



# Parents, work and care: **Striking the balance**

**Jemima Olchawski**  
Head of Policy and Insight

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Parents, work and care: striking the balance</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>People want balance</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Support for dads at work</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Length of leave</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Men want more time</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>An uncomfortable truth</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Working parents' commitment to work</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Who cares?</b>	<b>9</b>
Mothers continue to do the majority of the work around caring for children	9
Men and women have different perceptions of how much is shared	10
Time for fair parental leave pay	10
<b>Conclusion and recommendations</b>	<b>11</b>

## Introduction

The interaction between work and care are at the root of much of the persistence of gender inequality in Britain today. Despite widespread commitment to gender equality between women and men,<sup>1</sup> it remains the case that women continue to do the majority of care and domestic work.<sup>2</sup> Women are on the frontline of the growing pressures around balancing the provision of care for children and relatives with participation in the workplace. This contributes to women being more likely to work part time<sup>3</sup>, to be in low skilled jobs<sup>4</sup> and making up two thirds of the low paid.<sup>5</sup> This motherhood penalty is at the core of the gender pay gap, currently 13.9% for full time workers.<sup>6</sup> Women are the majority of part time workers<sup>7</sup>; yet average hourly pay for part time work is 30% less than for full time pay.<sup>8</sup>

There have been important steps forward in working culture and practices – from the right to request flexible working to the introduction of shared parental leave. But working patterns continue to reflect the traditional male breadwinner model. This is increasingly unsustainable. Not only does it mean many women are prevented from achieving their potential, in the context of the skills shortage it means vital talent is missing from the labour market.

Fawcett's largest ever survey on these issues, which includes 2372 parents of children under 18, finds that whilst fathers are concerned about balancing work and care, women continue to do the majority of tasks around raising children. That may be a result of men not feeling supported in the workplace to take time off to look after their children. Consequently, men are more likely to lie to their bosses in order to do so. 41% of men feel that they did not have enough time off at the birth of their child. The survey also finds support for a mechanism that could begin to change this pattern – 68% of people believe that men who take time off work to look after a baby should be entitled to the same pay and amount of leave.

Women experience discrimination and disadvantage from a variety of sources and at various stages of the life course. These affect women both with and without children regardless of their relationship status. This report focuses on the challenges for those balancing work and childcare as well as the perceptions of women as mothers. However, it is important to note that this is just one way in which women may experience disadvantage in the workplace.

## Methodology

Survation polled 8165 UK residents aged 18+ between 30th November and 3rd December 2015. This included 2372 parents of children under 18. The survey was conducted via online panel. Differential response rates from different groups were taken into account. Data were analysed and weighted by Survation to the profile of all UK adults aged 18+. Data were weighted by age, sex, region, household income, education and past vote. Targets for the weighted data were derived from Office for National Statistics 2011 Census data and the results of the 2015 General Election.

Because only a sample of the full population were interviewed, all results are subject to a margin of error, meaning that not all differences are statistically significant. For the whole sample (8165 respondents) it is 95% certain that the “true” value will fall within the range of 1.1% from the sample result. Subsamples will be subject to higher margins of error. Throughout this report statistics are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

---

1 Fawcett's report *Sex Equality State of the Nation 2016* revealed that 74% of people believe in equality for women and men

2 Women spend on average 178 minutes a day on domestic tasks compared with 100 minutes among men. Lader D, Short S and Gershuny J (2006) *The Time Use Survey 2005*, ONS

3 42% of women work part time compared to 11% of men: ONS (2015) Annual Population Survey, November 2015

4 47% of women do low-medium skill work compared to 18% of men: ONS (2013) Women in the Labour Market 2013 [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_328352.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_328352.pdf)

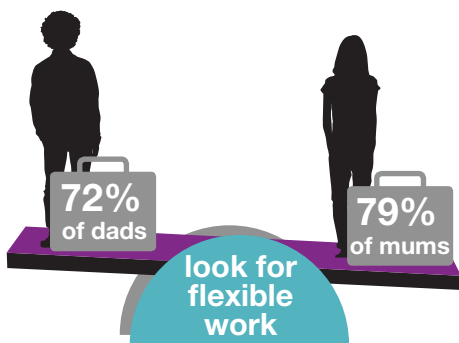
5 *Ibid*

6 ONS ASHE 2015 (provisional) Table 1.6a <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-referencetables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-400803>

