



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

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1.1 Finland

1.1.1 Introduction

Finland has consistently been ranked as one of the top ten places in the world to be a mother. In 2011, the country ranked 7th on the *Save the Children 2011 State of the World's Mothers* index¹ just behind Norway, New Zealand, Australia and the other Nordic countries. The differences between these countries are minimal, with Finland falling slightly behind in terms of the length of and the remuneration available during maternity leave.

The *OECD Report on Family Wellbeing*² shows that the proportion of children born to unmarried couples in Finland is quite high. It also confirms that the number of single parents – mostly mothers – is expected to rise and with it child poverty. The issue of single parenthood is widely discussed in Finland - and hitherto has been kept in check thanks to the generous social welfare system. Finnish society values and prioritises the provision of good care during pregnancy and childbirth, access to education for children and adolescents, providing opportunities for women to work in paid employment, and the participation of women in government.

The active participation of women in working life has helped to steer the development of legislation to focus on the care of small children and job protection for parents. The aim of Finnish family policy has been to make a combination of work and childcare easier. The Finnish government provides various forms of financial support and childcare arrangements to alleviate childcare costs for families. As in other parts of Europe, reconciling paid employment and family life is one of the major challenges facing Finnish mothers today.³ Increasing demands for efficiency at work and greater uncertainty around job security have placed further pressure on both parents. Work-related stress, pressure of time and unemployment are all factors that make the lives of mothers with children more difficult.

1.1.2 Historical Perspectives

Finland differs from the other Nordic countries in that it was an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire from 1809–1917 with no parliamentary administrative practices of its own. This meant that many reforms were postponed until the 1920s following the country's independence. Finnish society, therefore, maintained a

relatively restrictive vision of the social role of women for some time.

In the agrarian society in the 19th century and earlier, a woman's status and role was defined by her position in the family. The man was the head of the family and a woman without a husband and children was seen as 'a difficult case' and a source of embarrassment to her family.⁴ The agrarian way of life experienced by peasant households continued to shape people's lives up until the 20th century. To an extent, the division of labour in such households was flexible: everybody participated in productive labour, although men did not do any household work. Despite the importance of women's productive labour, throughout the first half of the twentieth century this kind of work never enjoyed the same recognition or value as that of men.⁵

The National Pensions Act of 1937 was one of the most important socio-political reforms in Finland during the interwar period. Together with the Maternity Grants Act (1938) and the new Workers' Compensation Insurance Act (1935) significant progress was made in the evolution of Finnish social security. Similarly, Child allowances date from the 1930s. Attitudes towards the development of social security in Finland became more positive at this time. A new way of thinking was emerging that stressed common responsibility, fairness and social security.

The family policy of the Finnish welfare state really started to develop after World War II in line with social trends emerging across Western Europe. A family allowance scheme was introduced in 1948, and it was significant as it covered all families with children (600,000 children at the time). As these allowances were paid to mothers, many women received money of their own for the first time. Expectant mothers became eligible for maternity grants in 1949.⁶ Maternity and other benefits were aimed towards increasing the birth rate in post-war Finland. In the immediate post-war period a 'maternity package' was given to new mothers by the Finnish Social Insurance Institution, *KELA*. This included clothes and useful items for babies and in many ways was symbolic of the change in the relationship between mothers and the state. The package was often referred to as 'the government's gift to the mothers in Finland'. At this time women were strongly discouraged from having abortions, an act that was seen as 'one of the most unpatriotic' things a woman could do.⁷

Mothers' participation in the labour market was in many ways borne out of economic necessity in post-war Finland,

¹ Save the Children (2011) *State of the World's Mothers*. London: Save the Children.

² OECD Report on family wellbeing.

³ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: Finland's Family Policy. Helsinki 2006.

⁴ Aapo, S. 1999. Myyttinen nainen. Luonnon ja kulttuurin yhdistäjä. In Suomalainen nainen. Helsinki: Otava. 15-17.

⁵ Pylkkänen, Anu. Finnish Understandings of equality. In Lipponen and Setälä (Ed.). Women in Finland. Otava Publishing Co. Ltd. Helsinki, 1999.

⁶ H. Niemelä & K. Salminen. 2006 Social security in Finland. Helsinki: The Social Insurance Institution Kela.

⁷ Nätkin, R. 1997. Kamppailu suomalaisesta äitiydestä. Maternalismi, väestöpolitiikka ja naisten kertomukset. Tampere: Gaudeamus.

it being “such a poor country that mothers...could not afford to become housewives”.^{8,9} From the late 1940s onwards, the notion of ‘the housewife’ became of limited popular appeal. The family model where the mother stays at home while the husband goes out to work is an alien to most Finnish families and the proportion of working women in Finland has increased steadily since the early 1900’s. One state initiative that supports this trend is the provision of school meals, which were introduced in Finland over six decades ago in 1948. This freed mothers from preparing meals for their children who could now stay at school from morning until the afternoon. In comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools and vocational education institutions today, pupils and students still get a free daily meal.¹⁰

Among the most significant socio-political reforms in Finland was the introduction of compulsory sickness insurance (Compulsory Sickness Act, 1963) which, for example, allowed all mothers to be reimbursed for necessary costs incurred by pregnancy and childbirth. In addition to this, the Primary Health Care Act (1972), the Children’s Day Care Act (1973) and the reform of the Social Welfare Act (1982) formed the building blocks of the Finnish welfare state in the 1970s and 1980s, and established the foundations of the welfare state services.¹¹

Finnish women were pioneers in women’s rights. The women’s organisation – ‘Feminist Association Unioni’ – was founded in 1892 and it focused primarily on fighting for women’s right to vote (achieved in 1906), equality of pay, improvement of education, and prohibition of prostitution. Its founders, Lucina Hagman, Maikki Friberg and Venny Soldan-Brofelt, were all prominent figures in Finnish cultural life. In later years, Unioni’s priority issues have included promoting women’s position in society, as well as increasing the number of women in political decision-making.¹² The association led the way for other movements such as the Equality Movement of the 1960s whose aim was to reform traditional and out-dated gender roles and achieve equality between men and women. As a result, in part, of the activities of these pressure groups, women’s employment did increase, but it remained the case that fathers were reluctant to take any parental leave. This led to a situation where professions that were traditionally favoured by women – such as nurses and teachers, became unappreciated and underpaid.¹³

The first Act on Equality between Women and Men came into force in 1987. The objectives of the Act were to prevent discrimination based on gender, to promote equality between women and men, and thus to improve the status of women, particularly in working life. Finnish society, however, continues to have elements that are criticised as discriminatory against women.¹⁴ Issues such as how women should integrate into a ‘man’s world’ remain. The salary gap between men and women, for example, has remained quite stable from the beginning of 1980s to the 2000s in Finland. In 2005, women earned 80.9 per cent of men’s earnings.¹⁵

Despite the high social status of women, equality between men and women, fathers and mothers, is still seen by many as an illusion in a modern-day Finland. Women still deal with, among other issues, unequal pay and cultural expectations regarding childcare and domestic responsibilities. The ‘Daddy month’, a full month of paternity leave after childbirth, which was introduced in 2007 in Finland is still used by less than 20% of all new fathers. The current Government is aiming towards prolonging the Daddy month by two weeks with the objective of emphasising fathers’ responsibility in nurturing their children. This new proposal is expected to be accepted in early 2012.¹⁶

1.1.3 Key Demographics

The average age of women at the birth of a first child is 28 years. In 2010, the average age of all women giving birth in Finland was 30.1. The share of women giving birth aged 35 years or more is 18 per cent. This was higher than in 2009, but slightly less than earlier in the 21st century.¹⁷ The current average fertility rate is 1.7 children per woman. Fertility rates have stayed relatively stable at this level since the 1980s, although in the last decade, the number of new-borns has increased by 8 per cent.

The number of marriages has decreased steadily in Finland due to an increase in the number of cohabiting couples. Approximately 20,000 couples were married at the beginning of the 21st century, whereas the figure was exactly double 30 years earlier in 1970. Finnish men and women also now marry later in life. The age of first marriage for Finnish women was 29.1 in 2008 (31.3 for men).¹⁸ This is an increase of five years on the average marrying age recorded in the late 1960s. In 2010, there were 29,952 new marriages and 13,619 divorces recorded in Finland. In 1970, there were 40,730 new marriages and

⁸ Yesilova, K. 2003. Sukupuolen ja vanhemmuuden serpentiinejä oikomassa. *Sosiologia*. 1/2003.

