



Department for  
Business & Trade

# Shared Parental Leave

## Evaluation report

BEIS/DBT Research Paper Series Number 2023/010

June 2023

# Contents

Contents	2
Figures	4
Tables	6
Executive summary	7
Key findings	7
1. Introduction	14
Structure of this report	14
Policy background	14
Policy objectives	19
2. Methodology	19
Evaluation aims and objectives	19
Scope of the evaluation	20
Key Evaluation Questions	28
Synthesis Methodology	36
3. How has the policy been implemented and delivered?	40
Awareness and understanding of Shared Parental Leave	42
Implementation	50
Satisfaction with SPL	53
4. Has the anticipated take-up of SPL been achieved, and by whom?	59
Take-up of SPL	60
What proportion of parents are taking up Shared Parental Leave since the introduction of the entitlement?	60
What are the characteristics of parents who take up Shared Parental Leave and Pay?	63
Comparisons with other types of parental leave	77
Shared Parental Leave duration, pay, use of flexible features and Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days	83
SPL duration	83
Pay	85
Are employees offering enhanced ShPP?	8587
Of the parents who took SPL, how have the flexible features been used, namely, the 'block' feature and Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days?	94
Enablers and barriers to taking SPL	8597
What are the factors affecting the decision to take-up shared parental leave?	9497
5. Has the policy increased shared parenting?	113
Attitudes and perspectives on childcare and shared parenting	114

Is paid leave perceived as important for childcare? _____	114
Childcare and shared parenting arrangements among SPL recipients _____	119
Effects of shared parenting _____	121
6. Has the introduction of SPL improved labour market outcomes for women? _____	125
Labour market participation following birth or adoption _____	126
Working arrangements on return to work and family-friendly support _____	151132
Satisfaction with work arrangements and perceived effects of taking leave on career prospects _____	151145
7. Has the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay led to any wider impacts? ____	148
Anticipated benefits of SPL _____	151149
Have anticipated benefits from the introduction of SPL been realised _____	151149
More flexibility for parents over childcare arrangements and work-life balance _____	151
Supporting female labour market attachment _____	151
Conclusion _____	156
Has Shared Parental Leave achieved its original objectives? _____	156156
Unintended consequences _____	159159
Annexes _____	161161
Abbreviations _____	161161

## Figures

Figure 2.1: Analytical framework [Logic model] for the Shared Parental Leave and Pay evaluation .....	25
Figure 3.1: Parents' awareness of SPL.....	159
Figure 3.2: Employers' level of awareness of SPL, by workplace size.....	45
Figure 3.3: How well-informed parents felt about SPL and Pay arrangements provided by their employer.....	48
Figure 3.4: Advertising and promotion of SPL across different media types, as commissioned in 2018 after the launch of SPL .....	159
Figure 3.5: Employers' satisfaction with Shared Parental Leave and pay, per cent workplaces .....	54
Figure 3.6: Advantages of Shared Parental Leave and pay, per cent workplaces.....	55
Figure 3.7: Disadvantages of Shared Parental Leave and pay, per cent workplaces.....	56
Figure 4.1: Individuals in receipt of ASPP/ShPP by year, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	62
Figure 4.2: Individuals in receipt of ASPP/ShPP by gender, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	63
Figure 4.3: Age of parents .....	64
Figure 4.4: Proportion of individuals in receipt of ASPP/ShPP by age, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	64
Figure 4.5: Number of individuals in receipt of SMP by age, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	65
Figure 4.6: Number of individuals in receipt of SPP by age, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	66
Figure 4.7: Number of individuals in receipt of ShPP by age, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	66
Figure 4.8: Highest qualification of parents.....	68
Figure 4.6: Number of individuals in receipt of SPP by age, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	66
Figure 4.7: Number of individuals in receipt of ShPP by age, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	66
Figure 4.8: Highest qualification of parents.....	68
Figure 4.9: Gender role of attitudes.....	69
Figure 4.10: Sector parents worked in before birth or adoption of their child.....	71
Figure 4.11: Parents' occupation prior to child's birth/adoption.....	72
Figure 4.12: Normal gross earnings (per annum): pre-birth (All respondents).....	74
Figure 4.13: Individuals in receipt of ShPP by income, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	74
Figure 4.14: Individuals in receipt of SMP by income, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	75
Figure 4.15: Individuals in receipt of SPP by income, 2014/15 to 2020/21.....	75

Figure 4.16: Proportion of ShPP claims by claimant resident region, 2014/15 to 2020/21	75
Figure 4.17: Individuals in receipt of ShPP, SMP and SPP 2014/15 to 2020/21	78
Figure 4.18: Number of weeks parents took as SPL	83
Figure 4.19: Number of weeks respondent's partner took as SPL	84
Figure 4.20: Whether SPL was paid by gender, as reported by workplaces	86
Figure 4.21: Whether conditions were attached to the enhanced rate of ShPP, by workplace size, per cent workplaces	89
Figure 4.22: Reasons why enhanced ShPP is offered, workplaces in Britain	90
Figure 4.23: Number of weeks of enhanced SMP, 2009 and 2019	93
Figure 4.24: Number of weeks respondent's partner took as SPL	84
Figure 4.25: Extent to which parents think SPL provides parents with greater flexibility in taking leave	96
Figure 4.26: Factors that influenced parents' decisions on which type of parental leave to take	98
Figure 4.27: Factors that helped parents take the leave they took	101
Figure 4.28: Whether parents considered taking SPL	107
Figure 4.29: Reasons for not taking SPL	108
Figure 4.30: Reasons for not taking more SPL	109
Figure 5.1: Views on the best way for a family with a child under school age to organise family and work life, 2012 and 2018	116
Figure 5.2: The main adult responsible for planning and arranging childcare arrangement	120
Figure 5.3: Childcare used in the previous week	121
Figure 5.4: Whether leave has made any difference to how they plan to share childcare responsibilities in the next 12 months	123
Figure 5.5: Positive consequences of taking leave, by mothers and fathers	124
Figure 6.1: Employment rate, males and females with dependents, 2014-2020 (per cent)	128
Figure 6.2: Return to work following birth/adoption of child	129
Figure 6.3 Changes in parents' role, hours and working arrangements on return to pre-birth job	134
Figure 6.4: Changes in parents' level of responsibility when returned to work	136
Figure 6.5: Reasons that may have caused parents to change jobs	137
Figure 6.6: Types of childcare/family-friendly support offered by pre-birth employer	141
Figure 6.7: Types of support accessed when they returned to pre-birth job	142

Figure 6.8: Are parents satisfied with their current working arrangements.....146

## Tables

Table 1.1: Maternity and Paternity Leave and Pay entitlements available to mothers and fathers/partners before the introduction of SPL in 2015..... 16

Table 1.2: The statutory parental leave and pay entitlements under shared arrangements.....18

Table 2.1: Cost-benefit analysis from the original Impact Assessment..... 26

Table 2.2: Key evaluation questions and sub-evaluation questions .....28

Table 3.1: Amount of leave respondents thought they and their partner were allowed to have in total when their baby was born .....43

Table 4.1: Proportion of parents that agree/disagree with each statement on gender role attitudes.....69

Table 4.2: Mother’s gender role attitudes by ethnicity.....70

Table 4.3: Individuals in receipt of ShPP, SMP and SPP 2014/15 to 2021/22.....78

Table 4.4: Number of individuals in receipt of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) who had not been in receipt of ShPP in the previous 12 months.....79

Table 4.5: The number of individuals in receipt of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) by the number of months the payment occurred.....80

Table 4.6: The number of individuals in receipt of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) by the number of months the payment occurred.....81

Table 4.7: Types of leave taken.....83

Table 4.8: Breakdown of pay types while on SPL.....85

Table 4.9: Number of days/weeks taken as Paternity Leave on full pay, 2009 and 2019  
Number of days/weeks taken as Paternity Leave on full pay, 2009 and 2019.....92

Table 5.1: Time spent in unpaid work by gender, 2015 and 2020, minutes per day.....122

Table 6.1: Proportion of mothers that remained in same job and proportion that did not return and are still not working..... 130

Table 6.2: Workplaces offering help with childcare, by workplace size, percentages.....140

Table 6.3: Proportion of mothers that remained in same job and proportion that did not return and are still not working, by employer support.....144

Table 7.1: Costs and benefits estimates for introducing SPL&P in impact assessment..156

## Executive summary

I) The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) scheme achieved its original objectives. This evaluation reports findings and conclusions on SPL and ShPP policy relative to its stated objectives, by analysing a broad range of survey, administrative, qualitative and literature-based evidence sources to inform policymaking.

II) The objectives of the evaluation were:

- to explore the implementation of the entitlement by employers in practice to learn what works and what could be improved;
- to understand awareness and take-up of SPL and ShPP amongst parents, including understanding of enablers and barriers to take-up;
- to assess whether any wider outcomes and impacts have been realised since the introduction of SPL and ShPP, including the extent to which the costs and benefits stated in the original impact assessment were realised.

## Key findings

### Awareness and understanding of SPL and ShPP

III) Over seven in ten employers were aware of SPL policy. Awareness of SPL varied by workplace size. Employers are generally supportive of SPL. Some employers reported that the policy was not actively promoted, however, many parents that have taken SPL found that their experience of taking leave helped inform others.

IV) Qualitative research suggests that as employers build experience in handling requests for SPL, the process for requesting and approving leave will become gradually easier.

V) Where SPL was not taken, over half of mothers (51%) and over two in five fathers (42%) had heard of SPL and had at least a small amount of knowledge of the policy. A third of all mothers who did not take SPL had not heard of it at all when their baby was born or adopted (33%), and the proportion is closer to half among all fathers that did not take SPL (45%). There is variation in awareness among parents by occupation, qualification level, income as well as protected characteristics such as age, ethnicity and disability.

VI) Just under half of workplaces in Great Britain were satisfied or very satisfied with SPL policy. Parents who took SPL (97%) were more likely than mothers (91%) and fathers (86%) in general to recommend taking the leave they took.

### Take-up

VII) Among eligible couples, 1% of employee mothers in Great Britain took SPL following the birth or adoption of their child. Slightly more employee fathers took SPL following the birth or adoption of their child, at 5%. Take-up of SPL varies amongst different groups of parents, including by age, income, qualification level and occupational status. Among fathers, take-up is particularly high in central Government organisations, predominately female workplaces and organisations with a trade union presence. Male take-up of SPL also varies by ethnicity. HMRC data shows that the number of individuals in receipt of Shared Parental Pay has consistently improved since its introduction, from 6,200 in 2015-2016<sup>1</sup> to 13,000 in 2021-22, this is in line with forecasts made in the original impact assessment<sup>2</sup>. The majority of parents who take SPL are fathers.

VIII) Parents who take up SPL and pay are more likely to be older, of white ethnicity, highly qualified, work in large organisations, earn a higher income, and have progressive gender role attitudes, compared to parents who do not take up SPL and pay. Parents that took SPL are also more likely than mothers and fathers in general to be married. SPL parents consistently displayed a more gender progressive outlook than mothers and fathers on average and they are also more likely to share caring arrangements.

IX) Take-up of SPL is largely concentrated in two sectors: public administration, health or education (43%) and business, professional or other services (31%). Parents who took SPL were also more likely than mothers and fathers generally to have been working in more senior occupations.

X) In 4% of workplaces aware of SPL, at least 1 employee had taken SPL in the last 2 years. Larger workplaces of more than 250 staff were more likely (37%) to report any employees taking SPL in the 2 years prior to the survey than smaller employers of 5-50 staff (3%).

### Leave duration and pay

XI) An average of just over 16 weeks leave were taken among all SPL parents and more weeks are taken among mothers (19 weeks) than fathers (14 weeks). Results from the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19) also show that women spent longer on SPL than men; the average (mean) length of SPL reported by employers for women was 14 weeks, while for men this stood at 10 weeks.

XII) On average SPL parents were paid at full pay for nearly six weeks (5.7) of their SPL, which was just over a third (37%) of their time on leave. Among fathers, the percentage of their SPL that was at full pay was higher (42%) than among mothers that took SPL (31%). Parents taking SPL received statutory pay for an average of seven weeks, which is equivalent to just over two fifths of their time on leave, on average (44%). Mothers received statutory pay for a higher proportion of their time on leave (53%) than fathers (37%).

XIII) Less than a tenth (8%) of workplaces where managers were aware of SPL said they would pay more than the statutory level of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (SShPP). The

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<sup>1</sup> For 2015/16, those receiving Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP) for children born before April 2015 cannot be distinguished from those claiming Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) within HMRC data.

<sup>2</sup> Final impact assessment: [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2015/146/pdfs/ukia\\_20150146\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2015/146/pdfs/ukia_20150146_en.pdf)



proportion of workplaces paying more than the statutory minimum is higher among larger workplaces of more than 250 staff (22%), and among workplaces with experience of employees taking SPL in the last two years (20%). Employers with union recognition (16%) were more likely to offer enhanced pay than the economy average (8%).

XIV) Where men had taken SPL, 84% of workplaces said that this leave was always paid. Receiving paid SPL depends on location, size of workplace and whether the organisation was public or profit-making. The average (mean) percentage of pay offered stood at 87% of normal pay. On average this rate of pay was offered for a 16-week period, although in 44% of cases it was not known how long this would be paid for. Managers in almost half (45%) of workplaces said that the enhancement to shared parental pay would apply for the whole period.

### Enablers and barriers to taking SPL

XV) Survey evidence shows several key factors affecting parents' decision to take-up SPL. Positive factors driving take-up include support from partners, support from employers, desire to spend more time with the child in their first year and desire to work flexibly. Factors moderating take-up include financial constraints and access to enhanced pay, as well as attitudes towards sharing leave and childcare responsibilities. Decisions to take-up and share parental leave were often based on trade-offs between the benefits of SPL and the anticipated financial loss.

XVI) The main reason cited amongst those who took SPL but did not take their full entitlement, was that they could not afford to.

XVII) Qualitative research suggests that employer support including offering enhanced ShPP is a crucial factor in the take-up of SPL. Access to enhanced pay, alongside strong workplace support for gender equality, meant that employees in supportive workplaces shared leave more equally than employees in other workplaces.

XVIII) Across workplaces interviewed for the qualitative research, employees and managers felt that the financial offer needed to be improved. Senior managers also acknowledged the need to improve the financial offer to attract and retain high quality staff. The perception of additional complexity in having to deal with another employer was also a factor behind the lack of promotion of SPL in the workplace. Larger employers and workplaces with experience of SPL do report complexity of the scheme in setting up and managing SPL in practice as a disadvantage of the scheme.

XIX) Some participant workplaces in the qualitative research mentioned the difficulties in finding cover for absences due to parental leave, which could present a barrier. 'Hesitant' workplaces in the qualitative research found that taking Maternity Leave was perceived as not optional for female employees, whereas taking parental leave was perceived as optional for men. With fathers' access to SPL and ShPP depending on access to the mothers' leave entitlement, this can act as a barrier to fathers taking advantage of access to longer periods of parental leave, if a significant proportion of mothers do not want to share their leave with the child's father/mother's partner.

## Shared Parenting

XX) Survey evidence shows that the proportion of the public supporting sharing parental leave equally between the mother and father has increased and the share of respondents supporting the mother taking the majority or all of the leave has also reduced. For parents that took SPL a much higher proportion than compared with mothers and fathers generally said that responsibilities for childcare arrangements are an equal combination of them and their partner.

XXI) Mothers who take SPL have felt their experience has facilitated a more shared approach to parenting even after the leave period had ended. There has been an increase over time in the proportion of mothers that say their partner regularly looks after their child while they are at work.

XXII) SPL fathers were almost twice as likely (62%) than fathers in general (23%) to cite wanting to share childcare as the main factor influencing their decision on which type of parental leave to take. SPL mothers are more likely than mothers generally to report sharing childcare as a factor influencing the type of leave they took and to report more equal responsibilities for childcare.

XXIII) SPL parents are most likely to indicate that their leave has made a difference to how they plan to share childcare at least to some extent (53%), compared with mothers (19%) and fathers from the core sample (24%). This suggests that fathers' experience of SPL has positively impacted intentions to continue sharing childcare responsibilities in the first year, after the leave period has ended.

XXIV) Fathers that took SPL are also three times as likely to mention that their leave enabled them to spend time/bond with their child (30% compared to 10% of fathers), and four times as likely to say that it enabled the mother to go back to work earlier. There was consensus that the time at home facilitated by SPL led to personal growth and development.

## Female labour market outcomes

XXV) The female employment rate in the UK has increased since the introduction of SPL. More females with dependents were in employment in 2020 than in 2014 prior to the introduction of SPL, representing an increase of around five percentage points<sup>3</sup>. Rising female labour market participation forms part of a longer-term trend over the last 50 years and it is problematic to attribute any changes directly to any single policy.

XXVI) A greater proportion of SPL mothers (73%) report returning to their pre-birth job than mothers overall (54%). Only 5% of SPL parents (6% of SPL mothers) did not return to work following birth or adoption, compared with 25% of mothers overall.

XXVII) Fathers who take SPL are more likely to be involved in childcare and mothers who take SPL are more likely to return to work than mothers generally. There is a substantial

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021>

body of evidence on childcare and mothers' employment outcomes<sup>4 5</sup>. It remains difficult to isolate the effect of fathers' involvement in childcare on their partner's return to work and there are many other important cultural and economic factors that may influence mothers' return to work.

### Working arrangements and family-friendly support

XXVIII) Women change their work patterns to accommodate parenting responsibilities to a much greater degree than fathers.

XXIX) SPL fathers were more likely to report changing working hours (14%) and working arrangements (24%) than fathers overall (3% and 2% respectively).

XXX) SPL mothers in the Parental Rights Survey (2019) were also twice as likely to report changes to their agreed working arrangements (use of part-time, flexible working) than SPL fathers (49% and 24% respectively). SPL mothers were less likely to reduce their working hours than mothers more generally. Three quarters of mothers started working part time following the birth or adoption of their child (75%), compared with three in five mothers that took SPL (58%).

XXXI) Parents who took SPL are significantly more likely to work for employers which offer family-friendly support including flexible working. Nine in ten SPL parents (91%) said their pre-birth employer offered flexible working compared with over three quarters of mothers (78%) and half of fathers (53%) in general.

XXXII) Parents who take SPL are significantly more likely to have access to family-friendly support from their employer, such as childcare vouchers. Consistent with the broader evidence base, findings from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) also demonstrate that access to family-friendly support significantly increases the probability of mothers' return to work post-leave.

XXXIII) Employers that had any staff taking SPL were also more likely to report use of flexible working than workplaces on average and to offer and promote family-friendly policies more generally. Parents who took SPL are more likely to say their employer offered family-friendly policies including flexible working arrangements and childcare support.

XXXIV) Nine in ten SPL parents (91%) said some form of flexible working arrangement was on offer at their pre-birth job, compared with four in five (78%) mothers and fewer fathers (53%).

### Wider impacts or societal benefits

XXXV) More parents are benefitting from extra weeks of statutory paid leave since ShPP was introduced in 2015. Survey data shows that fathers who took SPL reported that their leave had made a difference to how they intend to arrange childcare responsibilities going forward, and that parents with experience of SPL have reported its benefits for their work-

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<sup>4</sup> <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/careers-and-time-use-mothers-and-fathers#:~:text=The%20average%20employment%20and%20hours,40%20to%20less%20than%2030>

<sup>5</sup> <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06838/SN06838.pdf>

life balance, including providing them with more choice and flexibility over their work and caring arrangement and facilitating fathers' take-up of childcare responsibilities.

XXXVI) The provision of family-friendly policies and parents' increased satisfaction with their work-life balance has a positive relationship with their commitment to their employer and may lead to a more productive workforce in the long-term. Survey evidence on SPL and job retention (Parental Rights Survey 2019) shows that just under three quarters of parents who took SPL (72%) returned to the job they had before the birth of their child and remained there.

## Conclusions

XXXVII) The original policy objectives of SPL scheme were to:

- Give parents more choice and flexibility in how they care for their child in the first year by increasing the share of leave fathers can take, thus enabling both parents to retain a strong link with the labour market;
- Encourage more fathers to play a greater caring role (pre-birth and in the first year) via longer, more flexible shared leave;
- Increase flexibility for employers and employees to reach agreement on how best to balance work and domestic needs without state interference.

XXXVIII) Parents with experience of SPL have reported its benefits for their work-life balance, including providing them with more choice and flexibility over their work and caring arrangement and facilitating fathers' take-up of childcare responsibilities. The majority of parents that took SPL (85%) are satisfied with their current working arrangements, and two in five parents that took SPL are 'very satisfied' (40%).

XXXIX) Employers are also shown to be broadly satisfied with the policy, noting more advantages than disadvantages, including increasing flexibility for parents, and helping with staff recruitment and retention.

XL) There is variation in awareness and take-up of SPL among parents by occupation, qualification level, income as well as protected characteristics. Among eligible couples, more employee fathers (5%) than mothers (1%) in Great Britain took SPL following the birth or adoption of their child. Take-up rates are as estimated when the policy was introduced (between 2% and 8%). HMRC data shows that the take-up of SPL has also consistently improved since its introduction, from 6,200 in 2015-2016<sup>6</sup> to 13,000 in 2021-22, in line with estimates in the original impact assessment<sup>7</sup>.

XLI) The ability to afford time away from work has been found to be an important factor in taking leave entitlements. One in four mothers and one in three fathers who participated in the survey of parents stated the negative financial impact was the main reason for not taking SPL.

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<sup>6</sup> For 2015/16, those receiving Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP) for children born before April 2015 cannot be distinguished from those claiming Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) within HMRC data.

<sup>7</sup> Final impact assessment: [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2015/146/pdfs/ukia\\_20150146\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2015/146/pdfs/ukia_20150146_en.pdf)

XLII) Evidence from NatCen's British Social Attitudes Survey (2018)<sup>8</sup> does show that attitudes towards sharing leave and childcare responsibilities are improving. With fathers' access to SPL and ShPP dependent on mothers sharing their leave entitlement, this can act as a barrier to fathers taking advantage of access to longer periods of parental leave, if a significant proportion of mothers do not want to share their leave with the child's father/mother's partner.

XLIII) SPL parents are most likely to indicate that their leave has made a difference to how they plan to share childcare at least to some extent (53%), compared with mothers (19%) and fathers from the core sample (24%). This suggests that fathers' experience of SPL has positively impacted intentions to continue sharing childcare responsibilities in the first year, after the leave period has ended.

XLIV) Employers reported several advantages of SPL, including SPL gives parents flexibility and choice (15%), helps with staff recruitment and retention (14%), improves employee morale (14%) and benefits parents and children (13%). The most commonly reported disadvantages cited among employers were the need to arrange cover for staff (10%), a negative impact on running the business (10%) and the loss of staff (9%). The qualitative research also found that employers are generally supportive of SPL.

XLV) Some employers in the qualitative research cited issues finding cover and difficulties accommodating discontinuous blocks of leave. Requesting leave was harder when awareness of the policy in the workplace was limited. Among some employers, employers' willingness to accommodate SPL requests had a limit, and that their leave request may not have been seen positively if a longer leave period was requested.

XLVI) Employers that had any staff taking SPL were also more likely to report use of flexible working than workplaces on average and to offer and promote family-friendly policies more generally.

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<sup>8</sup> NatCen British Social Attitudes Survey (2018): [https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39284/bsa35\\_full-report.pdf](https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39284/bsa35_full-report.pdf)

# 1. Introduction

1.1) The introduction of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP)<sup>9</sup> in 2015<sup>10</sup> as new statutory entitlements alongside Maternity and Paternity Leave, aimed to give parents more choice and flexibility in how they care for their child in the first year by increasing the amount of leave fathers can take, thus encouraging fathers to play a greater caring role and enabling mothers to retain a strong link with the labour market.

1.2) When the policy was introduced, the impact assessment committed to evaluating the extent to which the original aims of the policy were being met and the intended outcomes realised.<sup>11</sup> This analytical report is the culmination of an evaluation process to assess the implementation and take-up of SPL and ShPP and the extent to which it achieved its anticipated objectives.<sup>12</sup>

## Structure of this report

1.3) This report first discusses the policy background to SPL and ShPP and the purpose of the evaluation. The second section sets out the methodology for evaluating the entitlement relative to the original objectives, including the research commissioned to inform the evaluation.

1.4) Subsequent sections detail the findings of the evaluation: chapter three discusses how SPL has been implemented and delivered; chapter four focuses on whether the anticipated take-up of SPL has been achieved and by whom; chapter five discusses evidence on whether SPL has increased shared parenting; chapter six reviews SPL policy and improved labour market outcomes for mothers; and chapter seven looks at wider benefits and costs following the introduction of SPL.

## Policy background

1.5) In order to deliver a system of shared parental leave, new legislation was introduced in the Children and Families Act 2014,<sup>13</sup> that intended to give working parents more choice

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<sup>9</sup> Referred to together throughout as Shared Parental Leave or SPL unless otherwise specified.

<sup>10</sup> The entitlement came into force from 1 December 2014 for eligible parents of children due to be born or adopted on or after 5 April 2015

<sup>11</sup> BIS (2013) *Modern workplaces: Shared Parental Leave and Pay administration consultation – impact assessment*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (pp. 58): [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> The package of measures to reform parental leave and pay also included legislation to: introduce a new statutory right for fathers to attend antenatal appointments (Antenatal Leave); extend Unpaid Parental Leave to parents of children up to the age of 18 years and the number of weeks that could be taken from 13 to 18; and to amend Adoption Leave and Pay so the eligibility criteria for adopters would align with those for birth parents.

<sup>13</sup> The Children and Families Act (2014) amended the Employment Rights Act (1996) in order to introduce SPL, and the Social Security, Contributions and Benefits Act (1992) in order to introduce ShPP.

and flexibility in how they share the care of their child in the first year, than was available through the existing parental leave entitlements at the time: Maternity Leave and Pay and Paternity Leave and Pay.

1.6) The pre-existing system of maternity rights were first developed at a time when mothers were assumed to be the primary carer. These rights to take leave from work following childbirth led to increasing women's participation in the labour market: in 1979 when they were first introduced, only a quarter of women returned to work after the birth of their child and by 2002 this figure had risen to 84% returning to work.<sup>14</sup> However, there was an increasing need to provide parents with more choice and flexibility in how they shared childcare responsibilities in the first year, which the SPL system addressed by allowing mothers to share their maternity entitlements with the father/partner.

### Parental leave and pay system prior to the introduction of SPL

1.7) Maternity entitlements give mothers access to 52 weeks of leave, 39 weeks of which are paid. The first six weeks are paid at 90% of average weekly earnings (with no upper limit) and the remaining 33 weeks are paid at the lower of 90% of average weekly earnings or the statutory flat rate (£172.48 in 2023/24).<sup>15</sup> To qualify for Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), an expectant or new mother must have worked for her employer for 26 weeks by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> week before the start of the week when the baby is due. She must also earn, on average, at least the lower earnings limit (£123 week in 2023/24) during a specific 8-week period within these 26 weeks. Women who are not eligible for SMP may receive Maternity Allowance (MA) for 39 weeks.<sup>16</sup> To qualify for MA, an expectant or new mother must have worked for 26 weeks in the 66-week period leading up to the expected week of childbirth and must have earned at least £30 a week (on average) in any 13 of those weeks. Maternity Allowance is a benefit paid by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and is worth up to the statutory flat rate (£172.48 in 2023/24), but the exact amount the mother receives depends on her eligibility.

1.8) Under Paternity Leave and Pay entitlements, fathers/partners<sup>17</sup> are entitled to two weeks of paid leave to be taken within eight weeks of the birth of the child, paid at the lower of 90% of average weekly earnings or the statutory flat rate known as Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP).<sup>18</sup> To qualify for Paternity Leave and Pay, a father must have been with their employer for at least 26 weeks by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> week before the start of the expected week of childbirth and continue to work for that employer continuously up to the week before they claim SPP,<sup>19</sup> and the week they take Paternity Leave. Before the introduction of SPL, eligible fathers could also take up to 26 weeks leave as Additional

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<sup>14</sup> BIS (2013) *Modern workplaces: Shared Parental Leave and Pay administration consultation – impact assessment*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/maternity-pay-leave/eligibility>

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/maternity-allowance/what-youll-get>

<sup>17</sup> Henceforth referred to as 'fathers'

<sup>18</sup> £172.48 in 2023/24. See <https://www.gov.uk/paternity-pay-leave/pay>

<sup>19</sup> Or in the case of adoption, by the end of the week that the prospective adopter was matched with a child. The father/partner must also earn, on average, at least the lower earnings limit during a specific 8 week period within these 26 weeks - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rates-and-allowances-national-insurance-contributions/rates-and-allowances-national-insurance-contributions>.

Paternity Leave (APL) if the mother decided to return to work, some of which may have been paid as Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP) if the mother had not used up her SMP.<sup>20</sup> However, APL and ASPP could not be taken before the 20th week after the birth.

1.9) For both Maternity and Paternity statutory entitlements, leave can only be taken sequentially and in single blocks. Table 1.1 below sets out the entitlements.

**Table 1.1: Maternity and Paternity Leave and Pay entitlements available to mothers and fathers/partners before the introduction of SPL in 2015**

Mothers	Fathers/partners
52 weeks maternity leave	2 weeks Paternity Leave
Of which 39 weeks are paid	Of which 2 weeks are paid
First 6 weeks of Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) paid at 90% of average weekly earnings (with no upper limit) and subsequent 33 weeks paid at the lower of 90% of average weekly earnings or the statutory flat rate (£172.48 in 2023/24). Women who don't qualify for SMP may qualify for Maternity Allowance (MA).	Statutory Paternity Pay is paid at the lower of 90% of average weekly earnings or the statutory flat rate (£172.48 in 2023/24).
From April 2011 until April 2015, where the mother had returned to work, Additional Paternity Leave (APL) and Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP) was available to fathers from the 20th week after the child was born. Up to 26 weeks of leave and 13 weeks of pay were available if the mother returned to work early.	

### Rationale for introduction of SPL

1.10) Society benefits from parents being able to care for their child whilst retaining their employment status, yet the system outlined above was considered inflexible and not conducive to shared parenting.

1.11) Because it was predominantly focused on the need to protect mothers' entitlements and the assumption that women are typically the main carer for children, it risked perpetuating a gender imbalance with women more likely to be absent from the labour force as a result of having children.<sup>21</sup> This is due to the negative impacts of large gaps in

<sup>20</sup> If the mother takes no SMP before the birth and returns to work after 20 weeks, an eligible father could be entitled to a maximum of 19 weeks ASPP.

<sup>21</sup> OECD (2017). *Women at work: A snapshot of women in the labour force, in The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Accessed from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-14-en>;

Berniell, I. et al. (2020) Motherhood and labor market trajectories across Europe: Harmonized evidence on 29 countries. CEDLAS Working Paper, Center for Distributive, Labor, and Social Studies. Accessed from: <https://aaep.org.ar/anales/works/works2020/Berniell.pdf>;

Kleven, H, Camille L, & Sogaard, J.H. (2019). Children and Gender Inequality: Evidence from Denmark. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 11 (4): 181-209;

Sigle-Rushton, W. & Waldfogel, J. (2007) Motherhood and women's earnings in Anglo-American, Continental European, and Nordic Countries. *Feminist Economics*, 13 (2): 55-91. DOI: 10.1080/13545700601184849



employment. Mothers who remain at home for extended periods face challenges in relation to later employment outcomes, including earnings (the gender pay gap).<sup>22</sup>

1.12) Despite a shift in cultural preferences over recent decades towards more equal childcare responsibilities,<sup>23</sup> the previous system prevented flexibility for those families where the father would like to take a more active caring role in the first year of their child's life.

1.13) Out of concern that the current system of parental leave was contributing to unequal labour market and caring outcomes for men and women over time, the Government committed to encouraging shared parenting from the earliest stages of pregnancy, allowing both parents to bond with their children in the first year. A new statutory system that provides a shared leave entitlement to both parents was therefore put in place.<sup>24</sup> It was intended to be both flexible enough to give parents the ability to agree on how leave might be taken whilst also encouraging fathers as well as mothers to take up more parental leave.

### How Shared Parental Leave and Pay works

1.14) Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) is available to eligible parents in the first year of their child's life.<sup>25,26</sup>

1.15) Mothers still have the right to 52 weeks of Maternity Leave and 39 weeks of Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance; however, if they do not intend to use their full maternity entitlements they can 'share' the remaining pot of leave and pay (as SPL and ShPP) with the child's father/their partner or take SPL themselves (they may wish to do this as SPL is more flexible than Maternity Leave). Up to 3 blocks of leave can be taken (more if their employer allows) and parents can return to work between blocks of SPL if they wish.

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<sup>22</sup> See literature on the causal effects of having children on the gender pay gap, which is the difference between average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men and women expressed as a proportion of average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men's earnings. E.g. Blundell, R., Dias, M. C., Meghir, C. & Jonathan M. S. (2016). Female labour supply, human capital and welfare reform, *Econometrica*, 84(5) p. 1705-1753. Accessed from: [www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctp39a/BDMS\\_Ecta\\_Sept\\_2016.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctp39a/BDMS_Ecta_Sept_2016.pdf);

Paull, G. (2006). The Impact of Children on Women's Paid Work, *Fiscal Studies*, 27(4): 473-512. Accessed from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1475-5890.2006.00043.x>;

Olsen, W., Gash, V., Kim, S. & Zhang, M. (2018). *The gender pay gap in the UK: evidence from the UKHLS*. Government Equalities Office. Accessed from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/706030/Gender\\_pay\\_gap\\_in\\_the\\_UK\\_evidence\\_from\\_the\\_UKHLS.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/706030/Gender_pay_gap_in_the_UK_evidence_from_the_UKHLS.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Scott, J. and Clery, E. (2013), Gender roles. An incomplete revolution? in Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J. and Phillips, M. (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 30th report*, London: The National Centre for Social Research. Accessed from: [http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38723/bsa30\\_full\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38723/bsa30_full_report_final.pdf)

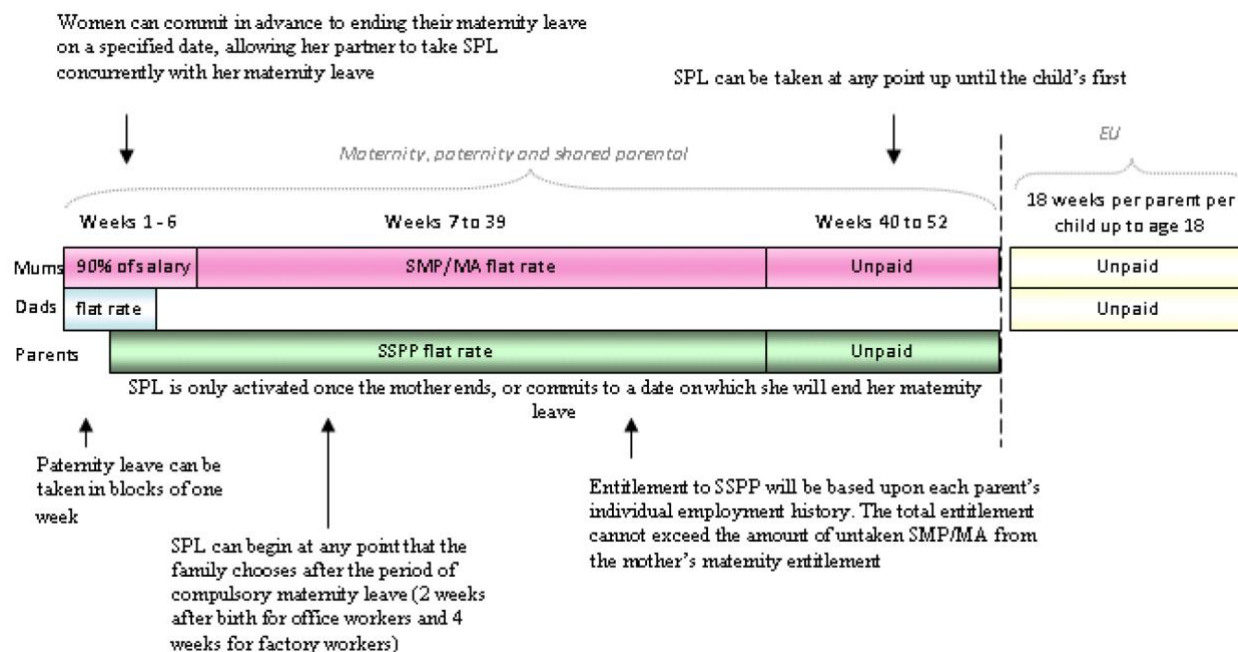
<sup>24</sup> BIS (2013) *Modern workplaces: Shared Parental Leave and Pay administration consultation – impact assessment*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Or in the case of adoptions, the first 52 weeks following the child being placed with the family.

<sup>26</sup> ShPP is paid at the same statutory rate as SPP, which in 2023/24 was £172.48 a week or 90% of your average weekly earnings, whichever is lower. This is the same as SMP except that during the first 6 weeks SMP is paid at 90% of earnings (with no upper limit).

1.16) Given mothers cannot return to work before the end of the compulsory first two weeks (or four weeks for factory workers) of Maternity Leave following the birth,<sup>27</sup> the maximum amount of leave mothers can share with the father/partner is 50 weeks and the maximum amount of pay mothers can share with the father/partner is 37 weeks, depending on whether the father/partner meets the qualifying criteria.

**Table 1.2: The statutory parental leave and pay entitlements under shared arrangements**



1.17) To qualify, both parents must share responsibility for the care of the child at birth,<sup>28</sup> and meet work and pay related eligibility criteria.

**Eligibility criteria**

1.18) For both parents to be eligible for SPL and ShPP, parents must<sup>29</sup>:

- share the main responsibility for the care of their child at the date of the child's birth;
- be employees who have 26 weeks continuous service with their current employer by "the relevant week" (the end of the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth);
- continue to stay with the same employer (up to the date that they take their SPL and up to the week before the week in which they first claim ShPP);
- each earn on average at least £123 a week in the 8-week reference period.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Four weeks if she works in a factory.

<sup>28</sup> Or placement for adoption.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay/eligibility-for-birth-parents>

<sup>30</sup> The 8-week period leading up to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> week before the baby's due date.

1.19) If either parent is a 'worker'<sup>31</sup>, then the parents may be able to share ShPP but not SPL. If either parent earns less than £123 a week, they can share SPL but not ShPP.<sup>32</sup>

1.20) Parents must notify their employers of their chosen leave arrangements in advance. Mothers must notify employers of their Maternity Leave dates 15 weeks before the baby's due date. Parents must give their employer eight weeks' notice of entitlement to and their intention to take SPL and eight weeks' notice of each block of leave. Once the shared parental leave period has begun, parents can then make a further request to change their leave arrangements so long as they give their employers eight weeks' notice.<sup>33</sup>

## Policy objectives

1.21) The statutory entitlements of SPL aimed to:

- Give parents more choice and flexibility in how they share the care of their child in the first year, thus enabling both parents to retain a strong link with the labour market;
- Encourage more fathers to play a greater caring role;
- Increase flexibility for employers and employees to reach agreement on how best to balance work and domestic needs without state interference.

# 2. Methodology

## Evaluation aims and objectives

2.1) The evaluation aims to provide an assessment of the extent to which Shared Parental Leave and Pay scheme has achieved its anticipated objectives since its introduction in 2014.<sup>34</sup> This evaluation reports findings and conclusions on the impact of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Pay (ShPP) relative to its stated objectives, by deploying a synthesis approach to analyse a broad range of survey, administrative, qualitative and literature-based evidence sources.

2.2) The objectives of the evaluation are:

- to explore the implementation of the entitlement by employers in practice to learn what works and what could be improved;

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<sup>31</sup> More information on employment status can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/employment-status/worker>

<sup>32</sup> Further information on eligibility for SPL, including where one parent is eligible can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay/eligibility-for-birth-parents>

<sup>33</sup> More information on applying for SPL can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay/applying-for-leave-and-pay>

<sup>34</sup> For parents of children who were due to be born or placed for adoption from 5<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

- to understand awareness and take-up of SPL amongst parents, including understanding of enablers and barriers to take-up;
- to assess whether wider outcomes and impacts have been realised since the introduction of SPL and ShPP, including the costs and benefits stated in the original impact assessment, as well as any unintended consequences resulting from the legislation;
- to inform future policy-making.

### Stages of the evaluation

2.3) In order to answer the objectives outlined above, the multi-stage process adopted was as follows:

**Stage 1:** Establish the logic model which sets out the theory that underpins SPL and ShPP. By laying out the assumptions and relationships of the policy, the logic model forms the basis of the evaluation and could be used to identify indicators to measure the intended outputs, outcomes and impacts of SPL. These informed the development of the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) and sub-evaluation questions.

**Stage 2:** In parallel with above, primary data collection was carried out and published separately by externally-commissioned researchers – e.g. survey of employers (NIESR and Kantar) and parents (BMG and Institute for Employment Studies) and qualitative research (NatCen) – that could then inform the basis of the evaluation findings. The questions asked in the research were developed to feed into the KEQs. Alongside this, administrative data from HMRC was used to form a comprehensive evidence base on the take-up and effect of SPL.

**Stage 3:** Systematic analysis and triangulation of data from different sources to produce the findings presented in this report. This entailed synthesising the evidence base against the KEQs and where possible, using survey data to compare outcomes before and after the introduction of SPL.

**Stage 4:** Assess the extent to which the costs and benefits estimated in the original Impact Assessment have been realised.

### Scope of the evaluation

2.4) Evaluations typically consists of a combination of three types of assessment: analysis of the implementation of a policy intervention and whether it is working as intended (“process” evaluation), an appraisal of what changes have occurred and the extent to

which they can be attributed to the intervention (“impact” evaluation) and a comparison of the costs and benefits of the intervention (“value for money” evaluation)<sup>35</sup>.

2.5) This evaluation takes a synthesis approach to interpret and collate the evidence gathered in order to comprehensively assess the implementation and take-up of SPL and ShPP, and the extent to which this has achieved its anticipated outcomes and intended policy objectives. While the report discusses the costs and benefits of the SPL scheme, the focus is predominantly on a process- and impact-based evaluation.

2.6) The introduction of SPL and ShPP was intended to give working parents more choice and flexibility in how they share the care of their child in the first year, than was available through the existing parental leave entitlements: Maternity Leave and Pay and Paternity Leave and Pay. By enabling mothers to share their leave and pay with fathers, this could change the cultural norms around work and caring responsibilities, encouraging more fathers to participate in childcare and improving labour market outcomes for women.

### Logic model

2.7) As part of the evaluation approach, a logic model was designed to detail the theory and assumptions underpinning SPL and ShPP. Figure 2.122.1 outlines the finalised logic model. It illustrates the context and rationale that motivated the introduction of the policy and explains how inputs and processes were anticipated to yield outputs, outcomes and wider impacts. The logic model could also be used to clarify the domains and beneficiaries related to SPL. The domains are the areas that the policy seeks to affect such as child development, work-life balance and equality in employment. The beneficiaries are employers, employees and parents, as well as society and economy as a whole.

2.8) The logic model (Figure 2.1) forms the basis of the evaluation and was used to identify relevant indicators that could measure intended outputs, outcomes and impacts (see Table 2.2 under ‘Key Evaluation Questions’).

2.9) As the logic model shows, SPL and ShPP were introduced to give parents more choice and flexibility in sharing childcare in the first year, to encourage fathers to be involved in the early years of the child’s life, to challenge the assumption of the mother as the primary carer, and to remove any barriers that could inhibit mothers’ attachment to the labour market.

2.10) Legislation enabling mothers to transfer up to 50 weeks of their leave and up to 37 weeks of statutory pay to a shared ‘pot’ for both parents to use was introduced to address the above concerns. And to implement this legislative change, the Government aimed to design a simple shared parental leave system that was easy to navigate by employers and parents alike.

2.11) To raise awareness and share information about the new system, the Government published information on Gov.uk and ran a number of communications campaigns, including a £1.5m campaign in 2018. The Government has also produced guidance for employers and employees, including model forms which parents can use to notify their

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<sup>35</sup> More details on evaluation approaches can be found in the Magenta book:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/879438/MT\\_Magenta\\_Book.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/879438/MT_Magenta_Book.pdf)

employer of entitlement to, and intention to take, SPL and to “book” periods of SPL. In 2021, Government published a new online tool<sup>36</sup> which is intended to make it easier for parents to access SPL (which is technical in nature). The tool enables both parents to check whether they are eligible for SPL and plan the leave they want to take.

2.12) Cumulatively, the intention was that the various interventions by Government, would drive interest in SPL amongst eligible parents, who would be better able to tailor the leave taken after their child’s birth to their individual needs. Over time, as positive feedback developed, take-up would increase.

2.13) It was intended that introducing SPL and ShPP would lead to the benefits for employers and parents described in more detail in the original impact assessment and illustrated in the Logic Model (Figure 2.1). In summary, the benefits for employers were anticipated to be increased staff retention, as staff who took SPL would be more satisfied with their work-life balance and committed to their employer. This would lead to reduced staff turnover, lower recruitment and training costs for employers, reduced loss of knowledge and an increased return on investment in employees for businesses.<sup>37</sup> Where mothers opt to share their leave with the father/partner, this will benefit their individual employers if they are absent from work for shorter periods of time.

2.14) In the case of fathers, it was anticipated to reduce stress over perceived conflict between work and caring responsibilities,<sup>38</sup> which can be associated with higher staff turnover and lower commitment. It was also anticipated that SPL would provide mothers with more choice over the timing of their return to the labour market, which would support their connection to the workforce and hence their future career development, as well as maintain an important source of labour supply.

2.15) The introduction of SPL was expected to have economic and non-economic benefits, including:

- Financial benefits to parents due to more choice over how they share leave-taking and returning to work;
- Greater opportunities for fathers to take time off work to care for and bond with their child, via antenatal appointments and longer time off immediately after the birth;
- More flexibility for parents over their childcare arrangements;
- Greater choice for mothers over the timing of their return to work, enabling mothers to return to work earlier where their preferred option for the father or partner to take over responsibility for caring for the child and supporting their connection to the labour market. This also helps maintain an important source of labour supply;

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/plan-shared-parental-leave-pay>

<sup>37</sup> Smeaten, D. (2014). Costs and benefits to business of adopting work-life balance working practices: a literature review, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Accessed from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/323290/bis-14-903-costs-and-benefits-to-business-of-adopting-work-life-balance-working-practices-a-literature-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/323290/bis-14-903-costs-and-benefits-to-business-of-adopting-work-life-balance-working-practices-a-literature-review.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Shockley, K. M., Shen, W., DeNunzio, M. M., Arvan, M. L., & Knudsen, E. A. (2017). Disentangling the relationship between gender and work–family conflict: An integration of theoretical perspectives using meta-analytic methods. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(12): 1601–1635. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000246>.

- Employer benefits through increased retention of staff<sup>39</sup> and greater flexibility from discussing how and when parental leave is taken, and from employees being able to take up to three blocks of leave,<sup>40</sup> so they can stay in touch with and retain their attachment to their individual employer.
- Enhanced child development and welfare through greater involvement by fathers, which research has shown has a positive long-term effect on children including higher educational outcomes, lower criminality, protection against mental health difficulties and better peer relationships.<sup>41</sup>

2.16) It was also expected the introduction of SPL and ShPP might confer wider social and economic benefits over a longer period of time. These include improved child welfare through shared parenting and increased bonding between father and child in the early years,<sup>42</sup> improved attachment to the labour market amongst both mothers and fathers, increased effective labour supply and a decrease in the gender pay gap.<sup>43</sup> By encouraging fathers to take a greater role in childcare, both parents may be more able to balance work and family responsibilities, providing mothers with more choice to return to the labour market earlier.<sup>44</sup>

2.17) These socio-cultural changes are the result of many drivers and in the case of SPL, are only anticipated to occur as the policy becomes embedded over a longer period of

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<sup>39</sup> This was expected to: lower recruitment and training costs; reduce the loss of knowledge and human capital; increase return on investment in training as employees stay longer

<sup>40</sup> Or more if their employer allows

<sup>41</sup> Flouri, E. (2005). *Fathering and Child Outcomes*. Wiley-Blackwell, London;

Chung, H. (2021). Shared care, father's involvement in care and family well-being outcomes. A Literature Review. Government Equalities Office, January 2021. Accessed from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957538/Shared\\_care\\_and\\_well-being\\_outcomes- Literature\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957538/Shared_care_and_well-being_outcomes- Literature_review.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Tanaka, S. & Waldfogel, J. (2007). Effects of parental leave and work hours on fathers' involvement with their babies: evidence from the millennium cohort study. *Community, Work and Family*, 10(4): 409-426.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800701575069>;

Tamm, M. (2019). Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation.

*Labour Economics*, 59: 184-197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.04.007>;

Flouri, E. (2005). *Fathering and Child Outcomes*. Wiley-Blackwell, London;

Huerta, M., et al. (2013). Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development: Are They Related? Evidence from Four OECD Countries, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 140, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5k4dlw9w6czq-en>;

Chung, H. (2021). Shared care, father's involvement in care and family well-being outcomes. A Literature Review. Government Equalities Office, January 2021. Accessed from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957538/Shared\\_care\\_and\\_well-being\\_outcomes- Literature\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957538/Shared_care_and_well-being_outcomes- Literature_review.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2015). *The motherhood pay gap: a review of the issues, theory and international evidence*. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. ISBN: 9789221292678;

Dunatchik, A. & Özcan, B. (2020). Reducing mommy penalties with daddy quotas. *Journal of European Social Policy*. 31(2):175-191. DOI:10.1177/0958928720963324; Andersen, S.H. (2018) Paternity Leave and the Motherhood Penalty: New Causal Evidence. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80(5):1125-1143,

DOI:10.1111/jomf.12507

<sup>44</sup> Norman, H. (2020). Does Paternal Involvement in Childcare Influence Mothers' Employment Trajectories during the Early Stages of Parenthood in the UK? *Sociology*, 54(2):329-345;

Patnaik, A. (2019). Reserving Time for Daddy: The Consequences of Fathers' Quotas. *Journal of Labor Economics* 37(4): 1009-1059 <https://doi.org/10.1086/703115>

time. Instead, this evaluation seeks to comment on the extent to which any benefits have already been realised or are likely to be realised through the establishment of the policy.

### Unintended Consequences

2.18) It was envisaged that several unintended consequences could arise as a result of the new SPL system:

- Where the new system is more complex, in particular the features that enable flexibility for parents (such as non-continuous blocks) may place an unreasonable burden on businesses to administer and process. In addition, a new parental entitlement which operates alongside more established entitlements may create wider confusion and mean prospective parents are deterred from taking SPL.
- Where there are negative attitudes within workplaces towards those fathers who take up longer periods of parental leave, resulting in negative consequences such as worsened career and earnings prospects, as some women have experienced historically.
- Employers 'levelling down' other enhanced parental schemes: employers who pay Occupational Maternity Pay (OMP) may remove the enhancement due to concern they may face a legal challenge on discrimination grounds if they did not also enhance ShPP to the same degree.
- Financial and time costs of HMRC and/or the employer verifying claims, may mean there is a risk of fraudulent claims, in particular relating to couples where one partner is self-employed which would theoretically require verification across both HMRC and DWP systems.



**Figure 2.12: Analytical framework [Logic model] for the Shared Parental Leave and Pay evaluation**

Context/Issue prior to introduction of SPL	Inputs: Legislation	Process: Activities to implement legislation	Outputs: Direct results of the processes and the new legislation.	Outcomes: Changes in attitudes, knowledge or behaviour of direct beneficiaries	Impacts: Wider benefits to society and economy
<p>The system of Maternity, Paternity and parental leave (prior to SPL) cannot be described as flexible and does little to encourage shared parenting in the first year of a child's life.</p> <p>The system prior to SPL could be seen to reinforce the notion that mothers are always the primary carer after a child is born.</p> <p>The system prior to SPL could contribute to negative perceptions around employing women and their commitment to work.</p> <p>The system prior to SPL can inhibit mothers' attachment to the labour market and could contribute to unequal labour market outcomes for men and women.</p>	<p><b>Government legislates to:</b></p> <p>Allow 50 weeks of the 52 weeks of Maternity Leave to be ended and transferred to a Shared Parental Leave 'pot' (37 weeks of which are paid at the statutory flat rate).</p> <p>Enable Shared Parental Leave to be taken in separate blocks (either overlapping with the partner or staggered) rather than in one continuous block.</p>	<p><b>Government implements legislation:</b></p> <p>Government design Shared Parental Leave and Pay system.</p> <p>Government disseminates information about the new system.</p> <p><b>Employers:</b></p> <p>Employers set up the system in their organisation.</p>	<p><b>Parents:</b></p> <p>Increased awareness of SPL.</p> <p>More mothers opt-in to SPL to share leave with their partners.</p> <p>Fathers /partners take more weeks off work to care for their child in the first year of its life.</p> <p><b>Employers:</b></p> <p>Employers use the SPL system to claim back statutory pay.</p> <p>Employers introduce occupational Shared Parental Leave and Pay schemes that build on the statutory provision.</p>	<p><b>Parents:</b></p> <p>Greater involvement of fathers/partners during the child's first year.</p> <p>More mothers are willing to share leave.</p> <p>Mothers are able to return to work earlier and face fewer disadvantages in their career development.</p> <p>More equal working patterns between parents.</p> <p>Increased job satisfaction for parents.</p> <p><b>Employers:</b></p> <p>Employer attitude change and cultural shift making it more acceptable for fathers to take longer leave. Employers perceive SPL as beneficial for their organisation.</p>	<p>Societal benefits from parents being able to care for their child whilst being able to retain attachment to the labour market.</p> <p>Enhanced child welfare (i.e. through healthy attachments to both parents, male role models increased/greater visibility).</p> <p>Increase take-up of shared parenting throughout the child's life not just in early years.</p> <p>Shift in attitudes away from the mother being considered the primary carer.</p> <p>Improved female labour market participation.</p> <p>Reduced gender pay gap in employment.</p> <p>Increased productive potential of parents due to better work-life balance; greater commitment and engagement.</p>

## Costs and benefits of SPL and ShPP

2.19) Table 2.1 shows the cost-benefit analysis from the original impact assessment<sup>45</sup>. The net benefit - the present value of the differences between costs and benefits – was estimated to be -£279.5m, to be accrued over 10 years.

<sup>45</sup> Final Impact Assessment: [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2015/146/pdfs/ukia\\_20150146\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2015/146/pdfs/ukia_20150146_en.pdf)

**Table 2.1: Cost-benefit analysis from the original Impact Assessment, (millions)**

Costs	High	Best estimate (medium)	Low
Exchequer SPL, additional payments to fathers	£1.29	£0.32	£0.0
Exchequer SPL admin recurring costs	£1.5	£1.2	£0.0
Employer recurring SPL costs	£3.3	£1.2	£0.3
Annually recurring benefits for parents from additional Exchequer payments	£9.3	£8.4	£8.1

2.20) The anticipated costs and benefits outlined above were based on estimates that 285,000 fathers would be eligible for SPL, and of which 2-8% would take SPL and ShPP. Some of the costs associated with this will be offset by those that would have been taken by the mother. However, it was assumed that in just over 11% of households, the father might take SPL and ShPP that would not have been claimed by the mother and this would result in additional exchequer costs.

2.21) The evaluation will test the validity of the assumptions made in the economic appraisal of SPL and whether anticipated outcomes were achieved.

### Causal attribution

2.22) The anticipated impacts of parental leave entitlements – such as improving women’s participation in the labour market and more equal caring responsibilities between parents – rely on multiple social, economic, and cultural drivers that are beyond the scope of this evaluation and by extension, the policy itself. At the time of reporting, SPL has only been in place for eight years. There is a complex relationship between the introduction of SPL and ShPP and the anticipated objectives, and it is expected that the effect of shared leave will build up gradually over an extended period of time, beyond the first few years following intervention.

### Identifying a counterfactual

2.23) In order to robustly assess the extent to which any measured change can be attributed to the policy intervention being investigated, where possible a comparison of the ‘counterfactual’ scenario is made, examining outcomes following the introduction of the legislation compared with what would have occurred if the legislation was not introduced. However, in this instance it is difficult to construct a counterfactual (‘control’) group, because SPL and ShPP entitlements were made simultaneously available nationwide to all employee parents so long as they meet the eligibility criteria.

2.24) Parents who do not meet the eligibility criteria would not be suitable as a control group because they may have different characteristics to parents who do (the ‘treatment’ group); there is a strong risk that any measured differences between the two groups might not be due to SPL but inherent differences between the groups and any comparison could be inaccurate.

2.25) For example, parents who are employees with less than 26 weeks continuous service are likely to have different relationships with their employers than those who have longer tenure, or working parents who are not employees and therefore not eligible for SPL. Workers might be more likely to feel greater job insecurity and less likely to work for employers who are as supportive of family-friendly schemes. These differences might therefore have an effect on how comfortable a parent feels asking their employer for leave, or the desire of fathers to take longer periods away from work, or on the outcomes of interest such as work-life balance.

