

Stay-at-home dads in the UK

A Fatherhood Institute briefing



How many are there?

Latest official figures¹ show that in the UK there are 141,000 men living with dependent children², who are 'economically inactive and looking after the family home'. This is the best available estimate of the number of **full-time stay-at-home fathers**, and represents 2.2% of all UK men living with dependent children.

By comparison, there are 1,185,000 UK women living with dependent children who are 'economically active and looking after the family home':

¹ Source: [Office for National Statistics: Economic activity and employment type for men and women by age of the youngest dependent child living with them in the UK: Table S](#). The most recent figures relate to July to September 2022.

² Dependent children are children aged under 16 and those aged 16 to 18 who have never married and are in full time education.

these *full-time* stay-at-home mothers account for 14.9% of all UK women living with dependent children.

Full-time stay-at-home fathers therefore represent one in nine (10.6%) of all full-time stay-at-home parents in the UK. The proportion varies according to the age of the youngest child, however. For example, only 7.1% of full-time stay-at-home parents whose youngest dependent child is aged 0-2, are fathers, whereas 15.5% of full-time stay-at-home parents whose youngest dependent child is aged 11-15, are fathers.

What about other fathers?

The vast majority of UK men (92.9%) living with dependent children are in paid employment: 83.1% work full-time and 6.3% work part-time. By comparison, three-quarters (75%) of UK women living with dependent children are in paid employment: 38.4% work full-time and 34.4% work part-time.

Again, these proportions vary according to the age of the youngest dependent child. For example, 29.7% of mothers whose youngest dependent child is aged 3-4, work full-time, whereas 84.6% of fathers whose youngest dependent child is aged 3-4, do so.

Overall, full-time working fathers represent just under two-thirds (63.6%) of all full-time UK working parents living with dependent children. This proportion rises to 68.3% where the youngest child is aged 0-2, and 69.3% where the youngest child is aged 3-4.

Part-time working parents may, of course, have actively chosen to work part-time in order to achieve a balance between time spent earning and looking after their children.

ONS data³ shows that just over three-fifths (61.3%) of part-time-working men with dependent children (who, as described above, make up 6.3% of UK men who live with dependent children and are in paid employment) say they do not want a full-time job. This may be because they have childcare responsibilities – so we might reasonably describe them as ***part-time stay-at-home fathers***.

³ Office for National Statistics, Families and the Labour Market: main reference tables, UK: 22 July 2022. Table 11

For comparison, the percentage of part-time-working women living with dependent children (34.4% of UK women who live with dependent children and are in paid employment) who say they do not want a full-time job is 91.9%.

Stay-at-home dads – in their own words

We contributed to a [news item](#) in The Guardian (published on 25 December 2022) about the increase in the number of stay-at-home fathers, and in the time working fathers spend daily on childcare and other domestic work, since the pandemic (drawing on our reports, Closing the Gap and Lockdown Fathers: The untold story – both available on our website, on our resources page). The story was subsequently also reported in other newspapers⁴. We also wrote an [opinion piece](#) for The Guardian (published on 2 January 2023).

Among the many responses to these articles, some stay-at-home fathers came forward to share their personal experiences. We also received several emails and comments on our social media pages from such men.

To acknowledge these fathers' stories and perspectives, which are rarely heard in the public arena, we have compiled and anonymised their comments, and present them below.

Dad 1

My daughter is now 12, and I was the lucky one to get to stay home in her early years. It was a simple decision... my wife earned more. I received no support, but then, we didn't look for it. So I can't really comment on what support is/should be available for stay at home dads. What I would like to say is, I wouldn't trade those first 5/6 years for anything, and I highly recommend that dads don't pass on the chance, if it suits your circumstances.

Dad 2

When I looked after my daughter on my own from aged 9 upwards I applied to the local GP and sought to move her notes across from her prior surgery. After 3 weeks of nothing, one of the secretaries rang up to see what the hold-up was, she made the call and then put the phone down and apologised to me. I asked why and she explained that the local

⁴ These included stories in [Daily Telegraph](#), [MailOnline](#), [The Times](#) and the [Daily Express](#)

NHS records department hadn't signed off the transfer because they assumed I was a problem father or divorcee trying to move records for nefarious reasons. Good job there was nothing majorly wrong with my daughter .

Dad 3

I have been the male "homemaker", as it appears on forms, for years. It is a lonely furrow to plough. I am most self-conscious at parties when the other "blokes" are talking about their jobs. I don't quite fit in their camp, nor am I one of the mums. The children have benefited from having a dad on hand and I am glad to have the bond with them. I wouldn't do things differently but I look forward to more of us so I can be part of a bigger thing.

