

Babies & bylines



More journalists are going freelance to look after their kids, but can you chase stories with a child on your lap? **Asks Lauren Kelly**

Joy Joses (*Journalism BA*, 2000) 42, begins her day at 7am. She wakes her two sons, Jubril, 11, and Jaleel, 9. Then, while making Jaleel his jam on toast, and Jubril his Coco Pops, she sends emails and schedules Twitter posts for her online lifestyle publication, Melan Mag. At 8:20am she walks the boys to school, before beginning the working day – writing, commissioning and coordinating content – until 3pm, when the school run comes round again.

After pick-up, Joy makes dinner and edits copy on her iPad while the children practice the piano and do their homework. Her husband gets home around 8pm and together they put Jaleel and Jubril to bed. A few times each week Joy will then head to a networking event for a couple of hours.

She works on features when she gets home. At 1am, she drags herself away from her desk and is up again at 7am, ready to repeat the routine.

Joses is among an estimated two million professional freelance workers in the UK, one in seven of whom are mothers, according to the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed (IPSE). The hours fit around school runs and mean that Joses is on hand to comfort her children when they're sick and never misses a school play. The flexibility of freelance work may explain why the number of freelancing mothers in the UK has almost doubled since 2008 to reach 302,000 in 2016.

Ben Machell (pictured left, *Periodical*, 2005), 36, a freelance writer for *The Times*, *Vice*, and *The Evening Standard* says that freelancing has allowed him to fit his work around his children. "Since there's nobody checking where you are and you can work when the children are in bed, it's the most ideal set-up for a parent," he says. "I've never missed bedtime because of work."

Gaby Hinsliff longed for a similar arrangement. At 38 she resigned from her role as political editor of *The Observer* in 2009 and started freelancing in order to spend more time with her two-year-old son Freddie. She says: "I used to work 18 hour days and have three hours of sleep – it reached a stage when I was barely seeing Freddie, or my husband. Now that I'm freelance I work mainly from home. I'm more in control of my hours, and I can organise my workload in regards to term time and school holidays."

When the worlds of children and work collide, however, it is not always so simple. Katie Pisa (*International*, 2000), 41, a freelance writer for CNN and mother of three, has created an office at home – but that doesn't stop the children disturbing her. "They always manage to find me, even when I lock myself away," she says. "Whenever I do a Skype call, I genuinely spend the entirety of the call praying that the kids don't walk in and ask me something embarrassing. They usually do. It can be difficult to remain professional when working at home, surrounded by children," she says.

Tom Lamont (*Periodical*, 2004), 35, a freelance writer for *The Guardian* who has two children aged four and one, has been in similar predicaments. He explains that there have been times when he has edited articles with a child on his lap or sat in a playground while having a phone call. He has been known to cradle a snoozing child during an interview – "That is when it all falls apart," he says. But when London

pre-school nursery places cost as much as £22,000 a year and freelance journalists in the UK earn on average £20,000 a year, is there any alternative to this balancing act?

For those without support, perhaps not. Joe Crowley, 35, a freelance television presenter for *The One Show* and *Countryfile*, who has a three-year-old son, says the only reason that he and his wife can afford nursery is because she doesn't work in journalism and has a well-paid job. "At one point we were paying £1,200 a month. For a journalist to be able to afford that, it would mean a lot of news shifts."

He adds: "There have been times when I've had to turn down work due to not having childcare, and in television it's very dangerous to turn down work. If you say no to a job then somebody else will do it – if they do it well then you may not get a look-in after that."

But it's not always the journalists who are turning down work to look

"COLLEAGUES SEE YOU AS A PARENT, RATHER THAN A JOURNALIST"

after their children. Sometimes employers pass over journalists because they have children. Crowley, for example, maintains he was not offered a reporting job in Ireland because the company thought he wouldn't want to be away from home. "It made me so incredibly angry that I was judged as a parent and not as a journalist. I do not want the fact that I have a child to affect my career and, as far as I'm aware, it shouldn't," he says.