2.26) For similar reasons it is not possible to use parents in other countries as a counterfactual group, and reliably compare outcomes between them and parents in Great Britain. This is because there are many differences in parental entitlements between countries, as well as complex underlying factors, such as cultural attitudes, that might influence outcomes.

2.27) This means it is not possible to achieve the necessary standard of *ceteris paribus* (all other things being equal) between a group of parents exposed to SPL and ShPP (the 'treatment' group) and a group of parents not exposed to SPL and ShPP (the 'control' group) in order to robustly attribute any observed effects to the introduction of SPL and ShPP.

2.28) It is therefore not possible for this evaluation to empirically measure any causal links between the introduction of the shared entitlement and any intended impacts ('attribution').

### Non-attributational approach

2.29) Evaluations will vary in terms of the extent to which outcomes can be attributed to the policy intervention(s). Given the evidence available, this evaluation takes a non-attributational approach and does not aim to extract precise causal effects of SPL and ShPP on parent and employer outcomes nationwide.<sup>46</sup> Any relationship identified between the introduction of SPL and ShPP and any observed effects is based only on observation of outcome indicators amongst parents who were eligible to take SPL and not a control group.

2.30) Where possible the evaluation takes a 'before and after' design, in which outcomes are compared to the 'before' state (prior to the introduction of the policy in April 2015). Collecting time series data via representative surveys of the experience of parents and employers helps us assess whether employer provision of parental leave schemes, how parents' use leave entitlements, their distribution of caring responsibilities and mothers' return to work, has changed over time. As SPL and ShPP was introduced at the midpoint between the latest data collection point (2019) and the previous survey of parents in 2009/10, this helps us understand some of the effects of the introduction of SPL and ShPP. A low take-up rate of SPL by parents and the correspondingly small sample of parents who have taken SPL achieved through the Parental Rights survey, has meant that it has not been possible to undertake any quasi-experimental analysis to quantify the effects of SPL.

2.31) Therefore, whilst this evaluation cannot robustly test the extent to which any changes that have occurred can be attributed to SPL and ShPP, it is nonetheless able to assess whether SPL achieved its anticipated objectives, and whether any outcomes occurred which were not originally intended.

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<sup>46</sup> Coglianese, C. (2012). *Measuring Regulatory Performance: Evaluating the impact of regulation and regulatory policy*, OECD, pp. 15-16. Accessed from: [https://www.oecd.org/regreform/regulatory-policy/1\\_coglianese%20web.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/regreform/regulatory-policy/1_coglianese%20web.pdf)

## Key Evaluation Questions

2.32) The contextual factors, assumptions and intended objectives identified in the original impact assessment and incorporated into a logic model (Figure 2.12) for the purposes of this evaluation, provided the basis for the development of key evaluation questions (KEQs) by analysts in a collaborative process involving policy colleagues. It was ensured that KEQs reflected process, impact and value for money components.

2.33) The key evaluation questions this evaluation seeks to answer are therefore as follows:

- How has the policy been implemented and delivered?
- Have the anticipated outcomes of the policy been achieved? Namely:
- Has the anticipated take-up of Shared Parental Leave and Pay been achieved?
- Has the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay increased shared parenting?
- Has the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay improved labour market outcomes for women?
- Has the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay led to any wider impacts and societal benefits?

2.34) The secondary sub-evaluation questions that were developed to help answer the eight KEQs above and are addressed in the evaluation are also derived from the logic model set out for the policy (see Figure 2.12 and Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2: Key evaluation questions and sub-evaluation questions**

Chapter	Key Evaluation Question (KEQ)	Section	Sub-Evaluation Question	Data sources
3	3.1 How has the policy been implemented and delivered?	3.1 Awareness and understanding of SPL	3.1.1 What is parents' awareness and understanding of SPL and pay?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
			3.1.2 What is employer awareness and understanding of SPL and pay?	Management and Wellbeing Practices survey (2018-19); Qualitative research
			3.1.3 Have employers undertaken any activities to raise awareness of SPL?	Qualitative research

			3.1.4 How well-informed do employees feel about the SPL and pay offer from their employer?	Parental Rights Survey (2019)
			3.1.5 Is the information available on Shared Parental Leave policy easy to understand?	Qualitative research
		3.2 Implementation	3.2.1 How have employers updated their policies to reflect the changes in parental leave entitlements?	Qualitative research
			3.2.2 How have employees experienced the process of requesting SPL and how have employers experienced the process of approving SPL?	Qualitative research
			3.2.3 Are employers aware that they can reclaim the cost of Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) claims from HMRC?	Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)
		3.3 Satisfaction with SPL	3.3.1 Based on their experience(s), how satisfied are employers and employees with the Shared Parental Leave and Pay scheme?	Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19); Qualitative research
			3.3.2 Would parents who have taken Shared Parental Leave recommend it to other parents?	Parental Rights Survey (2019)

			3.3.3 Do employers perceive Shared Parental Leave as beneficial for their organisation?	Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19); Qualitative research
			3.3.4 Do employers and/or employees have any suggestions for improvements to the SPL system?	Qualitative research
4	Has the anticipated take-up of Shared Parental Leave and Pay been achieved, and by whom?	4.1 Take-up of SPL	4.1.1 What proportion of parents are taking up Shared Parental Leave since the introduction of the entitlement?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); HMRC Statutory Payments data.
			4.1.2 Are employees taking up SPL, as reported by employers?	Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)
			4.1.3 What are the characteristics of parents who take-up SPL?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); HMRC Statutory Payments data

			4.1.4 Comparisons with other types of parental leave	Parental Rights Survey (2019); HMRC Statutory Payments data
		4.2 SPL duration, pay, use of flexible features and SPLIT days	4.2.1 What is the average duration of SPL taken by parents? How is SPL shared within households?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19); Qualitative research
			4.2.2 Of parents who took SPL, how many received: a) statutory ShPP; b) enhanced ShPP, and for how long?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19).
			4.2.3 Are employers offering enhanced ShPP?	Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19); Qualitative research
			4.2.4 Is there any evidence to suggest employers are reducing parental pay enhancements as a consequence of Shared Parental Leave introduction?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19); Qualitative research

			4.2.5 Of the parents who took SPL, how have the flexible features been used, namely, the 'block' feature and Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)
			4.2.6 Does the Shared Parental Leave and Pay scheme offer parents greater flexibility?	Parental Rights Survey (2019)
			4.2.7 How are the flexibility features of the Shared Parental Leave scheme perceived by employers?	Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19); Qualitative research
		4.3 The decision-making process; and enablers and barriers to taking SPL&P	4.3.1 What are the factors affecting the decision to take-up and share parental leave?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
			4.3.2 How comfortable do parents feel asking their employer for SPL and pay?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
			4.3.3 What are the enablers to taking-up SPL?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research



			4.3.4 What are the barriers to taking up SPL?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19); Qualitative research
5	Has the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay increased shared parenting?	5.1 Attitudes and perspectives on childcare and shared parenting	5.1.1 Is paid leave perceived as important for childcare?	NatCen's British Social Attitudes Survey (2018); Parental Rights Survey (2019);
			5.1.2 To what extent have attitudes towards shared parenting changed since the introduction of Shared Parental Leave?	NatCen's British Social Attitudes Survey (2018); Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
			5.1.3 Is fathers' willingness to spend more time with their children in the early years a motivator for take-up of SPL?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research

			5.1.4 Are mothers who take SPL more willing to share childcare responsibilities?	Parental Rights Survey (2019)
		5.2 Childcare and shared parenting arrangements among SPL recipients	5.2.1 What are the current childcare arrangements of parents who take SPL, and how do these compare with parents who do not take SPL?	Parental Rights Survey (2019)
			5.2.2 How much unpaid work is carried out by men and women since the introduction of SPL?	ONS Time Use Survey
		5.3 Effects of shared parenting	5.3.1 Are fathers who take SPL more likely to continue to share childcare responsibility in the early years of the child's life?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
			5.3.2 Have fathers reported benefits from spending more time with their children as a result of taking SPL?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
6	Has the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay improved labour market	6.1 Return to work following SPL	6.1.1 Labour market participation following birth or adoption	ONS Labour Force Survey data;  Parental Rights Survey (2019)

outcomes for women?		6.1.2 Do mothers return to work following taking Shared Parental Leave and how does this compare with mothers who did not take Shared Parental Leave?	Parental Rights Survey (2019)
	6.2 Flexible working arrangements and family-friendly support	6.2.1 How do working arrangements on return to work vary among mothers and fathers, and among parents who take or do not take SPL?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
		6.2.2 Changes in earnings and responsibility on return to work	Parental Rights Survey (2019)
		6.2.3 Are employers offering family-friendly support?	Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)
		6.2.4 Are SPL parents reporting availability and take-up of family-friendly support schemes?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
	6.3 Satisfaction with work arrangements and perceived effects of taking leave on career prospects	6.3.1 Are parents who took SPL more satisfied with their working arrangements?	Parental Rights Survey (2019)

			6.3.2 Have employees who have taken SPL perceived any impacts on their career?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Qualitative research
7	Has the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay led to any wider impacts or societal benefits?	7.1 Anticipated wider benefits of SPL	7.1.1 Have anticipated benefits from the introduction of SPL been realised?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19); Qualitative research
		7.2 Assumptions relating to the costs of SPL	7.2.1 To what extent have the costs underpinning the original impact assessment been realised?	Parental Rights Survey (2019); HMRC Statutory Payments data

## Synthesis Methodology

2.35) A synthesis approach has been used to interpret and collate the evidence gathered in order to assess the effectiveness of SPL and ShPP since its introduction, and the extent to which the legislation has achieved its anticipated outcomes and intended policy objectives.

2.36) A rigorous synthesis framework was designed to build a comprehensive picture of the implementation, use and impact of SPL for parents and employers nationwide. Using this framework, we assessed the evidence collected and findings against the KEQs and sub-evaluation questions. We were then able to triangulate the findings from different sources to test the assumptions underpinning the logic model and original policy expectations as set out in the impact assessment. This is discussed in more detail below under Approach to Synthesising Findings.

### Evidence sources

2.37) Quantitative survey data was the main source of primary data, supplemented by additional case-study based qualitative research, relevant academic literature and administrative data provided by HMRC.

2.38) Unless otherwise stated, where differences within survey findings are discussed (e.g. between mothers and fathers or between mothers of different age groups within the Parental Rights, Management and Wellbeing Practices and British Social Attitudes Surveys), the differences are statistically significant, at the 95% confidence interval or above. This means we can be confident that estimates represent true differences in the population.

## Parental Rights Survey (formerly Maternity and Paternity Rights Survey series)

2.39) The Maternity and Paternity Rights Survey (MPRS) series has monitored the take-up of maternity and family benefits and post-birth employment decisions since the late 1970s, with the last survey conducted in 2009-10.<sup>47</sup> The 2019 edition (Parental Rights Survey) provides an opportunity to deliver insight into the take-up of recently established rights including SPL and ShPP and Antenatal Leave.

2.40) The survey also provides evidence on mothers and fathers decision-making and experiences of return to work; attitudes of parents towards family leave, childcare responsibility, and returning to work; and factors that enable both men and women to remain in work while playing a role in their child's upbringing from birth. By making comparisons with the 2019 survey findings and the 2009-10 survey data collected prior to the introduction of SPL, this evaluation has been able to measure outcomes on the above thematic areas both before and after the entitlement.

2.41) The 2019 Parental Rights Survey surveyed a representative sample of 1,959 mothers who had worked in the previous 12 months and 1,062 fathers (or mothers' partners) of children born May and September 2017.<sup>48</sup> Fathers were eligible for the survey if they were employed at the time of the child's birth and resided with the child. In addition to the 'core sample' of mothers and fathers, to support this evaluation, the survey also included an additional boost sample of 336 interviews with parents who have taken SPL ('SPL parents').

2.42) Fieldwork was carried via face-to-face interviewing and telephone interviews between March to November 2019. In relation to comparisons over time, on the limited analysis that has been possible, it has been difficult to be sure that the figures outputted\*<sup>49</sup> from the 2009 SPSS file are completely comparable with the most recent survey findings. Some caution is therefore needed as we cannot be certain that comparisons have been made on a like for like basis.

## Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey

2.43) The Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (MWPS, 2018-19) is a representative survey of 2,489 workplaces with five or more employees in Great Britain.<sup>50</sup> It was undertaken in late 2018 and early 2019 to provide evidence on how employers were responding to policy developments in flexible working, in-work support for parents and collective rights. Interviews were carried out with the most senior manager in the workplace responsible for human resource issues, with fieldwork taking place between September 2018 and February 2019.

2.44) The sample for the MWPS was drawn from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR), which is held and maintained by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The IDBR is

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<sup>47</sup> Chanfreau, J. et al. (2011). *Maternity and Paternity Rights Survey and Women Returners Survey 2009/10*. Research Report No.777, DWP and BIS, London. Accessed from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maternity-and-paternity-rights-and-women-returners-survey-200910-rr777>

<sup>48</sup> A combination of the Child Benefits Register (CBR) and Royal Mail's Postcode Address File (PAF) was used to ensure full coverage of parents in Great Britain with a child aged 18-24 months.

<sup>49</sup> Figures in the analysis flagged with an asterisk are where the data has come from the SPSS file, rather than the published report, and therefore some caution is needed due to the issues outlined.

<sup>50</sup> A workplace refers to the activities of a single employer at a single set of premises (for example, a branch of a high street bank).

widely acknowledged to be the most comprehensive register of businesses available and is the same sampling frame used for the 2013 Work-Life Balance (WLB) Employer Survey.<sup>51</sup>

2.45) The 2018/19 MWPS is a successor to the 2013 WLB Survey and where relevant, comparisons are drawn between 2013 survey findings of employer practices prior to SPL's introduction in 2015, and the 2018/19 survey findings.

### HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Real Time Information data

2.46) For the purposes of this evaluation, HMRC were commissioned to extract statutory payments data on those in receipt of Shared Parental Pay (ShPP), Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) and Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) from their Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) system.

2.47) HMRC receive a record of payments employers make to their employees through their PAYE RTI system.<sup>52</sup> PAYE RTI data covers the whole claimant population (for those paid through PAYE), rather than a sample as with surveys. However, the statistics produced are limited to what the administration system reports.

2.48) HMRC have provided data on the number of individuals in receipt of ShPP/SMP/SPP and the amount paid to claimants, in total and broken down by gender, age, Government office region for both claimant resident and business location, number of months in a tax year that a claimant made a claim, and by earnings of the claimant in the previous tax year. They also provide quarterly data on the value of the sum recovered by employers.

2.49) The statistics used in the evaluation cover the period April 2014 to end of March 2022.

2.50) It is important to note that RTI data is subject to revision and there may be small fluctuations between earlier iterations of data extracts, so the figures included in this report should not be considered "final".<sup>53</sup>

### Qualitative research

2.51) In addition to the above, qualitative research was also commissioned to explore the motivations, barriers and perceived effects of the SPL policies on employers and employees in a range of workplaces.

2.52) The research was carried out by NatCen Social Research and consisted of a qualitative case study design, using in-depth interviews. A purposive sampling approach was used to achieve six case studies. The sample was drawn from participants of the 2018/19 MWPS who consented to take part in further research.

2.53) Case studies were based in a mix of workplaces in Great Britain who either had or did not have staff who had taken up SPL. Six case studies were conducted in total, five at workplaces with take up of SPL and one at a workplace without take up. All workplaces were

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<sup>51</sup> BIS (2014) *The fourth work-life balance survey: 2013, Research Paper 184*. Accessed from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fourth-work-life-balance-employer-survey-2013>

<sup>52</sup> Including the cost of statutory payments which are then recovered by employers. For further information on PAYE RTI data, see

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/newmethodsfornightlyearningsandemploymentestimatesfrompayasyouearnrealtimetypeinformationpayertidata/december2019>

<sup>53</sup> Please also note that where quoted, figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Quarterly figures should not be added together, e.g. to make a yearly count of individuals in receipt of ShPP, due to double counting claimants from quarter to quarter.

large employers<sup>54</sup> in both the private and public sector. Three were female-dominated (more than 60% female employees) and three were male-dominated (more than 60% male employees).

2.54) A total of 19 in-depth interviews were conducted with six senior managers, four line-managers and nine employees across the six case studies. Six male and three female employees were interviewed. Interviews were either conducted face-to-face at participants' workplaces or by phone. Interviews took place between August 2019 and February 2020.

2.55) This evaluation uses the qualitative research to supplement the quantitative data collected and outlined above by exploring issues in depth within individual contexts. As qualitative data based on a purposive sampling approach, it is important to note that the qualitative findings and case studies discussed throughout the report are not representative of the wider population of employers and parents with experience of SPL. Any wider inferences that can be deduced from the research are limited. However, the qualitative research does provide in-depth insight into the range of experiences, views and suggestions given by those participants interviewed. Where relevant, verbatim quotations from across the sample have been used to illustrate the findings.<sup>55</sup>

### Additional evidence sources

2.56) Additional evidence from the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS) and a range of academic literature has also been used to supplement the primary data collection above to investigate attitudes and behaviour towards shared parental leave among parents and any change over time.

2.57) The BSAS is an annual survey that has been running since 1983, allowing changes in attitudes over time to be measured. The 2018 survey was based on a representative sample of 3,879 adults across Great Britain living in private households.<sup>56</sup> A set of attitudinal questions were included as a module in 2012 and 2018 to examine changes in people's attitudes and behaviour to the progression of women in the Labour Market and more equal sharing of childcare between parents since the introduction of SPL.

### Approach to synthesising findings

2.58) Given the multiple sources of data on parents and employers experiences with SPL above, the analysis attempts to systematically review and triangulate findings from different sources using a synthesis approach in order to present the evaluation findings discussed below.

2.59) Data was first extracted from the above sources based on the KEQs and sub-evaluation questions. The framework was structured according to the overarching KEQs, relevant component in the logic model, and sub-evaluation question. For each finding per sub-evaluation question, the data source, data variable (e.g. specific survey question), type of evaluation and analysis,<sup>57</sup> and relevant beneficiaries and domains were recorded. Where relevant, any observed change over time was also recorded, as well as any perceived

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<sup>54</sup> This refers to employers with 250+ employees.

<sup>55</sup> They are labelled to indicate participant gender, parental leave policy taken, workplace sector, workplace size and workplace gender ratio. Further information is not given in order to protect the anonymity of research participants.

<sup>56</sup> NatCen Social Research. (2021). *British Social Attitudes Survey, 2018*. [data collection]. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 8606, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8606-2>

<sup>57</sup> For example if the sub-research question addressed process, impact or value for money evaluation components, and if the analysis required descriptive or inferential statistics, qualitative analysis etc.

evidence gaps that would need to be addressed through additional evidence, e.g. academic literature.

## Limitations

2.60) The findings discussed in this report are the product of a methodological process that involves extracting, analysing and synthesising a range of data sources. As a result, the main limitation of this evaluation is the inability to evidence a causal relationship between the introduction and take-up of SPL and any observed outcomes. This evaluation takes a non-attributional approach as attempting to attribute observed effects directly to SPL policy is difficult. Though the findings in this report build a comprehensive picture of parents and employers experiences with SPL, and outcomes of SPL parents in terms of work and caring responsibilities relative to parents who did not take SPL, it is not possible to attribute any outcomes or impacts to SPL itself.<sup>58</sup>

2.61) One way to improve this evaluation could be to carry out further analysis, comparing the outcomes for SPL parents with those among mothers and fathers of similar observable characteristics. Comparing outcomes among these groups would help to provide more of an indication of the potential difference SPL makes, allowing for stronger conclusions to be drawn.

2.62) Another potential area for improvement could be to explore long-term effects of SPL on wider outcomes such as improved child outcomes. A relatively short space of time has lapsed since the introduction of the policy and the evaluation is therefore limited to cross-sectional data, providing evidence from one point in time.

2.63) However, this evaluation report is still able to significantly contribute to the Government's understanding of how the SPL system is implemented by employers, taken-up and experienced by parents. It is also able to provide comment on the impact SPL has had in the five years since its introduction on both mothers' participation in the workplace and take-up of shared parenting more generally.

## 3. How has the policy been implemented and delivered?

*This section of the evaluation explores parents' and employers' awareness and understanding of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and Shared Parental Pay (ShPP), including how complex SPL is perceived to be. It then examines how employers*

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<sup>58</sup> Alternative statistical approaches using data from the Parental Rights Survey were considered to allow for attribution (e.g. propensity score matching), however the available sample base of parents who took SPL was too small for any robust conclusions to be drawn. The relatively short time span between when the legislation entitling new parents to SPL came into force (2015), and when parents surveyed in the Parental Rights Survey had a child (May-September 2017) meant that the SPL policy had not had much time to embed e.g. in employers' parental leave schemes.



*implemented the SPL system in their organisation, including how employees experienced the process of requesting SPL and the process of handling leave requests.*

*Finally, the section discusses parents' and employers' satisfaction with the policy as it's designed, along with suggestions from research participants for improvements to the scheme.*

## **Key findings**

Where SPL was not taken, over half of mothers (51%) and over two in five fathers (42%) had heard of SPL and had at least a small amount of knowledge of the policy. A third of all mothers who did not take SPL had not heard of SPL at all when their baby was born or adopted (33%, and the proportion is closer to half among all fathers that did not take SPL (45%). There is variation in awareness among parents by occupation, qualification level, income as well as demographic characteristics.

Over seven in ten employers were aware of SPL entitlements. Awareness of SPL varied by workplace size. Two in five managers had at least some knowledge of SPL. Nine in ten employers knew that SPL was a legal right.

A fifth of workplace managers (20%) say they have a good understanding of SPL. A higher proportion (58%) said they had at least some understanding, and this increased amongst workplaces with recent experience of SPL (93%).

Some employers noted the scheme was complicated and hard to understand and explain to others. Efforts to improve awareness within workplaces and among fathers in particular would be beneficial, to make the SPL offer simpler to understand and explain to others. Employers and employees felt that the elements of SPL policy, such as pay and leave entitlements could be complicated, particularly familiarising with policies of two different employers.

Employers were generally supportive of SPL. Many workplaces updated their policies to reflect statutory changes and review their policies on an ongoing basis to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Some employers reported that the policy was not actively promoted, however many parents that have taken SPL found that their experience of taking leave helped inform others. As employers build experience handling requests for SPL, it was felt the process for requesting and approving leave on the side of employees and employers will become gradually easier.

Just under half (47%) of workplaces were either very satisfied or satisfied with the Government's SPL and Pay policy, while 5% were dissatisfied and 41% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Notably, in workplaces where employees had taken SPL in the past two years, a greater proportion of managers (63%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the policy. Parents who took SPL were more likely than mothers and fathers in general to recommend taking the leave they took, although the vast majority do in all cases (97%, 91% and 86% respectively).

Employers reported several advantages of SPL, including SPL gives parents flexibility and choice (15%), helps with staff recruitment and retention (14%), improves employee morale (14%) and benefits parents and children (13%). The most commonly reported disadvantages were the need to arrange cover for staff (10%), a negative impact on running the business (10%) and the loss of staff (9%).

Across workplaces, employees and managers felt that the financial offer needed to be improved. When workplaces offered statutory ShPP, SPL was not accessible due to the pay reduction employees would have to take. When workplaces offered enhanced ShPP, employees still felt the financial offer could be improved to give employees greater flexibility in their decision making around childcare. Senior managers also acknowledged the need to improve the financial offer to attract and retain high quality staff.

## Awareness and understanding of Shared Parental Leave

3.1) This section first describes parents' and employers' awareness and understanding of SPL and what the scheme involves. The section also describes whether employers have undertaken any activities to promote awareness of SPL within their workplace and how well-informed employees feel about the SPL scheme offered by their employer.

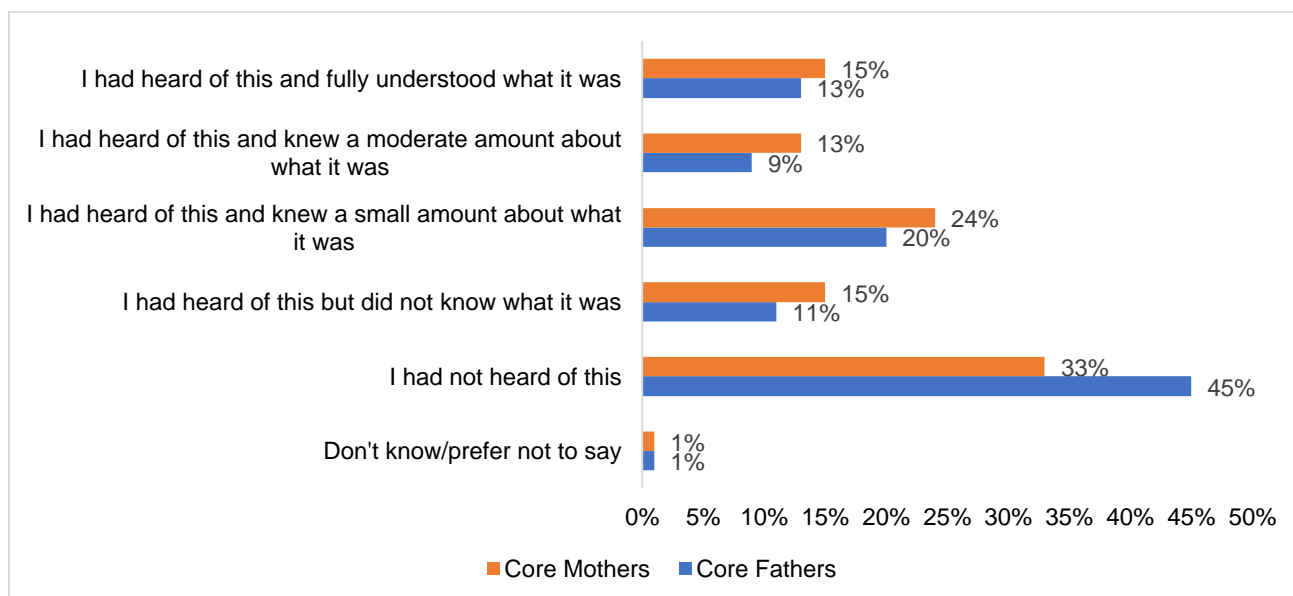
### What is parents' awareness and understanding of Shared Parental Leave and Pay?

3.2) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) asked parents of children born between 29th May and 30th September 2017 who had not taken SPL about awareness and understanding of SPL. Where SPL was not taken, over half of mothers (51%) and over two in five fathers (42%) had heard of SPL and had at least a small amount of knowledge of the policy. Of those who were aware of it, a relatively small proportion fully understood the scheme.

3.3) As Figure 3.1 shows, a third of all mothers who did not take SPL had not heard of SPL at all when their baby was born or adopted (33%) and the proportion is closer to half among all fathers that did not take SPL (45%). A further 15% of mothers and around one in ten fathers (11%) had heard of SPL but did not know what it was.

3.4) Overall, only around one in seven mothers and fathers who had not taken SPL reported being aware of SPL and fully understood the scheme (15% and 13% respectively).

**Figure 3.1: Parents' awareness of SPL**



Base: Parents who did not take SPL (Core mothers 1,926; Core fathers 1,026)

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

3.5) Employee mothers (31%) were slightly less likely to report not having heard of SPL when their baby was born or adopted.

3.6) A majority of mothers with no formal qualifications (61%), those in skilled, process and elementary occupations (57%), those who are workers (53%), those working in the hospitality sector (52%) and mothers on the lowest incomes earning less than £10,000 per annum before birth (51%) had not heard of SPL. Awareness is also significantly lower amongst mothers with a health condition (50% had not heard of SPL), those aged under 25 years of age (45%), and Asian mothers (44%).

3.7) Mothers earning over £40,000 (35%), those living in London (29%), older mothers aged 40 and over (25%), those with qualifications above degree level (26%) and mothers working in Public Administration and Defence (27%) and Professional occupations (24%) were more likely to report that they had heard of SPL and fully understood the scheme than mothers overall (15%).

3.8) Proportionally fewer employee fathers (40%) had not heard of SPL than fathers overall. Among fathers that did not take SPL, those that had not heard of SPL was reported among Black fathers (60%) and Asian fathers (56%). Lower awareness of SPL is also reported among fathers with no qualifications (72%) or qualifications below degree level (52%), in the North West of England (68%) and among workers (74%), those on lower incomes (63% among those on incomes below £20,000), and in skilled, process and elementary occupations (61%).

3.9) Fathers working in professional occupations (29%) and central government (27%), those earning over £40,000 (26%), fathers living in London (24%), fathers aged 35-39 (20%), those with qualifications above degree level (29%) and fathers working in larger organisations of over 250 staff (20%) are more likely to say they have heard of SPL and fully understand the scheme than fathers overall (13%).

3.10) As Table 3.1 shows, whilst the majority of SPL parents correctly believed they and their partner were entitled to 52 weeks leave (70%) in total, a reasonably high proportion of mothers thought they were only entitled to 39 weeks (20%)<sup>59</sup> or were not sure or preferred not to say (19%)

**Table 3.1: Amount of leave respondents thought they and their partner were allowed to have in total when their baby was born**

	<b>Core Mothers</b>	<b>Core Fathers</b>	<b>SPL parents</b>
Up to 2 weeks	1%	20%++	5% <sup>60</sup>
3-38 weeks	5%	8%	
39 weeks	20%++	7%	6%
40-51 weeks	5%	8%	4%

<sup>59</sup> It is likely respondents may have conflated the amount of pay they were entitled to (39 weeks) with the amount of leave (52).

<sup>60</sup> For SPL parents, only a figure for up to 38 weeks is available.

52 weeks	37%+	14%	70%++
More than 52 weeks	13%	11%	10%
Don't know/prefer not to say	19%+	32%++	5%

Base: all parents surveyed in the Parental Rights Survey (2019) (Core mothers: 1,959; Core fathers: 1,062; SPL parents: 336)

+ = significantly higher at 95% level of confidence than one other column

++= significantly higher than both other columns

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

3.11) Fathers exhibited even higher degrees of uncertainty over entitlements, with the highest proportion saying said they don't know or preferred not to say what they thought their own and their partner's total entitlement was (32%), and only one in seven saying they were entitled to 52 weeks (14%). Given that the most common answer amongst fathers was two weeks (20%), it is likely many fathers answered the question in terms of their own (Paternity) Leave entitlements.

3.12) Qualitative research carried out for this evaluation asked employees about their level of understanding of SPL. Participants described some confusion between different leave and pay entitlements more generally. Employees felt that, because there is no set standard for how workplaces should navigate it and workplace policies differ, it was difficult to figure out with their partners how much leave they were able to take and when. Whilst the main principle of the policy that two parents are entitled to share leave between them was well understood, interviewees varied in terms of their confidence in details such as eligibility and different leave and pay entitlements.

3.13) When employees were eligible for SPL and pay, they were then unable to recall detail about eligibility criteria because they didn't need that level of detail when making a leave request:

*"I couldn't really get my head around [eligibility] because there was no problem with eligibility for us. It just wasn't a problem."*

(Male employee, SPL, local authority, female-dominated extra-large employer)

3.14) Parents who took SPL were more likely to have a view as to the amount of leave they and their partner were legally entitled to. This may be due to knowledge acquired by parents navigating the SPL system and the process of applying for SPL may have required a more active understanding of their total household entitlements.

## What is employer awareness and understanding of Shared Parental Leave and Pay?

3.15) When the Shared Parental Leave and Pay scheme was launched in December 2014 for parents of children who were born or adopted from 5 April 2015, in addition to providing guidance for parents and employers on Gov.UK, technical guidance was published for employers<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shared-parental-leave-and-pay-employers-technical-guide>

3.16) Managers were asked in the Management and Wellbeing Practices survey (2018-19) whether they were aware of SPL, and if so, to describe their level of knowledge and whether they knew that this is a legal right.

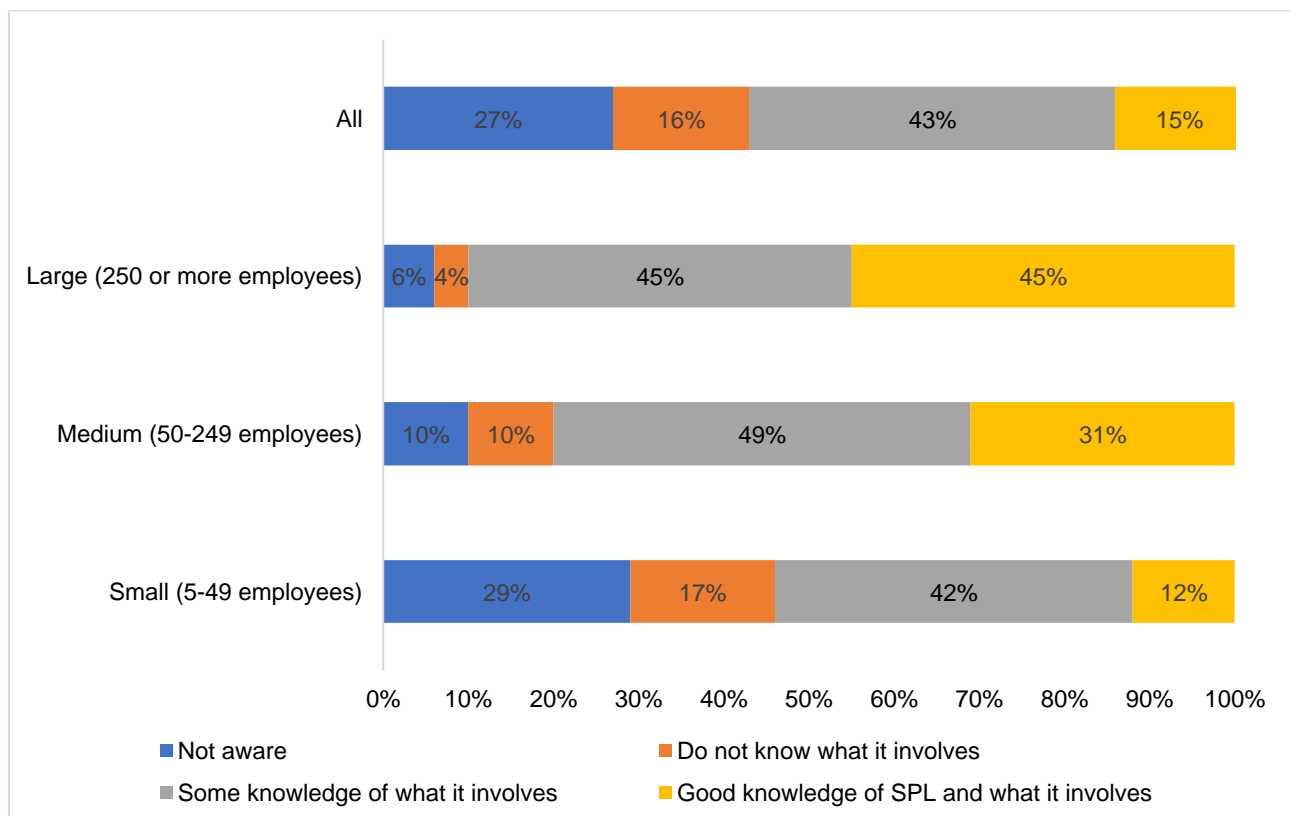
3.17) Around three-quarters (73%) of managers were aware of SPL, with levels of awareness higher in larger workplaces; 94% of managers in workplaces with 250 or more employees were aware compared with 71% in workplaces with 5-50 employees (Figure 3.2).

3.18) Awareness was higher in public sector workplaces (87%), but still high in the private sector (72%) and not for profit sector (79%). Across sectors, awareness was highest in workplaces in the public administration and defence (87%), education (91%), transport and communications (81%) and health and social work (80%) sectors and lowest in construction (61%) and hotels and restaurants (57%) sectors.

3.19) Overall, almost nine in ten employees (86%) worked in a workplace where there was awareness of SPL amongst managers. Among employers who were aware of SPL, almost all (94%) knew that it was a legal right.

3.20) Figure 3.2 shows that two in five (43%) of all managers said they had some knowledge of what SPL involves and a minority of workplace managers (15%) said they had a good understanding of SPL and what it involves.

**Figure 3.2: Employers' level of awareness of SPL, by workplace size**



Base: all workplaces with five or more employees (2,489 workplaces)

Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices survey, 2018-19

All refers to all managers irrespective of organisation size

3.21) Unsurprisingly, levels of understanding about SPL significantly increased for those workplaces with direct experience of employees taking SPL in the two years before the survey.

Half of those workplaces said they had good knowledge of what SPL involves, and an additional two in five (43%) said they had some knowledge of the scheme.

3.22) Levels of understanding also varied by workplace size. Nine in ten (89%) of managers in large workplaces reported having at least some knowledge and almost half (45%) reported good knowledge of SPL. In contrast, only 12% of managers in small workplaces who were aware of SPL, stated they had good knowledge of the entitlement.

3.23) Qualitative research carried out among workplaces found that despite widespread support, senior managers, line managers and employees across different workplaces felt that SPL was complicated and hard to understand in terms of how SPL and ShPP worked alongside Maternity and Paternity Leave and Pay entitlements, and how to coordinate SPL when parents worked at two different organisations.

3.24) For example, senior managers interviewed were more familiar and aware of entitlements and eligibility criteria but found it difficult to recall precise details:

*“I have to read it every time I want to explain it to someone because it is complex and difficult.”*

(Female senior manager, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

3.25) The research also found that line managers and employees interviewed offered different (and not always accurate) interpretations for how much leave and pay parents were entitled to, and whether they could take SPL simultaneously. Some line managers and employees also conflated the total statutory leave entitlement (50 weeks) with how long ShPP is paid for (37 weeks).

3.26) Staff across workplace case studies were asked for their views on why the Government had introduced SPL.

3.27) Participants interviewed fell into two groups: those who had thought about it and expressed views and those who had not thought about it and did not express an opinion. Participants who articulated their views on Government policy were from workplaces where staff considered to hold supportive and receptive attitudes towards SPL. They perceived three key aims:

- to benefit family life and children e.g. via giving parents more flexibility
- to increase gender equality, e.g. by enabling opposite-sex couples to share time off for childcare more equally and therefore reduce negative career impacts for women
- to help same-sex couples e.g. by making it possible for them to access and share parental leave

3.28) Reflecting on these responses in light of the policy’s objectives outlined in the Introduction, it is clear that particularly with the first two aims mentioned, the Government’s objectives for the new SPL entitlement to provide more flexibility for parents and to reduce the gender bias present in the current parental leave system were clearly understood, at least by the participants in the qualitative research.

3.29) Participants who reported not having thought about the underpinning aims of the SPL system came from workplaces with receptive and hesitant attitudes towards policy. This

suggests that improvements could be made to improve employer engagement with SPL and organisational culture towards parental leave and pay entitlements.

### Have employers undertaken activities to raise awareness of Shared Parental Leave?

3.30) Whilst this question was not asked of workplace managers in the survey of employers, qualitative research described some active promotion to staff and general supportive attitudes towards SPL policies within workplaces with experience of SPL.

3.31) For example, the senior manager from one workplace said they had recently promoted SPL via an optional training course open to all staff about their family-friendly employment policies. This senior manager also said that when a woman became pregnant, she would usually sit down with HR to discuss her options, at which point she would be told about SPL.

3.32) Within some workplaces, senior managers reported that their workplaces did not actively or regularly promote their SPL policies. Managers justified this as the norm for most workplace policies and generally gave two explanations. One, that it was unnecessary to promote any policy since all staff knew that workplace policies could be found on the staff intranet and two, that SPL was very complex as a policy and difficult to explain:

*“I think the complexity is the big thing that probably puts managers off trying to push it or promote it because you just think, oh God, don’t want to go there.”*

(Female senior manager, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

3.33) Across all workplace types, there was some ad-hoc promotion of SPL policies when the workplace offer changed or was updated, with information circulated by email. However, senior managers perceived that these emails were not read by most staff. Line managers and employees from across workplace types commented that SPL is not actively promoted at their workplace and there is generally low awareness of its existence among colleagues.

*“Because [my colleagues] never actually bothered to consult the HR, they didn’t know about this shared parental leave. I think that’s something that should be more advertised.”*

(Male employee, SPL Higher Education, male-dominated, very large employer)

3.34) This is consistent with the findings from the survey of parents which evidenced generally low levels of awareness of SPL across mothers and fathers who had not taken up the entitlement.

3.35) However, findings from the qualitative research also evidenced that awareness-raising was often implicitly undertaken by the employees who had taken-up SPL themselves. Where employees were amongst the first to take SPL at their workplace, they felt they were setting a positive example. They also found that, by taking SPL, they raised awareness amongst colleagues by improving visibility.

*“I was the first person in the department to take shared parental leave and they were very supportive of it in personal terms but also in terms of demonstrating to other employees, other colleagues, that this is an option. Subsequently, four other male colleagues have taken shared parental leave since I took it”*

(Male employee, SPL, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

3.36) As the number of individuals in receipt of ShPP has increased consistently, albeit slowly, each year since its introduction (2015) (

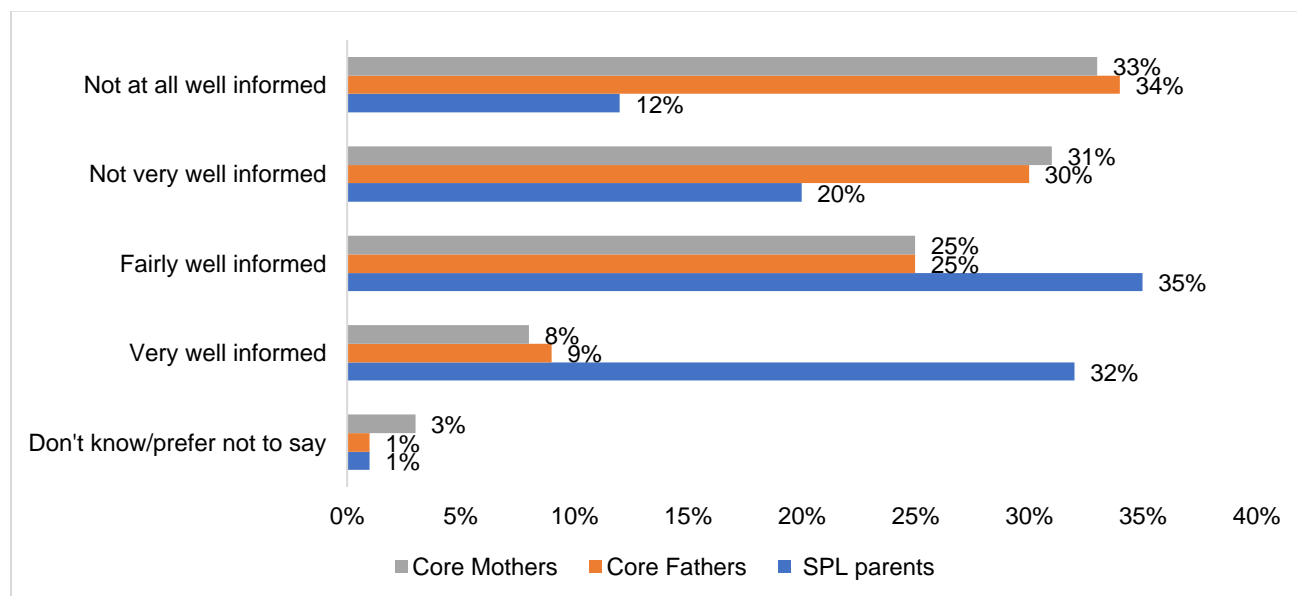
Figure ), SPL awareness may organically increase across workplaces as more colleagues' experience SPL and improve visibility through this kind of implicit advertising.

### How well-informed do employees feel about the Shared Parental Leave and Pay offer from their employer?

3.37) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) asked parents, regardless of whether they took SPL or not, how well informed they felt about SPL and pay arrangements provided by their employer. As to be expected, a significantly higher proportion of parents with experience of SPL felt more informed about the SPL arrangements provided by their employer, than those parents without direct experience.

3.38) Of the parents who took SPL, two in three felt very or fairly well-informed about SPL and pay arrangements provided by their employer, while one in five did not feel very well-informed, and one in eight felt not at all well-informed. Among the core sample of mothers and fathers who were employees/workers before birth (regardless of whether they took SPL or not), a smaller proportion felt very or fairly well-informed about SPL arrangements offered by their employers as Figure 3.3 shows.

**Figure 3.3: How well-informed parents felt about SPL and Pay arrangements provided by their employer**



Base: Parents who were employees or workers before birth (core mothers 1,858; core fathers 900; SPL parents 330)

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

3.39) The proportion of mothers that felt 'not at all' well informed of their employer's SPL arrangements increases to at least half among mothers aged 25 or under (50%), those with a health condition (53%), those living in the North West of England or in Wales (57% and 54%), and those working in the hospitality sector before birth (51%).

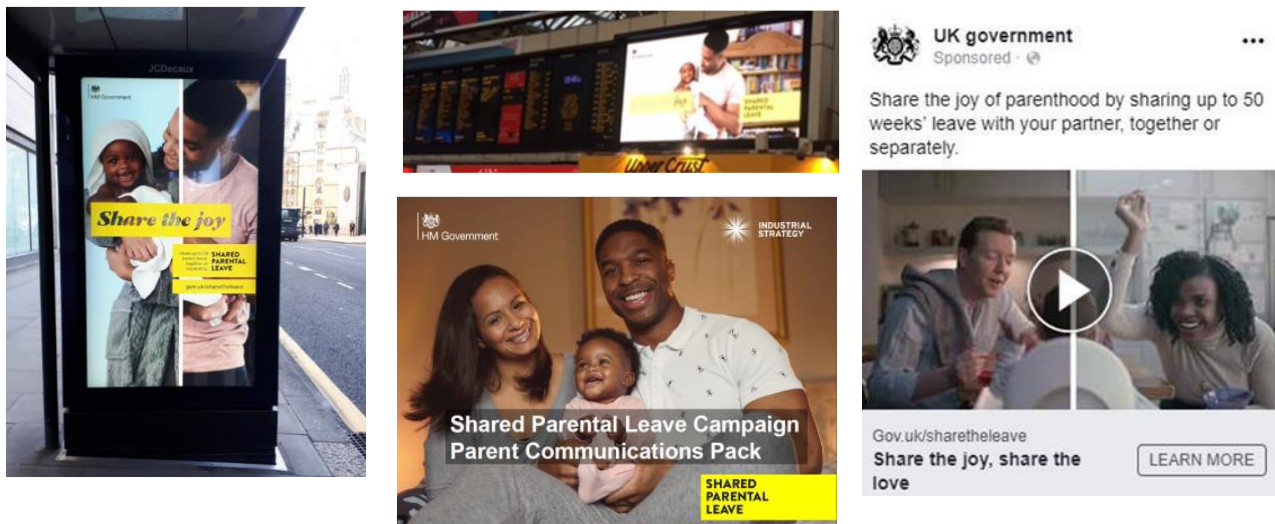


3.40) Among fathers the proportion that felt 'not at all' well informed about SPL arrangements is higher than average among fathers from Black ethnic groups (53%), those living in the North West of England (49%) or in Wales (48%), among workers (54%) and those on incomes under £20,000 per annum (50%).

### Is the information available on Shared Parental Leave and Pay policy easy to understand?

3.41) To promote awareness and adoption of SPL, at the time that the policy was introduced the Government produced guidance for parents and employers (including technical guidance on all aspects of the scheme) and ran a communications campaign to raise awareness. This was followed up with a £1.5m communications campaign in 2018. The campaign involved: development of four stakeholder communications packs for parents, employers, Other Government Departments (OGD's) and Government civil servants; a ministerial Op Ed and round of Ministerial media interviews; promotion across social media channels; and paid digital display adverts.<sup>62</sup> The campaign was supplemented by refreshed tools and guidance for parents.

**Figure 3.4: Advertising and promotion of SPL across different media types, as commissioned in 2018 after the launch of SPL**



3.42) A subsequent PR/social media campaign was run in 2019 to maintain the high levels of awareness that had been achieved in 2018. In 2021, Government published a new online, interactive, tool for parents which enables them to check if they are eligible for SPL and plan their leave and pay with the other parent and/or their employer.

3.43) During the qualitative research, managers were asked whether they reviewed the guidance provided by the Government on SPL and Pay to set up their own schemes. A majority of those interviewed stated they made small changes to improve the clarity of the guidance because they found the Government policy documents to be complicated and confusing.

<sup>62</sup> Specific outputs delivered included 63 comms packs sent to parent & employer stakeholders, OGDs and DAs; 129 pieces of media coverage incl. coverage by 11 broadcasters of which 8 featured ministerial interviews; 26 national stories including 1 ministerial Op Ed in The Sun online; 5,562 unique page views of the press release on Gov.UK; 24 published tweets with an average of 13,192 impressions, 7 UKGov Facebook posts, 12 paid for posts on Instagram, 7 paid for tweets on Twitter and 3 paid for posts on Facebook.

3.44) Some of the employees interviewed similarly found the policy and paperwork jargonistic and confusing, though it's important to note that employees did not distinguish between the original and subsequent Government issued guidance and their employer's adaptation of the guidance during interview discussions.

*"To actually apply was - it was really unclear. The actual thing is a very good idea, but it was very complicated to understand what you were allowed, what information you had to send in, and to actually apply was complicated."*

(Male employee, SPL, information and communication, male-dominated, very large employer)

3.45) To mitigate the lack of clarity, one employee stated that they opted to use the ACAS form<sup>63</sup> instead, which their employer then decided to adopt. Employees from the same workplace reported the supporting information their employer had put out, including flow charts and employee case studies, were also helpful in demonstrating the way in which the logistics of the policies could work. Interestingly, there were instances of different employees from the same organisation giving both similar and contrasting accounts of the same processes or documents. This suggests that perceptions of Government guidance and documents may be determined not only by the clarity of process and policies but also of employee interpretation and understanding.

## Implementation

3.46) The following section assesses how employers have implemented SPL within their workplace, including updating organisational policies, raising awareness of SPL, reclaiming the cost of the entitlement from HMRC, and how employees experienced the process of requesting SPL from their employer.

### How have employers updated their policies to reflect the changes in parental leave entitlements?

3.47) Interviews with workplace managers in the qualitative research evidenced that across all participant workplaces, each had produced their own SPL and ShPP policy, which was either based entirely on statutory requirements or included additional enhancements.

3.48) No workplace policies discussed offered more leave than the 50 weeks enshrined in the statutory policy. Workplaces either offered statutory ShPP or offered a period of full pay, and in some cases followed by a period of statutory pay plus half pay. One employer offered the choice between half pay plus statutory ShPP for 12 weeks or one-third pay plus statutory ShPP for 20 weeks. One employer stipulated that in order to qualify for enhanced ShPP, leave had to be taken in the first six months after the child was born or adopted.

3.49) Findings showed that there were two key processes for senior managers when developing their workplace policy:

- internal including an HR staff member or team drafting the policy with sign-off from more senior staff or developing the policy with the help of a 'working group' of employees, trade union representatives and other non-HR colleagues; and

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<sup>63</sup> The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) were commissioned by Government to produce model forms which employers could use to provide all necessary information to their employer.

- external input including benchmarking the workplace offer against what similar organisations offered their staff or adopting a policy wholesale from an external sector association.

3.50) Workplaces with policies based on statutory requirements focused on compliance with the law and fairness. In other words, so long as company policy followed Government requirements, it was considered sufficient. They also considered it unfair to have enhanced ShPP when Maternity and Paternity Leave were not enhanced - although interestingly, it was not considered unfair to offer enhanced Maternity Pay but not enhanced ShPP.

3.51) Workplaces with enhanced policies were motivated by workforce benefits, such as family-friendly benefits to motivate, recruit and retain staff, and affordability. Senior managers believed that staff valued employers that promoted policies designed to improve staff wellbeing and enhance their family life. However, these benefits were balanced with what was affordable. Senior managers designed enhanced ShPP policies in a way that balanced the perceived benefits to employers and employees (happy and motivated staff) and perceived drawbacks (financial costs).

3.52) Most of the workplaces interviewed reported reviewing their policies and making small changes to improve clarity because the policy documents were found to be complicated and confusing, as discussed above. Though one workplace considered amendments unnecessary as they felt the guidance was clear and easy to use by managers, even though the participating employee from the same workplace found it difficult to understand. Workplaces considered to be supportive of SPL also reported reviewing their SPL policy to make it more generous in response to lobbying from staff, including adding a period of enhanced pay. They stated this change was motivated by fairness and a desire to attract and retain good staff.

3.53) Though these findings come from a small sample of predominantly large employers and are not necessarily representative of employer actions across the UK, they indicate that at least amongst large employers, workplaces both updated their policies to reflect statutory changes, and review their policies on an ongoing basis to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

### How have employees experienced the process of requesting Shared Parental Leave and how have employers experienced the process of approving Shared Parental Leave?

3.54) As part of the qualitative research, employees and staff were asked to describe their experiences of requesting or handling SPL requests.

3.55) The research found that across workplaces, leave requests were handled primarily by line managers and HR departments. The request process consisted of formal to less formal discussion of leave types, periods and cover arrangements and written notifications of leave decisions.

3.56) Senior managers could not always recall the exact time periods required for employees to give notice for their leave. While some mentioned a minimum of eight weeks, others emphasised the need for sufficient time to organise cover. The sample included employees who took continuous and discontinuous leave. Employers were aware that continuous blocks could not be refused. While they wanted to accommodate employees' preferences, discontinuous blocks were considered harder to manage organisationally.

3.57) Positive experiences of request and approval among employees interviewed were shaped by supportive, approachable and knowledgeable employers and simple and clear application processes and policies perceptions.

*"[There was not] much fussing, there wasn't much bureaucracy which was great."*

(Male employee, SPL for adoption, Higher Education, male-dominated, very large employer)

3.58) Conversely, less positive experiences among employees interviewed concerned less approachable employers with a weaker command of the policy, unclear forms and policies, overly bureaucratic application processes and inconsistencies in the communication of approved leave.

*"The paperwork was rubbish, if I'm honest, it had lots of unclear parts, it went back and forth several times."*

(Male employee, SPL, local authority, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

3.59) As discussed above, both employers and employees felt that the mechanisms of the SPL policy, such as pay and leave entitlements, could be complicated and difficult to understand, and that this was compounded by the need to navigate the policies of two different employers. Employees reported finding it difficult during the request process to work out the best arrangement for their family based on their workplace offer, and their partners' offer.

*"I think overall the policy and the concept of shared parental leave is not confusing, but the mechanics of how you make it work can be."*

(Female employee, SPL, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

3.60) Beyond this, employers also highlighted the difficulties of combining requests and in particular those that involved two policies, such as SPL and Adoption Leave. To mitigate against complexities, some employers described offering advice not only to employees but to line managers as well, guiding employees and line managers to HR departments, who could answer questions both in relation to policy details and application forms. Flexibility in being able to contact HR advisors was correspondingly valued by the employees interviewed, and they highlighted when HR departments offered clear and informative support as a particularly positive aspect of the process.

3.61) Interestingly, interviewees from one workplace stated that the SPL policy and process was hard to understand partially because it was new at the time the employee took leave.

*"They didn't have a clue about shared parental leave, but then nobody did back then...I didn't really understand shared parental leave; it was a bit of a minefield to all of us. But we figured it out together so there was stuff that they didn't know, but it's just because they hadn't been through it before. I'm sure the process is much smoother now."*

(Female, SPL for adoption, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

3.62) This suggests that as SPL becomes more embedded over time, and as employers build experience handling requests for SPL, the process for requesting and approving leave on the side of employees and employers will become gradually easier.

### Are employers aware that they can reclaim the cost of the statutory payments for Shared Parental Leave from HMRC?

3.63) As of financial year 2023-24, employees who are eligible to take SPL are entitled to ShPP of either £172.48 per week or 90% of their weekly earnings for up to 39 weeks, whichever is lowest. As with Statutory Maternity Pay and Statutory Paternity Pay, employers can reclaim the cost of paying out ShPP from HMRC.

3.64) The Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (MWPS, 2018-19) found that three in five (61%) managers in workplaces where an employee had taken SPL in the two years prior to the survey were aware that they could reclaim the cost of ShPP from HMRC. Similar levels of awareness were reported among employers that Statutory Maternity Pay and Statutory Paternity Pay can be reclaimed from HMRC (62% and 60% respectively).

3.65) Awareness that costs of ShPP can be reclaimed from HMRC is higher among Not-for-Profit organisations (84%), Education sector (80%), London-based organisations (76%) and larger organisations of more than 500 staff (70%).

3.66) Organisations with more than 10,000 employees were more likely to be unaware (52%) that they could reclaim costs than workplaces overall (36%), suggesting that the payroll function is likely not under the responsibility of the HR manager interviewed for the survey, thus helping to explain low levels of awareness.

## Satisfaction with SPL

3.67) The following section reports on the satisfaction of parents and employers with the design of the SPL system and whether parents or employers have suggestions for improvements to the system.

### Based on their experience(s), how satisfied are employers and employees with the Shared Parental Leave and Pay scheme?