⁹ Helén, I. 1997. Äidin elämän politiikka. Naissukupuolisuus, valta ja itsesuhde 1880-luvulta 1960-luvulle. Tampere: Gaudeamus. 172.

¹⁰ Finnish National Board of Education.

¹¹ H. Niemelä & K. Salminen. 2006 Social security in Finland. Helsinki: The Social Insurance Institution Kela.

¹² <http://www.naisunioni.fi/index.php?k=13935>

¹³ Kuusipalo, J. 1999. Suomalaiset naiset politiikassa. Teoksessa Suomalainen nainen. Helsinki: Otava. 55-78.

¹⁴ Pylkkänen, A. 1999. Suomalainen tasa-arvo. Agraarinen perintö ja valtion kiinnittynyt yksityisyys. In Suomalainen nainen. Helsinki: Otava. 26.

¹⁵ Official Statistics of Finland (OSF): Structure of Earnings [e-publication]. ISSN=1799-0092. 2005. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [referred: 8.12.2011].

¹⁶ KELA – The Social Insurance Institute of Finland.

¹⁷ National Institute for Health and Welfare. 2011. Perinatal statistics: parturients, deliveries and newborns 2010.

¹⁸ OECD Family Database at www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

6,044 of ended in a divorce¹⁹, suggesting a considerable increase in the number of divorces relative to rates of marriage.

In 2010, there were 117,782 lone-parent families (20.2% of all families) in Finland, of which 87% were headed by single mothers²⁰.

1.1.4 Popular representations

The Kalevala, a work of epic poetry from the oral tradition compiled by Elias Lönnrot in the mid-1800's, portrayed Finnish mothers as strong women who were filled with motherly love, were selfless in nature, good at housekeeping and devoted to their sons.²¹

A Finnish mother's role in running a household is very much more present in popular discourse than the role played by the Finnish father. A mother is commonly described as the key figure in a family's well-being (perhaps due to a fact that earlier, the mothers were specifically targeted by information campaigns aimed at safeguarding family hygiene and health)²². The reality of 'equal' parenting, where a mother and a father share their responsibility with regard to childcare and their children's upbringing, has not been fully realised in Finland. Mothers use parental leave significantly more than fathers, and women also do more domestic work than men.²³ In 2009, women spent approximately 95 minutes per day on domestic work; for men the figure was 45 minutes. In comparison with the 1970's, the time spent on domestic work has reduced by 15 minutes for women in Finland.²⁴

Mothers in Finland, as is the case elsewhere in Europe, report feeling pressure to conform to a societal ideal of motherhood. The National Broadcasting Company, YLE, reported in 2011²⁵, for example, found that mothers (particularly those who were more highly educated) put substantial pressure on themselves to be 'perfect' mothers.

Another particularly salient issue in popular discussions²⁶ concerning motherhood in Finland is child poverty, despite

the fact that Finland enjoys some of the lowest levels of child poverty in Europe. Approximately 150,000 children are affected by domestic poverty in Finland today.²⁷ This may be one of the lowest figures in the EU²⁸, but child poverty is still regarded as one of the most significant factors in increasing familial dysfunction. Income differences and relative poverty have returned to 1970s' levels. Finland is unquestionably one of the wealthiest EU Member States and child poverty is the second lowest in the EU (12.0%),²⁹ but at the same time, the social and economic inequalities between rich and poor in Finland are widening. As a result there is an increasingly large proportion of mothers who are now classified as 'poor', many of whom are single mothers. In 2010, 23.4% of the lone-parent families received *toimeentulotuki* (income support)³⁰. It is also the case that most poverty is found among mothers of small children, although some regional differences occur.³¹

1.1.5 Motherhood and employment

Prior to the twentieth century, when Finland had a predominantly agrarian economy, women were very much involved in productive labour. Indeed, it has been said that in the 1800's, a woman's annual work load might have been greater than that of a man.³² As suggested above, however, women seldom received recognition for their toil, not least in terms of levels of pay compared with those of male workers.

Women's rates of employment in Finland are significantly higher than in many other countries within the EU and exceed the EU averages. In 2009, for example, 83.2% of Finnish women without children were in employment (EU average 75.8%), as were 78.6% of those women with one child (EU average 71.3%). Rates of employment for women with two children were higher still; 83.3% (EU average 69.2%). The proportion of Finnish women with three children or more in work was also considerably larger (68.2%) than EU means (54.7%). Across the EU, it is common that employment rates of women decrease as the number of children increases. The case is slightly

¹⁹ Official Statistics of Finland (OSF): Changes in marital status [e-publication].

ISSN=1797-643X. 2010, Appendix table 1. Marriages and divorces 1965–2010. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [referred: 17.11.2011].

²⁰ Official Statistics of Finland. 2011. Families [e-publication]. ISSN=1798-3231. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [referred: 17.11.2011].

²¹ Kalevala Seura [Kalevala Society] at www.kalevalaseura.fi/index_e.php

²² Yesilova, K. 2009. Ydinperheen politiikka. Helsinki: Gaudeamus. 35.

²³ Miettinen, A. 2008. Kotityöt, sukupuoli ja tasa-arvo. Palkattoman työn jakamiseen liittyvät käytännöt ja asenteet Suomessa. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

²⁴ Official Statistics of Finland (OSF): Ajankäyttötutkimus [e-publication]. ISSN=1799-5639. Kulttuuriharrastukset 1981 - 2009 2009, 2. Ajankäytön muutokset. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [referred: 29.11.2011].

²⁵ http://ohjelmat.yle.fi/akuutti/hyva_aiti_huono_aiti

²⁶ See, for example, Minttu Mikkonen's editorial in the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper: <http://www.hs.fi/paakirjoitukset/Pakoon+pahaa+todellisuutta/a1305546283749>

²⁷ Official Statistics of Finland (OSF): Income distribution statistics [e-publication]. ISSN=1799-1331. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [referred: 17.11.2011].

²⁸ Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006. BG and RO national HBS 2006. In The provision of childcare services. A comparative review of 30 European countries.

²⁹ Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006. BG and RO national HBS 2006. In The provision of childcare services. A comparative review of 30 European countries.

³⁰ Yhden vanhemman perheiden liitto [Lone Parents' Association].

³¹ Haataja, A., Mikkola, A. & Pääkkönen, J. 2007. Naisten ja miesten tasa-arvoistumista 1990-luvun pyönteistä eteenpäin? In Heikki Taimio (Ed.) Talouskasvun hedelmät – kuka sai ja kuka jäi ilman? Työväen sivistysliitto. Helsinki: Tammer-paino. 150-151.

³² Lähteenmäki, M. (1999) Vastuu kasvattaa itsenäisyyttä. In Suomalainen nainen. Helsinki: Otava. 39-54.

different in Finland, however, where the rate decreases for the first child but then increases for the second.³³

Five per cent of mothers who have children under the age of 18 are either on maternity or parental leave. Mothers who stay at home for the maximum period of the maternity and parental leave tend to be those with fewer educational qualifications. It is likely that the motherhood penalty for this group is smaller than for those whom may have received more years of formal education. The decision to exercise their right to the maximum amount of parental/maternity leave may in part be motivated by the fact that remuneration they receive is not too dissimilar to the value of the salary they earned when in employment.³⁴

The age of the youngest child has a clear impact on the mothers' employment. Only about half of mothers are employed if their youngest child is under the age of three years. Many go back to work once their youngest child turns three years old, but it is only once the child reaches school age that mothers' employment rates approach parity with that of fathers (approximately 90%). Fathers' employment rate remains relatively constant irrespective of the child's age.

