

Work and Family



Edited by Justin Healey

ISSUES
IN SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

Work and Family is Volume 462 in the 'Issues in Society' series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC

It can be challenging and exhausting for working parents to hold down a job while also raising a family. In order to meet the costs of living, families often have two parents engaged in paid work – but at what personal cost? Why are most mothers still earning less at work and doing more at home than fathers in relation to care and domestic duties? What are the stresses for parents in terms of work-life balance and work-family conflict? And how does child care help families to grow, learn and earn?

This book explores the realities of parenting and gender roles, and looks at how workers and employers can maintain sustainable work-family balance through family-friendly, flexible work options. It also reviews the role of affordable child care and how it supports the needs of children while sustaining workforce participation. What are the most effective ways to balance work and family life?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Titles in the 'Issues in Society' series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the 'Issues in Society' series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:

- Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
- Website fact sheets
- Magazine and journal articles
- Statistics and surveys
- Government reports
- Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION

As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES

The 'Exploring issues' section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The 'Web links' section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.

FOUR HOME TRAPS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENDER PAY GAP

Australia's gender pay gap is diminishing, says a new report, but some contributors to it seem harder to overcome than others. For Emma Williamson, the findings hit close to home

The report¹, by KPMG prepared with Diversity Council of Australia and Workplace Gender Equality Agency, says the pay gap declined from \$3.05 an hour in 2014 to \$2.43 in 2017 (see page 3). In 2017, women on average earned A\$31.14 an hour compared with A\$33.57 for men.

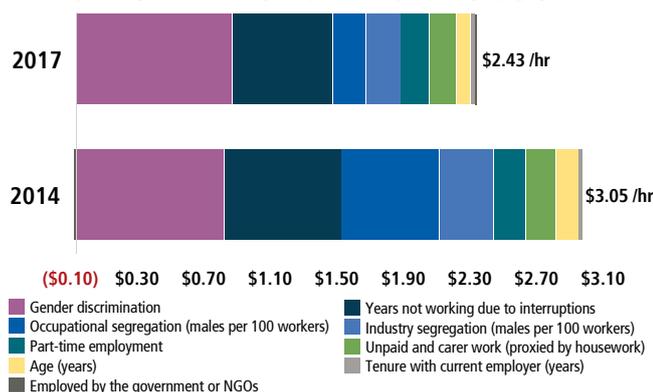
The report breaks down the economics to some very specific factors. Overall, two-thirds of the total decline in the hourly gender pay gap is credited to diminishing industrial and occupational segregation.

Proving harder to erode is “gender discrimination” (which the report defines as that portion of the pay gap unexplained by other factors) and the impact of career interruptions. For women, time out of the workforce is generally to care for young children or other family members, the report states, with such interruptions being “gendered and highly persistent”.

As an academic, working architect and chair of a national committee for gender equity, I have been engaged with discussions and research about what holds women back in their careers. The data shows many women leave the profession in their late twenties or thirties and never return. This is hardly unique.

There is a lot of talk about what can be done through government and corporate policy to welcome women back to the workforce. That’s all good, but I have also been thinking about how we can address the issue more holistically.

Type of work, family responsibilities, education and age no longer explain the majority of the gender pay gap



For women, time out of the workforce is generally to care for young children or other family members ... with such interruptions being “gendered and highly persistent”.



I have been reflecting on the sudden gender divide that happened when I gave birth to my first child. My husband and I had gone to university together and worked together. We both considered ourselves fierce feminists. Yet when we started our family it was an almost instant shift to gendered roles: I gave up full-time work, and he stayed in full-time work.

At the time it seemed the efficient thing to do. We both thought it was just a phase. But it has been harder to shift than we first imagined.

I see four traps we can easily fall into at home and work that reinforce the gender pay gap.

1. BEING THE HOMEMAKER

Breastfeeding binds women and children and ensures we stay close. But when not performing this miracle of sustenance, we are often looking for other ways to be the perfect mother and homemaker. We turn our

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attention, energy and intelligence to conquering the domestic situation in full. Cooking, cleaning, washing and ironing slowly but surely become our responsibility as the person who is at home the most.

The pattern once set is hard to change. Studies in countries with paid parental leave, such as Sweden, show that when housework and child care are divided more evenly at the beginning of a child's life, that division is likely to be maintained at a more equitable rate in the longer term, and be associated with women having a higher participation rate in paid work.

2. COUNTING CHILD CARE COSTS

Returning to work is usually preceded by weighing the relative costs and benefits of time away from the baby with a desire for meaningful paid work. Most of us will also factor in the costs of child care.

But comparing the cost of child care and associated domestic assistance against the amount of money the woman will earn is one of the biggest mistakes we, and our partners, can make. This isn't something that should be considered just as an immediate cost. It's a long-term investment in ensuring both parents have the chance to progress their careers.

3. DEVALUING PART-TIME WORK

Many women I know have returned to work part-time or started their own small business because they want the flexibility to fit their work around looking after children. Their partner meanwhile maintains the consistent full-time role as main financial provider.

The danger for those of us in this position is that we are the ones who drop everything. Our work is thus disproportionately affected and devalued.

4. REVERSE SEXISM

The last trap is thinking only mothers need support to balance the demands of working and parenting.

Fathers need it too – just in different ways.

Organisations like the Workplace Gender Equality Agency help ensure there is now a lot of fantastic support to women to take maternity leave, return to work when they are ready, and have flexible work arrangements. We need more support for men to unshackle themselves from the demands of full-time jobs – often working overtime and sacrificing time with their family for the sake of the family.

Our kids don't just need mothering. They need parenting. Until paternity leave and flexible workplace arrangements are not only available but taken by both women and men, the gender pay gap will persist.

By avoiding these traps we might help dismantle some persistent contributors to the gender pay gap. It's not wholly in the hands of individuals, or families, or companies, or governments to change these dynamics. For the social good, it's a project we should all be working on.

ENDNOTE

1. KPMG prepared with Diversity Council Australia (DCA) and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), *She's Price(d) less: The Economics of the Gender Pay Gap*, 22 August 2019, accessed from: <https://home.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2019/gender-pay-gap-economics-summary-report-2019.pdf>

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Emma Williamson does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond her academic appointment.

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THE CONVERSATION

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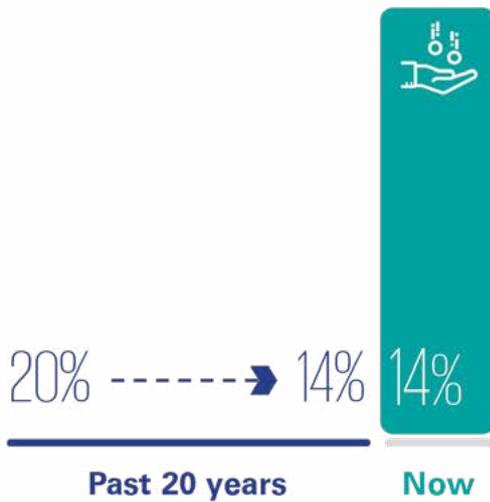


GENDER PAY GAP: KEY MESSAGES

Infographic from a **KPMG** report on the economics of the gender pay gap



Weekly wage gaps over the past 20 years



Source: ABS average full-time average weekly earnings gap between men and women



Hourly wage in \$



Hourly wage gaps by %



Source: KPMG analysis of Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey, Waves 7, 14 and 17 (HILDA Survey).

Alongside the overall decrease in the hourly gender pay gap, there have been changes in the share of drivers of the gap between 2014 and 2017.



Gender discrimination

The most significant single component contributing to the gender pay gap in Australia continues to be gender discrimination, accounting for **39 per cent** of the gender pay gap.

Closing this gap is equivalent to **\$182 million** each week.



Care, family and workforce participation

Factors that relate to the gendered impact of **children and family** (years not working due to interruptions, part-time employment and unpaid care and work) together account for **39 per cent** of the gender pay gap.

Closing this gap is equivalent to **\$186 million** each week.



Occupational and industrial segregation

Occupational and industrial segregation persist across the labour force.

Together, occupational and industrial segregation account for

17 per cent of the gender pay gap.

Closing this gap is equivalent to **\$77 million** each week.

A 2018 KPMG report, *Ending workforce discrimination against women*, found that **halving the gender pay gap** in Australia and **reducing entrenched discrimination against women in the workforce** could result in a payoff to society valued at **\$60 billion in GDP by 2038**.

Source: KPMG, 2018, *Ending workforce discrimination against women*, viewed 16 February 2019, available at: <https://home.kpmg/au/en/home/media/press-releases/2018/04/improving-workforce-participation-rates-for-women-could-boost-gdp-26-april-2018.html>.

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Gender workplace statistics at a glance

LATEST STATISTICS COURTESY OF THE **WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY AGENCY**

WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

- Women comprise 47.1% of all employed persons in Australia; 25.8% of all employed persons are women working full-time, and 21.3% are working part-time¹.
- Women constitute 37.6% of all full-time employees and 67.9% of all part-time employees².
- The workforce participation rate* is 59.9% for women³ and 69.6% for men (61.4% for women and 70.9% for men in February 2020)⁴.
- The workforce participation rate among those aged 15-64 years is 73.1% for women (74.5% in February 2020) and 82.0% for men (83.1% in February 2020)⁵.

* The workforce participation rate relates to active population, all people aged 15 years and over who are working or looking for work (i.e. employed or unemployed).

ECONOMIC SECURITY

- The full-time average weekly ordinary earnings⁶ for women are 14.0% less than for men⁷.
- Among non-public sector organisations with 100 or more employees, the gender pay gap for full-time annualised base salary is 15.5%, and 20.8% for full-time annualised total remuneration⁸.
- The adult full-time average hourly ordinary time cash earnings⁹ for non-managerial women are 11.4% less than for non-managerial men¹⁰.
- The median undergraduate starting salaries for women are 4.9% less than for men. This gap widens 14.4% for postgraduate (coursework) graduates¹¹.
- Median superannuation balances for women at retirement (aged 60-64) are 21.6% lower than

those for men¹².

- 55.1% of people receiving the aged pension are women¹³.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

- Of all women aged 20-24, 91.1% have attained year 12 qualifications or above, compared to 88.8% of men in the same age bracket¹⁴. Of all women aged 25-29, 44.5% have achieved a bachelor degree or above, compared to 32.2% of similarly-aged men¹⁵.
- Women represent 58.7% of domestic students enrolled in universities or other institutions. This has risen from 57.6% in 2007¹⁶.

PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

- Of all organisations in the Agency's 2018-19 dataset:
 - 49.4% provide primary carer's leave in addition to the Federal Government's paid parental leave scheme.
 - 43.8% provide secondary carer's leave in addition to the Federal Government's paid parental leave scheme¹⁷.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

- Latest results from the Agency's 2018-19 dataset show:
 - Women hold 14.1% of chair positions and 26.8% of directorships¹⁸, and represent 17.1% of CEOs and 31.5% of key management personnel¹⁹.
 - 34.0% of boards and governing bodies have no female directors²⁰. By contrast, only 0.9% had no male directors²¹.
- Real-time statistics from the Australian Institute of Company Directors reveal:
 - 30.7% of directors in the ASX 200 are women²¹.



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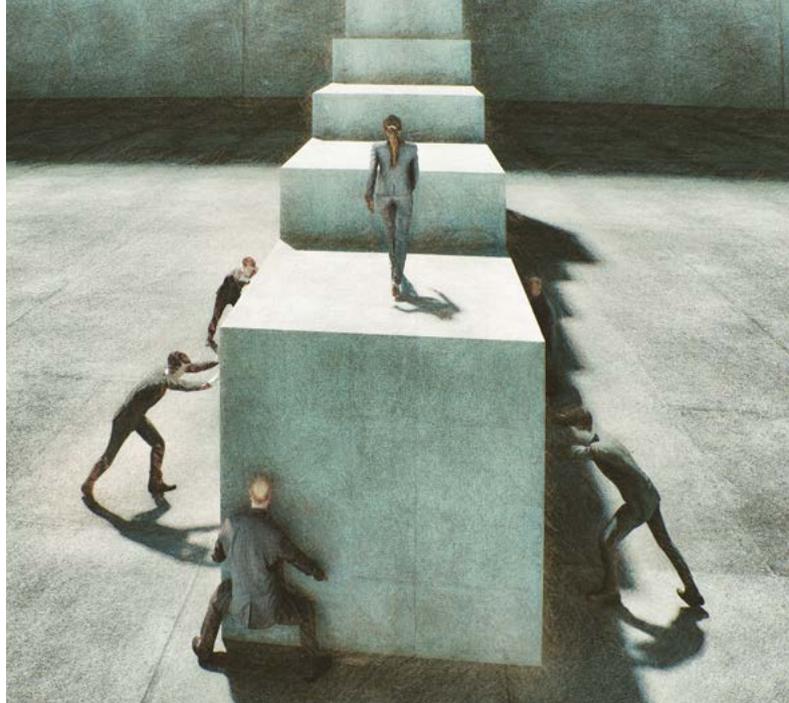
- Women comprised 30.9% of new appointments to ASX 200 boards²¹.

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2. *Ibid.*
3. Participation rate is the sum of the employed and unemployed divided by total population from age 15 onwards.
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5. *Ibid.*
6. Ordinary time earnings used comprise regular wages and salaries in cash, excluding amounts salary sacrificed. For more information refer to: <www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6302.0/>.
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Women aren't better multitaskers than men – they're just doing more work

Science doesn't appear to support the modern myth that women are super-human multitaskers, according to **Leah Ruppner**

Multitasking has traditionally been perceived as a woman's domain. A woman, particularly one with children, will routinely be juggling a job and running a household – in itself a frantic mix of kids' lunch boxes, housework, and organising appointments and social arrangements.

But a new study, published today in *PLOS One*, shows women are actually no better at multitasking than men. The study tested whether women were better at switching between tasks and juggling multiple tasks at the same time. The results showed women's brains are no more efficient at either of these activities than men's.

Using robust data to challenge these sorts of myths is important, especially given women continue to be bombarded with work, family and household tasks.

No one is good at multitasking

Multitasking is the act of performing several independent tasks within a short time. It requires rapidly and frequently switching attention from one task to another, increasing the cognitive demand, compared to completing single tasks in sequence.

This study builds on an existing body of research showing human brains cannot manage multiple activities at once. Particularly when two tasks are similar, they compete to use the same part of the brain, which

makes multitasking very difficult.

But human brains are good at switching between activities quickly, which makes people feel like they're multitasking. The brain, however, is working on one project at a time.

Public opinion persists that women have a biological edge as super-efficient multitaskers. But, as this study shows, this myth is not supported by evidence. This means the extra family work women perform is just that – extra work.

In this new study, German researchers compared the abilities of 48 men and 48 women in how well they identified letters and numbers. In some experiments, participants were required to pay attention to two tasks at once (called concurrent multitasking), while in others they needed to switch attention between tasks (called sequential multitasking).

The researchers measured reaction time and accuracy for the multitasking experiments against a control condition (performing one task only). They found multitasking substantially affected the speed and accuracy of completing the tasks for both men and women. There was no difference between the groups.

Domestic duties

My colleagues and I recently busted another relevant myth – that women are better at seeing mess than men. We found men and women equally rated a space as messy. The reason men do less cleaning than women may lie in the fact that women are held to higher standards of cleanliness than men, rather than men's "dirt blindness".

WOMEN DO MORE HOUSEWORK, REGARDLESS OF WHO THE BREADWINNER IS

Average (mean) hours per week of housework in male/female couples, by earnings arrangement, 2015-17

COUPLES WITHOUT DEPENDENT CHILDREN



COUPLES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN*



* Housework and child care have been combined for couples with dependent children.

Source: HILDA Survey, Release 17.



Recent data shows Australian men are spending more time doing domestic work than they used to, but women still do the vast majority of housework. Working Australian women have seen their total time across work and family activities increase over time, with bread-winning mothers spending four hours more across these activities per week than bread-winning fathers.

This means working mums are balancing planning birthday parties, child care drop offs and ballet lessons all on top of their regular jobs, commutes and careers.

Consequences of the myth

If women's brains are equally strained by multitasking, why do we keep asking women to do this work? And, more importantly, what are the consequences?

Our recent study shows mothers are more time-pressed and report poorer mental health than fathers. We found the birth of a child increases parents' reports of feeling rushed or pressed for time, but the effect is twice the size for mothers than it is for fathers. Second children double mothers' time pressure again and, as a consequence, lead to a deterioration in their mental health.

Women are also more likely to drop out of paid work when children are born or family demands intensify. They carry a larger mental load tied to organising the needs of the family – who has clean socks, who needs to be picked up from school, whether there is enough Vegemite for lunch. All of this labour is at the expense of time planning for the next day's work, the next promotion, and so on.

Women are also asked to multitask family demands at night. Children are more likely to interrupt their mother's than their father's sleep.

Debunking these myths that expect women to be superheroes is a good thing, but we need to go further and create policy environments where gender equality can thrive.

Although gender roles are changing and men are assuming a larger share of the housework and child care than in the past, gender gaps remain in many important domains of work and family life. These include the allocation of child care, the division of housework, the wage gap, and the concentration of women in top positions.

So, the multitasking myth means mothers are expected to "do it all". But this obligation can affect women's mental health, as well as their capacity to excel at work.

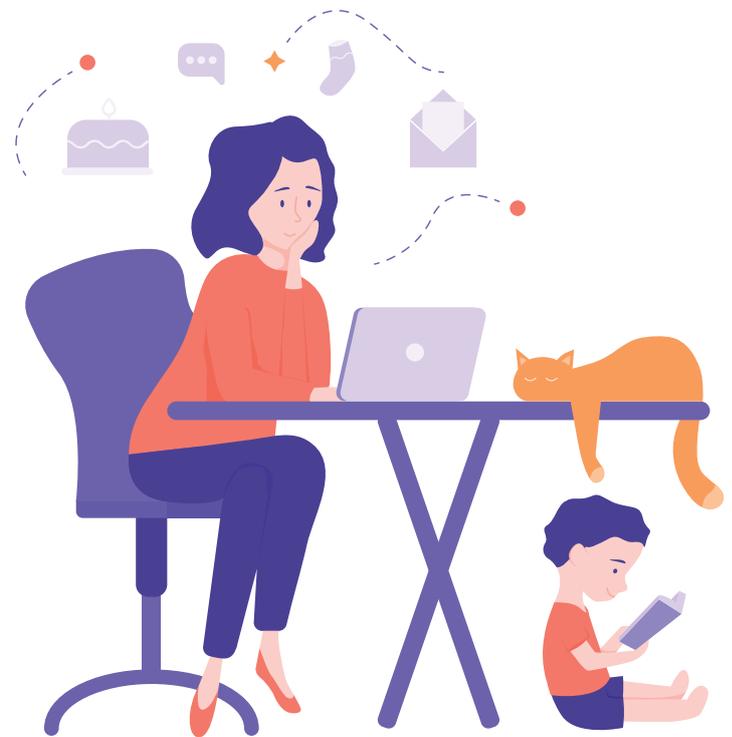
Challenging misconceptions

Public opinion persists that women have a biological edge as super-efficient multitaskers. But, as this study shows, this myth is not supported by evidence.

This means the extra family work women perform is just that – extra work. And we need to see it as such.

Within the family, this work needs to be catalogued,

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discussed and then equally divided. More men today are invested in gender equality, equal sharing and co-parenting than ever before.

As well as in the home, we need to dismantle these myths in the workplace. The assumption women are better multitaskers can influence the allocation of administrative tasks. Tasks like taking minutes and organising meetings should not be allocated based on gender.

Finally, governments need to dismantle these myths within their policies. Children add work that cannot be easily multitasked. Women need affordable, high-quality, and widely available child care.

Men also need access to flexible work, parental leave and child care to share in this labour, and protections to ensure they aren't penalised for taking time to share in the care.

Debunking these myths that expect women to be superheroes is a good thing, but we need to go further and create policy environments where gender equality can thrive.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Leah Ruppanner receives funding from the Australian Research Council.

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THE CONVERSATION

Ruppanner, L (15 August 2019). *Women aren't better multitaskers than men – they're just doing more work*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 April 2020.

Working mum guilt: is tackling the tension between work and care ‘mission impossible’?

Guilt stems from trying to balance work and family life. Working mums feel like they are not doing any of it particularly well, reports Kate Midenas for **ABC News**

Blueberry pancakes, gingerbread French toast, real coffee: Mother’s Day breakfasts have come a long way in recent times. But there is one area within motherhood where we still have a way to go: the guilt that comes from being a working mum.

“The idea that maternal employment is bad for family life is the single greatest cause of guilt among working mothers”, an article in the *Australian Women’s Weekly*, titled ‘Working mothers: getting rid of the guilt’, reads.

“Holding down a job in no way lessens the responsibility you feel for your children.”

Mothers the world over would agree with those sentiments ... but what would you say if you heard that article was written in 1979?

That’s right: 40 years on, we are still talking about the same feelings of guilt, fracturedness and failure. It is almost as if nothing has changed.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

“Australian parents spend more time with their children compared to almost all of the other OECD countries,” Professor Lyndall Strazdins from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the ANU said.

“We’re incredibly devoted to our children in terms of time, there’s a really strong ethos around being an engaged parent.

