

# Flexible work arrangements reduce wage gap for mothers

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/Public Domain

Access to flexible work arrangements reduces the wage gap for mothers compared to women who don't have children, new UBC research

suggests.

The study, published recently in the journal *Work and Occupations*, is the first to look at how the use of a range of flexible [work](#) arrangements affects the wage gap between mothers and [childless women](#), and how this varies depending on a women's education.

The researchers found that access to flexible work arrangements— such as being able to work from home and to choose work hours— improves wages for mothers, especially for those with a university education.

Workplace flexibility benefitted mothers primarily by reducing barriers to employment in higher-paying firms, the researchers found.

Sylvia Fuller, the study's lead author and associate professor in the UBC department of sociology, said the findings offer an important lesson for hiring managers.

"Our findings suggest that, when companies allow work to be organized in a flexible way, they're less worried about hiring mothers," said Fuller. "Not only does flexibility make it easier for mothers to do well in their jobs, but it also alleviates concern from the employer that they'll be able to."

For the study, the researchers used data from Statistics Canada's Workplace and Employee survey gathered from 1999 to 2005. The sample included 20,879 women, of which 58 per cent were mothers, between the ages of 24 and 44.

The researchers found flexible work hours reduced the motherhood wage gap by 68 per cent, while the ability to work from home reduced the [wage gap](#) by 58 per cent.

They also looked at the effect of education level, whether mothers had a high school diploma, non-university post-secondary education, a bachelor's degree, or a post-graduate degree.

For women with postgraduate degrees, flexible hours made the biggest difference. Without flexible hours, such mothers earned seven per cent less than childless women. Among those working flexible hours, however, mothers earned 12 per cent more compared to childless women who also had flexible hours.

The findings build on earlier research from Fuller that found mothers overall tend to earn less than childless [women](#) because they're not being hired by the highest paying firms.

She said the findings highlight a need for employers to look at their hiring practices to ensure they are not discriminating against [mothers](#), as well as to consider allowing flexible work arrangements.

"Flexibility might not be possible for all jobs, but it is appreciated by workers generally and makes good business sense in terms of attracting and retaining highly qualified employees," she said.

**More information:** Sylvia Fuller et al, "Family-Friendly" Jobs and Motherhood Pay Penalties: The Impact of Flexible Work Arrangements Across the Educational Spectrum, *Work and Occupations* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0730888418771116](https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888418771116)

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