



Dads Survey Report 2022

Preliminary findings from the Fathers Network Scotland survey
of 271 dads which took place between 27 May - 30 June 2022

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Context

In May 2021 the Fatherhood Institute (FI) reported on a survey of 2,045 fathers of children under 12 years undertaken during June 2020 in the UK. It stated that:

“Up until the nineteenth century, most fathers in Britain worked close to, or even in, their family homes. This changed as the later stages of the Industrial Revolution removed the majority from their households for all or most of the working day. By early 2020, most fathers of young children in the UK worked full-time and outside their homes, with many also undertaking long commutes. While they aspired to spend more time caring for their children, including their babies, their workplace responsibilities and the inflexibility of most workplaces inhibited this. Researchers hypothesised that fathers would remain ‘secondary’ caregivers at home (with most mothers remaining ‘secondary’ breadwinners) until ‘something big’ happened to alter the fathers’ engagement with the workplace.

Covid-19 has proved to be that ‘something big’, generating a massive reverse migration as – in their millions across the world – daddies came home. Many workplaces were transformed – and the transformation of workplaces transformed fatherhood.”

Around the same time as the FI survey Fathers Network Scotland reached out to dads across Scotland to ask them to share their experience of the first lockdown. The results from our first lockdown survey largely mirrored the FI findings. Scottish dads had come home, and they had stepped up to do much more hands-on caring of their children. This increased involvement led 56% of the dads we surveyed to tell us they wanted to change the way they parent in the future to spend more quality time with their children.

The start of 2021 saw Scottish families once again having to deal with staying at home, school closures, home-schooling, video communication and social isolation. Fathers Network Scotland reached out again to dads to find out how they were coping with the fresh challenges of Scotland's second national Lockdown. Our survey found dads struggling to balance work and family life and their mental health deteriorating. However they found positives in time spent playing with their children or supporting their learning. This resulted in their determination to change the way they parented in the future.

In November 2021, having emerged from many of the COVID restrictions, we undertook another survey to better understand how the pandemic had affected dads and families. Sadly we found dads mental health continuing to deteriorate, and the relationships between dads and their partners badly affected. However, spending time with their children remains a priority.

- [Dads Survey - Lockdown 1](#) - Fathers Network Scotland - June 2020
- [Dads Survey - Lockdown 2](#) - Fathers Network Scotland - March 2021
- [Dads Survey - Life after Lockdown](#) - Fathers Network Scotland - November 2021
- [Lockdown Fathers the Untold Story](#) - Fatherhood Institute - May 2021

In May the remaining COVID-19 rules and restrictions were lifted, but as the public health crisis receded a global economic crisis was developing. In June the Office of National Statistics revealed that 90% of those living with a dependent child aged 0 to 4 years felt very or somewhat worried about the rising cost of living.

During late May and June we conducted the fourth in our series of surveys to chart how these seismic changes were affecting dads and their families. Over 271 dads responded. This report sheds light on how these dads are coping - at work and home, the effect on their health & wellbeing, their familial relationships and the way they parent.

There are well over 400,000 dads with dependent children in Scotland. Their wellbeing and level of positive involvement can have a profound impact on their children, their families and society as a whole. We hope that the findings from this survey and the voices of dads from across Scotland who took part will help policy advisors, service managers, practitioners and employers understand and better support dads and their families.

Key Findings

1. Dads' are struggling to balance work and family life

60% of all working dads told us they struggled to balance work and family life, selecting very difficult, difficult or can be tricky on our survey. Time away from home as a result of work e.g. long, extra hours & travel is the most frequently sighted reason for poor work life balance (46%) with shift work being particularly problematic. Dads with children under 1 are finding it particularly difficult, 57% found balancing work and family life 'difficult' or 'very difficult' (compared to an average of 23%).

2. Dads are continuing to prioritise spending time with their children.

Despite many dads struggling to balance work & family life, astonishingly the number spending 10 or more hours per week playing or supporting their children's learning has increased by 13% since last November to 68%. This is same as during the 1st lockdown when only 75% of dads were working compared with 94% in the most recent study.

3. Relationships between dads & partners or co-parents continue to deteriorate

Almost a third (31%) of dads told us that the relationship with their co-parent had been negatively affected. A third of these dads told us that exhaustion or no time together was the reason & 23% spoke about the negative impact of work or employment.

4. Dads want more flexible working to be with their family

Homeworking has made a significant difference to many. Of the dads who found balancing work and family life 'okay' or 'very easy' 25% mentioned the positive impact of homeworking. However a significant number expressed the problem they have separating work & family life. Over 50% of dads wanted to change the way they parent in the future and 34% of dads who wanted to change the way they parent in the future identified flexible working arrangements as a key aspect of helping them spend more time with their family.

Recommendations

1. **The UK Government should enhance the statutory paternity/partner provision to six weeks at or near the full rate of pay.**

Fathers increasingly want to share the responsibilities of childcare, however they are only entitled to a maximum of two weeks of statutory Paternity Leave, whereas mothers are entitled to 39 week paid leave. Gendered state policies around Paternity and Maternity leave severely restrict parents choices, steering them into a traditional division of childcare during the infant's first months. This inequality disadvantages both women in the workplace and denies men the opportunity to develop close nurturing relationships with their children. More and more dads are being left with little or no choice but to leave their partners and newborns just days after the birth to return to work. Urgent action is required to reform state policies generally and paternity leave particularly to help families balance caring responsibilities and provide greater financial support to working parents.

2. **Employers should support the development of a positive, family-friendly workplace.**

Findings from a 2022 University of Lincoln¹ study found that “parents’ experiences of workplaces are often dependent on individualised factors such as supportive or unsupportive managers, and employees are sometimes made responsible for being aware of policies and asserting their entitlement.” The benefits to both employees and employers of adopting a family-friendly culture are becoming more widely understood. However a consistent, positive approach for all those with caring responsibilities should be developed and underpinned by improved clarity, knowledge and visibility of policies.

3. **Children and family services should support working dads involvement in their services.**

Dads often don't believe services value their input or make an effort to involve them. This can be particularly true of working dads who frequently find it difficult to engage in person during normal 'office hours'. But small changes can make a big difference. We are urging service providers to think about how to involve dad more. A good place to start is to ask mums, dads and children for their opinions. Tell dads that they matter as much as mums and let dads know what they can do to get involved and the difference that this makes to their children.

¹ Gaunt, R., Jordan, A., Tarrant, A., Chanamoto, N., Pinho, M., Wezyk, A. (2022). Caregiving dads, breadwinning mums: Transforming gender in work and childcare?

