Choosing to be different

Women, work and the family

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT sets store by its agenda for 'family-friendly' working practices. It claims to favour the achievement of a better work-life balance. But will its policies, based on increased regulation, the expansion of daycare and an elaborate system of employee rights, really improve the quality of family life in Britain today? In particular, will these policies deliver a change for the better in the lives of women, who currently bear most of the pressure in trying to reconcile the competing demands of home and work?

The Government's current programme appears to be based on the assumption that men and women should be homogenous and interchangeable. In this vision of family life, all adults of working age, regardless of gender or parental status, should ideally be in full-time paid employment, equal earners and taking equal shares in their domestic responsibilities.

The problem is that this vision ignores the changes which come about in the lives of women when they become mothers. It assumes that, given the choice between work and home responsibilities, women will exercise that choice in the same way as men. In other words, that their priority will be participation in the job market. But the evidence shows that the choices women make are based on a different set of priorities from those of their male counterparts. Women today have no difficulty in regarding themselves as equal with men, but they do not consider themselves the same. In particular, on becoming mothers, only a

small percentage of women remain centred on their careers. The majority choose a more home-centred pattern of work, either by reducing their working hours, transferring to part-time work or leaving the job market entirely. Large numbers of mothers who remain in work due to financial pressure continue to express a clear preference for more time at home.

Fresh evidence of the life-choices being made by contemporary women is provided by new national research by Dr Catherine Hakim of the London School of Economics. Dr Hakim has tested 'preference theory' – her hypothesis that women's lifestyle preferences tend to determine the pattern of their lives, and that with the benefit of equal opportunities, women continue to make choices which are different from those made by men.[1]

The results and implications of Dr. Hakim's research are revealed in this pamphlet. They suggest that a clear choice exists for those framing public policy: should Government recognise the preferences of women? Or should it seek to override them in the belief that it knows best? The evidence is clear that the majority of women want to give a high priority to their families and their relationships. By doing so, they are also fulfilling a vital role in society. But if the Government were to recognise these real-life choices made by women today, then it would need to adjust its social, welfare and employment policies to respond to 21st century reality, rather than to egalitarian dogma.

1 Dr Catherine Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Ashgate, July, 2003.

CHAPTER TWO

WORKING FAMILIES: THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW

GOVERNMENT MINISTERS have frequently stated that they would like us to achieve a better work-life balance.[2] On the face of it, this is an attractive proposition. Who would not like the opportunity of a balanced life? But is that really what we are being offered?

At first sight, the Government's programme appears reasonable enough. Reducing lone mothers' dependency on the state, offering a 'single seamless system of support for families', 'tackling child poverty' and 'making work pay' are hardly controversial.[3] The problems come with the Government's target-driven, regulatory approach which means that it is interfering in many aspects of family life where parents are likely to be the better judge of what is right for their families; and in the Government's underlying assumption that *all* mothers want to pursue full-time careers while they are bringing up their children.

The Government has published two reports which set out its strategy and the spending required to give shape and substance to its plans. The first, *Delivering for Children and Families,* came from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in November 2002. The Government's intention to interfere in family life is spelt out clearly:

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2 For example, in *Balancing work and family life: enhancing choice and support for parents*, Gordon Brown and Patricia Hewitt stated that:

> "We are providing parents with more choice and support than ever before to balance family and work in ways that benefit everyone – employers, employees and their children."

3 Ibid.

> The Government is developing an overarching strategy for all children and young people from conception to age 19.[4]

Whether or not such an overarching strategy is desirable, it is certainly ambitious. Unfortunately, it is also full of contradictions. For example, a central part of this strategy is a major increase in child care spending (doubling to £1.2 billion over three years, plus £725 million on Childcare Tax Credit).[5] Yet the report also acknowledges that many mothers are reluctant to use formal child care, preferring informal, family-based care (which does not attract any credit or subsidy). It also seeks substantial increases in child care facilities but admits that existing child care suppliers have enormous difficulty recruiting staff.

One solution proposed by the DWP to the recruitment problem is to "encourage more men into what is currently a female-dominated sector."[6] Given the current difficulty experienced by schools in attracting and retaining male teachers at primary level, recruiting young men into day nurseries does not seem a realistic proposal. But it provides a signal of the overall objective – removing 'gender stereotypes.'

The document openly states that its aim is to increase the number of two-earner families:[7]

> The set-up of the childcare tax credit is particularly effective, since it ensures strong incentives for the second earner in a family to move into work.

It also claims that child care:

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4 *Delivering for Children and Families*, p. 12.

5 Public expenditure on child care is divided between subsidies to daycare providers (creating nursery places and after-school clubs, start-up grants, training schemes, pump-priming, advertising and recruitment) and subsidies to parents through Childcare Tax Credits and the New Deal for Lone Parents.

6 *Delivering for Children and Families*, p. 22.

7 *Delivering for Children and Families*, p. 17.

> …plays a key role in extending choice for women by enhancing their ability to compete in the labour market on more equal terms, helping them to overcome the glass ceiling.[8]

But the reasons why some mothers do not go out to work are far more complex than lack of child care. Some simply don't want to, preferring to stay at home to look after their children. Others may prefer to work in part-time jobs; and many working mothers also prefer family-based care for their children rather than institutional care.

The link between child care places and labour market equality is tenuous at best, and to suggest that daycare subsidies will propel women through the glass ceiling does not indicate a practical understanding of the realities of what mothers want. A strategy genuinely based on extending choice and opportunities for women would look very different.

There was a little more recognition of the realities of parental choice when the Department for Trade and Industry joined forces with the Treasury in January 2003 to produce *Balancing work and family life: enhancing choice and support for parents.* This consultation paper considers how child care provision and subsidy can be extended but also reviews the state of maternity and paternity leave provisions and the new rights for parents to request flexible working. Once again, however, the emphasis is on getting women to spend more time in the workplace and achieving 'gender equality.'[9] The Foreword to the consultation states that:

> Enabling parents to balance work and family responsibilities can make the difference between their participation in the labour market and their exclusion.

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8 *Delivering for Children and Families,* p. 5.

9 "Supporting greater participation of men in family responsibilities is important to the objective of gender equality and as important as increasing women's ability to participate in the labour market." *Balancing work and family life: enhancing choice and support for parents,* p. 14.

But the careful use of the gender-neutral 'parents' instead of 'mothers' should deceive no-one. It is assumed automatically that getting as many women into work as possible is a good in itself. For example, the paper regrets that the:

> …imbalance in caring responsibilities between men and women is reflected in the fact that women take significantly more time out of the labour market than men in order to care for children. [This] translate[s] into lower earnings, reflecting, for example, the depreciation of their skills and reduced level of work experience.[10]

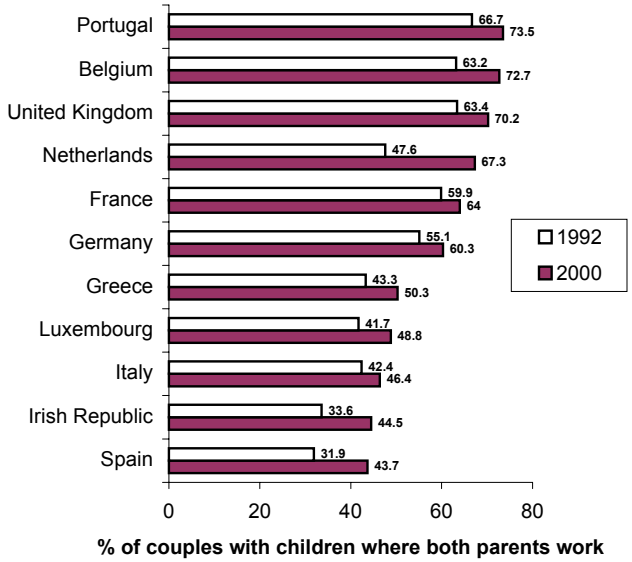
This statement implies that the objective is to reduce the amount of time women spend in the home. The 'choices' offered in this document are still based on the assumptions described earlier – that men and women are deemed interchangeable, and that both should be workplace-based. Because it is unwilling to distinguish between mothers and fathers, there is no scope for consideration of women's preferences.

