

Peanut presents

INVISIBLE MOTHERS

THE STATE OF
INVISIBILITY

October 23



THE SILENT
BATTLES AND
UNVOICED
FRUSTRATIONS
OF PEANUT'S
COMMUNITY

Unseen
Yet Too
Visible

The State of *Invisibility*

Beneath society's perception of motherhood is something unexplored - a world of invisible challenges, sacrifices, and resilience. While the identity of a mother or potential mother stands out, her complexity and individuality often remain in the shadows. We are a culture that celebrates motherhood, but it is shallow praise. Rarely do we acknowledge the true extent of women's efforts or award the role of mother with any real social or cultural status.

The State of Invisibility unmask raw stories, silent battles, and unvoiced frustrations, and sheds light on the everyday experiences that women grapple with. From gender stereotypes and the division of domestic labour to identity shifts and postpartum struggles, we dive into the untold stories that shape their lives.

We believe that through real-life storytelling, frank research and expert voices, we can unmask the invisible realities of women.

We hope The State of Invisibility brings us closer to a society that values women for who they are, and all they do, and not for the roles they are expected to play.



Methodology

In September 2023, we surveyed 3615 women from the Peanut community to gather both qualitative and quantitative insights. Participants answered a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions yielded qualitative data, providing rich narratives and perspectives. The closed-ended questions facilitated the collection of measurable, quantitative data. To enhance relevance, the quantitative data included in this edition is from the UK community only.

1. The *Invisibility* of Motherhood

Speaking to our community, a disconcerting trend emerged:



So, we wanted to understand the dynamics and interactions that cause this.

Who is making women feel *invisible*?

Friends



Family



Healthcare Professionals



Partner/Spouse



Strangers/Random People



Colleagues



Online/Social Media



Schools/Teachers



💡 Percentages indicate the % of women who have experienced feelings of invisibility from these groups.

What is making women feel *invisible*?

1.1 The External Expectations of Family Labour

Because society disproportionately places the responsibility of household duties, domestic tasks and childcare upon women, mothers feel like they're fading into the background. This assumption—even when a woman works full-time or earns as much (or more than) her partner—can lead to feelings of overwhelm and frustration.

Expectations Are Deep-Rooted in Family and Friendship Circles

"I am an Indian woman. I was always taught that it's a woman's burden to have children. To raise them, to cook, to clean. To do everything."

"My mother-in-law assumes that since I am a stay-at-home mum, I have to manage everything apart from actually working because that's my husband's job."

"Last month we went to visit some friends and my husband was helping with our 10-month-old baby. While there, our friends said: 'This is not a man's job. How can you just sit and not be with the baby all the time?' That felt very rude to me - not many understand that both parents need to be involved."

"Today I was sitting eating lunch, my husband was next to me, and my MIL was holding baby. When baby started getting fussy, he was brought back to me and not to dad who is also perfectly capable of caring for/soothing baby."

Strangers and Neighbours Share These Expectations Too

"I am often asked whether my husband helps with household chores and kids. It is infuriating to me, that question assumes I am the one who is primarily responsible for everything home-related."

"I have been out before with my partner and people will come over and ask me specifically who is at home caring for our child - my partner never receives the same treatment."

"If my child wanders off ahead of me in the grocery store while dad and I are walking together, I hear whispers: 'Where is the mum?'"

"When moving into a new house, our neighbours asked my husband what he did for work, but didn't ask me. They assumed I stayed home with our daughter."

Men Get Applause While Women Are Overlooked

Women express how their contributions to childcare are downplayed or dismissed, while men are praised for minimal contributions, excusing them from active participation.

"Dads are given so much credit for doing the bare minimum. A woman shouldn't have to ask her partner to 'babysit' their child."

"People have made comments in church about how I'm so lucky my husband will 'babysit' our children if I need a night off. Even though he is a parent and that's called parenting!"

"When I go out shopping with my daughter I get told that I'm brave to have her so young. I'm lucky to get help etc. Yet if her dad takes her out, he's told he's amazing and such a good 'babysitter'."

"Most people can't believe that my husband is involved in the housework and chores, such as dishes and bath time. He gets constant praise for doing normal things."

Women Are the Primary Points of Contact

Women are the primary points of contact for family matters and plans, even when their partners are equally capable.

"My MIL automatically assumes I'm 100% responsible for everything within our household including looking after her adult son (my partner) as if I'm his mother. I arrange our entire lives."

"Pretty much everyone comes to me for any questions about my children's well-being. I'm the primary parent for my own children, over my boyfriend. People always come to me first."

Couples frequently encounter assumptions about who holds decision-making authority and responsibility for various activities and events.

"All of our relatives believe I make all the decisions within our home. It's really frustrating because they blame me for everything that goes wrong. MIL isn't allowed to see the kids? Must be my fault."

"Since before my child was born, people have spoken to me like all decisions about him are solely mine. I'm asked about his schooling and diet, and there's no regard for anyone else's input."

Women are Socially Excluded due to Assumptions About Childcare

The assumption that women have limited availability due to childcare responsibilities leads to exclusion from social events and activities, whereas partners are assumed to be free to participate.

"I'm not invited to social events because of assumptions that I won't have availability or childcare."

"I have not been invited to events but my husband has - it's assumed that I am taking sole responsibility for our baby and wouldn't be leaving her with my husband."

"I have not been invited to social events with work, assuming I wouldn't want to go now I have a child."



1.2 The World's Opinions On Her Womb

Women often face questions about family planning or fertility issues, perpetuating cultural biases that the burden of creating a family weighs heavily on them.

Women Are Interrogated When Trying To Conceive

Despite a woman's reproductive decisions and ability being inherently personal and intimate, it's often a subject of interrogation and judgement.

"When I got married it took us a long time to conceive and I was the one blamed for being unable to get pregnant. When we finally went to specialists, the fault did not lie with me."


