

Article

Families and the labour market, UK: 2019

The employment rates of men and women with dependent children in the UK, based on data from the Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey.

Contact:
Tim Vizard
policy.evidence.analysis@ons.
gov.uk
+44 (0)1633 455278

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1 . Main points

- In April to June 2019, 3 in 4 mothers with dependent children (75.1%) were in work in the UK. This compared with 92.6% of fathers with dependent children.
- Since 2000, fathers have consistently had a higher employment rate than men without dependent children. During this period, the rate of mothers in employment has overtaken the employment rates of women without dependent children.
- Almost 3 in 10 mothers (28.5%) with a child aged 14 years and under said they had reduced their working hours because of childcare reasons. This compared with 1 in 20 fathers (4.8%).
- The proportion of parents who faced an obstacle fulfilling responsibilities decreased as the age of the child increased; from 34.9% of parents whose youngest child was aged between 0 and 4 years to 20.4% of parents with a child aged 11 to 14 years.

2 . Statistician's comment

"In 2019, three-quarters of mothers with dependent children were in work, up from two-thirds of mothers at the start of the century. In comparison, over 9 in 10 fathers were working.

"Many parents make changes to their work to help balance work and family life. Almost 3 in 10 working mothers said they had reduced their hours to help with childcare, compared with 1 in 20 fathers."

Tim Vizard, Policy Evidence and Analysis Team, Office for National Statistics

3 . Things you need to know about this release

This release provides the latest insight into the employment rates of parents with dependent children in the labour market in 2019. For the first time, analysis is based on men and women aged 16 to 64 years living in the UK (previously England only). This release, where possible, also provides breakdowns by England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Previous releases in this series have looked at how the rates of men and women in employment have changed over time. This is now covered in the [Working and workless household publication](#), which provides quarterly updates of employment rates at a UK and country level.

Estimates have been produced using the April to June Labour Force Survey (LFS) household dataset in 2019, and the January to December Annual Population Survey (APS) household and person datasets.

Respondents in this release are classified as parents if they have dependent children living with them in the same household. This may also include children who are being cared for by someone other than their birth mother or father (for example, guardians or foster parents). This analysis does not include parents whose children do not live with them, or parents whose children usually reside elsewhere (for example, with a former partner).

Unless otherwise stated, dependent children are those living with their parent(s) and are either aged under 16 years, or aged 16 to 18 years and in full-time education. Children aged 16 to 18 years who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household are not classified as dependent children. Further information on how families are defined, including definitions for dependent and non-dependent children, can be found in the [Families and households statistics explained publication](#).

Throughout this release we refer to mothers and fathers, by which we mean mothers and fathers who have a dependent child living in their family.

Alongside this release we have published datasets that contain additional estimates, which support those presented in this release. All analysis this year has been based on recently revised data from the LFS and APS, which have been reweighted using the latest population estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Therefore, analysis in this release may differ slightly to previous releases because of the updated population estimates.

Unless otherwise stated, all estimates commented upon in this release are “statistically significant”. This means that statistical tests have been carried out to reject the possibility that differences between estimates have occurred by chance. Therefore, statistically significant differences are very likely to reflect real differences in the employment outcomes of parents.

4 . Employment rates for parents in the UK

In April to June 2019, three in four mothers with dependent children (75.1%) were in work in the UK. This compared with 92.6% of fathers with dependent children.

The number of mothers in the labour market has grown substantially over the last 20 years, with 66.2% of mothers in employment in 2000. The number of fathers in the labour market has also changed over the last 20 years, increasing from 89.4% of fathers in 2000.

