

## **Caring through Mothering and Working: Grounding and Verifying *Amoris Laetitia*'s Concern for Families**

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**Abstract:** This article is a contribution to “working mothers” literature as well as an instance of grounding-verifying *Amoris Laetitia*'s “working mother” data. Two separate semi-structured interviews were conducted with two Filipino working mothers-respondents who expressed caring behavior through mothering and working. The common thread of Care runs through the four salient themes: (1) *care for the family as priority*; (2) *coping with stressors and frustrations*; (3) *practical attitudes toward work*; and (4) *being a working mother as tough yet rewarding*. Discussion around these thematic areas hopes to provide some help in formulating pastoral programmes mandated by *Amoris Laetitia*. It thus pays special attention to Pope Francis' call for solidarity with troubled families today.

**Keywords:** *Amoris Laetitia*, family, working mother, mothering, gender and work, solidarity, Pope Francis

### **Introduction**

Pope Francis' account of “The Experiences and Challenges of Families,” in *Amoris Laetitia*<sup>1</sup> (*AL*,

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family* (Vatican: Vatican Press, 2016).

chapter 2) cannot possibly include all experiences or challenges that families would encounter today. Pope Francis is, of course, aware of this when he states: “I will not attempt here to present all that might be said about the family today. Nonetheless, because the Synod Fathers examined the situation of families worldwide, I consider it fitting to take up some of their pastoral insights, along with concerns derived from my own experience.” (*AL* 31) He thus offers some general observations about the many sides of family experiences and challenges. It may be important to mention that, for Pope Francis, it is not divorce that primarily rocks the stability of marriage and family life but those social forces that convey risks and bring about stress, loneliness, suffering, division, separation, abandonment, and other kinds of threats to individuals, family members, and society at large, like extreme individualism, fast pace of life, a cultural decline that fails to promote love or self-giving, narcissism, consumerism, poverty, unemployment, war, terrorism, organized crime, migration, human trafficking, ill-treatment of women, domestic violence, and various forms of discrimination. In this regard, Pope Francis puts emphasis on the need for the presence of pastors (through pastoral plans and interventions) especially where families are extremely troubled by life’s hazards. This is a call toward solidarity with those who are facing various forms of risks and troubles (*AL* 38, 46).

One of those threats to the stability of family life is poverty, with the consequent troubles caused by lack or deprivation of resources. Pope Francis states:

Here I would also like to mention the situation of families living in dire poverty and great limitations. The problems faced by poor households are often all the more trying. For example, if a single mother has to raise a child

by herself and needs to leave the child alone at home while she goes to work, the child can grow up exposed to all kind of risks and obstacles to personal growth. In such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God's mercy. Rather than offering the healing power of grace and the light of the Gospel message, some would "indoctrinate" that message, turning it into "dead stones to be hurled at others". (AL 49)

The present study joins Pope Francis in his concern for families, specifically for women who are commonly referred to as "working mothers" or "working moms". It will provide two concrete examples of what he describes as "trying" problems (AL 49) that confront working mothers. The complex nature of the "trying problems" can neither be fully grounded<sup>2</sup> nor completely verified,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In a sense, the present study contributes to giving groundedness to AL's general remarks. In grounded theory, methodic gathering and analysis of data precede explanation and generalizations. Since Pope Francis has not done the methodical process to ground his 'trying problems' category, this article may serve to compensate for that lack. It should be mentioned that an exhortation like AL is not required to be like academic journal articles which are expected to follow rigorous research methods. See, Antony Bryant, *Grounded Theory and Grounded Theorizing: Pragmatism in Research Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Verification in social science is a process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain about data to ensure that these represent reality or what actually occurred on the ground or are

but this article may be an attempt in concretizing and serving *AL's* local pastoral concern. The study, in effect, direct its attention to *Amoris Laetitia's* pastoral call as it deals with real life working mothers. It thus links arms with people who pay attention to the call of Pope Francis and get involved in the problems confronting “working moms.”

### **Mothering and Working**

A mother's role is customarily tied to household concerns. This role, being embedded in and reinforced by cultural institutions, define, to a great extent, a woman's identity—something that is difficult to detach from the outside-the-household opportunities or activities. Nevertheless, as mothers participate in work-employment settings, women's identity tends to expand and this would eventually serve to question and challenge role stereotypes. This would also mean that the idea and practices of working mothers emerged not without criticism especially coming from among those who invoke traditional prescriptions about motherhood: child-rearing and housekeeping/homemaking.

Indeed, for nine months, it is the mother who carries and nurtures the child in her womb. This nurturing role would be extended outside the womb as mothers are expected to be the main care providers for their children as well as for the other household members. However, in modern societies, females join the workforce and are no longer strictly restricted to home chores. As a consequence, a mother's responsibilities in the workplace have developed on top of household concerns (including the “night shift” with the husband). This

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clearly derived from the analysis. See Claire Ballinger, “Verification,” in Lisa M. Given, ed., *Qualitative Research Methods*, Volumes 1 & 2 (London: Sage Publications, 2008), 913-914.

extension of the mother's reach toward the workplace did not put an end to the mother's connection to care. Rather than obliterate care, the workplace has gradually accommodated it into its broader arena, a factor formerly regulated and tagged by traditional cultures as a principle that belongs primarily to domestic life.

Thus, the term "working mother" has also literally shaped the emerging modern aspects of motherhood care: As "working," the mother may extend her expression of care through the task of providing for the family—the provider role will slowly shed off its exclusively male character as it appears that the role is no longer solely imposed on the father. As "mothering," the mother bears the pre-established expectations set upon her in terms of child-rearing and home-making. Taking care of children and housekeeping remain to be *primarily* associated with the mother or the female.

In the Philippines, traditional socio-cultural definitions of motherhood still prevail. This assumption is taken for granted as this study looks into the mothering aspects of non-traditional work of mothers in the workplace.

### **What the Available Literature Shows**

The desire and pursuit of financial stability for one's family or personal career advancement, alongside the emergence of women empowerment and work opportunities, may have contributed to the rising number of working mothers. In many countries, amidst economic opportunities open to women,<sup>4</sup> female

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<sup>4</sup> The World Bank, "World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development," (World Bank 2012); <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/4391>, accessed 31 October 2016.

employment has been increasing albeit at a slow to moderate rate.<sup>5</sup> Some may attribute this to the shift toward a more service-oriented economy,<sup>6</sup> where work appears as characteristically “more feminine.” Female employment status implies that females involve themselves in varying types of occupations depending on different factors and circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Some may be working part-time or at home to ensure time for the family, while others may choose to work full-time for higher income or to gain better job positions.

However, a section of İnce Yenilmez’s research,<sup>8</sup> explained how labor, though categorized by class, remains to be characterized by gender division. The study discussed the economic and social changes that have accompanied the rise of capitalism alongside the enlightenment’s focus on reason and individualism; particularly when it comes to gender disparities and limited opportunities for women. Findings suggest the enforcement of gender distinctions (primarily based on the binary male/female and public/private oppositions) both economically and socially, therefore implying the need for policies that ensure equal opportunities for both men and women and an additional challenge for working moms. The following may supplement Yenimez’s study:

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<sup>5</sup> The World’s Women 2015. Chapter 4: Work (2015); <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/chapter4/chapter4.html>, accessed 6 November 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Meltem İnce Yenilmez, “Female employment and gender inequality: Challenges and opportunities in Turkey,” *Hacettepe University Journal of Economics & Administrative Sciences/Hacettepe Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 26, 1 (2015): 131-147.

<sup>7</sup> D.L. Rodin, K. McNeill, N. Vite-León, & J. Heymann, “Determinants of informal employment among working mothers in Mexico,” *Community, Work & Family*, 15, 1 (2012): 85-99.

