

Women
Entrepreneurship
Knowledge Hub

The Intersection of Motherhood & Entrepreneurship

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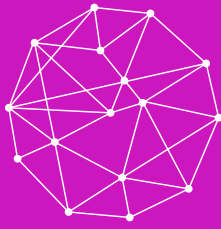
Total
Mom^{Inc}



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Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub

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The Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) is a national network and accessible digital platform for sharing research and resources, and leading strategies. With 10 regional hubs and a network of more than 250 organizations, WEKH is designed to address the needs of diverse women entrepreneurs across regions and across sectors. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WEKH adopted an agitator role connecting women entrepreneurs and support organizations across the country, and led network calls and training sessions. WEKH's advanced technology platform, powered by Magnet, enhances the capacity of women entrepreneurs and the organizations who serve them by linking them to resources and best practices across the country.

With the support of the Government of Canada, WEKH spreads its expertise from coast to coast, enabling service providers, academics, government and industry to enhance their support for women entrepreneurs. Toronto Metropolitan University's Diversity Institute, in collaboration with the Ted Rogers School of Management, is leading a team of researchers, business support organizations and key stakeholders to create a more inclusive and supportive environment to grow women's entrepreneurship in Canada.

Total Mom Inc

TOTALMOM.CA

Total Mom Inc. is a professional network and e-learning community platform that supports ambitious women founders to start and grow their businesses while juggling motherhood.

It is the fastest-growing network of mom entrepreneurs serving over 25,000 women across Canada and the U.S. through award-winning programs in partnership with North America's largest brands. The various initiatives and programs aim to break down barriers that women face in accessing equal business opportunities, funding, connections and education while navigating their careers and company as a busy parent. Total Mom's events and programs include the Total Mom Show, Total Mom Business Summit, Canada's Total Mom Pitch, M-shop and Total Mom Ventures. The network provides members with access to community support, business opportunities, connections to experts, investors and a supportive community of like-minded, driven women. The programs help women create their #totalmomlife and access transformation in their life and business.

Sponsors

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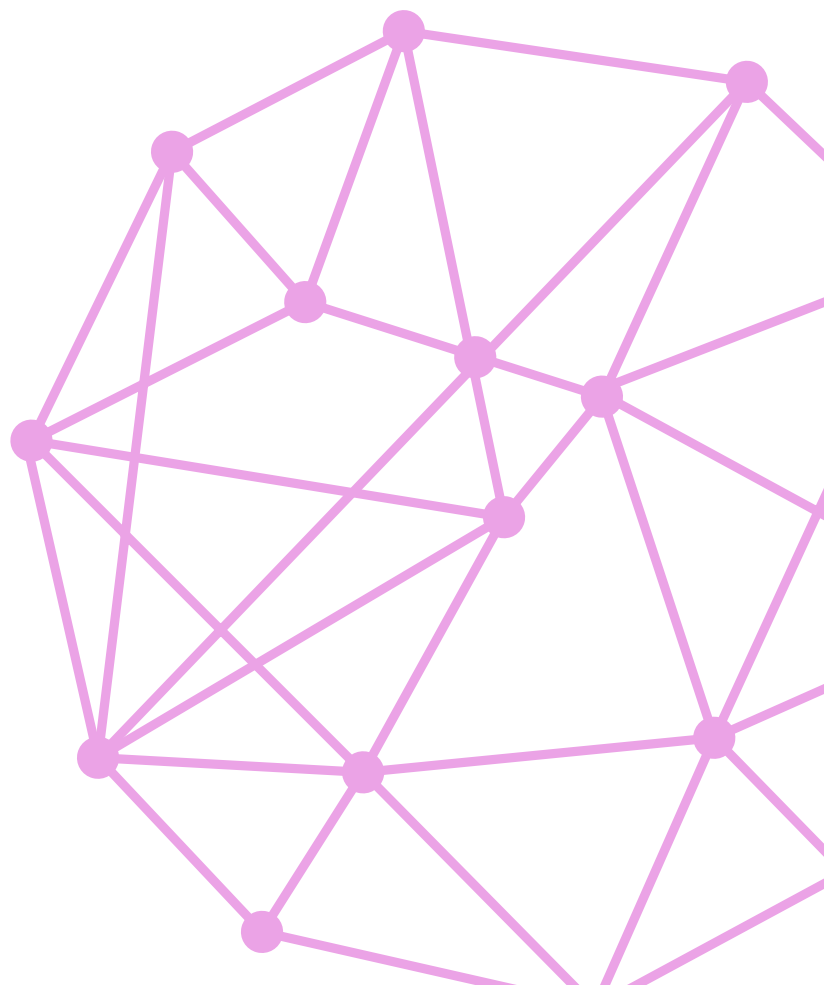
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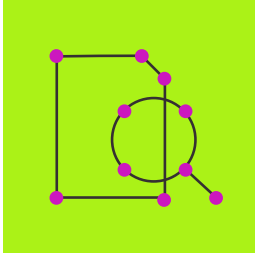
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Introduction

Overview

Extensive research shows that women are under-represented among entrepreneurs worldwide and face major barriers in entrepreneurship. In particular, women often face additional challenges as they tend to bear the brunt of unpaid work including household duties, child care and elder care.¹ There is some evidence to suggest that many women choose entrepreneurship to gain control over their time and to better balance work and family responsibilities.² Yet there has been limited research to date on the experiences of women entrepreneurs who are also parents.

This study draws on a purposive sample of 439 women who identify as mothers and entrepreneurs and who participated in a pitch competition hosted by Total Mom Inc. It examines mom entrepreneurs' experiences, challenges and barriers when starting and sustaining their businesses. This study draws insights into how the COVID-19 pandemic affected mom entrepreneurs' experience and what strategies they adopted to balance motherhood and entrepreneurship during the pandemic.

Total Mom is designed to support entrepreneurs who are also mothers. Each year, Total Mom hosts an award-winning national initiative, Canada's Total Mom Pitch, where women from across the country can apply to receive a non-dilutive monetary grant, access to connections, networking and mentorship opportunities, as well as media exposure and other services. Participants represent a variety of industries, including food and beverage, fitness, health and wellness, beauty, children, and family products and services.

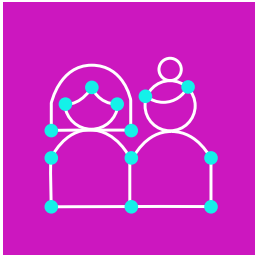
Total Mom defines a mom entrepreneur as a "self-identifying woman entrepreneur and [who has] been a caregiver at some point in [her] life so that [she] would consider [herself] mom-identifying (includes but not limited to step-mom, grandmother, adoptive mother)."³

Objective

While numerous studies have explored the relationships between gender and entrepreneurship,^{4,5} limited focus has been placed on mom entrepreneurs, women who are running their businesses while caring for their young children. This report aims to:

- > Understand the main challenges that Canadian mom entrepreneurs faced during the pandemic
- > Identify strategies that mom entrepreneurs used to balance motherhood and entrepreneurship, as well as solutions to child care support
- > Provide actionable recommendations to highlight areas of opportunity, support and inspiration that could benefit mom entrepreneurs' long-term growth and success.

The following sections offer a glimpse of mom entrepreneurs' constant struggles, the adverse effect of the pandemic on their businesses and some of the creative strategies they adopted to overcome daily hurdles during the pandemic. This report also provides a set of multifaceted recommendations and offers a way forward for future studies.



Motherhood & Entrepreneurship

Overview

The lines between gender, motherhood and entrepreneurship are more interconnected than ever before. Since the 20th century, women and mothers have been granted more choices and opportunities to participate in the paid labour force and in entrepreneurship.

Women entrepreneurship in Canada

The importance of entrepreneurship to Canada's economic development is well documented, particularly the contributions of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which account for 90% of private sector employment. A recent analysis conducted by the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) reported there were about 982,600 self-employed women in Canada in 2021;⁶ women-owned businesses accounted for about 18% of Canadian businesses, with SMEs comprising 99.8% of these, based on the quarterly Canadian Survey on Business Conditions reports.^{7,8} Women's ownership of SMEs saw an increase to 16.8% in 2020⁹ from 15.6% in 2017.¹⁰ Further, the rate of total early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA) among women rose to 81% in 2022 from 65% of the men's TEA rate in 2021; the proportion of established businesses (EB) owned by women increased to 77% of men's EB rate from 68% in the same period.¹¹

Women SME owners constitute a higher percentage of SME ownership in specific sectors. For instance, women-owned SMEs make up 26.2% of all SMEs in retail trade, surpassing the national rate of 17.5%.¹² The percentage of women-owned SMEs is also higher than the national average in the professional, scientific and technical services (20%), and accommodation and food services (17.6%) industries. On the other hand, the percentage of women-owned SMEs is low in primary and industrial sectors such as construction (3.7%) and agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting and mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction (5.8% combined). Despite the relatively high representation of women SME owners in the service sector, SMEs predominantly owned by men are more prevalent across all sectors.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, 50% of women in the early stages of entrepreneurship and one-third of established women entrepreneurs in Canada have amplified their use of digital technologies.¹³

Women-owned SMEs emphasize inclusivity, extending opportunities to equity-deserving groups, such as Indigenous Peoples, women, and racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Moreover, the representation of intersectional women dropped from 2017¹⁴ to 2020.¹⁵ Despite the downward trend in Indigenous and racialized women SME owners, the rate of SMEs majority-owned by women living with disabilities increased to 26.1% in 2020¹⁶ from 16.7% in 2017.¹⁷

Mothers who are entrepreneurs

Although women entrepreneurs' contributions to the economy and social and environmental sustainability have been recognized, research suggests that the roles and expectations of women, particularly mothers, remain relatively unchanged.¹⁸ They are often burdened with the same levels of family, motherhood and caretaking responsibilities regardless of their education and skills levels, limiting their participation in the workforce and career advancement.¹⁹ Literature further suggests that women entrepreneurs are faced with constrained contexts due to a lack of the same rights and resources compared to their men counterparts.^{20,21}

Historically, women have been pressured to be good mothers, productive employees and good housewives.²² These unrealistic expectations have affected the physical and mental health of working mothers, contributing to their feelings of guilt when choosing to prioritize work over their families. Working mothers have consistently expressed difficulty balancing professional and motherhood responsibilities.^{23,24}

Particularly for women entrepreneurs the lack of child care has been identified as a major barrier to success.²⁵ In Canada, close to one-quarter of women who are small business owners have children under the age of 18 years; of those, 67% reported taking on additional care work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, 28% of men reported taking on additional care work during the pandemic. Moreover, 63% of women with children under the age of five years agreed with the statement "When I work from home, I feel like I am working all the time and never have time for myself or my family." This is a struggle that is less likely faced by those without children under the age of five (36%).²⁶ During the pandemic, school closures and



the lack of child care services increased closures of businesses owned by mother entrepreneurs.²⁷

Gender biases, unfair expectations of women, motherhood responsibilities, and the lack of access to child care support and services pose significant challenges to women in the workforce and in entrepreneurship.^{28,29}

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- > What are the challenges and barriers faced by mom entrepreneurs, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- > What strategies were adopted by mom entrepreneurs to overcome these challenges and balance dual roles of motherhood and entrepreneurship?
- > What recommendations and suggestions could be provided to support the long-term growth and business success for mom entrepreneurs?



