

Dr Jasmine Kelland, Dr Laura Radcliffe and Ms Joanna Gregory Chialton - Written Evidence (LBC0090)

Submission by Dr Jasmine Kelland, University of Plymouth (Dr Laura Radcliffe and Joanna Gregory-Chialton, University of Liverpool based on their 'Parents in the Pandemic' research project that began in March 2020.

Are there any positives you would take from this pandemic?

Currently nearly 5 million households in the UK with dependent children are now managing paid work alongside childcare with minimal access to their usual support mechanisms (ONS, 2020¹). The combination of work and caregiving and the decision making surrounding the division of labour for both areas has historically been associated with both 'motherhood penalties' and 'fatherhood forfeits' (Kelland, 2016²; Radcliffe and Cassell, 2015³; Correll et al, 2007⁴). However, early findings from our 'Parents in the Pandemic' research which involved a survey of parents working from home during the early lockdown period in the UK⁵, follow-up interviews with 24 parents, as well as daily diaries kept by 30 participants indicates that the Covid 19 pandemic has resulted in many of the traditional barriers in combining paid work and childcare being minimised.

Early findings indicate that alongside some new challenges in managing work and family, the pandemic has also brought with it numerous benefits for parents, such as welcoming the increase in family time, less travel time and the ability to manage more effectively both their home and work life. As illustrated by *Kim;

"I'm getting a real sense of achievement out of just having time with my kids and my husband rather than that half hour block in the morning and then that few hour block before bedtime....It is really nice just to have a knock on the door... and it's like, "Shall we go out for a little family walk?"

Parents reported the pandemic has resulted in a wider involvement in their children's education and feeling of increasing connection to them. For example *Jon identified the following benefits;

"I think it has been nice having the time to be directly involved in the kids' schoolwork in a much more active way than I normally would.... there has been

¹ Office of National Statistics, ONS,(2020)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronavirusandemploymentforparentsintheuk/octobertodecember2019>

² Kelland, J., 2016. 'Fatherhood forfeits' and 'motherhood penalties': An exploration of UK management selection decision-making on parent applicants. ARC/2016/2. London: CIPD.

³ Radcliffe, L. S., & Cassell, C. (2015). Flexible working, work-family conflict, and maternal gatekeeping: The daily experiences of dual-earner couples. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 88(4), 835-855.

⁴ Correll, S., Benard, S, and Paik, I. (2007) 'Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(5), pp. 1297-1338.

⁵Survey based on 127 working parents of school-age children who were working from home in march-April during the pandemic, the sample comprised 91 mothers and 36 fathers.

a lot of quality time that we wouldn't have normally got just because the kids are doing other stuff and we're doing other stuff. It has actually been really nice and enjoyable, and it's been quite enriching... I think us and the kids have been brought closer together because of it as well".

Many participants also felt that they were a better employee as a result of their lockdown experience. Kaye* stated:

"I actually achieve more in terms of my workload..... if anything, it's (work ethic) is slightly stronger because I feel I need to do more to communicate and feed those connections..."

What are the things you are most worried about?

The challenge over the coming months will be how best to organise workplaces in light of the monumental 'trial run' of home working and the consequent likely changes in expectations of work life balance. It is expected that the effectiveness of the adaptation to the post Covid-19 workplace will be central to the retention of employees, with those who are unable to reconcile their new discoveries regarding balancing work and home life with the reality of their working arrangements actively seeking alternative employment and organisations running the risk of losing key talent.

Additionally, there is a potential risk to employees mental health if boundaries between work and home continue to be blurred. Organisations and policy makers will need to take steps to avoid an 'always on' culture through the establishment of a clear framework in which to address this issue. As illustrated by Lucinda*

"I ended up close to tears around 11am, all got too much. Felt like I was been hounded by people at work for unrealistic deadlines....Still working at 8.30pm, had to cancel my day off on Thurs as too much work to do before month end"

We are worried that if we don't move to a model of flexible working as a day one right for all and without any associated stigmatisation or career penalties for both men and women there is a significant risk of exacerbating gender inequality. Whilst in our data there is evidence of some men being more involved in caregiving during the lockdown than previously and wanting to continue this, there is also evidence of women struggling to combine work and caregiving, with women's paid work becoming secondary to that of their partners, regardless of job roles, exacerbating existing inequalities.

Through daily diaries with both members of a couple specifically revealed the different experiences and outcomes for those who had support for flexibility from their organisations and from their partners. A more equal/ turn taking approach was seen by those fathers who were encouraged explicitly and without penalties by their organisations and direct line managers to be flexible for family reasons and who did not feel that they had to hide this. Where women felt the burden fell completely on them and their partners felt pressured to maintain constant visibility at work, women reported increased daily stress and/or a tendency to

reduce working hours and decide to let their career take a backseat or even contemplating quitting their jobs. As evidenced by Emma*

"Harry's boss has shown no understanding of the work family balance and expected a lot of work from him. It has caused a few arguments between us, especially the weeks I've struggled because Harry sees no way to help, but it makes me feel like my job doesn't matter at times"

What do you most hope changes for the better?

Whilst the research is in its early stages, many parents appear to be re-evaluating their work life balance as a consequence of their experience during the pandemic, learning the value of changes to work routines to allow for wider involvement in family life, with the argument for flexible working gathering significant momentum. Paul* observed;

"I still feel like I really would like to have.. more of a lifestyle where the kids are around more.... rather than just it all being about school, school, school. Because I do hate all that morning rush. One of the choices that I've made is quite specifically about more quality time with the kids"

Similarly, Kairen* reported;

"Everybody talks about this new norm, and I do hope that there is – for the sake of, you know, fulltime working mums and dads, and also for the sake of businesses going forward, that they do actually learn some proper lessons from this and move with the times, and actually reap the benefits"

It is hoped that changes will be made to the current policy landscape to maximise upon the societal shifts that appear to have occurred during the pandemic. With the establishment of wider, more formalised flexible working in the post Covid-19 workplace proposed as a natural output of the pandemic, deviating away from the complex network of favours and negotiation that often guides decision making in this area.

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