

Better jobs for mums and dads

A TUC Report



There are nearly 3.2 million young mums and dads, who are employees, in the UK¹. This is a large group of people who have to juggle childcare with the day to day pressures of working life. We've heard from trade unions and young people, that many mums and dads are struggling to cope.

Trade unions represent approximately 300,000 young parents². They negotiate policies that help parents to work flexibly and take well paid leave, helping them to spend more time with their families.

But we also know that many young parents are not in trade unions and really struggle to juggle their work responsibilities with childcare.

We wanted to know more about the challenges that young parents face, so we commissioned some research to identify the areas where young parents need further support. This report sets out what we found.

We focus on the workplace challenges that young parents face, the inadequacy of the employment rights that are supposed to help young parents and how workplace culture needs to change to better support them. These are the areas where trade unions are best placed to help young parents by negotiating with employers to introduce policies which help young mums and dads manage their childcare.

We will use the evidence from our research to campaign for improved workplace rights for parents and to help unions identify the areas where young parents need further support in the workplace.

This report is a 20 minute read.

¹ LFS Quarterly Data, January to March 2017

²

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/616966/trade-union-membership-statistical-bulletin-2016-rev.pdf, Table 3.1 and page 11,
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/living%20for%20the%20weekend%20long%20report%20whole%20thing.pdf>

Contents

3	Executive Summary
15	Introduction – Frances O’Grady, TUC General Secretary
17	What are the key challenges that young parents face?
30	How do parents deal with the challenges that they face?
37	What do parents think about the employment rights which were designed to help them?
43	Recommendations

Section one

Executive Summary

Over the last couple of decades, employment rights have been introduced that have made it easier for mums and dads to spend more time with their kids. Increases in maternity and paternity leave and pay, have made a real positive difference. Other rights have also been introduced such as the right to time off for dependants, the right to request flexible work and unpaid parental leave. These rights were designed to help working parents manage their childcare and work responsibilities.

But trade unions representing members in sectors where there are large numbers of low paid parents tell us that they have not seen the benefits they hoped for from legislation like the right to request flexible working. Our research set out to investigate the extent to which these rights were assisting low paid working parents manage their childcare and work responsibilities.

Unions have also reported that increasingly flexible working practices such as shifts being decided at short notice and uncertain working hours have made things really difficult for mums and dads with childcare responsibilities. For example, unions report members worrying every day that they are not going to manage their work shifts alongside their family commitments. They have employers who are continually varying their working hours and making short notice demands of them. Generally, unions say employers take a punitive rather than a supportive approach to workers who need time off or adjustments for family reasons.

The feedback from unions was supported by previous TUC research. An analysis of the 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study³ showed that the proportion of employers who agreed that "it is up to individual employees to balance work and family responsibilities" rose significantly between 2004 and 2011. Put simply, a significant number of employers do not feel it is their responsibility to support young parents with their childcare needs. This has created a workplace culture that does not reflect the modern attitudes of young parents.

Other changes over the last decade have meant young parents are struggling to spend as much time with their families as they would like. The attitudes of young fathers have changed considerably.

The 2017 Modern Families Index⁴, published by the charity Working Families and Bright Horizons, shows fathers wanting to take a much more active part in childcare

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/workplace-employment-relations-study-wers>

⁴ <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/publications/2017-modern-families-index-summary-report/>

and of workplaces failing to adapt and support their aspirations. Our research supports this finding.

There has also been a sharp rise in insecure work. We estimate that there are now at least 3.2m workers in insecure work⁵. Young workers are disproportionately over represented in insecure types of work such as agency work and zero hours contract work⁶. Because of their employment status many of these workers will miss out on key workplace rights, including the employment rights which help young parents manage their work and childcare.

Young people are over represented in sectors such as retail, hospitality and private sector health and social care work⁷. A TUC survey of insecure workers revealed that flexible working practices, such as short notice of shifts and variable working hours, are prevalent in these sectors. In the hospitality and health and social care sectors there has been a significant rise in insecure work leading to increased job and income insecurity⁸.

We wanted to explore the challenges that young, low paid parents are facing and work with unions to develop strategies to help them. We wanted to know more about the day-to-day pressures that parents must deal with once they return to work.

We commissioned Britain Thinks⁹ to speak with and survey young working parents to find out:

- The real experiences of younger working parents in balancing their working time with their childcare responsibilities;
- The level of awareness, use and response to rights designed specifically to help working parents balance their responsibilities;
- And the effectiveness of these rights and where they could be improved.

⁵ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/the-gig-is-up.pdf>

⁶ Page 33, Living on the Edge,

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Living%20on%20the%20Edge%202016.pdf>

⁷ Page 13,14,

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/living%20for%20the%20weekend%20long%20report%20whole%20thing.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/the-gig-is-up.pdf>

⁹ <http://britainthinks.com/>

Executive Summary

Research methods

Our research involved a diary tracking task, focus groups and then a large scale survey. Initially we spoke with 56 young parents and heard directly about their experiences.

All young parents we spoke to:

- had at least one child aged between 1 and 16 years old
- were aged between 20 and 35
- had household earnings of less than £28,000
- and none found it easy or very easy to organise childcare with their working hours.

We then designed a survey, which was shaped by the feedback from the 56 parents, to explore these issues across a broader range of young parents. We surveyed 1,050 young parents to find out more about their experiences.

The research findings confirmed what unions have been telling us. Young, low paid working parents are facing the following challenges:

Everyday working practices make managing childcare even more difficult

A key concern for low paid, young parents is uncertainty about their working hours. They are often given their shifts with less than one week's notice. Shifts are changed at short notice and there is great uncertainty about shift finishing times, which causes real difficulties when trying to organise childcare.

Of the young working parents we spoke to:

26% of young working parents have had their shifts changed at short notice.

19% of parents are given their rota less than a week in advance.

Workers from a previous TUC survey on insecure work also highlighted the difficulties with not having certainty of working hours:

"I don't get a rota for the coming week till the Friday if I am lucky – this makes planning anything but work difficult. During quiet periods I will have no shifts so making ends meet is hard but then if it's busy I'm expected to work 70+ hours."

The uncertainty makes both planning and affording childcare very difficult.

Workplace culture is not supportive of young parents

Workplace culture is a huge barrier to young parents being able to manage their childcare responsibilities.

One of the main barriers is that employers are not talking to parents about their childcare needs and how workplace policies could better support them.

51% of young parents have an employer who has never spoken to them about policies that exist to help them better balance work with childcare.

"They just see it like you're there to do a job, and they don't care."
(Female, All Sectors, More regular)

(These quotes are taken from young mums and dads who participated in the diary tracking task and focus groups. The quotes show whether they were involved in a focus group which had young mums and dads from a specific sector, or whether it was an "all sector" focus group. They also show the regularity of their working hours.)

Employer indifference, and in some cases, vindictive behaviour from line managers, means that many young parents are afraid to ask their employer for help.

Workplace culture can actively discourage young parents from using their rights or asking their employer for support. Parents showed concern that doing so would negatively impact them at work by:

- Jeopardising their job security if their manager views them as unreliable or a trouble maker
- Jeopardising their relationships with their colleagues who may perceive them to be getting special treatment

Over a third of young parents felt stigmatised at work because of needing flexibility to help manage childcare.

Vindictive behaviour from line managers can make life extremely difficult for staff and actively discourage them from asking for support. Young parents told us that vindictive line managers created a workplace climate which discouraged them from

Executive Summary

asking for help. Where they did need support from their line manager this often led to negative consequences for the young parents. For example:

- Their line manager deliberately making last minute shift changes making childcare arrangements even more difficult.
- Line managers using disciplinary and health monitoring procedures against staff who had taken absences because of children's sick days.

"My baby stopped breathing and I had to go to hospital – I got threatened with a disciplinary."

(Female, Retail, More regular)

Workplace culture is stuck in the past. Gender stereotypes are still rife in the workplace, with many employers viewing the mother as having the primary caring responsibilities. Employers under-estimate the childcare responsibilities that fathers have and would like to have. Young fathers' attitudes have shifted significantly over the last decade but employers have failed to keep up. Fathers reported feeling uncomfortable revealing the pressures on them as parents, to employers, for fear that these will not be well understood or accepted by their employer.

Half of young fathers in our survey felt stigmatised at work because of needing flexibility to help manage their childcare.

48% of men feel guilty when they bring up childcare issues at work

57% of fathers have employers who have never spoken to them about better work life balance policies

"My wife's got a better job than I do so we try to protect her work... so I'm the one who takes a day off if my kid is sick, and my female managers at work ask, 'doesn't your wife take care of her?' No, she doesn't. She's got a good job."

