

Families 24/7 web survey for **working parents**

Summary of findings:

Comparing the UK, Finland and the Netherlands



THE STUDY

The Families 24/7 study collected web-survey data from 1,294 parents in the UK, Finland, and the Netherlands to compare experiences of work, childcare, family life and well-being among those who work non-standard schedules and those in regular day work.

All countries exhibit great variation in working times, and non-standard working hours do not easily fit with family commitments. The study is funded by the Academy of Finland, and the web-survey data were collected between November 2012 and January 2013.

NON-STANDARD WORK:

Work during early mornings, evenings, nights and weekends, as well as shift work.

WHO TOOK PART IN OUR STUDY?

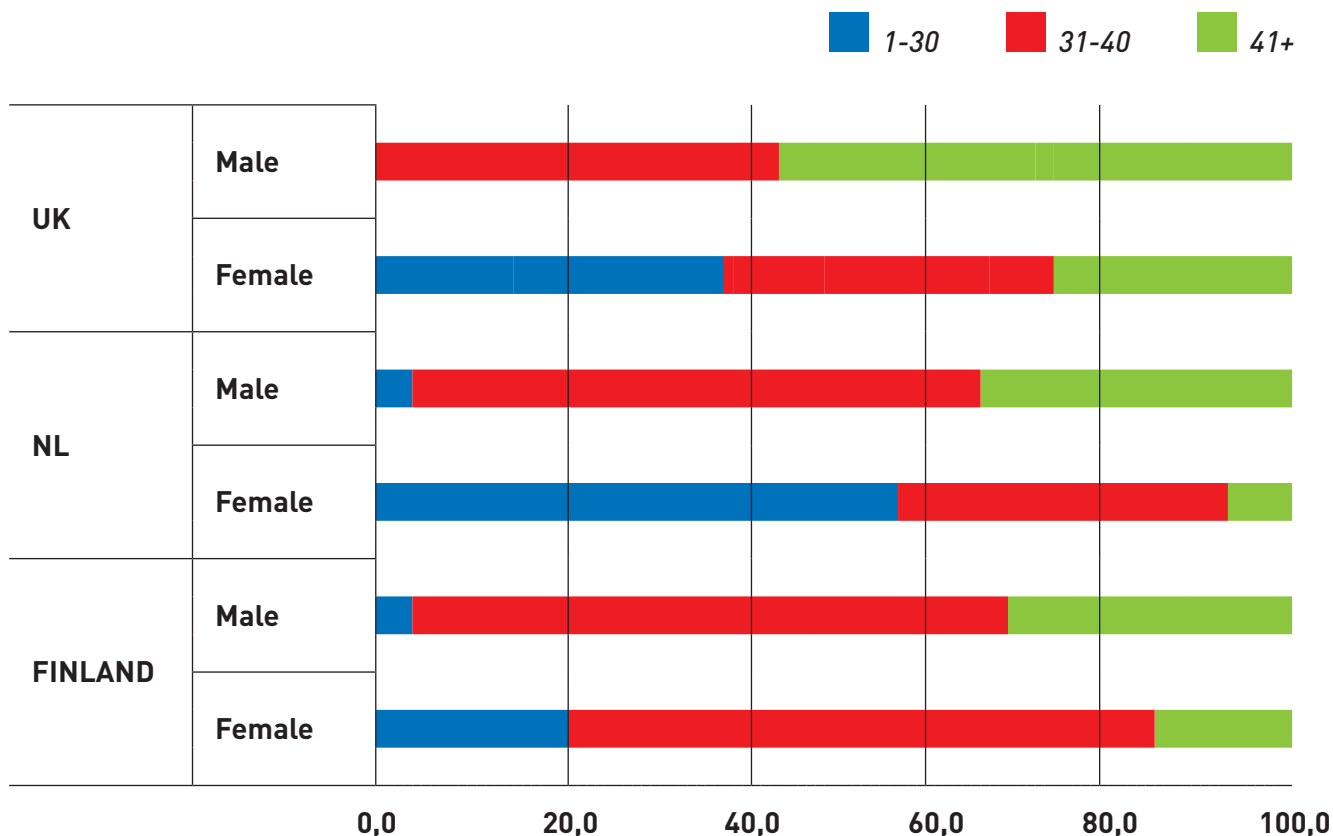
- 437 British, 483 Finnish and 374 Dutch parents
- 83% women
- Highly educated: 79% of the Brits, 42% of the Finns and 74% of the Dutch had tertiary education
- The majority of respondents had either one (38%) or two (47%) children living at home
- 87 % of respondents were married or cohabiting
- 95% of the respondents were employed

