

# Innovative social policies for gender equality at work

**Elizabeth Fox, Gillian Pascall, and Tracey Warren**



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Elizabeth Fox, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham,  
University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD

Gillian Pascall, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham,  
University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD

Tracey Warren, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University

Website: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/research-innovative-social-policies-for-gender-equality-at-work.php>

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## **Project Summary**

The project asked about policies to support work-family reconciliation among low-waged women in England. How are low-waged women constrained in their choices by limited and fragmentary social policies? We identified innovative social policies available in the international arena around parental leave, child-care, and time that could promote work-family reconciliation, more continuous employment and better quality jobs among low-waged women in England. Would these policies be attractive and better meet their needs in reconciling paid work and family?

First we identified key problems for UK low-waged women, relating them to innovative policies in European countries, which enable parents to reconcile paid work and childcare. Secondly, we used the *British Household Panel Survey* to investigate job quality and caring responsibilities among the lowest-waged working-age female employees. Thirdly, our qualitative research explored how innovative policies could enable low-paid mothers of younger children to access better quality, more continuous employment. We interviewed 35 male/female couples (70 interviews in all) with a youngest child of seven years or under. We asked about innovative policies to bring fathers more decisively into unpaid work: so we interviewed couples, with both parents in paid work, full- or part-time. We recruited 25 low-waged and 10 higher-waged mothers, and their partners, to highlight by comparison the contribution of low pay to mothers' choices.

## ***Findings***

- Policy assumptions have switched under New Labour from male breadwinner model to dual earner, with women's labour market participation increasingly assumed, and necessary, to avoid poverty and earn pensions.
- A one-and-a-half breadwinner arrangement persists, women earning half men's lifetime earnings. Motherhood brings major disadvantage. Mothers' lives bend to children's needs, reducing access to quality employment, working time, income and careers, especially for poorly qualified women.

- Innovative social policies for parental leave give equal rights to men and women and encourage them to share responsibility. Sweden has two months' paid leave dedicated to fathers, Slovenia 90 days, Iceland three months' leave for each parent and three to share between them.
- UK policies have focussed on mothers' employment, entrenching mothers' responsibility for childcare rather than enabling fathers'.
- Innovative parental leave policies offer solid social support for employment through the pre-school period. Support for parental leave is low in the UK: around 20 weeks of 'effective parental leave' compared with over 100 in Sweden and Hungary.
- Fathers and mothers favoured legislation and would use dedicated 'Daddy leave'. Mothers saw shared leave as building on their current childcare systems.
- Government support for 'universal childcare' brings significant ideological and practical change, but is not truly universal. Reliability, quality, access, affordability and government spending compare unfavourably with Scandinavian countries.
- A 120-week gap between the end of 'effective parental leave' and pre-primary admission compares with 30 weeks in Hungary and Sweden.
- Low-waged mothers highlighted their lack of childcare choice, limiting their scope for increasing working hours, gaining promotion or envisaging careers. Higher-paid mothers described a range of services they could use and trust.

- Pre-school hours are shorter than elsewhere in Europe. Respondents described the very part-time pre-school day as a source of stress for themselves and inadequate care for children.
- High-quality, publicly funded childcare, including longer pre-school hours, would be particularly helpful to low-waged mothers for whom quality, continuity and affordability are crucial.
- The gender pay gap for UK full-timers has reduced, but unequal working time – including career breaks and part-time work – damages women’s earnings.
- Three strategies towards more equal working time are Sweden’s policies to make women’s working lives more like men’s through (nearly) full-time employment, the Netherlands’ Combination Scenario, using quality part-time employment to make men’s lives more like women’s, and France’s shorter working week, bringing the most gender-equal working time in Western Europe, with few part-timers.
- Government sees freedom from Europe’s 48-hour working time limit as individual choice, ignoring parents’ joint responsibilities, reduced choice for those caring for children, and the degradation of women’s earnings as part-timers.
- Mothers perceived their working time and career-building as constrained by fathers’ working hours. Fathers and mothers saw a shorter working week as increasing choice over sharing paid work and care, improving work-family reconciliation, enabling low-waged mothers to realise career aspirations.
- Part-time work is central to UK mothers’ disadvantage: the European Part-time Work Directive and National Minimum Wage have modest impact. The

Netherlands' Combination Scenario is an innovative approach, improving the quality of part-time employment for men and women.

- Mothers working part-time saw themselves as undervalued and the Combination Scenario as improving their status and income. Some fathers saw barriers to working part-time themselves. Mothers, and some fathers, approved the Combination Scenario's challenge to traditional gender roles.
- Low-waged women lived in strong male breadwinner households, contributing less than a third to the couple's total wage, and performing most housework. Most rejected the male breadwinner model in principle: they saw children as needing fathers' care equally with mothers'. With stronger government support through childcare, pre-school hours, regulated working time, mothers and fathers would welcome more gender equality in care and work.

## **Innovative Social Policies for Gender Equality at Work**

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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

The project asks about policies to support work-family reconciliation among low waged women in England. How are low-waged women constrained in their choices by limited and fragmentary social policies? Would policies available in other European countries be attractive and better meet their needs in managing paid work and family? First we use the UK policy literature to identify key problems, relating them to innovative policies in the international arena which enable parents to reconcile paid work and the care of young children. Second, we examine gendered employment, comparing the caring and employed lives of low waged women with their higher waged peers. Thirdly, drawing on qualitative research, we ask about the relevance of the pioneering policies identified in the international arena to low-waged women and their partners whose labour market participation, earnings and work-family reconciliation are currently constrained by the care of young children. The project's prime concern, under its European Social Fund remit, is with policy for low-waged women in England. Both quantitative and qualitative data therefore relate to England, but we discuss England within the wider UK context in policy and policy debates.

The salience of motherhood in marginalizing women's labour market position has been emphasised by recent research. The Equalities Review (Interim Report March 2006) has stimulated research comparing age, disability, ethnicity and gender as sources of disadvantage. 'Persistent Employment Disadvantage, 1974 to 2003' uses the *General Household Survey* to measure 'employment penalties': the extent to which women are less likely than men to have a job (16 hours + per week), and compared with people who are disabled, from ethnic minorities, or older, after taking account of differences which might justify unequal pay, such as education and local labour markets. Compared with a non-disabled, partnered, younger white man, a disabled person has a 15.5% employment penalty, a partnered woman without children 9.4%, and a partnered mother of young children 37.2%. The gender penalty for women together fell from 41 to 18 points over this period, but closer analysis shows that it is not so much women as mothers of young children who are disadvantaged: penalties have rapidly declined but remain nearly 40% (Berthoud and Blekesaune 2006: 5-17). Using panel data to examine critical times in women's

employment, a DWP-commissioned study finds that men and women's working patterns are very similar until the year before the arrival of the first-born child. After the first year, mothers' participation climbs, but remains below men's even 30 years after the first birth (Brewer & Paull 2006: 30-1).

Similar long-term consequences are recorded for mothers' earnings, which fall from 91% of men's before children to 67% afterwards, recovering slightly to 72% when children have grown up. Controlling for demographic, educational and work factors explains some of this difference, but not all. Wage growth for women is markedly slower around the periods of first birth and school entry (Brewer & Paull 2006: 87-8).

There is clear evidence that women are disadvantaged in the labour market in England. Combining paid work and motherhood is still a major source of difficulties for women. It is mothers, rather than fathers, who bend their jobs to meet family needs. Activity rates for women in England are 73% compared with 84% for men, a rate which drops to 57% for women who have pre-school children (Aston et al 2004: 30, 31). This 'one and a half earner' model creates opportunities for segregating women into marginalized sectors of employment, and for indirect discrimination, with poor conditions and pay for workers with discontinuous work histories and part-time jobs. Recent *Equal Opportunities Commission* research found that, amongst women who had previously worked full-time, 21% moved to part-time work and 24% out of the labour market within a year of their first child. With a second birth even more women left full-time employment (Johnes 2006: v).

As the pay gap for full-time workers has reduced, differences in working time and working conditions have increased in importance in producing gender inequality. The UK simultaneously has one of the highest levels of part-time employment in the EU and the lowest rates of pay and poorest working conditions for part-timers (Dench et al 2002). The gender pay gap in the UK in 2003 was among the highest in Europe (EU 15), at 22% of hourly earnings for all employees working 15 hours or more per week (Eurostat structural indicators ([epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int](http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int))). Women full time workers in England in 2004 earned 81.1% of men's full time hourly earnings (Aston et al 2004: 74) - but including part-timers widens the gap to 58.8% (Aston et al 2004:

78) (contrasting markedly with 84% in Sweden (Dench et al 2002). The problems facing women are experienced most sharply by those with lower qualifications, who are more likely to stop paid work when they have children, and to return to more part-time and lower paid jobs. Women in part-time jobs earned only £8.26 an hour compared with £11.38 for women full-timers and £14.04 for men full-timers in England in 2004 (Aston et al 2004). The gap between women full-time workers and women part-time workers has been widening (Bellamy and Rake 2005). Low waged mothers are the target group of this project, but we compare their experience with a comparative group of higher wage earners, to highlight the contribution made by their lower earnings to their situations.

The role that choices play in the ways women and men combine their waged and domestic work is key to understanding work-family reconciliation among low-waged women. For Hakim (2000) preferences now determine work-lifestyles in the UK, over-riding the influence of demographic, social, economic and institutional factors. While recognizing the importance of choice, other writers emphasise instead how constraints shape the formation and enactment of preferences (see Crompton 2006 for a review). Constraints are clearly part of the context within which people make working family decisions, and decisions cannot be understood as individual choices out of their material context. The research asks how low-waged women are constrained in their work-family reconciliation choices by current UK policies.

New Labour has brought new assumptions about working motherhood, from the first discussion paper, *Supporting Families* (Home Office 1998) and the *National Childcare Strategy* (Department for Education and Employment/Department of Social Security 1998) to the *Work and Families* and *Childcare* Bills which received royal assent in summer 2006 (Brannen & Moss 2003, Bellamy and Rake 2005, Stanley et al 2006). Increasingly, through the New Deal for Lone Parents and Sure Start, government departments assume that women should be treated as individuals and earners, as well as mothers. Women's labour market participation is increasingly assumed, as in the 2005 election manifesto's (Labour 2005) long-term aim of 80% employment for men and women of working age. Rather more slowly, policies for

work-life balance and childcare have followed the recognition of women's labour market participation, with support justified in terms of investment in children and social inclusion of parents (implicitly mothers): 'enabling parents to balance work and family responsibilities can make the difference between their participation in the labour market or their exclusion' (Gordon Brown and Patricia Hewitt forward to *Balancing work and family life* (HM Treasury and DTI 2003). The current ten-year strategy for childcare, *Choice for parents, the best start for children* (HM Treasury and DTI 2004) sets out long-term plans for increasing support for childcare.

These policies challenge the traditional assumptions of the male breadwinner model, yet residues of the model remain, encapsulated in the research finding in *Women's Incomes over the Lifetime* that women's lifetime earnings are only half men's (Rake 2000). If, as is increasingly the case, women are assumed to be able to earn their own living now and their own pension later, this one-and-a half arrangement will bring serious risks of poverty for women (Lewis 2001). The National Minimum Wage and the regulation of part-time work seek to reduce the marginalization of part-time workers, bringing pay and conditions equivalent to full time work, and improving pay. But despite the high political salience of these issues there are major gaps in women's ability to earn and care and in government policies to enable them to do so. We look to the international arena to identify innovative social policies that could promote work-family reconciliation, more continuous employment and better quality jobs among low waged women in England.

### ***Methodology***

We used the *British Household Panel Survey* to ask about job quality and caring responsibilities, using cross-sectional quantitative analysis of working age female employees (aged between 18 and 59) in Wave L, 2003, of the *BHPS*. The *BHPS* interviews each adult in a nationally representative sample of over 5,000 households. Approximately 10,000 individuals are interviewed (see Taylor et al., 2000). We looked for a broad picture of the employment and caring experiences of the lowest waged women in England (the sub-sample of female employees in England consists of around 1,700 women) that would feed into the analysis of our smaller qualitative sample.

Our qualitative research asked whether innovative policies from Europe might be applied in England, and explored the extent to which they could enable low paid mothers of younger children to access better quality, more continuous employment, while bringing fathers into childcare. We recruited the sample from parents of children in primary schools in the East Midlands for in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 35 male/female couples (separately, so 70 interviews in all) with a youngest child of seven years or under. All respondents adopted pseudonyms, which we use here to protect their anonymity. We were interested in the views of mothers' and their partners, and so we recruited 25 low-waged mothers and their partners, and 10 higher waged mothers and their partners for comparison. Some limitations to our sample restrict the conclusions that we can draw. First, our parents were self-selected, responding to a letter sent to their child's school. All the women responding were white. Second, the main target was partnered mothers, as we were interested in the perspectives of both parents on social policies that would enable work-family reconciliation. Had we also interviewed lone mothers, not only would we have expected a more ethnically diverse sample, we could consider the potential of innovative policies for more family types too. Third, our innovative policies included those intended to bring fathers more decisively into unpaid work: so further criteria were both parents being in paid work, in any combination of full and part time employment and married or cohabiting. The research asked about these households' experiences of reconciling work and family.

## **Chapter 2 Gendered patterns of employment and caring amongst low waged coupled women in England**

### ***Gendered patterns of employment in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales***

The focus of the project was on women in England, reflecting ESF concerns. The analysis of the *BHPS* showed female employees in England as not atypical of women in Britain in their patterns of employment. Seventy one per cent of women of working age in Britain were in the labour force, 63% as employees (18-59, Table 1). Women's rates of employment were highest in England and Scotland but the differences between the four countries were not substantial. The picture of broad similarities between the four countries, with a slight overall labour market advantage associated with living in England, was repeated in the usual weekly paid working hours of employees and in their typical hourly earnings. Most women in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were in employment in 2003, and most were working short full-time or long part-time hours.

The analysis confirmed the gendering of labour market status, of hours employed and of wages earned in each country. Looking at the overall proportion of women in the labour force as proportion of male for each country gives rates of around 80% for each, with Northern Ireland somewhat lower at 77%. Women's median gross hourly rates as a proportion of the male median within each country also stood at 76-79%, suggesting more overall similarities than differences in the broad patterning of gendered paid work in the four countries of Britain.

Table 1. Labour market profile of women and men (aged 18-59).

	Women					Men				
	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland	All	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland	All
<i>Labour market status.</i>	column %									
Employee	66	60	66	59	63	73	66	68	63	69
Self-employed	5	5	4	2	4	13	12	13	14	13
Unemployed	2	5	3	3	3	4	6	6	8	6
Other	27	31	27	35	29	10	16	12	16	12
N	2,799	953	1,098	1,201	6,051	2,460	799	958	845	5,062
<i>Usual weekly hours of employees.</i>										
1-19	18	18	16	16	17	1	2	2	1	2
20-30	24	27	23	25	24	3	4	2	3	3
31-37	34	33	42	38	36	36	35	40	33	36
38-47	22	20	18	20	21	50	50	49	55	50
48+	2	2	1	2	2	10	10	8	9	9
N	1,768	553	701	694	3,716	1,736	507	633	518	3,394
<i>Distribution of employee gross hourly earnings.</i>										
Low waged*	22	28	25	26	24	7	12	10	9	9
Moderate wage	36	38	38	38	37	29	32	34	34	31
High waged	42	34	38	36	39	64	56	56	57	60
N	1,697	508	669	652	3,526	1,642	470	607	466	3,185

\* Low waged=(NMW+0.25% or less). Moderate waged=(>NMW+0.25%-<2\*NMW). High waged=(2\*NMW or higher)  
Source : BHPS Wave 12. 2003

### ***Low waged female employees in England***

We were interested in the relative experiences of low waged women in England, and grouped the women in England in the sample into three wage categories derived from their hourly wages relative to the adult rate of the National Minimum Wage in 2003. If employees were earning at or below the NMW adult rate of £4.20 plus 0.25%, they were classified as low waged. If they earned more than this but less than £8.40 then they were classified as moderately waged. The higher waged were earning twice the NMW or more. Only 17% were earning over 3 times the NMW. The median for women was £7.32 an hour. Overall, 22% of women employees in England were low-waged and 42% were high-waged (Table 1). Equivalent figures for men in England (aged 18-59) were 7% and 64%.

A familiar pattern of low hourly wages and short weekly working hours emerged clearly when we moved to the sub-sample of coupled women employees in England (Appendix Table A shows around 70% of women aged 18-59 were living in a couple). Sixty nine per cent of the lowest waged were working fewer than 31 hours a

week, compared with around a half and third of the moderate and higher waged. Table 2 also shows that the bulk of the low waged women expressed preferences for continuing these same hours, reaffirming what we know on work time preferences from the wealth of research into constraints surrounding part-timers' choices (see Walters 2005 for a recent example).

Short hours and low hourly rates of pay translated into low median gross weekly wages of only £92, comparing very unfavourably with the average for all women of £231. Low hourly wages were also a reflection of the women's typical over-concentration in manual employment, with 76% in the Standard Occupational Classification manual categories. These low-waged manual jobs offered few 'perks' and benefits to the women. Low coverage by employer pension schemes and very poor promotion opportunities meant women's future prospects were unfavourable. Working time arrangements that might have helped them in balancing work and family life (flexitime, job share, zero hours contracts etc) were experienced by very few women in the sample as a whole, with only flexitime and term time working figuring as options in their working lives and only for small minorities: 15% and 10%. The low-waged women were less likely to mention flexitime and more likely to report the availability of term-time working than their higher waged peers. Term-time working usually amounts to unpaid leave over the holiday period. It tends to be taken by women with school-age children.

Table 2. Women's characteristics by wage. Coupled female employees aged 18-59 in England.

