

Modern Families Index 2017

Summary Report

The Modern Families Index is the most comprehensive survey of how working families manage the balance between work and family life in the UK. It has been published annually by charity Working Families and Bright Horizons Family Solutions since 2012.

Who took part in the Index?

The Index provides a snapshot into the lives of working families from across the UK: 2,750 working parents responded with at least one dependent child aged 13 or younger who lives with them some or all of the time.

The sample gathered equal numbers of fathers and mothers of all ages. Respondents represented a range of household incomes and family structures: the majority of respondents (78%) identified as being from couple households and in just under half (48%) of couple households both parents worked full time. The most common household income was between £40,000 and £60,000 for couple households, and below £40,000 for single parent households.

To download the full report, and for helpful advice and information for working parents, carers and employers, please visit workingfamilies.org.uk and brighthorizons.co.uk.

Balancing the twin currencies: time and money

- Only one in five families says they have got the right balance between time (to spend with family) and money (earning or having enough income) to see their family thrive, with over a third saying they haven't got enough time or money.
- 47% think that over the last two years it has become financially more difficult to raise a family.

Time is an equally valuable currency for families:

- More than a third of parents (36%) said they would take a pay cut to work fewer hours.
- Millennials were more likely to agree: 41% would reduce their salary compared to 31% of older workers.

"Only one in five families feels that they are getting it right. This is cause for concern – and a call to action for positive change." - **Sarah Jackson, Working Families**



Working hours squeezing parents' family time

Family remains the greatest priority for working parents but balancing the increasing pressures of work is taking its toll, with only a third of parents leaving work on time every day:

- 72% of parents work at home in the evenings and at weekends, with 41% saying this happens often or all the time.
- One in five parents working full time is putting in five extra weeks a year – the equivalent of their annual holiday allowance - in unpaid work, just to keep up with the demands of the job.
- Dealing with workload is the most common reason parents give for working extra hours (67%), followed by lack of time to get proper planning and thinking done (57%), organisational culture (54%) and manager attitude (47%).

"Where we used to talk of a work-life balance the reality is that for most of us it is more of a blend. This increasingly complex reality risks the creation of a 'fatherhood penalty' if not addressed." - **Denise Priest, Bright Horizons**

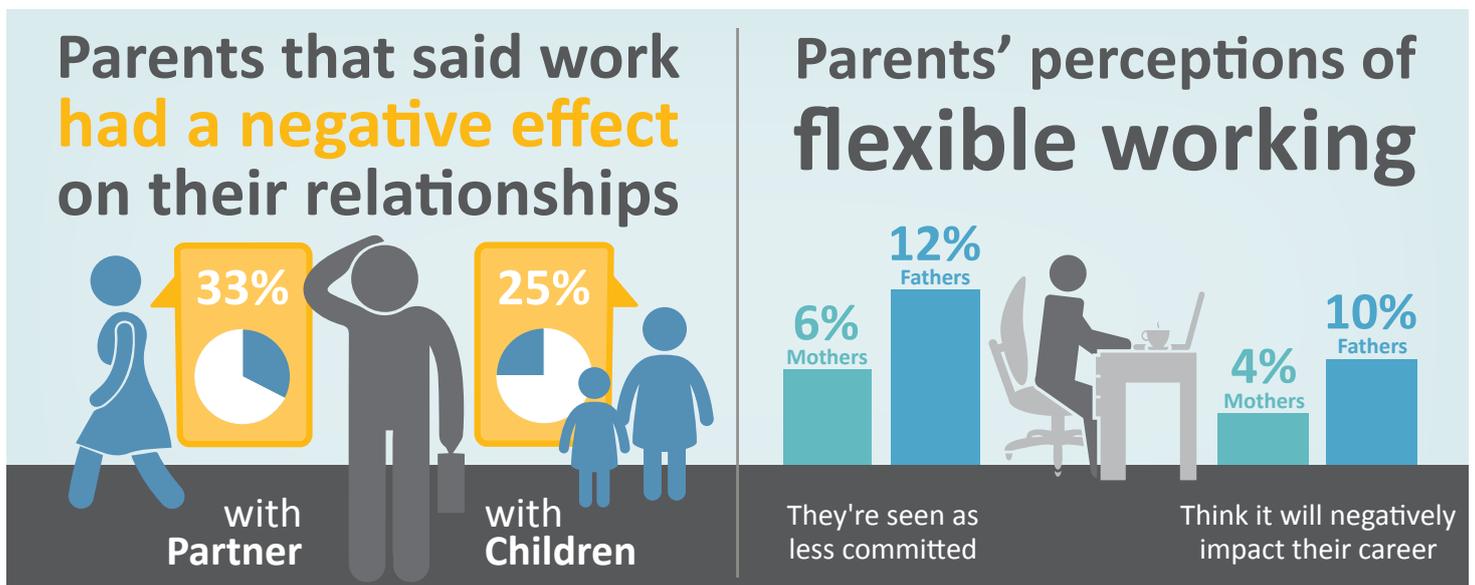
The impact of time-poverty

Families are feeling the pressure:

- 50% of parents agreed 'my work life balance is increasingly a source of stress'.
- 43% said that work had a negative impact on spending time helping children with their homework often or all the time.
- Almost half (48%) said working hours regularly got in the way of spending time with their children.
- A third said that work had a negative effect on their relationship with their partner and a quarter said it led to rows with their children.