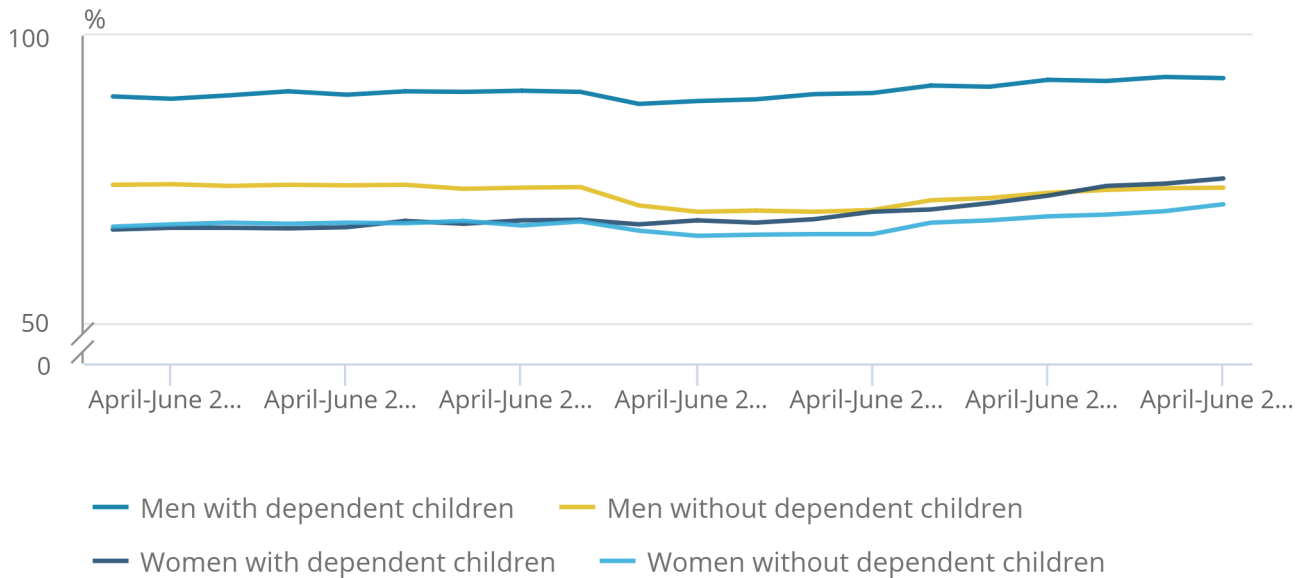
When looking at women and men without dependent children, there were 70.6% of women without dependent children in work in 2019, compared with 66.7% in 2000. In comparison, 73.5% of men without dependent children were in work in 2019, compared with 74.0% in 2000¹.

Figure 1: Employment rates of mothers in the UK continue to rise

April to June 2000 to 2019, UK

Figure 1: Employment rates of mothers in the UK continue to rise

April to June 2000 to 2019, UK



Source: Working and workless households in the UK, Office for National Statistics

Over the last 20 years, fathers have consistently had a higher employment rate than men without dependent children. During this period, the rate of mothers in employment has overtaken the employment rate of women without dependent children. In 2019, the employment rate of mothers (75.1%) was greater than men without dependent children (73.5%).

While we are unable to offer analysis of the reasons for these changes over the last 20 years, it is useful to consider the support received by parents during this period. In addition to statutory [maternity leave](#) and pay for mothers, [shared parental leave](#) was introduced in 2015 providing the legal right for parents to share maternity leave entitlement.

In addition, two-year-olds are able to [receive childcare and free early education](#) when meeting certain criteria. Parents have also been able to claim [financial support](#) for looking after their children in certain circumstances (including Child Benefit, tax credits and Tax-Free Childcare). Since 2017, working parents in England have been able to claim up to [30 hours free childcare](#) for three- and four-year-olds, with similar schemes in [Wales](#), [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

Notes for: Employment rates for parents in the UK

1. When comparing the employment rates of men and women with and without children, it is important to remember these are broad groups with varying characteristics. For example, men and women without dependent children may include more adults in full-time education, or who are inactive for other reasons. The age of parents at the birth of their child could also affect employment rates. The average age of first-time mothers in England and Wales was 28.8 years in 2017, while the average age of all fathers was 33.4 years ([Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2017](#)).

