

Article

Families and the labour market, England: 2017

How the employment of men and women aged 16 to 64 years with children has changed over the past two decades and what the current picture looks like.

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1 . Main points

- The employment rate of mothers in England has increased by 11.8 percentage points to 73.7% between 1996 and 2017; however, mothers aged between 16 and 49 are still less likely to be in employment than women without dependent children of the same age.
- 1.1 million (75.2%) inactive or unemployed mothers stated they would definitely or probably return to work in the future.
- Mothers with a youngest dependent child aged three or four years old have the lowest employment rate of all adults with or without dependent children (65.1%).
- Mothers with children aged between 1 and 12 years old are more likely to be in part-time employment than full-time employment.
- As couple families have more children, the likelihood of both parents working full-time decreases.
- 1.8 million couple families split employment so that the father is in full-time work and the mother in part-time work; this is the most common way that families in England organise their economic activity.

2 . Things you need to know

The analysis in this article is based on men and women aged 16 to 64 living in England.

Estimates have been produced using the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS) household datasets. This means that some estimates may differ from other published labour market estimates, which are based on person datasets.

Respondents in this article are classified as parents if they have dependent children living with them in the same household. Parents whose children do not live with them, or parents whose children do not live with them as their usual residence, are not classified as parents for the purpose of this analysis.

Dependent children are those living with their parent(s) and either aged under 16, or aged 16 to 18 in full-time education. Children aged 16 to 18 who have a spouse, partner or child living in the household are not classified as dependent children.

Throughout this article we refer to mothers and fathers, these are mothers and fathers who have dependent children.

3 . Introduction

At the beginning of September 2017, the [government's 30 hours free childcare offer for working parents in England](#) was launched. One of its aims is to support parents who wish to work, or to work more hours.

The analysis presented here shows how the employment of men and women with children has changed over the past two decades and what the current picture looks like. It also provides an insight into how families with children organise their economic activity.

4 . Employment rate for mothers increased by 11.8 percentage points over the past 2 decades

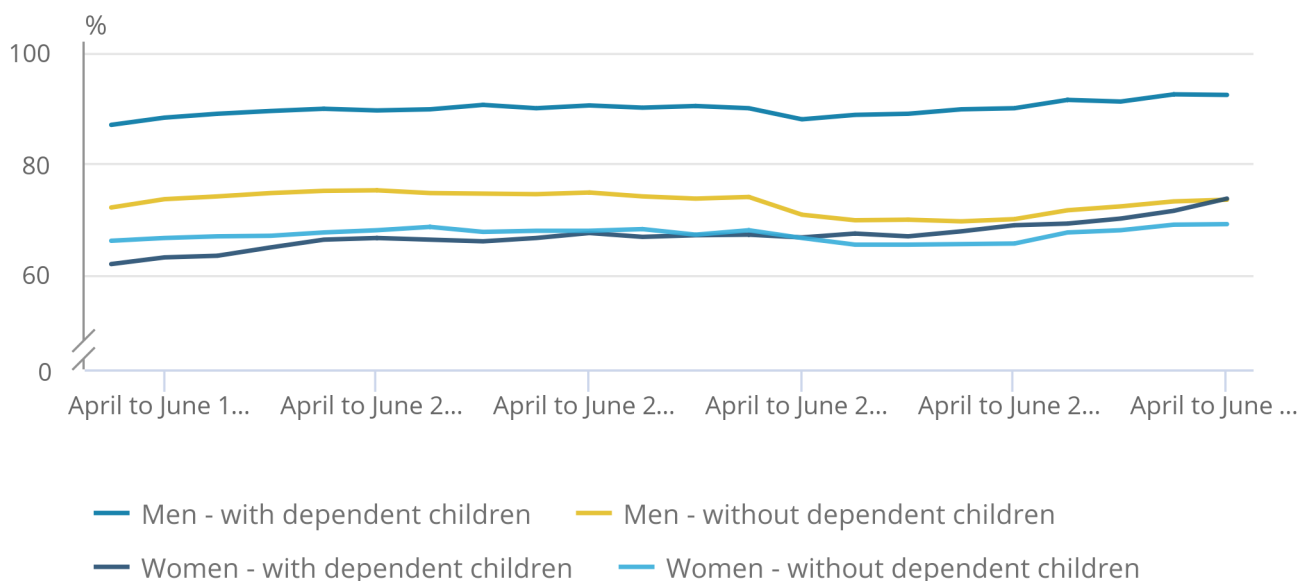
Employment rates for mothers and fathers generally increased between 1996 (when the series begins) and 2017. Although there was a fall in the employment rate for fathers at the beginning of the economic downturn in 2009, it recovered to pre-downturn levels by 2013.

For men and women without dependent children, employment rates were fairly stable during the 2000s. They declined more sharply in 2009 and took longer to recover than mothers and fathers. The employment rate for women without children returned to pre-downturn levels in 2015; however, the latest data for April to June 2017 show that the employment rate for men without dependent children has still not reached pre-downturn levels.

Figure 1 shows that over the past 20 years, mothers with dependent children have experienced the largest increase in employment rates. There are currently 4.9 million mothers in employment, which equates to 73.7% of all mothers. In comparison, 3.7 million mothers were in employment in 1996, which was equivalent to 61.9%.

Figure 1: Employment rates of men and women with and without dependent children (aged 16 to 64), April to June 1996 to April to June 2017, England

Figure 1: Employment rates of men and women with and without dependent children (aged 16 to 64), April to June 1996 to April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

5 . Mothers aged under 50 are less likely to be in employment than women under 50 without dependent children – the opposite is true for men