Methods

Overview

This section discusses the data collection and analysis processes for the study, introduces the high-level themes identified during the thematic analysis and describes some of the key characteristics of participants.

Data collection

The data used for this study comes from 439 mom entrepreneurs who submitted applications for Total Mom's third annual business pitch grant in 2022. Participants completed application surveys, which included a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions focusing on the challenges and barriers faced by mom entrepreneurs and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their life and career.

This report examines the factors that challenge or support mom entrepreneurs' journeys and successful strategies for balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship.

Data analysis

To analyze the application data provided by Total Mom, we employed a two-step approach, combining basic descriptive analysis and thematic analysis. This approach allowed us to generate comprehensive insights into the challenges and barriers faced by applicants during the pandemic and study the strategies they adopted to balance motherhood and entrepreneurship.

> Basic descriptive analysis

We conducted a basic descriptive analysis of the 439 applications to provide an overview of applicant demographics and their businesses. This analysis included information such as the ranking of applicants' biggest challenges and mental health state, in addition to basic demographic information.

> Thematic analysis

Next, we performed a thematic analysis, which enabled us to categorize and understand the key patterns and trends within the data. We focused on two main areas: the challenges and barriers faced by applicants during the pandemic and the strategies applicants adopted to balance motherhood and entrepreneurship. The broader themes and the sub-themes are shown below.

This report examines the factors that challenge or support mom entrepreneurs' journeys and successful strategies for balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship. It analyzes the barriers and challenges that these entrepreneurs face using the inclusive innovation ecosystem model,³⁰ which brings together intersecting factors and forces at



the societal, organizational and individual levels to understand what promotes and impedes women's entrepreneurship. For the two broad themes, the following codes were identified.

Barriers and challenges during the pandemic codes

- > **Societal-level barriers and challenges**
 - > Government and policy barriers
 - > Market and competition barriers
- > **Organizational-level barriers and challenges**
 - > Financial challenges
 - > Operational and logistical challenges
 - > Market and customer acquisition challenges
- > **Individual-level barriers and challenges**
 - > Mental and physical health-related challenges
 - > Family and relationship barriers
 - > Skill development and adaptation barriers
 - > Personal financial barriers
 - > Other barriers

Strategies for balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship codes

- > Child care support during the pandemic
- > Making changes to accommodate work
- > Effective time management
- > Enhancing connection in all buckets of life
- > Seeking support from others
- > Overcoming "mom guilt"

Participants

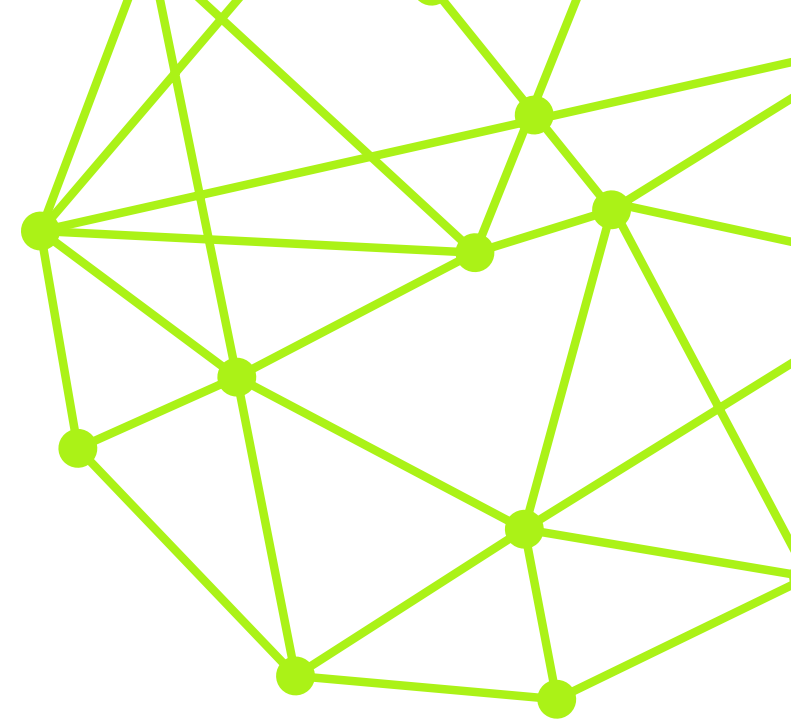
Demographic representation

During the survey's rollout in 2022, most respondents lived in Ontario (58.7%), followed by Alberta (12.7%) and British Columbia (10.6%). Over one-half of respondents (50.8%) self-identified as white from North America, while 10.4% self-identified as Black from Africa, 9.5% identified as white from Europe (e.g., British, Italian, Russian, Portuguese), and less than 5% cumulatively self-identified as Latin American, Middle Eastern or Caribbean. Most respondents (88%) did not self-identify as living with a disability, while 5.1% preferred not to say. Regarding the ages of their children, over one-half of respondents (53.8%) identified their children as aged five years or younger, while 46.2% had children aged over five years.

Industry representation

Most respondents (92.4%) had active businesses in 2022, while a 7.6% of respondents' businesses were inactive. In most cases, the inactivity was largely influenced by closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic or their businesses being in early stages of development.

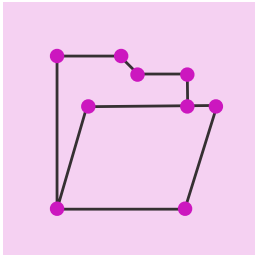
Regarding the industry of respondents' businesses, the largest percentage (23.5%) had businesses in "other services, with the exception of public administration," while 13.7% focused on retail trade, 12.1% were engaged in health care and social assistance, and 12.1% were based in arts, entertainment or recreation. All other sectors represented under 10% of mom entrepreneurs' business industries.



Ownership and financial information

Most mom entrepreneurs (76.9%) own between 91% and 100% of their business, while 11.8% own 41% to 50%. Over one-half of respondents (55%) described their businesses in the growth and expansion stage, while 39.5% had businesses in the prototype and startup stage, 4.4% had businesses in the concept stage and 1.2% had businesses in the maturity stage.

Regarding their business' main source of revenue, most respondents' (90.3%) revenue was tied to sales to Canadian businesses or consumers, while 9.7% earned from non-Canadian sources. Most businesses (53.6%) had annual sales of less than \$249,999, and 34.2% reported businesses with no current sales or in the startup stage. Only 0.5% of respondents had businesses with annual sales of \$300 million or more.



Key Findings

Overview

This section includes basic descriptive analysis findings followed by a thematic analysis of the challenges and barriers faced by mom entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies they adopted to balance motherhood and entrepreneurship.

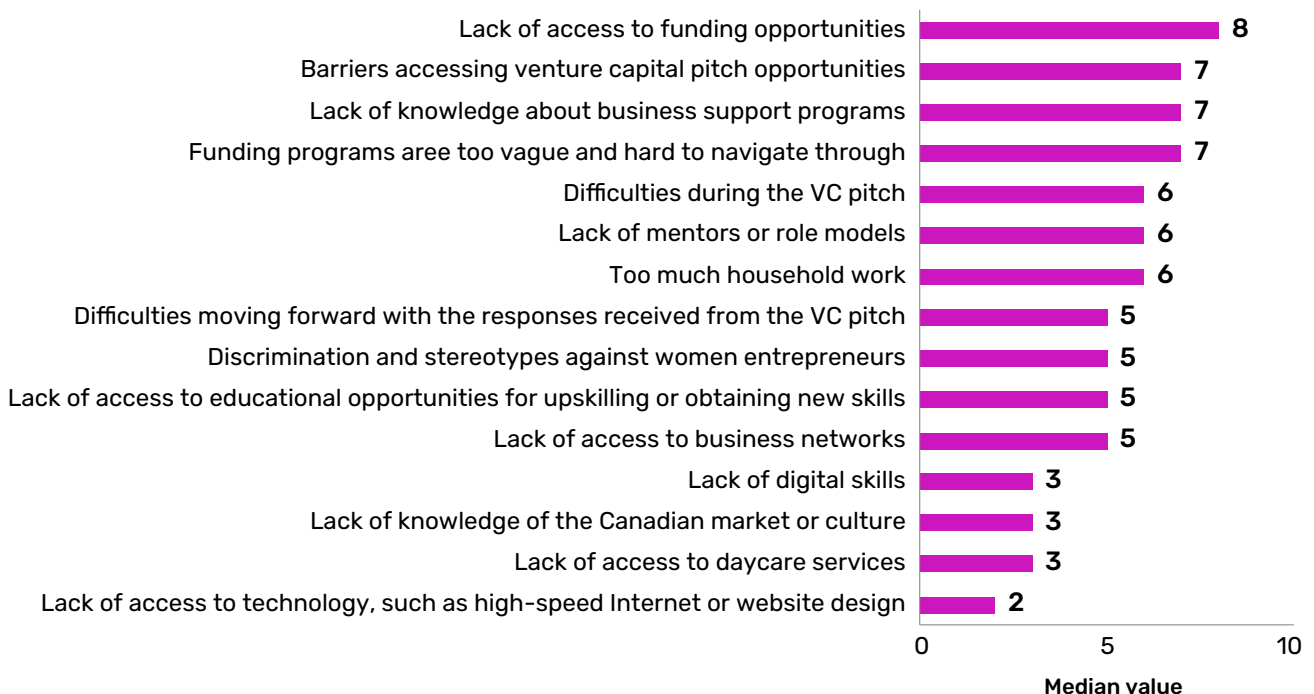
Descriptive analysis findings

Biggest challenges at each level of the entrepreneurial ecosystem

Participants were asked to rank challenges on a scale of 0 to 9, where 0 is not challenging and 9 is extremely challenging. The biggest obstacle reported was the lack of access to funding opportunities, followed by lack of knowledge about the existing funding and business support programs available. Other challenges included difficulties in accessing venture capital (VC) funding or challenges experienced during the VC pitch, lack of mentors and role models, and balancing household work and business activities. Figure 1 shows the median ranking value by participants of the biggest challenges at each level of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

