

# **The DISCOVerY project**

## **The career progress of disabled researchers who are also minoritised by race, gender and caring responsibilities**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Preethi Premkumar

# Outline

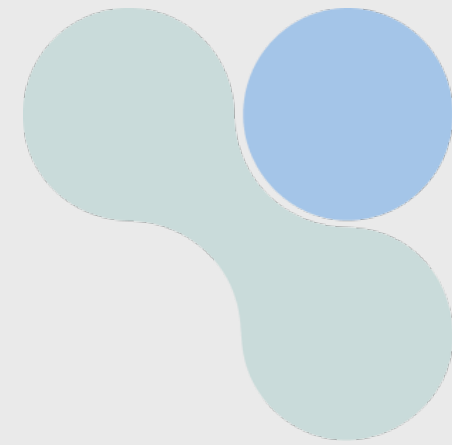
Background

What we did

Impact

Recommendations

Next steps



# Journey of an academic researcher

- Primarily teaching and supporting students
- Delivering lectures, seminars
- Marking coursework
- Administration around delivering of courses
- Applying for funding
- Conducting the research and disseminating the findings

# Perceiving career progress



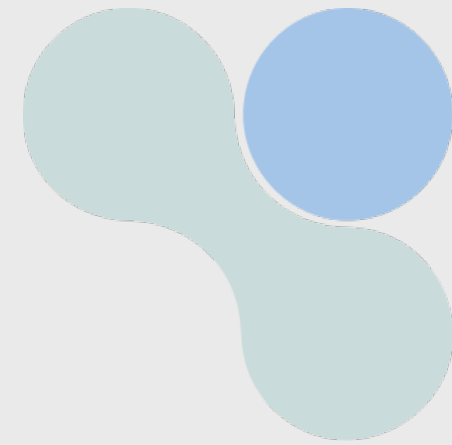
Social cognitive career theory (Zacher et al., 2019): An academic's career development depends on

- Individual characteristics, such as gender and personality styles,
- Contextual factors, such as working conditions, support networks, professional networks and career development training,
- Active career behaviours, such as making career choices

# Career progress of disabled researchers

- Poorly researched
- Academic staff are reluctant to disclose a disability because of the stigma of being “othered”
- Resort to activism to defend their roles
- Risk losing their jobs
- Need to conform to the able-bodied model
- Need to justify their roles because of difficulty sustaining the long working hours
- Need to negotiate their working hours and manage expectations about productivity

# Career progress of racially minoritised researchers



Are not promoted equally as White men

Black women are least likely to be promoted to Associate Professor or Professor compared to White men in the Medical profession (Clark, 2024)

Racially minoritised academic general medical practitioners (18%) are under-represented among speakers at the annual clinical fellows conference (Howe et al., 2024)

# Career progress of women and those with caring responsibilities

Women are delayed in being promoted compared to men

Women publish less, have smaller circle of influence in professional networks and their ideas are supported less by funding organisations (Casad et al., 2021)

Progress favours an autonomous sense of agency rather than a relational sense of agency which favours men

Women given more teaching because it is seen as communal and nurturing

# Aims

Enablers and barriers to the career progress of minoritised researchers who identified as disabled or who were minoritised by race, gender and caring responsibilities and how they experienced career progress during and after the pandemic.

# Method

Three stages of research

## **Focus groups**

Two focus groups in May 2025, one on early- to mid-career researchers and another on late career researchers. Eight participants, some were disabled and some were from a racial minority

## **Online survey**

Survey designed from the themes of focus groups, including the decision for choosing a career in research, seeking career guidance, receiving and the positive and negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

128 academic researchers

## **Interviews**

17 participants in the survey were interviewed about recommendations for practice

# Results – Focus group

Motivation for becoming a researcher was largely altruistic and underpinned by the desire to seek social justice

Establishing a career in research was often contingent on support from key individuals who advocated on researchers' behalf



# Results - Survey



Researchers with sensory impairments or multiple disabilities perceived receiving more support during the COVID pandemic than researchers who were not disabled.

Among disabled researchers, greater perceived support from the institution predicted having a greater sense of career progress.

# Results - Survey

Among racially minoritized researchers, seeking career guidance and choosing a career in research because of the stability it offered predicted having a greater sense of career progress.

