

ELGC COV 40

Ymchwiliad i COVID-19 a'i effaith

Inquiry into COVID-19 and its impact

Ymateb gan: Pregnant Then Screwed

Reponse from: Pregnant Then Screwed

Pregnant Then Screwed ( [www.pregnantthenscrewed.com](http://www.pregnantthenscrewed.com) ) is a project and campaign which protects, supports and promotes the rights of mothers who suffer the effects of systemic, cultural, and institutional discrimination through our various schemes and activities, including: A free legal advice service, a website where women post their stories of discrimination anonymously, lobbying the Government for legislative change, and a mentor scheme that supports women who are considering legal action against their employer.

We surveyed over 3500 women to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on pregnancy and motherhood.

### **COVID-19 helpline**

Since the lockdown notice that pregnant women should isolate, we had to instate an emergency phone line for the many women who are being pressured to work on the frontline, refused their legal right to a risk assessment and being wrongly sent off on sick leave rather than full pay or furlough. Volunteers have taken over 200 calls since implementation of the line in April, in addition to the calls taken by our legal advice line.

## **Pregnant women**

### **Pregnancy & safe working**

- Pregnant women are being asked to return to work in a number of settings despite the H&S requirement for them to continue to socially distance. Many are utilising our [letter](#), drafted by employment law experts, to be told that they have made things safe and that if they don't want to work their options are sick pay or unpaid leave. Our team of legal professionals are currently overwhelmed with women who have received unsatisfactory responses or have been told to return to the workplace, despite many previously being suspended on full pay (as per section 67 and 68 of Employment Rights Act 1996).
- 8.1% of pregnant women have been suspended from work on incorrect terms including: Sick pay, no pay, told to take annual leave or told to take their maternity leave early.
- Not all pregnant women are able to adhere to social distancing measures, with 5% still going to work, rising to 6.4% for BAME pregnant women, in environments that are unsafe.

### **Pregnant BAME women**

- 4.6% of all pregnant women are going to work and are worried about their safety.
- This rises to 6.4% for BAME pregnant women.
- 15.4% of pregnant women working in the NHS are having face to face contact with patients who could have Covid19. The NHS has predominantly more BAME staff than reflects the population, and 75% of the frontline workers who died are from BAME

backgrounds. We want to see clear messaging across NSH Wales to ensure the safety of pregnant BAME women in Wales.

### **Pregnancy, furlough & redundancy**

- 22% of pregnant women have been furloughed, with 3% stating that they are being furloughed when others are not. For those on low incomes they are concerned that furlough will take them under the threshold to access SMP.
- 2% of pregnant women have already been made redundant, 7.7% of the pregnant women we spoke to are expecting to be made redundant, of these women 20% believe their pregnancy is a factor.

## Childcare

### **Childcare & schools**

Whilst we understand that the Welsh Government approach is to follow guidance from the Chief Medical Officer, the news that schools will be offering blended-learning for the academic year 20-21 will have a detrimental impact on the careers of mothers. In addition, the lack of wrap around and holiday care, vital to sustaining a career as a mother, must be on the agenda.

### **The 30 hours childcare offer**

- This has been suspended, and Welsh Government have said that the offer has been transferred to key workers of children under 5. Firstly, this goes to show how essential support with childcare costs are for *all* under 5's not just those aged 3-5. WG have stated the offer is for households where one parent is a key worker, yet some Local Authorities have interpreted this as both parents must be key workers to qualify. This must be clarified as it may push parents using childcare into financial difficulty, extreme pressure and some stating that they may have to quit their jobs in order to cope.
- There is severe detriment for those families who saw light at the end of the tunnel, only for the Welsh Government to limit the 30 hours scheme to those who are already in receipt of it. This is not just an issue for coronavirus. Without access to affordable childcare, many women are unable to make work pay and are unable to return, resulting in a detriment to their long-term career and pension provisions. The inequality of the 30 hours roll out and criteria mean those who it was implemented to support (parents facing barriers to the workplace), have not been helped at all.

### **Future of childcare**

Some parents will have been forced to sacrifice their nursery place where fees were still expected as they can't afford to cover the costs, others will have to pay fees upfront until the offer catches up with them, meaning parents have to stump up the cash until the administration of the offer has been dealt with. This can amount to £100's every month, when many families are already under financial strain.

### **Informal childcare**

The announcement of the ability to form 'bubbles' does little to countenance the glaring gap that school closures have on parents ability to work. Many parents do not have family nearby

with which to utilise 'informal care', or are unable to plan as family members are shielding, and will not be released until at least the 16<sup>th</sup> of August. We must also raise awareness of the multiple disadvantage of single parents who are less able to manage the juggle of parenting, work and home education.

