

Article

## Career, Covid-19, and Care: (Gendered) Impacts of the Pandemic on the Work of Communication Scholars

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### Abstract

The study at hand analyzes the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions on scholars in the area of media and communication studies. It aims to highlight inequalities in the negative effects of the pandemic on academic output by examining the working conditions of scholars, taking into account gender, parenthood, and the partnership-based division of professional and care work. The quantitative survey was directed at communication scholars in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The findings show that there are no significant gender differences in terms of changes in academic output during the first 15 months of the pandemic; instead, disadvantages were observed in terms of parenting, regardless of the gender of the parents. Gender-specific effects could be detected concerning family situations and partnerships. Here, male participants are more often found in relationships in which the partner only works half-time, than women who mostly live with a partner who works full-time. The data suggest that gender differences related to changes in the time allotted for professional and care work and academic output are leveled out by the characteristics of the academic career model in which German-speaking scholars work. Nevertheless, gendered structures in academia and partnerships shape how the impact of the pandemic on professional work is experienced.

### Keywords

academic output; care work; communication studies; Covid-19; gender gap; German-speaking countries; inequality; transnational perspective

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

The sharing of professional and care work, which is always gendered, inevitably had to be renegotiated after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, especially during the imposed containment measures. Numerous studies and research findings indicate a “re-traditionalization” (Allmendinger, 2020) regarding gender roles and a gender-specific division of labor as care work is borne primarily by women (e.g., Berghammer, 2022; Craig, 2020). Professionals

who were expected to remain in their home office during the pandemic were particularly challenged because they also had to manage childcare, homeschooling, and housework in the time they normally had exclusively for professional obligations. Concerning academia, there was concern that the gender gap would widen as a result of these multiple burdens (e.g., Flaherty, 2020; Frederickson, 2020).

This study extends previous research on the impact of the pandemic on academia and takes a new focus by evaluating the self-reported publication activities and

research accomplishments of scholars in media and communication studies, a previously understudied discipline. Special consideration is given to contextual factors, such as partnership, parenthood, and the age of the children under care. The aim of the study was to find out which individuals are particularly affected by pandemic-related restrictions and especially what influence gender, relationship status, and parenthood have on academic output during the pandemic. Parenthood is relevant for us here only in connection with the performance of care tasks. When mothers or fathers are referred to elsewhere in the text, this does not necessarily mean the biological parents, but a person who identifies as female or male, lives with children, and is responsible for their upbringing.

We conducted an online survey aimed primarily at communication scholars working in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The results show that parenthood is the most influential factor in academic discrimination during the pandemic. No significant gender differences emerged regarding self-assessed publication activity during the pandemic or relating to the increase in care work and the reduction in time available for professional work—although women have invested more hours in care work in absolute terms than men both before, during, and since the pandemic.

## 2. The Gendering of Professional Work and Care

In this study, gender generally and the terms “women” and “men” specifically, are regarded as socially defined categories that become relevant in everyday life through the interplay of continuous, socially anchored processes of attribution and articulation. In our understanding of these and related terms, we explicitly integrate those women and men who are often not recognized as such in the rigid system of heteronormative gender binary. Members of societies bring concepts of gender into life by doing gender (West & Zimmermann, 1987), but can also deconstruct them via deviating articulations that question established constructs (Butler, 2006). On a societal level, these continuous articulations primarily make gender culturally meaningful and fuel the symbolic system of gender binary (Hagemann-White, 1984), which functions as a principle of structuring society (Rakow, 1986). Both become relevant in terms of articulating not only gender but also one’s identity as both a professional and caregiver.

Professional and care work are, on the one hand, shaped by gendered structures. On the other hand, it is the subjective (de-)construction of gender in both contexts that renews these structures. “Gendered structures” are generally “permeating academic institutions” (Bender et al., 2022, p. 48) as a working field, as the “structuring effects of gendering processes...conform with the structures of dominance” (Becker-Schmidt, 2002, p. 26). Research has shown that female academics have fewer career prospects than males (Le Feuvre et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2022). This is also true for

German-speaking communication studies (Riesmeyer & Huber, 2012, p. 16)—a working field that was once described as a “gendered organization” (Prommer et al., 2006). Previous research has shown that it has not changed fundamentally since the early 2000s: Women hold only one-third of the full professorships (Prommer & Riesmeyer, 2020, p. 7) and half of the postdoc positions, even though they represent the majority of doctoral students (Engesser & Magin, 2014, p. 319). We expect the pandemic to reinforce these gender-bound structures and gender inequality in communication studies in German-speaking countries.

