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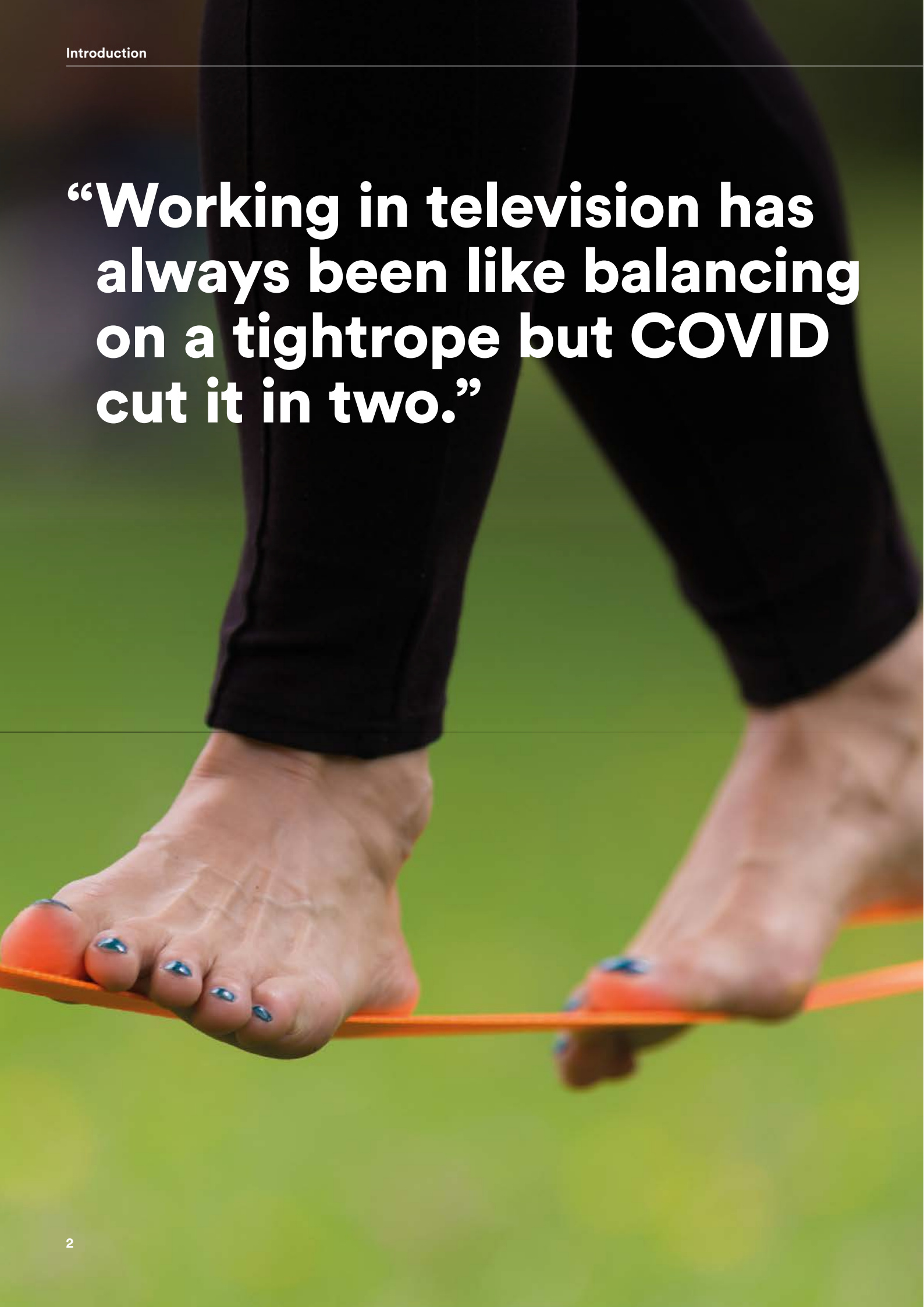
Locked Down and Locked Out: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mothers working in the UK television industry

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A close-up photograph of a person's legs and feet as they balance on a thin orange tightrope. The person is wearing black leggings. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green field.

“Working in television has always been like balancing on a tightrope but COVID cut it in two.”

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the energy and commitment of the mothers at SMTJ and Telly Mums Network.

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A special thanks to the 523 mothers who took the time to tell us their stories. We have read them all and wish we could include every one. We hope we have done justice to your experiences.

About the Institute for Screen Industries Research

The Institute for Screen Industries Research at the University of Nottingham is a leading centre for academic-industry partnership engaging with challenges in the global screen sectors.

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Foreword By Dorothy Byrne



Dorothy Byrne

President of Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge and former Head of News and Current Affairs at Channel 4

This is a report of great significance. I was enraged as I read it. In this pandemic, we were all supposed to be in it together, helping each other. But this excellent research shows that mothers have suffered great hardship, at least some of which could have been avoided if the television and film industries had the family-friendly policies that employers claim to believe in.

This is a major piece of work that involved talking to more than 500 mothers. Half couldn't accept work because of childcare problems. Many couldn't find sufficient work. Many were overloaded as they tried to work as well as caring for and educating their children. They suffered real financial hardship and high levels of stress.

It's always been hard to be a mother trying to keep a career going in TV and film but in this pandemic, it was either difficult to an extreme degree or impossible for a huge percentage of women.

So, what's to be done? What can we learn from this ghastly experience?

For a start, men need to pull their fingers out. Although there was a 50/50 split in who was the main earner in partnerships among those interviewed, nearly 80% of mothers said they had been responsible for most of the home-schooling and childcare. Lots of those programmes and news items we saw reporting on how women were suffering disproportionately in the pandemic were made by men who were dumping on their own wives and partners back home!

This industry is reliant on freelance workers and we all need to be campaigning for freelance workers to get the same benefits as staff employees. Employers who espouse lovely ideas about caring for everyone who works on their programmes and films need to take more responsibility for ensuring that freelance women workers are treated fairly. You can't make films about social justice if the people making them are suffering injustice. And the industry needs the knowledge and experience of these mothers. We can't afford to waste it.

I was a single parent who had to go back to work when my child was just six weeks old. It was awful. But at least I could afford a live-in nanny who was legally permitted to stay in my house. If I had had a baby during this pandemic, I think I would just have had to give up work.

I run a college for women now. What would I say to young women who were interested in working in film or TV? I'd tell them that it is a fulfilling and creative line of work, but I would also have to warn them it's not friendly to mothers. That is wrong. Let this excellent report be a spur to action for us all!

Dorothy Byrne
August 2021

Foreword By Natalie Grant



Natalie Grant
Freelance Series Producer, Co-Director at SMTJ
and Job-Share & Flexible Working Officer for the
Unscripted TV Union (part of Bectu)

The idea for this research came in part from my own experiences during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and an awareness that a huge number of other TV mums were having a considerably tougher time of it than me. I felt totally frustrated that so many brilliant, bright and talented women were crying out for the industry to notice them – to care what was happening to them – and yet, they were being completely ignored.

As 2020 wore on, through my involvement with SMTJ and Telly Mums Network, I was increasingly hearing heart-breaking stories. Hard working single mums, used to earning enough to support their kids, being forced to sell their belongings or even go without food so that their children could eat. Pregnant women feeling pressured by productions to go into central London edits, despite them expressing serious concerns about the risks to their health and the health of their unborn babies. Mums battling COVID and Long COVID themselves and yet still trying to work, home-school and maintain a facade to their employers that they were coping for fear that anything less would have long-lasting consequences for their career. Women literally

begging their employers to let them job-share or reduce their workloads in some way and being refused or replaced. Incredible, experienced women at absolute breaking point. Many left feeling they had no choice but to leave an industry they've given so much to.

In January 2021, schools closed for a third time and national newspapers began reporting a 'crisis for working mothers'. It struck me that most of the mothers quoted in the articles had access to HR departments, formalised recruitment processes and permanent jobs. So why did no one seem to be talking publicly about what was happening to the mums in the largely freelance, notoriously unregulated world of television production?

For all the industry chatter about implementing better duty of care and the need to #BeKind, COVID made it abundantly clear that we work in an industry which doesn't actually care – and certainly not for the people who, themselves, care.

Retaining mothers in TV isn't a priority for the industry. It doesn't feature on diversity agendas and the exodus of women over 35 isn't talked about as something that there's any urgency to address. That's not because it isn't well known. It's because it's been accepted. There's decades worth of research to illustrate the precarity of TV careers for mums – but it is knowingly ignored. By ignoring mothers it is implied that a choice must be made between motherhood and TV work. We either want a family or we want to work in television – we can't and shouldn't expect to have both.

I recently came across a Broadcast article published in 1995 with the headline: 'Motherhood and TV don't mix'. It struck me that in the 26 years since this article was written, little has changed and very few attempts have been made to address the problem. COVID didn't cause a crisis for mums



who work in TV – it simply turned up the heat and laid bare everything we already knew about the inequities mothers working in TV face.

Whilst what happens to TV mums is well known, outside of closed groups it is rarely spoken about. TV mums are too afraid to speak out about their experiences and even when some do, it's usually met with apathy. We chose to have children. We're lucky to have children. We wanted children. We asked for this. We should be grateful. We knew what we were doing. If we wanted to work in television badly enough, we'd 'just get a full-time nanny and get on with it'.

We're told that we're 'not as dedicated as we used to be'. There are assumptions made that our 'priorities are probably elsewhere'. We're overlooked for promotions. We're the first in line for redundancy. We're told we're 'just not as fun anymore'. Even though we bring more experience, if the industry continues to measure performance in hours worked then we simply can't compete with a young, single bloke doing a 90 hour week. When we try to, comments are made about how our kids must never see us. We are damned when we do and damned when we don't.