<sup>8</sup> İnce Yenilmez, “Female employment and gender inequality.”

While mothers and would-be mothers have been forced to concentrate on tasks at home and nearby, fathers and would-be fathers have been impelled to go hunting, exploring, and mastering lands and colonizing other humans. Hundred-thousands of years of skills-development to ensure victories in conquests (and defenses) have insidiously imprinted in the male brain the more rational and less affectional dispositions – a disposition to be identified by later generations as “natural” to males and dictating some norms or standards of behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

In today’s context, working conditions do not favor working women in many countries. In small businesses, women are not given the ample opportunity to balance out their lives at the workplace and at home. Some of these working conditions include irregular working hours, overtime work, and, in some cases, frequent business trips.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, there is also a so-called “motherhood wage gap,” where non-mothers earn higher and fathers earn far higher than mothers in the workplace because working mothers incur wage penalties for the times they have to attend to their family responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

In the Philippines, additional stress is put on women since amidst the drive and sometimes the need to aid in

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<sup>9</sup> Ferdinand D. Dagmang, “Impingements in Capitalist Economy: Decoding an Obscure Factor in Ethical Analysis,” *Journal of Dharma* 38, 2 (April-June 2013), 206 (195-210).

<sup>10</sup> E. Zdravomyslova, “Working mothers and nannies: Commercialization of childcare and modifications in the gender contract (a sociological essay),” *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 28, 2 (2010): 200-225.

<sup>11</sup> International Labor Organization. “Women at Work Trends 2016”; [http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/Publications/WCMS\\_457317/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/gender/Informationresources/Publications/WCMS_457317/lang--en/index.htm), accessed 6 November 2016.

the financial expenses of their families, there is also pressure coming from particular gender expectations. The participation of women in the labor market remains to be lower than that of men because of insufficient decent work opportunities as well as constraints coming from perceived social norms.<sup>12</sup> It was said that the persisting cultural expectations about the domestic responsibilities of women interfere with their participation in the labor market and may hinder them from seeking or maintaining employment. The mere fact the maternity leaves are more dominant in the labor market than are paternity leaves implies the reinforcement of traditional gender roles as this reflects the burden of balancing work life and personal/home life primarily resting on females.<sup>13</sup> This again further suggests that child-rearing especially after the birth of a child is *primarily* associated with the mother more than the father, instead of it being a shared responsibility.

Female participation in the labor force often depends on the expectations set upon them, since women tend to still be the ones to provide care for their children as well as other family members. Data from a research on working mothers in Mexico<sup>14</sup> showed that although it was of great importance for the participants to earn to support their family, they were still the primary subjects of domestic demands. This consequently created a strain on how women would view their employers; they are said to begin seeing their job as constraints, preventing them from fulfilling domestic

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<sup>12</sup> Asian Development Bank, "Gender Equality in the Labor Market in the Philippines," (2013), <https://think-asia.org/handle/11540/796>, accessed 31 October 2016.

<sup>13</sup> J. Smithson & E. H. Stokoe, "Discourses of work–life balance: Negotiating 'genderblind' terms in organizations," *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 12,2 (2005): 147-167.

<sup>14</sup> Rodin, et al., "Determinants of informal employment among working mothers in Mexico."



duties when they are restricted from attending to the needs of their children.

Women try to create time for care—for their children, their families, and also for their relatives while trying to manage their responsibilities at work.<sup>15</sup> Although working mothers' contribution to the household benefit their children,<sup>16</sup> obtaining working ranks entails more responsibilities and consequently more time allotted for work. Thus, if working mothers want to continue making a significant contribution to their families' finances and perhaps at the same time want to advance in their careers, it may become next to impossible to have a perfect balance between their various roles; and therefore become difficult for women to be career-oriented and family care-oriented at the same time.<sup>17</sup> This may be especially difficult when a mother seeking for career advancement feel unsatisfied in a workplace that prevents her from properly fulfilling her domestic roles. In this connection, many journalists from across the globe continue to popularize and publicize the argument about the difficulty to reconcile the “mother” with the “worker,” which in turn also reinforces the “distressed mother theme.”<sup>18</sup> The media tends to paint a picture of what a good mother entails, often at the expense of working mothers who are indicated as ‘bad’ moms or moms who are not as good as stay-at-home moms.<sup>19</sup>

With the many issues linked to the idea of working

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<sup>15</sup> Zdravomyslova, “Working mothers and nannies.”

<sup>16</sup> The World's Women 2015. Chapter 4: Work.

<sup>17</sup> Zdravomyslova, “Working mothers and nannies.”

<sup>18</sup> J. Motro & J. Vanneman, “The 1990s shift in the media portrayal of working mothers,” *Sociological Forum*, 30,4 (2015): 1017–1037.

<sup>19</sup> L. Hadfield, N. Rudoie, & J. Sanderson-Mann, “Motherhood, choice and the British media: A time to reflect,” *Gender and Education*, 19, 2 (2007): 255-263; doi: 10.1080/09540250601166100.

mothers, the phenomenon obviously did not emerge without prejudice attached to it. Arguments critical to the idea and prospects of working mothers have been increasing. There have been many qualms about whether or not working mothers can balance work life and home life;<sup>20</sup> there have similarly been concerns as to whether a mother's reduced time at home due to work has negative effects on the development of children.<sup>21</sup> Some, however, reinforced the argument that a mother's employment status does not have a negative effect on her children so long as there remains enough quality time spent with them.<sup>22</sup> Youngberg's research further argues that effects of employment will ultimately depend on what will work for a family, in turn providing

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<sup>20</sup> H. Eija, U. Satu, & M. Kaarina, "See-sawing between work and home: Shift-working mothers' perceptions on work/family balance," *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 1,2 (2012): 31-42. doi: 10.5861/ijrse.2012.v1i2.67.

<sup>21</sup> J. E. Brown, D. H. Brom, J. M. Nicholson, & M. Bittman, "Do working mothers raise couch potato kids? Maternal employment and children's lifestyle behaviours and weight in early childhood," *Social Science & Medicine*, 70 (2010): 1816-1824. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.01.040; M. S. Morrill, "The effects of maternal employment on the health of school-age children," *Journal of Health Economics*, 30 (2011): 240-257; doi: 10.1016/j.jhealeco.2011.01.001; C. J. Ruhm, "Maternal employment and adolescent development," *Labour Economics*, 15 (2007): 958-983; doi: 10.1016/j.labeco.2007.07.008; J.B. Wills & J. R. Brauer, "Have children adapted to their mothers working, or was adaptation unnecessary? Cohort effects and the relationship between maternal employment and child well-being," *Social Science Research*, 41 (2011): 425-443; doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.10.004; R. L. Sherlock, A. R. Synnes, & M. Koehoorn, "Working mothers and early childhood outcomes: Lessons from the Canadian National Longitudinal study on children and youth," *Early Human Development*, 84 (2007): 237-242; doi: 10.1016/j.earlhumdev.2007.06.003; Zdravomyslova, "Working mothers and nannies."

<sup>22</sup> E. Youngberg, "Working mothers: Work-life balance and relative cognitive effects on children," *Business Studies Journal*, 3, 1 (2011): 95-108.

evidence against those who criticize the idea of working mothers.

