

Leave in the lurch: Paternity leave, gender equality and the UK economy

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A joint report by

centre for
progressive
policy



**PREGNANT
THEN SCREWED**

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Forewords

As the UK charity working to end the motherhood penalty, we know that equal parenting is critical to women's empowerment and increased earnings. But it has many other benefits too. Enabling fathers and partners to spend time with their children in the first 12 months of life has been shown to improve the mental and physical health of mothers, improve educational outcomes for children and it even reduces the divorce rate. That is why we have been campaigning for better paternity leave policies for UK parents for the last 6 years. We believe that paternity leave is not a luxury but a necessity. With a general election due to take place within the next 18 months, we want to be sure all political parties understand the importance of paternity leave to parents, children and the economy. This report is an in-depth analysis to better explore how our current policies are holding us back, what the public appetite is for change, and the benefits those changes could have for all of us. We are thrilled to partner with the Centre for Progressive Policy and Women in Data®; and we would like to thank Cattanach for funding this work.

Joeli Brearley, CEO of Pregnant Then Screwed

Despite a large increase in women's participation in the labour market in recent decades, women are still disproportionately likely to take time out of their careers when they have children. While long-held societal norms about gendered parenting roles are shifting, the UK's parental leave system has not kept pace. As our findings in this report show, it is still very difficult for most fathers and second parents to be able to afford to take significant amounts of leave when their children are born. As a result, women still provide significantly more childcare compared to men, perpetuating gender inequalities in the labour market which damage women's careers, long term earnings and the UK economy as a whole. We are delighted to have partnered with Pregnant Then Screwed and Women in Data to develop important new evidence on the impact of the UK's current parental leave offer, and to present policy recommendations to reform paternity leave policy. If the UK is to compete with our international peers, government policy must send a strong signal about the importance of both parents' role in providing childcare from the very beginning of a child's life.

Ben Franklin, Director of Research & Policy, Centre for Progressive Policy

Summary

This report is a collaboration between the economics think tank the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP), the global movement Women in Data® and the charity and campaigning organisation Pregnant Then Screwed (PTS). It explores the economic and health impacts of extending the statutory entitlement to paternity leave and pay, including through its impacts on gender equality in the labour market.

Parental leave entitlement presents one of the first policy opportunities to influence the course of gender inequalities in pay and employment, which we know to be detrimental to the economy. They also provide an early opportunity to signal the importance of both parents' participation in childcare, including for maternal mental health.

This paper first considers international evidence on the economic impact of paternity leave and presents new evidence that 6 or more weeks of paid paternity leave is associated with reduced gender inequality in the labour market. It then examines the insight from two new surveys, one survey of recent parents conducted by PTS and another more recent YouGov survey, commissioned by PTS and CPP, which focuses explicitly on paternity leave.

While one of the aims of this paper is to highlight the gendered impact of unequal access to parental leave, we recognise the diversity of couples who have children, including same-sex couples and couples who adopt. All our recommendations apply to all couples, in which the second or non-birthing parent has access to paternity pay and rights, as is currently the case in UK law.

Key findings

There is convincing existing evidence that increasing the entitlement to paid leave for fathers and those eligible for paternity after the birth or adoption of a child increases their engagement with their children, spreading the distribution of unpaid care responsibilities and housework more equally between parents, improving gender equality.

- New CPP analysis suggests that this translates into higher levels of gender equality in the labour market. CPP's analysis of OECD data finds that countries with more than 6 weeks of paid paternity leave have a 4 percentage point smaller gender wage gap and 3.7 percentage point smaller labour force participation gap than countries that have less than 6 weeks.

In turn, greater gender equality in the labour market has beneficial macroeconomic impacts:

- Recent CPP analysis finds that closing gender employment gaps in all UK local authorities would increase economic output by £23bn (approximately 1% of GDP).

New CPP analysis of PTS survey data suggests that fathers and partners taking paternity leave supports mothers to return to the labour market:

- We find that a woman's partner taking parental leave is associated with a **34%** increase in the likelihood of a woman being physically ready to return to work.

According to new data from our YouGov survey carried out in May 2023, this finding is in line with public opinion:

- **65%** of mothers with children under the age of 12 polled as part of our YouGov opinion survey thought that increasing paid paternity leave would have a positive impact on mothers' readiness to return to work.

New findings from PTS's 2023 'State of the Nation' survey of recent parents suggest that fathers and partners are taking lower than optimal levels of leave due to their finances:

- **20%** of recent fathers said that no parental leave options were available to them following the birth or adoption of their child.
- **43%** of recent fathers who took some parental leave but did not use the full entitlement available to them cited financial hardship as the primary reason for returning to work early.

This situation is perpetuating mental health problems, which has both short- and long-term cost implications:

- **63%** of recent fathers surveyed by PTS said they did not feel mentally ready to return to work when they did.
- **29%** of parents surveyed by YouGov said either they or their partner had experienced a new mental health issue in the two years following the birth of their most recent child.
- **45%** of these parents received no treatment or support. Existing evidence suggests that perinatal mental health problems cost the NHS £1.2bn a year and the failure to address perinatal mental health problems costs society even more - around £8.1bn a year.
- **83%** of mothers with children under the age of 12 polled as part of our YouGov opinion survey thought that increasing paid paternity leave would have a positive impact on mothers' mental health.

Despite the introduction of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) in the UK, the length of leave taken by parents is closely tied to statutory entitlement, regardless of income. Changing this entitlement could therefore have a strong influence on behaviour. In our new YouGov poll, there is broad public support for increasing paternity entitlement:

- **Only 18%** of the public think that the statutory entitlement to paid paternity leave should be two weeks or fewer.
- **57%** of parents of children under the age of 12 and 44% of the wider public would support paid paternity leave increasing to at least 6-8 weeks.
- **81%** of parents of children under the age of 12 and 66% of the public would support an increase beyond the current statutory provision of two weeks
- **57%** of prospective parents say that they or their partner would be able to take 6 weeks of paternity leave if it was paid at 90% of their current salary, falling to 53% of likely parents if leave was paid at 80% of salary.