You only have to follow @shitmenintvhavesaidtome or read the accounts detailed as part of Bectu's #UnseenOnScreen campaign to see that the industry remains rife with sexism, misogyny and unfair treatment of women and mothers. The industry likes to perceive itself as liberal and forward thinking and yet, the ways in which we work are anything but.

As we emerge from COVID-19 the television industry has a golden opportunity to implement real change. The last 18 months have shown that when forced, the industry can adopt new ways of working. Change is possible; but only when there is will from those with the power to make it happen.

Thank you to Jack, Helen, Natalie and Rowan for your unwavering belief in this project, for listening and for writing a report which I sincerely hope will make the 523 women who responded finally feel heard.

Natalie Grant
August 2021

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 Pandemic and associated government lockdowns have been nothing short of a disaster for mothers working in the UK television sector. The research in this report reveals the multiple impacts across childcare, ability to work, finances, mental health and well-being, and hope for the future.

- Nearly half (49 percent) of survey respondents said they had been unable to accept work due to childcare related issues. Over 55 percent had been part of a production that was either cancelled or postponed and 54 percent said they had not been able to find enough work. Of the 523 people who completed our survey, 29 said they had been made redundant and 61 said they had been let go early from a contract.
- During the pandemic many mothers in TV worked flexibly, often having to manage already gruelling workloads with increased childcare and housework. The continued significance of gendered expectations around childcare combined with a ‘lack of care’ culture within the industry, made this intolerable.
- Nearly 80 percent of the mothers in our sample said that they had been responsible for most of the home-schooling and childcare in their household, despite the fact that there was an almost 50/50 split as to who was the main earner.
- Many mothers had to juggle work and childcare, while others were unable to work because of childcare. The first group had fewer financial worries, but suffered serious consequences to their well-being and mental health. The latter group suffered more from financial hardship, something that was compounded for freelancers, single parents, those from a minoritised racial or lower socio-economic background, and disabled mothers.
- There was a lack of understanding and accommodation from employers for additional childcare responsibilities and ongoing uncertainty caused by the fragility of the school ‘bubble’ system. This was felt to be the natural extension of a pre-existing lack of understanding and accommodation for caring responsibilities outside work that characterises the television industry. There is a strong sense among mothers that the industry does not care.
- 61 per cent of all respondents said they have seriously considered leaving the industry during the pandemic.
- The pandemic was difficult for all mothers working in television. However, freelance mothers and those from minoritised racial groups were particularly vulnerable, often with lack of access to furlough and difficulty finding work that would accommodate additional child caring responsibilities. Over two thirds of the mothers that responded were self-employed or freelancers (72 percent) compared to just 22 percent who were in a permanent role.
- Mothers felt they were treated as ‘disposable’ and often replaced by men or women without caring responsibilities, locked out from careers which have taken years to build.
- Working from home (WFH) has played a vital role in enabling mothers to cope with the demands of additional childcare and the intensive work patterns that characterise television labour. However, while flexible work patterns can play a significant role in helping to prevent mothers from dropping out of the industry, on its own it does nothing to disrupt the gendered assumptions around work and childcare that disadvantage mothers.

The effects of the pandemic on mothers’ careers undermines the diversity of the television workforce and drains a wealth of experience and talent from the industry. It is vitally important, however, that these impacts are understood as a result of pre-existing, long term, chronic weaknesses in television labour markets, television work cultures, and wider societal attitudes and organisation around childcare and women’s labour. COVID-19 did not create this situation. Rather, it revealed and compounded it up to the point where for many mothers it has become so unbearable that they consider exiting the industry and, in some cases, even taking their own lives.

Our recommendations for policy and practice draw upon this research evidence alongside the now considerable body of scholarship and activism around motherhood and television work to argue that better workplace approaches to motherhood and childcare should be at the forefront of industry and policy as we move towards recovery.



1. Context

1.1 Introduction

2020 and 2021 saw unprecedented changes to the way that we live and work due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. On 23rd March 2020, the UK went into full-scale lockdown in a bid to stem the spread of coronavirus. Many people were forced to work from home, and for long periods of complete lockdown, schools and other types of childcare were closed for all but the children of keyworkers. In many cases this put immense strain on parents, who found themselves trying to work, take care of and educate their children at the same time. Some were fortunate enough to qualify for the UK Government's emergency financial relief schemes which provided furlough for employees who were unable to work – although this was originally conceived to help businesses that could not continue to operate with staff at home – and support for some self-employed workers and small businesses.

Many workers in the creative industries – particularly PAYE freelancers – did not qualify for any government support, leading to campaigning by organisations such as Women in Film and Television (WFTV) (Bhalia, 2020), Bectu (2020) and Freelancers Make Theatre Work (www.freelancersmaketheatrework.com). With productions being cancelled, venues closing and businesses scrambling to work out what was possible under COVID-19 restrictions, many workers were suddenly left stranded and not knowing where their next pay cheque was coming from.

A survey by Women in Film and Television found that as many as 96 percent of women film and television workers reported having lost all of their income either temporarily or permanently and that 67 percent of freelancers in the UK film and television industries reported having received no support from the government (Dalton, 2020).

A survey by the Film and TV Charity (2020a) between March and April 2020 confirmed that 93 percent of freelancers in film and television were not working.

Early research evidence from the Centre for Cultural Value (O'Brien et al, 2021) and the Trade Union Congress (2021a) revealed a picture of widening inequalities and it quickly became apparent that there was a widespread retraditionalising of gender roles with women shouldering the burden of additional childcare responsibilities and suffering exclusion from labour markets as a result (Hinsliff, 2020). The risk of long-term 'career scarring' is compounded for disabled women, single parents and women from racially minoritised backgrounds. Women were more likely to be furloughed (Women's Budget Group, 2020) and, partly as a consequence, have become more likely to lose their jobs (Smith, 2020).

The research that forms the basis of this report was conducted to investigate these issues in the television industry. Launched in March 2021, on the eve of UK schools reopening after a third national lockdown, the survey *Locked Down and Locked Out? The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mothers working in the UK television industry* garnered 523 responses in the month it was active. Investigating the impact of the 'motherhood penalty' (Brearly, 2021) in the context of the British television industry, the survey generated detailed and vivid narrative accounts of the effects of the pandemic and government lockdowns on mothers.

The findings contained in this report starkly highlight the still-gendered responsibility for bringing up children, and the failure of the UK's creative industries to understand and accommodate for the realities of life for working parents. The global COVID-19 pandemic and its

“Being a mother in TV was always a nightmare; now it feels impossible.”

associated restrictions has created a moment where care work is more visible than ever before, and has also proven that change is possible on a massive scale in a short time frame. This research report shows the disastrous, multifaceted impacts of the pandemic upon mothers working in UK television: on their careers, their finances, their mental health and wellbeing and their hopes for the future. It also shows that through listening to these experiences it is possible to identify practical steps that can be taken to make television work – and work in the cultural and creative industries more generally – more equitable for mothers, to secure the rich diversity of experience and expertise in the industry.

The effects of the pandemic on mothers' careers undermines the diversity of the television workforce and drains a wealth of experience and talent from the industry. It is vitally important, however, that these impacts are understood as a result of pre-existing, long term, chronic weaknesses in television labour markets, television work cultures, and wider societal attitudes and organisation around childcare and women's labour. COVID-19 did not create this situation. Rather, it revealed and compounded it up to the point where for many mothers it has become so unbearable that they consider exiting the industry and, in some cases, even taking their own lives.

Our recommendations for policy and practice draw upon this research evidence alongside the now considerable body of scholarship and

activism around motherhood and television work to argue that better workplace approaches to motherhood and childcare should be at the forefront of industry and policy as we move towards recovery.

1.2 Methodology

The survey was designed in collaboration with SMTJ¹ and Telly Mums Network² and was developed and refined through testing among this community. The survey probed changes to working patterns, home-schooling responsibilities, wider care sharing and issues related to physical, mental and emotional wellbeing during the pandemic. It was distributed through online networks and on social media, and promoted by groups including Bectu the Film & TV Charity, the British Film Institute, SMTJ and the Telly Mums Network. Efforts were made to include the voices of mothers from social groups underrepresented in television, such as those from Black and minoritised racial backgrounds and disabled mothers, by sharing the survey with groups and organisations that represent them³. The survey was open between 5th March and 26th March 2021 and received a total of 523 responses.

This report is based upon survey results from this self-selecting sample of mothers working in unscripted UK television combined with insights gained through fifteen follow-up qualitative interviews conducted June-July 2021. The survey data was used to identify participants for the follow-up interviews (282 survey respondents agreed to be contacted for follow-up interviews). A purposive sample was constructed so as to gather data from mothers from different demographic backgrounds and a range of experiences and work arrangements during and after the pandemic. All data has been anonymised.

1.3 Demographics: What does the evidence tell us about the profile of mothers working in UK TV during the pandemic?

Those who took part in the survey broadly reflect the demographics of those who work in the UK television industry. The majority of respondents identified as heterosexual, and 19 percent identified as LGBTQ+. Most of the mothers were based in London (44 percent) or the South East (17 percent), indicating the difficulty of working in the UK television industry if you do not come from one of these regions. The next largest group was from the North West (9 percent) and then Scotland (8 percent). Only 3.4 percent considered themselves to be disabled, with the majority of those citing a long-standing illness or health condition, learning disability or hearing disability. Just two participants considered themselves to have a physical or mobility disability, potentially reflecting barriers to accessing work in the UK television industry (CAMEo, 2018).