“But we have two competing very important priorities: commitment to job and commit to family. Both are very demanding roles.

“When women work, they hardly cut back on anything else; they just add more and feel incredibly stressed.”

In her book *The Wife Drought*, Annabel Crabb articulated this tension felt by working mothers:

“The obligation that evolves for working mothers, in particular, is a very precise one; the feeling that one ought to work as if one did not have children, while raising one’s children as if one did not have a job. To do any feels like failing at both.”

Similarly, when Ariana Huffington said in 2014 that “while all mothers deal with feelings of guilt, working mothers are plagued by guilt on steroids,” many mums breathed a sigh of relief.

Professor Strazdins said those feelings of guilt stemmed from trying to balance work and family life, and feeling like you were not doing any of it particularly well.

“We’ve set up this binary between work and care that is not sustainable,” she said.

“There has been an extreme transformation over the last 30 years, with the recognition that women should be part of the paid workforce.

“But the whole conversation has been how to get them to catch up with men, and actually it’s mission impossible.

“We’ve said, sure, you can work, if you can fit in with the system we’ve got.”

That is a sentiment working mother-of-three Taryn Donohue agrees with.

“The so-called freedom to work and have it all has resulted in more stress,” Mrs Donohue said.

“There isn’t any margin.

“Not only are we expected to have cupcakes ready for the kids at school, we’re supposed to be excelling at jobs, looking a million bucks, attending an exercise class, being on top of everything.”

Mrs Donohue is essentially describing the “mental load” concept – the duties around managing a household which, regardless of paid employment, often fall on the mother.

“My partner is a good dad, he’s hands on, but it’s all the behind the scenes planning and the logistics of how someone gets to the right place at the right time, the menu planning, cooking, everything before I even get to work, that is the most stressful part,” Mrs Donohue explained.



“There is a real double standard around mothers feeling guilty, and it’s assumed that fathers don’t have as big a role at home.

“I know my partner doesn’t want me to feel guilty, and he never feels that way, so I wonder if it is the societal construct of seeing women as primary caregivers.

“For example, when I first went back to work after my baby, the first thing people said was, ‘who’s looking after your baby while you’re here?’ But I know no one ever asked my husband the same thing.

“That mindset is detrimental to mothers and fathers, because it takes away from both contributions.”

‘WE HAVEN’T CHANGED THE CULTURE’

According to Professor Strazdins, the experience of Mrs Donohue, and indeed Annabel Crabb and Ariana Huffington before her, was a result of women straining to squeeze themselves into a paid employment system that was not really built to support them.

And Professor Strazdins said that problem had a long history – back to 1904 when the decision about how to set a minimum family wage was made.

“The wage set was enough for a husband to support a wife and three or four children at home and, while it positioned Australia as having the best minimum wage regime worldwide, it also set up the notion that the women would do the rest,” Professor Strazdins explained.

“She freed up his time from care and domestic work, so he could use his time to earn money.

“We still imagine work based on this minimum wage system; we haven’t changed the culture.”

As a result, women have found themselves in the position of trying to achieve all the things that need to happen at work, as well as all the things that need to happen on the home front, with – literally – less hours in the day.

“We’re trying to fit into a system that has not yet fully understood the transformation in women’s work,” Professor Strazdins said.

“In the 1970s, a breadwinner worked 45 hours a week. Nowadays, if two people in a family are working, it’s around 70 hours.

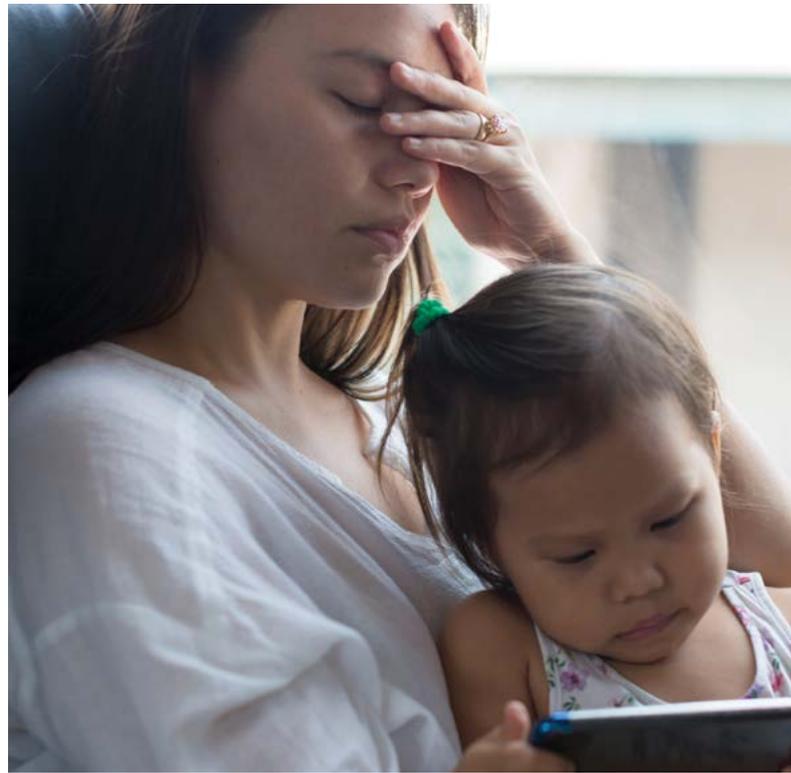
“That’s an enormous change in terms of time spent in the family.

“The compromise has been to give women part-time jobs. But women still feel constantly under pressure in terms of care.”

Professor Strazdins said that, while having access to high-quality child care made a big difference to feelings of guilt while at work, it made little difference to the guilt that relates to performance.

“I know I’ve missed out on opportunities and promotions because I haven’t been as available as [my workplace] would like me to be,” Mrs Donohue said.

“When I’m at work I feel like I can focus and concentrate, but when it’s the end of the day and my boss wants me to stay an extra hour, I just can’t – I



“We’re incredibly devoted to our children in terms of time, there’s a really strong ethos around being an engaged parent. But we have two competing very important priorities: commitment to job and commit to family. Both are very demanding roles.”

have to go. Of course I feel bad about that.

“Walking away from a job feeling like you haven’t been able to give 100 per cent, having to sometimes down tools and walk away for your family, it can be frustrating. Especially when you get home and your children are complaining about being hungry or you being late.”

SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

Since the 1996 census, the proportion of mothers who are active in the workforce has increased from 46.1 per cent to 53.4 per cent. That increase is showing no signs of changing.

The latest census data also showed that women spend five to 14 hours per week in unpaid domestic work, whereas men spend less than five hours a week. Women also spend an additional hour a day looking after children.

So the real question, according to Professor Strazdins, should not be ‘how can we help women stay in the workforce after children?’ or even ‘how can we help women feel less guilty?’, but rather, ‘how can we flip things on their head?’

“We’ve misunderstood the system,” Professor Strazdins said.

“We’ve asked women to work like men, and we’ve created an impossible target.



“Instead of being expected to work like a man, how can we work like each other? How do we help men redirect their work back into children and into the house?”

She suggested Australia could move to a legislated 38-hour working week like Finland to prevent over-working, or a four-day work week.

“We’ve done no serious questioning around this,” she said.

In a 2017 research paper, Professor Strazdins found that 55 per cent of men wanted to reinvest their time into care, and were frustrated that their work conflicted with their desire to spend time with family.

“There are baby steps we can take, and one is to help men be the fathers they want to be,” she said.

“We want men and women to feel they can use their talents and capabilities for work and for home, that they should and could and want to be at home.

“We need leave policies to help men and to take away the stigma that men are not committed to work if they take on home duties, but that being in the family is just as desirable. That would make a big difference to mothers.”

While Australia ranks lower than other OECD countries when it comes to family-friendly workplaces, Professor Strazdins pointed to Westpac and the Australian Public Service as workplaces that were making good headway in terms of leave and flexible arrangements.

Then there are advocacy organisations such as Parents at Work, who count Dexus and the Commonwealth Bank as clients. They hosted a roundtable discussion last year to look at why only five per cent of dads take primary parental leave in Australia.

MAJOR SOCIAL CHANGE IS NEEDED

So can we expect any kind of reform by next Mother’s Day?

“I don’t see any evidence at the moment,” Professor Strazdins said.

“Workplaces have done a lot around flexibility, around leave for mothers, but it’s all fiddling around at the margins. Women still sit around men’s jobs and care.

“We need to transition and start to blend up and blend down the working styles and opportunities of men and women so they become more even.

“We need a major social change.”

So as far as dealing with working mother’s guilt in the short-term, let’s look back to the 1979 AWW article.

“Like most women, you may experience a tremendous sense of exhilaration when you first start to work,” the article read.

“When you are feeling particularly overwhelmed, remind yourself that, by definition, beginnings don’t last forever. Things do get easier as you go along.

“In time, with patience, humour and practice, you will learn how to save time and energy through shortcuts, how to run your household more smoothly, how to be more efficient on your job, how to enlist the aid of ‘volunteers’ and make the best use of professional services.

“You’ll become adept at evaluating child-care arrangements, at diagnosing a sick child’s condition over the telephone, and at heading off behavioural problems before they get serious.

“Above all, you’ll become the best mother you can in the limited time you have.

“So, buck up. Thousands and thousands of women are holding down jobs and raising children at the same time. If they can do it, so can you.”

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Midena, K (12 May 2019). ‘Working mum guilt: is tackling the tension between work and care ‘mission impossible’?’, ABC News. Retrieved from www.abc.net.au/news on 28 April 2020.

BRINGING UP BABY: FATHERS NOT ALWAYS ABLE TO SHARE THE LOAD

The birth of a child changes little for Australian fathers' working lives, according to an analysis of employment trends in the past few decades by the **Australian Institute of Family Studies**

Institute Director Anne Hollonds said that while mothers' employment alters dramatically after having a child and for years to come, fathers' employment remains virtually unchanged.

"While fathers today may be more involved in child care, especially at weekends, the number of hours fathers spend in employment remains the same after the arrival of children," Ms Hollonds said.

"Mothers, on the other hand, tend to be the primary carers of children under one and take years to gradually increase their time in paid employment.

"When it comes to "choices" about parenting responsibilities, the availability of parental leave for fathers and the gender pay gap are still barriers for couples who would otherwise choose to share family responsibilities more equally."

Institute Senior Research Fellow Dr Jennifer Baxter said fathers do spend time on parenting and child care when they have young children, but they fit this in around their hours of employment.

"Fathers are more likely to choose flexible work or working from home arrangements, rather than reduce their overall work hours, to fit work around child care," Dr Baxter said.

The gender pay gap means that men traditionally earn more in the family and this too affects a father's decision to take extended leave or to consider changing their work arrangements.

"For couple fathers, the vast majority are in full-time work. They rarely take up part-time hours as a flexible work option to assist in the care of children.

"Instead fathers continue to work full-time in the labour market where expectations about the need to work long hours tend to prevail.

"Single fathers have more diverse work patterns, with higher proportions in part-time work or unemployed, but these arrangements are not likely to always reflect active choices to spend fewer hours in employment."

Dr Baxter said the most common arrangement fathers use to care for children is flexible work (30%), followed by working from home (15%), while a few fathers (5%) work part-time.

"While there was steady growth in the proportion of fathers taking up flexible work options to care for children between 1996 and 2008, this trend has since levelled off over the last decade."

The CEO of Parents At Work, Emma Walsh, said fathers' reluctance to change their working lives or to



take parental leave is based on continued adherence to traditional gender roles and the gender pay gap.

"For example, Australia does not have a nationally legislated approach to "shared parental leave" and as a result fathers are often labelled as secondary carers. Most employers provide limited parental leave for secondary carers, if any at all," Ms Walsh said.

"Fathers are conscious of a stigma and bias around taking extended leave, especially when they are unable to see their male colleagues taking leave.

"The gender pay gap means that men traditionally earn more in the family and this too affects a father's decision to take extended leave or to consider changing their work arrangements.

"Parental leave for fathers needs to be actively encouraged and incentivised. Companies need to develop an organisational culture that encourages men to take leave. Importantly, fathers in leadership positions should themselves take leave, leading by example and removing any bias within the workplace.

"Fathers would then have a better balance between work and family and spend more time with their children, while mothers would have the opportunity to pursue their employment with flexibility and purpose.

"By actively promoting men and women as equal carers through shared parental leave, we have the opportunity to narrow the gender pay gap, boost workplace productivity and champion Australian parents in both their family and work goals."

View the AIFS' *Fathers and Work – A Statistical Overview* by Dr Jennifer Baxter (<https://aifs.gov.au/aifs-conference/fathers-and-work>) or CEO of Parents At Work Emma Walsh's article: *Fathers and Parental Leave* (<https://aifs.gov.au/aifs-conference/fathers-and-parental-leave>), also published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Australian Institute of Family Studies (28 May 2019). *Bringing up baby: fathers not always able to share the load*. Retrieved from <http://aifs.gov.au> on 29 April 2020.

Fathers and work: a statistical overview

This article by Jennifer Baxter from the **Australian Institute of Family Studies** shows the statistical trends in fathers' employment, for couple and single fathers over recent decades. Trends indicate that while mothers' employment changes considerably after having a child, fathers' employment shows little change.

Key messages

- While fathers today may be more involved in child care, for most families the number of hours fathers spend in employment remains the same before and after having children.
- Single fathers have more diverse work patterns with higher proportions in part-time work or not employed.
- Fathers are more likely to choose flexible work or working from home arrangements rather than reduce work hours to fit work around child care.

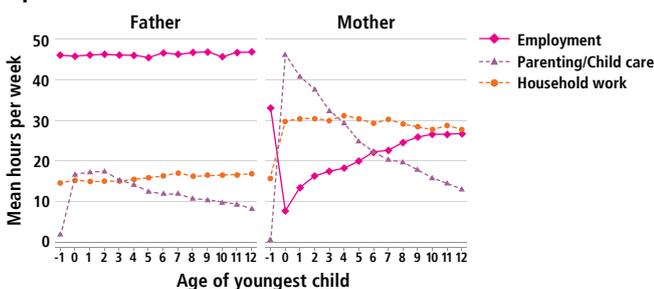
FAMILY EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS

While family employment patterns have shifted over recent decades away from that of a bread-winning father and stay-at-home mother, the shift has seen an increase in maternal employment (generally part-time) but little change in fathers' employment patterns. This growth in the 'modified male breadwinner model' has seen more mothers engaging part-time in paid work while continuing as the primary caregiver (Pocock, 2005). Mothers and fathers still tend to have gendered roles when it comes to work activities in the years after becoming parents.

We see this most clearly when comparing time use data for mothers and fathers, and also contrasting these data with their time use in the year before they had their first child (see Figure 1). The number of hours fathers spend in employment remains at the same level before and after having children. Fathers do spend time on parenting and child care when they have young children, fitting this time around their hours of employment.

From other time use research, we know that, for many fathers, weekends provide more opportunity for this shared time than weekdays. Mothers' time

Figure 1: Mother and father's time use up to and after the birth of first child



Note: Age of youngest child = -1 is the year before the first birth.
Source: HILDA, pooled Waves 2 to 16.
Credit: Australian Institute of Family Studies 2019 (aifs.gov.au/copyright).

Gendered patterns such as these have been observed in other research (see Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000; Graid, Mullan & Blaxland, 2010; Sayer, 2005).

Figure 2: Couple parent employment patterns 1991-2016



Note: 'Stay-at-home' parents are those who are not in work who have a partner/spouse who is in work. 'Jobless' families are those in which both parents are not working, including those away from work. 'Both working' indicates both parents spent at least one hour in paid work in the reference period. Excludes families in which either parent's labour force status was not stated. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: Australian Population Census customised reports, 1991-2016.
Credit: Australian Institute of Family Studies 2019 (aifs.gov.au/copyright).

use patterns are dramatically different, as their time in employment is lowest when they have an under one-year-old child, gradually increasing thereafter.

FATHERS' EMPLOYMENT PARTICIPATION

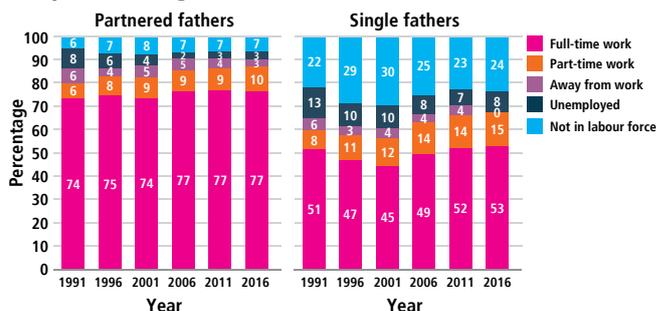
These gendered employment patterns are apparent also in statistics on employment participation, which show that over time, an increasing number of couple families feature two working parents, with fewer comprising a working father and stay-at-home mother (see Figure 2).

While there have been changes in family-level employment patterns, fathers' employment rates are just as high now as they were some decades ago. In fact, higher percentages of fathers were employed in each of 2006, 2011 and 2016 compared to earlier years, reflecting to some extent past economic conditions.

Figure 3 shows the trends in fathers' employment, for couple and single fathers. For couple fathers, the vast majority are in full-time work. In Australia, fathers may request to work part-time hours, as a flexible work option, to assist in the care of children. However, they rarely do, and instead work in the full-time labour market, in which expectations about long work hours tend to prevail (Smyth et al., 2012).

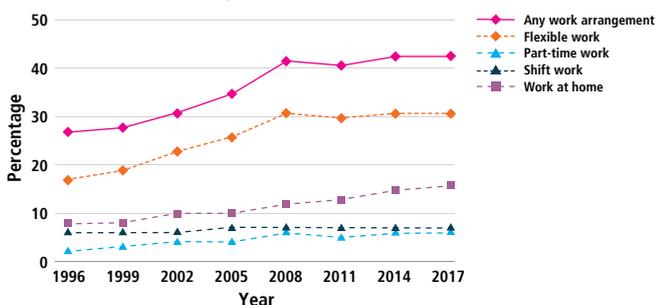
Single fathers have more diverse work patterns with higher proportions in part-time work or not employed. Their higher rates of part-time work and

Figure 3: Trends in fathers' employment, couple and single fathers, 1991-2016



Note: Away from work includes those classified as employed but with work hours of zero or not stated.
Source: Australian Population Census customised reports, 1991-2016.
Credit: Australian Institute of Family Studies 2019 (aifs.gov.au/copyright).

Figure 4: Fathers' work arrangements used to care for children, 1996-2017



Note: Estimates are for employed parents with children aged under 12 years.
Source: ABS Childhood Education and Care, various years.
Credit: Australian Institute of Family Studies 2019 (aifs.gov.au/copyright).

non-employment are unlikely to reflect active choices to spend fewer hours in employment.

FATHERS' WORK ARRANGEMENTS

The relatively low uptake of part-time work by fathers, as a means of helping to care for children, is evident in Figure 4, which shows the proportion of fathers reported to use any work arrangement to care for children, for 1996 through to 2017. While there was steady growth in the proportion using some work arrangement to care for children from 1996 through to 2008, this has levelled off since this time. The most common arrangement for fathers is flexible work, and this has not changed since 2008. The next most common arrangement for fathers is working at home, and this is the one arrangement that has continued to increase. As seen here, very few fathers are reported to work part-time in order to care for children.

Taking this back to a family perspective, we do find that when mothers work full-time, fathers more often use their own work arrangements to help care for the children. This is particularly evident in relation to flexible work, which is much more likely in families where mothers work full-time compared to those where mothers are not employed (see Figure 5).

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While fathers today may be more involved in child care, for most families the number of hours fathers spend in employment remains the same before and after having children.

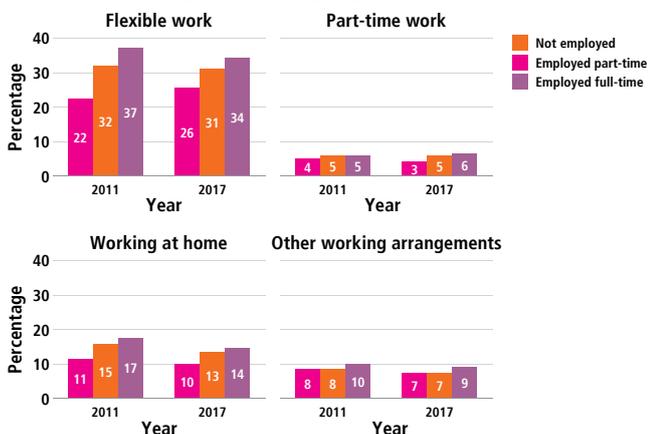
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ENDNOTE

1. These estimates were derived from unit record data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the author and should not be attributed to either DSS or the Melbourne Institute.

Dr Jennifer Baxter is a Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. This article is based on a presentation, 'Trends in fathers' working arrangements', given at the AIFS 2018 Conference.

Figure 5: Fathers' working arrangements by mothers' employment category, 2011 and 2017



Note: Estimates are for employed parents with children aged under 12 years.
Source: ABS Childhood Education and Care, 2011 and 2017, derived from Tablebuilder.
Credit: Australian Institute of Family Studies 2019 (aifs.gov.au/copyright).

