

Fatherhood, flexibility and the future of work:



In Australia, the role of fathers has shifted significantly compared to that of the previous generation. Increasingly, men are playing a more active role in caring for their children.

Men are now expressing their need to be understood when it comes to having a better balance between their work and family commitments.



However, men are twice as likely as women to have their requests for flexible working hours rejected.

Why is this so?

Traditionally, the role of the father has been defined as the provider or “breadwinner”, while the role of the mother has been defined as the ‘caregiver’. Social and cultural norms in Australia are changing but some men still face significant bias and discrimination when taking time out to care for their children.



1 in 4 fathers report experiencing carer discrimination according to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).

It is not uncommon to hear requests for flexibility denied based on outdated ideals around men taking time out to meet family responsibilities. Many men are also not aware of their rights to workplace flexibility and therefore do not consider or investigate their options to work flexibly.

Flexible Workplaces in Australia

Workplace flexibility is when an employee and an employer mutually agree on changes to when, where or how an employee will work in order to accommodate work-life needs. This is particularly important for new fathers as they transition to parenthood, so that they can adjust to their additional responsibilities.

Flexible working arrangements can be formal or informal in nature and can include flexi-time, parent-friendly working hours and split shifts, job-sharing, time-in-lieu, unpaid leave, purchase leave, gradual return to work, annualised work or working from home.

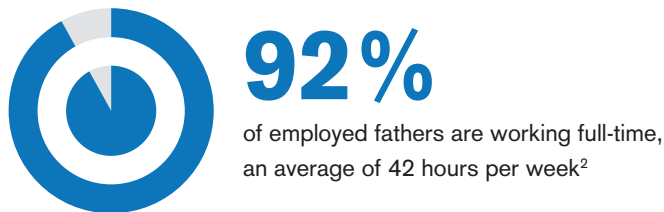
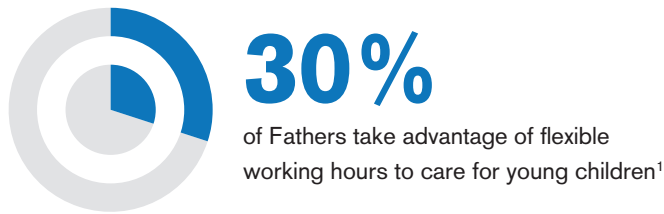


Produced in collaboration with Parents At Work





Employees who have access to greater flexibility at work are more likely to be engaged, productive, and have a higher level of job satisfaction.



Workplace flexibility and the prevention of men's violence against women:

Historically, paid full-time work has been strongly associated with a masculine identity and the 'breadwinner' role. The gendered nature of traditional jobs and workplaces entrenches inequality in our society. It reinforces the attitudes, behaviours and violence-supported social norms of male dominance and privilege that create and maintain violence against women.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that 82% of mothers returning to work after childbirth work in part-time roles. More men working flexibly to support with caring duties enables women to make fewer career sacrifices and have fewer interruptions. Financial independence, confidence and a wider support network can consequently benefit women and reduce the risk of poverty.

What can I do to promote flexible work in my workplace?

Employers play a key role in the prevention of carer discrimination against women and men. Various workplace-based strategies - including White Ribbon Australia's Workplace Accreditation Program - can help to combat rigid stereotypes, gender inequality and gender-discrimination. Through supporting employees with caregiving responsibilities and promoting gender equality, workplace flexibility establishes the wellbeing of both men, women, and their families.

Under the National Employment Standards, employees have a right to request a flexible work arrangement.

How to embed flexibility in your workplace:

- **Be adaptable**
Adopt a more agile management approach and attitude to meet the changing needs of your workforce.
- **Be clear**
Foster an organisational culture that is supportive of flexible work for everyone – not just those with caring responsibilities.
- **Train leaders**
Ensure leaders and managers are setting an example by openly supporting and visibly role modelling an agile approach to work. Measure employee output as opposed to presenteeism.
- **Remove gender bias**
Ensure that parental leave and flexible work policies are actively promoted as gender equal, and specifically encourage men to get involved.

Where can I find out more about workplace flexibility in Australia?

Workplace Gender Equality Agency:

www.wgea.gov.au/strategic-approach-flexibility/understanding-workplace-flexibility

Parents at Work:

<https://parentsandcarersatwork.com/>

¹Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016, Media Release: Dad's the Word, viewed 18 February 2019, [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~August%202016~Media%20Release~Dad's%20the%20word%20\(Media%20Release\)-2](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4125.0~August%202016~Media%20Release~Dad's%20the%20word%20(Media%20Release)-2)

²Ibid.

³Ibid.