

# The Modern Families Index 2017



# Foreword

**Denise Priest, Director of Employer Partnerships, Bright Horizons Family Solutions**



“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. Flexibility helps but can also hinder. We thrive and falter dependent on how the relationships between family, work, time, money, and health are managed.”

In this, the fourth year that Bright Horizons has sponsored *Working Families’ Modern Families Index*, it seems to me an appropriate time to reflect on the “long view” and identify what are the persistent “pain points” families report year upon year and consider why this might be. Similarly it is important to recognise progress where it has been made, and also to note key statistical trends which over the years have become the ‘new truths’ challenging traditional assumptions.

It’s clear that in so many lives ‘family and work’ is not a good fit. For just 8 per cent of survey respondents work is their first priority. Family and relationships rank far higher – and higher than we found last year – among parents. So it’s important that whatever is asked of them around working more to meet business needs it must not be at the expense of family time. This year’s *Index* shows “a clear pattern where family life is eroded to some degree for many families, with the currency of time in short supply for many” – we need a better fit.

Given the national concern with obesity, diabetes, and heart disease it is saddening to see nearly half of respondents reporting that work demands prevent them from taking enough exercise and also from eating healthily. There’s often a consequent risk of burn-out: 30 per cent of working parents feel burnt out regularly – rising to 46 per cent among millennials. Asked what they would do about burn out, 29 per cent of respondents would go off sick, a quarter would cut back hours and 11 per cent would resign even without alternative

work to go to. Apart from the significant human cost, for a business the impact on employee retention is considerable.

We’re still hearing that people feel forced into lying to their boss about needing time off for caring responsibilities. And if people aren’t talking now - primarily about childcare – what will happen in the future when eldercare needs are more widespread?

On a related note, grandparent care is still the most common type of non-parental care. However, with increasing numbers of older people still in full employment, or caring for their own parents this is going to mean this resource will be more stretched in the future. More stress for the ‘club sandwich’ generation, caring for children, grandchildren and their own parents.

So, what’s going well? It is impossible to overstate the impact of an understanding and supportive employer. Asked what difference having a flexible and family-friendly employer makes, *Index* responders were very definite: more than half of respondents said having such an employer would make them happier, more likely to stay with their employers, more motivated and more productive. Which is what we at Bright Horizons have found in our own experience of partnering with leading employers. In fact we’re currently compiling a report on the key impacts of employer-sponsored dependant care which will be published in May.

For those who are able to work flexibly in a way that suits their needs, flexible working helps - but it is not always possible, and some parents, particularly fathers, are concerned that asking for it signals a lack of commitment. Flexibility works if it is two-way, supporting the needs of business and also of the family - and also if take-up is not inhibited by a long hours workplace culture and presenteeism.

Childcare really matters to working parents: 75 per cent of survey respondents this year would assess their childcare before taking on a new job or promotion - this is shown as a particularly strong element for mothers, seen in 81 per cent of respondents this year, from 56 per cent last year. The fact that it is also higher in millennials shows this is not going away.

Employers also need to support their employees in practical ways by providing them with tools to manage their care needs. Back-up care by its very nature supports flexibility, allowing people to work unscheduled days when the need arises without negative impact on the family. Similarly workplace nurseries are typically more affordable and their location helps the much needed currency of time as their locations make pick-up and drop-off easier, plus commute time can be quality parent/child time.

On the topic of time, the new truth is that the typical model for working patterns in couples is for both to work full time rather than the previous one full time, one part time (which in itself replaced the 'man works and woman cares' traditional pattern.) The two full-timers model is represented by 48 per cent of responders to this survey, and 52 per cent for millennials which indicates this is a pattern which will become increasingly dominant going forward.

What does work-life balance mean to us today?

Where we used to talk of a work-life balance the reality is that it for most of us it is more of a blend – a much more complex picture. There are blurred lines between society's expectations and business actions. Flexibility helps but can also hinder. We thrive and falter dependent on how the relationships between family, work, time, money, and health are managed.

I would urge employers to look to the examples of role-model workplace nurseries provided by Cisco, Toyota, and the University of Oxford, or back-up care solutions provided by JP Morgan and Thomson Reuters. Employers should consider what practical supports, and cultural measures they can offer working families. As the survey respondents indicated, responsibility for a good work-life fit lies with not only employers but also with government and also ultimately with the individual. Today's working families are trying to do it all – let's help them thrive while doing so.



## Sarah Jackson, Chief Executive, Working Families



*“Parents are clear about the benefits brought by a more balanced fit between family life and work. Life in more ‘time-wealthy’ families is less pressured, relationships are under less strain and wellbeing levels are higher. But these benefits are not just one way traffic - all for parents and children. It is clear from what parents tell us that benefits will accrue to employers who nurture a work-life balance culture within their organisation.”*

The 2017 *Modern Families Index* provides a fascinating picture of life for working families across the UK. Where family life and work meet is a complex boundary that is shifting for many families. Parents’ ideas about what is achievable and desirable are evolving; many fathers, for example, now say that they weigh up career decisions in the light of their childcare responsibilities just as most mothers do. But it is not just changing social attitudes that affect the way parents navigate work and home. The world of work is changing, too. The *Index* shows very clearly that for many, work absorbs a large proportion of their time, and that this is not always a positive choice. Financial pressure and work pressure combine to erode the edges of family life, whilst also affecting individual wellbeing. Parents are very clear: family is the most important thing to them, but the twin currencies of time and money they need for their families to thrive are not available to them. Only one in five families feel they are getting it right. This is cause for concern – and a call to action for positive change.

What might this change look like? The *Index* provides us with some strong pointers. One is the need for better opportunities for fathers to make real work-life balance choices. Many are concerned that their workplace culture means flexible employees are seen as less committed. To avoid the clear emergence of a ‘fatherhood penalty’, where men’s careers are stalled or side-lined as they try to find roles they can combine with family life, employers need to ensure that work is designed in a way that helps women and men find a good work-life fit.

Viable options for flexible working, and a dose of realism when it comes to what can be done in the hours available, must be a central part of this. And honest conversations between employer and employee about both are vital. This in turn will help with the equalising of care between genders: women are still doing more than men, and workplace culture continues to reinforce these traditional gender roles even if parents feel these roles are increasingly out of step with their lives and aspirations.

Parents are clear about the benefits brought by a more balanced fit between family life and work. Life in more ‘time-wealthy’ families is less pressured, relationships are under less strain and wellbeing levels are higher. But these benefits are not just one way traffic - all for parents and children. It is clear from what parents tell us that benefits will accrue to employers who nurture a work-life balance culture within their organisation. They will reap the rewards of a more loyal, motivated and productive workforce, and the costs of absenteeism, stress and increased staff turnover that result from inflexible workplaces can be avoided. A first step on the path to achieving this is for employers to ensure that all employees can trust that they can have an adult to adult honest conversation about work and working life without worrying about whether they will be seen as less committed.

For any employers and policy-makers uncertain about the advantages of engendering better work-life balance in the UK labour market, the evidence here is compelling.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S Jackson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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## Key Findings

- Only one in five families said they have got the right balance between time (to spend with family) and money (earning or having enough income) to see their family thrive. More than a third say they haven't got enough time or money.
- In couple families, many parents both work full time. 48 per cent of couple families in the survey said they both worked full time. 57 per cent of single parents worked full time.
- Just under half of parents (47 per cent) think that over the last two years it has become financially more difficult to raise a family.
- Family life is under pressure from work. The majority of parents (72 per cent) catch up on work at home in the evenings and at weekends, with 41 per cent saying this is often or all the time.
- Only a third of parents manage to leave work on time every day. For many, staying later at work is a regular occurrence. 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. A third of working parents regularly feel burnt out.
- Almost half (48 per cent) said working hours regularly got in the way of spending time with their children. A third said that work pressure negatively affected their relationship with their partner and a quarter said it led to rows with their children.
- 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 their job, manager's attitude or workplace culture.
- Parents are worried about discussing family and work related issues with their employers. 41 per cent said they had lied or bent the truth to their employer about family life conflicting with work, and almost half said they were not comfortable talking about work boundaries with their employer.
- Fathers increasingly see themselves as actively involved in childcare, and will make career sacrifices accordingly: 69 per cent of fathers said they would consider their childcare arrangements before they took a new job or promotion. Fathers are the more likely (47 per cent) to want to downshift into a less stressful job and 38 per cent would be willing to take a pay cut to achieve a better work-life balance, reflecting the difficulty they face in reconciling work and home life.
- Parents said they would leave employers who do not offer good work-life balance opportunities. Improved opportunities for better work-life balance and a better work-life balance culture were priorities. In contrast, parents said that employers who afforded them a good work-life balance would get more motivated, loyal and productive employees.

## About the *Modern Families Index*

The *Modern Families Index* is a snapshot of how working families in the UK manage the balance between family life and work. The *Index* asks them what their family and work balance is like, whether or not the balance they have matches their aspirations, and what the effects of being a working parent and an employee are on family life. How much time do families spend together, and what is the quality of that time? Are parents able to leave work at work, or do they bring it home with them? In couple families, how do parents share working and caring and is this changing between the generations? And do parents feel that their employer and government are doing enough to help them combine work and family? The *Index* is not a study of a particular group of parents, but seeks to capture the experiences of 'everyday' families, however configured. It describes the pressure points where family and work meet today, and how these vary by demographic and other circumstances. Learning from what parents who have completed the *Index* say, based on the reality of their experience, shows us what is working for working families, and what needs to change – to inform the policy landscape, configuration of the labour market and employment practice in the UK.

### Families in the UK today

In 2016, there were 4.8 million married (opposite and same sex) or civil partner couple families with dependent children in the UK. There were 1.3 million cohabiting couples with dependent children and 1.9 million single parent families with dependent children<sup>1</sup>. Women accounted for 86 per cent of single parents with dependent children and men the remaining 14 per cent<sup>2</sup>.



Of the 13.9 million dependent children living in families, the majority (63 per cent) of dependent children live in a married couple family. The percentage of dependent children living in cohabiting families increased from seven per cent to 15 per cent between 1996 and 2016, while the percentage of dependent children living in single parent families changed little<sup>3</sup>. 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 39 per cent of married couples with dependent children had one child<sup>4</sup>.

### Working Patterns

Dual-earner households are now the norm in the UK: in 2014 in more than 68 per cent of couple families both parents were working<sup>5</sup>. Among couple families, the percentage of both parents working full time increased from 26 per cent in 2001 to 31 per cent in 2013<sup>6</sup>.

In 2014 96 per cent of couple families with one or two dependent children had one or both parents working. This reduces slightly to 91 per cent of couple families with three or more dependent children. Similarly, in 2014 65 per cent of single parents with one or two dependent children were working

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<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics [ONS], Families and Households, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> ONS, Families and households in the UK: 2016

<sup>4</sup> ONS, Labour Force Survey, 2016

<sup>5</sup> ONS, Families in the labour market, 2014

<sup>6</sup> Modern Fatherhood, Parental Working in Europe, 2016

compared with 47 per cent of single parents with three or more dependent children<sup>7</sup>. Couple parents with young children (aged under five) were almost twice (78.6 per cent) as likely to be in employment as single parents with young children (40.9 per cent)<sup>8</sup>.

The Institute for Public Policy Research reported that, since the extension of the right to request flexible working in 2014, 36 per cent of women in employment with children under six have requested more flexible hours, with 80 per cent of requests either partially or fully agreed<sup>9</sup>.

Qualitative studies show that fathers in employment feel marginalised from access to flexible working opportunities, due to their managers' assumption that they are the breadwinners<sup>10</sup>. Studies also show that mothers working flexibly, including part time, tend to be side-lined or downgraded<sup>11</sup>. For both mothers and fathers there is a gap between policy and practice with regard to flexible working.

Turning to types of occupation, in 2014 single mothers with dependent children were more likely to work in low skilled jobs such as cleaning and catering than mothers living in couple households. More than 14 per cent of single mothers were employed in low-skilled occupations, compared with eight per cent of mothers in a couple relationship. 40 per cent of mothers in a couple relationship worked in higher skilled occupations like nursing or teaching, compared with 17 per cent of single mothers<sup>12</sup>.

