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A Literature Review: The relationships between Flexible Working Arrangements and Gender Inequality, Socioeconomic Status and Overall Well-Being

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Abstract

Several studies have shown the positive effects that Flexible Working (FW) can have on employee's work-life balance, mental health and overall job satisfaction. Not only can it positively impact the individual but evidence suggests a correlation between increases in productivity and Flexible Working Practices (FWP). However, many people report feeling hesitant to request or use FWP or having used FW people feel discriminated against in some way or that they have experienced poor career outcomes. Through the literature review, the mechanisms behind flexibility stigma will be investigated. Qualitative and quantitative studies, longitudinal studies, literature reviews and reports are included in the review. Main themes identified in the literature that influence what groups in society have access to genuine FWP and what groups benefit from them are gender, policy developments, income, and occupation. The impact that FWP has on overall health and mental well-being is investigated also. Type of flexible working offered are extremely dependent on income and seem to be heavily influenced by traditional gender roles and norms and the work-devotion schema. Telecommuting, flexitime and flexplace seem to be perceived positively, they are more common in higher income roles and give workers more control over their schedules, yet this leads to many workers working more than before. Low-income groups require genuine FWP to balance work and family commitments yet still earn an adequate wage to make ends meet yet the literature shows that part-time work is more prevalent among low-income groups which do not benefit the worker and make them more susceptible to worker exploitation. Policymakers and employers must demonstrate the family case for using FWP in the workplace, including articulating associated societal benefits so that perceptions change. People will then be more likely to use FWP if they are not discriminated against for doing so.

Keywords: Flexible Working Practices, Flexible Working Arrangements, Work-Life Balance, Gendered norms, Parental status, Flexibility Stigma, Work-Devotion Schema, Flexibility Gap, Flexibility Paradox, Socio-economic status, In-work poverty, Allostatic load

1. Introduction

Over the past 100+ years, economic activity in the UK has transformed drastically. Large scale societal events such as the industrial revolution and both world wars, being main drivers for this. Further to these economic changes came changes to the workforce. It is of course inevitable that when the economy changes, the workforce must adapt alongside it. Roles determined based on gender changed in the early 20th century leading to models such as the male breadwinner being less predominant as models such as the dual-earner have gradually took its place (Sulaymonov, 2020). Not only did changes take place in what makes up western workforces, but the conventional way in which people are expected to work has also transformed. Preceding the industrial revolution, work schedules were a lot more relaxed with no concrete schedules having to be followed. The rise of capitalism brought with it a new emphasis on time to allow factory workers to meet intense and increasing productivity levels, set working schedules were given and 80-90 hour working weeks became the norm. The beginning of the 20th century introduced a rise in trade unions and various political ideologies, one of which coming from Marxist theory which promoted the importance of improving working conditions as this would enhance wellbeing and therefore optimise productivity. By the mid-1900s the working week for the average working-class individual was down to 48 hours.

The way that people are expected to work and the work opportunities available to them varies depending on demographic and socioeconomic factors including gender, race, education and class. The literature shows significant gender and class differences in the types of flexible working arrangements (FWA) available to people and the way they are perceived. Flexible working (FW) is an umbrella term that covers a variety of work arrangements which aim to provide workers with more control over their work schedules. Common FW practices include remote working, which has become increasingly prevalent post covid, compressed working, part time, job sharing and banking of hours. These forms of FW should provide workers with more control, security and autonomy in their working lives (Kelliher and de Menezes, 2019). However, certain work arrangements advertised as 'flexible working' such as 0-hour

contracts and temporary work do not provide the worker with security or control but rather, insecurity and lack of control. It was reported in early 2020 pre-covid that at least 2.4m workers were in insecure job contracts such as 0-hour and temporary work (McDonald & Sandor, 2020).

