



***The changing face of motherhood in Western Europe:  
Denmark***

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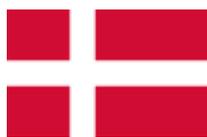
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## 1.1 Denmark

### 1.1.1 Introduction

Denmark is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in the Save the Children's *State of the World's Mothers Report 2011*.<sup>1</sup> As in the case of other Nordic countries such as Norway, Sweden and Finland, Denmark has a reputation for high levels of state involvement in the shaping of modern motherhood – and as a result, Denmark is considered one of the best places in the world to be a mother. Parental leave is substantial, childcare provision is comprehensive, gender equality is high on the political agenda, and women are encouraged to develop professional lives as part of their experience of motherhood. Women make up a large proportion of Denmark's labour force, with most mothers taking advantage of the extensive system of childcare provision in order to return to work while their children are still very young. At the same time, Danish men are also now encouraged, via increased paternal leave, to participate more actively in the domestic sphere, meaning that there is the promise (if not always the reality) of greater gender equality in this area of life as well.

This does not mean that mothers experience ideal conditions in Denmark, however: as in the case of many other European countries, the opportunity to combine childrearing with a professional career brings with it the stresses and strains of managing competing and sometimes divergent commitments inside and outside the home. In Denmark this is a particular issue in relation to the gendered division of unpaid household labour. As we shall see, the fact that these unequal distributions of domestic labour are seen by many as part of the normal order of things in the family home suggests that some more traditional ideas about gender remain prominent in Danish society, despite the considerable progressive changes that Denmark has seen in terms of gender equality in other areas of social life.

### 1.1.2 Historical perspectives

As with Norway, the social history of Denmark's transformation into a nation-state is inextricably tied to the changing face of motherhood and to the women's movement, which emerged in two waves, roughly during the years 1870-1920 and 1970-1985. Figures such as Mathilde Fibiger, Nina Bang, Bodil Begtrup and Olivia Nielsen were all instrumental in placing issues to do with motherhood at the centre of the Danish political project during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's organisations

such as the *Dansk Kvindesamfund* (Danish Women's Society) began to call for greater gender equality in Denmark. The first goal of such organisations was to secure the vote for women, which they succeeded in doing in 1915 (just two years after neighbouring Norway). A series of equality laws also followed during the early 1920s, the combined result of which was that women gained access to education, to work, and to equal rights and obligations in marriage and under the law. Nina Bang became the world's first female senior government minister as Denmark's Education Minister in 1924.

With these key battles over women's rights won, in the 1930s the move towards greater gender equality began to stall somewhat. Despite having the same legal and political rights as men, in practice women in Denmark continued to experience discrimination. This is partly evidenced in the relative invisibility of women in public life, especially within the sphere of politics. Until the end of the Second World War, the proportion of women in the Danish parliament never exceeded 4%, and only reached 10% in 1960 (the figure is now closer to 40%).

Issues to do with women's rights became central to Denmark's social and political life again in 1950s, when economic changes and the creation of a 'universalist', decentralised welfare state necessitated a re-thinking of the role of women in Danish society. After economic downturn in the 1930s, and years of upheaval and turmoil during World War II, the Danish economy began to flourish. In the 1950s the Danish economy started to become focused on manufacturing, and migration into urban areas rapidly increased.

As in Norway during the same period, the 1950s and 1960s also saw the emergence of movements advocating for women to remain in the domestic sphere. Those women who did enter into the workforce at this time were often stigmatised as being 'bad' mothers, because they did not dedicate themselves fully to their children. The economic realities of the 1960s-1990s, however, were to push forward a significant change in popular ideas about motherhood. In the second half of the twentieth century the Danish economy needed workers to keep up with levels of production, and as a result the labour force grew by almost one million people. Women represented 85% of this increase. With social mores to do with women and work changing apace with economic change, during the years 1960-1990 it slowly became more acceptable for women to engage in paid work, while also attending to the domestic sphere of the family.

This change in perceptions of motherhood was also augmented by the second wave of feminist activism in Denmark, during the years from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s. Based around the *Rødstrømpebevægelsen* (the 'Red Stocking' movement), women's organisations began to respond to their new position in the labour force by advocating for new forms of state childcare provision and

<sup>1</sup> Save the Children (2011) *State of the World's Mothers Reports 2011*. Save the Children.

changes to the gender division of labour in the home. While the new Danish constitution of 1953 did not explicitly deal with issues of women's equality with men, it set in place the principles of equality that would later be used to enact more exacting legislation related to gender equality.<sup>2</sup>

From the late 1960s onwards, for example, day-care facilities (*kommunale daginstitutioner*) were set up by local authorities in order to supplement existing private provision. These were intended both to encourage the healthy development of children, and to encourage women's participation in the workforce. In the same decade (1964) a 14-day universal maternity leave was introduced. The Social Security Act of 1976 built on these kinds of reforms by streamlining welfare provisions into one piece of legislation. The Danish constitution is now complemented by five parliamentary acts related to equality, specifically focusing on equality of opportunity, equal pay, equal treatment, and equal appointment to community bodies and to the civil service. A further piece of legislation, the 1987 *Plan of Action on Gender Equality*, calls for gender-related issues to be addressed at all levels of Danish political life through a process of 'gender mainstreaming'.<sup>3</sup>

This process has continued during the last twenty years, to the extent that issues of gender equality now make up an important part of mainstream politics. Currently some 38% of the Danish parliament are women, the Danish head of state is a woman (Queen Margrith II), and so is the Prime Minister. The recent election of Helle Thorning-Schmidt as Denmark's first ever female Prime Minister is considered by many as evidence of the success of 'gender mainstreaming' as a way of incorporating women into every aspect of public life in Denmark. There is some evidence that Danes agree: recent Eurobarometer data suggest that 73% consider gender equality to be more widespread in Denmark now compared with ten years ago.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, the election of Thorning-Schmidt into the Danish parliament has confirmed that issues of equality will remain in the forefront of the Danish political imagination; and this includes ongoing debate about the competing demands of contemporary motherhood in Denmark.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1.3 Demographics of motherhood

In order to understand the nature of contemporary motherhood in Denmark it is useful to consider the view

provided by the official statistics. The number of live births per 1,000 population in Denmark is 65.0, representing a small decrease from 66.2 in 1998. The fertility rate in Denmark, however, has increased slightly during the same period, and, unlike many other European countries, has been increasing since the 1970s. More recently, the fertility rate has increased marginally from 1.76 in 1997 to 1.9 in 2008. While this is below natural replacement, it is well above the EU27 average of 1.55. As with other Nordic countries, this increase is sometimes explained in relation to the level of childcare support provided by the state – that is, mothers are more likely to have more children because they can be confident that they will receive sufficient support to make this practicable and affordable. While mothers in Denmark are now having more children, they are also having children later in life: the average age at first birth for Danish mothers is now 29 – an increase of five years from 1970.<sup>6</sup>

Women are also getting married later in life: in 1970, 88% of Danish women were married by age 30, but now the figure is more like 40%. The average age of first marriage for women in Denmark is 32, while men on average marry slightly later in life, at 35.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, unlike many other European countries Denmark has also seen a slight increase in the number of marriages in recent years (although marriage rates have declined generally since the 1970s). In 1997 there were 6.6 marriages per 1,000 population, while in 2008 this had increased fractionally to 6.8 per 1,000 population. Again, this is significantly higher than the most recently recorded EU27 average (2007) of 4.9. In line with this increase in the rate of marriage, Denmark has also seen an increase in the divorce rate from 2.5 to 2.7 per 1000 population.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike many European countries, on average Danish women leave home at a relatively young age. Among women aged 25-29 only 20% still reside in the parental home. Most of those who do not live in the parental home in this age range live in a couple household. Indeed, among all EU27 and EU15 countries, Denmark has the lowest average age of leaving home for both men and women, suggesting that for many there is a period of independent living outside of the family home which serves as a prelude to establishing new families and, for women, becoming a mother.

Whether married or cohabiting, the majority of families with children in Denmark are couple households (50.9%), and most households are made up of four members. This

<sup>2</sup> In terms of family planning, for example, Denmark introduced legalised, state-funded abortion in 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Jespersen, K. (2011) (second edition) *A History of Denmark*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

<sup>4</sup> Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender Equality in the EU 2009*. Eurobarometer/European Commission.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Goth, Anita (2011) 'Denmark has its first female Prime Minister ever', in *KVinfo* [available at: <http://kvinfo.dk/side/674/article/118/> - accessed 21-11-2011]

<sup>6</sup> Danmark Statistik (2011) *Denmark in Figures 2011*. Danmark Statistik [available at: <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/upload/14851/dkinfigures.pdf> - accessed 24-11-2011]

<sup>7</sup> Danmark Statistik (2011) *Denmark in Figures 2011*. Danmark Statistik [available at: <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/upload/14851/dkinfigures.pdf> - accessed 24-11-2011]

<sup>8</sup> Eurostat (2010) *Eurostat Handbook 2010*. Eurostat.

tallies with recent OECD data suggesting that Danish women between 15-39 would ideally like to have no more than two children.<sup>9</sup> Only 5.1% of all households are occupied by single-parent families. Among these families, 85% are headed by mothers. A total of 18% of all Danish families with dependent children are single-parent families, while the vast majority (81.3%) are in couple households. Among these households, 20.93% are cohabiting couples. This represents a considerable increase in cohabiting households compared with figures for 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, we can see that Danish mothers are having more children, later in life, and that they are also marrying later in life. At the same time, Danish women are leaving home earlier, and living primarily in couple households. Most mothers raise their children in couple households, with an increasing number of women cohabiting. Among those families where there is only one parent, these are overwhelmingly single mothers. Single parent families, however, make up less than one fifth of all families with dependent children. Most mothers have approximately two children, in keeping with a commonly accepted view of the ideal Danish family type. The data would therefore seem to suggest that Danish motherhood is in many ways characterised by a traditional approach to the family, with the nuclear family, headed by a married heterosexual couple, as the norm experienced by most children. Women may start families later, and cohabit more, but otherwise contemporary families are quite similar, in form at least, to Danish families throughout the twentieth century. How, then, do Danish mothers reconcile this seemingly traditional experience of family life with a legacy of progressive social reform aimed at gender equality? How do Danish perceptions of motherhood incorporate both traditional ideals of motherhood while also embracing an increasing diversity of opportunities for women outside of the home?

