



**families** commission  
kōmihana ā **whānau**

**NEW ZEALAND CULTURAL NORMS OF PARENTING AND  
CHILDCARE AND HOW THESE RELATE TO  
LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION DECISIONS AND REQUIREMENTS**

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**REPORT OF QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH 40 MOTHERS**

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AND MASSEY UNIVERSITY**

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I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the EEO Trust and Massey University with carrying out this project. And also the 40 women who gave their time and their experiences to this project – without you the project could not have happened. I hope the study will contribute to finding better solutions for the thousands of mothers out there who, like yourselves, are juggling the dual roles of parent and paid worker.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## AIMS AND METHOD

The aim of this qualitative study of 40 New Zealand mothers is to explore their ideas, beliefs and values around the roles of mothers, parents and formal childcare in meeting the care needs of children, and how that relates to decisions about labour force participation for mothers. The study also provides information on the difficulties experienced by mothers in this study in combining paid work and parenting, and their perceptions of the roles of the Government and employers in relation to other provisions to assist parents in combining their dual roles of parent and paid worker.

## LIMITATIONS

Being a qualitative study of 40 mothers, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to all New Zealand mothers. The sample is skewed towards those in paid work, particularly full-time work, and those in middle to upper income and occupational groups. However, it does identify the issues that determine decisions around paid work and parenting for these mothers from throughout New Zealand, and how they perceive motherhood in early twenty-first century New Zealand. These findings are supplemented by findings from a random sample survey of New Zealanders (Gendall 2003) on attitudes of New Zealand society in general towards mothers' roles, and of a national random sample survey of parents on issues of work, family and parenting by the Ministry of Social Development (2006), published subsequent to this study being undertaken. The findings presented in this report are, thus, indicative of how New Zealand norms of motherhood, childcare and paid work may differ from those in various European countries, as presented by Pfau-Effinger (2004), which could contribute to policy development in this area for New Zealand.

## NORMS REGARDING MOTHERHOOD, AND THE ROLES OF PARENTS AND CHILDCARE

- > The findings of this study suggest there has been a shift in the concept of what it means to be a good mother, from being a full-time stay-at-home mother to there being many ways to be a good mother, and that being a good mother is compatible with also doing paid work. Children still come first but this does not require the mother's constant presence.
- > Combining paid work and parenting was regarded as positive for the mothers in this study in terms of mental and social stimulation, self-esteem, independence, a sense of pride and achievement, being a good role model and being able to provide opportunities for their children.
- > However, there was also a quite widespread perception among the mothers in this study that society still judges mothers whether they stay home or do paid work and expects them to do both, but makes them feel guilty for choosing one or the other. This is supported by quantitative findings that New Zealanders are almost evenly split on whether mothers of pre-school children should be in paid work at all. In general, though, the mothers in this study felt confident in the decisions they made for themselves and did not judge other women for their choices.
- > The mothers in this study had a general perception that stay-at-home mothers are not valued in New Zealand today. At the same time there is a belief that more should be done by government so that mothers have the choice to stay at home and care for their own children rather than only be offered assistance with childcare.
- > Mothers in this study believe babies up to a year old, and to a lesser extent children aged up to three years old, are best cared for primarily by parents rather than in full-time childcare. This is supported by quantitative findings that New Zealanders generally believe mothers of pre-school children should not work full-time. Mothers in this study also generally feel the first year is an important time for mothers rather than fathers to be with their children, for bonding and breastfeeding.
- > The perception of childcare was generally positive; that quality childcare is now available. Mothers in this study are clear about what criteria they look for in quality childcare – ratios, interaction, Education Review Office (ERO) reports, values, training and turnover – and most seemed to have made an active choice.
- > Where childcare is necessary for babies up to a year old, home-based care was the preference for this age group for most of the mothers in this study. A few held an opposing view that there was greater safety in public care than with one unsupervised carer.

- > The participants in this study thought some kind of early childhood education/care is to be beneficial to children from the age of three years, but part-time rather than full-time is still preferred. These findings are consistent with those of Stephens and Callister (2006).
- > The mothers in this study felt that fathers/partners were crucial to enabling mothers to do paid work. The more flexibility their partners had in their employment, the more they were able to share the role of caring for their children through taking sick leave and sharing the picking up and dropping off of children. With one exception, belief in an equal role for fathers did not extend to suggesting they too could work part-time.
- > Where fathers had taken on full-time caring responsibilities this was usually the result of unplanned changes in their paid work circumstances. While the mothers reported this had been a positive experience for them and their partners and children, they also reported the men would not have deliberately chosen this role and felt they should be providing financially for the family.
- > Among the participants in this study, many fathers also shared parental leave, although the general view was that mothers want that first year for breastfeeding and bonding, and want fathers to play an equal role after that.
- > Other family members, especially grandmothers, also played an important role in offering family-based childcare as a balance to full-time formal childcare, and for emergency care, after-school care and school holiday care. However, many grandmothers are themselves in paid work, or do not live nearby.
- > Based on this study and supporting quantitative research, comparison with overseas models of cultural norms suggests New Zealand lies between the Netherlands and Germany. The Netherlands' ideal model is of equal roles in parenting and paid work for mothers and fathers, with both working part-time and sharing care of children. The German model is of women working part-time and their work being secondary to that of their husbands and their role in childcare. Childcare is a part-time complementary role to parents as main caregivers in both these models. If the views of the women in this study, which are consistent with other New Zealand research, reflect the New Zealand ideal, then that is for parents to be the main carers for children under three, for women to work part-time but in their normal occupations, and for fathers to share responsibility for the care of children while working full-time. Full-time childcare was not seen as an ideal, as in the Scandinavian model which supports parents to provide full-time childcare up to the age of two years, and then expects both parents to work full-time with publicly provided full-time childcare. Quantitative research from New Zealand supports a part-time paid work role for one parent, with New Zealanders as a whole believing that should be the mother, but parents saying it could be either partner and not necessarily part-time but a less demanding job.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR PAID WORK**

- > This study suggests that part-time labour force participation may be the ideal for mothers of children at all ages, even teenagers. This is not just for the children's needs; the general theme emerging from this study is that mothers enjoy being with their children and do not want to miss out on that experience or be too tired and stressed to enjoy it by working full-time.
- > There was no ideal length of time for parental leave after the birth of a child, but in general the mothers in this study who took less than 12 months would have preferred to take longer, though not necessarily the full 12 months. In general the view of the mothers in this study was that three months is not long enough and paid parental leave should be at least six months.
- > Many mothers in this study are happy with their combination of paid work and time with their children, but others have returned to work sooner than they would like and for more hours than they would like. The reasons for earlier return to work after parental leave and for working full-time rather than part-time are a mixture of financial need – this is particularly so for sole parents – and the requirements of the job, eg limits on length of parental leave, client expectations, the need to retain skills and career momentum.
- > Among the women in this study, there was a group of women with pre-school children who are in paid work but would prefer to be at home full-time with their children until they are at least one or two years old, or until they go to school. Financial need is the main driver for this group being in paid work.
- > The main drivers to return to work after having a child for the participants in this study were a combination of financial, the requirements of the job in terms of fear of losing it or desire for career progression, and a woman's need for mental stimulation and social contact. A number of women were the main earner in their household and this drove their decision of when to return to work.
- > Personal beliefs and preferences around mothering and children's needs determined ideals but were frequently overridden in reality by financial need or the requirement to either return to work or lose their job or their skills and career.



- > Those who took 12 months parental leave did so for both their own and their child's benefit. None of the mothers in the study expressed a desire to return to work sooner than they did, but many wished they had taken more time out than they did. While many were ready to return after 12 months, some would have taken longer but they would have lost their job. In general, the women in this study enjoyed the time they spent with their children.

## **DIFFICULTIES IN BEING BOTH PARENT AND PAID WORKER**

- > Balancing the dual roles of mother and paid worker was seen as difficult by the study participants. For some this was on a daily basis around the mornings and evenings when dropping off and picking up children conflicted with the demands of the workplace to be there. For others it was specific occasions, such as when children are sick or have special events or activities they would like to attend.
- > Other times when juggling the two roles is difficult is when breastfeeding, and during school holidays and after-school time once children start school.
- > Childcare provision for the under-twos was felt by some of the mothers in this study to be insufficient.
- > Affordability of childcare was also seen as a problem. The general view of the women in this study was that there should be more subsidy and up to a higher income threshold. This was seen as the government's responsibility, not employers'. It should also be easier to access.
- > Other problems with childcare reported in this study were with the hours centres are open, which make it difficult for parents/caregivers to get to work on time, or they have to leave work early. While couples could share this and make it work, the lack of travel time on top of the work day to get to a centre on time made it difficult for sole parents.
- > The area of after-school and school holiday care was one of the major difficulties identified by mothers in this study for mothers in paid work. Their comments suggest that there is not enough, it is not conveniently located, it is not regulated, it is too expensive and there is a lack of information of what is available.
- > Mothers in this study reconcile paid work with being a good mother by saying their children come first. This means they experience guilt if they need to put work first sometimes, or because they feel they are not doing either role as well as they feel they should be, although there was no evidence from employers or clients that they were not performing satisfactorily in the workplace.
- > Some mothers in this study found juggling their two roles so difficult they left their job and became a full-time mother temporarily or found a less demanding job.
- > The negative personal impacts were stress, loss of family time and 'me' time, and giving up a social life, sport and exercise.
- > Those in professional positions also lost career momentum as they felt they could not combine being a mother in the way they wanted with the hours required in more senior positions.

## **ROLE OF EMPLOYERS**

- > As in the Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Trust online survey, flexibility of start and finish times, and the ability to take time off to attend children's special activities or when their children were sick were reported to be the main ways in which employers can enable their employees to be both parents and paid workers. This applies to fathers as well as mothers.
- > Other ways in which the mothers in this study suggested larger employers can assist their parent employees were: on-site childcare or subsidy at nearby centres; after-school and school holiday programmes; and support for breastfeeding mothers through provision of a private space for feeding or expressing, and storage facilities.
- > Those whose employers provided after-school or school holiday programmes found it a huge benefit, and thought it also benefited the employer as parents/carers were able to continue being productive. But most did not think it should be their employer's responsibility and that government provision was needed to ensure equity of access for all parents.
- > More availability of part-time work at senior levels would both better utilise the skills of mothers and make it easier for them to balance their dual roles.
- > More flexible career paths for both men and women would allow them to care for and spend time with their children while they are young.
- > In order for family-friendly and flexibility to really work though, the strong message coming through this study is that there needs to be a genuine culture of support for these policies, and it should not be left up to the discretion of individual managers.
- > Mothers as employees see it as a win-win situation for employers, who benefit from staff loyalty, higher productivity from higher morale, retention of skills and the willingness to go the extra mile in return.

## ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

- > The implications for public policy in New Zealand from the perspectives of the mothers in this qualitative study, in conjunction with random sample survey data, are that policy should aim to provide more support for parents to be able to choose to provide the majority of care for children up to two years. After that, support is needed for women to be able to work part-time in jobs which fully utilise their skills and for men to have sufficient flexibility in the workplace to share responsibility for children's needs. However, many mothers who would prefer to spend more time at home caring for their children need to return to paid work sooner or for more hours due to financial reasons, the limits on parental leave time and a lack of part-time work options; so childcare and other workplace initiatives to support mothers of younger children and in full-time work are also needed.
- > There was a strong feeling expressed by the mothers in this study that if the government wants more mothers in the paid workforce, they need to provide more assistance for them with the costs and difficulties of juggling those two roles.
- > While it is recognised that governmental support is available through childcare subsidies, paid parental leave of 14 weeks and the Working for Families programme, what is wanted in terms of government support, as indicated by this study and consistent with other studies, are:
  - more childcare subsidy
  - more after-school and school holiday programme funding, regulation and information
  - longer paid parental leave at a higher rate
  - greater eligibility for and/or higher amounts of tax rebates or credits for parents to enable them to have real choice about when and if to return to paid work
  - support for employers who provide support for parents.
- > The provision, funding and information on after-school and school holiday programmes was seen as a role for government, particularly through utilising school property and facilities.
- > There was mixed feeling on the role of legislation for such things as part-time work and flexibility as it was felt some small employers would find these things difficult; but on the other hand there is a need for equity for parents/employees.

## CONCLUSIONS

The ideal, as portrayed by participants in this study, would be for institutional and structural factors, such as government and workplace policies and practice in relation to financial assistance, childcare and flexible workplaces, to support cultural norms and preferences of parenting and paid work. That is, to allow parents real choice. The reality is that institutional and structural factors override cultural norms and preferences for many. While there have been initiatives in the right direction from both government and employers, this study indicates there is a need for more institutional and structural support from government and workplaces to enable New Zealand parents to more successfully combine parenting and paid work in a way that fits with the cultural norms of parenting and paid work that are emerging from this and other studies of the New Zealand context.

From mothers' perspectives represented in this study, both men and women want to be both parents and paid workers, but often compromise their parenting role to fit into the structures of the world of paid work. Women particularly also often compromise their role in the workforce in order to combine their dual roles within the current structural framework. Other studies suggest men may be experiencing greater work-family conflict than women as they desire to be more involved with their families, or strive to meet changing expectations for them to do so, while their traditional role in the paid workforce is seen as less flexible than for women.

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 AIMS

The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the ideas, beliefs and values of a group of New Zealand mothers around the roles of parents and formal/public childcare in meeting the care needs of children, and how that relates to decisions about labour force participation. The study also provides information on the difficulties experienced in being both a parent and paid worker, and the perceived roles of the state, the private sector, and families in relation to childcare and supporting families to balance paid work and parenting.

This complements quantitative data from an EEO Trust online survey of 4,475 parents in 2005 on issues around combining parenting and paid work (EEO Trust 2005). For example, 76 percent of those parents not currently in paid work said they would like to be, and to do this required an improved combination of affordable, quality convenient childcare, flexible work hours and quality part-time work options. The qualitative approach of this study enables an exploration of how the norms of motherhood and parenting emerging from the attitudes and values of the mothers in this study affect the combination of these options that mothers require in order to solve the tension between their roles as mothers and employees.

### Research questions

There were two complementary drivers of this research: the New Zealand context relating to mothers, paid work and childcare; and the theoretical and cross-cultural context outlined by Pfau-Effinger (2004). This research was motivated by a desire to explore in the New Zealand context Pfau-Effinger's thesis that the orientation of women on the basis of cultural models and values with respect to the family and the labour market should be the primary consideration in analysing cross-national differences, and that the role of institutions and existing social structures in enabling women to realise their orientations should be the secondary consideration, rather than the primary. There are several research questions emerging, which can be summarised as follows:

1. What are current New Zealand perceptions of the roles of parents, particularly mothers, and public/formal childcare in the care of young children?

This is explored in depth through the qualitative interviews with mothers in this study, mothers being the predominant alternative to public/formal childcare, and in general through the 2002 Information Systems Strategic Plan (ISSP) national random sample survey of all New Zealanders on the roles of men and women (Gendall 2003, 2006).

2. How have these perceptions changed since the 1950s and 1970s/80s, as reported by May (1992)?
3. (a) Where does New Zealand, as indicated by this exploratory qualitative study of 40 mothers and supporting quantitative research, fit on the continuum of norms of mothering/parenting and childcare outlined by Pfau-Effinger (2004), and  
  
(b) how does this affect decisions about labour force participation by mothers, ie when to return to work and whether full-time or part-time, compared to other drivers of that decision, eg financial need, how long job is kept for them, career progression?
4. (a) From these mothers' perspective, what are the difficulties and barriers to combining parenting and paid work, and  
  
(b) among these mothers, what are the relative roles of government, employers and other family members in order to solve the tension between their dual roles as parents and paid workers (in relation to expanding on information from the quantitative results from the EEO Trust survey (2005))?
5. Among these mothers, is comparatively low labour force participation of women with young children in New Zealand due primarily to institutional factors, such as lack of affordable quality childcare and family-friendly workplaces, or, as Pfau-Effinger (2004) proposes, primarily due to cultural preferences for primarily parental care rather than childcare for very young children?

## Definitions

The terms 'norms' and 'ideology' have varied meanings and uses and are used here in relation to their use primarily in the readings which guided this study. Wearing (1984) used the term 'ideology' in relation to motherhood to be strongly held beliefs, and includes norms and ideals in her study of the ideology of motherhood. Pfau-Effinger's (2004) use of the term 'cultural norms' refers to attitudes and values prevailing within a particular country or cultural tradition. These fit with more formal definitions of ideology as "a tightly knit body of beliefs organised around a few central values" (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 2000: 172) and norms as "expectations about appropriate conduct which serve as common guidelines for social action" (Abercrombie et al 2000: 243). Marshall (1998: 453) defines norms in sociology as "a shared expectation of behaviour that connotes what is considered culturally desirable and appropriate" and states that actual behaviour may differ from what is considered normative. Giddens (2001: 22) also defines values as abstract ideas that "give meaning and provide guidance to humans as they interact with the social world, and norms as "the rules of behaviour which reflect or embody a culture's values". Thus the terms 'norms', 'values', 'ideals' and 'ideologies' are used interchangeably to refer to beliefs about what is considered desirable and appropriate within the New Zealand social culture.

## 1.2 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Being a qualitative study of 40 mothers, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to all New Zealand mothers. The sample is skewed towards those in paid work, particularly full-time work, and those in middle to upper income and occupational groups. However, it does identify the issues that determined decisions around paid work and parenting for these mothers from throughout New Zealand, and how they perceive motherhood in early twenty-first century New Zealand, which are supplemented by quantitative findings from a random sample survey of New Zealanders (Gendall 2003, 2006). Although these findings cannot be generalised to all New Zealand mothers, they can be extrapolated to those of similar backgrounds to those in the study and are indicative of how New Zealand norms of motherhood, childcare and paid work may differ from those in various European countries, as presented by Pfau-Effinger (2004).

Subsequent to this project being undertaken, the Ministry of Social Development (2006) published the findings of their survey on work, family and parenting, which does provide some complementary national random sample quantitative data on some of these issues to further guide policy in this area for New Zealand. Further qualitative research on women from groups underrepresented in this study, such as those who are not in paid work, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and rural women, would also round out the picture.

Because of limitations on the size of this project it is not ethnic-specific; although it includes many ethnicities, it is dominated by the views of New Zealand European mothers. Thus it is recommended that future similar work be undertaken by Māori, Pacific and other ethnic groups, and with fathers.

The rest of this section presents the background to the issue that led to formulation of the aims of the project, details of the method and sample and an outline of the structure of the report.

## 1.3 BACKGROUND

### The New Zealand context

In response to a current tight labour market, which is projected to continue as the population ages, the Government has been looking to those groups which are not participating in the labour market to try and encourage greater participation. Bryant, Jacobson, Bell and Garrett (2004) found that, compared with other OECD countries, New Zealand has a low rate of labour force participation by women aged 25-34. As this is the peak childbearing period for New Zealand women (Statistics New Zealand 2005a), the main focus here is mothers. The Prime Minister's response was to call for increased provision of dawn to dusk childcare for school-age children to enable more women to enter the labour force (Clark 2005). This was met by a backlash from 'stay-at-home' mothers who felt their work and their choice were being devalued. It has been assumed theoretically that institutional differences such as lack of affordable quality childcare and tax-benefit abatement systems are major factors in the low labour force participation rate of New Zealand women aged 25-34. However, given the outpouring in the media in response to the Prime Minister's pronouncements in this area, albeit a misinterpretation of her actual words and intentions, we need to consider cultural differences in New Zealand norms and values around motherhood and childrearing as well.

Johnston (2005) found that while New Zealand women have low labour force participation when their children are pre-school age, they have relatively high participation once their children are at school. Johnston (2005: 35) concludes that “the presence of pre-school children is a key factor in explaining women’s participation in New Zealand compared to other countries”. The reasons for this could be institutional factors such as a lack of childcare and suitable family-friendly work options, or it could be a cultural preference for mothering, rather than public childcare, as the best option for very young children.

Also on the Government’s agenda since 2003 has been a work-life balance project through the Department of Labour, aimed at finding out what New Zealand workers want in terms of government and workplace initiatives and policies to enable them to better balance their paid work with their other life activities and responsibilities, including parenting (Department of Labour 2004, 2006).

### **The theoretical context**

These issues are not unique to New Zealand, but are being faced by all OECD countries (Jaumotte 2003). Some research has focused on inter-country differences in approaches to initiatives to enable parents to better combine their paid work and parenting roles. Pfau-Effinger (2004) focused on differences in underlying cultural norms around parenting as an explanation for different practices. She argues that these cultural norms are the primary determinant of differences, and institutional and structural factors, such as policies and practice in relation to childcare and financial assistance for families, are secondary. For example, the Scandinavian countries have a normative acceptance of public childcare after age two, so their solution is heavily funded paid parental leave for over 12 months, followed by heavily subsidised full-time childcare.

In contrast, the Netherlands has a strong normative belief that parents are the best carers and the workplace should change to allow both mothers and fathers to combine paid work with childcare, rather than utilising full-time public or private childcare. The German model is one of mothers’ primary role being the care of children, with work secondary to that and to their husband’s role as the main breadwinner. One of the key points emerging from Pfau-Effinger’s analysis is that part-time work rather than total disengagement from the labour force is a crucial demarcator of contemporary difference in cross-national models of work and family.

However, these models are ideals that are not necessarily actualised. For example, while almost four out of five women in the Netherlands state a preference for part-time work, in reality just over one in five is in part-time work (Pfau-Effinger 2004). Over half are not employed at all, and more are working full-time than want to. This suggests the need for social policy and workplace change to enable women who want to work part-time to do so. At the moment a large amount of willing female labour productivity is being lost due to social policies and workplace cultures not having adjusted to the cultural change in the family model. A further disjunction apparent in the Netherlands is that while many men support an egalitarian dual worker/dual part-time carer model, and while they have a higher rate of part-time work than Germany or Finland, there is still unmet need for part-time work for men.

International comparative data on part-time work for women aged 15-64 shows the Netherlands has the highest rate, at almost 60 percent. New Zealand, with similar rates to Germany at just over 30 percent, is in the top third of OECD countries (Johnston 2005).

Rasmussen, Lind and Visser (2004) compared trends in part-time work in New Zealand, the Netherlands and Denmark. Their findings for Denmark were similar to those Pfau-Effinger found in Finland – women in full-time rather than part-time work – which they could not explain from the social institutional differences. Pfau-Effinger’s theory of the underlying role of cultural norms around family and equality would be a valid explanation. The findings for New Zealand showed high levels of part-time work, but at low pay and poor conditions, ie not quality part-time work at senior levels. These findings indicate that institutional change in New Zealand has not yet caught up with cultural change in the family and gender roles.