1.1.6 Childcare

Since 1973, the Act on Children's Day Care has provided a framework for the implementation of day care. The Child Home Care Allowance Act took effect in 1985 as part of wider reforms concerned with the care of small children.³⁵

One of Finland's most notable features concerning childcare is the unconditional right to publicly subsidised childcare regardless of the income level of the family or the parents' employment situation. This also means that every child in Finland under the compulsory school age (7 years) has a right to early care and education which is provided by the local authority once parental leave (most commonly 9 months in total with the maternity leave), comes to an end. Families have three publicly subsidised options for pre-school childcare: municipal childcare; private care using the private childcare allowance; or home care using care leave and child home care allowance.³⁶

There are approximately 400,000 children under school age in Finland, of whom about half use municipal childcare services. Of all children using these childcare services, 77% are in full-day care. About 3.5% of all children are in private childcare. Almost all children aged between 0 to 12

months are cared for by parents or through informal family care. Approximately 24% of children aged between 1 and 3 years are in early childhood education and care services (of which 54% are in family day-care and 46% are in childcare centres). Over one-half (54%) of children aged 3 to 6 years attend childcare centres full-time, while another 12% do so on a part-time basis. Over three-quarters (78%) of 6 year old children currently attend pre-school classes, either in kindergarten (90%) or in schools (currently 10%, but the proportion has been growing ever since the pre-school system was introduced in August 2000).³⁷

Childcare services in Finland are very affordable and heavily subsidised, with client fees accounting for only 15% of total costs. Municipalities charge fees according to the size and income of the family. In 2005, the fee was a maximum of EUR 200 per month for the first child, a maximum of EUR 180 per month for the second child and a maximum of EUR 40 per month for each subsequent child. The lowest-income families are wholly exempt from these fees. Pre-school hours for all 6 year olds are free. Municipal authorities are required by law to organize 700 hours of pre-school teaching per child per year; in practice, this means three to four hours per day. Although attending pre-school is voluntary, some 95% of six-year-old children attend pre-school.

In Finland, childcare combines care and education, known as the 'Educare' model. This approach, as its name suggests, incorporates educational features into care and, correspondingly, elements of care in teaching. The purpose of the childcare services is to support parents in raising their children and to work with families in promoting their children's 'balanced' development as individuals.

Municipalities are also required to offer childcare in the child's mother tongue if it is one of the official languages of Finland, i.e. Finnish, Swedish or Sámi. Childcare personnel also support development of the language and culture of Roma and immigrant children. Most of the children in childcare are in full-day care, but part-time care is also provided. Municipal authorities also operate 24-hour childcare for children whose parents work in shifts.

Child home care allowance is available to families with a child under three years of age who is not in municipal childcare. Child home care allowance is also paid for other children in the same family who are under school age and not in municipal childcare. Some municipal authorities pay a discretionary municipal supplement to families who care for their children themselves. The child home care allowance can be granted immediately when the parental

³³ Eurostat. 2011. Women and men in the EU seen through figures. Eurostat Press releases [e-publication]. Luxembourg: Eurostat [referred: 18.11.2011].

³⁴ Article "Ammattina äiti" [Mommy as a profession] In Karjalainen newspaper http://www.karjalainen.fi/Karjalainen/Teemat/ammattina_%C3%A4iti_3680904.html. More information in Anttonen, A. & Sointu, L. 2006.

³⁵ H. Niemelä & K. Salminen. 2006 Social security in Finland. Helsinki: The Social Insurance Institution Kela.

³⁶ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2006. Family Policy. Helsinki.

³⁷ National Institute for Health and Welfare. Lasten päivähoito 2009. Statistical Report. http://www.stakes.fi/tilastot/tilastotiedotteet/2010/Tr32_10.pdf

allowance period ends and can be paid until the youngest child in the family is three years old or enters municipal day care, or until the family chooses the private childcare allowance option for their childcare. Child home care allowance includes a basic sum paid separately for each child entitled to the allowance. This basic allowance for one child under the age of three is EUR 294.28 per month, with EUR 84.09 per month for each additional child under three, and EUR 50.46 per month for each child over three but under school age (since 2006). In addition to the basic care allowance, the family may also receive an income-related supplement depending on the size and income level of the individual family. This is paid only for one child, to a maximum amount of EUR 168.19 per month (since 2006).

The Basic Education Act of 1998 includes a provision entitling municipalities to receive a central government contribution to the cost of providing morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren in class 1 and 2. In order to qualify for this contribution, the municipality must provide at least 570 hours of activity per child per year. The National Board of Education has approved the principles for morning and afternoon activities, noting that these support the educational work of both school and home and provide children with a safe environment. In autumn 2004, 358 of Finland's municipalities had morning and afternoon activities, involving 38% of all schoolchildren in class 1 and 2. Municipalities are allowed to charge clients for this service, but the fee may not be more than EUR 60 per month if the child participates in the activity for less than 3 hours per day. Most children require more than 3 hours per day, however, and in such cases the municipal authority is free to set the fee. Participation in morning and afternoon activities is voluntary.

1.1.7 Motherhood and sport

In terms of sports and physical activity, Finnish people are among the most active citizens in the EU and sport is a profoundly important part of the Finnish lifestyle, starting at a young age. Physical activity in all age groups has been measured in annual surveys in Finland since the 1970's.

According to a national interview survey³⁸, over 90% of Finnish children aged between 3 and 18 are engaged in sports in one way or the other. Similarly, sport clubs play a significant role in the life of the Finnish children with participation rates of over 40%. This rate has steadily increased over the past 20 years. It is more common for boys to take part in sports club activities than for girls who, to a certain extent, prefer engaging in sports on their own or taking part in activities at gyms, dance schools etc.

The participation of older children and young adults, however, is considerably lower. According to Eurobarometer statistics³⁹, the proportion of young people aged between 15 and 30 who have participated in a sports club is only 28% in Finland, in comparison with the EU27 average of 34%.

Football and cycling are the top two sports among Finnish children and adolescents. Swimming, jogging, skiing and floorball are also popular and of these, skiing has lost the most enthusiasts in the recent years. At the same time, running and floorball have become more popular in Finland. In 2006, 55% of Finnish people attended at least one live sporting event, with 6% having attended more than twelve.⁴⁰

Despite this, there is a growing concern that children are not doing enough physical activity⁴¹ which may in part play a role in the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity among the child population. Increasing sedentary behaviour among this cohort has also been implicated in this trend.

1.2 Finnish national survey

1.2.1 Introduction

A survey of over 500 Finnish mothers, with at least one dependent child under the age of 16 years, was conducted in 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. Mothers were not only asked to consider their own situation, but also how their experiences of motherhood may vary from those of their own mothers. The results of the survey are discussed in the following sections of the report.

1.2.2 Current free time and 'me time'

The survey asked mothers to consider the amount of time they have in an average week which they could genuinely consider to be time for themselves; often referred to as 'me time', but defined in the questionnaire more specifically as 'time devoted purely to oneself without obligation to do something for other people'. There is a substantial variation in the quantity of free time reported by Finnish mothers, as illustrated in Figure 1.

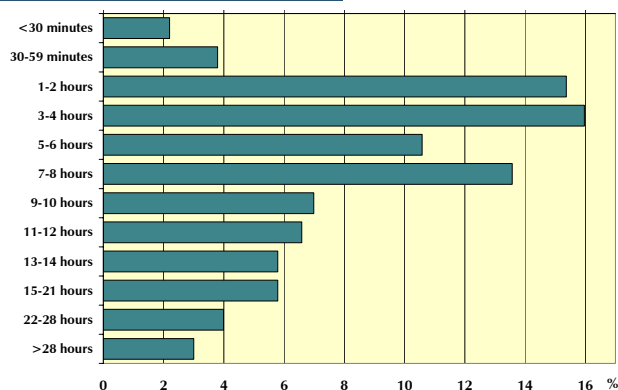
³⁸ Finnish Sports Federation. 2010. *Kansallinen liikuntatutkimus 2009-2010* at <http://www.slu.fi/liikuntapolitiikka/liikuntatutkimus2/> and Reports of Ministry of Social affairs and Health. 2007. At <http://pre20090115.stm.fi/pr1169019512649/passthru.pdf>

³⁹ Eurobarometer (2011) *Youth on the Move: Flash Eurobarometer 319a 9 (Youth Participation)*. Eurobarometer.

⁴⁰ Eurostat (2009) *Youth in Europe: A statistical portrait*. Eurostat.

⁴¹ Finnish Medical Society Duodecim at www.kaypahoito.fi

Figure 1. Free time, hours per week



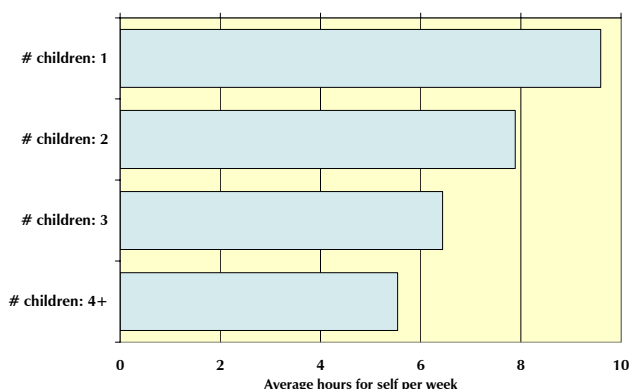
The largest cluster of responses spanned the categories between 1-2 hours and 7-8 hours. In an average week more than one-fifth (21%) of respondents reported having two hours or fewer to themselves, while over one-quarter (27%) indicated that their genuine ‘me time’ amounts to between three and six hours.