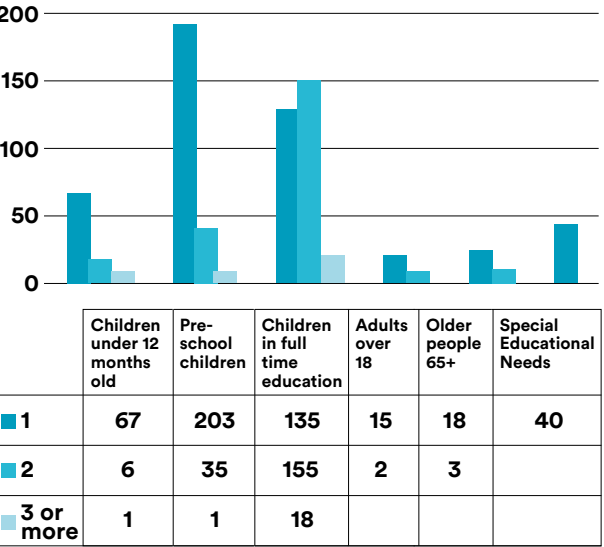
The socio-economic background of our sample reflects the higher social class profile of workers in the cultural and creative industries more generally (Carey et al, 2020). Sixty seven percent reported having a Bachelor's degree and a further 26 percent a Master's degree or other postgraduate qualification. 23 percent went to an independent fee-paying school. This is significantly higher than the UK population, where just 6.5 percent attend a private school.⁴ The majority of respondents self-identified as middle class (47 percent), upper middle class (6 percent) or lower middle class (20 percent). However, a surprising 26 percent considered their class origin to be working class. Although this is roughly in line with the UK population (Social Mobility Commission, 2021), evidence shows that working class people are under-represented in the creative sector (Carey et al., 2021). The large number of self-identified working class respondents could be accounted for in a number of ways. Recent research has shown that people have a tendency to downplay their middle class origins and call on grandparents or even further back to reconcile this (Friedman et al, 2021), or it could be that

those from a lower socio-economic background have less financial support to fall back on in times of trouble and so were more likely to participate in the survey to express their struggles.

90 percent described their ethnic group as white. Over 6 percent of those were Scottish, 4 percent were Welsh, 2 percent were Irish and 2 percent Northern Irish. In addition some respondents described their ethnic group as Asian or Asian British Indian (2 percent); or Pakistani (0.4 percent); Black or Black British African (1 percent); Black or Black British Caribbean (1 percent); Mixed white/Asian Chinese (0.2 percent); Mixed white/Asian Indian (1 percent); Mixed white/Asian Pakistani (0.2 percent); Mixed white/Asian Other (1 percent); Mixed white/Black British/African (0.6 percent); Mixed white/Black British/Caribbean (2 percent); Mixed Other (2 percent); Jewish (1 respondent) or Mauritian (1 respondent).

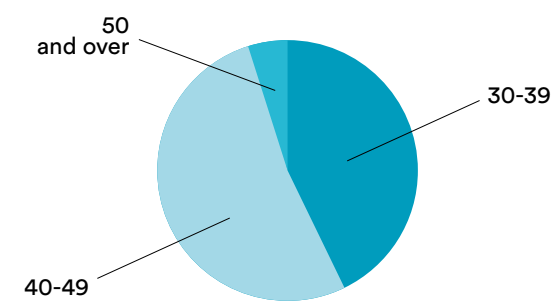
In terms of their personal life, 64 percent said they were married or in a civil partnership and a further 27 percent lived with their partner. 4 percent said they were single, another 4 percent were divorced or separated, and 0.4 percent were widowed. When it came to children, 20 percent had at least one child under twelve months, and

Caring Responsibilities



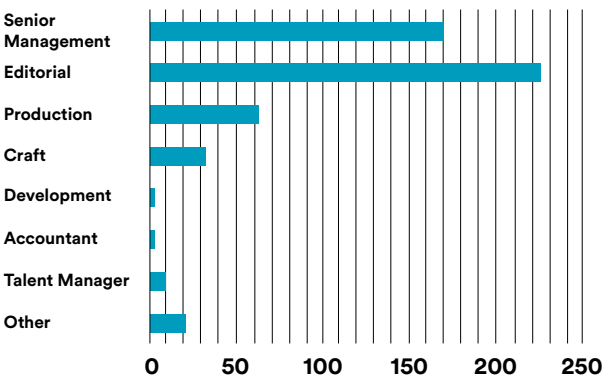
57 percent had children of pre-school age. The majority – 74 percent - had school-age children and a further 6 percent cared for adults over 18 years old and 7 percent cared for people over 65 years old. Among the mothers, 8 percent had disabled children or special educational needs, including autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy, deafness, speech delay and complex and severe physical and learning disabilities.

Age of respondents



Of those in a relationship, 28 percent had a partner who also worked in television and 9 percent had other family members who worked in television. The chart above shows the age of the respondents, with the majority being aged between 30 and 50, reflecting the age of television workers as a whole of whom the majority are under 50 (Diamond, 2021) but younger than the general working population, where only 50 percent of workers are between 25 and 49 (ONS, 2021). This is most likely due to the survey being aimed at those with children, and those who felt particularly affected by the coronavirus restrictions - and therefore likely to respond to the survey - being those with younger children.

Over 35 percent reported being the main earner in their household, roughly equal to the 37 percent who said their partner was the main earner. Another quarter of respondents said that their



income and their partner's income were equal.

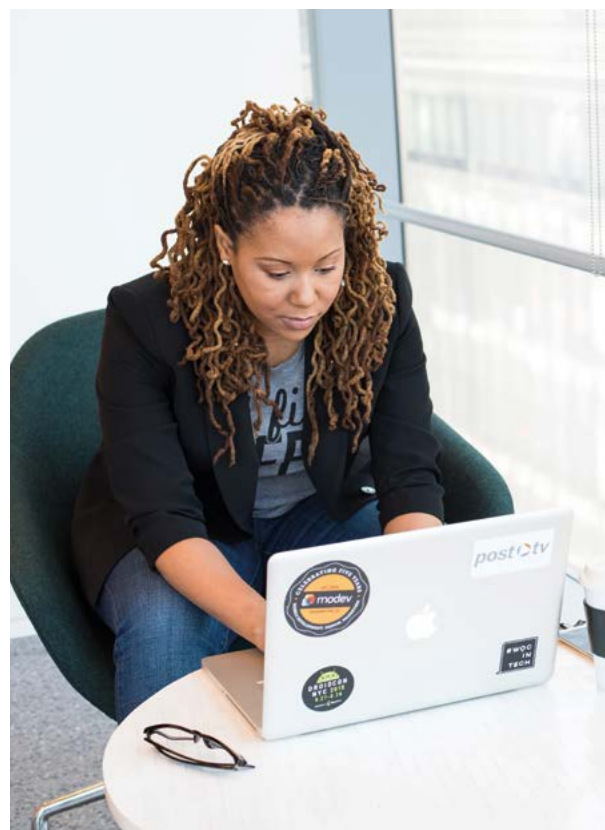
The majority of survey respondents worked in either an editorial role such as Producer, Director or Researcher, or in a senior management role such as Series Producer or Executive Producer. However, 6 percent reported working in a craft position such as Camera or Sound Operator, and other roles included Accountant, Presenter, Talent Manager, Writer, Head of Post-Production Facility, Reporter, Distribution, Sales and Broadcaster. Craft roles are heavily gendered, with women concentrated in set design, costume and hair & make-up (Diamond, 2021). That so few mothers in our sample work in these craft positions again suggests that it is even more difficult to be in an on-set position and have responsibility for children as the hours and the requirement to be present are even more inflexible and less accommodating.

This demographic profile tells us that mothers working in the television industry during the COVID-19 pandemic are largely white and that they tend to be from middle-class backgrounds, and that they are likely to be in financially equal relationships. It suggests a gendered incompatibility between motherhood and certain on-set craft roles. This might suggest that it is difficult to be a mother in television without these characteristics. It also shows that even with positions of relative privilege compared to many UK workers, mothers working in television were still not shielded from the impacts of the pandemic.

¹ www.sharemytellyjob.com
² www.tellymumsnetwork.com
³ These included Deaf and Disabled People in TV, B Inclusive Task Force, We Are Doc Women, Women in Film and TV, The TV Collective and DiVA Apprenticeships.
⁴ www.isc.co.uk/research

1.4 Black and racially minoritised mothers in UK TV: A barrier too many?⁵

Our research sample contained only a small (n=55 or 10%) of mothers from Black, Asian and other racially minoritised backgrounds. This is on a par with the employment of people from these groups at the BBC (9.9 percent), and slightly less than at the other broadcasters (ViacomCBS is the highest at 14.8 percent) (Diamond, 2021). Minoritised groups tend to be employed at slightly higher rates in public organisations and broadcasters, so the percentage that completed the survey may be due to the greater numbers of small businesses and freelancers in the respondent population as a whole. This may be the result of a variety of factors: it could indicate lower participation rates in the networks through which the survey was distributed. It is likely, however, that this small number is a reflection of the further intersectional barriers that mothers from racially minoritised backgrounds face when working in television.



As a result, there are limitations on what conclusions we can draw about the particular barriers that racially minoritised mothers face. However, these are likely to be much higher than those faced by white mothers. For example, research from the US finds that working mothers from racially minoritised backgrounds have been more significantly impacted by COVID-19 pandemic than white mothers. They are more likely to be their family's sole earner or to have partners working outside the home. It was also found that Black mothers were twice as likely to be doing all the domestic labour than white mothers (McKinsey & Co, 2021).