Gender as a structuring category and a central aspect of identity construction is assumed to play a role in the ways in which communication scholars handle the interplay of care and professional work during the pandemic. Domestic and care work are generally organized along gendered structures of partnerships and the domestic sphere (Wimbauer & Motakef, 2020, p. 54). They are also reproduced via doing gender—according to what makes sense to the subjects against the background of the social field in which they are articulating themselves. The division of work between partners is often strongly gendered, even if they are both highly qualified (Wimbauer, 2012) because more traditional gender identifications are articulated in the context of partnerships. Thus, they are more dominant than identity articulations that construct the subject as a professional. Consequently, women are more likely to engage in unpaid domestic care work than men, which results in a gendering of care work as a task primarily performed by women. Referring to this, our study asks how German-speaking communication scholars have structured their working routines concerning the integration of professional work and care during the pandemic, which means care work in general, but especially childcare.

## 3. The Gendered Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Academic Work and Output

A large number of bibliometric studies from various disciplines have been published to date that show that the proportion of women among authors decreased significantly in the first phase of the pandemic (e.g., Andersen et al., 2020; Squazzoni et al., 2021), while publication activity increased overall (Cui et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022). This reduction is particularly evident among female first authors (e.g., Jemieliak et al., 2022), among younger female scientists in their early and mid-career phase (Kwon et al., 2021), and in the life sciences. To the best of our knowledge, the only communication science journal for which such a study is available did not show any differences in the gender distribution of authors before and after the spread of Covid-19—although the authors give valid reasons why such an effect may, nevertheless, exist (Karnowski & von Pape, 2022). Furthermore, women are underrepresented as authors in the research on Covid-19 (Amano-Patiño et al., 2020; Pinho-Gomes et al., 2020).

Some studies have used other methodological approaches to examine the research productivity of scholars during the crisis, such as an analysis by Kim and Patterson (2022) of 1.8 million tweets from 3,000 political scientists showing that women have posted comparatively fewer work-related tweets since the beginning of the pandemic, while their family- and caregiving-related tweets increased over the same period compared to men. There are also survey studies, both quantitative and qualitative, based on self-reporting by scholars that aim to provide a more in-depth analysis of working conditions during the pandemic (e.g., Deryugina et al., 2021). Focusing on a specific country, such as Canada (Gordon & Presseau, 2022) or India (Jiwani, 2022), a specific status group, such as early career scholars (Kınikoğlu & Can, 2021), or a specific structural characteristic, such as maternity (Martucci, 2021), all confirm that women in academia faced severe constraints and disadvantages especially when raising children due to the double burden of professional and care work (Kasymova et al., 2021, p. 430; Martucci, 2021, pp. 17–18). The debate centers mainly on economics, the natural sciences, and medicine as disciplines (Cushman, 2020; King & Frederickson, 2021); with a few exceptions (e.g., Sawert & Keil, 2021), the social sciences and humanities are not the focus of attention.

The primary reason for the decline in scientific output identified in the survey data was the decrease in the time the female scientists, who appeared to be the ones most negatively affected by Covid-19, had available for professional work, especially those caring for young children (Deryugina et al., 2021). The fact that women spend a disproportionate amount of time on housework and childcare and less time on research is closely linked to the enactment of gendered roles and social norms related to housework and caregiving tasks. As findings on the impact of children on scholarly productivity in academia before the pandemic are mixed (King & Frederickson, 2021, p. 5) but indicate that mothers face greater restrictions in their careers (Gordon & Presseau, 2022, pp. 1–2), we suppose that communication scholars who identify as female are generally more engaged in child care, invested even more time during the pandemic, and are, therefore, affected the most because of the gender-based division of labor. Other causes may also play a role according to research, such as women investing more time in teaching after the abrupt transition to the remote modus (Heo et al., 2022) or being more engaged in service and administration tasks (King & Frederickson, 2021). Factors such as the partner's flexibility in pursuing their professional work are especially relevant because they contribute to determining how much time female scholars have available for research activities in addition to domestic responsibilities (Martucci, 2021).

Against this backdrop, our study explores the following question of what gender-specific impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the academic work and output of communication scholars (RQ1) and asks about the country-specific differences in the three countries stud-

ied: Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (RQ2). Thus, it aims to contribute to the existing research in three ways. Firstly, it focuses on communication studies, a discipline at the intersection of social sciences and humanities that has received little attention in the academic discourse on the gendered impact of Covid-19 on scientific work. Secondly, the results presented below are not based on bibliometric analysis but focus on subjective perceptions of strains and challenges during the pandemic, as well as self-assessments of the scholarly output targeted and achieved. The survey stands out in that it is not limited to the first phase of the pandemic, but takes a look at the working conditions of communication scholars over a period of more than a year. Thirdly, we include in our data analysis the employment extent of respondents' partners because, given the theoretical considerations in Section 2, we assume that the negotiation and distribution of (additional) care work is deeply gendered within partnerships and family constellations. This aspect has hardly been studied in the academic context, with a few exceptions (Deryugina et al., 2021; Martucci, 2021).