Mothers from across Finland reported that, on average, they have 8 hours of time to themselves per week. Of all countries included in SIRC’s pan-European study, it is mothers from Finland who report having the most time to themselves.

Finnish mothers, on average, have more than 68 minutes per day of ‘free time’. Across the European sample, mothers in Finland report having the most time to themselves.

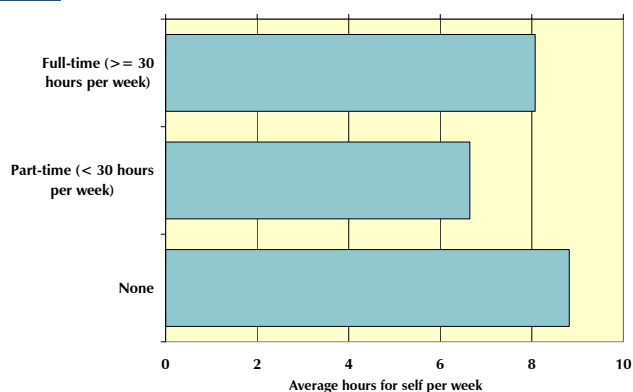
Mothers’ free time, unsurprisingly, is inversely proportional to family size; mothers with one child said that they have 9.6 hours to themselves compared with just 5.5 hours reported by those mothers with four children or more, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Free time, average hours per week by number of children



The data show, perhaps rather counter-intuitively, that mothers who work part-time (less than 30 hours per week) have significantly fewer hours to themselves (6.6 hours per week) than those who work full-time (8 hours per week), as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Free time, average hours per week by employment status



This trend has been noted elsewhere and other studies have shown that, in terms of leisure time, part-time working mums are a ‘particularly pressured group’.⁴² This has been attributed to the fact that as part-time workers the boundary between employment and family life is perhaps a little more blurred. Part-time working mothers, for example, may be less likely to rely on paid help and yet still be expected to undertake the majority of childcare and domestic chores. Part-time work for some mothers, rather than delivering on its promise to provide the optimum work-life balance may, in reality, present mothers with a double burden.

Mothers who are not currently in paid employment reported the most time to themselves (8.8 hours per week), but the amount of free time they do have is not significantly greater than those mothers who work full-time; on average an additional seven minutes per day.

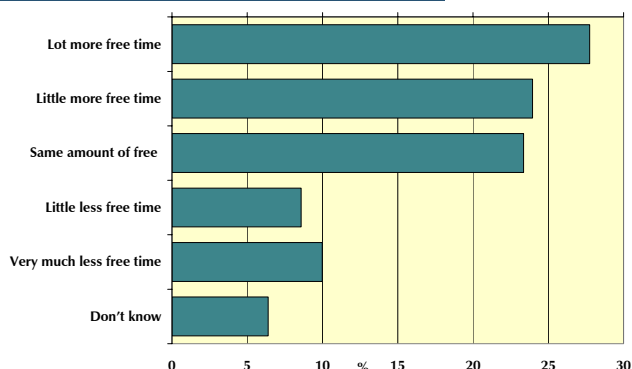
1.2.3 Generational comparisons

Time-use scholars have noted the fact that when people are asked to think about trends in time-use they have a tendency to relate their current situation with earlier stages in their own lives. Generally, as people get older (up to a certain age), their commitments tend to increase, both to paid employment and to their families, so while they may actually feel more pressured in terms of time at an individual level this may not necessarily reflect that accurately actual societal shifts in time-use. As a way of controlling for this potential bias, the current study asked mothers to compare the amount of time they have to themselves, or lack thereof, with that of their own mothers at the same life-stage. Figure 4 shows that the majority of Finnish mothers (52%) believed that they have more free time than their own mothers did, which perhaps goes against much of the popular discourse which focuses on contemporary ‘time famine’. A further 23% reported having about the same time to themselves as their

⁴² Sullivan, O. & Gershuny, J. (2001) Cross-national changes in time use: some sociological (hi)stories re-examined. *British Journal of Sociology*, 52, 331–347

mothers did, while approximately one-fifth (19%) felt they have less time.

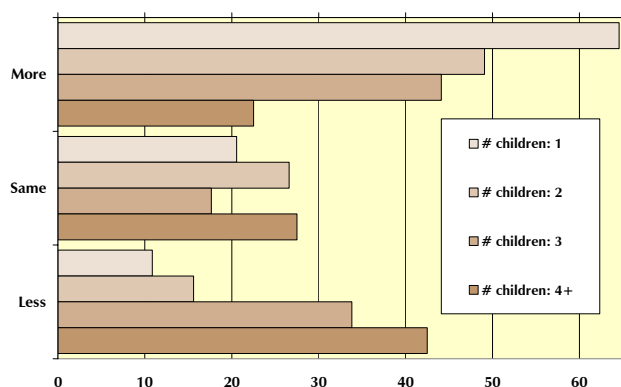
Figure 4. Free time, generational comparison



The majority of Finnish mothers feel that they have more free time than did their own mothers.

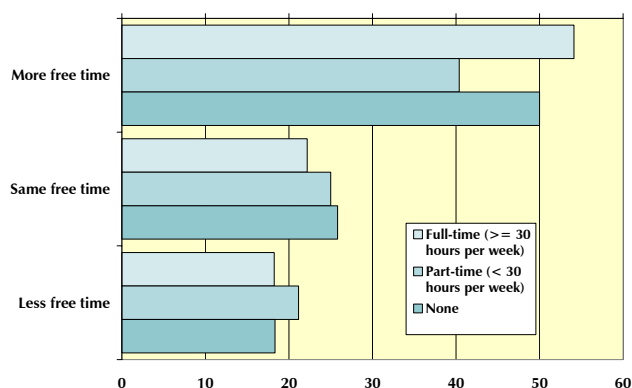
The respondents' perception of their own free time in comparison with that of their mothers is directly correlated with the number of children they have (see Figure 5). Nearly two-thirds (65%) of mothers with one child said that they have a lot more free time to themselves compared with less than one-quarter (23%) of those with four children or more. At the other end of the scale, the free time reported by mothers with four children or more compared particularly unfavourably when contrasted with that of their own mothers; over two-fifths of this group (43%) felt that they have less free time. Only 11% of mothers with one child reported feeling the same way.

Figure 5. Free time, generational comparison by number of children



Finnish mothers in full-time work are the most likely, among the three employment-status groups, to perceive themselves as having more free time than their own mothers did at the same life-stage; an opinion which is shared by the majority of this group (52%). Part-time working mothers regarded themselves as a little less fortunate in this regard, although two-fifths still suggested they enjoy more free time than their mothers, despite the fact that they reported having the least free time overall.

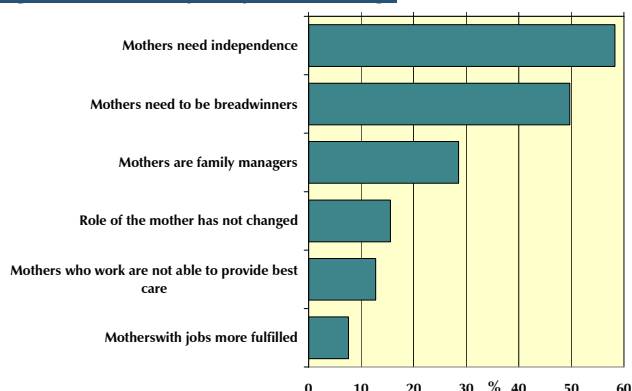
Figure 6. Free time, generational comparison by employment status



1.2.4 Perceptions of change

An additional question in the survey explored the extent to which motherhood in modern world is now different from that experienced by the previous generation of mothers. Mothers were provided with a list of statements from which they could choose up to three responses, the results of which are illustrated in Figure 7. Over one-half of Finnish mothers (58%) agreed that 'mothers today feel that they need the independence to pursue their own interests' more than their own mothers did; a sentiment which resonates more with the older cohorts than it does for mothers under the age of 26 years.

Figure 7. Mothers' perception of change



Contemporary Finnish mothers need a level independence with which to pursue their own interests, but are also required to be breadwinners.