Hakim (2003) uses a framework of preference theory to explain differential labour force participation of women, concluding that some women prefer mothering to paid work, while the majority want to combine both roles as equally important, and others prefer paid work. Those who prefer paid work will either not have children or work full-time and find alternative care for their children. Those who want to combine both roles as equally important are more likely to work part-time to allow more time with their children, but want quality part-time work in their normal occupation. Those who prefer mothering prefer not to do paid work at all or only work that fits around their mothering role. In reality many from

this latter group are in full-time work for economic reasons. This suggests that financial need overrides preference.

### **New Zealand research**

These studies made me wonder where New Zealand sits on the continuum of cultural norms and preferences of mothering and childcare, and what impact this has on decisions about labour force participation and the type of support required from government and employers. Knowing this is important to devising policies and practices that will maximise both the wellbeing of children and parents, and labour force participation and productivity.

Previous New Zealand work on the issue of parenting, paid work and childcare related to the aims of this study and available prior to undertaking this study includes:

- > An analysis of 2001 census data that showed 31 percent of parents both work full-time, 28 percent one works part-time and one full-time, and in 20 percent one works and one doesn't do paid work at all, and these vary by age of youngest child (McPherson 2005; Statistics New Zealand 2001a).
- > A UMR/Littlies Lobby (2005) summary report of quantitative and qualitative research on the key issues of concern to children and families in New Zealand found that the two top issues were "spending quality time with my children" and "providing housing and food". This reflects the conflict between paid work and parenting that all parents now face.
- > The ISSP random sample survey of 1,025 New Zealanders' attitudes to the roles of men and women (Gendall 2003) found that just over half (57 percent) said that mothers of pre-schoolers should not be in paid work at all, with almost a third (31 percent) saying they should only work part-time, and only 2 percent saying they should be in full-time work, with 10 percent undecided. Further analysis by the author shows these views were strongest at older ages, but approximately half of those aged under 35 and from 35-49 still thought women with pre-school children should stay at home full-time while a third supported part-time work and only 2 percent full-time work. There were no significant differences by gender. Once children were at school the norm was for mothers to work part-time: 71 percent, with 13 percent supporting full-time work and only 6 percent saying mothers of school-age children should stay at home full-time. And while 43 percent think pre-school children suffer if a mother does paid work, 35 percent disagree and the rest do not have an opinion. These results were replicated in a more recent ISSP survey (Gendall 2006).

Since undertaking this study, a Ministry of Social Development (2006: 10-11) random sample survey on work and parenting was published.<sup>1</sup> This study found that the preference of a majority of New Zealand parents was not to have both parents in equally demanding work and equally responsible for housework and childcare: 39 percent preferred one parent at home; 29 percent preferred one parent to have a less demanding job than the other in order to accommodate that partner taking on household and childcare responsibilities; and 30 percent preferred both parents to have equally demanding jobs and equal responsibility for childcare and housework. Just over half said it didn't matter which partner had the more or less demanding job.

Further relevant findings from the Ministry of Social Development study indicate that only a third of couples who prefer to have one parent at home have that in reality and that a third of couples who are both in paid work would prefer one partner to be at home. Just over half said it didn't matter which partner was at home or at work. Conversely, however, almost half (46 percent) of couples where one parent was not in paid work preferred them both to be in paid work. Only 5 percent of parents who want both partners to be in paid work and equally share housework and childcare have their preferences fully met. There was no breakdown of these findings by age of children (Ministry of Social Development 2006). The preference for staying home if there was not any financial need for both parents to be in paid work was higher for women and for tertiary qualified parents.

There was also a strong egalitarian ethos expressed in the Ministry of Social Development study, with 94 percent agreeing that housework and childcare should be shared equally when both partners are in full-time work and that the father should be equally involved with the care of his children as the mother (Ministry of Social Development 2006). Only 20 percent held the view that when women are in paid work, the man should still be the main earner. This view was greater among those with lower incomes and educational levels. In reality, however, the study found that women do more of the housework and childcare, even when both partners are in equally demanding jobs (Ministry of Social Development 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Although it was a random sample survey the Ministry of Social Development study (2006) had a low response rate of 33 percent, but results were weighted to census data on key demographic characteristics.

### **Norms and ideology of motherhood**

A search of the literature on motherhood showed research fell into three areas: experience; myth; and ideology. It could further be categorised into theory versus experience; historical versus contemporary; journalism versus academic; and New Zealand versus overseas.

The New Zealand material was predominantly on experience rather than ideology or theory (Kedgley 1996; McKenzie and Thomas 2003; Phillips 1988). It was also predominantly journalistic rather than academic (Kedgley 1996; Phillips 1988; Woods 1993). There have been academic studies focused on specific aspects of mothering, such as breastfeeding and paid work (Galtry 2000) and the experience of becoming a parent (Loveridge 1999). Where there were academic studies that included ideology, they were historical rather than contemporary, and qualitative. For example, Perrett's thesis (2003) covered representations of motherhood in the 1920s in New Zealand and Australia; Griffiths (1984) covered feminism and the ideology of motherhood in New Zealand from 1896 to 1930; and May's (1992) research included issues around perspectives, issues and experiences of motherhood for two groups of women – those mothering in the 1940s and 1950s, and those mothering in the 1970s and 1980s. She herself acknowledges that these issues, which include the conflict between childrearing and paid work or careers, would have changed by the 1990s, let alone the 2000s. Similarly, McKinlay (1983) dealt with ideologies of motherhood, but was based on 1970s women. As patterns of childbearing change to more women having their first child in their 30s, and patterns of female education and labour force participation change for this new cohort of mothers, what has happened to the traditional norms and ideologies that May and McKinlay found for earlier cohorts of mothers?

The prevailing views in 1950s New Zealand, according to May (1992), were that being a wife and mother were women's primary focus with any paid work secondary to the man's role as family breadwinner and the needs of the children. There was little shift in the prevailing ideology of motherhood in the 1970s and 1980s, which was that, despite the increasing combining of paid work and childrearing, mothers should care for their own children most of the time and that childcare was outside the boundaries of acceptable childrearing. For women in the 1970s and 1980s the traditional ideals of motherhood remained despite a shift in actual roles driven by economic necessity from divorce or low incomes, and by new ideals of gender equality and independence for women. This resulted in conflict and guilt between children's needs and their own needs. Lack of institutional and structural support, such as sufficient affordable and quality childcare and workplaces that recognised and accommodated the dual roles of paid worker and childrearer, made reconciling the two demands difficult.

Studies on the ideology and norms of motherhood from overseas that provided useful background in conceptualising ideology and norms, and the issues to cover in the interviews, include Betsy Wearing's (1984) study in Australia, Dex's (2003) UK study, and DiQuinzio (1999), Roiphe (1996) and Villani (1997) from the US.

The primary theme emerging from the overseas literature on the ideology of motherhood was that of the 'good mother'. A good mother puts her children first, and inherent in doing that in the 1970s was being there with them full-time, based on the prevailing beliefs of the time that young children need their mothers in constant attendance (Wearing 1984). Similarly, a more recent study in the UK found that a good mother is "one who is there for the children, and who gives priority to children's over her own needs and, if there is a choice to be made, over workplace demands" (Dex 2003: 44).

### **Conflict between motherhood and paid work**

Other overseas literature/studies deal with the issue of the conflict arising in the contemporary Western world as traditional ideology/norms of motherhood conflict with contemporary norms of education and paid work for women (Gerson 1985; Roiphe 1996; Villani 1997). Williams (2000) describes this as the ideal mother meets the ideal worker norm, where the ideal worker is based on the traditional breadwinner male as a full-time worker without primary responsibility for the care of children and the need to take time out from the workforce for this role, while the ideal mother is one whose prime responsibility is the care of children.

Roiphe (1996) writes of the guilt felt by mothers in paid work for not being at home with their children, and the anger they feel if they sacrifice personal fulfilment and financial independence and security to stay at home and be a good mother. She refers to public daycare as the Swedish model to solve the dilemma but claims the US is "not a country fond of the communal solution" of public childcare.

Gerson (1985) argued that altering childrearing ideologies was easier for women than changing workplace and institutional structures. Women who wanted or needed to do paid work “developed new notions of good mothering that better fit their needs. ...Ambivalent emotions of guilt and fragile confidence that children would not be harmed emerged side by side.” The benefits for children of having a mother in paid work are emphasised, along with criticisms of the traditional model of good mothering as over-mothering, or full-time mothers spending time on housework rather than with their children.

Similarly, Villani (1997), citing empirical research, and DiQuinzio’s (1999) theoretical analysis both note that there is not one right way to be a good mother, but that society’s support is needed in order for women to have choice: high quality childcare being at the core of women’s ability to be a good mother and do paid work.

Villani (1997: 118) notes that some women find juggling the dual roles of mother and paid worker too difficult but quotes Schwartz (1984) as this being due to “the inability of the workplace to accommodate mothers rather than individual women’s inability to accommodate a job” (Schwartz, cited in Villani 1997).

### **Policy responses**

A number of New Zealand publications include analysis of data on increasing female labour force participation, both full-time and part-time, particularly of mothers with young children (McPherson 2005; Sceats 2003; Statistics New Zealand 2005b). Sceats (2003: 169) concluded that “combining of work and family life is harder than it has ever been” and is linked to declining fertility, particularly among highly educated women, and underutilisation of women’s skills in the workforce due in part to lack of senior part-time positions.

This leads to discussions of public policy and workplace measures to alleviate this conflict, such as public-funded childcare, and flexible work-life balance or family-friendly initiatives in the workplace. Recommendations for New Zealand from an OCED report (2004: 12) include extending New Zealand’s current childcare subsidies, greater out-of-school care, modifications to the marginal effective tax rate structure for second earners, modifications to the Domestic Purposes Benefit to make the transition to paid work easier, and enhancing the family-friendly nature of workplaces. As noted previously, the current government has responded with a call to improve childcare provision and a project to improve work-life balance in the workplace. The Government also has an Early Childhood Education strategy aimed at addressing concerns about childcare and a Working for Families programme has also been implemented to provide greater financial assistance to families with at least one parent in paid work, and increased levels of childcare and out-of-school care subsidies. The initial paid parental leave period has also been extended from 13 weeks to 14 weeks and eligibility extended to self-employed women.

### **Contribution of this study**

The gap in knowledge that this study aimed to contribute to filling was in providing an academic, contemporary, exploratory study of the cultural norms – attitudes, values and beliefs – of the roles of parents and childcare in New Zealand from mothers’ perspectives. These can then be looked at to get an indication of how such norms have changed since the 1950s and 1970s/80s and where New Zealand may fit in Pfau-Effinger’s (2004) cross-national cultural continuum, and her theoretical framework of the place of these norms in determining behaviour relating to labour force participation of women with children. The findings of this study could be further investigated through a quantitative random sample survey in order to generalise to the wider population.

In addition, the in-depth information from this qualitative study can be linked to quantitative information from the survey of parents and paid work completed by the EEO Trust in 2005 on what encourages and supports women with young children into paid work. Findings from that study found that flexible working hours were more important than childcare for parents overall, but while flexibility was important to both mothers and fathers, childcare was more important for women than men. Part-time work options were also rated more highly by women than men and were particularly important to those with children aged less than three years. The most important reason for both mothers and fathers being in paid work was financial, followed by personal fulfilment and being a good role model to their children.



## 1.4 METHOD

The research comes from an interpretivist approach, which views social reality as constructed and negotiated and whose concern is to understand the world from the point of view of the participants in the research. The qualitative approach was used to enable an in-depth exploration of mothers' beliefs about their roles and the reasons for their decisions in relation to paid work to supplement previous survey research (EEO Trust 2005; Gendall 2003). However, this previous research did not focus on the role of cultural norms of parenting/motherhood as factors in decision-making about labour force participation.

### **Qualitative interviews**

Forty qualitative interviews of about one hour's duration were carried out with mothers from around New Zealand from December 2005 to February 2006. The interviews took place at either the interviewee's home or workplace and were audio-taped then later transcribed by a professional transcriber. Interviewees also completed a one-page questionnaire of their personal, family and employment characteristics. (This information is summarised under "The Sample" below and in Appendix 1).

### **Sampling method**

Interviewees were randomly selected from those who indicated a willingness to be contacted by email for further research in an online survey on paid work and parenting by the EEO Trust carried out in August-September 2005 (n=4,475 of which 1,100 agreed to further research contact).

An initial sample of 80 was randomly selected by computer and potential interviewees were approached by email with an information sheet setting out the purposes and requirements of the research. Those who were interested returned a signed consent form, or replied by email and completed the consent form at the interview.

### **Ethics**

The research processes were peer reviewed for ethical compliance in line with Massey University Human Ethics Guidelines. This included informed consent using written information sheets outlining the research procedure and use of the resulting information, and voluntary participation. Participants also had to approve a copy of the transcription.

### **Analysis**

A cross-case thematic analysis approach was used. Themes were identified both from the research aims and questions and, as they emerged, from the interviews. Both consistency and discrepancy of views and behaviours were noted and, where relevant, specific sub-group characteristics of interviewees were noted; for example, where there was consistency of views among rural mothers, or sole mothers, or those who were referring to their experience of parenting young children more than 10 years ago. However, the purpose of including a wide range of mothers from throughout New Zealand and using a qualitative approach was not to disaggregate findings by sub-groups, but to look for what was common to the experience of being a mother and a paid worker in New Zealand, regardless of individual characteristics, and what was not.

The approach was primarily descriptive, but in the discussion and conclusion links were drawn between the various aspects covered by the different research questions, such as the link between norms of motherhood, parenting and childcare, and decisions about paid work and the kind of supports needed from partners, other family, employers and government to assist women to be both mothers and paid workers.

## 1.5 THE SAMPLE

Forty New Zealand mothers from Northland to Southland, randomly selected from a list of participants in the 2005 EEO Trust online survey on parenting and paid work, were interviewed between December 2005 and February 2006. A numerical summary of the characteristics of the sample is in Appendix 1. Key characteristics of the sample, which is skewed towards mothers from middle and upper income and occupational groups who are in paid work, are described below.

While the geographic distribution of the sample did not exactly reflect the distribution of the population, it did include women from both the North and South Islands, and a range of location types from large

urban centres, to provincial cities in both islands, small towns and rural areas. The predominance of responses from Wellington may reflect the means of distribution of the survey from which the sample was drawn, or the level of interest in the topic among those who live and work in the seat of government.

Most of the women were in their 30s (55 percent) and 40s (35 percent), with one over 50, three in their 20s and none under 20. The sample included New Zealand European and Māori women, as well as some who had migrated from other countries.

The sample is reflective of the number of children in families today, with most interviewees having one or two children, although it did include those with three or more children. Just over half of the children of the interviewees were of primary school age, and just over a quarter were pre-school age, with 10 percent in high school and a similar proportion aged 18+ years. None of the interviewees currently had a baby less than 12 months of age.

Most of the women (73 percent) were in paid work full-time<sup>2</sup>, with 25 percent working more than 40 hours per week. A quarter were in paid work part-time, and one was not in paid work at all. The sample is, thus, mainly composed of mothers in paid work, particularly full-time work, compared to all mothers in New Zealand where 20 percent are not in paid work, and 31 percent in full-time work, and 27 percent in part-time work (McPherson 2005). This is probably related to the lack of mothers in the study with a baby less than 12 months of age, this being the group most likely to be not in paid work, and to the source of the sample from a survey on paid work and parenting.

Those in long hours of paid work mostly had primary school-age children, but some also had pre-school-age children. The part-timers mostly had pre-school children, but those working 30-40 hours a week in paid work were also more likely to have pre-school children than primary school-age children.

An overwhelming majority of the women had returned to the same occupation after taking time out to have a child, with only two saying they had chosen to reduce the level of their occupation as a result of having a child. Five had returned to a more advanced level than what they had left.

Most of the sample also returned to full-time hours when they returned from parental leave. Approximately a quarter made a graduated return to full-time hours after some weeks, months or years part-time. Another quarter were still working part-time.

Time out of paid work after having a child was mostly less than 12 months, with around 20 percent taking less than three months. Only six women had taken the full 12 months. Another five had taken more than 12 months, varying from around 18 months, to two years, five years and 11 years.

The sample was highly educated compared with the total population. Nearly half (45 percent) had a degree, and another 20 percent had some other type of tertiary qualification. A third had a school-level qualification. This compares with only 13 percent of all New Zealand women aged 30-49 having a degree (Statistics New Zealand 2001b).

The education levels were reflected in the distribution of occupation types, with 65 percent in professional or managerial roles and a quarter in administrative roles compared with only 31 percent of all New Zealand women aged 30-49 in professional or managerial occupations (Statistics New Zealand 2001b).

Similarly, half the sample had a household income of over \$100,000, and a quarter had between \$70-100,000. The quarter whose household income was less than \$70,000 included most of the sole parents as well as four couples. This compares with 16 percent of couples with children and 2 percent of sole parents having household incomes of over \$100,000, and 15 percent of couples with children and 3 percent of sole parents having household incomes of \$70-100,000 (Statistics New Zealand 2001c).

Most of the sample were using or had used private childcare, fairly evenly split between full-time and part-time. Seven used only informal care, mostly their partner or mother, and another five used a combination of private and informal care. Those using informal care only tended to be on lower incomes in non-professional occupations and with lower educational qualifications.

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2 Full-time as per Statistics New Zealand census definition is 30 or more hours per week. Part-time is less than 30 hours per week.

## 1.6 STRUCTURE OF REPORT

Sections 2.0 to 7.0 of the report present the findings from the qualitative interviews with mothers undertaken for this study. The findings are divided into six sections, following the key areas covered in the interview guide and relating to the aims and research questions of the study. These are: the roles of mothers and fathers; childcare; implications for decisions about labour force participation; the difficulties of combining paid work and parenting; and the role of employers and government in assisting parents to be both parents and paid workers. Within these six sections the material is ordered under themes that either emerged from the interviews or from the aims and research questions. There is some overlap: for example, comments on childcare funding occur both under views on childcare and on the role of government.

Section 2.0 explores respondents' views on motherhood in relation to the aim of exploring cultural norms about the role of mothers. Section 3.0 focuses on attitudes to and experiences of childcare so that these can be considered in relation to their decisions about returning to paid work.

Section 4.0 considers issues involved in being both a mother and a paid worker and how this impacts on decisions about when and how much to return to paid work after having a child and what the ideal combination of roles would be. This section concludes with consideration of the role of partners/fathers and family members in supporting mothers to combine their roles of parent and paid worker.

Section 5.0 outlines the impacts, both positive and negative, experienced in combining both roles and identifies the most difficult aspects of being both mother and paid worker. Sections 6.0 and 7.0 present the women's perceptions of the roles of employers and the government, respectively, in supporting them to be both mothers and paid workers by addressing the issues identified in Section 5.0.

Section 8.0 discusses the findings in relation to the aims and background to the project presented in Sections 1.1 and 1.2. Section 9.0 sums up the outcomes of this project in relation to its aims and research questions, which are to provide a contemporary academic study of the norms of parenting and childcare from mothers' perspectives and how that relates to decisions about labour force participation and the combination of childcare and flexible workplace options that mothers require to solve tensions between their roles as mothers and paid workers.

## 2.0 THE ROLES OF MOTHERS AND FATHERS

This first section explores respondents' views on motherhood in relation to the aim of exploring cultural norms about the role of mothers and how these may have changed over time. The key findings are that there is now a wider concept of being a 'good mother' that is compatible with mothers being in paid work in a way that it was not for their own mothers. At the same time there is a feeling that wider society holds contradictory views about the role of mothers: that on the one hand they should be at home with their children, especially young babies, but on the other hand they should be out contributing to society through participating in paid work.

However, the general theme emerging from the mothers in this study is that full-time motherhood has been devalued and is not supported as much as combining paid work and motherhood, except in rural areas. There is also a belief that many mothers do not have a real choice about being a full-time mother or being in paid work; that they need to work for financial reasons. Some women feel they are missing out by not being with their children as much as they would like. Others, particularly the sole mothers in this study, believed they were being good role models for their children by being in paid work.

The section concludes with mothers' views on what the roles of fathers are and should be in relation to childcare and paid work, and in supporting mothers to combine paid work and parenting.

### 2.1 BECOMING A MOTHER

The mothers in the study came to parenthood in a range of ways, from deliberately planned and eagerly awaited, to unplanned surprise, devastation or shock.

Ecstatic. I've always wanted to be a Mum. I couldn't wait. It was really good and that was all I thought about. Nothing else.

It was a bit of a shock. I think it's hard work for anybody, but I loved it. I think what made it better for me was the choice to go back to work. I think I would have gone insane if I'd been a full-time mother.

For some their first thoughts were uncertainty about the change and the impact on paid work and finances.

Just sort of excitement and how will we manage and how will we cope financially and those sorts of things.

Anxiety about how to keep working and earning an income and be a mother.

I was quite anxious. I imagined all kinds of scenarios and I know that children got sick a lot and holidays and no women in my unit had children or if they did the children were a lot older. I felt I would be breaking new ground, it would be difficult.

I'd taken quite a long time to find the job that I was in and I love it, so there was that concern too, that the impact of having a child would detrimentally impact on that. ... I also felt that if you're going to have them, probably you should be at home looking after them, so there is that tension between the two, that I have a job, finally, that I really love and that I don't particularly want to give up.

I was concerned about how I was going to manage both being a parent and getting a career. That was probably the biggest thing; having children and having a career at the same time.

A number of the interviewees told of their position being made redundant while on parental leave. That this is seen to happen makes other women anxious about taking parental leave. This is one woman's experience when asked what her thoughts were on becoming a mother.

A lot of anxiety around the employment situation. As soon as you say you're taking parental leave it's like, right, let's do the internal reshuffling. If you're not on the ground

at the time then it makes it difficult to have influence, obviously it's an easier time to do that. And in actual fact that's what happened, because I was made redundant when I was on parental leave.

When asked about their expectations and experience of being a mother, the two most common responses were that it is hard – harder than expected – and that it is wonderful, enjoyable and overall positive.

I was very excited about becoming a mother and I absolutely adore being a mother. I never dreamed how hard it was, because it is very stressful, especially if you are full-time working.

