



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

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## 1.1 Germany

### 1.5.1 Introduction

Motherhood in Germany appears to be approached in a more traditional way than in many of its neighbouring European countries. Mothers are expected to focus on caring for their children rather than pursuing their own professional career. Women who do choose to take on busy work schedules are often under societal pressure to justify their decision to spend less time with their family. This conflict that exists between home and work life means that motherhood is seen as an increasingly unattractive option for many German women. The German government is making steps towards ensuring that 'family-embedded' motherhood is more financially attractive, while also giving women more options by supporting paid paternity leave initiatives. There also exist German NGOs which are fighting for issues such as more flexible work-arrangements for mothers, better conditions for single parents, more involvement of fathers in the child rearing process, and for the proper recognition of housework as an economic activity. Despite the prevalence of a traditional image of motherhood which limits mothers' choices, Germany is placed 11<sup>th</sup> in the Save the Children *State of the World's Mothers 2011* rankings, suggesting that in international perspective being a mother in Germany is a very good thing.

#### 1.1.1 Historical perspectives

The contemporary German attitude to family life still sees the mother as its most important component. It is seen as preferable for mothers to work part-time so that she can be at home for the children as opposed to relying on day-care or other institution based alternatives. Indeed, German attitudes can still be seen to conform to more traditional notions of gender-based role division.

This is partly rooted in ideas stemming from early 17th century Protestantism, when women were expected to observe the 'three Ks' of social and family life: Kinder (children), Kirche (church), and Küche (kitchen).<sup>1</sup> Early Lutheran ideology saw marriage-based family life as 'heaven on earth'. Women were supposed to be obedient, self-sacrificing mothers who were solely dedicated to the education and rearing of their children. Luther founded the 'Muttermythos' ('mother's myth'): parents who raised their own children were doing a service to God.<sup>2</sup> At once this both glorified the role of women as mothers, while at

the same time significantly limiting the other roles that were available to them.

The next significant change with regards to the role of the German mother took place in the 18th century. Politics became 'gendered' and the 'institutional mother' emerged. Mothers were idealised and the mother's importance for the spiritual and emotional well being of children and husbands was increasingly emphasised. The 18th century became the century of 'the discovery of childhood' which in turn emphasised the importance of motherhood.<sup>3</sup> Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi was the educationalist at the forefront of this movement across the German speaking world. According to his writings, the 'Elementarerziehung' (basic, essential or elemental education) of the child took place between the age of 0 and 3. Pestalozzi believed that the childrearing methods used by 'decadent' aristocratic mothers needed to be replaced by an organic, spiritually grounded mothering model. This ideal came to be conceived of as 'Urmutter' (archetypal mother), a world-redeeming figure. Pestalozzi's vision of the family also worked to invert Lutheran patriarchal ideals. Within the realms of the family, the father should be conceived of as subordinate to the mother and was to receive emotional and moral guidance from her just as their children did. Pestalozzi's ideal state was also founded on the principle of all-uniting 'motherly love' rather than of the stereotypically 'masculine' German state.<sup>4</sup> This said, the literal role for mothers remained within the 'inner sphere' of domestic life. It was only allegorically that they allowed outside of it.

This ideal was only to change substantially with the rise of National Socialism in the 20th century. While women experienced a shift towards greater equality during the early years of the Weimar Republic, these progressive reforms were to be undone during the Nazi era. According to the Nazis, children were born to the Führer, not to the parents.

Adopting a pro-natal stance, the Nazis introduced 'mother's day', child allowance payments, financial rewards for marriage and tax breaks for families with children. They also introduced the so called 'Lebensbornheime' - facilities where racially-screened mothers were supervised to raise their children for the first three years of their lives. The 'Lebensborn' society also encouraged extra-marital child bearing and rearing as long as the racial 'requirements' were met by mothers and the often absentee fathers. In 1934, all mothers were officially suspended from state employment in order to be able to fulfil their duty at the 'birth front' ('Geburtenfront'). The mother was conceived of as a 'Gebärmachine' ('child-bearing machine') and the Nazis notorious 'Mutterkult' ('cult of the mother' was

