

Modern Families Index

2015



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Foreword

Bright Horizons is proud to partner with Working Families once again by sponsoring the *'Modern Families Index'* research report.

Helping working families and employers to find the right kind of support and to achieve a better balance between our responsibilities at home and at work has never been more important than it is today. Over the last twelve months, we have seen the highest number of working families since records began almost two decades ago and one thing is certain – balancing work and family life continues to be an ongoing challenge for the majority of families. As a working mother, employer, employee and carer, I can certainly empathise and understand the challenges we face in balancing busy working lives with caring for those who depend on us.

At Bright Horizons, it is our mission to make a difference to the lives of children, families and employers. We have always considered it vital to listen to our families and to our clients to find out what they really need, and we have grown and evolved our services through reflecting and acting upon what we have heard. This report provides us with additional valuable insight into what we are getting right, both as an employer ourselves and as a dependent care partner of other employers.

Since our previous report in January 2014, we have seen several new government reforms with the sole objective of helping working families to carefully balance work and personal commitments, and to access a variety of high-quality, dependable care. The strategies include the right to request flexible working, the announcement of a new tax-free Childcare Payments Bill, and the appointment of the House of Lords Select Committee on Affordable Childcare. In the coming months, we will also observe how employees and employers react to the introduction of Shared Parental Leave.

We often see leaders at the top of organisations committed to doing the right thing and legislation from government to bolster this: however what can often be lacking in reality is having those approaches truly embedded throughout all levels of an organisation. Today's families are becoming increasingly more diverse and as we welcome new changes and a greater emphasis on balancing our work and home life, this report provides an important insight into modern family life.

The respondents to this study show how important they believe it is to be seen to work in a certain way, or to stay late at the office, either to 'get the job done' or because the culture demands it. If we truly want to help working families and ensure we're not creating a ticking time bomb of stressed, disengaged employees, we need a paradigm shift of attitude. Managers at all levels and employees alike need to view work and family life as not solely two separate areas to be "balanced" but as vitally important roles in everyone's lives which must be carefully integrated and respected.

As you read through the findings of this research I am sure you that you will find much to think about, as I did. The importance of supporting working families is something I am passionate about and I believe together, we can use these insights to drive the cultural shift that is required, allowing us to engage meaningfully with the working families of not only today – but tomorrow as well.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carole Edmond". The script is fluid and cursive.

Carole Edmond
Managing Director
Bright Horizons Family Solutions

Introduction

There is no one size fits all pattern for family life: different families will have varying priorities and aspirations according to their circumstances. But however they configure their work and caring arrangements, families need the twin currencies of time and income to enjoy a reasonable quality of life, and the time away from work to do this. Where income is too low, or working time too long then this imbalance can result in a negative overspill into the home and into the workplace. Getting work right for parents and families is essential. Not only must it pay well enough to support family life, but it needs to be alive to the realities of parents' responsibilities outside of the workplace. The growth and spread of flexible working practices and enhancements to parental leave arrangements show that many employers (and government) are trying to work with the grain of employees' lives. But some parents do not have a full range of flexible options available to them and work itself is still organised in many workplaces in a way that is family-unfriendly.

Finding a satisfactory combination will be an evolving journey as family and employment circumstances change. For example, what may be suitable work and childcare arrangements when children are at pre-school will change when they enter school, and again as they transition into secondary education (and parental time can be required at the further education stage, too). Many families will also find themselves taking on caring responsibilities for adults, and these usually occur in an unplanned way. These pressure points of changing work-life integration may make work and family more difficult to reconcile; but there are also stable periods where families are able to maintain a good balance.

The 'hard-working family' has become a very familiar phrase, with families singled out by politicians of all parties as a core concern; improving their lot is a recurring theme. Getting it right for families, runs the argument, means getting things right for society. But does this mean developing a family-friendly economy or economy-friendly families? It is a balance between the two that is required, and this is evident from the families in the Modern Families Index. Whilst the workplace itself has become much more family-friendly over the last two decades, there remain some substantial obstacles: workplace cultures that still implicitly encourage longer hours; negative perceptions of flexible working and career (and income) progression; and a lack of affordable, available and appropriate childcare.

The responsibility for a good work-life fit for families is not only the concern of parents. It is a joint one, between individuals, their employers and government too.



Sarah Jackson OBE
Chief Executive
Working Families.

Key findings

- Parents want dependable childcare, and would make sacrifices to get it. Women in particular are having to think carefully as they consider promotion opportunities because of childcare issues.
- There is a clear role for employers to be more involved in the provision of childcare. Childcare breakdown is a significant issue, and has high work impacts in terms of disruption
- Parents are putting in extra hours just to get the job done. This is a combination of work pressure, jobs growing too large to be done within 'normal' hours and workplace cultures that still value presenteeism and long hours. Fathers are putting in the longest hours.
- Family is the highest priority for parents, whilst work is lower. Policy makers and employers should recognise this reality: working *with* the grain of parents' values is likely to create happier, more effective employees. Practices like long hours and presenteeism, although believed to be productive, may have negative effects if they conflict with values about family life.
- Fathers appear to be more involved. For example, young fathers are dropping off at school in greater numbers (and more frequently than mothers in the under 25 age group). However, fathers generally are more resentful towards their employers about their work and family balance, and this is more pronounced in younger fathers. Younger fathers are more involved with their children, and want to be even more involved but are finding workplace culture is out of sync with this. In addition:
 - Social structures are set up to recognise mothers. Although fathers are more visible at the school gate, mothers are still the first port of call when a school needs to call a parent.
 - The workplace expectation is that mothers are 'on call', not fathers. Both mothers and fathers agreed that it was easier (and more acceptable) for women to take time off work for family reasons.
- Workplace stress is significant and not abating. It is likely that the results of workplace stress spill over negatively into family life, and also back into the workplace. Forty-one per cent of parents said that work life is becoming increasingly stressful.
- Work is impinging on family life. This affects both the time that families can spend together, and partner relationships. Home is an essential 'buffer' against work, giving employees the chance to re-energise and remain mentally and physically healthy. If work demands eat into

this buffer, then there will be negative effects within families and eventually within the workplace too.

- Working time is affecting health. Work is eroding the time parents have to make healthy choices, such as having time to exercise or to cook properly. Public health policy is focussing on improving wellbeing and diet. Working arrangements need to be configured to support working families in leading healthy lifestyles, not working in ways that impinge on their time to live healthily.
- Time off for family reasons and discussing family at work is increasingly acceptable for fathers, and more feel confident doing it. But discussing workload and putting boundaries upon work is something that fewer men are confident about.
- There are mixed attitudes towards shared parental leave (SPL). Parents favour more equality in caring responsibilities, but there are also strong gendered beliefs about the importance of the role of the mother. There is potential for these beliefs to come into conflict with each other within families. The effects of this are difficult to predict, but might lead to families eschewing SPL in favour of more 'traditional' patterns of leave.
- Two in five (39 per cent) of parents anticipate that they will become a carer in the next 10 years.

Families and work in the UK

The Modern Families Index aims to capture an annual snapshot of how working families combine work and family life. Taking over 1000 working families across the UK, the Index asks parents to describe the arrangements that they use to navigate everyday working life with dependent children, and how they feel work and family life is shaped by this combination. It looks at the factors these families negotiate every day: work and working arrangements, and care for children. It also examines the effects of these arrangements on family life. The effects on parental health and stress are also explored, along with parents' attitudes and satisfaction with their employer when viewed through the lens of work-life balance.

There were an estimated 7.8 million families in the UK with dependent children in 2011/12. Of these, 5.9 million were couple households (either cohabiting or married) and 1.9m lone parent households. Ninety-five per cent of couple families with one or two dependent children had one or both parents working in 2012. Eighty-seven per cent of couple families with three or more dependent children had one or both parents working. Sixty-three per cent of lone parents with one or two dependent children were working in 2012 and 38 per cent of lone parents with three or more children were working in 2012.¹

Working patterns

It is more typical for families in the UK with young children to have one full-time working and one part-time working parent rather than two full-time earners.² However, this picture is changing and is no longer as distinct. A more diverse set of working patterns amongst couples with children has emerged. Four-fifths of cohabiting households with children conform to three patterns: the one and a half (1.5) earner (male full time and female part time) accounts for 31 per cent; dual full-time earner couples account for 29 per cent; and the 'traditional' male sole breadwinner working full time accounts for 22 per cent.³ Within couple households, there has been a convergence between parents in the amount of paid work that they do. Fathers are also working less intensively and are more likely to be around in the evenings and at weekends as the number working non-standard hours has fallen.⁴ UK Fathers still work longer than men without dependent children and remain more likely to work long hours.⁵ For lone parents, there has been an increase in the number in paid employment, with 63.4 per cent of single parents are in work, up 19.6 percentage points since 1996.⁶

Income

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, there has been an "unprecedented erosion of household living standards' thanks to rapid inflation and flat-lining wages."⁷ They calculate that a working couple with two children need to earn £19,400 each. A lone parent requires earnings of £25,600. Financial pressure on families comes from the rising costs of childcare (rising twice as fast as inflation and up 37 per cent) and rising energy, food and housing costs. The median net family income

¹ Family size in 2012, Office of National Statistics 2013

² Counting the costs of childcare, Resolution Foundation 2012

³ Connolly, Aldrich, O'Brien, Speight and Poole, Fathers and Work, 2014

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Modern fatherhood labour market trends, <http://www.modernfatherhood.org/themes/fathers-and-work/?view=key-facts-and-figures> retrieved 23 January 2015

⁶ Working and Workless Households, 2014, Table P. Office for National Statistics, October 2014

⁷ A minimum income standard for the UK in 2013, JRF, 2013

for families with dependent children in the UK is estimated at £27,006 per year.⁸ Clearly, families are feeling the effects of the recession and austerity, as well as the effects of other longer term trends and subsequent low levels of wage growth and, as noted above, women's income is vital for families and its importance is growing. Work by the Resolution Foundation has identified a squeeze on families with dependent children: these middle and lower income households, despite being in employment, have little discretionary disposable income and their family budgets are sensitive.⁹

Childcare

The use of childcare in the UK is widespread. In 2013, 78 per cent of families with dependent children used childcare.¹⁰ Families used a variety of different types of childcare: 10 per cent used a day nursery, and a further 10 per cent used nursery schools or nurseries attached to a primary school. Five per cent used sessional preschool (e.g. playgroup) and the same number used a registered childminder. Families also use pre- and after-school clubs, and use childminders to pick up and drop off at school. Holiday clubs are also popular. Informal care is also used, with 27 per cent of families relying on grandparental care, and 6 per cent relying on friends and other family.

Grandparents are an essential part of childcare provision in the UK. Nearly three in five grandparents provide regular childcare.¹¹ Grandparents Plus estimates that grandparents are providing an increasing amount of childcare, but grandparents are under pressure themselves, working longer and struggling to combine paid work with new caring responsibilities.

Parents in the UK spend 33 per cent of their net household income on childcare compared to an OECD average of 13 per cent.¹² Childcare costs are a barrier to work for women, particularly low paid women,¹³ and may also be a factor in parents moving out of work in order to care for their own children as costs consume too great a proportion of their earnings. A recent report found that of 1000 parents, almost 20 per cent were considering either giving up work or reducing their hours because of childcare costs.¹⁴ Nonetheless, childcare, in some shape or form, is an essential element for most working families in facilitating the combination of work and family life.

The workplace

The ability to balance work and family life through the use of work-life reconciliation measures such as flexible working practices is, in many workplaces, mainstream. Backstopped by legal provisions such as the Right to Request flexible working, recent years have seen organisations adopting family-friendly methods to let their employees (including those without young children) get a good work-life fit. Practices like part-time working, flexitime and remote working all allow some control over when and where work is done, and parents are able to combine this with school and childcare arrangements.

⁸ DWP FOI 2013-4145

⁹ Commission on Living Standards, Resolution Foundation 2012

¹⁰ Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, Department for Education 2014

¹¹ Nearly seven million grandparents provide regular childcare, Available: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/employment-rights/working-time-holidays/work-life-balance/nearly-seven-million> TUC, retrieved Jan 2014

¹² Women, Men and Part-time Work Equality and Human Rights Commission 2013EHRC 2013,

¹³ Careers and Carers: childcare and maternal labour supply, Resolution Foundation and Mumsnet 2014

¹⁴ High childcare costs mean one in five parents are considering reducing hours or giving up work altogether in 2015, 4Children website <http://www.4children.org.uk/News/Detail/High-childcare-costs-mean-one-in-five-parents-are-considering-reducing-hours-or-giving-up-work-altogether-in-2015> retrieved January 2015

The Working Families Top Employers Benchmark¹⁵ shows both the extent of policy development around work-life balance within organisations, and also the spread and duplication of work-life practices between organisations.

However, there are a number of factors, inside and outside organisations that affect the uptake and use of flexible working practices even when parents would like to make use of them. Historically, family-friendly working practices focussed on mothers of young children, and the legacy of this still persists. Working flexibly for family and childcare reasons is still perceived by many as a mother's issue, and this deters fathers from using flexible policies in the same way, as they fear that they will be seen as less committed and suffer the same career penalty that mothers traditionally have. Some types of flexible working, for example part time working and job sharing, are heavily gendered; there remains an assumption that women, not men, will reduce or adapt their working time to provide childcare. Generally, the take up of flexible working options is more common amongst women.¹⁶ Fathers are more likely to work flexibly informally, to almost 'fly under the radar' to avoid being identified as a flexible worker.¹⁷

Apart from the 'cultural' factors that determine uptake of flexible working practices, there are a number of work organisation and management issues that affect how parents can combine work and family. The first might be described as the pressure of work, particularly where the time it actually takes to fulfil a role is more than the working time allotted to it. People regularly stay late at work or work longer hours not because they are inefficient or unproductive, but simply because the job is too big for its hours. The TUC has calculated that the extent of this unpaid overtime was worth £29.2 billion pounds to the UK in 2012.¹⁸ Line manager attitudes can also have a significant effect on whether employees can get a good work-life fit. Although many organisations understand the benefits of a work-life approach, some don't, with a 'trust gap' around flexible working practices.¹⁹

Many employers have developed flexible and work-life balance practices because they have recognised that they are good for business. They allow people with caring responsibilities to work, and they improve the quality of life for employees, which translates into better wellbeing and higher performance. Conversely, blocking access to flexible working practices and work-life balance measures will have a negative effect. This might translate as resentment towards an employer, or reduced levels of commitment and discretionary effort.

¹⁵ Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark report, Working Families 2014

¹⁶ The fourth work-life balance employee survey, BIS, 2012

¹⁷ Flexible Working and Performance, Cranfield University and Working Families 2006

¹⁸ TUC Website <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/working-time-holidays/campaigns/06-working-time/total-unpaid-overtime-worked>, retrieved January 2015

¹⁹ HR Magazine <http://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/hro/news/1148815/trust-gap-remains-flexible> retrieved January 2015

Findings

Demographics

The sample was of 1010 working parents from across the UK. The survey ran online between 5th November 2014 and 19th November. To participate in the survey there had to be at least one working parent or carer in the household, with at least one resident dependant under 18 years old. The sample achieved an almost equal response between genders: 515 female and 495 male. The sample was representative across the UK for age, gender and region. The breakdown of respondents by region can be seen in figure 1.

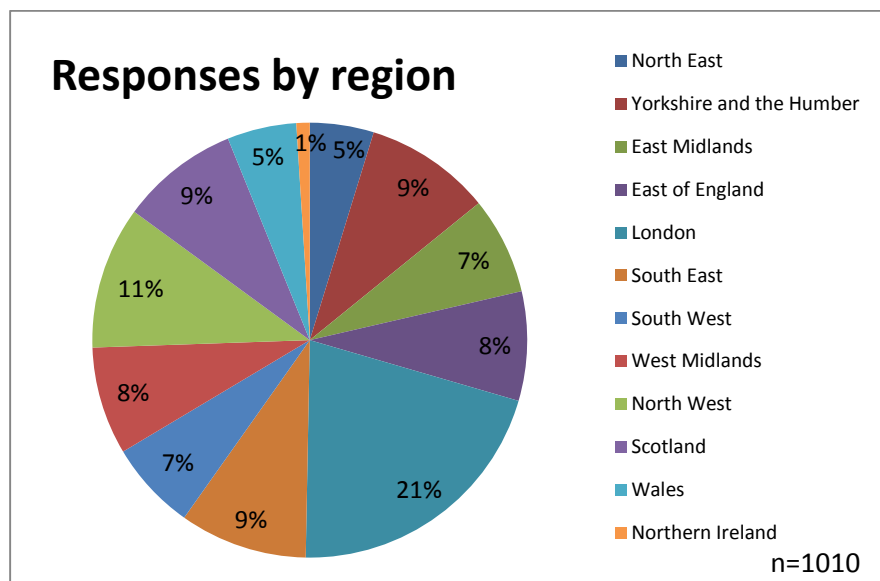


Figure 1

Figure 2 shows the respondent age profile. (Note: The qualifying criterion of dependent children under 18 resulted in fewer older parents being eligible to complete the survey. Numbers were boosted in lower age groups to compensate).