3.68) The MWPS (2018-19) found that almost half (47%) of workplace managers were either very satisfied or satisfied with the Government's SPL and Pay policy, while 5% were dissatisfied and 41% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

3.69) Satisfaction levels were shown to vary by workplace size, as 3.71) Qualitative research among staff showed that the ability to split leave and the flexibility around how this could be done worked well. However, they also reported that the complexity of SPL policy made it difficult to understand how terms and eligibility compared with Maternity and Paternity Leave. Limiting ShPP to the statutory rate and lack of pay enhancements for Shared Parental Leave was seen to impede take-up.

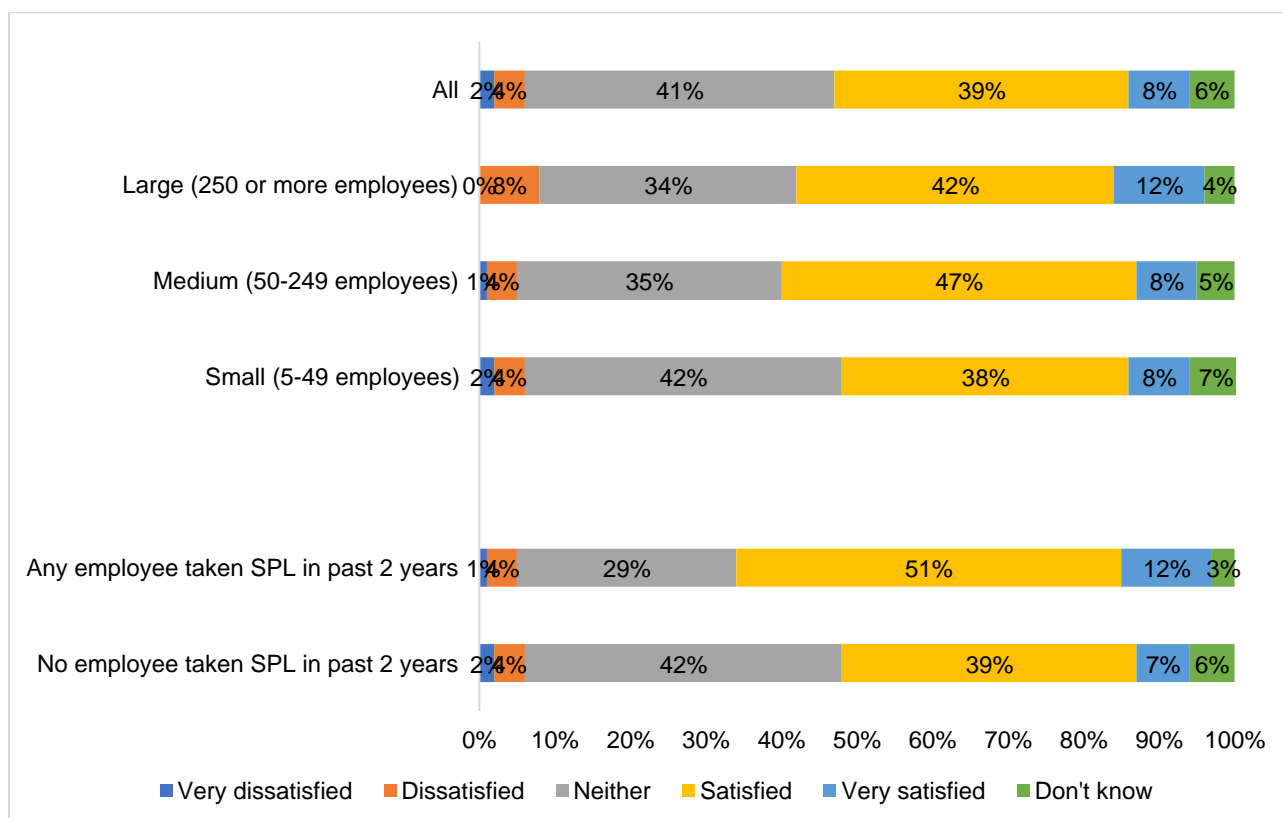
Figure 3.5 shows. A slightly higher proportion of managers in medium and large workplaces reported being either satisfied or very satisfied (55% and 54%) than employers overall (47%).

3.70) Differences in satisfaction were also found depending on whether the workplace had experience of employees taking SPL, with employers more likely to be satisfied or very

satisfied (63%) if they had any employees taking SPL in the last 2 years than workplaces overall (47%).

3.71) Qualitative research among staff showed that the ability to split leave and the flexibility around how this could be done worked well. However, they also reported that the complexity of SPL policy made it difficult to understand how terms and eligibility compared with Maternity and Paternity Leave. Limiting ShPP to the statutory rate and lack of pay enhancements for Shared Parental Leave was seen to impede take-up.

**Figure 3.5: Employers' satisfaction with Shared Parental Leave and pay, per cent workplaces**



Base: all workplaces with five or more employees where respondents aware of shared parental leave (2,025 workplaces).  
 Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices survey (2018-19)

### Would parents who have taken Shared Parental Leave recommend it to other parents?

3.72) In keeping with the benefits outlined above, the Parental Rights Survey (2019) found that parents who took SPL were more likely than mothers and fathers in general to recommend taking they leave they took, although the vast majority do in all cases (97%, 91% and 86% respectively). There were no significant differences between mothers and fathers who took SPL in whether they'd recommend the leave they took.

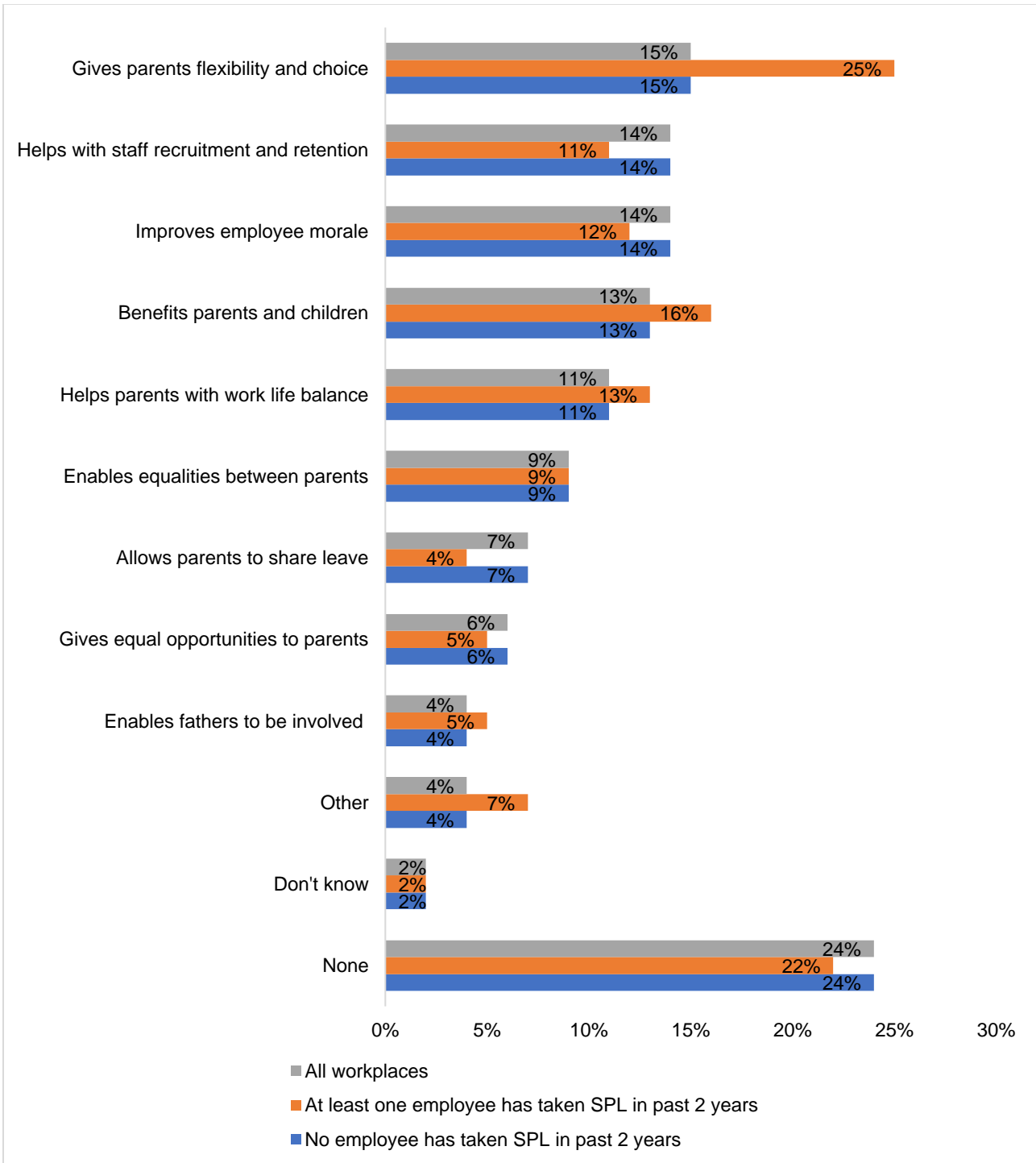
## Do employers perceive Shared Parental Leave as beneficial for their organisation?

3.73) Employers were more likely to report that SPL and pay offered advantages than disadvantages.

3.74) As

Figure 3.6 shows, advantages cited by employers where manager was aware of SPL were that SPL gives parents flexibility and choice (15%), helps with staff recruitment and retention (14%), improves employee morale (14%) and benefits parents and children (13%).

**Figure 3.6: Advantages of Shared Parental Leave and pay, per cent workplaces**



Base: all workplaces with five or more employees where respondent is aware of shared parental leave (2,025 workplaces; 1,593 where no employee had taken SPL; 281 where at least one employee had taken SPL in past 2 years).

Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)

3.75) Managers in larger workplaces of over 250 employees (12%) were less likely to report no advantages than the average (24%). Larger workplaces were most likely to report that an advantage was giving parents flexibility and choice, cited by almost three in ten (28%) than workplaces overall (15%). They were also more likely to see an advantage as helping with staff recruitment and retention (reported by 23% compared with 14% of managers in workplaces overall).

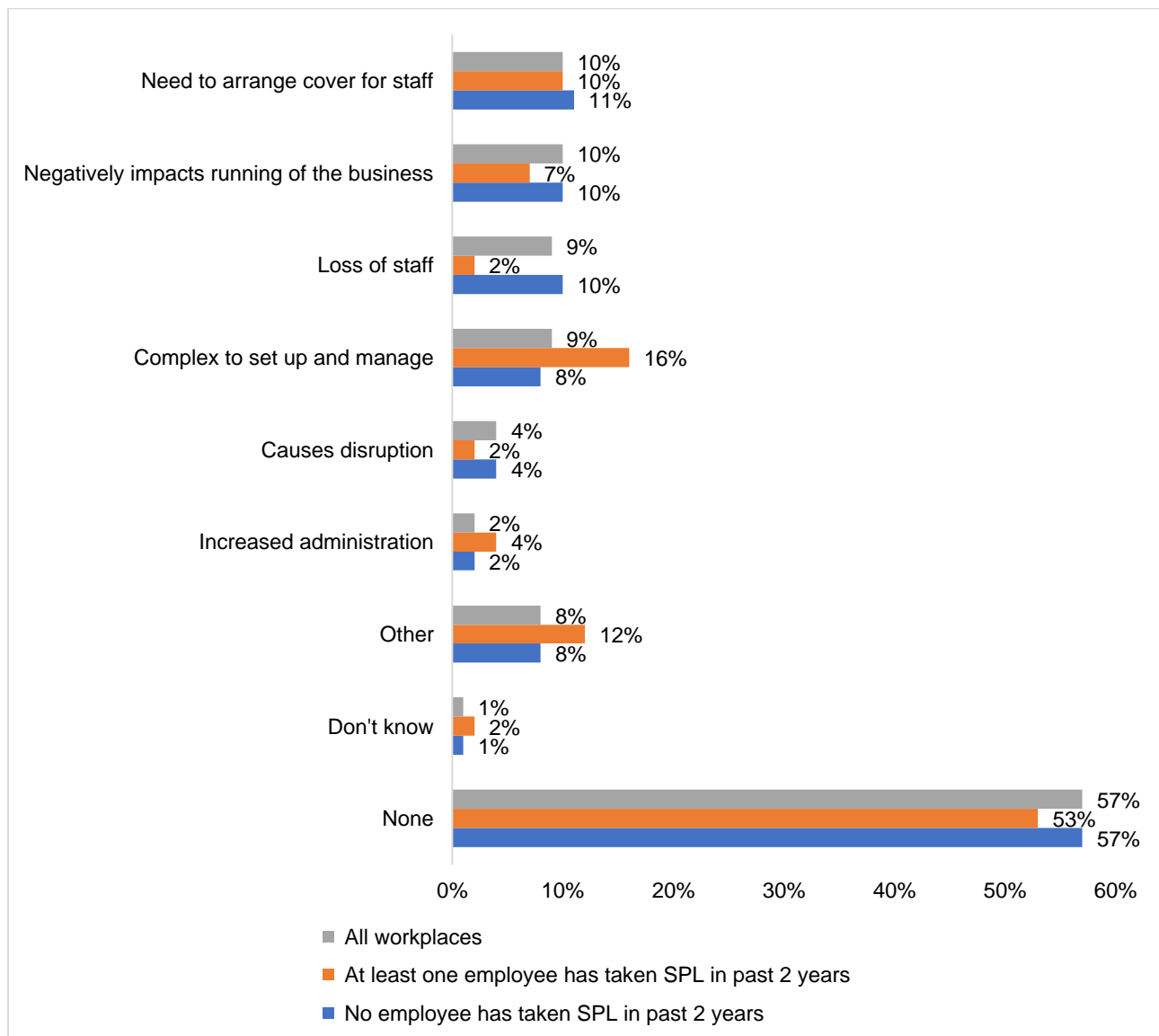
3.76) Managers views also differed according to whether they had direct experience of SPL in



their workplace. Among those workplaces where at least one employee had taken SPL in the two years prior to the survey, managers were more likely to say that an advantage was giving parents flexibility and choice (25%), compared with workplaces where no employees had taken SPL (15%).

3.77) Positively, managers in more than half of workplaces (57%) did not report any disadvantages of providing SPL or Pay (Figure 3.7). The most commonly reported disadvantages were the need to arrange cover for staff (10%), a negative impact on running the business (10%) and the loss of staff (9%).

**Figure 3.7: Disadvantages of Shared Parental Leave and pay among workplaces**



Base: all workplaces with five or more employees where respondent is aware of shared parental leave (2,025 workplaces; 1,593 where no employee had taken SPL; 281 where at least one employee had taken SPL in past 2 years)

Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices survey (2018-19)

3.78) Managers in workplaces who had experienced employees taking SPL within the last two years, were more likely to report the complexity in setting up and managing this as a disadvantage, with 16% of employers noting this, compared to 9% of workplaces overall. In

contrast, managers in workplaces where employees had taken SPL were less likely to cite disadvantages as loss of staff (2%) than workplaces overall (9%).

3.79) Interestingly, the proportion of managers who stated no disadvantages was similar regardless of whether the workplace had experienced employees taking SPL (53% among workplaces where at least one employee had taken SPL in the past two years and 57% where no employees had done so).

3.80) Qualitative interviews across six different workplaces in Great Britain also reported similar advantages, such as retaining staff, though the strength of support varied across workplaces and many also reported the same disadvantages mentioned above, such as the need for employers to arrange cover for employees.

3.81) In what the research terms 'supportive' workplaces, senior managers and line managers noted a number of organisational and other benefits such as attracting and retaining staff, tackling stigma attached to men taking family leave and enabling families to bond. These benefits were felt to outweigh the potential negatives, such as the need to reorganise staff workloads to cover responsibilities of leave-takers during their periods of absence. It should however be noted that in these organisations, take-up of SPL was less disruptive because work could be paused and resumed without the need to arrange cover.

3.82) In 'receptive' workplaces, senior leadership was supportive of SPL but somewhat concerned about financial costs of employees taking it. For example, in a local authority where enhanced ShPP was offered, the senior manager indicated that if take up increased, negatives (such as costs and the difficulty of arranging staff cover) would start to outweigh the positives:

*“Although we don't, yes, we don't have an issue with people taking it. I guess I don't see we want lots of people to start taking it. I don't see why you would want to encourage it. I don't see what would be in it for the organisation. It's not to say in any way we're negative about it.”*

(Female senior manager, local authority, female-dominated extra-large employer)

3.83) In one receptive workplace, findings showed that there could be a discrepancy in support between senior leadership and wider workforce staff. Staff interviewed at an information and communications company described strong support for SPL amongst management, who were committed to enabling new parents to take SPL if they wanted to do so, and this was reflected in their enhanced ShPP offer of 24 weeks' full pay. However, this view was not reflected amongst the wider workforce at the same company, where the senior manager felt that, in a predominantly male workplace, staff perceived family-related leave as an inconvenience.

3.84) Continuing from the above, in what the researchers termed 'hesitant' workplaces, disadvantages of SPL were seen as outweighing any advantages, particularly regarding financial costs and the compatibility of shared leave patterns with resource and workload management. Whilst senior leadership was supportive of the idea of SPL, interview participants felt more comfortable with women taking time off to care for a new child and were not as familiar with men wanting to do this.

3.85) Managers concerns about reorganisation burdens featured in the survey were also mentioned in the qualitative research surrounding the complexities covering absences from staff. Some hesitant workplaces demonstrated concern in finding cover for employees taking discontinuous leave; finding cover for SPL was anticipated to be more challenging compared with Maternity Leave because the absence could be shorter and intermittent:

*“If she was to say, 'I'm going to go off on 3rd February and I'll have two weeks and then I'm going to come and work for two weeks, and then I'm going to go off for two weeks and then I'll come back', which she's perfectly entitled to do, we would take a deep breath and say, 'oh my God, how on Earth are we going to do that?' It's just, we can't get someone to cover the whole block of it because we only need them in for two weeks of it...That is really difficult.”*

(Female senior manager, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

3.86) Line managers interviewed in the qualitative research reported similar concerns on the negative impacts from missing staff whilst on parental leave, which could lead to a short-term drop in productivity. This is in part because cover staff needed time to adjust to their new role, but also because colleagues had to adjust to new members of the team or new managers. It could also leave a gap in skills in the team, especially within advanced roles which are more difficult to cover. Senior managers also noted cost implications of cover staff and re-prioritising or reallocating work.

### Do employers and/or employees have any suggestions for improvements to the SPL system?

3.87) Staff who participated in the qualitative research suggested active, targeted promotion of SPL amongst men and in workplaces in male-dominated sectors and designing and promoting guidance around managing absences and resourcing for sectors where this is more challenging. For the latter, although participating staff were aware of their legal rights, managers and employees felt that additional support was needed to facilitate and manage requests, particularly in settings where accommodating SPL was presumed to be inconvenient.

3.88) Many of the suggestions by participating staff focused on changes to improve the effectiveness of workplace policies, around improving accessibility, promoting policy documents, streamlining the request process and expanding pay entitlements. Employees interviewed felt that having an easily accessible workplace policy would be a useful improvement to smooth the process, for example by having a workplace policy that was easily accessible and clearly written, filling in an online form to request SPL or having access to support from line managers and HR. For employers, having a notice period was the most helpful component of their workplace SPL policy because it enabled them to plan and prepare for staff being on leave.

3.89) Across workplaces, employees and managers felt that the financial offer needed to be improved. When workplaces offered statutory ShPP, SPL was not accessible due to the pay reduction employees would have to take. When workplaces offered enhanced ShPP, employees still felt the financial offer could be improved to give employees greater flexibility in their decision making around childcare. Senior managers also acknowledged the need to improve the financial offer to attract and retain high quality staff.

## 4. Has the anticipated take-up of SPL been achieved, and by whom?

*This section of the evaluation assesses the uptake of SPL by employee parents in Great Britain, including the characteristics of those who take up SPL, duration of leave, levels of pay and experience of flexibility features of the policy. It then reports on the enablers and barriers to taking SPL, including parents' decisions around leave-taking.*

### Key findings

Among eligible couples, only 1% of employee mothers in Great Britain took SPL following the birth or adoption of their child. Slightly more employee fathers than mothers took SPL following the birth or adoption of their child, at 5%. This is in line with the forecasted take-up rates estimated in the policy's Impact Assessment. Analysis of HMRC payments data since 2015/16 shows a small but consistent increase in those in receipt of ShPP since the policy's introduction in line with estimates in the Impact Assessment. The majority of parents who take SPL and ShPP are fathers.

There is variation in take-up of SPL among parents by age, income, qualification level and occupational status. Parents who take up SPL and pay are more likely to be older, parents of white ethnicity, highly qualified, work in large organisations, be on a higher income, and have progressive gender role attitudes, compared to parents who do not take up SPL and pay. Parents that took SPL are also more likely than mothers and fathers to be married. SPL parents consistently displayed a more gender progressive outlook than mothers and fathers on average and they are also more likely to share caring arrangements. Take-up of SPL is largely concentrated in two sectors: public administration, health or education (43%) and business, professional or other services (31%). Larger workplaces of more than 250 staff were more likely (37%) to report any employees taking SPL in the two years prior to the survey than small employers of 5-50 staff (3%).

An average of just over 16 weeks were taken among all SPL parents, and the number of weeks taken is higher among mothers (19 weeks) than fathers (14 weeks).

On average SPL parents were paid at full pay for nearly six weeks (5.7 weeks) of their SPL, which was just over a third (37%) of their time on leave. Among fathers, the percentage of their SPL that was at full pay was higher (42%) than among mothers that took SPL (31%). Parents taking SPL received statutory pay for an average of seven weeks, which is equivalent to just over two fifths of their time on leave, on average (44%). Mothers received statutory pay for a higher proportion of their time on leave (53%) than fathers (37%). Receiving paid SPL depends on location, size of workplace and whether the organisation was public or profit-making.

Eight per cent of workplaces where managers were aware of SPL said they would pay more than the statutory level of SShPP. The proportion of workplaces in Great Britain paying more than the statutory minimum is higher among larger workplaces of more than 250 staff (22%), and among workplaces with experience of employees taking SPL in the last two years (20%). Employers report that the average (mean) percentage of pay offered stood at 87% of normal pay. On average this rate of pay was offered for a 16-week period.

The qualitative research found that some employees had a rule that employees should have worked for their employer for at least 52 weeks prior to the birth or adoption of their child to access enhanced ShPP. Where enhancements were made, under a quarter of employers cited this was in place to improve staff wellbeing, to offer flexibility and family friendly policies (20%) and to improve staff retention among parents (18%).

Half of all parents that took SPL were aware of SPLIT<sup>64</sup> days (51%). On average 1.75 SPLIT days were taken by SPL parents. One in seven (15%) of parents reported taking Shared Parental Leave in blocks. Among workplaces where employees had taken SPL, 9% had at least one employee take it in multiple blocks. For a third of SPL parents, SPL was taken at the same time as their partner (35%). A higher proportion of parents took their SPL at different times to their partner (45%).

Positive factors driving take-up include support from partners, support from employers, desire to spend more time with the child in their first year and desire to work flexibly. Factors moderating take-up include financial constraints and access to enhanced pay, cultural norms and the design of the policy itself. In terms of barriers to taking SPL, three in ten mothers stated they wanted to mainly look after the child themselves, whilst 84% of mothers said wanting to look after their child themselves was a factor in taking the leave they took, suggesting cultural norms play an important role. Access to enhanced pay is a direct facilitator of take-up of SPL, and conversely, reliance on only statutory pay is a barrier to take-up. Parents taking SPL were more likely to be employed in workplaces where enhancements were offered. Qualitative research suggests that employer support including offering enhanced ShPP is a crucial factor in the take-up of SPL.

## Take-up of SPL

### What proportion of parents are taking up Shared Parental Leave since the introduction of the entitlement?

4.1) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) findings show that only a small proportion of parents whose children were born between May and September 2017, have taken up SPL.

4.2) Only 1% of mothers in Great Britain took SPL following the birth or adoption of their child, compared to 83% who took Maternity Leave. Six per cent took time off not categorised as parental leave and 9% of mothers did not take any time off.

4.3) Slightly more fathers than mothers took SPL following the birth or adoption of their child, at 4%. Three in five (59%) fathers took Paternity Leave and 21% took time off that was not categorised as a formal type of parental leave. Eighteen per cent of fathers said they did not take any time off, which is double the share of mothers reporting no time off (9%).

4.4) It is important to note, that to be eligible for SPL and ShPP, parents must meet work and pay related eligibility criteria, including in most instances that they are employees. Employee

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<sup>64</sup> Employees can work up to 20 days during SPL without bringing it to an end. These are called 'shared parental leave in touch' (or SPLIT) days: <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay-employer-guide/starting-shared-parental-leave>.

fathers (5%) were more likely to take SPL than fathers overall (4%). The same proportion of employee mothers took SPL (1%) as mothers in general.<sup>65</sup>

4.5) Take-up of SPL varies amongst different groups of parents. The proportion of mothers that took SPL is higher than average among those aged 35 and over (3%), mothers that live in the North East of England (10%), those earning at least £40,000 before birth (12%), mothers qualified to degree-level and above (4%) and among managers and senior officials and professional occupations (4% in each case). Among mothers there were no statistically significant differences in take-up by ethnicity or disability status.

4.6) Among fathers the proportion that took SPL is higher than average among those aged 40 and over (7%), held qualifications at degree-level or above (10%), fathers on higher incomes (9% among those earning at least £40,000), among professional (9%) and associate professional and technical occupations (12%). Take-up was particularly high among fathers that worked in central Government (20%). Take up of SPL is also higher among fathers that worked in organisations composed mostly of women (14%) and where a trade union or staff association was in place (11%). By ethnicity, White fathers were more likely to take-up SPL (5%) than Black fathers or Asian fathers (unfortunately there are too few unweighted cases to report). There were no statistically significant differences by disability status.

4.7) The original Impact Assessment for SPL and pay estimated that take-up for SPL among eligible employees would be between 2-8%,<sup>66</sup> based on analysis of ONS' Labour Force Survey data to calculate the number of eligible fathers and data from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) to predict take-up.

4.8) Analysis of HMRC data shows the number of individuals in receipt of ShPP has steadily increased year on year since the policy's introduction;<sup>67</sup> in 2015/16 there were 6,200 individuals in receipt of ShPP and this had risen to 13,000 in 2021/22.<sup>68</sup>

4.9) Prior to April 2015, Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP) was in place, this was replaced by ShPP. For 2015/16, those receiving ASPP for children born before April 2015 cannot be distinguished from those claiming ShPP within Real Time information (RTI) data.

4.10) HMRC data showing the number of individuals in receipt of ShPP per month since 2015/16 can give an indication of whether take-up has improved over time.

4.11)

Figure shows a consistent increase in the take-up of ShPP over time, so it is not unreasonable to conclude that the take-up of SPL has also consistently improved since its introduction.

#### **Figure 4.1: Individuals in receipt of ASPP/ShPP by year, 2014/15 to 2021/22**

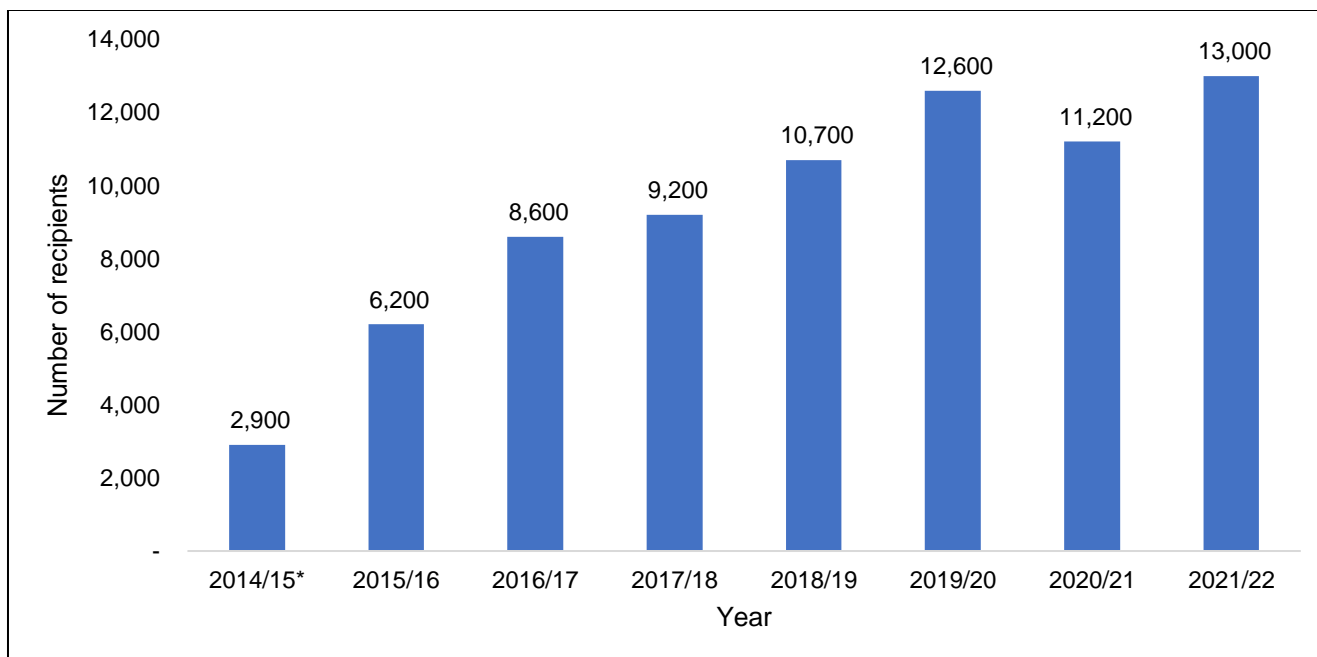
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<sup>65</sup> If either parent is a 'worker', then the parents can share ShPP but not SPL; if mothers are self-employed and receive Maternity Allowance, fathers can access SPL if they are employees.

<sup>66</sup> BIS (2013) *Modern workplaces: Shared Parental Leave and Pay administration consultation – impact assessment*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> It is important to note that HMRC data only shows individuals in receipt of pay, and not those individuals who may have taken unpaid SPL.

<sup>68</sup> However, a slight fall in the number of recipients can be seen in the 2020/21 year. This may be due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some parents may be on furlough and therefore more able to take care of their child without the need to go on SPL and pay specifically.



\* Prior to 5 April 2015 Additional Statutory Paternity Pay was in place, this was replaced by ShPP.

\*\* For 2015/16, those receiving Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP) for children born before April 2015 cannot be distinguished from those claiming Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) within HMRC data.

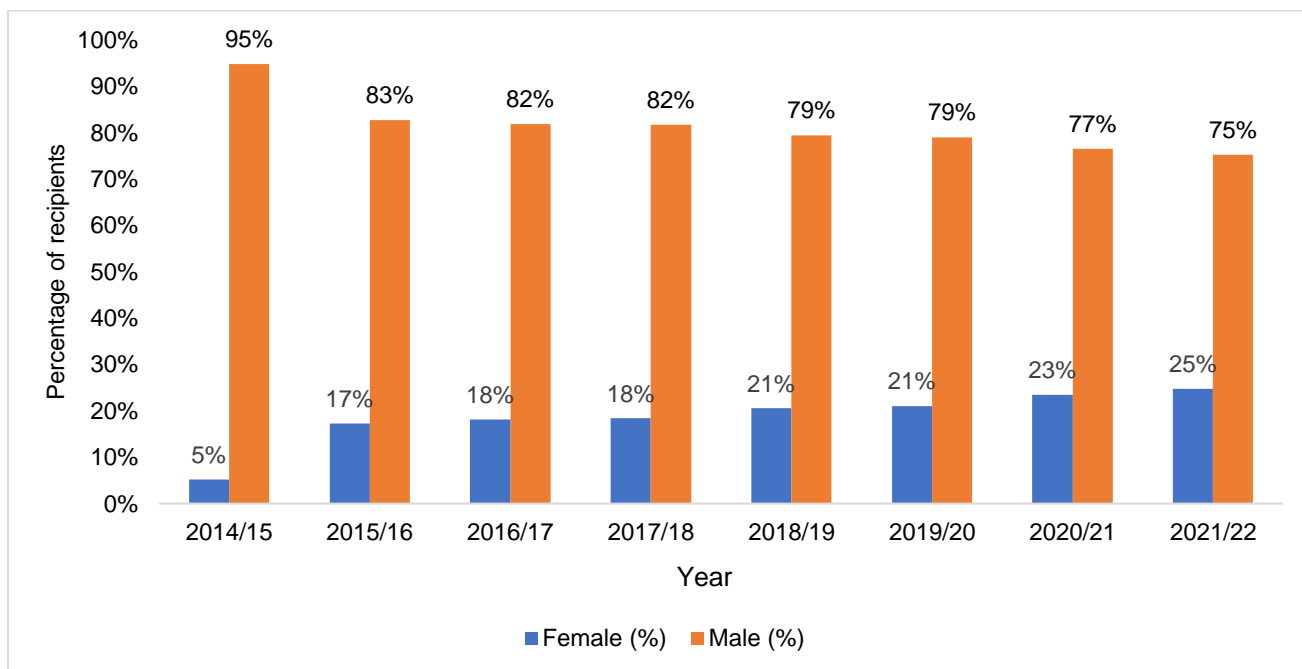
Source: HMRC Real Time Information.

4.12) In terms of percentage growth, the number of individual claims for Additional Paternity Pay (the predecessor of ShPP)/ShPP has doubled between 2014/15 and 2015/16 when ShPP was introduced. Between 2016/17 and 2021/22, ShPP claimants have increased by around 30%, from 8,600 to 13,000.

4.13) In line with findings from the Parental Rights Survey (2019), the payments data shows that the majority of parents who take SPL are fathers, making up on average 80% of ShPP recipients since 2015/16. This suggests that mothers are using the policy as designed, transferring their Statutory Maternity Pay to ShPP in order for the fathers/partners to take leave and for the mothers to return to work. Interestingly however,

Figure shows that the proportion of mothers taking ShPP is steadily increasing over time, from 17% in 2015/16 to almost a quarter of all claimants (25%) in 2021/22. This might indicate that more mothers are taking advantage of the flexibility features offered by SPL by taking SPL themselves as well as their partners.

**Figure 4.2: Individuals in receipt of ASPP/ShPP by gender, 2014/15 to 2021/22**



Source: HMRC Real Time Information

## Are employees taking up SPL, as reported by employers?

4.14) Similarly low levels of take-up of SPL as a proportion of workplaces were found in the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19). In 4% of workplaces aware of SPL, at least 1 employee had taken SPL in the last two years. This is equivalent to just 3% of all workplaces.

4.15) When asked how many men and how many women had taken time off as part of SPL, in one quarter (25%) of workplaces where at least 1 employee had taken SPL in the past two years, managers did not know how many men had taken SPL, and in one fifth (21%) managers did not know how many women had done.

4.16) Where managers could recall, in 40% of workplaces with experience of SPL in the last two years, one or two female employees had taken it and in the remaining 4% three or more female employees had done so. In 41% one or two male employees had taken SPL and in 6% three or more had done so. This indicates that even within workplaces with experience of employees taking SPL in the last two years, it is still relatively uncommon for employees to take SPL.

## What are the characteristics of parents who take up Shared Parental Leave and Pay?

4.17) There is significant variation in take-up of SPL and pay by protected characteristics, occupation and labour market positions, and personal and household circumstances.

4.18) Data from both the survey of parents and HMRC data suggest that, predominantly, parents who take up SPL and pay are more likely to be older, parents of white ethnicity, highly qualified, work in large organisations, be on a higher income, and have progressive gender role attitudes, compared to parents who do not take up SPL and pay. Birkett and Forbes

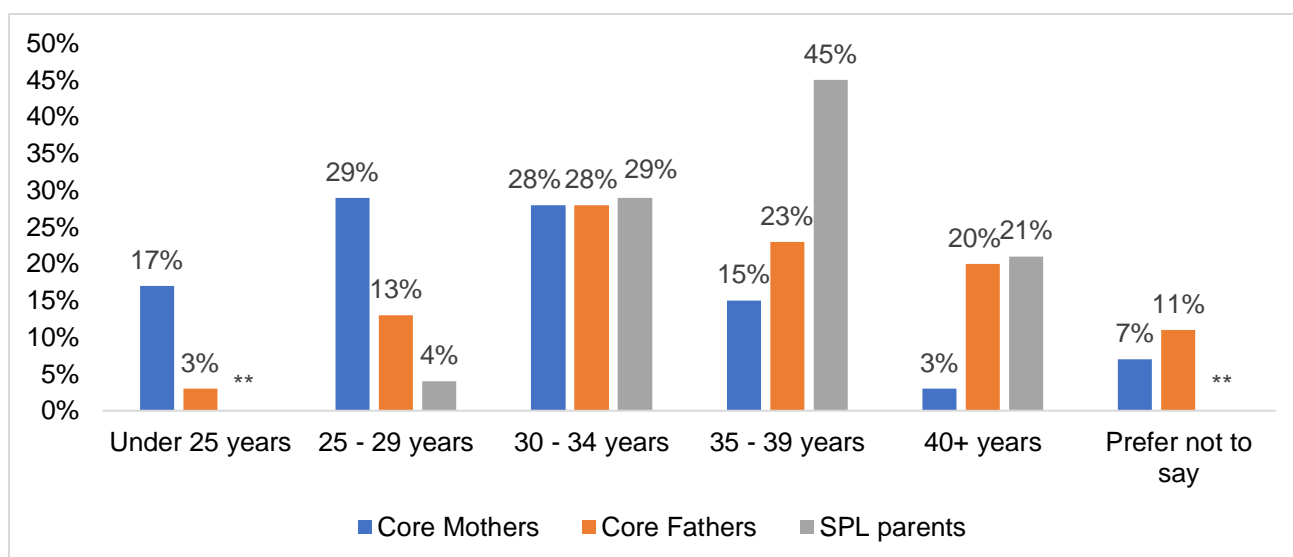


(2019) in their qualitative study of parents eligible for SPL found clear variations in take-up based on parents' socio-economic circumstances, level of educational attainment, ethnic background and whether they had more than one child.<sup>69</sup>

## Age and household circumstances

4.19) Parents that take SPL are considerably older compared with mothers and fathers in general. Take-up of SPL is more likely to be reported among parents aged 35 and over (45%) and over 40 years (21%). Younger parents aged 25-29 years (4%) were less likely to take SPL (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3: Age of parents**



Base: core mothers 1,959; core fathers 1,062; SPL parents 336

\*\* Supressed due to low counts

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

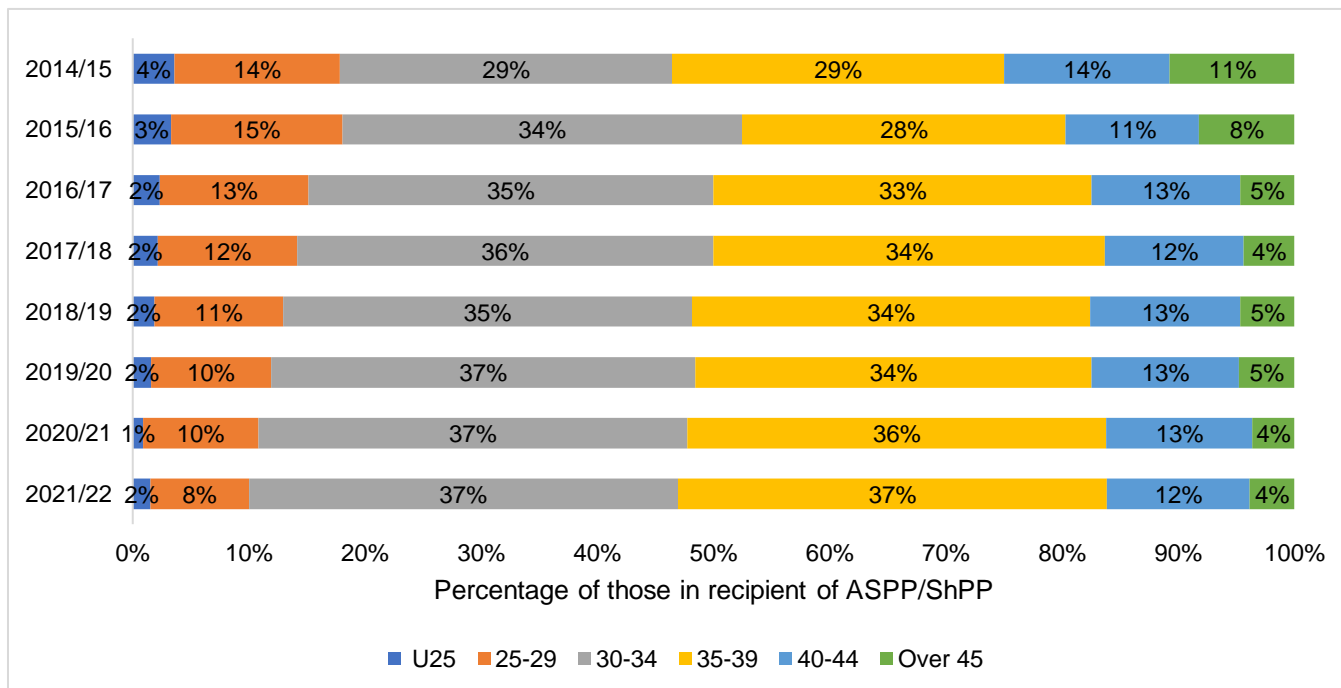
4.20) HMRC payments data confirms these findings, showing that of individuals in receipt in ShPP in 2021/22, over half (53%) were 35 years or older (Figure). This contrasts with mothers in receipt of SMP in 2021/22, where only 28% were 35 years or older, and to fathers in receipt of SPP in 2021/22, where 41% were 35 years or older.

**Figure 4.4: Proportion of individuals in receipt of ASPP/ShPP by age, 2014/15 to 2021/22**

<sup>69</sup> Birkett, H., & Forbes, S. (2019) *Where's dad? Exploring the low take-up of inclusive parenting policies in the UK*, Policy Studies. 40:2, 205-224, DOI: 10.1080/01442872.2019.1581160

<sup>70</sup> 54 ASPP is Additional Statutory Paternity Pay<sup>70</sup> ONS (2019a) Births by parents' characteristics, 2019. Accessed from:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthcharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2019>



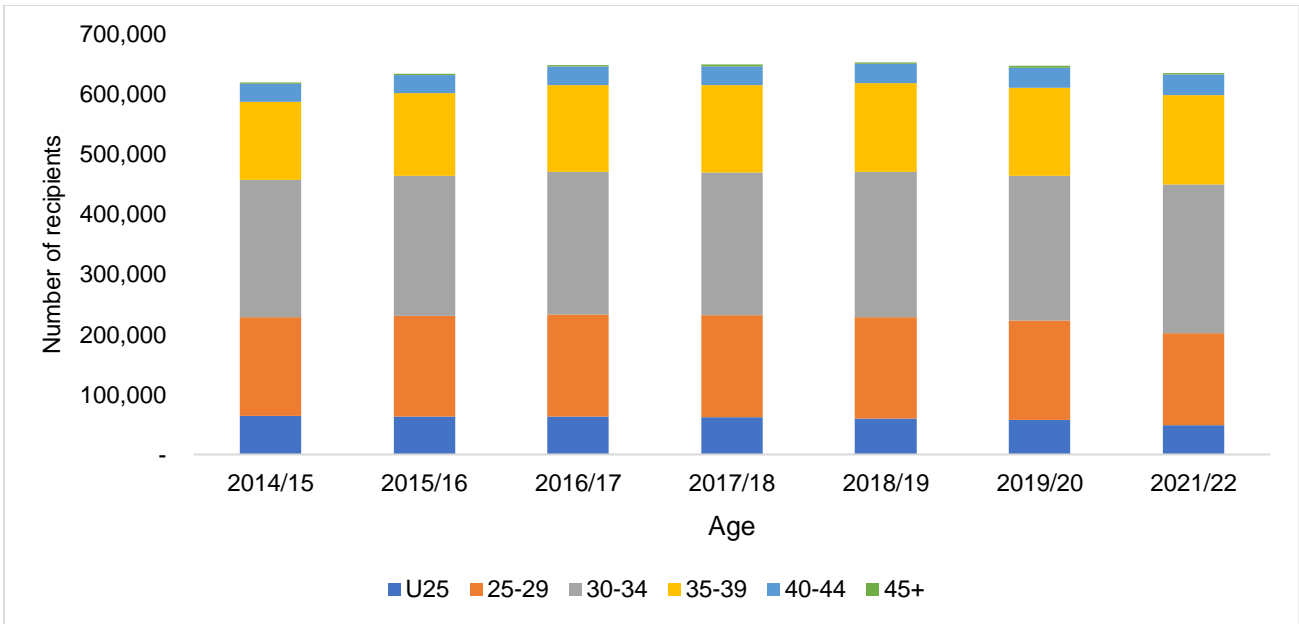
Source: HMRC Real Time Information

4.21) As Figure 4.5-4.7 show below, the distribution of individuals by age varies by statutory entitlement type. Unsurprisingly given birth patterns,<sup>70</sup> mothers claiming SMP are slightly younger in age whilst fathers claiming SPP are slightly older in age; though for both entitlements, the number of individuals and pattern of distribution remain unchanged over time.<sup>71</sup> Interestingly however, individuals who claim ShPP increasingly cluster among those aged 30-44 years over time. Looking at payment data since SPL/ShPP was introduced, it's clear that whilst take-up has increased across all age categories since 2014/15, the proportion of claimants aged under 30 and over 45 years had decreased over time whilst conversely take-up has increased the most amongst parents aged 30-34, 35-39 and 40-44 years.

**Figure 4.5: Number of individuals in receipt of SMP by age, 2014/15 to 2021/22**

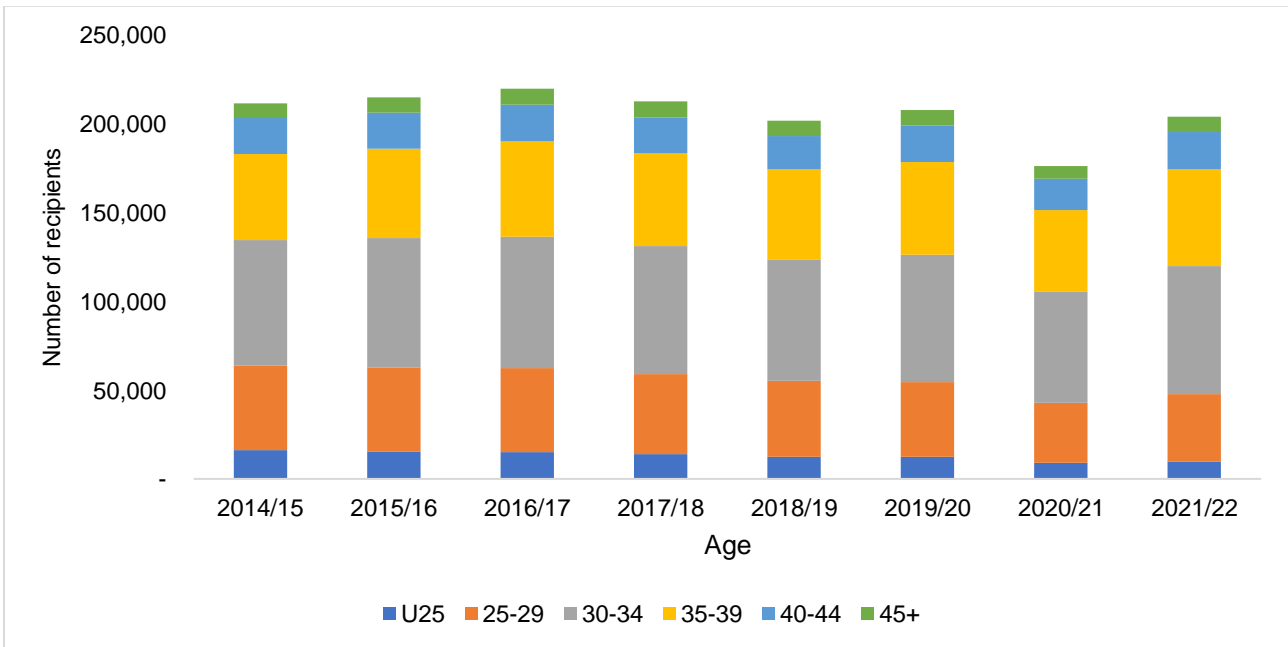
<sup>70</sup> ONS (2019a) Births by parents' characteristics, 2019. Accessed from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthcharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2019>

<sup>71</sup> Statutory payments data is taken from HMRC's Real Time Information system (RTI) and is subject to revision or updates, and so there may be small fluctuations in figures reported, and these figures should not be considered "final".



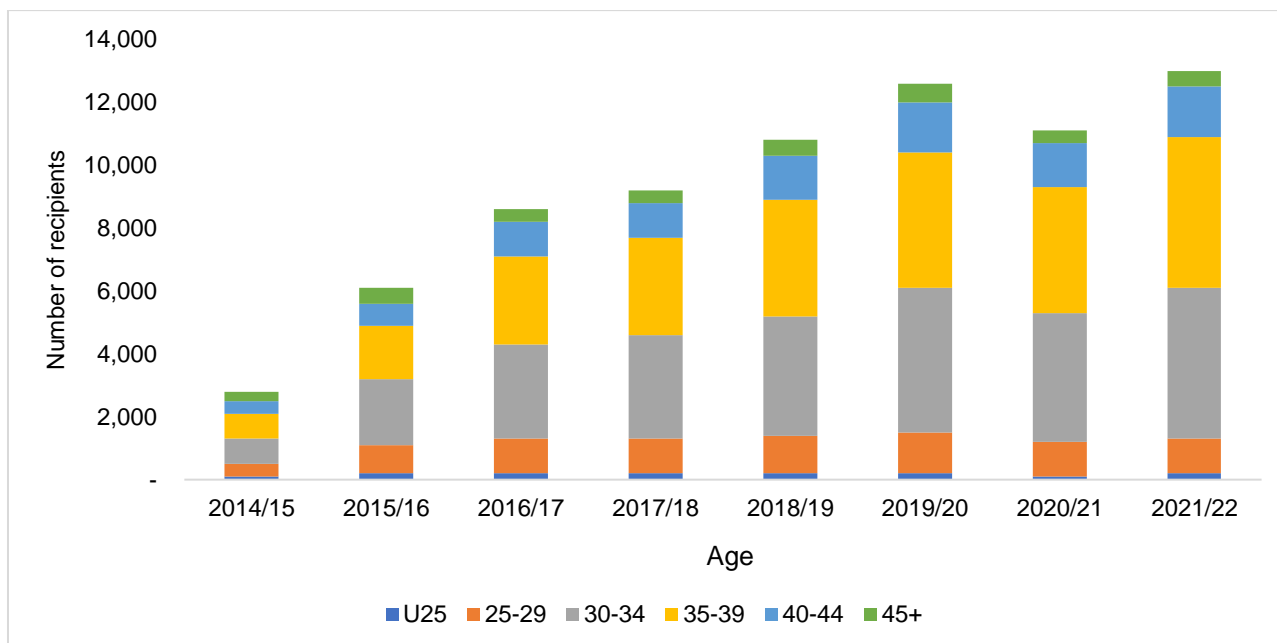
Source: HMRC Real Time Information

**Figure 4.6: Number of individuals in receipt of SPP by age, 2014/15 to 2021/22**



Source: HMRC Real Time Information

**Figure 4.7: Number of individuals in receipt of ShPP by age, 2014/15 to 2021/22**



Source: HMRC Real Time Information

4.22) Parental Rights survey (2019) findings showed that parents that took SPL are also more likely than mothers and fathers to be married. A majority (81%) of SPL parents were married compared to 71% of fathers and 46% of mothers.

4.23) This may also suggest the very small proportion of younger parents who have taken SPL. The proportion of mothers who are lone parents (25% overall) increases to more than half for mothers aged 25 years or less (57%) and mothers of Black ethnic groups (52%).

4.24) Parents that took SPL (60%) are also significantly more likely than core mothers (48%) and fathers (39%) to have had no other children at the time of the survey.

## Ethnicity

4.25) Analysis of Labour Force Survey data in the original SPL Impact Assessment<sup>72</sup> showed that the proportion of employees with a child under one are often higher among ethnic minority groups.<sup>73</sup> It was thought that the SPL proposals would have a disproportionate positive effect and there was potential for greater take-up among ethnic minority groups. It is important to note that male employees with a child under one offers a very high-level indicator of the eligible population but does not account for the employment and earnings test/requirements.

4.26) Parents that took SPL are more likely than both mothers and fathers to describe their ethnicity as White (92% compared with 85% of mothers overall and 70% of fathers overall).

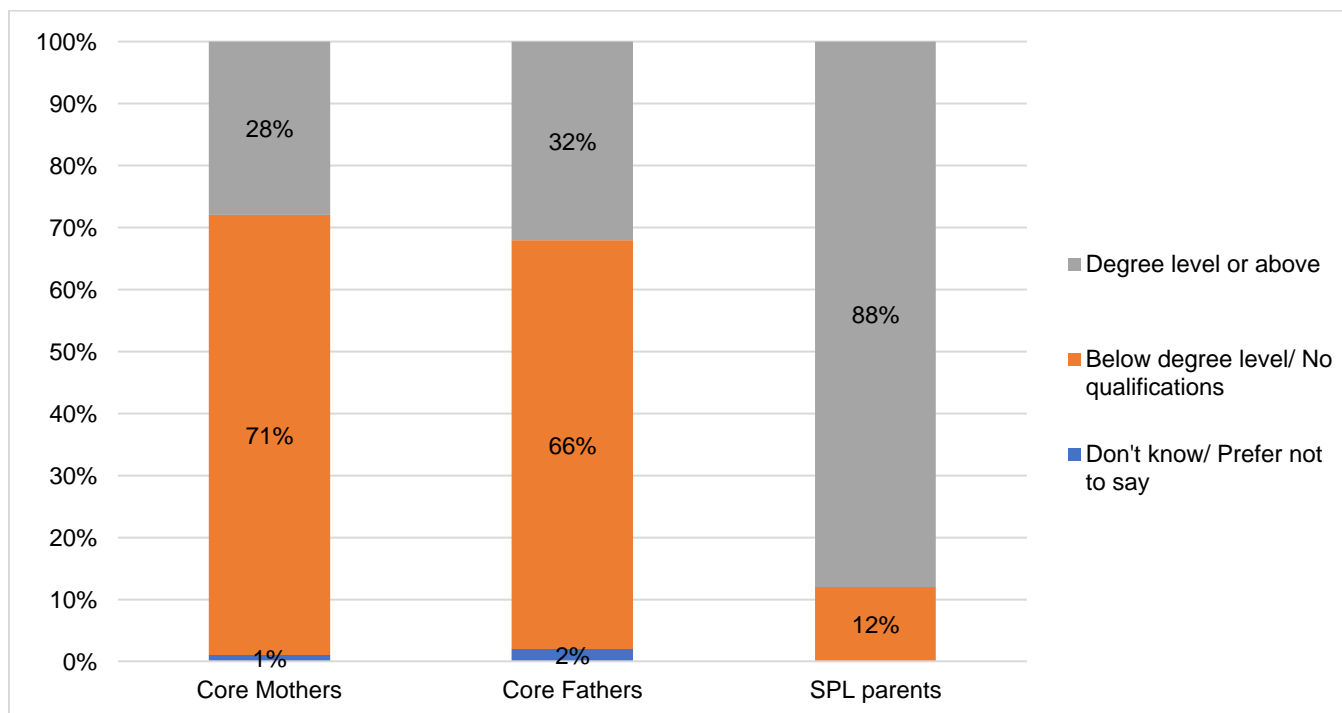
<sup>72</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2015/146/pdfs/ukia\\_20150146\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia/2015/146/pdfs/ukia_20150146_en.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> BIS (2013) *Modern workplaces: Shared Parental Leave and Pay administration consultation – impact assessment*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (pp. 61): [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf)

## Education

4.27) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) found that parents that took SPL are more likely than both mothers and fathers generally to hold higher-level qualifications: almost nine in ten parents that took SPL have qualifications at degree level or above, compared with 32% of core fathers and 28% of core fathers and 28% of mothers) (Figure 4.8).

**Figure 4.8: Highest qualification of parents**



Base: core mothers 1,959; core fathers 1,062; SPL parents 336  
Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

## Gender role attitudes

4.28) Supporting the relationship between cultural attitudes towards gender and take-up, SPL parents consistently displayed a more gender progressive outlook across the different scenarios put to respondents in the Parental Rights Survey (2019).<sup>74</sup>

4.29) Virtually, all parents that took SPL disagreed that 'a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family' (96%), in comparison to parents generally; just under three-quarters of mothers (70%) and just over half of fathers (58%) are in disagreement (Table 4.1). Equally, the vast majority of those that took SPL (94%) agreed that men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children, though almost as high a proportion of mothers and fathers in general are also in agreement (84% and 86%).