At the same time, however, half of the total sample felt that, out of necessity, there is a greater pressure on contemporary mothers to contribute to the family income. Paid employment, however, does not appear to offer Finnish mothers any great sense of personal fulfilment. Less than one-tenth of mothers were of the opinion that mothers who work have more fulfilling lives than those who remain at home to look after children. There was some agreement, expressed by a significantly higher proportion of non-working mums (23%) than those who

worked full- (9%) or part-time (12%), that ‘mothers who go out to work are not able to provide the best care for their children’. While the vast majority of working mothers appear to have reconciled the need to balance work with their role as a mother, one-tenth feel that their employment ‘choice’ is having some detrimental impact on the quality of care they are able to provide for their children.

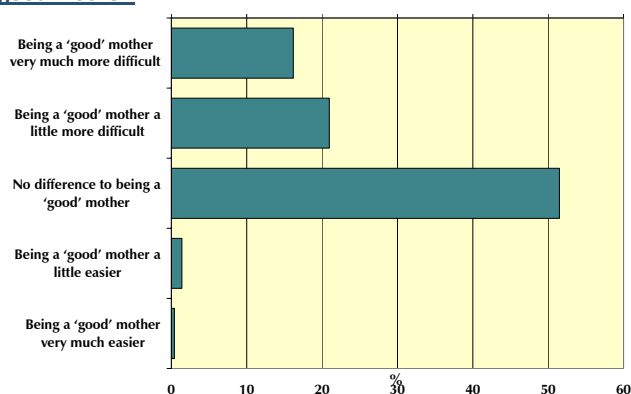
There was some agreement with the notion that the role of mother now incorporates, more than was the case in previous generations, a degree of ‘family management’ which is a departure from what might be termed as a more traditional notion of the ‘housewife’.

A minority of the respondents (16%) perceived there to be little change in a generation in the mother’s role in the average family. This sentiment was expressed most strongly among the younger cohorts (29% of those aged 21-25 years and 35% aged 26-30 years) whose mothers were the most likely to have experienced motherhood at a time when broader societal transitions may have already taken place.

1.2.5 Impact of economic downturn

The rather precarious state of the European economies is a topic which has been much in the news of late, but how, if at all, has the economic situation in Finland impacted on the lives of contemporary Finnish mothers? Figure 8 below shows that for the majority of respondents (51%), the current economic climate has had no impact on their ability to ‘be a good mother’. Over one-third (37%), however, did suggest that it had made ‘being a good’ mother more difficult.

Figure 8. Impact of the current economic climate on ‘being a good mother’



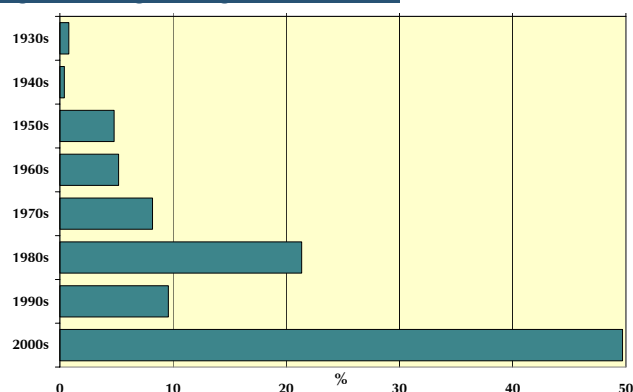
For most mothers in Finland the economic downturn has not impacted on their ability to be a ‘good’ mother.

1.2.6 The Golden Age of motherhood?

So while, for some, the current decade presents some notable challenges to women’s ability to be a ‘good’ mother, we were keen to explore mothers’ perceptions of

what they might consider to be the ‘golden’ age for motherhood (see Figure 9). Interestingly one half of the respondents, if they had a time machine, would choose to travel back only as far as the 2000s. Two-fifths preferred the 1980s and a further 10% would opt for the 1990s if they were given the opportunity to travel back in time. Clearly, while contemporary motherhood is undoubtedly not without its significant challenges, there was recognition among those surveyed that being in a mother in the last 30 years was certainly preferable to having to take on the role in the preceding decades. Unsurprisingly, few mothers would choose to return to the 1940s.

Figure 9. The golden age of motherhood



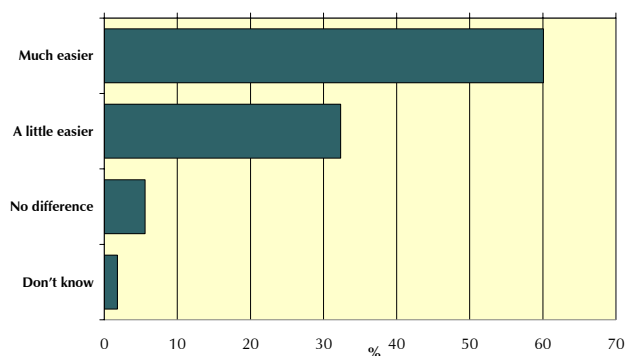
The ideal decade in which to be a mother would be, for one-half of Finnish mothers, the 2000s.

1.2.7 Labour saving devices and impact on time-use

Given that nearly two-thirds of the sample were of the opinion that mothers free time has increased over a generation, respondents were asked to ponder the contribution that labour-saving devices and products may have had on their quality of life; the extent to which domestic appliances, for example, may have enriched their lives and afforded them more time to engage in other, perhaps more enjoyable pursuits (see Figure 10).

The overwhelming majority of Finnish mothers (92%) recognised that, when compared with their own mothers’ generation, their lives are richer or easier as a result of labour saving devices and products. Three-fifths of the sample suggested that their lives are in fact ‘much easier’.

Figure 10. Impact of labour saving devices/products on mothers

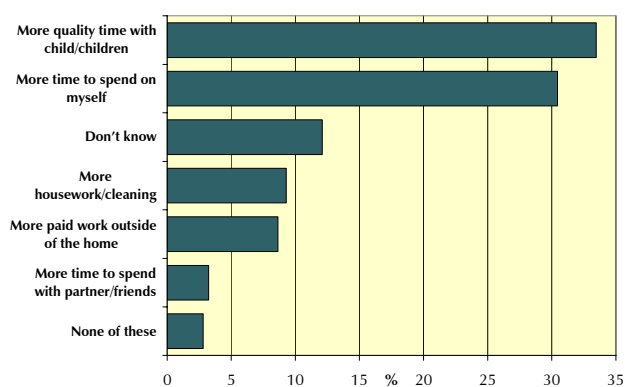


This sentiment was expressed most strongly among the older cohorts, those whose mothers lived in an age when such devices and products were less abundant.

An overwhelming 92% of mothers in Finland agree that labour-saving devices and products have made the lives easier and richer

When asked to consider how they spent most of the 'additional' time appropriated through the use of labour-saving devices and products in the home, the most common response, cited by one-third of the mothers, was that these 'innovations' allowed them to spend more quality time with their children (see Figure 11).

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



A significant proportion (30%) were also of the opinion that labour-saving devices and products have given them more time to themselves. The time saved for some, however, is used for perhaps less appealing pastimes; 9% use this 'additional' time to do more paid work and the same percentage said they use it to do more housework/cleaning. Very few (3%) chose to take advantage of these extra minutes in the day to spend time with friends or partners.

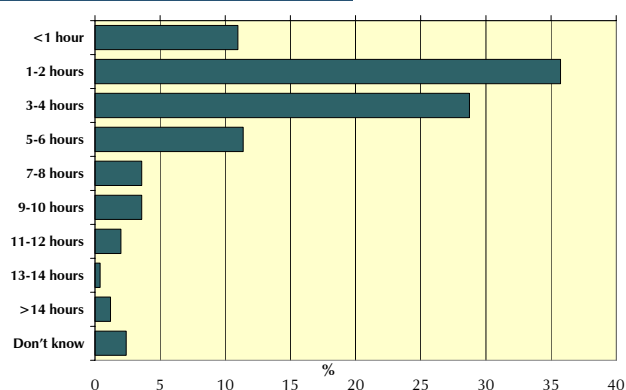
Most of the time saved by the use of 'domestic technologies' is used up on extra time spent with children. A significant proportion (30%) of

mothers, however, use this appropriated time for themselves.

