



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

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1.1 France

1.1.1 Introduction

France is the 10th best place in the world to be a mother according to the Save the Children's 2011 State of the World's Mothers index.¹ France has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe as well as a high rate of female employment. Family-friendly government policies aim to assist French women in reconciling their work and family life, and achieving a healthy work-life balance remains the primary concern for many French mothers.²

1.1.2 Historical perspectives

During the Enlightenment, motherhood, or *la maternité*, developed from being a necessary burden for women to evoking ideas of the happy, nurturing mother. Rousseau's 'Emile' was a key contribution to this development, encapsulating the notion that *la maternité* was a woman's natural role and responsibility rested with her to ensure the child was well cared for and educated and would subsequently develop into a 'good' citizen.³ This new concept of maternity became known as 'the cult of Motherhood' and set the scene for civic motherhood which remained the dominant attitude throughout the 19th century.

By the end of World War One, the 'cult of motherhood' was in decline and a more scientific, state-led approach to child rearing arose.⁴ Concerns over a shrinking population saw the prevalence of pro-natalist, anti-contraception policies in the first half of the twentieth century. Being a good mother and producing a large family became a public concern and a duty that women owed to the state.

Following the end of World War Two in 1945, Mother's Day (*la Fête des Mères*) celebrations were conducted with more enthusiasm than ever before. For some, such as the Christian democrat party (*Le Mouvement Républicain Populaire*), the day was used to emphasise the role of women as house-wives and mothers, while left wing politicians had a Mother's Day honours list published to congratulate those who had continued working and were thereby making a 'double contribution' to France.⁵ These divergent definitions of motherhood were further supported by technological innovations in the home.

Beginning in the 1950s, and spreading to the working classes and localities throughout the 1960s and 1970s, more sophisticated products and machinery to wash, cook and clean were being introduced. The role of the housewife became more highly valued as it earned the attention of scientific innovation and assistance. Conversely by cutting down the amount of time it took to complete household chores women were freer to spend their time outside of the domestic sphere, and indeed were more able to join the workforce.⁶

This negotiation between women as mothers and women in the workforce continued into the latter half of the 20th Century. Government incentives for women to produce large families remained until the 1960s. Women in the second half of the 20th Century, however, increasingly saw their career and work life as fundamental to their identity alongside that of being a mother. Changes to the benefit system to provide for this new 'ideal mother' saw generous maternity leave, child support payments and extensive public funding for childcare being introduced. These social programmes to assist mothers in achieving an acceptable work-life balance have continued into the 21st Century, and are at the centre of debates about the role and expectations of French mothers today.⁷

1.1.3 Demographics of motherhood

The demographics of motherhood in France reveal an interesting balance between work and home life. The fertility rate was 2.0 children per woman in 2009, which is just short of the rate needed to ensure population replacement (2.1 children per woman). France has one of the highest fertility rates in Western Europe and is only equalled or surpassed by Norway, Ireland and Iceland.⁸ Maternal employment is also relatively high at 65%, with the OECD average at 61.4%. Women in France are having their first child later than most of their European counterparts, with 28.6 years being the average age of a mother at the birth of her first child.

The relationship between one's marital status and having children has changed drastically. In 1970 only 7% of births were out of wedlock, whereas by 2008 this had risen to 53%. Within Europe only the Scandinavian countries, Estonia and Slovenia have higher rates of unmarried women becoming mothers. This does not indicate an increase in teenage pregnancies, as might be expected. Adolescent fertility rates have decreased from 18 children being born per 1,000 women in the age range of 15 to 19 in 1980 to 11 in 2008. In 2007, 79.5% of French children

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

² Stevens, de Bergeyck & de Liedekerke (2011) *Realities of Mothers in Europe*, Family Platform

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1979) *Emile, or On Education*. New York, Trans Allan Bloom.

⁴ O'Reilly, Andrea (ed) (2010) *Encyclopedia of Motherhood, Volume 2*, USA, SAGE publications Inc.

⁵ Duchon, Claire (1994), *Women's rights and women's lives in France, 1944-1968*, Routledge.

⁶ De Grazia, Victoria (2005), *Irresistible Empire: America's advance through twentieth-century Europe*, Harvard University Press.

⁷ See for example a *Le Monde* article from 04.10.11 which highlights parents' expectations for the government to support working mothers and fathers. [Can be found

at: http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/10/04/les-deux-tiers-des-parents-estiment-qu'ils-manquent-d-autorite_1581781_3224.html]

⁸ OECD Family Database www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

aged 0 to 14 years lived in a household shared by their mother and their father. Seventeen percent of children in this aged bracket lived with just their mother, less than three percent solely with their father and 0.6% with neither parent. Despite the figure for children living with both parents being relatively low compared with many European countries, France still has markedly higher rates than countries such as Belgium, Estonia, Latvia and the United Kingdom.

1.1.4 Defining motherhood (*la maternité*) in the French context

The figures above appear to show France as a country where an increasing number of women are raising their families in ways that diverge from what could be considered a traditional family model. Many mothers are employed, more than half are unmarried and an increasing number are not cohabiting with the father of their children. Contemporaneously, the fertility rate in France has risen to be one of the highest in Western Europe.

The high fertility rate in France can be linked to government policies that encourage and support large families. Income tax is calibrated so that the more children you have, the less you pay. Other benefits include a tax deduction for families to afford home help and the *carte famille nombreuse* (large-family card) which gives up to 30% reductions on rail and metro travel and free entrance into public swimming pools and other amenities.⁹

Many French mothers want to raise a family and also pursue a career. A survey conducted in 2011 found that for French mothers their primary concern was achieving a healthy 'work-home life balance'.¹⁰ This desire for mothers to meet both the demands of raising a family and of pursuing a career seems to be fundamental to both French families and the French government. The *Mouvement Mondiale des Mères* (World Mother's Movement) conducted a survey of European mothers in 2011. Mothers were given the opportunity to write a message to policy-makers in their country at the end of the questionnaire. One typically suggested that, "The work hours of mothers should match those of the children, and mothers should be able to take time off during school holidays".¹¹

In France many mothers do not want to make the choice between having children and continuing to work. Alongside high fertility rates exists an attitude that women with families should be able to work. France and Belgium, are the only countries in Europe where the public opinion sees childcare services, including those for very young

children, to be generally acceptable.¹² This reflects the fact that France has some of the most extensive provision of state-aided childcare in Europe and calls continue for more places to be created in crèches to support mothers who work. Indeed, employment rates have been seen to rise for women who have a household consisting of 1 or 2 children, before dropping from the 3rd child onwards.¹³

The provisions in place to encourage mothers to return to the workforce do affect the amount of time they are able to spend with their families. French mothers in 2009 were recorded to have spent on average 9.5 hours per week caring for their children, which is among the lowest figures for such activity reported in Europe. The underlying tensions between mothers' work-life balance have become more pronounced in recent years. The philosopher Elisabeth Badinter published a book in 2010 entitled *Le conflit: la femme et la mère* ('The conflict: the woman and the mother') which soon became a bestseller in France.

Badinter identifies three strands of political discussion in the last 40 years that have impacted on conceptions of motherhood in Europe. First, what she describes as 'ecology' and a desire to return to simpler times, second 'ethology' which is a zoological approach that seeks to identify the 'natural' behavioural traits of an animal, and finally an 'essentialist' feminism where natural means of giving birth and raising children such as breastfeeding, washable nappies and so on are valued.¹⁴ These 'morally good' methods of mothering have developed alongside an expectation for women to go to work. French mothers now feel greater pressure to invest more of their own time into raising their children, as the reliance on formal childcare systems is beginning to be called into question.

1.1.5 Motherhood and Employment

Almost two thirds (65%) of mothers with at least one child under the age of 15 are in work, meaning France has a slightly higher proportion of working mothers than the OECD average.¹⁵ The overall French female employment rate for the 25 to 49 age group is 78%, again placing France slightly above average and seeing a typically sized gap between maternal and overall female employment. More French mothers with children under the age of 3 have jobs than most of their European counterparts though, with 58% of them in the workforce. The proportion of French mothers with very young children who are also employed is similar to the numbers in Austria, Lithuania and Switzerland and is superseded only by the Scandinavian countries (not including Finland).

⁹ The 'perks' of having a large family in France are explored in a BBC news article from 29.03.2006 – <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4856992.stm>

¹⁰ Family Platform (2011) *Realities of Motherhood in Europe*.