It's the best, most rewarding thing, and the most difficult – highs and lows.

Others noted changes in the way they felt about themselves and how others perceived them.

I did find it had quite a negative effect on my brain and how I was perceived. I hadn't realised how much of me my career was, or my occupation was, to other people. Other people's perception of me and what that did to me if I was kind of dismissed as 'just a mother' when I considered what I was doing was a very tough job, harder than anything I've been paid to do.

## 2.2 BEING A 'GOOD MOTHER'

Some voluntarily talked about what being a 'good mother' meant, while with others I asked them what they thought it meant, as it is a term that occurs frequently in the literature as representing norms of motherhood in the sense defined in this study, ie "expectations about appropriate conduct which serve as common guidelines for social action" (Abercrombie et al 2000: 243). Being a good mother seems to mean putting your child first, nurturing, teaching and ensuring its needs are met at all times. For most of the women in the study, it doesn't mean being there yourself 24 hours a day, but ensuring that someone who can provide these requirements is, be that herself, her partner/husband, a grandparent or a professional caregiver. Thus, being a good mother is compatible with doing paid work.

I suppose being a mother is no longer putting yourself first and actually putting your children first.

I guess it's just kind of a guidance role. I'm just one player in my children's lives. Obviously when they are young you're kind of a central part of it, but especially with the whole early childhood thing, bringing up children is such a multi-person role, and so while I have a big part to play in it, I'm just one.

I think being a good mother means to provide your children with everything that they need growing up, love and support and a comfortable environment and a safe home.

*And for you, does that mean personally that you as the mother has to be there doing all that for them?*

I think I need to make sure somebody is doing that for them and doing a proper job of it, whether it's me or my husband or a family member.

However, while this was generally the view of the mothers themselves, some believed that others in society saw it differently.

I think probably going back to work so early isn't other people's idea of a good mother. Probably not seen as a great thing to do.

The assumption is that you can only be a good mother if you stay at home full-time and I don't think that's true.

And a few still judged themselves by this concept.

I don't think I'm a good mother, but probably because I compare myself to friends of mine who are full-time mothers and who just seem to do so much more. I think it's the time thing, because I've never really believed that quality was better than quantity.

## 2.3 MANY WAYS TO BE A GOOD MOTHER

What came through these interviews quite strongly was that there is not one way to be a good mother today; there are many ways and it is for each mother to choose the way that works for her. There was little judgement by the women interviewed on those who chose a different pattern to themselves. And most were confident and happy in the choices they had made for themselves that worked for them.

I don't care what society thinks because you've got pros and cons of both sides of either full-time working Mum or full-time mother at home. I don't take any notice of what people say, and feel quite scornful that some people can be, you know, a working mother obviously doesn't care about their child because they should be at home where they belong, or vice versa. I just can't be bothered with people who have such opinions because they shouldn't judge.

I think it's about being happy and doing what makes you happy. So if you need to work, then you work, but if you don't work and you enjoy being at home, then that's where you should be. It's about being happy and settled in yourself.

In the past I think if mothers went out to work it was seen as a negative thing, but I think now it's much more accepted in society that men and women both work and both share the care of children. And some people certainly make the choice that they don't want to work any more, and that's almost less accepted now. It's just horses for courses, so many different ways.

Many noted that choice was only possible for those on higher incomes and with a partner, that for those on lower incomes or without a partner there was no choice to stay home as they had to do paid work for financial reasons.

There are quite a few Mums, solo Mums, who have come to work because they have no other option. There are a lot of mothers out there who would like to be full-time mothers and can't, they just can't afford to be.

Some saw their paid work role as part of being a good mother by being able to provide for things for their children, like education, swimming lessons and other activities and experiences they wouldn't otherwise have.

I guess making sure that she's able to do the things that we see are important for her to do. Financially being able to have a good education and no student loan. If she wants to try something I want to not have to struggle for her to try that. We work so that she will have opportunities.

And others, particularly sole parents, saw being a good role model by doing paid work as part of being a good mother.

The role of a mother is to love and care and guide and to be totally hands-on and full-on in that child's life. Although I'm back at work, he is my main priority in life. Nothing ever takes precedence over that. So me working full-time in quite a career-driven job is part of my development for him, so that he sees the importance of working. He doesn't see me sitting on the DPB doing nothing, he sees me carrying on and working.

## 2.4 THE INFLUENCE OF THEIR OWN MOTHER'S ROLE

Many of these women were children in the 1970s and 1980s when their own mothers were starting to shrug off the idea that a mother's role is in the home and not in the paid workforce, so they grew up with role models who combined parenting with paid work, and saw that as the norm. They also had positive experiences of being in childcare themselves.

She was in paid work because she left my father when I was eight months old. She had to be in paid work and I went to daycare, and I don't think I turned out that bad.

*So you had a positive experience of having your mother in paid work and being in childcare?*

I did. I was an only child and it was fine.

My mother owned her own business and worked long hours. I was in childcare. I think it probably had a large impact on my decisions because I can remember really enjoying the childcare centre that I was at, loved it.

She was the breadwinner. I had a role model of a mother working and being the provider, the breadwinner. I see my role as being to provide for my family financially and to help raise the children. I provide a balance to my husband as the main caregiver.

For those who grew up in the late 1950s and 1960s when it was the norm for mothers to be at home, or whose mothers continued that tradition in the 1970s, the influence of that experience does not seem to be strong. For many their memory of growing up with a mother who was at home was that she was busy doing unpaid housework rather than spending time with them. In reaction to that, some actively decided that if they were at home full-time it would be to spend time with their children, not doing housework.

Because my mother was always really busy with chores looking after the three of us and because household chores took so long in those days, standing by the washing machine and all that kind of stuff, she had little time to play, so when I had my children I wanted to spend a lot of time playing with them, so I actually got a cleaner in because I found they wanted me to come and sit down on the floor and play with them and I was up to my ears in washing up, so then I could spend real quality time playing with them a lot more.

I think that I probably spend more time playing with my children than my mother ever did with us. I never remembered her getting down on the floor and actually playing with us, because she was... She was a great Mum and she was always there, but she was always doing everything else, whether that was housework or helping my father on the farm, or whatever.

And some saw their own mothers as being trapped and resentful as a result of not being in paid work.

My mother was at home full-time. She was trapped and she resented it. I didn't want to be like my mother. I was not going to end up that way. I considered it vital for my own self-esteem and sense of self-worth, and also not to feel guilty about the entire financial burden being laid on my partner.

For others they reconciled the difference in their role to that of their mother to changing times and norms so that it doesn't have a strong effect on what they do or how they feel about it. They're aware of it, but things have changed.

My view would be one of my upbringing with my Mum, and she was a full-time mother. Yeah, that was my view of motherhood. I would have liked to have been that kind of mother, but I know this was a different time ... and as a sole mother getting a full-time job was for self-esteem for my children, to see me working, being a role model.

I think that it is good for a mother to stay at home at least initially when the baby is first born because it's good to have that bonding time with your new baby, but I don't think

my parents' traditional values influenced me so much that I thought I should stay home until my child goes to school.

She was a full-time mother but I don't think that influenced me because things have moved on considerably since then.

For some, though, the effect of their own childhood experience was to make them feel that a mother's role is to be at home full-time with her children. There is some conflict between this and their own role and ability to do this.

She had always been at home and she had always been there when we were sick and that's really important to me, that I'm there for the kids, and yeah, I always felt torn between work and kids.

I didn't think about it that much other than a vague feeling that if you are going to have children probably it's better to be there, it's the idea of handing their care over to someone else.

*And is that for your needs because you want to be with your child, or because you think it's best for the child?*

A bit of both. I do really enjoy being with him, he's great fun although it's quite demanding work as well, but there's part of me thinks it is better for them to have that one caregiver who is developing that sort of relationship and I suppose provide stability, but at the same time I don't know if I could do it full-time

## 2.5 BEING A FULL-TIME STAY-AT-HOME MOTHER

There was a general feeling that today women who are full-time mothers are not valued and are judged more critically than those who do paid work, especially once children are older than two years.

Just the comments you hear. You'll be out with a group of people and they ask, 'And what do you do?' 'Oh, I'm at home with my children' – you hear people negatively react to that sort of thing a lot more.

When I talk to Mums at home they seem apologetic and that worries me. What I take from that is they perceive themselves to be more undervalued than perhaps women were 20 years ago doing that job. They think they need to justify their role, which I think is sad. I don't think they should, any more than I should have to justify my own work full-time when I've got a pre-schooler.

Several of the women referred to Prime Minister Helen Clark's statement about providing more childcare to get more mothers into paid work, and other government measures to get women off the Domestic Purposes Benefit as not valuing the work that full-time mothers do.

I think all these kind of pressures add up to a whopping amount of negative feedback on to women that they're not being productive. There is no perceived output, whereas I think producing healthy, happy children has a much bigger place in society than is apparent from the way we value mothers.

I don't think that we any longer in New Zealand have a culture where women expect that they should be at home. It sounds a bit old fashioned. I think that there's an expectation that women will do everything and they might have to change their whole world to do it, but that there is something still wrong with a woman that stays at home and doesn't go back to work, even on a part-time basis. It may not have been valued before, but it was accepted and it was what people did and there wasn't anything wrong with it, and now there is sort of something wrong with it, that it's sort of a cop out, and something you do if you can't get a good career, otherwise you get a good career, and have your kids around that.



The decision to be full-time stay-at-home mother is often driven by the needs of a child. Some women who had planned to return to paid work sooner changed their mind because they had a special needs child, or a child who they felt would not do well in childcare.

After about a month my child developed a chronic condition that needed special care. It was probably just the gelling point of resigning and giving up. We struggled, we sold the car, sold a house, but no, I couldn't return to work.

Most enjoyed their time as full-time mothers, but were happy to go back to paid work at the end of their parental leave.

I felt good about it. I thought it was a really positive experience and I made the most of that time. I involved myself and my son in a lot of parenting activities and child activities. There were a lot of other full-time Mums around. I joined a local mothers' group and got on really well – we were all first-time mothers, so we had a lot in common and we lived quite closely together. I found it quite easy.

I enjoyed it, but I was well ready to do something by the end of the year. I was quite keen to get my teeth into things again.

It's been really, really good and I wouldn't change it for the world and I loved being at home with L.... for that time, but I didn't realise until I went back to work that I had actually lost some of me, and since I've gone back to work I feel that I've got some of me back.

Others didn't want to go back to paid work and would have preferred to remain at home for longer – either a full year for those who went back sooner, or two years, or until the youngest was at school. Returning before they were ready was driven by financial need<sup>3</sup> or the requirements of the job to return or resign at the end of the parental leave period.

I would like to have constant presence in her life. I would prefer to be with her practically 24 hours a day, knowing that she is being taken care of.

*So what has driven your decision to go back to work?*

Purely monetary. I didn't believe before I had her... I had full intentions of going back to work and I thought I'd go back to work no problem. Of course I didn't realise how strong my maternal feelings were. I didn't, you don't know until you know. It breaks my heart that I have to go back to work.

Initially I was supposed to go back when he was three months old, but I just absolutely didn't want to. Had I the choice, I probably wouldn't have gone back to any employment, I would have just stayed home with him full-time, but financially it just isn't an option for us. That was what drove our decision, a basic need, rather than what we wanted for our son. I would have ultimately liked to have been a full-time mother until he was at school.

Taking more than the 12 months parental leave would have meant resigning from my job, but when it was time to go back I didn't feel ready. I cried when I first realised that I was going to have to go back. Just the thought of leaving him with someone else was really quite scary, but yeah, I would have had to resign. In an ideal situation it would have been lovely to stay with him until he was about three.

Some noted that you only get one opportunity to be with your children when they're young, and they want to be with their children as much as possible. Being with their children is a positive experience they don't want to miss out on.

I feel like you get such a small window of opportunity to spend that time with your kids before they've become more independent of you, that it's nice to be as much a part of that as you can.

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3 One of the benefits of conducting face-to-face interviews, mostly in the women's homes, is that I can confirm that those women who spoke of having to return to work for financial need were living in modest situations. They were not working for extra material gain, but to provide basic accommodation needs for their families.

I don't want to give up on those early years of my kids' lives because they don't come back.

I don't want to miss out on watching my child take the first step, call somebody else Mummy, when they are talking those first words. They will never do first ever again. I'm sorry, I'm too greedy.

## 2.6 DAMNED IF YOU DO, DAMNED IF YOU DON'T

Another theme emerging from some interviews was that mothers today are made to feel guilty whichever role they choose, and that society, and therefore mothers, is conflicted about what mothers should be doing. However, overall, this attitude seemed to be more at societal level than what the mothers in this study felt themselves.

I think being a good mother is to nurture your children and look after them and I think there is still, but less than it used to be, a perception that if you're not the person doing that 24/7 you're not being a good mother, but then on the other hand you think you should be contributing to the economy and that if you're not, then you hear people say 'I'm just a mother'. So it's a bit of a no-win situation really. If you're not working outside the home you're just sitting around looking after children and not expanding your mind, and then if you are out working you get the other side, that you should be looking after your children. It is quite hard. In most of our heads there are probably both views.

The generalisations and expectations put on women these days are too much for us to live with. We're damned if we go out and work and abandon our children, we're damned if we stay at home and don't go out and earn the bread and get off our backsides, so to speak.

It's almost like there's two camps: you are a bad mother if you're not at home all the time and you are selfish if you want to go back to work with a pre-school child ... equally you are a slack, lazy person for setting a poor example by staying at home; you should be out role-modelling for your children.

I think it's really conflicted. There used to be a dominant idea, whether or not people were happy with it, that Mum at home baking cookies was good, and we kind of lost that. In my circle it's absolutely normal to go back to work full-time, although quite a few people have been able to choose not to. I know they feel at social events and people say, 'Oh what do you do?' and they say 'I'm at home full-time' and it's like, OK, you're not worth talking to. And equally sometimes I feel kind of guilty that I'm not at home making cookies and stuff all the time. It's really mixed up at the moment, what we think of parenting.

## 2.7 MOTHERS IN PAID WORK

Very few interviewees expressed any sense of guilt about doing paid work and using childcare. For most they were surrounded by other women in the workplace doing the same thing and saw it as the norm.

Because you are in the workforce you are working with other mothers with children, so you are with your own sort of group. So you may not be aware of the negative views about it.

Because of the sort of work I do I was working with other fairly well trained women who also had children and they had private childcare, nannies, that sort of thing, so it was very much the norm.

On the contrary, many expressed a sense of needing to be in paid work to feel they are contributing. This was especially so for the sole parents in the study, for whom being a good mother meant being a good role model by doing paid work rather than being on a benefit.

I think I was only on the benefit for about three months and then I got this job. I just hated the thought of being on a benefit and I couldn't afford a mortgage on the benefit, so I know I would have to work full-time. I just feel like it's your responsibility to go and work. I have never felt I have to rely on government for survival.

I am young, intelligent and able to work and I don't think I would be sending a very good message to my children to say well it's OK to sit on a benefit.

Fundamental to their lack of guilt about leaving their children in childcare is that the care they have chosen is good, quality care where their children are safe and happy and being stimulated and enriched.

Knowing that she's in a place that they care for her enough to look after her. And I know that no one could love your child like you, but I know that they care a lot about her. She will be safe and happy and I know that they will look after her well and take care of all her needs and she's not going to be neglected in any way. That for me, I know that I can relax and put that worry aside.

Initially I found it really, really distressing going back to work and I didn't cope with it very well at all, and I still do at times wish that I was at home with him full-time. But I really appreciate the relationship that he has with his Dad now and also that he gets to spend time at the daycare with other kids. He's well socialised and the daycare people are just the most amazing people. It was so difficult for us to put our son into daycare and now I am just absolutely happy with it.

Some women who have returned to paid work earlier than they would have liked, or full-time rather than part-time, for financial reasons or because of the requirements of their job, feel both they and their child have missed out.

I have never believed that quality is better than quantity and I guess it's just that they are with their kids all the time. They haven't missed anything. I've never been with her when one of her teeth has fallen out – my partner has, because he's home during the day and he also took two years off – and I miss a lot of things at school, and friends of mine they go to everything, plus they also have time to do stuff for themselves and they're fuller, richer people for that, I think.

I think particularly for me because I've only got one child and I will only have one child, that I wouldn't have missed out on all those milestone things. I don't know whether they actually change your experience of motherhood, I just assume they do, but I don't have anything to reference that.

## **2.8 RURAL MOTHERS**

Although there was a relatively small number of rural mothers in the sample, there was a feeling that being a stay-at-home mother was the norm in rural areas and doing paid work when you have pre-school children was negatively judged.

You'll probably get a different answer from somebody who lives and works in Auckland, compared to a rural person. I've copped a lot of flack about it.

Being a good mother here means being there all the time and able to bake cookies in the morning and crumpets for lunch and things like that. I think they probably feel they know their children better than I know mine, that they feel more involved, but I don't think they do.

There's one woman here who strongly believes that a woman's place is in the home when she has children, that that's the best place for them, and I don't disagree with that, it's just that I think that people aren't realistic. If young couples today are trying to have a home and have a family, then it's not always realistic to think that you could stay home.

I was wondering what my parents would think of me going back to work and then when a lot of people in the community heard that I was going back to work I did get a lot of comments like, 'Oh, you're leaving your baby, how could you do that?' and all that sort of thing, so I was thinking I should stay home, but then I guess I have to look at what other people were doing in cities. I am in such a rural area and people I guess are a bit more conservative here, so we did have to block out what I thought a mother's role traditionally has been, staying at home with the children. But that doesn't necessarily suit everyone and I didn't think it would suit me, as long as I could be flexible in my role, but I did think of motherhood traditionally as being staying at home. It just plays with your mind a wee bit I guess.

## 2.9 THE ROLE OF FATHERS/PARTNERS

In general there was a belief that the roles of mothers and fathers should be as equal as possible.

Having the same responsibilities as the mother and being able to share the load. The house and work as well. It's not always the woman who has to take the sick leave or the one who leaves early if the child is sick. The father can pick the children up, rather than always being the mother who has to do that.

He has been fully involved from the start in terms of changing nappies and showering her and playing with her and taking her for walks and that kind of thing, she's had shared care from the start. But he can't breastfeed and she was fully breastfed.

One of us can start early and finish early to be home when they get home from school and the other can do the school drop off and finish later.

But when asked if that included sharing the first year of parental leave, the general theme emerging was that most women wanted to protect that for themselves, citing breastfeeding and bonding as important mothering roles.

I think I would have found it very hard to share the 12 months parental leave with my partner. I breastfed right through so he was very dependent on me anyway. My partner was made redundant and he actually voiced the idea of me going back to work full-time if he didn't find anything and he could stay home, and I was like, 'Well I don't think so.' I think I would have found it quite an intrusion on my time with L.... but that's probably not fair. I think the bonding is different for a mother and their baby so that's why earlier care seems to be more with Mum. It kicks in more gradually with Dads and they have traditionally always gone to work, so...

I wanted to breastfeed and I did and so I did see the mothering thing as being distinct from the fathering role. I guess the physical care side of it and being there to bond with her and just spend the time with her. I think parenting involves different things at different stages and at the toddler stage it's more parenting than mothering and the roles can be more equal.

I think it depends on what the mother wants to do because the mother is the most important for the child for the first year. That's not saying fathers have no role at all; they have a big role supporting the woman, but they can't breastfeed. It may work for other families, but I think it must be terribly difficult when a woman's breastfeeding for it to be the male that is the full-time carer.

Even after the first 12 months and if working part-time, most did not want to give up the time they spent with the children.

My partner would actually be totally happy for me to work full-time and for him to be at home full-time, but right now I feel like I want both – some work and some childcare.

Only one couple were both in paid work part-time to share both roles. While this generally worked very well for them, the trade-off was struggling financially.

I think it's good for me and I think it would be good for lots more people, but there's a definite negative financial side of it. I don't think many families can afford to live on one income, which is effectively what we've got. For a lot of people it's not really a choice. I think it should be and I think, because we've got two boys, that it's really good that their Dad is around a lot for them.

Some fathers had taken on the full-time caring role either because the mother earned more, or because they had been made redundant. The view of the mothers was that this resulted in very positive experiences for the men and enhanced their relationship with their children. While they reported that the men enjoyed their experience, most of the men would not have chosen it if circumstances hadn't created the situation.

I think he felt it himself, he felt that it was his job to provide the income and he loved being at home with L... and he loved spending time with her, and to see the way their relationship developed when he was off work and now they've got a relationship that none of the other children her age have with their fathers, but he thought he should be out earning the money so that I could be at home with her.

Without exception the interviewees expressed how important the support of their partner was in enabling them to juggle paid work and being a parent.

I think I've been really lucky in that my partner's taken a lot of the burden when G.... has been sick. He's really had to sacrifice quite a lot as well, in order to make it work for me. He's taken quite a bit of time off work and given up quite a lot of his personal activities in order to be fully involved in childcare at weekends and evenings, and if I've got a big deadline at work he's usually the person that ends up compromising what he's doing at work or personally to give me some extra time.

He's really good. The minute I had the baby it's been baby wakes at night, he will always get up and pick the baby up and bring it to me to feed and change. He'd hang out the washing in the morning. If things weren't done at home he wouldn't come home and go 'blah, blah, blah'. He'd just get the vacuum cleaner out and do it. He'd cook tea, do the dishes. He is very, very supportive. He is a very good man.

For those who no longer had a partner, this limited their choices, in particular the choice to do part-time paid work. However, this was often compensated for by the shared care arrangements which left them with weeks or nights without children when they could put in extra time at their job, or take time out for themselves.

Fathers who were self-employed or in jobs with flexibility enabled their partners to do full-time or more demanding jobs; for example, jobs that required travel away from home.

He's in a management position so he can work from home. He's not expected to be there like I am.

I'm pretty lucky in that my husband runs his own business and has a lot of flexibility. So if I have to come in for a meeting he can go home and look after our daughter. I feel for other people who don't have that flexibility because it must be incredibly hard.

I was keen to get back to work and that was possible because my husband had a commercial cleaning business at the time that mean he was available for the childcare side of it and I thought it was just as good having a Dad as a Mum looking after the children.

However, for some, equality in childcare didn't mean equal sharing of household work, and this put more pressure on mothers.

I don't think the workload is shared 50/50. I'm sure I do 80 and he does 20. I do feel stretched.

The next section considers attitudes to the role of non-parental childcare, and problems experienced with it.

