

MARCH 14, 2013

Modern Parenthood

Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family

by *Kim Parker and Wendy Wang*

OVERVIEW

The way mothers and fathers spend their time has changed dramatically in the past half century. Dads are doing more housework and child care; moms more paid work outside the home. Neither has overtaken the other in their “traditional” realms, but their roles are converging, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of long-term data on time use.

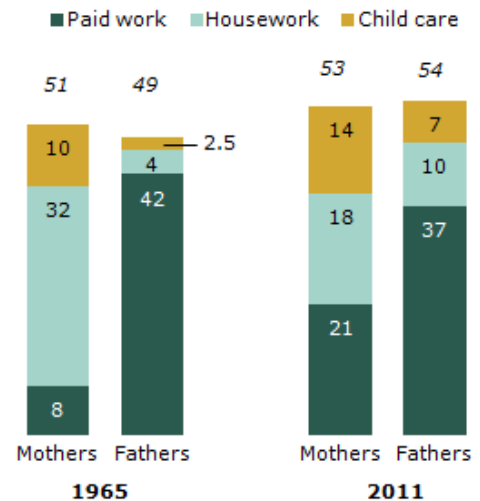
At the same time, roughly equal shares of working mothers and fathers report in a new Pew Research Center survey feeling stressed about juggling work and family life: 56% of working moms and 50% of working dads say they find it very or somewhat difficult to balance these responsibilities.

Still, there are important gender role differences. While a nearly equal share of mothers and fathers say they wish they could be at home raising their children rather than working, dads are much more likely than moms to say they want to work full time. And when it comes to what they value most in a job, working fathers place more importance on having a high-paying job, while working mothers are more concerned with having a flexible schedule.¹

However, mothers’ attitudes toward work have changed considerably in recent years. Among mothers with children under age 18, the share saying they would prefer to work full time has increased from 20% in 2007 to 32% in 2012. Tough economic times may have ushered in a new mindset, as women in the most difficult financial circumstances are among the most likely to say working full time is the ideal situation for them.

Moms and Dads, 1965-2011: Roles Converge, but Gaps Remain

Average number of hours per week spent on ...



Note: Based on adults ages 18-64 with own child(ren) under age 18 living in the household. Total figures (at the top of each bar) may not add to component parts due to rounding.

Source: 1965 data from Table 5A.1-2 in Bianchi, et al. (2006). 2011 data from Pew Research analysis of the American Time Use Survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

At the same time, the public remains conflicted about what is best for children. Among all adults, only 16% say the ideal situation for a young child is to have a mother who works full time. A plurality of adults (42%) say mothers working part time is ideal, and one-third say it's best for young children if their mothers do not work at all outside of the home.

These findings are based on a new Pew Research survey of 2,511 adults nationwide conducted Nov. 28-Dec. 5, 2012, and an analysis of the American Time Use Survey (ATUS). The ATUS, which began in 2003, is a nationally representative telephone survey that measures the amount of time people spend doing various activities throughout the day. It is sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Data collected from 2003 through 2011 include interviews with more than 124,000 respondents. Comparable time diary data are available going back as far as 1965, allowing for an analysis of trends over a nearly 50-year period.²

Balancing Work and Family

The Pew Research survey finds that about half (53%) of all working parents with children under age 18 say it is difficult for them to balance the responsibilities of their job with the responsibilities of their family. There is no significant gap in attitudes between mothers and fathers: 56% of mothers and 50% of fathers say juggling work and family life is difficult for them.

Feeling rushed is also a part of everyday life for today's mothers and fathers. Among those with children under age 18, 40% of working mothers and 34% of working fathers say they always feel rushed.

With so many demands on their time, many parents wonder whether they are spending the right amount of time with their children. Overall, 33% of parents with children under age 18 say they are not spending enough time with their children. Fathers are much more likely than mothers to feel this way. Some 46% of fathers say they are not spending enough time with their children, compared with 23% of mothers. Analysis of time use data shows that fathers devote significantly less time than mothers to child care (an average of seven hours per week for fathers, compared with 14 hours per week for

Work-Family Balance Is Challenging for Moms and Dads

% saying it is ... for them to balance the responsibilities of their job and their family



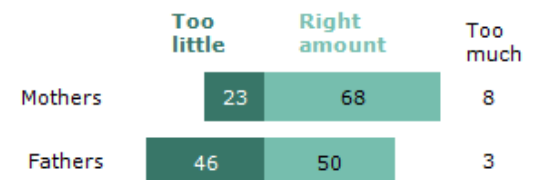
Notes: Based on mothers and fathers with children under age 18. "Working" refers to full- or part-time employment. "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Q41

Fathers Conflicted about Time Spent with Children

% saying they spend ... time with their children



Notes: Based on mothers and fathers with children under age 18. "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Q26a

mothers). Among mothers, 68% say they spend the right amount of time with their children. Only half of fathers say the same. Relatively few mothers (8%) or fathers (3%) say they spend too much time with their children.