WORKING LIFE

Differences in working hours

Figure 1 shows how many per cent of the respondents in the three countries worked 1-30 hours, 31-40 hours and over 41 hours a week. These figures correspond with national averages for women and men.

Figure 1. Working hours for women and men in the UK, the Netherlands and Finland, per cent.



The British long working hours culture is reflected in our study: over half of the British men worked over 41 hours a week. In the Netherlands, a high percentage of women work part-time and indeed, over half of our Dutch women respondents worked part-time. Finland, in contrast, is known as a country where women work full-time, even if they have children. In our sample, the majority of Finnish women and men worked between 31 and 40 hours a week.

At least occasional work during non-standard hours is the norm

Looking at working time patterns, we can see that most of our respondents worked outside of standard hours, at least once a month:

- **A higher proportion of the Finnish respondents were contracted to work at non-standard times (for example, shift work, rotating hours or evening work) than in the other two countries: 73% in Finland, 29% in the Netherlands and 23% in the UK.**

These country differences are the result of how and where we recruited our participants rather than representative of national figures; the proportion of people working non-standard schedules is about the same in the three countries.

- **Many of those in regular day jobs also worked, at least sometimes, outside of normal office hours:**

76% in the UK, 88 % in Finland and 71% in the Netherlands worked during early mornings, evenings and nights at least once a month, while somewhat fewer parents worked weekends.

- **Whereas the Finnish parents worked non-standard times mainly because of the operating hours of their working place, the Dutch and the British said that their non-standard work was due to their inability to complete their work duties during office hours.**

“

I am a lone parent and shift work is challenging with small children, especially with my school-aged child.”



“

We are constantly having to plan and discuss and be flexible.”

CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS

Formal or informal childcare?