## 3.0 CHILDCARE AND OUT OF SCHOOL CARE

Childcare in the context of this study referred to any form of formal, public care of children provided outside of the family. While childcare generally refers to care for pre-school children, also included in this section is reference to out-of-school care for school-age children, ie after-school and school holiday care.

The focus on childcare in this study is two-pronged. Firstly it is concerned with mothers' attitudes to childcare and what they perceive to be the ideal combinations of parenting and childcare for children at different ages. That is, what do mothers want from childcare? The second focus is on problems experienced in using or accessing childcare that contribute to difficulties in balancing their dual roles as parents and paid workers. Conversely, what aspects of childcare, such as quality, make it easier for them to combine their roles? Together these contribute to exploring the question of to what extent it is institutional factors around the provision of childcare that contribute to low labour force participation by mothers of pre-school children in New Zealand and to what extent it is cultural factors relating to New Zealand norms about the respective roles of parents and childcare for children at different ages.

Childcare was generally positively regarded, but there was a strong feeling that parental, particularly maternal, care was best in the first 12 months, and primarily parental care or family care for the rest of the pre-school years. Some time in childcare, particularly early childhood education, was seen as desirable for children from the age of three. Full-time childcare was not a preferred option. For those who had to use formal childcare in the first one or two years, home-based care such as Barnardos was preferred, with some exceptions. The quality of the childcare was a key factor in enabling mothers to participate in paid work without worrying about their child, and they generally had a list of criteria for assessing centres before choosing one. There were some concerns about inadequate availability of care for children under two years of age for those who need it, and hours of opening not being adequate.

One of the key themes emerging in this section of the interviews was in the areas of after-school and school holiday care. There was a strong feeling that these areas were under-supplied and that there was a lack of easily accessible information on what was available. There was also dissatisfaction on the application processes for financial assistance with out of school care. All these factors contributed to the difficulty of combining parenting and paid work.

### 3.1 ATTITUDES TO CHILDCARE

The mothers in this study had used a range of childcare options, from private and workplace crèches, to Barnardos home care, nannies and family members. Feelings about childcare were overwhelmingly positive. Even those who would have preferred to be a full-time mother and were working primarily for financial reasons were positive about the childcare they were using.

Childcare was one thing I hoped would never happen to my baby. We used a friend at first but then that didn't work out so I found a childcare centre near my work that other people at work had used and they were just amazing, the most amazing people. They are just so kind and patient and treat all children individually. I said to one of the carers how difficult it was for us to put him in and how just absolutely happy I am with it.

Another noted that some mothers from her antenatal group had observed her use of Barnardos home-based care for her three-month-old work well and said that she thought that encouraged them to think of using childcare and returning to paid work themselves.

One full-time mother said she still used childcare once or twice a week to give herself a break and time for herself.

I think childcare is great. I think it serves a purpose. It is certainly something that should be readily available to Mums, but good quality childcare. My children all went to playgroups once I stopped working, where once they turned three I got three mornings a week where I could leave them and have time for myself. It's hard work being a Mum, you feel isolated often.

This mother was one of the few who had had any negative experience of childcare, and that was with a first child some 20 years ago. Another mother who had also had children 20 years ago and again now noted the improved standards of childcare available now compared to then.

The standards are better, the staff training and quality of staff appears to have improved and I think that particular sector has 'grown up'. They are getting a lot better at what they are doing.

Another who had experience of UK childcare recently judged New Zealand childcare to be "about a million times better than UK childcare", her reasons being size and structure in relation to cost.

It wasn't individualised enough. They were all very big, unless you paid a fortune, full-on, lots of children running everywhere. There didn't seem to be enough structure.

Others noted that while they wouldn't use it themselves, there was definitely a need for it for those parents who needed to be in paid work.

I don't like the idea personally, but I think there is definitely a need. There are some women who don't want to be home and some women financially have to go to work, so there has got to be childcare. It's not like the grandparents are around any more to look after the grandkids, they're working still too. And some women have just got to get out of the house.

In a lot of circumstances parents don't have the option, they need to go back to work, and therefore it's essential that they find childcare. I was fortunate that we could afford to live off one income, but many families don't have that luxury, they have to go out and work, and then good childcare is essential.

## **3.2 INFORMAL FAMILY SUPPORT**

Although not specifically asked about in the interview, the role of grandparents, especially grandmothers, in providing some at-home childcare, after-school care and school holiday care was frequently mentioned. This enabled those women who had to be in paid work full-time but did not want their children in full-time childcare to do so. Grandparents were also mentioned as emergency carers when children were sick and couldn't go to daycare or school and it was not possible for the parents to get time off paid work.

After the separation I didn't have the option of part-time work at all. When I first went back to work and she was 16 months old, she went into crèche three days a week and my Mum took care of her one day a week and the other day she was with her Dad.

I'm lucky, I've got a really supportive family, so he'll either be off-loaded on my sister, who is fantastic and always helps, or I can ring up and say he's sick and I'm not coming in and my employer is really cool.

In some cases the grandmothers were still in paid work themselves, but often had more flexible hours.

## **3.3 THE ROLE OF FORMAL CHILDCARE IN RELATION TO AGE OF CHILD**

### **Under 12 months**

Although many of the mothers in the study had used childcare satisfactorily for babies under 12 months, the general theme emerging for this age group was that parental bonding, especially with the mother, is important in the first year, and therefore primarily parental care is preferred, though it was also acknowledged that some women have no choice about returning to paid work.

I don't like the idea of babies being in childcare, but that's just my personal view. I don't know anybody who's had an actual problem with it, I just think somewhere in my mind that it's not right.

I feel that young children especially need that constant presence at home, particularly in the first year and if we have another child, I will definitely take a year off because I think that's really important from a bonding point of view... I think it's important if you need to work, you can, and I understand some people aren't able to choose, but I think it's important to the children.

Breastfeeding is seen as another reason for babies to be primarily at home with their mother in the first year.

Under 12 months my ideal would be for the child to be predominantly with its mother because where there is breastfeeding ... that was actually one of the hardest things I found about returning to work early, expressing milk. I hated the expressing.

The inability of very small children to speak for themselves and stand up for themselves in a group setting was also a reason for keeping this group at home.

I guess when they're so young and pretty defenceless, they can't speak up for themselves, you really need to be sure about them, and I guess it's just that nurturing thing too.

I think it would be pretty difficult for a child, a baby, to go into childcare. It's a rough and tumble world.

Barnardos in-home care seemed to be preferred to a crèche for this age group due to the perceived higher level of one-on-one interaction. Barnardos is also seen to be a relatively affordable option, especially as they charge by the hour rather than a flat fee and don't charge for public holidays. Because of the smaller number of children it was also perceived as less likely to be an environment where children caught a lot of bugs from other children.

Daycare kids get sick and then your baby ends up getting sick, and I don't think they get the individual attention they should because there's so many.

Nannies were also seen as an ideal as the child remains in their own home environment, there is no drop-off and pick-up time, and they often provide other services like preparing the evening meal and being there for school-age children after school, but they are not affordable for most. For some, though, a crèche was preferable as they worried about leaving their baby with one unsupervised person.

I wasn't comfortable handing over full-time responsibility of my child to one person who wasn't going to be in any way supervised.

Another with experience of using a nanny for her children still believed it could not replace the one-on-one interaction with a parent.

For children under 18 months, my view is the best childcare is the parents themselves. Research has backed up that for the first 18 months of life, what the children need is positive, supportive, caring based on a one-on-one engagement with an adult. Also, a new baby particularly wants an engagement with its parents to start with. I suppose it could be a surrogate parent but in my experience, the children's nannies, while very loving, could not provide the one-on-one engagement as well as my husband and I could. The main reason is that they didn't have the same motivation we did to do it – we wanted to be perfect parents and for our children to get all the love that they could. I don't think my kids have been deprived because of my going back to work so soon after they were born, but I do think they missed out on some special attention that could have been given if we had more of that one-on-one time.

Other family members such as grandmothers or sisters or husbands were also preferred to formal childcare at this age.

I was quite happy to go back to work because I was comfortable knowing that my husband was looking after our son. If that wasn't the case, if none of my family was available to look after my son, I probably would seriously reconsider going back to work and possibly not even go back to work, stay home.



So her grandmother looked after her until she was seven months old, and then she went two days into childcare and two days with her grandmother. The family care initially was good for the breastfeeding factor, because I wanted to breastfeed until at least six months. It was easier to go home and feed than it would have been at a childcare centre or express off.

There was also a preference for formal childcare not being full-time (five days, 8am-5pm or 6pm), but mixed with parent or other family care.

In the perfect world it would be quite nice to only do 20 hours, and 10 was in a private facility and 10 was with grandparents maybe.

You've definitely got to expose kids probably from one year onward, and even before that, so they have the benefit of mixing with other children, but there is a difference between that and full-time childcare.

Some referred to there being a social stigma about full-time childcare rather than it being a personal concern.

There is a major stigma attached to mothers saying 'I work full-time and she goes to crèche full-time.' The reaction from people can be very strong.

The main concerns about full-time childcare were the lack of one-on-one interaction and the confined space that some are in.

I wouldn't want her in any more than the three days that she is because it's quite a restrictive physical environment, it's quite a small space to spend a full day in and they don't take the under-tuos out very much.

I think it's really hard to provide good childcare in centres for under-tuos, and especially full-time. I have concerns about that in terms of the lack of communication that little children have at that age.

### **1-2 years**

At this age the prevailing view was becoming more mixed about crèches versus in-home care. Some felt children at this age were now better able to cope with the crèche environment while others felt that in-home care with smaller numbers was still preferred. The emphasis on parent care and bonding was less than for babies, but still considered important.

I think all kids are different so I don't think there should be any set limit. Ideally when they are under-tuos I think they should have a bit more parent time, rather than childcare, but then it can be gradually increased.

I did sometimes send the children to childcare just for a break and looking around at the other children who were there from 7.00 in the morning to 6.00 at night, I felt they were very sort of institutionalised and I didn't want them to have that. I wouldn't have wanted them to have had full-time care at such a young age. Under two years I wouldn't have contemplated anything more than 20 hours a week.

There were benefits seen for this age group in being able to model themselves on the next age group up and learn from them and getting used to being around adults other than family. For some mothers, though, it was their own needs rather than, or as much as, the child's needs that made them prefer to care for their children themselves at this age as much as possible, rather than use childcare, especially full-time.

I think as a mother, part of it is I don't want to miss out on all those stages of development, and most of the time I actually enjoy being with my kids. I realised how quickly that early childhood stuff is gone and it's precious and you don't get it back, and for me I didn't want to miss out on that.

Many of the mothers in the study preferred their own mothers, or mothers-in-law, or sisters to full-time private care for children under two years.

I think that younger children should be within a family environment. They should be with their Mum or their Grandma. I just think they get more one-to-one time, more one-to-one attention.

Mum was always great and very supportive and very happy for me to be working and to help out as much as she could.

When she was 16 months old, she went to crèche three days a week, my Mum took care of her one day, and the other day she was with her Dad.

The opposing view was that relatives do not provide early childhood education or sufficient stimulation and interaction.

### **3-4 years**

By age three the general view was that childcare, particularly early childhood education, was beneficial to children in terms of socialising with other children, the range of activities available and the professional expertise of the teachers.

The fact that he goes to crèche and interacts with other children, I think that's enormous. They do things that I could never do. They are specialised in educating him and I'm not, and I think that's really important. That interaction with other children; to me that's huge. Okay, he has friends, we have friends who have children, we go to gym classes and things like that, but he also has these other people that he has to get on with and it's not only for an hour here and an hour there, it's three days a week and that's really important.

This was especially so for only children, which is a growing group these days.

I think crèche has made her a better person, particularly because she is an only child. She relates much better to people, she has less expectation that everything is centred around her, she is great at sharing and she's been particularly responsible around younger children.

She's interacting with other children, because she's an only child, and she's making friends. And she's learning some really good stuff as well. They've got all the resources there for painting and cutting and jungle gyms and all the rest of it that we don't have at home.

Some distinguished early childhood education from childcare at this stage.

Yes, there's definitely a role for pre-school education and kindergarten.

For me childcare is like a crèche. The child is being minded, but that's all. With an early childhood education, you've got qualified teachers and they are educating your children at the appropriate stage and in the appropriate way.

## **3.4 QUALITY OF CHILDCARE**

Fundamental to the success of juggling the dual roles of mother and paid worker is the quality of the childcare.

It is important that the childcare available to your children is care that you can have confidence in. If you are not certain that your children are safe and loved while in care, you don't feel good about being at work. My observation is that this is a natural instinct for just about every mother I've ever met. You pick up messages instinctively and feel a reaction in your body, in your bowels, reminding you of the implications for your children if they are not being properly cared for. If, when I am in the office, I get the feeling that my children aren't happy, I find it difficult to focus on my work. This is the aspect of parenting that I think makes the most difference to working mothers' careers.

Asked what makes for quality childcare the interviewees readily listed a range of things from ratio of carers to children, segregation of older and younger children, the qualifications of staff, nappy changing area being visible, to the provision of emotional needs and the child being happy.

Warm, loving environment and that the children are being stimulated and encouraged to mix with the other children.

Good childcare is warmth and lots of interaction.

Others felt that the emotional need was the one thing a professional caregiver couldn't provide that a parent could.

The crèche we were at, they were all trained early childhood educators, they really did care for the children, they had a fantastic programme, but I couldn't expect them to love her.

The importance of stimulation and outings was also noted.

He gets the educational thing, and the ratio of teachers to children, and the outings. They take the kids for walks every day to the park, and catch buses into town, and go to the Botanical Gardens and things like that.

Most interviewees carefully selected the childcare centre they used, looking at ERO<sup>4</sup> reports, recommendations from other parents, staff-child ratios, staff turnover, the interaction between staff and children, whether the children there looked happy, physical space and outdoor space and cleanliness.

We looked at the caregivers primarily, and interaction between them and the children, and the warmth of greeting, that kind of thing, their qualifications, the length of time they've been there, and the staff turnover.

I looked at the facilities they had, how clean they were. Then I found out about qualifications and per child to teacher ratio, and how much they would stick with my routine within their environment and then what they did to stimulate the children and learning environment. I also checked on the ERO report and that there were separate areas for nursery care, separate from the older children. And then just recommendations around town and looking at the other children there and if they seemed happy.

The carer or centre sharing the parents' values and philosophies of childrearing was important to many, or at least respecting the different ways people choose to bring up their children.

I would look for somebody with similar values to my own and my family's.

Having a childcare situation that shares your values and your routines and is able to complement what you do.

She's got similar ideas about raising children and she's very keen to keep him in his routines.

### **3.5 AVAILABILITY AND HOURS**

The general view was that early childhood care or education is fairly available now, except for the under-tuos. While the preference is for mainly family care at this age, there is still a need for formal childcare provision as some mothers do not have a choice and need to return to work, and those who work part-time need alternative care for that time.

A lot of places only have a license for two under-tuos or something and of course with two under two I would have blown their quota, so how people with twins manage, or multiple births... A lot of places have a very limited number of very small children that they can take.

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4 Education Review Office.

There were some complaints about the inconvenient hours centres operated; that is, the same hours as workplaces, which did not allow parents travel time to get to work after the morning drop-off, and from work for the evening pick-up. Most couples seemed to be managing this by dividing the morning and afternoon childcare run and one starting work early and finishing early, and the other starting late and finishing late. For sole parents this is a major problem.

Well, if you're in an urban centre, a 5.30 deadline to pick up your kids is pretty unrealistic.

One of the concerns I have with the daycare system here is the hours. Generally our working hours start at 8.00, but the daycare doesn't open until 8.00. And school starts at 9.00. So you can't drop them off and get to work on time. It's a real big problem and it is one of the main reasons that I have a half-hour lunch break compared to everybody else having an hour, because I have to start work later.

### **3.6 AFTER-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL HOLIDAY CARE**

One of the strongest themes emerging from this study was the need for more after-school and school holiday care. It was felt the focus has been on pre-school care, and for most that is now available and of good quality, although often too expensive still. However, there is a lack of quality, local, affordable after-school and school holiday care, and it is very difficult to find out what is available.

I think there's plenty out there for pre-schoolers, but I feel there isn't enough there for after school. They seem to think that once children go to school then parents have got no problem at all. It's a continual juggling act. There is definitely a demand for school holidays and after school. At the moment I use my Mum a lot because I can't afford to send him to after-school care very much.

The local after-school care is about 5 kms from our place. They don't provide one at school. And it costs about \$25 per day.

It's really difficult to get information about after-school care options. I can't find anything. If your school offers it's fine, but otherwise where do you go and who do you ask? (This is from an employee of a large city council.)

The other challenge I go through is school holidays, and that's really, really hard. I'm really lucky that I work in a government department that provides a school holiday programme for one week of each school holidays, which is also subsidised, but it's still only one week. I'm very fortunate that my Mum is able to take her the other week. Without that family support I don't know what I'd do.

Many thought the school was the ideal place to provide after-school care and activities.

There should be something available at the school, maybe funded, so that they can stay there from 3.30 to 7.00 at night to allow parents to commute. I think that should be taken into consideration. And just do stuff at the school, play games, do drawing, take them to the beach.

As with quality of childcare, quality of after-school and school holiday care is important to parents' ability to focus on their paid work.

We've been exceptionally lucky with the after-school care provider. She is amazing. She'd be the best care provider we've ever had, so we've gone into a period where we have no worries about childcare. And she is very flexible about pick-up time.

Prior to this they had had worries after a childcare worker at the community childcare centre came before the courts for something that happened at the centre and left the parents wondering "Well, gosh, did anything happen when my son was there?"

Others also expressed concern that school holiday programmes did not seem to be regulated in any way.

When you look at school holiday programmes you have issues with safety. Anybody can run a school holiday programme. It's terrifying when you actually start looking at who's running these things.

Another concern was the lack of programmes approved by Child, Youth and Family for funding support from the government through Work and Income for low-income families.

School holidays are a pain in the arse. The council have actually stopped running several holiday programmes in this area and the new people who've taken over are not CYPS approved and until they are WINZ won't touch them, which is one of the reasons my children didn't go into holiday programmes over the summer holidays. So we've had various people looking after them, like neighbours, friends and family, some paid out of my pocket.

The problem of hours being out of step with workplace hours also applied to after-school care and school holiday programmes.

I've never used after-school care because I could never rely on my work being finished so that I could be on time for after-school care. I think if there was more congruence between work and the school day it would make a huge difference.

My son goes to holiday club and it runs from 8.45 to 3.00. They must know parents work full-time, but you have to pay extra for them to go from 8.00 to 5.30, and even 5.30's not good enough because I can't get there before 6.00. And in the Christmas holidays they only run two weeks. So what are you meant to do for the other weeks?

A problem with the services that are provided is that if they are not based at the school, there is often no provision for the children to get from school to the programme.

Another complaint is about the complicated form filling needed to get any assistance with the cost of after-school care and school holiday care, especially as often parents need to use a range of different providers. Suggestions were that it would be better to fund/subsidise the providers and have all parents pay less.

### **3.7 COST OF CHILDCARE**

For some women in the professions and senior management, the cost of childcare was not an issue, but they recognised it was for others. For others, particularly sole parents, it was an issue which delayed return to the workforce. Some of the mothers in the study used informal childcare – family, friends and neighbours for at least some of the care – or did a split-shift with their partner. This was not totally financially driven as often they also preferred family or home-based care all or some of the time rather than full-time childcare.

When the children were both still just under two I found it extremely hard being here full-time and looking after them and I did look at joining the workforce, but the cost of childcare was so prohibitive that you would never have done it for financial reasons. It just didn't make sense.

Even with the childcare subsidy it's still expensive. My daughter pays \$145 a week, and she doesn't get a subsidy now. That's a big hole out of a young girl's salary.

It's \$48 a day, four days a week, so that's \$200 a week. It's almost prohibitively expensive.

There was a lot of comment about the paltriness of the childcare rebate in relation to the cost of childcare to the parents, and the contribution they make by returning to the paid workforce.

I think the childcare rebate you get is a maximum of \$300 and I think that could be a bit more generous considering I spend \$25,000 on childcare. That would be a big help to get a bit more back. I think the government's really happy for people to go back to work and contribute to the tax pool, but it's costing me a lot to do that. I'm happy to do that and I feel proud that I work, but you pay double for it in a way.

At first I thought that was per child, then I found that women who've got two or three littlies in care it's still just \$300 and I thought well, that's just pathetic.

The level at which childcare subsidies stop, especially for sole parents, was also an issue.

At that time I was on \$45,000, and they considered that to be a good income, but that's in the hand, and when you consider a third of that goes on childcare, and a third on mortgage, and being one parent, then you have to look at do the government step in, to keep that single parent in work, because the other option would be to go on the DPB. Maybe they should do part-funding, because I don't get subsidies. I worked out that after the childcare was paid, I was not much better off than being on the DPB, although I didn't want that because I wanted to show my daughter that it's normal to go to work regardless of your circumstances.

After-school and school holiday care was also considered to be too expensive and inadequately subsidised or funded, especially for sole parents.

There are things that run, like the YMCA, but they are really expensive. They are like \$25 a day; some of them are \$50 a day. I can't afford that.

### **3.8 FUNDING OF CHILDCARE**

Most of the mothers in the study thought the government definitely had a role in providing funding for childcare, especially since the Prime Minister has publicly stated that government policy is to increase the participation of women with children in the workforce (Clark 2005). But they also thought parents should contribute; they didn't expect full funding from government, just that at the moment the parent contribution is too high, especially for those on lower incomes.

The government is saying at the moment they want more women back in the workforce. Well, in that case perhaps they should provide a bit of assistance, because it is expensive and you do want your children to be well looked after. I think the government should step in for people who can't afford it. We can afford it so I think I'd rather fall back on the government when I need to, rather than just as a sense of entitlement.

Few expected employers to provide or fund childcare, recognising the high proportion of small businesses in New Zealand.

I think that the full cost would be a real barrier for some women participating in the workforce. I think it's a real hard call to expect employers to pay for it, but I think the government is already subsidising it.

However, there was a general feeling that for larger employers it was in their own interest to provide or subsidise childcare. Some noted the benefit to the employer of women returning to the workplace after having children, and that therefore perhaps they should assist with the costs to the woman of doing that.

In our workplace so many women have come back after having children, and they have kept that knowledge and experience in the workplace, so perhaps they should subsidise childcare more.

