

The experiences of mothers during the Covid-19 pandemic

I was in college, not long started college, I don't think, because I started college the year of 2020. And I know obviously when you're going in and out of places every day, all day, it was like you were seeing more masks everywhere, you're seeing more hand sanitiser, and things everywhere. Right, I know what's going on, but what's actually going on because you hadn't heard that much about it. You just know and something going round like a cold, like a bug. And then it was just more and more all over the news and you were like, Right, this is actually a bit scary. And then I stopped going to college because I was like, I don't want to go out.

~JLR

Well, I can't really remember when we actually heard about it. I suppose it must have been on the telly when it came up, you know, this is happening in China and that. But the first sort of 'oh hell this is going to affect us', everybody here was we'd got something planned, we had karaoke planned in the meeting room. And Trevor came in, and this would be the Tuesday, the karaoke was going to be the Friday, and Trevor came to us and said, 'the restaurant is shutting tomorrow' - it was as quick as that - 'the restaurant's shutting tomorrow. You can have your karaoke on Friday and that's it.' Everything is closing. Nothing, you won't use the lounges or anything. So that was the first thing here that we realised that, you know, this was really quite big and it was going to affect us all.

~ MO'H

So I was one of the few people in my family that was genuinely terrified. And there was a lot of people from Covid that were like 'oh, it will be fine'...but I'm very much somebody, not so much now that I'd watch the news and I'd see the hospitals in different countries and I'd see how places were shutting down in different countries and I used to think, you know, this is serious. This is, you know, the news would be saying one person has come off a flight to the UK and it was a big thing, and it was newsworthy. And I thought, this isn't something small. And one of my daughters, my middle daughter has got Type 1 diabetes, which is an autoimmune disease, and she relies on insulin. If she doesn't have insulin, she'll die. That's just how it is. And I remember thinking that she's vulnerable and I'm scared. I was very, very scared. I didn't really know what was going to happen in the sense that I didn't think the world would shut down. But I kind of knew. I remember saying to my partner, saying 'the schools are going to shut, and he was like, they won't, and I was like, they will. But before they do, I decided to take Mollie out anyway. And I had spoken to other parents as well with children that have got autoimmune diseases and things like that...I knew I'd made my decision and I like to see what other people think and...they were very much of the same

mindset. I think I took Mollie out of school maybe two days before the schools actually closed. And I think for the first, I can't really remember how long - it could have been the first week, the first month - I was pretty scared. I was pretty worried because I genuinely thought we all might die and I didn't quite know how to process that.

~ MM

And then Covid happened and everything kind of changed. So first of all, I think I got redeployed to intensive care, which meant my shift work changed, so my work pattern changed. So I had to do 12 hour days or 13 hour days, 13 hour nights, which was very different to what I was used to and what the children were used to. And then school shut down. So I had no childcare because my family live quite far away and James' family live quite far away and James is a GP so he still also had to work. So the kids then had to go to what we called virus school. So the kids had to go to virus school and they were in the same class as each other. So they just kind of got put into school with about six or seven other children I think initially. And they weren't really doing any work. And I was expected to homeschool them as well as work my shifts and then it was hard, just not really being here. Lots of my colleagues moved out of their family home because they didn't want to bring Covid back because it was nobody really knew what we were doing. And it was all over the news that it wasn't safe for doctors and nurses to go to work. And my kids picked up on that quite a lot, which was awful because they were just terrified that I was going to go to work and not come home. So we tried to kind of address those fears, but we had similar fears. We weren't really sure. So there were varying degrees of paranoia really. So I initially started just coming in as normal. I'd have a shower at work after my shift come in as normal and change my clothes as soon as I came in and then as it kind of progressed, I'd just shower at work and then come home and not bother getting changed and try not to...Oh, I remember one day coming home from work and Izzy running up to me and I had a particularly hard shift and I was definitely head to toe covered in Covid and I think hadn't bothered showering at work at this point, coming home. She ran up to me, jumped on me and licked my neck, and just having a horrible sinking feeling that I was bringing potentially bringing this virus into the family home. It was really awful.

~CG

Well my husband passed away in the January just before lockdown, so we managed to have his funeral before things went haywire. And then after that, I spent those first three months of lockdown sort of clearing the house of clutter to give myself something to do. My daughters used to come with shopping for me, granddaughters used to come and stand at the back door and have a little chat with their children. So I was quite busy actually during lockdown when I decided to sell the house and getting that sorted. So it didn't pass too unpleasantly for me, apart from being able to see the family.

~J

You know, my garden is not very big at the back, but I sort of organised it so I got seating because quite a few people I knew weren't working. And I just said, if you're passing the door, just knock. I'll make us all a drink and we can sit in the garden, 6-7 feet between all of us. And we'd sit there and sometimes, people would call and I'd make drinks and there's a table in the middle and I'd put it in the middle with a pack of wipes and everybody wiped their hands. I mean, the lengths we went to when I think about it. But you had to because you just didn't know.

~J

They were very, very strict, but yeah, well, I am. I don't know. I was vulnerable. I kept getting these letters telling me that I should isolate it and I did. And between my television and my phone, I kept in touch with everybody, you know? And it didn't bother me so much, I suppose. A bit of a loner, you know, and enjoy my own company.

~L

But during that time, the first one, we did have the good weather, which made all the difference in the world. You could go out and you could listen to the birds sing because there was no planes, very little traffic. All my children worked and their other halves all worked all the way through it. And occasionally they'd come and stand at the back gate and say hello. But it's very lonely time, a very lonely time. We talk to the neighbours, because I do talk to anybody anyway, because I've lived there 40 odd years, it was something that we all did. We chatted because we were the same age group and it's made a sort of community. And because I don't drive, I wasn't going incognito anywhere, you know, I walked wherever I went or I went on the bus. Once a week I got on the bus to do my shopping and that would be about it. I learned how to do jigsaws, crossword puzzles, things like that. Anything to keep my mind going and told myself how lucky I was. And I think that was important. I did lose two family members during it to Covid and two from all the things which meant that when no funerals, etc., but it's something you have to live with and get on with.

