

The Cityparents Member Survey – July 2015

Mind the Gap

Today Cityparents releases the results of a survey of over 1,100 working parents in City professions.

Foreword by Sarah Jackson OBE, Working Families

“Balancing family responsibilities with the demands of a career is a challenge, wherever a parent works. In striving for that balance, we are reminded daily that family life requires two currencies – not just money, but time, too. Our children thrive not just on what our wages can buy for them, but also on the time and attention which we can give them. And in the workplace, time is an important currency too. Time for considered decision-making, time to invest in relationships with clients and colleagues, time for personal wellbeing.

City careers can deliver great financial rewards but, as the Cityparents 2015 survey shows, this often comes with a huge time price-tag. Well over three quarters of respondents struggle to achieve a satisfactory work/life balance. Although flexible working now offers greater opportunity to improve the balance, many who are taking advantage of flexible or reduced hours working are concerned about the impact on their career.

A welcome indicator of how the City is changing is that, broadly, men and women are making equal use of flexible working arrangements. Where the difference remains stark is around full- and part-time working, where women are far more likely to be working part-time, and men far more likely to be working full-time. This may well explain why three times as many women as men worry that their flexible working arrangement is likely to impede their career path. Although 'flexible' is becoming more acceptable, 'part-time' still carries the unspoken assumption 'uncommitted'.

It is also striking how many men would like to work flexibly but have not asked. This reflects findings in other surveys, not least the Working Families annual Modern Families Index, which show that men are cautious about how much of their family life and responsibilities they share at work. This reticence is not cost-free. Modern Families Index shows that the employees least happy with their work/life balance are younger fathers; and that these men blame their employer. Resentful employees are not the fully engaged employees who deliver the highest performance. And so I urge City organisations to take this survey seriously. Many benefits flow from enabling personal balance for every employee, whether they have family responsibilities or not. Engagement and performance are driven not just by financial reward, but also by trust and autonomy – much of which is rooted in control over time, by that sense of personal balance which continues to be only an aspiration for too many City parents.”

Sarah Jackson is CEO of Working Families. Working Families is the UK's leading work/life balance organisation. The charity helps working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work. Leading Working Families' policy and parliamentary work, Sarah Jackson is the charity's key media and public spokesperson on all aspects of work/life balance. In 2007, Sarah was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to Quality of Life Issues.

Louisa Symington-Mills, founder of Cityparents, which encompasses the London-based networks Citymothers and Cityfathers, said today "Our survey shows that the majority of working mothers and fathers in City professions are still concerned with achieving a satisfactory work/life balance without sacrificing the ability to progress in their careers. According to our research, the picture is showing some early signs of improvement for fathers following the extension of flexible working rights and the introduction of shared parental leave over the past year, with more men saying they are taking advantage of employers' adoption of these family-friendly policies. However, working parents want more active support from employers to help them progress in their careers and many say that a change in the attitudes and support from line managers and peers is still overdue with firms paying little more than lip-service to the subject. Working parents across the City point to a significant gap between the formal policies offered and the way they are put into practice, suggesting that a tangible culture change is still some way off."

Key findings

- Achieving a satisfactory work/life balance is still the biggest challenge encountered by parents working in City professions (78% of Citymothers and 80% of Cityfathers responding). For women, maintaining career trajectory comes a close second (71%), whereas this is less of an issue for men (49%) who find the division of domestic duties with their spouse or partner more problematic (60%).
- 46% of Citymothers respondents described their employer's support of their maternity transition as either neutral or negative; one respondent noted that 'they say all the right things but don't do them in practice'.
- Our survey shows a higher take-up of paternity leave by working fathers, with 86% saying they have taken their full leave entitlement compared to 71% in 2014 and just 3% saying they took none of their Paternity Leave, down from 12% in 2014. Correspondingly, more working fathers say their employers are supporting their right to paternity leave than last year (71% of Cityfathers respondents vs 58% in 2014).
- Almost half of working fathers (47% of Cityfathers responding) say they would take up Shared Parental Leave rights, an increase of 10% since April 2014. However fewer working mothers (37% of Citymothers respondents) are in favour of sharing the care of a new child.
- Securing their employers' support has overtaken pay entitlements as the most important criteria for working fathers in deciding whether to take up Shared Parental Leave (68% of Cityfathers respondents), although pay is still a critical factor for both working fathers (65%) and mothers (62%).
- Following the introduction last year of flexible working rights for all, our survey results show a marked increase in the number of Cityfathers respondents saying they now have a flexible working arrangement in place (42%, up from 28% in 2014). However, 1 in 5 working fathers would still like to request flexible working but haven't yet asked for this. 75% of Citymothers respondents work flexibly.
- Overall, working mothers are more concerned about the impact of flexible working on their career progression than working fathers (68% of women responding vs 53% of men). However a marked increase in the number of working fathers now believe that it will take them more time to achieve their desired career path (44% in 2015 compared to 28% in 2014), possibly as a consequence of more fathers taking up flexible working.

- Both Citymothers and Cityfathers respondents would like their employers to put more effort into supporting their career progression as working parents. Both sets of respondents see this as a higher priority than allowing more flexible working.
- The vast majority of working mothers actively network to help advance their career (83% of Citymothers respondents), with informal conversations in the workplace being the most common route to doing this. However almost half of Citymothers respondents (49%) say they need to be more proactive in implementing their career goals.
- 29% of Citymothers and 32% of Cityfathers said their work/life balance was less than satisfactory; only 6% of Citymothers and 4% of Cityfathers rated it 'ideal'.
- Working fathers' experience to date of managing a career and a family has notably improved with 40% of fathers rating this as either 'positive' or 'very positive' now compared to 29% last year. Fewer working mothers agree (34%) and more mothers describe the experience as 'a struggle' compared to fathers (16% vs 11%). However half of all working parents still feel there is room for improvement.