Based on the theoretical considerations and the state of research presented, we assume that respondents who identified as female had a lower academic output during the study period than those who identified as male (H1). Analogously, we assume that this was more likely to be the case for mothers than for fathers (H1a), and for those raising children more than for respondents without care responsibilities (H1b). We also hypothesize that communication scholars who identify as female invested more time in care work during the pandemic than their colleagues who identified as male (H2). This presumably affects mothers more than fathers (H2a) and parents more than respondents without parental responsibilities (H2b). In the same way, we expect that communication scholars who identified as female had to reduce their work hours during the pandemic more than their colleagues who identified as male (H3), similarly, mothers more than fathers (H3a), and parents more than respondents who do not parent (H3b). Referring to the research on the relevance of the partner's scope of employment and taking into consideration that the part-time ratio in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland is significantly higher among mothers than fathers (Eurostat, 2021; Skinner et al., 2021), we assume that communication scholars who identified as male and work full-time are more likely to have a partner who works part-time than their counterparts who identified as female (H4a). If hypothesis H4a is verified, we assume that this couple constellation also has an influence on the pandemic-related change in care work, because mothers are less able to delegate care work to a partner working part-time and are also less inclined to do so due to socially embedded gender roles. We, therefore, anticipate that full-time working female communication scholars with children to care for increased their share of care work in the study period more than full-time working male communication scholars with parental obligations (H4b).

## 4. Method

The aim of the study was to describe the impact of Covid-19 on communication scholars on all levels and in all forms of employment in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. We follow an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989) by comparing differences between communication scholars who identified as female and male, and between those who have cared for children during the pandemic and those who have not—always in relationship to the caregiver’s gender. Consequently, despite the socio-constructivist approach, the empirical design follows the idea of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak & Landry, 1996, p. 204), i.e., gender binary is restored with the goal of identifying and naming inequalities that affect the working conditions of all scholars.

### 4.1. Participants

Respondents for the survey were recruited in collaboration with the three professional academic associations: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft (DGPK, Germany), Österreichische Gesellschaft für Kommunikationswissenschaft (ÖGK, Austria), and Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Kommunikations- und Medienwissenschaft (SGKM, Switzerland). A web survey via SoSci Survey was distributed using newsletters and direct mailings to the members of the respective associations. The online survey ran from 14 April–7 May 2021. At that time, as published in self-reports, the DGPK had 1,214 members (610 women, 604 men), the SGKM had 272 members (145 women, 139 men), and the ÖGK had 103 members (47 women, 56 men). A prerequisite for participation was employment at a university, university of applied sciences, or comparable research institution.

Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the analysis, which resulted in a sample of  $n = 293$  respondents. We did not exclude individuals who refused to give personal information, such as age or gender. Overall, we counted 1.1% of individuals in the sample who identified as nonbinary. These are not considered in this article, as its aim is an analytical differentiation between those who identified as male (40.8%) and those who identified as female (59.2%). The majority of the participants (77.4%) relate themselves to the DGPK, and additionally, 14% have a dual membership (DGPK plus SGKM or DGPK plus ÖGK). The sample was mostly balanced in terms of age, as Table 1 shows.

The average age was 41.7 years, and 40.1% reported that they are living together with children who are 19 years old or younger. The sample generally shows a high percentage of academics living in partnerships (overall, 74.8%). It needs to be pointed out here that men are more likely to live in a relationship (79.1% compared to only 71.9% of the female participants). The majority (72%) of the respondents of the survey work up to 100% (scope of employment of at least 75%), and 40%

are in continuing positions. Related to the international comparison, the majority of the participants work at a German university, while 10.8% work in Austria, and 11.9% in Switzerland.