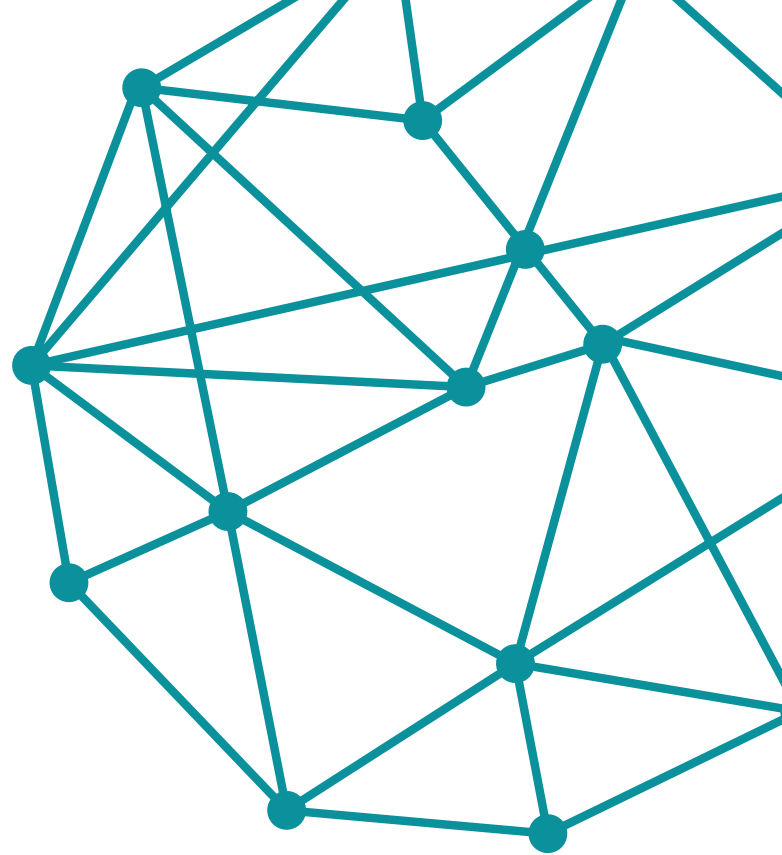
FIGURE 1

Participant ranking (median value) of the biggest challenges at each level of the entrepreneurial ecosystem



SOCIETAL-LEVEL CHALLENGES

- > Lack of access to funding opportunities (median value of 8): This was ranked as the biggest challenge faced by mom entrepreneurs. Limited access to funding sources can significantly affect women entrepreneurs' ability to grow and sustain their businesses.
- > Discrimination and stereotypes against women entrepreneurs (median value of 5): Women entrepreneurs face prejudice and biases that often hinder their progress in the business world. Societal norms and expectations may contribute to these challenges, making it difficult for women to succeed as entrepreneurs.
- > Lack of access to educational opportunities for upskilling (median value of 5): Women entrepreneurs may face barriers to accessing educational resources that can help them develop new skills or improve existing ones, which can affect their business growth.
- > Lack of access to daycare services (median value of 3): Women entrepreneurs often struggle with finding adequate daycare, which can hinder their ability to commit fully to their businesses.



ORGANIZATIONAL-LEVEL CHALLENGES

- > Barrier to accessing VC pitch opportunities (median value of 7): Women entrepreneurs often find it difficult to access VC pitch opportunities, which can significantly affect their ability to secure funding.
- > Funding programs are vague and hard to navigate (median value of 7): Complexity and lack of clarity in funding programs can create barriers for women entrepreneurs seeking financial support for their businesses.
- > Lack of access to technology (median value of 2): Women entrepreneurs may face challenges in accessing essential technologies—such as high-speed Internet or website design—which can negatively affect their business operations and growth.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CHALLENGES

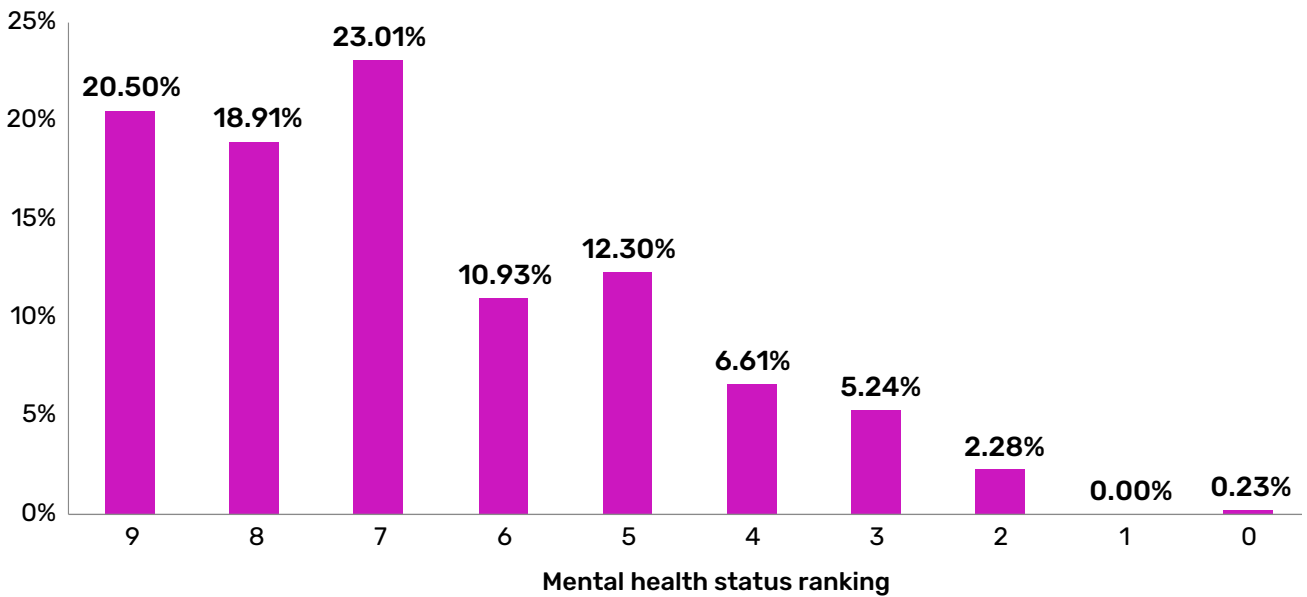
- > Lack of knowledge of business support programs (median value of 7): Women entrepreneurs may be unaware of available business support programs, which can limit their access to valuable resources and assistance.
- > Difficulties during the VC pitch (median value of 6): Women entrepreneurs may face challenges in effectively presenting their businesses during venture capital pitches, which can negatively affect their chances of securing necessary funding.
- > Lack of mentors or role models (median value of 6): A shortage of mentors or role models for women entrepreneurs can limit the support and guidance available for them to develop successful businesses.
- > Too much household work (median value of 6): Women entrepreneurs may struggle with balancing household responsibilities and their businesses, which can negatively affect their ability to focus on entrepreneurial goals.
- > Difficulties moving forward with the responses received from the VC pitch (median value of 5): Women entrepreneurs may struggle with processing feedback from VC pitches, which can delay or impede their progress.
- > Lack of access to business networks (median value of 5): Women entrepreneurs may face barriers in accessing valuable business networks, which can limit their opportunities for growth and collaboration.
- > Lack of digital skills (median value of 3): Women entrepreneurs may struggle with acquiring or improving digital skills, which can hinder their ability to compete in an increasingly digital marketplace.



- > Lack of knowledge of the Canadian market or culture (median value of 3): Women entrepreneurs may face challenges in understanding the Canadian market or culture, which can affect their ability to grow and adapt their businesses.

FIGURE 2

Participants' mental health status during the COVID-19 pandemic (ranked between 0 to 9, where 0 is low and 9 is high)



Participants' mental health status or stress level during the pandemic

Research shows that working mothers and mom entrepreneurs are often burdened with a greater workload due to household chores and child care in addition to their professional commitments, leading to higher stress and other mental health challenges.^{31,32} Participants were asked to rate their mental health status or stress level during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2) on a scale of 0 to 9, where 0 is not stressful or no mental health issues and 9 is extremely stressful to high mental health issues.

Most participants experienced high stress levels during the pandemic, with around 62% reporting stress levels above 6. About 30% experienced medium stress levels (between 4 and 6), while about 8% reported low stress levels (3 or below). This suggests that the pandemic's effect on mental health and stress varied across individuals, with most facing significant stress.

Research shows that working mothers and mom entrepreneurs are often burdened with a greater workload due to household chores and child care in addition to their professional commitments, leading to higher stress and other mental health challenges.



Thematic analysis findings

This section elaborates on the thematic analysis findings for two broad themes from the applicant questionnaire:

- > Barriers and challenges during the pandemic; and
- > Strategies adopted for balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship.

Barriers and challenges during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented obstacles and challenges of various levels, profoundly affecting individuals, organizations and society at large. At the societal level, barriers ranged from government and policy constraints to market and competition hurdles. Organizations grappled with financial difficulties, operational disruptions and difficulties in market and customer acquisition. At the individual level, the pandemic contributed to mental and physical health issues, strained family and personal relationships, and created hurdles in skill development and personal finance. This analysis delves into these multifaceted challenges, providing a comprehensive overview of the myriad barriers faced.

SOCIETAL-LEVEL BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Government and policy barriers

Government lockdown and other COVID-19 pandemic restrictions

- > Government-imposed lockdowns during the pandemic posed significant challenges for mom entrepreneurs. Participants experienced issues such as being forced to close doors (#2), the loss of clients (#12) and cancellation of events (#36), which disrupted their normal operations.
- > Mandatory physical distancing affected community-focused businesses. As one participant (#44) highlighted, “The biggest challenge faced was being in the business of creating community during a time where it was mandatory to be socially distant.”

- > The pandemic led to a decline in in-person shopping. Participant (#70) noted that customers were discouraged from in-person shopping.
- > Participant (#66) mentioned that limitations on special events and gatherings negatively affected businesses, especially those in the event industry. These lockdown measures, coupled with the constantly changing landscape, presented substantial barriers for women entrepreneurs in this field during the pandemic.

Lack of government support

- > Lack of government support during the pandemic presented significant challenges and barriers for women entrepreneurs in maintaining their businesses. One participant (#152) stated, "Did not receive any information or help," and another (#85) wrote, "Zero support."
- > Participant #252 described the government's response as inadequate, believing that "the government failed some industries," and explaining how the financial support provided was insufficient to cover expenses and maintain their business. This lack of support led to feelings of being "useless and stuck."
- > Participant #431 reported difficulties in qualifying for loans or grants due to their business's early stage, which forced them to make tough decisions such as downsizing and relocating.

Market and competition barriers

Greater market competition

- > Many mom entrepreneurs faced increased market competition during the pandemic. As participant #24 noted, competing with franchise chains and big box stores, along with Amazon, was challenging.
- > The pandemic led to a surge in similar businesses, as participant #98 pointed out: "Everyone started a home candle

business!" This increase in competition made it difficult for women entrepreneurs to differentiate themselves, as participant #107 expressed: "The concern was what will separate us from others." Heightened market competition during the pandemic presented substantial barriers.

Market uncertainties and disruption due to the pandemic

- > Market uncertainty and disruptions during the pandemic presented significant challenges for women entrepreneurs. Participants faced fluctuations in sales; participant #13 expressed, "questioning if we were going to make it through, then focusing on really defining our expertise and figuring out how to pivot and grow." The need to pivot to meet market demands (#19) and adjusting to new realities was a common theme among the participants.
- > For some, the pandemic led to a sudden loss of clients and projects. As participant #35 noted, "Overnight, all the work I had lined up had suddenly dried up. I had to quickly pivot into virtual speaking and source new avenues for marketing work." Participant #43 described the impact of market uncertainty: "There was so much uncertainty, and many of our clients were changing their policies and operations to avoid exposure and risk of spread. They were also pulling back on purchases to conserve their cash flow. We lost significant revenue as a result."
- > Some participants experienced challenges like increased costs of goods and shipping (#54), declining sales (#118) and unpredictable consumer behaviour (#197). Participant #438 explained, "During the pandemic, consumers frequently changed their buying and recreation habits depending on local health regulations and impacts to the economy, so our sales were very unpredictable." This market uncertainty and disruption during the pandemic significantly hindered the success of women entrepreneurs.