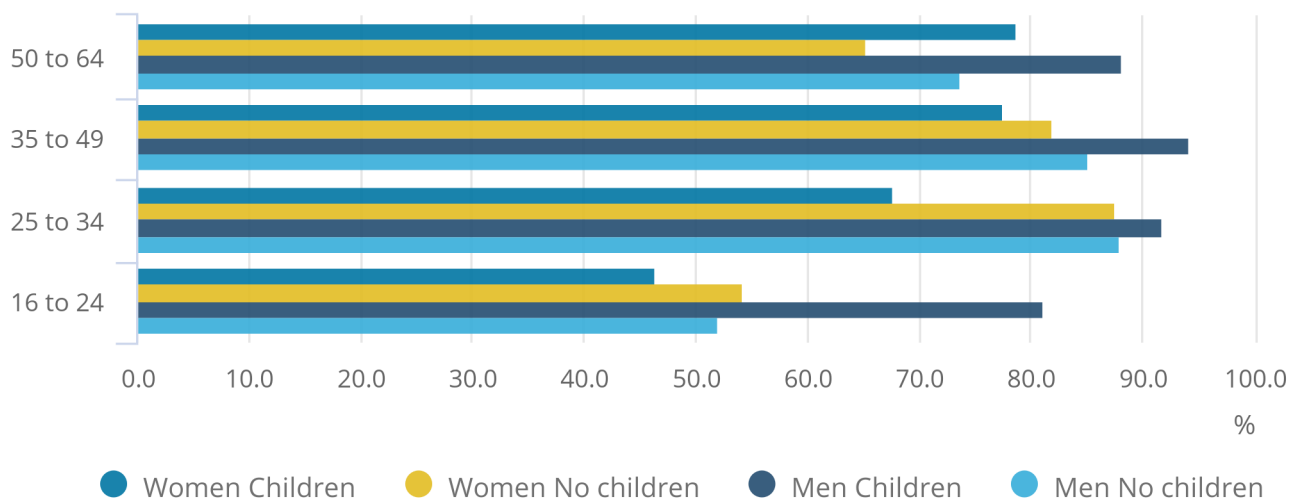
Mothers aged 16 to 49 are less likely to be in employment than women without dependent children of the same age (Figure 2). In the period April to June 2017, there are 116,000 mothers aged between 16 and 24 years old in employment. This is less than half (46.4%) of mothers in this age group. This is in contrast to over four in five (81.2%) fathers aged between 16 and 24 being in employment, however, there are only 74,000 fathers aged 16 to 24, of whom 60,000 were in employment.

Fathers are more likely to be in employment than men without dependent children and this is the case across all adult age groups. In the youngest age group (16 to 24) just over a third (33.5%) of men with no dependent children are students (around 1 million) and in older age groups (35 and over), more men without children are inactive due to long-term sickness and disability than men with children.

As mothers get older, employment rates increase. This is likely due to the fact their children are getting older and entering full-time primary and secondary education, which often makes it easier for parents to work.

Figure 2: Employment rates of men and women with and without dependent children (aged 16 to 64) by age group, April to June 2017, England

Figure 2: Employment rates of men and women with and without dependent children (aged 16 to 64) by age group, April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

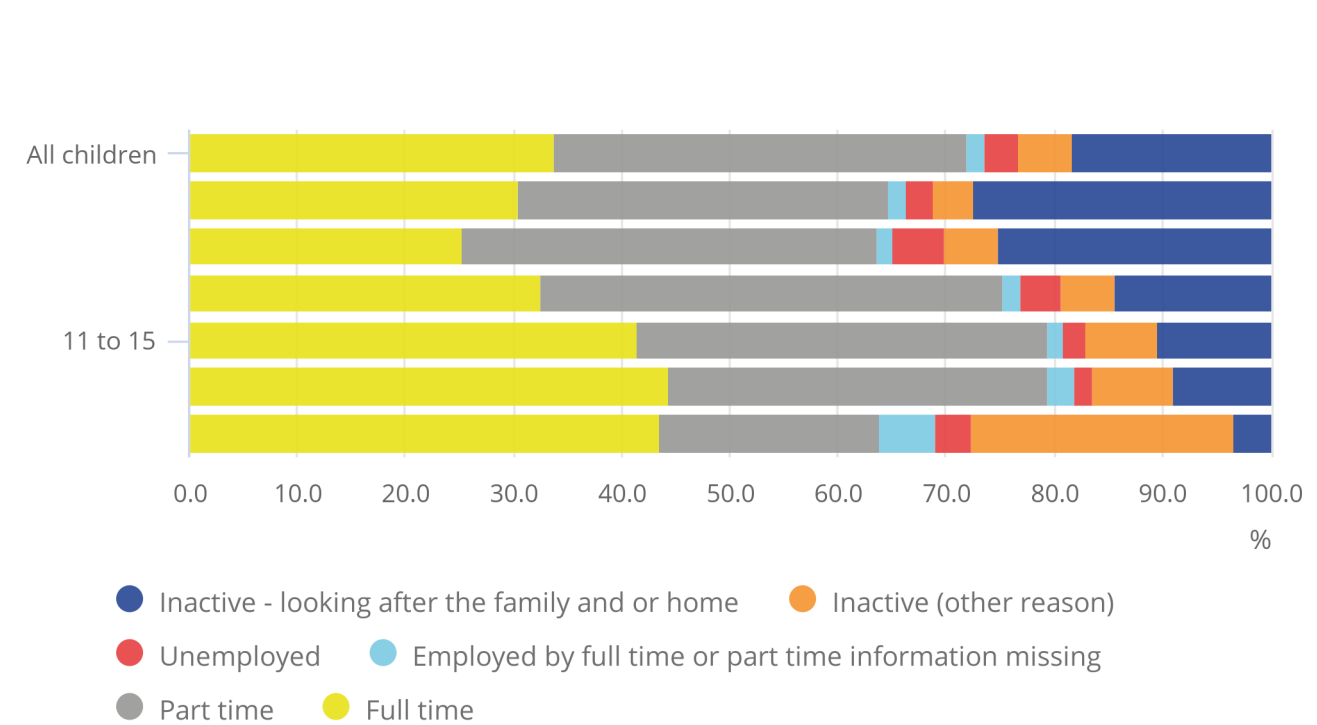
6 . Mothers with a youngest child aged between three and four years old have the lowest employment rate of all adults with or without children and are the most likely group to work part-time

Women with children aged between three and four years old have the lowest employment rate (65.1%) and of these women, 58.7% work part-time (Figure 3).

Mothers are more likely to be in part-time work when their youngest dependent child is aged under 11. When children join secondary school, mothers are more likely to be in full-time work, as childcare responsibilities may no longer be such an issue.

