

Double Jeopardy: Exploring how the Covid-19 Pandemic has impacted employment among young women with disabilities in the Irish labour market and their future career aspirations



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Final Year Special Topics Research Project

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Date of Submission: 28th of April 2022

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“I certify that this Final Year Special Topic Research Project is my own work, based on my personal study and/or research and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication. I also certify that this Special Topic Research Project has not previously been submitted for assessment in any other unit, and that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of other students and/or persons”.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
ADD	Attention-Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BAME	Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic groups
CSO	Central Statistics Office
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
NDA	National Disability Authority
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
PWD	People with Disabilities
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
WWD	Women with Disabilities

RELEVANT (PROJECT-SPECIFIC) TERMINOLOGY

Classifications of disabilities do overlap, but for the purpose of my study - hidden disabilities include hypermobility syndrome, mental health conditions and epilepsy, etc; physical disabilities include primarily cerebral palsy; and sensory disabilities include predominantly autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and hearing difficulties*

<u>Classification of Disability</u>	<u>Description</u>
Hidden	Also known as an ‘invisible disability’. It is a condition or illness that is internal, invisible or not immediately apparent. In other words, the disability is not physically or visibly obvious to an onlooker as it is happening inside the person’s body with little outwardly symptoms (Invisible Disability Ireland 2022).
Physical	Results from conditions that outwardly affect the physical body (Trinity Disability Service 2022).
Sensory	Neurological disorder that affects the human brain to process sensory information, such as sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, normally and properly (Rutgers School of Arts & Sciences 2022).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Nuala Whelan, for her patience, inspiration and support throughout the year of doing my Special Topics research project. Her guidance made the whole process so much easier and manageable. This project would not be what it is today without her ongoing feedback and clarifications, or her cooperation and commitment to this piece of research.

These thanks extend to all the faculty members of the Department of Sociology at Maynooth University who have encouraged and challenged me to view and explore the world through a sociological lens. Their assistance and encouragement during my three years at Maynooth is much appreciated.

An expression of gratitude and appreciation (most especially) to the Access (MAP) Office at Maynooth University, the Cochlear Implant Department at Beaumont Hospital, Epilepsy Ireland and a number of the EmployAbility network services around the country who kindly put up with my requests and were so helpful in my recruitment process. Also, a sincere thanks to all of the other disability-related organisations, and disability offices in educational institutions around Ireland whom I contacted, for spreading the word about my research project.

Additionally, I acknowledge and thank each of my interview participants who so selflessly contributed their time and invaluable insights to this project. This study would not have been possible without them. I wish them all the best and every success in their future endeavours.

Last but not least, I am forever indebted to my wonderful family for their continued moral and financial support throughout my years of education, and to my friends for keeping me in high spirits and believing in me.

ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 Pandemic impacted employment with certain socio-economic groups including youth, women, and people with disabilities being particularly adversely affected. This research, which presents an original contribution to sociological knowledge, explores the lived experiences of young women with disabilities in the Irish labour market during Covid-19. Specifically, it aims to investigate the perspectives of eleven young women with disabilities on their experience of disability and the impact the Covid-19 Pandemic had on their employment and future career aspirations. This research attempts to draw upon and incorporate sociological literature surrounding disability, intersectionality and employment to interpret how young women with disabilities navigate the world of work. A qualitative research study using semi-structured interviews to gather suitable data was undertaken. From the data collected through interviewing and thematic analysis, key research findings revealed the experiences, identities and meaning of women with disabilities. Data further suggests how remote work and online education became the norm for most participants which were socially isolating experiences that significantly deteriorated physical and mental wellbeing of the participants. Another research finding serves as a reminder that in the face of adversity and social disruption, having self-control over career choices is crucial. The significance of this research contributes to the wider agenda that better integration of young women with disabilities into the Irish labour market through the provision and access of material resources and services is required in the event of another economic fallout akin to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter firstly provides some context and background about the research topic of inquiry. Subsequently, the problem at hand is presented which shall set the basis for justifying the relevance and importance of this research. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of the proceeding chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Context and Background

There has been much discourse within the broader scope of social sciences, social policy and disability studies on the topic of disability since Oliver coined the ‘social model of disability’ in 1983. However, this area of inquiry still lacks sufficient attention in the realm of sociology (Barton 2018; Gerschick and Stevens 2016; Green and Barnartt 2016). Feminist disability studies on gender, race and ethnicity have risen to prominence with increased attention to diversity, inclusion and marginalised voices (Bailey and Mobley 2019; Thomas 2004; Garland-Thomson 2005). In addition, research literature on youth (un)employment in Ireland has re-emerged, this time in line with the repercussions of the Covid-19 Pandemic as opposed to those of the Great Recession of 2008 (Murphy 2020). The focus of this research will be on the overarching themes of disability, gender, youth and employment from an Irish context, and in the domain of a Pandemic. Thus, this is an attempt to fill the gap in sociological literature.

Problem statement

The Covid-19 Pandemic that originated in Wuhan, China in 2019 and is still ongoing, has presented economic and social challenges to all individuals regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability, or sexuality. Employment is vital for cultivating a sense of personal and financial independence, reducing social isolation and poverty, and increasing job and life satisfaction (Schur 2002). According to the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) (2021), demographically, disabled people, younger workers and women fared worse than non-disabled people, more experienced workers and men in the Irish labour market during the Pandemic. For this reason, the aim of this research is to concentrate on the specific demographic of young women with disabilities.

The most recent and available figures from the Central Statistics Office highlight significant employment gaps amongst those with and without a disability in Ireland¹(CSO 2016). The (unreleased) 2022 census may reflect more accurate results as it will take the implications of the Covid-19 Pandemic of three years into account. Nonetheless, one quarter of disabled women are in any kind of paid employment, which further accentuates gender gaps in the Irish labour market (Disabled Women of Ireland 2022). WWD often face obstacles when navigating the world of work due to their gender and disability (National Disability Authority (NDA) 2021). Consequently, their disadvantaged position in society makes them susceptible to double discrimination due to occupational segregation and ableist attitudes (Doren and Benz, 2001).

The Irish labour market also has scarring effects on youth, inclusive of young WWD, especially during times of economic crises (Murphy 2020; Murphy, Whelan, McGann and Finn

¹ Figures from the 2016 Census revealed labour market participation for people with disabilities in Ireland is a rate of 30.2% compared to a rate of 61.4% among the general population
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp9hdc/p8hdc/p9chs/>.

2020). Periods of worklessness, disruption to work and educational routines, and a lack of meaningful socialisation contribute to poor psychological wellbeing and exacerbate feelings of job-related uncertainty and insecurity (Shakespeare, Ndagire and Seketi 2021). Hence, having detrimental effects on young WWD. This toll is particularly felt by women in jobs severely hit by the Pandemic, and in sectors where women are overrepresented with low-pay (Murphy, et al 2020). Among the sectors adversely impacted were customer-facing services, food services, education, childcare, hospitality, and retail (NESC 2021). A time of crisis provides a time for increased internal reflection upon career aspirations. Will the Pandemic prompt re-evaluation of employment and shifting career aspirations amongst young WWD?

Relevance and Importance of Research

The ongoing Covid-19 global pandemic is a fitting aspect to mention due to the impact it had on individuals and the Irish labour market, which this research touches on. Sociological/social policy studies (for example McGann, Murphy & Whelan 2020; Murphy 2020; Murphy, et al 2020), credible newspaper sources and government reports were pertinent sources for reviewing the current labour market situation under the Covid Pandemic.

Few qualitative studies have been conducted examining the lived employment experiences of people with disabilities in the Irish labour market (e.g., Kitchin, Shirlow & Shuttleworth 1998; O'Connell 2021; Scanlon, Kamp & Cochrane 2020). Youth, WWD and the Covid-19 Pandemic were not of relevance in the mentioned studies. Other studies that do consider youth, gender and/or the Pandemic are based elsewhere, namely the UK (Shakespeare, et al 2021; Bend & Fielden 2021), Norway (Østerud 2022), the US (Brown and Moloney 2019; Moloney, Brown, Ciciurkaite and Foley 2019), Canada (Lindsay & Ahmed 2021; Maroto, Pettinicchio & Lukk 2021), India (Varshney 2022) or China (Wang & Li 2018).

Disability is complex as the margins for categorising disability are so slight. For the purpose of this study, the disabilities I draw upon are hidden, sensory and physical disabilities, as limited research has been done mentioning these categories of disability. How I have divided up disability types is solely subjective for this study (see terminology section on page iv). This research study is highly relevant and timely as disability at the intersections is so often excluded from sociological literature (Carey and Souza 2021; Shifrer and Frederick 2019). Hence, all the more reason for bringing it to light in an Irish context, with the purposes of this research being to employ qualitative interview methods to hear the ‘marginalised voices’ and grasp a better understanding the employment experiences and future career aspirations of young WWD in the Irish labour market during a Pandemic.

Subsequent chapters will proceed as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature Review – critically analyses and evaluates an abundance of key literature and themes surrounding disability, intersectionality, the ideal worker norm, career development theory, and modernist approaches to conceptualising the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Chapter 3: Methodology – justifies the qualitative research approach taken for this study and makes considerations for ethics, reflexivity and positionality. The chapter also addresses limitations of this research and provides a visual representation of the research process.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings – presents thematical data that arose from conducting the research. Such themes include: embodied experiences; changing working conditions and digitalisation of work; and future career aspirations.

Chapter 5: Conclusion – summarises the study and identifies strengths, weaknesses and limitations of conducting this research. It also suggests directions for future research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive review of a variety of sociological literature that aims to provide the context for which my research will be formulated. Comprising of five main sections. It starts by reviewing the ‘social model of disability’ as a pivotal framework for perceiving the social oppressions of people with disabilities. The next section discusses Crenshaw’s theory of ‘intersectionality’ to understand the experiences and oppressions of disabled women. The third section conceptualises gender and disability performance to dispel Acker’s notion of the ‘ideal worker’. The following section applies young WWD to Gottfredson’s theory of ‘Circumscription and Compromise’ to help set realistic aspirations when making career choices. The final section rounds off on Beck’s theory of ‘risk’ and discusses uncertainty to manifest how the Covid-19 Pandemic has shaped employment situations for youth in contemporary Irish society.

Social Model of Disability

The social construction of disability can be understood through the ‘social model of disability’ as coined by Oliver in 1983. The social model was proposed in response to the radical shift away from the medical model of disability (Oliver 1990; 2009; 2013). Through the social model, society is viewed as the “root cause of disability”, not the individual with the impairment (Owens 2015:386; Shakespeare 2006;). Barnes (2000) posits that individuals are disabled by physical, social, communication and attitudinal barriers. Oliver (2018) concurs,

noting the way social environments such as the labour market, education, or social interactions are organised impose limitations on disabled people that prevent equal access to society. Unlike the social model, the ‘medical model of disability’ takes a functionalist approach towards trying to ‘fix’ the illness or what is ‘wrong’ with the individual, instead of accepting the person as they are and irradicating societal barriers in their way (Thomas 2004).

It has been established that the social model derived from radical Marxism. It identifies capitalism to be a major contributor of social oppression for disabled people (Barnes 2000; Finkelstein 1993; Oliver 1990). Continuing this line of thought, a study by Barnes and Mercer (2005) found that the social model in application to employment highlights how socio-economic exclusion is based on the way society and employment is structured. These findings re-emerge in alignment with a study conducted by Barnes (2012) seven years later. Clearly, a worrisome picture is drawn which illustrates that almost a decade later the same problems, namely, stigmatisation, socio-economic exclusion and the risk of poverty, still persist.