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Conflict between work and family affects fathers' and children's mental health

The often incompatible demands of work and family life typically have been viewed as a burden for mothers. However new research from the **Australian Institute of Family Studies** shows it is also affecting fathers.

A recent report on employment trends by Dr Jennifer Baxter found that fathers' working hours do not change when children are born. And this disconnect between work and family life may help to explain why Australian fathers are reporting high degrees of stress.

Research just published by the Institute found that fathers experiencing persistent or high levels of conflicting work and family demands reported a significant deterioration in their mental health. And the effects were flowing on to their children. These troubling findings were reported in two articles published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, drawn from research by La Trobe University and Australia National University researchers.

Institute Director Anne Hollonds said: "Balancing work and family demands affects fathers as well as mothers, with the potential also to impact on the wellbeing of children".

"Fathers today are often still expected to fulfil the traditional role of 'breadwinner', while also taking a more active role in child care. Fathers wanting to share

family responsibilities can come into conflict with cultural norms and workplace expectations, creating stress and mental health concerns.

Fathers wanting to share family responsibilities can come into conflict with cultural norms and workplace expectations, creating stress and mental health concerns.

"When fathers are worried about their ability to balance work and family commitments, it places them and their families under strain, which can be a concern – especially if it continues for lengthy periods.

"This research underscores the importance of the availability and 'acceptability' of parental leave for fathers as well as flexible work practices, to ease the pressure on fathers and their families."

La Trobe University researcher Amanda Cooklin said that her study shows the increasing demands of work and family can lead to a deterioration in fathers' mental health.

"Our research found that fathers who reported high work-family conflict also reported high psychological distress. However, when fathers moved out of high work-family conflict, their mental health showed significant improvement," she said.



“Those most at risk of poor mental health were fathers who worked very long hours – more than 50 hours a week – had no access to flexible work arrangements, no job security, no control over their workload and no access to paid family-related leave.

“We know that work-family conflict is linked to lower productivity and higher burnout, stress and job turnover in employees. Therefore, it’s important for fathers who do spend long hours at work that they have access to the conditions and workplace entitlements that help them to combine work and care.”

The study involved 3,460 fathers from the Australian Institute of Family Studies’ *Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*. The fathers were employed and living in a couple household, and included non-professionals, semi-skilled workers and professionals. Over half the sample reporting working more than 50 hours a week.

“Those most at risk of poor mental health were fathers who worked very long hours – more than 50 hours a week – had no access to flexible work arrangements, no job security, no control over their workload and no access to paid family-related leave.”

Reporting on related recent research on children’s mental health, also published by the Institute, Australian National University researcher Liana Leach said an increase in fathers’ work-family conflict can in turn affect the emotional development and wellbeing of the children.

“Our research shows that children’s family environment and mental health are affected by their fathers’ struggles to balance demands at work and at home,” she said.

“When fathers moved into high and persistent work-family conflict, their mental health, relationship and parenting capabilities deteriorated. These issues flowed on to negatively affect the psychological wellbeing of their children.

“However, these effects were not permanent, and in cases where the work-family conflict were modified there were improvements for the whole family.”



Download *Conflicts Between Work and Family and Fathers’ Mental Health* by La Trobe University’s Amanda Cooklin at: <https://aifs.gov.au/aifs-conference/conflicts-between-work-and-family-and-fathers-mental-health>

You can also download *Fathers’ Work and Family Conflicts and the Outcomes for Children’s Mental Health* by the ANU’s Liana Leach at: <https://aifs.gov.au/aifs-conference/fathers-work-and-family-conflicts-and-outcomes-childrens-mental-health>

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HOW TO EVEN UP HOUSEWORK WITH YOUR PARTNER

Australians are becoming increasingly open to non-traditional gender arrangements when it comes to dividing paid and unpaid labour, researchers have found. An **ABC Life** report by Grace Jennings-Edquist

Who cleans out the fridge at your house? Or books the dog's vet appointment, or scrubs the loo, or keeps a mental diary of the kids' next parent-teacher interviews?

It's probably a woman, especially if you're in a heterosexual relationship in Australia. Even when both partners work full time, women still take on the majority of household chores across the country, according to the latest (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey.

It's true that men are doing more housework than they once did: an average of 13.3 hours per week in 2016, up from 12.4 hours in 2002. But the lion's share of housework and child care still falls to women – and it's mums who shoulder the largest burden of unpaid work of all.

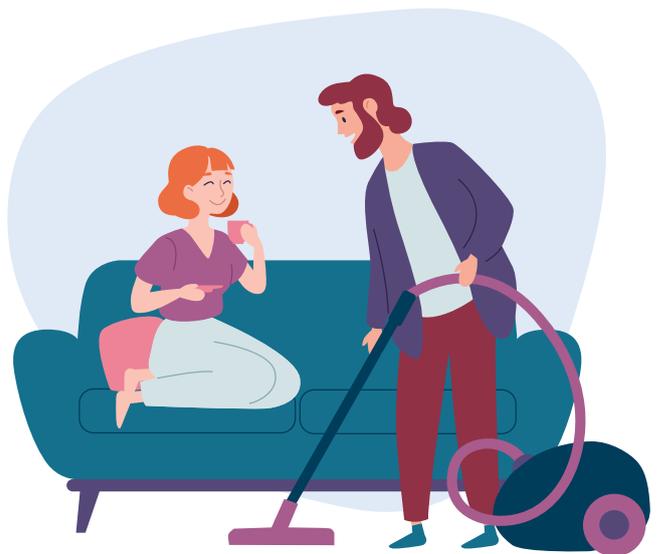
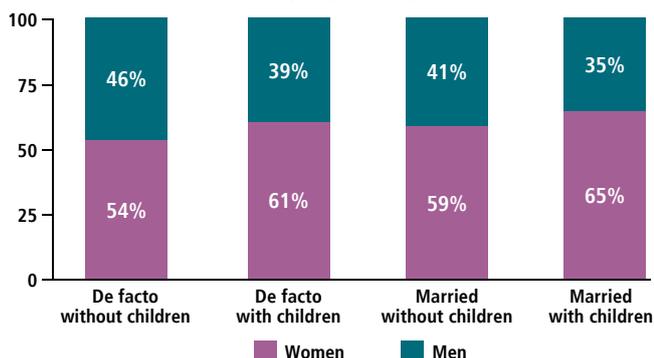
Australians are becoming increasingly open to non-traditional gender arrangements when it comes to dividing paid and unpaid labour, the 2018 HILDA researchers found.

But those attitudes often aren't reflected in the day-to-day reality of how our households work, the latest HILDA survey shows:

- In childless de facto couples where both partners work full-time, women do 54.6 per cent of housework
- In couples with kids where both partners work full-time, women do 57.8 per cent of housework and 58.8 per cent of child care
- Among married couples with kids, women do 65 per cent of housework and 63 per cent of care duties in the family
- Married women spend an average of 23.3 hours caring for their dependent children compared to only 11.0 hours by married men each week
- Women in de facto relationships with kids spent

DIVISION OF UNPAID WORK IN AUSTRALIA

Who spends the most time on housework in a couple, broken down by relationship type and gender



28.6 hours on child care, compared to 13.6 hours among their male counterparts

- In traditional 'man-as-breadwinner' family arrangements with children, women do 72.8 per cent of the housework and 70 per cent of child care, on average.

If you're keen to even things up at your place, here's how to get started.

Talk with your partner

A frank conversation about division of labour is a good way to start making changes, explains Justine Alter, a psychologist who specialises in life transitions and work-life balance.

"The earlier you do this, the better," she says.

Ideally, those expectations should be discussed before you have children (if kids are on your agenda.) That's because it's usually women who take parental leave after having a baby – and that can leave a couple locked into a dynamic where the woman becomes responsible for running the household, even once she returns to work, experts say.

You can help avoid inadvertently slipping into those roles by naming the assumptions you might have both grown up with about who does what in the home.

"A common question we ask is: What was your family set-up? Did your mother work out of the home? What kind of family do you want to be when you have children yourselves?" Ms Alter says.

Then discuss what those assumptions are, and whether you want to try to flip any of them.

What a healthy argument looks like

Bottling up anger risks damaging a relationship beyond repair – but there is a right and wrong way to express it. Experts explain what a healthy argument looks like and how to create one. Read more at: www.abc.net.au/life/advice-for-having-a-good-fight-in-a-relationship/10880284

Addressing the gender gap at home

We often hear about the gender gap in the context of the workforce (we all know men get paid more than women, right), but it's just as prevalent in the home.

Assumptions to pay attention to include: that the woman will take the lion's share of parental leave; that she will be the one to take leave from work to look after a sick kid; that a man's working hours shouldn't change once they have kids; and that a dad shouldn't be getting up to tend to the baby overnight because they're working the next day. Read more at: www.abc.net.au/life/when-youre-sick-of-carrying-the-mental-load-for-your-household/11292628

Keep a list

It sounds obvious and simple, but a well-kept list of all the chores that go into running a household really can transform the way you live. Importantly, it allows both members of a couple to visualise and take ownership of unpaid work at home. There are a number of apps including Labor of Love, AnyList, Remember the Milk and Alarmed that allow you and your partner to write down, assign and check off household chores. Or you could keep a physical list somewhere visible and take turns claiming and crossing off tasks.

"We have a giant chalkboard calendar which is right as we walk into the garage to leave the house," says Simone McLaughlin, a mother-of-two and director of business development at a global job platform that helps women find supportive workplaces.

"At the start of the month each month we write out what we have in our diaries – all the kids' extracurricular activities, if we're going to be out in the evening, if we've got travel. Then we negotiate: 'I need to be able to do this or that'," says Brisbane-based Ms McLaughlin.

"That means we are able to give everyone at our work as much as notice as possible."

Writing out a list will also help contain the "mental load" (the unseen mental burden associated with running a household, which tends to fall to women).

As Ms Alter explains: "Typically it's the mum who organises the birthday party, or buys the birthday gifts, or packs the swimming bags or even knows the after-school activities."

Fostering an expectation that both partners will pop those items on the to-do list – and check them off – can help even up that load.

If you have young children you probably have postnatal depletion

I was lucky not to have to cope with postnatal depression, but a few years back it was clear something else, more insidious had happened to me. Postnatal depletion, Rebecca Huntley writes at: www.abc.net.au/life/what-is-postnatal-depletion-do-i-have-it/10862228

Outsource whatever you can (even without a budget)

If both partners in your relationship work, outsourcing what you can is one way of cutting down on housework.

Ms Alter suggests working couples ask themselves: "What does your budget allow? Can you get a cleaner?"

You can even outsource without spending a cent by entering into a reciprocal arrangement with friends or family members.

"It might be sharing a load with a neighbour, or babysitting a friend's kid one night and another night they'll babysit your kids," Ms Alter suggests.

Is hiring a cleaner worth it?

Cleaning is repetitive, boring and dirty – and often falls to women. So is it time to investigate hiring help? Read more at: www.abc.net.au/life/is-hiring-cleaner-worth-it-economics-of-outsourcing/10242748

Dads, seek paternity leave and flexible work options

In childless relationships, women do slightly more housework than men – but it's when kids enter the picture the division of unpaid labour really widens. If you'd like to head off that dynamic, the key may lie in the child's father taking a solid chunk of parental leave.

According to a study of families here and in America, Britain and Denmark, fathers who had taken paternity leave are more likely to feed, dress, bathe and play with their child after their leave ended.

But lots of fathers don't even know the option of taking extended parental leave is available to them, according to Kiri Stejko, chief services officer at a coaching and training business for working parents.

"There's a lot of employers who do offer it to both men and women and same-sex partners as well now," says Ms Stejko. "You just have to ask the question in your company: 'Am I eligible?'" (You can also check if your employer is an Employer of Choice with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.)

If it's not possible for the man to take parental leave, he could look into working flexibly to allow for more hands-on involvement with child care. Working from home to save on commute time; finishing early to take charge of evening care routines; and working a nine-day fortnight are all possibilities worth exploring, suggests Ms Stejko.

In Ms McLaughlin's family, both partners work flexibly: she works remotely, while her husband leaves work early two days a week to pick up the kids.

"He's responsible for dinners that night, for getting the kids showered and all that kind of stuff, and then I do that on my two nights," she says.

Her husband, an engineer, also makes sure his flexible work style is visible to others at work.

"The more dads we have that are openly sharing the care, the more it will become just the norm," Ms McLaughlin says.

Dads' experiences asking for parental leave

From promotions to job losses, here are three accounts of fathers who ask for leave at work. Read more at: www.abc.net.au/life/fathers-experiences-asking-for-parental-leave/11055826

Got kids? Time to revisit your super

Superannuation is an important part of you and your family's financial future – and taking steps to improve your retirement savings may be easier than you think. Read more at: www.abc.net.au/life/superannuation-system-isnt-fair-for-new-mums/10363694

Stop gatekeeping

Is the bloke in your house banned from touching the washing machine in case he turns everything grey? Does the mum in your family jokingly declare she'd never let her male partner dress the kids?

If this kind of attitude sounds familiar, you want to nip it in the bud. It's called gatekeeping, and it can further cement women in the homemaker role and lock men out of housework duties.

"There is an issue of [women saying], 'Well, I've been doing it because it's really quick and easy for me, and I do it the way I like it to be done'," explains Ms Stejko.

"There needs to be a shift – because you practically cannot work in whatever capacity you're working and still have all the responsibility at home."

The solution: If you're a woman, relinquish some control at home. Or consider heading away for the weekend and letting your partner take charge of all

household duties for a couple of days, Ms Stejko suggests. The idea is to let your partner gain confidence and expertise when it comes to home duties.

Sure, your partner might dress the kids differently to how you'd like, or he might get dinner on the table later than you'd prefer the first few times – but giving up your unofficial role as "the only competent parent" and letting your partner take the reins where possible will free you up to sleep, work and enjoy your leisure time.

"Running the household becomes a natural habit, and it's about re-setting those habits," Ms Stejko says.

Consider switching up the primary carer role

If your family really doesn't want to fall into the trap of the woman doing more of the housework, your best bet may be for the man in the relationship to become a stay-at-home parent.

HILDA research shows that this "anti-traditional" set-up is the only family arrangement in which men do more housework than women.

It's a rare arrangement in Australia – with fewer than 5 per cent of families having stay-at-home fathers in 2016. But it's worked for Mark Valencia, 50, based on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

Mark left his paid job with the army 11 years ago to look after two sons when it became unfeasible for him and his wife, who works in the medical industry full-time, to both continue working long hours.

"It was difficult to manage the children, who were only two and four at the time," he says.

"It got to a point where we couldn't divide up the home duties equally – we were fighting about it, the children were bleary-eyed, we needed to drop them off in the dark and pick them up in dark," he says.

"I said to my wife, 'Would you like to stay at home?' And she said, 'Fat chance, I'm going to keep my career going', and I said, 'I'll give it a go'."

Mark says he has a close bond with his sons, now 13 and 15, as a result of being their primary carer. And while the arrangement has meant a significant drop of income for the family, he says the kids have had a better life as a result.

Dads overcoming the barriers in the workplace to taking parental leave

Unless your workplace offers gender-neutral parental leave, the options for dads are slim. Read more at: www.abc.net.au/life/dads-taking-paternity-parental-leave-in-australia/11055054

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Jennings-Edquist, G (14 July 2019). 'How to even up housework with your partner' (Updated 3 February 2020), *ABC News*. Retrieved from www.abc.net.au/life on 29 April 2020.

STAY-AT-HOME FATHERS

According to a 2018 report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, fathers who take on the role of primary carer in couple families are a small but steadily growing group. Around 80,000 Australian families were estimated to have a stay-at-home dad caring for children.

Although the overall number of stay-at-home fathers remains low, they are estimated to have risen from 68,500 (4.2%) of couple families with children in 2011 to around 80,000 (4.6%) in 2016, based on Census figures. By contrast, there are 498,900 families with stay-at-home mothers.

Key statistics from the report

- Stay-at-home dads are more likely to have only one child at home; that child is likely to be older.
- Stay-at-home dads are older on average (at 43 years) than fathers in stay-at-home mother families (38 years) and fathers in families where both partners work (41 years).
- One in 10 stay-at-home fathers are students.
- There are more stay-at-home dads who are carers or have a disability.
- Stay-at-home fathers tend to have lower levels of education than fathers in dual-working families but higher education levels than fathers in jobless families.
- A relatively high percentage of stay-at-home fathers have lower levels of educational attainment than their spouse or partner, which suggests parents chose the arrangement because mothers have the greater earning capacity.

SOURCE

Baxter, J. (2018). *Stay-at-home fathers in Australia*. (Research Report). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Background: work and family in Australia

Background from the *National Working Families Report* by **Parents At Work**

THE STRUGGLE TO COMBINE WORK AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

A substantial number of employed parents (at least one in three mothers and fathers) find it practically and psychologically difficult to successfully combine work and family-care commitments – an experience known as work family-conflict.

The nature of how families combine work and caring responsibilities is changing with women's increased workplace participation rates as well as a greater emphasis on men's involvement in sharing parenting and caring responsibilities. This poses difficulties for many men in the context of traditional expectations of their roles at work.¹

One way that women deal with conflict between work and family commitments is to reduce their working hours or to leave the workforce altogether. Men, on the other hand, rarely make substantial adjustments to their working lives to accommodate family commitments, although it is not necessarily through lack of desire to make those changes.²

THE GENDERED APPROACH TO WORK AND CARING PERSISTS

While it is now the norm for both parents to be in paid employment in most family households, the labour market and caring/household responsibilities in Australia continue to be highly gendered.

In 2017, Australian mothers who were also the primary earners of a household spent 24.1 hours on housework and 19.3 hours on child care compared to their male counterpart who spent 15.3 hours on housework and 10.9 hours on child care per week.³

The inequality in household and parenting labour in Australia is partly due to the way workplaces are structured and managed, but also due to an entrenched 'male bread-winner' culture.

When parents use flexible working arrangements for child care, men can face a flexibility stigma which has been seen to result in lower earnings and shorter career ladders.⁴ This kind of backlash against men who use flexible work to manage their parenting responsibilities limits progress towards equality for





both women and men.

This cultural divide underpins the many difficulties all parents and carers face in managing work and family responsibilities effectively while trying to avoid negative consequences and stereotypes in the workplace.

There is inequitable access to paid parental leave that can assist families to balance work and family roles – and substantial gaps between policy and practice.

Legislation requires the government to fund parental leave at the minimum wage – 18 weeks for primary carers and 2 weeks for secondary carers (“Dad and Partner Pay”). The primary carer is assumed to be a woman and the secondary carer a man.

For many people, Australia’s minimum wage is insufficient to cover the basic cost of living. Employers can and do provide additional paid parental leave to employees, however less than 50% of private sector organisations with over 100 employees offer any additional paid parental leave provisions.⁵

IMPACT OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT ON WELLBEING

Being unable to find an effective balance between work and family leads to elevated levels of stress. Parenting couples who experience constant high levels of work-family conflict are 50% more likely to separate than those facing less work-family conflict.⁶

In addition, there is new emerging research indicating that the impact of work-family conflict is inter-generational – with children also experiencing a

reduction in their mental health and wellbeing when their parents cannot effectively juggle work and family responsibilities.⁷

The 2019 *National Working Families Report* provides an insight to the pressures and concerns that Australian parents and carers are facing combining job and family responsibilities in the modern work environment.

Prior research has highlighted some of these issues, but no recent work has taken a large-scale look specifically at how Australian working parents and carers are faring when combining work and caring responsibilities – nine years since the introduction of legislated national parental leave scheme and the right to request flexible work.

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NATIONAL WORKING FAMILIES REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A SURVEY-BASED REPORT BY PARENTS AT WORK

Competing pressures of work and caring responsibilities impact the wellbeing of Australian working families. Work-life balance pressures not only present a significant challenge for individuals and the families they care for, they have implications for employers and the wider community in which we all live and work.

In July 2019, Parents At Work launched the inaugural National Working Families Survey with the support of parenting health care provider, Karitane, and not-for-profit employer group APLEN (Advancing Parental Leave Equality Network).

Parents and carers across Australia were asked about the impact of managing work and caring responsibilities to better understand their future work needs. More than 6,000 parents and carers from around Australia completed the survey.

This summary report reveals the key findings and considers how workplaces can provide men and women equal opportunities to fulfil their work and family responsibilities.

The results clearly reveal that parents and carers across Australia are finding it difficult to balance their work and family commitments and report their personal wellbeing and family relationships suffer as a result.

Increasingly, employees want to work for organisations that recognise and support their outside of work

responsibilities. And the study firmly confirms this.

Parents and carers reported that their job helped them feel personally fulfilled, but they want additional measures to help them better manage work, family and care demands. It suggests that current workplace flexible work policies, parental leave and caring support is falling short.

While many organisations have flexible work and parental leave policies in place to support parents and carers, the effective implementation and embedding of those policies vary.

Workplace culture, job expectations/workload and the (personal) work-life attitudes of managers remain key to implementing flexible work and other caring policies.

The study found nearly half of all respondents said that a worker's commitment to their job was questioned if they used family-friendly work arrangements.