Recommendations

“ CPP and PTS recommend that paternity leave policy in the UK is reformed based on the principles of improving statutory pay, guaranteeing non-transferable leave, sufficient time for non-transferable leave and enhancing existing maternity rights.

“ CPP and PTS call on the government to increase the length of non-transferable paternity leave to a minimum of 6 weeks and to pay it at 90% of income in line with current statutory maternity pay. This would help to reduce financial hardship, support parental mental health and support gender equality in the labour market, to the benefit of the wider economy.

“ To prevent parents being forced to choose between childcare and a career, resulting in lost economic potential, CPP and PTS also call on the government to implement policies which will improve access to flexible working for all.

Introduction

Women still do the vast majority of unpaid care in the UK. Previous research by the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) estimates that women provide 450 million hours of unpaid childcare each week compared to the 186 million hours provided by men. These inequalities contribute to an average gender pay gap of 15% and mean that women have an increased risk of poverty in old age.³ Many of these inequalities start when women have children, making parental leave a key policy opportunity to reduce gender inequity and maximise women's earning and productive potential for the benefit of themselves, their families, and the wider economy.

The introduction of Shared Parental Leave in 2015 was intended to tackle some of these issues by giving mothers the right to share leave with their partners, however the policy has had very low take up rates. Maternity Action found that only 2% of new mothers who start on statutory paid maternity leave use the scheme to transfer any paid leave to their partner. Existing evidence from parents suggest that workplace culture is at least partly to blame. A 2022 survey by Pregnant Then Screwed (PTS) found that one in seven (14%) fathers who used the shared parental leave scheme said they faced workplace discrimination and 80% of fathers are only offered two weeks paternity leave by their employer.⁴

Other countries have much more generous parental leave policies. In Sweden, parental benefit is paid out for 16 months with each parent entitled to 8 months of leave, and 3 months reserved for fathers only.⁵ For 13 of these 16 months compensation is based on income and as a result, uptake is high. Many other OECD countries, including France, Spain, Norway and Luxembourg amongst others have a paid period of at least 6 weeks leave reserved for fathers and partners.⁶

1 ONS *Gender pay gap for median gross hourly earnings for all job roles (full-time and part-time) in 2022*. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/genderpaygapintheuk/2022>

2 McDonald, R. (2020) *Women should not be held back because of the vital care they provide* [JRF].

Available at:

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/women-should-not-be-held-back-because-vital-care-they-provide>

3 More detail is available on Maternity Action's website:

<https://maternityaction.org.uk/reform-shared-parental-leave/>

4 Based on a survey of 8,000 fathers in 2022. Of these, only half believed that their employer understood SPL, while 16% of fathers overall didn't know what it was and 25% of fathers expecting a baby in the next 6 months hadn't heard of it. Full survey results are available at: <https://pregnantthenscrewed.com/press-release-8-in-10-dads-say-that-their-employer-is-not-doing-enough-to-support-fathers-in-the-workplace/>

5 Prior to 2016 this was 8 weeks.

6 More details on paid leave reserved for fathers can be found here: OECD (2022) *Parental Leave Systems*, https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf

While parental leave policies are far from the only barrier to mothers' participation in the labour market they are one of the first policy touchpoints and provide an early opportunity to signal the importance of both parents' participation in childcare.

While parental leave policies are far from the only barrier to mothers' participation in the labour market - with the accessibility of childcare, gender norms and workplace culture also being highly influential - they are one of the first policy touchpoints and provide an early opportunity to signal the importance of both parents' participation in childcare, including for maternal mental health.



Economic analysis of parental leave implications

Existing international evidence on the impact of paternity leave policies on the labour market are mixed with some studies finding significant impacts on female or maternal labour supply and others finding that these do not persist over time.^{7,8} A 2010 government study from Sweden, which has one of the more generous parental leave policies for fathers, found that uptake of parental leave by fathers was associated with higher earnings for women with maternal earnings rising by 6.7% for each additional month fathers took, however this also lowered paternal earnings by a comparable amount.⁹

There is more consistent and convincing evidence that increasing fathers' entitlement to paid leave permanently increases their engagement with their children, spreading the distribution of unpaid care responsibilities and housework more equally between parents and improving gender equality.¹⁰ Previous research by CPP finds that women currently provide 450 million hours of unpaid childcare each week, over twice as many hours as men, which is worth £382 bn to the economy.¹¹

Increasing paternity leave and sharing care responsibilities has been associated with improved mental health for both parents. A 2022 evidence review by University College Cork found that a longer duration of paternity leave was associated with higher levels of mental wellbeing for fathers, while experimental research by the University of Toulouse in 2012 suggests that longer paternity leave can mean more infant care from fathers and consequently mothers are less likely to suffer from postpartum depression.^{12,13}

7 Fernández Bettelli, M. (2020) *The impact of paternity leave mandates on women's employment in the OECD countries* [Universidad de San Andrés]. Available at:

<https://repositorio.udesar.edu.ar/jsui/handle/10908/18499>

8 Tamm, M. (2018) *Fathers' Parental Leave-Taking, Childcare Involvement and Mothers' Labor Market Participation* [IZA Institute of Labor Economics]. Available at: <https://docs.iza.org/dp11873.pdf>

9 Johansen, A. (2010) *The effect of own and spousal parental leave on earnings* [The Swedish Ministry of Employment]. Available at: <https://www.ifau.se/globalassets/pdf/se/2010/wp10-4-the-effect-of-own-and-spousal-parental-leave-on-earnings.pdf>

10 Tamm (n 9).

11 Hochlaf, D. & Billingham, Z. (2021) *What Women Want* [CPP]. Available at: <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/what-women-want>

12 Philpott, L. et al. (2022) *Paternal Leave and Fathers' Mental Health: A Rapid Literature Review*. *International Journal of Mens' Social and Community Health*, 5(SP1), 29-49. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.22374/ijmsch.v5iSP1.72>