"I have been trying to get pregnant for a few years. I am now pregnant. During those years many people came up to me and said 'Has your husband left you due to not having kids?'"


"During the years my husband and I were going through infertility, I had people saying to my face 'What is keeping you from conceiving?' 'Are you sure you are meeting your husband at the right times of the month?' Unbeknownst to them, we were suffering from male factor infertility."

"We struggled to conceive for a year after I stopped contraception. We were constantly asked when we would be having a baby even though we desperately wanted to be pregnant and were heartbroken how long it was taking, and could potentially take."

Women Feel Pushed Into Motherhood

Even when it may not align with their desires or timing, women feel pressure to start a family and pursue motherhood.

 **75%** of women have been asked "When are you having children?"

 **44%** felt pressured to get pregnant and start a family.

That pressure comes from:

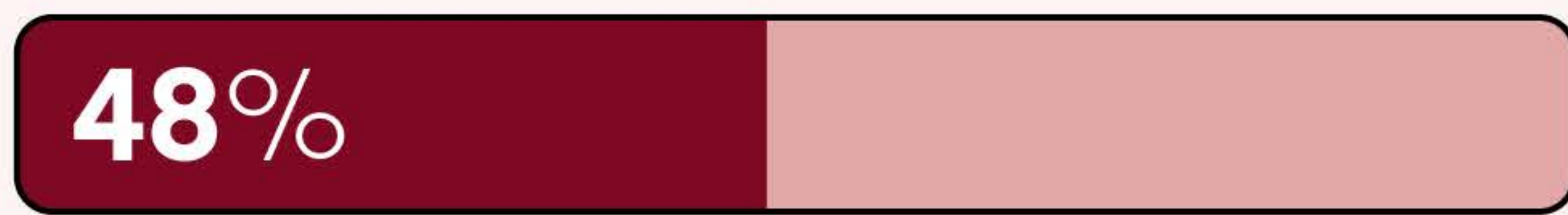
Family

75%

Society

63%

Themselves



Online



Advertising



Healthcare professionals



Strangers



Friends



Partner/Spouse



"My mum and aunt were caught buying baby clothes when I was only 25 (currently 37). When I explained I didn't have a boyfriend, I was pursuing a busy career, and I may not want kids, her response was: 'You wouldn't do that to me.' Whenever I've talked about work and job opportunities, she's never been excited. She's straight away asked about the maternity package and how that job would affect me when I have kids. It became a running joke in my family how my poor mum was suffering without grandchildren."

"Before the wedding, I was asked: 'When's the baby coming?' I was not pregnant. The day after the wedding, I was asked: 'You gonna have a baby yet?' I was still NOT pregnant. While holding my 3-month-old, I was asked: 'When's the next one coming?' It's like... You DO realise I am a PERSON and not just a baby-birthing machine, right?"

"My husband's family made a bet at our wedding on how long it would take us to have a baby. I was disgusted that they thought it was appropriate to make bets on our ability to conceive."

Women Are Expected To Create A Growing Brood

Women encounter pressure from family, friends, doctors, and even strangers to have more children, reinforcing the idea that a woman's worth is tied to her role as a mother.

"My MIL asked my husband and me if we would be having a second child, when we answered that we weren't sure yet, she made a comment along the lines of 'I would make it happen.'"

"Once [my child] was born, almost instantly I was asked when I was going to have another. It made me feel as though my purpose was no longer to be myself but to purely be a mother and nothing else."

"As soon as I had my baby, people asked when I was having another. Clearly forgetting that I had 4 miscarriages before him & I have a medical condition that affects having a successful pregnancy."

"People keep asking me, when are you having more children?!! But they don't ask my husband that."



1.3 The Dual Duty of the Working Woman

The modern woman faces a delicate balancing act, striving to excel in both her professional and maternal roles. **52% of women** say this contributes to feelings of invisibility.

Stay-at-Home Mothers Feel Undervalued

Stay-at-home mothers, often thought to have an 'easy' job, deal with misconceptions that don't recognise the full extent of their responsibilities.

"Assumptions that being a stay-at-home mum is relaxing makes me feel invisible. I have to monitor [my child] full-time, planning her naps, errands, food, chores. I have to deal with physical and mental overstimulation, and no one takes it seriously outside of therapy."

"Taking care of a kid all day, cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping, etc. is not what I would call the easy way out. My job starts at 7:30 am when she wakes up and ends at 7pm when she goes to bed."

"The overall attitude of 'you're a SAHM, why do you need a break?' makes me feel invisible. Or assumptions that because I'm a SAHM, I don't do as much as my partner who works full time."

The Struggle of the Juggle Is Real

Juggling the demands of work and motherhood is a real struggle for many, taking a toll on physical and emotional well-being.

"I started working after maternity leave out of necessity but I was judged for being away from her, even from my family. So I quit my job after her first year. Even then I was judged for not helping my husband in bringing in an income. I couldn't win either way."

"I am 11 weeks postpartum and I am already being asked by friends and family when I'll be going back to work. There is definitely a pressure to mother like I don't have a job and work like I don't have children."

"While slowly announcing my pregnancy to colleagues and clients, I've constantly been asked how I was going to make it work post maternity leave. Only a few people have ever bothered to ask what my husband's role would be in any of these decisions or home life after I give birth."

"When returning to work, I was asked to work less hours. This meant that we had less money and I was under a lot of pressure to either keep my daughter at home and manage the stress of having her at home while working, or put her into a nursery which we couldn't really afford. I felt the balance of trying to manage it all felt very overwhelming and invisible to family and even my partner."



90%

of women feel expected to work like they don't have children and mother like they don't work.

(64% often and 26% sometimes)

Workplaces Miss The Mark on Support

Instances of discrimination, unaccommodating environments, and disregard for caregiving responsibilities compound women's work/life balance struggles, implying career and motherhood are inherently incompatible.

"I work in a manufacturing plant. I had to keep my pregnancy a secret because I got promoted. When they finally found out, I was excluded from team meetings and was treated like I was incapable of doing my job. My supervisor even suggested I quit."