The purpose of any job should be to improve overall quality of life however in work poverty is increasing in the UK. A study from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) found that in the first 3 months of 2020 the rate of poverty in households with at least one member in employment increased to 17%, this is equal to more than one in 5 households (SVP, Dec 2021). The welfare system in the UK maintains that working is the most reliable route out of poverty, so it has to be asked, why is it that so many jobs are failing to get people out of poverty? There are 2 two main drivers of in work poverty, low wages which for many people is due to their inability to work certain times and days leading to them unable to secure the number of hours needed to provide an adequate wage (Poinasamy, 2011). Lack of career growth is also a main driver of in work poverty and both of these drivers are more likely to be experienced by people with caring responsibilities, especially mothers (Chung, 2020).

Flexible working was at first, one way of addressing the underrepresentation of women in the workplace but over recent years, the demand for work-life balance has increased leading to a demand in flexible working arrangements for all. A survey aimed at working fathers in 2017 showed that 69% of fathers agreed that childcare was an important factor to consider when accepting a new job or promotion and 38% said they would accept a cut to their wages to improve their work-life balance. As of 2021 in the UK, due to the Flexible Working Bill, it is now within every person's right to request flexible working from their first day of employment (Flexible Working Bill, 2021). However, due to the gap between availability and use of FWP's it is clear there are other issues that have to be addressed such as gender inequality and economic inequality in workplaces. Regardless of there being policies in place that ensure the availability of flexible work practices (FWP's), evidence shows many people do not actually use them when they are available. This gap between availability of FWP's and actual usage is driven by a number of different factors including workers being unaware of their rights (Budd and Mumford, 2006), negative career consequences (Chung, 2020) and lack of support from co-workers and managers.

A lot of studies have shown the positive effects that FWP's can have on employee's work-life balance, mental health and overall job satisfaction. Not only can it positively impact the

individual but many studies show a correlation between increased productivity and reduced employee turnover and FWP's. So why is it that so many employees are hesitant to use FWP's and so many employers are unsupportive? Perceptions around FWP's seem to be dependent on different demographic and socioeconomic factors including gender, income, education, race.

It has been found that in many cases, using FWP's leads to decreased wages, lower performance evaluations and fewer promotions. Both lack of support and negative career consequences can be explained through 'Flexibility Stigma' (Williams, Blair-Loy and Berdahl, 2013). Perceptions on people using FWP's to be available for non-work commitments include: they are lazy, not hard working and causing more work for other workers not using FWP's. These stigmas are dependent on factors such as gender, class and parental status. The widespread worker culture known as the 'work devotion schema' (Chung and Van der Horst, 2020) is most likely a driver of these stigmas. The work devotion schema is a cultural model that endorses the idea of work being the most central part of an employee's life, commitment and dedication to the job is measured by heavy workload and intense hours. As might be expected for many people, parenting responsibilities and high childcare costs mean that they cannot adhere to this model. Workers who do not adhere to the work devotion schema and use flexible arrangements such as reduced hours or remote working are therefore stigmatised by co-workers and face consequences to their career such as lack of promotion. It is not surprising that people avoid requesting genuine FWP's altogether leaving them with few options including 0-hour contracts or decide to work flexibly but 'work harder' to avoid stigma from co-workers, this being counterproductive as work-life balance worsens. When a worker has more control over their schedule, yet they work harder, longer hours, this is self-exploitation and is known as the Flexibility Paradox. Working longer hours when flexi working or remote working is common, especially in higher income earners who are most commonly given the most control over their schedules. The flexibility paradox is a byproduct of the 'work devotion schema,' expectations around what it means to be a respected worker and industrious worker are influenced massively from the ideal worker culture where work has been positioned as the most important aspect of a worker's life (Chung, 2022).

The prevalence of flexible working in lower income roles (<£23,000 annual salary) will be assessed through reviewing the existing literature. Themes that will be explored in relation to the prevalence of flexible working will be gender and parental status, flexibility stigma, socio-economic status, disadvantages and benefits to overall well-being and finally ways to

overcome any identified challenges to increasing the usage of FW across disadvantaged socio-economic groups.