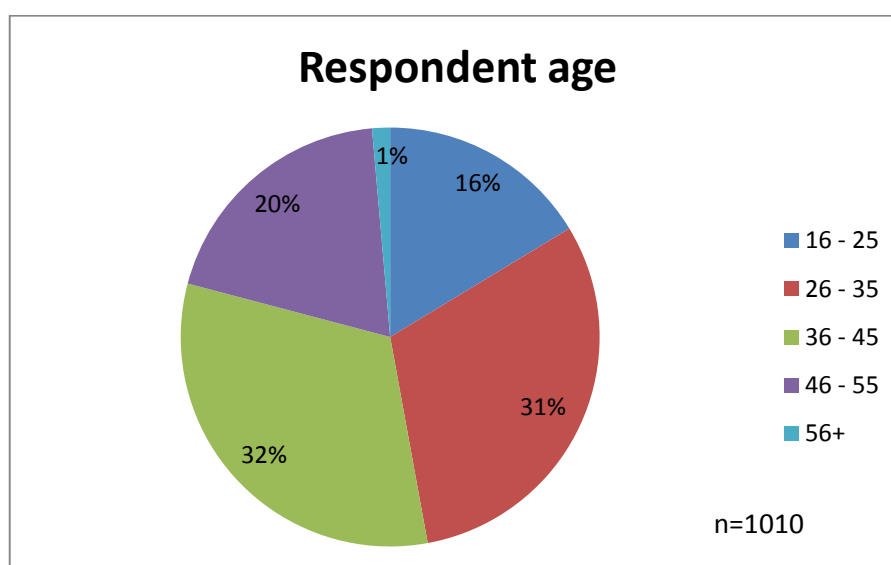


Figure 2

The majority of respondents were in a cohabiting couple relationship. Fifty-eight per cent were married or in a civil partnership, whilst a further 12 per cent were living together. A further 12 per cent identified themselves as in a relationship but not cohabiting, and the remaining 18 per cent identified as single parents.

The respondents were asked about the number and ages of their dependent children. Forty seven per cent had one child, forty per cent had two children, ten per cent had three children and the remaining three per cent had four or more children. The age ranges are shown in figure 3.

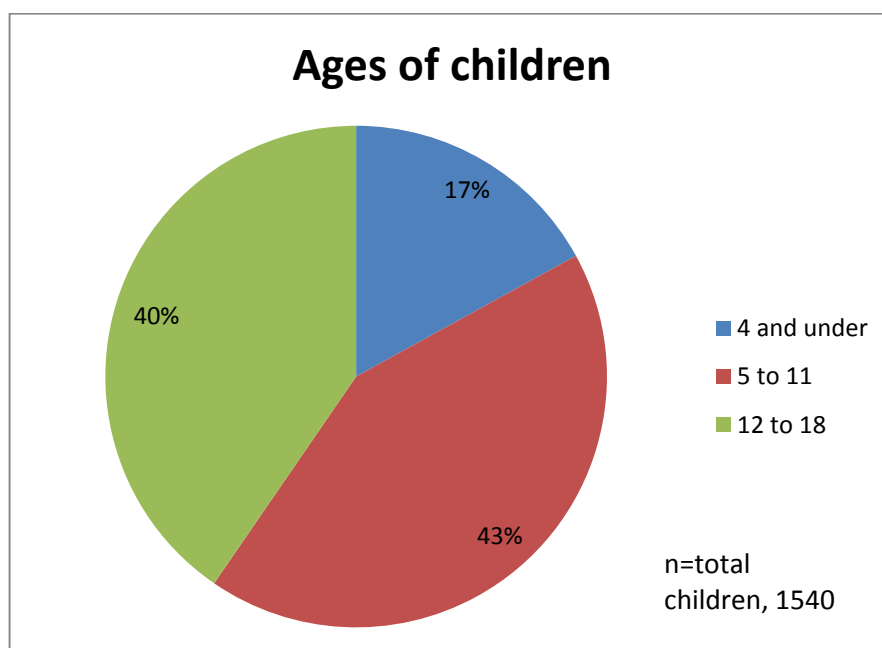


Figure 3

Income and work

For couple households, income before tax per partner is shown in figure 4. The most frequent configuration was of both partners earning less than £20,000, giving a maximum household gross income of £40,000. As a reference point, the Resolution Foundation estimates that a couple household with a gross income of £40,000 and two children are almost in the middle of the distribution of households²⁰ with 51 per cent better off and 49 per cent worse off. The majority of individuals in couple households earned below £30,000 per annum. For parents who did not live with a partner, there was a similar picture with the majority earning below £30,000. Figure 5 shows the income for lone parents.

²⁰ Resolution Foundation Commission on Living Standards 'Where do I stand?' tool.
<http://www.livingstandards.org/features/where-do-i-stand/>

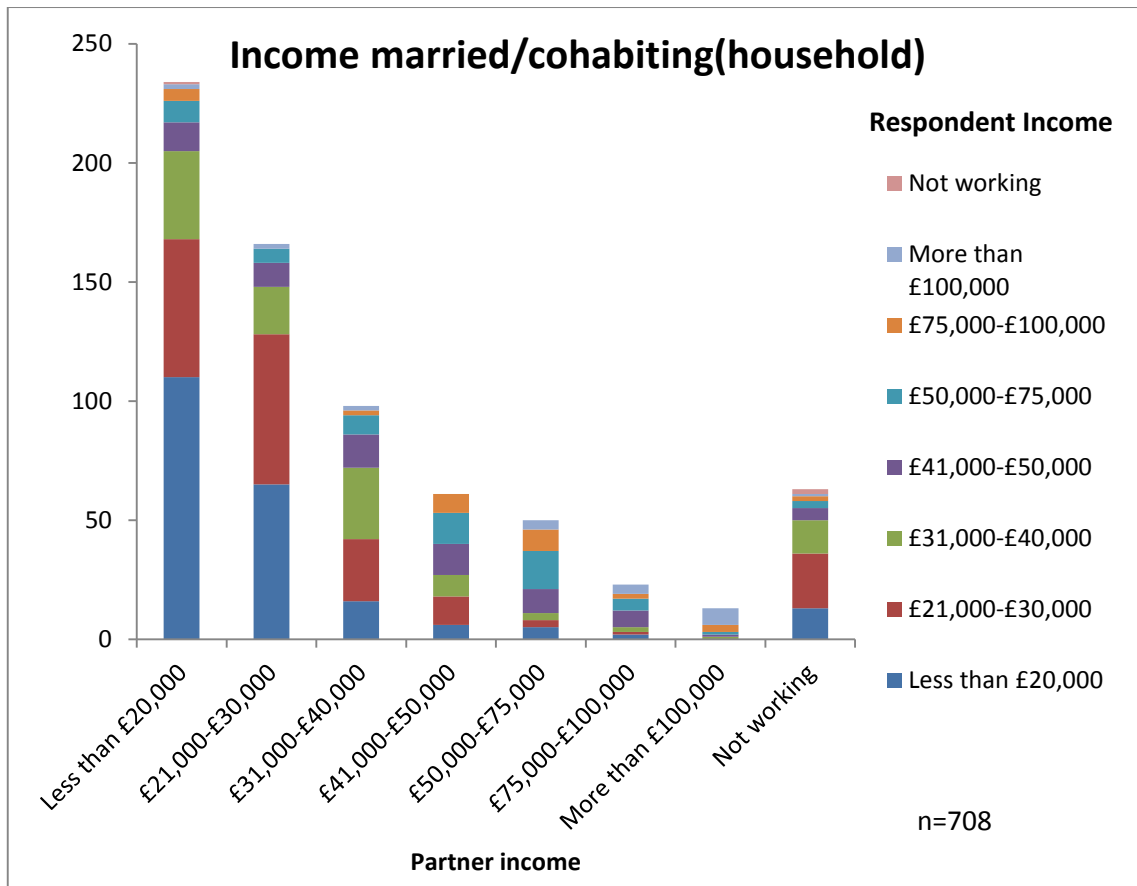


Figure 4

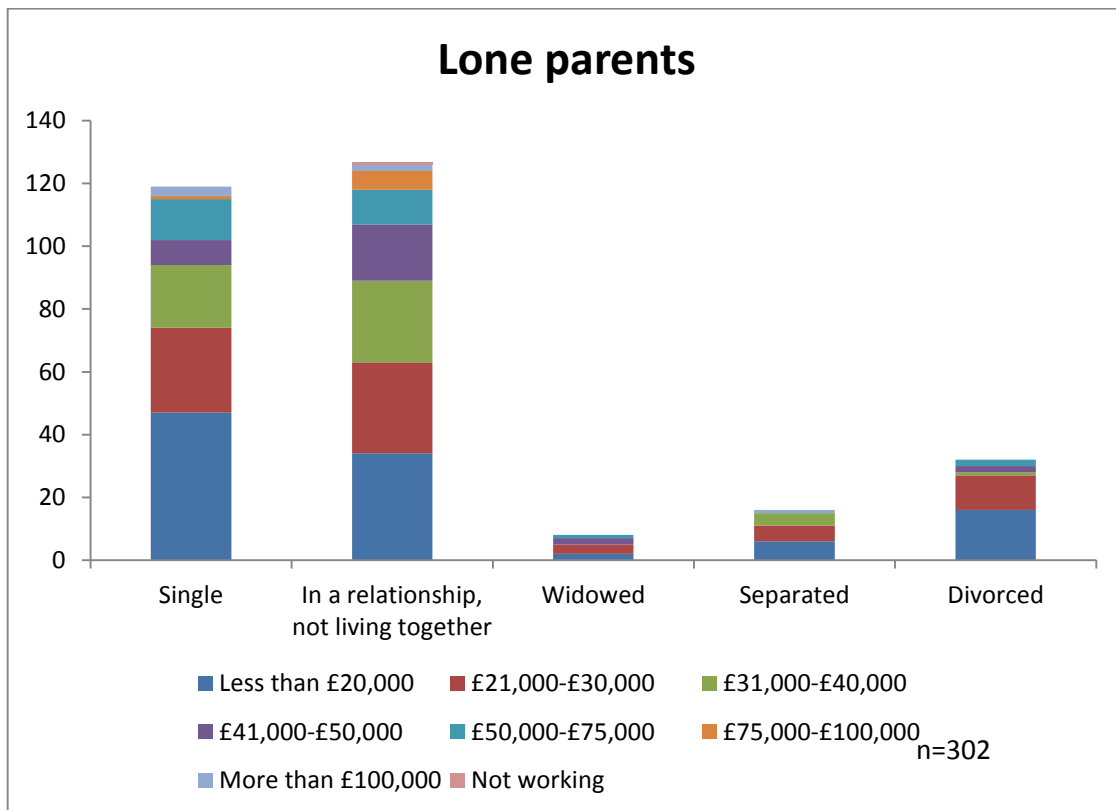


Figure 5

Respondents were asked if they were financially better off than in 2013. A third (34 per cent) said that they were. For most respondents their financial circumstances had remained static (45 per cent) or gone into decline (21 per cent). Women were less positive about their family's financial wellbeing, with fewer reporting that they were better off, and more saying that they felt the same or worse off. Parents aged 36-45 were least likely to say they were better off. Parents with more than one child did not report feeling worse off than those who had fewer children. Those on lower incomes were more likely to feel worse off or the same.

However, a lack of fiscal improvement does not seem linked to a lack of employment. The working patterns for the main respondent, and for their partner (where applicable) are shown in figures 6 and 7. In 51 per cent of couple households both parents worked full time, and only 14 per cent of couple households had only one partner working.

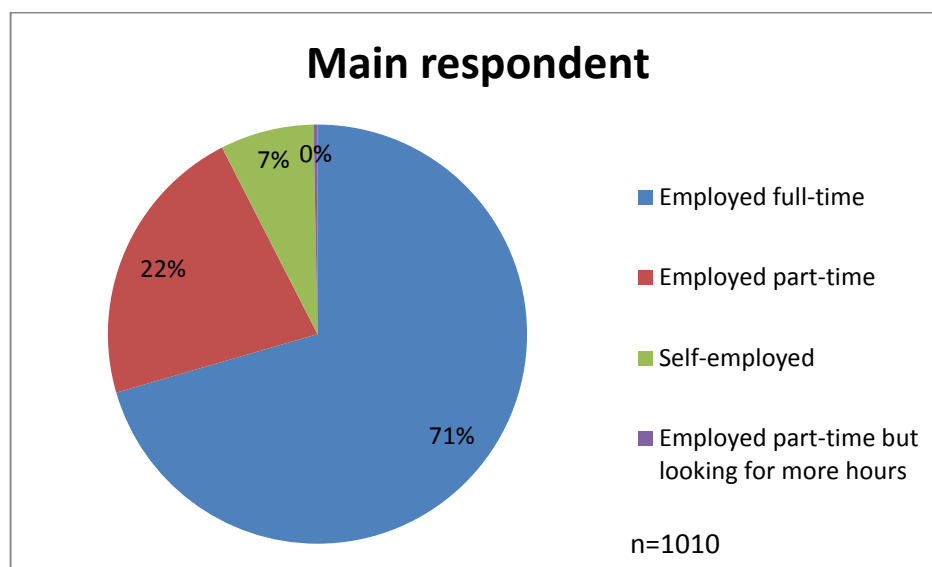


Figure 6

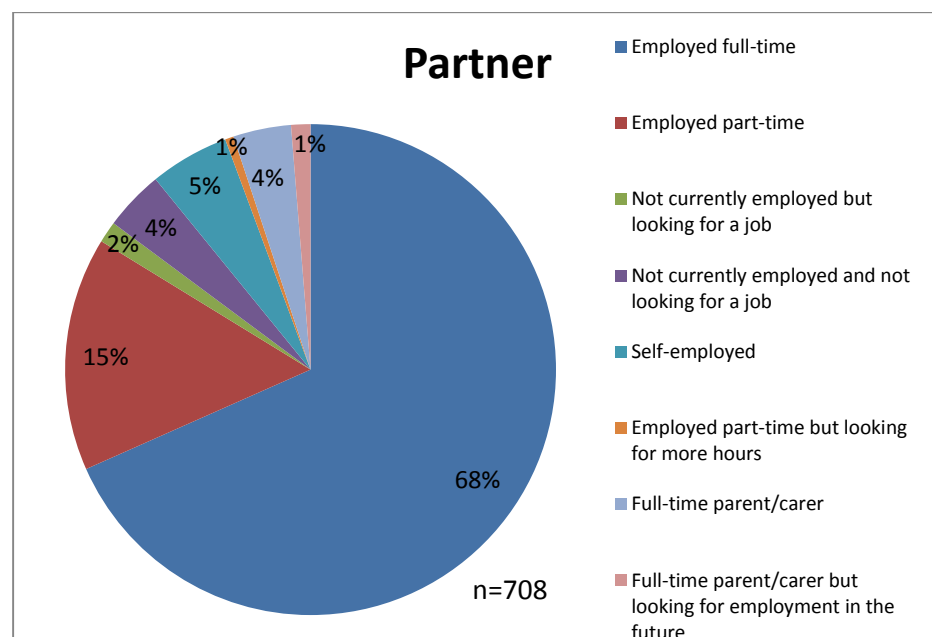


Figure 7

Employment by sector

There was a broad spread of sectors of employment (using Standard Occupations Classifications), shown in figures 8 and 9. Within the largest group of administrative occupations, the most common occupation was office-based managers and supervisors. Twice as many men reported working as managers, directors and senior officials, whilst women were two and a half times more likely to work in administrative and secretarial occupations (15 per cent).