¹¹ Mouvement Mondiale des Mères (2011) *What matters to Mothers in Europe?*

¹² European Commission (2009), *The Provision of Childcare Services*.

¹³ Eurostat (2009) *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

¹⁴ Badinter, E. (2010) *Le conflit, la femme et la mère*, Flammarion

¹⁵ OECD Family Database www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

Evidence shows that French mothers are among the first to return to work after giving birth, but a look at the prevalence of women working part-time and the employment patterns of fathers reveals more about the structure of French family life. A study conducted in 2007 found that out of couples with at least one child under the age of 6, 38.4% of them both worked full-time. A further 29.6% saw only the father working full-time and the mother not working at all, while 21.8% of couples surveyed reported that the father worked full-time and the mother part-time. Indeed, France, along with Germany, Italy and Sweden, has some of the highest numbers of women in part-time jobs.¹⁶

There are also distinct regional variations in this context, and women in full-time work are significantly overrepresented in and around Paris.¹⁷ Part-time working mothers add weight to the idea that French women are concerned with achieving a good work-home life balance. Indeed, two thirds of all children enrolled in kindergarten and primary school spend Wednesday morning, when French schools do not open, with at least one of their parents.¹⁸ Furthermore, a study in 2007 found that 17.2% of French children below the age of 2 attended nursery school. Of these, 70% attended nursery for no more than half of any given day and were cared for by their parents the rest of the time.¹⁹

A woman's level of education can be seen to influence how she approaches her family life. In 2006, 66.5% of childless women between the ages of 25 and 49 who had received a low level education were employed, compared to 85.2% of childless women in the same age bracket who had received a high level of education.²⁰ When women in this age bracket had two children, the employment rate of those with a low level of education fell to 57.7% while among highly educated women their level of employment only fell to 84.2%. If women had three or more children the employment figures were at 40.9% and 74.4% respectively. It is more likely that highly qualified women will gain and then retain work before and after they become mothers, suggesting that the dilemmas of achieving a good work-life balance are especially pressing for this group of women. It is less likely that women with a lower level of education will continue to work once they begin their family. The correlation that often exists

between holding higher qualifications and obtaining higher earning jobs may also mean that better educated women are more able to afford formal childcare services and so are able to continue to work.

There is some evidence that the role of fathers is undergoing a change. In a 2007 survey, 10.2% of couples with children under the age of 6 described their employment arrangements as 'other', which would have included situations where the father worked part-time or not at all, while the mother worked part-time or full-time. When the same survey was conducted in 1994, only 3.4% of couples answered with 'other'.²¹ Despite this seeming to reflect a decline of the 'male breadwinner' model, other statistics indicate that men continue to fulfill their traditional gender role when they become fathers. Despite men being entitled to 14 days paid paternity leave and up to 2 years unpaid parental leave (to be shared with the child's mother), very few actually take any parental leave.²² In fact male employment rises with the presence of children in the household by an average of 10 percentage points in France, and fathers only spend an average of 3.6 hours per week caring for their children, which is one of the lowest amounts of time in Europe. It appears that on the whole it is still mothers who are expected to change their working patterns in order to accommodate the demands of having a family.

The French state is proactive in ensuring women can be mothers and pursue a career and provisions have been made to assist mothers in entering or retaining employment. Men and women in France have a statutory right to apply for (although no entitlement to be awarded) a conversion from full-time to part-time work or vice-versa when they become parents. It is the initiative to provide large-scale, publicly funded childcare, however, that sets France apart from the rest of Europe.

1.1.6 Childcare

France has one of the most extensive public day care systems in Europe. The prevalent attitude sees childcare as a responsibility to be shared between the state and families.²³ Kimberly Morgan has argued that France looks similar to the Scandinavian countries in its approach to childcare because they have all seen a similar secularisation of political life.²⁴ This shift away from conservative, Christian ideals which value the conventional family model mean that French culture is accepting of, and

¹⁶ Eurostat (2009) *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*

¹⁷ Gurgand and Margolis (2005) *Does work pay in France? Monetary incentives and the guaranteed minimum income*, Institute for the Study of Labor, Bonn.

¹⁸ Sautory, O., Drees, Biausque, V. & Vidalenc, J. (2011) *Le temps périscolaire et les contraintes professionnelles des parents*, Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques.

¹⁹ Legendre, E. (2011) *Études et Résultats – Les enfants scolarisés à 2 ans vont à l'école surtout le matin et rarement l'après midi*, DREES (Directions de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques)

²⁰ Eurostat (2009) *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

²¹ OECD Family Database www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

²² Eurostat (2009) *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*

²³ Letablier, M-T. (2005) *Restructuring Childcare Policy in France*, presented at the Wellchi Network Conference 1, *Challenges and opportunities faced by European welfare states: the changing context for child welfare*.

²⁴ Morgan, K. (2003) *The politics of mother's employment, France in comparative perspective*, *World Politics*, 55(2).

aims to provide for, women who do not want to be stay-at-home mothers.

Formalised childcare is prevalent in France, and French mothers themselves spend on average 9.5 hours a week caring for their children (2009), which is among the lowest amount of time in Europe.²⁵ Families are entitled to up to 36 months of shared parental leave, but many begin to make use of childcare facilities when their child is 3-4 months old (i.e. at the end of paid maternity leave).²⁶ Furthermore, only a small number of parents use informal childcare (such as an unpaid babysitter, friends and family, etc.), highlighting the widespread availability of formal childcare provision. In 2008, 17.7% of 0 to 2 year-olds were looked after via means of informal childcare during a typical week, as well as 19.6% of 2 to 5 year-olds and 13.6% of 6 to 12 year-olds.²⁷

In the same year, 42% of 0 to 2 year-olds were enrolled in some form of formal childcare (such as a crèche). In the Nordic countries, and in the Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal, a higher proportion of children aged 0 to 2 years are put in formal childcare. From the ages of 3 to 5 though, 100% of French children are in pre-school educational programmes, the highest in the OECD. Municipality-run, free *Écoles Maternelles* (nursery schools) are available throughout France for children aged 2-6, although most do not join until they are 3 years old.

The provision of childcare is high on the political agenda in France. In the 2007 presidential election, a 'legal right to childcare' was promised by Nicolas Sarkozy, although its implementation was delayed until 2012.²⁸ France, Germany and Luxembourg are the only countries in the European Union who have a minister or secretary of state specifically charged with a family portfolio, demonstrating the significance of the subject at an institutional level.²⁹ State funded childcare institutions such as crèches and pre-schools are one way in which the government supports the provision of formal childcare. Crèche fees are calculated in relation to income so as to encourage low income families to use them.³⁰ In addition various forms of financial assistance are available from the *Caisse d'Allocations Familiales* (Family Allocations Office). These include the *Prestation d'Accueil du Jeune Enfant* which provides means tested financial assistance to help parents with the costs of very young children, including paying for

some form of childcare.³¹ Nevertheless it remains the case that places in crèches are limited and many mothers chose to look after their young children themselves. A TNS-Sofres survey found that 57% of French mothers with children younger than 2 years old stay at home to care for them, and of these, 90% have chosen to do so (i.e. are not at home due to unemployment).³² Despite the state pursuing measures to assist in the provision of childcare, the majority of mothers in fact still chose to care for their very young children themselves.

1.1.7 Values and popular representations

In a study conducted for *Enfant* magazine and *Femme Actuelle*, 75% of those surveyed believed it was more difficult to raise children today than during their parents' generation.³³ In fact, when the parents surveyed were asked to identify the words or phrases they most associated with parenthood, 'lack of authority', 'stress', 'difficulty' and 'tiredness' were the top four responses. The issue of work/life balance resonates strongly with contemporary French mothers and the issue of 'maternal guilt', particularly in the context of time available (or lack thereof) to spend with their children is widely discussed. Others suggest that French society has unrealistic and untenable expectations of its women and mothers. Valerie Toranian, editor of *Elle* in France, provided the *New York Times* with the following summary of what is like to be a woman in modern day France:

*'We have the right to do what men do — as long as we also take care of the children, cook a delicious dinner and look immaculate. We have to be superwoman.'*³⁴

The new pressures placed on mothers mean that popular discourse is dominated by discussions of the heightened conflicting demands placed on mothers. One such new trend is that of 'green parenting', where an emphasis is placed on natural and environmentally friendly means of child rearing. Concerns include the importance of children eating organic food, both at home and in school³⁵, and 'environmentally-friendly' companies can be seen to be

²⁵ Eurostat (2009) *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

²⁶ European Commission (2009) *The provision of childcare services*.