2. Is flexibility stigma gendered?

Flexible work arrangements had been becoming increasingly widespread since the beginning of the 21st century however due to the uncertainty and stigma surrounding them, these changes to where and when people chose to work were gradual and slow. Due to the first national lockdown in March 2020 every worker that was not deemed 'essential' were forced to work from home, something that most had not thought possible before then (Sulaymonov, 2020). Post-pandemic, restrictions have been lifted and life is getting increasingly back to pre-covid normalcy meaning all the 'non-essential' workers have been expected to go back into the workplace but is that what people want? A global study by Future Forum showed that 76% of all 10,569 respondents (knowledge workers who worked more than 30 hours per week) from the US, UK, Germany, Australia, Japan and France post-covid, wanted flexibility where they work and 93% wanted flexibility when they work (Future Forum, 2022). The demand for FWP's has inevitably grown over the past 2 years yet the issues preventing the usage of FWP's pre-covid such as flexibility stigma are still very much prevalent in the UK. Flexibility stigma relates to the negative perceptions that are directed towards people using FWP's and the negative outcomes experienced by those using FWP's. This stigma is specifically focused on people using or requesting FWP's in an attempt to make more time for caring responsibilities. The gender division of labour which although is much less prevalent in UK culture, is still there meaning that women are more likely to be expected to take care of the children and home while men are able and expected to comply to the ideal worker culture that is prevalent in the UK. The ideal worker culture can be traced back to the 17th century when the protestant work ethic (Max Weber, 1905) spread across the UK promoting the idea that commitment to 'God' was measured through one's commitment to their work. In contemporary society it is not so much important for religion to make work such an integral part of one's life, but it does affect how people view you in the workplace and it has a significant impact on one's sense of identity and self-worth (Williams et al, 2013). People are looked down upon somewhat when they work flexibly, ideas such as they are making more work for others, they are lazy and not committed are common and definitely

have a part to play in the gap between availability and use of FWP's. FWP's first became part of UK legislation in 2003 when it became every parent's right, who had a child under the age of 6 to request flexible work. It is now within any persons right regardless of parental status or gender to request FW. Yet, women workers are more likely to use them due to gendered roles and expectations, therefore flexibility stigma is argued to be gendered.

A study conducted by researcher Heejung Chung in 2020 aims to assess the prevalence of flexibility stigma in the UK and the negative experiences that flexible working causes for people. She argues that flexibility stigma is gendered and that it increases during parenthood. It is now common for mothers to stay at work after childbirth however up until the late 1900s unless childcare expenses were feasible, most mothers could not stay at work. Day to day responsibilities vary between people and are also influenced by a variety of factors, traditionally it has been the mother's responsibility to care for children and take care of household duties while men were expected to earn a wage to support the family. Due to the male breadwinner model being prominent in the UK for most of the 20th century women were unable to adhere to the ideal worker culture that is also prominent in British workplaces. Until the late 20th century, UK policies reflected the male breadwinner model as there were no policies or structures in place that supported mothers being able to remain in the workplace after childbirth. Changes in policy and legislation began to take place in the 1990s such as maternity leave, these reflected a demand for mothers to remain in the workplace (Ray et al, 2010). The British Social Attitudes survey showed in 2013 that 72% of women in the UK were in employment with 41% of them working part-time hours. This was compared to 80% of men working and 13% working part-time hours. The discrepancies between male and female part time hours suggests that although FWP's allow mothers to remain at work, the traditional gender division of labour is still prevalent making women more likely to have to work harder as along with part-time working, the majority of unpaid domestic and care work is also their responsibility. Flexible working arrangements were mainly introduced to allow mothers to remain in the labour market as flexible hours are needed to balance both work and care demands. However, despite the fact that both men and women workers now use flexible working arrangements for reasons other than childcare, the idea still prevails that flexible working is mainly for mothers. This is consistent with findings from the British Social Attitudes survey (2019) which showed 50% of women were working flexibly as of 2019 compared to 36% of men. The expectation for mothers to be the main care giver but also work is also a main driver of the gender pay gap.