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 hours per week in 2001 to 45 hours per week in 2011. There has also been a significant change in the proportion of fathers working 48 hours or more. In 2001, 40 per cent of fathers in the UK worked 48 hours or more. However, this proportion declined to 31 per cent by 2013<sup>13</sup>.

While mothers tend to perform more routine family activities and be more involved with children than fathers<sup>14</sup>, it is clear that fathers' involvement with children has grown and is growing. Their involvement in childcare increased from less than 15 minutes a day in the mid-1970s to three hours a day during the week by the late 1990s<sup>15</sup>. In 2005, fathers did a third of parental childcare within households<sup>16</sup>.

## Income

The average UK salary for a full-time employee in April 2016 was £28,200<sup>17</sup>. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2016, a single parent with one child (pre-school and primary age) needed to earn at least £27,909 a year before tax to achieve the minimum income standard (how much income households need to afford an acceptable standard of living). Couples with two children (pre-school and primary age) need to earn at least £18,906 each before tax<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> ONS, Families in the labour market, 2014

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> The Institute for Public Policy Research, Women and Flexible Working, 2014

<sup>10</sup> Gatrell, Caroline J., et al, 'Parents, perceptions and belonging: exploring flexible working among UK fathers and mothers', 2014

<sup>11</sup> Blair-Loy, M., 'Competing Devotions: Career and Family among Women Executives', 2003

Lewis, S., R. Gambles and R. Rapoport, 'The constraints of a work-life balance approach: an international perspective', 2007

<sup>12</sup> ONS, Families in the labour market, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Modern Fatherhood, Parental Working in Europe, 2016

<sup>14</sup> Modern Fatherhood, Fathers' Involvement with Children, 2013

<sup>15</sup> Fathers Network Scotland, Dad Matters, 2014

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings: 2016 provisional results, ONS, October 2016

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, A Minimum Income Standard for the UK in 2016

It is estimated to cost £152,000 in two parent families and £183,000 in single parent families to bring up a child<sup>19</sup>. By 2014/15 the number of children in poverty had increased by 60,000 from 2002/03 to 3.9 million<sup>20 21</sup>. Children in single parent families are more likely to live in poverty (44 per cent of children) than in couple parent families (24 per cent)<sup>22</sup>.

## Childcare

The use of formal childcare in the UK is high. 68 per cent of families use childcare, with 42 per cent of families using more than one type of childcare. Informal care plays a significant role in childcare – grandparental care is most commonly used (31 per cent)<sup>23</sup>.

The cost of nursery part time (25 hours) is £117 per week, or £6,100 per year, a one per cent rise since 2015. A registered childminder now costs £104.27 per week for part-time care for a child under two, compared with £104.06 in 2015<sup>24</sup>. Childcare costs account for a significant proportion of family expenditure. For example, a family with one child under two in part-time childcare and one child at an after-school club can now expect to pay £7,900 per year for childcare, which is over 28 per cent of median household income in the UK<sup>25</sup>.



Women still take a disproportionate amount of responsibility for unpaid care work within households. Analysis of time use data shows that women carry out an average of 60 per cent more unpaid work than men<sup>26</sup>. On average, men spend 16 hours a week doing unpaid care work including childcare, laundry and cleaning, compared to women (26 hours a week).<sup>27</sup> The gendered division of labour within households is a barrier to women's participation in the labour market. While only one per cent of men aged 16 to 64 were economically inactive due to unpaid care work, ten per cent of women aged 16 to 64 stayed out of work to look after the family or home<sup>28</sup>. The high cost of childcare has a great influence on parents' choices, particularly mothers, to give up work or reduce their working hours<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Child Poverty Action Group, The Cost of A Child in 2016

<sup>20</sup> Poverty is measured as the proportion of children living in households with, after housing costs, an income below 60 per cent of the contemporary median household income.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Child Poverty by Family Type, 2016

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Child Poverty Rate by Family Type and Parent Work Status, 2016

<sup>23</sup> Institute of Education, Provision and Use of Preschool Childcare in Britain, 2015

<sup>24</sup> Family and Childcare Trust, 2016 Childcare Survey

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> ONS, Women shoulder the responsibility of 'unpaid work', 2016

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> ONS, Labour Market Statistics, February 2015

<sup>29</sup> Action for Children, 'High childcare costs mean one in five parents are considering reducing hours or giving up work altogether', 2015

## Who took part in the *Modern Families Index*?

The *Index* was completed by 2,750 parents across the UK in 2016. Responses were gathered online across 11 regions, with 250 responses from each region. The regions covered were: North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, East of England, London, South East, South West, West Midlands, North West, Scotland and Wales. To take part respondents needed to be in paid employment (full or part time) or self-employed, and to have a dependent child aged 13 or under who lives with them some or all of the time. 54 per cent of respondents had one child under 13, with 33 per cent having two children under 13. The remaining 13 per cent had three or more children under 13. The survey had an almost equal number of respondents by gender. No selection criteria were attached to relationship status, allowing both couple and single parent households to complete the questionnaire.



Respondent ages and the proportions responding were: 16-25yrs (seven per cent); 26-35yrs (39 per cent); 36-45yrs (38 per cent); 46-55yrs (14 per cent); 56+yrs (two per cent). Because of the relatively low proportions of 16-25yrs and 56+yrs, these age groups have been banded with the adjacent age group in some analyses. Millennials, for example, are defined<sup>30</sup> as those born between 1981 and 2000, encompassing the 16-35yrs age banding.

The majority of respondents identified as being from couple households (78 per cent). The relationship status of households is shown figure 1.

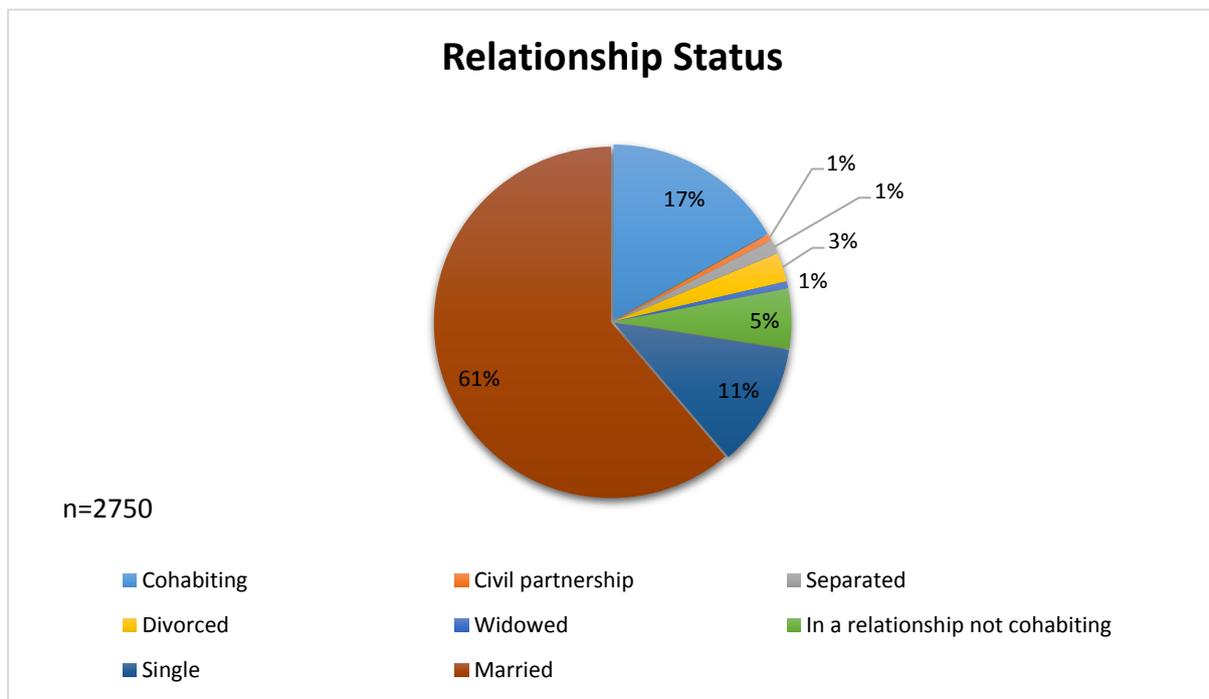


Figure 1

<sup>30</sup> [www.resolutionfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Intergenerational-Commission-launch-document.pdf](http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Intergenerational-Commission-launch-document.pdf) retrieved 15 October 2016

The sample was not dominated by particularly high or low incomes. The most common household income was between £40,000-60,000 for couple households, and below £40,000 for lone parent households. Taking £28,200 as the average salary for a full-time UK employee<sup>31</sup>, our cohort is broadly in line with average UK families in terms of income. Household incomes were higher for couple households, for older households and for households in London. The lowest household incomes were in Wales. Women generally earned less than men, as shown in figure 2.

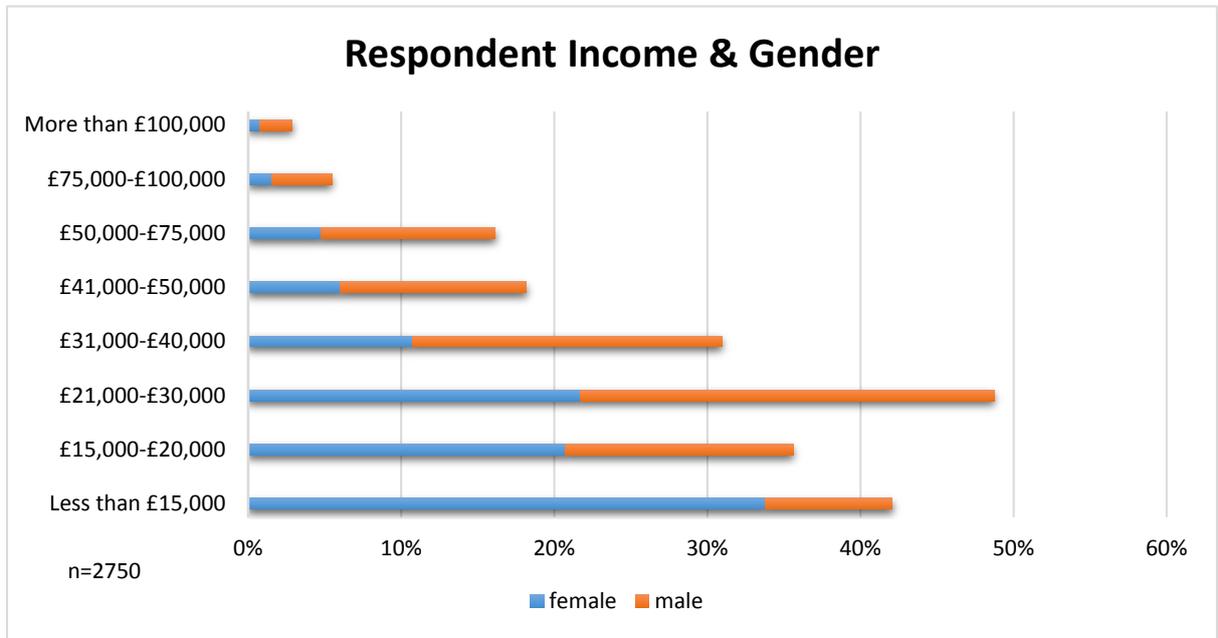


Figure 2

<sup>31</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings: 2016 provisional results, ONS, October 2016

## The Rise of Couples in Full-Time Work

The majority of respondents were in full-time employment as shown in figure 3, with full-time work being dominated by men, with few working part time. There were few respondents who said they worked zero-hours contracts (although evidence from Working Families’ Legal Advice Service indicates many parents are not aware of their contract type and employment status which could account, to some extent, for this).<sup>32</sup>



Figure 3

In just under half (48 per cent) of couple households, both parents worked full time, with 52 per cent of millennial couples both working full time and 44 per cent of couples aged 36 and above (by age of respondent). The next most common pattern of work in couple households was a full time employee and a part time one, with 28 per cent of couples working in this way. This pattern of a majority of couple households both working full time is one seen in last year’s *Index*. It should be recalled that the sample for this survey was for parents in work with no set criteria for their partner (if they had one). As noted in the 2016 *Index*:

“Although the ‘traditional’ pattern of a full time father and part time mother is still evident, it is no longer the most common arrangement for these parents. Although women are still more likely than men are to work reduced hours, it appears that increasingly mothers are working more. This may be due to the growing importance of women’s incomes within a household, against a backdrop of austerity and low wage growth. Simply put, families may not be able to get by without two full time incomes.” Sarah Jackson, Working Families

<sup>32</sup> One per cent of respondents reported being on a zero hours or temporary contract but ONS figures show 2.9 per cent of the employed workforce on zero-hours contracts in April-June 2016. Labour Force Survey, 2016

A third of male respondents said their female partner worked part time whilst they worked full time, and 41 per cent of female respondents said they worked part time whilst their male partner worked full time. 57 per cent of single parents worked full time.