#### 1.1.4 Defining motherhood (*moderskab*) in the Danish context

It is important to keep in mind, of course, that most Danish mothers now also maintain professional lives alongside this seemingly traditional experience of motherhood, and in this respect the lives of contemporary Danish mothers are quite different indeed to mothers of the 1950s. As in other Nordic countries, in Denmark this more inclusive, modern perception of what motherhood entails is inextricably linked to the role that the state plays in family life. In turn, the ideal of state provision for families is also tied into Danish national identity, as

progressive welfare reform is one of the hallmarks of the modern Danish nation-state. The idea of 'motherhood' or *moderskab*, therefore, is rich with symbolism about Danish society: mothers are expected to embody the best of traditional family values and nurturing virtues, while also acting as exemplars of the universalist Danish welfare state-in-action, and of gender equality-in-process.

Not surprisingly, this puts Danish mothers under some degree of strain in terms of maintaining expectations. Denmark is similar to Norway in that these discussions take as their starting point the widely-held belief that mothers 'have it good' in Denmark: they enjoy extensive levels of state childcare provision, and, particularly in the case of Denmark, they are also in an advantageous position in terms of continued participation in the labour force. With so many perceived benefits of being a mother in Denmark, there is little room in popular discourse for complaint: it is generally frowned upon for mothers to highlight any negative aspects of being a parent. With so much social support, Danish women are expected to love all aspects of their role as mothers and to effortlessly balance motherhood with other aspects of their lives.

This ideal image of Danish motherhood was most recently celebrated in the internationally popular documentary, *Babies*, produced by the American media magnate and doyenne of all things female, Oprah Winfrey.<sup>11</sup> The enduring image of self-assured, relaxed, confident Danish motherhood in *Babies* is captured in the practice of Danish mothers leaving their children outdoors when they go into a shop or for a coffee in downtown Copenhagen. Danish mothers are so confident in their roles, and Denmark is so safe for children, that Danish mothers feel comfortable leaving their prams on the street while they go about their business indoors. Indeed, Danish mothers are seen to approve of this practice because it makes their children strong and capable of dealing with cold weather while wrapped up in their *dunes* (Danish baby blankets).<sup>12</sup> Failure to live up to this care-free, confident ideal of Danish motherhood is a real concern for some new Danish mothers – as is the feeling of not being able to express these fears.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, Danish mothers are also considered by many to be beyond reproach: indeed, in popular discourse pundits use the term 'mama mafia' or the 'pram mafia' (*barnevognsmafiaen*) to describe mothers who are 'militant' in their commitment to their children above all else. A recent example of the *barnevognsmafiaen* in action was the report of a Copenhagen café owner being

<sup>9</sup> OECD (2010) *OECD Family Database 2010* [available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/30/35/45582462.pdf> - accessed 25-11-2011]

<sup>10</sup> OECD (2010) *OECD Family Database 2010*. [available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/27/41919533.pdf> - accessed 24-11-2011]

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.oprah.com/oprahshow/Watch-a-Sneak-Preview-of-the-New-Movie-Babies-Video>

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, 'motherhood Mondays: Sleeping in Denmark' [available at <http://joannagoddard.blogspot.com/2011/09/motherhood-mondays-prams-in-denmark.html> - accessed 2-12-2012]

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, <http://www.danishmama.com/2011/11/whats-the-big-deal/>

physically assaulted by young mothers because he asked them not to breastfeed in his establishment. Popular with young Copenhagen mothers, the café eventually accommodated the *barnevognsmafiaen* by creating a 'breastfeeding lounge' suitable for this particular motherly activity.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, such cases attract media attention because they are rather rare and somewhat extreme. Perhaps more common is the experience of women feeling pressure to achieve the ideal of Danish motherhood, in terms of being the perfect carer for one's children, the ideal housewife for one's partner, and with regards to professional success as well – all the while maintaining similarly high expectations for gender equality.

### 1.1.5 Motherhood and employment

These issues are central to the relationship between motherhood and employment in the Danish context. One of the reasons why Denmark has a low unemployment rate overall is the fact that so many women are working. In 2009, 79.2 % of men and 74.4% of women were actively involved in the labour market. Among women in full-time employment the average number of working hours is 33.3 per week. This compares with an average of 39 hours per week for men.<sup>15</sup> Unemployment for men in Denmark is currently at 3.0%, while for women the figure is only slightly higher at 3.7%. This is significantly lower than the EU27 average of 7.5% and far below countries such as Spain (13%) and Greece (11.4%) and Slovakia (10.9%).<sup>16</sup> Among women, 24% are engaged in part-time work, while 17% of men have part-time jobs.

These figures are unusual in comparison with other EU27 countries in terms of the relative parity between men and women in part-time work. The norm, even in other Nordic countries, is for women to account for a much larger proportion of part-time work than men.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the figure for women working part-time is actually now lower than in the past, with more women (and mothers) engaging instead in full-time employment.<sup>18</sup> This figure must be reconciled, however, with the fact that Danish women (and men) enjoy high levels of flexible

hours and working time banking. Less than half of the Danish labour force (45%) works fixed or staggered hours. This is particularly beneficial to working mothers in that it affords a much more flexible approach to work, within which family responsibilities can be more easily accommodated.<sup>19</sup>

In part this suggests that paid employment has become normalised as part of the experience of contemporary motherhood in Denmark. Indeed, according to recent Eurobarometer data, 57% of Danish respondents agree that women who do not work are isolated from the world, implying that paid employment is a necessity rather than an option when it comes to quality of life for women. It is also interesting to note, however, that in the same survey the majority (56%) agree that it is normal for women to work less than men. It would seem that while paid work is an essential part of women's lives in this respect, it is also assumed that mothers will work less than their partners and that their primary responsibility is to the family rather than to work. This is in keeping with perspectives on the relative importance of work and family life. Slightly more than half (57%) of Danes agree that mothers should put looking after their children above any professional aspirations. While this figure is considerably lower than the EU27 average (70%), it nevertheless suggests that family is still perceived to come first for working Danish mothers.<sup>20</sup> These figures also imply, then, that there is a tension between the normalisation of paid work as part of the experience of being a woman in contemporary Denmark, and the continuation of an ideal vision of motherhood that places women in the home more than in the workplace.

In addition to this issue for working mothers, there also remains a significant gender pay gap between men and women in Denmark. While below the EU27 average of 17.1%, the current gender pay gap of 16.8% between men and women in Denmark suggests continued gender inequality in the workplace. It should be noted that this represents a decrease from 17.6% in 2006, but that generally the gender pay gap in Denmark has not changed significantly since the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> According to recent Eurobarometer data, 55% of Danish respondents agreed that addressing the gender pay gap between men and women was the most important issue to do with gender equality in the country. In the same survey, 50% agreed that providing women with equal pay and equal rights in

<sup>14</sup> See for example, *The Copenhagen Post*, 'The Mother Mafia and other Myths of Modern Motherhood', [available at <http://www.cphpost.dk/news/national/mama-mafia-and-other-myths-modern-motherhood> - accessed 2-12-2011]

<sup>15</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*. [<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf> - accessed 2-11-2011]

<sup>16</sup> Eurostat (2010) *Eurostat Handbook 2010*. Eurostat.

<sup>17</sup> Danmark Statistik (2011) *Denmark in Figures 2011*. Danmark Statistik [available at: <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/upload/14851/dkinfigures.pdf> - accessed 24-11-2011]

<sup>18</sup> Gupta, N., Smith, N., Verner, M (2007) 'PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE: The impact of Nordic countries' family friendly policies on employment, wages, and children', in *Review of Economics of the Household*, Vol. 6:65-89.

<sup>19</sup> Eurostat (2007) *The flexibility of working time arrangements for women and men*. [available at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-SF-07-096/EN/KS-SF-07-096-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-07-096/EN/KS-SF-07-096-EN.PDF) - accessed 1-12-2011]

<sup>20</sup> Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender Equality in the EU 2009*. Eurobarometer/European Commission.

