

## **WORK-LIFE CONFLICT TAKES A TOLL ON PERSONAL WELLBEING: 2019 NATIONAL WORKING FAMILIES REPORT**

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A new national survey has found 62 per cent of parents and carers report difficulties looking after their own physical and mental health as they try to balance competing work and family pressures.

The study also found about one-third of parents reported that the combination of work and family responsibilities contributed to stress and tension in the relationship with their partners and with their children.

Initial findings from the *National Working Families Report*, to be released today, analysed data from more than 6,000 Australian parents and carers. The survey was commissioned by Parents At Work with the support of a national network of employers and parenting advocacy group, Karitane.

Parents At Work CEO, Emma Walsh, said that the majority of working parents and carers reported difficulty striking the right balance between their work and family commitments.

“These stresses have important implications for both families and employers. One in four parents and carers reported an increased intention to leave their jobs in the next 12 months, because they struggle to combine caring with their job,” she said.

“Two-thirds of working parents and carers reported struggling to look after their own physical and mental health, and that’s a startling statistic by anyone’s measure. Working parents and carers also find it difficult to manage household chores and caring for family.

“Half of all women and one-third of men who were parenting or caring reported they were under a lot or a great deal of stress when juggling work and family roles.

“Two-thirds reported feeling too emotionally or physically drained when they got home from work to contribute to their family and half had missed out on family activities in the past month, due to time they had to spend at work.”

Ms Walsh said most individuals reported that their job helped them feel personally fulfilled but highlighted the need for more support to better manage the pressures of work and care demands.

“Top priorities included a need for more flexibility over when and where they worked, reduction in job pressure and overall workload and help with care services such as having access to child care at work, or being offered child care rebates from their employer,” she said.

“Individuals also reported wanting more role models or ‘champions’ that foster a family-friendly workplace culture as well as personal health and well-being and parenting education programs at work.

“When it comes to the gender divide, the report found that women continue to carry the ‘caring load’ and that employers could do more to support men to use flexible work and parental leave.

“This means employers need to address the financial, social and cultural barriers that prevent men sharing the caring load to level the playing field for both women and men to contribute at work and home.”

Parent and child health care services provider, Karitane CEO, Grainne O’Loughlin said parents taking stress home from work impacts on their personal and family wellbeing, particularly when there is a lack of employer support.

“Parenting can be stressful and with the added pressures of working it can have a profound impact on the individual and on the child,” she said.

“This report found half of all parents returning to work after parental leave report significant fatigue; a third are worried and anxious; and one in five report feeling depressed. We need to find ways to better support parents and families at this crucial time.”

Additional key findings in the report include:

### **Access and attitudes to flexible work**

- Flexible work is still seen as being primarily for women, with more than two thirds of survey respondents agreeing that it is more acceptable for women to use family-friendly work options than men.
- Men faced more barriers accessing flexible work citing the impact on their career and reputation, how it would be perceived by their employer or colleagues and whether they could afford it.
- Those not using flexible working arrangements were concerned about negative career impacts if they did use flexible work.
- Others were concerned their supervisor would be reluctant to allow them to take up flexible working arrangements even if offered by the organisation.
- One-third of parents and carers reported having missed out on opportunities for promotion due to their use of flexible work, although this was more common for women (35 per cent), than men (14 per cent).
- Nearly half of all respondents (46 per cent) said that a worker’s commitment to their job was questioned if they used family-friendly work arrangements.

### **Access and attitudes to paid parental leave**

- Most parents (85 per cent) reported that paid parental leave was offered at their workplaces and around half of all mothers and fathers had accessed all or part of the parental leave benefit.
- However, more than half of fathers (57 per cent) and one-third of mothers reported the leave was ‘too short’.
- Financial reasons were the most common explanations for parents not using longer paid leave.
- On return from parental leave, 28 per cent of mothers stayed with their employer but reported changes to their job. In comparison, 96 per cent of fathers returned to their same employer and only 6 per cent reported any job change.
- One in three mothers (34 per cent) missed out on an opportunity for promotion due to their use of paid parental leave, as did 11 per cent of fathers.
- Twenty-three per cent of mothers and 13 per cent of fathers reported receiving negative comments from managers and supervisors for using paid parental leave.

For more information about Parents At Work and the *2019 National Working Families Report* go to: [www.aplen.pages.ontraport.net/WorkingFamiliesReport2019](http://www.aplen.pages.ontraport.net/WorkingFamiliesReport2019)

Parents At Work is a social enterprise supporting parents and organisations to better manage the challenges that employees face when balancing work and family life. The 2019 National Working Families Report is a not-for-profit initiative spearheaded by Parents At Work and employer advocacy group APLEN (Advancing Parental Leave Equality Network) sponsored by Karitane, Deloitte, QBE, Baker McKenzie, KPMG, IKEA and HSBC.

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