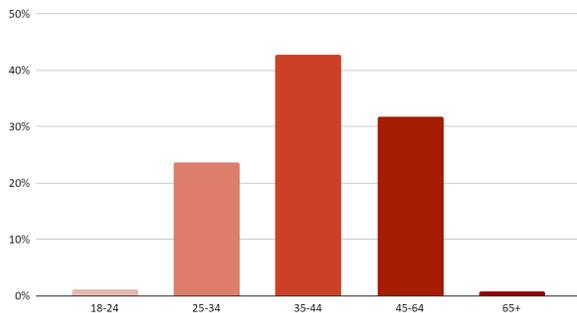
Dads who took part

271 dads completed the survey between 27 May - 30 June 2022.

Age

- 1% 18-24 years old
 - 24% 25-34 years old
 - **43%** **35-44 years old**
 - 32% 45-64 years old
 - 1% older than 65+.
- (n=271)

How old are you? (n=217)



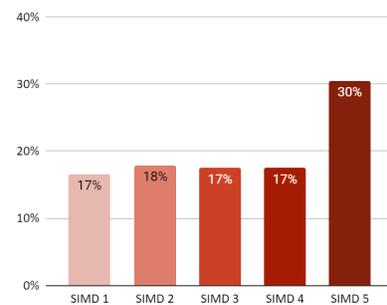
Location

Dads from 13 of the 14 Health Board Areas in Scotland took part. With **Greater Glasgow & Clyde (26%)**, Ayrshire and Arran (19%), Lothians (17%), Grampian (7%), Forth Valley (6%) and Orkney (6%) attracting the greatest participation only dads from Shetland were not represented. (n=271)

Level of deprivation

Using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation it was established that dads were reasonably evenly distributed across a range of socio-economic backgrounds, from Quintile 1, the most deprived households in Scotland, to Quintile 4. Dads from the least deprived areas Quintile 5 were most represented.

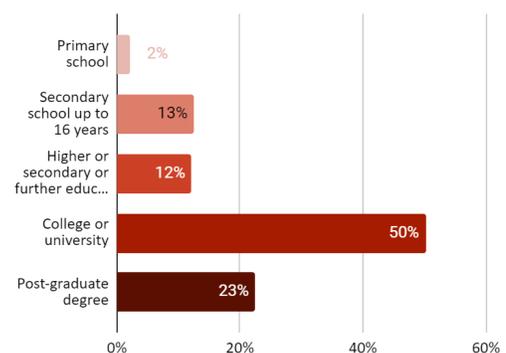
Level of deprivation utilising the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (n=223)



Level of education

73% of dads were college or university educated or higher

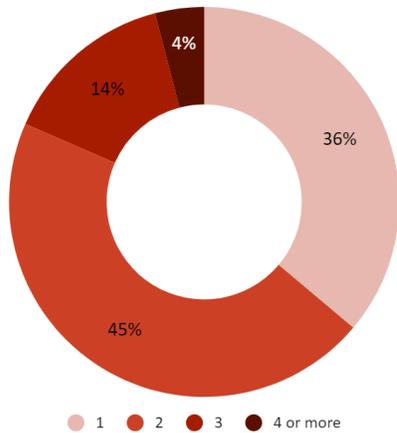
What is the highest level of education you have completed? (n=271)



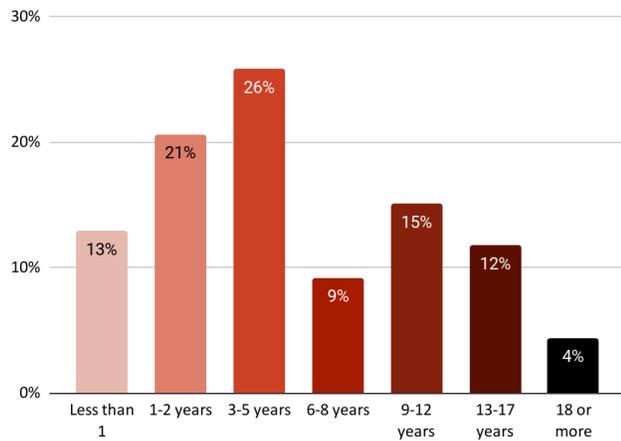
Children

Over 80% of dads had 1 or two children and 60% had a child in the early years.

How many children do you have? (n=271)



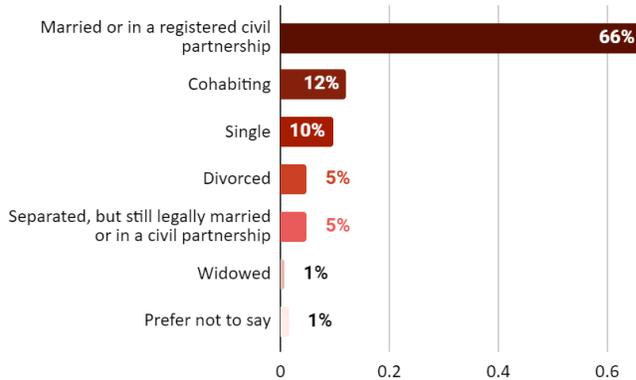
How old is your youngest child? (n=271)



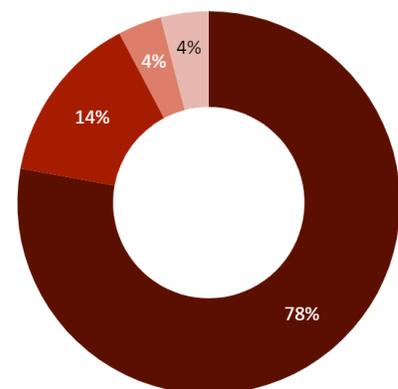
Marital Status & Living Arrangements

80% of dads were married, in a registered civil partnership or cohabiting and over 80% lived with their children all of the time.

What is your marital status? (n=271)

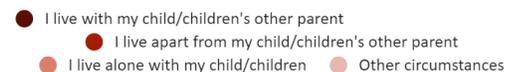


Can you tell us about your living situation? (n=271)



We asked dads who told us that they live apart from their child(ren) or have 'other circumstances' to tell us about the level of contact they have with their children.

8 told us they had "little or no contact with their children", which was 3% of all dads surveyed.



Home Life

For many dads home and work life has changed enormously as a result of the COVID pandemic as the Fatherhood Institute Report from May 2021 points out:

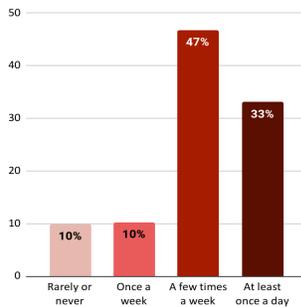
Before the Spring 2020 lockdown mothers of young children in couple households in the UK were contributing at least twice as much childcare as fathers.

During the Spring 2020 lockdown, fathers in couple households stepped up to do much more hands-on caring of their children, and more housework. On average, the fathers almost doubled the number of hours each day during which they undertook childcare. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), fathers' childcare time rose from just over four to eight hours per day, while mothers' rose from almost seven to just over ten.

