

The price of motherhood: Women and part-time work ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report in pdf ^[2]

Summary:

British women are paying a shockingly high price for motherhood as they are forced into lower-skilled, part-time work after having children, according to the findings of our new survey with Netmums.

The poll of over 1,600 part-time working mothers revealed almost half (48%) of mothers on low to middle incomes take a lower-skilled part time job on their return to work after having children. Even those mothers that held a degree could not find work which paid a salary commensurate with their skills: 42% of degree holders said they had taken a less skilled job because of working part time.

Excerpts from the report on child care:

The high costs of childcare in the UK have been identified as one of the reasons for larger numbers of women working part-time than in other developed countries. Parents in the UK spend 33 percent of their net household income on childcare compared to an OECD average of 13 percent. This means that the amount of money lone parents and second earners forgo in tax credits and childcare costs for every additional hour earned is higher than in almost any other OECD country. The situation has been made worse by the government's decision to reduce the amount of support available to families through the childcare element of the working tax credit from 80 to 70 percent of eligible costs in April 2011. Furthermore, the introduction of Universal Credit in 2013 will create further disincentives for part-time working mothers wanting to extend their hours. A second earner working 16 hours and earning £6.08 an hour would lose 82 percent of her weekly earnings under Universal Credit compared to only 53 percent under the pre-April 2011 tax credit system.

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There were important differences between income groups in the amount of choice that mothers felt they had. Over a third of part-time working women in the low to middle income group and two-fifths of those in the benefit reliant group felt that working part-time had not been a choice. There was little difference in response by age of youngest child and the responses from single parents did not differ significantly from those living with a partner.

The variation in response by income group in large part reflects the high costs of childcare. These pose a greater barrier to working longer hours for low to middle income families than for those on higher incomes, especially where parents cannot rely on informal support from family and friends. Expensive childcare leaves many low to middle income women stuck working part-time when longer hours would help relieve the financial pressure they face in meeting rising living costs. The average family in the low to middle income group has not seen its income increase since 2001-02 in large part because wages for those in the bottom half of earnings have been stagnant since 2003.

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Barriers to full time work:

A lack of affordable childcare appears to be the most important barrier to mothers working full-time. Overall, 44 percent specifically cited the lack of affordable quality childcare as a barrier. In addition, 43 percent said that it was not financially worth their while to work full-time. This is largely because the additional childcare costs that would be incurred would leave mothers with little take home pay.

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