Employers must be willing to confront and tackle stigma, discrimination and gender bias associated with caring for children and working part-time or flexibly. This means investing in and creating a workplace environment that is inclusive and respectful of the fact employees have both work and family commitments.

When employees are adequately supported to meet these dual commitments their ability to thrive increases – this is good for families, business and society.

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1

Australians report feeling fatigued, stressed, anxious and depressed as a result of trying to balance work and family commitments and report that personal wellbeing and family relationships suffer as a result.

FINDING 2

Women continue to shoulder the majority of household labour.

FINDING 3

There are barriers to men's access to paid parental leave and flexible work options, as well as social attitudes that make it challenging for men to ask for and take these support mechanisms.

FINDING 4

Returning to work after a period of parental leave is a challenging and difficult time, particularly if jobs and employment conditions have changed without consultation during leave.

FINDING 5

Difficulties with balancing work and family roles, gender imbalance in accessing paid parental leave, and lack of access to work flexibility are primary motivators for parents and carers to leave their employer.

FINDING 6

Work has positive benefits for parents and carers and most reported their jobs are satisfying and fulfilling.

FINDING 7

There is a perceived lack of support from managers for a substantial number of parents and carers. This differs by gender – women feel unsupported in returning to work and having access to the same opportunities as colleagues who have not been on parental leave; men experience fewer issues but can receive negative comments from managers about their involvement in family responsibilities.

FINDING 8

The persistent belief that 'flexible work is for women' is a primary barrier to men's access to flexible work and this attitude forces women to take on the bulk of family care work.

FINDING 9

Flexibility stigma persists for both men and women. Employees' commitment to their job is questioned if they use flexible work arrangements.

FINDING 10

Work hours for men and women vary significantly until children reach the teenage years, with men continuing to do more work hours than women.

Working mothers more stressed than fathers as cost of child care skyrockets, HILDA survey shows

As more mothers struggle to balance professional work and manage work-family tension, the cost of child care has more than doubled over the past two decades. By ABC News Specialist Reporting Team's Laura Gartry and Mary Lloyd

KEY POINTS

- More women are working than ever before, with their employment rate rising to 71 per cent in 2017.
- Working mothers in full-time jobs have the highest 'work-family conflict' levels.
- There has been a significant increase in young women with depression and anxiety.

The latest annual Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey found the median cost of child care for children not yet in school rose by around 145 per cent in the 2002-2017 period.

The research found in part, this is the result of increased uptake of childcare services. However, hourly costs of care for young children have also been rising. In contrast, Australian household incomes have on average remained at the same level since 2009.

Giselle Haber, who works as a photographer and has three children, says her kids enjoyed going to child care, and it made it possible for her to get back into work, but it was not easy.

"Some of the places are \$160 to \$175 a day," she said.

"For some women, it's not worth it because their salary might not be good enough to justify going back to work, so a lot of women choose to stay at home to look after their kids because the cost is so exorbitant."

The report found the majority of parents have experienced some sort of difficulty over the last 12 months when using or thinking about using child care.

Parents are increasingly worried about the cost of child care, finding care for a sick child and finding care at short notice.

More women are working than ever before

Women are working more than ever before, with the working-age employment rate rising to 71 per cent in 2017, the highest it has been in the history of the survey.

Report author Professor Roger Wilkins said the growth area had been mothers with young children. Between the 2001-2017 period, mean weekly earnings of full-time employees increased 24 per cent for women, as opposed to 20 per cent for men.

Median weekly earnings for men have fallen since 2014, and by contrast, earnings of full-time employed women have continued to grow. But overall since 2001 there has been a rise in pay inequality and women



Parents are increasingly worried about the cost of child care, finding care for a sick child and finding care at short notice.

continue to do most of the caring and housework.

Clinical psychologist Daniel Condon said many women experience stress at work and then find themselves dealing with household chores and looking after their kids' emotional needs at home.

"When they peak, when there are issues at school or friendship issues ... very often women just automatically feel it's their role to step in and solve those," he said.

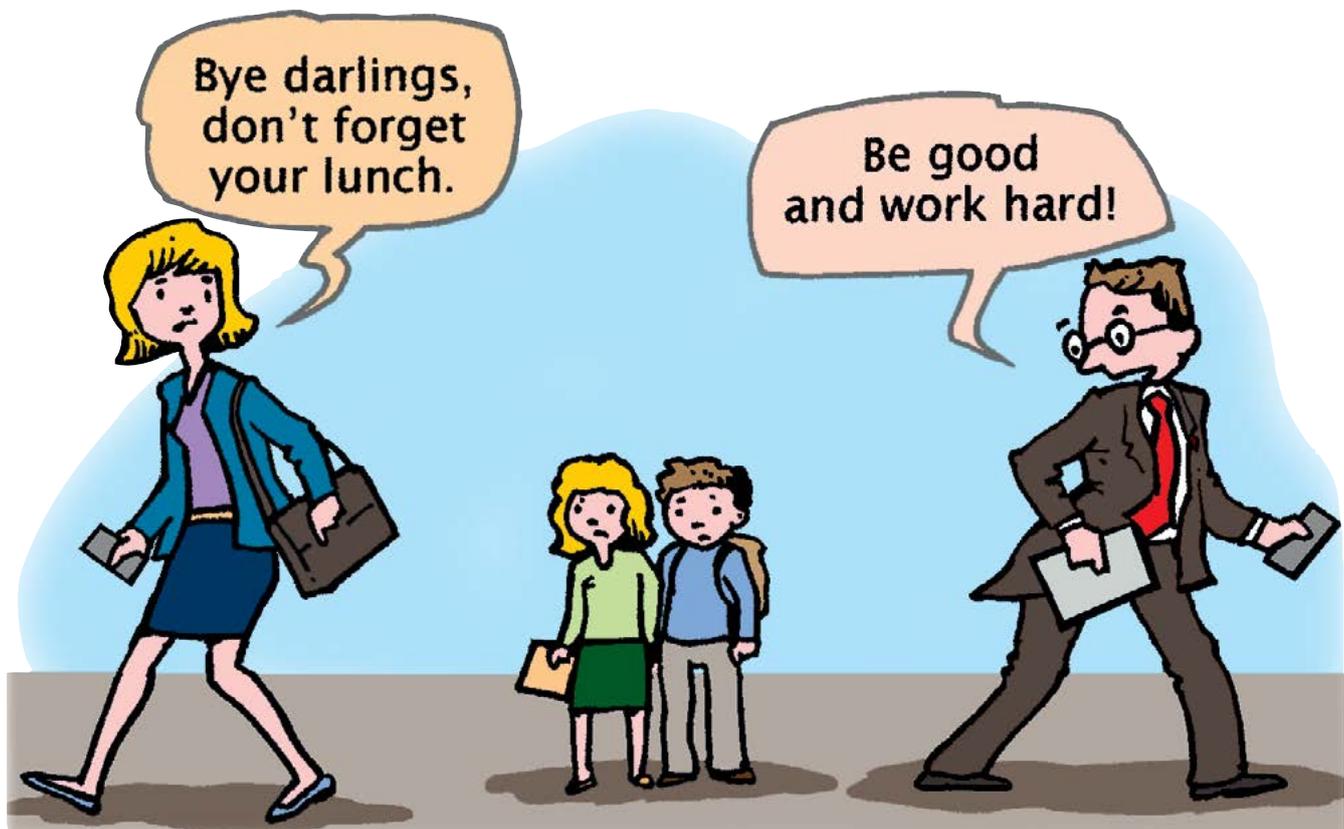
"And on the converse, often the fathers are opting out of that and taking more practical support."

Mr Condon said women were doing too much work at home and needed to speak to their partners about stepping up.

"Things do need to change and it needs to start from a household, grassroots level where people are having these difficult conversations and calling things as they are," he said.

Rise in stress as families juggle competing priorities

Traditionally, men reported higher levels of "work-family conflict" but that has dropped since 2001, while the number of women in full-time work reporting this stress has risen.



Working mothers have the highest level of work-family tension as they struggle with the stress of balancing work and family life, and women overall have higher work-family conflict than men.

Ms Haber juggles her work with raising two school-aged kids and a four-month-old baby. When she works, she asks someone to come over to look after the kids, or her husband will come home early, then she has to express milk for the baby.

“Sometimes it’s not easy, she’ll just cry the whole time when I’m gone. I’ve even taken her with me sometimes,” she said.

“We’re women, we have to multi-function, multi-task and do the best we can.”

Professor Wilkins said this was often due to traditional gender roles in the home being “quite sticky”.

“Women who are in full-time employment are still carrying the brunt of the responsibility for managing the home and care of the children, and so ... that hasn’t really kept pace with what’s been happening in the labour market now,” he said.

“Women’s increased participation in the labour market has certainly had implications for work-life balance and basically it’s made it a lot harder to achieve for many families, particularly young families.”

Work-family conflict is based on questions related to work-family gains and strains including: ‘working causes me to miss out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent’ and ‘because of the requirements of my job, my family time is less enjoyable and more pressured’.

Mr Cordon said working women experienced high levels of stress at home without the ability to rest. He warned that if a women’s neurological system remained

in a stressed state for a sustained period without having an opportunity to recover, she was at risk of that stress becoming a mental illness, such as anxiety.

“The brain and the body are becoming depleted of the important feel-good, healthy, restorative chemicals that they need, and when there is that imbalance, it’s just really fertile ground for mental illness,” he said.

Spike in young women with depression and anxiety

The report found there has been a substantial increase in reported diagnosis of depression and anxiety across all age groups, most notably in young people. Young women aged between 15-34 have the highest level of diagnosis, and this has significantly increased over time – from 12 per cent in 2009 to 20 per cent in 2017.

Professor Wilkins said more people may be seeking treatment, but the rise of social media is also likely a contributor.

“The growth has been strongest amongst younger people who tend to be more actively engaged with social media,” he said.

There has been an increase in young adults participating in education, with women aged 22-25 rising from 13 per cent in 2001 to 24 per cent in 2017.

The report said young women were also delaying their departure from the parental home to undertake further education.

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Garty, L, and Lloyd, M (30 July 2019). ‘Working mothers more stressed than fathers as cost of child care skyrockets, HILDA survey shows’, ABC News. Retrieved from www.abc.net.au/news on 29 April 2020.

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

This chapter from the latest HILDA survey explains the negative impacts of work demands on family life. By **Inga Lass**, University of Melbourne

Combining raising children with paid employment is the norm among Australian parents. In 2017, in approximately 68% of couple families with children aged under 18 both parents were employed, as were approximately 56% of single parents. Balancing these two life spheres, however, is not always easy and often results in work-family conflict, defined as a situation in which the demands of work and the family role are incompatible so that participation in one role is made more difficult by participating in the other (*Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985*).

The conflict between work and family life can flow in both directions: work demands can interfere with the family role (known as work-to-family conflict) and family demands can interfere with the work role (family-to-work conflict). Work-family conflict may have consequences for the wellbeing of individuals and their family members, as well as for their work performance.

This chapter investigates the trends and correlates of work-family conflict in Australia. Although work-family conflict is bi-directional, the chapter focuses exclusively on the negative impact of work demands on family life. It examines the trends in work-family conflict over time, the work and family characteristics that are associated with work-family conflict, the intra-couple distribution of work-family conflict, and the effects of work-family conflict on family wellbeing and future employment.

The analysis draws on responses to four different statements, administered as part of the self-completion questionnaire, that elicit the extent of work-family conflict experienced by parents of children aged under 18 who are in paid work.¹ The responses are used to construct a work-family conflict index (see Box 6.1 above), which ranges from 1 ('no conflict at all') to 7 ('highest possible conflict').

LEVELS AND TRENDS IN WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

In 2017, mothers had an average work-family conflict score of 3.7 on the 1-7 scale, whereas fathers had a slightly higher average score of 3.9. Given that the mid-point of the scale is 4, these numbers suggest that on average parents experience mid-range levels of conflict between their work and their family lives. There is, however, considerable variation in how parents perceive the interplay of these two spheres.

Figure 6.1 shows the distribution of work-family conflict scores for mothers and fathers in 2017. For a clear visualisation of the distribution, the index has been rounded to the nearest integer. Figure 6.1 shows that the most common work-family conflict score is 4 (that is, between 3.5 and 4.4), with approximately 26% of fathers and 25% of mothers falling into this category.

BOX 6.1: MEASURING WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Each wave, based on an item battery developed by Marshall and Barnett (1993), the HILDA Survey ascertains from parents in paid work the extent to which they agree with a range of statements about combining work with family responsibilities. Following Hosking and Western (2008), in this report, responses to the following four statements are used to construct a measure of the extent to which work demands negatively impact on family life:

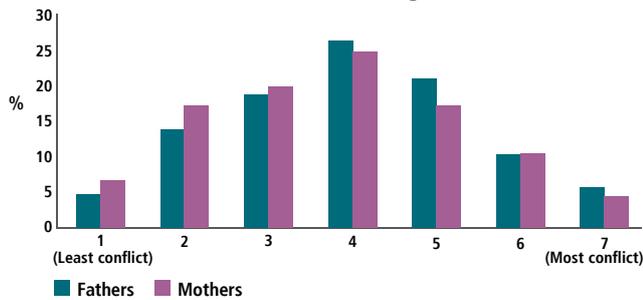
- a. *Because of the requirements of my job, I miss out on home or family activities that I would prefer to participate in*
- b. *Because of the requirements of my job, my family time is less enjoyable and more pressured*
- c. *Working leaves me with too little time or energy to be the kind of parent I want to be*
- d. *Working causes me to miss out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent.*

These items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale (where 1 is 'strongly disagree' and 7 is 'strongly agree').

The values of the individual items are summed and then divided by four, so that the scale of the summary measure ranges from 1 (representing no conflict) to 7 (representing high conflict). If respondents are missing information on one of the statements, the values for the three remaining items are summed and divided by three. No composite measure is constructed for cases with more than one of the four items missing.



Figure 6.1: Distribution of work-family conflict of working mothers and fathers with children aged under 18, 2017



Note: The work-family conflict index is continuous but has been rounded to the nearest integer to aid visualisation for this figure only.

The analysis includes all persons who form a parent-child relationship with a child aged under 18 living in their household (including biological, step and foster children as well as grandchildren where no parent is present), as well as persons with biological or adopted children aged under 18 living elsewhere. Note that approximately 1.5% of participants who completed the work-family conflict items do not have any children below age 18 and were therefore excluded.

As we move towards the extremes, the shares gradually become smaller. Approximately 5% of fathers and 7% of mothers have a score of approximately 1 (that is, between 1 and 1.4) and therefore experienced very little conflict between their work and family roles, while approximately 6% of fathers and 4% of mothers have a score of 7 (that is, between 6.5 and 7) and therefore experienced particularly high conflict. It is also evident that mothers were considerably more likely than fathers to report lower work-family conflict (rounded scores of 3 or below), whereas fathers were more likely to report medium to high conflict.

Figure 6.2 shows how the mean work-family conflict score of mothers and fathers has changed over time. In 2001, the level of work-family conflict differed by parental gender, with fathers reporting an average score of 4.1 and mothers reporting an average score of 3.5, a sizeable gap of 0.6 points on the 1-7 scale. Interestingly, work-family conflict has since trended in different directions for mothers and fathers. The average scores for fathers have slightly declined over the 2001 to 2017 period, while those of mothers have increased. Consequently, the gap between mothers and fathers has narrowed to only 0.2 points in 2017.

A higher degree of work-family conflict among fathers may come as a surprise, given that it is women who typically do the bulk of housework and child care duties (see, for example, *Chapter 5 of Wilkins and Lass, 2018*). Therefore, we may have expected women to have more difficulties combining home duties with paid employment. That said, fathers on average spend considerably more time in paid employment than mothers, which reduces the time they have available for family life. Moreover, it is possible that mothers and fathers work in jobs that differ in their conditions that might facilitate or impede combining work and family roles. The next section looks at how different employment and home characteristics are associated with work-family conflict.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Table 6.1 shows results from a linear regression analysis

that investigates the determinants of work-family conflict, based on pooled data from 2001 to 2017. The first model includes all parents, while the second and third models separately investigate the effects for fathers and mothers, respectively. Each model considers the roles of several characteristics of the main job – namely work schedule, employment status, firm size, occupation, and whether a person has supervisory responsibilities – as well as working hours in all jobs.

With respect to family characteristics, the models include variables for a person's relationship status, age of the youngest own resident child and the number of own resident children (with resident children being defined as those residing in the household at least 50% of the time; see Box 2.3, page 8). Another indicator variable is included for those who only have non-resident children. Further, the models include variables for sex (only in the joint model), age, whether a person has a bachelor's degree or higher qualification, whether a person has a work-limiting disability and year.

Focusing on the model that includes all parents, there is a clear positive relationship between longer working hours and work-family conflict. For example, compared to those working less than 15 hours per week, the conflict scores of those working 55 or more hours per week is approximately 2 points higher on the 7-point scale. Further, the working schedule considerably affects how parents perceive the impact of work on their family lives. Compared to a regular daytime schedule, workers on regular evening schedules, rotating shifts, split shifts, on call, irregular shifts and 'other' types of shifts have significantly higher work-family conflict scores.

Table 6.1 shows that employers, the solo-self-employed and unpaid family workers have significantly lower work-family conflict than employees. This is perhaps driven by the self-employed having more control over their work, even though they potentially have more responsibilities. Additionally, workers in small firms with fewer than 20 workers report lower work-family conflict scores than workers in larger firms. Compared to managers, most other occupations have significantly higher conflict scores. However, workers who have supervisory responsibilities have higher conflict scores than those who do not.

Figure 6.2: Mean work-family conflict of working parents with children aged under 18

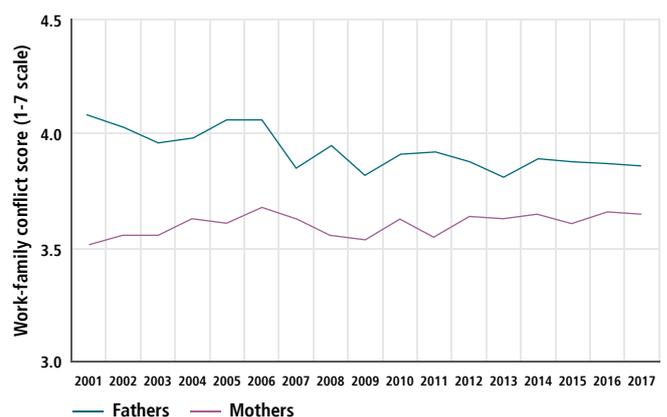


Table 6.1: Association between work-family conflict and worker and job characteristics – working parents with children aged under 18, 2001 to 2017 (pooled)

	ALL PARENTS	FATHERS	MOTHERS
Weekly working hours in all jobs (Reference category: Less than 15 hours)			
15-24	0.516	0.218	0.501
25-34	0.984	0.524	0.964
35-44	1.279	0.698	1.340
45-54	1.588	1.045	1.588
55 and over	2.001	1.476	1.794
Work schedule main job (Reference category: Regular daytime schedule)			
Regular evening shift	0.189	0.218	0.172
Regular night shift	<i>ns</i>	0.199	<i>ns</i>
Rotating shift (changes from days to evenings to nights)	0.314	0.351	0.238
Split shift (two distinct periods each day)	0.282	0.310	0.259
On call	0.240	0.339	<i>ns</i>
Irregular schedule	0.124	0.199	<i>ns</i>
Other	0.378	0.436	0.349
Employment status (Reference category: Employee)			
Employer	-0.263	-0.217	-0.296
Solo-self-employed	-0.226	-0.219	-0.235
Unpaid family worker	-0.302	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Firm size (Reference category: Less than 20 workers)			
20-99 workers	0.078	0.111	<i>ns</i>
100-499 workers	0.110	0.108	0.135
500 workers and more	0.154	0.136	0.181
Occupation (Reference category: Manager)			
Professional	0.075	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Technician or Trades Worker	0.091	0.086	<i>ns</i>
Community or Personal Service Worker	0.085	0.173	<i>ns</i>
Clerical or Administrative Worker	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	-0.121
Sales Worker	0.141	0.187	<i>ns</i>
Machinery Operator or Driver	0.178	0.210	-0.274
Labourer	0.139	0.172	<i>ns</i>
Has supervisory responsibilities	0.141	0.108	0.175
Male	-0.201	–	–
Age	-0.004	-0.010	<i>ns</i>
Single parent	0.258	<i>ns</i>	0.321
Age of youngest own resident child (Reference category: 0-3)			
4-7	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	0.072
8-12	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
13-17	-0.321	-0.263	-0.394
No resident child	-0.174	<i>ns</i>	<i>ns</i>
Number of own resident children (Reference category: One)			
Two	0.087	0.093	0.087
Three or more	0.216	0.221	0.226
Educational attainment of a bachelor's degree or higher	0.144	0.128	0.157
Work-limiting disability	0.379	0.310	0.419
Survey year	-0.004	-0.006	<i>ns</i>
Constant	11.388	15.162	<i>ns</i>
NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS	51,258	27,660	23,598

Notes: The table presents coefficient estimates from Ordinary Least Squares regression models of the level of work-family conflict. The models contain an indicator (not reported) equal to 1 if firm size is missing. *ns* indicates the estimate is not significantly different from 0 at the 10% level.