13 Séjourné, N. et al. (2012) *Effect of paternity leave on maternal postpartum depression*. *Gynécologie, obstétrique & fertilité*. 40. 360-4. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221839678_Effect_of_paternity_leave_on_maternal_postpartum_depression

Closer to home, analysis of an English national maternity survey of over 4,000 women carried out in 2010 found that paternity leave was strongly associated with maternal wellbeing at three months postpartum, with women whose partners had taken no paternity leave being more likely to report feeling unwell or ill at three months, and women with more than one child reporting much higher rates of depression at one and three months compared to women whose partners took more than 2 weeks of paternity leave.¹⁴

Increasing paternity leave is also important for reducing the gender pay gap that exists in the UK. Analysis by the ONS finds that the gender pay gap in the UK increases steeply from around 3% for groups under age 40 to over 10% for those aged 40-49 or older, due to lack of progression into higher paid managerial positions.¹⁵ The IFS finds that the gender pay gap grows year-on-year after childbirth as mothers in low-hours jobs see no wage progression, reaching 33% by the time a woman's first child is twelve.¹⁶ Overturning such equalities can boost economic output. For instance, continual improvements in gender equality in pay and workforce participation are expected to improve economic outcomes for developed countries – boosting EU GDP by 6.1% by 2050.¹⁷ Previous evidence for the UK suggests that equalising labour force participation rates could increase per capita GDP growth by 0.5 percentage points a year and that eliminating occupational segregation would result in a 13% increase in women's pay in Britain.¹⁸

14 Redshaw, M. & Henderson, J. (2013) *Fathers' engagement in pregnancy and childbirth: evidence from a national survey*. BMC Pregnancy Childbirth 13, 70. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2393-13-70>

15 ONS (2022) *Gender pay gap in the UK: 2022*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/genderpaygapintheuk/2022>

16 Costa Dias, M. et al. (2016) *The gender wage gap*. [IFS]. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/news/gender-wage-gap-grows-year-year-after-childbirth-mothers-low-hours-jobs-see-no-wage>

17 Pollitt, H. et al. (2017) *Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the EU* doi:10.2839/970626, [European Institute for Gender Equality]. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/>. See www.e3me.com for further information, including the full model manual.

18 Ibid

New CPP analysis of OECD countries

New CPP analysis of labour market outcomes in OECD countries from 1975 to 2021 finds that the introduction of a paid paternity leave entitlement of at least six weeks is associated with a decreased incidence of both gender wage gaps and labour force participation gaps, by 4 and 3.7 percentage points respectively.¹⁹ This suggests that more generous paternity leave reduces gender inequality in the labour market.

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Increasing the length of leave taken by fathers and those eligible for paternity leave has the potential to reduce gender inequalities in pay, career progression, employment, and the provision of childcare. At the moment, these inequalities are limiting the types and sector of work available to women with childcare commitments. The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2022 finds that the availability of flexible working in job adverts varies widely depending on the type of role and that sectors such as manufacturing, construction and maintenance lag far behind more female-dominated sectors like social services.²⁰ As such, they are contributing to the gender pay gap, acting as a drag on the wider economy.

This new analysis builds upon CPP's recent model of local area productivity in the UK which reveals the importance of an area's gender equality to its level of productivity alongside the area's high value-added sectors, investment, health and skill levels. This model estimates that if local authority gender employment gaps were closed, this would increase economic output by £23bn (1% of GDP).²¹

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19 CPP analysis of OECD data. These findings are based on a heterogeneous difference in differences regression model which draws on data from 38 countries for the time period 1975-2021, with the treatment group consisting of countries that have more than six weeks of paid father-specific leave. Results are significant at the 1% level. For more detail on the methodology please see the technical appendix.

20 Timewise (2022) *The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2022*. Available at:

<https://timewise.co.uk/article/flexible-jobs-index/>

21 Franklin, B. (2023) *Fair growth: opportunities for economic renewal* [CPP]. Available at:

<https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/fair-growth>

Parents' experience of taking leave

To explore more about how much parental leave is currently being taken, and by who, we conducted new analysis of data on parents who have birthed or adopted a child in the last three years collected by Pregnant Then Screwed for their 2023 State of the Nation survey. Women in Data® have randomly sampled from over 20,000 responses to PTS's 'State of the Nation' survey and applied weighting on UK regions, gender and social grade to get a final sample of 3,540 parents: 1,735 women and 1,805 men that targets national representation. This paper publishes results on parental leave and discrimination for the first time.²²

How much leave do parents take?