7 ONS (2015) Annual Population Survey

8 ONS ASHE 2015 (provisional) Table 3.6a <http://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/regionbyoccupation2digitsocashetable3>

## Key Findings

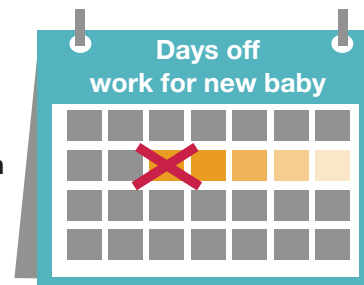


**Everyone wants balance:** 68% of people think about whether a job is likely to allow them to balance work and family when considering career choices

**Dads need more support at work:** 35% of employed dads of under 18s say men in their workplace who take time off to care for children are not supported



**Length of leave:** 18% of employed dads of under 18s only took between one and five days off at the birth of their child

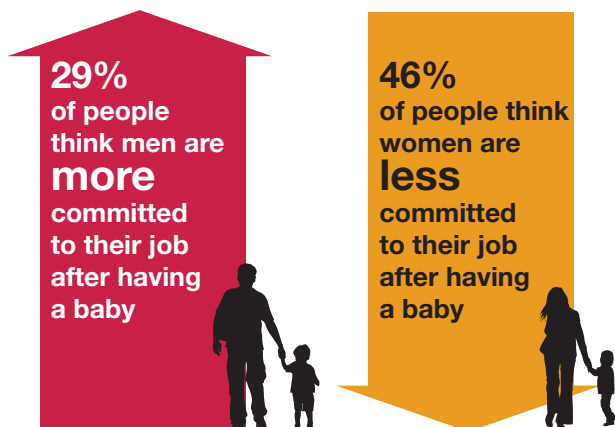


**Many people struggle to balance work and care:** 32% of parents lie to their boss to take time off to spend with their children – 38% of dads lie

**This is likely to reinforce traditional gender roles around childcare:** The majority of work around raising children remains the responsibility of mums



*9/10 childcare tasks are mostly the responsibility of my child's other parent rather than my responsibility*



**Old stereotypes about working parents persist**



**People want equality:** Nearly 7 in 10 people believe that men who take time off work to look after a baby should be entitled to the same pay and amount of leave as women

# Parents, work and care: striking the balance

## People want balance

Recent years have seen significant progress on the flexible working agenda. This has traditionally been seen as a policy to support women to balance work and care, but as suggested by the recent extension of the right to request flexible working to all workers<sup>9</sup> this is increasingly a mainstream need and concern.

- ▶ Over two thirds (68%) of people say that when they think about their career choices they think about whether a job is likely to allow them to balance work and family
- ▶ That includes nearly two thirds (64%) of men
- ▶ 79% of mothers and 72% of fathers say they think about balance

## Support for dads at work

Despite the fact that men are clearly nearly as likely to be concerned about balance as women, we found that many feel men are not fully supported in the workplace. Participants in work were asked to choose between two statements:

“In my workplace dads who take time off to care for children are supported” or “In my workplace dads who take time off to care for children are not supported”. They were also offered a “Don’t know” option.

- ▶ 46% of people believe that dads are supported
- ▶ But a quarter (25%) of people feel dads aren’t supported
- ▶ Men are more likely to believe dads aren’t supported than women (29% compared to 21%)
- ▶ The figure rises again for dads with children under 18: Over a third (35%) of this group say men who take time off work to care for children are not supported
- ▶ Mums are about as likely as the overall population to feel that dads aren’t supported (26%)

Whilst it’s clear that many fathers do feel supported (50%) there are large numbers of working dads who currently do not feel provision is made for them to take time off. This is supported by evidence that fathers are more likely than mothers to have requests for flexible working turned down.<sup>10</sup>

This will have a knock on effect on the distribution of childcare in a household. Pressure on dads to not take time off makes it more likely that mums will take time out instead – reinforcing old gender roles and fuelling the motherhood penalty.