Mothers, Fathers and Time Use

A lot has changed for women and men in the 50 years since Betty Friedan wrote “The Feminine Mystique.” Women have made major strides in education and employment, and the American workplace has been transformed. But with these changes have come the added pressures of balancing work and family life, for mothers and fathers alike. Trends in time use going back to 1965 clearly show how the increased participation of women in the workforce has affected the amount of time mothers devote to paid work. In 2011, mothers spent, on average, 21 hours per week on paid work, up from eight hours in 1965. Over the same period, the total amount of time mothers spend in non-paid work has gone down somewhat.

For their part, fathers now spend more time engaged in housework and child care than they did half a century ago. And the amount of time they devote to paid work has decreased slightly over that period. Fathers have by no means caught up to mothers in terms of time spent caring for children and doing household chores, but there has been some gender convergence in the way they divide their time between work and home.

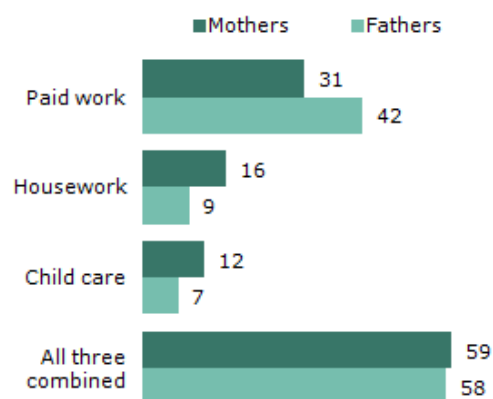
Roughly 60% of two-parent households with children under age 18 have two working parents. In those households, on average, fathers spend more time than mothers in paid work, while mothers spend more time on child care and household chores. However, when their paid work is combined with the work they do at home, fathers and mothers are carrying an almost equal workload.

How Do Today’s Mothers and Fathers Rate Themselves?

In spite of challenges they face, today’s parents give themselves good grades overall for the job they are doing raising their children. Among all parents with children under age 18, 24% say they have done an excellent job, and an additional 45% say they have done a very good job. Some 24% say they have done a

How Dual-Income Couples Divide Their Time

In dual-income households, average number of hours spent each week on ...



Note: Based on adults ages 18-64 who are currently married or living with a partner, working either full or part time and have their own child(ren) in the household.

Source: Pew Research analysis of the American Time Use Survey, 2003-2011.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

good job, and only 6% rate their job as parents as fair or poor.

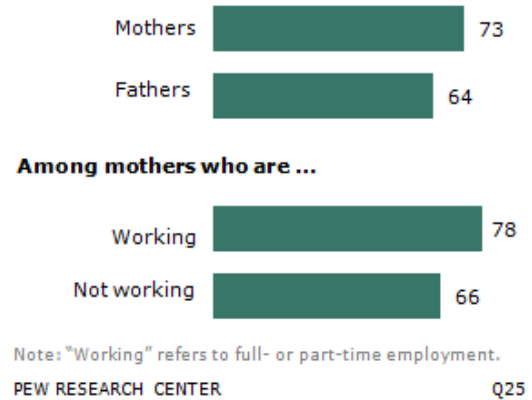
Mothers give themselves somewhat higher ratings than do fathers: 73% of mothers say they are doing an excellent or very good job as a parent, compared with 64% of fathers.

Working mothers give themselves slightly higher ratings than non-working mothers for the job they are doing as parents.

Among mothers with children under age 18 who work full or part time, 78% say they are doing an excellent or very good job as parents. Among mothers who are not employed, 66% say the same.