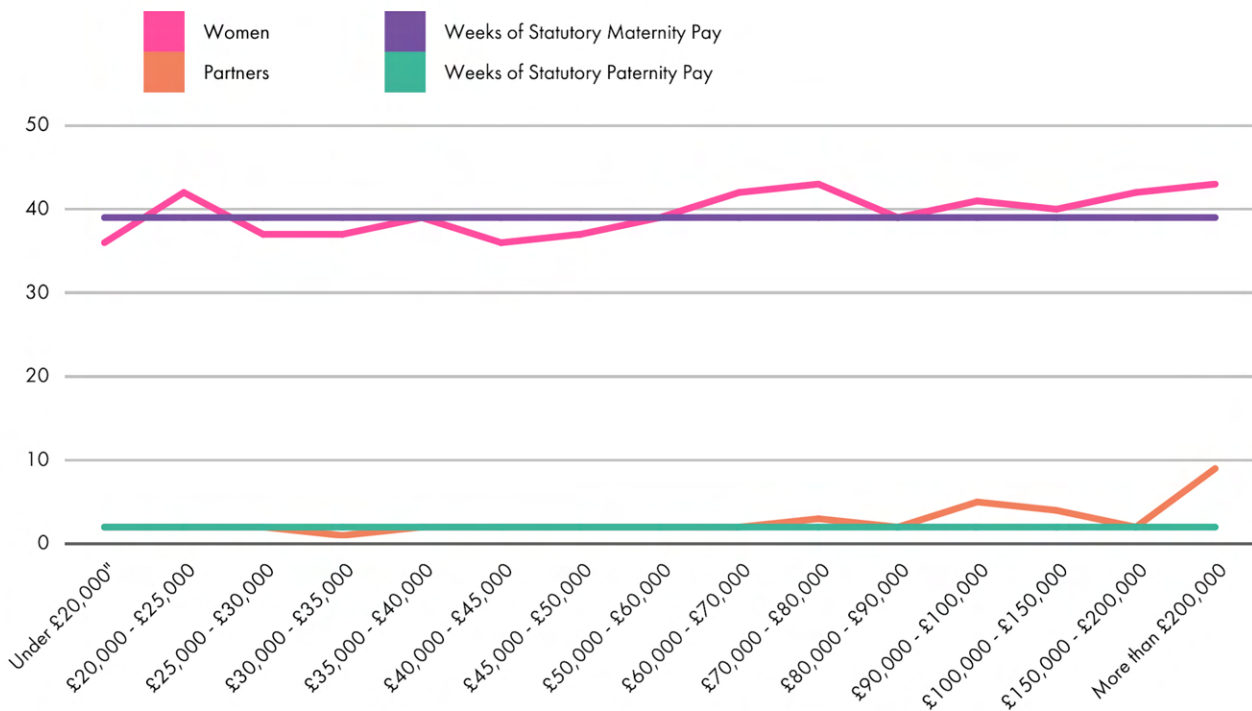
New analysis of PTS survey data finds that while women who have had a child or adopted in the last three years take 40 weeks leave on average, the median length of parental leave taken by recent fathers is just two weeks.²³ This is very close to the length of time that statutory maternity and paternity pay is available: 39 weeks for women and one or two weeks for men. While parents can technically choose to split their leave and pay using Shared Parental Leave, this survey data suggests that very few do so, even at higher income levels. As Chart 1 shows, the average number of weeks leave taken by women's partners was just 2 - the minimum legal entitlement - with over a third (36.6%) of women saying their partner took no parental leave at all.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, after such a short period of leave, when returning to work, 63% of men said they did not feel mentally ready.

22 Fieldwork ran from the end of Jan to mid Feb 2023. While the survey results have been selected and weighted to make the sample representative on region, gender, and social grade, respondents were not paid and self-selected to respond to the survey. This may bias the results. To ensure that our headline results are unbiased PTS and CPP commissioned a supplementary YouGov poll of 2,136 adults. The results of this second survey are detailed below.

23 A sub-sample of 1,100 men and 1,214 women who had adopted or given birth in the last three years were asked questions on parental leave policies.

24 Two weeks is the minimum amount of time employers must offer their employees who have been employed with them for at least 6 months.

Chart 1: Average weeks of parental leave taken by gender and household income ²⁵



As well as increasing their own readiness to return to work, there is evidence that fathers and partners taking leave can also benefit the mother. 27% of recent mothers surveyed did not feel physically ready to return to work when they returned, while 53% did not feel mentally ready and 59% did not feel emotionally ready. CPP’s analysis of these survey results finds that a woman’s partner taking parental leave is associated with a 34% increase in the likelihood of a woman being physically ready to return to work.²⁶

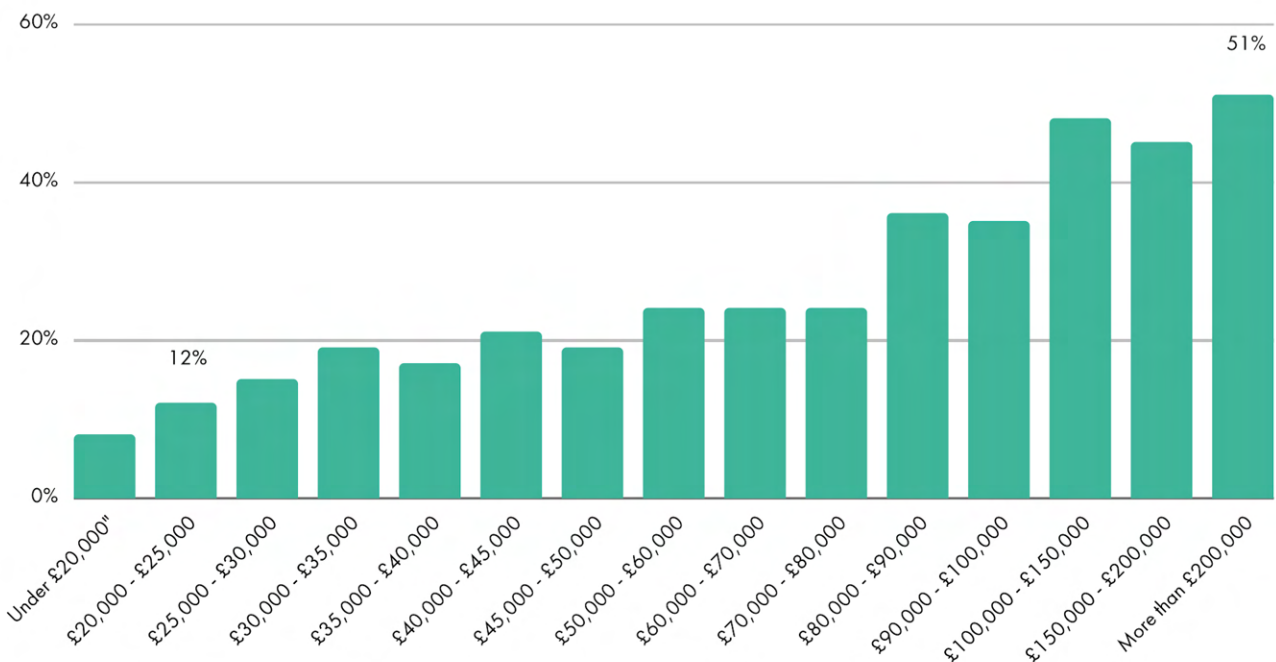
25 Chart is based on response to the question: ‘How long were you on parental leave in weeks?’ Data is from Pregnant Then Screwed’s 2023 ‘State of the Nation’ survey on parents who have birthed or adopted a child in the last three years. Responses have been randomly sampled and weighted by Women in Data to target national representation, giving a final sample of 3,540 parents, 1,735 women and 1,805 men.