5 . Parental employment rates by country

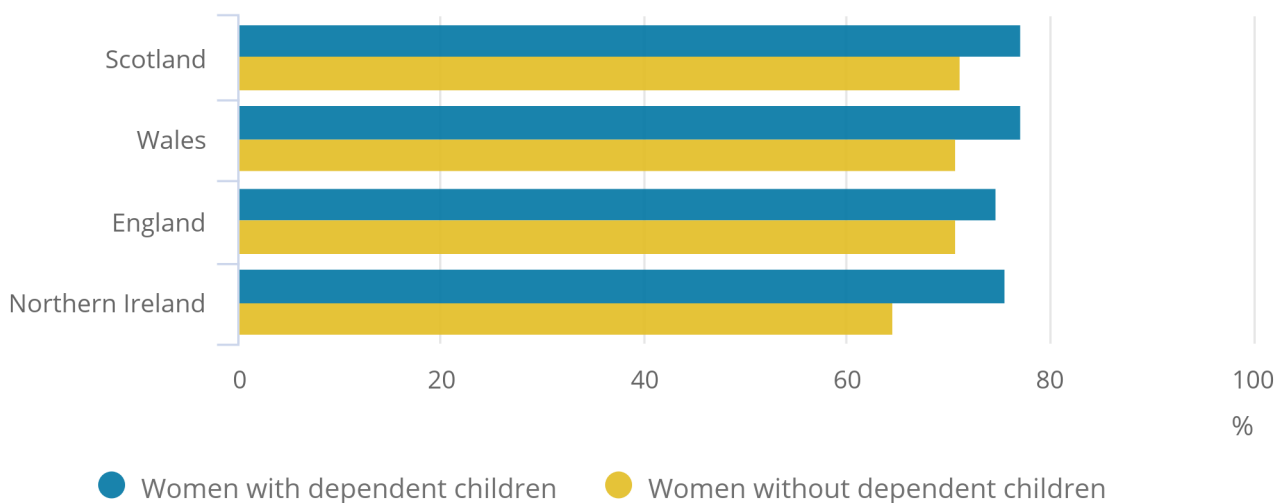
The employment rates for mothers were similar across different parts of the UK. Figure 2a shows that 77.2% of mothers were in employment in Scotland and Wales, with similar rates in Northern Ireland (75.7%) and England (74.8%). Differences between these countries were not statistically significant. Women without dependent children had the lowest employment rate in Northern Ireland (64.5%), with rates higher in Scotland (71.3%), Wales (70.9%) and England (70.8%).

Figure 2a: Employment rates of mothers were similar across UK countries

April to June 2019, UK

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April to June 2019, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

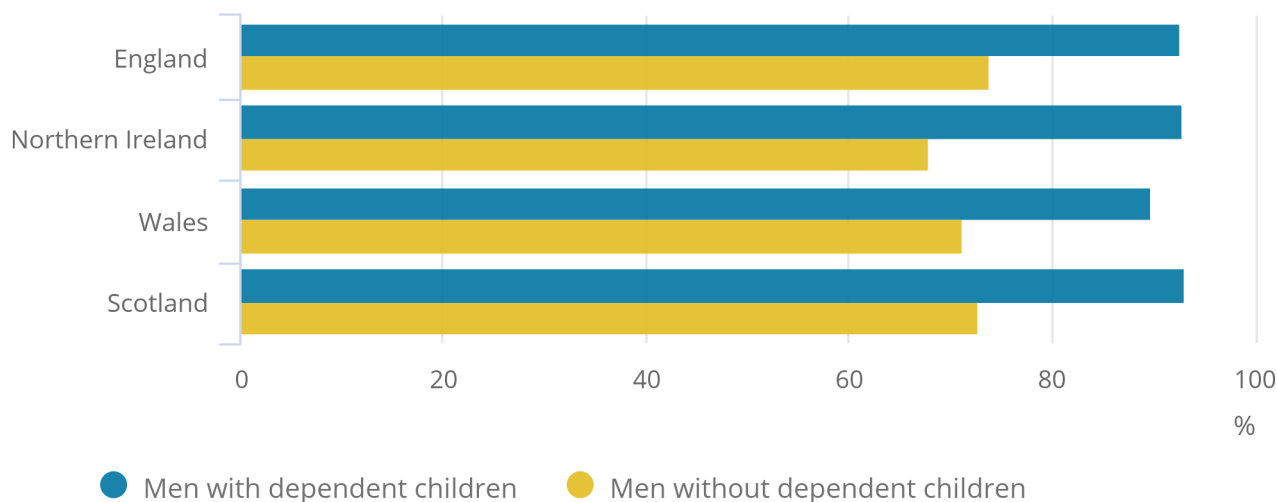
The employment rates for fathers were also similar across different parts of the UK, as demonstrated in Figure 2b. Rates ranged from 93.1% in Scotland to 93.0% in Northern Ireland, 92.7% in England and 89.9% in Wales (although differences between countries were not statistically significant). Employment rates for men without dependent children did not differ significantly either, with rates of 73.9% in England, 72.8% in Scotland, 71.3% in Wales and 68.0% in Northern Ireland.