1.2.8 Time with children

Mothers were asked to estimate the amount of active time that they spend in an average day with their children (see Figure 12). Active time, for the purposes of this survey, was defined as 'activities such as reading, writing, playing, washing, dressing, etc.' The largest proportion of mothers (36%) reported spending between 1 and 2 hours of active time in the average day with their children and a further 29% estimated this time to be between 3 and 4 hours. Across the sample, the mean active time spent with children on the average day is 3.28 hours, or 197 minutes.

Figure 12. Active time with children



The quantity of active time spent with children is, unsurprisingly, correlated to the age of the mother and also the age of the youngest child in the household. Older mothers, who tend to have in the main older children, reported less active time spent with children than their younger counterparts. Mothers aged less than 26 years, for example, spend nearly three times as much time (385 minutes per day) on active childcare as mothers aged 51-55 years (133 minutes per day).

Figure 13. Active time with children by age of youngest child

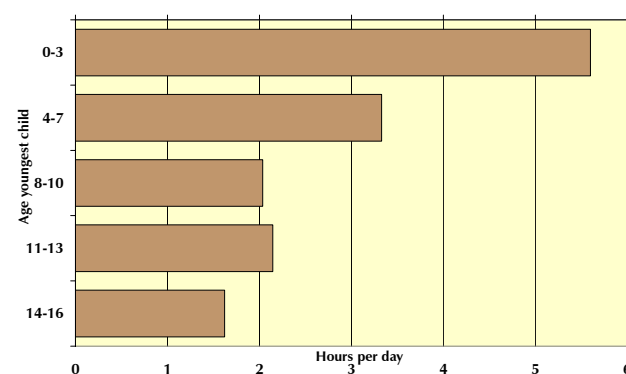
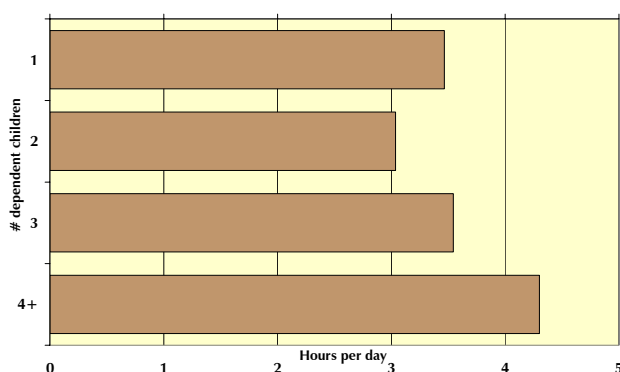


Figure 13 illustrates the relationship between the age of youngest child and amount of active time spent with children and shows clearly that the presence of an infant or toddler in the household necessitates a significantly greater investment of active time when compared with

mothers whose youngest child is at a different developmental life-stage. Mothers with a child up to the age of three years, for example, reported spending 5.6 hours in the average day (336 minutes per day) on active childcare in contrast to the 1.6 hours (approximately 97 minutes per day) reported by those mothers whose youngest child is 14-16 years of age.

There is an interesting relationship between the number of children in the household and the amount of active time that mothers spend with them (see Figure 14). Mothers who have two or more children spend increasing amounts of active time with their children as the size of family increases. Mothers with one child, however, reported spending more active time than those with two; indicating perhaps the need to entertain and interact with their children more in the absence of other siblings in the household.

Figure 14. Active time with children by number of dependent children



The average Finnish mother spends nearly 200 minutes per day actively engaged with her children.

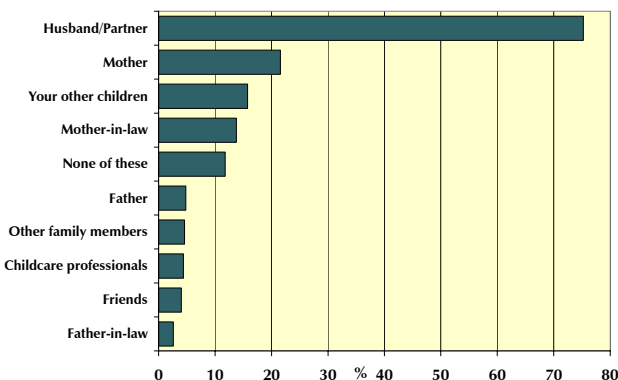
1.2.9 Help in the home

1.2.9.1 Childcare

Analyses of time-use surveys show that women in Finland, as is the case across Europe, do the lion's share of childcare in the home. Data from Eurostat, for example, indicate that women (not just mothers) undertake nearly three-quarters of childcare (72%).⁴³ While there is evidence to suggest that the fathers are increasingly involved in childcare, the level of their involvement is still some way short of the time spent by mothers on this activity. Partners, of course, are not the only source of support for mothers when it comes to the day-to-day care of children and the SIRC survey sought to explore the other people in mothers' lives who help most with this task (see Figure 15). The survey allowed participants to

choose up to three options meaning that the percentages discussed in the following section total more than 100%.

Figure 15. Support with childcare and domestic activities



Three quarters of the mothers reported that they receive help from their husbands and partners and nearly one-quarter (22%) said that their own mothers also supplied substantial help in this regard. The presence of other children in the household also seems to be of some benefit to mothers; 16% of them said that they receive assistance from their other children. Mother-in-laws, cited by 14% of the respondents, are also seen as a valuable source of help by some.

Partners' contribution to childcare is inversely proportional to the age of the youngest child; mothers of younger children were more likely to report partners as a major contributor to childcare than those with older children. Ninety-five percent of mothers whose youngest child is between 0 and 3 years cited fathers as a source of help with childcare, compared with just over one-half (52%) of those with children aged between 14 and 16 years. While the total time required for childcare undoubtedly decreases with the age of the dependent children, the proportion of partners who devote any time to it also falls.

Mothers with a single child were also the least likely to say that their partner helped with childcare; less than two-thirds (64%) of these mothers reported that partners offered any assistance in this regard compared with over four-fifths of those who had two or more children.

1.2.9.2 Domestic work

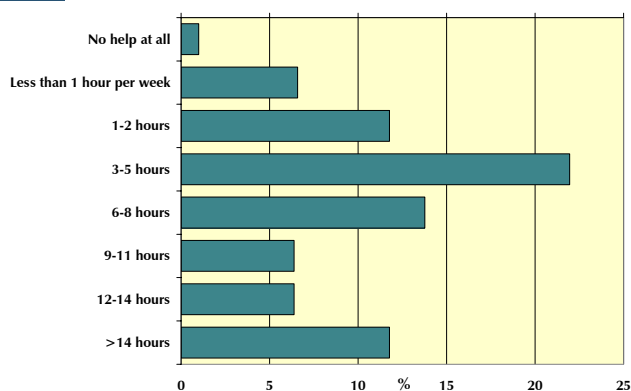
Having established the fact that partners/husbands are indeed a significant source of help with childcare, the survey also asked mothers to estimate the amount of time that their partners devote to childminding and other household chores (see Figure 16).

Mothers' most frequently cited estimate of partners' contributions to such tasks is that their partners spend between 3 and 5 hours per week helping them around the home. On average, partners were reported to provide an input of 6.9 hours a week into childminding and household chores, the equivalent of just less than one hour per day.

⁴³ Winqvist, K. (2004) *How Europeans spend their time: Everyday life of women and men*. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.

Only fathers from Denmark and Greece were reported to spend more time on domestic chores and childminding in the SIRC European survey.

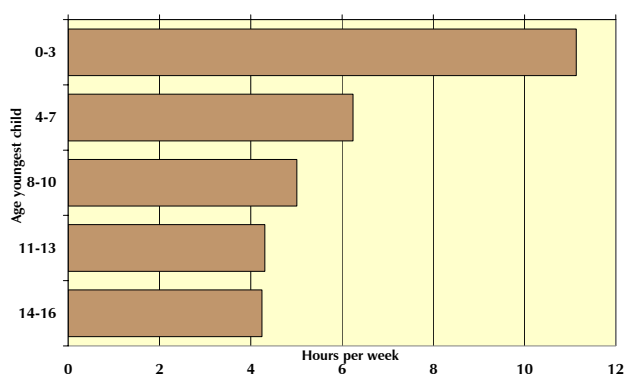
Figure 16. Time spent by partner on childminding and domestic chores



Mother's main source of help in Finland, reported by three-quarters of the sample, is her partner or husband. On average he contributes one hour of help per day.

The quantity of time that partners spent on domestic activities, as reported by mothers, decreases with the age of the youngest child. Partners in households with a child aged 0 to 3 years are reported to spend over 11 hours on domestic activities in an average week (95 minutes per day) compared to only 4.2 hours (36 minutes per day) of those in which the youngest child in the household is aged between 14 and 16 years (see Figure 17).