ORGANIZATIONAL-LEVEL BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Financial challenges

Access to funding

- > Access to funding (#258), financing (#266) and capital for scaling up (#345) were identified as some of the biggest stressors by mom entrepreneurs. The inability to “raise capital” directly affected mom entrepreneurs to “growing my business” (#125). Participant #349 stated that it was hard for businesses to access “seed capital” and have the “bandwidth for market demand.” Participant #288 mentioned that it was difficult to adapt to new requirements “while we were completely self-funded.” Similarly, participant #410 wrote, “The challenge was getting free funding to continue to put our business at [the] full potential that it needs to be so we can reach our goals.”
- > Participant #439 reported that it was challenging to secure “stable funding and to balance my personal resourcing” while raising her first child. She explained that “To secure funding during the pandemic was time-consuming, tedious and often did not do enough on its own to provide for the business stability. Many grants were difficult to find and apply for—and once they were completed, a large time lag between application and receiving funding would often cause stress on the business.”
- > Despite government funding being available, some participants were unable to “qualify for loans” and grants were “impossible being early-stage business” for the “business relief” funding. Participant #431 explained: “We have some regional funding, yet [it is] very small and only held us over to pay current suppliers, yet we have to pay 75% of that back. I had to sell my house in Toronto and make tough decisions to move to a smaller town to

downsize and ensure we can survive, let alone invest back into marketing and supplies to turn [the] business back around.”

Startup and operational costs

- > The COVID-19 pandemic strained startups, with participants—especially those pivoting to digital operations—citing increased costs and a struggle to secure funding for operational costs. One participant (#308) highlighted the essential need for “finances to properly run the business.” Another (#428) revealed the struggle of losing “90% of [their] business over food-service closures” and losing “a partner shareholder,” which resulted in “a lack of resources to navigate a startup.” Adding to the costs, participant #74 expressed difficulty in affording the transition to online, stating that she was “not able to afford getting my site running online.”
- > Contributing to these struggles were the experiences of participants such as #10, who highlighted the challenge of bearing “startup costs associated with starting a business, which were entirely out of pocket.” Participant #30 noted the challenges of finding the time



and resources to start asset creation while managing other businesses and homeschooling. Some mom entrepreneurs, such as participant #41, moved to a new town during the pandemic, which brought additional obstacles like networking and building a client base. Participant #72 found it challenging to manage a “demanding full-time job,” “build a startup,” and “manage remote learning with kids” simultaneously. As a newcomer, participant #109 found the pandemic challenging in “establishing connections” and dealing with “supply chain disruptions” for starting a new business.

Delayed or lost revenue

- > During the pandemic, many mom entrepreneurs experienced “loss of revenue” (#195), “closure of businesses and reduction in sales” (#176). Participant #18 reported that 90% of her business diminished during the pandemic.
- > Mom entrepreneurs dealt with challenges associated with office closures. Participant #12 stated that “the biggest challenge (her) business faced was income loss because [she] had to close [her] office for a few months.” Additionally, participant #104 noted “the pandemic was a huge challenge for [her] business because [she] had to shut down on three different occasions.” These closures resulted in what participant #220 described a slowing down of “long-term goals” and a “drop in sales and services.”
- > During the closure, some businesses were not eligible for government assistance; participant #437 had to “pivot as much as possible but struggled to keep the doors open with little income.”
- > Participant #269 explained that the “shut down during the lockdown” interfered with her personal finance, as she described being “barely [able to] put food on the table.” Participant #188 stated that

the lockdowns were “really hard on my business” and impacted “a huge portion of my funds ... especially being a small business.”

Operational and logistical challenges

Supply chain issues

- > The COVID-19 pandemic affected various levels of the supply chain; issues of backlogs and delays were well-documented in participants’ responses. For example, participant #96 explained that their “suppliers were out of some ingredients, which delayed our production,” and moreover the “delay with the mail office” resulted in “extremely slow” production and delivery time. Participant #127 noted that “supply chain issues have affected everything from shipping containers from overseas to glass bottles and cardboard boxes. The coordination involved with ordering and receiving our product, and therefore our ability to meet our commitments to our clients, was a tremendous challenge.”
- > In addition to the backlogs and delays, “PPE supply was the hardest challenge,” according to participant #26. Participant #188 described that it was necessary to “ensure we had the PPE and staff to cover emergency care.”
- > Some participants noted that the increase in shipping costs posed a significant challenge. Participant #302 said that her “biggest challenge so far has been high shipping rates to customers.” When faced with an increase in unit costs, others, like participant #341, said they had to “increase our prices to just cover our costs of running the business.” To put the situation into perspective, participant #406 estimated that they had “a cost of 2.5 times more than the 2019 business year.” Participant #81 stated, “The pandemic disrupted the supply chain which directly impacted

my business. Shipping was slow, some products were unavailable or delayed and shipping costs increased. This made it difficult to maintain inventory, remain competitively priced and make a profit."

Staff shortages

- > Staff shortages during the pandemic presented significant challenges for mom entrepreneurs. Participant #20 mentioned difficulties in "finding staff to fill vacancies" for her clients, while participant #33 experienced setbacks in their timeline due to "issues with production due to staff shortages."
- > Short-staffed businesses struggled. As participant #111 described, "Due to lack of marketing and being short-staffed," they were not able to execute their plans. Another participant (#333) mentioned that they struggled to find workers, which made operations "less productive."
- > Participants #2 and #427 highlighted difficulties in "finding more employees" and "staff refusing to work." Consequently, businesses like participant #349's faced an "inability to hire staff to take on the client demand."

Forced to pivot or change business model

- > Participant #104 shared that, "The pandemic forced me to completely pivot and move forward with my digital strategy," reflecting the overall shift toward digital transformation. Participant #160 mentioned being "forced to get creative and quickly adapt to generating all of my income online," marking a successful transition as "2020 and 2021 ended up being [her] highest grossing years to date" after the pivot. Participant #72 also took her business "from brick and mortar in my little town to being online," listing "content creation" as the most significant challenge since the pandemic started.

- > Additional experiences shed light on the multidimensional challenges of the transition to online. Participant #19 had to ensure staff and customer safety while remaining operational and pivoting toward ecommerce and logistics. For participant #35, the transition involved sourcing new avenues for work after clients paused or cancelled their budgets. For participant #110, the pivot required juggling virtual operations with homeschooling children and maintaining a full-time job. Participant #162 identified the successful transition to online platforms as their biggest challenge, underscoring the importance of digital literacy and effective research skills.
- > In the new online-focused scenario, participants #170, #225 and #244 emphasized the need for creativity in developing relationships with vendors and customers, and managing time effectively between child care and work. Participant #292 highlighted her struggle switching from in-person to virtual legal services, coupled with managing virtual schooling for her daughter and running her business.

Temporary business closure or displacement

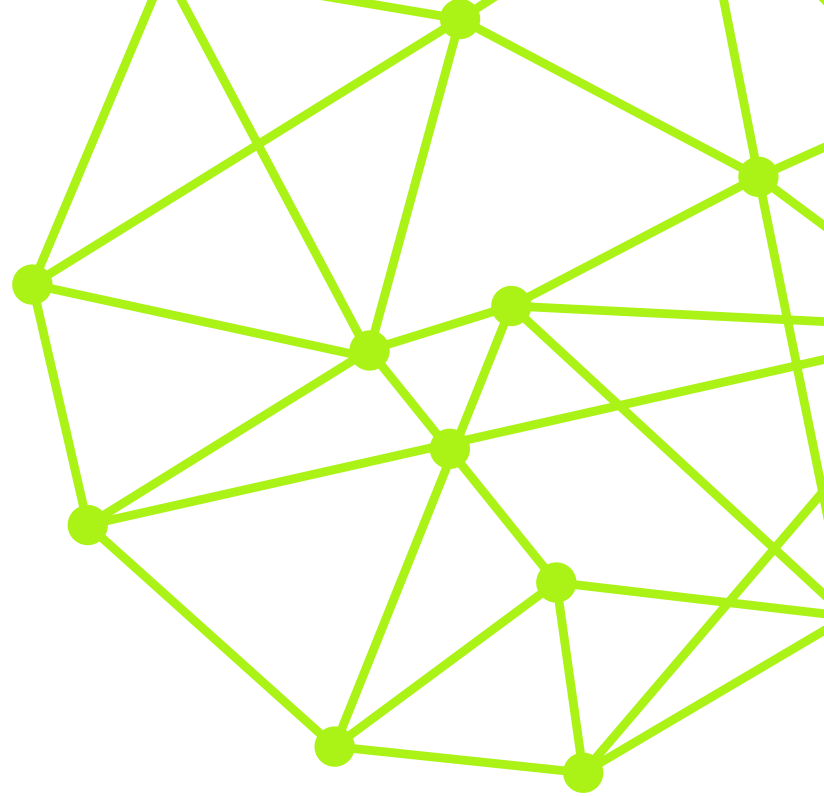
- > The COVID-19 pandemic triggered widespread temporary business closures, as noted by participant #119. Some businesses, like those of participant #171, had to shut down entirely, particularly those reliant on in-person, one-on-one experiences (#252). For others, such as participant #11, operations could continue but at a significantly limited capacity due to the closure of indoor locations.
- > The pandemic's unpredictability added further complexity, leaving business owners uncertain about resuming operations. Participant #204 experienced an extended closure without knowing when recreational facilities would reopen, while participant #78 saw their business

launch pushed back by a year due to repeated shutdowns of their production factory. These closures also imposed unforeseen financial burdens, as businesses like that of participant #176 continued to incur overhead expenses despite reduced sales.

- > Another challenge was displacement or relocation due to restrictions and lockdowns. This disruption of business operations, coupled with financial losses and uncertainties, was particularly problematic for mom entrepreneurs. Participant #11 was forced to relocate due to their shared office building being sold, leading to a business hiatus. Similarly, participant #142 faced permanent closures for most of her studios; the resulting personal financial hardships included legal action from banks and landlords.
- > Quick displacements, like the one experienced by participant #148, who was given only 24 hours' notice by their landlord, caused considerable concerns among employees and clients, destabilizing businesses further.

Business operating challenges due to the pandemic

- > The pandemic induced significant disruptions in routine operations, limiting the ability to connect with customers and employees. Participant #255, who provided children's enrichment programs in schools and child care facilities, saw her business fully shut down for most of 2020. Despite the transition to online services, operations were only able to resume at about 25% of their pre-pandemic capacity.



- > For businesses heavily reliant on in-person services, the switch to remote models presented hurdles. Participant #303 noted the diminished efficacy of “over the phone” meetings, and participant #235 described the struggles of connecting with professionals virtually for banking, financing, legal work and other operational necessities.
- > Maintaining a safe and functional workspace also posed challenges. Participant #102 highlighted the need for “office space distancing and cleaning,” as well as upgraded electronics to facilitate online sessions. For #139, supply chain disruptions led to difficulties in receiving supplies and materials and manufacturing issues.
- > The pandemic's restrictions affected businesses in varied ways. Participant #179, who started her business during the pandemic, faced challenges communicating with customers while adhering to mask mandates and physical distancing rules at markets. For participant #195, travel restrictions hampered her desired “business as usual” model.