Figure 3: Economic activity of women (aged 16 to 64) by age group of youngest dependent child, including the percentage who work full or part time, April to June 2017, England

Figure 3: Economic activity of women (aged 16 to 64) by age group of youngest dependent child, including the percentage who work full or part time, April to June 2017, England

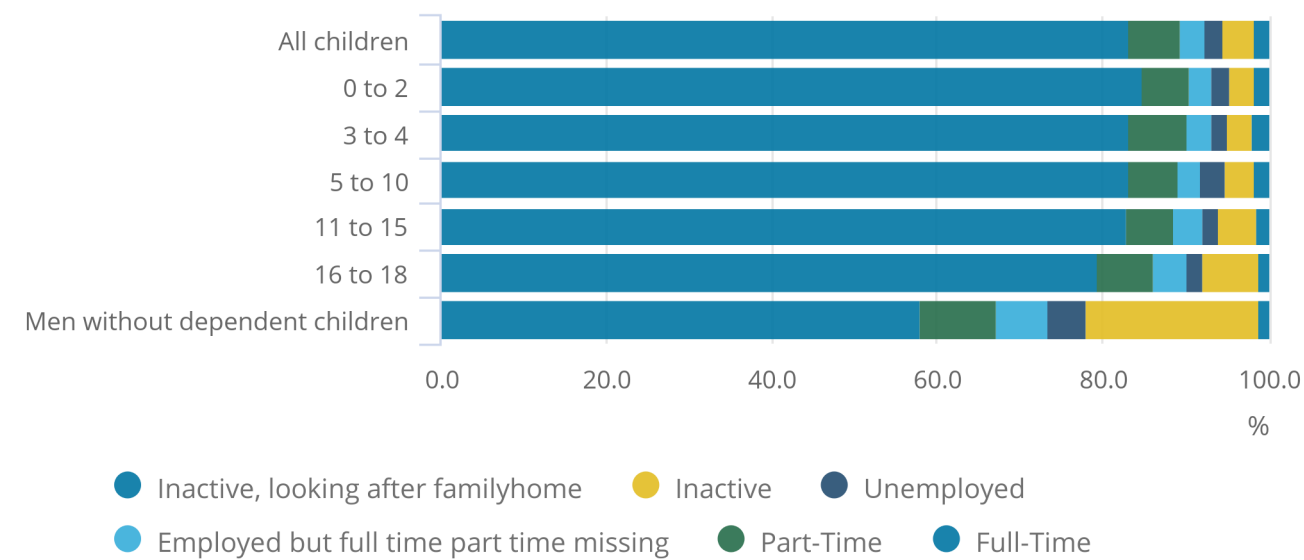


Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

Men on the other hand are always more likely to work full-time than part-time, irrespective of whether they have children or not, and the age of their youngest dependent child. Fathers have a very high employment rate across all age groups of children (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Economic activity of men (aged 16 to 64) by age group of youngest dependent child, including the percentage who work full or 'part time', April to June 2017, England

Figure 4: Economic activity of men (aged 16 to 64) by age group of youngest dependent child, including the percentage who work full or 'part time', April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

Notes:

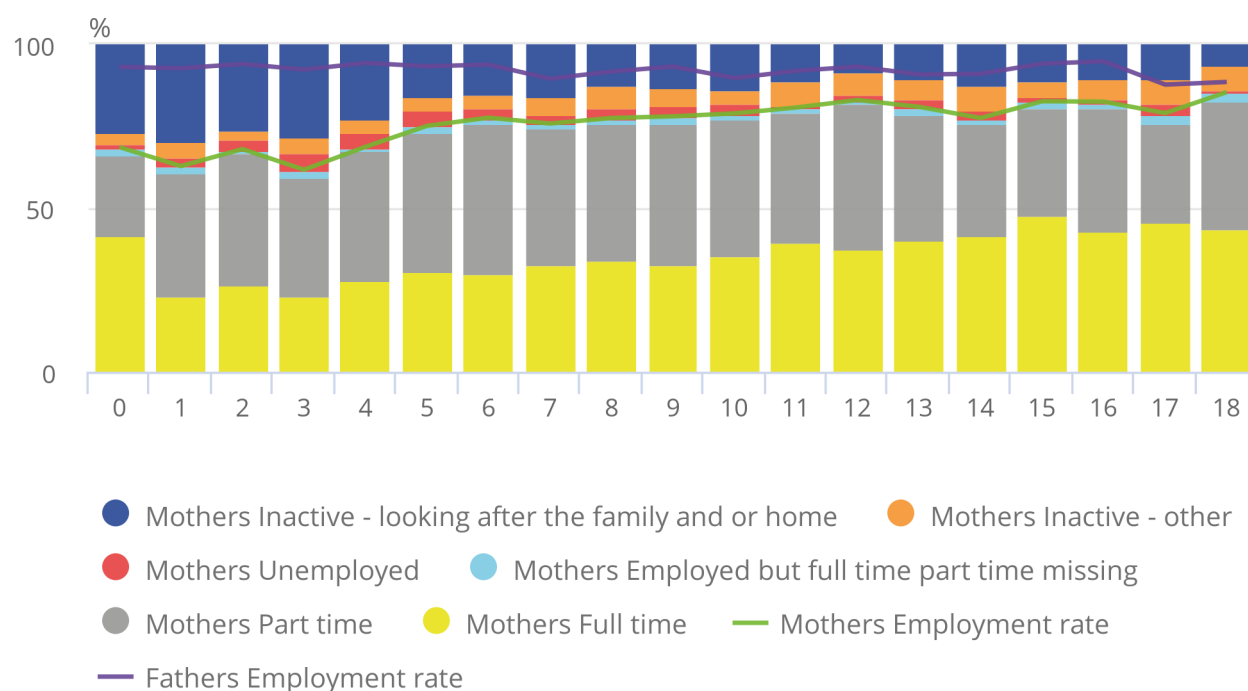
7 . Mothers with children aged between 1 and 12 years old are more likely to be in part-time employment than full-time employment

For fathers, employment rates appear to be relatively unaffected by the age of their youngest dependent child, ranging from 87.6% to 94.9%. For mothers, however, there is a much larger range of employment rates (61.8% to 85.4%) and typically lower rates of employment are seen for mothers with a youngest dependent child aged four or under. After the age of four, employment rates for mothers begin to rise, but there is still a gap between the employment rates of mothers and fathers who have children of this age (Figure 5).

When a child is under one, the majority of mothers report that they are in full-time employment (many are likely to be on maternity leave at this point). However, this changes when the youngest dependent child is between 1 and 12 years old – the majority of mothers with children in this age range report that they are working part-time.

Figure 5: Economic activity of mothers (aged 16 to 64) by age of youngest dependent child, including the percentage who work full or part time, and employment rates of mother and fathers, April to June 2017, England

Figure 5: Economic activity of mothers (aged 16 to 64) by age of youngest dependent child, including the percentage who work full or part time, and employment rates of mother and fathers, April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