### **6 weeks summer break**

- Many parents have had to use up their annual leave to already accommodate the 100+ days of lockdown. There is no wriggle room for covering a further 6 weeks of care. Where the ease of lockdown measures has enabled some to form bubbles, this is not practical to single parent families, those who don't have family close by or families where both parents are in the key worker category.
- A lack of key worker care for the 6 weeks of summer will result in families having to make very difficult choices. At a time when work and finances are already under threat, this is hugely damaging and unfair.
- We need Welsh Government to engage with local authorities to provide summer childcare for children over 5, providing financial assistance where schemes are unable to operate on a financially viable basis due to H&S measures of coronavirus.

### **The long-term problems of lockdown.**

- Our research shows that a huge majority (78%) of working mothers have found it challenging to manage childcare and their paid work during lockdown, and a quarter (25%) of these mothers explained that their work hasn't been flexible to allow for them to complete their paid work and manage childcare duties.
- 56.5% of employed mothers believe that their childcare responsibilities during the pandemic have impacted their career prospects or will affect their career prospects in the future. Will the Welsh Government implement extra support within the range of career services currently on offer, and open these services to all those who want it? (PaCE, Communities for Work etc.)
- Our Founder, Joeli Brearley says 'It's utterly disgraceful that employers haven't recognised that working from home with children has been a case of absolute survival. Women are more likely than men to lose their jobs in the impending recession\* and yet for a quarter of working mothers their employer has refused to give them the flexibility they need. This has resulted in women being pushed into unpaid leave, sick pay or furloughed as a direct result of having children. It's no wonder working mothers aren't thinking positively about their future careers.'

### **Parenting, work and flexible working**

- Many have lauded that we are now in a phase of flexible working – let us be clear, this is not flexible working; this is at home, during a crisis, trying to work. The anecdotal data on this is that many employers simply aren't understanding of care responsibilities and are reliant on traditional gender roles.
- There is a lack of provision in place to support the strain that the (un)balance is having on parents. The average school day is 6 hours, work day is 8 hours and the parenting day is 12 hours. That's 26 hours of labour in a 24-hour day. This model is not sustainable and is leading parents towards a mental health crisis.

- 58% think that homeworking will be possible once normality resumes – an increase of 14.4% from before February 2020 but a decrease of 13% from the percentage of mothers able to work from home during lockdown. How will Welsh Government ensure to promote the possibility of flexible working for those who wish to continue?
- Our homes have now become unequal workplaces. Non-breadwinning careers have become secondary to their partners. The constant juggle and feelings of failure are on women where men are locked away trying to continue adhering to an 8-hour day.
- Furlough: without the opportunity for part-time furlough, we need to know the gender breakdown on who has taken furlough as what we've seen are women being forced to become carer and take the hit to their career & long-term earnings, as reflects regular society.
- Self-employed women are clearly being discriminated against and are in breach of the Equality Act 2010. Women who have taken maternity leave are required to include their maternity period when calculating support under the SEISS. This directly penalises them for taking maternity leave, which is a protected characteristic. Whilst we are aware that this is a UK Government issue, the Minister for Economy could provide support to this group of people in Wales.

### Our survey data

#### *1326 pregnant women completed the survey*

- 1) 7.7% of pregnant women expect to be made redundant and 20% of those who expect to be made redundant believe their pregnancy is a factor.
- 2) 4.6% of all pregnant women are going to work and are worried about their safety. This rises to 6.4% for BAME pregnant women.
- 3) For women less than 28 weeks pregnant 6.1% are going to work and are worried about their safety. For women who are more than 28 weeks pregnant 2.2% are going to work and are worried about their safety.
- 4) 3% are being furloughed when others are not.
- 5) 15.4% of pregnant women working in the NHS are having face to face contact with patients who could have Covid19.
- 6) 22% of pregnant women have been furloughed.
- 7) 2% of pregnant women have already been made redundant.
- 8) 8.1% of pregnant women have been suspended from work on incorrect terms including: Sick pay, no pay, told to take annual leave or told to take their maternity leave early.

#### *3010 mothers of children under the age of 11 completed the survey*

- 1) 77.6% say they have found it challenging to manage childcare and their paid work during lockdown.
- 2) 25% of employed mothers say that their employer has not been flexible to ensure they can manage their paid work and childcare responsibilities.
- 3) 56.5% of employed mothers believe that their childcare responsibilities during the pandemic have impacted their career prospects or will affect their career prospects in the future.
- 4) 48.6% feel forced to send their child/ren back to school or childcare because of their job.

- 5) 43.6% of mothers were able to work from home before February 2020 and 71.1% have been working from home during lockdown (an increase of 27.5%).
- 6) 58% think that homeworking will be possible once normality resumes – an increase of 14.4% from before February 2020 but a decrease of 13% from the percentage of mothers able to work from home during lockdown.
- 7) 55% of mothers say they will want to work or will need to work fewer hours in the future.