- > A wide range of product and service limitations were experienced by participant #226 who had to constantly reschedule, shift and refund weddings, couldn't host workshops or parties, and faced delays with flower shipments, all while managing her children at work due to school closures.
- > Ensuring the safety of clients and staff in personal service industries like salons, as shared by one participant (#238), necessitated ongoing adjustments to restrictions, constant communication and fast, educated decisions to ensure everyone involved felt comfortable. These accounts underline the complex and diverse operational challenges faced by mom entrepreneurs during the pandemic.

Market and customer acquisition challenges

Reduced clientele

- > Due to pandemic restrictions, many participants were "forced to close doors" leading to "loss of clients" (#2) or clients that "immediately paused their work or canceled their budgets" (#35).
- > The lack of "foreign tourists," "cancellations due to illness," and fear of in-person services caused participants to experience a reduction in clientele. For instance, participant #12 stated that "the biggest challenge my business faced was income loss because I had to close my office for a few months. When I was allowed to reopen my office, my caseload decreased because some of my clients were afraid to come to my office for therapy because of the pandemic."
- > The loss of clientele and lower revenue exacerbated the feelings of "fear and uncertainty" as participant #18 expressed. These effects "took a toll on [their] businesses" as many of them could not do their usual business due to the government restrictions.

Negative business growth

- > The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns resulted in negative business growth for many mom entrepreneurs, primarily due to the cancellation of events and an overall atmosphere of uncertainty. Participant #36 captured the experience of many, noting that "Events of all sizes and shapes were cancelled," leading to significant unpredictability in business growth. This sentiment was echoed by participants #197 and #483, who pointed out the inherent "unpredictability" and "uncertainty" of operating during the pandemic.
- > These circumstances imposed challenges for operations-heavy businesses. Participant #250 expressed the difficulty of growing her business and hiring help without a central office or workspace amid multiple lockdowns; this disruption had a tangible effect on long-term business objectives. Participant #221 noted that the pandemic "prohibited the growth of my business," delaying her goal of establishing a location to facilitate growth and sustainability.
- > The absence of in-person interaction, a crucial sales factor for many businesses, was another consequence of the pandemic. Participant #191 explained how this change eliminated the human interaction that she relied on to sell her products. Participant #255 revealed that her business was operating at only 25% due to closures.
- > Participant #53's experience encapsulates the necessary adaptability during this time. When she started her business in January 2021, she had hoped the pandemic would recede. When it didn't, she had to pivot and come up with new ideas for revenue generation. She noted that, "Our herbal dining experiences had the potential to make the most revenue, pre-COVID; however, the pandemic has caused us to

behave differently.” This highlights the sweeping changes the pandemic forced upon business operations and growth.

Restricted sales channel

- > Before the pandemic, many business owners or self-employed individuals obtained income through multiple sales channels. However, since COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions were implemented and the resulting downturn, participant #35 found that “clients immediately paused their work or cancelled their budgets,” consequently reducing the avenues they had to do business.
- > Some participants depended on “in-person sport games” and “live events” to generate income. As a result of lockdowns and in-person restrictions, participant #94 described a “loss of sales” she experienced on her merchandise since all youth sports were canceled.” In addition, participant #95 stated that “there was little or no income.”

Unable to retain customer or attract new customers

- > During the COVID-19 pandemic, mom entrepreneurs faced considerable obstacles in attracting new customers. Participant #2 reported a “loss of clients,” while participant #68 noted the difficulty of finding customers during the pandemic, particularly given her business’s focus on customer experience, a concept that seemed “abstract and not well understood by many organizations.” This sentiment was echoed by participant #8, who cited a lack of access to business clients as a major challenge.
- > These difficulties were not confined to retaining existing customers. The pandemic also heightened the challenge of attracting new clients. Participant #300 highlighted the “greater marketing requirements” needed to reach and attract new customers amid the ongoing health crisis.
- > The shift toward work-from-home and in-home businesses posed its own unique challenges. Participant #282 mentioned the difficulty of finding clients for an in-home business due to potential customers’ attitudes and perceptions toward these types of professions. This reflects a broader societal challenge that the pandemic has exacerbated: the need to adapt to new working modalities.
- > For participant #63, the birth of new businesses during the pandemic brought unique challenges. This participant stated that not being able to attend events and markets due to pandemic-related restrictions was a significant hurdle. Participant #37 pointed out the ongoing challenge of attracting the “right calibre of clientele on a consistent basis.” These experiences underscore the multifaceted difficulties mom entrepreneurs faced in attracting and retaining customers during the pandemic.



INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Mental and physical health-related challenges

Burnout

- > The pandemic posed additional mental and physical health-related challenges. Participant #87 described her mental health state as “pouring from an empty cup at times” when navigating all the pandemic related challenges, her own mental health, and her clients’ needs.
- > Participant #89 stated that “with the kids at home, it felt impossible to concentrate during the day, which meant pulling long nights in the evenings, and running on empty,” illustrating the difficulties of mom entrepreneurs “juggling it all” without “having any time for myself.” Similarly, participant #98 admitted that “the balance between work/life became unmanageable at times.”
- > Mom entrepreneurs often take on multiple roles; participant #412 illustrated this reality by stating, “I was spreading myself very thin. As a mom I had to be able to wear many hats during the pandemic such as teacher, chef, business owner, provider, nurturer, partner, sister etc., all at the same time.”

Mental health and well-being

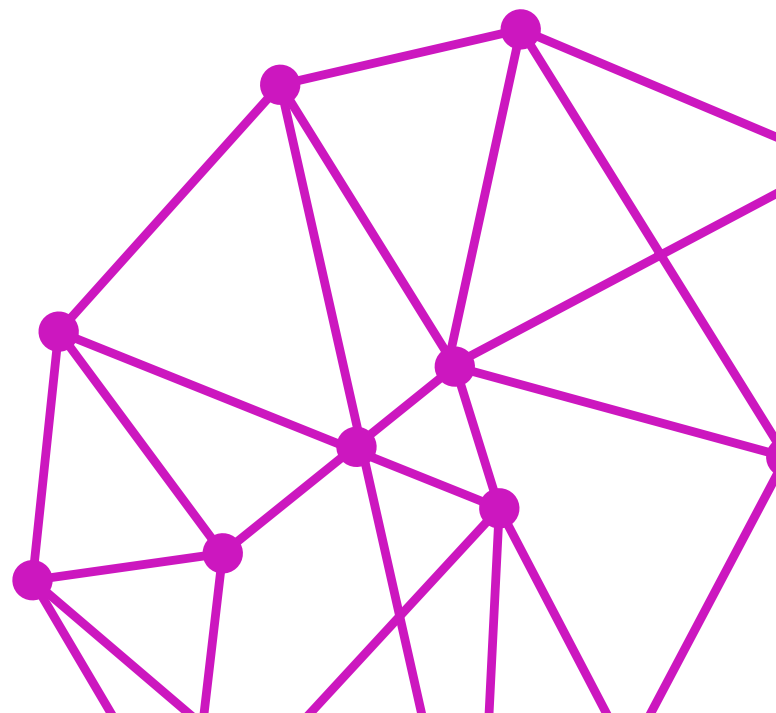
- > Participants noticed a decline in their mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Anxiety,” “stress” and “depression” were the most mentioned. Participant #43 said that her “stress levels were at an all-time high.” Participant #348 felt “isolated,” “anxious” and “depressed.”
- > Participants noted additional motherhood-related mental health burdens. Participant #113 experienced “an immense amount of mom-guilt” when working while juggling “three young kids at home in virtual

school.” Participant #289 recalled a similar struggle “watching her daughter full time” while trying to complete her “workload,” resulting in having “panic attacks” due to the intensity.

- > Participant #323 noted that “postpartum depression and anxiety” were challenging for new mothers.
- > COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions limited in-person interactions, making it difficult for participant #105 to “manage her social anxiety/ panic disorder through the pandemic,” especially “without regular community interaction.”

Pandemic-related health and safety concerns

- > The pandemic brought on new health and safety concerns for entrepreneurs. Participant #238 explained that it was important for her clients and team to feel “as safe as possible” and “comfortable” with the ongoing restrictions. She added that “constant communication” was important to make “fast and educated decisions.”
- > Those with young children and elderly parents, such as participants #49, #327 and 367, were taking extra precautions to prevent from “getting sick” to “manage family health concerns.”



Family and relationship barriers

Familial commitments and child support during pandemic

- > On top of work-related commitments, the pandemic exacerbated the need for child support and the additional familial commitments of mom entrepreneurs. Participant #396 described that “trying to successfully operate and grow a company all while trying to be a great mom was impossible and frustrating.” Similarly, participant #439 recalled, “Working from home and raising our first child created an additional challenge during the pandemic. Trying to balance the emotional pulls during this time has been challenging and I am grateful for my support network to pull through this.”
- > Participant #30 explained: “We started our business during the pandemic, so the main challenge was finding the time and resources to start our initial asset creation while maintaining other businesses and homeschooling” of her children due to school closures. Participant #397 noted that “having school shut down put an extra strain because extra attention to the children was needed during business hours.”
- > Participant #431 listed some of the impacts: “From being forced to stay home as [a] single mom as my [elementary school] child needed me ... [to] help support their online schooling, to managing / holding down my businesses, and lost sales and income [enabling me] to barely get by.”

Strained interpersonal connections and relationships

- > The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way people interacted with each other. With “restrictions” and “limit to in-person gatherings,” people relied more on digital connections and less on face-to-face interactions. However, participant #24 suggested that “that [in-person]

interpersonal interaction is so important” but was missing. Participant #276 noted that although she is “adapting” to “an increasingly digital era,” she still missed “the direct human connection.”

- > Participant #131 recalled feeling “isolated” and “lonely” due to the inability “to do face to face meetups with people, as well as networking.” Others, such as participants #324 and #425, echoed this sentiment, especially for new mothers and mothers-to-be. Participant #324 stated, “I was isolated due to not having any family or friends here and being a new mom.” Participant #425 found it especially challenging “not being able to lean on my networks, my family and my close ones” during her pregnancy all while “learning about an entirely new business.”
- > Participants noted the importance of “community” and “in-person events, socials and activities” for “women in business.” For instance, participant #218 explained that “connection is a basic human need” but “was lost for so many” during the pandemic. As a result, participants had to “find ways and create opportunities for women to come together virtually.”

Skill development

New training and skills required

- > Considering the vast number of changes that occurred during the pandemic, many mom entrepreneurs sought out educational or training advancements to keep their businesses running through digital platforms. Participant #16 reported that she attended a 10-week fellowship program to “upgrade skills in marketing,” whereas other participants followed the route of self-taught education. Participant #203 reported “learning things I had never done before” and “I had to teach myself about digital marketing” to adapt to the rapidly evolving state of business.

- > Some people picked up new digital marketing strategies; participant #221 learned how to “make a website” and “create an email list” to market the business. Another participant #343 learned to navigate a new social media platform—“TikTok”—and “grew my following in three months to 100,000.” She is hoping she can help others grow their businesses on this platform and develop ways to convert “their audience off of TikTok into paying clients.”