Chung (2020) argues that different components of flexibility stigma are gendered and they may be influenced by parental status also. Chung's study focuses on two components of flexibility stigma, the first being poor worker stigma which is directed towards workers not adhering to the 'ideal worker culture.' It is predicted that men will be more likely to hold this stigma towards people using FWP's. This was assessed through asking respondents to state how much they agree with the statement "people who work flexibly create more work for others". Results showed that men were around 1.6 times more likely than women to agree with the statement. Men were also more likely than women to say that they had experienced negative outcomes in work due to their belief that flexible workers create more work for others. Rather than flexible workers being the cause of the increase in workload, it could be that preconditioned attitudes and beliefs that arise from the "work devotion schema" lead to predictions of workload increasing coming true as they in fact, alter their behaviour which confirms their expectations. This is as a self-fulfilling prophecy, the theory was developed by Robert K Merton who was a sociologist in the 1940s and can be used to discuss the psychological processes that may be behind discrimination (Glover, 2018). The perception of negative career consequences as a result of FWP's was assessed through asking respondents to state how much they agree with the statement "people who work flexibly are less likely to get promoted", it was predicted that gender and parental status would both affect the responses. Significantly more women agreed with this statement, especially mothers. Mothers were also more likely to have directly experienced lack of career progression due to flexibility stigma. This is consistent with evidence from other surveys for example the 'British Social Attitudes Survey (2019) showed that 3 in 10 people believed they had experienced or would experience negative career consequences due to working flexibly. The different forms of flexible work including part-time and flexitime are used for a variety of reasons. Part-time work is more likely to be taken up by mothers, part-time reduces hours which allows mothers to balance work with caring responsibilities. This may explain why mothers are more likely to experience flexibility stigma compared to men who take up FWP's such as flexitime and telecommuting, these forms of FW maintain the number of hours but give the worker more control over when and where they work. The results showed that although there are gender and parental status differences in the negative outcomes experienced by flexible workers, the type of flexible working arrangement and the purpose behind using it are more important indicators for who will experience negative outcomes. Women are more likely to face negative consequences due to the fact they are more likely to work part time hours for family purposes whereas FWP's such as telecommuting are more

commonly used by men for work purposes and therefore less likely to induce flexibility stigma. For many people part-time work will meet workers needs but for many others, the stigma associated with this form of working will have harmful effects on both work and personal life. Chung found that despite a descriptive analysis initially showing parental status to have a significant difference on perception of flexibility stigma, a multivariate analysis was conducted to control for other factors, and this showed no significant difference, the difference was linked more to gender. Parental status was however, found to have a significant difference on experiences of negative career outcomes but only between mothers and women without children. Although there did not seem to be any significant difference between fathers and non-fathers, this could be explained by the types of flexible work participants were using. It may be that the males in this study were using FWP's that maintain hours and are more in line with the ideal worker culture and therefore are less likely to be discriminated against.

3. The invisible and stigmatized father in the workplace

Most of the research looking at the experiences of flexibility stigma relating to gender and parental status differences has focused on women and mother's experiences, there is little looking at the issues men face in the workplace. Now more than ever, men are seeking out roles that will enable them to have a better work-life balance. The way workplaces are responding to these changes will affect fathers in different ways dependent on factors such as economic position, education and race (Ladge et al, 2015). The type of job a person has is a telling factor for whether flexibility stigma will affect them and in what way it will affect them, although gender plays a significant role on the perception and experience of flexibility stigma, it can be argued that class has more of an effect. For example, a high earning mother such as a doctor or lawyer will be less likely to experience flexibility stigma compared to a father working part time in a low-income role such as a factory worker, retail worker or labourer. A report conducted by the Trade Unions Congress in 2017 found that almost 3.2 million young mothers and fathers in the UK are employed and many are struggling to cope with balancing work-family commitments. Young parents in low-income roles especially are at high risk of worker exploitation. Sixty-three percent of young parents who work in low-income roles such as social care and retail had not been made informed by their employer of any employment rights such as parental leave. Young parents working in low-income roles are also more likely to experience negative outcomes from FWP's, 0-hour contracts are increasingly common in low-income roles especially with parents who feel they have no