26 Logistic regression model of the impact of parental leave taken by a woman’s partner on their stated physical readiness for return to work, controlling for demographic variables including income, age and region. See appendix for coefficients and 95% confidence interval.

What stops men taking more leave?

The survey suggested that the primary drivers for not taking more parental leave were financial. More than four in ten (43%) recent fathers surveyed cited financial hardship as a reason for not staying the full length of parental leave. As household income increases, the availability of enhanced leave to men and their ability to take it in full increases dramatically; from 12% of men with a household income of £20-25k having access to and taking full advantage of enhanced leave compared to 51% of men with a household income of over £200k (see Chart 2).

Chart 2: Fathers who had access to enhanced parental leave and pay and used it in full by household income ²⁷

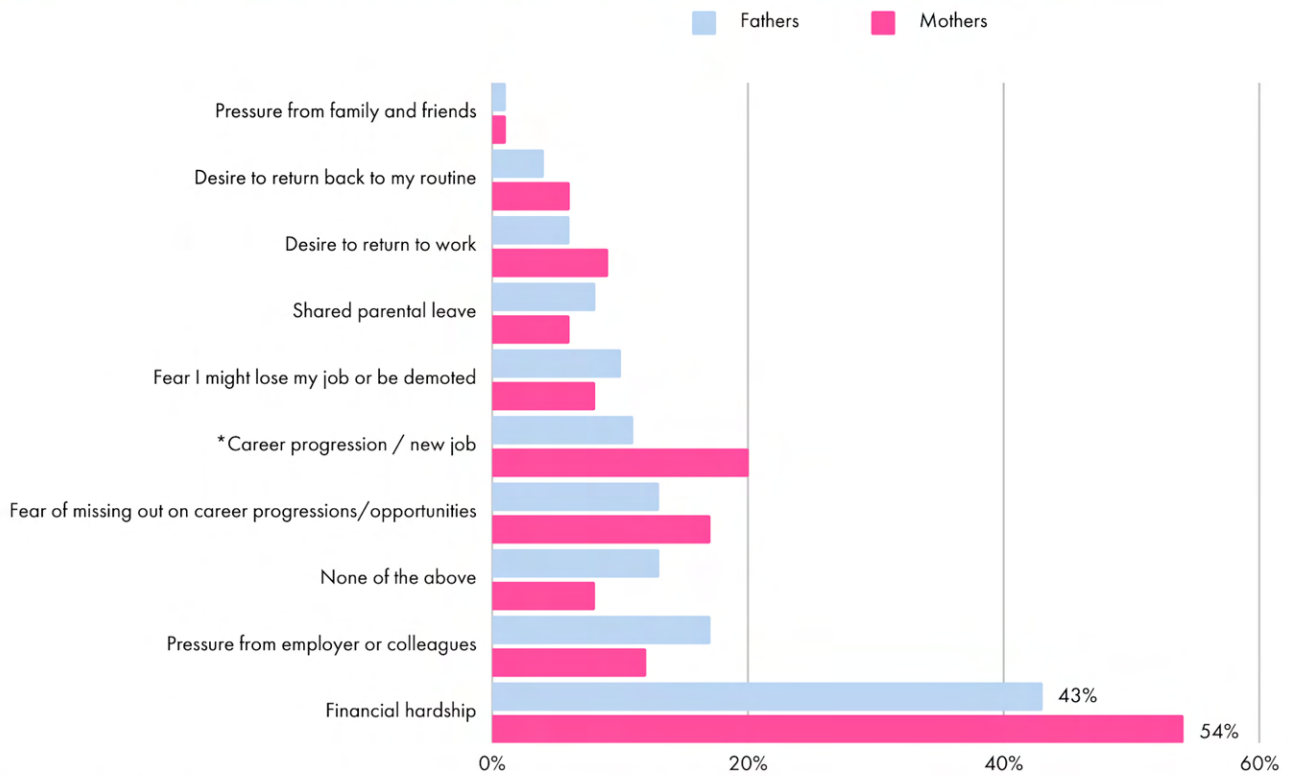


But 17% of recent fathers who did not take either statutory or enhanced leave in full said that they were unable to stay the full length of parental leave because of pressure from their employers and 13% returned for fear of missing out on progression opportunities. This shows that workplace culture also plays a part in driving fathers back into work. ²⁸

²⁷ Chart is based on fathers who responded 'Enhanced parental leave pay was available to me and I've used it in full' to the question 'Which of the following parental leave options best describe your most recent situation?' Data is from Pregnant then Screwed's 2023 'State of the Nation' survey on parents who have birthed or adopted a child in the last three years. Responses have been randomly sampled and weighted by Women in Data to target national representation, giving a final sample of 3,540 parents, 1,735 women and 1,805 men.

²⁸ Based on a sub-sample of 400 recent fathers who did not take either statutory or enhanced leave in full.

Chart 3: Reasons parents were unable to stay the full length of parental leave ²⁹



* (Interest to continue with career progression/development A new job/career opportunity became available)

Returning to work

When returning to work, 87% of recent fathers (who have had or adopted a child in the last three years) said they returned full-time, while only 30% of recent mothers did the same, with 54% of recent mothers returning part-time or on reduced hours. Recent mothers were also much more likely to put in a flexible working request than men, with 72% of men not requesting flexible working when returning to work compared to 28% of women. Women were also more likely (16%) than men (6%) to say they experienced being demoted or side-lined on return to work, providing new evidence that return from parental leave is a key point of divergence in gender equality in the labour market. These findings suggest a workplace culture where part-time and flexible working is not normalised for men.

