



University of
HUDDERSFIELD

**Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible
working arrangements amongst men.**

“...just the way we work now.”

MA (by research) Business Management Thesis

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an MA (by research) in Business Management.

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Dedication and acknowledgements

Thanks to Dr Anna Zueva and Dr Peter Greenan for their support throughout this journey.

This thesis is dedicated to those people who were unable to complete this journey with me.

Thank you to all those who have supported this project from conception to final submission.

Abstract

Background

As the UK workforce faces turbulent conditions – pandemic, cost of living crisis – the need for HR policy that enables and encourages productivity whilst being well-being conscious is needed now more than ever before. Understanding how to better engage men in flexible working arrangements (FWA) is crucial to align policy and people better. However, there is a dearth of literature on the male experience, particularly about their utilisation of FWA. As FWA are at the heart of ‘good work’, it is vital that all employees have equal access and success in being able to benefit from FWA. This is where the study aims to provide key contributions to this previously under researched area. The study aims to explore factors affecting male utilisation and make recommendations for ways organisations can better engage men in their FWA policies.

Method

The method was semi-structured interviews, recorded using video conferencing software – Microsoft Teams. This enabled in-depth qualitative data capture. A phenomenological approach was taken, and a thematic analysis was conducted to allow participants to explain their experiences from their perspective, which is important as how people subjectively engage with policy is essential. This approach meets the research aim of exploring the utilisation of FWA amongst men whilst also allowing the participants to maintain their authentic voices. This adds value to the recommendations they offer. 15 interviews were carried out.

Findings

The data analysis was based on the work of Smith et al. (1999). There were 19 minor themes recognised through first phase coding and six major themes identified through second phase coding. The overarching theme found through the analysis of these major themes is that the realities of FWA are challenging for men, so whilst the idea for many is something they thought they might enjoy – the reality of using FWA was far more complex. There are five major themes exploring these ‘reality’ factors, and one exploring the participant's recommendations for how organisations can adapt how they engage men with FWA.

- Theme one – identity factors.
- Theme two – personal factors.
- Theme three – social factors.
- Theme four – organisational factors.
- Theme five – unique phenomenon factor.
- Theme six – participant recommendations.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors affecting male utilisation of FWA. This thesis brings together 15 male perspectives of FWA and the factors affecting their decisions about how they engage with this crucial HR policy. It concludes with the idea that there is not one factor that stands above the rest when considering FWA, rather the ‘realities’ of multiple factors mean that FWA for these men was a challenge. These conclusions are not only a base for further study but also provides recommendations for how these men feel organisations could better engage them with FWA policy. It begins to fill the dearth of a male perspective in the current field of research. This is where the contribution to the field lies – in beginning to discuss the factors affecting the male utilisation of FWA, in a context of more FWA options than at any time previous. To conclude this thesis, there is an exploration of the strengths but also limitations of the study and how it could be improved and further expanded on in the future.

LIST OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS	7
1.1.1 <i>Defining flexible working arrangements</i>	7
1.1.2 <i>The evolution of flexible working arrangements</i>	7
1.1.3 <i>Defining 'good' work</i>	9
1.1.4 <i>'Good' work and flexible working arrangements</i>	10
1.2 THE GENDER GAP	12
1.3 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES	13
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION	13
1.5 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE	13
1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE	14
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2.1 FACTORS AFFECTING THE UTILISATION OF FWA	16
2.2 INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	16
2.2.1 <i>Perceptions of masculinity/femininity</i>	17
2.2.2 <i>Traditional family values</i>	18
2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	18
2.3.1 <i>Relational contexts</i>	19
2.3.2 <i>Location of work in relation to home</i>	19
2.3.3 <i>Cost-of-living crisis (unique phenomenon)</i>	20
2.4 SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL FACTORS	21
2.5 LINKS TO RESEARCH QUESTION	21
CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY	23
3.1 PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONING	23
3.2 APPROACH	23
3.3 DATA COLLECTION	24
3.4 PARTICIPANTS	25
3.4.1 <i>Selection of participants</i>	25
3.4.2 <i>Participant information</i>	26
3.5 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS	27
3.6 ETHICS	29
CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS	31
4.1 THEME 1 – IDENTITY FACTORS	32
4.1.1 <i>Traditional family roles</i>	32
4.1.2 <i>Perceptions of gender roles</i>	32
4.1.3 <i>Counter stereotypical roles</i>	33
4.1.4 <i>Distribution of household responsibilities</i>	33
4.2 THEME 2 – PERSONAL FACTORS	34
4.2.1 <i>Blurring of lines between work and family life</i>	34
4.2.2 <i>Distraction and procrastination</i>	34
4.2.3 <i>Overworking</i>	35
4.2.4 <i>Workspaces</i>	36
4.3 THEME 3 – SOCIAL FACTORS	36
4.3.1 <i>Perceptions of significant others</i>	36
4.3.2 <i>Perceptions of other household members</i>	37
4.3.3 <i>Isolation</i>	38
4.3.4 <i>Challenging workplace politics</i>	38
4.4 THEME 4 – ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS	39
4.4.1 <i>Workplace power and hierarchy</i>	39
4.4.2 <i>Organisational empathy (ability to listen)</i>	39
4.4.3 <i>Organisational infrastructure limiting implementation of FWA effectively</i>	40
4.5 THEME 5 – UNIQUE PHENOMENON FACTORS	40
4.5.1 <i>Cost-of-living crisis</i>	41

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

4.6	THEME 6 – PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS	41
4.6.1	<i>Clearer organisational communication</i>	42
4.6.2	<i>Improved FWA education</i>	42
4.6.3	<i>Increased organisational empathy</i>	43
4.7	OVERARCHING THEME – THESE MEN FIND FWA CHALLENGING.	43
CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION		45
CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION		52
6.1	SUMMARY	52
6.2	RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS.....	53
6.3	PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS	54
6.4	STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS	56
6.5	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY	57
6.6	CLOSING STATEMENT	58
REFERENCES		60
APPENDICES		74
	APPENDIX A - PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	74
	APPENDIX B - CONSENT FORM.....	76
	APPENDIX C - INTERVIEW RUBRIC	77
	APPENDIX D - ETHICS FORM.....	78
 LIST OF TABLES		
Table 1 - Summary of UK FWA legislation.		8
Table 2 - Summary of the benefits and challenges of FWA.		12
Table 3 - Summary of potential factors affecting the male uptake of FWA.		21
Table 4 - Participant selection criteria.....		25
Table 5 - Participant profiles.....		26
Table 6 - Data analysis process		28
Table 7 - Summary of themes.		31
Table 8 - Recommendations for future studies based on gaps from this study.....		58

Chapter One - Introduction

“Organisations that simply say flexible working is for all ignore the perceived barriers preventing men from applying and the flexibility stigma they face.

Messages need to be developed to actually target men.” - Sarah Forbes, 2022

In 2023 the need for a workforce which is adaptive to modern technologies, the changing business environments, and evolving societal structures - the use of flexible working arrangements (FWA) can be a vital tool in achieving increased productivity, greater efficiency and greater health and wellbeing. Forbes (2022), whilst responding to a report on the gender gap surrounding the uptake of FWA, suggests that not only having a policy of equality for FWA opportunities is important but also having a policy that engages is crucial when approaching the future of FWA.

Dynamic. If there is one word which describes what it is like living in 2023, it is “dynamic”. All around the world is changing at a record pace. Political upheaval, nostalgia, and external events all make the 21st century comparatively uncertain and challenging to navigate (Simmons, 2020). At the same time as having meaningful dialogue around social issues, we also have difficult conversations about political systems and economic realities. Pandemics, recessions, wars, and skills shortages contribute to a tight labour market, harsh economic conditions, and challenging times for businesses to navigate (Guardian, 2023). This is before considering the broader social changes at play, nuclear families becoming families of split parenting and AI becoming less science fiction and more reality. Now more than ever, it is crucial to understand how to get people into meaningful work and not only that but to understand the implications that work has. FWA are just one element of the workplace mix which can either improve one’s life immeasurably or make it miserable. The benefits of FWA are not gender-specific, so this study explores a key demographic to unlock the benefits for both genders and not solely women, as much of the literature already explores (Ewald et al., 2020). Because of all these changing ‘dynamic’ circumstances, the male workforce needs to be better understood so that more can engage and benefit from FWA.

Fleetwood (2007) explores the demand for work life balance and it’s link to FWA. He comments on an influx of women who have entered part-time, paid work and the impact that this has had upon requests for flexible working practices, in addition to a double burden that this creates for working women. Crompton (2006) comments on the change of gender roles since more women are participating in the workforce and the subsequent impact upon the gendered division of labour. Lyonette & Crompton (2015) again highlight the persistent gender inequality related to the division of domestic labour, where women still complete a greater proportion than their male partners, despite their increased role in the workforce. This chapter will define FWA and how it has evolved. It will outline why FWA is important, the broader contexts, such as the gender gap and how FWA is a crucial part of ‘good’ work. Then, perhaps most importantly, why this research is needed. The research objectives and aim will be detailed,

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

and then the research question will be outlined. It will conclude with an overview of the structure of the following thesis.

1.1 The importance of flexible working arrangements

The following subchapters will define and explore the critical contexts of FWA, showing how FWA has evolved legally but also how they are a crucial part of the ideas behind 'good work'. This discussion provides a base of understanding where FWA have come from and how they continue to be important to a 2023 economy.

1.1.1 Defining flexible working arrangements

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (2022) suggests that FWA can describe the format of working, which allows for "a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when and at what times employees work." They suggest these terms include part-time, term-time, job-sharing, flexitime, compressed hours, annual hours, remotely, mobile working, career breaks, commissioned outcomes, and zero-hour contracts. This list is not exhaustive and can include other practices which may be role or sector-specific (Kelliher et al., 2019). Even within this definition, there is a large degree of ambiguity due to the 'flexible' nature of these work formats.

HM Government (2022) uses a slightly different, more legalistic definition when considering what is protected under UK law, making it clear that FWA is about suiting the employee needs; employers can refuse a request for FWA if they have a "good business reason" to do so. The Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service (ACAS) (2022) makes it clear that these reasons fall into a few categories; too great additional costs, the inability to adapt organisational practices, performance and quality issues, insufficient workload, and inability to recruit new staff.

The one defining feature which brings consensus is that FWA are not standard, full-time jobs where the worker must agree to, and not deviate from, a regular pattern of hours, activities, and locations. This study will use these definitions as the base understanding for FWA and accept that FWA in its basic form is any arrangement that is not standard and deviates from regular working practices.

1.1.2 The evolution of flexible working arrangements

FWA are nothing new (Kelliher & de Menezes, 2019) and, as a way of work, has evolved into the negotiated understanding in the workplaces this study will investigate.

The legal right to FWA in the UK has developed since 1996 (Wels, 2021), when the focus was on helping a specific demographic to achieve a healthier work-life balance. As the benefits of FWA became more apparent and more research (Thomson, 2008; Costa et al., 2009; Dizaho et al., 2017) supported the more widespread use of FWA, further demographics have been given the right to flexible work. As of 2019, the focus of policymakers has been squarely on giving the right to FWA to all workers, not

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

just those eligible by being a member of a specific demographic (Cooper & Baird, 2015; Cook et al., 2021)

Table 1 summarises the relevant legislation that has been developed since 1996.

Table 1 - Summary of UK FWA legislation.

Year	Legislation	Summary
1996	Employment Act 1996	This Act superseded previous employment rights, protecting the rights of employees to request a change to contractual terms to allow for flexible working, providing they had 26 weeks continuous service.
2001	Work and Parent's Taskforce (Flexible Working)	This taskforce was set up to consider how parents and employers can be helped to agree flexible working hours and explore what measures the government could introduce to aid family-friendly working practices so that both the business and employee can benefit.
2002	Employment Act 2002	This Act further protected the rights of employees to request a change to contractual terms specifically for parents with child-caring responsibilities (up to the age of 18). The aim was to implement recommendations of the Work and Parent's Taskforce around encouraging better work-life balance.
2006	Work and Families Act 2006	This Act added many rights to paternity and maternity leave, adoption leave and other employment rights and further widened the definitions of child and who classified as a carer so that these people could benefit from the 'right to ask.'
2006	Flexible Working Regulations	These regulations build on previous legislation, adding protections for employees who have caring responsibilities for adult dependants.
2014	Children and Families Act 2014	This Act further widened eligibility criteria from those with caring responsibilities to <u>all employees</u> who have 26 weeks continuous service.
2017	Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices	This report explored what 'good work' looked like in the 21 st century, one of the elements of 'good work' is having access to flexible ways of work as the alternative was identified as people leaving employment altogether which is not only damaging for the individual but also for the businesses who employ these individuals and the wider economy. The government agreed with the report's findings and set up a joint taskforce to partner with industry to encourage flexible working.
2019	Work Life Balance Directive	This EU directive further underpins the legal elements of which the UK had already passed into law. For many EU countries, this was the first time they had protected some form of FWA in law. The focus was still on targeted support – focusing on parents and carer's ability to look after children up to the age of eight years. (Europa, 2019)
2020	Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984	The 1984 Act was enforced, and the country was locked down meaning that non-essential businesses were made to work from home, just one of the formats that fall under the definition of FWA. Exemptions were

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

		industry specific such as critical logistics, medical staff, and food suppliers. Notably, this is the first time that legislation allowed widespread, mainstream homeworking.
2022	FWA Taskforce	Following on from the COVID pandemic, the government set up a taskforce to promote creative ways of working not just the hybrid model that came out of the pandemic model of work. Furthermore, the government plans to make flexible working not just something to be requested after 26 weeks of continuous service but something that is available from day one of employment and in many cases the default way of work.

Throughout the evolution of FWA legislation, the UK has been at the cutting edge of the development towards a fairer, more balanced approach to working. Recognising that encouraging choice in the way people can work has an impact on productivity, and that has a relatively positive impact on the broader economy. This approach meant that frequently, when the EU made new laws and directives, this just consolidated UK law and was often less far-reaching than the UK statute book as seen in Table 1. Since leaving the EU, however, some rights that have been protected are under review, and EU directives no longer apply if the UK government decides to change the law (Financial Times, 2023). Overall, whilst the UK has historically been moving towards creating flexible working accessible for all, the current trajectory into the future is less known.

As Table 1 shows, the development of FWA has been legally progressing for over 20 years. This does not consider the evolution of FWA from ideas piloted in specific organisations to statutory rights for employees. As the government's aim is to make FWA the default (Employment Law Advice, 2022), it is more important than ever to be aware of the implications of such a policy on both the individual and organisations. This study is important in allowing organisations to better engage with male employees who currently underutilise FWA opportunities (Atkinson et al., 2009; Diversity Council Australia, 2020; Cook et al., 2021).

A holistic approach to understanding FWA, not just as statutory requirements, is a helpful and much-needed context for this study. Therefore, acknowledging what role FWA plays in the broader context of 'good' work is where most of the discussion about the 'ideas' that evolve FWA takes place.

1.1.3 Defining 'good' work

What can be classified as 'good' work has been discussed throughout the centuries (Rainhorn & Bluma, 2013; Bailey et al., 2019) from anecdotal conversations between people who pass in the street to the politicians and great thinkers of nations. As people try to figure out their place in the ever-changing world around them, exploring what work means and, more broadly, the value and purpose they place on it are at the very core of human progression. Bregman (2017) profoundly describes this idea by arguing that what would once have been a utopia in the past is today's reality, yet people still strive to

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

improve. Furthermore, Bregman argues that there will never be a utopia, and its existence would be dystopian for the civilians, who would still want to move forward and experience progress. Therefore, it has been argued that what ‘good’ work is, is constantly evolving.

Taylor (2017:7) explores what ‘good’ work is and defines it as “Work [that] is shaped by working practices that benefit employees through good reward schemes and terms and conditions, having a secure position, better training and development, good communication and ways of working that support task discretion and involve employees in securing business improvements.”. In a post-Brexit, post-COVID, and weak economy, the importance of work that is at its core ‘good’ is crucial to the long-term success of the individuals providing the power behind the UK economy (GOV.UK Business and Industry, 2022). Taylor (2017) highlights the need for good terms and conditions as one of the seven pillars of ‘good’ work, and one of the ways in which companies can ensure they provide a good work environment is through adopting FWA policies. Whilst the case for FWA has evolved quicker in the last few years, which is primarily attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic (CIPD, 2021), the need for employee engagement in this vital element of the employment relationship is crucial in the hyperdynamic economic environment (Chanana, 2021) currently gripping the UK and much of the Western world.