other choice (JRF, 2021). With fathers gradually taking on more childcare and housework commitments, they are being faced with new challenges that have to be researched so that fathers can be supported in the workplace. 'Involved' fathering has increased massively since the mid-20th century when the male breadwinner model predominated the way in which the nuclear family functioned. Although, fathers are still most commonly expected to provide financially for their family, they are also expected to and wish to take on more child-care responsibilities. There is substantial evidence showing the many benefits that inevitably come from adopting flexible ways of working to make more time for family, work-life balance is improved meaning more time can be spent on family and hobbies which supports overall physical and mental health so it could be difficult to understand why research shows that very little fathers actually take advantage of FWP that are offered. Gendered norms and masculine identities that were formed through the male breadwinner model positions fathers in the workplace while mothers take care of the home and children (Thébaud & Pedulla, 2016). There are studies showing that men do not feel comfortable requesting to work flexibly and when they do use FWP they are not rewarded and are perceived as a 'poor worker' (Wayne and Cordeiro, 2003). A study by Rudman (2003) found that men who request family leave face femininity stigma, they are viewed by co-workers as having 'weak' and 'feminine' traits. A systematic literature review (Ewald et al, 2020) focussing on research in the area of fathers and FWP found that 97% of all articles included results that indicated the significant role that gendered norms have in the shaping of men and women's work practices. Ideas about what it means to be a man in UK work culture is heavily related to the work devotion schema so when men deviate from the expectations held of them in attempt to make more time for caring, they face discrimination and labelling, social isolation and lack of career progression. Ewald et al (2020) looked at 121 articles that were published between the years 2008 and 2019 and they were analysed, four recurring themes were identified. The first theme being gendered norms and ideals which continue to massively impact on so many aspects of both men and women's work lives. Failure of policy was also identified as a recurring theme; workplace policies reflect this long-standing presumption that men should be in the workplace and women should take care of the home and children. These beliefs mean that even when policies change to include all parents rather than only mothers, societies expectation of men in the workplace decreases the chances of them using FWP. However, the research also shows that many men are unaware of what policies mean for them and employers not directly informing them means many are unlikely to find out themselves. Eighty percent all of all articles showed evidence of the effect that workplace norms and

expectations have on FWP, often FWP are presented as a business case meaning that unless the worker is working flexibly for productivity reasons then he will face discrimination and negative work outcomes. Another recurring theme that was found in 54% of all articles was that of social class, FWP's are more available to higher status workers and men who have lower levels of education and are in lower status occupations don't have access to FW and even when they do, it's unlikely that it will allow them to meet their financial demands due to low income. The researchers observed that a recurring theme in all articles was that of the invisible father in the workplace, men are predominantly thought of as workers and responsible for financial needs and mothers are the ones who care for the children and therefore entitled to paternal leave. The fathers' role as a caregiver and worker has to be promoted in the workplace and by policy makers if FWP are to become more common for men and fathers.

4. Socially economic disadvantaged groups less likely to have access to or benefit from FWP

There is an abundance of research on FWP and how they can have both positive and negative effects on work-life balance, well-being and career progression. However, a sizeable percentage of this research focuses on the experiences of flexible working in middle/high income roles. There are significantly less studies looking at low-income earner's experiences of FWP. Economic status impacts nearly all aspects of a person's life so inevitably there will be significant differences in the experiences of FWP's across different occupations. Both middle/high earners and low-income earners face challenges related to work-life balance, volume of work and time off. However, these challenges will vary dependent on occupation and income for example, there is plenty of evidence showing the positive effects that FW has on productivity and creativity hence why Google is redefining their organisational model to implement flexibility (Shagvaliyeva, 2014; Choudhury et al, 2020). High income earners such as doctors and lawyers may struggle to switch off from work as developments in technology mean they can continue their work tasks at any time making it difficult to disconnect from work. Whereas low-income earner such as retail and hospitality workers face challenges such as working extremely long hours yet still struggling to make ends meet due to low wages or lack of FW. Research conducted by Family Friendly Working Scotland (2017) focused on Scottish households that were in the lowest 40% of incomes, the study found that these workers had significantly less access to genuine FWP. This research involves both qualitative and quantitative data from a survey, interviews and focus groups with low