Dad 4

I've had it too being a single dad of three, in the playground you're a misfit and then being around blokes it's hard and given the toxicity of all male groups my age I've completely stepped away. Now that my kids are growing up what am I to society? Nothing. One of the hardest things though is always during the holidays, you're alone and your kids are alone with you, ostracized from community. I'm very close to my kids but we are definitely not part of the community.

Dad 5

I lost my job in 1987, just as my daughter was born and by default I became the main carer. When we went to the mothers and toddlers group, they [mothers and staff] were all quite wary of me, a long haired and bearded biker. The next time we went the sign on the door said "parents and toddlers group". Change comes in small increments, but it comes.

Dad 6

When my first sprog came along in 96 and then another in 98 my then partner had a career and I didn't. So I was a stay at home dad. I could have done with more support, but I enjoyed the experience a lot. Though not always at the time. What really hurt was the refusal of employers to take seriously the years I had been my children's primary care giver. When I explained the gap on my CV, she tended to smile and say "unemployed then! Ha!". I hope things have changed.

One thing that surprised me was the attitude of some mothers. Not a majority, not even close, but some. When I tried to attend things organised for people looking after young kids, a fair few women were incredibly hostile and offensive. Again, not most by any means, but enough to make those things too uncomfortable. I know that attitudes have changed somewhat since then so I am 90% sure that that minority is even smaller now.

Despite everything though, I'd never change that period in my life. I'll always have some amazing memories of seeing my children develop from babies into complex, interesting young people.

Dad 7

I raised my twins (now 16) from birth until 7 years old in a town to which I had only recently moved with my then wife. Some people were accepting of this set up and some were not, the latter perhaps informed by the still pervasive assumption that fathers-and men in general- are inept when it comes to childcare and housework. Bringing up kids contains an element of drudgery but it's certainly not the science of rocket manufacture, and is thus within the grasp of the average man. Caveat pater - beware the professional Ma-fia who lurk at every school's gates. They don't want you in their girls' club.

Dad 8

I am in this exact situation but it is exacerbated by the fact that I am a widower. My wife died at just 40 when our son was only 18 months old. The combination of grief followed by Covid meant I had to let go of my catering business and ended up claiming Universal Credit which is simply not geared up to understand solo, male parents. I'm now getting back on my feet and my son is my world but the "passive" discrimination I find myself on the end of doesn't make my life any easier.

Dad 9

I left work to become a stay at home dad in 2013 when my daughter was 6 months and my wife went back to work. Whilst I would do it again, I would now go into it knowing how isolating it can be.

My first experience was a health visitor who looked genuinely horrified and disgusted when I said that I was the primary carer as my wife had gone back to work.

Whilst we now have "Parent and Child" groups, there is still an unwritten assumption that the parent is female. At one group the other mums

actively turned their chairs into a circle so that I couldn't join in the conversation. New mothers were warmly welcomed and their babies adored, mine was actively ignored.

In another group the other mums organised additional activities for themselves. They extended an invite to my wife, but I was never invited. I am now in my mid 40s and starting to try to get back into work. Age and a big break in employment are definitely being held against me, and you can visibly see the concern on interview panels when I explain what I have been doing.

Dad 10

I took time when my son was born and my daughter was three. Twenty years later, my salary is back to the same level as when I stopped working....

Dad 11

I've spent twenty years looking after five sons while my wife was happily the breadwinner. There were ups and downs. Accepted in one playgroup but not another. Teachers asking was my wife permanently ill. I think the relationship I have with my sons is one I wouldn't have if I'd been the main breadwinner.

Dad 12

I was a single father, it's very lonely precisely because for whatever reason society doesn't quite know how to deal with you. So whatever can be done to normalise fathers looking after kids is to be welcomed.

Dad 13

I have by far the lion's share of caring for our daughters, 8 and 5 yrs old! Whilst they are older now, it is difficult in a society that looks upon the dads as being in the wrong place!!! I live in France, have been here since the 1990s, but I don't think this is a cultural phenomenon unique to France. In the parks, play groups, on the telephone; with the other mums (they are all mums) I'm seen with suspicious eyes!! I'm not sure why this still is in 2023! But that's the deal it seems!!! My wife works a 50hr week and I work part time, so this all makes economic sense. My two daughters do seem to benefit from an outdoor et dad, lots of bike, walks, swimming, etc, by far the fittest and toughest girls in their school! I wrestle too with the oldest, so no seedy nightclub sleaze ball can take advantage of her!!! Hopefully this will all pay off, but it's a lonely road.