<sup>21</sup> Gupta, N., Smith, N., Verner, M (2007) 'PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE: The impact of Nordic countries' family friendly policies on employment, wages, and children', in *Review of Economics of the Household*, Vol. 6:65-89.

the workplace are crucial to improving participation in the labour force. A further 63% were in favour of 'making working hours more flexible and introducing greater possibilities of working' as a means of improving the quality of life for women. Among Danish participants, 31% thought that companies should be compelled by law to facilitate better work-life balance. At the same time, 47% agreed that women were not as willing as men to fight to make a career for themselves, suggesting persistent, engrained perceptions of women as inherently less capable or competitive in the workplace, compared with the domestic sphere.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.1.6 Childcare

Despite these assumptions about the competitiveness of women in the workplace, the statistics speak for themselves: women in Denmark work more than women in most other European countries. One of the main reasons why Danish women can sustain such high levels of participation in the labour market is the fact that childcare provision in Denmark is so comprehensive. Statutory maternity leave for Danish mothers currently stands at 18 weeks, at 100% of normal pay. Paternity leave is 2 weeks, with at least 90% of pay, although Denmark is the only Nordic country not to have a formal quota for paternal leave beyond this two week period. Maternity and paternity leave is complemented by a further 32 weeks of parental leave to be shared between the mother and father, which can also be transferred and used on a part-time basis. It is quite unusual, however, for fathers to take very much of this leave. Instead, mothers take the majority and remain away from work for longer. It is interesting to note that this is in part connected to rates of wage compensation for men and women relative to the areas of the economy in which they work.

As more women work in the public sector they are more likely to receive 100% wage compensation from their employers while on parental leave, while fathers, more frequently employed in the private sector, will receive considerably less (closer to 60%). It therefore often makes financial sense for families to place the onus for early childcare on the mother, while the father continues in (better) paid employment.<sup>23</sup>

Under the Leaves Schemes Act, Danish parents are entitled to further time off work (between 13 and 26 weeks) until children reach the age of eight. This leave is subsidised by the government through state childcare benefit, or *børnepasningsydelse*, up to 70% of full salary. This is actually a reduction in parental leave from the mid 2000s, when total leave could be extended to 52 weeks.

<sup>22</sup> Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender Equality in the EU 2009*. Eurobarometer/European Commission.

<sup>23</sup> Gupta, N., Smith, N., Verner, M (2007) 'PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE: The impact of Nordic countries' family friendly policies on employment, wages, and children', in *Review of Economics of the Household*, Vol. 6:65-89.

Among single parents, some 99% have received childcare maintenance provision since the early 2000s.<sup>24</sup>

Among the Nordic countries (and therefore across Europe as well), Denmark has the most comprehensive system of daycare provision for children in the early years. In the pre-school years (0-6 years), childcare is particularly extensive. Childcare is managed across a number of different facilities, all of which are managed at the municipal or county level. Daycare facilities, or *dagtilbud*, are available at subsidised rates for all children in this age range, in addition to pre-school classes (*børnehaveklasse*) and school-based leisure time activities (*skolefritidsordning*) for slightly older children. The quality of childcare is also high, with student-staff ratios of approximately 6:1. The extent of childcare provision in the early years in part explains why parental leave is slightly shorter in Denmark than in other 'Nordic model' countries such as Norway and Sweden. Childcare provision continues until children reach the age of 16.

Each of these forms of childcare provision serves, then, to encourage women to return to work after childbirth. This is evidenced by the fact that, unlike other European countries, Denmark also experiences a low level of wage 'penalty' for mothers. That is, most women are able to successfully return to work after childbirth at similar or equivalent levels of status and pay to those experienced before maternity leave. Smith et al., for example, have shown that Danish mothers do not have a significantly lower labour supply than other women, when controlling for other factors.<sup>25</sup> This may be connected to the level of childcare provision for children aged 0-2 and the subsequent opportunities that this provides for mothers wishing to return to work soon after childbirth. On the other hand, Nielsen et al. provide a slightly more nuanced perspective, suggesting that in fact there are long-term wage penalties for *some* Danish mothers.<sup>26</sup> Nielsen et al. argue that mothers in the private sector do face a small wage penalty, while those in the public sector are much less likely to experience the same disadvantage because of the assurances that the public sector provides for its female employees.<sup>27</sup>

While Danish childcare provision is therefore considerable in comparison with other EU27 countries, and while it is successful in encouraging many mothers to participate in

<sup>24</sup> OECD Family Database [available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/52/8/41920285.pdf> - accessed 1-12-2011]

<sup>25</sup> Smith, N., Callan, T., Dex, S., & Vlasblom, J. D. (2003). Taxation of spouses: A cross country study of the effects on married women's labour supply. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 55(3), 417-439.

<sup>26</sup> Nielsen, H. S., 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.

<sup>27</sup> See also Gupta, N. and Eriskin, T. (2007) 'New workplace practices and the gender wage gap', WORKING PAPER 04-18, Aarhus School of Business

the labour force, there is still evidence that some Danish families find the standard of provision to be lacking. Eurobarometer data suggests that 54% of Danes think childcare provision is too expensive, to the extent that the costs are equivalent to mothers' earnings.<sup>28</sup> Recent European data also shows that despite this level of provision, some 22% of Danes record a time conflict between work and family life. A further 47% record dissatisfaction with time devoted to family, suggesting that even though childcare provision is very comprehensive, parents still do not see it as a substitute for family time spent together.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.1.7 Time use and the domestic division of labour

This may be linked to the fact that time is also taken up by domestic chores and housework, which may detract from the 'quality' family time at home. In particular, domestic tasks impact negatively on the available time of Danish mothers, as it is mothers who complete the lion's share of housework. Recent European data suggests that Danish men are quite involved in housework compared to other European countries. Among Danish men, roughly 50% claim to be responsible for daily household chores, in comparison with the EU average of 45%. Among Danish women, however, the figure rises to 80%.<sup>30</sup>

In a separate study for the Danish National Centre for Social Research, a more detailed picture of the unequal division of labour emerges. Women are responsible for 67% of cooking, while men do the remaining 33%. When it comes to time-inflexible tasks like picking children up from day care – tasks that can impact considerably on working hours – women also do more than two thirds of the domestic work. Interestingly, this study in particular also suggests that Danish women rationalise this unequal division of labour not as a result of asymmetrical power relations in the home, but instead as an independent choice that they make for themselves.<sup>31</sup> According to these data, mothers seem quite happy to accept that their larger share of domestic work is a normal part of the order of things in the family.

Not all data support this view. Recent Eurobarometer data, for instance, suggest that 19% of Danish respondents see the unequal sharing of household tasks as the main area of gender equality that needs to be addressed. When

asked about gender equality in household tasks, however, 69% of Danes agree that it is normal for men to participate less in household tasks.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, only 16% of Danish women feel that they do 'more than their fair share of housework', while a further 80% agree that they do 'just about' their fair share.<sup>33</sup> More interesting still, it would seem that Danes are also optimistic about changes in this aspect of family life, with three-quarters believing that men will continue to take more responsibility for household and family tasks over the next twenty years.<sup>34</sup> These slightly conflicting data seem to speak to the fact that while mothers are compromising on family time in order to catch up on domestic chores, and while they are conscious of the inequalities inherent in this division of domestic labour, there is also a well-held belief in Danish society that this is part of a mother's role in the family. This is a trend that is reflected in other data as well. While the same Eurobarometer survey suggests, for example, that 71% of Danes are in favour of men taking responsibility for childcare in the home, it is interesting to note that only 39% agree that a father should give up his job in favour of domestic responsibilities if he earns less than the mother. In this respect there seems to be a limit to which Danish men (and women) are willing to embrace total gender equality in the domestic sphere.

### 1.1.8 The role of sport in the lives of Danish mothers and children

Healthy living is an issue that is high on the agenda both in public and political discourse in Denmark. Recently, for example, the Danish government has sparked much debate by putting forward a so-called 'fat tax' on certain foods high in sugar and salt, in an attempt to counter rising levels of obesity among the adult population.<sup>35</sup> More generally, the Danish government is also committed to increasing sports participation as a means of combating sedentary lifestyles and encouraging health living. Sports participation has been increasingly steadily in Denmark since the 1960s, when only 15% of Danes took part in regular physical activity.<sup>36</sup> Overall, Danish people now enjoy a high rate of sports participation, with some 64% of Danes exercising regularly.

Among those who do exercise regularly, most (64%) do so outside, either in the countryside or in a park. It is

<sup>28</sup> Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender Equality in the EU 2009*. Eurobarometer/European Commission.

<sup>29</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*. [<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf> – accessed 2-11-2011]

<sup>30</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*.

<sup>31</sup> European Working Conditions Observatory (2009) 'women satisfied with current division of labour', [available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/2008/12/DK0812019I.htm> - accessed 1-12-11]

<sup>32</sup> Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender Equality in the EU 2009*. Eurobarometer/European Commission.