The mothers in our survey that were from a Black or other racially minoritised group were much more likely to identify as working class than the respondents as a whole. Almost half (45 percent) considered their class origin to be working class, compared to just 23 percent of the white mothers. They were slightly more likely to say that they felt unsafe at work due to COVID-19 (22 percent versus 16 percent of white mothers), and to report having been ill during the pandemic (9 percent as opposed to 6 percent of white mothers). As we have already said, the low numbers make it difficult to draw any wider conclusions from these but they could be reflective of the fact that people from these racially minoritised backgrounds were more likely to be affected by the coronavirus itself (Stevens and Pritchard, 2020). All this is likely to further limit the opportunities for racially minoritised people to be mothers and build successful careers in television, limiting workforce diversity even further. More research is needed to explore the particular barriers faced by Black and racially minoritised mothers working in UK television.

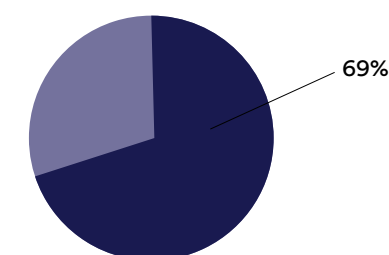
⁵ In this report we use the terminology to describe racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 reporting outlined by Milner and Jumbe (2020): [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpub/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30162-6.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpub/PIIS2468-2667(20)30162-6.pdf)

2. Locked Down: Childcare and TV work during the pandemic

2.1 Introduction

As in other parts of the screen sectors and wider creative industries, our survey produced strong evidence of the gendered nature of the impacts of the pandemic and its effect on television employment. Nearly 70 percent of our respondents said they had been required to provide home-schooling and/or care for a child while also working and over half said that this had prevented them from applying for or accepting work in television.

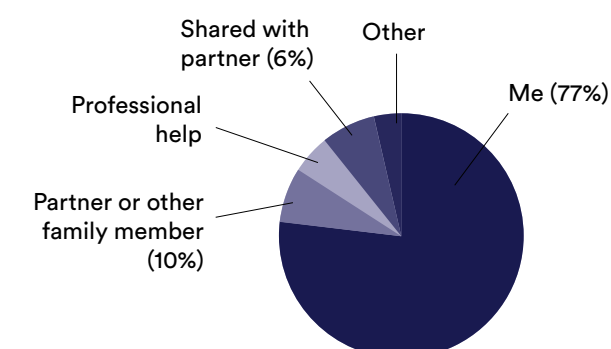
Percentage of mothers who had to provide home-schooling and/or childcare whilst also working during the pandemic



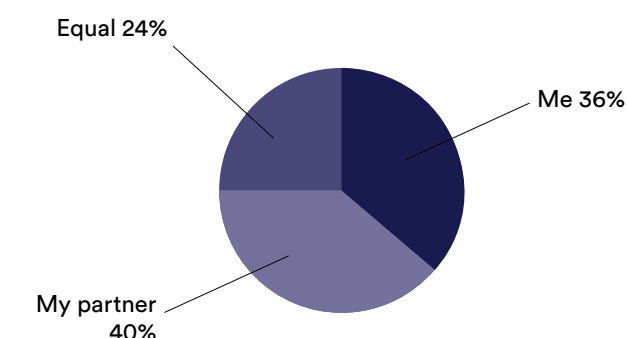
Most notably, nearly 80 percent of the mothers said that they had been responsible for most of the home-schooling and childcare in their household, despite the fact that there was an almost 50/50 split as to who was the main earner in the household. Only 6 percent said that they shared the responsibilities with their partner.

"I feel I was penalised for being a mother."

Who did most of the home-schooling and childcare?



Who is the main earner in your household?



During the time of crisis where schools were closed and other kinds of formal and informal childcare unavailable, the burden of childcare disproportionately fell upon mothers, while most fathers continued to work without this additional responsibility. This is the case whether they were primary or secondary earners within the household and demonstrates the continuing importance of unpaid socially-reproductive labour to determining gendered labour market outcomes.

The wider research literature on housework and care work shows that the division in heterosexual households continues to be heavily gendered. For example, The Cranfield School of Management annual report on women on the boards of top FTSE companies suggests that the division of power and labour at home “remains problematic” (Vinnicombe et al, 2020) and contributes to continued wage inequality. They argue that in the light of widening inequalities brought about by the global pandemic, a voluntary approach may no longer be sufficient to address gender inequality at work (ibid). Despite some shift in cultural ideologies around fathering towards the idea of a more involved father (Yadav et al, 2016), traditional gendered roles still persist where employers uphold expectations of the ideal worker as one who is free to work all hours and has no obligations outside of work. (Mescher et al, 2010)

Over the next sections, we look at the unique challenges and effects that were faced by both mothers who had to juggle work and childcare, and those who were unable to work because of childcare. The first group had fewer financial worries, but were stretched to breaking point to the detriment of their mental health. The latter group suffered more from financial hardship, something that was compounded for freelancers, single parents, those from a minoritised racial or lower socio-economic background, and disabled mothers.

While intersectional inequalities are an important factor in understanding the impacts of the

pandemic on mothers working in television, some effects were felt across all mothers, most notably the feeling that they could not discuss their struggles, and that mothers and those with caring responsibilities were already struggling to make it work in the fast-paced, all-hours culture of unscripted television. There was a strong sense that COVID-19 had simply exacerbated existing problems - sometimes with long-term and devastating consequences - and that lessons need to be learned in order that parents and carers can have a fair and equal chance of continuing to work successfully.

2.2 Doing it all: the unequal effects of no childcare

“There was no allowance made in the production schedule for the fact that I was teaching and caring for a 6-year-old while trying to run an edit from my kitchen table.”

For many mothers the pandemic and its restrictions brought new ways of working, and many additional pressures. With childcare settings and schools only open to the children of keyworkers, and restrictions on movement and association meaning extended family or friends could also not help out, children of all ages were at home with their parents. Babies and nursery-aged children needed constant attention. School-aged children were expected to do their lessons from home with many - especially the youngest - needing constant help from their parents. This responsibility was highly gendered with women and mothers disproportionately shouldering the burden (Summers, 2020; Topping, 2020).

In this section we outline what the evidence tells us about the effects of the pandemic on the already difficult prospect of juggling television work with childcare. Here, we build upon a strong body of existing research about the ways in which motherhood disadvantages women in

the labour market and the specifics of television work, showing the continued relevance of the ‘motherhood penalty’.

A study by the institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and the Institute of Education found that during the pandemic, in two opposite-gender parent families, mothers were more likely to be spending their work hours simultaneously trying to care for children (Andrew et al, 2020). The IFS survey reported that mothers were looking after children during an average of 10.3 hours of the day and also doing an average of 1.7 hours more housework than fathers. Indeed, in families where the father had lost his job and the mother kept hers, men and women still split housework and childcare responsibilities equally, and in all other types of households the mothers spent substantially more time on these.

The majority of our respondents were able to find ways to continue working, but their stories strongly echo what the wider research evidence shows with regards to gender and childcare. As one participant put it:

“I have done more childcare than my partner whilst still working full-time.”

With children at home much of the time, the mothers described how they had to take extreme measures to be able to do their job:

“I’ve been getting up at 5.30 am in order to work uninterrupted for 2 hours before the children get up.”

“In order to look after my children, I’d end up waking super early so I could work before schooling, etc. Plus I’d have to work really late.”

The survey responses were full of these types of descriptions: women finding time and places to work around their children, working early and/or late, many working weekends too. They described not receiving any “understanding or discussion” from their employers - they were just left to get on with it, often to the detriment of their career.

“Whilst working on a project at the beginning of lockdown, I had a partner with COVID and two children at home who were 1 and 3. The company I worked for did not make any allowances for this situation and so I effectively had to drop out of the role.”

There appeared to be even less understanding as the pandemic went on, with employers initially sending out supportive messages and agreeing to some reduced hours. However, respondent accounts show they were increasingly “left out of it”, or judged as “not making an effort” and subsequently feeling like their ideas and contributions were being overlooked.

For those who were struggling on, the stress and the pressure seemed unbearable and often endless:

“The stress to deliver has been enormous - you know you’re behind the curve, but you can’t do anything about it because you have two kids at home needing education and attention. I’ve been starting work after finishing with the kids at 3pm, downing tools to help sort kids for dinner/bed at 6pm, then starting again at 8pm ‘til midnight-1am every night. Then back up for school in the morning.”

This example was from a mother who said their parent company were “forever sending well-intentioned emails” about mental health and understanding how stressful it was to have children at home, but in reality, they were not being offered any help, extended deadlines or reduced hours to cope with the additional work they were doing at home.

Many respondents report working more hours than they were prior to lockdown, with an associated fear that if they weren’t available to work, then they would be replaced by someone without childcare responsibilities.

This was something that was already felt before the pandemic. They knew that television work demanded they have no commitments outside of work.

"I didn't feel it was an option for me to go part-time at any point, because the TV industry would look unforgivingly on a woman doing that."

"All shows need you to 'work above and beyond'. Which means they won't make allowances for you to see your family".

Although some staff were furloughed, the majority experience was one of having to conceal the impact on their working day as much as they could. Seven out of ten requests for furlough were turned down (Trades Union Congress, 2010b). Many described being told that they would not be employed if they had 'childcare issues' or 'home commitments':

"It had been made clear to me (in the nicest possible way) that this required me to be full time, and if I was not able to commit to that due to childcare issues, then the position would be offered to someone else."