(Male, All Sectors, More regular)

Employment rights aren't doing enough to help parents manage these challenges

Despite a range of employment rights which have been designed to help young working parents, there is very low awareness of the employment rights that could help them spend more time with their kids. But this isn't the only problem. Many parents are afraid to use their rights and find that these rights often fall short of their expectations.

We asked young parents about their awareness and use of three key rights which are in place to support young parents who are working:

1. Right to time off for dependents	2. Right to request flexible working	3. Right to unpaid parental leave
<i>This right allows parents to take unpaid time off at short-notice to deal with an emergency involving dependents (these can be children, or others who depend on them for care).</i>	<i>This right means parents can ask for a change to the way they work for example, home-working, job sharing or changing your hours.</i>	<i>This right allows all parents to take time off work to look after their kids. This leave is unpaid and is available for each child up to their 18th birthday. Each parent qualifies for 18 weeks of leave per child in total. This can be used in blocks of a week, with up to 4 weeks a year being taken.</i>

58% of young parents feel they know little or nothing about what legal rights they have at work to help them balance work with childcare. This means many parents may be missing out on emergency time off to look after sick kids, missing out on changing their working patterns which would make it easier to drop off or pick up their kids, or missing out on parental leave which might help them out during the school holiday when their childcare arrangements are more difficult.

"I have to admit, I didn't know any of it really...I've never heard of that."

(Female, Retail, Less regular)

Lack of awareness of employment rights is one issue. There are other issues with these employment rights:

Executive Summary

- Young parents are often concerned about the consequences of using these rights. They are worried about how they will be perceived by their line manager and colleagues.
- The rights are very limited and the ability to use these rights greatly depends on the income level of families. Low paid parents suggested that rights which don't come with paid time off are just not feasible.
- Not all working parents can access these employment rights. In the UK, the range of different rights to which individuals are entitled varies substantially depending on whether they qualify as an “employee”, a “worker” or as “self-employed”. Core protections including access to many of the “family friendly” rights are reserved for “employees”. This means mums and dads in agency work or on zero hours contracts would not be able use rights such as the right to request flexible work. Many of these rights also require a parent to have been working for their employer for a period of time before they can qualify to use the right. For example, you have to be employed for 6 months before you can request to work flexibly.

Young parents gave us useful feedback on how employment rights could be reformed. They have clear expectations about what employment rights should look like.

Young parents wanted rights which still let them have a regular and predictable income. They wanted rights which let them plan in advance, but also react on short notice. And importantly they didn't want any negative impacts at work because they had decided to use their rights.

They also told us where existing employment rights fell short.

- Loss of earnings are biggest barrier to using their employment rights. This is especially true of the right to unpaid parental leave, which results in a significant loss of income over a short period of time. It's simply not affordable for parents to use these rights.
- It's too easy for employers to stop parents using the rights. This is especially true of the right to request flexible work. Young parents reported that where an employer wanted to turn down a request, it was too easy for them to do so.
- The notice period for using the rights was too long. This is especially true for the right to unpaid parental leave where the notice period required is 21 days. This meant that parents could not use this right at short notice to respond to a situation where childcare had fallen through, for example.

Coping strategies adopted by parents leave them short on time and money

Because of the challenges that young parents face they have to rely on different support networks to help them. And when these networks aren't able to provide the support needed they have to rely on other strategies to help them cope.

Parents rely on informal, formal and workplace networks to manage their childcare:

- Informal networks, such as family, friends and other school parents
- Formal networks, such as school, babysitters and nurseries
- Workplace networks, such as close colleagues

Problems often arise which mean that these support networks fail. This means parents must fall back on last resort strategies which have a detrimental impact on their time and finances. For example, many parents use their annual leave entitlement to look after a sick child.

29% of parents have used annual leave, in the last 12 months, to cover a sickness day for a child

“Annual leave is for accidents and birthdays.”

(Male, All sectors, Less regular)

24% of young parents have asked to take time off, with no pay at short notice to deal with a childcare issue within the last 12 months.

There are serious consequences for parents who are trying to manage

The daily grind of managing childcare with work responsibilities has inevitable consequences.

Many parents reported an adverse impact on their health. Trying to juggle work and childcare led to parents feeling anxious, stressed, tired and guilty that they couldn't give their best to either their children or their employer.

“When you are a mum and you are relying on others just the lack of control is very stressful as things are out of your hands.”

(Preston, diary entry)

Relying on informal networks means that when things go wrong, it is family and friends who suffer. Many young parents reported that personal relationships suffered as they often had to let down family and friends when work prevented them from

Executive Summary

picking their kids up on time or when they had to ask them to provide childcare at extremely short notice.

Parents also reported that their reputation was tarnished at work when they experienced difficulties with childcare. They felt they were jeopardising their job security if their manager viewed them as unreliable or a trouble maker. They also felt they were putting their working relationships under strain as colleagues may perceive that they are receiving getting special treatment.

Parents are often left short of time to spend with their families as many of them use annual leave to cover childcare emergencies.

29% of parents have used annual leave, in the last 12 months, to cover a sickness day for a child

Juggling childcare with work priorities often has a detrimental impact on young parents' finances. Notwithstanding the massive cost of childcare, 24% of young parents take time off with no pay at short notice. And 10% have incurred penalty fees for picking up children late.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Young parents do not get enough support in the workplace. They face three key challenges when trying to manage their childcare with work responsibilities:

- A lack of certainty over working hours,
- Workplace culture that doesn't support young parents,
- And employment rights which low paid, young parents say are too difficult to use because of the lack of pay.

But there are changes that government, employers and unions could make that would make a real difference to families' lives.

Changing working practices

Shift variability

Young parents reported that being given short notice of shifts and being uncertain about shift finishing times caused them great difficulties. It impacts on their time, income and ability to organise childcare for their kids.

We propose that:

- 1. Government should ban the regular use of Zero Hours Contracts. Individuals who work regular hours should have a right to a written contract guaranteeing their normal working hours.**

This would give greater income security to young mums and dads who normally work regular hours. It would also help them with their childcare as there would be less fluctuation in their working hours each week.

2. Young parents and all staff should be given notice of their shifts at least one month in advance.

This would give parents greater certainty about their working hours and help them to plan their childcare in advance. It would also give them greater certainty about their income over the next month.

3. Employers should be required to pay for a scheduled shift that is cancelled at short notice, including their travel costs if they have come into work for their shift.

4. Parents who are employed on zero or short hours contracts should have a right to be paid a premium, in the form of overtime payments, for any non-contractual hours worked.

This would encourage employers to give their staff contracts which reflect their real working hours. It would give parents greater certainty about their weekly working hours and also their weekly income.

Day one rights for all parents

5. All working parents should have access to the same rights, from day one in their jobs. All workers, including zero-hours contracts workers, agency workers and those in casual work, should benefit from the same decent floor of rights currently enjoyed by employees. This includes all family friendly rights, which are by and large, only available to “employees”.

Unpaid parental leave

We propose several reforms to unpaid parental leave, to make it more effective:

6. There is very low awareness of the right to unpaid parental leave amongst young parents. We suggest renaming this right to “childcare leave” as it sums up the right better and would hopefully raise greater awareness of this right.

7. Parental leave should be paid. It is not affordable for many young parents to take time off unpaid. The government should start by introducing a period of 5 days paid parental leave. It should be paid at least at the rate of the relevant National Minimum Wage rate.

8. The current notice period for taking unpaid parental leave is 21 days. This should be shortened to 5 days so parents can use this leave in conjunction with the right to time off for dependants, to make sure they can take care of their kids when they are sick.

9. **At the moment, unpaid parental leave can only be taken in blocks of one week. Young parents told us that it would be helpful if they could use this leave in shorter periods. We propose that mums and dads should be able to take parental leave in one day slots. This is currently the case for those mums and dads with disabled children.**

Right to request flexible working

We propose a reform to the right to request flexible working to make it more effective:

10. **It should be possible to request a temporary change to working patterns. At the moment, a granted request for flexible working results in a permanent change to terms and conditions. It should be possible to request a temporary change to terms and conditions so that parents can react to temporary changes in circumstances.**

Right to time off for dependants

We propose a couple of reforms to the right to time off for dependants:

11. **This should be a paid right. It should be paid at least at the rate of the relevant National Minimum Wage rate. Young parents reported that it was difficult to use this right as they couldn't afford to take the time off unpaid.**
12. **There should be greater clarity about how many days a parent can take off to look after their kids. There should be a clear provision of 5 days paid leave to look after dependants.**

Above, we have proposed that the government should also introduce a period of 5 days paid parental leave. We think the right to paid time off for dependants and paid parental leave would work in synergy. For example, a young parent whose child falls sick at short notice, could use their right to paid leave to look after a dependant. If their child was likely to be sick for longer than 5 days, they could give notice (5 days' notice period, under our proposal) and then use some of their parental leave, once the 5 days' time off for dependants had been used up.

