

‘I spend my whole life worrying’: The experiences of student mothers working in the Early Childhood Sector

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Abstract

This study was designed to explore the experiences of student-mothers in higher education, with participants drawn from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes within the discipline of Education and Childhood at a UK University. The study used a mixed open- and closed-question questionnaire and semi-structured follow-on interviews to capture students’ reflections on their experiences. Responses were considered in light of feminist perspectives, specifically the concerns raised by recent campaigns (Pregnant Then Screwed, 2015) regarding the social and economic pressures on women with young children. The research discovered that many student mothers are balancing the demands of academic work with childcare, financial pressures, and household responsibilities, often with limited or negligible support. The current cost of living crisis has further exacerbated problems, with students often working in poorly paid early childhood roles, whilst paying a premium to have their own children cared for when they attend lectures. We conclude that higher education institutions could improve student experience, retention and outcomes by recognising and responding to the additional and specific needs of this group.

Keywords: Higher Education, Motherhood, identity, time, support.

Introduction

The Million Plus Group (2022) an association of universities, recognises that the 44,000 mature students currently enrolled in UK universities are amongst those most in danger of dropping out, yet there appears to have been little appetite to investigate reasoning or initiate change. Some 56.6% of students at UK universities are female (The Higher Education Policy Institute, 2020) with women now dominating areas allied to medicine, veterinary science, and education (HESA, 2021). The institution used for this study has approximately 34,000 students on roll. Of the 2,049 students currently enrolled on Education or Childhood related programmes, 75.7% are female. In programmes where the focus is specifically on younger children, the proportion rises. For instance, 88.6% of those undertaking a BEd in Primary Education are female, as are 95.8% of those completing a degree in Early Childhood Studies. Programme-level records demonstrate that in recent years between 11-16% of students on Childhood related programmes are mature women with children. However, College and University-wide data records only those who become pregnant during their degree, not those who enter Higher Education with childcare responsibilities (HESA 2018). Student mothers are therefore a largely unrecognised and, subsequently, generally unsupported group (Owen & Simmons, 2023).

When viewed more broadly, the experience of student mothers is framed by the cultural contradictions (Hays, 1996) of modern motherhood and prevailing attitudes towards “women’s work”. The current cultural and sociopolitical context has created a paradoxical position. On the one hand, women are expected to embrace the ideology of “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Lynch, 2008) – a gendered model which anticipates mothers will give freely of themselves to maximise their child’s developmental potential (Simmons & Barnes, 2023). On the other, they are expected to utilise their abilities and talents, contributing to the workforce and the household income (Lamar & Forbes, 2020). The view of modern, Western mothers is thus dichotomised and conflictual, retaining the dominant self-sacrificing parenting ideologies of previous generations, overlaid with competing ideologies of individual expression and economic independence. As a result, many Education and Childhood student-mothers find themselves both working in and using a childcare system which is expensive, yet poorly paid, and endeavouring to be both a ‘perfect mother’ and a conscientious student.

This study considers UK Government policy, economics, motherhood, and childcare through a feminist lens to reconceptualise the experience of student-mothers and explain how failure to heed the needs and contribution of mothers at home, in work, and in higher education, when combined with the current crisis in childcare, has created a perfect storm.

Methodology:

Following receipt of ethical approval (ETH2021-2669 – University of Derby), purposive sampling was used to draw participants from amongst the 160 students registered on Childhood related programmes (both under-graduate and post-graduate level) at a University in the East Midlands of the UK.

A questionnaire including a mixture of open- and closed-questions was created using Microsoft Forms, and all student-mothers who had expressed an interest in the research (n = 11) had the link emailed to their student email account. This safeguarded anonymity and confidentiality.

