

# Mothers at Home Matter

AGM and Conference November 2021

*“I felt I was sold a lie that I could have it all as I was educated, strong and independent and that was hard to come to terms with. After my last child I thought, what a load of rubbish, I am not doing this. I wish I had been able to do this with my first two.”*

**Your Voice - the focus group response**

Maria Lyons and Joan Walsh

## Background and aims

- 6 focus groups via Zoom
- Half participants members/half non members
- Mix of SAH/working part-time and full-time mothers
- Predominately all mothers of pre-school and school age children
- 22 participants took part
- Wanted to get a better idea of people's actual experiences and views
- Hope the findings will feed into MAHM campaigning and support work going forward

## Overview: six questions

- **What factors have influenced your decisions around childcare?**
- **What are the main obstacles to being a stay-at-home mum?**
- **What has enabled you to be a stay-at-home-mum?**
- **The impact of “lockdowns” and school closures**
- **Does MAHM represent your views and/or reflect your experiences?**
- **What difference can MAHM make and what should it prioritise going forward?**
- Collected an amazing amount of material!
- Passionate, interesting and insightful contributions reflecting a range of personal experiences and circumstances
- Summary of findings in latest MAHM newsletter (Autumn 2021)
- Detailed report with all the responses will soon be available on the website
- Today we will cover Obstacles and Enablers only, to give us time for discussion

# Main obstacles to being a SAHM?

Participants mentioned **financial** and **practical** obstacles as well as **socio-cultural**, **psychological** and **emotional** obstacles. Five key themes emerged from the discussion.

## 1. The lack of value placed by society on motherhood and childrearing

*“Society doesn’t value unpaid work. Expectations of my friends is that they want to have a career.”*

*“ Society makes you doubt your choice, question everything.”*

*“It’s sad that childcare is more often talked of in terms of a burden rather than in terms of what it gives to us, what it is worth. The media bear much responsibility for this.”*

*“Society has you constantly having to justify why you don’t work. Women are expected to do everything and that got worse during lockdown.”*

## 2. Difficulties of returning to work after a career break

*“Take a long time off (work) and you are written off. I am lucky to have professional qualifications that I can go back to.”*

*“I’m an NHS nurse and going back is hard, I would have to retrain, wouldn’t feel confident doing that.”*

*“I’m resigned to the fact that I won’t be able to go back to what I did.”*

## Main obstacles to being a SAHM?

### **3. Lack of support networks and/or family and social pressure to return to work**

*“Family members start asking “what’s your plan now?” and I wanted to tell them I still need to be a mum! I’m nervous now my child is starting school that I will get asked that more and more.”*

*“There’s a sense of derision. The positive outcomes for children, mental health, wellbeing etc., are not recognised...The only mantra politically is mothers back to work.”*

*It can be isolating being a mum at home. There are lots of childminders and nannies, not so many SAHMs.”*

### **4. Feminist perspective which promotes work over choice**

*“Modern feminism seems to still want to put an economic value on motherhood. Where are we going here? We are still caught up in numbers. There has to be political movements that value people. Staying at home is a radical choice nowadays, raising a child the way you want to. It feels radical.”*

*“There is a problem with the narrative, with a lot of thinking about choice in feminism. Staying at home is equally a valid choice. Feminism needs to be about choice.”*

*“Many other mums have said to me they wish they could have done as we have but didn’t feel it was an option.”*

# Main obstacles to being a SAHM?

## 5. Finance and financial vulnerability

*“I would love to stay at home, not have to use nurseries, but I’m not in a financial position being the main breadwinner for my family”*

*“It is a privilege to stay at home, but you put yourself in a vulnerable position financially e.g., pension, relationship breaking down, you are putting yourself in a precarious position. A number of people go back to work because of this. Staying at home makes you vulnerable in the long term.”*

*“Money, end of the day you need a house, food, not everyone has that choice. Also some people don’t want to. What does society say if you don’t earn money?”*

*“Financially London life is expensive, I am lucky that I don’t have to worry too much about this, I know a lot of people who can’t afford to take the risk.”*

## What has enabled you to be at home?

Clearly, many responses were the opposite of above, e.g. **financial security, adequate support networks** and the **option to return to work**.

Two further responses were:

- **Having a supportive partner**

Suggesting perhaps that the attitudes and values of our nearest and dearest play as (more?) crucial a role in women's decisions about childcare as other factors such as finance and wider social norms?

- **Conscious, long-term financial planning**

Relating to the question of what "sacrifices" people are and are not prepared to make to raise their own children, a topic that was raised a number of times.

*"We made decisions, I won't necessarily call them sacrifices. Bought a smaller house, planned for a single income, won't go abroad every year, we had time to forward plan."*

*"We have gone without because of the choice we made...We go camping instead of holidays abroad. We juggle to make it work."*

# Over to you

- Do these responses and the topics raised resonate?
- Next steps: how could we follow up on this project and what could be done with this wealth of material?
- Questions, comments welcome!