Both these rights would give parents a right to look after their sick child and protect their income whilst doing so.

Changing workplace culture

Workplace culture is a huge barrier to young parents being able to manage their childcare responsibilities.

13. **There should be a government campaign targeted at young parents to raise awareness of the employment rights which help those parents who have returned to work, get better support to manage their childcare and work responsibilities. The government should raise awareness of**

employment rights at key touchpoints. For example, the MATB1 form could be used to inform pregnant women about their rights.

14. Alongside this, there should be a campaign aimed at businesses which promotes the business benefits of developing policies that help young parents. This would include promoting evidence and case studies which highlight the positive impact on recruitment and retention and increased productivity, for example.

15. Alongside an awareness raising campaigns there should be a legal requirement for all workers to receive information about their workplace rights, including the rights which will help them manage their childcare needs and the right to join a trade union.

All workers should have a day-one right to a written statement setting out their pay and conditions, including their expected hours of work. This should include all the day one statutory rights that young parents are entitled to, how they are calculated and how they will be paid. This would include information about workplace rights that support young parents to manage their childcare. This is supported by a recommendation in the recent Taylor Review.

16. Trade unions should continue to negotiate workplace policies with employers that help young parents to take time off to spend with their kids. Through dialogue with employers, unions play a vital role in changing workplace culture for the better.

The report sets out further information about the trade union impact on workplace policies which support young parents. We've also included some brief examples of agreements negotiated between employers and unions.

Most jobs are not advertised flexibly. Many staff are not getting the benefit of being able to use positive flexible working options, which would help them manage their childcare, even though flexible working might be possible in their workplace. This can include practices such as flexitime, compressed hours and term time working. And employers are recruiting from a smaller talent pool as many parents see flexible working as increasingly important. We should move to a starting point that jobs can be done flexibly unless there's a business reason why not, rather than the other way around.

17. It should be the default position that all staff can benefit from positive flexible working practices. This would especially help parents manage their childcare. Employers should have to justify where it is not possible to advertise a role flexibly. This would be a big step towards changing workplace culture and creating a more supportive climate for young parents to work flexibly and manage their childcare needs.

Section two

Introduction

This report is a window into the ordinary working lives of mums and dads. Its findings won't be news to those parents trying to give their kids a great start in life as well as do a good job at work. But it reminds the rest of us that, despite the advances of the last two decades in family-friendly rights, the combination of working and bringing up children is still too hard. And that's doubly so for those parents who are the focus of this report: younger workers with school-age children, earning less than the UK median income, many of whom work in jobs with unpredictable hours.

Anyone who has raised kids knows how tough it can be. I certainly remember the pressure of running against the clock between the nursery and the job. I think my generation of working mums hoped it would get easier for those who followed us: but instead, the juggling act is getting more difficult for many lower-income parents, struggling to cope with zero hours contracts, variable shift patterns and unsupportive bosses.

We shouldn't discount the legal changes that have progressively given more rights to pregnant women, new mums and dads, and the parents of older children. But during this project, we heard lower income parents tell us over and over again that concepts like "work-life balance", "family friendly work" and "flexible working" didn't feel like they applied to them. They thought these were for other people – women with children who worked in offices, in better-paying jobs, who could afford to reduce their pay. When we talked them through the rights that they already have in law, they didn't know about them – and worse, they couldn't imagine taking them up, because they were afraid to do so.

This report is about those mums and dads – and it's intended to stimulate a conversation about how we change the world of work to make sure they can simultaneously be even better parents and do well at work. All the solutions we propose are grounded in what mums and dads told us would really work for them.

I want everyone who reads this report to act. We need legislative changes to make jobs better and to tweak existing family-friendly rights so they work for today's working mums and dads. Employers need to lead the culture change we need to support mums and dads at work, and stop the managers they employ making the lives of parents harder. And everyone at work – managers and colleagues alike – need to think about how they create an atmosphere that supports parents, rather than undermines them.

There is a key role for unions too. We need to make sure that wherever we are recognised, we are bargaining for a better deal for mums and dads. Unions already represent more than 300,000 younger parents. Being in a union is one of the best

ways to make sure you can get your rights as a working dad or mum. But currently, just 9% of 21-30s in the private sector are members of trade unions. As these young workers settle down and start families they'll hit the same barriers and problems we've written about in this report. So we need to get out there and organise workplace by workplace to make sure more mums and dads get those protections that only unions can offer.

I am hugely proud of this work, and hope it can make a real difference to how we think about helping out the next generation of parents in the workplace. And above all, I'd like to thank all the young parents who gave up time with the kids to tell us about their lives and help us with our research.

Frances O'Grady

General Secretary

Section three

What are the key challenges that young parents face?

The first part of the research was to identify the main challenges that young parents face. We found that things outside work create a range of challenges for parents, with childcare provision a major barrier. But as trade unions' main influence is within the workplace, we wanted to focus our attention there.

We found that young parents do not get enough support in the workplace. They face three key challenges when trying to manage their childcare with work responsibilities:

- A lack of certainty over working hours
- Workplace culture that actively discourages them from seeking support from their employers
- And employment rights that young parents say are therefore too difficult to use because of the lack of pay.

Research methods

Our research involved a two-week diary tracking task and six focus groups. We spoke with 56 young parents and heard directly about their experiences. The diary task meant we could hear from parents on a regular basis and learn about challenges as they arose. All young parents we spoke to:

- had at least one child aged between 1 and 16 years old;
- were aged between 20 and 35;
- had household earnings of less than £28,000;
- And none found it easy or very easy to organise childcare with their working hours.

We spoke with young parents across the country, visiting parents in towns and cities including Coventry, Hull, Preston and Harlow. We held four focus groups with women and two focus groups with men. Two of the focus groups involved retail workers. The remaining four represented workers across all sectors.

We then designed a survey, which was shaped by the feedback from the 56 parents, to explore these issues across a broader range of young parents. We surveyed 1,050 young parents to find out more about their experiences

Things that happen outside work create challenges

Parents reported that there are four common challenges outside of work, which make their lives more difficult.

Childcare provision	Children becoming ill	School holidays	Traffic and transport
- Childcare provision can be inflexible. There are often set hours or term-based provision. - It often needs to be booked in advance, which is tricky where shift patterns vary. - Childcare is expensive! - It has to be paid for even if it isn't used. - There are significant penalties for picking children up late. - Informal childcare provision, such as friends and family, are often reliant on 'goodwill', which means personal relationships can suffer when problems arise.	- If a child becomes suddenly ill, then the parents need to respond quickly - It's very hard to find cover for an ill child, childcare providers will often not take poorly children - Parents may need to take more time off, and the situation can spiral if a bug 'travels' and the rest of the family becomes poorly. - Young parents reported that children who suffer from longer term conditions additionally require regular and frequent appointments	- The level of childcare and planning required increases massively - And often the resources (both time and money) to provide a comprehensive childcare plan are not in place - For example, funds for clubs are limited, availability of others to help is restricted, and the ability to get time off from work is difficult (due to high demand from other parents at this time.)	- Even short delays have huge knock-on effects (e.g. late for pick up / work / swapping over with partner) - These problems are exacerbated when parents are reliant on public transport

Trade unions are experienced at resolving workplace issues. We campaign and negotiate for improvements to working life. Because of this, our research focussed on the in-work challenges that young parents face.

Challenges that happen inside work

Shift work and everyday working practices were identified as the biggest barrier to parents being able to manage their childcare.

Shift variability

Parents said that having regular hours or advance rotas make the balancing act between work and childcare much easier. Unfortunately, it's common for young parents to experience a high level of variability in their working hours.

26% of the young parents we spoke to reported that they have a very high level of variability in their working hours

What are the key challenges that young parents face?

When hours are variable, arranging childcare becomes much more challenging. Many childcare providers require advance booking, which simply isn't possible if you don't know what hours are required. Many parents also use informal networks for childcare, such as family and friends. Friends and family need to know when to be available, which, again, is not possible when working hours are up in the air. Relying on family and friends, and not being able to provide them with sufficient advance notice can also increase the strain on personal relationships and lead to young parents feeling increasingly guilty for causing inconvenience to others.

Our research has shown that variability of hours is a real problem for young working parents.

Variability of hours manifests itself in different forms. For example:

26%

Of young parents have had their shift times changed at short notice within the last 12 months

19%

Of young parents have been given their rota less than a week ahead of time in the last 12 months

Overtime and working late

Many young parents feel obliged to take on shifts at short notice. Refusing shifts can have a negative impact on a family's finances, particularly those in insecure and low paid work. Therefore, an employer's request for overtime and/or working late can often leave a young parent with little choice but to take on the additional work, meaning parents have to arrange "emergency cover" more frequently. This can be costly as care providers can charge more when little notice is given. It also means relying on those informal networks of friends and family more often. This is stressful and can harm the relationships with those providing their childcare cover.