About Citymothers & Cityfathers

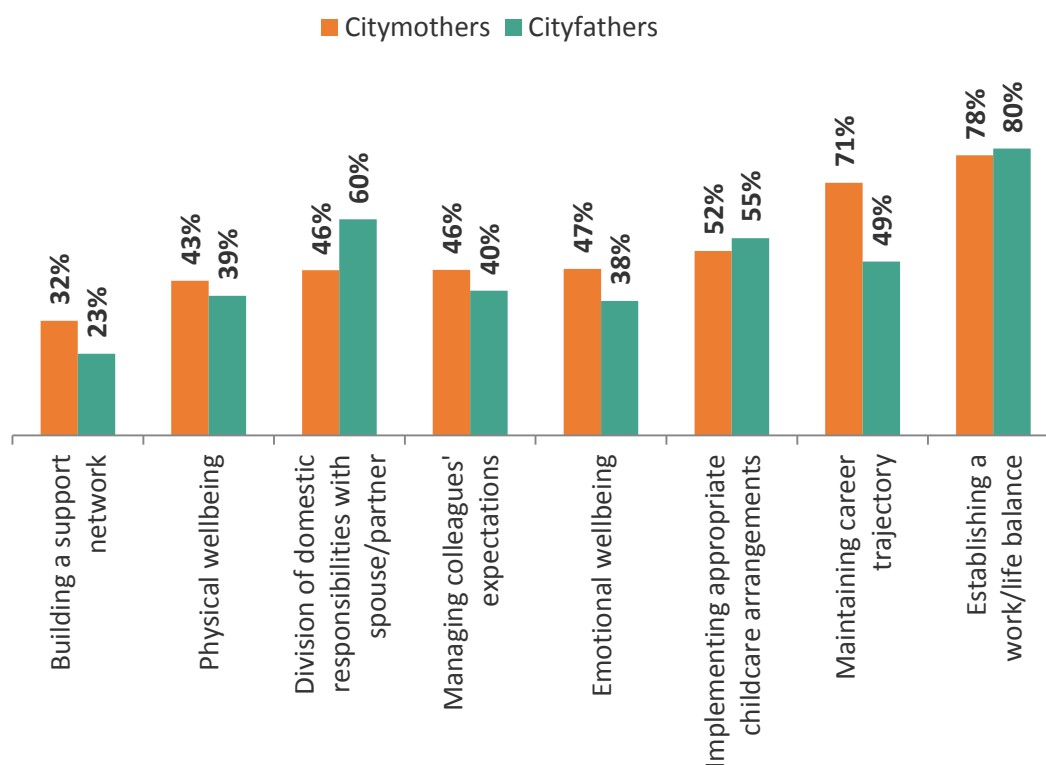
Citymothers (www.citymothers.co.uk) and Cityfathers are inclusive networks for City professionals who have a shared interest in balancing family life with a progressive career. The networks have over 6,800 members in London. Their aim is to provide peer support to those balancing careers and families; to help members maintain career trajectory; and to provide a schedule of informative networking events at family-friendly times covering topics relevant to working parents.

For information please contact Louisa Symington-Mills at louisa@citymothers.co.uk

Survey Methodology

This Survey of Citymothers and Cityfathers working in 'City' professions was conducted from 17-26 June 2015. It reflects the views of 1,113 respondents.

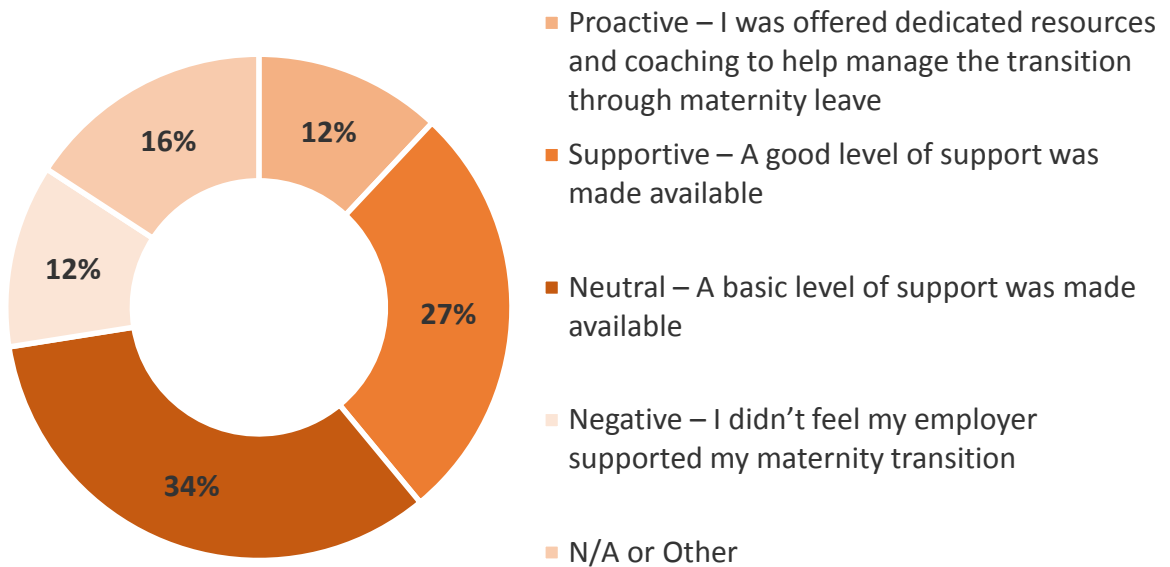
1. What key challenges, if any, have you encountered as a working parent in the City?