The UK government’s response to the Taylor Review saw the launch of The Good Work Plan in December 2018 (HM Government, 2018), which outlined a number of legislation and policy changes that could improve working conditions for people in the UK (McKee, 2020). These changes have been beneficial to the progression of the aim to make FWA accessible for all. Whilst this is far from the end objective regarding FWA as the default way of work, it was a tangible step in the right direction and provided a foundation for future discussions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic where FWA had become the default for many.

Amongst some of the developments legally (explored in Table 1), there have been movements toward organisations signing up to ‘good work’ charters. These help organisations to voluntarily commit to improving access to FWA and improve working conditions on a broad basis (Local Government Association). Whilst some organisations have signed up to these, they don’t always adhere to them. One of the more significant challenges is regulating the agreements and not using them to greenwash organisations with poor working conditions. The benefits of these have been further challenged by the tension created when employer and employee aims are not aligned (Pondy, 1967)

1.1.4 ‘Good’ work and flexible working arrangements

Many have argued that the benefits of FWA outweigh the potential challenges (Brewster et al., 1997; Kelliher et al., 2009; Wheatley, 2017). There is a near-unanimous belief that FWA has direct and indirect organisational benefits (Thomson, 2008). Increased productivity and efficiency benefits can lead to a better match between resources and demand as employees can manage their time and

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

productive hours (CIPD, 2022). The challenge with this additional flexibility is that it can blur work–life boundaries, which can have the opposite effect. Whilst productivity remains high, stress, anxiety, and depression can play a more significant part in an employee’s life as they lose critical social contact (Pedersen et al., 2012). This can lead to them taking more sick absences (Terluin et al., 2011). The appropriate implementation of FWA can combat this.

It has been widely reported that people who take advantage of FWA feel more satisfied in work as they feel like they have more control and ability to work in a way that suits them, whether that is flexi-hours, compressed hours, part-time hours, or full-time hours depending on their circumstances (Costa et al., 2009; Wheatley, 2016; Gerdenitsch, 2017). This has been reported to further increase employee well-being which should be at the heart of HR policy as the UK tries to reduce sickness absence and other forms of absenteeism (CIPD, 2020; 2022).

However, it should be noted that employees who use FWA have reported struggling to integrate into the wider workforce, leading them to feelings of social isolation and increased business tension (Soga et al., 2022). So, whilst businesses can save on office space expenditure, most organisations recognise the need for some physical office space no matter how remote their employees can work (Forbes et al., 2020). Furthermore, procrastination’s role in the remote working element of FWA can leave some employees struggling to meet deadlines healthily (Silva et al., 2022). This has been identified as one of the reasons that organisations who adopt FWA as default use a hybrid working model, hoping to achieve all the benefits that FWA offers whilst minimising the impact of the challenges such as procrastination and mental health challenges (Williamson et al., 2022).

A further challenge with FWA is that it can lead to communication problems (Coenen et al., 2014), feeling side-lined (Berkery et al., 2017; Austin-Egole et al., 2020), and understaffing in critical times (Cañibano, 2011; Avgoustaki et al., 2019). This means that organisations that use FWA must mitigate these problems so that FWA can still be beneficial. Some ways this can be done are by encouraging not just email use but video conferencing or summary documents, encouraging staff social events and having clear communication boundaries. Hence, all who need to be included are using a shift/hour planner so all are aware of each other’s working times (Creagh, 1998).

A benefit of FWA is that it can be used to make a recruitment campaign more competitive as FWA is attractive to many people who have young families, volunteering commitments, health reasons, or other circumstances which benefit from the flexibility these arrangements offer (Thompson et al., 2014; Wheatley, 2017). All of this has been shown to allow for a better work-life balance and other responsibilities.

Ultimately, the benefits of FWA are improved productivity, better workforce efficiency and, in most cases, a better work-life balance for the employees (Wheatley, 2017; Hunter, 2019). These are the reasons that FWA is promoted within the ‘good’ work framework because when implemented correctly

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

they can unlock people's employability (Taylor, 2017). Those who would otherwise have to give up employment can continue working, which is good for their mental health and the broader economy. With the UK economy being so dependent on keeping unemployment down due to the reduction of economic migrants, it is more important than before that organisations can engage with the broadest workforce possible, which means offering 'good work' for all.

Table 2 provides a summary of both the benefits and challenges associated with FWA. Most of these highlighted are often benefits/challenges for both parties involved. For example, employee satisfaction is great for the employee; however, it is also good for the organisation as this has been shown to lead to a better workplace ethic and stronger resilience within the workforce. Others noted are specific to whom it affects. For example, being attractive to recruits is a clear organisational benefit as this is a benefit that does not change for the employees or potential employees.

Table 2 - Summary of the benefits and challenges of FWA.

Benefits	Challenges
Better match between resources and demand	Blurs work life boundaries
Employee satisfaction	Communication problems
Increased wellbeing	Procrastination
Reduced sickness absence	Feeling side-lined
Attractive to recruits	Organisational tension
Better work life balance	Understaffing in critical times
Savings on office space	Integration and teamwork challenges
Allow for other responsibilities	Mental health challenges

1.2 The gender gap

Many have argued that there is a gender gap between the utilisation of FWA by men and women (Lambert et al., 2008; Atkinson et al., 2009; Wheatley, 2017). Others have hypothesised the reasons for this gender divide (Borgkvist et al., 2018; Chung, 2018; Borgkvist et al., 2021). However, many of the answers focus on increasing the utilisation of FWA amongst women, with some arguing that this can be a helpful method for women to return to work following pregnancy (Vandello et al., 2013; Dizaho et al., 2017). Furthermore, the fact that mothers are more likely to return to work using a format of FWA so that they can continue with childcare responsibilities is an example of how 'good mother ideology' influences the utilisation of FWA amongst women (Lewis et al., 2010).

The challenge, however, is in providing meaningful contributions to the broader discussion around the utilisation of FWA amongst all employees, not just women who are pregnant or have young families. For many women, the return to work following pregnancy can be challenging, and FWA provides a method for that return to happen. However, the advantages of FWA are for more than just those employees to benefit. Thompson et al. (1999) suggest that outside of media popularity, FWA is widely underutilised. Women who are career-focused, those who perhaps delay or do not get pregnant, are still more likely to take up FWA (Smithson et al., 2004) as they cite better work-life balance and better

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

mental health as reasons for this flexibility in work (Fleetwood, 2007). Some have used these two discussion points, work-life balance and mental health, as reasons why men are less likely to utilise FWA. This viewpoint argues that discussions of work-life balance and mental health are not part of the male discourse and have a lesser impact on their decision-making process (Raiden et al., 2013).

1.3 Research aim and objectives

This study aims to explore the factors affecting the utilisation of FWA in male employees. This will be achieved by meeting the following objectives:

RO1 – To collect primary data to describe men's lived experiences and perceptions when interacting with FWA policy.

RO2 – To identify whether this primary data substantiates or challenges existing themes within wider literature.

RO3 – To provide practical recommendations for organisations which can help them better engage the male workforce in FWA policy.

The critical insight of this study and its practical implications for organisations will influence how organisations engage with the male workforce and encourage the use of FWA policies, where both parties would benefit from such an arrangement. It is important to note that this is not just about one element of FWA but could include arrangements such as flexitime, part-time, full-time, compressed hours or other contractual changes that do not conform to standard work such as 9-5, Monday through Friday.

It has been argued that having a productive employee-employer relationship is essential to business success (Hofner-Saphiere, 1996). Therefore, understanding how employees respond to and engage with HR policy is paramount for HR practitioners and the broader organisational success. Exploring what factors affect the utilisation of FWA in men is just one element of championing 'good' and fundamentally meaningful work.

1.4 Research question

Through exploring the existing literature and conducting primary, qualitative research, the following research question will be addressed:

RQ – What factors affect the utilisation of FWA by male employees?

1.5 Research significance

This research is an important study into the male perspective of factors affecting their utilisation of FWA so that organisations can better engage men in their FWA policies. Men are the least likely to take advantage of some of the benefits of FWA when they could enhance their well-being and work-life balance (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). One of the most significant advantages of FWA is the ability

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

to balance better other commitments that benefit mental health (Galea et al., 2014). Men are the least likely to discuss their mental well-being and are the most likely to suffer silently from depression, anxiety, and ultimately more men than women end their own lives (Samaritans, 2019). If the aims of the Taylor Review are to be fully realised and ‘good’ work is offered to all, then how organisations engage with this crucial demographic is important. This study will offer insight, opinions, and practical implications on how organisations can better engage, stimulating discussions about this critical HR problem.

Many have argued that having a ‘positive’ working environment that allows productivity and efficiency is critical to organisational success (Hofner Saphiere, 1996). The relationship between HR policy and vision must be aligned with the employees on the ground or ‘in the field’. The male perspective is both under-researched and a growing problem with how policy engages with the employees. Existing literature is heavily female-focused, and whilst this is very important, there are very few cross-gender studies and even fewer focused on the male perspective. The significance, therefore, of this study is to provide critical insight into the under-researched perspective of male employees when engaging with FWA policy, providing key practical implications for organisations to improve male engagement with FWA.

1.6 Thesis structure

This study aims to explore the factors affecting the male utilisation of FWA by understanding the existing knowledge base and conducting further primary research. This study will provide a background of FWA, discuss the benefits and challenges of FWA, look at the gender gap in the utilisation of FWA and then present the findings of the study - exploring factors that affect the utilisation of FWA amongst men. This research is presented in the following chapters:

Chapter One – Introduction

This chapter introduces the research field and explores the background and context of FWA. It further outlines the benefits and challenges of FWA, the significance and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

In this chapter there is a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature focusing specifically on creating a framework for the rest of the study to explore. It explores factors that may affect the utilisation of FWA amongst men.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Through this chapter a discussion of the research design takes place. Critically discussing what data is collected, how the data collection process was designed and considers the ethics of the study.

Chapter Four – Findings

In this chapter the findings are presented through a thematic analysis approach providing critical insight into how the participants interact with FWA policy and how they would improve their organisations approach to such policy.

Chapter Five – Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings, taking into consideration the implications of the study with reference to the framework of existing literature identified in chapter two.

Chapter Six – Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, there is a summary of the study, exploration of the strengths and limitations, recommendations for future study, and details of the practical implications for organisations.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

This chapter explores the existing literature surrounding FWA, the factors affecting the utilisation, the impact of individual and environmental factors and concludes with a thematic framework for the study to explore. It will also explore some reasons for the lack of utilisation amongst men, using literature that is not necessarily gender-specific but offering insight into factors affecting the utilisation of FWA in wider populations and other countries. Arguably this will offer insight and a thematic review of some factors affecting the utilisation of FWA amongst the male workforce.

2.1 Factors affecting the utilisation of FWA.

The use of FWA to gain a better work-life balance is nothing new, with employees surveyed in a 1993 study showing that 30% of the respondents said they would take a reduction in pay to achieve a better work-life balance (Galinsky et al., 1993). Even as early as 2002, there was recognition amongst corporations that allowing FWA was becoming more critical to corporate HR strategies as they become more popular among employees (Bond et al., 2002). Whilst FWA has been recognised as both a popular and increasingly important HR strategy, more research needs to be conducted to understand the utilisation of FWA and the reasons why a person may or may not choose to use FWA. One study (Kossek et al., 1999) conducted in the US surveyed 1000 managers with three alternative schedule options. The results of this study were that managers whose peers use FWA were more likely to use FWA themselves. This idea of herd mentality or using the FWA by personal recommendation is just one of the many factors that have been explored as factors affecting the utilisation of FWA.

Many studies have explored the role of work-life balance as the main reason for using FWA (Hayman, 2009; Mohan et al., 2010; Kelliher et al., 2019) however, little has been discussed in the way of reasons for not using FWA (Allen & Shockley, 2009). Furthermore, there are studies which explore the role FWA plays in women's lives, particularly exploring the impact it has on women with young families, women who are pregnant and how women return to the workforce following the birth of a child. For example, Desai & Waite (1991) found that women who had given birth were more attracted to occupations where it is easier to combine their work and family responsibilities, Blake-Beard et al. (2010) explored how gender, race, and class impact access to FWA and Fuller & Hirsh (2019) discussed how FWA affects a 'motherhood wage penalty'. Warren (2004) contributes to the discussion of FWA and WLB, highlighting a gap in the literature where 'lower level' part time female workers are concerned. She suggests that examining their financial security and leisure lives indicates a less positive picture of strategies that aim to support WLB.

2.2 Individual factors

Many have suggested that the factors affecting the individual's decision-making process can be divided into individual and environmental factors (Fabio et al., 2023). Within the individual factors theme, there are two subthemes: perceptions of masculinity/femininity and traditional family values.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

Individual factors can be defined as the factors in an individual's life that make up an individual's values and belief system (Okurame, 2014). Examples of these factors are demographics, physiological, psychological, and non-work factors.

2.2.1 Perceptions of masculinity/femininity

One of the main factors affecting an individual's decision-making process is their understanding of masculinity and femininity's roles in their life (Koellinger et al., 2008). This is of more importance when societal acceptability is taken into consideration. The hegemonic viewpoints stigmatise marginalised people and views (Cheng, 1999; Hannem & Bruckert, 2012). In relation to FWA and men, it has been suggested that the stigma attached is one of increased femininity (Almer & Single, 2004), which is counter to the hegemonic idea of masculinity. This, therefore, impacts the utilisation of FWA by men as they do not want the stigma attached to it (Vandello et al., 2013). Some have argued that this stigma has lessened over the past decade (Chung, 2020), and it has been suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic has expedited this evolution of thinking so that FWA is more socially acceptable for men than at any other time in history (Alon et al., 2020).

Perry (2014) explores a stereotypical view of masculinity within the 'default man' framework. This theory suggests the world is 'made' for white, heteronormative, middle-class men. This ideology is backed up by a view of masculinity based on power, money, and traditional family values (Gould, 1991; Franklin II, 2012). Whilst 'the default man' theory does not have a specific academic origin, significant research suggests the world is 'made' for the white, heteronormative, middle-class man (McIntosh, 2017; Feagin & Ducey, 2017). The argument is that the media they consume reinforces this privileged ideology, explored by Johnson et al. (2008), who found that the media perpetuates the stereotype that men should be assertive and violent. This, in turn, perpetuates the system which gives them power. This could help understand why men have not utilised FWA in the same way as women because it is perceived as not as powerful and breaks the idea of what the system is. The system that has given white, heteronormative, middle-class men social dominance.

When this idea of masculinity linked with social dominance is perceived to be challenged, men experience poorer mental health, increased risk-taking, increased aggression, and poor work-life balance (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Whether this challenge comes from a change in home life or work pressure (i.e., implementing FWA as the default), men who tie their identity to their social status struggle and therefore resist changes. Vandello and Bosson (2013) argue that this is a potential factor in men's poor utilisation of FWA.

This study will explore if and how individuals' perceptions of their masculinity affect the utilisation of FWA amongst men.

2.2.2 Traditional family values

One of the factors identified by most of the literature regarding the female perspective is the role that traditional family values play in the decision-making process around how women work especially following a pregnancy (Frome et al., 2008). Some have shown that this bias has increased despite the new flexibility enshrined in law – women are much less likely to work full-time on their return to work (McRae, 1993; Chung & van der Hurst, 2018). It is this sort of gender bias, based on the idea of who should be doing what in the family, that affects men also – the idea that a man in a heteronormative relationship is the breadwinner and the woman is the homemaker still influences how families interact with workplace decisions post-pregnancy (Bosoni, 2014; Moran & Koslowski, 2018; Baxter, 2018).

These traditional family values are underpinned by nuclear family ideology, which is underpinned by the widespread historical belief that family structure is foundational to the basis of social organisation (Zimmerman, 1972). In times of empire, war and extreme poverty, how society was organised was foundational to success (Goldstein, 2009). Those societies that organised well, using a nuclear family ideology, were frequently superior on the battlefield and therefore had vast empires (Phillips, 2009). This further entrenches the nuclear family ideology, leading to times of prosperity and relative peace for ordinary citizens.

These traditional family values have been challenged in the late 20th century and early 21st century, and whilst many have argued for the death of the nuclear family ideology (Uzoka, 1979; Bengston, 2004; Graham, 2012), the reality is that lingering unconscious bias remains for large parts of the population, specifically for men (Dernberger & Pepin, 2020). Crompton et al., (2007) examine ‘the new normal’, with increasing numbers of women and mothers engaging in paid work and the social challenges this presents. Ultimately, how men perceive these ideologies concerning their identity will impact how they engage in FWA policy.

