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"Viewed with suspicion, considered idle and mocked-working caregiving fathers and fatherhood forfeits"

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Abstract

Existing academic literature consistently points to a changing role for modern fathers in which they take an egalitarian role in the caregiving responsibilities for their children. Despite this, fathers are observed to continue to dominate the realms of full-time working, aligning to more traditional breadwinning mentalities than such trends might suggest, raising questions around inequality. Fathers at work have previously been found to encounter challenges within the workplace when they alter, or consider altering their work patterns due to caregiving responsibilities. Employing a sample of working parents and managers, this paper explores how caregiving fathers are perceived within organizations and in considering their experiences, provides a nuanced and detailed understanding of the ways in which mistreatment for caregiving fathers manifests within contemporary UK workplaces. Caregiving fathers are found to face specific challenges termed "fatherhood forfeits" such as perceived idleness, suffering mockery, and being viewed with suspicion by male and female co-workers. Actions are proposed to address "fatherhood forfeits" that include specific organizational training interventions and the importance of workplace role modeling.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The landscape for contemporary western working parents is suggested by many to have moved toward a position of increased equality in relation to both work and home spheres over the last 150 years (Altintas & Sullivan, 2017; Burnett et al., 2010; Moran & Koslowski, 2019; Taylor & Scott, 2018). The portrayal of modern fathers is often that of an active parent, taking a more involved role in the upbringing of their children than in previous generations, with mothers making an increased contribution to the labor market (Caracciolo di Torella, 2014; Gatrell et al., 2014; Henz, 2017). Existing research suggests that more traditional notions of parenting, in which fathers have a primary affiliation to the workplace and mothers to the home, have been replaced by more egalitarian patterns whereby domestic responsibilities are shared by contemporary couples, with both parents undertaking employment outside of the home and mediating between family and employment (Haas & Hwang, 2019; ONS, 2019). However, while it has been suggested that perceptions of fatherhood are changing (Caracciolo di Torella, 2014; Featherstone, 2009; Henz, 2017), it is argued that a climate of minimal actual change in paternal working patterns prevails and policies that support work-life balance continue to be accessed by fathers less than mothers (Burnett et al., 2013; Moran & Koslowski, 2019). Most UK fathers can be observed to be continuing in the traditional role of primary earner, rarely reducing paid work hours for caregiving with mothers upholding the larger share of caregiving activities, regardless of the working hours or salary of either parent (Lyonette & Crompton, 2015; ONS, 2017; Speight et al., 2013). This holds true for fathers who participate in caregiving, who often do so in a "supporting and helping" capacity rather than taking ownership (Braun et al., 2011; Lewis, 2000; Podnieks, 2016). This research, located in the UK, resides within the context of the juxtaposition of societal discourse of a modern father within a climate of limited evidential change to contemporary working patterns. For the purposes of this paper, a caregiving father is defined as a father who is involved with specific childcare activities that require adjustment to their working arrangements, for example, working on a part-time basis or working more flexibly to meet childcare responsibilities.

A key explanation for the maintenance of traditional gendered parental norms is that parents navigate their work and home life through a complex set of "benefits", "penalties", "dividends", and "deficits". Such sanctions and rewards have been observed to impact upon workplace relationships and promote adherence to more traditional patterns of parenting in which men's caregiving is devalued and breadwinner mentalities are preserved (Bailey, 2015; Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Connell, 1995; Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Holter, 2007). When fathers attempt to combine work and caregiving, it has been suggested that they face negative peer relations (Burnett et al., 2013), stigma (Cook et al., 2021), social mistreatment (Berdahl & Moon, 2013), and can expect poor job opportunities (Halrynjo, 2009). This paper places emphasis on the experience of fathers who move away from traditional full-time working patterns to enable a greater involvement in caregiving, a grouping that is often under researched within the work and family literature (Kelliher et al., 2019). In so doing, our paper responds to calls for wider research in this area (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Burnett et al., 2013) through exploring the experiences of the social actors involved (identified as working parents and managers), to enable understanding of both the experiences of individual parents and organizational perceptions of fathers within the workplace. Adopting the viewpoint of working fathers alone was considered insufficient to generate necessary knowledge; hence, our adoption of multi stakeholder viewpoints that are essential in exploring working practices of parents and are often absent in work and family literature (Pas et al., 2011).