Selection of open text responses:

- Overcoming prejudices by some individuals towards working mothers, whether conscious or unconscious.
- Despite two good salaries, childcare/ education costs are unaffordable.
- Always feeling like I'm not spending long enough in the office but not spending long enough with the children.
- Working with a manager who is unsympathetic to flexible working arrangements, despite our bank's initiatives on this.
- Being taken seriously working part-time (4 days a week), lack of flexibility over working hours etc.
- Managing home/work/childcare around Spouse's employer's expectations (he also has a city profession), and the majority of his superiors assume he has someone at home full-time. We both dance around these expectations a lot.
- Dealing with childrens' schools/health professionals who expect mothers to drop everything to attend appointments, etc at short notice.
- Lack of appetite for flexible working.
- Now my children are older, getting back to career progression.

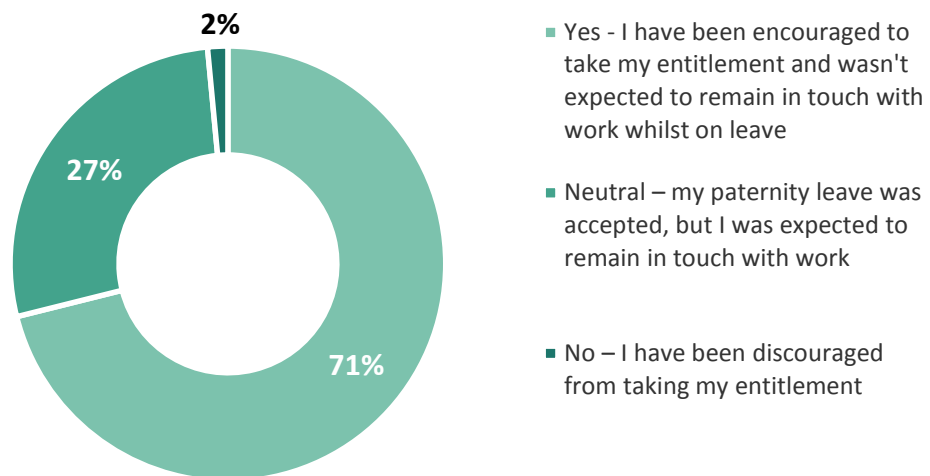
2. Citymothers – How would you describe your employer’s approach to your maternity transition?



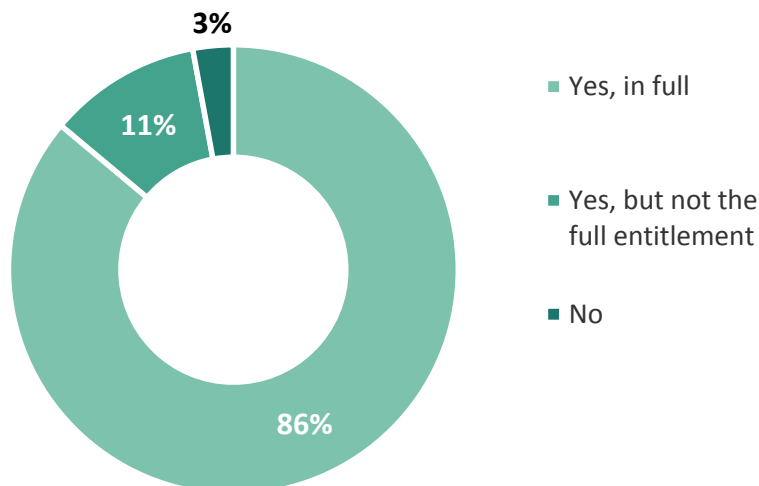
Selection of open text responses:

- Whilst the firm had maternity coaching in place, which was brilliant, the experience I had from colleagues and my function was not positive.
- Generally the support offered by my employer is good. However, I was subject to a specific incident in my team that resulted in my return experience being highly negative. I put that down to my new line manager not understanding or dealing with the issues in the team despite me raising them, as he was away from the office and wasn’t aware of what was going on and what my specific needs were.
- I couldn’t find the flexibility I wanted so set up my own business.
- Coaching was provided but it seemed to be a box ticking exercise.
- Negative – I was offered third party maternity coaching (which I took up) but very little active support from the employer in day to day work.
- Proactive in providing the tools externally, but not internally from the people I work with.
- Supportive but without practical help.

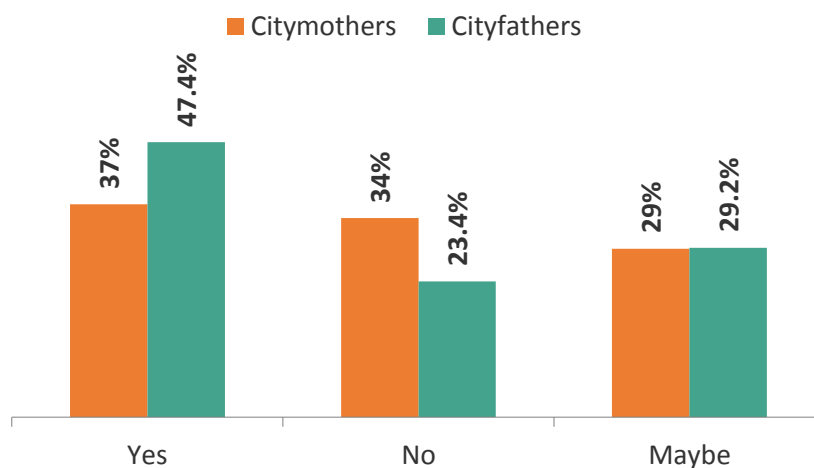
3. Cityfathers – do you feel your employer has supported your right to paternity leave?