Conflict with work and family life may also depend on a person's family situation. With respect to the age of the youngest resident child, having older children (aged 13 to 17 years) is related to significantly reduced levels of work-family conflict. Additionally, having only non-resident children is linked to lower conflict. Perhaps unsurprisingly, work-family conflict increases with the number of resident children. Also, single parents have significantly higher conflict scores than couple parents, suggesting that having a partner in the household to share child care responsibilities reduces work-family conflict.

Workers who have a bachelor's degree or higher educational attainment have significantly higher conflict scores than those with lower education, while workers with a work-limiting disability experience higher conflict than those without. Further, work-family conflict decreases with the age of the worker.

With respect to gender, Table 6.1 reveals that, after accounting for other worker and job characteristics, fathers have significantly lower work-family conflict than mothers. This is in direct contrast to the findings illustrated in Figure 6.2, where fathers had higher conflict scores. The difference is primarily due to the ability to control for working hours in the regression model. Mothers have lower average work-family conflict scores because they work fewer hours than fathers, but when holding hours constant, mothers have higher conflict scores. Gender differences in working hours are also key to understanding the differential development in the level of work-family conflict for mothers and fathers over the 2001-2017 period. On average, fathers in the sample have experienced a decline in working hours over the period, from 47.0 to 44.5 hours, whereas mothers' working hours have increased, from 29.1 to 30.7 hours.

Comparing the impact of the different characteristics separately for fathers (second model) and mothers (third

model) reveals some notable sex differences. Mothers with a youngest child aged 4 to 7 experience significantly higher work-family conflict than those whose youngest child is aged under 4, while this is not the case for fathers.

Also, being a single mother is linked to significantly increased work-family conflict compared to being in a couple, while there is no statistically significant difference between single and coupled fathers. Work-family conflict decreases with age for fathers but not for mothers. Further, working a regular night shift, being on call or having irregular schedules significantly increases fathers', but not mothers', work-family conflict scores. There are also several differences with respect to occupation-specific effects.

The distribution of work-family conflict within couples

Work-family conflict may not only affect the individual person, but also their relationships and family well-being. In this context, it may matter whether only one or both parents experience difficulties in combining work demands with family life. This section considers both parents' levels of work-family conflict by focusing on four different types of (heterosexual) dual-earner couples, namely those in which: i) both parents experience low work-family conflict; ii) the mother experiences high levels of work-family conflict but the father does not; iii) the father experiences high levels of conflict but the mother does not; and iv) both parents experience high levels of conflict. 'High' conflict is defined as a work-family conflict score of more than 4, which is the mid-point of the scale and above the averages of both men and women.

Figure 6.3 shows the prevalence of these four types of couples across time, with average shares presented for three-year periods and for a two-year period for 2016-2017. In the most recent period, in 41.0% of couples both parents experienced low work-family conflict, in 17.8% of couples only the mother experienced high conflict, in 23.6% of couples only the father experienced high conflict, and in 17.6% of couples both parents experienced high levels of conflict.

Looking at the trends over the period in the prevalence of these types, the share of couples experiencing

Figure 6.3: Couple types with respect to work-family conflict – working parents with children aged under 18

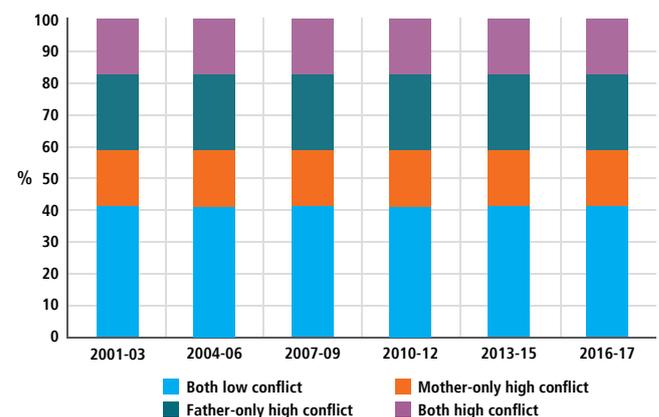


Table 6.2: Mean satisfaction with family aspects and life overall, by couple type – working parents with children aged under 18, 2001 to 2017 (pooled) (0-10 scale)

	Relationship with partner		Relationship with children		Partner's relationship with children		Life overall	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Couple type								
Both low conflict	8.5	8.3	8.7	8.8	8.8	8.5	8.1	8.2
Mother-only high conflict	8.1	7.6	8.4	8.3	8.5	7.9	7.9	7.6
Father-only high conflict	8.0	7.9	8.3	8.6	8.5	8.2	7.7	8.0
Both high conflict	7.8	7.6	8.2	8.3	8.3	7.8	7.4	7.5
All couples	8.2	7.9	8.5	8.6	8.6	8.2	7.9	7.9

no conflict has slightly increased, from 37.5% in 2001-2003 to 41.0% in 2016-2017. Further, the share of couples in which only the father experiences high levels of conflict has decreased, from 28.3% to 23.6%. In contrast, the share of couples in which only the mother experiences high levels of conflict has increased. These two trends are in line with the trends found in Figure 6.2. Finally, the share of couples in which both parents experience high conflict initially declined but has since increased, so that the 2016-2017 levels are similar to the 2001-2003 levels.

Among the majority of couples, one or both partners thus experience high work-family conflict, which raises the question of whether high levels of conflict affect couples' wellbeing. It is possible that work-family conflict not only negatively affects the worker's wellbeing, but that it 'spills over' to affect their partner's wellbeing as well. Further, the couple's wellbeing might be particularly affected if both partners experience

work-family conflict.

Table 6.2 presents mean satisfaction scores with a range of family aspects as well as with life in general, all measured on a scale from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). Both mothers and fathers fare best on all these indicators if both partners experience low work-family conflict. In other words, if at least one partner experiences high work-family conflict, there is a reduction in family and life satisfaction for both partners. For example, mean satisfaction with the relationship with the partner is 8.5 for fathers in 'both low conflict' couples but drops to 8.1 in couples where only the mother experiences high conflict, 8.0 in couples where only the father experiences high conflict, and 7.8 in couples where both experience high conflict.

Among fathers, satisfaction scores are lowest if both partners experience high conflict, while for mothers there is often little difference between the 'mother-only high conflict' and 'both high conflict' situations, with women in both groups having particularly low satisfaction scores.

Since work-family conflict is related to lower satisfaction levels with the relationship with one's partner, it may also be linked to an increased risk of separation. Table 6.3 investigates the risk of separation of dual-earner couples by the level of work-family conflict. Couples in which both partners experienced low levels of conflict are the most stable, with only 1.6% of these couples separating one year later. Couples in which only one partner has high work-family conflict are also relatively stable, with 2.1% of couples having separated the following year if

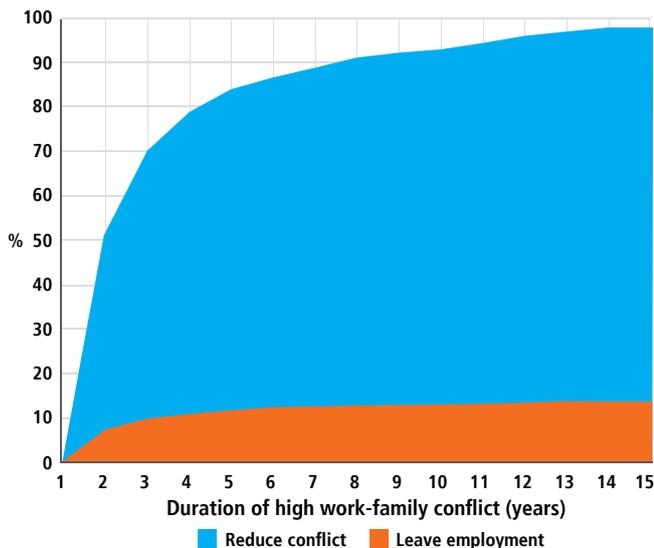
Table 6.3: Share of couples separated one year later, by couple conflict-type – working parents with children aged under 18, 2001 to 2017 (pooled) (%)

Couple type	
Both low conflict	1.6
Mother-only high conflict	2.1
Father-only high conflict	2.3
Both high conflict	2.5
All couples	2.0

Table 6.4: Proportion of workers experiencing employment-related changes, by level of work-family conflict – working parents with children aged under 18, 2001 to 2017 (pooled) (%)

	Reduce hours	Change working schedule	Give up supervision	Change employer	Change occupation	Mean number of events
Low conflict	30.1	16.1	17.6	10.6	30.9	0.9
High conflict – persistent	33.8	17.0	13.7	11.1	29.0	1.0
High conflict – exiting	40.4	17.4	19.7	15.6	33.1	1.2

Figure 6.4: Cumulative rate of exit of working parents from high work-family conflict, by duration since onset of high work-family conflict



Notes: The figure examines working parents with children aged under 18 over the full 2001 to 2017 period. Estimates are unweighted.

mothers experienced high conflict, and 2.3% having separated if only fathers experienced high conflict. The highest separation risk is found among couples in which both have high work-family conflict, of which 2.5% separate one year later.

Exiting high work-family conflict

This last section investigates whether high conflict between the work and family spheres is a transitory or long-lasting experience. To this end, we follow workers from the onset of high work-family conflict (again, defined as a value above 4 on the work-family conflict index) until they exit this state. Two different types of exits are considered: a) remaining in employment but reducing work-family conflict to a value of 4 or below; and b) leaving employment.

Figure 6.4 presents the cumulative share of persons with high work-family conflict who have left this

situation after a certain period, differentiated by the type of exit.² The share of workers who have exited high work-family conflict increases steeply in the initial years after the onset of high conflict. One year following the onset of high conflict, about 51% no longer experience high conflict, with the majority of these (44%) having stayed in employment and 7% having left employment. Five years after the onset of high conflict, 87% have left this state, with a total of 74% staying employed and 12% leaving employment.

Nevertheless, the figure also shows that there is a small share of workers who experience high work-family conflict over an extended period: 21% of workers entering high work-family conflict experience it for at least three years; 13% of workers still experience high conflict after five years; and 6% after 10 years.

How do workers manage to remain employed and reduce work-family conflict? Table 6.4 compares the share of workers experiencing a range of employment-related changes from one year to the next among those who experience high work-family conflict in two consecutive years ('persistent') and those who experience high work-family conflict in one year but not the next ('exiting'). Workers who have low conflict in the first year and remain employed in the following year are also included in the table.

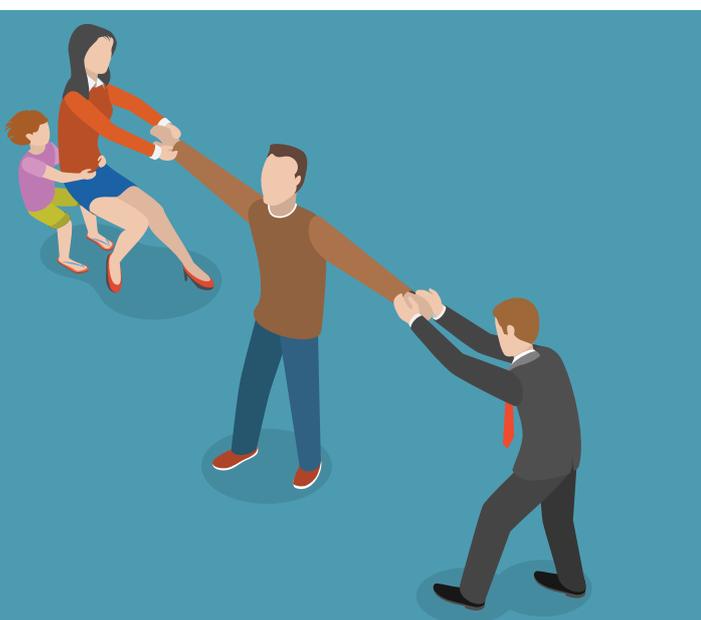
The table shows that workers who experience high work-family conflict but manage to reduce conflict the following year (that is, exit) were more likely than other workers to undertake changes to their employment situation. For example, more than 40% of workers who exit high conflict reduced their working hours, compared to approximately 34% among those who continue to experience high conflict. They are also considerably more likely than other workers to change their employer, working schedule, occupation or to give up supervisory responsibilities. On average, workers who manage to reduce their work-family conflict undertook 1.2 of these changes, compared to 1.0 changes among workers with continued high conflict and 0.9 changes among workers with low conflict to begin with.

ENDNOTES

1. The analysis includes all persons who form a parent-child relationship with a child aged under 18 living in their household (including biological, step and foster children as well as grandchildren where no parent is present), as well as persons with biological or adopted children aged under 18 living elsewhere. Note that approximately 1.5% of participants who completed the work-family conflict items do not have any children below age 18 and were therefore excluded.
2. Note, however, that the HILDA Survey only observes the level of work-family conflict at the time of interview. Movements out of and back into high work-family conflict between interviews can thus not be captured.

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Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research, University of Melbourne (2019). *The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 17*, pp. 102-111. Retrieved from <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au> on 29 April 2020.



WORK AND FAMILY: BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

A GUIDE REPRODUCED COURTESY OF THE FAIR WORK OMBUDSMAN

Working at best practice

Best practice employers foster flexibility to achieve a better balance between work and family responsibilities for all employees. From reduced absenteeism to improved productivity and job satisfaction, there are significant benefits for employees and employers in providing flexibilities for work and family balance.

Work and family flexibilities ensure employers and employees balance work and family commitments by using employment arrangements that help employees manage family and lifestyle commitments while taking into account business needs.

The benefits of work and family flexibilities can be achieved in all workplaces, regardless of the size of the business, by developing and implementing family-friendly workplace policies.

This best practice guide explains:

- The advantages of working at best practice
- The benefits of developing family-friendly workplace strategies
- Employees' rights to family-friendly entitlements
- Developing flexible workplace strategies
- Communicating family-friendly initiatives
- The importance of reviewing and assessing family-friendly policies and procedures
- Workplace discrimination.

There is also a checklist on how to achieve a family-friendly workplace.

This guide illustrates best practice when it comes to achieving family-friendly workplaces. For specific information regarding your minimum legal obligations, contact the organisations listed under the 'For more information' section at the end of this guide.

Why work at best practice?

Reducing the stress from conflicting demands between family, work and other responsibilities in life is of benefit to employees, employers and the wider community. Employers who work to achieve best practice with work and family balance will reap many benefits, including:

- A cost-effective means of retaining skilled staff and attracting new employees
- A way to be recognised as an employer of choice within an industry or sector
- An increase in the number of people returning to work after parental leave
- Improvement in staff morale, leading to greater engagement in the workplace
- Reduction in turnover of staff, leading to lower recruitment and training costs
- Demonstrating to staff that they are valued by the organisation

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- Reduced absenteeism
- Maintained and improved productivity by ensuring highly skilled employees are recruited and retained
- Improved organisational efficiency through the benefits of long service, e.g. institutional memory, industry knowledge, networks and contacts.

What is work-life balance?

One of the best ways of ensuring balance between work and family is by the use of family-friendly workplace policies and practices.

Family-friendly workplace provisions negotiated between an employer and its employees may include:

- Accessing annual leave in single or part-day periods
- Taking time off in lieu of overtime payments
- Working additional hours to make-up for time taken off
- Accessing accrued rostered days off in part-days or more flexibly
- Enabling children to access the workplace (where safe) or providing a carer's room, child care facilities or information about where parents can access these facilities near their workplace
- Working part-time or creating part-time work opportunities



- Job share arrangements
- Telecommuting or home-based work.

What are an employee's entitlements to family-friendly arrangements?

The *Fair Work Act 2009* (FW Act) contains entitlements which an employer must provide to employees to assist employers and employees achieve better work and family balance. Access to entitlements under the FW Act will vary depending on whether the employee is a casual, full-time or part-time employee.

The National Employment Standards (NES) set out a safety net of minimum entitlements for most national system employees. The NES includes:

- A 38-hour working week for full-time employees, plus reasonable additional hours
- Four weeks annual leave per year (pro-rata for part-time employees)
- A total of 10 days paid sick and carer's leave each year, two days paid compassionate leave for each permissible occasion, two days unpaid carer's leave for each permissible occasion, and five days unpaid family and domestic violence leave (in a 12-month period)
- 12 months unpaid parental leave after 12 months continuous service with a right to request to extend the initial period of unpaid parental leave by a further 12 months. An employer can only refuse if they have given the employee a reasonable opportunity to discuss their request, and there are reasonable business grounds to do so. If a request is refused, the written response

- must include details of the employer's reasons
- Community service leave (for an eligible community service activity)
- Public holidays
- The right to make a written request for flexible working arrangements by employees because they:
 - Are the parent, or have responsibility for the care, of a child who is of school age or younger
 - Are a carer (within the meaning of the *Carer Recognition Act 2010*)
 - Have a disability
 - Are 55 or older
 - Are experiencing violence from a member of their family or
 - Provide care or support to a member of their immediate family or household, who requires care or support because they are experiencing violence from their family.

What should employers do with a request?

Employers covered by an award must first discuss the request with their employee to try to reach an agreement about changes to the employee's working conditions, taking into consideration:

- The needs of the employee
- Consequences to the employee if changes in working arrangements aren't made
- Any reasonable business grounds for refusing the employee's request.

All employers who receive a request must provide a written response within 21 days which outlines whether the request is approved or refused.

Employers can only refuse a request on reasonable business grounds. If a request is refused the written response must include the reasons for the refusal.

If an award applies and there's no agreement on a change in working arrangements the written response must state whether or not there are any changes in working arrangements that the employer can offer the employee. If the employer can offer changes, they must set out those changes in the written response.

What are reasonable business grounds?

A request for flexible working arrangements can only be refused on reasonable business grounds.

Reasonable business grounds for refusing a request from an employee may include, but are not limited to:

- The new working arrangements requested by the employee would be too costly for the employer
- There is no capacity to change the working arrangements of other employees to accommodate the new working arrangements requested by the employee
- It would be impractical to change the working arrangements of other employees, or recruit new employees, to accommodate the new working arrangements requested by the employee
- The new working arrangements requested by the employee would be likely to result in significant

- loss of efficiency or productivity
- The new working arrangements requested by the employee would be likely to have a significant negative impact on customer service.

Some of these entitlements are not available to casual employees. For more information about these entitlements, visit the 'Flexible working arrangements' page or contact the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94.

In addition to the FW Act, other legislation – such as state/territory and federal anti-discrimination laws – operates to ensure that employees are not discriminated against where they have certain family or carer responsibilities. Some of this legislation also includes a right to request flexible working arrangements. Best practice employers should familiarise themselves with the relevant state or territory legislation which regulates their business. See also best practice guide No 1a 'The right to request flexible working arrangements'.

Employers can build on the minimum entitlements by implementing family-friendly workplace strategies.

Developing flexible workplace strategies

A successful family-friendly workplace strategy should be developed having regard to the flexible work requirements of employees as well as business needs. There are a wide variety of initiatives that an organisation can introduce as part of a flexible family-friendly workplace strategy.

These include:

- Ensuring employees and potential employees are informed of available family-friendly working arrangements at recruitment and induction

- Organising staff meetings when most people can attend
- Providing unpaid leave during school holiday periods to accommodate carer's responsibilities
- Creating meaningful part-time employment opportunities
- Providing periods of paid parental leave
- Consenting to an employee working flexible hours to accommodate their personal circumstances such as dropping off or picking up children from school or day care, or assisting elderly family members
- Making sure that employees on parental leave are kept up to date about what is going on in the workplace including any changes that might occur
- Organising professional development or training during ordinary work hours.

Remember, you can also develop your own flexible working arrangements to suit the needs of your workplace. A good place to start is to ask the employees what would make a difference to them.

The extent to which a business adopts flexibility initiatives may be guided by the organisation's resources (including cost and level of administrative support), the size of the business and the demographic of the workforce.

While some initiatives may require initial or up-front expenditure, they may be cost-efficient in the long term when taking into account staff retention rates, increased productivity, business reputation and status as an employer of choice. If in doubt, trialling a new flexible work arrangement may be a useful way of determining whether it suits both employees and the organisation.

When developing flexible workplace strategies, you should keep in mind that work responsibilities can



impact on different people's lives in different ways. For example, women with caring responsibilities are a group of employees that are often disproportionately disadvantaged when balancing work and family responsibilities. It is important, therefore, to consult with employees about their needs and to understand the types of family-friendly provisions which would benefit both employees and the business. This will help to ensure that the flexible strategies introduced are tailored to your particular workplace.

Case study: benefits of work and family best practice

Murray works at NPW Pty Ltd, which has been expanding for the last few years. When the business started, no one at NPW had children. However, Murray and three other co-workers are all expecting children over the next few months. Murray is concerned because he is not sure how his new family responsibilities will be viewed and accommodated at work. After all, the issue has simply never come up before. Murray approaches the manager Aneeqa, who acknowledges that this is an issue that needs to be carefully considered.

Aneeqa organises a staff meeting during work hours to consult with employees on how to best accommodate each employee's family responsibilities while still meeting business objectives. Aneeqa also invites the employees to ask a representative to attend the meeting if they wish. The employees have a range of ideas that they raise in the meeting. Aneeqa also asks Murray to write a short email survey for employees to fill out. The survey results are considered at a follow-up staff meeting at work two weeks later. While a number of ideas are discussed, the employees and Aneeqa decide that they would like to be able to work from home at times, have flexible starting and finishing times and a carer's room at work.

