

Modern Families Index 2019

SUMMARY REPORT



The *Modern Families Index* is the most comprehensive study of how working parents manage the balance between work and family life in the UK.

Now in its seventh year, it has been published annually by Working Families and Bright Horizons Family Solutions since 2012.

Who took part in the *Index*?

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

Respondents represented a range of household incomes and family structures, equally distributed between the regions and nations of the UK. The median household income was £39,000. For single parents it was £18,500.

The sample gathered slightly more mothers than fathers (53% to 47%). The majority (76%) of parents are between the ages of 26 and 45. 46% are millennials. The vast majority are white British (84%), and 63% are either married or in a civil partnership, with a further 17% cohabiting. In couple households, a very high proportion had both parents working full-time (76%). 20% of parents in the sample were single parents.

To download the full report and for helpful advice and information for working parents, carers and employers, please visit

workingfamilies.org.uk and solutions.brighthouse.co.uk

The financial pressures on family life

Only a quarter of parents taking part in the *Index* felt that they had the right balance between work, family and income. Increasing financial pressure that parents are feeling is combining with a demanding work environment to produce a situation where family life is under strain.

- Less than a quarter (24%) of families felt that their financial circumstances had improved over the last three years. Instead, the majority (49%) thought that it had become more difficult financially to raise a family. For single parents this was a particular problem, with 69% saying it had become more difficult.
- Parents who worked part-time felt more financial pressure. 64% of part-timers felt that it was getting more difficult to raise a family. Having a partner working part-time also had an effect, with 56% reporting raising a family as getting more difficult. Having a full-time working partner reduced this to 42%.
- For many families in the *Index*, dual full-time earners was the model that worked best for them, easing financial difficulties around raising a family.



Workplace flexibility – a valuable commodity in short supply

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% increase.

However, despite its value, it seems that for many parents, routes to flexible working are being closed off.

- There is an unmet demand for flexible working. 86% of working parents in the *Index* want to work flexibly but just under half (49%) of parents do.
- Two out of five parents that don't work flexibly said flexibility isn't compatible with their job. Although it is difficult to incorporate flexibility into some types of work, there are positive examples of flexibility in retail, manufacturing and shift-based jobs, which show that some flexibility is possible.
- Over a third (37%) of parents that don't work flexibly said it isn't available where they work, despite the fact that all employees have the Right to Request flexible working and employers must consider requests seriously.
- Nearly one in ten parents (9%) that don't work flexibly said their manager doesn't like it, demonstrating the importance of line manager support for flexibility, so parents feel able to ask for flexibility or use their Right to Request.

THE UNMET DEMAND FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

86%
of parents want to work flexibly

But less than half
(49%) do

REASONS FOR NOT WORKING FLEXIBLY

2 out of 5
parents that don't work flexibly say it isn't compatible with their job

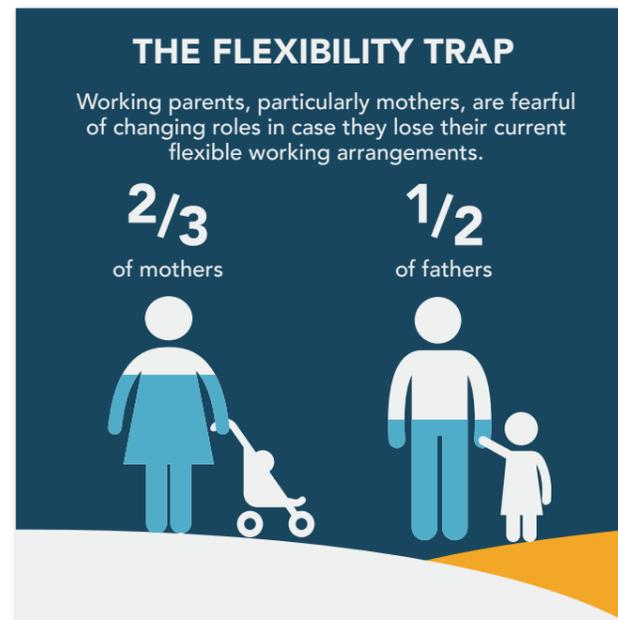
37%
say it isn't available where they work

1 in 10
say their manager doesn't like it

The flexibility 'trap'

The value of flexibility to parents – particularly mothers – is highlighted by the numbers of parents not seeking career progression because of the fear that they won't be able to secure flexibility in a new role.