	Low waged*	Moderate waged	Higher waged	All
<b>A]. Demographic characteristics</b>				
<i>Women's age</i>				
		column %		
18-29	17	22	16	18
30-44	43	44	52	47
45-59	40	35	32	35
<i>Number of children aged &lt; 16</i>				
		column %		
0	53	56	60	57
1	17	22	17	19
2	21	17	19	19
3+	9	4	3	5
<i>Education level</i>				
		column %		
High - A level +	43	53	80	62
Moderate (O level -some)	36	38	18	29
No qualifications	21	10	2	9
<b>B] Job characteristics</b>				
<i>Usual weekly hours</i>				
		column %		
1-30	69	46	35	46
31+	31	54	65	54
Mean hours	24	29	32	29
% Preferring to continue same hours	71	64	53	61
<i>Median gross usual weekly wage</i>				
		£s		
1-30	70	130	250	127
31+	176	256	462	323
All	92	210	390	231
<i>Occupational location</i>				
		column %		
High non-manual	11	22	65	38
Clerical/sec	13	40	22	26
Manual	76	38	13	36
<i>Benefits</i>				
		%		
Employer runs a pension scheme	51	78	89	77
Has opportunities for promotion	30	45	56	46
Special working hours arrangements in main job:				
Flexitime	9	15	19	15
Term time only	13	7	9	10
Annualised hours	2	3	4	3
Job share	0	3	2	2

\* Low waged=(NMW+0.25% or less). Moderate waged=(>NMW+0.25%-<2\*NMW). High waged=(2\*NMW or higher).  
Source : BHPS Wave 12. 2003

Despite stark differences in their job characteristics, the three groups of women were more similar in their life-course locations, being aged 30-44 on the whole and substantial proportions having at least one dependent child aged under 16. But the sample was strongly divided in their educational attainment: only 43% of the low-waged women had 'A level' equivalent qualifications or better, compared with 80% of the higher waged, suggesting sizeable polarisation (Table 2).

### *The domestic division of labour: coupled female employees in England*

Characteristics of women's partners were a second indicator of polarisation amongst the women in the sample. Almost 70% of the partners of low-waged women were in manual jobs or not employed, for example, compared with 42% for the higher waged women (Table 3). Since the low-waged women were living in predominantly dual manual couples, their joint wages were low. Their total household income as a proportion of the median for all the employed women lay at 75%, dropping down to 40% for those women whose partners were not employed. Unsurprisingly, the latter women reported the most severe financial problems of the sample. We can see the extent of polarisation in the sample by considering too the household incomes of high waged women whose partners were not employed: they stood at 88% of the average, higher than the average household income of all couples in which women were low waged (75%). Finally, although the partners of the low waged women were typically earning low wages, the women's still lower earnings meant they were contributing only small amounts to the couples' combined wage pot. Fully 77% could be seen to be living in 'strong male breadwinner' couples, (compared with only 20% of the highest waged women), where they contributed less than a third to the couples' joint monthly gross wages.

We were interested in how, if at all, these differences in breadwinning work amongst women and their male partners were related to their performance of domestic work. Study after study reaffirms the persistence of female-dominated domestic work. While there is evidence of moves in the direction of convergence in how long women and men spend on domestic tasks, with men's participation in tasks like grocery shopping growing in particular (Gershuny 2000; Sullivan 2004), any changes identified have made only a small impact on men's overall contribution to domestic work. Furthermore, women retain ultimate responsibility for organising domestic work: identifying what work needs doing, allocating it and making sure it is completed and on time (Hochschild 1989).

The British one-and-a-half-earner model signifies a persistent gendering of domestic labour but there is variation in how differently waged households arrange their

domestic work. Higher-waged women still carry out more domestic work than their partners, but the couples commonly contract out or buy in elements of their domestic tasks including cleaning, gardening and childcare (Gregson and Lowe 1994). How low-waged manage their domestic work is fascinating, not least because, in some cases, low-waged women are also providing domestic labour for other, higher waged, households (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). Studies of low-waged homes suggest strongly female dominated domestic work, although some groups of working class men, historically and in recent times, have been more involved in childcare than the higher waged, in part because their female partners are often employed on evening and night shifts (Warren 2003).

Women in all wage groups in the BHPS sample reported carrying out the bulk of domestic work and childcare, but the load lay more heavily on the low waged women and on the moderately waged women behind them. The low waged women took major responsibility for almost all domestic tasks and contributed more hours a week to housework. Table 3 presents the men's participation. It shows that the men most likely to be involved in domestic work were participating more in grocery shopping and, after this, childcaring and cooking. Far fewer men took part in washing/ironing and fewer still cared for ill children. For almost all tasks, it was the partners of the lower waged women who were the men least likely to be involved. The only exception was caring for ill children, but this was only a small minority of the men.

Table 3. Household characteristics and division of labour. Coupled female employees aged 18-59 in E

	Low waged*	Moderate waged	Higher waged	All
<i>Partner's labour market status</i>				
		column %		
Not employed	11	9	7	8
Employed - manual	57	53	35	46
Employed - non manual	32	38	58	45
<i>HH income as % median for female employees</i>				
Not employed	40	54	88	58
Employed - manual	75	87	113	92
Employed - non manual	85	103	142	119
All	75	92	127	[£3,173]
<i>% Reporting severe financial problems**</i>				
Not employed	37	29	21	29
Employed - manual	22	23	16	21
Employed - non manual	16	18	8	12
All	22	21	12	18
<i>Breadwinner status based on gross monthly earnings</i>				
Strong male BW***	77	49	20	42
Moderate male BW	16	31	29	27
Dual BW	4	11	26	16
Female BW	3	9	25	15
<i>Percentage of couples where man is involved in task:</i>				
Child-care (with child aged 12 or under)	29	42	44	40
Cares for ill children (in paid work with child 12 or under)	12	7	7	8
Cooking	31	36	43	38
Cleaning	25	33	30	30
Grocery shopping	42	47	45	45
Washing/ironing	17	23	29	24
<i>Median hours women spend on housework in an average week (cooking, cleaning, doing laundry).</i>				
Part-timers	18	16	15	15
Full-timers	13	10	9	10
All	15	14	10	12

\* Low waged=(NMW+0.25% or less). Moderate waged=(>NMW+0.25%-<2\*NMW). High waged=(2\*NMW or higher).

\*\* Just about getting by or in financial difficulties.'

\*\*\* Strong male: women's earnings less than a third of couple total. Moderate male: a third to less than 45%.

Dual: 45% to less than 55%. Female: 55% or more.

Source : BHPS Wave 12. 2003

Previous studies have identified some contradictions between how domestic work is organised and how women feel it could or indeed should be arranged between partners (Sullivan 2004). Our BHPS findings add support to these discrepancies between practice and attitudes. We asked, given the far higher concentration of the lowest waged women in strong male breadwinner/female caring households, whether their views reflected this arrangement. The findings suggest that, for the overwhelming majority of women in the sample, they did not (Table 4). Indeed, sorted in order of the strength of their agreement with the available statements on

gender work roles, women expressed least support for ‘A husband’s job is to earn money; a wife’s job is to look after the home and family’. The low waged women expressed more support than the other two wage groups but still only 11% agreed. Conversely, the bulk of women (82%) agreed that ‘Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother’. Support for this statement was slightly lower amongst the low waged women but it still amounted to 79% in agreement. The majority of low waged women (80%) also agreed that ‘Employers should make special arrangements to help mothers combine jobs and childcare’.

Table 4. Attitudes to gendered work roles. Coupled female employees aged 18-59 in England.

	Low waged*	Moderate waged	Higher waged	All
<i>% agreeing with:</i>				
A husband’s job is to earn money; a wife’s job is to look after the home and family	11	5	3	6
A woman and her family would all be happier if she goes out to work	16	18	15	16
A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works	31	25	19	24
All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full time job	32	30	24	28
Having a full-time job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person	35	31	39	35
Both the husband and wife should contribute to the household income	51	54	43	49
Employers should make special arrangements to help mothers combine jobs and childcare	80	79	81	80
Children need a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as the mother	79	83	84	82

\* Low waged=(NMW+0.25% or less). Moderate waged=(>NMW+0.25%-<2\*NMW). High waged=(2\*NMW or higher).  
Source : BHPS Wave 11. 2002. Minimum wage at £4.10.

## Conclusion

Low-waged coupled women in England were concentrated in very poorly paying shorter hours jobs at the bottom end of the occupational hierarchy. Women’s low wages were not compensated by their partners’ higher earnings, since their male partners were themselves over-concentrated in low-level occupations. Most women were contributing only a small amount to the total couple monthly wages; since they were performing the majority of domestic labour tasks, they were living under strong male breadwinner/female carer gender arrangements. But most did not express attitudes in support of this division of labour. Finally, most low waged women considered that employers should make special arrangements to help mothers combine jobs and childcare, but only a minority had access to special work time arrangements in their own jobs. Working part-time was their only real ‘alternative’.

We now move to explore the results of our qualitative analysis, examining the extent to which innovative policies are attractive to couples in England exploring in turn parental leave, child-care, time in the city, the 35 hour week, and the Combination scenario.

### *Chapter 3 Parental leave*

#### *Parental leave policies in the UK*

Parental leaves have been introduced in Scandinavian and Central and Eastern European countries to bring women into the labour market, and sustain their participation through early motherhood, while making time to care for children. Three key issues are debated: how long should leaves be to meet children's needs for care and parents' needs for earning? What level of social support is needed and justified to enable parents to meet their obligations as carers? Can parental leaves support gender equality in employment, underpinned by increasing gender equality in care, rather than just supporting maternal employment?

Despite significant developments to leave systems for parents under New Labour, existing systems and plans in the UK have serious limitations. Currently, Statutory Maternity Pay lasts 6 months, which the government claims is now the longest in Europe, but at £106 per week it is rather low. Mothers can take an extra 6 months unpaid. The plan to extend paid maternity leave to one year should be in place by the next election. But there is room for debate about the extent to which UK leaves are effectively supported, so that parents can afford to take them. European data, drawing maternity leaves into parental leaves for comparative purposes, and allowing for the level of payment, suggest that 'effective parental leave' in the UK is actually rather short. By this measure Sweden and Hungary have parental leaves of over 100 weeks, while the UK has just over twenty. This measure puts the UK among the lowest group of parental leave providers in Europe. The UK also has one of the longest gaps between the end of effective parental leave and pre-primary School Admission Age, with 120 weeks, compared with around 30 weeks in Hungary and Sweden (Plantenga & Siegel 2005: 10-11).

There has been much pressure for leave for fathers, with 95% of working men taking some time off when their babies are born (Smeaton 2006: 18), but much reluctance from New Labour to see any such gesture to new fatherhood. April 2003 saw the first leave for fathers: two weeks Statutory Paternity Pay, at the same standard rate as Statutory Maternity Pay. Statutory Paternity Pay announced some break with a policy past in which men's responsibility for care was scarcely considered. Secretary of State

for Trade and Industry, author of a book about time and family life (Hewitt 1993), pursued this 'women's agenda' energetically but always within a set of New Labour priorities about business, individual choice and market means. Government's next proposals were for a right for mothers to transfer maternity leave to fathers, rather than a right of fathers to 'Daddy leave' (HM Treasury and DTI 2003, 2004). The government proposes that the father may take up to three months paid (at £106 per week) and three months unpaid leave in the second half of a child's first year instead of the mother. Unpaid leave and low replacement rates of pay are strong reasons for parental leave non take-up and there are no incentives in these ideas for men to take responsibility for care. These ideas still entrench mothers' responsibility for care rather than fathers'.

#### *Parental leave policies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Scandinavia*

The longest parental leaves are in the CEE countries. Childcare leave to enable parents to care for nursery-age children has been a strong feature of the systems throughout Central and Eastern Europe, with childcare leave added to maternity leave, rather than replacing it as in Sweden, and entitlements together making around three years (Paci 2002: 34, Wolchik 2003: 591). In 2002, the Czech Republic had the longest parental leave in Europe, reaching until the child is four years old (Kocourkova 2002). At transition, childcare leave schemes were generally made more attractive while workplace nurseries closed. Parents in the Czech Republic may have rights to four years' leave, but they also suffer 'a gradual erosion in the value of their qualifications and previous work experience, and find it more difficult to return to their jobs after such a long break', while childcare benefit is set at one fifth of average incomes and brings the risk of poverty (Kocourkova 2002). Market pressures on firms, job insecurity and fear of losing position at work have made women's position more vulnerable. These add up to considerable pressures on those women who have employment to take shorter periods of leave than their entitlements (Erlor and Sass 1997, Firlit-Fesnak 1997, UNICEF 1999). A review of evidence about parental leaves for a US audience and not including CEE countries, argues that the balance of the evidence favours shorter leaves – around one year - as the best fit between the needs of children for parental care, the needs of parents to earn, and the requirements of gender equality (Gornick and Meyers 2003). The US literature on the impact of

care is more extensive than the UK literature, but there is some evidence supporting the positive impact of formal care between the ages of one and four, on various measures of child development (Hansen et al 2006:89), while parents use a variety of resources, formal and informal, in the context of costs, availability, and their need for a healthy and safe environment in which they can trust (Hansen et al 2006: 96).

The Swedish system has been based on shorter periods of leave than in CEE countries, with 80% income replacement. It now allows 480 days of parental leave, which can be used flexibly on a full-time or part-time basis. The time on parental leave in Sweden can be stretched, using entitlements to lower levels of benefits than the 80% of previous income. This allows parents to care for their children at home for 16 months on average, before using other forms of childcare (Duvander et al 2005: 13). After this public support for childcare is extensive (see below). Sweden's leave system is rated as highest in Europe if measuring 'effective parental leave', with Hungary close behind, Finland and the Czech Republic following. It also has one of the shortest gaps between the end of effective parental leave and pre-primary admission age (Plantenga & Siegel 2005: 10-11). Parents in Sweden also have a right to work reduced hours – 30 hours per week – until their children are twelve. Thus, Sweden has a flexible system, which allows parents to stay at home during the first year and more, on high levels of replacement income. It clearly sustains women's labour market participation in a more continuous manner, and with stronger levels of social support, than those now being developed in the UK.

The DTI *Work and Families* consultation 'responding to the growing demand from fathers' (DTI 2005: 39) makes an interesting contrast to countries such as Norway and Sweden, whose governments have been using 'Daddy Leave' to encourage fathers to care (Hobson 2002, Deven and Moss 2002). Norway introduced this policy first and Iceland and Slovenia now have the longest period of paid leave allocated to fathers (ILO 2005). But Sweden stands out in Europe in terms of men's expectations about taking parental leave (European Opinion Research Group 2004).

Parental leave – along with childcare and individual taxation - has been an important part of policy for increasing women’s labour market participation and for gender equality. Sweden replaced maternity leave in 1974 with parental leave, (lasting 26 weeks, with 90% wage replacement) which could in principle be taken by either parent. While this policy supported women’s employment, it was mainly mothers who took parental leave: there were no incentives for fathers to do so. One consequence was that mothers, and mothers’ employers, paid the costs of their more risky status as employees. Another was a segregated and unequal labour market (Duvander et al 2005). To counter these problems, policies have developed to make the entitlements to parental leave more equal. To encourage fathers to share parental leave, a ‘Daddy month’ was introduced in 1995 and extended to two months in 2002. Currently, there are 480 days of parental leave, which can be used flexibly on a full-time or part-time basis. But 60 days are reserved for each parent, and cannot be switched to the other. Income replacement is at 80%, though there is a ceiling, which affects men – because they have higher earnings – more than women. Fathers have become 43% of those taking parental leave and in 2002 those who took leave took 30 days on average. Parental leaves are in addition to 10 days’ paternity leave and allowance at the time of childbirth (Nyberg 2004: 12). Flexibility means that fathers take 18% of parental leave days, long working hours get in the way of men’s involvement at home, and taking parental leave is not enough in itself to transform fathering. But Swedish fathers who take longer leaves (over 90 days) are reported to be more involved with childcare, physical and emotional tasks, and (in the case of younger children) to feel closer to their children (Haas and Hwang 2005). The Swedish agenda is shifting towards gender equality at home (Bergman and Hobson 2002).

Parental leave is only one of the elements in Sweden’s success in bringing women into the labour market on more equal terms. Parental leaves are well established, and strongly supported in terms of income replacement. Gender differences in taking leave have had some adverse effects for mothers, and have been challenged by changes since the 1990s towards gender equality in care. Parental leaves and childcare entitlements add up to system which enables women to sustain continuous employment status and income from work. The new ideas about bringing fathers into care are an essential part of the agenda for making mothers more equal in the labour

market. The Women's Budget Group argues for the UK that higher levels of income replacement and the 'use it or lose it' principle, are needed if men are to use the leaves and become more involved in childcare (WBG 2005: 1).

Can parental leaves can be designed to support gender equality in employment, underpinned by increasing gender equality in care, rather than just supporting maternal employment? So far, most parental leave policies have been designed to protect mothers and children through childbirth, and enable mothers to balance childcare with employment. While these arrangements have brought important benefits to mothers and children, they have also put mothers into a more vulnerable position in the labour market. Norway introduced a non-transferable Daddy month to give fathers an incentive to take parental leave. Sweden borrowed this policy in 1995, increasing the month to two in 2002. Now Iceland has a 3 x 3 system, with three months for the mother, three for the father, and three for sharing between them. An official commission in Sweden has proposed – following Iceland - a 5 x 3 system, with five non-transferable months for each parent and five to share between them (EIRO 2005; Nyberg 2006). Innovative designs for parental leave are now about bringing fathers into care.

In Sweden, as discussed above, 'Daddy leave' reserved for fathers has been used – with some success - to encourage men to care. In our project, we first asked parents about their own experiences of parental leave, and if this policy would help mothers to engage in paid work. Secondly, we asked if they would use leave reserved for fathers if it were available to them.

