NATIONAL WORKING FAMILIES REPORT 2019

Executive Summary and Key Findings
Competing pressures of work and caring responsibilities is impacting the wellbeing of Australian working families.

Work-life balance pressures not only present a significant challenge for individuals and the families they care for, they have implications for employers and the wider community in which we all live and work.

In July 2019, Parents At Work launched the inaugural National Working Families Survey with the support of parenting health care provider, Karitane, and not-for-profit employer group APLEN (Advancing Parental Leave Equality Network).

Parents and carers across Australia were asked about the impact of managing work and caring responsibilities to better understand their future work needs.

More than 6,000 parents and carers from around Australia completed the survey.

This summary report reveals the key findings and considers how workplaces can provide men and women equal opportunities to fulfil their work and family responsibilities.

The results clearly reveal that parents and carers across Australia are finding it difficult to balance their work and family commitments and report their personal wellbeing and family relationships suffer as a result.

Increasingly, employees want to work for organisations that recognise and support their outside of work responsibilities. And the study firmly confirms this.

Parents and carers reported that their job did help them feel personally fulfilled, but they want additional measures to help them better manage work, family and care demands. It suggests that current workplace flexible work policies, parental leave and caring support is falling short.
While many organisations have flexible work and parental leave policies in place to support parents and carers, the effective implementation and embedding of those policies vary.

Workplace culture, job expectations/workload and the personal work-life attitudes of managers remain key to implementing flexible work and other caring policies.

The study found nearly half of all participants said that a worker’s commitment to their job was questioned if they used family-friendly work arrangements.

Employers must be willing to confront and tackle stigma, discrimination and gender bias associated with caring for children, working part-time or flexibly. This means investing in and creating a workplace environment that is inclusive and respectful of the fact employees have both work and family commitments.

When employees are adequately supported to meet these dual commitments their ability to thrive increases – this is good for families, business and society.

As women continue to be expected to take on the lion’s share of caring responsibilities, the future of women’s wellbeing, career advancement and financial security remains at risk if we fail to invest in creating family friendly workplaces.

Equally, workplaces must make it more accessible and acceptable for men to lean in to caring by normalising men taking time to raise children or to care for others in their family.

The primary earner ‘breadwinner’ versus primary carer ‘caregiver’ stereotypes persist and are limiting.

Australia underperforms on work-life balance indicators and compared to the majority of other OECD countries and paid parental leave progress has stalled.

UNICEF is calling on all nations and organisations to invest in family-friendly policies and is urging government and business to take more action.

The future of work must respond to the changing nature of modern family life and increasing caring demands to ensure families, the community and economy can thrive.

Emma Walsh
CEO and Founder
Parents At Work
About the Survey

Participants

A total of 6289 Australian parents and carers completed the survey, from NSW (56%), Victoria (22%) and Queensland (11%). The remainder were spread across each of the other states and territories.

80% of participants identified as women, compared to 19% men and 1% non-binary.

The majority of participants (89%) had children under 18 years of age and 60% of those had two children.

Most participants were in a dual-earner household (80%) and 56% were in full-time employment.

More women than men were in part-time employment (37% compared to 7.5% respectively), reflecting the persistently gendered division of labour in Australia, particularly among those with caring and parenting responsibilities.

The Survey

The survey was developed in consultation with key partners and with advice from academic researchers. It was designed to address the following research questions:

1. Overall, how are parents and carers feeling about their current work and family juggle?
2. What are the key challenges and priorities for parents and carers?
3. Are our current workplace policies and practices enough to support families at work?

In addressing these questions, the survey asked working parents and carers about how they are managing their work and family commitments; the impact it has when balancing work and family becomes a challenge; and what employers are doing and could do to better support them.

Participants were also asked about their access to and use of flexible work arrangements and paid parental leave.
PARTICIPANTS WERE FROM A DIVERSE RANGE OF INDUSTRIES AND OCCUPATIONS:

- All 18 Australian industry categories were represented in the survey.
- The most common industries represented were professional, scientific and technical services (27%); health care and social assistance (12%); Education and training (8%), and Information and technology (6%).

- One third were managers (35%); half were professionals (46%); and a number were clerical or service workers (9%).
- Half of all participants were employed full-time (56%); over one third were part-time employed (38%) and the remainder were casual or employed on a different basis. 90% worked for an employer; 7% self employed, or another basis (3%).

It’s important to note that these pressures aren’t just impacting employees. They have a tangible and negative impact on employers.

Emma Walsh
Key Themes

1) Australians report feeling fatigued, stressed, anxious and depressed as a result of trying to balance work and family commitments and report that personal wellbeing and family relationships suffer as a result.

2) Women continue to shoulder the majority of household labour.

3) There are barriers to men’s access to paid parental leave and flexible work options, and social attitudes that make it challenging for men to ask for and take these support mechanisms.

4) Returning to work after a period of parental leave is a challenging and difficult time, particularly if jobs and employment conditions have changed without consultation during leave.