Society, on the other hand, has no uniform response toward the recent surge of the presence of women in the workplace and how this impacts on their roles at home.<sup>23</sup> The way media has been portraying working mothers has also been creating clashing opinions about working mothers.<sup>24</sup>

A couple of studies, for example, have theorized that adults and youth from the U.S. might actually have been less supportive of the working mother during the late 1990s<sup>25</sup> and that Millennials (or those born from 1982 to 1999) prefer the typical and prevalent patriarchal form of society.<sup>26</sup> Donnelly, et al., suggest that there are multiple varying explanations as to why this is so. One such explanation proposes that Millennials could have experienced the negative aspects of having a working mother such as the inability of the mother to balance work life and family-care life. Another explanation might be that Millennials' view marriage as a tradition and thus prefer the traditional idea of a wife and mother.

An earlier study associated this change in

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<sup>23</sup> K. Donnelly, J. M. Twenge, M. A. Clark, S. K. Shaikh, A. Beiler-May, & N. T. Carter, "Attitudes towards women's work and family roles in the United States, 1976-2013," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40, 1 (2016): 41-54; doi: 10.1177/0361684315590774; A. Slaughter, "Why women still can't have it all," *The Atlantic*, 310 (2012): 84-102.

<sup>24</sup> J. Page, "Will the 'good' [working] mother please stand up? Professional and maternal concerns about education, care, and love," *Gender and Education*, 25, 5 (2013): 548-563; doi: 10.1080/09540253.2013.797069.

<sup>25</sup> D. Cotter, J. M. Hermsen, & R. Vanneman, "The end of the gender revolution? Gender role attitudes from 1977 to 2008," *American Journal of Sociology*, 117 (2011): 259-289.

<sup>26</sup> Donnelly, et al., "Attitudes towards women's work and family roles in the United States, 1976-2013."

perceptions of motherhood with the concept of intensive mothering.<sup>27</sup> Intensive mothering is a gendered parenting model that urges mothers to spend a lot of their resources—time, money, and energy—on their children, further suggesting that parents should be informed of and try to achieve what experts deem a proper child development.<sup>28</sup> Each decision of the mother therefore becomes associated with parenting and is transformed into a moral dilemma—one reflecting tensions created by traditional socio-cultural norms, on the one hand, and modern family/personal values and pursuits, on the other hand.<sup>29</sup>

Intensive mothering, alongside “egalitarian essentialism,”<sup>30</sup> a concept which puts together the conflicting views in feminism and traditional ideals of the family, consequently supported a return to a more traditional take on gender roles.<sup>31</sup> By 2012, however, it was observed that majority of U.S. adults and high school students’ egalitarian views and attitudes toward women and gender roles have generally become more prevalent and steady therefore indicating the acceptance of the idea of working mothers,<sup>32</sup> and

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<sup>27</sup> Cotter, et al., “The end of the gender revolution? Gender role attitudes from 1977 to 2008.”

<sup>28</sup> Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), cited in L. Steiner & E. Lachover, “The mommy wars: on the home front and waged abroad,” *Feminist Media Studies*, 16,5 (2016): 869-885; doi: 10.1080/14680777.2015.1137337.

<sup>29</sup> Miriam Peskowitz, *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2005), cited in Steiner & Lachover, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Maria Charles and David B. Grusky, *Occupational Ghettos: The Worldwide Segregation of Women and Men* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), cited in Cotter, et al, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Cotter, et al., “The end of the gender revolution? Gender role attitudes from 1977 to 2008.”

<sup>32</sup> Donnelly, et al., “Attitudes towards women’s work and family

subsequently contradicted earlier findings.

In addition, working mothers are also immensely affected by society's change in ideology that subsequently affects the formulation and implementation of policies. In Israel, for example, a study<sup>33</sup> showed that women could previously be able to carry both parenting duties and work responsibilities simultaneously; but as Israel adopted a more Western neoliberalism which consequently advised mothers to be more involved with the lives of their children, policies were eventually modified and became less beneficial for mothers.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the Israeli labor market reinforced the ideal of a male worker disconnected and free from domestic duties.<sup>35</sup>

In line with this, there have also been many researches concerning the effects of balancing roles on the working mother herself. In Pakistan, for example, data indicated that working mothers' personal reasons for burnout include not having enough time to relax and socialize, demanding expectations, taking on numerous responsibilities without enough assistance from others, and lack of sleep and intimate, supportive relationships.<sup>36</sup>

Another study also found that although the difference in anxiety levels between working and non-

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roles in the United States, 1976-2013.”

<sup>33</sup> Steiner & Lachover, “The mommy wars: on the home front and waged abroad.”

<sup>34</sup> E. Lavee & E. Benjamin, “Working-class mothers' school involvement: A class-specific maternal ideal?,” *The Sociological Review*, 63, 3 (2015): 608–625.

<sup>35</sup> Steiner & Lachover, “The mommy wars: on the home front and waged abroad.”

<sup>36</sup> S. Gardazi, N. Mobeen, & S. Ali Gardazi, “Causes of stress and burnout among working mothers in Pakistan,” *The Qualitative Report*, 21, 5 (2016): 916-932.

working mothers did not prove significant,<sup>37</sup> it remained worthy to note that the anxiety of working mothers mainly come from excessive stress from professional life and personal life. Working mothers struggle more than working fathers because they have to deal with both family care/housework and career-work,<sup>38</sup> aside from the “night shift” for the husbands. In addition to that, data shows that women actually work longer hours than men when unpaid domestic work is accounted for.<sup>39</sup>

Though beliefs about motherhood are constantly changing through time, and recent studies show that society has been more or less accepting of working mothers, the struggles of working mothers persist. The contradicting expectations and unreasonable demands of modern motherhood contribute to social discomfort when women achieve economic independence and reduced emphasis on domestic life and responsibilities.<sup>40</sup>

The stress and tension that working mothers feel from mothering and working responsibilities are corroborated by data from the available literature. Existing studies have examined the differences between working and non-working mothers; the relationship of a mother’s employment with one’s health, relationships, and the development of one’s child; as well as the cultural expectations set upon women and the changes that have occurred through the years. There are, however, very few that focus on narratives, especially in relation to the mother’s family background and the

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<sup>37</sup> S. Panda & T. M. Chettri, “A comparative study of anxiety level of working and non-working mothers,” *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing*, 6, 12 (2015): 1199-1202.

<sup>38</sup> Panda & Chettri, “A comparative study of anxiety level of working and non-working mothers.”

<sup>39</sup> The World’s Women 2015. Chapter 4: Work.

<sup>40</sup> Steiner & Lachover, “The mommy wars: on the home front and waged abroad.”

current situation. In the Philippine setting, where the trend of working mothers seems to be prevalent, there is not much field research done on the experiences of working moms.

What follows is the field work component that aims therefore not only to provide concrete faces to *Amoris Laetitia*'s concerns but also to offer some data to the existing gap in the "working mothers" literature.

### **The Field Research**

The present study gathered and analyzed data from two (2) middle-aged working mothers, currently employed in two separate private companies. Participants were recruited via purposive and convenience sampling. The researcher got in touch with a working mother she knows as well as with another individual who referred her to another working mother.

The study made use of a consent form informing the respondents of their rights as participants as well as what their participation entails. An interview guide was utilized to ensure that all necessary questions will be asked and that relevant information will be gathered. A smartphone was also used as a recording device.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted. Before the interview started, the participants were first informed about their rights as respondents. The consent form was given to them and they were given time to read it. They were then asked to sign it upon agreeing to participate in the research. Once the consent form has been signed, participants were informed that recording will begin. During the interview, the researcher asked pertinent questions and followed the interview guide while taking note of important input from the participant. After the interview, participants were given tokens of appreciation.

Information collected from the two one-on-one interviews followed a format similar to those of case studies as the participants' family background and past experiences were deemed significant to this research. Data gathered were then analyzed using thematic analysis. A table summarized the themes that emerged throughout the interviews. Recurring themes across interviews and related sub-themes were defined. Extracts which best depict the said themes as well as those which were relevant to the discussion of each case were chosen from the two transcripts.