Although all of the fathers in our sample had taken some leave when their children were born, around half had supplemented paid time off with their annual leave, and many said that they would have liked to take more time off than they were actually able to take. Mothers often said that the time off that their partners had taken was 'not enough', especially in families where there were older children, or in situations where they experienced a difficult birth or postnatal complications. Mothers felt that they

needed more support in these situations, and not all were able to rely on wider social networks.

Most parents saw existing arrangements as unsatisfactory. Many couples expressed an emergent commitment to a more egalitarian sharing of paid and unpaid work and care. Some fathers expressed ambivalence about extending parental leave to enable mothers to return to work, but broadly fathers were positive about sharing time off around the birth of a child. This was the most favoured policy among our respondents (see Smeaton 2006 and Yaxley et al 2005: 26-31 for a more quantitative approach to this question; the latter show much higher proportions likely to take leave as the rate of pay increases, from 22% at the current rate of £106 per week to 83% at £200 per week).

### ***Parents' experiences of parental leave***

Parents' experiences of existing parental leave arrangements appeared to be contingent on several factors, including difficulties around the time of the birth, the availability of support networks, and the support offered by employers. Several parents mentioned specific difficulties around the time of one or more of their children's birth; four mothers had experienced post-natal depression.

One mother, Chloe, had experienced a combination of limited support for parental leave from her partner's employer, compounded by a difficult birth and her own subsequent postnatal depression. Her partner used a week of his annual leave to enable him to care for their two older children for two weeks after the birth of their youngest child:

*When I had (child) last year, Matt took two weeks off, thinking they was both paid, bearing in mind he worked for the council, they're usually pretty up on things like that. Yet for the second week he ended up putting leave in, because they wasn't going to pay, so in the end he ended up putting a week's leave in, to have the time off with me when I had the baby. Bearing in mind I'd had an emergency Caesarean as well, so I actually needed him here.*

Nevertheless, in this example, the family had to rely on their extended family for support when Matt returned to work after two weeks:

*But even after the two weeks, because he'd got to get back to work, I still wasn't ready for him to go back to work, I still couldn't drive, which became a total... I ended up having to ask my mum to come over every day to sort the kids out for school and stuff. I also got a bit of post-natal depression, so I struggled to cope and I probably could have done with that support on hand, instead of me keep having to ask me mum (Chloe, moderate waged, play worker, P/T).*

From the fathers' perspective, several fathers gave accounts of very limited time off work when their children were born. Luke (who routinely worked long hours) made up most of his parental leave by changing his hours, and consequently had only one full day off work for each of his children's births:

*At the time when both (two children) were born I think I had a day off, unpaid, and the rest of the time was what I made up, so working extra hours without pay (Luke, manager, automotive engineering).*

Mothers, too, gave accounts of the tension between earning and caring, and the pressure on them to return to work after the birth of their children. One mother, for example, had returned to work earlier than she would have wished because of the families' reliance on her full-time earnings:

*When I had (the children), I think it's 12 weeks paid maternity, or 26, which were then only paid for the 12 weeks, that's why I went back to work after the 12 weeks. I think it would have been nice if I was off for the 12 weeks, and*

*then (partner) looked after the children. I think in my situation that was too young to leave (child) (Megan, retail manager, moderate waged, F/T).*

### ***Mothers' attitudes to parental leave policies***

In the context of parents' experiences with existing parental leave policies in the UK, mothers responded to shared parental leave as a policy that would support them with childcare, and offer increased possibilities for father involvement from the time of the birth of the child:

*Yes, we have actually talked about this ... He would definitely like something like that; he would like to spend more time with the family. I mean really the only time you are together is mealtimes and sometimes we hardly see him, we're like, we just pass each other (Kerry, local government worker, low waged, P/T).*

*That is a good idea because when (child) was born he didn't take any time off, he just worked more hours. I think he (partner) was afraid of him (child) but if he was off for two months with (child) he would have bonded with him. I think it would have helped, yeah, definitely and if we had the fifteen months leave with 80% of the wages you'd hardly notice the difference (in income) (Danielle, local government worker, low waged, F/T).*

As we have discussed, most parents mentioned the lack of 'family time' as a significant pressure in their day-to-day experience of balancing paid and unpaid work and care. Mothers said that leave for fathers would enable parents to experience time together around the time of their child(ren's) birth:

*I'd like (parental leave) at the same time. Those first couple of months are the best couple of months. It would have been nice because he just had a week with me when I had (child) (Natalie, child care worker, low waged, P/T).*

Mothers said that leave for fathers would provide a strong incentive for fathers to engage in care. One mother, for example, argued that this would extend beyond the immediate family situation:

*Oh definitely. I think, whatever they can do to encourage Dads to be Dads, they need to do it. I do think kids benefit tremendously from having, and I know there's a lot of bad Dads and bad Mums, but on the whole they need both parents, whether you're married or parents, or separated, whatever your situation, there needs to be that strong influence of the father (Kate, high waged, teacher, F/T).*

All the mothers interviewed regarded fathers' availability to care and involvement with young children as a positive benefit for mothers, fathers and children. They also saw a father's share of parental leave as increasing maternal choice around employment:

*It would be good because if the Dad could have the leave, you could see if you wanted to go back to work after the baby, the Dad could (care for the child) ...rather than have to take childcare on straight away...to see if it suited you (Gemma, clerical worker, manufacturing, low waged, F/T).*

*It would be good initially because she would be able to go back to work and she'd have the peace of mind that she'd left it with her husband rather than a nursery or whatever, so she'd be able to get back into the working routine gradually, and then put him into nursery slowly. That would be better (Natalie, child care worker, low waged, P/T).*

### ***Fathers' attitudes to parental leave policies***

Fathers' responses, while generally positive, were more cautious, especially perceiving that career prospects may be damaged by a commitment to 'family'.

Fathers expressed concerns around having time away from the workplace, ‘missing out’ on office culture, and financial constraints:

*I couldn't possibly be away from work for that long, the place couldn't keep going if I wasn't there, there's no way I could be away for weeks at a time. (Liam, IT worker).*

*For 90% of this population it is, (a financial decision) yes, most people have got bills to pay and if they're struggling they've got to do the work (Luke, manual worker, manufacturing).*

The extent to which couples are negotiating equal and interchangeable sharing in the domestic sphere remains a contested issue. (Gornick and Myers, 2003; Dienhart, 1998) While fathers had substantial involvement in their children's care, mothers tended to remain primary carers for very young children. Financial constraints were important, but three fathers also expressed ambivalence about caring for a very young child, while Alan agreed that he would use an entitlement a little later:

*I couldn't cope with a newborn baby, not straight away; I mean a woman would have to have it for the difficult period. I'm no good with newborn babies...but I think that (Daddy leave) would be good, I would definitely take it (Alan, electrician).*

A rather more complex picture emerged when we asked parents if they would envisage taking the leave separately or together. Fathers appeared to perceive benefits that they felt they would derive from the leave in different ways (although these were not necessarily mutually exclusive). Some fathers argued that sharing the entitlement would allow them more time as a family, and strengthen their relationships with their children, giving this as a reason for their preference that they take it together with the mother:

*Well I just think that if you're together it takes the strain off both of you (Nigel, manual manufacturing).*

*I've got friends that erm ...well their relationship with their wife has suffered because the wife has bonded with the child and Dad is out at work, Dad comes back and its almost it has developed into a us and him situation. So I think that that would be great ... for both people to get involved at the start sort of thing, that would be my view on it and we are trying for another child myself and Fiona and if that was okay in this country then I would want to be off (Alastair, Technical Manager, manufacturing).*

Other fathers saw extended, shared parental leave as a potential means of supporting their partners in paid work, and enabling their own involvement in family life:

*Gone are the days when the woman stays at home and the man goes to work that's gone, its never going to happen again, it very rarely happens but I think that it would be very, very beneficial for them to spend time with the baby I've found it ... I found spending time with Debbie and the baby very beneficial, both as a family and it helped Debbie no end. I would have spent more if I'd the option I would have spent more time I would have took it (Paul, manual manufacturing).*

*It would be fantastic wouldn't it, absolutely fantastic, yes. I mean I get two weeks paternity leave full pay anyway, as part of my salary contract, so I'm quite lucky in that sense. I would probably have two separate months, being in our scenario, where I would take the pressure of the home and away from Sarah's work and I'd take over the two children, so take over the child we'd already got and the baby (Jason, Retail manager).*

Respondents were negotiating paid and unpaid work around very varied employment situations, and some expressed the belief that their employer would be unwilling to allow fathers extended parental leave. Nevertheless, most said that they would use an entitlement supported by legislation:

*I'd use it if it were supported by the Government...I mean, if you were still getting 80% of your wages and everything, I mean you wouldn't have your travel costs, would you? (Gary, manual worker, manufacturing).*

### **Conclusion**

Parental leaves in the UK have focussed on sustaining mothers' employment supported by Statutory Maternity Pay, while introducing two weeks Statutory Paternity Pay in April 2003, in response to demands from parents and organisations representing them. By comparison with other European countries, effective support is rather low, giving around 20 weeks of 'effective parental leave' compared with over 100 in Sweden and Hungary. The UK is also well down the European league, with a 120-week gap between the end of effective parental leave and pre-primary admission age compared with 30 weeks in Hungary and Sweden. UK policies have also focussed on mothers and their employment, entrenching mothers' responsibility for childcare rather than encouraging and enabling fathers'. Scandinavian countries have pioneered leave targeted at fathers' involvement in care. Now Sweden has two months non-transferable leave for each parent, Iceland has a 3 x 3 system, with three months for each parent and three for sharing between them, while an official commission in Sweden has proposed a 5 x 3 system, with five non-transferable months for each parent and five to share between them. These policies are important for gender equality at work, if men and women are to be seen as equally likely to be responsible for children, as well as for gender equality at home, by bringing fathers into care.

Although UK parental leave policies have been designed to protect mothers and children through childbirth, and enable mothers to balance childcare with employment, some mothers in our sample experienced the period immediately after the birth, and during their children's early years, as a time during which they felt that

their partners were not as available to care as mothers (and many fathers) would have wished.

Fathers in dual earner households are undertaking a significant proportion of childcare (O'Brien 2005), and for couples where mothers worked during evenings or weekends, partners were the main source of childcare. Parental leave policies – shared on the Swedish model - were seen as potentially enabling couples to build on their existing shared childcare arrangements where the father is the main carer while the mother works.

Overall, respondents expressed very positive views about shared leave for fathers and mothers, as a policy that would help them to reconcile paid work and care. The policy was seen as limiting disruption to fathers' careers, because it would be a time-limited and clearly delineated entitlement. While some fathers expressed some ambivalence about extended parental leave for fathers, most agreed that they would take advantage of it, and saw it as enabling their involvement with their children as well as support for their partners. Respondents argued that legislation would be necessary to bring about change in many workplaces: some parents saw their employers as reluctant to support parents through paid leave. Both mothers and fathers argued that the policy would receive broad social support, and that legislation would validate fathers' engagement in care.

## Chapter 4    Childcare

### *Childcare policies*

A range of policies developed for children and parents began with Sure Start, which describes itself as ‘the Government’s programme to deliver the best start in life for every child by bringing together: early education, childcare, health and family support’ (surestart.gov.uk). Current aims are to provide integrated services through children’s centres in the most disadvantaged areas, including childcare, but going beyond to a range of supports for parents and children. The Child Tax Credit is now the key mechanism for lifting children out of poverty, while its childcare component assists parents with payments, currently including families earning up to £59,000 per year, paying a maximum of £300 per week (£175 for one child), and covering up to 70% of costs, planned to increase to 80%. In 2004, Gordon Brown argued that ‘the early part of the twenty first century should be marked by the introduction of pre-school provision for the under fives and childcare available to all’ (Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Comprehensive Spending Review). Such is the commitment to childcare as social investment; the 2005 election Manifesto breaks a long-established rule, proposing ‘universal’ childcare (Labour 2005: 76). All of these amount to important changes of principle since the Thatcher/Major years.

These shifts of rhetoric towards a more comprehensive and universal childcare service for pre-school children have been followed by real changes in practice. The government has made serious changes of policy in assuming the value of childcare for children and parents, and serious investments in new services. The promise of kindergarten places for pre-school children has now been met, with publicly funded places for all 3- and 4-year olds. Labour hit its target of 1.6million new childcare places and had developed 300 new children’s centres by 2005 and made plans for 2,200 more to be in place by 2008 (Toynbee and Walker 2005: 71, 312).

But are there limits to what New Labour can achieve in childcare through ‘Market Means and Welfare Ends’ (Taylor-Gooby 2004a)? New Labour’s childcare development has been a case study of this approach, using means-tested tax credits to

stimulate demand, and a mixture of public and private providers to supply. The ten-year strategy for childcare explains government policy for childcare as ‘progressive universalism, with some support for all and most support for those who need it most’ (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 4). Provision so far is piecemeal, with a mixture of public and private providers making a complex pattern, with a mixture of funding streams, and many poor children living outside the catchment areas of the sure start and children’s centres (Land 2002). Despite help through tax credits, parents in the UK pay around 75 per cent of the cost of childcare (Daycare Trust 2004: 10). Now just over half of lone mothers are in paid employment and nearly a quarter of lone mothers receive CCTC, which will pay a proportion of their childcare costs, stimulating the demand for childcare places (Women’s Budget Group 2005: 3.9). But the mixed economy makes access and quality uncertain (Lewis 2003; Wincott 2006). Problems of trustworthiness, supply and affordability of childcare places still encourage discontinuous and part-time employment, especially among less qualified mothers (Lewis 2005, Hansen 2006). By 2004, Peter Moss described the early years childcare system as ‘an incoherent and exclusionary jumble of services’ (Moss 2004: 24).

The ten-year strategy for childcare *Choice for parents, the best start for children* certainly plans improvements for parents and children: increasing the scope of pre-school places from the current 2.5- hour day to a 3-hour day by 2010, giving a 15-hour week in term-time (with a long-term prospect of a 20-hour week), and an obligation on local authorities by 2008 to ‘secure sufficient supply’ for families’ needs. There are also plans for developing a skilled workforce, and reducing the proportion of childcare costs paid by parents (HM Treasury and DTI 2004). The ten-year strategy does not address the provision of childcare for one- and two-year olds. It also continues the policy of focussing on disadvantaged areas, thus missing the many poor children who live outside them (Land 2002).

Childcare campaigners have been arguing for a more thoroughgoing universal system, with a shift from a demand-side approach to a supply-side approach. They argue the need for a guaranteed supply of childcare places, a strategy for 1- and 2-

year olds, higher public spending, and reducing parents' share of the costs, comparing the UK budget for childcare –0.8% GDP – with the 2 –2.5% spent in Sweden and Denmark (Stanley et al 2006; Women's Budget Group 2005: 6.11, see also [daycaretrust.org.uk](http://daycaretrust.org.uk) 2004).

There has been real increase in spending and commitment to Early Education and Childcare. And there are plans and promises for more, including – by the end of the next Parliament – out of school childcare places for 3-14 year olds between 8am and 6pm on weekdays (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 1). But these debates show how far the UK is from a universal system of childcare. Despite unprecedented concern with women's labour market participation, work-family reconciliation for parents, investment in children through quality services, social inclusion of parents and children, we still have a 2.5 hour day for pre-school children, forcing parents (usually mothers) to patchwork care arrangements if they are to use the time for jobs. And despite unprecedented commitment from HM Treasury to children and childcare, the system relies on the unreliable: private providers who do not necessarily respond to government incentives (Taylor-Gooby 2004b) and 17.7 per cent of whom went out of business in the year to 2004 (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 15).

Do we have anything to learn from the more universal, supply-side child-care systems of countries such as Hungary, Sweden and Denmark? Hungary has sustained kindergarten enrolments for 3-6 year olds at 85% to 88% throughout the transition from communism (UNICEF TransMONEE database). Places are full-day, with modest charges for meals, but no charges for pre-school: Szikra sees them as close to the Nordic model, with extensive public responsibility for childcare (Szikra 2006: 16). For childcare in 2000, Hungarian parents paid about 20% of the actual cost (Fultz et al 2003). Dorottya Szikra argues that the family support system – including family allowances and kindergartens - has remained comparatively stable through political changes because people see children's care as a social responsibility (Szikra 2005: 12). Swedish public funding is 100% for pre-school provision and 75% for younger children, while the Danish system gives parental freedom of choice of care through grants for childcare for children from 24 weeks until primary school age (OECD

2001). The UK's very short part-time hours compare unfavourably with other European countries. Even where pre-school education is part-time elsewhere, opening hours may be longer: for example, Denmark's pre-school system provides part-time education (3-6 hours per day) but facilities are open from 7am to 5/6 pm for leisure activities. Sweden's pre-schools are open from 6am to 6.30pm, while in France the pre-school day is from 8.30 to 4.30. Slovenia, with much lower per capita GDP than the UK has pre-school opening hours from 6am to 5pm (Plantenga & Siegel 2005). Denmark and Sweden stand out in quality measures for childcare, especially for younger children, having 3.5 years of higher vocational training for childcare centre and pre-school workers (Denmark) and University educated staff (Sweden) and staffing ratios of 3.3:1 and 5.4:1 respectively for younger children. In Sweden, public childcare, with university trained teachers, covers 87% - 96% of 2-, 3-, 4- and 5- year-olds, with parents paying 9% of total childcare costs (Gornick & Meyers 2003, Nyberg 2004, Plantenga & Siegel 2005, Kremer 2006). The research asks low waged mothers and their partners in England about the relevance of universal, high quality childcare system to their situations.

### *Mother's employment and use of Childcare*

We asked parents about their current childcare arrangements, and whether access to a good quality, universal childcare system would help mothers to work. Parents' current childcare arrangements drew on a range of resources: paid, formal care; family members, with complementary childcare frequently supplied by grandparents (themselves often in paid work); part-time pre-school or nursery combined with some childcare from friends; 'tag-team' parenting where couples worked 'opposite' hours to fit around childcare (Dienhart 1998).