Turning to look at disability from a feminist disability stance, this socio-economic exclusion and discrimination is two-fold for WWD on the basis of disability and gender. For younger WWD it can be argued that it is three-fold on the additional basis of age and their inexperience as they enter the labour market (Gander 2014). Nevertheless, societal structures impose external barriers preventing women with disabilities from gaining access to the labour market. Oliver (2018) calls attentions for ‘reinvigoration’ or a ‘replacement’ of the social model for one that clearly defines disability through all lived experiences of impairment and takes into account the intersections of gender and race more sufficiently. Hannah Arendt, a theorist of power, suggests the ‘relative model of disability’, a model developed in Sweden, which may improve labour market accessibility for women with an emphasis on abilities and capabilities (Owens 2015). The inclusion of feminist disability perspective in the literature by

the likes of Garland-Thomson (2005), Morris (1993) and Owens (2015) has been vital in adequately giving a voice to disabled women. A similar approach is taken to this research to gauge the experiences of employment among young WWD in Ireland during a Pandemic.

Intersectionality

Social identities are multi-dimensional and complex, and have numerous layers and meanings. This ideology is best conceptualised through Crenshaw's (1989) theory of 'intersectionality'. Intersectionality was initially a term that emerged in the legal field but has since become a "buzzword" in mainstream sociology and feminist studies (Davis 2008). It is a lens or framework through which an individual can see the origin of power and where it collides (Crenshaw 1989). Moreover, it acknowledges that everyone has their own unique experiences and oppressions through gender, race, class, physical ability, age or sexual orientation, etc (Collins and Bilge 2020; Davis 2008; Walby, Armstrong and Strid 2012).

Intersectionality is an adequate theoretical framework and methodological approach (McBride, Hebson and Holgate 2015; Mooney 2016) to describe how in this case, gender and disability at the intersection limit access to employment for women with disabilities in the Irish labour market. Review of the research literature indicates that WWD are more likely to experience inaccessible working arrangements, performative expectations, discrimination, stigmatisation, gender gaps and subordination in the labour market on an international scale (Acker 2012; Bend and Fielden 2021). However, in the Irish labour market, there are significant pay gaps for WWD against non-disabled women and disabled men, and training, employment and promotion opportunities are limited (DWI 2022).

Additionally, there is a trend that WWD are at a higher risk of precarious employment and becoming unemployed compared to their counterparts, in this instance, non-disabled

women, disabled men and non-disabled men (Brown and Moloney 2019; Moodley and Graham 2015; Shifrer and Frederick 2019). This is not to say WWD are more or less oppressed than non-disabled women and men and disabled men as experiences are distinct for different individuals, however, it is to say their privilege runs deeper and they can climb higher and faster up the job ladder (Crenshaw 2011).

Hence, the conceptualisations of ‘twice penalised’ as posited by O’Hara (2004) and ‘double jeopardy’ by Doren and Benz (2001) appropriately describes how WWD are doubly discriminated against on the basis of gender and disability. This is an attempt to make a contribution to a discussion beyond the confines of women of colour, and an opportunity to address other social groups that are often overlooked. Whilst chronological age is also a vital social group within intersectionality, it will be addressed in the latter sections of this literature review.

Emerging research which links intersectionality to a Covid-19 context is particularly relevant for this study. According to Maestriperi (2021) the Covid Crisis was highly gendered provoking a ‘pink recession’ whereby women in female-dominated sectors experienced unemployment. Younger workers also fared worse in terms of education and employment disruptions, and layoffs (ibid.). Meanwhile PWD were an oversight and faced stigmatisation and social exclusion during the Pandemic (Shakespeare et al 2021). A need for more inclusion and better access to resources is required for all affected social populations discussed.

It can be concluded that “intersectionality applies to everyone – no one exists outside the matrix of power” even the most privileged in society, characterised as the upper-class, able-bodied white man (Crenshaw 2011:230).

The 'Ideal Worker'

A significant number of feminist sociological scholarships affirm Acker's (1990) theory that workplace organisations are gendered. In line with Acker's theory, my objective is to add to the discourse that ableism is prominent in organisations as well as gender and cannot be overlooked. In this vein, literature from Østerud (2022) and Bend and Fielden (2021) aid in the quest of confronting the 'ideal worker' norm. According to Acker (1990:149), the 'ideal or standard worker' is characterised as the able-bodied man who "exists only for the work". Furthermore, the ideal worker is promoted to a managerial role and must be committed and available to paid full-time work (Foster and Wass 2013; Østerud 2022). The purpose here is to use the performativity of gender and disability as a way of challenging this worker norm.

Gender performativity

Akin to the social construction of disability, gender encompasses characteristics that are also socially constructed. Gender refers to "social, behavioural and cultural attributes" that are associated with being a man or a woman (Warwick-Booth 2019:55). The idea of 'doing gender' ascribes women to part-time work, gender stereotypes (of being more caring and nurturing), and occupational segregation (such as in nursing, administration or teaching roles) (Butler 1988). This gender subordination is equally evident within the home a theoretical account provided by Giddens and Beck to demonstrate how gender transitions of women in late modernity has seen the departure of the 'male breadwinner-homemaker narrative' and more egalitarian household divisions of labour (Mulinari and Sandell 2009). However, the assumption that history has been revisited due to the Covid-19 Pandemic is postulated by Chung and colleagues (2021). Women struggled during Covid-19 lockdowns as they were burdened with unpaid domestic labour resembling the housewives of the 1950s (Chung et al

2021). Nevertheless, looking beyond the Pandemic, there has been a significant growth of women rising to leadership positions in the Irish labour market, most particularly in academia (Woods 2021). The analogy of the ‘glass ceiling’ effect symbolises women’s resistance to social barriers while it is cracking, there is still a way to go before it is broken. (Gander 2014; Woods 2021).

Disability with gender performativity

Goffman’s (1959) ‘presentation of self’ is a metaphor to theorise how first impressions determine the construction of a worker’s identity (as cited in Brown et al 2009). Goffman’s ideology can be attached to the ‘two-way mirror’ effect as hypothesised by Bend and Fielden (2021), as a way to demonstrate the ableist behaviours and attitudes in recruitment. For example, why a woman with epilepsy (hidden disability) may be hired over a woman in a wheelchair (physical disability) (Ghosh 2010). The ‘why’ of this circumstance can be reduced to Acker’s (1990:153) claim that in the same way women’s bodies are “ruled out of order” under male dominance, this notion also rings true for a disabled person’s body in hiring practices, most often done by able-bodied managers (as cited in Østerud 2022). Therefore, ‘doing disability differently’ to challenge the assumption that WWD are ‘Other’ than their male able-bodied counterparts should be negotiated through terms of better inclusion and embrace ability rather than disability (Boys 2014; Jammaers and Zanoni. 2021).

Career Theory of Circumscription and Compromise

There are many benefits of employment for minority groups such as young WWD. Schur (2002) postulates how for people with disabilities, employment plays a particularly vital role in preventing poverty, alleviating social isolation and enhancing both civic and life skills

among those with disabilities. For young WWD, the transition from education to meaningful careers is a critical life stage development. However, career barriers such as disability stereotypes and traditional gender role norms frequently stand in their way and which may impact upon career aspirations and attainment (Lindstrom et al 2012).

A recent qualitative study conducted by Farrugia (2021) that focused on young people's experiences of employment and perceptions of 'career' in the Australian labour market, which became key to my research process, found the general consensus to be that self-identity could be articulated through 'career' and having loosely-based career aspirations was important for self-actualisation. Although, my study centres around young WWD in the context of the Irish labour market and the Covid-19 Pandemic, the conceptual basis remains similar to that of Farrugia (2021).

For young WWD, there comes a point when thinking within the boundaries of realism with respect to career choice becomes crucial. Hence, this research takes a unique approach by implementing Gottfredson's career theory as a lens which provides a "sociological understanding of career decision-making" to help young WWD formulate realistic career aspirations (Luke and Redekop 2019:66).

Under Gottfredson's (2005) career theory of 'Circumscription and Compromise', the 'process of circumscription' through four stages from aged three to fourteen and older, illustrates how certain career choices are eliminated based on self-concept, whether that be by prestige, gender stereotype, social valuation or self-identity. Race, class and disability are other limiting factors that impact career choice (Maroto, Pettinicchio and Patterson 2019). Comparably, 'process of compromise' requires individuals to sacrifice a job for one more socially acceptable and compatible in terms of both gender and disability (Brown 2002). To apply this theory to context, as previously alluded to under 'gender performativity', a female

engineer is doing a ‘man’s job’. Similarly, the subconscious assumption that women in wheelchairs are desk-bound does not promote positive representation of women with disabilities in employment.

Risk and Uncertainty at a time of Covid-19

We are living in between an industrial society and advanced modernity, whereby risk is inherent and pervasive in contemporary society. For Beck (1992; 2009), risk society is considered the unforeseen human-produced risks that make up ‘reflexive modernisation’ and have emerged through global warming, technological advancement and scientific innovation, comparably for Giddens (1986), the notion of risk is formed through a society preoccupied with the future and safety. Beck’s (1992) theory was further elaborated to ‘world risk society’ to emphasises the global risks and negative environmental impacts of industrialisation worldwide.

The current Covid-19 Pandemic is the epitome of a global risk society. During a global pandemic risk is exacerbated (Beck 1992) as is fear (Bauman 2013). The Pandemic gave rise to a ‘digital risk society’, which added a new dimension of risk for education and domestic life, setting the stage for cyberbullying, digital misinformation and a digital divide between developed and developing countries (Hantrais et al 2021; Ward 2020).

Shifting employment patterns and heightened job uncertainty and precarious youth employment became synonymous to the Pandemic. The Covid-19 Pandemic highlighted how “risk society leads to a vulnerable society” with women, disabled people, low-income earners being the most disproportionately impacted (Sadati et al 2020). Bourdieu’s (1990) sociological use of ‘hysteresis’ describes the disruption between the field and the habitus to signify workers during the Pandemic. A Finnish qualitative survey by Ranta, Silinskas and Wilska (2020)

exploring young and older PWD's Covid experience found young people to be worse affected by the Pandemic compared to the older demographic in terms of personal concerns, mental health, and economic situation pertaining to career/education, with mental health concerning women more than men. The latter finding is troubling, it could be fathomed in this study.

An ESRI report conducted in conjunction with NDA found that Ireland performs poorly in its economic recovery after economic shocks (i.e., Great Recession) and in employing PWD² (Kelly and Maître 2021). While there is no knowing when the Covid-19 Pandemic will end, it will be interesting to see if history repeats itself in terms of the economic recovery for PWD.

Conclusion

This review of the literature has displayed a plethora of literature and theoretical concepts that contribute to the employment of women with disabilities and the impact the COVID-19 Pandemic had on youth employment. Looking through a disability and intersectional lens at the complexities of how young WWD fare in employment in a climate laden with risk and uncertainty, is pertinent for this research. Beginning with a conceptual and theoretical analysis of the social model of disability and intersectional framework, it then investigates the equivocal myth of the 'ideal worker', presented as the able-bodied man. Finally, it explores a Gottfredson's career theory, and assesses risk and uncertainty of youth employment under the precarious conditions of modern society. Little research has been carried out in Ireland in relation to what it is like for young females with disabilities who are in employment during a time of economic distress. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by exploring their experiences, from their own perspective, of employment in the Irish labour market during the Covid Pandemic.

² Out of 28 EU countries included in the study, Ireland had the 4th lowest employment rate for PWD.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter consists of seven sections. Section one appraises the methods chosen to sufficiently address the research question underpinning this research. Sections two and three assess the participant sample selected and describe the research procedure. Sections four and five address research ethics, and reflexivity and positionality of the researcher. Section six observes limitations of the study. Section seven provides an overview diagram of the research approach used to collect data for the findings concludes this chapter.