I think that because the government is encouraging people to get back into the workforce they can subsidise daycare, and employers too. If they've got people that they want to bring back into their business, then it's in their interest to pay some of that cost.

More detail of the respective roles of employers and the government in the provision of childcare can be found in the following sections on the role of employers and the role of government.

The next section considers the implications of attitudes to the respective roles of parental care and childcare for decisions and ideals of mothers around engagement in paid work.

## **4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR DECISIONS ABOUT PAID WORK: DRIVERS AND IDEALS**

This section considers issues involved in being both a mother and a paid worker and how beliefs about the role of mothers impact on decisions about when and how much to return to paid work after having a child compared to other factors. It then outlines what the ideal combination of roles would be.

The key findings on decisions on returning to paid work are that they are driven by a wide range of factors which, using Pfau-Effinger's (2004) framework, are both institutional and cultural. Institutional factors include financial considerations, time limits of the parental leave period, childcare availability, the availability of part-time work in their normal occupation and the need to retain job skills or meet client demand. Cultural factors were personal preferences around paid work and parenting. Institutional factors mostly overrode cultural factors in deciding when to return to paid work and for how many hours. However, the mothers in this study all saw their children as their priority and felt guilty when they put work first, but most did not feel this negatively affected their work performance.

Part-time paid work was seen as the ideal way to balance the dual roles of parent and paid worker, but was not always possible due to the requirements of the job or employer for positions to be full-time, or family financial circumstances.

### **4.1 MAKING CHOICES – WHAT DRIVES DECISIONS ON WHEN AND HOW TO COMBINE PAID WORK AND PARENTING?**

The decision to combine paid work and parenting is driven by a combination of financial need, the requirements of the job and career, the length of paid parental leave, childcare availability, personal needs for mental and social stimulation, and personal preferences or beliefs around parental care and childcare. Having family or workplace role models was also a factor.

Returning to work was at least 50 percent driven by the fact that I'd invested so much in my career prior to having children so I at least wanted to keep my hand in so even though I'm not advancing my career at the moment I still want to be sufficiently in touch so that when the time is right I can advance. We need some income from my job as well.

With the first I felt very anxious about how work would view it and what I was going to do, how long I was going to be away. I was very anxious to get back to work as quickly as possible because I thought I was Wonder Woman and it was the right thing to do and I was not letting the side down too much workwise, and financially as well was a big thing.

Financial and workplace drivers, such as returning within the parental leave period and maintaining career momentum, seem to override personal preferences and beliefs around childcare.

The first thing I think you try and work though is the financial side of it. I always knew I wanted to try and take as much time as I could off work to stay home with him because I know I wouldn't get that chance back again. But you're definitely working out the financial side first and trying to work out what it was going to be like to be down on a reduced income for whatever period of time.

It was getting towards a year, I knew it was coming up and basically we looked at our bank account and said it's getting to the point where we're running out of money and also I had done some serious looking at childcare and a place had become available, so that was another serious factor in taking the place and going back to work.

Role models in the family or workplace were a factor in some women's decisions.

I've got a really big family and I had seen my sisters go back to work and manage the family and children and work, so I knew that it was possible and also at my workplace

we were quite encouraged to go back to work, even if it was part-time, so I knew it was going to be easy for me to do it, to balance the two, because I have a really good employer.

I had two women who were three or four years ahead of me and I'd already observed how they did it.

### **Returning in 12 weeks or less**

While some women who chose to go back to paid work in 12 weeks or less were happy with their decision, generally in retrospect they would have taken longer. The main drivers for these women were financial need, the requirements of the workplace<sup>5</sup>, the length of paid parental leave, and what they thought were their own needs before having their first child.

The reason I went back to work so quickly after each child was born was fear that I would lose my place following my chosen career path. This fear is not around wanting the money or the status, it's that I wanted to be able to progress in the areas where I have particular skills and interests and to be taken seriously for the ideas that I had and the creative ideas and things I could do. I worried that every month away from the workforce, things were closing down on my career. Now, with hindsight, I don't think my racing back to work six weeks after the baby was born made any difference to my career. That is why I recommend to women that they take the full year of parental leave legally allowed if they possibly can.

The reason I said three months, that's when the government parental leave scheme stopped. If it had gone on longer, I would have stayed out of work longer. So it was a financial decision, that's the reason I went back to work, there's no other reason. Six months would have been my ideal – your child is in more of a routine and you feel more in control. At three months I didn't feel in control and I was sleep deprived.

### **Returning in 4-10 months**

Fear of losing one's skills or place in the workplace was a key driver for women returning before 12 months, along with financial need. For most of them their ideal time out would have been longer than they took, though not necessarily 12 months.

It was largely driven by the company I was working for. If I'd decided to take eight months or a year they would have re-advertised my position. I had to go back after six months or look for new work. My ideal time would have been eight or nine months I think, not as much as a year.

In an ideal world I would have a year out to be with my kids exclusively for that first year, but the decision to go back sooner is totally career-driven. If I'm going to be out of my job for a year, then, particularly if I'm going to do it twice for two kids, then I might as well forget it. It would be really difficult to come back and still be in touch with what's going on, and people forget you too. Even after four months off I was a bit worried when I went back that I wasn't thought of for projects, that I wasn't visible.

I thought five months would be plenty. I lived to regret that, but I thought at the time it would be plenty of time. When I went back to work I started seeing her develop more because that first year is very important. You kind of missed out on that and I wished I'd had that 12 months off.

This woman took a year with her second child, having found she went back too early the first time. This woman also spoke of having more confidence the second time to negotiate what she wanted.

I took a year off with my second child. I'd got back to work too quick the first time. Five months, once you take into account a month off at the end of the pregnancy, I was still breastfeeding, it was terribly stressful, terribly full-on, and I felt with two children and my body needed some time, just emotionally and physically. I needed that year to sort myself out.

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5 Requirements of the workplace include a time limit on parental leave after which the woman would have to resign from her job, the time limit on paid parental leave, or the need to return to maintain skills and career momentum and meet client demand.



The woman being the higher earner in a couple was also a driver as to when to return to the workforce.

Partly it was financial. I stayed home until he was eight months old. My husband and I were aware that I could earn more money than him and we were relying on one income. We were determined not to have to put our child into care with somebody else. We wanted myself or my husband to stay home.

The second child I was going to have a year off but went back after six months because I got offered a really good job, a promotion and more money, and it was too good to turn down, especially as I'm the main breadwinner. But ideally I'd like to have a year off.

### **Taking the full 12 months**

Those who took the full 12 months parental leave did so because of personal beliefs and preferences.

I chose to be with her for 12 months because that first 12 months is when they are going to grow the most and working full-time you're going to miss it.

I took the whole 12 months off because I wanted to be with my babies for that long and it could have been longer, maybe 18 months.

But job, career and financial requirements overrode personal preferences to take longer than 12 months. Some would have taken longer if their job had been held open for longer.

It would have meant resigning from my job to take more than 12 months off. When it came around and it was time to go back I didn't feel ready. I know I cried when I first realised that I was going to have to go back. Just the thought of leaving him with someone else was really quite scary, but yeah, I would have had to resign.

Others went back to maintain their professional skills and position.

There's lots of reasons for going back to work and it's not all money. The reality is if you want to stay in a profession you need to protect that. I think I wanted to keep my foot in the door with the professional life and keep my options open. I don't want to close the door on that and I know, being in my late 30s, if I gave up the working life for a few years and tried to come back in my 40s it would be difficult. And I would have had to resign if I took longer than 12 months.

Women in the professional services area spoke of client need as a main perceived driver of workplace patterns that don't suit women with children.

I would ideally like to stay home with them until they are at least two, but from a work perspective that doesn't work. I'm an accountant and if the client's got a need you need people to do the work and you can cover for someone for a year, but anything longer than that and they would look to recruit someone else.

I don't know of a position where there is a part-time partner. I don't think that would be possible from the client's perspective because the expectation would be that you were there.

For others, going back to paid work before they were ready was because they were the main earner.

I was quite reluctant to go back to work at the end of 12 months. It's quite a transition to get back into the swing of work. Normally the bank balance will motivate you and I was the higher earner.

## 4.2 PRIORITIES: CHILDREN FIRST BUT PAID WORK NEEDS MET

Although financial and job needs mostly drove the decision on when to return, the mothers in this study were clear that in balancing and prioritising the two roles, the needs of their children came first.

We did think if the baby was not happy or we could see it was disadvantaging the baby or me that I would go part-time or whatever.

Mostly they are on an equal footing, but obviously if he isn't well then he comes first. If I had any sense that the situation wasn't working for him, then I would certainly reconsider working.

You do have to prioritise. If he's really sick I will stay home with him; I would put my son before work anytime. I'm obviously going to take that time and I don't really give a toss what work thinks. My boss that just left, he was very good that way too and he's got a little baby and a wife that's back in the workforce and his family comes first all the time too. So he understood that type of thing.

Where there are competing demands with high priorities in both areas, mothers usually juggle by getting the father or other family member to tend to the child's needs, or trying to negotiate the paid work situation and plan ahead.

My husband can be flexible so if I've got something comes up at the end of the day I'll ring him and ask him to pick the kids up so I'm there for the work and I'm there to the end and do what's expected of me.

If I've got a big deadline at work he's usually the person that ends up compromising what he's doing at work or personally to give me some extra time.

Mostly I've been able to plan ahead when work comes first and put support systems in place. Then when my son needed some operations obviously that became a top priority, but again, being able to plan it and allow for it in advance.

When paid work must take precedence over their children, mothers feel guilty.

When I have demands from both work and my children I feel quite stressed and guilty. Guilty as a mother because you've got a child saying 'Mummy, can we...' and you've just been called about some disaster at work and you've got to get something to somebody by a certain time. So you try and fulfil that and you put on a video and they sit and watch a video while you work but you're thinking 'I should be spending this time with them – what a terrible mother I am.'

I think I'm a good mother most of the time, but I do feel guilty when I must put work over spending time with the kids on the days that I'm not supposed to be working.

It's difficult to manage both roles and something is going to suffer and sometimes that will be my child and sometimes it will be work. Emotionally that's very difficult, very difficult.

And sometimes work comes first and it is impacting negatively. It makes me feel terrible, but the reality is, either I have her crying or starving, so, you know.

### 4.3 IDEAL COMBINATIONS

There was no ideal length of time for parental leave, but many women wished they had taken longer than they did. Anything from six months to “until my child starts school” were expressed as ideals.

I think probably the first year, to connect and bond with the baby.

I probably wouldn't launch into five days a week, full-time daycare from four months of age. I'd probably go back to work a bit more gradually, and have more of a mix of family and private formal childcare if I could.

Ideally at least a year, because that is the most important time in their lives. And then go back to work part-time, maybe two or three days a week, if I didn't have to worry about money.

Once back in the workforce, the overwhelming ideal combination of paid work and parenting for the mothers in this study was part-time paid work, and paid work that fitted around school hours and holidays. The pattern of part-time work shifted from fewer, longer days a week for pre-school to four or five shorter school-hours days a week once school age.

Ideally I think two years at home, and then after that probably three days a week until they go to school. What I see is when she goes to school I will move to working five days a week school hours. That would be my ideal, because then I can pick her up and bring her home and spend time with her in the evenings, but I can't see myself not working.

Ideally I think I would be at home until she started school and then I would have worked part-time for the duration of her schooling right through to the end of secondary school. I wouldn't have been happy to be entirely in the house once she was out during the day, but I certainly wouldn't have worked hours any longer than 9.00-2.00 probably.

I would like to be able to see him off and then be home here at the end of the day when school's finished four days a week and then have one day to do the housework and so on and then have the weekends as family time.

The benefits of being employed part-time with a pre-schooler are expressed in this quote.

I like being part-time, I like having more space. On the days when I am home we can go at her pace. I'm not trying to fit her into my schedule and I really like that.

There was a feeling that mothers who were employed full-time missed out on much of their child's life which they may regret later.

I didn't want to stay home full-time. I would like to have a happy medium, maybe being able to work part-time and still be able to be there in the holidays and being there after school. I've felt like I've missed out, not being there after school and not being able to go on school trips and things like that.

I think mothers have realised they're missing out. They've got a young child and they turn around and they are older and they think, 'Where's it gone?' and I think they are revaluing what their actual values are. Sometimes work, a career, was more important, like for me before I had children, but since I've had a child, I've realised that my values have changed and work is important because it pays the bills, but it's not 'the' important thing, and I realise that time with my daughter actually is, and if possible I would prefer to work part-time to get that back. I think that's what mothers are realising, is that is actually what the important thing is, spending time with your child, because once it's gone, it's gone.

From a sole mother in paid work full-time for financial reasons and because her job is not available part-time:

In an ideal world I would work three days a week. It would be a reasonable cost and I would have four days with my children and that would be balanced more in their favour. At the moment I feel I'm balanced more in my employer's favour, which is fine, I can understand that, but I do feel my kids are missing out on time with me.

This was so even with older children. The needs of teenagers for parents to be around and to be available for guidance, communication and emotional support were especially noted by those with experience of this age group.

I feel it's more important and I'm prepared to take a drop in salary to have a lifestyle that enables me to spend more time with my children as they get older. I know a lot of people feel it's more important to spend the early years with children at home. I actually think it's more important for parents to spend time with their children when they're teenagers, so they can keep an eye on what they're up to and keep closer bonds and lines of communication open.

I'm not going to be prepared to go back to work full-time and leave my children, young teens, to come home and have the house to themselves for two or three hours every afternoon. It's not safe. But I'm not quite sure where you get this magic nanny person from who is affordable, who the children will accept, and most of the time it will be a boring job. You just have to be there.

Also, they are at an age where they need a taxi driver after school to get to music lessons, dancing, sports practice...

The two main reasons for not being in part-time paid work were financial, especially for sole parents, and the requirements of the job; for example, good part-time jobs not being available.

If I was still married I would have gone back two or three days a week.

It's extremely hard to find really good interesting part-time jobs.

Self-employment was also regarded as providing the flexibility needed to combine paid work and parenting.

Being self-employed is certainly more enjoyable. I'm more in control. I get a lot more enjoyment from my clients, I make more money and I've got the flexibility with the kids.

Ideal patterns are usually not borne out in reality due to a combination of financial and workplace demands for earlier return to paid work, and for longer hours than desired, as outlined in Section 4.1 'Making choices', above.

The next section outlines the difficulties experienced by mothers in this study in combining parenting and paid work as a precursor to outlining their views of how employers and the government could assist them.

## 5.0 THE DIFFICULTIES OF COMBINING PAID WORK AND PARENTING

While most women reported an overall positive benefit to their personal wellbeing from combining paid work and parenting, there were also a number of negative effects, such as lack of time for family and personal activities, often resulting in stress and fatigue and negative impacts on relationships, and having to put career progression on hold.

The mothers in the study identified a variety of difficulties experienced in being both a parent and a paid worker. The most common difficult aspects of combining parenting and paid work occurred around the morning and evening periods of organising children and getting to and from work, after-school and school holiday times, when children are sick, and if still breastfeeding on return to the workplace. Also an issue for some were the difficulties of being separated from their child on first returning to the workplace, the 'double shift' of paid work and housework and a lack of fixed boundaries between home and work.

### 5.1 IMPACTS ON PERSONAL WELLBEING

The emphasis in studies on women combining paid work and parenting tends to be on the difficulties or negative impacts. Clearly there are also positive impacts which lead women to combine the two roles despite the negative outcomes. While this study was concerned with identifying the difficulties and barriers mothers experience in combining paid work and parenting and the perceived roles of employers and government in addressing these, it also presents the positive outcomes that emerged in the interviews.

#### **Positive**

Positive outcomes of combining paid work with being a mother that emerged in this study were mental and social stimulation, self-esteem and independence, easing of financial worries and allowing more opportunities for their children, and keeping a foot in the door of the workplace in terms of keeping skills and experience up to date.

This quote sums up all the positives:

It's a huge benefit for me to be working, because I've got my own life and my brain is still active and I'm mingling with other people and I've got adult conversation and I think that is advantageous to him because he can see the benefits of working and of course financially it's a huge benefit.

Mental and social stimulation from being with other adults was important to many of the mothers in this study.

Personally it's the sanity of having other people around, the ability to go for a coffee and not have to worry about taking a small person to the toilet every five minutes, yeah, and the money, the intellectual stimulation. I really enjoy the work that I do.

I think it's good to have a break, both for him and me. Certainly it's good for me to have that intellectual stimulation and to be with my colleagues and talking about things that are not to do with children.

Feeling proud of achievements was another positive outcome mentioned by some.

I feel very proud of my job and what I've accomplished there and what I do. I feel it re-energises me in terms of being with T... and caring for him.

It's positive. I feel proud that I achieve at work and I've got some control. If I want the children to go to music lessons or save up for their education or whatever, I've got some say in the matter. Or if I need to get out I can pay for a babysitter. I suppose a role model as well; work is good and I'm contributing to society.

Self-esteem and financial security and independence were also important outcomes for women who combine parenting with paid work.

It has done wonders for my sense of self-belief, my self-esteem. For a long time I felt guilty and like a burden on my partner or the government when I was on a benefit. Just to go out and say 'I earned that, I helped pay the bills'. And I enjoy my job, I meet all sorts of people, I've learned a lot, made new friends and feel appreciated, and that does a lot for a person's ego.

I like being financially secure, to have that regular income coming in and knowing that we can cover the bills, should anything happen, has been a real weight off my mind. I also enjoy the days that I come to work because it's meaningful to me, the work that I do, and it's time away from the children, to be honest.

Maintaining their skills and contact with the workforce was another positive outcome mentioned by some of the mothers in the study.

I think working part-time has been good because I like adult company and the adult stimulation, and I think you lose something if you're out of the work environment, your skill base drops, your experience, and it's difficult to get back into the working environment.

Some believed the quality of life for their children improved by their being in paid work in terms of the opportunities the extra income can provide for them.

I have to work to have the quality of life that I have to do the things with my son, otherwise we probably would have less quality of life because I wouldn't be able to take him places, go on holidays, do things, his activities, like soccer, that he likes, if I didn't work. That's how I try and explain it to him. So I have to work for us to be able to do the things for him, to have the things he wants.

Being busier and having less time were balanced by having a more rounded and fulfilling life. Many felt being a mother had created a better balance in their lives so that they worried less about their paid work.

I think we are more fully rounded, but a lot busier.

Overall I'm much happier than before I had children. I feel more stretched, but at the same time the work isn't as important to me as it was before, so I don't need to worry about the job as much as I used to worry about it. Overall I feel like it's a much more rewarding balance in my life, even though I'm stretched.

### **Negative**

The negative outcomes for women of being both a parent and a paid worker can be summed up as time pressure resulting in tiredness and stress, and lack of time for personal activities and family.

It's hard work. It is really, really hard work and you have to be totally focused and sometimes you're at home and you want to be at work and sometimes you are at work and you just want to be at home and it's really hard to get the balance right and you get tired and you get worn out with it.

There's definitely parts in my own personal life that were put on hold for a long time, such as horse riding, and all the groups and organisations I belonged to, but you did it quite willingly because you knew they were things you could go back to and to be part of someone's childhood and development was a lot more important.

Some noted that exercise, sport and personal health were sacrificed in order to fit in both paid work and family responsibilities.

I find it very difficult to find the time to exercise and when I was at home full-time I managed to go for walks, and when I was working full-time and my partner was at home, I walked to work, but now that I work part-time and she has a nanny it's impossible because I need to drive to work so I can get home in time for the nanny.

Friends, social life, and 'me' time also lost out in the time pressures created by being a mother and a paid worker.

I find it difficult to make commitments after work. I don't put a lot of time into friendships, which is something I miss, or I see friends at lunchtime or I go for coffee with colleagues, or we have family friends with children. I don't feel like there's much time for me.

And family time was less than ideal.

The negatives were that I didn't get to spend as much time with my family and that the time I did have was a little bit more strained because of other pressures in my life – work commitments and things.

A number of women spoke of the negative impact of being both a mother and a paid worker on their relationship with their partner, mostly due to a lack of time to spend together.

I think our relationship has deteriorated in lots of ways.

*In what ways?*

Time. Time together, time pressures. We love each other and everything, but everything is 'ships passing in the night'.

For one couple who chose to work separate shifts in their jobs to cover childcare:

The only other negative impact really has been my relationship with my partner, because apart from the time for me, there isn't any time for us, and I don't know, it's not something I really talk about with other people, so I don't have much of a basis, but it's probably normal. We are just passing each other, colleagues swapping over the shifts. And while we were really fortunate that we could work different hours, I think we've kind of sacrificed ourselves.

## 5.2 THE MOST DIFFICULT TIMES

On a daily basis, being both a parent and a paid worker is most difficult in the mornings and evenings when getting to and from the workplace conflicts with dropping children at childcare or school or collecting them afterwards, and during that after-school time. There are other specific times when the two are difficult to juggle, particularly during school holidays, when children are sick and when breastfeeding.

### **Mornings and evenings**

On a daily basis the juggling is most difficult in the mornings and the evenings.

It is most challenging around 8.00 in the morning and then again around 5.00 every evening. And that is on a daily basis. Those are the two times of day that just make life feel hard, and then the school holidays as well.

Leaving home in the morning, that is the hardest. You do get conflicting pressure because you've got work to do, but you need to be at home, and juggling the needs of your employer and the needs of the child are very difficult.

Timing, getting out the door on time. You know you've got to be on the road at a certain time. Making sure her bag is packed for the whole day, a change of clothes, nappies, food, bottle. Getting to work on time.

At the end of the day, when you come home and you're absolutely knackered, and you've got to cook the meal, clean up, do the washing and stuff for the next day, get the kids to bed...

The incongruence of workplace hours and school hours or childcare hours adds to the morning pressures.

I always find it's a juggling act in the morning to get to work at 8.30 and so I have to drop my son off at school at about 8.20. Now school doesn't start until 9.00 so there is always that little bit of guilt and shame about the dropping off so early, and then I'll get to work ... it's just that whole morning rush, and children – he's nine and he's not that quick at getting ready in the morning.

To cope with the morning and evening time pressures some mothers are working through lunch or tea breaks to make up time.

### **After school and school holidays**

For those who can't afford to work part-time, particularly sole parents, after-school time is a worry.

I was a single working Mum and around 3.00pm was my nervous time. They were on their own. A neighbour would keep an eye on them. But from 3.00 to 5.00 I would continually worry, continually phone. I felt terrible. I was the most indecent mother, the cruellest mother. I have a guilty conscience about leaving him on his own. Cheaper childcare, that would take before and after school, because there is nothing around.