29 Chart is based on the question 'What is the reason you were unable to stay the full length of the parental leave?' Data is from Pregnant then Screwed's 2023 'State of the Nation' survey on parents who have birthed or adopted a child in the last three years. Responses have been randomly sampled and weighted by Women in Data to target national representation, giving a final sample of 3,540 parents, 1,735 women and 1,805 men.

Women were also more likely (16%) than men (6%) to say they experienced being demoted or side-lined on return to work, providing new evidence that return from parental leave is a key point of divergence in gender equality in the labour market

Overall, 40% of recent parents requested flexible working when they returned from parental leave with nearly one in five of those who requested it (19%) having their request denied completely and one in four (26%) having their request partially met. Those with household incomes lower than £35k were significantly more likely (30%) to have their flexible leave requests denied, while older parents (aged 35-44) were the most likely (60%) to have their request accepted in full. These findings suggest that current flexible working practices are disproportionately penalising younger and lower income parents, reiterating the influence of income on the range of choices that parents have under our current system.

Current flexible working practices are disproportionately penalising younger and lower income parents.

Public opinions on paternity leave

In addition to a voluntary survey of Pregnant Then Screwed's network, PTS and CPP commissioned YouGov to conduct a paid, nationally and politically representative survey of 2,136 adults to examine public opinion on paternity leave and the relationship between parental leave and mental health.³⁰

Parental leave entitlement and perinatal health

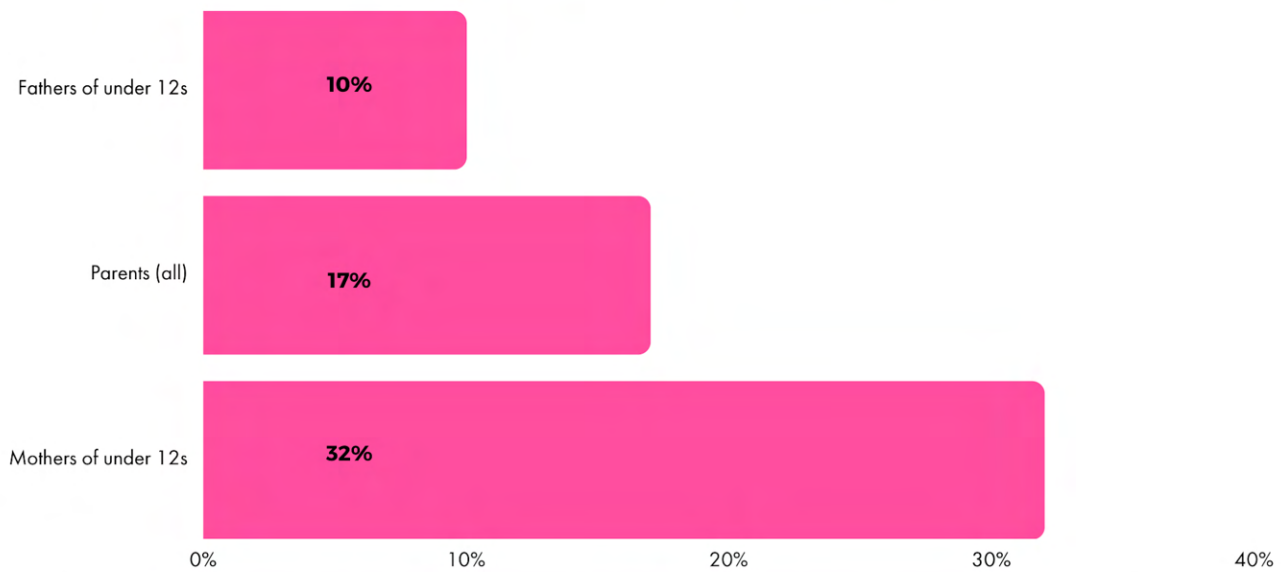
According to the survey, 17% of parents said they had experienced a new mental health problem in the two years following the birth of their youngest child. When asked about their partner's health as well as their own, 29% of parents said either they or their partner had experienced a new mental health issue with 11% saying that they or their partner had received support from the NHS.³¹

Worryingly, nearly half (45%) of parents who reported that they or their partner had experienced a new mental health issue reported having not received any form of treatment or support.

30 Figures from a nationally and politically representative poll of 2,136 adults in the UK, provided by YouGov. Fieldwork dates: 22-23 May 2023.

31 Based on a sub-sample of 1,219 parents from the YouGov poll for PTS & CPP.

Chart 4: Proportion who said they had experienced a new mental health issue in the two years after the birth or adoption of their most recent child³²



Perinatal mental health problems costs the NHS £1.2bn a year and the failure to address perinatal mental health problems costs even more – social costs are estimated to be around £8.1bn a year.³³ If mental health issues continue to affect parents when they return to work – and PTS’s SoN survey suggests that 53% of women and 63% of men are not mentally ready to return to work when they do – they will also likely have productivity impacts, as improving mental health has been consistently associated with higher productivity.³⁴

If mental health issues continue to affect parents when they return to work ... they will also likely have productivity impacts, as improving mental health has been consistently associated with higher productivity.

32 Data from a YouGov survey commissioned by Pregnant then Screwed & The Centre for Progressive Policy and carried out online between 22nd and 23rd May 2023. Total sample size was 2,136 adults and figures have been weighted to be representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). This question was asked to parents, excluding those who refused; n=1219.

33 Public Health England (2019) *Guidance 4. Perinatal mental health*. Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-mental-health-jsna-toolkit/4-perinatal-mental-health>

34 Ziggs, I. et al. (2022) *Economics of mental wellbeing: A prospective study estimating associated productivity costs due to sickness absence from the workplace in Denmark*. *Mental Health & Prevention*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhp.2022.200247>

The notion that increasing statutory paternity leave would improve mothers' mental health is widely supported across the UK population: our YouGov survey shows 71% of people thought that it would have a positive impact, rising to 83% for mothers of under 12s.³⁵ Similar proportions thought that increasing statutory paternity leave would improve mother's physical health. A high proportion of mothers with children under the age of 12 (65%) also said that increasing statutory paternity leave would have a positive impact on a mother's readiness to return to work.