Aneeqa discusses the proposals with the general manager and financial officer, who are supportive of the ideas but advise they need to ensure that the ideas are feasible from a business perspective. After further consideration of financial and work health and safety (WHS) issues, the management team decide that clear protocols about the use of the carer's room at work need to be established and that a policy on flexible working arrangements needs to be developed.

Aneeqa works with Murray to put NPW's commitment to family-friendly working conditions in writing and they create the NPW Work and Family Policy which outlines the procedures for working from home, requesting flexible start and finish times and sets out the facilities that will be provided in the carer's room together with protocols for use. Staff are advised that the policy has been finalised and it is then included in NPW's employment manual, which is accessible to all employees. Management suggest that a follow-up meeting should be held in three months' time to assess how well the policy has been working.

Communicating family-friendly provisions

Documenting family-friendly provisions enables employers and employees to have a clear understanding of the provisions that are available within a business and how they can be accessed. Recording flexible workplace arrangements or family-friendly provisions created after an employer and employee consultation process will mean that both parties are aware of their responsibilities and entitlements. This will help prevent confusion in the future.

The most common way to record family-friendly provisions is by including them in an enterprise agreement, contract of employment or in a policy and procedures manual. This will ensure that employees are aware of what is available, why some flexibilities can be accessed and why others cannot, as well as the process for making requests. Documenting family-friendly provisions will also help an employer to develop a process for considering requests and to ensure that fairness and equity is provided across the workplace. Employers may choose to seek advice before implementing an agreement, contract or policy.

Where family-friendly provisions are included in an enterprise agreement or an applicable award, they will apply to those employees covered by the agreement or award.

Family-friendly clauses in agreements and awards usually contain information on the:

- Nature of the provision (e.g. flexible hours of work)
- Entitlements under the provision (e.g. a right to apply for flexible hours of work)
- Eligibility criteria (e.g. primary care of a child or children under school age or a child under 18 with a disability)
- Awards contain specific information on what needs to be included in the employer's written response if the request is refused.



CHECKLIST FOR A FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

- Is the concept of work and family balance and its benefits positively received and understood by managers and employees?
- Is it acknowledged that employees have important roles and responsibilities outside the workplace?
- Are there consultative processes in place that enable staff to talk collectively and individually about business and employee needs for work and family balance?
- Are employees aware of what family-friendly entitlements exist in the workplace and how to utilise the provisions?
- Are the family-friendly provisions documented in writing and easily accessible to all employees?
- Are employees who use family-friendly provisions, such as flexible working hours or parental leave, treated the same as other employees when assessing opportunities within the organisation, including promotion and training opportunities?
- Is there an internal process to implement flexible working arrangements for employees?
- Have you considered using an individual flexibility arrangement to accommodate an individual employee's specific needs? See also best practice guides No. 1a *The right to request flexible working arrangements*, and No. 3 *Use of individual flexibility arrangements*.
- Are regular reviews conducted of existing family-friendly provisions?

There will also generally be a review process that an employee can access if they have concerns about whether they are receiving the entitlement. In some cases, employees and employers can also agree to have the Fair Work Commission resolve disputes in relation to flexible work arrangements.

Family-friendly policy or procedure documents may supplement the provisions in the applicable agreement or award and provide further information about how the provision is applied.

To give flexible working arrangements the best opportunity to succeed, it is also important to ensure managers are given adequate training on how to manage flexibility in the workplace.

Review and assessment

Over time, both staff and business needs change so family-friendly provisions should be regularly reviewed. This will ensure family-friendly provisions are consistent with applicable legislation and do not become outdated or irrelevant to the business.

Discrimination

Various state/territory and federal anti-discrimination laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of marital status, sex, pregnancy, and family or carer's responsibilities.

The FW Act also makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an employee based on their marital status, sex, pregnancy, and family or carer's responsibilities.

Employees who believe they have been discriminated against should contact:

- Their employer or human resources manager
- An equal opportunity officer or grievance officer
- A union (if they are a member)
- The Fair Work Commission
- The Fair Work Ombudsman, or
- The Australian Human Rights Commission or the relevant state or territory anti-discrimination body.

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Fair Work Ombudsman. *Work and family*. Retrieved from www.fairwork.gov.au on 29 April 2020.

KIDS, NOT GENDER, BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON WORK/CARE POLICY ATTITUDES

Only 15% of Australians can balance work and family responsibilities, according to findings by a team of researchers from the Australian Women's Working Futures project at the **University of Sydney**

However, young men without children are least likely to consider supportive work and care policies and shared domestic work at home as important to their future. This is despite the fact they are just as likely as men with children to plan to have a child in the future.

The findings contrast with the attitudes of young women without children, who are more likely than their male peers without children to report that equality in domestic life is very important to their future success at work.

"Young women are making sophisticated and calculated choices about how they manage work and care early on in their careers."

Associate Professor Elizabeth Hill

Lead author, Associate Professor Elizabeth Hill from the University of Sydney, said the study reveals the growing momentum among young parents for better

work and care policies, regardless of their gender.

"Both men and women who are young parents understand the importance of sharing the responsibility for child care and housework for success at work," said Associate Professor Hill.

The team of researchers from the University of Sydney's Australian Women's Working Futures project surveyed more than 2,500 working women and men aged 16 to 40, who were representative of the workforce nationally.

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY A CHALLENGE FOR YOUNG WORKERS

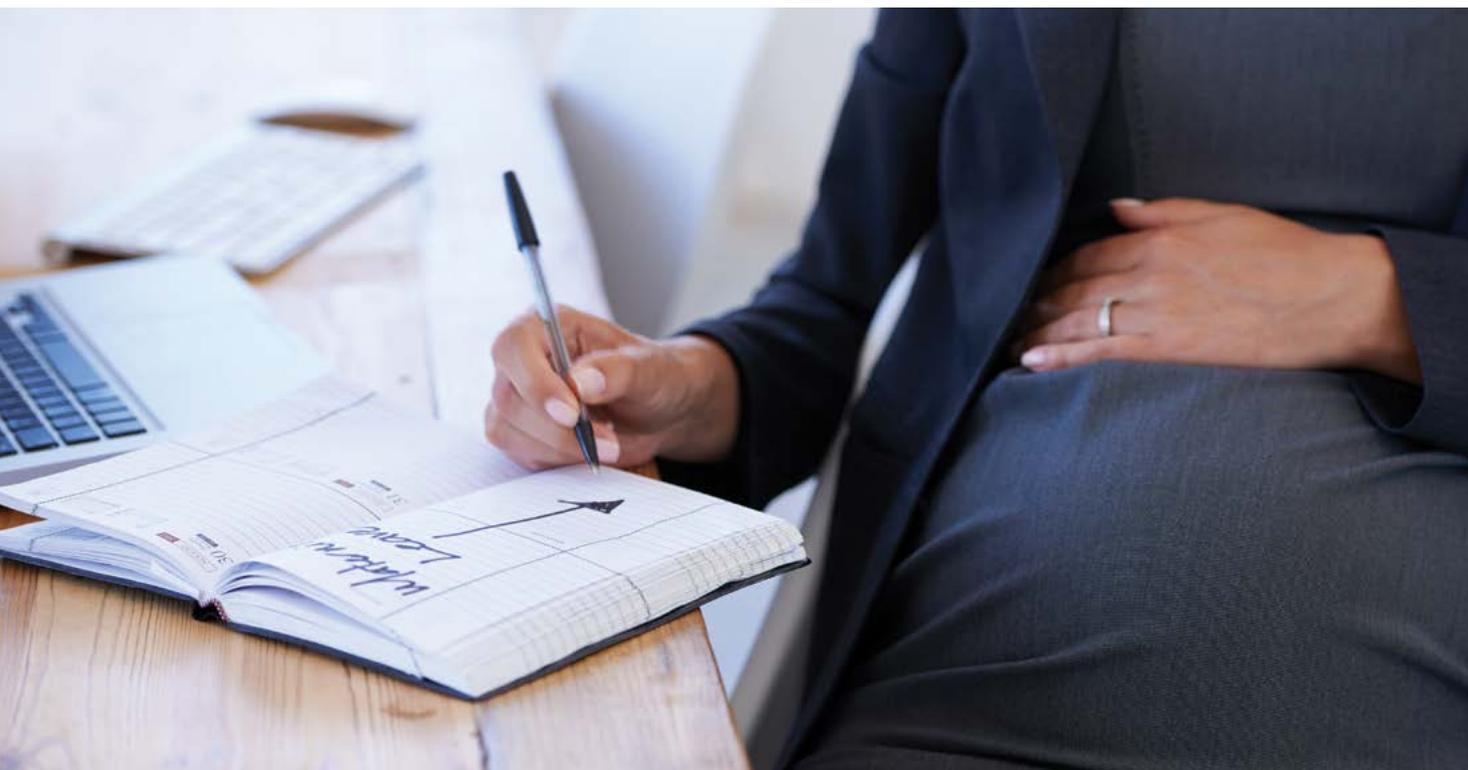
Only 15 per cent of respondents strongly agreed that they can balance work and family responsibilities, which Associate Professor Hill said shows a clear gap between what young workers expect and the current level of support at home and in the workplace.

"Since paid parental leave was introduced in 2010 and dad-and-partner pay in 2013, we've seen alarmingly little progress in the work-and-care policy space."

Professor Marian Barid

"To bridge this gap, young women are making sophisticated and calculated choices about how they manage work and care early on in their careers, even

"Both men and women who are young parents understand the importance of sharing the responsibility for childcare and housework for success at work."



before they have children,” Associate Professor Hill said.

“This often includes shifting to lower paid jobs with less responsibility. Sometime the choice is not to have children. Public policy should not impinge on people’s capacity to manage a successful work and family life.”

One survey respondent in high-paid and secure work said: “I don’t see myself having kids for another couple of years but if I think of long-term career goals, I have to factor in that I do want [children] eventually and the job I’m in now pays for maternity leave ... I’m staying put.”

While increased participation of women in the labour market is an objective of governments around the world, the proportion of women working full-time, as opposed to part-time, has remained consistent since the 1970s, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics data.

Professor Marian Baird, co-author on the paper, said: “Despite huge labour market changes, the rate of women working full-time hasn’t changed over the past 40 years in Australia.

“Over the same time, we’ve seen mothers working part-time to accommodate caring responsibility. The fact that women make up almost 70 per cent of all part-time employees shows how gendered caring is.”

Women with children told the researchers how the unequal burden of child care limits their earning capacity as part-time workers, with one working mother saying: “It’s very much a man’s world ... as the ‘mum’ you’re generally the one who has the sick days, who has to pick up from day care and so I can’t take the overtime.”

HOW YOUNG MEN WITH (AND WITHOUT) CHILDREN VALUE WORK/CARE POLICIES

The research, published in the *Journal of Sociology*, said: “The gap between expectations of young men with and without children points to the need for more research on how men manage the transition to fatherhood and the impact on households and workplaces.”

The published statistical analysis reveals that the presence of children, rather than gender, has the biggest influence on whether workers consider balancing work and care as being very important.

The likelihood that men with children report that access to work-care policy (such as paid parental leave and child care) as ‘very important’ for future success at work is 71 per cent compared with 79 per cent for women with children, but only 50 per cent for men without children.

“Young men without children aren’t planning for their future work and family nearly as meticulously as women,” said Associate Professor Hill.

“Since paid parental leave was introduced in 2010 and dad and partner pay in 2013, we’ve seen alarmingly little progress in the work-and-care policy space. This research demonstrates the significant gaps that we



“The gap between expectations of young men with and without children points to the need for more research on how men manage the transition to fatherhood and the impact on households and workplaces.”

need to address for both women and men to succeed in the future.”

DECLARATION

The study was funded by the University of Sydney’s Sydney Research Excellence Initiative 2020. It was authored by Associate Professor Elizabeth Hill, Professor Marian Baird, Professor Ariadne Vromen, Professor Rae Cooper, Zoe Meers and Professor Elspeth Probyn.

Hill, E, Baird, M, Vromen, A, Cooper, R, Meers, Z, and Probyn, E (29 October 2019). *Kids, not gender, the biggest influence on work/care policy attitudes*. Retrieved from www.sydney.edu.au on 28 April 2020.

Strategies to juggle work and young kids at home: it's about flexibility and boundaries

RUCHI SINHA OFFERS SOME STRATEGIES TO SURVIVE THE DISRUPTION OF A CRISIS LIKE THE RECENT PANDEMIC-INDUCED LOCKDOWN

It's hard enough juggling a job with parenthood when you've got young kids. But what do you do when social-distancing policies mean you've all been sent home? This is the reality many families now face. Schools have been shut in Britain, France, Germany, South Korea and all but five US states. In Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory are closing schools this week, with more states likely to follow.

To entertain and home school your children while working from home is going to take self-awareness, planning, communication and technology to stop the boundaries between the work and family from fraying and ripping. Here are six strategies to survive.

1. BE FLEXIBLE

Working parents often develop routines around work (8 am-4 pm) and family time (4 pm-8 pm). Even if you prefer to stick to your routine and keep work to regular work hours, you may need to re-evaluate. The new normal is likely to involve combining greater flexibility with plans and schedules for non-standard working and family time.

To plan successfully, it is critical you know your own style and work preferences. Research shows some people are "integrators", who cope well with multitasking and switching between work and personal tasks, while "segmenters" prefer to keep things separate and have strong boundaries.

2. MAKE A PLAN

Make a daily work and child care schedule that you, your partner and (to a large extent) your kids agree on. It is crucial to schedule things as it gives you a realistic understanding of what is possible and what you may have to give up versus what you need to claim as essential.

Here is my personal schedule (*see below*) for my partner and I working from home with our six-year-old daughter. It's a manic schedule and we are trying to adapt it each day to make it work. But to have it in the first place made us realise how to share home duties and educational responsibilities while carving out work and personal time.

To entertain and home school your children while working from home is going to take self-awareness, planning, communication and technology to stop the boundaries between the work and family from fraying and ripping.

Have a family meeting and lay down what you think is critical for the health of your family and for your productivity at work. Use that understanding to identify workload-sharing plans.

Try different scheduling for a week and meet as a family to discuss what does not work and what could

A MARATHON SCHEDULE EXAMPLE: Adjust activities, breaks and transitions to suit your personal, work and family needs.			TAG-TEAM DUAL-EARNER PARENTING: For balance swap roles every other day.	
SCHEDULE FOR YOUNG KIDS			WORKING ADULT 1	WORKING ADULT 2
Before 9:00 AM	Wake up!	Make your bed, eat breakfast, brush teeth, get dressed	Set the stage for the day	
9:00-10:00	Outdoor time	Family walk or outdoor play	1 hour with kids	Work: 2-hour block
10:00-11:00	Academic time	No electronics! Reading, homework, study, puzzles, journal	Work: 2-hour block	
11:00-12:00	Creative time	Creative play, drawing, Logos, crafts, music, cooking, baking		
12:00-12:30	LUNCH		Shared workload: cooking time and lunch break	
12:30-1:00	Home chores	Clean rooms, put away toys, take out garbage, pet care	Shared workload: home duties	
1:00-2:00	Quiet time	Reading, nap, puzzles, yoga	1 hour of work	Work: 2-hour block
2:30-4:00	Academic time	Electronics OK! Educational games, online activities, virtual museum tours	1 hour with kids	
4:00-5:00	Outdoor time	Family walk or outdoor play	1 hour of work	1 hour with kids
5:00-6:00	Dinner time	Family dinner, help with clean-up and dishes	Shared workload: cooking time and lunch break	
6:00-7:00	Bath time	Bath or shower	1 hour with kids	1 hour of work
7:00-8:00	Reading/TV time	Relaxing before bedtime	1 hour of work	1 hour with kids
9:00 PM	Bedtime	Put on PJs, brush teeth, clothes in laundry	Shared workload: bed time, cleaning and re-evaluating tomorrow's plans	
9:00-10:00 PM	FLEXIBILITY – a two hour window: Some may want to work after kids go to bed or before they wake up. But do not forget to take breaks and give yourself that leisure time to connect with your friends and to relax on your own. Tag-team parenting and working could mean couples spend less time with each other.		1 hour of work or time to unwind?	
10:00-11:00 PM			Child-free couple time to relax OR Zoom hangout with friends!	
11:00PM-7:00 AM	SLEEP TIME – 8 hours is what helps to keep your stress levels low and your immunity up!			

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work. For example, try a two-hour work block for two days and see how your partner and kids react to it. Or swap activity times or roles twice a week or every other day.

Once you have a plan, it is critical to communicate the same with colleagues in a way that ensures they are supportive and can work with your constraints and capabilities. Be genuine about your struggles and ask others at work about how they manage their schedules. They will be able to empathise and appreciate you being upfront.

3. CREATE A WORK SPACE

Research shows working from home is less stressful when you have a dedicated work area. This helps you mentally and physically separate roles and boundaries.

With younger kids, you may want to have a symbolic boundary, such as a bookshelf or a room divider, so you can still see and hear them.

Invest in a good noise-cancelling headset and an ergonomically-designed desk and table.

Make small traffic-light signs to indicate to young ones when they can and cannot interrupt. Use alarms to give you 10-minute reminders before you need to change gear from work to parenting.

When you are about to transition, write a note on what you want to do when you come back. This will help reduce the spillover of those incomplete tasks into your next activity.

4. BUILD A COMMUNITY

Gather every human and virtual resource you can find to aid mental wellbeing and efficiency. You, your

partner and your kids will need social stimulation beyond each other.

Organise virtual play dates through video chat. Reach out to the parents of your child's classmates to help share the load. Another parent doing a video music class or a virtual art class might free up precious time for you to do something else.

5. LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Don't forget you also need some time to unwind. This is the time to shed guilt and be generous to yourself. Don't beat yourself up for mistakes and missed targets. You are working in a brave new world and it will take time to adjust.

Be patient. Learn from each day by taking note of what worked and what didn't. With time you will find a rhythm that works for you, your partner, your colleagues and the young ones at home.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Ruchi Sinha does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond her academic appointment.

Ruchi Sinha is Senior Lecturer, Organisational Behaviour and Management, University of South Australia.

THE CONVERSATION

Sinha, R (23 March 2020). *6 strategies to juggle work and young kids at home: it's about flexibility and boundaries*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 April 2020.

Child care and early childhood education

A SNAPSHOT FROM THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE

Early childhood education and care programs assist parents with their caring responsibilities. These programs can support the economic and social participation of parents, while helping to ease the transition to full-time school (Warren et al. 2016).

In Australia, early childhood education and care services may be provided by government and non-government organisations. They may be formal or informal.

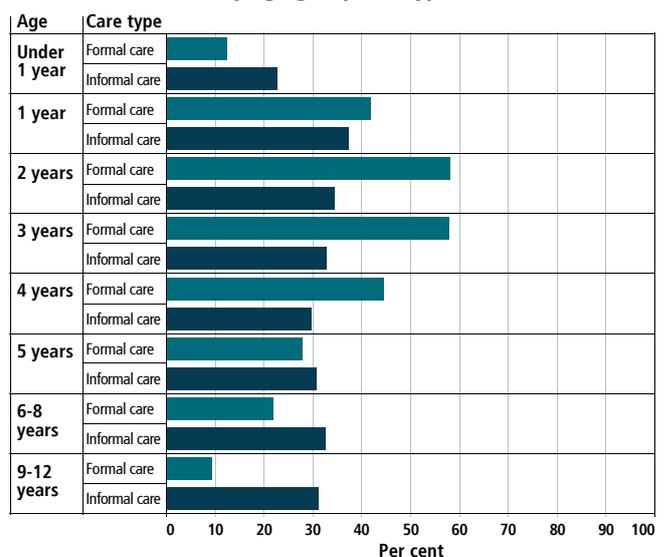
FORMAL AND INFORMAL CARE

Child care can be categorised as formal or informal.

Formal care: The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines formal child care as regulated care away from the child’s home, including:

- Outside school hours care
- Centre-based day care
- Family day care (ABS 2017).

Figure 1: Proportion of children aged 0-12 who usually attended child care, by age group and type of care, 2017



Source: ABS 2018.

Preschool was once considered a type of formal care, however since 2005 the definition of formal care has excluded preschool. Preschool data is collected separately from child care data and is discussed later on this page.

Informal care: The ABS defines informal care as non-regulated care, paid or unpaid. Informal care may be provided by:

- Grandparents
- Other relatives (including siblings and a parent living elsewhere)
- Other people (including friends, babysitters and nannies)
- Other child minding services (for example a crèche) (ABS 2017).