Although we can not benchmark against comparable data collected before the lockdown we can see trends emerging for dads at home and work from June 2020 onwards ².

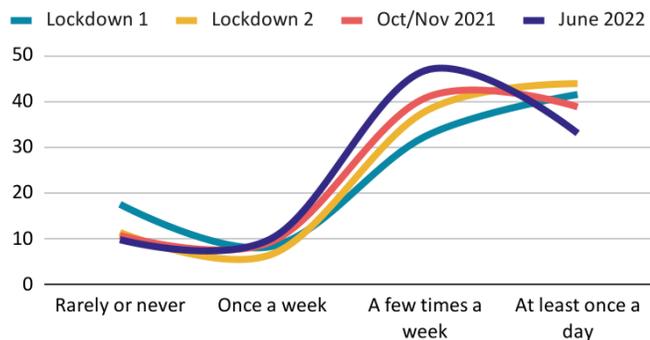
Cooking

How often do you cook meals for your child (ren)? (n=263)

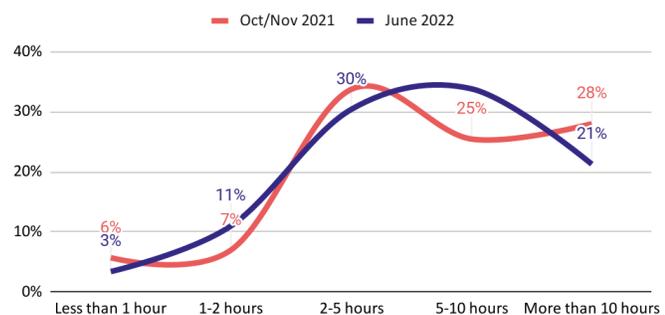


Despite 94% of dads working, up from 75% during the first lockdown, they continue to cook regularly. Although the number of dads cooking at least once a day has dropped by 5% since the last survey, the numbers cooking once a week, rarely or never, are now remaining fairly constant. A similar trend can be seen in the amount of time spent on household chores.

How often do you cook meals for your child



How many hours per week do you normally spend on household chores?

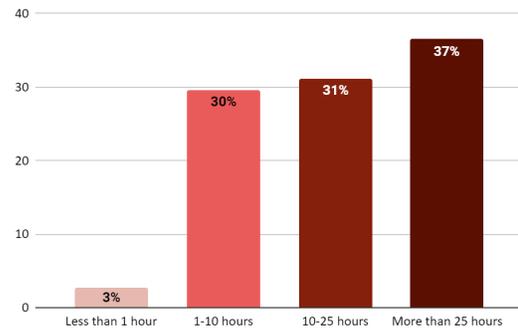


² Note: in the most recent study this section was not answered by individuals who answered that had 'little or no contact' with their children.

Play and Supporting Children's Learning

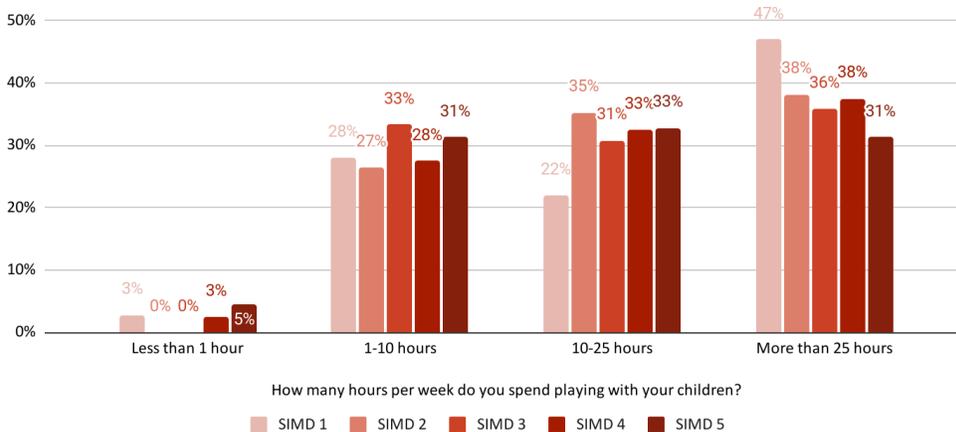
Despite COVID restrictions and rules being completely lifted many dads are continuing to spend a significant amount of time playing with their children or helping them learn. 68% of dads are spending 10 or more hours a week playing with their kids or helping with schoolwork and 37% of those are spending 25 hours or more.

How many hours per week do you spend playing with your children or supporting their learning? (n=263)



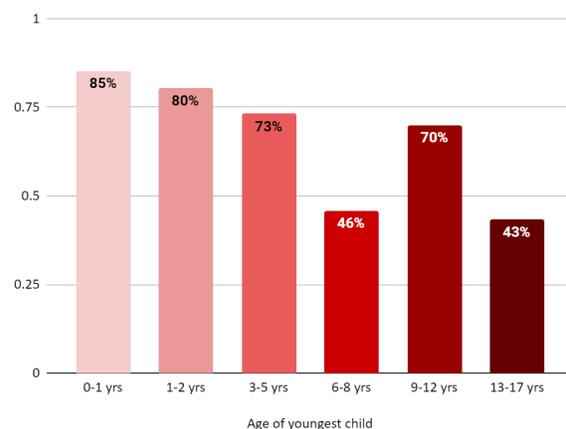
The survey also revealed that dads from the most deprived areas (SIMD1) are doing the most, with 47% telling us that they spend 25 hours or more playing or supporting their children's learning. Whereas only 31% of dads from the most affluent areas (SIMD 5) are spending 25 hours or more.

Number of hours dads spend playing or supporting their children by SIMD (n=216)



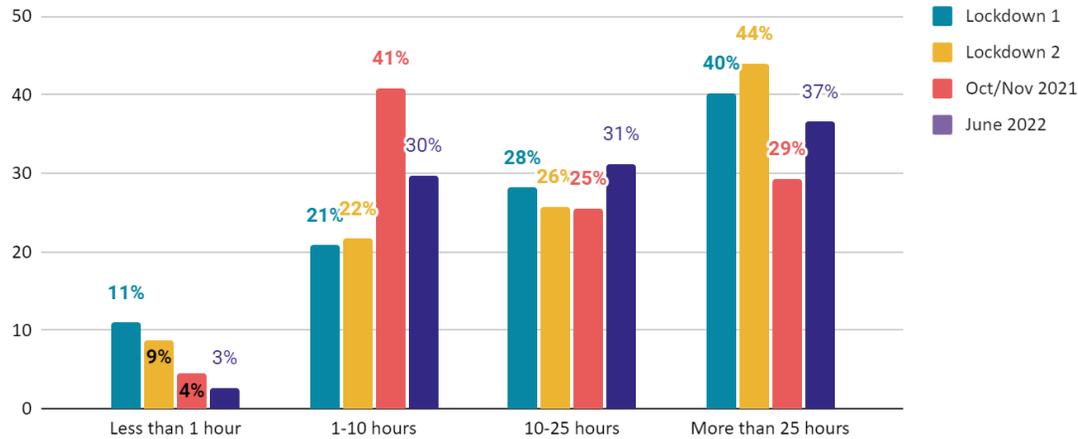
There are also times when dads are more involved with their children's lives than others. Those with very young children in the perinatal period are most engaged with gradually decreasing engagement during the early years then a sharp dip when children are between 6-8 years old. This increases again at the point of transition from primary to secondary school. However there is a dip during the early years.

