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Full Fat GRAYLING



MANIFEST THE UNMISTAKABLES

Working Parenthood in the UK PR Sector.

A Research study, conducted by PR Mums & Platform 55 with the support of a pan-industry Steering Group consisting of PRCA, CIPR, Women in PR, Axicom, Fine Lines, Full Fat, Grayling, Hope & Glory, Manifest, and The Unmistakables about how PR Professionals perceive and experience parenthood and working life.

NOVEMBER 2024

Powered by:  Platform55

PR
Mums



Championing Parental Policy Best Practice In PR

When we launched PR Mums, creating a best practice charter and certification scheme was always part of our long-term vision, on the roadmap, but planned for years 3 or 4.

However, we were forced to revise this timeline almost immediately after we were inundated with a barrage of requests from agencies seeking support and guidance on how to create inclusive, family-friendly workplaces. We consistently heard the same message: *"We want to do more in this area, we just don't know where to start."*

For us, the solution was obvious: we needed to tear up the original timeline, move quickly, and prioritise our efforts to urgently identify, advocate for, and implement an industry-wide Parenting Policy Best Practice Charter.

What followed was a 6-month, 4-step journey:

1. Industry-wide Collaboration

We brought together a representative, pan-industry Steering Group consisting of the PRCA, CIPR, Women in PR, Axicom, Fine Lines, Full Fat, Grayling, Hope & Glory, Manifest, and The Unmistakables. I'd like to take this opportunity to offer my wholehearted thanks to everyone involved—their input has been invaluable in shaping the entire framework from the ground up.

2. Comprehensive Research

To ensure we fully understood the current state of play across the industry regarding parenting policies and practices, we undertook extensive research in partnership with market-leading specialist HR platform, Platform55. The response rate was fantastic, with many hundreds of PRs taking part. The results have been instrumental in informing our approach, and I'd like to thank everyone who participated.

3. Developing a Best Practice Parental Policy Charter

Responding to the research findings and in collaboration with the Steering Group and Platform55, we developed a framework for best practice across organisational policy and behaviour to drive new standards and deliver work-life balance and inclusivity in PR.

4. Spreading Best Practice: Launching the Certification Programme for Best Practice in Parental Policy

Words mean nothing without action. Our ultimate objective is to present the charter as an inspirational call to action, catalysing a move towards better (and then, in time, best) practice across our industry.

To this end, we have designed a certification programme to recognise and reward agencies and in-house teams that demonstrate best practice in managing and supporting a healthy work-life balance, signalling to both employees and clients a commitment to creating an inclusive and flexible workplace.

Our hope is that the PR Mums Parental Policy Best Practice Certification Scheme marks a transformative moment for our industry, setting a new standard for work-life balance and inclusivity in PR.



Ferzana Bham
Managing Director, PR Mums

October 2024



Foreword



Alastair McCapra,
CEO,
CIPR

“This white paper arrives at a crucial moment for our profession. In our fast-paced industry, where client demands and communications needs rarely conform to traditional working hours, supporting working parents and carers is a must.

Building workplaces that actively support employees through various life stages isn't just about retention - it's about creating a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable PR industry. I warmly welcome this step towards advancing workplace equality and encourage organisations across our sector to engage with these findings.”



Angela Balakrishnan,
Women in PR (and Executive
Director Of Communication &
Public Affairs at Information
Commissioner's Office)

“Being a parent should not mean sacrificing your professional growth. But, depressingly, women in our industry are the hardest hit by their family choices. Research shows that 80% of the gender pay gap is down to the motherhood penalty. Let's put that into real terms: a woman you know is being devalued in the workplace because she decided to have children.

These are people who are fantastic employees - highly motivated, hard workers, with heaps of talent – but we risk losing them because we are expecting the impossible of doing it all. At Women in PR, we are calling for employers to step up and do better to help working parents succeed.

That means really walking the walk when it comes to shifting office cultures, challenging biases, offering practical support, not just talking about it. Flexible working is non-negotiable. This isn't just a nice to have, studies show time and again that engaged and supported employees are more productive. Parental policies, that are properly implemented, make fundamentally good business sense to help our industry thrive.”



James Hewes,
CEO,
PRCA

“The PR industry has made progress in inclusivity, but this report by PR Mums and Platform 55 shows more must be done. Balancing career and caregiving should be foundational.

The research highlights a divide: some believe flexibility and career growth can coexist, others struggle to reconcile work and family. We must act to support parents better.

At the PRCA, we are committed to change. The Parental Policy Best Practice Charter is a step towards truly inclusive workplaces. We must empower managers to support parents, so no one has to choose between career and family.

I thank all contributors for their insights. Your voices guide us toward a better future for all PR professionals.”

Executive Summary & Key Themes

The PR sector is marked by a division in attitudes toward balancing work and family life. While half of the respondents to the Platform 55 survey believe that flexible working arrangements are possible and that career progression can coexist with family responsibilities, the other half maintain that work must come first.

This divide has created a culture of tension within the sector, particularly between working parents and those without children, as well as between individuals who take family leave and their colleagues.

Managers are increasingly being called upon to facilitate more open and supportive conversations around balancing work and family life. Employees are seeking guidance on setting expectations and boundaries, managing stress, and navigating the complexities of family leave.

At the same time, the desire for career progression remains strong, with 91% of workers focused on advancing their careers. The sector must address these conflicting needs to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all employees.

Sector Attitudes Towards Caring is Mixed

The PR sector reveals conflicting attitudes toward balancing career ambition and caring responsibilities. While many strive for career progression, there's division regarding the support offered to those with family obligations, and concerns remain about whether senior roles are compatible with parenting.

“There are no senior leaders with children, so while some are highly sensitive and try to understand, it feels like there's still a lack of understanding as to what you're dealing with outside of work” - survey respondent.

Culture is About Commitment, Not Caring

The PR sector tends to prioritise commitment to work over caring responsibilities. A large portion of the workforce acknowledges tension between employees with and without children, and career opportunities may be limited for working parents, despite efforts to introduce flexible arrangements.

“There is still an expectation to work set hours, in reality I work my hours as I need to round the children” - survey respondent.

Parenthood Challenges: Often Internalised

Parents in the PR sector often struggle with stress related to balancing their personal and professional lives. This stress frequently stems from internal pressures and the mental load of managing home life, childcare, and personal guilt, in addition to regular work demands.

“The guilt on both sides – feeling like a crap parent, and a crap employee. Wanting to be there for your child, but wanting to progress at work” - survey respondent.

Managers are Managers, Not Empathetic Leaders

Managers in the PR sector are seen as unprepared to support working parents effectively, with many lacking the training or empowerment to have sensitive conversations or implement family-friendly policies like parental leave or flexible work arrangements.

“No training is provided to managers around these kinds of conversations. There is a brief maternity policy on the system but it isn't very thorough” - survey respondent.

Family Leave: Anxiety About the Return

Returning from family leave often triggers anxiety, particularly for mothers, due to inadequate re-onboarding processes, fears of being excluded, and lack of clarity about roles. Many employees believe that support before, during, and after family leave is inconsistent or lacking.

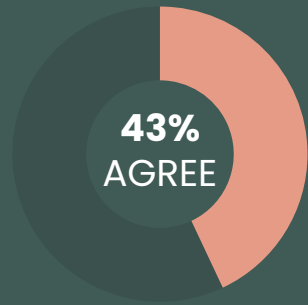
“Coming back from maternity leave has been really positive for me. But there should be a clear off-boarding and keep-in-touch strategy in place” - survey respondent.

Solutions, Expectations, & Conversations

Employees are calling for more training on managing stress, setting boundaries, and navigating return-to-work processes. There is also a demand for improved support systems for working parents and more transparent discussions around managing both professional responsibilities and personal challenges.

“Check in more regularly to see if support is needed. Design working practices in collaboration with staff rather than having one size fit all policies” - survey respondent.

Sector Attitudes Towards Caring is Mixed



“Senior leadership roles are compatible with caring responsibilities.”

“While the organisation talks about support for careers and parents and the right to request flexible working - expectations on office attendance, commuting, travelling for work make it harder if you do have children, meaning it’s easier to progress if you don’t.”

- PR Professional – Survey Respondent

The PR sector reveals a mixed landscape regarding attitudes towards balancing career ambition and caring responsibilities. **The overwhelming majority (91%) of respondents express a strong desire to progress their careers.**

However, the sector is split on whether work flexibility and support for individuals with caring roles are provided without judgment. Around half of the sector believes that such support exists, while the other half disagrees, highlighting the division on these issues. Furthermore, only 43% believe that senior leadership roles are compatible with caring responsibilities, signalling concerns about advancing careers while fulfilling family obligations.

A significant portion of the workforce, **40%, believes that parenthood enhances workplace performance**, suggesting that being a working parent can bring valuable skills to the job. On the other hand, **31% feel that parenthood has a negative impact** on productivity, reflecting another deep divide in perceptions within the sector. These conflicting attitudes create a complex and often polarised environment for working parents, where ambition to succeed professionally is strong, but the means to balance family and career are viewed inconsistently across the sector.

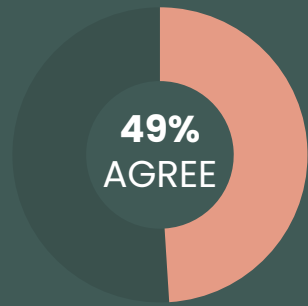


Sarah Taylor,
Associate Director,
Axicom

“It’s encouraging that those in senior leadership positions are visibly setting good examples around successfully balancing work and home, but flexibility isn’t just for senior leaders – caring commitments fall to those at every level of an organisation.

Businesses must ensure that all their employees have the ability to set – and stick to – a work-life balance that works for them.”

Culture is About Commitment, Not Caring



“It is expected that work commitments come first, regardless of the policies or flexible arrangements employees have.”

“Leadership can be accepting of the needs of parents; however, if you want to progress, they make it abundantly clear you need to do more than your contract says, which isn't really possible with small children.”

- PR Professional – Survey Respondent

The culture within the PR sector leans toward prioritising work commitments over caring responsibilities. **Nearly half (49%) of respondents believe that work takes precedence over family obligations**, with an additional 18% undecided, indicating a skew towards a work-first mentality.

This attitude disproportionately affects mothers, as there is a belief that they are more likely than fathers to miss out on career opportunities due to family responsibilities.

There is also **tension between workers without children and those with caring responsibilities, with 41% acknowledging the existence of this strain.**

Despite these challenges, some positive trends emerge: over three-quarters of respondents report that flexible work arrangements are possible, and **59% observe role models in senior positions successfully balancing family life with work.**

This suggests that while the sector still grapples with prioritising work over family, there are visible efforts to integrate flexibility into the workplace.

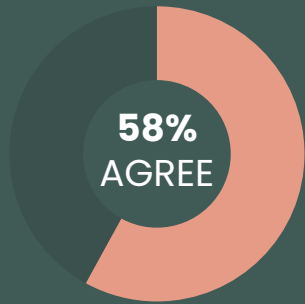


Ella McWilliam,
Co-Founder + Co-CEO of
Creative, Culture, People,
Full Fat

“Building trust within teams is essential for driving positive change in our industry. Leaders need to foster a culture of trust and flexibility, recognising that caregivers may need adjustments in order to thrive.

Open, honest communication about what works and what doesn't, will empower everyone to succeed.”

Parenthood Challenges: Often Internalised



“Workload causes me the most stress when trying to balance work and home.”

“The guilt on both sides - feeling like a crap parent, and a crap employee. Wanting to be there for your child, but wanting to progress at work. And knowing that you'll never get a break or downtime, and that nobody I work with really understands or cares.”

- PR Professional – Survey Respondent

For working parents in the PR sector, **workload is the top source of stress, with 58% citing it as a significant contributor to their anxiety.**

However, many of the challenges parents face are internal and relate to their responsibilities outside of work.

Four of the six main stress factors are personal, including managing the mental load at home, dealing with the cost of living, personal guilt, and arranging childcare.

Specifically, 51% of respondents report that the mental load of household responsibilities causes stress, while 47% struggle with balancing care work alongside their careers.

These findings suggest that working parents are burdened not just by professional demands but by the complexities of juggling home life as well. The internalisation of these stressors means that much of the pressure working parents experience stems from their expectations of themselves and their efforts to manage both work and home responsibilities effectively.

This underscores the need for support both within and outside the workplace to address the broader picture of stress for working parents.



Heather Blundell,
UK CEO,
Grayling

“When it comes to managing demands at home and working in PR, the juggle is real.

As agency leaders, we need to create a supportive and adaptive environment which helps our employees navigate these challenges in the way that best suits them, allowing them the space to be present both at work and for their families.”

Managers are Managers, Not Empathetic Leaders



“Policies relating to parental leave and flexible working are not easy for managers to put into practice.”

“In my case, management are not trained at all on how to deal with personal matters in their teams. There can often be favoritism depending on the person and how close they are to the boss. When I told my boss about my pregnancy, her first response was to tell me not to talk about it in front of another colleague who just had a miscarriage.”

- PR Professional – Survey Respondent

There is a widespread belief that managers in the PR sector are not fully equipped to support working parents. Less than half of the respondents view their managers as empowered to assist parents effectively.

Moreover, only **53% believe that managers provide equal opportunities to those working flexibly versus full-time**. This highlights a division between flexible and full-time workers in terms of perceived fairness and support from leadership.

A concerning finding is that **60% of respondents feel that managers do not easily implement parental leave or flexible work arrangements**. Additionally, **only 19% believe that their managers are capable of handling sensitive conversations** related to family or fertility.

These figures indicate that many managers lack the skills or empowerment to facilitate supportive conversations and arrangements for working parents, suggesting a need for more training and resources to foster a better environment for all employees..



Shilpa Saul,
Director,
The Unmistakables

“The world is changing, and today's leaders have little choice but to build their people skills or risk becoming obsolete. A significant focus on leading with empathy is needed if we are to retain talented working parents.

This, alongside leadership training and development, is an essential component for building the leadership skills needed for a new era.”

Family Leave: Anxiety About the Return



“For employees returning from extended family-related leave there is a clear re-onboarding plan..”

“I often find I’m left out of meetings since returning from maternity leave, with many happening on my non-working day. The lack of clarity around my role has also caused a lot of confusion and dragged on significantly after returning from leave.”

- PR Professional – Survey Respondent

Taking family leave creates anxiety among working parents, particularly mothers. The survey reveals that 76% of respondents believe there is a significant difference between how leave is experienced by mothers versus fathers. **Only one-third of respondents believe that workers are supported before, during, and after taking family leave**, while **25% have noticed discrimination** or exclusion towards those who take leave.

Additionally, **70% of respondents are unsure whether or believe that a re-onboarding plan exists for employees returning from leave.** This uncertainty fosters tension between workers with and without caring responsibilities and highlights the need for clearer and more supportive policies regarding family leave and the transition back to work.

Without such policies in place, employees returning from leave may struggle to reintegrate, and workplace tensions could further exacerbate issues of fairness and productivity.

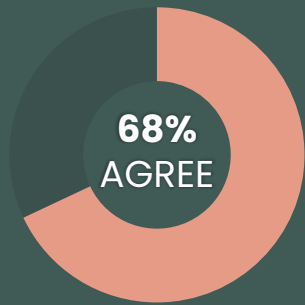


Valerie Holloway,
Director & DE&I Lead,
Hope&Glory PR

“The Whitepaper highlights that workplaces need to commit to proper returnship programmes following family leave.

Whether it’s access to career coaching, flexible working arrangements or a re-onboarding plan that is shared ahead of time, these are crucial to helping everyone to navigate both family leave as well as the return, reduce unnecessary anxiety and set everyone up for success.”

Solutions, Expectations, & Conversations



Support when returning from maternity or paternity leave should be provided

“Take time to understand the challenges and pressures and work together to find working patterns and systems that reduce anxiety and stress so that people are able to focus and be productive without feeling torn, guilty and distracted.”

- PR Professional – Survey Respondent

There is a strong demand for more training and support around managing stress, setting boundaries, and returning from leave in the PR sector. A **significant 68% of respondents believe that support for returning from leave would be beneficial**, echoing the concerns raised about the lack of clear re-onboarding programs. Similarly, **65% highlight the need for training around stress management**, reflecting the challenges faced by both parents and non-parents in balancing workload and personal life.

Training on setting boundaries between work and home life is seen as important by 56% of respondents, underscoring the difficulty many face in managing the mental load at home alongside professional responsibilities.

Additionally, over 40% express a desire for career development training and help with difficult conversations, especially regarding personal guilt and expectations.

These figures suggest a growing awareness of the need for organisations to provide more holistic support to employees, helping them manage both their personal and professional challenges effectively.



Ali Maynard James,
Director,
Manifest

“Reintegrating into work after family leave can be daunting, especially without structured support. Organisations must prioritise clear re-onboarding plans and ongoing support for returning employees, ensuring they feel valued and able to balance work with family life. A compassionate approach here fosters a more inclusive, resilient workplace.”

Research Methodology & Sample Profile



Quantitative Research Methodology

Across July to September 2024, through the PR Mums network, PR Professionals were invited to take part in a survey on Parenthood and Working.

1,684 people accepted the invite and 360 people completed the research, representing 21% of people who showed initial interest in contributing their view.

This high level of people who viewed the survey, but decided not to contribute can be explained through several factors:

1. Not having enough time to contribute.
2. Not having an interest in presenting their view.
3. Not having a sense that their view was relevant.