"[The] company verbally told me they were 'only keeping people with fewer home commitments.'"

It is perhaps not surprising then that, like many working mothers (Bell, 2020), these women

Workplace policies around work-life balance and 'flexible' working may now be worded as gender neutral but in reality they continue to be framed largely as a women's issue (Orgad, 2019; Gregg, 2008). Between February and May 2021 in the UK 59 percent of all working women worked part-time, compared to 14 percent of men (ONS, 2021). Although motherhood can certainly not be considered the only reason for continued gender inequality in creative work (Gill, 2014), more recently feminist sociologists have started to upick the way that the motherhood penalty still works to disadvantage women in the screen industries (see for example Berridge, 2019; Dent, 2019; O'Brien & Liddy, 2021). In these accounts, the struggles of mothers working in these sectors is clear, and the utopian ideal of flexible working is called into question (Wreyford, 2018). We discuss flexible working in more detail in Section 4.

suffered greatly during the pandemic in regard to their mental health and wellbeing. Working longer hours, juggling home and childcare responsibilities and fitting work in around that, with little or no support or understanding at work or at home, women have born the brunt of the crisis, and have been expected to do it for little more than being told they were "doing a great job" (Murphy, 2021). The next section turns to look at the impact on the mother's health in more detail, and discuss how this impact on mothers should be expected to have effects that last beyond the lockdowns themselves.

2.3 The impacts of the pandemic on mothers' mental health

"At more than one point I considered ending my life."

In January 2021, a survey by the Trades Union Congress (2021b) revealed nine out of ten mothers said their mental health had been negatively affected by the pandemic. A survey by The Telegraph for International Women's Day 2021, found that almost half (49 percent) of working mothers said their mental health had been negatively impacted (Silverman, 2021). For women in unscripted television, the impact of the coronavirus restrictions on their stress levels and mental health was very clear. This ranged from the very serious and life-threatening, as in the quote at the beginning of this section, to a general overall experience of exhaustion, anxiety and feeling like a failure.

"It has been awful. Having to homeschool 3 kids under ten and try and continue to find and DO work has been a huge strain."

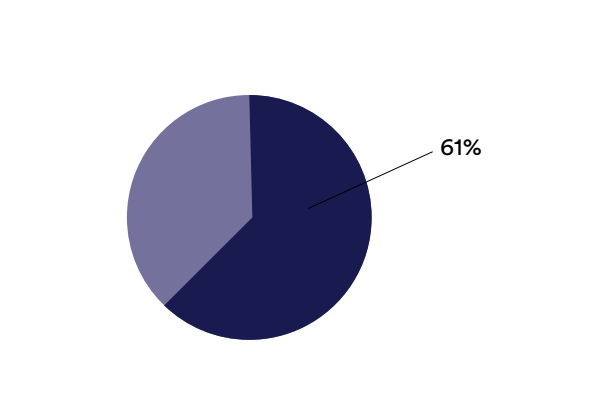
"Expected to work most evenings and early mornings to feel I am not letting my employer or kids down. Heightened anxiety when trying to homeschool, work, cook and clean up. Feeling like I am a failure."

"I've started having panic attacks and have developed quite bad anxiety and depression during the past year".

Self-blame and self-criticism was the only way that some of the mothers could articulate the impossibility of their situation combined with a lack of understanding or help from employers, partners and the government, which meant that these mothers struggled to see how anything could be different. COVID-19 brought back to the surface the assumption that women will take on a second shift of parenting with no compensation or consideration of their own job or needs.

Again and again respondents described the additional stress that they had taken on by doing the majority of the childcare and home-schooling. They told us how difficult it was to concentrate with their young babies in the house; how they experienced vocal microaggressions from colleagues if they stopped work at 6pm in order to spend time with their children and returned after bedtime; how their employer refused to furlough them until they had reached a point where they had been diagnosed with severe anxiety and stress. They described having panic attacks and depression and feeling "so broken" and "physically and emotionally drained" to the point where they considered - or in some cases did - quit their jobs.

Percentage of mothers who have seriously considered leaving the television industry



61% of all respondents said they had seriously considered leaving the industry during the pandemic. This is especially worrying in the light of recent reports from Broadcast (Goldbart, 2021a) as well as the open letter in support of pay parity for production workers (Goldbart, 2021b). These highly gendered areas of production are now severely understaffed and arguably, historically undervalued. Women have been, and are continuing to leave the industry in droves.

This is an area that needs more scrutiny going forward as productions struggle to continue and there are reports of a concomitant under-skilling of production staff, where more junior workers are brought in to fill roles once filled by senior women.

The television industry is potentially facing a crisis and a skills drain as a consequence of the difficulties mothers have been facing for some time. As people who had previously devoted themselves to their work and had successful careers, leaving was something the mothers in our sample were shocked to find themselves contemplating. The mothers felt they were letting down their children, their employers and themselves.

As already discussed, many respondents found it impossible to even think about raising this with their employers for fear of being labelled as difficult, "weak", or just not being hired again.

"I found the pressure to continue delivering work to pay the mortgage whilst dealing with home school, childcare and mental health issues in my teenager very difficult to bear. It has affected my own mental health. But as a freelancer in TV, admitting you're struggling isn't really an option as they just won't carry on hiring you."

"I was suffering from mental health problems at the time though I didn't tell them this as I felt it was a sign of weakness."

Just before the coronavirus hit Britain, The Film and TV Charity conducted a survey on mental health in the screen sector, The Looking Glass (Wilkes et al, 2020). It revealed that poor mental health was already high for workers in film and television (87 percent), with 64 percent of workers saying they suffered from depression and ten percent saying they had tried to take their own life. The causes given by those that took the survey included long hours, lack of work-life balance, a culture of bullying and feeling like they did not belong. All of these were described by our participant mothers as factors that made their lives in television more difficult.

In *The Looking Glass* survey, two thirds of both men and women reported challenges in balancing work with family life and other responsibilities, but women in particular expressed their struggles as a parent, with the lack of predictability of work

schedules and a lack of flexible childcare options being raised as particular issues. The mothers in *The Looking Glass* survey shared with our mothers the stress caused by the pressures of picking up children from childcare and were most likely at mid-career to have considered leaving the industry due to concerns about their health and wellbeing.

The evidence suggests that poor mental health was something that generally affected all mothers. For example, the disabled mothers and mothers from racially minoritised backgrounds who responded to our survey did not report any mental health concerns that were significantly worse than the rest of the mothers, but all of the LGBTQ+ mothers said their mental health was either somewhat worse (65 percent) or significantly worse (35 percent) - higher than the heterosexual mothers (59 percent and 26 percent respectively).

Amongst the respondents to our survey, 28 mothers told us they had suicidal thoughts during this time. This is a shocking figure that powerfully represents the impacts of the pandemic on mothers.



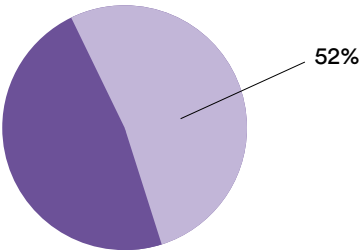
3. Locked out: The impacts of the pandemic on mothers' employment

3.1 Introduction:

“This pandemic has highlighted how disposable we are as a workforce and how as a mother you become a nuisance as opposed to an asset.”

Although 86 percent of the survey respondents reported that they had been able to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, 52 percent had their work affected by the childcare crisis, and said that having their children at home had stopped them applying for or accepting work.

Percentage of women who said home-schooling and/or childcare had stopped them applying for or accepting work during the pandemic

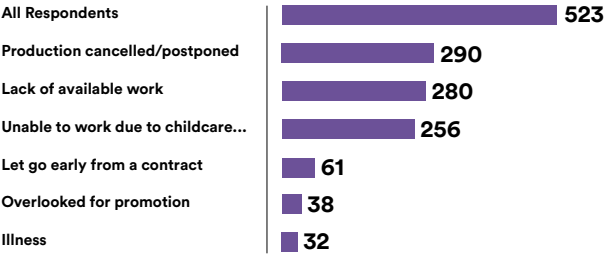


- Many working mothers found it impossible to work once schools, nurseries and other childcare providers were no longer able to take their children, despite the effect this had on their finances and their careers.
- Pre-school, out of hours and wrap around care such as childminders, nurseries and afterschool clubs were closed.
- Informal childcare provision such as grandparents and extended family were no longer available.
- Short-term contracts ended leaving mothers without financial support and often replaced by workers without caring responsibilities.
- Mothers felt forced to choose between their jobs or their children.

While the combination of lost childcare and other support structures, losing contracts and then being unable to work is often understood by respondents as a kind of ‘perfect storm’, when taken together, it is clear that they reveal structural weaknesses in the industry and the way it manages the caring responsibilities that workers have, that disproportionately fall onto mothers.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions began in March 2020 nearly half (49 percent) of the respondents said they had been unable to accept work due to childcare related issues. Over 55 percent had been part of a production that was either cancelled or postponed and 54 percent said they had not been able to find enough work. In addition, 29 people said they had been made redundant and 61 said they had been let go early from a contract.

Effects of Covid-19 and restrictions



“During the pandemic I didn’t even look for work because I knew I could not do the hours required whilst having 2 children at home, one being very young. I was expected to teach my 9yo a full school day’s work and also had a toddler that could not be left alone. Simply not enough hours left in the day, even if I’d worked outside ‘normal’ working hours.”

“I had to quit working when the nurseries shut as I can’t WFH and do childcare. I have had no income since November.”

“I can’t work during lockdown as I don’t have access to grandparents, and I can’t rely on nurseries being open.”