<sup>1</sup> Slawik 2011, 'Der Sonderweg der deutschen Mutter' ('The German mother's different route'), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Slawik 2011, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Slawik 2011, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Slawik 2011, 11.

exemplified by the bestowal of the 'Mutterkreuz' ('cross of honour for the German mother' as a reward for bearing at least four children). After children reached the age of 3, parents were forced to enrol them in state-run and ideologically oriented kindergartens and day care facilities. Once children were older, they joined the infamous 'Hitlerjugend' ('Hitler Youth') and the 'Bund deutscher Mädels' ('BDM' or 'Union of German Girls'). Part of the role of the BDM was to instil this pro-natal, *geburtensfront* vision of motherhood in girls from an early age. The Nazi state thus undermined the longstanding German focus on the importance of the family, and, like most of the activities of the regime, can be seen as antithetical to longstanding German values.

The immediate post-war period necessitated a sea-change in the social positioning of women, as they were at the heart of national recovery and reconstruction. So-called *Trümmerfrauen* (women of the rubble) were literally involved in the clearing away the rubble of a devastated Germany and the rebuilding of German society. In West Germany the post-war era saw the rather slow emergence of greater gender equality. In 1949, for example, women and men were legally made equal by the new Basic Law, although it was not until 1957 that the Civil Code was amended to acknowledge this change. At the same time, West German society promoted a return to the ideals of an 18<sup>th</sup> century vision of motherhood located in the domestic sphere. As in other Western European countries, the 1970s marked a change in pace for alterations in gender roles as a strong women's movement called for gender equality both at work and in the home. The impact of this movement led to a number of reforms. In 1977 women were for the first time given equal rights in marriage and no longer required their husband's permission to work outside of the home or petition for divorce. The first national office for women's equality was established in West Germany in 1980, and from the 1990s onwards women became increasingly visible in public life (one such example would be the politician Rita Süßmuth).

In East Germany, on the other hand, women did not experience the same kind of return to the domestic sphere. On the contrary, under Soviet control women were encouraged to remain part of the workforce, with the state taking greater responsibility for childcare. This emphasis on the role of women in the economy led to the development of a comprehensive childcare system and new opportunities for women in education and the workforce. Women were also more active within the political sphere than was the case in West Germany. Mothers in East Germany in this sense have a long history of balancing work with family responsibilities, although of course it is worth remembering that this was not a balancing act that mothers carried out by choice during the Soviet era.

The process of unification placed an incredible strain on the 'insurance' model of welfare that existed in West Germany. Unification hit East German women hard as their state support was suddenly removed and the economy struggled. The end of the 1980s/early 1990s was, then, a particularly difficult time for mothers in East Germany. With time, however, the gap between East and West has lessened. Experiences of motherhood in Germany are now similar across the country, although it is still families in the East who are more likely to need 'social aid' from the state. Germany's welfare state has continued to evolve post-unification, but generally there are still considerable concerns about the structure of the welfare system in Germany and its effect on women. Germany still maintains a system that is predicated on support being distributed according to the male 'breadwinner' of the family, meaning that single women and divorced women in particular face significant barriers in terms of welfare provision. These issues clearly have significance for how motherhood is conceptualised, and for how it is experienced, in contemporary Germany.

### 1.1.2 Demographics

The changing nature of German women's experiences of motherhood is expressed in part by the country's relatively low fertility rates. In 2009, the average German mother had 1.36 children, which marks a stark decline from the 1960s when the figure was 2.5 children per mother.<sup>5</sup> A decline in birth rates can be observed from the mid 1960s onwards. In western Germany, the all time low was reached in the mid 1980s: a mere 1.3 children per woman was combined with a sharp increase in the average age of first time mothers. This figure rose until the 1990s and stabilised around 1.45 children per woman in 1996. The former Socialist Republic, on the other hand, introduced several countermeasures in order to increase fertility rates in the 1970s. This resulted in a rise of fertility rates up to 1.94 in the mid 1980s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the eastern birth rates initially declined rapidly from 1.52 to 0.77 and then levelled with western rates in the mid-1990s. Since 1995, birth rates in east and west have slowly increased again, to an average of about 1.4. The East nevertheless remains slightly ahead of the west by around 0.2 points. The 'Gender Datenreport'<sup>6</sup> of the ministry for family, pensioners, women and youth shows that German fertility rates are close to the European mean.