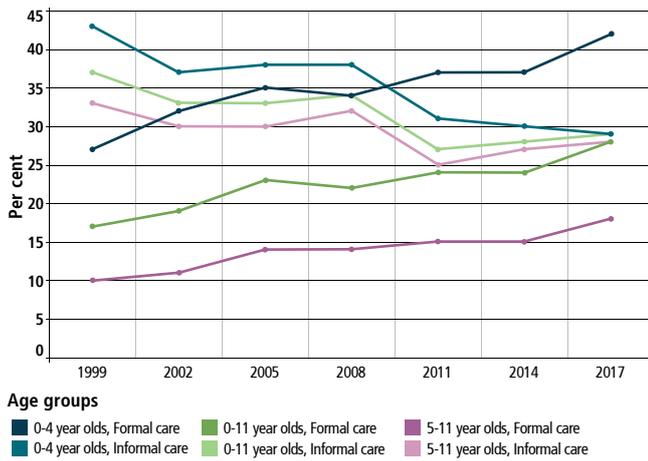
HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE IN CHILD CARE?

In 2017, formal or informal early childhood education and care was a usual form of care for 49% (or 2.0 million) of children aged 0-12 (up from 48% in 2014). Patterns of formal and informal care use varied by age (Figure 1).

- Children less than 1 year of age were more likely to attend informal types of care (23%) than formal types (12%). The same was true of children aged 6-8



Figure 2: Proportion of children aged 0-11 in child care services, by age group and care type, 1999 to 2017



Notes:
 1. Care type is assessed as the type of care attended in the week before survey completion.
 2. Formal care does not include preschool for time series analysis.
 3. Some children attend both formal and informal care and will be counted in each sector.
 Source: ABS 2018.

- (informal 33%, formal 22%) and 9-12 (informal 31%, formal 9.6%).
- Children aged 2, 3, and 4 years were more likely to attend formal types of care (58%, 58%, 45% respectively) than informal types (35%, 33%, and 30% respectively).
- The highest level of overall care attendance was among 2- and 3-year-olds (ABS 2018).

TRENDS

Most children have some exposure to formal, non-parental care and/or early learning before starting school (ABS 2018).

Between 1999 and 2017, the proportion of children aged 0-11 attending formal care increased from 17% to 28% and the proportion in informal care decreased from 37% to 29% (ABS 2018) (Figure 2).

Long day care continues to be the most attended type of formal care for children aged 0-4. The proportion of this cohort attending long day care increased from 18% in 1999 to 35% in 2017 (ABS 2018).

For children aged 5-11, the increase in formal care was driven by an increase in children using before and after school care, up from 8% in 1999 to 15% in 2017 (ABS 2018) (Figure 2).

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND CARE TYPE

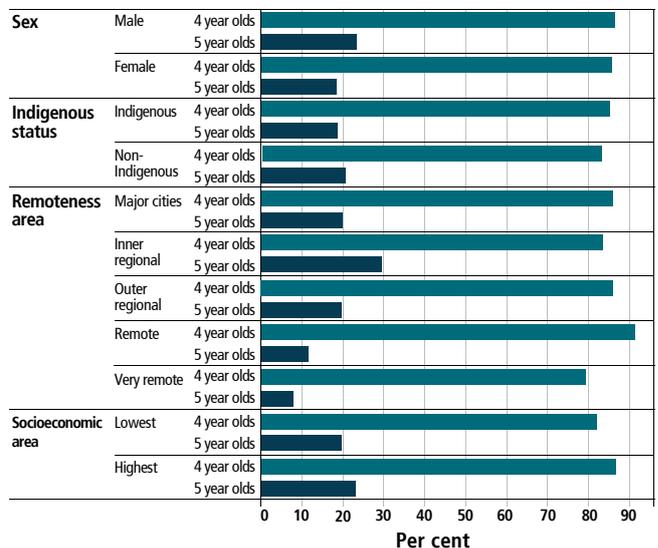
According to the Childhood Education and Care Survey (ABS 2018), of children aged 0-12 in 2017:

- Children from couple families were more likely to attend formal care (28%) than children from one-parent families (24%), and less likely to attend informal care (29% and 45%, respectively). Children from one-parent families were more likely to attend a combination of formal and informal care types (12%) than children from couple families (9%).
- 60% of children from couple families where both parents were employed usually attended care. Among them, 38% used informal care and 35% used formal care.



- 75% of children from one-parent families where the parent was employed usually attended care. Of these, 61% were in informal care, while 34% were in formal care.
- Grandparents were the most common source of child care for couple families (22%). For one-parent families, grandparents and the non-resident parent were an equal source of child care (both 20%).
- 52% of children from couple families and 43% from one-parent families did not usually attend care (ABS 2018).

Figure 3: Proportion of children aged 4 and 5 enrolled in a preschool program, by sex, Indigenous status, remoteness area, and socioeconomic area, 2018



Source: ABS 2019e.

PRESCHOOL PARTICIPATION

Preschool programs aim to meet the learning needs of young children through play-based activities (DET 2018). These programs are generally provided by preschools or centre-based day care services (formerly long day care) in the years before children enter full-time school (Warren *et al.* 2016). Preschool participation is not compulsory and age entry requirements vary across states and territories (ABS 2019c). Preschool subsidies are available in all states and territories (DET 2019).

PRESCHOOL AND CENTRE-BASED DAY CARE

A preschool program can be offered by a preschool or a centre-based day care service.

According to the ABS (2014), preschools deliver a structured educational program to children before they start school. The preschool program can be delivered from a stand-alone facility or the preschool may be integrated or co-located within a school. Preschools can be operated by government or non-government entities.

Centre-based day care services provide child care to children aged 0-5. Services may include delivery of a preschool program by a qualified teacher. Like preschools, centre-based day care can be offered from a stand-alone facility or be co-located within a school. Centre-based day care can also be operated by for-profit and not-for-profit organisations.

Since 2008, the Australian Government has provided funding to assist states and territories to increase preschool participation through the National Partnership Agreements on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (Warren *et al.* 2016). The initiative aims to provide universal access to quality preschool programs for all children in the year before full-time school for 600 hours per year.

In 2018, nearly 342,500 children aged 4-5 were enrolled in a preschool program, an increase from 339,000 in 2017 (ABS 2019b) (Figure 3). More children were enrolled in a preschool program through a centre-based day care service (50%) than a preschool (42%) (ABS 2019b).

Of children aged 4-5 and enrolled in a preschool program:

- Around 275,000 were aged 4 and 68,000 aged 5, representing 86% of all children aged 4 and 21% of all children aged 5
- More than 18,000 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian children (representing 85% of Indigenous 4-year-olds and 19% of Indigenous 5-year-olds). This number is around 5% higher than in 2017 (ABS 2019b)
- Most children (95%) were enrolled for 15 hours per week or more
- About half of children (51%) were enrolled in a program that charged between \$1 and \$4 per hour; around 1 in 5 (22%) in a free program (ABS 2019b).

WHERE DO I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

For more information on early childhood education and care, see:

- ABS, *Childhood Education and Care*, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/PrimaryMainFeatures/4402.0?OpenDocument
- ABS, *Preschool Education*, www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4240.0Main+Features12018?OpenDocument
- Department of Education, *National Partnership Agreement Universal Access to Early Childhood Education*, www.education.gov.au/national-partnership-agreements

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Childhood education and care: key findings

LATEST CHILD CARE DATA FROM THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS



CARE USUALLY ATTENDED

The proportion of children aged 0 to 12 years who usually attended formal and/or informal care decreased from 2011 (52.2%) to 2014 (48.1%) and was about the same in 2017 (49.3%). Breaking this down into the various care arrangements:

- Use of Formal care only (e.g. Long day care) increased slowly from 13.6% in 2011 to 15.3% in 2014, then to 17.4% in 2017.
- Use of Informal care only (e.g. grandparents) decreased slightly from 28.5% in 2011 to 24.5% in 2014, to 22.2% in 2017.
- The proportion of children using a combination of both formal and informal care changed little from 10.1% in 2011, dipping to 8.5% in 2014, then rebounding to 9.7% in 2017.

CARE ATTENDED LAST WEEK

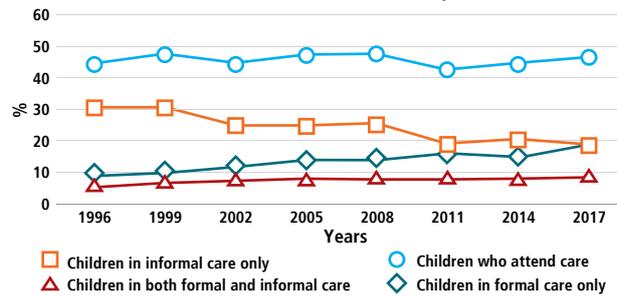
ABS data on the use of care back to 1996 shows little change in the use of care in the week before the survey (*Endnote A*) by children aged 0 to 11 years (*Endnote B*). The proportion of children in care in 1996 was 45% while it was 47% in 2017.

Over this longer time period, some interesting trends include:

- The proportion of children in formal care increased gradually from 9% in 1996 to 19% in 2017.
- The proportion of children in informal care decreased gradually from 31% in 1996 to 19% in 2017.
- The proportion of children using a package of both formal and informal care increased slightly from 6% in 1996 to 9% in 2017.

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Graph 1: Children aged 0 to 11 years who attended formal and/or informal care last week, 1996 to 2017



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2017.



COSTS AND HOURS OF CARE

After adjusting for inflation, the average usual weekly cost of formal care (after subsidies) (*Endnote C*) increased from \$74.30 in 2011 to \$110.50 in 2017, however the average usual weekly hours were about the same over the period.

ENDNOTES

- Prior to 2008 the survey collected data for the child's week prior to the survey (also known as last week). In 2008 the survey collected data for the child's usual week. Some time-series going back to 2008 for the child's usual week are supplemented by time-series going back to 1996 for the child's week prior to the survey (also known as last week).
- Prior to 2005 the survey included families with children aged 0 to 11 years. From 2005 the survey included families with children aged 0 to 12 years. Some time-series going back to 2005 for children aged 0 to 12 years are supplemented by time-series going back to 1996 for children aged 0 to 11 years.
- The subsidies that were available to eligible families were the Child Care Benefit and the Child Care Rebate.

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Australian Bureau of Statistics (23 April 2018). 4402.0 – *Childhood Education and Care, Australia, June 2017* (Last updated 7 June 2018). Retrieved from www.abs.gov.au on 29 April 2020.

Australian families' experience of child care should be a call-to-arms for government

Work-family time and money challenges should be seen by governments as ideal opportunities for good policy-making, suggests **Leah Ruppanner**

Australian parents are disadvantaged by a lack of affordable child care, with child care costs rising by about 145% in real terms since 2002, the latest HILDA study reveals. The annual survey found the majority of Australian parents have experienced child care difficulties over the past year and the costs of child care are an increasing stress.

This is no surprise given that child care costs absorb 27% of household income, with child care costs in Australia among the highest of OECD nations. Compare those costs to a country like Sweden, where child care costs absorb only 5% of the family income, and it is no wonder Australian families feel overwhelmed by the rising and excessive costs of child care.

Perhaps we cannot expect Australia to become Sweden. But we would expect Australia could look like a country like Bulgaria, where child care absorbs 8% of the household income.

Australia has fallen behind most OECD countries in making child care a top priority to help families thrive. So far, the answer from successive governments has been a head-in-the-sand approach leaving families and early childhood learning centres to work out the rising cost of child care.

The child care crisis cannot be solved by asking workers to take lower wages or families to pay more money. The government must step in to help subsidise

the rising cost of child care to support Australian families.

This rise in child care is on top of significant increases in petrol prices, food costs and electricity. So it is little wonder Australian families increasingly feel like they can't keep up – and buying too many avocado toasts does not seem to be to blame.

The child care crisis cannot be solved by asking workers to take lower wages or families to pay more money. The government must step in to help subsidise the rising cost of child care to support Australian families.

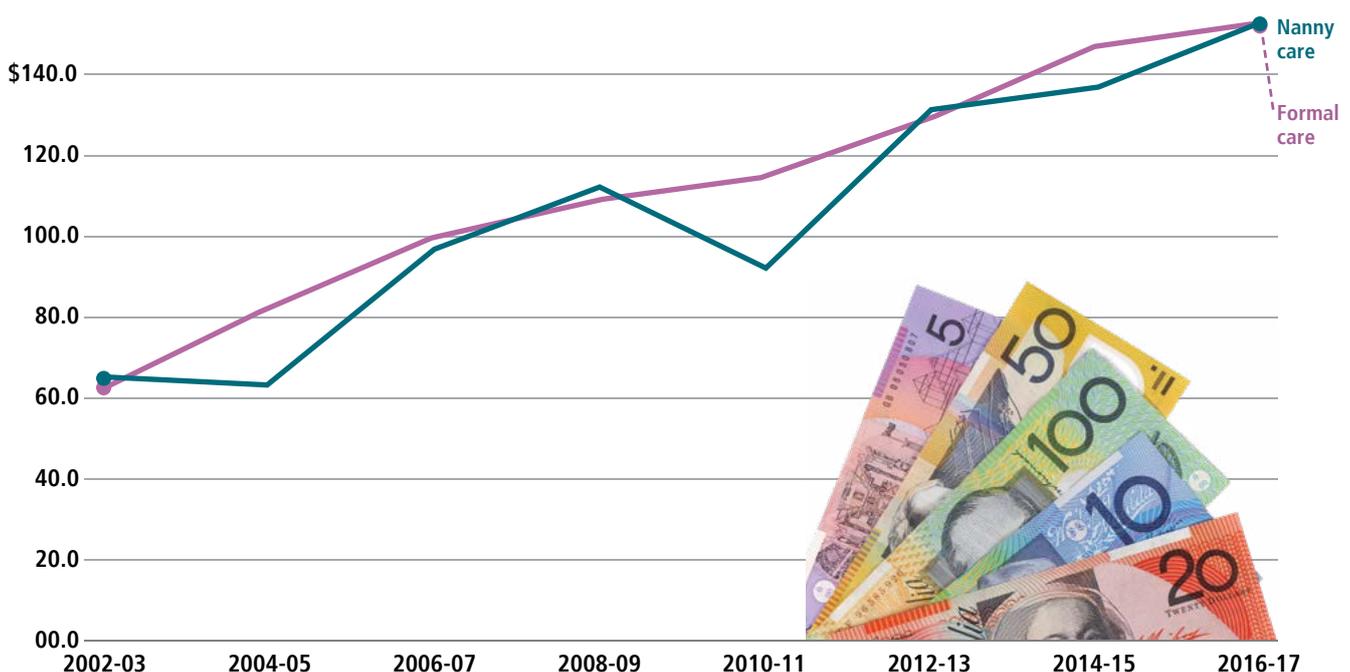
Neither is women's reticence from the labour market. The HILDA study shows women's labour force participation rates have increased to their highest rates since the survey's inception in 2001, as has the number of dual-income couples.

But, women continue to make less money than men, and are less likely to be breadwinners than their male partners. In fact, the HILDA reports that even when women are the family breadwinners, it's only for a short time, with 60% remaining in that position five years later compared to 80% of male breadwinners.

So, these competing realities present a knotty prob-

CHILD CARE COSTS HAVE MORE THAN DOUBLED SINCE 2002

Median weekly expenditure on child care for children not yet at school, by type of care, 2002-2017. December 2017 prices.



Note: Expenditure on child care is after deduction of regular child care benefits.

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lem – women are more attached to the labour market than in the past, yet families feel like they can't keep up. And child care costs are central to this, with many families unable to out-earn the huge dent it places on their household income.

For many Australian families, part-time employment is the solution. Australia has the fourth-highest rate of part-time work rates across the OECD. Mothers are more likely to reduce work time to part-time than fathers (37% against 5%) to buffer the family from rising child care costs.

The consequence of these employment shifts mean mothers perform more child care and housework while fathers' work time is largely constant as children age.

Then, of course, there is the mental load, or the unpaid invisible mental work that women do to ensure husbands have socks for work and children have lunches for school. As the HILDA survey shows, women are assuming the bulk of this work on top of their increased attachment to employment. Thus, it is no wonder that work-family conflict has boomeranged – once higher for fathers, but now experienced more severely for mothers.

The cumulative pressure of all of it and, doing it all right, is disproportionately shouldered by mothers at the expense of their health.

For families, the HILDA report has little good news – child care costs, poverty and anxiety are rising, all while women are more involved in the labour market. While these types of reports can cause one to assume a foetal position in a dark room, there is reason for hope.

Government subsidised, full-time child care is a policy solution that is shown to work. In my forthcoming book, I look at which US states are the most effective in supporting working mothers. The results are clear: reducing child care costs, offering high-quality child

care and extending school days and after-school care are key to effective family policy.

Mothers in these states have the highest employment in the nation and fewer families are below the poverty line. These states provide key policy directions for countries with a void – like Australia.

In Washington D.C., lawmakers expanded government-subsidised child care to cover all children in the district. As a result of this policy, maternal employment rates increased by 12%, with 10% of the increase directly attributable to the program, reducing employment gaps between high and low income mothers.

Extending high-quality child care to a wider population also benefits children, with those in effective programs exhibiting better language skills, fewer behavioural problems and more positive parent-child interactions that extend into their primary school years.

In this regard, the recent HILDA report should be a call to action – for governments to look at work-family challenges as major policy opportunities.

And, legislating high-quality, low-cost government-subsidised child care to all Australian families is the perfect place to start.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Leah Ruppner receives funding from the Australian Research Council.

Leah Ruppner is Associate Professor in Sociology, University of Melbourne.

THE CONVERSATION

Ruppner, L (30 July 2019). *HILDA findings on Australian families' experience of childcare should be a call-to-arms for government.*

Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 April 2020.

Parents prefer more flexible child care options even if it means less taxpayer support

Half the parents receiving Australia's \$8 billion annual subsidy for formal child care would prefer other forms of child care, according to **Centre for Independent Studies** research. And 66% would also be okay with receiving less subsidy if they could spend it on more informal child care.

In *What Do Parents Want? Australian childcare preferences and attitudes*, research co-author Dr Fiona Mueller found parents saw formal child care as very expensive and generally not very flexible.

"50% of the 521 working mothers surveyed nominated a first preference other than formal child care, and instead would prefer informal arrangements such as grandparents, friends and family day care," Dr Mueller said.

"Only 26% of mothers disagreed with the idea of government subsidies being available for informal care, while 66% would prefer this flexibility even if it meant receiving a lower subsidy overall."

So what do parents want? Dr Mueller said 60% of mothers nominated personal 'warmth' of the child care as one of their top three priorities in child care, followed by location (which 56% of mothers had in their top 3) and cost (48%).

"Only 9% said that child care staff qualifications were the most important factor, and only 32% even had it in their top 3 concerns, while only 34% felt that the educational aspect was among the most important factors."

"Yet these factors have driven massive increases in cost in the sector in recent years."

She added that the shift to a focus on early childhood education was impacting on child care cost and availability, making life harder for working mothers.

"Instead, the system should focus on improving mothers' access to jobs," Dr Mueller said.

"For 88% of working mothers, availability and affordability influenced how much they worked," Dr Mueller said.

"We found that 46% of mothers would work more hours if child care were more affordable. The economic and social impact of this increased workforce participation could be substantial.

"The research clearly shows it is crucial for federal and state governments to consider how to offer choice and ensure taxpayer funds are spent effectively.

"A significant number of parents may not feel they are getting value for money through current child care arrangements.

"Taxpayers will spend \$8 billion this year on child care. It is highly regulated and increasingly expensive – with the cost growing on average by 6.5% each year since 2009.

"Of course we all want the best care for our children – what parent doesn't? However the current system is clearly not meeting the needs of half the parents."

To view and download the policy paper, *What Do Parents Want? Australian childcare preferences and attitudes*, go to: www.cis.org.au/publications/policy-papers/what-do-parents-want-australian-childcare-preferences-and-attitudes/

Mueller, F (10 September 2019). *New CIS research: Parents prefer more flexible childcare options even if it means less taxpayer support.*

Retrieved from www.cis.org.au on 29 April 2020.



Quality child care has become a necessity for Australian families, and for society. It's time the government paid up

An Australian family on the average wage typically spends close to A\$6,000 out of pocket per year on child care, a new analysis from the Mitchell Institute shows. This is more than the average cost of sending a child to a private primary school. By Jen Jackson

Unlike the school sector, families don't have the option to choose a low-cost, publicly-delivered child care service. Child care costs in Australia are among the highest in the OECD, eating up around 27% of families' incomes. Many families are being forced to choose affordability over quality.

But research shows quality preschool can deliver \$2 of returns to the economy for every \$1 invested. Children who receive quality early childhood education and care are also up to eight months ahead in learning, with the benefit still evident in adolescence.

If quality early learning delivers public benefits for the country as well as private benefits for families, then there's a strong case for Australian governments to carry a greater share of the cost.

HOW MUCH ARE WE PAYING?

Our analysis shows government spending on early childhood education and care has escalated over the past ten years by around 140%. This means both sides of politics are recognising early learning is a worthwhile investment. But Australia's public investment is still below the OECD average of 0.8% of GDP.

Over the past ten years, families' investment in early childhood services has grown even faster, by about 150%. Governments contribute a far lower share for early learning than what they contribute to schools. A two-parent, one-child Australian family on an average income of A\$85,000 will typically spend around A\$6,000 a year on child care fees, with the government contributing about the same amount.

If that child then goes to a public primary school, the government contributes close to A\$12,000, with minimal costs imposed on the family. Even a private primary school would typically cost the family less than they spend on child care, thanks to almost A\$10,000 per child in government funding.