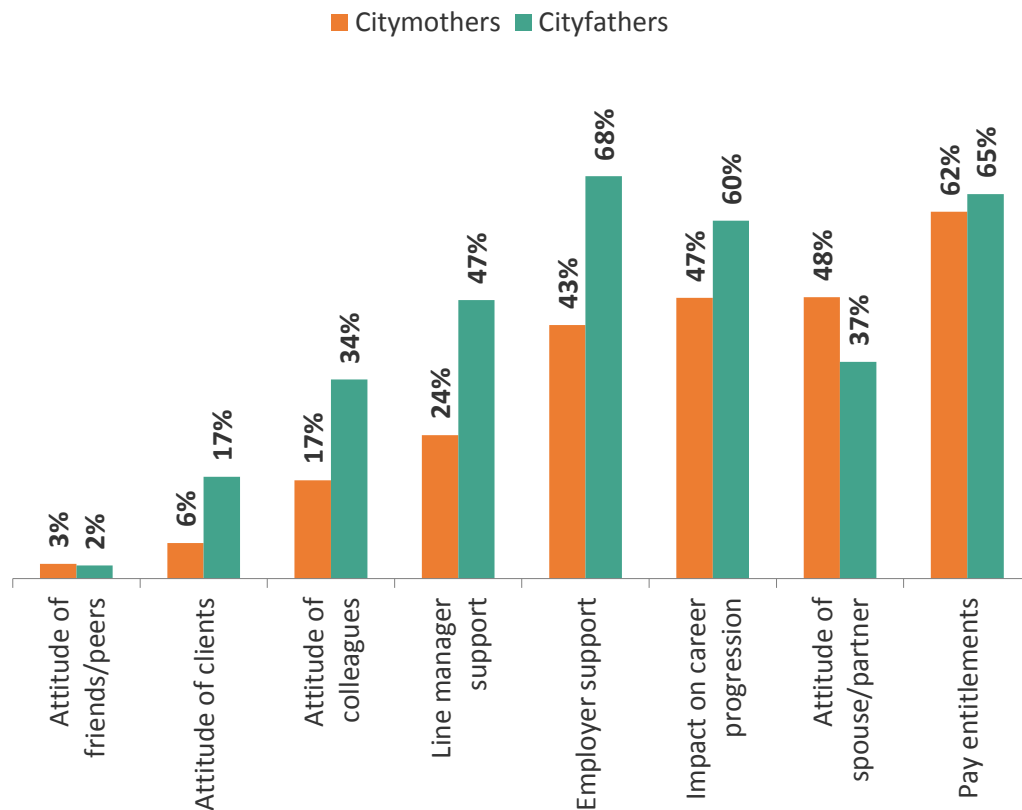
4. Cityfathers – Have you always taken the paternity leave you were entitled to?



5. Would you consider taking sharing parental leave with your partner under the new Shared Parental Leave rules, if you were to have another child?



6. What factors would influence your decision to take Shared Parental Leave? Please select all that apply:



Selection of open text responses (Citymothers):

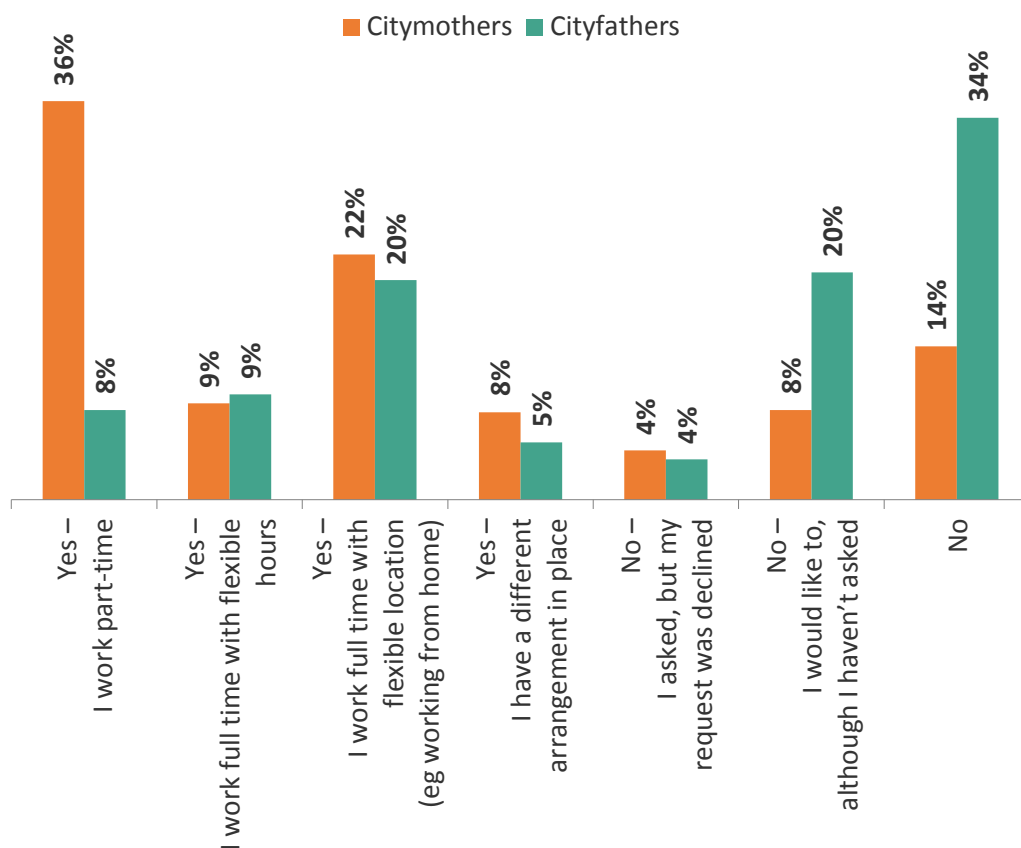
- I would not take it as I'd like to breastfeed – expressing is more time consuming and not as effective.
- Attitude of husband's employer – it is a financial services firm that is not supportive of paternal leave.
- I want to be at home with the children. My husband's career is more important to him than mine is to me.
- Wouldn't want to lose nanny and couldn't afford to keep her on.
- Mainly my spouse's employer's attitude.
- Attitude of spouses employer and subsequent career progression.
- Attitude of husband's company! As a mother it's expected, harder for him.
- Impact on exclusive breastfeeding.
- Most firms in the City offer enhanced mat leave and pay, divergences on how that is being extend to pat leave and pay.
- Would not be an option for us given spouse's job and comparative pay levels.

