

Time Use and Childcare

This briefing is based on analysis of the UK Time Use Survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics in 2000/01. This survey collected information in diary form from 6,500 households. Respondents were asked to identify one or two activities for each ten minute period on two days: one a weekday and one a weekend day.

Key facts

- Mothers and fathers still play different roles in the family, but the division of time is no longer a simple one. Fathers are not solely engaged in paid employment, and mothers do not only do housework and childcare. Families adopt different ways of dividing up paid and unpaid work.
- Total time spent on paid and unpaid work (defined as employment, household tasks, childcare and caring) differs little for mothers and fathers. During the week, fathers spend 50 minutes more on average than mothers, whilst this is reversed at weekends.
- Mothers account for over three-quarters of time spent on childcare activities during the week and two-thirds at weekends
- However fathers do play an important role. In 24% of two parent families the father did most of the childcare on at least one of the days covered by the survey. During the week, 22% of couples with a child aged under five shared childcare with each parent doing at least a third, and 37% did so at weekends. On average, fathers of under fives spend about the same time as mothers on reading, playing and talking with their children at weekends.
- Household tasks are also divided between mothers and fathers, but with mothers on average spending more time than fathers on tasks that need to be done every day. At weekends, mothers spend around twice as much time on food management and household upkeep as fathers, and three times as much time on a weekday.
- Other household tasks are mainly carried out by fathers. On average, fathers spend 1 hour a day at weekends on construction, repairs, gardening and pet care, compared with 30 minutes a day spent by mothers on these tasks.
- Parents with young children spend far more time on childcare activities than those with older children. During the week, mothers with children under the age of five spend 4 hours and 50 minutes a day on childcare, compared with 1 hour a day by mothers whose youngest child is aged 12–14.



- For mothers, not working or working part-time is associated with their spending more time caring for their children, especially when they are young, although the gap is smaller than might be expected. Non-working mothers with children aged under five spend 5 hours and 50 minutes a day on childcare activities during the week, compared with 3 hours a day by full-time working mothers.
- Whatever their hours of work, fathers find some time for childcare. On average, fathers of under fives spend 1 hour and 20 minutes a day on childcare activities during the week and 2 hours and 30 minutes a day at weekends.

Introduction

This briefing is based on data collected using 24 hour diaries and examines the gender differences in time spent on childcare and household tasks. Most of the results are presented as averages and will tend to reflect the most common arrangements. However, it is recognised that practices vary, and the results will not apply to atypical families.

The UK Time Use Survey (TUS), carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2000/01, is the first large-scale diary-based survey measuring the time spent by the UK population on various activities.¹ The survey involved interviewing 11,700 individuals in 6,500 households, who were then asked to complete diaries recording their activities on two days: one a weekday, and the other a Saturday or Sunday.

In this briefing, parents are defined as adults living in the same household as a child or children aged under 15 and identified as their parent or guardian, step parent or foster parent. This includes both lone parents and parents in couples. Non-resident parents cannot be identified from the survey. Respondents could record both a main activity and a secondary activity for each ten minute period during the diary day. For example, a parent who talks to a child whilst doing the washing up can record both activities.

Childcare is measured in three ways. The first two measures are based on time recorded as spent on childcare activities (see box for details). The first measure counts time spent on childcare as a main activity only, whilst the second measure additionally includes time spent on childcare as a secondary activity alongside a non-childcare main activity. The third measure of childcare measures all time that parents are in the same place as children in their household, e.g. at home. This is quite a broad definition as the parents and children do not have to be engaged in the same activity or even be in the same room.

Unless otherwise specified, from this point on, all estimates are reported in hours and minutes per day using the notation hours:minutes/day, and rounded to the nearest ten minutes. For example, 3:10/day equals 3 hours and 10 minutes per day.

In this briefing, 'How parents spend their day' looks at the main activity recorded, whilst 'Time spent on childcare' compares the three different measures of childcare. Later sections of the briefing concentrate on the second of these measures: childcare recorded as either a main or secondary activity.