In the EU as a whole, 30% of all children are born outside of marriage. In Germany this is the case for 26.1% of all newborns. Nation-wide, the number of marriages has been increasing since 2007 from 368,922 (2007) to 382,047 (2010), while divorce rates have remained fairly

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.destatis.de>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bmfsfj.de/Publikationen/genderreport/4-Familien-und-lebensformen-von-frauen-und-maennern/4-1-Einleitung/4-1-1-geburtensziffern-im-europaeischen-vergleich.html>

stable (187,072 in 2007 and 187,027 in 2010).<sup>7</sup> Both marriage and divorce rates in the east remain slightly lower than those in the West. The age of marriage has increased for both genders since 1991: on average, men are 32 years-old when they get married (an increase from 28.5 years old in 1991), and women are 29 years-old (an increase from 26.1 in 1991). The ministerial 'genderreport' speculates that one of the reasons for the sharper increase in men's average age might lie in the fact that men are spending greater amounts of time developing their careers under increasingly difficult and competitive economic conditions.<sup>8</sup>

The age at which a mother has her first child has increased from 27 in 1991 to 29.4 in 2009. This marks a steep increase from the 1970s, when the average age of a mother at first birth in East Germany was 21.9 and the average age in West Germany was 24.3. After a dip in the 1980s (to 21.6 in the East and 22.9 in the West), the fall of the Berlin wall led an increase of mothers' average age at first birth. In the East the figure rose significantly, from 22.9 in 1989 to 25 in 1991. In 2000, the average mothers' age in East and West had become virtually identical (28.4 in the East compared to 28.9 in the West).<sup>9</sup> According to the most recently available statistics, the mean age of women at first birth in Germany has now increased to 30.38.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.1.3 Defining motherhood (*Mutterschaft*) in the German context

As in many other European countries, popular discourse in Germany revolves around the competing ideas of a traditionalist view of motherhood which places a mother's role within the home, and an alternative model that sees mothers balancing traditional roles with new commitments and aspirations in the professional sphere.

Rike Drust's widely read book *Muttergefühle: Gesamtausgabe* ('motherly feelings: complete edition') describes the dilemma of the modern German mother: if she stays at home, she is a representative of the antiquated mother-role; but if she works, she neglects her family and is considered a 'Rabemutter' ('child-neglecting, bad mother').<sup>11</sup> Describing her own experiences of motherhood, Drust also explains the conflict that 'practical' considerations cause for German mothers. While Drust stayed at home with the child, her higher-earning husband continued working. This led to a

need to re-define her self-image and accept that her own interests and projects were second in line to her child's needs and her husband's career. In order to have some more time to pursue her career, Drust engaged a 'Tagesvater' (male nanny) after her husband had taken some paternity leave and her child had grown older. She vividly describes the social stigma that was attached to leaving her child with a paid professional who is not part of one's own family.

One of Germany's most influential weekly's, *Der Spiegel*, has explored other aspects of family life that have been topics of popular debate, such as the economic situation of fathers and the low level of German fertility rates. With regards to paternity leave, for instance, *Der Spiegel* suggests that claiming 'parents' money' is becoming more popular with young fathers.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, fathers of newborns are increasingly willing to take time off work (25% in 2010) and do so for an average of 3.4 months (while women usually take a year off). Under German law, young parents receive money for 14 months and both men and women have a right to take time off work once a child is born.

In spite of such legislation, German birth rates are still alarmingly low. In an article from August 2011,<sup>13</sup> *Der Spiegel* reported that Germans have fewer children than ever before, and that the country has the lowest birth rate in Europe for 2011. There are several reasons for this development. Firstly, there are too few after-school care clubs and kindergartens, and this lack of provision serves as a disincentive for couples thinking of having children. Furthermore many would-be parents find it increasingly difficult to take on the responsibility of having a child alongside existing career-related pressures. Members of some social groups are also wary of having a child because of the perceived implications this would have for the woman's level of autonomy. Indeed, *Der Spiegel* argues that Germans have a stronger tendency to conceive of mothers as belonging to the home than people do in France, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The Sociologist Kerstin Jürgens has supported this argument, stating that until the late nineties the German social model dictated that fathers earn money outside the home and mothers are mainly dedicated to taking care of the children. This model presents the professional and domestic spheres as entirely separate. This idea persists, as is evidenced by the fact that housewives, for example, are still insured via their husbands. Germany has been slow to enact reforms in this area, and this is also revealed in popular discussions about motherhood. There are institutions calling for change though, and for example the