Choosing the Research Method

For this research project, a study on **“how the Covid-19 Pandemic has impacted employment among young women with disabilities in the Irish labour market and their future career aspirations”** was carried out. The main objectives were to explore the lived experiences of young WWD in the Irish labour market during a time of global social and economic disruption, and to investigate how the employment of young WWD has been affected as a result of the Pandemic. Another key objective was to examine whether the Pandemic is a catalyst that gives rise to changing career aspirations.

This study inquires through an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm (Cresswell 2003; van der Walt 2020), whereby reality is multidimensional and is socially constructed through individual experience (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006). A paradigm is a “tool... or metaphysical construct” that identifies an individual’s worldview through philosophical assumptions (Mertens 2007:215). These assumptions are: ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (nature of knowledge), methodology (research strategies) and axiology (role of values) (Merriam and

Tisdell 2016). Through an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, this study uses a phenomenological reality as an ontological view, and subjectivity with a corresponding feminist standpoint as an epistemological stance. To elucidate, this research relies on “the participants’ views” of a given situation or phenomenon being studied (Cresswell 2003:8). Meaning of the situation or phenomenon is interpreted through the individual beliefs, opinions, attitudes and lived experiences of the participants (Chambliss and Schutt 2016). Whatever meanings young WWD attach to their lived experience of employment during the Pandemic in Ireland, is subjective reality. Moreover, the fundamental agenda (or axiology) of this research strives to “give a voice to the underdogs” (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen 2008:6) or “underrepresented” (Stake 2010:202); for this research, young WWD. Taking the former into account, the researcher adopted an exploratory research design and deemed semi-structured qualitative interview methods as the most suitable and appropriate means for this study.

Interviews are a common qualitative method of research implemented by sociologists and other social scientists (Bryman 2012). Qualitative methods can be paired with feminist standpoint methodology (Finch 2004; Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Olesen 2011) and can easily incorporate a feminist disability theoretical stance (Garland-Thomson 2005; Tregaskis and Goodley 2005). Semi-structured interviews rely on an interview guide and elicit greater breadth and depth of information through words which is usually rich in detail and descriptive with a “focus on human subjectivity” (Chambliss and Schutt 2016:200). For this study, the focus is on young women and their subjectivity to the lived experiences of disability and employment in Ireland during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are adaptable by nature and adopt an open-ended question format which permit probes, follow-up questions and exploration of motives and feelings in more depth, however, it is a highly subjective technique thus, bias can arise (Bell and Waters 2014).

Contrastingly, structured interviews are more rigid in style and depend on asking preestablished sets of questions whereby responses and ordering of questions are limited but “ensures comparability of the data”, which is not what this study endeavours (Blee and Taylor 2002:92). Likewise, quantitative methods, taking the form of questionnaires or surveys, would be incompatible with such a study as to rely on “linear attributes, measurements and statistical analysis” would not deliver descriptive and conceptual findings (Stake 2010:11). While qualitative approaches offer more advantages for investigating understudied populations and helps answer the exploratory research question at hand, pitfalls of this approach cannot be overlooked. Unlike quantitative approaches, qualitative research is time-consuming and uses a smaller sample size “raising issues to generalisability” to the wider population of all genders and older demographics, with and without disabilities (ibid.:28). Other qualitative methods such as focus groups, observational research and secondary data were considered, but were later rejected as they would generate superficial and surface-level findings; a stark contrast to an in-depth qualitative analysis which this study undertakes. Nonetheless, the pros of qualitative research counterbalance the cons, hence the reason for choosing qualitative methods to conduct semi-structured interviews with eleven young WWD.

Selecting the Sample

Non-probability sampling methods were implemented. This is a sampling technique whereby some participants are selected while others are not (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim 2016). Interviewees were purposefully selected due to the nature of the study and the “unique position” as per the participant eligibility criterion (Chambliss & Schutt 2016:105). Eligible participants were: young women aged 18-29 years with one or more sensory, physical or hidden disabilities (see terminology section on page iv), with experience of employment (part-time, full-time, internships, etc) before and/or during the Pandemic and would continue to do so in

the future. The reason for selecting this cohort was simply for convenience in a tight timescale and ensuring not to overstep ethical boundaries regarding ‘vulnerable’ groups (i.e., intellectual disabilities). Also, the specific age group was chosen as young WWD are experiencing ‘emerging adulthood’, a period characterised by instability, identity exploration, self-focus, feelings of ‘in between’ an adolescent and adult, and (lack of) employment/educational possibilities (Arnett 2014). The Pandemic delayed this smooth transition to emerging adulthood (Vehkalahti, Armila and Sivenius 2021). Snowball (referral) sampling was used when finding participants was a challenge.

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

	Pseudonym*	Gender	Age	Type of Disability		Most Recent Employment
1	Jennifer*	Female	21	Physical	Cerebral palsy	Research Assistant
2	Aisling *	Female	23	Sensory & Hidden	ASD (Autism) & Dyslexia	Farm Labourer
3	Orla *	Female	20	Physical	Cerebral palsy	Teaching Assistant
4	Kate*	Female	20	Sensory	Hearing (profoundly deaf)	Waitress/Bartender
5	Lucy*	Female	22	Hidden	Hypermobility syndrome & Dyslexia	Retail Sales Assistant
6	Ciara*	Female	20	Sensory & Hidden	Hearing (hard-of-hearing), Dyslexia & Epilepsy	Legal Assistant
7	Sarah*	Female	20	Sensory & Hidden	Hearing (profoundly deaf) & Dyslexia	Paramedic Care Assistant
8	Aoife*	Female	28	Sensory & Hidden	ASD (Autism), Anxiety, ADHD & ADD	Deli Assistant
9	Maria*	Female	23	Sensory & Hidden	ASD (Asperger’s syndrome) & Dyspraxia	Public Relations Assistant
10	Sinead*	Female	23	Sensory	Hearing (profoundly deaf)	Administrative Assistant
11	Hannah*	Female	27	Hidden	Epilepsy	Communications Executive

Real names changed for confidentiality*

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants.

Conducting the Research

The researcher was pragmatic towards recruiting participants - instead of interviewing a number of different groups (e.g., employers, HR managers, parents), those who fit the participant criteria were selected. Initially, seven personal contacts who fit the criteria were contacted through social media – four agreed to do the interview while the remaining three either declined or did not meet the specifics of the criteria. Four more participants were enlisted through snowball sampling. In addition, flyers and emails were sent to several disability-related organisations and gatekeepers of disability organisations, and a number of educational institutions were contacted (see Appendix 5.1.) in the hope of finding volunteers for the interviews. The results of this endeavour were partially successful – two participants were recruited from two different EmployAbility services and the final interviewee was through the Epilepsy Ireland organisation.

The researcher emailed interview invitations (see Appendix One) to suitable participants. Candidates who expressed interest in partaking in the study received a follow-up email containing the information sheet/consent form (see Appendix Two) which had to be signed, dated and returned to the interviewer prior to the interview. The option of signing the consent form physically for interviews conducted in-person was also viable.

Covid-19 restrictions had eased by the time the interviewing process commenced so six were conducted in-person. Four interviews were administered online through MS Teams and one was a telephone interview; which saved time, travel costs and allowed for more anonymity surrounding sensitive topics (Irvine, Drew and Sainsbury 2013). Traditional in-person interviews were preferable as the development of rapport and *Verstehen* (empathic understanding of human behaviour) between the interviewer and interviewees was greater (ibid.). Visual cues allowed for “active and visible engagement of the researcher to create

authentic dialogue with interviewees” (Blee and Taylor 2002:99). Each interview was recorded on MS Teams with the participants’ permission and ranged between thirty minutes to one hour. At the outset of every interview the interviewer explained the purpose of the study, clarified ethical protocols and began with open-ended and demographic-based questions, and at the end, thanked participants for their time and contribution to the research.

Ethical Considerations

The topic of disability can be sensitive for some people, especially if respondents have had negative employment experiences in the past. For those who voiced experiences of discrimination encountered in the workplace, it was vital that all information shared stay confidential and any names mentioned remain anonymous (Surmiak 2018).

Before beginning the interviewing process, my supervisor approved my interview guide (see Appendix Three). An interview guide was utilised to avoid ‘leading questions’ that may distort or skew the data. Following this and the recruitment process, the day before the interview, the researcher emailed participants to confirm about proceeding with the scheduled interview. Each participant gave informed consent by signing, dating and returning the consent form via email to be stored away in a password-protected folder on the researcher’s laptop.

Participants were also informed within the consent form and at the start of every interview that they could withdraw at any point during the process or choose not to answer questions of their choice. Moreover, the interviewer obtained verbal consent prior to every interview for permission to audio/video record interviews via MS Teams, and explained that recordings would be used for transcription purposes and deleted upon the completion of the research project. All participants were given pseudonyms replacing real names to ensure anonymity, although realistic names were used to reflect real life.

Reflexivity and Positionality

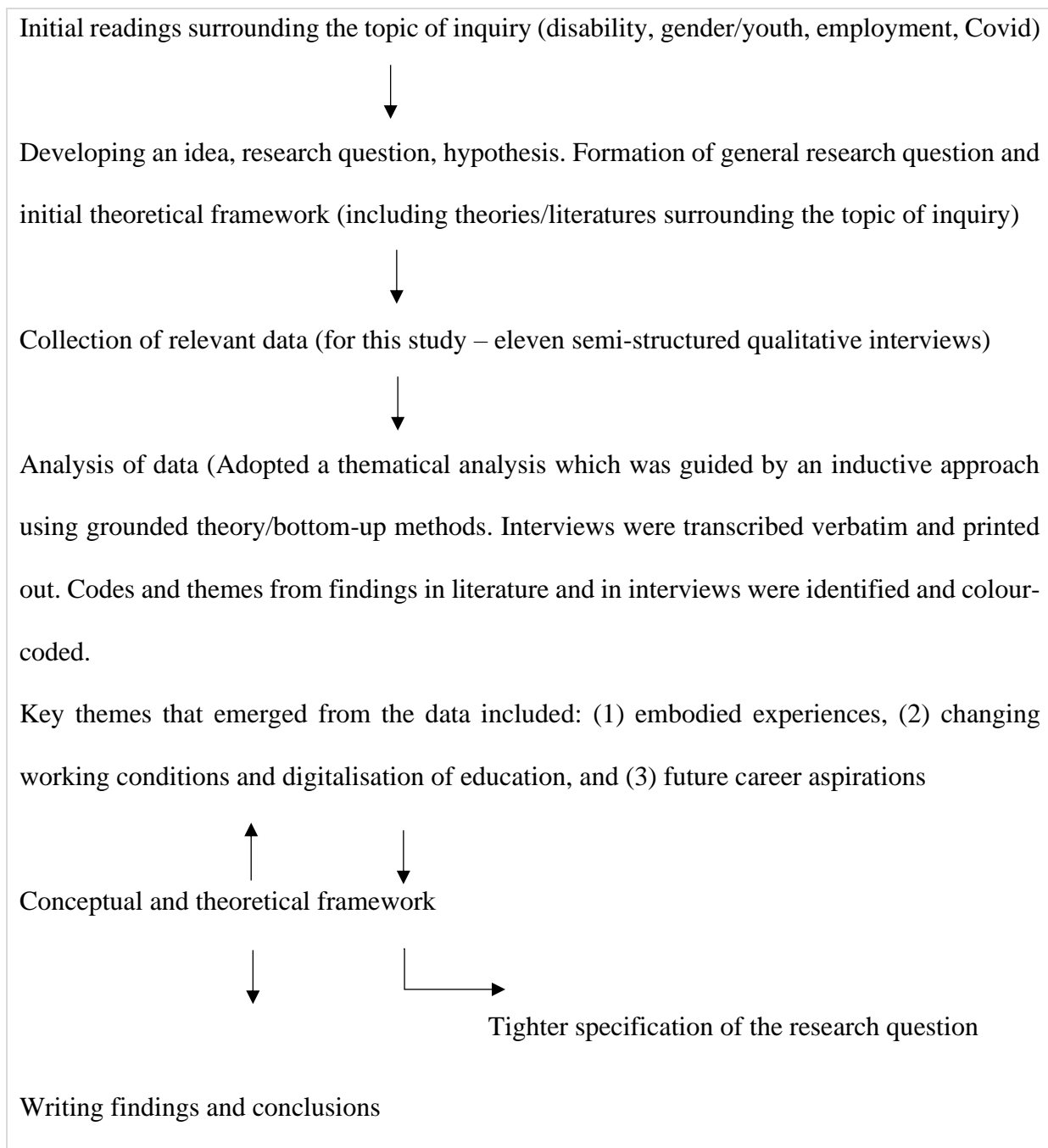
Apart from ethical considerations, reflexivity and positionality as a researcher was also considered. As a young woman with a hearing disability and as a potential candidate of the population sample under research, there runs the risk of bias when conducting the interviews. According to Major and Savin-Baden (2010:82), reflexivity requires “challenging our biases and examining our stances, perspectives and views as a researcher”. Reflexivity informs positionality and through this knowledge, as a researcher I strived to be cognisant of my position and perspectives in order to undertake ethical research (Holmes 2020).

