

Coalition For Quality Flexible Work

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Fact Sheet 4 : Why is flexible work good for families and children?

Flexible working hours are good for employers and good for employees. There are also huge benefits for families and children. New Zealanders are working longer hours and it is now the norm for both parents to work. Juggling family and work responsibilities can put stress on parents and on children.

Parents Centre support for flexible working hours

Viv Gurrey, Chief Executive Parents Centre says: "The stress of attempting to work full time and balance family responsibilities is taking a significant toll on families being the best that they can be. As two parent working families are normalised, and more parents are in the workforce, many employees say they feel under constant stress. This is having a debilitating effect on their lives and those of their families. It has a debilitating effect on how we raise the next generation of New Zealanders and on society as a whole."¹

Families Commission support for flexible working hours

The Families Commission kōmihana ā whānau says:²

- Families and whanau with working parents/carers are facing a "time squeeze" as they struggle to find enough time for themselves and their families.
- New Zealanders face some particular challenges in trying to balance their working lives with their family and caring responsibilities.
- Average working hours are high compared to other countries and the number of people working very long hours (50+ hours a week) has been rising.
- Some employers offer flexibility but others do not.
- Single parents, those on low incomes and shift workers often face additional challenges.
- There is growing international recognition of the social and economic benefits of flexible working arrangements.³

Good for working parents

A recent on-line survey conducted by the Equal Employment Trust found that the most important factor to help working parents is flexible start and finish times.⁴

- 82% of respondents not in paid work and 75% in paid work rated flexible start and finish times as very important in helping parents who work

¹ Parents Centre Inc., submission for Department of Labour consultation on quality flexible work, December 2006

² Family Focus 2, Families Commission Kōmihana ā Whānau, December 2006

³ Family Focus 2, Families Commission Kōmihana ā Whānau, December 2006

⁴ New Zealand Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, *Parenting and Paid Work* – on-line survey analysis, October 2005

- 70% of respondents not in paid work and 60% of those in paid work rated ability to change working hours as very important in helping parents who work
- 55% of respondents not in paid work and 39% of those in paid work rated ability to work part time in normal occupation as very important in helping parents who work

Good for working fathers

International research shows men want to spend more time with their children than their fathers spent with them.⁵

Another survey conducted by the Equal Employment Trust found that:

- 80% of fathers generally wish they could spend more time with their children
- 82% think their paid work negatively affects the amount of time they spend with their children
- 52% think their paid work affects the quality of the time they spend with their children.

Asked how they wanted their workplace to help them be the sort of father they wanted to be the most popular answer was flexibility in terms of start and finish times, sometimes being able to work from home and sometimes being able to take time off during the day.

While most of the men who completed the survey were fathers, 126 were not. Of these, 82% wanted to have children in the future. When asked if they thought they could be the sort of father they wanted to be if they stayed in their current job, 55% said no.

Good for breastfeeding mothers and their children

- The *Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding* (WHO 2003) recommends breastfeeding exclusively for six months and continuing to breastfeed with the addition of solid foods to two years or beyond.
- As the current New Zealand paid maternity leave is for 14 weeks mothers are returning to work while still exclusively breastfeeding.
- The best protection for breastfeeding mothers and their babies is the enacting of legislation to give mothers the right to request flexibility in their work environments and the right to paid breastfeeding breaks.⁶

“I think we are pushed more and more into losing our free time to spend with family. After all we did have a family to enjoy their upbringing and to be part of their lives...”

Father response to EEO Trust on-line survey.

“Support from employer that you are balancing essentially two full-time jobs (kids and career work). Most of us try as hard as we can while working which is usually at some personal cost as one role doesn’t stop when the other resumes.”

A parent says what is needed to help working parents - EEO Trust on-line survey.

⁵ New Zealand Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, *What do Kiwi fathers really want?* - on-line survey analysis, 2003

⁶ La Leche League New Zealand, DOL consultation, 14 December 2006