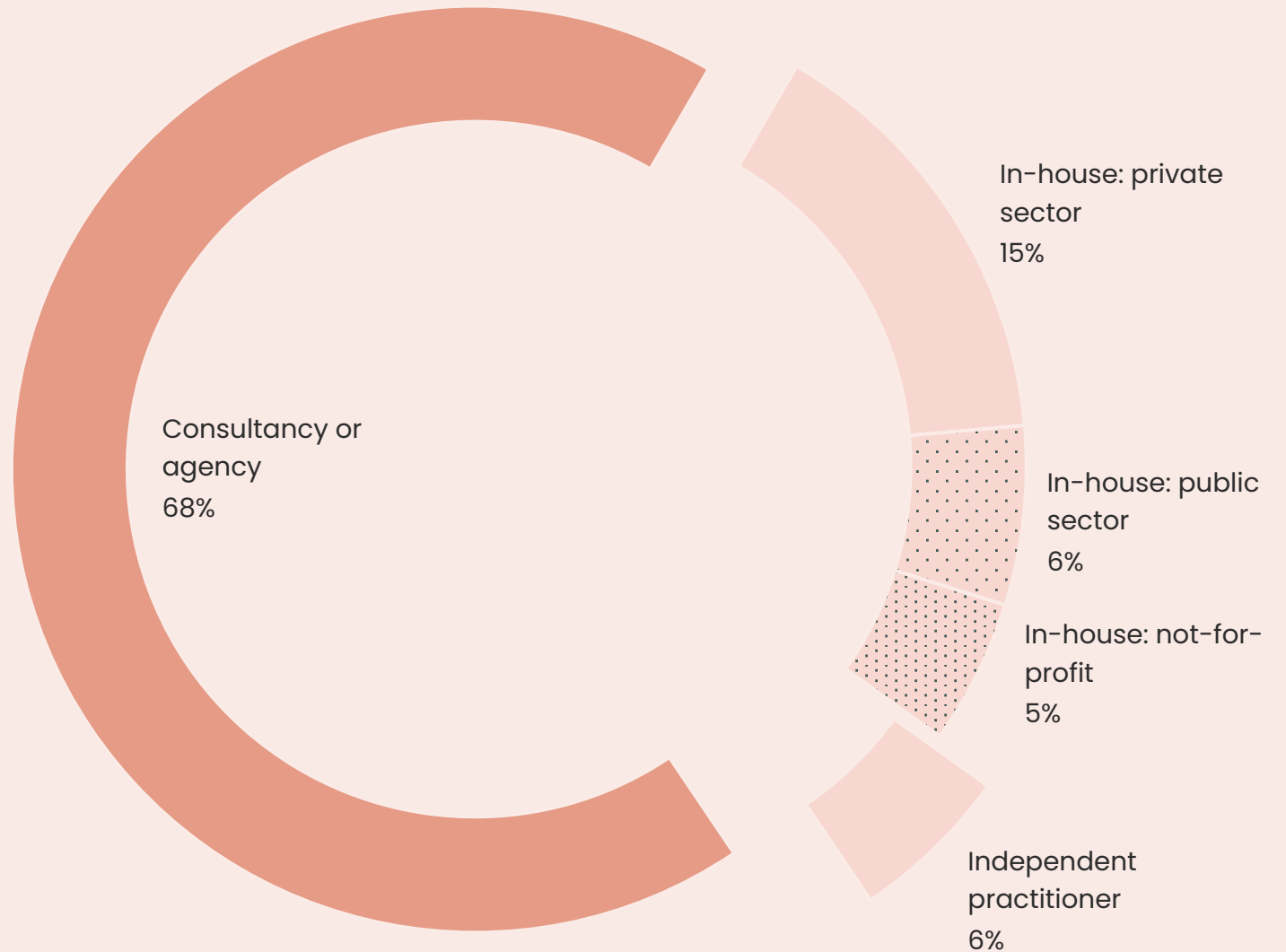
While the sample of 360 participants provides plenty of insight, it must be noted that the profile of the sample is skewed towards people that wanted to contribute their views. As a result, there are specific demographic skews in the data:

- 87% identify as female.
- 95% identify as straight/heterosexual.
- 70% are married
- 88% identify as White: Includes British, Northern Irish, Irish, Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Roma or any other White background

Two-thirds of research participants work in a consultancy or agency.

A significant proportion (two-thirds) of research participants are employed within consultancy or agency roles, reflecting the dominance of this type of employment within the sector. Just under one-third work in-house in either private, public, or not-for-profit organizations, while 6% are independent practitioners.

This demographic split is essential because it may influence the respondents' views and priorities. Those working in consultancies or agencies might have different experiences and attitudes compared to those working in-house or independently, especially regarding job stability, work flexibility, and career development.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
Which of the following best describes your current employment?

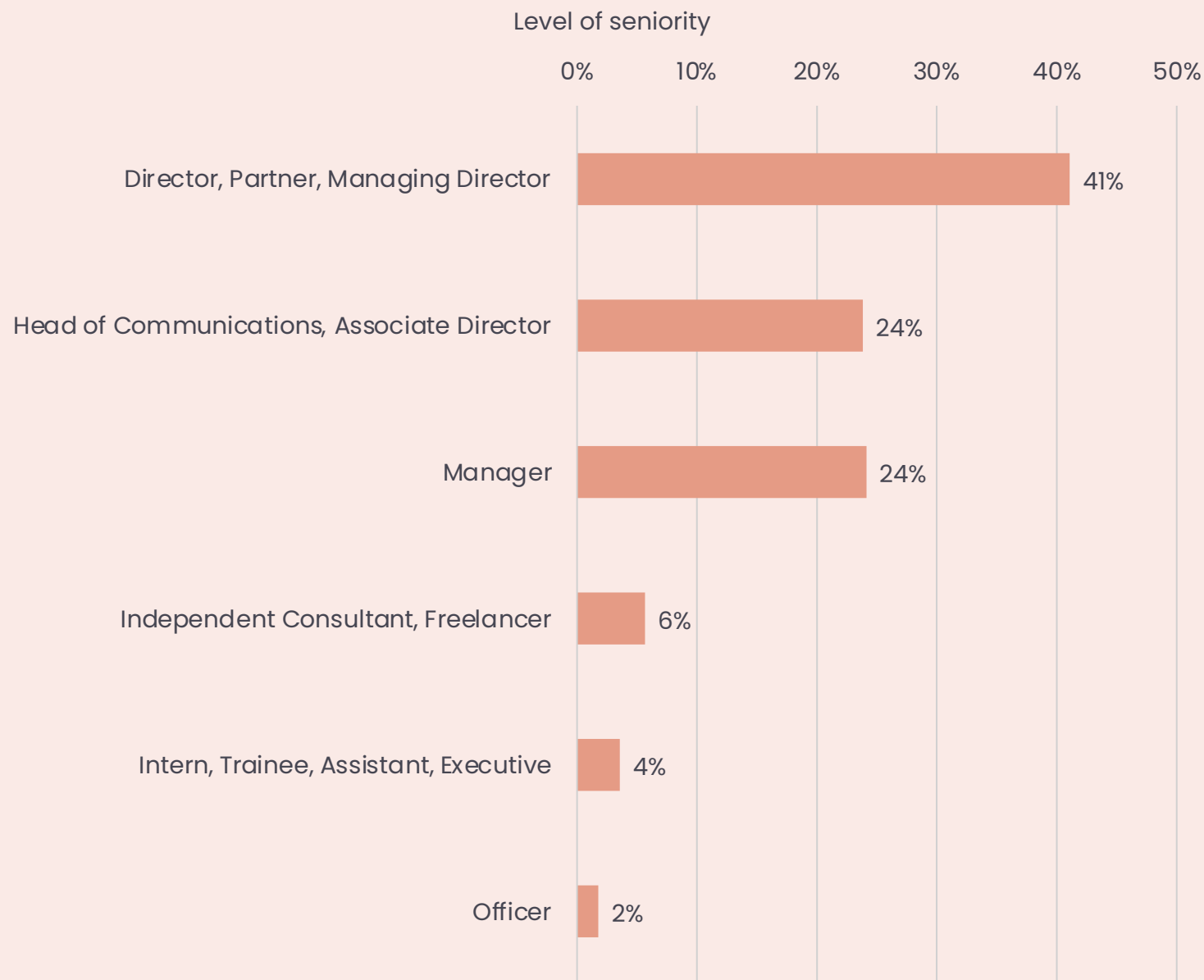
65%

Majority of participants are at Director level.

Over 65% of participants hold senior positions within their organizations, with titles such as Director, Partner, Managing Director, Head of Communications, or Associate Director.

The prominence of senior leaders in the sample suggests that the insights gathered will heavily reflect strategic viewpoints and managerial experiences, potentially skewing the findings toward issues pertinent to those in leadership roles.

As a result, responses may emphasize strategic priorities like organizational growth, leadership challenges, and staff development, providing a comprehensive view from the top tiers of the profession.



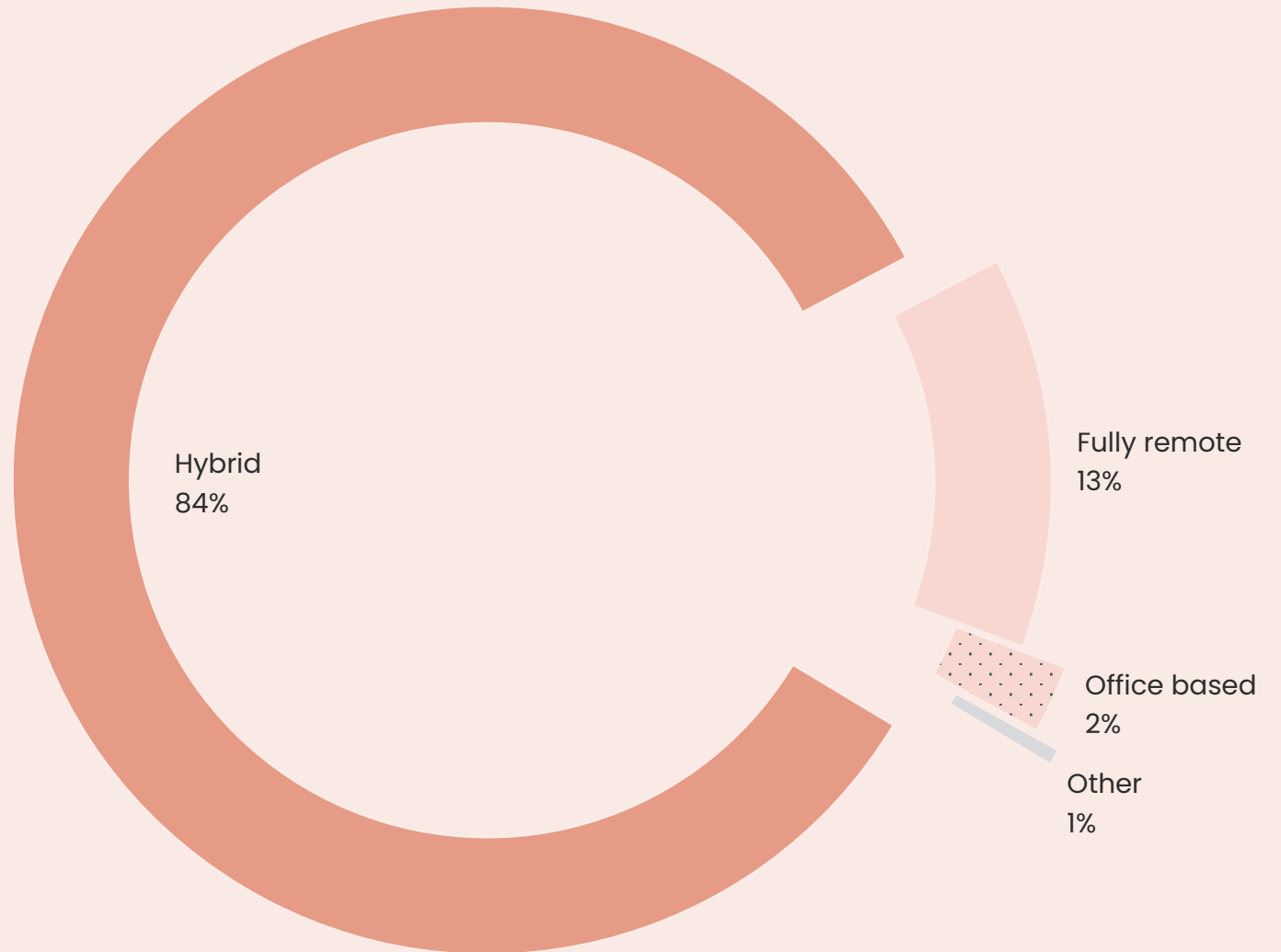
Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
Please select the description that best fits your current level of seniority

97%

are hybrid or fully remote workers

Nearly all respondents (97%) have hybrid or fully remote work arrangements, with 84% working in a hybrid model and 13% working fully remotely. Only 2% of participants are based entirely in an office setting. This overwhelming trend toward hybrid and remote work environments has considerable implications for employee experiences and expectations.

Participants' responses are likely influenced by the flexibility, autonomy, and potential isolation associated with these setups, affecting perceptions of work-life balance, team dynamics, and overall job satisfaction. This context is crucial for understanding how remote and hybrid working models are shaping the future of the industry.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
Which one best describes how you currently work?



“Progressing in my career is important to me.”

91% AGREE

An impressive 91% of participants agree that career progression is a priority, with over half (51%) strongly agreeing. This indicates a highly ambitious and motivated sample group, with respondents placing significant emphasis on their professional growth and development.

The high level of ambition could influence perspectives on organisational support, professional opportunities, and leadership pathways. It's clear that this is a proactive group looking to advance in their careers, which suggests that retention and career development programs will be critical areas for organizations to focus on in the future.

Understanding different working groups

Segmenting survey respondents
into four working groups

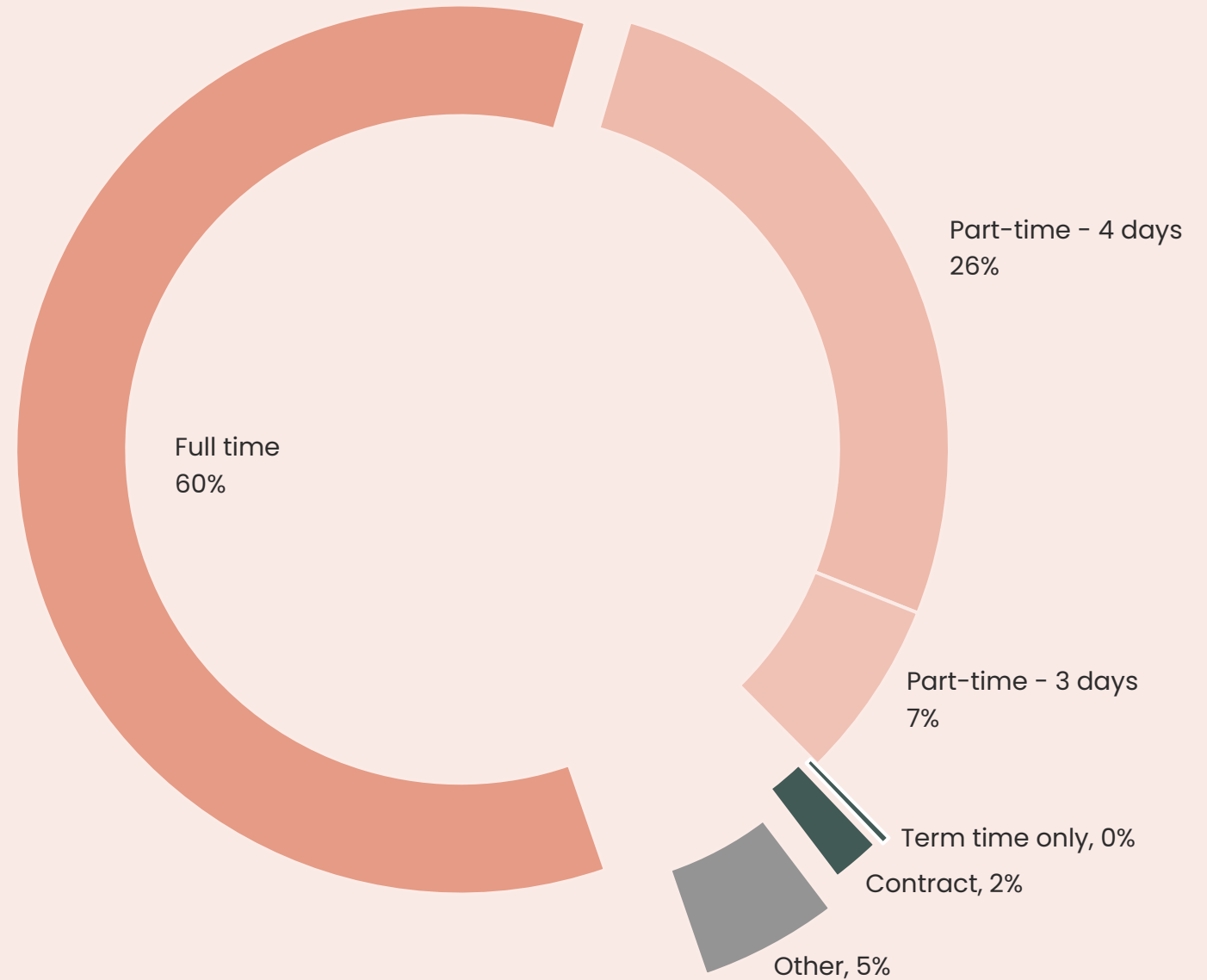


60% working full time
33% work part-time

The majority of participants (60%) are employed full-time, while 33% work part-time. The remaining participants are engaged in contractor or other flexible work arrangements.

The considerable representation of part-time workers is notable, suggesting a strong preference or need for flexible working arrangements in the industry.

This has implications for how organisations can structure roles, manage workloads, and support employees who might be balancing multiple commitments. The data may also reflect broader industry trends towards non-standard work setups, emphasising the importance of flexibility in modern employment contracts.

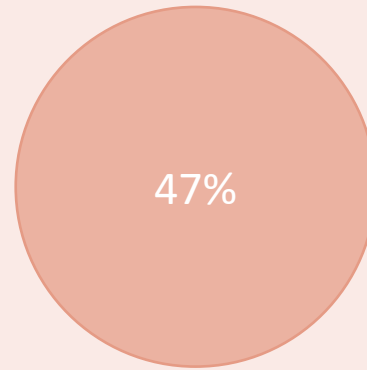


Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
What's your typical working pattern?

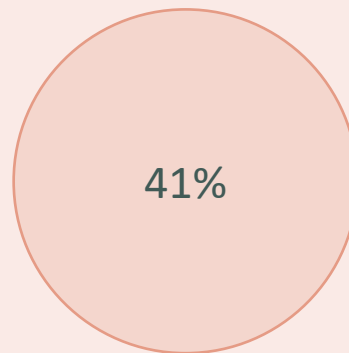
Just under half - **47%** -
have taken family leave.
73% are managers.

A substantial proportion of participants (47%) have taken family leave, and 73% are currently managers. This combination suggests that career breaks and managerial responsibilities are common within the sample group, which could shape their attitudes towards work-life balance, organisational support, and career progression.

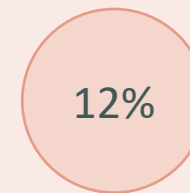
The segment of participants who have taken family leave may have unique perspectives on re-entering the workforce, managing career continuity, and balancing professional and personal commitments. Understanding these experiences can help organizations better support employees through different stages of their careers, particularly those transitioning back from family leave.