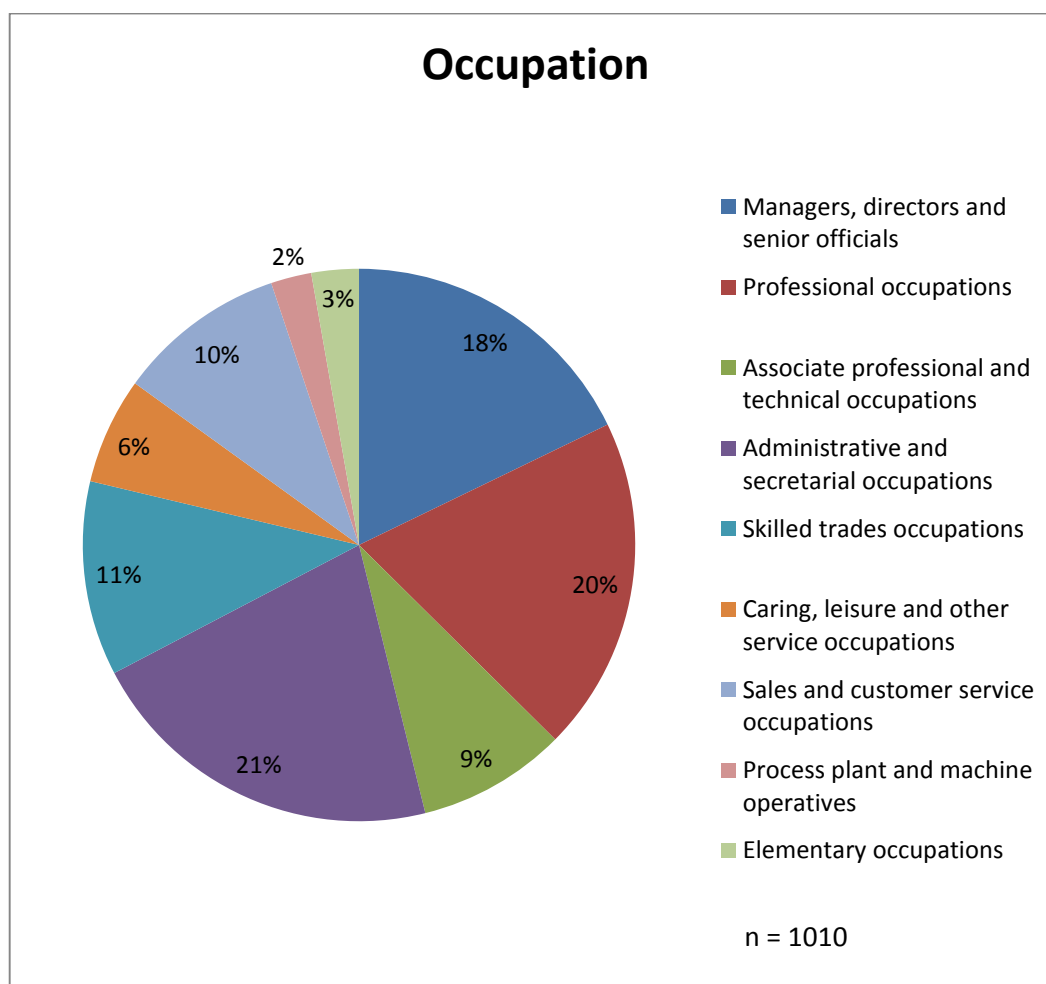


Figure 8

In 2005 the Equal Opportunities Commission²¹ identified the issue of women working at consistently lower levels than men, and often at levels below their qualification and skills levels. Three main causes were identified: work inflexibility; management resistance; and pervasive traditional gendered attitudes around work and care. These obstacles might still be in evidence. Certainly parents recognised that caring responsibilities were still widely perceived as a mother's issue in the workplace, and that it is expected in the workplace that mothers will take time off for childcare, for example.(Figure 19) Although fathers are increasingly involved in childcare and family life, the effects on female career progression of caring responsibilities are still very evident.

²¹ Britain's Hidden Brain Drain, Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005

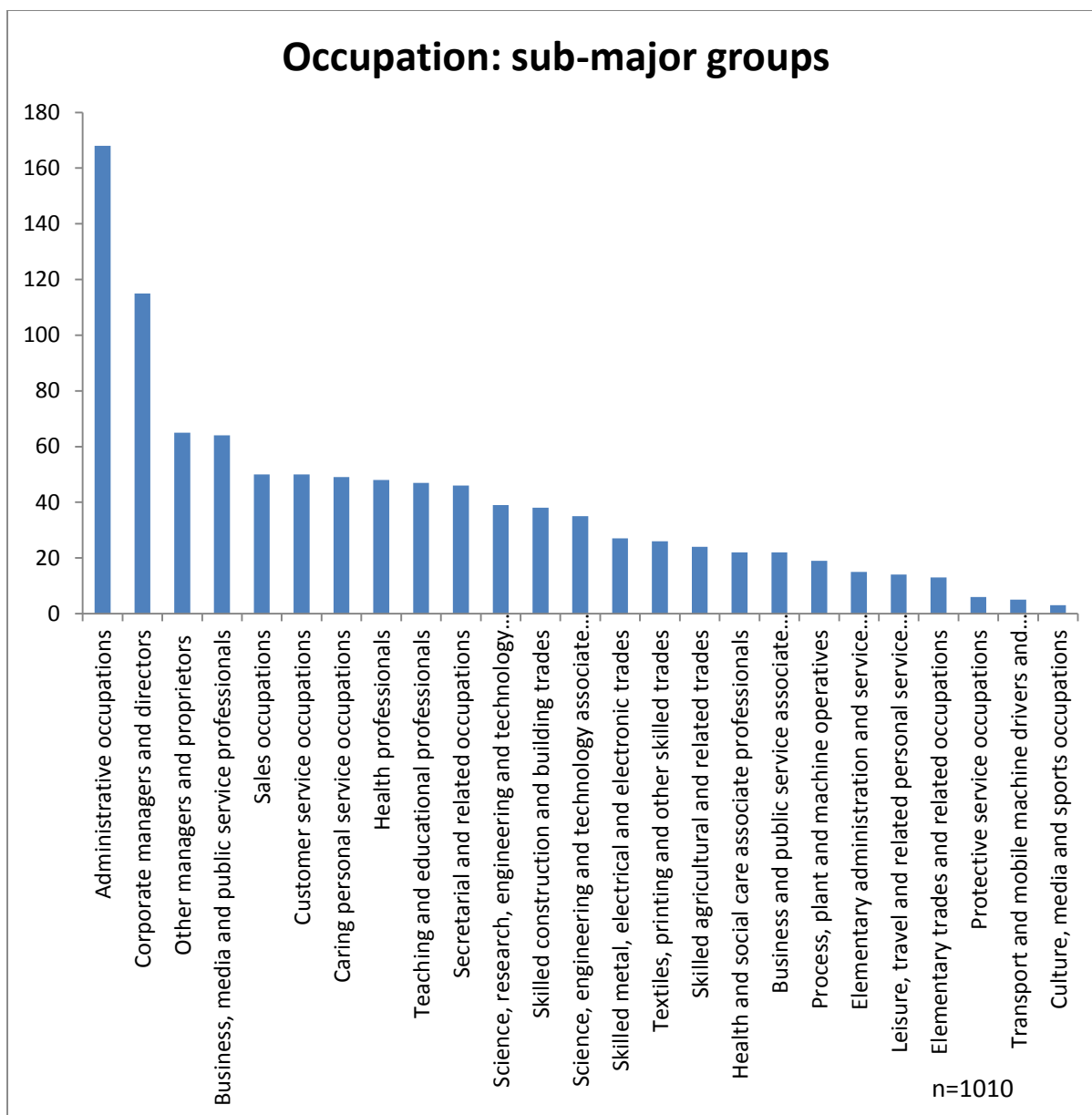


Figure 9

Working Time

Respondents were asked about their working time, including how long they worked for each week, and how they arranged their working time through the use of flexible working practices. Working hours were broadly in line with contracted hours (figure 10). Those working lower numbers of contractual hours each week were slightly less likely to work extra hours, apart from those working 25-35 hours, whilst those working very long hours (48+) per week reported working fewer hours. This is a mixed picture that suggests that for those working in reduced hours patterns, working fewer hours means it is more likely that actual hours will closely align to contracted ones. As hours increase to around the 25 per week level, it becomes more likely that extra hours will be worked. Around five per cent of the sample were working long hours, above 48 per week. Whilst a very few of these were contracted to work 24-35 hours per week, the majority were 'full-time' workers working between 35 and 48 hours per week. Of those working 48 hours or more, twice as many fathers (12 per cent) as

mothers worked these hours. Those working in managerial or professional roles were most likely to be working 48 hours or more.

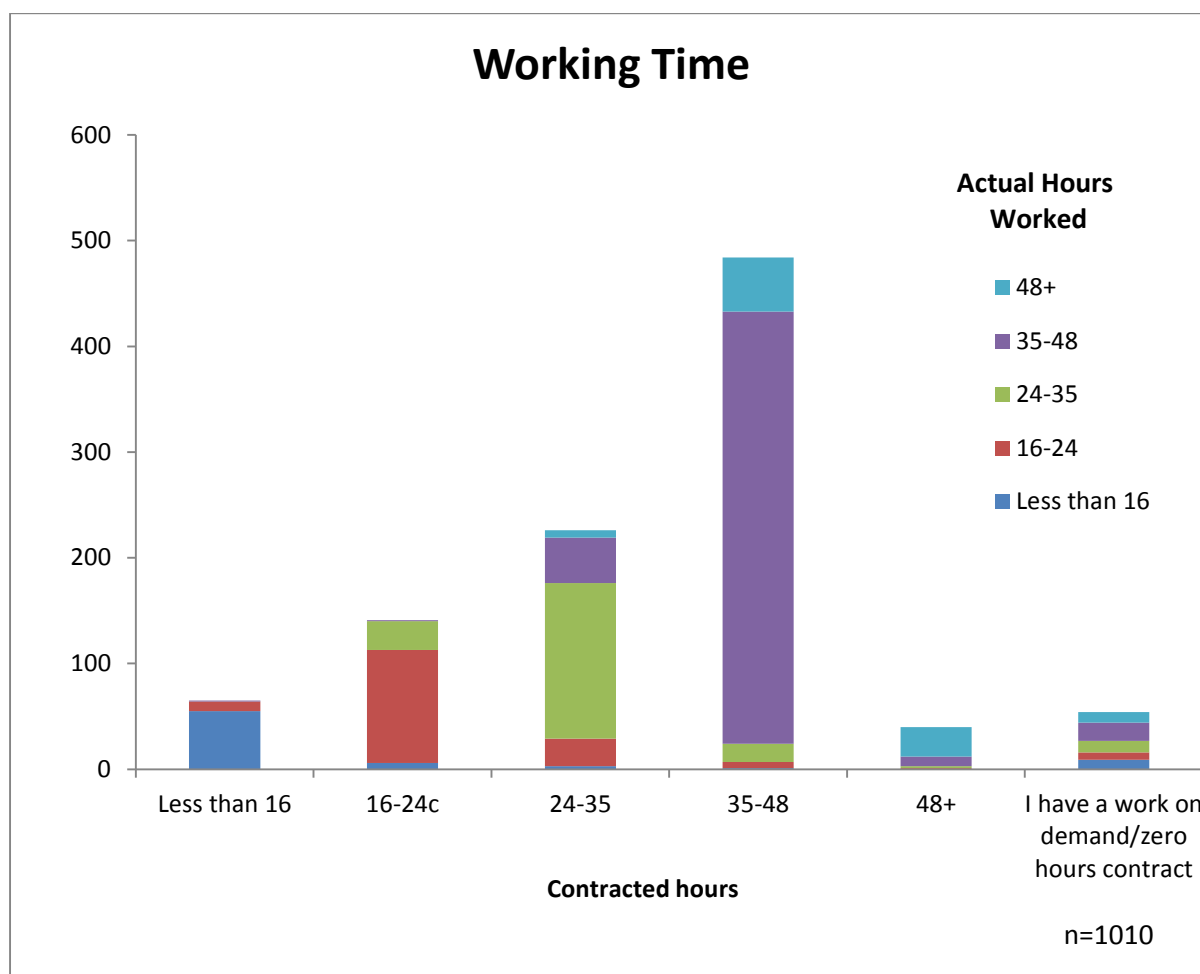


Figure 10

Respondents were asked to identify, on average, how often they left work on time in a normal working week. A third said that they left work on time every day, with a further third saying that they managed to leave on time more than half the time. However, the remaining third only managed to get away from work on time half the time, or less. Men, aged between 36-45 were the least likely to leave work on time. The reasons for staying longer at work are shown in figure 11. Work organisation and workload are the most common reasons for staying late. 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. These findings are consistent with last year's Time Health and the Family survey: generally, the mismatch of allotted hours to tasks is the cause, which can then become culturally 'normal': a result of work intensification that has been amplified by the recession.²² 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 barriers.

²² Quality of Working Life 2012, Chartered Management Institute

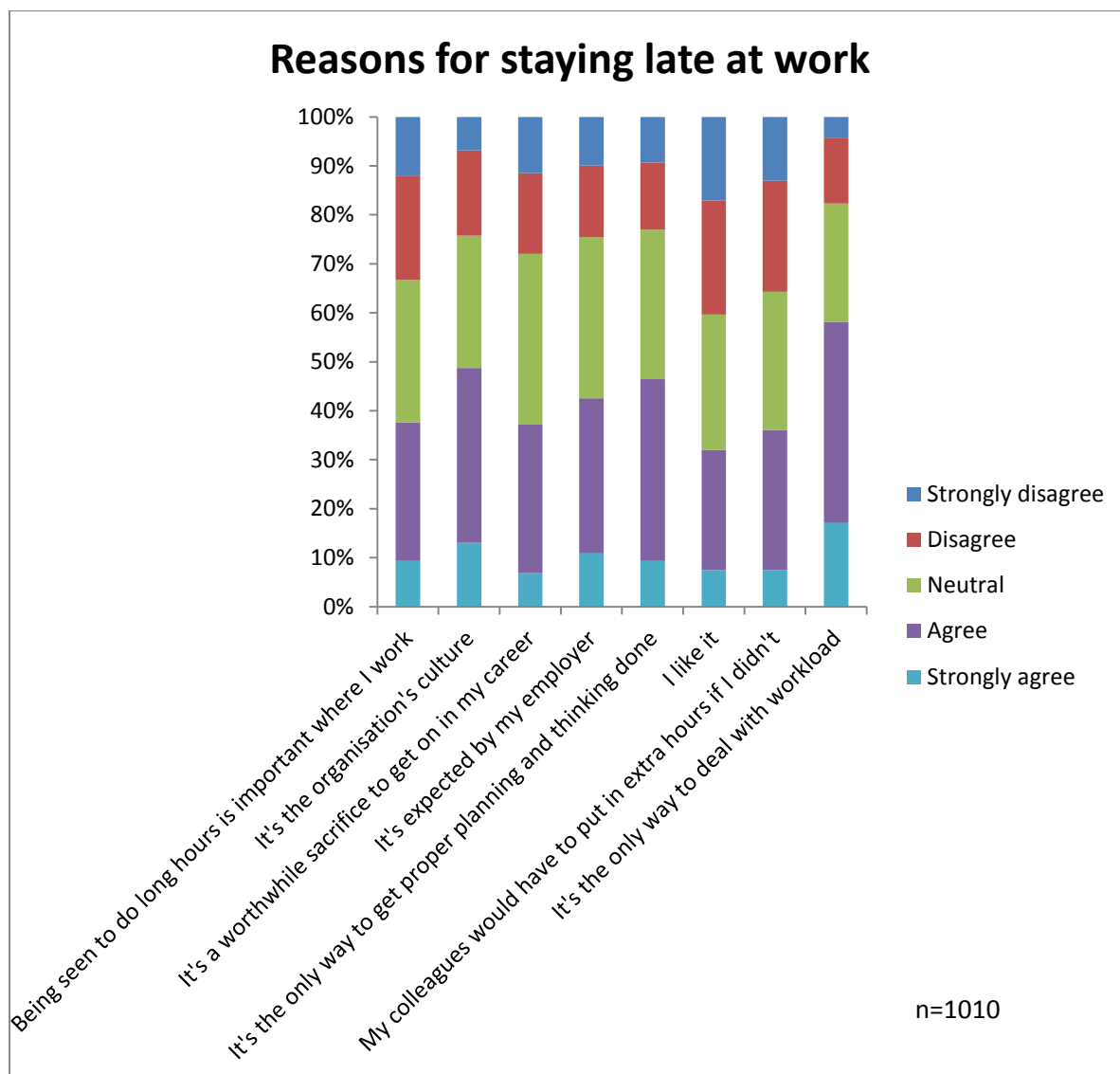


Figure 11

Workplace culture can also be a brake on employees asking for work to be reconfigured (Figure 25, later in the report). Some employees, notably younger men, are not as confident about asking their employer to constrain or reduce their workload.

An important finding from WERS is that there appears to be an increased belief among managers that work-life balance is the responsibility of employees. In 2004, 56 per cent of managers believed that it was up to individuals to manage their work and family commitments. This had increased to 71 per cent in 2011. This attitude was more common in the private sector (77 per cent) than in the public sector (69 per cent).²³ Certainly line manager attitude (Figure 12) is a barrier to flexible working for some employees, and if this negative attitude is coupled with an organisational culture of longer-hours working and with presenteeism then employees will struggle to find a satisfactory work-life fit in the absence of organisational support. In an economy where employment might be precarious or vulnerable due to ongoing tough economic conditions, employers may feel they have the whip hand in demanding more of their employees.