[10] *Balancing work and family life: enhancing choice and support for parents,* p. 16.

WORKING FAMILIES: THE REALITY

TO WHAT EXTENT do British families embrace the Government's vision of a symmetrical two-earner model of family life? Eurostat figures show that over the last ten years there has indeed been a marked rise throughout Europe in the number of families where both parents are employed. Britain is no exception to this trend: two-earner couples with children have risen from 63.4% to 70.2%.

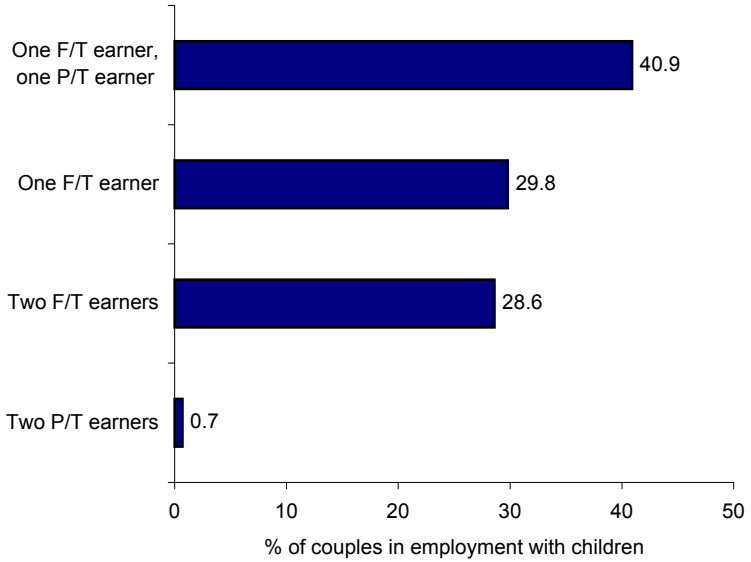
More parents in work throughout the EU



Source: Eurostat, *Statistics in Focus*, Population and social conditions, no. 9/2002, *Women and men reconciling work and family life*.

But in the UK less than a third of couples with children consist of two *full-time* workers. Almost 30% still have only one earner, and four out of every ten couples consist of a husband working full-time and his wife working part-time.

…but two full-time earners are a minority



Source: Eurostat, *Statistics in Focus*, Population and social conditions, no. 9/2002, *Women and men reconciling work and family life*.

Similarly, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies in a 2002 report, 36% of partnered mothers in the UK are not working. 37% work part-time, just 28% work full-time.[11] Among the under-40s, there remains a big difference between male and female employment patterns; figures from Hakim's national survey[12] show three-quarters of men under 40 are in full-time work, but only one third of women. Another third of women work part-time and a quarter are full-time homemakers.

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11 G. Paull, J. Taylor, A. Duncan, *Mothers Employment and Childcare Use in Britain*, IFS, Spring 2002.

12 C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies,* p. 130.

Employment patterns in Britain by age

	Men			Women		
	Under 40	**Over 40**	**All**	**Under 40**	**Over 40**	**All**
Full-time work	74%	46%	57%	37%	21%	28%
Part-time work	7%	5%	6%	31%	21%	25%
Unemployed	5%	4%	4%	4%	1%	2%
Student	8%	--	4%	6%	--	4%
Retired	--	36%	21%	--	38%	22%
Economically inactive	6%	10%	8%	23%	19%	20%

Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 5.3, p. 130.

All this evidence suggest that a dual-earner, symmetrical model of the family with interchangeable spouses is *not* the prevalent model in Britain today. Families are more likely to have one earner (usually the husband) working full-time, while the other is either caring for children full-time or combining part-time work with family responsibilities. Is this through choice or circumstance, and do women really aspire to the two-career working family model? The results of Catherine Hakim's research suggest that most women do not aspire to this model – and the findings also help to explain *why*.

CHAPTER FOUR

PREFERENCE THEORY

DURING THE 1990S, Dr Catherine Hakim developed a new, research-based theory to explain and predict women's choices between the competing demands of work and family. Termed 'preference theory,' Hakim's approach examined the evidence of working patterns adopted by women today and, most significantly, looked behind the snapshot of employment figures to find out *why* these working patterns remain so different from those practised by men.[13] From an exhaustive analysis of the available research evidence on women's work histories and life goals from the 1970s onwards, Hakim concluded that, contrary to feminist assumptions, women do not operate as a homogenous group, held back by sex discrimination from pursuing their ambitions. Hakim's theory predicted that women would continue to fulfil a very different role in the labour market from men (see box opposite).

[13] C. Hakim, *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century – Preference Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Preference theory

Five historical changes in society and in the labour market over the last 30 years have produced a 'new scenario' for women:

- the contraceptive revolution, giving women control over their own fertility;
- the equal opportunities revolution, giving women equal access to all positions, occupations and careers in the labour market;
- the expansion of white-collar occupations, more attractive to women than most blue-collar occupations;
- the expansion of part-time jobs;
- the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in the lifestyle choices of people in affluent modern societies.

Hakim argues that, far from causing women to think and act like men in relation to their employment, these changes have led to greater diversity of lifestyles among women. She reports that analysis of women's preferences shows that women fall into three categories:

- '**work-centred' women,** giving highest priority to their careers (15 to 20% of the population);
- '**family-centred' women,** whose lives are devoted to home and family (also 15 to 20% of the population);
- '**adaptive' women,** whose lives encompass both work and family (60 to 70% of the population).

This largest group, the 'adaptive' women tend to express their life-choice by working reduced hours at certain stages of their lives, and/or combining part-time work with child care, or taking career breaks in their children's early years.

Testing Preference Theory: the British survey

Dr Hakim's latest research tested preference theory by inserting a module of questions in the Office of National Statistics (ONS) omnibus survey in January and February 1999.[14] The questions (see box on page 13) aimed to identify the three categories of women described by preference theory and to ascertain the factors which determine how and why women fall into each of these categories. (For example, what is the impact of a woman's education and training in shaping her choice of lifestyle? And is it determined by socio-economic background? The short answer, incidentally, to both of those questions is: much less than you might think.)

The questions are structured so that they do not simply provide information about the current way of life of the respondents, but also assess their ideals and preferences. The first four questions are concerned with *public* opinion and attitude, the remaining three examine *personal* preference. Careful analysis of the results, with comparisons against the background, education and circumstances of the participants, enables Hakim not only to assess trends in modern family life but also to measure aspiration against reality. For example, do women's preferences predict employment patterns, or are those patterns determined by external factors? To what extent does public opinion conflict with personal decision-making?

The answers to the questions are important in their implications for social and employment policy. If government ignore the underlying factors which shape behaviour, and try to engineer results which conflict with human nature, their policies are, at worst, likely to be harmful and, at best, an expensive waste of resources.

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[14] The ONS survey is a nationally-representative, random sample survey, primarily used as a means for government departments to monitor the effect of government policies. Hakim's research forms part of the Economic Social and Research Council's *Future of Work* Research Programme 1998 – 2003.

The Seven Questions

1. **Even when women work, the man should be the *main* breadwinner in the family?** agree strongly/somewhat, no strong feelings, disagree somewhat/strongly.

2. **In times of high unemployment, married women should stay at home?** agree strongly/somewhat, no strong feelings, disagree somewhat/strongly.

3. **Who *should* have the *ultimate* responsibility for ensuring an adequate income for a family?** The male partner? The female partner? Or both equally?

4. **Who *should* have the *ultimate* responsibility for ensuring that the housework is done properly in a household?** The male partner? The female partner? Or both equally?