Among women and those with caring responsibilities, the type of employment contract predicted having a greater sense of career progress

# Results - Interviews



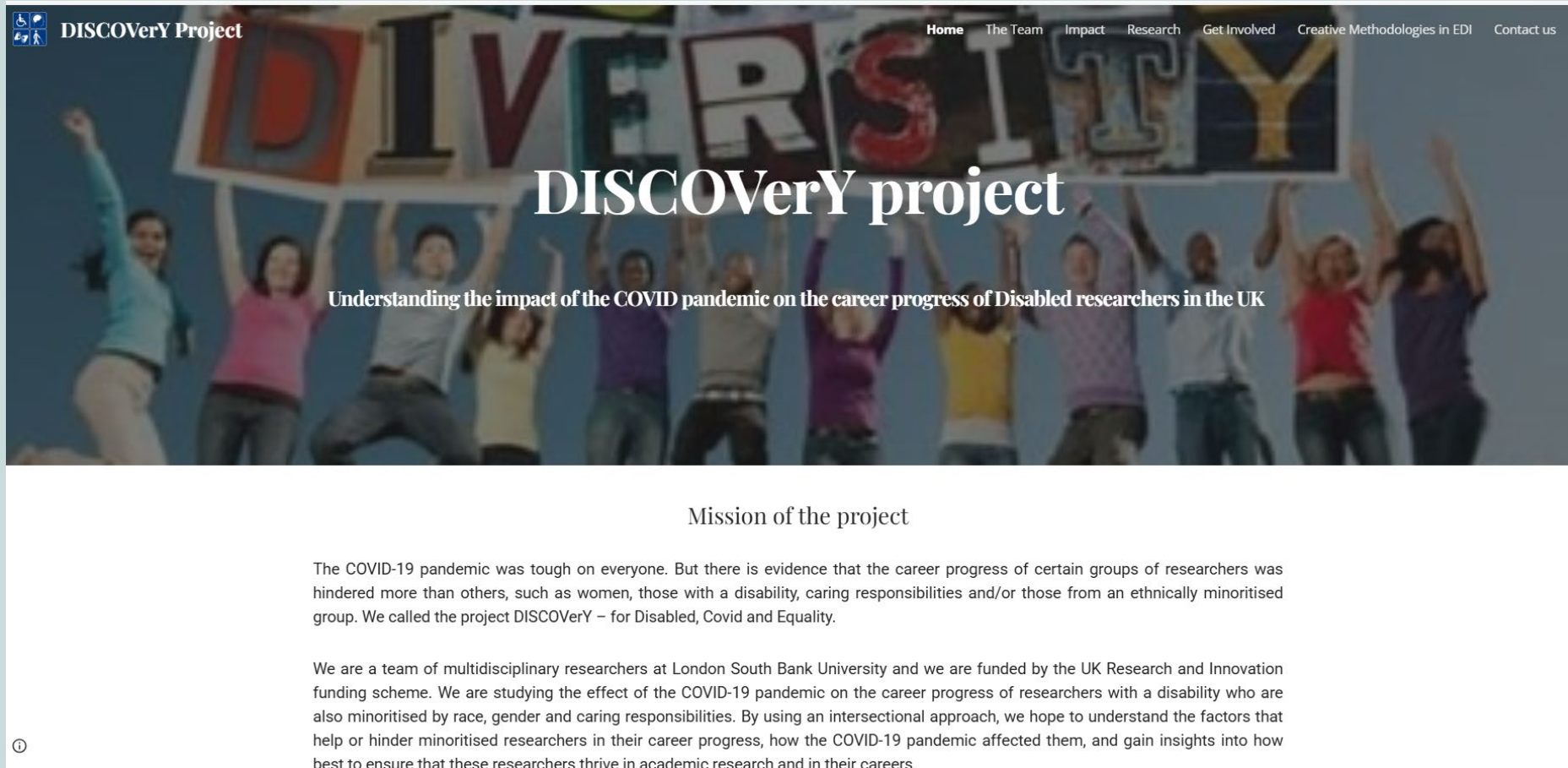
## Opportunities

- Visible disabilities became invisible
- Normalisation of remote working
- Caring responsibilities – ages of children mattered

## Challenges

- Diffuse and distant relationships

# Website: DISCOVerY Project

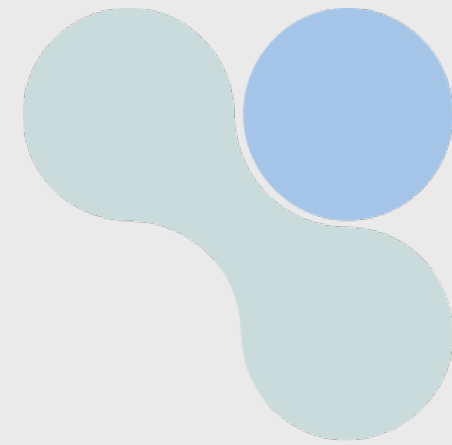


# Exhibition

[LSBU EDI Discovery Installation video v4 on Vimeo](#)



# Pathways to impact



[LSBU DISCOVERy Project on Vimeo](#)

# Thank you