Figure 4 shows the broad occupations in which respondents said they worked. The majority (62 per cent) worked in the private sector, with 36 per cent working in the public sector and two per cent in the voluntary sector. This is a higher proportion of public sector employment than the UK average.<sup>33</sup>

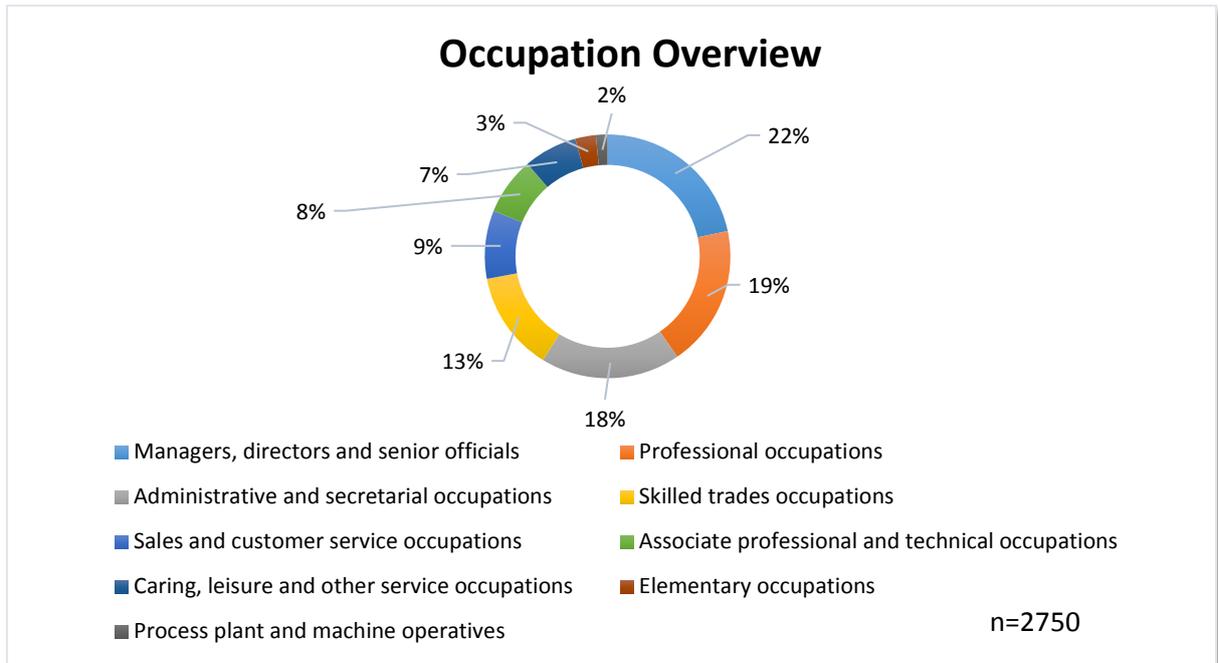


Figure 4

<sup>33</sup> According to the Office of National Statistics, Northern Ireland (25.2per cent), Scotland (20.7per cent) and Wales (20.6 per cent) showed the highest public sector employment proportions. The North East (20.2 per cent) is the English region with the highest public sector employment proportion. London (14.2 per cent) has the lowest proportion.

## Flexible Working – Inequality of Access

Respondents were asked to describe their flexible working arrangements. Overall 60 per cent of respondents said that they worked flexibly. Millennials (65 per cent) were more likely to report working flexibly than older employees (55 per cent). Regionally, the least flexible working was found in Scotland (48 per cent) and the highest was found in London (69 per cent).

In terms of jobs, overall respondents were most likely to work flexibly in senior and managerial roles, and least likely in secretarial and administrative ones. In other polling conducted by Working Families in 2016<sup>34</sup>, there was a clear pattern of higher income and flexible working arrangements. For many parents, their place in the hierarchy at work translates into a lack of flexible working opportunity. Types of flexible working differed between mothers and fathers. More men said they worked remotely (60 per cent vs 42 per cent) whilst women were more likely to work part time or reduced hours arrangements (20 per cent vs 4 per cent).

When asked about their reasons for working flexibly, 75 per cent said that their reason was childcare or eldercare, with 70 per cent of men and 81 per cent of women agreeing they work flexibly to accommodate their caring responsibilities. Younger respondents were also more likely to agree, with 72 per cent of under 45s agreeing vs. half of those over 45. 29 per cent of respondents said that they worked flexibly to pursue hobbies or other interests, with a marked gender difference - only 19 per cent of women vs twice as many men (37 per cent) said this is why they worked flexibly. For the 40 per cent who did not work flexibly, the majority (55 per cent) said that this was because their role did not accommodate the flexibility they would like (figure 5). Less than a fifth didn't work flexibly because they didn't want to, suggesting that more parents would work flexibly if obstacles such as hostile work culture or unsupportive managers were removed.

Not being able to work flexibly was broadly equally spread across all major occupational groups, suggesting that an absence of flexibility is not particular to certain sectors.

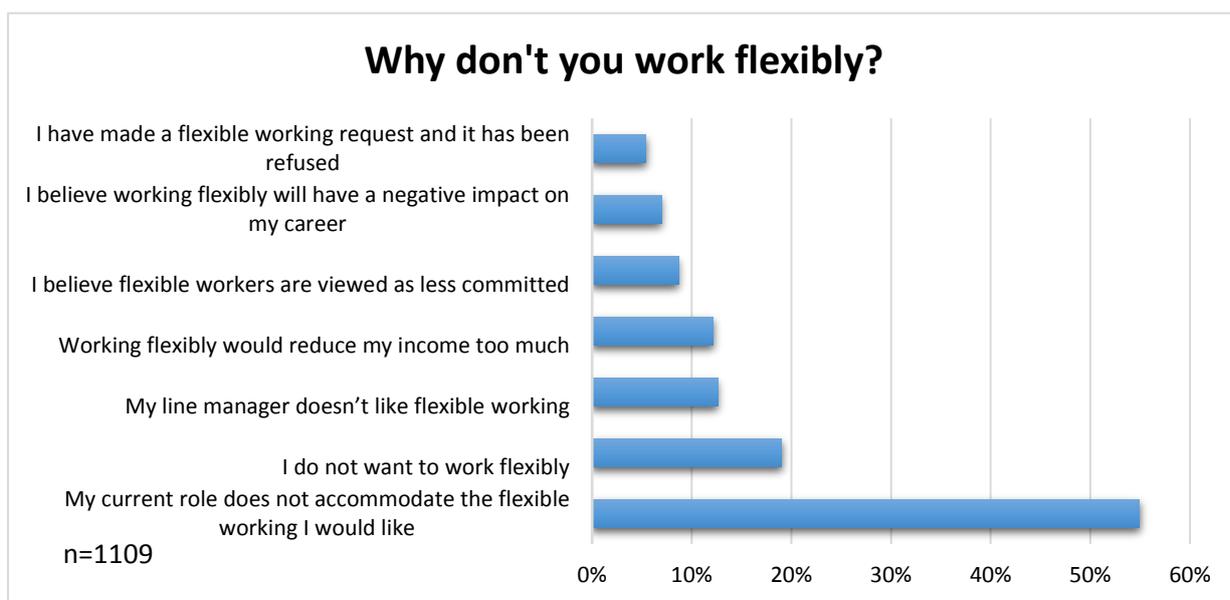


Figure 5

<sup>34</sup> [www.workingfamilies.org.uk/news/flexible-working-only-if-you-earn-enough](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/news/flexible-working-only-if-you-earn-enough)

## The Twin Currencies: Time and Money

Respondents were asked about how close they were to having the right balance between time (to spend with family) and money (earning or having enough income) to see their family thrive. Only one in five families felt that they had the right combination (figure 6), with more than a third saying that they lacked both time and money.

Families reported that insufficient income was an issue. When asked to think back over the last two years 47 per cent said it was becoming financially more difficult to raise a family, and this was more pronounced in regions excluding London (an average of 49 per cent, vs 32 per cent for London). Women were more likely to feel that it is becoming financially more difficult, with 52 per cent agreeing vs 42 per cent of men.

Only 21 per cent of respondents thought that it was becoming financially easier to raise a family, with those in London most likely to agree (38 per cent). 30 per cent of millennials thought it was getting easier, whilst only 12 per cent of those over 36 did.

*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

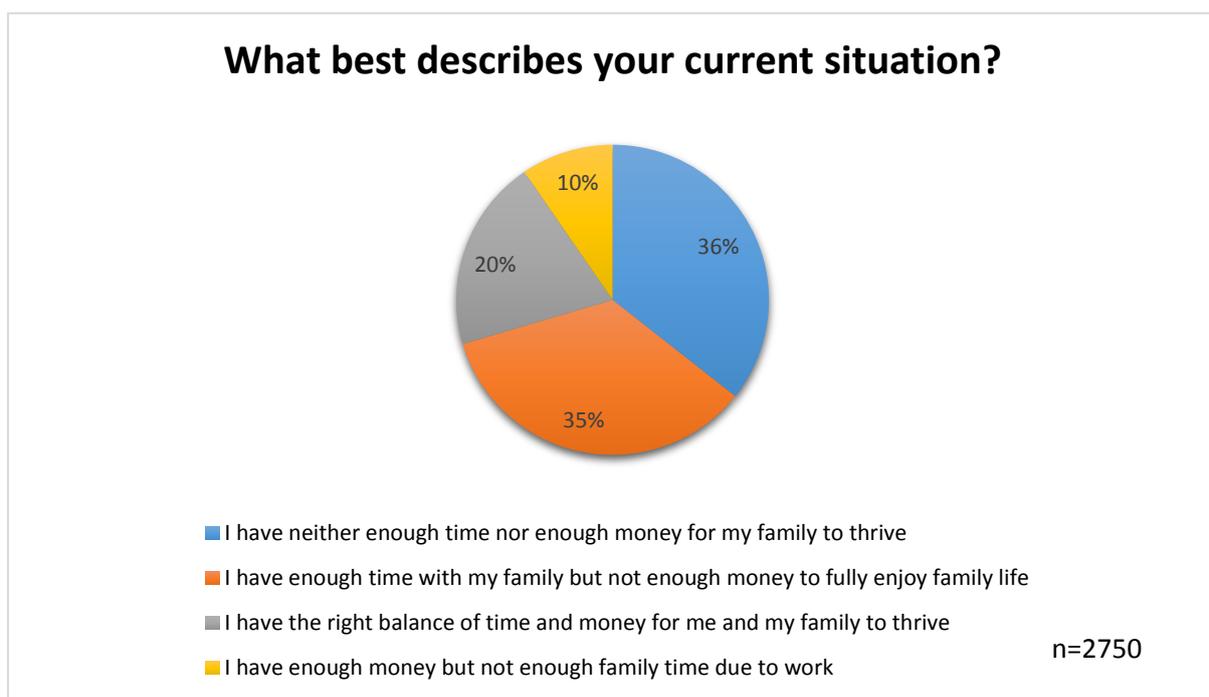


Figure 6

When asked what changes they would make to their own working lives to tackle time poverty parents identified flexible working arrangements. The most frequently chosen option was to be able to work from home some of the time (27 per cent), followed by having flexible hours (25 per cent).