Our research into insecure work¹⁰ earlier in the year also revealed the pressure placed on workers to take on shifts at short notice.

"Feeling pressured to take on extra shifts at very short notice (less than an hour sometimes), worried that if I don't take them I won't get offered extra work in future, which would mean not getting enough work to pay bills."

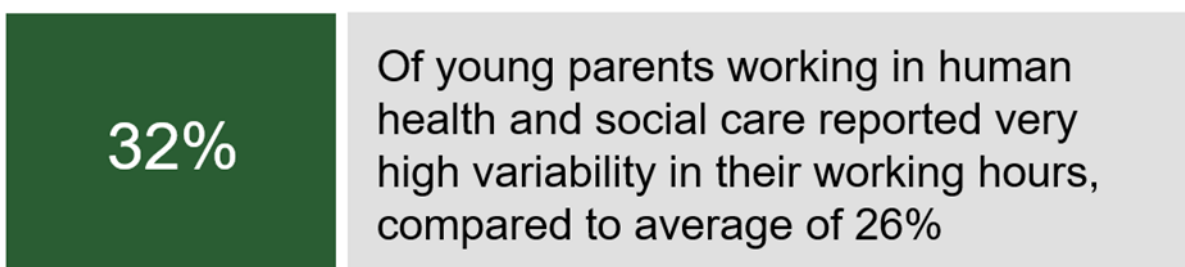
Female community care assistant aged 20-25 working on a zero-hours contract

¹⁰ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/the-gig-is-up.pdf>

This was echoed by the young parents that we spoke to, who reported that they got fewer hours and worse shift patterns when they took time off for childcare reasons.

Unpredictability is much worse in some sectors

Despite small sample sizes from our survey, there are indications that experiences of unpredictability vary greatly from sector to sector. For example:



Problems with being given rotas at short notice are a key concern in the food services sector. And workers in the accommodation and facilities sector, such as hotel workers, are much more likely to face uncertainty about their working hours and when they will be able to finish work.

Food services	Higher incidence of young parents having their rota given to them less than a week ahead of time (34% compared to average of 19%)
Accommodation and facilities	- Higher incidence of young parents being unable to finish work on time (44% compared to average of 31%) - Higher incidence of them having their shift times changed at short notice (40% compared to average of 26%)

Cultural barriers that hinder young working parents

As well as working practices that make it difficult for parents to plan their time and income, workplace culture is seen by young parents as a real obstacle to managing their childcare responsibilities with work.

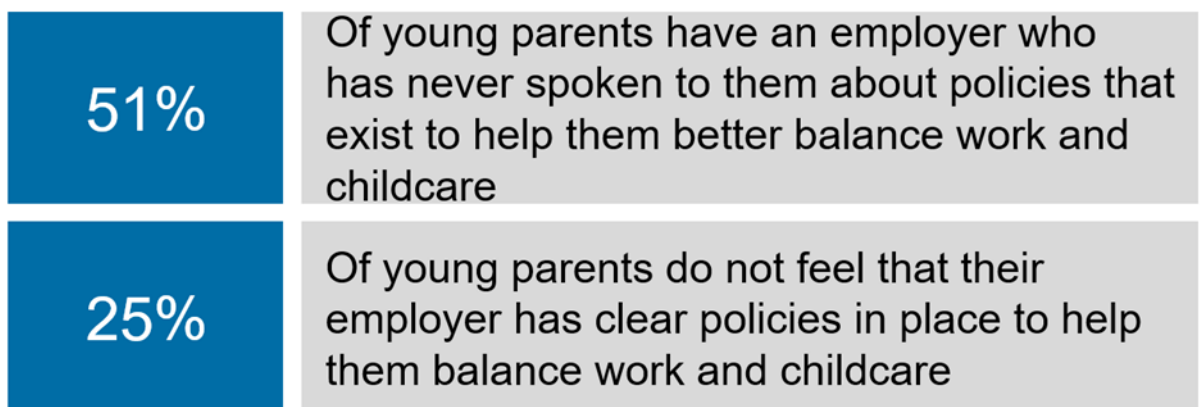
Indifference from employers

For young parents, it's obviously a key priority to ensure that their children are looked after properly. If this part of their life is causing them difficulties, the added stress and anxiety is likely to have a negative impact on their work. So, we would

What are the key challenges that young parents face?

expect employers to take the time to speak to their staff about policies they have in place to help their staff balance their work and childcare responsibilities.

However, we found that nearly a quarter of young parents (23%) in our survey did not feel that their employer understands the demands on their time as parents. And nearly a quarter (24%) of young parents in our survey did not feel that their employer does anything to accommodate their childcare needs. For the most part, parents did not feel that employers took any proactive steps to support them.



The stark reality is that in too many cases, the perceived needs of the business will trump the needs of the young parent who has caring responsibilities.

“They just see it like you’re there to do a job, and they don’t care.”

(Female, All Sectors, More regular)

Shockingly, some young parents found little sympathy from employers even if their children had to be rushed to hospital:

Shortly after I got a call to say that my little one's reflux is getting worse and he was having difficulty breathing so I had to rush him to A & E. Earlier got a call again from work to find out when I will be back. Some managers have no sympathy or feelings.

(Diary entry: Female, Social care, More regular)

Attitudes amongst working families are changing and they are placing a much higher priority on achieving a good work life balance and spending time with their families. Employers need to adapt to meet these changing expectations. Discussing challenges and concerns with staff and their trade unions means they can develop policies to make sure people can meet their caring needs. This, in turn, will make it much easier for employers to recruit and retain staff.

Negative perceptions associated with asking an employer for support

Parents said they worried that asking for flexibility would result in them being seen as unreliable or expecting special treatment. Over a third of young parents in our survey felt stigmatised at work because of needing flexibility to help manage their childcare. They reported a sense that they are “sticking out” for the wrong reasons. In some cases, parents are given a hard time when they can't help their employer with extra shifts or working long hours. Parents have also reported that there are penalties attached to asking for time off to look after children such as getting worse shifts or being given fewer hours.

42%

Of young parents feel penalised at work when they need flexibility to help them look after their children

Vindictive behaviour from employers

Where parents do not have a good relationship with their direct manager, this can lead to serious problems. In some cases, parents reported that their managers are deliberately making it difficult for them. We heard examples of the following types of behaviour from managers:

- Vindictive actions by line managers, including shift changes, breaching confidentiality, and creating an atmosphere of fear which stopped parents raising issues related to childcare.

What are the key challenges that young parents face?

- Making demands on time that the manager knows can't be met due to family responsibilities, which leads to the parent taking an "unauthorised absence".
- Line managers using disciplinary and health monitoring procedures against staff who had taken absences because of children's sick days.
- Some young parents told us that they had seen instances where taking time off to look after children had led directly to people losing their jobs.

"My baby stopped breathing and I had to go to hospital – I got threatened with a disciplinary."

(Female, Retail, More regular)

This type of behaviour was prevalent in large retail sites and the "in home social care" sector.

These shocking examples highlight the need for a cultural shift in workplaces so young parents are not discouraged and punished for using their employment rights or asking for support.

Employers are not keeping up with the changing attitudes of young fathers

Our research shows that young fathers feel that the modern workplace is not meeting their needs. The attitudes and priorities of young fathers have changed and many employers are not keeping up.