- Nearly three in five parents in the *Index* (58%) said that they intended to stay in their existing job over the next two years – over half of fathers (51%) and more than two-thirds of mothers (68%). Flexible workers were more likely to want to stay (68%) than non-flexible ones (48%).
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) 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 half of fathers. Mothers who work flexibly were more likely to say they would stay (72%) than those who didn't work flexibly (57%).
- More than one in ten (11%) of parents in the *Index* had turned down a new job or promotion in favour of preserving their work life balance. Fathers and mothers were equally as likely to have made this choice.



Part-timers, gender and promotion

41% of mothers in the *Index* worked part-time, compared to only 5% of fathers. 92% of part-timers in the *Index* were mothers. There is evidence that those working part-time can be at a disadvantage in terms of progression at work. Part-timers were less likely to be promoted than their full-time counterparts, which can be attributed to employers persistently placing a higher value on full-time work, which there is simply more of.

- Part-timers in the *Index* were half as likely to have been promoted in the last three years compared to those who worked full-time. Approximately one in five part-timers (21%) had received a promotion in the last three years compared to 45% of their full-time counterparts.
- For every five fathers in the *Index* that received a promotion in the last three years, only four mothers received one, largely due to the disparity in promotion rates between part-time and full-time workers.
- Mothers in the *Index* said they last received a promotion on average 6.5 years ago. Fathers received a promotion on average 4.5 years ago. Put another way, the average mother has gone

two years longer without a promotion compared to the average father – again, largely due to the disparity in promotion rates between part-time and full-time workers.

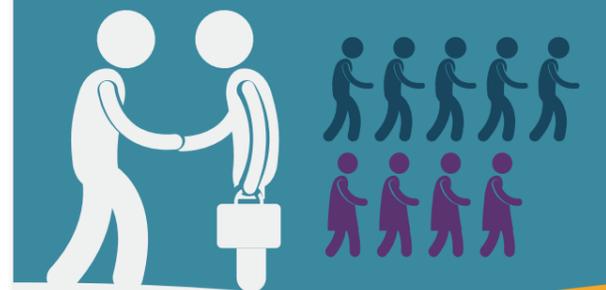
- More parents who used formal childcare said that they had received a promotion in the last three years (69%) than those who used informal childcare (56%). Split by gender, both mothers and fathers who had been promoted in the last three years reported using more formal rather than informal childcare by 10%.
- Having a child under two meant it was less likely that parents received a promotion. This applied almost equally to mothers and fathers.

PARENTS WORKING PART-TIME ARE HALF AS LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN PROMOTED WITHIN THE LAST THREE YEARS COMPARED TO PARENTS WHO WORK FULL-TIME.



THE PROMOTION GAP

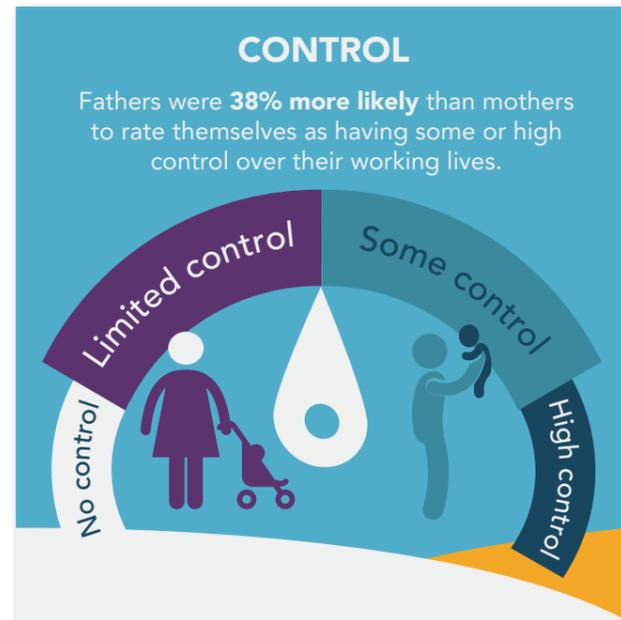
For every **five fathers** that received a promotion, only **four mothers** received one.



Flexible working, control and work life fit

Working flexibly affords more control for parents over their work life fit. But more control doesn't necessarily translate into better satisfaction with work life fit, often because control can't solve the problem of unmanageable work loads.