²³ The 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study, BIS 2013

In terms of arranging working time, 61 per cent of respondents said that they worked flexibly in some way. The most common type of flexible working used flexible time arrangements (including compressed hours), followed by workplace flexibility (working from home or other remote locations). The most common reason for working flexibly was for childcare or eldercare. There was no significant difference between men and women: both used flexible working in almost equal number.

For the 39 per cent of respondents who did not use flexible working, there were a variety of reasons which are shown in Figure 12. The reasons can broadly be categorised as not working flexibly through choice, not working flexibly because of perceived barriers, and not working flexibly because of lack of availability. The most common reason is lack of flexibility in the role, and this was most noticeable in the teaching profession, administrative occupations and in social care. For some roles it is more difficult or not possible to accommodate some types of flexibility (such as working remotely). Senior managers were the most likely to believe that flexibility will damage their career. This is of concern because they are the people who both set the organisational culture and often make decisions about flexible working arrangements for their employees, including the implementation and development of flexible working policy. If these senior managers are wary of flexible working, then it will be difficult for other employees to be confident in exercising flexible working choices above certain level, especially if this is seen as an individual and not organisational responsibility.

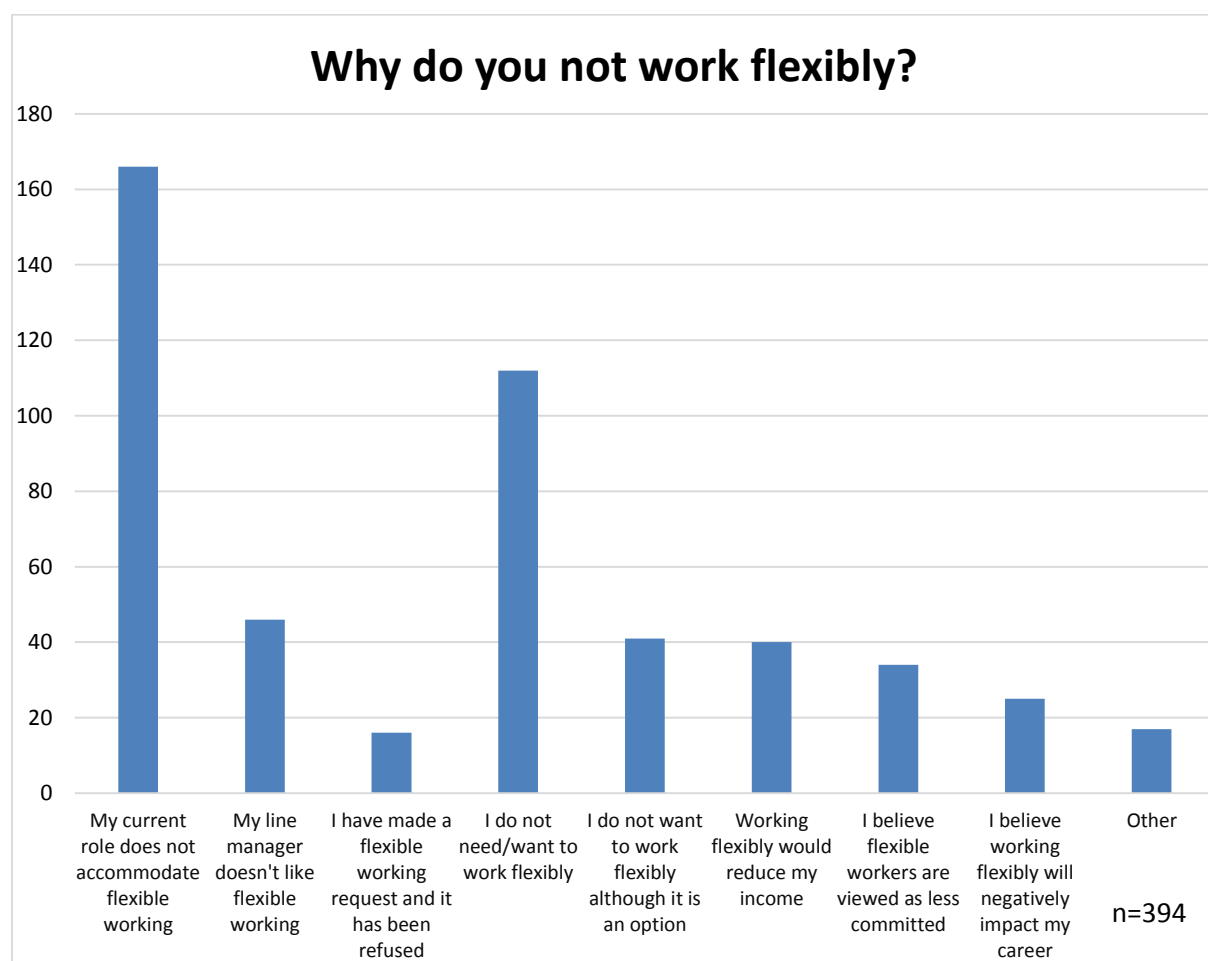


Figure 12

Childcare: use and choices

There was a wide variety in the types and amounts of childcare that respondents used. The childcare families used, sometimes combining different types, is shown in Figure 13. Childminders and private nurseries were the most commonly used, at 20 and 19 per cent respectively. Eighteen per cent used informal care (grandparents and friends and family); 17 per cent said that they mixed formal and informal childcare. Eighty per cent paid for their childcare, and a further 10 per cent paid for some and used some informal childcare. To pay for childcare parents relied on various funding sources. 51 per cent used childcare vouchers; 60 per cent received the childcare element of working tax credits; 60 per cent had financial help from grandparents of family; and 36 per cent had access to employer provided childcare spaces both on or offsite.

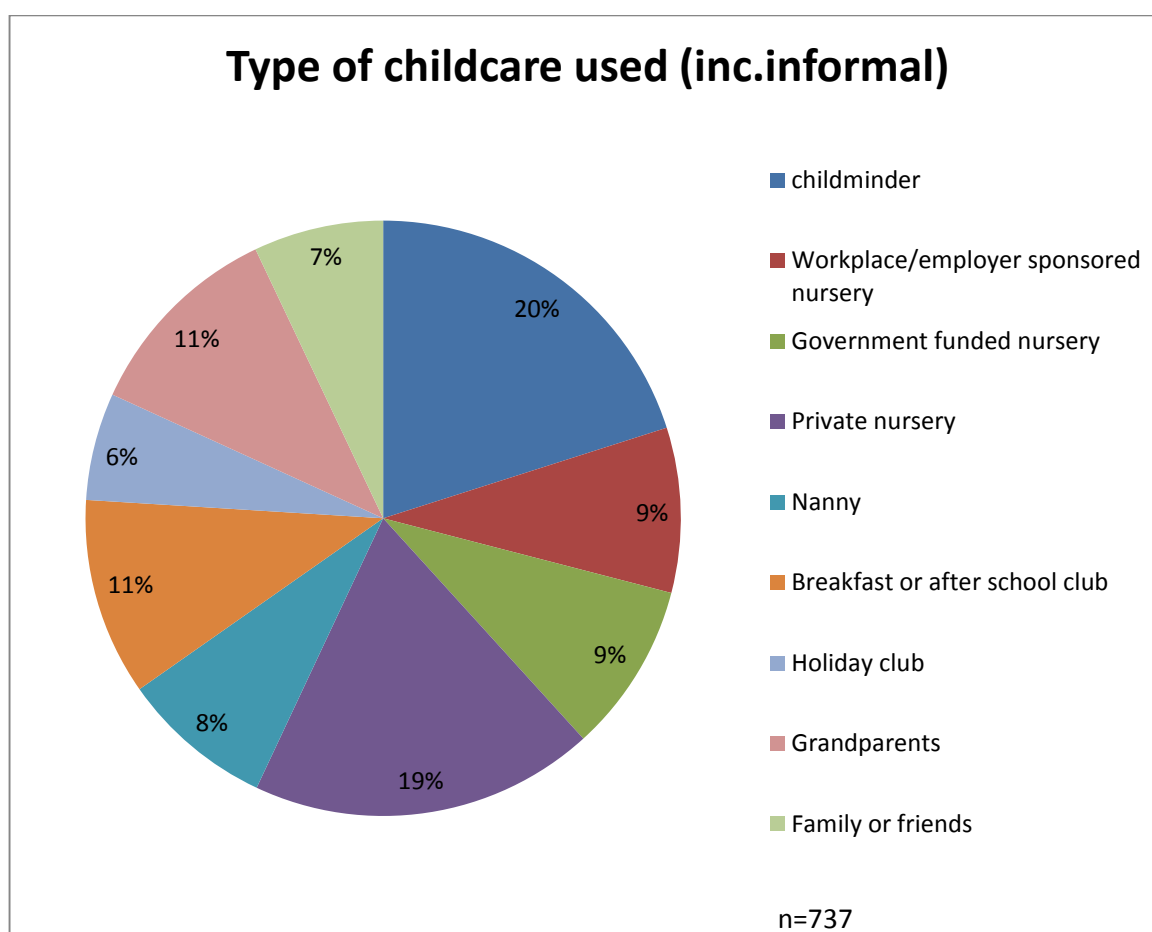


Figure 13

The amount of formal childcare used, on a weekly basis, is shown in Figure 14. Sixty-five per cent are using 15 hours or below each week, with only nine per cent using more than 30 hours each week.

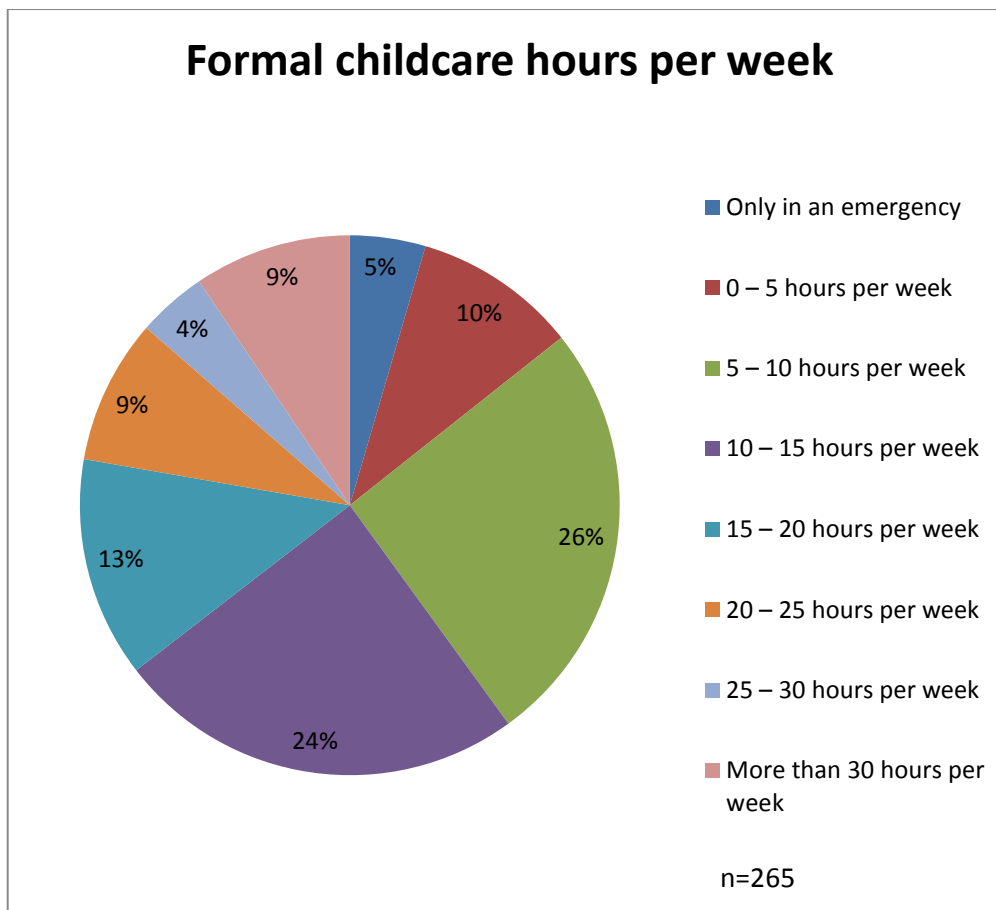


Figure 14

Parents were asked to comment on the amount of childcare that they used (Figure 15). Sixty four per cent felt that their childcare balance was wrong, citing costs (20 per cent), availability (18 per cent) and work and family imbalance (29 per cent). Fathers and mothers were similar in their attitudes towards childcare, apart from costs with 25 per cent of fathers saying they would use more if they could afford to (as opposed to only 16 per cent of mothers). Seventy seven per cent of those who said they would like to use less childcare had access to flexible working practices, suggesting that for these parents volume rather than arrangement of work, was the main issue. Those working 16-24 hours were proportionally those most likely to feel that they couldn't get the right childcare for reasons of costs or finding appropriate childcare. Parents who identified themselves as single parents were the least likely to be content with the amount of childcare that they are using. For parents with a disabled child, availability and cost of childcare were substantial barriers, with only 20 per cent saying that they have the right balance. Getting childcare right appears to be elusive for many families, who are instead, in 64 per cent of those using it, making do with the arrangements that they have been able to put together. Availability and affordability are issues, particularly for lone parents and for those with a disabled child. But there are also issues around the volume of childcare. For these parents, working time is impinging on time they would rather spend with their children. Financial realities may mean that for these parents there is no alternative, but measures like flexible working practices might help. So too might a lifecycles approach to employment and caring that acknowledges that childcare needs peak and then decrease, allowing parents to work fewer hours when their children are young without penalising their later career prospects.

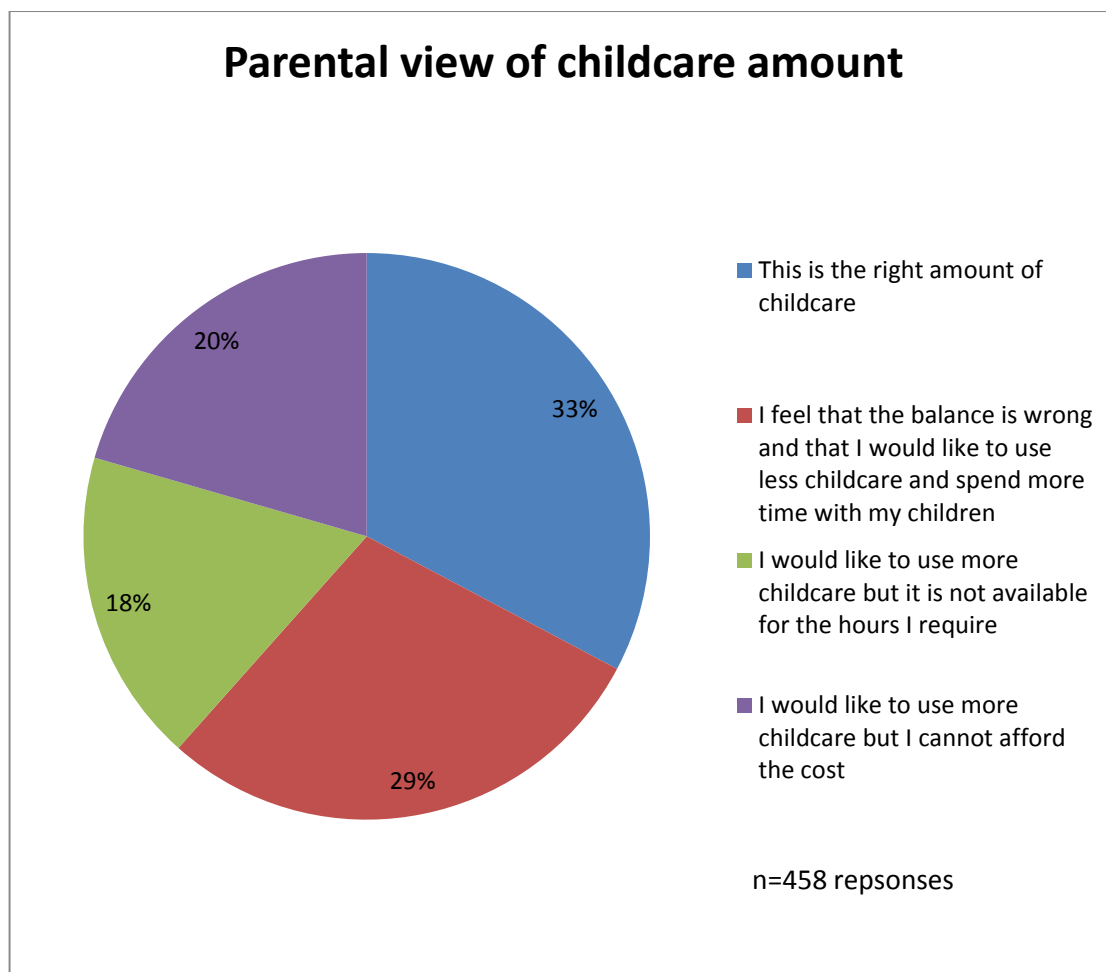


Figure 15

Childcare breakdown was also an issue. This is not necessarily about the reliability of childcare itself: the reasons for breakdown often, as in the case of children being ill, originate in the family rather than with the childcare provider. It is worth noting that some childcare breakdown is probably inevitable, and it can be unpredictable. Two thirds (66 per cent) of parents reported that within the last year their childcare arrangements had broken down. The reasons were: informal carers were unable to look after the child (26 per cent); their formal care provider was either closed or otherwise unable to take the child (26 per cent); illness prevented the child attending the usual provider (26 per cent); and work had called the parent in when they would usually look after their own child (22 per cent). In response parents had made alternative emergency arrangements, which are shown in figure 16. The effect of childcare breakdown is very clear. In particular the impact on the workplace is significant, with 47 per cent of parents having to take time off. Reliable childcare is an issue that should concern employers, as disruption to work occurs in almost half of all instances of childcare breakdown. However, only 12 per cent of employers provide emergency back-up care. There is a clear business case here for employers to be more involved in the provision of back up or emergency childcare to mitigate the impacts, especially when the breakdown is caused by the employer themselves through work scheduling demands. Some organisations²⁴ do put in place arrangements for back-up childcare if a parent is called to work on their usual non-working day, but they are not in the majority.