Figure 2b: Employment rates of fathers were similar across UK countries

April to June 2019, UK

Figure 2b: Employment rates of fathers were similar across UK countries

April to June 2019, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

6 . Employment activity of mothers and fathers in a family

While looking at the employment rates of mothers and fathers separately provides a useful insight into their activity in the labour market, it is also important to look at how parents share their working lives around their family.

In 2019, there were around eight million families with dependent children in the UK, with 6.2 million couple families with dependent children (that is married or cohabiting families). Around 7 in 10 (73.2%) of these couple families had both parents in employment.

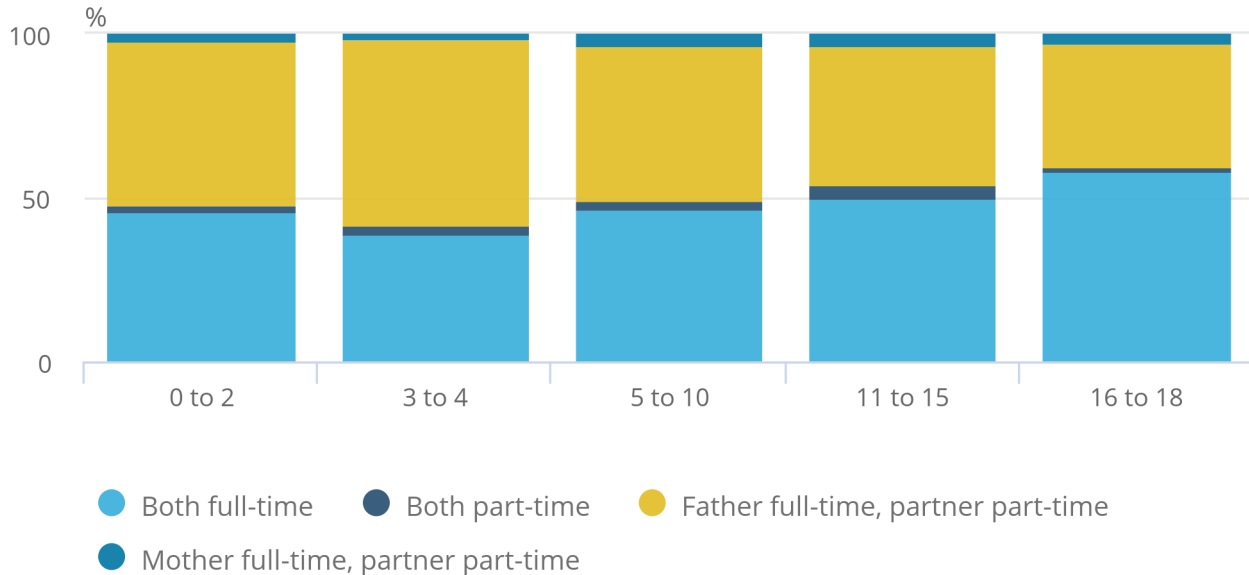
The way couple families structured their employment differed depending on the age of the youngest dependent child. Figure 3 shows that families whose youngest dependent child was aged between three and four years were most likely to have a father working full-time while their partner worked part-time (56.5%). In comparison, parents whose youngest dependent child was aged between 16 and 18 years were most likely to both be in full-time employment (58.3%).

Figure 3: Families structured their employment differently depending on the age of their youngest dependent child

April to June 2019, UK

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April to June 2019, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

