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Managing Expectations

A Survey of New Mums and Dads



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Glossary

Maternity Leave

Employees are entitled to take up to 52 weeks maternity leave.

This is made up of:

- Ordinary maternity leave (OML) – which is 26 weeks; and
- Additional Maternity Leave (AML) – which is a further 26 weeks, beginning immediately after OML.

Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP)

Women are eligible for SMP if they have been working for their employer for at least 26 weeks by the 15th week before the baby is due. SMP is paid at the rate of 90% of the woman's average pay for the first six weeks, followed by 33 weeks at £136.78 (2013-14), or 90% of their gross weekly earnings if lower.

Enhanced Maternity Pay

Employers may offer an enhanced maternity pay to their employees which is paid on top of the rate of Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP).

Maternity Allowance (MA)

A mother who does not qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) is entitled to Maternity Allowance (MA) if she has been employed or self-employed for 26 weeks of the 66 week period which ends the week before the week the baby is due. She must also have had average weekly earnings of at least £30 during any 13 weeks of the qualifying period. MA is paid at the rate of £136.78 (2013-14), or 90% of the woman's average pay, whichever is lower, for 39 weeks.

Ordinary Paternity leave

Fathers who have worked for their employer for 26 continuous weeks by the 15th week before the baby is due are entitled to two weeks paternity leave.

Additional Paternity Leave (APL)

Fathers can take a period of up to 26 weeks leave once the mother returns to work after maternity leave. Additional Paternity Leave can be taken after the 20th week after the baby is born. Fathers must have been working for their employer for a continuous period of 26 weeks before the leave begins in order to be eligible.

Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP)

SPP is paid at the rate of £136.78 per week (2013-14).

Family friendly Working Policies (FFWPs)

Some employers choose to offer family friendly policies to their staff, which exceed the statutory minimum, to help them balance their work and family lives. There are three broad types of policies which may be offered:

- 1) Enhanced maternity and paternity pay and/or leave arrangements.
- 2) Childcare support, such as the Childcare Voucher scheme or a workplace nursery.
- 3) Flexible working arrangements, such as part time hours, flexi-time, home working or condensed hours.

See the Appendix for some examples of each of the three types of FFWPs.

Shared Parental Leave

Government proposals suggest that from 2015 a new system of Shared Parental Leave will become available. After the birth of a child the mother and father could potentially share 50 weeks of parental leave. The mother decides when the parental leave can begin. It is anticipated that parents can take the leave in any way which suits them, for example taking it off together or individually, in as little as one week blocks. Shared parental leave arrangements must be agreed by both parents' employers before going ahead. Additional Paternity Leave will be abolished once Shared Parental Leave is introduced.

Shared Parental leave will be introduced to Great Britain as part of the Children and Families Bill which is currently passing through Parliament. Similar measures are also being considered for Northern Ireland. Earlier this year the Department for Employment and Learning consulted on a new system for Shared Parental Leave which should also be introduced in 2015.

Executive Summary

This study aims to focus on parents in Northern Ireland and the factors which influence their decisions about taking maternity and paternity leave. It also explores parents' opinions about Shared Parental Leave and the choices they make about employment after the birth of a child.

An online survey was carried out in May 2013. A total of 492 parents responded to the survey.

Key findings

Shared Parental Leave

- 66% of respondents commented that they would use Shared Parental Leave.
- More fathers (72%) than mothers (64%) said that they would avail of shared leave.
- The majority of respondents agreed with the concept of shared leave and believe it has many positive outcomes, for example, time for fathers to bond with their children, the promotion of childcare as a shared responsibility and the ability to balance work and family. In particular the leave could be tailored to meet individual family needs.
- Despite many families endorsing the development of Shared Parental Leave, the general consensus from both mothers and fathers was that in order to avail of the new system other sacrifices would have to be made. For example many parents stated financial or career-orientated sacrifices as the limiting factor which would stop them from using shared leave.

Fathers, paternity and post-birth employment decisions

- 80% of male respondents took Ordinary Paternity Leave (OPL).
- 55% of respondents received an enhanced paternity pay package.
- 52% of respondents who did not take OPL could not afford to do so. A further 30% took annual leave instead for financial reasons.
- Only 9% of survey respondents took Additional Paternity Leave (APL).
- 23% of male respondents were unaware of their entitlement to APL.

- 30% of fathers changed their employment patterns after the birth of their child to accommodate for their families needs.
- 39% of fathers working in organisations which offered three broad types of family friendly working policies changed their employment patterns.

Mothers, maternity and post-birth employment decisions

Maternity leave and pay

- 69.5% of female respondents received enhanced maternity pay.
- The majority of women returned to work after taking 39 weeks maternity leave (26.1%). This is when Statutory Maternity Pay ends and the three month period of unpaid leave begins.
- 16.5% of mothers took 52 weeks leave. Of these respondents, 75% received enhanced maternity pay.
- Respondents only receiving Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) (26%) or Maternity Allowance (MA) (47%) were more likely to return to work at week 26 or before, compared to mothers receiving enhanced maternity pay (16%).
- Just under a third (32.2%) of mothers returned to work at the time they did because their maternity pay ended.
- 29.2% ended their maternity leave before their maternity pay ended because they could not afford to stay off any longer. Of these respondents, 64.9% received enhanced maternity pay.
- 63% of managers and senior officials stated that they ended their maternity leave at the time they did because of career concerns. Correspondingly, a higher number of mothers (30%) in higher paid roles (£50,000+ per annum), than those on lower salaries, returned to work at week 26 of maternity leave or earlier.

Post-maternity employment

- 98% of respondents returned to work after maternity leave.
- 54.1% returned to exactly the same job.
- Almost a third (32.2%) returned to the same job, but with a reduced number of hours or a different pattern of working hours.

- 60% of employees who changed employers after maternity leave worked in pre-maternity organisations which offered no family friendly working policies (FFWPs) or only one type (30% and 30% respectively).
- Over two thirds (69%) of women who returned to exactly the same job worked in organisations that offered two (30%) or three (39%) types of FFWPs.
- 45% of mothers who reduced their hours or changed their working patterns were employed by organisations offering 3 types of FFWPs.
- 85.5% of respondents stated that the ability to arrange suitable childcare was the main enabling factor which helped them return to work.
- Almost half (47%) of the respondents who credited their return to work to the availability of family friendly working polices (10.3%) worked for family friendly employers who offered three types of family friendly policies

Conclusions and recommendations

- The qualitative responses reveal that many parents believe that fathers will compromise their careers if they take time off for their families.
- Parents in more senior occupational groups and higher salary brackets are more likely to cite career concerns as the reason for not taking up their full entitlements, compared to other parents.
- The prominence of financial concerns as an influencing factor in making decisions about maternity, paternity and Shared Parental Leave was consistent across the survey results.
- For many parents financial sacrifices were a necessary factor in taking up their maternity or paternity leave entitlements.
- The rate of Statutory Maternity Pay was considered to be too low to support a family (even for basic essentials) for an extended period of time.
- Childcare is a main enabling factor for mothers to be able to return to work. The Assembly needs to do more to make the provision of affordable childcare available.
- Employers must also be encouraged to offer family friendly working policies in order to help parents reach a suitable work-life balance.

1. Introduction

The traditional roles of men and women as mothers and fathers, and the responsibilities they are expected to undertake and fulfill as part of these definitions, have undergone somewhat of a transformation over the past few decades.

The structures of modern families are very different to the family structures which dominated the mid-twentieth century. The male breadwinner and the 'stay at home mother' model is now very much outdated. Indeed, the boundaries between the ideals of the mother as the caregiver and the father as the main wage earner have become blurred over recent years.

The introduction of equal opportunities and sex discrimination legislation in the 1970s encouraged more women to enter into employment and participate more fully in public life. As a result, between the early 1970s and the present day the number of women entering the labour market has increased substantially.

The subsequent rise in dual earner households has resulted in caring responsibilities becoming increasingly shared between partners. Although mothers are still largely regarded as the primary carers of children, this model is becoming more flexible. Changing social attitudes are both reflected in and driven forward by policy and legislation. This is particularly noticeable when policies associated with maternity, paternity and parental leave are concerned.

1.1 Policy development

Maternity, paternity and parental leave policies are an integral part of a wider range of social and employment policies. Indeed these policies have a wide variety of objectives, including:

- ensuring the health and wellbeing of mothers and children
- promoting gender equality
- supporting parents in the labour market
- helping parents achieve a better work-life balance.

The link between these policies and employment, however, is one which has changed dramatically over recent decades. Initially maternity leave was introduced for the wellbeing of mothers; it was not until 1978 that maternity leave was fashioned into the form it still takes today – in that for the first time mothers had a right to return to work after maternity leave. However, this was only available to mothers who had worked for a certain length of time. In 1994, the right to maternity leave was extended to all employees, yet again only those who met certain length of service criteria were entitled to the full amount of leave on offer (43 weeks). It was not until 2006 that all women were entitled to

take one years maternity leave, regardless of the amount of time they had been employed, and this is still the case today. Women who return after 26 weeks leave have the right to return to exactly the same job. After this, mothers still have the right to return to the same job, however if the employer cannot reasonably offer that job, a similar alternative job with similar terms and conditions must be made available. This entitlement enables women to take time off during the first year of their child's life but also recognises that after this point they may wish to return to their careers.

The development of maternity leave policy has traced the changing social trends associated with families and the rise of the dual earner household. However, in addition, the decline of the male breadwinner model and the move towards mothers and fathers sharing caring responsibilities more equally has also impacted on the development of policies to accommodate these changing social trends. The introduction of paternity leave in 2003, for example, reflects the need for fathers, as well as mothers, to be away from work after the birth of the child. The development of Additional Paternity Leave from 2011 was further recognition of the important role of the father during the first year of a child's life. For the first time the father could take time off to be the main carer of the child once the mother had returned to work.

Further changes are in the pipeline. The Children and Families Bill, which is currently passing through Westminster, will introduce a new system of Shared Parental Leave from 2015. Shared Parental Leave will allow both parents to share 50 weeks leave between them, even taking it off together if they wish. It is to be completely flexible. In Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning also recently launched a consultation about the potential for introducing similar legislation for the region.

As its rationale for introducing a radical change to the traditional systems of maternity and paternity leave, the Government stated in its impact assessment (BIS, 2013) that the current system does not encourage shared parenting:

“It also perpetuates a gender imbalance in terms of attachment to, and position in, the labour market; reinforcing the culture that women do the majority of caring and are more likely to be absent from the labour force as a result of having children. In so doing, the current system contributes to unequal labour market outcomes for men and women in the longer term (BIS, 2013:5).

The new system will therefore aim to encourage a positive cultural change whereby it is accepted that mothers and fathers should be there for their child in the first year of his/her life and that there should be no negative long-term implications on either partner's career as a result of taking leave.

Maternity, Paternity and Shared Parental Leave legislation timeline, key milestones

1911 – Maternity first reached the political agenda in 1911 as part of the National Insurance Act, which came into force in 1912. A Maternity benefit was introduced, but was later removed in 1978.

1978 – It wasn't until 1978 that maternity leave legislation was introduced, but not all women were eligible for it, a woman had to have worked two years full time or five years part time in order to qualify. Until this time women had no right to return to work after maternity leave.

1994 – Maternity leave was extended to all female employees. All female employees, regardless of length of service and whether they worked full or part time, were entitled to a minimum of 14 weeks maternity leave. This was referred to as Ordinary Maternity Leave. Some women were also entitled to Additional Maternity Leave of up to 29 weeks, provided they had worked for their employer for two continuous years by the beginning of the 11th week before the expected week of childbirth. The right to receive up to 18 weeks Statutory Maternity Pay was also introduced.

1999 – Ordinary Maternity leave was extended to 18 weeks.

2003 – Paternity leave was introduced, and maternity pay was extended to 26 weeks for all employees. Employees who had been employed for minimum of 26 weeks by 14 weeks before their estimated due date were also entitled to a further 26 weeks of Additional Maternity Leave (AML).

2006 – The Work and Families Act (2006) introduced 52 weeks maternity leave for all women and 39 weeks maternity pay from April 2007.

2010 – It was announced that from April 2011 Additional Paternity Leave would come into force. For the first time, once the mother returned to work the father could take over the remaining leave.

2012 – Nick Clegg announced a new system of parental leave from 2015, where parents can share parental leave from two weeks after the baby is born.

2013 - Children and Families Bill 2012-13 passing through Parliament to bring Shared Parental Leave into law. NI Executive also launches a consultation about Shared Parental Leave.

1.2 Policy, employment and reality

Current maternity and paternity policy aims to encourage parents to balance their work and family responsibilities, this will become more emphasised when the new system of Shared Parental Leave is introduced. However, the relationship between parents availing of the rights contained within these policies, employers' willingness to embrace and enhance their entitlements and the external factors which can influence parents' choices (such as the cost of living, the availability of external support mechanisms, for example childcare, and prevailing stigmas which instill the belief that work and family are two separate entities) is more complex in reality than it may seem.

Therefore, although these policies are in place to support the relationship between family life and employment, the opportunity to avail of these entitlements and the ability to do so is influenced by a number of external factors. As a result many parents do not use their full entitlement.

1.2.1 Maternity and paternity leave in the context of modern society

The complexities around taking maternity and paternity leave are shaped by current social trends. For example, one major influencing factor is the recession and its impact on employment, workplace cultures and family finances. The amount of research studies and press coverage dedicated to maternity and paternity leave, and parents ability to avail of these policies, has heightened since the recession began. To place this in context, this section explores how maternity and paternity leave is portrayed in the media and current literature.

Maternity, paternity and employment

The strained relationship between maternity, paternity and parental leave policies and employment has received much attention in recent years from researchers and the media alike.

In particular, the issue of maternity discrimination is at the centre of the media's attention where maternity leave is concerned. Such cases have made the headlines more and more frequently over the past few months. Indeed, a new piece of research published earlier this year by law firm Slater and Gordon sought to quantify the problem of maternity discrimination. The figures showed that one in seven women had lost their job while on maternity leave and that for 40% of respondents their jobs had changed when they returned to work. In addition, more than a tenth of employees had been replaced by their maternity cover (see McVeigh, 2013).

Specialist advice services have also reported an increase in the number of calls received about maternity discrimination in recent times. An advice service, operated by Maternity Action, recently made the news reporting that demand for its helpline had tripled and that 28,000 factsheets about maternity discrimination

were downloaded from its website every month (see Williams, 2012). Similar trends were also published in relation to a helpline operated by charity Working Families. In each of these cases the increased number of calls has risen extensively since the start of the recession (2013).

Few Government statistics exist on the number of maternity discrimination cases. In 2005 the Equal Opportunities Commission published statistics which showed that nearly half of all pregnant women experienced some form of disadvantage in the workplace just because they were pregnant or taking maternity leave. Of these, 30,000 were forced to leave work altogether (EOC, 2005: 4). More recently, data which was analysed by the House of Commons Library (2013) showed that up to 50,000 women who take maternity leave each year are unable to return to their former jobs or are forced to take roles with less responsibility (see Wright, 2013).

Research shows that even before the recession began the number of women who were victims of maternity discrimination was high. The attitude of employers towards women who take maternity leave is fundamental to these figures. Women taking maternity leave can be a cost to the employer, in terms of finding maternity cover and covering maternity pay (although a large proportion of Statutory Maternity Pay can be claimed back from the Government). The recession has done little to improve the attitudes of employers who look upon maternity leave negatively. A report by the Fawcett Society in 2009 stated that women are particularly vulnerable when it comes to job cuts and redundancies because of the amount of time they can be away from work and this can make them an easy target for "unscrupulous" employers (Rake, 2009: 5).