9 Gov.uk (2014) *Flexible working rights extended to more than 20 million*, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/flexible-working-rights-extended-to-more-than-20-million>

10 Peck S (2014) *Fathers twice as likely as mums to have flexible working requests turned down*, Telegraph.co.uk, 28th January 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10601408/Fathers-twice-as-likely-as-mums-to-have-flexible-working-requests-turned-down.html> accessed 4th March 2016

## Length of leave

Participants who have children and who said they took leave at the birth or adoption of their child were asked how long they took. Given that rights to extended leave for fathers have only recently been introduced<sup>11</sup> it is not surprising to see that mothers took substantially longer on average than fathers:

- ▶ The most common length of leave taken for mothers was six months or more. Over half of mothers (54%) took this amount of time
- ▶ The most commonly stated length of time for fathers was just six to 14 days. 43% of fathers took this amount of time
- ▶ A third of men (33%) only took between one and five days
- ▶ That means that three quarters of men (75%) took two weeks or less

We are able to look at all those who have had children as well as parents whose children are still under 18. Looking at these two groups we can see that the amount of time taken by mums is broadly unchanged. There are no statistically significant differences between the amounts of leave taken by mums of children under and over 18.

The most commonly stated length of leave for dads of under 18s remains six to fourteen days (45% took this amount of time.) But there are some differences in the length of time taken for dads who had their youngest child more recently, with dads of under 18s taking slightly longer overall .

- ▶ 33% of all dads took between one and five days. But for dads of under 18s this figure falls to 18%
- ▶ 16% of all dads took two to four weeks. This rises to 23% of dads of under 18s
- ▶ 6% of all dads took one to three months. This rises to 9% of dads of under 18s
- ▶ But dads of under 18s are just as likely as dads overall to take three months or more (3% of all dads and 4% of dads of under 18s took over three months)
- ▶ Despite the small increases in time taken by dads of under 18s, it remains the case that 64% – or nearly two thirds – of dads take two weeks leave or less

It is likely that a perceived lack of support for dads who take time off to care for children combined with low income replacement rates are contributing to fathers taking only the briefest of breaks once their child is born. Fathers taking paternity or shared parental leave are currently paid at 90% of earnings or £139.58 per week, whichever is lowest.<sup>12 13</sup> Given that the mean weekly pay for men in the UK is just under £600<sup>14</sup> for many this represents a significant cut in earnings at a time when costs are increasing and their partner is also likely to be earning less.

Fawcett welcomes the introduction of Shared Parental Leave but given the large proportion of men taking such small amounts of leave it seems unlikely it will fundamentally alter the balance of who takes time out to care until these underlying barriers are addressed.

11 Second carers have been entitled to Additional Paternity Leave since April 2011 Gov.uk (2015) *Additional Paternity Pay and Leave: employer guide* <https://www.gov.uk/employers-additional-paternity-pay-leave> (accessed 7th March 2015) and Shared Parental Leave since 2015 Gov.uk (2014) *Flexible working rights extended to more than 20 million*, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 30th June

12 Gov.uk (2015) *Statutory Paternity Pay and Leave: employer guide* <https://www.gov.uk/employers-paternity-pay-leave/entitlement> (accessed 29th February 2016)

13 Gov.uk (2015) Shared Parental Leave <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay/what-youll-get> (accessed 7th March 2016)

14 ONS ASHE 2015 Provisional Results, Table 1.2a <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-400803>

## But men want more time

This is not about forcing mothers back to work before they are ready or undervaluing the important caring contribution of women and men who choose not to work while they raise their children. But it is critical that we recognise that many couples make decisions about who will take time off to care in highly loaded conditions: women are likely to be earning less, men will usually have less generous paid leave and our research makes clear that men feel unsupported when they do take time off. This context will significantly influence what parents decide to do and is likely to be inhibiting many men from playing a greater role at home. This research suggests this is indeed the case with men more likely to feel they did not have enough time off at the birth of their child.

- ▶ Men are less likely than women to be satisfied with the amount of time they took. 55% of men feel the amount of time was about right compared to 61% of women
- ▶ 41% of fathers feel they did not have enough time, compared to 36% of mothers
- ▶ 80% of men who feel they did not have enough time took four weeks or less

## An uncomfortable truth

Despite advances in the availability of flexible working it is clear that many parents continue to feel that they are not fully able to balance their caring responsibilities with the expectations of their employers.

- ▶ 32% of parents lie to their boss to take time off to spend with their children
- ▶ 1 in 10 lies regularly

Dads are more likely to admit lying than mums – adding further evidence that they are keen to play a greater role than that their employer currently permits.