While it is widely acknowledged that fathers face structural challenges when attempting to combine work and caregiving, often associated with access to flexible working arrangements, leave entitlements (Cook et al., 2021), and financial penalties (Burnett et al., 2013; Fuller & Cooke, 2018), this paper seeks to explore the cultural forces that are at play and may act as drivers to the maintenance of breadwinning patterns of working arrangements for fathers,

with the aim of highlighting specific areas that organizations can focus on at a local level to improve gender equality within teams. After all, the prevailing adherence to the full-time male breadwinner ideology, which *"pulls men out of the home and pushes women into it"*, is indicative that any revolution toward gender equality is further away than may appear on the surface (Berdahl & Moon, 2013, p: 343; Esping-Andersen et al., 2013). It is envisaged that an increased understanding of the obstacles faced by fathers in the workplace facilitates improved effectiveness of organizational recruitment, selection, and retention processes for caregiving fathers (Li et al., 2018) and harnesses potential for increased work performance due to wider support and reduced levels of work family conflict (Kelliher et al., 2019). Finally, adherence to traditional patterns of arranging work and family are believed to have a role to play in the maintenance of the gender pay gap in the UK, which currently sits at 17.3% among all employees (Burgess & Davies, 2017; ONS, 2019). Thus, exploration of the potential barriers facing caregiving fathers may enable a reduction in associated gendered economic inequalities.

This paper commences by charting the existing literature surrounding the topic of paternal experiences within the workplace and specifically the inequalities that exist for fathers, moving then to discuss data obtained from semi-structured interviews with working parents and managers. Finally, the findings are considered in the context of existing academic terrains to establish the contribution and outline areas of future research. Specifically, adding to existing knowledge by exploring the experiences of working caregiving fathers through the lens of the actors involved in the process, thus providing detailed understanding on the ways in which social mistreatment of caregiving fathers manifests in UK workplaces as "fatherhood forfeits".

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Workplace inequalities for fathers

The experience of fathers in the workplace as the antithesis of the experience of mothers is well established within work and family literature; with many proposing that fathers are associated with workplace benefits, premiums, and "patriarchal dividends" (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Connell, 1995; Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Loh, 1996). The nature of such benefits, premiums, and "dividends" are proposed to be variable but found to include an increased likelihood of promotion, higher starting salaries, viewed as more stable and committed and believed to have more control and agency over their lives than women (Bailey, 2015; Connell, 1995). Fatherhood in the workplace has been observed to be symbolic of a dedicated and reliable worker (Connell, 2005; Hodges & Budig, 2010) associated with stability, flexibility, commitment, increased work effort, and financial responsibility (Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Fuegen et al., 2004; Kmec et al., 2014). Such conformity to traditional breadwinning norms has been associated with "good citizenship" (Dermott, 2005), conceptualizations of being successful (Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Gould, 1974), and "social inclusion" (Lewis, 2001). Specifically, fathers have been evaluated as more competent, fit for promotion, more settled and focused on their job role than nonfathers (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Kugelberg, 2006). However, fathers who deviate from their expected "emotional performance" by moving away from full-time breadwinning working patterns toward a more active involvement in caregiving have been found to alter the traditional landscape of premiums and benefits for fathers (MacDonald & Liff, 2007, p: 121).

Contemporary fathers have been observed to face a disadvantage, identified as the "patriarchal deficit", which hinders the extent to which they are involved in their children's lives due to normative ideas regarding gendered behavior, consistently placing them in a secondary position (Bailey, 2015). Within the context of the workplace, researchers have noted that when fathers strive to be active participants in the caregiving of their children (e.g., through mechanisms such as reduced working hours or flexible working), they face social consequences such as disapproval, mistreatment, suspicion, and scrutiny (Burnett et al., 2013; Berdahl & Moon, 2013, p: 346; Locke, cited in; Podnieks, 2016; Byun & Won, 2020). Thus, the decision to amend working patterns due to caregiving has been conceptualized as *"a risky choice for fathers"* (Byun & Won, 2020, p: 606). Existing research tells us that caregiving

fathers are often stigmatized in the workplace, experiencing implicit and explicit workplace discrimination, and transmitting an immediate message regarding disapproval (Hipp, 2018; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003). More recently, Cook et al. (2021) explored data from the UK Household Survey and observed that while both parents faced stigma when attempting to utilize flexibility for caregiving reasons, stigma was more widely reported by men in the workplace than women and was especially prevalent with regard to the reduction of working hours, supporting earlier findings by Rudman and Mescher (2013). However, as identified by Cook et al. (2021), what is lesser known is the way in which stigma manifests itself in the workplace, with research often lacking qualitative insight. Similarly, Berdahl and Moon's (2013) quantitative study of middle class workers observed that fathers who undertook high levels of childcare faced a "fatherhood penalty" and were subject to greater workplace harassment and mistreatment than traditional fathers and nonfathers, observing that caregiving fathers faced considerable social mistreatment, which included being teased, put down, or excluded by colleagues. While Berdahl and Moon study developed understanding in a US context, it is not known if this is replicable in a UK context. This paper presents a sample of both managers and working parents, thus providing an opportunity for a multifaceted understanding of the perceptions and experiences of caregiving fathers within UK workplaces.