Limitations

A first limitation of this study was having a homogenous sample for the interviews due to the specialised demographic. The participant eligibility criterion was very narrow in terms of gender, age, disability type and specific employability guidelines. Therefore, reliance on snowball sampling and reaching out to disability-related organisations to recruit participants was necessary. A second, the sample was not culturally or racially representative as all participants were Caucasian, white and Irish. In future, an organisation such as Black and Irish³ would be contacted when recruiting to leverage inclusion and diversity. A third, with fewer time limitations, other groups besides the target group such as disability inclusive employers, disability organisations or parents/siblings of WWD would be interviewed for more holistic perspectives.

³Black and Irish is an organisation that highlights and celebrates the identity of black and mixed-race Irish people <https://www.blackandirish.com/>

Data Analysis



(Source: Adapted from Bryman 2004:264).

Figure 1: Brief outline of steps taken in this qualitative research project.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The chapter analyses and interprets thematically, how the Covid-19 Pandemic has affected the lived experiences of young WWD and their employment experience in the Irish labour market. It also discusses how the consequences of the Pandemic may (or may not) influence changing career aspirations among young WWD. This chapter strives to synthesise and apply some of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 as a way to analyse the findings from this research. Four fundamental themes that emerged from conducting the series of semi-structured qualitative interviews with my participants are investigated further in this chapter. Themes include: (1) embodied experiences: being female and disabled, (2) changing working conditions and digitalisation of education, and (3) future career aspirations.

The intention is to link the emerging themes to new sociological literature as well as previous literature mentioned. The first theme revisits Acker's myth of the 'ideal worker theory' to analyse WWD's 'embodiment experience' of being a disabled woman. 'Changing working conditions and digitalisation of education' is the second core theme that investigates the attitudes towards flexible working arrangements and digitalisation of education instigated by the Pandemic. The final emerging theme concludes by assessing whether the Pandemic has impacted upon young WWD 'career aspirations. It will draw on new literature as well as literature surrounding 'Gottfredson's career theory', as discussed in Chapter 2.

Embodied Experiences: Being Female and Disabled

Gendered experience of being a woman

The first major finding was the embodied experiences of being a disabled female. According to Ghosh (2010:58) the “body is a socially constructed, interpreted and experienced” whereby the physical place from where the body comes from, goes through and interacts with the social world. When Acker (1990) initially devised the concept of the ‘ideal worker’ the intention was to bring attention to the gendered aspects of workplace organisations. Lucy provides an example of the gender stereotypes she encounters working in a motorcycle shop:

“...in the motorbike shop, people do see it as a men type thing. Like, it’s really equal staff wise, but if people come in looking for help, they go straight to the lads before they come to myself or my female colleagues...” (Lucy 2022).

This connotation clearly implies that gender stereotyping continues to persist in the Irish labour market and in contemporary Irish society. Women’s abilities and their knowledge of a male-dominated occupation are undermined due to their gender. A report from the CSO (2019)⁴ clarifies that occupational segregation not to be the main problem but rather it is the attitudes of society that need to change.

Self-identity experience of being a disabled woman

The disabled body becomes a key part in the construction of a woman’s identity, this is true for all eleven interview participants as they begin the interview by stating how they self-identify as a disabled woman with a physical, sensory or hidden disability. The type of

⁴ According to the CSO report in 2019, men make up 12.8 and women make up 13.7 of the wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles industry sector in Ireland.

disability participants self-identified with held particular meaning for them and how they perceived their own disability and also how they make sense of their disability within distinct disability communities.

All participants had at least one or more disabilities and had experienced some form of employment throughout the duration of when the Pandemic began in Ireland (13th of March 2020) up until the time the interviewing process took place (February-April 2022). Each women had their own unique experience of disability and working with a disability. Of the eleven interview participants, two women who had a physical disability were more likely to self-identify with their disability more strongly than the women with a sensory or hidden disability. Due to the visible nature of a physical disability, it is difficult to escape not identifying as someone with a disability especially when societal attitudes and behaviours of non-disabled people shape the social construction of disability (Oliver 1990). This is certainly true for Orla, who has cerebral palsy, who shared:

“Yeah, I would self-identify as a disabled woman because my disability is cerebral palsy. It is a physical disability, it’s very obvious. Because I’m on crutches, when I’m walking around, people can see that I obviously have some kind of physical disability” (Orla 2022).

Meanwhile, Jennifer, who also has cerebral palsy, shared the same sentiment:

“Definitely, I definitely do self-identify as having a disability because it’s very visible. I don’t see why I wouldn’t self-identify as a disabled woman but I don’t see it as a bad or a good thing, it’s just what I am. It means I just have more obstacles than any other woman. It just means that most women can identify with each other about misogyny so I definitely do think we can relate to each other, but I can’t relate to a non-disabled woman’s experience and they can’t relate to my experience with a disability. But I can relate more to a woman with a disability” (Jennifer 2022).

Although all eleven of the participants from this study self-identified as being a disabled woman, a finding in a study conducted Chalk et al (2020:307) contradicts the findings from my study, revealing that young adults with disabilities suggested that they “do not self-identify as having a disability”. Hence, from my study I gathered that the majority of women had a ‘positive disability identity’. Having a positive disability identity helps them to deal with stigma and overcome adversity better (ibid.). When disabled people have a positive attitude towards their own disability, there is a general agreement among the participants that this heightens disability awareness and acceptance in the labour market and thus, alleviates predisposed problems when it comes to disclosing a disability with a manager in the workplace and improves human agency (Østerud 2022). The importance of disclosing a disability becomes crucial in regards to negotiating services, accommodations or resources that is needed to help an employee boost job satisfaction and job retention, and will improve the employee and organisation’s overall productivity and moral by knowing how to navigate a disability (Moloney et al 2019). This is expressed by Sarah:

“... I do have a disability and it's something that I try to be proud of. I make sure that it does not define me though, it's not who I am on the inside.... I disclose my disability because I think it's important for your employer to know and just be aware of because if the situation does arise, you're not trying to explain your disability. You don't always have to just go there, but I would always. Any employer I've had have been more than happy to know. They've actually thanked me for telling them and stuff. We need to be confident to tell them” (Sarah 2022).

As remarked by Garland-Thomson (1997:6) “within a hierarchy of bodily traits ... determines the distribution of privilege, status, and power”. In line with the literature review of Acker’s (1990) theory of the ‘ideal worker’, the able-bodied man is the standard worker. He has more power, privilege and status than disabled man, non-disabled woman and the disabled woman

putting them at a significance disadvantage in the labour market and workplace (Jammaers and Zanoni 2021).

“Take a walk in my shoes”

Able-bodied/disable-bodied and gendered typologies help to identify the inequalities between men and women that women with disabilities encounter on a daily basis in the workplace. Echoing the literature review, of Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation, Brown et al (2009) claim that work is vital for a shaping the construction of young WWD’s identity construction. Embodiment theory is a prominent area of discussion when it is linked to notion of the ‘ideal worker’. This ideology is particularly apparent when it is applied to recruitment practices. The assertion that there should be more emphasis on making recruitment practices fairer on potential disabled employees is accepted by Maria. Urging managers and human resource managers to “take a walk in [her] shoes”, since they cannot relate to someone with a disability. Maria who has Asperger’s and Dyspraxia, explains her frustration about the recruitment practices. She states although she has a hidden disability, she would rather disclose it in a “more discreet way”. Disclosing a disability on paper in amongst a candidate pool of potential employees significantly decreases the chances of a disabled individual being hired over a non-disabled individual (Østerud 2022). Maria notes:

“During Covid for my online job interviews, you know you’re checking boxes... sometimes there is just a disability box and it says ‘do you have a disability?’ Sometimes I wouldn’t feel comfortable checking that box... because you don’t know if that’s automatically then going to reject you going for an interview. Maybe if they ring the day before an interview and say ‘listen, I have this interview coming up in a couple of days, could you make accommodations?’. And they’ll probably say ‘yeah’ but I honestly do think if you tick that box, it’s an automatic reject. ... you don’t see a box that says are you male or female? Are you married or are you gay or straight? Then it’s like do you have a disability? ... They don’t ask if you’re pregnant, religion isn’t there, if you a member of a community? They’re all discriminatory” (Maria 2022)

Changing Working Conditions and Digitalisation of Education

A second key finding was the changing working conditions or arrangements and the digitalisation of education during the peak of the Pandemic, however, as the easing of Covid-19 restrictions brought a reopening of workplaces and educational institutions. The majority of the interviewees that were in (secondary/tertiary/other) higher level education had moved online for most, while of those who were working amidst the Pandemic shifted to remote work or hybrid arrangements of working. However, of the eleven participants, seven did not need to work remotely.

Remote Work and Digitalisation of Education

With remote work and digitalisation of education comes a heightened digital risk as individuals enter into a ‘digital society’ under the Covid-19 Pandemic (Ward 2020). Lupton (2016) claims that digital devices have not reduced risk and uncertainty but rather have created them. Ulrich Beck (2013 as cited in Lupton 2016) theorised ‘global freedom risk’ which threatens technology and environmental hazards as well as global financial crises and terrorism. Other more micro-level risks range from internet addictions, to cyberbullying, to online predatory behaviours by paedophiles, and to physical fitness and the risk of weight gain or worse, obesity (Lupton 2016). Such risks are what people with disabilities need to bear in mind when using technology.

Uncertain, challenging and socially isolating times

Findings from this study unveiled other disadvantages of remote work and working during the Pandemic. Uncertainty regarding employment situation and college situation was a major disadvantage for roughly 50% of the participants. The four of the eleven participants who were deaf all experienced communication challenges regarding not being able to lip-read or hear people and customers with the masks on. Furthermore, one of the most crucial findings that every one of the participants mentioned was feeling socially alienated (socially isolated) from friends, family and the employment and college experience, subsequently having drastic impacts on mental and physical wellbeing. Seven of the women remarked:

“Everything is so uncertain” (Hannah), “I feel socially isolated when I work” (Maria), “no motivation to work” (Lucy), “missing my routine” (Aisling and Aoife), “gaining weight in lockdown” (Sarah and Kate), and “difficulty communicating with customers as I couldn’t read their lips under the masks” (Kate).

Results were similar or added to the results as shown in Lupton’s (2016) book.