6. Continued:

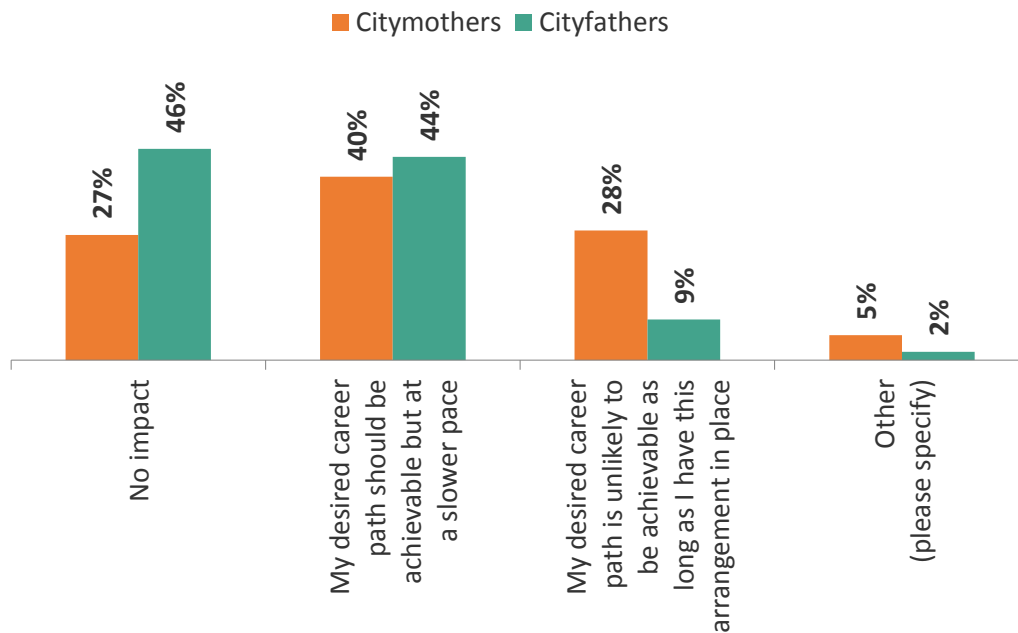
Selection of open text responses (Cityfathers):

- My wife's career would be massively impacted compared to mine if she were to take another extended break.
- Timing of leave – ability to use flexibly.
- In all honesty I would rather be at work than undertaking childcare all day.
- Attitude of other parents we know (as distinct from friends/peers).
- Financial consideration being the most important one: would I get enhanced pay equal to the maternity pay.
- I'd of course like the support of all but my family have to have priority in these extremely important decisions.