### **Andrea's Story**

Andrea is the ninth of ten children. She finished a two-year course and later on earned her bachelor's degree. She is currently working in a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), and is the breadwinner of her family. She is married with two sons, one in high school and another in grade school.

Andrea experienced many great difficulties when she was younger and said that her childhood was, "*masalimuot*," the Filipino term for 'complicated and stressful'. Her stories reflected this word and suggested a not-normal childhood. What seemed to remain very clear in Andrea's memory was how she experienced various financial crises, had to learn to get along with relatives at a young age, and work hard in order to meet her needs and wants. Andrea narrated her school-related experiences below,

*Sa elementary, naranasan kong maglakad ng one hour para lang makapasok ng school. Tapos sa hapon, lakad uli ng one hour para makauwi ng bahay. Tapos kung di naman ganun, pwede rin naman— Nakitira din ako sa mga lolo, lola, tiyo, tiya na kailangan makisama. Sobrang hirap.*



*Kailangan mag-igib ng tubig para panligo, panlaba. 'Yun. Sa awa ng Diyos, nakaraos din; hanggang hayskul ganun ang sitwasyon. (Q: Ah 'pag ano, nakikitira pa rin, ganun?) M-mm, nakikitira. Hanggang mag-college nakikitira. [...] Kung hindi dahil sa kapatid na nagmagandang-loob, hindi makakapagtapos ng college.*

As the above extract shows, Andrea needed resilience and determination at an early age. To be able to attend school, she needed to go through the struggles commonly experienced by a low-income family in the rural area—walking long distances to school, having to live with relatives, and relying on the help of others to pay for expenses. This went on until she studied college in Manila and experienced staying in the homes of her siblings and in boarding houses.

After graduating from her two-year course, Andrea worked in an electronics company for a year before taking the board exams. She passed the board but was unable to find a job related to her expertise. This forced her to return to the province and worked in a store owned by her aunt.

Throughout her school life, Andrea's siblings and relatives were the ones who paid for her schooling as well as for her boarding needs. When she finally discovered what she wanted to do next, one of her first thoughts was to try to be more self-sufficient. Here she narrated how she wanted to work in Hong Kong with her sister so she could study again:

*Si Ate S1 no'n, nasa Hong Kong. Sabi ko, 'Te, gusto kong pumunta diyan. Saan ang agency mo?' Tapos sabi ng ate, 'Bakit ba gusto mo mag-abroad, mahirap dito?' Sabi ko, 'Eh mahirap dito, ang hirap ng trabaho. At least diyan,' ka ko, 'siguradong may trabaho.' Ta's sabi ng ate, [...]*

*bakit ko daw kailangan mag-abroad. Sabi ko, 'Gusto ko mag-ipon, mag-aaral ako; ngayon alam ko na kung anong gusto ko—gusto kong mag-aral kaya tulungan mo akong makapunta diyan,' sabi ko sa kanya. Sabi niya, 'Kung 'yun lang pala ang gusto mo, huwag ka nang mag-abroad, tutulungan na lang kita sa tuition fee mo.*

With the help of her sister, Andrea was able to study again without needing to work abroad. She was generally doing well in school, and this was especially so during her second year. She claims that she was “inspired” then. Upon noticing her good performance, Andrea’s brother told her, “*Baka kaya mo mag-dean’s list.*” Rather than being motivated, she felt pressured by this; something she did not appreciate.

Because of the desire to avoid the pressure of getting into the dean’s list, Andrea decided to work part-time near her boarding house. Later on, she became a full-time employee. After graduating, she claimed that there was no progress with her situation. Andrea narrated how difficult it was to be jobless back then. She looked for a job and was already employed in the HMO where she worked while taking the board exams which she failed to pass. She self-reviewed afterwards to prepare for the re-take. It was not clear whether or not she passed the second attempt.

Although Andrea mainly talked about her past experiences as a student and jobseeker, she shared some things about her previous family situation and how she is at present. She talked about how difficult it was to be a daughter of a farmer and a housewife back then, and mentioned their experience of only having salt and water with rice for a meal. In relation to this, one of the many things worth noting, as mentioned earlier, was the amount of help Andrea received from her siblings.

At present, Andrea lives with her eldest son while her husband remains in the province with their youngest. Asked about how she is doing now, she admits that she finds it difficult to be away from her husband and youngest son. Although she is able to talk things through with her husband and communicate with him and their youngest on a regular basis, she feels that her children were not guided well. She believes that it is sometimes difficult to handle her children because she was not the one who raised them. The concern for the welfare of her children is clear.

On the other hand, Andrea enjoys her current accounting job. She does not feel too frantic in the workplace and neither is she too relaxed—“*tama lang sa pakiramdam*” as she would say. This is contrary to her previous job in the same company, from where she asked to be transferred, and where she experienced a lot of pressure, lack of time to rest, and stress caused by a fast-paced environment. However, amidst what others would assume as a working woman’s needs, Andrea does not consider herself as someone who likes to go out. She would only go out with friends “*para makisama*” and this is primarily because of budget constraints. As the breadwinner of the family, her priority is to have sufficient allowance for her family. Although she finds joy in gatherings with her friends, she would simply not be the type to initiate.

Throughout the interview, it appeared that Andrea repeatedly sought means to avoid pressure or to distract herself from being pressured into achieving certain things. For example, it was mentioned earlier that she decided to look for a job when her brother brought up the possibility of being in the Dean’s List. Amidst the desire to veer away from pressure, however, is a great effort on Andrea’s part to make sure that she can stand on her own, and even as a working mother.

Andrea admitted that there are pressures from her role as a working mother. Contrary to the kind of pressure mentioned above, the pressure she encounters from being a working mother appears to be rather unavoidable. There are times when her children need her presence and support in school activities but she cannot make it because of constraints from the workplace. The opposite also happens; there are times when she decides that she really needs to skip work. There then appears to be tension between her responsibilities at work and at home, which she consistently tries to resolve and which also tends to require having to choose one over the other.

From Andrea's story, it is apparent how the many struggles she has experienced during her childhood has somehow influenced the way she dealt with many stresses, particularly those which come with being a working mother. First of all, learning how to get along with people at such an early age may have made it a bit easier for her to adjust to changing and challenging circumstances, like living in different places, having to work part-time, and managing from a distance her family relationships.

It was also evident in the interview that Andrea no longer found time management as an issue in being a working mother. When she was asked about the difference between her situation before and now as a working mother, she explained:

*Parang ano eh... wala masyado. Kasi nung nagtatrabaho ako, nag-aaral ako. Kaya 'yung gastos— [...] [Q: In terms of time management pareho lang halos?] Parehas lang. [Q: Pero 'yung stress magkaiba ba or?] Siyempre mas stressful 'yung ano... may anak ka na kasi hindi lang 'yung stress mo iniisip mo, pati 'yung para sa*

*mga anak mo.*

The working mother is here clearly in a high-context mode of thinking/behaving,<sup>41</sup> as she shows anxious care for her family while still in the context of work.