²⁷ OECD Family Database, <http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database>

²⁸ European Commission (2009), *The provision of childcare services*.

²⁹ Fagnani, J. (1996) Family Policies and Working Mothers: A comparison of France and West Germany', in Garcia-Ramon and Monk (eds), *Women of the European Union, The Politics of Work and Daily Life*, Routledge.

³⁰ Eurostat (2009) *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

³¹ From www.mon-enfant.fr, 'Mon Enfant' was launched by the French government in 2009 to provide parents with a resource which collated all the information concerning childcare provision.

³² From a TNS-Sofres survey reported in Family Platform (2011) *Realities of Motherhood in Europe*.

³³ Ipsos Public Affairs (2011) *Qu'est ce qu'être parent en 2011?* [Can be found at: http://www.ipsos.fr/sites/default/files/attachments/rapport_etre_parent_en_2011_ipsos_aout_2011.pdf]

³⁴ Bennhold, K. (2010) When having it all doesn't mean equality. *New York Times*, 11 Oct.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/12/world/europe/12iht-ffrance.html?pagewanted=all>

³⁵ See for example <http://www.nosjuniors.com/tendances-nouveautes/le-bio-dans-les-cantines-cest-pour-quand/>, 'nos juniors' is a website aimed at parents of 6-12 year olds and here is promoting the importance of parents agitating for organic foods being served in schools.

identifying French mothers as a key target audience.³⁶ This idea of returning to more natural methods extends to expectations around mother's bodies. A website produced for French families ran a poll in 2010 asking if respondents 'blamed mothers who do not breastfeed', to which 77% answered 'yes'.³⁷ While incentives are being introduced to encourage more women back into the workforce, an expectation is also mounting for mothers to raise their children 'naturally', which requires careful consideration and time.

Another emerging area of tension sees some French women claiming that new trends in motherhood mark an end to feminism. Women's magazines and online forums are at once celebrating women who discover their true purpose when they become mothers³⁸, while lamenting an end to the pursuit of gender equality as women return to the home and their domestic responsibilities.³⁹ As noted earlier, the number one concern for French mothers is establishing a good work-home life balance.⁴⁰ Internationally, France is held up as a paragon of how mothers should approach their careers and family life⁴¹, but it seems that as the definition of what amounts to a healthy home life becomes more demanding and complex, French mothers are finding it increasingly difficult to strike this balance.

1.1.8 Single motherhood

The prevalence of single motherhood in France is roughly in line with European averages. Divorce rates have risen between 1970 and 2008 from 0.8 to 2.1 divorces per 1,000 in the population.⁴² In 2007, 17% of children aged 0 to 14 years lived in a household with their mother but not their father, while 2.9% of the same age bracket lived with just their father. Children living in single parent families are more likely to experience poverty, underperform at school and receive less 'parental investment' than those in a two parent family.⁴³ A non-traditionalist conception of the family in France does mean that there is extensive

support for single mothers. The *Caisse d'Allocations Familiales* (Family Allocations Office) includes in its *Revenu de solidarité active* provisions for single parents to receive a minimum income.⁴⁴ Predating the *Revenu de solidarité active* was the single parents allowance (*l'allocation parent isolé*), which in 1998 was reformed to include a 'temporary top-up schedule' that increased income for benefit recipients who took on paid employment. The reform planned to incentivise single mothers to return to work, and indeed, employment rates of eligible single mothers increased significantly as a consequence.⁴⁵ This highlights again the attitude that French mothers should be able to achieve their desired work-/home- life balance, and that single mothers should not be barred from this aspiration.

1.1.9 Motherhood and sports

Participation in formal sporting activities in France is low for very young children, although this is in line with figures from across Europe, and it is more likely that children of this age are engaging in informal play and physical activity which is difficult to measure. Once children begin school the school-week is structured in such a way that there are no lessons on a Wednesday, allowing for time to be devoted to extra-curricular activities. Nearly one third (32%) of primary school-aged children partake in either sporting activities or attend tutoring on a Wednesday afternoon. This figure rises to 42% among students at secondary school (*collège*).

Overall, youth participation in a sports club in France is above the EU average (34%) at 40%. Participation in sport is clearly an important and routine part of the lives of many French children. Current data, however, do not reveal the role that mothers play in encouraging their children to take part in sporting activities. It can be suggested that the provision of sport, like childcare in France, is seen to be at least in part the responsibility of the state, by for example creating time in the school week for sport.

³⁶ See for example www.unbloguemaman.blogspot.com, where environmentally friendly companies sponsor some of the content so as to promote their products.

³⁷ Can be found at: www.famili.fr/a-t-on-tendance-a-faire-culpabiliser-les-meres-qui-n-allaitent-pas,374,82692.asp

³⁸ See for example <http://www.famili.fr/moi-la-working-girl-je-suis-devenue-mere-au-foyer,789,272646.asp#articles>, a French career girl describes how she left her job when she started her family and found "the women [she] truly was".

³⁹ See for example <http://www.elle.fr/Societe/Les-enquetes/Quand-Superwoman-rentre-a-la-maison-740939/La-fin-du-feminisme-740943> – asks if it is "the end of feminism?" as today's women who were raised by emancipated mothers place increasing value on being traditional mothers.

⁴⁰ Family Platform (2011) *Realities of Motherhood in Europe*.

⁴¹ See for example, 'Mommy tracked' on 'One more reason French mothers have to be thankful' – <http://www.mommytracked.com/one-more-reason-french-mothers-have-be-thankful?page=0%2C0>

⁴² OECD Family Database, www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database

⁴³ Stevens, J., de Bergeyck, J. & de Liedekerke, A-C (2011) *Realities of Mothers in Europe*, Family Platform.

⁴⁴ See the Caisse d'Allocations Familiales' website:

<http://www.caf.fr/wps/portal/particuliers/catalogue/metropole/rsa>

⁴⁵ Gonzalez, L. (2005) *Single mothers and incentives to work: The French experience*, Universitat Pompeu Fabra.

1.2 French national survey

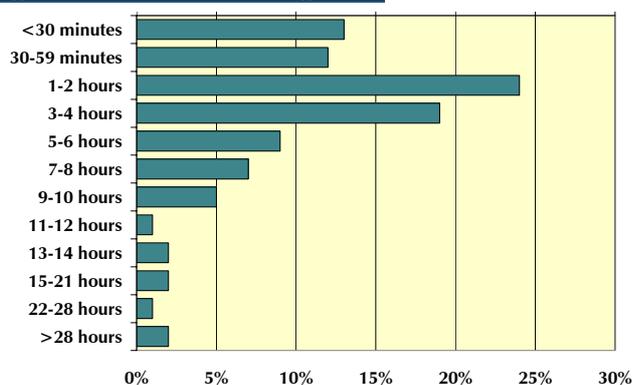
1.2.1 Introduction

SIRC surveyed over 1,000 French mothers to try and establish what it was like to be bringing up children in modern day France. The participants were aged 16 and over, with the majority of respondents falling between the ages of 25 and 44 years old. The majority of participants had either one or two children. All respondents had at least one dependent child under the age of 16. In terms of work life, 61% of those surveyed were in full-time employment (i.e. worked more than 30 hours a week), while 20% were in part-time employment and 20% did not work at all. The survey comprised 22 questions, looking at issues of time use, how mother's perceived their experience compared to that of previous generations, sources of support and advice, feelings of guilt and isolation as a mother, how mothers like to be thanked for what they do, and the importance placed on their children's participation in sports.

1.2.2 Current free time and 'me time'

Participants were asked how much 'me time' they had in a week, that is to say time which they considered to be devoted purely to themselves without having any obligations to other people. Figure 1 shows that the largest proportion of respondents (24%) said they have between 1 and 2 hours of 'me time' in a week, while 19% reported they have 3-4 hours. Taking into account the answers from all respondents, mothers in our poll sample have on average 4.4 hours of 'me time' each week.