The final conceptualization of the workplace experience of caregiving fathers that currently exists in the known literature is the notion of "negative peer relations" as observed in Burnett et al.'s (2013) study. This highlighted how fathers in a UK context encountered disapproval in the workplace from fellow employees when altering work patterns due to family commitments, highlighting how the needs of their children in the workplace could result in "professional problems" and in perceptions of being "second class" (p10). In this context, it is not unsurprising that many fathers have been observed to be considerably less likely than mothers to access flexible working arrangements, which can be conceptualized as a central mechanism enabling the management of the two spheres of work and family (Moran & Koslowski, 2019; O'Brien et al., 2017). Thus, a study, which seeks to understand in more detail the ways in which workplace treatment of caregiving fathers manifests across both peer and subordinate relationships, is critical toward the reduction of gendered disparities.

3 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study takes an interpretivism/social construction approach due to the acknowledgment that many factors can potentially affect upon subjective interpretations of behavior (Denzen & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Central to this choice was a belief that the very notion of a "father" is socially constructed, having varying interpretations dependent on the experience of individuals and their construction of reality. Specifically, the approach adopted is considered suitable due to the many factors that might influence upon perceptions of caregiving fathers in contemporary UK workplaces. Such subjective interpretations and feelings of individuals are considered to be critical to understanding the experience and perceptions of caregiving fathers and thus the data collection is focused on words, observations, and meanings rather than facts and figures (Creswell, 1994), acknowledging the impact of social construction on the actual behavior of participants (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to their ability to gather high quality information, allowing the researcher to access detailed responses and thus obtain the "complete story" from the respondents (Sheppard, 2004, p: 149; Whittaker, 2009). Such a qualitative approach was adopted with the aim of providing further detail than existing quantitative studies (such as Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Cook et al., 2021). The semi-structured interviews were predominantly undertaken face to face, but occasionally via telephone due to participant availability or preference.

Managers and working parents were identified as participants due to the capability of such a sample to capture a broader view than currently exists. For example, Burnett et al.'s (2013) study focused solely on working fathers while Berdahl and Moon's study (2013) took a broader approach utilizing "middle class workers", the data were quantitative and US based therefore having contextual limitations and insights to the UK labor market. Such triangulation of data was envisaged to create potential for a fuller understanding of both the experiences and perceptions of caregiving

fathers with the aim of expanding understanding of the treatment of fathers, beyond personal self-reported experiences (Murgia & Poggio, 2013). The study utilizes the personal accounts of working fathers with caregiving fathers not being directly targeted to obtain broader data than currently exists. Specifically, it was envisaged that this would result in obtaining the views of fathers who had altered their working patterns for caregiving as well as fathers who had not done so to enable the multitude of reasons for this decision to be explored.

The manager participants, as organizational representatives, were chosen, as they were believed to be well placed to understand how working parents are treated within the organization and have awareness of the broader organizational response toward caregiving fathers. Additionally, they were identified due to the central role that they play in the management of requests for amendments to working patterns as identified in Burnett et al.'s (2013) study. The final grouping of participants were working mothers who were selected due to being key social actors in family decision-making regarding parental working arrangements as well as their ability to provide more details on both the perceptions of caregiving fathers within their workplaces and report on the experiences of their partners.

3.1 | The procedure

The sample comprised 40 semi-structured interviews; 25 interviews with working parents (12 fathers and 13 mothers) and 15 managers (12 females and three males). The sample was drawn from a number of different populations, including some participants responding to a direct request from the researcher (via email or the professional network LinkedIn®), and others indicating a willingness to participate after previous participation in studies conducted by the researcher. Twenty-one participants were originally interviewed, with four more participants being interviewed at a later point due to coming forward after the initial data collection period, see Table 1 and 2 for full sample composition details are outline. The only prerequisite for participation was that participants needed to be either a manager or a working parent. It was envisaged that by having minimal prerequisites, there would be a wide variation in participants, which would result in the emerging data being broadly representative of the population (Howell, 2013).

The family circumstances of the managers was not explored as their role in the data collection was that of organizational representatives. Occasionally, if the interview topic digressed to the participants personal circumstances (it was apparent through the interviews some were working parents, some were not) they were encouraged to consider the challenges facing working parents as a grouping, rather than their specific circumstances. All managers interviewed had experience of managing working parents.