A negative workplace culture and some employers' attitudes to maternity leave has arguably led to increased cases of discrimination, furthermore some employers view employees who take extended time off on leave as less committed than other staff members. One study by Talking Talent showed that almost half of respondents (48%) believed that their employer thought that they were less serious about their career after having a child (see Woods, 2009). Furthermore, a more recent study of over 2,000 women by Santander found that 67% of working mothers thought that having children had hindered their progress at work (Santander, 2013).

Other pieces of research show that when employers enhance maternity leave and pay packages for employees there are positive results. For example Jaguar Land Rover pay one years full wages for maternity leave and 99% of mothers return to work (see Llewellyn and Freegard, 2012). Other studies such as Chanfreau *et al's* survey of women returners (2011) show that offering enhanced maternity pay increased staff retention, in the form of new mothers returning to work. The report showed that for organisations that offer an

enhanced maternity pay, the rate of return to work was 90%. This is compared to 38% of mothers who only received Statutory Maternity Pay (2011:3).

Indeed, women returning to work are more likely to stay in an organisation which makes available family friendly working policies to enable them to balance their work and family responsibilities. The provision of family friendly working policies is therefore an important decision maker for parents who are either returning to the labour market or changing employment.

This was a key theme which also emerged in a recent study by Bashir *et al* (2011). Mothers commented that they would need some form of family friendly working policies in place, in addition to a supportive employer, in order to return to work. In the current economic climate it is particularly important for employers to both attract and retain talented staff. The provision of family friendly working policies can assist in this task. Savvy employers introduce family friendly working policies because of the proven business benefits, otherwise they risk losing talented female staff. The recent survey by Santander found that 26% of working mothers changed jobs after maternity leave to ones which better suited their family life. A further 26% changed careers entirely and 6% left employment altogether because they could not balance their work and family life (Santander, 2013).

The increase in statutory entitlements for maternity leave are positive as they encourage women both to take time off after the birth of their children and to enable them to return to work with their employer. This concept is, however, hindered when the attitudes of employers discriminate against women for availing of their entitlements. Furthermore, there is still a conflict of interests in the relationship between employment and maternity leave; this extends beyond the opinions of employers only. The recent case of Marissa Mayer has encouraged new debate from a variety of stakeholders on this issue.

Mayer was appointed as CEO of international internet company Yahoo last year. After accepting the \$1million a month job she announced that she was pregnant. This announcement sparked outrage on some fronts with many parties commenting that she could not be fully committed to the job, particularly if she took a long maternity leave. In her defence Mayer commented "my maternity will be a few weeks long, and I'll work throughout it" (see Llewellyn and Freegard, 2012). This statement in turn sparked fury from those on the other side of the debate, branding Mayer as a bad role-model for working mothers. The case of Mayer, and the subsequent debate, featured highly in the media worldwide and shows that this issue is still one of much contention.

Length of maternity leave and money worries

The current economic climate, characterised by stagnant wages and the increased cost of living, coupled with various cuts to family social security and

welfare benefits and entitlements has placed many families in difficult financial circumstances. As such, recent studies have pointed to the fact that many women return to work earlier than they would have liked from maternity leave due to financial concerns.

A recent customer survey by price comparison website Money Supermarket made the headlines in March this year. The survey of expectant mothers revealed that a third were planning to return to work after six to nine months of maternity leave (see Newcombe, 2013). One in ten commented that they could only afford to take between three to six months off. The researchers stated that the current economic climate has made it especially difficult for families where the mother is only receiving Statutory Maternity Pay, where finances are so tight that she may have no option but to return to work sooner.

Other studies have also shown that financial concerns are a fundamental factor for women returning to work at a specific time. For example, a survey by NCT in 2008 showed that for 68% of mothers their main reason for returning to work was financial (NCT, 2008:8). Furthermore, the most recent Women Returners Survey (2009/10) showed that the majority of respondents (59%) attributed the timing of their return to work to financial concerns (Chanfreau *et al*, 2011:83).

Mothers who are only receiving Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) may find it more of a struggle financially during maternity leave as their pay can be substantially less. SMP is paid at a rate of 90% of an employee's average pay for the first six weeks of maternity leave, followed by 33 weeks at £136.78 (or 90% of the gross weekly earnings if lower).

Fathers and Paternity leave

For fathers, financial concerns can also impact upon their decision to either take up paternity leave or influence the amount of leave taken. The most recent Maternity and Paternity Rights survey (2009/10) showed that 66% of male respondents did not take their full paternity leave entitlement because they couldn't afford to (Chanfreau *et al*, 2011:164). Indeed a report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2009 showed that of men that did not take paternity leave (45% of a survey of 4,500) the most common reason stated was that they couldn't afford to take it (EHRC, 2009). Furthermore, a study by law firm Allen and Overy published earlier this year also showed that 42% of fathers surveyed were prevented from taking paternity leave because they were not "prepared to make the financial sacrifice" (2013:5).

Traditionally fathers were not encouraged to take time away from work after the birth of a child. This is reflected in the fact that paternity leave was not introduced until 2003. Many fathers choose not to take paternity leave due to the resonance of traditional values and subsequent stigmas attached. Allen and Overy's study found that 26% of respondents stated that they wouldn't consider

taking paternity leave because of conventional values, "traditionally it has never been done so I wouldn't consider it". Fewer respondents stated career progression (7%) or lack of encouragement from their employer (6%) as disincentives (2013:5).

The introduction of Additional Paternity Leave in 2011 aimed to allow fathers more time off with their families, however the level of take up has been very low amongst new parents. TUC's analysis of BIS Shared Parental Leave and Pay Administration Impact Assessment (2013) figures showed that only 1% of fathers have availed of Additional Paternity Leave (TUC, 2013). Further studies into the take up of additional parental leave have shown that the two prominent factors which discourage fathers to take ordinary paternity leave also prevail when additional leave is considered - financial and damage to career.

The TUC conclude that many fathers do not take advantage of additional leave because of the statutory rate of pay, which is rarely topped up by employers. Another study by consultancy firm Talking Talent (2012) showed that three common reasons were given by fathers for not taking additional paternity leave, Firstly, fathers were worried about the effect it would have on their career. Secondly, they were worried about how they would be perceived by management and other colleagues. The final reason was the financial implications for the family (see Parke, 2012).

1.3 Conclusions and our research

It is clear from the policy context that the Government's aim through the introduction of and changes over time to, maternity and paternity leave policies are for the good of parents in encouraging them to balance their work and family lives. However, the literature and media coverage review has shown that despite the availability of these policies, parents can be limited in their ability to avail of them due to a number of conflicting constraints.

Our study aims to focus on parents in Northern Ireland and the factors which influence their decisions about taking maternity and paternity leave. It also explores parents' opinions about Shared Parental Leave and the choices they make about employment after the birth of a child.

2. Methodology

In May 2013 we conducted an online survey with parents who have a child aged between 12 months and two years old. Only parents with a child in this age range, who were in employment before the birth of the child, were eligible to complete the survey. We wanted to target a sample of this nature because these respondents have very recently had to make decisions about their maternity and paternity leave and post-birth employment.

The survey asked questions about:

- The new system of Shared Parental Leave
- Maternity and paternity pay received
- The types of maternity and paternity leave taken; and
- The decisions parents made about employment patterns after having a child.

Limitations

Although the response rate was good (n: 492) it was difficult to gain responses from:

- one parent families, and
- employees in either the community and voluntary sector or the Social Enterprise sector.

This meant that the results could not be analysed more fully based on these variables.

The next section details the findings.

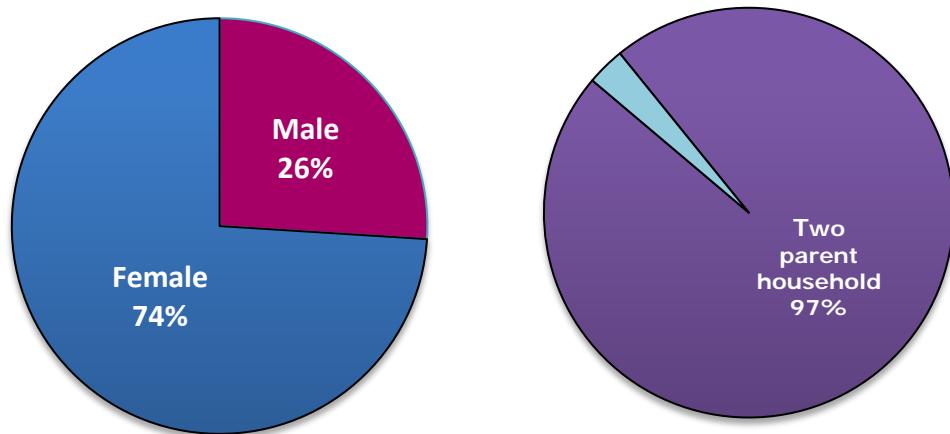
3. Results

3.1 Profile of all respondents

A total of 492 parents responded to the survey.

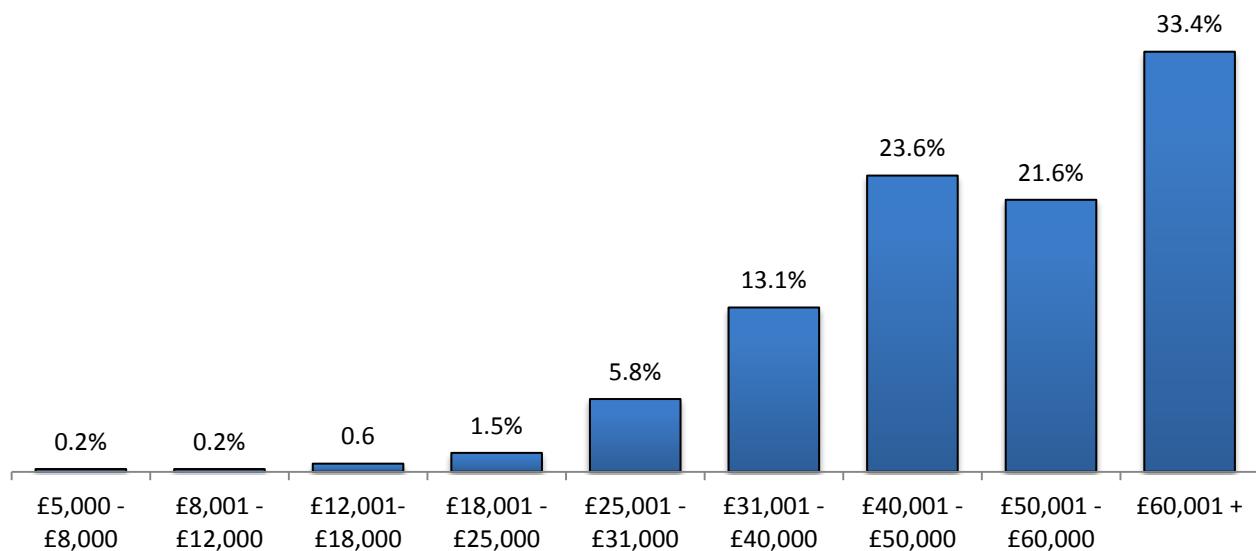
Family types

74% of respondents were female and lived in two parent households (97%)



Household Income

A third of respondents had a household income of £60,000 per year, indeed 78.6% earned over £40,000 per year. the fact that the majority of respondents came from two parent households and were in employment, explains this trend.



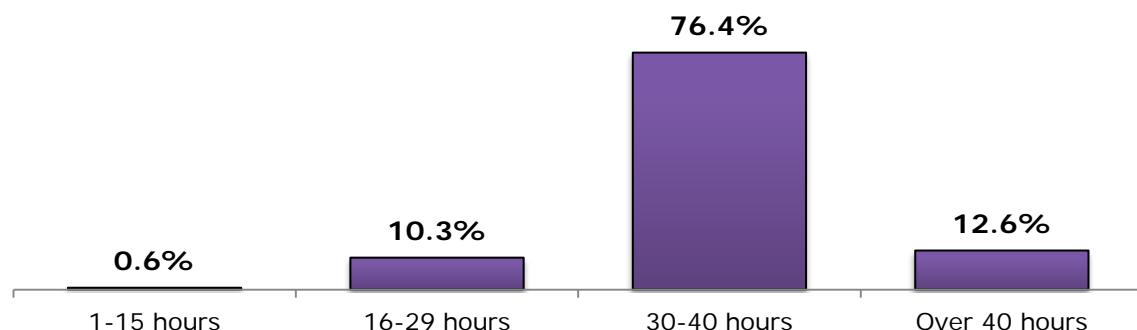
Salary by male and female

The chart below breaks down respondents' salaries by gender. Over half (54%) of male respondents had an annual salary over £31,000, compared to almost a third of female respondents (32.9%).

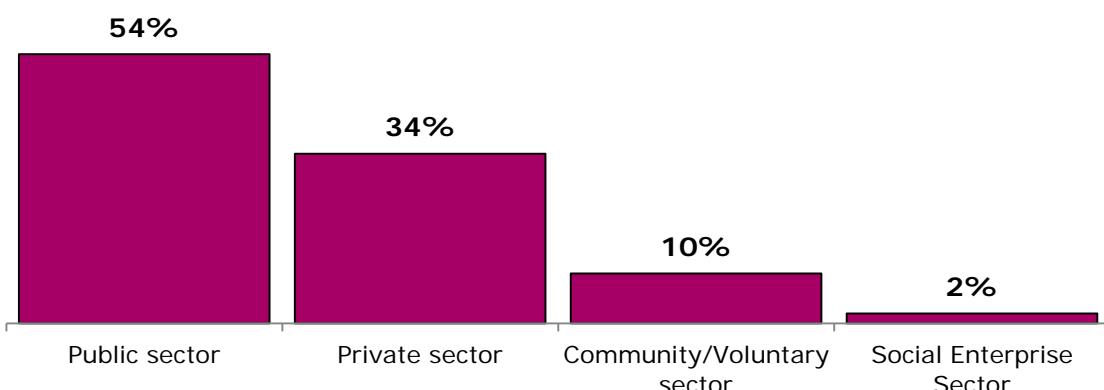


Employment

The majority of respondents worked between 30-40 hours per week before maternity/paternity leave. Only 10.9% worked under 30 hours per week.



Over half of respondents worked in the public sector, followed by just over a third who worked in the private sector.



3.2 Shared Parental Leave

The Children and Families Bill, which is currently passing through Parliament, will introduce a new system of Shared Parental Leave from 2015. After the birth of a child the mother and father could potentially share 50 weeks of parental leave between themselves. It is anticipated that parents can take the leave in any way which suits them, for example taking it off together or individually, in as little as one week blocks. It will be completely flexible.

The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has also launched a consultation which seeks views on the introduction of Shared Parental Leave for parents in Northern Ireland.

The survey asked if respondents would use shared leave if it became available. 66% of respondents commented that they would use Shared Parental Leave. Interestingly more fathers (72%) than mothers (64%) said that they would avail of shared leave.

Figure 1: Would you use Shared Parental Leave?