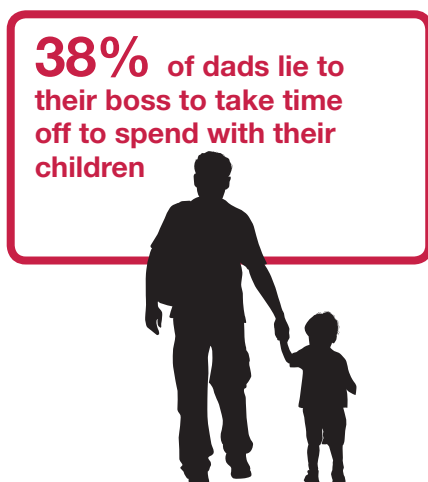
- ▶ 38% of dads lie to their boss to take time off to spend with their children, ten percentage points higher than the 28% of mums who lie
- ▶ 12% or over 1 in 10 dads say they lie often

Younger parents were more likely to lie:

- ▶ 43% of parents aged 18-34 lie to their boss to take time off with their children.
- ▶ That's more than two and a half times the proportion of dads over 55. 16% of this group report lying

The research revealed some interesting regional variations

- ▶ Nearly 6 in 10 Londoners interviewed lie in this way, including 67% of London dads in the survey
- ▶ This compares to 32% or just over 3 in 10 parents UK wide and 38% of dads across the UK
- ▶ That makes London dads in or survey nearly twice as likely to say they lie than dads UK wide

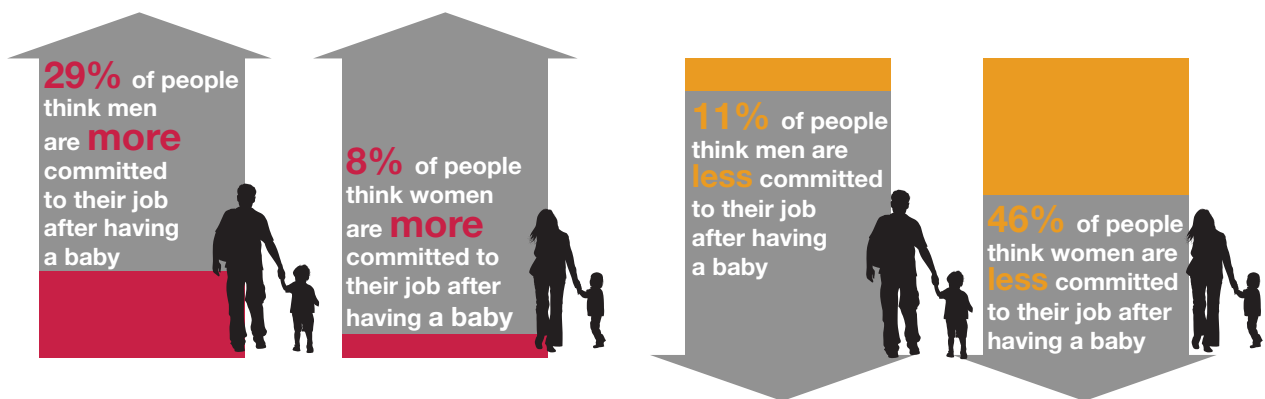


## Working parents' commitment to work

Participants were asked their views on what happens to men and women's commitment to their job after they have a baby. The sample was split – half were asked about a man's commitment and half about a woman's – to avoid their answer to one question influencing their response to the other.

The results for those asked about the commitment of women reveal widespread perceptions that mothers become less committed to their job when they have a child.

- ▶ Whilst 47% believe that when a woman has a child her commitment to her job is not affected, almost the same proportion (46%) believe that she becomes less committed: over 4 in 10 people believe that a woman with a child is less committed to her job
- ▶ Yet the responses for men becoming fathers are very different. A much higher proportion (60%) believes a man's commitment is not affected
- ▶ Only 11% believe a man becomes less committed
- ▶ **But 29%, or nearly 3 in 10, believe that he becomes more committed. Just 8% believe a woman becomes more committed**



Not only do mothers face a widespread perception that they are less committed once they've had a baby they are working in an environment where men in the same situation are actually perceived as more committed. This is often described as the "daddy bonus".