Figure 17. Time spent by partner on childminding and domestic chores by age of youngest child

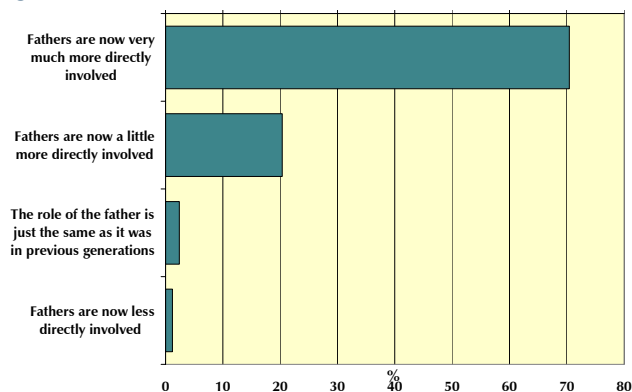


Partners' levels of participation in non-paid domestic work is also reported by mothers, perhaps unsurprisingly, as increasing with the number of children in the household. Mothers with one child reported that their partners provide 6.4 hours of help and support with domestic chores, while women with four children or more average 8.6 hours.

1.2.10 Role of the father

The overwhelming majority (90%) of mothers taking part in the survey believed that fathers are now more directly involved in the day-to-day care of children in Finland than they were in their own parent's or grandparent's day, as shown in Figure 18.

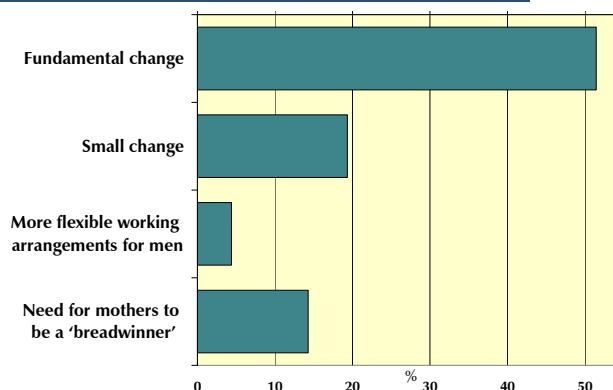
Figure 18. Involvement of fathers



Over one-half (51%) of mothers were of the opinion that fathers increased involvement in childcare is as a result of fundamental changes in gender roles within Finnish society. Almost one-fifth agreed that gender roles had indeed changed but believed that these changes were small, rather than fundamental. There was some further support for the notion, cited by 14% of mothers, that in contemporary society there is a greater need for women to earn money and that as a result, gender roles in the respect of childcare have had to adapt accordingly (see Figure 19).

There is a consensus among Finnish mothers that fathers are now more involved with the day-to-day care of children. Seventy percent believe this to be as a result of societal changes in gender roles.

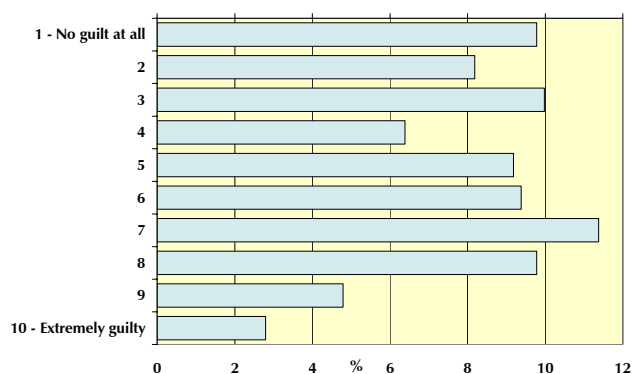
Figure 19. Reasons for greater involvement of fathers



1.2.11 Maternal Guilt

The survey sought to investigate mothers' feelings of guilt by asking them to rate on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is 'no guilt at all' and 10 is 'extremely guilty', the extent to which they feel guilty about their work-life balance and their ability to spend time with their children. The results, illustrated below in Figure 20, show a wide distribution of guilt among Finnish mothers. The mean score across the sample is 4.17, indicating that Finnish mothers, on average, reported experiencing moderate levels of guilt with regards to their work-life balance and the time they were able to spend with their children. Relatively few (8%) reported experiencing levels of guilt towards the more 'extreme' end of the scale, scoring '9' or '10'. Less 'extreme', but still significant feelings of guilt, however, were reported by a greater proportion of mothers. Just less than one-tenth of mothers ranked their guilt as '8' and 11% rated it '7'; the latter score being most frequently selected value. For 10% of mothers, guilt is not an issue.

Figure 20. Maternal guilt



The extent to which mothers feel guilty varies according to employment status. Full-time mothers, unsurprisingly, reported significantly greater degrees of guilt than those who worked part-time; 5.2/10 and 4.1/10 respectively. Also examining the mean 'guilt' scores, mothers aged 41-45 years are the cohort which said they feel the most guilty as do those mothers whose youngest child is between the ages of 8-10 years.

Ninety percent of Finnish mothers report feeling some guilt about their work/life balance.

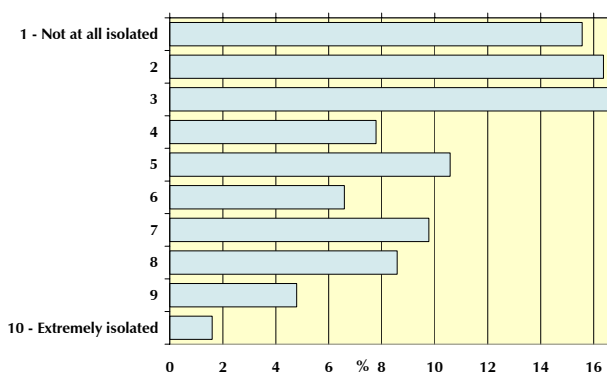
1.2.12 Maternal isolation

A similar ten-point scale was used in the survey to ascertain the extent to which Finnish mothers experience feelings of isolation or feel that they have to face the challenges of childrearing alone. The scale used for this particular question asked respondents to rate their feelings of isolation on a scale of 1-10, where 1 corresponded to 'not all isolated' and 10 equated to 'extremely isolated'. The responses from this question are illustrated in Figure 21 below and show a tendency for Finnish mothers to report only a limited degree of

isolation, or indeed none at all. Sixteen percent of the sample, for example, said that they are 'not isolated at all' and appear to be particularly well supported (maternal sources of support and advice are discussed in section 1.2.13). Approximately one-half of mothers (49%) ranked their levels of isolation as either '1', '2' or '3'.

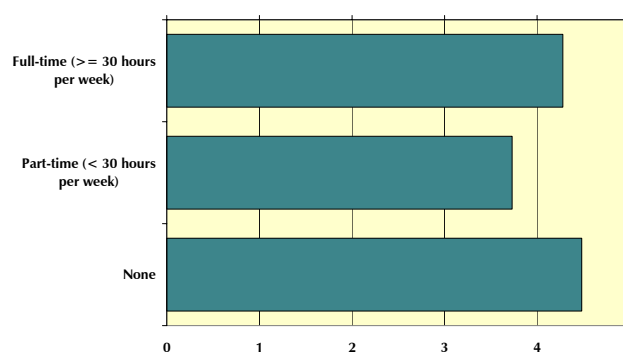
At the other end of the scale, however, the data show that maternal isolation is an issue for concern for a significant proportion of the population sampled. Nearly one quarter (24%) of mothers, for example, rated their feelings of isolation between '7' and '10'. The average rating for isolation across the sample of Finnish mothers is 4.3/10.

Figure 21. Maternal isolation



Mothers who are not currently in paid employment reported feeling more isolated (average: 4.5/10) than those in both full-time (average: 4.3/10) and part-time (average: 3.7/10) work (see Figure 22). Work it would seem provides opportunities for mothers to communicate and interact with others which serve to lessen their feelings of isolation and heighten their sense of being supported.

Figure 22. Maternal isolation by employment status



There are some minor fluctuations in the average levels of isolation when cross-tabulated with the age of the youngest child. One might expect, for example, that mothers with very young children (0-3 years) might be the most likely to experience feelings of isolation or that they are not receiving sufficient support, but this is not supported by the data. Average levels of isolation actually increase with the youngest child's age, peaking when the

age of the youngest is 8-10 years. This may, in part, be explained by the role of partners whose contribution to childcare and domestic chores declines significantly as their child gets older and moves through the various life-stages between 0 and 10 years.