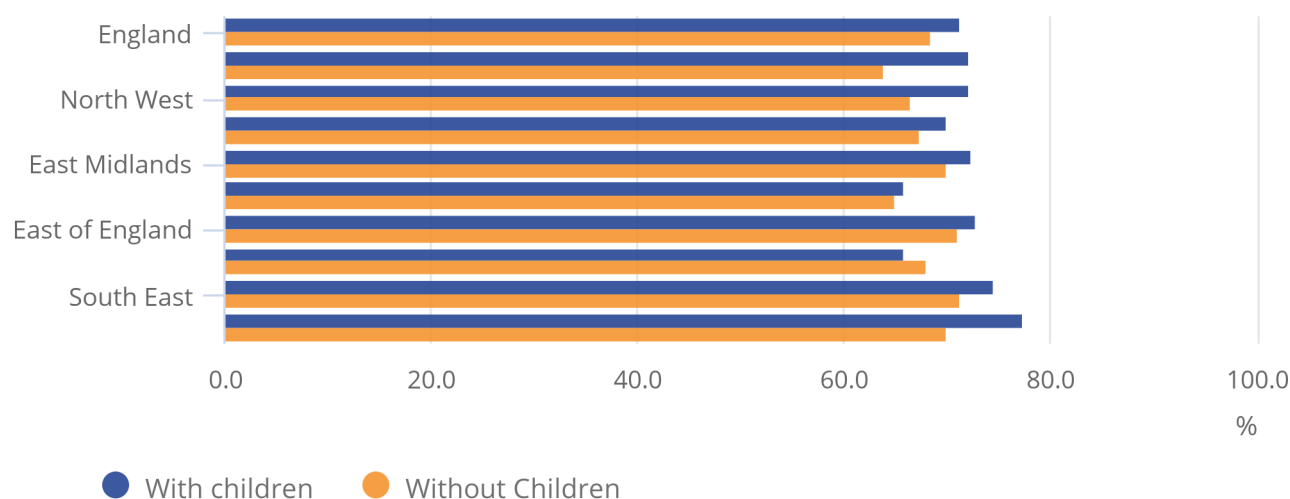
8 . In London, mothers are less likely to be in employment than women without dependent children – this is not the case in other English regions

In the majority of English regions, mothers have higher employment rates than those with no dependent children. However, it should be noted that these estimates are for people aged 16 to 64, which includes students and people who retire before age 65.

In 2016, women living in London were less likely to be in employment if they had dependent children. There were 65.9% of mothers in employment in comparison with 68.1% of women without dependent children (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Employment rates of women with and without dependent children (aged 16 to 64) by region, January to December 2016, England

Figure 6: Employment rates of women with and without dependent children (aged 16 to 64) by region, January to December 2016, England



Source: Annual Population Survey (APS) Household datasets

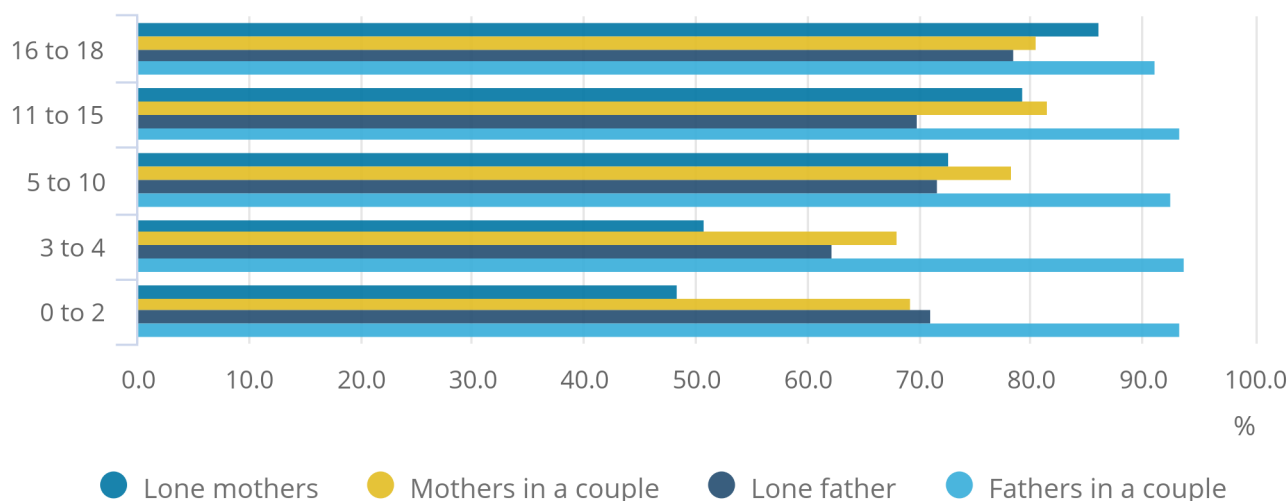
9 . Less than half of single mothers with children aged under two are in employment

Overall, single parents are less likely to be in employment than parents who are in a couple family. Of single fathers 71.7% are in employment compared with 93% of fathers in a couple. Of single mothers 68.5% are in employment, while 75% of mothers who are in a couple are in employment (Figure 7) .

Single mothers are least likely to be employed when their youngest dependent child is aged between zero and two – less than half are in employment (48.4%). Single fathers are least likely to be in employment when their youngest dependent child is aged three or four (62.3%), however, it must be noted that women are more likely to be lone parents than men.

Figure 7: Employment rates of fathers and mothers (aged 16-64) who are lone and couple parents by age group of youngest dependent child, April to June 2017, England

Figure 7: Employment rates of fathers and mothers (aged 16-64) who are lone and couple parents by age group of youngest dependent child, April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

10 . 1.8 million couple families split employment so that the father is in full-time work and the mother in part-time work

Most couple families have both parents in employment (71.8%). The majority of this group (1.8 million families) is made up of couples where the father is in full-time work and mother part-time work. This is the most popular way that families in England split employment (Figure 8).

For families where the youngest child is aged between 5 and 10, families are most likely to split work so that the father works full-time and the mother part-time. Families with the youngest dependent child aged 11 or over are most likely to have both parents in full-time employment.

Figure 8: Percentage of couple families by employment composition and age of youngest dependent child, April to June 2017, England

Figure 8: Percentage of couple families by employment composition and age of youngest dependent child, April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