Which dads spend more than 10 hours per week playing with with their children or supporting their learning?



Perhaps one of the most surprising and encouraging findings from the survey is the upward trend in the amount of time dads are spending with their children. Since last November the number of dads spending more than 25 hours a week with their children has increased by 8%. This difference may be because of the time of year we conducted surveys, however remarkably the number of dads spending 10 hours with their children is the same as during the first lockdown.

How many hours per week do you spend playing with your children or supporting their learning?

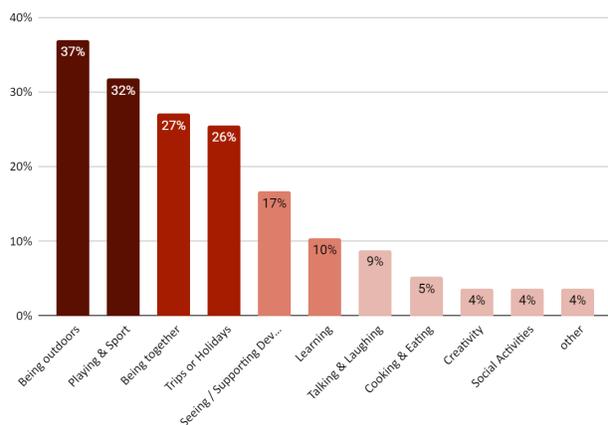


What dads LOVE doing with their children.

“As much as it is time consuming, every minute is amazing. Small things like playing in the garden are so underrated.”

Being outdoors, playing, participating in sport and just being together continues to be what dads most LOVED to do with their children. And often it is the simple things that dads loved the most:

What is the thing you have LOVED doing most with your children in the last 6 months?



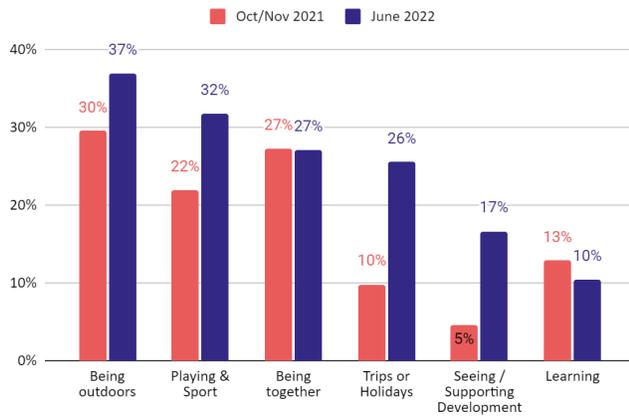
“Making her laugh”

“We love being outdoors wet or dry.”

“Watching them grow, watching their personalities flourish.”

“I have loved being able to put my child to sleep every night.”

What is the thing you have LOVED doing most with your children in the last 6 months?



The difference in the number of dads mentioning outdoor activity between November 2021 and June 2022 seems to support the notion that seasonality may affect the time dads spend with their kids.

Being outdoors, playing and participating in sport and going on day trips and holidays all saw a significant rise in the most recent survey.

This information may be useful to support targeted family learning.

Work Life Balance

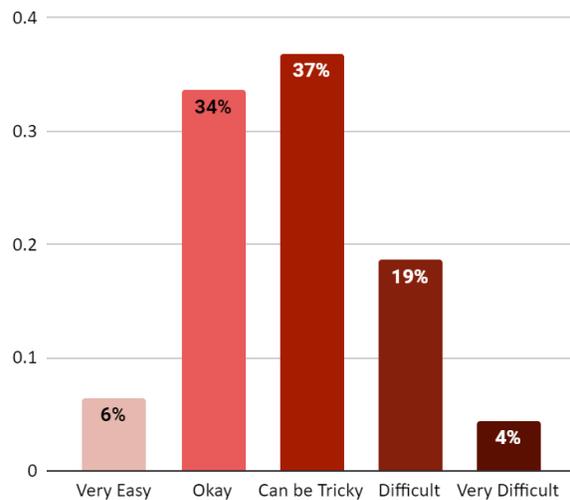
Balancing work and family life is...

94% of dads we surveyed were in work, the highest it has been since our first survey during Lockdown 1 (when it was 75%).

60% of all those dads told us they struggled to balance work & family life

“When my work is stressful, or I am worried about it, I notice that I am less patient with my son, which I feel absolutely awful about.”

Balancing work and family life is... (n=247)



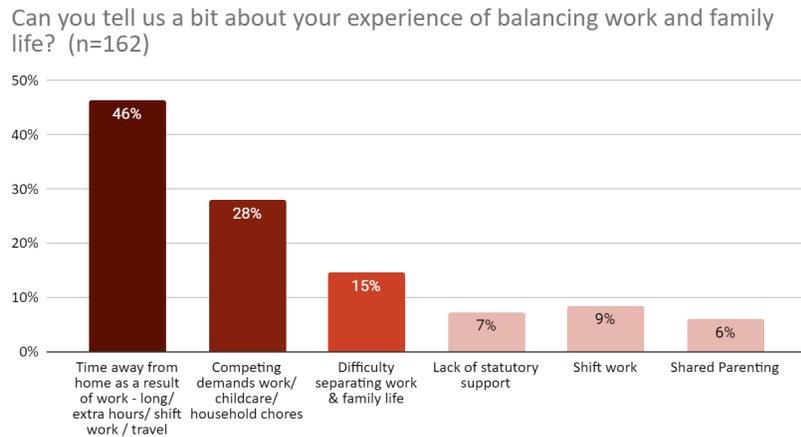
Cause of difficulties

“It is a treadmill which is tiring and at times induces feelings of guilt and anxiety because you want to do the absolute best...and not let anyone down... Never feels like enough time for either.”

162 dads then went on to tell us more about their experience of balancing work and family life.³

28% discussed difficulties juggling competing demands of work, childcare & household chores.

46% told us about the negative impact of long hours, extra hours and travel on family life. Increasing financial pressure may be forcing more dads to work more.



“My job is weekend and evening heavy as I have to work these extra overtime hours to pay the mortgage and bills. I work 9.30 - 5.30 Monday to Friday and have to drive 70 miles a day to get to work and back. Hardly any time for myself, family and home”.