The table below outlines the Programme and Stage of study of the questionnaire participants:

Programme of Study	Number of participants	Stage in Programme	Number of participants
BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies	6	Year 1	2
		Year 2	2
		Year 3	2
MA Education (Early Childhood Pathway)	3	Current Postgraduate Student	3

MA Childhood	2	Alumni (having graduated within the last 12 months)	2
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Table 1: Questionnaire Participant Programme and Stage of Study

Semi-structured interviews (n=5) were also conducted with questionnaire participants who identified themselves as willing to be interviewed. The interviews followed the University of Derby’s ethical guidelines throughout. The table below outlines the Programme and Stage of study of the interview participants:

Programme of Study	Number of participants	Stage in Programme	Number of participants
BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies	2	Year 1	0
		Year 2	0
		Year 3	2
MA Education (Early Childhood Pathway)	2	Current Postgraduate Student	2
MA Childhood	1	Alumni (having graduated within the last 12 months)	1

Table 2: Interview Participant Programme and Stage of Study

Participants were invited to reflect on their own experience of being a university student to comment on any challenges they have experienced and any supportive or positive aspects they wished to highlight. Questions for both the questionnaire and interviews included:

What would you say are the most challenging aspects of being a student and a mother?

What would you say are the most rewarding aspects of being a student and a mother?

Please describe your usual routine on days when you have lectures.

How have you been supported to undertake your degree as a student mother?

Please provide any suggestions for how the programme team or wider university could improve your experience.

It was made clear that the researchers were not able to resolve issues but were attempting to understand experiences and explore perceptions. The researchers did,

however, provide information regarding support agencies within the university where students were registered if required.

Qualitative data from both the questionnaires and follow up interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, adhering to the guidelines laid down by Braun and Clarke (2022) and by Nowell et al (2017). Whilst it is acknowledged that within this research, “empirical generalisation” (Gillham 2008, p. 20) cannot be claimed; the sample framework, rationale and key characteristics of participants help to provide “theoretical generalization” (Gillham, 2008, p. 20), whereby results can often be applied to other individuals in similar context.

The approach to the sample, methodology and thematic analysis can help to illuminate “pertinent issues and factors” (Gray, 2014, p. 185), which can be considered for future support of student mothers.

Results and Discussion

As previously noted, universities generally do not acknowledge student-mothers as a distinct group with characteristics that may disadvantage them in comparison to other students. However, it was immediately apparent that all the women in our sample were balancing their academic studies with a variety of other demands. Not only did they have responsibility for children, but many had also retained full responsibility for the household and were in full- or part-time paid employment. Betty Friedan (1981) famously spoke of the need for mothers to be “Superwoman” as they are “doubly enslaved” (Friedan, 1981), but our findings suggest that student-mothers are often undertaking far more than that, with three or four separate roles.

The following sections consider women’s positions in each role separately before looking at the cumulative impact and suggesting how universities can better support student-mothers.

Cultural Contradictions

(i) *The Home*

Berger & Kellner’s (1964) classic study of roles within a marriage or intimate partnership, suggested they are socially constructed and in a constant state of flux. Partners must renegotiate their roles in response to changing circumstances, meaning volatility in relationships is more common when a major change occurs in the family’s life and circumstances. Changing from being simply partners, to being parents, challenges the status quo, and reduces relationship satisfaction (Margolis & Myrskylä, 2015). Similarly, a mother’s move into Higher Education creates a degree of instability within the relationship and household.

My partner’s having to work longer hours [to compensate for the student’s lost earnings]. So, we’re both constantly tired and falling out. (Student Mother Interview).

Although traditional notions of women as housewives have been progressively eroded, women still complete most domestic chores (World Economic Forum, 2019). In part

this is attributable to cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity which uphold gender inequalities and confer greater status upon men throughout the lifespan (Kincaid, 2022). When men control a greater share of resources, “women’s ability to counter male coercion may be particularly limited” (Lawson, Alami & Somefun, 2023, p1). Therefore, those who reduce their financial contribution to the household to attend university are inclined to retain or increase their share of household responsibilities in order to maintain harmonious relationships.

[I’m] juggling everyone’s needs and often feeling like a ‘one man show’ both emotionally and physically. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

He goes to work, and I do everything else. (Student Mother Interview)

Despite many social changes, women are still regarded as primarily responsible for the children and expected to sacrifice their own needs for the good of the family (Ennis, 2014), giving themselves over both physically and emotionally to their children (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017). As the cultural context of parenting has intensified within the last generation (Craig et al, 2014; Wall, 2010) demands upon parents, and particularly mothers have increased, creating an additional layer of pressure (Simmons, 2020).