Higher income, couple families are those most likely to use formal childcare, (Bryson et al., 2006) and this was reflected in our findings. High waged women in the sample, with one exception, all worked full time, and were able to buy into a range of childcare including child minders, and after school clubs. One mother, for example, described the comprehensive, long term childcare available to her locally:

*They start off at the nursery club where they pick him up at quarter past three where they do kiddy things with them and feed them and then when they become of a certain age which was five they then move to the kids' club then when he's eleven he'll go to their older children's like a youth club as they call it they go right up to eighteen, so that is quite useful (Fiona, high waged, sales, F/T).*

A recent study of parents' use of childcare found a significant unmet demand for childcare at atypical times (Bryson et al., 2006) and this was reflected in parents' responses. The ability of both parents to engage in full time work, and their success at managing work and care, were contingent on both partners having workplace flexibility, which enabled them to share the practical organisational tasks, and to meet their need for flexible, affordable childcare:

*We sit with the diaries, where are you where are you and because you're making appointments to see customers...like tomorrow for instance I'll take (child) to school, but today Alastair had to take him because I left so early, so we manage it that one of us, depending on where we are, will take (child) to school, so it just depends (Fiona, high waged, sales,F/T).*

Other higher waged parents (especially those with more than one child) also benefited from a degree of workplace flexibility, which also allowed them to keep childcare costs as low as possible:

*(Partner) is able to negotiate his hours. He takes them both to school and then we have a childminder who collects them four afternoons in a week. And to be honest that was an economic decision that we made, because of the childcare... I mean the childminder I don't think is being unreasonable in what she charges, but it's just when you have two children at both ends of the day for care, it quickly adds up (Kate, high waged, teacher, F/T).*

However, few of the low waged mothers in our sample used formal childcare, because of both the cost and the availability of care, relying instead on family and friends for

support (Wheelock and Jones 2002). Low waged mothers saw the availability of these informal support networks as absolutely essential in enabling them to work. The majority of the low waged mothers of pre school aged children in our sample worked part-time, often during evenings and weekends, because those were the hours that they knew that partners would be available for childcare. We found that the hours that partners worked were often crucial to the hours that mothers were able to work, and mothers often took jobs with hours to fit around partners' working hours.

While partners were the primary source of childcare during these times, working patterns that involved the absence of one parent during evenings and weekends increased pressure on 'family time' and had a significant impact on the ability of most couples to reconcile paid work and family life. Far from offering real 'choice', low waged mothers often found that part time patterns of work imposed real limits on 'family time', creating new stresses in the daily life of the family:

*I'm just tired all the while and (partner is) cause he's like doing an eight-hour day and then he's doing a four-hour night with the kids so, tired. It's the only way we could do it really, other than like use childcare but it wasn't worth a go (Angela, retail sales, low waged, P/T).*

Similarly, many mothers who worked full time (in all wage bands) experienced an imbalance between paid work and 'family time':

*You've got so many worries on your mind haven't you, am I spending enough time with them, am I setting a good example, do I feel good in myself, it just goes round and round and round, and I don't think you will ever be, well I know that I will never come to a perfect world (Kimberley, clerical work, low waged, F/T).*

### *Childcare and parental choice*

To what extent did parents in our sample exercise ‘choice’ about their use of childcare? We found that in families where the mother was low waged, informal and family care was typically described as the only real alternative. So although this might be expressed as a preference, low waged mothers’ use of family care was rooted in a complex mix of economic reality, in which the costs of childcare outweighed the potential advantages of paid work; the availability of good quality, affordable childcare, and parents’ beliefs about appropriate care for young children.

Limited choices around, and the availability of, good quality, affordable childcare had a significant effect on low waged women’s ability to sustain employment. We found several examples of the familiar pattern in which women had given up full time, relatively well paid, jobs when they became mothers, later returning to lower waged, part time occupations. Sarah, for example, gave up a moderately well paid retail job at managerial level, returning to work six years later as a part time retail sales assistant for a major supermarket:

*When I was pregnant with (my first child) I thought, no way, because I’d like literally be bringing home £50 a week or something, to myself, after I’d paid everything, and I was like I’m not doing it anymore (Sarah, low wage, retail sales, P/T).*

This pattern reflected the experience of several of our low waged mothers, who had made significant adjustment to the hours that they worked, typically by moving from full to part time employment (see Walters 2005). The costs and limited availability of childcare resulted in significant changes in both family life and women’s longer term career prospects:

*Yes, I mean (partner) really had to change her career because of the childcare situation. I mean government policy has changed since then, we could now claim back quite a lot of money with the child tax credits which we never*

*could do, it was too late for us really, and we'd changed our lifestyle (James, Local Government Officer).*

Where parents relied on the extended family for support with childcare, grandparents provided much of the care. However, although parents often said that they preferred this form of care, they were conscious of the demands that caring for a very young child placed on grandparents, (some of whom were also in paid employment), particularly during the longer school holidays:

*My parents do a good job when they do look after (children), they love em to bits, but the six week holiday is the worst, they do have the children a lot in the six week holidays, which does put pressure on me Dad because my Dad is not very patient (Paul, manual manufacturing work).*

Nevertheless, grandparents provided childcare that parents saw as safe and reliable:

*My Mum and Dad, and Alan's Mum and Dad share it between them, the grandparents. So it's nice and cheap really. Private nurseries are expensive, not that I've had anything to do with them, but from what I've heard other people say, they're expensive (Lauren, Low waged clerical work, P/T).*

Geographic mobility was also an important factor in the availability of family care, and several families in our sample did not have family members who could be relied on to help, even in an emergency. These parents drew on support from a range of 'alternative' family and friends:

*No. We've got no grandparents able to help us out. The Godparents we do tend to rely on quite a lot, they lived opposite us at our old house, and we've kept in touch with them and they're the children's Godparents, so we tend to rely on them quite a lot as well (Kimberley, low waged clerical work, F/T).*

*It's just the one person, but she also works, and she's also got two children and she's a single parent, so it would have to be an extreme case I suppose, but we rely on each other for things like that. There's been times before I started work I went and picked her son up. But family-wise, no (Stacey, low waged office worker, F/T).*

Reliance on friends or other family members for childcare often involved a degree of reciprocity. This took the form of gifts or reciprocal childcare; part time low waged mothers often shared some childcare with other mothers. Although parents said that these arrangements worked well, there was evidence of a wider childcare deficit. Where mothers were unable to rely on partners, extended family, and friends for support, a lack of appropriate and affordable childcare significantly affected both the hours that women could work, and their progression at work:

*I mean I've been offered jobs like to go onto the customer service desk, which I know I can do, and I do overtime on there if I can, and I absolutely love being on there because it's a bit more of a demanding job, and when I've been offered a job on there I come home thinking, oh I'm so excited, I really want to do it, then when I think about it and think about all the problems that would go with it, I'm brought back down to earth, and no, children are the priority, I have to wait. And that's where what I want and what I can do are two different things (Sue, low waged, retail sales, P/T).*

Parents' current use of formal childcare varied across the sample, and was similarly influenced by income, working time, availability and affordability, perceived social norms around parenting roles, and the effect on very young children of group based care. This meant that parents were often ambivalent about their use of formal childcare, and while some were quite happy to leave their young children with registered childcare providers, other parents felt a significant degree of anxiety about the emotional and physical safety of their children in childcare settings. Parents in the

UK receive very 'mixed messages' about their use of formal childcare, particularly for children under five, (Stanley et al., 2006) and this was reflected in our research findings.

Gendered assumptions that young children benefit most from maternal care were reflected by some of our respondents, who were reluctant to use formal childcare:

*I must admit I'm not a big fan of childcare. I'm of the group that thinks it's nice for the mother, I know... they try and share it nowadays, but a mother stays at home with the child as long as they can, if they can financially obviously. I'm a big believer in bringing the child up in the early years at home (Graham, manager, building company).*

Although responsibility for making practical arrangements for childcare was usually undertaken by mothers, this was in the context of partners' attitudes and employment situations, which frequently influenced maternal choice. Graham (quoted above) expressed his reservations about the use of formal childcare. His position, however, was only partially mirrored by that of Laura, his partner, who agreed that very young children (whom she defined as two years or younger) benefited from being at home. Nevertheless, she expressed some ambivalence about her own position:

*Well personally I stopped work when I had (child) and I tried not to work for as long as I possibly could, until financial dictates meant that I had to go back to work, because I personally think that, certainly for children under 2, they're better to have a parent at home with them.*

*Int: So would you consider (childcare)?*

*Yes. I mean I know you can leave children as young as six weeks, but I think from two onwards they benefit from the social interaction that they get with other children (Laura, high waged, teacher, P/T).*

In a broader context, while low waged mothers typically worked hours that fitted around their partners' work and children's care, some fathers described their employers as less than sympathetic about time off for family reasons. In the example of Graham and Laura, both said that Laura's employer was more 'family friendly' than Graham's and so if their child was ill, for example, Laura would be able to negotiate time off, which would not be possible for Graham.

Other couples shared childcare responsibilities by working 'opposite' shift patterns; both mothers and fathers in these couples often stressed the importance of parental care over external sources of care:

*To be honest I've always liked to look after my own kids, so we have used like nurseries and that, to look after the kids when we've been at work, but... I've always worried that when they're in these places that they're not looked after properly. You hear about some kids being abused or something. I always like to know what my kids are doing, definitely (Luke, manager, automotive engineering).*

*I don't know, I think that in an ideal world you wouldn't want to use child care whatsoever, you know if employers were more flexible, (although) mine haven't been too bad (Denise, Low waged retail sales, p/t).*

### ***Parents' Responses to Innovative Childcare Policies***

We asked parents to consider whether access to good quality, publicly funded childcare provision on a more universal basis, as in Sweden or Denmark, or longer hours of public pre-school enrolment, as elsewhere in Europe, would help mothers in their paid work. A minority of parents continued to express ambivalence about the use of childcare to enable mothers to work, arguing that parents' responsibility for their children requires parents to be available to care, rather than engage in the labour market:

*My personal opinion is you don't have children to then like push them off on other people, or so you can just return back to work, if you make that commitment of having a family then you've got to make the commitment to raising the family and if that means you've got to take time out for a couple of years, 5 years, 10 years, whatever it may be to raise your family then so be it, perhaps that's a bit archaic I don't know (Simon, local authority worker).*

Some parents felt that this level of formal care would mean young children spending 'too long' in day care or pre-school, though this depended on the child's age. One father equated his own (often long) working day with an extended day in a childcare setting:

*I don't think a child should be at school like from 8 in the morning to 6 at night, not all day like...I know if I've had 11 hours at work. I mean, it's a long time...(but) if both parents want it... (child) used to go to nursery for those times, and I were never happy about that (Grant, self-employed driver).*

Other parents saw more universal childcare as promoting both quality and continuity of care. Although all of the couples in our sample shared childcare (to a greater or lesser extent) in the domestic environment, arrangements for childcare while both parents were at work was, as mentioned, primarily organised by women, and it is notable that most had to fit their own paid work around their partners' working time, and childcare around their own working day, often while trying to minimise disruption to family life. For low waged part-time working mothers this was particularly challenging.

All respondents had experience of part-time pre-school and experienced the 2.5-hour day as problematic. Even where employers offered flexible working, very few occupations fitted around pre-school hours, and alternatives were needed for the remainder of the working day. Some parents in our sample used their breaks during the working day to join up their patchwork of childcare provision. Grant's partner, for

example, worked full time, and had transferred their child from pre-school to private nursery during her breaks, often making up the time at the end of her working day, when Grant was available to care for their child. For this mother, universal, affordable childcare would have made all the difference to her ability to manage paid and unpaid work and care:

*It would be good...it was so difficult when (child) was at pre school nursery, I used to have to come out of work at half past eleven and take him to his other nursery. It was an absolute nightmare... (Erin, low waged local government worker, F/T).*

Parents perceived this pattern of care, involving multiple childcare providers, as unsatisfactory, yet unavoidable in their current situations. Another mother described arrangements that she felt were very unsettling for her child:

*That would be good – you would know that they were safe and not having to go here and there... (child) used to go to (private nursery) after (pre-school), and they picked him up and took him ... so he was here and there, and then I picked him up and brought him home...I think it really was too much for him (Jodie, low waged manual worker, manufacturing, F/T).*

Although some parents also expressed ambivalence about the *extent* to which they would use formal childcare, this related to both the age of the child and the length of time that children would spend in a formal childcare setting. Mothers emphasised the quality and costs of formal child care provision as having primary importance:

*Yes, definitely. I think what people tend to worry about is when it's cheap, if it's cheap childcare you think it's not as safe, but if it was, if it was safe and they were going to get as (much) benefit as if it was a private nursery (Hayley, low waged, beauty therapist, P/T).*

*I think there's a lot of people who would like to work but can't because of the childcare (Gemma, low waged, (private) play centre worker, F/T).*

*I think you'd get a lot more people back to work. If you think about how much the basic pay is, how much your childcare is, you have to be earning an awful lot to be able to go back to work. I mean just one child say for instance at a private nursery it's £25 a day, now admittedly that's from half 8 till 6, but the average pay and by the time you've been taxed you're going to work for nothing (Megan, moderate waged, retail sales, F/T).*

Moreover, mothers wanted broader choices than those currently available to them. Although some mothers were ambivalent about both formal childcare and working full time, most said that more choice would improve the quality of family life, and their choices around engagement in the labour market. Hayley, for example, (quoted above), expressed ambivalence about the possibility of full-time work, but said that affordable, good quality child care would enable her to make choices that were currently not open to her:

*Personally, obviously it is nice that you have a variety of like you staying at home and looking after your children, that's probably better for part-time, but personally I would go full-time if they were old enough (Hayley).*

*Good childcare would be nice. Or just crèches where you could leave them (children) at a reduced rate while you did work (Denise, low waged retail sales, P/T).*

Although some parents expressed ambivalence about government supported childcare places, and an extended school day, most low waged mothers working longer hours expressed strong support. We asked parents if an extended school day would help women to work:

*It would, yes. The school's open 8 till 6, which would be fantastic. That sounds horrible doesn't it, I think it sounds fantastic, but it is, and the fact that the nursery is fully supported (by government)(Gemma, low waged (private) play centre worker, F/T).*

Parents clearly wanted continuity of care, stressing the importance of good quality, accessible and affordable childcare. For low waged women, the lack of economic balance around childcare currently available to them was a significant disincentive to increase the hours that they worked, or to aspire to more interesting or demanding occupations which would more fully use their abilities (Grant et al 2005).

### ***Conclusion***

Sure Start, extending entitlements to parents of 3- and 4- year old children and support for private development through the tax credit system: these are all significant advances in provision for pre-school children through recent government policies. The current government has offered explicit support for mothers' employment, in contrast to previous governments' assumptions under the male breadwinner model. Important as these developments are, they began from a low base, and there are serious gaps in the system, which are particularly important for mothers on low wages who have not had the same access to private providers as better-paid parents. Overall government spending is low compared with Scandinavian countries. There are gaps in access and affordability. The educational level of staff compares badly with Denmark and Sweden. The very short part-time hours for pre-school children of 2.5 hours each term-time day offer much less to parents and children than most European countries, and make reconciling work and family particularly difficult.

Mothers' attitudes to formal childcare were influenced by quality and affordability, and our research highlighted several gaps in existing information for parents: for example, some parents were unaware of their potential entitlement to the childcare element of tax credits. Respondents also highlighted their lack of support and choice:

mothers with the most childcare 'choice' appeared to be moderate or higher-paid women with access to good quality childcare.

Low waged mothers working part time in supermarkets were able to negotiate their hours around childcare and partners' working hours, but their ability to increase the hours that they worked or to achieve promotion was severely limited by their childcare responsibilities. The very part-time hours to which respondents were entitled as parents of 3- and 4-year old children were a source of stress for themselves and - they said -inadequate care for their children.

Several mothers were working well below their potential, as evidenced by the jobs that they had prior to motherhood, and many found it difficult to envisage their future employment careers. While some parents said that they would prefer to wait until their child or children started school full time before making any changes to their own employment situation, most low waged mothers wanted far more choice than they have under the current piecemeal system. A universal, high quality childcare system has the potential to transform low waged mothers labour market engagement, and to support families in reconciling paid work and care.

## Chapter 5 Time in the city

### *Policies for positive flexibility*

The management of time is crucial to the way that parents experience paid and unpaid work and care, and the reconciliation of work and family life. In couple households, the unequal distribution of paid work and care, working hours and responsibility for children's schedules means that parents experience increased pressure on time, and their ability to work, care, and carry out tasks that are essential to household management. These factors around work and care timetables in families have been characterised as 'scheduling problems' (Baldock and Hadlow, 2006). From this perspective, the key issue of how couples schedule work and care activities is seen essentially as a management problem, or 'too much to do in the available time' (Baldock and Hadlow, 2006:718). Gendered asymmetries in paid and unpaid work and care are underpinned by gendered asymmetries in time (Sirrianni and Negrey, 2000, Fagan et al, 2006). Boulin has argued for local time policies in Europe, in the context of change from a coherent time, based on paid work, widespread rejection of the male breadwinner model and women's incorporation in the labour market while they have children. There is a clear case to be made for policies promoting gender equality and autonomy in the use of time, 'temporal well-being' in which individual autonomy is harmonized with social organisation (Boulin 2006).

During recent years a shift in emphasis in the policy arena has been towards working time that is increasingly seen as linked with equality of opportunity in work and the reconciliation of work and family life (Fagan et al., 2006; Pillinger, 1999). A concern with time features highly in the European Union, including the Working Time Directive and Part Time Work and Parental Leave Directives, all of which, it is argued, 'set minimum standards for employee security and the reconciliation of work and family life' (Fagan et al, 2006:19). Nevertheless, a large number of workers are 'missing out' on flexible working time (Fagan et al, 2006) and there are strong arguments for the extension of flexible working to all employees, (not just those with caring responsibilities). In terms of the relationship between flexible working and responsibility for care, studies of parental time use across Europe demonstrate the

unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work and care, despite a widespread belief in Europe that childcare should be shared between mothers and fathers (Fahey and Speder 2004). In this context, ‘flexibility’ may reinforce gendered inequalities; women make the majority of requests to work part time, with all the potential consequences that part-time work brings (EOC, 2005; and Chapter 6, this Report).