Men are more likely to believe commitment falls for both women and men

- ▶ 51% of men believe a woman becomes less committed to her job when she has a child, ten percentage points higher than the 41% of women who hold this view
- ▶ Men are more than twice as likely as women to believe a man becomes less committed to his job when he has a child (15% compared to 7%)

This suggests that men are more likely to perceive a tension between work and home life.

Parents are less likely to agree that a woman becomes less committed (39% of parents agree with this compared to 48% of those without children under 18). But just as likely as non-parents to agree that men become more committed (30%).



## Who cares?

### Mothers continue to do the majority of the work around caring for children

Whilst there is an increased awareness of the role fathers can play in raising children our research shows that ownership of the responsibility for child raising continues to rest primarily with women.

We asked participants with children under 18 whose responsibility it is in their family to do a range of the tasks around child raising – from trips to the dentist to bath and bed time. Our research reveals that the majority of tasks associated with childcare are still undertaken by women.

- ▶ For nine of the ten tasks we asked about, men are more likely to say that they were mostly the responsibility of their child's other parent than mostly their own. The only task to buck the trend was making sure children have completed their homework
- ▶ 28% of men say making sure children do their homework was mostly their responsibility
- ▶ 21% said this job was mostly the responsibility of their child's other parent
- ▶ Women disagreed. 60% of women said making sure children do their homework was mostly their responsibility. Only 7% describe this as mostly their child's other parent's responsibility
- ▶ Men were least likely to say that organising playdates and children's parties was mostly their responsibility. 18% of men said this and only 7% of women said that this job was mostly the responsibility of their partner.
- ▶ Women are mostly likely to say that washing the children's clothes is mostly their responsibility. 79% of women say this, over ten times as many as those who say it is mostly their child's other parent (7%). Only 13% say this is shared equally

Significantly, both men and women say it is mothers who are more likely to take time off work when children are ill

- ▶ Just under a third (32%) of men say this is mostly the responsibility of their child's other parent
- ▶ Just under a quarter (23%) of men say it is mostly them
- ▶ Nearly 4 in 10 men (39%) say it is equally shared

The difference between the sexes reported by mothers is much more emphatic:

- ▶ 70% of women say it is mostly them who has this responsibility. Only 7% say it is mostly the responsibility of their child's other parent
- ▶ 20% or one in five say the responsibility is equally shared

This is an example of responsibility impacting more directly on women's ability to participate at work. This is likely to have a number of consequences. On the most immediate level it means women are more likely to find their time at work interrupted impacting on their ability to deliver their workload.

Participants were asked "in your family whose responsibility is it to...?" about the following tasks:

- Take time off if children are ill
- Take the children to the doctor
- Take the children to the dentist
- Take the children to the hairdresser
- Organise playdates and children's parties
- Take the children to school
- Do bath time and bed time
- Make sure children do their homework
- Wash the children's clothes
- Cook the children's meals

*It's important to note that not all participants will have described someone of the opposite sex as their child's other parent. However the numbers here are likely to be small and to balance each other out on both sides. With this caveat in mind it is reasonable to use these findings to draw conclusions about whether men or women are more likely to undertake the tasks.*



This may well fuel perceptions of mothers' lower commitment to work. The research reveals a widespread belief that when a woman has a baby she becomes less committed to her job – but this is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. An environment in the workplace that makes it more acceptable for women to take time out in an emergency than men will lead to more women doing so. This in turn means women with male partners will tend to take on a greater role in caring – it just makes sense when their partner is less likely to be supported. And this then feeds into perceptions that women become less committed to work after they have children.

If women simply aren't in the room they miss out on chances to contribute and demonstrate their skills. Many bosses may conclude that women simply aren't interested or ready for promotion. Or women may feel inhibited about going for a more senior role, knowing that, in practice, the bulk of caring tasks rest with them.

## Men and women have different perceptions of how much is shared

The research reveals a large perception gap between women and men about whether jobs around raising children are really shared. Men are consistently more likely than women to say that tasks are shared. Across all the tasks in the survey on average 37% of men said they were equally shared but only 20% of women said the same.

