

# Working mothers face pay and childcare challenges, reports find

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**Source:** The Guardian

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 22 Apr 2017

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Whether it's the gender pay gap, a lack of promotion opportunities or the demand from retailers to work longer shifts – often standing at checkouts for 10 hours straight – life can be tough for women in the shop trade.

For mothers it can be even worse, whatever industry they choose and in whichever part of the country they look for work.

A TUC report last year found there was an overall gender pay gap of 34% for full-time working mothers who were born in 1970 and had their children before the age of 33. The time out from work on maternity leave before they had established themselves in skilled or senior roles effectively killed their chances of advancement, or at best restricted them, the report said.

A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research this month found that the cost of childcare had risen to the point where some parents in low-income families effectively “pay to work”. The thinktank blamed a lack of support under the current system of tax credits as much as it did spiralling nursery charges.

The report said a woman with a partner and two children who works fewer than 16 hours a week and earns the government's “national living wage” of £7.50 an hour would see her childcare costs overwhelm her earnings, leading to a net loss.

This situation is also common for women on higher hourly rates when they live in high-cost areas like London. The IPPR said the capital had the lowest maternal employment rate in the country and urged mayor Sadiq Khan to lobby the government for extra subsidies to plough back into childcare facilities. Metro mayors due to be elected next month in Manchester and the West Midlands will find parents in their areas facing similar difficulties.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation asked last year whether self-employment was a possible route out of low-paid work, particularly for women. It found the government needed to put in place much more support before people with lower skills – such as former BHS workers – could make the leap. It also highlighted research by the Social Market Foundation that revealed four out of five low-paid workers remained stuck in low pay even after 10 years in self-employment.

But a study by NatWest suggested that while overall interest in starting a business has risen this year, having fallen to a historical low in the run-up to and aftermath of the Brexit vote, the gender gap remains firmly in place. Its research revealed that men are still significantly more likely than women to want to set up their own business.

Sixteen per cent of men say that they want to start their own business compared to 12% of women, the majority of women saying they were discouraged from doing so because of a lack of inspiring role models.

-reprinted from The Guardian

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