

Article

Families and the labour market, England: 2018

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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Release date:
3 October 2018

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

- The employment rate for mothers was 74.0% in April to June 2018, which has increased from 68.9% in 2013 and from 61.9% in 1996 (when comparable records began).
- Since 2010, the employment rate for women with children has remained higher than for women without dependent children, whilst the employment rate for fathers has consistently been higher than for men without dependent children.
- 5 in 10 (50.5%) mothers work 30 or more hours in their usual working week (excluding overtime) compared with almost 7 in 10 (69.7%) women without dependent children.
- In April to June 2018, almost three-quarters (72.5%) of families with couple parents had both parents in employment; of these families, almost half (45.5%) had both parents in full-time employment.

2 . Things you need to know about this release

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

Estimates have been produced using the April to June Labour Force Survey (LFS) household datasets from 1996 to 2018, and the January to December Annual Population Survey (APS) household datasets from 2015 to 2017.

Respondents in this article are classified as parents if they have dependent children living with them in the same household. This analysis does not include parents whose children do not live with them, or parents whose children usually reside elsewhere (for example, with a former partner).

Dependent children are those living with their parent(s) and are either aged under 16 years, or aged 16 to 18 years and in full-time education. Children aged 16 to 18 years 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, by which we mean mothers and fathers who have dependent children.

Unemployment measures people without a job who have been actively seeking work and are available to start work. Economically inactive people are not in employment and have either been seeking work but are unable to start, or have not been seeking work and/or are unable to start work. For further details please see the latest [UK labour market bulletin](#).

Alongside this release we have published datasets that contain additional estimates, which support those presented in this article.

The [Working and workless household publication](#) provides quarterly updates for a selection of data tables used in this publication at a UK and country level.

3 . Did the employment rates of parents and non-parents keep increasing?

In England, employment rates for mothers and fathers generally increased between 1996, when comparable records began, and 2018. Employment rates for all men and women fell following the financial crisis of 2007 to 2008, with the fall in employment rate being greatest for men irrespective of whether they had children.

Since 1996, the employment rate for fathers has consistently been higher than for men without dependent children. However, the employment rate has only been higher for mothers compared with women without dependent children since 2010 and now stands at 74.0% compared with 69.7% for women without dependent children. Prior to 2009, the employment rate was consistently higher for women without dependent children than mothers.

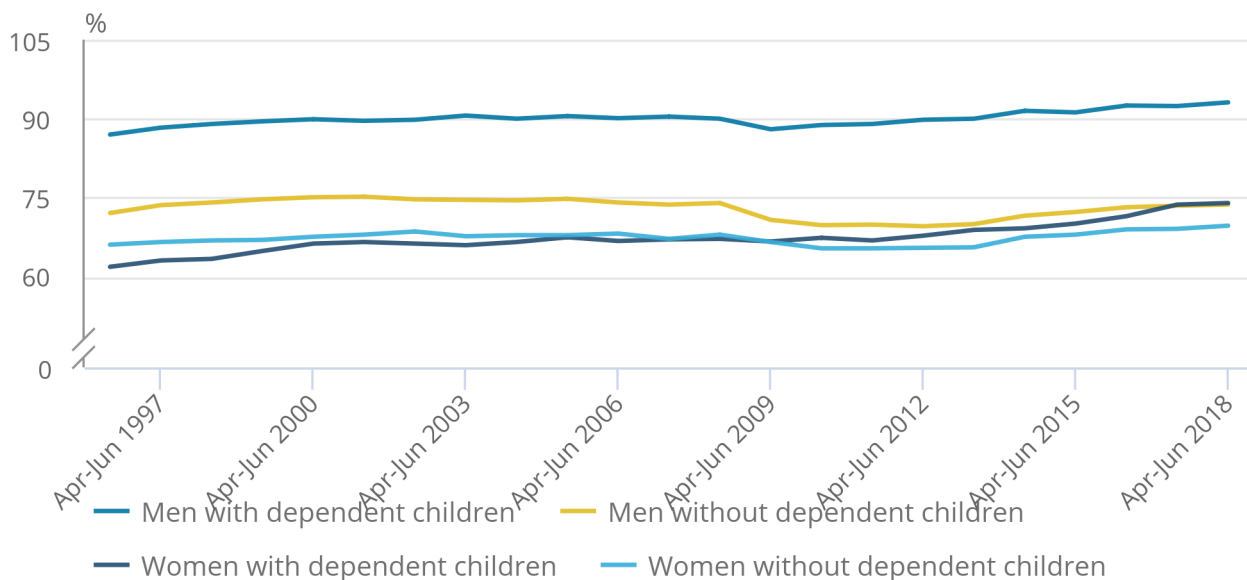
Figure 1 shows that over the past 20 years, mothers have experienced the largest increase in employment rates. There were 4.9 million mothers in employment in April to June 2018, which equates to 74.0% of all mothers. In comparison, 3.7 million mothers were in employment in 1996, which was 61.9% of mothers.