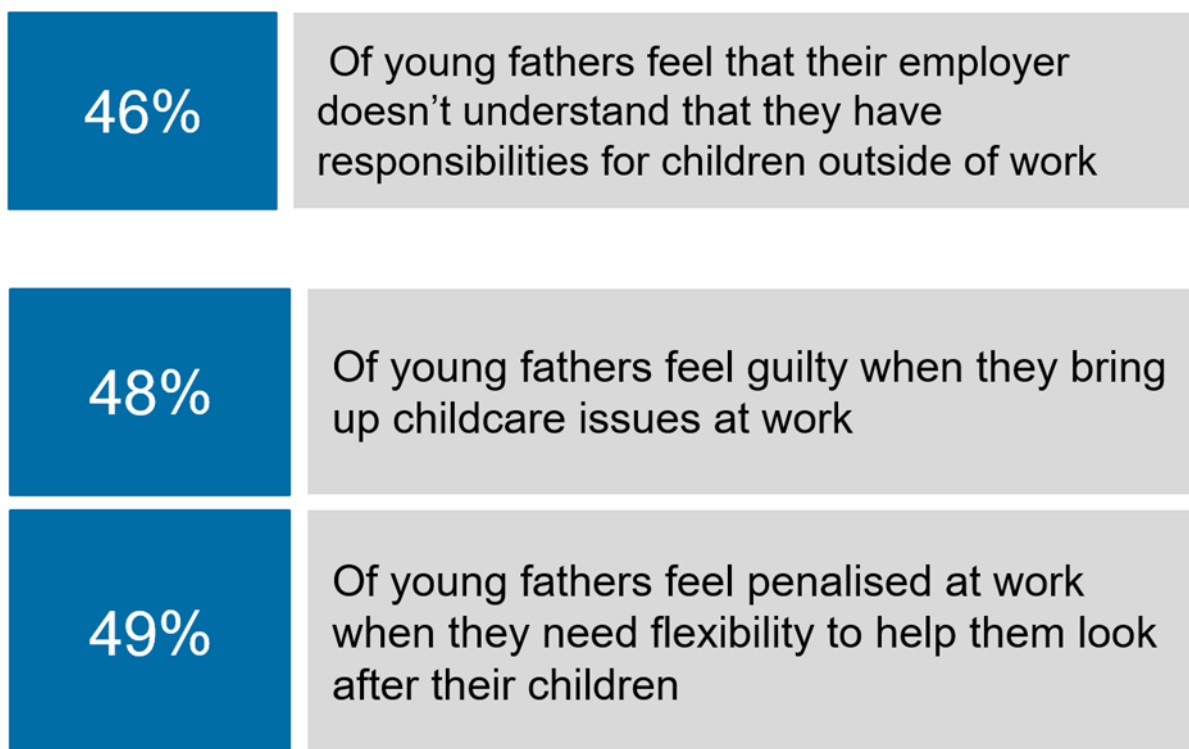
The recent Modern Families Index, published by the Working Families, suggested that the UK is running the risk of creating a "fatherhood penalty" – as fathers consider stalling or side-lining their careers to find roles they can better combine with family life. Their research¹¹ showed **that nearly half of working fathers want to downshift into a less stressful job because they can't balance the demands of work and family life.**

Our research echoes these findings, with a significant proportion of the young fathers that we have spoken to, suggesting that workplace culture is prohibitive to them managing the balance between childcare and work.

Fathers reported feeling uncomfortable revealing the pressures on them as parents, to employers, for fear that these will not be well understood or accepted by their

¹¹ <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/news/2017-mfi/>

employer. Half of young fathers in our survey felt stigmatised at work because of needing flexibility to help manage their childcare.



Young fathers are less likely than women to use their workplace rights. For example, men (19%) are 7% less likely to have used the legal right to time off for dependants than women (26%). And they are 6% less likely to have used the legal right to request flexible working than women (17% compared to 23%). As well as workplace culture discouraging fathers from taking a greater role in looking after their children, this also reflects the fact that women do still have the majority of caring responsibilities.

The recent Modern Families Index, revealed the following:

- 53% of millennial fathers want to downshift into a less stressful job because they can't balance the demands of work and family life.
- 48% of millennial fathers said that they would be willing to take a pay cut to achieve a better work-life balance.

Employers should offer more support to young fathers and help shape a culture which encourages fathers to use their rights to meet their priorities. If not, young fathers may vote with their feet, and find employers with a more progressive outlook.

What are the key challenges that young parents face?

Lack of awareness of employment rights and concerns around exercising their rights

We tested the awareness and use of three, key legal rights for working parents.

1. Right to time off for dependents	2. Right to request flexible working	3. Right to unpaid parental leave
<i>This right allows you to take unpaid time off at short-notice to deal with an emergency involving your dependents (these can be your children, or others who depend on you for care). For example, if you receive a call from school saying your child is sick you would be able to leave straight away to attend to your child and arrange provisions for their care</i>	<i>This right means you can ask for a change to the way you work for example, home-working, job sharing or changing your hours. For example, if you want to make sure that you can always drop your children at school/nursery you could request to start work half an hour later and stay half an hour extra to compensate. Though your employer is not obligated to grant this.</i>	<i>This right allows you to take time off work to look after your child's welfare. This leave is normally unpaid and is available for each child up to their 18th birthday. Each parent qualifies for 18 weeks of leave per child in total. This can be used in blocks of a week, with up to 4 weeks a year being taken. For example, if you know that the summer holidays are particularly hard to cover for childcare, you could request a few weeks off unpaid during this time to help look after your child yourself.</i>

"I have to admit, I didn't know any of it really...I've never heard of that."

(Female, Retail, Less regular)

Most young parents (58%) feel they know little or nothing about what legal rights they have at work to help them balance work with childcare.

Parents tend to be most knowledgeable and confident when they feel established in their role. This is more difficult to achieve when you are working part time, or when you don't have good relationships at work. 67% of young parents working part time say they know little or nothing about their rights.

50%

Of young parents said they were **unaware** of the legal right to time off for dependents

Many of those young parents who take time off to look after dependants are unaware that they are using a legal right, and it is often seen as a "risky" solution that could

impact job security. Young parents should not be discouraged from using their legal rights.

43%

Of young parents said they were **unaware** of the legal right to request flexible working

Again, parents who are unaware of this right, often perceive this to be a risky solution that may impact their job security or mark them as “difficult” in some way.

63%

Of young parents say they are **unaware** of the legal right to request unpaid parental leave

The majority of young parents are unaware this is a legal right, and most did not think they would be comfortable asking their manager directly for time off in this way.

Lack of awareness of employment rights is not the only problem. Many young parents showed concern that exercising these rights would negatively impact them at work. They felt it could jeopardise their job security if their manager viewed them as unreliable or a trouble maker. There was also concern that it could jeopardise their relationships with their colleagues who may perceive them to be getting special treatment.

Conclusion

The research showed that despite the introduction of new rights for working families in the past two decades, many parents still face challenges juggling their work and family life. The next section of the report looks at the coping strategies parents use to manage these.

What are the key challenges that young parents face?

What are trade unions doing to support young parents?

Unions represent around 300,000 young parents. Every day, trade unions negotiate with employers to introduce and improve workplace policies which help young parents.

In previous research, we've looked at the positive impact that trade unions have on workplace policies that help parents. Our research revealed that unionised workplaces have more policies that help mums and dads, such as parental leave, paid family leave, child-care and job sharing – compared with similar workplaces without unions¹². Where an employer and union have a formal agreement to work together, these workplaces have, on average, one more policy that would help mums and dads than workplaces where unions are not recognised by the employer.

The research also showed that the number of workplace policies which help with parental and paid family leave increase in line with the number of union members in the workplace, suggesting these policies come about because of the strength of union bargaining power.

Unions also increase employee awareness of these important policies, making it more likely that mums and dads will be able to benefit from them.

In unionised workplaces, there is a more supportive workplace culture for young parents. In both the public and private sector, managers in unionised workplaces were significantly less likely to think it was up to individual employees to balance their work and family responsibilities, than managers in non-unionised workplaces.

Young parents in unionised workplaces are less likely to work long hours. The probability that an employee usually works more than 48 hours per week falls as the number of union members in a workplace increases. This is another plus for young parents, as a “long hours culture” can impact on the time spent with their children.

There is plenty of evidence to show that unions negotiate with employers to develop:

- policies which can help mums and dads, and
- supportive workplace cultures for mums and dads.

Each year the TUC carries out an Equality Audit¹³. Unions give us practical examples of policies they have introduced to help young parents. Below are some examples of unions negotiating improvements to parental leave. This is one of the key rights that young parents identified as problematic.

¹² Bryson and Forth, 2016, Budd and Mumford, 2004; Dex and Smith, 2002

¹³

https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Congress_2016_TUC%20Equality%20Audit_Digital.pdf

Last year almost half of respondents to the Equality Audit reported that they had negotiated with their employer to provide some amount of pay for Parental Leave. Unions have negotiated many agreements which go beyond the statutory minimum requirements of parental leave:

- NHS Scotland’s model policy requires employers to provide eligible employees with four weeks of parental leave at full pay. The Homes and Communities Agency pays the first three weeks of parental leave at full pay. The Big Lottery Fund allows parents one week’s parental leave on full pay per year if they have a child under the age of eight. The Department of Transport allows parents of disabled children up to three weeks paid parental leave in any 12-month period up to a maximum entitlement of 26 weeks’ paid parental leave.
- In terms of flexibility, a rep at the University of Bedfordshire said the way parental leave must be taken “is not prescriptive” and can be taken in “short or long blocks”. An agreement negotiated at the University Hospitals of Leicestershire means leave can be taken on a day by-day basis. A number of other agreements allow for leave to be taken as single days. These are Aston University, Cereal Partners UK (Bromborough), Co-operative Banking Group, Durham Police Staff, Institute for Employment Studies, North Lanarkshire Council, Northern Ireland Civil service and the University of Reading.
- Unpaid parental leave is normally available for those employees who have one year’s service. Unions negotiate for this to be a day one right. Reps reporting that their employers have extended the leave to those without a year’s service include those at Cardiff and Vale College and British Gas (for those who have completed a six-month probation period), Fujitsu Services (26 weeks’ service), and for all employees at HM Prison Service, Swindon Borough Council, University of Liverpool and Turning Point Scotland. Dial Leeds and London Fire and Emergency Service only require staff to have completed probation/initial training rather than having one year’s service.