Furthermore, an underlying theme explored in the research in relation to traditional family values is that there has been a shift in childcare responsibility, notably since the COVID-19 Pandemic (Alon et al., 2020). While mothers were still primarily responsible for housework and childcare tasks, fathers working from home reported that they were more involved in these roles than before the pandemic (Chung et al., 2021). This suggests that when FWA is enacted on a mass scale, the opportunity is provided for a more equal and egalitarian split of household labour (Carlson et al., 2021).

This study will see if and how the traditional family values bias affects the utilisation of FWA amongst men.

2.3 Environmental factors

Environmental factors can be defined as external influences, not individuals’ values and belief systems, that impact an individual’s decision-making process (Rauthmann, 2020). Examples of these are societal,

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

legal, and economic factors. The CIPD (2022) similarly identifies these as political, economic, sociological, technological, legal and environmental factors influencing a person or organisation. Under the environmental factors' themes, there are three subthemes: relational contexts, location of work in relation to home, and cost of living crisis (unique phenomenon).

2.3.1 Relational contexts

A factor explored in the existing literature is the relational context's role in the decision-making process around FWA. For many, this looks like pressure to conform to an ideology or worldview of the society around the individual (McDonald & Crandall, 2015). Family pressure is one of the most substantial pressures when making decisions (Powell & Greenhaus, 2012). If a spouse or significant other has a negative view of FWA, that perception can lead them to pressure their partner not to use it. Similarly, if a partner or spouse has a positive view of FWA, that positive perception can result in them encouraging their partner to use it (Shockley & Allen, 2011). Chung (2022) suggests that FWA can lead to 'self-exploitation', which results in negative things such as overworking, increased stress and poor mental health. However, Dreike et al. (2003) suggest that these adverse effects can be combated by spousal pressure to stop overworking and encourage a healthy work-life balance. Despite this example of positive spousal pressure, the far more evidenced outcome of spousal pressure is negative (Allen et al., 2012; Higgins et al., 2014; Ongaki, 2019). Men and women both report feeling unsupported by their partners, and often, this conflict is based on misconceptions about what working flexibly looks like (Kim et al., 2019).

Dreike et al. (2003) also suggest other social pressures outside of romantic relationships, such as parental and childcare pressures. If parents believe that FWA would benefit childcare responsibilities, for example, then parental pressure can be a reason that FWA is either adopted or not. Therefore, this study will explore the kinds of pressures these men experience and what impact this has on their decision-making process about using FWA.

2.3.2 Location of work in relation to home

Another factor identified in the existing literature is the relationship between the place of work and the place of residence (Hamblin, 1995; Flores, 2019). Some have found that if there is a more considerable commute to work, FWA is more appealing because it is cheaper to work remotely as the employee is not paying for petrol/diesel or a train ticket to commute (Beno, 2021).

Green et al. (1999) suggest that the commute length is increasing due to the ability to conduct work remotely. Therefore, they argue that the geographical location of work and home becomes less important the more flexibly the employees can work. However, for industries that require in-person flexibility, i.e., engineers who work shift patterns, the geographical location of the home and work is still important.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

Brewer and Hensher (1998) suggest that access to public transport affects the decision-making around the utilisation of FWA as those who live in suburban, well-connected locations are more likely to be able to take advantage of elements of FWA, such as flexitime. In contrast, those who are less well-connected are unlikely to be able to use FWA. Therefore, this factor can explain the geographical low utilisation of FWA regardless of gender. However, the reality is that flexitime is used by women more than men and therefore has a disproportionate impact on women's ability to use FWA (Boden, 1999, 2006; Haar, 2007).

2.3.3 Cost-of-living crisis (unique phenomenon)

The consumer price index rose in 2022 by 10.5% (Office for National Statistics, 2022). This is in contrast to 2021 of 5.4% and 0.5% in 2020 (Office for National Statistics, 2021). The cost of living in the UK is on a sustained rise, and whilst some believe the peak to be over, these figures represent the most significant increase in the cost of living for over two decades (House of Commons Library, 2023). Combine this with the relatively low wage increase rate of 6.4% (BBC News, 2023), and this has led to a squeeze on household incomes, the like of which much of the workforce has never experienced.

This provides the background for one of the more situational and context-driven factors that currently has very little literature around its impact, and there is a growing concern, reported in the media, that the cost of living is influencing how people work (HR Strategy News, 2022; Brown, 2023; Johnson, 2023). Anecdotally, it has been reported that people are trying to save costs at home by working in the office, in an environment where working from home is more usual in a post-COVID economy (The Telegraph, 2022). Others are saving on the cost of commuting by working from home. At this point, it is important to stress that FWA is more than just working from home (Kelliher & de Menezes, 2019). It could be that some parents, for example, are using flexitime, working a set number of hours over the course of the week, not just a conventional 9-5, so they can cut back on childcare costs (Lautsch & Kossek, 2011; Čiarnienė et al., 2018). This would be a pull factor when considering FWA within the context of a cost-of-living crisis. Furthermore, organisations may encourage employees to work from home, away from the office, to save on overhead costs (Church, 2015). All of this remains to be seen, and the full impact of the cost-of-living crisis will be seen in the coming years.

This factor is one that is under-researched and, under 'normal' economic conditions, perhaps would play a less critical role in the decision-making around FWA. However, this is a unique phenomenal factor and will be recognised as such in this study. It could be that upon a return to relatively stable economic conditions, this factor will be less critical to the decision-making process, however, the impacts on the psychology of workers will be seen as the workforce is made up of more people who have only lived in times of great economic challenge (World Economic Forum, 2023). Most notably, the financial crisis of 2008, the coronavirus pandemic (2020-22), the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the cost-of-living crisis (2022-present) (Izzeldin et al., 2023).

2.4 Summary of potential factors

Table 3 provides a thematic summary of potential factors that may influence the utilisation of FWA among men based on the existing literature, this provided through a thematic review. Providing the base knowledge of this study. It will allow the study to contribute to the field by finding data that supports these themes, contradicts them, or adds new ideas not currently evident in the wider literature.

Table 3 - Summary of potential factors affecting the male uptake of FWA.

Factor	Explanation
Individual factors	Internal factors that an individual uses to help make a decision based on their values and belief system.
Perceptions of masculinity	How a man perceives what masculinity is, and how he relates to that, can be an influencing individual factor when deciding to either use or not use FWA.
Traditional family values	Whether a man identifies with tradition family values of male being the breadwinner and gender roles such as the man 'going out' to work, can affect whether he utilises FWA or not.
Environmental factors	External factors that affect an individual's decision-making process outside of the values and belief system.
Relational contexts	The relationships that men have with their significant others, children, parents, and friends. These can influence the way a man makes the decisions around FWA due to social pressures and circumstances.
Location of work in relation to home	The distance between home and work can be a limiting factor when making workplace decisions such as FWA.
Cost of living crisis (unique phenomenon)	The cost of living has got worse in the UK and a factor that has always been a consideration is taking a much greater role in individuals decision making. How expensive it is to heat your home whilst working from home one day a week may discourage the use of this FWA.

It could be argued that these potential factors affecting the male uptake of FWA also impact women's utilisation of FWA. Williams et al., (2021) suggest that it isn't gender which is the greatest factor influencing the utilisation of FWA, rather organisational support and access to FWA policy. Whilst it may be that organisational support or lack thereof influences both men and women's decision to utilise FWA, men encounter significant challenges and mocking when seeking to adopt FWA due to caregiving responsibilities (Kelland et al., 2022). There is a dearth of literature regarding other gendered factors affecting the utilisation of FWA and this is where the value of this study lies.

2.5 Links to research question

When exploring the factors affecting the utilisation of FWA amongst men, the thematic review set out above in Table 3 will help assess whether the existing themes amongst the literature are present in the data found in this study. Not only this, but it will allow the researcher to contribute to the field by being able to support themes that already exist, potentially contradicting themes that already exist, but perhaps where there is the greatest possibility to add value is by offering new themes or recommendations not

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

currently found within the literature base. Using the two main categories, individual and environmental factors, will allow the findings and discussion chapters to identify and discuss these factors broadly in relation to the factors found in this study. For example, one participant may explain that they find the pressures of working from home too high because of the perceptions of a partner (Barker, 2022). This would support the theme within the existing literature of relational contexts affecting decision-making around FWA (Allen et al., 2012; Pedersen & Lewis, 2012). This means that the findings will help to answer the research question of what affects the utilisation of FWA amongst male employees.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Through this chapter there will be a link made between the philosophical positioning, approach, research design, data collection, sampling method, and participant case studies. All of which will be linked with the research objectives. The approach taken is based on interpretative phenomenology and the work of Smith et al. (1999). Semi-structured interviews will be used to collect the data, and this will allow the participants authentic voice to remain in the findings. The following subsections critically explore these decisions.

3.1 Philosophical positioning

When conducting a study like this, it is essential that the research methods are detailed and the researcher's positioning in their approach to the research (Cassell et al., 2017; Quinlan et al., 2019). Within social research, it has been argued that there are two main approaches and models of research: one from a positivist perspective and one from an interpretivist perspective (Heshusius & Ballard, 1996). The positivist approach, dominant in the past, is known for objective, universal truths tested over time, adding to existing truth through absolute measurable conclusions that can be tested repeatedly (Bell et al., 2018). In contrast, the interpretivist researcher challenges the positivist approach, rejects the notion of universal truth to some extent, and explores reality through the meanings people understand over time through lived experiences and personal circumstances. In this approach, the researcher is detached from the findings as they only allow the participants interpreted, negotiated experiences to be the findings rather than that of the researchers (Schwandt, 1994). When research explores how people feel in response to a specific, experience-based subject, an interpretivist approach is considered the best approach to hold validity and offer the most tangible findings for others to improve how a demographic is understood. The researcher intends to allow the perspectives of the men interviewed to be the findings of this thesis and, therefore, considered interpretivist.

3.2 Approach

Whilst the researcher comes from an interpretative perspective, one that is interested in finding out participants understanding of the world around them through their own eyes and their unique perspectives, this study is phenomenological in nature, exploring how experiences affect the participants concerning the research topic (Husserl, 2014). The participants' responses are textual and offer insight into the perceived, the emotions, and the thoughts, which is critical in this study as it seeks to explore how male employees interact with FWA within the workplace (Smith et al., 2009). What factors do they feel affect them, what factors do they think affect them, and what factors do they perceive to affect them? The study recognises that these factors may not be based on the subjective truths that more quantitative approaches might offer; recognising the value of the psychologies of the employees is an essential key in unlocking the way forward for organisations and employees (Holland, 2007). The

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

inductive nature of phenomenology allows the study to explore these men's experiences and add to the knowledge of how men interact with FWA policy.

3.3 Data collection

To fully understand how men perceive FWA and how this affects their utilisation of it, considering the philosophical positioning and approach taken in this study, there are a few methods that could be used to explore the research question, including ethnography, action research, case studies, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The list is fairly extensive however when considering the constraints placed on a master's thesis, only a few options are credible. Even still, some stand out from the rest as offering the greatest route to a diverse data set (Patten et al., 2017) providing a better foundation for a comprehensive discussion as well as addition to the field and offering the most grounded solutions for organisations to implement.

Whilst ethnographic research would offer the greatest in-depth data set (Urban et al., 2013) and perhaps highlight data that is overlooked by the participants unconscious bias, the focus of this study is less on the 'real' universally accepted truths of FWA but rather the perceptions of the participants and therefore taking an ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis would not help in answering the research question. If the research question was framed differently and the researchers' approach was different, and the time restraint on a master's thesis was less then this approach would offer suitable data in future studies.

Case studies offer another plausible method for data collection and would allow for the in-depth data that this study is looking to collect (Simons, 2014). However, when considering case studies as the data collection method, it was decided that the study would not offer substantive results to the body of work already published. If this approach was taken as part of a series of studies which would add depth to the conclusions found then this would be beneficial however within the framework already set out, this approach was discarded.

Focus groups were also considered as the method for data collection as they offer in-depth insight into a chosen population and specific research topic (Morgan, 1996) however they rely on people feeling that they can share their experiences which could pose difficult to achieve with a group of strangers. Furthermore, it was recognised that the logistical challenges of such a data method would hinder the collection of sound results. It was recognised that if this thesis was part of a series where the study is just one element of a final conclusion which would add depth, then this would be an appropriate method, however with the restrictions of the master's thesis combined with the researchers positioning, this data collection method was discarded.

Semi-structured interviews were explored as a data collection method due to the ability to gain in-depth responses (Barriball, & While, 1994; Ruslin et al., 2022), allowing participants to share their sensitive personal experiences more discretely than in a focus group setting (Smith, 1995) and are the least

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

challenging to set-up as people can typically fit a 30-40 min interview in around work, and other commitments (Adams, 2015). This approach allows for the collection of in-depth information without a preconceived idea of what the answers will be or how the conversation will go (Brinkmann, 2020). It is semi-structured in nature meaning key areas will be discussed but the questions themselves may differ between participants in order to get the most detailed data. This helps to draw conclusions that are steeped in the experiences and perspectives of the participants – a key aim of the study. Therefore, this data collection approach was taken.

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study allows participants to share new ideas and experiences whilst building on the researcher's current knowledge (Wilson, 2014), ultimately contributing depth to existing literature and providing unique insights. Through this data collection method, the researcher can interact with the participant and be receptive to where they lead the conversation (Jennings, 2005) in contrast to a rigid interview script. This allows the study to reflect the men's experiences as they perceive them, providing an authentic account of factors they believe affect the utilisation of FWA. Whilst this method can provide detailed information on participants' experiences, it may also result in a greater volume of data (Brinkman, 2020), with interviews leading to conversations not relevant to the research being conducted. This limitation can be largely overcome by the researcher being attuned to the discussion and being able to steer it if necessary while allowing the participants to share their personal experiences.

3.4 Participants

3.4.1 Selection of participants

The sampling technique used in this study was generic purposive (Bryman, 2016; 2021), which enables the researcher to be specific as to whether the participants are relevant to and meet the requirements of the study aims. This was achieved through a two-stage process: interest identification and eligibility through the selection criteria.

Table 4 - Participant selection criteria

Selection criteria
Speaks fluent English (<i>written fluency less important as interview data collection</i>)
Over 18 years old (<i>English law mandates participation in education or training until that time</i>)
Live and work in the United Kingdom (<i>organisation can be multinational</i>)
Sex: male
Experience of using or trying to use flexible working arrangements

Access to potential participants was restricted due to the length of the project and the geographical spread leading to the location being a limiting factor. However, the study did not need to be contained within one location as it explores the male perspective generally and not the male perspective in specific locations. Therefore, social media was used to encourage potential participants to get in contact before

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

going through the selection criteria (Table 5). This allowed for the greatest possible reach and improved access to potential participants for the study (Bhatia-Lin et al., 2019).

The generic purposive sampling approach was chosen because the study is into a specific demographic whilst also being limited by study constraints such as time and location. The social media used was a public post on a personal Facebook account. This meant that potential participants snowballed as people shared the post and showed interest. This was in keeping with the generic purposive method chosen. Only 2 of the 15 participants were familiar with the researcher. This enabled the majority of the data to be free from the researcher's personal bias.

3.4.2 Participant information

21 men registered their interest in being involved in the study, and following the selection criteria, 19 men were still eligible for the study. After reading the participant information sheet, 15 men gave their informed consent to participate in the study. The average age of these men was 42.9. Table 6 expresses their background information.

Table 5 - Participant profiles

Participant	Profile
A	Male, 40, works in a small faith-based charity. Him and his partner have three children, two living at home. He has worked remotely since July 2020.
B	Male, 35, works as a customer sales representative for a national car rental company. He has two dependent children. He worked remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic but chose to return to work in August 2021.
C	Male, 45, works as a peripatetic learning and development coach. He works remotely two days a week, one day a week in the office and is on placement two days a week. Him and his partner have a child who is dependent.
D	Male, 36, works for full time hours for transnational healthcare provider. He works fully remotely however has had pressure recently to return to the office three days a week. Him and his partner have three children, all primary school age.
E	Male, 52, works as a senior manager within healthcare. He works in the office five days a week, spasmodically working from home. Him and his partner have two children: one of secondary school age and the other of university age.
F	Male, 26, works as a community project co-ordinator within the care for vulnerable children sector. He works from an office for five days a week. He has no children.
G	Male, 23, works as a customer sales assistant within the car retail industry. He works from the dealership four days a week and teleworks for one day. His working week is Tuesday through Saturday. He has no children.
H	Male, 49, works as a manager for a local charity that supports adults with learning difficulties. He works in the office five days a week. Him and his wife have two adult children who do not live at home.
I	Male, 46, works as a debt collections officer for a local authority housing agency. He works three days in the office and two days from home, however his job requires meeting with clients who are off-site. He has two adult children who do not live at home.
J	Male, 48, works as an IT engineer for a multinational manufacturing company. He used to work fully remotely however has returned to the office, four days a week due to the cost-of-living crisis. Oftentimes, he must travel for his work. He has two adult children, one who still lives at home.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

K	Male, 56, works as a water engineer for a regional water supplier. He works 'in the field' but is office-based when not out on call. He has two adult children, one who still lives at home.
L	Male, 58, works as a further education teacher. He worked remotely throughout the pandemic and has returned to the classroom-based teaching for three of the five days he works. He has two adult children who do not live with at home.
M	Male, 42, works as a public sector mental health nurse. He works on hospital wards for a shift pattern. He has three children, two of whom are still dependent on his earnings.
N	Male, 58, works as a mechanical engineer for a regional property developer. He works remotely when not on building sites. He has two adult children who do not live at home.
O	Male, 30, works as a regional support coordinator for a national charity. He works remotely one day a week; the other four he is office based. He has two children under the age of seven.