The desire to have flexible hours was particularly pronounced for those respondents who live in London, with 38 per cent choosing this option. Men were more likely to choose the option of working full time but without additional hours (29 per cent of men, 19 per cent of women) and to want a less 'long hours' culture at work (19 per cent men, 12 per cent women).

When asked about changes women, on the other hand, were more likely to choose reduced hours working arrangements like term-time working (25 per cent of women, 14 per cent of men), or giving up work altogether (22 per cent of women, 17 per cent of men).

When asked to choose what they wanted their partners to do, 16 per cent of men said they wanted their partner to give up work and stay at home, whilst only seven per cent of women said the same thing.

Whilst 60 per cent of respondents say they work flexibly there is a clear desire for more flexibility in working time, and control of it, suggesting a 'flexibility gap' – with parents wanting more flexibility than is available to them. This will be explored in more detail on page 27.

## The Overwork Problem

As in previous years, the 2017 *Index* found that many parents are putting in extra hours each week. 72 per cent said they do extra hours at home in the evenings or at weekends 'all the time', 'often' or 'occasionally' compared to 28 per cent that never do (figure 7). Younger employees were more likely to do extra hours 'all the time' than older ones: 22 per cent of 16-35yr olds compared to 13 per cent of those over 36. In the context of these findings and what parents report to be the effect on family life, news that French workers have won the legal right to avoid checking email out-of-work hours is very interesting.<sup>35</sup>

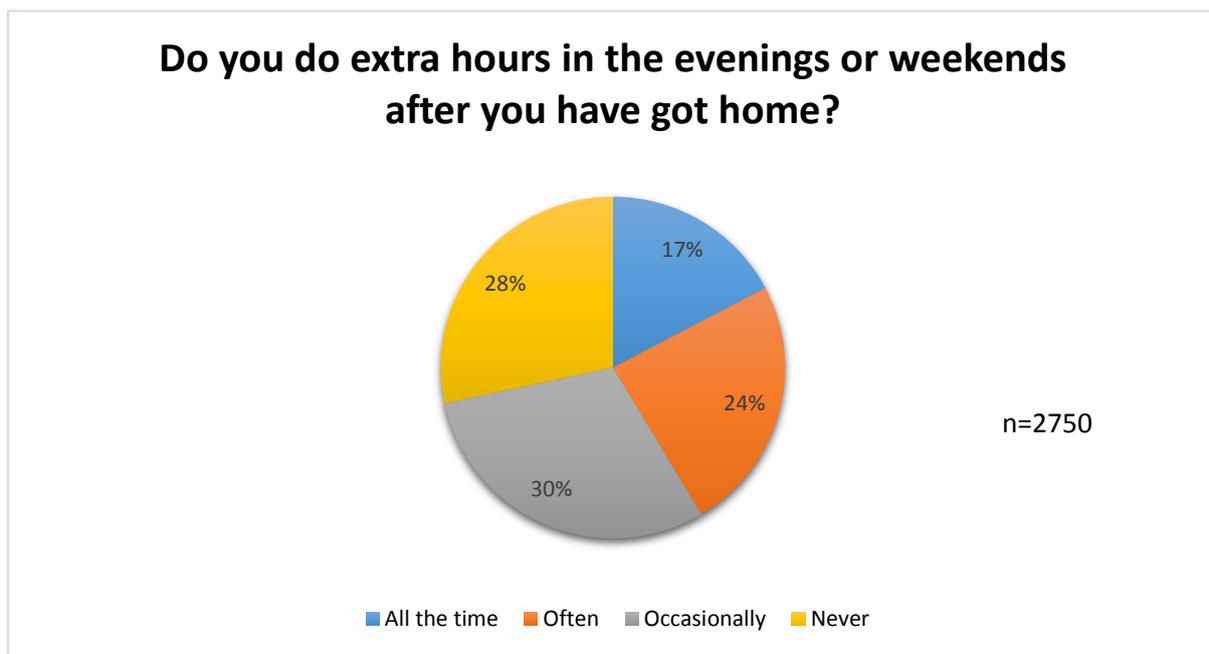


Figure 7



Only a third of parents said they managed to leave work on time every day – with two thirds working later at least a few times each week. In terms of overall working time, many parents are putting in significant extra hours every week. For example, figure 8 below shows parents working 'normal' full-time hours, and the extra hours they do. In all of these bands, more than half of parents work beyond their contracted hours, and for some parents they are putting in lots of extra hours. For example, of those contracted to work 39-40 hours each week, more than a third (36 per cent) are putting in three or more extra hours each week, with ten per cent putting in 48+ hours each week. Those working fewer hours were less likely to work extra hours, although even here the responses point to more over than under work.

<sup>35</sup> [www.theguardian.com/money/2016/dec/31/french-workers-win-legal-right-to-avoid-checking-work-email-out-of-hours](http://www.theguardian.com/money/2016/dec/31/french-workers-win-legal-right-to-avoid-checking-work-email-out-of-hours)

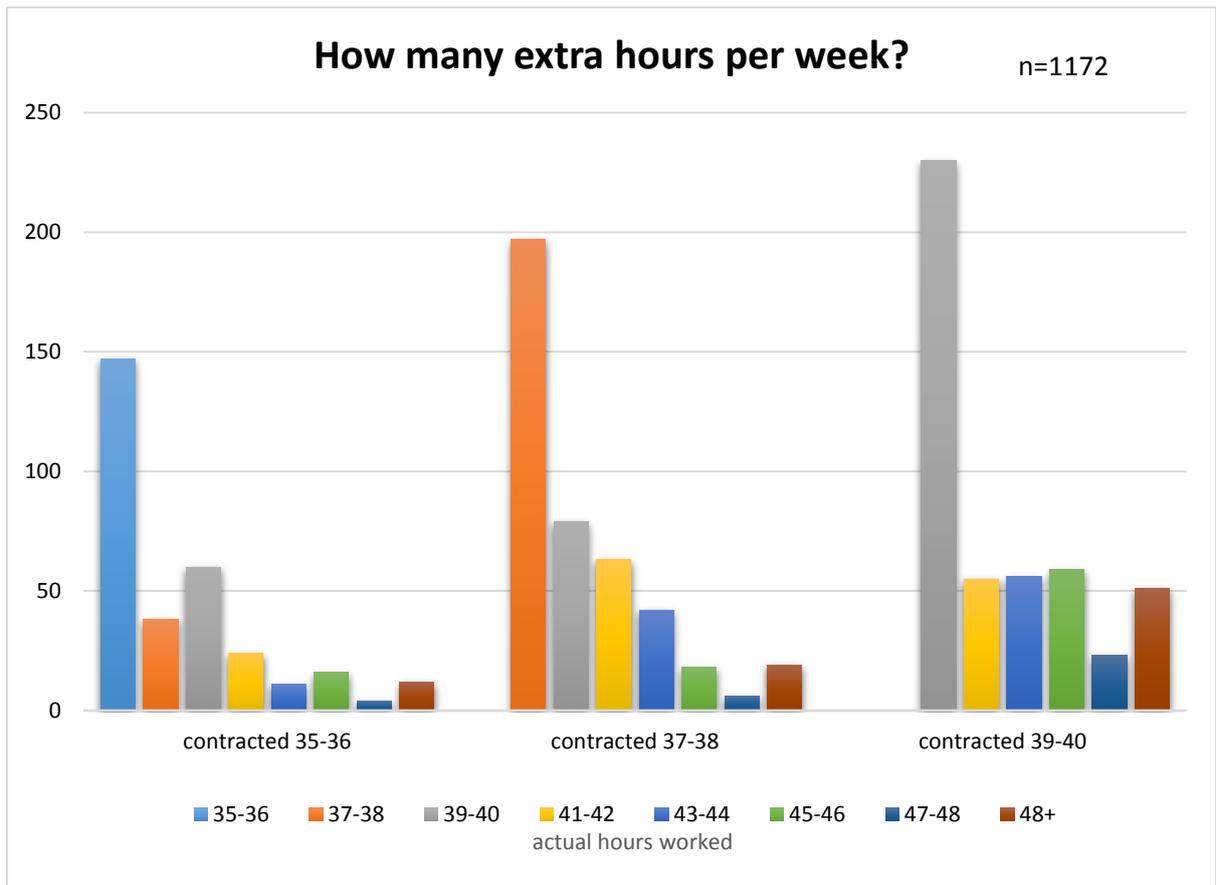


Figure 8

Dealing with workload is the most common reason parents give for working extra hours, followed by lack of time to get proper planning and thinking done (figure 9). Given the ongoing issues we are seeing in terms of overwork, accurate calibration of working time to the demands of the role is essential, unless the employer is to rely on employees putting in extra time.

Workplace culture is also prominent as a reason for staying late. Working late is often interpreted as commitment, however inefficient this might be. Research evidence finds that long hours are counterproductive and do not result in high-quality work.<sup>36</sup> Again, job design is key. Generally, the mismatch of allotted hours to tasks is the cause of overwork, which can then become culturally 'normal': a result of work intensification that has been amplified by the austere economic climate.

<sup>36</sup> [www.hbr.org/2015/08/the-research-is-clear-long-hours-backfire-for-people-and-for-companies](http://www.hbr.org/2015/08/the-research-is-clear-long-hours-backfire-for-people-and-for-companies)

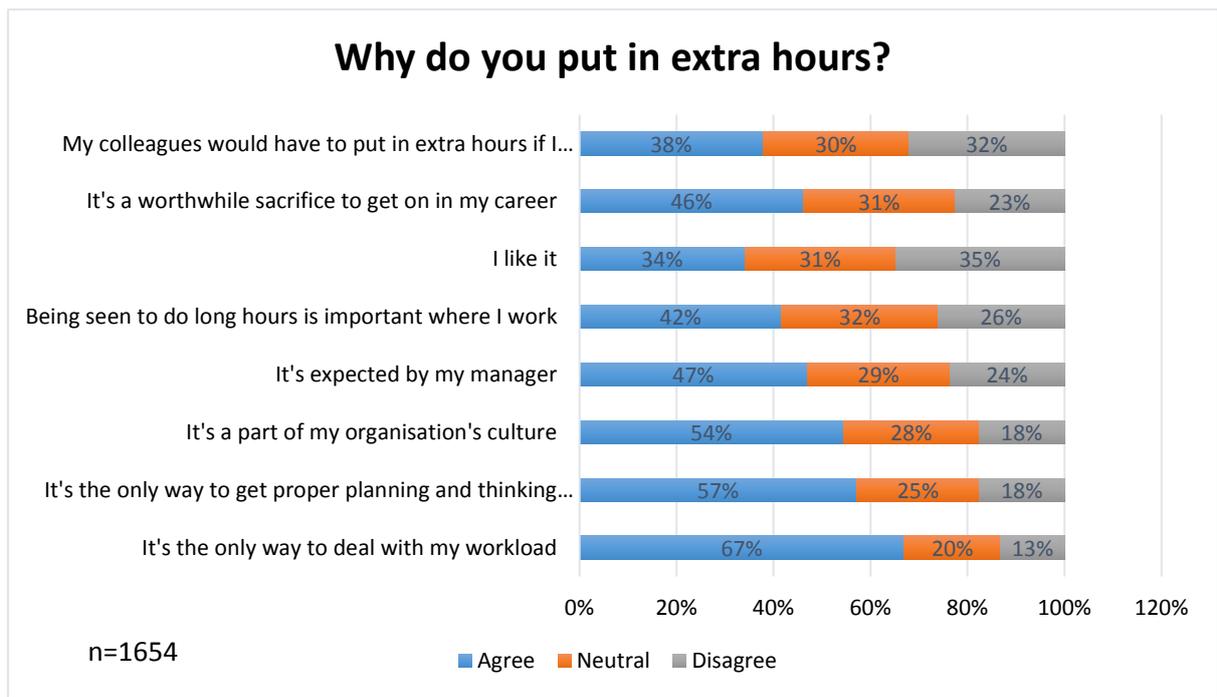


Figure 9

The idea of making sacrifices to get on career-wise is an interesting one, with progression in these workplaces clearly being tied to ideas about presenteeism and longer hours working. For employees who want or need to work flexibly the message is that part-time or reduced hours work is not compatible with career advancement - to the detriment of those unable to work long hours because of caring responsibilities or because they want to spend time with their families.