This was particularly true during the COVID-19 Pandemic, with participants sharing the following reflections within the theme ‘studying in a pandemic’:

I had to juggle my degree and 4 children at home. It was such hard work. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

Balancing being a mom, referee, home teacher and a student was near impossible at times. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

My carefully organised timetable went completely to pot. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

Thus, despite a general perception that women entering higher education will be emotionally, financially, and practically supported by their partners, responsibility for the home and family has remained gendered (Valiquette et al., 2019). Within our sample, all those student-mothers who alluded to the distribution of household labour, stated they had maintained their previous domestic and childcare responsibilities.

(ii) Motherhood and University

Modern, individualist cultures such as that of the UK propose that personal and economic success are predicated on an individual’s drive and commitment. Subsequently, for mothers, the pervasive belief that “‘you can do anything’ means ‘you can do everything’” (Beaupre Gillespie & Schwartz Temple, 2011, p. 4). As has been demonstrated, women enter university under pressure to maintain levels of care for home and family, but with an allied social expectation that the conflicting demands of academic study should prove manageable with appropriate organisation.

However, as Von Benzon (2021, p. 481) notes, the extent of care children require means mothers are necessarily “chronically ‘time poor’”, even before the demands of academic workload are added. Where no dispensations or amendments are afforded to student mothers by the university, they find themselves in a position of disadvantage when compared to students without caring responsibilities.

Within the theme ‘Challenges and Rewards’ that emerged from student mother reflections, the following challenges were identified:

Sub-Theme 1: Challenges: *Time, time management, guilt, daily structure, balance, juggling, concentrating.*

Amongst our participants, ‘time’ proved to be a dominant theme, with 64% (n=7) of the questionnaire participants citing ‘time’ and ‘time management’ as the most challenging aspect of being a student and a mother.

Time management and having enough time to get into the right headspace, it [studying] has never been something I can jump into for half an hour or an hour. (Student Mother Questionnaire).

Making the time to spend quality time on the children and study and a lack of time for my own personal and social life. (Student Mother Questionnaire).

Participants reflected that attempts to juggle the competing pressures of home, children, and academia were a major source of stress. Allied to this was a ubiquitous sense of guilt at their inability to balance or fully meet these demands. Participants reported feeling guilty about “neglecting” their children or the house when they studied, and guilty about their lack of academic engagement when they were concentrating on home and family.

It’s a lot. Sometimes I spend the whole day in tears. (Student Mother Interview)

Research suggests such inability to manage competing demands is experienced as being out of control, not coping, or as not being ‘good enough’ and is detrimental to maternal mental health (Currie, 2008).

I tend to try to be too perfect sometimes and over-analyse everything that I’ve done. At some point there’s got to be a switch off then you think ‘no, no, that’s it, I’ve done what I can now.’ (Student Mother Interview).

(iii) Paid employment and financial pressures

The “cultural contradictions” Hays (1996) spoke of have arguably intensified over the last decade with the rise of two competing ideologies - “new Momism” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004) and the growth of neoliberal sociopolitical and economic structures. From a personal financial perspective, the move into motherhood necessitates a decision – to either become economically dependent on the State or another person (usually male) or attempt to combine motherhood with paid employment (Finch & Groves, 2022).

Programme level records indicate that approximately 48% of mature students undertaking Early Childhood Studies degrees are additionally employed in early

childhood settings. Despite huge childcare costs, those who are working within the sector are often earning appreciably less than the national average. Childcare workers with less than four years of experience will earn just over £8/hour, or £20,049 a year for those in a full-time post (payscale.com, 2022).

The early childhood sector is female dominated, and widely regarded as being caring, vocational and low-skilled with little recognition of the transformative impact engendered by early education with skilled specialists. In some respects, this is unsurprising. Women's work has historically been poorly paid. As Ferber and Nelson noted in their seminal text (2003, preface),

“the topics, assumptions, and methods of contemporary mainstream economics reflect distinctly masculine concerns... [giving] market relations pride of place over family and social relations.”

Whilst the wage penalty generally attenuates with age (Khan, Garcia-Mangano & Bianchi, 2014) and has seen a gradual reduction for professionals and those in highly paid roles, younger, low-paid women continue to experience a substantial wage-penalty in comparison to men (Glauber, 2018).

Financial pressures were thus cited by student mothers as another challenge; although, this pressure was lessened for those that lived with a partner.