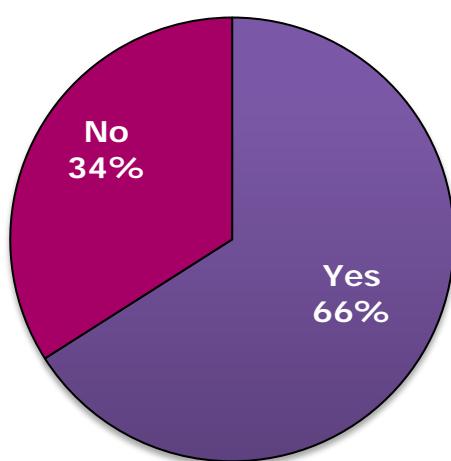
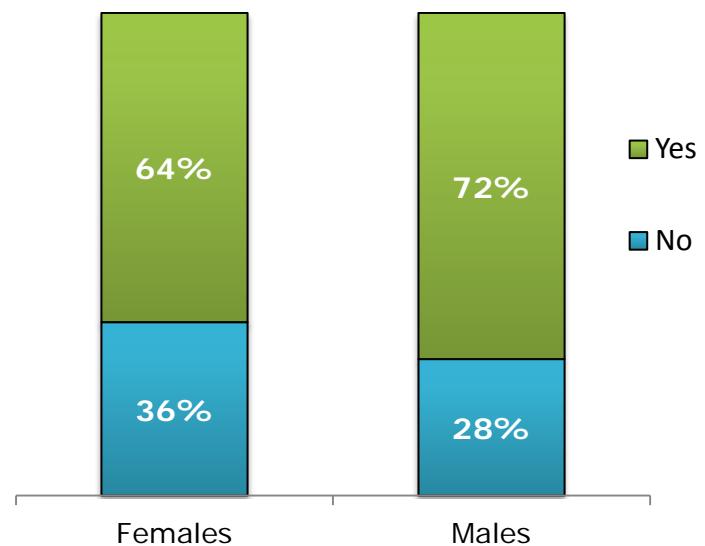


Figure 2: Shared Parental Leave - Breakdown of female and male respondents



We asked respondents to give reasons for their answer. The qualitative responses received show how parents view shared leave and the factors which would influence their decision as to whether they would avail of it or not. There were mixed opinions about the positives and negatives of Shared Parental Leave. Due to the difference in results between the male and female respondents, the results in this section are broken down by gender.

3.2.1 Female Perspective

Would not use shared leave

Financial reasons were largely cited by mothers who stated that they would not use Shared Parental Leave. In particular, for the large majority the deciding factor was that their husband/partner was the main earner and it would not make financial sense for him to take some of the shared leave. For example:

"It completely depends on finances. My partner earns more than me so it would be pointless for him to reduce our income by sharing the leave".

"Although my husband would like to take leave, we could not afford for both of us to be off at the same time. We couldn't afford to pay our bills on the statutory payment without my husband's income. SMP is just not enough to live off".

It was clear that for the majority of these respondents taking parental leave, although they thought it was a good idea for families, was just not an option due to financial matters.

Another prominent trend which emerged focused on the interaction of Shared Parental Leave on father's employment/career. Firstly, many mothers commented that taking parental leave could have long-term negative career affects for fathers:

"It would be detrimental to my husband's career if he was to take too much time off".

"My husband's firm is unlikely to be able to release him. I would feel he would be less likely to be able to fit back into his job after taking a prolonged period off".

"Husband's career progression is too important but I think it's a fabulous idea when it works for some couples".

In the same vein of thought, some respondents commented that taking shared leave would not be supported in the workplace, particularly by employers:

"I'm not sure my husband would take the parental leave as I do think it would harm his career as it would not be perceived well in his workplace".

"Being off work damages your career, if we both had time off we would both be thought less of at work".

"It is quite a good option but employers do not seem to have the same attitude toward men so men may feel silly/wrong to ask for it in case it damaged their career".

Other mothers commented that their husband/partner's job was too important to take parental leave, for example:

"My husband is the director of his company so we would not be able to make the most of this".

The traditional view that women are the main carers, and the stigma that exists in the workplace around fathers balancing caring responsibilities and work, is clear in these responses.

Finally, fewer respondents commented that they did not agree with the prospect of shared leave because in their opinion it is the mother's role to be at home with the baby. Other respondents commented that either they would not want to share leave with their partner or that their partner would not want to take the leave.

Would use shared leave

Considering that many women who wouldn't consider using Shared Parental Leave because their husband or partner was the main earner, it is unsurprising that the majority of women who stated that they would use the leave were the main earners in their households. For these respondents it makes more financial sense to share leave:

"In our family I am the main wage-earner, so when my pay drops to SMP only (after 6 months) I cannot comfortably afford to stay off work. With Shared Parental Leave my husband would be able to take a few months after I return to work to mind the child and get to spend more time with him in the early stages. As I am currently expecting our second child, this would be even more advantageous this time as childcare costs are going to be doubled!"

"This would further enable both parents to share parental leave between them which is especially useful today as many women in a partnership are now the higher earners. If it becomes more acceptable that the father can take time off too, this can be a lesser financial burden on a family during the first year after a child is born".

"In our case I earn more than my husband and therefore it would be more affordable for him to take a few months instead of me".

Many women also commented that shared leave would have less of an impact on their careers:

"Sounds like a good idea. In senior management roles you don't want to be away from your career for too long so sharing maternity leave with your partner is a great idea".

"I think it is the way forward... it reduces the difficulty many women have in maintaining a career after starting a family".

Other trends which emerged focused on the positive aspects of sharing childcare after the birth of a child with regards to bonding, particularly considering that fathers often miss out on the very early stages of their child's life:

"I think it would be a good idea, I know that my husband would love to spend extra time with a new child. I think it is helpful to be able to share the responsibility and you are both able to form a bond".

"I think this is a good idea as men should share responsibility for raising children I also think some companies do not offer great paternity leave for men and think this initiative would help with those first few months with a new baby".

"I do think it would be nice for the men to have additional time as two weeks paternity leave is not much and generally taken after birth so they are missing out on many milestones".

These quotes also show that women feel that childcare should be a shared responsibility between mothers and fathers and that this type of leave would support that view:

"I feel this gives equal opportunities to fathers and also challenges the assumption that ONLY women 'do childcare'".

"I think it is a great opportunity to split parenting. I don't believe that the mother should be considered the main carer for children and men should be given the opportunity to be an equal parent".

3.2.2 Male Perspective

Would not take shared leave

Interestingly, there were only two clear trends in the fathers' qualitative responses. Firstly, similarly to the female responses, financial matters were a key decision maker. Many fathers commented that as the main earners it would not make sense financially for them to take shared leave with their partners. The rate of maternity/paternity pay was considered to be too low to sacrifice a full wage for, although the concept of shared leave was endorsed:

"For me, as the highest earner, I would be taking too much of a pay cut to take more time off at the statutory pay rate".

"My main issue with any leave is the financial support to families - it is very hard to survive on Statutory Pay, especially with the rising costs of living".

"It's a good idea so long as the financial penalties are not too harsh, it would not be possible for my family to make ends meet if statutory pay was all that was on offer".

"I am the higher earner and a reduction in my income to avail of such an opportunity could not be afforded in our household. This is a great facility in principle and should be offered and would benefit households where the female was the higher earner. I would have loved to afford to make use of this as I feel it would help father/child bonding and would ease pressure on mothers especially during the early days if taken together".

Again many fathers commented that if the mother was the main earner that they would potentially avail of the leave.

Secondly, fathers commented that their wives or partners would like to take the full entitlement themselves. These results indicate that for many families, mothers are still considered to be the main caregivers.

Would take Shared Parental Leave

The majority of fathers who stated that they would use Shared Parental Leave focused on the benefits of being at home during the first year of their child's life, for example many commented on the ability to spend time bonding with their children. The results show that many fathers feel that the current system does not support the father's desire or need for this:

"I think it would be a great idea and allow both parents time to bond with their child. I feel fathers do not get adequate time in the present system and I feel I missed out on a lot because of it".

"I would definitely be in favour of this as there is too much onus on the mother to take leave from work, while the father only has two weeks and then returns to work".

"It would be great if both parents could have half the time but be simultaneously off work to spend time bonding with their new born".

Some fathers also commented that legislation should reflect the changing patterns in families and that childcare should be considered as a joint responsibility between partners:

"I think caring for a child is a joint responsibility and we should have legislation that reflects this".

"More and more families are finding that the mother is actually earning more, or the father wants to take more of a role with the children. An arrangement such as this may be very helpful in such circumstances".

Some fathers also commented that this leave would help facilitate the balance between working and family life:

"It would give us the opportunity to spend time at home together and manage needs of both family and work".

However, many fathers also commented that it would be difficult for employers to facilitate the changes.

"Sounds like a good idea, however, not sure how employers will deal with it".

"Sounds like a good idea but it will be hard for employers to cover staff".

Only one father hinted that employers may not be in favour of male employees taking such leave:

"Employers must be forced to make the changes in legislation and employees must be protected if they take it".

The use of the word "protected" suggests that employees who take this leave could be impacted upon negatively in terms of their employment. This is in contrast to the women's responses, many of whom focused on the potential for shared leave to impact negatively on their husband or partner's long term career. On the whole fathers did not mention that taking shared leave could impact negatively on their career progression or that they felt they could not ask for leave from their employer for this reason.

3.2.3 Conclusions

Although there are differences in opinions about Shared Parental Leave, some common trends emerged:

- The majority of parents agreed that financial concerns would influence their decision whether to take shared leave or not. Many parents commented that in families where the mother is the main earner shared leave would be most beneficial.
- The majority of respondents agreed with the concept of shared leave and believe it has many positive outcomes, for example the time for fathers to bond with their children, the promotion of childcare being a shared responsibility and the ability to balance work and family.
- It was clear that even though some families would not use the shared leave for whatever reason, there was a general acknowledgement that the new arrangements provided more flexibility for families that are in a

position to use them. In particular, the leave could be tailored to meet individual family needs. This is best summed up with a quote from one of the mothers who completed the survey:

"I feel strongly that greater flexibility around parental leave will allow working families to find the most appropriate solution to their unique situation".

Table 1: Summary of male and female views:

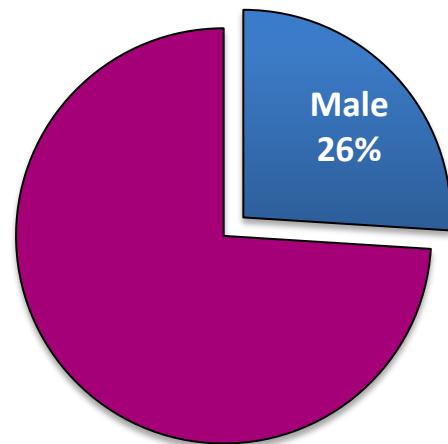
	Advantages	Disadvantages
Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficial if the mother is the main earner. • Encourages bonding between father and child. • Promotes childcare as a shared responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial concerns (husband/partner main earner). • Negative impact on husband/partner's career. • Would prefer to take the leave themselves. • It's the mother's role to look after the children.
Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to bond with child. • More choice for fathers than the current system. • Promotes childcare as a shared responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial matters (father main earner, couldn't afford to live on statutory pay). • Mothers prefer to take the leave. • Difficulties with employers managing the leave.

3.3 Fathers' Results

3.3.1 Profile of male respondents

26% of survey respondents were male.

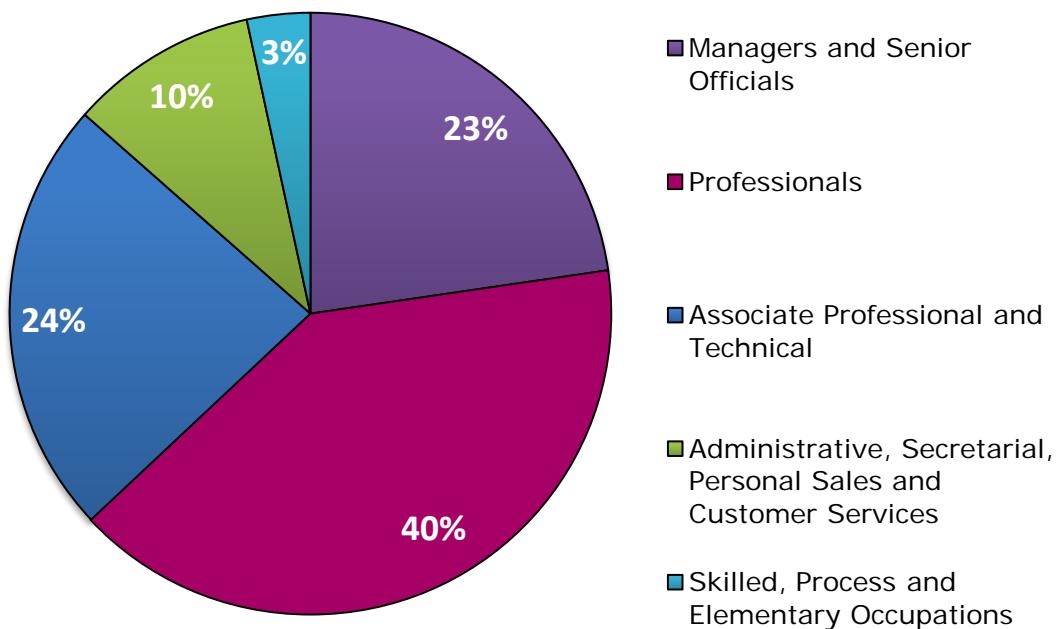
100% lived in a two parent family.



Occupational group

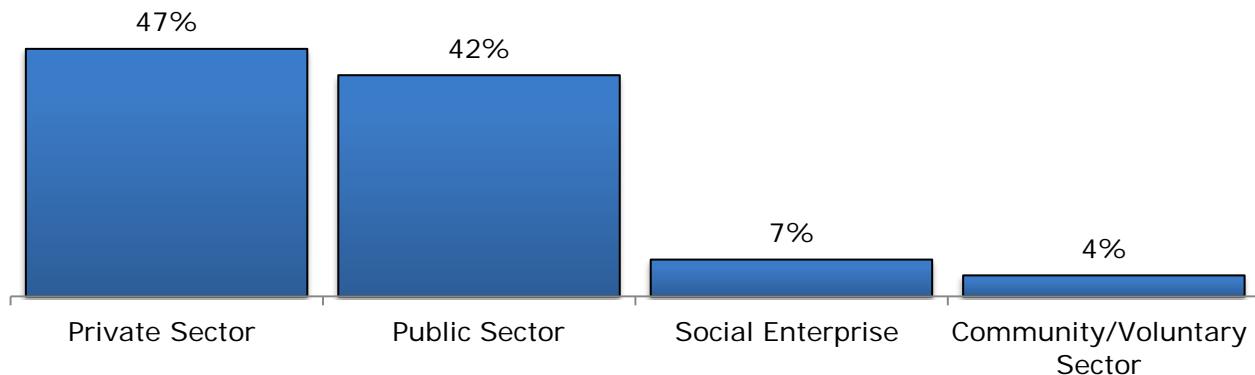
The majority of male respondents belonged to the professional occupational group (which includes Teachers, Engineers, Dentists and Solicitors).

23% were managers or senior officials. Only 13% of male respondents were in either the administrative, secretarial, personal sales and customer services or the skilled, process and elementary occupations groups.