Shift work is particularly problematic. 43% of the dads who found balancing work and family life “Very Difficult” talked about the impact of shift work

“I work 13 hour shifts 4 days on, 4 days off. On my work days I leave before the kids are awake and get home after bed time.”

Worryingly dads with children under 1 are also finding balancing work and family life particularly difficult with 57% finding it ‘difficult’ or ‘very difficult’, compared to an average of 23%.

“I work from home 2 days a week, 3 days in the office for an oil and gas company. Balancing both doesn’t exist, my little girl is profoundly deaf and requires hearing aids at the moment. We try to attend sign language classes but I rarely if never am able to go because of the workload and how demanding my job is.”

“Working extra hours to fill the hole in family finances left as mum takes maternity leave is difficult.”

³ This section of the survey was not answered by individuals who had ‘little or no contact’ with their children or those who were not currently working.

Hybrid and Flexible Working

70% of all working dads told us they had flexibility on where they work. And home (or hybrid) working in has made a huge difference to many dads lives.

25% of all dads who said they were finding balancing work and family life 'okay' or 'very easy' mentioning the positive impact of homeworking

"The one positive which came from COVID was that I can now work some days at home in my home office and some days in the office so balancing my priorities has become easier than ever."

However hybrid does not come without problems with 15% expressing the problem they have separating work & family life.

"I have flexible working but a very demanding job. It is sometimes hard to separate home and work time, especially when working from home. Hybrid has many benefits but it makes differentiating less easy."

Family-friendly work can come in all shapes and sizes, and can make all the difference:

"I am a Gamekeeper so I get to spend time with my kids and they are good at helping me doing jobs eg building pheasant pens etc"

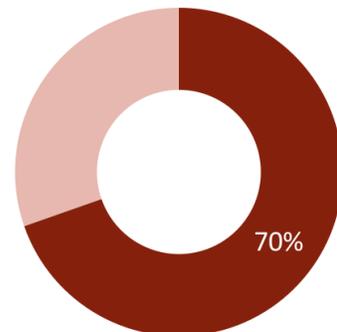
"I am lucky. I have a condensed working week so I have a day off a week, and compared to pre-pandemic I don't travel so much. So I do the school run every morning and have lots of time in the evening and at the weekend."

However many employers are not keeping pace with societal changes which is seeing increasing numbers of dads putting their families first:

"Priorities have changed and I don't think my line manager fully appreciates or understands that, especially being male. It's expected by them that my wife deals with everything to do with my son to let me work, which I don't agree with."

"Recently starting a new role it's been difficult to have conversations about expectations when it comes to work/life balance and also while in a probationary period I feel I have to work harder."

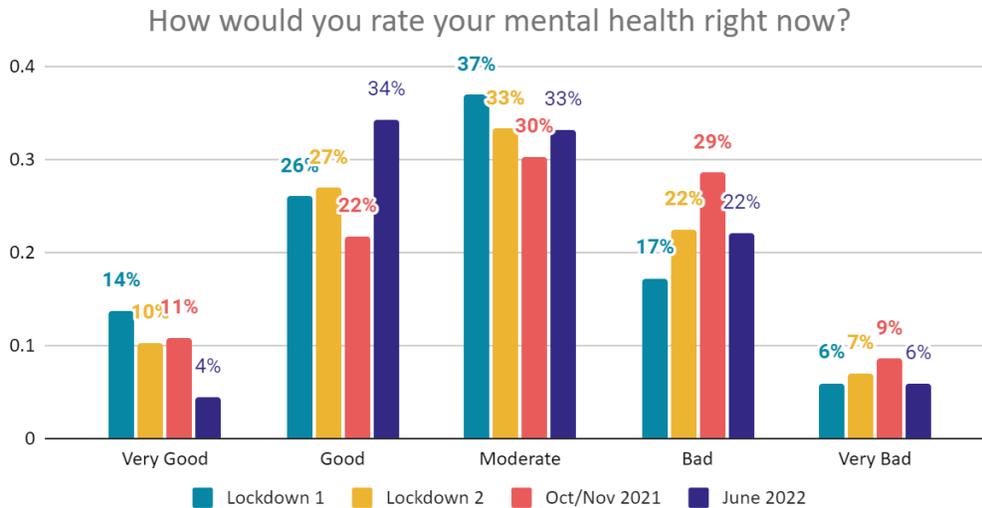
Yes I have flexibility on where you work



Mental Health & Wellbeing

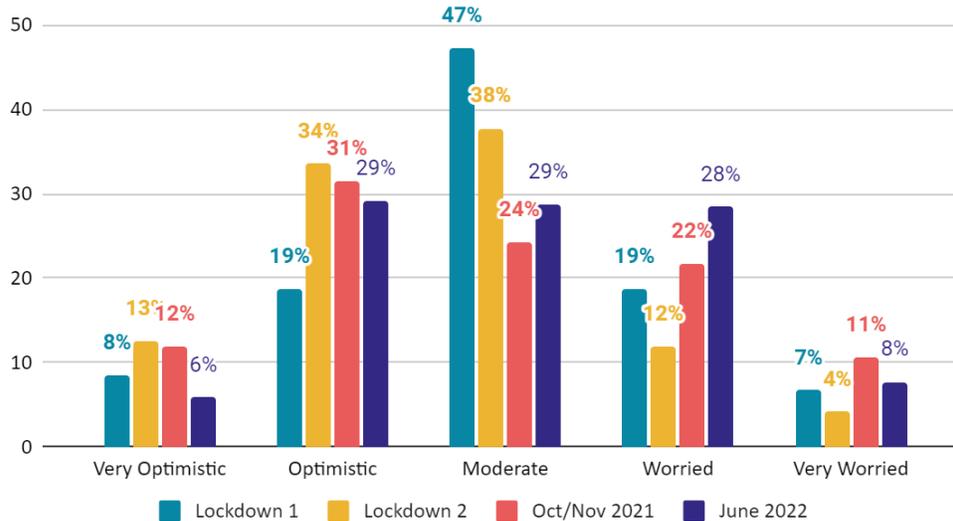
Mental Health Rating

Dad's mental health appears to be improving, with only 22% rated their mental health as not great or very poor compared to 38% in Nov 2021. Although this is excellent news it may, at least in part, be as a result of the time of year we surveyed dads.



However, concern about the future persists with 36% of the dads feeling worried or extremely worried about the next 12 months, the highest level since the first lockdown.