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.destatis.de>

<sup>8</sup> see the German Federal Genderreport at <http://www.bmfsfj.de/Publikationen/genderreport/4-Familien-und-lebensformen-von-frauen-und-maennern/4-1-Einleitung/4-1-1-geburtensziffern-im-europaeischen-vergleich.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bmfsfj.de/Publikationen/genderreport/4-Familien-und-lebensformen-von-frauen-und-maennern/4-1-Einleitung/4-1-1-geburtensziffern-im-europaeischen-vergleich.html>

<sup>10</sup> Eurostat.

<sup>11</sup> Drust, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Article: 'Mehr Väter beziehen Elterngeld' ('More fathers claim parents money') 06.09.2011,

<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,784702,00.html>

<sup>13</sup> Article: Kinderland ist abgebrannt ('Children-land has burned down'), 08.08.2011 <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-79805341.html>

'Hausfrauenrevolution' ('house wife revolution') wants being a housewife to be recognised as a proper job, and aims to achieve a state-paid salary of 400 Euro per month and the right to a pension for housewives.

These issues have also emerged in political discourse: Kristina Schröder (Minister of State for Families) recently made the following statement about the situation of German mothers: "Women can't win. If we stay at home, they call us '*Heimchen am Herd*' ('unambitious, obedient housewife'); if we work, we're called 'egotistical'. If a woman tries to combine both, she's either a '*Rabenmutter*' ('child-neglecting, bad mother') or a '*Latte Macchiato Mother*' ('lazy, leisure-oriented mother'). In support of this perspective, in a recent interview the previous Minister for Families Ursula von der Leyen argues that there is also a massive shortage of women in the higher levels of German business.<sup>14</sup> She demands a share of 30% for women on corporate boards by 2018, and demands a change in the German attitude to high profile jobs. This is not a perspective shared by all, however, and most large German corporations are still hostile to the notion of a 'female quota' in boardrooms.<sup>15</sup> The top 30 German stock exchange listed companies oppose affirmative action and do not want a legal quota for women, while the state is as yet unable to impose regulatory measures on companies. While some companies have set themselves official goals with regards to female representation - for example, Allianz (24.7 % to 30 % women in management positions by the end of 2015), RWE (22 % of all top posts should be held by women by 2018), and E.On (from 8.6% to 14 % female staff by the end of 2016) – these represent the exception, rather than the rule.

Another theme of interest in popular discourse is the status of single parents in Germany. The widely circulated German women's magazine *Brigitte* recently ran a series of articles on the situation of single mothers. The article '*Alleinerziehende - von der Gesellschaft im Stich gelassen*' (Single parents - left alone by society) argues that Germany has 2.2 million single mothers who are isolated and marginalised by German society. According to *Brigitte* single mothers are less likely to be employed and the first to be fired. There is also a crucial lack of state support, and it seems as if the state wants to motivate single women with children to find a substitute husband as soon as possible. While there is less stigma attached to raising children without a partner nowadays, the state is still focused on the image of the father as breadwinner. The situation is worsened by the fact that there is almost the same tax category for single mums as there is for singles. In sum, popular commentators in *Brigitte* argue that Germany needs an intellectual climate in which combining

raising children and working is more acceptable, regardless of your marital status.

There are several institutions, NGOs, lobbying groups and public and private interest groups that pursue the creation of a more 'mother-friendly' economic environment in Germany. One of these is the *VBM: Association of working mothers*.<sup>16</sup> It attempts to redefine the traditional German notion of 'work' that is tied to the physical workplace and set working hours. Instead, it proposes a more goal-oriented and geographically flexible concept of work that is conducive to mothers' requirements. The VBM has also published a recent interview with its co-founder, Silke Lenhardt, which taps into popular debate about the different experiences of mothers in western and eastern Germany. In the article, entitled *Wieso machen ostdeutsche Frauen häufiger Karriere?* ('Why are eastern German women more likely to have a professional career?') Lenhardt observes that women from eastern Germany often do not take their full quota of maternity leave and are more likely to continue in full-time work after giving birth.<sup>17</sup> By dedicating less time to family life and child rearing, women from eastern Germany are more successful in maintaining their professional lives once they become mothers.