In order to analyze the collected qualitative data and answer the research aim, it was necessary to first categorize the data to enable its management, identifying themes and patterns (Howell, 2013). To this end, the coding process was divided into four phases, involving thematic analysis to underpin the qualitative analysis, creating an *"analytic scaffolding on which to build"* (Denzen & Lincoln, 2005, citing Charmaz, p: 517). This process involved initial line-by-line analysis, which was maintained until the researcher felt that the scrutiny of the data had reached saturation, and regularities had started to emerge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The final three codes that emerged from phase four, which were termed as the "fatherhood forfeits", were identified as conceptualizations of being idle, being viewed suspiciously, and facing mockery, and are explored in depth within this paper. While it is believed this process is effective and has been undertaken in a robust manner, this approach can be described as selective, as the researcher consistently makes the choice about what is pertinent and what is not (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

4 | RESULTS

Drawing on data gathered from semi-structured interviews with working parents and managers, extracts from the data illuminate the challenges faced by fathers who alter their working patterns for caregiving responsibilities. These have been identified as the "fatherhood forfeits". The "fatherhood forfeits" refer to the way in which caregiving

TABLE 1 Working parents

Allocated name	Parental status	Number of children and parental working hours
David	Father	3 children, full time, wife is part time
Paul	Father	1 child, divorced, part time
Jack	Father	2 children, part time initially, wife is full- ime
Emma	Mother	2 children, full time, husband is part time
Mike	Father	2 children, both parents part-time
Ted	Father	1 child, took parental leave, now full time, wife is full-time
Sue	Mother	2 children, full time, partner is part time
Luby	Mother	2 children, both parents are full time
Sid	Father	4 children, part time, wife is full time
Stephanie	Mother	2 children, part time, husband works flexibly
Lyn	Mother	2 children, full time, husband is full time
Kelly	Mother	1 child, full time, husband is part time
Caitlin	Mother	2 children, full time, husband does not work
Jane	Mother	1 child, part time, divorced
Corey	Father	3 children, both parents are full time
Rick	Father	2 children, part time, wife is full time
Terry	Father	1 child, both parents are full time, took extended SPL
Betty	Mother	2 children, full time, partner works flexibly
Matt	Father	1 child, part time, divorced
Adrian	Father	1 child, full time, mother is part time
Cerys	Mother	2 children, both parents full time
Nicola	Mother	2 children, full time, husband is part time
Sarah	Mother	2 children, part-time, husband is full-time
Bill	Father	3 children, shift work, wife is full-time
Liv	Mother	1 child, both parents part time

Abbreviation: SPL, Shared Parental Leave.

fathers are treated in the workplace and comprise three elements; conceptualizations of being idle, being viewed suspiciously, and facing mockery. The ʺfatherhood forfeitʺ concept builds on the findings of Burnett et al. (2013), who identified that fathers at work experience negative peer relationships, giving more detail on the nature of workplace relationships and extending this knowledge beyond peer relationships. It adds to the work of Berdahl and Moon (2013) who identified that caregiving fathers faced social mistreatment in US workplaces in their quantitative study. Such an approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the notion of stigma as observed in fathers when amending their working patterns due to childcare reasons (Cook et al., 2021).

4.1 | Friendly banter?

The first element of the ʺfatherhood forfeitʺ, which emerged from the data, was that caregiving fathers faced mockery. Managers observed that fathers within their organizations who altered their working hours due to caregiving responsibilities could expect *"friendly banter"* but that in some cases this would be made *"with menace"* and result in *"vindictive comments being made behind people's backs."* "Mark", a senior manager, was more specific about the type of

TABLE 2 Managers

Allocated participant name	Job role and sector
Sam	Manager, NHS
Dave	Manager, military
Clare	HR manager, technology
Sophie	Manager, NHS
Lois	Team manager, NHS
Simone	HR manager, university
Samantha	HR manager, NHS
Jon	HR manager, military
Amy	Cancer nurse team leader, NHS
Laura	Team leader, NHS
Katie	Manager, healthcare
Jenny	HR and operations manager, housing charity
Mark	Senior manager, public sector
Caren	Manager, healthcare
Helen	Manager, recruitment consultancy

Abbreviation: NHS, National Health Service.

mockery that would occur within his organization if a father was to mention changing their working patterns due to caregiving responsibilities and stated;

> *"There would be a lot of piss taking ... you are a bit of a wuss [scared], she rules the roost, wears the trousers"*
> *that sort of thing. ... I think there would definitely be an element of piss taking; you are not a real man, what*
> *is wrong with your wife ... it would be gentle but it would definitely occur."*

Similarly, "Dave", a manager at a military organization, felt that a father who wanted to alter his hours due to caregiving responsibilities should expect comments such as, *"taking early retirement are we?"* and, *"you work-shy f****r"* as part of the process. For some working fathers, the "fatherhood forfeit" of mockery, or fear of mockery, was evident as directly resulting in them not amending their working patterns for caregiving. Specifically, "Corey", a father of three stated he would like to reduce his hours to permit greater involvement with his children but was concerned about the organizational response to a deviation from the company standard of a Monday-Friday working week *"I don't want to be one of those people **T**uesdays, **W**ednesday **A**nd **T**hursday they get called"*.