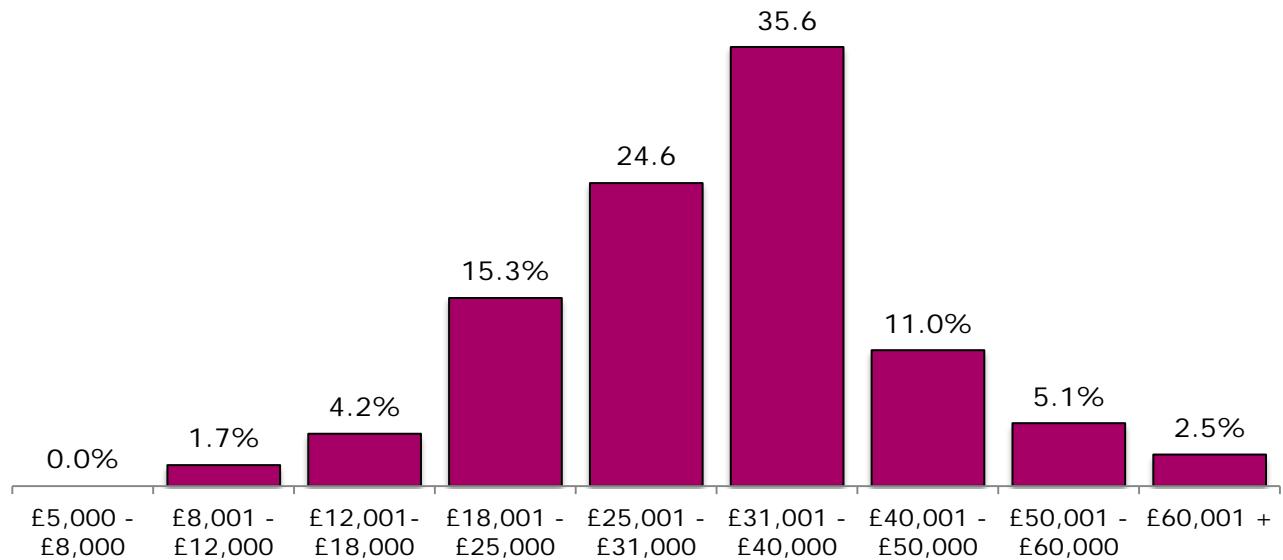
Sector of work

The majority of male respondents worked in the public sector (47%), however this was closely followed by 42% who worked in the private sector. Fewer respondents worked in the Social Enterprise sector (7%) or the Community/Voluntary sector (4%).



Annual salary

Just over a third of fathers had an annual salary of £31,000-£40,000 per year. 18.6% earned over £40,000 annually. Only 5.9% earned up to £18,000 per year.



3.3.2 Ordinary Paternity Leave

Fathers are entitled to take two weeks ordinary paternity leave after the birth of their child. Only fathers who have been working for their employer for 26 weeks before the baby is born are entitled to take paternity leave.

80% of respondents took ordinary paternity leave. The remaining 20% did not take any paternity leave.

Of these respondents, some trends emerged:

- Fathers who were managers and senior officials¹ and those who work in skilled trades, process trades and elementary occupations were less likely to take paternity leave than fathers who are professionals, associate and technical professionals or worked in administrative and customer services roles (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Fathers who took Ordinary Paternity Leave by occupational group



¹ See appendix for breakdown of occupational groups.

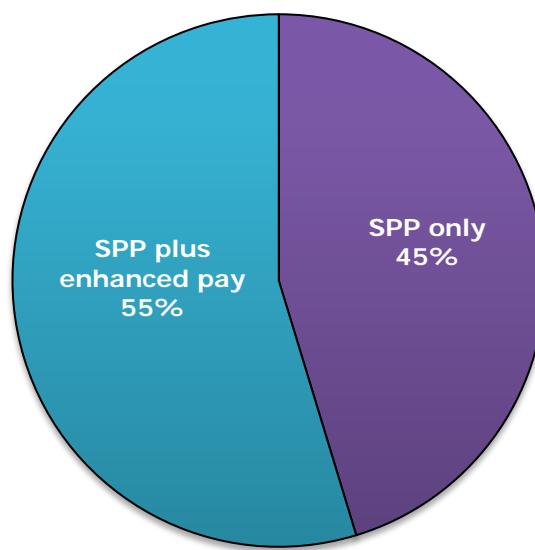
- Fathers who work in the public sector are more likely to take paternity leave than those working in the private sector² (92% compared to 71% respectively).
- Fathers who worked more than 40 hours a week were less likely than fathers working between 30 and 40 hours to take paternity leave (74% compared to 84% respectively).

3.3.3 Paternity Pay

Fathers who take ordinary paternity leave are entitled to receive Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP), which is paid at the rate of £136.78 per week. Some employers offer an enhanced paternity pay package which is above the rate of SPP, in some cases it can be as much as the equivalent of full pay.

Our survey results showed that the percentage of respondents receiving SPP only and enhanced paternity leave was almost half and half. A slightly higher number of fathers (55%) received enhanced pay compared to those receiving SPP only (45%).

Figure 4: Paternity Pay received



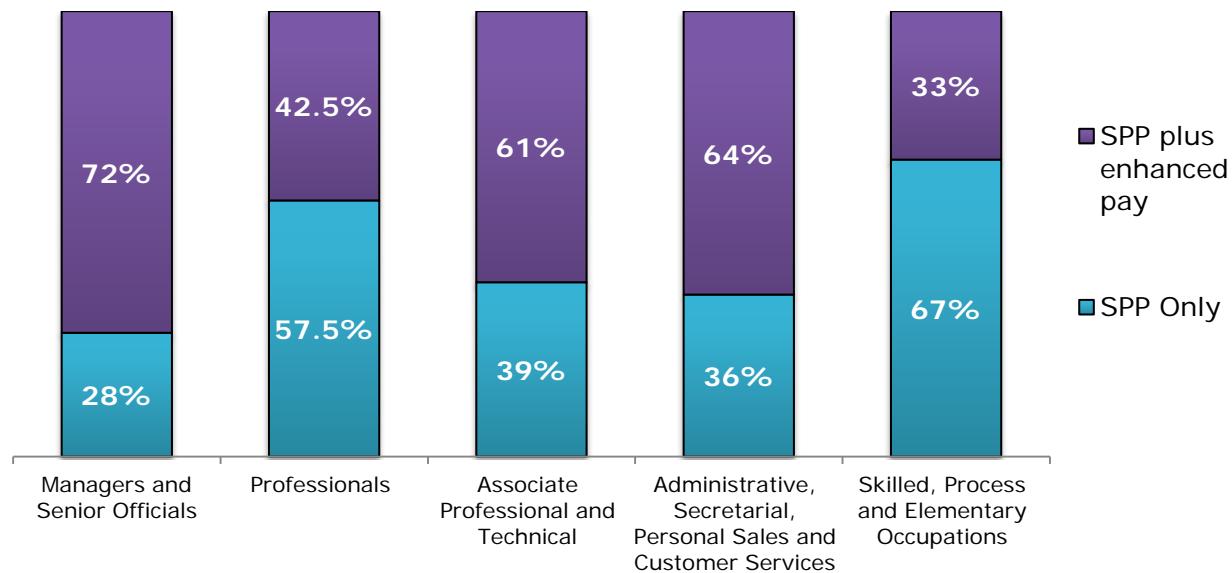
A breakdown of the results showed that:

- Managers and Senior Officials were more likely to receive enhanced paternity pay (72%) above any other occupational group. It is interesting to note that this group of respondents were also the least likely to take up paternity leave. Skilled, process and elementary occupations had the highest number of fathers receiving only SPP (67%). See Figure 5. This could perhaps explain

² The number of male respondents working in the community/voluntary sector and in Social Enterprises was too low to carry out an analysis from this perspective.

why 25% of these respondents (second largest percentage after Managers and Senior Officials at 31%) did not take paternity leave.

Figure 5: Paternity pay by occupational group



- Perhaps unsurprisingly, fathers with the highest salaries were more likely to receive an enhanced paternity pay package. In contrast fathers in the lowest paid positions were more likely to receive SPP only (83%).

Figure 6: Paternity pay by annual salary



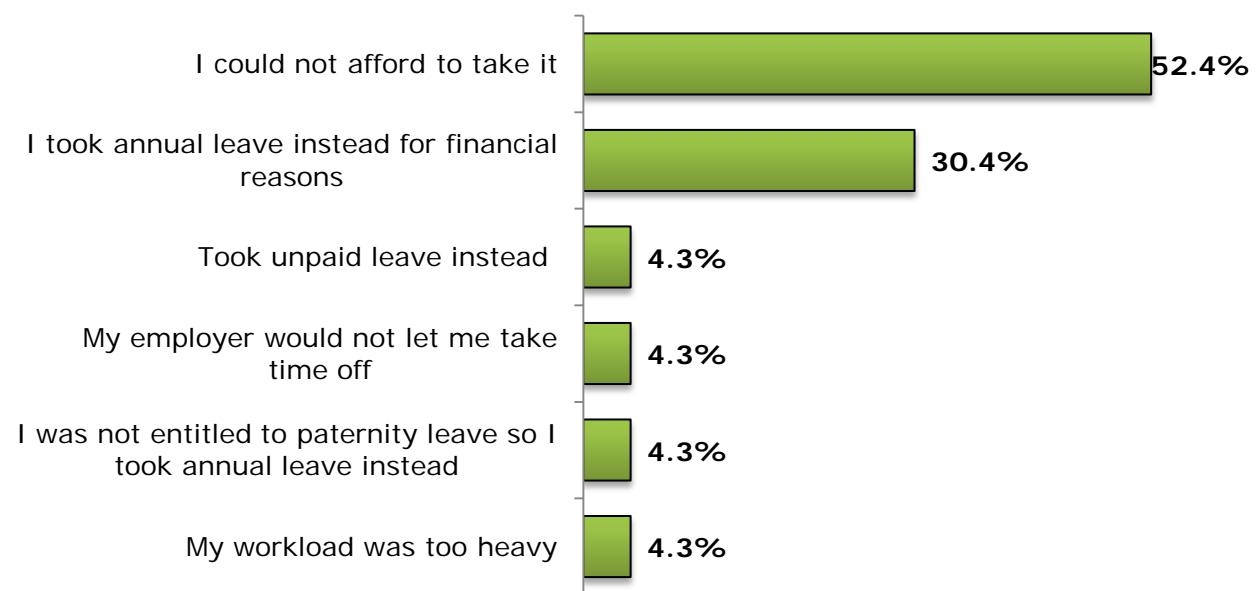
- Fathers working in the private sector were more likely to receive enhanced paternity pay than those in the public sector (60% and 49% respectively). Anecdotal evidence suggests that public sector employees are entitled to more workplace benefits than private sector employees. Indeed, the survey shows that public sector employers offer more family friendly working policies than private sector employers. Perhaps this trend in the paternity pay results

is linked with a higher number of respondents working in the private sector at a higher occupational level than those respondents in the public sector.

3.3.4 Reasons for not taking paternity leave

Only 20% of respondents did not take paternity leave. The most common reason for not taking paternity leave, cited by over half of the respondents (52%), was "I could not afford to take it". A further 30% took annual leave instead of ordinary paternity leave for financial reasons. Fewer respondents commented that their employer would not let them take time off (4%) or that their workload was too heavy (4%).

Figure 7: Reasons for not taking paternity pay

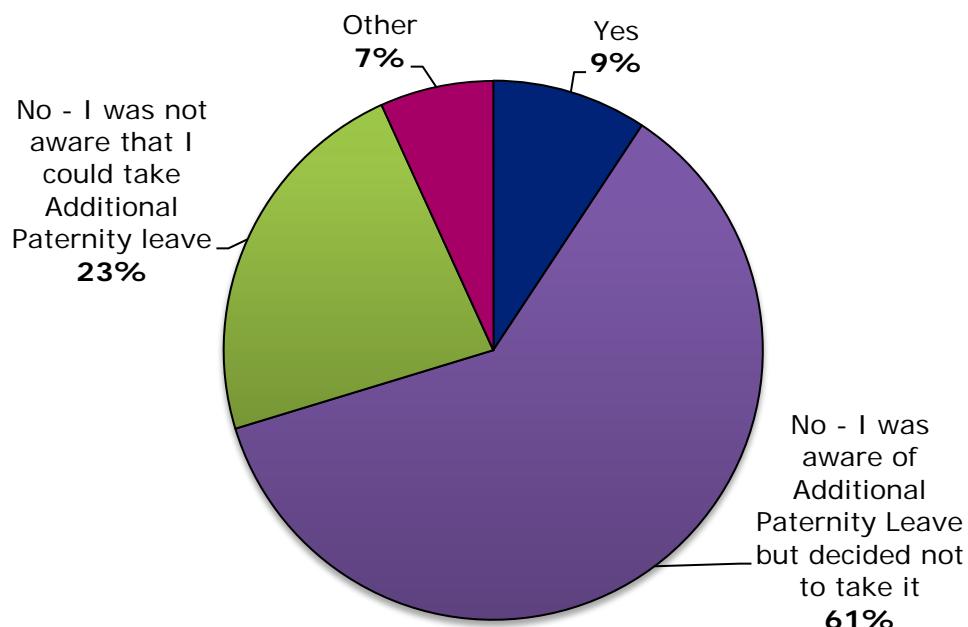


3.3.5 Additional Paternity Leave

Additional Paternity Leave allows the father (or mother's partner) to take some of the mother's maternity leave to allow her to return to work before the end of her 12 month maternity period.

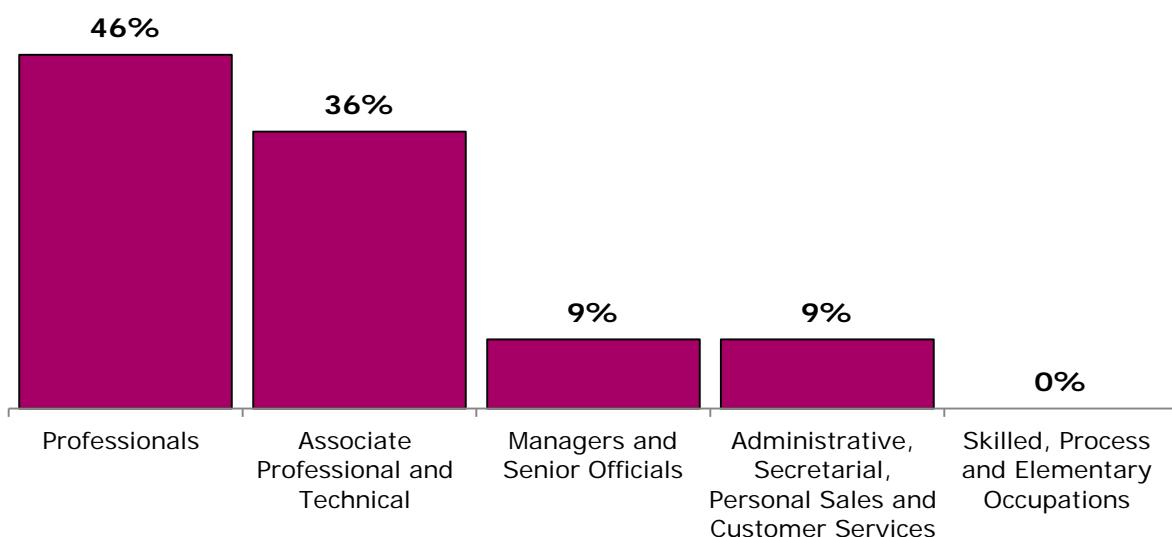
Additional Paternity Leave can be taken from 20 weeks after the baby's birth (provided the mother has returned to work) and must be completed by the child's first birthday. Only 9% of the survey respondents took Additional Paternity Leave. The majority of respondents (61%) were aware of their entitlement to Additional Paternity Leave, but decided not to take it. 23% were not aware of their entitlement.

