

Modern Families Index 2019



Foreword from Denise Priest

Director of Employer Partnerships, International, Bright Horizons

I am delighted to be writing this foreword on behalf of Bright Horizons, and to say how proud we are to be once again partnering with Working Families to produce and share the *Modern Families Index*.

In today's Instagram world we can sometimes be misled into thinking that everyone else "has it all" – effortlessly juggling careers and family life, in perfect interior-designed homes – and that if we are finding things less than perfect ourselves we must be doing something wrong. That is why research such as the *Modern Families Index* is so valuable in providing a realistic picture of today's working parents' and carers' lived experiences. This year's study shows that only a quarter of parents taking part in the *Index* felt that they had the right balance between work, family and income and almost half said that work gets in the way of spending quality time with their family: reading or playing with their children or taking them to activities. These findings are certainly reassuring reading if you are feeling Instagram-envy! More importantly, the honest feedback which our survey respondents share with us each year helps create the context in which we can all explore what works, what doesn't and how we can improve.

Several themes emerge from this year's survey, including the issue of high workloads and blurred boundaries, both of which result in parents staying late at work, or checking and responding to emails once they get home. Nearly half of the survey respondents said they felt technology had increased the number of hours they worked – no wonder their family life, and their wellbeing, was affected. We need to look more realistically at the design of job roles, and ways of ensuring that flexibility works both ways and is well supported.

What has particularly caught my notice this year is that nearly twenty years into the new millennium the stereotype of men as providers and women as carers persists, despite the reality being that most mothers and fathers both work, and in the majority (over three-quarters) of the couples in this survey, both partners worked full-time. Tackling gendered assumptions about who works and who cares is crucial in the fight for gender equality in the workplace and has implications not only for personal wellbeing and family life but also for businesses as they strive to address the gender pay gap, and to attract and retain the best talent.

It was heartening therefore to see that some of our surveyed families (almost a third) said they share care equally. Looking at the data there are several elements which seem to make this more likely, such as age and attitude, but the most significant was their employer. Judging by their feedback these parents seem to have a more supportive workplace as measured by multiple factors – they are less likely to feel resentful toward their employer, less likely to consider downshifting, less likely to say that work-life is becoming increasingly stressful, and less likely to have an unhealthy lifestyle due to work.

This comes as no surprise to me; Bright Horizons is privileged and proud to partner with many employers of choice in the matter of the support they provide to their working parents. We witness time and again the value of a family-friendly workplace culture and measures such as flexible working, and access to dependant care services, in terms of our clients' experience of improved employee wellbeing, careers thriving, and retention of key talent. These success stories are achieved through employers committing to listening to their working families and planning accordingly. By reading this report you too are listening – thank you.



Foreword from Jane van Zyl

Chief Executive, Working Families

This year's *Modern Families Index* offers a unique insight into the boundary where family and work meet. It shows how parents are configuring their working time to find the best fit for themselves: striking the sometimes-elusive balance between work and time with family, ensuring they have enough money to thrive, and developing a fulfilling work-life.

Almost half of working parents in the *Index* are using flexible working—and many more want to use it than are able to—but the report also shows that flexible working needs to be carefully managed. Flexibility doesn't necessarily generate a better work-life balance or quality of life for those who use it, often because part-time and flexible jobs are poorly designed and managed within workplace cultures that don't necessarily support it.

For many working parents, the boundary between work and family life has become increasingly blurred. Technology has made possible new ways of working flexibly. But it has also led to a feeling of having to be available all the time, driven by managers' expectations and organisational culture. In some cases, parents said that technology has increased their overall workload.

This is linked to a wider and persistent problem where parents are routinely putting in extra hours to get the job done, which links back to poorly designed jobs. Inevitably, work and family life then come into conflict. More time spent working and thinking about work means less time for family life. Flexibility alone can't help here, if all it means is shifting hours worked around an unrealistic workload.

However, it is important to note that parents value flexibility when it is working well. The *Index* shows us that when flexibility allows parents to have more control over their time, it plays a significant role in their decisions about their careers. Many would prefer to stay in a job with flexibility than move to a new one where it might not be available.

The survey results show the benefits of effective flexibility. It is worrying, then, to see so many parents say that they are not permitted to work flexibly, or that flexibility is not available to them at work. The government's recent announcement around a duty on employers to consider whether a job can be done flexibly, and advertise it as such, is therefore very welcome. What is crucial to the success of any

statutory measure is properly designed part-time and flexible jobs that give parents genuine control over their working lives.

There are other positive signs in the *Index*. More fathers are taking an active role in family life and some couples are sharing childcare equally. Fewer fathers are doing extremely long hours and many feel at least partially positive toward their employers about their support for a good work-life fit.

Over the last six years, the *Modern Families Index* has explored changing attitudes and expectations about how family and work should fit together. This year's *Index* continues this vital work, demonstrating both the value and limitations of flexibility, and offering recommendations for the government and employers to change the world of work for the better. In examining the challenges that working parents face and offering practical solutions, this report can be a powerful catalyst for positive change.



Families in the UK today

There are 6.2 million couple households with dependent children in the UK and 1.7 million lone-parent families.¹ Of the 14 million dependent children living in families, the majority (64 per cent) live in a married-couple family. The percentage of dependent children living in cohabiting families increased from 7 per cent in 1996 to 15 per cent in 2016, while the percentage of dependent children living in single-parent families changed little. Married couples with dependent children have more children on average than other family types. In 2016, 55 per cent of single parents with dependent children had one child, whereas 40 per cent of married couples with dependent children had one child.²

Dual-earner households are now the norm in the UK. Among couple families, the percentage of both parents working full-time increased from 26 per cent in 2001 to 31 per cent in 2013.³ In 76 per cent of couple families with one child, both parents are in employment. Very similarly, in 75 per cent of couple families with two children, both parents are in employment. Families with one child are most likely to have both parents in full-time employment (40 per cent). Families with two children are more likely to split employment so that fathers work full-time and mothers work part-time (41 per cent). In couple

families with three or more dependent children, 41 per cent have just one parent in employment. Couple families with three or more children are most likely to split their employment so that the father works full-time, and the mother is not in employment.⁴

The employment rate for mothers was 74 per cent in 2018, an increase of 5.1 per cent over the last five years. Employment rates are higher for both women and men with dependent children than those without.⁵

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

'a single person must earn £18,400 a year to reach MIS (Minimum Income Standard); each parent in a working couple with two children must earn £20,000. The minimum wage remains too low to reach MIS, with widening shortfalls for some groups. A lone parent with two children, working full-time, had disposable income 4 per cent below the MIS in 2008 but 20 per cent below today.'⁶

The UK median income is £569 per week – an increase of 3.5 per cent since 2017. Wages are highest in London at £713 per week. Earnings for both men and women tend to climb to a peak at around 50 years old, after which they begin to fall.⁷

¹ ONS (2017) Families and households 2017. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2017>

² ONS (2017) Families and households 2017. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2017>

³ Connolly, S; Aldrich, M; O'Brien, M; Speight, S; Poole, E; (2016) Britain's slow movement to a Gender Egalitarian Equilibrium: Parents and Employment in the UK 2001 - 2013. *Work, Employment and Society*, 30 (5) pp. 838-857

⁴ ONS (2017) Families and the labour market 2017. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/familiesandthelabourmarketengland2017>

⁵ ONS (2018) Families and the labour market 2018. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2018>

⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018) A minimum income standard for the UK 2008–2018. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-uk-2018>

There are 13 million working parents in the UK⁸ (employed and self-employed). Parents in the UK use a variety of flexible working arrangements. According to the Labour Force Survey, 853,000 have flexible working hours and 494,000 work term time only (the majority of whom are women).⁹

There has been a change in fathers' working hours in the UK. Although they still work some of the longest hours in Europe, their hours have fallen from 47 per week in 2001 to 45 per week in 2011, driven by a decline in weekend and evening working. There has also been a significant change in the proportion of fathers in the UK working 48 hours or more: in 2001, 40 per cent of fathers worked 48 hours or more, but this proportion had declined to 31 per cent by 2013.¹⁰

The time parents spend on housework has declined significantly between 2000 and 2015. There has also been a reduction in the time spent on paid work – to be expected, given the relative decline in working hours experienced by UK workers since the turn of the millennium.¹¹

While mothers tend to perform more routine family activities and be more involved with children than fathers,¹² fathers' involvement with children has grown and continues to grow – from less than 15 minutes a day in the mid-1970s to three hours every weekday

(with more at the weekend) by the late 1990s.¹³ In 2005, fathers did a third of parental childcare within households.¹⁴

On average, men spend 16 hours a week doing unpaid care work – including childcare, laundry and cleaning – while women spend 26 hours a week on these activities. Analysis of time-use data shows that women carry out an average of 60 per cent more unpaid work than men.¹⁵

This gendered division of labour within households is a barrier to women's participation in the labour market. Women are more likely to work part-time – 51 per cent worked part-time compared to 18 per cent of men. When couples have children, women are even more likely to move to part-time work to accommodate the new demands of home and family – 65 per cent of mothers with a child under 11 worked part-time compared to fewer than half (47 per cent) of other women. And fathers with a child under 11 are slightly more likely to work longer hours than other men – 33 per cent compared to 31 per cent. These work patterns persist across every country in the EU-28.¹⁶ In addition, work and family policy with shorter paternity leave perpetuates the idea of mothers as carers and fathers as workers, although Shared Parental Leave (SPL) provides an opportunity for some parents to make different choices.

⁷ ONS (2018) Annual survey of hours and earnings (ASHE). <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2018>

⁸ ONS (2018) Parents and non-parents by sex and age of youngest dependent child and different working arrangements, UK and regions. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/adhocs/009340parentsandnonparentsbysexandageofyoungestdependentchildanddifferentworkingarrangementsukandregions2018>

⁹ ONS (2018) Parents and non-parents by sex and age of youngest dependent child and different working arrangements, UK and regions. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/adhocs/009340parentsandnonparentsbysexandageofyoungestdependentchildanddifferentworkingarrangementsukandregions2018>

¹⁰ Modern Fatherhood (2016) Parental working in Europe. <http://www.modernfatherhood.org/>

¹¹ Nat Cen (2019; forthcoming) Changing patterns of parental time use in the UK]

¹² Modern Fatherhood (2013) Fathers' involvement with children. <http://www.modernfatherhood.org/>

¹³ Dad Matters. Why fathers should figure in your work Fathers Network Scotland (2014)]

¹⁴ Dad Matters. Why fathers should figure in your work Fathers Network Scotland (2014)

¹⁵ Women shoulder the responsibility of unpaid work, ONS. <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/the-value-of-your-unpaid-work>

Who took part in the 2019 Index?