Caregiving fathers themselves echoed this experience. "Ted" reported that after returning from a period of parental leave to look after his son there had been *"jokey comments"* such as *"enjoy your long holiday?"*. He described it as *"teasing"* aligned with *"gentle ribbing"*. "Mike", who worked a 3 day week due to caregiving responsibilities for his two children, described the mockery as *"a few jabs and stuff"*, stating it was *"all meant good heartedly"*, but his colleagues routinely referred to his working pattern as *"girls' hours"*.

Such mockery was not always external and was also observed to come from the fathers themselves, as depicted by "Nicola" about her husband who worked part-time hours to allow him to care for their two daughters. She stated that;

> *"He'd pre-empt the mockery and he would make a joke out of himself...kind of volunteer, you know, "laugh*
> *at me, this is funny", rather than the truth"*

The finding that caregiving fathers are mocked supports previous research from the UK and US which observed that such fathers are regularly subjected to teasing and name-calling (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Gregory, 2009; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). The findings highlight the prevailing nature of mockery as an element of mistreatment toward fathers who alter their work patterns for caregiving, casting light on the way in which it manifests in UK workplaces between both peer and management relationships. Additionally, it builds upon the notion of negative peer relations as identified by Burnett et al. (2013), highlighting the specific type of negative relations and how they emerge in manager-employee and peer-to-peer relationships. Due to its widespread nature, it is suggested that organizations should take action against the mockery "of fatherhood forfeit" to minimize mistreatment of caregiving fathers in the employment relationship.

"It wasn't considered to be quite normal"

The next element of the "fatherhood forfeit" that emerged from the data was the notion that caregiving fathers in the workplace can expect to be viewed with suspicion when altering their paid hours to absorb caregiving duties. "Paul", a divorced father of one who works 4 days a week, explained the responses of his friends and co-workers to his reduced hours;

> *"I get a few funny faces, I get a few funny reactions … people find it a little bit weird … a bit odd …. Saying you want to reduce your hours (for a child related reason) is treated suspiciously."*

Single dad of one, "Matt", felt that his reduced working week was met with a *"quirked brow"*. This was a sentiment echoed by "Jack", who worked part time when his children were young, and believed that his working patterns were *"probably something that wasn't considered to be quite normal"*. Similarly, "Rick", who works part-time due to caregiving recalled that when attending interviews for part-time roles he was consistently scrutinized about his choice to work less than full-time hours which he believed impacted upon the likelihood of success during the selection process;

> *"I was constantly being asked, and it did surprise me. "Well, why do you want part-time work? Why do you want flexible work?" … and quite often they would have a job that they advertised as part-time and flexible, but as soon as a man applied they went, "Well, you don't quite fit what we're looking for". Someone was as blunt to say, "Well, we think you'll want to leave very soon"*

He described the experience as *"horrible"* and not only restricted to the workplace, believing that as most people in his social circle *"found it bizarre"*. He continued to narrate how in his previous role his employer had been *"unbelievably difficult"* about his request for extended parental leave and when he raised the idea of going part time, *"it was just, "No"*. As a consequence, he left the industry completely, which is indicative of the impact that such microaggressions (Sue, 2010) can have upon the actual decisions made by fathers regarding working arrangements.

The "fatherhood forfeit" of suspicion was also evident within the manager interviews. For example, "Jon", a manager in a military organization stated that if a father in his company requested to work flexibly due to childcare they would face scrutiny. He felt that managers would be *"funny about it"*, and there would be a sense of *"Why are you doing it?"* with other staff being *"cynical about a father working part time in this environment"*. He evidenced this by illustrating a scenario whereby a father requested to amend his hours to allow him to pick his child up from school and highlighted that this involved lengthy discussions within the HR team surrounding whether he was "credible" and whether or not *"they believed him"*. Similarly, "Helen", a manager at a recruitment consultancy felt that it would be considered *"unusual"* for a man to reduce his hours due to caregiving within her organization and it would generate discussion, she stated;

> *"I do think managers would discuss it, and straight away to my mind, I think they would question the guy's commitment to the job role....there would be a lot more focus on whether they were committed or not. There would be more scrutiny paid to that than there would be to a female."*

Further echoed by Clare, a manager in a technology company, who stated that if managers in her organization were faced with an application for reduced hours from a father *"the discussion would be very interesting, I think they'd be quite baffled to start with ...... I think it would just throw them if it was a man working part time because we don't have any men working part time... A bit kind of "oh dunno!".* This is reinforced by "Mark", a senior manager who felt that if managers in his organization were faced with an application from a father for a part-time role his gender would affect the likelihood of success as "*at least one person on the panel (would be) viewing it as suspicious and not viewing it as normal... part time men get discriminated by everyone*".