<sup>33</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2009) *Second European Quality of Life Survey*. [<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2009/02/en/2/EF0902EN.pdf> – accessed 2-11-2011]

<sup>34</sup> Eurobarometer (2010) *Gender Equality in the EU 2009*. Eurobarometer/European Commission.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, 'Body Blow for Butter-Loving Danes as Fat Tax Kicks In', *The Guardian*, October 2011 [available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/02/denmark-fat-tax-obesity> - accessed 2-12-2011]

<sup>36</sup> Fridberg, T. (2010) 'Sport and exercise in Denmark, Scandinavia and Europe' in *Sport in Society*, 13:4, 583-59

interesting to note, along these lines, that most Danes (53%) do not belong to sports clubs. This is in stark contrast to the situation in Norway, where most people belong to some kind of state-sponsored sports organisation. It is also in contrast to the situation in Denmark in the 1960s, when most sporting activity took place in sports clubs. Among Danes, most (76%) agree that they engage in sports and physical activity in order to improve their health, while a further 47% exercise to control weight, and 33% exercise to improve self-esteem. Almost one fifth of Danes (18%) agree that they never exercise of play sport, but only 4% agree that they never take part in physical activity of any kind.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, however, more than half of Danish respondents (66%) suggest that being physically fit does not really interest them, relative to other activities. On one level, this may be linked to the so-called 'Law of Jante' or *Janteloven* – a sense of modesty and humility in relation to sporting activities that eschews competition and the overt celebration of individual success, in favour of the simple pleasure of participation. Competitive sports may in this sense not hold the same draw in Denmark as they may do in other European contexts.

Other practical factors, however, can also be taken into consideration. Just as time management is an issue for mothers in Denmark, time constraints are also a major barrier to sports participation for Danes. Just under half (45%) agree that a lack of free time is the main reason why they do not exercise more. It is certainly not an objective lack of local sports facilities that hinders participation in sports; on the contrary, 90% of Danes agree that their local context provides ample facilities for exercise. Similarly, 89% agree that they have access to local sports clubs as well. Ironically, however, 74% of Danes also agree that their local council could do more to encourage sports participation and healthy living.<sup>38</sup>

Among young people aged 15-24 in Denmark, 57.8% agree that they think they have a very good level of physical fitness. Within the same age range, 16% are overweight or obese, when measured against BMI.<sup>39</sup>

## 1.2 Danish national survey

### 1.2.1 Introduction

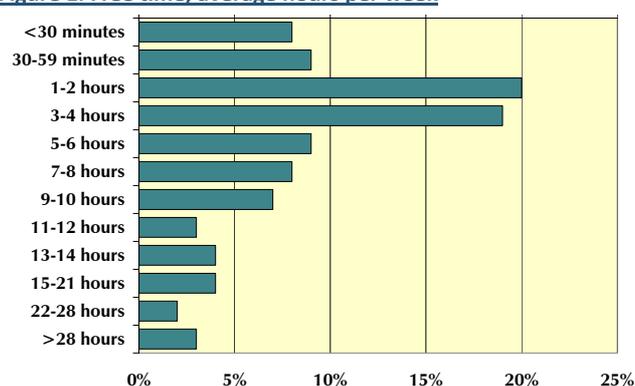
A survey of over 514 Danish mothers, with at least one dependent child under the age of 16 years, was conducted during November 2011. The purpose of the poll was to explore aspects of contemporary motherhood by mapping mothers' insights and opinions on a variety of topics including: time-use; sources of advice and levels of

support; the impact of the economic downturn; the extent to which mothers are valued; the role of fathers in contemporary society; and aspects of child development and the importance of sport in this context. The details of the survey are explored below.

### 1.2.2 Current free time and 'me time'

Figure 1 depicts the amount of free time that Danish mothers perceive they have in an average week.

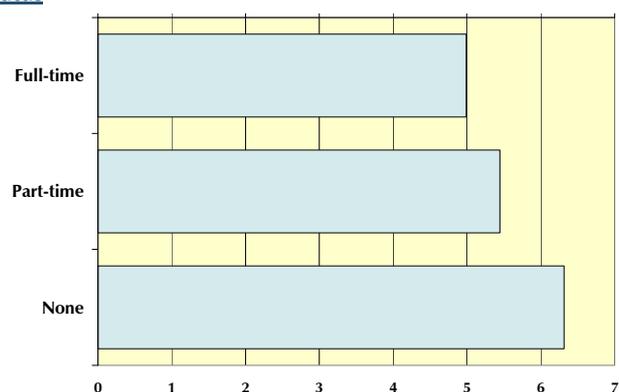
Figure 1. Free time, average hours per week



The most frequent answer saw 20% of respondents saying they have between 1 and 2 hours of free time. A further 19% said they have between 3 and 4 hours. When an average is taken across all of the answers given, Danish mothers have 5.8 hours of free time in a week, which constitutes a middling amount when compared to other countries in the study.

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of the answers according to the employment status of the respondent.

Figure 2. Free time, average hours per week by employment status



If one looks to the most populous answer given overall, which was that mothers had 1-2 hours of free time (20%), by employment status, a more nuanced picture is revealed. Nearly one quarter (24%) of full-time working mothers said that they have 1 to 2 hours of free time in a week, as did 18% of part-time mothers and 11% of non-working mothers. Nearly a quarter (23%) of part-time working mothers reported having between 3 and 4 hours of free time, as did 20% of full-time working mothers and

<sup>37</sup> Eurobarometer (2010) *Sports and Physical Activity*. [available at - [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_334\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_334_en.pdf) - accessed 2-12-2011]

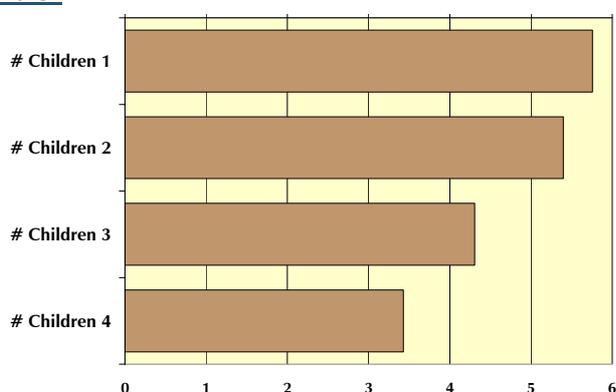
<sup>38</sup> Eurobarometer (2010) *Sports and Physical Activity*.

<sup>39</sup> Eurostat (2010) *Youth In Europe: A Statistical Portrait*. Eurostat.

17% of mothers that did not work outside of the home. It can be seen then, that mothers who are in formal employment have, in general, less free time. Indeed, 11% of non-working mothers said they have between 9 and 10 hours of free time in a week, which is only true for 2% of part-time working mothers. As is mentioned in section 1.1.6 of the Danish background report, provision of formal childcare is extensive in the country. This does not, however, mean that the added burden on working mothers to meet the demands of both their home and working lives is completely removed.

Figure 3 shows the average amount of free time our respondents have according to how many children they have.

**Figure 3. Free time, average hours per week by number of children**



It can be seen here that mothers with fewer children have more free time. Danish mothers with one child have on average 5.8 hours of free time in a week, whereas mothers with 4 children have on average 3.4 hours.

### 1.2.3 Generational comparisons

The study then looked to identify whether respondents felt the amount of free time they were reporting was more or less than the amount of free time enjoyed by their own mothers when they were at the same life-stage. Figure 4 illustrates the results.

**Over a third (34%) of Danish mothers believe they have more free time than their own mothers did when they were at the same life-stage.**

Over a third (34%) said that they have either ‘a lot more’ (18%) or ‘a little more’ (16%) free time than their own mother. A quarter of respondents thought that they have ‘about the same’ amount of free time, and 27% reported having either ‘a little less’ (12%) or ‘very much less’ (15%).

**Figure 4. Free time, generational comparison**

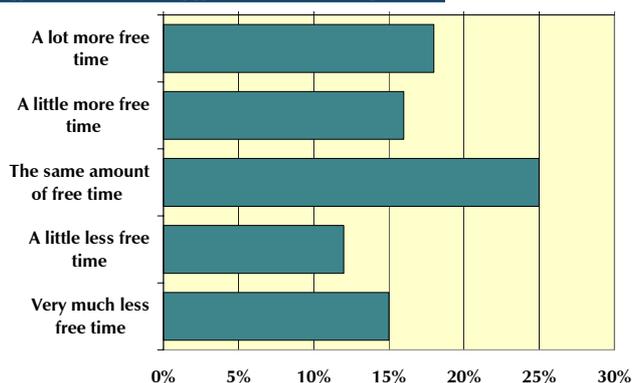
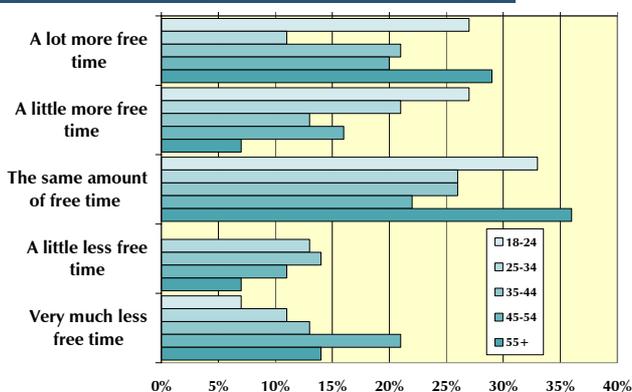


Figure 5 shows the data when they are broken down according to the age of the respondent.