School holidays are a similar worry.

In the school holidays, when I'm at work, I feel like I've never quite switched off from responsibility for my children. I'm still sort of thinking 'It's Tuesday today, so does that mean I have to shift them from place A to place B at lunchtime? Oh no, that's Thursday, it's OK, I don't have to do that today.'

Annual leave is used for school holidays, and sometimes sick leave, or a combination of arrangements.

I've had to take my annual leave time during school holidays to care for my child rather than to take it for myself, but that's something that I accept you have to do as a parent.

Some of my friends have managed to negotiate school holidays off and work school hours and I'm thinking that would be really nice.

I take some time off work, she goes to my sister for some of the holidays, but she also works but there is a school holiday programme where she lives she can send her to, or my partner [on shift work] just tries to stay awake.

Others point out the incongruence between school holidays, tertiary holidays, and workplace holidays. And the fact that the worry doesn't stop even when the children are teenagers.

I've had a couple of wonderful university students over the years. That all started falling apart because their holidays don't coincide anymore. You're fine for Christmas, January, and sometimes you get a week's overlap at Easter, but there are several weeks that don't quite work and it's a matter of whether you want to devote all of your own paid leave to looking after the children or whether you imagined you might have a holiday of your own for grown-ups sometime.

The teenage years, I think, are really terrible and I don't think there is enough understood about how difficult these are in the workforce. For a start it would be nice if the teenage holiday periods were in conjunction with the primary school ones and that they were in conjunction with when people take time off work. I've counted up the holidays. I think there's 16 weeks when kids are out of school and even if my husband and I both took our holidays separately we could still only manage eight.

### **Sick children**

One of the times balancing paid work and parenting is most difficult is when children get sick. Most mothers managed this by using their sick leave. Some had separate domestic leave provisions. Most also shared this with their partners, although it depended on who had the most flexible job. Others relied on other family members. Usually it was not a problem but sometimes it coincided with important workplace requirements and this was when having a partner or other family member available was an important support to enable the women to fulfil their paid work obligations.



The ability to do paid work from home at such times also helped.

The main problems for me are when she gets sick. It can be very stressful. The crèche rings up and says you need to come and get her right now and I'm in the middle of doing something, I haven't got many options.

One of the issues for me recently has been around sick leave. Usually once a month I'm taking a day off, not for myself but for the kids, and I've already exhausted my sick leave. My partner is a contractor and if he's not there he doesn't make any money, so he's reluctant to take time off. I sometimes rely on a good neighbour.

Now it's a mixture of either my husband, myself or my mother-in-law that look after him. Normally between the three of us there's someone that can take the day off and look after him, but my mother-in-law is really good.

Some felt there should be more sick leave available to cover the needs of parents. Some feel they have to use or save all their leave entitlement for possible illness, and so can't use it to attend school events.

The most difficult things are not being able to go to things, just not having the flexibility to go. Like school events. Having to use up all of my leave just to take care of her. And I can't really use that leave to go to things even when I have it. I just can't risk wasting it and then she'll be sick and I won't get paid. So there's the missing out stuff.

For others, having a sick child means losing out on training options. One sole parent, a widow, explains what going on a training session out of town involved in terms of making alternative arrangements for the children.

Last year I was all lined up to go on a training course and one of the children wasn't quite well enough to leave after a couple of days off school. My plan for looking after them for two days while I was away was somebody to take them to school, and someone else to pick them up from school, and someone to have them overnight and another person to come in the morning and my daughter was just not up to handling that level of upheaval so I just didn't go on the course.

### **Breastfeeding**

For most women breastfeeding did not affect the decision on when to return to paid work and returning to the workplace did not affect the time they breastfed for. Most had stopped before returning to paid work or were only doing night feeds. However some said that the need to return to paid work meant they had stopped breastfeeding sooner than they would have as they didn't see how they could do both.

I went back when he was 16 weeks, and I breastfed up until 12 or 13 weeks and then stopped. I worked a distance from home and it would have just been impossible. I just didn't see breastfeeding once I was back at work as a realistic thing. Ideally I would have kept breastfeeding.

Those who were still feeding managed by expressing milk, having the child brought in to them at the workplace or living close to the workplace and going home at lunchtime. Some found this too difficult and would take a longer maternity leave next time for this reason. One woman who took four months off with her first child opted for six months with the second as she found combining breastfeeding and paid work too difficult.

I think breastfeeding is really difficult to combine with work; it makes this really complex combination of things to manage. I had to express at work a couple of times a day and do extra expressing at home. So at work I decided to use my lunch break for expressing so I didn't have a lunch break and I was always thinking about expressing time coming up and that was quite a bit of stress all round, trying to make sure the expressing was working okay and that I was still giving my workplace enough time and effort.

Most of those interviewed said there was usually an office or room in their workplace that breastfeeding mothers could use, though some had used the toilets. Most stored the milk in the tearoom fridge. But there was a lack of confidence about asking for more suitable facilities.

I had an office with big glass panels that everyone walked past on the way to the kitchen and I was not confident enough to ask for a place to be set aside to express. I was a little bit embarrassed maybe, so I would go into the toilets and express in there. That's how I managed it, the breastfeeding thing. I was the only young mother here, the only one doing that. Just a little bit embarrassed about it. Now I would probably be more confident to ask, but probably a bit hormonal and embarrassed.

Her negative breastfeeding experience in the workplace was one reason for taking a longer parental leave with her second child. While she said her employer probably would have provided a facility if she had asked, she was too embarrassed to ask, indicating the importance of workplaces being proactive in this area if they want women to return to paid work earlier.

Another just accepted that it was her decision to come back to paid work, so she had to put up with the conditions for breastfeeding.

When I came back to work, initially my husband used to bring him in at lunchtime. Or I expressed. I tried to do it in here, but it just got harder and harder, and he got less and less.

*Was there anything you felt your employer could have done to make it easier for you to juggle that?*

I don't think I did at the time. I just accepted it. It was my decision to come back to work; I had to put up with it.

### **5.3 OTHER DIFFICULTIES IN COMBINING PAID WORK AND PARENTING**

For many the most difficult aspect of being a parent and a paid worker is being away from their baby or child and having to trust a stranger with their care.

The biggest thing I didn't anticipate was probably the fear, the fear of something happening to him when I wasn't there and that doesn't really seem to go away. It's not as bad now as when he was a baby, but definitely it's there.

I had to go off to work and basically leave my daughter with a stranger and I couldn't ring because it was the middle of the night (nurse on night shift) and that was quite stressful. It was just basically that you had to trust that things were all right.

For others it's the double shift for women because, although fathers are sharing childcare, they are not sharing housework.

Being a mother and a paid worker is just bloody hard work and I don't think women get enough credit for it by society. We don't give enough credit to the women who go out there, work their guts out, for far less money than a colleague of the male version, and then comes home and has to juggle children and a husband and a house and generally most of that responsibility still lies with her. That's where things need to change.

For yet another group the difficulties come from the nature of the job in that there are not fixed boundaries or full-time paid work is long hours (more than 40) so part-time work easily spills over into extra hours at home. While being able to do paid work from home is sometimes an advantage, at other times it means working more than you should.

It's really difficult. I've found maintaining a kind of level of quality that I want in both of those roles really difficult. There are often weeks where I feel like I'm not doing that good a job of keeping the job together and looking after him. In reality I usually just feel like I'm not doing very well at either thing.

## 5.4 THE IMPACT ON PAID WORK

There is a fear of not being on time in the morning, or not being able to do it all before having to leave to pick up children at the end of the day, and being seen as less productive or committed because of having children and putting their needs first. But mothers feel they are just as productive as they are more organised and efficient with the limited time they have.

We used to have an 8.30 briefing every morning and that was one of my anxieties, that I won't make that, I'm going to be late every morning and it's really obvious that children are a handicap. But with a new manager that meeting was dropped and it's not noticed what time you arrive, you just do your hours – I take shorter lunch breaks generally. Because I have to get away I'm more organised than I was before, and people perceive me as being very efficient with my time than those who don't have those pressures.

I'm still struggling to find that balance because I want to give my employer a really fair run, give them my value, my work, but at the same time my child comes first in my life and she needs me more than anybody else, so it really is a struggle. It's almost like she's my first priority, but when she's in care, it's now my employer, I have to give all I've got to my employer and he's my priority. It's really hard; I'm still finding that balance, because you're torn.

Many of the women expressed feelings of guilt at not performing to their own expectations in the workplace, though this was not borne out by employer or client feedback.

I feel very torn because I feel a great responsibility to my work and I love my clients and I've got very good relationships but I'm always feeling a little bit guilty that I'm not performing like I should be.

*Is there any external reason for feeling like this, your performance review or client feedback?*

No, client feedback has been magnificent.

*So it's your own feelings?*

Yes, I'm very hard on myself.

I always struggle because I never feel like I'm giving my best to anything. I'm having to accept less than I'd like at everything. I'm quite regularly behind at work so working under a high level of stress.

For many for whom paid work had been the main priority and satisfaction in their life, this was now overtaken by their child.

I enjoyed my work and I still do, but it very quickly became much lower down the list of priorities.

### **Putting career on hold**

Many professional women spoke of having to put their career on hold while their children were young as they did not believe senior level and management positions were able to be done on a part-time or even 40 hours a week basis, or that their employer was not open to the idea that they could be done part-time.

My career is on hold until I can put more time into it, so while I can put all the foundation stones in place and build things up, I'm not going to be able to make the next step up to partner until I work in a full-time role or full-time role equivalent, but that is going to call for considerably more time than I'm willing to invest at the moment. Realistically my career is probably five or six years delayed from where it would have been if I hadn't had a child.

I don't know of a position where there is a part-time partner. I don't think that would be possible from the client's perspective because the expectation would be that you were there. When it comes to it the partners are pretty much still old boys with a few women thrown into the mix, and I would think that would be a huge leap for them. I do know one woman partner who is expecting her first child and she's already hired two nannies so that she can be at work 12 hours a day, five days a week.

I think it would be a really career-limiting move if I did work four days a week. I'm not showing as much commitment as other people if I only work four days a week. I don't have the same level of commitment to the cause as full-timers.

Our manager asked me if I would be interested in the acting manager role when she left, and I said no, because that would have to be full-time, there is no way you could do it part-time.

Others feel they are limited to certain sorts of work or projects because they can't be there full-time or put in longer hours.

There are projects on at the moment that I know I am capable of doing if I was working full-time but I'm not getting the opportunities to do as much and I see those opportunities going to other people because I work part-time, because I'm not there all the time, and that's really difficult, although I understand that if they need to have something for a meeting today they need to be able to do that. It doesn't always sit comfortably.

#### **Giving up paid work because doing both roles is too hard**

For some, juggling the two roles became too difficult and they returned to the home or changed jobs.

It's hard. The juggling is hard, it's stressful. I think my mental health suffers sometimes. I first went back when my first child was three months, then I left six months later to be a full-time mother because it was just too hard, the juggling, the dropping off and picking up.

A solo mother who later married and became a stay-at-home mother for 14 years explains why.

It just got too hard. I just felt guilty. He would cry all the way home and fall asleep through his dinner so I couldn't bath him. It's just so hard. He was still waking through the night so I wasn't getting enough sleep. I just felt constant guilt. And I didn't feel able to do my job effectively because of that and worrying that I wasn't doing the right thing for my child.

The following section presents the views of the mothers in this study on how employers can help them to be both mothers and paid workers, and the benefits to employers of doing so.

## 6.0 THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

This section reports on what the mothers in the study think employers can or should do to enable their employees to be both parents and paid workers by reducing some of the difficulties they experience in combining the two roles. The difficulties that employers can address, as identified in the preceding sections of this report, are managing the morning and evening delivery and collection of children and out-of-school time alongside fulfilling their paid work hours, managing emergencies such as sick children, combining breastfeeding with paid work, time pressure and lack of time for family and themselves.

It was thought the employer's role, through the provision of work-life balance initiatives such as flexible and part-time work, should not be mandatory. This was partly due to a high awareness of the small size of many New Zealand organisations. But there were some key ways in which the mothers in this study thought employers could assist them to combine their dual roles in ways that would also benefit employers. These are flexible hours, extra domestic leave for sick children, onsite or nearby childcare provision or subsidy, after-school and school holiday programmes, part-time paid work at senior levels, and ensuring a genuine culture of acceptance of work-life or family-friendly policies that prevents management discretion as to whether and how such policies are implemented.

If we could make our employers say, look, I am committed to the work that I am doing for you, but please allow me to be a parent at the same time. I know for a fact that my employer gets 45 or 50 hours a week out of me although I'm only required to do 37 hours, because I appreciate so much that they do allow me that flexibility.

Many of the interviewees were expressive and appreciative of how good their employer was.

As far as an organisation that is generous, they are fabulous. They are very understanding if I have to leave in the middle of the day for a doctor's appointment or go to the school or whatever. They are absolutely fabulous about that.

I've just been incredibly lucky in terms of my employer. My managers have just been incredible. When I went back I had a new manager and she's had children and so was just exceptionally understanding of what it's like. She was more than happy that some days I took my son into work with me if I desperately needed to do something and he could just play on the floor or sit in his bouncy chair and nobody minded. He was able to be brought in to me at times to be breastfed, or I could go home at lunchtime or whenever I needed to feed him. If I was doing interviews I just timed it around his feed times. I had flexible hours so I worked when I could and if that meant I went in at night when he was asleep then I was allowed to do that.

### 6.1 FLEXIBILITY

Flexible start and finish times and the ability to make up time to accommodate childcare and school times or appointments, or being able to do paid work from home when children are sick, were the main ways in which the mothers in this study thought employers could help them manage their dual roles of parent and paid worker. This would reduce stress at the beginning and end of the day and improve their focus on their paid work when they were there.

Flexibility in terms of work hours and job sharing and those kinds of things can actually help people make it work better.

Flexibility in work hours, so if my husband has other commitments in the afternoon and can't pick up our child from school I know I can start a little earlier because I've got that balance available at work so then I can finish a little earlier and be there in the afternoon for my children. Having flexibility of hours is really important.

It was the flexibility and I knew if my son was ill that they would have given me the time. I could walk in the door at 9.00 and leave at 5.00. And they set me up at home with a computer. They had a workplace crèche as well. There is all that kind of encouragement to make it easier for parents to be at work.

Some didn't have flexibility to attend their children's school events and would like employers to offer the flexibility to do this.

I wish you could take the odd half-day for a school trip or something, and not take it as annual leave. That they would understand that you need to be with your child and that you would try and make up the hours. A bit more give and take.

## 6.2 SICK LEAVE AND DOMESTIC LEAVE

Most people only had the normal sick leave allocation for employees to use when their children were sick. After that they had to use annual leave or were not paid if they needed more time off for a sick child. Some employers provide additional domestic leave to cover such occasions and there were requests from others that more do this.

I rang my husband to see if he could pick her up because I don't get paid if I don't work, but he had meetings all day, so I had to take time off, and we lost money. I still had to pay the daycare and I didn't get paid. That was difficult. You need to work to earn but you need to go to your child when she needs you.

I'm at the point now where I've used up my domestic leave, because kids get sick a lot, so I'll have to start taking my annual leave if I want to stay home and look after him.

## 6.3 SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

One theme emerging from the interviews was that although some workplaces nominally have family-friendly policies, it depends on the boss whether there is actually a culture that encourages and supports using such initiatives.

They've always had a whānau-come-first approach. So if, for whatever reason, the kids have an accident at school or something, then we're not obliged to sit here until 5.00. So there is no guilt feeling. It's okay to say 'I need to go, my child needs me.' And generally you make up the time later.

I think it just comes down to the ease of being able to say 'I need to go home, or I need to stay at home' and I never feel you have to justify it. There is a culture of acceptance.

In some workplaces employees are discouraged from taking up work-life provisions, or made to feel they are not being a good employee for doing so.

At my last employer I felt guilty if I had to take time off to go to a Plunket appointment or something, but here, as long as I'm getting the work done on time and my clients are happy, you can fit other personal things around your work as well. They encourage family time and family participation, like taking a day for school sports. That is encouraged here because they want their staff to be happy and surely that will flow on through the work environment as well.

There's recognition on paper but in practice the culture of a place can make it the parents' problem, like 'Oh, you're not here on Tuesday, what a nuisance'. It can push it back on the individual and set you up to fail.

I think they could be stronger in support. They're close to part-time friendly – within individual teams there is support, but the Ministry has a culture that if the Minister wants it at 10 o'clock at night you do it at 10.00 pm. And a colleague of mine on three days a week ended up doing four days a week.

I think some managers have made me feel they are obliged to let you do that, rather than that they actually care and understand.

Having a boss with family needs who understands or role models family-friendly practice is one way of making employees more comfortable about using such options.

Generally the most useful thing I find from an employer is their willingness and understanding of your problems. Not so much what they can offer you as far as time off, but just how much understanding and respect they show you when you say you've got family commitments. It's much easier for you to take a day off with a sick child if your employer shows that they are understanding about it.

*So it's more of an attitude?*

That's right.

The general manager is a family man and family is very important. I think that's one of his values. I really admire that, and it sort of filters down.

## **6.4 MANAGER DISCRETION**

Another recurring theme in the interviews was that even in organisations that did have a good work-life or family-friendly policy, it was often at the discretion of managers as to whether and how that was applied. This meant the culture and implementation varied from department to department, or when there was a change of manager.

I think that many of the things that made it such an attractive place to work are informal things and depend on an individual manager. So the flexibility around my start time; with previous managers if I wanted to start at a different time I could just adjust my hours, but that's changed with the new manager.

I've had different managers since the baby was born. At the start I felt really conscious of being late or leaving on time. Now it's a different manager, one with children and he's had to go off for the odd appointment with his baby, and I'm more relaxed.

I work for a very large organisation and I do know those are their policies. I am very fortunate to work for a manager who works within those policies and is happy with those policies and genuinely doesn't mind. I know for a fact that it's not the case with all managers and that mine's probably the exception rather than the rule in that regard.

## **6.5 BENEFITS TO EMPLOYER**

Benefits to employers of providing family-friendly initiatives were seen as improved work performance, loyalty and being more able to attract and retain staff.

I think if an organisation welcomes the family and appreciates that their staff have a life other than working, they get happier staff, and happier staff are more willing to go that extra mile for their employer because they've done well by them.

They get more back from the employee if they are happier in their role and there is give and take. I can see they appreciate my work if they're willing to do this, and I'm going to put more effort in and be happier here, and if I'm happier I'm better at my job.

Just being allowed to go off for a Plunket appointment without having to take leave, just puts me in that frame of mind, well you know, I'll do anything for them. When somebody asks me to come in a bit earlier or set something up for them after hours, I've got no problem with that.

For those whose work is computer-based, being provided with a laptop to enable them to work from home is a benefit to both them and their employer.

Obviously they saw a benefit as well. It means that if I'm at home with a sick child I can still be productive and meet my deadlines.

Asked if it would make a difference to them taking a job or staying in a job whether or not an employer offered flexible work hours, part-time work in their normal occupation, breastfeeding facilities, childcare, etc, most said it would.

If I had known how much more flexible my current employer is than my previous employer I would have left the old job sooner.

I think mainly it's just the understanding that if my child needs me I can leave.

*And if you didn't have that understanding?*

I wouldn't be working there.

If parents are happy and kids are happy and all that is a bit easier, then people would stay in work longer. They win by it I think; they get good staff who want to stay. I've been in this job eight years and the main reason I'm still here is that it suits me with the kids.

It was also noted that family-friendly flexible workplaces don't just benefit the current employees, but benefit the employer by making the workplace attractive to future potential recruits as well.

I don't know whether they should have to do it, but I think it's definitely in their interest to do it because good people are hard to find. Also in terms of increasing their employment brand in the marketplace, to be known as a good employer; it's not just parents, it benefits other people to have flexibility as well. I think it makes for a more happy, committed workforce for your existing people, and it makes you more attractive as an employer to potential recruits as well.

It would definitely affect your decision even if it's not directly relevant because it's sending a signal about a good employer.

Family-friendly workplaces benefit male staff as well as female.

It's not just women's issues, because men have wives who are working as well. So even though you are employing men, you should recognise that if they have got children, then they have got family responsibilities just as much as female employees.

## **6.6 CHILDCARE**

Most people did not think employers should be responsible for childcare funding or provision. However, some did note that larger organisations should think about it as it is a real benefit to parents having onsite care or subsidised care, and the employer reaps the benefit of a less stretched parent trying to fit in childcare drop-offs and pick-ups into the working and commuting day.

A childcare centre in the building would be good – a one-stop-shop.

When she was at my husband's workplace crèche she was just there for the working day, whereas now she is also in for the travel time, which makes the day a good hour or more longer, which we are really aware of. Also, as employees were on the crèche committee there was more sense of involvement and community than with a private centre.

It is also a benefit to breastfeeding mothers to have the children onsite or nearby which might encourage some women to return to paid work sooner.

It would affect my decision as to whether to take a job or not if there was onsite childcare and I had a newborn baby. I wouldn't have so much problem going to work if I knew that they were just downstairs or there were facilities for me to breastfeed.

One of the advantages for me of onsite or nearby childcare facilities shared with other employers is that I can pop in there in my lunchtime and breastfeed or take her for a walk. So it would be really helpful if more employers did that.



## 6.7 BREASTFEEDING FACILITIES

Most women had not thought about expecting employers to provide breastfeeding facilities, but when it was put to them they thought it would definitely be a good idea and make it easier for women who had to return to paid work early.

Having a private place in the workplace to breastfeed or express milk would make a difference I would think. I fed him in the staffroom and people were fine about it but I did sometimes feel that they didn't want to see me doing it when they came for their coffee. Some people want to be more private about it and I certainly wouldn't express milk in the staff room.

It would be really great for them to have an automatic checklist of things to consider and consult with you, so that you don't have to raise it, it's automatically given. Somebody in a position on a lesser level might feel intimidated about asking.

## 6.8 AFTER-SCHOOL CARE AND SCHOOL HOLIDAY PROGRAMMES

Again, most did not think employers should be responsible for school holiday or after-school care, but for those whose employers did provide such services it was seen as being a benefit to both the parent and the employer.

The school holiday programme has been a real blessing because I used to have to take all the holidays off.