Flexibility of working from home

On the other hand, the advantages included “more flexibility” (Ciara), “no need to commute because it stresses me out” (Jennifer), “enjoy working from home, it’s a personality trait” (Hannah), and “no one coming over to my desk...letting me do my job” (Sinead).

Jennifer also mentioned how she “did not feel disabled” during the Pandemic:

“I feel like the Pandemic made me feel like I didn’t have a disability. Because I was stuck at home, everyone was stuck at home. We had new routines. And because I didn’t leave the house, it made me feel like I had no disability. Like there was no one there to kind of point it out. It was only really me and my family in the house so it’s just normal. But once I go outside the house, like when I go to the shop it’s very obvious that people

are uncomfortable around my disability. The Pandemic has made me become so socially anxious; you have no idea” (Jennifer 2022).

Two of the participants have flexible work arrangements, whereby they work from home three days a week and go onto the workplace for the remaining of the week. What was discovered during the interviews was that a number of the participants had changed between jobs or recently got a job since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic. While this finding was intriguing, it is not that surprising considering the fact that these eleven women are between the ages of 18-29 years who have recently been doing the transition-to-work, and are experiencing a period of growth and instability, which is more important in a Covid world now than ever (Arnett 2014).

“The great work of the EmployAbility services”

Women with disabilities often struggle to gain and retain employment (O’Hara 2004). Two women who were recruited as my interview participants for this study were from the EmployAbility services. This is a service for people with disabilities which offers a range of resources and career coaching expertise to aid young people with disabilities gaining and retaining sustainable employment⁵. One of the two women who was from this service praised it highly for helping her to retain employment for over a year following her precarious situation of moving from job to job. Aoife, a 28 year old woman who has hidden disabilities narrated:

“..... I had jobs that I didn't last that long because I let my disability get in the way. That was kinda hard, alright. I think where [Manager of EmployAbility service] really like helped me out was for like explaining my disability to them. [Current job] is currently the longest job I’ve had. Whereas before that I suffered, like from panic attacks and stuff so I would never have stayed in a place like long enough. Yeah, so [manager], like, reached out to them and kind of gave him like a heads up and told them

⁵ EmployAbility Network Services <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/8578c4-access-the-employability-service/>

what I could do instead of what I couldn't do it. Yes, like, this massively helped in that regard. So yeah, it was very hard. Hard before, like, I could never really explain myself of having a disability because I didn't want it to like, turn it into my like, you know, attitude towards the job. [Manager] did all the hard work for me, like kind of guessing what employers will kind of understand where I'm coming from, getting the cv done, doing the research for me, helping like doing interviews and stuff... helped massively, like by putting me through all the procedures that needed to be done in regards to getting me to where I am today and a massive involvement in how well I've gotten with [current job].” (Aoife 2022).

Maria, another participant from the EmployAbility services, also spoke highly of this service, however, believes that implementations for services like these should be more mainstream and for people regardless of their ability or disability:

“I guess that’s what EmployAbility is doing like, if there are more programs like that who would work with them that would take on people every year.... You will probably get something you something, for a couple of weeks of experience, but I feel like more companies should kind of just be doing that in general, even if it's for like a month at a time for” (Maria 2022).

In terms of employment losses during the course of the Pandemic, only one participant lost her job as a direct result of Covid-19’s impacts. Conversely, the other reasons for unemployment during the same period was due to educational obligations and some people were about to start help their employment path Some women did not want to have to juggle a job and education especially through the hardships evident at the beginning of the Pandemic.

Future Career Aspirations

The last core finding was surrounding future career aspirations, the penultimate of this research project. Drawing once again from articles in the literature review from Gottfredson's Career Theory, this study tries to identify whether the Pandemic had an impact on their career aspirations and if they changed at all. According to Pham, Hirano, Lindstrom and DeGarmo (2020) young women with disabilities face a number of barriers to career development that limit their training, career pathway, career advancement and lack of role models serving as representation to young women with disabilities. Furthermore, obtaining employment can help to assure an income, self-fulfilment, financial independence, and enhanced wellbeing. Young women with disabilities are at a stage whereby they are continuing to build their self-efficacy skills and improve on their employment outcomes. Career aspirations refer to an individual's hopes and dreams for the future and is a significant indicator of the type of career that person pursues (Lindstrom, Hirano, Ingram, DeGarmo and Post 2019).

Most women from my study had career aspirations from since they were a child or adolescent. However, for most women, these career aspirations have shifted. When asked if they shifted during the Pandemic, specifically, there was a general consensus that career choices did not change significantly due to Covid-19 per se, rather the Pandemic was a prompt towards the importance of self-reflection and self-efficacy when making a career choice. Greater emphasis on a work-life balance also became apparent during the Covid as did discovering what type of work you would rather do through what the Pandemic took away. Sinead, who was an administrative assistant who worked online for the majority of the Pandemic responded:

“The Pandemic has made me re-evaluate my priorities ... that I actually want to and like working with people.... And to have more of a work life balance. I think during Covid it was like I don't wanna sit at my computer screen and I find that oh might as well stay an extra hour online and do a bit more work to catch up with tomorrow and

then next thing I know is 9:00 o'clock. I've also kind of learned to recommend anything like, you can change whenever you want to be at any time and when you are like 53, you want to be a teacher, you can be a teacher like, you know, we don't have to be tied to the same job forever, which is something that all kind of really learned during the Pandemic” (Sinead 2022).

Some of the respondents have highlighted more generally how disability can impact upon future career aspirations whereby through Gottfredson’s (2005) theory of circumscription and compromise, careers are eliminated through the process of compromise. This can be applied for the following example. Jennifer initially had hoped to study and pursue Psychology, however, after a negative encounter with her former manager decided against and is now hoping to earn a Master’s in Occupational Therapy. I have been given permission from Jennifer to allow me to include her following experience in this research project. Through Gottfredson’s theory, it highlights how negative societal attitudes can influence the elimination of an individual’s career aspirations. Jessica shares:

“I was doing a Psychology internship and I was talking to [the manager of the internship] about applying for a role working with disadvantaged kids I had worked with for the internship. They knew who I was and I knew who they were, and they knew I had a disability. I didn’t feel like I was challenged enough in that internship because I was basically told to sit in on therapy sessions and I was given tasks But when I was talking to the [manager] afterwards about applying for a job there, I was told ‘maybe it’s not the best for you to do that because ... you have a *different* kind of disability’ ... The way they said it in person to me was like nothing but they sent a letter so the message was clear... having grown up with a disability all my life, I’ve grown a thick skin now.... but when I asked what the point in hiring me was, it was because she knew my dad” (Jessica 2022).

Applying Gottfredson’s theory, it is evident in the narrative from Jessica, stigmatisation and discriminatory attitudes were held against her due to her disability. It demonstrates how managers, can be inadvertently discriminatory towards their employees with disabilities. Another example of where peoples’ attitudes oftentimes undermine the abilities and aspirations of people with disabilities is provided by Sarah who is a profoundly deaf trainee paramedic:

“I always knew I wanted to be a paramedic or work in the medical field and I always liked the idea of helping people. Some people were negative and discouraging of me wanting to do this job. Like employers would be like we don’t want to employ you because you are deaf... 99% requires communication with the nurse so I think people get a get worried that I can’t hear them. It’s an environment where there is constant communication and it can be a life or death situation. But I think if employers and patients were able to see a deaf person helping a patient and having a positive attitude towards work, they will be calm and more relaxed and shows they can work hard and do just as good a job as anyone else without a disability.... I was on Google and I saw that there’s only two deaf women paramedics in England. Like you don’t see that in Ireland. I think representation is so important for people with disabilities, to show younger girls that they can be and do anything they want to do. Their disability shouldn’t be the reason to hold them back....” (Sarah 2022).

Sarah also recognises that for many people, their disability prevents them from pursuing their career aspirations:

“I know some people who really want to get that job but are like oh I don’t think I’ll be able to get that job because of my learning disability hold me back” (Sarah 2022).

Within Sarah’s experience of the attitudes and beliefs around her that was against her wanting to pursue a career as a paramedic. She expresses how there is a lack of role models and representation in the media that show disabled female paramedics. Regarding this more needs to be done to represent women with disabilities in a range of different roles, and society needs to avoid putting a people in a ‘one-size-fits-all’ box (Pham et al 2020). People with disabilities should not be seen for their disability but rather for their capacity and capabilities to overcome the adversity that they have to endure on a daily basis. Therefore, whatever the career aspiration, should be aspired to with no prejudice.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

This research study explored the lived experiences of disability and employment among eleven young women with sensory, physical or hidden disabilities, who were between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age. The research further examined if the Covid-19 Pandemic had an impact on their employment and whether these young WWD had intentions to switch careers as a result of changing career aspirations through self-reflection during the Pandemic. The Pandemic had caused working conditions to change to remote work and education moved online. This had both positive and negative effects on the majority of the participants, although the negatives did outweigh the positives. The negatives pertained to a lack of socialisation and an unhealthy merging of work and home life reducing people to exhaustion and fatigue. Most participants were glad for the return to work in person and found flexible working arrangements to provide a better work-life balance. Future career aspirations became more self-focused and the idea that they ‘do not need to be set in stone’.

This research is significant as it puts disability from a sociological perspective to the forefront. Furthermore, it has given young WWD an opportunity to share their experiences of living with and working with a disability during a Pandemic. Personally, I could relate to the women in my interviews who were profoundly deaf, and it has also allowed me to connect and network with many different disability organisations that I was unaware of prior to this conducting research project.

Initially, I considered covering a broader range of oppressions of ‘intersectionality’, featuring race as well as gender and disability, alas due to time constraints and for practical reasons, women and disability were requisite. Albeit, there is ripe opportunity to explore this

topic in even more depth with more time and fewer ethical constraints. With more time, a longitudinal cohort study design would be applied to analyse WWD experiences before, during and after the Pandemic, which may justify cause-effect relationship and render more detailed findings. Also, a comparative study using mixed-methods with both genders would produce more adequate results to base a gendered experience upon.

Also, with more time and resources, I would recruit a more diverse interview population including the likes of WWD in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); people with disabilities amongst the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community; employers and human resource managers of organisations that have recruited PWD; parents of PWD or siblings of PWD. This would serve as a chance to explore their perspectives and experiences on the topic of inquiry and would elicit alternative and more holistic results. Thus, it would take into account greater racial/ethnic diversity and intersectionality, employability practices, and family dynamics. To mention family dynamics again, it would be intriguing to interview mothers with disabilities in Ireland⁶, to get a ‘disabled mother’s outlook’ on the topic of inquiry⁷.

In terms of ethical limitations, while I respect that ethical approval must be sought from an Ethics Committee, I would be interested in including people with intellectual disabilities in a replica study such as this. This could potentially be a direction for future research, perhaps for a post-graduate study. While many people with intellectual disabilities are considered “vulnerable”, many would be very capable of participating in a research study of this kind. I have no doubt that they would love to share their views on a topic of this nature. This would in essence broaden the spectrum of diversity, inclusion and equality.

⁶ NDA (2021:31), 2016 Census recorded 209,222 mothers with disabilities. Limited literature on mothers with disabilities in employment in Ireland.

⁷ Wagner et al (2022) on ‘motherscholars’ with a disability during Covid as a basis for such a study.

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APPENDIX ONE: Interview Invitation (circulated via email)

INTERVIEW INVITATION 2022

Dear [name],

I am inviting you to participate in my study as part of my final year Sociology research project entitled *“How has the Covid-19 Pandemic impacted employment among young women with disabilities (WWD) in the Irish labour market and their future career aspirations?”*

.....

My name is Suzy Mooney and I am a third-year Sociology student at Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for my final year of studies towards a BA degree, I am currently undertaking a research project under the supervision of Dr Nuala Whelan of the Department of Sociology at Maynooth University. My study has been reviewed by my supervisor.