Such observations by managers imply that the fatherhood forfeit of "suspicion" results in both social mistreatment for caregiving fathers but it also impacts upon the likelihood of a father being successful in obtaining a role that is conducive to caregiving.

The "fatherhood forfeit" of suspicion builds upon earlier work by Byun and Won (2020) who found that the initial reaction to Korean fathers taking up parental leave was largely "Umm ... why should you?", demonstrating the emergence of suspicion in a wider context. The data of this paper suggest that organizations need to take action against the "fatherhood forfeit" of suspicion to enable a move away from conceptualizations that amendments to working patterns due to caregiving for fathers are considered as *"a risky choice"* (Byun & Won, 2020; 606).

> *"Any excuse to get out of work"*

The final element of the "fatherhood forfeit" to emerge from the data was the relationship between caregiving fathers and associations of being idle. "Paul", a divorced father of one recalled a number of statements made to him when he needed to leave work for caregiving responsibilities, alluding to his reduced work ethic. They included, "*How convenient, you're not available to work again!*", *"Are you off again? You've only just arrived"*, and *"Nice of you to turn up"*. Such responses appeared commonplace, with phrases such as *"Hardly doing any work this week again?"*, *"sloping off"* and, *"Any excuse to get out of work"* regularly emerging from the data with fathers who deviated from full-time working patterns. Similarly, "Bill" who undertook shift work to enable him to drop off and pick up his children from school felt that his involvement in caregiving resulted in assumptions that he was *"probably unemployed"*. "Sid", a father of four, who had stepped away from a traditional full-time working pattern to work from home and be the primary carer for his children, provided more specific examples of the nature of the judgments, which are indicative of perceptions of being idle;

> *"I think I come across as doing it as I can't do anything else... I always think they (other parents) don't think I am capable of doing a day's work."*

He continued to narrate an example in which a fellow parent said to him *"who are you anyway? Well, you are just a bum really aren't you?"*

Such commentary was also observable from the mothers in the sample, for example, "Sarah" a mother of two, stated that when she sees fathers who alter their working hours to collect children from school she thinks, "*go to work - lazy bxxxxx - it wouldn't work for my house."* Similarly, "Nicola", who worked full-time hours while her husband worked part time due to caregiving responsibilities, felt that he was repeatedly linked to comments regarding being idle. She felt that there was an assumption that he was *"sat on his butt all day doing nothing"*, *"to laze about"*, and *"have a nice easy time"*.

Once again, implying that comments which might present as largely innocuous microaggressions (Sue, 2010) can have a tangible impact on decision-making regarding the extent of workplace support offered to caregiving fathers.

Such findings can be aligned with existing research from over 20 years ago in the US, which also found fathers to be criticized more than mothers for doing "too little" paid work (Deutsch & Saxon, 1998; Etaugh & Folger, 1998). More recent research has observed that fathers at work are primarily defined by the extent of their alignment to bread-winning norms, which are consistent with constant availability (Burnett et al., 2013; Kangas et al., 2019; Özbilgin et al., 2011; Von Alemann et al., 2017) and that caregiving fathers are challenging traditional judgments surrounding organizational commitment (Collier, 2019). Such existing research offers potential explanation for the "fatherhood forfeit" of perceptions of being idle that emerged within this study. As with the previous "fatherhood forfeits", it is suggested that organizations need to address the "fatherhood forfeit" of perceptions of being idle, taking action in this area to minimize the potential for discrimination within organizations and increase gender equality.

5 | DISCUSSION

This paper explores the workplace treatment of caregiving fathers, defined as fathers who undertake specific child-care activities that require adjustment to their working arrangements. Data were collected through 40 semi-structured interviews with managers and working parents to enable a multifaceted view of both the experiences and perceptions of caregiving fathers in the workplace. It is proposed that caregiving fathers face "fatherhood forfeits" in the workplace, which sees them being considered as idle, viewed with suspicion, and facing mockery. It is suggested that such "fatherhood forfeits" create a barrier to paternal involvement in caregiving and is one potential explanation for the continuation of traditional gender norms regarding parenting.

