

Mums feel pressure of cooking duty

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Australia's National Nutritional Guidelines are not helpful to working mums, who are committed to providing nutritious meals for their families but find this difficult under time pressures that are ubiquitous to modern life.

Flinders University researchers found that time-scarcity for working mothers—and especially those who are also studying—amplified stress attached to providing [family food](#) and that more help is needed from the family unit and society at large to support ideal nutritional goals.

The report—"Feeding the Australian family: challenges for mothers, nutrition and equity," by Kaye Mehta, Sue Booth, John Coveney and Lyndall Strazdins, published in *Health Promotion International*, found that women are shouldering the bulk of household duties, including family food provision, despite increasing participation in the workforce.

The research focused on 22 employed South Australian mothers who had at least one child aged less than 13 years, with the aim of understanding their daily experience of providing food for their families—especially the intersection between family food provision, [gender inequality](#) and nutritional guidelines as they impact women's time and health.

"Most mothers valued nutrition and strove to provide [nutritious meals](#), but tend to work from their own nutritional understandings, not the national nutrition guidelines," says report lead author Associate Professor Kaye Mehta.

"They saw the nutrition guidelines as unhelpful because of the time demands that were implied."

The national dietary guidelines recommend a whole-of-family approach that encompasses what is purchased (agreeing on such areas as avoiding high salt, sugar or fat, and selecting food from the five groups), along with the planning of meals and snacks (with the aim of reducing [fast food](#) and encouraging home-cooked meals), as well as ensuring water and low fat milk are readily available to drink.

"These messages target families as a group, and their wording is gender neutral, but they have particular poignancy for mothers because they are expected to take the time and effort to meet them as part of their role as caregivers," says report co-author Professor John Coveney.

"This is linked to the gender division of unpaid work."

While the women in this study valued being the primary food providers for their families, they nevertheless found the role stressful while juggling paid work, domestic responsibilities and, for some women, undertaking tertiary study as well.

To help remedy this situation, the study's authors want [policy makers](#), practitioners and researchers to consider structural changes to address this health inequity for women, rather than continue to pressure women with nutritional guidelines.

For example, reforms to the food system to ensure healthier convenience foods, more flexible employment conditions for [mothers](#) and fathers, and greater sharing of domestic work by men.

"It's important that we recognize time for family food provisioning is a crucial social determinant of family as well as women's health," says Associate Professor Kaye Mehta.

More information: Kaye Mehta et al. Feeding the Australian family: challenges for mothers, nutrition and equity, *Health Promotion International* (2019). [DOI: 10.1093/heapro/daz061](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daz061)

Provided by Flinders University

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