Demographics are consistent with previous years. There were 2,750 respondents, equally distributed between the regions and nations of the UK. Slightly more mothers than fathers responded: 53 per cent and 47 per cent respectively. The majority – 76 per cent – of parents were aged 26 to 45; 46 per cent of parents were millennials.¹⁷

The vast majority – 84 per cent – were white British. Sixty-three per cent were either married or in a civil partnership, while 17 per cent were cohabiting.

Raising a family

Overall, 49 per cent of respondents said they thought it was getting more difficult financially to raise a family over the last three years, while 27 per cent thought it hadn't changed. Less than a quarter thought it had got easier, painting a picture of increasing financial pressure for the majority, which has implications for their work and life choices. Single parents were more likely, at 69 per cent, to feel this pressure.

Only those living in London thought it was either getting easier or not getting harder. Eleven per cent of Londoners reported it was getting harder, against a UK median of 50 per cent. People in the North West were more likely to think it had got harder than people in any other region in the UK, with 62 per cent reporting that it had become more financially difficult to raise a family over the last three years.

Parents who said they felt it was becoming more financially difficult to raise a family were also the most likely to say they had increased their hours to provide more income.

Increased hours

Respondents were asked about adjustments they had already made to their working life for family reasons. Fifteen per cent said they had increased their hours to boost their income. Mothers were slightly more likely than fathers to have done this, at 16 per cent compared to 13 per cent respectively.

These respondents were younger than the average age in the cohort and had lower incomes. However, this wasn't down to a lack of work – on average, they were working two hours more per week than the wider cohort.

They were also more likely to report poor wellbeing and having neither enough time nor money for their family to thrive.

This group was significantly more likely to have received a promotion, suggesting they had accepted career progression to obtain more money, but that this had resulted in working more hours.

Subsequently, their wellbeing had decreased, and they still felt they had neither sufficient time nor money. This was a particular issue for single parents.

¹⁶ Norman, H. and Watt, L., Why aren't men doing the housework?
<https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/workflex-blog/why-arent-men-doing-the-housework>

¹⁷ For this report, Millennials are those born between 1983 and 2002.



Figure 1 shows the avenues that respondents pursued to obtain a better work-life balance, including increasing working hours.

Adjustments I have made for work-life reasons

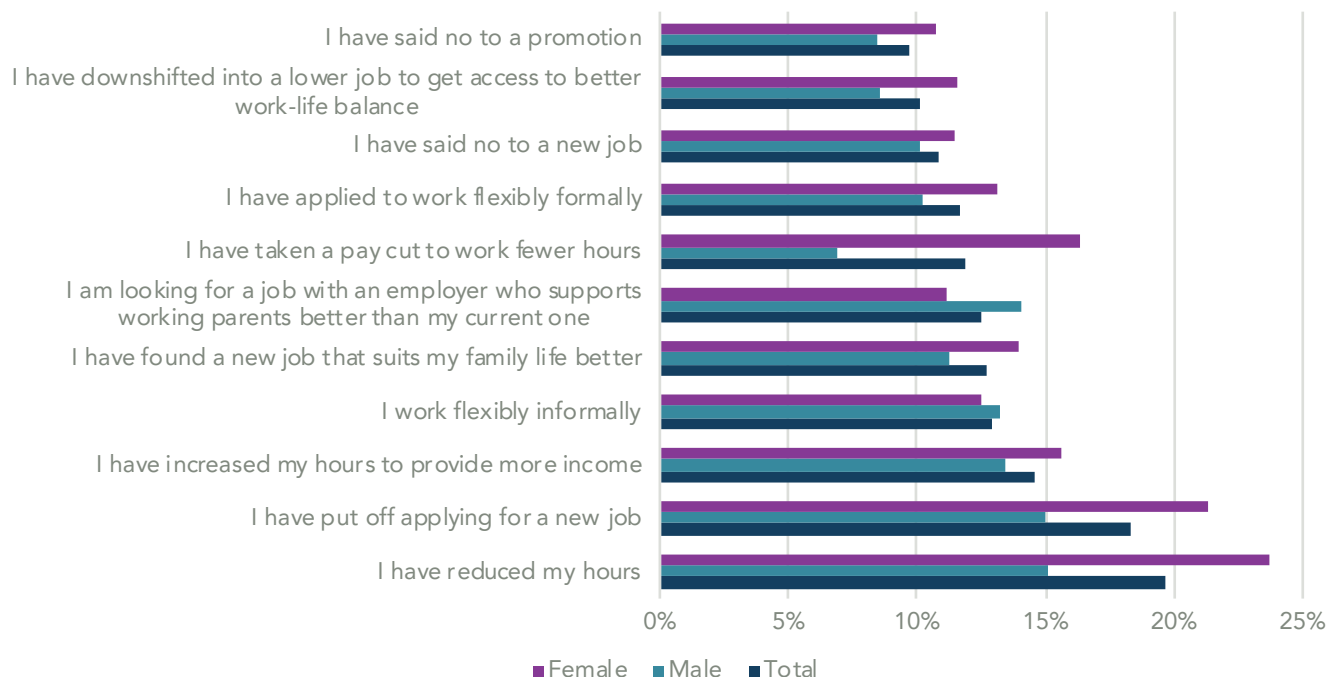


Figure 1 n=2,770 Adjustments I have made for work-life reasons.

A number of positive and negative choices are evident here. On the positive side, parents were making use of flexibility, either formally or informally. However, there were more negative choices, with evidence of limiting careers through refusing promotion and new jobs, withdrawing (at least temporarily) from the jobs market and trying to find a better, more flexible employer. There is also evidence that higher-level jobs continue to lack flexibility: 10 per cent of respondents had deliberately downshifted to lower-level jobs in an attempt to find the flexibility they desired.

Senior workers, flexibility and work-life fit

Senior workers enjoy the best access to flexible working. However, they don't derive as many benefits from this as do more junior workers with access to flexibility. Satisfaction with work-life fit is slightly higher for senior workers, but this is because more senior workers are on average older, better paid and have more access to flexibility. When we controlled for these factors, we found that increased seniority tends to decrease satisfaction and wellbeing. This suggests that, for these jobs, a work-life satisfaction cost is related to the level of the role.



Working time and flexibility

Respondents presented a mixed picture on working time. More mothers than fathers worked part-time, although the proportion of dual-earner full-time couples in the sample was very high: three quarters (76 per cent) were dual full-time earners. As noted earlier, slightly more mothers than fathers had increased their hours. This may be as a result of greater equality and improved career prospects for mothers. However, considering the financial pressure that families are under, it seems more likely that full-time work for both partners in a couple household might be more a necessity than a positive choice. More than half – 56 per cent – of those who had taken on more hours to raise more income also reported feeling it was getting harder financially to raise a family.

In terms of working time, the general pattern was for people to work more than their contractual hours rather than less. Every week, women worked an average of 1h17m (6 per cent) more than their contracted hours – not including paid overtime. For men, this figure was 1h35m, or 4.7 per cent more than their contracted hours.¹⁸ Many workers were putting in more than an extra hour every day. For example, 20 per cent of those working a 37-hour week were putting in more than five extra hours each week, as shown in Figure 2. The top five sectors for putting in extra hours are shown in the table below.

Sector	Extra hours worked p/w (average)
Professional, scientific & technical activities	2.22
Education	2.04
Wholesale, retail & repair of motor vehicles	1.69
Information & communication	1.52
Accommodation & food services	1.48

Table 1 Top five sectors for extra unpaid hours worked

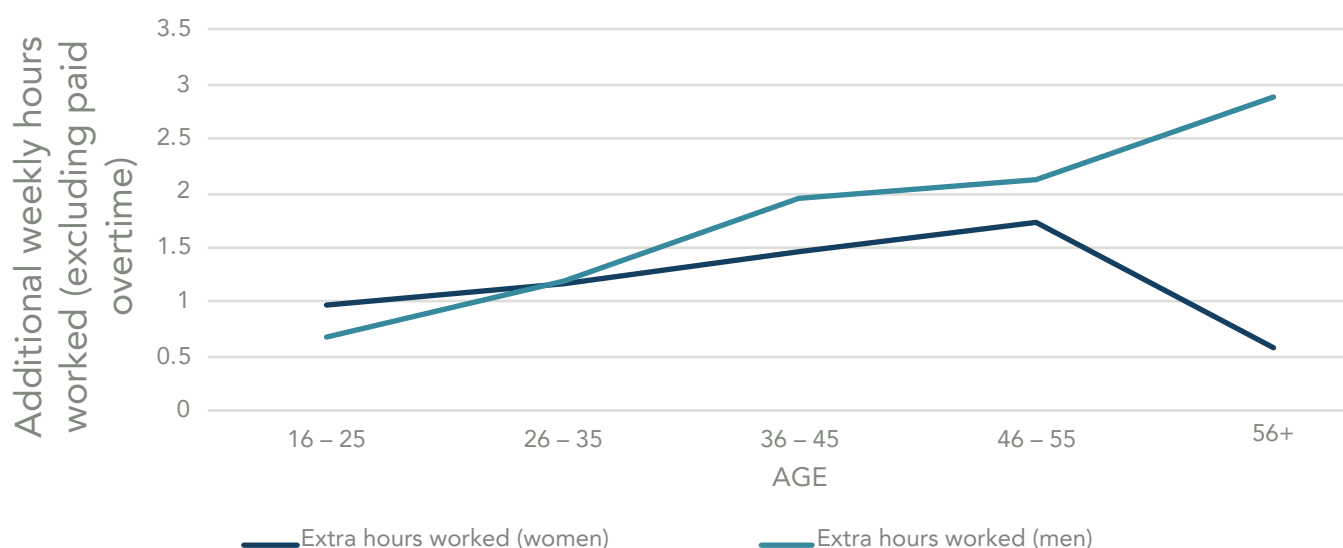


Figure 2 n=2,770 Additional hours worked by gender

¹⁸ These results excluded people on zero-hour contracts – as well as outliers who said they worked more than 15 extra hours, or fewer than 15 hours in total, per week.

Just over a third (36 per cent) of parents managed to leave work on time every day, while 30 per cent said they only left on time a maximum of half the week. Those most likely to be able to leave on time were junior and administrative workers. Very senior managers and directors were more able to leave on time than middle managers and professionals, suggesting that being very senior allows more discretion about when to leave work, perhaps because there is effectively no one to report to.

Just under half (49 per cent) of parents worked flexibly: 47 per cent of fathers and 51 per cent mothers. Younger parents were slightly more likely to work flexibly than older colleagues, and self-employed parents were especially likely to work flexibly (86 per cent). Parents working in SMEs were slightly more likely than those in larger organisations to work flexibly, as shown in Figure 3.