Despite legislative and employer efforts to provide work-life balance opportunities through measures such as flexible working, the way that work is organised and prevailing workplace cultures and attitudes remain significant barriers. Evidence from the Working Families benchmark<sup>37</sup> also shows that in many organisations responsibility for work-life balance is individualised by line managers. Instead of an organisational culture ensuring work-life balance is 'normal' for employees, individual employees are made responsible for their own work-life 'problem' as they have to ask for flexibility, rather than be empowered to just do it. In this environment, a long hours, inflexible culture can develop deep roots as employees perceive flexibility as 'exceptional' in a negative way, and managers treat it as an unwelcome imposition that hinders getting the job done.

*"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

<sup>37</sup> Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark 2016, Working Families

## Time Poverty and Family Life

Parents were clear about the effect of inflexible workplaces and work intensification on family life. This could be from work getting in the way of everyday family activities, to feelings of stress and burnout from unmanageable workloads that do not reconcile well with raising a family. Figure 10 summarises the levels of work and family conflict across a range of everyday family activities.

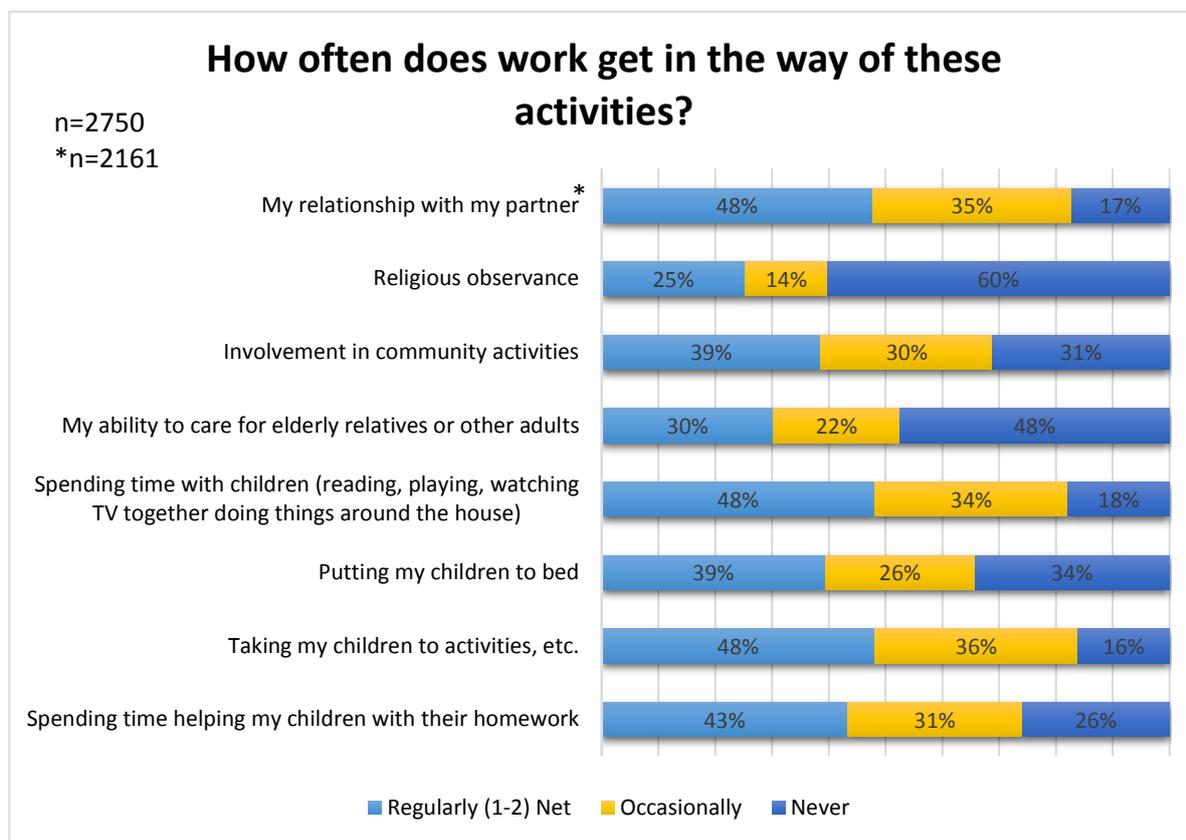


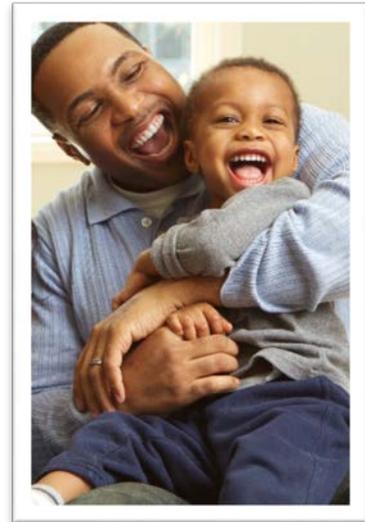
Figure 10

It is evident that for many parents regular disruption is normal (although this does not mean it is acceptable). For example 43 per cent reported that spending time helping children with their homework was negatively impacted by work often or all the time, and even more (48 per cent) said it got in the way of taking children to activities. The same number said simply spending time with their children was affected - this was particularly high in London where 67 per cent identified it as a regular issue. Relationships, community involvement and the ability to care for other relatives were all also regularly impinged.

What emerges is a clear pattern where family life is eroded to some degree for many families, with the currency of time in short supply. It's clear that family life is the priority for most families, so a better fit between the demands of work and the needs of families is vital.

What are the effects of too much time spent working on family life? Parents reported that there are negative effects that result, including on their health and their relationships. Almost half of parents (49 per cent) said that it prevented them from taking enough physical exercise and 43 per cent said it meant that there was not sufficient time to ensure a healthy diet.

A third said that it negatively affected their relationship with their partner and a quarter said it led to rows with their children. This is a problem for parents and children first, but also in all probability for their employers too.<sup>38</sup> Home stress is likely to feed back into work, which in turn can then negatively affect employees who bring their work stresses home, establishing a negative feedback loop<sup>39</sup>.



Parents report being stressed and burned out by work. There is high parental agreement with the statement 'My work-life balance is increasingly a source of stress'. Almost half (49 per cent) agreed. Parents in London were significantly more likely to agree (64 per cent) than anywhere else in the country.

Again, younger respondents appear to be under the most stress, with 52 per cent of millennials and 45 per cent of older employees agreeing. At the age extremes the differences were more pronounced: 63 per cent of 16-25 year olds agreed whilst only 32 per cent of those aged over 56 did. It may be that younger parents, with younger children, are experiencing the realities of combining work and care for the first time and finding that the impact is significant. But it also may be that younger parents are still in relatively junior positions and therefore are not able to access the work-life reconciliation opportunities that seem to accompany seniority.

Similarly, younger parents (millennials) reported higher levels of burnout than older parents (figure 11). The causes of burnout were ascribed by parents as work (49 per cent), family (15 per cent) or a combination of both (36 per cent).

Parents were asked how they would cope with burnout. The most frequent responses focused on ways to remove themselves from the workplace: 37 per cent said they would take annual leave, 29 per cent said they would go off sick and a quarter said they would cut back their hours. Other responses were asking for a lighter workload (20 per cent), asking for flexibility (17 per cent), or even resigning from work without having another job to go to (11 per cent).

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<sup>38</sup> A Labour of love – or labour versus love? Relate, 2016

<sup>39</sup> Happy Homes, Productive Workplaces. One Plus One and Working Families, 2009



High levels of burnout, especially amongst younger parents, indicates that for them reconciling work and family life fit is elusive. This is concerning, not only from the perspective of family life, but also from that of individual health and wellbeing. Furthermore, burnt-out employees are unlikely to be productive ones and there is a real risk, as we can see, that they will absent themselves from the workforce as they try to deal with their burn out issues.

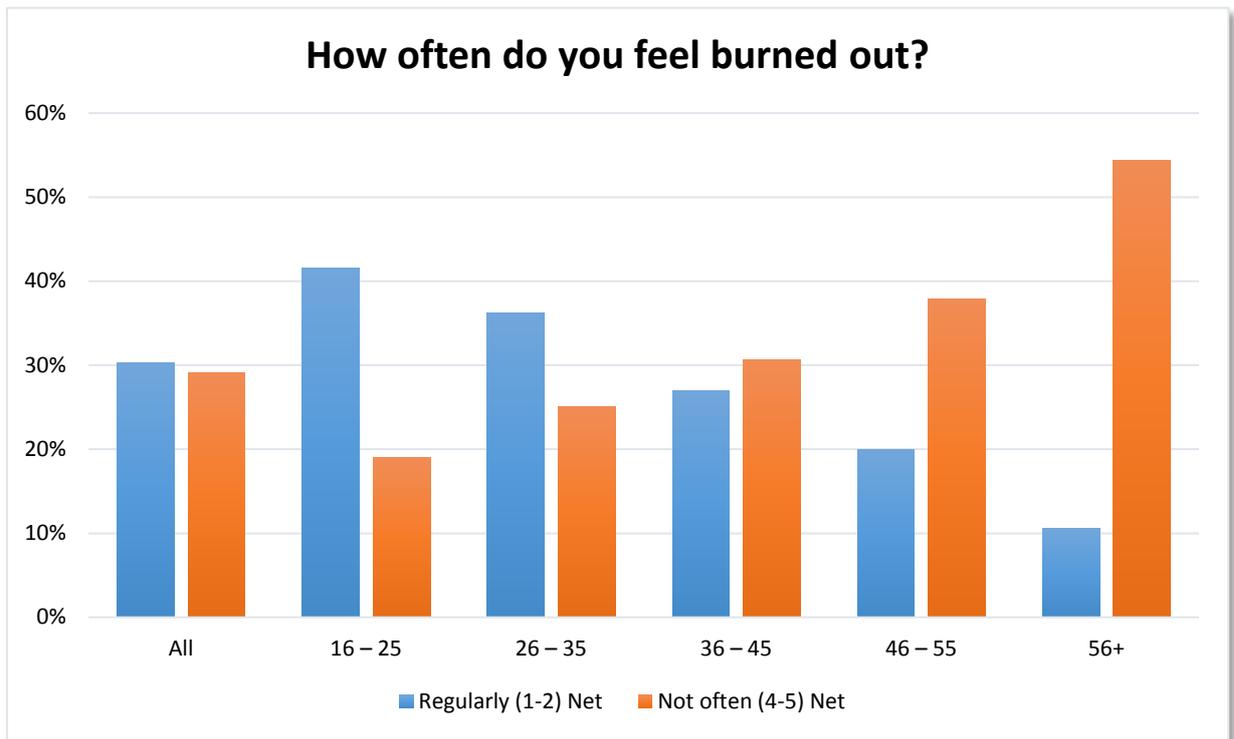


Figure 11

## The 'Fatherhood Penalty'

*"Where men's careers are stalled or side-lined as they try to find roles they can combine with family life, employers need to ensure that work is designed in a way that helps women and men find a good work-life fit."*

Sarah Jackson, Working Families

Parents were asked about their working lives, and in particular what changes they would make to their jobs to get a better work-life balance. Overall, 36 per cent said they would take a pay cut to work fewer hours, with 38 per cent disagreeing. Millennials were more likely to agree (41 per cent) than older employees (31 per cent). Those in Scotland and Wales were the least likely to agree (29 per cent), with those in London (who were the most highly paid group and thus may have more room for manoeuvre) most likely to agree (55 per cent).

Fathers, particularly millennial ones, showed more appetite than mothers to consider a pay cut to work fewer hours, as shown in figure 12. As mothers were more likely to earn less than fathers, it may be that they have less scope to reduce their income further, but the substantial number of fathers who are willing to countenance a pay cut in exchange for fewer hours indicates that for many men the time and money balance is not working.