²⁴ Top Employers Benchmark, Working Families 2014

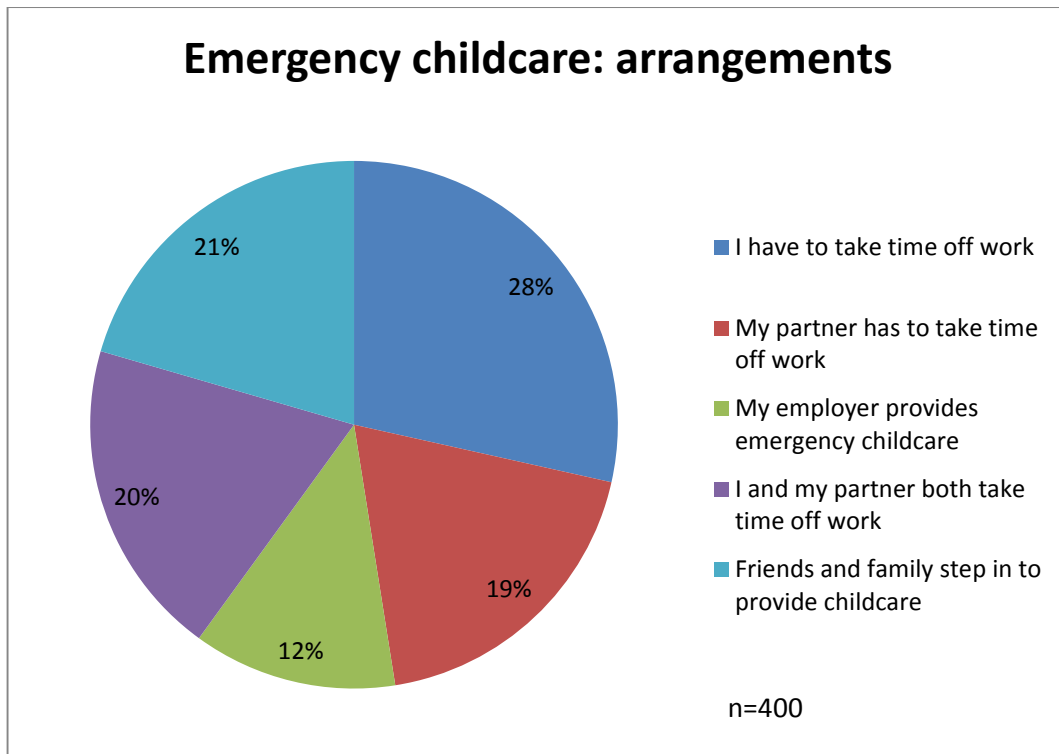


Figure 16

The importance of childcare reliability was emphasised by respondents (Figure 17). Parents would sacrifice one year of paid leave to secure dependable childcare. In reality, many are probably already doing this: 74 per cent say they use their annual leave to cover childcare, with 60 per cent saying they do this often or all the time. In relation to emergency childcare, annual leave is vital for parents: 44 per cent said that they used it all the time to cover childcare emergencies.

Fifty nine per cent of parents would consider what a promotion meant for their childcare arrangements before applying for the role. There was a clear difference between men and women, with 67 per cent of women saying they would consider the childcare implications of a promotion, compared to 51 per cent of men. With childcare remaining a primarily female activity, available childcare is a crucial component in getting women into work and in particular into more senior roles. As noted, the phenomenon of women eschewing or being shut out of more senior roles or going for promotion because of caring responsibilities is not only a gender equality issue but also a workplace effectiveness one.

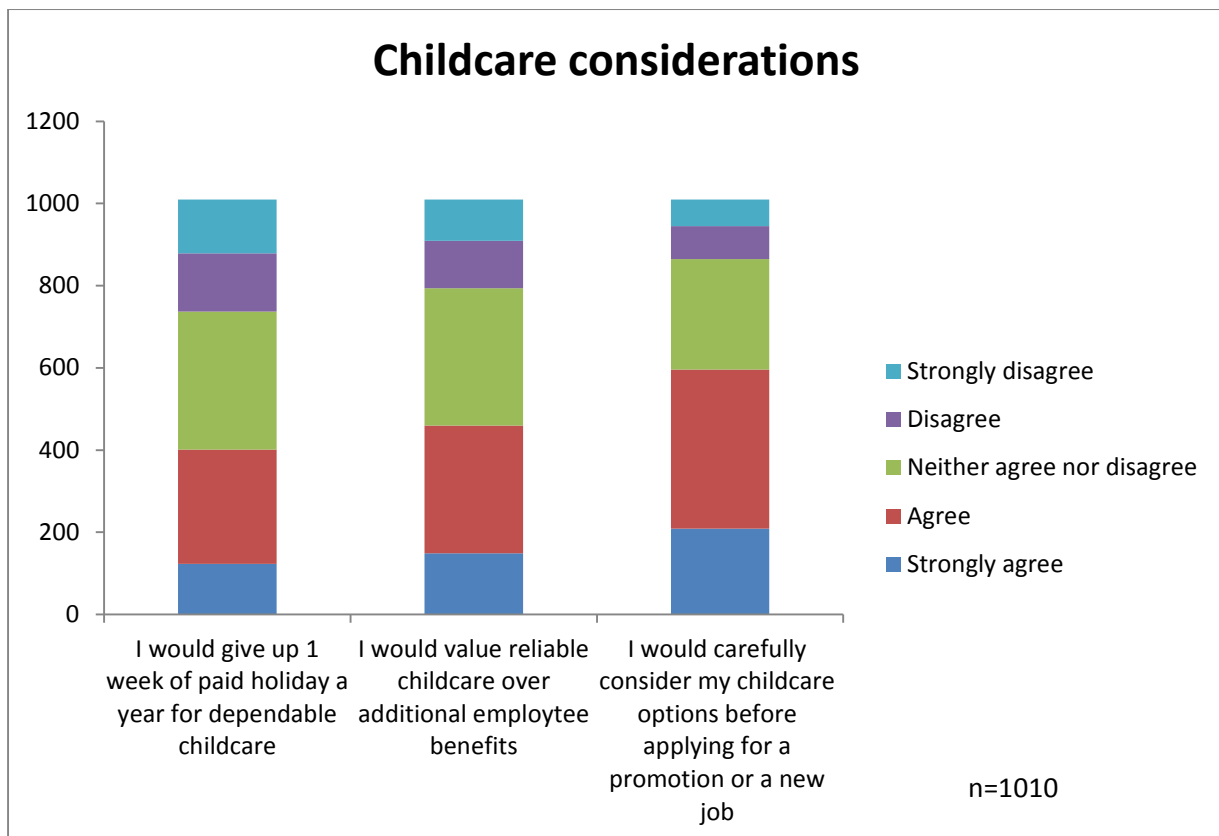


Figure 17

Work-life balance and wellbeing

Respondents were asked to rank, in order of importance, how they valued work and family. The results can be seen in Figure 18.

Family was rated as the highest priority, whilst work was rated more lowly. This is an important reality to recognise, not only in understanding how parents see family life but also in understanding work/family and family/work conflict. Family life is desirable and important to parents in itself; it is also the place where parents take ‘time out’ from work, refreshing both their physical and mental wellbeing. Work and family balance is crucial; where family (the most important value) is curtailed or negatively influenced by other factors, like work, conflict is likely to be experienced. This is not only bad for the parents themselves, but it also affects their home life including their relationships. This can then transfer back in to the workplace, affecting performance, motivation and inter-colleague relationships.²⁵

Employers should look to focus on working with parents’ values to promote employee wellbeing and develop employee engagement, which has positive outcomes for employers. Research²⁶ has found that engaged employees are healthier, have lower levels of job-impacting stress, fewer overall health concerns, and miss significantly fewer days of work. Additionally, supported employees—those who received assistance from their employers with family care and other work-life issues—were the most likely to report a high sense of wellbeing.

²⁵ Happy Homes, productive Workplaces, Working Families and One Plus One, 2012

²⁶ Employee Engagement: the tangible effects of employee Wellbeing. Bright Horizons Family Solutions 2012

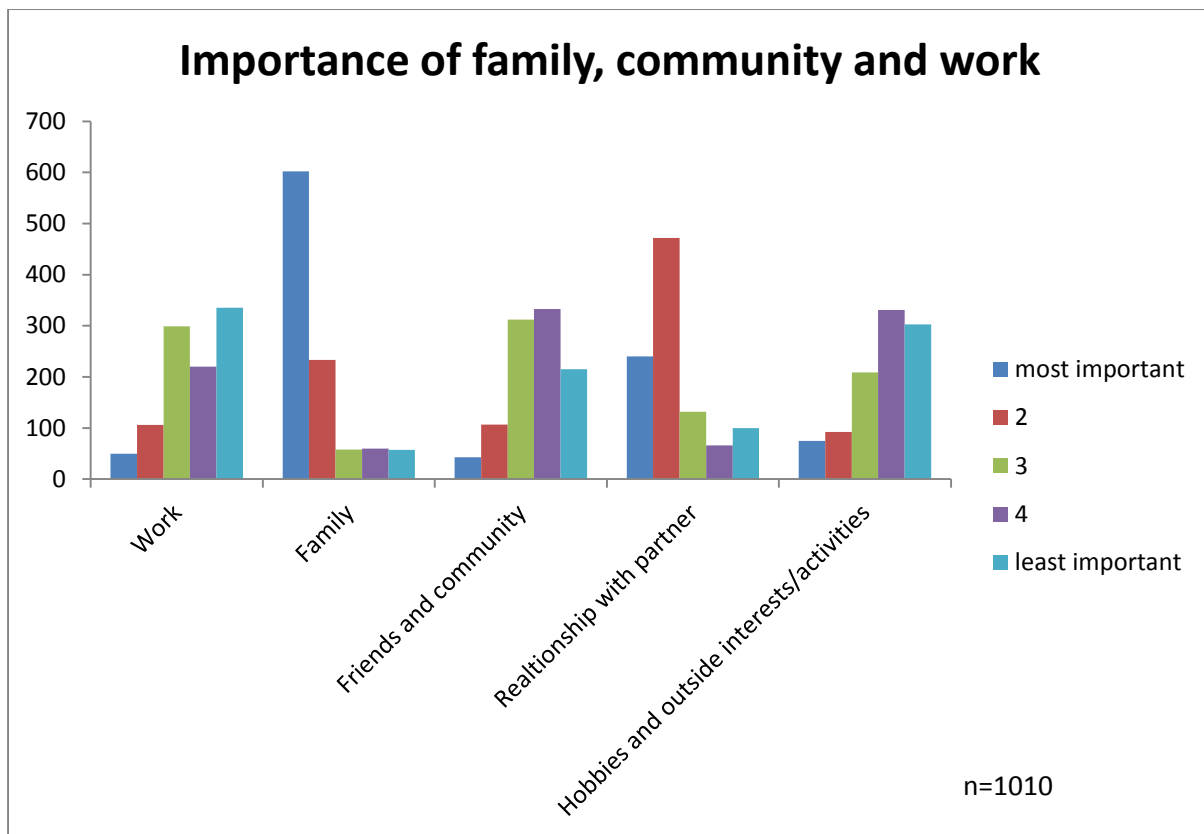


Figure 18

Respondents reported on their work stress levels in a typical week, shown in Figure 19. Twenty seven per cent were feeling quite or very stressed, with a further 37 per cent feeling a bit stressed. This is quite a high number of parents feeling work-related stress (The Health and Safety Executive estimates that 1 in 5 employees suffers work related stress). In terms of both individual health and wellbeing, and in terms of wider societal and economic impacts, reducing this stress would be beneficial. However, when asked to compare their stress levels to three years ago, only 18 per cent said their stress had gone down. For the remainder it had either stayed at a similar level (46 per cent) or increased (32 per cent). Work stress is likely to spill over negatively both into family relationships, and back into the workplace too.

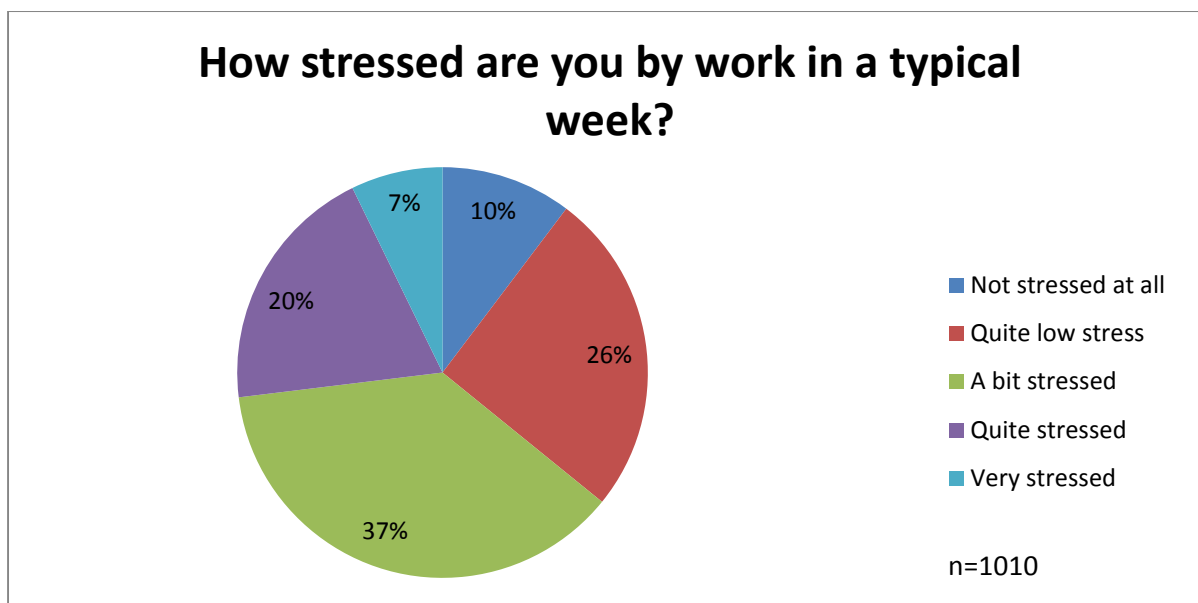


Figure 18

Parents showed some appetite to change their work and family balance as a response to workplace pressure (Figure 20). Forty per cent said that their work life was becoming increasingly stressful, and 35 per cent said that they would like to downshift into a less stressful job if they could, but only 26 per cent were willing to countenance a pay cut to achieve this downshift, suggesting that family finances mean that for many parents a less stressful working life is not realistically achievable.

Twenty seven per cent of parents said that they felt resentful towards their employer about their work and family balance. This is a substantial number, with more than a quarter of working parents dissatisfied with their work-life fit and blaming their employer for this. Resentment may stem from a number of sources: a lack of flexible working opportunity; an employer culture that is not conducive to work-life balance, or a line manager who is opposed to flexible working; a lack of control in managing their own workload; and a workload that is difficult to deal with because of its volume, its intensity, or both. Resentment towards an employer may manifest itself in a number of ways that are damaging: a diminishing of engagement and commitment; lower productivity; and a withdrawal of discretionary effort on the part of the employee. Employers, therefore, should have an interest in ensuring that if there is cause for resentment amongst employees, that they detect and diagnose the issue before it affects organisational performance.