Percentage of flexible workers by employer size

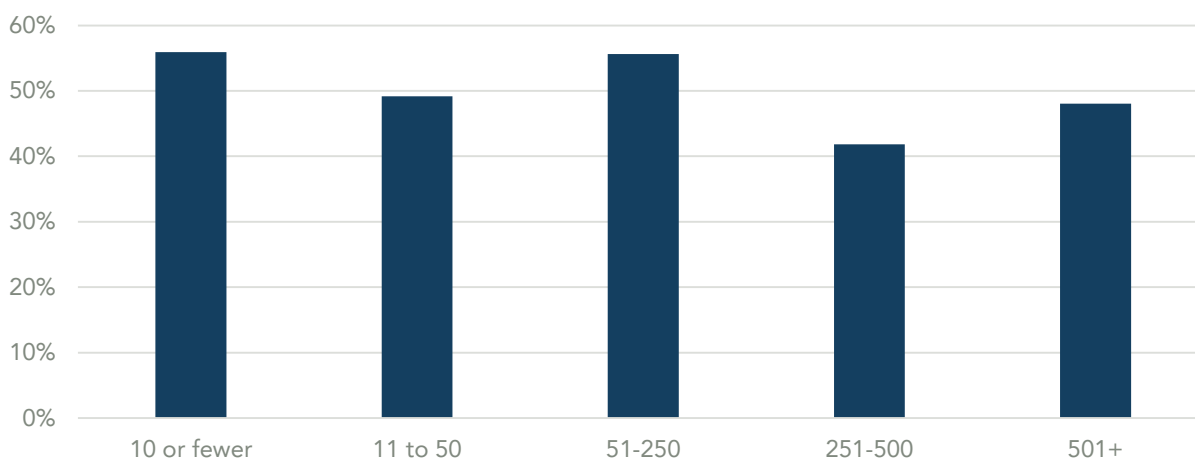


Figure 3 n=1,380 Percentage of flexible workers by employer size

Respondents were asked why they worked flexibly. The majority – 63 per cent – did so for childcare reasons, followed by 31 per cent who did so for wellbeing reasons. More than a quarter said their employer required flexibility – for example, they had to work at home at least some of the time – and 24 per cent said they worked flexibly to pursue outside interests or hobbies.

Those who worked flexibly for non-caring reasons were 12 per cent more satisfied with their work-life fit. However, those whose employer required them to work flexibly experienced a decrease in wellbeing. This indicates that choice may be an important factor in maximising the positive impacts of flexible working practices – where flexibility is primarily seen as a benefit for the employer, work-life balance for individuals may be seen as less important.¹⁹

¹⁹ Lewis, S., Anderson, D., Lyonette, C., Payne, N., and Wood, S. (eds) (2017) Work-life balance in times of recession, austerity and beyond. New York: Routledge.

The types of flexible working respondents used are shown in Figure 4.

Types of flexible working

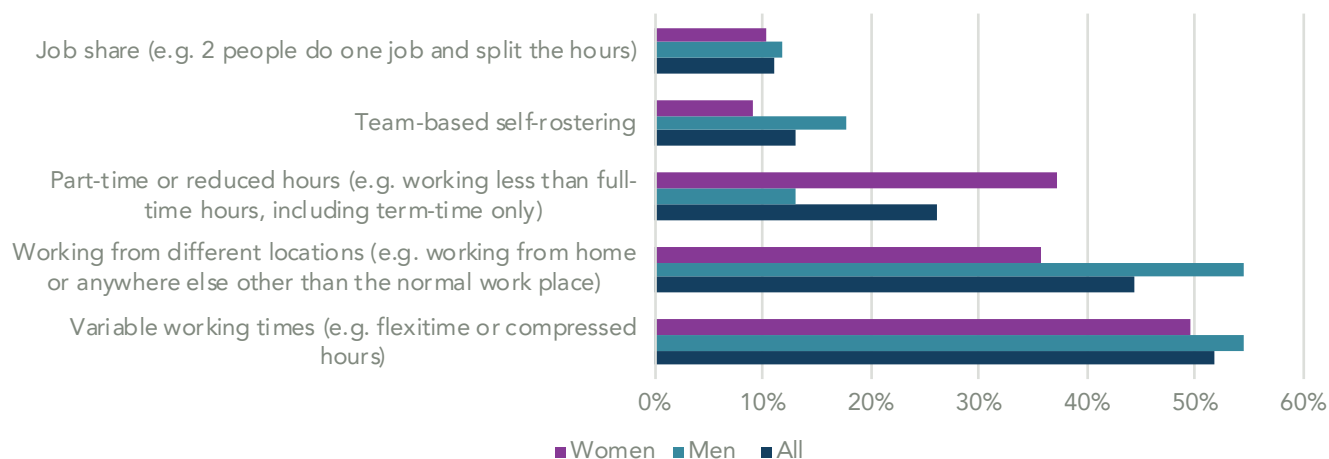


Figure 4 n=1,379 Types of flexible working used

Flexible working and satisfaction with work-life fit

Working flexibly was associated with a 5% increase in satisfaction with work-life fit, even when controlling for other factors such as income, seniority and age. Being able to take time off for childcare caused a 10 per cent increase in satisfaction. Employees who worked more hours were less satisfied with their work-life fit, while self-employed and part-time workers were more satisfied. Although only a small proportion of the overall sample were zero-hours or agency workers, these people were the least satisfied with their work-life fit. Taken on its own, working from home didn't have a noticeable effect on satisfaction.

Employees who had never changed employer were the most satisfied of any group with their work-life fit. This indicates that ensuring employees can find a good work-life fit is good for retention. It also suggests flexibility is accrued, and that flexible recruitment by default is likely to give scope to parents to move across the labour market without being 'stuck'. Conversely, dissatisfaction risks driving employees to seek a different, more family-friendly employer.

Flexitime was the most commonly used option by both mothers and fathers. Other flexible working types were more gendered: men were more likely to use flexible workplace arrangements,²⁰ and women were more likely to work using reduced hours arrangements.

Job-sharing, which mothers and fathers used almost equally, was used by only 11 per cent of respondents, but these respondents had high levels of work-life satisfaction.

²⁰ Cranfield University and Working Families (2008) Flexible working and performance, Working Families.

There were more non-flexible than flexible workers (51 per cent) in the sample, although only 14 per cent said that they didn't want to work flexibly. This indicates that there is both an unmet demand for flexibility and a combination of workplace factors that act as barriers to flexibility. Although some roles may not immediately seem to have much scope for flexible working, it is unlikely that none at all could be accommodated. Thinking about when, where and how much work is done, as well as the design of jobs, would go some way to unlocking flexibility. Other factors, such as company culture and manager

attitude, are persistent issues that need to be dealt with at an organisational level. Until this is done, employees are likely to vote with their feet.

The education, motor vehicle and health and social care sectors were proportionally the most likely to say that flexible working was not available to their employees. Although employees have the Right to Request Flexible Working, these parents did not reach this stage because their employers had effectively communicated that it wasn't possible. Respondents' reasons for not working flexibly are shown in Figure 5.

Why do you not work flexibly?

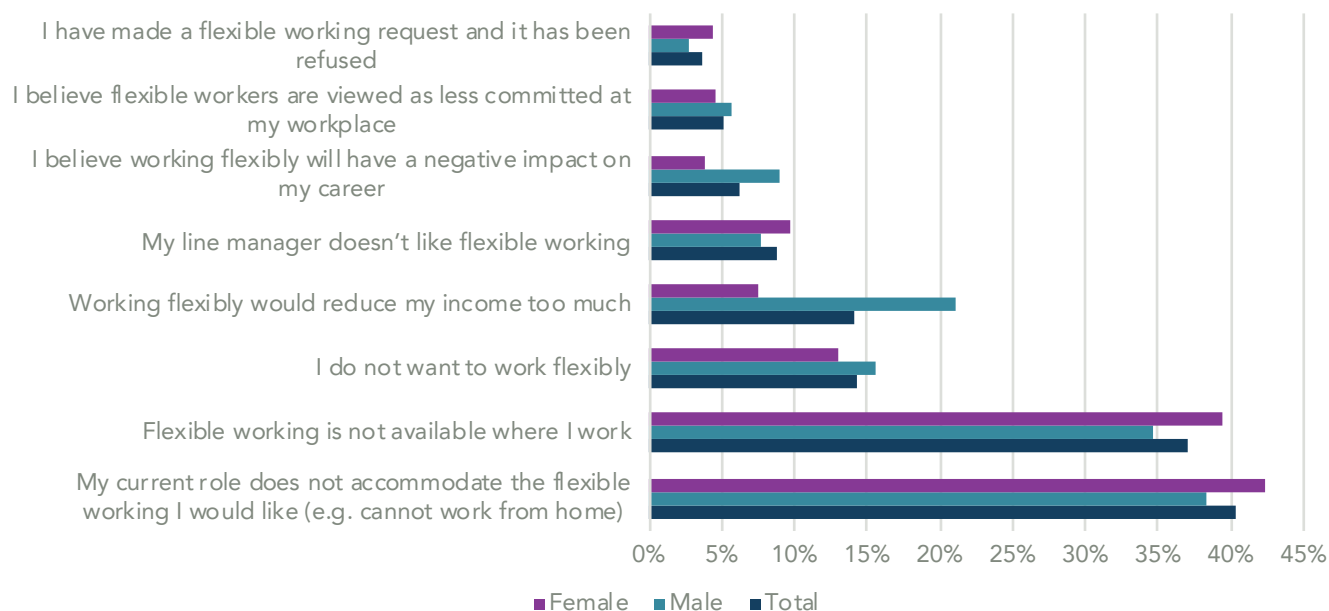


Figure 5 n=1,386 Why do you not work flexibly?

Making flexible working available

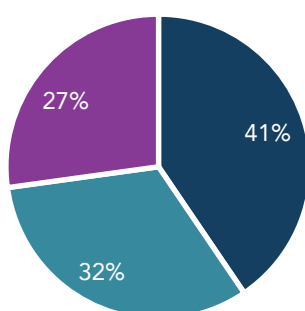
There are good reasons for employers to think about making flexible working available. Employees who said it wasn't available where they worked, or that their manager didn't like flexible working, were unsurprisingly less satisfied with their work-life fit and less happy about their opportunities for work-life balance. This affected more mothers than fathers and

more junior than senior workers. Those who worked in education, health and social care were overrepresented when it came to limited access to flexible working, as well as those in accommodation and food industries and transport and storage.

Forty-four per cent of respondents said they found it difficult to avoid dipping into work after they had gone home. This was more of an issue for fathers than mothers – 50 per cent compared to 38 per cent respectively – and affected Millennials more than older age groups. The more senior the role, the more likely

this was to happen. People generally didn't do this for positive reasons – only 27 per cent did it because they wanted to, while the remainder did so because of pressure or manager expectations. Almost half – 48 per cent – said this happened often or all the time, as shown in Figure 6.

Why do you dip into work after getting home?



- It's a way of keeping on top of things at work
- I can't resist quickly checking
- My manager expects me to be available

Figure 6 n=1,217 Why do you dip into work after getting home?

Two issues are apparent here. First, workplace culture includes an expectation of availability, extending presenteeism into the home. Second, workloads are unmanageable or poorly designed, meaning the job cannot be done in the time available. 'Job design' means matching work and hours.