Figure 1. 'Me time' in an average week



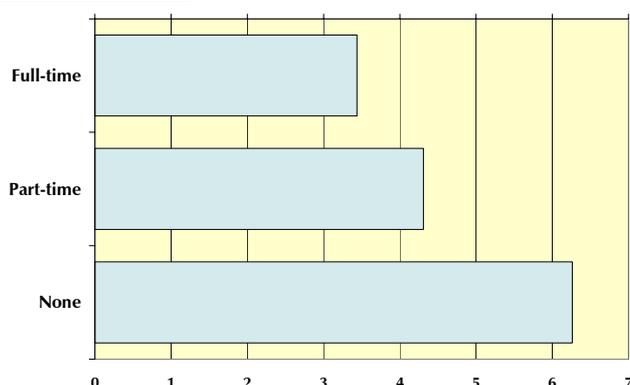
French mothers, on average, have less than 38 minutes per day of 'free time'.

Further nuances are revealed when the data are broken down according to the number of children in the household. Unsurprisingly, more children equates to less 'me time'. Mothers with one child had on average 44.1 minutes free each day, while mothers with three children had 31.4 minutes available. The age of the mother's youngest child is also significant, with mothers with a child below the age of 3 years having 27.9 minutes spare, and

mothers whose youngest child was between the age of 11 and 13 having 49 minutes.

The amount of free time reported by mothers also varies according to employment status (see Figure 2). Mothers in full-time employment have on average 3.4 hours of 'me time' in a week, while part-time working mothers have 4.3 hours and non-working mothers have 6.3 hours.

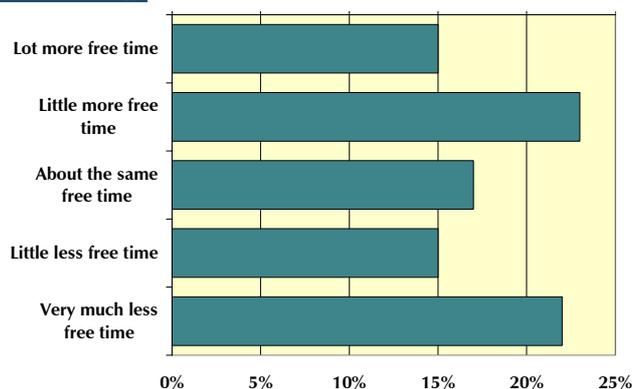
Figure 2. Average amount of 'me time' in a week by employment status



1.2.3 Generational comparisons

Figure 3 shows how mothers judged the amount of free time they have in comparison with their own mothers when they were at a similar point in their lives. Section 1.1.6 of the background report suggests that a variety of new expectations being placed on today's French mothers may make it more difficult to balance increasing demands both in and outside of the home, resulting in a reduction in the availability of free time. The poll results show that today's mothers, however, are divided over how their experience of free time compares with that of their own mothers.

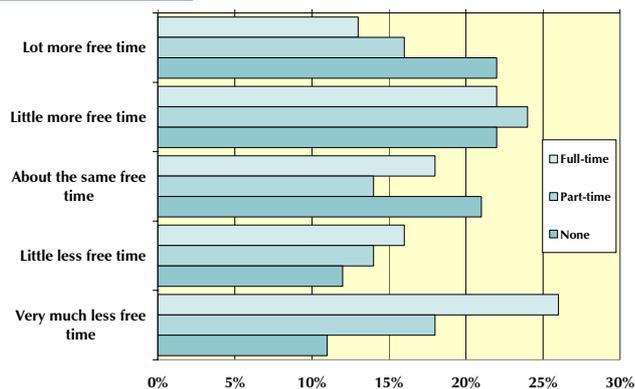
Figure 3. Free time compared with your own mother at the same life-stage



When one looks at the mother's employment status though, a clearer trend begins to emerge. Over one-quarter (26%) of mothers who work full-time believed they have 'much less free time' while 11% of non-working mothers reported the same. Over one-fifth (22%) of unemployed mothers said they have 'a lot more free time' than their own mothers did at the same life-stage, while

only 13% of full-time working mums agreed with this statement. A correlation can be drawn between a mother's employment status and her perceived amount of free time. It appears that crucial among the demands placed on modern mothers is her working life. Mothers in full-time employment, as discussed in section 1.1.3 of the background report, do not want to sacrifice a family life. This means that working mothers continue to fulfil responsibilities in the home while also going out to work and, as a consequence, forego 'me time'.

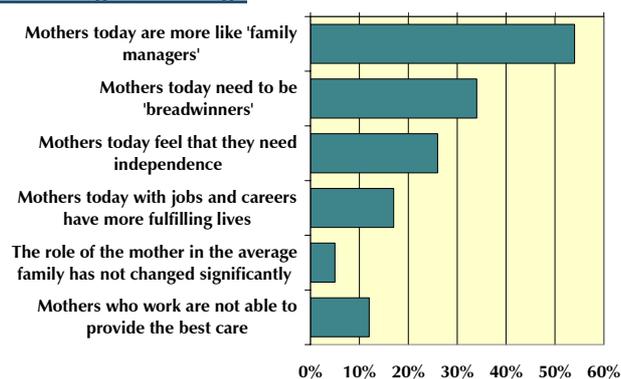
Figure 4. Free time compared with your own mother by employment status



1.2.4 Perceptions of change

The topic of mothers entering employment is further highlighted in Figure 5. Over one-third (34%) of respondents agreed with the statement 'Mothers today need to be 'breadwinners' in the family much more than in my own mother's day'. Employment is seen as a factor that plays an important part in differentiating the French mothers of today from previous generations.

Figure 5. Differences between being a mother now and being a mother a generation ago



Today's French mothers need to be both family managers and breadwinners.

Looking more generally at mother's perceptions of their role compared to that of their own mothers, the emphasis is indeed on change. Few respondents identified a situation of stasis. Only 5% of those surveyed agreed with the statement that 'The role of the mother in the average

family has not changed significantly from that experienced by my own mother'.

The area of change which gained the highest level of agreement saw 54% of our respondents agreeing that 'Mothers today are more like 'family managers' than the traditional 'housewife' of my mother's day'. In identifying themselves as 'family managers', it appears that the mothers we surveyed still see it as their role and responsibility to organise the home. Additional, often work-related demands outside of the home have changed how our respondents approach their domestic duties. Tasks within the home have now taken on a more logistical, managerial nature for our mothers, rather than something they could focus on more completely if they were stay-at-home housewives. As is discussed in section 1.1.4 of the background report, the prevalence of working mothers in France means that the term 'housewife' does not adequately capture the roles that the majority of mothers in modern day France now take on.

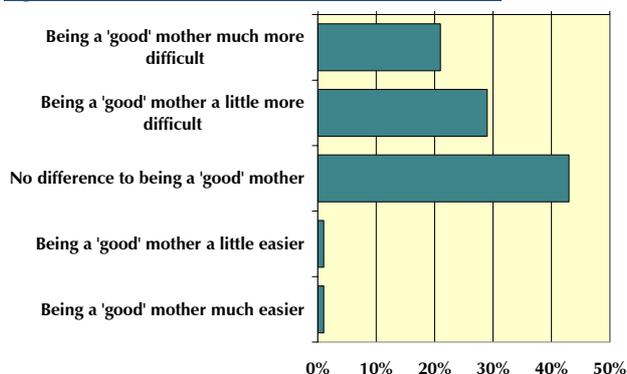
There was some evidence of opposition to this 'family manager' vision. Twelve percent of respondents agreed that 'Mothers who go out to work are not able to provide the best care for their children'. France is renowned for the widespread acceptance of formal childcare, as is highlighted in section 1.1.3 of the background report. It is noted, however, in section 1.1.6 that there has recently been a resurgence of the idealisation of the housewife and the 'stay-at-home mum'. Although only a small proportion of our respondents registered concerns about the care working mothers were able to provide their children, it is interesting to note that this response fits with a recently emerging trend that questions the ability of working mothers to be 'good' mothers.