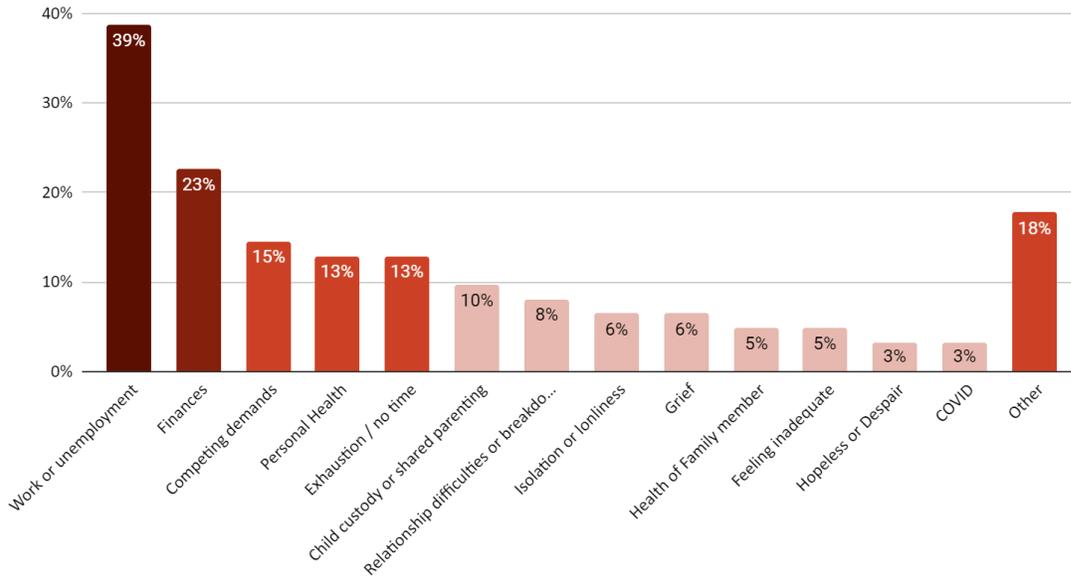
In general how optimistic do you feel about the next 12 months?



Deterioration in mental health & causes

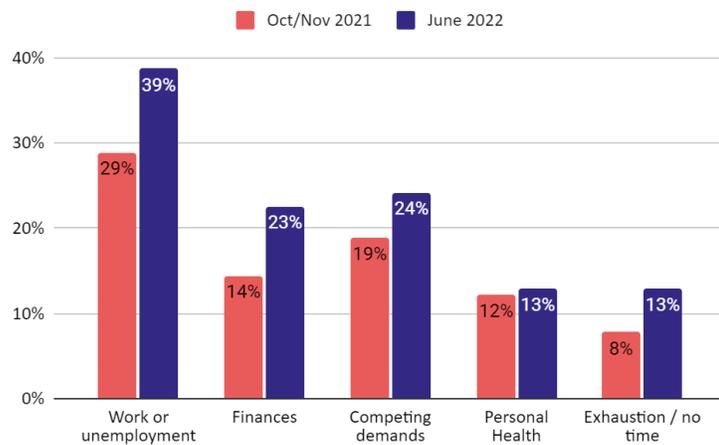
The primary reason dads provided for a decline in their mental health was work and unemployment at (39%) then financial concerns (23%).

why do you think your mental health or well-being has suffered over the last 6 months?
(n=61)



Work and unemployment was also the primary reason in November 2021, however the percentage of dads mentioning this and financial concerns has increased substantially - by 10% and 9% respectively. This is perhaps unsurprisingly given the current cost of living crisis. This cause may be linked to the increased number of dads citing competing demands, exhaustion and lack of time.

why do you think your mental health or well-being has suffered over the last 6 months?



Work or unemployment

“People left the company and I’ve taken on the job of 3 men now. No wage rise in 7 years.”

“No job and another child on the way.”

Finances

“As youngest is going to school her childcare needs are changing so we are having to come up with a solution to how to be there for her whilst also maintaining enough income to mitigate the rising cost of living etc.”

Personal Health

“I am in poor physical health which limits my ability to do things for my children, wife and round the house which in turn creates massive guilt and affects my mental health.”

“I went into the pandemic suffering from PTSD and its associated symptoms. Now, 2 years of pandemic and another baby in the family, I am struggling to keep things together and it is badly impacting my mood, self-worth and relationships.”

Exhaustion / No time

“Very tired and find myself drinking a little too much probably. Very hard to make plans to see friends.”

What is of particular concern is the number of dads who are reporting multiple factors related to a decline in mental health

“The birth of my second has been difficult to balance. I had no legal entitlement to any paternity leave due to having switched jobs 4 months before and grandparents made promises about helping which did not materialise.

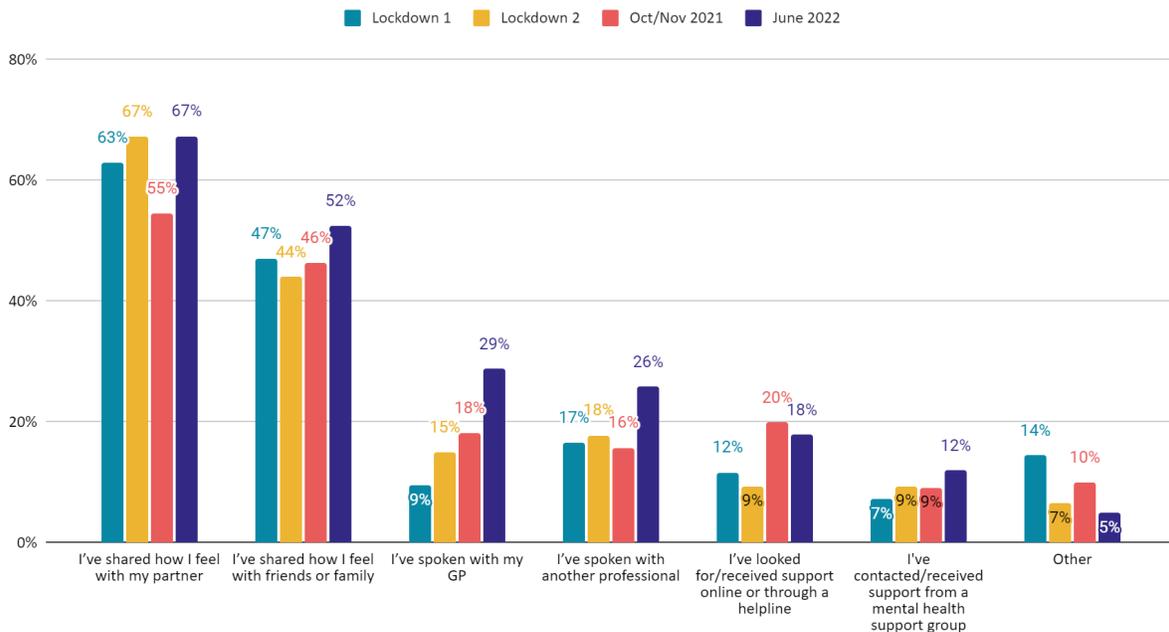
Our eldest has become far more difficult to go to bed and as per a lot of 3 year olds more temperamental, while the youngest is not sleeping without mum through the night. Making it largely impossible to do much other than work or look after children because it really takes a person per child.”