Many parents would consider absenting themselves from the workplace in order to deal with burnout:

- 37% would consider using annual leave, 29% taking sick leave and 25% cutting back their hours.
- One in ten parents would consider resigning from work without having another job to go to.



The 'flexibility gap'

Parents are keen to mitigate the effects of work on family life. They identified flexible working as a key way of getting a better balance, but many felt that they could not make use of it because of the nature of their job, manager's attitude or workplace culture:

- Almost half of parents are not comfortable raising the issue of workload and hours with their employer.

Fathers are less comfortable asking for formal flexible working arrangements - and more likely to lie or bend the truth to their employer about their family responsibilities.

- Twice the number of fathers compared to mothers believe flexible workers are viewed as less committed and over double the number of fathers believe working flexibly will have a negative impact on their career.
- 44% of fathers have lied or bent the truth to their employer about their family responsibilities, compared to 37% of mothers.

Despite legislative and employer efforts to provide work-life balance opportunities, the way that work is organised and prevailing workplace cultures and attitudes remain significant barriers:

- 37% of parents felt resentful towards their employer about their work-life balance, including those parents that work flexibly, suggesting that there are also issues around workload and overwork.

Parents said they would leave employers who do not offer good work-life balance opportunities.

- In contrast, parents said that employers who afforded them a good work-life balance would benefit from more loyal (57%), motivated and productive employees (55%).

The ‘fatherhood penalty’

Fathers increasingly want to take an active part in childcare but are having to consider the same compromises women have had to for decades. This runs the risk of creating a ‘fatherhood penalty’ – whereby men move into lower paid and lower quality work because they have become fathers:

- 47% of fathers agree they would like to downshift into a less stressful job, reflecting the difficulty they face in reconciling work and home.
- Eight out of ten mothers and seven out of ten fathers agree they would assess their childcare needs before taking a new job or promotion, indicating that both genders now feel they might have to downgrade their careers in order to care for their families.
- Just under half of millennial fathers (46%) said they would be willing to take a pay cut to achieve a better work-life balance, vs. just over a third of fathers overall (38%).



Sharing caring – mothers, fathers and grandparents

Availability and affordability of childcare remain major issues for working families, especially for those parents who work atypical or irregular hours:

- 41% of parents are using grandparental care, making it the most common type of non-parental childcare.
- When childcare arrangements breakdown, traditional gender roles resurface. Mothers and fathers agree that it is twice as acceptable for women to take time off work for childcare as it is for men.

Almost a fifth of parents reported that their employers were unsympathetic toward their childcare responsibilities:

- 11% said their employers made no allowances.
- 8% felt they had to conceal childcare responsibilities as they feared it would result in negative views of them at work.

What needs to change?

- 1** Too many employees feel that the flexibility they have is not enough to give them the balance they aspire to, and flexibility is too frequently viewed as a concession or an inconvenience. To address the ‘flexibility gap’ we need to shift the starting point so that jobs are advertised as flexible as the norm rather than the exception. This would compel hiring managers to think through the best way to get the job done and level the playing field for access to flexibility. Working Families has developed the *Happy to Talk Flexible Working* strapline for employers to signal their commitment to flexibility from the outset¹.
- 2** Greater availability of flexible working will not support parents’ work-life balance if employers continue to rely on extra discretionary effort from employees to get the job done. This is not sustainable. The twin challenges for organisations are to think more carefully about job design and what the role really requires – to be realistic about what can be done in the hours available – as well as the potential for flexibility. Getting both right will help employers deliver social as well as business objectives – providing an opportunity to attract people for whom full time or inflexible work is a barrier to getting back into work, helping to ensure fairness and social justice. For employers the return on investment can be felt in employee sentiment and loyalty towards their employer.
- 3** Fathers want to be more involved with their children’s lives. Seven out of ten fathers would consider childcare before taking a new job or promotion. To tackle the motherhood penalty and prevent a fatherhood penalty taking root, we need to end the zero sum game between career progression and family life. The creation of a properly paid period of extended paternity leave would send a clear signal about the role that both sexes play in bringing up their children, and provide a realistic route for parents to exercise real choice.
- 4** Employers should consider other, practical ways to support their employees with caring responsibilities. Employers could consider a subsidised workplace nursery or securing nursery places on behalf of their employees, making childcare more affordable and more convenient. Childcare arrangements can sometimes go awry; offering access to emergency childcare can provide a solution to this. Back-up care for dependants should be considered as a key part of an employer’s attraction and retention package. Intervention like these send a clear signal to parents that they are supported at work, and help shift the workplace culture to one that is supportive of caring responsibilities at home.
- 5** For many families childcare can be inflexible and unaffordable. The success of the childcare offers in different nations of the UK – free childcare hours, tax free childcare and changes to the childcare element of Universal Credit, for example – must be measured by the extent to which they can meet the needs of diverse families and offer parents maximum choice in the way they organise care. Additional public funding may be needed to help local authorities address gaps in childcare provision, alongside encouraging employers to consider their role in supporting employees’ childcare needs.
- 6** Grandparents are still an important part of the childcare mix for many families. But the proposal to extend the Shared Parental Leave scheme to grandparents risks undermining the intention of the policy – to give fathers the opportunity to share care of their children – and perpetuating gender divisions in caring across the generations. A more effective way of supporting grandparents who take on childcare is needed. Investing in the UK’s childcare infrastructure, and promoting flexible working opportunities to grandparents, are useful starting points.