One of the most controversial publications about the role and image of contemporary mothers in Germany is Barbara Vinken's *Die deutsche Mutter: Der lange Schatten eines Mythos* ('The German mother. The long shadow of a myth').<sup>18</sup> Vinken argues that Germany is currently convinced by the idea that being a mother and being employed are incompatible. The author attacks the notion that a child can only be healthy in soul and body if it has a 'deep' relationship with its mother, an idea which has long been embodied in the acts of breastfeeding and eye-contact. An assumption exists that the child has the right to its mother's constant attention as she is the '*Bezugsperson*' ('the primary care-taker'). German motherhood is currently cast as a safe site, separate from the outside world and its problems, claims Vinken. He maintains that Germany has to revise this idea of the mother: it has to move away from 'self-sacrifice' towards the idea that the role can bring 'self-realisation' and liberation.

Barbara Volkwein's book '*Die etwas gelasseneren Art, Mutter zu sein*' ('The more relaxed way of being a

<sup>16</sup> (<http://www.vbm-online.de/>)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.vbm-online.de/geschichten-a-gespraech/interviews/1314-wieso-machen-ostdeutsche-frauen-haeufiger-karriere.html>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez\\_id=4255&ausgabe=200110](http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=4255&ausgabe=200110) Book reviewed:

Barbara Vinken: '*Die deutsche Mutter. Der lange Schatten eines Mythos*' Piper Verlag, München 2001. 329 pages, 22,50 EUR. ISBN-10: 3492038611

<sup>14</sup> Simple Rituale, hohles Gehabe ('Simple rituals, empty gestures'), 01.08.2011 <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-79723287.html>

<sup>15</sup> (<http://www.vbm-online.de/>)

mother'),<sup>19</sup> looks at how German mothers can achieve this 'self realisation'. Instead of 'over-identifying' themselves with the child and all of its actions, and thereby 'losing themselves' and their selfhood within the role of 'mother', Volkwein urges mothers to allow the child to make its own mistakes, to assume responsibility for its own actions, and for mothers to dissociate themselves to a degree from the child's personality. Her CEUS-method urges mothers to focus on the positive experiences and not dwell on negativity. By so doing, the mother can regain some of her personal space and a notion of self-determination that is all too easily lost in the (typically German) desire to meet prevalent social expectations with regards to raising the 'perfect' child and being the 'perfect' mother.

### 1.1.4 Motherhood and Employment

It is clear, then, that in contemporary Germany there are conflicting ideas about the role of mothers in the family and in the workplace. To what extent can these ideals of modern motherhood be seen in the available statistical data? In terms of income generation, in most German families, the father remains the main breadwinner. However, while wives used to be entirely devoted to the household, contemporary Germany is dominated by a family model where the mother working part-time and the father full-time. In 2009, both partners worked in 52% of all families with children under 18. Meanwhile, 31% percent of families prefer the arrangement of a working father and a mother that stays with the children. Only 6% rely on a working mother while the father remains at home. In 11% of all German families, neither of the parents works. In families where both parents work, 71% prefer an arrangement where the father works full-time and the mother part-time. Of families with children, 24% have both parents working full-time and only 2% rely on a part-time working father with a full-time working mother. In just 3% of all families, both parents work part-time.<sup>20</sup>

In comparison to the situation 15 years ago, one can identify a decrease of the model 'father earns, mother stays at home' (by 9%); an increase in the number of families where the father works full-time and the mother part-time (from 52% in 1996 to 71% in 2010); and a decline in the number of families where both partners work full-time. The greatest and most significant increase is to be observed in the number of families where the father works full-time and the mother part-time.