Figure 1: Employment rates for men and women living with and without dependent children

April to June 2018, England

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April to June 2018, England



Source: Labour Force Survey household datasets, Office for National Statistics

4 . How did the employment rates of parents and non-parents vary by local authority?

Figure 2 shows the employment rates for men and women with and without dependent children by local authority in 2015, 2016 and 2017. This map shows the difference in employment rates across the local authorities in England. However, as shown at the national level in Figure 1, the employment rate of men with dependent children was typically higher than the other groups explored, across all local authorities.

Local authority estimates should be treated with caution as these are provided from a sample survey. For more information, please see the [Families and the labour market, England: local authority dataset](#).

Figure 2: Employment rates for men and women with and without dependent children by local authority, 2015 to 2017, England

5 . How did mothers' employment rates change when considering the age of their youngest dependent child?

Lower rates of employment were typically seen for mothers with a youngest dependent child aged four years or under. When the youngest dependent child was over four years old, the employment rates for mothers began to rise. Overall, employment rates for fathers appeared to be relatively unaffected by the age of their youngest dependent child.

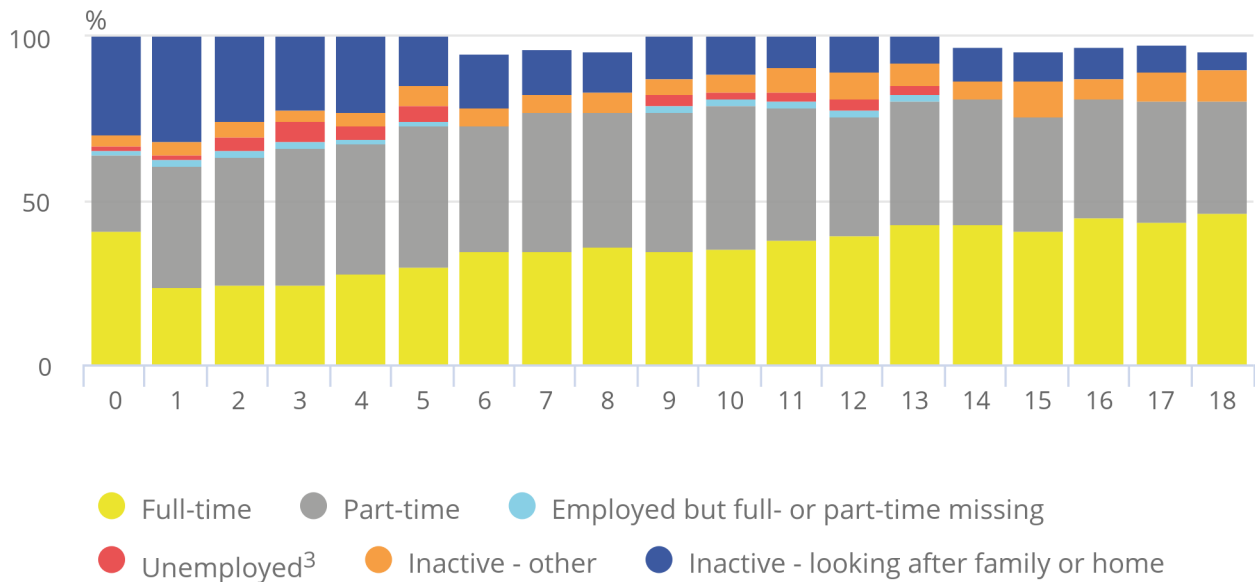
When a child was aged under one year, the majority of mothers reported that they were in full-time employment, with the most likely reason for this being that they were on maternity leave at this point. Mothers with children aged between 1 and 11 years were more likely to be in part-time employment than full-time employment. The proportion of mothers working full-time increased with the age of the youngest child. Less than one-quarter (24.1%) of mothers with a child aged one year worked full-time, compared with 46.3% of mothers with the youngest child aged 18 years.