5. **If *without* having to work you had what you would regard as a reasonable living income, would you still prefer to have a paid job, or wouldn't you bother?**

6. **People talk about the changing role of husband and wife in the family. Here are three kinds of family. Which of them corresponds with *your* ideas about the family?**

- A family where the two partners each have an equally demanding job and where housework and the care of the children are shared equally between them. (Termed the 'egalitarian' or 'symmetrical' model);
- A family where the wife has a less demanding job than her husband and where she does the larger share of housework and caring for the children (The 'compromise' model);
- A family where only the husband has a job and the wife runs the home (The 'role segregation' model);
- None of these three cases.

7. **Who is the *main* income-earner in your household?** Yourself? Your partner/spouse? Both of you jointly? Or someone else?

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FINDINGS: COUPLES AND WORK

Who are the breadwinners?

> At the start of the 21st century, four-fifths of men still see themselves as a main breadwinner. Three-fifths of women see themselves as secondary earners, if they work at all… In effect, the majority of wives still regard themselves as secondary earners and this leads them to choose part-time jobs and to earn less than their husbands.[15]

Hakim's findings show that the vast majority of all couples of working age continue to regard the husband as the principal earner and the wife as the secondary earner (if she works at all):

% regarding themselves as main or equal earner

	Husbands	**Wives**
20 - 39 years	93%	22%
40 - 59 years	89%	30%

Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 3.11, p. 78.

This varies little across social class and age group. Furthermore, at least two-thirds of people who choose the dual-earner model as their ideal of family life *still* regard the husband as the primary earner:

15 C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies,* p. 120.

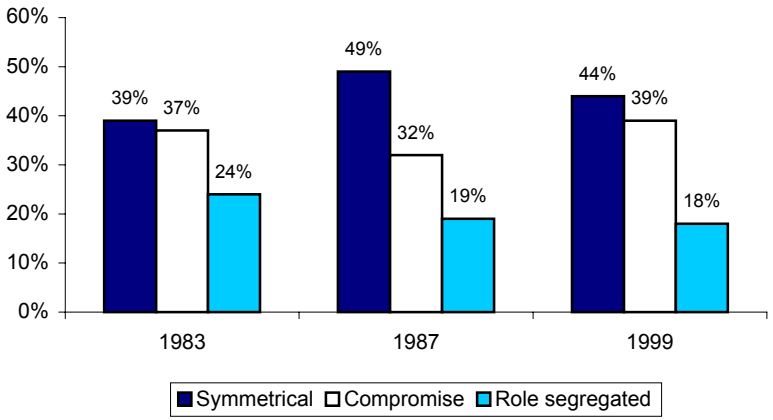
Who earns more according to the preferred family model?

	The preferred family model					
	Symmetrical		Compromise		Role segregated	
Main earner	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Husband	64%	64%	91%	81%	76%	73%
Both spouses	22%	15%	4%	9%	18%	12%
Wife	14%	20%	5%	10%	6%	15%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: Data for couples aged 20 –59 who have completed full-time education.
Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 3.12a, p. 80.

Hakim compares these findings with 1983 and 1987 Eurobarometer data showing that support for the symmetrical model of the family in Britain first rose slightly (during the 1980s) – and then fell. The compromise model became more popular during the 1990s, whereas the symmetrical dual-earner couple became a less attractive ideal. It seems that the 'Superwoman' as role model peaked in the 1980s, along with the Yuppies.

How the preferred model of the family has changed

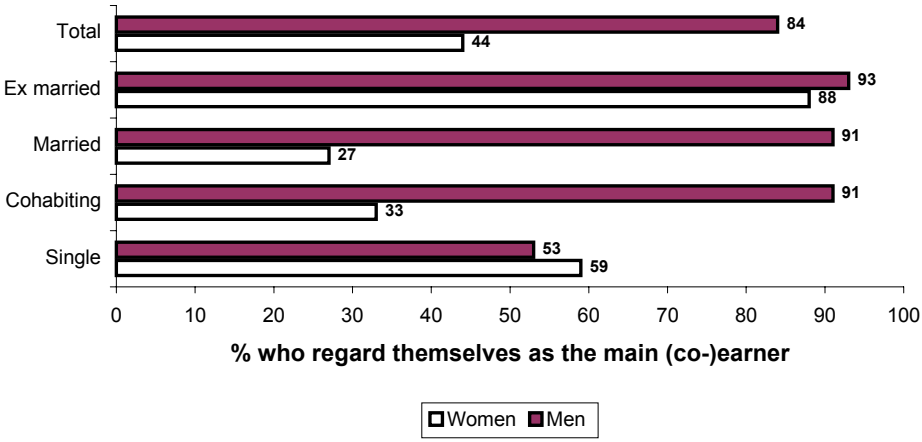


Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 3.3 p. 54.

The impact of marriage

For both men and women, the 'breadwinner role' is very closely linked with marital status. About half of women regard themselves as primary earners until they marry, when the proportion drops to about a quarter. In men, the proportion rises on marriage from half to nine out of ten. This suggests that traditional expectations of marriage still remain valid – women see marriage as a route to financial security, and men still accept the role of breadwinner as part of a husband's responsibilities.

Who is the main earner?



Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 3.13, p. 82.

This does not mean that women expect their husband to bear the entire burden of wage-earning. The findings confirm that most British wives prefer the 'compromise' model of the family, giving them a secondary earner role.

Amongst their husbands, however, there seems to be some conflict between ideas and reality. Although most men claim to be primary earners, half *also* claim to favour the symmetrical family model, in which they share earning responsibilities and domestic responsibilities equally:

The preferred family model: his and her view

	Preferred model of family		
	Symmetrical	**Compromise**	**Role segregated**
Men	49%	36%	15%
Women	44%	42%	14%
Husbands	46%	39%	15%
Wives	38%	48%	14%

Note: People aged 20 – 59 years excluding full-time students.
Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 4.8, p. 111.

What explains the contradiction between male claims to be primary earners and yet to prefer sharing equally with their wives in breadwinning and domestic responsibilities? A cynic might suggest that the husbands think of their roles as 'equal' until their wives remind them that this means they also have to do half the chores – at which point the men revert to their claim to be primary earners, too exhausted by the strain of breadwinning to wash the floor. There is also a degree of self-censorship here – men seem reluctant to openly admit to any desire for role-differentiation, lest they be accused of harbouring sexist views.

The evidence is that majority of modern women still expect to (and do) reduce their level of career commitment on marriage, because they see their husbands as the main breadwinners. This ties up with Hakim's evidence on the 'marriage market', set out in detail in her previous book on preference theory.[16] Hakim found that as women have in recent decades achieved higher qualifications, their tendency to marry better-qualified and more educated men has grown, rather than diminished. Even for women who have themselves achieved status and earning power, their husbands' material prospects remain important. Women today are still looking for slightly older, wealthier and more powerful husbands. It seems that there is little demand for toy-

16 C. Hakim, *Work-Lifestyle Preferences in the 21st Century – Preference Theory*, Chapter 7.

boys – or for househusbands. In Hakim's latest survey, the number of families where the husband had taken on the domestic role while his wife provided the family income was so small as to be almost invisible. Role-swapping has not caught on.

Women continue to choose men who are likely to be ahead in the breadwinning stakes, who can provide them with the opportunity in due course to take time out of the workforce, or to reduce their job commitments, in order to concentrate on home and family.

Further confirmation of women's tendency to rate the earning power of their potential partners was provided by the British Psychological Society. In a detailed survey of the lonely hearts columns, women advertising for a mate were found to be six times more likely than men to be seeking status, and were more interested in a man's income and education than in his physical attributes.[17]

Why can't a man... be more like a woman?

This analysis helps to answer another question that has puzzled many social commentators. It is often reported that, despite the greater participation of women in the job market and the growth of the dual-earner family, women remain disproportionately responsible for housework. Hakim's research does much to explain why there remains a gap between ideals and reality.

