of the child. It is an intentional decision to postpone their academic and work projects to instead fully focus on raising their children.

"I prefer like, I don't know, to tolerate the frustration of my professional life now, because I say that my babies are not going to be babies for all my life and in the future I will return to work, when they are grown ..." G-W-HE-WE-IN-C

Second, women's decision-making capacity to reconcile motherhood and work is different when comparing middle-class women and those from vulnerable groups. This is reflected in the little (or sometimes completely absent) decision-making capacity of economically vulnerable women. These women: i) lack access to paid jobs, ii) lack availability and access to childcare centers (either public or private ones) as they do not have any in the proximity to their homes or workplaces, and, iii) lack sufficient income to access childcare services that are private or that would involve any costs. In contrast, middle-class women are more likely to implement strategies to reconcile motherhood and work than those from vulnerable groups. Some of the alternatives available to them include the use of private centers and the use of CADIs (Centros de Atención y Desarrollo Integral - Care and Integral Development Centers), which can be within or outside their area of residence since they have access to private transportation. In addition, they can sometimes perform work with flexible hours (consulting work for instance). Others work from home or participate in family businesses.

"... I left [university work], but I continued with the consulting work, I continued with the consulting projects at home ..." I-W-HE-WE-FW-W (a)

Finally, alternative support systems for childcare are also different when comparing middle class and vulnerable women. Middle class mothers tend to have various forms of additional support, including the grandmothers, childcare services and domestic workers. For this group, there are different types of help available, some of which are paid. In addition, they can combine some of these support systems, as mentioned above. Some mothers take their children to private care centers until two or three in the afternoon and then they have someone in their homes who supports them for a few additional hours. Other interviewees rely on someone who supports them at home full-time, but they take their children to dedicated stimulation activities for a few hours. Mothers from vulnerable groups, unlike middle-class mothers, usually turn to the maternal grandmother or to their mothers-

in-law for childcare. This is mainly because they cannot afford to pay a person to support them. When they do not have this support network to rely on, women from vulnerable groups do not have the possibility to look for a paid job and must take on the care of their child.

"... I have a person who is dedicated to doing all the [chores] at home and my mom is one hundred percent with Emilia and my dad as well, for a large part of the day, until one in the afternoon." G-W-HE-WE-PW-W

Figure 2: Emblematic stories

<p>22-year-old woman, mother of a five-year-old girl, a boy of four and another girl of two. She lives with them and her husband. She has incomplete secondary schooling (eight years of study).</p>	<p>40-year old woman, mother of a 3-year-old boy and pregnant with her second child. Studied English in Ontario, Canada, and Marketing at ITESM Monterrey campus.</p>
<p>She is originally from Guanajuato but has been living in Chimalhuacán for three and a half years. She met the father of her children at age 14 in Guanajuato and got pregnant with her first child at 15. They left their state in an emergency due to her husband's personal problems. In Chimalhuacán they have lived in several rented houses and in the last one month they have been in a very precarious house.</p> <p>She has never worked outside her home, as her husband has convinced her to take care of the children. Sometimes she sold candy in front of their house to make some money and she is interested in doing it again in the coming weeks, since they are facing serious financial shortages.</p> <p>She has no support network, since she has not been living in Mexico City for a long time and in addition, she has no family or close friends where she is now. Regarding the use of childcare services, she points out: "I don't feel safe leaving my children, I don't know, because they are very hyperactive and I don't know, I don't like anybody yelling at them, I don't want anybody to scold them ..." Regarding her husband's opinion, she points out: "My husband says that this is precisely why he is working, so that my children don't need anything."</p> <p>I-W-BE-WE-IN-E</p>	<p>She is originally from Monclova, Coahuila but lives in Santa Fé, Mexico City. She met her husband in Mexico City five years ago.</p> <p>She has been working at BANORTE for 12 years. She wants to keep her job when her second child is born, but she does not rule out looking for part-time solutions. Her husband works for a European pharmaceutical company and has three and a half months of paternity leave. She has only been at BANORTE for three months.</p> <p>She does not have family support networks, since her family lives in Monclova. She does not have many friends.</p> <p>Their first child spends nine hours in a private childcare center that is located on the first floor of the building where they live. She has domestic support, a person who looks after her home and her child. Her second child will not be an impediment to continue working. Together with her husband they think of alternatives and, although she admires mothers who dedicate themselves exclusively to the care of their children, it is clear for her that she will continue working because it makes her happy and she wants to continue her professional development. She recommends changes in the country's organizational culture to allow mothers to work in home-office, to have childcare services available at the workplace or to have more flexibility in working hours for mothers.</p> <p>I-W-HE-WE-FW-W</p>

3. Conclusions

For many women, especially the vulnerable, it is not possible to describe the observed process as a decision in favor of or against childcare centers. A decision entails an evaluation of different options, something that is often not available to vulnerable families in Mexico City. Women in this group do not have a range of possibilities and alternatives that allow them to choose from and make decisions

about the care of their children. First, the absence of accessible, quality and free childcare centers in their residential areas, and, second, the lack of access to paid jobs with adequate wages and conditions, both limit the ability of these women to make those choices.