earning parents. The study showed that parents were more likely to call in sick rather than say their child was sick, they also relied more on their colleagues than their employer to meet their childcare demands. This not only demonstrates the discrimination that parents face due to their childcare responsibilities, but it also shows that there is a real problem with the way employers specifically treat their employees and the kind of work culture they foster. Of course, since this report was conducted there have been several large-scale changes to the economy in Scotland including the covid-19 pandemic which required half the working population to work from home and also, legislation was introduced making it compulsory for FWP to be available to every worker. Despite all of these changes, in-work poverty is still increasing and many workers do not yet feel they can request FWP without facing discrimination. Research conducted by The Collective working with One Parent Families Scotland (2021) included both quantitative data from a survey with 40 parents and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with 26 single parents. Data produced from the interviews and focus groups showed that people felt the labour market was not designed in a way that supported single parents and parents felt they would face discrimination when requesting time off for childcare responsibilities (JRF, 2021). Low-income earners are more susceptible to being exploited by their employer for example last minute shift changes are the norm for these workers. The Trade Unions Congress report found that in the past year 19% of young parents had been given a rota with less than one week's notice. Things like this drive in-work poverty and are detrimental to people's quality of life.

There is a lack of research specifically focusing on the differences in experiences of FW across different income groups and occupations, due to this Kossek et al (2020) aimed to systematically review existing literature on FW and identify any themes relating to occupational differences. This is one of the first literature reviews specifically focusing on workplace implications across occupations. Overall, the literature showed that both work-life balance and work outcomes as a result of FW vary across occupations, it was also found that distinct types of FWP such as part-time, flexitime and telecommuting are experienced differently depending on level of work status. For example, part-time work is found to provide both upper-level workers and their organisation with a variety of benefits. Part-time work offered to upper class workers is usually a way for employers to retain highly skilled workers, reduced hours give them a little more control over their schedules. Despite the positive effects that part-time work can have on upper- and middle-class groups, part-time workers in the lower workforce face many challenges. Often, part-time work is involuntary

for the part-time worker, many need full-time hours to meet their financial demands. Flexitime which gives workers control over when they start and end their workday is rarely available to lower income workers which means many are unable to work the required hours needed to meet their financial demands. Care-demands and other commitments mean many people are unable to work standard hours and due to this, employers are inevitably losing out on a substantial proportion of the potential workforce.

5. Impacts of the workplace and the availability of FW on overall well-being

The personal significance that a job has on a person varies, some occupations require years of studying and experience whereas others are simply a temporary means of income to make ends meet. Some occupations are based on passion and motivation, others are the cause of many struggles in life. No matter how a person feels about what they do, work inevitably has a significant impact on many distinct parts of one's life. Where we work, how we work and who we work with are all factors that have a significant impact on the type of life we lead and our overall well-being. Different jobs will affect people differently and unsurprisingly mental health is affected by occupation across classes, gender and ages. However, due to the many struggles that come with low-income occupations including failing to make ends meet and work-family conflict it is no surprise that there seems to be a causal relationship between low socio-economic status and prevalence of mental health disorders. The link between socioeconomic status and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety has been studied for decades by psychologists and sociologists interested in the impact society has on health. Studies have shown the relationship between the prevalence of mental health conditions and suicide attempts and low levels of household income (Sareen et al, 2011; Applebaum et al, 2003). Research done by Money and Mental Health found that in England over 1.5 million people that are experiencing money problems are also struggling with their mental well-being, which is nearly half (46%) of all people who are in debt. Ridley and colleagues (2020) were interested in the mechanisms that drive the relationship between poverty and mental illness. Their research identified a range of mechanisms that drive this causal relationship: Productivity, labour supply, economic decision making, women empowerment and childhood development can determine whether a person lives in poverty or not and poverty then impacts stress levels, violence and crime, physical health and social status. All these mechanisms together determine the likelihood of a person developing mental health disorders.