7. Do you currently have a flexible working arrangement in place?



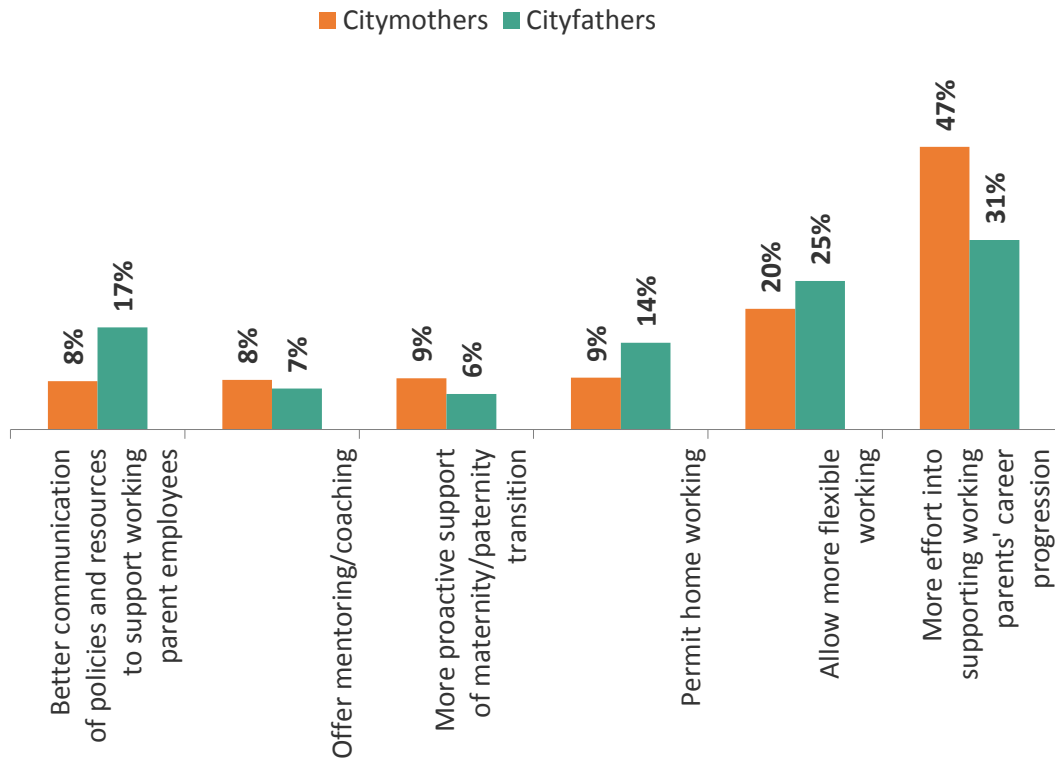
8. If you have a flexible working arrangement in place, what impact do you think it will have on your desired career progression?



Selection of open text responses:

- I might have to give this up if I want to progress, depending on my (new) line manager. I am therefore put off trying for progression.
- I hope achievable, but may need to work harder to ensure this.
- I doubt I will progress but this is probably a good thing as being a partner would take up more time.
- I have to work harder on networking to ensure effort does not go unnoticed.
- In reality it is me slowing down career progression. My work involves a lot of travel as I work in an international bank. All senior jobs are global so minimising travel is the biggest restriction on my progression.
- Difficult to tell but feels unachievable at the moment.
- My career has progressed but my flexible arrangement is routinely run roughshod over.
- Officially I work one day a week from home, but in reality it only happens once a month. i.e. I have to sacrifice the arrangement I would like to ensure it doesn't affect my career progression. Even doing this I think I won't eliminate the bias entirely.
- Not much impact but probably only because I hardly ever use my right to work from home.
- I didn't have a career route within the company per se, but I definitely feel that I am overlooked for certain projects that I feel would still be achievable given my flexible arrangements.
- This role means there is limited career progression from here but on the upside it offers much better life/work balance.
- I have had to move off the career path in order to get this arrangement.

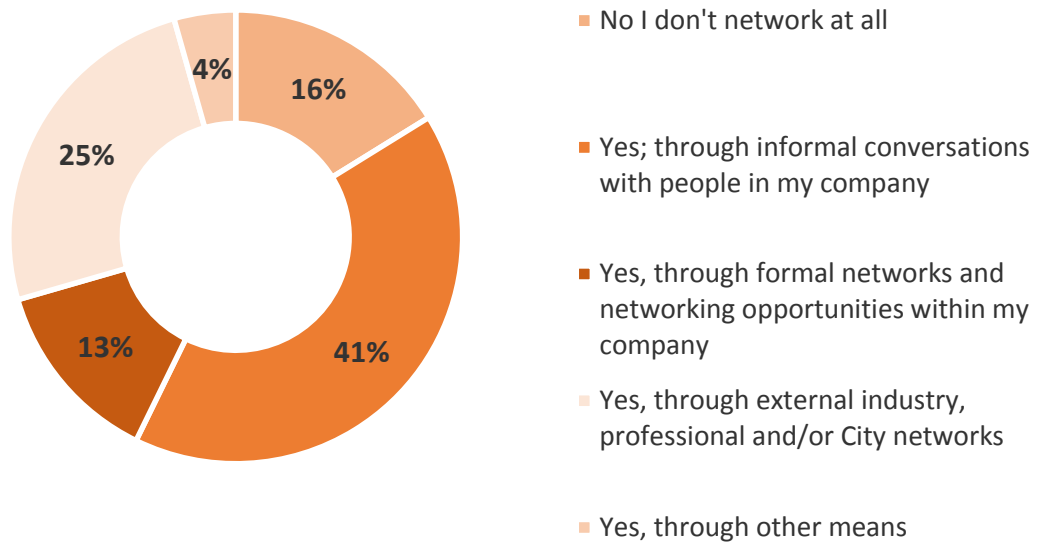
9. What is the one thing your company could do to support you better?