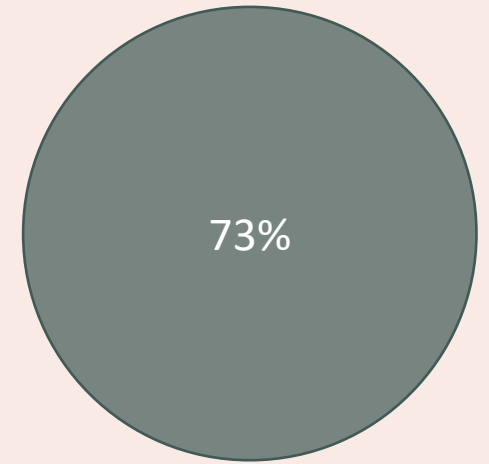
Proportion **who have taken**
family leave for at company.



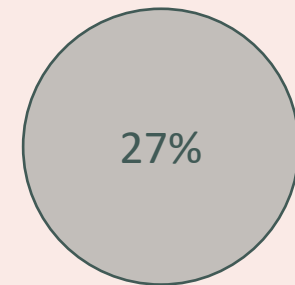
Proportion **who have**
not taken family leave
for at company.



Proportion **who have**
not taken family leave
but may in future.



Proportion **with line**
management responsibility
for at least one team member



Proportion **without line**
management responsibility
for at least one team member

Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
Do you have line management responsibility for at least one team member? While working at this company, I have taken at least one period of family leave (e.g. maternity, paternity, adoption, parental leave, carer's leave)

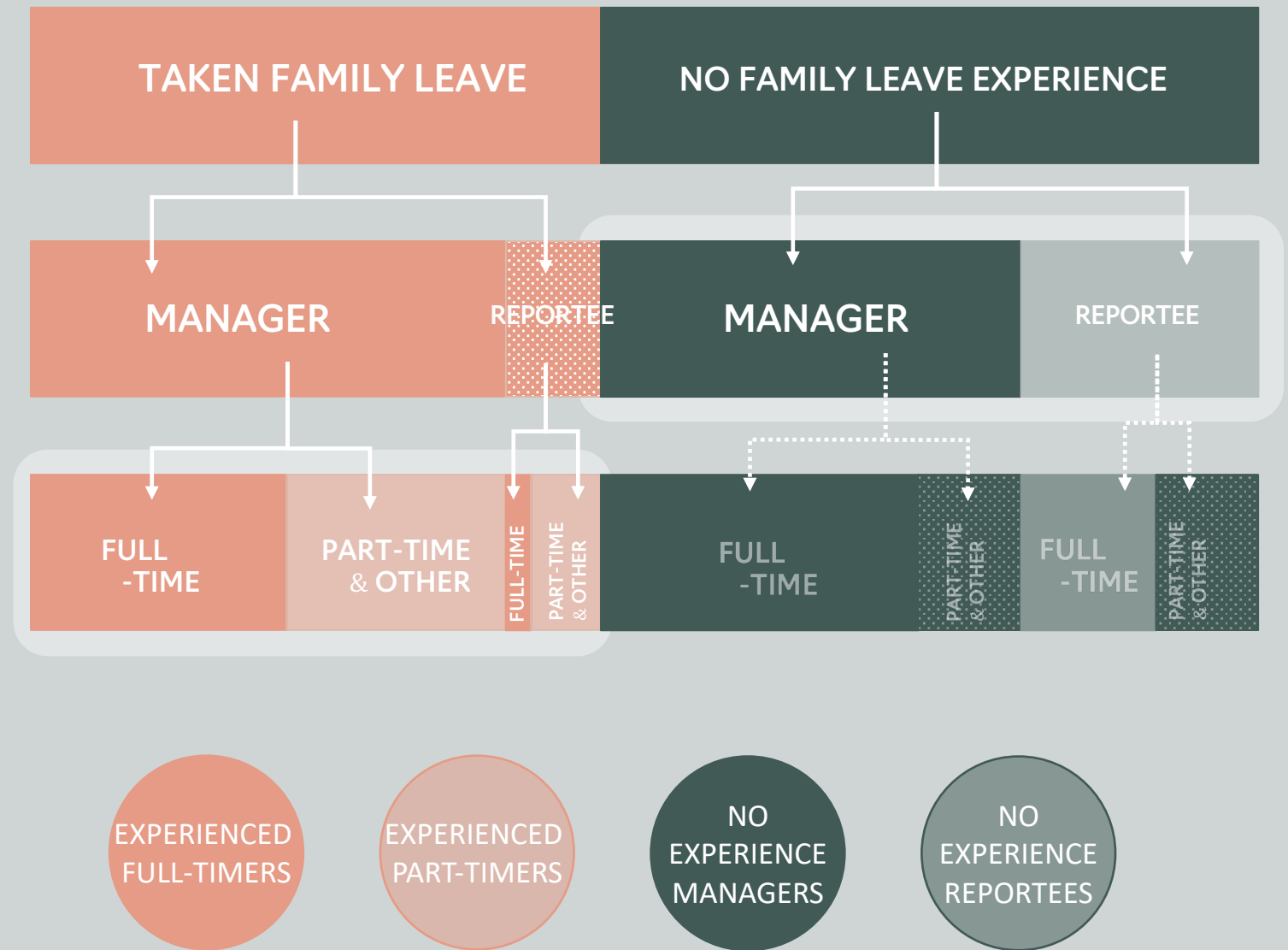
Development of Four Segment Groups

1. Whether participant has experience taking leave or not.
2. Whether participant is manager or not.
3. Whether participant works full-time or part-time and other (e.g. contract, flex-time, etc).

The sample has been divided into four distinct segments based on family leave experience and employment status: Experienced Full-Timers, Experienced Part-Timers, No Experience Managers, and No Experience Reportees.

This segmentation allows for a more nuanced understanding of how different career and life experiences impact work attitudes and behaviours. Each group's responses provide unique insights into how factors like job role, family responsibilities, and employment type shape their professional experiences.

This granular approach helps identify specific needs and challenges faced by different segments, offering organisations actionable data for tailoring support programs and policies.



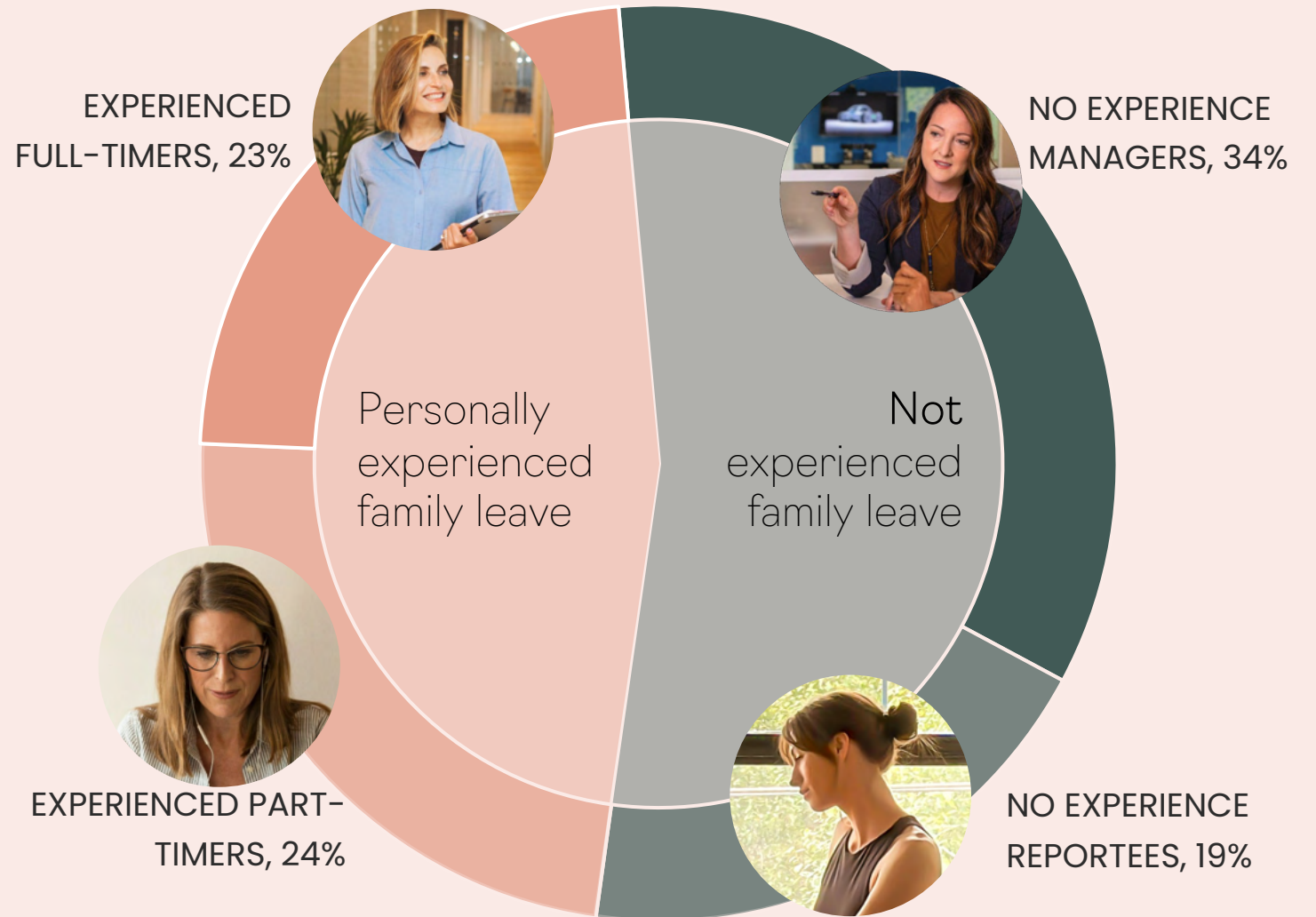
Research participants can be divided into four groups

The four segments identified in the research include 23% of Experienced Full-Timers, 24% of Experienced Part-Timers, therefore, 47% in total who have taken family leave.

Within those who haven't taken family leave but may in the future, 34% are managers, and 19% are reportees.

These segments are analysed throughout the research to understand how their varying experiences influence their views on topics such as career development, flexibility, and support for caregiving responsibilities.

The segmentation provides a clearer picture of how family leave and managerial status intersect, revealing differences in attitudes and behaviours across these groups.

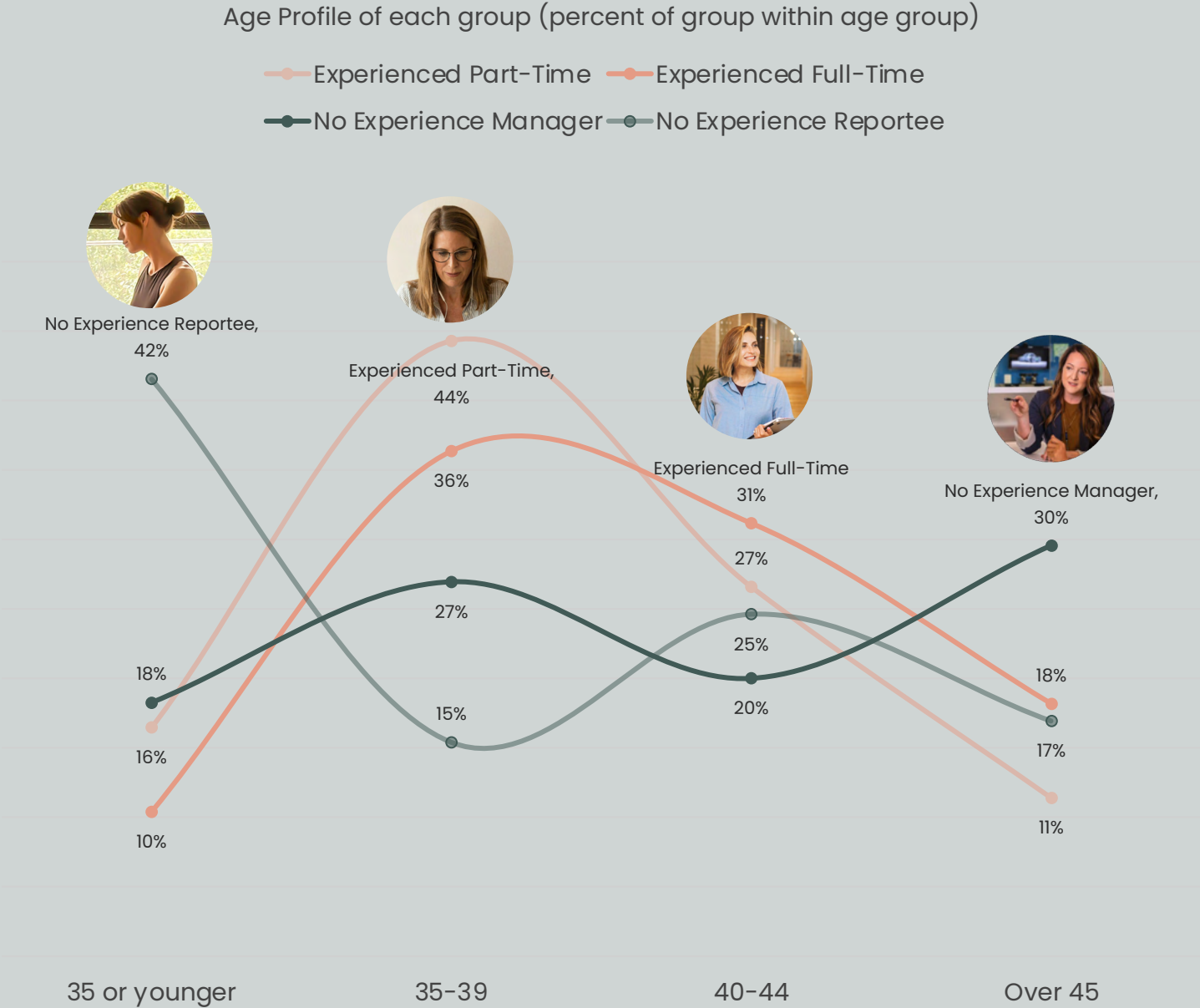


Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
What's your typical working pattern

Age Profile of Groups

Age distribution plays a significant role in understanding the attitudes and experiences of each segment. For example, No Experience Reportees tend to be younger, under 35, while Experienced Part-Timers are typically 35-39 and often managing young families.

Experienced Full-Timers skew slightly older, falling between 35-44, suggesting that they might have more established careers or are navigating mid-career transitions. In contrast, those who have not yet taken family leave but are managers display a fairly even age distribution, skewing slightly older. This diversity in age profiles helps contextualize how different life stages and career paths impact responses, allowing for a deeper understanding of the factors influencing professional aspirations and workplace satisfaction.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK



Experienced Full-Timers: Advocates Balancing Leadership and Care

FULL-TIME WORKING PARENTS WHO
HAVE RETURNED FROM FAMILY LEAVE,
BALANCING LEADERSHIP ROLES WITH
CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

This group of full-time employees, who have returned from family leave, represent the most vocal advocates for a supportive and caring company culture, especially one that aligns with senior leadership positions. **While 52% of them believe that senior leadership is compatible with caregiving responsibilities, this confidence is not universal**—half of this group still feels the two are incompatible. Nevertheless, these experienced full-timers are more likely than any other working parent group to promote the company, reinforcing their belief in the organisation's family-supportive policies.

The primary challenges faced by this group revolve around juggling work and family responsibilities. With 51% citing career and work demands as major stressors and 48% struggling with childcare, these barriers reflect the reality of working full-time, which leaves limited time for caregiving. While 48% of this group agrees that family-related leave is well-supported before, during, and after their time away, there is still room for improvement in how these policies are perceived. Furthermore, only 14% of this group feel there is a negative attitude towards employees who take family leave, which suggests some progress in workplace culture.

To better support this group, companies should focus on providing resources such as stress management training, career development opportunities, and training for difficult conversations. As many of these experienced full-timers are now in managerial roles, their positive experiences can shape the expectations of their teams. However, companies should continue to remind them of ongoing progress and the importance of actively nurturing a culture of care. **Regular check-ins and policy updates can ensure that this group does not assume others will have the same supportive experience they had.**

Experienced Part-Timers: Navigating Career Progression with Care Responsibilities



PART-TIME OR CONTRACT-BASED
WORKING PARENTS BALANCING
CAREGIVING WITH SKEPTICISM TOWARD
LEADERSHIP AND CAREER PROGRESSION

This group of working parents, who have taken family leave and now work part-time or on contract, are less optimistic than their full-time counterparts about the compatibility of senior leadership with caregiving responsibilities.

Only one-third of them believe that leadership roles can be successfully combined with caregiving, and as a result, they are less likely to promote the company as a supportive place to work. In fact, 43% feel that being a working parent can negatively impact work performance, limiting their opportunities for career progression.

The challenges they face are both cultural and internalised. Over half (53%) believe it is more difficult to progress in their career after taking on caregiving responsibilities. **Juggling work and care is their most significant challenge, with 62% identifying it as a major hurdle, compared to 47% of the broader workforce.** Guilt, mental load, and childcare also weigh heavily on this group, with over half experiencing these struggles. While some of these challenges stem from company practices, much of it is tied to their perception of the company's culture and their own expectations.

Another area of concern is the exclusion they have witnessed—37% have noticed colleagues on family leave being left out of important

projects, meetings, or restructuring decisions. This exclusion reinforces their belief that career advancement is more difficult for part-timers with caregiving responsibilities.

To address these concerns, companies should focus on both external and internal challenges. **Offering training to managers and team members on how to support returning employees, helping part-timers set clear workload boundaries, and providing career development opportunities can empower this group.** Although they remain interested in career progression, their perception that caregiving and leadership are incompatible needs to be directly addressed. **By improving communication and offering targeted support, companies can enhance this group's experience and ultimately bolster their advocacy for the organisation.**

Line Managers Without Family Leave: Balancing Flexibility & Performance Expectations

This group of line managers has not taken family leave themselves but often manages teams that include working parents who have. Despite their roles in facilitating family leave, **37% of these managers believe that parenthood negatively impacts work performance, a sentiment higher than the industry average of 31%.** This perception highlights a concern that managers may view caregiving as a potential detriment to team productivity.