Figure 3: Percentage of mothers living with dependent children by economic activity by single year of age of youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England

Figure 3: Percentage of mothers living with dependent children by economic activity by single year of age of youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Totals may not sum to 100 due to rounding and suppression.
2. Chart does not include categories with low sample sizes. These are unemployed and employed but full- or part-time missing for single age groups 6, 7, 8 and 14 years and over.
3. Please note that the unemployment proportion calculated here is conceptually different to the headline unemployment rate as inactive respondents are included in the denominator.
4. The classification of full- or part-time is determined by the respondent.

6 . Did being a parent involve working less hours?

In April to June 2018, more than 9 in 10 fathers (93.2%) worked 30 or more hours a week in their main job, compared with half (50.5%) of mothers. The majority (69.7%) of women without dependent children worked 30 or more hours in their usual working week (excluding overtime).

When the youngest dependent child was aged three to four years, almost six in ten mothers (58.2%) worked less than 30 hours a week. For mothers who had a youngest dependent child aged over three years, the proportion working less than 30 hours decreased as the age of the youngest dependent child increased. The proportion of mothers with a youngest child aged zero to two years who were working over 30 hours a week is likely to be influenced by mothers on maternity leave being classified as in employment, rather than being a true reflection of mothers' usual working hours.

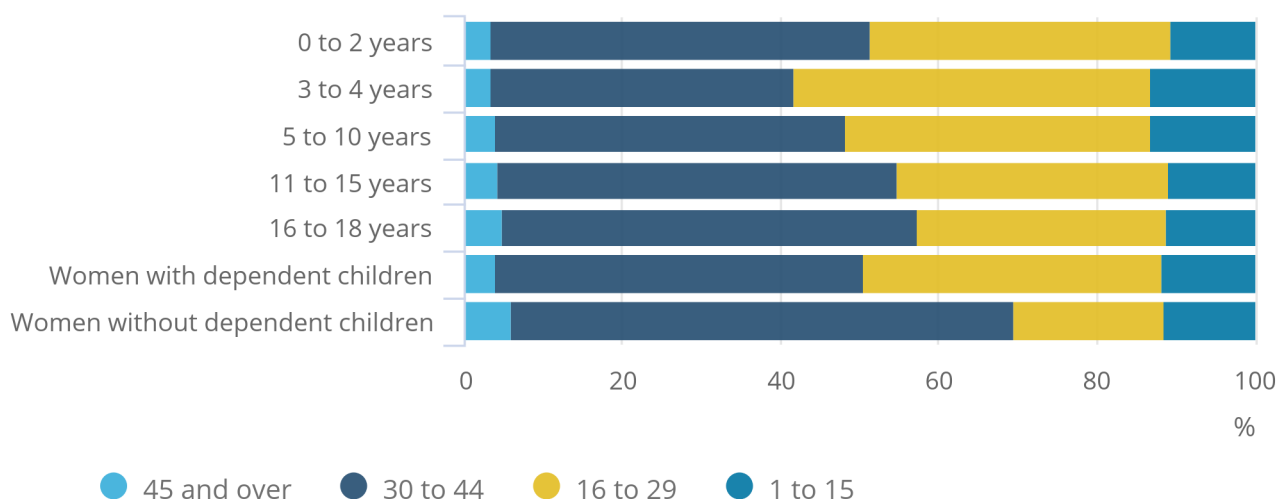
For fathers, the usual hours worked (excluding overtime) remained reasonably consistent regardless of the age of the youngest dependent child.

