

Work-life balance

OVER HALF OF MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN ARE IN EMPLOYMENT. HOWEVER WOMEN ARE STILL MUCH MORE LIKELY THAN MEN TO CUT DOWN THEIR HOURS OR TAKE A CAREER BREAK WHEN THEY HAVE CHILDREN:

- In Great Britain 20 per cent of mothers with children under five work full time and 35 per cent part time. For mothers whose youngest child is 5-10, 28 per cent work full time and another 43 per cent part time. ¹
- In contrast, 86 per cent of fathers with children under 10 work full time and 4 per cent part time. ¹
- In 2004, 22 per cent of children in the UK lived in lone-mother families and 2 per cent in lone father families. ² The employment rate for lone parents is 56.5 per cent, compared to 71.4 per cent for married and cohabiting mothers. ³

THERE IS A 'LONG HOURS' CULTURE IN BRITAIN:

- The European Working Time Directive (WTD) became law in the UK as the Working Time Regulations 1998, ⁴ including a maximum working week of 48 hours. The UK has retained the right to an opt-out, under which workers can waive their right to the 48 hour limit.

IN 2003, 26 PER CENT OF ALL WORKERS WORKED MORE THAN 48 HOURS A WEEK, COMPARED TO ONLY TEN PER CENT IN 1998. NINE PER CENT WORKED MORE THAN 60 HOURS A WEEK ⁵

- Of those workers who worked more than 48 hours a week, 45 per cent said that long hours had put a strain on their relationships, and 11 per cent believed that this contributed to their divorce, while 20 per cent said that long hours had a negative effect on the relationship with their children. ⁵
- Eleven per cent of the workforce (2.3 million people) would like to work shorter hours even if this meant that their pay was reduced. ⁶

FATHERS ARE STILL MUCH MORE LIKELY TO WORK LONG HOURS THAN MOTHERS:

- A third of working fathers work 48 hours or more a week. ⁷
- Men make up 75 per cent of those working 48 or more hours and 80 per cent of those who work 60 or more hours. ⁵

FATHERS NOWADAYS WANT MORE THAN A 'BREADWINNER ROLE':

- Many fathers feel as confident as their partner in caring for their child (87 per cent agree overall). ⁸
- Many fathers would like to be more involved in childcare (70 per cent in a recent study). ⁸
- In one study around a fifth of men questioned said that they felt part-time flexible working would be ideal when their children were young, and two-thirds favoured full-time flexible working. ⁹

- Children whose fathers have been actively involved in their lives are likely to have higher educational achievements, more satisfactory relationships in adult life, and less likely to have mental health problems or be in trouble with the police in later life. ¹⁰

WOMEN ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY THE FACT THAT REDUCING HOURS TO LOOK AFTER CHILDREN CAN AFFECT CAREER PROSPECTS, PAY AND PENSIONS:

- In 2004 women were found to make up 97 per cent of those going part-time for family reasons. ¹¹
- Women who work part time earn 32 per cent less than the median hourly earnings of women who work full time and 40 per cent less per hour than men who work full time. ¹²
- There are many contributing factors to the pay gap, including a lack of part-time jobs above the lowest grades on the open labour market and a resistance among managers towards creating senior level, part-time jobs. ¹³
- A survey revealed that 53 per cent of the part-time women workers questioned had previously worked in jobs requiring either higher qualifications, or more skills or experience, or which had involved more management or supervisory responsibility. ¹³
- Part-time workers are about 40 per cent less likely to receive work-related training than their full-time counterparts. ¹⁴
- The effects of part-time working can last well beyond returning to full-time employment. Even after 15 years, women who moved to full-time employment after only one year part-time can earn up to 10 per cent less per hour. ¹⁴
- Among those retiring in 2005, around 85 per cent of men have entitlement to a full basic State Pension, compared with only about 30 per cent of women. ¹⁵

DESPITE THE PRESSURES OF WORK, BOTH MOTHERS AND FATHERS HAVE CUT DOWN ON OTHER THINGS TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH THEIR CHILDREN THAN THEY DID IN THE PAST:

- Mothers of children aged under 5 spent under one hour, 40 minutes a day in the mid-1970s on childcare and over four hours a day by the late 1990s. ¹⁶
- Fathers of children under 5 spent less than quarter of an hour a day in the mid-1970s on childcare and two hours a day in the late 1990s. ¹⁶

PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 6 OR DISABLED CHILDREN UNDER 18 HAVE THE RIGHT TO REQUEST TO WORK FLEXIBLY, AND THEIR EMPLOYERS MUST CONSIDER THEIR REQUESTS SERIOUSLY:

- Fourteen per cent of British employees reported that they had requested a change to their working arrangements in the last two years. Most (81 per cent) requests had been partly or fully accepted by employers. ¹⁷
- Thirty-six per cent of women with dependent children under the age of 6 and 12 per cent of men with dependent children under 6 had made a request to work flexibly in the last two years (including changing to part-time). ¹⁷
- However, according to the Labour Force Survey in 2005, 77.4 per cent of employees have no working time flexibility. ⁶ (defined as flexitime, annualised hours, compressed working week, job sharing or term-time only working, but not homeworking or part-time work).
- In 2005 only 0.6 per cent of all employees had job share agreements and one per cent a compressed work week (extending daily working hours to be able to either work a nine-day fortnight or four-and-half day week). ⁶