Purpose: To explore the perspectives of employment among women with disabilities and how their employment and career aspirations may have been altered due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Why me? You have been asked to participate as you are a woman with a physical, sensory or hidden disability, between the age of 18 and 29 years, who has experience with employment and will continue to do so, in the future.

What it entails? I ask respectfully for approximately 30 minutes or more of your time to participate in this interview at a time of your convenience, ideally over MS Teams or Zoom (to comply with Covid-19 guidelines). In-person interviews can be conducted upon request. All responses will be treated with strictest confidentiality and participant identities will be anonymised using assigned pseudonyms for the write-up. Participation is voluntary. You have a right to withdraw at any stage of the interview or choose not to answer certain questions.

For anyone willing to participate: Information Sheet/Consent Forms (formal and easy-to-read) to follow. Please email me () to receive these.

I look forward to hearing from you.

If you have any queries or would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Kind regards,
Suzy Mooney

Researcher: Suzy Mooney Department of Sociology, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare.
Email: .

Supervisor: Dr. Nuala Whelan Department of Sociology, Maynooth University, Co. Kildare.
Email:

APPENDIX TWO: Information Sheets and Consent Forms

2.1. Formal Information Sheet and Consent Form



INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM 2022

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my study for my Special Topics Research Project.

Please read and sign this form if you would like to participate in this study.

I understand the following:

- ✓ This research study will be carried out by **Suzy Mooney** a final year (BA) student at the Department of Sociology, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Co. Kildare.
- ✓ Participation is voluntary - It is my choice whether to participate or not. I may change my mind at any stage and withdraw from the process. Should this occur, all of my personal data shall be destroyed.
- ✓ My participation in the study will be kept confidential and anonymous. No identifying information will be included within the transcripts nor will any information be included in the final write-up of the research. Any extracts from what I say that are quoted in the research report, will be entirely anonymous. The identities of participants/ interviewees will be concealed in all documents resulting from the research ensuring anonymity. However, it must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.
- ✓ I understand that I will be asked to be involved in an interview with the researcher for approximately 30 minutes or longer.
- ✓ All participants will be allocated a code [pseudonym] at the point of consent (to participate) so as to anonymise the data from the outset. A document containing the coding key will be accessible only by the researcher. All coded data will be stored on the researcher's laptop and protected by encryption software.

- ✓ Interviews will be conducted online (to comply with Covid-19 restrictions). Upon request, interviews can be done in-person.
- ✓ All interviews will be audio/video-recorded (with my consent), but no-one will be identified by name. The audio files will be kept in a password protected computer protected by encryption software. All of the information recorded is confidential.
- ✓ The results will be seen by the researcher. The results will be presented in a report and may also be presented at relevant conferences and published in academic journals and, where applicable, in other outlets.
- ✓ There are no anticipated risks or negative consequences envisaged for participants taking part. There is no conditionality related to this study, no penalties for non-participation apply.
- ✓ I have been provided with an information sheet related to this research.
- ✓ I will receive a copy of this signed consent form for my own records.
- ✓ I may have a companion/interpreter with me if I so wish.
- ✓ I may contact the researcher at any point if I have questions or concerns regarding my participation in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet and Consent Form.

If you have any further queries or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Suzy Mooney
 Department of Sociology, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare
Email:

OR

Supervisor: Dr Nuala Whelan
 Department of Sociology, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare
Email:

“I have read and understand the information provided on the Information Sheet and Consent Form and agree to voluntarily participate in this research”.

Signed (Participant): _____

Date: _____

Signed (Companion): _____

Date: _____

2.2. “Easy to read” Invitation and Information Sheet/Consent Form

Dear [name]



You are a woman aged 18-29 who has a disability and has/ has had a job in Ireland and someone whose job may have been affected during the Covid-19 Pandemic.



I invite you to do an interview with me for my sociology research project.



The interview will take around 30 minutes or more where you will be asked questions about your disability, your work, about the Covid-19 Pandemic and your future career plans.



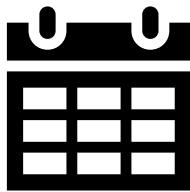
Interviews will be audio or video recorded with your permission.



You will not be identified in this interview and you will be given a special code so that any identifiable information cannot be recognised.



You may have your companion or interpreter with you during the interview.



Interview will take place:

Date: [Day / Date / Month / Year]

Time: [Time]

Location: [Online or in person]



Please sign this form if you wish to take part in my study.

Participant: _____

Companion: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX THREE: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

How has the Covid-19 Pandemic impacted employment among young women with disabilities in the Irish labour market and their future career aspirations?

Framing questions: Lived Experience of Disability

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself – age, a little about your disability, etc.
2. Do you self-identify as a disabled woman? Can you tell me how/how not?
 - What does it mean to you to identify as a disabled woman?
3. What are your thoughts on disclosing your disability to your employer?

Employment

General questions about employment & gender:

4. Are you currently employed?
 - In what sector?
5. What duties would you carry out in your typical working day?
 - How would you explain your attitude towards work?
6. Is being employed important to you?
 - What are some of your reasons?
7. Have you always wanted to work **[in current role/job/sector]**?
8. Did anyone help you with choosing your career path?
 - Who helped?
 - Can you relay the advice they gave to you?

9. What is your opinion on the 'gender gap in employment' in Ireland?
- What about in terms of women with disabilities?
10. What more, do you think, can be done to further ease the entry of women, and women with disabilities (WWD) into the Irish labour force?
- What can employers do, in your view?
 - Is there anything more policymakers can do, in your view?
 - Can schools/colleges (educational institutions) do more, in your view?

Impact of Covid-Pandemic on Employment & Wellbeing

Pandemic & employment specific questions:

11. The Covid-19 Pandemic has been a time of reflection for many people. Tell me have you used this time to reflect on your career aspirations and career trajectory?
12. Is the job you have now the one you had before the Covid-19 Pandemic?
13. Has the Covid-19 Pandemic affected this job?
- To what extent?
 - What were negative ways it was impacted?
 - What about any positive ways it was impacted?
14. Tell me what kind of toll the Pandemic took on you in relation to employment.
15. How do you feel the Pandemic has impacted the Irish labour market for young women?
- And more specifically, young women with disabilities?
16. Did you experience working from home/remotely at any time during the Pandemic (whether that be for school, college or work etc)?
- What was this experience like for you?
 - What were some advantages & disadvantages of working from home?

17. As we come out of the Pandemic and back to some sort of normality, how do you see the future of employment playing out?

- What would you like your own employment to look like?

Concluding questions: Future Career Aspirations

18. Is your desired career path/trajectory the same as before the Covid-19 Pandemic?

- Please describe to me your desired career path.

19. Would you say that your employment aligns with your future career aspirations?

- Can you tell me how or how not?

20. To wrap up this interview, is there anything else you would like to add that has not already been mentioned?

APPENDIX FOUR: Transcription of Interview

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Interview 5 - Lucy* (March 4, 2022)

Interviewer: As you know, I am doing my research project on “how the Covid-19 Pandemic has impacted employment among young women with disabilities in the Irish labour market and their future career aspirations”. I just want to say thank you for agreeing to do the interview with me today. Before we begin, could I get verbal consent that you are happy to proceed with the interview and know that it will be recorded just for transcription purposes. Once the transcription is done and my project is submitted, I will delete your interview recording. To ensure confidentiality, your name and any other identifiable details will be anonymised with a code that I will assign you. Also, if there are any questions you wish not to answer or skip that is absolutely fine. You can also stop the interview at any point during the process. Is that okay?

Lucy*: Yeah, absolutely no problem.

Interviewer: The first section is relating to your lived experience of disability. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself?

Lucy*: My name is *****. I am 22. I am in my final year of college at [name of college].

Interviewer: Would you say you self-identify as a disabled woman?

Lucy*: I would self-identify myself as a disabled person, woman. I am with the disability office in [name of college], which I find brilliant. Thank you [name of college]. *laughs* But my disability is what most people would call hidden or invisible, because it is in my joints like. It is kind of like arthritis but it's not. It is called hypermobility syndrome or HMS. Type it in full because you get some really weird things if you type in HMS.

Interviewer: *laughs* Okay good to know.

Lucy*: One of my friends typed in HMS and it didn't go so well. *laughs* And it is essentially like arthritis where you would get stiff really quickly and everything kind of hurts. But apart from that it is just an over flexibility of the joints and the muscles. People would be like: “oh my god she's so flexible” and I'd be like oh no I'm too flexible type of thing. Like I could be walking down the street and next thing you know my knee is gone one way or the other and I'd be on the ground. I would have to shove the knee cap back into place or whatever. With that you know you do get quite a few stares, like: “I thought she was alright, she was walking grand there a minute ago and next thing you know, splat”. *laughs* It's kind of funny when people who haven't seen it happen before and they are just like: “are you ok?” and I'm like I'm fine. *laughs* ... I had a train of thought what was it?

- Interviewer:** That's ok. You can come back to it. As you said you do self-identify as a disabled woman. What does that mean to you?
- Lucy*:** It means that I am just a little bit 'broken'. *laughs* So I find things that most people would find simple, I would find it difficult. Like writing, or holding a pen for more than two minutes. I am very grateful to the fact that for exams and stuff I can type and thank God I do because I have the writing speed of a snail but the typing speed of Flash himself. *laughs*
- Interviewer:** *laughs* That's brilliant! With technology really taking off, especially now, it is working out really well for you then. What are your thoughts on disclosing your disability to your employer?
- Lucy*:** I have actually had issues with that in the past.
- Interviewer:** Could you tell me about that?
- Lucy*:** I can indeed, yeah. For a while I did work in a café and it was fine until like my wrists started hurting. I had to put wrist supports on, like bandages. I get them for all my joints. I literally have *counts* two wrist ones, two knees, two ankles. I only have one elbow one, I need to get another elbow one. Oh yeah, like you see people out on a skateboard — I essentially have all that. *laughs* And that's just for walking. Everything is fine until I whip them out and people are like "oh my god what did you do, did you hurt yourself?" and I'm like no, I'm fine. But um I actually work in a motorbike shop now.
- Interviewer:** Oh wow! That's ironic. You need the protection but now you are working where you are selling other people protection?
- Lucy*:** Exactly! *Points to shoes* these are actually motorbike boots. We sell them — they protect people — like from flying off motorbikes. They are so comfy. I have never had a comfier pair of shoes. ... But with that, there was a time where I was having a really bad flare-up. I was tested for rheumatoid arthritis — that will show you disparities. Every now and then I would go into the staff bathrooms and put myself back together again. You know like push the knee in, push the ankle in, into the right direction and stuff like that. I would come out like five, ten minutes later and all the staff are looking at me like are you okay in there.
- Interviewer:** Sounds sore, is it sore? It sounds kind of like dislocation — like if you dislocate your shoulder and you pop it back into place?
- Lucy*:** Kind of, it's kind of like dislocation. Only one of my shoulders does it. Will I show you? *Gesturing at shoulder*
- Interviewer:** No please don't *laughs*
- Lucy*:** my boss actually called me into his office one day and was like: "I've been hearing you were taking like thirty-minute breaks in the bathroom, are you okay? Is there something we need to know?". I didn't want to say this, but I am 'broken'. He said like: "if you need to wear your bandages for your support or anything, do it, because I can't

have you falling on the floor every time”. There have actually been days where I’ve had to call in where I’m like “I’m not coming in today. I physically cannot move”.

Interviewer: How often would that be?

Lucy*: It’s literally only happened once. But like I don’t like it happening because I work one day a week because there is college on. It’s not like you get paid when you are home sick.

Interviewer: What day would you be working?

