# Raising Films

## BACK FROM THE BRINK: A Scoping Study

Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 reported by parents and carers working in the UK screen sector

March 2021

*During this period, I would work through the night and do the extra hours. People have been very supportive and understanding, but there was just an inevitable amount of work that you could not get to in two hours. It's worth saying that we managed to get through, and I managed to keep those projects going. But it had a big physical impact on me. I have been very close to burnout.*

Tess (Director)

#BackFromTheBrink

www.raisingfilms.com

BFI          THE NATIONAL LOTTERY

# Contents

## Acknowledgements & Thanks

# Introduction

COVID-19 has had a negative impact on every aspect of many screen sector workers' lives. While there are not yet clear figures relating to job losses in the screen sector, our preliminary scoping study strongly indicates that:

*workers with parenting and caring responsibilities experience additional negative impacts specifically relating to loss of statutory state care leading to additional financial and psychological impact.*

Our sister organisation Parents in Performing Arts (PIPA) has reported on the specific impact of COVID-19 on parents and carers in the live arts sector, including the headline that 72% of parents and carers are considering abandoning their career in the performing arts.[1]

No parallel research has as yet been carried out in the screen sector, yet Raising Films' previous research on the experiences of parents and carers in the sector, Making It Possible (2016), Raising Our Game (2017) and We Need to Talk about Caring (2019), demonstrated that pre-pandemic sector-specific employment practices, including long hours and lack of flexible working, have exclusionary impacts on parents and carers.

As these exponentially affect women, who remain the majority of unpaid primary carers, they contribute to persistent gender inequality in the screen sector.[2]

Sector-specific research is **urgently needed** as broader reports have clearly shown that COVID-19 has had additional, disproportionate effects on working primary carers.

**Back From The Brink** begins to evidence the present and potential future effects of this impact for screen sector employment and retention of skilled workers, particularly women, leading to the risk of a decade of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work in the screen sector being rolled back. This study draws on the pandemic-informed insights of working parents and carers to suggest good practice in employment policy supporting workers' rights in the industry, including hiring practices, freelance contracts, parental and caring leave, flexible working, and digital equality.

Our 2020 project Raising Our Futures, which brought together anonymised contributions from our community and provocations from six visionary thinkers from across the arts and culture, demonstrated the creativity, resilience and comprehensive insight in our community, and this scoping study, **Back From The Brink**, confirms it.[3]

The solutions proposed by those on the frontline of caring responsibilities offer **significant, implementable insights for employers** into retaining workers through building on EDI progress, as a crucial strategy for bringing the screen sector back from the brink as we work through the pandemic and into recovery.

# Background

While there are not yet statistics available to the screen sector, national cross-sector reporting by multiple bodies indicates multiple additional negative impacts on working parents and carers.

Common factors include impact of homeschooling, closure of classes and schools outside lockdown; the attrition of the childcare sector;[4] and the loss of NHS care and disability support.[5]

According to figures released in February 2021 by the Office for National Statistics 67% of women and 52% of men were taking charge of their children's education at home during the third lockdown. Women reported that home schooling was having a negative impact on their wellbeing, with 53% struggling compared with 45% of men.[6]

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)'s study of 3,500 families across multiple UK sectors demonstrates that working women are being made redundant or losing contracts and opportunities at a higher rate than men.[7]

## Background (cont.)

An Office of National Statistics (ONS) survey of over 22 million people found that 17.9% of respondents cited childcare responsibilities as impacting their ability to work during the first lockdown.[8]

According to research from the Mayor of London's office, mothers were 47% more likely than fathers to have lost their jobs or resigned from their jobs, and 14% more likely to have been furloughed, meaning a 20% decrease in wage.[9]

The Citizens Advice report An Unequal Crisis found that severely disabled people (37%) and parents and carers (39%) were most at risk of redundancy.[10]

A major Trades Union Congress (TUC) survey of 50,000+ working parents revealed that 70% of working mothers who had requested furlough from employers were refused.[11]

Maternity pay has been a significant economic issue: UNISON's bargaining guide quotes Andy McDonald, Shadow Secretary of State for Employment Rights and Protections reporting that "many pregnant women have been unlawfully put on Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) during the pandemic, affecting their maternity pay and other entitlements."[12]

