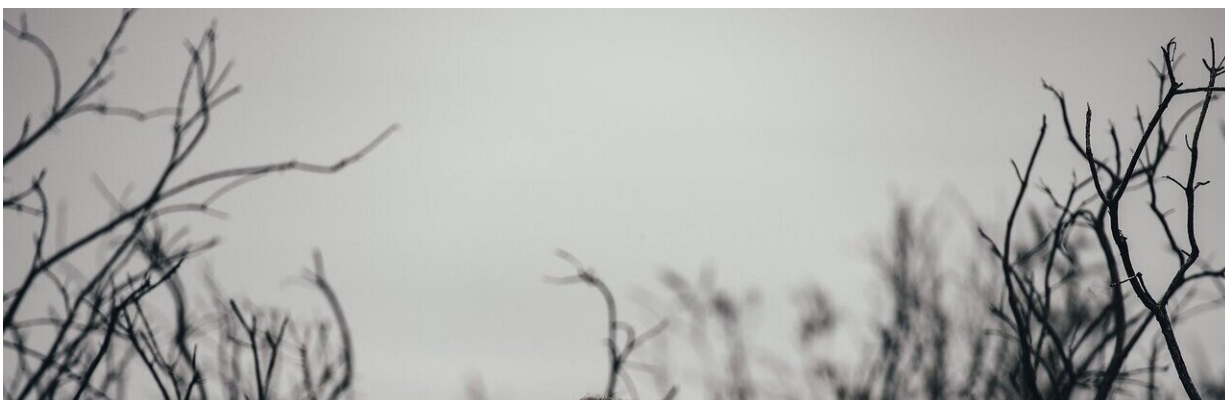


Kids, not gender, the biggest influence on work/care policy attitudes

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Young dads consider paid parental leave and childcare to be as important to their future success at work as mothers. And it's the same trend in attitudes to shared household work, according to new University of Sydney research.

However, young men without children are least likely to consider supportive work and care policies and shared [domestic work](#) at home as important to their future. This is despite the fact they are just as likely as men with children to plan to have a child in the future.

The findings contrast with the attitudes of young [women](#) without

children, who are more likely than their male peers without children to report that equality in domestic life is very important to their future success at work.

Lead author, Associate Professor Elizabeth Hill from the University of Sydney, said the study reveals the growing momentum among young parents for better work and care policies, regardless of their gender.

"Both men and women who are young parents understand the importance of sharing the responsibility for childcare and housework for success at work," said Associate Professor Hill.

The team of researchers from the University of Sydney's Australian Women's Working Futures project surveyed more than 2500 working women and men aged 16 to 40, who were representative of the workforce nationally.

Only 15 percent of respondents strongly agreed that they can balance work and family responsibilities, which Associate Professor Hill said shows a clear gap between what young workers expect and the current level of support at home and in the workplace.

"To bridge this gap, young women are making sophisticated and calculated choices about how they manage work and care early on in their careers, even before they have children," Associate Professor Hill said.

"This often includes shifting to lower paid jobs with less responsibility. Sometimes the choice is not to have children. Public policy should not impinge on people's capacity to manage a successful work and family life."

One survey respondent in high-paid and secure work said: "I don't see

myself having kids for another couple of years but if I think of long-term career goals, I have to factor in that I do want [children] eventually and the job I'm in now pays for maternity leave ... I'm staying put."

While increased participation of women in the [labour market](#) is an objective of governments around the world, the proportion of women working [full-time](#), as opposed to part-time, has remained consistent since the 1970s, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics data.

Professor Marian Baird, co-author on the paper, said: "Despite huge labour market changes, the rate of women working full-time hasn't changed over the past 40 years in Australia.

"Over the same time, we've seen mothers working part-time to accommodate caring responsibility. The fact that women make up almost 70 percent of all part-time employees shows how gendered caring is."

Women with children told the researchers how the unequal burden of childcare limits their earning capacity as [part-time](#) workers, with one working mother saying: "It's very much a man's world ... as the 'mum' you're generally the one who has the sick days, who has to pick up from day care and so I can't take the overtime."

The research, published in the Journal of Sociology, said: "The gap between expectations of young men with and without children points to the need for more research on how men manage the transition to fatherhood and the impact on households and workplaces."

The published statistical analysis reveals that the presence of children, rather than gender, has the biggest influence on whether workers consider balancing work and care as being very important.

The likelihood that men with children report that access to work-care policy (such as paid [parental leave](#) and childcare) as 'very important' for future success at work is 71 percent compared with 79 percent for women with children, but only 50 percent for men without children.

"Young men without [children](#) aren't planning for their future work and family nearly as meticulously as women," said Associate Professor Hill.

"Since paid parental leave was introduced in 2010 and dad-and-partner pay in 2013, we've seen alarmingly little progress in the work-and-care policy space. This research demonstrates the significant gaps that we need to address for both women and men to succeed in the future."

More information: Elizabeth Hill et al. Young women and men: Imagined futures of work and family formation in Australia, *Journal of Sociology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1440783319877001](https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319877001)

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