Although income is an important factor which is linked to overall mental and physical well-being, there are many other aspects of a job that can have either positive or negative effects on overall well-being. For example, the relationship between jobs that typically cause elevated levels of stress such as white-collar occupations and cardiovascular disease (CVD) has been a research focus for decades, again showing the impact that the principles expected as part of the work devotion schema has on the worker. Working can lead to both positive and negative health outcomes though, people living comfortably above the poverty threshold are more able to afford private health care, education and healthier food while people living under the poverty threshold are more likely to engage in health risk behaviours such as smoking, physical inactivity, excessive drinking, failure to attend health check-ups, and poor diet (Fukuda et al, 2005). A review by Clougherty et al (2010) focused on the impact that work has on a variety of health problems particularly focusing on cardiovascular disease. Findings from the study supported the previously mentioned link between white collar jobs and CVD, they also looked at CVD in jobs that required psychical work such as labourers, any causal relationship between work and CVD was not as clear however a link between these jobs and both physical injury and depression was found.

With the demand for flexible working practices increasing in an attempt to improve work-life balance, decrease work-family conflict and have more control over day to day working lives, it would be justifiable to question the positive impacts that FW can have on well-being. The literature has shown that flexible working can have both positive and negative impacts on many aspects of work and personal life. However, flexible working is an umbrella term for a variety of different types of flexible work, these have been considered and show to have different effects on outcomes. Type of FWP, gender, income and social status all impact the potential benefits and disadvantages that FW can provide. A study by (Chandola et al, 2019) specifically interested in flexible working and stress aimed to investigate the potential relationship between the two, it was predicted that lower levels of chronic stress-related biomarkers would be associated with FWP. Data for this was obtained from the Understanding Society longitudinal household study (UKHLS), waves 2 and 3 of the study were used which took place between the years 2010-2012. 54,597 participants were interviewed by an experienced interviewer, the interview covered a range of themes including education, work, income and health. Participants were asked during the questionnaire if reduced hours such as part-time, job-share and term-time, variable hours such as flexitime and compressed hours and other FWP including remote working were available to them. Of

the respondents only 6025 were able to take part in the 5-month nurse follow up check due to exclusion criteria and missing data. Results showed that women were more likely to use reduced hours such as part-time, this supports previous research and is most likely due to gendered roles. The follow up nurse assessment collected psychological data including allostatic load and blood samples. Allostatic load is defined as “the cost of chronic exposure to elevated or fluctuating endocrine or neural responses resulting from chronic or repeated challenges that the individual experiences as stressful” (Kudielka & Kirschbaum, 2001). Allostatic load is measured through biomarkers that are known to be involved in allostatic load such as the neuroendocrine, cardiovascular, immune and metabolic systems (Mauss et al, 2014). A limitation of using allostatic load to measure stress is that it was only recorded once, it would have been more insightful were allostatic load biomarkers taken at a further follow up assessment. 11 biomarkers involved in this study were 11 blood-based biomarkers and pulse rate, blood pressure and waist-to-height ratio. Covariates including gender, age, parental status, smoking status, income, illness and race that could also explain any results that came from the nurse assessment were controlled for. The researchers controlled for them by ensuring participants were put into groups dependent on these factors for example, people of different ethnicity were grouped into White-British or non-White British. The results showed that in terms of the types of flexible working practices available, part-time hours were more common in underprivileged groups and FWP that give the employee more control over where and when they work such as flexitime and remote working are more available in higher socioeconomic groups. This finding supports previous research and is most likely a result of different stigmas surrounding how people of different socio-economic status are expected to work, it is also likely that employers of high earning workers wish to retain skilled workers and the business case for flexible working is likely a considerable influence also. Allostatic load was lower in workers that made use of reduced hours arrangements suggesting that the availability of part-time hours would lead to improved health. There were no significant findings between flexitime and allostatic load. It was found that other factors influencing allostatic load including smoking status, low income and illness had more of an impact. Both men and women who were smokers, had poor health, were physically inactive and/or had low incomes had higher levels of allostatic load. However, all of these factors have been found in previous studies to be improved by quality of job. An interaction between childcare responsibilities and number of hours worked was found to be a significant predictor of allostatic load and due to majority of mothers being the main carer men were not included in this analysis. Mothers who worked more than 37 hours a week had higher levels of

allostatic load than non-mothers who worked more than 37 hours a week. It was also found that women that had no reduced hours available to them had higher levels of allostatic load. Surprisingly, allostatic load was higher in both men who had no availability of reduced hours or flexitime and men who in fact used these practices which demonstrates further the negative and positive outcomes that come from both, using FWP and having no access to them.