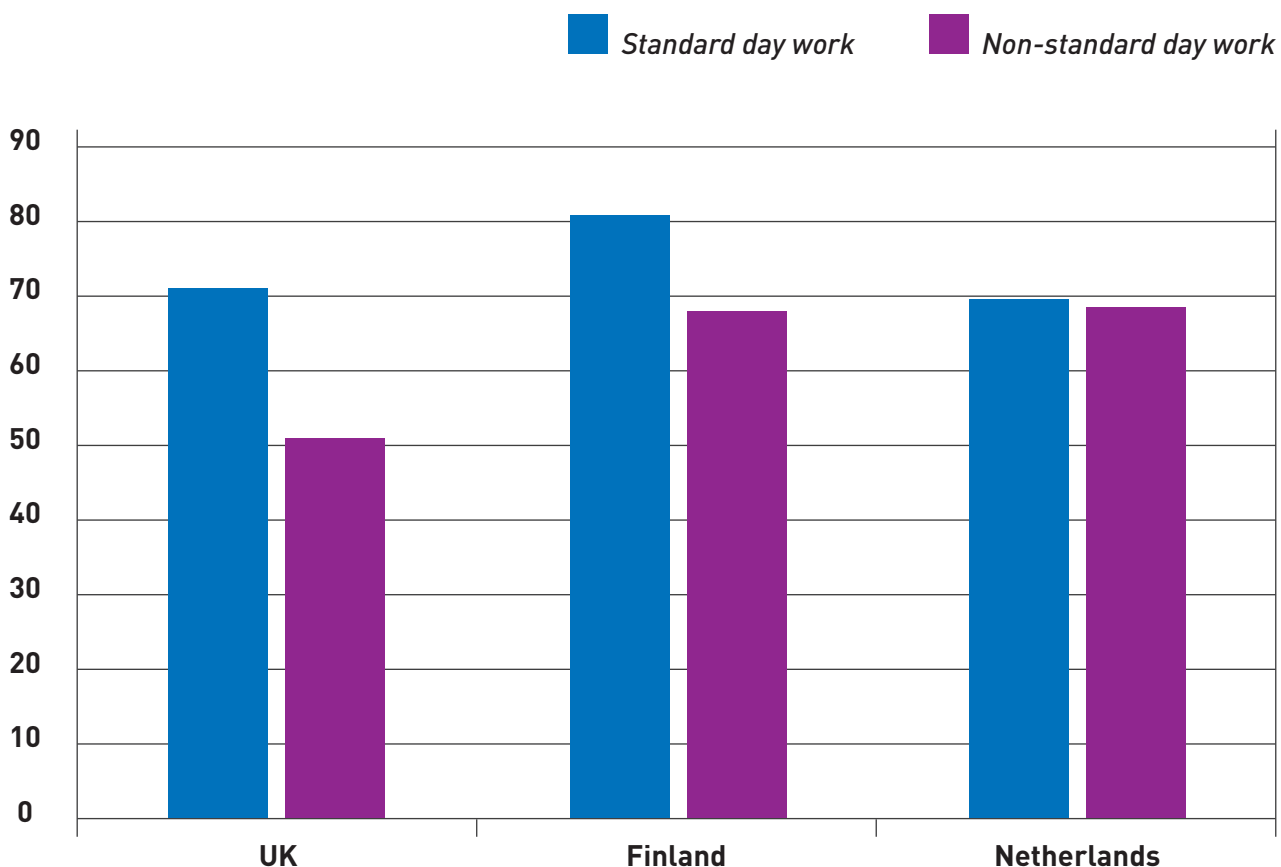
FORMAL CHILDCARE:

Formal childcare is performed by a professional (e.g. nursery staff, childminder).

INFORMAL CHILDCARE:

Informal childcare is performed by a non-professional (e.g. grandparent, family friend).

Figure 2. Use of formal childcare in the UK, Finland and the Netherlands by parents working standard and non-standard hours, per cent.



In Finland and the UK, parents' work schedules had an impact on the type of childcare used: Finnish and British parents working non-standard hours used less formal and more informal childcare when compared with parents working standard hours.

In the Netherlands, there were no differences between parents working different schedules.

Working non-standard hours creates problems in organizing childcare

Almost half of the British parents (45%) reported that they currently experienced problems organizing childcare, and the figure was quite high also among the Finnish parents (31%). In the Netherlands, only 8% of the parents experienced problems in arranging child care.

The three main problems reported were:

1. Difficulties posed by working hours (this includes variations in working time patterns, working overtime, arranging child care for shifts or when both parents are working in the evening or at the weekend)
2. Sudden and unexpected events such as changes to working times or illnesses (of the child, the parents or the childminder/informal carer)
3. Finding appropriate childcare outside of standard hours and during holidays

“

It's good that we're not always there at the same time. My husband has to take responsibility when I am not there”

FAMILY LIFE AND WELL-BEING

Top sources of satisfaction and worry

The parents were asked to rate the extent to which various aspects of their family life were going well.

THE THREE TOP SOURCES OF SATISFACTION WERE:

- Health of child(ren)
- Safety and security of child(ren)
- Behaviour, development and learning of child(ren)

THE THREE MAIN SOURCES OF WORRY WERE:

- Alone carrying the responsibility of parenting
- Own wellbeing
- Having too little time as a family

Although the top sources of satisfaction and worries were similar across the three countries, the British and Finnish parents were less satisfied than the Dutch over many issues, including childcare arrangements, availability of before and after school care, long periods of time in childcare, and own wellbeing.

CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

Overall, fewer Dutch parents reported difficulties with their children's behaviour, compared with Finnish and British parents. In Finland and the UK, but not in the Netherlands, parents working non-standard hours reported more challenges with their children's behaviour. Looking specifically at how happy children were in centre-based childcare, our results showed no differences between countries or between children whose parents worked standard versus non-standard schedules.



“

**The children have early
wake-ups and stay up late
on other nights.”**



Families 24/7 web survey for **working parents**

Summary of findings in the UK



The British survey respondents

- 437 parents responded to our survey in the UK, the clear majority of whom (83.5%) were women
- The majority (90%) were in a relationship
- Ethnicity: 92% white, 5% were of mixed ethnic origin, 2% Asian, 0.2% Black, 1% Other
- Our British sample was highly educated: 12% had studied up to A-levels, 79% had a university degree
- The majority of our sample worked: 88% were employed, 8% self-employed



WORKING LIFE

Working non-standard hours is the norm

While a clear majority of our female respondents in the UK had a regular day job (81%), almost half of the male respondents had a working time pattern that included non-standard hours or was irregular (47%). This however does not give the full picture, because a clear majority of our respondents reported that they worked outside of normal office hours at least once a month (73% of the women and 81% of the men).

For the nine in ten of our respondents who were in a relationship, we must also consider the working times patterns of their partner. Of those partnered respondents who worked regular day hours, 21% reported that their partner worked non-standard hours. Of those partnered respondents who worked a non-standard schedule, almost half reported that their partner also did so.

We can thus conclude that only in a minority of the families in our study did the parents work solely regular day hours.

Working long hours

Those parents who had a non-standard working time pattern tended to also work longer hours than parents in a regular day job did: under a quarter of parents working normal office hours compared to almost half of the parents working at non-standard times worked over 41 hours a week.

This is partly explained by the fact that those working day jobs tended to be women, who were also more likely to work part-time.

Work spill-over into family life

The majority of parents felt that their work had an influence on their family life:

- **Over 80% felt that their mood at work had an influence on their mood at home**
- **Just over half of the respondents thought that their working times kept them from family activities more than they would like, while approximately a third felt they were unable to participate equally in household responsibilities**
- **57% felt so pressured at work that they were too stressed to do the things they enjoy**

“

He works longer hours, so I work and do childcare and housework which leads to some resentment.”

“

I sometimes have five 10-hour late shifts in a row, straddling a weekend. It feels like I never get to see my wife or son, which is very hard for all of us.”

Parents who worked longer hours and those with a non-standard schedule were more likely to feel that their working hours did not fit well with their family commitments than parents working shorter hours and those with a regular day job.

SPOUSAL RELATIONSHIP

Happy relationships

A clear majority of our partnered respondents were happy or very happy in their current relationship. There were no significant differences in satisfaction between those who worked standard hours and non-standard hours or between men and women. However, many respondents did comment on how long working hours of one or both partners meant that they got to spend too little time together as a couple once childcare and housework had been taken care of.

Women do most of the childcare

It would seem that housework such as looking after children is unevenly divided. Women were less likely than men to report that their spouse was a resource or support in childrearing, and to feel that they did more than their fair share of household tasks. This is perhaps at least partly explained by the fact that the fathers in our sample were more likely than the mothers to work a non-standard schedule and to work long hours, leaving mothers largely responsible for childcare and housework.

“

Despite having a demanding job, I do most of the childcare, school responsibilities, getting home on time etc.”

THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF PARENTING

Being a loving parent

There were many aspects of parenting that our respondents said were relatively easy, including being someone their child could turn to when upset, making their child feel loved, spending time talking to their child, knowing what is going on in their child's life, setting age-appropriate limits for their child, and establishing family routines.