The early years of life are the most critical period for brain development. Yet Australian governments are under-investing in early learning, preferring to spend millions remediating gaps once children reach the government-funded school system.

INVESTING IN PARENTAL WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

About half of the increase in Australia's investment in early childhood services can be explained by the increase in children attending them. Since the early 1990s, the



Child care costs in Australia are among the highest in the OECD, eating up around 27% of families' incomes. Many families are being forced to choose affordability over quality.

number of children in child care has increased five-fold. Our analysis shows since 2008, participation in child care has increased by around 80%.

Changing family structures have fuelled this rise in demand. In the 1980s, most two-parent families had only one adult in the paid workforce. Now, more than one in five Australian families with young children have both adults in full-time work.

It's not feasible to say this is a private choice, and that the costs of child care should therefore be borne by the family. For many Australian families, costs of living can only be met by both parents working, and accessing child care as cheaply as possible.

The impact of child care costs is greatest for Australia's most vulnerable children and families. Low-income families are likely to spend a much bigger proportion



Research shows quality preschool can deliver \$2 of returns to the economy for every \$1 invested. Children who receive quality early childhood education and care are also up to eight months ahead in learning, with the benefit still evident in adolescence.

of their discretionary income on child care than high-income families – meaning less is leftover for other family essentials.

Other families combine care for children with part-time work. Australia has the fourth-highest rate of part-time work in the OECD, and numbers of part-time workers are growing.

The Australian government recognises that helping families balance work and family life is a worthwhile investment. The child care subsidy is designed to make it easier for families to work, especially working parents on lower incomes.

One problem with subsidies to working families is that children miss out if either parent is unemployed. These children stand to gain most from quality early childhood services, which deliver greatest benefits for children from lower-income homes.

More money to families also enables child care providers to charge more. Education minister Dan Tehan has acknowledged the benefits of the 2018 change to the child care subsidy on costs for families have been swallowed up by fee increases. This suggests Australia needs to invest in early learning more wisely.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN

A smarter investment in early childhood education and care focuses on the benefits for children's learning. This kind of investment ensures all children gain access to quality early childhood services, regardless of what their parents can pay.

In 2009, governments committed to 15 hours of preschool for children in the year before school, recognising this would yield strong public benefits in the long-term.

This investment logic is similar to schools: governments pay, children learn, and the economy and society benefits. Parents can pay extra if they choose, but every child is guaranteed a quality education.

Few people would question this logic for schools, but the Australian government is still holding back from funding preschool long-term. This instability creates inefficiencies. Many preschool staff are on short-term contracts and families are unable to plan their investment in their child's early learning.

Other countries do this better. Australian families might look longingly to Sweden, which provides over 500 hours of free education and care for children aged three to five, and low fees for younger children, matched to families' income. Sweden is in the top five countries for working mums, and top ten for economic competitiveness.

A shift from private to public investment is possible even in early childhood systems more similar to Australia. In Canada, a major review of early childhood funding concluded free preschool from age 2.5 was the fairest solution, above all other options.

The review also found tax deductions (a solution proposed in Australia) favoured middle-income families, but left low-income families behind. This is because they wouldn't earn enough for tax credits to cover the costs of quality education and care.

Whatever the solution, something has to change. As annual government investment in early childhood approaches \$10 billion, and families still struggle under the burden of costs, the longstanding "barbecue stopper" of child care costs needs to become an evidence-based debate about smarter investment.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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THE CONVERSATION

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When it comes to child care, grandparents are the least stressful option for mum and dad

According to research by **Brendan Churchill and Lyn Craig**, the use of informal and family care may lower levels of parenting stress because using one's own family members, such as a grandparent, is similar to co-parenting, as it involves sharing practical and emotional aspects of parenting.

As any mother or father will tell you, being a parent is hard. Being successful at it is highly dependent on the personal and material resources of parents, and the emotional, mental and physical needs of children.

There is a culture of expectation around parents, especially mothers, to be "good" parents, regardless of their children's needs or challenges. Some people find parenting very stressful, which can cause a form of psychological strain known as parenting stress.

What is parenting stress?

Parenting stress can involve feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities, feeling trapped and exhausted, finding parenthood more work than pleasure, and experiencing difficulties in your relationship with your child.

Parenting stress can affect children as well. Children of parents with higher levels of parenting stress have poorer developmental outcomes, are more likely to experience behavioural problems and have strained relationships with them.

What reduces parenting stress?

Much of the research has focused on maternal parenting stress. This is because mothers are more likely to be primary caregivers, even though fathers have become more active in child care.

Research on fathers and parenting stress tends not be on their parenting stress, but on their role in alleviating the mother's parenting stress. Fathers who spend more time with their children, engaging in shared activities, such as reading and playing, have partners with lower levels of maternal parenting stress.

And when fathers take on child-related chores, such as caring for children while their partners are busy, mothers are found to report lower levels of stress.

In short, mothers' parenting stress is lessened when their burden of care is reduced through fathers' active participation in parenting. This is what sociologists call "role delegation": strain can be reduced when social roles or aspects of them can be delegated to someone else.

Can the use of non-parental care reduce parenting stress?

Our research, which uses data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey, looks at whether the use of non-parental care might reduce parenting stress for mothers and fathers in the same way.

It is possible that non-parental care might increase, rather than reduce, parental stress, because of the associated time demands of organising child care. Child care can be unpredictable and unstable, which can affect work-family schedules, creating stress. So, using non-parental care might lead parents to feel pressed for time, which can lead to poorer mental health.

Also, parents are likely to worry about their children's health and wellbeing even when they are in care. The use of child care services can add to stress financially with child care fees costing up to \$30,000





While for some grandparents, caring for their grandchildren is rewarding, is not without its challenges, and grandparents often need a balance between their own lives and care commitments.

a year for some parents.

Our research also looks at whether different types of child care are associated with more or less stress. Australian child care varies by type, covering formal day care and informal arrangements, such as the use of family and friends.

Families also vary in the packages or patterns of usage. For example, some households may use formal-only or a mix of informal and formal child care. Grandparent care is by far the most common form of informal care, and around 40% of grandparents look after their grandchildren at least once a week.

More time spent in child care is more stressful for parents

Our findings show the more time children spend in non-parental care, the greater level of parenting stress experienced by mothers and fathers. This finding is true of both mothers and fathers, which is surprising, given that mothers are often responsible for managing child care.

We argue that while a father can assume the role of primary carer, relieving mothers of full parenting responsibility, replacement care does not relieve parents of role responsibility in the same way.

We found that mothers and fathers who used informal and family care had lower parenting stress scores, indicating less stress, than parents who used other child care packages. Most of the informal and family care provided in our sample was undertaken by grandparents.

Previous research has found informal and family care arrangements, especially grandparent care, has

advantages over other child care packages. It is more flexible and considerably cheaper than formal child care.

The use of informal and family care may lower levels of parenting stress because using one's own family members, such as a grandparent, is similar to co-parenting, as it involves sharing practical and emotional aspects of parenting.

Implications

Child care is critical to mothers' workforce participation, especially impoverished women in developing economies. Yet governments struggle to provide adequate child care support for parents.

Formal care is the most common child care package used in Australia, yet there are numerous issues including quality, cost, and fit. And as our research shows, it does not relieve parents of the stress that informal and family care does.

However, formal child care is beneficial to children. Research has shown that quality early childhood education is linked to better student learning outcomes at later ages. It is also linked to a better start at school: children who attended early child care education programs have better language, reading, numeracy and social skills.

Our results may also explain why many grandmothers provide child care for their families. While for some grandparents, caring for their grandchildren is rewarding, is not without its challenges, and grandparents often need a balance between their own lives and care commitments. Importantly, grandparents are now eligible for a child care benefit.

Grandparent care is not always available, especially as governments try to increase older female workforce participation. If both younger and older women need to increase their workforce participation, there will be increased pressure to use care outside the family.

Thus, governments need to acknowledge the stresses involved and ensure that families can access affordable, conveniently-located care. They must also ensure policies regarding labour force participation are complemented by supportive and flexible high-quality child care.

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THE CONVERSATION

Churchill, B and Craig, L (27 June 2018). *When it comes to childcare, grandparents are the least stressful option for mum and dad.* Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com> on 28 April 2020.

EXPLORING ISSUES

WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES

The Exploring Issues section comprises a range of ready-to-use worksheets featuring activities which relate to facts and views raised in this book.

The exercises presented in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond. Some of the activities may be explored either individually or as a group.

As the information in this book is compiled from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Is the information cited from a primary or secondary source? Are you being presented with facts or opinions?

Is there any evidence of a particular bias or agenda? What are your own views after having explored the issues?

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Brainstorm, individually or as a group, to find out what you know about work and family.

1. What does the term 'family' mean?

2. Explain the term 'work-family conflict'.

3. What is parental leave, and why is it important?

4. What is a family-friendly workplace?

5. What is the difference between formal and informal child care?



Complete the following activities on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

“When it comes to “choices” about parenting responsibilities, the availability of parental leave for fathers and the gender pay gap are still barriers for couples who would otherwise choose to share family responsibilities more equally.”

AIFS, *Bringing up baby: fathers not always able to share the load.*

Form into groups of two or more people to discuss your thoughts on how the gender pay gap and the limitations of parental leave can create barriers for families. Detail your ideas using the spaces below. Discuss and compare your findings with other groups in the class to create a comprehensive list.

GENDER PAY GAP

PARENTAL LEAVE

Consider the findings from the gender pay gap and parental leave discussion activity above. In your groups, or as a class, discuss potential ways that any related parenting stress could be reduced or addressed. In the space below, list the thoughts and ideas from your discussions.



MULTIPLE CHOICE

Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of the following page.

- 1. The decision on how to set a minimum family wage in Australia was made in what year?**
 - a. 1770
 - b. 1884
 - c. 1904
 - d. 1966
 - e. 2000
 - f. 2014

- 2. Which of the following is the *most* common arrangement fathers use to care for children?**
 - a. Part-time work
 - b. Working from home
 - c. Stay-at-home father
 - d. Flexible working hours
 - e. Volunteer work
 - f. Job share

- 3. The median cost of child care has increased by approximately what percentage in the period 2002 to 2017?**
 - a. 1%
 - b. 4%
 - c. 15%
 - d. 45%
 - e. 105%
 - f. 145%

- 4. The cost of child care in Australia is absorbing approximately what percentage of an average family's income?**
 - a. 2%
 - b. 7%
 - c. 12%
 - d. 27%
 - e. 42%
 - f. 71%

- 5. What is the *most* common source of child care for children aged 0 to 12 years in couple families?**
 - a. Nanny
 - b. Workplace creche
 - c. Family day care
 - d. Babysitter
 - e. Grandparents
 - f. Friends

- 6. Research has found that approximately what ratio of stay-at-home fathers in Australia are students?**
 - a. 1 in 2
 - b. 1 in 5
 - c. 1 in 10
 - d. 1 in 15
 - e. 1 in 25
 - f. 1 in 100



MULTIPLE CHOICE

7. Which of the following types of care are classified as formal child care? Select any that apply.

- a. Nanny care
- b. Grandparent care
- c. Family day care
- d. Babysitter care
- e. Centre-based day care
- f. Creche

8. Respond to the following statements by circling either 'True' or 'False':

- a. Preschool participation is compulsory across all states and territories. **True / False**
- b. Census data shows women spend between 5 to 14 hours per week in unpaid domestic work. **True / False**
- c. Census data shows men spend less than 5 hours per week in unpaid domestic work. **True / False**
- d. A recent study has debunked the myth that women are better at multi-tasking by finding women's brains are no more efficient at multi-tasking than men's. **True / False**
- e. Australia does not have a nationally legislated approach to 'shared parental leave' which means fathers are sometimes labelled as secondary carers. **True / False**
- f. Australia ranks higher than most other OECD countries when it comes to family-friendly workplaces. **True / False**

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS

1 = c; 2 = d; 3 = f; 4 = d; 5 = e; 6 = c; 7 = c; 8 = a = F (Preschool participation is not compulsory and age entry requirements vary across states and territories), b = T, c = T, d = T, e = T, f = F (In fact, Australia ranks lower than most other OECD countries when it comes to family-friendly workplaces).

- Studies in countries with paid parental leave, such as Sweden, show that when housework and child care are divided more evenly at the beginning of a child's life, that division is likely to be maintained at a more equitable rate in the longer term, and be associated with women having a higher participation rate in paid work (Williamson, E, *Four home traps that contribute to the gender pay gap*). (p.2)
- Women comprise 47.4% of all employed persons in Australia; 25.8% of all employed persons are women working full-time, and 21.6% are working part-time (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Gender workplace statistics at a glance*). (p.4)
- A recent study shows mothers are more time pressed and report poorer mental health than fathers (Ruppanner, L, *Women aren't better multitaskers than men – they're just doing more work*). (p.7)
- In 1904 the decision about how to set a minimum family wage was made. The wage set was enough for a husband to support a wife and 3 or 4 children at home (Midena, K, *Working mum guilt: is tackling the tension between work and care 'mission impossible'?*). (p.9)
- Australia ranks lower than other OECD countries when it comes to family-friendly workplaces (*ibid*). (p.10)
- While mothers' employment alters dramatically after having a child and for years to come, fathers' employment remains virtually unchanged (AIFS, *Bringing up baby: fathers not always able to share the load*). (p.11)
- The most common arrangement fathers use to care for children is flexible work (30%), followed by working from home (15%), while a few fathers (5%) work part-time (*ibid*). (p.11)
- Australia does not have a nationally legislated approach to "shared parental leave" and as a result fathers are often labelled as secondary carers. Most employers provide limited parental leave for secondary carers, if any at all (*ibid*). (p.11)
- While fathers today may be more involved in child care, for most families the number of hours fathers spend in employment remains the same before and after having children (AIFS, *Fathers and work: a statistical overview*). (p.12)
- Those most at risk of poor mental health were fathers who worked very long hours – more than 50 hours a week – had no access to flexible work arrangements, no job security, no control over their workload and no access to paid family-related leave (AIFS, *Conflict between work and family affects fathers' and children's mental health*). (pp. 14-15)
- Men are doing more housework than they once did: an average of 13.3 hours per week in 2016, up from 12.4 hours in 2002. But the lion's share of housework and child care still falls to women – and it's mums who shoulder the largest burden of unpaid work of all (Jennings-Edquist, G, *How to even up housework with your partner*). (p.16)
- In traditional 'man-as-breadwinner' family arrangements with children, women do 72.8% of the housework and 70% of child care, on average (*ibid*). (p.16)
- According to a study of families here and in America, Britain and Denmark, fathers who had taken paternity leave are more likely to feed, dress, bathe and play with their child after their leave ended (*ibid*). (p.17)
- Although the overall number of stay-at-home fathers remains low, they are estimated to have risen from 68,500 (4.2%) of couple families with children in 2011 to around 80,000 (4.6%) in 2016, based on Census figures. By contrast, there are 498,900 families with stay-at-home mothers (Baxter, J, *Stay-at-home fathers*). (p.18)
- In 2017, Australian mothers who were also the primary earners of a household spent 24.1 hours on housework and 19.3 hours on child care compared to their male counterpart who spent 15.3 hours on housework and 10.9 hours on child care per week (Parents At Work, *National Working Families Report 2019*). (p.19)
- Employers can and do provide additional paid parental leave to employees, however less than 50% of private sector organisations with over 100 employees offer any additional paid parental leave provisions (*ibid*). (p.20)
- Parenting couples who experience constant high levels of work-family conflict are 50% more likely to separate than those facing less work-family conflict (*ibid*). (p.20)
- Australia underperforms on work-life balance indicators and compared to the majority of other OECD countries, our paid parental leave progress has stalled (*ibid*). (p.22)
- More women are working than ever before, with their employment rate rising to 71% in 2017 (Gartry, L, and Lloyd, M, *Working mothers more stressed than fathers as cost of child care skyrockets, HILDA survey shows*). (p.23)
- The median cost of child care for children not yet in school rose by around 145% in the 2002-2017 period (*ibid*). (p.23)
- Since paid parental leave was introduced in 2010 and dad-and-partner pay in 2013, we've seen alarmingly little progress in the work-and-care policy space (Hill, E, et.al., *Kids, not gender, the biggest influence on work/care policy attitudes*). (p.37)
- Between 1999 and 2017, the proportion of children aged 0-11 attending formal care increased from 17% to 28% and the proportion in informal care decreased from 37% to 29% (AIHW, *Child care and early childhood education*). (p.41)
- Of children aged 4-5 and enrolled in a preschool program most children (95%) were enrolled for 15 hours per week or more (*ibid*). (p.42)
- Mothers are more likely to reduce work time to part-time than fathers (37% against 5%) to buffer the family from rising child care costs (Ruppanner, L, *HILDA findings on Australian families' experience of child care should be a call-to-arms for government*). (p.45)
- Child care costs in Australia are among the highest in the OECD, eating up around 27% of families' incomes. Many families are being forced to choose affordability over quality (Jackson, J, *Quality child care has become a necessity for Australian families, and for society. It's time the government paid up*). (p.47)

Child care

There are four options for child care in Australia: home-based care, centre-based care, family day care, and outside school hours care. Child care is also known as early childhood education and care, and is mainly designed for children up to five years, but also includes care for primary school-age children.

Dependent children

All family members under 15 years of age; family members aged 15-19 years attending school or aged 15-24 years attending a tertiary educational institution full-time (except husbands, wives or lone parents).

Domestic duties

These include housework such as food preparation, service and clean-up; washing, ironing and clothes care; indoor cleaning and tidying activities; domestic management; home and car maintenance and improvement, pet care; and care of the grounds.

Family

Two or more persons, one of whom is aged 15 years and over, who are related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering; and who are usually resident in the same household.

Family-friendly workplace provisions

Provisions negotiated between an employer and its employees which may include: accessing annual leave in single or part-day periods; taking time off in lieu of overtime payments; working additional hours to make up for time taken off; accessing accrued rostered days off in part-days or more flexibly; enabling children to access the workplace (where safe) or providing a carer's room, child care facilities or information about where parents can access these facilities near their workplace; working part-time or creating part-time work opportunities; job share arrangements; and telecommuting or home-based work.

Formal care

Regulated care away from the child's home. Main types of formal care include: before and/or after school care, long day care, family day care, occasional care, preschool.

Gender pay gap

The difference between women's and men's average weekly full-time equivalent earnings, expressed as a percentage of men's earnings (currently around 14% for full-time work in Australia). It is a measure of women's overall position in the paid workforce and does not compare like roles. Gender pay gaps in favour of men are a common feature of economies worldwide.

Informal care

Non-regulated care, arranged by a child's parent/guardian, either in the child's home or elsewhere. It comprises care by brothers or sisters (including step siblings), care by grandparents, care by other relatives (including a parent living elsewhere), care by other people such as friends, neighbours, nannies or babysitters.

Non-dependent children

In couple or one-parent families, sons or daughters who are aged over 15 years and who are not full-time students aged 15-24 years (except those classified as husbands, wives or lone parents).

Parental leave

Parental leave policies are designed to support and protect working parents around the time of childbirth or adoption of a child and when children are young. The availability of paid parental leave for each parent fosters a more equal division of unpaid care and paid work, improving the family work-life balance.

Work

Work is a physical or mental effort or activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something; it can be both paid and unpaid. *Paid work* is work activity undertaken for remuneration/salary in the production of goods or services in the marketplace. It also includes work activity undertaken without pay in a family business, as well as travel associated with work activity. *Unpaid work* includes household or community work activity undertaken without pay (excluding in a family business) that could be replaced by market goods or paid services. It includes: volunteering/other community work undertaken without pay, domestic work, child care, informal care of older people/people with disability, shopping, and communication and travel associated with these activities.

Work-family conflict

Occurs when an individual experiences incompatible demands between work and family roles, causing participation in both roles to become more difficult.

Work-life balance

Relates to the extent that employees are able to balance the demands of their work with family and social commitments.

Working arrangements used to care

Working arrangements used to care for someone include: paid leave, unpaid leave, flexible working hours, rostered days off, working from home, informal arrangements with employer, or taking a child into work.

Workplace flexibility

A flexible work arrangement is an agreement between a workplace and an employee to change the standard working arrangement to better accommodate an employee's commitments out of work. Flexible working arrangements usually encompass changes to the hours, pattern and location of work. Flexibility is becoming increasingly important for all employees as employees and managers balance competing priorities in life. Flexibility in work can be a number of different things, including: telework or working from home, flexible hours, compressed working weeks, and job sharing.

Websites with further information on the topic

ABC News (*Life*) www.abc.net.au/life
 Advancing Parental Leave Equality Network www.aplen.com.au
 Australian Bureau of Statistics www.abs.gov.au
 Australian Institute of Family Studies <https://aifs.gov.au>
 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare www.aihw.gov.au
 Fair Work Ombudsman www.fairwork.gov.au
 First Five Years www.firstfiveyears.org.au
 Parentline www.parentline.com.au
 Parents At Work <https://parentsandcarersatwork.com>
 Raising Children Network www.raisingchildren.net.au
 Services Australia (Australian Government) www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/families
 The Conversation Australia <https://theconversation.com/au>
 Workplace Gender Equality Agency www.wgea.gov.au

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