Figure 4a: Percentage of women living with and without dependent children by number of hours worked and age of youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England

Figure 4a: Percentage of women living with and without dependent children by number of hours worked and age of youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

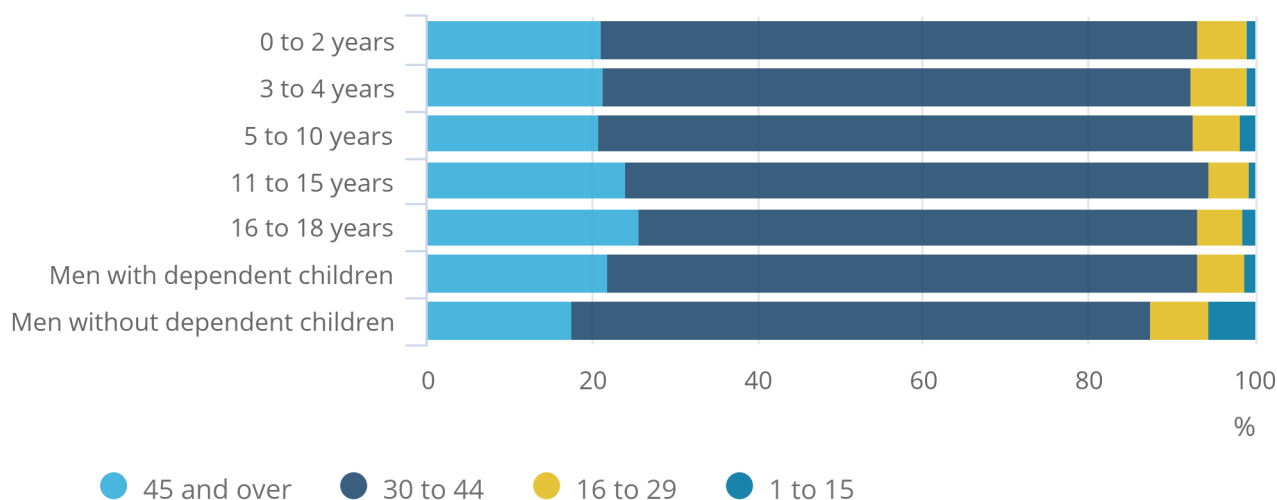
- Hours worked refers to total usual hours worked in main job (excluding overtime).

Figure 4b: Percentage of men living with and without dependent children by number of hours worked and age of youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England

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April to June 2018, England



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

- Hours worked refers to total usual hours worked in main job (excluding overtime).

7 . Did being a parent increase the likelihood of working in certain industries?

Figure 5 shows that almost half (47.8%) of all mothers worked in the public administration, education and health industry sector, compared with 42.3% of women without dependent children. This is potentially due to a perceived higher flexibility and family friendly policies in parts of this industry. In comparison with women, only 16.7% of fathers and 15.8% of men without dependent children worked in this industry.