### 4.2. Measures

Participants were asked to fill out an online survey featuring sociodemographic questions, questions on academic career, position, and university; furthermore, the respondents were asked to describe their family status (i.e., relationship, raising children) and also give some information relating to the employment status of their partner (i.e., half-time or full-time job). The majority of the questions were conceptualized to explore the impact of the pandemic and related regulations and restrictions on teaching, research, and service, with a specific focus on academic output (projects, publications, and conferences). All items were reviewed by experts and pretested on a small scale ( $n = 12$ ). Dichotomous items and 5-point Likert items (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) were used, next to dropdown items to retrieve the volume of time invested for care, household, leisure, and academic work (measured in hours). Regarding the impact of the pandemic, we were able to combine formal questions, such as the volume of hours spent for professional, care, and household work and the support universities offered during the pandemic, with questions for self-evaluation around the individual academic output, structured around scales of “I did more/equally/less than before the pandemic,” “more/equally/less than I expected,” and similar items. We contextualized the notion of “care” with a narrow understanding of “active” care as including all tasks, activities, and structural components that are directly involved in care processes done in the service of others, particularly children and older relatives. The survey was conducted in German, where the term “*Betreuung*” that we used in the questions and categories means more than empathy and rather actual supervision and taking care of, which includes a certain investment of time and specific actions.

### 4.3. Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were applied following the questions of how much the pandemic impacted academics in the dimensions of teaching, research, and output related to gender and care duties. The measurement depends on the research question: the evaluation of publications and conferences is based on a Likert scale and, thus, allows an ordinal level of measurement. Exemplarily, we calculated the percentages of answers among the participants on the Likert scales (1 = *not likely*, 2 = *somewhat likely*, and 3 = *very likely*). The hours that the participants of the survey invested in care and work are based on a ratio scale; we refer in the analysis to the mean and median in the findings. The changes in working hours and time invested in care duties were clustered for analytical

**Table 1.** Sample: A socio-demographic overview.

		Age groups			Partnership			Children			Country of the workplace							
Gender ( <i>n</i> = 282)		Male ( <i>n</i> = 112)	Female ( <i>n</i> = 159)	Total ( <i>n</i> = 271)	Male ( <i>n</i> = 115)	Female ( <i>n</i> = 167)	Total ( <i>n</i> = 282)	Male ( <i>n</i> = 115)	Female ( <i>n</i> = 167)	Total ( <i>n</i> = 282)	Male ( <i>n</i> = 111)	Female ( <i>n</i> = 157)	Total ( <i>n</i> = 268)					
Male	40.8%	Age 24–36	25.9%	44.7%	36.9%	Yes	79.1%	71.9%	74.8%	Respondents raising children	48.7%	34.1%	40.1%	Germany	68.5%	77.7%	73.9%	
Female	59.2%	Age 37–49	42.9%	37.7%	39.9%	No	20.9%	28.1%	25.2%		Respondents not raising children	51.3%	65.9%	59.9%	Austria	15.3%	7.6%	10.8%
		Age 50–62	24.1%	15.7%	19.2%					Switzerland		12.6%	11.5%	11.9%	Other countries	3.6%	3.2%	3.4%
		Age 63–71	7.1%	1.9%	4.1%													

reasons, similar to the children's age, in order to differentiate according to the type of care/schooling. They were then measured using a nominal scale that does not allow for statistical analysis other than reporting numbers and percentages.

Thus, we worked predominantly with the percentages of responses, mainly for the categories of changes in hours invested in academic work (publications and output, teaching, and project-related endeavors). The data refers to the last semester in spring 2021. Concerning working hours, they were summarized into three groups for differentiating the scope of employment: less than seven hours per day = part-time employment; between seven and nine hours per day = full-time employment; or more than nine hours = overtime. We compared the percentages of these groups using bar charts. Additionally, Pearson's chi-square tests (Cohen, 1988; Field, 2009) were applied to examine the statistical differences between men and women as well as between those who are raising children and those who are not. All analyses were conducted in SPSS.

This article focuses on gender differences and the impact of Covid-19-related restrictions on academics and their work, therefore, we did not apply further (multivariable) regression analyses exploring individual perceptions of capacities or resilience to cope with an increase in care duties.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Gender and Scholarly Output During the Pandemic

One of the key questions of the study at hand was about gender differences related to scholarly output during the Covid-19 pandemic. A chi-square test on the interrelation of gender and the realization of publications was not significant ( $p = .393$ ). A total of 63.2% of those who identified as male and 58.7% of those who identified as female said that they did not fully meet their publication plans. Only a very small group, 9.3% of the respondents who identified as male and 13.4% of those who identified as female, reported that they published more than originally planned. Related to the impact on research activities, more communication scholars who identified as male (29%) than those who identified as female (18.7%) felt affected by an increase in care work. We also asked whether they presented fewer conference papers due to care commitments. Here, the chi-square test examining the interrelationship with gender was also not significant ( $p = .348$ ). Thus, H1 was not proven. The data does not show that female communication scholars reported being more limited in their professional output than their male colleagues.