Mothers, Fathers Give Themselves High Ratings for Parenting

% with children under age 18 saying they are doing an "excellent" or "very good" job as parents



Other Key Survey Findings

- The rise in the share of mothers saying they would prefer to work full time since 2007 has been more pronounced among working mothers themselves than among those who do not work outside of the home. Fully 37% of today's working mothers say their ideal situation would be to work full time, up from 21% of working mothers in 2007. (Among non-working mothers, the increase from 16% to 22% is not statistically significant.)
- The new Pew Research survey finds a strong correlation between financial well-being and views about the ideal work situation. Among women who say they "don't even have enough to meet basic expenses," about half (47%) say the ideal situation for them is to work full time. By contrast, only 31% of women who say they "live comfortably" say working full time is their ideal situation.
- Marital status is also strongly linked to views about the ideal work situation, and the gap in views between married and unmarried mothers has widened significantly in recent years. Among unmarried mothers, about half (49%) say working full time would be their ideal. This is up dramatically from 26% who said the same in 2007. Only 23% of married mothers today say their ideal situation would be to work full time, basically unchanged from 2007.
- A plurality of mothers (45%) and about four-in-ten fathers (41%) say the best thing for a young child is to have a mother who works part time. Relatively few (16%) say having a mother who works full time is best for children. Mothers' views about this have remained relatively consistent over the past few years, while fathers' attitudes have changed significantly. In 2009, 54% of fathers with children under age 17 said the ideal situation for young children was to have a mother who did not

children under age 17 said the ideal situation for young children was to have a mother who did not work at all outside the home; today only 37% of fathers say that—a drop of 17 percentage points.

- When asked how difficult it is for them to balance the responsibilities of work and family life, 16% of working mothers and 15% of working fathers say it is very difficult. Overall, 56% of working mothers and 50% of working fathers say it's either very or somewhat difficult for them to balance work and family.
- Whether parents feel they spend enough time with their children has a big impact on how they evaluate their parenting. Parents who think they spend the right amount of time with their children are about three times as likely as parents who say they spend too little time with their children to say they are doing an excellent job parenting (30% vs. 11%).
- Among mothers with children under age 18, married moms are happier overall than unmarried moms. Fully 43% of married mothers say they are very happy with their life these days; only 23% of unmarried mothers say the same. There is also a significant gap in happiness between working and non-working mothers: 45% of non-working mothers say they are very happy, compared with 31% of mothers who work either full or part time. When other factors (race, ethnicity, income and education) are taken into account, marriage is a significant predictor of a mother's happiness while employment status is not.

Other Key Time Use Findings

- The amount of time parents spend with their children continues to go up. Fathers have nearly tripled their time with children since 1965. Mothers' time with children has also increased, and today's mothers spend more time with their children than mothers did in the 1960s. There is still a large gender gap in time spent with children: Mothers spend about twice as much time with their children as fathers do (13.5 hours per week for mothers in 2011, compared with 7.3 hours for fathers).
- The amount of time parents spent doing housework has changed significantly too. Fathers' time spent doing household chores has more than doubled since 1965 (from an average of about four hours per week to about 10 hours). Mothers' time doing housework has gone down significantly over the same period (from 32 hours per week to 18).
- Married parents spend more time at work than unmarried parents, counting housework, child care and paid work together, and have less leisure time than other parents. Married parents are also

more egalitarian than cohabiting couples. Married fathers' time in paid and unpaid work totals about 55.5 hours per week, 1.4 hours more than that of married mothers. Yet the total work hours for cohabiting fathers are almost three hours less than that of cohabiting mothers.

- When paid work, child care and housework are combined, parents in dual-income households have a more equal division of labor than parents in single-earner households. In dual-income households, fathers put in, on average, 58 hours of total work time a week, compared with 59 hours for mothers. In households where the father is the sole breadwinner, his total workload exceeds that of his spouse or partner by roughly 11 hours (57 vs. 46 hours per week). In households where the mother is the sole breadwinner, her total workload exceeds that of her spouse or partner by about 25 hours (58 vs. 33 hours per week).
- Men spend more time than women in leisure activities (such as watching TV, playing games, socializing and exercising). The gender gap in leisure time is bigger among men and women who do not have children in the house (37 hours per week for men vs. 32 hours per week for women). Among parents with children under age 18, fathers spend, on average, 28 hours per week on leisure activities, while mothers spend 25 hours on leisure.

Roadmap to the Report

The report is divided into two main sections. Section I, *Public Opinion Survey Findings* (Chapters 1-3), is based mainly on the new Pew Research survey. **Chapter 1** looks at women's growing presence in the labor market and explores changing attitudes about work. **Chapter 2** looks at the challenges mothers and fathers face in attempting to balance work and family life. **Chapter 3** explores how these challenges are affecting parents—both in terms of their overall happiness and in how they evaluate the job they are doing raising their children.

Section II of the report, *Time Use Findings* (Chapters 4-6), primarily draws from time use surveys and includes public opinion questions related to time use when available. **Chapter 4** provides an overview of how mothers and fathers spend their time in the workplace and at home and how they feel about their time. **Chapter 5** goes into detail about the long-term trend in time use among men and women—and fathers and mothers—over the past five decades. **Chapter 6** looks at current time use patterns among parents of different family types and living arrangements.