Figure 8: Up-take of Additional Paternity Leave



The majority of fathers who availed of Additional Paternity Leave worked in the public sector (70%). A further 20% worked in the private sector in organisations with over 250 staff. In terms of the occupational groups the respondents fitted into, the majority of fathers who took Additional Paternity Leave were in professional occupations (46%), this was followed by associate professionals (36%). None of the fathers who took Additional Paternity Leave worked in skilled, process or elementary occupations.

Figure 9: Fathers who took Additional Paternity Leave by occupational group



As with Ordinary Paternity Leave, the majority of fathers who decided not to take the leave did so for financial reasons, for example:

"I could not afford to take Additional Paternity Leave as the amount that would have been paid, similar to that on normal paternity leave, was a significant reduction to my standard wage and much lower than the amount needed for me to financially run my household".

However, in order to still take extra time off some fathers made other arrangements, such as taking annual leave or changing their working patterns. Again financial matters, and the negative impact taking leave could have on the family income, are the main deciding factors for fathers in whether or not to take leave. For those fathers who did avail of the leave, the main benefit was the additional bonding time they gained with their new son or daughter:

"I wanted to spend some time with my family and I believe it will be of benefit for my son to bond with me".

"I wanted to bond properly with my child, I took 3 months off with him. I am very serious when I say that I think dads should take this time off, you understand your child better, I now feel I have a much better connection between the child, my parent role and home".

3.3.6 Change in employment patterns after birth

30% of fathers changed their employment patterns after the birth of their child to accommodate their family's needs. The majority of fathers (70%) did not.

A breakdown of results by annual salary, occupational group and sector of work showed no clear trends in the data, however the number of family friendly working policies offered by the father's employer did prove to be an influential factor in the results.

All parents (with children under 18 years) are entitled to make a flexible working request, however not all employers will have specific workplace policies in place to accommodate employees who wish to make a request. Much of the literature and media coverage which is focused on fathers changing their working patterns or hours after the birth of a child show that the organisational culture and attitude towards family friendly working patterns are key deciding factors in parents' decisions. This research confirms these findings, as fathers who worked in family friendly organisations were more likely to change their working patterns to accommodate their families' needs. For example in organisations where no family friendly working policies (FFWPs) were offered, 100% of fathers did not change their hours or patterns of work. However, as Figure 10 shows, the number of fathers changing to family friendly work patterns increases as the number of FFWPs offered by an organisation increases. Almost 40% of fathers working in organisations which offer three types of FFWPs changed their working

patterns/hours. This shows that if an organisation embraces family friendly working, fathers are more likely to try to balance their work and family lives.

Figure 10: Fathers who changed their working hours by number of Family friendly Working Policies (FFWPs) offered

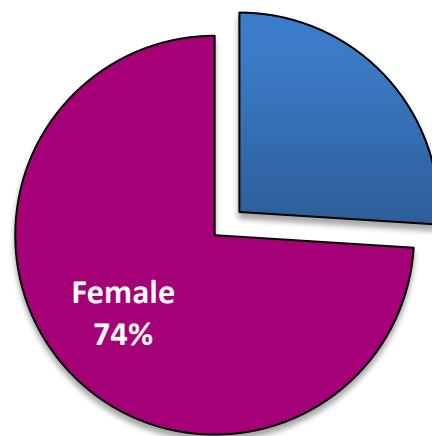


3.4 Mothers' Results

3.4.1 Profile of female respondents

The majority of survey respondents were female, making up 74% of total respondents.

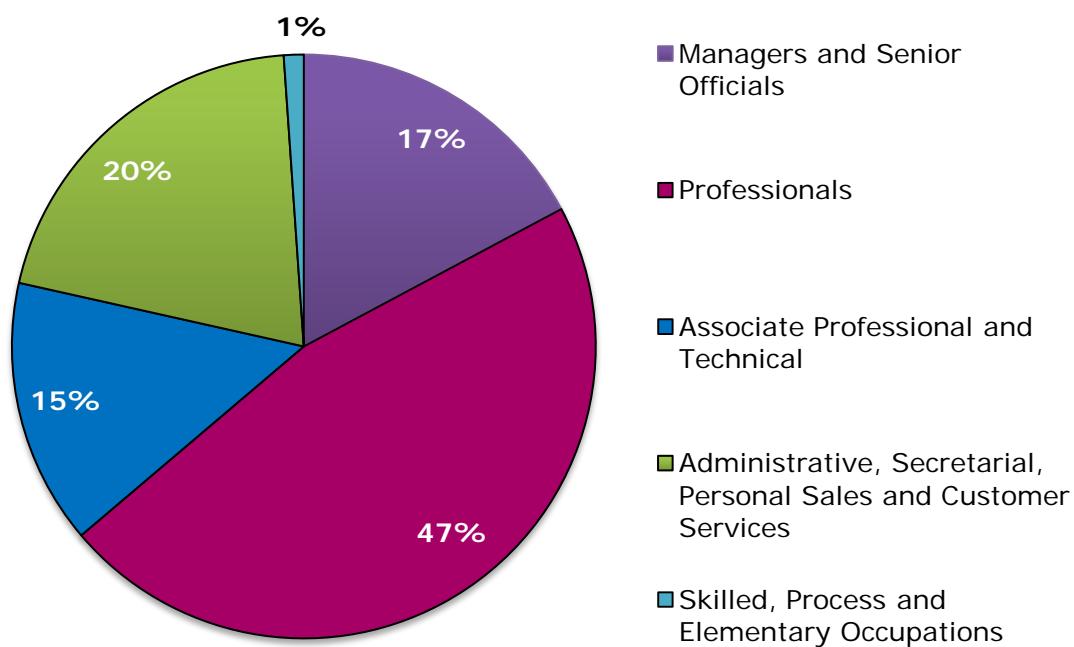
97% lived in a two parent family, this is a contrast to the male respondents who were 100% lived in two parent households.



Occupational group

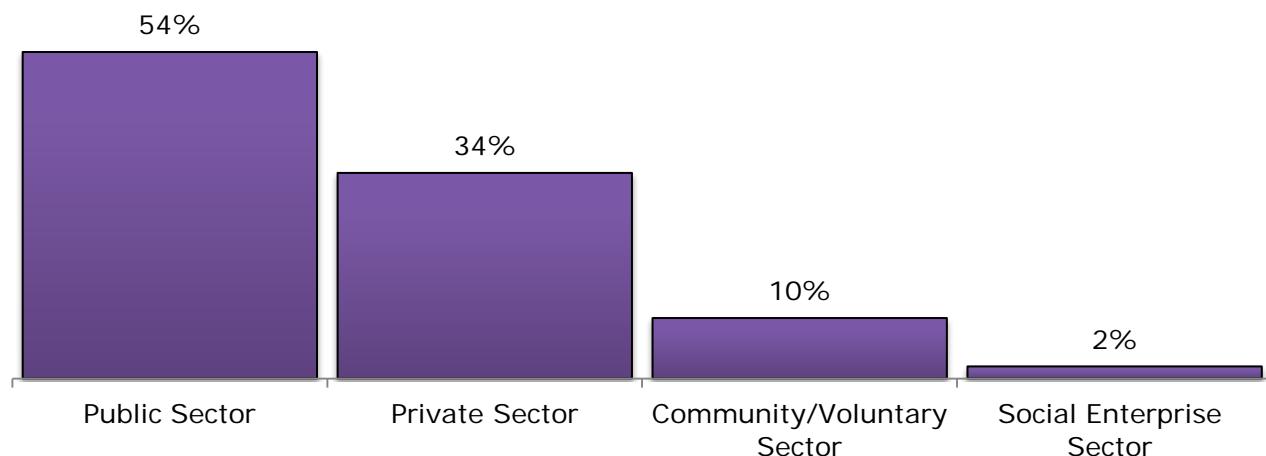
As with male respondents, the majority of females belonged to the professional occupational group (47%). However, in comparison to the male results, only 17% of females were managers and senior officials.

A higher percentage of females than males (21% compared to 13%) worked in either the administrative, secretarial, personal sales and customer services occupational group or in Skilled, Process and Elementary Occupations.



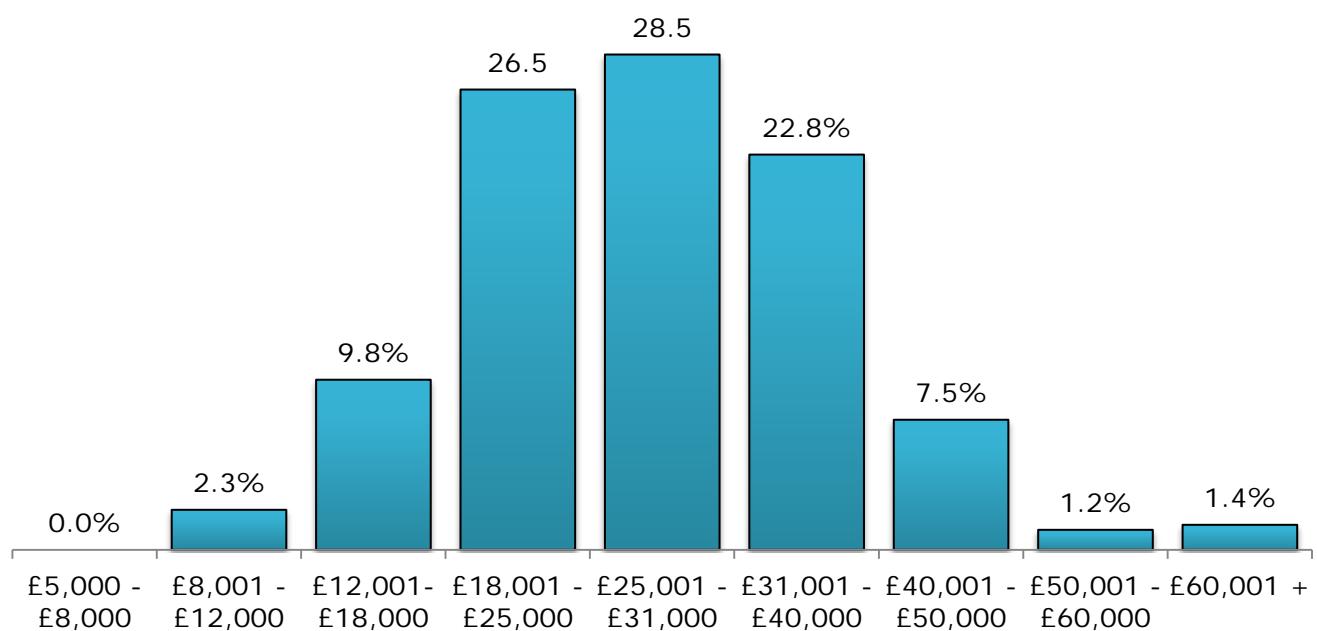
Sector of work

A higher number of female respondents than male respondents worked in the public sector (54% compared to 47%). Correspondingly just over a third of females worked in the private sector compared to 42% of male respondents. Similar numbers of male and female respondents worked in the community/voluntary sector or the Social Enterprise sector.



Annual salary

78% of female respondents had an annual salary of between £18,001 and £40,000 per year. only 10.1% of female respondents (compared to 18.6% of male respondents) earned over £40,000 per year.

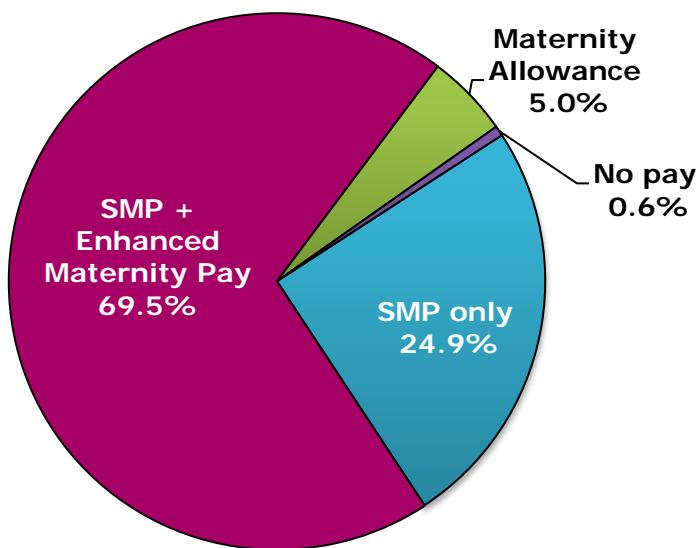


3.4.2 Maternity Pay

Women who have been working for their employer for at least 26 weeks by the 15th week before the baby is due are entitled to receive Statutory Maternity Pay from their employer. SMP is paid at the rate of 90% of the woman's average pay for the first six weeks, followed by 33 weeks at £136.78 (2013-14), or 90% of their gross weekly earnings, if lower ³. Some employers offer enhanced maternity pay which is paid above the rate of SMP.

The majority of mothers(69.5%) received enhanced maternity pay in addition to their Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP). Just under 25% received SMP only. Fewer parents received Maternity Allowance (5%) or no pay (0.6%).

Figure 11: Type of maternity pay received



A breakdown of the results showed that occupational status had little impact on whether mothers were paid SMP only or an enhanced amount. Other factors were more influential, in particular:

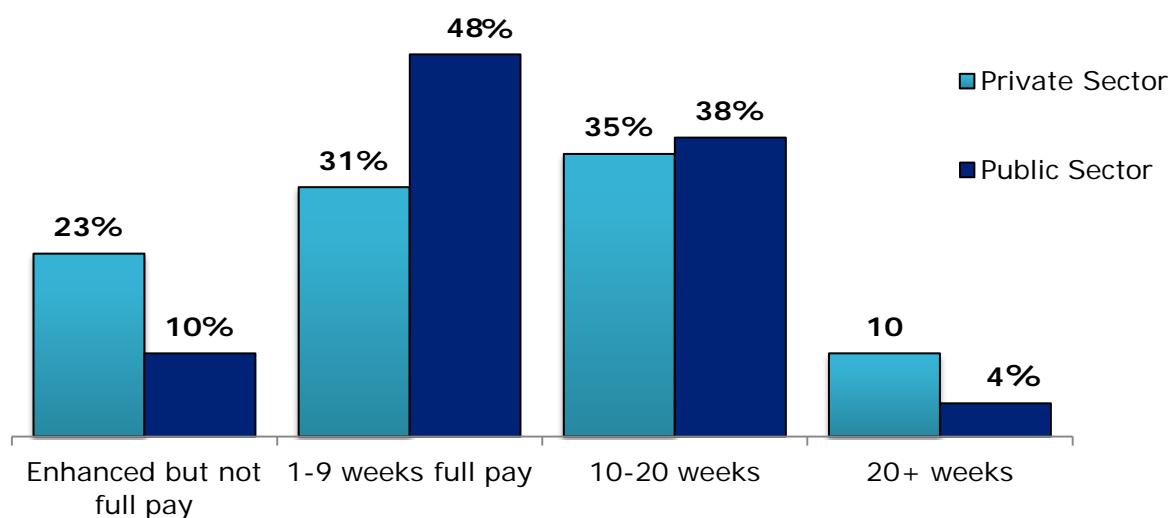
- The sector of work has a large influence on the type of maternity pay received. 90% of mothers who worked in the public sector received enhanced maternity pay. The picture in the private sector is not as clear cut, with the results showing an almost half and half split between those receiving SMP only (48%) and those receiving enhanced pay (52%).
- The type of enhanced maternity pay received in each sector differs. Although maternity leave packages differ across organisations, there are two general types: those who receive enhanced pay above SMP but do not receive full

³ Mothers who do not qualify for SMP, may be eligible for Maternity Allowance (MA). MA is paid for 39 weeks, at the rate of £136.78 per week (2013-14).

pay for any amount of time (for example mothers may receive 90% of their average earnings for a period of their maternity leave), and those who receive full pay for a number of weeks. In both instances the initial period of full pay is usually followed by a further drop in pay (for example half pay) for a number of weeks before reducing to SMP. For the purposes of this analysis, the breakdown of enhanced maternity pay focuses on the number of weeks where 90% of the salary is received or full pay is provided.