The supposition is that dual-earner couples are aiming for an equal division of labour. If this supposition is right, then women should be surprised and aggrieved when their husbands do not do their fair share in the home. But Hakim shows that when individuals are questioned about their *personal* ideals and circumstances, women at all income levels are still choosing men for their breadwinning capacity and for their success in the world of paid work. Even among dual-earner couples, roles are differentiated, and the men are significantly more likely to be work-centred than their female partners.[18]

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17 "Lonely heart ladies WLTM rich gents – looks unimportant," *Daily Telegraph,* 14 March 2003.

18 C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies* Table 5.6, p. 135.

Confirmation of the importance of work and breadwinning in men's lives appeared in March this year when the Work Foundation think-tank reported (in a survey for the magazine *Management Today*) that for nine out of ten men their job provides them with a sense of accomplishment in life. Four out of ten said that they would rather push for promotion than spend extra time with their children; nearly a third believe that the Government's new regulations giving time off for parents have gone too far. *Management Today's* editor Matthew Gwyther said:

> Modern dads are in a dilemma. They understand the importance of spending time with their families and want to contribute on the domestic front. But at the same time men still derive an immense amount of satisfaction from their jobs and in quite a traditional way continue to define their sense of accomplishment through their work.[19]

Stephen Bevan of the Work Foundation regretted this old-fashioned view, saying:

> Legislation giving parents the right to family-friendly working is a step in the right direction but it is clear that there is still some way to go before attitudes catch up.

Pity these men, struggling to bring their 'attitudes' in line with current legislation. A survey in 2001 by the University of East Anglia reported new fathers having difficulty in combining work and home loyalties. Its author pointed out:

> They found it difficult to reconcile being both provider and supportive partner and home-builder.[20]

Living up to expectations as a 'new man,' is not always easy - and it doesn't seem any better for the over-40s. In the same year,

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19 "Do so many men really want to work long hours?" *Daily Mail*, 28 March 2003.

20 Dr K. Henwood, *First time fathers question their role as provider,* Economic and Social Research Council, November 2001.

researchers at the Department of Psychiatry at Queen Mary's School of Medicine found that middle-aged men whose partners worked full-time had higher depression scores than those whose partners worked part-time or who were at home caring for the family. Similarly, men whose partners moved from caring for the family to full-time work were also more depressed.[21]

Role strain and marital tension

The 'reality gap' is not just a problem for policy makers. For those couples who aspire to the equal-earning equal-sharing model of family life, there seems to be the most ideological inconsistency *within* couples, about their roles. Couples who prefer role specialisation seem more likely to share each other's views on family structure.

This might explain Hakim's findings that those couples who believe in the symmetrical family type are almost twice as likely to be divorced or separated (13%) as those who prefer some differentiation of roles (7%).[22] This concurs with previous findings from the National Child Development Survey showing that role-differentiated marriages are generally happier and less prone to divorce.[23]

Further confirmation emerged from a more recent study by Professor Susan MacRae of Oxford Brookes University which reported that mothers returning to full-time work soon after having a baby are much more likely to end up divorced than those who stay at home or work part-time.[24] Couples seem to find it easier to

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21 Professor S. Stansfeld, and Dr V. Cattell, *Men with stay at home partners less likely to be depressed*, Economic Social & Research Council, November 2001.

22 C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 4.10, p. 116.

23 For NCDS data, see C. Hakim, *Work-Lifestyle Preferences in the 21st Century – Preference Theory*, Chapter 5.

24 Professor Susan MacRae, *Careers and motherhood still don't mix*, Economic and Social Research Council report, December 2001.

practice the more traditional model, based on some division of labour, even if they originally hoped to defeat the stereotype.

Hakim's figures also show that couples who prefer role specialisation generally have the largest families, whereas those who favour the symmetrical model tend to have fewer children. The rise in the dual-earner family has certainly had implications for the UK's falling birth-rate.

Stay-at-home wives have more children

	Preferred model of family		
	Symmetrical	**Compromise**	**Role segregated**
Average no. of children under 16 at home:	.79	.98	1.13

Source: Calculated from Table 4.8, p. 111 in C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*.

Hakim also finds that amongst couples of working age who describe themselves as joint earners (just 13% of all couples), three-quarters of them have no dependent children at home.[25] It appears that most of the couples who succeed in practising a symmetrical family life are unencumbered by the demands of children.

[25] C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies,* p. 112.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FINDINGS: WOMEN, WORK AND IDENTITY

Work *v.* life

Hakim has also explored the ways in which men and women define themselves in relation to their work. She creates what she terms an *index of work centrality* by combining answers on work commitment (would you still work if you could afford not to?) with those on primary earner identity (are you the main or co-earner in your household?) The results show that jobs are central to identities for 55% of husbands and just 17% of wives in Britain:

Job centrality among couples

	% of whom are job-centred	
	Husbands	**Wives**
20 to 39 year olds	60%	15%
40 to 59 year olds	50%	19%
All aged 20 to 59	55%	17%

Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 3.11, p. 78.

Just as men seem to be inconsistent in their claims to be both breadwinners and equal sharers, Hakim finds some inconsistency in women's views about equality. Only one-third of those wives who believe in the symmetrical dual-earning model of family life actually regard their jobs as central to their identity.

Amongst wives who prefer differentiated roles (husband as main earner, wife primarily responsible for the home) most do not regard themselves as work-centred – a logical conclusion.

Putting together the survey answers, Hakim is able to establish the proportion of women who can be classified as work-centred, those who are home-centred, and those she terms 'adaptives' – whose lives are not dominated by work but who seek an even balance between the demands of a job and their domestic role.[26] The following table shows national distributions of work-centred, home-centred and adaptive women. The results largely confirm Hakim's previous analysis and show that the 'adaptive' group is by far the largest – 69%.

National distribution of lifestyle preferences among women

	Home centred	Adaptive	Work centred
All aged 16+	17%	69%	14%
All aged 16-64	14%	71%	15%
Wives aged 20-59	13%	77%	10%
All in employment	11%	72%	17%
Full-time workers	14%	62%	24%
Part-time workers	8%	84%	8%

Note: Excludes full-time students
Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 3.14, p. 85.

Only 14% of women are classified as work-centred. These women, frequently childfree, can rightly be deemed to share the ambitions and values of their male colleagues, but these results show that they are not representative of their sex in general. Another 17% are classified as 'home-centred', whose lives are devoted to their children and families. Again, this is only a minority, but is similar in size to the work-centred, and worth noting since it confounds the widespread modern assumption that a 'home career' is no longer a viable or desirable way of life.

[26] Those women who like the idea of the symmetrical model but who say they are not work-centred are classified by Hakim as 'adaptives' – clearly they cannot be classified as work-centred, yet neither do they confine their interests to the domestic sphere.

Among married women of working age the adaptive category increases and the work-centred figure falls. Interestingly, it is not just part-time working women who regard themselves as 'adaptive'. Even among full-time workers this self-perception predominates: two-thirds of full-time working women appear to be adaptive; only a quarter are work-centred. Many women in full-time jobs do not see themselves as independent lifelong breadwinners. They may be working full-time to meet financial pressures, perhaps only for a phase in their lives, planning or preferring to spend some time out of the workforce or in part-time employment. Their attitude is best described as 'work to live' rather than 'live to work'.

Most of this sounds like common sense. Women who become wives and mothers do still tend to put their home lives before their jobs. But for a Government committed to more female participation in the workforce, financial independence for women both in work and in old age, and expanding institutional child care, these findings do not fit the script.