3.5 Data analysis methods

When considering the data analysis method for this study, many options are applicable, such as narrative analysis, discourse analysis, content analysis, and thematic analysis.

Narrative analysis is a technique that evolved through qualitative research found in psychological and sociological studies (Cortazzi, 1994). This form of study clusters narrative within a data set that allows participants to organise and make sense of their experiences (Oliver, 1998). This approach is useful when exploring how people recognise their stories within the socio-cultural settings they find themselves in (Sharp et al., 2019). In addition, narrative analysis is a tool that generations have used to understand their place within the broader contexts of life. Therefore, this is a helpful tool when considering people's lived experiences, such as in this study. However, when using a narrative approach, there is a degree of interpretation required. Often, the researcher is open to the potential of their biases affecting which information is considered significant (Riessman, 2007). Therefore, this analysis technique was disregarded and not chosen for this study.

Similarly, discourse analysis is a research analysis technique examining how a person uses communication within a social context (Johnstone, 2018). Whilst socio-cultural discourses are often narrative based, this is a distinct field of qualitative research analysis, focusing on how language and the language used in social contexts affect how an individual understands their lived experiences (Trappes-Lomax, 2004). This would have been an effective analysis method for this kind of study had the research project been conducted within a longer time frame. Understanding how men use the language that is in societal discourse and where they conform and diverge from such societal discourses would be a helpful tool for organisations to reframe the language they use surrounding FWA for male

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

employees. Future studies could use this method to comprehensively review how societal discourses influence views on masculinity and other factors affecting the utilisation of FWA.

Content analysis is a similarly language-focused analysis technique, generally looking at word frequencies to provide a quantitative data set to provide a statistical base for inferences of language used for the wider population (Harwood, 2003). This quantitative approach differs from the philosophical positioning of this research; the qualitative approach would offer a way to look at the meaning behind the language used when approaching FWA for men. Whilst this approach would be beneficial in a more extensive study, with a slightly different focus away from exploration and more towards how the content consumed by men influences their decisions regarding FWA. If this thesis were part of a more comprehensive series of theses, this approach would only add depth to any conclusions to a multifaceted research question. Therefore, this analysis technique was disregarded and unsuitable for this specific study.

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 1999) was considered for its alignment with the research positioning and approach; however, without a unifying phenomenon, one distinct lived experience, this approach was discarded. If the cost-of-living crisis continues to get worse and the standards of living in the UK continue to decrease materially, then this method would offer future studies the opportunity to explore how the cost-of-living crisis affects male employees. However, this study is focused on FWA as a general, multifaceted HR policy.

Thematic analysis has a broader focus than some of the other methods explored, focusing on common themes, repeated topics, and shared ideas of meaning (Terry et al., 2017). This approach allows the researcher to determine the level of interpretation congruent to the approach taken in this study. Furthermore, this method allows the participants to maintain much of their authentic voice without focusing on a phenomenon like the IPA method (Braun et al., 2006). In future studies, perhaps solely exploring the impact of the cost-of-living crisis (a unique phenomenon), an IPA method would be more appropriate, but for a study exploring the factors affecting the utilisation of FWA, a thematic approach allows for the most factors to be explored and reported with the intention of this study providing a base for future studies. Therefore, this analysis technique has the greatest opportunity for offering results that add to the field and offer crucial insight into how men perceive FWA and how this affects their utilisation of this critical pillar of good work. Table 6 shows the analysis process similar to the works of Smith et al. (1999), Braun et al. (2006) and Kiger et al. (2020).

Table 6 - Data analysis process

Phases	Description
1	Transcripts read without field notes, broad themes were identified and codified on an individual basis.
2	Transcripts read with field notes, adding depth to individual themes already identified.
3	Emergent themes were then identified.
4	Similarly connected themes were identified.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

5	These connected themes were then checked against original transcripts.
6	Major and Minor themes were identified dependent on how prevalent the theme was across all transcripts. The greater the appearances, the more major the theme, the less appearances, the less valid to apply to a majority of these men's experience.

These phases of analysis, conducted manually, allowed the themes to come from the participants' direct responses and not the researcher's interpretations or the existing literature, minimising bias. The final two phases were conducted to ensure the themes remained true to the original voice of the participants (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.6 Ethics

It is considered good practice to consider the ethical implications of a study (Bulmer, 1992; Gregory, 2003). Most research projects are now required to seek ethical approval from a research ethics committee so that any adjustments necessary for the study to be conducted appropriately are completed (Gelling, 2016). The University of Huddersfield Business School Research Ethics and Integrity Committee granted this study ethical approval on 1st November 2022.

The data privacy of all participants will be maintained in line with GDPR. This means that all data collected (transcripts, audio recordings, and personal details) will be stored securely in a password-protected folder and destroyed six months after the degree is conferred as per best practice considering GDPR (expected approx. 10th December 2023). Within this study, all participants will be given complete anonymity, with no personal information being included which could identify them as study participants. They have been assigned a letter of the alphabet to allow data analysis whilst protecting their identity.

Participants may withdraw their responses throughout the data collection process until a day before submission, 2nd April 2023. The researcher deemed this reasonable as not one finding will be based solely on one participant's testimony. Before data collection begins, participants will be given a 'Participant information sheet' (see Appendix A). This will allow for informed consent to take part in this study. Following their consent, they will progress to the interview stage, being reminded that they may withdraw at any time and without any reason. If a participant declines to consent, they shall be removed from the process.

When a study explores participants' experiences, it is of the utmost importance that their opinions are respected. It is not the place of the researcher to judge, comment or further cause any harm to the participants. It is, however, within the researcher's rights to suspend the interview if they feel this mutual respect is broken. Renzetti & Lee (1993) detail appropriate tools for sensitively conducting research interviews. Therefore the researcher will be mindful of their questioning and be receptive and astute if the participant is upset. The participant may reveal personal and confidential information to the researcher through the interview, which will be treated with the strictest confidence. In addition, the researcher will ensure that the participants feel comfortable answering the questions.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

There are questions about the ethical nature of using social media to source participants (King et al., 2014). Whilst for more extensive, better-funded projects, this should be a consideration, for this study, within the confines already explored, the use of social media is no different from asking friends and family who want to get involved to get in touch. Therefore, because it aligns with the research design and scale of the project, it is deemed appropriate to use it as a participant recruitment method.

Chapter Four – Findings

This chapter presents the findings and discusses these within the themes identified through the data analysis process detailed in Chapter 3. The themes and sub-themes explored are detailed below (Table 7). The data shows that the overarching theme is that the realities of FWA are challenging for men. This conclusion was seen in the six major themes amalgamated from the 19 sub-themes identified through the first coding phase. The analysis method was adapted from the works of Smith et al. (2009) and was based on this IPA approach. The data also provides three recommendations for organisations to better engage men in FWA policy. These recommendations are the participant's ideas for how they would respond better to FWA within their organisations. Theme six presents the data which supports these recommendations.

Before the data is presented, it is worthy of note that these findings concentrate on men who use flexitime and remote working and not other options such as job sharing, term time only working, and part-time work.

Table 7 - Summary of themes.

Overarching theme (one)	Major themes (six)	Minor sub-themes explored (19)
The realities of FWA are challenging for men.	1. Identity factors.	<i>1.1 - Traditional family roles.</i>
		<i>1.2 - Perceptions of gender roles.</i>
		<i>1.3 - Counter stereotypical roles.</i>
		<i>1.4 - Distribution of household responsibilities.</i>
	2. Personal factors.	<i>2.1 - Blurring of lines between work and family life.</i>
		<i>2.2 - Distraction and procrastination.</i>
		<i>2.3 - Overworking.</i>
		<i>2.4 - Workspaces.</i>
	3. Social factors.	<i>3.1 - Perceptions of significant others.</i>
		<i>3.2 - Perceptions of other household members.</i>
		<i>3.3 - Isolation.</i>
		<i>3.4 - Challenging workplace politics.</i>
	4. Organisational factors.	<i>4.1 - Workplace power and hierarchy.</i>
		<i>4.2 - Organisational empathy (ability to listen).</i>
		<i>4.3 - Organisational infrastructure limiting implementation of FWA effectively.</i>
	5. Unique phenomenon factor.	<i>5.1 - Cost-of-living crisis.</i>
	6. Participant recommendations.	<i>6.1 - Clearer organisational communication.</i>
		<i>6.2 - Improved FWA education.</i>
		<i>6.3 - Increased organisational empathy.</i>

The following sub-chapters will present the findings, sharing the data which makes up these major and minor themes – leading to the overarching theme.

4.1 Theme 1 – Identity factors

Many of the men identified their understanding of who they are and what 'role' they are meant to have in different settings. This motif was identified across the subthemes of the first phase of analysed data.

The subsequent sub-chapters provide the data for the four minor themes within this broader theme: traditional family roles, perceptions of gender roles, counter-stereotypical roles, and distribution of household responsibilities.

4.1.1 Traditional family roles

Many of the men spoke about their understanding of traditional family roles and how this influenced their experience of FWA. Participant A commented on the family roles within his household, “it does run more smoothly when she is with the kids”. When reflecting on the pandemic, participant B commented that he did not feel well equipped to teach and nurture his children, “had to help my kids and teach them some important lessons and, I don’t really have the skills for that”. Participant D remarked that before the pandemic, he was resistant to utilising FWA as he viewed himself as a provider, “working from home is a big change to that, not going out to work or going out to provide for your family”. Participant E described his hesitancy to adopt FWA before it became necessary due to the pandemic, “I didn’t really think it would work for our family”. Participant I explained he now takes on more household responsibility; however, his partner does not always appreciate his workload “she expects me to keep the house clean when I’ve got work still to do”. Participant J explained that his family still adopt a traditional approach in many areas “I think those expectations of who does what in the house still remain”. Participant K identified external pressure for men to be ‘going out’ to work, “I think there is just more societal pressure on men to go out to work”. Participant O remarked he was happy to support his partner around the house, but this came at a cost to his time spent working, “I’ll be in a Teams meeting and get a call to do this job or that or even pick the kids up”. All these men shared experiences of how traditional family roles negatively influence their decision-making around FWA, despite the hegemonic perspective evolving through new discussions on what family roles look like in 2023. This means that these men, whilst having experiences with FWA, see FWA as a counter to the family role they see themselves fulfilling.

4.1.2 Perceptions of gender roles

These men identified how gender roles impacted their utilisation of FWA. Participant A explained that before using FWA, he felt his role was to be ‘out of the house’ working, “for me, that looked like going off or out to work”. Participant B explored his role as the ‘breadwinner’ within his family unit, commenting, “it’s my responsibility to earn money”. Participant E identified that a unique challenge of FWA for men was feeling isolated and not knowing how to reach out to others “It is not our natural instinct I would say to share how we are feeling”. When discussing the perceived challenges of FWA and that it was important for him to leave for work, participant H explained, “I like the routine of going

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

out to work, it's just how it should be". Participant I commented that since taking up FWA, "my wife likes it best when I'm in the office, I don't get in her way". Participant J explained that he believed it was more challenging for men to utilise FWA as "woman are still pretty much the ones running the house, they don't just get given a list of jobs that need doing, they can actually just manage their time themselves". Participant K further developed this idea, saying, "it might just be better for women to work flexibly. It means that they can do all the other things they need to." These discussions demonstrate that perceptions of gender roles influence men and women and their decisions around work.

4.1.3 Counter stereotypical roles

A minority of men described their household and family unit roles as counter stereotypical. Participant C explained that since adopting FWA, he has "far more time with my son than before, which I really enjoy". Participant F described a future scenario with his significant other, where they would both utilise FWA policies to provide childcare, "when we have kids I would want a role with flexitime or something like that so I could help with childcare and we could save money". For Participant H, the flexibility afforded to him within lockdowns allowed him to spend significantly more time completing housework "I liked being able to do more cooking, cleaning, gardening, just looking after the house". Participant L explained how FWA had allowed a more even split of housework within his family, something he enjoys as well as his significant other, "it is nice when we get to do housework together and split it more evenly between us. My wife appreciates that". Whilst many of the men demonstrated in their discussion that traditional family and gender roles influence decisions they make about utilising FWA, this is not the case for all men.

4.1.4 Distribution of household responsibilities

The utilisation of FWA by many organisations and individuals during the pandemic and beyond has been argued to have created a shift in the distribution of household responsibilities. Participant A explained he now has a more significant amount of time where he "can spend more time with my family now and help out around the house more than I used to". Participant C shared a similar sentiment appreciating what he can now contribute to household responsibilities "I used to just come home in time for tea, but when I'm at home now I can help make it". The change in the distribution of household responsibilities has caused increased pressure for Participant D "she expects a lot more of me, around the house, when I'm working from home". Participant G said that within his household, "my mum expects me to do loads of housework the days I work from home". Participant I recognised the shift in household responsibilities, saying, "I definitely do more around the house now". Participant J explained how the shift in the distribution of household responsibility crept into his working hours, "then I would get left a list of jobs to, sort this, do some washing". Participant N added that there might be less need for external childcare when utilising FWA, "if you were working flexibly with a young family you could do a lot more of the childcare yourself". Similarly, this has been the case for Participant O, who commented, "I do a lot more childcare than I had to do before". These men's experiences of the

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

evolution in the distribution of household responsibilities highlight how this influences their decisions about utilising FWA.

4.2 Theme 2 – Personal factors

Personal factors were identified as a major theme in this study, as many of the men identified that their circumstances influence their perceptions and opinions of FWA. Many participants recognised that these personal factors were distinct from the identity factors already explored as these were more circumstantial and separate from their identity.

The subsequent sub-chapters provide the data concerning the four minor themes within this broader theme: the blurring of lines between work and family life, distraction and procrastination, overworking, and workspaces.

4.2.1 Blurring of lines between work and family life

Most of the men spoke about how FWA has blurred the lines between work and family life. Participant A explained that “life feels jumbled up and you don’t know what you are supposed to be doing”. Participant B discussed the challenge of differentiating between work and home when not going out to work “I found it hard to get my head into work mode”. Participant D identified how work crept into his evening when utilising FWA “when I had finished work for the evening, I would still check emails”. Participant E explained that he would lose track of when he was working “everything just blurs together”. Similarly, participant F explored how time would get away from him when completing work or life tasks “days just end up disappearing”. Participant H highlighted how working flexibly complicated being able to shift between work and family life, “really hard to switch off the work brain when you work flexibly”. Participant I explored how FWA and access to technology such as Zoom or teams can extend his working day into ‘family time’, “I don’t always know when I’m going to finish working”. Participant K succinctly said that FWA “blurs the line between work and home”. Participant N described that since beginning to use FWA, specifically home working, “it doesn’t feel like work ever stops”. Here, most men perceive that FWA causes a blurring of their home or family life with their work which makes them less likely to utilise FWA or perceive a benefit to FWA.

