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THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN RESEARCHERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A SCOPING REVIEW

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BACKGROUND

The global response to the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted lives and contributed to the exacerbation of pre-existing inequalities. Women in research were also affected. The prominent role that women played in professional and personal care duties had detrimental effects on their research outputs, potentially hindering their career progression and aggravating existing gender disparities within academia.
Research question "What are women researchers' experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic?"

METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive search was performed in seven bibliographic databases from inception to February 2023. Of the 2620 records retrieved, 1451 studies were screened after removing duplicates. Of these, 35 articles met the inclusion criteria. A qualitative meta-synthesis of these included studies was conducted using a thematic approach aiming for an interpretive synthesis of findings.

RESULTS

THREE ANALYTIC THEMES EMERGED FROM A META-SYNTHESIS OF THE 35 INCLUDED ARTICLES:

THEME 1

Gendered professional expectations and work pressure

- Disproportionate teaching burden
- Gendered professional expectations related to pastoral and mentoring tasks

! Anxiety about career progression, pausing research tasks, financial insecurity (affecting mostly migrants and women on temporary contracts)

THEME 2

Colliding identities

- Forced flexibility in renegotiating space and time to work
- Difficulties in expressing one's professional identity
- Feeling pushed into gender normative roles both at home and at work

! Mental and physical health issues, intrusion of institutional violence in private spaces (especially for black women)

THEME 3

Support and coping strategies

- Exposing parenting responsibilities as an act of resistance
- Self-care and lowering expectations vs. taking pride in being resilient
- Seeking and cultivating social and institutional support

CONCLUSION

- Current division of labour reflects the gendered power dynamics present in academia and in the broader social context
- Productivity focused research assessment criteria, can be viewed as perpetuating structural (gender) inequalities
- Pastoral care, teaching and service work are essential to academic system, especially in times of crises

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To foster the resilience of academic systems it is important to:

- Recognize and support those who 'care for' and are (made) responsible for the indispensable social reproductive work
- Make mentoring and caring for students an explicit, valued and rewarded task for all academics
- Value team output over the individualistic 'publish or perish'

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