It was also tested whether gender, raising children, and a successful realization of publication plans were interrelated. A chi-square test was not significant ( $p = .246$ ). Nevertheless, a chi-square test on this interrelationship of parenthood in general and the success-

ful realization of publication plans, in particular, was significant ( $p = .001$ ). A total of 73.1% of the respondents raising children said that they did not publish what they had planned, but only 52% of their colleagues without childcare obligations reported the same. By contrast, 9.6% of the parents in the sample, but 24.3% of the non-parenting respondents answered that they had met their publication plans. Additionally, a chi-square test was significant for the communication scholars who were raising children and identified as male compared to those who identified as male and were not raising children ( $p = .002$ ), but not for those who identified as female and were raising children compared to those who were female and not raising children ( $p = .185$ ).

More communication scholars without children responded that they had even increased their publication output than communication scholars with children. A chi-square test was significant ( $p = .005$ ). Only 1.9% of the communication scholars raising children who identified as male and 6% of those identified as female reported that they had published more, but 16.7% of the respondents who were not raising children and identified as male as well as 17.2% of those who identified as female. Again, raising children and reporting that they had not published more was significant for male respondents ( $p = .029$ ) but not for female respondents ( $p = .131$ ).

Being a parent and reporting that research was limited because of pandemic-related care work is interrelated. A chi-square test was highly significant ( $p = .000$ ). While 50.9% of the parents (mostly) agreed, only 3.8% of their colleagues without children reported the same. About a fifth (19.8%) of parents partly agreed, but only 5.1% of the communication scholars without children. By contrast, 91% of the communication scholars without children (mostly) disagreed that they faced limitations in research resulting from pandemic-related care work, but only one-third of the parents said the same (29.2%). Chi-square tests were highly significant in both gender categories ( $p = .000$ ).

More parents reported giving fewer presentations at online conferences than they had scheduled for in-person events than their colleagues without children. About half (48.5%) of the parents said they had delivered fewer presentations at online conferences, while only 4.1% of their peers without children reported the same. Vice versa, 44.7% of parents reported that care and household work had had no impact on their ability to present at online conferences, while 93.8% of respondents without children reported the same. Communication scholars who were raising children and identified as female ( $p = .000$ ) and those who identified as male ( $p = .000$ ) are equally affected. H1a was not proven whereas H1b was verified.

### 5.2. Gender and Care Work During the Pandemic

A chi-square test was conducted to examine the relationship between gender and changes in the amount



of caregiving (childcare or care of dependents) and housework per day, and to determine whether the burden of communication scholars who identified as female increased more during the pandemic compared to those who identified as male. It was not significant ( $p = .216$ ), therefore, H2 was not proven. Both men's and women's care and household work increased to a total of 3.68 hours per day, which was 49.6% more than before the pandemic. A total of 56.7% of male respondents and 48.4% of female respondents reported that they had put more hours into care and household work during Covid-19. We conducted chi-square tests to determine whether more respondents who identified as female and were raising children increased their caregiving and household work than communication scholars who identified as male and were raising children, which was not significant ( $p = .314$ ). A total of 88.9% of male and 82.7% of female respondents with childcare responsibilities increased their share of care and household work during the pandemic. It should be noted, however, that the average time spent on care and household work during the pandemic in absolute terms is higher for female respondents raising children, at 6.69 hours than for male respondents raising children, at 6.09 hours.

The majority (85.8%) of respondents raising children reported increasing their amount of care and household work per day during the pandemic; this relationship was expectedly highly significant ( $p = .000$ ). The interrelationship of the age of the children and the changes in the

amount of care and household work was also significant ( $p = .001$ ). Compared to pre-pandemic times, 96.8% of parents with school-age children (7–12 years) and 87% of parents of babies and toddlers (0–3 years) reported an increase, as well as 89.7% of parents of young children (4–6 years), and 52.9% of parents of teenagers (13 years and older; see Table 2). Of those who said they increased their care work by five or more hours per day following the outbreak of the pandemic, parents of young school-age children (7–12 years) represented the relatively highest proportion of respondents at 19.4%. A total of 13% of the parents of children aged 0–3 years, 13.8% of parents of 4–6-year-old children, and 5.9% of parents of children over 13 years report the same. A chi-square test on this interrelationship was also significant ( $p = 0.01$ ). H2b was, thus, verified, parenthood is a significant predictor regarding the increase in care and household work.