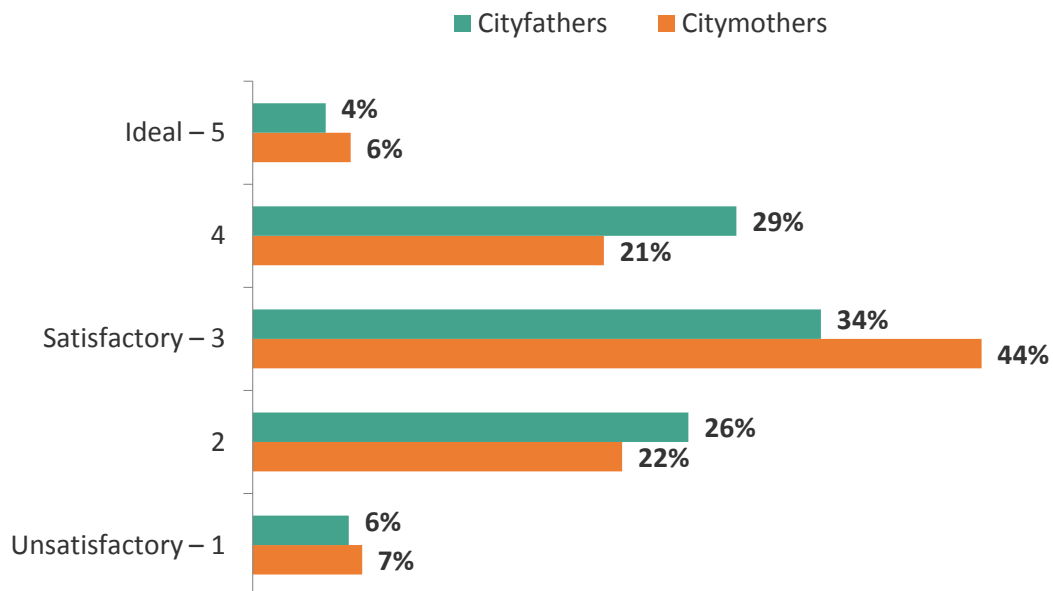
Selection of open text responses:

- Support all parents with flexibility, not just the returning mothers. Fathers need flexibility too to allow mothers to stay in career.
- Reduce unconscious bias across the organisation.
- Although the resources are generally very good, it sometimes depends on managers proactiveness (or not) as to whether they are aware and make their direct reports aware.
- Shift to a greater focus on outputs than inputs.
- Really mean what the policies say and be proactive and realistic in supporting working parents.
- Encourage ALL employees to use flexible working, etc. – not just those with children. It should become part of the culture.
- Permit compressed hours.
- Quit making me feel guilty for working part-time.
- Support cultural change about working hours (e.g. leaving at 5pm isn't part-time!).
- More willingness to address corporate culture of long hours/work as no 1 priority. Technology for flexible/home working is good but culture needs to catch up.
- Not regard part-time workers as a sub-category of employee.

10. Citymothers – do you network to help advance your career, and if so, what kind of networking do you find most valuable?



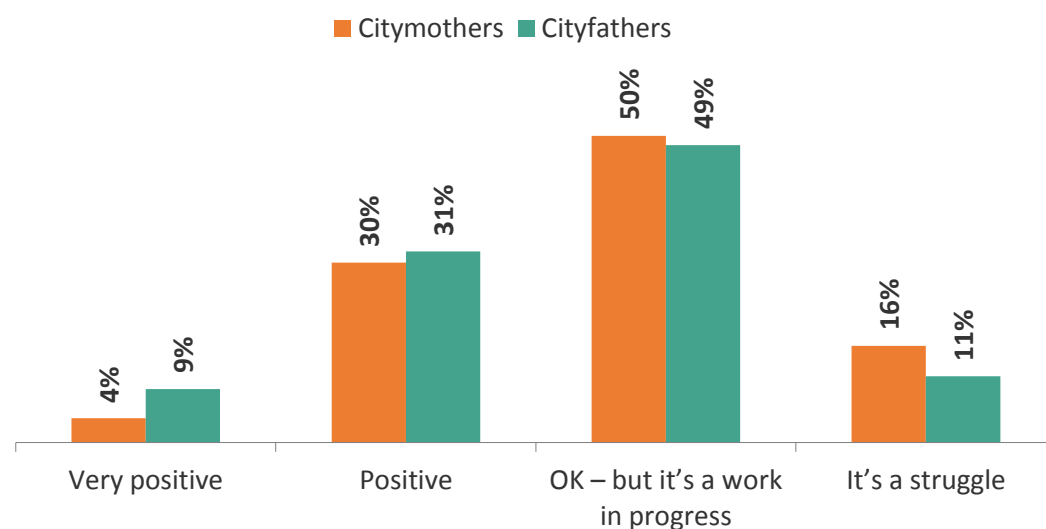
11. How would you rate your work/life balance? Please provide a score out of 5, with 5 meaning you have your ideal work/life balance; 3 meaning your work/life balance is satisfactory; and 1 meaning it is unsatisfactory.



Selection of open text responses:

- I would like to consistently see my kids at night and that doesn't happen.
- Not allowed to work at home except as a special occasion. Do relatively short hours but definitely impacts how I am viewed at work. I work full time again because I feel colleagues are not supportive of part time.
- We are expected to work extremely long hours so I end up working in the majority of my spare time – I have absolutely no time for myself and very little time to relax at all.
- I think what needs a balance is not work/life, but ambition/life balance, if one wants to develop in career, it is very hard to balance the 2.
- Don't feel it is a life – just an existence.
- I take the balance because I am senior and work independently but cannot judge how this is perceived at management level.
- Balance is right but with strains on both home & work life.
- My employer is unwilling to consider anything other than full time for those in support / back- office roles, even though it will accommodate them in business roles.
- Simply volume of work means too much evening and weekend working.
- Constantly feel like I'm not doing enough at work and not at home enough either.
- My current balance is pretty good, but that's because I make it that way – I think that may influence my immediate career progression because I'm not willing to disrupt that balance.
- My boss is amazingly understanding but it is thanks to him only that this works. The firm themselves aren't as supportive as he is.
- I have made professional/career choices which have closed many advancement doors (I will never be a partner) but which have made a decent work/life balance possible.
- Balance is definitely skewed towards work with life taking a back seat.