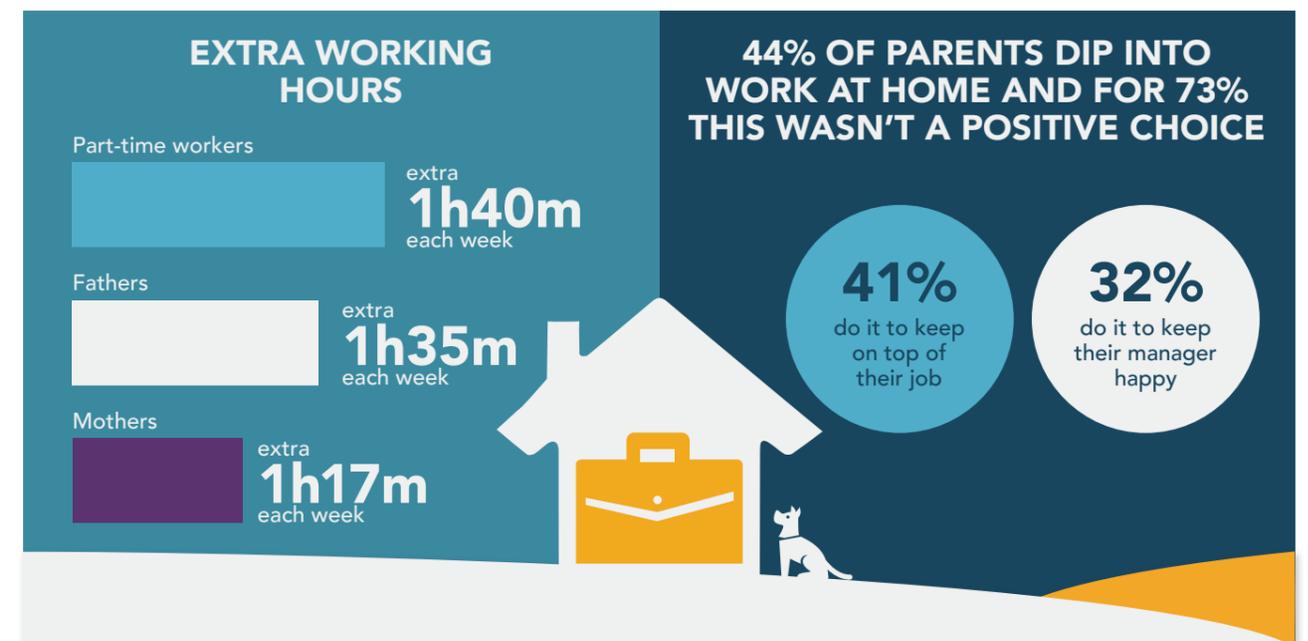
- Overall, parents who had access to flexible working had more control over their working lives than parents who didn't.
- When asked about the level of control they had over their working lives, fathers were 38% more likely than mothers to rate themselves as having some control or high control over their start and finish time, where they work from and how many hours they work. Mothers – 41% of whom work part-time – were 67% more likely than fathers to say that they had 'no control' in any of these aspects of their work.
- Parents that are more senior enjoyed more control over their working lives than more junior ones. At the top they had high control, whereas junior workers had only limited. This indicates that control is something that is often 'accrued'.
- Flexible working can't deliver work life balance when jobs are simply too big and rely on extra hours to get done. 60% of all parents in the *Index* said that they had to work extra hours to deal with their workload, going up to 72% amongst more senior workers.



'Always On'

Parents reported problems with working time, with high workloads requiring many of them to work extra hours. This was an issue that affected both mothers and fathers. For many parents, leaving work was not the end of the working day.

- Mothers on average worked an additional 1h17m (or 6% more than their average contracted hours) each week. For fathers this figure is 1h35m (or 4.7% more than their average contracted hours). Across a year, this is almost two weeks extra for men and seven and a half days extra for women.
- Part-timers in the *Index* were putting in extra hours. On average, people working the most common part-time pattern (16hrs per week), were working an extra 1hr21m (or 8% more than their averaged contracted hours) each week. Over a year, this adds up to almost four times their working week, or seven and a half days extra. Full-timers are working 5.5% more than their average contracted hours each week.
- Many working parents were putting in more than an extra hour a day. For example, of those working a 37-hour week, one in five were putting in more than five extra hours each week.
- 44% of parents in the *Index* said they dip into work (for example checking emails) when they get home. For 73% this wasn't a positive choice – they had to do it – either to keep on top of their job (41%), or to keep their manager happy (32%).
- Over half (51%) of those who found themselves dipping into work had access to flexible working. For these parents, flexibility may be more about shifting work hours rather than substantively resolving their work life fit.