The decision to use or not to use childcare services is not only linked to the issue of access or the lack thereof, but also to a set of other relevant factors. The desire and the ability to dedicate themselves full-time to the care of children is something that women express as central to their identity and foundational for their aspirations in many cases. Culturally, the figure of the mother continues to be predominant in the care and upbringing of children across the different social strata. In the collective imagination, whether full- or part-time, the role of the mother is considered essential. In the case of women from vulnerable groups, the detachment from their role as mother is interpreted as a great breach of their female identity. For middle-class women, the burden of maternity comes with two different aspects: a) an increase in the working hours of women (with work inside and outside the home), and b) the experience of discrimination and disadvantage in relation to their male peers in the workplace, as a result of their role as caregiver.

As seen in this study, the decision to use childcare services is intrinsically linked to the desire or the necessity to work for pay. Both groups of women, those with higher and those with basic education, may have the desire to participate in the labor market to acquire economic independence and to contribute to the household economy. However, the context of women with basic education presents greater barriers since their conditions are more adverse, precarious and they have less opportunities to generate incomes. On the other hand, middle-class women, as a result of their academic training, can have greater opportunities for growth and job development that provide them with personal satisfaction, but this in turn becomes an element of conflict and tension when they have to decide to either keep their jobs or dedicate themselves to “mothering”.

Access to other forms of care support (partner, domestic help, family support) is also an important driver behind the decisions of families, and of mothers in particular. Alternatives and multiple care options are more present among the group of women with higher education since their economic resources enable them to diversify their options. In addition, some can count on the participation of their partners in caring for their children and the home. In contrast, women with basic education depend mainly on the family support network provided by other women, such as mothers and mothers-in-law, if they want to continue studying or working. The main responsibility for care falls on themselves, since their partners mainly assume the role of economic providers.

Perceptions about the costs and opportunities associated with having one’s child in a childcare center affect both groups, vulnerable and middle-class women. Both groups of women share insecurity and fear that adequate care may not be guaranteed as key factors preventing them from using care services. There is little direct and transparent information on the operation of these centers for those who do not use them yet, which contributes to the negative perception and to mistrust. On the other hand, there does not seem to be enough information about the benefits from using childcare centers, such as for instance early stimulation and the physical, emotional and cognitive development that they promote among children under five years of age. In fact, both mothers and fathers and key informants working in childcare centers agree that the main information channel about the centers’ methodology is personal contacts – hence, users and non-users that share their views and impressions.

The findings from this research suggest policy reforms along three dimensions: labor and parental leave policies, attitudes and social norms around the role of mothers and fathers in childrearing, and the functioning of childcare services. The promotion of paternity and shared parental leave would be an important policy step to achieve a more balanced distribution of care and work responsibilities between men and women. Mexico provides 84 days of paid maternity leave (Ley Federal del Trabajo, Art. 170) and also grants new fathers five days of paid paternity leave (Ley Federal del Trabajo, Art. 132 XXVII). However, it does not mandate paid parental leave, which can provide more time off for both mothers and fathers to care for their children (Women, Business and the Law Database 2020). Fathers' leave has proven to be effective in stimulating fathers' involvement in care: Huerta et al. (2013) found that in four OECD countries fathers who take leave for over two weeks were more likely to be involved in childcare during the child's first year of life. Boll, Leppin and Reich (2014) show that father-specific parental leave led to an increase of over one hour per week spent on childcare in Germany. Incentives for uptake are also very important in this context: Those may include "daddy" quotas that are not transferable or longer shared leaves when the leave is shared (which is the case, for instance, in Iceland, Germany and Sweden).

Awareness raising activities around fathers' involvement and the positive associated outcomes may be needed among fathers, families, the broader population and companies and employers. The findings of this research indeed call for the promotion of the positive effects from men's involvement when caring for children, while on the other hand, continuing to promote the economic, labor, social, and political rights of women and strengthening the mechanisms for compliance with these. Changing attitudes and beliefs that underlie the observed patterns is necessary. Information and sensitization campaigns may be important steps towards this direction: An example comes from Finland, where The National Institute for Health and Welfare presented a media campaign ('It's Daddy Time!') which emphasizes the benefits for families, workplaces and society through ads on the radio, websites, testimonials, outdoor marketing materials, the internet and social media (EU 2018).