My partner does the majority of the work and money making for the family therefore, he works 6 days a week. (Student Mother Questionnaire).

I spend my whole life worrying. I worry about the children, my parents, my husband's job security, money, and the state of the world. (Student Mother Interview)

For lone parents, the financial costs of raising a child to age 18 are £200,000, compared to £160,000 for a couple (Child Poverty Action Group, 2022). Coupled with the emotional labour and time management pressures, financial pressures pose enormous challenges for student mothers who do not have the support of a partner.

Along with the financial costs of being a student, childcare costs place substantial financial pressures on student mothers, with Child Poverty Action Group identifying childcare as a key factor affecting family costs and incomes:

‘The persistent rise in childcare costs over the past decade means that childcare comprises of around 60 per cent of the lifetime cost of a child for a couple working full time, compared to 40 per cent in 2012’. (Child Poverty Action Group, 2022, p. 4).

Barriers to success for student-mothers

(i) The Childcare System

Research has also shown that the accessibility of public childcare is a crucial factor in terms of women remaining in work and subsequently reducing the wage penalty. However, over the course of the last decade, the UK has seen drastic cuts in public expenditure, and an ideological and real terms shift towards voluntary and informal care arrangements.

These pressures have been highlighted recently through the Pregnant then Screwed (2015) campaign which has drawn attention to employment discrimination that women face when they have children, and the impact that this has on a:

'woman's confidence, her mental health and her earning potential and it is a direct contributor to the gender pay gap' (Pregnant Then Screwed, 2024).

Their work also highlights the compounded pressures that women face as they seek to return to their careers, only to find that they are:

'reliant on one of the world's most expensive, dysfunctional childcare systems and a lack of access to good quality flexible working' (Pregnant Then Screwed, 2024).

Recent years have also seen an exponential rise in the cost of fuel, food, and childcare, with Britain currently experiencing a cost-of-living crisis. The additional pressure of childcare costs has been highlighted recently with the Coram Family and Childcare Survey (Coleman, Shorto and Ben-Galim, 2022, p. 12) stating that

'the average price of 50 hours of care a week for a child aged under two in nursery is £269.86 across Great Britain, or £14,030 a year'.

When this is compared to the UK's average yearly income (£23,583.48), it is apparent that parents with an average income are currently spending 47.65% of their earnings on full-time childcare (Haqqi, 2022). Such findings and subsequent concerns have led to the Education Committee (UK Parliament. Committees, 2022) launching an enquiry into childcare affordability and early years education.

The NCFE (2022, pp. 27-28) explored the experiences of early years educators in their review of qualifications and reported that the main challenges the sector currently faces are:

- Poor pay
- Burnout/workload
- Difficulty recruiting staff.
- Respect and value

Participants with young children who were also working in early education reported they were thus losing out in both directions – paying a premium to place their children in a suitable Early Years setting whilst they attended lectures, but being inadequately remunerated for the work they did within the sector.

It's hard work and honestly hardly worth it for the pay. (Student Mother Interview)

For participants, gaining a degree is seen as a means to address some of these issues, opening up opportunities, providing a more financially secure future for their children, and improving their own feelings of self-worth (Owen & Simmons, 2023). Mothers within the research study articulated a desire to secure a better long term financial position.

I'm tired of putting my life on hold, working so hard and being paid next to nothing (Student Mother Interview)

However, one participant highlighted that they simply wished:

To earn enough money to take the boys on holiday. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

(ii) Higher Education Orthodoxies

Although women's access to education per se, and to higher education in particular has been gradually extended (Polenghi & Fitzgerald, 2020), historically, female students were limited to those subjects considered "appropriate" for women. Whilst this has seen some erosion, there remains a cultural perception that vocational and caring roles are primarily the domain of women. Subsequently, university programmes that lead to such roles are frequently regarded as low status (Gov.UK, 2019) and are female dominated (HESA, 2021).

The Million Plus group (2022) reported in October 2022 that the cost-of-living crisis in the UK had placed nearly 300,000 students in an untenable financial position, bringing with it the physical, mental, and emotional ramifications of dealing with poverty and debt (Clark & Wenham, 2022). Whilst middle-class, teenage students may be able to draw on support from parents; older, working-class, and Black students are less likely to enjoy such support and are therefore disproportionately affected. Furthermore, despite the rise in female academics, a wage-penalty remains, and universities, who gather entry data regarding issues they consider may disadvantage students, do not routinely enquire about childcare responsibilities (HESA, 2018). Where universities lack cohesive support strategies, facilities or adapted provision, the needs and difficulties facing student-mothers need to be addressed at a personal or programme level.