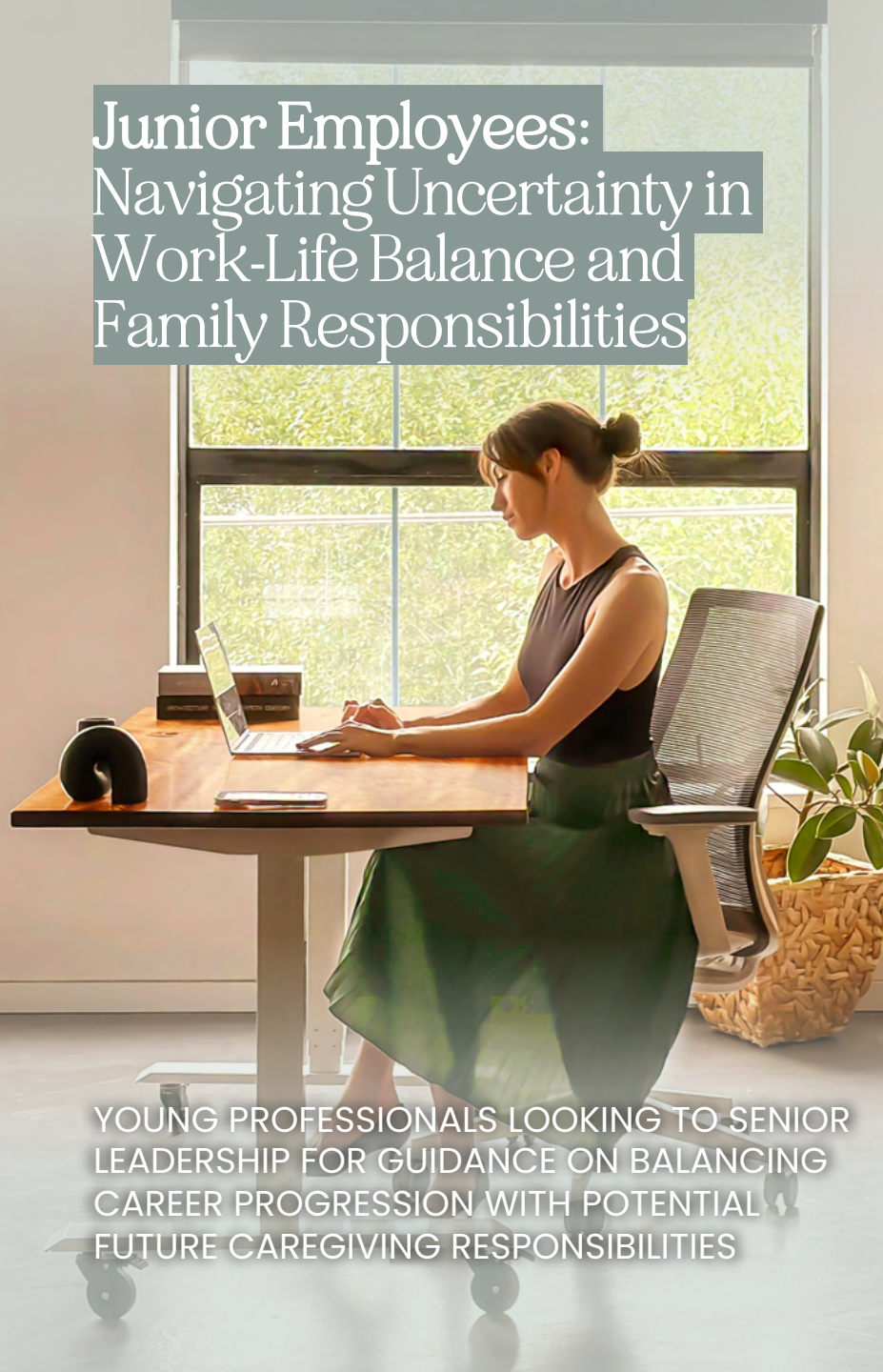
However, these managers are quick to cite the flexible practices and policies they implement, believing that they can offer flexibility without sacrificing work commitment. Unlike employees who have taken family leave, these managers are less likely to think that having children affects career progression. **This disconnect suggests that line managers may be somewhat unaware of the real challenges working parents face in balancing their careers and caregiving responsibilities.**

While this group doesn't report significant stress related to juggling caregiving, mental load, or cost of living, **they are more likely to identify their overall workload and the demands from upper management or clients as key stress factors.** Despite this, they try to provide flexibility and foster conversations around the challenges faced by working

parents in their teams. Interestingly, 35% of these managers express uncertainty about whether those taking family leave are adequately supported, and there remains a belief that team members on leave are not excluded from important projects—showing some defensiveness in their approach to managing leave.

To better support these managers, **companies should provide training on managing stress and burnout, particularly related to balancing client demands and internal team needs.** Additionally, 63% of line managers express interest in training focused on supporting employees returning from family leave, setting clear boundaries, career development, and navigating difficult conversations. As they juggle the commercial success of the business with team members' family challenges, **it's crucial to bridge the gap between their perception of providing support and the reality experienced by their team members.**

MANAGERS OVERSEEING TEAMS WITH CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES, BALANCING WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY WITH PERFORMANCE CONCERNS



Junior Employees: Navigating Uncertainty in Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS LOOKING TO SENIOR
LEADERSHIP FOR GUIDANCE ON BALANCING
CAREER PROGRESSION WITH POTENTIAL
FUTURE CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

This group of junior employees, that have not taken family leave, and report to managers, is predominantly in the early stages of their careers and skewed towards individuals in their 20s or early 30s. **As they look upwards to senior leaders for cues on company culture and practices, they face a significant lack of understanding around the impact of family responsibilities on work performance.** Only 29% of this group believe that working parents enhance performance, and 22% think it negatively impacts performance, with both figures being lower than the sector average. **This indicates unfamiliarity with how parenthood intersects with work.**

Additionally, this group is less likely to recommend the company's support for employees with caregiving responsibilities, signalling potential long-term risks as they consider their own future family plans. A large portion, 46%, are unsure whether having children makes it difficult to progress in their careers, reflecting a lack of awareness and role models who have successfully balanced senior roles with caregiving responsibilities. Without these examples, **junior employees may be hesitant to set personal and professional goals that involve family life.**

Their primary challenges relate to individual stresses such as the cost of living and unclear

boundaries between work and personal life, rather than stresses directly tied to caregiving. However, they are uncertain about whether their managers are equipped to support team members in balancing family life, with 52% unsure whether the company has a re-onboarding plan for employees returning from family leave.

To support this group, **companies should focus on educating them about family-related policies and showcasing role models who successfully balance career advancement and caregiving.** Offering training on managing stress, burnout, and navigating difficult conversations would also be beneficial. **By informing this group early on, companies can build confidence that work-life balance and career progression are achievable.**

Attitudes Towards People With Caring Responsibilities

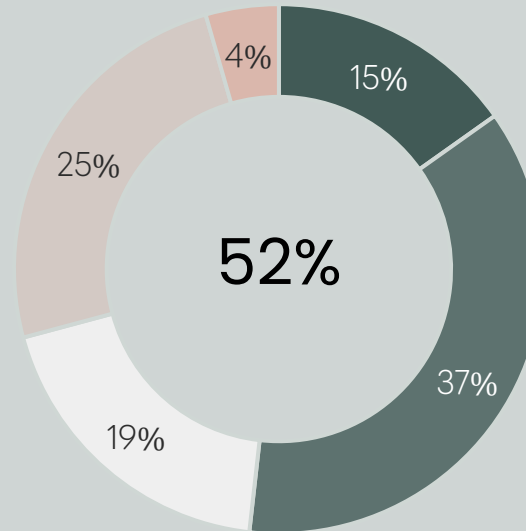


Across sector, acceptance of flexibility and support for caring roles is 50:50

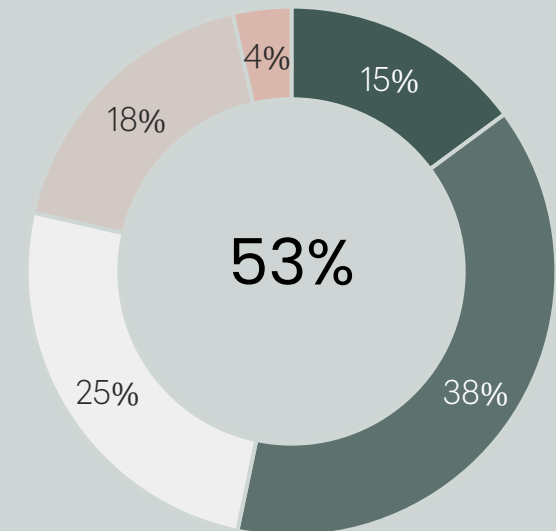
There is a split in perception regarding flexibility and support for caring responsibilities within the workplace. When respondents were asked whether one can request flexibility without judgment and if companies actively support employees with caring roles, only 52% and 53% agreed with these statements.

The remaining respondents were either undecided or disagreed. This lack of consensus suggests a need for greater acceptance and support for those requiring flexibility due to caring responsibilities.

Anyone can ask for the flexibility they require without judgement



This company does everything it can to support individuals with caring responsibilities.



- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Only 43% believe Senior Leadership is Compatible with Caring Responsibilities.

Less than half of the respondents (43%) believe that senior leadership roles are compatible with caring responsibilities. This sentiment varies significantly across segments: full-time employees who have taken family leave are more likely to believe senior roles are compatible, while part-timers with family leave experience are less optimistic.

Managers without family leave experience are also more positive, but only 35% of reportees share this view.

The key takeaway is that junior employees and those working part-time perceive a limited ability to hold senior positions while managing family responsibilities, highlighting a gap in perceived support and career progression opportunities.

At this company, **senior leadership** roles are **compatible with caring responsibilities**



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
Being a working parent/guardian/carer enhances performance at work
Being a working parent/guardian/carer negatively impacts performance at work

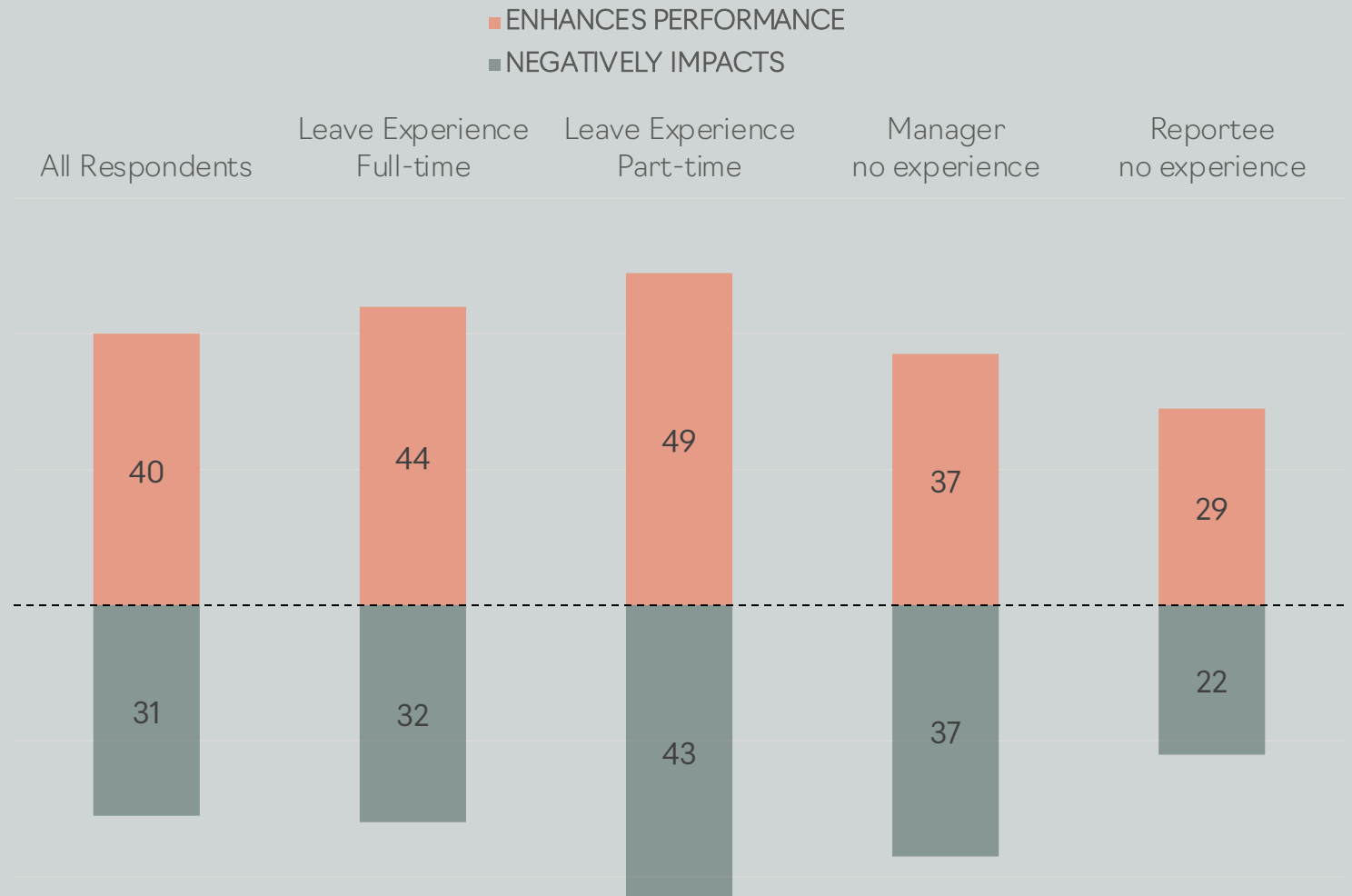
40% believe being a working parent enhances performance.

While 40% of participants believe being a working parent enhances performance, 31% perceive it as a negative influence. Notably, managers with no family leave experience are more likely to view parenthood as a hindrance, with 30% holding this belief.

Part-time workers with family leave experience report mixed feelings—acknowledging both the benefits and the challenges.

This divergence in views across segments suggests that the impact of parenthood on performance is complex and context-dependent. Understanding and addressing these differing perceptions is critical to ensuring a supportive environment where all employees can thrive, regardless of their parental status.

Percent who believe **being a working parent** enhances or negatively impacts performance.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
Being a working parent/guardian/carer enhances performance at work
Being a working parent/guardian/carer negatively impacts performance at work

Detractors

Likelihood to recommend employer is low.

The overall Net Promoter Score (NPS) is negative (-7.1), indicating that respondents are generally unlikely to recommend their employers.

The only group with a positive NPS consists of full-time employees who have previously taken family leave.

Conversely, part-time employees with family leave experience are the least likely to recommend their employers.

This disparity suggests that support for family responsibilities may be perceived as inconsistent, depending on one’s employment status and experience with leave. Full-time employees with leave experience have the highest satisfaction levels, while part-time workers feel less supported, potentially influencing their willingness to endorse their organisations.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
How likely are you to recommend working here to someone with parental or caring responsibilities?

Key themes related to working parenthood.



1. Flexible Working Arrangements

Many employees appreciate the availability of flexible working arrangements, but there are issues with consistency and access across different levels of seniority.

Explanation: Flexibility in working hours, remote work, and compressed hours is valued, but many feel it is not applied evenly. Some employees mention that flexibility is offered more readily to senior staff or only under specific conditions.

"Flexible working pattern change request was processed within 2 months. It would be good to see more acceptance, acknowledgement, and openness to the changes or flexibility to working for parents/carers."

"There is a lack of flexibility for working parents in terms of working hours and WFH policy."



2. Impact on Career Progression for Parents

The experience of being a parent, especially a mother, is seen to hinder career progression. Employees often feel side-lined for promotions or opportunities due to their caregiving responsibilities.

Explanation: Despite policies supporting parental leave and flexibility, parents—particularly mothers—often face implicit biases that affect their professional growth and career trajectories.

"There's an unsaid expectation you'll work that evening to 'make up the time.' But the amount of pressure on us to be at the top of our game is immense."

"I was actively held back from progression and there is clear tension between me and my line manager."



3. Inequality Between Parents and Non-Parents

There is a perceived inequality between employees who are parents and those who are not. Both groups feel that the other has benefits or advantages that are unfair.

Explanation: Non-parents may feel parents receive preferential treatment (e.g., flexibility in hours), while parents feel they sacrifice career opportunities and time to manage both personal and professional responsibilities.

"Single people are always forgotten about. We have double the amount of work and cost in our personal lives as there is nobody to split these costs and responsibilities with."

"There is a tension between those with kids and those without—those without kids feel parents are getting special benefits, but do not realize the benefits they get that parents forego, and vice versa."

Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
Please expand on your answers above. What do you see at your company that's really positive?
Where do you think there is room for improvement?

Key themes related to working parenthood.



4. Presenteeism and Office Culture

The emphasis on being present in the office and attending out-of-hours events is seen as a significant barrier, especially for parents.

Explanation: A strong culture of presenteeism and after-hours events often excludes those with caregiving responsibilities, making it challenging for parents to participate and feel included.

"The obsession with being in the office to be productive needs to stop. Meetings outside of work hours need to stop."

"Strong drinking and socializing culture in PR and financial services means people miss out if they can't join in with those things."



5. Support During and After Parental Leave

Employees report varying levels of support during and after parental leave. While some mention positive experiences, others highlight a lack of proper reintegration and support upon returning to work.

Explanation: Returning parents often feel overwhelmed by a lack of structured support, leading to burnout and decreased job satisfaction. Some employers provide phased returns and support, but these are inconsistent.

"On returning, there was no welcome pack of any kind to reintroduce me to the business. All my most exciting responsibilities had been stripped away."

"Very flexible. Has a phased return policy whereby for the first month returning from maternity leave you work 50% of the hours (2.5 days a week) for 100% of the pay."



6. Implementation vs. Policy

There is a gap between company policies and their implementation. While policies often exist, they are not consistently enacted or enforced by management.

Explanation: Employees acknowledge the existence of policies, but many feel that these are not applied or communicated effectively, leading to confusion and inconsistent experiences.

"The policies are all there, but it's applying them in practice. The reality is that there is a divide between those workers who are parents and those who aren't."

"Often a disconnect between having a policy and lip service to being flexible around working parents and supporting their career progression and not putting it into practice."

Please expand on your answers above. What do you see at your company that's really positive?
Where do you think there is room for improvement?

About Company Culture



Working Mums and Dads perceived differently & half of experienced proactive support.