There was also an appetite for downshifting, suggesting that for some employees, career trajectory is of less importance. Forty-four per cent said they would like to downshift to a less stressful job, whilst 28 per cent disagreed. Again, younger employees were more likely to agree, with 47 per cent saying they would be prepared to downshift as opposed to 41 per cent of older employees.

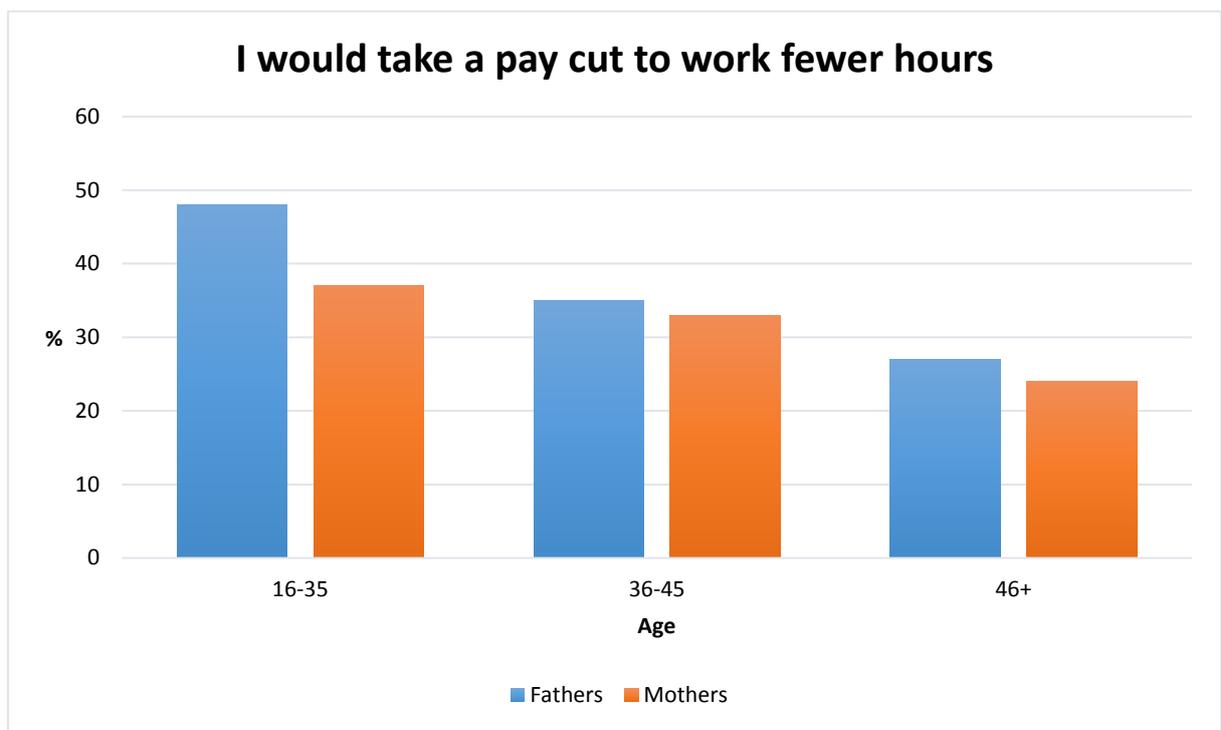


Figure 12

Men (47 per cent) were also more likely to be prepared to downshift than women (41 per cent). This may be because women have already downshifted into lower-level jobs to enable them to fulfil their caring roles. But it is also probable that there is a link between higher preparedness to downshift and the higher numbers of men identifying long hours and workplace culture as problems.

And on the subject of fathers, seven out of ten would consider childcare before taking a new job or promotion.

These findings suggest that work hasn't changed - so fathers are having to consider the same compromises women have had to for decades. This runs the risk of creating a 'fatherhood penalty', rooted in ideas about ideal employees and presenteeism, and at odds with father's desire to spend more time with their children. Evidence shows that fathers are spending more time with their children<sup>40</sup> and that many want to slow their careers as their children grow up.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Fisher, K., McCulloch, A. & Gershuny, J. (1999). British fathers and children. Working Paper. University of Essex: Institute for Social and Economic Research

<sup>41</sup> Blades, J., & Fondas, N. (2010). *The Custom-Fit Workplace: choose when, where, and how to work and boost your bottom line*. New Jersey: Jossey Bass

## Is Flexibility Working?

Only eight per cent of parents identified work as their main priority (17 per cent in London, more than double anywhere else in the UK). Family and their relationship with their partner are a much higher priority for parents. Although this ordering of priorities is to be expected, it shows in clear terms where parental priorities lie and why it is important that this is not blocked often or all the time by work, to avoid negative overspill effects and resentments building up.

*“It is impossible to overstate the impact of an understanding and supportive employer.”*

Denise Priest, Bright Horizons

This is important context for the questions parents were asked about their views of their employer. On the one hand, 37 per cent said that they felt resentful towards their employer about their work-life balance, with more men (39 per cent) than women (30 per cent) feeling this way. Half of millennial fathers were resentful, whilst a third of those over 35 were, reflecting findings in the 2015 *Index*. Of those who said that they do work flexibly, 37 per cent still said they were resentful about their work-life balance.

However, when asked if they felt positive towards their employer about the work-life balance opportunities they offered, 53 per cent agreed that they did, with younger employees more likely to agree.

This presents a mixed picture for which there might be a number of possible explanations. Younger employees may have higher expectations around access to flexibility, and remain hopeful for improving conditions - whilst older employees have accepted and live with prevailing work-life conditions. Or it may be evidence of a ‘flexibility gap’ - where employees – whether they work flexibly or not - appreciate the work-life opportunities available but are unhappy about their own work-life balance (in the context of factors like poor job design, their resulting workload and their organisation’s working culture, for example).

Overall, many parents expressed positive views about their relationship with their employer although there were some differences by region. 46 per cent of parents agreed that flexible working was a genuine option for mothers and fathers, with those living in London the most positive at 57 per cent. Those in the North West were least likely to agree at 42 per cent.

An identical percentage (46 per cent) agreed that their organisation cares about their work-life balance, and again the highest agreement came in London at 60 per cent, with the lowest in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber.

48 per cent agreed that their manager cared about their work-life balance, 51 per cent thought that their employer would take account of their family responsibilities and treat them fairly and the same number said they felt confident discussing family-related issues with their employer. In all of these the highest levels of agreement were in London, while the lowest were in Yorkshire and the Humber. The overall levels of agreement are summarised in figure 13.

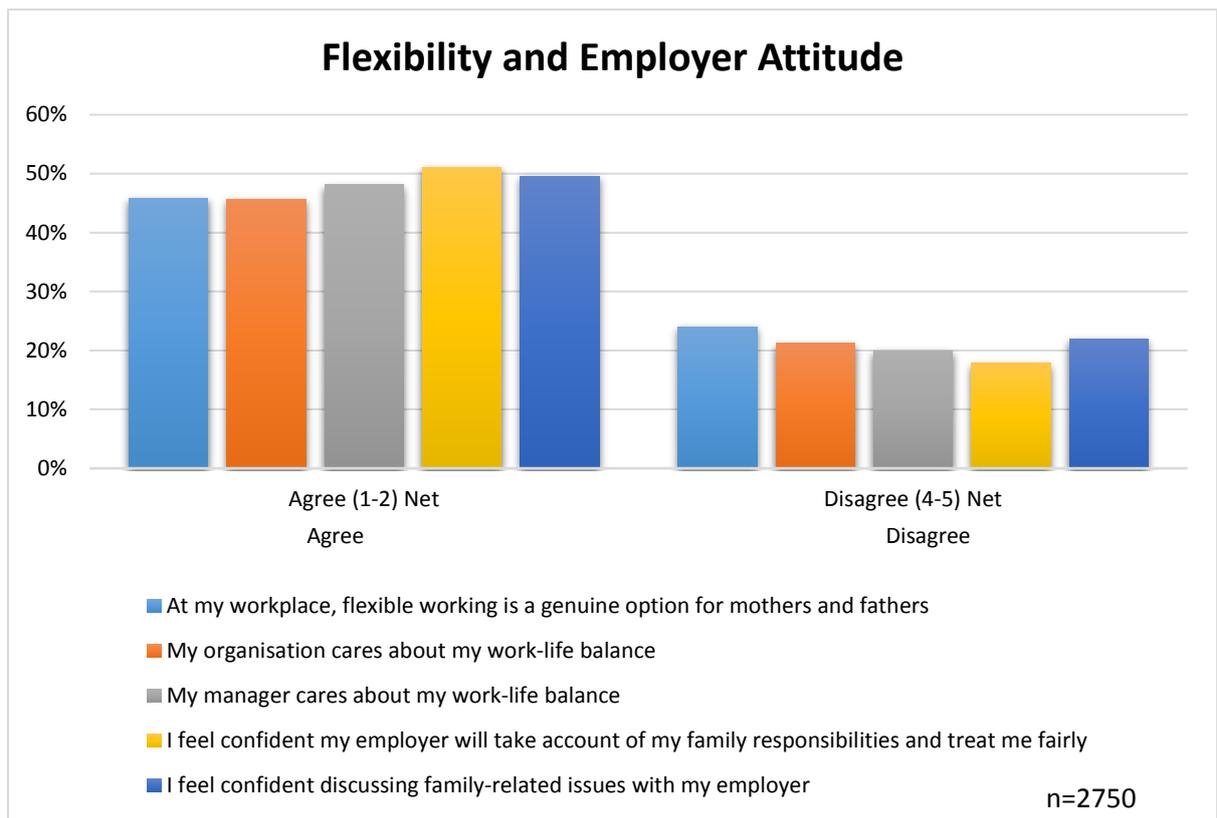


Figure 13

Parents were also asked about whether or not they were comfortable talking specifically about work-life fit with their employers. The responses provided a nuanced picture that might be characterised as limited confidence in the strength of family-friendly cultures.

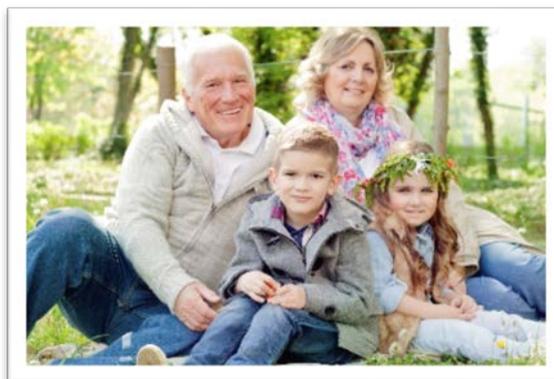
41 per cent overall, for example, said they had lied or bent the truth to their employer about family life conflicting with work, with a significantly higher proportion of millennial parents (46 per cent) than those over 36 (35 per cent) acknowledging this. Fathers were also more likely to say they had lied than mothers (44 per cent vs 37 per cent). Parents in London were most likely to say they had bent the truth (51 per cent) and those in Scotland the least likely (35 per cent). One third of parents said they had faked being sick to meet family obligations, rising to 38 per cent of millennial parents.

61 per cent of parents said they would feel confident asking their employer to miss work for a family occasion, but this fell to 51 per cent who said they would feel confident talking to their employer about reducing their hours or placing boundaries around work emails or calls. In other words, almost half of parents are not comfortable raising the issue of workload and hours – both of which are clearly issues for many employees - with their employer. There is a tension here. Parents are uncomfortable talking about hours and workload, but they also see themselves (figure 16) as primarily responsible for their own work-life balance and recognise the need to be proactive with their employer. It is vital that employers create a ‘safe’ environment where employees feel confident talking about work-life issues without worrying that it will create a negative impression. At the same time employees and managers should be trained to recognise signs of overwork, stress and burnout before they become a bigger problem.