Figure 12 shows that more private employers offered enhanced, but not full, pay to employees than public sector employers (23% compared to 10%). However, the majority of public sector employees received 1-9 weeks full pay, whereas the majority of private sector employees received full pay for ten weeks or more, with 10% of those receiving 20 or more weeks at full pay.

Figure 12: Enhanced maternity pay by sector of work



- A closer look at the private sector results also reveal that the size of the organisation has an impact on the maternity pay received. Companies with a larger number of employees are more likely to provide enhanced maternity pay. For example, 74% of employees in large companies with 250+ staff received enhanced pay, followed by 61% of employees in companies with 51-250 employees. Smaller companies were less likely to pay an enhanced amount, for example only 22% of employees in companies with between 11-50 employees and 31% of employees in organisations with 10 or less employees received an enhanced maternity pay package.
- The number of years a person had worked for their employer before going on maternity leave also played a part in the amount of maternity pay received. 40% of employees who worked for their employer for one year or less

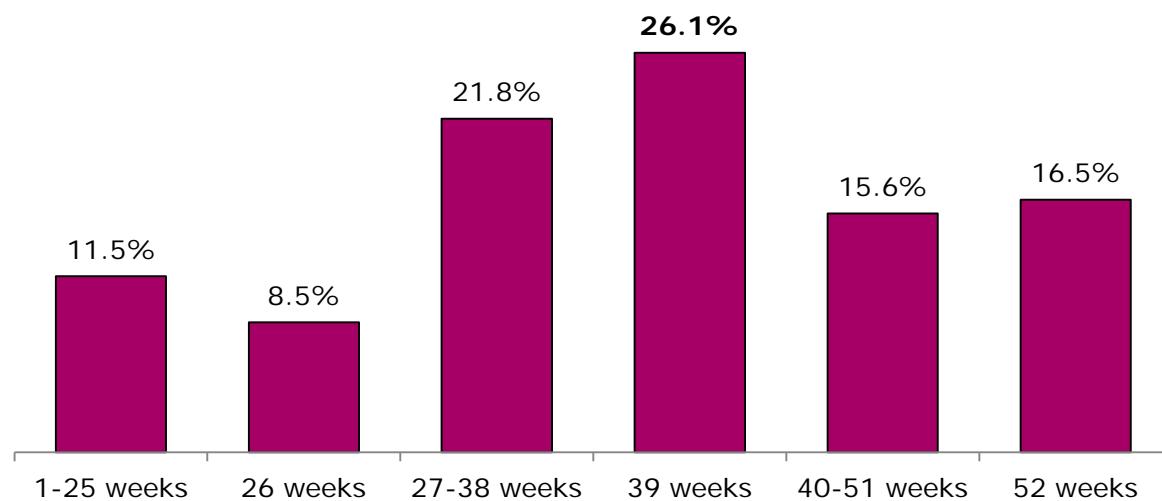
received enhanced pay, compared to 85% of those who had worked for 10 years or more for their employer⁴.

3.4.3 Maternity Leave

Mothers are entitled to take 52 weeks maternity leave. The first 39 weeks are paid (see section 3.4.2) and the remaining three months are unpaid.

The majority of women in the survey returned to work after 39 weeks of maternity leave (26.1%). This is unsurprising given that the last three months of maternity leave are unpaid, unless the employer provides an enhanced package which extends to this stage of maternity leave. Indeed, the majority of respondents returned to work before week 40 of their maternity leave (67.9%). 32.1% of respondents took more than 39 weeks leave, with only 16.5% taking the full 52 weeks.

Figure 13: Length of maternity leave



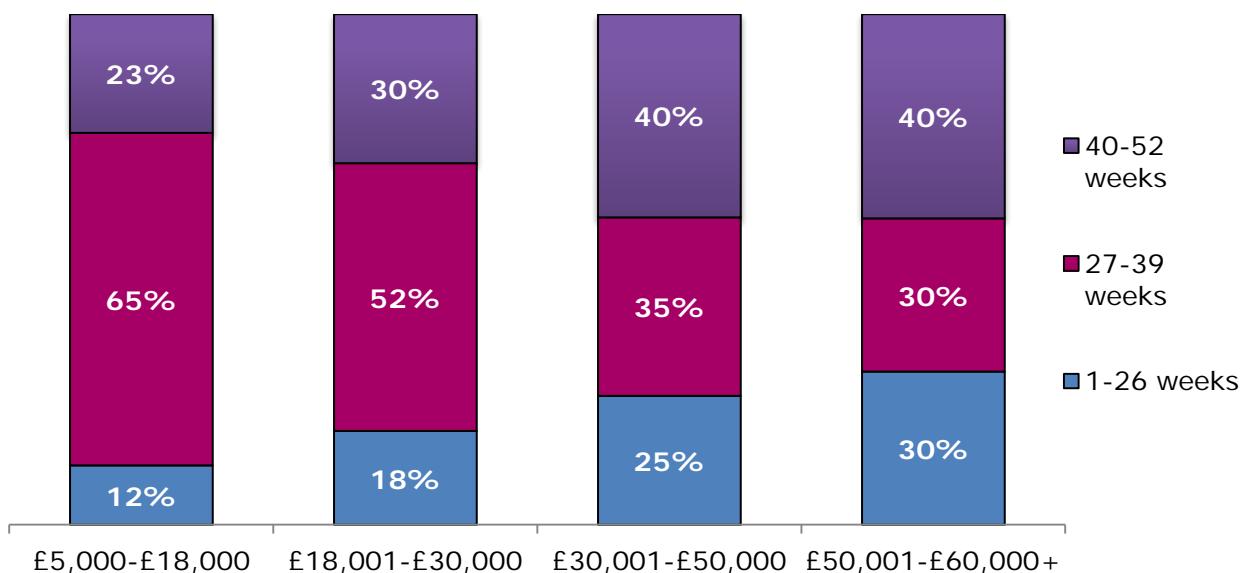
It is interesting to consider the statistics on length of maternity leave at face value because certain trends appear which predict or pre-empt the reasons why mothers return to work at the time they do. For example, the results showed that:

- Mothers who worked in administrative, secretarial, customer service or personal sales were more likely to return to work at or before 39 weeks maternity leave (75%). Only 24% took more than 39 weeks maternity leave. It is also noticeable that a higher number of women in senior or management roles and also those in professional roles, were more likely to return to work before week 26 (22% and 25% respectively).

⁴ Compared to 65% of employees working in an organisation for 2-4 years and 80% employed for 5-9 years receiving enhanced pay.

- Mothers earning the lowest salaries were most likely to return to work between weeks 26 and 39 of maternity leave. As the annual salary increases the number of women returning to work during this period decreases. Interestingly, also as the annual salary increases the number of mothers taking longer maternity leave (40-52 weeks) increases but so does the number taking between 1 and 26 weeks. 30% of women earning over £50,000 per year returned to work at week 26 or before.

Figure 13: Length of maternity leave by annual salary



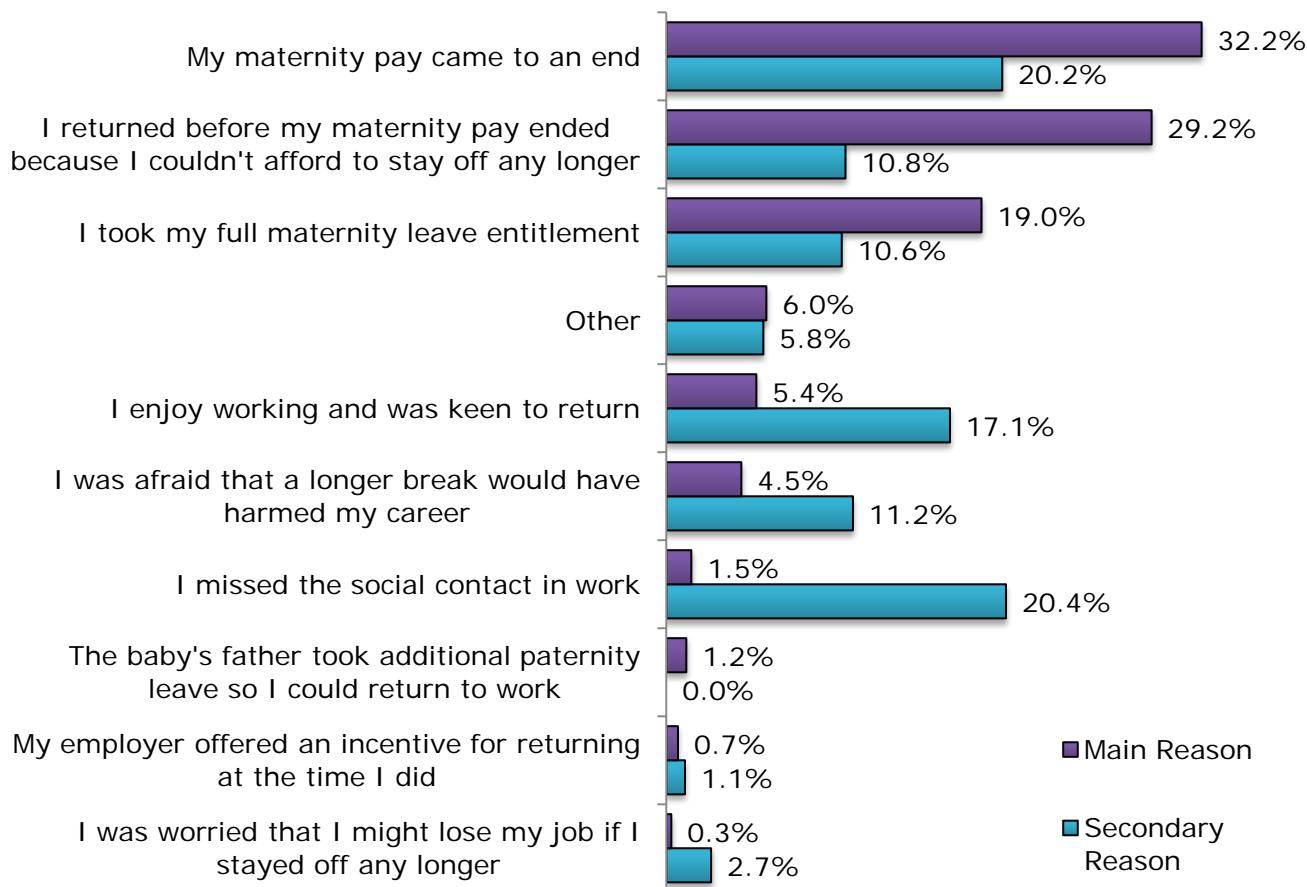
- Respondents receiving SMP only (26%) or Maternity Allowance (47%) during their maternity leave were more likely to return to work at week 26 or before than those receiving an enhanced maternity pay package (16%). Correspondingly over a third of mothers receiving enhanced maternity pay (36%) compared to 25% of those receiving only SMP, or 18% receiving only Maternity Allowance, took 40 weeks or more off on leave. 75% of respondents who took the full 52 weeks received enhanced maternity pay, compared to only 23% of those receiving SMP only or Maternity Allowance (2%).

From these raw results two prominent factors which influence the length of the maternity leave period appear – firstly the impact of financial matters and secondly, the influence of occupational status and hence responsibility. These are two issues which are explored in more detail in the next section.

3.4.4 Timing of return to work

We asked respondents to tell us why they returned to work at the time they did. In addition to asking for the main reason for the time of return, we also asked respondents for any other factors which influenced their decision. The results line up with the conclusions drawn from the last section which explored the statistics on the length of maternity leave taken.

Figure 14: Main and secondary reasons for timing of return to work



Financial matters are a main factor in women's decisions about when to return to work. Indeed almost two thirds of the respondents stated that they returned to work because of financial reasons. For 32.2% of mothers the main reason was that maternity pay came to an end, however almost a third of respondents also commented that they returned to work before their maternity pay ended because they couldn't afford to stay off any longer (29.2%). It is interesting that of these two groups of respondents, the majority received enhanced maternity pay (64.9%). Therefore despite receiving a pay package above the rate of SMP, the enhanced amount is not enough to support families after the birth of a child.

It is clear that financial concerns are the main influencing factor for the majority of women when they are deciding when to end their maternity leave and return to work. The qualitative responses reflected this:

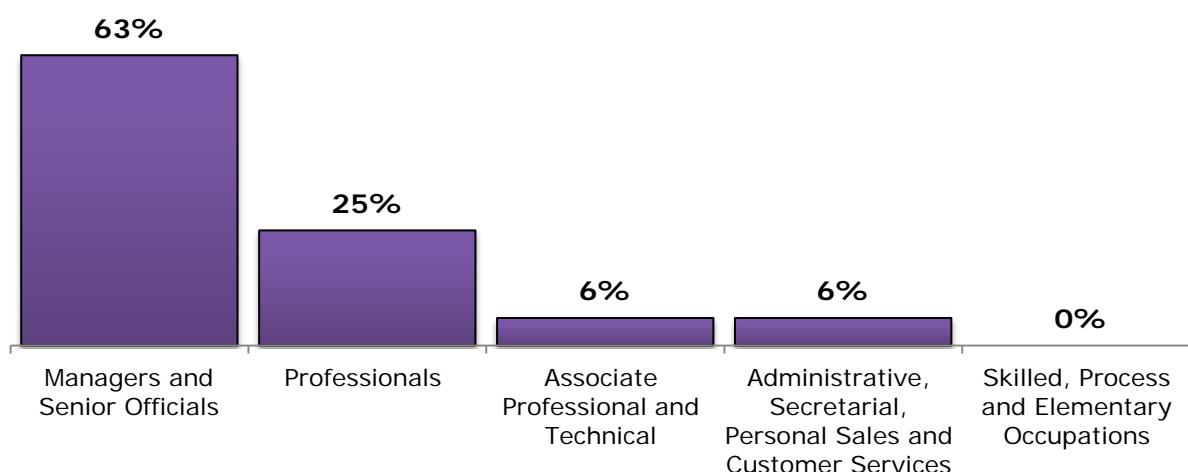
"There was no choice surrounding my return to work. It was a purely financial decision".

"Statutory Pay needs to be increased from the very poor level it is currently at. The current level can barely support a child in nappies and food, never mind trying to keep a roof over your head and feeding the rest of a family".

Other factors, such as missing the social contact at work (20.4%) and being keen to return to work (17.1%), were also important for mothers, but were not the main factor in decision making.

It is interesting that factors such as 'I was worried that a longer career break would have harmed my career' and 'I was worried I might lose my job if I stayed off any longer' feature more highly on the list of secondary reasons than in the list of main reasons why women return to work (4.8% compared to 13.9%, combined figures). However a breakdown of results shows that for women who chose these as their main reasons for ending their maternity leave, the majority were managers or senior officials (63%). Furthermore, 50% of those ending their maternity leave because of career concerns also worked over 40 hours per week. These results taken with the results of the previous section, which showed that employees in higher paid roles were more likely than other groups to return to work before 26 weeks maternity leave, could explain why these particular women return to work earlier.