Section four

How do parents deal with the challenges that they face?

In this section of the report we look at how parents cope with the challenges they find at work. We found that parents have to create a ‘jigsaw’ of childcare, often involving family and friends. When this breaks down, parents rarely use their employment rights, instead relying on annual leave and sometimes taking sick days themselves. When parents don’t have proper support this often left them feeling anxious and stressed, and worried about their reputation at work.

Young Parents have to create a “jigsaw” of childcare

Parents rely on different networks to help them manage work and childcare. The first port of call for many low paid, young parents will be “informal networks” such as family members, close friends and other school mums and dads.

- These options are mostly unpaid, but young parents have to repay these favours, so this will result in further time constraints for parents.
- These support mechanisms depend on good will to work smoothly.
- Informal networks are part of the “business as usual” model, so are routine for most young, low paid mums and dads.

“I still had customers in the shop with me at 5 which meant I had to stay later so I had to ring my mum to go to my house and wait for [my son] coming back from his dad's and I didn't get home till 6.30.”

(Female, Retail, Less regular)

Parents often use formal networks, such as school clubs, babysitters and nurseries for childcare. These formal childcare mechanisms cost parents money and they also have to be planned in advance, with parents giving notice to use them. They can only be used for fixed periods and there is a risk of financial penalties for parents when they run late.

*"I can't put them in a nursery on an off chance, it's got to be stable."
(Female, All sectors, More regular)*

Parents will often use workplace networks to help them as well. For example, swapping shifts with friendly colleagues is one solution used by young parents. This often happens when rotas are first shared, but can also happen on an ad hoc reactive basis. Parents reported that this provides them with an opportunity to balance working time and childcare "under the radar". However, parents reported that some companies have formalised shift swaps and have specific processes in place to accommodate this.

*"The senior will sign it off about whether we can swap but we do all the sorting ourselves."
(Female, Social care, Less regular)*

Jointly headed households have an advantage in managing this jigsaw, since they can share the burden between them. Within a joint household where both partners work, several solutions are used:

- The lower earning partner's wages are sacrificed so the higher earning partner can attend work. In practice, this often skews towards mums making the call to stay off work or cut their hours. This is a key contributing factor to the gender pay gap.
- The number of "sick days" being used, are shared out between parents, to avoid one partner's record becoming a cause for concern.
- Parents work opposite shifts, which can lead to families not spending much time together.
- Splitting responsibility for children's events or simply missing them altogether such as parents' evenings, sports days and assemblies.
- Taking alternate weeks of leave during the school holidays.

It's more difficult for single parent families, as obviously, they are not able to use the strategies above, which see jointly headed households sharing care responsibilities.

How do parents deal with the challenges that they face?

Missing pieces in the “jigsaw”

For nearly all parents, the jigsaw is incomplete, imperfect and not always able to adapt when they need it to.

Inevitably, weeks occur in which there are sudden gaps, due to:

- Childcare becoming unavailable or falling through

“My childcare informed me this morning that she has a vomiting bug and is unable to look after my child.”

(Female, All sectors, Less regular)

- Working hours being changed at short notice; and
- Unexpected events derailing plans such as illness within the family.

Our research clearly demonstrates that problems arise, regularly:

19%	Of young parents have been late picking their child up from childcare in the last 12 months
10%	Of young parents have incurred penalty fees for picking their child up late in the last 12 months

Coping strategies

When the unexpected occurs, parents have several coping strategies.

1. Parents take sick days instead of admitting their child is ill for two reasons:

- In most cases this ensures their income is covered
- For some, it means they are avoiding the feeling that “they’re always asking for something because of the kids”.

33%	Of young parents have taken a sick day when actually it was their child who was ill, within the last 12 months
-----	--

Many parents reported using this strategy when they had a poor relationship with their managers. But all reported that this wasn’t a comfortable choice and used as a last resort because there was no other choice.

"It all depends on your manager because I've done that before when I've thought, 'If I ring in and say he's ill I'm not getting paid.' So I ring in and say 'I'm ill...'"

(Male, All sectors, More regular)

2. Parents take annual leave to look after their sick child.

29%

Of young parents have used annual leave to cover a sickness day for a child within the last 12 months

Annual leave is often seen as a “reserve” of days to be used in an emergency or to cover required appointments. Parents keep this “bank” in place, protecting it as much as possible. There is a cultural assumption that this is what annual leave is for.

“Annual leave is for accidents and birthdays.”

(Male, All sectors, Less regular)

Some young parents even expressed a sense of “owing it to their employers” to think about using their annual leave in this way.

Again, the effectiveness of this coping strategy to take time off at short notice relies on a parent’s relationship with their line manager.

3. Taking unpaid leave to look after children.

24%

Of young parents have asked to take time off with no pay on short notice to deal with a childcare issue within the last 12 months

This is a last resort strategy, used in sudden emergencies and often only if parents feel they have already taken too many sick days.

How do parents deal with the challenges that they face?

Importantly parents also try to take steps to try and avoid having to use these strategies in the first place:

- They don't apply for jobs where they know the shifts may be difficult or will be very upfront at the interview stage about restrictions on their time.
- They will continue to work with more difficult arrangements – because it's in their contract.
- They anticipate that certain times of year are going to be difficult and absorb this into their planning (e.g. Christmas working, or summer holiday rushes)

The impact on young parents when they don't have proper support

Young parents told us how they are affected when they are struggling to cope.

Anxiety, stress, fatigue and guilt

Many parents reported an adverse impact on their health. Trying to manage the balancing act of work and childcare led to parents feeling anxious, stressed, tired and guilty that they couldn't give their best to either their children or their employer.

"When you are a mum and you are relying on others just the lack of control is very stressful as things are out of your hands."

(Preston, diary entry)

36%

Of young parents feel guilty when they bring up childcare issues at work

"Part of the guilt is that while you're at work you're not with your kid and you think, 'I've not seen you since 8.45 this morning when I've dropped you off and you're in bed when I get back'. The other guilt is when you've had a bad night with a kid and you're understandably knackered at work, so you're not pulling your weight so there's guilt from that side as well."

(Female, Retail, Less regular)

Relying on informal networks means that when things go wrong, it is family and friends who suffer the consequences. Many young parents reported that personal

relationships suffered as they often had to let down family and friends when work got in the way of childcare.

Parents also reported that their reputation was tarnished at work, when they experienced difficulties with childcare. They felt they were jeopardising their job security if their manager views them as unreliable or a trouble maker. And it was jeopardising their relationships with their colleagues who may perceive them to be getting special treatment

Parents are often left short of time to spend with their families as many of them use annual leave to cover childcare emergencies.

29%

Of young parents have used annual leave to cover a sickness day for a child within the last 12 months

Managing childcare with work priorities often has a detrimental impact on young parents' finances. Notwithstanding the massive cost of childcare, 24% of young parents take time off with no pay at short notice.

Someone was late at work so I couldn't leave until they came which made me nearly late to pick my little boy up from nursery. If I pick him up late I have to pay £5 every five mins I'm late which I can't afford.

(Diary entry: Female, Retail, Less regular)

And:

10%

Of young parents have incurred penalty fees for picking their child up late in the last 12 months

Parents have also reported that there are penalties attached to asking for time off to look after children such as getting worse shifts or being given fewer hours.

Conclusions

The research found that despite the help of family and friends, many parents are still struggling. The next section looks at parents' views of the employment rights designed to help them manage these challenges.

Section five

What do parents think about the employment rights which were designed to help them?

Over the last couple of decades, employment rights have been introduced that have made it easier for mums and dads to spend more time with their kids as a result of campaigning by trade unions and parents. Welcome increases in maternity and paternity leave and pay, have made a real positive difference. Other rights have also been introduced such as the right to time off for dependants, the right to request flexible work and unpaid parental leave. The table below sets out a full list of the rights that have been won over time.