These two factors are likely to be related, and manager expectations of availability are probably driven by pressure on their own workloads and time. High workloads and expectations of presenteeism are therefore likely to cascade down from higher up in the organisation, negatively affecting employees' work-life satisfaction and wellbeing – as well as entrenching gender inequality, as those with caring responsibilities are not able to put in the extra hours.

This suggests that job design and workload are structural issues that flexible working arrangements alone cannot resolve, which the figures appear to back up: 51 per cent of those dipping into work after getting home said they worked flexibly.



Overall, 78 per cent of parents said they put in extra hours at work. The reasons for doing so are shown in Figure 7.

Why do you work extra hours?

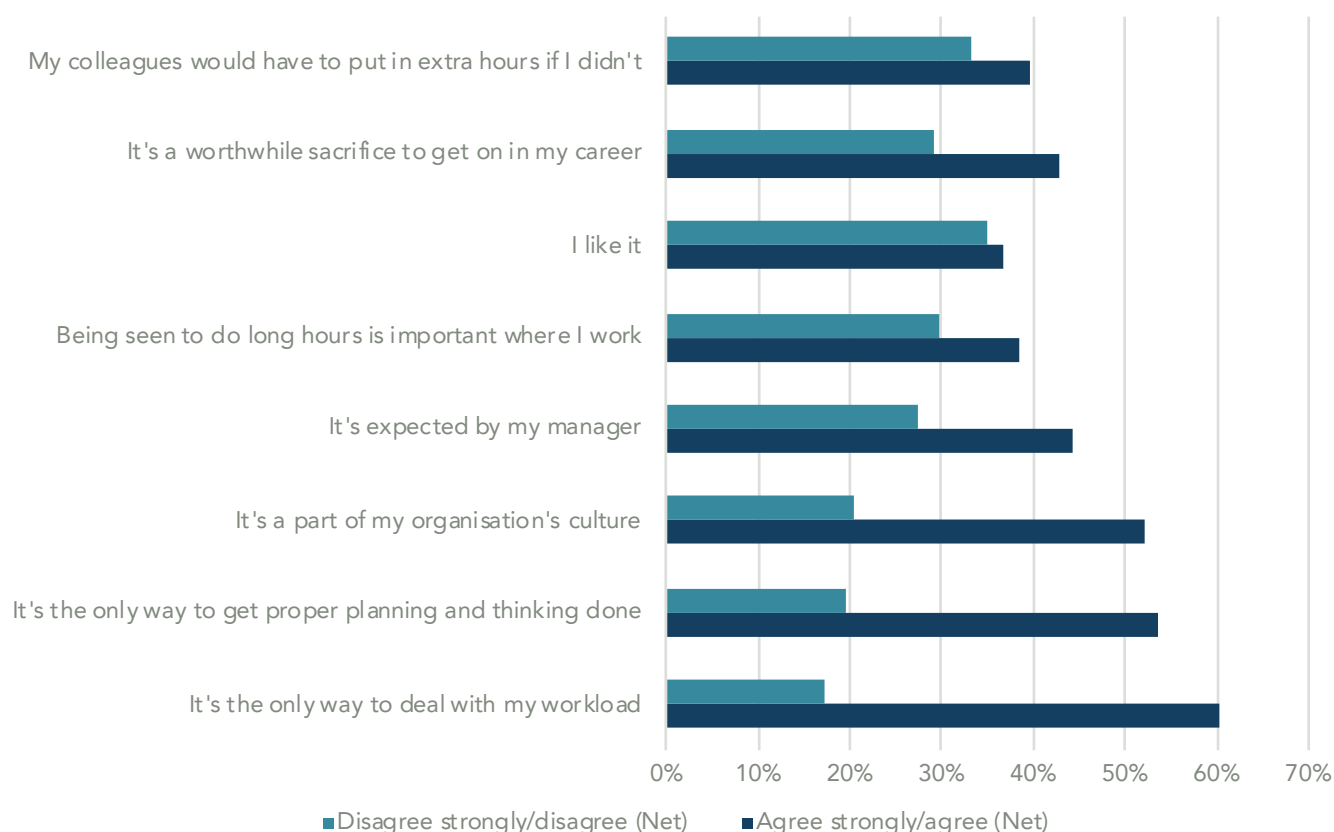


Figure 7 n=1,760 Why do you work extra hours?

The issues of culture, manager expectation and job design (where hours and tasks are matched) are again apparent here. Sixty per cent of respondents identified their workload as a problem, and 54 per cent said they

lacked the time to do the job properly. Culture and expectations drove extra work, with the same negative effects as noted previously, including dipping into work after getting home.

Technology, work and blurred boundaries

The question of work overspill is important for both employees and employers. Parents reported that work regularly and negatively spilled over into home life, disrupting everyday activities as well as health and wellbeing. Technology was a mixed blessing for parents in the *Index*. Fifty per cent, and slightly more women than men, said it had helped them obtain a better work-life balance. However, 31 per cent remained equivocal about the benefits, and 19 per cent felt it had harmed their work-life balance. For many people, technology has increased their work hours – 44 per cent agreed with this statement, as opposed to 29 per cent

who disagreed. Work expanding into family time is unlikely to have positive consequences, especially if this is persistent and long term.

More parents were 'separators' rather than 'blenders', in that more (47 per cent) felt the boundaries between work and home had become too blurred by technology, while only 25 per cent disagreed. While a technology-enabled blending of work and life may suit some workers, parents would prefer a less blurred division. This is particularly true of higher-income workers. Those who felt that boundaries were too blurred reported having poorer wellbeing.

Childcare

Forty six percent of parents used some form of childcare. Of these, half used formal, registered childcare whilst the other half used informal childcare (provided by a family member, for example) or a mixture of both. Childcare was a key consideration for families, with 78 per cent saying that they would consider their childcare arrangements before applying for a new job or accepting a promotion. This applied to both mothers and fathers (85 and 71 per cent respectively).

Parents who used formal childcare were more likely to report that they had received a promotion within the last five years (69 per cent) than those who used informal care (56 per cent). Split by gender, both mothers and fathers who had been promoted in the last five years were more likely to report using formal childcare – 85 per cent of fathers who had been promoted in the last five years reported using formal childcare versus 75 per cent of fathers whose childcare arrangements aren't formal. The same figures for mothers are 56 per cent versus 46 per cent. Figure 8 shows the proportion of parents promoted (and when) by childcare type:

Promotion by childcare type (all)

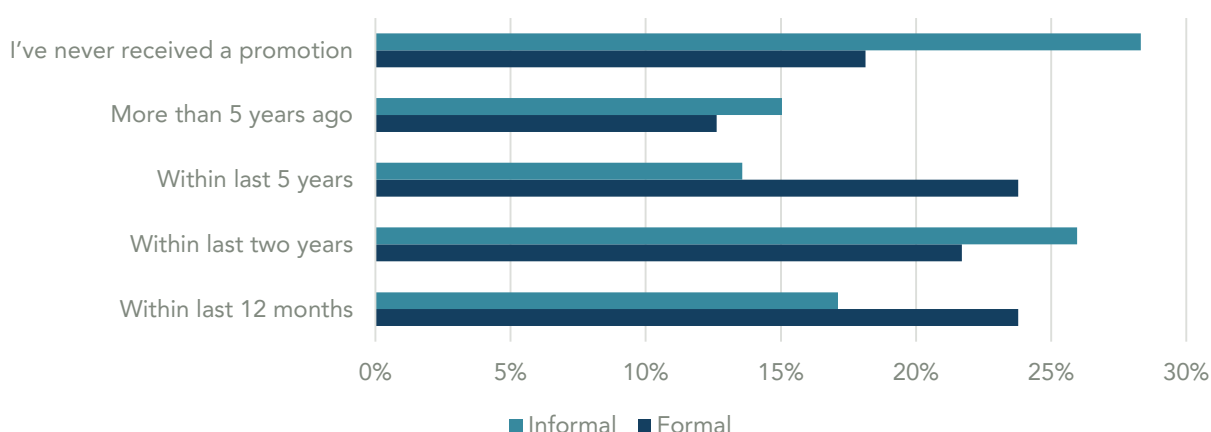


Figure 8 n=1,012 Promotion by childcare type

Middle managers were more likely to use formal childcare by a factor of 2:1 and senior managers by a factor of almost 4:1. Conversely, parents who were junior workers were almost as likely to use informal as formal childcare.

Parents thought that there was a role for employers to play. Twenty seven percent of those who used any type of childcare – formal and informal - said they believed employers should provide childcare. More than twice this number - 57 per cent - thought that the government needed to do more by making it easier to find affordable childcare.



Family life and work

The highest priority for parents is family. This means that decisions about family life affect the way they engage with opportunities at work. The majority of parents said they would, for example, weigh up their

childcare responsibilities before moving to a new job. This is an issue for fathers as well as mothers, as shown in Figure 9.

I would carefully consider my childcare arrangements before taking a new job or promotion

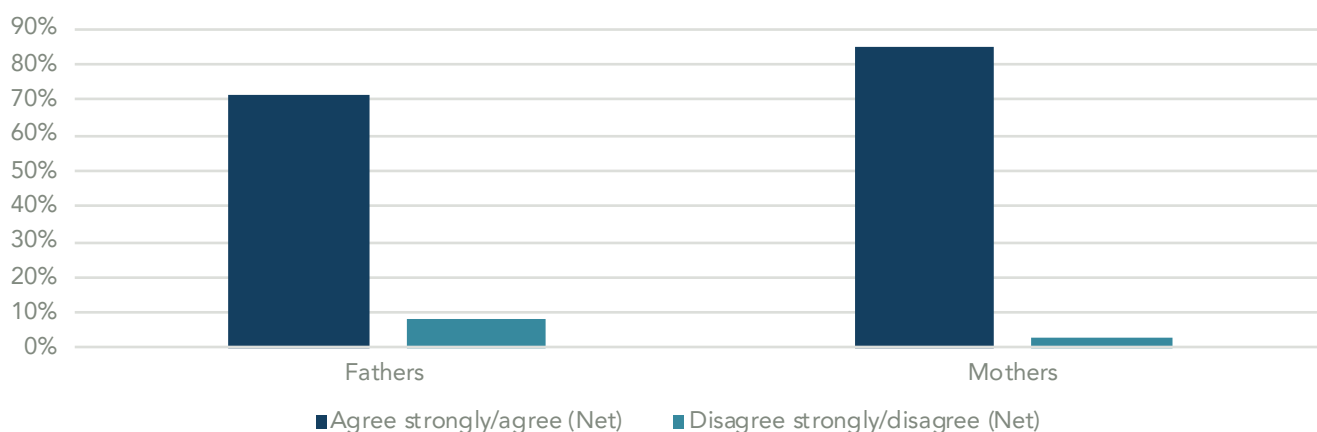


Figure 9 n=2,770 I would carefully consider my childcare arrangements before taking a new job or promotion

Millennial parents are more likely than older parents to weigh up their options, even when controlling for the age of the youngest child. This is part of a wider picture when considered alongside other findings: millennial parents are more likely to be considering downshifting, reducing their hours or taking pay cuts to obtain a better balance between work and family life.

