

Modern families index 2016^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF^[2]

About the Modern families index

The Modern families index is intended to provide a snapshot of family life in the UK today. In particular, it focuses on how families combine work and family life, and how successfully parents feel they are combining family and work in the way that they want to. The Index is not intended to be an exhaustive, descriptive account of every aspect of family life and work - rather it examines the points where the two come together; time spent together (and the quality of that time), aspirations for family life, the way that work accommodates family responsibility and access to family and work integration are some of the factors examined. The Index asks some questions about income and financial wellbeing, but for a more detailed description of family income other researchers have covered this ground in much more detail. In particular, the Index looks at parents of different ages, and one of the key questions each year is to examine whether there are differences between parents of different ages in both how they arrange work and family life, and whether their aspirations for integration and their opportunities to make this a reality differ.

Key findings summary

- More parents are working full-time. For these parents, the traditional dominant arrangement of a father working full-time and a mother working part-time is receding. In 49 per cent of couple households both parents are working full-time.
- Seniority allows for flexible working. There is evidence that people on higher incomes are more likely to work flexibly: nearly 80 per cent of those earning between £50,000 and £70,000 reported they are able to access flexible working. Only 50 per cent of those earning less than £30,000 did.
- Parents continue to put in extra hours just to get the job done. In some cases an additional ten hours a week – this is almost 74 days a year for someone contracted to work seven hours per day.
- Working parents are increasingly feeling “burnout”. This is due to the toll of family and work obligations. A third of parents (29 per cent) reported being burned out often or all the time – and 4 many take annual or sick leave to cope. Family life is a priority for most parents, but work consistently impinges. This prevents parents from helping children with homework or putting them to bed. Forty per cent said this happened regularly.
- Millennial parents (aged 16-35) are the more likely to both work full-time, work flexibly and share caring responsibilities. However, millennials are struggling to maintain these commitments and it is millennial parents who are particularly prone to burnout. In addition:
- Millennials are the most likely to say they would like to downshift and the most willing to take a pay cut to find a better balance. The idea of career progression characterised by long hours and sacrifice of family life is less prominent in their mind-set.
- From an employer perspective this poses questions about engagement, loyalty and performance: how will work have to be configured to meet the expectations of millennials? For policy makers there are also questions: how can compatible flexibility be supported, and how can barriers to equal share of care be addressed and removed? How, effectively, can policy be designed to work with the grain of the work-life fit aspirations and needs of young families?
- There is a muted response to the government’s proposed increase in free childcare. Parents aren’t planning substantial changes in response to the planned increase in government support for childcare. Only 14 per cent said it would have a significant impact on their plans.
- For women, recruitment and childcare go hand-in-hand. Women remain more likely than men to consider childcare responsibilities before taking a new job: over 60 per cent of women strongly agree that they would need to do this compared to 36 per cent of men.
- Fathers are doing more. More than one in five fathers now say they share care, with younger parents the most likely to report working flexibly and sharing family responsibilities. But gendered work expectations still persist: mothers remain the first port of call when childcare breaks down by a factor of two to one.
- A mother’s work is never done. Although all parents prioritise spending time with children when getting home from work, traditional gender roles still persist in the home. For example, mothers (nearly 45 per cent) are more likely than fathers (just under 25 per cent) to start doing domestic chores straight away.

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: work-life balance ^[4]

families ^[5]

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