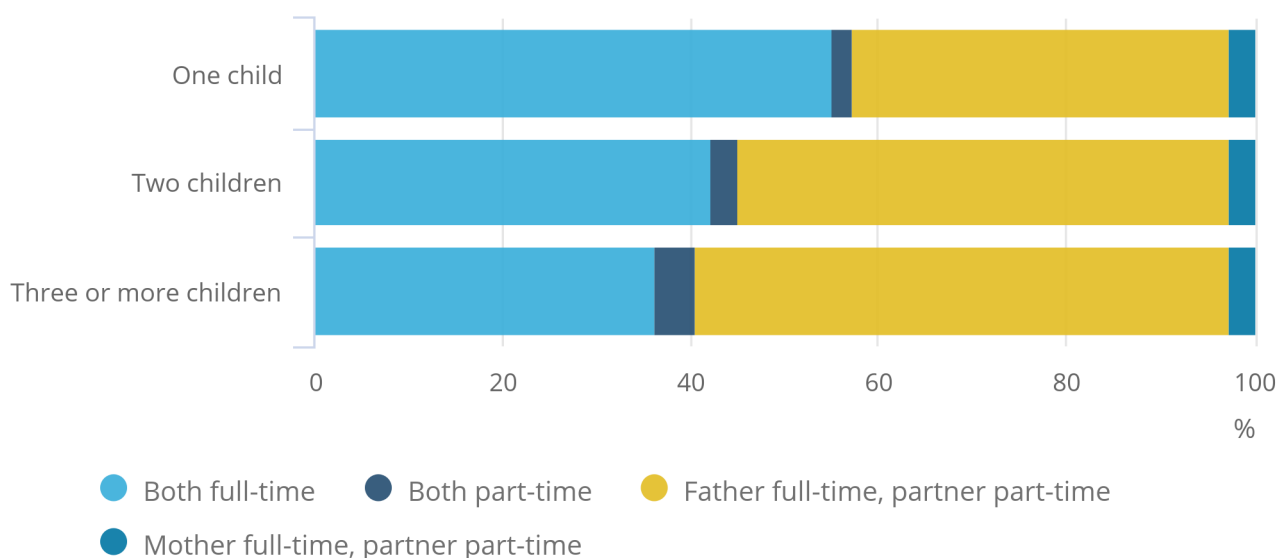
The way parents structured their employment also differed depending on the number of dependent children in their family. Figure 4 shows that more than half (55.1%) of families with one child had both parents working full-time, compared with approximately one-third (36.3%) of families with three or more children.

Figure 4: Families with three or more children were more likely to have fathers working full-time and their partner part-time

April to June 2019, UK

Figure 4: Families with three or more children were more likely to have fathers working full-time and their partner part-time

April to June 2019, UK



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

There were 1.8 million lone-parent families with dependent children in the UK in 2019. The majority (69.9%) of lone parents were in employment. For children aged 0 to 2 years, 35.4% of lone parents were in full-time employment. This increased to 66.0% of lone parents of 16- to 18-year-olds.

Around half of lone-parent families worked full-time (49.6%). Lone parents with one child were more likely to work full-time (55.3%), but as the number of dependent children increased, the number of lone parents undertaking part-time employment increased.

7 . Balancing work and family life

A big challenge for parents in the labour market is how they balance working life and looking after their dependent children. Using data from a [Eurostat ad-hoc module](#) on the 2018 Annual Population Survey, we can look at the experiences of parents aged 18 to 64 years old who have a dependent child aged 14 years and younger living with them in the household.

Changes to employment made by parents because of childcare responsibilities

Over half of mothers (56.2%) said they had made a change to their employment for childcare reasons, compared with 22.4% of fathers. The proportion of parents making a change to employment for childcare reasons decreased as the age of the youngest child increased, ranging from 43.8 % of parents of 0- to 4-year-olds to 24.9% of parents of 11- to 14-year-olds.