4.30) Parents that took SPL are more likely than mothers and fathers generally to be in disagreement with the statements that 'family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job' and 'a pre-school child is likely to suffer if their mother works full time' (74% in each case). Over half of parents that took SPL (60%) and a similar proportion of mothers (56%) believe

<sup>74</sup> Levels of agreement to all the statements on gender role attitudes were summarised, with the scales reversed so that a score of 4-5 indicates a 'progressive' attitude, while 1-2 indicates a more 'traditional' attitude.

that having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person, while fathers are less likely to be in agreement (47%).

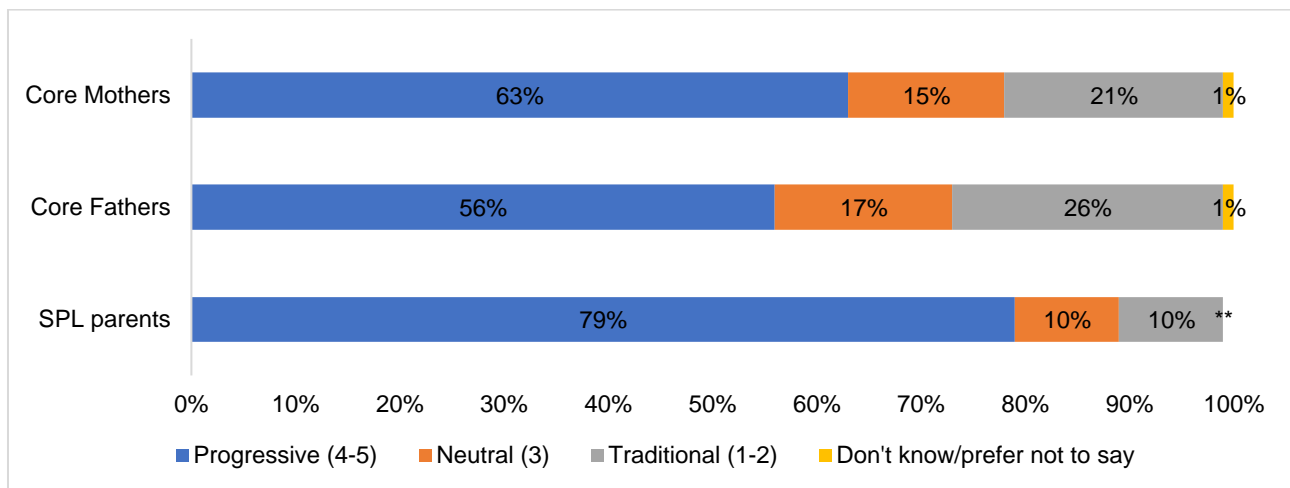
**Table 4.1: Proportion of parents that agree/disagree with each statement on gender role attitudes**

		<b>Core Mothers</b>	<b>Core Fathers</b>	<b>SPL Parents</b>
<b>A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family.</b>	Agree	15 per cent+	26 per cent++	**
	Disagree	70 per cent+	58 per cent	96 per cent++
<b>A preschool child is likely to suffer if their mother works full-time.</b>	Agree	31 per cent+	42 per cent++	15 per cent
	Disagree	53 per cent+	41 per cent	74 per cent++
<b>All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.</b>	Agree	32 per cent+	33 per cent+	16 per cent
	Disagree	51 per cent	47 per cent	74 per cent++
<b>Men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children.</b>	Agree	84 per cent	86 per cent	94 per cent++
	Disagree	4 per cent	4 per cent	2 per cent
<b>Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person.</b>	Agree	56 per cent+	47 per cent	60 per cent+
	Disagree	21 per cent+	24 per cent+	15 per cent
<b>Unweighted bases</b>		<i>1,959</i>	<i>1,062</i>	<i>336</i>
+ = significantly higher at 95 per cent level of confidence than one other column				
++ = significantly higher than both other columns				

\*\* Supressed due to low counts  
Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.31) SPL parents are much more likely to have progressive views on gender role attitudes (79%) than mothers (63%) and fathers (56%) in general.

**Figure 4.9: Gender role attitudes of parents**



Base: core mothers 1,959; core fathers 1,062; SPL parents 336)

\*\* Supressed due to low counts

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.32) Table 4.2 shows that attitudes to gender roles among mothers differed by ethnicity.

**Table 4.2: Mother’s gender role attitudes by ethnicity**

		Progressive (4-5)	Neutral (3)	Traditional (1-2)
All core mothers (1,959)		63%	15%	21%
Ethnicity	White (1642)	64%+	16%	20%
	Black (84)	57%	13%	26%
	Asian (184)	56%	12%	30%+

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

+ = significantly higher at 95 per cent level of confidence than one other column

++ = significantly higher than both other columns

4.33) The role of progressive attitudes driving taking and sharing parental leave can be seen in a case-study from the qualitative research, where Josh, a male lecturer in opposite-sex relationship, took six months, the longest period of leave of the male employees in this study. His partner also took six months off. Josh cited progressive views on gender as a key motivator for this:

*“Both my partner and I are quite motivated about gender equality and we see [SPL] as one of the ways that we can enact that in our own lives for our own benefits but also potentially as a demonstration to others that it can be done, and it works... We’re critical of standard gender roles and critical of just very basic things like household tasks and division of them.”*

4.34) Gender role attitudes amongst mothers in particular become more important when reflecting on the design of SPL, with fathers’ access to SPL in the mothers’ ‘gift’. SPL parents report more progressive views on gender role attitudes, and they are also more likely to share

caring arrangements. A much higher proportion of parents taking SPL compared with mothers and fathers generally say they share responsibility for childcare arrangements equally between them and their partner (66%). SPL mothers are around half as likely (38% as mothers generally (71%) to say they are the main adult responsible for childcare arrangements.

## Occupation, labour market position and income

4.35) SPL parents are much more likely to be working full time, and in better paid sectors and more senior occupations than mothers and fathers in general.

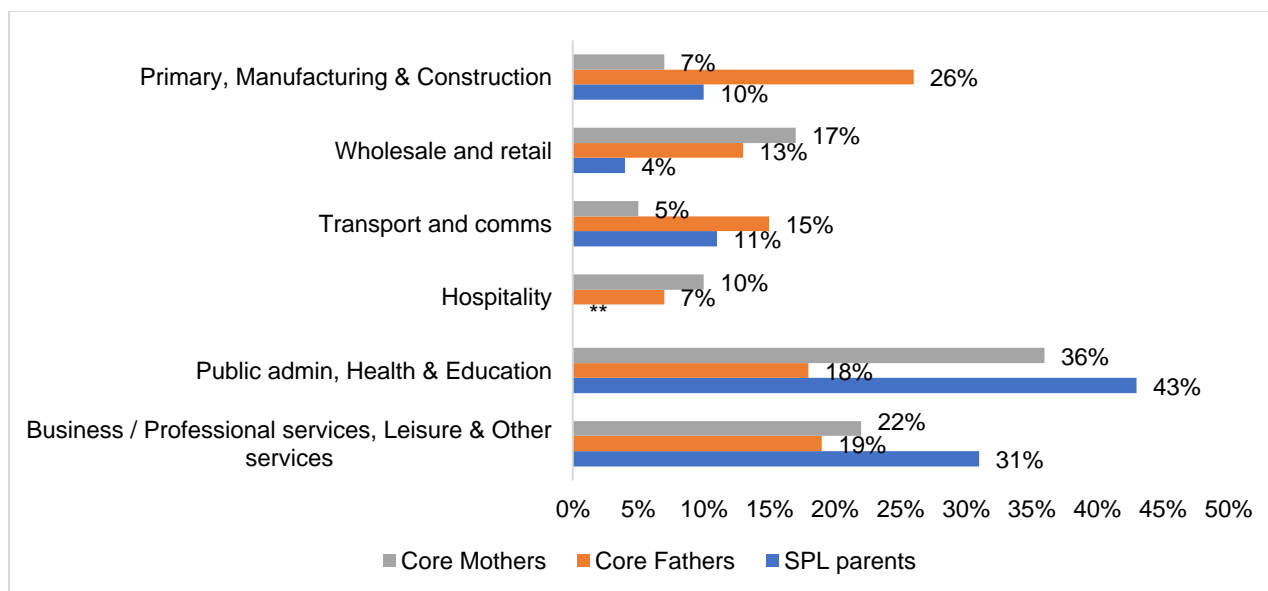
### Working hours

4.36) Mothers were more likely than fathers and SPL parents to be working part time hours (i.e., less than 30 hours per week) before the birth of their child, with a third (34%) of mothers doing so, compared with 8% of fathers and 12% of SPL parents. Among all the mothers from the core sample that experienced changes in their agreed working arrangements, three quarters (75%) started working part time following the birth or adoption of their child, compared with three in five (58%) mothers that took SPL. The majority (93%) of fathers reported no changes in job role, working arrangements or hours).

### Industry sector

4.37) Evidence from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) shows that three-quarters of parents who took SPL largely worked in two sectors: public administration, health or education (43%) and business, professional or other services (31%). Fewer SPL parents reported working in wholesale or retail (4%).

**Figure 4.10: Sector parents worked in before birth or adoption of their child**



Base: core mothers 1,959; core fathers 1,062; SPL parents 336

\*\* Supressed due to low counts

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.38) Findings from the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19) is broadly consistent with the above, reporting take-up of SPL by employees to be highest in workplaces in the public administration & defence (18%), and education (9%) sectors and lowest in wholesale & retail trade (2%).

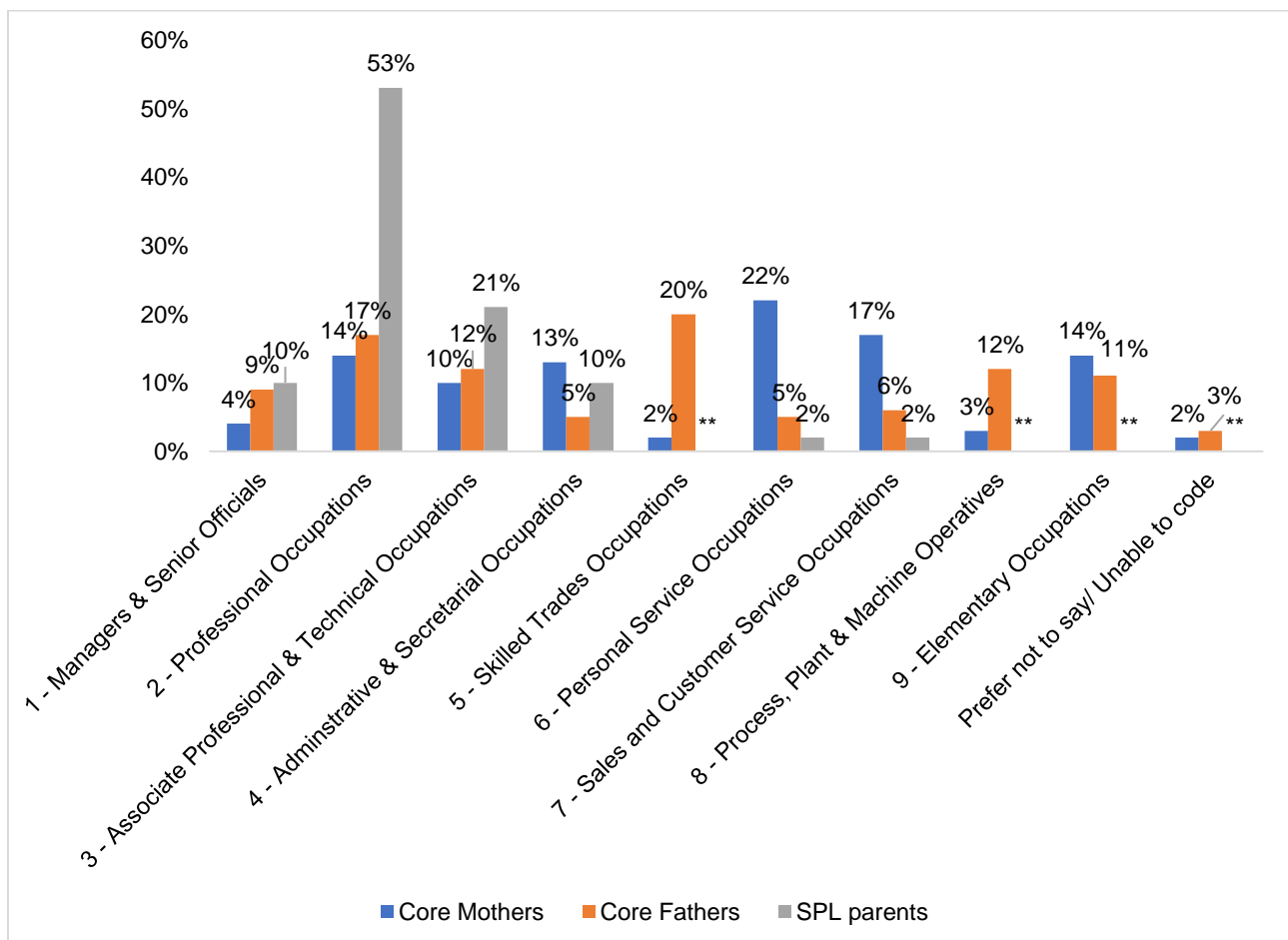


## Occupation type and supervisory responsibilities

4.39) Parents who took SPL were also more likely than mothers and fathers generally to have been working in more senior occupations. Nearly two thirds of SPL parents reported working in manager/senior official or professional occupations (63%), compared with 18% of all mothers and 26% of all fathers (see Figure 3.18). A relatively low proportion of SPL take-up can be seen among skilled trades, personal service, sales and customer service occupations. SPL parents are concentrated within professional occupations, with similar proportions of SPL mothers (53%) and SPL fathers (53%) working within this group. Figure 4.11 also shows gender-based differences by occupation amongst mothers and fathers in general.

4.40) Given low take-up rates of SPL within both the employer and employee surveys, it is difficult to make any conclusions on this discrepancy.

**Figure 4.11: Parents' occupation prior to child's birth/adoption**



Base: core mothers 1,959; core fathers 1,062; SPL parents 336

\*\* Supressed due to low counts

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.41) Over half of parents that took SPL had supervisory responsibilities in the job they were in prior to the birth or adoption of their child (55%), compared with a significantly lower proportion of fathers (37%) and mothers (26%) in general. There is no significant difference between the proportions of men and women who took SPL and had supervisory responsibilities.

## Workplace size, organisation type, and gender composition

4.42) Parents that took SPL (72%) were significantly more likely than mothers to be working in large businesses with over 250 staff before birth or adoption of their child than mothers (37%) and fathers (45%). Overall, just over a quarter (26%) of parents that took SPL were working in SMEs, compared with just under half of all fathers (47%) and nearly six in ten mothers (57%).

4.43) Findings from the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19) showed larger workplaces of more than 250 staff were more likely (37%) to report any employees taking SPL in the two years prior to the survey than small employers of 5-50 staff (3%).

4.44) This may be explained by the fact large workplaces were significantly more likely to enhance ShPP, encouraging take-up: almost a quarter of large workplaces (22%) enhanced ShPP compared to just 8% of workplaces with 5-50 employees.

4.45) SPL parents were over twice as likely to work in central Government (30%) than mothers (15%) and fathers (10%) more generally. SPL parents were also more than four times as likely to work in charity or voluntary sector organisations (14%) than mothers and fathers (3% respectively) and less likely to work for profit-making organisations (49%) than mothers (71%) and fathers (80%) overall.

4.46) Around half of mothers (52%), fathers (50%) and parents that took SPL (51%) were working in organisations composed of about equal proportions of men and women prior to the birth or adoption of their child.

4.47) Equally, findings from the employer survey (MWPS 2018-19) show that majority female workplaces were found to be less likely to enhance ShPP than majority male workplaces (7% of workplaces with 50% or more female employees enhanced ShPP compared to 13% of workplaces with 25-49% female employees, 8% of workplaces with 10-24% female employees and 11% of workplaces with less than 10% of female employees).

4.48) Interestingly, take-up of SPL is significantly higher for employee fathers who work in majority female workplaces (14% compared with 5% of employee fathers overall).

4.49) Employers reporting any SPL take-up was more commonly reported in MWPS (2018-19) among public (10%) and not-for-profit organisations (10%) than private firms (3%). There were no statistically significant differences in take-up of SPL by workplace gender composition in the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19).

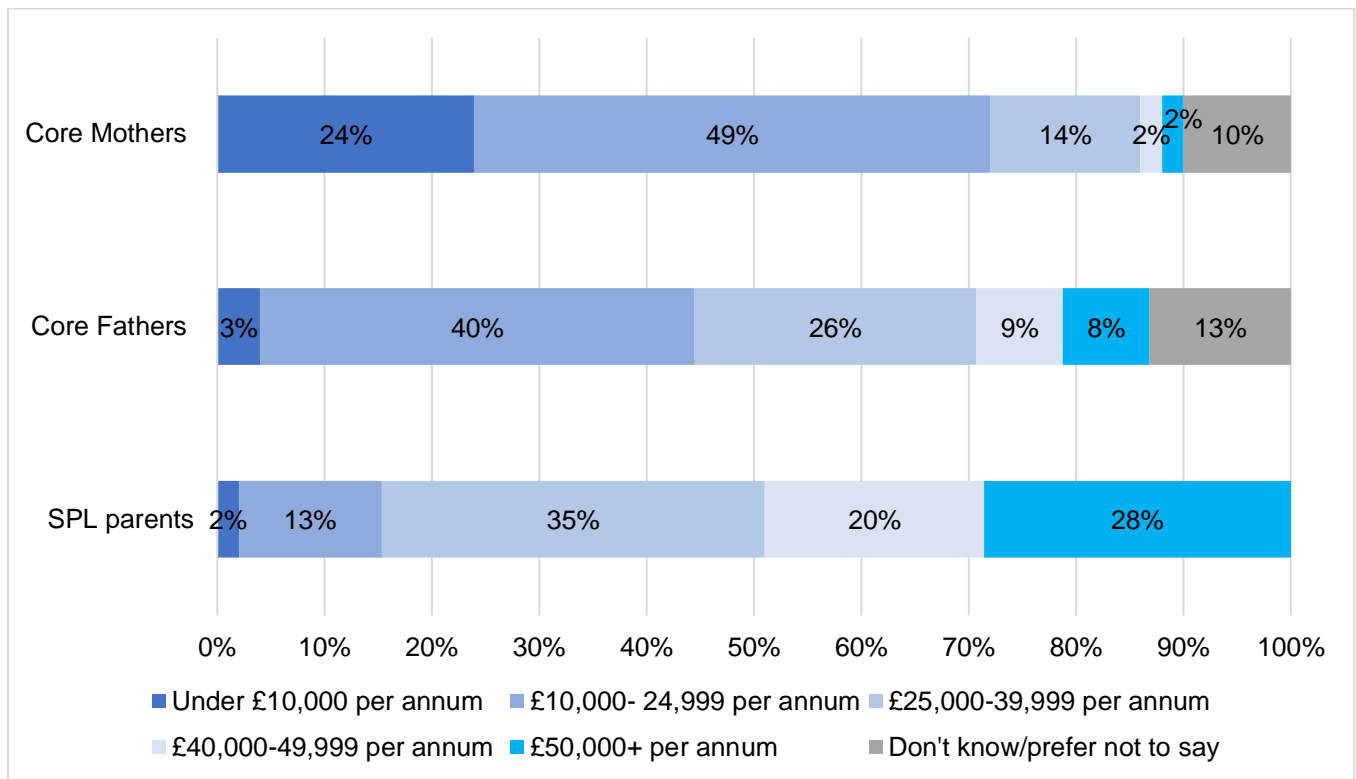
## Income

4.50) Based on their normal gross earnings parents that took SPL were significantly more likely to be on higher incomes compared with both mothers and fathers in general.

4.51) Among parents that took SPL, the Parental Rights Survey (2019) shows that almost half (48%) were earning at least £40,000 per annum. This is significantly more than mothers (only 4%) and fathers in general (17%). Only 2% of parents who took SPL were earning less than £10,000 per annum in the last main job they were in before the birth of their child. This is approximately the same proportion as fathers in general (4%), however substantially fewer than mothers in general earning less than £10,000 per annum (24%) (Figure 4.12).

4.52) On average parents that took SPL were earning just under £43,500 per annum, which is a significantly higher average than for fathers, who were earning just under £28,900 and mothers, who were earning £17,200 per annum.

**Figure 4.12: Normal gross earnings (per annum): pre-birth (All respondents)**



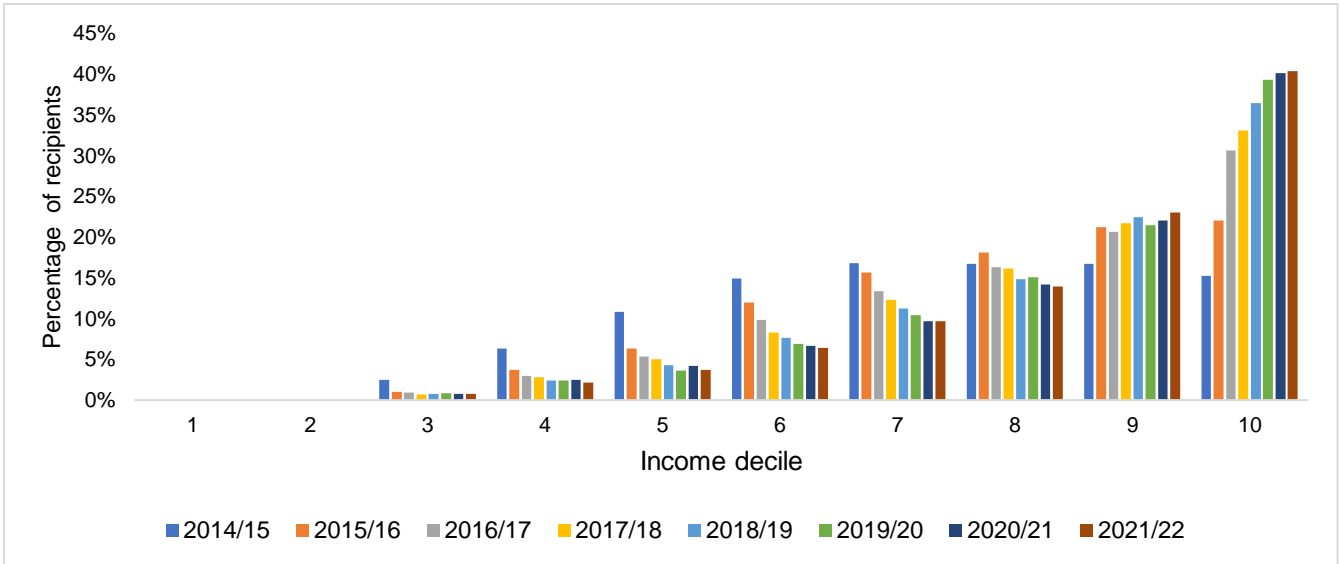
Base: core mothers 1,959; core fathers 1,062; SPL parents 336  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.53) HMRC payments data<sup>75</sup> confirms that higher-income individuals<sup>76</sup> are overrepresented amongst parents in receipt of ShPP, and that this trend has become more pronounced over time (Figure 4.13). The figure shows that this is in contrast to mothers in receipt of SMP, where clustering occurs around the median (deciles 5,6 and 7) and is more reflective of the income distribution of fathers in receipt of SPP, which is also concentrated towards the upper income deciles – though noticeably the proportion of recipients peaks in the 9<sup>th</sup> income decile, compared to ShPP recipients where the 10<sup>th</sup> (highest) income decile is predominant.

**Figure 4.13: Individuals in receipt of ShPP by income, 2014/15 to 2021/22**

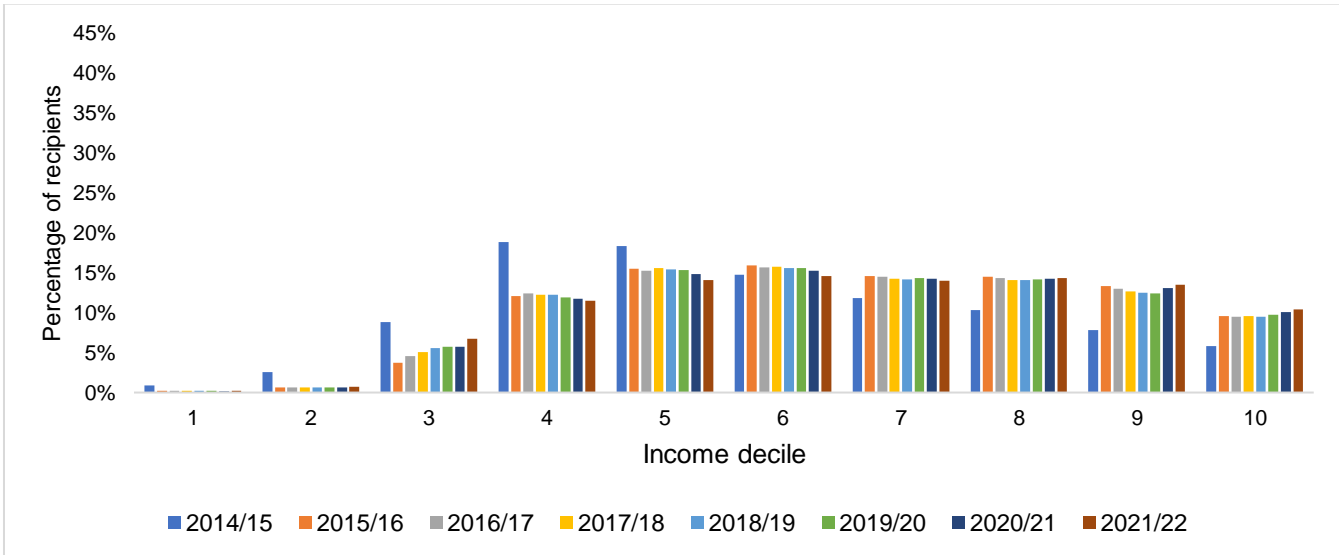
<sup>75</sup> Please note HMRC data is UK-wide, whereas Parental Rights Survey data covers Great Britain.

<sup>76</sup> Earnings are divided into deciles across the entire RTI population before the relevant claimants (ShPP, SPP, SMP) are extracted.



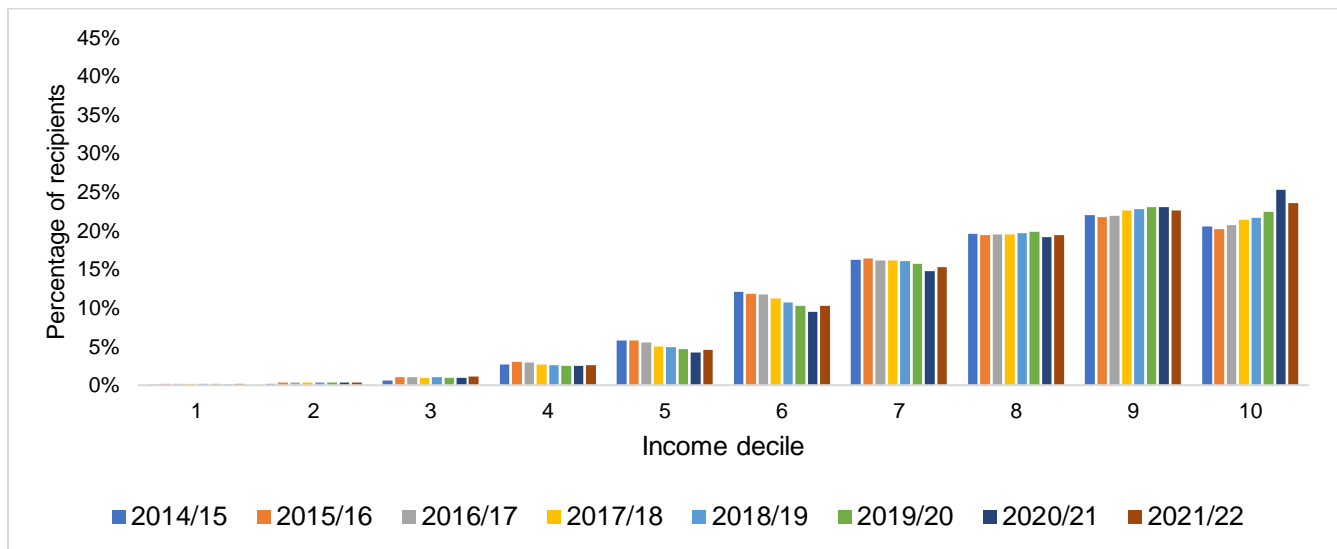
Source: HMRC Real Time Information

**Figure 4.14: Individuals in receipt of SMP by income, 2014/15 to 2021/22**



Source: HMRC Real Time Information

**Figure 4.15: Individuals in receipt of SPP by income, 2014/15 to 2021/22**



Source: HMRC Real Time Information

## Trade union

4.54) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) also found that parents who took SPL were also significantly more likely to have a staff association or trade union at their workplace, at nearly half (46%) compared to one in three mothers and fathers that were employees or workers before birth/adoption (33% in each case). It is therefore unsurprising that SPL parents were also more likely to be members of a trade union or staff association, at just over one in five (22%), than one in six of mothers and fathers overall (15%).

## Location

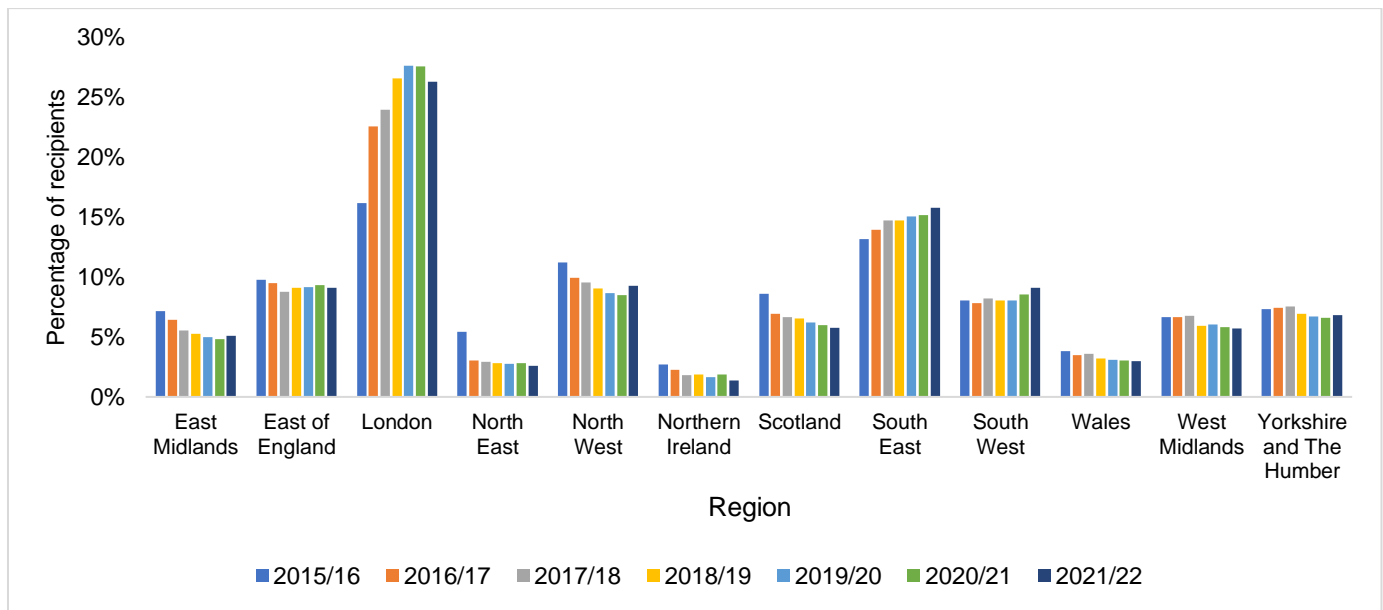
4.55) SPL take-up is higher than average amongst mothers that live in the North East of England (10%) than average (1%). Among fathers, there are no statistically significant differences in take-up of SPL by region.

4.56) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) does also show that of all SPL parents, almost one-quarter live in London (24%) and a further fifth (20%) live in the South East.

4.57) In the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19), take-up of SPL by employees is also fairly consistent across workplaces in different regions (4% on average across Great Britain), with no statistically significant differences.

4.58) HMRC statutory payments data shows individuals in receipt of ShPP, by resident location. Data from 2014/15 to 2021/22 shows that take-up of ShPP is dominated by claimants living in London and the South East (Figure 4.16).

**Figure 4.16: Proportion of ShPP claims by claimant resident region, 2014/15 to 2021/22**



Source: HMRC Real Time Information

4.59) Whilst there has been relatively consistent proportion of claims recorded for ShPP across almost all regions, the above figure shows an increase in the South East and London in particular. The share of claimants from London has risen from just under one in six claimants (16%) in 2015/16 to almost three in ten claimants (26%) by 2021/22. Claimants in the South East has slightly increased, from 13% in 2015/16 to 16% in 2021/22.

4.60) It is important to note that payment data only shows claims for ShPP, and not broader take-up of SPL itself.

4.61) This section has shown that parents who take SPL have a particular set of characteristics which may be seen to not be typical of the rest of the population of mothers and fathers. Parents that take-up SPL are more likely to be older, married, of White ethnicity, to hold more progressive gender role attitudes, be better qualified, on higher incomes and working in better paid sectors and occupations than mothers and fathers overall. Therefore, there is a possibility that the observed outcomes noted in this evaluation reflect these characteristics among SPL parents, rather than providing a true indication of the potential difference SPL makes. Further research would be beneficial, comparing the outcomes for SPL parents with those among mothers and fathers of similar observable characteristics.

## Comparisons with other types of parental leave

4.62) To gain a clearer sense of employers' provision and employees' use of Shared Parental Leave, it's useful to briefly compare the policy against take-up of Maternity and Paternity Leave and Pay.

### Maternity Leave and Pay

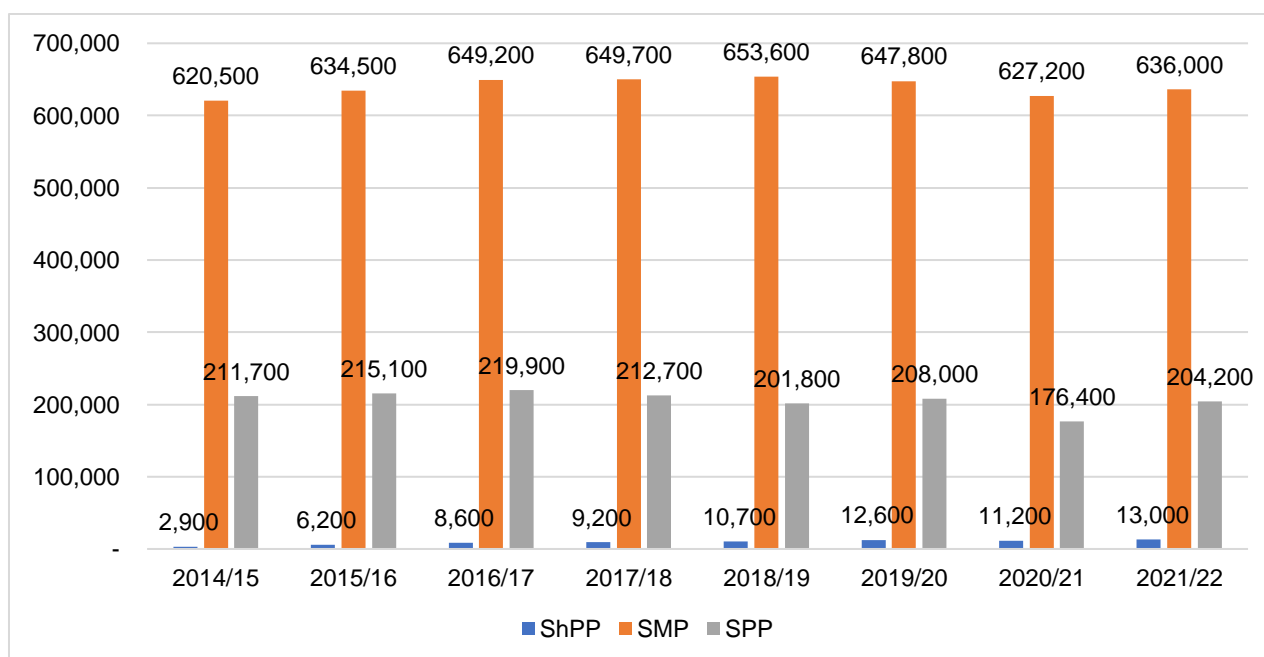
4.63) Evidence from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) shows that just over four in five mothers took Maternity leave following the birth or adoption of their child (83%) and 6% took time off but it was not categorised as a formal type of statutory leave, and 9% did not take any time off. This compares to 1% of mothers who took SPL.

4.64) Interestingly, the survey of parents shows that the average number of weeks Maternity leave taken by mothers appears to have increased over time; from 39 weeks in 2008 to an average of 44 weeks in the 2019 survey.

4.65) The majority (70%) of biological mothers received Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) when they had their child, while one in seven (14%) received Maternity Allowance (MA) and a similar proportion (13%) received Occupational Maternity Pay (OMP). More mothers taking SPL received SMP than mothers overall (89%) and substantially more mothers taking SPL received OMP (49%) than mothers overall, whilst a smaller proportion of SPL mothers received MA (7%). This is unsurprising given that mothers who take SPL are more likely to work for public sector and/or large employers, who are more likely to offer enhanced maternity benefits.

4.66) Though HMRC data is only able to provide information on the number of individuals in receipt of statutory parental pay (ShPP, SMP and SPP) and not leave, **Error! Reference source not found.** Figure 4.17 shows it is useful to show a comparison between the numbers of parents receiving each payment type and any change over time. In particular, whilst the numbers of individuals claiming ShPP are substantially smaller than of those claiming SMP and SPP – which reflects the comparably lower take-up rates – claims of ShPP are increasing over time whilst those of SMP and SPP, unsurprisingly for such established schemes, are approximately stable.

**Figure 4.17: Individuals in receipt of ShPP, SMP and SPP 2014/15<sup>77</sup> to 2021/22**



Source: HMRC Real Time Information

**Table 4.3: Individuals in receipt of ShPP, SMP and SPP 2014/15 to 2021/22**

Year	No. of individuals in receipt of	No. of individuals in receipt of Statutory	No of individuals in receipt of

<sup>77</sup> Data for 2014/15 includes ASPP claimants.

<b>(Apr to Mar unless otherwise stated)</b>	<b>Statutory Paternity Pay</b>	<b>Shared Parental Pay</b>	<b>Statutory Maternity Pay</b>
2015-16	215,100	6,200	634,500
2016-17	219,900	8,600	649,200
2017-18	212,700	9,200	649,700
2018-19	201,800	10,700	653,600
2019-20	208,000	12,600	647,800
2020-21	176,400	11,200	627,200
2021-22	204,200	13,000	636,000

Notes:

1. Data collected uses HMRC Real Time Information (RTI) system. RTI is subject to revision and updates, so there may be small fluctuations in figures reported, and these figures should not be considered “final”.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. The table shows the number of individuals in receipt of Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) per year. This is based on the total number of individuals who claimed SMP, SPP and ShPP in a given year, irrespective of when the payment first started.
4. For the 2015-16 tax year, those receiving Additional Statutory Paternity Pay (ASPP) for children born before 6 April 2015 cannot be distinguished from those claiming Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) within RTI data.
5. This data represents individuals in receipt of statutory parental pay only, so those who take unpaid parental leave are not included.

4.67) Table 4.3 looking at the number of individuals in receipt of parental payments can, to some extent, obscure the true pattern of take-up in a given year as it counts all those in receipt irrespective of when those claims first started. As an example, for SMP and SAP, there are a large number of individuals in receipt of such payments in the first part of the year that had actually started their claim in the previous financial year. To account for any double-counting across years, table 4.4 presents information on those in receipt ShPP who have not been in receipt of ShPP at any time in the previous 12 months. The data tables published separately provide similar data for SMP, SPP and SAP.

**Table 4.4: Number of individuals in receipt of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) who had not been in receipt of ShPP in the previous 12 months**

<b>Year (Apr to Mar unless otherwise stated)</b>	<b>No. of individuals in receipt of ShPP who had not been in receipt of ShPP in the previous 12 months</b>
--	--



2015-16	5,900
2016-17	7,400
2017-18	7,800
2018-19	9,100
2019-20	11,100
2020-21	9,100
2021-22	11,000

Notes:

1. Data collected uses HMRC Real Time Information (RTI) system. RTI is subject to revision and updates, so there may be small fluctuations in figures reported, and these figures should not be considered “final”.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Figures are based on the total number of individuals in a given year, irrespective of when the payment first started. Some individuals will be counted across two years.
4. Some individuals in receipt of payments in the first part of the year had actually started their claim in the previous financial year. To correct for any double-counting across years, the table presents information on those not in receipt of ShPP at any time in the previous 12 months.
5. This data represents individuals in receipt of statutory parental pay only, so those who take unpaid parental leave are not included.

4.68) HMRC data also provides information on the “number of months claimed”, this counts the number of months the same individual was in receipt of parental pay, in a given tax year. These figures should not be interpreted as a measure of total duration of pay received. Where individuals have received pay spanning multiple months, however briefly, they will be recorded as receiving pay in each month. In addition, where payments have spanned tax years, they will be counted in two separate blocks.

4.69) The following table shows the pattern of number of months claimed for ShPP.

**Table 4.5: The number of individuals in receipt of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) by the number of months the payment occurred**

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	More than 9 months
2014/15	1,400	600	500	300	100	-	-	-	-	-
2015/16	2,700	1,300	1,000	600	300	200	100	-	-	-
2016/17	3,100	2,000	1,500	900	500	200	200	100	-	-
2017/18	3,000	2,300	1,600	1,100	500	300	200	100	-	-
2018/19	3,500	2,600	1,900	1,200	600	400	200	100	-	-

2019/20	4,000	3,100	2,300	1,500	800	500	300	100	100	-
2020/21	3,400	2,700	2,100	1,400	700	500	300	100	100	-
2021/22	3,700	3,200	2,400	1,600	900	600	400	200	100	-

1. Data collected uses HMRC Real Time Information (RTI) system. RTI is subject to revision and updates, so there may be small fluctuations in figures reported, and these figures should not be considered "final".
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Figures are based on the total number of individuals in a given year, irrespective of when the payment first started. Some individuals will be counted across two years.
4. HMRC does not hold information which calculates the total duration of parental pay received by individual claimants. However, "number of months claimed" counts each month the same individual was in receipt of parental pay, in a given tax year. These figures should not be interpreted as the total duration of pay received.
5. Where individuals have received pay spanning multiple months, however briefly, they will be recorded as receiving pay in each month.
6. '-' denotes an unrounded figure of less than 50.
7. Prior to 5 April 2015 Additional Statutory Paternity Pay was in place. This was replaced by ShPP and is included in the ShPP statistics.
8. This data represents individuals in receipt of Statutory Shared Parental Pay only, those who take unpaid Shared Parental Leave are not included.

4.70) An alternative approach to estimating the length or duration of ShPP received by individual claimants is by deriving an average length of claim by dividing the total value of ShPP payments by the total number of those in receipt and the statutory rate for that year. The resulting figure represents an average length of parental pay. Note this works for ShPP as the weekly payment amounts do not vary (as opposed to Statutory Maternity Pay which for some weeks is based on a percentage of an individual's earnings). The table below presents the total value of ShPP payments alongside the total number of claimants and the statutory rate for ShPP in that particular year<sup>78</sup>. This shows that the average length of ShPP has increased since its introduction.

**Table 4.6: The number of individuals in receipt of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) by the number of months the payment occurred**

Year	Total Statutory Shared Parental Pay Payments	Value of Statutory Shared Parental Pay Payments	Statutory Rate	Derived average length of Statutory Shared Parental Pay (weeks)
2015/16	6,200	£7,700,000	£139.58	8.9
2016/17	8,600	£12,700,000	£139.58	10.6
2017/18	9,200	£13,800,000	£140.98	10.6

<sup>78</sup> This derived calculation approach only works for SPP and ShPP as the statutory rate is fixed (same for the whole period) unlike SMP and SAP where the first 6 weeks of leave are paid at 90% of normal earnings.

2018/19	10,700	£16,900,000	£145.18	10.9
2019/20	12,600	£20,600,000	£148.68	11.0
2020/21	11,200	£19,500,000	£151.20	11.5
2021/22	13,000	£23,200,000	£151.97	11.7

Notes:

1. Data collected uses HMRC Real Time Information (RTI) system. RTI is subject to revision and updates, so there may be small fluctuations in figures reported, and these figures should not be considered “final”.
2. Figures for the total value of ShPP payments (£) have been rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.
3. Figures for the Total Statutory Shared Parental Pay Payments are rounded to the nearest hundred.
4. Figures are based on the total number of individuals in a given year, irrespective of when the payment first started. Some individuals will be counted across two years.
5. This derived calculation approach works for ShPP as the statutory rate is fixed (same for the whole period), apart for a small number of low earners who earn less than the statutory rate, in which case, they will be entitled to 90% of their average weekly earnings. Full details available here - <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay/what-youll-get>
6. Prior to 5 April 2015 Additional Statutory Paternity Pay was in place. This was replaced by ShPP and is included in the ShPP statistics.
7. This data represents individuals in receipt of Statutory Shared Parental Pay only, those who take unpaid Shared Parental Leave are not included.

## Paternity Leave and Pay

4.71) In the 12 months after their child was born or adopted, three in five say they took Paternity Leave (59%), which rises to three-quarters of fathers who are employees and took time off (74%) and 4% took SPL. One in five fathers took time off but it was not statutory leave (21%) and just under one in five took no time off (18%). Among the fathers that took SPL, an even higher proportion also took Paternity Leave (92%). Three in five employee fathers, (60%) took annual leave.

4.72) The mean number of weeks of time off taken among all fathers was 4.8 weeks, and for fathers who took SPL it was considerably higher, at 17.4 weeks. Overall fathers that took leave, took an average of just under 16 days Paternity Leave, compared with just under 17 days for fathers that also took SPL. Six in ten (58%) fathers received full pay throughout their Paternity Leave, while a quarter (23%) did not receive full pay at all. Fathers who took SPL as well as Paternity Leave were more likely to receive full pay throughout their Paternity Leave (70%) whilst one in eight (14%) did not receive full pay at all. Where fathers took some Paternity Leave that was not at full pay, two thirds (64%) were paid at the statutory rate per week (i.e., 90% or £148.68 per week in the 2019-20 financial year) and one in ten (9%) were paid a proportion or percentage of their salary.

4.73) Interestingly, findings from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) show that fathers who are more likely to take Paternity Leave share similar characteristics with those who are more likely to take SPL, for example fathers were more likely to be older, to work in larger organisations and public sector organisations.

4.74) Comparing the 2019 survey of parents with its 2009 predecessor (Table 4.7) shows that an increased proportion of fathers are taking additional forms of paid leave in addition to Paternity Leave.

**Table 4.7: Type of leave taken**

	<b>2009*</b>	<b>2019</b>
Paternity Leave only	47%	26%-
Other paid leave only	18%	14%-
Other non-paid leave only	6%	3%-
Paternity Leave and other paid leave	24%	46%+

+/- significant increase/decrease, at 95% level of confidence compared with 2009 Q161, unweighted base 737 2019; 1,056 2009.  
Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

## Shared Parental Leave duration, pay, use of flexible features and Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days

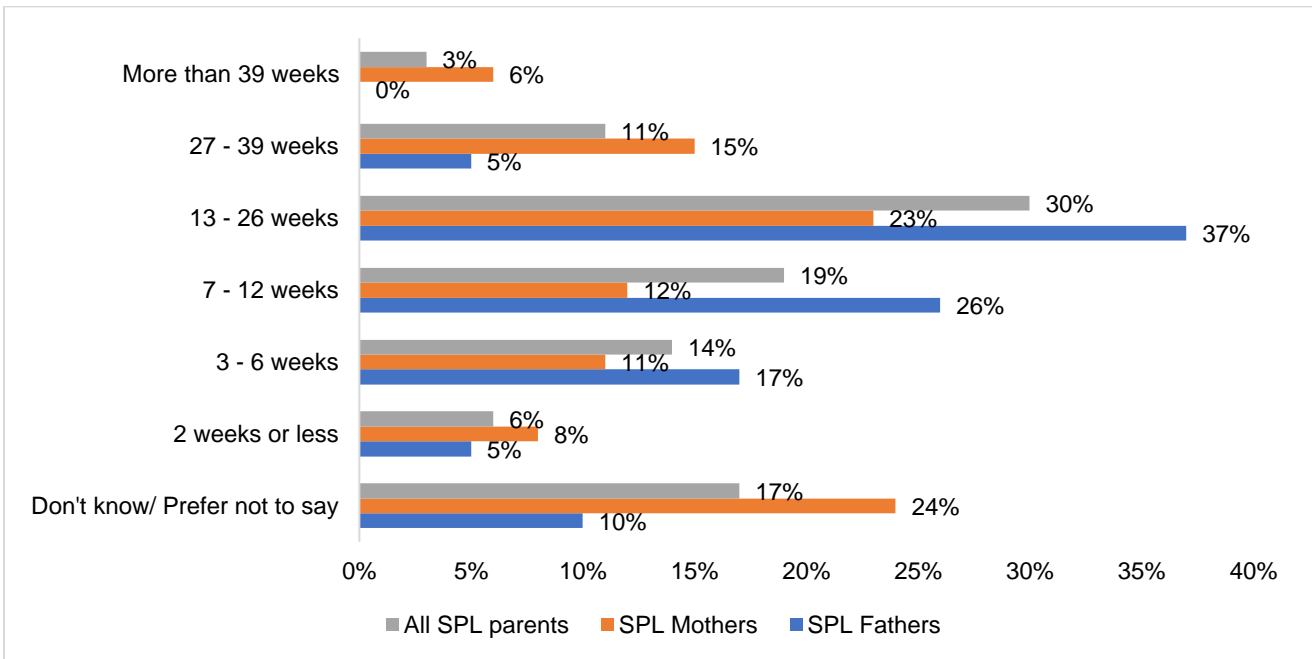
### SPL duration

What is the average duration of SPL taken by parents? How is SPL shared within households?

4.75) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) found that around one in three SPL parents overall (30%), 23% of SPL mothers and 37% SPL fathers took between 13 and 26 weeks as SPL. One in five parents that took SPL took 6 or fewer weeks as SPL, and a further one in five took between 7 and 12 weeks, as can be seen in **Error! Reference source not found.**4.18. Relatively few SPL mothers and even fewer SPL fathers took more than 27 weeks of SPL.

4.76) An average of just over 16 weeks were taken among all SPL parents, and interestingly, the average is significantly higher among mothers (19 weeks) than fathers (14 weeks). Though firm conclusions cannot be made from the data alone, this suggests that mothers who take-up SPL are taking advantage of the features of SPL themselves alongside the child's father/mother's partner.

**Figure 4.18: Number of weeks parents took as SPL**



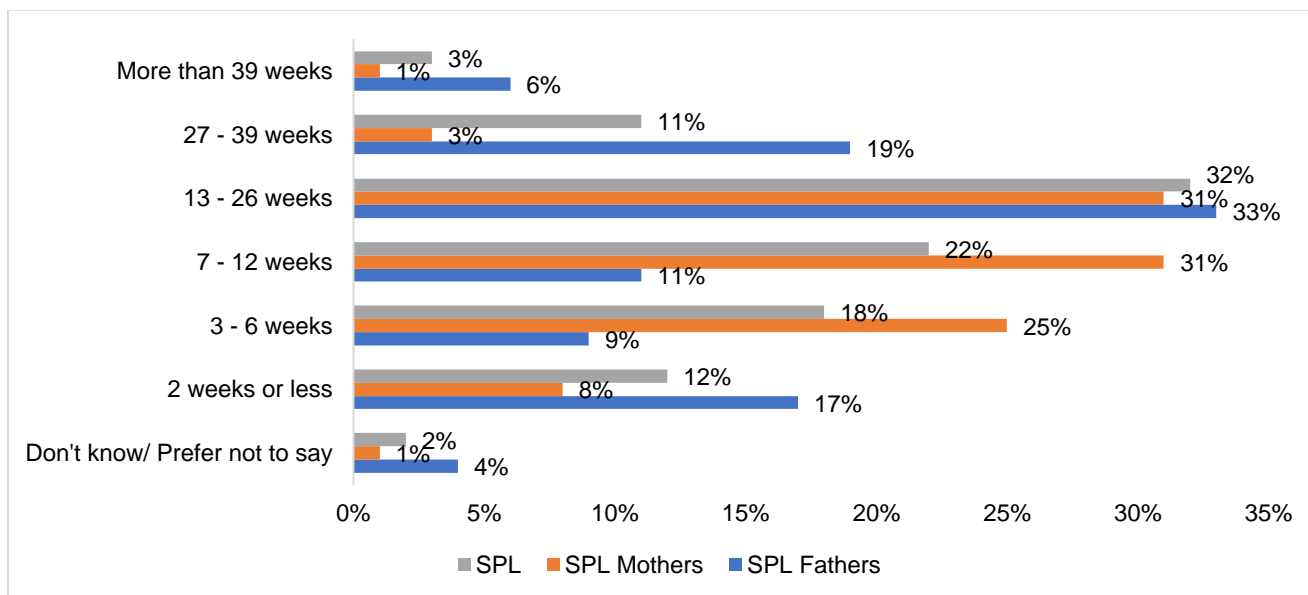
Base: Employees and workers that took SPL (All SPL parents: 330; SPL mothers: 175; SPL fathers: 155)  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.77) Results from the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19) also show that women spent longer on SPL than men; the average (mean) length of SPL reported by employers for women was 14 weeks, while for men this stood at 10 weeks. This is less than that reported in the Parental Rights Survey (2019), which asks parents themselves, whilst the employer survey (MWPS 2018-19) asks managers on behalf of employees in their workplaces. A substantial proportion of managers did not know the length of leave taken by SPL recipients (21% did not know how much time men took; 44% did not know how much women took).

**How is Shared Parental Leave shared within households?**

4.78) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) asks parents that took SPL how many weeks their partner took as SPL (see Figure 4.19). The average number of weeks SPL parents say was taken by their partner is 15 and is significantly higher among fathers (18.5 weeks) than mothers (12 weeks).

**Figure 4.19: Number of weeks respondent's partner took as SPL**



Base: Employees and workers whose partner took SPL (All SPL parents: 330; SPL mothers: 175; SPL fathers: 155)

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.79) Findings from the qualitative research focussed on the discussions employees held with their partners about the length of SPL they were planning to take. It was cited as a mutual process between partners. In some cases, male employees took SPL in shorter periods of six weeks or less so their partners (the mother) could take several months off, and in other cases employees split SPL 50:50. Employees reported that they agreed with their partner about the best parental leave option for their family:

*“I think it was a mutual decision. We were both aware of it, and it was just one of those decisions, that it was a logical thing for us to do. It just meant that my wife got the time that she wanted, I got time that I wanted, and it balanced out as much as we possibly could.”*

(Male employee, SPL, local authority, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

## Pay

4.80) The following section details the types of pay (e.g. statutory or enhanced) parents who have taken SPL received during their leave period, and in particular the extent to which employers provide enhanced pay and their reasons for doing so.

### Of parents who took Shared Parental Leave, how many received statutory ShPP or enhanced ShPP, and for how long?

4.81) Table 4.8 shows how the rate of pay varied across SPL parents.

4.82) On average SPL parents were paid at full pay for nearly six weeks (5.7 weeks) of their SPL, which was just over a third (37%) of their time on leave. Among fathers, the percentage of their SPL that was at full pay was higher (42%) than among mothers that took SPL (31%). For two fifths (40%) of all parents on SPL none of their leave was at full pay and around one in four (23%) did not know or preferred not to say.

4.82) Parents taking SPL received statutory pay for an average of seven weeks, which is equivalent to just over two fifths of their time on leave, on average (44%). Mothers received statutory pay for a higher proportion of their time on leave (53%) than fathers (37%).

4.83) For just over half (55%) of parents on SPL none of their leave was unpaid. On average parents were unpaid for nearly 3 weeks of their leave, which equates to 14% of their leave on average. A fifth (21%) of SPL parents overall took at least some of their leave without pay.

4.84) The vast majority (71%) did not receive an enhanced rate of pay for any of their SPL. An enhanced pay rate was received for less than a week by around 5% of parents and on average enhanced pay was received for less than a week.