Additionally, the continuing exclusion of maternity pay from SEISS calculations, which is to the serious detriment of freelance and self-employed mothers, is a primary concern for the Gaps in Support APPG.[13]

Pregnant then Screwed's July 2020 survey of 20,000 working mothers confirmed the misuse of SSP and described a lack of COVID safety for pregnant workers. This survey also showed that 25% of working mothers had experienced unfair treatment in the workplace, and, particularly significant for the screen sector, 74% of freelancers had their earning potential reduced due to lack of childcare.[14]

*Any freelance work I've taken on has all been based around, 'Can I do it around the children?'*
Tina (Marketing & Audiences Officer)

## Scoping Study Parameters

All of the factors reported more broadly were echoed by the screen sector workers who participated in our scoping study.

From a total number of 36 people who participated in Making It Possible 2020 (our online training programme) 11 participants (30%) were selected to take part in this scoping study. All interviews were anonymised, and all names have been changed.

The aim in selecting this cohort was to be as representative as possible of nations and regions, screen sector roles, career seniority, and parent/carer status.

## Key Findings

Based on this small but indicative sample, Raising Films can report that:

- Over half (7 out of 11) parent/carer screen sector workers experienced a **negative direct impact** on **household finances** from COVID-19.

- While pre- and post-production, exhibition and writing/directing provided some measure of adaptability, **5 out of 7** of **parent/carer production workers** experienced a **negative direct impact** on their **working arrangements** from COVID-19.

- Most (9 out of 11) parent/carer screen sector workers experienced a **negative direct impact** on their **caring arrangements** from COVID-19.

- All participants in this scoping study experienced a negative direct impact on their **mental health** from COVID-19.

# Raising Films

## Key Findings (cont.)

**Negative impact on household finances**

**Negative impact on working arrangements**

**Negative impact on caring arrangements**

**Negative impact on mental health**

## A Rolling Crisis

The eleven interviewees in this scoping study have varied caring responsibilities and represent a range of roles in film and television, at varying levels of seniority, across the UK's regions and nations.

Collectively the interviewees detailed **the granular experience** of **a cascade effect** relating to both day-to-day uncertainty, and the **exponential feedback cycle** caused by mutually-impacting changes such as class/school closures and work cancellations.

The psychological as well as economic impact of **losing and/or cancelling work** due to caring responsibilities was also mentioned by interviewees, and was seen as contributing to attrition of parents and carers from the screen sector.

*I'm not very good if I'm not working, mentally.*
Meg (Producer)

The interviews took place in late November 2020, and all participants were **hopeful for improvement** as production had restarted and schools had reopened, although some had lost work from September onwards due to caring responsibilities.

Some described themselves as **"very close to burnout"** due to working extra hours and nights while homeschooling. Several participants remarked that they were in a much better place when it came to mental health than in the middle of the first national lockdown.

However, as Oxford University's Co-SPACE (COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics) study reports, drawing on data gathered from 6,000 UK parents and carers, parental mental health has worsened with the nationwide 2021 lockdown.[15] Participants in our scoping study speculated that the return of lockdown would replicate the **"nightmare" scenario of first lockdown**, at a time that participants also speculated that they would be left with potentially both fewer work opportunities and fewer mental, physical and economic resources.

## A Stolen Year

*I am still here in November waiting to hear about work. I'm hopeful that I'll get some in the new year, but it's been a very long, dry patch for me.*
Beth (Producer Director, Edit Producer, Screenwriter)

While attention has rightly been drawn to a lost generation of emerging talent and workers who have missed a year of opportunities that are usually open to school leavers, university graduates, interns/placements, first filmmakers and entry-level jobs, it is clear that both **emerging** and **professionally established** parents and carers may find it more difficult to get new commissions and/or return to work due to homeschooling and caring. In particular, this has a **gendered impact**, exacerbating the barriers facing women across the sector.

*As a female director, I'd just got a shot, and produced a film for BBC Four and been a director on a BBC Three series. It's taken me a long time to get to that level. This feels like a stolen year.*
Bonnie (Producer Director & Development Producer)

# A Stolen Year (cont.)

As the industry is becoming even more **risk-averse**, there is a fear that those with gaps in their professional CV due to ongoing parenting/caring duties will be increasingly seen as **disposable**, with the reason given as a lack of commitment, especially when requesting part-time or flexible working patterns. From an intersectional perspective, **older freelancers (especially women)** and **disabled people** are likely to bear the brunt of this exclusion disproportionally.