- The Work and Families Act 2006 extended the right to request flexible working to carers of adults and this will apply from April 2007. ²¹

FLEXIBLE WORKING IS ALSO POPULAR AMONG EMPLOYEES WITH OLDER CHILDREN:

- Eighteen per cent of employees with children aged 6-11 years and 15 per cent of employees with children aged 12-18 years requested flexible working in the last two years, compared to 22 per cent of those with children under 6. ¹⁷
- Around three-fifths of men and just under half of women questioned thought that flexible full-time working would be ideal when they had older children. ⁹

THERE ARE BENEFITS FOR BUSINESS IN ENABLING EMPLOYEES TO HAVE A GOOD WORK-LIFE BALANCE:

- In a survey of Human Resources professionals, 74 per cent believed flexible working to have had a positive or major positive effect (27 per cent of all respondents) on employee retention. 70 per cent believed employee motivation had benefited. ¹⁸
- It costs an estimated £80 to handle a straightforward flexible working request, but £4800 to recruit a new employee. ¹⁹

PARENTAL LEAVE ALLOWS PARENTS TIME OFF TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILD, BUT IT IS UNPAID AND SO TAKE-UP IS RELATIVELY LOW:

- Parents are able to take 13 weeks' unpaid Parental Leave up to child's fifth birthday. Those with disabled children can take 18 weeks' Parental Leave up to the child's 18th birthday.
- Of parents of 17-month-old babies, just 8 per cent of fathers had used any parental leave. Just 11 per cent of those mothers who had returned to work had done so. ²⁰

ALTHOUGH MOTHERS ARE ENTITLED TO A YEAR'S MATERNITY LEAVE, FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS MAY LIMIT HOW MUCH OF THIS THEY CAN ACTUALLY TAKE:

- For women with babies expected on or after 1 April 2007, statutory maternity pay will be 90 per cent of the mother's average weekly earnings for the first six weeks, then up to £108.85 a week for the remaining 33 weeks. (See www.direct.gov.uk which has up-to-date information about rights and benefits).
- In 2005 only 14 per cent of mothers took their full 52-week entitlement. Nearly half of mothers took exactly six months of maternity leave, the point at which statutory maternity pay ends. ²⁰
- Seventy per cent of mothers who returned to work while still entitled to statutory leave said that they did so for financial reasons. ²⁰
- The Work and Families Act 2006 ²¹ allows the Government to extend statutory maternity pay further to one year which it intends to do in this parliament. ²²

PATERNITY LEAVE :

- New fathers can take up to two weeks' paternity leave with Statutory Paternity Pay, currently paid at £108.85 a week.
- In 2005, around a quarter of fathers took one week's leave or less. ²⁰
- In one study, the main reason fathers gave for not taking their full entitlement was financial: 33 per cent of the fathers said they could not afford to take two weeks' paternity leave at the statutory rate. ²⁰
- Fathers earning less than £1,000 gross per month were far more likely to take less than two weeks' leave around the time of childbirth: 49 per cent compared with less than one-third of fathers earning £1,000 or more per month. They were also more likely to take no leave at all. ²⁰

- Employers often help by paying more than the statutory rate; employees may also take other forms of leave to avoid the drop in pay. Around half of fathers used this in addition to or instead of paternity leave.²⁰
- Awareness of paternity rights varied according to fathers' incomes, with 34 per cent of fathers earning less than £1,000 per month, and 9 per cent of fathers earning £3,000 or more saying they did not know, before the baby's birth, that they were entitled to paid paternity leave.²⁰
- The Government intends to give fathers up to 26 weeks' additional leave during the first year of the child's life. This could not start before the child was 20 weeks old, and could only be taken if the mother had returned to work. With maternity pay extended to a year, a mother and father could then take 6 months paid leave each to care for their child, if they chose to.²³

DESPITE GOVERNMENT SUPPORT, FINDING CHILDCARE IS STILL A BARRIER TO WORK FOR SOME PARENTS:

Within the last year, 67 per cent of families had used informal childcare and 57 per cent formal care. Half (49 per cent) had used grandparents, 19 per cent other relatives and 23 per cent friends or neighbours.²⁴

In a DfES survey 23 per cent of parents reported that they found it difficult or very difficult to meet the cost of childcare.²⁴

A typical full-time nursery place for a child under two in Great Britain now costs £142 a week, over £7,300 a year.²⁵ This compares with median weekly earnings of £364 a week before tax.²⁶

The childcare element of Working Tax Credit covers up to 80 per cent of eligible childcare costs, up to a total of £140 for one child (80 per cent of £175) and £240 for two or more children (80 per cent of £300).

At April 2006, 374,300 families received the childcare element of Working Tax Credit; receiving an average of £49.80 per week help with their childcare costs.²⁷

A Daycare Trust survey of parents of disabled children found that for 69 per cent it was difficult to find childcare to meet their children's needs.²⁸ In a survey by Contact a Family, of those who used formal childcare over a third paid more than £7.50/hour.²⁹

WORKING 'ATYPICAL' HOURS IS COMMON...BUT CHILDCARE MAY BE DIFFICULT TO FIND:

14 per cent of mothers and 17 per cent of fathers worked evenings/nights (after 8.30pm) several times a week. 18 per cent of mothers and 22 per cent of fathers worked every Saturday as well as Sunday at least once a month.³⁰

In a 2003 survey, less than a third of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in England reported actively trying to develop childcare at atypical times, although most thought that some parents needed such a service.³¹

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