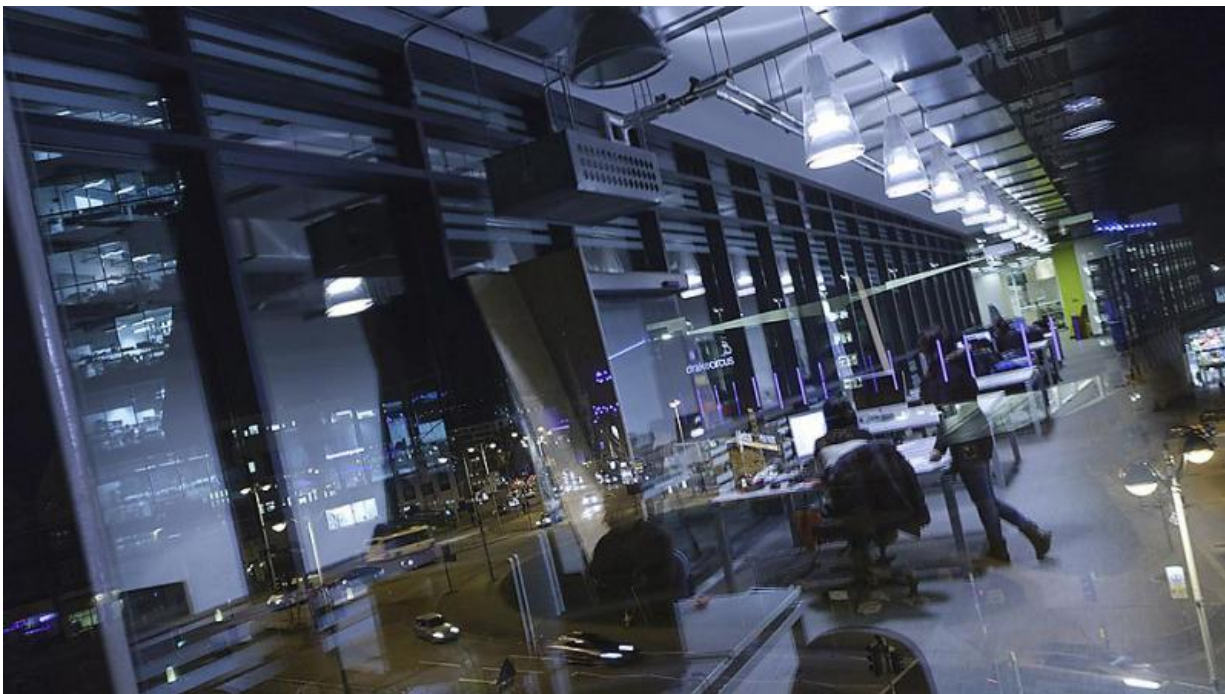


# Fathers face negative bias over quest for work-life balance, study suggests

February 22 2017, by Alan Williams

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Credit: University of Plymouth

Fathers face 'forfeits' when applying for part-time employment and in the workplace, with questions over their commitment and suspicion regarding their quest for a work-life balance, a new study suggests.

Research by the University of Plymouth explored previously-identified phenomena which highlighted a tendency for managers to categorise

individual employees based on [gender stereotypes](#).

This can result in [mothers](#) being seen to face 'penalties' in the [workplace](#), and at the point of selection, whereas [fathers](#) reap 'benefits' in relation to full-time employment.

However, this study showed the reverse also exists when it comes to part-time work, with fathers facing a number of potential issues while mothers receive praise for their dedication to proactively seeking a [work-life balance](#).

The research was led by Jasmine Kelland, Lecturer in Human Resource Management within the Plymouth Graduate School of Management. She said:

"In the UK, traditional patterns of employment and parenting are in decline, and the stereotype of fathers going to work while mothers raise a family are increasingly diminishing. Conversely, we are seeing an increasing number of fathers working fewer hours to accommodate family life, while mothers increasingly work full-time. In the context of these societal changes, a shift in the attitudes of employers is also required so that workers are treated fairly on the basis of their skill set rather than their familial choices."

The study included an online survey completed by around 100 managers, where participants were asked to score fictitious applicants who were equal apart from their parental status. It also featured a focus group made up of managers and working parents, and a series of interviews with parents, managers and HR professionals.

The preliminary findings indicate that when wanting to work less hours fathers can be seen to face a 'fatherhood forfeit', with mothers being scored five per cent higher than fathers through the online survey despite

having similar qualifications and experience.

In the [focus groups](#) and interviews, the 'fatherhood forfeit' was apparent again with managers viewing fathers who wanted to work part-time with suspicion and considering them deviant. Fathers themselves said they felt they received less workplace support than mothers and had to make more of a case than their female counterparts when wanting to work part-time. They also reported often facing 'Where is mum?' discrimination', felt a loss of status and had friendship issues as a result of their reduced working hours.

For the full-time post, the [online survey](#) bucked the trends shown in previous research, with the mother scoring eight per cent higher than her male counterpart. However, the focus groups were consistent with existing studies, with the female applicant facing questions about reliability as well as judgements about her partner's ability to provide and concerns about her apparent wish not to spend more time with her children.

Mrs Kelland, who is currently completing a PhD focused on the experiences of parents in the workplace, added:

"The issues raised by [managers](#) and parents in this study are quite alarming and warrant further exploration. This initial research may explain why so many more mothers [work](#) part-time than fathers. If as a society we are to reach a position of equality for parents it is critical that modern workplaces address the issue of the 'Fatherhood Forfeit' to reduce the disparities that exist in the workplace."

Provided by University of Plymouth

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