5.1 | Theoretical and empirical implications

This study offers a number of empirical contributions. First, the paper builds upon existing knowledge regarding the social mistreatment of working caregiving fathers (Berdahl & Moon, 2013) by further developing scholarship through identifying the ways in which mistreatment manifests in UK workplaces. Second, by providing additional knowledge and insights of the ways in which fathers who amend working patterns for caregiving face stigma and negative peer relations (Burnett et al., 2013; Cook et al., 2021), we illustrate contemporary "fatherhood forfeits". Our understanding is enhanced using lenses of working parents and managers shedding insights on the barriers facing modern caregiving fathers in the UK. Additionally, the paper illustrates that 20 years on from the work of Deutsch and Saxon (1998), UK fathers continue to receive levels of criticism much greater than mothers for doing less paid work indicating an absence of equality of caregiving across genders. Such evidence demonstrates the enduring nature of the breadwinner model, despite the rhetoric of a societal rise of a more involved style of fatherhood (Burnett et al., 2013; Gatrell et al., 2021; Ladge et al., 2015).

We propose that the "fatherhood forfeit" illustrated in this paper provides insights which are relevant to both the low take-up of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) in the UK, the continuing low numbers of fathers who work less than full-time hours, and the subsequent implications of this on the maintenance of the gender pay gap. Our paper has highlighted how caregiving fathers in UK workplaces face multiple "fatherhood forfeits" which can act as a negative force against caregiving fathers. Specifically, fathers maybe discouraged from changing their working patterns due to concerns about facing "fatherhood forfeits" and also they may be less likely to be successful if they do seek changes as a consequence of the "fatherhood forfeits".

5.2 | Organisational and policy implications

This paper has demonstrated that while the UK has addressed some aspects of mistreatment in the workplace, the discourse regarding the mistreatment of fathers who move away from traditional patterns of employment while juggling childcare responsibilities remains largely under developed. Fathers continue to be conceptualized as "ghosts in the organizational machine" 9 years after this was identified by Burnett et al. (2013). This is specifically prominent when compared to the HR and workplace responses to discourses on race, sexuality, and gender in a more general sense. If organizations are to minimize the potential impact of the "fatherhood forfeit", attention needs to be paid to all elements of the employment relationship including recruitment, selection, and promotion policies. Thus, the findings can be observed to have far reaching implications for organizational practice, emphasizing the importance of organizations taking steps to ensure that caregiving fathers do not face "fatherhood forfeits" of the kinds described here.

By focusing specifically on the "fatherhood forfeits" of perceived idleness and mockery, it is proposed that organizations need to extend and reinforce existing organizational training. Most examples given in these data did not appear to be positioned to intentionally cause offense or to diminish the workplace experience of fathers; however, their negative impact has been consistently evidenced. Such wider training, echoing the suggestions of Li et al. (2018), to specifically explore the potential biases enacted toward caregiving fathers, both unconscious and conscious, and the importance of valuing diversity in parental roles throughout the organization could both mitigate and reduce the impact of the "fatherhood forfeits". Unfortunately, such training has often been reported as lacking, despite its many potential merits which might explain some of the findings of this research (den Dulk et al., 2011). This wider requirement for education, specifically for those managers involved in shortlisting and recruitment, could increase awareness of the importance of gender neutrality in the workplace and also highlight the specific risks of gender bias for caregiving fathers in this context. For example, with regard to the "fatherhood forfeit" of mockery, it is suggested that wider education of the impact of what was often construed as "friendly banter" could help minimize this "fatherhood forfeit". This could include exploration of what can be construed as "small talk", using stories and storytelling in the process to illustrate the impact of the statements made to, or about, working caregiving fathers, thus acting as a force to alter some of the attitudes expressed (Spear & Roper, 2016; Vance, 1991). This could be enabled through utilization of an organizational learning approach by which managers improve team capabilities to enable increased understanding and management within the organization (Jones, 2001; Salathia, 2015). Such an approach should allow for the cascading of education from managers to their teams via individual discussions within the organizational appraisal or team briefing meetings process, enabling the impact of the "fatherhood forfeits" to be transmitted successfully and for a shared understanding to develop. Naturally, in line with the observations of Haas and Hwang (2019), it is essential that any interventions are fully supported by line managers to maximize the chances of its success, therefore it is suggested that any revisions to organizational training are conducted via consultations with management teams.