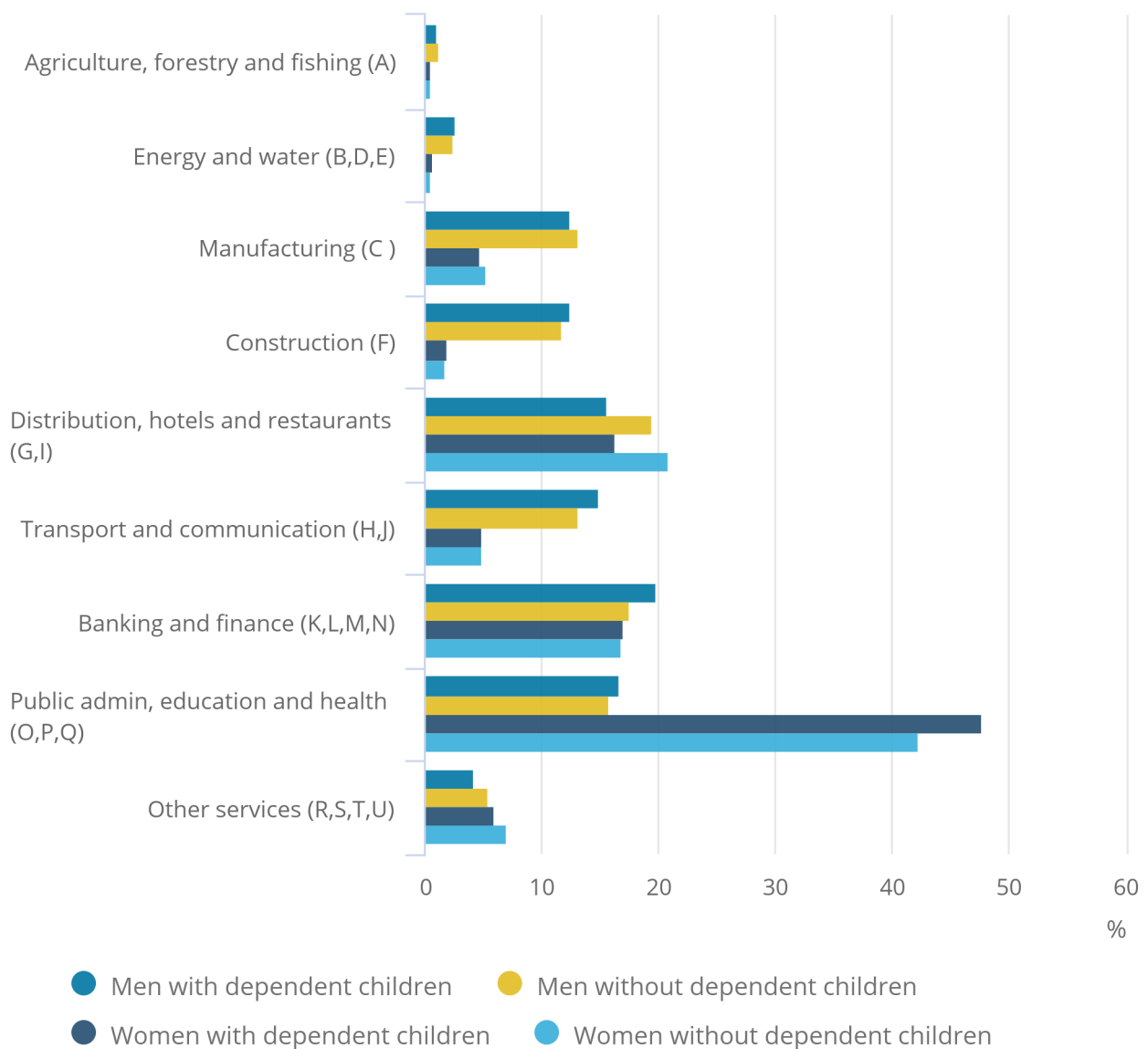
Regardless of whether they had dependent children, a larger proportion of men worked in the manufacturing, construction, and transport and communication industry sectors compared with women. A slightly higher proportion of men and women without dependent children worked in the distribution, hotels and restaurants industry sector (19.4% and 20.8% respectively), compared with fathers and mothers (15.7% and 16.3% respectively).

Figure 5: Percentage of men and women employed in each industry sector living with and without dependent children

April to June 2018, England

Figure 5: Percentage of men and women employed in each industry sector living with and without dependent children

April to June 2018, England



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

Mothers were more likely to work in jobs considered to require a high skill level compared with women without dependent children (29.8% and 24.8% respectively). A higher proportion of fathers (35.4%) worked in high skill level jobs, whereas 25.7% of men without dependent children worked in such jobs. Women were most likely to work in jobs with a lower middle skill level (which includes jobs such as administrative, caring, and retail jobs), regardless of whether they had dependent children.