The importance of flexibility to parents was highlighted by the numbers who weren't seeking career progression because they weren't sure they

would be able to secure flexible working arrangements that suited them in a new role. Fifty-eight per cent – 51 per cent of fathers and 68 per cent of mothers – said they intended to stay in their existing job over the next two years.

One reason for this was a lack of flexible opportunities in the job market, leading to parents – especially women – not seeking opportunities for advancement. Sixty-five per cent of mothers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I will stay in my job because I won't be able to get the flexibility I have now elsewhere', compared to 50 per cent of fathers. This is a waste of talent and potential. It points to a need for better childcare provision and the creation and promotion of flexible jobs. Concerns about a 'parenthood penalty' – whereby parents are unable to fulfil their economic potential, and move across and up in the labour market, simply because they have become parents – would appear to be well founded.



Parents reported that work overspill presented a problem because it interfered with normal family life. The effects were substantial, with parents reporting high levels of disruption, as shown in Figure 10.

How often does work impinge on family life?

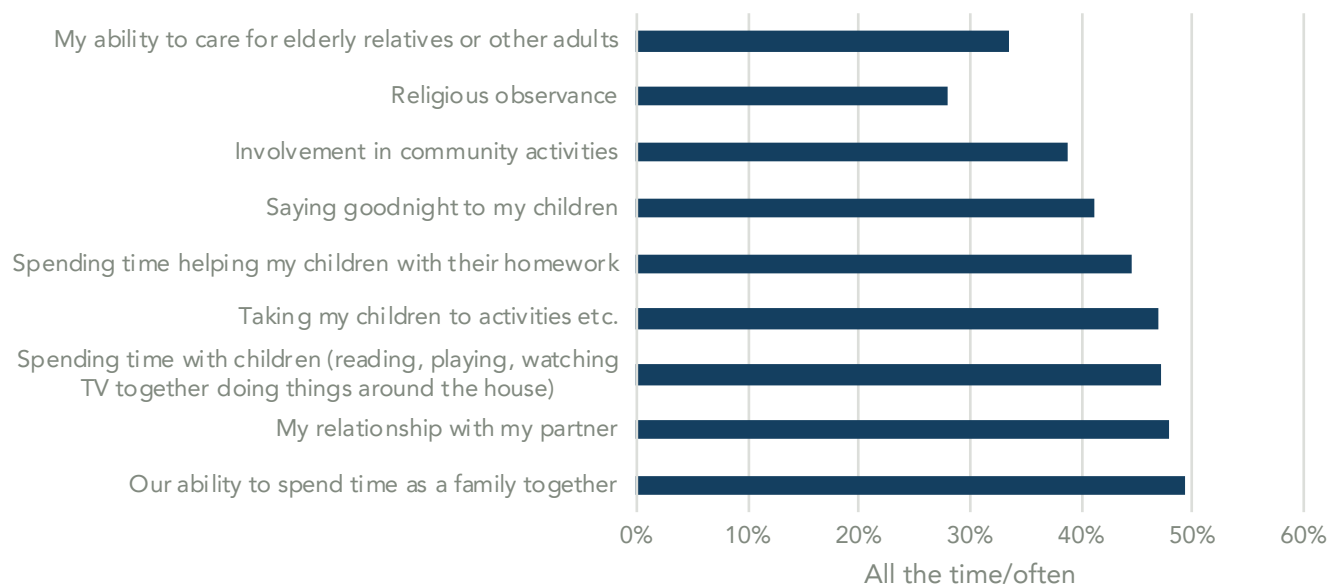


Figure 10 n=2,770 How often does work impinge on family life?

Where family life and work come into conflict there is the potential for negative effects both at home and at work. Parents also reported the effects of working time on their wellbeing, saying it had noticeable negative impacts on the amount of sleep they could get (47 per cent), not being able to take exercise (47 per cent), eating unhealthily (43 per cent), arguing more with their partner (32 per cent) and arguing with their children (28 per cent).

Respondents were asked to assess their family wellbeing in terms of time and money, as shown in Figure 11. Only a quarter thought they had the right balance for their families. The increasing financial pressure felt by parents is combining with a demanding work environment to produce a situation in which family life is under pressure.

Reported balance between time and income

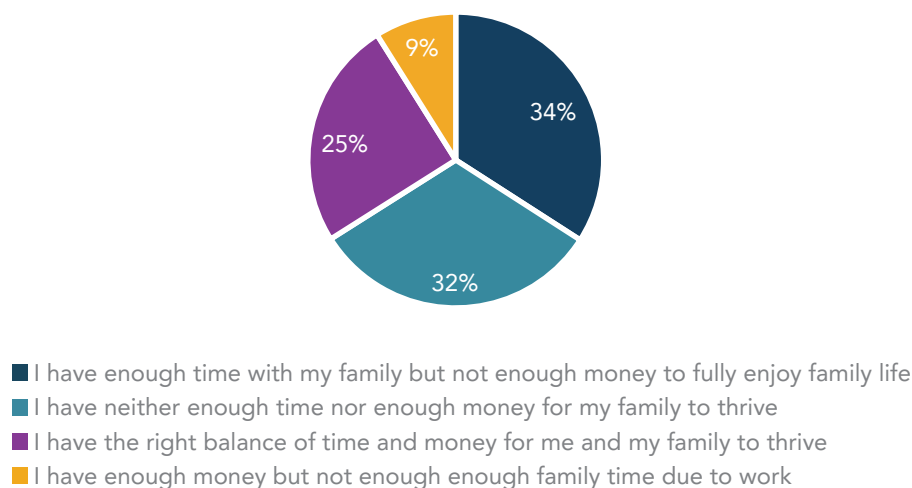


Figure 11 n=2,770 The reported balance between time and income

Wellbeing and work

Parents were asked to evaluate their wellbeing in relation to their work-life fit. Twenty-nine per cent said it was poor often or all the time, while 38 per cent said it was poor some of the time. When asked how they would respond to poor wellbeing, parents said they would primarily struggle on in the hope it would get better (31 per cent), take annual leave (30 per cent) or go off sick (27 per cent). This suggests that, for these employees at least, workplace solutions for resolving wellbeing and the causes of stress are either insufficiently developed or unavailable.

There are clear costs for both parents and their employers here, either through struggling at work (not an optimal way of working for anyone), using annual leave to effectively patch themselves up or going off on unplanned sickness absence. Parents identified work as the main driver of poor wellbeing – to address their wellbeing issues, 43 per cent said they would need to address their work-life, 18 per cent their home life and 39 per cent both.

Parents were also asked about how often they thought about work when they were ostensibly enjoying 'family time'. The results are shown in Figure 12.

How often do you think about work when you are with your family?

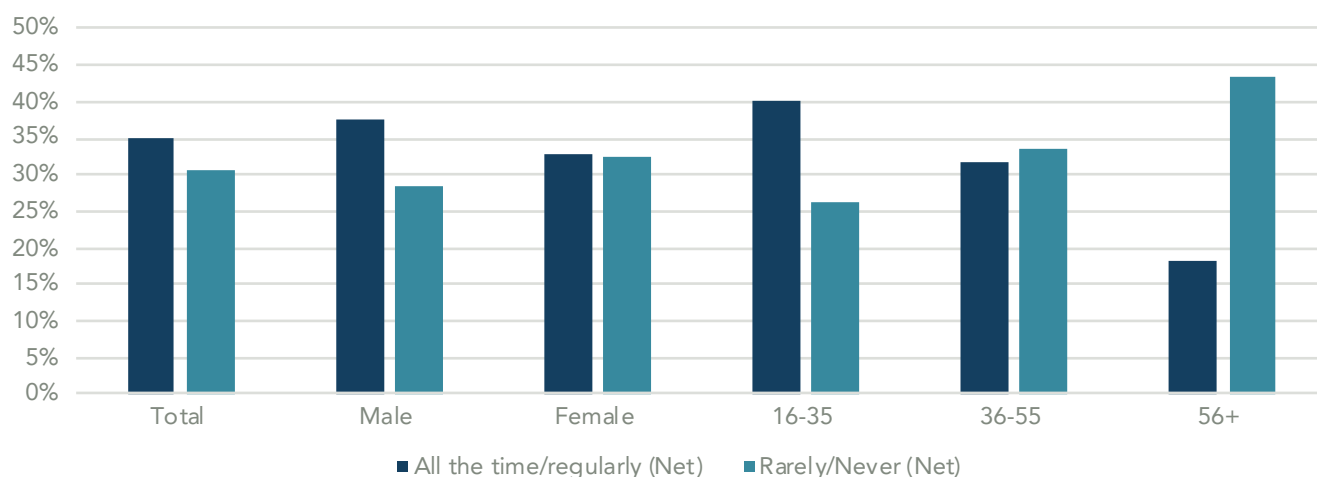


Figure 12 n=2,770 How often do you think about work when you are with your family?

Fathers were more likely than mothers, and Millennials more likely than older workers, to think about work when with their families. Other research²¹ has identified the importance of quality time between parents and children without work distractions impinging. Although thinking about work is not as physically disruptive to family time as spending long hours at work, parents' inability to switch off from work when with their families may lead to increased feelings of work and family conflict.

Mothers did more childcare than fathers: more than half of mothers (55 per cent) said they did the majority of it, while 18 per cent of fathers said they did the majority. Twenty-nine per cent of couples said they shared the childcare equally.

²¹ Galinsky, E. Ask the children, Morrow and co, 1999.

Who are the couples saying they share the childcare equally?

Couples who said they shared the childcare equally were slightly older than the rest of the cohort and were on higher salaries. They were mostly full-time workers, and this dual full-time role meant traditional caring patterns were not an option. They did make use of flexibility but were still putting in, on average, an extra four hours per week. Their extra earnings meant they were more likely to be satisfied with the balance of time and money in their families. They were also more likely to be satisfied with their work-life fit and less resentful of their employer about their work-life balance opportunities.

They were less likely to say their work-life balance was becoming stressful and less likely to report unhealthy behaviours as a result of poor work-life fit.

Parents who said they shared childcare equally did more similar things when they returned from work – there was less of a gender divide between women doing chores and fathers relaxing. Put another way, parents who shared childcare equally also tended to share household chores after work.

Parents were asked about the division of caring responsibilities at home. There were differences here: mothers were more likely to do tasks like caring or

cleaning, while fathers were more likely to play with their children or take some 'me' time. Figure 13 illustrates this division.

What do you do when you get home from work?

