

# The mom-dad 'work gap' <sup>[1]</sup>

Mothers still doing less paid work than fathers

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## EXCERPTS:

In 2012 many Mother's Day headlines focused on the fact that mothers still do more child care and housework than fathers. This year, the Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being at the University of Guelph has flipped that question to ask: Why are mothers still doing less paid work than fathers?

Even in this age of gender role convergence and the steadily increasing participation of mothers in the workforce, one persistent difference remains between mothers and fathers. On average, mothers do less paid work, and, yes, more unpaid work, than fathers.

Consider the following statistics:

During the prime parenting years (ages 25-44) women are much more likely than men to work part-time - 20 per cent vs. 6 per cent.

In dual-earner couples with one partner employed part-time, 95 per cent of the time the woman is the one with the part-time job.

Even when mothers work full-time they tend to work fewer hours than fathers: 35 hours a week for mothers versus 46 hours a week for fathers (including commuting time).

Full-time employed mothers are less likely than full-time working fathers to work 40 hours or more a week (44 per cent vs. 49 per cent).

What are mothers doing with that 11-hour per week difference in paid work time? You guessed it: more unpaid work, in the form of child care, cooking, cleaning, shopping, and other domestic tasks. Although fathers are spending considerably more time on child care and housework than they were 30 years ago, mothers do an average of 38 hours a week of unpaid work compared to 27 hours for fathers.

What accounts for these gaps in mothers' and fathers' paid and unpaid work?

There is some evidence to suggest that many families with two employed parents want to have a parent at home when children are young, at least some of the time. One in three mothers who work part-time give child care responsibilities as the reason for doing so, compared to only one in 25 part-time working fathers. And a European study showed sharp increases in mothers' employment once their youngest child reaches the age of primary school.

Similar dynamics quite likely apply to the employment patterns of Canadian mothers. Parents with young children are striving to fulfil their responsibilities for providing economically for their families and providing the best care for their children. Three-quarters of the time, that involves both parents working outside the home. But very often, one partner devotes less time to paid work in order to spend more time at home. As the above statistics show, it is usually Mom who opts for less paid work and more unpaid work.

The inevitable questions arise: Should mothers "lean in" more? Should society be doing more to close the gap so that the paid work hours of mothers become the same as those of dads? Ultimately these questions are personal, political, and complex.

But employment statistics can only tell us so much. Simply knowing if a mother is employed or not, whether full or part-time, tells us very little about the quality of her work - how fulfilling it is, how well it matches her education, skills and aspirations, and how well workplace culture and practices support her in managing work and care for family members. And it tells us even less about the quality of supports available for parenting and child care, and whether she is comfortable with her options for combining her roles as earner and mother.

These issues are even more pressing for the many Canadian single mothers who do not have a partner to share responsibilities for earning and caring or in families that face extra challenges such as caring for a family member with a disability.

So in the end, the contemporary question about working mothers is not "Should mothers be involved in paid work or not?" That question has largely been answered. The real question is, "What can governments, employers and communities do to better support mothers and fathers in their crucial roles as workers, providers, builders of society, and caregivers to the young, elderly and ill?"

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[3]</sup>

mother's labour force participation <sup>[4]</sup>

work/life balance <sup>[5]</sup>

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