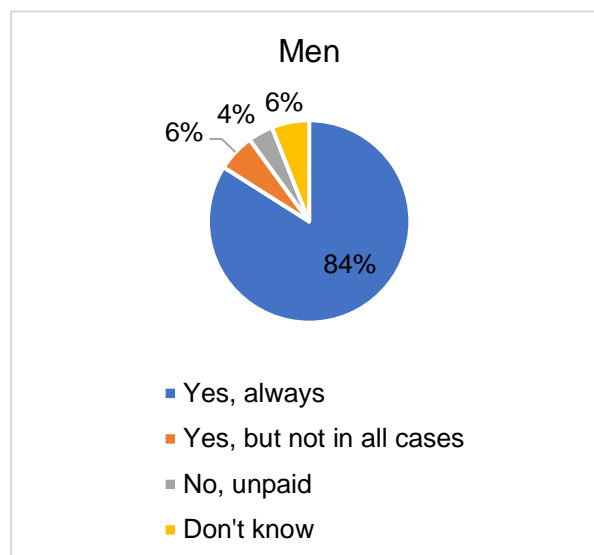
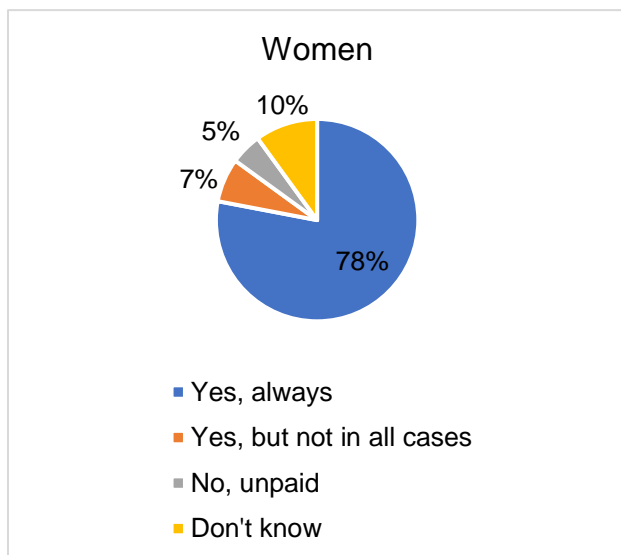
**Table 4.8: Breakdown of pay types while on SPL**

	Full pay	Statutory rate	Enhanced rate	Unpaid
0 weeks	40%	29%	71%	55%
1-6 weeks	11%	18%	2%	7%
7-13 weeks	14%	15%	2%	11%
14-26 weeks	11%	9%	1%	3%
27-39 weeks	1%	3%	0%	<0.5%
40 - 52 weeks	0%	<0.5%	0%	0%
Don't know/ Prefer not to say	23%	26%	25%	24%
Average no. of weeks	5.7 weeks	7.1 weeks	0.7 weeks	2.7 weeks
Average % of time on leave	37%	44%	3%	14%

Base: all parents that took SPL (330)  
Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.85) The employer survey (MWPS, 2018-19) asked workplaces where at least one employee had taken SPL in the last two years whether this leave was paid (Figure **Error! Reference source not found.4.20**). Where men had taken SPL, 84% of workplaces said that this leave was always paid, while 6% SPL was paid in some cases and 4% stated this was unpaid. A similar pattern is apparent for women taking SPL; 78% of workplaces said this was always paid, among 7% of workplaces it was paid in some cases and in 5% it was unpaid.

**Figure 4.20: Whether SPL was paid by gender, as reported by workplaces**



Base: all workplaces with five or more employees of which at least one man or woman had time off as part of shared parental leave in the past two years (134 workplaces for men, 113 workplaces for women).

Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)

### Patterns in access to enhanced pay

4.86) Access to enhanced pay varied by location, employer size and type, which is consistent with patterns in take-up. Parents living in London, working for large organisations or organisations in the public sector were the most likely to access enhanced ShPP.

4.87) SPL parents in London received full pay for nearly nine weeks of their SPL leave, compared with six weeks average among parents in Great Britain overall.

4.88) SPL parents working for a large employer received an average of 6 and a half weeks of full pay, compared to less than three weeks for parents working for an SME. Those working for an SME spent the majority of their time on SPL receiving statutory pay. SPL parents working for central Government received full pay for an average of almost eight weeks, compared to just five weeks for those working for private employers.

4.89) This reflects the pattern of take-up of SPL in the Parental Rights Survey (2019) amongst parents and in particular the higher level of take-up amongst parents who work for central Government (30% of all parents who took SPL), or for large organisations of more than 250 staff (72% of all parents who took SPL), or whom live in London (24% of all parents who took SPL).

### Are employers offering enhanced ShPP?

4.90) Among employers (MWPS, 2018-19), 8% of workplaces where managers were aware of SPL said they would pay more than the statutory level of ShPP. The proportion of workplaces paying more than the statutory minimum is higher among larger workplaces of more than 250 staff (22%), and among workplaces with experience of employees taking SPL in the last two years (20%). Of all workplaces aware of SPL, employers with union recognition (16%) and public sector employers (15%) were more likely to offer enhanced pay than the economy average (8%).



4.91) Under a third (29%) of workplaces in Great Britain who were aware of SPL did not know if they would pay more, while the remaining 63% stated that they would not.

4.92) By comparison, 17% of workplaces offered more than the statutory maternity benefits, with the same percentage offering more than SPP.<sup>79</sup> This suggests that employer enhancements of maternity and paternity benefits are significantly more widespread, which is unsurprising given how established those two entitlements are within workplaces. Of those workplaces that offered enhanced Maternity pay, 35% also offered more than the statutory minimum for ShPP (33% did not and 32% did not know).

4.93) There were no statistically significant differences in enhancing SPL by location, except for employers in the South West, fewer managers (3%) reported that ShPP is enhanced than average (8%).

4.94) Managers in workplaces offering more than the minimum were asked what percentage of normal pay they offered, and for how long this would be paid. One third (32%) did not know what percentage of normal pay would be offered. Among those that did, three quarters (75%) would offer 100% of the employee's normal pay, 8% would offer between 75 and 99%, 8% would offer between 50 and 74%, 2% cent would offer between 1 and 10% while the remaining 7% would offer none. Therefore, the average (mean) percentage of pay offered stood at 87% of normal pay. On average this rate of pay was offered for a 16-week period, although in 44% of workplaces it was not known how long this would be paid for. Managers in almost half (45%) of workplaces said that the enhancement to shared parental pay would apply for the whole period, while 25% stated this would vary over time and 31% did not know. Larger workplaces were more likely to apply the enhancement for the whole period, with 68% doing so.

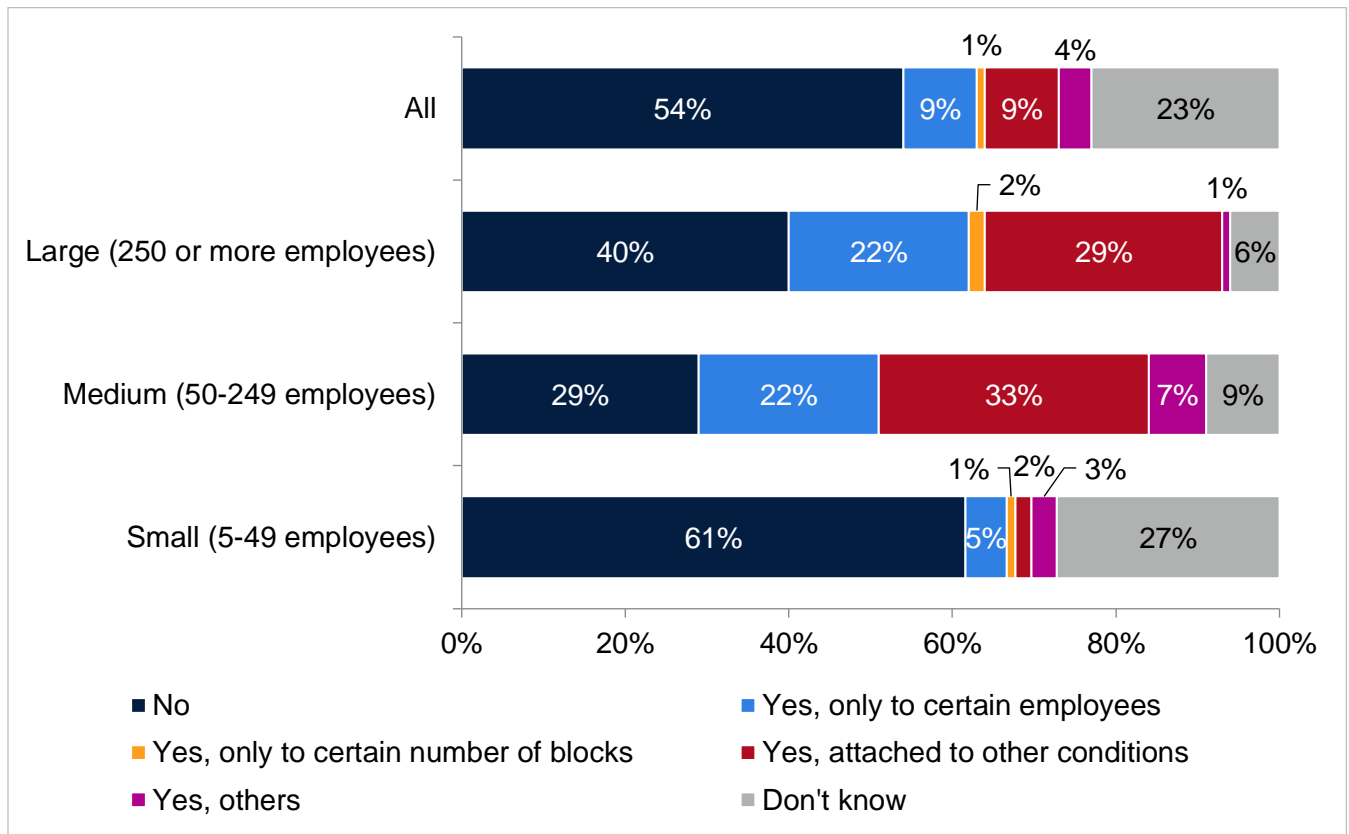
### Whether conditions attached to enhancements

4.95) The employer survey (MWPS, 2018-19) found that over half (54%) of workplaces that enhanced ShPP, did not attach any conditions to enhanced rate of ShPP. In 9% of workplaces, enhancements only apply to certain employees, in 1% enhancements only apply to a certain number of blocks, and in 13% they only apply to other unspecified conditions (Figure **Error! Reference source not found.**4.21).

**Figure 4.21: Whether conditions were attached to the enhanced rate of ShPP, by workplace size, per cent workplaces**

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<sup>79</sup> Note that the questions about Maternity and Paternity Pay enhancements were asked of all respondents, whereas the question about ShPP was asked only of those aware of SPL.



Unweighted base: all workplaces with five or more employees offering more than the statutory minimum for shared parental pay (239 workplaces)  
 Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)

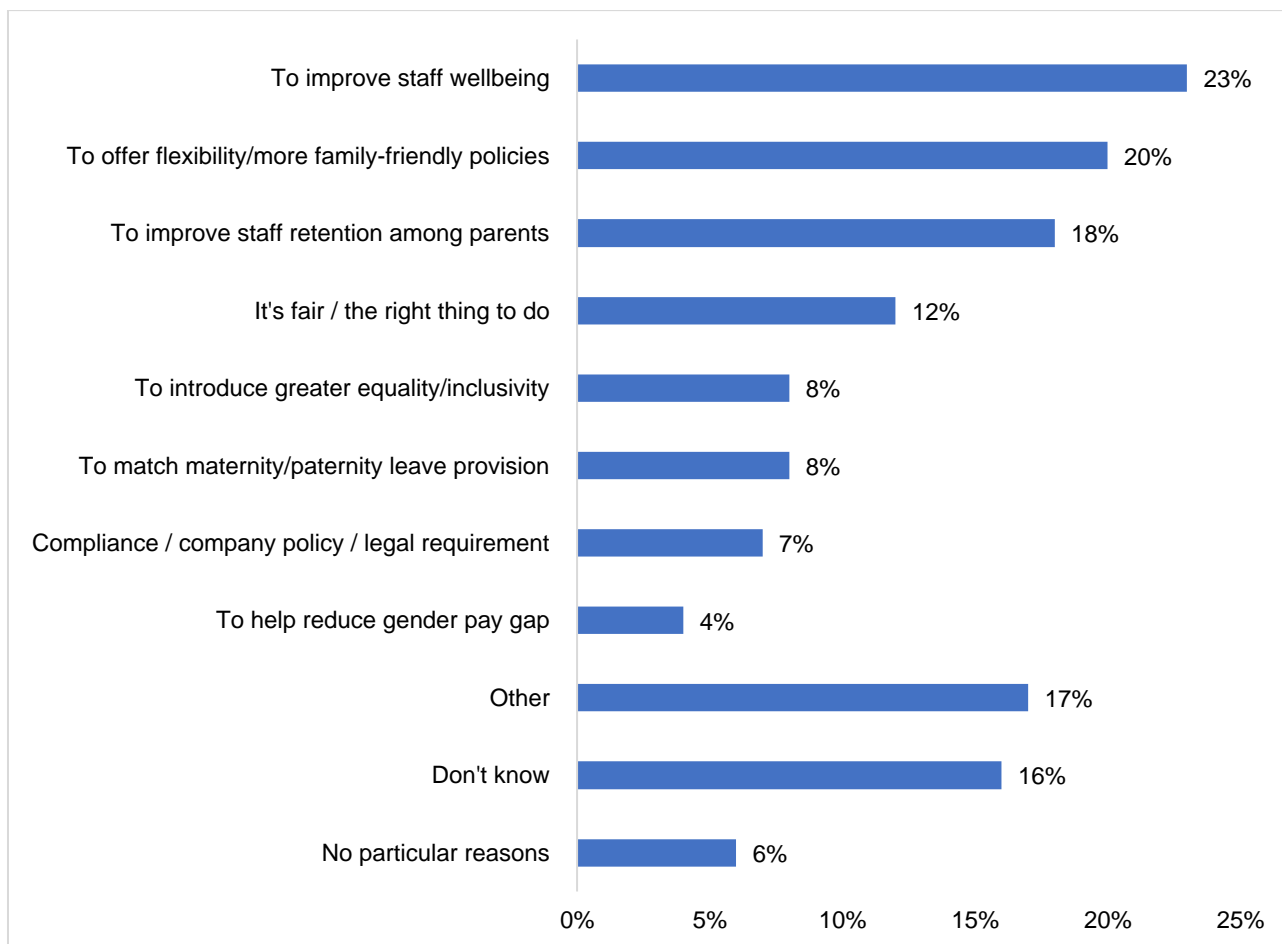
4.96) Interestingly, the above figure shows that smaller workplaces of 5-50 staff are more likely not to attach any conditions to receiving an enhanced rate of ShPP, with this being the case for 61% of small workplaces compared with 40% of large workplaces and 29% of medium-size workplaces. In contrast, 22% of medium and large workplaces offered enhancements to only certain employees, compared to this being the case in only 5% of small workplaces.

4.97) Qualitative research suggests that larger workplaces participating in the interviews placed certain conditions on employee access to enhanced ShPP. In all but one workplace, to access enhanced ShPP employees should have worked for their employer for at least 52 weeks prior to the birth or adoption of the child. The exception to this was a Higher Education institution whose employees were eligible for enhanced ShPP from day one of employment.

### Why do employers offer enhanced ShPP?

4.98) Managers were asked why they offered, or did not offer, enhanced ShPP. Most commonly, workplaces enhanced ShPP to improve staff wellbeing (23%) (see Figure **Error! Reference source not found.**4.22). A further one fifth of workplaces did so to offer flexibility and family friendly policies (20%) and to improve staff retention among parents (18%). Notably, employers generally cited similar reasons for the advantages of SPL overall system, perhaps suggesting that employers who enhance pay are those most encouraging of SPL, recognising its potential benefits amongst their workforce.

**Figure 4.22: Reasons why enhanced ShPP is offered, workplaces in Great Britain**



Base: all workplaces with five or more employees, offering more than the statutory minimum for shared parental pay (239 workplaces).

Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)

4.99) Complying with company policy/legal requirements was also more relevant for public sector workplaces (35%) than private sector firms (3%).

4.100) Public sector workplaces are significantly more likely to have enhanced Maternity Pay (41%) and Paternity Pay (31%) policies than average and it is likely these organisations have aligned their SPL offer with their pre-existing maternity/paternity offer.

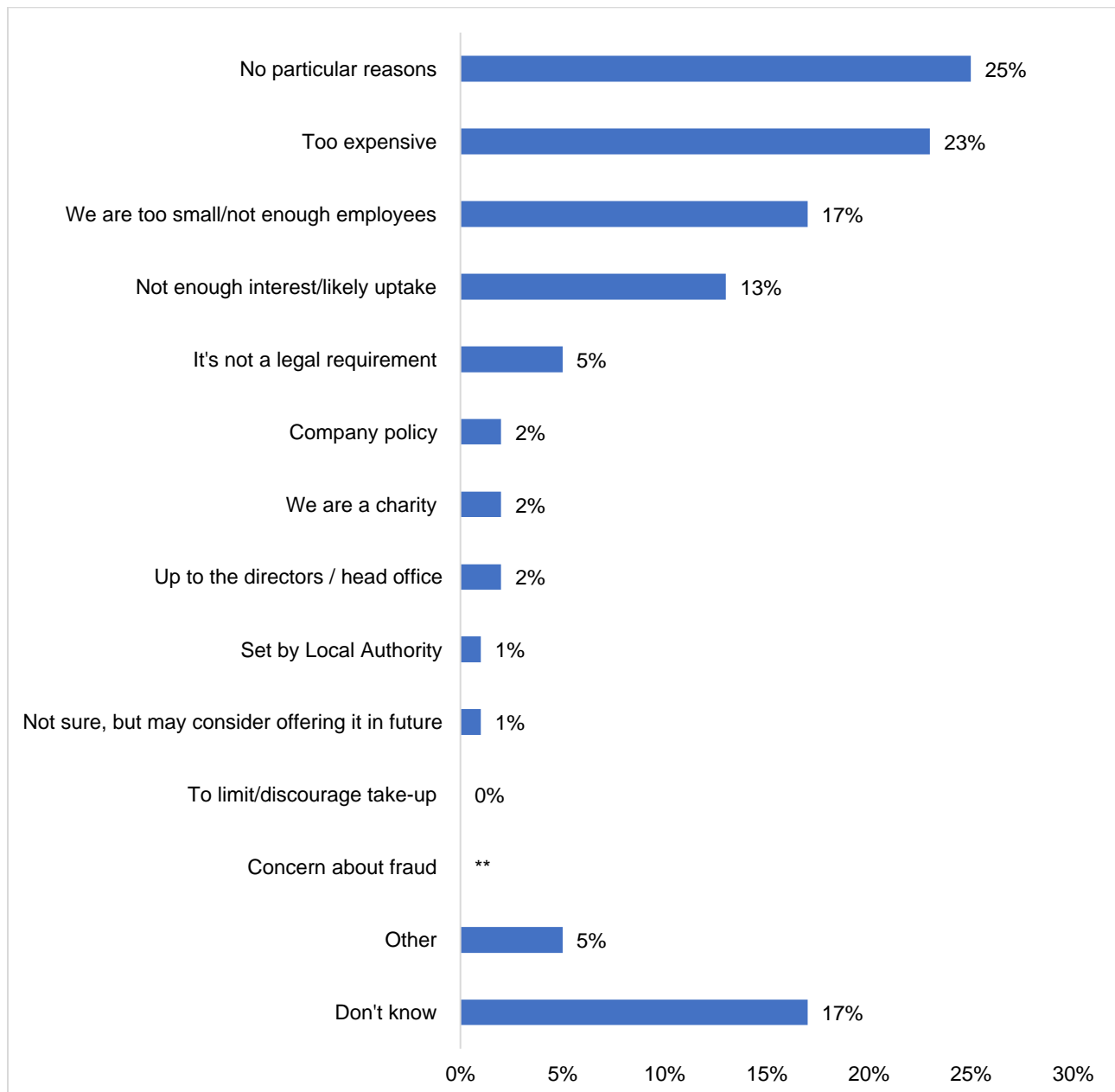
4.101) Larger workplaces were also more likely to cite policy/legal requirements (17%) than average (7%). Larger workplaces of over 250 staff were also more likely to cite the need to introduce greater inclusivity (17%) than average (8%).

4.102) Qualitative research by Forbes, Birkett and Smith (2020) on employer motivations for enhancing SPL, found that organisations interviewed who offered more than the statutory rate were motivated by attracting and retaining staff and employee wellbeing amongst other factors.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Forbes, S., Birkett, H., & Smith, P. (2020). *What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?* Government Equalities Office, April 2020. Accessed from: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/952934/What\\_motivates\\_employers\\_to\\_improve\\_their\\_Shared\\_Parental\\_Leave\\_and\\_pay\\_offers.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952934/What_motivates_employers_to_improve_their_Shared_Parental_Leave_and_pay_offers.pdf)

4.103) For those workplaces who did not enhance shared parental pay, when asked why not, managers most commonly stated they had no particular reason (25%). Almost a quarter stated it was too expensive (23%). Other reasons included attributing it to the small size of workplace (17%), or lack of interest or likely uptake (13%) (see Figure 4.23 **Error! Reference source not found.**).

**Figure 4.23: Reasons why enhanced Shared Parental pay is not offered, workplaces in Great Britain**



Base: all workplaces with five or more employees not offering more than the statutory minimum for shared parental pay (1,231 workplaces)

\*\* suppressed due to low number of responses

Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)

4.104) Single independent establishments were more likely to say enhancing ShPP was too expensive (30%) compared to workplaces which were part of a larger organisation (15%).

Workplaces from the not-for-profit sector were also more likely to cite the expense (41%) compared to public sector workplaces (13%).

4.105) Concern about the affordability of enhancing SPL was also a key reason expressed by organisations who did not have an enhanced SPL offer when interviewed in Birkett, Forbes and Smith’s (2020) research.<sup>81</sup>

### Is there any evidence to suggest employers are reducing parental pay enhancements as a consequence of Shared Parental Leave introduction?

4.106) In terms of types of Maternity Pay, the Parental Rights Survey <sup>82</sup> shows that the proportion of mothers receiving Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) and no other forms of pay has increased over time, from 42% in 2009 to 58% in the latest 2019 survey. However, analysis suggests the proportion of mothers receiving Occupational Maternity Pay (OMP) has fallen from 36% in 2009\* to 12% in 2019, while the proportion receiving Maternity Allowance is stable over time (11%; 12% in 2019).<sup>83</sup>

4.107) In contrast with the findings for mothers, Table 4.9 shows that fathers who took Paternity Leave in the 2019 survey received full pay for a longer period of time than compared with 2009, with significantly fewer receiving full pay for less than 7 days and a significant increase in the proportion that received full pay for more than two weeks.

**Table 4.9: Number of days/weeks taken as Paternity Leave on full pay, 2009 and 2019**

	2009*	2019
0 days	20%	23%
Less than 7 days	31%	2%-
7 days	7%	12%+
1-2 weeks	40%	43%
More than 2 weeks	1%	13%+
Don't know/prefer not to say	2%	8%+

+/- significant increase/decrease, at 95% level of confidence compared with 2009

Q167 unweighted bases 643 2019; 826 2009

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2009) and (2019)

<sup>81</sup> Forbes, S., Birkett, H., & Smith, P. (2020). *What motivates employers to improve their Shared Parental Leave and pay offers?* Government Equalities Office, April 2020. Accessed from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/952934/What\\_motivates\\_employers\\_to\\_improve\\_their\\_Shared\\_Parental\\_Leave\\_and\\_pay\\_offers.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/952934/What_motivates_employers_to_improve_their_Shared_Parental_Leave_and_pay_offers.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> Chanfreau, J. *et al.* (2011). *Maternity and Paternity Rights Survey and Women Returners Survey 2009/10*. Research Report No.777, DWP and BIS, London. Accessed from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maternity-and-paternity-rights-and-women-returners-survey-200910-rr777>

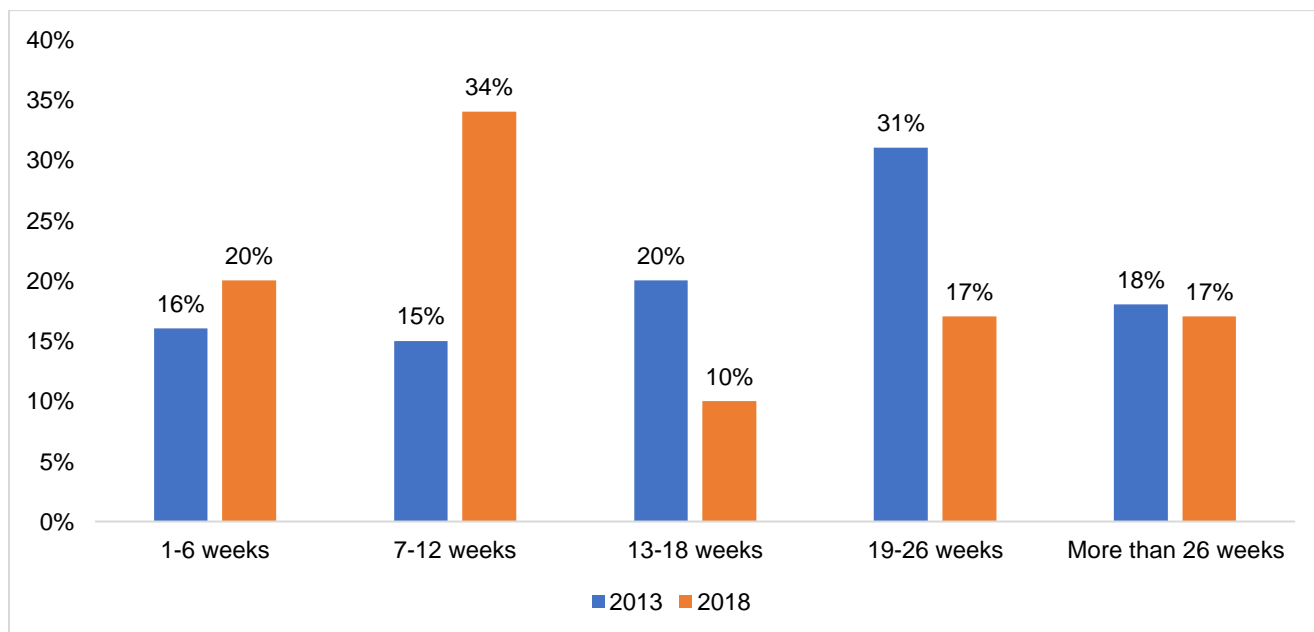
<sup>83</sup> \* Figures flagged with an asterisk are where the data has come from the SPSS file, rather than the published report, and therefore some caution is needed as we cannot be certain that comparisons have been made on a like for like basis.

4.108) Analysis of the employer survey (MWPS, 2018-19) shows an increasing proportion of employers offer enhanced Maternity Pay, from 13% in 2013 to 17% in 2018, though on average the enhancements offered are less generous. In 2013, 40% of workplaces who offered Occupational Maternity Pay offered full pay for mothers on Maternity Leave, however this had reduced to 35% in 2018.

4.109) These findings must be interpreted cautiously, as almost half (49%) of workplace managers in the 2018 survey who had an enhanced offer did not know what percentage of this offer was made up of full pay, compared to only 13% in the 2013 survey.

4.110) Similarly, analysis shows a decrease in the length of weeks that employers pay out occupational pay, from 21 weeks on average in 2013 to 17 weeks on average in 2018. Again, it's relevant to note the high degree of uncertainty around this, as just over half (53%) of employers offering more than SMP in 2018 did not know how long they offered this for. Of those employers who did know, the biggest decrease is among those who pay an Occupational (enhanced) rate of Maternity Pay for 13-18 weeks (from 20% in 2013 to 10% in 2018) and 19-26 weeks (from 31% to 17%) (see Figure 4.24). The change has been driven by employers paying an enhanced rate for less time, as the proportion providing 7 to 12 weeks of enhanced pay has more than doubled from 15% in 2013 to 34% in 2018.

**Figure 4.24: Number of weeks of enhanced SMP, 2009 and 2019**



Base: all workplaces with five or more employees offering more than the statutory minimum for Maternity Pay and for whom the number of weeks this was paid was known (465 workplaces in 2013 and 455 workplaces in 2018). Excludes 'don't knows.'

Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey, 2018-19 and Work-life Balance Survey 2013.

4.110) In terms of enhanced Paternity Pay, the same proportion of workplaces offered enhanced pay for fathers in 2018-19 and 2013 (17%).

4.111) Regarding the extent of enhancements, in 2013, 71% of workplaces who offered enhanced Paternity Pay offered full pay for fathers were on Paternity Leave. This reduces to 58% of all workplaces who offer full pay in 2018-19. Again, as with maternity enhancements,

it's important to note caution in interpreting these findings, as 38% of workplace managers who offered enhanced pay were unsure of the extent of enhancements in 2018-19, compared to 4% in 2013 who did not know.

4.112) The qualitative research is able to provide additional detail on employer decisions to enhance parental leave policies. Interviews found that workplace SPL and ShPP policies were designed in a way that managers felt was fair to employees but also affordable for the organisation.

4.113) When employers offered enhanced ShPP, reasons given for enhancing the offer included a desire to attract and retain staff and a perception that it was fair to offer enhanced ShPP alongside enhanced Maternity Pay. This indicates that among the small sample of participating workplaces, they had not experienced any levelling down of maternity schemes and were conscious of fairness principles in implementing parental leave and pay schemes.

4.114) Whilst findings from surveys of parents and employers indicate that employer Maternity Leave enhancements are less generous today than in the past, it is important to note that these trends cannot be attributed to the introduction of the SPL scheme. Any changes to the level of enhancements offered by employments for Maternity and/or Paternity Leave may be due to other factors beyond the introduction of SPL, for example the effects of the financial crisis on employee benefits more generally, which are beyond the scope of this evaluation to assess.

### Of the parents who took SPL, how have the flexible features been used, namely, the 'block' feature and Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days?

4.115) One of the key objectives for SPL was to give parents more choice and flexibility in how they share the care of their child in the first year, whilst increasing flexibility for employers and employees to reach agreement on how best to balance work and domestic needs. The primary features of the SPL system to improve flexibility for parents and employers are:

- Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days, which enable parents to work up to 20 days each in total during SPL. These days are in addition to the 10 'Keeping In Touch' (KIT) days which are available to those on Maternity and Adoption leave.
- The ability to take SPL in up to 3 blocks (more if the employer allows) separated by periods of work or other types of leave (e.g. annual leave), instead of taking leave in one continuous block. In contrast Maternity Leave must be taken in a single block and once the mother has returned to work her Maternity Leave ends and cannot be reinstated, even if the mother decides she has made a mistake.
- The ability for parents to take SPL and pay at the same time (i.e., be off work together) and for fathers/partners to start their SPL whilst the mother is still on Maternity Leave or to stagger the leave and pay (e.g. to be off work one after the other) so that one of them is always at home with their child.

### What is the take up of Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) days by parents?

4.116) All parents that took SPL were asked: Before your Shared Parental Leave began, were you aware you can work up to 20 days during Shared Parental Leave without bringing it to an

end. These are called 'Shared Parental Leave in touch' (SPLIT) days. These days are in addition to the 10 'Keeping in Touch' (KIT) days available to those on Maternity or Adoption Leave.

4.117) Employees can only work a SPLIT day if their employer agrees. The rate of pay that someone receives when they work a SPLIT day is also a matter for negotiation, although parents must be paid at least the National Minimum Wage.

4.118) Evidence from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) shows that half of all parents that took SPL were aware of SPLIT days (51%) and there is little difference between mothers and fathers (49% and 53%).

4.119) Moderate awareness levels of SPLIT days could be because SPLIT days are not as well understood or promoted by employers, and/or that parents conflate SPLIT days with KIT days and are not aware that they are a separate right. Interestingly, parents who took SPL were more likely to have accessed the KIT scheme (43%) than mothers in general (26%).

4.120) Moreover, nearly three quarters of parents that took SPL did not take any SPLIT days (73%). Just 3% of parents that took SPL took up to 1 SPLIT day, around one in ten took between 2 and 5 SPLIT days (11%) and a similar proportion took 6 or more days (10%). On average 1.75 SPLIT days were taken by SPL parents.

4.121) Despite the features of SPL offering greater flexibility for parents, take-up of SPLIT days is relatively low.

### How many parents who took Shared Parental Leave used the block feature?

4.122) In the majority of cases of parents who took SPL, the leave was taken 'all as one' (83%) and among a further 15% of parents reported taking leave in blocks.

4.123) There is little variation in take-up of the block feature, by parent characteristics. Mothers who took SPL were more likely to have taken their SPL in blocks (19%) than fathers who took SPL (12%).

4.124) Whether leave was taken in blocks or all as one varied by gender composition of the parent's workplace. Those parents who worked for workplaces made up of all or mostly women were the most likely to take their leave all as one (94%) compared to in blocks (6%), indicating those workplaces are more likely to be familiar with staff taking extended periods of leave and are well-placed to adapt to employees doing this via SPL. There were no differences in whether SPL was taken in blocks or all as one by length of leave taken.

4.125) Evidence from the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19) confirms findings reported by parents, where a minority of employees report taking advantage of the block feature. Among workplaces where employees had taken SPL, 9% had at least one employee take it in multiple blocks. In a further 63% no employees had taken SPL in blocks. Under three in ten (28%) of employers did not know whether their employees had taken it in multiple blocks. In relation to the ability for parents to take SPL and pay at the same time (i.e. be off work together) or to stagger the leave and pay (e.g. to be off work one after the other), the Parental Rights Survey (2019) found that in just over one in three cases, SPL was taken at the same time as their partner (35%). A higher proportion of parents took their SPL at different times to their partner (45%), and for just under one in five SPL parents, some of their leave was at the same time as their partner and some at a different time (18%).



4.126) Unsurprisingly, parents who took longer than 4 months of SPL were significantly less likely to take their leave at the same time as their partner (23%) than average (35%). Parents who worked longer working weeks (e.g. 35 or more hours) were more likely to take SPL at a different time to their partner (48%) than average (45%), suggesting their use of the policy helps those who wish to return to work. Parents who's partners earn £25,000-39,000 are also more likely to take SPL at a different time to their partner (57%) than average (45%), possibly reflecting the affordability concerns if both parents reduce their income at the same time.

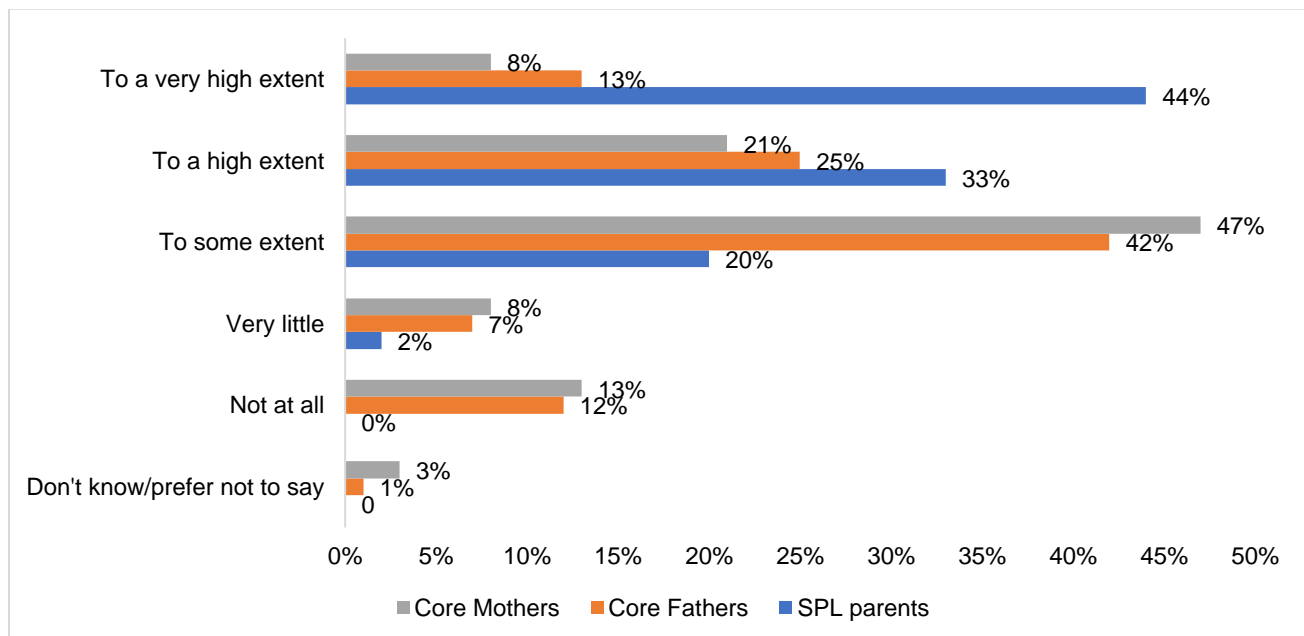
4.127) Equally, parents who took SPL and reported that it was the 'main' type of leave they took, were significantly less likely to take their leave at the same time as their partner (30%) and significantly more likely to take it partly at the same time as their partner and partly at different times (23%). This indicates that some parents are using SPL to take advantage of the flexible 'blocks' feature of the policy to enable them or their partner to return to work or conversely take on primary parenting responsibilities.

### Does the Shared Parental Leave and Pay scheme offer parents greater flexibility?

4.128) Evidence from the survey of parents (Figure 4.25) shows that among the parents that took SPL or have some knowledge of the scheme, around three quarters (77%) agreed to a very high or high extent that SPL provides flexibility for parents taking leave.

4.129) Overall, around 3 in 10 mothers (from the core sample) who took or had some knowledge of SPL agreed that SPL offers flexibility to a 'very high' or 'high' extent (29%), while fathers are significantly more likely to agree that this is the case (38%).

**Figure 4.25: Extent to which parents think SPL provides parents with greater flexibility in taking leave**



Base: parents who took SPL or know at least a small amount about SPL law (Core mothers: 1089; Core fathers: 465; All SPL parents: 336)

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.130) This is a positive outcome for SPL, suggesting that parents felt that SPL overall provided greater flexibility. This indicates that the SPL policy is meeting its objective to provide

choice and flexibility for parents in how they arrange caring responsibilities for their child in the first year.

## How are the flexibility features of the Shared Parental Leave scheme perceived by employers?

4.131) Among employers who were aware of SPL, the most common advantage cited was the flexibility and choice it offers parents (15%). Flexibility and choice SPL offers for parents is more likely to be reported as an advantage in workplaces where at least one employee had taken SPL (25%) than workplaces with no experience of SPL (15%). This suggests that many employers do recognise the flexibility SPL offers.

4.132) Findings from the qualitative research provide more detail on employer experience with the flexibility features of SPL. The sample of employees interviewed for the case studies included those who took continuous blocks, and employees who opted for alternating blocks of leave.

4.133) Employers were aware continuous blocks could not be refused. While they wanted to accommodate employees' preferences, discontinuous blocks were considered harder to manage organisationally as they were potentially more disruptive to staff resourcing arrangements. The most common concern about SPL amongst employers relates to the option for parents to take discontinuous blocks of leave. This was the case even among supportive workplaces.

4.134) For one participant workplace, a further education college in which no staff had yet taken up or requested SPL, approval for discontinuous leave would depend on whether cover could be arranged. It was explained that arranging cover in this setting would require either hiring externally or for internal staff to increase their hours. Finding cover for SPL was anticipated to be more challenging compared with Maternity Leave because the absence could be shorter and intermittent:

*"If she was to say, 'I'm going to go off on 3rd February and I'll have two weeks and then I'm going to come and work for two weeks, and then I'm going to go off for two weeks and then I'll come back', which she's perfectly entitled to do, we would take a deep breath and say, 'oh my God, how on Earth are we going to do that?' It's just, we can't get someone to cover the whole block of it because we only need them in for two weeks of it, so what do we do with the kids? How do we...? That is really difficult."*

(Female senior manager, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

## Enablers and barriers to taking SPL

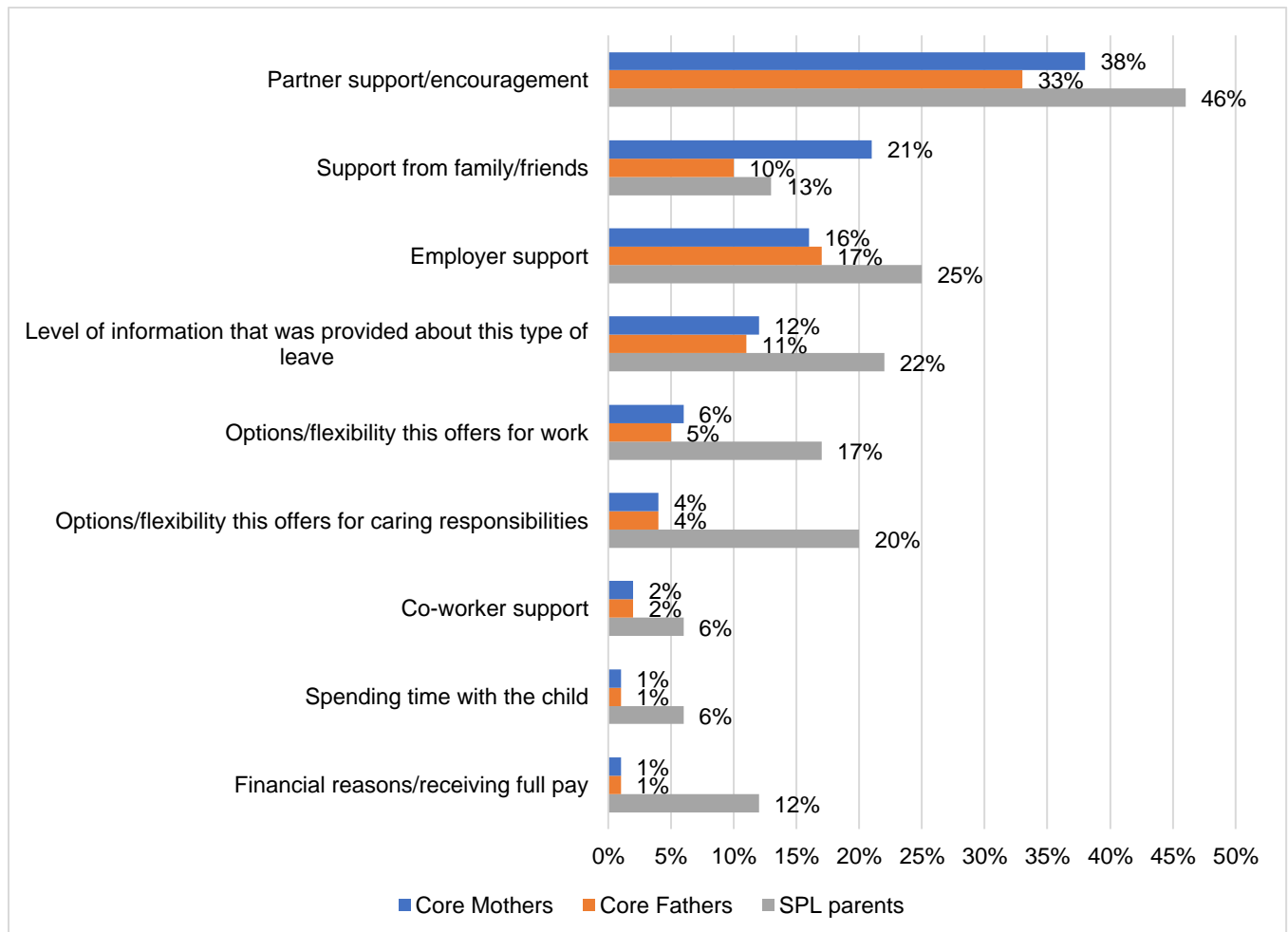
### What are the factors affecting the decision to take-up and share parental leave?

4.135) Both quantitative findings from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) and interview findings from the qualitative research found several key factors affecting parents' decision to take-up SPL. Positive factors driving take-up include support from partners, support from employers, desire to spend more time with the child in their first year and the desire to work flexibly.

Factors moderating take-up include financial constraints and access to enhanced pay, cultural norms and the design of the policy itself.

4.136) Parents were asked about factors that influenced their decision-making around which types of leave to take when they had their child (Figure 4.26).

**Figure 4.26: Factors that influenced parents' decisions on which type of parental leave to take**



Base: core mothers 1,959; core fathers 1,062; SPL parents 336

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.137) SPL parents cited a broad range of motivating factors, including over four in five (85%) parents who took SPL saying they chose SPL because they wanted to share childcare (and 55% said this was the main reason), compared to just 23% of core fathers and 6% of core mothers giving this as the main reason. SPL parents were also more likely to say the leave they took gave them and their partner the most flexibility (67%) than mothers and fathers who didn't take SPL (9% and 14% respectively). Financial incentives to take SPL were also shown to be important for two in five parents who took SPL (40%).

4.138) These findings suggest that parents who take SPL are influenced by SPL offering greater flexibility and choice, enabling mothers and fathers to share childcare responsibilities and because they are financially better off taking leave in this way.

4.139) The factors cited by core mothers and fathers, most of whom did not take SPL, also reveal some of the barriers to taking SPL. Three in ten mothers did not take SPL because they

did not want to share/take this leave. In terms of factors influencing decision to take leave, the vast majority of mothers (84%) stated they were influenced by wanting to mainly look after their child themselves, whilst far fewer fathers said this (21%), suggesting cultural norms can play an important role. These factors, alongside financial constraints, are discussed in more detail below under 'Barriers'.

4.140) The qualitative interviews also emphasised that decisions to take-up and share parental leave were often based on trade-offs between the factors. For example, a male employee's desire to spend time with his new child could be in direct competition with the need to maintain an income, which made decision-making less straightforward. This was especially the case for those employees whose household income was generated predominantly by one earner. Decisions to take-up and share parental leave were often based on trade-offs between the benefits of SPL and the anticipated financial loss. Moreover, this was in play for employees whose household income was generated predominantly by one earner or for employees who earned a similar income to their partners, resulting in different decisions depending on the family context.

### How comfortable do parents feel asking their employer for SPL and pay?

4.141) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) asked parents how comfortable they would feel asking their employer for Shared Parental Leave and Pay. Overall, three in five mothers and fathers from the core sample who were employees or workers before birth said they would feel comfortable (58% and 57% respectively). Unsurprisingly, this is less than among parents that took SPL, where 85% said they felt comfortable to any degree about asking their employer for SPL, including two thirds that felt 'very comfortable' (54%).

4.142) However, it is worth noting that younger mothers under the age of 25 were more likely to say they would feel uncomfortable asking their employer for SPL (14%), as were mothers with a health condition (17%). These mothers exhibit significantly lower rates of take-up not just of SPL but of Maternity Leave more generally.

4.143) In the qualitative research, employees described both positive and negative experiences of the request and approval process for SPL. Employees described feeling more comfortable when their line managers and colleagues were supportive and understanding, and willing to make adjustments when they took leave. This was important because employees often felt responsible for their roles being covered, particularly when their roles involved teaching or more senior responsibilities.

4.144) Employees who described a less supportive approach, particularly from HR, felt that requesting leave was more challenging. This was exacerbated when awareness of the policy in the workplace was limited. Although this did not prevent employees participating in the qualitative study from requesting leave, it was considered a potential barrier for others.

4.145) Among employees who requested shorter leave periods, there was also a view that their employers' willingness to accommodate SPL requests had a limit, and that their leave request may not have been seen positively if a longer leave period was requested. For example, a male employee working in an operational role for a male-dominated company noted that his employer was not accustomed to finding cover for long periods of staff absence and may find this challenging.

4.146) These findings support quantitative evidence suggesting the importance of employer support in facilitating take-up of SPL. It is clear that the perceived and actual receptiveness of

employers to employees requesting longer periods of leave is important as a factor underpinning take-up of SPL.

## What are the enablers to taking up Shared Parental Leave?

4.147) Parents and employees cited support from partners and the ability of leave to facilitate a desired approach to shared childcare, support from employers (e.g. through a receptive workplace culture and/or access to an enhanced pay scheme) and the desire for a more equal work-life balance as key motivators behind their take-up of SPL.

### Partner support

4.148) Key factors underpinning the decision to take-up SPL were wanting to share childcare with their partner (85%) and getting the most flexibility from their leave for them and their partner (67%).

4.149) Interestingly, a quarter (26%) also stated SPL would be best for their partner's ongoing career progression.

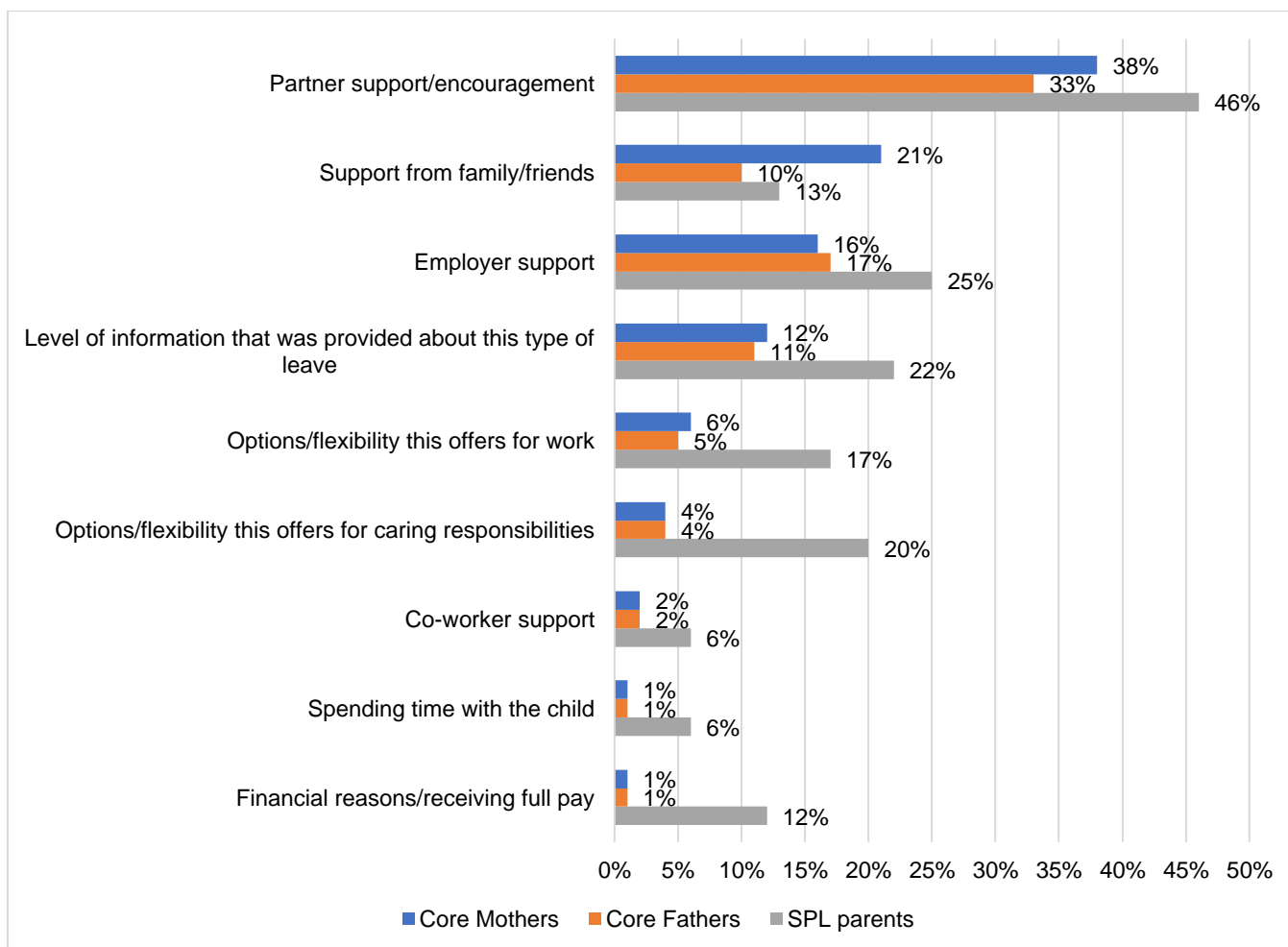
Fathers who take SPL (35%) were more likely to say that the option was best for their partner's career progression than mothers (18%), indicating that fathers are relatively more incentivised to take SPL. Supporting this dynamic, a similar proportion of SPL mothers (31%) say they are incentivised to take SPL because it helps their own career progression (compared to only 6% of SPL fathers who say this).

4.150) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) also asked parents about the factors that helped them take the leave they took (see Figure 4.27). Almost half of SPL parents mentioned support or encouragement from partners as influential (46%).<sup>84</sup> Partner support also appears to be the biggest influence for mothers and fathers generally, suggesting this is important regardless of leave type.

### Figure 4.27: Factors that helped parents take the leave they took

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<sup>84</sup> 49 per cent of mothers and 43 per cent of fathers who took SPL



Base: core mothers 1,959; core fathers 1,062; SPL parents 336  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.151) This is consistent with findings among participating workplaces in the qualitative research, which found that across workplaces in Great Britain, the needs of partners, and the ability of leave to facilitate a desired approach to parenting and childcare within a household, were key considerations underpinning take-up of SPL.

4.152) Of those parents who took SPL to facilitate a more traditional approach (e.g. the mother spending longer periods at home), male employees reported wanting to spend more than two weeks' Paternity Leave at home but to still allow their female partners to have at least six months off. Female employees who were interviewed reported wanting to enable their partners to spend more time at home without losing out themselves. SPL was considered an effective way to facilitate this, and the additional pay fathers received through ShPP was viewed as a positive enhancement.

4.153) Of those taking a more progressive approach (e.g. splitting leave equally between parents), employees in opposite-sex relationships voiced a strong intention to model non-traditional, equal parenting responsibilities between mother and father. For example, a male employee in a Higher Education setting felt strongly about taking a parenting approach that was informed by progressive ideologies about gender equality. For him and his partner, receiving enhanced ShPP was considered a bonus:

*“Both my partner and I are quite motivated about gender equality and we see [SPL] as one of the ways that we can enact that in our own lives for our own*

*benefits but also potentially as a demonstration to others that it can be done, and it works.”*

(Male employee, SPL, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

## Employer support

4.154) SPL parents surveyed in the Parental Rights Survey (2019) are also more likely than both mothers and fathers overall to cite employer support (25%) and the level of information provided (22%) as key enablers to taking up their leave (see Figure 4.27).

4.155) Parents who took SPL are more likely to cite family-friendly support from their pre-birth employer (96%) than mothers (53%) and fathers (48%) overall. For instance, two-thirds (83%) of parents who took SPL could access childcare vouchers from pre-birth employers, compared to around three in ten parents overall. Equally, 62% of SPL parents could access time off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters from their pre-birth employer, compared to under a quarter of parents generally. SPL parents were also more likely to receive enhanced pay for the leave they took, for example Occupational Maternity Pay (49%) than mothers overall (13%).

4.156) These findings were also confirmed by the qualitative research, which categorised participating workplaces into three categories based on their views and attitudes towards SPL, two of which were supportive and receptive.<sup>85</sup> Categories took into account workplace culture, parental leave policies and practices and staff members' attitudes and take up of SPL.

4.157) In supportive workplaces, staff at all levels were highly supportive of men and women sharing parenting roles and leave, and senior managers saw the positives of SPL as outweighing negatives. They offered enhanced ShPP including a period of full pay (16-18 weeks) to encourage take up. By way of an example, in one supportive workplace, Sue, an HR partner, said they conducted interviews to better understand employees' views and experiences of SPL and they improved their SPL and ShPP offer to encourage take up. Joe, a line manager in the same workplace also described a flexible and accommodating approach to SPL, by supporting staff in preparing to take leave and returning to work, so that the employee gets the type of leave they want and don't worry about taking the time off.

4.158) In receptive workplaces, senior leadership were also supportive of SPL but they voiced concerns about financial costs of take up and other staff had mixed views about gender roles in parenting, with traditional views still common among some older/male employees. Workplace policies varied from statutory ShPP to enhanced ShPP with 24 weeks full pay.

4.159) Twamley and Schober's (2019) study of take-up of SPL amongst mothers in London also found that attitudes and take-up amongst colleagues to be important, both in terms of enhancements and in counteracting prevailing norms around fathers' involvement in childcare.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The third category was 'hesitant'; hesitant workplaces are discussed under the section discussing barriers to taking SPL110.

<sup>86</sup> Twamley, K, & Schober, P. (2019). Shared Parental Leave: Exploring Variations in Attitudes, Eligibility, Knowledge and Take-up Intentions of Expectant Mothers in London. *Journal of Social Policy*, 48(2): 387-407. DOI:10.1017/S0047279418000557

## Access to enhanced pay

4.160) Access to enhanced pay is a direct facilitator of take-up of SPL, and conversely, reliance on only statutory pay is a barrier to take-up.

4.161) Significantly more parents who took SPL cited receiving full pay as a factor which helped them take-up of their leave (12%) compared to mothers and fathers in general (1% respectively). The qualitative research also demonstrates that all interviewees considered access to enhanced pay as important for take-up.

4.162) Some employees interviewed reported finances as a primary factor in their decision making, describing access to enhanced pay options as “crucial”. This was particularly true when employees’ household income largely depended on one salary. When employees were the main wage earner and they took SPL, they reported only taking SPL for the amount of time that their employer offered enhanced ShPP at full pay:

*“If there was no Shared Parental Pay, we could not afford to actually just live with my wife's salary or just part of my salary, so it was crucial.”*

(Male employee, SPL for adoption, Higher Education, male-dominated, very large employer)

4.163) Employer support including offering enhanced ShPP is a crucial factor in the take-up of SPL. Access to enhanced pay, alongside strong workplace support for gender equality, meant that employees in supportive workplaces shared leave more equally than employees in other workplaces. Male employees took longer periods of leave (ranging from several weeks to several months), and female employees took shorter periods of six months or less. Adoptive parents chose to take SPL instead of Adoption Leave as it offered greater flexibility and enabled joint adopters to share leave and pay entitlements more equally between them.