- ▶ The largest perception gap is in washing children's clothes. 36% of men say this is equally shared, but only 13% of women – 23 percentage point difference
- ▶ The smallest perception gap was on whose responsibility it is to do bath and bed time. 41% of men say this is shared equally, compared to 29% of women. This is also the task women were most likely to say was shared

## Time for fair parental leave pay

The introduction of Shared Parental Leave has been an important step forward – allowing fathers to share mothers' leave enabling them to play a fuller part in the early months of their child's life. However, the current system permits firms to offer enhanced arrangements for maternity pay but does not require them to do the same for Shared Parental Leave. Consequently, many couples may find that it is just too expensive for dads to take time off in the first year their baby is born.

But Fawcett's research shows that the public firmly support equalising pay and leave entitlements.

- ▶ 68% of people believe that men who take time off work to look after a baby should be entitled to the same pay and amount of leave as women. Only 17% of people disagree
- ▶ Men and women are nearly as likely to agree with this statement. 67% of men support the proposal, compared to 70% of women
- ▶ Support is even higher amongst parents with 71% agreeing. Mothers and fathers are equally as likely to support equal leave and pay



## Conclusions

It's clear that traditional gender roles continue to play an important part in family life. Women remain more likely to be responsible for work around caring for children, and to take time out of work to meet these responsibilities. This is both the result and cause of widely held beliefs about women's commitment to work once they become mothers. But it is further compounded by an environment where fathers are not supported to take time out and can still be paid proportionately less when they do.

Whilst evidence that women with children are perceived as less committed to their job is worrying, perhaps of even greater concern is the perception of a fatherhood commitment bonus. A high proportion of people automatically assume fathers will become more committed to their job; this double standard is likely to further disadvantage female employees but also to intensify pressure on men to meet expectations and deliver more at work. Our research suggests that for many this is unmanageable with large proportions lying to their boss in order to spend the time they feel they need with their children.

We cannot achieve gender equality or close the gender pay gap until these issues are addressed. Working practices must adapt to better reflect the practicalities of raising a family and working. This must change for men as well as for women so that both sexes can fully participate in care. Also important is the need to continue the growth of men's role in domestic tasks and to make sure work really is shared equally.

### In this context Fawcett recommends

- **A more generous period of leave dedicated to dads or second carers and paid at a replacement rate that makes time off viable.** Only then will we shift expectations of who takes time off work to care for children and a shared sense of responsibility
- **Flexibility by default.** Whilst many employees report being able to request flexible working only 6% of jobs paying over the equivalent of £20,000 per year are actually advertised as part time or flexible.<sup>15</sup> Fawcett is calling for all employers to be required to advertise their jobs as flexible unless there is a strong business case not to
- **An end to maternity discrimination and the removal of harmful tribunal fees** which act as a barrier to justice. EHRc research shows that 54,000 women have to leave their job early as a result of getting pregnant or having a baby<sup>16</sup> but we know that sex discrimination claims have fallen by 80% since the introduction of £1200 employment tribunal fees<sup>17</sup>
- **Unconscious bias training.** It is clear that traditional perceptions of mothers and fathers in work remain powerful. For some parents it may be the case that having a child temporarily or permanently impacts upon their commitment to their job. However, for many others this will simply be untrue. These women and men will face unspoken expectations and perceptions. For many women this may hamper their chances to progress at work or may make it harder for men to play a fuller role at home. Employers should be encouraged to identify and challenge where they hold prejudices and establish good working practices in order to ensure high retention rates for women returning from maternity leave
- **An investment in our childcare infrastructure so that mums and dads can afford to work.** The price that parents pay for childcare in the UK remains high, with childcare for two children under five costing 28% of median household income<sup>18</sup>

---

15 Timewise (2015) *The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index*

16 EHRc (2015) *Pregnancy and Maternity-Related Discrimination and Disadvantage*, BIS Research Paper No. 235

17 TUC (2014) *At What Price Justice?* [https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC\\_Report\\_At\\_what\\_price\\_justice.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC_Report_At_what_price_justice.pdf)

18 Rutter J (2016) *2016 Childcare Survey*, Family and Childcare trust

---

The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading campaign for equality between women and men. We trace our roots back to 1866, when Millicent Fawcett began her lifetime's work leading the peaceful campaign for women's votes. Today we remain the most authoritative, independent advocate for women's rights in the UK.

Fawcett Society  
Unit 204 Linton House  
164-180 Union Street  
London SE1 0LH  
020 3598 6154

[www.fawcettsociety.org.uk](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk)  
Registered charity No.1108769