Aside from being more financially independent, she considered it a major change when her children became her top priority and that this entailed additional stress because of the additional role of working on top of mothering. Andrea states:

*Mas priority mo na sila [mga anak]. 'Yung sa sarili mo, pang-ano na lang 'yun, kung meron na lang matitira. More on nasa anak na lahat.*

Andrea's past experiences also shed light on her ways of raising her children. She narrates how, back then, being vocal about expressing love for family was unusual. They deemed it as "*nakakahiya*," or shameful. Birthdays and other more intimate celebrations would come and go like they were nothing. Because of this, Andrea has tried to raise her kids to be vocal about their feelings and to be more open to verbalizing statements like "I love you." She explains here:

*In a sense... Siguro ang pagkakaiba, no'n kasi talagang parang wala lang. Birthday... Oo, naalala nila 'yung birthday pero ipagpapatay ka ng manok ganun, pero hindi 'yung vocal na*

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<sup>41</sup> In a communication process, conversation partners are said to be in a high-context communication if they share information about culture and geography, a sharing that could bring about better understanding. One who displays a low-context thinking is suffering from a tunnel vision, focusing exclusively on a limited goal. Thus, a high-context thinking allows broad or multiple contexts to influence her behavior. See Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), p. 91.

*'Happy birthday! I love you!' Wala 'yung mga ganyan, unlike 'yung ngayon na— Ako kasi, tine-train ko 'yung mga bata na mag-yun, magsabi sila ng 'I love you' ganyan, naggu-goodnight 'pag gabi. Kasi dati talagang hindi naman uso 'yun. Nakakahiya kaya.*

Overall, when asked how being a working mother is like, Andrea's first answer was simple: "*mahirap pero rewarding.*" She explained that as a mom she would want to be able to take care of her child and be able to guide them but given their family set-up, she could not fully accomplish such responsibilities. On the other hand, seeing her children at the end of the day is what relieves her from all of her stress. She continues to maintain a good relationship with her husband, although she admitted to not having time alone with him anymore because of her preoccupation with work. This is further supported by the fact that she spends most of her time (eight hours a day) in the office, and is only able to relax when she has extra time. Her phone has been a means to entertain herself every once in a while. She also spends a decent amount of time (three to five hours) for her eldest child and for household chores.

### **Sofia's Story**

Sofia is a middle-aged woman who has been working in a private corporation for 30 years. She has two daughters, one of whom is still in college while the other, in her early 20s, is already working. Sofia's case is quite different as the whole interview was angled toward a tough past experience—her husband's death when the kids were still young. Sofia was also able to share about her childhood experiences and family background.

When she was younger, Sofia lived in the province

with her family. She described her childhood as “*masarap pero mahirap*.” She noticed that even if they did not have much material resources, their home was still where their relatives and friends would congregate and bond in. She would play with her cousins and siblings, sometimes secretly going to the beach to swim.

The closeness their family had and continues to have was attributed by Sofia to a disinterest in the pursuit of material things. She thinks that money is one reason for family fallouts and that having healthy family relationships has a lot to do with one’s values more than anything. Sofia grew up keeping in mind that there are people willing to help should anyone be in need, and that there will never be anything wrong with sharing. She tells a story about her father exemplifying this:

*Siguro ganun talaga, Elaine, ‘pag mahirap ang buhay para talagang close close kayo, maski na— Basta alam ko sa mga ate ko nagagaya ‘yun eh. [...] Halimbawa sa Papang ko. Si Papang bibigyan mo ng-- Nakikita ko kasi binibigyan ng ate ko ng— si Papang ng bagong damit, bagong ano— ‘Pag binisita ko naman si Papang sa probinsya, wala na. Pinamigay niya na ‘yun lahat.*

In relation to this, Sofia was aware of her relatives’ generosity, and throughout the first part of the interview, she also narrated how her aunts shared resources with their family and provided them with help when necessary. Every school year, she and her siblings would be one of the few to have new school supplies like notebooks and pens. Their mother would keep mum about these, but Sofia knew that these were from their relatives, particularly her aunts. She mentioned that their house was near her school and was therefore a lot

more convenient. It was also customary for children in their province to finish grade school and high school there. However, a college degree was traditionally pursued in Manila. She, however, admitted to not knowing who paid for her tuition and other expenses.

Later on, her older sister offered to help her with her college education. She then moved to where her sister and brother-in-law were staying and there obtained a college degree. Her experience, however, was not that simple. Sofia became a working student in the school she was studying in, and shared her experience in this extract:

*Nag-apply ako na working student, natanggap naman ako. [...] For example, nung work, pupunta ka dun sa [...] 'yung isang walang asawang matanda na teacher ko. Ako magse-secretary sa room niya, sa office niya. [...] Tapos nalipat ako sa English department. Taga-- Di na uso siguro ngayon 'yung exam eh ipapa-ano talaga sa printer, ay 'yung sa ano... malaking machine... [...] Basta talagang ano makikita mo 'yung print niya dadaan sa malaking machine, parang alam mo 'yung sa newspaper [...] Ganun kaluma 'yung technology noon. [...] Basta ako magta-type nun. 'Yung pinagta-type-an ko, ano 'yun, 'yung parang may carbon paper sa loob. [...] Tapos, pagkatapos mong i-type 'yun, pupunta ko dun sa isang print shop [...] Tapos 'yun, magta-type ng exam sa English department, mas madali 'yun kasi malapit lang sa bahay [Q: Ah, kumpara po dun sa pagse-secretary?]. Oo, ang layo noon.*

Sofia did not recall much about her childhood except for those already mentioned above, and she stated that it is mainly because most things seemed like play to her back then. However, when she started working she was



able to apply what she learned from the challenges she faced and realized how different she was from her peers. According to Sofia, she was not the type to experiment a lot and go out. She would usually be alone and found their school ministry as helpful. Because of this, she claims, she was like a “*manang*” or an old maid upon arriving in Manila. More importantly, however, her experiences taught her how to stand alone, persevere, and to have a “I can do this” attitude.

Furthermore, comparing her past to her present, Sofia noticed that aside from being more financially able, the family closeness she experienced when she was younger continued to exist and even extended toward her siblings’ children. It seemed that the kind of family relationships she had before is still being fostered through and lived by their family’s succeeding generations. Sofia continues to be constantly concerned about her siblings lives, shares that she would surprise her sister every once in a while, and seems to take pride in seeing her daughters having close relationships with their cousins. Sofia’s close ties with her family always translated into family solidarity.

Although it appears that Sofia generally had a relatively pleasant past, things were not always this way. She admits that sometimes she does not like it when they are too happy. As she puts it:

*Okay na ‘tong ganito [close family ties]. Ayoko ng masyadong... Minsan nagpe-pray ako. Ayoko ng masyadong masaya. Natatakot ako. Ayoko ng ano, sabi ko, minsan masyadong masasarap ang pagkain. Sabi ko, ‘Okay na po ‘to, Lord,’ [Nag-]thank you na ‘ko. Ganun. ‘Okay na ho ito, di na ako naghahanap ng iba.’ Basta palagi ‘yung sa... mga kasama ko [...] family, lakas ng katawan.*

Because of how the rest of the interview went, one can draw out that the belief suggested in this quote may have something to do with the experience of losing her husband to illness. Even though this could also be attributed to strong spirituality and contentment with one's life, it remains evident that the death of her husband really affected the way she viewed and dealt with certain things. Sofia believes that things get more complicated when one is already married and this is another reason why close family ties greatly matter.

Sofia and her husband were both working back then, so they needed nannies to take care of their children while they were away. Though this was not always the case since the ones they hired did not stay long. This is why she would sometimes ask her mother-in-law or her sister to take care of her daughters while they work. When her husband passed away, things became a lot more difficult for Sofia and her children.