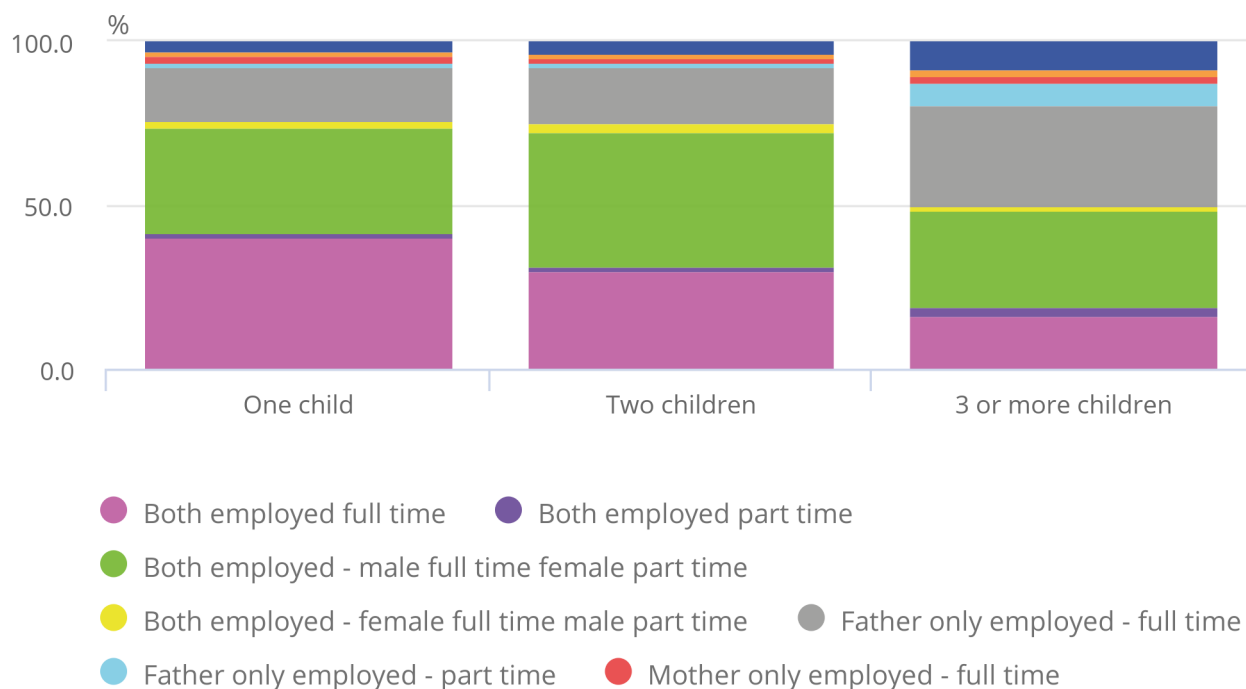
11 . As couple families have more children, the likelihood of both parents working full-time decreases

The percentage of couple families with one or two children where both parents are in employment is similar – 76.0% and 75.1% respectively. Families with one child are most likely to have both parents in full-time employment (40.1%), whereas families with two children are more likely to split employment so that fathers work full-time and mothers work part-time (41.4%) (Figure 9).

In couple families where there are three or more dependent children, 41.5% have just one parent in employment. Couple families with three or more children are most likely to split their employment so that the father works full-time and the mother is not in employment.

Figure 9: Percentage of couple families by employment composition and number of dependent children, April to June 2017, England

Figure 9: Percentage of couple families by employment composition and number of dependent children, April to June 2017, England



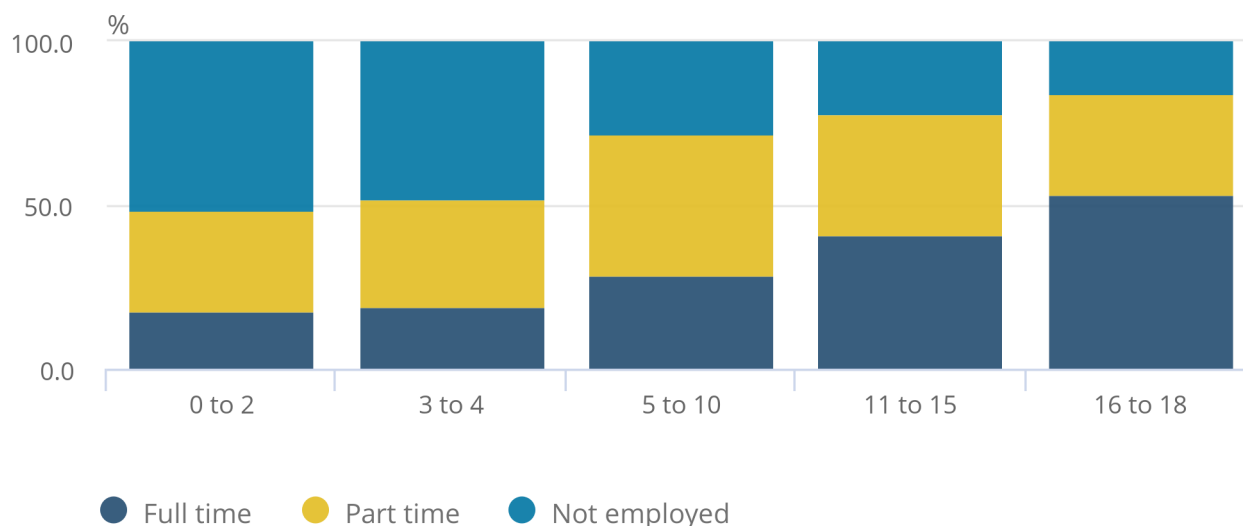
Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

12 . As a child gets older, lone parents become more likely to be in full time work

Less than half (48.5%) of lone parents with a child aged between zero and two are in employment. As a child gets older, lone parents become more likely to be in full-time work. When children are of primary school age, lone parents are most likely to be in part-time employment and when these children progress to secondary school age, lone parents are then more likely to be in a full-time job (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Percentage of lone parents by employment and age of youngest dependent child, April – June 2017, England

Figure 10: Percentage of lone parents by employment and age of youngest dependent child, April – June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

13 . What is the long-term impact of having children on the economic activity of women?

Using Office for National Statistics (ONS) Longitudinal Study data drawn from the decennial census in England and Wales, we can see how the employment status of women aged 16 to 49 in 2001 and then 26 to 59 in 2011 changed over the periods, according to whether the women had children or not.

Figure 11 shows the movements of these women in and out of economic activity statuses over the 10-year period, according to different combinations of whether they had children or not and the number and ages of the children. It should be noted that this analysis shows us the difference between two points in time – it does not tell us when these movements occurred, or if this was the only movement in the 10-year period.

The most commonly observed movement for women with children in 2011, who did not have children in 2001, was a shift from full-time to part-time work. You can explore the Sankey diagram to look at specific movements in more detail.

Changes in women's circumstances over 10 years, 2001 to 2011, England and Wales

Notes for : What is the long-term impact of having children on the economic activity of women?

1. This diagram is designed to illustrate the flows of women between economic activity categories between 2001 and 2011 - it does not represent the proportions or stocks (population) of women in each category.

14 . Fathers who are economically inactive are less likely than mothers to cite “looking after the family or home” as a reason for inactivity

Men are less likely to report that they are economically inactive than women. Reasons for being economically inactive include looking after the family or home, long- or short-term sickness or disability, study, retirement and other reasons such as waiting on a recent job application. In the period April to June 2017, there are 16.7% of all men economically inactive compared with 26.0% of women. For parents, 5.3% of fathers and 23.3% of mothers report that they are economically inactive.