Across the literature, all distinct aspects of a person's working life are found to have significant effects on health and health risk behaviours, physical health and mental health yet few studies focus specifically on how flexible working practices contribute to these effects. The studies mentioned previously have not been replicated either, this may be due to the fact they are relatively novel studies and therefore have not yet had the chance to be replicated. Further research should focus on the different types of flexible working and how availability of them can improve over-all well-being and also, the replication of previous research to validate findings.

Conclusion

Due to technological advances, it is now possible for workers to connect via phones and computers and work for many occupations, most commonly higher income groups including the tech industry, lawyers and doctors does not have to be done at set times or in a specific place. Work can be completed from anywhere and many organisations have found that this improves productivity and creativity. Therefore, managers use this as a way to micromanage their employees and although many benefits come from flexible work, when used for business reasons the benefits to the employer such as better work-life balance and decreased stress do not apply. On the other end of the spectrum, low-income workers such as factory workers, retail, laborers, and support workers are more susceptible to in-work poverty and lack of genuine FWP's seems to be one driver of this. Throughout the literature, themes including gender and class were found to be main influences on the types of FW that were offered to people and the benefits or disadvantages they brought.

It is clear that many employers in the UK must make changes to the way they manage and treat their employees. Promoting gender equality and ending the normalisation of gendered roles is a crucial step that should be taken to make workplace cultures a place that encourages the widespread usage of flexible working arrangements. Making FWP's more attainable to both men and women and encouraging the uptake of them for family purposes will aid in this. People who work flexibly are also more likely to work even harder to meet work

commitments and unpaid labour such as caring for the young and/or elderly which are more traditionally the female's role. This fact is also a main driver for the gender pay gap as female's unpaid care work leads them to having less time to work more hours. Change in perception towards FWP's would be more likely to take place if employers made it a priority to inform employees of the business case for flexible working arrangements. It is also imperative that employers inform employees of their rights including parental leave and availability of FWP's so that workers can make informed choices about how work can best suit their circumstances. The role of the 'father' has to be realised in workplaces as out of date masculinity norms and expectations mean that the modern father is stigmatised for being available for childcare demands. The organisation of workplaces took place when the male breadwinner model was predominant, this means they were organised in extremely gendered ways. Contemporary work cultures enable gender inequality to continue. Encouraging men to use FWP's for childcare purposes will aid in tackling flexibility stigma.

Of all the themes that were identified throughout the literature, income was the biggest predictor for who has access to what FWP and who benefits from them. Although recent changes in legislation mean that every employee has the right to request FW, it does not mean the employer will grant it. There also seems to be a lack of low-income earners being aware of their worker rights, awareness of rights should be made a priority in workplaces as people should be making their decisions based on all the information. The types of flexible working that people have access to was heavily dependent on occupation. Different types of FW seemed to indicate different things to people, for example flexitime and telecommuting which are more common among high earners indicate they are dedicated, highly skilled and industrious workers. Part-time hours which are more prevalent in low-income groups seem to indicate the opposite including making more work for others, however this is also linked to gendered norms and expectations where women are more likely to work part time due to childcare.

So many people are unable to remain in or enter the labour market due to a lack of genuine FWP, organisations must change the way they manage their employees so that both, mothers and fathers can remain in employment and not be exploited through the negative aspects of 0-hour contracts and temporary work. Another main influence on low-income workers accessing or using FWP is that part-time work, which is the most commonly offered FWP in low-income jobs, prevents them from earning an adequate wage. Part-time hours may enable workers to balance work and family responsibilities but having a wage that allows them to

achieve the basic standard of living is equally as important, this prevents people from working part-time as low wages mean they need to work full-time to make ends meet. Low-income earners must be made aware of their right to request genuine FWP that may suit them better and still allow them to earn an adequate wage such as having more control of when they work or where they work. The nurturing of gender inequality and the 'work devotion schema' in UK work cultures must be addressed, even if workers are aware of their rights many people do not feel they can work flexibly due to the stigmatisation and negative career outcomes associated with them.

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