4.164) Access to enhanced ShPP was seen as a key enabler for employees in participating workplaces, especially for those where the household income dependent on one salary or where the employee in question was the main wage earner. For example, a male employee in Higher Education had not originally considered SPL an option. This changed when his workplace updated their policy to include enhanced pay during his partner’s pregnancy; he changed his mind and took SPL in addition to Paternity Leave because he was able to get more time off at full pay.

*“Well, to be honest with you we hadn't really planned to take it in the first place. It wasn't until they enhanced our entitlements that I thought oh, do you know what, this actually is not going to impact us or have any negative effect financially. Then it seemed to work for us. So, when initially my daughter was born we hadn't planned for... I think I'd mentioned it as kind of almost a joke and my wife was like, 'Yes, not a chance.' Then things worked out in terms of she could go back to work. She ideally liked to go back to work for a certain period just to carry out a certain task, so it just fell into place really.”*

(Male employee, SPL, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)



## Work-life balance

4.165) The qualitative research also found that drive for a better work-life balance was a key factor underpinning decisions around SPL, in terms of how much time was spent with the new child and how much time was spent away from work.

4.166) Participating mothers who took SPL or Maternity Leave for 16 weeks or more, cited wanting to spend time with their new-born child as a motivator. Fathers reported similar motivations amongst those who took a block of SPL lasting six weeks or more. For fathers who took SPL for their second child, they reported feeling they had missed out previously and wanted a different experience this time.

4.167) The qualitative research also found that regardless of length of leave, male employees who took SPL did so in part to enable their female partners to go back to work sooner than if they had taken Maternity Leave. Of participating female employees who took SPL, regardless of the length of leave they took, they described a desire to get back to work. Their consideration of their career break had two primary components: firstly, they enjoyed their jobs and therefore did not want to take a substantial period of time away and secondly, their role at work was not easily replaceable, e.g. projects could not continue in their absence.

4.168) This indicates that parents who take SPL recognise that it fulfils some of its original stated objectives, to enable mothers to return to work earlier and provide parents with greater flexibility to balance work and caring responsibilities.

## What are the barriers to taking up Shared Parental Leave?

4.169) The research cited the following key barriers to take-up of SPL among parents: varying levels of understanding, financial constraints (including whether parents had access to enhanced pay), workplace culture including cultural norms around gender, parenting and work and policy design.

4.170) In discussion of barriers, it is first important to mention awareness of SPL the relatively low levels of understanding amongst parents and employers of SPL, as this presents an immediate barrier to take-up. Where SPL was not taken, over half of mothers (51%) and over two in five fathers (42%) had heard of SPL and had at least a small amount of knowledge of the policy. A minority of mothers (15%) and fathers (13%) where SPL was not taken said that they had heard of SPL and fully understood what it was. A third of mothers and 45% of fathers where SPL was not taken had not heard of the scheme when their baby was born or adopted.

4.171) Managers are more likely to report awareness of SPL (73%), and almost nine in ten employees (86%) work in a workplace where managers were aware of SPL. Similarly, a minority of managers said they had a good understanding of SPL and what it involved (20%), and Birkett and Forbes (2019) suggest lack of knowledge amongst managers is a significant barrier to take-up of SPL.<sup>87</sup>

## Does the complexity of the system prove a barrier to parents taking up Shared Parental Leave?

4.172) Evidence from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) found that 9% of mothers and 8% of fathers who did not take up SPL cited that it was too complicated to set up and manage as a reason. Only 4% of mothers and 6% of fathers said this was the main reason for not taking

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<sup>87</sup> Birkett, H., & Forbes, S. (2019). Where's dad? Exploring the low take-up of inclusive parenting policies in the UK. *Policy Studies*. 40:2, 205-224, DOI: 10.1080/01442872.2019.1581160

SPL. When parents who took SPL were asked if there were any negative consequences from the leave they chose, relatively few stated that it was complicated to manage in practice (6% of mothers and 5% of fathers).

4.173) The employer survey (MWPS 2018-19) found that less than one in ten managers mentioned that SPL was complex to set up and manage (9%), though this rises to almost one in five managers in larger workplaces (17%) and workplaces with employees taking SPL within the last two years (16%). Larger workplaces are more likely to report direct experience of employees taking SPL.

4.174) Despite few employees stating complexity of the policy as a specific reason for not taking the policy, it may be useful to consider some of the steps involved for employees in setting up SPL in practice, such as the need for fathers to seek transfer of Maternity Leave to access the policy as well as the need to involve two employers to negotiate time off. Some of these features of the policy may be seen to add to the complexity of the scheme and inadvertently act as a deterrent to some parents considering the options for parental leave.

4.175) Interviewees from the qualitative research noted that the SPL policy could be complex and difficult to understand. Participating staff reported that the complexity of SPL policy made it difficult to understand how the terms and eligibility compared with Maternity and Paternity Leave and Pay. One employee interviewed who took SML instead of SPL, stated she and her husband might have taken SPL if not because of its complexity, the reduction in pay and because she was wary of being the first person in her workplace to take it.

*“In all honesty, [SPL] sounded complicated. I couldn't understand how my employer would communicate with my husband's employer to cooperate to make that work. Also, finances seemed complicated... I assumed that it would mean we'd miss out financially... I get my enhanced maternity, so I didn't want to lose that [...] I think if this was ten, 15 years down the line and I'd seen a few people do it prior to me, then I would've been much more intrigued by it. But it's always scary, isn't it, being the first one to try something different, not knowing how it'll pan out.”*

(Female employee, Maternity Leave, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

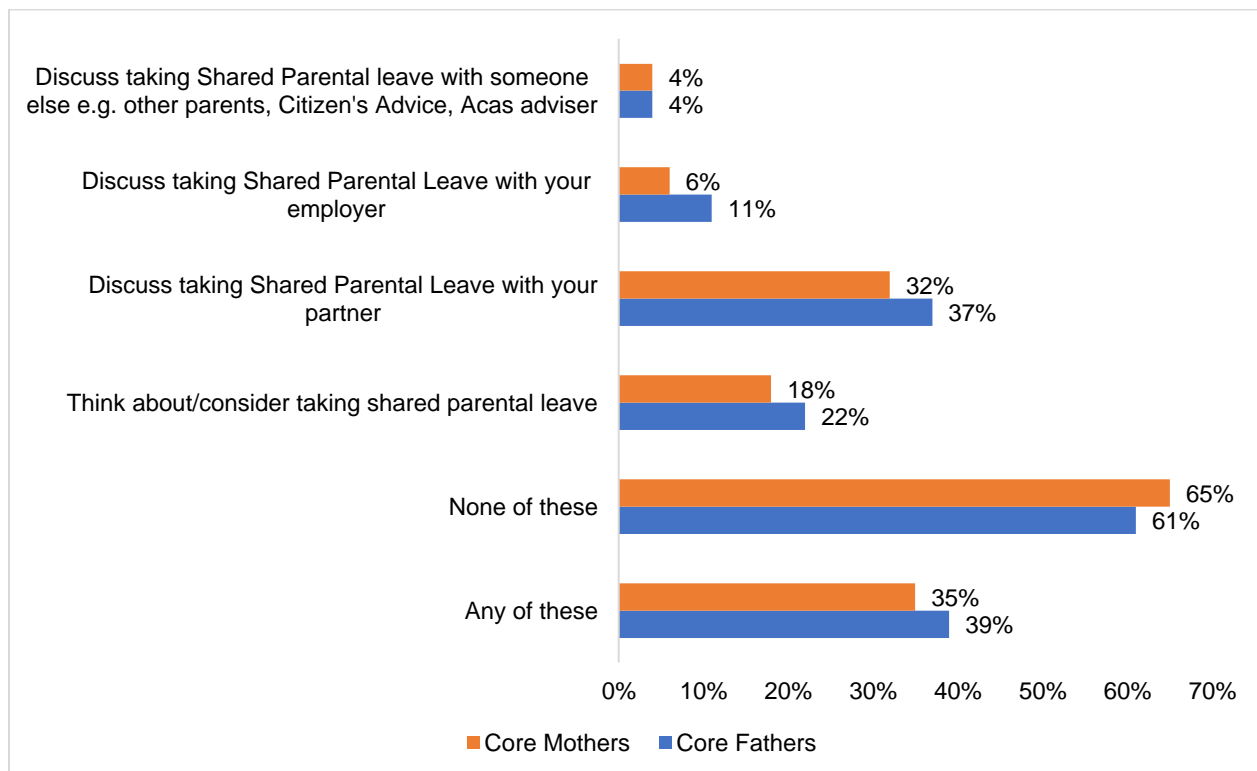
4.176) Senior managers noted that SPL was seen as complicated due to the flexibility built into the policy, to the point that employees and line managers struggled to understand what would work best. Additionally, senior managers also commented that the additional complexity of having to deal with another employer was also a factor behind the lack of promotion of SPL in the workplace. Even in receptive and supportive workplaces, barriers such as the lack of understanding of the logistics of coordinating leave, overcame management support for any requests for SPL. One Senior manager cited that no one had taken SPL because “nobody understands it”. The lack of notable concern for the scheme's complexity may have been because many parents who did not take SPL did not look into the details and mechanisms of it closely.

4.177) Larger employers and workplaces with experience of SPL do report complexity of the scheme in setting up and managing SPL in practice as a disadvantage of the scheme. For workplaces, arranging cover for intermittent absences (to accommodate both continuous and discontinuous blocks of leave) could be seen to be disruptive and impacts other employees. Complexity could be perceived as a barrier to take-up and support for the scheme among parents and employers.

## If Shared Parental Leave was not taken, was it considered or discussed with their partner or employer?

4.178) Half of mothers (51%) and two in five fathers (42%) had at least small amount of knowledge of SPL. Among this group with a small amount of knowledge of the scheme, around two thirds did not give any consideration to taking it (65% of mothers and 61% of fathers) (Figure 4.28). However, 37% of fathers and 32% of mothers that did not take SPL but had a small knowledge of the policy did discuss taking SPL with their partner.

**Figure 4.28: Whether parents considered taking SPL**



Base: Where SPL was not taken, but had at least a small amount of knowledge about it (Core mothers: 1056; Core Fathers: 429)  
Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.179) Moreover, for mothers who did know at least a small amount about SPL but did not take it, they believed this knowledge made no difference at all to how they planned to share childcare (79% of mothers) and for only around one in ten it made at least some difference (11%). Among fathers, a higher proportion felt their knowledge of SPL made at least some difference (20%), although two thirds felt it made no difference (66%).

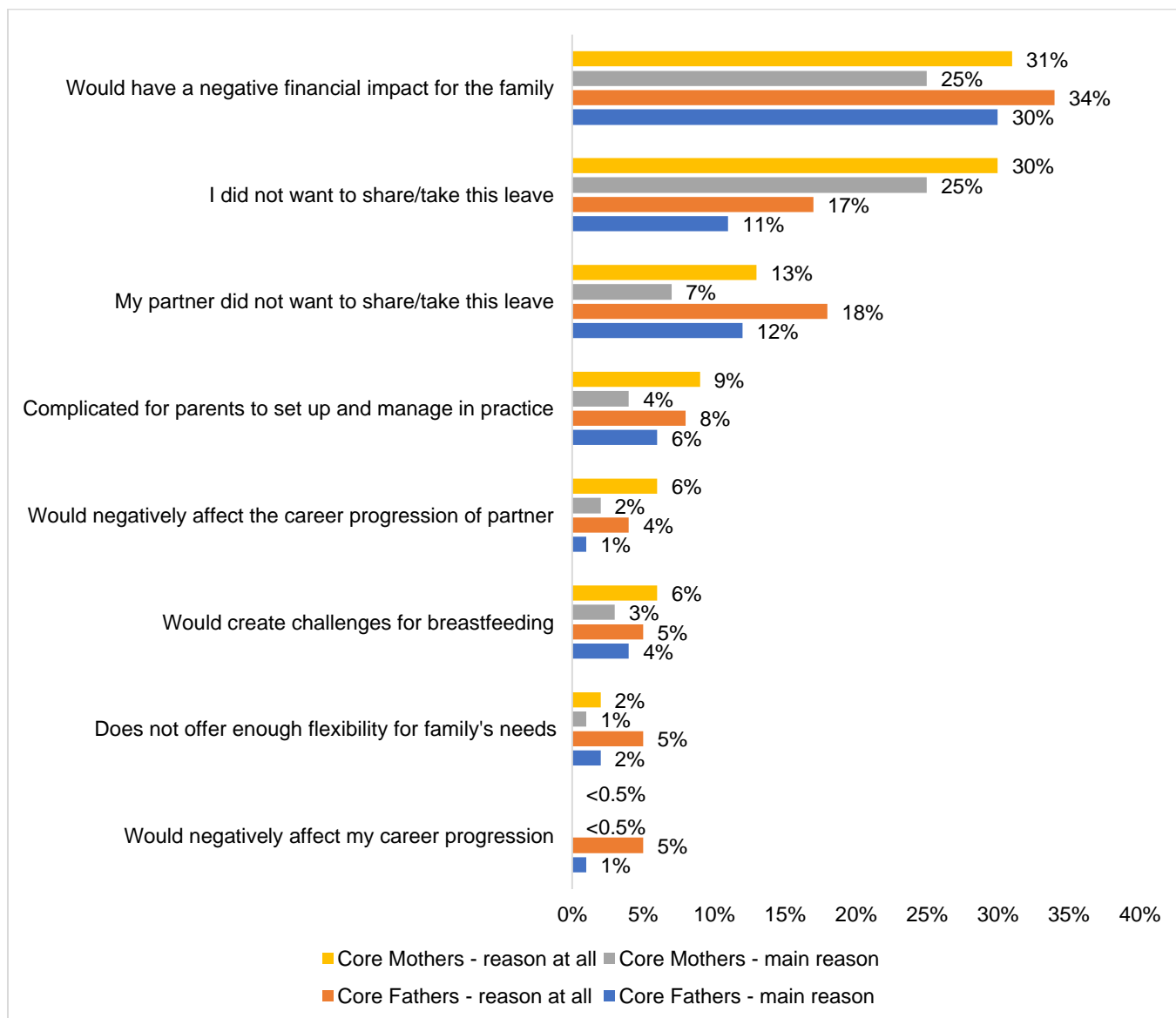
## Financial constraints

4.180) When asked about the reasons why they did not take SPL, one in four mothers and one in three fathers surveyed in the survey of parents stated the negative financial impact was the main reason for not taking SPL (25% mothers and 30% fathers) (see **Figure 4.29**).

4.181) This is unsurprising, given the statutory ShPP offer, and the variation in parents who took SPL and parents in general. Parents who took SPL are likely to be older, with graduate-level qualifications and in higher paying jobs than parents in general. They are more likely to have a higher annual income and are therefore less likely to face the same financial

constraints as parents in general when taking time off work. Equally, SPL parents are much more likely to work for large organisations, and for the public sector, both of which are more likely to offer enhanced pay than smaller organisations or private sector employers.

**Figure 4.29: Reasons for not taking SPL**



Base: Where parents did not take SPL but had at least a small amount of knowledge about it, core mothers: 1056; core Fathers: 429)  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.182) Interestingly, the negative financial impact of SPL is mentioned as a reason for not taking SPL among a greater proportion of mothers whose partners income was at least £50,000 per annum at the time of birth (56%), or their household income at least £40,000 (41%).

4.183) This suggests that financial constraints to sharing leave are not just limited to low-income households, and mothers' decisions on leave-taking consider the impact on overall household earnings. This may be because households on relatively higher incomes face a proportionally greater loss to their earnings whilst on leave.<sup>88</sup> This is significant for uptake of

<sup>88</sup> Depending on the extent to which pay is enhanced from the statutory rate, if at all.

SPL because fathers earn significantly more than mothers on average,<sup>89</sup> so mothers may be aware that the impact on their household's financial status is disproportionately greater if fathers take longer periods of leave at the expense of mothers.<sup>90</sup>

4.184) Among fathers, the proportion that say they did not take SPL due to its financial impact is higher than average among those qualified below level 4 (42%); in skilled, process and elementary occupations (41%); living outside of London (41%) and who were at supervisory level (43%).

4.185) This suggests that affordability is a concern among many fathers and is again not limited to income level. Beyond this, of those fathers that did not take statutory leave at all, one in three say this was because they could not afford to, suggesting that financial constraints limit take-up of fathers across leave entitlements and is not limited to SPL.

4.186) These findings are consistent with the findings of qualitative research carried out by Birkett and Forbes (2019),<sup>91</sup> which also reported financial barriers as a key constraint on take-up of SPL, due to the low level of ShPP and higher earnings among males more generally. The research also showed that many mothers interviewed had access to Occupational Maternity Pay which would have been lost if they transferred their leave to their partner as SPL.

### Why was the full entitlement of Shared Parental Leave not taken?

4.187) The main reason cited amongst those who took SPL but did not take their full entitlement, was that they could not afford to (Figure 4.30). A further one in seven parents were worried about harming their career/business or said they or their partner took occupational or enhanced SMP; both of which may also be linked to financial concerns.

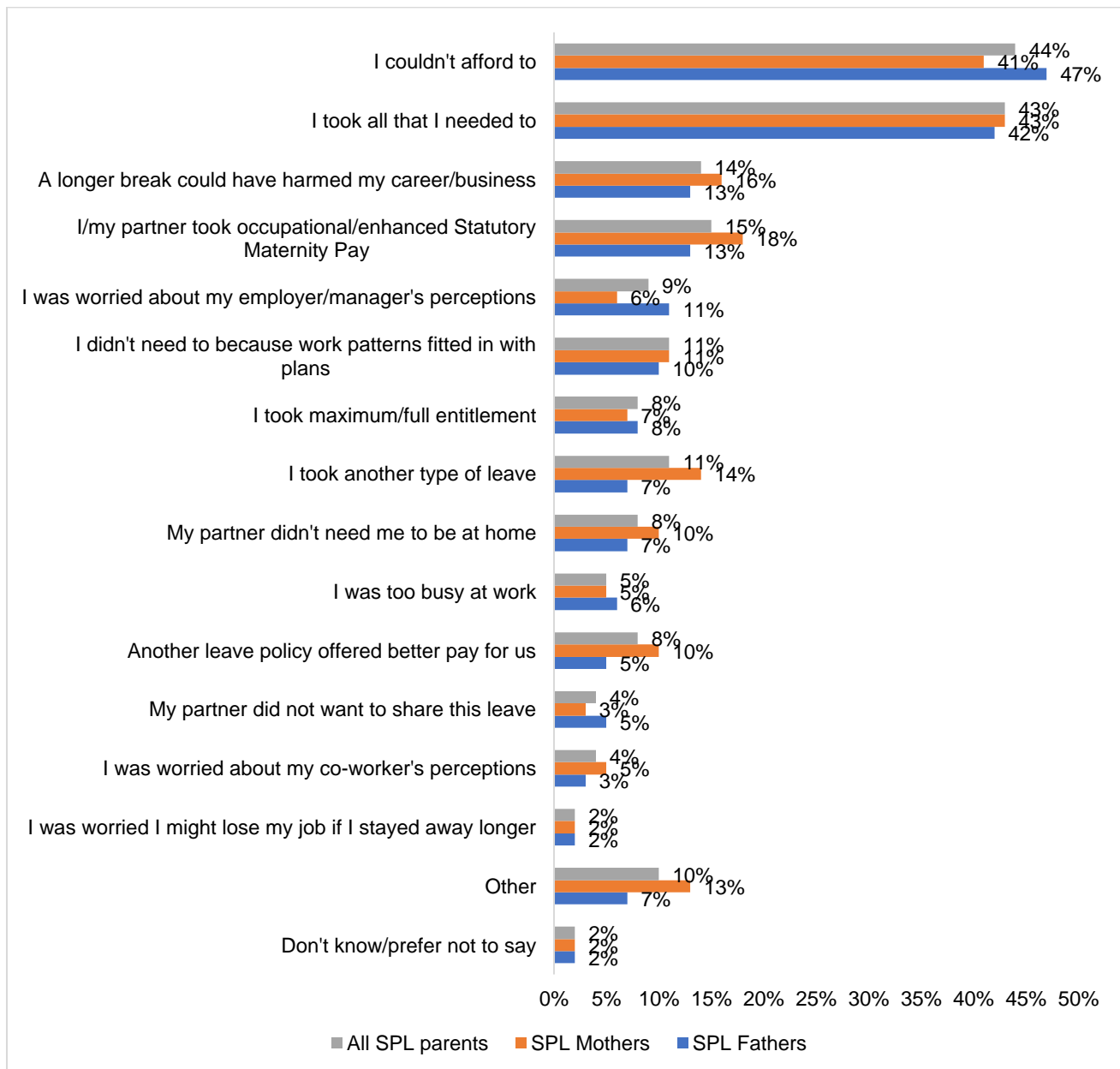
#### Figure 4.30: Reasons for not taking more SPL

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<sup>89</sup> On average mothers in the Parental Rights Survey were earning just under £17,200 per annum before having their child, compared with a significantly higher average of just under £28,900 among fathers.

<sup>90</sup> As fathers' access to SPL is in the mothers' gift and statutory ShPP and SMP offer different pay rates for the leave entitlements.

<sup>91</sup> Birkett, H., & Forbes, S. (2019). Where's dad? Exploring the low take-up of inclusive parenting policies in the UK. *Policy Studies*. 40:2, 205-224, DOI: 10.1080/01442872.2019.1581160



Base: Employees and workers that took less than 50 weeks SPL (SPL parents 261; SPL mothers 125; core fathers 136)  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

4.188) Qualitative research also found that workplaces considered the statutory ShPP offer to be insufficient and impeded uptake when employers offered statutory ShPP without enhancement.

4.189) For example, a female employee in a same-sex relationship was the primary earner in her household. She took a shorter period of leave (16 weeks) than her partner as she would receive enhanced ShPP at full pay for that period. She noted that, while she wanted to spend time with their child, her family could not lose such a large part of their income. Similar views were expressed by a male employee in an opposite-sex relationship who earned a similar amount of money to his wife and took three months' SPL as he received enhanced ShPP at full pay for that period.

4.190) Senior managers reported that those who took SPL tended to be those on higher salaries. For example, a senior manager in a Higher Education setting noted that employees on higher pay bands (e.g. academics, professional services, and HR staff) took SPL more often than employees on lower pay bands (e.g. administrative, manual, and clerical staff). Similarly, parents who took SPL for Adoption also tended to be those on higher salaries.

## Workplace culture

4.191) Whilst employer support – for example via an encouraging workplace culture or access to family-friendly policies and enhanced pay – was cited by survey and interview respondents as a key enabling factor to taking SPL, unsupportive workplaces with a more traditional focus on supporting mothers to take Maternity Leave, were also cited as a barrier to take-up of SPL. In particular, the qualitative research noted potential difficulties of overcoming strong cultural norms around gender, parenting and work.

4.192) In what were described as ‘hesitant’ participant workplaces, the negatives of SPL were seen as outweighing the positives due to financial costs and the challenges of covering workload over leave periods. Though senior leaders were supportive of the idea of SPL, in reality they were more comfortable with women taking time off to care for a new child and were not familiar with men wanting to do this. Statutory ShPP was typically offered without any enhancements.

4.193) Hesitant workplaces were supportive of family-friendly employment practices, such as Maternity Leave or part-time hours, but had historically focused on supporting mothers rather than fathers. It was seen as the norm for women to take Maternity Leave after having a child; in contrast, some workplaces were unaccustomed to men and women taking shorter periods of leave, possibly in discontinuous blocks. Taking Maternity Leave was perceived as not optional for female employees, whereas taking parental leave was perceived as optional for men. For example, a line manager, who was male, expressed discomfort with the idea of taking a period of SPL himself:

*“From my point of view, from a, in my role, I think taking that period of time off, I wouldn't - this is just personally - I wouldn't necessarily feel all that comfortable...”*

(Male line manager, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

4.194) This attitude could be felt by employees at the same workplace (a Sixth-Form colleague, which had no take-up of SPL). For example, one employee interviewee noted that although it is positive to have a parental leave policy that enabled greater equality in sharing leave and childcare responsibilities, the cultural expectations that men will prioritise work and women will prioritise children remains. It is the norm for mothers to take one year's Maternity Leave rather than SPL whilst at her partner's workplace, it would be considered very unusual for her husband to take SPL. Together, these attitudes deterred her and her partner from taking SPL:

*“[If we had taken SPL], [my husband's] bosses would've assumed that he wasn't committed to the role and that he was going to be somehow flaky. Unfortunately, he works in a fast-paced environment where people are very replaceable and they are commission-based, so the more you work, the more you can commit, the better you do for yourself and the company. I just don't think it fits with the culture of being a man or the culture of working in sales for you to take any sort of extended period of time off work, whereas a female teacher taking a year off after*

*she's had a baby, completely the norm, completely expected that that's what you would do."*

(Female employee, Maternity Leave, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

4.195) Discouraging cultural attitudes were noted amongst colleagues as well as employers. For example, one male employee who had taken six weeks of SPL, said that while his immediate line manager and colleagues had been fully supportive, other colleagues were less understanding and had teased him about taking leave:

*"There are a lot of people that's been here a long time, and there are a lot of very old-fashioned views, is probably the polite way to put it. There's a lot of jokey, 'Wife's job to bring up the kids. You should be out working. Why are you taking time off?'"*

(Male employee, SPL, local authority, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

4.196) This was a view consistently shared among employees working in the utility company, and information and communication sectors as well as in Further Education. The research found that workplaces with male-dominated departments or older male staff who have views contrasting with the wider workplace could influence decision-making. Under the typical expectation that women will be the primary care giver and fathers will go back to work, male employees could feel as if it is inappropriate to take SPL:

*"They may feel they are pushing it... taking advantage of a new legislation and change in society"*

(Male line manager, Higher Education, female-dominated extra-large employer)

4.197) The discouraging effects of a workplace culture was also found to be prevalent amongst interviewees in Birkett and Forbes' (2019) study, where some respondents noted the negative attitudes of co-workers about fathers' actively taking on childcare responsibilities as off-putting.<sup>92</sup>

### Difficulties finding cover for absences due to Shared Parental Leave

4.198) Some participant workplaces in the qualitative research mentioned the difficulties in finding cover for absences due to parental leave, which could present a barrier. Office-based roles with shared workloads were considered easier to cover than more senior or specialist roles and/or operational roles.

4.199) For example, a line manager in Further Education noted that, for employees in senior roles such as head of department, it would not be practical to take short blocks of leave because there would not be enough support to cover the absence. Notably, at this workplace, no employees had taken SPL:

*"It just wouldn't be feasible to just take, for the next one, to take two months off, three months off, to, and leave the department as it is because there just isn't enough support for people."*

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<sup>92</sup> Birkett, H., & Forbes, S. (2019). Where's dad? Exploring the low take-up of inclusive parenting policies in the UK. *Policy Studies*. 40:2, 205-224, DOI: 10.1080/01442872.2019.1581160



(Male line manager, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

4.200) One in ten managers in workplaces (MWPS, 2018-19) also mentioned the need to arrange cover for staff as a disadvantage to SPL. The same proportion also cited the negative impact on running the business (10%) and the loss in staff (9%) **Error! Reference source not found.** However, the concern for the costs of reorganisation did not seem as impactful for those workplaces where an employee had taken SPL in the last two years, reducing to only 2% who considered the loss of staff a disadvantage. Workplaces with experience of SPL were, however, more likely to cite that SPL was complex to set up and manage (16%) than workplaces overall (9%).

## Policy design

4.201) The SPL system is designed to ensure mothers still have the right to 52 weeks of Maternity Leave and 39 weeks of pay if they want to use their full maternity entitlements, whilst enabling them to 'share' some of their maternity entitlements with the child's father/their partner (as SPL and ShPP), if they choose to return to work or end their Maternity Pay period early.<sup>93</sup> The policy also enables eligible parents to be at home together for up to six months if they wish.

4.202) The survey of parents found that for mothers who did not take SPL, a third stated this was because they did not want to share their leave and a quarter of mothers cited not wanting to share leave as a main reason for not taking SPL (see Figure 4.29). A lower proportion of fathers said their partners did not want to share or take this leave (18%), with 12% citing this as a main reason for not taking SPL. This is unsurprising, given that the majority of mothers said they took the leave they took, predominantly Maternity Leave, because they wanted to mainly look after the child themselves.

4.203) This suggests that the design of the SPL system, with fathers' access to SPL and ShPP in the mothers' 'gift' via transfer of maternity entitlements, can act as a barrier to father' taking advantage of access to longer periods of parental leave, if a significant proportion of mothers do not want to share their leave with the child's father/mother's partner.

4.204) Birkett and Forbes (2019) also point out the negative effects of 'maternal gatekeeping' in their paper on take-up of SPL,<sup>94</sup> where some fathers interviewed mentioned they wanted to take SPL but were overruled by their partners who wanted to take their full maternity entitlement. They also point out that fathers' perceptions around their partner's wants/needs could have a constraining effect, if fathers did not ask the mother about SPL because they assumed their partner would prefer to have the full length of Maternity Leave.<sup>95</sup> This is linked to the effects of prevailing cultural norms of the mother as the primary carer.

4.205) Survey data from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) shows that parents who are married and living with their partner are significantly more likely to take-up SPL (81% of SPL parents are married, compared with 71% of core fathers and 46% of core mothers), suggesting that relationship status matters in take-up of the entitlement. The orientation of the policy towards two-parent relationships, may help explain low take-up rates amongst young mothers

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<sup>93</sup> See 'How Shared Parental Leave and Pay works' (p.8) for a detailed description of the SPL system, including a description of the eligibility criteria mothers and fathers must satisfy to access the entitlement.

<sup>94</sup> Birkett, H., & Forbes, S. (2019). Where's dad? Exploring the low take-up of inclusive parenting policies in the UK. *Policy Studies*. 40:2, 205-224, DOI: 10.1080/01442872.2019.1581160

<sup>95</sup> The researchers also identified 'paternal gatekeeping' as a barrier, where fathers' presumptions about mothers' entitlement to leave (incl. that it is necessary for breastfeeding) and their concern about the negative impact on their careers influenced uptake of SPL.

or those from a Black ethnic background: the proportion of new mothers who are lone parents (25% overall) rises to 57% for mothers under 25 years and 52% among mothers of Black ethnic groups.

## 5. Has the policy increased shared parenting?

*This section of the evaluation explores attitudes and perspectives on childcare and shared parenting and whether parents who take SPL are more likely to share childcare responsibilities equally post-birth. It discusses whether fathers' willingness to take a more active caring role is a motivator to taking SPL and whether parents taking SPL are more likely to go on to share childcare responsibilities equally after the leave period has ended.*

### Key findings

NatCen's British Social Attitudes Survey series has recorded a consistent shift in public attitudes towards gender equal work and caring responsibilities over time. Since 2012, the proportion of the public supporting sharing parental leave equally between the mother and father has increased and the share of respondents supporting the mother taking the majority or all of the leave has also reduced. Similarly, findings show those favouring the father as the sole or main family breadwinner has decreased from two-thirds (69%) in 2012 to half (51%) in 2018.

There has been an increase over time in the proportion of mothers that say their partner regularly looks after their child while they are at work. For parents that took SPL a much higher proportion than compared with mothers and fathers generally said that responsibilities for childcare arrangements are an equal combination of them and their partner.

SPL mothers are more likely than mothers generally to report sharing childcare as a factor influencing the type of leave they took and to report more equal responsibilities for childcare. SPL fathers were over twice as likely (62%) than fathers in general (23%) to cite wanting to share childcare as the main factor influencing their decision on which type of parental leave to take. Fathers who take SPL are more likely to be motivated to use their leave as an opportunity to assume childcare responsibilities and make use of the flexibility for childcare.

The majority (85%) of SPL parents reported using some form of formal childcare in the previous week, whereas just over a third of mothers and fathers more generally (36% respectively) reported using any formal childcare.

SPL parents are more able and willing to outsource childcare arrangements beyond their partner/relatives, which would be expected given that they're more likely to work full-time, be on higher incomes on average and have more progressive attitudes.

Around two in five parents that took SPL say that their leave has made a difference to how they plan to share childcare responsibilities in the next 12 months to a 'high' or 'very high'

extent, compared with only a small minority of mothers and fathers in general (4% and 8% respectively).

SPL fathers are more likely than fathers overall to cite allowing both parents to have a full role in caring for the child as a positive consequence of the leave that they took. Fathers that took SPL are also three times as likely to mention that their leave enabled them to spend time/bond with their child (30% compared to 10% of fathers), and four times as likely to say that it enabled the mother to go back to work earlier. Amongst parents who took SPL, their experiences of the scheme have facilitated a more shared approach to parenting once the leave period had ended. Mothers who take SPL are more willing to share childcare responsibilities with their partner than mothers generally and their experiences of the scheme have facilitated a more shared approach to parenting once the leave period had ended.

## Attitudes and perspectives on childcare and shared parenting

### Is paid leave perceived as important for childcare?

5.1) The British Social Attitudes Survey asked the public and parents in 2018 about their attitudes towards paid parental leave.<sup>96</sup> Among the British public, the vast majority (88%) agreed that parents of a new-born child should have access to paid leave enabling them to take time-off work; only one in ten (10%) disagree and say parents should not be eligible for any paid leave. This view is consistent over time and has not changed significantly since 2012.

5.2) Most of the public also think that parental leave should be shared between the mother and the father, though views are more varied on the extent to which it should be shared. Four in ten (40%) think most of the leave should be taken by the mother with the father taking some, one in three (34%) think parents should share the leave period equally, and a further one in ten (12%) think that the mother should take the entire leave period. Almost none of the respondents thought the father should take most or all of the leave.

5.3) There are more noticeable changes in the public's attitudes towards sharing parental leave since 2012, prior to the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay scheme. Over time, the proportion of the public supporting sharing parental leave equally between the mother and father has increased by 12 percentage points, from 22% in 2012 to 34% in 2018. The proportion of respondents supporting the mother taking the majority or all of leave has also reduced. Whilst the data suggests public attitudes are shifting in alignment with the policy change, it is unclear the extent to which this attitude shift can be directly attributed to the policy.

5.4) Parents that took SPL were almost universally (94%) in agreement that men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children. For parents that took SPL a much higher proportion (66%) than compared with mothers (26%) and fathers (43%) generally said that responsibilities for childcare arrangements are an equal combination of them and their

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<sup>96</sup> Curtice, J., Clery, E., Perry, J., Phillips M. and Rahim, N. (eds.) (2019), British Social Attitudes: The 36th Report, London: The National Centre for Social Research. Accessed from: [http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39363/bsa\\_36.pdf](http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39363/bsa_36.pdf)

partner. Parents that took SPL were also much more likely than mothers and fathers generally to have used some form of childcare in the previous week, with just 6% that said no one else had looked after their child, compared with 36% of mothers and 45% of fathers.

5.5) The findings outlined above, show that mothers who take SPL are more willing to share childcare responsibilities with their partner than mothers generally and their experiences of the scheme have facilitated a more shared approach to parenting once the leave period had ended.

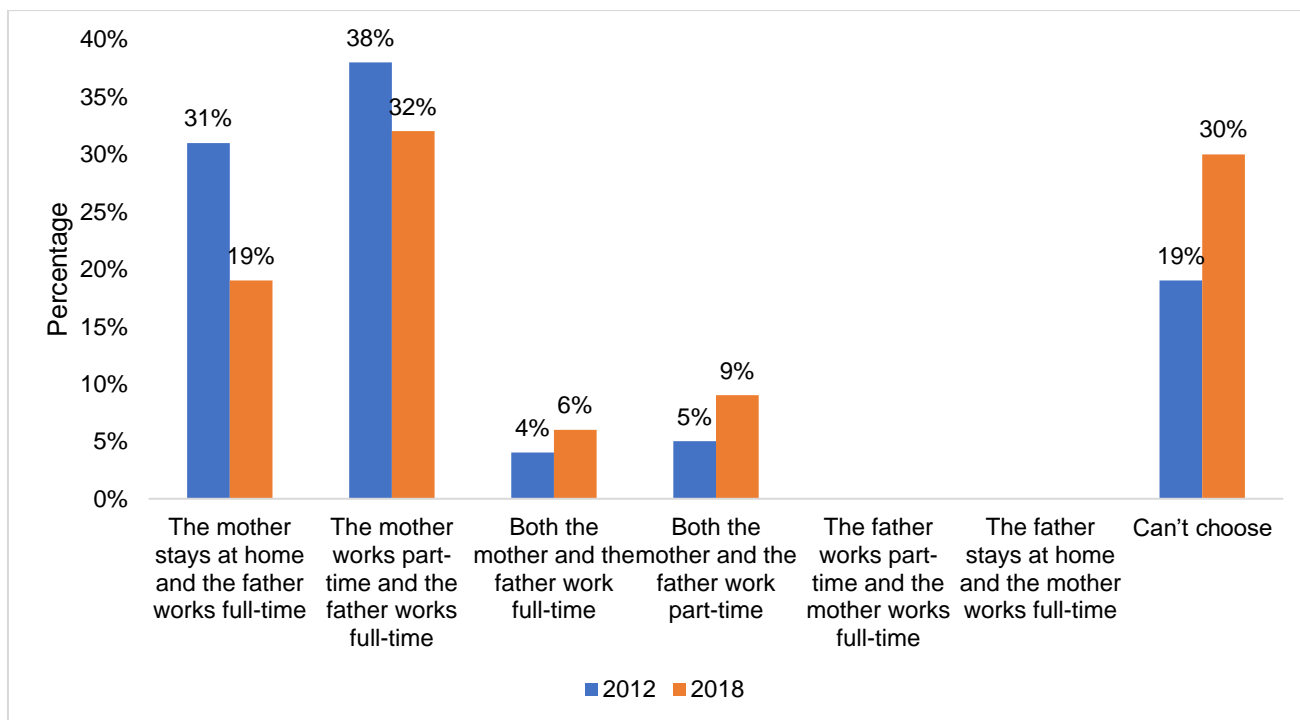
### To what extent have attitudes towards shared parenting changed since the introduction of Shared Parental Leave?

5.6) The British Social Attitudes survey asks adults aged 18 and over living in private households in Great Britain what is the best way for a family with a child under school age to organise family and work life (see Figure 5.1). Agreement with the statement ‘the mother stays at home and the father works full time’ has reduced from under a third in 2012 (31%) to less than a fifth (19%) of the British public in 2018. The mother works part-time and the father works full-time has decreased slightly over time (from 38 in 2012 to 32% in 2018). Findings show those favouring the father as the sole or main family breadwinner has decreased from two-thirds (69%) in 2012 to half (51%) in 2018.

5.7) In contrast, the proportion of respondents who think that both parents should work part-time has almost doubled, from 5% to 9%, and the proportion of those who think both the mother and father should work full-time has also increased, from 4% to 6%.

5.8) An increasing proportion of adults can’t choose, from one-fifth (19%) in 2012 to one-third (30%) in 2018. These findings suggest that UK public attitudes towards gender roles in work and at home are becoming more equal, but there is no clear consensus regarding how a couple should organise their work and family life.

#### **Figure 5.1: Views on the best way for a family with a child under school age to organise family and work life, 2012 and 2018**



Base: Adults aged 18 or over living in private households in Britain (2012: 950; 2018: 1,504)

Blank columns are where there is no data

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey (2012 and 2018)

5.9) These trends are consistent with the broader change in attitudes recorded by the BSAS since 1987, where support has steadily declined for arrangements where the mother plays the main caring role. In authors Scott and Clery's (2013) analysis of this pattern,<sup>97</sup> they attribute this shift to differences between generations, as views of older generations who ascribe to more traditional gender attitudes are replaced by views held by younger generations with more gender-neutral beliefs.

5.10) Findings from the survey series of parents report an increase over time in the proportion of mothers that say their partner regularly looks after their child while they are at work, from 51%\* in 2009 to 57% in 2019.

5.11) Overall, attitudes towards shared work and caring responsibilities have changed since the introduction of SPL and form part of broader shifts in public attitudes towards gender equal work and caring responsibilities that have occurred over time.

5.12) Qualitative research findings suggest that, amongst parents who took SPL, their experiences of the scheme have facilitated a more shared approach to parenting once the leave period had ended.

5.13) Within the qualitative research, employees reported that taking SPL influenced their parenting in two ways: it either enabled and solidified their intended shared parenting approach or created an opportunity for shared parenting going forward in a way that was not expected.

<sup>97</sup> Scott, J. and Clery, E. (2013), Gender roles. An incomplete revolution? in Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J. and Phillips, M. (eds.), British Social Attitudes: the 30th report, London: The National Centre for Social Research. Accessed from: [http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38723/bsa30\\_full\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38723/bsa30_full_report_final.pdf)

5.14) For example, a male employee decided to split 12 months' SPL equally with his partner because they felt passionate about modelling gender equality and shared parenting in their relationship. When reflecting on the effects of SPL, he felt that splitting leave 50:50 had set a precedent to split childcare equally going forward. When he and his partner had both returned to work, tasks like drop-off at day care and taking days off when their child was unwell were shared equally "by default."

5.15) Equally, for employees who did not consider sharing childcare a strong driver in their decision-making, they still reported similar reflections on sharing responsibilities going forward. For example, a male employee who took four weeks of discontinuous leave described how taking SPL had changed his understanding of the ways parental responsibilities could be shared:

*"...it's broadened my horizons, as far as I understand how you should be able to actually share responsibilities, yes? Both maternal and paternal. So, I've been there through the day, even though it's been for two weeks, to be able to still share that kind of responsibility of bringing a child up."*

(Male employee, SPL, utility company, male-dominated, extra-large employer)

5.16) When employees took SPL for a second child, they were able to reflect on how their parenting roles changed. They found that taking SPL enabled them to share parenting responsibilities more equally with their second child compared with taking previous Maternity, Paternity or Adoption Leave for their first child. This meant that childcare felt much more like a shared responsibility and that these employees felt better able to bond with their new arrival as well as older children.

### **Is fathers' willingness to spend more time with their children in the early years a motivator for take-up of Shared Parental Leave?**

5.17) It is helpful to reiterate findings on fathers' willingness to take on childcare responsibilities as a driver for take-up of SPL, before discussing outcomes from taking SPL.

5.18) There is some evidence from the survey of parents that SPL fathers' desire to bond with their child in its first year was a factor underpinning the take-up of SPL. In particular, SPL fathers were over twice as likely (62%) than fathers in general (23%) to cite wanting to share childcare as the main factor influencing their decision on which type of parental leave to take.

5.19) In terms of factors that helped parents take the leave they took, SPL fathers were also significantly more likely to cite the flexibility their leave offered for caring responsibilities (26% compared with 4% of fathers overall).

5.20) This indicates that fathers who take SPL are more likely to be motivated to use their leave as an opportunity to assume childcare responsibilities and make use of the flexibility for childcare, compared with fathers who only take Paternity Leave.

5.21) Qualitative research also reported that fathers who took a block of SPL lasting six weeks or more cited wanting to spend more time with their new-born children in order to bond. Interestingly, this was especially the case for fathers who took SPL for their second child, following use of Paternity Leave for their first child; some fathers reported feeling they had missed out previously and wanted a different experience.

## Are mothers who take Shared Parental Leave more willing to share childcare responsibilities?

5.22) As discussed previously (Gender role attitudes 4.1.3), findings from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) show that SPL mothers are more likely than mothers overall to hold progressive views in terms of gender role attitudes, with 94% agreeing that men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children, compared with 84% of mothers.

5.23) Evidence suggests that SPL mothers are more likely than mothers generally to report sharing childcare as a factor influencing the type of leave they took and to report more equal responsibilities for childcare.

5.24) This can be seen in the varying motivations underpinning take-up of the leave mothers took. The vast majority of SPL mothers (81%) stated wanting to share childcare with their partner as a factor influencing their decision to take the leave they chose (compared to just 6% of all mothers). In contrast, 84% of all mothers say a factor influencing their decision on the type of leave they took was to look after their child themselves compared with around half of SPL mothers (53%). Significantly, fewer SPL mothers than fathers stated wanting to share childcare as the main reason influencing the type of leave they took (reported among 49% of SPL mothers and 62% of SPL fathers). This suggests that, though important for both mothers and fathers, the benefits of SPL to facilitate sharing childcare was far more important for fathers, particularly as SPL enables access to greater leave entitlement.

5.25) Figure 5.2 shows SPL mothers are also more than twice as likely than mothers generally to say that planning and arranging childcare is an equal responsibility between them and their partner (60% compared to 26% of mothers overall). Seven in ten mothers say planning and arranging childcare is predominantly their responsibility (71%), compared with less than two-fifths of SPL mothers (38%).

5.26) Interestingly, fewer SPL mothers (47%) said their partner regularly looks after their child while they go to work compared with over half of employee mothers (57%), though this might be because far more SPL parents use formal childcare (four-fifths) than non-SPL parents (36%).

5.27) Just 8% of fathers say they are mainly responsible for childcare, and half say their partner is the main adult responsible for childcare arrangements. Fathers (43%) are more likely than mothers (26%) to say it is an equal combination of them and their partner.

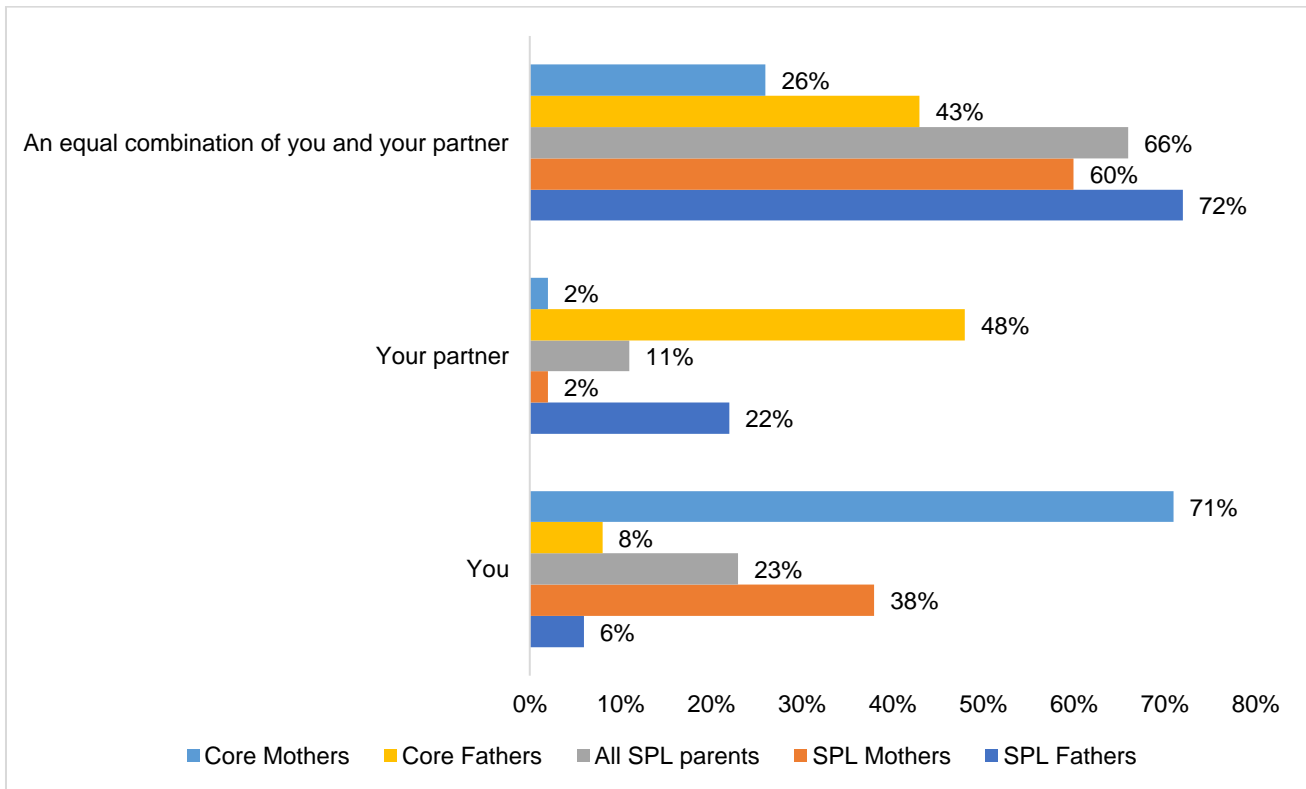
5.28) This is despite 84% of mothers and 86% of fathers agreeing that men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children (compared to 94% of SPL parents), suggesting a disconnect amongst parents who didn't take SPL between their views on gender roles and organising childcare responsibilities.

5.29) This can possibly be explained by Poortman and Van der Lippe's (2009) research on the relationship between gender attitudes and caring responsibilities,<sup>98</sup> which found that gendered attitudes towards childcare (e.g. division of responsibility) were relatively unimportant to involvement in childcare in practice.

### Figure 5.2: The main adult responsible for planning and arranging childcare arrangements

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<sup>98</sup> Poortman, A., & Van der Lippe, T. (2009). Attitudes toward housework and childcare and the gendered division of labor. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71: 526–541



Base: Core mothers: 1959; Core Fathers: 1062; Parents that took SPL: 336; SPL Mothers: 181; SPL Fathers: 155  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

5.30) This indicates SPL parents are more able and willing to outsource childcare arrangements beyond their partner/relatives, which would be expected given that they're more likely to work full-time, be on higher incomes on average and have more progressive attitudes.

## Childcare and shared parenting arrangements among SPL recipients

5.31) This next section looks at childcare arrangements and the division of unpaid work among SPL parents and parents who do not take SPL.

### What are the current childcare arrangements of parents who take Shared Parental Leave, and how do these compare with parents who do not take Shared Parental Leave?

5.32) The Parental Rights Survey (2019) asked parents what type of childcare they had used, if any, in the week prior to the interview. Figure 5.3 shows that parents that took SPL are much more likely than mothers and fathers generally to have used some form of childcare in the previous week, with just 6% saying no one else had looked after their child.

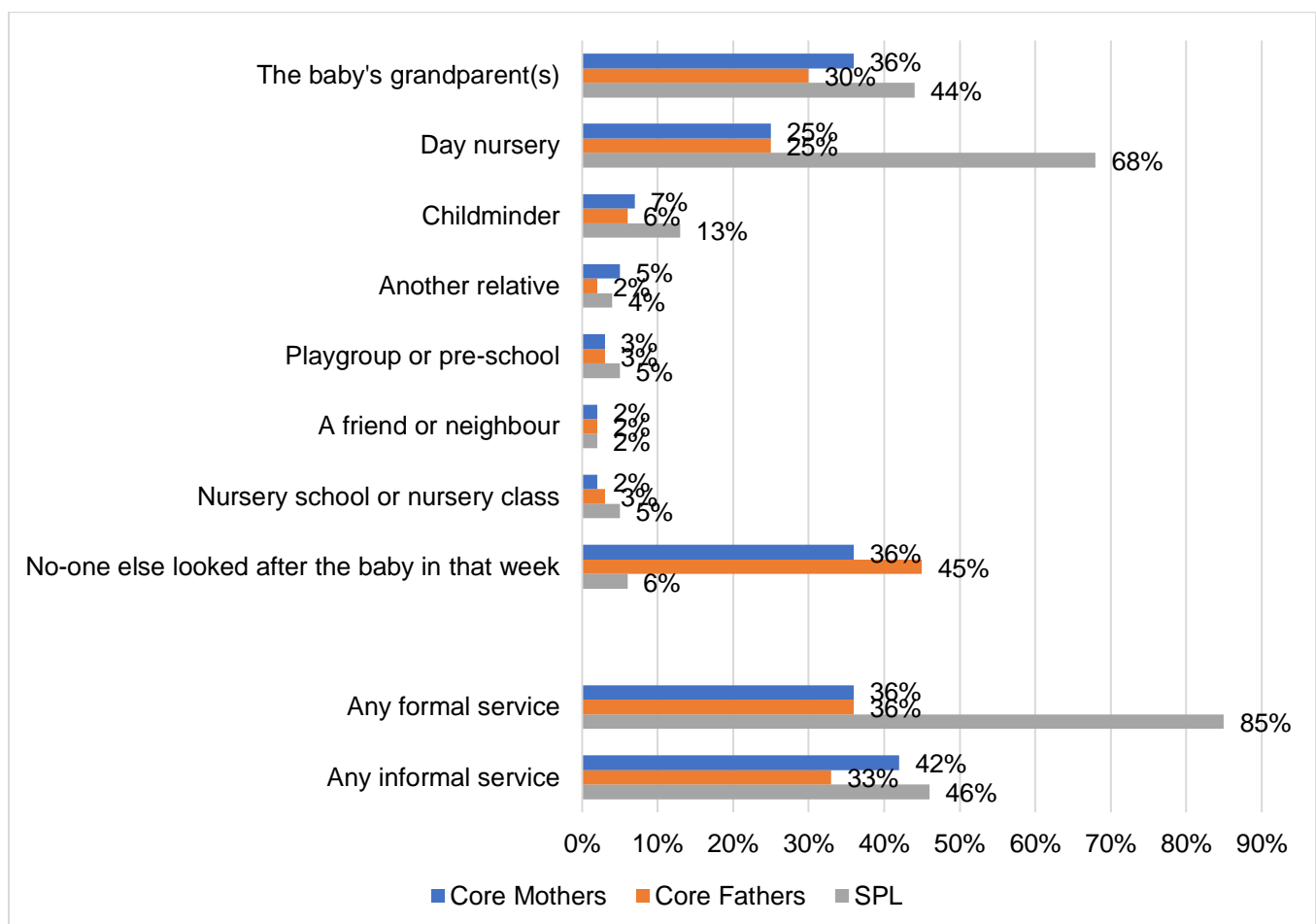
5.33) The majority (85%) of SPL parents reported using some form of formal childcare in the previous week, whereas just over a third of mothers and fathers more generally (36% respectively) reported using any formal childcare.



5.34) By far the predominant response among SPL parents was that they used day nurseries (68%), compared to one in four mothers and fathers generally. On average SPL parents used a day nursery for 26.5 hours a week compared to 18 hours a week for mothers and 20 hours a week for fathers in general.

5.35) SPL parents were also more likely to use the baby's grandparent(s), reported by over two fifths of SPL parents compared to around a third of mothers and fathers overall.

**Figure 5.3: Childcare used in the previous week**



Base: Core mothers: 1959; Core Fathers: 1062; Parents that took SPL: 336

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

5.36) This is unsurprising given that SPL parents are more likely to work full time (82% of SPL mothers and 97% of SPL fathers compared to 61% of mothers and 91% of fathers). SPL parents are also more likely to be higher earners on average (£43,500) than mothers (£17,200) and fathers (£28,900) overall and potentially more able to afford the cost of formal childcare.

### How much unpaid work is carried out by men and women since the introduction of SPL?

5.37) ONS provide time series estimates on the amount of time spent per day on unpaid work by gender.<sup>99</sup> Data for 2020 shows that since 2015, time spent on unpaid work in Great Britain has increased for males by 22 minutes and decreased by 20 minutes for females (Table 5.1).

<sup>99</sup> ONS (2020) Online Time Use Survey, March-April 2020, Office for National Statistics:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/satelliteaccounts/bulletins/coronavirusandhowpeoplespenttheirtimeunderrestrictions/28marchto26april2020>

The gap in time spent doing unpaid work between men and women has reduced from 1 hour 50 minutes to 1 hour 7 minutes a day. Since the introduction of SPL time spent on unpaid work among men and women is to some extent more equal, however the 2020 data largely reflects the effects of social distancing measures. It is therefore difficult to isolate any changes in time use to the SPL policy.

**Table 5.1: Time spent in unpaid work by gender, 2015 and 2020, minutes per day**

	2015		2020	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Great Britain	122.7	232.8	145.2	212.3

Note: Unpaid work is defined as, 'unpaid childcare and unpaid household work (excluding travel and childcare).

5.38) In terms of childcare, the Parental Rights Survey (2019) found that on average mothers say their partner regularly looks after their child for 18 hours per week. The average is the same among SPL parents, while among fathers their partners look after their child for an average of 34 hours per week while they work. The comparable average amongst SPL parents with mothers generally might be because the working patterns of SPL patterns overall are more similar to fathers than mothers and because of the predominant use of formal childcare options by SPL parents (see section 5.2.1 above).