5) Difficulties with balancing work and family roles, gender imbalances in accessing paid parental leave, and lack of access to flexibility are primary motivators for parents and carers to leave their employer.

6) Work has positive benefits for parents and carers, and most reported their jobs are satisfying and fulfilling.
Key Themes

7) There is a perceived lack of support from managers for a substantial number of parents and carers. This differs by gender – women feel unsupported in returning to work and having access to the same opportunities as colleagues who have not been on parental leave; men experience fewer issues but can receive negative comments from managers about their involvement in family caring responsibilities.

8) The persistent belief that ‘flexible work is for women’ is a primary barrier to men’s access to flexible work, and this attitude forces women to take on the bulk of family care work.

9) Flexibility stigma persists for both men and women. Worker’s commitment to their job is questioned if they use flexible work arrangements.

10) Work hours for men and women vary significantly until children reach the teenage years with men continuing to do more than women.
Key Findings

What are the most challenging issues facing families?

62% of parents and carers say that their most challenging issue is looking after their personal physical & mental wellbeing.

2/3 of working parents reported feeling too emotionally or physically drained when they got home from work to contribute to their family.

1/2 of all women and a 1/3 of men who were parenting or caring said they were under ‘a lot’ of stress or ‘a great deal’ of stress.

1/3 reported that the combination of work and family responsibilities contributed to stress and tension in the relationship with their partners and with their children.

1/2 had missed out on family activities in the past month, due to time they had to spend at work.
Key Findings

The impact on career

1 in 3 of parents and carers reported having missed out on opportunities for promotion due to their use of flexible work. This was more common for women than for men.

1 in 4 parents and carers report that they had considered – or actively intended – leaving their job in the next 12 months due to difficulties combining their job with caring.

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For societies and economies to thrive, countries and businesses need to support workers as families and parents, through family-friendly policies, as they carry and raise children from pregnancy to school age.

UNICEF”
What support do parents and carers want?

44% of parents and carers say they think having more control over when or where they work will support them - flexibility being key.

Parents and carers who completed the survey said these five things would help them manage their work and family responsibilities more effectively:

1. More flexibility - Having more control over when or where I work (44%)
2. Access to caring support - Childcare at work and / or childcare rebates from my employer (38%)
3. Role models - Family-friendly champions and leaders in my workplace (36%)
4. Managing work stress - Reducing job pressure and workload (29%)
5. More training for leaders – Specific training for managers to help embed family-friendly policies (27%)

“Mutual investment by families, businesses and the State in this critical phase of human life lays the foundation for children’s success in school, adults’ success at work, the ability of children and families to exit poverty, and lifelong health.”

UNICEF
Further Key Statistics

Wellbeing

- Parents taking stress home from work impacts on their wellbeing, particularly when there is a lack of employer support or when returning to work after the birth of a child.

- 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.

Career

- Parents reported that their job helped them to feel personally fulfilled, but they want additional measures to help them to better manage work, family and care demands.

- 28 per cent of mothers stayed with their employer but reported changes to their job, compared to 96 per cent of fathers who returned to their same employer, with only 6 per cent experiencing any job change.
Further Key Statistics

Parental Leave

- Problems remain with access and attitudes to paid parental leave. Most parents (85 per cent) said paid parental leave was offered in their workplaces and around half of all mothers and fathers had accessed it.

- Financial reasons were the most common reasons why parents didn’t take longer paid leave.

- 23 per cent of mothers and 13 per cent of fathers reported receiving negative comments from their managers and supervisors for using paid parental leave.

- During parental leave, only 19 per cent of mothers and 12 per cent of fathers kept in touch with their employers.

- On returning from parental leave, mothers’ jobs were much more likely to change than fathers’ jobs.

- One in three mothers missed out on an opportunity for promotion due to their use of paid parental leave, as did 11 per cent of fathers.

“Half of the fathers surveyed and a third of mothers reported that the leave was ‘too short’”
Most working parents (88 per cent) report being able to access some type of flexible work, most commonly flexible hours (52 per cent) and work location (50 per cent).

Two-thirds of parents (64 per cent) report that it is more acceptable for women to use family-friendly work options than for men. Men faced more barriers accessing flexible work, citing the reason for this being the potential negative impact it might have on their career and reputation, how they might be perceived by colleagues/manager and/or whether they could afford it.

Further Key Statistics

Flexibility Stigma

- Nearly half of all parents in the study said that a workers’ commitment to their job was questioned if they used family-friendly work arrangements.
The Full Report

The full 2019 National Working Families Report will be released November 2019. For more information, please contact info@parentsatwork.com.au.

The 2019 National Working Families Report is a not-for-profit initiative undertaken by Parents At Work with the support of Karitane and the Advancing Parental Leave Equality Network (APLEN).

This summary was prepared by Parents At Work - a membership-based organisation providing education, coaching and consulting services and is committed to creating family friendly workplaces.

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