A micro-census undertaken by the Ministry for Statistics found that mothers between the ages of 21 and 30 severely restrict their working time in order to have more time for family care. While 79% of all childless women in this age range work, only 39% of those with a child are in

paid work.<sup>21</sup> Even more childless women between 33 and 37 years of age work (81%). While a high proportion of mothers between the ages of 48 and 49 are employed (72%).<sup>22</sup>

Focusing on families with children, 59% of all mothers work, and 83% of all fathers. Eastern German mothers tend to be more active (61%) than their western counterparts (58%) in terms of seeking paid employment. Generally speaking, the older the child is, the more likely the mother is to work. While around 70% of all mothers work part-time, they do not do so out of mere economic necessity but rather as a conscientious lifestyle choice. Compared to 1996, more mothers and fewer fathers work and there is a substantially larger number of mothers who are active in the job market. However, when searching for employment, Western German mothers find it easier to attain work than their Eastern German counterparts, which is largely due to a lower number of available jobs in the east. While both partners work in more than half of all families, it is mostly the husband who works full-time while the mother engages in part-time work.<sup>23</sup>

In comparison with other EU27 countries, the numbers of working women in Germany have increased so much in the last ten years (from 57.4% to 66.2%) that only Scandinavia and Netherlands have higher levels of participation (68% and 73% respectively).<sup>24</sup> German women are becoming increasingly integrated via part-time work. Women in eastern Germany, however, are more likely to work full-time than women in western Germany, which might also be due to lower average wages. Despite all of this, Germany still sees women earning on average 23% less than men, compared to an EU average of 18%.<sup>25</sup> Gender equality in the workforce is yet to be achieved in any part of the country.

With regards to the work-life balance for mothers, the Gender Datenreport<sup>26</sup> provides a number of insights. Comparatively, childless women in Germany are very active economically, while German mothers with several children hardly work outside of the home. German fathers work and earn more than German mothers, and women very often do the housework regardless of whether they are also in full- or part-time employment. The increase in

<sup>21</sup> "[Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf - Ergebnisse des Mikrozensus 2009](http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/Statistiken/Bevoelkerung/HaushalteFamilien/Wista_Text,tempelid=renderPrint.psml)", [http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/Statistiken/Bevoelkerung/HaushalteFamilien/Wista\\_Text,tempelid=renderPrint.psml](http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Content/Statistiken/Bevoelkerung/HaushalteFamilien/Wista_Text,tempelid=renderPrint.psml)

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Fuchs, Gesine, Gleichstellung auf dem Arbeitsmarkt: Ein europäischer Vergleich, in 'Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte' [http://www.bpb.de/themen/AVISSS,0,0,Gleichstellung\\_auf\\_dem\\_Arbeitsmarkt.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/AVISSS,0,0,Gleichstellung_auf_dem_Arbeitsmarkt.html)

<sup>25</sup> Krell/Winter 2008.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bmfsfj.de/Publikationen/genderreport/5-vereinbarkeit-von-familie-und-beruf.html>

<sup>19</sup> Volkwein, B. (2011) Die etwas gelassener Art, Mutter zu sein, Kösel Publishers.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.destatis.de>

women's engagement in the labour market was not accompanied by fathers becoming more active at home.

Unlike fathers, mothers often have problems returning to work. In the east of Germany this is often due to a lack of job opportunities, where western Germany lacks flexible working arrangements, kindergartens and afternoon childcare centres.<sup>27</sup>

In the whole of Germany, work remains important for mothers despite family life (42% say it is as equally important as family).<sup>28</sup> Most mothers take maternity leave of between 7 and 24 months while 19% take no break at all. While they are legally entitled to a break of up to 3 years, this is hardly ever fully used. The mothers' decisions are usually made independently from the employers' requirements. The factors that influence the mothers' decisions are: child welfare, career prospects, and the fear of stalling future professional development. Women are increasingly demanding more flexibility in the working hours, and that employers rethink the implications of an employee also being a mother. Given the correct facilitation, mothers are indeed willing and able to deliver at work in spite of the requirements of their family lives.

### 1.1.5 Childcare

In Germany childcare is primarily considered the responsibility of the mother, compared to countries like France and Sweden where the state is expected to take care of children.<sup>29</sup> Instead of encouraging parallel child-rearing and working, the German model is rather geared towards giving mothers long breaks while their child is very young, followed by reintegration into the labour market at a later stage. Germany has set itself the goal of improving this situation: from 2013 onwards, 35% of children ought to have a kindergarten place and parents will have a legal right to this provision.