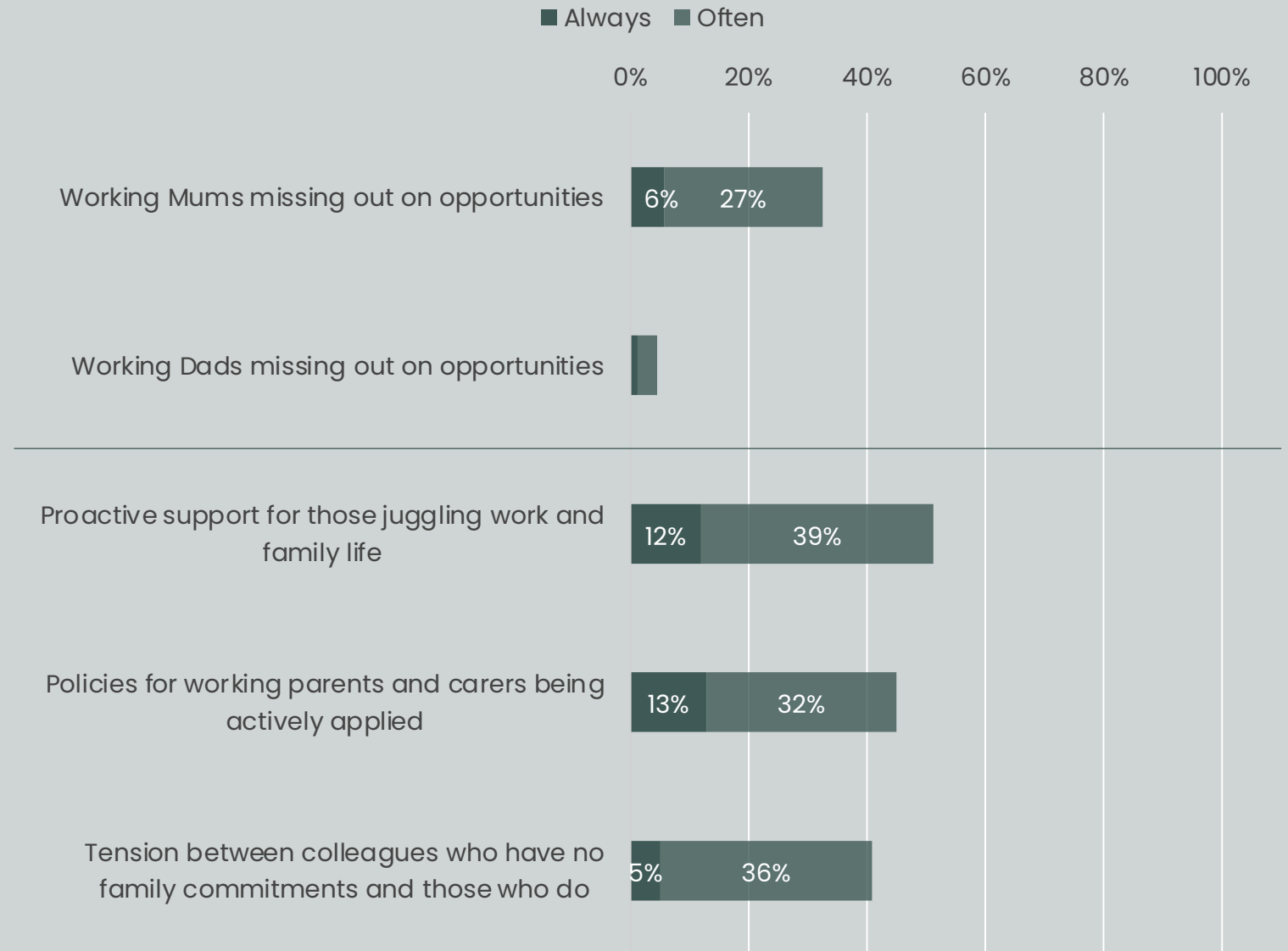
A third of participants reported observing that Working Mothers often miss out on opportunities, whereas significantly fewer perceive the same for working fathers.

Moreover, fewer than 50% of respondents believe that policies supporting working parents are actively applied.

There is also a perception of tension between colleagues with and without family commitments, with 41% reporting that these tensions have arisen in the past six months.

This suggests a need for organisations to actively address these disparities and tensions, ensuring that policies are not only in place but also effectively implemented to support working parents and reduce workplace friction.

Percent who have experienced the following in the last 6 months.

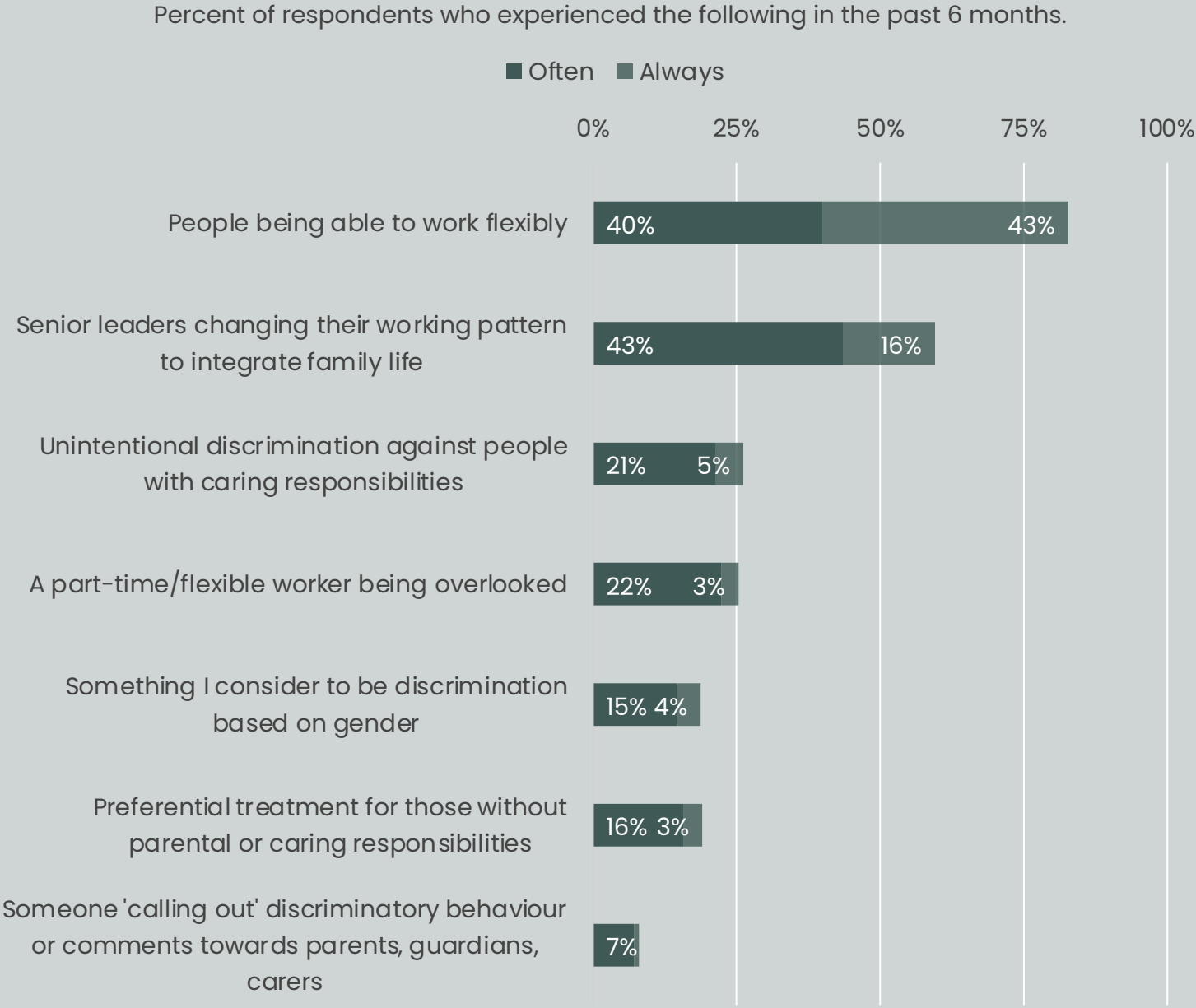


Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK

Flexible Working does not prevent discrimination.

Flexible work is now widespread, with over 83% of respondents reporting that their organisations offer it.. However, concerns about discrimination persist. Some respondents feel that workers with caregiving responsibilities or those who opt for flexible work are overlooked or discriminated against, particularly based on gender or family duties. Moreover, this behaviour often goes unaddressed by others in the workplace.

While flexible work has become the norm in the post-COVID world, there is still work to be done. Senior leaders are expected to not only practice flexible work themselves but also actively combat discrimination toward those who make similar choices. Ensuring fair treatment for all employees, especially those balancing personal responsibilities, is essential to creating a supportive and inclusive work culture.



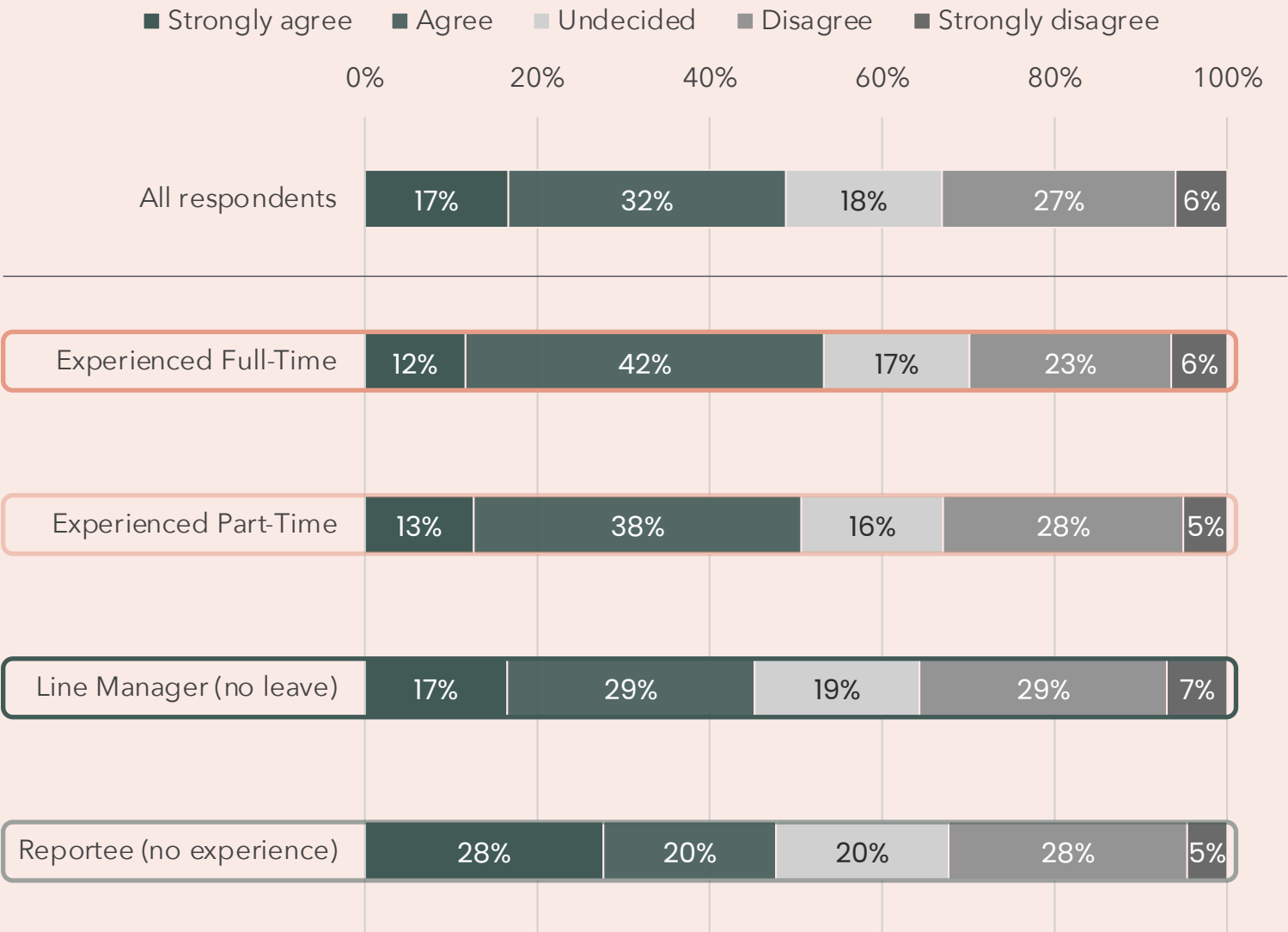
Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK

Overall expectation of work commitment.

There is a strong belief among employees that work commitments take precedence over flexible work arrangements, despite organisational policies supporting flexibility. Nearly half of respondents (49%) feel that work responsibilities should come first, even when flexible options are available. This belief is particularly common among full-time employees who have taken family leave, suggesting that those with caregiving responsibilities are more likely to feel pressured to prioritise work over personal commitments.

The data highlights a disconnect between the intent behind flexible work policies and how they are perceived by employees. While companies may offer flexible arrangements to accommodate personal and family responsibilities, many employees still feel that these arrangements are secondary to their professional obligations. This suggests that cultural attitudes within organisations may not fully support the practical implementation of flexibility.

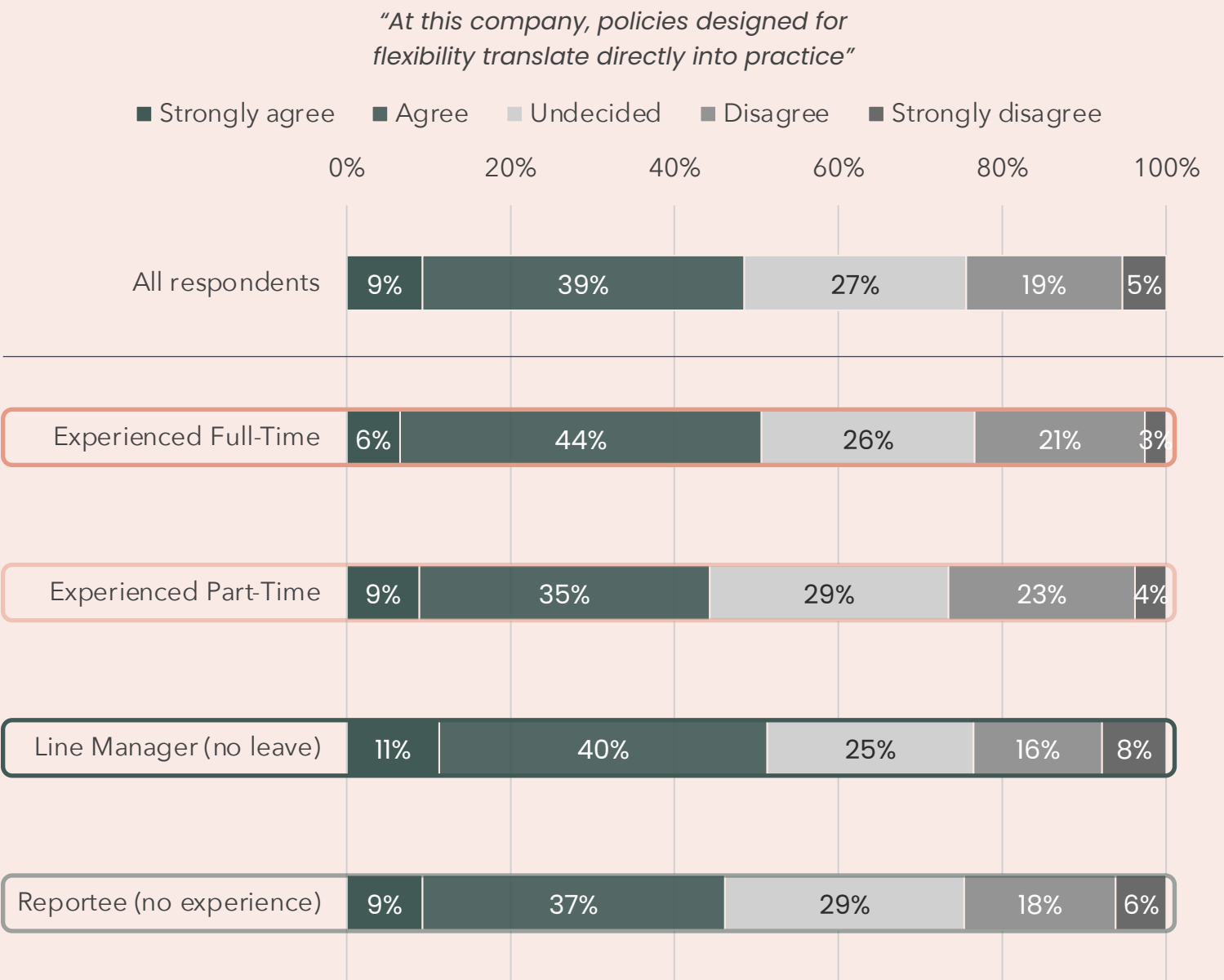
"It is expected that work commitments come first, regardless of the policies or flexible arrangements employees have"



Policy and Practice

There is a split opinion among employees regarding whether flexible work policies are effectively put into practice. While 48% of respondents agree that flexibility policies are being translated into action, the other half of the sector either disagrees or is unsure. This indicates a significant portion of employees feel that, although policies may exist, they are not consistently implemented in a practical sense.

Moreover, as many employees believe that work commitments often override flexible arrangements, there is a clear need for improvement in how flexibility is managed and perceived. The data suggests that even with formal policies in place, there is uncertainty about whether they truly allow for the intended work-life balance.