A further way of encouraging cultural change within organizations with the aim of reducing the "fatherhood forfeits" identified in this research is through active role modeling and the championing of fathers in the workplace. This builds on previous assertions by Moran and Koslowski (2019), who identified this practice as being essential to the successful introduction of organizational work/family balance policies. In the words of participant, Terry, regarding the uptake of parental leave, *"normalization is a big part of it. People are aware ... they just haven't seen enough people go through it for it to become normal".* Thus, wider role modeling of the caregiving practices of senior leaders throughout organizations and wider availability of such roles in more flexible formats (e.g., part time, job share, annualized hours or 9 day fortnights) are suggested to have a part to play in the reduction of the "fatherhood forfeits" as reported here. This aligns with previous research that noted how having active and positive role models within leadership teams is a central tool in encouraging the uptake of family friendly policies such as SPL (Forbes et al., 2020).

More broadly, at the macro level, it is suggested that key findings should be widely disseminated to inform stake-holders of the risks "fatherhood forfeits". The key routes for dissemination are proposed as being through Government

Committees (such as the Fathers at Work Select Committee and Fatherhood All Party Parliamentary Group and employer forums (such as Working Families and The Fatherhood Institute). It is suggested that ˝fatherhood forfeits˝ need to be addressed by policy makers within the UK Government to ensure all parents are supported in managing caregiving responsibilities alongside work without being disadvantaged or mistreated. Wider support is suggested through changes to the existing policy landscape to explore the potential of providing fathers with increased access to SPL and amendments to the ways in which flexible work is requested, moving to a system where flexible working is the default position. Additionally, it is proposed that a minor revision to the Equality Act (2010) to include ˝parental status˝ as a protected characteristic might have a dual benefit of protecting both fathers and mothers by law, rather than by what may be variable levels of ˝good practice˝ across all job sectors. This would make it explicit, that discrimination on the grounds of parental status would be illegal. For fathers specifically, this would provide a clearer line for seeking resolution for unfair treatment than currently exists. Finally, it is suggested that wider compulsory reporting of the uptake rates of organizational flexible working arrangements (akin to Gender Pay Gap Reporting) to include the availability of flexible working, the number of requests made, and the number of successful requests, by demographic is necessary. Such reporting would enable accurate and measurable snapshots of any pockets of discrimination within certain industries, highlighting areas of disparity in uptake with a view to its equalization.

5.3 | Limitations and recommendations for future research

Overall, the findings of this paper expand the existing knowledge regarding the workplace treatment of caregiving fathers through identifying specific "ʻfatherhood forfeits" faced by caregiving fathers in UK contexts. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study and to signpost potential future areas for research.

As with previous research in this area, the sample for this study was narrow, primarily due to the predominance of married, heterosexual, white British participants who came forward to be interviewed. While this is the most prevalent family type in the UK (ONS, 'Families and Households in the UK', 2019) and the lack of diversity is a common critique of research in this area (Kelliher et al., 2019), it is not known to what extent these findings would differ if the sample were more varied, for example, amongst same-sex couples with childcare. Therefore, we suggest that further research is undertaken with a larger stratified sample, to encompass more diversity in ethnicity, sexuality, and family composition to better represent UK society. This would allow for exploration of intersectionality as a lens for uncovering further influencing factors. Additionally, the study reported here is UK specific, and the broad concept of the ˝fatherhood forfeit˝ that emerged in this context warrants wider exploration to consider whether they also emerge in contemporary international contexts, and if so, the extent to which they act as a barrier to fathers in undertaking caregiving activities. It is also timely to consider the increased deployment of home working caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of this for childcare. Finally, the individual family circumstances of the manager participants was not explored and previous research has found that this may influence manager's perceptions of caregivers within the workplace (Las Heras et al., 2017) and future research of this dynamic is needed.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this paper has explored the experiences and perceptions of UK caregiving fathers from the viewpoints of both working parents and managers within organizations. It has illustrated that caregiving fathers in the workplace face attitudinal barriers, which have been identified as ˝fatherhood forfeits˝. Specifically, it has been found that caregiving fathers face ˝fatherhood forfeits˝ of being mocked, conceptualized as being idle, and viewed suspiciously.

This paper supports the findings of Bailey (2015) and Berdahl and Moon (2013), who observed that fathers who deviate from breadwinning norms face both penalties and deficits, thus adding to knowledge by exploring the ways in which such ˝deficits˝ manifest within the workplace. The research presented here also offers support for the notion

that caregiving fathers face negative peer relations, stigma, and social mistreatment (Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Burnett et al., 2013; Cook et al., 2021), providing further knowledge regarding the way in which these are experienced as "fatherhood forfeits". Organizational and policy implications have been identified to reduce the impact of the fatherhood forfeits and it is suggested that further exploration is undertaken to ascertain if the "fatherhood forfeits" are observable in broader contexts than presented here.

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