Technology 'creep'

Parents in the *Index* have mixed views of the extent technology supports their work life fit. More parents were separators rather than blenders, in that most parents prefer clear boundaries between work and home: periods where they are clearly working and periods where they can completely 'switch off'.

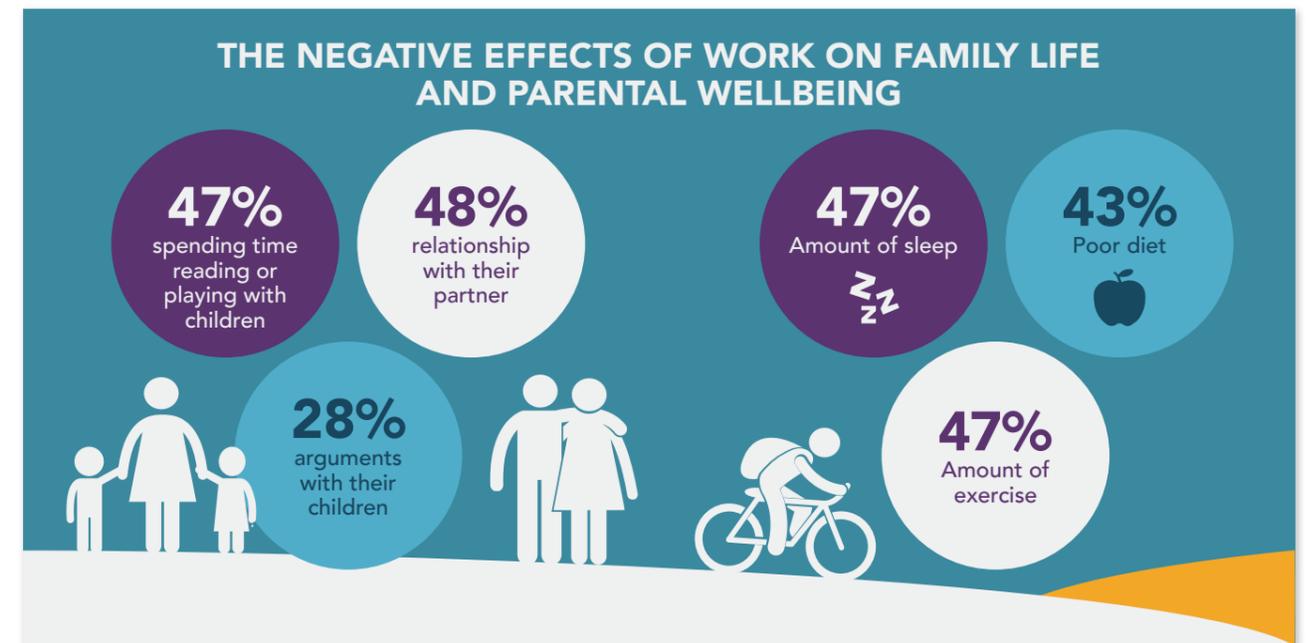
- Half (50%) of parents in the *Index* agreed that technology has helped get a better work life balance, with slightly more fathers than mothers agreeing.
- However, 31% remained equivocal about the benefits and 19% felt that it harmed their work life balance. One reason is that for many parents, technology has increased the number of hours they put in: 44% said they thought it had increased their hours, as opposed to 29% who disagreed. Work expanding into family time is unlikely to have positive consequences, especially if this persists over the long term.
- Almost half (47%) felt that the boundaries between work and home had become too blurred by technology, whilst only a quarter disagreed. Whilst a technology-enabled blending of work and life may suit some, the *Index* shows that working parents would prefer more separation. This is particularly true of those on higher incomes, for whom blending may have become the 'norm'. Parents who felt that boundaries were too blurred reported poorer wellbeing.



Work effects on parental wellbeing

Parents working more hours were less satisfied with their work life fit, reporting a number of negative effects of working time impacting on their family life and emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. Unsurprisingly, when asked what would improve their wellbeing, more parents said that changes to their work life would make the most difference.