“I’ve been forced to choose: kids or job. I feel bitterly angry that it’s me who has to fall on my sword.”

“There came a time where I had to choose between my children or my work.”

During the pandemic, employers were able to furlough parents who could not work due to childcare responsibilities, as part of the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, initially designed for businesses that could not continue to operate under lockdown conditions. Under this, employers could claim 80 percent of an employee's salary up to a maximum of £2,500 a month and the employee would not be required to work. Government figures show that women were more likely to be furloughed than men, leading to claims of a 'gender furlough gap'⁷. Just over 20 percent of our respondents were able to secure some furlough: a quarter of those were in permanent jobs, 45 percent were sole traders, 23 percent were PAYE freelancers, and just 2 mothers who are Schedule D freelance workers.

Not everyone was so lucky, however. Many of the mothers told us that they were not offered furlough, even when they were eligible. There are so many stories to choose from, here are just a few:

"I voluntarily dropped work days for a period to help with childcare and home school. I was not offered part-time furlough."

"I feel let down and forgotten by the employer I've mainly worked with over the past 3 years. They could have provided furlough/flexible furlough, but wouldn't help PAYE freelancers like me as soon as employers were required to pay employers national insurance."

"I missed out on furlough by one day as my contract ended a day too soon. I submit a tax return every year so there is no reason for me not to be supported"

Despite the furlough, the self-employed income support scheme and 'bounce back' loans for small businesses, the rate of redundancies recorded since the beginning of the pandemic is higher than that during the 2008 to 2009 financial crisis and the arts and entertainment industries were amongst the highest redundancy rates recorded. The Trades Union Congress's January 2021 jobs and recovery monitor report on Black and minority-ethnic employees concluded that these employees faced higher unemployment and they tend to work in industries that are hardest hit by the pandemic (Trade Union Congress, 2021). Disabled workers were also more likely to be made redundant. Over five percent, 29 of

our mothers had been made redundant, and one respondent told us she was sure she had been made redundant because she is a mother:

"I believe the reason I was made redundant (the only person in my role in my department) was because I'm a working Mum and cannot commit to the hours that people without children can."

As the lockdowns began to ease, those who had been furloughed began to realise that there might be consequences to their career that they had not anticipated, and some expressed their belief that there was a connection to their childcare responsibilities.

"I have been told my role is now under scrutiny even though I was furloughed for 4 months of last year, because the company needs to make post-COVID cuts. I'm brilliant at my job, I know I am, but I rely on childcare to give me the opportunity to actually do it. I'm a BAFTA-nominated producer for my work there, but when things hit the fan, I'm entirely disposable."

"At the end of July when I knew furlough was coming to an end my contract was not renewed. I was not expecting it to be renewed but another development producer who had left the company before furlough was brought back. That left a bad taste in my mouth."

On top of all this, some were also put under pressure to work illegally while on furlough, despite being on only 80 percent pay and not having childcare. "Everyone in the industry is doing it" one mother reported being told. There were many stories of mothers being let go from contracts despite having worked for many years, and having good track records.

"I was made redundant, when two months pregnant (unbeknownst to my employer) from my staff PAYE role because I refused to work whilst furloughed."

"I was let go early from a 6 month contract with no notice at all, my contract was worthless in the end, no loyalty whatsoever. 10 of us freelancers were all let go on the same day."

One mother reported that the broadcaster she was working for at the beginning of the pandemic responded swiftly: "all of the PAYE contractors were let go." Another told us a 10-week

contract was cancelled with no compensation at the beginning of the pandemic. By the time productions were up and running again she could not take any work on because "the children were at home with the schools shut."

The survey respondents made it clear that they felt the pandemic had had a gendered and disproportionate effect on mothers, acknowledging that the work they could have been doing was going to men or women without children:

"I have had to pass work onto male, childless friends who have been more flexible, so I feel women and mothers have gone massively backwards this year."

"My peers without children are getting all the jobs on offer and companies seem to be less accepting of part-time / job-share roles since the pandemic. Mothers in the workplace have taken a massive step backwards and I feel completely shut out of a career I have loved for 12 years, just because I have children."

Throughout the pandemic there have been many headlines pointing out that women were taking on the majority of the responsibility for children being at home, "shattering the fragile jigsaw of support that allowed women with children to work." (Walter, 2021). Working mothers were called the 'sacrificial lambs' of the coronavirus (Topping, 2020) and UK society seemed to be regressing back to the traditional gender roles of the 1950s (Summers, 2020). A survey by campaign group Pregnant then Screwed revealed that 46 percent of mothers who had been made redundant said lack of childcare provision was a factor in them losing their jobs, 65 percent of mothers who have been furloughed saying the same, and 72 percent of all mothers having to work fewer hours due to childcare issues. (Pregnant Then Screwed, 2020)

In unscripted television, mothers described how they felt they had been pushed out and replaced by someone without the same caring commitments:

"I had only been back from maternity leave for 8 months. They effectively replaced me whilst I was

away then promoted someone below my pay grade as I couldn't work a five-day week due to childcare commitments. They also removed my flexible working."

"In January, I actually quit my job as the pressure of trying to work and have no childcare was too much for me. I was subsequently offered two other jobs which I had to turn down - only to discover that they were then given to younger, far less experienced (and I would argue, less competent) single men without caring commitments."

The participants told heart-breaking stories of financial hardship caused by the pandemic, having to take any job they could to make ends meet, often at a very reduced wage.

"I had 17 weeks work cancelled in March 2020 and no other work on the horizon. I took a temp job at Sainsbury's stacking shelves."

"I had to move from our cottage and sell all our possessions and furniture. We now live with my parents in their 80s and I'm fast becoming their carer. It feels like a trap we'll struggle to ever get out of. I used to earn 80k a year, I'm now broke earning £10.99ph as an NHS vaccinator (20 hours a week)."

In the next sections we discuss some of the worst experiences of the pandemic for mothers who were unable to work. First we take a look at the financial impact and the extreme measures some had to take to make ends meet. Then we look at the experience of freelancers who felt like second class citizens compared to those with staff jobs. Once again this aspect of the pandemic unearthed working practices which were already challenging, particularly for parents and carers.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-october-2020/>

⁷ <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Gender-furlough-gap.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomicanalysisquarterly/december2020>

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomicanalysisquarterly/december2020>

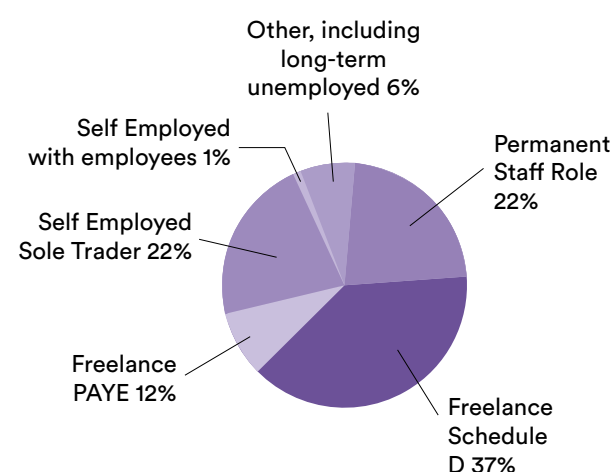
¹⁰ www.pregnantthenscrewed.com

3.2 Forgotten freelancers

“The TV industry doesn’t care about freelancers, our mental well-being or our safety - we are disposable and it’s fundamentally rotten at its core.”

Over two thirds of the mothers that responded were self-employed or freelance (72 percent) compared to just 22 percent who were in a permanent role. Three quarters of the freelancers were registered Schedule D, meaning that they are responsible for their own tax payments, and a quarter were pay as you earn (PAYE), where the employer deducts tax and national insurance payments and processes those on behalf of the employee. Of the remaining self-employed mothers, 4 also had their own employees.

Type of employment



The mothers who were in staff positions were significantly more likely to have experienced *none* of the adverse effects on their employment - lack of work, production cancelled, let go, made redundant, unable to work due to childcare issues, etc. As many as 40 percent said their work had not been affected, as opposed to only 8 percent of the rest of the mothers. This in itself demonstrates the stark difference between those

in staff positions and those in freelance positions. In addition, the staff mothers made up more than 70 percent of those who said they did not need any help from the government’s financial provisions, however they were more likely to have been made redundant or overlooked for promotion.

Mothers who were PAYE Freelancers were the most likely to not qualify for any of the government financial schemes (35 percent), followed by the Schedule D Freelancers (31 percent). The PAYE freelancers (38 percent of them) and sole traders (41 percent) were also more likely to have been furloughed. Sole traders were most likely to receive a limited company ‘bounce back’ loan, although only 20 percent of them reported receiving this and 60 percent of the Schedule D Freelancers received money under the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, more than any other group.

While the COVID-19 pandemic was difficult for all mothers working in TV, the evidence shows a clear distinction in the experiences between those mothers who had staff jobs and those who were on freelance contracts. This reflects the particular impacts upon mothers of what is already known about the vulnerabilities of freelance workers in television labour markets.

Some of the mothers who were on staff had experiences of supportive work cultures.

The UK television workforce is hugely project-based and reliant on freelance workers (Glynn, 2020). The BFI estimates that self-employed workers in the film and TV sectors account for 32% of this workforce, more than double that of the UK working population as a whole (15 percent). The Film and TV Charity estimate that the actual figure is much higher - around 50 percent, as PAYE Freelancers register in government data as employed, and the nature of freelance work means that not all individuals would be employed in any given week that is used for data gathering (Film and TV Charity, 2020b). Freelance work is precarious and can intensify inequalities. (Brook et al, 2020)

“As an employee I feel like I have been very lucky. I was furloughed for 9 weeks and my employer made up the additional 20% so I received my full salary.”