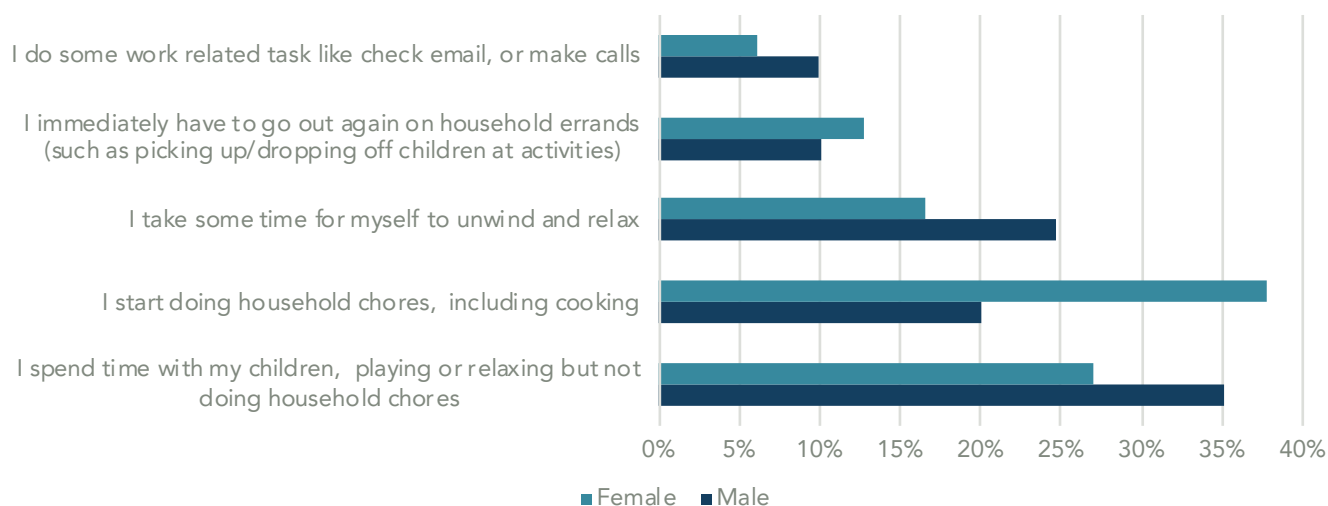


Figure 13 n=2,770 What do you do when you get home from work?

Opportunities for flexible working

Parents were asked whether they thought flexible working was a genuine option for men and women in the workplace. Both mothers and fathers thought it was a more genuine option for women rather than men, as shown in figures 14 and 15.

This indicates that cultural and other barriers influence employees' mindsets about the true availability of flexibility at work and who is "allowed" to use it.

Flexible working is a genuine option for women

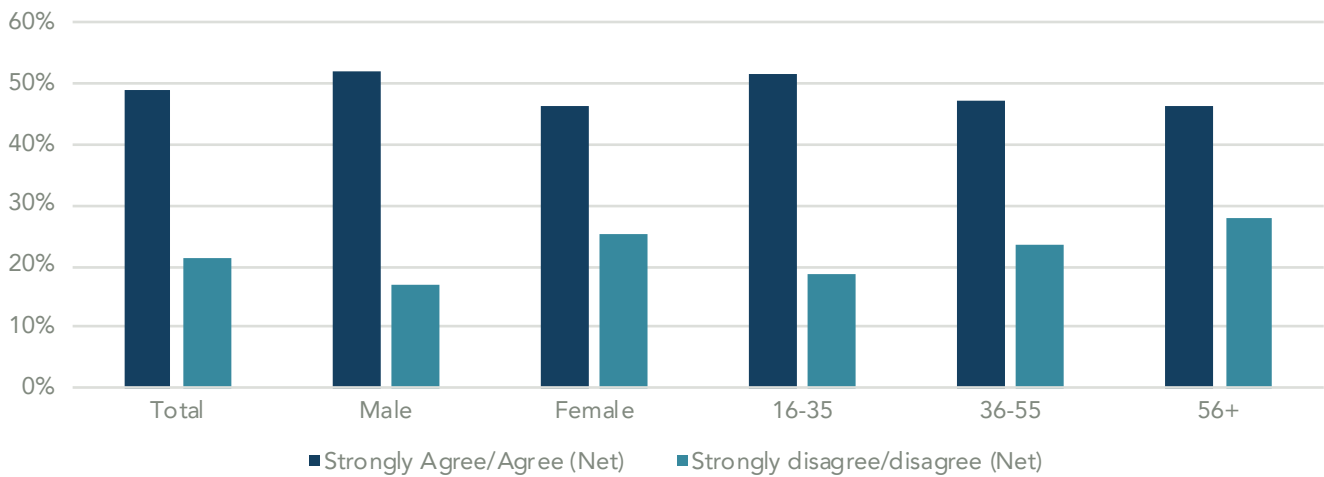


Figure 14 n=2,770 Flexible working is a genuine option for women

Flexible working is a genuine option for men

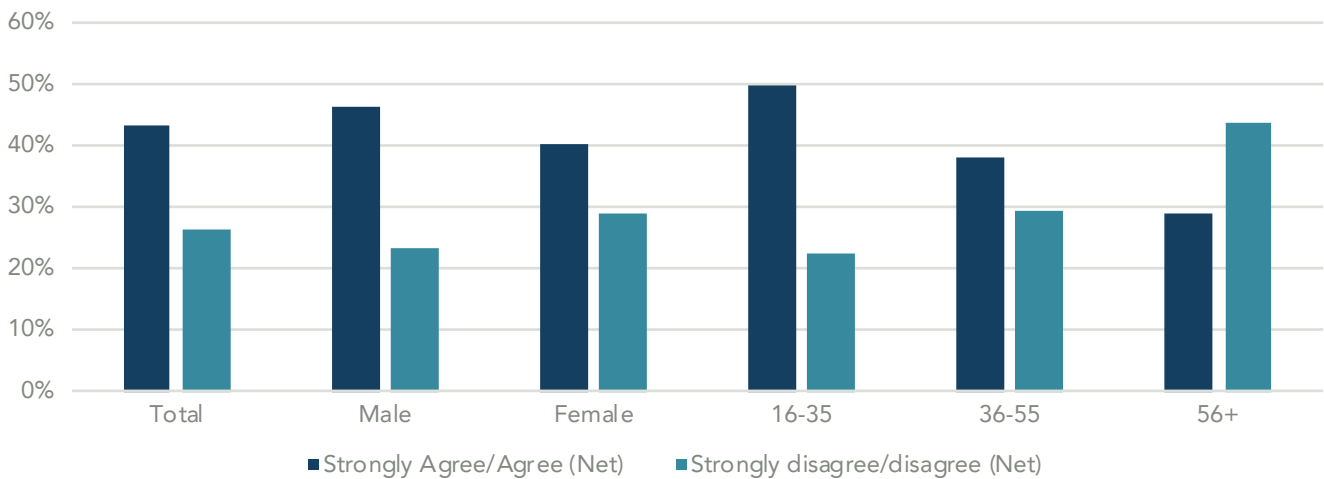


Figure 15 n=2,770 Flexible working is a genuine option for men

Younger workers in particular believed flexibility was more of an option, although they too said it was more of an option for women. There is more work to do here. The availability of flexibility as a genuine and realistic option should be boosted – not only in policy but also in practice – so that parents (and other workers) can exercise real choice about how they work, where, when and how much. Belief in the genuine availability of flexibility decreases with age, suggesting that career progression and incorporating or using flexibility become more difficult. This is also seen in the choices of people who limit their advancement or downshift to find or retain flexibility. It may also reflect different generational attitudes towards what constitutes an ideal worker, who should be working and who should be caring. These ideas may be particularly relevant in terms of culture – if more senior managers are less able to access flexibility, and perhaps less sympathetic to changing expectations around work and family life, this may inhibit the development and take-up of flexible working options. However, it may be encouraging that younger workers are more likely to see flexible working as a genuine option. The next step is to maintain this as their careers progress to more senior levels.

Less than half (46 per cent) of parents felt that, overall, their organisation cared about their work and family balance. A slightly higher number – 49 per cent –

felt that their immediate line manager cared. As previously discussed, line manager opposition can be a barrier to work-life balance measures like flexible working, and organisations are aware of the need to ensure line managers are supportive of their work-life balance initiatives.²² Still, the overall approach and commitment to work-life fit are primarily set by the organisation. Line manager attitudes are likely to fall into line with these – parents experience line manager and organisational concern at similar levels. This was borne out in other areas: 50 per cent said they felt confident discussing work-related issues with their employer, 51 per cent said they felt confident discussing family-related matters with their employer and 54 per cent thought they would be treated fairly around family and work issues. In addition, more than a third – 36 per cent – had lied or bent the truth about family-related responsibilities that got in the way of work, and 34 per cent had faked being sick to fulfil family obligations. Clearly, flexible working is not a genuine option for these parents.

Parents reported gendered behaviour within and outside the workplace that impacted on their working arrangements, particularly how they combined childcare with work. Both fathers and mothers recognised the mother was the default carer in most cases. Figure 16 shows that childcare or schools see mothers as the ‘first port of call’ far more often than fathers.

Who will school/childcare contact if there is a problem?

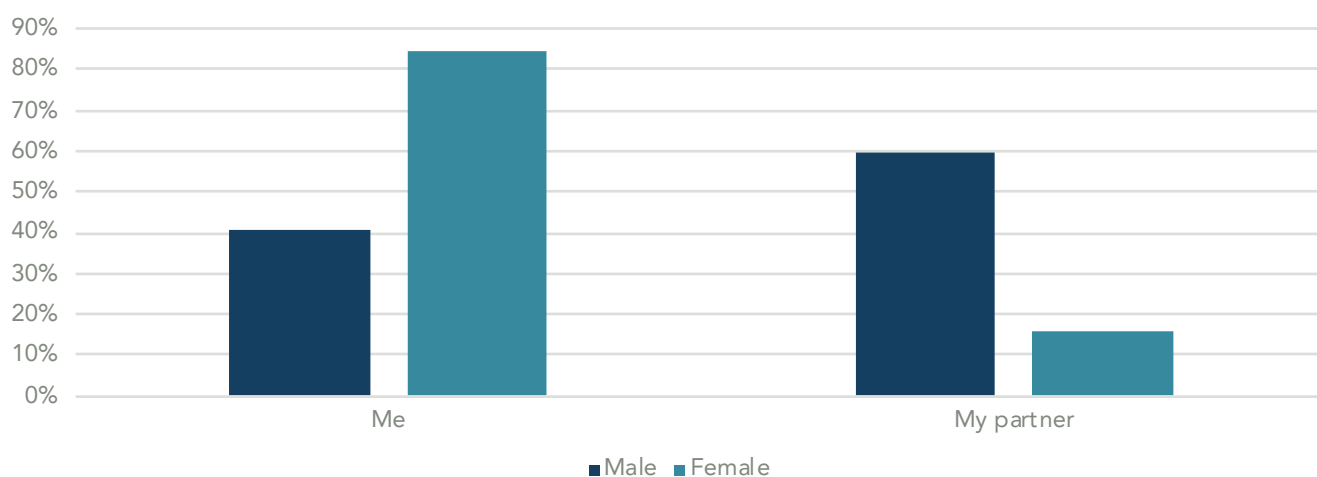


Figure 16 n=2,229 Who will school/childcare contact if there is a problem?

