

Pregnancy, maternity, parents and carer related microaggressions

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1. Pregnancy, maternity, parents and carer related microaggressions - what are they?

In the RPS Inclusion and Diversity strategy, being a parent and carer was highlighted as one of the key barriers to working in pharmacy requiring more support and improvement, individuals also felt that pregnancy and maternity status was a barrier to working in the profession.

Individuals going on or returning from maternity or paternity leave, parents and carers may experience negative attitudes and microaggressions within the workplace which are a combination of misinformation, assumptions, stereotypes, judgemental, outlooks and biases culminating in actions, comments or attitudes that communicate microaggressions and negative attitudes to parents and carers.



This document considers microaggressions from pregnancy including difficulties in pregnancy through to being a parent or carer and onwards.

There is a need to create judgement free working environments that challenge societies ingrained culture around pregnancy, maternity and being a carer as it slows a woman's career progression and devalues the time new fathers spend with their children and needing to care for a spouse or family member. We would also like to challenge the additional barriers that parents and carers experience if they have additional protected characteristics such as sex, disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

It is well documented that women have a higher caring burden compared to men, which will impact their career opportunities, resulting in not having the same opportunities to apply for senior roles. This in turn worsens the gender pay gap. For men, if they're the primary care provider, they may face prejudices and negative views in taking on this role for their family. Or have difficulty in accessing flexible working arrangements.

Individuals from an ethnic minority background may experience biases and discrimination preventing them from being represented and visible in senior leadership roles, which maybe compounded by the barriers experienced as a parent or carer. Women from an ethnic minority will be disproportionality impacted.

Members from the LGBTQIA+ community face discrimination and microaggressions which will be compounded by being a parent or carer, or they may experience additional discrimination for being a parent in a same-sex couple.

Single parents may also experience additional discrimination, and certain groups including single parents of colour often face additional layers of stigma and discrimination.

Being a parent or carer is not a protected characteristic, however parents and carers maybe covered by other protected characteristics including:

- Sex
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Disability
- Marriage and civil partnership

You can find out more about what sex and disability related microaggressions may look like in our [Gender \(/recognition/inclusion-diversity/microaggressions/gender\)](#) and [Disability \(/recognition/inclusion-diversity/microaggressions/disability\)](#) related microaggressions references.

Pregnancy and maternity discrimination occurs when a woman is treated unfairly because of her pregnancy, pregnancy related illness or intention to take maternity leave. Examples of unfair treatment include:

- Being dismissed, removal of responsibilities or seniority.
- Excluded from training as you're going on maternity leave.
- Not being given a promotion because you're pregnant or on maternity leave.

Marriage and Civil Partnership discrimination, this can happen when a person is treated unfairly because of their marital status or because they are in a civil partnership. Examples of indirect marriage or civil partnership discrimination are:

- A married partner may potentially be able to claim indirect marital discrimination if an employer has a policy or practice that disadvantage married people compared to non-married people

Disability, most relevant to parents and carers roles, they may experience direct and indirect associative disability discrimination. This occurs when they are treated less favourably than someone else because of being associated with a person with a disability.

2. Different types of discrimination

There are different types of discrimination:

Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination refers to situations where someone is treated less favourably if they're pregnant, a parent or a carer.

A pregnant woman may have experienced discrimination if they have been intentionally excluded from a training opportunity because they're pregnant.

Your job is changed unfavourably on your return from leave, as you have been on maternity leave.

Carers may experience direct discrimination by being discouraged to apply or not being given a role because of their caring responsibilities.

Discrimination by association

This falls under two acts of discrimination; direct associative disability discrimination and indirect associative disability discrimination.

Direct associative disability discrimination

This is when someone is treated unfavourably because they're associated with someone else who has a disability. For example, if a parent of a disabled child is treated less favourably than a parent of a non-disabled children because they have a disabled child.

Indirect associative disability discrimination

This could occur for parents and carers when an employer requires something of or imposes a working practice that puts those parenting or caring for someone with a disability at a disadvantage compared to those who do not.

For a carer, this could be a change from working from home to being made to go into the office which you're unable to commit to due to caring responsibilities. As a result of being unable to go into the office, you're dismissed.

Discrimination by association can also be experienced in pregnancy or maternity if the partner has been discriminated against due to association.

Indirect discrimination

It is indirect discrimination to have a rule, a policy or practice which applies to everyone, however, puts individuals who are pregnant, parents and carers at a disadvantage.

An example of this may be seen if there is a change in service delivery which will include late night and weekend working which negatively impact individuals who are pregnant, parents and carers.