"I work in healthcare and there is really no space or time for motherhood. There's no allowance for pumping and there's no 'light labour' when you are pregnant. There's no flexibility when your own kids are sick. It's shocking really."

"I work 50-60 hours a week. Before having a child that wasn't a big deal, but now my work is unwilling to load balance so I can be at work less. In order to keep my job, I have to tolerate the unpaid overtime and miss moments with my son in the evening."

"My boss clearly said he wasn't giving me the promotion I deserved as 'I'd be too busy looking after the baby' and that he 'couldn't risk any absence or lack of dedication from my side,' because apparently 'no woman can do everything perfect: either career or family, and it looks like I've already chosen.' He said the last bit pointing at my belly."

Women Are Expected to Sacrifice Their Careers for Their Children

Women face expectations that they will sacrifice career advancement for childcare, overlooking the potential for shared responsibilities and partnerships within households.

"Strangers, colleagues, friends, friends of friends and family members have all at some point made a remark about me having to change career, give up work, or slow down as when I have a child it will be my responsibility to bring her up."

"Often, people assume that I will give up my career to [care for our baby]; but even when people expect me to go back to work, there is no implication that my fiancé will take on any additional duties at home or with the baby, more that I will 'find a way to cope.'"



94%

of women feel expected to self-sacrifice and put themselves last.

(69% often and 25% sometimes)



1.4 The Fight For Identity and Independence

Women voice the challenges they face when asserting their autonomy and maintaining a strong sense of identity, away from the identity of 'mum' or 'wife'.

Tying the Knot Means Tackling Traditions

With **22%** of women feeling pressured to get married and **28%** feeling societal pressure to change their surname, decisions surrounding marriage and name changes spark internal conflicts.

"I have brought up to friends and family that I might want to keep my last name when my partner and I get married and almost all of them expressed disdain, they said it's tradition and that's what you are supposed to do."

"In the end, I decided to change my name to make things easier for my daughter but I often think I shouldn't have changed it. I want to show her that she doesn't need to conform to be accepted or loved."

"My partner's family would prefer me to change [my name]. It's hard to give up my 'identity' that I've had my whole life."

Women Desire Independence Amidst Parenting Demands

Society does not see women as worthy of independence, and therefore women struggle to balance their desires with the daily demands of parenting.

"My in-laws, who I spend the most time with, hardly know anything about me. I've been a part of their family for nearly 10 years. They don't ask about my interests, hobbies, aspirations, or talents. I'm seen as a mother, and that's it."

"I've been told that I chose to be a mum, that I chose to give up having a life outside of that when I got pregnant. I've been a mum for 11 years, I don't have a hobby, I have never done anything for myself."

"It's as if my only identity is to care for my child, but my partner is allowed to have his own life."

"I feel as though becoming a mum made people automatically think I will love every moment of it and just give up every aspect of my life to be a full-time mum."



93%

of women say since becoming a mother, their pre-baby identity has felt minimised to one identity: mum.

(61% often and 32% sometimes)

Women Desire Discussions on Subjects Beyond Motherhood

Women find conversations tend to gravitate towards their roles as mothers, revolving around their parenting responsibilities rather than their other achievements or interests.

"Since having a baby all conversations with other people relate to my baby and being a mother whereas my partner is able to have conversations and interactions that have nothing to do with parenting."

"I often feel like when trying to find parent acquaintances, other parents don't have any interest in getting to know me, but rather 'what do my kids like to do' so only our children can be friends."

