

[00:00:19.980] - Amanda Stanley

Hello and welcome to The Briefing, bringing you fortnightly news of women's equality and Covid-19. I'm Amanda Stanley,

[00:00:26.310] - Alys Mumford

And I'm Alys Mumford.

[00:00:27.780] - Alys Mumford

We're now into the third episode of these new shorter podcasts. And it's fair to say Amanda, I think that the subjects we're covering are somewhat heavy. So we thought we'd start kicking off each episode now with something cheery. Amanda, can you tell us something good, big or small, something you've done, read, witnessed, or just a reminder that fluffy animals exist?

[00:00:47.310] - Amanda Stanley

When we're talking about this in our meeting prior to this, I was having this thought and that evening, afterwards, I was sat outside my house. I've got a nice little bit that I can sit at, and it was half past ten at night. And I just kept thinking, it's so light! Remember when we didn't think it was going to get light again? So that was actually my main thing, was the sun is still up. [Laughs]

[00:01:08.920] - Amanda Stanley

It made me think, I remember back in February just being like we're not ever going to see Sun after 4pm ever again. And now it's here. And yeah, it's been really nice, I've been going for evening cycles in the golden hour, the late golden hour, and yeah, it's been really lovely. What about you?

[00:01:24.540] - Alys Mumford

I feel like most people on this recording can guess what mine is going to be, and it is of course that Spring Watch is back this week. People don't watch Spring Watch, other nature shows are available, but they're not as good. It's really lovely. Yeah, similar Amanda, looking at spring, like spring still happens. And also I feel like they've got a really good job, the presenters, of sort of acknowledging that this is a really, really difficult time. And the fact that there are fledgling Blue Tits, doesn't change that, but it's still nice to look at them.

[00:01:52.320] - Alys Mumford

So we've also got on the podcast this week, Engender's Emma Ritch and Eilidh Dickson, hello both.

[00:01:59.470] - Eilidh Dickson

Hi.

[00:01:59.480] - Emma Ritch

Hello.

[00:01:59.470] - Alys Mumford

What good things can you tell us about, Emma kick us off?

[00:02:01.950] - Emma Ritch

I am really not a baker, but during lockdown I've been trying to master a Ginger Crunch traybake that my mum and my sister make all the time, which is really popular in my home country of New Zealand. And this last week I think I've cracked it. So I produced an award winning in my own household batch of Ginger Crunch, which was a really delicious boost to the busy work of Engender all through the week.

[00:02:25.950] - Alys Mumford

Amazing.

[00:02:26.970] - Amanda Stanley

Sorry, I just was laughing at the award winning in my own household [Laughs]

[00:02:33.450] - Alys Mumford

Do we have to assume therefore that the previous batches were not award winning, even inside your own household?

[00:02:37.770] - Emma Ritch

Even inside my own household, Alys, it was a little bit of.. [unclear word]

[00:02:46.620] - Amanda Stanley

I feel like we could just end the podcast there on good things that have happened, that would be a joy, [Laughs] but we're not going to are we Alys?

[00:02:55.600] - Alys Mumford

We're not.

[00:02:57.280] - Amanda Stanley

So today what we're gonna be talking about is care. We're recording this on Wednesday, the 27th of May. And I think it's fair to say that there's been slightly more discussion of the strains of child care during a global pandemic than normal this week, due to reasons that I'm sure everyone knows. But we thought it would be a perfect time to talk about why unpaid care is a feminist issue.

[00:03:20.280] - Alys Mumford

Exactly. So care is pretty integral to everything we talk about, as advocates for women's equality. Comes up in workshops and policy chats, both childcare or social or kinship care, is overwhelmingly done by women, and is worth a whopping 10.3 billion pounds in Scotland. That's almost equivalent to the cost of the NHS, about a third of the economy. And we talked about unpaid care in Season One of our On The Engender podcast, an episode called Making Work Visible. So do you have a listen to that if you haven't already.

[00:03:48.540] - Alys Mumford

But today we're going to focus in specifically on unpaid care during Covid-19. Eilidh, it's fair to say that the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent public health measures have brought into focus some pretty unsustainable care structures. Can you just run us through some of the key issues?

[00:04:03.900] - Eilidh Dickson

As we've noted before on this podcast, so many of the heart-breaking trends that we have seen throughout lockdown are exacerbated patterns that were true even before it. So we know that women, as you mentioned before, spend more time on care for the elderly and disabled relatives, as well as on child care, than men do. The UN estimates around 2.5 times more. But lockdown is making access to paid work even more difficult, as women work in sectors that are most likely to be shut down, while also increasing the amount of children in the home while schools are shut.