The impact of motherhood

The Government cannot claim to be unaware of this reality gap, for Hakim's findings largely concur with a 1999 survey conducted by the Cabinet Office Women's Unit. Called *Listening to Women*, its results showed that most women see themselves as having jobs, not careers, and that their family and child care commitments come first. The women interviewed said they want choice, and when they are not working, they want motherhood to be valued and respected. As many as one-third believe that home and children are a woman's main focus in life.[27]

This was probably not the message that the Women's Unit had been looking for. The findings were not publicised. Women did not, it seemed, want to join in the fight for parity with men; they knew they had something else to do – spend time with their families.

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[27] Bryson and others, *Women's Attitudes to Combining Paid Work and Family Life*, Cabinet Office Women's Unit, 1999.

These findings were by no means a one-off. Since then, a series of surveys have underlined the importance that women attach to their role as mothers. As the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) found last year, only 10% of part-time working women were interested in increasing their hours and only a quarter of non-working women wanted to be back in work.[28] A survey published in May 2002 by the magazine *Pregnancy & Birth* found that 75% of mothers-to-be would not return to full-time (or even part-time) employment if their finances allowed.[29] According to the same survey, a remarkable 87% of pregnant women and working mothers said the Government should "put more energies into financially helping mothers to stay at home rather than trying to force all mothers back into the workplace." Also in 2002, BUPA/*Top Santé* magazine polled 5,000 women and found that only one in five wanted to be a 'career woman'; 83% claimed they would quit their jobs and look after their children if they could afford to. Nine out of ten mothers thought children suffer emotionally because of the stress of mothers trying to juggle work and home.[30] The National Birth and Motherhood Survey conducted by *Mother & Baby* magazine reported in October that of 3,000 mothers questioned, more than 85% would choose to be stay-at-home mothers in an ideal world.[31]

Of the non-working mothers surveyed by the IFS, 83% of those with pre-school children, and 66% of those with school-age children, said they were not looking for work because of their children. Indeed, the DTI's *Balancing work and family life* (referred to earlier) acknowledges that "To a large extent, the predominance of part-time working reflects choice." [32]

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28 Paull et al, *Mothers Employment and Childcare Use in Britain*, IFS, 2002.

29 "Women 'prefer motherhood to going to work'," *The Times*, 16 May 2002.

30 The National Women and Work survey, "Have it all? We just do it all…," *Evening Standard*, 12 June 2002.

31 "Let us stay at home with our babies", *The Times*, 1 October 2002.

32 *Balancing work and family life: enhancing choice and support for parents,* p. 16.

This suggests that the Government's expansion of daycare as a method of getting more women into work is likely to have limited effect. As Hakim argues, a mother's decision whether or not to return to work after the birth of her child is determined primarily by her values.[33] It is a question of attitude rather than circumstance and will depend on a woman's view of her identity – either as a mother first and foremost, or as a working woman who happens to have a child. Hakim examines the 'contextual' factors which influence women's work-rates, and finds that if women are 'work-centred,' their participation in the labour market is not influenced by their parental responsibilities. If they perceive themselves as home-centred, having children is much more likely to keep them at home. This bears out earlier US research from the National Longitudinal Survey,[34] showing a woman's decision whether or not to work after children depends on her prior choice of emphasis on the home as her central responsibility.

More time at home, please

Hakim's findings also appear to confirm that many working women would spend more time at home if they could afford it. A substantial proportion (41%) of the women in Hakim's survey who said they preferred full-time homemaking were nevertheless working full-time – apparently because economic necessity overrides preference.[35] In other words, a good many full-time working women would rather be homemakers if they could be. It seems that the Government's current, work-centred policies are appropriate for enabling work-centred women to pursue their chosen lifestyle – but they are not enabling home-centred, or indeed adaptive women, to focus on their families.

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33 C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies,* p. 123 citing British Social Attitudes Survey, Thomson 1995: 80-83; Hakim 1997: 35-44; Himmelweit, 2001 and two studies in ESRC future of work survey.

34 C. Hakim, *Work-Lifestyle Preferences in the 21st Century – Preference Theory,* Chapter 4.

35 C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies* Table 5.4, p. 132.

What determines a woman's choice of lifestyle?

Why is it that despite increasing opportunities in education and jobs, women are still choosing different lifestyle priorities from men? It seems that they are simply using those opportunities differently. Hakim's three 'preference groups' cut across class, socio-economic groupings and educational qualifications. A woman's set of personally chosen values seem to be much more important than her education or class background in determining her lifestyle.

The answers to Hakim's survey show that social class has very little impact on the ideal family models – the 'role segregated' model of family (where men are breadwinners and women homemakers) is slightly more popular amongst unskilled women than among women generally (23% compared to 17%) but the group of women next most likely to favour this model are professional women (21%):

Social class has little impact on women's preferences

	The preferred family model		
	Symmetrical	**Compromise**	**Role segregated**
Professionals	42%	37%	21%
Employers/managers	50%	39%	11%
Intermediate non-manual	48%	37%	15%
Junior non-manual	38%	45%	17%
Skilled manual	36%	44%	20%
Semi-skilled manual	41%	42%	17%
Unskilled manual	37%	40%	23%
Total	**42%**	**41%**	**17%**

Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 4.4, p. 100.

There *are* differences between ethnic groupings. Black women are much more likely to favour the symmetrical family model, and to be work-centred, than their white counterparts. Unlike white women, they tend not to become part-time workers once they are mothers, and they have higher work-rates across all occupations. Women from the Indian subcontinent, especially Moslem women, are more likely to prefer some degree of role-segregation.[36]

[36] C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 5.11, p. 147.

Ethnic groupings apart, it seems that women at all levels of society vary to similar degrees between the work-centred and the home-centred, between self-reliance and dependence, whether they are cleaners or company directors.

Likewise, higher education has only a slight effect on a woman's choice of ideal family model, as the following table shows. The preference for the symmetrical model rises with the level of education but the distribution between the different family models is very similar at all education levels. Women who completed higher education are more likely to be work-centred, but the proportion only lifts from a quarter to a third. It seems that many women obtain education as what Hakim calls 'cultural capital,' which enhances the quality of life and status, rather than primarily being the means to lifelong employment.

Education has little impact on women's preferences

	Age at which education completed		
Preferred family model	**Up to 16 years**	**17 to 20 years**	**21 years old +**
Symmetrical	36%	47%	51%
Compromise	45%	39%	35%
Role-segregated	19%	14%	14%
% who believe ultimate responsibility:			
▪ for income lies with man	32%	16%	13%
▪ housekeeping lies with woman	40%	22%	16%
% who are work-centred	24%	26%	35%

Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 4.1a, p. 96.

Sex and segregation

Having established that women at all levels of education remain much less likely than men to be work-centred, Hakim considers whether those women who want to be homemakers, or those who seek an even balance between home and work, limit themselves to particular kinds of jobs. Surprisingly, it seems the answer is No. The following table shows how women choosing different family models are distributed between male-dominated, female-dominated and mixed occupations:

The preferred family model does not affect choice of job

	The preferred family model		
	Symmetrical	**Compromise**	**Role segregated**
'Male' occupation	53%	30%	17%
'Mixed' occupation	45%	48%	7%
'Female' occupation	46%	43%	11%
All	**47%**	**42%**	**11%**

Source: C. Hakim, *Models of the Family in Modern Societies*, Table 6.4, p. 172.

The results show that whether they plan a lifelong career or just a short period of employment prior to marriage, women nowadays feel free to choose any type of occupation. While just over half of women in male-dominated occupations prefer the 'symmetrical' dual-earner model of family life, a significant minority (17%) prefer the traditional role-segregated model. This is similar to the minority of home-centred women in the population as a whole.

There is a popular assumption that people in professional and managerial jobs are committed to long-term careers. Hakim shows that while this is broadly true of men, it does not apply as much for women. The fact that women train to become, for example, lawyers or doctors, or other historically male-dominated occupations, does not mean that they will work full-time throughout their lives. Many of these women will marry; when they have children a significant number of them will either reduce their hours or drop out of the workforce altogether for a time. For the last 20 years or more, equal numbers of men and women have been entering professions such as medicine and the law, but have not reached the top in equal strength. Preference theory suggests that this is not due so much to sex discrimination, but to women exercising choice.