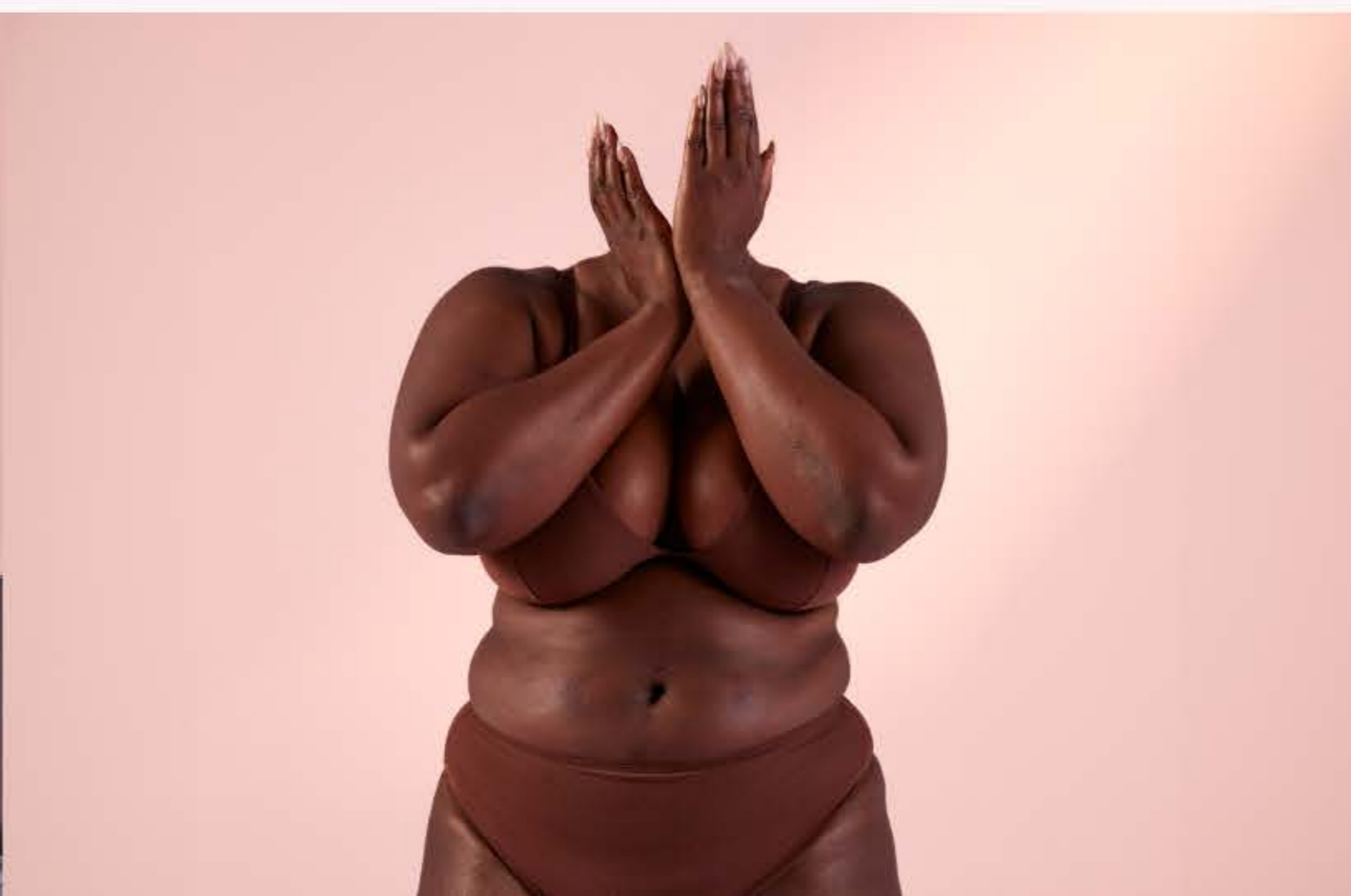
Women of Colour Face Unique Obstacles

Women of colour navigate unique challenges that intersect with race, gender, and motherhood, amplifying the struggle for identity and autonomy.

"My whole family is traditional and Indian and thinks that I should do everything for my husband. My mum, upon hearing that my husband wakes up at 5am every day to get to work, asked me if I wake up with him to make him breakfast before he leaves. Uh, no."

"Some African societies assume it's a woman's responsibility to make sure everything is done in the family. I was once asked 'Why are you studying instead of getting married and having children? You don't want to get married old and unattractive.' This created a lot of pressure to start a family. It saddens me how some people view women in our societies."

"I am originally from Nigeria, West Africa where the cultural, social and religious beliefs are all geared towards subduing and domineering women. If a man cheats, it is the woman's fault. If a woman is abused, she must have triggered the abuser. If a couple is unable to have children, it must be the woman's fault. I happened to fall under the third category."





1.5 The Search for Empathy and Understanding



66%

of women say lack of empathy and understanding contributes to feelings of invisibility. Women frequently feel dismissed, invalidated, or that their struggles are overlooked.

Unsolicited Remarks Show a Lack of Understanding

Unwanted advice and opinions from strangers and acquaintances show a lack of respect and understanding about women's emotions and challenges.

"People always ask me the same questions: 'How many weeks are you? What's the gender?' Or say 'You're so big!' Or think they can gawk at my stomach or guess the gender without asking if I'm okay with that. No one just says 'Hi how are you?' They start telling you how you should eat more now you're eating for two, or about how you'll have your hands full... so many unsolicited comments. It gets to the point where I hide every pregnancy as long as possible because I don't want to get a lecture while I'm buying a coffee."

"When I spoke to doctors, neighbours or strangers who knew I had kids, I would emotionally wall myself off, anticipating the 'you've got your hands full' or 'your baby isn't wearing socks!' or 'do they have the same father?' Or whatever insensitive unsolicited comment strangers and acquaintances would make."

Women Yearn For Acknowledgment

Women's stories reflect the pain of feeling invisible amidst their struggles, with disappointment at having their experiences belittled by those closest to them.

"I do feel that mothers are a forgotten species and need care and attention, especially after birthing a human being. I almost died having my second child yet less than a year later I'm expected to have it all together by society."

"When I was freshly postpartum, my family and friends just came over to hold the baby and expected me to cook and host them as if I wasn't dealing with a second-degree tear and periurethral tear. Plus my back was aching from a poorly done epidural."

"It is extremely difficult to get people to understand the many roles a mother takes on. It's not only traumatic, but it's also extremely exhausting. Having no one to turn to just to ask for help is the hardest part. I always feel like people don't understand how much help a mother actually needs. Generally, it is assumed that I can handle anything that comes my way."

"Everyone saw a happy and well-kept baby while I was in the dark and in constant agony and pain."



1.6 The Heartache of Hiding Pregnancy Loss

Women share how stories of miscarriage and pregnancy loss are often kept in the shadows, making their pain invisible to the world.

Women Feel Frustrated Facing Loss in Silence

Women feel frustrated by the fact that they have to navigate pregnancy loss in silence, because of a general societal discomfort around it.

"Any time I've mentioned having a miscarriage, I usually get an 'oh' or a silent response."

"When it kept happening, my mother asked me to keep it to myself and not to speak about it until I reached the 2nd trimester. I've had 12 losses and she has said it's best for no one to be let down and get their hopes up."

"I had 3 miscarriages and felt like I couldn't talk about it. It made me feel like I was invisible and like something was wrong with me."

"I am very open about losing our son, and I know it makes people uncomfortable. I was told by a family member (the DAY he died) that I should think about going back to work 'to take my mind off of things.'"

"I have had 6 miscarriages and only one live birth. While pregnancy is an open conversation, no one speaks about loss."

The Emotional Weight of the 12-Week Wait

Pressure to conform to norms, like not revealing pregnancies early, adds to women's sense of invisibility.



27%

of women do not think pregnancy should be kept a secret for the first 12 weeks.



45%

think it should be a secret only sometimes.

"I was pressured so much to keep both pregnancies a secret until I was 12 weeks along, no matter how I felt."

"I was asked to keep my pregnancy secret till after 12 weeks to prevent anyone becoming uncomfortable with miscarriage."