Definition of childcare activities

Childcare activities are classified under the following categories:

- Physical care and supervision (e.g. supervision indoors or outdoors, feeding, dressing, washing, preparing children for bed etc)
- Teaching the child (e.g. helping with homework, providing guidance in doing something)
- Reading, playing and talking with child
- Accompanying child (e.g. to the doctor or similar, lesson or other activity, visiting school or nursery)
- Travel escorting to/from education or other activity
- Other childcare, including childcare as help to another household

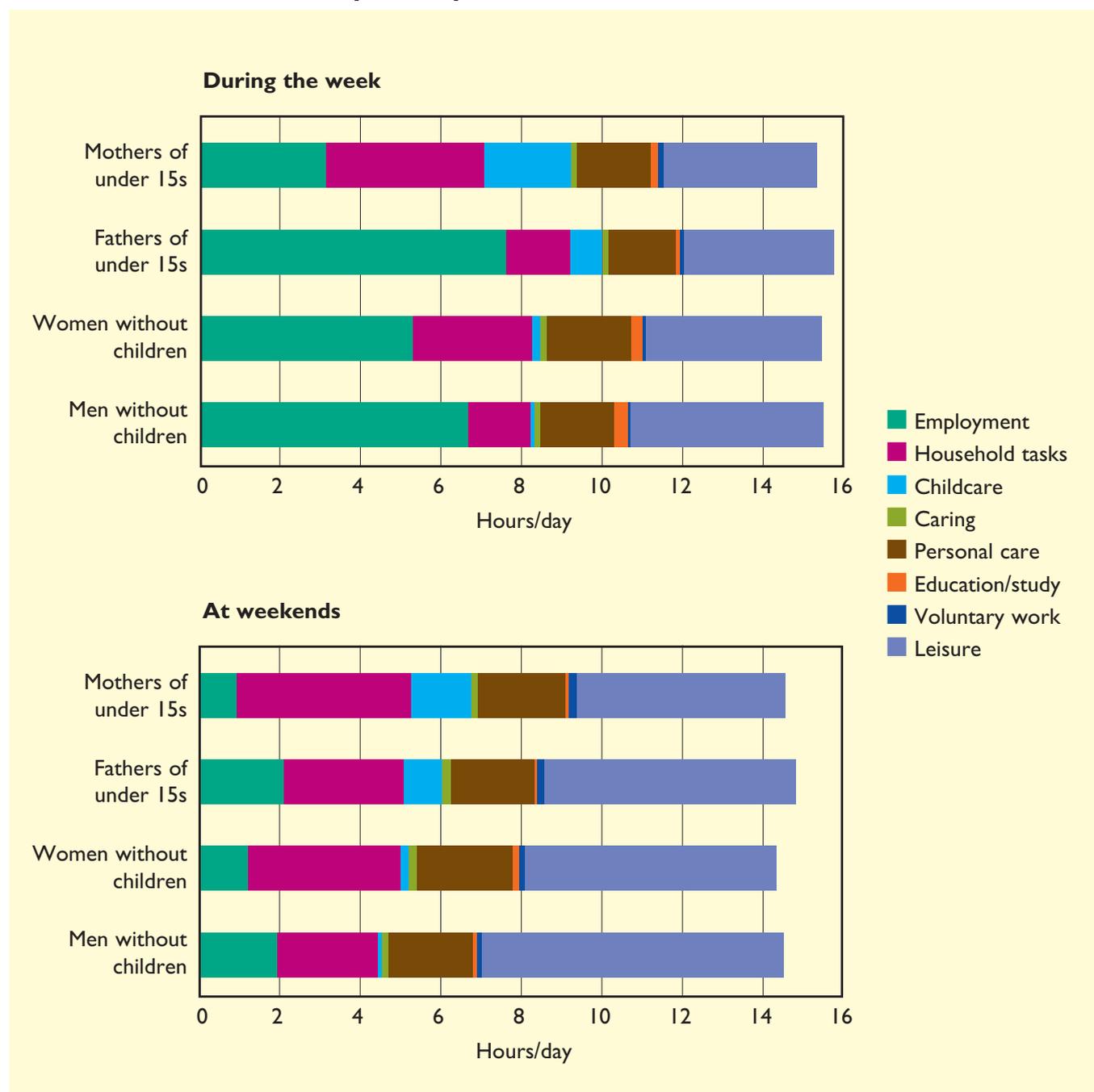
How parents spend their day

An analysis of time use over the waking day can help to put time spent on childcare in context. This section relates to the main activity recorded in diaries, and is limited to 20–54 year olds as this age range covers almost all parents, whilst excluding many students and retired people.

When combined, total time spent on paid and unpaid work (defined as employment, household tasks, childcare and caring) differs little for mothers and fathers. During the week, fathers spend 10:10/day on average on paid and unpaid work, 50 minutes more than mothers with 9:20/day. This is reversed at weekends, when mothers spend 7:00/day on these activities, whilst fathers spend 6:10/day.