Additional tests on the interrelationship of changes in the amount of care work and the country of the workplace were not significant. However, parents working in Germany most often reported doing more care work than before the pandemic, namely, 89.2%. Of the scholars working in Austria, 76.9% of respondents with children reported doing more care work, compared to 75% in Switzerland. By contrast, only about a quarter of the respondents without childcare obligations (Germany: 27.1%, Austria: 22.2%, and Switzerland: 27.8%) stated that they had performed more care work during the pandemic (see Table 3).

**Table 2.** Changes in care hours during the pandemic in relation to the age of children living in the household.

	Age groups of children			
	0–3 years ( <i>n</i> = 23)	4–6 years ( <i>n</i> = 29)	7–12 years ( <i>n</i> = 31)	13 years and older ( <i>n</i> = 17)
Fewer care hours during the Covid-19 pandemic	8.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Similar care hours during the Covid-19 pandemic	4.3%	10.3%	3.2%	47.1%
More care hours than before the Covid-19 pandemic	87.0%	89.7%	96.8%	52.9%

Note:  $p = .000$ .

**Table 3.** Changes in care work during the pandemic in relation to the country of the workplace.

	Germany		Austria		Switzerland	
	Respondents raising children	Respondents not raising children	Respondents raising children	Respondents not raising children	Respondents raising children	Respondents not raising children
	( <i>n</i> = 74)	( <i>n</i> = 107)	( <i>n</i> = 13)	( <i>n</i> = 9)	( <i>n</i> = 8)	( <i>n</i> = 18)
Fewer care hours during the Covid-19 pandemic	2.7%	5.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.6%
Similar care hours during the Covid-19 pandemic	8.1%	67.3%	23.1%	77.8%	25.0%	66.7%
More care hours than before the Covid-19 pandemic	89.2%	27.1%	76.9%	22.2%	75.0%	27.8%

Note:  $p = .753$ .

We also tested if there were national differences concerning the question of whether respondents received support services from the university for which they worked during the pandemic. A chi-square test was highly significant ( $p = .000$ ). German universities were clearly more employee-friendly as 65.2% of the respondents working for them received support, but only 37.9% of those working in Austria, and 31.3% working in Switzerland. It should be noted, however, that the number of respondents who reported working in Austria (10.8%) or Switzerland (11.9%) is quite small compared to respondents based in Germany, making comparability difficult.

### 5.3. Gender, Raising Children, and Working Hours During the Pandemic

Looking at the interrelationship between gender and changes in the number of working hours in order to see if more communication scholars who identified as female had reduced their working hours during the pandemic, another chi-square test was conducted which did not reach significance ( $p = .068$ ). Gender does not predict whether respondents will spend less time working during the pandemic. We also tested the interrelationship between gender and the number of working hours per day during the pandemic, which is not significant either ( $p = .313$ ). Gender also does not predict the number of working hours. H3 was not proven.

We did chi-square tests to find out whether respondents who identified as female and were raising children were more likely to reduce their working hours than communication scholars who identified as male and were raising children. It was not significant ( $p = .734$ ). However, the interrelationship between parenthood in general and changes in the number of professional work hours accumulated during the pandemic was highly significant ( $p = .000$ ). A total of 15.1% of the parents worked one to six hours before the pandemic. During the pandemic, considerably more of the parents (40.6%) worked between one to six hours per day. The proportion of communication scholars without children who work one to

six hours a day (5.8%), is only slightly higher than before the pandemic (5.2%). Most of the communication scholars with children (75.5%) worked between seven and nine hours per day before the pandemic. During the pandemic, only 49.1% of them worked this number of hours.

It has to be pointed out that a larger number of childless communication scholars increased their working hours: 32.9% of them worked more than nine hours per day during the pandemic, whereas only 17.6% of them worked that long before Covid-19. In comparison, 10.4% of the communication scholars with children worked more than nine hours during the pandemic, which is only 1% more than before (see Table 4).

We also tested whether the children's age and changes in the number of working hours were related. This was also significant ( $p = .004$ ; see Table 5). Just over half (52.2%) of the parents of children aged 0–3 years, 34.5% of the parents of children aged 4–6 years, and 32.3% of the parents of children 7–12 years reduced their working hours. But only 5.9% of the parents with older children reported that they worked less. H3a was not proven, whereas H3b was verified. Thus, instead of gender, parenthood predicts if communication scholars reduced their working hours during the pandemic.

### 5.4. The Distribution of Care and Professional Work in Partnerships With Children

We also used a chi-square test to examine the relationship between the gender and the scope of employment of the partner, which was significant ( $p = .001$ ). Among respondents with children who were in a partnership and employed full-time, 51.2% of men but only 12.5% of women had a partner who worked half-time and was employed up to 50%. A total of 71.9% of women in this group of respondents but only 24.4% of men had a partner who was also employed full-time (scope of employment between 76%–100%). H4a was, thus, verified (see Table 6).