How long should paternity leave be?

Our nationally and politically representative YouGov survey found that 79% of those eligible to take paternity leave currently take two or fewer weeks of parental leave, including 22% who take no time off work at all.³⁶ Yet most (62%) second parents who took at least some leave said that they would have taken longer off work if statutory paternity pay had been higher.

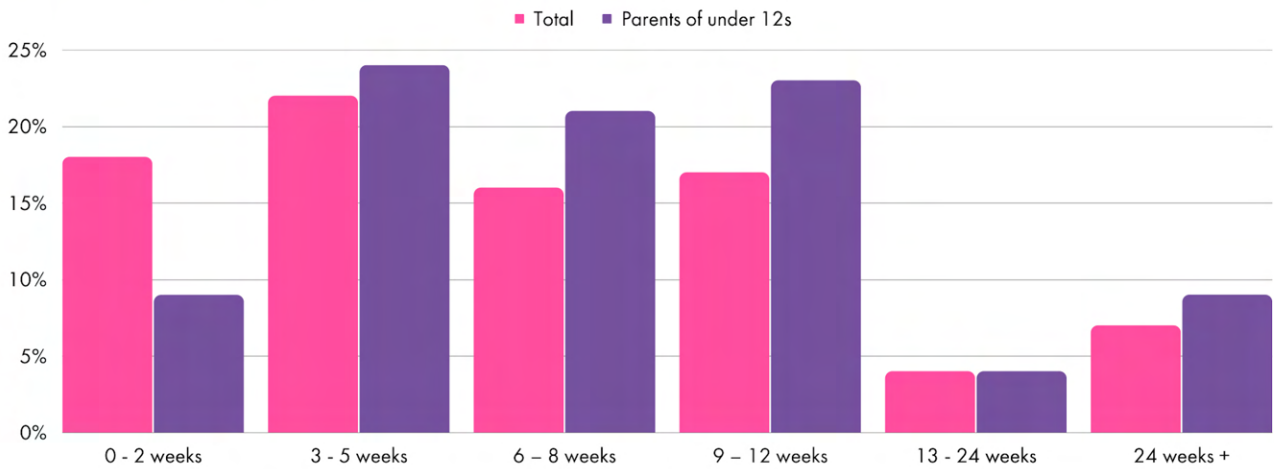
There is widespread public support for increasing the statutory period of paid paternity leave beyond two weeks. Of all the people we surveyed, 44% thought the entitlement should be 6 weeks or longer, while one in four (26%) thought it should be at least 12 weeks. These proportions rise for parents with children under the age of 12 to 57% for at least 6 weeks and 32% for at least 12 weeks, with just 9% of these parents with children under the age of 12 saying that those eligible to take paternity leave should be entitled to two or fewer weeks of paid leave.³⁷

35 Based on a sub-sample of 215 mothers with children under the age of 12 from the YouGov poll for PTS & CPP

36 Based on a sub-sample of 362 self-identified second parents from the YouGov poll for PTS & CPP.

37 Based on a sub-sample of 397 parents with children under the age of 12 from the YouGov poll for PTS & CPP.

Chart 5: Public opinion on how long the statutory period of non-transferable paid paternity leave should be in weeks³⁸

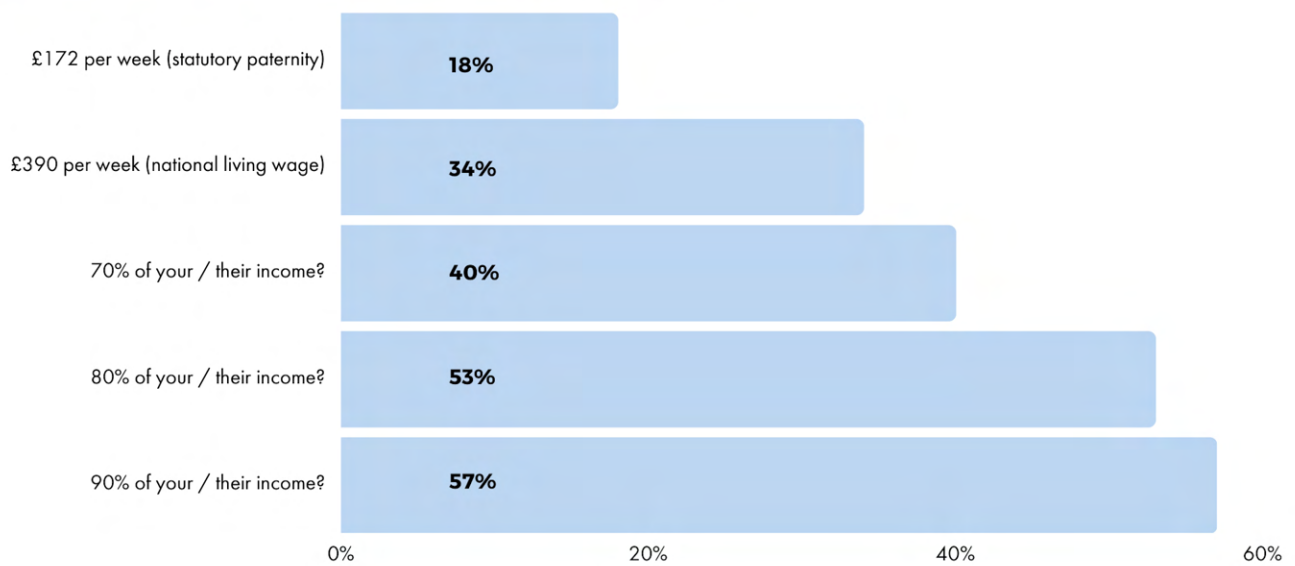


To ensure that those eligible are actually able to take their paternity leave entitlement, our YouGov survey finds that it must be paid at a higher rate. Currently, the statutory weekly rate for paternity pay is £172 a week, 44% of the national living wage, which is approximately £390 a week. Our YouGov survey finds that fewer than one in five (18%) prospective parents could afford to take 6 weeks of parental leave at that rate of pay. By contrast, 57% of prospective parents said they or their partners would take 6 weeks of paternity leave if it was paid at 90% of their income, as maternity pay is for women.³⁹