Based on their own recent experiences or those of colleagues, several respondents believe that working conditions in British television have already **worsened**, due to smaller budgets resulting from the loss of advertising revenue.

They reported broadcasters demanding **shorter timeframes** and **lower fees** than before the pandemic, causing frustration as respondents are **keen to return to work**, but only on **fair terms**.

## Preventing an Isolation Legacy

The output of the UK screen sector has benefited audiences during the pandemic,[16] but **isolation burnout** may add to COVID's economic and practical impact on new production, with a disproportionate effect on parents and carers in creative roles.

*Lots of people talk about how wonderful creativity has been in the face of a crisis, but I think it's hard for freelancers. There is an isolation legacy, which might impact people's happiness and the level of creativity that they can bring to the work.*
 Beth (Producer Director, Edit Producer, Screenwriter)

Caring responsibilities can generate isolation, regardless of the pandemic, due to parental leave, remote working, moving to remote areas where housing is more affordable and that might offer extended family support, and the responsibility of caring work.

However, participants noted that **targeted online training with structural support and peer networks** can be successful in addressing isolation.

They cited the advantages of programmes operating from an inclusion framework, mentioning Raising Films' Making It Possible and Bird's Eye View Pandemic Response Programme, that addressed specific needs.

Both these programmes shaped an effective use of 'buddying', with **relationships formed and maintained online** during the pandemic, the success of which in turn drove their recognition of **the need for local in-person meet-ups and face-to-face work**.

*A lot of people in this industry are 'people' people. They like human beings and work is a social experience. On sets now, some people never come out of their little rooms. But sets are about being physical and being in it together.*
Mary (Development Producer)

## (Not) On Set

**Production workers** were particularly hard hit during and between lockdowns due to two key issues: the inability to pivot to remote working; and the lack of formal HR structures and practices, including enforceable employment codes that provide some recourse, regulation and resilience for those in **post-production**, some **creative roles**, and **exhibition**. Screen sector workers are twice as likely (32%) as the general workforce average (15%) to be freelancers.[17]

Raising Films' Making It Possible study evidenced that parents and carers are twice as likely (63%) to be freelancers than the sector average.[18] They are additionally more likely to be among those **excluded from SEISS** for interlocking reasons described by one participant as "a huge black hole", including but not limited to the non-factoring of maternity and parental leave, being PAYE employees, being set up as a company, and irregular patterns of earning.

# (Not) On Set (cont.)

*We didn't 'fall through the net', we were deliberately overlooked. We both work in broadcasting and haven't received any support. Our income disappeared in an instant.*

Nancy (Producer Director & Editor)

While production was shut down, these impacts were distributed more or less evenly across all production workers, but even before lockdown was reintroduced, the parents and carers in our study were reflecting on both the **asymmetrical and exclusionary opportunities** for a return to work, and the **lack of oversight** by production employers for ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion in the terms of the Equality Act, as documented in the pre-COVID landscape in our Raising Our Game report.[19]

*The first opportunity that came up was in September, to go somewhere for two weeks, which I took happily. The next one was in October, but because travelling regulations meant quarantine I refused. So I've been basically being a mother.*

Dolores (Assistant Producer & Producer Director)

Participants expressed concern that employers may use the lockdown production shut-down and reduced budgets to **exclude the most vulnerable workers** who are (or are perceived as) less able to return to work based on long hours, long weeks, working away from home, and on lower fees.

The **lack of flexibility and responsiveness** in UK production work in particular, which was evident and exclusionary before the pandemic, is exacerbating the multiple and interlocking negative economic, physical and psychological impacts on parents and carers.

# Digital Divisions

Participants in the study were overall positive about the opportunities created by remote digital access to training and networking. They identified digital tools as making their caring responsibilities more attainable, and also creating benefit for those – including participants themselves, their family members and colleagues – who are neurodivergent, have physical access needs, and/or come from socioeconomic backgrounds that had previously excluded them due to training and travel costs.

However, participants raised concerns about negative impacts of digital access for employment for these same groups who were more able to gain access to remote training and networking. They noted that the lack of access to technology and connectivity creates a **digital divide** that exacerbates extant class-based and access-based barriers to working in the industry.