This is not to deny that some job segregation occurs. Women who do not regard themselves as 'work-centred' tend to gravitate towards female-dominated occupations, mainly because they offer the convenience factors of part-time and temporary jobs. Work-

centred women, not surprisingly, are more likely to choose male or mixed occupations. But whatever their occupation the majority of women still do not regard work as central to their identity – just a quarter of women and a fifth of wives. They are choosing different lives from men because they have different priorities, not because they are forced into subservient roles.

Further confirmation of this emerges from the evidence on the behaviour of men and women working in the same occupation. Although they are doing the same 'job', they preserve different work patterns. An example provided by Hakim is pharmacy, to which equal numbers of men and women are recruited. Male pharmacists use pharmacy as a route into self-employment and owning their own business, whereas women use it as a source of family-friendly, part-time work.[37]

While women tend to still favour female occupations because they fit better with family commitments, the increasing availability of part-time and temporary work across all occupations means that this line is becoming more blurred. Women are using the opportunities provided by a diverse, equal-access job market, but they do not wish to be ruled by their work.

[37] C. Hakim, *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century – Preference Theory*, p. 39.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

HAVING ESTABLISHED that women, especially women as mothers, are motivated by different priorities and have different needs from men, it is time to turn to the other part of the work-life equation: their children. To what extent does the Government's collectivist response to family life meet the needs of children?

Child care for all?

To facilitate the fuller participation of women in the job market, the Government is planning a major expansion of child care. As the National Childcare Strategy states, it "aims to deliver quality, affordable and accessible child care in every neighbourhood."[38] Direct spending on child care is to double (to £1.2 billion), and some ambitious targets are cited for the creation of as many as 900,000 new child care places (serving 1.6 million children) by 2004.[39] These places will be in daycare centres and schools or with registered childminders.

This is a significant intervention by government in the upbringing of children. Is the strategy, and consequent expenditure, justified? As already discussed, there is a clear reluctance amongst many mothers to use formal daycare, preferring a mixture of informal and family-based care. In the words of the Government's Listening to Women report:

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38 *Delivering for Children and Families,* p. 10.

39 *Delivering for Children and Families*, p. 10.

> The key criterion which appeared to underpin women's assessment of the different types of childcare was the extent to which it minimized any potential harm caused by the absence of the mother. This led to a general preference for family members, particularly grandparents, to be the replacement carer rather than 'strangers'. There was considerable emphasis on the extent to which carers in formal arrangements could be trusted to provide high-quality care in a safe environment.[40]

Even assuming enough staff can be recruited to service the proposed daycare places, can the Government therefore count on mothers opting to use them? Moreover, is the Government right to try to persuade mothers to use daycare, and is it justified in believing that it is good for children?

Delivering for Children and Families makes much of the merits of child care, claiming it can:

> …improve educational outcomes for children [as well as] meeting other top level objectives, for example in improving health, boosting productivity…reducing crime…[41].

Are these claims justified?

There is clearly scope to argue that children who suffer parental neglect can benefit from being placed in daycare facilities. Indeed, research studies show that intervention from an early age can be good for children who are deprived of attention and stimulation in their own homes, or where their mothers are failing to cope.[42] Where children would otherwise be left to roam the streets, there is also a good case for extending school hours.

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40 *Better for Women, Better for All*, Cabinet Office 1999.

41 *Delivering for Children and Families*, p. 6.

42 An example is the Perry Pre-school programme in Michigan, an early education programme coupled with home visits to improve parenting skills. For a detailed description, see Patricia Morgan, *Who Needs Parents?*, IEA, 1996.

But the wider motive for the expansion of daycare is less about taking children off the streets and more about encouraging mothers to participate in the 'productive' economy.

Professor Jay Belsky, Director of the Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues at London University's Birkbeck College, has been one of the most prominent critics of the rush to daycare, expressing concerns about the developmental consequences of non-maternal care. Belsky warns that children who spend long periods in daycare from an early age seem to be less compliant, more aggressive, less popular and more likely to have behavioural problems than peers who are cared for by their mothers. Belsky's findings are drawn from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Child Care study, an ongoing review of more than 1,000 US families. In his detailed analysis, summarising 20 years of research, Belsky says:

> Children who spent more time in child care during their first five years scored lower on a composite measure of positive adjustment (i.e., peer popularity, teacher-rated peer competence) and higher on a composite measure of negative adjustment (i.e., teacher-rated behaviour problems, peer dislike, observed aggression) than children with less child-care experience.[43]

Belsky reports that more than just ten hours a week of non-maternal care in the first year of life can adversely affect mother-infant security, as can having more than one caregiver in that first year. And he points out that it is not just the mother-child relationship which can be affected – where the child is a boy, the relationship between the infant and his father can suffer. Belsky concludes that:

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[43] Professor Jay Belsky, *Developmental Risks (Still) Associated with Early Child Care,* Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 2001.

> Early nonmaternal care, as routinely experienced on a full- or near-full-time basis, poses risks with respect to the development of aggression, noncompliance, and problem behaviour [and that such care is also] associated with less harmonious parent-child relations.

Interviewed after the release of his findings, Belsky was asked why he thought this might be. He replied:

> It may be that a child is trying to develop a sense of the world around him and stability and consistency with a mother figure is important to that. Take that stability away and this may engender an inability to manage your own emotions, to develop social skills; and that fosters the aggression, the non-compliance.[44]

Belsky stresses that he is not fundamentally opposed to child care provided it is used moderately, but feels that parents and society should be aware of the risks before embarking on a big expansion of daycare. A handful of aggressive and insecure children in a classroom might be manageable; if half the class has been in daycare from infancy, the problems are of another order.

In March this year Professor Kathy Sylva of Oxford University reported similar findings in a UK study which followed the progress of 3,000 children.[45] Sylva said that under-twos who spent long hours in daycare were more likely to be anti-social when they start school. Time spent with grandparents as carers had a beneficial effect on behaviour. The study also found that the most important influence on a child's behaviour and cognitive ability was the extent to which the child's parents engaged in constructive activity with the child, regardless of the child's social background. The study advocated the use of pre-school learning provision but cautioned against long periods of daycare for young children.

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44 "The smart and nasty childcare kids", *Financial Times*, 3 February 2001.

45 Sylva, Melhuish and others, *The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project*, Institute of Education, University of London, 2003.

In the mid-1990s, the Early Childhood Unit at the National Children's Bureau carried out a detailed research and development study on nursery care of children under three; they found an alarming lack of personal contact between staff and children which meant the child's need for attachment was not being met. When interviewed about their project the researchers said that this led to frightened and bewildered children.[46] Reading their detailed accounts of days in the lives of toddlers in day nurseries is revealing and troubling.

Consideration of some of the longer-term consequences of non-maternal care appeared in research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2001, based on longitudinal data from the British Household Panel Survey. The research showed that children whose mothers were employed full-time when the child was under five had reduced chances of obtaining qualifications, were more likely to be unemployed and to suffer psychological distress in early adulthood.[47]

None of these findings is particularly surprising when considered in the light of research on early attachment. Children who have first developed secure relationships with a primary caregiver are better equipped to deal with their emotions and their relationships in later life.[48] Interrupting the attachment process too soon, or for long stretches, can result in unhappy and non-compliant children, and insecurities reaching into adulthood.

These findings do not suggest that use of daycare, even for young children, is harmful *provided* it is limited to short periods. But they do make it clear that collective care for young children

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46 Peter Elfer and Dorothy Selleck, authors of the research, talking to Diana Appleyard in a *Daily Telegraph* article "Your child in their hands", 1998. Their reports appeared as *Everyday Stories*, published by the National Children's Bureau, available at www.ncb.org.uk

47 John Ermisch and Marco Francesconi, *The effect of parents' employment on outcomes for children*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2001.