Acknowledgements

Paul Taylor, executive vice president of the Pew Research Center and director of Social & Demographic

Paul Taylor, executive vice president of the Pew Research Center and director of Social & Demographic Trends, provided the editorial guidance and also edited the report. Eileen Patten, Research Assistant, assisted in drafting several chapters of the report and also helped with charts, formatting and number checking. Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, Research Associate with Pew Research's Hispanic Center, assisted with number checking. Marcia Kramer of Kramer Editing Services copy-edited the report.

The Pew Research Center thanks Margaret Usdansky of Syracuse University for her contribution in the initial planning of the project and her exploration of the American Time Use Survey data and Suzanne Bianchi of University of California, Los Angeles for her insights in historical time use surveys and her expertise in time use research. Gretchen Livingston and Rick Fry, both senior researchers at Pew Research's Hispanic Center, contributed economic and demographic research for the report. Cary Funk, Senior Researcher at Pew Research's Forum on Religion and Public Life, helped with data analysis.

About the Data

Findings in this report are based on two main data sources: (1) Pew Research Center surveys conducted in 2007 and 2012 and (2) time use data collected from 1965 to 2011.

Public Opinion Surveys: The latest Pew Research survey was conducted Nov. 28 to Dec. 5, 2012, with a nationally representative sample of 2,511 adults age 18 and older, including 353 mothers and 290 fathers with at least one child under age 18. A total of 1,506 interviews were completed with respondents contacted by landline telephone and 1,005 with those contacted on their cellular phone. Data are weighted to produce a final sample that is representative of the general population of adults in the United States. Survey interviews were conducted in English and Spanish under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. Margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.2 percentage points for results based on the total sample at the 95% confidence level.

The report also draws on findings from a previous Pew Research Center survey. That survey was conducted Feb. 16 to March 14, 2007, with a nationally representative sample of 2,020 adults age 18 and older. All interviews were conducted by landline telephone. Data were weighted to produce a final sample that was representative of the general population of adults in the continental United States. Survey interviews were conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International, in English and Spanish. Margin of sampling error was plus or minus 2.8 percentage points for results based on the total sample at the 95% confidence level.

Time Use Surveys: Different from the standard survey questions that ask people to estimate how much time they spend on doing different activities, Time diary/Time use surveys record respondents' activities sequentially, including the starting and ending times for each, over a specific time period (usually 24 hours). The time use findings presented in Chapter 4 are primarily based on the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), the nation's largest survey on time use and the only federal survey providing such data. It was launched in 2003 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The ATUS sample is nationally representative and drawn from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The ATUS interviews a randomly selected individual age 15 or older from a subset of the households that complete their eighth and last interview from the CPS. Interviews are conducted over the telephone. The monthly sample is divided into four randomly selected panels, one for each week of the month. It is also split evenly between weekdays and weekends. The ATUS data files are released annually. The response rate for each year has been above 50% since the survey started in 2003. For more information on the ATUS methodology, see <http://www.bls.gov/tus/atususersguide.pdf>.

The Pew Research Center analyses are based on the yearly ATUS data from 2003 to 2011. To increase the sample sizes for parents in different types of families, ATUS data from 2003 to 2011 are pooled and analyzed. The sample size for working-age parents with children under age 18 at home is 46,483: 18,865 fathers and 27,618 mothers. The data are weighted to adjust for nonresponse, oversampling and the weekend and weekday distribution. The ATUS data files were downloaded from ATUS-X (www.atusdata.org).*

Historical time use findings prior to 2003 are drawn from Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie (2006), Table 5A.1-2, who analyzed the following datasets: 1965-66 Americans' Use of Time Study; the 1975-76 Time Use in Economic and Social Accounts; 1985 Americans' Use of Time; the 1995 Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) Study; and the combined file of the 1998-99 Family Interaction, Social Capital and Trends in Time Use Study, and the 2000 National Survey of Parents.

* Katharine G. Abraham, Sarah M. Flood, Matthew Sobek, and Betsy Thorn. 2011. American Time Use Survey Data Extract System: Version 2.4 [Machine-readable database]. Maryland Population Research Center, University of Maryland, College Park, and Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

1. Unless otherwise noted, references to “parents” and “mothers” or “fathers” throughout this report refer to those with at least one child under the age of 18 and references to “young children” refer to children younger than 18. ↩
2. In both the Pew Research Survey and the American Time Use Survey, it is possible that some two-parent households are made up of a same-sex couple rather than a mother and father. Due to data limitations, same-sex couples are not analyzed separately. ↩