[00:04:34.050] - Eilidh Dickson

Research published this week from the Institute of Fiscal Studies shows us that women are more likely to quit their job and be furloughed. But many are also still working from home or working on the front line. And we know that the majority of frontline workers in health and in retail are women. So, of course, balancing childcare and paid work is incredibly difficult. And now many women are also having to do the home schooling that's required whilst term time is in place, which is an entirely different skill and responsibility altogether.

[00:05:00.450] - Eilidh Dickson

So that's added an extra complication into the mix. And of course, on top of that, the support that so many women rely on, like paid child care, or free childcare from grandparents or family, as well as access to nurseries has been extremely curtailed, if not cut off altogether. There's also been, at least I think, a lack of clarity, because we don't know for sure how long this is going to continue, or the detail of when and how we're going to be able to re-access things like school and child care facilities when it does come.

[00:05:29.390] - Eilidh Dickson

And so all of this juggling and the pressure that that means is having really severe consequences for women's mental health and well-being, but also serious, and still really unknown, consequences for women long-term and their ability to stay in paid work.

[00:05:42.380] - Amanda Stanley

In our last episode, we talked about how the UK government didn't initially allow furlough to be requested due to child care requirements. But this is now changed. Emma, what else is being done to try and help those struggling with unpaid care?

[00:05:55.550] - Emma Ritch

Very little. Truth be told. So Scottish Government has agreed an ad-hoc payment that's going to go out to all of those who receive, as carers, Social Security entitlement. But as unpaid carers often point out, this is only goes to about 10 percent of the unpaid carers in Scotland, although it does go to those who are most at risk of poverty. Otherwise, there's been a bit of a concerted effort to try and get unpaid carers, better Personal Protective Equipment.

[00:06:23.960] - Emma Ritch

That was something which unpaid carers told us they were extremely alarmed by. But apart from that, we really haven't seen much consideration of unpaid care either for Disabled and older people. Or for the type of child care work that Eilidh was describing.

[00:06:39.560] - Alys Mumford

That speaks to something that always seems to come back to in these discussions, that women will bear the brunt and will pick up the pieces. Whether it's in a single domestic setting, whether it's sort of society-wide. There is this sense that, well, it'll get done because women will just squeeze it in to make sure that people are cared for.

[00:06:58.730] - Alys Mumford

And one thing Engender has been doing during this pandemic to capture some of the stories of women, to highlight those sort of policy deficiencies and how they're reflected in people's lives, and they really illustrate the challenges, sort of, far better than we can. So we thought we'd just share some of those submitted stories with you now. Thank you so much to the women who have shared that share their experiences with us. Eilidh, can you start us off?

[00:07:22.550] - Eilidh Dickson

This came in from a mum of two, "I'm lucky that my partner is doing the bulk of childcare, so I'm managing to balance work with school closure. But I still have to shut the door and hear my three year old crying on the other side because he doesn't understand that I'm home, but can't play. I speak to friends who are trying to work from home while their five and two year old are there wanting attention. The guilt that the mum is feeling and the impact on the kids of the parents being physically present, but not actually, is so hard. The stress of doing both at the same time, it's going to have a big impact on mental health. No amount of mindfulness will help. In Facebook groups, I see mums asking for advice and they're working until midnight after putting the kids to bed so that they can fit their hours in. I'm really, really worried about burnout for so many women because the majority of cases will be women. They have more flexible employers, they work part-time, so they're expected to do it all. They are more involved with school work, etc.."

[00:08:10.520] - Amanda Stanley

And so we've also got a note from a working mum of a two year old in which they say, "I am a full time charity worker who's thankful to have a job where I can still work from home, and understanding colleagues. My partner and daughter's father is out of work, so he's taking on the brunt of child care, whilst I carry out work from home. It's been a strain. Our relationship is being tested to new limits with being around each other 24/7.

[00:08:33.560] - Amanda Stanley

Our daughter is relatively happy despite toddler outbursts on a half hourly basis. Of course, it's hard

going keeping a two year old entertained. Sometimes we have to just give her the tablet and let her play with games. We can't be 24/7 educators, entertainers and playmates, whilst being parents. She's desperately missing her friends at nursery, so I'm concerned about her socialisation and education, which she gets at nursery. To be honest, I felt a gnawing sense of guilt at times, trying to work at home whilst knowing my partner and daughter are there, trying to keep occupied, avoid confrontations when things get fraught.

[00:09:04.580] - Amanda Stanley

I've become the sole earner of the household overnight. Of course, we take our breaks and walks when we can, but the lines between work and home have become blurred. I long to get out the door in the morning to work with fellow colleagues and be around adults again. But I'm no different to any other working mum trying to keep motivated, balanced plates, and keep going. Just longing for a light at the end of the tunnel."