Date	Statutory right that was introduced or improved
1975	6 weeks' maternity pay and right to return to same job up to 29 weeks after childbirth
1986	18 weeks' Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP)
1999	13 weeks' unpaid parental leave per child which can be taken up to child's 5 th birthday Right to take time off for dependants
2001	Unpaid parental leave for parents of disabled children improved – extended to 18 weeks and can be taken up to their 18 th birthday
2003	52 weeks' maternity leave and SMP extended to 26 weeks 2 weeks' paternity leave and Statutory Paternity Pay 52 weeks' adoption leave and 39 weeks' Statutory Adoption Pay introduced and partners adopting a child gained rights to paternity leave Right to request flexible working for parents of children up to age 5 and disabled children up to age 18
2007	SMP extended to 39 weeks Right to request flexible working extended to carers of adults

2009	Right to request flexible working extended to parents of children up to age 17
2011	Additional Paternity Leave introduced allowing mother to transfer up to 26 weeks of maternity leave from 20 weeks after childbirth
2013	Unpaid parental leave entitlement increased to 18 weeks per child
2014	Right to request flexible working available to all employees (provided meet qualifying criteria of 26 weeks' service)
2015	Shared Parental Leave replaces APL allowing mothers and fathers more flexibility in how they transfer and take first years' leave Statutory Adoption Pay improved to match SMP so first 6 weeks' paid at 90% of normal earnings Parents having a child via surrogacy gain rights to adoption leave, paternity leave and shared parental leave Unpaid parental leave improved by allowing parents to take it up to child's 18th birthday

Feedback from trade unions representing members in sectors where there are large numbers of low paid parents tell us that they have not seen the benefits hoped for from legislation like the right to request flexible working. So we asked the young parents we spoke to how employment rights could be improved to make them more effective.

Young parents gave us useful feedback on why employment rights need to be reformed:

- There is a real lack of awareness of the existing employment rights that could help parents manage their childcare whilst they are working (as we set out in section two).
- They have clear expectations about what employment rights should look like.
- They pointed out that existing rights fall well short of these expectations and gave us examples of how they don't work.

Young parents identified four criteria for judging the effectiveness of employment rights:

What do parents think about the employment rights which were designed to help them?

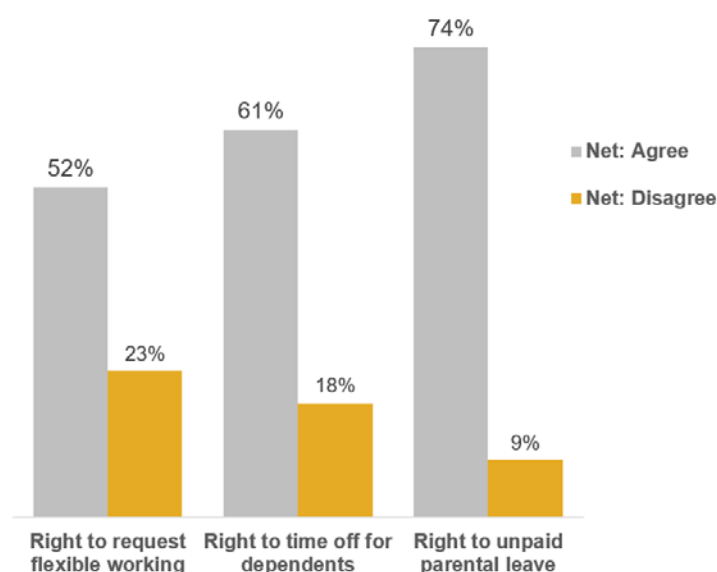
1. Income – regular and predictable	Essential to this demographic, with even small losses resulting in serious consequences, especially when unexpected	<i>"You can't afford not being paid because your kids ill. You've got to work to put food on the table."</i> (Male, All sector, More regular hours)
2. To be able to plan in advance	Important for organising childcare, which often requires advance booking, and routine and stability for children	<i>"Precision, order and a solid routine are really key."</i> (Female, Social Care, Less regular)
3. To be able to 'react' on short notice	Important because children (and life) are unpredictable, and because childcare can often fall through	<i>"When just one thing goes wrong everything topples down...it's like that game...it's like Jenga."</i> (Female, Social care, More regular)
4. No negative impacts at work	In terms of job security, but also their relationships with their colleagues, and their ability to negotiate future 'give and take' arrangements	<i>"They can't sack you because you've had to take time off for your children, but they can make your life a right misery though."</i> (Male, All sectors, More regular hours)

We asked parents why they aren't using the current rights. In general, they told us they were worried about the loss of earnings, and about negative consequences from their employers if they asked to use their rights. They also identified ways that each specific right could improve.

Loss of earnings

Young parents identified the loss of earnings as the biggest barrier to using their employment rights. Over half of parents said they would be worried about a loss of earnings when it came to accessing each of the three main rights we asked about. This is especially true of the right to unpaid parental leave, which can result in a significant loss of income over a short period.

*I would worry about the **potential loss of earnings** that comes with this right*

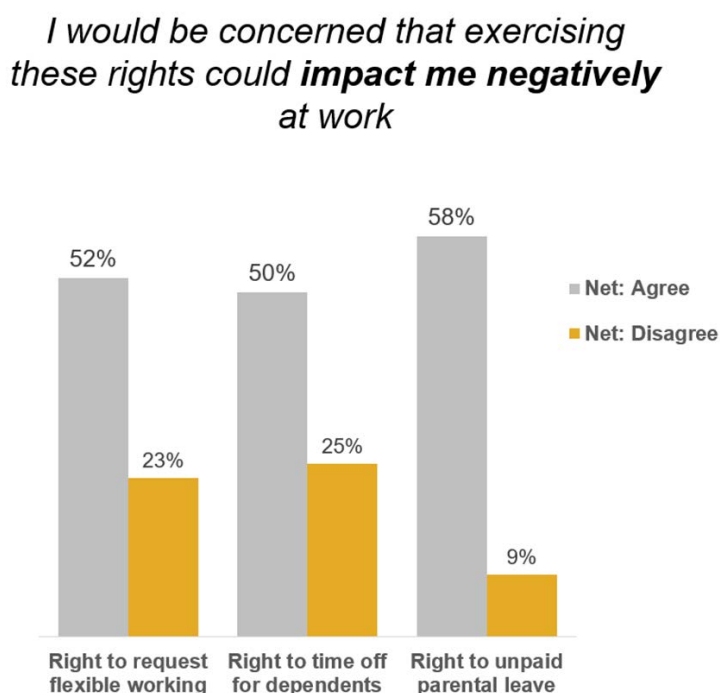


Scared to use employment rights because of the negative consequences

Unfortunately, workplace culture also discourages young parents from using these rights. Parents showed concern that exercising these rights would negatively impact them at work, by:

- Jeopardising their job security, if their manager views them as unreliable or a trouble maker
- Jeopardising their relationships with colleagues who may perceive them to be getting special treatment

This can be clearly shown in the graph below, which shows that at least half of parents would be worried about the negative consequences of using each of the three main rights we asked them about.



Specific rights: The Right to time off for dependants

Lack of pay for the time off to look after dependants was identified as a real barrier to parents using this right. Parents emphasised that unpaid leave was simply unaffordable.

What do parents think about the employment rights which were designed to help them?

"I took the day off work today because my son was ill, and I decided I wouldn't lie so I called in and said, 'my son is ill,' and they said, 'Oh, we can give you his dependency leave.' I said, 'excellent does that mean I get paid?' They said, 'No. It's just it'll come up as a dependency day instead of a sick day.' I just thought well, who cares... if they don't pay me, that's all that really matters."

(Male, All sectors, More regular)

Young parents also thought there should be a set number of days leave, allocated to this right. This would give greater clarity over how many days they are permitted to take off to look after their kids. Currently, there is only a right to "reasonable" time off for dependants, which means the employer has a big influence over how much time a parent can take off to look after a sick child.

The right to request flexible working

There is scepticism as to the extent which employers are willing to grant this right. Young parents reported that:

- Securing this right depends on the relationship with the manager. Parents reported feeling that you had to "earn" this right after building a good relationship with a manager.
- A successful request would lead to a permanent contract change, which limits the ability to react to changes that may appear further down the line.
- There is a strong sense that employers will always be able to find a "good business reason" to reject the request.

"Rubbish, companies can do what they want. I tried to get different hours cause I used to work full time so I wanted to go back to working evenings, and they just wouldn't do it."

(Female, Retail, More regular)

Young parents themselves can clearly see the inherent weaknesses in the right to request flexible work.

"It feels like you would put yourself out there and then you'd be shot down...like in some way it could go against you, like you're not going to work as hard."

(Female, Retail, More regular)

Right to unpaid parental leave

Young parents flagged up several barriers to them using unpaid parental leave:

Sacrificing pay to take a period of leave was not possible if you are in low paid employment.

The notice period of 21 days for using unpaid parental leave is too long. If a young parent needs time off to attend hospital appointments or look after a sick child at short notice, then this right didn't help.

"For sickness if the 21 day notice were removed that would work, but it's still that 21 days notice. You can't predict when your child is going to vomit or when school is going to ring you, so there the notice period is a flaw."
(Female, Retail, Less regular hours)

In the final section of the report we set out our recommendations for how these rights could be improved to meet the needs of young parents.

Section six

Recommendations

We know juggling work and childcare responsibilities will always pose some challenges but it could be a lot easier for parents with some sensible reforms.