Lucy*: On Saturday. Always Saturdays. 10am to 5pm. When I get home, I literally collapse on my bed for an hour. I am literally on my feet for the seven hours.

Interviewer: Must be exhausting, but good on you.

Lucy*: Yeah, but I actually kind of like my job. It is something I thought I would never have interest in. Like it’s motorbikes. I don’t drive. I don’t ride a motorbike. I don’t have my theory done. I don’t have my learners. Nothing. But I don’t care. Motorbikes are cool. They look cool. I wouldn’t be able to tell you about the motorbike itself but if you were to point to a random jacket, I would be able to tell you: “it is this brand” ... I would know how it fits and that.

Interviewer: What sector would this be in?

Lucy*: Um, so during the Pandemic it would have been um, classified as essential, because there are people who use a bike as their main form of transport and if they like break or lose or need a replacement, or gear.... if you think about it, your motorbike gear — the jacket, the trousers, the helmet and everything, that’s essentially your airbag. I would say it’s a cross between retail and essential. I was working there during the Pandemic and thankfully we didn’t close down.

Interviewer: What duties would you typically be carrying out in your working day?

Lucy*: In my working day, if I am out on the shop floor, I would be doing pretty much anything from just like dusting down the shelves, making sure there is no dust on the helmets, like making sure everything looks clean, nice, looking presentable. You see people who don’t have anything to do and they are just putting a t-shirt on the rack, [I do] that, to fully kitting out someone. When we get new people into the shop, like, they have never had a bike before and they are like “I need everything”. So, you need to get the right sizes of the jackets, of the trousers, of the boots, and you’d be fitting them for helmets as well. Something I am actually qualified to do *laughs* ... I’ll tell you something though, there’s nothing more terrifying than if you are not sure about a helmet, giving it out. If I am able to say I am comfortable in selling someone a helmet, like the amount of responsibility. As a ‘broken’ person myself, like I don’t want to add to the population *laughs*

Interviewer: How would you explain your attitude towards work?

Lucy*: I love it and I hate it. I love it because it's so fun. The people I work with are all really great craic but at the same time I do hate it, like sometimes if I am in pain and if say, I don't have any painkillers with me that day or anything.... Luckily, my brother does actually work in that place as well, but he'd be in a different part, on a different floor, on a different side of the building. Sometimes he has painkillers so it can be an extra help having him that day. But I mean, sometimes when I find that he's not, I would be dying. I am literally walking around like a zombie, hoping no one forces me to do anything.

Interviewer: Is being employed important to you?

Lucy*: Oh God, yeah. See, um, I am probably going to come across as a bit hypocritical now. Just because I have a disability does not mean I am disabled, type of a thing. Like, okay, it takes me a while to do the same thing someone else does, that's because it hurts but em, I can still do it.

Lucy*: Sorry, what was the question again?

Interviewer: Is being employed important to you? And what are some of your reasons?

Lucy*: So "yeah, like, I'm struggling and you told me not to do it but I am going to still do it". Just because I fit the stereotype of not being able to do certain things, I am kind of like to them: "look at me go". *laughs* As well as that, I like having a bit of my own money. Especially, because I am still living at home. I am not paying rent or anything, so I do like being able to contribute to the house. Like, I do throw a bit of my wages to my parents. I like being able to do that because no one wants a twenty-two year old mooching off, you know?! *laughs* I was able to go down to Kilkenny for a friend's birthday, because I had the money.

Interviewer: Have you always wanted to work in a bike shop, store?

Lucy*: No, I don't give a flying flamingo about it. *laughs*

Interviewer: *laughs* Okay, so, what have you wanted to do, work as?

Lucy*: For as long as I can remember, I wanted to work as a primary teacher, but I could never get the Irish. That is partly because I am dyslexic as well. Everything is kind of adding on ... absolutely everything ... *laughs* Especially, even typing, you have probably seen in my emails, I would get my spellings wrong or take a long time to reply.

Interviewer: Okay, oh right no, I never noticed. But, um, are you still hoping to do primary teaching?

Lucy*: I would love to but I have come to the realisation that I don't have the patience for little kids. I love them, like I was a childminder for years, a babysitter, in secondary. I did work experience in a creche as well. Like I can feed them and play with them and all, but I don't think I would have the patience to you know, tell them to politely shut up and listen. *laughs* If they don't understand it, I feel like in my brain I'd be like "well

why don't you understand it?". Apparently, that's a thing though, with dyslexic people — once you figure something out, you don't know how to explain it to other people ... which I didn't know was a thing until recently.

Interviewer: Oh really? Neither did I. How did you find that out?

Lucy*: My brother told me. He's also dyslexic. He's bad enough that he actually managed to get the ehm, the exemption from Irish and other languages. He didn't have to do them.

Interviewer: Is primary teaching still the career path you want to go down on?

Lucy*: I don't think so, not anymore, no.

Interviewer: What is it now?

Lucy*: Haven't got a clue at the moment. Just hope I pass this year. But I think for the time being, I am quite happy in the motorbike shop.

Interviewer: The Covid Pandemic has been a time of reflection for many people. Can you tell me have you used this time to reflect on your own career aspirations or trajectory?

Lucy*: Kind of and kind of not. Before we were put into lockdown in March, was it? — I was still working in the café, as I was saying earlier. When the Pandemic came, I couldn't apply for the PUP (Pandemic Unemployment Payment). I was laid off. I was out of work for months — the end of March till about... September. I think that's about 6 months.

Interviewer: That's quite a long time to be out of work. What is your opinion on the 'gender gap in employment' in Ireland?

Lucy*: Oh my god, it's actually ridiculous! Even in the motorbike shop, people do see it as a men type thing and fair enough— but you do see in that place, there is *counts* one, two, three, four women staff and *counts* three or four men staff. Like, it's really equal staff wise, but if people come in looking for help and things, they go straight to the lads before they come to myself or my female colleagues. Like I'll just be there in my uniform, with the logo and everything, and I'll be like: "hey, do you need anything?". And they'll be like: "no, no, thanks very much". I've seen it happen a lot.

Interviewer: What about in terms of women with disabilities?

Lucy*: Yeah, you'd be surprised, I'm actually the only staff member ... who has a job and acts as if they are "normal". Like, by normal, I mean, not 'broken'. *laughs* Notice how I keep using 'broken' a lot, it's my humour — It just means disabled. But more people with disabilities need to be represented in the labour market. Young girls need someone to look up to for when they work.

Interviewer: *laughs* I get you.

- Interviewer:** What do you think or what more do you think can be done to ease the entry of women, and women with disabilities into the Irish labour force?
- Lucy*:** Realistically I don't see anything happening unless someone does something big or extravagant like that because there's a bunch of old men who run the place... Unless there's a big movement and it's actually brought to the people in the Dail, I don't think there's going to be much done.
- Interviewer:** Do you think there is anything employers or companies can do?
- Lucy*:** I think if employers gave fairer breaks. Like when I was working, I'm literally on my feet if I'm not on the shop floor the whole time, like for a 7 or 8 hour shift. I need to be able to sit down for like 5 minutes.
- Interviewer:** What can the educational institutions? Like schools or colleges, or teachers. Could they do anything?
- Lucy*:** I think its been really good. I know [name of college] has been amazing like sending out emails all the time. Sometimes I'm just like shh, we don't need an email every ten minutes *laughs* But there's actually a guy in one of my classes who goes up to the lecturer at the start of class with a microphone/device thing that he wear around his neck that hooks up to his hearing aids. The lecturers are really good about it and have no issue with it. I also told someone of my lecturers at the start of the year that I may need to stand up or leave class for a few minutes to stretch. Just like if I stand all day my legs also get sore if I sit down for too long *laughs*
- Interviewer:** So I am going to move on to questions on the Pandemic and how it has impacted employment and well-being. Is that ok?
- Lucy*:** Yeah perfect
- Interviewer:** Is the job you have now, is that the same job you had before the Pandemic?
- Lucy*:** No, so the job I had before was in a café before Covid but it sucks because you couldn't eat inside when Covid came and I was there I think for about 6 months and was laid off but just by luck then and my brother, I landed the job I have now. It was so good like for my mental health even, because you know yourself, we weren't able to go anywhere, we weren't able to like see anyone, we weren't able to get work experience or anything. And when I lost my job as well, that was like 90% of my social life and that all went so then I was on the couch being a potato in my home.... But it was so good to be able to get back out there.
- Interviewer:** I know you've mentioned a lot of negatives there. What about any positive ways Covid impacted your job?
- Lucy*:** Mainly just that I was so happy to get back out doing things again. After not being able to qualify for the PUP with my last job and then living like a couch potato, it was so good to be able to be out there again.

- Interviewer:** Absolutely. How do you feel the Pandemic has impacted the Irish labour market for young women?
- Lucy*:** From what I can see, it hasn't been great. It hasn't been great for anyone, but after that I couldn't really tell you.
- Interviewer:** And what about, more specifically, for young women with disabilities?
- Lucy*:** Again, I couldn't really say but just from my experience, like it hasn't been great like the job with the café and losing my job, but then I got lucky with my current job. That goes for your previous question too. I'm just going by my own experience, sorry I can't give you more of a well-informed answer for this question.
- Interviewer:** No worries, that was perfect. Did you experience working remotely or working from home at any time during the Pandemic? Whether that be for like school or college or your work? And what was this experience like for you?
- Lucy*:** Not for my job, just for college. Hated it, couldn't stand it. So happy we're back on campus now, you have no idea. Being online was awful.
- Interviewer:** What were some of those awful things?
- Lucy*:** The fact that my it took so much motivation to do the lectures. Like I find it easier to do the work in the classroom, be immersed in the setting. Because I've always prided myself on this as well, I've always managed to separate college and education as being on campus and being social and my life at home as relaxed. So when the Pandemic hit, it did not go so well.
- Interviewer:** Okay, and what about some advantages of working from home?
- Lucy*:** The only real advantage I experienced was that 9am classes could be done in bed and no one would be none the wiser, only good thing about it *laughs*
- Interviewer:** Agreed! Can you tell me what kind of a toll the Pandemic took on you, in terms of employment, or in general?
- Lucy*:** In terms of employment, it worked out to be better actually because of this new job. I have a steady wage that is like properly enforced so if it were to happen again, like the covid lockdowns, I would actually be on the PUP scheme this time and I would actually be able to get the money this time. So I wouldn't be as much of a potato on the couch! In terms of in general, my mental health went so far down. None of my friends live near me, my best friend lives in Kilkenny and I live in Dublin.
- Interviewer:** Bit of a distance *laugh*
- Lucy*:** Yeah kind of *laugh* But yeah on that, of course there's video calls and normal calls but there's nothing like meeting in person.

Interviewer: Right, as we come out of the Pandemic (finally), and back to some sort of normality, can you tell me how do you see the future of employment playing out, just in general?

Lucy*: I really hope tomorrow I don't have to wear a mask to work tomorrow. As you can see, I wear glasses and they fog up really badly with the masks on. I really do hope that everyone who lost a job, the fact that the country is opening back up again, places are going back to what we would've called "normal". I've been seeing job flyer up around the place [college], so hopefully things will turn out for the better for those people.

Interviewer: Okay, now we're on the home stretch, we're nearly there. These last few questions are just based around your future career aspirations.

I know you said at the beginning, you don't have a specific desired career path at the moment, but if you did, can you describe it to me?

Lucy*: So I'm doing a double major in Classics and Anthropology, essentially a lot of people studies so potentially I'll do something to do with people. I feel like I work really well with other people, like in my job at work there's no one I don't get along with.... I did have a PLC lined up in case I didn't get the points for college in SNA care. So I'm actually think once I have this degree done, if I still don't really know what I want to do, I might actually go back and reapply for the SNA course because, I don't know, I think I work well with people who have some form of intellectual disability and I genuinely do think that it runs in my blood. Like both my parents were Autism/intellectual disability specialists.... I feel like I'd do really well, especially with kids like that and with that I could still get into primary school (teaching), although that would be more one on one which is more my standard.