"Our family reacted to our pregnancy news by saying we should keep it secret until 12 weeks in case something happens, suggesting it was bad news or something we should not be sharing."

Workplaces Don't Adequately Support Women Navigating Loss

Workplaces fall short of providing the necessary support and understanding for women grappling with the grief of pregnancy loss.

"I had a miscarriage while working as a community nurse. You don't get any bereavement pay or time off so I had a couple of days 'off sick.' When I returned to work everyone knew about it and I was left working a late shift by myself, with heavy lifting to do while I was still bleeding heavily. I felt so lonely and low. Then to top it off, my time 'off sick' was added to my sickness record and I was asked to attend a formal attendance meeting. They expected me to carry on like nothing had happened."

"I was expected by my job to work through a miscarriage. I work with sixteen 7-8 year-olds and it was tough going back to work the next day and having to put on a fake smile when all I wanted to do was be at home."



The Pain of Loss is Ignored

The stigma surrounding these topics can lead to their experiences being downplayed or dismissed by others.

"People definitely assume I'm now 'fixed' because I've had my daughter like her life erases [the loss] I went through."

"I was told that my baby I lost at 6 weeks was 'just a bunch of cells.'"

"I had a chemical pregnancy and it was heartbreaking. I was told I shouldn't be too sad about it because 'it's not even a real pregnancy,' but when that second line turned up pink it sure felt real to me."

"I told the hospital receptionist I had to cancel my next appointment because I was no longer pregnant due to a miscarriage. She just took my files off my hand and dropped them in a corner of her desk saying 'all done.'"

1.7 The Unspoken Battle of Mental Health



57%

of women share how mental health challenges make them feel invisible and vulnerable.

Women Feel Pressured to Endure in Silence

Women who experience mental health struggles, such as postpartum depression or anxiety, often face the notion that they should 'tough it out' and put on a brave face.

"Due to my cultural background, it is automatically assumed that I shouldn't experience any mental health overload or stress as a new parent because it is a sign of weakness. I've heard comments such as 'That's motherhood, you just get on with it,' 'It's all in your head,' 'What did you expect when you opened your legs?'"

"My family calls me selfish for focusing on my mental health. I personally do not think it is okay because mums can't be mums if we're not okay. How am I supposed to take care of my child if I'm not mentally stable?"

"As soon as I became pregnant, it was not about me anymore. I couldn't feel stressed because it wasn't good for the baby. I couldn't be upset because my baby could feel it. I had to keep my emotions quiet and it became worse after the birth."

"I am expected to be a 10 all the time and I'm not allowed to be a 1 when I need it. It's always 'Mummy has to be on top.' Being a full-time mother is a big job and no one talks about it enough, so we feel like we are kept in the shadows of our family. I can't ever get a break to just scream if I need to."

1.8 The Institutional Expectation is 'Mum'

The assumption that women bear the primary responsibility for family and children extends into institutions including healthcare, education, events, and advertising.

Ads Are Always Aimed at Mum

Adverts frequently target women as the primary audience for products and services related to children's needs and parenting, assuming that mothers are the sole decision-makers.

"I'm constantly spammed with adverts about life insurance because I have children and am a mum, whereas my husband doesn't receive these adverts."

"All advertisements I've come in contact with about children's clothing or other needs are geared towards mothers only."

"We need more targeted adverts for men being the parent. All formula and nappy adverts show mums. My husband has bought just as much baby stuff for the arrival of our little one and yet I get targeted ads for baby stuff he still gets cars etc."

Mum Is Assumed To Be In Charge of the Calendar

Invitations to events and gatherings are often addressed to women, highlighting the assumption that women are responsible for managing family social activities.

"All invitations to any event are sent to me. Any plans that need to be made, whether with family or with friends, go through me. Everything runs through me as if I'm the gatekeeper for my family."

"When my daughter is invited anywhere from her friends I am always the one who is asked if she can go, rather than both my partner and I being asked."

"Invites for parties are always being sent to me by other women and never sent from/received by the men."

Questions and Communications Always Come Her Way

For healthcare or school-related matters, questions are disproportionately directed towards mothers, causing partners to feel excluded.

"At the paediatrician's office, the receptionist will only ask me (the mother) questions even if my husband is present. It's as if she just assumes that he doesn't know and I carry the entire mental load."

"My husband is listed as the primary response person at daycare, but somehow they still call me first with questions, even though I'm the one working."

"My girl was born early, leading to a week in the ICU for her medical issues and my c-section recovery. While I was mostly bedridden, doctors would ask me about the baby's condition, even though my partner was with her constantly."

"Our son attended nursery while we worked. Despite listing my husband as the primary contact since I couldn't answer calls at my school job, the nursery always called me and expressed annoyance when I didn't answer. Even after clarifying that they should call my husband, who works from home, they persisted. We were astounded."

Forms Often Ask For Her Name Only

Women are asked to provide their names and contact information on forms relating to their children or family, reflecting an underlying assumption that mothers are the primary point of contact.

"I always get sent the paperwork for the doctor even though my boyfriend is on the contact information as well."

"Every doctor's office tells me I don't need to add Dad's information, all they need is mine."

"When registering my daughter for our doctor, there was no place to include her father's contact information. Only 1 space was given."

"The forms at my newborn's doctor's office have questions about my mental health and habits, but nothing in relation to the family or partner."

"Small changes can add up and lead to big impacts. We look to institutions to set standards and create guidelines, so if they make change their adjustments create ripple effects throughout an organisation , and this may also inspire individuals and smaller groups to make similar changes. It all starts with one person or one institution using their voice. This is called the butterfly effect where minor actions result in significant impacts."

– *Dr. Rachel, Clinical Psychologist*



1.9 The Blindspot in Healthcare

Women seek help for their physical and emotional struggles throughout all stages of motherhood. Unfortunately, they are dismissed by the very people who are supposed to care for them.