Sofia expressed that she was like a robot when she lost her husband; she became apathetic and insensitive, later on saying "*Parang naging bato ako.*" She also explained how it was difficult to not have a man in the family, let alone lose a husband. She admitted that she feels like she has to hide what she truly feels. She said more about this in this extract:

*Iba... Iba din kasi, Elaine, 'pag wala 'yung daddy, 'pag wala 'yung asawa— Halimbawa 'yung ako, 'yung [wala 'yung] lalaki sa family, parang iba din talaga. Parang mahirap. 'Yung parang hindi ka nag-aano ng totoo na 'yun 'yung feeling mo. Parang haay. Dapat tutulog ka na lang, siya na lang mag-aantay sa mga anak mo. Hindi eh. Wala kang mapagsabihan—totoo 'yun—wala kang mapagsabihan ng kung ano talagang nasa feeling mo. Hindi mo pwedeng i-*

*share sa iba, lalo na may mga asawa naman silang iba. Hindi ka nila 'yung totally na maintindihan.*

According to Sofia, having children changes things. Despite been used to taking care of nieces and nephews, Sofia found having children as a different experience, especially since her children lost their father at such a young age. She expressed a kind of regret in acting the way she did when she lost her husband. She wished that she allowed herself to be vulnerable in front of her children when she was grieving because she believes that if she did, her youngest might not have been pretending to be so tough and may have had a more memorable childhood. She shared in this extract:

*Sabagay... Kaya lang, Elaine, Gusto ko sana nung nawala 'yung asawa ko, sana 'yung... Hindi ako 'yung parang naging robot. Hindi ako 'yung kunwaring matigas, kunwaring kaya. Sana pinakita ko [sa kanila] noon na nag-iiyak ako. Hindi ko kasi pinakita 'yun. Parang ang tapang-tapang ko. Siguro... Siguro mag-iiba ugali ni D2 (youngest daughter). [...] kasi si D2, siya 'yung parang matigas ang ulo na caring naman, na parang kayang-kaya niya eh alam ko lalampalampa rin 'yun eh.*

She added:

*Parang nagkulang ako nung bata pa sila. 'Yung... Naging strikto ata ako noon eh. [...] Si D2 talaga parang ang tapang. Tapos kung minsan tatanungin ko sila, 'D2, anong na-mimiss mo nung bata ka?' Parang wala siya masyadong mai-share.*

Furthermore, she admitted that she does not remember much about her children's childhood. She feels as if she has had a lot of shortcomings after the loss, and was not as supportive of her children's school activities as well. The thought of carrying the weight of the world seemed to have faded away and she continues to ask herself why, as shown in this extract:

*[...] parang nakakalimutan ko na 'yung times na kasama ko sila nung bata sila, Elaine, nung wala na 'yung asawa ko. Parang feeling ko tuloy 'yun ang na-miss ko ngayon. Sabi ko, 'Ba't kaya...'* Hindi ko na maalala 'yung... nung umalis 'yung asawa ko, kung anong ginagawa naming masaya kaming tatlo. Parang feeling ko ano ata... Naging strikto ba 'ko sa kanila, naging parang bato ako sa kanila na di ko pinapakitang mahina ako.

Amidst this, her children remain to be her source of motivation. She mentioned that she is able to do new and exciting things because her children believe in her capacity. She becomes courageous for her children in the smallest of ways, and ensures that her free time is mostly time shared with them. Also, Sofia claims that her children now better understand her and the grief she went through because they are a lot older and more mature. Little by little, her youngest daughter has been opening up to her and this contributed to an increase in mutual knowledge and understanding.

Now, currently on her 30th year in service, Sofia shares about her feelings and experiences in the workplace. As she may not be the type to experiment when she was younger, she yearns to constantly learn new things in the workplace. At the same time, she finds joy in sharing what she knows although she seems disappointed when people do not give her due credit to

her effort. The company that employs her has been giving her financial assistance after the demise of her husband who worked there for 25 years. Aside from this, it seems that the workplace was Sofia's stepping stone in moving forward. She recalls:

*Tsaka 'pag minsan, alam mo 'yun, hindi naman totally 'yung tipong nakakalimutan ko 'yung asawa ko. Hindi ganun. Ilang years na? Ten years... More than ten years na, pero di ko pa rin makakalimutan 'yun. Andito pa rin siya. Oo, andito sa mind. Alam mo 'yung sinasabing naka-move on ka na? Siyempre, move on! Pero hindi mawawala sa puso 'yun. Siyempre kailangan mag-move on. Imagine mo naman. Kailangan mag-hanapbuhay ba.*

Overall, Sofia deems work as a life's teacher. She identifies work-related pressure as primary—having to deal with customer complaints and inventory-related stresses. She feels as if she must prove that she can still do work, especially since she is being paid well and since the company has been of great help to her family. Simply put, she does not want to disappoint her employers. As a single mom, she is thankful that she still has work despite her age. Furthermore, she has begun to look at work as both physical and mental exercise through an encounter with one of their interns back then:

*Sabi niya sa'kin, 'Ma'am, ilang taon ka na?' 54 years old na 'ko, J1. 'Ah talaga, Ma'am,' sabi niya. Okay lang, kaso sabi sa'kin ng isang dizer, 'Ma'am, konting tiyaga na lang 'yan. Konting tiis na lang 'yan, Ma'am.' Ginaganun ako. Pero hindi eh, ako ang pinagtiyatiyagaan ng [company*

*name]. [...] Hindi pa ako nagre-retire. Sumagot si J1, 'Ma'am, huwag muna. Exercise mo na 'yan eh.' Which is, alam mo, parang tama.*

On the other hand, since her daughters are now more mature, it has been a lot easier to manage time. She considers her children as blessings, although she does continue to long for those days she missed with her children and their milestones. At present, she spends most of her time in work (nine hours a day), gets enough time for sleep (6 to 7 hours), and spends time using social media and in prayer as well.

### **Integrated Results and Salient Themes**

Data was interpreted from the two cases narrated above and the common or intersecting points of the stories were identified. Using thematic analysis, a total of four main themes and six subthemes emerged from this research; the main themes are: (1) care for the family as priority; (2) coping with stressors and frustrations; (3) practical attitudes toward work and (4) having children as rewarding. The synthesis table (see table, below) summarizes the relevant themes on the experiences of the two working mothers.

It must be emphasized that the various discussions around these thematic areas would be useful for pastors or policy-makers who would formulate pastoral programmes as mandated by *Amoris Laetitia*.

#### *Summary of Themes and Sub-themes*

| Themes                          | Sub-themes   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Care for the Family as priority | Shortcomings in fulfilling domestic responsibilities |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | Child's burden as mother's own                |
| Coping with stressors and frustrations        | Receiving help or extended family solidarity  |
|   | From working students to breadwinners         |
|   | Challenges as influential to child-rearing    |
|   | Priorities and fatigue vs. seeking recreation |
| Practical attitudes toward work               | (none)  |
| Being a working mother as tough yet rewarding | (none)  |

***Care for the Family as a priority***

Both mothers deem caring for their own families as their priority, specifically the welfare of their children. It is apparent that their decisions and perceived lapses revolve around a certain idea about what is most beneficial to their offspring. More so, it is also evident that they share the burdens of their children. The sub-themes and relevant extracts below elaborate on this main theme.

***Shortcomings in fulfilling domestic responsibilities.*** Both mothers discussed particular shortcomings that have to do with their responsibilities at home, especially when it comes to child-rearing. They believe that they carry much of the responsibility to take care of

their children, and implied that they need time to focus on their kids' upbringing and well-being.

