

## Gender, ethnicity and class inequalities in Covid-19 work lives

**Supervisors:** [Dr Charles Barthold](#) and [Dr Cinzia Priola](#), Department for People and Organizations, The Open University Business School

### **Project description:**

This project focuses on the work and social inequalities laid bare by Coronavirus. In particular, we are seeking research proposals for studies that will contribute to a better understanding of how the intersection between ethnicity, class and gender has affected work lives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Research has shown that working class women of colour are more likely to experience workplace discrimination (e.g. Acker, 2006, 2012; see also Holvino, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989) and are more likely to be employed in precarious, unsafe work (e.g. Vosko et al., 2009; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Dyer et al., 2010; Mooney et al., 2017). In the UK of the 3,200,000 workers in 'high risk' roles during the Covid-19 emergency, 77 percent are women and almost a third of them are in low paid jobs (wbg, 2020).

There is no question that the economic effects of coronavirus will be felt for many years following the pandemic. Furthermore, it clearly emerged from the beginning of the health crisis that those populations subject to socio-economic and ethnic inequalities were the most affected by the virus. While women are less likely to die from COVID-19, research has reported that women and ethnic minorities have experienced disproportionately more negative effects during the coronavirus pandemic. For example, in the US African Americans are more likely to die from Covid-19 (Pilkington, 2020) and in England, ethnic minorities are dying from Covid-19 in disproportionately high numbers compared with white people (Barr et al., 2020). While there have been speculations that possible health reasons may explain such case (e.g. lack of vitamin D), this remain unfounded to this date. There is evidence, however, that ethnic minorities in most western countries experience work inequalities in terms of a lower access to remote working and a higher exposure to occupational risks (Laurencin and McClinton, 2020; Meer et al., 2020).

The pandemic has brought to the fore the social and economic importance of work carried out in the health and social care sectors as well as in sectors such as logistics and food retails. This work has been identified as 'key work', still it is precarious, low paid, and often carried out by working class women and men of colour. The work undertaken by women in the health and social care sectors, in particular, has been at the fore front of news and media debates in view of its reduced safety provision (including personal protection equipment). While during the 2008 financial crisis and recession, women lost a higher proportion of jobs than men (see Abramovitz, 2012, who refers to The Feminization of Austerity, during the 2008-2011 recession), the 2020 pandemic has shown that among the sectors that remained economically active during the lockdown, such as health and social care sectors, food retail sector and education to a certain extent, are often female dominated sectors. These sectors are also less

susceptible to being performed remotely. For example, in the US 28 percent of male workers but only 22 percent of female workers are employed in highly telecommutable work occupations' (Alon et al., 2020: 9). In the UK, not only most front-line workers are women (Norman, 2020), but also a higher proportion of them have caring responsibilities (e.g. home-schooling their children, caring and shopping for elderly family members), therefore bearing the brunt of the crisis.

When we intersect gender with ethnicity, statistics show that a high proportion of women of colour are employed in the health sector and have been suffering from COVID-19 more than white women. The intersections of gender, ethnicity and social class makes working class women of colour the most vulnerable group, not only to suffer the health effects of COVID but also to suffer the likely effects of the economic recession, when many jobs will be lost following the lockdown.

The coronavirus crisis has highlighted the need to better understand the effects of the pandemic in the lives of working class women of colour, in particular we are interested in projects that explore the role of discrimination in work for BAME women and the consequences that discrimination has on the health as well as wealth of these women, during and after the coronavirus pandemic. We would also welcome projects that focus on the interplay between work, identity and COVID-19, within specific front-line work.

Methodologically, we are interested in receiving research proposals that focus on qualitative projects such as ethnographic or interview-based studies with BAME women and men in front-line sectors. This could be complemented by document analysis and/or media analysis.

### **About the supervisors:**

Dr Charles Barthold has substantial experience in terms of researching power relations, and inequalities in neoliberal work organizations. This includes gender, intersectionality, race and precarious work. He has also relevant supervision experience in the areas of intersectionality and organizational studies.

Dr Cinzia Priola has a wide experience of teaching and researching in the area of work and social inclusion, diversity and intersectionality and gender and sexuality in organisations. She has published widely in these areas and has supervised several PhD projects focusing on equality, inclusion and diversity.

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