Dad 14

I currently look after our soon-to-be three year old one day a week, the same as his mum and his grandmother, he is in nursery the other two days. I purposely started a new company to allow me to do this given the lack of flexibility around working arrangements in employed positions. My work tends to involve dealing with people 50+. The responses when I inform them of the fact that I am unavailable one day a week due to childcare are almost entirely positive, and of those that have families the non-primary caregivers almost always say that they wish they had been given the same opportunity (it's very rare to find any that did). I would say however that we have to be careful not to make those that are not able to, or indeed might not wish to, stay at home, feel that their decision is a wrong one. It's down to each family to decide what's best for them, albeit I do believe that we as a society need to try to ensure that all options are available.

Dad 15

Brought both my children up as a stay-at-home dad - the prejudice and suspicion from the school, doctors, hospitals etc was really totally unfair. Attitude was always where is the mother? But it was totally worth it and the relationship I have now with my daughters is priceless I really have no regrets and I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Dad 16

I was a stay-at-home dad first in the late 1980s, followed by p/t stay-at-home stuff a couple of times in the noughties. For each, I had to give up my decently paid jobs, then eventually go freelance. After each time, the career breaks made me increasingly less employable. Even in the "progressive" employment arena I'm involved in, career breaks make for brutal decisions by employers. It's hard to compete with those with continuous direct employment, as well as somewhat of a suspicion around freelancers.

If it's of interest, the younger kids' mother tells me that her career was also very much damaged by the p/t shared care approach. The ability to deliver what is expected as a manager whilst having childcare responsibilities, even p/t ones, is a career killer. This again, in a relatively "progressive" employment field. So, I'd argue that it's probably not just legislative change that's required, but also a strong attitudinal change by Guardian reader types!

Dad 17

I am 78 and my wife and I did a complete role reversal in 1967. This was rarely done voluntarily then. There were exceptions when a wife or partner died. Society was very different then, prejudice was rife, and you were considered to be part of a subculture. This may still be the case. I did this for 12 years. There are financial penalties when you do the reversal. Pensions etc. I think your charity is to be applauded in providing advice to men who would like to be more involved in their children's upbringing.

What support do stay-at-home dads need?

Despite their rising numbers, *full-time* stay-at-home fathers remain a tiny minority of UK fathers living with dependent children. But many of the experiences they've shared above will also be well-known to fathers who are in paid work – whether full-time or part-time.

In our recent Closing the Gap report (available on our website, on our resources page), which highlighted a broader increase in fathers' involvement as hands-on dads, we made several policy recommendations (outlined below) to support fathers' continuing and increased involvement in looking after their children.

We think the focus should be on implementing these changes to benefit ALL fathers, including those who choose to take time out of workplace to focus on hands-on childcare; those who reduce their paid working hours; and those who work full-time - who will, of course, spend time caring for their children outside their working hours, and may wish to 'flex' these hours where this is possible.

The changes we describe below would, we believe, help level the playing field between fathers and mothers, by:

- Supporting fathers to take some time away from paid work to look after their baby in its first year – enabling them to bond closely and become expert, confident caregivers
- Enabling fathers and mothers to make fairer, better-informed choices about how to share the earning and caregiving
- Providing fathers as well as mothers with the information and support they need to be effective hands-on parents
- Normalising fathers' hands-on involvement in the public sphere

Our policy recommendations

A more gender-equitable parenting leave

system, including well-paid paternity leave and a period of well-paid, use-it-or-lose-it parental leave - for all fathers, including those who are self-employed.

Flexible working by default as a Day 1 right for all employees, with the onus on employers to advertise flexible options and justify when these are not possible – to fathers as well as mothers.

Routine and systematic engagement with fathers in the perinatal period by NHS maternity and health visiting services to support their close attachment to, and involvement in caregiving for, their babies; and by other services (including Family Hubs) for families with older children.

[Join the Time with Dad campaign](#)

Find out more about stay-at-home dads

If you want to find out more about stay-at-home fathers, recent articles in the Fatherhood Institute's research library include:

- Hodkinson, P., & Brooks, R. (2022). Caregiving fathers and the negotiation of crossroads: Journeys of continuity and change. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12980>
- Jones, C., et al. (2021). "Transitions Into and Out of Work: Stay-at-Home Fathers' Thoughts and Feelings: A Brief Report." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 0(0): 10608265211032097.
- Jones, C., Foley, S., & Golombok, S. (2021, October 7). Parenting and Child Adjustment in Families With Primary Caregiver Fathers. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/fam0000915>

We are able to provide a fuller list of references for a small fee. Please contact Dr Jeremy Davies via j.davies@fatherhoodinstitute.org for details.