Loss

"I suffered a miscarriage and a month later I was lucky and [got pregnant] again. I went to the doctor to make sure as I felt anxious I might lose the baby again. The doctor dismissed my feelings of anxiety because 'it's common to lose your first baby.' I felt like another statistic."

"When I had my miscarriage I suffered with PTSD as a result of negligence from the healthcare provider, and this was treated by them as something minor and common that I should 'get over.'"

Pregnancy

"I suffered from severe hyperemesis in pregnancy and my midwife was dismissive and didn't acknowledge it as a complication of pregnancy."

"After telling the counsellor my reason for seeing her was to deal with the enormous stress and anxiety I was feeling around the unplanned pregnancy, she just responded by congratulating me and moved on to a different topic."

Post-Birth

"I felt dismissed by healthcare professionals after a harrowing childbirth. My husband believes they downplayed the trauma in the operating theatre. The midwives seemed indifferent on the ward. Sharing my story, I sensed health professionals had 'heard it all before'. They prioritised my baby's care over my emotional recovery."

"After a difficult pregnancy and birth, I suffered extreme bladder issues, needing a catheter for months. Nurses and doctors overlooked my pain. While pregnant, I felt cared for, but post-birth, I felt invisible and dismissed, enduring intense pain and trauma."

"A midwife told me, 'Why is the baby in the crib? There's no heartbeat in there,' making me feel useless just a day after labor. I hadn't slept for a couple of days and baby was asleep so I was trying to take the opportunity for rest."

"After my second child, my midwife pressed me on birth control without considering my partner's role. When I mentioned his planned vasectomy, she rolled her eyes, insisting I should bear the responsibility, not him."

First-Time Mothers

"At the doctor's with my daughter, I felt my concerns were dismissed because I'm a 'first-time mum'. They suggested new mothers 'try to find problems that don't exist.' Their skepticism made me lose my confidence, making me doubt my judgements about my daughter's health."

"Any time I expressed my concerns to anyone I felt like I was talking to a brick wall. Hospitals assume that as first-time mums, we are overreacting and dismiss our concerns."



45%

of women say their desires and needs were not listened to during birth.



54%

of women did not feel supported by the healthcare system after birth.

"Many women feel unsupported by healthcare systems, especially after childbirth. While frequent check-ins occur during pregnancy to check on the baby, there's often a six-week gap once the baby arrives. This is sending a message that 'you should be OK', disregarding the physical and emotional upheavals. This period can feel quite lonely, with many women feeling abandoned by healthcare professionals and overwhelmed, exhausted, stressed and unprepared.

It's unfortunate that most healthcare systems don't allow professionals to have more time with each patient, but despite these time constraints, professionals should prioritise patient well-being. Each stage of motherhood can be quite emotional and difficult, and speedy appointments make diving into topics even more difficult. Even just simply saying "How are you really doing?" and taking the time to truly hear the other person is enough to feel supported and heard."

– *Dr. Rachel, Clinical Psychologist*



2. The Impact of Questions

Women are often asked questions that (while often well-intentioned) offend and demoralise them. These questions perpetuate traditional gender roles, make unfounded assumptions, and overlook the complexity of women's experiences.

We spoke to our community to identify unwanted questions they'd experienced alongside preferred questions that foster empathy and understanding.

	Unwanted questions	Preferred questions
Relationships	<i>Why has he/they not proposed yet?</i>	Do you want to get married?
	<i>Are you married or in a relationship?</i>	Tell me about you?
Pre-conception, Fertility & Loss	<i>Are you sure you want kids?</i>	What are your thoughts on becoming a parent?
	<i>When are you having a baby?</i>	Are you (or your partner) able to conceive?
	<i>When are you going to give that man some children?</i>	Do you want children?
	<i>Why aren't you giving him a child?</i>	How do you feel about starting a family?
	<i>Why are the miscarriages happening?</i>	How are you coping after loss?
	<i>Are you sure it's not twins?</i>	How is pregnancy going?
Pregnancy	<i>How is bump?</i>	How are you?
	<i>If you're pregnant, are you married?</i>	Congratulations! How has your journey been?
	<i>Was the pregnancy planned?</i>	Are you excited?
	<i>You're having another one?</i>	Are you excited to be pregnant again?
	<i>How long until you have another after this one?</i>	How has your pregnancy been so far?
	<i>Hows the baby?</i>	How are you really? Mentally, emotionally, and physically?
Motherhood	<i>How is your partner holding up?</i>	How are you holding up?
	<i>Do you need me to pick up anything for the baby?</i>	Do you need me to pick up anything for you?
	<i>Have you eaten enough for the baby?</i>	How are you feeling?
	<i>Is the baby fed, they seem hungry?</i>	Can I help you?

	<i>Are you taking care of the baby?</i>	Are you taking care of yourself?
	<i>Why is the baby crying?</i>	Can I help you?
	<i>Can I play with the baby?</i>	Can I watch the baby while you shower?
	<i>When's the next child coming?</i>	Do you think you want more children?
	<i>Why are you breastfeeding, bottle feeding is easier?</i>	How is breastfeeding going, can I support you?
	<i>How do you do it all?</i>	How is the mental load?
	<i>Has your husband/partner been babysitting?</i>	Do you need a break?
	<i>Where is the mum?</i>	Where are the parents?
	<i>How was the birth, share the details?</i>	How are you recovering and how is your mental health?
	<i>Have you put weight on?</i>	How are you doing?
	<i>Why do you look like that?</i>	Have you had enough sleep?
	<i>Are you hormonal?</i>	What is making you feel upset?
	<i>What do your kids like to do?</i>	What do you like to do?



14%

After birth, only 14% of women say they were often asked how they were.



86%

wish people would check in on how they were more frequently.

"We never know what anyone is going through unless they tell us, and this is why we need to be mindful of our language. We need to not make assumptions, or even use language that seems like we are making assumptions, and instead show care, and ask questions in a compassionate way.