Our recommendations focus on:

- How working practice should be reformed to help parents plan and afford their childcare more effectively;
- How employment rights should be reformed, so they really help young parents. We concentrate on the rights that can help parents with the day to day pressures they have to deal with once they return to work (so not the rights for mums and dads when their kids are born).
- How workplace culture needs to become more understanding of the needs of young parents.

Changing working practices

Shift variability

Young parents reported that being given short notice of shifts and being uncertain about shift finishing times was causing them great difficulties. This would impact on their time, income and ability to organise childcare for their kids.

We propose that:

- 1. Government should ban the regular use of zero hours contracts. Individuals who work regular hours should have a right to a written contract guaranteeing their normal working hours.**

This would give greater income security to young mums and dads who normally work regular hours. It would also help them with their childcare as there would be less fluctuation in their working hours each week.

- 2. All workers should be given notice of their shifts one month in advance**

Dear Employer...

I feel that having a 1 month in advance rota would be the biggest help. I will then be able to arrange the child care so that I do not have problems working my shifts. At the moment I have these problems because the shifts that I have are only given with a few days notice.

(Male, All sectors, Less regular)

"It depends when you get your rota as well. We're at the end of January and I know when I'm working up to the end of March.... because I get my rota so far in advance I can pre-plan to the best of my ability."

(Female, Retail, Less regular)

In the state of Oregon, in the US, legislation has been introduced¹⁴ which makes sure that low paid employees are given predictable work schedules.

The legislation requires large employers in the food service, retail and hospitality industries to provide advance scheduling notice to their workers. It intends to guarantee workers greater freedom to plan their lives and spend time with family. By 2020, notice of shifts will have to be given two weeks in advance.

We want all workers in the UK to be given notice of their shifts at least one month in advance. Where an employer cancels a shift at the last minute, workers should be paid for that shift and any costs they have incurred travelling to that shift.

The example from Oregon shows that legislation can be used to scale back flexible scheduling practices which make managing childcare so difficult for young parents.

- 3. Employers should be required to pay for a scheduled shift that is cancelled at short notice, including their travel costs if they have come into work for their shift.**

¹⁴ <http://gov.oregonlive.com/bill/2017/SB828/>

Recommendations

- 4. Parents employed on zero or short hours should have a right to be paid a premium, in the form of overtime payments, for any non-contractual hours worked.**

This would encourage employers to give their staff contracts which reflect their real working hours. It would give parents greater certainty about their weekly working hours and also their weekly income.

Reforms to employment law should end the pay penalty experienced by those in insecure work. All workers, including young parents who are expected to work variable hours should be financially rewarded for the flexibility they provide to employers.

Reforming Employment Rights

In the UK, the range of different rights to which individuals are entitled varies substantially depending on whether they qualify as an “employee”, a “worker” or as “self-employed”. Core protections including access to many of the “family friendly” rights are reserved for “employees”. This means mums and dads in agency work or on zero hours contracts would not be able use rights such as the right to request flexible work.

Many of these rights also require a worker to have been working for their employer for a period of time before they can qualify to use the right. For example, you must be employed for 6 months before you can request to work flexibly.

Changes to employment law should ensure that all working people benefit from the same floor of decent employment rights. And they should add to the existing framework of rights to ensure that flexibility in the workplace cuts both ways.

- 5. All working parents should have access to the same rights, from day one in their jobs. All workers, including zero-hours contracts workers, agency workers and those in casual work, should benefit from the same decent floor of rights currently enjoyed by employees.**

The TUC is also proposing specific changes to the workplace rights which are supposed to help parents who are in work, manage their childcare.

Unpaid parental leave

We propose several reforms to unpaid parental leave, to make it more effective:

- 6. There is very low awareness of unpaid parental leave amongst young parents. We suggest renaming this right to “childcare leave” as it sums up the right better and would hopefully raise greater awareness of this right.**
- 7. Parental leave should be paid. It is not affordable for many young parents to take time off unpaid. The government should start by introducing a period of 5 days paid parental leave. It should be paid at least at the rate of the National Living Wage rate.**

8. **The current notice period for taking unpaid parental leave is 21 days. This should be shortened to 5 days so parents can use this leave in conjunction with the right to time off for dependants to make sure they can take care of their kids when they are sick.**
9. **At the moment, unpaid parental leave can only be taken in blocks of one week. Young parents told us that it would be helpful if they could use this leave in shorter periods. We propose that mums and dads should be able to take parental leave in one day slots. This is currently the case for those mums and dads with disabled children.**

Right to request flexible working

We propose several reforms to the right to request flexible working to make it more effective:

"For sickness if the 21 day notice were removed that would work, but it's still that 21 days notice. You can't predict when your child is going to vomit or when school is going to ring you, so there the notice period is a flaw."
(Female, Retail, Less regular)

10. **It should be possible to request a temporary change to working patterns. At the moment, a granted request for flexible working results in a permanent change to terms and conditions. It should be possible to request a temporary change to terms and conditions so that parents can react to temporary changes in circumstances.**

Our starting position is that it should not be necessary for the parent to request flexible working patterns. Flexible working patterns should be available to all staff, unless the employer can prove there is a business reason why flexible working cannot be accommodated. We deal with this recommendation below.

Right to time off for dependants

We propose several reforms to the right to time off for dependants:

11. **This should be a paid right. Young parents reported that it was difficult to use this right as they couldn't afford to take the time off unpaid.**
12. **There should be greater clarity about how many days a parent can take off to look after their kids. There should be a clear provision of 5 days paid leave to look after dependants.**

"Having the five days paid, you won't abuse it because your kid is generally ill five days in a year. Maybe you'd have to prove it with a doctor's note though."
(Female, Retail, More regular)

Recommendations

There is likely to be a government consultation later in the year which will respond to the recent Taylor Review of Modern Employment Practices¹⁵. The government has also committed to review the right to request flexible working by 2019. Both of these will provide opportunities to push for much needed legislative change to the employment rights which support young, working mums and dads.

Changing workplace culture

Workplace culture is a huge barrier to young parents being able to manage their childcare responsibilities. We've heard from young parents that:

- Employers are not talking to young parents in their workforce about their childcare needs and how workplace policies could better support them.
- Many young parents are not told about the employment rights that exist to support them to spend time with their kids.
- Many young parents are afraid to use their rights.
- Some line managers make life extremely difficult for young parents and actively discourage them from asking for support.

13. There should be a government campaign targeted at young parents to raise awareness of the employment rights which help those parents who have returned to work, get better support to manage their childcare and work responsibilities. The government should raise awareness of employment rights at key touchpoints. For example, the MATB1 form could be used to inform pregnant women about their rights.

14. Alongside this, there should be a campaign aimed at businesses to promote the business benefits of developing policies that help young parents. This would include promoting evidence and case studies which highlights the positive impact on recruitment and retention and increased productivity, for example.

15. Alongside an awareness raising campaigns there should be a legal requirement for all workers to receive information about their workplace rights, including the rights which will help them manage their childcare needs and the right to join a trade union.

All workers should have a day-one right to a written statement setting out their pay and conditions, including their expected hours of work. This should include all the day one statutory rights that young parents are entitled to, how they are calculated and how they will be paid. This would include information about workplace rights that support young parents manage their childcare. This is supported by a recommendation in the Taylor Review.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-work-the-taylor-review-of-modern-working-practices>

16. Trade unions should continue to negotiate workplace policies with employers that help young parents to take time off to spend with their kids. Through dialogue with employers, unions play a vital role in changing workplace culture for the better.

Most jobs are not advertised flexibly. Many staff are not getting the benefit of being able to use positive flexible working options, which would help them manage their childcare, even though flexible working might be possible in their workplace. This can include practices such as flexitime, compressed hours and term time working. And employers are recruiting from a smaller talent pool as many parents see flexible working as increasingly important. We should move to a starting point that jobs can be done flexibly unless there's a business reason why not, rather than the other way around.

The charity, Working Families, has developed a practical strapline and guidance¹⁶ which will help employers change their recruiting culture and demonstrate to potential applicants that they will consider flexible working practices.

17. It should be the default position that all staff can benefit from positive flexible working practices. This would especially help parents manage their childcare. Employers should have to justify where it is not possible to advertise a role flexibly. This would be a big step towards changing workplace culture and creating a more supportive climate for young parents to work flexibly and manage their childcare needs.

¹⁶ <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/campaigns/happy-to-talk-flexible-working/>



Trades Union Congress
Congress House
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS

www.tuc.org.uk

contact:
Matthew Creagh
020 7 467 1298
mcreagh@tuc.org.uk

© 2017 Trades Union Congress

For more copies of this title contact our ordering point on 020 7467 1294 or publications@tuc.org.uk. Bulk discounts may be offered.

All TUC publications can be provided for dyslexic or visually impaired readers in an agreed accessible format, on request, at no extra cost.