~L

Then we had a two-year lockdown here. And it was terrible. Terrible. We couldn't go in the lift with anybody else. One at a time. We couldn't have our family here. This is two years we had here. Our children and grandchildren at Christmas on the car park, you had to talk to them through the windows. We weren't allowed out near anybody. Two whole years stuck in this place. We couldn't speak to anybody. We couldn't go in the restaurant. If you wanted stuff delivered, somebody came to the front door, you put an order in and they left it for you or your family would do shopping. You could ring them and they'd bring shop in and leave it at the door but I thought we were treated dreadful.

~JJon

- Did I tell you about my horrifying story of Covid? Talk about breaking the law! Our next door neighbour but one, the one who's really poorly now, she's bedfast basically. But at that stage she was having a lot of chest infections. She can't eat at all now, it's all peg fed and all that and she was quite often going into hospital because of her condition. Anyway, one day a friend of mine, her husband had just died. So I was obviously feeling sympathetic towards her and I knew you weren't supposed to, but I invited around for coffee and cake and a chat and whatever. Anyway, the next thing I know, we were sat there just we've got this big bay window and the police van turned up. And I thought 'Oh my God'. These people got out in all the white stuff, you know, the hazmat suits. The whole lot with the thing on the back and the thing on the front. And I'm looking at this and I said to Val 'what are we going to do?' I looked through the window and it was an ambulance at Sue's and these were like, you know, like emergency attenders and the ambulance had turned up separately but they were going into Sue's. But when I first saw it my heart was pounding. I thought - what excuse can I possibly use? Well I did break the law a few times to be honest.

- Well didn't we all?

~ CA, JN, JI

I think the most challenging thing for me was not being able to see family and friends. And because I mean, I didn't really mind the fact that I didn't have to work quite often and being able to just relax and but yeah, not being able to just nip out to my mom's or my dad's or, you know, go and see my friends. And then just not being able to do it, I suppose was the hardest thing is you have to have so much freedom before being told you it allowed anymore was difficult.

~MH

But generally I don't think I sort of experienced that much. But sick people and I mean, it impacted on that. My friend who lived downstairs from me, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and I gave her lifts to Christy's and that and I borrowed a car and gave her lifts and was very much involved with her as she deteriorated quite quickly and sadly died. And that, you know, it was always in our heads about Covid. There were times when I couldn't even go in the hospital with her. She had to specifically ask because she didn't have anybody, you know, she didn't have family to ask permission for me to go with when she saw the consultant, because you know, she just wanted somebody to hold her hand basically. It was that more than anything, you know, that that sort of and not being able to visit my daughter, and she recovered well, when she was very ill. Um, yeah. It was the effects of Covid, but it wasn't actually Covid.

~GS

Challenging for me, without a doubt was the fear of people becoming ill and particularly looking outside of my immediate family and my extended family, particularly my older relatives, I felt scared all the time that somebody was going to get Covid and die. And I particularly felt terrified that someone from my household, particularly me, because I was still going into school, would pass Covid on to somebody and then they would get seriously ill or die. So the challenge for me there were practical challenges like the change of people suddenly being at home but when I think back to that period, it's actually the fear of illness and deaths that I most remember, particularly in 2020 when there was, there wasn't really a great understanding of how we transmitted it. There was no vaccination. It just felt like this enormous enemy outside the front door all the time. In contrast to that, in terms of was it enjoyable, I actually found it wonderful being at home for so many additional hours with my husband and my children. It just suddenly felt like a precious gift within our house that we just had all this time to be told, you're here together and you can't go anywhere and you can't do anything. Just to suddenly have all that additional time together that wasn't filled by school or hobbies. There's obvious downsides to those things going, but just the joy of being at home with the kids again in the way I've had them as toddlers really was a happiness for me and my husband being at home.

~JG

I'd want him to know about like the strain on the NHS. That was a big thing. I'd want him to know about like the strain on everything, like the economy, just people living like not being able to work getting sacked from the job rather than put on, what's it called, the furlough, just like all that it was, it was more than just like getting stay home for a few months that like it actually had a big and ongoing impact. So even now, sounds silly but I've still not had my dentist appointment for about three years just because of backlog and so many people got kicked out of dentist. Hospital appointments, surgeries, the backlog still going on now even stuff like driving lessons like it's just everything got put on standstill, it's chaos. But yeah, so probably that it was more than just like, oh, you got to stay home for a few months.

~ RWi

I'd like people to know that we were really resilient, that people really pulled together, even though the government kind of didn't put that into place, people put together themselves. And there was a lot of amazing people that did amazing stuff with their communities and they'll never be recognised they don't want the recognition but that people did a lot of, you know, hard things. I feel like that for me teachers did an awful lot that people don't recognise. I think they were one way like the unsung heroes because I know obviously the NHS people were amazing and they're struggling with a lot of stuff now. But teachers also had to put themselves on the line, you know, and they had to, to give up being with their families and stuff just as much, but they weren't really recognised as much for that. Just that it was really

bloody hard, you know. And I don't think unless you've lived through it then you realise how ridiculous some of the things feel now like, you know, like not touching things, not hugging people when we know that it's not transmitted that way now as such, you know what I mean? Like because we didn't know, we know so little about it that it was actually quite a shock that something could affect us and that we're not invincible just because it's 21st century and we have all of the technology and all of these means that actually things can still go belly up. And, you know, we shouldn't take things for granted. You know, I think that's what I'd like people to know.

~RWa