48 Louise Pankhurst, *Promoting Infant Mental Health,* Child Psychotherapy Trust, 2001.

on a full-time basis can have adverse consequences. Presenting daycare as an attractive package, which educates and socialises young children while enabling their mothers to work full-time, is deeply misleading.

A report from Bristol University made headline news in May this year because it appeared to prove that children in daycare suffered no adverse developmental consequences. In fact the object of the survey was to compare activity levels in babies with their behaviour as three-year-olds, using answers given by mothers to questions about 'activity and emotionality' in their children. Sponsored by Pampers to coincide with the launch of their 'active-fit' nappy, one of the survey's findings was that mothers at work and at home reported similar levels of activity and moodiness in their toddlers. Contrary to the implication of many press reports, the study did not measure the impact of maternal employment on child development.[49]

Daycare versus personal care

Commenting on the drive for large-scale daycare, child care expert Penelope Leach is emphatic that day nursery settings are inappropriate for the very young:

> What is good for most children of three years is not necessarily appropriate for children of 30 months and may be downright harmful to any child of 13, let alone three, months. The educational tradition that legitimises pre-school centres has no relevance to infants, and their corporate nature – so desirable to policy makers and reassuring to parents – is developmentally inappropriate for them.[50]

In Leach's view, a baby needs one-to-one care – even one to three is too low where age groups are segregated (as they are in

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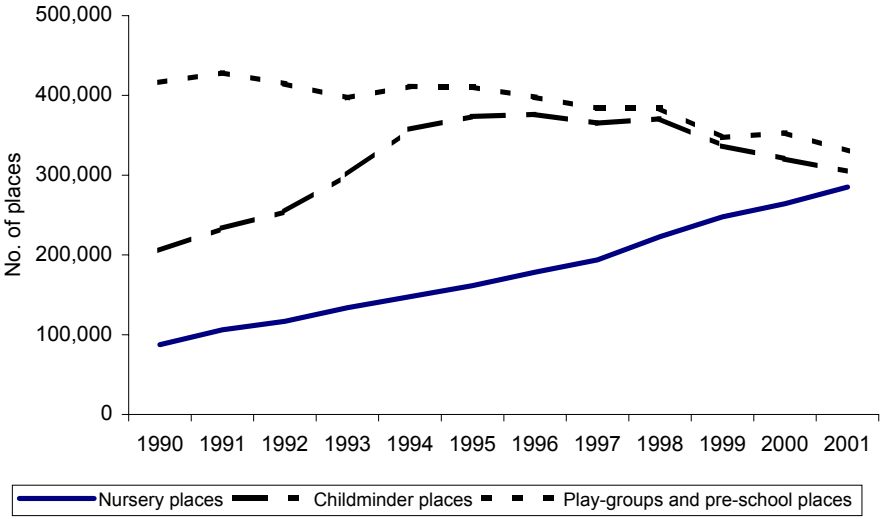
49 Professor D. Wolke and Dr A. Waylen, *Physical Activity from Birth to Three: A Large Scale Longitudinal Study*, University of Bristol in association with Pampers UK, 3 February 2003.

50 Penelope Leach, *Children First – what our society must do – and is not doing – for today's children,* 1994, p. 82.

most institutional settings). Hence family care is the most appropriate for under threes. Where family care cannot be provided, Leach believes that the best substitute for family care is small-scale care in a home setting. Hence the popularity with working mothers of informal care or childminders,[51] who can provide such a setting.

More nursery places, fewer childminder places



Source: *Children's Day Care Facilities at 31 March 2001*, DfES, Statistics of Education Issue No 08/01, October 2001, p. 9.

Yet the supply of childminders has fallen in recent years, as the number of nursery places has risen. In 1990, day nurseries provided 87,500 child care places; by 2001 this figure had risen dramatically to 285,000. Over the same period there has been a steady decrease in the number of places available with registered

[51] In a recent survey by Leach, childminders were the preferred form of child care for working mothers, scoring more highly than nurseries for being 'close and loving' "Report says childminders more trusted than relatives", *The Guardian*, June 19, 2002.

childminders. Since 1996 the number of childminders has fallen in each year; child care places provided by them have fallen by 60,000 since 1997.

The extent of the decline in childminder numbers since 1995 is partly disguised by the change in registration requirements which led to older children (for whom a lower carer:child ratio is permitted) being included in the numbers.[52]

The number of places in playgroups has also fallen. Playgroups traditionally provided three- to five-year olds with part-time pre-school education and play facilities, less formal than a school setting, based on play (indoor and outdoor) and creative activities. Many encouraged participation by mothers; few provided day-long care. As the day nursery sector has expanded, the total number of places provided in playgroups and pre-schools has fallen, from 416,000 in 1990 to 330,200 in 2001.

In 1999, the year in which the Government substantially increased subsidies for registered daycare through the Childcare Tax Credit (part of the Working Families Tax Credit),[53] it was announced that the regulation and inspection of child care facilities would be transferred to a new arm of OFSTED. This would ensure 'national standards' in child care regulation, and would ensure that the child care subsidies provided by the Government would be channelled to registered, inspected carers. The Care Standards Act 2000 transferred the function of regulating child care from English local authorities to a new Early Years Directorate within OFSTED, with effect from September 2001.

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52 There were approximately 93,100 registered childminders in 1990. This rose to a peak of 109,200 in 1992 then, largely due to the re-registration requirements of the Children Act 1989 (implemented October 1991), fell to 87,200 in 1993 before rising to 102,600 in 1996. Much of the increase in numbers of places since then has been due to the registration of places for five to seven year olds, for whom lower ratios of permitted carers to children, allowing total places to rise when there were fewer childminders.

53 See Chapter 8 for a summary of current Tax Credits.

The kind of daycare which lends itself to regulation and inspection, however, is large-scale nursery and after-school care, and this is the form of child care least likely to replicate home conditions, as well as having least flexibility for part-time working parents. It is also least able to provide small children with the personal care necessary for their emotional attachment and development.

These reforms may have been intended to reassure parents about the educational quality and safety of daycare. But the increased regulation and centralisation that it has involved have generally had the unintended consequence of reducing the choice of available child care. Combined with the continuing and rapid expansion of subsidised day nurseries, the result is to limit availability of the kind of substitute care that many mothers prefer and from which children most benefit. The regulatory approach to child care favoured by the Government in recent years is thus failing to meet the needs of children as well as their mothers.

CHAPTER EIGHT

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT has adopted a characteristically target-driven and interventionist approach to work-life policies and the care of young children. To what extent should the state intervene in family life?

Family Support

Providing financial support to working families through the tax and benefit system is not an innovation. In the earliest days of the Welfare State, taxes on families were kept to a minimum through generous allowances, not just for couples but also for children. The desire to protect the 'Family Wage,' and to sustain male earnings, was based on the assumption that mothers should not be expected to be wage earners while their children were young. There were advantages in such a system, especially at a time when jobs were seen as a finite resource to be allocated first among breadwinning men. Family poverty was alleviated, children were guaranteed time with their mothers and women were shielded from the demands of the workplace. But as women's employment opportunities expanded, thanks largely to a more flexible job market and the growth in part-time work, the case for the family wage diminished.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, female autonomy became a more important concept to policy-makers. Family tax allowances were steadily withdrawn, ending the concept of taxation according to family responsibilities. Allowances were partially replaced by

benefits, and in due course the system of individual taxation was introduced. Over the same period, in part due to these and other social reforms and in part due to cultural changes, family breakdown increased. The imperative for governments concerned about the increase in child poverty was then to direct 'family support' not to intact families but to the casualties of family collapse.