Transition to personal and digital work

- > On account of the COVID-19 pandemic, many mom entrepreneurs reported adapting to digital platforms to continue their businesses. Due to rapidly evolving circumstances, many were unprepared to transition from in-person business to an online platform. Participant #34 reported that she lost her accounts with supermarkets and had to start over selling online, while noting, “I am new to e-commerce. Made a new website, changed packaging to adapt to new customers.” Participant #92 expressed difficulty in “establishing credibility in an online space that is flooded while

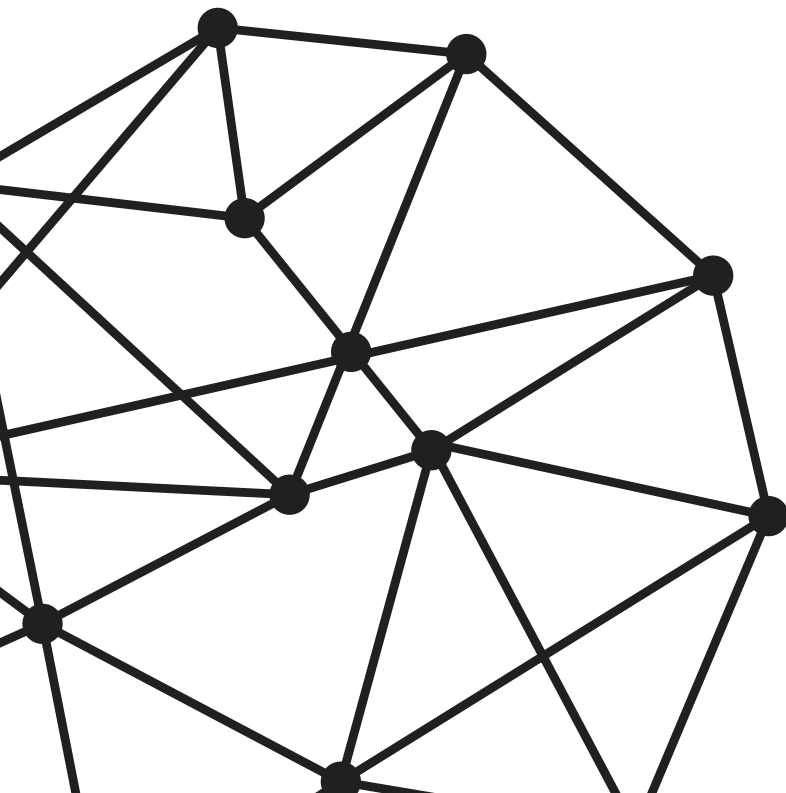
learning about the ins and outs of effective marketing.” These factors relate to the difficulty of transitioning from in-person operations to online.

- > The shift to an online platform meant adapting to the consistent modifications of entrepreneurship, especially within interpersonal relationships. Participant #32 reported that the interactional connections online as opposed to in-person affected her business: “We had years of packed events where people were hugging and laughing together and forming deep connections and now, they were forced behind a computer screen.” Participant #23 reported a similar struggle: “Reaching folks in a deep and impactful way through our screens when it comes to our emotional, mental, spiritual health and wellness was a fear that I had.”
- > Financial status was affected by the pandemic; participants #73 and #404 reported that digital platforms reduced their ability to increase profit due to the fast-paced shift from in-person to online.

Personal financial barriers

Personal financial challenges

- > Mom entrepreneurs faced not only business plan challenges but difficulties in personal finances. Participant #142 shared her fears; she had “almost gone bankrupt” due to “studio closures and other factors.” Participant 189 contributed to “paying for my services out of pocket” which was “difficult for many.” This strain caused by the pandemic prevented many from growing their personal wealth. Participant #291 said she had to manage with “CERB and savings” to get by.
- > As their businesses developed, personal expenses became secondary for many mom entrepreneurs. Participant #338 said, “We faced a financial crisis as our bills remained the same while sales and equity were less.” On the other hand, a



personal situation for participant #360 had “forced her into bankruptcy,” which stalled her “access to funding or lending,” which ultimately halted her business growth.

Other barriers

Immigration challenges

- > Many mom entrepreneurs who had recently immigrated to Canada struggled with running a business during a pandemic. Participant #222 stated that “being a newcomer to Canada, a mom/ designer, with kids, and deciding to open my small business during that same period. And I was the main breadwinner at home.” Participant #110 also expressed difficulties in being a newcomer as she stated that she “moved here on [a] startup visa, and due to [the] pandemic, I was not able to start generating revenue because as a newcomer I didn’t have any connections, and with lockdown and the disruption in [the] supply chain it become so challenging to start a new business.”

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Strategies for balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship

During the challenging pandemic times, many women entrepreneurs employed diverse strategies to balance their dual roles of motherhood and entrepreneurship. Central among these were enhancing child care support, making work accommodations and mastering time management. Mom entrepreneurs also emphasized nurturing connections in all areas of life, seeking support when needed and working to overcome the pervasive “mom guilt.” This section will explore these adaptive strategies, offering insights into the resilience and adaptability of mom entrepreneurs amid the pandemic.

Child care support during the pandemic

IN-PERSON DAYCARE AND SCHOOL

- > In-person daycare and school offered vital child care support for many mom entrepreneurs during the pandemic, providing opportunities for focused work during the day, in sync with regular school hours. Participant #246 shared the value in “taking advantage of all the time [her] children are at school/daycare for work time;” she also admitted to catching up on paperwork after her children’s bedtime.
- > For some mom entrepreneurs, the availability of full-time daycare was crucial to kickstart their businesses. Participant #164 stated that daycare for her children was the “only way [she was] able to begin [her] business.”

Started own daycare

- > In response to daycare closures during lockdowns, some mom entrepreneurs started their own daycare operations for their children to continue learning and engaging with others. For instance, participant #93 started a preschool out of necessity during the pandemic, but continued thereafter as she recognized the positive impact it had on other mothers, “changing their lives by allowing them to live out their needs.”
- > Participant #265 followed a similar path, opening a home daycare to care for her son and offer child care services to others. This creative approach to managing child care in a time of crisis shows the entrepreneurial flexibility of mom entrepreneurs.

Study or playgroups for children

- > Study and playgroups for children emerged as effective tools for mom entrepreneurs seeking to balance competing priorities during the pandemic. These groups not only provided learning support for children, but also offered vital social interaction during lockdowns. For instance, participant #98 highlighted how “our kids’ friends supported one another by planning group study groups and car pools during the restricted ‘bubbles.’”
- > Several participants mentioned seeking help from other mothers who offered to take their children to school or arrange playdates. This collaborative approach to child care provided a way for these mom entrepreneurs to continue their entrepreneurial activities, demonstrating the resilience and innovative thinking of these women under the challenging circumstances of the pandemic.

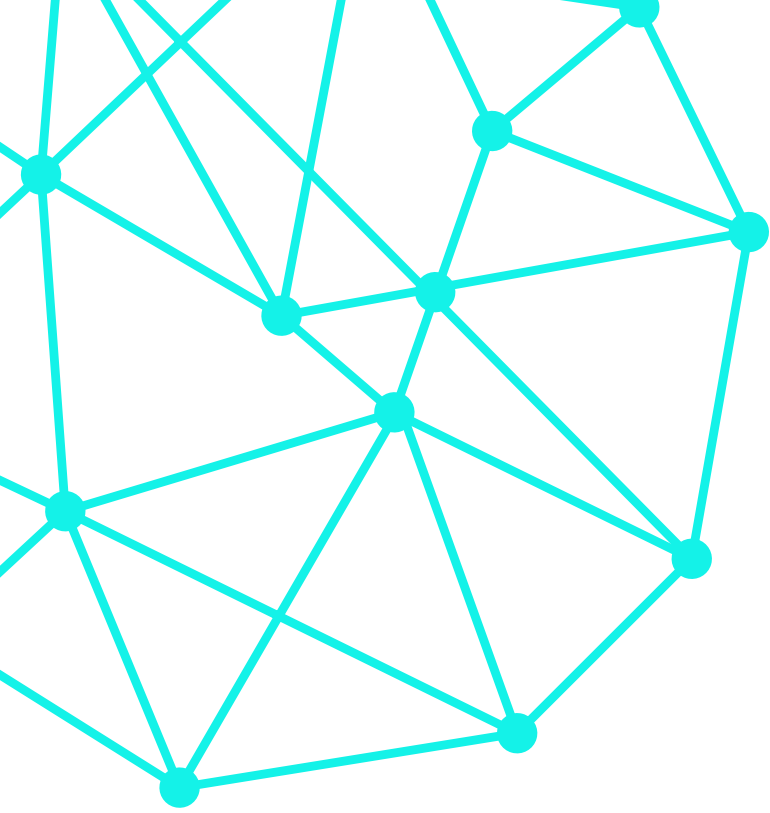
Support from family, relatives or community

- > Mom entrepreneurs were grateful for the support they received from family members and their communities, especially during the pandemic when many daycares and schools were closed. As participant #163 noted, “Having a supportive network is one of the biggest factors for mothers to have the best chances at maintaining an optimal motherhood/entrepreneurship balance.”
- > Participant #255 advised having someone on “speed dial for days when you know you need to focus,” providing the necessary relief to remain productive. Participant #83 expressed gratitude for her father’s support, saying she was “very fortunate” for his willingness to spend time with his granddaughter.

- > Having other relatives watch over the children or take care of household chores allowed mom entrepreneurs to put more time into their businesses, and prioritize self-care, an essential part of their success.
- > Some mom entrepreneurs expressed how helpful it was to have their partner working from home during the pandemic, especially to share household responsibilities. Participant #179 mentioned that “having a supportive and engaging partner makes a world of a difference,” while participant #430 emphasized that, “Balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship would not be possible without the support of a husband willing to take on significant child care and household responsibilities.”
- > These testimonies show the significant role that family and community play in supporting mom entrepreneurs’ endeavors, providing necessary relief and assistance in managing competing responsibilities.

Paid-for nanny

- > The engagement of professional child care allowed mom entrepreneurs to allocate more time and energy to their entrepreneurial activities. In response to their child care needs, a number of mom entrepreneurs turned to professional help by hiring a nanny. Participant #290 reflected on this necessity, stating, “I had to hire a nanny to support me as I got the business off the ground.” For others, like participant #308, having a “live-in babysitter for the work days” as part of their “excellent support system” was crucial.
- > The presence of a nanny often offered mom entrepreneurs the precious commodity of time, allowing them to focus on their business ventures. For instance, participant #126 appreciated the few hours per day provided by the nanny’s assistance to “focus and get work done.” Similarly, participant #262 conveyed her reliance on her nanny for child care, enabling her to carry out her day job.



- > This paid assistance was a lifeline for many mom entrepreneurs. Participant #395 exemplified this by sharing her routine: “On Fridays we have a nanny come to stay with our younger son so I can get some work done.”

MAKING CHANGES TO ACCOMMODATE WORK

Flexible work arrangements

- > Flexible work arrangements, in terms of location and hours of work, allowed mom entrepreneurs to navigate their business demands while addressing the needs of their families. Participant #43 credited her ability to operate her business from anywhere for her successful navigation of her child’s transition to online schooling: “Luckily, I have the flexibility of operating my business from anywhere, so I was able to work from home while my daughter attended online schooling.”
- > Participant #28 appreciated how being a business owner, despite its challenges, offered her the freedom to create her own schedule, making it possible for her to spend time with her family. Similarly,

participant #382 found that working from home made it easier to spend quality time with children in between work sessions.