I feel very, very lucky that my employer provides what they do as far as a school holiday programme is concerned, and they are also very, very understanding about family issues. I know I'm onto a good thing there.

I used to work for the Ministry of Health and they had their own holiday programme which was one of the things I found attractive about moving there, but they decided to get out of it, decided it wasn't their core business.

Some noted that their employer helps them balance their roles by letting the children come in to the workplace after school.

For this organisation they've for the most part had a family-friendly approach. For instance the children come in here after school. They get to relax in the tearoom. There's a TV and they can hire a video next door.

They have a family room. It's just an office with a PC and toys and if you've got a kid who can't go to school it enables you to work without disrupting the workplace and feeling uncomfortable about it. I think little gestures like that show that an employer is supportive. It's condoned, not merely tolerated. You feel it's perfectly acceptable and okay.

## 6.9 OTHER EMPLOYER INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT PARENTS

Some employers offer ex gratia payments on return from parental leave as an incentive to return. Other mothers in the study mentioned that being able to make a graduated return to the workplace after having a child helped.

For the first few weeks I just did 12 hours, then 16 and then within a year I'd moved up to the 20 hours I do now. If he had pushed me too soon, you have to come back full-hours or nothing, I think I might have said nothing.

The benefit of maintaining skilled workers by offering part-time work in senior positions was also noted.

I think employers should benefit for allowing part-time staff at senior management, because you're maintaining workers that would probably otherwise leave. But I guess I can understand, too, that in some jobs it's much more difficult to do that than with others.

If it's a good employee then as an employer you are keen to help and support them, because it's much better to have an efficient fully trained worker than to train someone from scratch. I've told my superiors that I want to go part-time at the end of this year. If they are happy enough with my performance I imagine they will probably try and work around what I've got to offer, but I'm also prepared to walk away and say, right this is the bottom line.

Another innovative suggestion was the provision of a pool of nannies to care for the children of employees in emergencies. There was also mention of some small law firms having a corporate nanny used by a number of staff and/or partners.

Helping parents in contemporary families to combine paid work with their parenting roles requires a combination of individual, workplace and government factors. The next section sets out the views of the mothers in this study on how government can assist.

## 7.0 THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

This section presents the views of the mothers in the study on what role they thought the government could or should play in assisting them to be both parents and in the paid workforce.<sup>6</sup> It was seen as the role of government to provide support for parents to be able to choose whether to stay home and raise their own children or join the paid workforce. This could be done by addressing difficulties in doing this which were identified in the preceding sections of this report. In particular, what the mothers in this study wanted from government was greater provision or subsidy of childcare, funding and regulating of after-school and school holiday care, some form of financial assistance through the tax system for all parents, raising the thresholds for childcare and family assistance, longer paid parental leave at a higher amount and support to employers to assist their employees to be both paid workers and parents.

A frequent comment was that if the government wants more mothers in the workforce, as demonstrated by Helen Clark's statement in 2005<sup>7</sup>, then they should provide and/or fund quality childcare, including after-school and school holiday programmes.

With unemployment as low as it is and desperately wanting to get people back into the workforce being a primary concern, then they need to put in place assistance to do that, so I guess some kind of subsidy maybe, for families whose children go into childcare and before and after-school care, and holiday programmes, or maybe give subsidies to workplaces that do that.

If they want us back in the workplace, if they want us contributing to society, I believe you should have some assistance. I'm not asking for free [childcare], just assistance.

Another reaction to Helen Clark's statement was a request for assistance through the tax system.

Well, if they want people to work, and clearly they do – Helen Clark has come out very strongly saying we would like to get Mums back in the workforce – and if that's the government's goal, they need to offer some assistance, like tax breaks, if that's the goal for the government.

The argument about the public versus private benefit of having children was made by some mothers as a reason for expecting government support.

On the one hand there are always arguments about people's choice to have children, which is fine if you don't actually think that there is any sort of societal benefit about having a labour force to help support you in your declining years. I think it is a social issue rather than just a family choice issue. I think that the government has a responsibility to assist in giving people some real choice. I know for a lot of people on lower incomes than us the cost of childcare can be prohibitive. I know some people who haven't gone back to work because they couldn't find childcare that they were happy with.

Some also noted the need for the government to provide support to encourage people to have more children because of the implications for the country of the falling birth rate and the cost to parents of having children and being in paid work.

I guess if they want to increase the birth rate they are going to have to do something because financially for a lot of families they're going to be on the breadline otherwise. I know for example we earn a reasonable amount of money, but during those school holiday programmes for these two or three weeks, it was about \$1,000 which is essentially not being paid for a considerable number of days.

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6 These are views of the study participants on what the role of government should or could be. In some cases the government is already doing these things, or planning to, in which case the study findings are supportive of current policy. In other cases the views indicate areas where the government could extend its role to meet the needs of parents. It was not the aim of this study to analyse and present current policy but to present the views of mothers on how government can assist them to be both parents and in the paid workforce.

7 It has been noted in the introduction that the Prime Minister's statement of 1 February 2005 referred to out-of-school care for five to 11-year-olds, but according to reports in the media, and the views expressed by many mothers in this study, it was interpreted by some mothers as suggesting all mothers, including those with pre-school children, should be in full-time paid work.

## 7.1 CHILDCARE SUBSIDY AND PROVISION

More direct funding for childcare was seen as a way government could help parents to be in paid work.<sup>8</sup>

It's the most expensive component next to our mortgage and we have to fork out in order for us just to survive. It would be great if the government could pick up the cost.

I think if they want more women back in the workforce, the government should step in for people who can't afford it.

This was especially so for sole parents.

It was initially very expensive when I first went back to work and then at one stage I was on the benefit and it was actually probably easier for me to stay on the benefit than go back to work and pay a large amount for childcare. I didn't like being on the benefit, I didn't like the stigma, so I went back to work, but it was a lot harder. It would have been really helpful if the government had paid for full childcare and made that transition from the Domestic Purposes Benefit into full-time work, or even possibly being able to have my income subsidised a little bit so I could have gone into part-time work. It was really difficult to make that transition back into the workforce. I managed to get a part-time job initially, but then had to go full-time to make ends meet.

But it was also thought that the level at which the current subsidy kicks in is too low.

And increasing childcare subsidies. If people want to work, you've got to make it worth their while, especially for people on lower incomes, but at the same time there's that financial burden on people on higher incomes as well, and it just needs to be more fair across the board I think.

There was overall dissatisfaction with the current childcare tax rebate and subsidy. A number of comments were also made about the difficulty of form filling to get the subsidy, and the number of government departments involved if you were a sole parent.

The only assistance I get is the \$5 per hour or whatever they provide into the childcare centre, and the other is the \$350 a year tax refund. I don't know why they even bother with it. The cost associated with collecting it, paying it out ... I'm sure could be better spent in another way.

I think the government certainly has a responsibility in terms of the tax rebate thing in terms of how appallingly low it is, and just encouraging ... those kinds of incentive would help a lot, and the subsidies that you may or may not be entitled to.

Having to pay for childcare on the days that children are sick and perhaps losing your pay because of taking time off to look after the child was a concern to some parents.

We have to give seven days' notice if she's not going to be there, and even then we pay a holding fee, which is half the cost, so you still have to pay regardless.

There was also a concern that only some types of childcare were being subsidised.<sup>9</sup>

I worry that the Government talks about funding for childcare, but only for certain childcares, like kindergartens, but they won't help others. I think it needs to be every child and they need to be able to make the choice of where they want their child to go.

I really object to the government discrimination against private early childhood providers.

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8 New Zealand currently has relatively high childcare costs compared with other countries. Concerns about childcare cost and availability were drivers behind the ECE strategy and Working for Families reforms which increased the level and threshold of childcare and OSCAR subsidies. However, despite recent moves to improve childcare provision, many mothers felt additional support was needed. According to the Minister of Social Development (<http://www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/press-releases/2006/pr-2006-10-02.html>), from 2 October 2006 through the Working for Families reforms, around 60 percent of couples with children and 96 percent of sole parents are eligible for help with childcare costs. New income levels are \$54,600 for one child, \$65,000 for two children and \$75,400 for three or more children.

9 Initially, plans for 20 hours of free early childhood education were limited to community-based services for all three and four-year-olds from July 2007, but it was later amended to apply to all teacher-led services.

Mothers in this study were supportive of the government's role in the regulation of childcare quality.

They need to make sure there is quality pre-school education for all kids, regardless of whether their parents work.

Government should provide good quality childcare so that it's regulated.

Concern about the poor pay for childcare workers was frequently mentioned.

What I would like is for the childcare profession to be better valued. The rate of pay for teachers astonishes me; they must love children a lot. They've got a huge responsibility, and yet \$15 per hour is something that we see as being too much somehow. It comes back to government and employer subsidies because when it comes out of your pay packet it's unlikely it's going to increase that much. It gets to a point for middle-income earners where childcare is just unaffordable.

## **7.2 AFTER-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL HOLIDAYS**

Government was perceived to have a role in funding, regulating and providing information about after-school and school holiday care.

After-school care is another thing that can really support parents. Early childhood is poorly funded, but after-school care is even worse. And it's poor quality. People have no training, it's badly regulated and terribly funded.

I think that some centralised information would be something good that the government could do. It's difficult enough to find out about how to get your child into primary school, but I don't know where to go for after-school care.

So if the government put programmes together like maybe a week-long camping trip or day trips or arts and crafts that they can attend instead of a parent trying to fork out money for it, even if they subsidised some of those programmes and made up brochures and handed them out at the schools so that we knew what was available and what our children would be interested in and affordable for us too. I think that would be brilliant. There's so much going on out there but the schools aren't providing the information and I think that's where it should be coming from. If the kids brought stuff home and we were aware of what's going on, because it's hard when you're working full-time – where do you go for this information?

It was also suggested that schools could play a bigger role in the provision of after-school and holiday options.

Something requiring schools to become involved in before and after-school care programmes. Some schools are fabulous at it, other schools say it's not education, it's nothing to do with us, we don't care. There are currently some good school holiday programmes. And I guess funding, why not. Any encouragement for schools to get involved, because they've got fabulous facilities lying unused during school holidays.

Those holiday times that parents can't be on leave should be structured using the school capital. The school's got the facilities there, the grounds. Initially the government has to put some upfront money into these ideas.

Greater congruence in the holiday periods for the different education sectors and the workforce was suggested. This would mean that older children could be involved in looking after younger ones, as well as parents being better able to fulfil both their family and workplace responsibilities.

I think there are those practical things, like longer annual leave, that would make that school holiday thing easier.

I think children and families would benefit if there was more congruence between high school and primary school holidays, and workforce holidays. Currently, there are between 12 and 16 weeks of breaks between schooling each year – this does not come

close to the four weeks paid leave available to parents. From what I understand about the ways children learn, I don't think that the answer is more days of formal school time. So, some creative ideas are required to gain better congruence. For example, you could have the teenagers organising the young ones at summer camps. This sort of activity would both be good for the teenagers (teaching them parenting and leadership skills), and would make working life a lot less stressful for parents when their children were on holiday.

### 7.3 TAX REBATES OR FAMILY CREDITS

Other ways of providing support for families were suggested, such as through a tax rebate or family allowance.

I think subsidies or tax rebates or something for families with school-age or pre-school children who are working.

Maybe some kind of more family credit, because having families is an expensive business and we have children for selfish reasons, but it does benefit society as well.

I'd like to see different tax rates for families. I think it's ridiculous for parents if they're both working to pay the same rate of tax. I think maybe if both parents are working they could look at tax relief for one of the working parents, more incentives to go back to work, supporting people when they work.

I think even things like sharing the income between the partners, in terms of taxing, so that you do get a bit of a break.

There was a strong feeling of anger at the perceived general lack of assistance for most parents, and that the threshold for assistance is too low and needs to be raised.<sup>10</sup>

We feel what they class as people that need help, they need to spread a little further, because they consider us middle-income earners (\$60-\$80,000 combined income) and we are struggling. As you can see, we are not in riches, we are not in a big house, we don't have fancy cars, we have a very simple life, but we are struggling.

We have had no assistance from government whatsoever. We've only got one child and we have been on the bones of our bottoms financially which has forced me to go back to work and I'm angry about that. I feel we get mixed messages about 'Women should be at home looking after the children' or 'Women should be getting back out into the workforce'. It's like, 'What do you want?' We feel very angry that we aren't even worth assistance.

### 7.4 ASSISTANCE FOR STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS

There was a strong theme emerging from this study that if mothers are to have a real choice then instead of just subsidising childcare, the government should offer some sort of assistance to mothers who choose to care for their child themselves.

A lot of people might really like to stay at home longer but it's the financial that's pushing them back. A lot of people don't have that choice.

I think it would be lovely, it would be ideal if we could have that choice. We don't have a choice, we can't have me stay home, it's not an option. We'd lose the house if I stayed at home to be a full-time mother. It would be nice to be given a choice like 'Would you like to go back to work? Because if you do we can assist you with childcare. If you want to stay at home, we can assist you with a housing allowance'.

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10 The Ministry of Social Development website states that in 2005/06 about 55 percent of all families benefited from the Working for Families package, increasing to about 61 percent of all families in 2007/08 ([www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/working-for-families/fact-sheet-2.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/working-for-families/fact-sheet-2.html)). At 2005/06 income thresholds almost all families with incomes below \$45,000 per year would benefit, plus a substantial number of those between \$45,000 and \$70,000.

I think it would be good for the government to acknowledge the role of mothering and maybe supporting women to stay at home a bit longer, rather than pay for childcare. Maybe lowering the threshold for family support and making that a bit more rather than paying for childcare, which for some women would be really helpful, but it sort of pushes people back into the workforce. It doesn't really acknowledge that mothering is just as important a job.

You can be paid as a sole parent, but you don't get paid to be one of a couple. If you or your husband stays home you lose one income, so I think, yes, definitely, extending paid parental leave or some sort of more tax relief for families would be beneficial so you don't feel that punch of losing that second income.

Again, Helen Clark's statement that we need more childcare so more mothers can join the paid workforce provoked an opposite reaction from those who felt mothers who stay home full-time to care for their own children are also contributing to society but that is not recognised in government policy. Although the Prime Minister's statement referred to "out-of-school care from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm for 5-11-year-olds", it was interpreted by many mothers as suggesting mothers of pre-school children should be in full-time paid work.

We could have got subsidies for childcare and we felt strongly I was doing a job, I was providing the best possible for our child, and there was no recognition of that, and people who chose to put their child into crèche were having government assistance. I don't think there's enough recognition of the importance that parents can play in their children's lives. I just feel, particularly comments that Helen Clark made however long ago, she was almost dismissive of people staying at home with their children. From then I took that they are just not willing to help. I think there is a pressure for people to go back to work.

Others felt that assistance for stay-at-home mothers would stigmatise stay-at-home mothers as beneficiaries, and there should be a universal family allowance as in some other countries to recognise the contribution they make. A more neutral form of assistance suggested would be a tax rebate which parents could choose to use for childcare or parent care.

To me it's another benefit and there is so much negative energy directed towards beneficiaries. It's just creating another underclass to me. I don't know a positive way of supporting motherhood. I know in Britain they had a child allowance, like a family subsidy that everyone got, it wasn't means tested, and I think they have something similar in France. It acknowledges the importance of families, which I think is a bit more important.

Others noted that some women will choose to stay at home regardless of government policies and assistance to encourage them into paid work.

I think that changing the way the workforce is to support mothers isn't going to make a lot of women go back to work because I think probably there are women that want to stay at home, who don't want to work because they don't enjoy the whole working experience.

## **7.5 LONGER AND BETTER PAID PARENTAL LEAVE**

Many of the mothers in this study had knowledge of paid parental leave schemes in other countries and did not think New Zealand compared favourably.

I guess it's quite surprising to find how far back New Zealand was in terms of things like paid maternity leave and things like that, because it's such a long way ahead in a lot of other areas. I think it's quite interesting to see what the rest of the world is doing, particularly Europe, and I'm hoping that maybe we'll start catching up.

The general feeling was that three months paid parental leave is not long enough; it should be six months to a year.

I find it sad when mothers are going back to work after three months. I don't think the child has had a chance to bond properly. I'm quite strong really that to stay at home as long as possible is best.

I think six months would be good. The overall good of the society is to have well-balanced parents and well-balanced children and if that means that a parent is going to be more well-balanced by having six months off, then let's have the option.

The current amount paid to parents in New Zealand's scheme was also thought to be too low.

I think it should go for at least a year, three months is just insufficient, and the amount they pay is insufficient. I know it's a start, but it's just not enough.

I would say they should increase the length of time they pay paid parental leave. And they should possibly look at increasing the amount.

## **7.6 LEGISLATION OR SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYERS – CARROT OR STICK?**

Support for legislation to make it mandatory for employers to provide family-friendly options for their workers was in a minority among the mothers in this study, although some expressed the view that it would make things more equitable for parents than leaving it up to individual employers.

I think it should be mandatory that employers do accept parents because it can only do good for everybody in the long run. That families are accepted as an important part of our culture and that working parents are also accepted as an important part of our culture. I look around sometimes and I see knowledge walking out the door with a pregnant woman and you just think, well, that's 20 years, or that's 10 years of knowledge walking out of this building and they can offer so much to this place, rather than letting them just go.

Legislation, such as for part-time hours, was thought to be unfair and impractical for the many small employers in New Zealand, and that it might also have negative repercussions for parents as less attractive employees.

There are some circumstances under which being able to insist on part-time hours with a little bit of effort from the employer would work quite well, but I'm sure there are other situations where it would be quite difficult for employers to manage that. But certainly the right to ask. I don't know how you take it a step further without making it really restrictive.

I know that would be really hard for a lot of employers, especially small businesses and that's why I feel that it would be better if some stuff comes through government so that no matter where you work you've got the ability to access things that make parenting and working a bit easier, because you hear some very different stories about the way people get treated in the private sector, especially the smaller employers that can't afford the losses that they would have.

It's very difficult to say how government can support parents in paid work because all they can do is legislate, and if they legislate to say that families returning to the workforce should be allowed the options of shorter hours or whatever, then, simply, businesses won't employ those people who fall into those conditions.

A more positive suggestion emerging from some respondents was for the government to assist and encourage employers to provide family-friendly options.

More support for employers who go that extra mile.

It could be the government forming strategies to help support employers into adopting family-friendly workplaces and practices. Something that's not too compliance heavy. Something that encourages employers to see the benefit in supporting their workforce and a range of different strategies. It might not just be around childcare.



## 8.0 DISCUSSION

### Norms of motherhood and the role of parents

There has been a shift in norms of motherhood in New Zealand. The data from this study indicate that New Zealand mothers today have a wide-ranging concept of what it is to be a good mother, and a wide-ranging practice of combining motherhood and paid work. In comparison, both the norm and practice in the 1950s was to be a full-time mother at home and not in paid work. In the 1970s and 1980s combining motherhood with paid work was becoming more common in practice, but was still more negatively judged than being a full-time mother, resulting in more guilt than was expressed in this study. Now it is the full-time mother who is perceived as less valued, and to combine paid work with parenting is regarded as the norm. There are qualifications to this: there is still not consensus on being in paid work, particularly full-time and using full-time formal childcare, when children are very young.

Childcare was generally very positively regarded and the women went to great lengths to check out the quality of the care and weigh up options. Findings of this study were consistent with those of Villani (1997) that high quality childcare was essential to women being able to reconcile being a good mother with doing paid work. However, primarily parental, particularly maternal, care was preferred for the first year or two of a child's life, and some would prefer to care for their own children full-time at least until they start school. This is consistent with the findings of Stephens and Callister (2006) in a literature review of research on the impact on child development of parents combining paid work and parenting. Full-time formal childcare was not a preferred option for the women in the study being reported in this report, with many mothers who were in paid work full-time relying on partners or other family members to provide some of the care.

These findings are consistent with those of DiQuinzio (1999), Villani (1997) and Gerson (1985) in the US that the concept of the 'good mother' has changed to fit the changing roles of women, while still incorporating the core value of putting children first, as identified by Wearing (1984) and Dex (2003). For all the women in this study, their children are their first priority. The guilt at not being with their children all the time (Roiphe 1996) has subsided as combining paid work and parenting has become the norm in reality, but still occurs when mothers have to put paid work ahead of a child's needs or wishes, thus conflicting with their belief their children should be their first priority.

There is also a residual guilt for some mothers as a result of conflicting messages they feel they get from society between trying to be a good mother, and meeting what they feel are their responsibilities to contribute to society by being a paid worker, too, or just meeting their financial needs to provide a home and physical needs for their children. Mostly this applies when children are pre-school, and particularly less than two years of age. While this study did not include many full-time mothers, the statistical data from the ISSP survey of the roles of men and women (Gendall 2003) reported in Section 1.2 confirm this as being the normative view of New Zealanders, with slightly more than half of all New Zealanders at all ages believing that women with pre-school children should not be in paid work at all, and only 2 percent saying they should be in full-time work. The findings of the ISSP study are also largely consistent with New Zealand society giving a mixed message about mothers and paid work, showing that while just over half think mothers of pre-school children should not be in paid work at all, a third think they should work part-time. And while 43 percent think pre-school children suffer if a mother does paid work, the remainder either disagree or do not have an opinion (Gendall 2003)<sup>11</sup>.

There were a number of sole parents in this study who were unanimous in their desire to be in the paid workforce rather than be on a benefit, to contribute to society and be a good role model for their children. For them this means full-time paid work, as part-time work with the cost of childcare was not an option.<sup>12</sup> Yet some also held conflicting values that being a good mother meant being at home with their children, particularly for school-age children out of school hours, and that caused tensions for them.

Findings from this study were consistent with those of Gerson (1985) that some women who wanted or needed to do paid work developed new notions of good mothering that better fit their own needs while ambivalent emotions of guilt and confidence that their children would be all right emerged side by side. The benefits of having a mother in paid work were emphasised, along with criticisms of the traditional model of good mothering, such as full-time mothers in the past spending more time on housework than with their children.

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11 These questions were also included in the 2005 ISSP survey on attitudes to work in New Zealand, with the same results, that is, no change since the 2002 survey (Gendall 2006).

12 The 1998 New Zealand Childcare Study found that childcare costs were a key barrier to labour force participation by sole parents, with New Zealand having a relatively low rate of employment among sole parents (Department of Labour and National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women 1999).