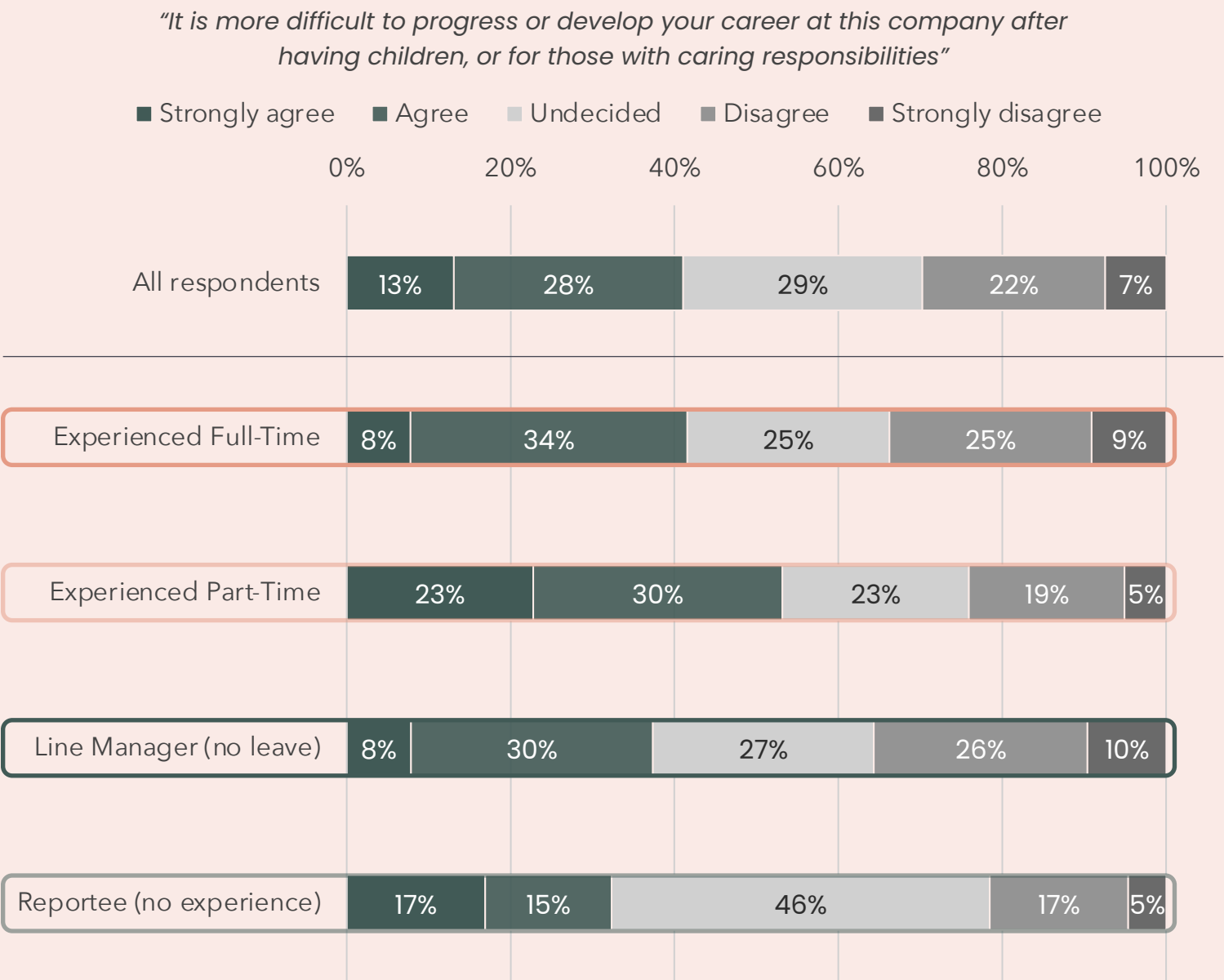
Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK

Part-timers most likely to feel pessimistic about career.

Part-time employees who have returned from family leave are the least optimistic about their career progression. A significant 53% of experienced part-timers agree that advancing their careers is more difficult after having children or caregiving responsibilities, indicating a belief that these responsibilities hinder career growth.

Meanwhile, employees who have not yet taken family leave and are not in management roles are uncertain about the impact of family life on their career development. Over half of this group is unsure whether having children will affect their career progression, which presents a risk for organisations. This uncertainty may lead to junior employees leaving the company if they feel they cannot balance family and career goals.

In summary, part-time employees returning from family leave feel pessimistic about their career growth, while junior staff members are uncertain about the impact of family responsibilities. This highlights a need for organisations to provide better support and clearer paths for career progression to retain talent.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
It is more difficult to progress or develop your career at this company after having children, or for those with caring responsibilities.

Parenthood Challenges

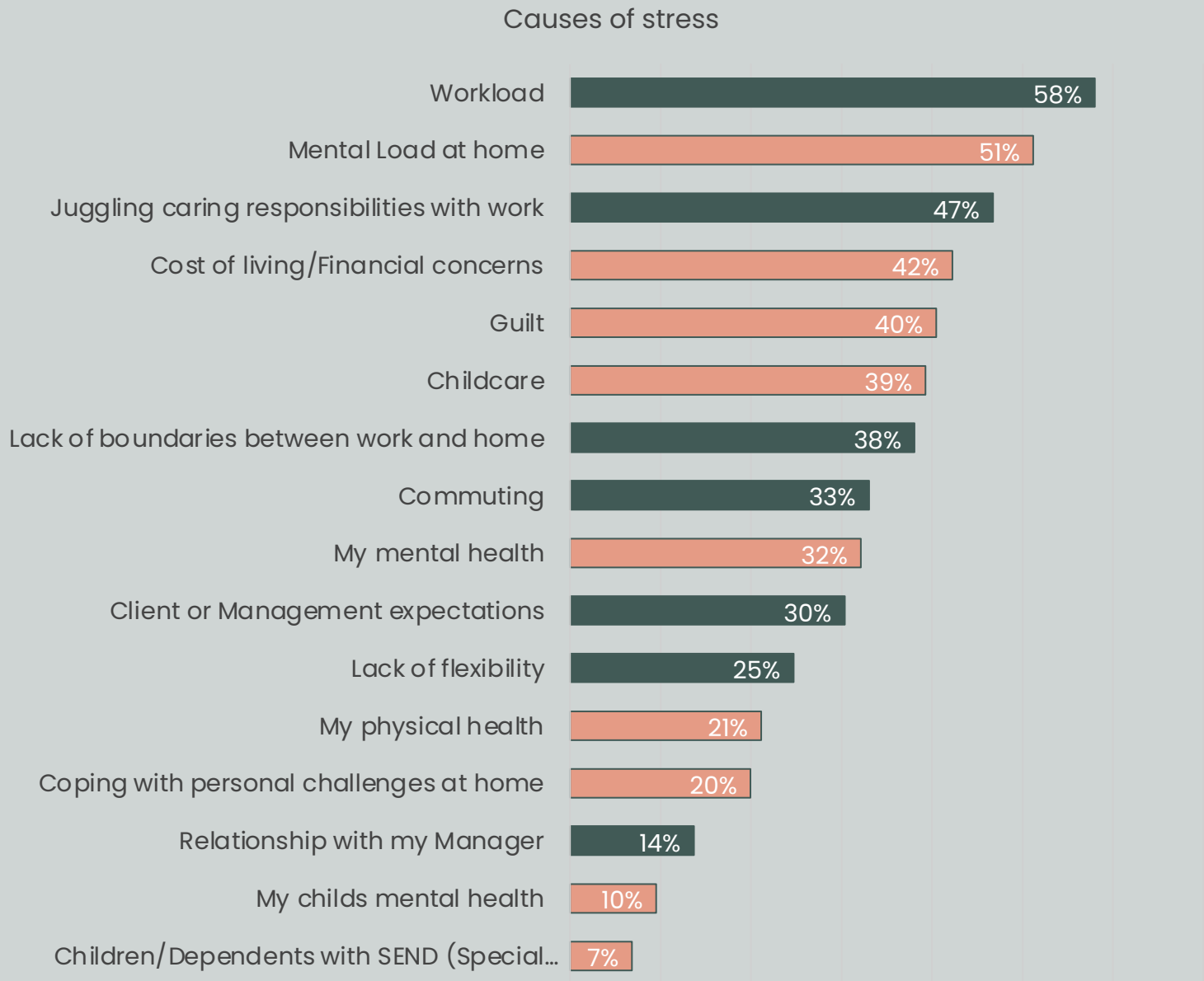


Most people say workload and mental load are greatest cause of stress.

When asked about the causes of stress, 58% of workers identified workload as the primary factor. Close behind, 51% cited the mental load at home as a significant contributor. Interestingly, out of the top six reasons for stress, four were related to internal or personal challenges rather than work-specific issues. These included the mental load at home, the cost of living, guilt, and childcare. While these concerns affect workers, they are often unrelated to their workplace responsibilities.

However, work-related stressors also play a role. Balancing career responsibilities and the lack of clear boundaries between work and home life were identified as additional stress contributors. This highlights the growing complexity of managing both professional and personal lives, with pressures from both spheres intersecting.

In summary, while workload remains the top cause of stress, personal and external factors like home responsibilities and financial pressures are also major contributors. The blurring of work and home boundaries further exacerbates stress for many employees, underscoring the need for better support and work-life balance solutions.



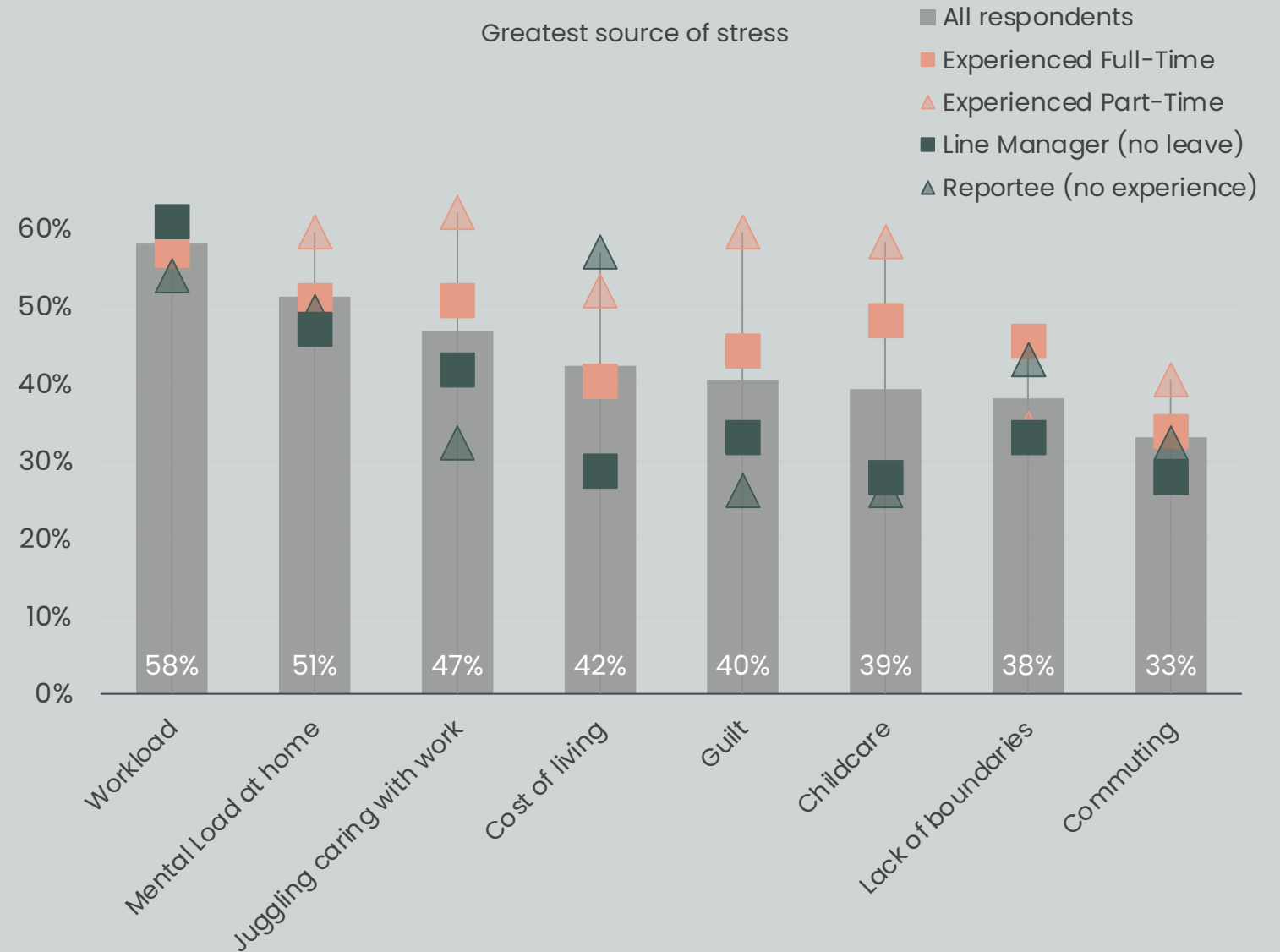
Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
What causes you the most stress when trying to balance work and home?
We would love to hear your views, no matter your personal family circumstances

Part-timers say juggling, guilt and childcare are greatest sources of stress.

Part-time workers identify juggling guilt and childcare as their greatest sources of stress. Workload and mental load are common stressors that affect most groups, but stress factors diverge depending on specific circumstances. Those who have taken family leave and returned to work often report that juggling caregiving responsibilities, dealing with parental guilt, and managing childcare are major contributors to their stress levels.

On the other hand, junior team members are more likely to be impacted by the cost of living and the lack of clear boundaries between work and personal life. These stressors reflect the different pressures faced by employees based on their family situations and career stages.

In summary, while workload and mental load are common sources of stress across various groups, specific stressors like caregiving challenges and financial pressures differ depending on an individual's family setup and position in the organisation. This highlights the need for tailored support that considers the unique stress factors experienced by different employees.



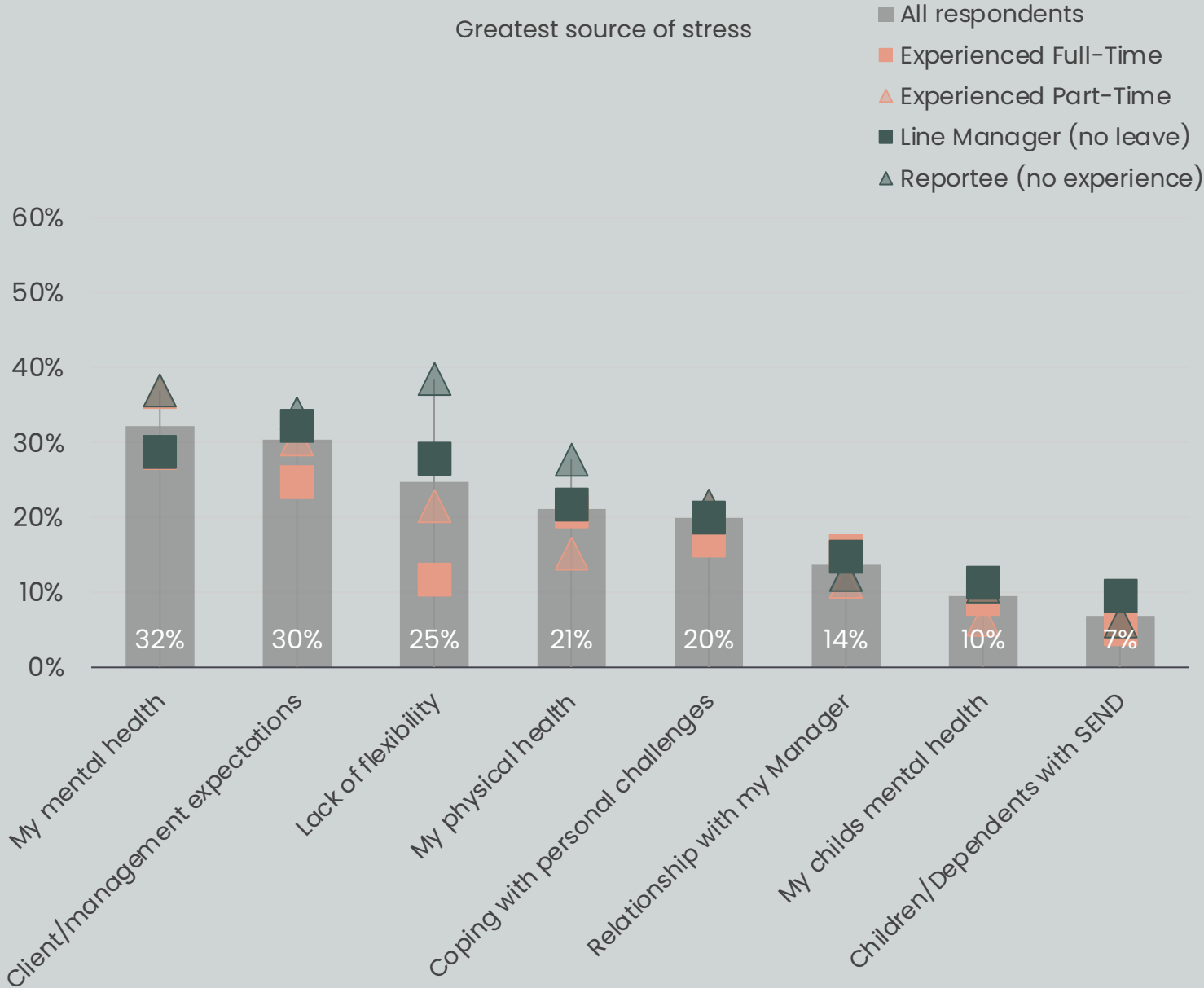
Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
What causes you the most stress when trying to balance work and home?
We would love to hear your views, no matter your personal family circumstances

Reportees say lack of flexibility is stress.

In addition to the more common stressors, a minority of workers report other significant sources of stress. These include mental health concerns and client management expectations. Junior employees, in particular, are more likely to cite the lack of workplace flexibility and concerns about their physical health as stress factors.

While these causes of stress do not impact the majority of workers, they are still important to acknowledge. Addressing these issues is critical to ensure they don't become more significant stressors, both for the individuals directly affected and for the broader team. Even though these stressors are less common, they represent potential areas for intervention to promote a healthier and more supportive work environment.

In summary, although mental health, client expectations, flexibility, and physical health are not the main sources of stress for most employees, they are still notable concerns for a minority. By addressing these niche stressors, organisations can help prevent them from growing into larger issues and ensure a more balanced and supportive workplace for everyone.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
What causes you the most stress when trying to balance work and home?
We would love to hear your views, no matter your personal family circumstances

About Managers



Less than half view managers as **always** or **often** being empowered to support parents.