Responses from student mothers within the theme 'Programme Reflections' highlighted the vital role of programme tutors and personal academic tutors in providing support:

Sub-theme 1. Support: *Tutorials, Extensions, Additional Support, Extra Reading:*

[My tutor provided] absolute understanding and positive reinforcement in bucket loads. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

I have had an academic tutor that has understood the barriers that can be in place with mature students with family responsibilities and offered valuable support. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

My tutor offered me online, evening tutorials. Without her, I don't think I would have got through. (Student Mother Interview)

My tutor was my pick me up. She put my needs and circumstances first, not the system's. She was the only person I felt able to expose my vulnerabilities to. (Student Mother Interview)

However, despite the best efforts of individual academics, some 44,000 mature students currently remain at risk of dropping out. Student mothers' reflections from the

research illuminate the challenges that they face every day, when outlining their daily routines:

Breakfast, panic, join in group session fending off the child, lunch, play with daughter and forget all about Uni work, tea, panic, bedtime, catch up on recorded materials etc., attempt some reading - fall asleep. (Student Mother Questionnaire).

HEIs' expectations of students regarding engagement, punctuality and commitment to study extend to all students, yet may be disproportionately difficult for student mothers to realise. For instance, unexpected changes to timetabling or within the home (for instance a child's ill-health) necessitate reliance on ad hoc arrangements or loss of learning.

I tried to stay in touch [online] and tutors were really good, trying to entertain the children, asking them to make things. But tutorials always ended up a shouting match over the children. I couldn't concentrate. It would have been different if the girls weren't there, or my partner was. (Student Mother Interview).

I couldn't start work until late evening and by then I was tired from dealing with a sick child all day. (Student Mother Interview)

I miss the library! It's my sanctuary! (Student Mother Interview)

For many, this lack of provision and apparent lack of awareness has increased their sense of separation from other students, and subsequently their risk of dropping out. These difficulties were exacerbated during the pandemic as the shift to virtual learning environments changed the psychosocial learning environment and occasioned the loss of many informal support mechanisms (Owen & Simmons, 2023). It simultaneously increased childcare responsibilities, including home schooling (ONS, 2021). Unsurprisingly, a third of all women (compared to 20% of all men) with school-aged children reported a decline in their mental health during lockdown (The Office for National Statistics, 2021).

I was always "mum" or "wife." I didn't have the chance to be me anymore. (Student Mother Interview)

Unfortunately, generally no additional adjustments were made for this group, and there has been no recognition of the pressures currently being faced as children attempt to adapt to life post-pandemic.

I've not had anything in an email that mentions parenting, or support available for parents, to do with university. (Student Mother Interview)

Moving Forward

(i) Motivation and Tenacity

Student mothers within the research reported feelings of pressure and frustration associated with juggling many different activities, but also reflected on a sense of pride and an innate determination to succeed.

It has been such a stressful challenging time, but I am determined and willing to work hard. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

The last 3 years have been a rollercoaster... Strain has been placed on my relationship with my partner... because of my dedication to study and so less time. But through all this there have been achievements, support, love, pride, and determination. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

Within the theme 'Challenges and Rewards,' participants reflected on the following:

Sub-theme 2. Rewards: *identity, future, role modelling, pride*

Feeling proud that I have achieved something for myself which will hopefully benefit my children in the long term. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

Being able to go into a profession that I am passionate about and do my little girl proud. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

Embarking on a career – making a difference. (Student Mother Questionnaire)

When I'm talking to my kids, you know talking to them about school.... I'm doing the same thing as them! Psychologically and emotionally, it gives me justification. (Student Mother Interview)

Gaining a high standard in a piece of work, sometimes in busy, difficult surroundings, can give a great sense of achievement. Confidence in my ability has definitely increased. (Student Mother Questionnaire).

(ii) Support networks

Participants suggested that universities could ease the pressures on student mothers by introducing support groups to help mothers develop connections and practical support strategies.