## Effects of shared parenting

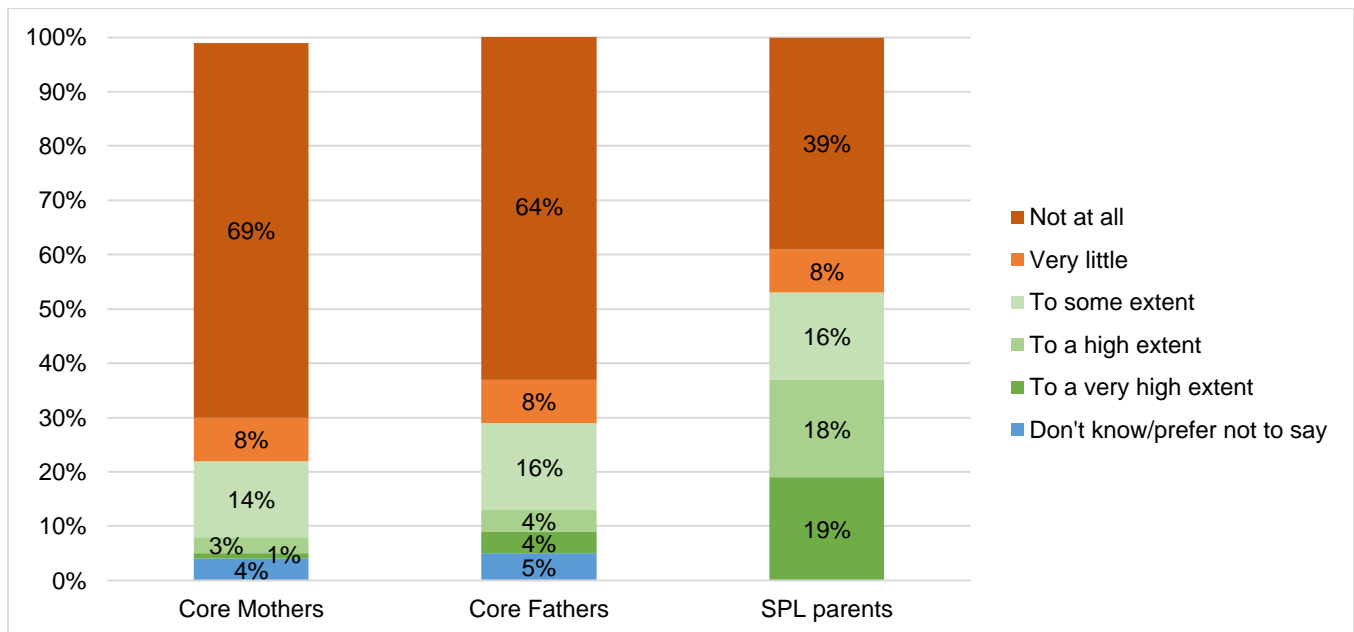
### Are fathers who take Shared Parental Leave more likely to continue to share childcare responsibility in the early years of their child's life?

5.39) Fathers who take SPL report that they are more likely to continue to share childcare responsibilities in the child's early years and that their experience on SPL has positively influenced this.

5.40) Survey data found that SPL parents are most likely to indicate that their leave has made a difference to how they plan to share childcare at least to some extent (53%), compared with fewer mothers (19%) and fathers from the core sample (24%).

5.41) Around two in five parents that took SPL say that their leave has made a difference to childcare responsibilities to a 'high' or 'very high' extent, compared with only a small minority of mothers and fathers in general (4% and 8% respectively) (Figure 5.4). More than three in five mothers and fathers (69% and 64%) say that it has 'not at all' made any difference to childcare plans over the next 12 months, compared with fewer parents that took SPL (39%). Slightly more SPL fathers than SPL mothers considered SPL to have made a difference to at least some extent (57% compared to 49%).

**Figure 5.4: Whether leave has made any difference to how they plan to share childcare responsibilities in the next 12 months**



Base: Core mothers: 1,959; Core fathers: 1,062; Parents that took SPL: 336  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

5.42) This suggests that fathers' experience of SPL has positively impacted intentions to continue sharing childcare responsibilities in the first year, after the leave period has ended.

5.43) Research undertaken by Tanaka and Waldfogel (2007) using data from the Millennium Cohort Study<sup>100</sup> found that father' leave-taking after the birth had significant positive effects on fathers' involvement in care when the child is eight to twelve months. Fathers who took any leave after the birth were 25% more likely to change diapers, 19% more likely to feed the baby, and 19% more likely to get up at night when the child is age 8 months to 12 months, than fathers who took no leave. The authors conclude that policies that provide parental leave are likely to improve father's involvement in their child's care in the first 12 months.

5.44) Analysing fathers' leave-taking in Germany, Tamm (2019) points out that the time fathers spent on childcare significantly increases if fathers took up the two months of leave reserved for fathers only ('daddy months'), and that this effect persists up to six years after childbirth.<sup>101</sup>

5.45) Tamm's findings are reflected in the qualitative research, which found that fathers who took SPL wanted to continue shared parenting after the leave period ended. For example, a male employee in Higher Education who took 11 weeks of SPL when he adopted his daughter noted a big shift in his priorities. He described how, before he adopted his daughter, he worked 12- to 14-hour days and did not take more than one or two days off at a time. Since adopting his daughter, childcare is now his priority, and he works shorter days to facilitate it:

*"My priority before was just producing science. My priority now is my daughter."*

(Male employee, SPL for adoption, Higher Education, male-dominated, very large employer)

<sup>100</sup> Tanaka, S. & Waldfogel, J. (2007). Effects of parental leave and work hours on fathers' involvement with their babies: evidence from the millennium cohort study. *Community, Work and Family*, 10(4): 409-426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800701575069>

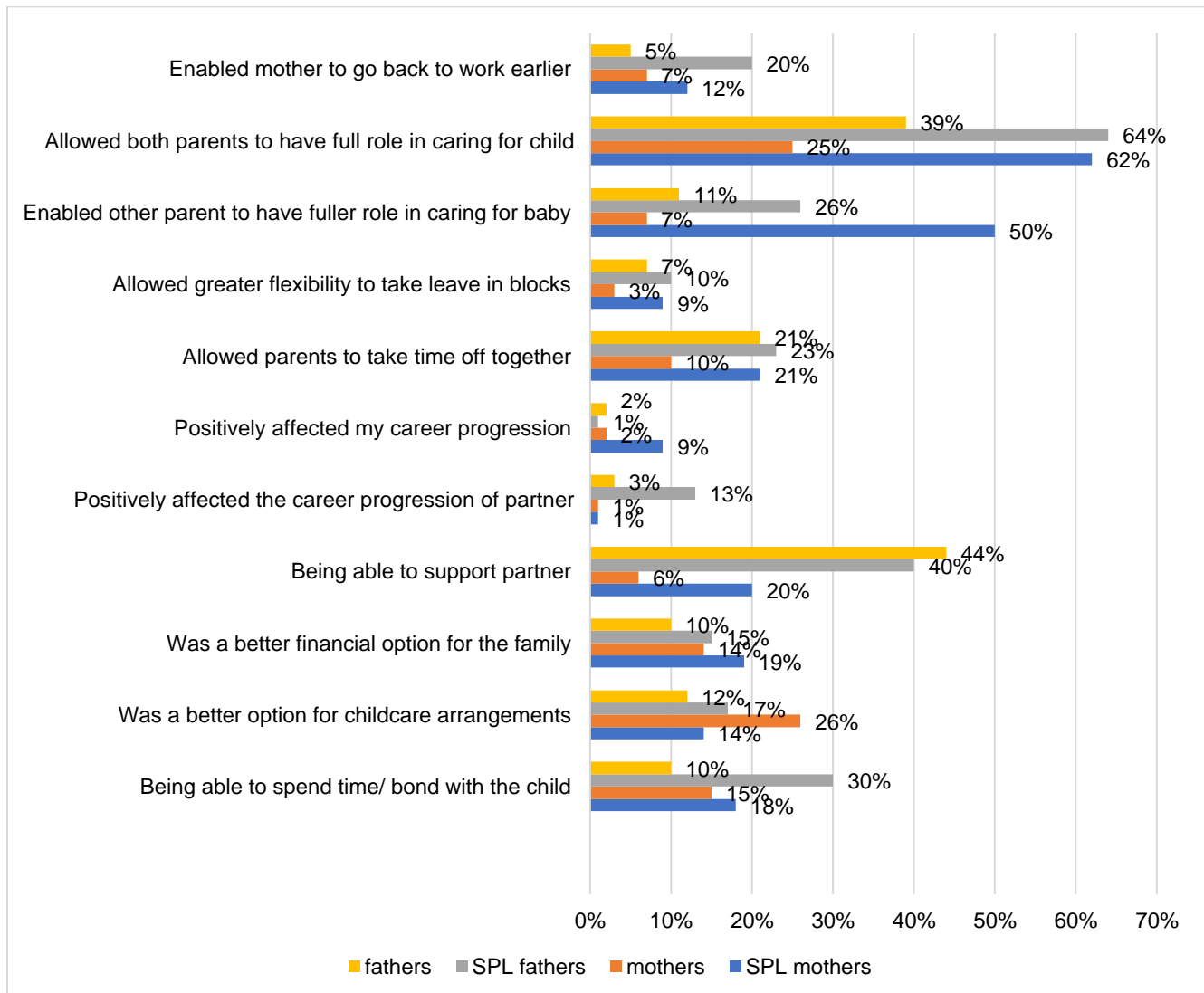
<sup>101</sup> Tamm, M. (2019). Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation. *Labour Economics*, 59: 184-197

## Have fathers reported benefits from spending more time with their children as a result of taking Shared Parental Leave?

5.46) The survey of parents finds that fathers that took SPL are more likely than fathers overall to cite allowing both parents to have a full role in caring for the child as a positive consequence of the leave that they took (64% compared with 39% fathers).

5.47) SPL mothers are also more likely than SPL fathers to say that it enabled the other parent to have a fuller role in caring for the baby (50% compared with 26% of SPL fathers).

**Figure 5.5: Positive consequences of taking leave, by mothers and fathers**



Base: Core mothers: 1,959; fathers 1,062; SPL fathers: 155; SPL mothers: 179

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

5.48) Fathers that took SPL are also three times as likely to mention that their leave enabled them to spend time/bond with their child (30% compared to 10% of fathers), and four times as likely to say that it enabled the mother to go back to work earlier (20% of SPL fathers compared to 5% of all fathers).

5.49) Whilst less than one in ten fathers who took SPL cited wanting to spend time with their child as a factor underpinning take-up of leave, their experience of SPL has shown that this is an additional benefit of the policy.

5.50) Male employees interviewed within the qualitative research reported several ways in which they developed personally through taking SPL. Although it was unusual for male employees in the study to take leave for more than 12 weeks, there was consensus that the time at home facilitated by SPL led to personal growth and development. Both first- and second-time fathers reported learning lessons about their understanding of parenting roles, and of how and why parenting should be shared. They also felt their leave gave them valuable experience of parenting, which led to improved confidence:

*“I’ve always been quite hands-on with my kids, but it probably just gave me a wee bit more experience because if my wife was to say go away for a couple of days, I’ve probably got some friends who would be a bit nervous about it, whereas I’d be completely fine. I’d probably encourage it. So yes, no, I think just a bit more confident. I think it might have been different if it had been my first child and I was home alone, but that’s just from a personal viewpoint, that because it was my second and I’d been there and done it and was a bit more relaxed.”*

(Male employee, SPL, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

5.51) International evidence also suggests parental leave more generally can be beneficial for fathers’ confidence and wellbeing. For example, Haas and Hwang’s (2008) research on the impact of parental leave on Swedish fathers suggests that fathers who take leave have greater satisfaction in parenting,<sup>102</sup> and evidence from studies of Australian and American fathers shows fathers who participate in childcare report greater life satisfaction and improved psychological wellbeing.<sup>103</sup>

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102 Haas, L. & Hwang, P.C. (2008). The Impact of Taking Parental Leave on Fathers’ Participation In Childcare And Relationships With Children: Lessons from Sweden. *Community, Work & Family*, 11(1): 88-105, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800701785346>

103 Craig, L. & Sawrikar, P. (2009). Work and Family: How Does the (Gender) Balance Change as Children Grow? *Gender, Work & Organization*. 16: 684 – 709;

Schindler, H. S. (2010). The Importance of Parenting and Financial Contributions in Promoting Fathers’ Psychological Health. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(2): 318-332

## 6. Has the introduction of SPL improved labour market outcomes for women?

*This section of the evaluation examines return to work following SPL, working arrangements and family-friendly support, satisfaction with work arrangements and perceived effects of taking leave on career prospects.*

### Key findings

The female employment rate in the UK has increased since the introduction of Shared Parental Leave (SPL). More females with dependents were in employment in 2020 than in 2014 prior to the introduction of SPL, representing an increase of around five percentage points. Rising female labour market participation forms part of a longer-term trend over the last fifty years and it is difficult to attribute changes to the SPL policy, however.

A greater proportion of SPL mothers (73%) report returning to their pre-birth job than mothers overall (54%). Only 5% of SPL parents (6% of SPL mothers) did not return to work following birth or adoption, compared with 25% of mothers overall.

Mother's return to work after parental leave is associated with their pre-birth employment status, occupation, income and qualification level, as well as personal circumstance such as whether living with partner or spouse. There is a substantial body of evidence in the literature on childcare and mothers' employment outcomes.

Women change their work patterns to accommodate parenting responsibilities to a much greater degree than fathers.

SPL fathers were more likely to report changing working hours (14%) and working arrangements (24%) than fathers overall (3% and 2% respectively). SPL mothers in the Parental Rights Survey (2019) were also twice as likely to report changes to their agreed working arrangements (use of part-time, flexible working) than SPL fathers (49% and 24% respectively). SPL mothers were less likely to reduce their working hours than mothers more generally.

Parents who took SPL are significantly more likely to work for employers which offer family-friendly support including flexible working. Nine in ten SPL parents (91%) said their pre-birth employer offered flexible working compared with over three quarters of mothers (78%) and half of fathers (53%) overall.

Parents who take SPL are significantly more likely to have access to family-friendly support from their employer, such as childcare vouchers. Consistent with the broader evidence base, findings from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) also demonstrate that access to family-friendly support significantly increases the probability of mothers' return to work post-leave. Employers with experience of SPL are also more likely to offer and promote family-friendly policies more generally. Parents who took SPL are more likely to say their employer offered family-friendly policies including flexible working arrangements and childcare support.

Multi-variate analysis showed the odds of mothers returning to work were significantly higher for mothers whose employer offered some kind of flexible working and mothers for whom childcare vouchers (or similar help) is offered by employer. However, a lack of family-friendly support can lead to negative experiences on return.

In terms of work-life balance, when asked to rate how satisfied they are on the whole these days parents that took SPL gave a score of 7.4, which is marginally higher than mothers and fathers more generally.

Around one in ten mothers who took SPL (9%) cited the positive consequences of SPL on their career progression. A similar proportion of fathers who took SPL (13%) cited the positive consequences of their leave on their partner's career progression. Fathers who took SPL were significantly more likely (15%) than SPL mothers (4%) to cite the negative impacts on their own career.

## Labour market participation following birth or adoption

6.1) It is widely acknowledged in the literature that employment and pay gaps between men and women appear around the time of the birth of the first child, reflecting traditional trends for women to be more likely than men to take time away from the workforce or to reduce their work hours because of caregiving responsibilities.<sup>104</sup> This has been demonstrated in the literature to have significant long-term implications for women's career outcomes, in terms of promotion opportunities, earnings and pensionable income, often referred to as the 'motherhood penalty'.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> OECD (2017). *Women at work: A snapshot of women in the labour force, in The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Accessed from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-14-en>; Berniell, I. et al. (2020) Motherhood and labor market trajectories across Europe: Harmonized evidence on 29 countries. CEDLAS Working Paper, Center for Distributive, Labor, and Social Studies. Accessed from: <https://aaep.org.ar/anales/works/works2020/Berniell.pdf>; Costas Dias, M., Elming, W., Joyce, R. (2016) *The Gender Wage Gap*, Institute for Fiscal Studies <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8428> using BHPS survey data 1991-2008, hourly wages; Kleven, H, Camille L, & Sogaard, J.H. (2019). Children and Gender Inequality: Evidence from Denmark. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 11 (4): 181-209; Sigle-Rushton, W. & Waldfogel, J. (2007) Motherhood and women's earnings in Anglo-American, Continental European, and Nordic Countries. *Feminist Economics*, 13 (2): 55-91. DOI: 10.1080/13545700601184849;

Fitzenberger, B, Sommerfeld, K., & Steffes, S. (2013). Causal effects on employment after first birth – A dynamic treatment approach. *Labour Economics*, 25(0): 49–62; Norman, H. (2020). Does Paternal Involvement in Childcare Influence Mothers' Employment Trajectories during the Early Stages of Parenthood in the UK? *Sociology*, 54(2):329-345

<sup>105</sup> Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2015). *The motherhood pay gap: a review of the issues, theory and international evidence*. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. ISBN: 9789221292678; Dunatchik, A. & Özcan, B. (2020). Reducing mommy penalties with daddy quotas. *Journal of European Social Policy*. 31(2):175-191. DOI:10.1177/0958928720963324.

See also literature on the causal effects of having children on the gender pay gap, which is the difference between average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men and women expressed as a proportion of average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men's earnings. Blundell, R., Dias, M. C., Meghir, C. & Jonathan M. S. (2016). Female labour supply, human capital and welfare reform, *Econometrica*, 84(5) p. 1705-1753. Accessed from: [www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctp39a/BDMS\\_Ecta\\_Sept\\_2016.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctp39a/BDMS_Ecta_Sept_2016.pdf); Paull, G. (2006). The Impact of Children on Women's Paid Work, *Fiscal Studies*, 27(4): 473-512. Accessed from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1475-5890.2006.00043.x>; Olsen, W., Gash, V., Kim, S. & Zhang, M. (2018). *The gender pay gap in the UK: evidence from the UKHLS*. Government Equalities Office. Accessed from: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/706030/Gender\\_pay\\_gap\\_in\\_the\\_UK\\_evidence\\_from\\_the\\_UKHLS.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/706030/Gender_pay_gap_in_the_UK_evidence_from_the_UKHLS.pdf)

6.2) ONS data shows that the female employment rate in the UK has increased since the introduction of SPL, from 69.2% in the three months to February 2016 to 71.7% in the three months to February 2021.<sup>106</sup> Rising female labour market participation forms part of a longer-term trend over the last fifty years and it is difficult to attribute changes directly to the SPL policy, however.

6.3) Figure 6.1 shows that most recently, three in four females with dependent children (75.6%) were in work in the UK, which is significantly less than the proportion of males with dependents (92.2%). Further analysis of ONS Annual Population Survey (2018) data suggests that mothers' depressed labour participation is partly a result of decisions made because of childcare responsibilities,<sup>107</sup> which is consistent with the evidence from the Parental Rights Survey (2019), where a quarter of mothers did not return to work following birth or adoption, compared to 4% of fathers.

6.4) Figure 6.1 also shows that more females with dependents were in employment in 2020 than in 2014 prior to the introduction of SPL, representing an increase of around five percentage points. It is not possible to directly attribute this to SPL, however, particularly given the longer-term trends of rising female employment,<sup>108</sup> and the broad range of other factors with the potential to influence female employment, including changes to childcare entitlements,<sup>109</sup> to welfare benefits<sup>110</sup> and the state pension age.<sup>111</sup>

**Figure 6.1: Employment rate, males and females with dependents, 2014-2020 (per cent)**

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<sup>106</sup> ONS (2021) Female Employment Rate aged 16-64, seasonally adjusted. Accessed:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/lf25/lms>

<sup>107</sup> From an Eurostat Ad-hoc module within the ONS (2018) Annual Population Survey, Accessed:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/1978984/6037334/Explanatory-notes-AHM-2018.pdf>

<sup>108</sup> Thévenon, O. (2013), Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 145, OECD Publishing, Paris. Accessed from:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/5k46civrqnms6-en>

<sup>109</sup> Including the introduction of 30 hours of free childcare for eligible parents in 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/30-hours-free-childcare> (Accessed 20 April 2021)

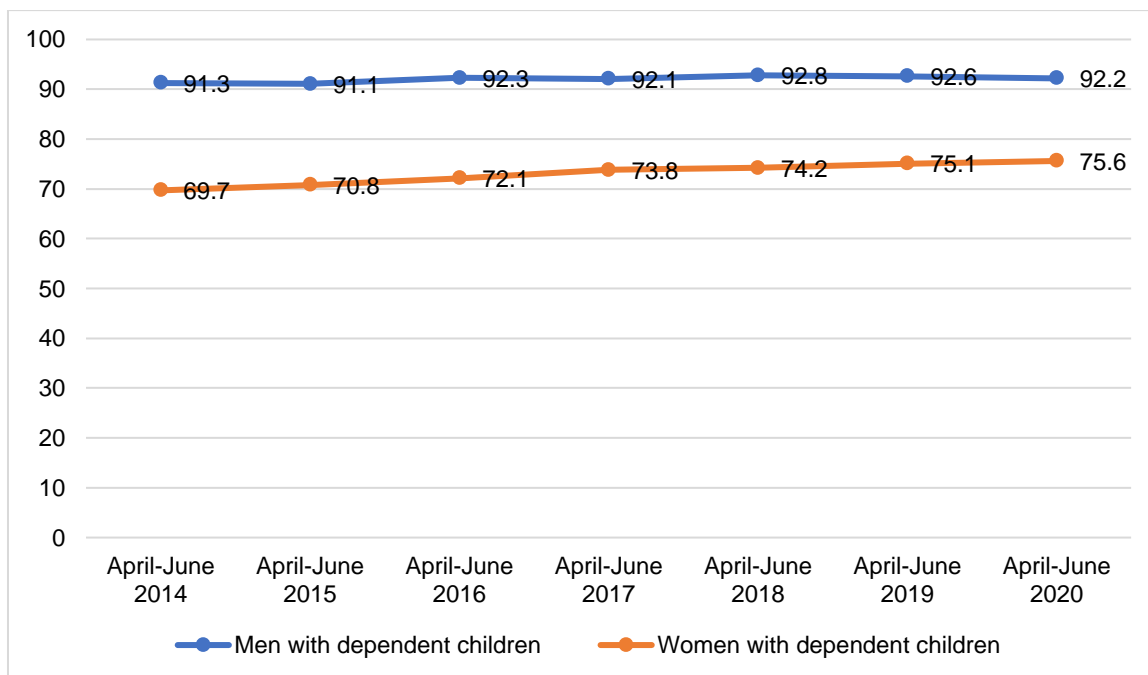
<sup>110</sup> Blundell, R., Dias, M. C., Meghir, C. & Jonathan M. S. (2016). Female labour supply, human capital and welfare reform, *Econometrica*, 84(5) p. 1705-1753. Accessed from:

[www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctp39a/BDMS\\_Ecta\\_Sept\\_2016.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctp39a/BDMS_Ecta_Sept_2016.pdf)

<sup>111</sup> ONS (2019) Employment in the UK: September 2019. Accessed from:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/september2019>





Source: Analysis of ONS Labour Force Survey, table 3, data not seasonally adjusted<sup>112</sup>

Dependent children are categorised as those living with their parent(s) and either aged under 16 years or aged 16 to 18 years and in full-time education.

6.5) In their (2018) examination of UK's female employment, Roantree and Virra demonstrate that one of the most notable changes behind the increasing employment rate of mothers, is the reduction in women who drop out of the labour market after the birth of their first child.<sup>113</sup> Using data from the National Child Development Study and the British Cohort Study, the authors point out that women born in 1970 are much more likely to be in work in the five years after having their first child than women who were born a decade earlier. The authors mention this could be because mothers of young children are increasingly likely to return to at least part-time employment after childbirth, rather than dropping out of the labour market altogether.

### Do mothers return to work following Shared Parental Leave and how does this compare to mothers who did not take Shared Parental Leave?

6.6) Figure 6.2 shows that following the birth of their child, almost three quarters (72%) of SPL parents returned to the job they had before the birth of their child and remained there. There are no statistically significant differences between SPL fathers and mothers.

6.7) A greater proportion of SPL mothers (73%) report returning to their pre-birth job than mothers overall (54%). Only 5% of SPL parents (6% of SPL mothers) did not return to work following birth or adoption, compared with 25% of mothers overall.

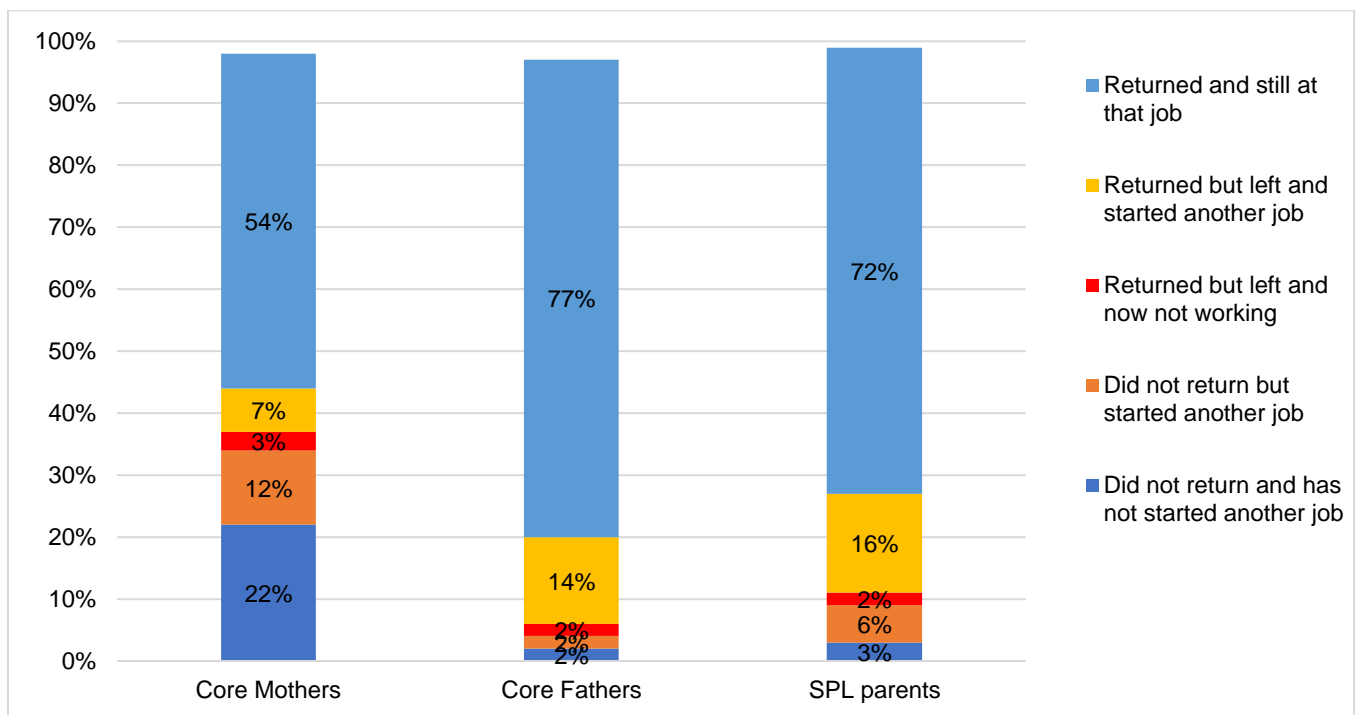
**Figure 6.2: Return to work following birth/adoption of child**

<sup>112</sup> From ONS (2021) Families and the Labour Market, 2020. Accessed:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/familiesandthelabourmarketukmaindatasetusingthelabourforcesurveyandannualpopulationsurvey>

<sup>113</sup> Roantree, B. & Virra, K. (2018). *The rise and rise of women's employment in the UK: IFS Briefing note BN234*, Institute for Fiscal Studies DOI: 10.1920/BN.IFS.2019.BN0234. Accessed from:

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/12951>



Base: Core mothers: 1,959; Core fathers: 1,062; SPL parents: 336  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

6.8) Table 6.1 shows characteristics of mothers that have remained in the same job and those that are not working following birth or adoption. Mothers living with their partner/spouse were more likely to return to their pre-birth job, as were mothers qualified to degree-level or above, those working full-time, mothers with supervisory responsibilities, those earning over £40,000 and working in professional occupations.

6.9) The proportion of mothers that remained out of the labour market at the time of interview (did not return and have not started another job) is higher among lone parents, those with no qualifications, mothers who are workers, earning less than £20,000 per annum, those with less than two years job tenure and mothers working in Skilled, process and elementary occupations.

**Table 6.1: Proportion of mothers that remained in same job and proportion that did not return and are still not working**

		Returned & still at job	Did not return & not started another job
All mothers (1,959)		54%	22%
Whether a lone parent	Living with partner/spouse (1,569)	60%+	17%-
	Lone parent (377)	36%-	38%+
Qualification level	No qualification (70)	36%-	39%+
	Below degree level (1,171)	48%-	26%+
	Degree level or above (692)	69%+	10%-

Hours worked before birth	Full time hours (30+) (1,194)	58%+	18%-
	Part time hours (736)	50%-	25%+
Employment status before birth	Employee (1,714)	57%+	20%+
	Worker (144)	16%-	52%+
Whether supervisor before birth	Supervisor (554)	66%+	10%-
	Not a supervisor (1,303)	49%-	27%+
Mother's income before birth	Less than £20,000 per annum (1,074)	48%-	27%+
	£20,000 - £39,999 (534)	69%+	8%-
	£40,000+ per annum (111)	84%+	2%-
Duration of main job before birth	Less than 2 years (188)	4%-	56%+
	2 to 5 years (538)	58%+	18%-
	More than 5 years (643)	76%+	7%-
Size of firm worked in before birth	SME (less than 250 employees) (996)	47%-	26%+
	250+ employees (757)	66%+	-13%
Occupation	Managers & Senior Officials (92)	76%+	8%-
	Professional Occupations (354)	77%+	5%-
	Associate Professional & Technical Occupations (228)	63%+	9%-
	Administrative, Secretarial, Personal, Sales & Customer occupations (932)	51%-	25%+
	Skilled, Process & Elementary occupations (316)	35%-	36%+

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019) RetEmp: Nature of return to work after birth – unweighted bases in parenthesis

+/- indicates a significantly higher/lower difference compared with all mothers on average

6.10) Findings in Table 6.1 suggest that mother's return to work after parental leave is associated with their pre-birth employment status, income and personal circumstances. This is

consistent with arguments put forward by Norman (2020),<sup>114</sup> which suggest that mothers are more likely to return to work if they are in professional occupations, managers or are well educated, because they are more likely to have higher earnings and be better able to cover the costs of childcare.<sup>115</sup>

### Does fathers' involvement in childcare in the first year of the child's life influence mothers' return to work?

6.11) Key aims set out in the original impact assessment were to provide a new system that facilitates shared parenting from the earliest possible opportunity and flexibility for both employers and their employees by removing regulatory restrictions on how parents manage their working patterns in the first year after birth. The impact assessment stressed the aim was not to 'dilute' the position for women, but, by introducing a new parental leave option, to provide families with more choice.

6.12) Evidence from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) suggests that fathers who take SPL are more likely to be involved in childcare and that mothers who take SPL are more likely to return to work than mothers generally. There is a substantial body of evidence in the literature on childcare and mothers' employment outcomes. It remains difficult to isolate the effect of fathers' involvement in childcare on their partner's return to work and there are many other important cultural and economic factors that may influence mothers' return to work.<sup>116</sup>

6.13) Evidence from the OECD (2013) establishes a strong relationship between the provision of childcare and rising female labour force participation,<sup>117</sup> but focuses specifically on the rising provision of formal childcare services, rather than fathers' take-up of caring responsibilities.<sup>118</sup> This paper also concentrates on leave entitlements for mothers and not fathers.

6.14) Tamm's (2019) study of fathers' uptake of leave in Germany<sup>119</sup> found a significant positive relationship between fathers' leave-taking on both their involvement in childcare after the first year and on the mother's labour market participation. However, whilst fathers' leave was found to significantly increase the time fathers spent on childcare up to six years after the

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<sup>114</sup> Norman, H. (2020). Does Paternal Involvement in Childcare Influence Mothers' Employment Trajectories during the Early Stages of Parenthood in the UK? *Sociology*, 54(2):329-345

<sup>115</sup> See also Fagan, C. & Norman, H. (2012). Trends and social divisions in maternal employment patterns following maternity leave in the UK. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(9): 544-560; Harkness, S., Borkowska, M. & Pelikh, A. (2019). *Employment pathways and occupational change after childbirth*. Government Equalities Office. Accessed from: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/840062/Bristol\\_Final\\_Report\\_1610.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840062/Bristol_Final_Report_1610.pdf)

<sup>116</sup> Norman (2020); Boeckmann, I., Misra, J., & Budig, M. J. (2015). Cultural and institutional factors shaping mothers' employment and working hours in post-industrial countries. *Social Forces*, 93(4), 1301-1333, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou119>

<sup>117</sup> Thévenon, O. (2013), Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 145, OECD Publishing, Paris. Accessed from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/5k46civrqnms6-en>;

<sup>118</sup> This is common in research partially because of modelling assumptions reliant on male's full-time employment, unsurprising given 84.3 per cent of men with dependent children were in full-time work and only 5.4 per cent were in part-time work, and for those parents not in employment, only 20.7 per cent of fathers in a couple said this was because they were "looking after the family/home" as their main reason, compared to 64.9 per cent of mothers in a couple ONS (2021) Families and the labour market, England: 2020. Table 17. Accessed from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/familiesandthelabourmarketenglandlfsandapsdatasets>

<sup>119</sup> Tamm, M. (2019). Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation. *Labour Economics*, 59: 184-197

child's birth, the positive effects on maternal working hours are shown to be strongest in the first year and become less persistent over time.

6.15) Norman's (2020) analysis of Millennium Cohort study data found that fathers' involvement in childcare nine-months post birth significantly increases the likelihood of mothers' being in employment when the child is aged three, and this effect persisted regardless of the mother's occupational class, or the parents' gender role attitudes. Other factors determining mothers' employment status aged three include occupational class and parents' gender role attitudes.<sup>120</sup>

6.16) Research by Ekberg *et al.* (2013) focusing on Swedish paternal leave reform, does not find a clear causal relationship between fathers' leave-taking, greater involvement in childcare and increased mothers' labour market participation.<sup>121</sup>

6.17) A review (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017) of the impact of family policies on women's employment outcomes in high-income countries,<sup>122</sup> state that there is not enough conclusive evidence on the impact of father's leave on mother's careers.

6.18) For the purposes of this Evaluation, due to low sample sizes it is not yet possible to establish a clear relationship between SPL fathers' involvement in childcare and SPL mothers' improved likelihood of returning to work.

## Working arrangements on return to work and family-friendly support

### How do working arrangements on return to work vary among mothers and fathers, and among parents who take or do not take SPL?

6.19) Whether parents are more likely to change their working arrangements when they return to work after parental leave varies amongst mothers and fathers, as well as by earnings and gender. Overall, SPL mothers are more likely to have similar returning to work experiences as mothers, however there are differences in changes to working arrangements among SPL fathers and fathers more generally.

6.20) Figure 6.3 shows that SPL mothers, were more likely to experience changes to working hours and arrangements on return to their pre-birth job than mothers overall. This may be due to more SPL mothers (59%) report being first-time parents than mothers overall (48%).

6.21) Over nine in ten fathers reported experiencing no changes to working hours or working arrangements (93%), compared to two in three SPL fathers (66%). SPL fathers were more likely to report changing working hours (14%) and working arrangements (24%) than fathers overall (3% and 2% respectively).

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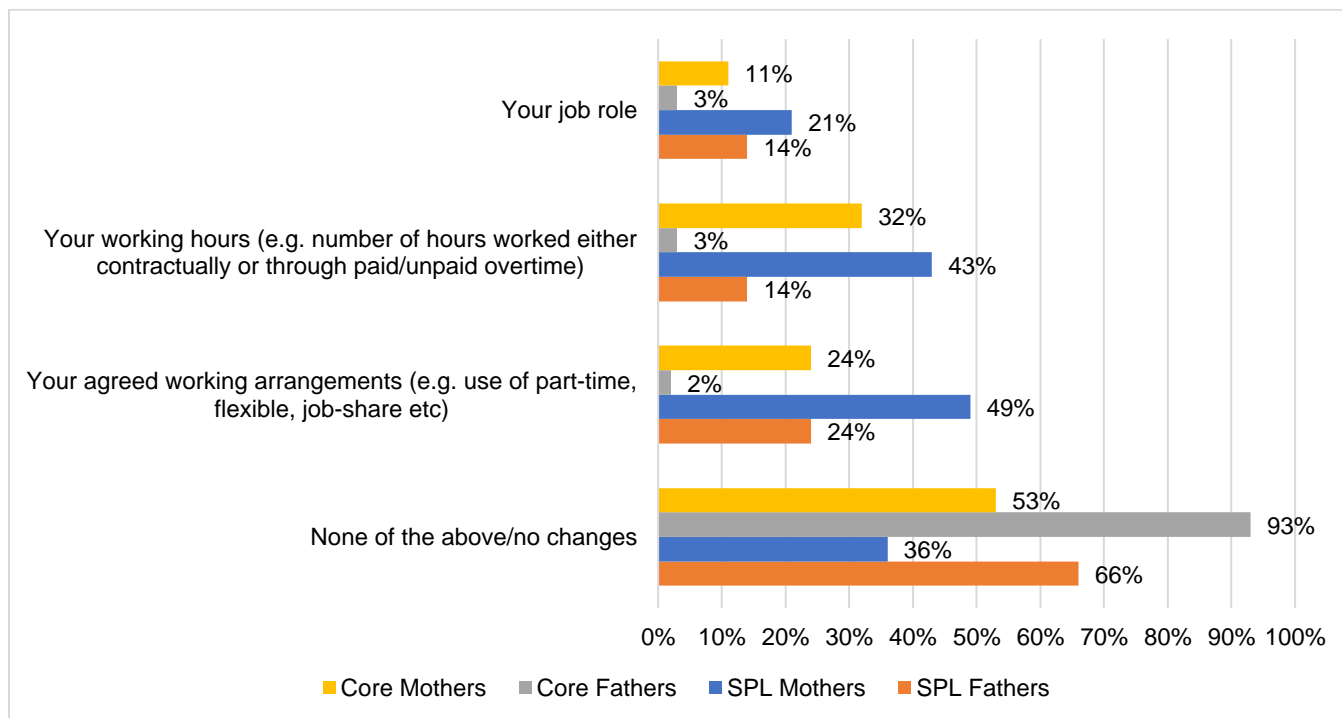
<sup>120</sup> Norman, H. (2020). Does Paternal Involvement in Childcare Influence Mothers' Employment Trajectories during the Early Stages of Parenthood in the UK? *Sociology*, 54(2):329-345.

<sup>121</sup> Ekberg, J., Eriksson, R. & Friebel, G. (2013). Parental leave: a policy evaluation of the Swedish "Daddy-Month" reform. *Journal of Public Economics* 97: 131-143.

Though, alternative research also focusing on the same reform indicated that fathers' leave-taking had a slight effect on parents sharing childcare responsibilities more equally, but mainly when the mother had a low educational profile. Duvander, A.-Z., & Jans, A.-C. (2009). Consequences of Father's Parental Leave Use: Evidence from Sweden. *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research*, 44, 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.23979/fypr.45044>

<sup>122</sup> Olivetti, C. & Petrongolo, B. (2017). The Economic consequences of family policies: lessons from a century of legislation in high-income countries. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31 (1): 205-30. DOI: 10.1257/jep.31.1.205

**Figure 6.3: Changes in parents' role, hours and working arrangements on return to pre-birth job**



Base: Parents that reported returning to their pre-birth job (Core mothers: 1,340; Core fathers: 987; SPL parents: 304)

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

6.22) This is encouraging as SPL fathers changing their working hours and arrangements is likely to be motivated by accommodating new childcare responsibilities and is consistent with findings from other studies. For instance, Duvander and Jans (2009) find a significant relationship between fathers' take-up of parental leave in Sweden and hours worked, where the longer fathers are on leave, the fewer hours they work per week upon their return to work.<sup>123</sup>

6.23) Qualitative research found that SPL made returning to work easier because it allowed parents to take-up transitional childcare arrangements and dictate their own pace of return, reduce disruption to their family life and fit work around childcare commitments.

6.24) For example, an employee in Higher Education took two weeks of SPL simultaneously with her partner and then returned to work while her partner took his share of SPL. This enabled her to ease back into work whilst knowing that her child was fully supported. Mothers who had taken SPL with their second child and were able to compare their experience with their return to work following their first child, felt that returning to work following SPL was less disruptive as it enabled the father/partner to be at home with the child.

6.25) SPL mothers in the Parental Rights Survey (2019) were also twice as likely to report changes to their agreed working arrangements (use of part-time, flexible working) than SPL fathers (49% and 24% respectively).

<sup>123</sup> Though the authors also note this may be due to self-selection bias and causal interpretations are limited. Duvander, A.-Z., & Jans, A.-C. (2009). Consequences of Father's Parental Leave Use: Evidence from Sweden. Finnish Yearbook of Population Research, 44, 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.23979/fypr.45044>

6.26) Overall, UK mothers – regardless of leave type – are more likely to take advantage of family-friendly support offered by employers, such as flexible working or use of part-time, than UK fathers. Mothers, including mothers who take SPL, are more likely to take on responsibility for childcare than fathers in general, and therefore adapt their working arrangements to allow for this.

6.27) These findings reflect the shifts found in other studies,<sup>124</sup> where women change their work patterns to accommodate parenting responsibilities to a much greater degree than fathers.

## Working Hours

6.28) Mothers were more likely than fathers or mothers that took SPL to reduce their working hours, whilst SPL mothers were more likely than mothers generally to take-up flexible working.

6.29) Three quarters of mothers started working part time following the birth or adoption of their child (75%), compared with three in five mothers that took SPL (58%).

6.30) However, significantly more mothers that took SPL started working flexitime (43%) compared to one fifth of mothers generally (20%). Mothers that took SPL were around five times more likely to start working from home on a regular basis (36%), compared with only 7% of mothers overall.

6.31) These findings are unsurprising, given parents who took SPL are significantly more likely to work for employers which offer family-friendly support including flexible working. Nine in ten SPL parents (91%) said their pre-birth employer offered flexible working compared with over three quarters of mothers (78%) and half of fathers (53%) in general.

## Changes in earnings and responsibility on return to work

6.32) The survey of parents asked all respondents who were either an employee or worker about any discussions or negotiations they may have had with their pre-birth employer with regards to the role they would be offered on return to work.

6.33) Among fathers and parents taking SPL, more than four in five (86% and 85% respectively) were offered a job with the same responsibility, and only a small proportion were offered jobs with less responsibility (1% and 5%) or more responsibility (4% and 6%). There are no statistically significant differences between SPL mothers and fathers. In contrast, fewer core mothers (61%) were offered a job with the same responsibility, though this is

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<sup>124</sup> Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2015). The motherhood pay gap: a review of the issues, theory and international evidence. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. ISBN: 9789221292678; Harkness *et al.* 2019;

Nielsen, H., Simonsen, M., & Verner, M. (2004). Does the Gap in Family-Friendly Policies Drive the Family Gap? *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 106(4), 721-744;

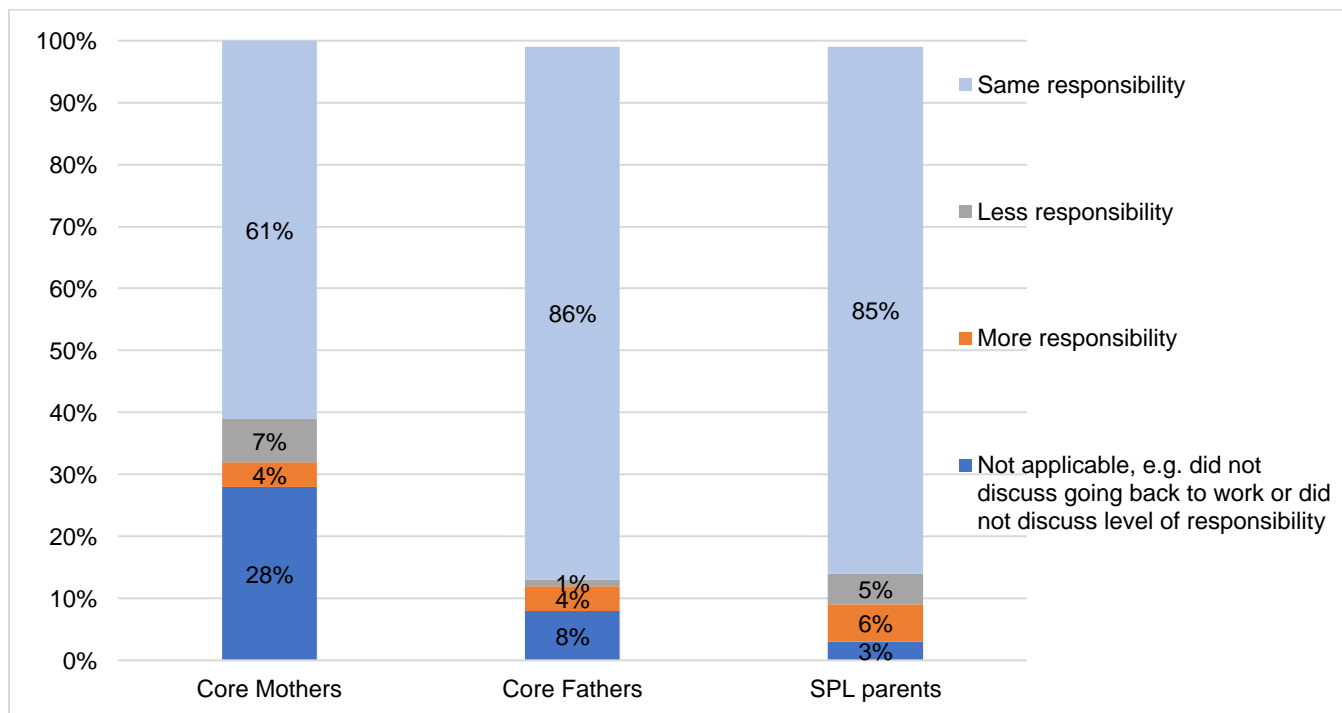
Fagan, C. & Norman, H. (2012). Trends and social divisions in maternal employment patterns following maternity leave in the UK. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(9): 544-560;

Norman, H. (2020). Does Paternal Involvement in Childcare Influence Mothers' Employment Trajectories during the Early Stages of Parenthood in the UK? *Sociology*, 54(2):329-345;

Boeckmann, I., Misra, J., & Budig, M. J. (2015). Cultural and institutional factors shaping mothers' employment and working hours in post-industrial countries. *Social Forces*, 93(4), 1301-1333, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou119>

predominantly because this was not applicable for over a quarter (28%) of mothers because they did not discuss going back to work or did not discuss levels of responsibility. Less than one in ten (7%) of core mothers were offered a job with less responsibility, and one in twenty (4%) were offered a job with more responsibility (Figure 6.4).

**Figure 6.4: Changes in parents' level of responsibility when returned to work**



Base: Core mothers: 1,858; Core fathers: 900; SPL parents: 330  
Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

6.34) A similar pattern was replicated in relation to discussions on the level of pay they would be offered when they returned to work, with 28% of mothers that had no discussions, compared with just 9% of fathers and 2% of parents that took SPL. Low proportions of SPL parents and fathers experienced any changes in their levels of pay, compared to slightly more mothers. While 7% of mothers were offered a job on lower pay, compared with 1% of fathers and 3% of parents that took SPL.

6.35) Interestingly, SPL mothers were more likely to be offered higher pay on their return to work (12%) compared to SPL fathers (4%), and SPL fathers were significantly more likely than SPL mothers to be offered a job with the same pay (92% compared to 82%).

## Occupational mobility

6.36) Amongst SPL parents that changed jobs in the Parental Rights Survey (2019), over half (52%) moved to new organisations that mainly sought to make a profit. A quarter (27%) of parents taking SPL got new jobs working for a central Government financed body.

6.37) The sectors they were most likely to obtain new jobs in were either public administration, health or education (35%) or business, professional or other services (33%) sectors. More than two in five (44%) of SPL parents who changed jobs started in a professional occupation and a quarter (27%) in associate professional or technical occupation.



6.38) These findings are consistent with the occupational profile of SPL parents and are in contrast with the findings for mothers and fathers generally. Where mothers had changed jobs, they were most likely to now be working in administrative, personal services or sales occupations (51%), whilst for fathers they were most likely to gain new positions in skilled, process or elementary occupations (36%).

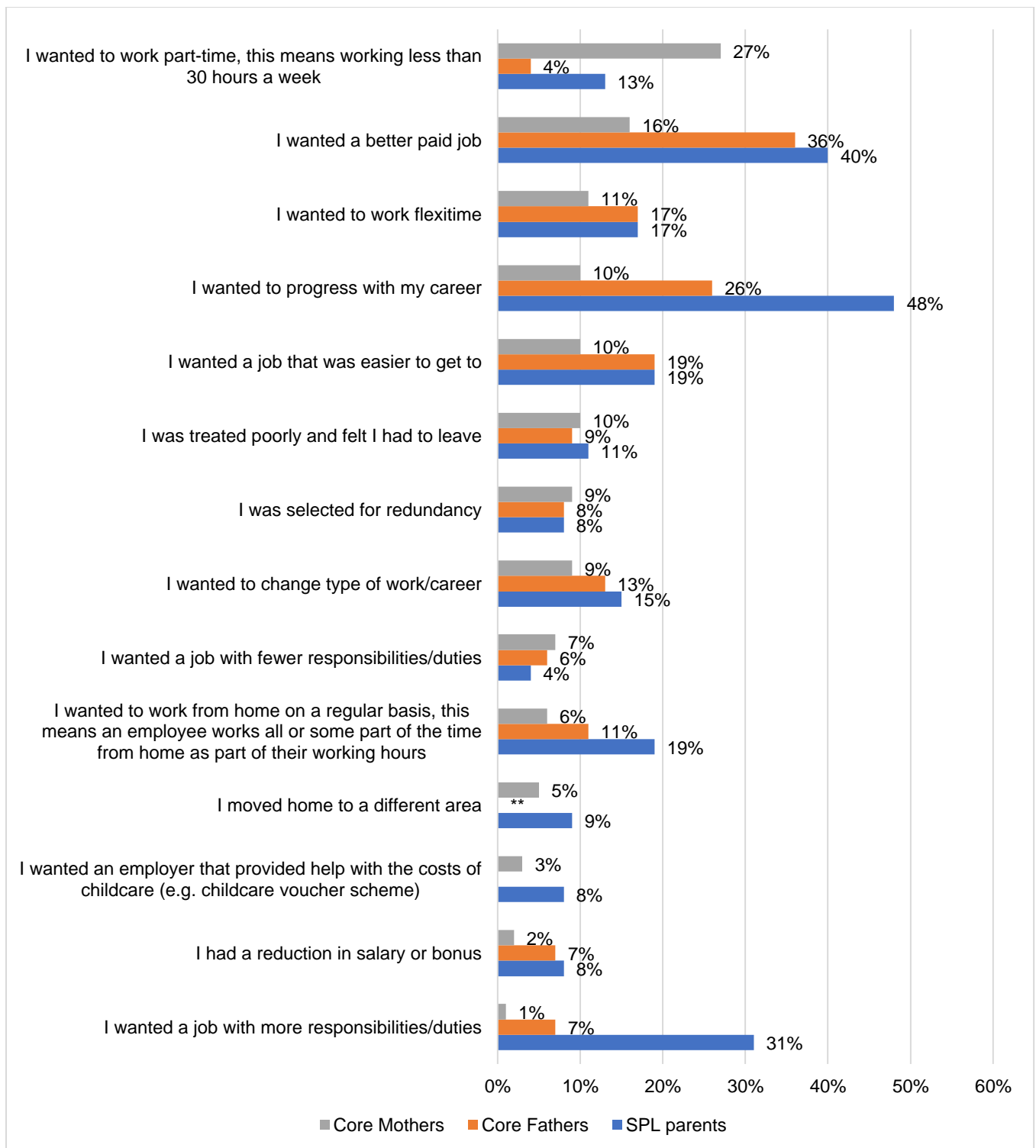
6.39) Of parents who were employees or workers before the birth/adoption of their child, just under one in ten parents who took SPL switched to a self-employed position (9%), which is same as the proportion of mothers who were employees or workers and became self-employed and marginally less than the proportion of fathers (11%).

### Factors underpinning the decision to change jobs

6.40) Parents who changed jobs were asked what factors influenced their decision-making, listed in Figure 6.5. Fathers and SPL parents (40% and 36% respectively) are more likely than mothers (16%) to have changed jobs due to wanting a better paid job, and so that they could progress in their career (48% and 26%) compared with one in ten mothers. Parents that took SPL are also more likely to say they changed jobs due to wanting more responsibility (31%), than mothers or fathers in general.

6.41) The same proportion of SPL parents, mothers and fathers said they were treated poorly in their pre-birth job and felt that had to leave (11%, 10% and 9% respectively).

### Figure 6.5: Reasons that may have caused parents to change jobs



Base: Parents who have changed jobs since the birth or adoption of their child (Core mothers: 343; Core fathers: 171; SPL parents: 75)  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

6.42) In line with the findings above on how working arrangements have changed, mothers in general were the most likely to say they changed jobs because they wanted to work part-time (27%), whilst parents who took SPL and fathers in general were more likely to say they wanted to work flexitime (both 17%). Interestingly, far more SPL parents cited wanting to work from home on a regular basis (19%) compared to relatively few of mothers and fathers (6% and 11% on average).

## Are employers offering family-friendly support?

6.43) There are many forms of employer-based family-friendly policies, including offering flexible working,<sup>125</sup> childcare support,<sup>126</sup> and offering generous leave policies for new parents. There is a substantial body of evidence suggesting that employers who offer family-friendly support attract women in particular; mothers often change jobs or sectors to more family-friendly employment when they are starting a family,<sup>127</sup> and those who work for family-friendly employers are more likely to return to work following childbirth.<sup>128</sup>

6.44) As already briefly discussed earlier in this report (section 4.3), parents who take SPL are significantly more likely to have access to family-friendly support from their employer, such as childcare vouchers. Consistent with the broader evidence base, findings from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) also demonstrate that access to family-friendly support significantly increases the probability of mothers' return to work post-leave.

6.45) Whilst the preceding discussion throughout this evaluation has been on parental leave, this is only one form of support available to help parents return to and stay in work, and some employers provide additional forms of 'family-friendly' support, such as help with childcare.

6.46) The employer survey (MWPS, 2018-19) asked employers whether they provided any forms of 'family-friendly' or childcare support arrangements listed, as listed in Table 6.2.

6.47) The most common form of help was childcare vouchers, provided by one third (33%) of workplaces. Vouchers are particularly prevalent in large workplaces, offered by 82% of workplaces with 250 employees or more, compared with 29% of workplaces with 5-50 employees. Childcare vouchers are also particularly common in public sector workplaces (offered by 71%) unlike in private and not-for-profit workplaces (offered by 30% and 39% respectively).

6.48) The next most common arrangement was help with childcare arrangements during school holidays, offered by 14% of workplaces, while 9% offered other financial help with childcare. Around half (51%) of workplaces did not offer any of the arrangements specified; this was mainly the case for small workplaces (54% compared with 11% of large workplaces). The

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<sup>125</sup> Flexible working patterns including part-time hours, compressed hours, varying start and finish times, job-sharing, working within school hours, or working from home on a full or part-time basis. See de Menezes, L. M. & Kelliher, C. (2011). Flexible Working and Performance: A Systematic Review of the Evidence for a Business Case. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(4): 452–474. Accessed from:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/8671/1/IJMR%200680%20Feb2011%20LdMCK.pdf>

<sup>126</sup> Such as childcare vouchers, career breaks, or 'Keep in touch' (KIT) schemes

<sup>127</sup> Fagan, C. & Norman, H. (2012). Trends and social divisions in maternal employment patterns following maternity leave in the UK. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(9): 544-560;

OECD (2017). *Women at work: A snapshot of women in the labour force, in The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Accessed from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-14-en>;

Thévenon, O. (2013), Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 145, OECD Publishing, Paris. Accessed from:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/5k46civrqnms6-en>;

Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2015). *The motherhood pay gap: a review of the issues, theory and international evidence*. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. ISBN: 9789221292678

<sup>128</sup> Norman, H. (2020). Does Paternal Involvement in Childcare Influence Mothers' Employment Trajectories during the Early Stages of Parenthood in the UK? *Sociology*, 54(2):329-345;

Plantenga, J. & Remery, C. (2005). Reconciliation of work and private life: A comparative review of thirty European countries. Report financed by and prepared for the use of the European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Accessed from: <http://www.cecot.org/harmonizacio/documentacio/estudi%20CE.pdf>.

lack of any help with childcare arrangements is mostly evident in the private and not-for-profit sectors (54% and 41%), rather than in the public sector (16%).