Time is an issue

Only a minority of parents found particular aspects of parenting challenging. The greatest challenges for our respondents were: being there when their child was sick, being consistent in what they expect from their child, and attending important events in their child's life.

The top two worries for the British parents were:

- Having too little time as a family
- Own well-being

“

I don't see enough of my children, I often have to miss school events, or reschedule due to work changes to scheduling.”

Parenting is hard work but a pleasure

A majority of our respondents reported that taking care of their child was more pleasure than work, though they also felt that being a parent was harder than they had imagined and many often felt tired, worn out or exhausted from raising a family. The parents working non-standard schedules seemed to find parenting harder and more exhausting than parents working day jobs did.

CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS

Having to rely on more than one form of childcare

Three quarters of the parents had used some kind of formal childcare arrangement in the past week, while almost half had used informal childcare arrangements. In other words, over a third of parents had to make use of a combination of formal and informal childcare arrangements to meet their childcare needs.

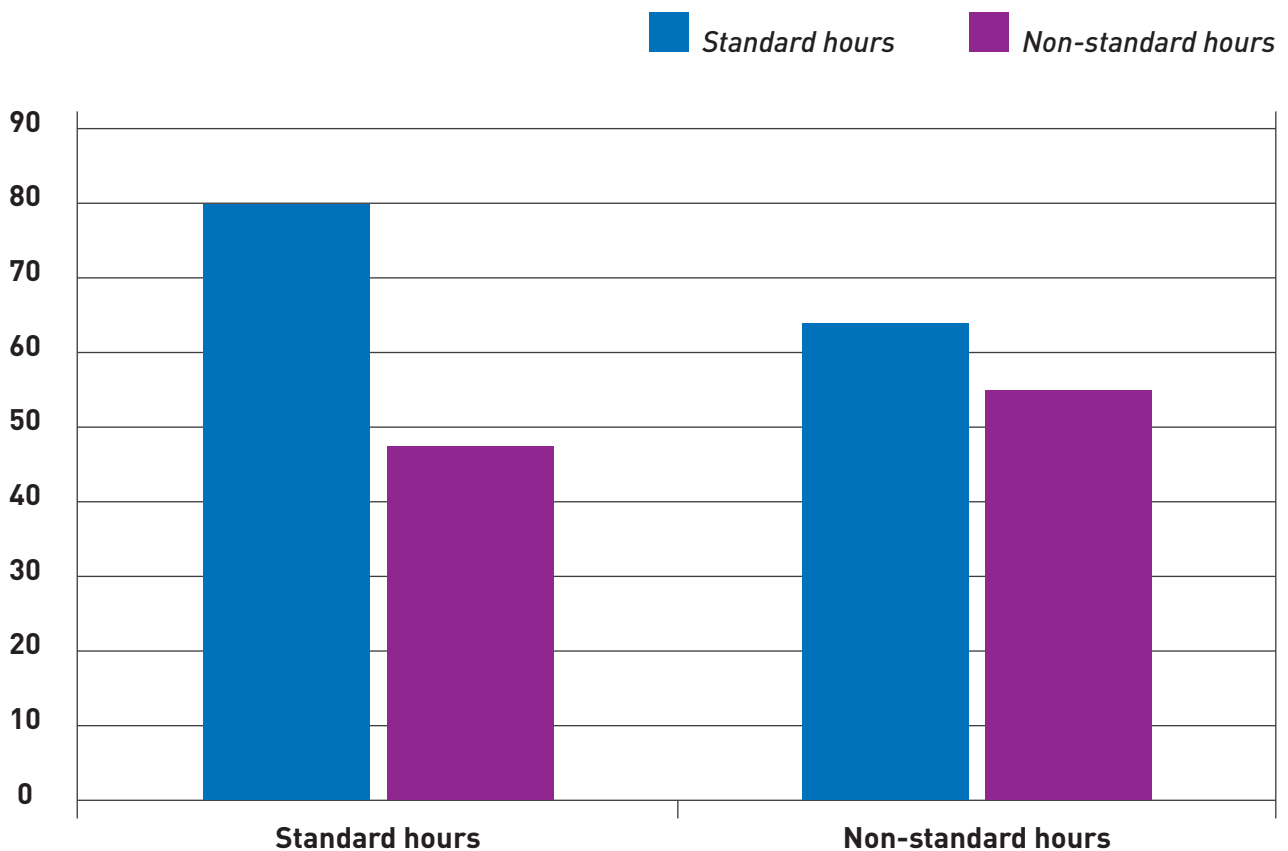
As Figure 3 indicates, parents working non-standard hours made more use of informal childcare and less use of formal childcare than did those working standard hours.