Whilst fathers record more than twice as much time as mothers on paid employment² during the week, mothers record more than twice as much time as fathers on unpaid work involving household tasks, childcare and caring. At weekends, fathers also spend more time than mothers on employment and mothers more time than fathers on unpaid work, but the differences are smaller.

Time use on main activities by 20–54 year olds



Men without children³ spend slightly less time on employment than fathers, whilst women without children spend more time on employment than mothers. Women and men without children have more leisure time than parents.

Combining time spent on household tasks and childcare, mothers spend 6:10/day on these during the week, or nearly twice as much time as women without children (3:10/day). Although both fathers and women without children spend 4:00/day on these activities at weekends, mothers still spend around 50% more time on them.

When asked to name one thing they would do more of if they had the time, childcare was not at the top of most parents' wish lists. A minority said childcare: 7% of fathers and 5% of mothers. More popular were physical exercise (32% of fathers and 30% of mothers) and social life (13% of mothers and fathers).

Time spent on childcare by mother and fathers

Analysis of main activity shows mothers spending more time than fathers on childcare activities, and this pattern is repeated in the other measures of childcare. Looking at the total amount of time spent on childcare by parents of under 15s, mothers account for over three-quarters of this time during the week and two-thirds at weekends.⁴

Breakdown of total time spent on childcare or in the same place as a child

	During the week		At weekends	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
Childcare as a main activity	77%	23%	67%	33%
Childcare as a main or secondary activity	78%	22%	67%	33%
Time in the same place as a child	69%	31%	61%	39%

Comparing the average times for mothers and fathers, during the week mothers spend three times as long as fathers on childcare. Mothers also spend nearly twice as much time as fathers in the same place as their children.

The division of time is more even at weekends. However, mothers still spend over 60% more time than fathers on childcare. Parents spend more time with their children on average at the weekend with fathers recording an extra 3:10/day compared with a weekday.

Hours per day spent on childcare

	During the week		At weekends	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
Childcare as a main activity	2:10	0:40	1:40	1:00
Childcare as a main or secondary activity	3:10	1:00	2:50	1:40
Time in the same place as a child	7:50	4:10	9:20	7:20

Information on the division of childcare can be obtained for those families where both parents completed diaries.⁵ During the week, 66% of mothers did most of the childcare (over two-thirds), compared with 12% of fathers, and in 22% of couples it was shared (each parent did at least a third).

At weekends, 53% of mothers did most of the childcare, compared with 17% of fathers, and in 30% of couples it was shared. In 24% of families, the father did most of the childcare on at least one of the days covered by the survey.

Age of child and types of childcare activity

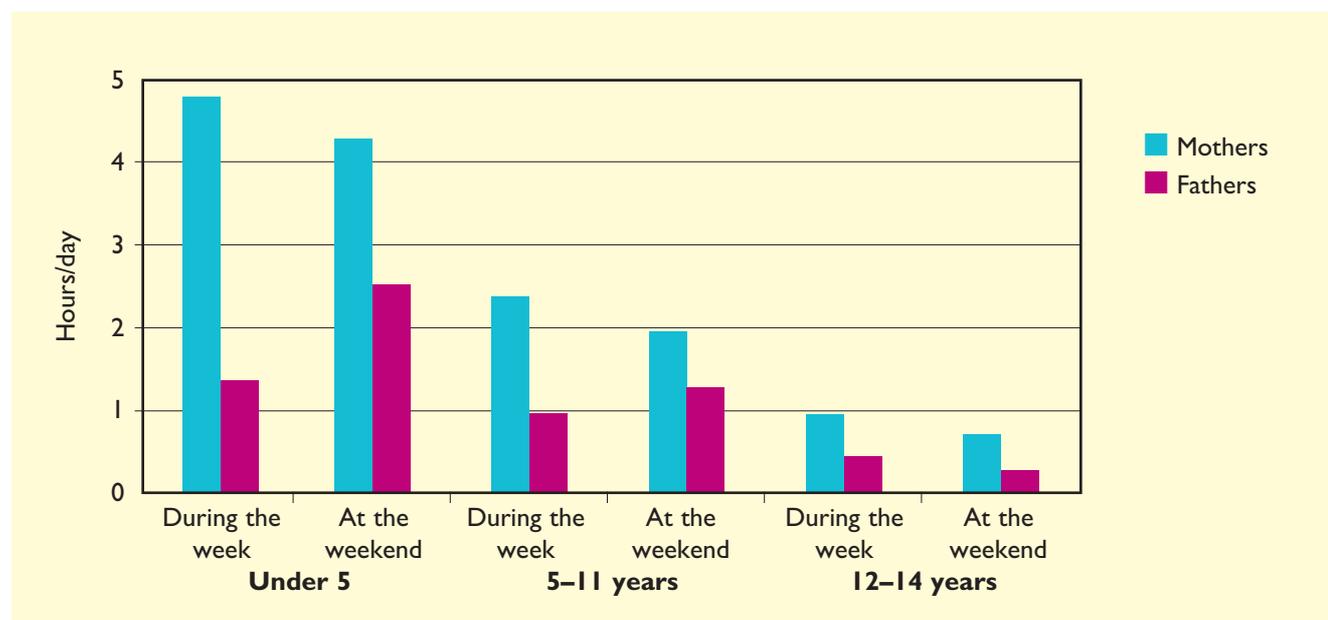
Time spent on childcare will depend in part on the number and age of children. Different childcare activities are associated with children of different ages, e.g. washing and dressing with younger children and helping with homework for older children.