12. Overall, how would you rate your experience to date of managing a career and a family?



If you have any other comments to add, please do so here:

- Many employers, like mine have diversity policies in place and claim to support working mothers. The reality does not match what the policies say.
- My biggest challenge is the level of family responsibility I have compared to my husband despite us both working full time.
- Love all the Citymothers events. Best parent support and networking organisation that I've ever been involved in!
- I think it is essential to keep the highly visible conversation going.
- My perception is that very few people are able to find a satisfactory balance between work and home life because the demands of working in the City are now so great. In fact, I think they paint a pretty depressing picture. Unless there is a dramatic shift in expectations and for as long as there are ambitious competitors in the workplace who may not be as hamstrung by their non-work commitments (so can pull in longer hours etc.), it will increasingly become more difficult to balance being good working parents with working in a City profession. If I had my time again, I probably would not choose to work in this profession in the City.
- Attitudes in the City are still pretty behind those of other industries.
- I have a supportive husband, and flexible employer, and a great career. But the overarching stress of the kids wanting more time with mummy, never being at the school gates at 3pm, barely keeping up on requirements for school activities, and trying to maintain some level of personal time/social time, its difficult to find right balance, and its really not something that my employer can fix. I need to look to reduce working hours, which will reduce career growth, cut paycheck and pension contributions, so it's a challenging choice...but I know I'm not alone! Every mother/parent is trying to manage the same every day...
- I am a single mother of a teenager and people don't understand how much time teenagers still need from their mothers! I am often asked to work outside office hours.
- It is hard, but I don't admit failure on this, I'm working on it and managing it. Some days I really felt I've had enough but most days I encourage myself to carry on. I think my life would have been much easier if I just accept no career progress for a few years. Juggling among 3 full time jobs is exhausting: full time mum, full time housewife, full time work! We have no help from families, it took me some time to get to the agreement with my husband to share the evening duties so I don't leave office everyday at 5. People think you leave early rather than I'm starting my 2nd job after leaving office. I would not say I've found my balance yet, as I'm still ambitious with my career. This is why I say that needs to be managed is not work/life balance, but ambition/life balance. Thank you.
- Some senior men buy into the issues but are unwilling to accept that it can work in their business. This can be a real blocker to progress.
- My career progression has stalled since having children. I don't think it's a coincidence. I work as hard (or harder) than I ever did.

- I'd go further than your survey allows to the point of saying it is almost impossible to be a working father these days. Society in London has evolved to the point where both partners share the childcare equally (I don't have issue with this) but only females are supported in the workplace. Positive discrimination is also alive and kicking in the industry where working moms are promoted and rewarded on the basis they are working moms and not on merit or ability to do the role. If I had the option of having children again now, knowing how unsupported in the workplace I would be, I wouldn't bother.
- The level of pay during parental leave should be increased (but to be paid by the state not the employer). Need to change the culture of men taking parental leave during first few years of the child – the more it becomes acceptable/standard the more it will help women (all women whether or not they have children) to get on/climb up the career ladders if she so wishes.
- The biggest challenge is the disparity between peer acceptance of a man leaving the office to see his children/pick them up when ill and a woman. Businesses talk a good game but in reality it is always taken into account.
- Until companies (I work in asset management) open up to flexible working, they will lose valuable staff.
- Until bonuses are affected by diversity scoring nothing much will change. It's a bit like attending a naughty driver's course – you go only because you are avoiding points and with much protesting in your head about why you shouldn't be there but when you have finished you acknowledge completely the worth of the subject matter and you change your behaviours.
- One key issue after maternity for me is that there is no opportunity for career progression for me at my current workplace working part time, but I can't move as no one seems to offer part time roles. People seem to be able to negotiate them on return from mat leave, but if you want to move you are stuck.
- In my experience there is still a large policy and practice gap. Employers keen to promote family friendly policy but implementation at the local level is rooted in old attitudes.
- Generally there seems to be a focus on the challenge of having a child and returning to work. I think that is fairly well provided for though maternity leave. The real challenge is managing the different needs of growing children, school, homework, school holidays etc. This is a stage in your career for which there is no support at all and it isn't amenable to a formal flexible working pattern because it changes week to week. Especially when you have lots of children, perhaps at different schools.
- I believe the challenge is multiplied where both parents work full time. I find it is often assumed that my wife doesn't work (she works full time), also that if a mother with young children is asked to travel, then more consideration is given, whereas if a father with small children is asked to travel, much less consideration is given.
- Experience is positive largely due to the supportive nature of the organisation I work for and the mature attitude of my bosses and peers – not always been as good as it is now – but when it is all in place – it works for everyone.

- Work/life balance in a city law firm is a myth. In transactional situations, client demands go unchecked by partners desperate to secure any work, no matter how ridiculous the deadline. Anyone who is not willing or able to work 24/7 (whether due to childcare, other commitments or even health) is considered a deadweight and managed out eventually. This is as true for men as it is for women in my experience over the past 11 years. Law firms supporting networks like Citymothers do so to pay lip service to issues their employees are crying out to be heard on, whilst internally refusing regular flexible working requests and creating unsustainable career demands for those who dare to have children or anything else in their lives before reaching partnership. The fact it is unlikely to ever change, no matter how hard the employees try to prove alternative arrangements can work is the most depressing thing about it.
- One of the biggest challenges I find is managing the mindset of those around me (particularly senior level men) who don't always fully understand the demands of full-time working mothers (with partners that also work) and the difficulties of balancing work/life, while still wanting to be ambitious.