 

# Complex fertility journeys and employment: Ethnodrama outlines

Ethnodrama refers to scripted dramatization of research data performed for an audience, designed to vividly and persuasively convey a story. The method is said to be fruitful for presenting research findings to audiences who have a key interest in a research topic, but who would be unlikely to come across the academic outputs that researchers traditionally engage with (conference papers and journal articles) – thus extending the impact of the research. The method has been used successfully in medical and management research, and in dealing with sensitive subjects.

We have appointed a Creative Consultant for the production of the ethnodrama outputs: Jen Berry (see her website <https://www.your-own-words.com/>). The research team have been working with Jen to sketch out five vignettes (scripts) for the ethnodrama to illustrate key messages from our data. The first two scripts have been developed into audio recordings, which can be found on our website: <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/research/research-centres/dwp/projects/complex-fertility-journeys>

The draft outlines of all five vignettes are below. The scripts will be developed into a package, with guidelines for how each can be used, for example in workplace line manager training sessions, and also in university teaching sessions. There will be discussion questions and activities to accompany the scripts/audios. The aim is that they will also raise awareness and promote discussion more broadly.

# 1) Title: ‘Man Up’

Monologue set at a team away day at a football match, illustrating the journey of a male going through IVF and not feeling he can speak out about his experience to anyone especially in the workplace. The story will illustrate various challenges, including logistical, financial, psychological and relationship. It also addresses the issue of problematic male banter in the workplace, and uncertainty over policy provisions. The title of the vignette - ‘Man Up’ - reflects the common perception that men should not voice their emotional concerns, and should put on a brave face.

Themes: Feeling isolated/unhelpful language in the workplace/keeping it quiet/policy makers

Target audience: Workers, managers, the general public, students (HR/business and also reproductive science)

# 2) Title: ‘The HR Meeting’

Three actor scene. A female member of staff is called into a meeting with her department manager and a HR representative, due to minor work performance issues. HR are expecting it to be an easy meeting with a chat about what has been going on. Unexpectedly, the employee breaks down and tells them she has been undergoing IVF which hasn’t worked a number of times and experienced several miscarriages over the last few years. However, with her role being senior she had kept this to

herself. She didn’t feel her managers were approachable and she wanted to keep her job. The

employee through pent up frustration then vents about the various workplace issues she has faced over the last few years and fires questions about policy, leave, allowances and compares her experience with the provisions for colleagues experiencing maternity and adoption (where there is more established policy). The manager and HR representative remain supportive and professional, but vague. Once the employee exits zoom, the manager and HR colleagues reveal their lack of knowledge and experience to one another, showing the need for more support and policy developments.

Themes: Decisions about disclosing to line management, or keeping quiet and covering up; the various challenges experienced on a fertility journey; career concerns; getting advice and support at work; lack of manager and HR knowledge

Target audience: HR specialists and policy makers on equality and diversity and wellbeing at work, workers, line managers, the general public, HR students.

# 3) Title: ‘Policy Politics – Who Gets What?’

Set in one workplace (TBC) this multi-scene vignette explores the challenges experienced by different demographic groups. We see the challenges experienced by a same-sex couple (both working in the same company) as well as a single woman who is pursuing motherhood alone, all going through fertility treatment. The journeys are at different stages, and they are unaware of each other’s situation. The same sex couple are struggling because, firstly not everyone knows they are together, and management have never dealt with two female employees in a relationship both needing time off for treatment. Colleagues are ignorant, offering unhelpful comments, and the broader challenges (including in the health system) are highlighted. The single employee is terrified of telling work and explaining her relationship status. Her job is lower paid so she is exploring unsafe avenues to gain a sperm donor. She is worried about her biological clock and feels isolated, alone and desperate. The final scene shows two employees upset in adjacent toilet cubicles, unaware that they could support one another if they could only see though the toilet wall to a colleague in the same boat.

Themes: Demographic group challenges; decisions about disclosing to line management, or keeping quiet and covering up; fertility journey experiences; getting advice and support at work (eg trying to work out what legal rights or organisational policies apply); feeling excluded, isolated or different from others in the workplace; distinctions between the workplace experience of being pregnant ‘naturally’ vs via fertility treatment; helpful versus unhelpful language, comments and experiences at work

Target Audience: Workers, general public, management, HR specialists and policy makers on

equality and diversity and wellbeing at work, HR students

4) Title: ‘Manager’s Discretion’

Multi-voice spoken word poem illustrating the challenges experienced by line managers attempting to support an employee(s) through fertility treatment, whilst also managing their own workloads and a broader team. The title reflects the theme in our data that there is often a lack of policy and explicit guidance for managers, meaning that they have to rely on their own judgement/discretion when deciding what supports to offer an employee. A range of different challenges for line managers are revealed.

Themes: Getting advice and support at work (eg trying to work out what legal rights or

organisational policies apply); managing workloads; managers lacking training and confidence; balancing the needs of different members of a team

Target Audience: Management, HR specialists and policy makers on equality and diversity and wellbeing at work; HR/business students

# 5) Title: TBC (Fertility journey ending in childlessness)

Spoken word poem from the perspective of an older woman, at the end of her fertility journey, coming to terms with fertility treatment being unsuccessful, and involuntary childlessness. She reflects on her experiences, emotions, and the re-evaluation of work/career that ensued.

Themes: Involuntary childlessness; unsuccessful treatment; emotions and ‘disenfranchised grief’; triggers in the workplace; feeling excluded from conversations and experiences; re-evaluating work/career.

Target Audience: HR specialists and policy makers on equality and diversity and wellbeing at work, managers, workers, students, reproductive science audiences.