**Figure 5. Free time, generational comparison by age**

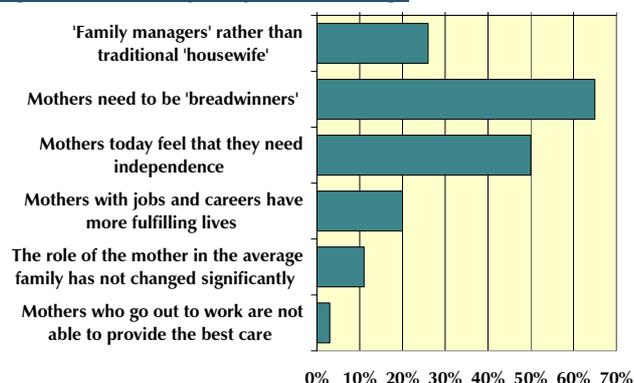


It is interesting to note that the two cohorts that most frequently noted having ‘a lot more free time’ were the 18-24 year olds (27%) and the 55+ age group (29%), who sat at each end of the age range scale. It can be suggested that the reasons these groups’ mothers had a lot less free time to themselves are quite different. For the 55+ age cohort, it is likely that their own mothers were at a similar life-stage to them when labour saving devices were not widely used in the home, meaning that their domestic tasks were much more demanding and took much longer, leaving less free time. For the 18 to 24 year old group, it is perhaps the case that their mothers were of a generation that saw an increasing normalisation and expectation for women to enter the workforce. If our youngest age cohort’s own mothers were raising their children and taking on formal employment when government support, gender roles and workplace practises were in their infancy in terms of supporting working mothers, it can be argued that these mothers were having to sacrifice their free time, as others were yet to provide meaningful assistance to help them achieve a work-home life balance. Their daughters are now growing up in an environment where there is more extensive support, resulting in them having more free time.

### 1.2.4 Perceptions of change

Figure 6 shows the ways in which our respondents perceived the role of the mother to have changed when compared with the previous generation.

Figure 6. Mothers' perceptions of change



The area of change most emphasised was in terms of the world of work, with 65% saying that mothers today need to be 'breadwinners' much more than in their own mother's day.

**Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Danish mothers think that there is a greater need for mothers to be 'breadwinners' and earn money, when compared to a generation ago.**

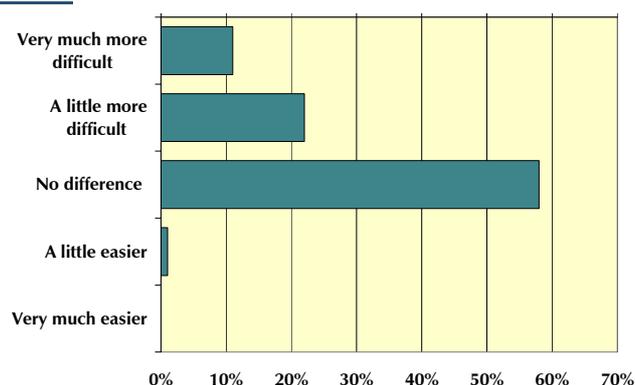
Only Greece and Norway registered a higher emphasis on being a 'breadwinner' out of all of the countries in the study. Half of respondents also thought that it was a notable change that mothers today need independence and interests that are separate to the family, to a greater extent than their own mothers.

Just over a quarter (26%) of the mothers surveyed said that a main area of change was that mothers today needed to be more like 'family managers' than the 'housewife' of their own mother's day. Only Norwegian mothers registered a lower level of agreement with this statement. It can be suggested that the fact that the answers given mostly focused on the role of the mother in the world of work, and outside of the home, shows that this is the site that debates regarding change and what it means to be a mother are currently centred. The relatively low agreement with the 'family manager versus housewife' statement may also reveal that Danish mothers do not regard their own mothers to have been 'housewives', and that gender role changes in this respect took place more than a generation ago.

### 1.2.5 Impact of economic downturn

Figure 7 depicts the perceived impact of the recent economic conditions on our respondents' ability to be a 'good' mother.

Figure 7. Impact of economic downturn on being a 'good' mother

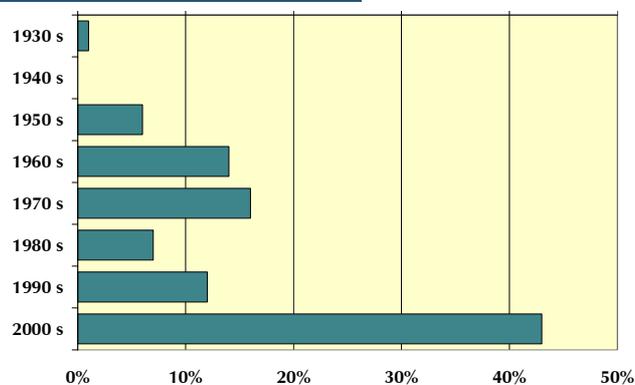


Over half (58%) thought that the recent economic conditions had made 'no difference' to their mothering abilities. A third (33%) did register some degree of newfound difficulty, with 22% reporting that being a 'good' mother was now 'a little more difficult', and 11% that it was 'very much more difficult'. When compared with the other countries in the study though, Danish mothers were the least impacted by the economic downturn in terms of their ability to be a 'good' mother.

### 1.2.6 Ideal decades

Figure 8 shows the responses given by Danish mothers when asked which decade in the last eighty years they would go back to if they had a time machine.

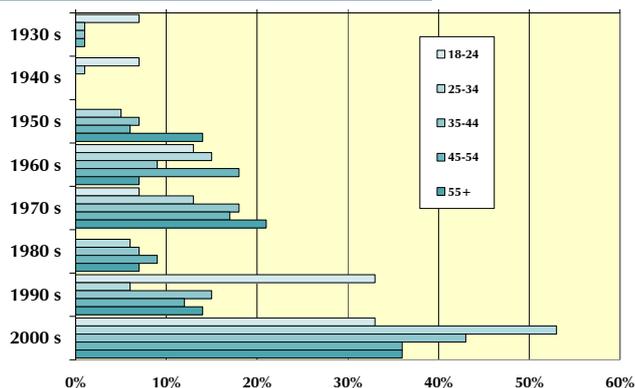
Figure 8. Golden age of motherhood



Close to half (43%) of respondents would go back no further than the 2000s, showing that they believed the decade through which almost all of them would have been raising children themselves is the best time to be a mother. None of the other decades came close to the 2000s in terms of popularity, with the 1970s receiving 16% of affirmative answers, the 1960s receiving 14% and the 1990s just 12%.

A more intricate picture can be seen when the data are broken down according to the age of respondent, as is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Golden age of motherhood by age



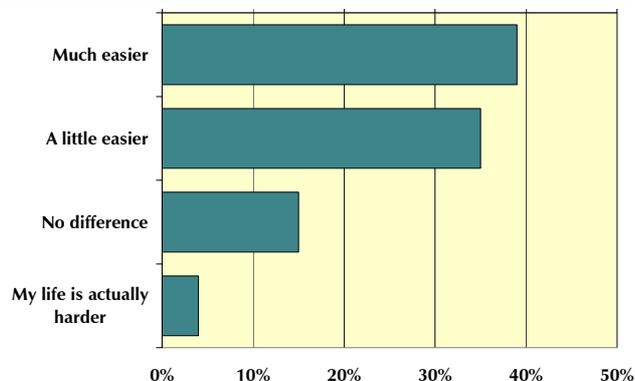
The most striking distribution of answers which is revealed is that although 33% of 18 to 24 years olds opt for the 2000s, another 33% choose the 1990s as their ideal decade, which is far higher than the overall average for this time period (12%). It is perhaps the case that, as this age cohort were children themselves in the 1990s, they have fond memories of family life in this decade which they would like to return to.

It is also interesting to note that 53% of 25 to 34 year olds chose the 2000s, which is above the overall average. It can be suggested that these mothers are likely to have young families who demand a lot of time and care. Indeed, 68% of this cohort has a child below the age of 3. It is therefore possible that these mothers (55% of whom are in some kind of formal employment) are the most keenly aware of a need for extensive state support in terms of financial aid and provision of childcare, as well as the increased help that fathers offer in the home (see Figure 15) which exist in modern day Denmark, as they cope with the challenges of raising a young family.

### 1.2.7 Labour saving devices and impact on time-use

Figure 10 shows the extent to which respondents feel the use of labour saving devices has made their role as a mother easier.

Figure 10 impact of labour-saving devices/products on mothers



Nearly three quarters (74%) thought that their lives as mothers were made easier, with 35% saying life was ‘a

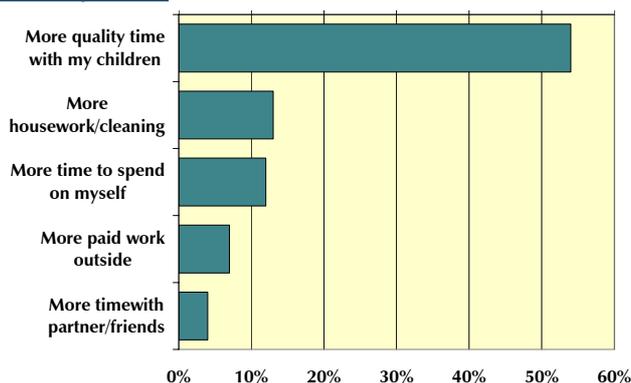
little easier’ and 39% that it was ‘much easier’. Just 15% thought that labour saving devices had made no difference, and 4% said that life was now in fact harder.