Asking open-ended questions allows the individual to respond as they want to and not feel pressure to answer in a certain way. We must take the time to actually hear their response and further, acknowledge that not everyone wants to share everything, or is ready to share, and that needs to be OK."

– Dr. Rachel, Clinical Psychologist

3: The Impact of Invisibility

To help understand the emotional and practical toll of invisibility on women, our community candidly shared what emotions they've experienced.

86% Anxiety

- "My postpartum anxiety was severe and explaining it to my family felt impossible."
- "I have social anxiety. I can't go out alone. I can't make eye contact and I have panic attacks when I'm out."
- "My entire 'fourth trimester' I felt invisible. It's such an insane change to go from caring for yourself to caring for a baby. I was struggling with anxiety and it was hell."

82% Stress

- "The amount of stress associated with not having a voice in the times of greatest need caused a flare-up of my chronic disease."
- "Motherhood is stressful and I've felt alone in it almost my entire journey."
- "I have reached out to friends about my mum stress and it goes ignored."

82% Burnout / exhaustion

- "I have to just get on with it, exhausting myself emotionally and physically."
- "I speak to friends and family about being exhausted and no one cares. I am ignored."
- "Whenever I say I'm exhausted I am met with 'me too' instead of 'how can I help?' or 'how come?'"

80% Overwhelm

- "I feel like a bad mum if I ever feel overwhelmed or talk about myself."
- "When you feel like you're the only one responsible for everything it's overwhelming."
- "I get nothing done at times because I'm just overwhelmed. It's affecting motivation for work and chores."

80% Feeling under-appreciated

- "I feel sad, unappreciated, invisible as if no one cares. I have to stop being ME to be someone's caregiver."
- "There should just be an appreciation of all the things us mamas do."
- "I have paralysis when I feel under-appreciated and overwhelmed."

80% Isolation / loneliness

- "When you have a baby, people expect 100% devotion to that baby without losing yourself. Yet, no one truly listens or understands. It can be very lonely."
- "I feel entirely invisible. Everyone asks about the baby, but nobody is looking after me. I feel very lonely and isolated."
- "I've lost a lot of friends. My social life is different, my priorities have changed. I am lonely and that is hard."

78% Irritability

- "I am just irritated."
- "I feel irritated, sad, like I am a disappointment."

66% Feeling judged

- "When I am overwhelmed or overstimulated I feel as if I am being judged for not being able to 'keep it together' as a good mother does."
- "I feel like I'm not good enough and home is my safe bubble where I'm not being judged."
- "I felt judged for not enjoying every moment of motherhood."

66% Feeling unsupported

- "There's no support for me beyond the small family I've made for myself."
- "I feel like my family is invisible and we have no support."
- "I've felt uncertain and trapped in pregnancy. I have no fears about being a mum as it relates to my child and partner, only fears about doing it in this society, unsupported."

65% Loss of identity

- "Motherhood changed who I am and how I feel. I am hurt, lost, broken."
- "When you feel like you're the only one responsible for everything, you miss out on opportunities. I felt the loss of identity."
- "I feel like I don't have an identity outside of being a mum."

63% Guilt

- "Mum guilt and feeling overwhelmed are just 'part of the job description' whenever I need to vent to family."
- "No one ever asked how I was or what I needed. Even now 8 months postpartum I'm guilty for wanting to do things for myself."
- "I felt guilty for not wanting any more kids."

55% Depression

- "My depression skyrocketed. I felt that I was going insane. But I felt I had to push my needs aside for the sake of my child because I was now a mother."
- "It hurts. I break down and cry a lot over my situation and when people do/say certain things that trigger me it's very difficult. It gets very lonely and depressing."
- "No one cares if I'm OK. It makes me feel like I am nothing, like I am invisible. It makes me depressed."

54% Resentment

- "I'm tired, lacking social interaction, resentful of society and how it perpetuates a rosy view of motherhood."
- "No one checks if I'm OK. It makes me feel lonely and resentful to the people closest to me."

50% Worthlessness

- "I feel worthless, like no one really cares about me."
- "I am invisible, boring, worthless."

24% Neglect

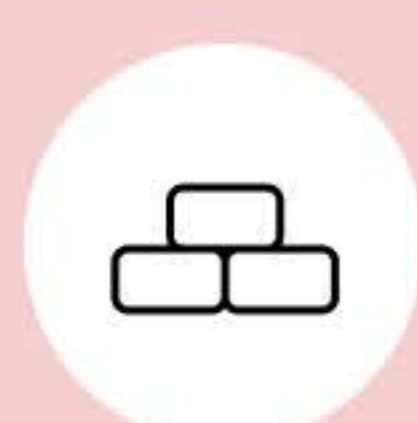
- "Initially I felt neglected, isolated and incapable [after birth], as though I was letting down my new baby. Afterwards, I felt quite angry and upset."
- "I've forced myself to go far beyond my physical capability and neglect myself. For example, not showering daily when that used to be the only time I got for myself."

"Checking in on women is crucial! As we see from this data, women feel unsupported, alone, isolated, not heard, unappreciated, and more. When people check in on others and ask how they are, it can immediately shift the way we feel. It immediately tells our brain that "someone cares," and since our thoughts, emotions and behaviors are all linked, it can completely shift the way that we feel, think, and act.

It doesn't take much to feel supported, but a simple "I'm thinking of you" or "How are you doing" can go a long way—as long as the person feels it is genuine and the person is pausing to actually listen. The person needs to feel heard for it to really have an impact."

– Dr. Rachel, Clinical Psychologist

Invisibility has a palpable emotional and practical impact on women, one that affects their well-being and ability to care.



54%

of women feel as though they don't have access to structural support that can help.

(34% rarely and 20% never)



70%

say that, before becoming parents, they anticipated having more support from societal infrastructure.