“I am one of the lucky ones as I work in partnership with [Broadcaster/Streaming Service] who have done their utmost to try to retain staff and my position is office based [...] so we have utilised the time to build contacts remotely and work with new producers in the country to make content and keep production and development going.”

By contrast, many of the freelancers suffered enormously:

“I’ve had to ask for emergency hardship funds just to put food on the table.”

“Myself and my husband are both freelance crew and had zero income for 6 months of 2020.”

“I feel like my career has ended. I don’t see any possible way I can return to a freelance role with 2 young children and the lack of job roles on offer.”

Those mothers who were working as freelancers were among the worst hit by the pandemic restrictions and most likely to have also been excluded from government support (Goldbart, 2020), leading campaigners to dub them ‘Forgotten Freelancers’. Almost a third of the mothers who participated in the survey had not been eligible for any kind of government support. The freelance mothers in our sample spoke of feeling disposable and undervalued by those that had employed them for many years and feeling treated like second class citizens compared to staff members.

“As a non-staff member, I was often called upon to cover for other people because they were refusing to do their jobs, using the excuse of childcare. Because they were staff nobody questioned their demands and yet I, as a single parent, was expected to fill in the gaps as if my children didn’t count.”

They described how the COVID-19 restrictions had exposed television’s problematic reliance on freelance workers, and that this way of working made things particularly difficult for parents.

“The pandemic has shown up the shameful way many people are employed in our industry, passing

on the risks of employment down the food chain and forcing many to work freelance when it doesn’t suit them, especially at the most junior end.”

“It’s highlighted that our industry doesn’t work for freelancers, especially those who are parents.”

For some, the pandemic had pushed them to the point where they were worried about the long-term effects on their careers, and they were either considering leaving the industry or feeling pushed out, reflecting findings in the recently published State of Play report by Bectu (Wallis and van Raalte, 2021).

“It has made me realise what an unstable industry tv is and how precarious I am. Considering giving up working in tv as I don’t believe the infrastructure and will is there to support freelancers.”

“As a freelancer trying to return from maternity leave during the pandemic it has been impossible. So much so that I have been looking at giving up my dreams and applying elsewhere.”

“The pandemic has highlighted how vulnerable I am as a freelancer. I nearly lost everything.”

The effects of the pandemic on mothers’ careers, particularly those on freelance contracts, as well as being a tragedy for them, undermines the diversity of the television workforce and drains a wealth of experience and talent from the industry. Research is needed to track the long-term impacts of the pandemic on mothers.



¹¹ BFI (Forthcoming) COVID-19 Impact Report - Film and TV Sector Workforce Statistics

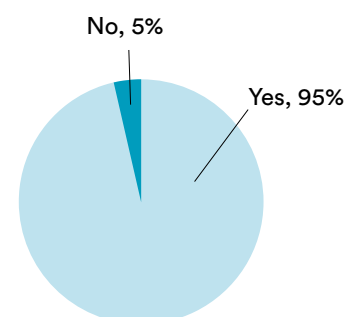
¹² See https://twitter.com/forgotten_2020?lang=en and <https://www.facebook.com/Forgotten.Freelancers/>

4. WFH, motherhood and the future of work

“Travel saved means time saved which is absolutely precious when you work full-time and have dependents.”

4.1 Introduction

Is working from home something you would like to continue after the pandemic?



Working from home (WFH) was one of the main ways in which mothers' employment practices shifted during the pandemic, and 86 percent of our respondents reported that they had been able to do so. As one of a range of working patterns often included under the umbrella term 'flexible working', does WFH, then, offer a possible solution to the issues mothers face working in television? While being able to work from home is almost unanimously popular across our sample, the reasons given reveal more about the endemic cultures of overwork that characterise the television industry than they do about home working itself, with mothers desperate to claw

back time for caring responsibilities wherever they can. That said, the evidence clearly shows that more flexible kinds of work should be one part of the solution to the problem of television labour practices and motherhood. This section outlines what the evidence can tell us about WFH before drawing on research from across the academic scholarship to understand the benefits and drawbacks of different flexible working patterns in television.

4.2 (Over)Working from home

“I could log on to work at 4am if I needed to make it work.”

Nearly all (95 percent) of our respondents expressed a desire to continue homeworking in some form after the pandemic. 463 of 523 mothers took the time to describe how they thought working from home would benefit them post-pandemic. An analysis of this large data set reveals a group of mothers working intensively with high levels of commitment to their jobs, often putting work ahead of other things in their lives, such as time with family and leisure activities. WFH emerges as a practice that enables mothers in television to claw back relatively small elements of work/life-balance that workers in other industries would take for granted such as putting children to bed at night, feeding infants or being able to pick children up from wrap-around childcare, while continuing to work intensively.

“The hours in TV are relentless and working from home can make it seem more manageable.”

“[I] could be here for [my] baby more even with childcare here or nursery etc studio days are very long, 10 to 15 hours per day.”

Although many of the women used the term ‘work/life balance’ to discuss how working from home would benefit them, their aspirations were not for relaxed evenings, hobbies or free time. Instead, these women yearn for the much simpler opportunities of just ‘being there’, to bathe their babies, put children to bed, join the family for dinner or even just a chance to see their children during the week.

“So I can put my daughter to bed. At the moment I see her for 40 mins in the mornings. It’s not enough.”

“I could actually see my child in the morning or before bedtime.”

“Pre-COVID we never ate as a family in the evenings in the week.”

A great many of the participants suggested that they could actually work *more* hours, or more efficiently and productively, without long and exhausting daily commutes, expressing a dedication that led them to return to work in the evenings having cooked a meal and put the children to bed:

“I can save [a] 2 hour commute. So even with working an extra hour or more I get extra time with my young children.”

“With time saved commuting I can start work at 8am and finish at 6pm in time to [put] my 13 month old to bed and can go back to work after that. It also means I can breastfeed at lunchtime and express while working at my laptop.”

“I’d be able to drop the kids off at a school and pick them up from after school club, which would mean not needing a nanny/other childcare. Massive cost benefit but also I’d see my kids and be able to give them dinner!”

Such accounts might say more about the way these women feel they must discursively position themselves as the ideal worker, free to devote themselves to their job. Certainly, they strongly reinforce the sense of commitment to their work and willingness to participate in these unhealthy work practices. To what extent are these women able to even consider an alternative way of working in unscripted television? The next section looks at how these mothers are desperate for the very basic attributes of parenthood.

4.3 Being able to be there

“Being able to be around for my children and not waste hours on commuting has meant the world to me.”

By far the most cited reason for wanting to WFH was the difficulties faced when managing childcare and work. It was clear that the hours of the school day or nursery day caused a huge amount of stress for these women, with over half of them specifically mentioning the challenges of drop-offs and pick-ups. Over and over the comments revealed a longing for the simple opportunity to be there to pick up children at the end of their day:

“[Working from home] allows me to see my children a bit more as I can squeeze in occasional school and nursery drop off and pick up.”

“[I] Can drop off my child at nursery and some days be here for bedtime. When I work in London I cannot do this.”

“Not commuting would mean being able to drop off and pick up my son from nursery.”

Or just ‘being there’ for their children:

“I am a single mum and working from home means I can be there for my daughter when she gets home from school.”

"Being around for [the] children."

"Be more available to my children and improve [my] relationship with them."

Many mothers working in TV have children who are in childcare until very late every day, whether in nursery or at wraparound school clubs and often with additional paid childminders and nannies or unpaid help from grandparents and other friends and relatives, in order to cope with the long working days in television plus commute.

The strain of having to meet childcare deadlines was palpable, with the respondents describing "stressing", "rushing", "racing" to get there in time, feeling "burned out", "worrying", "upset", "exhausted" and these feelings were amplified whenever there was illness or an "emergency" that required them to get to the childcare setting unexpectedly. They also talked of feeling "guilty" and "judged" by others they work with, even when they left at the official end of the working day.

"Being able to work from home would provide less stress and pressure to leave the team at the end of the day (and avoid the glares at 5pm) when I leave (unpaid) to pick up my children."

This last quote touches on how the mothers felt their additional responsibilities are viewed in a negative way in television work culture. The overall impression is one of unspeakability, of furtively trying to negotiate their burden of responsibility. In combination with the expressions of desire for time, for contact, for the basics of feeding their children and putting them to bed, there is a strong sense that these women are torn between two worlds.



4.4 Flexible working and more equal television work

"The massive increase in the incidence of working from home has suddenly accelerated a pre-existing but slowly-evolving tendency towards smart working and flexible work arrangements. The number of people working from home in the UK has risen from 2.9 million in 1998 to 4.2 million in 2014, representing 14% of employment, and an additional 1.8 million people report they would prefer to work from home if they were given the chance."

Hupkau & Petrongolo
2020: 5

Given the clear desire from mothers across all job roles to increase levels of WFH post-pandemic in order to manage childcare and work, this might seem to be an obvious recommendation, something that has been shown to work within the industry during the COVID-19 crisis and that can be carried into the future of work. However, evidence from the research literature suggests that calls for flexible working patterns that are not accompanied by broader cultural shifts must be approached with caution.

Over two thirds (68 percent) of the mothers told us that having the opportunity to job-share or work part-time would help them to balance their caring commitments and their job. However, by far the most common solution offered to mothers during the pandemic was 'flexible hours' (84 percent) - the idea that parents can just add-in their childcare responsibilities and extend their working day rather than reducing the hours they need to work. It is not difficult to see how this policy contributes to the stress and exhaustion that our mothers felt. Only 13 percent were offered a reduction in hours and just 9 percent were able to do a job-share.