Support

We asked the dads, who told us their mental health had gotten 'slightly worse' or 'much worse', what kind of support they had looked for or received. It is encouraging that 94% of this group had looked for or received help, an increase of 8% since last November.

Connections with friends and family appear to be a crucial source of support with two thirds of the dads sharing how they felt with their partner and over half talking to friends and family. There has also been an increase in the number of dads seeking professional help from GPs and other professionals and support from mental health groups.

What kinds of support have you looked for or received in the last 6 months? (n=101)

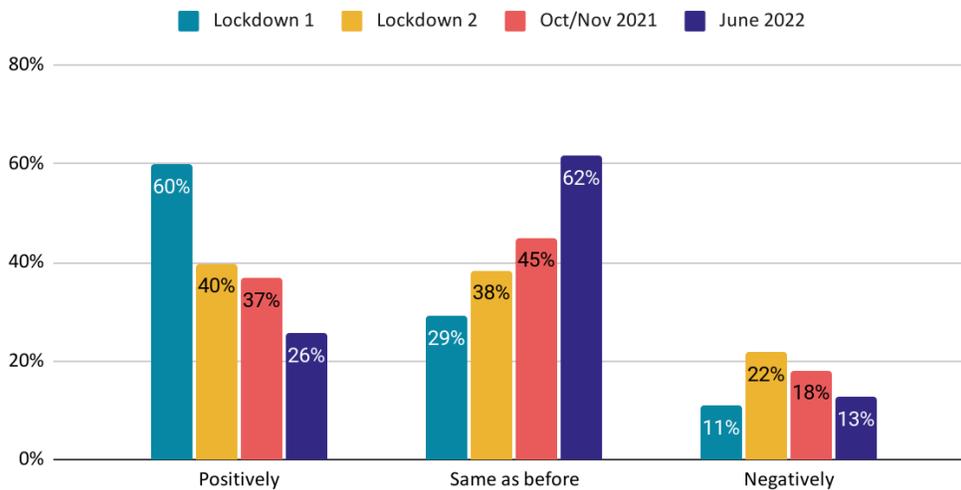


Family Relationships

Children

The last 6 months have seen a normalisation of dads' relationship with their children with 62% saying it was the same as before. This is in contrast to both the first lockdown, when 'stay at home' directives saw 60% of dads' telling us their relationship had been affected positively and the second when 22% were negatively affected.

Your Relationships - How has your relationship with your child(ren) been affected in the last 6 months?



Your Relationships - How has your relationship with your child(ren) been affected in the last 6 months?

However what many dads consider 'the same as before' may have shifted since before the pandemic with many dads telling us how they strive to prioritise being there for their children.

"I will always make sacrifices to ensure I have some time with my son and to make it as fun as possible. Even at my own expense."

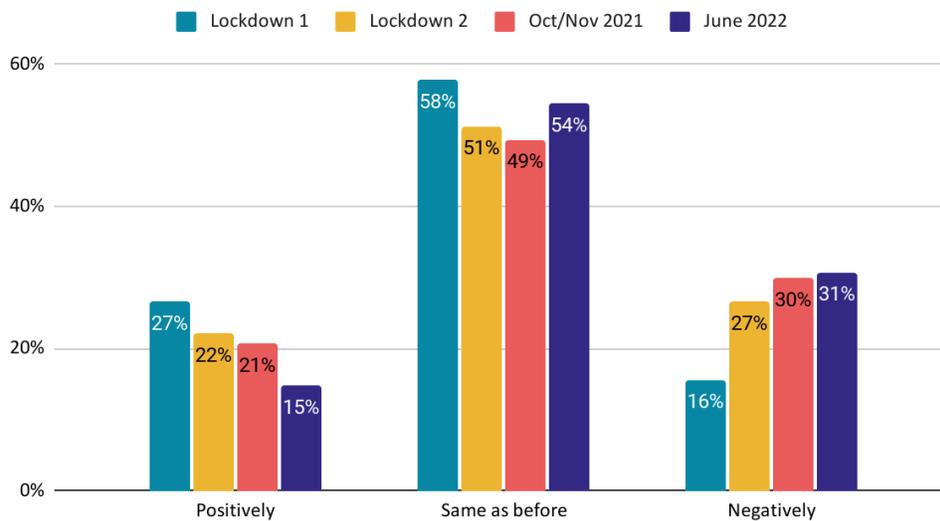
"I do what I can to make sure nothing has changed however I feel like this is why it's taken a toll on my own well-being"

"My relationship with my kids is everything. They are the 2 most important factors of my life. As long as I work with that in mind and keep that at my forefront, it will never be otherwise."

Partner / Co-parent

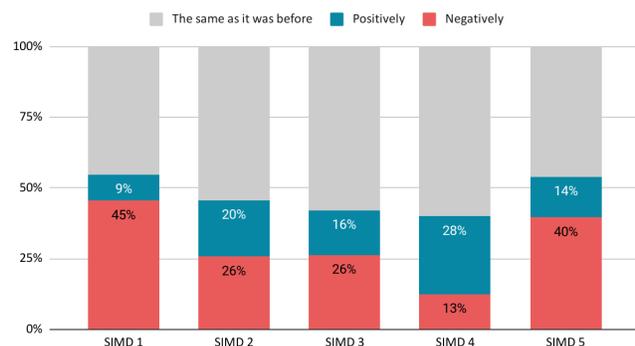
Dads' relationships with their partners or co-parents have been gradually deteriorating since the start of the pandemic. Our survey results show a steady decline in the number of dads reporting that the relationship with their co-parent has been positively affected over time, from 27% during the first lockdown to just 15% in our most recent survey. The number of dads reporting that their relationship with their co-parent has been negatively affected has almost doubled since the first Lockdown, 16% during lockdown 1 and 31% in the most recent survey.

Your Relationships - Over the last 6 months how has your relationship with your co-parent been affected?



Levels of deprivation seem to have a significant impact on the dad's relationship with their co-parents. With dads from both the most deprived areas and the least deprived areas being negatively impacted over the last 6 months.

Relationship with partner / co-parent based on SIMD (n=209)



We asked dads who reported changes in the relationships with their co-parent over the last 6 months either positive or negative to tell us more about what had caused these changes:

Positive

Of the 17 dads told why they had reported positive changes themes of mutual support, improvements at work and children getting older emerged:

“Lockdown was really hard for me and my wife but we now have a lot to look forward so things are much better than they had been.”