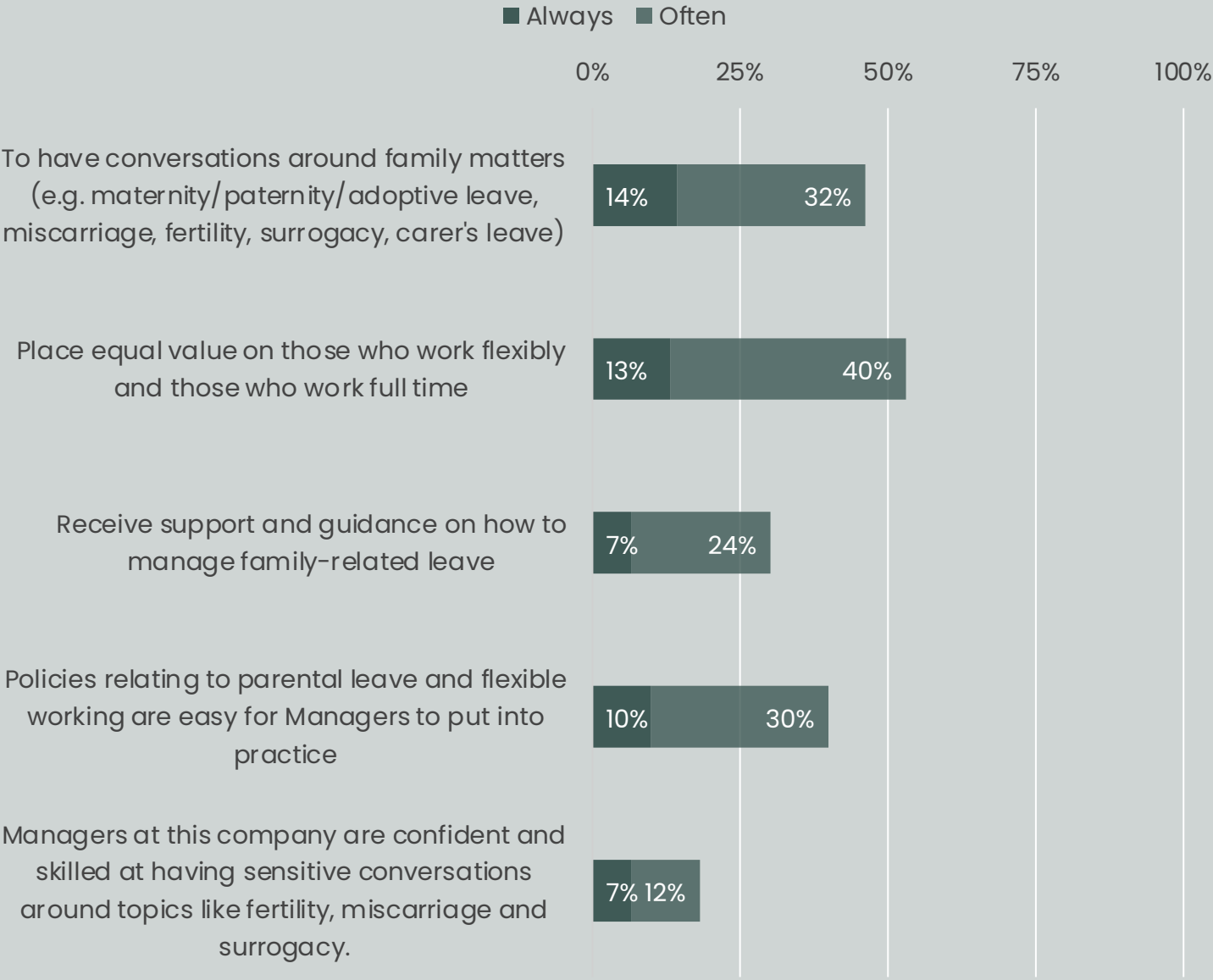
Less than half of the research sample believes that managers are empowered to support employees with caring responsibilities.

Only 46% of respondents feel that their managers are confident in having conversations about family matters, and just 19% agree that managers are equipped to handle more sensitive topics.

Furthermore, 53% believe managers value employees working flexibly as much as those working full-time, leaving a significant portion unconvinced.

These findings suggest a need for better training and support for managers to ensure they can effectively support team members with caregiving responsibilities.

Percent of respondents who agree Managers are Empowered...



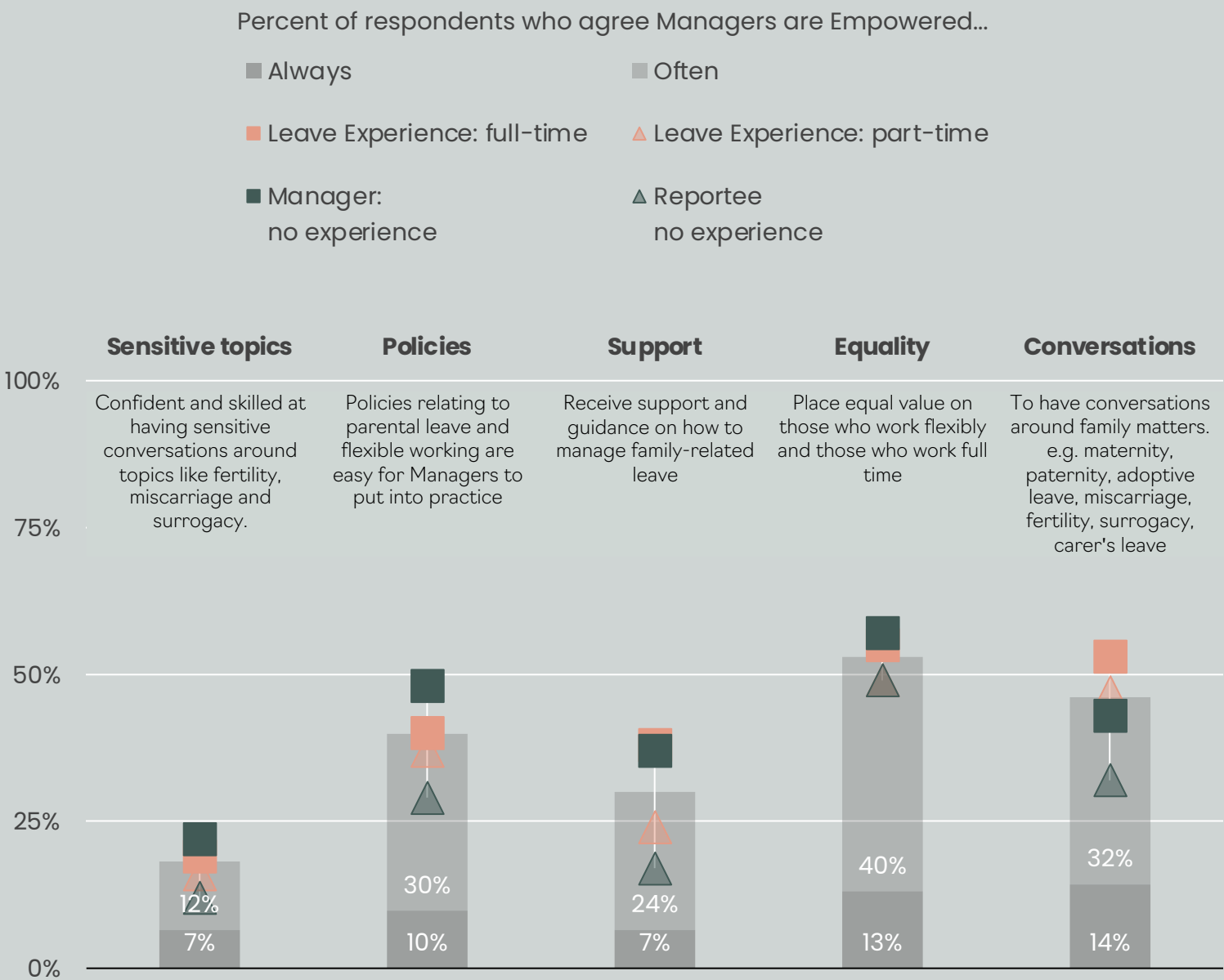
Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK

Managers more likely to believe they are providing supportive practices.

Managers tend to view themselves as providing sufficient support, with many believing they have the necessary policies in place and treat all employees equally.

However, this perception is not shared by part-time workers and reportees, who are less confident in their managers' ability to handle these issues effectively.

Full-time employees with family leave experience express greater confidence in having sensitive conversations with managers, indicating that personal experience with family leave may enhance the perceived supportiveness of managerial practices.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK

About Family-related Leave

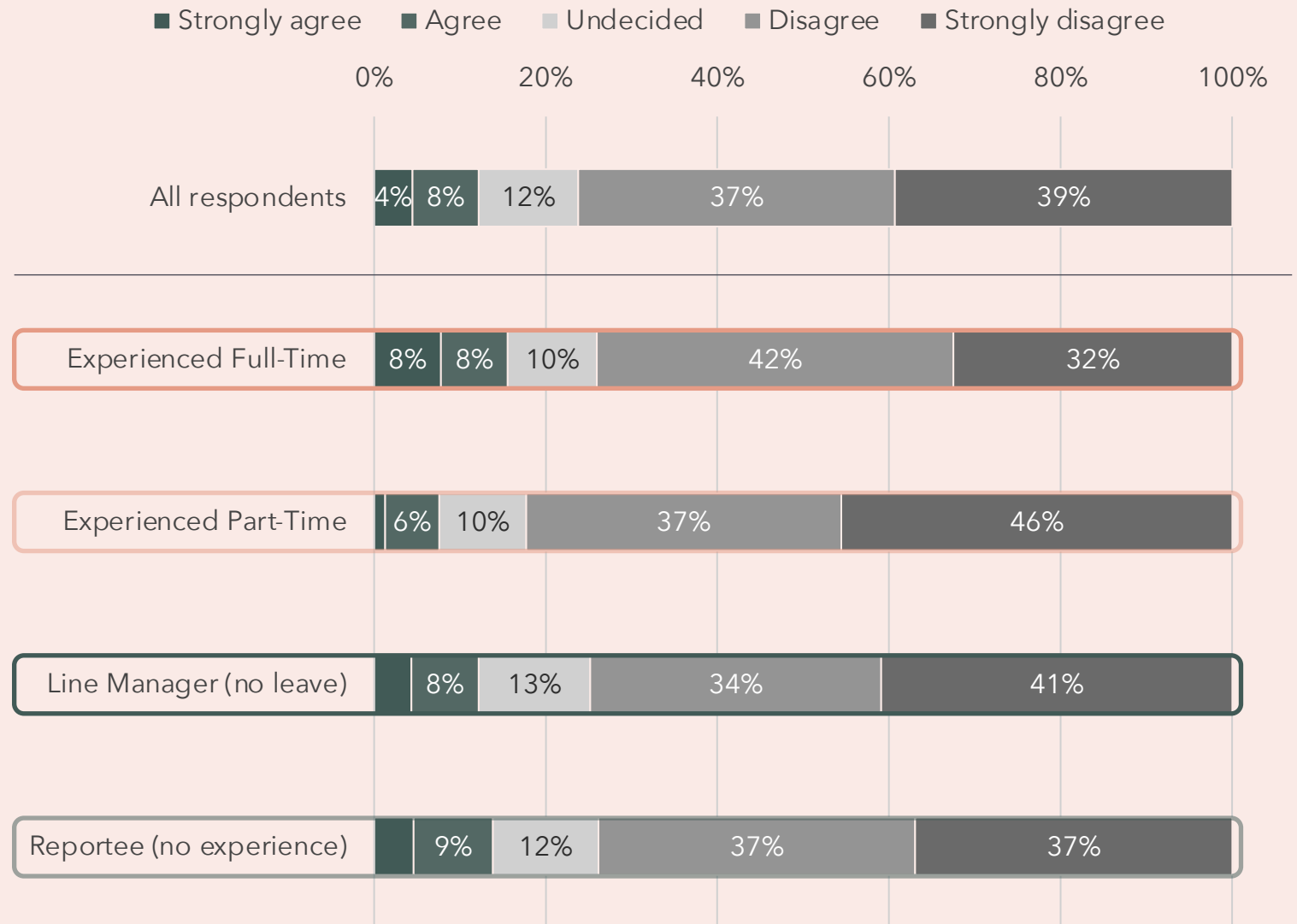


About Family-related Leave

Over half of respondents believe that taking family-related leave has a different career impact for men compared to women, suggesting a disparity in how parental leave is perceived across genders.

This perception points to a potential bias that could influence career progression and opportunities, making it essential for organisations to address these perceptions and ensure that family leave policies are applied equitably.

*"The career impact of taking family-related leave is the **same for men as for women.**"*

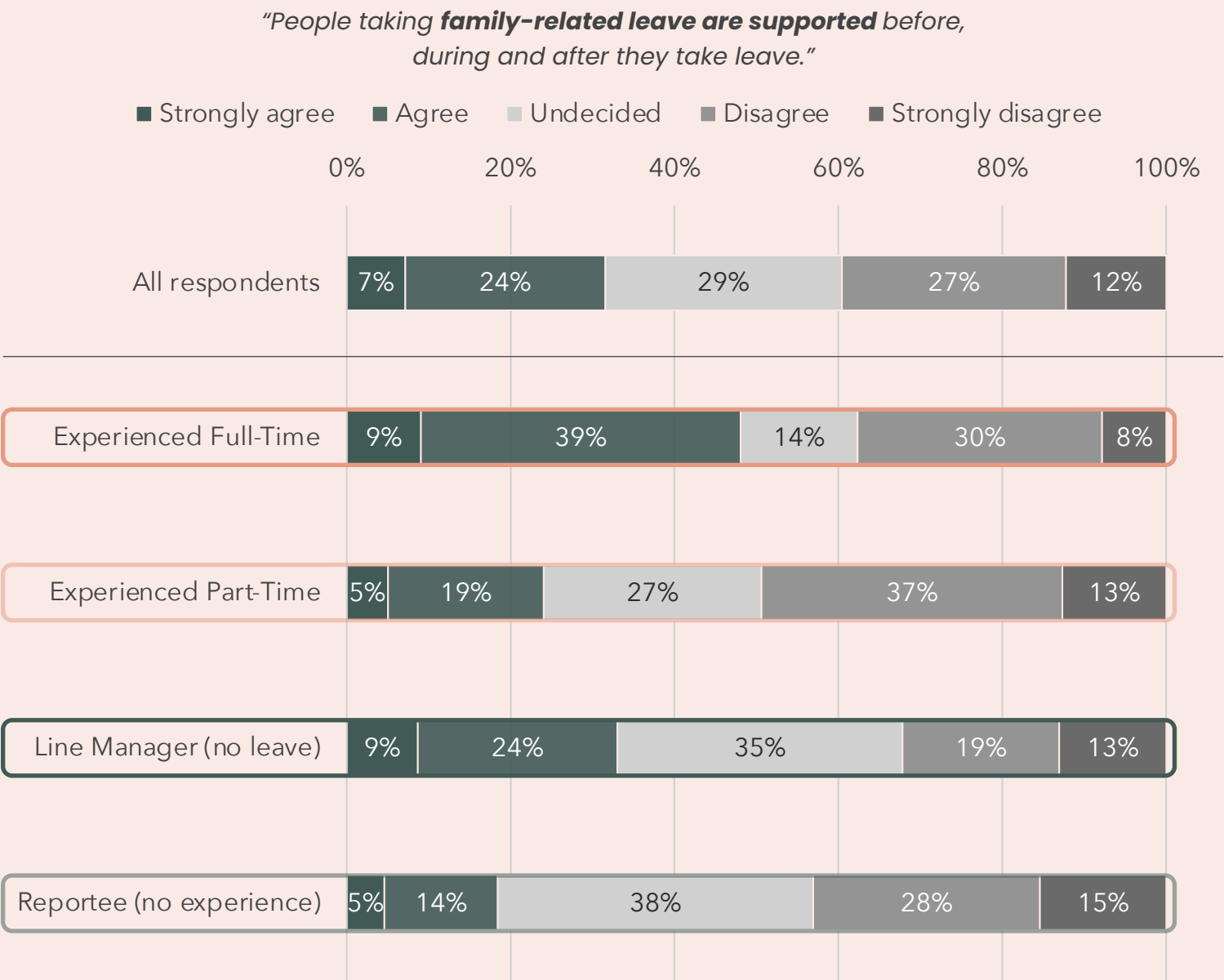


Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK

Full-time returners feel more supported than part-time. Managers are less certain.

One-third of respondents agree that individuals taking family leave are supported before, during, and after their leave. However, support is more commonly perceived by full-time returners, while part-time returners and line managers are less certain.

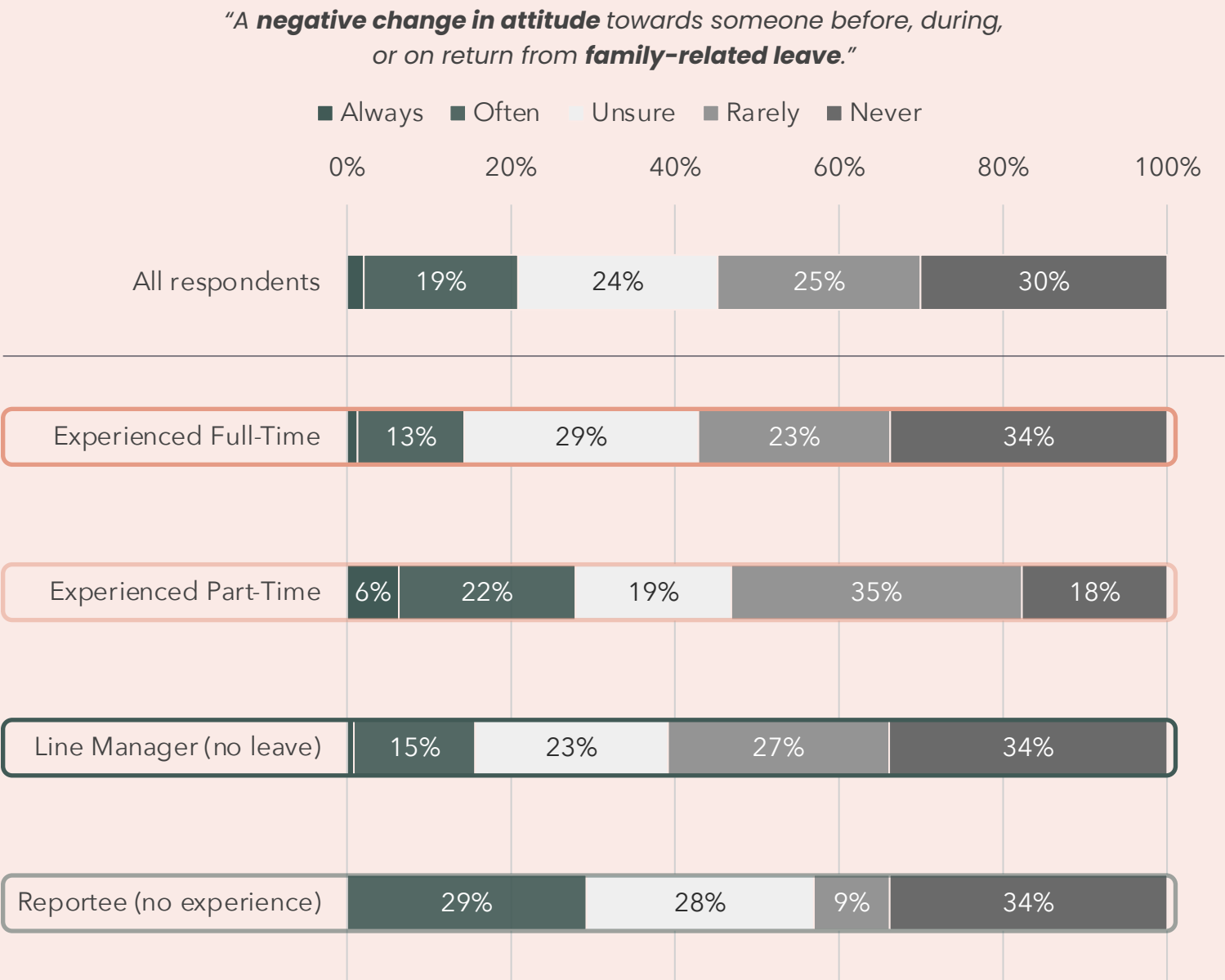
This uncertainty indicates a need for clearer communication and consistent support mechanisms for all employees taking leave, regardless of their employment status.