4.2.2 Distraction and procrastination

These men spoke about how distraction and procrastination impacted their experience of utilising FWA. Participant A explained that when utilising FWA, his breaks became elongated, impacting his work: “it is so easy to lose track of time on a break and then go back to my desk and I haven’t done anything I needed to”. When Participant B reflected on the personal challenges of FWA, he recognised one of these as distraction and procrastination, “if I was procrastinating that could be a whole day wasted”. Participant C explained how moving around his home could lead to the diversion of his attention from work, “just walking from one room in the house to another can distract me”. For Participant E, FWA

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

meant he worked whilst trying to complete a range of other tasks, “you don’t have people to keep you accountable so much so you end up doing your work at the same time as lots of other things”. Participant F recognised that whilst utilising FWA during the pandemic, he was generally a more productive worker but also said, “it was a lot harder to motivate myself to work, there was a lot more procrastination”. Participant G explained that his tendency to procrastinate could intensify his workload, “I just get lost in other things and then end up having to work much more intensely when really I should be finishing up for the day”. Participant H identified that when working remotely, he would often be distracted, taking time away from his working hours, “it never ends, just one little job that will take 10 minutes but an hour later you’re still not finished”. Participant I explained that when working remotely, he will engage in many tasks aside from work duties, “some days I end up doing everything but my work”. Participant J highlighted that his decision to return to primarily office-based working was influenced by procrastination “I’ve returned to the office because I wasn’t getting enough work done or meeting my deadlines”. Participant L explained that he would procrastinate before utilising FWA, but it was exacerbated when working remotely, “I thought I was bad at procrastinating in work but I took it to a whole new level at home”. Participant O spoke of the complexity of working in a busy household with competing needs and the impact this had on his work, “there is just so much going on around you it is hard to stay focused”. These men’s experiences suggest that distraction and procrastination are critical issues that must be explored when encouraging employees to utilise FWA.

4.2.3 Overworking

Several men spoke about their perception that utilising FWA could (or did) lead them to overwork. Participant B explained that when he worked remotely, he worked more than when in an office, “I would be putting in really long days, more than I ever worked before”. Participant D explained he felt like he was working all the time, notably when he would have previously been commuting, “I just feel like I’m working all the time. I fill my old commute time with work”. Participant E recognised that he was working more than he needed to, but continued to work into evenings and nights, “I was working a lot more than, I needed to. I just carry on working all night if there are things that need doing”. Participant F described how he would carry on working, specifically if he had time limits, “it was just so easy to carry on working, especially if there was a deadline soon”. Participant G commented that he works the most when teleworking: “I probably work the most on days when I’m working remotely”. Participant H explained it can be easier to overwork when utilising FWA, “if you have a tendency to work a lot anyway, always wanting to get x piece of work done before you go home...that can be really dangerous”. Participant K perceived a negative consequence of utilising FWA was the “ability to carry on working when you know you should finish, just because you have got your work laptop and stuff with you”. Participant M commented on how someone may work when utilising FWA, “you could probably carry on all day and night”. Participant N shared his experience of overworking, “not having my evening for myself and time just running away, and in the end you have worked for about 12 hours”,

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

remarking, “which isn’t healthy at all.”. These men have explained how they perceive that FWA can lead to overworking.

4.2.4 Workspaces

Many men identified that having an appropriate workspace was vital for utilising FWA. Participant B has returned to working in an office after utilising FWA during and beyond the pandemic. He commented, “you have everything you need in the office and your own space. I didn’t have that at home”. Participant C has chosen to continue utilising FWA and has created a ‘fit-for-purpose’ workspace, “I have made sure I have a good place to work now at home, with everything I need. When I first started I didn’t have that.” Participant E explained it would be more of a challenge to utilise FWA without a home office, “it would be even more tricky if I didn’t have my own office”. For Participant F, it was convenient to work from soft furnishings, even though he had a dedicated workspace, “I got lazy and would just work from my bed, but that wasn’t sensible”. Participant H utilised FWA and remote working during the pandemic and did not have access to a home office, “it’s not ideal to be working at the kitchen table”. Participant I recognised that not everyone has an adequate workspace for FWA “it is harder for people just depending on what their house looks like... I do have a dedicated workspace at home now”. Participant J had access to a workspace but found it difficult working there for extended periods over many months, “I certainly got fed up of working in my home office every day...monotonous”. Whilst explaining work/life conflict, participant N commented that not having a specific workspace could be a challenge when utilising FWA, “I think that is made harder when you work flexibly and don’t have a dedicated space for work”. These discussions demonstrate that access to a workspace influences men’s decisions surrounding FWA.

These findings show that these men's attitudes, formed during their practical experience of FWA, will impact the likelihood of them, and crucially of the other men in their workplace, taking up FWA and being productive while they do it. Therefore, organisations need to address these problematic experiences.

4.3 Theme 3 – Social factors

Social factors played a role in these men's experiences of FWA. This major theme was developed as the recurrence of external social pressures became apparent through the data set. The following sub-chapters provide the data for the four minor themes within this umbrella: perceptions of significant others, perceptions of other household members, isolation, and challenging workplace politics.

4.3.1 Perceptions of significant others

Many of the men articulated that the perception of their partner was that they were either not working or had more flexibility within their day than they actually did when utilising FWA. For example, participant A explained that he would be asked to complete household jobs when he was supposed to

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

be working, “my partner will ask me to quickly unload the dishwasher, sort this bit of washing... not everyone understands that I have things I need to do for work”. Whilst detailing his home office, participant C commented that his partner can be unsure about what work he is doing, “she isn’t always quite sure what I get up to”. Participant D explained that his partner does not always believe he is working, “she thinks I just spend my days doing nothing”. Participant E’s partner does not always understand that he does not have the same schedule or flexibility as her “she gets housework done during the day so why can’t I when I’m at home”. Participant J explained that sometimes, his partner did not understand the amount of work he was assigned, “my wife thought I didn’t actually have any work to do”. Participant L now has more flexibility at work, but with the same workload and time teaching, not as much freedom as his partner perceives, “I can work flexibly as in from home, but I still have my normal workload and teaching so I don’t have the time to do what she expects”. Participant N has experienced being left household jobs and expected to complete them during working hours, “it’s frustrating when I get a list of jobs to do, whilst I am still working”. Participant O typically works remotely one day a week, but his partner sometimes views this as another day off, “she doesn’t always understand, it’s not a day off. I can be more flexible but I still have to work”. These results suggest that the perception of a partner affects the likelihood of these men choosing to use FWA, and even then, it can help determine what format of FWA this looks like.

4.3.2 Perceptions of other household members

As well as the perception of the significant other, many men spoke about the perceptions of other household members. Participant A lives in a multigenerational home, where his parents perceive work to be ‘going out’ to an office, “my mum and dad don’t seem to understand that I can be doing proper work not based in an office”. Participant B explained that his children struggle to understand him as being at home whilst also working “they don’t always realise that I am at home, but I am also working”. Similarly, participant D’s children often ask for help and want to play when he is working “my kids especially don’t recognise I am working. They just want to play or want me to help them”. Participant F was living at home during the pandemic, which caused tension about his role, “my parents don’t understand that it’s not the same as when I didn’t have work responsibilities”. Participant G explained that his parents did not believe he was working, “my parents just think I’m not working and being lazy”. Participant I is often asked by his adult children for a lift or support with errands when working remotely, “I am working and can’t actually just help them with this or that.” Participant J has returned to the office after utilising FWA due to the pressure that was placed on relationships “my Mum lives with us and constantly needed me. It never ended”. Participant O has young children keen to spend time with him when he is working remotely, “the kids just see that I am home, they don’t see the working bit”. It is not only the perception of a significant other that may impact a man’s decisions about FWA but also children and parents.

4.3.3 Isolation

These men shared that when utilising FWA, namely remote working, they experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness. Participant A explained that he utilises FWA but can also visit organisations he works with, “It is good to be with people...and you don’t always have that when you work remotely”. Participant B reflected on the reality of FWA when interacting with others is limited, “it gets tedious looking at the same four walls, speaking to the same people”. Participant C explained that “flexible working can be really lonely”. When commenting on technology and software that facilitates interaction and communication, participant D explained he does not believe these can replace conversation, “Zoom and emails just aren’t the same”. Participant E again recognised the loneliness associated with FWA but suggested that for him, this was primarily due to restrictions in place at the time of the pandemic, “when I took up flexible working during the pandemic it was quite lonely”. Participant F shared a similar experience: “It was a very lonely time”. Participant G spoke of the isolation and recommended to organisations, “it can be isolating, so some sort of way to connect with people”. Participant I explained he has enjoyed returning to the office where he “missed the normal chat and banter”. Participant L explained that he now appreciates the value of teaching in a classroom, not just online “it’s nice to hear the conversation”. These results highlight how these men have experienced isolation and loneliness when utilising FWA, which could impact future decisions they make about the way they work.

4.3.4 Challenging workplace politics

Many of the men detailed their experience of challenging workplace politics and stigmatisation and how this impacts their decisions regarding utilising FWA. For example, participant A explained how his colleagues treated his decision to utilise FWA with disregard, “I want to be accepted by my colleagues, but they don’t all respect my decision to use flexible policies”. Participant C described that the perception of some colleagues was that FWA is for women, “I think they associate it with or, believe it is for women”. Participant D shared that there is tension between himself and colleagues who have returned to the office, “they are back in the office all the time now so it annoys them that I’m not”. Participant E explained the view that he and his colleagues held of FWA before it was widely utilised in response to the pandemic, “Nobody ever used it in our organisation before we had to. They thought it was not real work”. Whilst explaining the benefits he has experienced since utilising FWA, participant I commented that his colleagues believe he should return to the office “It really helps our family that I work remotely but some colleagues think I should just get back to the office”. Participant K shared his understanding of FWA: “Flexible work is for women really”. Participant L explained that his utilisation of FWA has caused others to interrogate his masculinity, “I feel like, sometimes, my masculinity is questioned because I work flexibly”. Participant O explained that a colleague had told him, “you should want be in the office, not at home looking after kids”. These discussions demonstrate how workplace politics and colleagues’ perceptions can present a challenge when men consider utilising FWA.

4.4 Theme 4 – Organisational factors

The men within this study explored this major theme as a significant factor impacting their perception and utilisation of FWA. In addition, many of the men identified that the organisations they worked for impacted their decision-making around FWA.

The subsequent sub-chapters provide the data for the three minor themes found within this broader theme: workplace power and hierarchy, organisational empathy (ability to listen), and organisational infrastructure limiting the implementation of FWA effectively.

4.4.1 Workplace power and hierarchy

Several men discussed the power and hierarchy within their workplaces and how this has impacted their previous and current utilisation of FWA. Participant C said he did not like asking for something, “I hate having those conversations, asking someone else for something. Especially my boss”. Participant D shared how he had wanted to request FWA but was fearful of doing as he did not believe it was for men, “I was scared to ask before the pandemic...I didn’t think it was something for men”. Participant G explained that he did want to be seen as requesting too much, “I don’t want to ask my employer for too much or end up rocking the boat”. Participant I failed to inquire about FWA as he did not know whom to make such a request to, “I didn’t know who to ask about working flexibly”. Participant J had only ever been aware of female colleagues utilising FWA “it was only ever my female colleagues who used it before so I didn’t think to ask” After beginning to utilise some aspects of FWA during the pandemic, participant L did not know if it would continue beyond then “I didn’t know if they would let me carry on working from home”. Participant N considered making a FWA request but expected his employer to deny it, “it wasn’t a widely used thing so I just thought they would say no”. Participant O described, “you don’t want to be an inconvenience”. These findings show that these men that their perception of their workplace, power, and hierarchy affect their decision to request and utilise FWA.

4.4.2 Organisational empathy (ability to listen)

Several men explained they did not feel the organisations they worked for consistently demonstrated (organisational) empathy. Participant A explained his view that “Everybody is different and works differently and has different needs and companies need to acknowledge that”. Participant C spoke highly of the organisation he works for but suggested that not all organisations are the same, “not every organisation respects its employees and what they want like mine”. Participant D commented on the competing needs of a wide range of employees, “I’m sure lots of us want different things but it would be nice if they tried to find a way to accommodate more people”. Participant E described how employees ultimately want to be respected in the workplace, “people just want to be valued, considered and I think listened to at work”. Participant G said that “companies don’t always listen to what their employees want”. Participant H explained, “we all want to feel like we are cared about or valued as employees at work”. Participant I shared his experience of making a request that is not honoured, “even when you

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

ask something, they don't always do it". Participant J described the importance of being included in conversations about organisational change as an employee, "you just want to be listened to. I don't want to be having conversations with my employer where they have decided what they want to do and discussing it with us, is ... just a formality". These men's experiences of organisational empathy suggest how it can manifest in men's decision-making surrounding the utilisation of FWA.

4.4.3 Organisational infrastructure limiting implementation of FWA effectively

These men detailed the challenges of effectively utilising FWA without adequate infrastructure. Participant A recognised it was less of a challenge when he began utilising FWA three months into the pandemic, with organisational infrastructure largely implemented "I started working remotely later on so that made it a lot easier. They knew what they were doing". Participant B explained it was easier to work in the office with the appropriate equipment, "it's easier to go into the office where you have all the right things and resources. At home you only have your computer". Participant D relayed how his organisation was ill-prepared for the mass utilisation of FWA without the proper technology "we didn't have the right technology to make it work. It felt like we were playing catch up". Participant F reflected on the complexity sometimes required when utilising FWA, "it's not just as simple as taking your laptop home. You need a lot of equipment to make it work". Participant J described his frustration at purchasing the appropriate equipment when utilising FWA, "why should I have to pay for a desk chair when I can use one for free in work". Participant H noted his perception that few organisations had planned for the adoption of FWA on such a large scale, "I don't think enough organisations were prepared for so many people to be working from home. They are only just getting sorted now". Participant K spoke of frustration with his workplace, "it's just the way we work now". Participant L described the different nature of working whilst utilising FWA and the forethought this required, "it is a totally different way of working. There is a lot to get your head around and a lot of moving parts". Participant M suggested that the set-up cost of FWA for organisations may deter them from promoting such policy, "it must cost a lot for organisations to put in place everything you need to work flexibly. And they might be reluctant to do that". Participant N shared the financial cost he has taken to effectively utilise FWA "I have had to invest in a lot to make it work". These men share how the infrastructure within organisations has impacted their experiences of utilising FWA and decision-making about further use of such policy.

4.5 Theme 5 – Unique phenomenon factors

This major theme was identified as a recurring category of factors explored by the men in this study. Many of the men identified a highly contextual factor that would play a minor role in their decision-making surrounding the utilisation of FWA under normal circumstances. Therefore, this was classified under the broad theme of unique phenomenon factors.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

The following sub-chapters provide the data for the one minor theme within this broader theme: the cost-of-living crisis.

4.5.1 Cost-of-living crisis

All these men identified the cost-of-living crisis as a current pressure impacting their decisions about their work. Participant A described how he could save money through utilising FWA, allowing him to provide childcare, “money is tight and we do save by not having to use as much childcare” In contrast, participant B explained he had saved money on specific bills since returning to the office “it has been cheaper for me to be working in the office again”. Participant D detailed his frustration at the pressure he has received to begin returning to the office as this will increase his childcare costs, “me going back to the office will mean we have to pay someone else a lot of money to look after the kids again”. Participant F, who has returned to an office-based role, explained how this had decreased his expenditure, “my bills did get cheaper when I changed jobs and became office-based again”. Participant H shared his perception that utilisation of FWA may save money for organisations, “it might be helping to keep overhead costs down for organisations if they have more people still working from home”. Participant I recognised that utilisation of FWA in families could save on the cost of childcare, “It obviously also allows for childcare which is a huge cost in this country at the moment...so if flexible working means someone can save on extortionate childcare costs, that must be a benefit.”. Participant J explained a factor in his decision to return to the office was the cost-of-living crisis, “by me returning to the office and not having to heat the house all day, put the kettle on however many times, then yeah, I have decided to take advantage of that and hopefully save a bit at home.”. Participant K agreed that using FWA, specifically remote working, could increase household costs: “I reckon it’s expensive for people working from home, heating and things like that”. Participant L noted that he could save money by no longer utilising FWA, “we would probably save a bit of money if I went back to being on site full time”. Participant M recognised the complexity of the cost-of-living crisis for both employers and employees, “it’s tricky because for employees its cheaper to be working in the office but home working keeps the cost down for employers”. This demonstrates that the cost-of-living crisis, a highly contextual factor, has placed significant pressure on and profoundly influenced these men’s decisions about how they work.

4.6 Theme 6 – Participant Recommendations

This major theme was identified when the participants in this study were asked how organisations could improve the reality of FWA. These men identified areas for improvement where organisations could further develop how they engage men with their FWA policies. The following sub-chapters provide the data for the three recurring recommendation themes found within the data: clearer organisational communication, improved FWA education, and increased organisational empathy.