Separation between work space and home life

- > For some mom entrepreneurs, creating firm boundaries and schedules was critical to balancing work and family time. Participant #220 acknowledged the demands of motherhood and entrepreneurship, stating that “a huge component to balancing it all is scheduling.” For her, setting business hours that allow her to be present for her children’s school routines has been instrumental.
- > Similarly, participant #414 emphasized the importance of adapting her work to her children’s needs, rather than vice versa, as a strategy to maintain balance, stating, “I make sure to keep the balance of work and home by working around my kids rather than my kids around my work.”
- > Despite these strategies, achieving a work-life balance was challenging. Participant #426 confessed that balancing both has been “the biggest challenge” she has ever experienced. Still, she said she remains dedicated to her passion for her business and her commitment to her daughter, developing weekly schedules that involve concentrated work during weekdays and the weekends reserved for family time. This intentional separation between work and personal life demonstrates a practical approach to navigating the complex demands of motherhood and entrepreneurship.

Work from home

- > Working from home allowed mom entrepreneurs to fulfil their professional responsibilities while being physically present for their children. Participant #430 shared, “We did the best we could; we had zero help but [were] blessed to be

both able to work from home.” Similarly, participant #42 considered herself “lucky to be working at home,” which enabled her to help with her child navigate online schooling.

- > The ability to operate their businesses from anywhere was highly valued. For some, moving their work to their home seemed like a logical solution to the demands of the pandemic. Participant #335 recounted, “I moved my office home when the pandemic hit, with a newborn and homeschooling, it made more sense to work from home. It was majorly exhausting trying to fit it all in.”

Took children to work

- > Some mom entrepreneurs—especially those in industries less conducive to work-from-home arrangements—opted to bring their children to work. Participant #27 shared, “I was fortunate to be able to work from home part-time and also I was able to bring my daughter to our shop where she could attend school online.” Similarly, participant #49 admitted that her children spent more time at her workplace than at home.
- > Children’s presence at work sometimes emerged out of necessity due to staff shortages or lack of alternative child care options. For instance, participant #246 reported, “A few evenings a week, I bring my children back to the office with me as I don’t have enough staff to cover evening shifts.” Others brought their children on work-related errands and site visits.

Sought more support at work to take care of children

- > During the pandemic, many mom entrepreneurs sought additional support at their workplaces to alleviate the stress of balancing increasing work demands and child care responsibilities. Participant #127 shared her dilemma: “I couldn’t and didn’t want to send any of my kids out when we were dealing with the pandemic.” To resolve this, she opted to rely more heavily on her staff.

- > Despite the additional financial strain, hiring more staff appeared to be a common strategy among mom entrepreneurs. For instance, participants #357 and #439 increased the number of staff on their team. As participant #357 put it, “I made the decision to hire staff instead of sacrificing too much time with my kids.”

Stopped or reduced working to care for children

- > For many mom entrepreneurs, the pandemic necessitated a reprioritization of roles and responsibilities, often placing their children’s needs in front of their businesses. For some, this meant reducing their work hours or even stopping work entirely.
- > Participant #91 confessed she quit her job to “stay home and help” her child who was dealing with mental health issues. Similarly, participant #94 temporarily halted her “self-employment goals” to prioritize her children’s learning. Participant #192 found that “the only solution was to walk away from my 20-year career in dentistry to be at home to care for our children.”

Multitasking: juggling multiple tasks simultaneously

- > Multitasking emerged as a fundamental strategy for mom entrepreneurs seeking to balance work and parenting responsibilities during the pandemic. As participant #34 puts it, “Mom entrepreneurs are expert multi-taskers We can work from the car during dance class. We can prioritize and keep track of all of the things whilst keeping ourselves grounded and sane.”
- > Participant #424 echoed this sentiment, noting that “multitasking is what moms do best!” but highlighting the importance of being realistic about daily tasks, while also prioritizing everyone’s mental and emotional well-being. Participant #317 expressed that “motherhood comes with innate multitasking skills.”

EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT

Practiced good time management by leveraging technology or organizing tools

- > To manage their time, mom entrepreneurs reported leveraging different organizational tools. Many used digital calendars and planners to structure their days, enabling them to balance family and business needs. Participant #91 used “time-blocking to ensure I have dedicated space in my calendar for my children,” while participant #38 also turned to her “calendar to time block and schedule as much as I can during the day.” Other online tools mom entrepreneurs mentioned included Pomodoro, “Capacity Calendar,” “Passion Planner,” “Coffee Breaks tool,” “Jane app,” “Routinery app,” “Click up” and more.
- > Keeping organized was seen as crucial for achieving a balance between work and family commitments. As participant #417 highlighted, “Balancing motherhood and entrepreneurship is challenging ... Keep a planner—schedule the days and times you have meetings, and sync these with your spouses.” This organized approach was common among mom entrepreneurs.

Making clear and realistic goals

- > Creating clear and realistic goals was crucial to effective time management. Mom entrepreneurs recognized the importance of setting daily targets that offered flexibility, while also having realistic expectations for what they could achieve daily, weekly and monthly. Participant #121 shared that it was important to “set daily goals that allow for flexibility” and to “have realistic expectations.”

- > The importance of clear goal-setting was echoed by participant #25: “I have learned to set realistic expectations Living your life with a purpose and having clear goals makes life smooth When you know what you want, and you know the steps to take to get there, and you find the focus to stay on track, you don’t waste away hours that could be productive.”

Maintaining “normal” routines and rituals as best as possible

- > While juggling multiple priorities mom entrepreneurs found stability and balance by sticking to routines and rituals. Participant #389, for instance, shared how she and her husband were able to manage household tasks and make time for self-care by scheduling these activities weekly. Similarly, participant #395 compartmentalized work, family time and personal downtime, ensuring that weekends and evenings were exclusively family-oriented.



- > Participants #15 and #136 highlighted the importance of consistency. While participant #15 focused on daily exercise before work, participant #136 established specific routines for homeschooling her daughter during the pandemic.

Being flexible and adaptable

- > Being flexible and adaptable enables mom entrepreneurs to adjust quickly to the unpredictable nature of entrepreneurship and motherhood. Participant #27 discussed planning ahead with her children and adapting when necessary, stating, "We discuss in advance what obligations or timelines we have. Flexibility is required and sometimes you need to change plans." Similarly, participant #39 emphasized the importance of having a backup plan and being prepared for the unexpected.
- > Participant #194 recognized the elusive nature of balance in motherhood: "Truthfully, there is a balance in understanding there is no balance The balance for me is taking things one day at a time, making sure home is secured first, because that is most important, and then moving according to the next line on my to-do list, hoping to get it all done in the time that I am given!" Mom entrepreneurs said they found that being adaptable and prepared for the unexpected is not only practical, but also crucial to navigate the uncertainty in business and motherhood.

Setting priorities

- > Effective time management for mom entrepreneurs is heavily reliant on the ability to prioritize, carefully choosing what requires immediate attention and what can wait. Mom entrepreneurs often prioritize tasks based on their children's needs at the expense of other priorities. For participant #16 this meant learning "to accept a messier house and eating more take-out meals."

- > Participant #424 shared their colour-coding strategy for scheduling and a realistic understanding of daily achievable tasks: "Between a lot of colour-coding of schedules, being realistic about what can be accomplished each day ... my goal throughout all of the challenges of being a full-time mom and a full business owner is to support people."

ENHANCING CONNECTION IN ALL BUCKETS OF LIFE

Being present when focusing on each bucket of life

- > Many mom entrepreneurs highlight the importance of being fully present when dedicating time to different facets of life. Participant #110 explains, "Some days, work gets priority and fills my business bucket. Other days, I focus on the mom bucket and do fun activities with the kids or do home chores, filling the mom bucket and not putting much or anything on the business bucket."
- > Participant #389 shares her dedication to putting her children first: "One of my main goals is to make sure my children don't feel my phone is more important than they are. I make sure that if my three-year-old ever asks me to put my phone down ... I instantly do it." Participant #434 echoed this sentiment, insisting on no distractions when spending time with her kids, and keeping a "no kids" zone when working.
- > Meanwhile, participant #191 mentions the idea of seeking harmony over balance: "Harmony releases me from the pressure to make things equal and instead make them equitable."

Bringing children into the business

- > Many mom entrepreneurs reported integrating their children into their business as a way to spend more time together while fostering valuable life skills. Participant #383 voiced that, by including their daughter, "she will get to see what

it means to work hard for what you want.” Participant #290 emphasized that, “one of the most helpful ways you can be a successful mom entrepreneur is to involve your kids in the creation of your business, discuss the challenges, mistakes, ideas and successes, and be involved in helping with anything they can.”

Focusing on joyful moments with children

- > Many mom entrepreneurs prioritized focusing on joyful moments with their children to maintain a connection within their families and a sense of unity. Embracing the happy times also helps put life in perspective. Participant #22 remembered a time where she put work aside to help her son: “It was all worth it as he hugged and thanked me. Those are the really important moments in life that moms don’t want to miss.”

Prioritizing self-care

- > Mom entrepreneurs often find themselves neglecting self-care due to many competing responsibilities; however, many said they are recognizing the importance of prioritizing their well-being. As captured by participant #197, “Pragmatically, I know that if I don’t take care of myself, nothing can be cared for.”
- > Similarly, participant #31 said she knows she is “less effective as a mom and an entrepreneur” if she does not take care of herself. Many mom entrepreneurs (participants #19, #27, #41 and #138) noted discovering the benefits of meditation and have prioritized daily meditative practices.
- > Respondents noted that prioritizing self-care benefits the rest of the family, as well as children’s personal and professional development. As participant #15 said, “We’re shaping how our children approach

challenges and self-care.” Participant #391 expressed: “I hope to raise my kids to see that I live to care for them, but that in order to be my best self and do that, I, too, need to care for myself. This will teach them the importance of caring for themselves and their mental health as well.”

Maintaining religious faith

- > Numerous mom entrepreneurs expressed that maintaining their faith and religious practices helped motivate and support them. Embracing their faith gave many a sense of strength and purpose, which they felt contributed to their resilience and determination in all aspects of their life.
- > Participant #222 expressed that her “faith in God and having a higher purpose” allowed her to stay on track in her entrepreneurial endeavours. Participant #255 attributed her ability to achieve balance to “divine grace.”

SEEKING SUPPORT FROM OTHERS

Learning how to ask for help

- > Mom entrepreneurs shared that learning to ask for help was essential when balancing work alongside familial commitments.



Mom entrepreneurs have relied on support from family members, colleagues, daycare providers and after school programs to oversee their children when they need to focus on their business.

- > Many participants mentioned it was difficult to ask for help; some even tried to avoid doing so. Relinquishing control and delegating tasks has been a process that many mom entrepreneurs acknowledged being forced to learn later in life and continue reminding themselves to prioritize. Participant #17 stated that she is “no longer afraid to seek help,” encouraged by other mom entrepreneurs in community groups and business networks who are in similar situations. Participant #106 suggested “teaming up with other moms,” such as “taking turns watching each other’s kids.”