**Nearly three-quarters (74%) of Danish mothers say their lives have been made easier by making use of labour saving devices and products.**

When looked at the results in terms of the age of respondents, it is interesting to note that the 55+ cohort were the one age group to reach a majority consensus (57%) on the fact that life was now ‘much easier’ due to the availability of labour saving devices. It is perhaps the case that these mothers remember a time when labour saving devices were not widely available or when they were very expensive. This means that they, more than the other age groups, are able to appreciate the impact they have had.

Figure 11 shows how Danish mothers say they use the time they have saved by using labour saving devices and products.

Figure 11. Use of time saved by using labour-saving devices/products



The majority (54%) use the time gained to spend more quality time with their children. For mothers whose youngest child is below the age of three, the proportion is higher (68%). Despite the fact that Danish mothers spend a relatively small amount of time with their children (as is discussed in relation to Figure 12), it can be seen here that quality time with their children, especially when their child is very young, remains a priority.

**Over half (54%) of Danish mothers use time saved by using labour saving devices to spend more quality time with their children.**

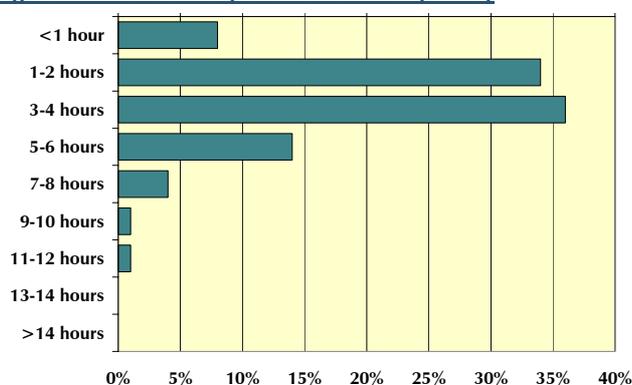
None of the other options received anywhere near the same volume of responses. A little over a tenth (13%) of Danish mothers said they do more housework, 12% said they spend more time on themselves, 7% that they take on more paid work and 4% that they spend more time with their partner or friends. It can be seen here that in terms of the responses which expressed a desire to take

on more work, nearly twice as many do more housework compared with those that do more paid work. Perhaps this is evidence of the fact that mothers in Denmark are content with the amount of paid work they are doing and so do not choose to do more. It is also perhaps the case that this taking on of more housework reflects what is described in section 1.1.7 as a rationalised, ‘independent choice’ which women make in order to comply with the typical organisation of Danish family life.

### 1.2.8 Time with children

Figure 12 depicts the amount of ‘active time’ Danish mothers perceive they spend with their children in a typical day. ‘Active time’ comprises of engaging in activities such as playing with, reading with, washing, dressing or feeding one’s child.

Figure 12. Active time spent with children per day



On average Danish mothers reported that they spend 3.2 hours a day of active time with their children. This is the lowest figure out of all of the countries included in the study.

**Out of all of the countries in the study, Danish mothers spend the least amount of active time every day (3.2 hours) with their children.**

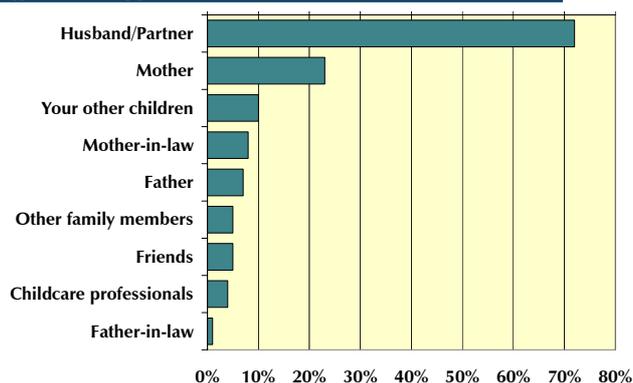
This is perhaps in part due to the high numbers of Danish mothers that go out to work and so are not at home with their children all of the time. As is noted in section 1.1.6 of the background report, Danish mothers can sustain high levels of labour force participation because the provision of childcare is so comprehensive. This means that some Danish mothers are entrusting childcare professionals with such responsibilities as feeding and playing with their children, thus reducing the amount of ‘active time’ that they personally spend.

### 1.2.9 Help in the home

#### 1.2.9.1 Childcare

Figure 13 shows which sources our mothers highlighted as their main sources of help with childcare and domestic duties in the home.

Figure 13. Support with childcare and domestic activities



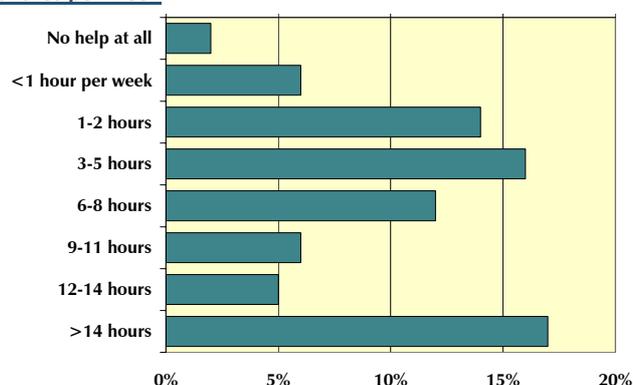
Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents said that their husband or partner is their main source of help in the home. Following this, nearly a quarter (23%) identified their own mother as their major source of assistance. Compared to other countries in the study, Denmark has the fourth largest proportion of responses, after Italy, Portugal and Spain, saying that one’s own mother is the major source of help. It is intriguing that a Nordic country would rank so highly in terms of reliance on the extended family, something which is normally associated with Mediterranean nations. It seems that even in states where public welfare provision is widespread and well established, the family is still relevant as a support system.

Only 4% of respondents said they rely on childcare professionals. It is important to remember though, that what is being investigated here is help ‘in the home’. Denmark’s extensive childcare system (see section 1.2.6 of the background report) is mostly provided in the form of day-care facilities, which operate independently to the households of individual children.

#### 1.2.9.2 Domestic work

The previous section found that mothers’ husbands and partners are the greatest source of help in the home. Figure 14 shows how much time respondents think their partners spend on childcare and domestic chores in an average week.

Figure 14. Time spent by partner on childcare and domestic chores per week



A reasonably high proportion (19%) of Danish mothers said that they do not have a partner, confirming the decline of traditional family structures that is suggested by the increasing divorce rates mentioned in section 1.1.3 of the background report. For the most part, however, it can be seen that mothers' partners play a significant role in the domestic sphere.

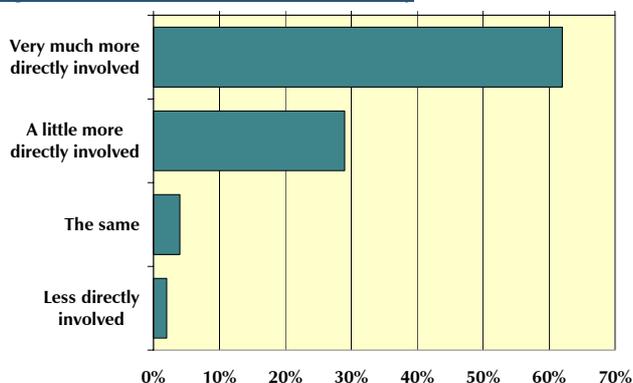
**The husbands and partners of Danish mothers spend the most amount of time helping with childcare and domestic chores (7.5 hours per week) out of all the countries in the study.**

On average, the partners of Danish mothers spend 7.5 hours a week helping in the home, which is the highest amount out of all of the countries in the study. Despite it being identified in section 1.1.7 of the background report that the distribution of tasks in the home still happens along unequal, gendered lines, it can be seen that in comparison with other European countries, Danish men make a relatively substantial contribution to work in the home.

### 1.2.10 Role of the father

The study then looked more closely at the role of the father and how it has changed. Figure 15 shows the extent to which mothers believe the role of the father has changed in the family when compared with previous generations.

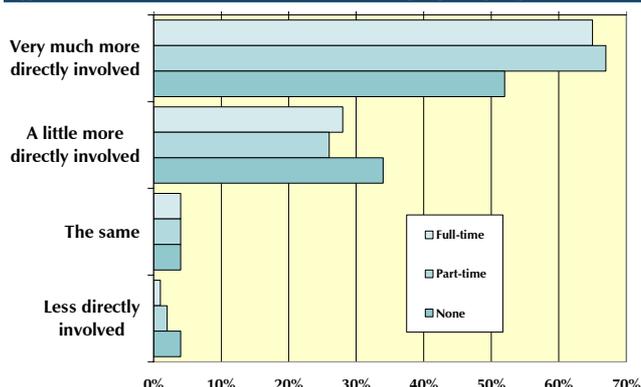
Figure 15. Role of the father in the family



The majority of respondents (62%) said that fathers were now 'very much more directly involved' in caring for their children than their own fathers or grandfathers were. A further 29% thought that they were 'a little more involved'. Only 4% said that the role of the father had stayed the same, and 2% that fathers were in fact now less directly involved.