8 . How did families structure their economic activity?

Overall, parents in a couple were more likely to be in employment than lone parents, for both men and women. While 93.5% of fathers in a couple were in employment, the figure dropped to 80.6% for lone fathers. The employment rate for mothers in a couple was 75.8%, compared with an employment rate of 66.9% for lone mothers.

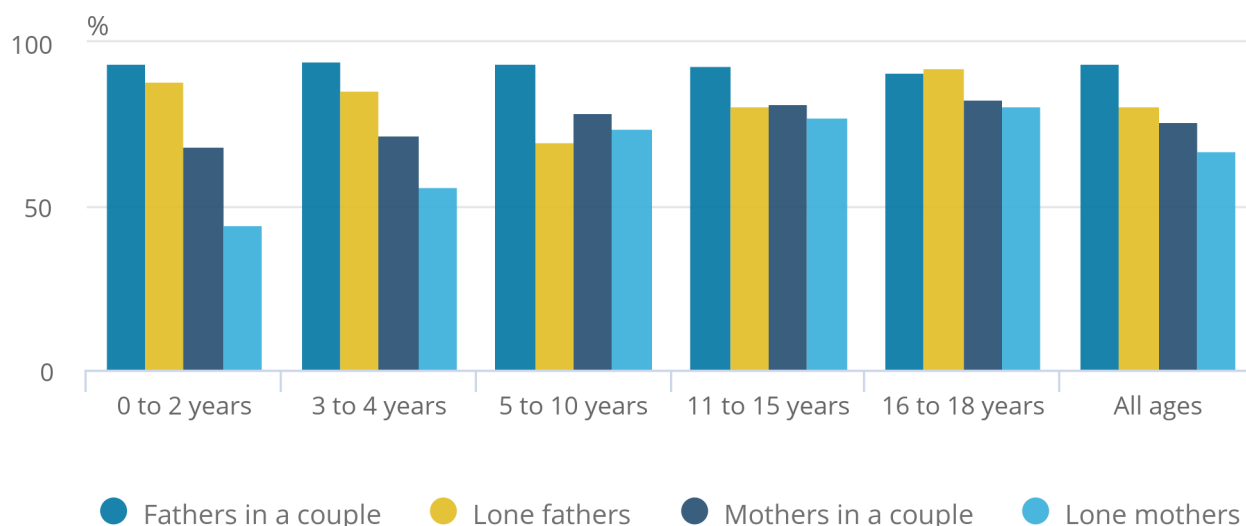
Lone mothers were least likely to be employed when their youngest dependent child was aged between zero and two years – less than half of this group were in employment (44.6%). Lone fathers were least likely to be in employment when their youngest dependent child was aged between 5 and 10 years (70.2%).

Figure 6: Employment rate of parents by family type and age of the youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England

Figure 6: Employment rate of parents by family type and age of the youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset, Office for National Statistics