[00:09:22.490] - Alys Mumford

Here we have a submission from someone who describes themselves as a single mother, carer, worker, lecturer, and a student. "Lockdown began on the 16th of March, face to face teaching ended then too. Forced to try and deliver term three of a practical course online for young adults, who are obviously sitting thinking, this is not what I signed up for. I have two jobs working part time and teaching part time, both are now being done from home. Then school shut, and now I'm juggling primary seven son's school work, and two jobs at home.

[00:09:51.020] - Alys Mumford

My son has a diagnosis of high functioning autism. I'm blessed with a beautiful boy who is smart, funny and a talented artist. He's very sociable and is missing talking with everyone he meets. I worry about his mental health with lockdown, and what will first year of secondary school look like? I'm a masters student in my third year, and I've a fast approaching deadline of 30th June for submission of work. I'm a carer for my mother who's a cancer patient. She is shielding. I help with changing her bed, hoovering, cleaning floors, bathroom and kitchen, weekly.

[00:10:16.790] - Alys Mumford

Normally, I'd shop for her too, but so thankful to her brother that he's been shopping for her since the start of lockdown. I worried for my mother's mental health during this lockdown. She's battled five different types of cancer over the last 20 years, the latest three years battling three very serious cancers, and amazing she's come out through, and is in remission for two of them. She was only just getting out to the theatre, gigs, and restaurants when lockdown happened. Both my older brothers live in different cities, and kind of leave it to me to help our mother normally.

[00:10:44.700] - Alys Mumford

However, I think this situation feels like it's harder to manage everything. I got out of the abusive relationship with my son's father, and I've been a single parent for nine years now. The relationship is still volatile and my son's father has been no practical help through lockdown or before. My son stayed with his father at the weekend. It's allowed me one day where I can breathe, sleep and write. I know that I'm lucky to have this one day. I feel guilt and think that I should be doing some to help others in the community on this day.

[00:11:11.040] - Alys Mumford

What I miss most right now is sitting in the theatre, of going to a gig, where I could just lose myself in the moment, just for that moment."

[00:11:17.400] - Emma Ritch

Mine is from someone who describes themselves as working from home, stressed with a toddler. "My office has staff working at home for now. I have a toddler who usually attends day care while I work at the office. I'm struggling to balance work and child care. With a small child present, trying to focus on work is problematic. Trying to do my paid work, and my main and my favourite job as a mother, does not combine well at all. My partner is still working outwith the home and I can't help but feel envy, that I want to go to work as normal.

[00:11:48.090] - Emma Ritch

I can feel the impact this is having on my mental health and the overall health of my small family. When my partner returns from work, I try to focus on additional work tasks that I have not completed for that day, and can feel the expectation from my employer. But the feeling of constant working from morning to night has me feeling I am not being the best mother or meeting my work expectations. I have read information online on how to work from home with a toddler, but it is so unrealistic. How are mothers coping with still doing their job and having a small child at home, and doing both combined? Do they expect to come out with their sanity intact? I do not."

[00:12:27.020] - Alys Mumford

Those stories, obviously, are really hard to hear, and will resonate, I'm sure, with many of our listeners. You can see these stories and more on our website at engender.scot/covid. And please do let us know how you're finding lockdown, either there on the website, or on Twitter, @womencovidscot

[00:12:45.210] - Amanda Stanley

Emma, one of the things which shines through clearly in all of these stories is that desire for some respite, a light at the end of the tunnel, as we heard. This week, we'll see the first easing of lockdown restrictions, in Scotland. And there have been lots of discussions about the measures which will be taken to keep schools safe and people well in the upcoming months. What needs to happen to try and relieve some of this burden of unpaid care?

[00:13:07.410] - Emma Ritch

I really wish I had some good news for people. But at the moment what we're seeing, is plans for lockdown really not taking account of this massive redistribution of unpaid care, from state services to women, during Covid. And so some of the plans for lockdown are either just assuming that they'll be quite good for women. In that once schools slightly re-open, then women will be doing less home schooling, but aren't really taking account of how women had to juggle to make all the pieces of their work and family lives fit together before Covid.

[00:13:43.680] - Emma Ritch

So we think, if they're not paying attention to how transport systems work, the way the school day will be configured, the lack of nursery provision, when childminders will be back up and operating, and when grandparents will be able to take on some of the unpaid care they did pre-Covid. Then it's going to take a significant amount of planning that is very mindful of women's roles to achieve success.