4.6.1 Clearer organisational communication

These men recommended clearer organisation communication as a way for their organisations to improve the utilisation and understanding of FWA amongst male employees. Participant C suggested it would benefit him to have an individual within his organisation to discuss FWA with, “it would help to have a designated person to speak to about it”. Participant D explained it was not always clear when it was his choice or the organisations for him to utilise FWA “It would be good to know when I am being asked to work flexibly and when I am choosing it”. Participant E commented that it was essential to understand the benefits and challenges before further utilising FWA, which was impossible during the pandemic “I want to be able to understand the pros and cons before I sign up to something like that”. Participant J identified that FWA was a significant shift in how they work and someone to discuss it with would be invaluable, “it’s a big change to make, so to have someone to talk it all through with ... A point of contact would help”. Participant I commented, “I’d like to see some clearer communication about flexible working”. Participant M described requiring an individual within his organisation who could detail how he could utilise FWA, “somebody to ask questions about flexibly working and how that could look for me”. Participant N explained it was not obvious whom he needed to discuss FWA with in his organisation, “it’s not clear who to approach about it in the chain of command”. Participant O recalled discussing FWA and changes in his contract but did not feel his line manager was equipped to advise and support him, “I’ve spoken to my line manager about making some more changes but I didn’t feel like he knew any more than me”. From these men’s recommendations, organisations should consider how they communicate internally about FWA, specifically with their male employees.

4.6.2 Improved FWA education

Many of the men detailed that they felt greater education was needed on FWA before employees began to utilise it, notably the benefits and challenges of such policy. Participant A commented that generally, organisations need to encourage utilisation of FWA by explicitly explaining how it would benefit the employees “organisations could do a better job really at encouraging their employees to work flexibly, explaining its good for them but also business, you know really sell it to them I think.”. Participant B described how he would not have utilised FWA for as long as he did if his organisation had informed him of the complexities involved, “If I’d have known the ins and outs of working flexibly ... would I have done it for that long... probably not”. Whilst Participant C highlighted several personal benefits to FWA, he also commented on the impact flexible work had on his well-being, “nobody told me how it would impact my mental health”. Participant F suggested organisations did not adequately explain why employees may want to utilise FWA, “I feel that, a lot of organisations don’t actually make a very good case to their employees and why they should want to be working flexibly”. Participant G explained that before the pandemic, he was unaware of FWA, “it didn’t really realise it was something that existed”. Participant I remarked that his organisation had not detailed all the components involved in utilising FWA, “I don’t think they make it clear how flexible working works, like... all the different

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

elements to it.”. Participant J suggested that organisations more clearly identify the challenges and benefits of FWA, “I would like to see an understanding the benefits and the negatives when organisations are discussing or considering flexible working”. Participant K asked, “what even are the benefits of flexible work?” demonstrating a lack of FWA education within his organisation. Participant L explained he was unaware of the range of ways an employee can utilise FWA, “I didn’t know there were so many different ways of working flexibly”. Participant O remarked, “should it be my responsibility to find out then benefits of working flexibly?”. These men’s discussion and subsequent recommendations highlight the need for significant FWA education.

4.6.3 Increased organisational empathy

These men identified that increased organisation empathy could positively impact their utilisation of FWA. Participant B explained that organisations should support employees to make a choice in utilising FWA, “letting it be a personal choice if people use flexible working and what elements they decide to take up”. Participant F outlined how organisational support was essential when utilising FWA “you need support from your employer to work flexibly”. Participant G echoed the sentiment that it should be his choice to utilise FWA “I don’t really want to be forced to work either flexibly or not. It should be my choice”. Participant H explained that organisations should discuss the support available to employees utilising FWA, “I think there should be a conversation about the support needed when working flexibly”. Participant I spoke to how individuals want to feel when discussing concerns with their employer, “I would just say that anybody whatever they are speaking to their organisation about want, to feel like they are being listened to.”. Participant L shared the importance of an employee’s perception that they are being listened to “I want to feel like I’m being listened to”. Participant M said, “I want my workplace to value me”. Participant O detailed the importance of being supported by an organisation, “it would be good to feel supported by them”. The recommendations of these men suggest that adequate organisational empathy and their perception of the support they are offered is a critical factor in their decision-making about the utilisation of FWA.

4.7 Overarching theme – These men find FWA challenging.

FWA is more challenging in reality than the idea men feel is portrayed to them by their organisations and what the media tells them. All participants explored this disconnect at some point during the interviews. Whether it was one major factor causing this disconnect or multiple factors making the conditions challenging, it was a recurring overarching theme across all the participants.

Participant A – “it has still been harder than I had anticipated.”

Participant B – “I just couldn’t do it, not like that. It took its toll.”

Participant C – “I am used to it now, but it took a long while to adjust.”

Participant D – “there were a lot of hoops to jump through to set everything up properly.”

Participant E – “it is easier to manage now that I am mainly back in the office.”

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

Participant F – “just...not as straightforward as I expected.”

Participant G – “I’m just glad I only work from home one day a week.”

Participant H – “it isn’t really the same as being in the office. It is probably just more complex.”

Participant I – “the balance is important. I couldn’t work from home every day.”

Participant J – “it was just far more complicated than anyone ever told me.”

Participant K – “I’m so glad I have never really had to work from home.”

Participant L – “it is just simpler to be teaching in a classroom.”

Participant M – “I’m not sure that I could do it.”

Participant N – “it’s just not as simple as people would have you believe. There is a lot of work involved in working from home, to make it work for you.”

Participant O – “there is just so much that I didn’t expect to have to deal with when I was working from home. It became quite challenging.”

Chapter Five - Discussion

Through chapter two, there was an exploration of themes of FWA and gender in the existing literature (detailed in table 3). The following chapter will explore this study's findings in response to the existing literature. Whether these findings support, contradict, or add to the existing field will be critically explored, and the value of this study will be evident in how the findings are situated within the field, where this study offers a unique insight for organisational leaders. Chapters 5.1 to 5.6 explore the themes found in this study, using the existing literature reviewed in chapter two as a base for this discussion. It is worth noting that some of this study's findings were not expected based on the original review however, they add crucial insight into the factors these men linked together even if existing literature failed to explore the same links.

This study's overarching theme shows a perceived negative impact on these men when using and interacting with FWA policy. Through the interviews, these men explored factors that affected how they engaged with FWA and highlighted some of the realities of using FWA methods such as remote working and flexitime.

This study found that most of these men identified the part that traditional family roles play in their decision-making. This finding expands on the conclusions of Bosoni (2014), Moran & Koslowski (2018), and Baxter (2018), who found that the male as a breadwinner is still a pervasive idea within society. The fact that traditional family roles are still prevalent in many of these men's experiences does suggest that the hegemonic nuclear family ideology is not dead as many have argued (Uzoka, 1979; Bengston, 2004; Graham, 2012), and in fact, the experiences of these men show that whilst it holds a different level of importance than in the past, these ideas do still have influence over the way men interact with FWA.

Furthermore, this study's findings are congruent with that of Dernberger and Pepin (2020), who found that whilst young people were open to less traditional divisions of home and work labour, a husband-as-earner and wife-as-homemaker was still the most desired arrangement. This suggests that unconscious bias remains prevalent in large parts of the population. This idea is reinforced through this study which shows that whilst traditional family roles were rarely discussed under that banner, they were discussed throughout these men's lived experiences and helped to define how they see themselves concerning FWA.

This study identifies that traditional family roles are not only still prevalent, but they are also largely unchallenged. Wen et al. (2020) found that when men (and women) diverge from expected traditional family roles, they may experience the 'backlash effect'. This suggests that the prevalent ideology amongst men regarding traditional family roles is conformist and not counter-stereotypical. However, some men expressed their counter-stereotyped lived experiences through this study. These counter-stereotypical roles are primarily based on these men's understanding of masculinity.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

Whilst there is a growing minority of counter-stereotypical roles amongst men, the dominant hegemonic perspective is that men should 'go out to work'. This was reinforced through the findings of this study and just one example of a unique finding. There is a dearth of literature exploring the perceptions of what 'good work' looks like for men in the 21st century post-financial crisis of 2008, and this is one of the ways in which this study adds to the field whilst also highlighting the need for further study to identify how perceptions of what work is amongst men are changing over time.

These men are taking on counter-stereotypical roles by taking on more childcaring responsibilities, which is a shift away from traditional family and gender roles. The distribution of household responsibilities is a crucial area where traditional viewpoints are being challenged and could offer excellent insight into how the hegemonic perspective is being challenged over time. This study's findings reinforce the work of Chung et al. (2021) and Carlson et al. (2021), who have argued that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the distribution of household responsibilities is changing with more men taking on childcaring responsibilities. Future studies could explore how the distribution of household responsibilities are changing over time and how this impacts hegemonic ideology around family, children, and the relationship with what 'good work' looks like.

The average age of these men was 42.9. This challenges previous work which suggests that the most likely age category to utilise FWA is over 55s (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020). This is a difference of approximately 12 years and could suggest that the perceptions of FWA are changing so that younger people are more likely to prioritise work with FWA options. Further study is needed to discern if there is a changing correlation between age and utilisation of FWA.

Another key finding was that these men had shared experiences of distraction and procrastination. This theme was identified in existing literature however it was coupled with overworking and relational contexts. Kim et al. (2019) found that relational conflict arose due to the perception of flexibility and the subsequent reality.

However, the findings of this study suggest that distraction and procrastination play a unique role in the conditions around using flexible options. Chung (2022) explored distractions and procrastination's role in the broader concept of 'self-exploitation'. This study's findings support self-exploitation with the men sharing their experiences of distraction and the adverse effects of procrastination. One such effect of procrastination is the need to overwork to compensate for the lost time. This idea is at the heart of what Chung (2022) argues as FWA's negative 'costs'.

Through the literature review, commuting was a factor that affected how people interacted with FWA (Hamblin, 1995; Green et al., 1999; Flores, 2019; Beno, 2021). However, despite this being found (chapter 2.3.2), this theme was not evident in the lived experiences of these men. This could be because of the impact remote working and flexitime has on the places of work. However, further study would be needed to explore if there is a correlation between distance to work and a preference for

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

homeworking. Furthermore, it is worth noting the axiom from American astronomer Carl Sagan, “the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence”, meaning that just because these men did not link with commuting does not mean that there is no correlation.

These men identified that they needed a good workspace, whether at home or the workplace. By this, they explained that having a place separate from their bedroom, a place with a desk and office chair, was a key part of being productive and mitigating some of the challenges of remote and flexitime working. This was identified as often under-resourced within their organisations and often left to their own resources to organise. This theme was not included in the literature review but was identified by several participants in the study. Morgan (2004) briefly explores the need for a home office resource ordering process for organisations that adopt FWA practices.

Similarly, Khamkanya & Sloan (2009) explores the need for a home workspace to be fit for work so that the benefits of FWA can be realised. However, there has been an absence of literature exploring the implications of workspaces since 2010. This is critical in a climate of greater utilisation of FWA due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Future studies could explore this factor as more people choose to use FWA.

This study found that these men experienced negative spousal pressure, which in turn impacted their perception of and engagement with FWA. The experiences of these men demonstrate that their spouse’s perception was one of a reduced workload when utilising FWA. This meant these men’s partners struggled to comprehend why they had similar or extended working hours while adopting FWA. The findings within this study reinforce the research of Higgins et al. (2000); Allen et al. (2012); and Ongaki (2019), who found that the utilisation of FWA can both positively and negatively impact work-family conflict.

Another key finding within this study was the negative perception of flexibility. Kim et al. (2019) explored the conflict that partners often experience because of the misconceptions surrounding what flexible working looks like in reality and what the perceptions of it are. This was supported by the findings of this study, where men detailed the conflict they experienced within their relationships based on their partner’s perception of what flexible working should look like and their lived experience of utilising FWA.

This study identifies that the perception of partners influences the utilisation of FWA and other household members, including parents and children. These findings reinforce the work of Dreike et al. (2003), who suggest that family perceptions and considerations influence intentions and the ultimate adoption of FWA. In likeness to the perceptions of a partner, the perception of parents of men that utilise FWA is that there is increased flexibility in their workload or required time spent working. A unique finding within this study was the perceptions of parents whose sons utilise FWA that flexible work is not ‘proper work’ as they are not required to go out to the office. This study also identified a

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

unique finding surrounding fathers utilising FWA. These men suggested that their children do not consistently recognise that they are working and frequently want to play.

A factor that was not explored through the literature review was social isolation. This was a theme that came out of this study; many of the men explored how using FWA, such as flexitime or remote working, would make them feel lonely, and often, they would work unsociable hours. This was a negative factor for them and often deflected from the benefits they felt from achieving greater flexibility to satisfy other pressures such as childcare responsibilities. Whilst not covered in the literature review, studies (Pierce & Newstrom, 1980; Skyrme, 1994; Schots & Taskin, 2005; Klopotek, 2017; Soga et al., 2022) have identified this as a factor when considering FWA. This is a recurring theme in the literature, which has spanned the evolution of FWA from teleworking in the 1980s to the current iteration of what FWA is.

A key finding within this study was the men's understanding of FWA and the range of formats this may take. A number of these men conflated FWA as a whole with WFH. This could be because of the rise in people having to WFH due to the COVID-19 pandemic, (OECD, 2021) and other forms of FWA, such as job sharing or informal flexibility being less accessible or visible (CIPD, 2022).

This study found that challenging workplace politics was a significant factor affecting the utilisation of FWA among men. Almer and Single (2004) suggest that a stigma of femininity associated with FWA contributes to poor utilisation among men. This is supported by the findings within this study, where men spoke to their experiences of colleagues' perception that flexible work is for women. In addition, many participants in this study discussed their perception that FWA is a feminine way of working. These findings reinforce the conclusion of Vandello et al. (2013) that an important factor affecting the utilisation of FWA among men is the stigma surrounding it.

In contrast, Chung (2020) argues that this stigma has decreased as FWA has become more widely accessible. Alon et al. (2020) suggest this is a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, where FWA was utilised on a mass scale due to public health concerns. However, the findings of this study contradict the claim that this stigma has significantly decreased and suggest it is still a substantial factor in men's decision-making surrounding the utilisation of FWA.

In addition to the feminised perception of FWA, Perry (2014) discussed the stereotypical view of masculinity, using the ideology of 'the default man'. Within 'the default man' ideology, it is suggested that the world is made for white, heteronormative, middle-class men, where masculinity is based upon power, money, and traditional family values. This ideology could suggest that a factor contributing to the poor utilisation of FWA among men is that flexible work is not considered 'powerful'. Whilst this study found that traditional gender and family roles still contribute to men's and women's decision-making around work. However, it is not the case that men view FWA as a less powerful way of working.

Findings within this study suggest that challenging workplace politics, such as the tension between employees who utilise FWA and colleagues who choose not to, can influence decisions around utilising

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

FWA. This is supported by Coenen and Kok (2013), who argued that whilst teleworking can improve the speed and quality of some work, face-to-face communication is still required to overcome some of the challenges associated with telework. Smyth et al. (2020) expand upon this idea, suggesting there is tension between those colleagues with autonomy in their role, able to utilise FWA in a straightforward manner. This contrasts employees in a more precarious role who are apprehensive about requesting the utilisation of FWA for fear that it may affect their job security. This is supported by the findings within this study, where some men explained that their colleagues are frustrated that only some have returned to the office.

This study found that these men felt that they had no one to ask about FWA, and when they did ask, they felt unsupported and not listened to. This increased the stigma attached to FWA in these men's perspectives. How responsive the organisation is to employee concerns (Nadeem & Hendry, 2003) and how workplace pressure affects the perceptions of workers (Ashkanasy et al., 2016) and how comfortable they are to ask for FWA (Munsch et al., 2014) are critical factors in the utilisation of FWA. This study also highlights the importance of organisations HR policy, aligning with what employees want to experience the business benefits of FWA.

This study found that some of these men did not feel like they had a choice and were forced into making decisions about FWA by their managers which did not benefit them in the ways explored earlier in the study. Whilst studies so far have focused predominantly on the female perspective (Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017), fewer explore the male perspectives of how organisations using harder management techniques see lower engagement in employee wellbeing (Böckermon, 2015). This study begins the discussion of organisations' impact when employees, specifically male employees, feel out of control of their decision-making.

Another key finding in this study is that these men felt there needed to be more organisational infrastructure to use FWA effectively. This was not a factor explored in the original literature review because there was not a vast amount of literature exploring the challenges around implementing FWA in a post-2000 context. The existing literature, pre-2000, focuses on teleworking, which is considerably different from the FWA used in 2023. These men identified that their workspaces at home were not fit for effective work, there were computer challenges, including server and intranet problems, and they felt over-reliant on their personal internet connections. This is a unique finding of the study within the post-COVID economy of more FWA, which includes more remote and flexitime working formats.