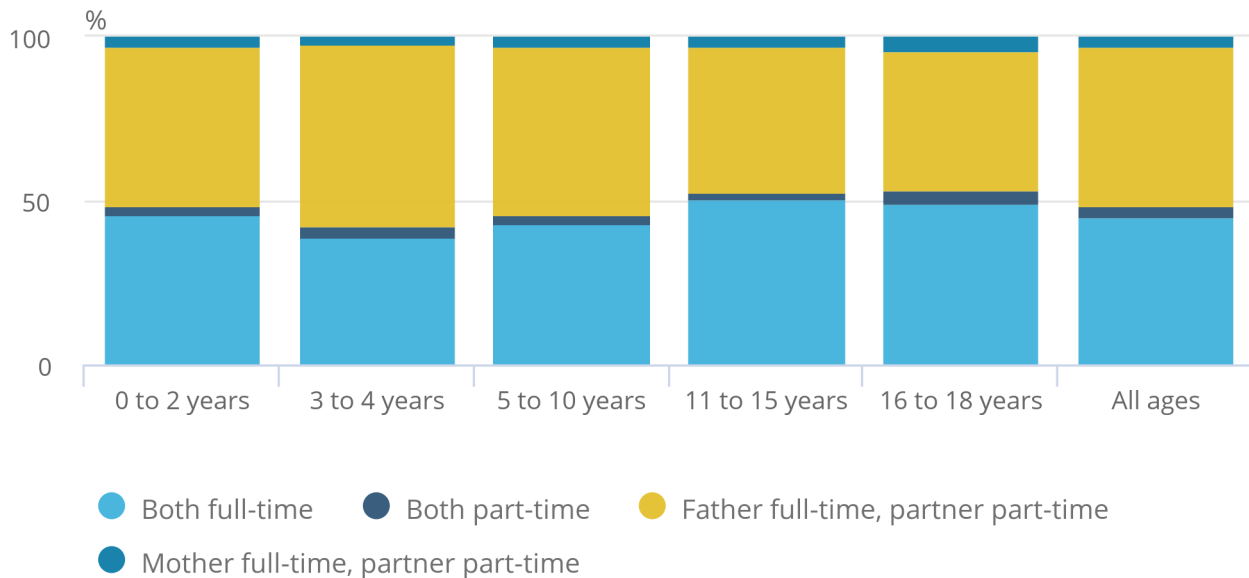
Most couple families had both parents in employment (72.5%). In almost half (49.1%) of these families, the father worked full-time and their partner worked part-time, which was the most common way for couple families to organise their economic activity. Whilst this was true for those who had a youngest dependent child aged between 0 and 10 years, when the age of the youngest dependent child was between 11 and 18 years, both parents were more likely to be in full-time employment, followed by the father working full-time and their partner working part-time.

Figure 7: Employment composition of couple families in which both parents are working by age of youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England

Figure 7: Employment composition of couple families in which both parents are working by age of youngest dependent child

April to June 2018, England



Source: Labour Force Survey household dataset

Notes:

1. The classification of full- or part-time is determined by the respondent.
2. Couples include same-sex couples.

The proportion of families where both parents were in full-time employment was higher for those with fewer children. Where couple families had one child, both parents worked full-time in over half (53.8%) of cases, compared with approximately one-third of cases (34.3%) for couples who had three or more children. Most lone parents (68.2%) were in employment. As the age of their youngest child increased, lone parents were more likely to be in full-time employment; 30.4% of lone parents with a child aged three to four years were in full-time employment, compared with 71.6% where the youngest dependent child was aged 16 to 18 years.

9 . What reasons did inactive parents most commonly give as their reason for inactivity?

Overall, 67.2% of mothers and 24.3% of fathers who were not in work stated that they were economically inactive because they were looking after the family or home.

As the age of the youngest dependent child increased, the proportion of parents who were inactive due to looking after the family fell. As shown in Figure 3, this happened when the child reached school age. A large majority (82.2%) of inactive mothers with a child aged between zero and two years reported looking after the family or home as their reason for inactivity. Meanwhile, only 44.5% of inactive mothers whose youngest child was aged 16 to 18 years attributed their inactivity to this reason.

Lone mothers were less likely to cite looking after the family or home as a reason for being economically inactive when compared with mothers living in a couple. Half of all inactive lone mothers cited this as a reason for being inactive, compared with nearly three-quarters (73.3%) of inactive mothers in a couple.

Lone parents were most likely to report sickness or disability as their reason for being economically inactive (42.1% of lone fathers and 19.7% of lone mothers) compared with parents in a couple. Sickness or disability was the least common reason for inactivity given by mothers in a couple (6.5%).

10 . Quality and methodology

The [Labour Force Survey](#) and [Annual Population Survey](#) Quality and Methodology Information reports 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