Within recruitment, specifying roles must be full-time, therefore excluding many working parents and carers – this will disproportionately impact women as they tend to be the main carer givers.

Harassment

Harassment in the workplace occurs when someone makes you feel humiliated, offended or degraded based on your pregnancy, maternity and carer status. This behaviour can include bullying, nicknames and threats.

An example of this could be, if you're pregnant then people accusing you of having a 'baby brain'

Victimisation

This is when you're treated badly because you have made a complaint of being discriminated against due to being pregnant, returning from maternity leave and being a carer.

3. What do pregnancy, maternity, parents and carer related microaggressions look

like?



What do Pregnancy, Maternity, Parents and Carer Related Microaggressions look like?

Micro-aggressive behaviours can be verbal, non-verbal or environmental, including:



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4. How to recognise parent and carer related microaggressions

We've collected some real-life examples of parent and carer related microaggressions, with an explanation of why these comments or questions can be offensive, insulting or insensitive.

"I bet you're looking forward to going on maternity leave! You get a year break from work!"
Assuming that maternity leave is a holiday and not taking into consideration the physical and psychological impact of having and caring for a baby.

On returning back from maternity leave "Great, you're back! You can jump straight back in, we can't have a pharmacist on the rota and them not working properly!"
A lack of reintroduction back into the workplace, you're expected to pick up where you left off.

Said to parents or carers who are late joining a meeting as they have caring responsibilities "Everyone else can make it on time" or "Nice of you to make it!"
Demonstrates a lack of empathy and understanding of the persons caring responsibilities, makes the parent or carer feel awkward.

Particularly senior women with children who say "I had to manage without flexible working or it was harder when I was a parent so just deal with it"
A lack of support from parents in senior roles as they didn't have the options available to them or their circumstances are different.

"Nice of you to have the day off or finish early!" said to parents or carers who have had to call in sick or change their working pattern to finish early to manage the sick person their caring for.
People minimising the caring responsibilities, indicating they're taking a holiday for the day.

"I know I shouldn't ask... but are you planning on having children or more children?"
A really intrusive question about peoples plans to have a family.

"They can't be given the promotion as she has a little one and will probably want another soon"
An assumption is made that because the woman is a parent she won't be fully committed to the role and will likely be going on maternity leave again so away from the organisation.

"What does your husband think about the pregnancy?"
Making heteronormative assumptions, not everyone has a male partner.

"Where is your partner?" or "your partner can help with childcare, can't they?"
Assuming that there is a two parent family, some families have single parents.

"Why can't your wife leave early to pick up the child(ren)?"
There is an assumption that they have a wife - they maybe a single parent or in a same sex couple. There is also an assumption that women should be the primary caregivers and that flexible working arrangements are not available for men.

"Where does your baby get their dark hair from?"
This could be a sensitive question for a parent who may have used donor conception and/or surrogacy or be an adoptive parent.

"Who does your child look like?"
This could be a sensitive question for a parent who may have used donor conception and/or surrogacy or be an adoptive parent.

Said to parents who have adopted or difficulty conceiving "Couldn't you have children of your own?"
Reinforces the message of inadequacy if you're unable to have children naturally.

Predominately said to women "Shouldn't you be heading home to your family? Who is looking after your children?"
Assuming that women take on the majority of the caring burden, this is very rarely said to male colleagues.

"What a wonderful thing you did by adopting those children"
Indicating that the children are unwanted and the adoptive parents are heroes.

"Do your children know how lucky they are that you adopted them?"
Indicates that adopted children should feel lucky.

Said to pregnant women or women who have come back after maternity leave "oh, you have baby brain!"
Indicating that because they're pregnant they don't know what they're talking about.

"Oh, I could never love someone else's child"
Adoptive parents can't truly love the children they adopt.

Predominately said to women "Why do you want to work full-time? Do you not want to be with your children?"
Assuming that women do not or should not want to return to work fulltime as they should be looking after their children.

"oh, you're pregnant! That's not good for us!"
Becoming pregnant is a problem for the department.

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"Do your children know how lucky they are that you adopted them?"
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Adoptive parents can't truly love the children they adopt.

Said in a disappointed or judgemental manner "oh you're pregnant again! Didn't you just come back off maternity leave?"
Insinuating that you haven't left it long enough before getting pregnant again and you need to 'earn' your next maternity leave.

"oh, you're pregnant! That's not good for us!"
Becoming pregnant is a problem for the department.

How to recognise pregnancy, maternity, parent and carer related microaggressions?

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Pregnancy, parent and carer related Micro Affirmative Behaviours

You have a duty to ensure that you're not acting in a discriminatory manner, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Take positive micro-affirmative actions to be inclusive and prevent microaggressions.