A broader approach to tackling the problem of the unequal distribution of time, and time constraints, is clearly needed, and across the European Union, projects to support ‘positive flexibility’ have met with some success. A key theme of these innovative policies is to increase choice and autonomy for the workforce, while recognising the employers’ demands for competition (TUC, 1999; Pillinger, 1999). In this context, ‘positive flexibility’ allows for flexible working hours that allow all employees to balance work, family life, leisure time and periods of extended leave, and increase workers’ control over their working hours. In contrast, ‘negative flexibility’ is linked with limited legal protection for workers, long working hours, casualised work, and lack of choice in determining working hours (Pillinger, 1999:6).

Although ‘positive flexibility’ is a far from universal feature of work in the European arena, innovative working time approaches at municipal level include working time reductions in municipalities in Sweden; job rotation projects in Denmark (based on training programmes to improve employee’s ability to ‘multi skill’); and the restructuring of some public services in Germany to improve public sector performance, worker flexibility and job satisfaction, and the availability of jobs. In other areas, notably Bristol in the UK, (TUC, 1999) in the context of extended opening hours in some public services (for example libraries; citizens advice bureaux) workers have been given the choice around their arrangement of hours through a process of ‘self-rostering’. There is evidence that this has resulted in improved services, improvements in employee’s ability to reconcile paid work and family life, and increased leisure time (Pillinger, 1999).

Nevertheless, the hours that people work and their relative flexibility is only one element of the management of time and the reconciliation of work and family life.

Men's and women's use of transport, and patterns of travel, are linked with differential access to economic, social, and time resources. Low waged women may experience significant constraints in the context of poor public transport systems, and the availability of local childcare and other services (Turner and Grieco, 2000). Even with government financial support for childcare, travel to work is a major issue for women who do not have access to a car (Nicholls and Simm, 2003). In Italy, 'Time in the city' policies are essentially concerned with four key areas, arising from the premise that the unequal distribution of time constraints excludes people (particularly women with family responsibilities) from full participation in society (Belloni, 1999). The division of work along gendered lines, inadequate welfare systems which lack adequate child- and elder-care facilities, hours of schools and pre-school provision which are out of synchronisation with working times, and women's increased labour market participation all increase the difficulty for women of reconciling work and family commitments (Belloni, 1999). 'Time in the city' encompasses a range of innovative policies at municipal level around bureaucratic and administrative services, including the opening hours of shops; traffic and mobility (for example, public transport, improving travel to work times, and easing rush hour traffic), and 'time banks', in which a person makes some of his or her time available (either through 'banking' paid work, or offering time out of working hours for essential tasks, for example, childcare) and receives the same amount of time when needed. These policies actively promote social cooperation (Belloni, 1999:481).

There are, however, limits to the extent to which policies in Italy have supported greater gender equality; indeed, in some areas, gender inequalities are reinforced, because of both occupational segregation, and the continuing importance of ideologies of 'the family', with their emphasis on intergenerational family ties (Naldini, 2003; Bozini Andinach, 2002). Expectations and reinforcement of 'kin solidarity' in policies in Italy have, it is argued, resulted in a 'stretched male breadwinner' and 'stretched female caring' model – a male breadwinner family model that is stretched towards a family/kinship solidarity model, in which there are clear assumptions about male breadwinning and female (intergenerational) caring for children and elders (Naldini, 2003:205). Nevertheless, in the context of low-waged women's engagement in paid work in England, balancing family life with paid

employment is a complex task, contingent to an extent on the hours worked by partners, and the availability of local employment. To what extent might Time in the City policies enable low-waged women in a dual earner - carer family model to engage in paid work and better balance work and family life, and would these policies help them to gain better quality, more continuous employment?

### ***Parents' experiences of managing time, work, and care***

The importance of working hours, and the choice and constraints that parents experience around the hours that they work are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 of this Report. For policies around 'Time in the City', we asked parents about the key themes of travel to work, synchronised opening hours, and time banks to support childcare and other domestic tasks.

### ***Travel to work***

We asked parents about their journey to work. Around half of the low-waged mothers in the sample worked near their homes, and walked to work. Only one mother used public transport, and the remainder either shared with their partner or owned a car. The distance between parents' homes, childcare providers, and schools made car ownership essential to enable most mothers to work, and time pressures meant that even a good system of public transport would not have met the needs of mothers in this sample. One mother worked 40 hours a week in retail sales, describing this as '*unavoidable – less hours is less money, isn't it?*' This mother started work at eight, after dropping her two children at a local childminder's house:

*I should leave at 25 to, and then I can get to work for 8 o'clock. But naughty, naughty, that's not driving at 30 miles an hour. Probably like most mums in the morning, drive like an idiot. And a lot of the time I think you're stupid, you should set out... but you can't, there's no time (Keira, supervisor, retail sales, F/T).*

Parents who worked overlapping hours also needed two cars, which was not what they would have chosen had there been either a choice of local employment, or a good public transport system. The extra expense of a second car put more pressure on family finances:

*No I haven't got time to walk, I've got to get there (work) so I need the car but I've only got an old banger, its just to get me and the kids where I need to go, for me to go shopping, to have a little bit of independence, I do need it it's me life- line (Debbie, low waged, retail sales, P/T).*

In contrast, one high-waged parent used the time spent on her journey to work as working time:

*(I'm) on the hands-free, generally, working. It's dead time really from a sales perspective and I'm a sales manager. Sitting in a car, you're not selling very much are you? (Fiona, high waged, sales, F/T)*

Most parents in our sample did not use, and would not consider using, public transport to travel to work. This was for a variety of reasons, but primarily because of time constraints and the accessibility of childcare. Few childcare providers (including grandparents) lived near the families in our sample, and this introduced a logistical challenge into parents' working days. Although some fathers shared the work of transporting children to school, for example, in low-waged mother households, mothers did most of the practical work of taking children to school or childcare.

### ***Synchronised opening hours***

As mentioned in previous Chapters, parents wanted a more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work and care. Nevertheless, responsibility for practical tasks was linked not only with the time available (dependent on the hours worked by parents) but also on household resources. This was illustrated by parents' responses to the issue of synchronised opening times for shops, banks, and public offices. Around two thirds

of the couples in our sample shopped together during evenings or at weekends, and 24-hour opening in supermarkets enabled them to do this. Nevertheless, some of the low-waged mothers in the sample worked in supermarkets during evenings and at weekends, and many parents expressed negative or ambivalent attitudes to extended opening times:

*I don't know, I think it would be really unfair on other, the people who work in those areas because they would then have to work longer hours to accommodate other people. So no, I think generally people manage to fit everything in, don't they? (Laura, high waged, teacher, part time).*

Another mother relied on late night shopping because her full time work left little opportunity during the day:

*Yes, in the evening, 11 o'clock at night is my favourite time because there's no kids or anything around at that time of night. And no queues at the checkout or anything, it's a fantastic time to go.*

However, this mother expressed the ambivalence of several parents in the sample, who observed that shop workers may also be parents:

*Well everybody has different times off don't they. And different days. I know it's OK saying shops are open so you could still get to the bank, and shops, after you've finished work, but bearing in mind that people who are working in there (bank and shops) would still have kids as well (Gemma, low-waged, private play worker, F/T).*

Most parents differentiated between public services and retail services, and responded positively to, for example, synchronised opening hours for council offices and health services:

*Someone that I work with she has had trouble, she got into arrears with the council tax but actually to get into the office and sit down and talk to somebody has just been impossible, she had to pass it on her way home from work but she's got to go straight for the kids and then it means dragging them all the way back to walk all the way home again, I don't know as it'd help me personally but yes it would help a great majority of people, yeah (Denise, low waged, retail sales, P/T).*

*I mean doctors now they won't come out unless it's an emergency, they're now sending you round to the local pharmacist for advice. If we've got to work 24/7 so should they. I'm not saying one doctor works 24/7, but you know, the facility should be there. I think doctors should be on call-out, or the service should be open, people are working longer and longer hours, it's not easy to get appointments to go to the doctors. I don't know. There's no easy answer because whatever the answer is it will upset somebody, it really would. (Megan, moderate waged, retail sales manager, F/T).*

Some parents lacked the resources to fully utilise some services. While many parents banked online, in households with no internet access, accessing banking services was sometimes problematic. There is a clear relationship between household income and home internet access (SEU, 2005) and this was reflected in our sample:

*Yes, we used to struggle for a bank before they started opening later than half past 11 on a Saturday, because that's the only day really we get to sort everything out, on Saturdays, well (partner) does anyway, when he needed to sort things out (Hayley, low waged, beauty therapist, P/T).*

Parents, whatever their current arrangements, said that more choice around opening times of services would make it easier for them to balance work and care:

*Well I think a lot of people now do their banking and things on the internet, so yes, a while ago that would help. I mean we haven't got a computer but if we did and I was pushed for time for my banking and my shopping I would. But then I think it can sometimes make for a lonely life, if you're just sitting and doing all that. I like to speak to people. And I think it's nice for the children you know, he (child) gets more attention when he goes round (supermarket)! But quite often I go in after work on a Friday night at half 10. So yes, that does help, and I'll do my shopping then, then I've got Saturdays free (Amy, low-waged, retail sales assistant, P/T).*

*They (banks) should have at least one day a week when they open early where people who do work longer hours have a chance to get to the bank. I know that the last job that was in the bank used to open till five and I used to get paid by cheque and the only way that I could get money was to go to the bank...and I turned up there one day and it was shut they'd changed the hours to half past four so I was stuck 'cause I started at eight and finished at half past four so I couldn't get to the bank. So I had to wait then I had to go out of work on Monday morning and put me cheque in (Gary, manual worker, manufacturing).*

One parent in our sample worked for a Local Authority that was actively considering extended opening hours. Interestingly, this proposal met with some resistance from Council staff:

*Like I say my local authority would like me to open late on an evening, and I've resisted that as much as I can. But I've resisted that because it doesn't suit my life. Well it doesn't suit the rest of my staff either. They want us really to open a late night, say on a Wednesday or a Thursday to work say from 2 till 10, or something like that. They quite often cite the library service as doing it. There's one man in the office and there's 13 ladies who also have their commitments and how they arrange their lives at the moment, so it suits them as mine suits me (James, Local Government officer).*

Parents expressed ambivalence about extended opening hours. While on one hand, the availability of goods and services during the evenings and weekends, (and online via the internet) enabled parents to manage to carry out tasks (shopping and banking), and to fit these around the need to work and care, on the other, many parents identified with staff in these sectors who were working at a-typical times (and in the case of James, the parent quoted above, were resistant to extended hours). Nevertheless, most parents said that they wanted more choice about access to goods and services.

### ***Time Banks***

Finally we asked parents about Time Banks, in which time in paid work could be 'banked' or time exchanged with other parents for childcare or practical tasks. As discussed in Chapter 4, some mothers had reciprocal arrangements with other mothers for childcare or collecting children from school. Only one (higher-waged) mother, was working in a job -share arrangement. Although parents responded with caution to the concept of Time Banks, several said that a community-based arrangement would be something that they would use. Some expressed reservations about the fair allocation and exchange of tasks:

*I mean if I went round and babysat for somebody, you know, it would be nice to think that then in return, you know you've done your turn, then like next month it's our turn, it would be nice to think that you could do something like that, yes. But a bit of hard labour digging up a path is different to a couple of hours' childcare (Alison, low waged, retail sales, P/T).*

One couple actively used a local arrangement with family and friends. Although this informal arrangement was intended to provide leisure time for couples, this mother could envisage an extension of the agreement:

*Yes, (could envisage this scheme) because my sister and her husband now sort of have, if you want to call it, a time bank scheme, she has two small children, she has a 4- and a 2- year old, and we thought, oh once a month, alternating*

*months, so it would be six times a year one or other of us will have all the children (Kate, high waged, teacher, F/T).*

However, most parents said that in terms of, for example, banking childcare, their own time constraints would make participation difficult:

*No, I don't think (I would like this). Like I said with our own family life we rely on each other, yes it would be nice to have somebody else to rely on to help us when needed, but I'm afraid giving them the time as well is very difficult (Jason, retail manager).*

As we discussed in Chapter 4, several mothers had informal reciprocal arrangements with other mothers for collecting children from school, for example, although most parents said that constraints on their own time would prevent their active participation in any scheme that required them to 'bank' hours. Nevertheless, many were open to, and interested in, the idea, and said that if such a scheme were well regulated and managed, they would consider its use.

### ***Conclusion***

'Time in the City' policies are micro-level policies, in municipalities across Europe. The principles of these policies would seem to connect very well with the broader political agenda in three ways: promoting work life balance through flexible working, promoting environmentally sustainable transport systems, and promoting active engagement and cooperation with other citizens (e.g. through the use of time banks). The parents in our sample were juggling work and care commitments; some had significantly more flexibility than others, and the greatest limits to flexibility were generally for the low-waged mothers whose time was subject to a complex array of constraints and contexts. This meant that they were reliant on individual solutions, for example to travel to work. In terms of policies around extended opening hours, many low waged mothers were engaged in jobs that were part of the 24-hour culture. Our findings suggest that although parents expressed some reservations about Time in

the City policies, these reservations were expressed from the context of the ‘long hours’ culture in the UK, and limited choices around child care and paid work, and these policies would require a cultural change to succeed on a larger scale.

## **Chapter 6    The 35-hour week**

### ***Working time policies***

UK working hours are rooted in the male-breadwinner model of the post-war ‘Beveridge’ era, and perpetuate gender inequalities: broadly, men’s long hours make them marginal to unpaid work (fathers have a particularly long week, over 48 hours), while women’s (especially mothers’) short hours make them marginal to paid. Working time is relatively unregulated, with a ‘mismatch between working-time preferences and the options available in the labour market’ (Fagan 2000, 2001a & b). National government permits employees to opt out of the EU Working Time Directive’s 48-hour maximum, arguing for labour market flexibility and individual choice (DTI 2004: 11). Similarly recent moves in France to provide more flexibility within 35-hour legislation for ‘optional’ overtime work are framed in terms of freedom of choice (EIRO 2005b, 2005c). But the UK has encouraged a long-hours culture among men. Hence, while New Labour have encouraged women’s labour market participation, the male breadwinner model remains strongly entrenched in unequal working lives, in particular working time.

If the pay gap for full-time work were closed tomorrow, even – much more challenging – the pay gap for part-time work, we would not have gender equality, unless we could also bring more equal working time. European Foundation data show the average working time for UK parents, with mothers of children under 15 working 27.3 hours, compared with 48.5 hours for fathers. Many worked shorter hours, which would not bring an independent income even if pay for part-time work shed its current penalty. There is also evidence in European Foundation data that UK parents would prefer more equal working time (Pascall & Warren 2006).

The need for independent earning grows, as changes in welfare provision and families mean women have decreasing access to family incomes and security through male

breadwinners. One measure of this is of rates of access to earnings through 'secondary employment': the proportion of non-employed individuals who have a partner in work decreased continuously from 76% in 1974 to 40% in 1994 and has remained at that level (Berthoud & Blekesaune 2006: 21). Gender equality in access to security and earnings depends on more equal working time. While the gender pay gap for full-timers has reduced, gender inequality in working time – including career breaks and part-time work - has become a more serious factor in women's ability to support themselves.

What routes are there to more equal working time? The Swedish route has been to support full-time employment – or nearly full-time employment - for women and men within a dual earner model, through high public spending on childcare and parental leaves. The Netherlands has pursued a part-time route: the 'Polder model' developed to share employment through encouraging part-time work, while the social ideal of the 'Combination Scenario' now aims to allow men and women equally to combine paid and unpaid work, which should be equally shared and equally valued (Plantenga 2002: 53-4). Finally France has legislated for a maximum 35-hour week for everyone. As in the Netherlands, this started as a policy to share employment, at a time of high unemployment, but more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work in families was also an objective (Fagnani & Letablier 2004). By comparison with the working time of UK parents, these three routes could be characterised as Sweden making women's working lives as far as possible like men's, the Netherlands making men's working lives more like women's, while France offers a mid-point between men's lives and women's.

While the UK has resisted unions and EU Directives, in France the issue of working time reduction has been intensely debated (Boulin 2000: 1-2). Two Aubry laws (named after Minister of Labour Martine Aubry) aimed to reduce working hours to 35 per week, in larger firms from January 2000 and in smaller firms (under 20 employees) from January 2002 (while defining issues of overtime, annualisation and guaranteed earnings). The legislation, enacted against a background of high unemployment (then around 12%), was intended to share available work. But it also 'implicitly aimed to promote greater family parity and a more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work' (Fagnani and Letablier 2004: 553). The 35-hour working week is

reported as reducing the working time gap between men and women. Among Western EU countries, and along with Denmark and Portugal, France has one of the lowest gender gaps in working time (Fagnani & Letablier 2006: 89).

It is too early to capture the full impact of the shorter working week, but what is the evidence to date of its implications for reconciling work and family and for sharing paid and unpaid work between men and women? Reduced working time has brought increasing approbation from French respondents to surveys (Boulin 2000) and major union mobilization against amendments designed to bring more flexibility to employers (EIRO 2005c, 2005d). In the mid-nineties, working time reduction was favoured as a measure to share work. The better paid were more ready to reduce hours with proportional loss of income than poorer respondents. But time shortage was important for these workers too, especially for women, of whom two million more had joined the labour market between 1975 and 1995. Lone parents are differently placed compared with dual earner families, and large families more reluctant to suffer lower wages. But in French surveys 'the dominant feeling is a high degree of satisfaction and a strong reluctance to come back to the previous situation' (Boulin 2000). Women - and parents - are more in favour of the reduced working week than men and non-parents. Women are also more in favour of deeper reductions.