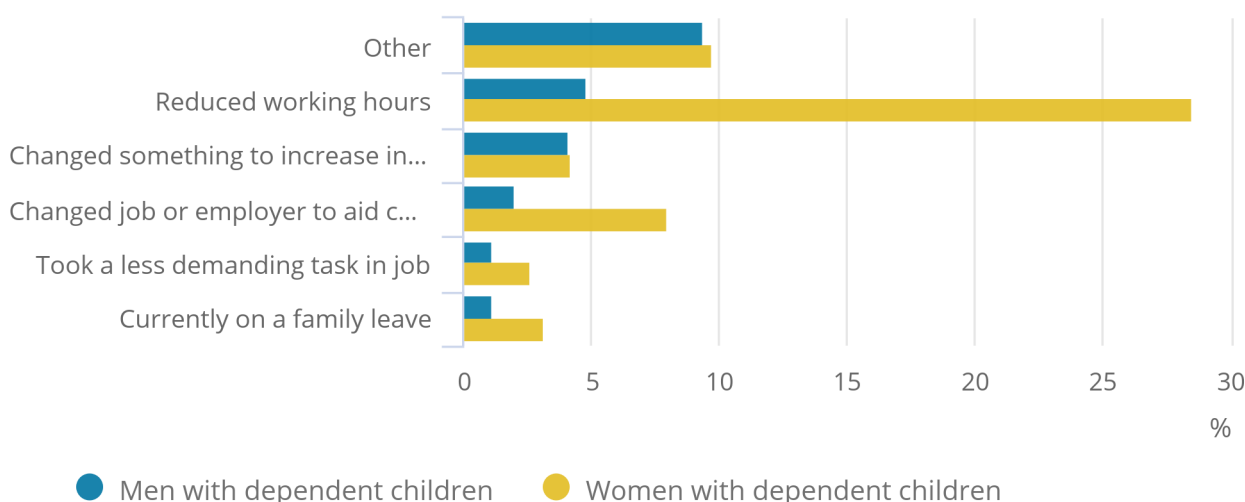
Figure 5 shows that mothers were most likely to say they “reduced working hours” because of childcare, with around 3 in 10 mothers (28.5%) selecting this. In comparison, 1 in 20 fathers (4.8%) said they reduced working hours for childcare reasons. In addition, around 1 in 12 (8.0%) mothers said they had changed jobs or employer to help with childcare arrangements, compared with 1 in 50 fathers (2.0%).

Figure 5: Around 3 in 10 mothers reduced their working hours to look after dependent children

January to December 2018, UK

Figure 5: Around 3 in 10 mothers reduced their working hours to look after dependent children

January to December 2018, UK



Source: Annual Population Survey person dataset, Office for National Statistics

Obstacles faced by parents in fulfilling childcare responsibilities within their work life

Around 3 in 10 mothers (28.9%) and fathers (30.9%) reported facing some sort of obstacle in fulfilling childcare responsibilities within their work life. As might be expected, this proportion of parents reporting obstacles decreased as the age of the child increased, from 34.9% of parents whose youngest child was aged between 0 and 4 years to 20.4% of parents with a child aged 11 to 14 years.

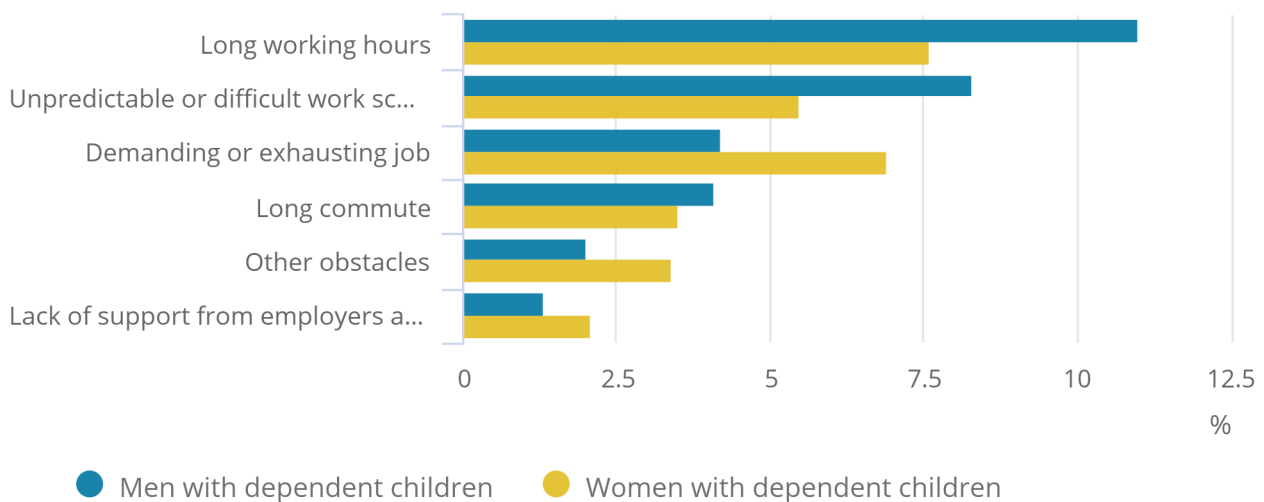
Long working hours was one of the main obstacles to parents being able to fulfil childcare responsibilities while working. Figure 6 shows that this was the case for 11.0% of fathers and 7.6% of mothers. Other obstacles faced by parents included unpredictable or difficult work schedules (8.3% of fathers and 5.5% of mothers), having a demanding or exhausting job (4.2% of fathers and 6.9% of mothers) and long commuting times (4.1% of fathers and 3.5% of mothers). However, because of sample sizes, differences between the obstacles experienced by mothers and fathers were not statistically significant.