“

I have to rely on my mother-in-law 5 days out of 8 to help with childcare.”



Figure 3. Use of formal and informal childcare by parents working standard and non-standard hours, per cent.



Quality of formal childcare

Overall, it seems that the British parents were satisfied with the quality of formal childcare: almost all reported that their children enjoyed attending formal childcare, that their child enjoyed the activities and play materials on offer, and felt at ease in the group. A clear majority of parents felt comfortable leaving their child in formal childcare and reported that their child does not have difficulties saying goodbye when left there.

The majority of parents stated that they discussed issues concerning the child with childcare staff, that they respected the professional caregiver(s), and that their child received individual attention from childcare staff. However, only a fifth of the parents said they received help from childcare staff when their child exhibited problems.

Parents working non-standard schedules seemed slightly less satisfied with the formal childcare setting than parents working day jobs, though the differences were small. One issue that did seem to cause concern was long hours spent in childcare.

“

I feel that my son has to spend too many hours at his nursery each day, making him tired by the time he is picked up.”

Cost and flexibility are an issue

Issues that were particularly pertinent to our British respondents were the high cost of childcare and the inflexible hours of childcare centres. While some parents said they had to work extra long hours to be able to afford to pay for childcare, others said that they had to restrict their working hours as a way of minimising their need for childcare.

Many also commented on the difficulties that sudden work commitments posed, as these could mean having to arrange for someone else to pick up their child from childcare. Parents with school-aged children said that the lack of appropriate after-school care posed difficulties for them in combining work and family life.

“

We have to work longer days so that our number of working days can be compressed to four out of five - this is because of the cost of childcare.”

CHILD WELLBEING

The children are alright

The parents in the UK reported more positive than negative behaviours amongst their children. The problem behaviours most frequently reported were: frequent temper tantrums, the child is argumentative with adults, and restlessness.

The most frequently reported positive behaviours were: the child is considerate of other people's feelings, is helpful when someone is hurt, upset or ill, is obedient and volunteers to help. There were no great differences in how parents working standard and non-standard schedules perceived their children's behaviour.

Time is the most precious commodity

Issues in relation to their children that the respondents were most concerned about were: their children spending lengthy time periods in childcare, the availability of before and after school care, the amount of sleep and rest their child was getting, and care arrangements while the parent(s) were working.

Parents working non-standard schedules were slightly more worried than were parents working day jobs about the amount of sleep their child was getting, their child's health, the availability of before and after school care, and the amount of time they had as a family.