Given this, working mothers feel bad for their shortcomings and regular absence in their children's lives. More so, they are torn between their workplace demands and their domestic responsibilities; many times they are forced to make a painful choice. This is apparent in Andrea's statement:

*Kasi may time na kailangan ng time ng mga bata. Halimbawa may activity sa school na kailangan mag-attend, minsan kailangang mong mag-absent. Tapos minsan naman kailangan sa trabaho. Minsan nagsasabay, kaya nakaka-pressure.*

This is also evident in Sofia's experience after the death of her husband:

*Parang 'Hay kawawa naman 'yung anak ko' parang di ko sila na ano talaga... totally 'yung nagabayan.*

She shared later on:

*Di ba siyempre kasama dapat 'yung magulang doon [school activity], hindi, hindi ako nakakasama. Dun lang ako sa dadaan ng parade, parade na 'yan. Hindi ako masyadong supportive ata 'pag may ano sila, school activities, parang absent ba ako nun o nasa [company name]. Siguro lang kung di lang ako [...] matigas ang ulo...*

**Child's burden as mother's own.** Despite the differences between the two mothers, it remains evident



that the stress of their children becomes their stress as well. As Andrea has put it:

*Siyempre mas stressful 'yung ano... may anak ka na kasi hindi lang 'yung stress mo iniisip mo, pati 'yung para sa mga anak mo.*

As discussed earlier, Sofia's youngest daughter seems to maintain a tough exterior and Sofia links this with the fact that she became the model as she pretended to be strong after her husband's death. Up until now, Sofia admits that she carries the weight of not giving her children a memorable childhood. Her youngest does not remember much and perhaps feels sad about this, and in turn, this seems to have troubled Sofia.

### ***Coping with stressors and frustrations***

Both mothers had challenging childhoods and both also experienced difficulties in their present family life. Given this, the two respondents have shared the ways they have adjusted and tried to cope with varying stressors and personal frustrations. Below are the sub-themes belonging to this category as well as the related extracts.

#### ***Receiving help or extended family solidarity.***

Both working moms have had a childhood which in large part consisted of dependence on other people such as their relatives. Because their parents cannot provide for all their needs, especially when it comes to their schooling, both Andrea and Sofia were given opportunities and resources by their relatives, as repeatedly mentioned in their individual cases.

***From working students to breadwinners.*** As both participants experienced assistance from relatives,

they in turn tried to do well in school and eventually became more self-reliant. Amidst differences in circumstances, both Sofia and Andrea became breadwinners of their families. Sofia assumed the position after the passing of her husband, and as mentioned earlier, shared how difficult it was to not be able to have someone with whom one shares the burdens and troubles. Eventually, she was still able to successfully provide for her family despite relying mainly on her own resources. Meanwhile, Andrea appeared to have become more independent out of necessity, a choice she made with her husband and was not able to expound on during the interview. She did, however, explain how her experiences and struggles helped her at present. She explained:

*Sobrang laking factor 'yung mga experiences. Kumabaga, dun ako natuto. Sa sobrang dami ng nakasalumuha kong tao, sa dami ng nakasama ko, natuto ako... kung paano mag-budget, mag-manage ng oras, 'yun, makisama.*

***Unconventional family set-up.*** In their own ways, both respondents have an unconventional family set-up since their family arrangements are not quite typical. Sofia narrated earlier on that they did not have a masculine figure at home, and that she thinks that it is difficult to not have a man at home specifically because of the reasons she stated above. On the other hand, Andrea lives apart from her husband and youngest son, as she briefly mentions:

*May dalawa akong anak, uh, kaso magkahiwalay sila; 'yung isa kasama ko, 'yung isa nasa [province] kasama ng tatay niya.*

Andrea adds:

*Ako, ngayon, mahirap. Mahirap 'yung sitwasyon dahil nandito ako tsaka 'yung isang anak ko, ta's 'yung bunso ko nandun sa probinsya pati asawa ko. Mahirap... uh... pero napag-uusapan naman. Nakakayanan naman.*

***Challenges as influential to child-rearing.*** As expressed multiple times, both mothers have encountered challenging experiences. The struggles they faced and the lessons learned from them formed their character and influenced the manner of raising their children. As mentioned above, Andrea makes it a point to encourage her children to be vocal about what they feel. She attributes this effort to the fact that it was not really the norm back then to be so open about one's emotions. Moreover, she deems it difficult to handle her own children sometimes due to missed parenting time:

*Mahirap na hindi mo nai-guide 'yung mga bata kaya mahirap din na kasama sa buhay kasi hindi ikaw nagpalaki. Haha.*

On the other hand, losing a husband has made Sofia realize many things and she has transitioned from being the tough mother to one who is more empathetic. There are times, however, when the balance between discipline and warmth becomes more challenging. Sofia narrated the fight she once had with her daughter that exemplified this:

*Minsan nga, nangyari, may drama. Nagalit ako, nandun 'yung kaibigan niya. Tapos parang nag-open up din siya, umiiyak siya. Sabi ko, 'D2, di mo na mababalik pa si Papa mo. Hindi mo*

*naman ma-aano 'yun, anak...' 'Yun sabi ko. 'I'm sure gusto ng Papa mo na maging successful ka, na maging mabuti ka pa ring anak.' Gumaganun ako sa kanya, iyak siya ng iyak. Parang first time kong makita siyang ganun. Hindi... Hindi ko alam. Sabi ko, 'Ano ba pagkukulang ko?[...] Bakit ang tigas ng ulo mo?'*

**Priorities and fatigue vs. recreation.** Although both working mothers would likely appreciate days off and time for themselves and with their friends, they claim that they would rather only do so when they have extra time or when they are given the opportunity to do so. This subtheme is particularly about the fact that both participants normally choose not to actively search for means to relax as they are mostly preoccupied with both workplace and household responsibilities. That is, they tend to only go out when time and/or budget permits, when there are occasions, or when they are invited. This was implied in the interview as they seem to have associated tedium with lack of recreation. This is exemplified through Andrea's statement:

*... hindi naman talaga ako pala-barkada. 'Yung tipong kaibigan— Hindi kasi ako mahilig nung gala gala. Minsan lang... Parang lumalabas, makisama, ganyan. Pero hindi talagang mahilig na 'Punta tayo dun, punta tayo dun,' hindi ganun. Kung may mag-aya, sige, sama, game! Pero 'yung sabihin mong ako ang [magsisimula], hindi, kasi unang-una budget! Bina-budget. Pangalawa, nakakapagod na, galing kang opisina ta's parang wala ka nang pahinga. Kaya kumbaga ang labas-labas, pakikisama na lang. Although masaya, masaya. Kaya lang, mas priority kasi 'yung budget para sa pamilya. Kasi*

*'pag lalabas ka, di naman pwedeng makikikain  
ka lang, makiki-join ka lang.*

Although there may be days when they have relatively more time, the working mothers interviewed are likely to choose spending it with their children rather than going out with friends or having a day out alone. Sofia said:

*'Yung time ko, na-occupy sa kanila [children] mostly. [...] Nag-eeenjoy din talaga ako kina D2, D1.*

### ***Practical Attitudes toward work***

Although both working mothers have been staying in the same company for a long time, they do not exactly seek career-advancement in them but only look for a certain sense of satisfaction, life improvement and comfort. This statement by Andrea, for example, shows that she feels better in her current job than her previous one because she does not feel too pressured:

*Yung tama lang, tama lang sa pakiramdam [yung trabaho]. Mababait 'yung boss, mababait naman 'yung kasamahan ko sa trabaho. Sa ngayon wala naman akong ano, wala naman akong problema sa ano... hindi katulad dun sa dati kong department. [Q: Bakit?] Dun talaga sobrang pressure. [Q: Dahil?] Ang dami ng trabaho tapos pupuntahan ka ng ahente, pupuntahan ka ng member, tatawagan ka sa telepono ng branch. 'Yon. [Q: Ah, parang sabay-sabay lahat?] M-mm, dun talaga wala kang pahinga.*

Meanwhile, Sofia seeks learning opportunities in the workplace and not necessarily for career advancement.