Viewed through the lens of company work-life balance culture rather than policy, the complex attitudes of parents come into clearer focus. Although organisations might talk positively about their family friendly values and support for work-life balance, if employees see that it is easier for more senior colleagues to access flexibility, or that men working flexibly are an anomaly then the old management saw that 'culture eats strategy for breakfast' rings true. Where flexible working is seen as an individual exception and line managers are unsupportive (possibly as a result of demands from their own managers) then all employees will feel the disconnect between warm words on flexibility and family friendliness and the reality of the way that people behave and are rewarded.

## Sharing Care: Mothers, Fathers and Grandparents

All parents in the 2017 *Index* had some childcare responsibilities for dependent children. Just under half (46 per cent) used childcare that was not directly provided by them or their partner. Just under half of these (48 per cent) used formal, registered childcare while 29 per cent used informal care, and the remaining 23 per cent a mixture of both. Of those using formal childcare, 32 per cent of parents were happy with the amount they used. 29 per cent said they would like to use less and spend more time with their children (a third of mothers and a quarter of fathers), and 17 per cent said they would like to use more but could not afford to. A further 11 per cent said they wanted to use more but couldn't because of the hours they worked, and the same proportion said that the week to week unpredictability of their hours precluded the use of more childcare. Affordability and availability were issues for 39 per cent of parents.



Grandparental care was the most common type of non-parental childcare, with 41 per cent of parents using it. Only eight per cent of parents selected workplace or employer-supported nurseries as an option, although this is highly likely to be due to lack of employer provision rather than parental preference. A third of parents used private nurseries. For those parents who used grandparental care, 56 per cent relied on regular care for a number of hours each week, 29 per cent on ad hoc grandparental care and the remaining 14 per cent on regular 'light' care such as dropping off or picking up children from school. It is clear that grandparents are an integral part of the childcare mix, but as others have noted<sup>42</sup>, pressures on grandparents to remain in paid employment, or become carers for older adults mean that this is a resource that is stretched and is not as 'free' or 'available' as might be supposed.

For those families who do not use childcare, the most common reason was that a partner was available to look after the children (34 per cent), and as might be expected, women were more likely to fulfil this caring role than fathers. A quarter said that they could not afford formal childcare, whilst 17 per cent said that both partners worked flexibly and shared the care between themselves. Six per cent said that they could not find appropriate childcare and a further six per cent could not find any childcare that fitted with their atypical hours.

For those parents who used non-parental childcare, when this became unexpectedly unavailable it was disruptive, primarily to work. Figure 14 shows what happens, with 70 per cent of parents saying that they have to take time away from work. Within this there are clear gender differences. Mothers are more likely to say that they have to take time off, with fathers confirming that it is their partner who is more likely to take time off.

Parents also say that in the workplace traditional gender roles dominate. Both mothers and fathers say that it is twice as acceptable at work for women to take time off for childcare as men.

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<sup>42</sup> Time to care, Grandparents Plus 2014

## What happens when childcare is unexpectedly unavailable?

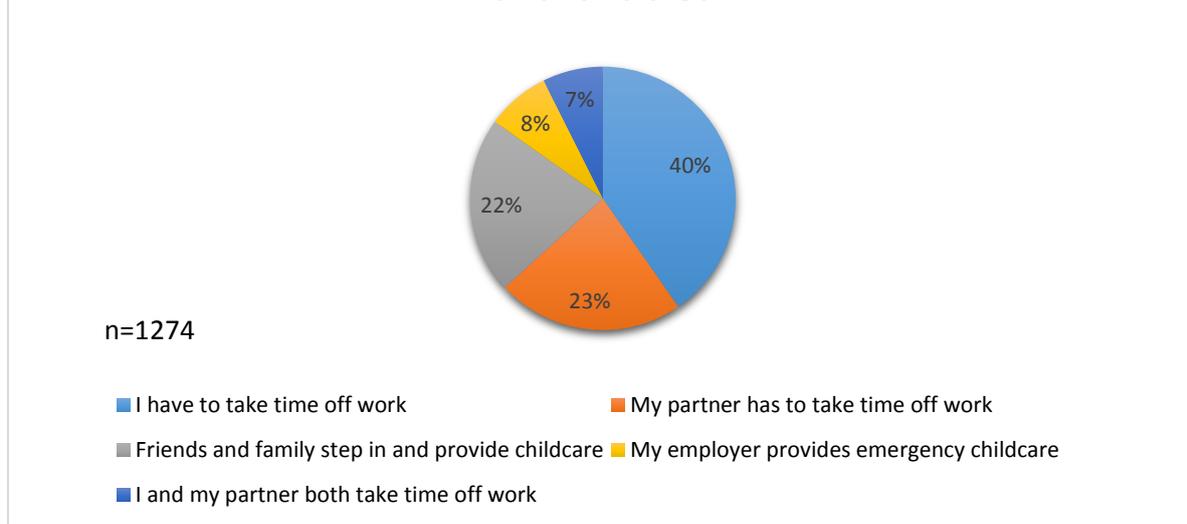


Figure 14

However the 2017 *Index* does show that although this gender attitude persists, fathers are more involved with their children’s care and that this is having a bearing on their work and career choices and decisions. When asked whether they would assess their childcare needs before taking a new job or promotion 75 per cent of parents said they would. Although more mothers than fathers agreed, the proportion of fathers was still very high at 69 per cent. Last year’s *Index* showed 56 per cent of mothers agreeing they would assess their childcare needs before taking a new job or promotion. 81 per cent of mothers asked this time agreed. Although the participants in the *Index* change each year, this increase is nevertheless noteworthy.

These considerations were particularly pronounced for millennial fathers, of whom 76 per cent agreed, vs 63 per cent of older fathers. Although younger fathers might have younger children and therefore more intensive childcare responsibilities than fathers with older children, it nonetheless suggests that these fathers are willing to countenance different career trajectories based on their childcare responsibilities. This may point to a more equal sharing of work and care in the future and to families making different choices about who works and who cares. But this can only be realised with accompanying changes in workplace culture and practice.

Both parents are involved in everyday childcare, although gender divisions still exist. More mothers than fathers, for example, both drop off and collect from school and nursery on a regular basis, but for millennial parents this division is less pronounced with 67 per cent of millennial mothers and 64 per cent of millennial fathers dropping off every day. For older parents (36+) 65 per cent of mothers dropped off regularly, and 45 per cent of fathers. However, in common with previous *Indexes*, it is generally the mother who the school or nursery calls if there is a problem. The default assumption is that the mother is the primary carer, even if both parents are working.

Parents were asked about what they did when they came in from work, and the results can be seen in figure 15.

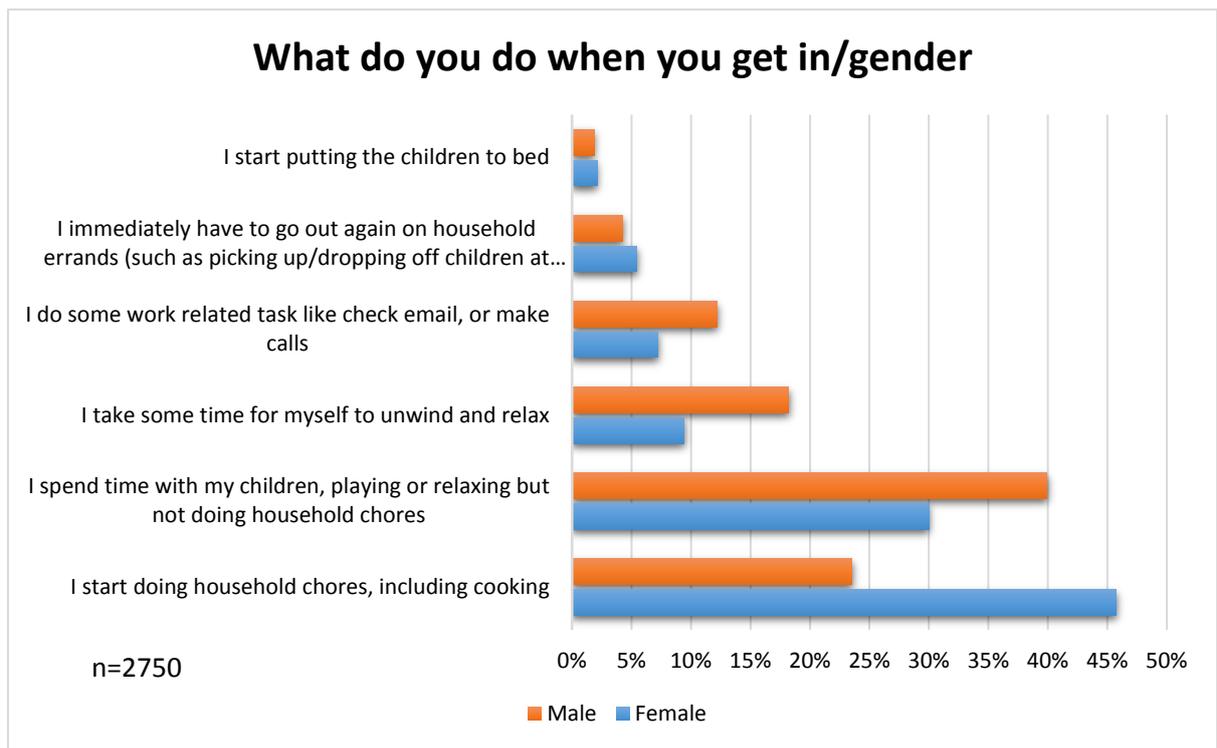


Figure 15

Here a picture emerges of fathers and mothers dividing childcare and household chores along more 'traditional' lines with mothers clearly doing more in terms of household chores and slightly more childcare. Fathers are more likely to play with their children (but not do chores) and also more likely to take 'me' time. It has been argued<sup>43</sup> that men see playing with their children as more worthwhile because it strengthens the paternal sphere of influence, while indirect childcare tasks such as sweeping the floor were tedious and did not augment fathers' power. Fathers are also more likely to carry out paid work-related tasks.

Parents were asked about how they perceived their employer's attitude towards their childcare responsibilities (figure 16). There was little difference between the responses by age, gender or region. The largest proportion (42 per cent) felt that their employer had some understanding, but this fell short of any practical help (which might be emergency childcare, or workplace nurseries, or time away from and flexibility in work, for example). The next most frequent response (39 per cent) was the most positive: employers who were both understanding and offered practical support.

<sup>43</sup> Gatrell, C. *Hard Labour: The sociology of parenthood*. OUP 2014

## What best describes your employer's attitude towards your childcare responsibilities?

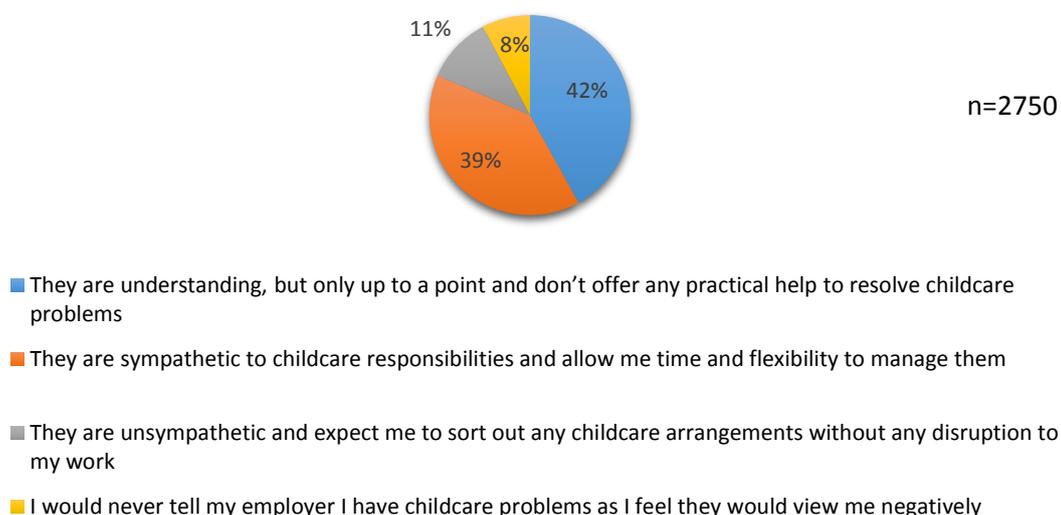


Figure 16

However, almost a fifth of parents reported that their employers were unsympathetic, with 11 per cent saying that their employers made no allowances for childcare responsibilities and eight per cent feeling they had to conceal the fact of any childcare responsibilities as they feared it would result in negative views of them at work. This is concerning: childcare is obviously a part of many people's day to day life - but in many instances it appears that modern workplaces are still unwilling to work with the grain of parent's lives. A lifecycles approach to work-life balance is one that could make things easier for parents, and one which is in tune not only with the aspirations of parents for a good work-life fit, but for the reality of work today, where fewer families have a full-time stay at home carer. Careers are also expected to last longer as people will retire later, and a lifecycles approach is one that better fits this new pattern of work, where work-life balance needs will spike less intensely but over a longer period. There is a role for employers in childcare provision<sup>44</sup>, and amongst employees, an obvious need for more options than currently exist.