Parents with young children spend far more time on childcare activities than those with older children. During the week, mothers with children under the age of five spend 4:50/day on childcare, compared with 1:00/day by mothers whose youngest child is aged 12–14. Fathers of under fives spend 1:20/day on average on childcare activities during the week and 2:30/day at weekends.

Surprisingly, having more than one child has a much smaller effect than age. During the week, mothers with more than one child spend only an extra 0:50/day on childcare compared with mothers with only one child, and having more than one child has little effect on the average time that fathers spend on childcare.

In two parent families with children under five, 71% of mothers do most of the childcare during the week and 50% at weekends.⁵ Childcare is most likely to be shared when children are younger. During the week, 22% of couples with a child aged under five shared childcare, and 37% shared childcare at weekends.

Time spent on childcare by age of youngest child



Parents in general spend far more time on activities involving the physical care and supervision of their children and reading, playing and talking with their children than on other childcare activities. When they have a pre-school child, mothers spend 3:00/day on physical care and supervision and 1:20/day on reading, playing and talking with their children (both at weekends and during the week).

At weekends, fathers of under fives spend half as much time as mothers (1:20/day) on physical care and supervision and about the same amount of time (1:10/day) on reading, playing and talking with their children.

Working patterns

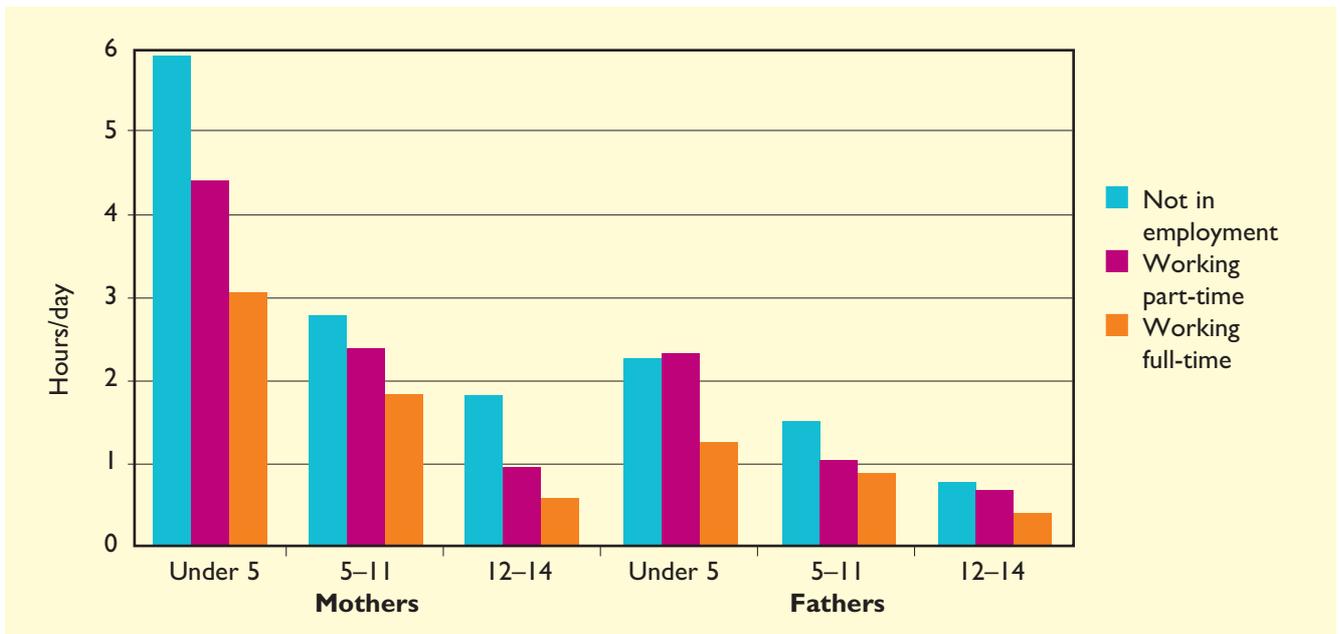
Whilst age of child is a key indicator of demand for childcare, parents' employment and working time will limit their availability to provide childcare, and time spent on childcare affects how much they can work. In the following, the term 'work' refers to paid work only. This section includes additional statistics on employment from the Labour Force Survey.