The participants (5 out of 11) able to work partially or fully remotely noted specific concerns, including:

- the **surveillance** aspect, in which productivity is monitored via always-on remote working platforms and social media that can instil pressure;

- **digital presenteeism** when working from home, with an assumption that digital tools and remote working cancel out any allowance for, or recognition of, caring responsibilities, or physical and mental health, although these continue to impact ability to work;

- the **muting of local and regional networks** in terms of both work and parent/carer communities, which are shaped by and reliant on in-person connection;

- the danger of a **two-tier hierarchy**, with those who need or want to work remotely (primary carers, disabled people, shielders) and/or flexibly regarded as less effective and important, with less access to networking and hiring.

## Digital Divisions (cont.)

As reported in The Guardian, **presenteeism** is manifesting in a demonstrable increase in hours worked per day, and a decrease in the ability to access flexible working, both of which have an additional effect those with caring responsibilities.[20]

The New Yorker reported a comprehensive client survey by leading design firm R/GA that provided clear evidence of the **two-tier fear** becoming a reality once workplaces re-open.[21]

The most significant anxiety for participants was that the rapid rollout of flexible and remote working, for which parents, carers and disabled people have advocated over decades, will be accompanied by a rollback of EDI meaning those who continue to need access the most will benefit the least as redundancies and changes to employment exclude those seen as '**the weakest link**': an anxiety borne out by employment studies from Leonard Cheshire[22] and the Fawcett Society.[23]

In a piece for our website, Justin Edgar, producer, director and visual artist, describes this as '**digital disenfranchisement**': the exclusion of those who shaped and advocated for technological change from its rapid, generalised adoption due to lack of attention for the particularities of access and inclusion,[24] as mandated by the Equality Act 2010, which incorporated and updated the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

This was of particular concern as there was a strong feeling that carers and cared-for people have skills and experience that are crucial for the post-COVID working landscape.

*People with disabilities have been using this technology for far longer, so the experts are the people that [employers] dismiss.*
Nancy (Producer Director & Editor)

## Caring as/at Work

Several participants referenced how their caregiving responsibilities had made them more aware of others' work/life balance needs, and foregrounded taking care of the mental health of colleagues and team members (as well as family members) as a key aspect of their work practice, rather than an add-on.

Some participants identified a **general lack of structural support** in most working arrangements, around both mental health needs and caring responsibilities.

Several participants noted that COVID-19 had highlighted this lack as it had brought caring responsibilities to the forefront of all work conversations, and had also made facing unemployment and/or managing caring leave a shared experience that might provide insight into the needs and experiences of parents and carers.

*If somebody's been on maternity leave, [employers] might ask, 'Do you remember how to use the camera?' [This year] it's like we were all on maternity leave from our craft.*
Bonnie (Producer Director & Development Producer)

Some participants saw this pivot having **potential positive effects** in producing inclusive change toward accessibility, aligned to remote and flexible working.

*Production companies and broadcasters will realise they can function when people are at home, which will have a knock-on effect for parents and carers. Can you imagine being able to do the school run?*
Meg (Producer)

## Business as Unusual: Next Steps

Parents and carers have experienced additional economic, employment and mental and physical health impacts from lockdown and homeschooling, leading to a coalition of organisations including the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Amnesty International, Save the Children and the Fawcett Society asking the EHRC to investigate what they are calling a gender equality failure.[24]

This has disproportionately affected working mothers, exponentially more so for Black, Asian and minority ethnic working mothers,[23] and mothers with disabilities.[22]

We recommend that action put forward by Citizens Advice, the Gaps in Support APPG and the TUC must be undertaken by the government to provide enforcement of workers' rights, fiscal redress, and legislative recognition.

Two **concrete proposals we support** for screen sector uptake are the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's Flex from First campaign, **calling for flexible working for all employees** from day one,[26] developed from their recommendations on employer strategies for parents and carers during lockdown,[27] and Carers' UK advocating for the **Carer Passport Scheme**,[28] which helps employers recognise and value carers.

Raising Films hopes to see more professional bodies calling for similar significant changes that benefit all.

There was consensus from participants in the scoping study that the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 must provide an impetus to **reflect on and change exclusionary working practices**, based on the experience and knowledge gained during this difficult period.

Both the **high levels of anxiety** and the **creative resilience** expressed by our scoping study participants point to **the need for corroborative and expanded research across the UK screen sector**.