Interviewer: Would you say that your employment aligns with your future career aspirations?

Lucy*: Absolutely not! *laughs* Considering I just said SNA and I work in a motorbike shop. Although essentially – I am literally giving people protection in order to not to make more people disabled *laughs*

Interviewer: *laughs* Very true! So now, to wrap up this interview, is there anything else you would like to add that has not already been mentioned?

Lucy*: We were talking before about the kind of disability I have about the mental, physical or whatever. It is a hidden one and with that, I don't have healthcare apparatus, and by that I mean that I don't have a cane or walker or something that'll help me function like a normal person. But there are disabled seats on my bus and you would be surprised the amount of stares you get from people when you're sitting in the seat when it looks like there's nothing wrong with you. Hidden disabilities are not always visible and it is easy for people to make assumptions so I think people just need to be more sensitive.

Interviewer: 100% couldn't agree with you more. Perfect. So, these are all the questions I have for you today. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it. I really enjoyed speaking with you today and hearing your insights and all about your experiences. Best of luck with everything. Okay I'm going to leave it there. I'll stop the recording now.

APPENDIX FIVE: Supplementary Information

5.1. List of Disability-related organisations and educational institutions I contacted via email in attempt to recruit participants:

Employment-related Organisations/Associations for PWD	Contact details	Email response
Ability Focus (Disability Employment Specialists)	info@abilityfocus.ie	No response (12/2/22)
EmployAbility Network Services, across Ireland:		
<u>Dublin</u>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dublin, Business in the Community (BITC) 	employability@bitc.ie	Recommended a potential interviewee (8/3/22) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviewee declined/was unavailable to do interview (11/3/22)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Dublin 	office@employabilitydublinnorth.ie	Would circulate my email to the team at EmployAbility North Dublin and ask them to reach out to any suitable individuals. (28/3/22)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> South Dublin 	info@dsse.ie	No response (15/3/22)
<u>Midlands</u>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Midlands (Co-ordinator) 	offaly@employabilitymidlands.com	Recommended a potential interviewee (2/3/22) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviewee agreed to do interview (3/3/22)
<i>Areas:</i>		
-Kildare (Kilcullen)		
-Laois (Mountmellick)		
-Longford (Longford town)		
-Offaly (Tullamore)		
-Westmeath (Mullingar & Athlone)		

<p><u>Mid-West</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clare (Administrator) • Limerick • North Tipperary 	<p>xxx@employabilityclare.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)</p> <p>info@employabilitylimerick.ie</p> <p>employabilitynorthtipp@gmail.com</p>	<p>Would circulate my email to staff to pass on to clients at EmployAbility Service Network in Clare (28/2/22)</p> <p>No response (12/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p>
<p><u>North East</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cavan/Monaghan • Louth • Meath 	<p>info@mcse.ie</p> <p>xxx@employabilitylouth.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)</p> <p>xxx@jobmatters.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)</p>	<p>Unable to assist with my research request. Policy not to disclose information on clients to third parties (7/3/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p>
<p><u>North West</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North West region email address <p><i>Areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Donegal -Leitrim -Sligo 	<p>info@employabilitynw.ie</p>	<p>No response (25/2/22)</p>
<p><u>South East</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carlow • Kilkenny • South Tipperary • Waterford • Wexford • Wicklow 	<p>info@kcases.ie [Carlow Office]</p> <p>info@kcases.ie [Kilkenny Office]</p> <p>info@employabilitysouthtipp.ie</p> <p>info@employabilitywaterford.ie</p> <p>info@employabilitywexford.ie</p> <p>info@employabilitywicklow.ie</p>	<p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p>

<p><u>South West</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cork (Co-ordinator) • Kerry (Co-ordinator) • West Cork (Co-ordinator) <p><i>Areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bantry Beara and Dunmanway -Bandon -Clonakilty -Skibbereen -Kinsale <p><u>West</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Galway • Mayo • Roscommon 	<p>xxx@employabilitycork.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)</p> <p>xxx@employabilitykerry.com (name anonymised for confidentiality)</p> <p>coordinator@empwc.org</p> <p>info@employabilitygalway.ie</p> <p>info@employabilitymayo.ie</p> <p>info@rosemp.ie</p>	<p>Recommended a potential interviewee (28/2/22)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewee agreed to do interview (3/3/22) <p>Did not know of anyone in EmployAbility service Kerry who fit my participant criteria but would notify me if there was a potential participant (28/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p>
<p>Intreo Centres, Dublin region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balbriggan • Ballymun • Coolock • Finglas 	<p>balbriggan@welfare.ie</p> <p>Ballymun@welfare.ie</p> <p>coolock@welfare.ie</p> <p>Finglas@welfare.ie</p>	<p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>No response (25/2/22)</p> <p>Provided contacts/information of alternative disability organisations → EmployAbility Services (28/2/22)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kilbarrack 	MaintenanceKilbarrackIntreo@welfare.ie	No response (25/2/22)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Swords 	activationswords@welfare.ie	Would pass my email onto the Case Officers and Job Coaches in the office for their attention (28/2/22)
Open Doors Initiative	info@opendoorsinitiative.ie	No response (21/2/22)

Table 2: Name of ‘employment-related organisation/association for PWD’ in Ireland, contact details and email responses with corresponding date of last contact.

General Disability Organisations/Associations	Contact details	Email response
Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD)	ahead@ahead.ie	No response (8/2/22)
Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)	info@disability-federation.ie	No response (9/2/22)
DFI Communications Manager	xxx@disability-federation (name anonymised for confidentiality)	No response (25/2/22)
Disabled Women of Ireland (DWI)	disabledwomenireland@gmail.com	No response (13/2/22)
Enable Ireland	communications@enableireland.ie	No response (9/2/22)
National Disability Authority (NDA)	nda@nda.ie	Provided contacts/information of alternative disability organisations → AHEAD, Open Doors Initiative, DWI and the network of EmployAbility services across Ireland (21/2/22)

Table 3: Name of ‘general disability organisations/associations’ in Ireland, contact details and email responses with corresponding date of last contact.

Disability-specific Organisations/Associations	Contact details	Email response
<i>Sensory Disabilities</i>		
AsIAm	support@asiam.ie	No response (25/2/22)
Cochlear Implant Department Beaumont Hospital	cochlearimplant@beaumont.ie	Would mention my research request to Cochlear Implant Team in next meeting (11/2/22)
Senior Medical Physicist/Neuroscientist, Beaumont Hospital	xxx@beaumont.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)	Suggested I create a single PPT slide (see Appendix 5.2.) advertising my research to add to slideshow that is continuously running in the waiting area of Cochlear Implant Department (18/2/22) Displayed my research project slide in waiting area of Cochlear Implant Department (21/2/22)
Irish Deaf Society (IDS)	info@irishdeafsociety.ie	No response (9/2/22)
Irish Deaf Women (IDW)	irishdeafwomen@gmail.com	No response (15/2/22)
Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind (IGDB)	info@guidedogs.ie	Would circulate my project details to those who fit participant criteria (9/2/22)
National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI)	info@ncbi.ie	No response (15/2/22)
<i>Physical Disabilities</i>		
Central Remedial Clinic (CRC)	info@crc.ie	No response (25/2/22)
Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA)	info@iwa.ie	Forwarded my research request to Ability Team (11/2/22)

Head of Learning and Development, IWA	xxx@iwa.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)	Shared my email address with members of IWA so if any interest is shown they could contact me directly (15/2/22)
CEO of Paralympics Ireland	xxx@paralympics.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)	No response (15/2/22)
<i>Hidden Disabilities</i>		
Epilepsy Ireland - I See Beyond (campaign initiative)	support@iseebeyond.ie	CEO forwarded my email to Advocacy & Communications Manager (9/3/22)
Advocacy & Communications Manager of Epilepsy Ireland	xxx@epilepsy.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)	Reached out to three women who met inclusion criteria (9/3/22) - One woman agreed to do interview (9/3/22)
Invisible Disability Ireland	invisibledisabilityireland@gmail.com	No response (25/2/22)

Table 4: Name of ‘disability-specific (sensory, physical and hidden) organisations/associations’ in Ireland, contact details and email responses with corresponding date of last contact.

Disability Support Services/Access Offices in educational institutions across Ireland	Contact details	Email response
Access Office, Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT)	access@ait.ie	No response (13/2/22)
Access Office, National University of Maynooth (NUIM)	access.office@mu.ie	Would be granted approval for my research request to be posted on Maynooth Access Programme (MAP) Moodle page (9/2/22) Permission to hung flyer on noticeboard in MAP Office (21/2/22)
Educational Technology Officer, MU	xxx@mumail.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)	Posted my research request on MAP Moodle Page (17/2/22)
Disability Office, Dublin City University (DCU)	disability.service@dcu.ie	No response (8/2/22)
Disability Service, National University College of Galway (NUIG) Shannon College of Hotel Management Disability Service, NUIG	disabilityservice@nuigalway.ie (Same email address)	Data protection issues in regard to research projects, my request not viable as I am not a student of NUIG (10/2/22)
Disability Service, Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	askds@tcd.ie	No response (8/2/22)
Disability Service, University College Dublin (UCD)	disability@ucd.ie	Cannot share my request with students (8/2/22)
Disability Support Service, University College Cork (UCC)	disabilitysupport@ucc.ie	Included research project flyer in UCC weekly newsletter that goes out to students (24/2/22)
Disability Supports, Institute of Technology, Sligo (IT Sligo)	disability@itsligo.ie	No response (13/2/22)
Inclusion Supports, IT Sligo	inclusionsupport@itsligo.ie	No response (13/2/22)

Head of Disability Support Services, University of Limerick (UL)	xxx@ul.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)	No response (13/2/22)
Loreto College, Mullingar Guidance Counsellor at LCM	info@loretomullingar.com xxx@loretomullingar.com (name anonymised for confidentiality)	Issued email with my project details to all parents/students from LCM (8/3/22) - Potential interviewee sourced: not eligible (8/3/22) Would contact friends/colleagues in the National Learning Network, HSE occupational services and members of the Loreto community (28/2/22)
Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) • Midlands • Midwest Disability Officer, TUS	Disability@ait.ie disability@lit.ie xxx@ait.ie (name anonymised for confidentiality)	No response (13/2/22) No response (25/2/22) Policy that prohibits students from participating in research (14/2/22)

Table 5: Name of ‘disability support services/offices in educational institutions (schools/colleges/universities/ITs etc)’ across Ireland, contact details and email responses with corresponding date of last contact.

5.2. Research Project Recruitment Flyer

Your Help is Needed for a Research Study on Young Women with Disabilities in Employment

This research study is exploring ***“how the COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted employment among young women with disabilities (WWD) in the Irish labour market and their future career aspirations”***

WHO IS ELIGIBLE? <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Women with a sensory, physical or hidden disability.o Between 18 and 29 years of age.o Someone with experience of employment before and/or during the COVID-19 Pandemic and who will continue to do so after the Pandemic.	PARTICIPATION INVOLVES: <ul style="list-style-type: none">o 30+ minute interview at a time of your convenience INTERVIEW LOCATION <ul style="list-style-type: none">o MS Teams or Zoom.o In-person interviews can be conducted upon request.	PLEASE CONTACT:
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(Source: created by researcher using MS PowerPoint software)

Figure 2: Research Project Recruitment Flyer circulated to various different organisations via email, and hung up in waiting rooms and on noticeboards per request by author and upon granted approval.