Fathers, in particular, are resentful. Thirty one per cent of fathers said they felt resentful, whereas 24 per cent of mothers did. That almost one third of fathers are resentful is cause for concern, and resentment is particularly pronounced amongst younger fathers: 45 per cent of fathers aged 16-25 and 36 per cent of fathers aged 26-35 are resentful towards their employer about their work-life balance. These younger fathers are the most likely to have young children, and feel most keenly work and family conflict where work time is impinging upon the amount of time they can spend with their children. They are also more likely to be more junior at work, and subsequently lack confidence that their requests for work-life reconciliation will be heard sympathetically.

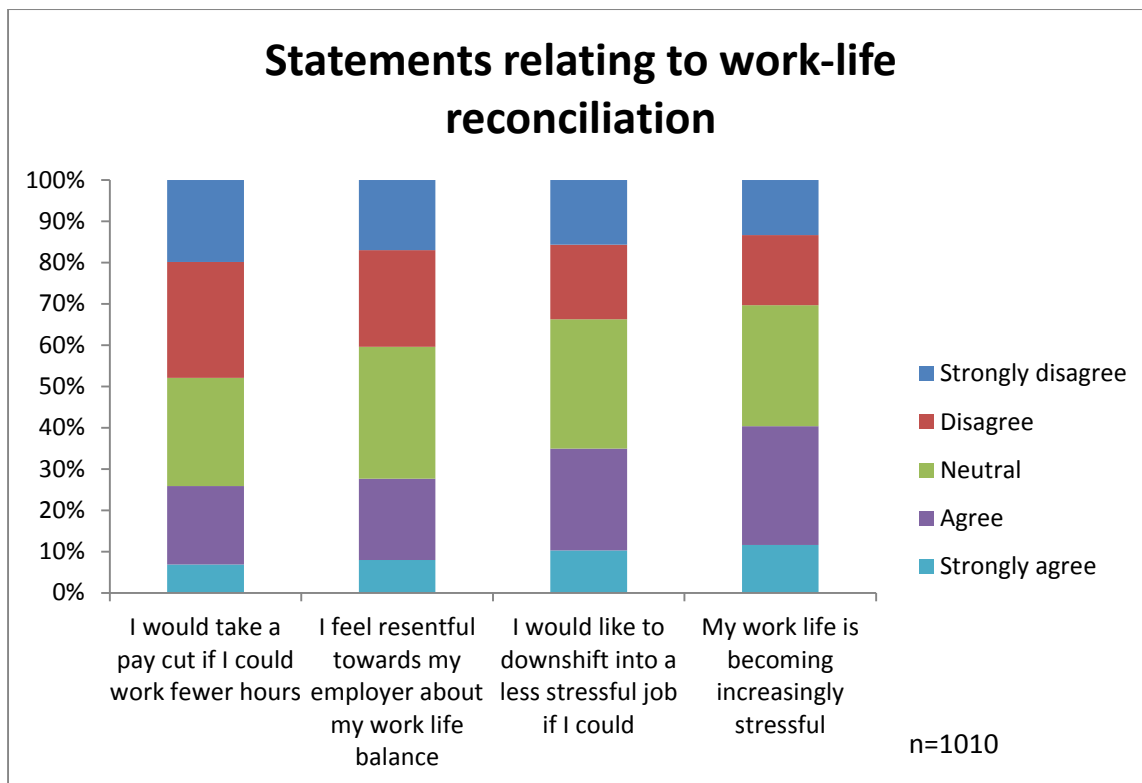


Figure 20

In terms of specific activities, respondents were asked to assess the level to which each was affected by work. The results can be seen in figure 21.

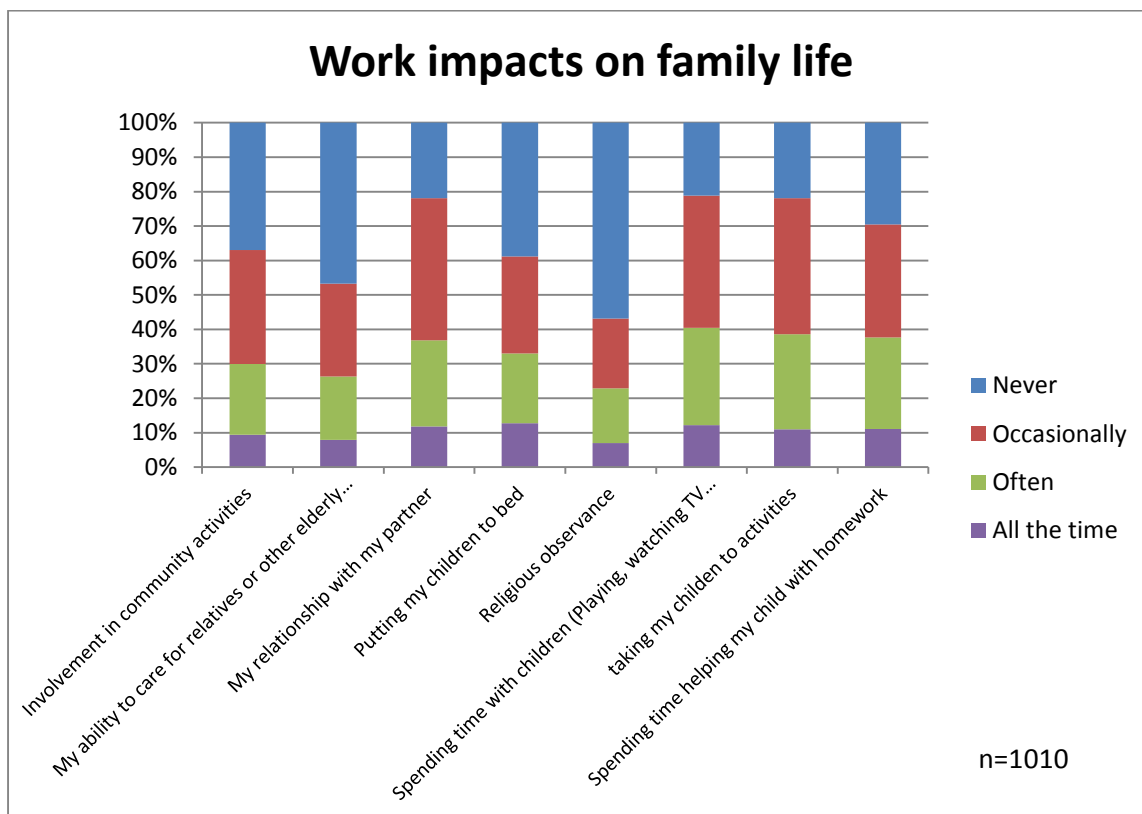


Figure 21

It is evident that work impacts family life across a range of activities, and this is mainly the result of work eroding family time. Although it is not unreasonable to expect work occasionally to impinge on family life, a substantial proportion of parents are saying that this happens often or all of the time. As noted previously, family life is parents' highest priority. Spending time with children is impinged upon often or all the time in 40 per cent of families, and it is at a similar level for other child-related activities including helping with homework, and taking children to activities. The relationship with a partner is also impinged upon often or all the time for 36 per cent of parents. It is important to recognise that the consistent erosion of 'family' time by work is likely to have negative consequences. Not only are family activities in themselves disrupted, with the attendant pressures and tensions that this might cause, but essential 'non-work' time is disrupted. Employees require this time to re-energise and to rest. If work consistently intrudes upon this time employees will eventually come to resent this, and will also lack the essential downtime that they need to remain effective and energised at work.

Respondents were asked about the effects that work had on health-related behaviour, to try and illuminate the extent to which working time affected health choices and activities that promote good health. Parents were asked whether or not the amount of time they spent at work influenced these. The results are in Figure 22.

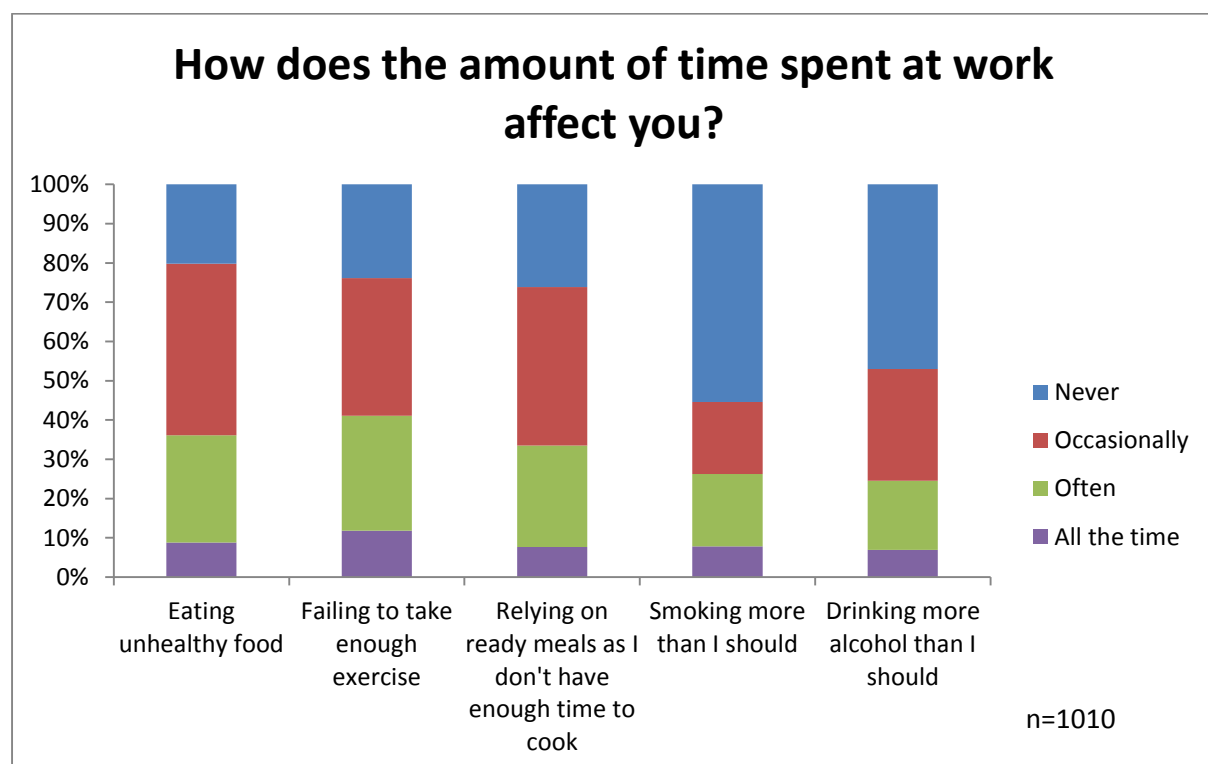


Figure 22

Negative effects occur around diet and exercise, with parents identifying work time as impinging upon their ability to cook properly and relying instead on convenience food. Forty-one per cent said they were not able to find the time to take sufficient exercise. Physical wellbeing is of paramount importance, and if work time is compromising the ability of parents to make healthy choices because they are time-constrained then there are serious implications not just for individuals but also for public

policy makers. Diet and fitness have been signalled as the major health issue of the near future²⁷ ; to achieve a healthier population the role of work in supporting healthy lifestyles should be taken into account. Many employers already understand the importance of wellbeing, and support it in the workplace: however, it is essential that wellbeing is supported outside of the workplace too, through the management of working time.

Choices and attitudes

Respondents were asked, across a number of options, what they would choose for themselves and what they would choose for their partner (if applicable) to improve their family work-life balance. Across the activities there were not significant differences between what men and women chose for themselves. However, when asked to choose for their partners differences emerged. Women wanted to see their partner reduce their working hours, have a less long hours culture at work and make more use of flexible working practices. Men wanted their partner to have better childcare facilities at work, or ideally give up work altogether. This may be due to entrenched gender attitudes, but in the light of increased father involvement in childcare, this seems unlikely. It may, in fact, be a reflection of a culture where men still feel bound to the workplace by culture and expectation and cannot envisage taking up more domestic responsibility.

In terms of their working time, respondents were given a number of attitudinal questions to examine their perception of their employer/employee relationship around work-life balance. The results can be seen in Figure 23.

Perceptions are positive, although there is a persistent level of around 20 per cent of employees who do not feel as positively about their employer's support of work-life balance, and around work/family issues in particular.

²⁷ Our Priorities for 2013/2014, Public Health England 2013

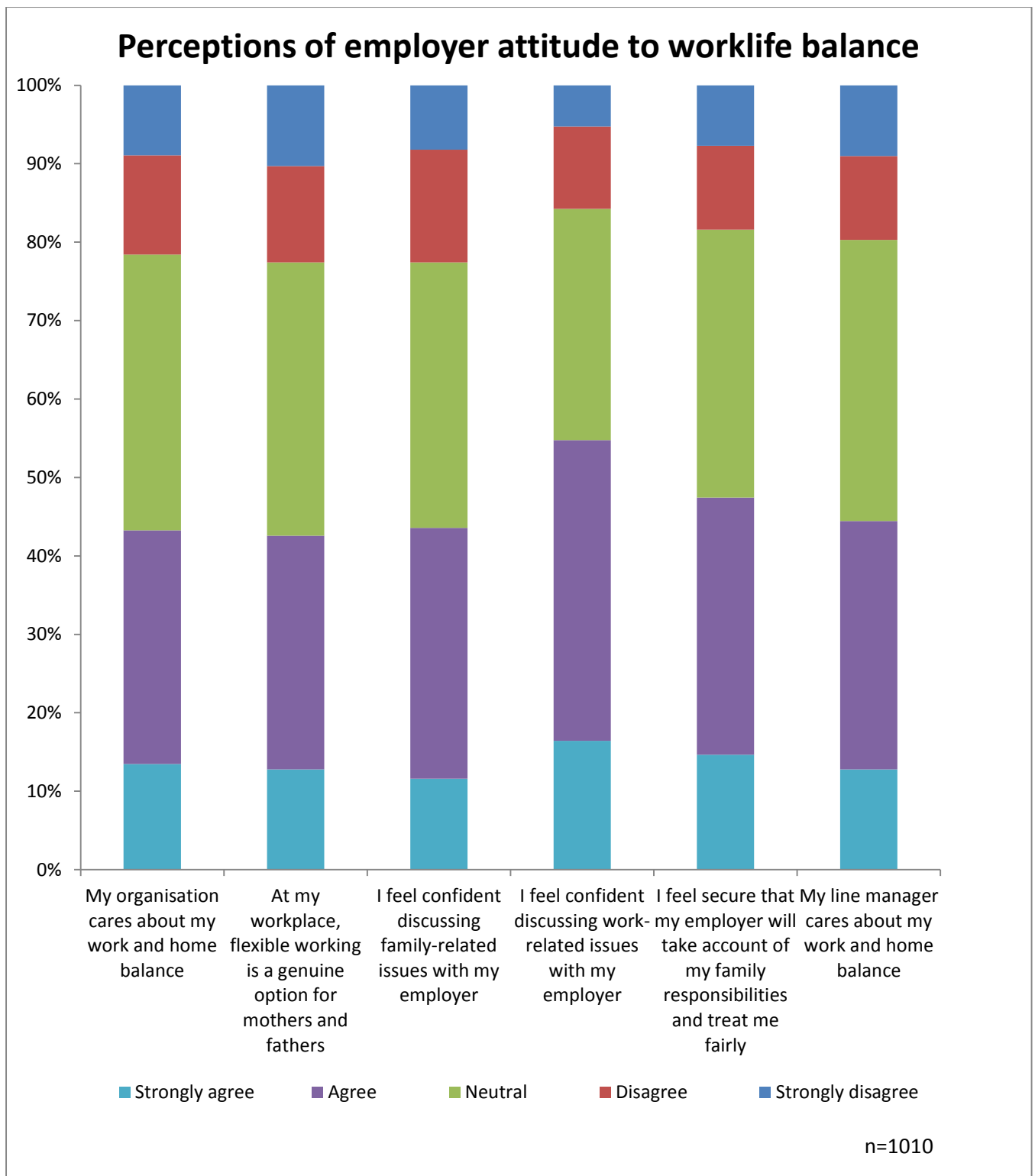


Figure 23

However, there is evidence that suggests that some employees do not feel comfortable discussing work-life issues with their employer, or are concerned about the acceptability of taking time off work for family reasons. This was highest amongst young fathers (Figure 24).