1.2.5 Impact of the economic downturn

The mothers surveyed were also asked whether the recent economic downturn has affected their ability to be a 'good' mother. As shown in Figure 6, 45% thought the economic conditions have made no difference to their ability to be a 'good' mother. Over one-quarter (27%) believed it has made being a 'good' mother a 'little more difficult' and 21% thought it makes the role 'much more difficult'. Only a small minority of the sample (2%) were of the opinion that the current economic situation has made being a good mother 'a little' or 'much' easier. These figures show that for almost half of all those surveyed, the recent economic crisis had had a negative affect on their ability to provide for their family, perhaps suggesting that the financial situations of these families have changed to the extent that they and their children are now feeling the effects. That said, almost half of our respondents felt that the current economic conditions had no overtly positive or negative impact on their ability to be good mothers. This could in part demonstrate the fact that France, in comparison with other European countries, may have more robust defences against the economic downturn. It

could also suggest that the respondents to the survey feel that their ability to be a 'good' mother is independent of one's financial status.

Figure 6. Effect of the recent economic conditions

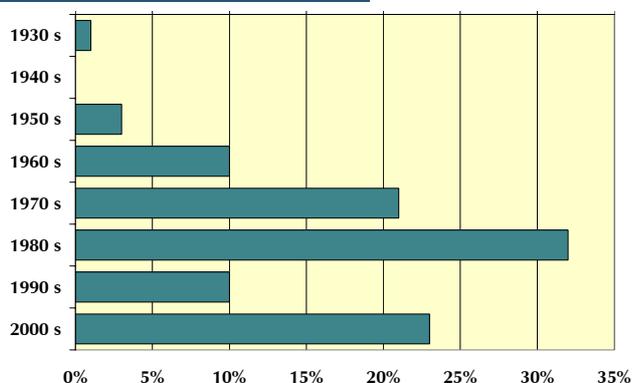


Nearly one-half of French mothers say that current economic conditions have had no impact on their ability to be a 'good' mother. For almost two-fifths, however, being a 'good' mother in these austere times is difficult.

1.2.6 Ideal decades

When asked in which decade in the last 80 years they would ideally like to be a mother, the most popular response was the 1980s, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Ideal decade to be a mother



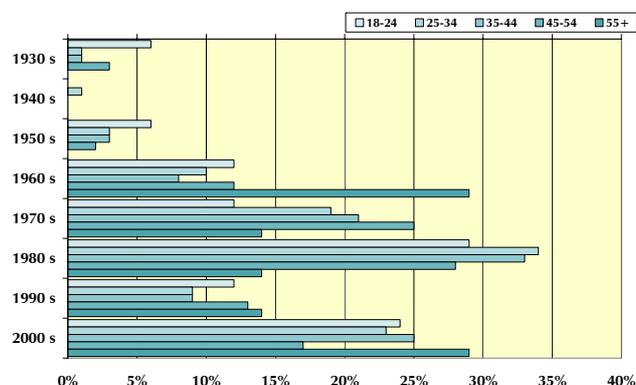
Approximately one-third (32%) of mothers said, if they were given the choice, that they would return to the 1980s, while 23% were content with being a mother in the 2000s and 21% opted for the 1970s.

When our respondents preferences are broken down according to their own age (Figure 8) it can be seen that their preferred decade often correlates to a time when they themselves were children. This is most striking among the 55+ cohort, 29% of whom thought the 1960s was an ideal decade in which to be a mother. It is perhaps the case that fond memories of one's own childhood play a part in influencing how mothers respond to this question.

The fact that the 1980s is seen as the ideal decade to be a mother may in part reflect the fact that many of our

respondents would have been children at this time. It was also from 1981-1995 that François Mitterand was President of France. Mitterand is so far the only leftwing President of the Fifth Republic. During his presidency, Mitterand pursued liberal social reforms while further securing welfare provision offered by the French state.

Figure 8. Ideal decade to be a mother by age of respondent

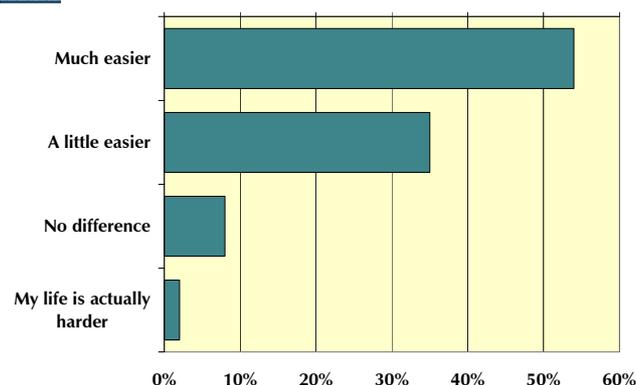


The ideal decade in which to be a mother would be, for one-third of French Mothers, the 1980s, followed by a quarter who would choose the 2000s.

1.2.7 Labour saving devices and impact on time-use

Figure 9 shows that labour saving devices have played a big role in alleviating some of the pressures faced by modern day French mothers. Over one-half (54%) felt their lives as mothers have been made 'much easier' by such devices, and 37% felt their job has been made 'a little easier'.

Figure 9. Extent to which labour saving devices have made life easier

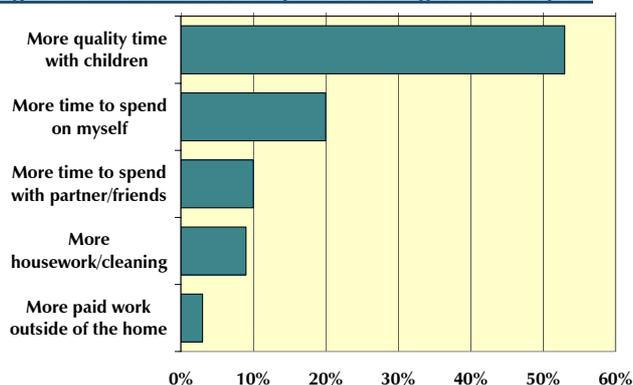


An overwhelming 91% of French mothers agree that labour-saving devices and products have made their lives easier and richer.

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 59% of the mothers, was that these ‘innovations’ allowed them to spend more quality time with their children. A significant proportion (20%) of French mothers also reported using this liberated time for themselves. This was particularly the case for those mothers with older children and those who do not work; 28% of mothers whose youngest child is aged between 14 and 15 years spend the time on themselves, as would 26% of mothers who are not currently employed.

Figure 10. How time saved by labour saving devices is spent



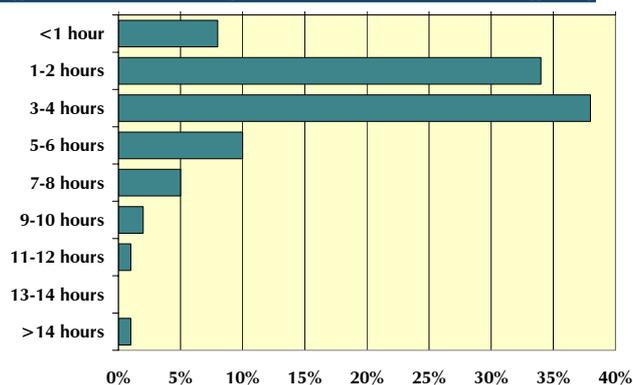
It can be suggested that teenage children do not rely on their parents in the way that younger children do, and so mothers of older children feel they can opt for more time to themselves without any negative implications. Mothers who do not work may feel that because they are at home most of the time, they are able to provide the quality time that their children need, and so again do not feel guilty in wanting more ‘me time’.

While labour-saving devices make life easier for most French mothers, the time saved is mostly devoted to their children. One-fifth, however, do use this time for themselves.

1.2.8 Time with children

Section 1.1.3 of the background study reported that French mothers spend some of the lowest amounts of time in Europe caring for their children. This survey sought to identify how much ‘active’ time mothers spent with their children. That is, engaged in activities such as reading, writing, playing, washing or dressing. Figure 11 shows the ‘active time’ our mothers perceived they spend with their children in an average day. Most mothers reported spending between 3 and 4 hours.

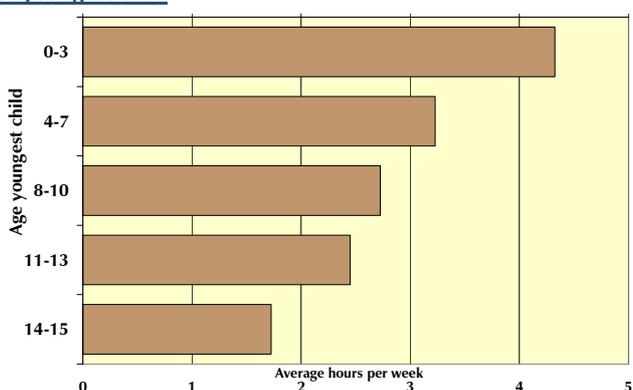
Figure 11. Active time spent with children in an average day



On average French mothers spend 3.26 hours a day of active time with their children. Echoing the results from other studies previously mentioned, French mothers spend relatively little time with their children when compared with mothers from other countries in Europe. In fact, in the SIRC survey, only mothers from Denmark reported spending less active time with their children, an average of 3.23 hours per day.