Figure 15: Timing of return to work due to career concerns by occupational group



This section and the results of the previous section on the length of maternity leave taken have shown that for many women the decision about the amount of maternity leave they take is dictated by a series of interlinking factors. For example, many women are constrained in the amount of leave they take by financial concerns, even those who receive an enhanced maternity pay package. On the other side of the scale women in higher paid, more time demanding roles of greater responsibility, such as managers or senior officials, although they may receive better maternity pay packages from their employers, are constrained in the amount of time they take by the importance of their job roles. This is evident by the number of parents in this situation who took less than 26 weeks leave and also returned to work at the time they did because of fear of harm to their career, or the chance that they may lose their job altogether by taking more time away from work.

3.4.5 Returning to work after maternity leave

The majority of respondents did return to work after maternity leave (98%). Just over half returned to exactly the same job (54.1%). The remaining 45.9% returned to different jobs, or the same job but at reduced hours or a different pattern of work, see Figure 16.

Figure 16: Post maternity leave employment

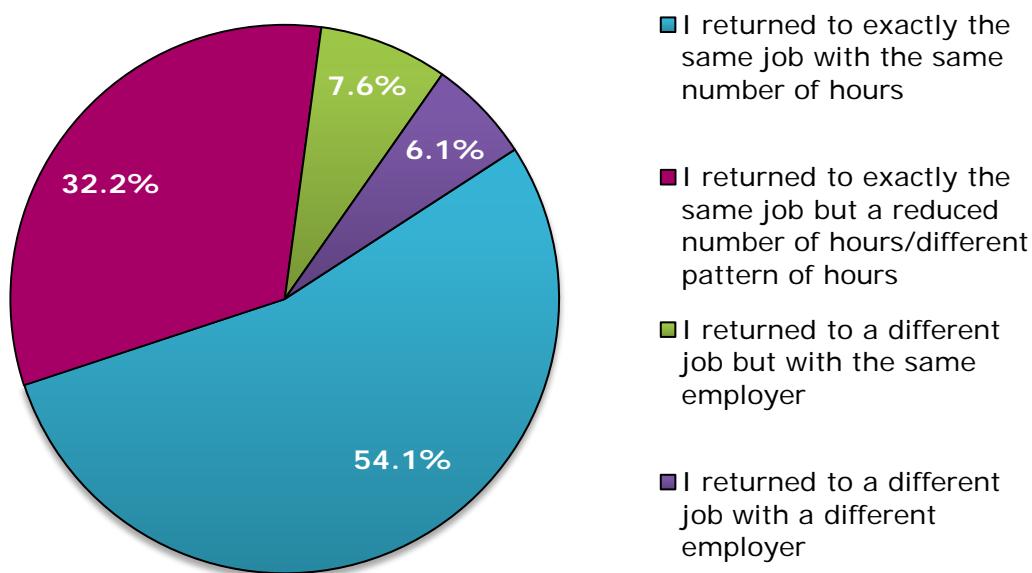
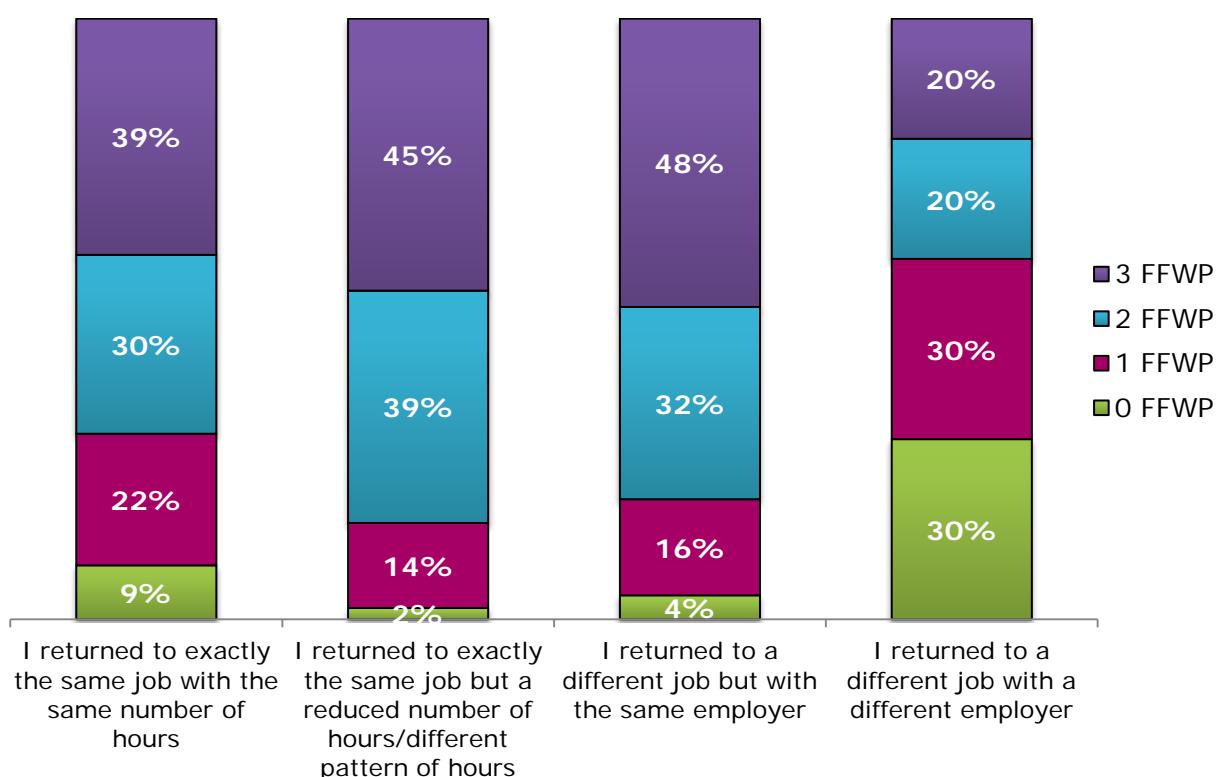


Figure 17 breaks down the results by the number of family friendly working policies (FFWPs) offered by respondents' pre-maternity leave employer. It is clear that the number of family friendly working policies offered has an influence on women's post-maternity leave decisions. There are three broad types of FFWPs which can be offered by employers, above the statutory minimum, these are:

- 1) Enhanced maternity and paternity pay or leave arrangements.
- 2) Childcare support, such as offering a Childcare Voucher scheme or a workplace nursery.
- 3) Flexible working arrangements, such as accommodating part time hours, flexi-time, home working or condensed hours, and having policies in place to assist employees in making a flexible working request.

Employers who offer a range of FFWPs assist their employees with balancing their work and family lives. The results show that employees who stayed with their pre-maternity leave employer were more likely to work in very family friendly organisations. 60% of employees who changed employers after maternity leave worked in organisations which offered no FFWPs or only one type (30% and 30% respectively).

Figure 17: Employment decisions by FFWPs offered by pre-maternity employer



Employees who stayed with their employer in the same job role but either reduced their hours or changed the pattern of their hours, or those who changed roles, were more likely to work in very family friendly organisations. Indeed, 45% of mothers who reduced their hours or changed their working patterns were employed by organisations offering 3 types of FFWPs. 48% of mothers who changed jobs within the organisation also worked for employers who provided three types of policies.

Over two thirds (69%) of women who returned to exactly the same job worked in organisations offering two (30%) or three (39%) types of FFWPS.

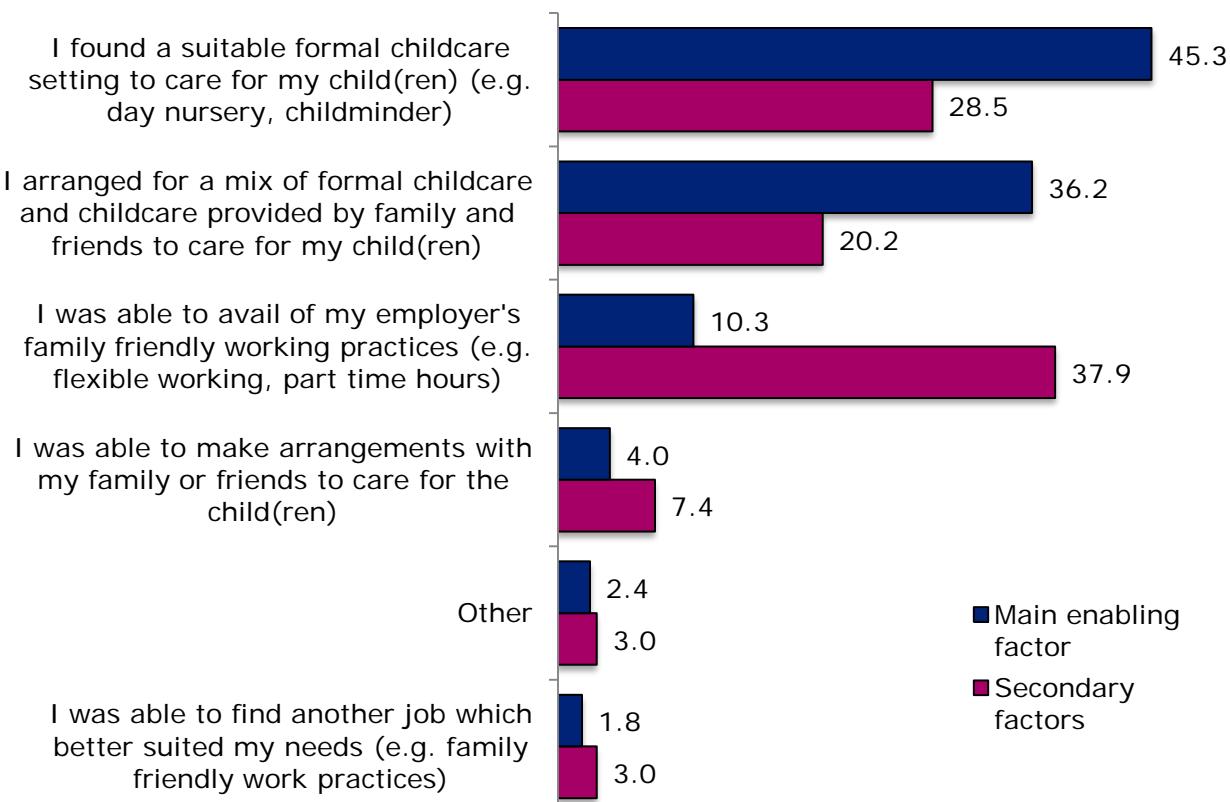
3.4.6 Factors which enabled mothers to return to work

There are certain factors which mothers must have in place to facilitate their to return to work. Although the availability of FFWPs may be the most important enabling factor for some women, for others, there are other issues which are more important to enable their return to work.

In order to understand this decision, we asked parents to detail the factors which enabled them to return to work. As with the question about the timing of the return to work, we asked mothers to detail the main enabling factor and then any additional factors. Figure 17 shows the results.

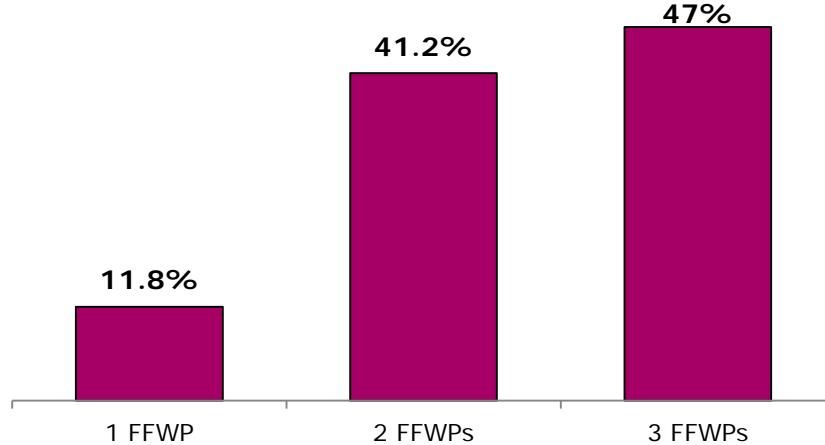
It is clear from the results that the top enabling factor which helped women to return to work was the ability to arrange suitable childcare to meet their needs (85.5%). 45.3% of these mothers found suitable formal childcare, 36.2% arranged for a mix of formal and informal care and a further 4% used only family and friends.

Figure 18: Main and secondary factors which enabled respondents to return to work



10.3% of respondents mentioned that availing of their employer's family friendly working policies enabled them to return to work. Of these respondents, almost half (47%) worked for an employer which offered three or more types of family friendly working policies. This was followed by 41.2% of respondents whose employer offered two types and 11.8% of those whose employer offered one type. Although the availability of FFWPs was most commonly cited as a secondary enabling factor (37.9%), rather than a main factor, the results show that where employers are more family friendly, mothers are more likely to return to work because they have been facilitated by the policies offered to them.

Figure 19: Available Family friendly Work Policies as a main enabling factor



The last two sections showed that financial and career concerns were both deciding factors in how long women took for maternity leave. Similar trends are also evident when the results for enabling factors are broken down by mothers' annual salaries.

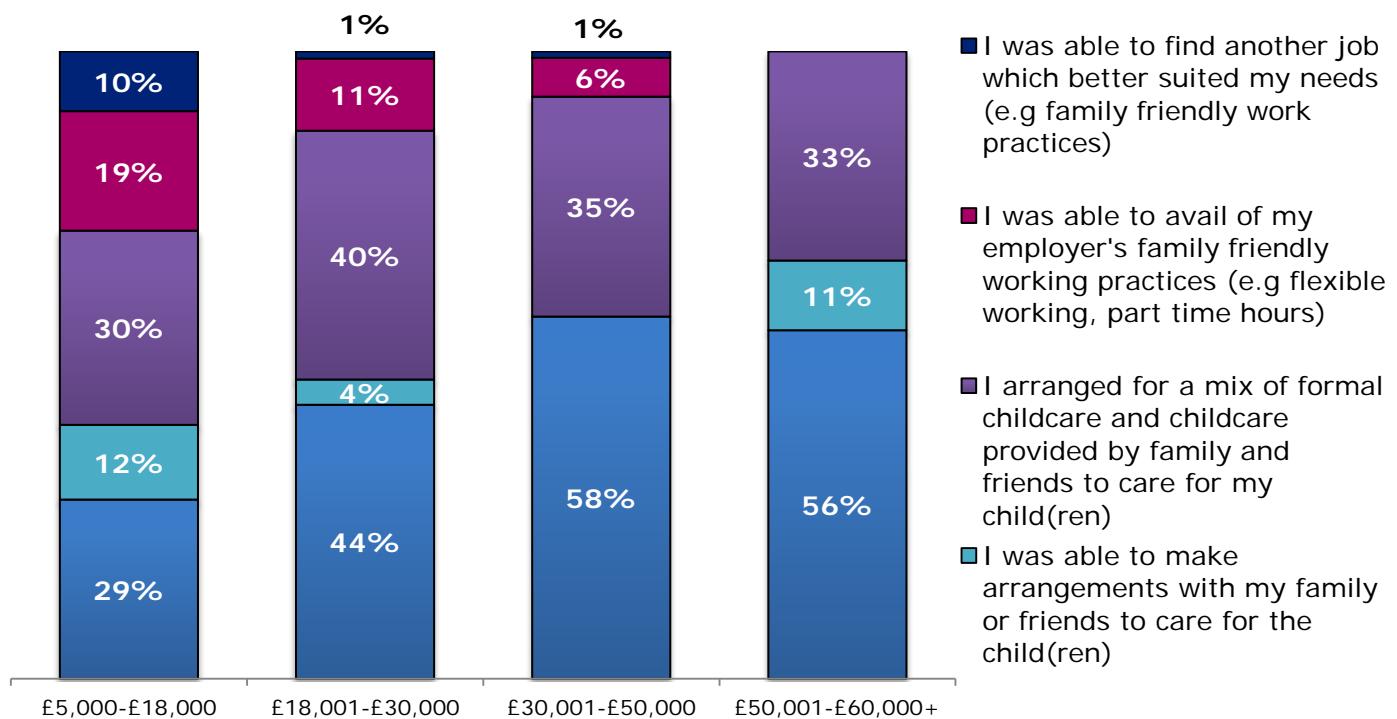
Figure 20 shows the results and uncovers a number of interesting trends:

- The number of respondents who relied solely on formal childcare to enable them to work increases as the annual salary increases, for example over half (56%) of mothers earning over £50,000 per year relied on formal childcare to return to work compared to 29% of mothers earning between £5,000 and £18,000 per year. This is perhaps a reflection of the cost of formal childcare, for most families relying solely on formal childcare is too expensive to be an option, this is particularly difficult for low income families.
- It is therefore not surprising that 12% of mothers earning between £5,000 and £18,000 rely on childcare provided by family and friends, as this can be a less expensive option. At the other end of the scale, 11% of higher income mothers (earning over £50,000 per year) also used informal childcare. This could perhaps be explained by the fact that the majority of parents in this group work over 40 hours per week. The inflexibility of formal childcare

services to provide care outside conventional working hours could lead these mothers to rely on family and friends.