Similarly, Hinsliff discloses that she was "definitely" treated differently when she came back to work after maternity leave. "People see you in a different category – colleagues see you as a parent, rather than a journalist. Colleagues would ask 'When's the next one due?'," she says.

On the other hand, parenthood can sometimes enhance a journalist's career. Machell, for instance, notes that with less time to spare he has become more efficient with his writing and produces more content than he did before he had children.

Similarly, Lamont has found that fatherhood has enabled him to relate to celebrities who are parents and has given him the confidence to ask them "icky things" about their children.

Likewise, Kalpana Fitzpatrick, 40 – a freelance writer for nine years, who has a six-year-old and a four-year-old – used her knowledge of motherhood to launch the blog *Mummy Money Matters* in 2012. The site was the runner up for the Personal Finance Blog of the Year at the Show Me the Money Blogger Awards 2016. It helped Fitzpatrick land her current job as finance editor at Hearst Magazines UK.

Combining work and children can, however, come at a price. According a 2014 study by childcare provider My Family Matters, six in ten mothers said that although they welcome the financial and emotional independence of working, they still felt guilty about it. Fitzpatrick says: "Every mother has experienced guilt. I've spoken to all of my friends and they, like me, have all suffered from it." Joses, affirms this: "I have internal guilt. I question my decision to work. Am I doing the best by my children or am I being selfish? Can a parent truly have it all?" ♦

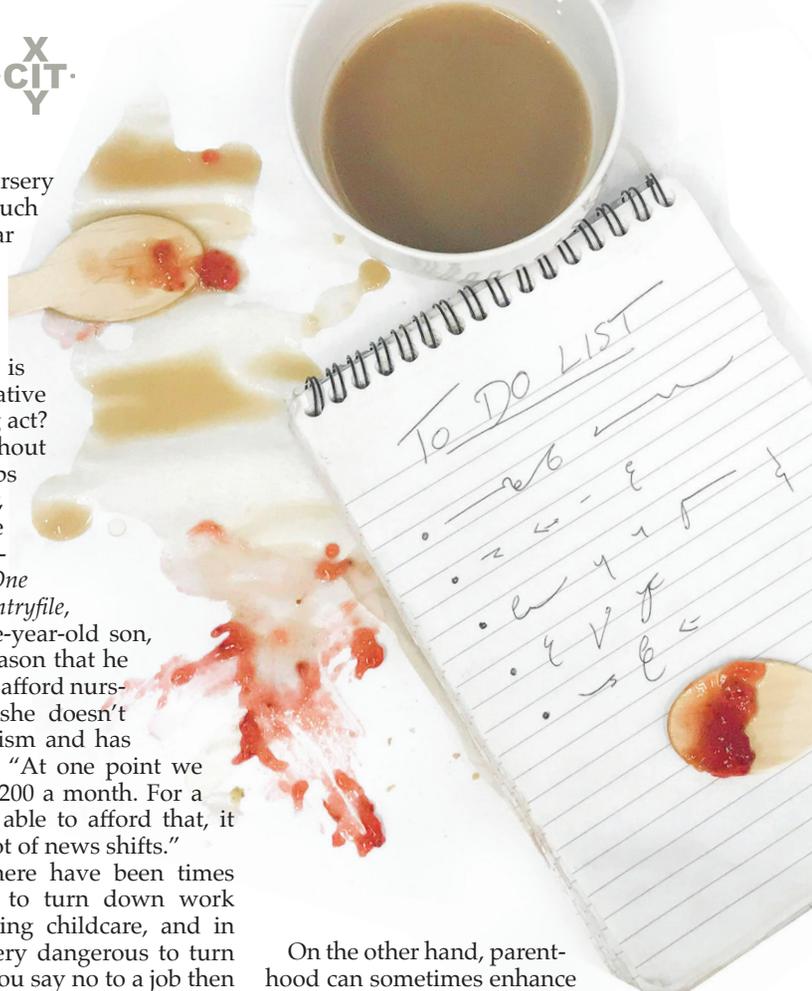


IMAGE: ZHOU ZHANG