Nearly half of mothers with a child aged under five are not in employment, about a third work part-time and only a sixth work full-time.⁶ The most common reason given by women of working age for being outside the labour market is looking after the family, and the most common reasons given for working part-time are related to a woman's family or domestic situation.

For mothers, not being in paid work or working part-time is associated with their spending more time caring for their children, especially when they are young. Non-working mothers with children aged under five spend 5:50/day on childcare activities during the week, compared with 3:00/day by full-time working mothers. This gap is smaller than might be expected as non-working mothers also spend more time on other activities, particularly household tasks.

In contrast to mothers, less than one in ten fathers are outside the labour market, and almost all working fathers are full-time.⁶ The 'long hours culture' particularly affects fathers, as a third of working fathers work over 48 hours a week compared with 5% of working mothers. As a result they spend less time on household tasks and sleep.

Time spent on childcare on a weekday by working time and age of youngest child



Whatever their hours of work, fathers find some time for childcare. On average, fathers working full-time spend 1:00/day on childcare activities during the week and 1:40/day at weekends. Full-time working mothers still spend more time on childcare than fathers: 2:00/day during the week and 2:20/day at weekends, however their hours of work are shorter on average. Mothers in full-time employment work 40 hours on average, compared with 47 hours by fathers working full-time.

Fathers not in paid work or working part-time spend 1:30/day on childcare activities during the week, which is less than might be expected. The likely explanation is that their situation is different from equivalent mothers. Whilst non-working and part-time working mothers will almost always have a partner working full-time (or will be lone mothers with no resident partner), these fathers will frequently have a non-working partner who also spends time on childcare.