<sup>44</sup> Employers guide to childcare. Working Families and Bright Horizons, 2015

## Who is Responsible? Parents' views

Parents were asked to identify how much they thought three groups were responsible for achieving a good work-life balance: themselves; their employer; and government. They were also asked to identify what each of these could do.

Parents identified themselves as being the most responsible for finding a good work-life balance, followed by their employer and then government (figure 17).

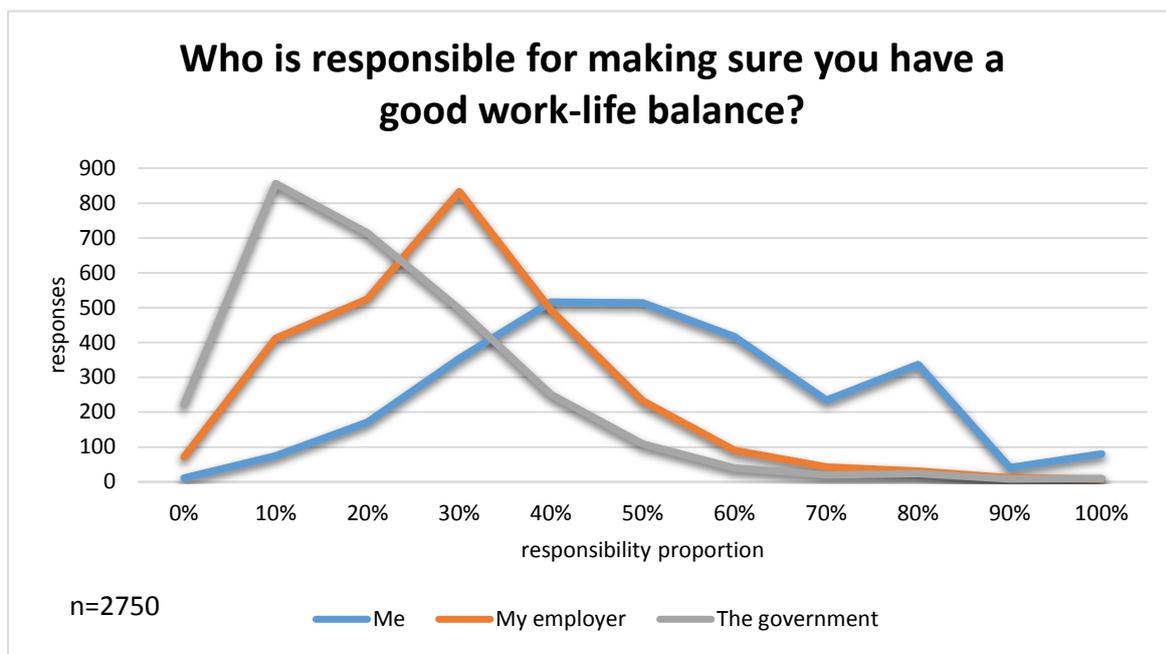


Figure 17

In terms of what each group should do, respondents identified that firstly parents could find a new job which allowed a better work-life fit (27 per cent), put down boundaries around work (27 per cent), approach their employer to make changes (25 per cent), or leave work altogether (11 per cent). This is a clear indication that work-life balance is a powerful attractor and retainer of working parents.

Parents thought that employers should put more policies in place to help people balance work and home (20 per cent), make efforts to change the company culture so work-life balance is more acceptable (20 per cent, rising to 40 per cent of fathers aged 36-45), encourage people to use existing company policies to help their work-life balance (16 per cent), advertise jobs as available on a flexible basis, rather than just full time (14 per cent), provide childcare (14 per cent), and let senior managers work flexibly to set a good example (9 per cent).

Parents thought that government should make it easier to find affordable childcare (28 per cent), improve rights to work flexibly (28 per cent), impose limits on the working week (20 per cent) and increase maternity and paternity leave and shared parental leave and pay (20 per cent). They see a clear role for government in terms of childcare provision, engendering a flexible working culture, curbing overwork and supporting efforts to share care.

Parents were clear about the difference having a flexible and family friendly employer would make (figure 18).

*“For any employers and policy-makers uncertain about the advantages of engendering better work-life balance in the UK labour market, the evidence here is compelling.”*

Sarah Jackson

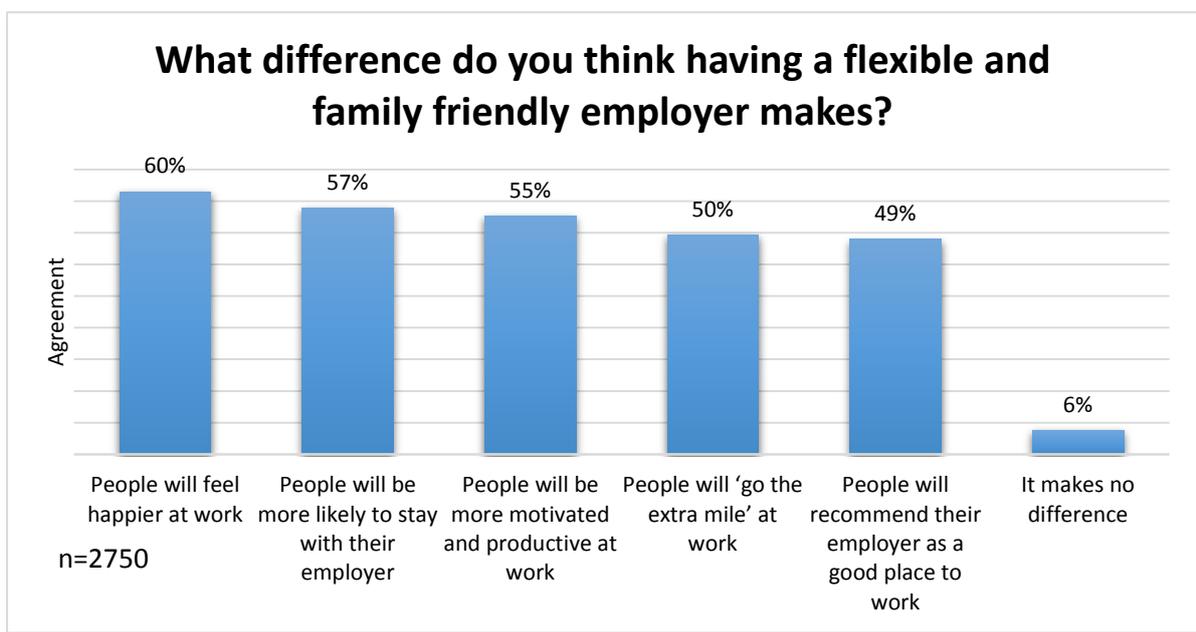


Figure 18

The benefits having a flexible and family friendly employer would bring, both to individuals and to employers themselves, are evident. Happier employees and extra motivation, productivity and loyalty are all outcomes in the eyes of parents. If any employers are uncertain about the advantages a work-life approach might bring, the evidence here is compelling.

## Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The shape of work is failing to keep up with the shifting context, where families with one full time and one non-working or part time working parent are becoming increasingly rare. For lots of families, two full-time incomes are necessary, yet only one in five thinks they have sufficient time and money to see their family thrive. Time and income can be squeezed even harder for working families with single parents (only 16 per cent of whom have sufficient time and money to enable their family to thrive).

For the 40% of working parents who do not work flexibly, access to flexibility is limited. Employer attitude and the type and level of job are both factors. And even for the significant numbers of parents who are working flexibly, workplace cultures mean many fear the consequences of working in a way that prevents work encroaching on family life. Many parents are working extra hours because their workload is simply too large. They say they are burned out by work, and that work. Crucially, flexibility should not just mean working long hours flexibly, around and during family life. Burning out employees is not a sustainable business model, but the potential gains from introducing a balanced, flexible approach are evident in the findings.

We need to mind the 'flexibility gap'. The benefits of access to flexible working have not been felt evenly across seniority, salary and between the genders. 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 rather than an effective way of running the workplace. We need to shift the starting point so that jobs are advertised **flexibly 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 outset<sup>45</sup>.

Greater availability of flexible working will not support parents' work-life balance if employers continue to rely on extra effort from employees to get the job done. This is not sustainable. The twin challenge for organisations is 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, and better decisions made on their behalf.

More women are in paid employment than before and at the same time fathers want to be more involved with their children's lives. But rather than bringing about a change in working practices, these trends seem to have left working fathers facing the same conundrums that working mothers have faced for decades. Seven out of ten fathers would consider childcare before taking a new job or promotion. Rather than create a 'fatherhood penalty', 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 both sexes play in bringing up their children, and provide a realistic route for parents to actually exercise real choice.

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<sup>45</sup> [www.workingfamilies.org.uk/campaigns/happy-to-talk-flexible-working](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/campaigns/happy-to-talk-flexible-working)

For many families the childcare infrastructure is inflexible and unaffordable. Parents have identified this as a key area for government action. The success of the childcare packages being developed by the UK and Scottish Governments – including additional free childcare hours, tax free childcare and changes to the childcare element of Universal Credit – will 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<sup>46</sup>.

Employers should consider other **practical ways to deliver for their employees with caring responsibilities**. Some larger employers could consider a subsidised workplace nursery, making childcare both affordable and (for those who live locally) more convenient. Childcare arrangements can sometimes go awry; employers could consider offering access to emergency childcare. Back-up care for dependants could also be considered as a key part of employers' attraction and retention packages. Interventions like these send a signal to parents that they are supported at work, and help shift workplace culture to one that is supportive of caring responsibilities at home.

Grandparents are still an important part of the childcare mix for many families. The current proposal to extend the Shared Parental Leave scheme to grandparents, however, risks undermining the intention of the policy – to give fathers the opportunity to share care of their children – and of 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.

***Family life and relationships are parents' priorities. Employers that work with the grain of this truth – and a government pro-active in supporting them to do this – will be rewarded with a happier, healthier and more productive workforce – crucial at a time when UK competitiveness is a priority for us all.***

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<sup>46</sup> Family & Childcare Trust, 2016 Childcare Survey

## About Working Families

Working Families is the UK's leading work-life balance campaign organisation. We support and give a voice to working parents and carers, whilst also helping employers create workplaces which encourage work-life balance for everyone. Our name defines two of the most important parts of life: family and employment. These are often in conflict. We feel passionately that this is unnecessary, counter-productive and must change. Things ARE changing. By working with parents and carers and organisations alike, Working Families helps children, working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work. By operating in the real world of pragmatic advice and practical solutions, we are making our vision a reality. To find out more about us visit: [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

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## About Bright Horizons

Bright Horizons partners with more than 1,000 leading employers globally to address the work-life and dependant care challenges that can impact productivity and engagement. Solutions are tailor-made to support clients' evolving business needs and include workplace nurseries and nursery place arrangements; back-up care for adults and children of all ages; maternity/paternity coaching and work-life consulting. We are proud of the longevity of many of our client relationships reflecting decades of consistently high levels of satisfaction with our services. To learn more, please visit [www.brighthorizons.co.uk/solutionsatwork](http://www.brighthorizons.co.uk/solutionsatwork).

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