Fathers who are economically inactive are less likely than mothers to cite “looking after the family or home” as a reason for inactivity. Of the fathers who are inactive in the period April to June 2017, 30.1% reported that they are looking after the family or home, compared with 77.9% of inactive mothers. Fathers are most likely to be inactive due to long-term sickness or disability.

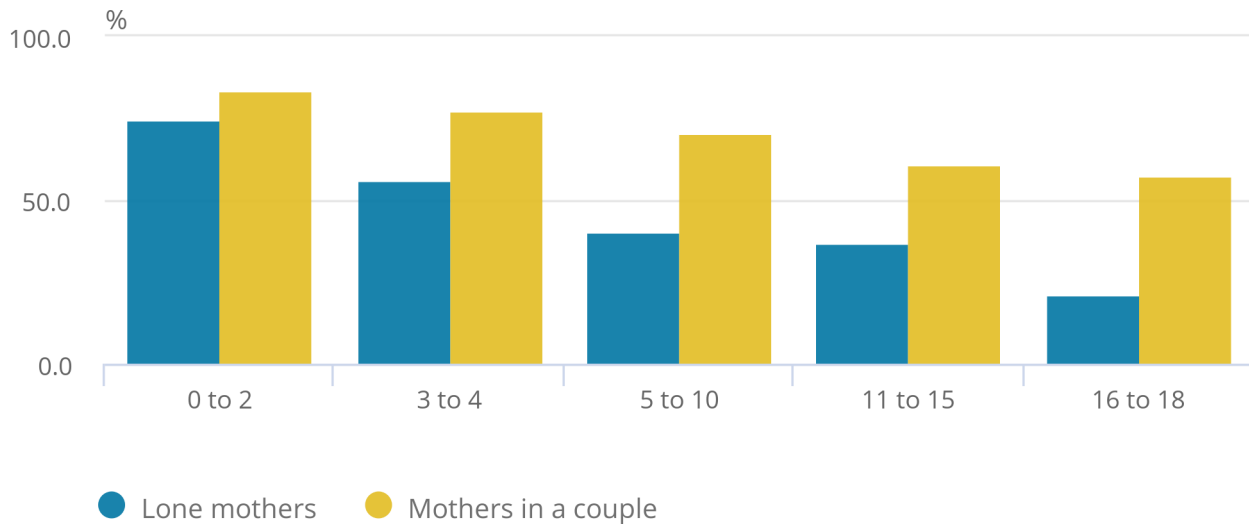
15 . Inactive mothers in a couple are more likely to be looking after the family or home than inactive lone mothers

Lone mothers are less likely to give looking after the family or home as a reason for inactivity when compared with mothers living in a couple. Of inactive lone mothers 65.6% cite this as a reason for being inactive, compared with 81.3% of inactive mothers in a couple (Figure 12).

When focused on the age of the youngest dependent child, inactive lone mothers are less likely to give looking after the family or home as a reason for inactivity as the youngest child gets older. The same is true for mothers in a couple; however, the difference between lone mothers and mothers in a couple grows as the age of the youngest dependent child increases.

Figure 12: Percentage of inactive lone mothers and inactive mothers in a couple (aged 16 to 64) who are looking after the family home, by age of youngest dependent child, April to June 2017, England

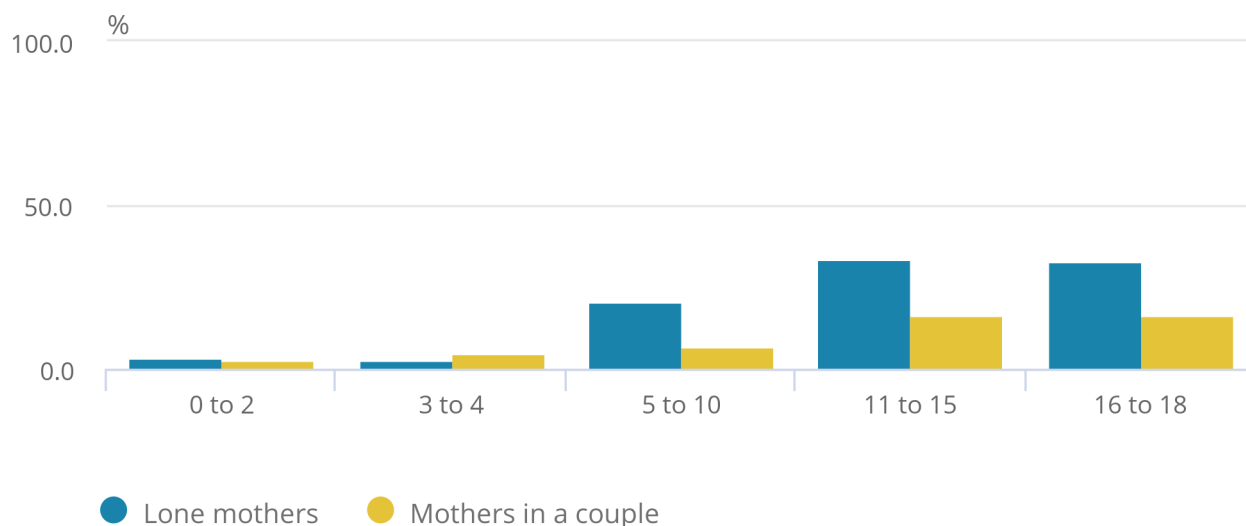
Figure 12: Percentage of inactive lone mothers and inactive mothers in a couple (aged 16 to 64) who are looking after the family home, by age of youngest dependent child, April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

Figure 13: Percentage of inactive lone mothers and inactive mothers in a couple (aged 16 to 64) who are inactive due to sickness or disability, by age of youngest dependent child, April to June 2017, England

Figure 13: Percentage of inactive lone mothers and inactive mothers in a couple (aged 16 to 64) who are inactive due to sickness or disability, by age of youngest dependent child, April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

Notes:

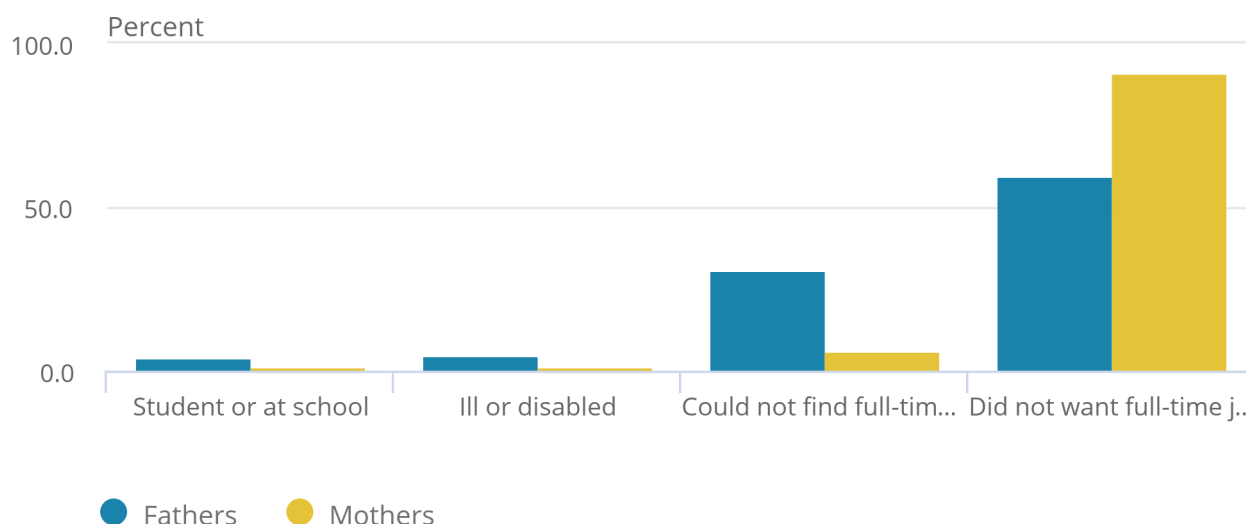
Percentage of mothers inactive due to sickness or disability increases as age of youngest child increases.

16 . Over 9 in 10 mothers in part time work do not want a full time job

Mothers are more likely to work part-time than full-time (38.1% and 33.9% respectively). Figure 14 shows that 91.3%, worked part-time because they did not want a full-time job. Only a small proportion of mothers (6.0%) are in part-time work because they could not find a full-time job.

Figure 14: Percentage of fathers and mothers (aged 16 to 64) who work part time, by reason for working part time, April to June 2017, England

Figure 14: Percentage of fathers and mothers (aged 16 to 64) who work part time, by reason for working part time, April to June 2017, England



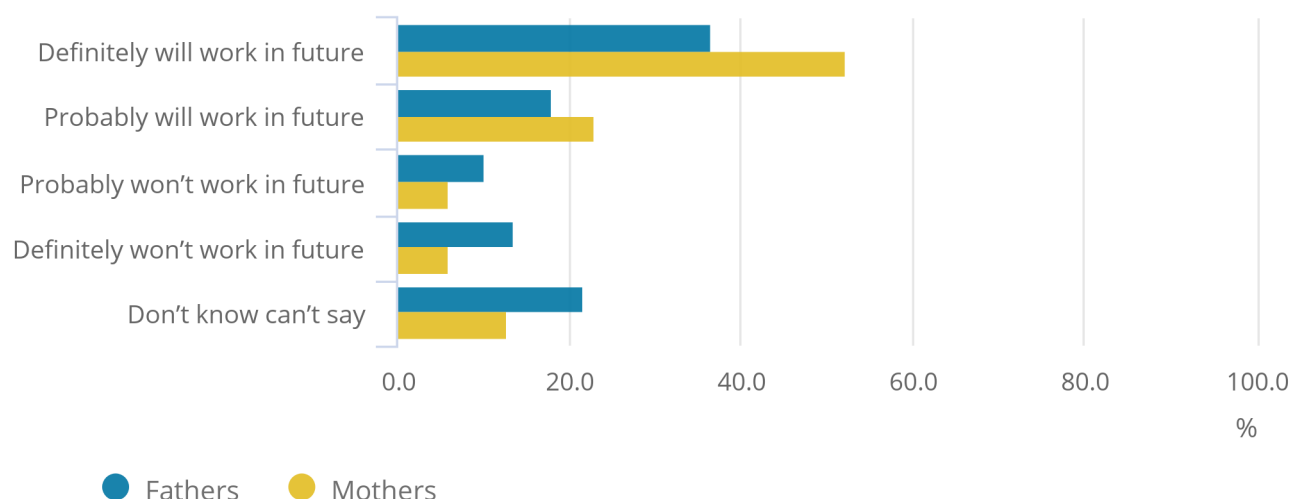
Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

17 . 1.1 million inactive or unemployed mothers intend to return to work in the future

When asked what the likelihood was that they would work in the future, over half (52.2%) of inactive or unemployed mothers stated that they would definitely work in future. This is a total of 793,000 mothers who definitely intend to return to work. A further 349,000 (23%) stated that they would probably work in the future. Only 181,000 mothers (11.9%) reported that they either definitely or probably would not return to work. Note that these mothers were unemployed or inactive for a variety of reasons – and were not necessarily looking after the family or home (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Percentage of fathers and mothers (aged 16 to 64) who are inactive or unemployed, and "self reported" likelihood of working in the future, April to June 2017, England

Figure 15: Percentage of fathers and mothers (aged 16 to 64) who are inactive or unemployed, and "self reported" likelihood of working in the future, April to June 2017, England



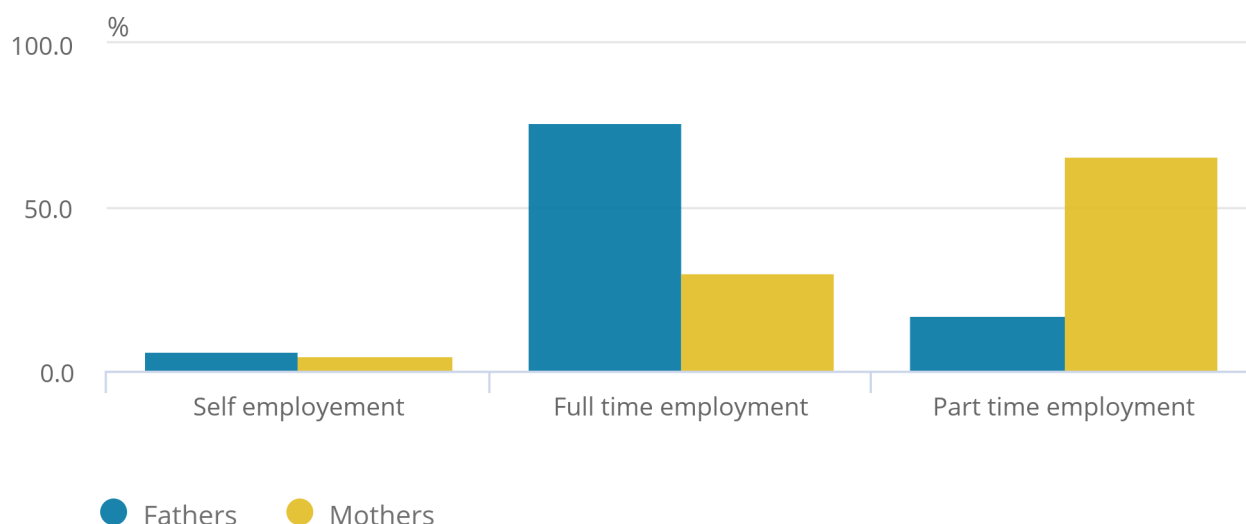
Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