Part-timers and reportees are more likely to notice negative attitude towards someone on leave.

There is a general disagreement with negative attitudes toward colleagues on leave, but part-timers and reportees without leave experience are more likely to perceive a negative change in attitude before, during, or after family leave.

Addressing these perceptions and preventing any form of discrimination or bias is crucial to maintaining a supportive and inclusive work culture.

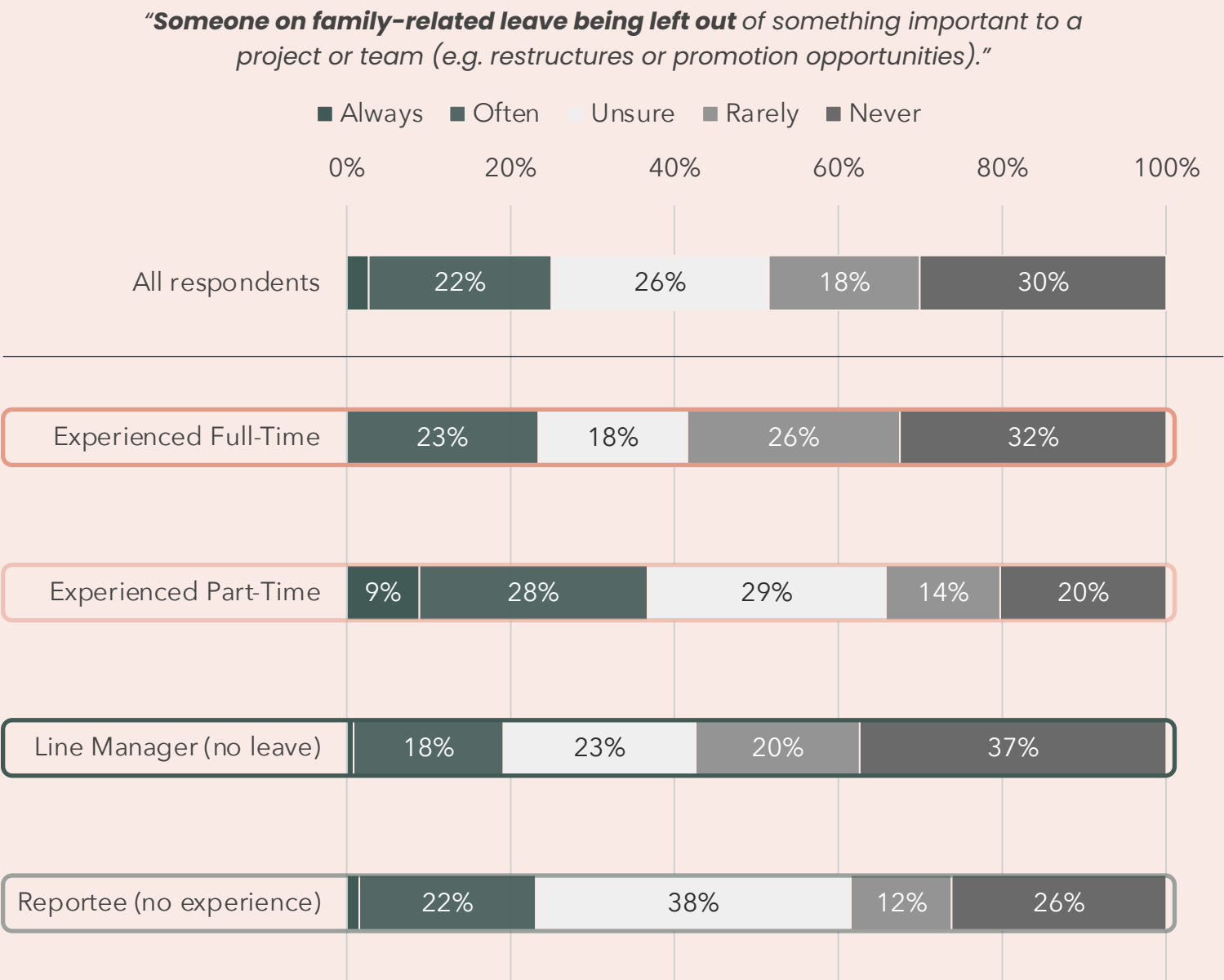


Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
In the last 6 months I have experienced or witnessed: * a negative change in attitude towards someone before, during, or on return from family-related leave

Part-timers experiencing isolation.

Part-time employees who have taken family leave are more likely to report feelings of isolation or being left out of important discussions or decisions.

This indicates that there may be a gap in communication or involvement for part-time workers. Ensuring equitable inclusion in workplace activities and opportunities for part-time employees is essential to fostering a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

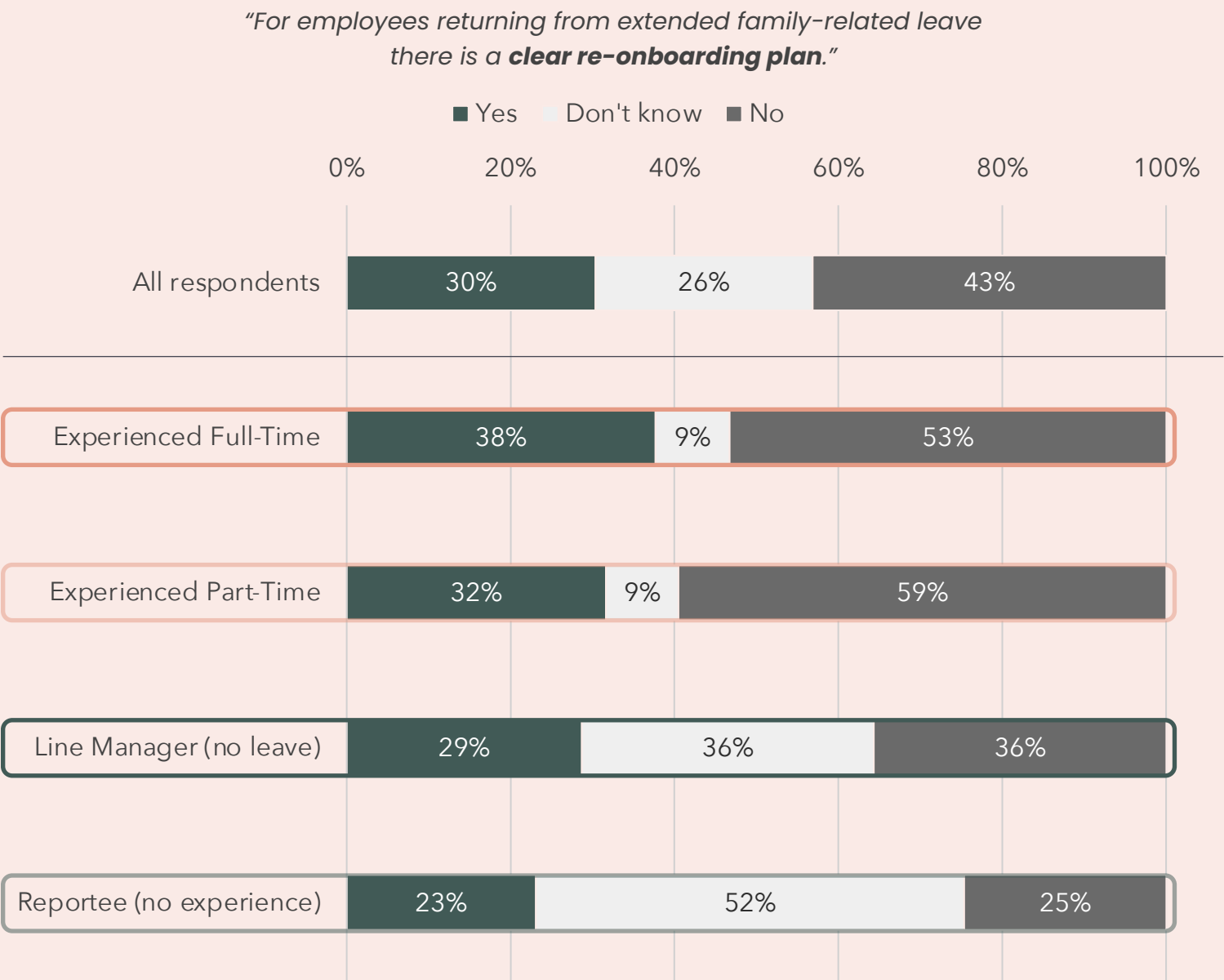


Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
In the last 6 months I have experienced or witnessed: * a negative change in attitude towards someone before, during, or on return from family-related leave

Full-timers are clear about re-onboarding. Line managers and reportees are unsure.

Full-time employees with family leave experience report greater clarity about re-onboarding processes, whereas line managers and reportees express uncertainty or lack of awareness.

This lack of knowledge highlights a need to inform all stakeholders about re-onboarding plans to ensure a smooth transition back to work for employees returning from leave.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
In the last 6 months I have experienced or witnessed: * For employees returning from extended family-related leave there is a clear re-onboarding plan.

Potential Solutions & Opportunities

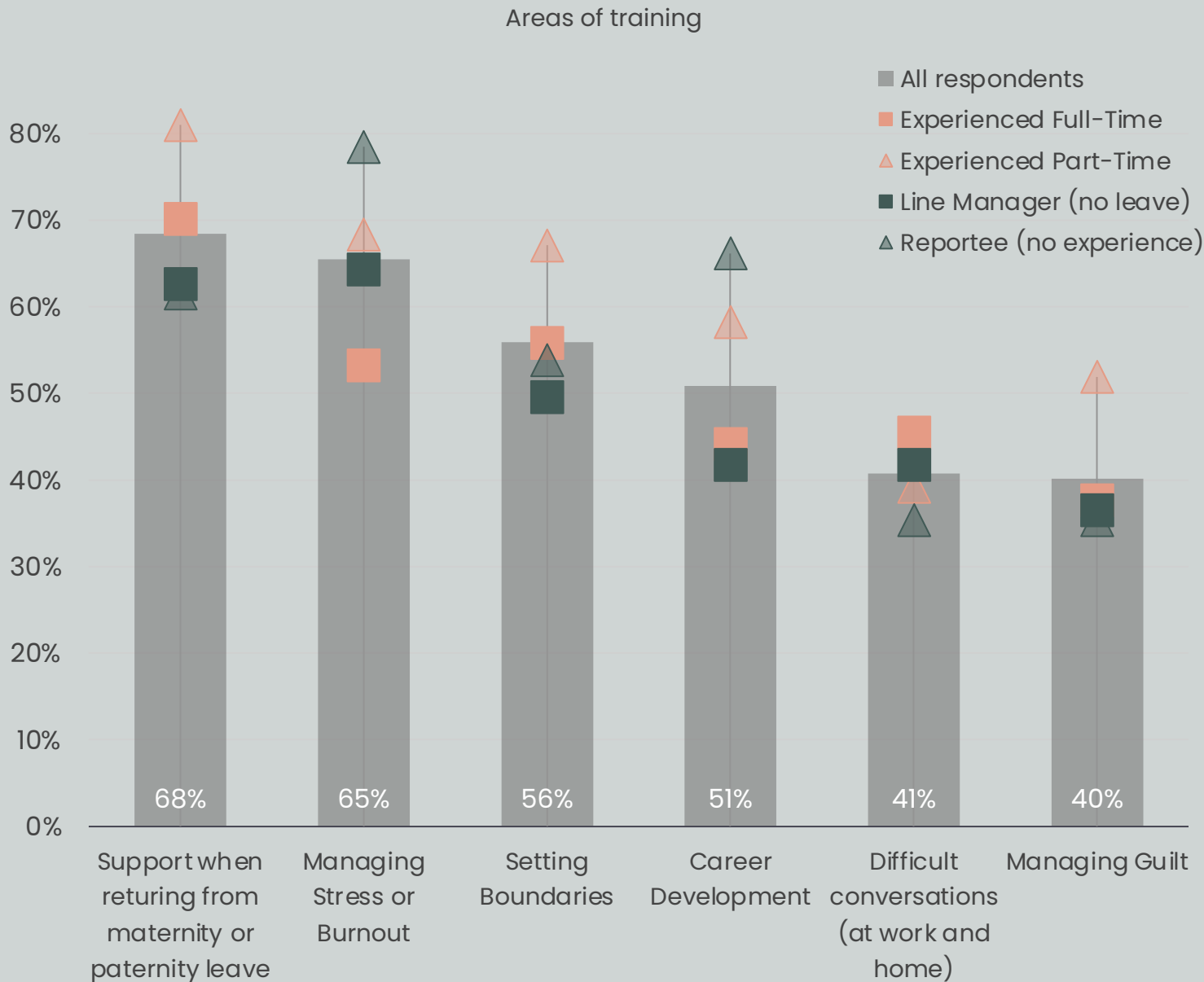


Key Training Support Needs for Working Parents Highlighted

When asked about helpful training resources, the majority of working parents identified support when returning from maternity or paternity leave as their top priority, with 68% expressing interest in this. Managing stress or burnout followed closely at 65%, and 56% indicated the need for help in setting boundaries.

Among specific groups, full-time employees who had taken family leave emphasized the value of a re-onboarding plan. Part-time workers, particularly those with experience and caregiving responsibilities, highlighted the importance of return-to-work support and training on setting boundaries. They also expressed a need for assistance in managing feelings of guilt associated with balancing family and work.

Junior employees, on the other hand, were more likely to request training focused on managing stress and career development, reflecting their unique challenges within the workplace.

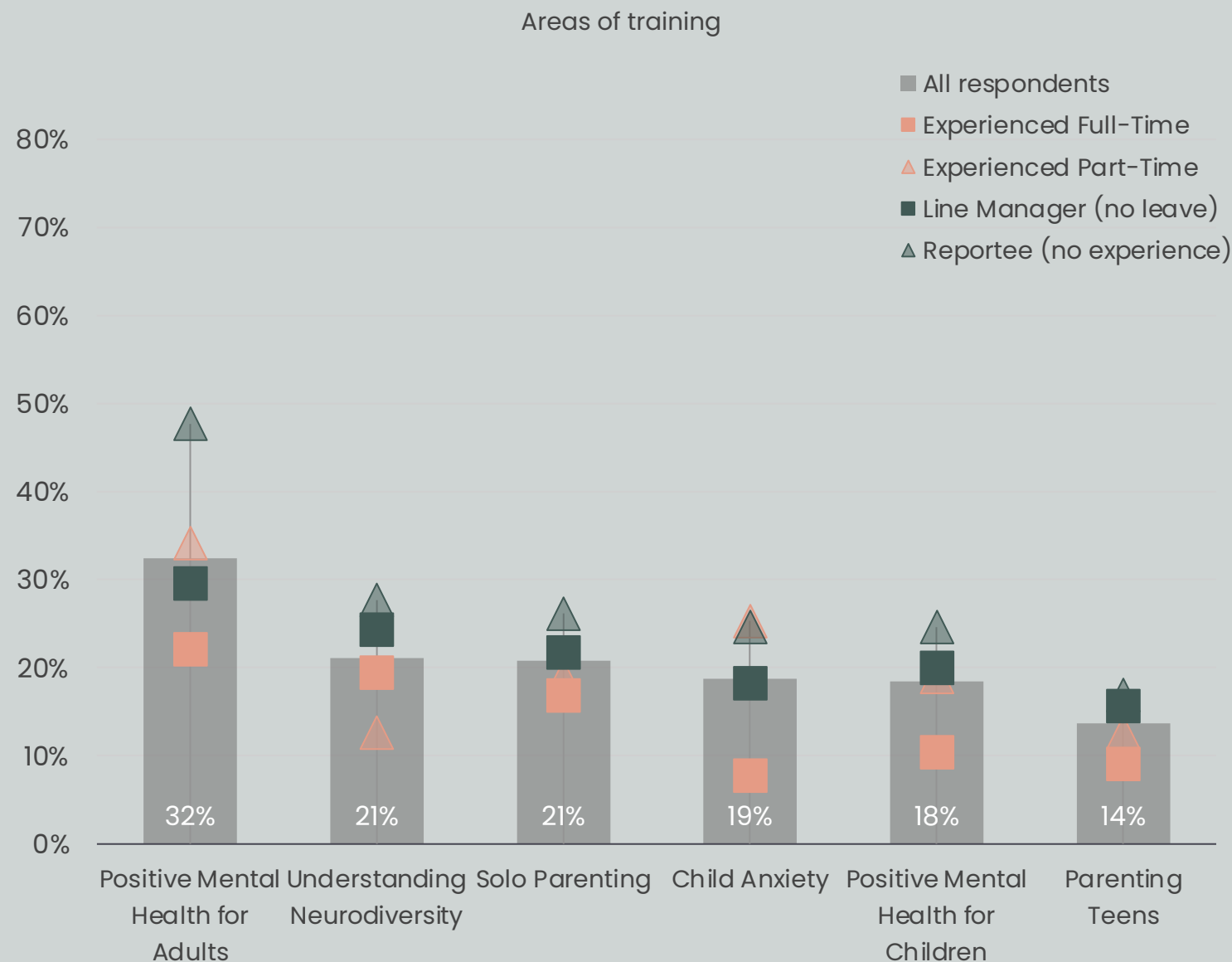


Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
In what areas of their lives do you think training resources or supports would help a parent/ guardian/ carer to balance work and home?

Niche topics should not be ignored, to ensure issues do not arise.

In summary, the data shows that working parents across different groups have varying support needs, with return-to-work programs, stress management, and boundary-setting training emerging as top priorities.

Addressing these needs can help organisations create a more supportive environment for working parents.



Source: Survey of 360 PR Professionals working in the UK
In what areas of their lives do you think training resources or supports would help a parent/ guardian/ carer to balance work and home?



AXICOM FINE LINES

Full Fat GRAYLING



MANIFEST THE UNMISTAKABLES

Working Parenthood in the UK PR Sector.

A Research study, conducted by PR Mums & Platform 55 with the support of a pan-industry Steering Group consisting of PRCA, CIPR, Women in PR, Axicom, Fine Lines, Full Fat, Grayling, Hope & Glory, Manifest, and The Unmistakables about how PR Professionals perceive and experience parenthood and working life.

NOVEMBER 2024

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