Saying no and delegating to others

- > Mom entrepreneurs discussed the importance of saying no and learning how to delegate some responsibilities to others, whether that meant sharing household duties with relatives and friends or seeking more support from their business colleagues.
- > Mom entrepreneurs have seen the benefit of building relationships and supportive team structures. As participant #427 expressed, “I have learned that in order to succeed I need to surround myself with an exceptional team who are incredibly good at what they do, love what they do, understand the cause”
- > Mom entrepreneurs have also tried to become more aware of their own limits and not take on any and every opportunity, especially out of fear of losing significant business opportunities. As participant #254 shared, “I’ve learned how to say no to things that don’t fit my ultimate values. Not every business opportunity is the right opportunity. Sometimes there is joy in missing out.”

Communicating one’s feelings with others

- > An essential part of asking for help is learning how to properly communicate one’s feelings and needs with others, at home and at work.
- > Mom entrepreneurs discussed the benefits of being open with their partners and children about the challenge of juggling multiple competing priorities. This has helped foster collective understanding and empathy at home, increasing other family members’ willingness to support and share household responsibilities.
- > Being honest with colleagues about one’s needs has helped mom entrepreneurs work more effectively while encouraging more teambuilding. As participant #336 wrote, “I think the only way to balance motherhood and entrepreneurship is to be vocal. You need to clearly state your needs and then have a team in place to get those needs met.”
- > Beyond one’s colleagues, mom entrepreneurs learned the importance of maintaining frequent and honest communication with clients. Participant #256 advised, “When things are happening personally, try to look ahead and warn your clients of issues so that you can create a plan of action to possibly still meet those deadlines but with much less stress.” This was especially important during the pandemic, when mom entrepreneurs had to navigate shipment delays, delivery challenges and event cancellations.
- > Mom entrepreneurs discussed the benefits of sharing feelings and experiences—positive and negative—with other women in similar situations. Engaging in opportunities and forums that facilitate open communication has helped mom entrepreneurs learn from each other while normalizing and legitimizing their feelings.



Seeking professional therapy

- > In addition to seeking support from family, friends, peers and colleagues, mom entrepreneurs received professional support from therapists to cope with competing priorities and the additional stress brought on by the pandemic. Mother entrepreneurs valued the guidance and tools they received to manage daily stressors, at home and at work. Professional support was essential for their own well-being, while also ensuring that their partner and children were not negatively affected by their stress. As participant #325 said, "I've worked hard to work through what I've been through with my therapist, so I don't pass that along to my daughter."

- > Mom entrepreneurs also encouraged their children to speak to therapists to manage heightened anxiety from the uncertainty surrounding the virus, school, shifting routines and more. Speaking to therapists helped minimize feelings of isolation and loneliness, especially in the absence of in-person gatherings at school or at extra-curricular activities.

OVERCOMING "MOM GUILT"

Allowing screen time for children when needed

- > To balance competing priorities, mom entrepreneurs were often forced to accept that allowing children screen time was necessary, especially in the absence of daycare or other child care support. Permitting their children to spend more time on their computers or watching television allowed mom entrepreneurs to focus on their work and complete other daily responsibilities.
- > Some mom entrepreneurs expressed feelings of guilt when promoting screen time instead of spending quality time with their children, while others accepted the necessity of encouraging different outlets for children. Participant #215 reflected that screen time is "not the perfect solution," but that it was the best she could do. Participant #219 further called screen time a "life saver" that allowed her to keep her business afloat.

Learning to let things go and not strive for perfection

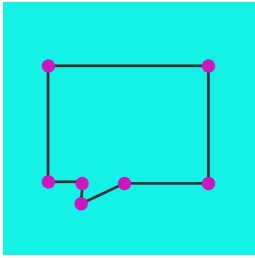
- > Perfection and balance are often viewed as one and the same. Many mom entrepreneurs conflate balance with perfection and find it difficult to release the weight of their responsibilities, putting significant pressure on themselves to succeed in all aspects of their life.

- > Mom entrepreneurs reported that they were attempting to let things go and relinquish preconceived notions of perfection. Participant #396 expressed the importance of “setting realistic expectations of what can be accomplished,” while also accepting that not everything will go exactly as planned. Participant #398 echoed this sentiment by stating that, “the reality is that balance is hard to achieve, and it can’t be perfect all the time.” Similarly, participant #24 shared the importance of “letting go and surrendering to joy and peace, ease and flow.”

Encouraging productive hobbies for children

- > While mom entrepreneurs frequently prioritize productivity and passion in their own work, they also encourage their own children to pursue hobbies that can expand and develop their skills, which in turn provides mom entrepreneurs more time to dedicate to their businesses or to their own self-care. Mom entrepreneurs mentioned encouraging their children to partake in hobbies like coding, reading, exercising, doing arts and crafts or activities in nature.





Recommendations

Based on the experiences that mom entrepreneurs shared in their responses, we identified key recommendations to help address and overcome some of their existing challenges.

Societal-level recommendations

- > Governments should increase public and private sector investment in reliable and affordable child care services. Policy makers must also design inclusive policies that address the unique needs of mom entrepreneurs.
- > Foster more social initiatives that promote gender equality and debunk stereotypes of women entrepreneurs, and increase societal awareness of the specific challenges faced by mom entrepreneurs through media campaigns and public discourse.
- > Develop and promote more education and training programs—through public universities, NGO affiliations and more—that support skill development for mom entrepreneurs.

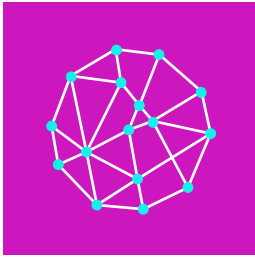
Organizational-level recommendations

- > Increase the availability and awareness of targeted funding programs for mom entrepreneurs, and develop more platforms and forums—online and in person—that facilitate networking, mentorship and skill-building workshops for mom entrepreneurs.

- > Foster organizational cultures that promote flexibility and adaptability, thereby acknowledging mom entrepreneurs' competing pressures and responsibilities.
- > Implement support systems within organizations, such as counselling and wellness programs, to help mom entrepreneurs manage their stress levels and prioritize their mental health.
- > Incorporate digital literacy and business adaptability training into standard professional development programs, especially with the continued adoption of digital transformations in the post-pandemic world.

Individual-level recommendations

- > Foster open conversations about work-life balance among friends, families and other networks outside of the workplace, including forums or support groups where mom entrepreneurs can share experiences, seek advice and learn about local mental health resources.
- > Encourage open and honest discussion about the realities of “mom guilt.” Recognizing that prioritizing self-care and mindfulness practices are integral parts of the entrepreneurial journey, mom entrepreneurs should be encouraged to leverage local community resources and support for child care, networking and business support.



Conclusion & Way Forward

Conclusion

This study examines the intersection of motherhood and entrepreneurship in Canada and offers valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by Canadian mom entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The experiences shared by mom entrepreneurs, including the innovative strategies they used to balance motherhood while running their business amid a global pandemic, demonstrate their resilience.

The findings highlight the multilayered barriers that mom entrepreneurs continue to encounter at societal, organizational and individual levels. During the pandemic, government-imposed lockdowns and physical distancing policies significantly disrupted mom entrepreneurs' business operations within their communities and beyond. Forced closures, loss of clients and events were only some of the challenges faced by mom entrepreneurs. Event and retail industries suffered due to restrictions on in-person gatherings and fluctuating consumer patterns. Mom entrepreneurs also struggled to gain access to adequate and sustainable funding, needing to complete complex loan applications and waiting long periods of time to receive loans.

To overcome the specific challenges brought on by the pandemic, mom entrepreneurs found new ways of leveraging digital platforms, often acquiring new skills and training to transition efficiently. Balancing these and other responsibilities, while also being socially isolated, negatively affected the well-being of mom entrepreneurs and their families. Alongside stories of success and perseverance, it is evident that mom entrepreneurs' mental health was severely compromised during the pandemic.

Way forward

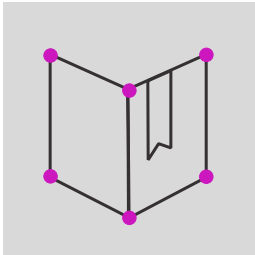
While many of the experiences described by mom entrepreneurs were either initiated or exacerbated during the pandemic, the study also illuminated long-standing and deep-rooted challenges faced by mothers throughout history. The study's findings should be used to inform policy and business practices, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem for mom entrepreneurs. The findings support the development of advocacy initiatives focusing on the specific needs of mom entrepreneurs in Canada, examined through different lenses: policy, research, programming and community dialogue.

Although the findings highlighted important insights into mother entrepreneurs' experience with entrepreneurship, we would like to acknowledge some of the limitations of this study. Due to the challenges cited by participants (e.g., struggles with the lack of access to child care), there is the possibility of women and mothers self-selecting out of the pitch competition, leading to a less

comprehensive sample pool. Furthermore, around one-half of respondents had children over the age of five; their responses may not be representative of all mothers. Information about the nuances of how mothers experience child care throughout different stages and ages of their children is not available. For future research, it is important to go beyond the child care focus of this study and explore the general category of family care (e.g., elder care) with which women are often associated. In addition, respondents from this study were mostly in the small business space and sectors that traditionally are more inviting to women. Outside the scope of this study, future research may explore the experience of mother entrepreneurs in other sectors and larger businesses.

It is important to continue refining our proposed recommendations to address persistent challenges at the societal, organizational and individual levels. Unfortunately, data is not available from this study to provide further recommendations targeting specific organizations. Continued collaboration between WEKH and Total Mom will help to ensure that ongoing support and resources remain available for mom entrepreneurs.

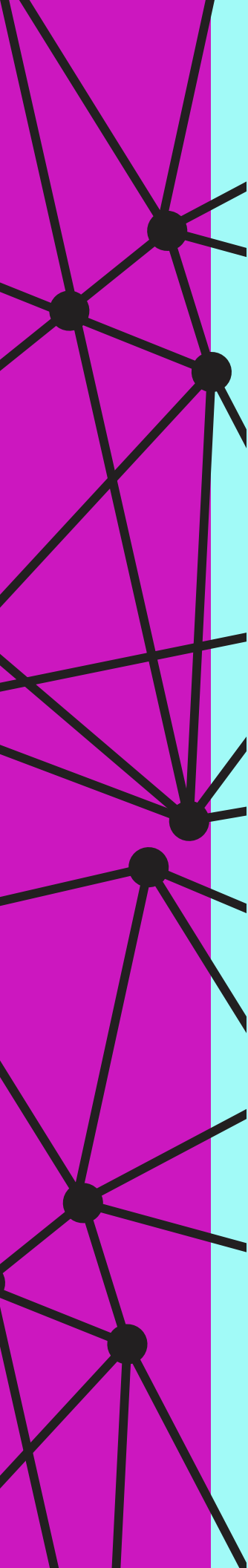




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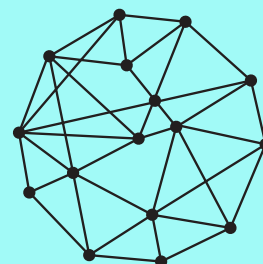
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