She looks for avenues through which she can improve and at the same time be able to teach others what she knows, as shown in this extract:

*[...] pero sa'kin, gusto ko pa rin matuto. Gusto ko pa rin mag-share ng alam ko. Alam mo, may mga times may alam ako, di nila alam. Ganun eh, hahahah. Nakakatuwa na lang. [...] minsan diretso ako magsalita. Sinasabi ko din, 'Eeh, wala naman na 'kong natututunan sa inyo eh.' Pero alam nila nagbibiro ako pero may katotohanan. Gusto ko may natututo pa rin ako.*

### ***Being a working mother as tough yet rewarding***

Amidst the difficulties that come with being a working mother, both participants found having children and being mothers as a source of strength. Their answers implied that regardless of the challenges they encounter, there continues to be a certain joy in simply seeing their children and spending time with them. To them, being a working mother is rewarding but is not as easy path to take. As Andrea shared:

*Mahirap pero rewarding. [Q: Paano?] Mahirap kasi siyempre bilang mother gusto mong mabantayan, maalagaan ang mga anak mo. Gusto mong ikaw ang mag-aalaga, mag-aasikaso kaya lang hindi mo magawa dahil nagtatrabaho ka. Ang nakakatuwa naman dun, pag-uwi mo, may ano ka, stress reliever ka. Kahit anong pagod mo, pagdating mo ng bahay at nakita mo sila [mga anak], okay na. Solb na.*

### **Conclusion**

We do well to focus on concrete realities, since 'the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history',

and through these ‘the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family’. (AL 31)

This research looked into the experiences of two Filipino working mothers, and took into account their childhood experiences and family background. Themes which have emerged through the semi-structured interviews showed that working mothers do indeed experience struggles, *AL*’s “trying problems” that have to do with the demands of work, home, and personal life. Yet, the respondents continue to find being working moms as rewarding. The findings of this study prove to be either in line with or contradictory to the available literature on the topic of working mothers. It goes without saying, that working and mothering pose threats and opportunities.

First of all, it appears that the support for working mothers—or at least the idea of it—is present in today’s societal ethos. This is particularly apparent in the story of Sofia, where the decision was made between her and her husband. Their family set-up implies the acceptance or at least the tolerance of the reversal of stereotypical roles. Andrea was not restricted to staying at home and this can be primarily attributed to the need to work to be able to provide for family. Filipino working mothers then prove to be capable breadwinners and can act in a way that is discordant with the traditional gender roles; contrary to researches that show cultural expectations to be a hindrance to maintain employment.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, this supports findings that suggest that female employment status is dependent upon the circumstances the woman is in,<sup>43</sup> as both working mothers

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<sup>42</sup> Asian Development Bank, “Gender Equality in the Labor Market in the Philippines.”

<sup>43</sup> D. L. Rodin, K. McNeill, N. Vite-León & J. Heymann, “Deter-

work full-time to be able to make ends meet.

On the other hand, Sofia's story also showed that without the husband, the wife/mother immediately assumes the position of breadwinner and because of this, it becomes necessary to find other means to take care of children. Many studies have reported the use of alternative childcare services such as hiring nannies or seeking the help of relatives.<sup>44</sup> This is similar to Sofia's case; she looked for nannies to take care of her children and when she could not find any, she would leave them either with her sister or mother-in-law. Family solidarity is evident here, as well as the absence of non-family solidarities in this case, like the state-run or NGO-run or church-run day-care services.

In line with this, making adjustments to one's child-rearing practices and searching for childcare alternatives suggests that the working mother remains tied to her domestic responsibilities<sup>45</sup> and is also the one primarily concerned with the well-being of their children. An example of this was when Andrea expressed frustration upon pointing out that it is sometimes difficult to handle her children because she was not the one who raised them. This somehow implies that things may have perhaps turned out differently if she took on the role of being a full-time mom. Although this could be linked to literature that shows reduced time at home has negative effects on child development,<sup>46</sup> it does not quite make sense to immediately

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minants of informal employment among working mothers in Mexico," *Community, Work & Family*, 15, 1 (2012): 85-99.

<sup>44</sup> Zdravomyslova, "Working mothers and nannies."

<sup>45</sup> Rodin, et al., "Determinants of informal employment among working mothers in Mexico."

<sup>46</sup> Brown, et al., "Do working mothers raise couch potato kids?"; Morrill, "The effects of maternal employment on the health of school-age children."; Ruhm, "Maternal employment and adolescent development."; Wills & Brauer, "Have children adapted to their



conclude that Andrea's hardship stems from her children's bad behavior or is caused exclusively by her employment. This is especially because she did not further expound on the matter. It seems that, similar to the implications of an existing study, the effect of the mother's employment will likely depend on what the family needs and pursues.<sup>47</sup>

Aside from this, it also seems that the age of children influences a working mother's experiences. As seen in the results, Andrea's source of pressure mainly comes from the fact that both their kids are still young and studying which necessitates a certain focus on their development. Meanwhile, Sofia no longer feels the same stress because her children are older and more independent.

Work-life balance thus appears to be less problematic when children are older despite meager social support. Literature states that women try to create time for their families while trying to manage work responsibilities<sup>48</sup> and that work-life balance is something that working mothers find hard to attain.<sup>49</sup> The findings of the current study, however, suggests that it may perhaps be a lot easier for a working mother to achieve this when their children are older. Despite this fact, working mothers were found to make time for family regardless of the age of their children.<sup>50</sup>

The "distressed mother theme" propagated by media<sup>51</sup> partly holds true especially in the case of

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mothers working, or was adaptation unnecessary?"; Sherlock, Synnes, & Koehoorn, "Working mothers and early childhood outcomes."; Zdravomyslova, "Working mothers and nannies."

<sup>47</sup> Youngberg, "Working mothers."

<sup>48</sup> Zdravomyslova, "Working mothers and nannies."

<sup>49</sup> Eija, Satu, & Kaarina, 2012; Steiner & Lachover, 2016; Youngberg, 2011

<sup>50</sup> Zdravomyslova, "Working mothers and nannies."

<sup>51</sup> Motro & Vanneman, 2015

Filipino working mothers with younger children. However, the study found no evidence on working mothers being indicated or labelled as “bad moms.”<sup>52</sup> However, it is worth noting that parenting concerns becoming moral dilemmas do not cease to exist for working mothers.<sup>53</sup> Amidst the tough decisions that Sofia had to make, she still carried the guilt of being frequently unavailable her children. Amidst recognizing her grief, she is still burdened by the past and wishes she could change the way she reacted to the loss of her husband so that she could have been a better mother to them.

Overall, it appears that the idea of working mothers has become acceptable in the Philippines, especially when circumstances require the mother to also take on the role of the breadwinner. There remain many challenges for the working mother, but the “trying problems” they face are not completely irreconcilable or unsolvable. They are open to making necessary adjustments and recognize whatever shortcomings they have especially in the area of family care.

Nevertheless, *Amoris Laetitia* is calling for pastors of the churches to get involved with working mothers, like Andrea and Sofia who “silently appeal” for solidarity as they tackle life’s troubles. Pope Francis also appeals for them: “This I ask you: be shepherds, with the “odour of the sheep”, make it real, as shepherds among your flock...”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hadfield, Rudo, & Sanderson-Mann, 2007

<sup>53</sup> Peskowitz, 2005 as cited in Steiner & Lachover, 2016

<sup>54</sup> Pope Francis, “Christ Mass Homily, Saint Peter's Basilica, Holy Thursday, 28 March 2013,” [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130328\\_messa-crismale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130328_messa-crismale.html))