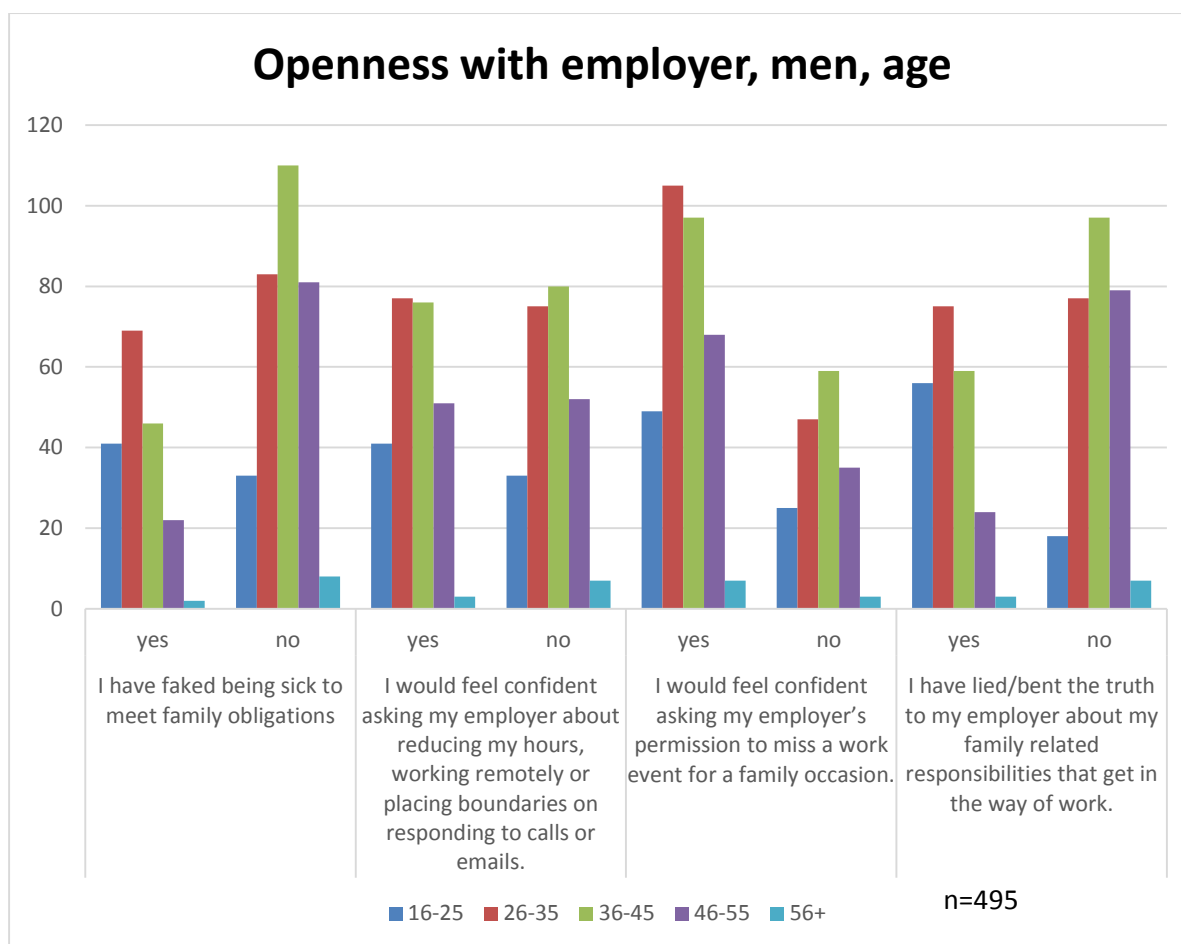


Figure 19

Thirty six per cent of all fathers said that they had faked being sick to meet family obligations, however, for fathers aged 16-35 this rose to 48 per cent. Younger men appear more willing to bend the truth for family responsibilities that get in the way of work. This may be a result of lack of flexibility, or perceived lack of employer support for men working flexibly or taking time off for family. Forty four per cent of all fathers had done this, rising to 58 per cent of fathers 16-35. Men are equally balanced between being confident and not confident about asking for boundaries to be put on their work. Although they felt generally confident about discussing work-related issues with their employer (Figure 23), discussing issues of capacity and workload they are more hesitant. They are more confident about asking permission to miss work for a family event. This is a welcome indication that workplace attitudes are changing, albeit around special family occasions. The Working Families Benchmark shows that many employers are actually recognising these special family days in policy now, and allow employees specific time off for these. However when it comes to placing boundaries on work or reducing hours, workload is a more taboo subject than family.

Fathers and family life

Figure 25 shows the comparative rates of dropping off at school between parents and grouped by age. Younger fathers are more likely to do this than older ones, and for very young fathers (16 to 25 years of age) they are more likely to do this than mothers. Among younger working fathers, 68 per cent regularly drop their children off at school, compared to 61 per cent of mothers in the same age group (16-35). Numbers are small and caution must be exercised for this group, but this may reflect a

changing aspiration to be more involved in family life for young fathers: there are important implications here about how employers think about making flexible working available to fathers, and about the changing role of caring for young children going on within families.

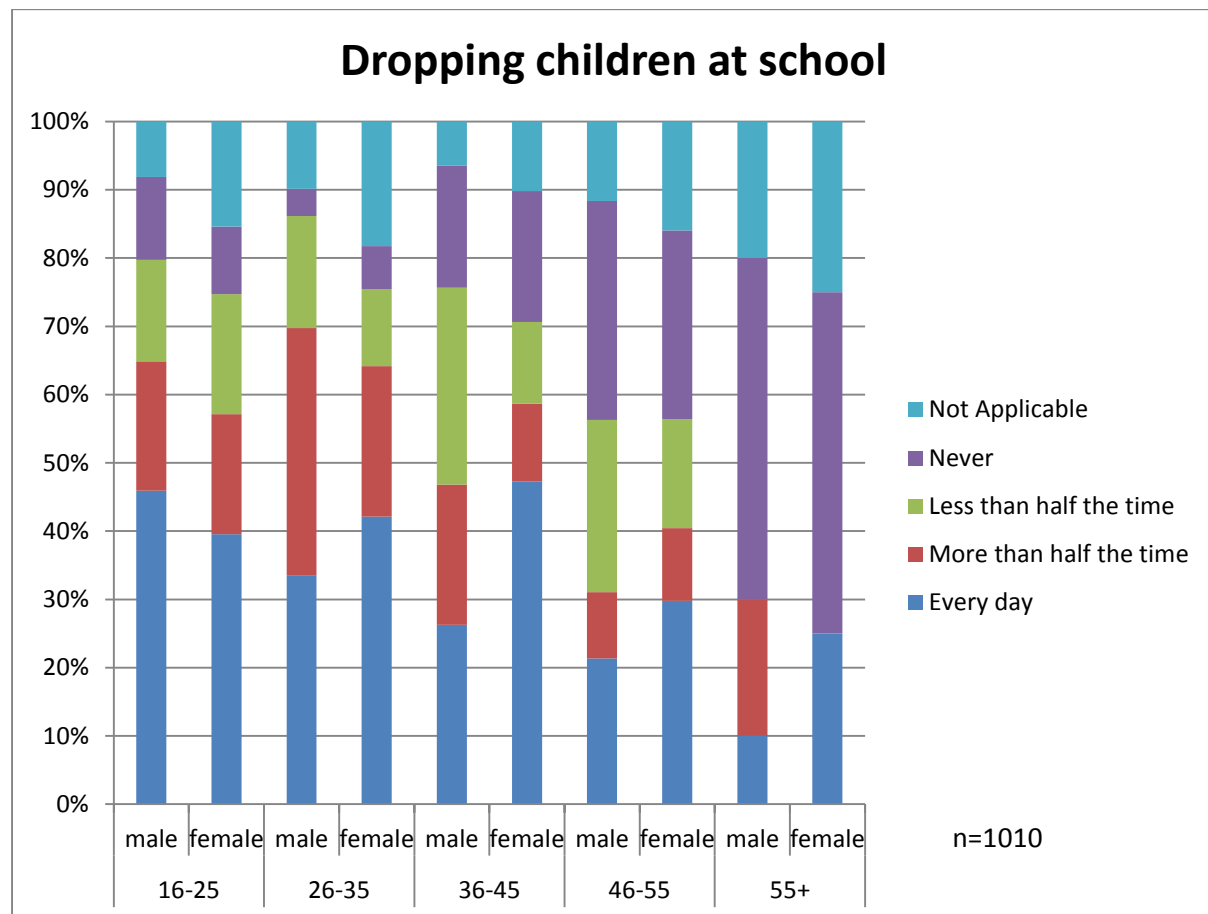


Figure 25

However, Figures 26 and 27 show that the expectation is that mothers are the first port of call if there is a childcare issue, and that this attitude permeates the workplace. Although fathers are evidently visible at the school gate in the morning when they bring their children to school, the assumption appears to be that it is a mother who will be called if there is a problem. Both mothers and fathers across all age ranges acknowledged this to be the case.

Figure 27 shows how this attitude or expectation translates into the workplace: it is more acceptable for women to have their work disrupted for childcare reasons than it is for men.

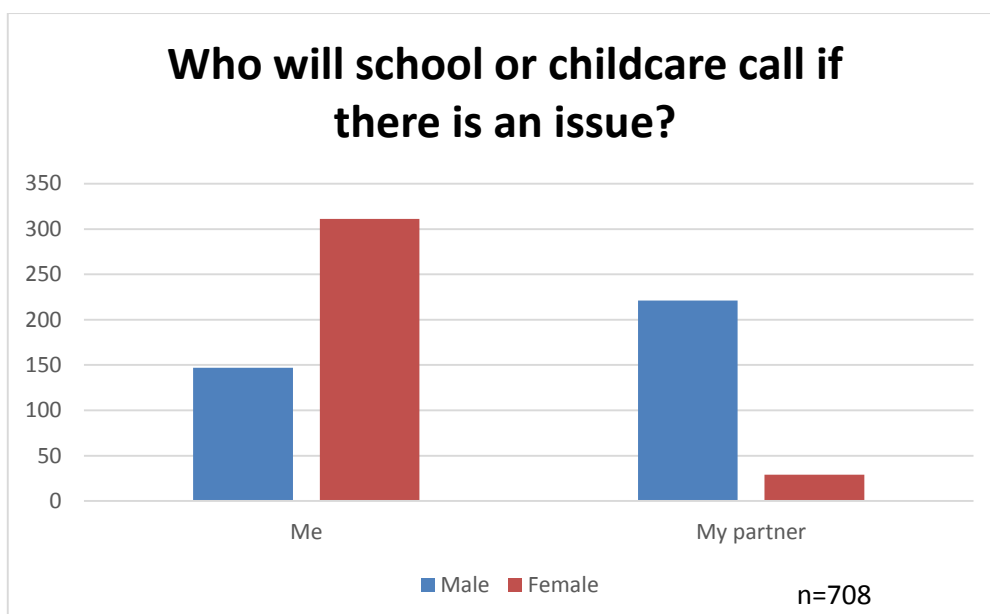


Figure 26

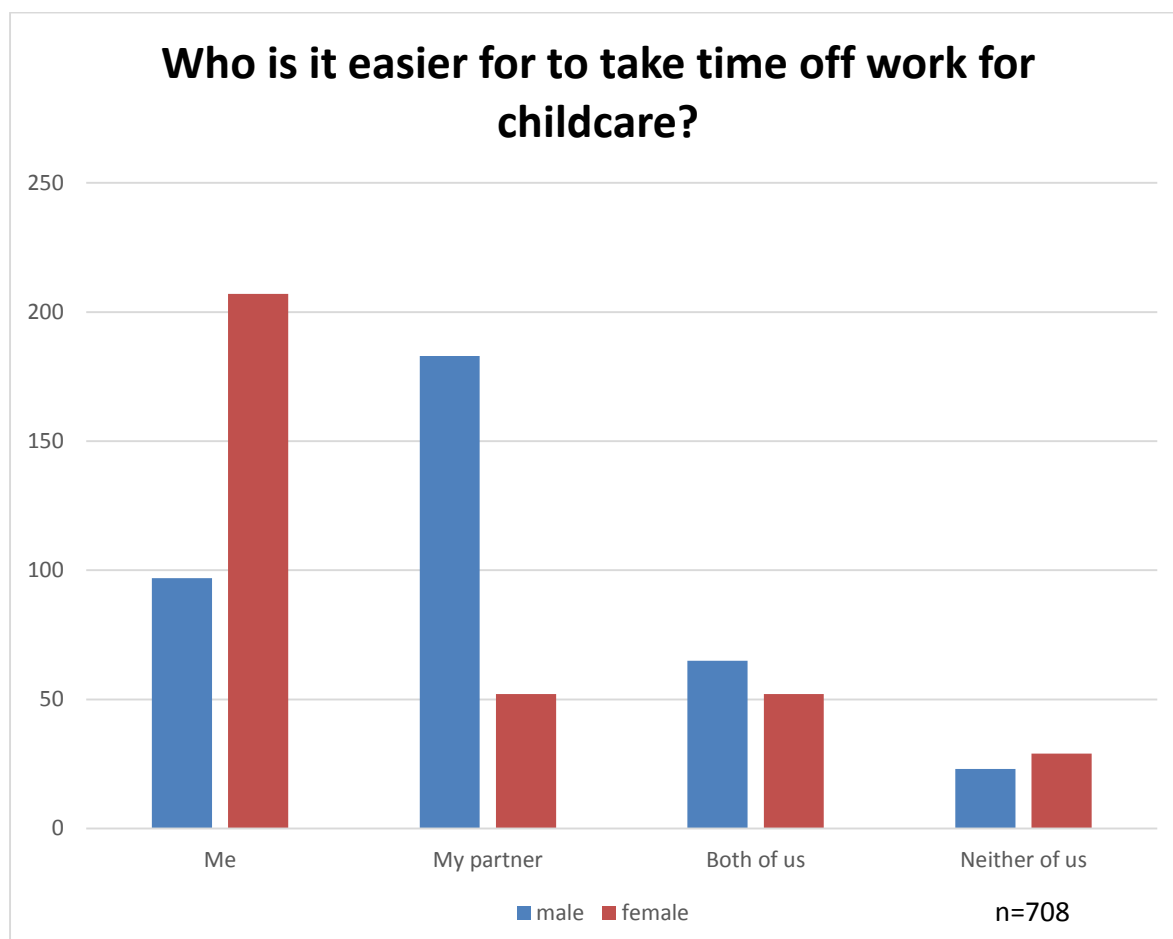


Figure 27

With the introduction of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) from April 2015, respondents were asked about whether they thought that they would use it if they had another child. Men were slightly more in favour of using SPL than women: 55 per cent of fathers said they would use it, whilst 52 per cent of women said that they would. Parents were also asked a range of questions exploring attitudes to SPL and parenting, with mixed results. The results of these questions are in figure 28.