When the data are broken down by age of youngest child, it emerges that, on average, mothers of younger children spend more active time with them. Mothers whose youngest child is below the age of 3 years, spend an average of 4.3 hours of active time with them per day. By the time the youngest child in the family is aged between 14 and 15, the average amount of active time a mother spends decreases to 1.7 hours (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Active spent with children in an average day by age of youngest child



These figures may in part show that parents of younger children need to spend ‘active’ time dressing, bathing and feeding them, whereas parents of older children do not have the same routine obligations.

The average French mother spends 3.26 hours per day of active time with her children.

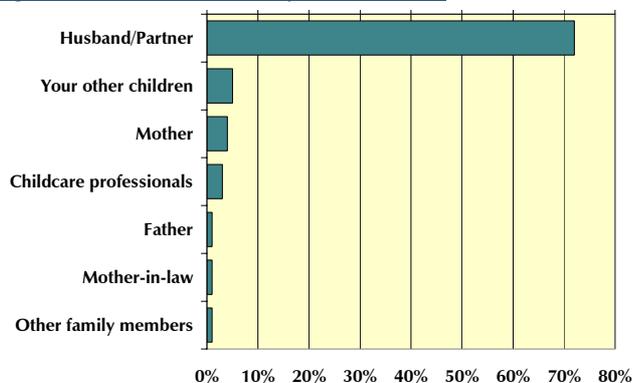
1.2.9 Help in the home

1.2.9.1 Childcare

As noted in section 1.1.3 of the background report, in contemporary French society more children are born to unmarried parents than they are to married ones. This does not however, mark a drastic rise in single motherhood. It appears that couples no longer see marriage as a prerequisite to starting a family. The institution of marriage may be on the wane in France, but it remains the norm for children to be raised with both a mother and a father figure in the household. So what contributions, if any, do partners and husbands make to childcare in the home? And, if partners' contributions are limited, on whom else do mothers rely on for help with this task?

As can be seen in Figure 13, a woman's 'husband or partner' is the one who helps most with childcare; a situation reported by nearly three-quarters (72%) of mothers. The use of other sources of help with childcare in the home is reported by very few French mothers. What is particularly noticeable is their lack of reliance on their own mothers in this regard. Of all the countries surveyed in the SIRC study, maternal grandmothers in France play the least significant role in home-based childcare. Only 4% of French mothers said that they receive the most help with childcare in the home from their own mothers, compared with the 33% reported by mothers in Italy.

Figure 13. Main source of help with childcare

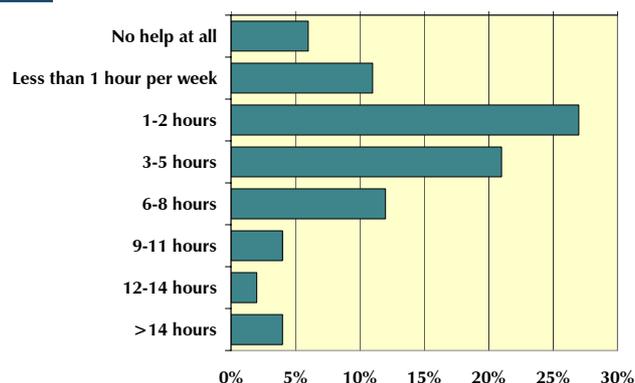


Mothers in France are helped most by their partners in nearly three-quarters of cases. French mothers, however, are the least likely in Europe to rely on their own mothers for help with childcare in the home.

1.2.9.2 Domestic work

Having established that those surveyed think their partners are their biggest source of help with childcare, Figure 14 illustrates how much help our respondents felt their partner gives them with household chores, including childminding.

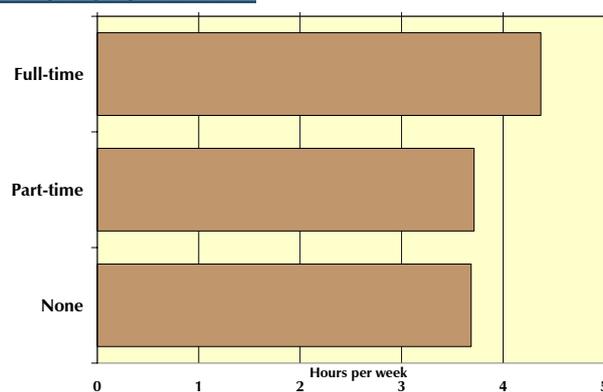
Figure 14. Help from partner in the home during an average week



Over one-quarter (27%) of respondents reported that their partners help them with household chores for between 1 and 2 hours per week. On average French mothers receive just 4 hours of assistance with childcare from their partners, the least amount reported in the Western European study. When the data are presented according to mother's employment status, it still remained the case that for these different groups, the most prevalent answer was that their partners helped them for between 1 and 2 hours a week with housework and childminding.

Figure 15 shows that on average mothers who work part-time receive the same amount of help as those who are not currently in employment (3.7 hours per week). Partners of mothers who work full-time are, on average, more helpful and provide 4.4 hours a week of assistance in the home. There is, however, a noticeably larger proportion of full-time and part-time working mothers who receive 3 to 5 hours of help from their partners (23% and 21% respectively), when compared with mothers who do not work (15%).

Figure 15. Help from partner in the home during an average week by employment status

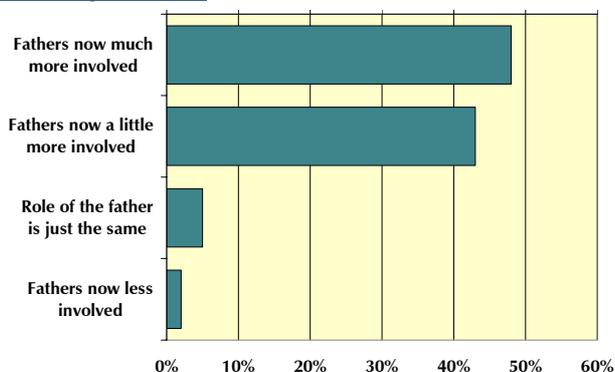


Across Western Europe it is French mothers who receive the least help from their partners with childcare – just 4 hours per week.

1.2.10 Role of the father

We then asked the sample of French mothers whether they think fathers in general are now more involved in childcare than they were in previous generations (see Figure 16).

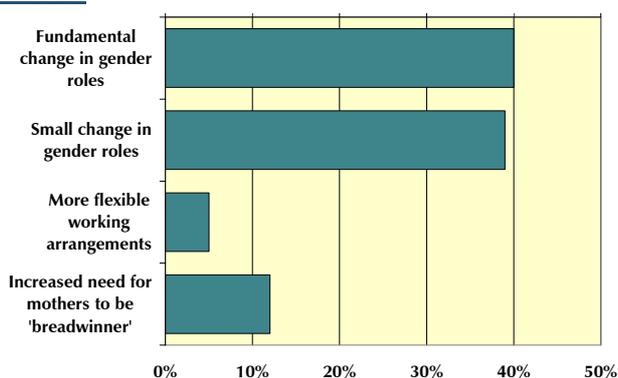
Figure 16. Involvement of fathers in childcare compared to previous generations



It is clear that fathers are seen to be playing a far more active role – 91% of respondents believed that fathers were either ‘a little’, or ‘very much more’ directly involved in the day-to-day care of children when compared with their own fathers’ or grandfathers’ day.

There is a consensus in the reasons given for this change. Approximately four-fifths (79%) agreed that either a small (42%) or fundamental (37%) change has taken place in terms of gender roles in French society, as can be seen in Figure 17. It is interesting when one then looks to the fact that only 4% believed that there were now more flexible working arrangements for men. In terms of fathers involvement in caring for their children it seems that attitudinal change, rather than situational change has been the driving force.