Another clear takeaway from this research is the potential benefits for families from taking advantage of more flexible work arrangements including flexible hours and home office. Those arrangements would allow women in particular to continue their professional development during the period of the first years of their children's lives while still being able to attend somewhat to their care needs. Many countries in Europe have established this type of provisions by which mothers but also increasingly fathers can reduce their working hours or ask to work from home during their child's early months.

With regards to childcare policies, the need to strengthen the quality of services, and in particular to guarantee the implementation of security policies such as concrete codes of conduct on how to respond in an emergency situation are evident from this research, appear to be crucial. In addition, the development of a communication strategy would help ensure making the functioning of those centers more transparent. The broader public, which has not been exposed directly to childcare centers, would learn about the advantages from enrollment such as benefits for the child's development and also about the deliberate efforts made by the government to ensure the quality of care. Such efforts will likely enhance the trust of potential users.

Finally, it is important that the supply of childcare services is adjusted to the needs of parents and prospective users. One of the crucial barriers emerging from this research is the insufficient hours of operation and the lack of affordable quality services in the proximity of residences or working places. Improving the coverage of quality and affordable services as well as extending the working hours to better adapt to the needs of working parents seems therefore necessary. Policies to offer childcare at the workplace (above a certain threshold in the number of workers) can also be important in this area. It would be interesting to explore in this regard the functioning of the settings cited by some participants that combined childcare services and working space for mothers.

Annex 1: Methodological aspects and research sample

Table 1: Number of focus group discussions and individual interviews with mothers

Interview type	Work conditions	East		Center		West		TOTAL
		Level of education						
		Basic	Higher	Basic	Higher	Basic	Higher	
Focus groups with mothers without experience using childcare centers	Inactive or unemployed	1	1	0	2	0	1	5
	Part-time (<20 hrs)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Full-time	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL		3		2		1		6
Individual interviews with mothers without experience using childcare centers	Inactive or unemployed	1	1	0	1	0	0	3
	Part-time (<20 hrs)	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	Full-time	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Individual interviews with mothers with experience using childcare centers	Full-time	3	3	0	3	0	3	12
TOTAL		9		6		3		18

Table 2: Number of individual interviews with fathers and staff of CADIS

	East	Center	West	TOTAL
Fathers without experience in using childcare centers	1	0	1	2
Fathers with experience in using childcare centers	1	0	2	3
TOTAL individual interviews fathers	2	0	3	5
	East	Center	West	TOTAL
Interviews with staff of CADIs	3	3	1	7

To guarantee the anonymity and privacy of the participants, they were asked to use pseudonyms. In addition to that, written consent was requested before the interview and the participants were informed of their right to interrupt or stop the interview at any time. There was no mention of place of residence or other personal information in the letter of informed consent. Interviews were conducted at locations defined by participants for reasons of facility of transportation, proximity to their homes, familiarity, and safety. The interviews were conducted during the day to ensure the safety of the field work team.

The interviews were recorded, fully transcribed and coded using the following strategy: 1) identification of topics that emerged inductively from the data, 2) categorization of data segments

of each transcription according to these topics, and 3) identification of patterns and similarities within each category of data.

The methodology applied in this study has limitations inherent to all qualitative research. First, it is not based on a representative sample. Furthermore, there are limitations specific to this study: Recruitment criteria for mothers and fathers were sometimes difficult to fulfill. In the case of the marital status of some participants, some seemed to be in the process of separation or have very recently separated as indicated during the interviews. Similarly, one participant did not clarify whether her experience from using childcare services was current or whether she had decided to withdraw in the past. Another difficulty was the overlap between those participants that considered themselves “inactive” and those that stated they “work full-time”. Additionally, it is important to recognize that the complexity of the factors that drive the demand for childcare services in different parts of Mexico, given its geographic and ethnic diversity, cannot be represented in this qualitative small-scale research with data collected only in Mexico City.

Table 3: Nomenclature

Abbreviation	Characteristics
WE/WOE	With experience/ without experience in using childcare services
I/G	Individual interview/ Focus group discussion
BE/HE	Basic education/ higher education
IN/PW/FW	Inactive/ part-time work/ full-time work
E/C/W	East/Center/ West neighborhoods of the City of Mexico

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