²² Working Families (2018) Top employers benchmark 2018 <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/research-publications/>

Parents also said it was easier for mothers than fathers to take time off work for childcare (and eldercare) reasons, as shown in Figure 17.

Who finds it easier to take time off work for childcare or eldercare?

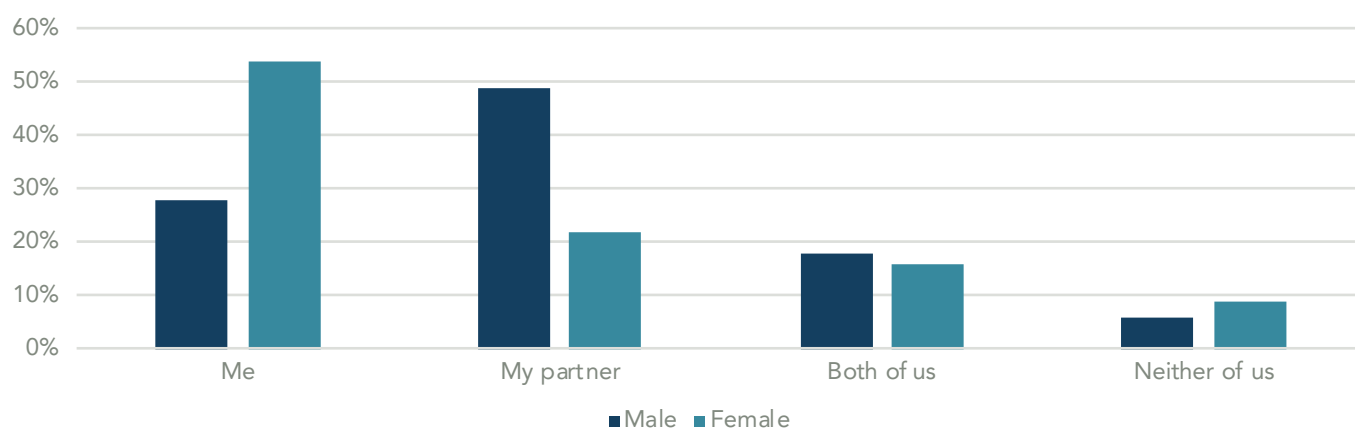


Figure 17 n=2,229 Who is more easily able to take time off work for childcare or eldercare?

Given that men were less likely to believe flexible working was a genuine option for them, these traditional gendered ideas about who should work and who should care²³ show clear room for improvement. Organisations have a role to play in communicating that it is acceptable for fathers to take time out for caring responsibilities in the same way as mothers. But fathers themselves also perhaps need to do more to identify themselves as carers with responsibilities, whether those responsibilities are for children or other adults. There was evidence that young fathers aged 26–35 were more likely than any others to say they found it as easy to take time off – an encouraging sign of changing attitudes. Employers have an interest in developing these as they think about equality and career progression for women. In light of the prevailing culture, workplaces where it is more acceptable for caring to disrupt women's working day than men's are not levelling their playing field.

Parents identified a troubling blind spot here: they felt it was more acceptable in their workplaces to take time off to care for children than for adults. Almost three quarters – 73 per cent – agreed with this statement. This is concerning. Although some organisations have made an effort to improve work-life integration options for carers in their workforce, this is by no means widespread. Carers are reluctant to self-identify at work, meaning they can struggle with little support. Performance issues can arise as a result, as well as other negative health and wellbeing impacts.

If employees feel it is less acceptable to take time off for eldercare, fewer will identify as carers or find the support they need. Organisations need to make it very clear that being a carer is not a problem and that the business will support employees with caring responsibilities. Simply communicating that all employees have the right to request to work flexibly, regardless of the reason, is an easy start. Caring is a key issue – with an ageing population, estimates predict that 30 per cent of people will have a caring responsibility by 2025,²⁴ so eldercare cannot remain at the bottom of the caring hierarchy.

Parents felt it was their responsibility – rather than their employer's job – to find a good work-life fit, by a ratio of 2:1. However, this didn't mean parents were passive in their acceptance of their work-life lot. In response to the question of what action they would take to improve their work-life balance, they identified several. Forty-five per cent said they would approach their employer to make changes to culture and policy to support work-life balance, 37 per cent said they would look for a new employer and 15 per cent said they would leave work altogether. This is a mixed picture. On the one hand, it is encouraging that employees want to engage positively with their employer to make changes, but more than half would look to either change or leave their employer – an indication of the value of work-life balance in retaining employees.

²³ Kelland, J. (2016) 'Fatherhood forfeits' and 'motherhood penalties': an exploration of UK management selection decision-making on parent applicants.: CIPD Applied Research Conference

²⁴ Carers UK (2015) Key facts about carers and the people they care for. <https://carers.org/key-facts-about-carers-and-people-they-care>

Employers have a role to play in policy creation and support, as shown in Figure 18.

What should employers do?

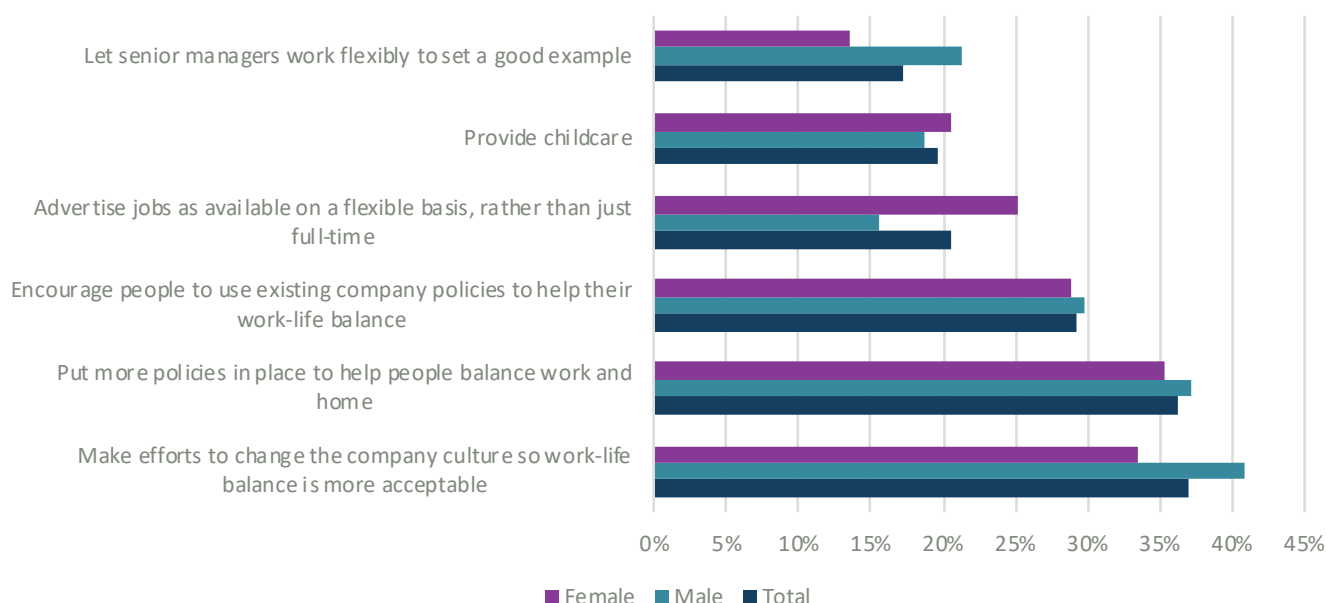


Figure 18 n=2,770 What should employers do to support work-life balance for their employees?

As noted in last year's *Index*, the importance of organisational culture is particularly relevant to fathers – even more so than policy. As noted, many parents do not believe flexible working to be a genuine option in their workplaces, and policy provision alone is insufficient. There is an appetite for more supportive policies but getting the existing ones into use is also important. Mothers and fathers almost equally identified this as something employers can improve upon. This change can be supported in organisations

small and large through addressing some of the pressure points that parents have identified: large workloads, work that impinges on family 'non-work' time, gendered expectations about work and care, and limited access to flexible working for different reasons.

Parents also identified a role for government. Almost half – 49 per cent – wanted to see affordable childcare provisions, while 47 per cent wanted improved rights to flexibility. This suggests that, for many, the Right to Request Flexible Working is not strong enough. Simple enhancements, such as flexibility being available from day one in a new job, combined with a requirement to advertise jobs as offering opportunities for flexible working would improve access to flexibility. Thirty-five per cent favoured limits on the working week to help with work-life integration, and the same proportion wanted to see maternity and paternity leave enhanced. Only eight per cent thought the government had no role to play.



For employers, the benefits of offering flexibility are clear, as shown in Figure 19.

What difference do you think having a flexible and family friendly employer makes?

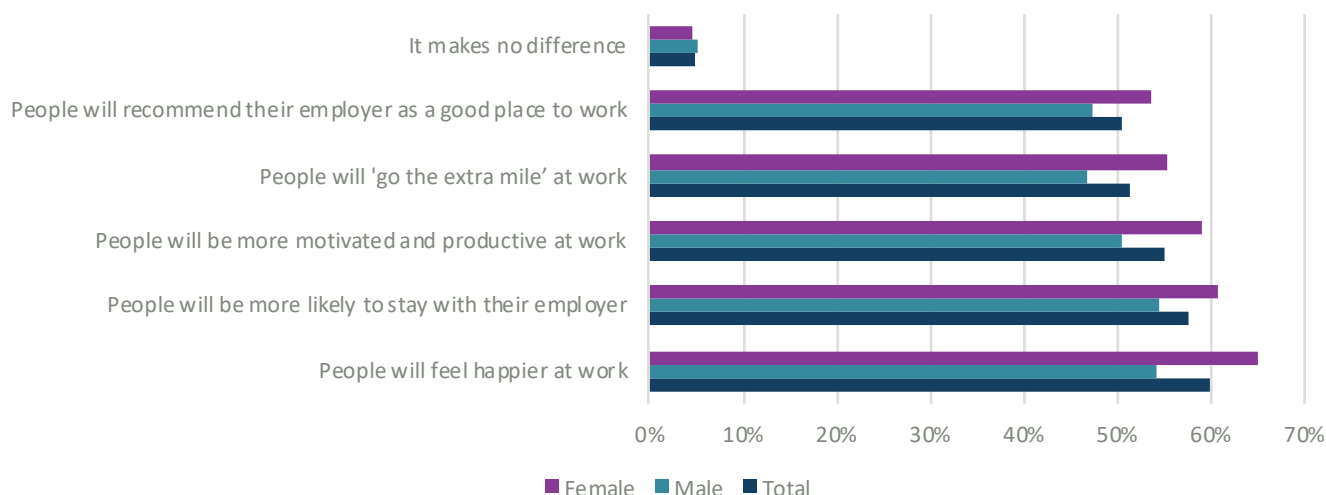


Figure 19 n=2,770 What difference do you think having a flexible and family-friendly employer makes?