Figure 6: Long working hours was one of the main obstacles faced by parents in work for fulfilling childcare responsibilities

January to December 2018, UK

Figure 6: Long working hours was one of the main obstacles faced by parents in work for fulfilling childcare responsibilities

January to December 2018, UK



Source: Annual Population Survey person dataset, Office for National Statistics

Flexible working arrangements for parents

Around 6 in 10 (62.0%) parents said that it was generally possible to vary their working day to facilitate childcare responsibilities, with similar rates observed for mothers (61.3%) and fathers (62.8%). [Research recently published](#) by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showed that 25% of adults in the UK worked flexibly through alternative working patterns, including flexitime (where workers can vary start and finish times and accrue hours), compressed hours, annualised hours, term-time only working, working on-call and zero-hours contracts.

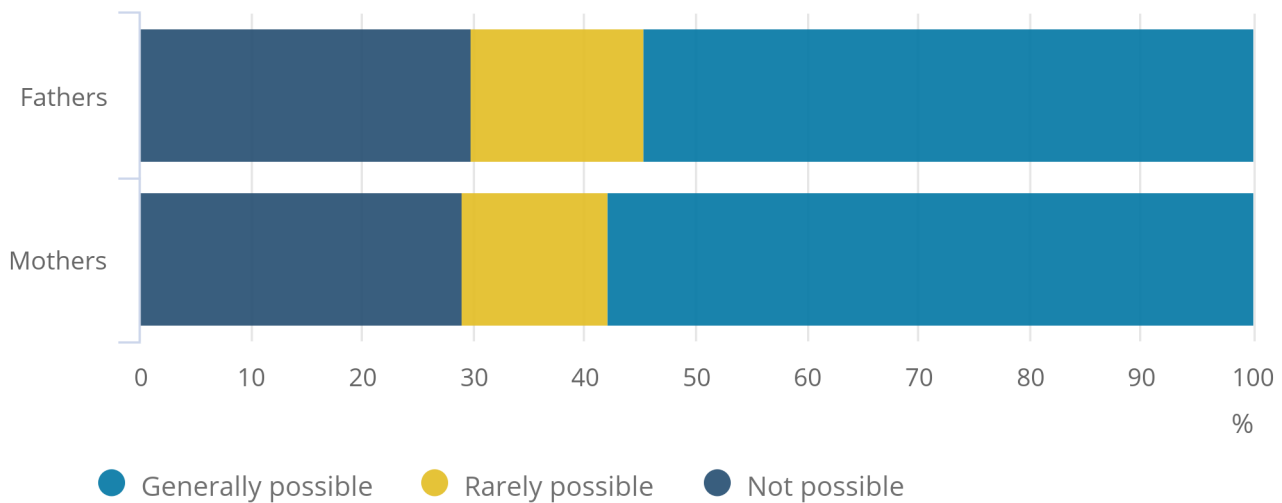
Parents found it slightly harder to take whole days off work for childcare purposes, with around half (56.2%) of parents saying it was generally possible to flexibly take a day off work for these reasons. Figure 7 shows that mothers were more likely than fathers to say it was generally possible to take time off work to fulfil childcare responsibilities (57.8% and 54.5% respectively).

Figure 7: Mothers were more likely than fathers to say it was generally possible to take days off work to fulfill their childcare responsibilities

January to December 2018, UK

Figure 7: Mothers were more likely than fathers to say it was generally possible to take days off work to fulfill their childcare responsibilities

January to December 2018, UK



Source: Annual Population Survey person dataset, Office for National Statistics

8 . Quality and methodology

The [Labour Force Survey](#) and [Annual Population Survey](#) Quality and Methodology Information reports contain important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

The [Families and Households](#) publication also has useful information relevant to this release, including trends in living arrangements for families (with and without dependent children), people living alone and people in shared accommodation, broken down by size and type of household:

Some analysis in this report is based on the 2018 Eurostat Ad-hoc module [Reconciliation between work and family life \(PDF, 489.06KB\)](#).