Full-time working female respondents raising children reported spending an average of 3.62 hours per day on care and household work before the pandemic

**Table 4.** Working hours per day of respondents raising children and respondents not raising children before and during the pandemic.

	Part-time (1–6 working hours/day)		Full-time (7–9 working hours/day)		Overtime (10 and more working hours/day)	
	Before the Covid-19 pandemic	During the Covid-19 pandemic	Before the Covid-19 pandemic	During the Covid-19 pandemic	Before the Covid-19 pandemic	During the Covid-19 pandemic
Respondents raising children ( $n = 106$ )	15.1%	40.6%	75.5%	49.1%	9.4%	10.4%
Respondents not raising children ( $n = 153$ )	5.2%	5.8%	77.1%	61.3%	17.6%	32.9%

Notes: Before the Covid-19 pandemic— $p = .008$ ; during the Covid-19 pandemic— $p = .000$ .



**Table 5.** Changes in working hours during the pandemic in relation to the age of children living in the household.

	Age groups of children			
	0–3 years ( <i>n</i> = 23)	4–6 years ( <i>n</i> = 29)	7–12 years ( <i>n</i> = 31)	13 years and older ( <i>n</i> = 17)
Fewer working hours during the Covid-19 pandemic	52.2%	34.5%	32.3%	5.9%
Similar working hours during the Covid-19 pandemic	39.1%	65.5%	51.6%	94.1%
More working hours than before the Covid-19 pandemic	8.7%	0.0%	16.1%	0.0%

Note:  $p = .004$ .

and an average of 6.03 hours during the pandemic. Accordingly, they increased their share of care work by 66.57% after the spread of Covid-19. Male full-time working respondents with childcare responsibilities increased their share of care work by 61.21% after the spread of Covid-19: from 3.3 to 5.32 hours. It is notable that this group of respondents stated that their partners spent more time on care work on average during the pandemic than they did, while female full-time working respondents with childcare responsibilities stated that their partners spent fewer hours on care work on average during the pandemic. Hypothesis H4b is, thus, also verified.

## 6. Discussion

Previous research has focused predominantly on the impact of the pandemic on gender differences (e.g., Cui et al., 2021; Zimmer, 2020) and showed that women in academia have been affected disproportionately, mainly concerning their publication output (Hochstrasser, 2020) and research endeavors (Radecki & Schonfeld, 2020). In response to RQ1, it can be noted that in this study, based on the information of the communication scholars surveyed, no significant gender differences could be found in terms of academic performance during the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the study focuses on the German-speaking community, sociocultural contexts could play a role. The respondents are working under the conditions of the so-called “survivor model,” which was minted in German-speaking countries. It is not only characterized by strong selection principles that are faced by the scholars over many years, but also by a “the winner takes it all” result: In the end, only a few scholars are able to “survive,” which means finding a permanent position in academia (Le Feuvre et al., 2018, pp. 61–63). Thus, we assume that a critical self-assessment is mold-

ing how both men and women experience and articulate the academic working culture. Consequently, they may tend to emphasize that they have underperformed when they self-report to evaluate their own performance, as self-criticism and self-doubt may be their constant companions. Beyond that, however, the data shows that there are gender-specific differences: On the one hand, female participants reported having spent more time on care and household work during the pandemic. This indicates the persistence of a traditional division of labor (Wimbauer & Motakef, 2020, p. 54) and suggests that female communication scholars identify with both traditional aspects of gender roles and their professional roles. On the other hand, the data show that the increases in care work were higher among men. Thus, the pandemic also worked against the traditional division of labor and established gender roles because male communication scholars invested more time in care work than before. The data indicate that this development was fueled mainly by the fact that parents in particular, regardless of their gender, were affected by the pandemic in their working hours and academic output. This finding contrasts with other studies arguing that particularly mothers have faced inequality (Deryugina et al., 2021; Martucci, 2021; Squazzoni et al., 2021). As a result of school and daycare closures, the pandemic, thus, promoted gender equality among communication scholars who are raising children—but not gender equality among communication scholars in general. It led to fathers investing more additional time in care work relative to mothers and, thus, catching up, while mothers, however, spent more time on care work in absolute hours both before and after the outbreak of the pandemic. This can also be assumed as one reason why male communication scholars raising children stated significantly more often than their female colleagues that

**Table 6.** Relationship between the gender and scope of employment of the partner.

	Respondents working full-time with partner and children	
	Male ( <i>n</i> = 41)	Female ( <i>n</i> = 32)
Partner’s scope of employment: up to 50%	51.2%	12.5%
Partner’s scope of employment: 50%–75%	24.4%	15.6%
Partner’s scope of employment: 76%–100%	24.4%	71.9%

Note:  $p = .001$ .

they did not meet their publication goals: since they had planned according to their working conditions before the pandemic, they may have been confronted with having achieved less than expected—a circumstance that was probably already familiar to female communication scholars with children before the pandemic because of the gendered structures that generally shape academic work (Bender et al., 2022).