Childcare in Germany is relatively cheap. Childcare fees for a two year old attending accredited early years day care costs 9% of the average wage. In this respect, Germany lies below the EU-27 mean.<sup>30</sup> Even for lone parent families, childcare is relatively affordable at 4% of the respective average wage (versus EU-27 at 9%).

Nevertheless, German families are relatively reluctant to enrol children under 5 years of age in childcare and early

education services. Compared to an OECD average of 30%, Germany only achieves around 18% enrolment for under-3 year-olds. This changes once children reach the age of 3-5. Over 95% of these children are enrolled in pre-school educational programmes in Germany, surpassing the OECD average of 77%.<sup>31</sup> The contrast between enrolment quotas for German children therefore significantly depends on the 3-years-of-age threshold and increases the older the child is. Approximately 87% of 3 year olds are enrolled in childcare, 95.4% of 4 year olds and 95.8% of 5 year olds.

The availability of state childcare institutions for older children means that Germans do not need to rely heavily on informal childcare mechanisms. Informal means of childcare average out at 3.2 hours per child per week. Only about 15% of children are looked after by informal carers until they are 12 years of age.<sup>32</sup> The very young and older children are less likely to be looked after by formal care providers: from 0-2 years of age, 67% of children have no usual childcare arrangement; whereas only 8% have no such an arrangement between the ages of 3-5. The number rises again to 61% for 6-12 year olds.<sup>33</sup> This suggests that German families, and most likely German mothers, feel quite happy about the formal care mechanisms offered but hesitate to use them extensively before the children reach the age of 3 years. The figures also show that as the child gets older, there is no longer the need for such extensive provision of active care, and so parents no longer need to rely on formal childcare.

### 1.1.6 Motherhood and sport

In Germany, youth sports are generally not organised by the schools and there is accordingly more pressure on the parents to ensure that their children are sufficiently physically active through membership of youth sports clubs.<sup>34</sup> As a result, sports club participation amongst adolescents is relatively high in the European context – 47% of German youth are active in a sports club compared with an EU average of 34%. This usually starts at around the age of 5. About 70% of all children aged 6-14 engage in sports activities,<sup>35</sup> 76% boys and 59% girls aged 7 to 14 are engaged in sports in a club. Sport is the second-most popular leisure activity among German boys. For girls, participation in sport also ranks still among the most

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.bmfsfj.de/Publikationen/genderreport/5-vereinbarkeit-von-familie-und-beruf.html>

<sup>28</sup> (<http://www.vbm-online.de/beruf-a-karriere/gleichstellung.html>), VBM supports e.g. the Ziegler/Graml study about the compatibility of family and work life entitled "The illusion of the compatibility of family and career: insights from the Frankfurt career study". 1801 individuals participated in an online survey. Most participants have A-levels equivalent, university and college degrees. Most are from West Germany.

<sup>29</sup> cf. RÜling/Kassner 2007.

<sup>30</sup> PF3.4: Childcare support, OECD Family Database [www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database) OECD - Social Policy Division - Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs.

<sup>31</sup> OECD Family database [www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database) OECD - Social Policy Division - Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Last updated 14/06/2011 1, PF3.2: Enrolment in childcare and pre-schools.

<sup>32</sup> OECD Family database [www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database) OECD - Social Policy Division - Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs PF3.3: Informal childcare arrangements.

<sup>33</sup> OECD Family database [www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database) OECD - Social Policy Division - Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs PF3.3: Informal childcare arrangements.

<sup>34</sup> Sports and Child Development, IZA DP No. 6105 - Institute for the Study of Labor, Christina Felfe, Michael Lechner, Andreas Steinmayr: 3.

<sup>35</sup> (Kutteroff & Behrens, 2006). (DOSB, Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund, 2009).

popular leisure activities, behind spending time with friends or listening to music, but only 33% of the girls consider sport as their most preferred leisure activity.<sup>36</sup>

Engagement in sports activities rises steadily until age 8/9 – from 57% for the 3-year-old boys and 58% for the 3-year-old girls, to 85% for the 9-year-old boys and 81% for the 8-year-old girls. At the beginning of secondary school (age 11) sports participation reaches its peak, involving 95% of boys and 88% of girls. By the end of secondary school (age 17) 83% of boys and 63% of girls still participate in some sports activities.