60%

do not think their experiences matter to lawmakers.
(37% rarely and 23% never)



56%

do not think these experiences matter to entrepreneurs, business leaders and employers.
(40% rarely and 16% never)

86% of women have found that the challenges associated with the experience of invisibility are taboo to discuss in social settings. The groups most reluctant to address these issues include:

Colleagues



Family



Schools/childcare



Healthcare professionals



Partner/Spouse



The media



Strangers



Social media



Friends



4. Creating Visible Change

With **92%** of women feeling as though their wants are ignored in society (48% often and 44% sometimes), they are resolute in their call for change for greater visibility, greater empathy, and gender equality in society.

Here are the initiatives women want to see.

82% Want Flexible, Family-Friendly Workplaces

Women advocate for family-friendly workplaces that offer flexible arrangements, recognising that work-life balance is essential for all parents.



75%

of women do not feel they can talk freely with people in positions of power to change things.

(44% rarely and 31% never)



38%

do not feel confident advocating for themselves in a workplace setting.

"Encourage workplaces to offer flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting and flexible hours to accommodate the caregiving responsibilities of all parents."

"I want more flexible return-to-work plans for new parents. The challenge of new parenthood is so known, but disregarded. Support men, women, and parents going through this tremendous life transition."

77% Want Equal and Extended Leave for Both Parents

Women call for extended parental leave that is equally accessible for all parents. Such policies not only promote bonding between parents and their children but also encourage a more equitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities.

"Implement and promote policies that provide equal and non-transferable parental leave for both parents. This ensures that fathers are encouraged and supported to take an active role in childcare from the beginning."

"Improved paternity leave for men, flexible working for fathers, so it's more equal. At the moment it always seems to be that women have a longer maternity leave, then return part-time. Like they no longer care about their job."

71% Want Equal Share of Parenting Tasks

Women want the promotion of shared parenting responsibilities. Breaking down traditional gender roles requires a shift towards equal participation of partners in childcare and household tasks.

"I don't know how, but men need to take responsibility for some of the mental load too, it's a mindset from when perhaps they were growing up that mum would do everything."

"I think people need to be more open-minded and see each parent as equals rather than one parent expected to do everything."

"I've been doing research on the gender division of labor since 2011, and what I have found time and time again is that women often only receive support from their partners in the form of execution (going to the store), but not in the conception (knowing what items each person in the family likes to eat) and planning (knowing what items are running low and adding them to the list). This is also known as the mental load. We need to start inviting our partners to take on full ownership of tasks. That doesn't necessarily mean sharing the load 50/50 but sharing what studies call "perceived fairness" for both parties."

– *Eve Rodsky, Author of 'Fair Play'*

71% Want Changing Facilities in Other Restrooms

Providing caregiving facilities in other gender restrooms ensures that fathers and other parents are not sidelined in their parenting responsibilities, fostering an environment where caregiving is shared and normalised.

"Baby changing facilities in men's restrooms, normalise this! Everywhere you go it's in the women's and it's so irritating, I'd worry that when my partner is out on his own there is nowhere he can go to change baby!"

"We need more changing tables in men's bathrooms, especially in smaller establishments. That is a way of the environment steering behaviour into equity."

65% Want Resources for Mental Health Support



95%

of women believe that the invisibility of maternal experiences has an impact on women's mental health and overall well-being.

"Compassion and education about chronic illness and mental health. Bringing awareness about mental health concerns and removing the stigmas around depression, anxiety, and other disorders would be life-changing for everyone."

"Helping women have easier access to mental health support. The burden of feeling as if we are carrying the weight of the world could be lessened by having a supportive person to listen."

65% Want Support Groups for Both Parents

Women see the establishment of support groups for both parents (not just women) as a powerful initiative.

"I want to see groups advertised not as 'mum and baby' but as 'parent/carer and baby.'"

"Dads need more targeted classes. While many are geared towards expectant mothers, partners should also feel involved and prepared. Knowing how to support and understand the mother's experience can prevent resentment and post-birth depression."

54% Want Other Parents (Not Just Women) Represented in Media

Women advocate for a transformation in how fathers and parents are portrayed in media, advocating for the normalisation of other parents as caregivers.

"I want to see the media promoting that parenting should be 50/50 and providing examples of how that can be done for men."

"Expose it more on social media to help normalise it. Remind young girls that just because they are women does not mean they have to be the main caregiver of any children."

35% Want Educational Initiatives About Gender Stereotypes

Women emphasise the importance of educational initiatives that challenge and deconstruct gender stereotypes and responsibilities.

"Develop educational programs and campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and emphasise the importance of shared parenting roles in schools and communities."

"Provide education to other parents on how they can be supportive and what a woman is going through so they can take some initiative and have some empathy."

"Women seek greater visibility, empathy, and gender equality in society and this is so needed. However, unless they feel comfortable speaking up and talking to those in power, change won't occur. Women need to feel supported, appreciated, and heard to voice their needs and have these important conversations.

Additionally, what women are asking for and want, shouldn't even need to be an ask. Gender shouldn't dictate expectations—both parents deserve equal pay/leave, and both parents should share responsibilities (or find a way to share responsibilities).

Society's messaging plays a significant role here. We must break the stigma and normalise both parents' involvement, as well as mental health challenges and getting support. Language shapes our perceptions and beliefs, individually and societally. We internalise things that we see and hear, just like we internalise and start to believe our own self-talk. If advertising only promotes 'mum and baby' roles, we limit possibilities and create the assumption that we should be doing this. But, if we see things advertised for 'dad/partner and baby,' this broadens our perspectives and eases pressure on women."

– *Dr. Rachel, Clinical Psychologist*



5. Closing statement

We appreciate you taking the time to explore The State of Invisibility. But this research is more than just an exploration; it's a call to action.

As we spotlight the state of invisibility at all stages of motherhood, we see the potential for change, empowerment, recognition, and equality. It is time to ditch antiquated scripts about what it means to be a woman and a mother and allow them to tell their stories, one at a time.

As a society, it's our collective responsibility to foster a world where every woman feels seen, heard, and valued.

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