**Table 6.2: Workplaces offering help with childcare, by workplace size, percentages**

Types of childcare arrangements	Small (5-49 employees)	Medium (50-249 employees)	Large (250 or more employees)	All workplaces
Childcare vouchers	29	63	82	33
Help with childcare arrangements during school holidays	13	17	22	14
Other financial help with childcare	9	9	7	9
Childcare facility	6	6	10	6
Flexible hours/change hours/shifts	4	5	9	4
Some other arrangement	2	2	3	2
None of these	54	28	11	51
<i>Base (all workplaces with five or more employees)</i>	<i>1,451</i>	<i>567</i>	<i>469</i>	<i>2,489</i>

Note: respondents could give more than one response

Source: Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey (2018-19)

6.49) These findings support wider evidence demonstrating women of childbearing age often change to public-sector employment before they start a family,<sup>129</sup> suggesting that as public sector workplaces are more likely to offer family-friendly policies, they are more attractive as a means to facilitate balancing of work and family commitments.

6.50) The findings of the employer survey (MWPS, 2018-19) also suggests that many workplaces are aware of work-life balance policies in attracting and retaining staff, with 48% of workplaces promoting flexible working for instances, and this rises to two-thirds (64%) of workplaces with experience of employees taking SPL in the last two years. Employers that had any staff taking SPL were also more likely to report use of flexible working than workplaces on average.

6.51) Employers with experience of SPL are also more likely to offer and promote family-friendly policies more generally.

<sup>129</sup> Nielsen, H., Simonsen, M., & Verner, M. (2004). Does the Gap in Family-Friendly Policies Drive the Family Gap? *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 106(4), 721-744;

Fagan, C. & Norman, H. (2012). Trends and social divisions in maternal employment patterns following maternity leave in the UK. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(9): 544-560;

OECD (2017). *Women at work: A snapshot of women in the labour force, in The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Accessed from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-14-en>;

Thévenon, O. (2013), Drivers of Female Labour Force Participation in the OECD, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 145, OECD Publishing, Paris. Accessed from: <https://doi.org/10.1787/5k46civrqnms6-en>

## Are SPL parents reporting availability and take-up of family-friendly support schemes?

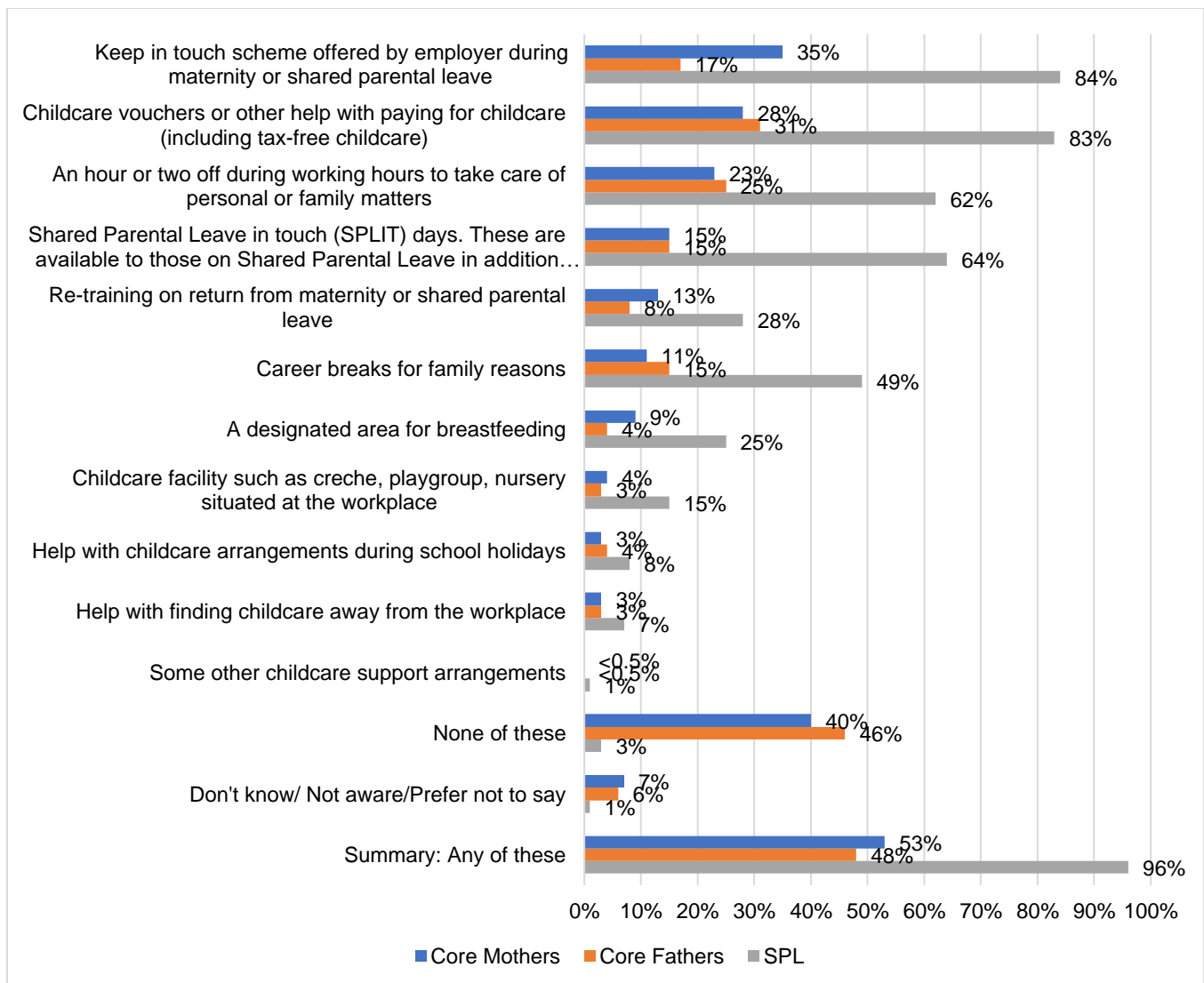
6.52) Consistent with employer survey (2018-19) results, the Parental Rights Survey (2019) also found that parents who took SPL are more likely to say their employer offered family-friendly policies including flexible working arrangements and childcare support.

6.53) In terms of flexible working arrangements offered by their pre-birth employer:

- 81% of SPL parents had access to part-time working arrangements, which is considerably higher than among mothers (73%) and fathers (40%)
- 60% of SPL parents had access to flexitime working, which was available to 22% of mothers and 27% of fathers
- 58% of SPL parents were able to work at home regularly compared to just 8% of all mothers and 17% of fathers
- Nine in ten SPL parents (91%) said some form of flexible working arrangement was on offer at their pre-birth job, compared with four in five (78%) mothers and fewer fathers (53%).

6.54) In terms of childcare support, almost all parents who took SPL (96%) said some form of family-friendly support listed in Figure 6.6 below was on offer from their pre-birth employer, which is substantially more than just over half (53%) of all mothers and just under half (48%) of all fathers.

### **Figure 6.6: Types of childcare/family-friendly support offered by pre-birth employers**



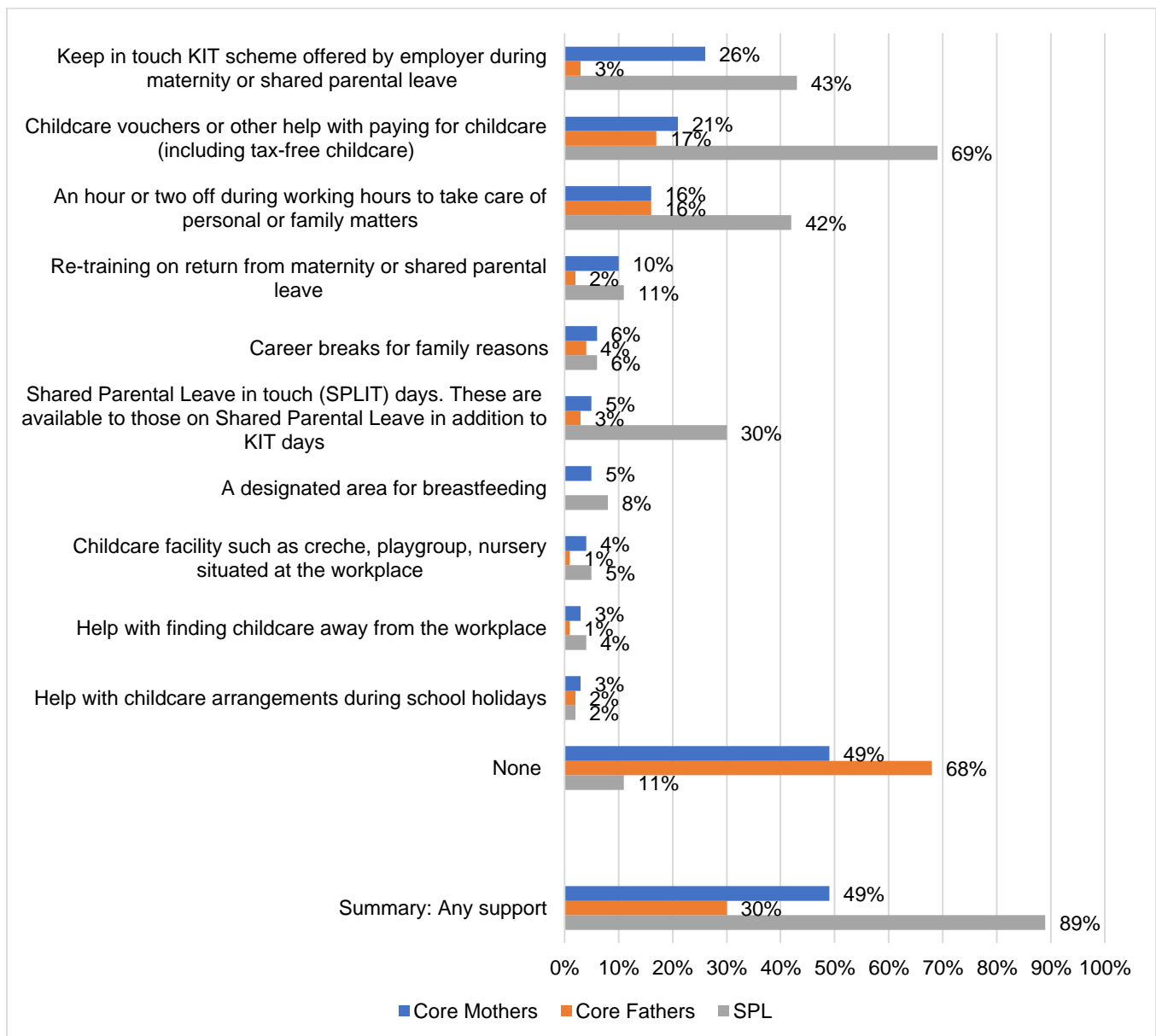
Base: Employees and workers before birth Core Mothers: 1858; Core Fathers: 900; Parents that took SPL: 330  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

6.55) Childcare vouchers were offered by pre-birth employers to around eight in ten parents that took SPL compared with just three in ten mothers and fathers. Keep in Touch (KIT) schemes were also on offer to over eight in ten parents that took SPL and just over a third of mothers (35%) in general. Shared Parental Leave in Touch schemes were on offer to nearly two-thirds of SPL parents (64%) compared to 15% of mothers and fathers overall.

6.56) Around three in five parents that took SPL were offered an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal matters, compared with around one in four mothers and fathers generally. While around half of parents that took SPL had the option of a career break for family reasons, compared with just 11% of mothers generally and 15% of fathers.

6.57) Figure .7 below shows whether any of the forms of family-friendly support listed above in Figure were utilised by parents upon their return to work. Most parents that took SPL (89%) accessed some form of support, compared to just under half of all mothers (49%) and only three in ten fathers (30%).

**Figure 6.7: Types of support accessed when they returned to pre-birth job**



Base: Respondents who returned to work after birth Core Mothers: 1247; Core Fathers: 987; Parents that took SPL: 304  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

6.58) Parents who took SPL were most likely to have accessed childcare vouchers (69%), compared with only 21% of mothers and 17% of fathers. Parents who took SPL were also significantly more likely to access KIT schemes (43%), time off during working hours (42%) and SPLIT days (30%).

### Access to family-friendly support from their employers and return to work

6.59) Descriptive analysis of survey data shows that whether employers offer family-friendly support for parents pre-, during and post-leave, including flexible working, childcare support or enhanced pay, appears to be important factors in influencing whether mothers' return to work post leave.

6.60) As Table 6.3 indicates, mothers that worked in organisations that offered any type of flexible working arrangements or childcare support are more likely to still be working at their pre-birth job, while mothers that worked in organisations that did not offer any of these

arrangements or support are more likely than mothers on average not to have returned to their job and to still be out of work.

6.61) By pay type, around two thirds of those that received SMP returned to their pre-birth job and remained there (64%t), compared with eight in ten mothers that received Occupational Maternity Pay (81%), and closer to four in ten mothers that received Maternity Allowance (44%).

**Table 6.3: Proportion of mothers that remained in same job and proportion that did not return and are still not working, by employer support**

		Returned & still at job	Did not return & not started another job
<b>All mothers (1,959)</b>		54%	22%
<b>SPL mothers (179)</b>		73%	3%
<b>Flexible working arrangements offered in pre-birth job</b>	Any (1,463)	57%+	20%-
	None (343)	43%-	30%+
<b>Childcare support offered in pre-birth job</b>	Any (1,051)	68%+	10%-
	None (705)	38%-	36%+
<b>Type of pay received</b>	SMP (1,413)	64%+	14%
	MA (263)	44%-	29%+
	OMP (313)	81%+	5%-
	None of these (243)	14%-	51%+

Base: unweighted bases of mothers in parenthesis; +/- indicates a significantly higher/lower difference compared with all mothers on average

Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

6.62) Multivariate analysis conducted as part of the Parental Rights Survey (2019) found that the most important driver of mothers returning to work was duration in job (that was also the biggest driver of mothers taking Maternity Leave/Pay). This was followed by net income and “*Mothers for whom a ‘Keep in touch’ scheme is offered by employer during maternity*”. The odds of a mother returning to work were:

- Nearly four times higher for mothers who had worked at a job for over 2 years and over five times higher for mothers in a job more than 5 years (both compared to those who had worked less than 2 years);
- Over twice as high for higher earners (over £25,000 per annum) compared to lower earners (under £15,000);
- Over twice as high for mothers for whom a ‘Keep in touch’ scheme is offered by their employer during maternity.



6.63) The odds of mothers returning to work were also significantly higher for mothers whose employer offered some kind of flexible working and mothers for whom childcare vouchers (or similar help) is offered by employer.

6.64) Mothers who take SPL are significantly more likely to return to work (either with their pre-birth employer or a new employer) than mothers in general (87% compared to 64%). This evaluation was not able to explore the relationship between SPL policy and the likelihood of returning to work, due to low sample size. There are many wider factors affecting return to work such as parent's employment history and employer characteristics, including availability of family-friendly policies.

6.65) Qualitative research carried out for this evaluation found that employees who reported positive experiences described a range of measures employers put in place to facilitate phased return that were distinct from the leave they took, e.g. through part-time or reduced hours, so they could adjust to returning to work at their own pace. Employees found this gave them a stronger sense of agency around hours worked and the flexibility to be present for school and nursery runs. Other forms of support mentioned as helping to smooth the return process included KIT days, cover arrangements and support managing breastfeeding.

6.66) For instance, interviewees said that KIT days helped employees stay on top of workplace developments, maintain workplace relationships and earn additional income. Having cover arranged by the employer and handover periods with cover staff when returning to work helped minimise any pressure that employees felt.

6.67) A lack of family-friendly support can lead to negative experiences on return however, such as including feeling pressure to return to work sooner than they would like, feeling pressure to complete an unrealistic workload on their return to work and having to adjust to changes made to their role and responsibilities in their absence:

*"They didn't seem to understand the fact that, yes, you've come back to work, it doesn't mean you're working at full capacity. It's going to take some time to get back up to that sort of level."*

(Male employee, SPL, local authority, male-dominated, very large employer)

*"I was seen a little bit as a jigsaw piece that has had to be slotted in somewhere. Yes, I think having time off, you sort of lose your position in College [ . . . ] personally it took an impact - it made an impact because it dented my confidence, teaching an A level that I don't have any experience of. It took me an awful lot of outside work to read up, to learn it, to prepare resources and to feel like I had enough knowledge to go to the classroom."*

(Female employee, Maternity Leave, Further Education, female-dominated, large employer)

6.68) Academic literature discusses family-friendly employer support and mothers' participation in the labour market. For instance, Fagan and Norman (2012) in their review of mothers' employment patterns post childbirth,<sup>130</sup> report that the likelihood of mothers returning to the workplace post-childbirth increases if they have access to workplace policies that facilitate a better work-life balance.

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<sup>130</sup> Fagan, C. & Norman, H. (2012). Trends and social divisions in maternal employment patterns following Maternity Leave in the UK. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(9): 544-560;

6.69) Plantenga and Remery in their (2005) assessment of 30 European countries,<sup>131</sup> found that though not widespread throughout Europe, employers have an important role in developing and promoting work-family arrangements as a supplement to legislative interventions, in order to facilitate women's participation in the labour market.

6.70) Grimshaw and Rubery (2015) in their review for the International Labour Organization,<sup>132</sup> note the importance of flexible working opportunities in improving women's employment outcomes and reduce the 'motherhood penalty'.

6.71) Family-friendly policies offered by employers – including parental leave – enable mothers in particular to accommodate work and childcare commitments. Family-friendly policies thus have a significant positive impact on mothers' participation in the labour market.

## Satisfaction with work arrangements and perceived effects of taking leave on career prospects

### Are parents who took SPL more satisfied with their working arrangements?

6.72) Given SPL's objectives to give parents more flexibility in how they share work and caring arrangements in the first year, this evaluation now turns to parents' satisfaction with their working arrangements post-leave, and whether parents who take SPL are more satisfied with their work-life balance than those who did not take SPL.

6.73) Parents who took SPL are more likely to be very satisfied with their current working arrangements than parents overall.

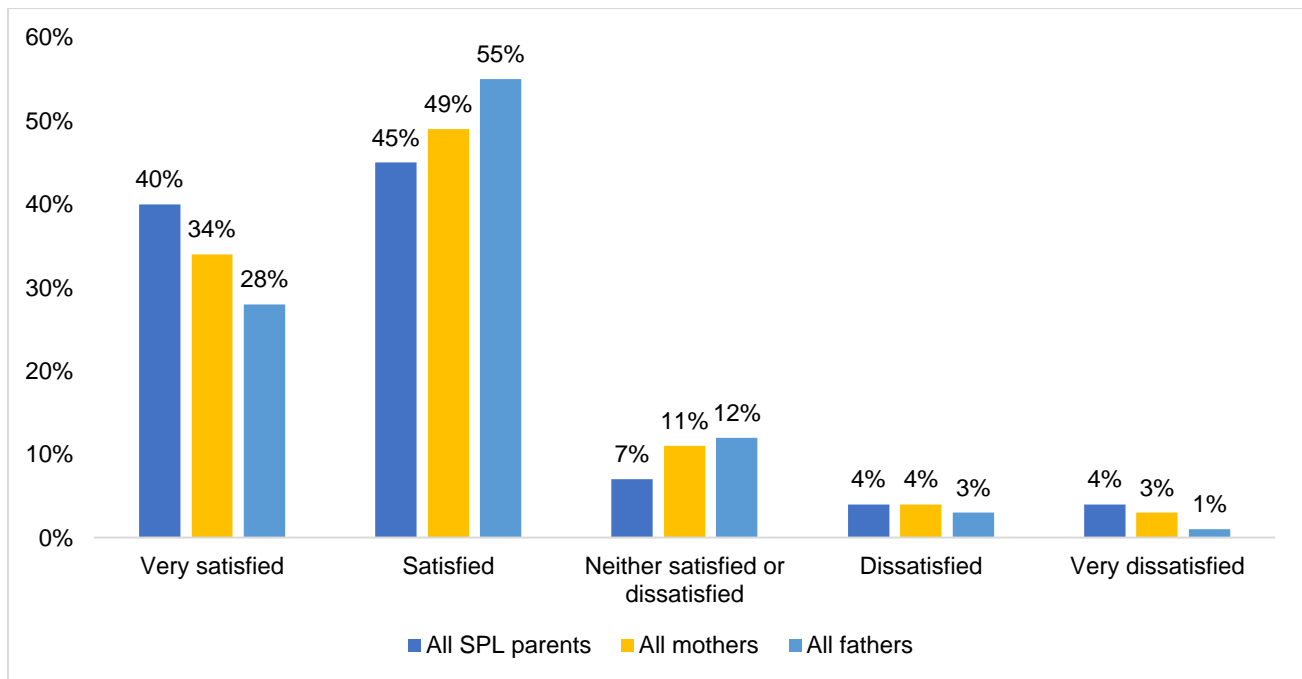
6.74) As Figure 6.8 shows, just over four in five mothers (83%), fathers (83%) and parents that took SPL (85%) are satisfied with their current working arrangements, although parents that took SPL are more likely to say they are 'very satisfied' (40%; 34% of mothers and 28% of fathers currently in employment). There are no statistically significant differences between mothers and fathers who take SPL.

### Figure 6.8: Are parents satisfied with their current working arrangements

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<sup>131</sup> Plantenga, J., & Remery, C. (2005). Reconciliation of work and private life: A comparative review of thirty European countries. Report financed by and prepared for the use of the European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Accessed from: <http://www.cecot.org/harmonitzacio/documentacio/estudi%20CE.pdf>

<sup>132</sup> Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2015). *The motherhood pay gap: a review of the issues, theory and international evidence*. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. ISBN: 9789221292678



Base: All parents who returned to work or got a new job since birth and are currently in employment (Core mothers: 1316; Core fathers: 967; SPL parents: 312)  
 Source: Parental Rights Survey (2019)

6.75) In terms of work-life balance, parents were asked to rate how satisfied they are on the whole these days on a scale from 1 to 10, on average parents that took SPL gave a score of 7.4, which is marginally higher than mothers and fathers from the core sample who gave a score of 7 out of 10.

6.76) Overall, just less than one in four parents who took SPL gave a score of 9 or 10 for their satisfaction with work-life balance (22%), which is the same proportion for core mothers (23%), but higher than for core fathers (16%). Parents who took SPL were less likely than core mothers however, to give a low score of between 1 and 4 (7% compared to 11%), and about as likely as core fathers (9%).

6.77) Findings from the qualitative interviews report that male employees who had taken SPL felt that the time off at home helped them gain new perspectives on their work-life balance.

6.78) For example, male employees interviewed found they had greater empathy with colleagues and direct reports who had children, so were more flexible when managing employees' family-related needs. Work-life balance improvements that employees experienced during leave continued when they returned to work. This was in part due to the changes in priorities also experienced when taking time off. Employees reported that, while their careers were still important to them, they were better able to maintain a balance between work and home.

### Have employees who have taken Shared Parental Leave perceived any impacts on their career?

6.79) Parental Rights Survey (2019) findings show that around a third of parents who took SPL said the leave they took was influenced by the mother's ongoing career progression. Over one in three fathers who took SPL (35%) cited considerations for their partner's career as a factor, and a similar proportion of SPL mothers (31%) reported that helping their own career progression was a factor influencing their decision to take SPL.

6.80) Around one in ten mothers who took SPL (9%) cited the positive consequences of SPL on their career progression. A similar proportion of fathers who took SPL (13%) cited the positive consequences of their leave on their partner's career progression.

6.81) Parents who took SPL were more positive about the effects on theirs/their partner's career progression than mothers and fathers in general. Only 1% of mothers said their leave positively affected the career progression of their partner and only marginally more (2%) said it had a positive effect on their own career. Similarly, only 2% of fathers said their leave was positive for their own career and this rises to just 3% in terms of their partner's career.

6.82) A minority of SPL parents (9%) reported negative career consequences from taking their leave. Fathers who took SPL were significantly more likely (15%) than SPL mothers (4%) to cite the negative impacts on their own career. Less than one in ten SPL parents (7%) report a negative impact on their partner's career.

6.83) The qualitative research also assessed whether employees perceived any impacts on their career from taking SPL.

6.84) Employees did not feel that taking parental leave had impacted their careers in any negative ways. This was either because they did not take a substantial amount of time off (6 months or less) or because taking nine months to a year off was the accepted norm.

*"I think because I only took it for 16 weeks, I don't think it had a huge impact"*

(Female employee, SPL for adoption, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

6.85) When positive changes were perceived, these were amongst male employees and dependent on individual and workplace context. For example, a male employee felt that taking parental leave motivated him to go for a promotion when he returned to work, while another male employee found that the time off was a chance to evaluate his career and the next steps he could take:

*"It did me the world of good if I'm honest, because it gave me a chance to really think about what I've done work-wise, and was I going back to doing the right thing, and things like that."*

(Male employee, SPL, local authority, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

6.86) Employees also felt positive about being able to set an example for their colleagues in terms of how SPL could be used, where they were amongst the first to take it at their workplace:

*"I was the first person in the department to take shared parental leave and they were very supportive of it in personal terms but also in terms of demonstrating to other employees, other colleagues, that this is an option. Subsequently, four other male colleagues have taken shared parental leave since I took it."*

(Male employee, SPL, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

## 7. Has the introduction of Shared Parental Leave and Pay led to any wider impacts?

*This section of the evaluation assesses whether the introduction of SPL has led to any wider impacts or societal benefits.*

*As part of this, this evaluation reviews anticipated wider benefits of SPL and tests the assumptions underpinning costs of the policy stated in the original Impact Assessment.*

### **Key findings**

More parents are benefitting from extra weeks of statutory paid leave since ShPP was introduced in 2015. There are, however, affordability concerns reported among parents which can act as a barrier to taking Shared Parental Leave.

Survey data shows that fathers who took SPL reported that their leave had made a difference to how they intend to arrange childcare responsibilities going forward, and that a benefit of their leave is that it enabled them to spend time with and bond with their child.

The flexibility SPL offers both parents for managing work and caring responsibilities, and the desire for work-life balance, are key factors influencing decision to take-up SPL.

Parents with experience of SPL have reported its benefits for their work-life balance, including providing them with more choice and flexibility over their work and caring arrangement and facilitating fathers' take-up of childcare responsibilities.

The UK's gender pay gap among employees (median hourly earnings excluding overtime) has reduced over time, from 19.2% in 2014 to 14.9% in 2022, this is likely due to broader economic factors and cannot be directly attributed to SPL.

The provision of family-friendly policies and parents' increased satisfaction with their work-life balance has a positive relationship with their commitment to their employer and may lead to a more productive workforce in the long-term. Survey evidence on SPL and job retention (Parental Rights Survey 2019) shows that just under three quarters of parents who took SPL (72%) returned to the job they had before the birth of their child and remained there.

In terms of cost assumptions, take-up among employee fathers was 5% in 2019 which is around the 'medium or best' estimate in the impact assessment. Among employee fathers, on average 14 weeks SPL was taken which is higher than that estimated previously. Mothers take on average 19 weeks SPL. SPL parents reported being paid at the statutory rate for SPL for an average of seven weeks, higher than estimated. Costs associated with administering SPL are likely to be as anticipated.

## Anticipated benefits of SPL

### Have anticipated benefits from the introduction of SPL been realised?

7.1) It was anticipated that the introduction of SPL and ShPP might confer wider social and economic benefits over a longer time period.<sup>133</sup> Economic and non-economic benefits include:

- Financial benefits to parents due to an increase in the amount of paid leave taken;
- Enhancing child welfare by providing increased opportunity for fathers to take time off work to care for their child;
- Providing both parents with more flexibility over their childcare arrangements;
- Providing mothers with a real choice over their timing of return to the labour market, where their preferred option is for the father or partner to take over responsibility for caring for the child;
- Employer benefits through increased retention of staff and greater flexibility in discussing how and when parental leave is taken.

7.2) These socio-cultural changes are the result of many drivers and in the case of SPL, were only anticipated to occur as the policy becomes embedded over a longer period of time.

### Financial benefits to parents

7.3) With the introduction of Shared Parental Leave in 2015, eligible parents were able to share up to 50 weeks of leave and up to 37 weeks of pay (at time of writing £172.48 a week or 90% of your average weekly earnings, whichever is lower) within the first year.

7.4) Survey data from 2019 found that take-up of SPL was reported among 4% of fathers and 1% of mothers in Great Britain. Average duration of leave was reported at just over 16 weeks taken among all SPL parents, with the average higher among mothers (19 weeks) than fathers (14 weeks). ShPP claims (from HMRC data) have increased from over 6,200 in 2015-16 to over 13,000 in 2021-22.

7.5) This would suggest that more parents are benefitting from extra weeks of statutory paid leave since ShPP was introduced in 2015. There are, however, affordability concerns reported among parents which can act as a barrier to taking SPL. Whether paid leave is perceived as a financial 'benefit' depends on the financial position of the parent(s) and ability to supplement statutory paid leave with 'income replacement' from other sources such as occupational enhancements from employers and savings.

### Enhanced child welfare by providing opportunities for fathers to take time off work to care for their child

7.6) It was anticipated that the introduction of SPL would lead to enhanced child welfare through shared parenting and increased bonding between father and child in the early years

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<sup>133</sup> BIS (2013) *Modern workplaces: Shared Parental Leave and Pay administration consultation – impact assessment*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/110692/13-651-modern-workplaces-shared-parental-leave-and-pay-impact-assessment2.pdf)

and following research<sup>134</sup> that shows fathers taking leave are more likely to be involved in childcare when the child is young, and this has a subsequent positive long-term effect on children's health, wellbeing and educational outcomes, increased fathers' involvement in childcare and thereby enhanced child welfare were anticipated in the long-term.

7.7) Survey data shows that fathers who took SPL reported that their leave had made a difference to how they intend to arrange childcare responsibilities going forward, and that a benefit of their leave is that it enabled them to spend time with and bond with their child.

7.8) Therefore, whilst SPL fathers said that their leave has positively impacted their intentions to continue sharing childcare responsibilities, measuring intentions could yield different results from measuring actual behaviour in the longer term.

7.9) Qualitative research is able, however, to highlight some of the effects of SPL in more depth, and fathers interviewed reported several ways in which they developed personally through taking SPL, including gaining improved confidence to continue hands on parenting in the future.

7.10) Wider academic research found that over the last couple of decades fathers (particularly fathers that are highly educated) have increased the time spent with children gradually over the last couple decades.<sup>135</sup>

7.11) Using longitudinal data from the UK, Australia and European countries, another study suggests that early involvement of fathers in the child's first year positively influences the father's involvement with their child in future months and years.<sup>136</sup> This in turn can have a positive longer-term effect on children in terms of their behaviour and cognitive development, including better peer relationships, fewer behavioural problems, higher academic achievement and more gender egalitarian behaviours. The association between fathers' involvement in childcare and positive behavioural outcomes in children beyond the first few years is also dependent on the type of involvement by fathers (how engaged or passive), their parenting

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<sup>134</sup> Tanaka, S. & Waldfogel, J. (2007). Effects of parental leave and work hours on fathers' involvement with their babies: evidence from the millennium cohort study. *Community, Work and Family*, 10(4): 409-426.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800701575069>;

Tamm, M. (2019). Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation. *Labour Economics*, 59: 184-197;

Flouri, E. (2005). *Fathering and Child Outcomes*. Wiley-Blackwell, London;

Chung, H. (2021). Shared care, father's involvement in care and family well-being outcomes. A Literature Review. Government Equalities Office, January 2021. Accessed from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957538/Shared\\_care\\_and\\_well-being\\_outcomes- Literature\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957538/Shared_care_and_well-being_outcomes- Literature_review.pdf)

<sup>135</sup> Chung, H. (2021). Shared care, father's involvement in care and family well-being outcomes. A Literature Review. Government Equalities Office, January 2021, Accessed from:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957538/Shared\\_care\\_and\\_well-being\\_outcomes- Literature\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957538/Shared_care_and_well-being_outcomes- Literature_review.pdf)

<sup>136</sup> Flouri, E. (2005). *Fathering and Child Outcomes*. Wiley-Blackwell, London;

Tanaka, S. & Waldfogel, J. (2007). Effects of parental leave and work hours on fathers' involvement with their babies: evidence from the millennium cohort study. *Community, Work and Family*, 10(4): 409-426.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800701575069>;

Tamm, M. (2019). Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation. *Labour Economics*, 59: 184-197;

Huerta, M., et al. (2013). Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development: Are They Related?

Evidence from Four OECD Countries, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 140, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5k4dlw9w6czq-en>

confidence and style and the mothers' involvement (i.e., the 'quality' of time spent by fathers on childcare).<sup>137</sup>

7.12) Given that the policy was only introduced in 2015 and that the survey evidence commissioned is cross-sectional, which examine mothers at one point in time after they have had their child, this evaluation is not able to assess any wider or long-term effects on children's health, wellbeing and educational outcomes from the policy.

### More flexibility for parents over childcare arrangements and work-life balance

7.13) It was anticipated that the introduction of SPL would give parents more choice and flexibility over how to arrange their work and caring responsibilities as a couple, as well as improve parents' work-life balance, so that they are better able to tailor their leave to their individual and household needs.

7.14) As outlined previously, evidence from the survey of parents and qualitative research found that the flexibility SPL offers both parents for managing work and caring responsibilities, and the desire for work-life balance, are key factors influencing decision to take-up SPL.

7.15) Positively, parents who took SPL in the Parental Rights Survey (2019) were found to be more likely to be satisfied with their current working arrangements than parents in general giving a score of 7.4, higher than mothers and fathers from the core sample who gave a score of 7 out of 10.

7.16) Consistent with this, interviewees from the qualitative research reported that SPL enabled parents to take-up transitional childcare arrangements, dictate their own pace of return to work, reduce disruption to their family life and fit work around childcare commitments. Moreover, male interviewees who had taken SPL felt that their leave had helped them gain new perspectives on their work-life balance, including new priorities to continue sharing caring responsibilities after the leave period.

7.17) Evidence from the survey of employers (MWPS, 2018-19) indicates that employers recognise these advantages of SPL, with one-quarter of those with experience of employees taking SPL in the two years prior to the survey saying an advantage of the policy is giving parents flexibility and choice, 16% citing the benefits to parents and children and 13% saying the policy helps parents with their work-life balance.

7.18) Parents with experience of SPL have reported its benefits for their work-life balance, including providing them with more choice and flexibility over their work and caring arrangement and facilitating fathers' take-up of childcare responsibilities.

### Supporting female labour market attachment

7.19) It was anticipated that the introduction of SPL, by providing mothers with more choice over their timing of return to the labour market, would support their connection to the workforce and future career development. Over time, it was envisaged that SPL has the potential to improve women's historical disadvantage in the labour market, reduce employment and gender

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<sup>137</sup> Cano, T, Perales, F & Baxter, J. (2019). A Matter of Time: Father Involvement and Child Cognitive Outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81(1): 164-184, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12532> referenced in Chung, H. (2021).



pay gaps associated with the motherhood penalty,<sup>138 139</sup> and improve equality in employment outcomes between mothers and fathers.

7.20) As section 6 has outlined in detail, mothers who take SPL are significantly more likely to return to work following the birth of their child than mothers in general.

7.21) Employment rates of women with dependents in the UK continue to rise since the introduction of SPL and this forms part of a longer-term trend.

7.22) There are many other contributing factors influencing women's participation in the labour market and this evaluation is unable to isolate the effects of SPL on employment rates.<sup>140</sup>

7.23) Though not assessing the SPL policy specifically, other studies focusing on the effect of parental leave on the long-term earnings of women with children find that in countries where men have access to generous, long-term periods of leave, the long-term earnings differential between men and women (often referred to as the motherhood penalty or gender pay gap) diminishes.

7.24) For instance, Sigle-Rushton and Waldfogel in their (2007) analysis of longitudinal data from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) across eight industrialised countries, conclude that by age 45, mothers in the Nordic countries face the smallest earnings relative to both women without dependents' earnings and men's earnings, compared to mothers in Anglo-American countries and mothers in Continental European countries. Though not explored in depth, the authors suggest that the positive effect of family-friendly policies such as paid parental leave for fathers in place in the Nordic countries, alleviating the burden on women to take-up the majority of childcare responsibilities, may be part of the explanation for this difference.<sup>141</sup>

7.25) The research by Norman (2020) cited above uses longitudinal data from the UK Millennium Cohort Study and finds that in some cases fathers' involvement in childcare in the first year is even more influential than mothers' occupation on her participation in the labour market when the child is aged three.<sup>142</sup>

7.26) In relation to earnings, the effects of parental leave taken by fathers on mothers' future earnings in the literature are mixed. Johansson's (2010) research on Swedish mothers suggests that for each month of leave taken by the father, the mother's future earnings

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<sup>138</sup> Sigle-Rushton, W and Waldfogel, J. (2007) Motherhood and women's earnings in Anglo-American, Continental European, and Nordic Countries. *Feminist Economics*, 13 (2). pp. 55-91. ISSN 1354-5701, DOI: 10.1080/13545700601184849

<sup>139</sup> Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2015). *The motherhood pay gap: a review of the issues, theory and international evidence*. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. ISBN: 9789221292678;

Dunatchik, A. & Özcan, B. (2020). Reducing mommy penalties with daddy quotas. *Journal of European Social Policy*. 31(2):175-191. DOI:10.1177/0958928720963324

<sup>140</sup> Including the 2009 financial crisis, changes to childcare entitlements, welfare benefits and the state pension age amongst others.

<sup>141</sup> Sigle-Rushton, W. & Waldfogel, J. (2007) Motherhood and women's earnings in Anglo-American, Continental European, and Nordic Countries. *Feminist Economics*, 13 (2): 55-91. DOI: 10.1080/13545700601184849

<sup>142</sup> Norman, H. (2020). Does Paternal Involvement in Childcare Influence Mothers' Employment Trajectories during the Early Stages of Parenthood in the UK? *Sociology*, 54(2):329-345;

Patnaik, A. (2019). Reserving Time for Daddy: The Consequences of Fathers' Quotas. *Journal of Labor Economics* 37(4): 1009-1059 <https://doi.org/10.1086/703115>

increased on average by 6.7% over a four-year period for each month of leave the father takes.<sup>143</sup>

7.27) Analysis over time shows the UK's gender pay gap among employees (median hourly earnings excluding overtime) has reduced over time, from 19.2% in 2014 to 14.9% in 2022,<sup>144</sup> this is likely due to broader factors than SPL, not least the consistent rise in women's employment rates described in Section 6 and the cultural changes towards gender norms described in Section 5.

7.28) This evaluation is unable to assess whether taking SPL is associated with improved labour market outcomes for women in the longer-term, both because the policy was introduced only relatively recently (2015) and because the survey evidence commissioned are cross-sectional studies, which examine mothers at one point in time after they have had their child.

### Employer benefits through increased retention of staff and greater flexibility

7.29) The original impact assessment estimated that employers would benefit from improved staff retention and greater flexibility in discussing how and when parental leave is taken. It was anticipated that this could lead to lower staff turnover (and so lower recruitment and training costs), reduced loss of knowledge and human capital, and higher staff commitment.

7.30) Research has shown that the provision of family-friendly policies and parents' increased satisfaction with their work-life balance has a positive relationship with their commitment to their employer and may lead to a more productive workforce in the long-term.<sup>145</sup> This is especially important in the context of enabling mothers' to return to work and stay in employment after they have had a baby, where wider evidence suggests that mothers are significantly more likely to return to the workplace post-childbirth if they have access to workplace policies that facilitate a better work-life balance.<sup>146</sup>

7.31) Survey evidence on SPL and job retention (Parental Rights Survey 2019) shows that just under three quarters of parents who took SPL (72%) returned to the job they had before the

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<sup>143</sup> Johansson, E. (2010). The effect of own and spousal parental leave on earnings. Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation, working paper No. 4. Accessed from: <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/45782>;

Hart, R. K., Andersen, S. N., & Drange, N. (2016). The father's quota: An earnings equalizer? Paper Presented in March 2016 at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Washington DC. Accessed from: [https://paa.confex.com/data/extendedabstract/paa/2016/Paper\\_1697\\_extendedabstract\\_453\\_0.pdf](https://paa.confex.com/data/extendedabstract/paa/2016/Paper_1697_extendedabstract_453_0.pdf);

Cools, S., Fiva, J. H., & Kirkebøen, L. J. (2011). Causal effects of Paternity Leave on children and parents (Discussion Paper 657). Oslo, Norway: Research Department, Statistics Norway

<sup>144</sup> ONS (2022)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/genderpaygapintheuk/2022>

<sup>145</sup> Clarke, S. & Holdsworth, L. (2017). Flexibility in the workplace: Implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations, ACAS. Accessed from: <https://www.acas.org.uk/flexibility-in-the-workplace>;

Colantuoni, F. et al. (2021) A fresh look at Paternity Leave: why the benefits extend beyond the personal. McKinsey, published 5th March 2021, accessed 15th May 2021 from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/a-fresh-look-at-paternity-leave-why-the-benefits-extend-beyond-the-personal>;

Beauregard, T.A. & Henry, L.C. (2009). Making the link between work-life balance practices and organisational performance. *Human Resource Management Review* 19(1): 9-22;

Kelliher, C. & Anderson, D. (2010). Doing more with less? Flexible working practices and the intensification of work. *Human Relations* 63(1): 83-106

<sup>146</sup> Fagan, C. & Norman, H. (2012). Trends and social divisions in maternal employment patterns following maternity leave in the UK. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 32(9): 544-560;

Grimshaw, D. & Rubery, J. (2015). *The motherhood pay gap: a review of the issues, theory and international evidence*. International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO. ISBN: 9789221292678

birth of their child and remained there, which is significantly more than mothers in general, with only half (54%) reporting they returned to their pre-birth job.

7.32) Mothers in professional occupations, earning £40,000 or more per year or qualified at degree level or above before they had their child are just as likely to return to their pre-birth employer as mothers who take SPL. This is supported with recent analysis by Norman (2020) who also finds that mothers' return to work is influenced by their occupational background.<sup>147</sup>

7.33) Around one in ten (11%) employers with experience of SPL say that an advantage of the policy is helping with staff recruitment and retention (MWPS, 2018-19). Senior managers interviewed within the qualitative research felt that staff viewed their workplace more positively for accommodating SPL and this was perceived to improve staff retention.

7.34) The qualitative research is also able to shed light on changes in employer perspectives. Senior managers and line managers felt that, when staff had time off to care for children, it improved morale across the workplace in two ways. One, staff, including non-parents, viewed their workplace more positively for offering and accommodating parental leave. This was then perceived to improve staff retention and productivity more generally. Secondly, when senior or line managers were able to accommodate leave requests, employees were loyal and did not seek alternative employment following leave:

*"I think people who also have no intention of even having kids or maybe had kids years ago, are like, 'It's nice to work for a university that does these kinds of things', so it can have a positive impact even on people who don't plan to take it."*

(Female senior manager, Higher Education, female-dominated, extra-large employer)

7.35) It remains difficult, however, to attribute any effects of SPL policy on parents' job retention and productivity in the workplace.

## Assumptions relating to the costs of SPL

To what extent have the cost assumptions underpinning the original impact assessment been realised?

7.36) Table 7.1 shows the original costs and benefits estimates for introducing Shared Parental Leave and Pay sets out in the impact assessment.

**Table 7.1: Costs and benefits estimates for introducing SPL&P in impact assessment, (millions)**

Costs	High	Best estimate (medium)	Low
Exchequer SPL, additional payments to fathers	£1.29	£0.32	£0.0
Exchequer SPL admin recurring costs	£1.5	£1.2	£0.0

<sup>147</sup> Norman, H. (2020). Does Paternal Involvement in Childcare Influence Mothers' Employment Trajectories during the Early Stages of Parenthood in the UK? *Sociology*, 54(2):329-345.

Employer recurring SPL costs	£3.3	£1.2	£0.3
Annually recurring benefits for parents from additional Exchequer payments	-	£8.4	-

### Exchequer costs in additional payments to fathers

7.37) The original estimate assumed rates of take-up between 2% and 8% among 267,000 eligible employee fathers with employee partners. Duration of leave was thought to be between 0 and 4 weeks. The statutory rate for 2011-12 was £128.73.

7.38) Latest evidence shows that take-up among employee fathers was 5% in 2019 which is around the 'medium' estimate in the impact assessment. One per cent of employee mothers took SPL. The total number of eligible employee fathers (part of a couple within households where all adults in the household are in employment) is approximately 275,000 (ONS, Labour Force Survey January-March 2019). This is consistent with estimates of eligibility for SPL reported in the original impact assessment.

7.39) Survey data (Parental Rights Survey 2019) shows that 43% of fathers took the statutory rate for at least some of their shared parental leave (18% did not know/preferred not to say). Half of mothers received the statutory rate of pay for at least some of their leave (35% did not know/preferred not to say).

7.40) Among employee fathers, on average 14 weeks SPL was taken which is higher than that estimated previously. Mothers take on average 19 weeks SPL. SPL parents reported being paid at the statutory rate for SPL for an average of seven weeks, higher than estimated.

7.41) Statutory Shared Parental Pay now £172.48, higher than flat rate used for the estimates in 2011/12.

### Exchequer SPL admin recurring costs

7.42) The original impact assessment estimated £1.2 million recurring costs (annually) from on-going IT and resource needs. This was based on 10 – 20 thousand claims each year. There have been fewer than 13,000 ShPP annual claims since the introduction of the policy.

### Employer recurring SPL costs

7.43) Ongoing costs to employers were expected to be around £1.2 million from administering fathers' take-up of SPL and ShPP in British workplaces. The original impact assessment assumed (medium estimate) that 11,400 individuals would be claiming ShPP annually. The scheme has attracted 13,000 individual claimants per year (2021-22) according to HMRC records. Actual costs to employers from administering SPL are therefore likely to be as anticipated.

# Conclusion

## Has Shared Parental Leave achieved its original objectives?

8.1) The original policy objectives of SPL scheme were to:

- Give parents more choice and flexibility in how they care for their child in the first year by increasing the share of leave fathers can take, thus enabling both parents to retain a strong link with the labour market;
- Encourage more fathers to play a greater caring role (pre-birth and in the first year) via longer, more flexible shared leave;
- Increase flexibility for employers and employees to reach agreement on how best to balance work and domestic needs without state interference.

### Giving parents more choice and flexibility

8.2) The majority of parents that take SPL agreed to a very high or high extent that SPL provides flexibility for parents taking leave. This indicates SPL policy is providing choice and flexibility for parents in how they arrange caring responsibilities for their child in the first year. In terms of factors influencing take-up of leave, SPL parents were also more likely to say the leave they took gave them and their partner the most flexibility. Parents with experience of SPL have reported its benefits for their work-life balance, including providing them with more choice and flexibility over their work and caring arrangement and facilitating fathers' take-up of childcare responsibilities.

8.3) Mothers' return to work after parental leave is associated with their pre-birth employment status, occupation, income and qualification level, as well as personal circumstance such as whether living with partner or spouse. Fathers who take SPL are more likely to be involved in childcare and that mothers who take SPL are more likely to return to work than mothers generally. Due to sample sizes, this evaluation was not able to explore the relationship between SPL fathers' involvement in childcare and SPL mothers' return to work.

8.4) Access to family-friendly support significantly increases the probability of mothers' return to work post-leave. The odds of mothers returning to work were also significantly higher for mothers whose employer offered some kind of flexible working and mothers for whom childcare vouchers (or similar help) is offered by employer. A lack of family-friendly support can lead to negative experiences on return, however.

8.5) Benefits are reported for those that take SPL. More parents are benefitting from extra weeks of statutory paid leave since ShPP was introduced in 2015.

8.6) SPL fathers are more likely than fathers overall to cite allowing both parents to have a full role in caring for the child as a positive consequence of the leave that they took. SPL mothers are also more likely than SPL fathers to say that it enabled the other parent to have a fuller role in caring for the baby.

8.7) Around one in ten mothers who took SPL (9%) cited the positive consequences of SPL on their career progression. A similar proportion of fathers who took SPL (13%) cited the positive consequences of their leave on their partner's career progression. SPL is beneficial for mothers in career terms. Qualitative research found SPL was taken by fathers in part to enable

their female partners to go back to work sooner than if they had taken Maternity Leave. SPL mothers are more likely to report increases in pay or a promotion than mothers overall. However, the same does not appear to be true for fathers. There is a perception among fathers that taking SPL might be detrimental to them in career terms.

8.8) The majority of parents that took SPL (85%) are satisfied with their current working arrangements, and two in five parents that took SPL are 'very satisfied' (40%). On average parents that took SPL gave a score of 7.4, which is marginally higher than mothers and fathers overall. Parents who took SPL were more likely than mothers and fathers in general to recommend taking the leave they took, although the vast majority do in all cases (97%, 91% and 86% respectively).

8.9) Employers are also shown to be broadly satisfied with the policy, noting more advantages than disadvantages, including increasing flexibility for parents, and helping with staff recruitment and retention.

### Encourage more fathers to play a greater caring role

8.10) In terms of awareness, where SPL was not taken over half of mothers (51%) and over two in five fathers (42%) had heard of SPL and had at least a small amount of knowledge of the policy. A third of all mothers who did not take SPL had not heard of SPL at all when their baby was born or adopted (33%), and the proportion is closer to half among all fathers that did not take SPL (45%). There is variation in awareness among parents by occupation, qualification level, income as well as protected characteristics such as age, ethnicity and disability.

8.11) Over seven in ten employers were aware of SPL policy. Employers and employees felt that the mechanisms of the SPL policy, such as pay and leave entitlements, could be complicated and difficult to understand in practice and that the policy was hard to explain to others. Efforts could be made to improve awareness, including among fathers and those with protected characteristics, to improve awareness within workplaces and make the SPL offer simpler to understand and explain to others.

8.12) Among eligible couples, more employee fathers (5%) than mothers (1%) in Great Britain took SPL following the birth or adoption of their child. Take-up rates are as estimated when the policy was introduced (between 2% and 8%). HMRC data shows that the take-up of SPL has also consistently improved since its introduction, to now over 10,000 individuals in receipt, in line with estimates in the original impact assessment.

8.13) Take-up of SPL varies amongst different groups of parents, including by age, income, qualification level and occupational status. Among fathers, take-up is particularly high in central Government organisations, predominately female workplaces and organisations with a trade union presence. Male take-up of SPL also varies by ethnicity. Improving take-up of leave entitlements among a more diverse group of parents will help further establish the policy in workplaces and reinforce positive messages around taking leave more generally. Evidence shows how take-up among peer groups is an important enabler for more and more fathers to take leave.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Dahl, Gordon B., Katrine V. Løken, and Magne Mogstad. 2014. "Peer Effects in Program Participation." *American Economic Review*, 104 (7): 2049-74. DOI: 10.1257/aer.104.7.2049

8.14) The ability to afford time away from work has been found to be an important factor in taking leave entitlements. One in four mothers and one in three fathers surveyed in the survey of parents stated the negative financial impact was the main reason for not taking SPL. The main reason cited amongst those who took SPL but did not take their full entitlement, was that they could not afford to. A further one in seven parents were worried about harming their career/business or said they or their partner took occupational or enhanced SMP; both of which may also be linked to financial concerns. Access to enhancements was found to be an enabler of taking leave. Access to enhanced pay is a direct facilitator of take-up of SPL, and conversely, reliance on only statutory pay is a barrier to take-up. Parents taking SPL were more likely to be employed in workplaces where enhancements were offered. Qualitative research found that across workplaces, employees and managers felt that the financial offer needed to be improved. When workplaces offered statutory ShPP, SPL was not accessible due to the pay reduction employees would have to take.

8.15) Evidence does show that attitudes towards sharing leave and childcare responsibilities are improving. More individuals support sharing parental leave equally between mothers and fathers than in 2012, prior to the introduction of SPL. Support has steadily declined for arrangements where the mother plays the main caring role, which forms part of a longer-term trend. There has been an increase over time in the proportion of mothers that say their partner regularly looks after their child while they are at work.

8.16) With fathers' access to SPL and ShPP in the mothers' 'gift', this can act as a barrier to fathers taking advantage of access to longer periods of parental leave, if a significant proportion of mothers do not want to share their leave with the child's father/mother's partner. In terms of barriers to taking SPL, three in ten (30%) mothers and around one in five (17%) fathers said they did not want to share or take this leave. Most mothers (84%) stated the factor influencing the decision to take the leave they took was because they wanted to mainly look after the child themselves, whilst far fewer fathers said this (21%).

8.17) Mothers who take SPL are more willing to share childcare responsibilities with their partner than mothers generally and their experiences of the scheme have facilitated a more shared approach to parenting once the leave period had ended.

8.18) SPL parents are most likely to indicate that their leave has made a difference to how they plan to share childcare at least to some extent (53%), compared with fewer mothers (19%) and fathers from the core sample (24%). This suggests that fathers' experience of SPL has positively impacted intentions to continue sharing childcare responsibilities in the first year, after the leave period has ended.

8.19) Fathers that took SPL are also three times as likely to mention that their leave enabled them to spend time/bond with their child, and four times as likely to say that it enabled the mother to go back to work earlier. There was consensus that the time at home facilitated by SPL led to personal growth and development.

8.20) Parents with experience of SPL have reported its benefits for their work-life balance, including providing them with more choice and flexibility over their work and caring arrangement and facilitating fathers' take-up of childcare responsibilities.

8.21) Within the qualitative research, employees reported that taking SPL influenced their parenting in two ways: it either enabled and solidified their intended shared parenting approach or created an opportunity for shared parenting going forward in a way that was not expected. Fathers who take SPL in particular report positive experiences from their time on leave, including improved confidence as a parent and a greater sense of work-life balance.

## Increasing flexibility for employers and employees

8.22) Employers reported several advantages of SPL, including SPL gives parents flexibility and choice (15%), helps with staff recruitment and retention (14%), improves employee morale (14%) and benefits parents and children (13%). Managers views also differed according to whether they had direct experience of SPL in their workplace. Positively, managers in more than half of workplaces (57%) did not report any disadvantages of providing SPL or Pay.

8.23) The qualitative research also found that employers are generally supportive of SPL. However, some employers reported that the policy was not actively promoted, noting that the scheme was complicated and hard to understand in practice.

8.24) The most commonly reported disadvantages cited among employers were the need to arrange cover for staff (10%), a negative impact on running the business (10%) and the loss of staff (9%).

8.25) Some employers in the qualitative research cited issues finding cover and difficulties accommodating discontinuous blocks of leave. Requesting leave was harder when awareness of the policy in the workplace was limited. Among some employers, employers' willingness to accommodate SPL requests had a limit, and that their leave request may not have been seen positively if a longer leave period was requested.

8.26) There were some concerns raised if large volumes of parents were to take SPL, although where managers could recall, the employer survey found that in 40% of workplaces with experience of SPL in the last two years, one or two female employees had taken it and in the remaining 4% three or more female employees had done so. Two in five (41%) workplaces said one or two male employees had taken SPL and in 6% three or more had done so.

8.27) Employers that had any staff taking SPL were also more likely to report use of flexible working than workplaces on average and to offer and promote family-friendly policies more generally. Parents who took SPL are more likely to say their employer offered family-friendly policies including flexible working arrangements and childcare support.

## Unintended consequences

8.28) This evaluation reviewed unintended consequences for parents or employers from the SPL and ShPP scheme, as follows:

**Fraud:** This evaluation did not find any evidence of fraud.

**Levelling down:** Whilst comparing findings from the most recent surveys of employers and parents and their earlier iterations indicates that employer schemes for Maternity and Paternity Pay may be less generous today than in the past, there is insufficient evidence to attribute this to the introduction of Shared Parental Leave.

**Complexity:** Evidence from the Parental Rights Survey (2019) found that a minority of parents (9% of mothers and 8% of fathers) who did not take up SPL said specifically that this was because it was too complicated to set up and manage. Similarly in the employer survey (MWPS 2018-19), less than one in ten managers in workplaces surveyed mentioned that SPL was complex to set up and manage, though this rises to almost one in five managers in larger



workplaces who are more likely to have direct experience of SPL. The interviewees from the qualitative research noted that the SPL policy could be complex and difficult to understand. Some of the features of SPL policy such as the need to involve two employers to discuss time off for parents and the need for fathers to negotiate transfer of Maternity Leave could act as a deterrent for parents. Similarly, challenges for workplaces to find staff cover to accommodate short periods of leave and in discontinuous blocks, may introduce added complexity for managers and colleagues.

**Negative impacts on fathers' careers:** A slightly bigger proportion of parents who took SPL listed the negative impact of SPL on theirs or their partners career progression as a negative consequence of the leave they took (9% and 7% respectively), than mothers and fathers in general. Fathers who took SPL (15%) were more likely to report a negative consequence from taking their leave was that it negatively affected the career progression than mothers who took SPL (4%).

# Annexes

## Abbreviations

APL – Additional Paternity Leave

ASPP – Additional Statutory Paternity Pay

BSAS – British Social Attitudes Survey

IDBR – Inter Departmental Business Register

KIT – Keeping in Touch scheme

MA – Maternity Allowance

MWPS – Management and Wellbeing Practices Survey

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OMP – Occupational Maternity Pay

ONS – Office for National Statistics

PAYE – Pay As You Earn

SAP – Statutory Adoption Pay

ShPP – Shared Parental Pay

SShPP – Statutory Shared Parental Pay

SMP – Statutory Maternity Pay

SPL – Shared Parental Leave

SPLIT – Shared Parental Leave in Touch scheme

SPP – Statutory Paternity Pay

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