Figure 17. Reason for increase in fathers’ involvement in childcare



Fourteen percent thought that a new need for mothers to be a ‘breadwinner’ meant that fathers are more involved in child rearing. As can be seen in section 1.1.5 of the background report, France, along with Germany, Italy and Sweden have some of the highest proportions of women working in part-time jobs. The typical employment

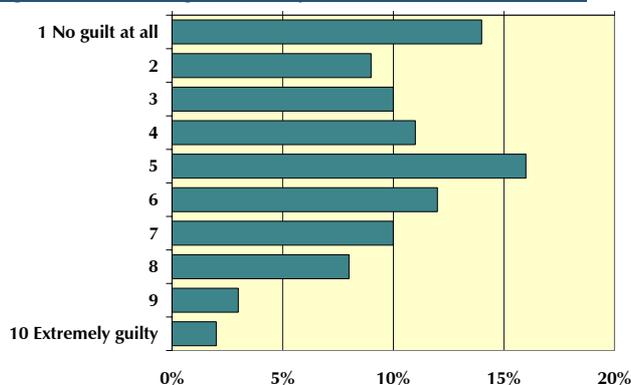
situation for many French couples is one where the man works full-time and the woman part-time. It is still the case that the duty of ‘breadwinning’ is seen to fall on the male partner, and that ultimately the father should be the one to provide financially for his family. Women have a more complicated, often conflicting set of obligations towards their work and home lives.

There is a consensus among French mothers (91%) that fathers are now more involved in the day-to-day care of children. The majority (79%) attribute this to changing gender roles in society.

1.2.11 Maternal Guilt

Figure 18 shows the levels of guilt mothers feel with regards to their work-/home-life balance.

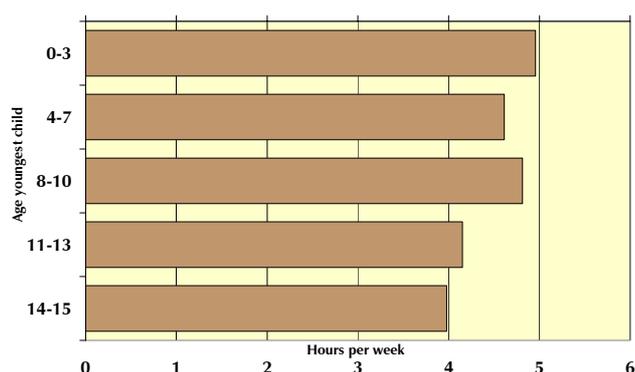
Figure 18. Level of guilt about paid work/home life balance



Mothers were asked to score their feelings of guilt on a ten-point scale where 1 is ‘no guilt at all’ and 10 is ‘extremely guilty’. The largest proportion of mothers expressed moderate guilt about their work and home life balance, with 16% rating their feelings of guilt at 5 out of 10. The second largest proportion of respondents said they felt no guilt at all, which accounted for 14% of answers. The average guilt ranking for French mothers is 4.6 out of 10.

When the data are broken down according to the age of the respondent’s youngest child, it can be seen that those with older children are less likely to experience feelings of guilt, while the inverse is true for those with younger children. Mothers whose youngest child was between the ages of 0 and 3 years reported feelings of guilt that averaged at 4.96 out of 10. Mothers whose youngest was aged between 14 and 15, had an average guilt ranking of 3.98

Figure 19. Guilt caused by work-life balance by age of child



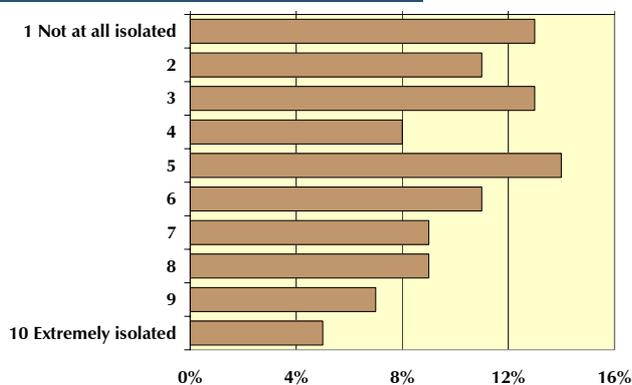
As noted in section 1.1.4 of the background report, France is one of the only countries, along with Belgium, where it is seen as widely acceptable to put very young children in formal childcare. The data presented here reveals that trying to balance a work life and a home life is a source of some guilt for mothers, especially when children are of a very young age. This suggests that an attitude still persists in France that places value on the amount of care a mother is personally able to provide for her child.

The majority of French mothers (86%) experience a degree of guilt about their work/life balance

1.2.12 Maternal isolation

Mothers were also asked to score their feelings of isolation and the extent to which they felt supported using a similar ten-point scale, where 1 is 'not isolated at all/fully supported' and 10 is extremely isolated/totally unsupported (see Figure 20). The data on feelings of isolation that French mothers experience is quite evenly spread across the scale, although the largest proportion (14%) of respondents scored themselves '5', expressing a moderate sense of isolation and a moderate level of support. On average, French mothers scored their level of isolation at 4.96 out of 10. In comparison with the other

Figure 20. Feelings of isolation as a mother



European countries in the SIRC study, French mothers reported feeling relatively isolated and unsupported with only mothers from the UK and Italy feeling greater levels of isolation.

If the data are broken down according to employment status one finds that working mothers feel less isolated and more supported than their non-working compatriots. On average mothers working part-time reported feeling the least isolated (4.77/10), followed by those in full-time employment (4.86/10) and those not currently in work (5.32/10). For French mothers having a role outside of the home appears to be an important factor in determining how isolated and supported they feel. For those whose role lies primarily in the home, there is a greater likelihood that they will find they feel cut off from sources of support.

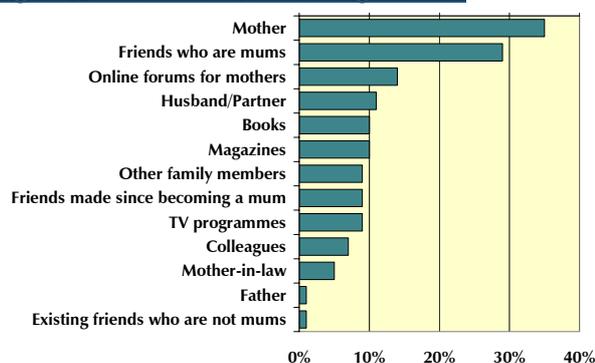
At least some degree of isolation is experienced by 87% of French mothers.

1.2.13 Support and advice

The most common source of advice for mothers was their own mother (35%), as can be seen in Figure 21. The second most recorded answer (29%) saw mothers turning to existing friends, who were also mothers, for advice.

The use of more technological sources of advice such as the Internet and the broadcast media were lower than family and friends, but still accounted for quite a significant proportion of main sources of advice. Fourteen percent said that they use 'the internet/ online communities/ forums for mothers/ parents' as their primary source of advice on being a mother. Nearly one-fifth (19%) said their main sources of advice are either Television programmes (9%) or magazines (10%).

Figure 21. Sources of advice on being a mother

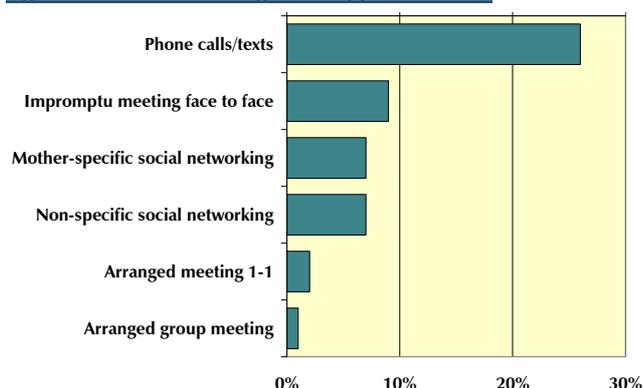


For the most part French mothers rely on familial networks and groups of friends to offer the support, but newly emerging networks which are facilitated by modern technologies are also playing a relatively important role. Only mothers in Portugal reported relying on Internet communities to a greater extent than French mothers in SIRC's pan-European study.

French mothers turn mostly to their own mother for advice.

Figure 22 summarises how those surveyed say they are most likely to communicate with their support network.