There is a dearth of existing literature exploring the cost-of-living crisis and how this interacts with FWA. This is likely because the cost of living since the late 1970s has been relatively stable (Ha et al. 2022), and those from two-income households have been broadly able to afford basic things like rent, mortgage payments, food, and energy. The challenge is that these things have become more expensive through a perfect storm of general inflation, energy insecurity and global economic

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

uncertainty. The lack of existing literature means this study has unique insight into the early impacts of the crisis concerning FWA. The findings within this study begin a discussion that should be further explored in the future as the full impact of the cost-of-living crisis is made apparent. These findings expand on the anecdotal evidence in the media and are detailed in chapter two (HR Strategy News, 2022; Brown, 2023; Johnson, 2023).

There were three broad ideas behind these men's experiences of FWA in relation to the cost-of-living crisis currently gripping the UK. One of these unique findings is the belief that going back to the office is cheaper than working remotely or by flexitime. The second unique finding is that there is a perception that organisations are saving money on overheads by encouraging FWA. The third is that parents can work flexibly to save on childcare costs.

These findings add depth to the claim made in The Telegraph (2022) that workers are saving money by working in the office rather than remotely or through flexitime as the costs are greater to work from home. This was reinforced through some of these men's experiences of FWA. Similarly, Church (2015) explored that organisations are able to save on overheads by encouraging FWA. Businesses and individuals are experiencing the current crisis; some organisations are encouraging FWA to cut costs. The perceptions of these men reinforced this as some were encouraged to work remotely or use more flexitime.

This study showed that saving on childcare costs was a factor in some of the men's decision-making regarding FWA, with some suggesting they chose to use flexitime to accommodate children at home, for example. This is reinforced in the wider literature, with both Lautsch and Kossek (2011) and Čiarnienė et al. (2018) exploring this idea outside of a crisis setting. It was found in this study that whilst childcare costs are almost always a factor, the current crisis means it plays a more critical role in decision-making around FWA.

This study's findings have added depth to anecdotal evidence in the media and have yet to contradict existing literature. This may be due to the lack of evidence already published however lack of evidence is different from there being no evidence. Perhaps this is an area for future study to explore and create a more diverse research pool. Another reason for the lack of contradiction could also be due to the media consumption of these men providing them with information to regurgitate without actual evidence. Again, this would need further research to prove either way. The cost-of-living crisis was not an intended outcome, and this study was not set up to explore the cost-of-living crisis and FWA. However, the evidence is that it currently has a large amount of importance when these men make decisions about FWA. This importance may continue as the cost of living continues to have an impact. Therefore future study is necessary to understand its impact on FWA in the longer term.

All the themes explored lead to the overarching theme, which shows that the realities of FWA for these men are, on the whole, challenging. For these men, despite pockets of benefits, the challenges outweigh

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

the potential gains of FWA. Whilst there is not a wealth of existing literature that supports this specific conclusion concerning the male demographic, some sources suggest that FWA is not as straightforward regardless of gender. This means that the gendered elements explored in this study add to the complexity level when trying to utilise FWA. This overarching theme, combined with the practical implications, offers organisations insight into how men interact with FWA policy and how organisations could better approach FWA so that some challenges are mitigated, the benefits enhanced, and there is a better utilisation of FWA regardless of gender.

Lewis and Humbert (2010) concluded that FWA are complex and mixed with an idea of the gendered organisation, making it hard to use FWA whilst promoting gender equity. This study concludes in a comparable way, however, going one step further by suggesting that the gendered organisation is only perpetuated by the leaders and managers that do not evolve their conversations about FWA. Since Lewis and Humbert's (2010) work, a global pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis have occurred. This makes the business case for evolving FWA into a genderless workplace policy more critical than ever before for businesses to succeed. It can be concluded that this study has contradicted, extended, and added to the knowledge base around FWA and gender. However, more study is needed in crucial areas highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter Six - Conclusion

Through this chapter, a summary of the study explores the practical implications of the study, the strengths and limitations, and recommends where further research is necessary in the future.

6.1 Summary

This sub-chapter details a summary of the study, discusses the main points and gives an overview of the conclusions made.

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that affect the utilisation of FWA amongst men. The existing literature regarding the utilisation of FWA provides an inadequate focus on the male perspective (Parents at Work, 2014; Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017; Thompson & Wheatley, 2019; Ewald et al., 2020). This study has sought to address the significant gap in the literature whilst also beginning a meaningful dialogue surrounding men's experiences, perceptions and their ultimate utilisation of FWA. Through semi-structured interviews, 15 male participants explored their experiences of FWA, primarily relating to flexi-time and remote working, where their in-depth discussions produced six major themes and 19 subthemes; evidence of this can be found in chapter four.

The men within this study shared how identity factors (e.g. family roles), personal factors (e.g. distraction and procrastination), social factors (e.g. perceptions of a partner), organisational factors (e.g. organisational infrastructure) and the cost of living crisis all had an impact upon their experiences of FWA. In addition, chapter four provided several unique findings from this study which had not been discussed in the literature review, which can be found in chapter two. The overarching theme from the study's findings was that the reality of FWA is more challenging than these men expected.

Chapter three discussed the methodology of this study, explaining that the research aimed to allow the perspectives of the participants who were interviewed to be the findings of the thesis, therefore being of an interpretivist position. The use of semi-structured interviews as the data collection method allowed participants to share experiences more discretely than focus groups and was relatively straightforward to organise. Thematic analysis was used as the method of data analysis in this study due to its unique ability to offer insight into how men perceive FWA, providing a broad understanding of their experiences and allowing the study to present practical implications for organisations.

As well as sharing their experiences of FWA, the participants within the study offered insight on how to better engage men in conversations surrounding FWA and recommendations which they believed could improve the utilisation of FWA.

Chapter five explored the research findings in response to the existing literature and whether this supported, contradicted or added to the existing field of study. The existing literature reviewed in chapter two demonstrated that identity factors play a significant role in men's decision-making around work; the findings of this study supported this. Gender roles were found to be prevalent in many men's

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

experiences, which was supported by the existing literature. It was then discussed that there are a minority of men who display ‘counter-stereotypical roles’ based on their understandings of masculinity. This was highlighted in a shift away from traditional gender and family roles as men in this study described increased childcare responsibilities. It was then highlighted that the dominant perspective is still that men should ‘go out to work’, which was also reinforced by this study. The participants in this research identified workspaces as an important factor in their utilisation of FWA. However, there was a lack of research surrounding this. The study also found that participants who felt unsupported in their workplace, specifically regarding the utilisation and challenges of FWA, perceived increased stigma surrounding flexible work.

The findings of this study suggested that the cost-of-living crisis can both positively and negatively influence the decision to utilise FWA, which future studies should further explore. It was explained in both chapter two and chapter five that there needs to be more research exploring the interaction between the cost-of-living crisis and the utilisation of FWA.

6.2 Research conclusions

This study set out the following objectives:

RO1 – To collect primary data to express men's lived experiences and perceptions when interacting with FWA policy.

RO2 – To identify whether this primary data substantiates or challenges existing themes.

RO3 – To provide practical outcomes and specific implications for organisations which can help them better engage the male workforce in FWA policy.

Through the course of this study, primary data was collected from 15 men. They expressed their lived experiences of FWA and highlighted their perceptions when interacting with FWA policy. This data was in-depth and provided a solid data base for discussion in relation to the existing literature around factors affecting utilisation of FWA.

The primary data collected added to some existing themes whilst challenging others – some of the gendered roles in households remain the same whilst others have changed. This has had an impact on these men’s experiences of FWA and informs their decisions around FWA in the future. The discussion chapter goes into depth about where the data lies in relation to the existing literature and themes.

These men identified 3 practical outcomes for organisations to help them engage the male workforce in FWA policy. Clearer organisation communication – improved FWA education – increased organisational empathy. These three recommendations provide a road map for HR departments to use

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

when looking to engage men in FWA and reap the benefits of a healthy more aligned workforce ultimately impacting productivity and profits.

All of these objectives helped this study explore and answer the critical research question:

RQ – What factors affect the utilisation of FWA by male employees?

This study explores the factors affecting the utilisation of FWA amongst men, as highlighted in table 7. The findings of this study make clear that there is an associated complexity with the realities of implementing FWA policy. These men highlighted multiple factors which influenced their utilisation of FWA. These factors were largely negative, and for most of the men, these factors resulted in their inability to link FWA with benefits highlighted in chapter 1. This critical conclusion of the study raises a few challenges for organisations as these men had multiple reasons to not positively engage with FWA.

6.3 Practical implications for organisations

The outcomes of this study are that these men all believed that FWA were more challenging in reality than in how organisations communicate about it. Three significant practical implications for organisations have been identified for improving how they engage with FWA policy and how to engage the workforce better. These implications are not solely male-focused however, the intention of implementation would be for organisations to include men in the FWA options better. The existing literature has shown convincing evidence that employees, regardless of gender, can experience benefits to FWA, and these personal benefits spill over into the work they do, resulting in higher productivity, greater workplace satisfaction and, ultimately, reduces costs associated with poor health, poor productivity, and low retention rates. The challenge for organisations remain clear – these men did not identify many benefits for them to use FWA.

This study has explored the factors affecting the utilisation of FWA amongst men (see table 7) and suggests three ways in which these men felt they would find FWA less challenging to interact with (see chapter 4.7).

-
1. Clearer organisational communication.
 2. Improved FWA education.
 3. Increased organisation empathy.
-

When considering the practical implications for organisations, any tangible solutions to these men's concerns about FWA must meet these three key recommendations. The answer that these men came to repeatedly was to have a designated FWA lead, someone who is trained and equipped to educate, communicate and implement changes to contracts regarding FWA. Most of these men identified the need for someone who understood what was and was not possible. Many of these men explained that

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

the chain of command was unclear. It can be seen from this study that it is critical for organisations HR policy to be aligned with what employees desire to ensure the business benefits of FWA (Gartner, 2022). The benefits of FWA were not adequately communicated, so in their opinion, having someone responsible for ensuring the accessibility of FWA would be a significant step forward for the equity of access to FWA. It would be important that these people were trained in unconscious bias and are approachable figures within the organisation whom employees feel they can speak their minds and are listened to. This would improve organisational empathy and the employee's feeling valued in ways not currently fully exploited.

It was identified that providing an education program would go a long way in dispelling the myths around FWA and clarify the process. Providing a thorough FWA education program as part of the onboarding process and having a designated FWA lead means that these men would feel more comfortable and in control of their decisions regarding their utilisation of FWA. By linking this with the onboarding process, all staff that join the organisation are offered the same opportunities to learn about and make informed decisions about which formats of FWA might work for them and enhance their work-life balance. This would ultimately benefit the employer by seeing a reduction in absenteeism, as discussed in chapter one.

There is a business case for organisations to implement these recommendations especially when considering the increased FWA education. Training programs have been a key element of the HR departments approach when rolling out new initiatives. This FWA education would be no different and holds more benefits financially for the organisation than other initiatives. This is because using the appropriate FWA has been seen to not only impact the organisation socially but also seen to increase productivity which in turn has been seen to impact profit margins (Bartel, 1994; Ballot et al., 2006; Salas et al., 2012).

These men identified that ignorance and lack of awareness was a large part of the reason they struggled to engage with FWA in the past and what perhaps prevents them from fully engaging now. If this training was open to all employees and not just men, this would further help to destigmatise FWA across the organisation.

These practical implications, if enacted, would enable the workforce to better engage in FWA and crucially begin to break down the stigma which is still attached to FWA that puts many male employees off taking advantage of FWA. These men all experience the challenges of FWA in the realities of their lived experiences. However, most of these challenges would be mitigated if organisations had clearer communication, better FWA education and onboarding processes, and increased empathy so that employees feel heard and valued.

6.4 Strengths and limitations

This sub-chapter explores the strengths of this study and details the limitations found within the project. Through completing this study, the data capture process and subsequent analysis, strengths and limitations of this study have been identified. Exploring these strengths and limitations contributes to potential improvements to the research design. In addition, it offers insight into how future projects could be conducted differently to achieve greater success.

When exploring factors affecting a subject, there is an innate subjectiveness of the results, and personal experiences differ from person to person. This research does not pretend to be able to account for every single factor someone may have for not engaging with FWA. However, this research aims to take the complexity of many lived experiences and draw together common themes that many have experienced. Clearly, in a more extensive study, there would be a greater sample size and potentially a more expansive list of conclusions; this is not possible due to the small scale of this project. This does not, however, mitigate any of the findings but should instead be treated as a foundation for further research and exploration of this complex topic.

A key strength of this study was the targeted approach through purposive sampling. This meant the targeted demographic, men, were identified, shortlisted through the selection criteria and then self-selected by giving their informed consent based on the study's participation conditions. The challenge with this approach was the size of the selection pool. By using this approach, people who saw the advert on social media were the only people who knew the research was taking place. This meant that the sample pool was those who had a connection with the researcher. This then meant there was a potential bias among the participants, and the pool was not as diverse as it could have been if a different method for advertising the research had been used, such as using multiple methods of communication, i.e. community notice boards and contacting specific organisations. This would have reduced the potential bias within the participants and opened the pool to more diversity.

Another key strength of the study was the use of semi-structured questions, which allowed for versatility which can be seen in results not initially explored in the literature review. The researcher's previous experience conducting semi-structured interviews using software such as Microsoft Teams was a further strength of this study. This allowed for an efficient interview process and design, providing the researcher with detailed data and exploring men's perceptions and utilisation of FWA. However, the data collection method, Microsoft Teams, could have been better, it was reliant on the internet, and therefore sometimes, when it dropped out, the audio cut out too. This made the process longer and could have influenced the participants' answers as it broke up some of the conversations. To improve this, in-person interviews would have allowed the conversation to flow more efficiently, adding to the depth of the results and findings.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

The use of video conferencing software to gather the data could be deemed a limitation of the study as body language is harder to detect; due to numerous factors and benefits of such software (i.e., transcription tools and recording facilities), the benefits of using such data collection methods outweigh the loss of absolute observations of body language. Furthermore, recording in this way means that the researcher can focus on the participant, making field notes and not being concerned with making notes for transcription after the data is collected.

It could also be argued that using Microsoft Teams could exclude some less technologically literate participants and therefore a limitation of the study; however, since the COVID pandemic, it has become more mainstream. Most people know how to use Microsoft Teams, even if it is a basic understanding – which was all that was required for participation in this study. It did not appear that the use of Microsoft Teams limited participants from engaging with this research, with men ultimately selected from diverse ages. Another strength of using Microsoft Teams within this study was the opportunity to interview participants from differing locations around the UK which provided the researcher with data on male perceptions and utilisation of FWA not just from one locality.

Whilst this study had male participants from diverse ages and locations, they were not from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with only one participant of colour. This limitation of the study should be considered, as the findings of this study are based on the experiences of predominantly white males. It is therefore more challenging to generalise the findings of this study to men of colour and their experiences of FWA.

The subconscious bias of the researcher could be another limitation of this study. A man researching a man means that sometimes unspoken shared experiences provide a base for communication, and that might mean that a line of questioning is left not fully explored, and despite the researcher's best interests, having a research co-author of the opposite sex would be beneficial in reducing the likelihood of this bias having a role in the study. A future study, with a female co-author exploring the distribution of household responsibilities and how this impacts the utilisation of FWA, would significantly enhance the discussions around this crucial topic. As more families move away from a nuclear family ideology, and as families become more complex, the need for research understanding the distribution of responsibilities and how this impacts perceptions around FWA is vital in ensuring that FWA benefits are equitable and not just on one person in the household.

6.5 Recommendations for future study

This study highlights the need for future study. Some key areas highlighted in chapter four and the subsequent discussion in chapter five show where future conversations need to be had. Table 8 details some of these key areas based on gaps from this study.

Table 8 - Recommendations for future studies based on gaps from this study.

Recommendations	
1. The impact of the cost of living on the utilisation and perceptions of FWA, specifically remote working.	2. The impact that industry-specific challenges have on the utilisation of FWA, specifically engineering.
3. The impact that home workspace has on the utilisation of FWA.	4. What methods can be used for reducing overworking?
5. How can organisations challenge social isolations whilst also adopting FWA policies?	6. A mixed-gender study exploring the distribution of household responsibilities and how this impacts the utilisation of FWA.

These six suggestions are gaps evident through multiple themes explored in the previous chapters.

The most important and arguably most time critical is exploring the cost-of-living crisis's impact and determining whether these impacts are long-term scars or short-term temporary factors. In addition, understanding how the cost-of-living crisis is impacting the perceptions of FWA, especially remote working, is important for businesses as employees may start to pressure organisations into returning to offices if working remotely continues to be costly for employees.

Another area that needs further study is how industry-specific factors affect the utilisation of FWA, such as people in engineering or other predominantly in-person industries. For example, in a similar way to the participant who is a water engineer, shift-work offers flexibility, but is remote working possible for this industry? It is highly unlikely, so exploring how to benefit from FWA, even in industries that find it hard to implement traditional FWA practices, is beneficial to unlock the benefits for all employees, not solely those from an office-based profession.