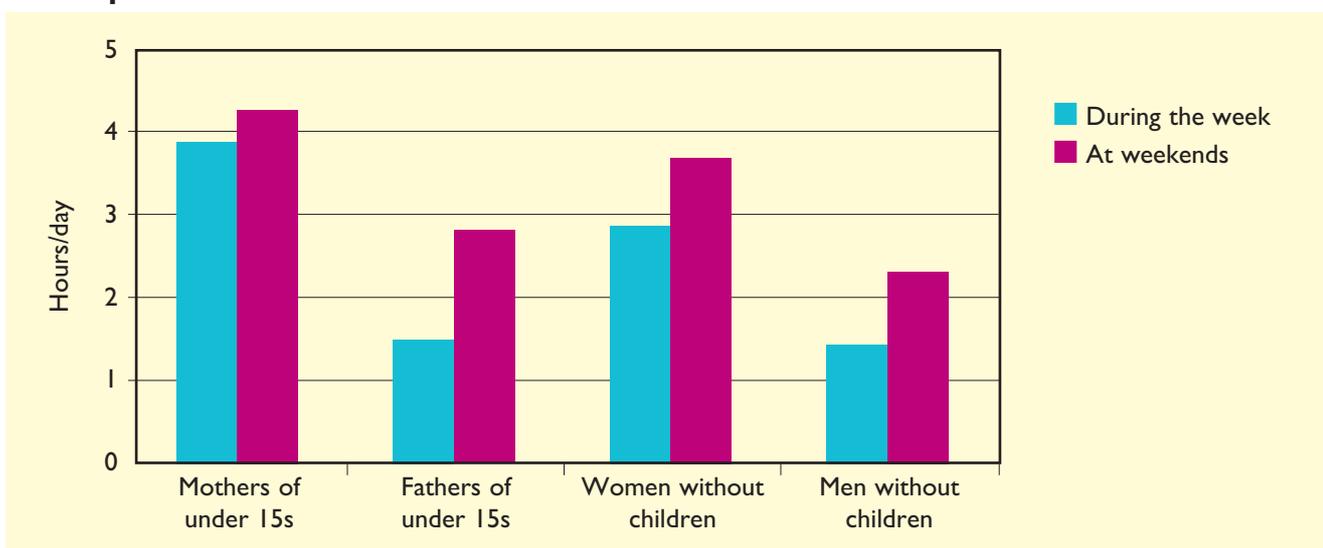
Household tasks

As with childcare, household tasks (see box for definitions) are also divided between mothers and fathers, with mothers on average spending more time on them than fathers. Both mothers and fathers devote more time to household tasks at weekends than during the week, with fathers almost doubling the time they spend on these tasks.

The most time consuming tasks are ones that need to be carried out on a daily basis: food management and household upkeep, such as cleaning and tidying. Mothers spend around twice as much time on these as fathers at weekends: 2:30/day compared with 1:10/day. Mothers also spend 0:50/day more on these tasks during the week than women without children.

Other household tasks are mainly carried out by fathers. Fathers spend 1:00/day at weekends on construction, repairs, gardening and pet care, compared with 0:30/day spent by mothers on these tasks.

Time spent on household tasks



Parents also spend more time on average on household tasks than on childcare activities, particularly at weekends. Fathers spend 1:10/day more and mothers spend 1:30/day more at weekends.

Having children in the household increases the level of housework. Overall time spent on household tasks is greater for mothers than for women without children both during the week and at weekends, and for fathers compared with men without children at weekends. In particular, mothers spend 1:00/day more on household tasks than women without children during the week.

Definition of household tasks

Household tasks are classified in the following categories:

- Food management (food preparation and tidying up afterwards, including cooking, baking and preserving, washing the dishes etc)
- Household upkeep (cleaning and tidying the house and garden, maintaining a supply of heat and water, waste disposal and recycling, arranging items in the home etc)
- Making and caring for textiles (laundry, ironing, handicrafts, making clothes/furnishings, cleaning footwear, repairs and alterations of clothes and footwear etc)
- Gardening and pet care
- Construction and repairs (relating to the house and garden, vehicles and appliances, and maintaining equipment for such work)
- Shopping and services (shopping, browsing/window shopping, visiting service providers such as bank, laundry, hairdresser etc)
- Household management (planning and arranging, budgeting, paperwork, arranging and supervising outside services at home)

Notes:

1 Ipsos-RSL and ONS (2002) United Kingdom Time Use Survey 2000 dataset, 2nd edition. Copies of the data files and documentation provided by the UK Data Archive. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) provided 50 per cent of the funding for the survey, and the remainder was funded by ONS and a consortium of government departments including the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Department of Health (DH), the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (now Department for Transport (DfT)). Please note that Ipsos-RSL, ONS, the other funding departments, ESRC and the UK Data Archive bear no responsibility for the further analysis or interpretation of data from the survey.

The UK Time Use Survey 2000/01 took place between June 2000 and September 2001. It was designed to achieve a representative sample of the population of households and individuals in the UK. Each household surveyed completed a household questionnaire. All individuals aged 8 or over were asked to complete individual questionnaires, two one-day diaries and a one week work and education time sheet.

- 2 Paid work or employment includes travel to and from work.
- 3 Without children means without dependent children aged 0–14 who live in the same household.
- 4 Part of these differences is explained by the relative number of resident mothers and fathers. Mothers outnumber fathers in the survey by 20%, mainly because the majority of lone parents are mothers. The Time Use Survey did not collect data on non-resident parents.
- 5 'Most of the childcare' means more than two-thirds and 'shared' means that each parent does at least a third. The analysis is restricted to couples spending over 30 minutes in total on childcare as a main or secondary activity on each diary day.
- 6 ONS (2004) Labour Force Survey Spring 2001 dataset (revised in line with Census population estimates).

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Equal Opportunities Commission

This briefing is by Karen Hurrell and Katherine Davies (EOC). The text and additional tables can be downloaded from the EOC website or are available as hard copy.

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