Encourage an inclusive culture which is understanding and open to education. Provide support and comfort for individuals and create new positive behaviours.

- Hold yourself and others to account for any of the microaggressions highlighted above. When you notice them, you can call them out as an ally as outlined here: <https://www.rpharms.com/recognition/inclusion-and-diversity/microaggressions#forms> (/recognition/inclusion-and-diversity/microaggressions#forms)
- If someone speaks up against a microaggression or tells you their hurt by what you said or did don't argue that it didn't happen, try and understand how your behaviour can be changed and see it as an opportunity to develop your awareness
- Be mindful of your biases, perceptions, and stereotypes - challenge your values and assumptions of individuals who are pregnant, parents and carers
- Challenge your view of traditional views of parents and carers and pregnancy
- Arrange meetings at times where everyone is available to attend without judgement and impacting caring responsibilities
- Everyone should be considered for development opportunities and promotions based on their performance and capabilities and not on their caring responsibilities
- Don't comment on a person appearance if they're pregnant
- Don't make any assumptions of peoples ambitions and career progressions based on their caring responsibilities
- Consider all team members for progression opportunities regardless of their caring responsibilities

- Support individuals with caring responsibilities in setting boundaries; by honouring their flexible working hours and enabling them to have a good work life balance
- Support individuals are transitioning back to work after an extended period off to readjust to work and supporting them with KIT days.
- Don't assume what is important individuals with caring responsibilities, ask them what they would like
- Support people to sustain their motivation and purpose in their role.

References

- 1 <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=counseling-facpubs>
(<https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=counseling-facpubs>)
- 2 [https://psychology.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/faculty_publications/Rachel%20H.%20Farr/Farr%20et%20al%20\(2016\)%20Microaggressions,%20JOYO.pdf](https://psychology.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/faculty_publications/Rachel%20H.%20Farr/Farr%20et%20al%20(2016)%20Microaggressions,%20JOYO.pdf)
([https://psychology.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/faculty_publications/Rachel%20H.%20Farr/Farr%20et%20al%20\(2016\)%20Microaggressions,%20JOYO.pdf](https://psychology.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/faculty_publications/Rachel%20H.%20Farr/Farr%20et%20al%20(2016)%20Microaggressions,%20JOYO.pdf))
- 3 <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/articles/discrimination-against-parents-and-carers-in-the-workplace/>
(<https://workingfamilies.org.uk/articles/discrimination-against-parents-and-carers-in-the-workplace/>)
- 4 <https://www.singleparentrights.org/research>
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6. Download our posters

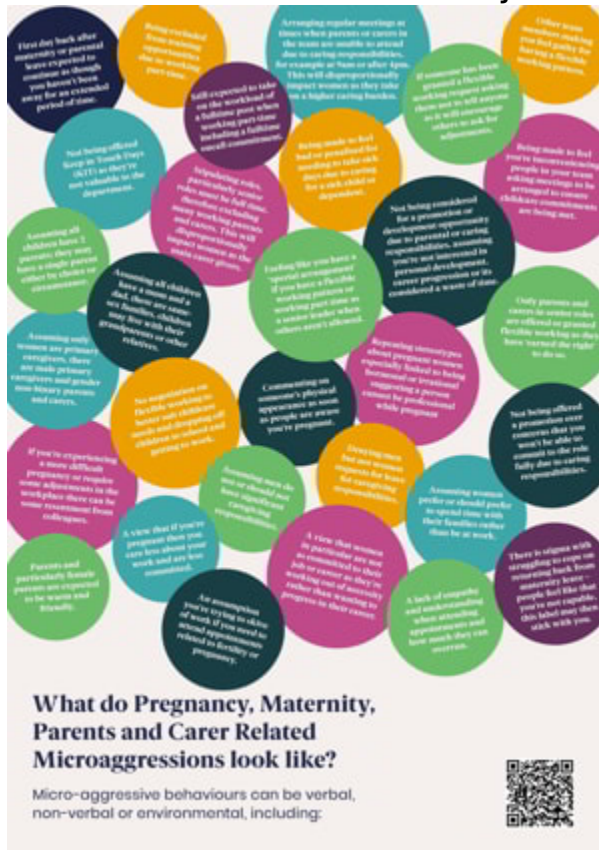
In addition to the behaviour highlighted above, parent and carer related micro-aggressive behaviours can be verbal, non-verbal or environmental.

Download our posters below, on recognising microaggressions, and examples of pregnancy, maternity, parents and carer related Microaggressions.



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