Difficulties in the 35-hour week policy have been identified. Some firms negotiated more flexible conditions in return for shorter hours, increasing productivity, but making synchronisation with the family harder. Reductions in working time may have stimulated non-standard hours of working, less predictability, more fragmentation and intensified workloads. Amongst women, managerial staff reported more satisfaction than unskilled female workers, who were more likely to report work intensification (EIRO 2002b, 2002c). Across the EU, the poorest households are most likely to express preferences for working more hours (Väisänen and Nätti 2002). Low pay brings risks of multi-jobbing by workers whose regular wages previously depended on overtime, unless people are protected by adequate minimum wages.

Notwithstanding these significant difficulties, early research suggests that the 35-hour week enables work-family reconciliation. Among parents with at least one child under six, 59.5% of women and 55.2% of men replied that the 35-hour week law had made

reconciling their working life and family life easier (Fagnani and Letablier 2006: 86). Parents were more positive when working within a family-friendly working climate, reducing hours on a weekly basis (71% positive), and – in the context of legislation not fully implemented at the time of this research - actually working near to the 35-hour norm (65% positive). Negative responses were associated with employers not being perceived as family-friendly, reduced working time not arranged to produce a 35-hour week (instead being annualised and giving longer holidays), or working hours above the 35-hour norm (Fagnani and Letablier 2004: 560-566). In another study, public sector employees with children under 12 are reported as spending more time with their children: 90% of fathers and 87% of mothers (Fagnani & Letablier 2006).

Structural changes in work, welfare and families have undermined the male breadwinner model. Women are exposed to risks of poverty and insecurity if they have anything less than gender equality at work; this brings them into the labour market and brings powerful trajectories towards two-earner households across Western Europe. But it also brings pressures on care, with real time constraints on dual-earning parents and gender inequalities in time and leisure (Bittman 2004, Bittman and Wajcman 2004). What model would people prefer? Statistical evidence is of strong popular support – in regimes as contrasting as Sweden and the UK - for shorter – and more gender equal – working weeks (Fagan 2000, 2001a & b, Pascall & Warren 2006). It also shows people ahead of their governments, in their embrace of a dual earner model with more gender equality in working time and care time.

Ideas and ideals about gender equality may well be stronger than gender equality in practice (Lewis 2001a), so we also need to ask whether egalitarian ideals expressed have any chance of being put into practice, especially in households, where men may use time for leisure rather than for care. The literature suggests that the time fathers (and mothers) spend with young children is increasing (Sayer et al 2004, O'Brien 2005). Almost all men who described the French 35-hour week as having a positive impact on their family lives emphasized that they spent more time with their children (Fagnani and Letablier 2004: 565). The question of what is happening to paternal time and why is explored through the European Community Household Panel, and a sample of parents of children under sixteen and under six (Smith 2004). While this study does not rank France high in terms of 'substantial paternal time' (28 hours or

more per week), it does show a statistically significant negative relationship between fathers' long hours of paid employment and 'substantial paternal time' in every country covered, including France. This study concludes that these findings are 'in line with theories which argue that child care time is a function of the time parents have at their disposal' (Smith 2004: 22). The broad picture is that shorter working hours help reconcile work and family in France, with some indications that they help fathers to become more involved with their children in France and elsewhere (Alber and Köhler 2004, Fahey and Spéder 2004).

A shorter working week may bring social benefits in terms of gender equality, time for care and security for parents and children but what of the political obstacles and economic costs? Substantial shifts from entrenched policy positions in the UK have made room for more radical thinking about motherhood and fatherhood, with improved childcare and parental rights, including a modest paternity leave (Land 2002, 2004, Lewis, 2005). The costs of under-using women's skills and time through discontinuous and part-time employment are increasingly officially counted (Equalities Review 2006: 67, Women & Work Commission 2006: 6). The French model, making maximum time for both parents to share childcare, could be more generally attractive, to people and politicians than the Scandinavian one, with its high public sector costs. A shorter working week could gain political support if seen as a merging of time, work and care patterns, enabling individual parents to support themselves and protect their children from poverty, with increasing mothers' employment compensating for decreasing male working hours.

Constraints by states and employers are clearly part of the context within which people make working time decisions, which cannot be understood as individual choices out of their material context. There are powerful arguments against the market model's understanding of time and care in terms of individual choice (Folbre 2004), which ignores joint responsibilities, and reduces choice for those who take responsibility for care (Women's Budget Group 2004). There are also arguments for social justice in time and its social regulation (Fitzpatrick 2004). Legislation at national and international level has focussed on women's labour market participation and gender equality in pay, with only modest regulation of time. The current EU Working Time Directive with its limit of 48-hours would need to be challenged and

reduced if the EU and national governments are serious about ‘the balanced participation of women and of men in both the labour market and in family life’ (Council of the European Union 2000). Reducing maximum working hours steadily towards the 35-hour week could bring greater gender equality at work, through enhancing women’s labour market participation, and at home through making time for men to care.

### ***Parents and the 35-hour week***

We asked parents about their current working hours, and whether respondents saw a 35-hour week as a policy that would help parents to balance work and care and enable mothers’ employment. There is evidence that in two parent families, fathers may emphasise the importance of ‘breadwinning’ over ‘family time’ (Reynolds et. al, 2003) and for some this may mean an increase in the hours that they work, with a negative effect on fathers’ childcare time (Gray 2006). There is some evidence in our data to support this view, and some fathers were working very long hours, with three saying that they often worked around sixty hours a week. Nevertheless, although financial constraints were important, most said that they would like to work fewer hours. The difficulties inherent in fathers spending long hours in paid work were compounded in couples where both were employed, because of the need to reconcile work with care. In ‘one and a half breadwinner’ households, mother’s evening work, combined with fathers’ long hours meant that mothers and fathers saw their working hours as severely limiting ‘family’ time.

Although parents said that financial considerations were important, couples’ experiences reflected a rather more complex view of the balance between the need to earn, and care for dependents. Even with good support systems and flexible working, for example, some mothers said that ideally, in their current circumstances, they would prefer to stay at home with their children until they started school, while some fathers appeared to have a very strong attachment to the labour market and to emphasise their ‘breadwinning’ role. However, although only three fathers in the study said that they would choose to stay at home to care for younger children full time while their partners worked, most fathers said that they would prefer to work fewer hours, and to have more flexibility around the hours that they worked.

Although our research did not set out to study fathers' employers' flexible working arrangements, more than two thirds of fathers mentioned some flexibility in employment as essential to their ability to manage paid work and family life; while some fathers cited the importance of predictable working hours, which allowed parents to plan their activities (including mother's paid work). Fathers particularly valued the ability to take time off at short notice if the need arose, and around a third cited occasions when they had actually asked for time off (varying between one or two hours to two weeks during a partner's hospitalisation), to cover a domestic crisis. (We return to the discussion of flexible working in Chapter 7 of this Report).

### ***Fathers' working hours***

Fathers expressed a variety of reasons for working long hours. For some fathers, working long hours was seen as a necessity for present and future security:

*The worry of (the 35 hour week) is, what's the wages going to be like, what's the security of a job, and what's your long term pension rights, because if you're not putting as much in, there's not as much to get out (Ben, Production engineer).*

Although some fathers said that they were satisfied with longer hours, some also felt they had little choice. One father, for example, worked as a factory maintenance engineer and felt that his position would be compromised at work if his employers believed him unwilling to work extra hours when required:

*I think that there should be some leeway that if people do want to work longer hours they can choose to do it. Because myself, I'd like to work shorter hours, but at the moment I do sometimes feel blackmailed into they're holding the job over you, you've got to work the hours otherwise, well, leave. But I do think that if people need to work it that they should be allowed to work it.*

*Int: Is it actually that explicit, does (employer) actually say if you don't like it you can (leave)?*

*Yes, I've had it mentioned a few times, if you don't want to do these hours then find another job. That's no good to this company, if you're not showing enough dedication to the company (Luke, maintenance engineer).*

Several fathers in manual manufacturing jobs worked shift patterns that made dual earning and caring very difficult. One couple, for example, combined differing shift patterns, in which the father worked a 48-hour week, and his partner worked 20 hours, with caring for two children (aged 6 and 2):

*I've always loved days. When I was on days - I was on days for five or six years - you get your routine going your body clock is perfect, although when I had days I didn't have children. I've been on shifts now for the last seven year, previous to that I was doing relays. Mornings and afters alternate, one week mornings one week afters, one week mornings one week afters. Debs's working hours are the problem, I have to give my rota over and Debs has to work a five week rota around what shifts I'm working.*

*Int: So your work isn't synchronized very well.*

*No because Debs has to work in the opposite hours, obviously they've got a shift rota that they've got to work at (partners workplace), so it was very very difficult so last week we didn't see each other 'cos I was coming home, I was doing six till six twelve hours and Debs was going to work at half six till half ten, so (Paul, manual worker, manufacturing).*

### ***Fathers' responses to the 35-hour week***

Fathers' responses suggested ambivalence, with financial pressures competing with time and family pressures. They argued for choice, including the choice to work longer hours. Fathers said that not all jobs would be amenable to the 35 hour week. One father, Adam, had felt pressured by his employer to opt out of Working Time Regulations, and said that a typical working week was 'anything between 40 and 65 hours', although he also felt that his job, which involved extensive travelling<sup>1</sup> to sites across the Midlands, was only possible because of his acceptance of long hours:

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<sup>1</sup> Travel time is not included in hours actually worked

*Errm, I would, (like a 35 hour week) but obviously I wouldn't be able to make the money that I need. So unless obviously my hourly rate was more to make up for the loss, but I mean otherwise not really no, because it wouldn't really work. I mean to be fair I don't think it would work in what I do really, because sometimes you could be travelling for two and a half hours, just to one place and by the time you've got there and you do like two or three hours work you'd have to come back then wouldn't you (Adam, welder, construction industry).*

Fathers' accounts raised interesting questions around fathers' 'choice' of long hours. Unpaid overtime contributes a significant number of hours to the length of the working week in the UK (TUC, 2006) and fathers appeared to be responding to a combination of employers' expectations, economic pressures, and workplace culture. Our research reflected the TUC's finding that managers are most likely to undertake unpaid overtime, and although few fathers cited concrete examples of overt pressure from employers, more than half said that there was an expectation (from employers) that they should be prepared to undertake long hours. For some fathers, this meant working through breaks in their working day, thus increasing the hours that they actually worked:

*This (the 35 hour week) is quite an interesting one because I'm actually contracted to do thirty six and a half hours, I actually have one half an hour's break, I'm actually there for nine hours. With me being a manager I don't always take my full breaks as well, I'm actually working more than my contracted hours without actually staying behind. So I suppose it depends which way you look at it. It could be down to 36 or 35 hours on paper, but you're still working more, which I'm doing anyway. But I do believe that you shouldn't have to work over a certain amount of hours, 42 hours really (Dean, Retail manager).*

*You're probably looking at an hour a day at least that I work over, just because of time constraints and things like that, but I try not to, I try not to. I suppose because I enjoy my work, because I enjoy my work and I can see things that need to be done, if you get one day finished you don't walk into*

*what you've left the next day, if you know what I mean (Chris, Retail manager).*

Some fathers said that they would have difficulty in completing the required work during a 35-hour week. One father, who expressed a strong 'breadwinning' orientation, argued that a desire for shorter working hours reflected a mismatch between people and their jobs:

*I wouldn't have time to do my work. Maybe if I was a different person, but if I hadn't got, I mean a 35- hour week that's just ridiculous. If you're in the right job and you enjoy your job, it flies by. I'm in the right job, I've been in the wrong job where the day's dragged and I couldn't wait to leave, that's a sure sign that you're in the wrong job, you're not doing the right thing (Liam, IT Technician).*

Although from this perspective, job satisfaction was emphasised over working hours, most fathers wanted more choice around their hours of work. Nevertheless, fathers also emphasised the importance of being able to meet financial commitments, and several respondents argued that limiting working hours would impose unacceptable constraints on their income:

*I know quite a lot of blokes, a friend of mine, he prefers to work 60 hours a week...not just because of the money, probably one will enjoy the job, or somebody don't want to go home! You know. Or like you say, if they've got lots of commitments, I mean we've got lots of commitments here, if they suddenly put a cap on my wages, not wages, but working hours (Mark, Local Authority Caretaker).*

One father argued that the 35-hour week would have a detrimental effect on people's overall standard of living:

*You know, let's face it we all want to work less, but we also want to be able to, how can I put it, we want the country as a whole to have quite a high standard of living and there's a trade off there (James, Local Government Officer).*

In spite of EU limits on working time, workers may feel pressure to conform to the norms of their employers. In two parent families, fathers may emphasise the importance of ‘breadwinning’ over ‘family time’ (Reynolds et.al, 2003) and for some this means an increase in the hours that they work. British fathers work some of the longest hours of fathers in Europe, linking too with the perception that career prospects may be damaged by commitment to ‘family’ (Camp 2004): the fathers interviewed here suggested their jobs might be compromised if they were seen as uncommitted to their work.

Several fathers said that Government legislation would be required to have any significant impact on long hours in paid work, and that some employers would be unlikely to reduce their employees’ hours without this. Moreover, ‘reasonable’ working hours, which would allow fathers to engage more in family life, would need to be significantly lower than the current 48 hours:

*I'd like to see the hours reduced within the company. But across the board because I think we do long hours, I think it would be good for them to turn round and say, look the government has introduced this, the maximum weekly work without overtime is 37 and a half hours, not what we're working at the moment, 42 and a half hours (Glen, Buyer, Construction Industry).*

### ***Low-waged mothers' working hours***

Evidence from our data suggests that maternal ‘choices’ around hours of work are particularly constrained by partners’ hours of work for low waged mothers. Part time, low waged, mothers often worked hours that fitted around partners’ hours of work, allowing partners to care for children while mothers worked. This pattern of working was seen by most mothers as especially problematic in terms of quality ‘family time’, because parents were rarely at home at the same time.

There were other tensions between low waged mothers aspirations and their decisions around paid work. For example, although several mothers in our sample worked in low paid jobs that did not demand a high level of skill or qualifications, some would have liked to increase the hours that they worked, even though their financial

contribution was a very small part of the household 'pot' (Warren, 2003). Amy, for example, worked for 8 hours a week as an evening shelf stacker, and said that although 'financially wise it's not worth it', paid work helped her to maintain a feeling of independence:

*(I would prefer) 12 to 15 hours, it would give me a little bit more money, which wouldn't make that much difference to us, but sometimes it seems a lot of effort just to do the two nights, and also you're sort of out of touch with what's happening in the work place because you're there such short time, something could be changed or you miss something. It's hard to keep up to speed (Amy, retail sales assistant, low wage, P/T).*

Amy relied on her partner for childcare while she worked, and so when he was offered more shifts in the factory where he worked, she was unable to continue with her plan to gradually increase her working hours:

*I would prefer a few more but I did choose to cut them just because of how my husband's shifts went. I was going back on 12 hours in April and then when he (partner) got these extra shifts I had to go and say I don't think I'm going to be able to do it (Amy, retail sales assistant, low wage, P/T).*

Although some mothers would have preferred more hours of paid work, a minority of low waged mothers in the sample worked full time. These mothers experienced the combination of their own and their partner's full time work as detrimental to their ability to reconcile paid work and family life. 'Free' time, in this scenario, was often spent catching up on household tasks:

*You would be able to spend more time as a family if you are doing thirty five hours rather than thirty eight or forty or whatever tends to be the norm but I also think that it has an impact on your health.*

*Int: In terms of?*

*by tomorrow I will be shattered with my hours, running round after (child) shopping; ... my eventual dream I'd like to work part time that's my eventual*

*dream but I don't think that its going to happen that its ever going to happen the job I do (Erin, low waged, local government worker, F/T).*

#### *Mothers' responses to the 35-hour week*

Mothers saw the 35-hour week as enabling them to work and care, freeing time to share the care of younger children with their partners. Moreover, mothers said fathers' unavailability to care because of long hours in paid work increased the pressure on their own caring:

*I think that, well just to have the children around all day and all night with no support is hard work...it would be difficult to work in that situation, I mean you haven't got another backup for whatever childcare you've got, and having the stress of the job, it's a lot to cope with (Rebecca, low waged, telecommunications worker, P/T).*

Mothers in full-time work saw a 35-hour week as promoting the reconciliation of paid work and family life, and that even a small reduction in their working hours would make a difference to the quality of time spent at home:

*Definitely (I would like the 35 hour week) because if I had like half an hour a day off my working day, it would still be light, and I could be home earlier, and it would be another half an hour a day that I could spend with (child) before he goes to bed (Erin, low waged, local government worker, F/T).*

*Definitely, (would like the 35 hour week) again I think the country at the moment is expecting far too much from everybody, I think they see everybody as a single person that has got nothing but work in their lives. When you become a family you're in effect having another person's life to organise! (Kimberley, assistant administrator, moderate waged, F/T).*

For many mothers, their partners' long working hours were a source of anxiety about their own engagement in paid work. For mothers in full time work, the tension between their own work choices and aspirations, and motherhood, introduced an added element of pressure:

*In terms of working hours, the expectations that you're there until whatever it is you're working on is finished, regardless of the children or... as if you had to choose between whether you were going to be in management or you were going to be a Mum (Kate, high waged, teacher, F/T).*

It is clear from parents' responses that working hours influenced the quality of parental time, parental care, and family life for both mothers and fathers:

*Less quality time together as a family ...Dad's always at work and Mum's on her own...he's working long hours and he's at work a lot of the time...it's difficult, you feel bad because the dad's not spending a lot of time with the children...it would be difficult for the children and if he's working long hours it would restrict the hours that she (mother) could work and the sort of employment that she could get (Rebecca, telecommunications worker, low waged, P/T).*

### **Conclusion**

Unequal working time makes a major contribution to gender inequality in the UK, with New Labour has resisted European legislation over working time, allowing people to choose to work longer than Europe's 48-hour working time limit. Many fathers work over Europe's 48-hour limit, and many mothers work part-time hours too short to give them independent incomes. While the gender pay gap for full-timers has reduced, gender inequality in working time – including career breaks and part-time work - has become a more serious factor in women's ability to support themselves. By contrast, France's shorter working week for men and women goes along with and supports the most gender-equal working time in Western Europe, with few women in part-time employment.