- The number of parents using a mix of formal and informal childcare is high in each of the salary groups (over 30%). The lack of available, affordable and flexible childcare in Northern Ireland can make it difficult for families to find one source of childcare to meet their needs, therefore it is not unusual for parents to use a mix of both formal and informal childcare.

Figure 20: Main enabling factors by annual salary



- Interestingly, the number of female parents being able to return to work through the availability of their employer's family friendly working policies decreases as the annual salary increases. Indeed none of the respondents earning in the highest salary group availed of family friendly working policies. Perhaps this result is linked to the trend in the previous section which showed that women in management and senior official roles took less maternity leave because they did not want to harm their careers. In the same vein, perhaps mothers feel that availing of family friendly working policies, such as part time working or condensed hours, could be a sign of less job commitment.

The qualitative responses provided some respondent's experiences of the lack of a supportive employer with regards to family friendly working:

"My employer did not offer family friendly hours. As a Senior Manager I was explicitly told that I could not work part time or reduced hours. It was made clear if I wanted to do that I would have to leave...I have found it incredibly disappointing that being a Senior female manager has meant my options for flexible or part time working are severely reduced".

"Flexible working is not supported in my workplace. I have been left feeling inadequate in my job and embarrassed at having to beg for flexibility - but still not get it".

- Finally, women who have lower annual salaries are more likely to move to a job after maternity leave which better suits their needs. Indeed this likelihood decreases as the annual salary increases.

This section has shown that the ability to arrange childcare is the most important factor for women to return to work after maternity leave. The ability to also avail of family friendly working policies, such as flexible working, is important and can be a main enabling factor for mothers whose employers are family friendly.

4. Conclusions

This section discusses the prominent findings of the survey and allows us to draw conclusions about the factors which influence the decisions parents in Northern Ireland make about maternity, paternity and Shared Parental Leave, as well as the choices they make about their employment after the birth of a child.

4.1 Shared Parental Leave

Shared Parental Leave is generally considered as a positive development for families as the concept allows for greater flexibility and choice in allowing parents to find the appropriate solution for their circumstances. In general the respondents could see the benefits, particularly for families where the mother is the main earner. Shared leave was also considered to be a positive development for complementing women's careers, encouraging fathers to bond with their newborns and in promoting the model that childcare should be a joint responsibility between parents.

However, despite many families endorsing the development of Shared Parental Leave, the general consensus from both mothers and fathers was that in order to avail of the new system other sacrifices would have to be made. For many these sacrifices were the limiting factor for families being able to use shared leave. The two most prominent sacrifices centre around financial implications and career concerns, both of which are also key trends in the general maternity and paternity leave results. For this reason, they will now be discussed in turn.

4.2 Career concerns

The potential negative impact that taking Shared Parental Leave could have on a parent's career was mentioned by a large number of female respondents. Much of the language used by parents in the qualitative responses reveals that underlying stigmas about fathers taking extended time off around the birth of a child exist. For example, references to parents being "thought less of at work" or feeling "silly/wrong to ask for it [parental leave] in case it damaged their careers", and even one respondent's comment that "if it becomes more acceptable that the father can take time off too" she would use Shared Parental Leave, uncover the underlying belief that fathers will compromise their careers if they take time off for family reasons.

The negative relationship between maternity/paternity leave and career is a key theme which is also evident in the general maternity and paternity leave results. This is particularly apparent when the results for respondents in higher occupational groups and salary brackets are considered. For example, both mothers and fathers in manager and senior official roles were more likely than other occupational groups to receive enhanced pay whilst on leave, yet these respondents were also more likely to either return to work earlier than other

parents or not take leave at all (in the case of fathers). Almost a third of fathers (31%) in senior or management roles did not take any paternity leave, correspondingly 30% of mothers earning over £50,000 per year took 26 weeks or less maternity leave. Indeed mothers in the manager and senior official occupational group were also more likely than any other group to credit the timing of their return to work to career concerns.

The qualitative responses from mothers in senior roles highlight the clash between their careers and taking time for their family. This was particularly poignant in the quotes from mothers who were denied flexibility upon their return to work due to their job roles, pointing to the fact that for many women rising to the top of their profession and maintaining a work-life balance are mutually exclusive. These findings reflect the sentiment of much of the literature around maternity leave and career concerns.

4.3 Financial concerns

The prominence of financial concerns as an influencing factor in making decisions about maternity, paternity and shared paternal leave was consistent across the results of the survey. Financial concerns were cited as the main reason behind many decisions for both mothers and fathers, including not availing of Ordinary or Additional Paternity Leave, the limiting factor in taking Shared Parental Leave when it becomes available, and the most common reason for mothers returning to work at a specific time.

The results show that even when parents are receiving enhanced maternity or paternity pay, the number of respondents citing financial concerns as a limiting factor is high. It is understandable why many mothers return to work when their maternity pay comes to an end, however the number of women returning earlier than they would have liked simply because they couldn't afford to live on maternity pay any longer is worrying.

Many respondents commented that the rate of Statutory Maternity or Paternity Pay was too low to support a family for an extended period of time. This was a particular issue when shared leave was considered, especially if both parents were to take the leave together. For the majority of families Shared Parental Leave would be an unaffordable option.

The findings reflect the results of many of the studies mentioned in the literature and media review. It is interesting that the low rate of SMP and SPP was mentioned by many respondents, particularly considering the current economic context. Maternity and Paternity Pay are amongst a series of working-age benefits which have been capped to increase by only 1% for three years (from the financial year 2013-14). Historically, these benefits have risen in line with inflation which currently sits at 2.9% (June 2013). With the increasing cost of

living, and statutory payments lagging far behind, it is not surprising that many parents are struggling financially.

4.4 The importance of childcare and family friendly working policies

The ability for mothers to arrange suitable childcare arrangements was the most important factor for enabling respondents to return to work. 85.5% of respondents stated that finding childcare to meet their needs facilitated their return to work. How this childcare is arranged differs between different types of respondents, some relied solely on formal childcare, others relied only on informal childcare and the remainder used a mix of the two. The breakdown of the results by annual income showed some interesting trends which could suggest why some childcare options are more suitable for some mothers over others, for example due to the cost or inflexibility of formal childcare services.

It is well acknowledged that there is a lack of affordable childcare in Northern Ireland. The services that are available can be inflexible and expensive. The 2012 Childcare Cost Survey showed that the average full time childcare place costs £156 per week for one child. There is financial support available to working parents with their childcare costs, through Childcare Vouchers and the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, however very few parents take up their entitlement due to lack of awareness. Furthermore, only a small amount of childcare settings open outside typical hours (7.30am-8am to 6pm) which can be difficult for parents working longer unconventional hours. Our results show that parents need to find suitable childcare arrangements to enable their return to work. We hope that the recently released Childcare Strategy framework, and upcoming strategy, will build a childcare infrastructure in Northern Ireland that will support parents in employment, including measures to promote the financial help available with childcare costs.

After childcare, the most popular enabling factor which facilitated a mother's return to work was the provision of family friendly working policies (FFWPs) from their employer. This was also cited as the most common secondary enabling feature for respondents. It is interesting that of respondents who credited their return to work to the availability of FFWPs, almost half worked for employers who offered three types of such policies. This shows that when FFWPs are available they can play more of a role for some women in facilitating their return to work, even over arranging suitable childcare.

Our results also show that a large number of both mothers and fathers changed their employment patterns after the birth of a child to facilitate their new circumstances. Indeed 45.9% of female respondents did not return to work in the same job with the same number of hours. Furthermore, nearly a third of mothers who did return to the same job role either reduced their hours or changed their pattern of work. 30% of fathers also changed their employment

patterns upon their return to work, of these the majority worked for family friendly employers.

The 2012 annual Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey showed that 46% of respondents reduced the number of hours worked and 40% changed the pattern of hours worked due to the high cost of childcare. Therefore, whether parents want to change the way they work due to other considerations or simply to achieve a better work-life balance, it is beneficial for employers to facilitate them. The Childcare Cost Survey and other work with parents have shown that if parents cannot find a working pattern that best fits their circumstances, they may leave work altogether.

The literature and media review highlighted the importance of attaining a suitable work-life balance for parents and, in many cases, this is necessary for parents to return to work. Other surveys have also shown that when parents reach a suitable work-life balance they are more productive, loyal and committed to the workplace (see Gray, 2002; DTI, 2004; Truss *et al*, 2006; BERR, 2007; DWP, 2009). Therefore it is to the benefit of the employer to facilitate employees in achieving work-life balance. Employers risk losing talented, knowledgeable staff if they do not offer policies to cater for working parents.

This survey has shown that when FFWPs are available parents will make use of them. Furthermore, on the opposite side of the scale when employers do not treat family friendly working positively, employees' choices are limited. Some of the qualitative data gathered from parents indicates that some employers, even those who appear to be family friendly, are not accepting of parents availing of FFWPs. Negative workplace cultures replicate the stigmas which state that family and career cannot be balanced effectively without one or the other suffering.

4.5 What this survey has shown about maternity, paternity and Shared Parental Leave policies for parents in Northern Ireland

Maternity and paternity leave policies, and the forthcoming Shared Parental Leave policy, are in place to support working parents. However, a series of interlinking factors shape parents' choices about the extent to which they avail of their entitlements. In returning to work parents rely on sourcing suitable childcare arrangements and often avail of FFWPs to achieve a work-life balance for their family circumstances.

For the parents who responded to this survey, leaving the workplace to care for family for any amount of time can force them to make sacrifices. Whether these sacrifices are financial, career orientated or otherwise, parents should be able to avail of their entitlements without worrying about the potential impact. The current economic climate has done nothing to ease the burden for parents; the impact of the recession has squeezed incomes, reduced family benefits and

entitlements, placing more pressure on employers. Collectively, each of these factors has made it more difficult for parents, particularly those who are expecting to or have recently added to their family.

It is clear that in addition to the current maternity and paternity leave policies (and forthcoming Shared Parental Leave policy) other support mechanisms, at both a Government and local employment level, are necessary to facilitate parents and enable them to make full use of their entitlements.

The next section outlines our recommendations which are based on the findings of this report.

5. Recommendations

- The rate of Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) and Maternity Allowance need to be increased, at least in line with inflation.
- Employers must be encouraged to provide family friendly working policies for their employees.
- The benefits of providing family friendly working polices must be promoted to employers.
- Employees must also be aware of their right to request flexible working; this right should be better promoted amongst parents.
- The Assembly must take measures to increase affordable and flexible childcare provision, and promote the financial assistance that is available with childcare costs.

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7. Appendix

Standard Occupational Classification (SOC2010) groups

The survey uses the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC2010) groups. Survey respondents were asked to state which occupational group their job role fitted into. To assist with this task some examples from each of the groups were given.

Occupational group	Examples/definition
Managers and Senior Officials	Major tasks must consist of planning, directing and coordinating resources fundamental to the functioning of the organisation or business.
Professionals	Examples include: Teachers, Engineers, Dentists, Social Workers and Solicitors.
Associate Professional and Technical	Examples include: Journalists, Web designers, Insurance Brokers and Personnel officers.
Administrative, Secretarial, Personal Sales and Customer Services	Examples include: Receptionists, Secretaries and Counter Clerks.
Skilled	Examples include: Electricians, Motor mechanics and Joiners.
Process	Construction operatives, Heavy goods vehicle drivers
Elementary Occupations	Waitresses, Couriers and Porters.

Family Friendly Work Policies (FFWPs)

Some employers choose to offer family friendly policies to their staff, which exceed the statutory minimum, to help them balance their work and family lives. There are three broad types of policies which may be offered:

- 1) Enhanced maternity and paternity pay and/or leave arrangements
- 2) Childcare support
- 3) Flexible working arrangements

The table below gives some examples of FFWPs under each of the three headings.

Type	Examples
Enhanced maternity and paternity pay and/or leave arrangements	<p><u>Enhanced Maternity and Paternity Pay</u></p> <p>For example, paying employees an enhanced amount on top of their Statutory Maternity/Paternity Pay.</p> <p><u>Enhanced Leave Arrangements</u></p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-allowing fathers to take more than two weeks paternity leave;-allowing mothers a staggered return to work after maternity leave; or-giving employees a number of paid days they can use when their children are ill etc.
Childcare support	<p><u>Workplace nurseries</u></p> <p>If an employer provides a workplace nursery to staff, not only is this convenient for parents, but also the places are completely exempt from tax and NICs for employees.</p> <p><u>Childcare subsidies</u></p> <p>Employers can 'buy' childcare places directly from a childminder or nursery for employees. Employees using these places benefit from tax and NIC</p>

	<p>exemptions on the first £55 per week (basic rate tax payers).</p> <p><u>Childcare Vouchers</u></p> <p>Employers can offer the Childcare Voucher Scheme as a benefit to employees. The scheme enables employees to take up to £243 per month from their gross salary in exchange for Childcare Vouchers to help with the cost of registered childcare.</p> <p><u>Childcare Information</u></p> <p>Providing employees with information which will help them access suitable childcare.</p>
Flexible working arrangements	<p><u>Part time working arrangements</u></p> <p>Employees are contracted to work for less hours than standard, full time hours.</p> <p><u>Job sharing</u></p> <p>Allows one full time job to be split between two workers who agree the hours worked between them.</p> <p><u>Home working</u></p> <p>Facilitates workers to spend all or part of the week working from home.</p> <p><u>Flexi time</u></p> <p>Gives employees the freedom to choose their actual working hours, usually outside certain agreed core times. This means that employees can vary their start and finish times each day at work.</p> <p><u>Term time working</u></p> <p>Allows an employee to only work during school term time.</p> <p><u>Compressed working hours</u></p> <p>Allow employees to work their total number of</p>

contracted hours over a shorter number of days.

Annualised hours

Employees work on an annualised hours basis, the employee's contracted hours are calculated over the year rather than per week.