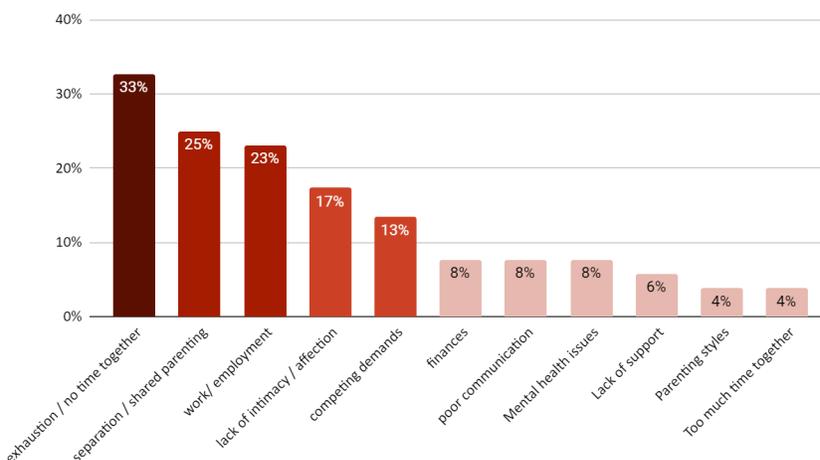
“It has improved since I changed job and I am in a happier workplace.”

“As we get out of the baby phase we are beginning to get a little bit of time back to relate to each other as husband and wife rather than as overworked members of a parenting team.”

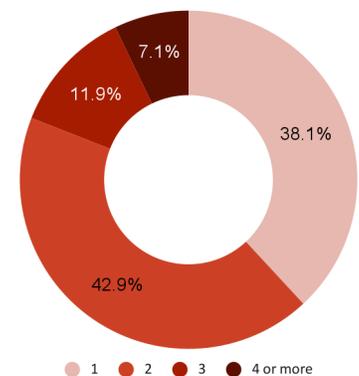
Negative:

52 dads told us about their negative experiences. A third of those talked about exhaustion or lack of time together, and almost a quarter talked about work or employment as a cause. And almost two thirds gave 2 or more reasons for the deterioration.

How the relationship with my co-parent has been affected negatively (n=52)



Number of reasons given for relationship difficulties (n=42)



“Tiredness and lack of money make things very difficult. We both do our best but it can be hard”

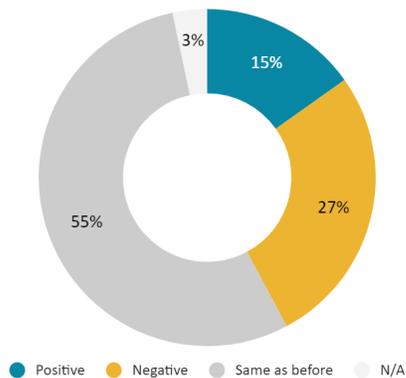
“Constantly stressing about how we will cope with the change of hours and worrying about the cost of living etc has led to a lot of tension.”

“It can be difficult as I'm so tired and we can't spend time together. We organised a lovely family day, then I get called away to work. Work comes first and I can't say no.”

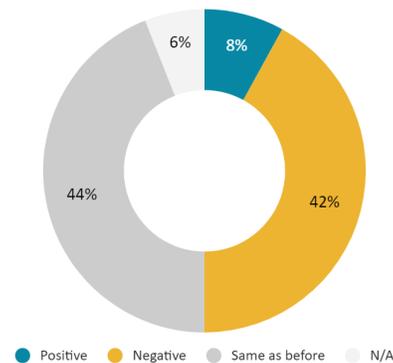
Living arrangements

14% of the dads live apart from their children and 4% have other living arrangements e.g. living apart from some of their children and with others. The relationship some of these dads can have with their child's other parents can be particularly difficult. 42% told us that their relationship had been negatively affected in the past month, compared to 27% of dads who live with their child's other parent.

I live with my child/children's other parent (n=211)



I live apart from my children / other circumstances (n=50)



A greater percentage of these dads also suffered from poor mental health, with over a third (34%) telling us that it was not great or very poor (compared to an average of 28%). The family court system seems to be particularly damaging:

“Going through court has had its challenges.. unnecessary fall outs and what I would describe as ‘point scoring’ attempts from the other parent, much to my frustration as I believe our child should be left out.”

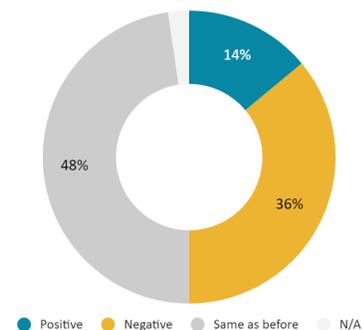
Parents with children under 2

Relationships between parents with children 2 or under are particularly badly affected with over a third (36%) telling us their relationship had been negatively affected (compared to an average of 27%)

“Parenting is hard!!! Disrupted sleep, very little time together, reduced intimacy, always seeing the ‘worst’ in each other.”

“Lot of stresses on sharing responsibilities, while I'm working full time and partner is on maternity leave. She is worried about returning to work herself which causes tensions between us”

I have a child 2 or under and am living with my child/children's other parent (n=86)



Grandparents and extended family

The African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” recognises that parenting is a shared responsibility - a communal affair - not just the concern of parents. It conveys the message that it takes many people to provide a safe, healthy environment that children need.

Families come in all shapes and sizes but grandparents and other family members often provide crucial, but frequently unrecognised support, that children and parents need to survive and thrive. That's why we asked dads about this important support network.

50% of dads told us that grandparents or relatives help with childcare and for some it is essential:

“It would be impossible without having both my parents and my wife's parents to help.”

“We are heavily dependent on... grandparents who travel 15 miles each way to collect/drop off one of our children.”

Others talked about how they missed wider family support:

“We don't have family members to help out... work always comes first, which is not fair to our kids.”

Both grandparents we heavily rely on for childcare have been unwell which require us to 'cover'... It is actually a bit scary how volatile our support network is, essentially if myself, my partner or one grandparent is unwell, it is definitely noticeable and you can see the impact.

Parenting in the future

During the spring of 2020 millions of dads, unable to go out to work, stepped up to do much more hands-on caring of their children. Additional time at home with their family and alternative ways of working showed many dads that there were alternative ways to share parenting and balancing work and family life.

Over the last 2 years our series of dads surveys has sought to track the changes happening to families across Scotland and assess if the pandemic has fundamentally changed the way families parent.

During the first lockdown 56% of dads told us the experience of living through the pandemic has changed the way you would like to parent in the future. They did not want to return to 'normal' but continue to be there for their children.

Two years on this number has remained almost the same at 54%. Of those dads 57% told us they wanted to spend more time with their family and 34% wanted to ensure their work was family-friendly. It may be too soon to say with absolute certainty that the pandemic has altered fatherhood for good, but as one dad told us...

"I want to be bolder and unashamed of putting family first.

I'd never before considered asking my employer to allow me to, say, work remotely for a period to allow my family to have an extended holiday during school break.

The pandemic was when I became a father. I feared sharing my father's guilt of being (necessarily) absent due to work. The pandemic seems to have given me a gift of time at the beginning and hybrid working if we can maintain it a real tool to balance things better."