Figure 22. Communicating with support network

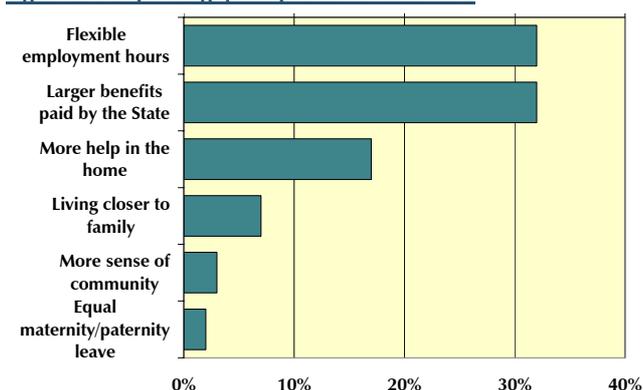


Leaving aside those respondents who did not express a preference, communicating via phone call or texts was the most popular method cited by 26% of the sample. The role of the Internet is again evident here in the mothers' responses; 14% of whom reported using social networking sites as a preferred method of communicating with their support networks. Face-to-face meetings are also favoured by some, though these are more likely to be impromptu as opposed to anything that may have been formally arranged.

1.2.14 Improving the quality of life

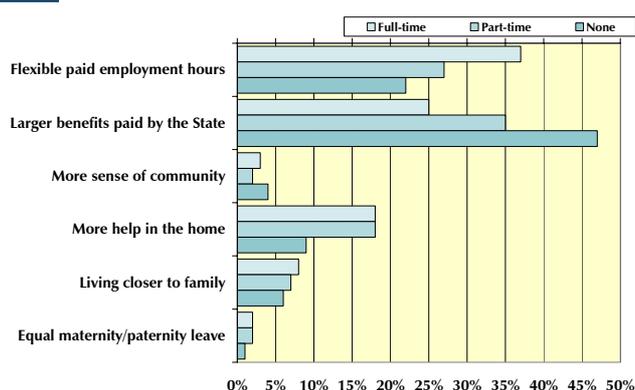
When asked what would most improve their quality of life as a mother, our respondents are divided. Figure 23 shows that French mothers are split between thinking that more flexibility in their working hours, and larger state benefits would be the most important factor in making their lives as mothers better.

Figure 23. Improving quality of life as a mother



When the data are broken down according to employment status (see Figure 24), the reason for this divergence of opinion becomes evident. It is mothers who work full-time who, for the most part, prioritise more flexible working hours, while part-time employed and stay-at-home Mums suggested larger state benefits would be more likely to positively impact on their quality of life as a mother.

Figure 24. Improving quality of life as a mother by employment status



More help in the home, as one would expect, is a greater issue for those mothers who work, cited by 18% of both full-timers and part-timers compared with half that proportion of non-working mothers.

Flexible employment hours and larger state benefits would most improve the lives of French mothers.

1.2.15 Sport

The mothers surveyed were asked to assess how much importance they placed on their child participating in sport (see Figure 25).

Figure 25. Importance of sport for your child's development and well being

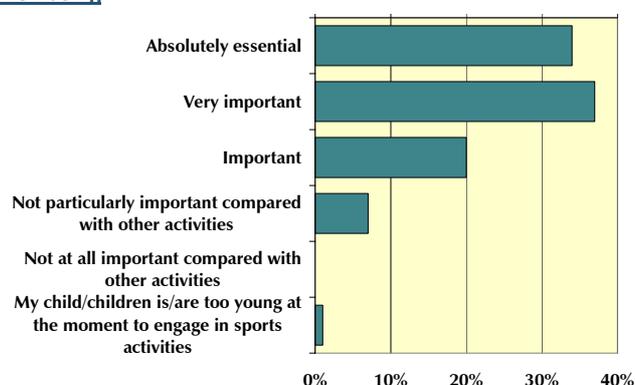
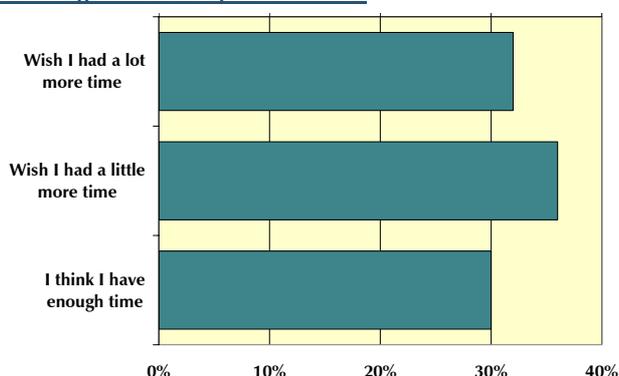


Figure 25 shows that 71% of mothers agreed that it was either 'very important' (37%) or 'absolutely essential' (34%) that their child participates in sport recognising the potential associated benefits for their child's development and well-being. Only 7% thought that sport was 'not particularly important' in comparison to other activities.

Almost all French mothers recognise the value of their children's participation in sport, but most wished they had more time to devote to their children's sporting pursuits.

When asked how satisfied they were with the amount of time they were able to devote to their children’s sporting activities opinion was divided, as can be seen in Figure 26.

Figure 26. Satisfaction with amount of time available to encourage children's sports activities

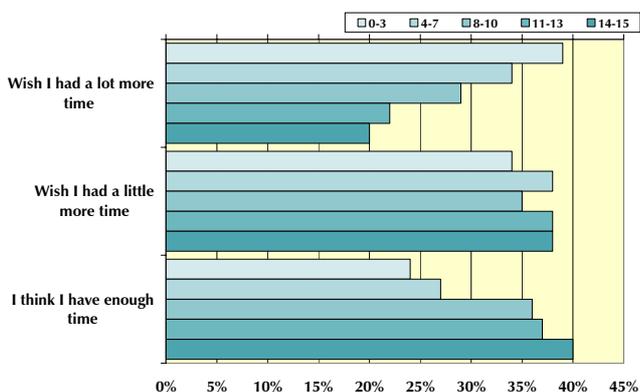


While 30% were of the opinion that they have adequate time with which to devote to the pursuit of their child’s sporting activities, 36% felt that they would benefit from ‘a little more time’ and a further 32% said that they wished they had ‘a lot more time’.

A mother’s work life does affect the amount of time she feels she is able to commit to her children’s sporting activities. When the data are broken down according to the employment status of the mother, 39% of mothers in full-time in employment wish they had a lot more time available to encourage their children’s participation in sport, whereas only 17% of mothers who are not currently working felt the same. Approximately one-quarter (24%) of full-time working mothers thought they have enough time available, compared with 48% of non-working mothers.

The age of the youngest child in the household also has an impact on mothers’ perception of the time required to encourage their child’s participation in sports (see Figure 27). Mothers with younger children, for example, wish they had a lot more time (39% of mothers of 0-3 year olds) compared with mothers with older children (20% of mothers whose youngest child is 14-15).

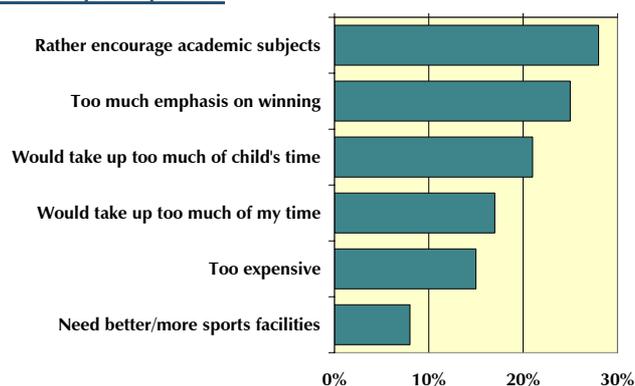
Figure 27. Satisfaction with amount of time available for encouraging children's sports activities by age of youngest child



Forty percent of mothers whose youngest child is aged between 14 and 15 years believe they have enough time to devote to their children’s sporting endeavours, whereas 24% of mothers of 0-3 year olds feel the same.

Those mothers who thought that their child’s participation in sport was relatively unimportant were asked to indicate why they were of this opinion. This group of mothers represent only a small proportion of the total sample. While it is difficult to draw any generalisable conclusions from the data, responses to this question are presented in Figure 28.

Figure 28. Factors that make children’s participation in sport relatively unimportant



For this small group of mothers, their children’s academic endeavours are more of a priority than their sports participation; 28% of them said that they would rather encourage academic pursuits. A similar proportion (25%) also suggested that they felt that there is too much emphasis placed on winning in children’s sports.