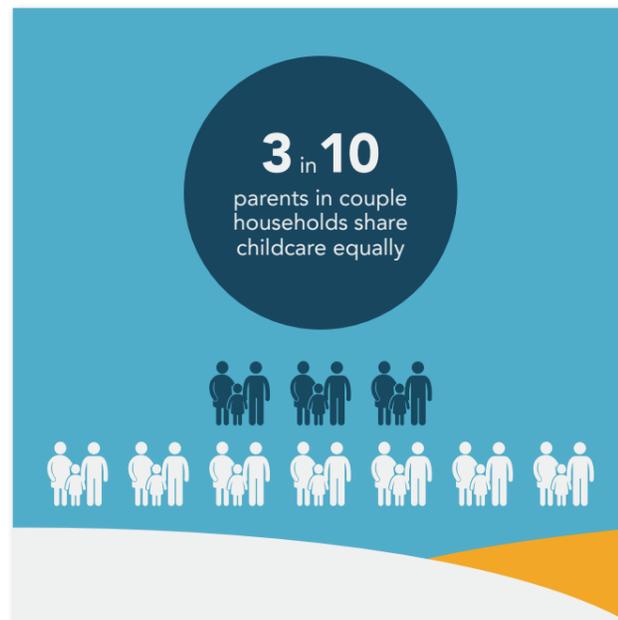
- Almost half (47%) said that work gets in the way of spending time reading or playing with their children or taking them to activities. These weren't rare disruptions: parents said this was happening often or all the time.
- 48% said it affected their relationship with their partner and more than a quarter (28%) said it led to arguing with their children.
- Physical wellbeing was affected too: work had noticeable negative impacts on the amount of sleep they could get (47%), the amount of exercise they were able to take (47%) and on their diet (43%).
- Millennial parents reported the poorest wellbeing (32% said their wellbeing was poor most or all of the time). They were also the most likely to find it difficult to switch off from work: two in five said they found themselves thinking about work when they were spending time with their family.



Sharing work and care – a new equality?

Nearly three in ten (29%) of parents in couple households in the *Index* said they share care equally. Who were these parents and what are the factors enabling them to share childcare equally?

- They were at the cusp of the millennial and adjacent (Gen X) cohort, at 37 years on average.
- They were more likely to be working full-time and both parents were likely to be higher earners than average. They were generally happier with their time/money balance.
- They were less likely to have a workplace culture or line manager with an expectation of extra working hours.
- They seemed to have a more supportive workplace as measured by multiple factors: they were less likely to feel resentful toward their employers, 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.
- They also appeared to have different attitudes to non-childcare duties: those parents who shared childcare equally also tended to share household chores.



Recommendations

1. The government is evaluating the Right to Request flexible working in 2019. It 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 the cultural shift towards normalising flexible working across workplaces, including amongst less senior staff.
2. The government is considering a duty for employers to consider whether a job can be done flexibly, and make that clear when advertising roles. This should be consulted on without delay, kickstarting the flexible working revolution that parents – particularly those ‘stuck’ in flexible jobs and those looking for employment – so desperately need.
3. Any new framework should take employers through job design prior to advertising roles, to unlock more part-time and flexible jobs and ensure they are ‘human-sized’. This is crucial to parents’ progression at work, their wellbeing and ability to spend time with family. Employers that use the *Happy to Talk Flexible Working* strapline and logo are taken through job design prior to advertisement.
4. A supportive workplace culture and, in particular, supportive line managers, are crucial to ensuring that parents have some genuine control over their work lives. Employers should understand their workplace culture and what needs to change and invest in support for line managers to ensure both fathers and mothers have access to genuine flexibility at work.
5. The government is evaluating Shared Parental Leave (SPL) in 2019. Simple reforms to the scheme – 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.
6. Going further, the creation of a properly paid, standalone period of extended paternity leave for fathers is likely to see better take-up. Coupled with more widespread and embedded part-time and flexible working, this would mean more fathers could share care in their baby’s first year and, crucially, could continue to share care in the long term, tackling the gender pay gap.
7. 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.



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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About Bright Horizons

Bright Horizons partners with more than 1,100 leading employers globally to address the work life and dependant care challenges that can otherwise negatively 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 our client relationships – reflecting decades of consistently high levels of satisfaction with our services.

To learn more, please visit: **solutions.brighthouse.co.uk**

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