However, a key theme emerging from this study is that there is not freedom of choice for everyone to be a good mother in their own way. There is a group of mothers who would prefer to be at home full-time with pre-school children, especially those under two, many of whom cannot do so due to financial need or the need to return to their job sooner or lose it, lose their skills or lose their position on the career path. Hakim's (2003) work in the UK puts the preference for full-time motherhood at about 20 percent, but few there are able to choose this preference either, due to financial need for paid work.

This also seems to be the case in New Zealand, as demonstrated in the disjunction between the desire for part-time work and the reality of full-time work found in this study, which is supported by quantitative data. The Ministry of Social Development (2006) study found that 39 percent of New Zealand couples prefer to have one parent at home full-time, yet the reality is that only 22 percent of couples with dependent children have one parent, mostly the mother, at home full-time, with another 4 percent having both parents out of the labour force (Statistics New Zealand 2001a). The Ministry of Social Development study also found that preference for having one parent at home full-time was higher amongst tertiary-qualified parents, who are overrepresented in this qualitative study.

The role of fathers, as perceived by the mothers in this study, is more incongruent. A positive outcome of this study has been the high regard for the role of partners and fathers expressed by the women. Their crucial role in enabling the women to balance their two roles was widely acknowledged. However, while it was widely believed that their menfolk were and should be equal partners in the raising of their children, this did not extend to a shared expression of an ideal of fathers working part-time, as there was for mothers. An equal role for men in raising children included sharing days of paid work to care for sick children, and the daily childcare run, or staggering their paid work days so one parent sees the children off to school and the other is there when they get home. The findings of the Ministry of Social Development study also support an egalitarian ethos regarding gender roles and parenting and paid work, although in actuality women did more childcare and housework and less paid work.

While some men also took parental leave (of more than two weeks) in the first year of a baby's life, and some became the main caregiver, this was mainly due to being made redundant from their job or earning the lower income. For those men who did become the main caregiver for some time it was a very positive experience for both father and child, according to their partners, but many of the men told their partners that they could not have asked for time off their job to do it, had it not happened by circumstance. According to a UK study, there is still even more of a barrier for men taking family leave than for women (Bond, Hyman, Summers and Wise 2002). The recent Department of Labour (2006) survey on work-life balance in New Zealand found that women reported better work-life balance than men.

In addition, most women in this study when questioned did not want to share or give up that first few months or year of bonding and breastfeeding time with their baby. These findings are inconsistent with those of the Ministry of Social Development (2006) quantitative study which found that just over half of couples said it did not matter which parent stayed at home or had a job, or had a more or less demanding job. However, that study also found that in reality women do most of the housework and childcare even when both partners have equally demanding jobs.

Another theme emerging in several sections of the analysis was that mothers who work full-time or return to work sooner than they would like to may be missing out on time with their children, and important moments in their children's lives. This was not expressed by all women in the study, but was expressed by some women in relation to their own feelings, and by others in relation to what they thought about other mothers in general. The preference for spending more time with their children and not working full-time was not just about children's needs, but also meeting the mothers' needs and desires.

In terms of the cross-national cultural continuum regarding paid work and parenting (Pfau-Effinger 2004), this study suggests New Zealand mothers' preferences are a combination of the Scandinavian, Dutch and German models. There is little support for a normative model of full-time childcare or mothers working full-time in paid work, whatever the age of the child, as in the Scandinavian model for children over two years. However, there is quite strong support for a parent being the primary caregiver in the first year or two, and for more government support to enable families to do this, as in the Scandinavian model. While there is an ethos of equal roles for mothers and fathers after the first year of a child's life, with one exception, this did not extend to a desire for both parents working part-time in paid work, as in the Dutch ideal model, but for mothers to work part-time in paid work, as in the German model. Unlike the German model, though, New Zealand mothers do not regard their jobs as

secondary to their partner's or to their role as parent – they want to work in their normal occupations, but would prefer to do so for fewer than full-time hours in order to make it easier to accommodate being a parent as well. These findings are supported by the Ministry of Social Development (2006) study which also indicates New Zealand parents are closer to the Dutch norms of equal roles for men and women than to the German male breadwinner model, but still with less actual gender role equality than the Scandinavian model.

### **Implications for paid work**

Pfau-Effinger's (2004) analysis showed part-time work rather than total disengagement from the workforce to be a crucial demarcator of contemporary difference in cross-national models of paid work and family. As reported in the Introduction, New Zealand has relatively high levels of part-time work, similar to Germany, but lower than the Netherlands (Johnston 2005). In this study, most women's ideal combination of paid work and parenting involves part-time work, around 25-30 hours per week, even once children are older. The need to be there for children even in the teenage years was stressed. However, in reality, most New Zealand mothers of children aged 10 and over<sup>13</sup> are in full-time paid work, as are nearly 40 percent of those with children aged five to nine, and over 20 percent of those with pre-school children (McPherson 2005). This may be due either to financial need, especially for sole parents, or the unavailability of suitable part-time work. A recently released survey of work, family and parenting by the Ministry of Social Development found that only 30 percent of parents in couples who were surveyed in New Zealand preferred to have both parents doing equally demanding jobs compared with 29 percent where one has a less demanding job and 39 percent where one is at home full-time. These results were not broken down by age of children (Ministry of Social Development 2006). The Ministry of Social Development study also found that only 61 percent of respondents said that permanent part-time work was currently available in their workplace, and that women with children, particularly pre-school children, often choose to trade senior positions for greater flexibility in hours and/or part-time hours, increasing their hours again once children start school.

There was no one ideal length of time for parental leave – anything from six months to until a child starts school were given as ideals – but many of the women in this study wished they had taken longer than they did. In the EEO Trust study, 20 percent of women had taken less than three months parental leave, and slightly more had taken less than six months (EEO Trust 2005). This suggests that around 40 percent of mothers are taking less than their ideal parental leave time. The main reasons given by mothers in this study for returning before six months were institutional factors: financial need; the time limit on paid parental leave; and the need to keep their skills, their career position and meet client demand. These findings are similar to those of a UK qualitative study of mothers' decisions and feelings about employment and childcare before six months of age (Leach et al In press). As with this study, mothers in the UK study were predominantly highly educated professional women.

The most difficult aspects of balancing paid work and motherhood are getting ready in the morning, dropping off and picking up from childcare, after-school and school holiday care, and caring for a sick child. For most women the two roles did not conflict on a daily basis, but only when there were simultaneous immediate demands from both roles. For most their children came first, but when the workplace need was very important they reconciled this by looking to husbands or other family members to help out if possible. Most had supportive employers/managers and most were still able to go the extra mile for their employer when needed on most occasions. For those for whom the conflicts were too great or too frequent, they had looked at changing jobs or roles within an organisation. Most also said that if their children were suffering in any way because of their paid work on a regular basis they would leave the job. Some of the women in this study had in fact left jobs because they found balancing the two roles too difficult, as also noted by Villani (1997).

The egalitarian ethos expressed in this study, that men were expected to share childcare, is not consistent with either gender working long hours in paid work and putting work ahead of family. Mothers in the paid workforce rely on the ability of their partners/husbands to have flexibility in the workplace to play an equal role in caring for the children, taking time off for sick children, doing childcare and school drop-offs and pick-ups. Flexibility in the workplace for both parents was the number one requirement of employers by both mothers and fathers in the EEO Trust (2005) survey and this also came through in the qualitative interviews.

Breastfeeding was not seen as a major problem for most of these women. Most breastfed for their desired amount of time within their parental leave period, or by continuing once back in paid work by expressing milk or having a child brought in to them. For others the child was older and only on morning and night breastfeeds. While few had special offices or rooms for breastfeeding, using the

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13 Fifty percent of those with children aged 10-14, 56 percent of those with children aged 15-17 (Statistics New Zealand 2001a: Table 19).

toilets or other space as they could find it, they had no complaints and did not think employers should have to provide a special room or storage facilities. They had managed okay, but thought it would obviously be better and easier if there were a private place available in larger workplaces. However, some women had stopped breastfeeding because they found it difficult once back in the workplace, and most of these women in this study worked in offices. This may be a more significant issue for women in factories and other workplaces where they cannot so easily leave their desk/work station and shut themselves in a spare room for a few minutes. Graduated return from parental leave and provision of a breastfeeding room were reported in the EEO Trust (2005) survey as most likely ways to assist return from parental leave.

The need to continue balancing the needs of children and paid work limit women's career progression. Many noted the need to put their career on hold either because they choose to work part-time which was not seen as compatible with management or partnership roles, or, if full-time, were not prepared to sacrifice their family time to the long hours required in many of these roles. Even women who had achieved high levels of management or partnership said they had put their career on hold at some stage, and had never caught up with their male peers in terms of salary and status. Some women in lower-level occupations noted they had had to give up opportunities for training and travel that limited their options.

There is also a strong theme emerging for women to be able to work in the professions and senior management on a part-time basis or at least without being required to work the long hours currently required in these sorts of positions. Equally strong is that women will put the needs of their children and themselves as mothers ahead of career advancement in the short term. These findings are consistent with those of Sceats (2003). This calls for a reconsideration of career paths for women that differ from the linear paths traditionally taken by men, enabling them to plateau or take time out, and then return to the career path later, but not to be written off as 'not on the career path' once they take parental leave or choose part-time hours either permanently or for a period of time while the children are young. Given the demand for men to equally share in parenting, this new career path might apply to both sexes.

### **Roles of employers and government**

There is now a body of research that suggests that for employers and governments that want to raise productivity by attracting and retaining the skills and experience of women they need to provide strong incentives around quality part-time work at senior levels, the ability to transition in and out of part-time and full-time status, with pay and conditions on the same level as full-time workers (McPherson 2005). For those countries with a culture of family and motherhood closer to the Finnish and Danish model, social provision or funding of quality childcare for women in full-time work is more likely to be acceptable than for countries like Germany and the Netherlands where childcare is still seen as best provided privately within the family (Pfau-Effinger 2004; Rasmussen et al 2004). For countries such as the US, New Zealand and Australia, with a high sense of gender equality but possibly less cultural support for state childcare than the Scandinavian countries, government and workplace support for part-time work for men and women may be more likely to be successful.

The findings of this study support the recommendation of the OECD (2004) and the findings of other New Zealand studies Boyd 2004; (Department of Labour 2004; Families Commission 2006) for more out-of-school-hours care and enhancing family-friendly workplaces. They do not support other recommendations of the OECD report that are incentives to get more women with children into paid work, such as lowering the Domestic Purposes Benefit and only paying family assistance, or improving the tax system only for mothers who are in paid work. The suggestions from the mothers in this study are more carrot than stick, such as greater assistance with childcare<sup>14</sup> and out-of-school-hours care to make it easier for sole parents to move from the benefit to paid work. There is also a demand, consistent with the findings of the Ministry of Social Development (2006) study and the ISSP study (Gendall 2003, 2006), for more support for parents to have the choice to care for their own children rather than work full-time in paid work and use full-time childcare. This latter approach is not consistent with the New Zealand norms of parenting and childcare suggested by this study, although this is qualified by the need for many parents to work full-time for financial reasons or in order to remain in their current position which is not available part-time.

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14 New Zealand currently has relatively high childcare costs compared to other countries. Concerns about childcare cost and availability were drivers behind the ECE strategy and Working for Families reforms which increased the level and threshold of childcare and OSCAR subsidies. However, despite recent moves to improve childcare provision, many mothers felt additional support was needed. According to the Minister of Social Development (<http://www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/press-releases/2006/pr-2006-10-02.html>), from 2 October 2006 through the Working for Families reforms, around 60 percent of couples with children and 96 percent of sole parents are eligible for help with childcare costs. New income levels are \$54,600 for one child, \$65,000 for two children and \$75,400 for three or more children.

The findings of this study are consistent with other New Zealand studies on work-life balance (Boyd 2004; Department of Labour 2004; Families Commission 2006) in wanting both more support for parents who are in paid work, and for those who prefer one parent to withdraw or limit paid work to take primary responsibility for childcare for a period. These provisions should be equally available to both mothers and fathers.

At the time this study was carried out, about 55 percent of all families benefited from the Working for Families package. This will increase to about 75 percent of all families in 2007/08 ([www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/working-for-families/fact-sheet-2.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/working-for-families/fact-sheet-2.html)). At 2005/06 income thresholds almost all families with incomes below \$45,000 per year would benefit, plus a substantial number of those between \$45,000 and \$70,000.<sup>15</sup>

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15 Revisions to the Working for Families programme since the writing of this report mean almost all families with incomes below \$70,000 would benefit, plus a substantial number of those between \$70,000 and \$100,000. For the information from Ministry of Social Development on these changes, see [www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/budget-fact-sheets/2006/working-for-families-extension.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/media-information/budget-fact-sheets/2006/working-for-families-extension.html)

## 9.0 CONCLUSIONS

This study suggests that the norms of motherhood in New Zealand, or at least within the mothers reflected by the study participants, have changed to accommodate combining motherhood and paid work, but children are still the first priority of mothers in the workforce and parental care is still considered the ideal in the early years. However, many mothers are returning to paid work sooner than they wish, and for longer hours than they wish, due to financial need or the demands of the workplace to return within 12 months and to return to full-time work, especially if they want to maintain their skills and career path.

The policy indications of the findings of this qualitative study of mothers' views and experiences, combined with other New Zealand qualitative and survey data, are that, as well as assistance for mothers in the workplace, more government assistance is wanted to support mothers to stay at home longer and give them a real choice about when to return to paid work. Once in the workforce, assistance is needed, not just with childcare for pre-schoolers, but also for after-school and school holidays for school-age children, including teenage children. The message is that while the Government is providing childcare funding and subsidies, and financial assistance for some families through the Working for Families package and paid parental leave, more of everything is needed.

In the workplace, employers can assist parents by offering flexible hours and flexible career paths for both men and women, and more part-time options for senior staff. The view expressed here is that employers will benefit from staff retention and recruitment and greater productivity through appreciative and less stressed staff.

The findings of this study, in conjunction with supporting quantitative studies, suggest that low labour force participation of women with pre-school children in New Zealand is due to both cultural and institutional/structural factors. There is quite a high preference for having one parent at home full-time, and for primarily parental care for pre-school children, that is, not both parents working full-time or in equally demanding jobs and using full-time childcare. However, cultural norms and preferences are in reality often overridden by practical needs for a full-time income or lack of suitable part-time options. Where this happens there is sometimes a lack of institutional and structural support for parents to combine parenting and paid work. There is also a suggestion that more institutional support is needed to give parents a real choice about when they return to paid work after a child is born by providing some kind of financial assistance to allow them to choose to stay at home for longer.

The main qualification to the findings of this study is that the sample was biased towards high-income, highly educated women, and, according to the Ministry of Social Development (2006) study, this group is more likely to have a preference for being at home full-time than those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, even if there was no need for the income. However, the Ministry study also found a substantial proportion of parents prefers to have one parent at home full-time.

The other driver of early return to full-time paid work overriding personal preference is related to workplace requirements. This includes a limited parental leave period after which resignation from the job is required if not returning, the need to maintain and keep up with skills, and the competing desire to retain one's position on the career path. Using Swartz's framework (Villani 1997), returning to work sooner than desired after having a baby, and working full-time rather than part-time, are consistent with women accommodating a job rather than the workplace accommodating mothers. That is, institutional and structural factors are paramount, and cultural norms and preferences are secondary considerations.

The ideal would be for institutional and structural factors to support cultural norms of parenting and paid work, that is, to allow parents real choice. While there have been initiatives in the right direction from both government and employers, there is a need for more institutional and structural support from government and workplaces to enable New Zealand parents to more successfully combine parenting and paid work in a way that fits with New Zealand's cultural norms of parenting and paid work.

From the mothers' perspectives represented in this study, both men and women want to be both parents and paid workers, but often compromise their parenting role to fit into the structures of the world of paid work. Women particularly also often compromise their role in the workforce in order to combine their dual roles within the current structural framework.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

		<b>Number of respondents</b>
<b>Location</b>	Auckland	9
	Wellington	15
	Christchurch	4
	Provincial city	6
	Town	1
	Rural	5
	North Island	34
	South Island	6
<b>Age group of mother</b>	Less than 20	0
	20-29	3
	30-39	22
	40-49	14
	50+	1
<b>Parental status</b>	Number of children	
	1	19
	2	13
	3	6
	4+	2
Age of children	Under 1 year	0
	1-2	13
	3-4	13
	5-7	7
	8-12	22
	13-17	9
	18+	8
<b>Partner status</b>	Partnered, co-resident	34
	Partner, not co-resident, but share childcare	3
	Not partnered, ie no shared childcare	3
<b>Education</b>	Highest qualification	
	None	0
	School	14
	Degree	18
	Other tertiary	8
<b>Household income</b>	Under 50,000	3
	50-70,000	7
	70-100,000	11
	100,000+	19
<b>Occupation</b>	Professional	18
	Managerial	8
	Clerical, sales, admin	11
	Technical	2
	Other	1

		Number of respondents
<b>Employment status</b>	Not in paid work	1
	Less than 30 hours	10
	30-40 hours	19
	Over 40 hours	10
<b>Childcare use</b>	Workplace	0
	Private	25
	Informal (family, etc)	7
	Combination	4
	Full-time	17
	Part-time	12
	After-school	9
<b>Paid work history since having children</b>	Same occupation	26
	Lower occupation	2
	Higher occupation	5
	Not known	7
	Full-time before and after	22
	Full-time to part-time	9
	Full-time – part-time – full-time (graduated return)	7
	Not known	2
<b>Parental leave</b>	12 weeks or less	7
	4-6 months	7
	7-11 months	7
	12 months	6
	Over 12 months	5
	Not known	8

## APPENDIX 2: BACKGROUND INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

### New Zealand cultural norms of parenting and childcare and how these relate to labour force participation decisions and requirements

#### Background information

##### Parental status

Number of children  
Age of children

##### Partner status

Partnered, co-resident  
Partner, not co-resident  
Not partnered, ie no joint childcare

##### Age group

<20  
20-29  
30-39  
40-49  
50+

##### Location

Auckland  
Provincial city  
Town  
Rural  
South Island  
Wellington  
Christchurch

##### Employment status

Not in paid work  
Less than 30 hours  
30-40 hours  
over 40 hours

##### Childcare use

Workplace  
Private  
Informal (family, etc)  
Full-time  
Part-time  
After-school

##### Education

Highest qualification

##### Work history

Prior to children  
Since children

##### Occupation or income level

Self  
Partner

## APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### New Zealand cultural norms of parenting and childcare and how these relate to labour force participation decisions and requirements

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE

##### Role of parents

Think about when you decided to have children/found out you were pregnant – what were your feelings, thoughts?

How do you feel about being a mother?

What does being a mother mean to you?

How do you see your role?

What should a mother's role be?

What do you actually do?

What about the role of fathers?

What should it be?

What is it actually for you?

What was your mother's role?

What was your father's role?

##### Childcare

How do you feel about childcare?

What should the role of childcare be?

Under 12 months

Up to two years

Three to four years

What is it actually for you?

Do you use it?

Who does it?

Formal

Family

Other

##### Children's needs

What roles of parents and childcare do you think works best for children?

##### Managing roles as worker and parent

How do you manage your roles as mother and worker?

If not working at all, what sort of things influenced that decision?

How do you prioritise these roles?

How has being a mother/parent affected your worker role/labour force participation?

How has combining roles/giving up worker role affected your wellbeing, quality of life?

##### Influence of financial status

How much does your financial situation influence the decisions you make about combining parenting and paid work?

**Breastfeeding**

What are your views on breastfeeding?

What is/was the ideal for you?

What is/was your reality?

How have/did your views on breastfeeding affected your decisions re paid work?

**Role of employer/workplace**

Has your employer/workplace helped you to manage your dual roles in any way?

If so, in what ways?

Do you think employers should assist parents to combine paid work and childrearing?

How does/could your employer/workplace enable you to combine your roles as parent and worker better?

Would the availability of options like flexible hours/start and finish times, part-time work at senior levels or in your normal occupation, breastfeeding facilities, after-school care, childcare, etc affect your decision to accept a particular job or not?

**Role of government**

In what ways has government policy or assistance enabled you to combine your dual roles as parent and worker, if at all?

Do you think they should?

How could they do it better?

Should childcare be publicly funded or provided?

### **Blue Skies Research**

- 1/06 *Les Familles et Whānau sans Frontières: New Zealand and Transnational Family Obligation*, Neil Lunt with Mervyl McPherson and Julee Browning, March 2006.
- 2/06 *Two Parents, Two Households: New Zealand Data Collections, Language and Complex Parenting*, Paul Calister and Stuart Birks, March 2006.
- 3/06 *Grandfathers – Their Changing Family Roles and Contributions*, Dr Virginia Wilton and Dr Judith A. Davey, March 2006.
- 4/06 *Neighbourhood Environments that Support Families*, Dr Karen Witten, Liane Penney, Fuafiva Faalau and Victoria Jensen, May 2006.
- 5/06 *New Communication Technologies and Family Life*, Dr Ann Weatherall and Annabel Ramsay, May 2006.
- 6/06 *Families and Heavy Drinking: Impacts on Children's Wellbeing, Systematic Review*, Melissa Girling, John Huakau, Sally Casswell and Kim Conway, June 2005.
- 7/06 *Beyond Demography: History, Ritual and Families in the Twenty-first Century*, Jan Pryor, June 2005.
- 8/06 *Whānau is Whānau*, Tai Walker, Ngāti Porou, July 2006.
- 9/06 *Supervised Contact: The Views of Parents and Staff at Three Barnardos Contact Centres in the Southern Region of New Zealand*, Anita Gibbs and Margaret McKenzie, August 2006.
- 10/06 *New Zealanders' Satisfaction with Family Relationships and Parenting*, Jeremy Robertson, August 2006.
- 11/06 *Korean Migrant Families in Christchurch: Expectations and Experiences*, Mrs Suzana Chang, Dr Carolyn Morris and Dr Richard Vokes, October 2006.
- 12/06 *The Role of Whānau in the Lives of Māori with Physical Disabilities*, Adelaide Collins and Huhana Hickey, September 2006.
- 13/06 *New Spaces and Possibilities: The Adjustment to Parenthood for New Migrant Mothers*, Ruth DeSouza, November 2006.
- 14/06 *New Zealand Cultural Norms of Parenting and Childcare and how these relate to Labour Force Participation Decisions and Requirements*, Mervyl McPherson, November 2006.

These reports are available on the Commission's website [www.nzfamilies.org.nz](http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz) or contact the Commission to request copies.

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