[00:14:10.800] - Emma Ritch

And so we are currently hearing through the channels that Alys just described a huge amount of concern from women who feel like the plans they've already heard a little bit about, really don't pay attention to their needs. And so women are asking schools things like, will you be able to make sure that both of my children are going to be having the same school day? So I can do some paid work during the times they're there, and schools say they'll try but won't commit to actually doing that.

[00:14:42.270] - Emma Ritch

So these are the really, really fine practical details that we need governments and education authorities to get on top of, if we're not going to see a huge entrenchment of women's unpaid work.

[00:14:54.810] - Amanda Stanley

And Eilidh, do you have anything that you would like to add to that as well before we close out?

[00:14:59.610] - Eilidh Dickson

I agree entirely that the kind of immediate things are just not being considered. And it's so important that they are properly considered when we're working out how to come out of lockdown. I think just starting to get the basics right is really important. But what we need is a much, much long needed, long-term change in how we value care. This crisis has shown just how vital things like schools and social care just really are for the functioning of what we have always considered to be our economy.

[00:15:28.830] - Eilidh Dickson

And we just don't count as value when we measure things like GDP. So this week we've seen our economy secretary talking about needing things like well-being indicators, which we've known for a really long time. But this is also going to take even more radical change in how we talk about things like care and child care and seeing them as infrastructure that enables us to get to work, just like we do roads and bridges. We need expansion and investment in flexible social care and child care hours. But we also need things like reassessments of pay and conditions within those jobs themselves.

[00:15:59.420] - Alys Mumford

Thank you, Eilidh. And we're going to be talking about all of these things and more in the coming months. As well as why unpaid care is one of the key things which needs rethinking in our post-Covid economy, and some work which we'll be launching next week. So do keep a lookout for that as well.

[00:16:13.100] - Amanda Stanley

So to see us out, you know, end on a high again. Could we all just give a recommendation for the next couple of weeks of things that you're enjoying, to look out for, maybe a film, a book, what you're up to?

[00:16:27.280] - Alys Mumford

Can I go first on this one please?

[00:16:29.190] - Amanda Stanley

Of course.

[00:16:30.450] - Alys Mumford

Because I have something like relatively, I'm not guilty about enjoying, normally my answers will be Buffy and Diagnosis Murder. But this week I've been really, really enjoying listening to the audiobook of The Five by Hallie Rubenhold. So it's the Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper. And it is absolutely fascinating social history. And like every time I listen to a bit of it, I come away with lots of facts and interesting things to talk to people. So highly recommend The Five.

[00:17:01.580] - Amanda Stanley

Eilidh, do you have anything that you've..?

[00:17:02.720] - Eilidh Dickson

I've been reading, or trying to read, according to the capacity of my attention span in the evenings during lockdown, which has meant readings from probably not so recommendable things. But I have just started reading Sex Matters by Alyson McGregor, who is an expert in sex and gender medicine. And it's really, really timely, given all of the many ways that this crisis is affecting women's health and access to health care.

[00:17:25.720] - Emma Ritch

I've been catching up on a bunch of Curtis Sittenfeld books that I've never read before, during lockdown. And I'm just about to crack the spine on her book, Rodham, which re-imagines what would happen if Hillary Rodham Clinton had not married Bill Clinton. So I'm looking forward to that.

[00:17:43.160] - Alys Mumford

Wow. How about you Amanda?

[00:17:46.870] - Amanda Stanley

Me? What would my recommendation be? You know, I've been going, if I've been feeling a wee bit down, I have been going back onto Twitter, onto Eva Victor. Does anybody follow Eva Victor on Twitter? If you look up Eva Victor on Twitter, she has gone viral many times for making videos, that most recently she's been doing stuff around being in quarantine and in lockdown. And all of her, all of the videos, are extremely funny, about like face-timing her friend and trying not to talk about that they're in lockdown, just trying to find something else to talk about.

[00:18:19.660] - Amanda Stanley

So any time I feel a bit down, I just search up her Twitter and just go through all of the videos. I would definitely recommend. It's a good laugh.

[00:18:29.200] - Alys Mumford

Amazing. Thank you so. Yeah, well, I hope that some recommendations for folk that are somehow finding they've got some more free time at the minute. And we'd love to hear from you as well. You contact us on Twitter, on the hashtag, #OnTheEngender to let us know if you like, or dislike, any of the things we've just recommended. Or if you have recommendations of your own.

[00:18:51.070] - Alys Mumford

Thank you so much, Eilidh and Emma, for joining us. And of course, Amanda, for co-hosting and doing all the actual work that goes into making a podcast. We will be back in two weeks. And until then, stay safe.