Satisfaction, retention, motivation and discretionary effort were all boosted by being family-friendly. Employers that are not yet providing flexible options or building genuinely supportive work-life cultures risk missing out on all these benefits.

They also risk being left behind as flexibility becomes increasing normalised and expected. Employers need to offer these opportunities as a matter of course – and, where they do have policies, they need to make sure these have made it into everyday practice.

Promotion

Thirty-eight per cent of respondents said they had received a promotion within the last two years, while 30 per cent said they had never received one. Having a child under the age of two significantly decreases the likelihood of having received a promotion in the last two years, suggesting that childcare for young children is a period where advancement is put on hold. This effect was seen for both mothers and fathers. Part-time workers were also less likely to have received a promotion in the last two years, but flexible workers were more likely to have received a promotion, suggesting that a promotion creates an opportunity to negotiate a flexible working arrangement.

The average mother in our survey received a promotion 6.5 years ago, and the average father received a promotion 4.5 years ago. Put another way, the average mother has gone two years longer without a promotion than the average father.

Conclusion

While the Right to Request Flexible Working has supported some parents and carers to get the flexibility they need, it has not gone far enough. Current legislation has not been the catalyst for flexible working as the 'norm'. Instead, it is something that is limited to certain employees – very often, mothers wanting to reduce their hours. Additionally, it is still seen as something that is 'earned' – a perception exacerbated by the 26-week qualifying period before employees can make a flexible working request. Despite the Right to Request being a legal entitlement, many parents taking part in the *Index* said flexibility wasn't allowed in their workplace.

Despite the legislation, fewer than half of working parents worked flexibly – despite 86 per cent saying they would like to – and fewer than half felt flexible working was a genuine option for mothers and fathers in their workplace. The Right to Request hasn't been the catalyst for the kind of labour market reform required to ensure the demand for flexible working is met, embed flexible working as the 'norm' and tackle the 'parenthood penalty'. Crucially, it can only be used once a parent or carer is already in a role and has accrued the 'trust' required to work flexibly (and has completed at least 26 weeks' continuous employment). The legislation can, and should, go further.

Flexible working on its own cannot deliver work-life balance for parents and carers. As the *Index* shows, nearly four in five (78 per cent) working parents – including those who work flexibly – are putting in extra hours at work every week, despite evidence that longer hours are counterproductive. These long hours are causing damage, intruding on time spent together as a family, on parental relationships and on wellbeing. As well as being integral to delivering more part-time and flexible jobs, job design is crucial to ensure they are 'human-sized'. This will better support mothers' and fathers' progression at work and will tackle the 'parenthood penalty' incurred when parents can't put in the extra hours required by poorly designed jobs without compromising their wellbeing and time spent with family.

Employers that use the Happy to Talk Flexible Working strapline and logo for job advertisements are provided with guidance on job design and the kind of flexibility that would work in the role. Telling potential qualified applicants they are Happy to Talk Flexible Working at the point the role is advertised is the final part of a process, giving parents and carers the confidence to ask about alternative patterns of work and employers the confidence to know how to respond.

The *Index* shows that flexible working is still the best way for parents and carers to gain some control over their working lives – where they work, their working time (start and finish) and the hours they work. However, for some parents who work 'flexibly' (including parents who say they work part-time), that 'flexibility' can be quite rigid. For example, control over working time is reduced for part-time workers and, on average, mothers had more less control and autonomy over their working time than fathers. More senior parents enjoy more control over their working lives than more junior parents. A supportive workplace culture, where flexibility is encouraged no matter how senior the role, and supportive line managers, who are very often responsible for conferring the kind of informal flexibility within flexibility (eg being able to take time off for childcare) that allows for genuine control, are crucial.

The take-up of flexible and part-time work remains highly gendered, with women taking on the majority of caring responsibilities at home. Encouraging more fathers to work part-time and flexibly would not only help address this imbalance – and help mothers fulfil their potential at work, tackling the UK's gender pay gap, which stands at 17.9 per cent¹ – but also support fathers to fulfil their aspirations around sharing care more equally. The *Index* shows that couples who say they share childcare equally also split household chores more equally.

Shared Parental Leave (SPL), which allows fathers to share the care of their new baby in its first year, is key to engendering this change. Take-up, however, has been low. This is because, very often, using SPL doesn't make financial sense for families. Employers that can afford to do so should go beyond the minimum pay for SPL. And there are simple reforms the government could make to the scheme that would allow more families to benefit.²

As the *Index* shows, parents are using annual leave (30 per cent) and sick leave (27 per cent) to manage things like a breakdown in childcare arrangements – as opposed to parental rights designed to help parents balance work and caring for their families. This is, in part, because existing rights – to parental leave and emergency dependents' leave – are not paid. Parents and carers need properly paid and flexible leave. Employers can go beyond the statutory offer and introduce this, and government should consider the role it has to play in ensuring this is available.

Going beyond the minimum pay for parental leave increases take-up, particularly among fathers. Compelling organisations to publish their parental leave policies would therefore be helpful – not least because this would support parents' decision-making and help employers to understand best practice. Current government proposals to consult on employers publishing their parental leave and pay policies are welcome.

Sixteen per cent (2.1 million) of the UK's working parents are self-employed, work for an agency, work casually or seasonally or are on a zero-hours contract. These parents do not enjoy the same employment rights as employees. Advertising higher-quality, permanent part-time and flexible jobs will make a huge difference to parents who want more job security and better access to parental rights. However, while the current three-tier employment status framework (self-employed, worker and employee) remains in place, it needs reform.

Considering employment rights, it's important to note that the UK's membership of the European Union has been a starting point and backstop for many of the employment rights and equalities measures in place in the UK. Given the inequality in access to the parental rights at work noted above and the often-damaging impact of work on family life, particularly long hours, existing employment rights and equalities measures should be built on – not eroded – following the UK's departure from the EU.

Finally, turning to childcare, parents taking part in the *Index* highlighted affordability as an issue. Our findings also suggest that better childcare provision for children under two would support parents' – both mothers' and fathers' – continued progression at work. There are currently seven types of childcare support available, each with different eligibility criteria and different ways of interacting with each other yet concerns about affordability and patchy provision remain. This tangled web of support can be complicated and difficult for parents and carers to navigate. The system needs reform.

Recommendations

1. The Right to Request Flexible Working can and should be strengthened, with a focus on ensuring more employers fully engage with the process. Making it a day-one right would support parents being more active in the labour market and the cultural shift towards normalising flexible working. This should be considered as part of the government's evaluation of the legislation in 2019. Individual employers can start to implement this, as many already are.
2. Going further, the government should consult on its proposal to create a duty for employers to consider whether a job can be done flexibly, and make that clear when advertising, without delay.³ Future proposals should ensure that roles are recruited flexibly by default, with the starting point being consideration of why a role can't be done flexibly. This would kickstart the flexible working revolution that parents and carers – particularly those 'stuck' in flexible jobs and seeking employment – so desperately need. Again, individual employers can start to implement this, as many already are.
3. Job design is crucial to unlocking more part-time and flexible jobs in the labour market – guarding against flexibility simply being the flexibility to manage too much – and helping deliver a better work-life balance for families. Any legislative next steps around flexible recruitment should ensure employers are properly considering the tasks that roles require and whether these can be done in the hours allotted, as well as which types of flexible working would work. Many employers are already considering job design with regards to recruiting more roles on a flexible and part-time basis.
4. As recommended in Matthew Taylor's 2017 review of modern employment practice, employers should use the Happy to Talk Flexible Working strapline and logo to recruit for more flexible jobs that can realistically be done in the hours allocated to them. There is an opportunity for the Flexible Working Taskforce – co-chaired by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy – to champion the strapline and logo among employers. Having been co-created with government, it should be a focus of its thinking going forward.



5. A supportive workplace culture – and, in particular, supportive line managers – is crucial to ensuring some level of informal flexibility within parents’ and carers’ part-time and flexible working patterns so that parents and carers have some genuine control. UK employers are encouraged to understand their workplace culture and what needs to change, and to invest in support for line managers, to ensure efforts to increase workers’ access to genuine flexibility at work are not undermined by inconsistent practice.
6. Shared Parental Leave (SPL) has been a step forward in enabling fathers to do things differently and challenging gendered ideas about who works and who cares. The legislation is due to be evaluated by government in 2019. Simple reforms to the scheme – such as making it a day-one right as maternity leave is and extending the scheme to self-employed parents – would allow more parents to benefit. Employers that can afford to do so should go beyond the minimum pay for SPL. Going further, the creation of a properly paid, standalone period of extended paternity leave for fathers means it is more likely they will use it – and continue to be involved in their children’s care.
7. As part of its work considering the question of dedicated employment rights for carers alongside existing employment rights,⁴ the government should consider the introduction of up to 10 days per year of paid carer’s leave, which can be taken as a single block or individual day. Paid carer’s leave is, of course, something that employers can introduce independently. There are many good practice examples.²⁵
8. The government should consult on employers publishing their parental leave and pay policies without delay.⁵ Working Families hopes this will ignite a ‘race to the top’ – particularly of employers going beyond the minimum pay for parental leave, which demonstrably increases take-up, particularly among fathers. Employers may wish to publish their own parental leave and pay policies without waiting for government, as many already do.
9. There is inequality in access to parental rights across employment contracts when there should be a level playing field. More broadly, while the UK has decided to leave the EU, there should be no curtailing of employment legislation that supports working parents and carers. The government should consider the message any amendment of these laws would send about the importance of time for family and for work performance – to both parents and employers.
10. Given the evidence that formal childcare supports parents’ progression at work, both the government and employers should consider the benefits of investing in a childcare system that ensures every parent is better off working, including options to bridge the childcare gap between the end of maternity and parental leave in the first year of life. Employers should consider how to support their parents with childcare - workplace nurseries, for example, provide families with high-quality, dependable care and help create a culture in which parents feel confident taking up support where it is offered.

²⁵ <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/employers/case-studies>

About Working Families

Working Families is the UK's work-life balance organisation. We help working parents and carers — and their employers — find a better balance between responsibilities at home and in the workplace.

Through our legal advice helpline, we assist parents and carers in tackling complex issues around employment rights and benefits. We give employers the tools and guidance they need to support their employees while creating a flexible, high-performing workforce. And we advocate on behalf of 13 million working parents across the UK, influencing policy through campaigns informed by ground-breaking research.

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Additional data analysis by Jude Wells

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