³⁸ Data from a YouGov survey commissioned by Pregnant then Screwed & The Centre for Progressive Policy and carried out online between 22nd and 23rd May 2023. Total sample size was 2,136 adults and figures have been weighted to be representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

³⁹ Based on a sample of 252 people who said that they were likely to have a child at some point in the next 10 years.

Chart 6: Levels of pay that prospective parents say would enable them or their partner to take 6 or more weeks of paternity leave ⁴⁰



⁴⁰ Data from a YouGov survey commissioned by Pregnant then Screwed & The Centre for Progressive Policy and carried out online between 22nd and 23rd May 2023. Total sample size was 2,136 adults and figures have been weighted to be representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). This question was asked to those who are likely to have a child at some point in the next 10 years; n=252.

Policy recommendations

On the basis of the findings above, CPP and PTS call on the government to increase the length of paternity leave and to pay it at a higher rate to reduce financial hardship, support parental mental health, support gender equality in the labour market and boost productivity. CPP has previously recommended that parental leave policy in the UK is reformed based on the principles of improving statutory pay, guaranteeing non-transferable leave, sufficient time for non-transferable leave and enhancing existing maternity rights.⁴¹ We also reiterate previous calls for both national and local government to foster a culture where flexible working is more normalised for both men and women in order to encourage families to spread unpaid care responsibilities more evenly between parents and stop parents having to choose between childcare and a career.

Paid leave entitlement for fathers and partners

New international policy analysis suggests that a paid leave entitlement for fathers of over 6 weeks can reduce gender inequality in the labour market. Our survey findings suggest that increasing fathers' and partners' statutory paid leave entitlement, and paying this at a higher rate, would encourage UK fathers and partners to take more parental leave. This is in line with the experiences of countries like Sweden that offer a 'father quota' of 90 days of non-transferable parental leave paid at 78% of earnings and has seen fathers' take up of parental leave days rise from 12% of all available days in 2002 to 30% in 2021.⁴²

The leave entitlement reserved for fathers and partners in the UK is very low at just 2 weeks and by law this only has to be paid at the statutory rate which is currently £172 a week, less than half the national living wage, which is approximately £390 a week. Our YouGov survey finds that fewer than one in five (18%) prospective parents could afford to take 6 weeks of parental leave at that rate of pay.

PTS and CPP recommend that the length of statutory paternity leave is increased to at least 6 consecutive weeks available to all fathers and partners and paid at 90% of income as a minimum in line with the offer available to women, whilst also enhancing current statutory maternity benefits.

41 Hochlaf, D. & Billingham Z. (2021) *What Women Want* [CPP]. Available at <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/what-women-want>

42 Duvander, A. & Löfgren, N. (2022) *International Network on Leave Policies and Research Annual Reviews: Sweden* [Stockholm University and Mid Sweden University]. Available at:

https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/country_notes/2022/Sweden2022.pdf

CPP has previously recommended that paternity leave policy in the UK is reformed based on the principles of improving statutory pay, guaranteeing non-transferable leave, sufficient time for non-transferable leave and enhancing existing maternity rights.⁴³

Flexible working policies

Leaving the details and enforcement of flexible working policies to businesses is perpetuating gender inequalities in the workplace and also having a disproportionate impact on younger and local income parents who are less likely to have their requests for flexible working approved. When working parents, particularly women, are forced to choose between childcare and a career, their economic potential can be damaged.

CPP and PTS therefore call on the government to implement policies which will improve access to flexible working for all.

CPP has previously recommended that the government requires all employers to consider flexible working arrangements for all new applicants, compel job advertising sites that host at least 20,000 job adverts per year to include options for flexibility as a prompt during the design stage of the job adverts and expand access to training and development for management and leadership teams to help them understand how to positively respond to flexible working requests and foster a culture where flexible working is more normalised.⁴⁴

43 Hochlaf, D. & Billingham Z. (2021) What Women Want [CPP]. Available at <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/what-women-want>

44 ibid

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All errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.

About the Centre for Progressive Policy

The Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP) is an economics think tank that champions inclusive economic growth. We publish research, analysis and practical policy solutions to make this model of growth a reality, working with local and national partners. www.progressive-policy.net/

About Pregnant Then Screwed

Pregnant Then Screwed is the voice of working mothers in the UK. We want a society in which pregnant women and mothers in all their diversity are enabled to fulfil their potential, creating a stronger, happier, better future for us all.

We provide world class advice and support to mothers to help them improve their confidence and wellbeing, to give them the tools they need to challenge discrimination in the workplace, and to find work that works for them. We advocate for change and raise awareness of the specific challenges faced by working mothers. We challenge deeply entrenched stereotypes about the role of mothers in society.

About Women in Data®

Women in Data® is a global movement committed to tackling the gender imbalance in the Data, Analytics and Tech industries. Today male analysts and data scientists outnumber their female colleagues 4 to 1. Addressing this imbalance isn't just the right thing to do ethically, it also makes business sense. Data shows that workplace satisfaction and business profitability significantly improve when organisations strive for greater diversity and inclusivity.

Women in Data® enables data professionals at all levels to share their knowledge and experience, as well as working with businesses to help them embrace the enormous advantages generated by diversity. Not only is Women in Data® supporting individuals and businesses on their diversity journey, we also harness the experience and passion of our community to effect societal change.

For these reasons we are proud to partner with PTS on this important initiative.

