

Silent struggles and adaptive resistance:

Professional working mothers' experiences of flexible working in the COVID-19 lockdown and implications for career management in the post-pandemic era

Dr Joy Probyn (University of Salford)
& Dr Eileen Cunningham (MMU)

Aims

To explore the lived experiences of 51 professional working mothers in Northern England during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020

Methods

Longitudinal interpretive phenomenological study using WhatsApp interviews

Findings

Four themes :(i) Adapting and adjusting (lived time); (ii) Bleeding spaces (lived space); (iii) Expectations and accountability (lived other); and (iv) Riding the 'coronacoaster' (lived body).

Findings support existing international research that mothers in heterosexual partnerships did more household labour and childcare than fathers during lockdown

Gap our research addresses

- *Essence of lived experience*: a "deafening silence" in which the mothers resisted lockdown pressures by silently navigating unrealistic demands to meet societal and personal expectations
- We draw on the theories of Brown (2000) and Hays (1996) to explain *why* women were doing more paid and unpaid work in the home during lockdown: '*the silence*' represented the power of gendered societal expectations and a conflicted relationship between paid and unpaid work within the home

Our contribution to COCAG Topic 2: Critical perspectives on equity and diversity

- Whilst flexible working may prevent women from leaving the workforce or shifting to part-time roles after childbirth, it may also disadvantage mothers in work-from-home cultures where they bear a disproportionate share of household responsibilities
- Policymakers and employers must recognise its potential to reinforce workplace gender inequality and take action to support mothers' career progression.