18 . Over 3 in 5 mothers who are seeking work, would like a part time job

Of the mothers looking for a job, 150,000 (65.5%) are looking for part-time work. There are fewer inactive or unemployed fathers looking for work. In the period April to June 2017, 97,000 fathers (76.3%) were looking for full-time work. Only 69,000 mothers (30%) were looking for a job that was full-time (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Percentage of fathers and mothers (aged 16 to 64) who are looking for work, and type of employment sought, April to June 2017, England

Figure 16: Percentage of fathers and mothers (aged 16 to 64) who are looking for work, and type of employment sought, April to June 2017, England



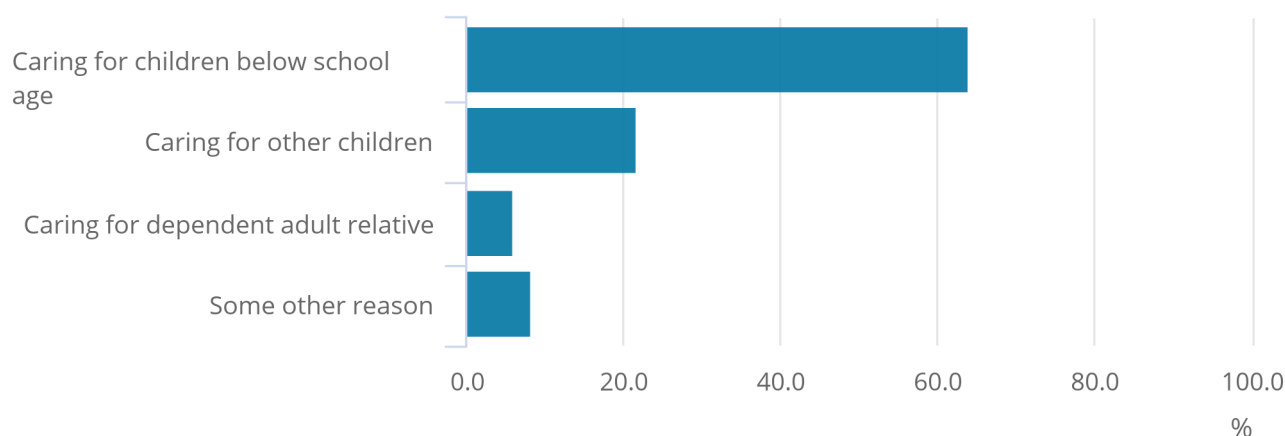
Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

19 . Mothers looking after the family or home are most likely to be caring for children under school age

Of the mothers who are inactive due to looking after the family or home, 166,000 (63.9%) are caring for children below school age. Of these, 56,000 (21.6%) mothers are caring for other children and 16,000 (6.0%) are looking after other adults (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Percentage of mothers (aged 16-64) who are inactive due to looking after the family or home, by reason for looking after the family or home, April to June 2017, England

Figure 17: Percentage of mothers (aged 16-64) who are inactive due to looking after the family or home, by reason for looking after the family or home, April to June 2017, England



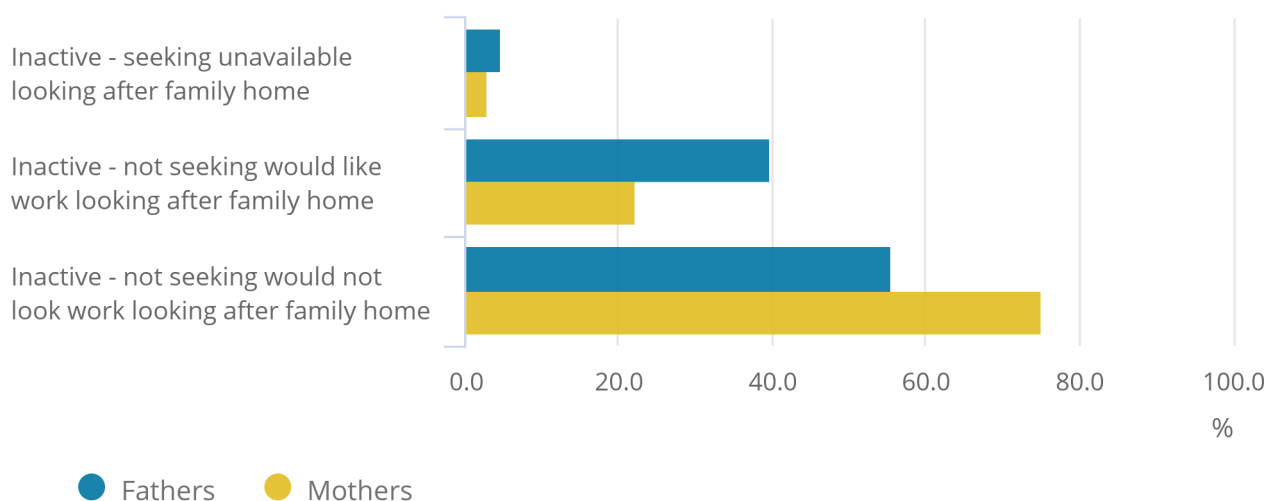
Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

20 . Three-quarters of mothers looking after the family or home are not seeking work, and currently do not want a job

Of those mothers who are inactive due to looking after the family or home, 909,000 (75.1%) are not looking for work and do not want a job currently. Fathers who are inactive due to looking after the family home are in much smaller numbers, with 49,000 (55.5%) stating they would not like to work and were therefore not looking for a job and 35,000 (39.9%) who would like a job, but were not currently looking (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Percentage of fathers and mothers (aged 16-64) who are looking after the family or home, and if they would like work or not, April to June 2017, England

Figure 18: Percentage of fathers and mothers (aged 16-64) who are looking after the family or home, and if they would like work or not, April to June 2017, England



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Household datasets

21 . Quality and methodology

The [Labour Force Survey](#) and [Annual Population Survey](#) Quality and Methodology Information documents contain important information on:

- the strengths and limitations of the data and how it compares with related data
- uses and users of the data
- how the output was created
- the quality of the output including the accuracy of the data

Information about the [ONS Longitudinal Study](#) and its methodology and quality can also be found on the ONS website.