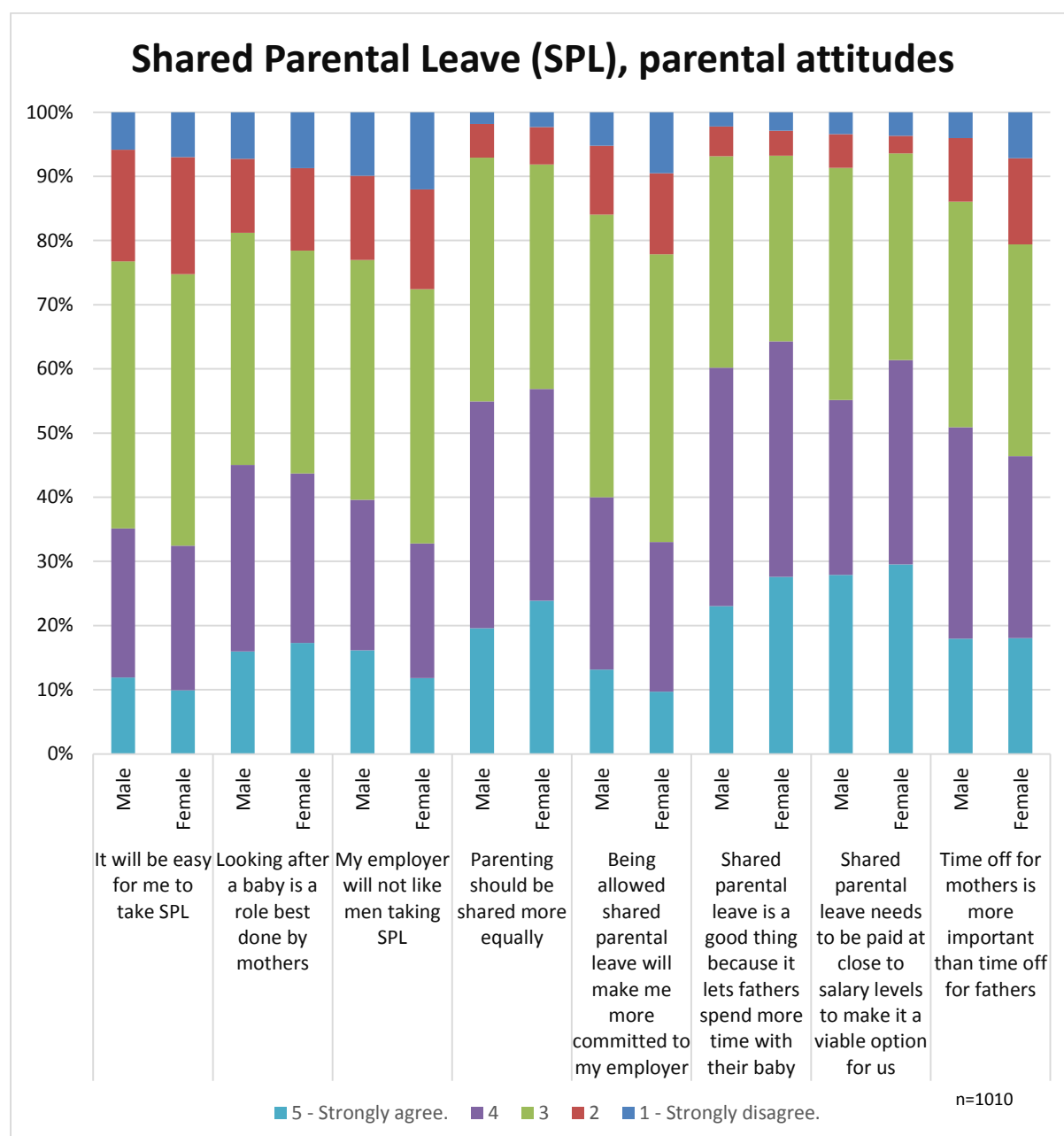


Figure 20

Fathers felt more positive than mothers about the ease of taking SPL. This may reflect their experience of taking Ordinary Paternity Leave (OPL), in which case it should be noted that SPL allows them to take significantly longer periods out of the workplace than for OPL, and this is a reality they have not yet fully countenanced. It may also reflect that mothers might perceive SPL as less favourable for them than maternity leave. Although they may gain the opportunity to share care of their new baby with their partner, there may also be a perception that they are making a sacrifice by giving up maternity

leave. There was evidence of strong gendered beliefs about who is best at caring, which echo the finding that fathers in particular would ideally like their partner to give up work to focus on childcare. Forty five per cent of men and 44 per cent of women thought that looking after a baby was a role best done by mothers. Although parents (60 per cent of fathers and 64 per cent of mothers) agreed that SPL was a good thing because it lets fathers spend more time with their baby, and 55 per cent of fathers and 57 per cent of mothers agreed that parenting should be shared more equally, this needs to be considered against the belief that mothers make the best carers and that time off for mothers is more important than time off for fathers (51 per cent of fathers and 46 per cent of mothers agreed with this). Uptake of SPL will therefore not only depend on how it is structured and paid, although this is of paramount importance; there are also cultural beliefs amongst mothers and fathers about who should be caring.

In terms of the structure and pay of SPL, parents were clear that it needed to be paid at near-salary replacement levels to make it a viable option. Fifty five per cent of fathers and 61 per cent of mothers agreed that this would be necessary to make it a realistic option. Evidence from paternity leave schemes in other countries²⁸ shows that pay levels are a crucial factor for fathers in determining whether they take some form of paternity leave. Parents were also cautious about employer attitude. Forty five per cent of fathers thought that their employer will not like men making use of SPL, and 32 per cent of women thought this too. Predicting their employer's attitude to SPL is probably based on observations that parents have made about how fathers with family responsibilities are viewed and treated. It may be that they have seen other fathers penalised in some way for working in a more family-friendly way (perhaps through working flexibly) or they may extrapolate from what they have seen in the treatment of mothers who have gone on, and returned from, maternity leave. However, more parents agree than disagree that being allowed to use SPL will boost their commitment to their employer. This has important implications, suggesting that there may be a business case in terms of employee engagement and motivation that employers can benefit from by introducing SPL as a realistic (well-paid and positively supported) option for employees.

Caring for older relatives

Many families combine caring for dependent children with caring for an elderly relative. Figure 29 shows a breakdown of how soon families predicted that they would have to provide care, with 39 per cent of parents saying that they expected this to happen within the next 10 years. An almost equal percentage (37) said that they hadn't thought about this issue yet, and understandably this was more prevalent amongst younger parents. Carers UK estimates that we will see a 40 per cent rise in the number of carers needed by 2037 – an extra 2.6 million carers, meaning the carer population in the UK will reach 9 million²⁹. The majority of carers are of working age, and the peak caring ages are 50-64: however 46 per cent of 46 to 55 year old parents in the Modern Families Index said that they had not thought about it yet. Those parents who are thinking about the possibility of caring may find themselves with better preparedness than those who have not considered the issue. Reconciling caring responsibilities with paid work can be difficult, and many carers find that the combination is not possible. Employers might support carers through policies like periods of adjustment leave, and employees who expect to take on a caring arrangement in the future should find out what support

²⁸ 10th International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2014, International Network on Leave Policies and Research

²⁹ Facts about carers, Carers UK Policy Briefing 2014

their employer might offer. An ageing population means that more people will become carers whilst at the same time remaining in paid work, and family life will have to adjust to configure itself to these demands.

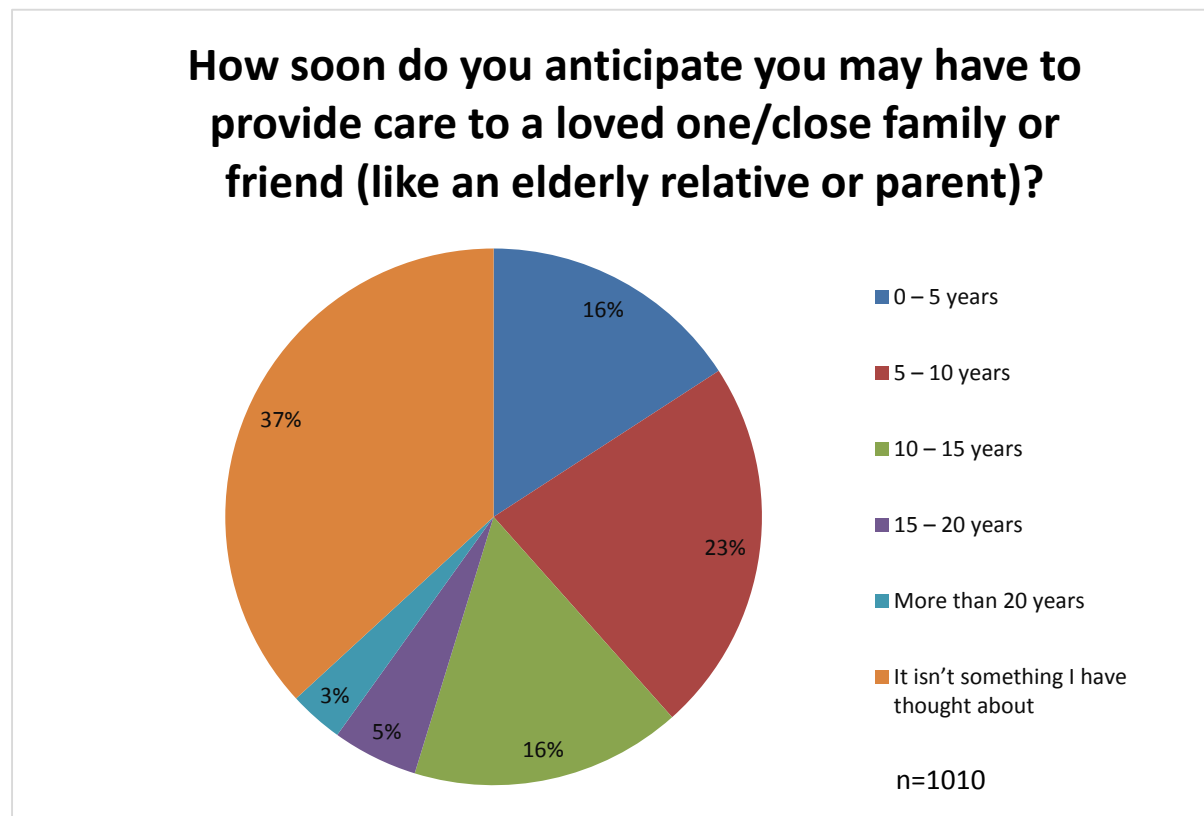


Figure 29

Parents said (Figure 22) that working time impinged upon their ability to sometimes provide care for parents or elderly relatives. This is an issue that is likely to become more pressing in the future, as increasing numbers will be juggling new responsibilities.

Discussion

The Modern Families Index captures some of the realities of family life for working families today. It also shows that to succeed in the combining of family and work life requires the ability not only to create arrangements to facilitate this, but also to adapt to disruptions and deal with barriers and attitudes that can get in the way of getting a good work-life fit for the whole family. Some of the barriers are easier to overcome than others: tweaks to working patterns can help them to fit in with childcare or school, for example. But more stubborn impediments, such as longer-hours cultures at work, or employers who are not open to flexible working, can be persistently disruptive to family life.

The majority of parents responding to the survey were in full-time work, and, in couple households, more than half of their partners were also full time. As noted previously, other research³⁰ has posited that the old 1.5 earner model of full-time male and part-time female may be in decline. Of the women responding directly to the survey, 55 per cent were working full-time and 36 per cent part-time. For men in couple households, 59 per cent of their partners were in full-time work and 24 per cent in part-time work. Parents may be choosing to work full-time for a number of reasons: economic necessity (exacerbated by effects of recession and subsequent austerity), career decisions or possibly a lack of alternative viable reduced-hours jobs. If parents are working full-time, then it is likely that there will be an increased requirement for childcare for younger children, and also eldercare provision. It also probably means that parents will need workplace flexibility to marry work and care responsibilities. More mothers working full-time also brings the issue of fathers as care providers, and the equal sharing of this responsibility. There is evidence that younger fathers are more involved, in the numbers dropping off and collecting from school, for example. If the proportion of both parents working full-time continues to increase, then access to childcare and also workplace flexibility will need to adapt and expand to accommodate this change.

For those parents who use childcare, the Index shows that two thirds use formal childcare, up to 15 hours per week. Formal private nursery was the most reliable form of childcare, but most parents reported experiences of childcare breakdown. Reliability of childcare is a key issue, with many parents relying on annual leave, taking other time off or piecing together other care arrangements as best they can. So important is childcare that 40 per cent of parents said that they would give up a year's leave in exchange for dependable childcare, and 59 per cent said it would affect their decision about either applying for a promotion or new job (65 per cent of women and 52 per cent of men). Childcare is not only integral for families in terms of their non-working lives, but also shapes career decisions for a majority. Getting childcare and childcare provision right is not only an issue for individual families, but is also an issue for employers and the wider economy. If parents (particularly mothers) are to realise their full potential at work, then childcare that allows them to do so is crucial. However, the Index shows that only a third of parents are content with their current childcare arrangements: two thirds are either unable to find appropriate childcare, are unable to afford it or feel that they are relying too heavily on childcare to the detriment of their family life. Accessibility, affordability and choice are crucial. Recent evidence shows that childcare costs can be high enough to drive some employees, usually mothers, from work as it no longer pays to be employed once childcare is accounted for.³¹ Employers are affected by childcare issues too, and not only in the career choices that parents make based on the costs and availability of said childcare. They experience the effects of

³⁰ Modern fatherhood, Ibid

³¹ 4Children, Ibid

childcare problems, with workplace disruption the most common outcome of childcare breakdown. Only 12 per cent of parents said that their current employer provided any childcare backup. There is a business case for employers to be more involved in helping parents access reliable and affordable childcare.

The type of work that parents do, and the nature and culture of their workplace affects how successfully parents feel about their work and family integration. Access to flexible working practices, workplace culture, colleague and manager attitudes and work intensity all play their part. Paid work is vital, but it is not the highest priority for the majority. Family is ranked as the most important thing in their lives. This is unsurprising, but needs to be considered when looking at how parents are working and the demands that work makes upon them. Organising work in a way that is in tune with the aspirations of parents for family life will reduce work-family conflict and improve employee wellbeing. This means getting it right in terms of working time, and work organisation. The most common reason for staying late was workload pressure. This would suggest that employers are allocating work beyond the hours that they have allotted to it, and are relying on parents (and, no doubt, other employees) to put in extra hours. Organisations which themselves are under pressure may place additional burdens on their employees in the form of expanded workloads to increase productivity. However, the risks to employee health and wellbeing caused by work-related stress and work-family conflict are also likely to worsen. Working in a way which is sustainable for employees, and ensures that they have an opportunity to fully enjoy family life makes good business sense, even if an organisation is under pressure. Parents are experiencing workplace stress, with over a quarter reporting they are quite or very stressed; stress does not seem to be abating, with less than a fifth saying their stress levels have gone down. In addition, parents also report that working time is affecting their health and wellbeing. Time for exercise is curtailed, and there is a reliance on convenience food as a result of time poverty. Their relationship with their partner is also negatively affected.

One way of mitigating work impinging on family life is to use flexible working practices, and many parents do make use of these. Two thirds of parents worked flexibly, the majority doing so for childcare reasons. The most popular type of flexibility was working time flexibility (for example flexitime) and working from home or from other locations. A third of parents did not work flexibly, some through choice although flexible working was available, but others because they either felt that flexible working was perceived negatively at work, or because their role would not accommodate flexibility. Factors like a dominant workplace culture and employer expectation of extra hours, both reported by parents, are unlikely to encourage the take up of flexible working. Even though policies may be available on paper, other research³² has shown that policy does not translate into practice where the culture is perceived as hostile to flexible working.

Hesitancy about the acceptability of discussing family issues at work is evident, particularly amongst younger men. Younger fathers were also more willing than other groups to mislead their employer about the reality of their family commitments. This points to a workplace culture where some men do not yet feel confident about being visible and explicit about their work and family aspirations and needs. At the same time, fathers have higher levels of resentment towards their employer about their work-life balance than mothers, suggesting that their hesitancy may be contributing to dissatisfaction. Other research has found that fathers were resentful of the perceived better access to work-life

³² Top Employers for Working Families Benchmark, Working Families 2104

balance and flexible working arrangements that mothers had.³³ To address access to flexible working practices is key in enabling parents to achieve a good work-life balance, and there is a key role for employers here in both ensuring that organisational culture is supportive of flexible working and that line managers and decision makers understand the benefits that can accrue from introducing them.³⁴

Additional opportunities to balance work and family life from the very earliest stages of parenthood are to be introduced in 2015 in the form of the new Shared Parental Leave (SPL) right, allowing mothers and fathers extended periods of time off work within the first year of their child's life. Both mothers and fathers were supportive and a majority said that they would make use of SPL if they were to have another child. However, strong beliefs about gender and caring roles raise the possibility that parents might retrench to 'traditional' arrangements in reality. It will be interesting to observe whether fathers do make use of SPL and whether some of the work-life resentment that fathers appear feel is reduced by the opportunity not only to take leave in the first year of their child's life, but also establish new working patterns that turn out to be long lasting.

Caring for older adults will increasingly become a part of family life as the population ages. Combinations of care are already evident within the 'sandwich generation', who care for elderly parents whilst also providing care for the grandchildren, often whilst still working. As the need for care rises families will need to find new ways to incorporate these additional responsibilities, fitting eldercare, childcare and work together. The challenge will be to do this in a way that recognises and preserves the family life that parents aspire to. Families need time to spend together and have time to be able to care for each other. They also need to work. Making sure that they have enough of the twin currencies – time and income – to enjoy a good family life requires careful planning. This must be a joint effort between policy makers, employers, care providers and parents, all of whom are crucial to ensuring that families can combine caring with the rest of family life.

³³ Lancaster University Management School and Working Families, Fathers at Work 2011

³⁴ Top Employers Benchmark Ibid



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



About Bright Horizons Family Solutions

Bright Horizons Family Solutions is a leading UK provider of high-quality child care, early years education and other services designed to help employers and families better address the challenges of integrating work and family life. Bright Horizons provides nursery care both to consumers and in partnership with employers and also offers innovative round-the-clock back-up care packages for children and adults. With a reputation for excellence spanning three decades, Bright Horizons has more than 200 nurseries in the UK and Ireland. From the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2008 Bright Horizons has consistently outperformed its sector in terms of "Outstanding" awards made by Ofsted. Bright Horizons is one of the UK's Best Workplaces as well as one of the Top 25 Best Large Workplaces in Europe as designated by the Great Place to Work Institute. www.brighthorizons.co.uk

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