

EMBARGOED RELEASE: 2017 Modern Families Index identifies a workplace that is stifling fathers' aspirations

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The UK is running the risk of creating a 'fatherhood penalty' - as fathers consider stalling or side-lining their careers to find roles they can better combine with family life, according to a major new study.

The *2017 Modern Families Index*, published today by work-life charity Working Families and Bright Horizons, captures a broad picture – of fathers wanting to take an active part in childcare and of workplaces failing to adapt and support their aspirations.

Family is the highest priority for fathers. A quarter of fathers that took part in the study drop their children at school or nursery every day; with just over a quarter (26%) collecting them more than half the time.

Seven out of ten fathers work flexibly to fulfil their caring responsibilities. However, for half of the fathers we spoke to their work-life balance is increasingly a source of stress. A third of fathers feel burnt out regularly and one in five fathers are doing extra hours in the evening or weekends all the time.

The study identifies workplace culture in the UK as a key problem. Fathers say they work extra hours because this is the only way to deal with their workload and that being seen to do long hours is important where they work. Tellingly, twice the number of fathers compared to mothers believe that flexible workers are viewed as less committed and that working flexibly will have a negative impact on their career.

For many fathers the workplace is unsupportive of their aspirations for a better work-life fit. For nearly one fifth, their employer is, at best, unsympathetic about childcare, expecting no disruption to work. At worst they say they wouldn't even tell their employer they had childcare problems - for fear of being viewed negatively. It's telling that a whopping 44% of fathers have lied or bent the truth to their employer about family related responsibilities that 'get in the way' of work.

But the study found seven out of ten fathers say that they would consider their childcare needs before taking a new job or a promotion. Fathers are making the same considerations and face the same barriers to their career progression that mothers have faced for decades simply because they have become a parent. The evidence is parents are feeling the pressure:

Nearly half of working fathers (47%) want to downshift into a less stressful job because they can't balance the demands of work and family life;

Just over a third of fathers (38%) say that they would be willing to take a pay cut to achieve a better work-life balance.

The study suggests that this risks creating a 'fatherhood penalty' [3] - with more fathers compromising career-wise, following a career that is below their skill set and reducing their earnings.

The study suggests this risk isn't going away - with these considerations being particularly pronounced for millennial fathers:

53% of millennial fathers want to downshift into a less stressful job because they can't balance the demands of work and family life

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48% of millennial fathers admitted that they would be willing to take a pay cut to achieve a better work-life balance.

Sarah Jackson, Chief Executive of Working Families, said:

“To prevent a ‘fatherhood penalty’ emerging in the UK - and to help tackle the motherhood penalty - employers need to ensure that work is designed in a way that helps women and men find a good work-life fit. Making roles flexible by default and a healthy dose of realism when it comes to what can be done in the hours available are absolutely vital.

“A game-changing first step would be government creating a new, properly paid, extended period of paternity leave - sending clear signal that government recognises the aspirations of modern fathers and is serious about tackling the motherhood penalty that blights the working lives of so many women.”

Denise Priest, Director of Employer Partnerships at Bright Horizons, said:

“It’s clear that the reconciliation of work and family life is now a priority for both mothers and fathers. It is impossible to overstate the positive impact of an understanding and supportive employer - one that adapts to its employees’ needs so that they can progress in their careers. Leading employers are those that protect their employees from parental penalties and provide optimum work and care arrangements.”

In March 2016, the Women and Equalities Committee published a report of its inquiry into the Gender Pay Gap which found that sharing care equally between fathers and mothers is the key to reducing the Gender Pay Gap. Following this, the Committee has today launched a new inquiry into Fathers and the Workplace and is asking whether fathers are being failed by workplace policies. The Committee will be taking written submissions via its website until 1 March 2016.

Maria Miller MP, Chair of the Women and Equalities Select Committee said:

“The Modern Families Index shines a much-needed light on the experiences of British fathers in the workplace. Many fathers want to take a more active role in caring for their children and our Committee’s inquiry into the Gender Pay Gap last year found that sharing caring responsibilities equally between mothers and fathers is the key to reducing the Gender Pay Gap. However, the Government’s flagship policy of Shared Parental Leave is likely to have little impact as it is predicted by the Government to have a take-up rate of just 2-8%.

“We are now launching a new inquiry into Fathers and the Workplace to look at whether fathers are getting the support they need in the workplace to fulfil their caring responsibilities. We look forward to hearing from Working Families and others as we conduct this Inquiry.”

Some further data from the report:

More than a third of parents (36%) said they would take a pay cut to work fewer hours;

72% of parents work at home in the evenings and at weekends, with 41% saying this happens often or all the time;

50% of parents agreed ‘my work life balance is increasingly a source of stress’;

Almost half of parents are not comfortable raising the issue of workload and hours with their employers;

Almost a fifth of parents reported that their employers were unsympathetic toward their childcare responsibilities, with 11% saying their employers made no allowances.

ENDS

For more information, or interview or case study requests please contact the Working Families Press Office: press@workingfamilies.org.uk 07715 651 509

Notes to the editors:

1. The *Index* provides a snapshot into the lives of working families from across the UK. It was completed by 2,750 parents across the UK in 2016. Responses were gathered online across 11 regions, with 250 responses from each region. To take part respondents needed to be in paid employment (full or part time) or self-employed, and to have a dependent child aged 13 or under who lives with them some or all of the time. 54% of respondents had one child under 13, with 33% having two children under 13. The remaining 13% had three or more children under 13. The survey had an almost equal number of respondents by gender. No selection criteria were attached to relationship status, allowing both couple and single parent households to complete the questionnaire.

2. The Fawcett Society provide a useful definition of the 'motherhood penalty' and its consequences. Women subject to it are "more likely to work part time, to be in low skilled jobs and (to make) up two thirds of the low paid. This motherhood penalty is at the core of the gender pay gap, currently 13.9% for full time workers. Women are the majority of part time workers; yet average hourly pay for part time work is 30% less than for full time pay." *Parents, work and care: Striking the balance, Fawcett Society, March 2016*

3. Men in the study generally earned more than women. As the TUC have shown, fathers do not currently earn less than their peers. When contrasted with the 'motherhood penalty', fathers who work full time currently experience a wage 'bonus' - earning 22 per cent more than similar men without children who are working full-time at age 42. *Pay and Parenthood: An analysis of wage inequality between mums and dads TUC, 2016*

About Working Families

Working Families is the UK's leading work-life balance charity. We support and advocate on behalf of working parents and carers, and work with employers to create workplaces which encourage work-life balance for everyone. Working Families provides a range of support for parents and carers, including through our legal advice service.

www.workingfamilies.org.uk

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About Bright Horizons Family Solutions

Bright Horizons® is the UK's leading provider of early years care and education, with over 300 nurseries in the UK and Ireland. We care for over 25,000 children each week and have over 100 corporate clients for whom we manage workplace nurseries and broader dependent care services.

We believe that by being an employer of choice, we are a natural partner of choice for our clients, and we have been recognised as one of the Best UK Workplaces since 2006 and achieved a Gold Award from RoSPA every year since 2011.

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