A further area highlighted in this study is the impact of home workspaces on utilising FWA. These men explored how their ability to be productive whilst remote working was largely dependent on what their workspace looked like. Future study is needed to explore the impact and provide employee- and employer-based solutions so that the costs of remote working are shared. This is the same for those using flexitime, as they need a workspace at home to be productive outside of the office.

One critical challenge from this study was the problems around overworking and how this impacts their effectiveness and mental well-being. Future studies should explore methods to reduce the likelihood of overworking and encourage healthy working habits. Similarly, future studies should explore how organisations can challenge and mitigate social isolation linked with adopting FWA policies. This will allow for a better alignment between policy and people.

This study, whilst addressing its research question, has highlighted more areas where further study is required to be able to fully benefit from FWA for all.

6.6 Closing statement

This study explored the utilisation of FWA amongst men. The findings suggest that the realities of FWA provide a substantial challenge to these men – the factors leading to this overarching theme were

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

explored, and recommendations for organisations were detailed. This study explores the complex nature of FWA for men and provides organisations with tangible outcomes, which can be implemented. Through this thesis, it is hoped that organisations can re-evaluate how they interact with their male employees regarding FWA, perhaps implementing some of the recommendations highlighted. This could lead to the better, healthier, less challenging utilisation of FWA policy. This is where the value in this research lies, however this is not conclusive and further study is needed (see Table 8). Specifically, these men highlighted that better communication, greater empathy and improved education would go a long way in helping reduce some of the organisational challenges they face when navigating FWA policy. The broader challenges affecting identity, personal and social factors will require greater understanding amongst the wider populace, however this essential conversation could and should begin within the organisation. This would allow men to feel more included in FWA policy and allow them to have accessibility to a policy which, at its heart, helps to achieve the ideal of 'good work'.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Participant information sheet

Hello!

I am a postgraduate researcher at the Huddersfield Business School. I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the male perspective of flexible working arrangements. Your participation in this study will help me complete my master's degree. Before deciding whether to take part, please take a look at the brief information about the study below. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me (contact details below).

What is the study about?

This study aims to explore experiences and perspectives of men when considering flexible working arrangements.

Why have I been asked?

You have been asked to take part because you have identified yourself through social media as someone who would like to be involved in the project and share your views of flexible working arrangements.

What will I need to do?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a Zoom or Microsoft Teams interview. It will be no longer than 60 mins. The interview will be recorded with your permission only.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation in this project is completely voluntary. You can also withdraw yourself and your data from the project at any time before the 2nd of April (my project submission date) without giving a reason.

Will my identity be disclosed?

All information collected during the interview will be kept confidential and treated with respect in accordance with GDPR regulations. Your name and any identifying characteristics will not be revealed in the report that will be completed for this project.

What will happen to the information?

Only I, the researcher, will have access to the interview notes, recordings, and transcripts. They will be kept in password-protected folders on a secure computer. The data you provide will be used in my master's thesis.

Who can I contact for further information?

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

If you need any further information about the study, in the first instance please contact me or if required, my supervisor on:

Researcher: Joshua Paul Barker

Email: joshua.barker@hud.ac.uk

Research Supervisor: Dr. Anna Zueva

Email: a.zueva@hud.ac.uk

Appendix B - Consent form

Consent Form for Interviews

Study of male perspectives of flexible working arrangements.

Thank you for taking the time to read the research participant information sheet. If you are happy to participate in this project, then please complete this consent form and return it to the researcher by e-mail. Thank you.

Tick to confirm:

I confirm that I have read the information sheet provided.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that I have read the participant selection criteria provided and meet the requirements for this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that participation in this study is voluntary, and I am able to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I am free to decline to answer any of the questions asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my response is completely confidential, and my name or identifying information will not be included in the transcript or the body of the report resulting from this interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that this interview will be recorded with my permission only and that it will only be used for the project described in information sheet.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for the data I provide to be kept until completion of the study, after which the data will be destroyed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in this interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix C - Interview rubric

Joshua BARKER (U1854810)

Interview Rubric

Interviewer Notes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a <u>semi-structured interview</u> and so you do not have to stick to the structure of questions found below. • You are here <u>to listen</u> and take note of their <u>thoughts, feelings, and experiences</u>. • Do not give your opinion. • Make sure to clarify how the answers will be used. • <u>Always be professional and courteous.</u>
Introduction
I am looking to gather as much information as possible about your experiences and perspective of flexible working arrangements. I'm very interested to hear everything you have to say, however if you are uncomfortable at all, please just let me know and we can end the interview. Also, there is no pressure to answer the question and we can move on or end the interview if you wish. My role today is not to give my opinion or thoughts, I am here to listen to you and ask the questions.
<i>Do you have any questions about the interview before we begin?</i>
<i>Is it ok for us to start?</i>
General Questions
Tell me about your role.
What do your work hours look like?
Do you have flexible working arrangements as part of your remuneration package?
Did you work at home during the pandemic?
Generally, how do you feel about taking up flexible working arrangements?
Benefits Questions
Do you think there are benefits to flexible working arrangements?
Have you personally benefitted from a flexible working arrangement? <i>Can you tell me about that?</i>
Who do you believe benefits the most from flexible working arrangements - the employer or employee?
What benefits of flexible working arrangements would benefit you most?
Challenges Questions
Do you think there are challenges to flexible working arrangements?
Do you feel these challenges differ between you and your female colleagues? <i>If so, how?</i>
What are some of the challenges your organisation would face if you asked for a flexible contract change?
How do you deal with these challenges?
Recommendations Questions
How would you change the way your organisation approaches flexible working arrangements?
What would you like to see when organisations discuss flexible working arrangements?
How would you like to feel when discussing flexible working arrangements with your organisation?
Is there one major factor you would change so that flexible working arrangements work for everyone?
End of Interview
Is there anything you would like to add or explain further before we finish?
Thank you for your participation today, if you have any further questions about your interview, or would like to withdraw your responses please contact us with the details provided.

Appendix D - Ethics form**Research Ethics and Integrity Committee****APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW – E1**

- Please complete and return via email to HBSEthics@hud.ac.uk along with the required documents.
- Before completing this application, please refer to the [Huddersfield Business School Research Ethics web pages](#). Applicants should consult the appropriate ethical guidelines.
- ALL Sections must be completed. You will only be able to start the research when you have been granted permission to use the specified material.
- Please provide sufficient detail to assess strategies used to address ethical issues in the research proposal. Forms with insufficient detail will need to be resubmitted.
- This form should be completed and kept by the principal investigator.
- The final responsibility for ensuring that ethical research practices are followed rests with the principal investigator for staff research projects.

SECTION A: APPLICANT(S) DETAILS

This application is for:

Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Name of the Applicant (Principal Investigator/PGR)	Joshua Barker
Student number (if applicable)	1854810
Names of the other Researchers in the project	N/A
Names of supervisors (if applicable)	Dr. Anna Zueva, Dr. Peter Greenan
Title of research	Male perspectives of flexible working arrangements
Proposed project start date	7 th November 2022

SECTION B: DECLARATIONS

I confirm that I have read, understood and followed the guidance in the Ethical Review Guidance document: available here	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that I have read and understood the University Research Ethics Policy: available here	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that I have read and understood the University of Huddersfield research data management policy: available here	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that I will respect and adhere to the decision and guidance that result from this application	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that if the circumstances and/or methods of my research change, I will seek further advice/approval from the Huddersfield Business School Research Ethics and Integrity Committee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SECTION C: RESEARCH STUDY DETAILS

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.**Research Ethics and Integrity Committee**

Rationale, aims and objectives	Details: There is a dearth absence of literature in a post pandemic world about how men perceive flexible working arrangements (FWA) and more importantly, what are some of the factors (which have changed post-COVID) that they consider as barriers or incentives to take advantage of FWA. The research will explore male perceptions of FWA and provide actionable recommendations for organisations struggling to engage men with this key policy of good work.
Brief overview of methodology Needs to be explained in sufficient detail to show the approach used (e.g. survey) and explain the research methods to be used during the study.	Semi structured interviews will take place to explore how men perceive FWA and what their experiences have been. A narrative analysis will then provide the key themes and compare contrast these themes with those identified by existing literature (that is predominantly about women). The project will result in recommendations on ways in which organisations can engage men more effectively with FWA.
Is this a retrospective application? If Yes, please provide details of why it was not possible to obtain ethical approval before the project started.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes explain here why this has arisen.
Has this research received funding?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes please give details.

SECTION D: DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPANT DETAILS

Does the research involve any of the following? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients recruited because of their past or present use of the NHS or Social Care • Relatives/carers of patients recruited because of their past or present use of the NHS or Social Care • Access to data, organs or other bodily material of past or present NHS patients • Foetal material and IVF involving NHS patients • NHS Staff • The recently dead in NHS premises • Prisoners or others within the criminal justice system recruited for health-related research • Police, court officials, prisoners or others within the criminal justice system 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If you have answered yes then you must seek the appropriate external approvals from the NHS, Social Care or the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) under their independent Research Governance schemes. Contact HBSEthics@hud.ac.uk for information and support.
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Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.

HUDDERSFIELD enriching lives
BUSINESS SCHOOL enhancing organisations
 engaging communities

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants who are unable to provide informed consent due to their incapacity even if the project is not health related 	
Who will be the participants of your research?	Men over the age of 18 (approx.15-20 respondents) who are not self-employed who live and are employed in the UK.
What are the arrangements for selecting/sampling and contacting potential participants?	Social media will be used to reach out to the potential participants before using email to stay in contact with them throughout the process. The above selection criteria will be used to confirm eligibility.
Will any of the participants be vulnerable? 'Vulnerable' people include children and young people, people with learning disabilities, people who may be limited by age or sickness or disability, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes, describe here how you will implement safeguarding procedures during data collection.
Will the research involve working with/within an organisation, and require their approval (e.g. business, charity, government department, international agency, etc.)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes, do you have granted access to conduct the research? If you do not have permission yet, explain here how you plan to gain approval.
Is there any reasonable and foreseeable risk of physical or emotional harm to any of the participants? Harm may be caused by distressing or intrusive interview questions, uncomfortable procedures involving the participant, invasion of privacy, topics relating to highly personal information, topics relating to illegal activity, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes, please explain further here.
Are any of the below questions relevant to the research? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? Will tissue samples (including blood) be obtained from participants? Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study? 	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes, please explain further here.

Exploring factors affecting the utilisation of flexible working arrangements amongst men.**Research Ethics and Integrity Committee**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing? 	
<p>Are any of the below questions relevant to the research?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it covert research? ('Covert research' refers to research that is conducted without the knowledge of participants). Please give details of why this is the only approach possible. Will anyone be taking part without giving their informed consent? Will the research output allow identification of any individual who has not given their express consent to be identified? 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If Yes, please explain further here, and give details of how you plan to carry out the research within the guidelines of the University Research Ethics Policy.</p>
<p>Describe the arrangements for obtaining participants' consent. Please explain how you will inform your participants about the study and whether they will be in a position to give informed consent. Please attach the forms you plan to use.</p>	<p>Participants will be asked to read and sign a consent form (please see attached) which, combined with the participant information sheet, will allow for informed consent for them to take part in the study.</p>
<p>Describe how participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw from the research. This should also include information about participants' right to withhold information and a reasonable time span (such as a clear point in the research process) for withdrawal should be specified.</p>	<p>Participants will be informed in the consent form and the information sheet that they can withdraw their data from the study without giving a reason up until the 2nd April, the day before the planned submission of the thesis.</p>
<p>Describe the arrangements for ensuring participant confidentiality. This should include details of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how the data will be recorded how data will be stored to ensure compliance with University of Huddersfield data protection procedures and other relevant wider legislation how results will be presented exceptional circumstances where confidentiality may not be preserved how and when confidential data will be disposed of 	<p>All data will be stored in electronic format in a password protected folder and the researcher will uphold the strictest confidence at all times. Results will be anonymised and so both anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. No names of or identifying information about the research participants will be made public in the thesis or any publications resulting from this research. The same confidentiality arrangements will apply to the participant's employers, co-workers, members of their families and any other individuals should these be named and discussed during the interviews. The data will be disposed through deletion, 12 months after award of degree.</p>
<p>Will you offer anonymity to your participants?</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>

Research Ethics and Integrity Committee

	As above.
<p>Are there any conflicts of interest in you undertaking this research? (E.g. are you undertaking research on work colleagues or in an organisation where you are a consultant?)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes explain here how this will be addressed.</p>
<p>Are there any potential risks to researchers' (i.e. your and other investigators') health and wellbeing associated with:</p> <p>a. the venue where the research will take place b. traveling to the research venue and/or c. the research topic itself? d. Time of day research is taking place e. Lone working</p> <p>IMPORTANT NOTE: The Research Ethics and Integrity Committee cannot evaluate the changing risks arisen from travelling to other countries. Appropriate Huddersfield Business School risk assessment procedures has to be followed and permission has to be obtained at the time of travel.</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, none that I am aware of <input type="checkbox"/> Yes If Yes, outline the risks here, including steps taken to minimise risk.</p>
<p>Please provide a summary of the ethical issues that you envisage and any action that will be taken to address the issues</p>	<p>As with any research considering people's personal experiences, sensitivity is of the upmost importance and so the researcher will endeavour to be mindful in the questioning that it isn't for the researchers' opinion to come across but rather allow the participants to express themselves and their experiences. In the course of the interviews about the participant's attitudes towards and experiences of flexible working, it is possible that the participants may reveal private/sensitive information about their employers and/or individuals in their lives. This information will be kept strictly confidential and the confidentiality arrangements described above will be followed. Under no circumstances will the researcher communicate with the interview participants' employers. The researcher will also be mindful</p>

Research Ethics and Integrity Committee

	that the interviews could lead to the discussion of topics that could be potentially distressing for the interviewees – e.g. the discussion of workplace stress in relation to flexible working. The researcher will monitor the progress of the interview carefully and ensure that the participants are never made uncomfortable or feel that they have to discuss topics that make them uncomfortable.
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SECTION E - STORAGE OF RESEARCH DATA

Please provide details of how you will store data gathered during the research Include information about the length of time the data will be stored.	Data (transcription and recording) will be stored in electronic format in a password protected folder and then destroyed 12 months after research completion (after award) in line with GDPR.
Do you plan to store the research data into a research data repository? If there are requirements from funders or other bodies to store data in a repository (for example, data from ESRC funded projects must be stored in the ReShare data archive), please give details here.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes please provide details
Will the research involve working with <u>copyrighted</u> documents, films, broadcasts, photographs, artworks, designs, products, programmes, databases, networks, processes, existing datasets or secure data?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If Yes, are the materials you intend to use in the public domain? Be aware that you may need to consider other ethics codes (such as code of the Association of Internet Researchers). If the material is <u>copyrighted</u> then explain here how you have explicit permission to use these materials as data.

SECTION F – DOCUMENTS CHECKLIST (TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT)

Please supply copies of all relevant supporting documentation electronically. If this is not available electronically, please provide explanation and supply hard copy.

I have included the following documents	
• Participant Information Sheet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
• Participant Consent Form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
• Organisational Consent Form/letter	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A


Research Ethics and Integrity Committee

• Letters (and other)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
• Any recruitment materials (e.g. posters, letters, etc.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
• Details of measures to be used (e.g. questionnaires, survey interview questions etc.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
• Outline survey interview schedule / focus group schedule	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
• Fieldwork risk assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

SECTION G – STATEMENT BY APPLICANT

Please complete the relevant section below.

Staff
<p>I, as the principal investigator undertaking this research, confirm that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this research will conform to the principles outlined in the University of Huddersfield and Huddersfield Business School research procedures, • the information I have given in this form on ethical issues is correct. <p>Applicant Signature (Electronic is acceptable): _</p> <p>Date: ____</p>

Student
<p>I, as the PGR undertaking this research, confirm that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this research will conform to the principles outlined in the University of Huddersfield and Huddersfield Business School research procedures, • the information I have given in this form on ethical issues is correct. <p>PGR (i.e. applicant) Signature (Electronic is acceptable): <u>Joshua Barker</u></p> <p>Date: <u>19/10/2022</u>_____</p> <p>Affirmation by Supervisor (where applicable) I can confirm that, to the best of my understanding, the information presented by the applicant is correct and appropriate to allow an informed judgement on whether further ethical approval is required</p> <div style="text-align: right;">  </div> <p>Supervisor Signature (Electronic is acceptable): _____</p>

Date: 20 Oct 2022