Figure 16 breaks the data down according to the employment status of the respondent. It can be seen that the level of work that a mother engages in affects her assessment of how involved fathers are in family life.

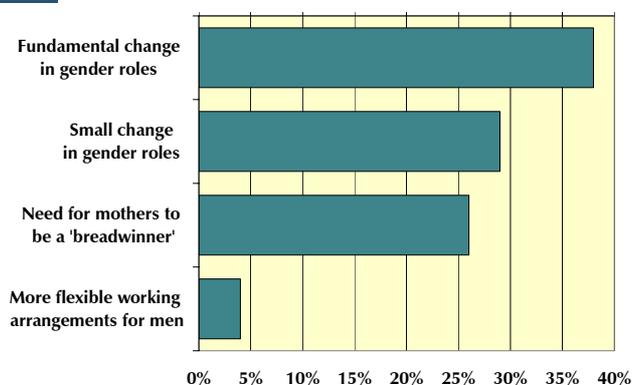
Figure 16. Role of the father in the family by employment status



Of the cohort of mothers who work full-time, 65% said that the role of the father had changed so that they were now 'very much more involved'. This was also true of 67% of part-time working mothers, and 52% of those who did not work. It can be suggested then that mothers who are in formal employment outside of the home receive more help from their partners within the home, and therefore are more aware of changes in the role played by fathers today, as they are the ones directly experiencing them.

Figure 17 depicts the responses of Danish mothers to the questions what has led to this change in the role of the father.

Figure 17. Reasons for the changing role of the father in the family



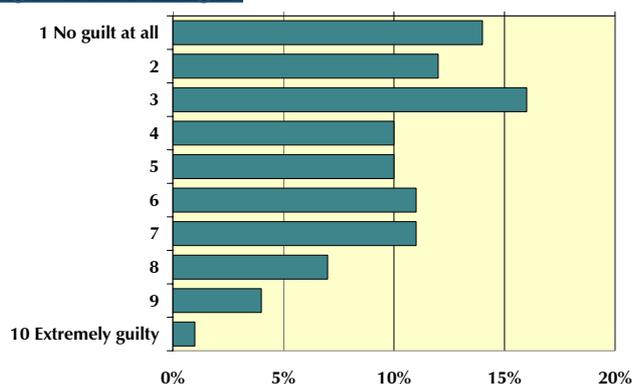
For the most part, a change in gender roles was reported, with 38% saying there has been a 'fundamental change' in gender roles in society, and 29% that there has been a 'small change'. Just over a quarter (26%) of respondents also noted that there is now an increased need for mothers to be 'breadwinners' and earn money, which has in turn affected the role of the father. It is suggested in section 1.1.7 of the background report that gender inequality persists in the home despite female labour force participation increasing. The results shown in Figure 17 do seem to establish a relationship of causation between mothers needing to earn money, and a growing set of responsibilities being taken on by the father in the home. This suggests that changing circumstances outside of the

home are in fact going some way to changing what is happening inside of the home.

### 1.2.11 Maternal Guilt

Motherhood is the period in women’s lives in which feelings of guilt often come to the fore. Indeed, some social theorists suggest that guilt is a normal condition of motherhood. Despite the considerable progress towards greater gender equality in recent decades, mothers are often still held ultimately accountable for the health and development of children. With women’s increasing participation in the labour market<sup>40</sup>, balancing work commitments with family life presents an ever increasing challenge. Given that Denmark has the highest level of women’s labour market participation in the EU<sup>41</sup>, how successful are Danish mothers at maintaining this balance and to what extent do they experience feeling of guilt about the amount of time they have available to spend with their children? Mothers were asked to assess their levels of guilt on a ten-point scale. The results are shown in Figure 18 below.

Figure 18. Maternal guilt



The largest proportion of mothers ‘scored’ their guilt on this scale as ‘3’, while a significant number also declared feeling ‘no guilt at all’. On average, Danish women reported a score of 4.39, placing them in the middle of the table when compared with 12 other European countries. Danish mothers, as noted in the cross-cultural section of the report, spend the lowest levels of active time with their children and while, as a population, they work more than most other European women, their moderate feelings of guilt would seem to indicate that they are somewhat successful in reconciling work and family time. The use of formal childcare in Denmark, for the youngest children (0-2 years) is substantially greater than in any

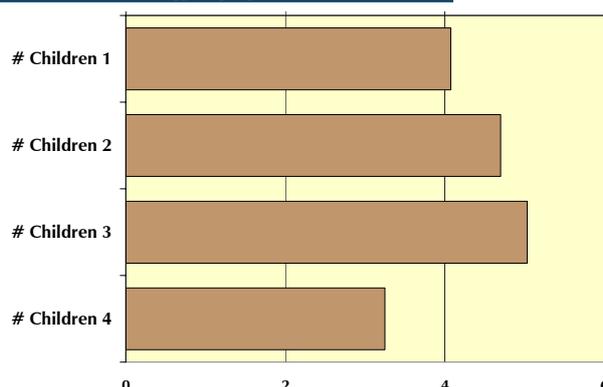
<sup>40</sup> According to Eurostat, female participation in the labour market in Denmark has increased by 4.1 percentage points in the period 1998-2008, from 70.2% to 74.3%.

<sup>41</sup> In 2006 82.1% of women aged 25-49 years were in employment, 28% of whom worked part-time. Two-fifths (42%) of these cited ‘looking after children or incapacitated adults’ as the primary reason for working on this basis. See *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009.

other EU country. In 2006, for example, 73% of children of this age were enrolled in some form of formal childcare arrangements. This was the case for only 45% of 0-2 year-olds in the Netherlands, the second highest ranking country in this regard<sup>42</sup>. The provision of childcare services for young children arguably instils a culture of acceptance of mothers’ participation in the labour market, even when their children are infants. Being a working mother in Denmark, more than other countries in the EU, is very much the norm rather than the exception, which may in turn reduce the associated feelings of guilt.

There are, however, some variations in the levels of guilt experienced by mothers according to household composition (see Figure 19). As the number of children in the household increases from 1-3 children so too do the levels of guilt reported by mothers. An indication, perhaps, that mothers feel more guilt when they have to try and apportion their finite time between increasing numbers of recipients. Mothers with four children, however, said that they felt the least guilty, but this group accounts for only 3% of the sample so it may be a little difficult to read too much into these responses.

Figure 19. Maternal guilt, by number of children



Feelings of guilt among mothers are also expressed more, as one might expect, by those who work full-time (average: 4.77) as opposed to those who are employed on a part-time basis (average: 3.43).

**Danish mothers reported moderate levels of guilt regarding their work/life balance, perhaps surprising given women’s participation in the labour market is the highest in the EU.**

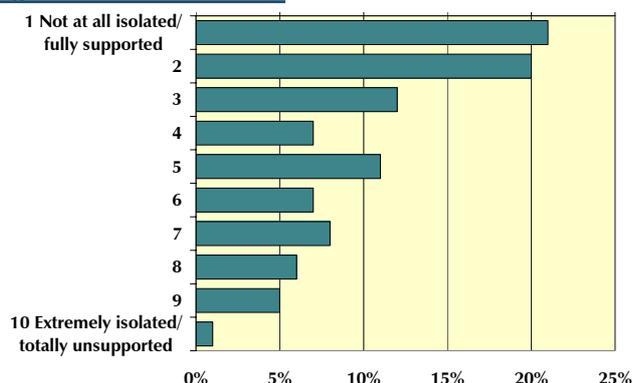
### 1.2.12 Maternal isolation

A similar ten-point scale was used to quantify the extent to which mothers felt isolated or unsupported. From Figure 20 it is clear that a substantial proportion of Danish mothers (21%) feel fully supported, with a further 20% scoring a ‘2’ on the ten-point scale. At the other end of the

<sup>42</sup> See *The provision of childcare services: A comparative review of 30 European countries*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009.

spectrum, only 1% feel that they are ‘extremely isolated/totally unsupported’

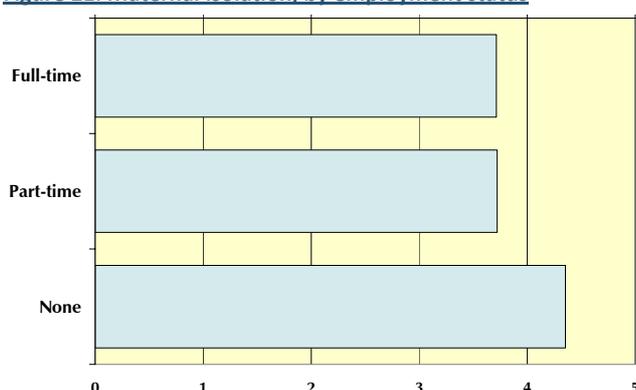
Figure 20. Maternal isolation



On average Danish mothers rated their feelings of isolation as 3.8, the lowest level reported by any country in the SIRC study. This is probably due, in no small part, to the quantity of help they receive from partners with childcare, housework and associated task. This was reported to be in excess of one hour per day, approximately 7.5 hours per week. Danish partners provide the most help with household tasks across the European study.

The high proportions of Danish mothers who work may also go some way to explaining their comparatively low levels of isolation. As we have seen from other countries, mothers who are not in paid employment tend to feel the most isolated. This is certainly the case for mothers from Denmark, as we can see from Figure 21.