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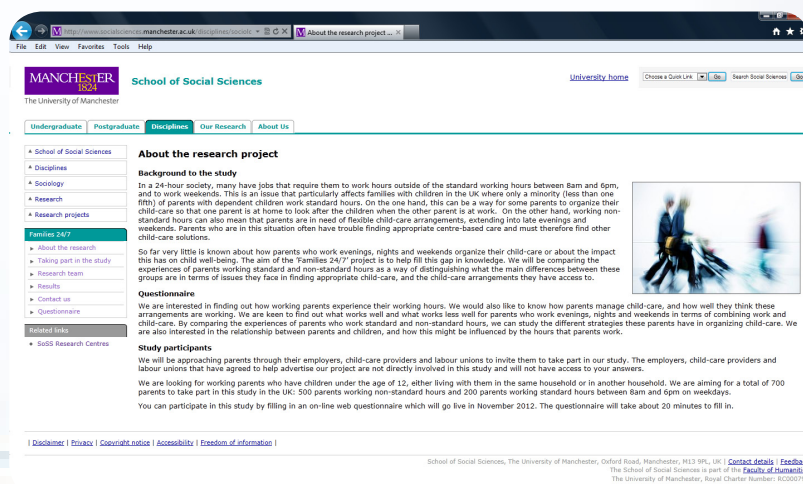
My wife also works shifts and so to ensure child care we often work opposite shifts, and don't spend as much time with each other as a couple or as a family as we would like.”

FAMILIES 24/7 WEB SURVEY FOR WORKING PARENTS

The 'Families 24-7' project is funded by the Academy of Finland, and is conducted in co-operation between JAMK University of Applied Sciences, University of Jyväskylä, the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Finland, the University of Manchester in the UK, and the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands.

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For more information about the project, and for updates on our publications, please visit our website www.manchester.ac.uk/families24-7



The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the 'Families 24/7' research project page on the University of Manchester website. The page is titled 'About the research project' and is part of the 'School of Social Sciences' website. The navigation menu includes 'Undergraduate', 'Postgraduate', 'Disciplines', 'Our Research', and 'About Us'. The main content area is divided into several sections: 'Background to the study', 'Questionnaire', and 'Study participants'. The 'Background to the study' section explains that in a 24-hour society, many jobs require working outside standard hours (8am to 6pm), and the project aims to understand how parents manage child-care during these times. The 'Questionnaire' section states that the project is interested in how working parents experience their working hours and how they manage child-care. The 'Study participants' section mentions that the project is approaching parents through employers, child-care providers, and labour unions, and is looking for working parents with children under the age of 12.

About the research project

Background to the study

In a 24-hour society, many have jobs that require them to work hours outside of the standard working hours between 8am and 6pm, and to work weekends. This is an issue that particularly affects families with children in the UK where only a minority (less than one-fifth) of parents with dependent children work standard hours. On the one hand, this can be a way for some parents to organize their child-care so that one parent is at home to look after the children when the other parent is at work. On the other hand, working non-standard hours can also mean that parents are in need of flexible child-care arrangements, extending into late evenings and weekends. Parents who are in this situation often have trouble finding appropriate centre-based care and must therefore find other child-care solutions.

So far very little is known about how parents who work evenings, nights and weekends organize their child-care or about the impact this has on child well-being. The aim of the 'Families 24/7' project is to help fill this gap in knowledge. We will be comparing the experiences of parents working standard and non-standard hours as a way of distinguishing what the main differences between these groups are in terms of issues they face in finding appropriate child-care, and the child-care arrangements they have access to.

Questionnaire

We are interested in finding out how working parents experience their working hours. We would also like to know how parents manage child care, and how well they think these arrangements are working. We are keen to find out what works well and what works less well for parents who work evenings, nights and weekends in terms of combining work and child-care. By comparing the experiences of parents who work standard and non-standard hours, we can study the different strategies these parents have in organizing child-care. We are also interested in the relationship between parents and children, and how this might be influenced by the hours that parents work.

Study participants

We will be approaching parents through their employers, child-care providers and labour unions to invite them to take part in our study. The employers, child-care providers and labour unions that have agreed to help advertise our project are not directly involved in this study and will not have access to your answers.

We are looking for working parents who have children under the age of 12, either living with them in the same household or in another household. We are aiming for a total of 700 parents to take part in this study in the UK: 500 parents working non-standard hours and 200 parents working standard hours between 8am and 6pm on weekdays.

You can participate in this study by filling in an on-line web questionnaire which will go live in November 2012. The questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to fill in.

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