Another insight that this study has produced is that it is important to consider contextual factors, such as the relationship status, parenthood, and employment scope of the partner. In this respect, gender inequalities also emerged, for example, when it came to female communication academics raising children and working full-time. Compared to their male colleagues, they were more likely to have a partner who also worked full-time and, thus, had a comparatively limited possibility of delegating care work to a partner who was employed to a lesser extent. In other words, full-time working mothers are impacted and burdened more than full-time working fathers. The study's intersectional approach generally underlines that it is not sufficient to merely compare gender differences but to differentiate according to other factors, especially the relationship status and parenthood because inequalities evolve in the combination of two or more of these characteristics and in an act of constantly doing gender (West & Zimmermann, 1987).

The study also provides evidence that broader backgrounds, contexts, and general conditions play a crucial role. Our results are consistent with other findings from the social sciences that have also found only small gender differences in research activity during the pandemic (Skinner et al., 2021). However, a lot of the research on the gendered impact of the pandemic in academia relates to natural science disciplines, where work and research are different (e.g., laboratory setting, working with machines, attendance requirements) from the social sciences and humanities. Disciplinary specificities in relation to the generation of academic output and the prevailing reputation regime should, therefore, be given special consideration in future studies.

Further in-depth research is also needed on country specifics, on the one hand, regarding the structures of universities and the education system, and, on the other hand, regarding the implementation and enforcement of containment measures. It must be acknowledged that there are differences between regions and countries and their timeline and severity of Covid-19-related restrictions that influence individual loads and perceptions of burden and impact on scholarly work. Additionally, the university systems in Switzerland, Austria, and Germany are not fully comparable, leading to different structural challenges and varying forms of support and resources offered in crisis situations. A comparative study by Abramo et al. (2021, p. 9) highlights gender differences in the impact of the pandemic and concludes that women in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland are more "affected" than men. By contrast, male scholars

in Germany and Spain feel stronger effects on their academic output than women. Concerning RQ2, the present study found no significant national differences in either increases in care work or decreases in academic performance across the three countries studied. However, it clearly shows country-specificities regarding institutional support services and, thus, suggests that their impact and scope should be investigated in more detail in follow-up studies using appropriate research designs. Further transnational studies, also in German-speaking countries, are also necessary because our case numbers in Austria and Switzerland were quite small and comparability is, therefore, limited.

## 7. Conclusion

While the study at hand offers valid and reliable results, there are certain limitations. The first limitation to mention is the lack of generalizability of the study. The population of this study was composed of academics who are members of professional associations in the three German-speaking countries of Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. Secondly, the timeframe for self-reflections on the pandemic's impact was focused on the first two "waves" (or 15 months) of the Covid-19 outbreak, therefore, generalizations relating to the long-term effects on academic output cannot be made.

Self-report answers are potentially exaggerated or biased. In our case, respondents may have been embarrassed to disclose threats and burdens in the way and intensity they felt them. Or the threats and limitations due to the pandemic might have been presented as more impactful because it became commonplace to feel "restricted" at the time of the pandemic. Furthermore, because of the cross-sectional nature of the data, we are unable to identify temporal trends or links between specific restrictions and impacts because we determined both simultaneously. The sample itself had a larger number of female respondents, which had been taken into consideration in the statistical analysis.

However, despite these constraints, the article offers a lot of potential for follow-up studies. It seems, for example, urgent to complement the data presented here on the impact of Covid-19 on academics with a qualitative study that seeks to understand the stressors, perceptions of additional stress, and resources offered better. Exploratory insights are needed to comprehend more fully the variations around the objective and subjective burden, the impact itself, and perceptions of the impact of regulations and restrictions, such as lockdowns, as well as potential spill-over effects from the overlap of working at home and caregiving responsibilities. Resources offered by employers, the community, family, and friends also need to be evaluated in terms of how much they are taken on and valued. Altogether, the study shows that the consequences of the pandemic for communication scholars identified as female and for those who are raising children should be taken

into account in future performance evaluations and the assessment of academic age.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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