To build on this urgency and insight, **Raising Films plans to conduct a sector-wide, solutions-oriented survey** to follow up the findings of this scoping study, for delivery summer 2021.

Making it Possible 2016 alumna Laura Scrivano, who worked on set between lockdowns in 2020, observed to Shots recently:

*Look at how brilliantly the film industry has adopted COVID protocols, and how quick we have been to pivoting to a new way of working. If we can do that, then making small adjustments or considerations for new mothers on set is simple.*[29]

Participants identified that their caring responsibilities, skills and experiences positioned them to lead on change towards safe, inclusive, sustainable work environments.

Even before the pandemic, **workers with caring responsibilities were experienced in self-managing remote and home-based working**, all forms of flexible working, collaboration, and pushing for sustainable working methods not based in long hours culture and/or presenteeism.

The industry needs to recognise the **long-term viability of these modes of work**, and that they require tech provision and HR support to address the digital divide and prevent two-tier fear and digital disenfranchisement.

Taking these now tried-and-tested practices forward, in consultation with those who need them most, would be a key move towards **recognising caregiving within employment policies and practices, to the benefit of all**.

*As a parent and a carer, I hope that some of that culture will stay with us, rather than having to conform to 'business as usual'. If we can keep pushing to work in ways which are conducive to our lives and timetables, that would be great.*
Will (Sound Designer & Composer)

# References

1. https://pipacampaign.org/research/covidreport
2. https://www.raisingfilms.com/research/
3. https://www.raisingfilms.com/research/raising-our-futures/
4. https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14990
5. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/19february2021#homeschooling
6. https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/learning-disabilities-autism/carers-family
7. https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14861
8. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jan/10/labour-asks-for-more-help-for-working-parents-in-england-lockdown
9. https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-calls-for-action-to-tackle-inequality
10. https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Work%20Publications/An%20unequal%20crisis%20-%20final%20(1).pdf
11. https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/tuc-poll-7-10-requests-furlough-turned-down-working-mums
12. https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/01/COVID-19-Pandemic-Bargaining-over-workplace-issues-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic-v21.pdf (see p.59)
13. https://www.gapsinsupportappg.org/about; first raised in Parliament 17 Sept 2020, see Hansard: https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-09-17/debates/42A771AA-6DFF-4D8E-A63F-E7E828ABCD22/SupportForSelfEmployedAndFreelanceWorkers
14. https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/the-covid-crisis-effect-on-working-mums
15. https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-01-19-parental-mental-health-worsens-under-new-national-covid-19-restrictions
16. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/lockdown-leads-to-surge-in-tv-screen-time-and-streaming
17. https://www.screenskills.com/media/3555/2020-04-21-screenskills-freelancer-survey.pdf (see p.1)
18. https://www.raisingfilms.com/portfolio-items/making-it-possible
19. https://www.raisingfilms.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Raising-our-Game-report-2017.pdf
20. https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/feb/04/home-workers-putting-in-more-hours-since-covid-research
21. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/02/01/has-the-pandemic-transformed-the-office-forever
22. https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/disabled-workers-facing-a-coronavirus-jobs-crisis
23. https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=cae4917f-1df3-4ab8-94e7-550c23bdc9cf
24. https://www.raisingfilms.com/justin-edgar-on-disability-and-digital-disenfranchisement/
25. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/15/ehrc-urged-to-investigate-ministers-for-equality-failures-in-covid-response
26. https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/campaigns/flex-from-first
27. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Community/blogs/b/policy_at_work/posts/stepping-up-support-for-working-parents-in-this-latest-lockdown-period
28. https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/campaigns/carer-passport-scheme
29. https://shots.net/news/view/working-mom

Raising Films' mission is to support, promote and campaign for parents and carers in the UK screen sector.

Raising Films calls on the UK screen sector to recognise the value of its parent and carer members and ensure that the best possible working practices are available to them. We challenge the sector to find ways to prevent the loss of talent and enable the working parent and carer community to grow in number so that all voices can be heard.

Since 2015 Raising Films has been carrying out groundbreaking research, building an online community, running training programmes, publishing resources and awarding the Raising Films Ribbon for best practice.

Raising Films is a community interest company.

@RaisingFilms | www.raisingfilms.com | info@raisingfilms.com