Could a shorter working week help parents to reconcile paid work and childcare, and support low-waged mother's engagement in the labour market? Among our interview respondents, mothers perceived their choices around paid work as constrained by fathers' working hours, particularly where fathers worked the longest hours. Some mothers said that they would like to increase their working hours, and some clearly

aspired to better quality jobs, but were limited in their ability to build their careers by their partners' working hours. Our mother respondents also saw shorter working hours as allowing their partners to be more available to their children. They saw fathers' long hours as increasing the pressure on them as mothers and as earners. Long hours were seen, by both fathers and mothers, as increasing stress on relationships, pressure on 'family time', and difficulty reconciling paid and unpaid work and care. Fathers' responses suggested more ambivalence than mothers', financial pressures competing with time and family pressures. Nevertheless, female and male respondents welcomed more choice, including realistic alternatives to long hours in paid work. They felt that a shorter working week would increase parental choice around the division of paid and unpaid work and care in families, and improve work-family reconciliation for both parents, enabling low waged mothers of young children to realise some of their career aspirations, but also enabling fathers to engage more fully in care.

## Chapter 7 The Combination Scenario

### *Working time policies: part-time work in the Combination Scenario*

What is the Combination Scenario, and how might it offer solutions to gender inequalities in work in England? The UK's working time regime developed in the context of government resistance to policies supporting mothers joining the labour market, particularly under Conservative governments, and until the 1997 election. Without public support for childcare, or work-family reconciliation policies, or regulation of working time, mothers rejoined the labour market under severe penalties. By the end of the twentieth century, when government policies began to encourage and support mothers in employment, levels of participation were already high, but the quality of work reflected the disadvantaged position of mothers expected to combine work and family on their own (Rubery 1999). Labour market segregation, short part-time hours, and very low pay characterise this section of the labour market. Research now shows that women working part-time (mainly mothers) are 'working below potential' (Grant et al 2005). In the context of family change they are risking their future ability to support themselves (Warren et al. 2001). The gender pay gap for full-time female compared with male median earnings is 13% but for part-timers it is 41% (Women & Work Commission 2006).

By contrast in the Netherlands, part-time work has been a central part of the Polder economic model, which arose out of economic recession and unemployment, but became a positive model for economic development. Part-time work has also been central to the social model in the Netherlands, the Combination Scenario, in which part-time work is designed to enable the equal valuation of paid and unpaid work and its equal sharing between men and women (Plantenga 2002). The Polder model 'aimed at a better distribution of existing employment' first – in the early 1980s - by reducing the working week, but later – in the later 1980s – using part-time work for flexibility in restructuring the labour market towards service industries. While economic objectives came first, part-time work was also seen as enabling women's labour market participation and equal opportunities. Legislation improved the position of part-timers in 1993 and prohibited discrimination based on working hours in 1996.

In 2000, the Working Hours Adjustment Act gave more rights to employees of larger firms to change their working hours, which firms may reject for serious business reasons only. These policies for flexible labour markets and part-time employment have been much discussed as the 'Polder model': a strategy or strategies for employment and economic growth. Part-time employment was integrated into economic policies (Goodin 2001, Plantenga 2002). These policies have emphasised quality in part-time work as well as increasing its quantity. Quality may still be lower than in full time work, and therefore still deter men (Visser 2002), but its development has been different from in the UK, where it remains thoroughly marginalized.

Part-time work was integral to the 'Combination Scenario' whose core concepts are the equal valuation of unpaid care work with paid employment, a balanced combination of care and paid work, and gender equality in both care and paid employment. This principle was adopted as a guideline for work and family policies in 1995. The Polder model adopted part-time work for economic goals, and enabled the absorption of women into the economy, but was not specifically a model for gender equality. However, the 'Combination Scenario' brought an ideological commitment to gender equality in care work as well as paid employment, challenging 'not only women's gender position but also men's' (Knijn 2001: 170). If this commitment seems rather remote in the context of the UK government's resistance to two weeks' paternity leave, we might notice that all our governments have signed up to a resolution on work-life balance, which appears to offer an ideal of work-life balance for men as well as for women. The new millennium began in Europe with a resolution on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life, supporting a new 'social contract on gender', agreed by the Council of the European Union and the Ministers for Employment and Social Policy:

The beginning of the twenty-first century is a symbolic moment to give shape to the new social contract on gender, in which the de facto equality of men and women in the public and private domains will be socially accepted as a condition for democracy, a prerequisite for citizenship and a guarantee of

individual autonomy and freedom, and will be reflected in all European Union policies (Council of the European Union 2000).

These ideas of gender equality in the public and private domains are close to the ideals of the Combination Scenario, to which the Netherlands has been committed since 1995. But we may ask what these ideals mean in practical terms, ten years on.

The Netherlands has the highest share of part-time employment in the EU: for women in the Netherlands in 2004 was just over 70 % compared with just over 40% for UK women. Comparable figures for men were 20% and 10% (Eurostat 2005: 112). The hours of part-time workers are near the EU average of 17 in the Netherlands, slightly above the UK figure (Eurostat 2005: 110-111). The median pay for women part-timers is around 93% of full-timers (Evans 2001 in Cousins & Tang: 539). Part-time work is well regulated (Knijn 2001), and less marginalized than in the UK. The ability to negotiate hours of work successfully with employers has been found to be higher in the Netherlands than in the UK and Sweden (Cousins and Tang 2004).

If part-time work is thoroughly embedded within economic policy in the Netherlands, and has been developed thoroughly for economic ends, how does it fit with the Combination Scenario? The evidence of the rapid development of women's part-time work is clear: it enables women to combine paid employment with care responsibilities. Part-time work has developed in the context of a lack of childcare outside the family, and may be seen as an alternative to public support for childcare (Knijn 2001). The picture for men's part-time work is less strong: though it has become a high proportion of men's work compared with other EU countries, it is still only 20% of men's employment. Men's part-time work may make room for them to care, but most Dutch fathers of young children are in full-time work with full time hours: there are fewer Dutch fathers working 48 hours+ than UK fathers (one-fifth, compared with one-third, with an average of 42 hours compared with 46 for UK fathers (Cousins & Tang 2004: 534). The Combination Scenario therefore strongly supports women's engagement in the labour market through the development of part-time work, and – somewhat less strongly – supports men's choice of working part-

time hours. To what extent do practical policies support the other side of the Combination Scenario, men's involvement in care?

The ideological commitment to fathers as carers, and government-sponsored media campaigns are important changes in the Netherlands. There is increasing official commitment to the 'ideal of the committed father' (Knijn & Selten 2002: 185). Legislative changes give men – as well as women - rights to part-time work. These changes move the Netherlands from a male breadwinner principle. But, while the caring father is officially encouraged, the male breadwinner is still privileged in taxation, social security and pension systems (Knijn & Selten 2002: 186).

The polder model and Combination Scenario bring two important developments. Firstly, rights to part-time workers appear to improve the quality of part-time work compared with the UK, as well as making part-time work a right for men as well as for women. Secondly, these policies also represent an ideological commitment to an environment in which men and women can choose to combine care with paid employment, and challenge traditional gender roles for men as well as for women. There is less evidence of powerful policies to encourage and enable men to care than there is of policies to bring women into the labour market. Plantenga's verdict that the Netherlands still has a one-and-a-half model must be accepted (Plantenga 2002). But the Combination Scenario could be seen as a route from a deeply entrenched male breadwinner model and towards more equality of paid and unpaid work. Women part-timers in the Netherlands are decidedly better off in terms of the higher quality of their jobs, and working hours somewhat more capable of bringing an independent income than their UK counterparts. Might the UK have something to learn from the Netherlands in terms of stronger rights to part-time work and more effective regulation to bring higher quality to part-time work? And could the ideological case for changing gender roles for men as well as for women take deeper root in the UK than it has done so far in the rather fragile national commitment to work-life balance policies which has arisen in the context of EU policy?

### *Parents' responses to the Combination Scenario*

As discussed above, part time work may be seen as supporting mother's labour market engagement, and as improving the quality of part time work in comparison with the UK, through rights for part time workers. Moreover, by making part time work a right for men as well as for women, part time work offers the potential for men and women to combine paid work and unpaid work and care. We asked parents first about the Combination Scenario, and if part time work (of around three quarters of a full time job) would enable both parents to engage more equally in the labour market and in caring for their children. Secondly, we asked parents under what conditions fathers would be able to engage in part time work, and to what extent this would enable them to take a more equal share of caring responsibilities.

As we have discussed in previous sections, the distribution of paid and unpaid work and care varied among households, although some parents had more egalitarian arrangements than others. For more than two thirds of our sample, though, this meant mothers' part-time work was designed to fit around the availability of fathers (and to a lesser extent, other family members) for childcare, and most fathers were working hours and shift patterns that made it difficult for low-waged mothers to work other than during the evening and at weekends.

### *Mothers' attitudes to Combination Scenario*

Most mothers in our sample responded positively to the Combination Scenario. Nevertheless, some argued that they already had a degree of flexibility in their work, and that this successfully enabled them to combine paid work with caring responsibilities. Mothers were either offered these hours, or had negotiated them (usually the former). Few low waged mothers had negotiated work at different times of the day to fit around caring responsibilities; rather, some employers offered hours at times that mothers were available to work. One mother, for example, described how her 20 hours a week job at a local supermarket was arranged to fit in with the hours that her partner worked:

*When I applied for the job it gives you a grid of what you can work, Monday through to Sunday, straightaway I crossed off the weekends. And then I just put, because I knew that I could work between 5.30 and midnight, and when I went to the interview I was offered the hours and that was it (Sarah, low waged, retail sales, P/T).*

To this extent, employers who offered women hours that they could fit around family commitments supported low waged mother's labour market engagement. While this type of 'flexibility' (the ability to choose working patterns) was common to low waged women working in retail sales (particularly in supermarkets), mothers usually 'chose' these hours primarily to fit around partners' hours in paid work.

Some higher waged mothers, however, appeared to have the ability to negotiate a different kind of flexibility, over which they exercised more choice than low waged mothers in the sample. One example of this ability was evidenced by the experience of one high waged mother, Zoe. As the only mother in our sample who negotiated a job share, (and one of the minority of mothers who earned more than their partners), Zoe was extremely satisfied with the flexibility part time hours offered. Job sharing meant that she worked over three days a week, which, combined with flexi-time, meant that work and care was perceived as fairly evenly shared between herself and her partner:

*We do that (share care) anyway... for the days that I'm working (partner) is the main carer, he's the one that looks after them, he is the one that gives them their dinner so he picks (youngest child) up round about three o'clock, (oldest child) finishes school at half past three and from then until about half six quarter to seven. Until I come in they're his full responsibility (Zoe, manager, high waged, P/T) (jobshare).*

Nevertheless, most mothers had little choice over the availability of partners to care. The mother quoted above was in a relatively unusual position in our sample, both in

her ability to command high wages, and in her employer's policies on flexitime, allowing both partners' paid work to dovetail. Low waged mothers in our sample had less choice, though, and several mothers said that successful implementation of the Combination Scenario would require a cultural shift in fathers' attitudes. One mother, for example, argued that the attitudes of most fathers to paid employment represent a barrier to an egalitarian sharing of paid work and unpaid work and care, and that her partner would be unlikely to accept a more egalitarian division of paid employment and caring responsibilities:

*I think the men in this country have more of an attitude where they think they should be out to work, and so I think a lot of it is they go to work the woman should stay at home up to a point. But yes, I mean that (the Combination Scenario) would be good, but my husband would stay at home, more might not ...No, I don't think he would, he's a bit old fashioned, I mean he'd be quite happy for me not to work I think (Denise, low waged, retail sales, P/T).*

Conversely, other mothers said that their partners would welcome the opportunity to share paid and unpaid work and care, and some mothers saw the Combination Scenario as an arrangement that would support parental care. Part time hours of work for both partners would mean that they would not be obliged to use formal childcare; instead, partners would be available to care:

*I think that would be brilliant, because then it's not just on the female to do it, it's something that could be shared.*

*Int: Is it something your partner would do?*

*Yes, he'd love it. Yes, he'd love to go and pick (child) up from school and go swimming and whatever (Natalie, low waged, play worker, P/T).*

As discussed in Chapter 4, many parents relied on informal childcare support, and some parents also saw this scenario as one in which they would be able to rely on informal rather than formal childcare. One low waged mother, for example,

expressed a strong preference for family care. Although she worked for 40 hours a week, care was spread between herself, her partner and her sister:

*Yes, yes. It would be good if (parents) could share it more and not pay childcare, I mean it's going to be better isn't it if parents can stay at home and look after the children, rather than having to have anybody, it is better, but not always possible (Gemma, low waged, (private) play centre worker, F/T).*

Overall, quality time spent together as a family was also a significant concern for almost all of the mothers in our sample, and although the Combination Scenario was well received by mothers, some expressed a degree of ambivalence about the impact on 'family time' of both parents in part time employment. Kate, (one of only three mothers in our sample who regularly worked longer hours than their partners), expressed the attitude of many mothers in articulating her concern about the potential impact on family life:

*Well (what) I think what they'd have to be careful about is that, although it is about the children, it's also about the husband and wife, and they have to be careful that they have parts of the day that they work together rather than ships passing in the night. So I think they'd have to balance it as far as each taking care of the children equally, but also keeping in mind that they need to have time for themselves, so they need to be off at the same time on a day or so, just so they can have those times. (Kate, high waged teacher, F/T)*

In the contemporary context of part time work in the UK, which, as we have discussed, is mainly lower paid, lower quality work, some mothers had difficulty envisaging a situation in which two part time jobs would be financially viable in their own situation:

*I just think it's... the hourly rate working part-time, it just doesn't happen in this country. I don't know. I don't know what... it would be nice as in the fact you'd get to see more of your children, but I don't know, I mean I'd work for 50p a week, if I could live on 50p a week, but you can't, and I've not had a wage rise for four years, but all my bills keep going up and that's, you know, if*

*you can afford to live like that then that's fine, that would be lovely, if I could afford to go part-time I would, I'd do it tomorrow, but I can't (Megan, moderate waged, retail sales manager, F/T).*

Another mother found it difficult to envisage equally sharing part time work and care with her partner because the family relied on his earnings to support her through further occupational training. This mother worked part time, for variable hours usually around 16 hours a week:

*The equal rights for part-time and full-time, because I just think that should just be the way it is, because circumstance, it's not their fault that they've got kids or whatever, if they want to work part-time (Hayley, beauty therapist, low waged, P/T).*

However, Hayley's perspective was that although part time workers should have exactly the same occupational rights as full time workers, people should be able to choose the hours that they work, an argument based primarily on financial constraints, a theme that was echoed in most low waged mothers' responses to the Combination Scenario:

*But at the same time I don't think, I don't know whether that is in the question, we can only work a certain amount of hours, because if he (partner) could only work a certain amount of hours we'd struggle, we'd really struggle, because that means I'd have to go out to work (more) and I've got college and the rest of it (Hayley, beauty therapist, low waged, P/T).*

*If women earned good money... it wouldn't work for us 'cos I don't earn anywhere near the same amount of money (as partner), so we need him to work full time to bring the money in, but if a couple were on about the same if it was two teachers for example it's a good idea (Debbie, low waged, retail sales, P/T).*

Most low waged mothers in the sample described the constraints imposed by their partner's work in terms of sharing paid and unpaid work and care. These constraints were also seen as potentially extending to their partners who, in male dominated occupations, worked in a context where other men may not have caring responsibilities:

*Erm I don't know to be honest, I mean a lot of the jobs in our country do require I mean like (partner's) job he's a skilled tool maker so I guess you get a lot of people that have got kids that yes would benefit but you'd also get the blokes that haven't and so you wouldn't get that (work) sharing thing going (Denise, low waged, retail sales, P/T).*

Finally, in the context of part time work in the Combination Scenario, employers' attitudes to part-time workers were seen as important. Several low-waged part time working mothers argued that many employers fail to appreciate the contribution made by part timers. Employers were seen in these accounts as simultaneously undervaluing and capitalising on the part time work force:

*I'd love to work part-time and have the same as you say, part-time in this country tends to be you start off part-time and the hours keep creeping up, and if you say no to those hours, you are not thought as well of. There used to be a time that if you go to an employer and no matter how many hours you work, you put 100% in while you were there, they was happy, and you'd be recognised for that. But I'm afraid I don't think employers think like that no more, and if you give them a lot they expect more (Chloe, moderate waged, play worker, P/T).*

### ***Fathers' attitudes to the Combination Scenario***

As discussed in the previous section, while mothers were generally positive about the Combination Scenario, more fathers expressed ambivalence. This response primarily reflected financial concerns, and appeared to be particularly linked with having a low waged partner – fathers may thus have found it difficult to envisage a scenario where part time work was equally well paid, and work and care could be more equally shared with partners:

*I suppose it depends on what actually part time hours they are working, whether it's like I mean some jobs can be 25 hours some can be like 12 can't they. But ... yeah I mean they could .... it also depends on are they both going to be on different hourly rates so unless they are doing actually the same job (Grant, self employed driver).*

Moreover, although some fathers expressed willingness to increase their share of childcare, some had difficulty in envisaging a scenario where most couples with young children would be in a position to consider this as an option:

*I can't see it working for everyone... there may be some people that it would be okay for. I know that, I mean presumably these people are on different rates of pay depending on what they do, so if you've got the major breadwinner only working three quarters of the time he could be, it is going to have a bit of an impact... I would quite happily spend less time at work if it didn't impact on us financially (Alastair, technical manager, manufacturing)*

Nevertheless, some fathers expressed a willingness to share paid working hours and care more equally with their partners. These fathers were often already undertaking a significant share of care and domestic responsibilities:

*Yeah, yeah it's not a bad idea at all, yeah if it meant me working less hours and sharing the responsibilities more (Nigel, manual worker, manufacturing).*

*I think it's very good, yes. I think that would be a good thing, yes. Because fathers tend not to spend as much time with their children as they'd like to, in that case they'd be allowed to. Yes, I'd be well up for that (Graham, manager, building company).*

Where mothers worked full time, flexibility in fathers' working hours was often an essential element of organising childcare, particularly when parents preferred to provide most or all of their children's care. The partner of one of the mothers in our

sample who regularly worked longer hours than her partner (discussed in the previous section) regarded his own situation as extremely unusual, arguing that part time work would not be possible in every occupation:

*Well it depends what the industry is. Lots of the industries that I know require bodies to be there at set times of the day, if you've got somebody missing they might have to find somebody else to fill short gap. So it's the continuity of staff. From a personal point of view I think that would be great... Because of the hours that (partner) has to work because of her job, it kind of governs when and when she cannot get the boys. And unlike some other Dads, I'm sure I've (already) got some real flexibility here (Ben, IT Consultant).*

Fathers also mentioned the role of employers in the successful implementation of policies around part time working. The following accounts present complementary views; fathers argued that employers would reject the Combination Scenario in part because of extra costs; nevertheless, productivity would be encouraged by more 'family-friendly' hours implicit in the Combination Scenario:

*It would be good ... I suppose I think, on the industrial side of things that they would stop you doing that, part-time, I think they'd find it very hard for people (workforce) to not be on site or.... no, plus there's extra cost because they'd have to employ other people (Alex, electrician).*

*And if employers could be encouraged to think of that type of thing, you get more money out of the people that's been trained. But unfortunately the Neanderthal type of British industry it's going to take legislation to force it (Luke, manager, automotive engineering).*

### **Conclusion**

The UK's one-and-a-half breadwinner model is rooted in the privileging of male full-time employment, with mothers still assumed to prioritise childcare and paying extreme penalties in the quality and continuity of their jobs and the income they are able to earn from them. Under New Labour since 1997, there has been increasing support for women's employment through childcare, maternity leave and pay, and

some increase in the pay of part-time workers through adopting the European Directive on Part-time work and the National Minimum Wage. But the part-time pay gap persists and brings extreme gender inequality in lifetime earnings. The principle under the Netherlands' Combination Scenario was a principle of gender equality in paid and unpaid work: to make part-time work equal with full-time, while allowing both men and women to give time to care.

Could part-time work for parents help mothers and fathers in England to combine paid work and unpaid work and care, and would it help low waged mother's labour market engagement? Most parents responded positively to the Combination Scenario, with some notes of caution. Although some mothers were discouraged by their perception of lacking skills to earn an equal portion of the household's wage, they were also conscious of the undervaluing of part time workers and their skills, and many wanted to feel valued as both workers and parents. Fathers appeared more likely to envisage practical barriers to men's part time working; both mothers' and fathers' perspectives might be seen as representing a challenge to employers, whom they saw as real barriers. As we have mentioned in previous chapters, many parents said that legislation would be necessary to support parents in part-time work in this scenario.

Mothers, and several fathers, also responded positively to the potential of the Combination Scenario to challenge traditional gender roles, and the potential for a more egalitarian sharing of paid and unpaid work and care in couple families. They appreciated the potential of the Combination Scenario to support fathers who were engaged in sharing childcare. One reservation was a concern that part time working schedules might mean that most of their time spent at home would be 'tag team' parenting: parents valued time spent together as a family, and were concerned to ensure that this would be possible. However, the Combination Scenario was seen by parents as an opportunity to balance their paid and unpaid work and care, through higher quality part-time work and more equal gender roles at home and in employment.

## Conclusion

We have asked about the relevance of innovative European social policies to low-waged mothers in England. How are low-waged women constrained in their choices by limited and fragmentary social policies? Would policies available in other European countries be attractive and better meet their needs in reconciling paid work and family? We have identified key problems in childcare, working time and parental leave, relating them to innovative policies in the international arena, which enable parents to reconcile paid work and the care of young children. We have used the *BHPS* to compare the caring and employed lives of low waged women with their higher waged peers. We have also drawn on interviews with low-waged mothers and their partners, and a smaller comparative group of higher-waged mothers and their partners, to ask about the relevance of the pioneering policies to mothers whose labour market participation, earnings and work-family reconciliation are currently constrained by the care of young children.

Policy assumptions have switched under New Labour from a male breadwinner model to a dual earner one, with women's labour market participation increasingly assumed, and necessary, to keep women out of poverty and earn their own pensions. Both *Childcare* and *Work and Families* Bills received Royal Assent in summer 2006 and evidence this change in principle. But a one-and-a-half situation persists, with women's lives bending to their children's needs, reducing mothers' access to quality jobs, working time and careers. Motherhood is increasingly identified – for example by research for the Equalities Commission – as a major source of disadvantage in labour market participation and pay, quality employment and working time. This one and a half breadwinner model has been quantified as bringing women in the UK half men's lifetime earnings.

How much can we understand this one-and-a half-earner model as a result of choices, preferences among mothers to put careers second to motherhood? Most commentators conclude that choices are important but so too are the contexts that constrain them. Our research has focussed on mothers with low wages because their context is particularly constraining, but we have compared them with higher waged mothers in

order to understand the ways in which lower wages bring some mothers fewer choices. The policy literature suggests that key problems persist over access to affordable, reliable childcare, continuing assumptions - in all current policies for parental leave and work-family reconciliation - about mothers' responsibility for children, and in the culture and regulation of working hours, exemplified by the national government's opt-out from Europe's 48-hour week. Given this context, poorly qualified women are more likely to stop paid work when they have children, returning to marginalized, lower paid jobs, with short part-time hours. Low-waged women in the *BHPS* were living in strong male breadwinner households, in which they contributed less than a third to the couple's total wage, and performed the majority of domestic tasks. But most rejected the strong male breadwinner model in principle, even if unable to carry this through in practice: they saw children as needing a father to be as closely involved in their upbringing as a mother.

We may ask how effectively parental leaves sustain mothers' employment, how well parents are supported in terms of income replacement, and whether parental leaves contribute to mothers' poorer employment prospects or promote gender equality? Parental leaves in the UK have aimed to sustain mothers' employment through Statutory Maternity Pay, with two weeks Statutory Paternity Pay from April 2003, in response to demands from parents and organisations representing them. By comparison with other European countries, effective support is rather low, giving around 20 weeks of 'effective parental leave' compared with over 100 in Sweden and Hungary. The UK is also well down the European league, with a 120-week gap between the end of effective parental leave and pre-primary admission age compared with 30 weeks in Hungary and Sweden. UK policies have also focussed on mothers and their employment, entrenching mothers' responsibility for childcare rather than encouraging and enabling fathers'. Scandinavian countries have pioneered leave targeted at fathers' involvement in care. Now Sweden has two months non-transferable leave for each parent, Iceland has a 3 x 3 system, with three months for each parent and three for sharing between them, while an official commission in Sweden has proposed a 5 x 3 system, with five non-transferable months for each parent and five to share between them. These policies are important for gender equality at work, if men and women are to be seen as equally likely to be responsible

for children, as well as for gender equality at home, by bringing fathers into care. Innovative social policies for parental leave offer solid social support for employment through the pre-school period, and encourage men and women to share responsibility.

Among our respondents, shared leave was the most popular policy. Mothers saw shared leave as enabling them to involve their partners from the beginning of their children's lives, building on their current shared childcare systems. Fathers in dual earner households do undertake a significant proportion of childcare (O'Brien 2005), particularly working class men if they work different shifts from their partners (Warren 2003). The fathers were generally positive about taking leave. They felt that entitlement for men - supported by legislation - would support uptake and enable their own participation at home. The extent to which fathers consider parental leave to be for them too is important because policies that are seen as primarily for women can serve to reinforce rather than weaken gendered inequalities in care (Moss et. al, 2004). Until 2003, UK fathers have had no rights to support their responsibilities as parents, (except to income as breadwinners): even now their two-week entitlement underlines their supporting and secondary role in caring for young children. Neither social policy nor labour market environments have recognised fathers as needing rights to enable them to care for their children. In this context, it is not surprising if some fathers are wary about the impact of taking leave on their position at work. Our father respondents did express anxieties about taking parental leave: financial constraints; getting behind at work; and missing out on office culture. Fathers in Europe also cite insufficient financial compensation and the potential effect on careers as reasons discouraging their take-up of parental leave. That fathers in the Nordic countries expressed some of the strongest levels of support for men's right to parental leave and to gender equality in its uptake (Eurobarometer 2004:14) reinforces the importance of income replacement and men's entitlement. Both fathers and mothers favoured legislation to share leave and would use rights to shared leave if fully supported by government.

The current government's support for 'universal childcare' is a significant ideological change, bringing explicit support for mothers' employment and making a distinct

break with earlier government underpinning of a male breadwinner model, which characterised UK policy until nearly the end of the twentieth century. Without government support for childcare, mothers had joined the labour force, but were severely disadvantaged by childcare responsibilities in terms of discontinuous working lives, lower pay, and shorter working time. New Labour support for childcare has also brought real practical advances in provision, particularly through Sure Start, but also through extending pre-school entitlements to all 3- and 4- year old children and the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. A Childcare Bill, which received assent in Summer 2006, is the first such legislation, and marks an important change towards seeing childcare as a core part of the welfare state. But in practice the system is far from truly universal. Reliance on tax credits to stimulate private provision puts question marks over reliability. Quality, access and affordability compare unfavourably with Scandinavian countries. Social commitment to pre-school children, measured by public spending is still low, and pre-school hours shorter than elsewhere in Europe – a 2.5 hour day during term-time offers a more limited part-time provision than other European countries. These all make reconciling work and family particularly difficult. This exposes low-waged women, who often live in low income households, as our *BHPS* data show, to limited choice.

Quality and affordability were key issues for mothers, who were not all aware of the potential support available through the childcare element of Working Tax Credits (which is contingent on income, employment status and working hours). Low-paid mothers highlighted their lack of choice, which contrasted with the higher-paid mothers, who gave accounts of a wider range of services they felt they could use and trust. Low-waged mothers working part time in supermarkets were able to negotiate their hours around childcare and partners' working hours, but their possibilities for increasing their working hours, gaining promotion or envisaging careers, were severely limited by their childcare responsibilities. Some mothers said that they would be unable to work without a high level of support from their children's grandparents, but not all had such help at hand. Several mothers were working well below their potential, as evidenced by the jobs that they had prior to motherhood. The very part-time hours to which respondents were entitled as parents of 3- and 4-year old children, they described as a source of stress for themselves and inadequate care for

their children. While some parents said that they would prefer to wait until their child or children started school full time before changing their employment situation, most low waged mothers wanted far more choice than they had under the current piecemeal system. Our evidence is that high-quality, publicly funded childcare, including longer pre-school hours, would be particularly helpful to low-waged mothers for whom quality, continuity and affordability of childcare are key issues.

‘Time in the City’ policies are designed in municipalities across Europe to promote positive flexibility in working time. They promote work-family reconciliation through flexible working, promoting environmentally sustainable transport systems, and promoting active cooperation with other citizens, for example, through the use of time banks. Our parent respondents were all juggling work and care commitments. Some had more flexibility than others, and the low-waged mothers’ time in particular was subject to a complex array of constraints and contexts. This meant that they relied on individual solutions for to travel to work: current public transport did not meet their needs for taking and fetching children, and reaching work on time. Many low-waged mothers were employed in jobs that were part of the 24-hour culture, and were conscious of the constraints around parents working flexible or evening hours. Some shared childcare or journeys to school, but they had little time in their lives to offer to time banks. While parents expressed some reservations about Time in the City policies, this was in the context of the UK’s long working hours, and limited choices around childcare and paid work.

Unequal working time makes a major contribution to gender inequality in the UK, with many fathers working over Europe’s 48-hour limit, and many mothers working part-time hours too short to give them independent incomes. While the gender pay gap for full-timers has reduced, gender inequality in working time – including career breaks and part-time work - has become a more serious factor in women’s ability to support themselves. Policies towards more equal working time may be seen in Sweden’s efforts to make women’s working lives more like men’s through (nearly) full-time employment, in the Netherlands’ Combination Scenario, which aims to make men’s lives more like women’s, with policies including better quality part-time employment, and in those countries – particularly France – which have legislated for a

shorter working week for men and women. France's 35-hour week goes along with and supports the most gender-equal working time in Europe, with few women in part-time employment. In the UK, New Labour has resisted European legislation over working time, arguing that the freedom from Europe's 48-hour working time limit contributes to labour market flexibility, and should be seen as a matter of individual choice. But these choice arguments ignore parents' joint responsibilities, reduced choice for those taking responsibility for care, and the degradation of women's careers, participation and earnings when they have to work part-time.

Among our interview respondents, mothers perceived their choices around paid work as constrained by fathers' working hours, particularly where fathers worked the longest hours. Some mothers said that they would like to increase their working hours, and some clearly aspired to better quality jobs, but were limited in their ability to build their careers by their partners' working hours. Our mother respondents also saw shorter working hours as allowing their partners to be more available to their children. They saw fathers' long hours as increasing the pressure on them as mothers and as earners. Long hours were seen, by both fathers and mothers, as increasing stress on relationships, pressure on 'family time', and difficulty reconciling paid and unpaid work and care. Fathers' responses suggested more ambivalence than mothers', financial pressures competing with time and family pressures. Nevertheless, female and male respondents welcomed more choice, including realistic alternatives to long hours in paid work. They felt that a shorter working week would increase parental choice around the division of paid and unpaid work and care in families, and improve work-family reconciliation for both parents, enabling low waged mothers of young children to realise some of their aspirations around labour market engagement, but also enabling fathers to engage more fully in care.

Part-time work is at the heart of mothers' disadvantage in the UK, carrying severe earnings penalties for women who interrupt their employment for children, and representing the 'half' in the one-and-a-half model only too closely, as it brings women on average only half men's lifetime earnings. It also represents many women working below their potential. Policies to upgrade part-time work – under the

European Part-time Work Directive or National Minimum Wage – may have moderated the exploitation of the lowest paid women workers, but have not so far brought gender equality, or even equality between women full-timers and part-timers. A case can be made, then, for new approaches to this problem, as in the Netherlands' Combination Scenario, which is underpinned by a principle of gender equality and aims to bring men into part-time employment and care, as well as women into the labour market on more equal terms.

Mothers were very conscious of their undervaluing as part-time workers, and saw the Combination Scenario as likely to improve their status and income from employment. Some reservations were expressed about shared childcare meaning too little time together, and fathers were more likely to see practical barriers to engaging in part-time work themselves. However, mothers, and some fathers, responded positively to the challenge to traditional gender roles represented in the Combination Scenario.

The situation and choices of low-waged mothers of young children in England are very constrained. Low levels of childcare provision and high costs of private solutions, policy constructions of parenthood that see mothers as responsible rather than fathers, and long working hours among fathers make a context in which mothers often have little choice but part-time work within 'male breadwinner' or 'one and a half' breadwinner families. Our evidence suggests that if alternative possibilities were increased, in terms of support for childcare, regulated working time, and shared care in couple families, male breadwinning is not a choice the women would make. All these policies spoke to mothers' needs for more support in parenting, both from governments and from partners. Most mothers saw childcare as something that could and should be shared. Most fathers would contemplate a stronger role in care, but in the context of changed conditions, in a more regulated labour market with shorter hours, and with government support for fathers taking parental leave.

## **Appendix 1**

Table Appendix A. Marital status of women and men (aged 18-59).

	Women					Men				
	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland	All	England	Wales	Scotland	N. Ireland	All
<i>Coupled</i>	72	68	69	63	69	70	70	68	68	70
Married	55	56	53	58	55	52	56	53	62	55
Cohabiting	17	13	16	5	14	18	15	16	6	15
Sep/wid/div	10	12	13	14	12	6	6	6	5	6
Never married	18	20	19	23	19	24	24	26	26	25
N	2,799	953	1,098	1,201	6,051	2,460	799	958	845	5,062

Source : BHPS Wave 12, 2003

## **Appendix 2**

### **Advisory Group Members:**

Kate Bellamy, Senior Policy Officer  
Fawcett Society, 1-3 Berry Street, London, EC1V 0AA  
[www.fawcettsociety.org.uk](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk)

Jenny Crook, Research Officer  
DWP Work, Welfare and Poverty Directorate, Family, Poverty and Work Division,  
King's Court, 80 Hanover Way, Sheffield, S3 7UF

Professor Jane Lewis,  
Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science,  
Houghton Street, London, WC2 2AE

Helen Lindars, Director of Social Policy  
Equal Opportunities Commission  
Arndale House, Arndale Centre, Manchester M4 3EQ  
<http://www.eoc.org.uk/>

Maggy Meade-King, Working Families,  
1 - 3 Berry Street, London EC1A 0AA  
[www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

Professor Margaret O'Brien  
Co-Director Centre for Research on the Child and the Family  
University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ, UK  
<http://www.uea.ac.uk/swk/research/centre>

Deborah Read  
Sure Start Unit and Supporting Children and Young People's Group  
Government Office for the East Midlands,  
The Belgrave Centre, Stanley Place, Talbot Street, Nottingham, NG1 5GG  
[dread.goem@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dread.goem@go-regions.gsi.gov.uk)

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