Other suggestions related to logistical aspects of the course, including bespoke timetables, given well in advance so that childcare challenges could be managed. Under the theme 'Programme Reflections,' the following sub-themes emerged:

Sub-theme 2. Suggestions: *Networks for mothers, hearing from other student parents, timetables in advance, flexible class start times:*

It would have been useful to have heard from other student parents on how they were coping, strategies they had employed and perhaps having had access to others in the same position so we could have shared childcare where possible. (Student Mother Questionnaire).

Perhaps if at the start of a course there could be a wellbeing tutorial with the academic tutor that opened up discussions about how a student home life could impact on their studies to put strategies in place. (Student Mother Questionnaire).

The importance of a support network cannot be underestimated. A recommendation of this research is for universities to provide spaces for student mothers (along with all parents and those with caring responsibilities), to work together and share experiences at different stages of their degrees.

When asked about what advice they would give to other student mothers, an interview participant provided this motivational response:

Hang in there! See through the seemingly present roadblocks. If you decide to look for the positives, you will make your adrenaline pump! Keep doing what you are doing, you will thank yourself. (Student Mother Interview).

Conclusions

The aim of this small-scale research project was to explore the experiences of student mothers undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate Childhood related courses at a UK university. It became clear that a combination of being “chronically time poor” (Von Benzon, 2021, p. 481), feeling pressure to meet societal expectations to be a “good mother”, a “good student” and a “good employee” resulted in an internalised guilt in participants, heightened by the social and economic pressures that women face when they become mothers (Pregnant Then Screwed, 2015).

Through its policies, the state promotes the socially constructed notion of “an ideal of family life in which women care for and nurture others,” and in which caring is regarded as an essential component of female identity “in a male-dominated and capitalist social order” (Ungerson, 2022 p 31). This promotion of caring as intrinsic to the female psyche, can then be used to offset or diminish the demands and worth of caring for children, and subsequently the social and financial worth of those who undertake it.

When coupled with the challenges intrinsic to motherhood, student-mothers often face a raft of difficulties connected to time limitations (Owen & Simmons, 2023), self-image (Currie, 2008) lack of recognition from the HE sector, low pay and financial difficulties. As such, they are faced with multiple and cumulative disadvantages that place them in an inequitable position when compared to students without caring responsibilities. As we live in a society that does not recognise the value of high-quality care for the very young, neither mothers nor early educators are considered worthy of recognition or financial recompense. For those attempting to improve their position, universities may exacerbate difficulties through their failure to acknowledge student mothers as a group requiring specific support.

The need for additional support systems is clear. Support strategies are fundamental to success and student mothers are ready and willing to share their experiences, build networks and work collaboratively to support one another. In order to allow student mothers to thrive and flourish, universities need first to acknowledge that student mothers face additional demands and pressures and have specific needs. Discussions regarding how best these needs can be met will provide the focus for future research.

Future research recommendations also include recognition of the risks to ‘equality of opportunity’ identified within the Office for Students (2023) Access and Participation Plan. This ensures an exploration of the diverse and multifaceted challenges of student mothers, whilst also ensuring that:

To identify the greatest risks to equality of opportunity, providers should also consider how student characteristics intersect. (Office for Students, 2024)

Overall, this study provided a useful insight into the experiences of student mothers, the pressures and support systems they have and their fundamental resolve. In the words of one of the research participants:

Mums should not be underestimated - what we may lack in time and youth, we make up for in sheer determination. (Student Mother Questionnaire).

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The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

We confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors and that there are no other persons who satisfied the criteria for authorship but are not listed. We further confirm that the authors listed in the manuscript took equal roles in its authorship.

We confirm that we have given due consideration to the protection of intellectual property associated with this work and that there are no impediments to publication, including the timing of publication, with respect to intellectual property. In so doing we confirm that we have followed the regulations of our institution concerning intellectual property.

We further confirm that any aspect of the work covered in this manuscript that has involved human patients has been conducted with the ethical approval of the university at which the authors work, and in accordance with the principles laid out by the British Psychological Society.

We understand that the Corresponding Author is the sole contact for the Editorial process. She is responsible for communicating with the other author about progress, submissions of revisions and final approval of proofs.

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