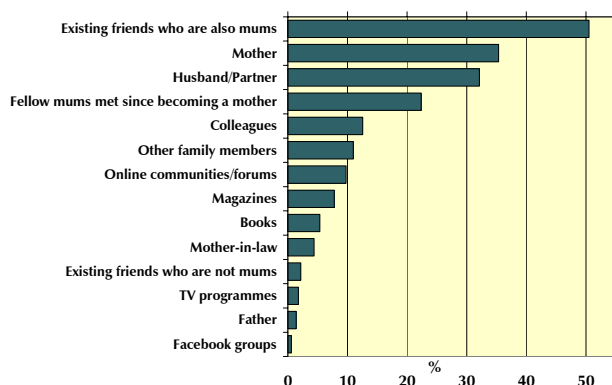
Some degree of isolation is reported by 84% of Finnish mothers.

1.2.13 Support and advice

The previous section discusses some of the survey findings relating to mothers feelings of isolation. There are some small variations in the prevalence of these feelings depending on age of youngest child and employment status. But where do mothers actually go when they need support and advice on being a mother? And how, if at all, do they choose to communicate with their support network?

The most significant source of advice on motherhood as shown in Figure 23 comes from existing friends who are also mums. One-half of all mothers reported this group as the one to which they turn the most when they are in need of guidance and support.

Figure 23. Sources of advice on motherhood



Over one-third (35%) also said that their own mothers are a source of invaluable counsel, although mothers-in-law are consulted by significantly fewer of the respondents (4%). A large proportion also reported referring to their partners for advice on being a mother, perhaps reflecting fathers' increasing involvement in the domestic setting in contemporary Finnish society more generally.

For the younger mothers, aged 21-30 years, their own mothers are their most important source of advice; 71% of 21-25 year olds and 73% of 26-30 year olds said that they turn to their mother most. These age groups are also the most reliant on their partners.

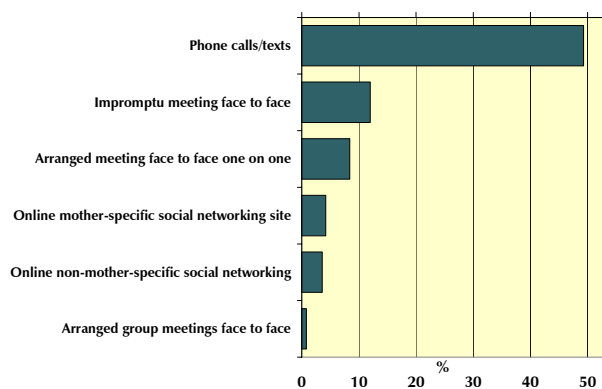
Those mothers working part-time appear to have a more varied support network than mothers who worked full-time or those who were not in paid employment. Part-time mothers, for example, are more likely to consult books, magazines and online forums than mothers with other employment statuses. This extended network used

more by part-time workers may, in part, explain why it is among the part-time workers that feelings of isolation are expressed the least.

Over one-half of Finnish mothers turn to their friends, who are also mothers, for advice. Over one-third prefer to seek counsel with their own mothers.

Having established *who* it is that mothers turn to for advice the survey also asked mothers *how* they communicate with their support networks (see Figure 24). The most common methods of communicating with support networks are by phone or text (49%). Face-to-face meetings account for just over one-fifth (21%) of these communications, although these are more likely to be impromptu meetings as opposed to anything that has been arranged in advance.

Figure 24. Communicating with networks

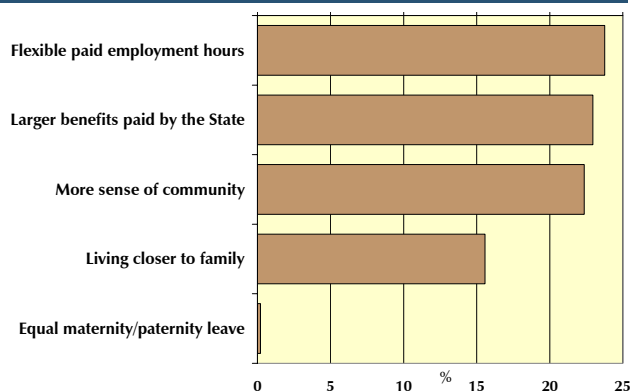


Scheduled face-to-face meetings are the most common among mothers who work part-time as is the use of mother-specific social networking sites; perhaps indicating a more multi-faceted approach to connecting with one's support network among this group, but also the need for a greater degree of planning.

1.2.14 Improving the quality of life

Respondents were asked to consider a number of factors that could potentially improve their quality of life as a mother (see Figure 25). Flexible paid employment hours were reported as something that would have a positive impact on the lives of nearly one-quarter of all mothers (24%).

Figure 25. Factors which would improve mothers' quality of life



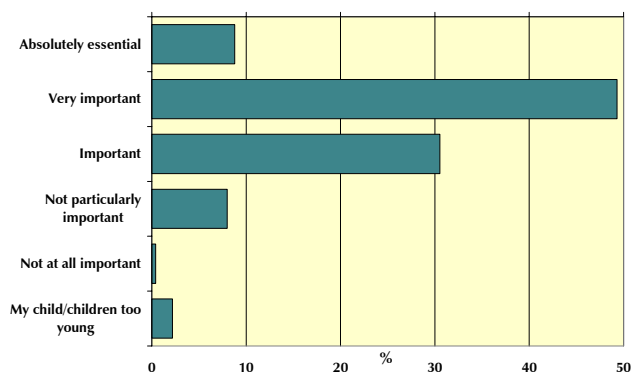
Despite the fact that Finland already has one of the most generous parental policies in Europe, 23% also believed that larger state benefits could also make a significant difference. There was some considerable agreement (22%) that a greater sense of community would improve mothers' quality of life, but also that living closer to family would have some tangible benefits (16%).

For Finnish mothers, flexible paid employment hours and greater state benefits would most improve their quality of life.

1.2.15 Sport

A supplementary section of the survey sought to explore mothers' attitudes to children's sports. Initially mothers were asked to assess how important it is that they encouraged their child/children to participate in sport and physical exercise for their development and well-being. The overwhelming majority (89%) were of the opinion that it is indeed important for mothers to promote and support children's participation in sport. As illustrated in Figure 26, nearly one-tenth of mothers viewed their children's participation in sport and physical activity as 'absolutely essential'.

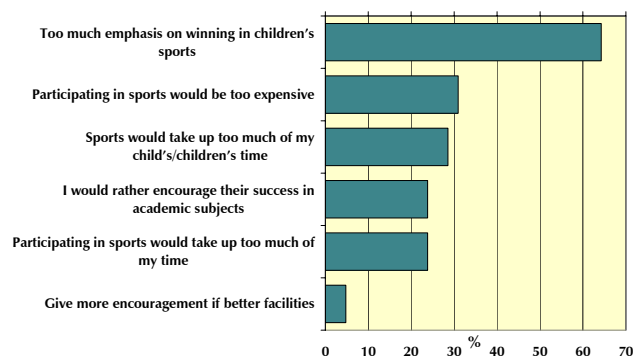
Figure 26. Encouraging child's participation in sport/physical activity



An overwhelming 92% of Finnish mothers recognised the value of their children's participation in sport.

Only a small minority of mothers (8%) felt that it is not important to foster and encourage sport. Mothers who shared this view were asked a supplementary question to ascertain the reasons for their ambivalence to children's sporting participation (see Figure 27). As the number of mothers in this group is relatively small (n=42), attempting to derive any generalisable conclusions from this limited dataset should be approached with a little caution. This aside, the most prominent themes emerging for mothers responses were that there is too much emphasis placed on winning in children's sport (64%) and that the costs of participation are prohibitive. Sports are also felt to place too much of a burden on both mothers' time (24%) and that of their children (29%). Twenty-four percent of these mothers also stated that they prioritise academic success over sporting achievements.

Figure 27. Reasons for not encouraging child sports



Mothers who recognised the importance of encouraging sports participation among their children were also asked a supplementary question; this one seeking to assess whether they felt that they had sufficient time at their disposal to enable their child/children to engage in sporting activities. A significant proportion (44%) of these mothers were of the opinion that they had sufficient time available to support their children's sporting aspirations. A little over one-third (34%) wish they had a little more time, but only 16% hankered for a lot more.