Figure 21. Maternal isolation, by employment status



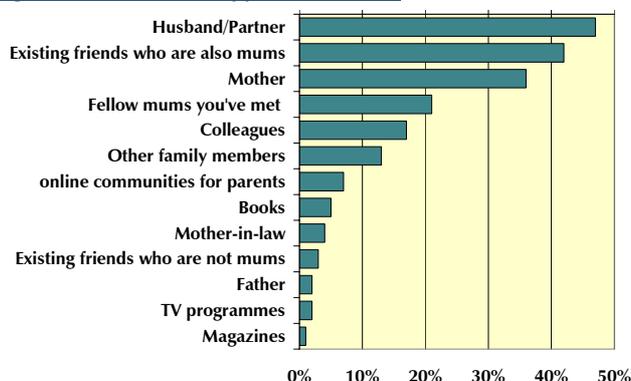
**In the survey of 13 European countries Danish mothers report feeling the least isolated.**

### 1.2.13 Support and advice

The substantive role of partners, in the Danish context, is also evidenced in mothers’ reports of the most influential sources of help and advice. From Figure 22 we can see that husbands and partners lead the field in this regard. Nearly one-half of Danish mothers (47%) were of the opinion that their partners are the people they turn to

most for advice on being a mother. Danish mothers acknowledged their partners’ contribution more than any other country in the European study. In Spain, for example, only one-fifth of mothers said that their partners provide substantive support and advice.

Figure 22. Sources of support and advice



Mothers in Denmark also rely quite heavily on other mothers, both existing friends who are also mothers (42%) and mothers whom they have met since becoming mothers themselves (21%), to help them negotiate the challenges of contemporary motherhood. As a result, the role of the maternal grandmother in this context is less significant in Denmark than it is in most other European countries, particularly those in Portugal, Spain and Italy.

Work colleagues also provide a great deal of support for Danish mothers in comparison with other European countries, again perhaps reflecting the high proportion of Danish mothers who work. Seventeen percent said that they turn to colleagues for advice on being a mother, with those in full-time work being more reliant on colleagues (21%) than those who are employed on a part-time basis (14%). Only 1% of Spanish mothers and 2% of Italian mothers reported seeking advice from colleagues.

Mothers in Denmark very much prefer to seek advice on motherhood on a personal level rather than relying on third-party (books: 3%; TV programmes: 2%; magazines: 1%) or virtual (online communities for mothers: 7%) sources. While this pattern is repeated in all countries sampled, it is particularly pronounced in the Danish context; the use of online communities, for example, is half that reported by mothers in France.

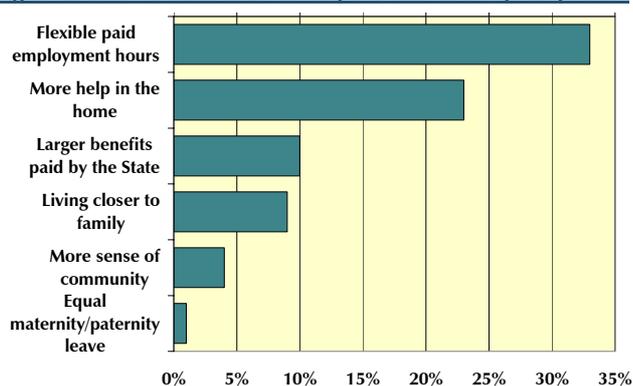
Having established the composition of Danish mothers’ support network and identified their most valuable sources of advice, respondents were asked to consider the methods of communication that they most used to communicate with them. Phone calls and text are the forms of communication most adopted (43%) by Danish mothers to fulfil this function. Face-to-face meetings, either arranged (9%) or impromptu (7%), while substantially less popular still garnered more support than the use of social media sites (4%).

Danish mothers rely on their partners for support and advice more than in other European countries. Colleagues also form a crucial part of Danish mothers' support network

### 1.2.14 Improving the quality of life

For one-third of Danish mothers more flexible working arrangements would make a significant contribution to improving the quality of their lives.

Figure 23. Factors which would improve mothers' quality of life

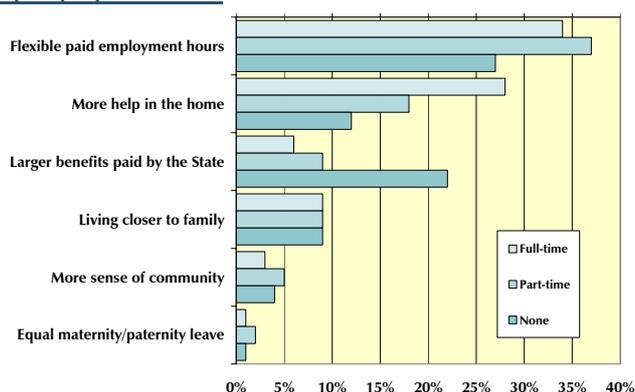


Despite reporting the fact that their partners are the most helpful in Europe with regards to the time that they spend assisting with household chores, nearly one-quarter (23%) of Danish mothers would welcome more help around the home. Only one-tenth were of the opinion that increased state benefits would have a considerable impact on their quality of life; the lowest figure reported in Europe in this context.

There are some interesting, though perhaps predictable variations in mothers' priorities according to employment status, illustrated in Figure 24 below. Mothers working part-time felt that they would benefit the most from greater flexibility in their working arrangements (37%). This is still considered as a priority by mothers in full-time work, but to a lesser extent (34%). For mothers who are not currently in paid employment, more flexible working hours are also seen as providing a potential contribution to their lives (27%); which could indicate that greater flexibility in the workplace might serve to remove some of the barriers to labour force participation.

Mothers who are in full-time employment were twice as likely as those mothers who do not currently work to cite more help around the home as having a significant impact on their quality of life (28% and 12% respectively).

Figure 24. Factors which would improve mothers' quality of life, by employment status



Non-working mothers also reported that they would value the most any increase in the provision of benefits by the state.

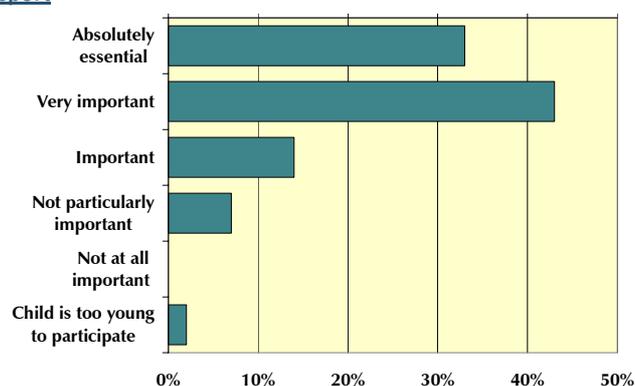
Danish mothers think that more flexible paid employment hours would have the most impact on their quality of life.

### 1.2.15 Sport

A substantial majority of mothers in Denmark (90%) recognise the importance of encouraging their children's participation in sport, understanding the contribution that it makes to their health, wellbeing and development (see Figure 25). One-third said that it is 'absolutely essential' that they encouraged their children to partake in sport and physical exercise, while a further 43% suggested that it is 'very important'. Only 7% did not consider sport to be a priority, saying that sport is 'not particularly important'.

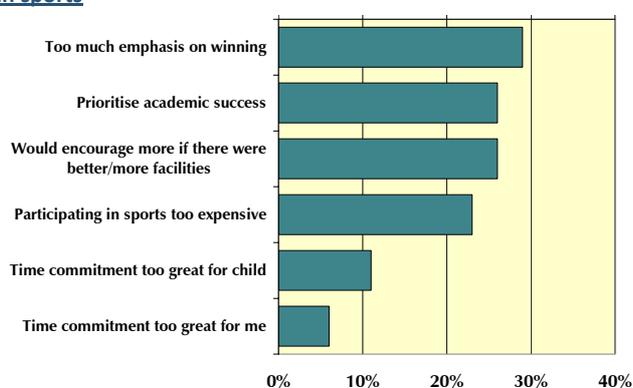
The perception that sport is important for children's development and well being, and that as mothers they need to encourage their child's participation, is felt most strongly among mothers with a single child (92%). It is among these mothers perhaps that the social function of sport is best appreciated. Or, that in the absence of other children in the household, activities outside of the home that offer their child the opportunity to interact with other children are valued and encouraged to a greater extent.

Figure 25. Importance of encouraging children's participation in sport



As only a small proportion (7%) of the mothers polled said that it is not particularly important to encourage their children's participation in sport, the reasons they provide for this stance may be interesting, but are not statistically significant. For illustrative purposes, however, their responses are represented in the Figure 26 below. What is apparent is that 29% of this group of mothers felt that too much emphasis is put on winning in children's sport. A quarter preferred to encourage their children's academic success, while the same proportion thought that the lack of facilities hindered their enthusiasm children's sport. The cost of sports are perceived to be a potential barrier to participation (23%) and although time commitment required to engage in sport and physical activity is also cited in this context, it was felt to be of less significance.

**Figure 26. Reasons for not encouraging children's participation in sports**



**Ninety percent of Danish mother consider it important to encourage their child's participation in sport and physical activity.**