This theme of family policy has been shared by Conservative and Labour governments alike, with only minor differences of emphasis. Under the last Conservative Government, the remaining forms of universal support for marriage and family (the Married Couples Allowance (MCA) and Child Benefit) were allowed to wither.[54] Since 1997, Gordon Brown has made significant increases in Child Benefit, but abolished the MCA. In general, he has coupled substantial increases in spending on children with a commensurate increase in means-testing, form-filling and child care subsidy. The centrepiece of this regime is the tax credit system, whose multiple titles and incentive systems have occupied many Budget column inches.

Tax Credits

The tax credit system offers the following two child-based payments to families. The new Child Tax Credit (up to £20 per week in the first year of a child's life, £10 per week thereafter) is available to all mothers whose family income does not exceed £58,000 (provided they complete the requisite set of forms about their financial and family circumstances.) For example, this will entitle a family with two children, annual income £25,000 a year, to £545 a year in credits. If the same family uses registered daycare they will also be entitled to Childcare Tax Credit of £7,030 per annum, to offset the cost of that care.

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[54] A change of heart was signalled before the 1997 election, when the Conservative Party manifesto proposed the introduction of transferable tax allowances.

The signal could not be clearer. For families where one earner stays at home to care for children, or who use informal or family-based care for their children, a weekly sum of £10 may be claimed. But for families putting their children in registered daycare, another £140 a week is available to offset the cost of that care. The Government estimates the cost to the public purse of the Childcare Credit will be £725 million over three years.[55]

Lone parents

The Government's expansion of child care appears to a large extent driven by its desire to solve the lone parent question. Lone parents, usually mothers, are less likely to be in paid employment than mothers generally; in response, the Government has set a 'target' for lone parent employment – 70% of all lone parents are expected to be in employment by 2010. This target is cited as a key reason for increasing child care provision.[56]

But should the Government's overall child care strategy be determined by its concerns about rising numbers of lone mothers? There are several reasons why it should not be. First, it is wrong to assume that lone mothers are a static and homogenous group in a condition of life-long dependency. The Government's reluctance to examine the causes and effects of family breakdown has led to this 'one size fits all' approach to lone parenthood, an approach where work and daycare is the universal answer.

Secondly, it is not at all clear that the provision of daycare will persuade lone mothers into work, any more than it would with mothers generally. (Moreover, if they can be so persuaded, it will not necessarily be in the best interests of their children.) It is worth noting that when the first phase of the Government's *New Deal for Lone Parents* was assessed, a key reason for lone parents ceasing to claim income support was "re-partnering."[57] In other

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55 *Delivering for Children and Families,* p. 10.

56 *Delivering for Children and Families,* p. 5.

57 Hales et al, *Synthesis Report, Findings of Surveys (2000),* cited in *A Raw Deal for Lone Parents* by David Willetts and Nicholas Hillman, CPS, 2000.

words, many lone mothers found (or acknowledged) partners who provided them with financial support. Would not a strategy that focused on reducing dependency by re-connecting children with their absent fathers be of greater long-term benefit to the children than simply putting them in daycare?

Thirdly, by increasing the pressure on all mothers to participate in full-time employment, the Government may be contributing to the very problem it seeks to resolve – as witness the greater incidence of divorce in households where mothers are in full-time work.

Reform of family taxation

There are practical policies available which would serve the dual purpose of supporting families and responding to the diversity of women's preferences. For example, families could be given the option of income-splitting, the incomes of both spouses being aggregated and then split in two to compute the tax rate for each spouse. This would enable couples to decide on the balance between paid employment and domestic or child-rearing work which best suits their circumstances. One spouse may work full-time while the other is a full-time parent or carer, without being discriminated against in the tax system; alternatively both can work part-time, or indeed full-time, sharing domestic work – the system would be neutral between families. This option is attractive to couples where earnings are not evenly split (the vast majority of all couples of working age) and would be particularly helpful to families with young children where one parent wants to take some time out from work to look after children. This is the system of family taxation currently operating in Germany; slightly varying forms of income splitting are also operative in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Norway, Switzerland and Ireland.

Maternal allowances

Another way in which families are supported in other EU countries is through maternal allowances. A simplified maternal allowance for the mothers of pre-school children, which would enable families to choose between daycare and family care, would arguably be a fairer use of currently allocated resources than subsidising only those parents who put their children into institutionalised care. It would also enable families to achieve a balance between parental and employment responsibilities. If women have the power to purchase the child care of their choice, they will be under less pressure to work if they prefer to provide their own care. They will also be free to use a mixture of informal and family care, and/or through working part-time or term-time. Such allowances are currently available in Finland, Norway and France.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS

THIS GOVERNMENT bases many of its social, employment and welfare policies on the assumption that women nowadays have the same life-goals as men. The evidence is clear: men and women are not interchangeable. Men remain much more likely than women to be work-centred and committed to breadwinning. A very small minority of men are willing to swap roles with their wives, but to base a strategy on the assumption of an influx of men into homemaking and child-caring roles is wishful thinking.

It is equally unfair and damaging to the long-term interests of women to assume that the majority are work-centred and financially self-sufficient. The data presented here demonstrates that this assumption is out of touch with the reality of women's lives. The vast majority of women regard themselves as secondary earners once they have family responsibilities. Secondary earners are a substantial and important part of the UK workforce. But they are different from primary earners. They are interdependent, not self-supporting, and this has serious implications for insurance, pension and welfare arrangements.

The evidence also shows that modern women, at all levels of education, socio-economic background and occupation, may be classified into three different groups: adaptive, home-centred and work-centred. The Government's work-life policies, however, are directed primarily at work-centred women. They have limited relevance to adaptive women and none at all for home-centred women. The current tax, welfare and child care systems all

discriminate against this latter group. It is time for a more even-handed approach.

Such an approach will only come after an open debate about women's priorities. The danger is that this debate cannot take place because discussion is stifled. Fear of appearing 'sexist' means that policy-makers, commentators and, equally importantly, employers, are unable to allude to the differing priorities of men and women.

This in turn means that differences cannot be valued, least of all celebrated. Family life and the care of children are the casualties. The evidence in this pamphlet shows that, in their personal lives, modern women are demonstrating the importance they attach to home and family. But when public life is out of tune with the personal, those choices are denied to the many by the ideology of the few.

Policies for work-life balance, for child care and for pensions, all entail significant public spending and complex, wide-ranging legislation. All have potentially serious consequences for women, for their families and for their long-term security. Such policies should be based on real life, not social engineering.

BROKEN HEARTS: family decline & its impact on society £7.50
Jill Kirby

The family is the heart of society. If the family fails, society breaks up. Yet family stability has been in remorseless decline over the last 30 years. The children of both lone and cohabiting parents are more likely to suffer physical abuse than the children of married couples; to experience mental breakdown; to turn to drugs; to commit crime; and to run away from home. And a cohabiting couple is far less likely to remain together after the birth of a child than a married couple.

Most other European economies support marriage through the tax and benefit system. Jill Kirby calls for government to acknowledge the link between family stability and a strong and peaceful society; and to implement policies which will turn the tide.

"Children are suffering because family stability in Britain is in remorseless decline according to a top think-tank study" – Singapore Straits Times

NO SYSTEM TO ABUSE £7.50
Harriet Sergeant

The NHS is being exploited. It is being taken advantage of by people from other countries who have no entitlement to our system of free health care. This is not the fault of the individuals concerned, but a systemic failure at the heart of the National Health Service. To the determined health tourist, it is relatively easy to get free health care. And the number of people arriving in this country who have a legal entitltement to free health care is also growing. On top of that, the great majority of immigrants – whether legal or not – are coming from countries where diseases such as TB, Hepatitis B and HIV are all endemic. In the absence of any system of control, the Department of Health is unfair on NHS staff, on genuine asylum seekers and on the ordinary citizen.

"Sergeant's explosive report on the abuse of the NHS by asylum seekers and illegal immigrants suggests Britain has takenleave of its senses" – Daily Mail

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