Research shows that some flexible working patterns can enable workers to devote more time towards unpaid socially reproductive labour such as housework and childcare and to fit work around family demands. The evidence accumulated in this report demonstrates how important this is for mothers working in television. However, research also shows that the effects of this upon gender equality in heterosexual households are often uneven. Women tend to use, and are expected to use, flexibility to meet household demands while men tend to use flexibility to increase their work time and therefore gain an advantage in labour markets (see Chung et al, 2021). While flexible work can play a significant role in helping to prevent women dropping out of the industry, on its own it does nothing to disrupt the gendered assumptions around work and childcare that disadvantage mothers.

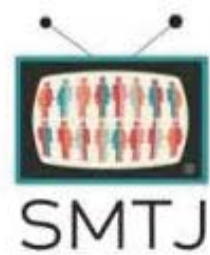
Furthermore, the industry contexts and specific kinds of flexible work adopted are crucial in determining the effects on overall hours worked and gender equality. Research conducted by Heejung Chung and Mariska vander Horst makes important distinctions between different kinds of flexible work. Flexi-time (where workers decide when they perform a set number of working hours) and remote working (e.g. WFH) are distinguished from 'schedule control' kinds of flexible work (where workers decide how many hours they work). Schedule control work results in more hours overall being worked as workers compete to intensify their schedules at the expense of those with caring commitments (Chung & van der Horst, 2018). In an industry like television characterised by highly intensive work schedules and hyper competition between freelance workers, the danger is that flexible work patterns increase hours worked and further



disadvantage mothers. The adoption of flexible work patterns needs to be accompanied by an overall reduction of hours worked for it to be effective.

Expanding certain kinds of flexible work for all workers, combined with socio-cultural shifts around the status of flexible work patterns, an overall reduction in work intensity, and a more equal distribution of household and care labour, are likely to provide the most effective routes towards more equal labour market outcomes for mothers in television.

Added to this is the stigma and 'career scarring' that mothers face when adopting more flexible working patterns (Chung, 2018). Amongst all the high-achieving, hard-working women that completed our survey, there was very little talk of wanting to reduce their hours, work part-time or indeed the desire to be 'stay-at-home' parents. What is not clear is whether this is something that these women feel unable to talk about. Indeed, when speaking of the wasted hours commuting to and from their offices or productions, the women spoke of using that time to work more. This certainly gives the impression that to work in television it is difficult to speak about working less, or putting their lives outside work ahead of the demands of the job.



SMTJ (www.sharemytellyjob.com) exists to promote job-sharing and the normalisation of other forms of flexible working in the television and film industry, such as condensed hours and part-time work. They advocate for a less masculinised working culture, which is itself primarily characterised by excessive working hours and which promotes the exclusionary practices endemic in production work.

While the benefits to mothers managing work alongside childcare are clear, SMTJ argue that job-sharing and the other measures mentioned above are good for all workers and to the industry as a whole. Benefits include talent retention, better mental health, increased work output and improved diversity.

SMTJ's work to promote better industry practice and culture includes:

Supporting more understanding of how excessive hours impact those with family commitments and people from other under-represented groups through their work on The Time Project: www.thetimeproject.co.uk.

Campaigning for the abolition of "buyout" contracts which force people to work excessive or uncapped hours.

Advocating for longer lead-up times to production to allow time for diverse hiring, management training and for parents to put childcare in place.

Calling for improved scheduling to allow for more realistic timeframes and work schedules that don't force excessive working hours and thus further disadvantage those with caring responsibilities, disabled people or people from other already marginalised groups.

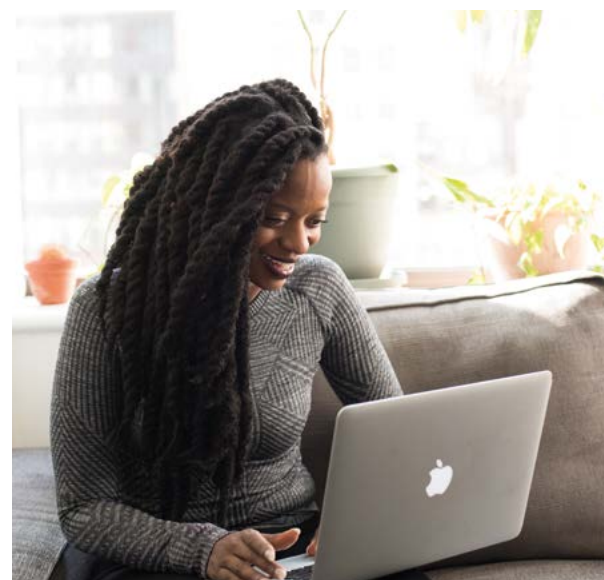
Offering training to teach best practice on how to manage people who work flexibly.

Training, networking events, support and mentoring for freelancers looking to job-share and schemes to support people who need to work flexibly.

Advocating for a commitment from broadcasters and employers to offer job-sharing and other flexible work patterns for all workers.

Campaigning that all roles be advertised as being open to job-sharers, and use language that demonstrates company culture is parent and carer-friendly and accommodating.

Encouraging all employers to invite positive and supportive conversations around caring commitments.



5. Recommendations for policy and practice: We have to do better

"I am at a loss as to what to do. I am an educated, successful professional who feels like I have no options available and have been forced through a combination of factors to become a housewife. I love my career, but I fear that it will be impossible to continue unless opportunities and attitudes change towards mothers."

and caring responsibilities, up to the point where for many it has become unbearable. The damage done to individual mothers and to the diversity of the television talent pool should shame the industry and be at the forefront of policy and debate about the recovery of creative sectors. UK television has proved remarkably resilient and able to adapt to massive transformation when required. There is no excuse for the industry to continue to shirk its social responsibility to its workers in their roles as mothers and carers, and its responsibilities to society more generally in raising the next generation of television practitioners and audiences.

5.2 Recommendations

The recommendations below have been generated from the empirical research upon which this report is based synthesised with the now considerable body of research evidence on motherhood and work. They are based first and foremost on the voices and experiences of mothers themselves. They range from short-term practical steps that can be taken by employers immediately to help mitigate the disastrous impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mothers, to long-term transformations in policy that will contribute to more equitable work futures.

For partners, colleagues and allies:

- Acknowledge the additional, gendered burdens that have been placed upon mothers during the pandemic.
- Unpaid, socially reproductive labour such as housework and childcare should be recognised, valued and shared more equally.
- Adopt shared parental leave to allow mothers to no longer be viewed as the default parent.

5.1 Summary

This report shows the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic upon mothers working in UK television: on their careers, their finances, their mental health & wellbeing and their hopes for the future. It is clear, however, that the pandemic has only revealed and deepened a crisis that was already present under the surface. Being a mother in television has always been accompanied by enormous difficulties related to the nature of the working practices and cultures that have become prevalent in the industry. The COVID-19 Pandemic has shattered the already fragile and precarious networks of support upon which mothers relied to enable them to manage work

For employers:

- Offer flexible working such as job-sharing, part-time work, WFH and flexitime as the default for all positions available to all workers from day one or give clear reasons why not applicable. Companies should work with organisations such as SMTJ and Raising Films and join the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's Flex from First campaign.
- Ensure that management training includes training around maternity rights, job-sharing and other forms of flexible working, as part of wider diversity policy and practice.
- Take the lead on creating shifts in working practices and workplace cultures around caring responsibilities for all workers, including freelancers.

This is not easy within the high pressure demands of a competitive, largely independent television production sector. It requires joined-up support from broadcasters and policymakers around budgets and schedules in particular.

- Make a commitment to engage with employees and freelancers with caring responsibilities from the point of interview. Offer support around care.

For broadcasters/commissioners:

- Take responsibility for the way decision-making, scheduling and budgeting affects mothers and those with caring responsibilities, particularly those working freelance.

A normal working week should not exceed 40 hours and measures should be taken to record and monitor the hours people are working in order to foster a healthier workplace culture.

- Ensure these practices are in place with any commissioned companies or workers.
- Commissioning needs to include longer lead-up times to allow mothers more time to put childcare in place.
- Build in provision for flexible, affordable childcare to budgets.

- Take a lead in challenging unrealistic and excessive work cultures that disadvantage mothers and those with caring responsibilities.

For regulators:

- Regulators have a critical role in ensuring that all organisations, projects, teams and individuals in receipt of public funding are fully aware of and compliant with their responsibilities towards their employees and subcontractors with regard to their protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- Regulators should act to impose remedy or sanction when there is evidence of non-compliance with the recommendation above.

For policymakers:

- Motherhood needs to be factored into debates on diversity much more than is the case currently.

No longer should motherhood be ignored.

- A programme of research must be commissioned to track the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mothers' careers in television.

This research would address the urgent need to understand how the pandemic has re-shaped television labour markets and its effects on equality and diversity and to explore the take-up and impacts of new emerging work patterns such as WFH and job-sharing. This research will be required to pay special attention to the intersectional impacts of motherhood with other diversity characteristics such as race, disability and socio-economic background.

- WFH and certain kinds of flexible working must be promoted as practices that can be adopted immediately in order to ameliorate the difficulties mothers face in television work.

These must not be promoted on their own as long-term solutions to the problems around mothers' employment. Policymakers have a key role to play in addressing the wider socio-cultural issues around the status of flexible work patterns, and the culture of excessive overwork that characterises television labour and disadvantages mothers.

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