The German Olympic Association reports club participation rates of 76% among 7-14 year old boys and 59% among 7-14 year old girls in 2009. Boys' favourite sport, football, is played by 45% of all boys aged 7-14, followed by gymnastics (14%), tennis (5%), handball (5%), and athletics (5%). Girls' favourite sports are gymnastics (37%), football (11%), horse riding (8%), athletics (7%), and swimming (6%). Sports club participation provides an important part of the overall level of physical activity among children.<sup>37</sup>

The high rates in sports club participation are probably a consequence of rather low membership fees, which vary between 0 and 120 Euro per year for children and 0 to 150 Euro per year for adults. Reductions in the membership fee for whole families participating in a sport club are common. Moreover, social assistance frequently bears the costs of such participation. Not only the high participation rates, but also the provision of public funds highlights the relevance of sports in German society. Total public expenditures for the provision of sports-related goods and services amount to 0.2% of the German GDP (4.84 €billion) and 77% of this amount is used for the provision of sports-related services (e.g. maintenance of sports venues, salaries of instructors, etc.) The overall relative spending levels vary, however, between states. They range from 0.14% in North-Rhine Westphalia and Schleswig-Holstein to 0.37% in Saxony-Anhalt and even 0.41% in Thuringia. Expressed in monetary terms, an average 49€ is spent per person for the provision of sports-related goods and services, the minimum amount spent in Hamburg (11€/person) and the maximum amount spent in Baden-Württemberg (68€/person).<sup>38</sup>

Despite Germany's substantial public focus on youth sports it seems to perform rather badly in international comparison of levels of physical exercise. For example, only 20% of German 11 year old girls and 25% of German 11 year old boys engage in at least 1 hour of moderate to vigorous activity daily – the average is 22% for girls and

30% for the boys. Germany just about manages to align with the international average with regard to weight-reducing behaviour of 11 year olds: 13% of engage in such behaviour in Germany<sup>39</sup>

Despite public and private efforts, youth and adolescent obesity is on the rise in Germany. The older the individual, the greater the probability of him or her being obese: While 26.5% of 15-24 year olds are obese in Germany<sup>40</sup> the same goes for 5% of 5-7 year olds<sup>41</sup> and 20% of 10-11 year olds. It appears that girls are especially exposed to the risk of obesity – the number of obese German girls has thus doubled in the last 5 years.<sup>42</sup>

While in 2001 only 5.5% of the 15 year old German girls were obese, 2006 saw this rise to 11% according to a recent OECD report. Obesity, however, is also on the rise among German boys: in the same period their numbers rose from 13.7% to 16%. This means that Germany is above the OECD average with regards to girls (10.1%) and is slightly lower with regards to the OECD average for obese boys (17.2%).<sup>43</sup>

## 1.2 German national survey

### 1.2.1 Introduction

SIRC commissioned a national survey of 1,004 German mothers with at least one dependent child under the age of 16 years. The field work was conducted in November 2011. The ages of the mothers included in the sample range from 16-60 years with approximately three-quarters (72%) being between 25 and 44 years. Nearly 98% of the sample have between 1 and 3 children, with the average number of children per woman surveyed being 1.56.

Sixty percent of those mothers polled had a youngest dependent child aged between 0 and 7 years and over one-third (36%) of the entire sample were mothers of very young children aged 0 to 3 years. Over three-quarters of the mothers were in paid employment (76%) of whom 45.5% worked full-time and 54.5% worked part-time. Respondents were polled from all regions of Germany, 17% of whom resided in the *neue Länder*.

The survey was designed to explore a number of specifically selected aspects of contemporary motherhood in Germany. These included time-use; childcare and

<sup>36</sup> Sports and Child Development, IZA DP No. 6105 - Institute for the Study of Labor, Christina Felfe, Michael Lechner, Andreas Steinmayr: 5.

(Tietjens, 2001)

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> Ahlert, 2004.

<sup>39</sup> WHO Europe, HEALTH POLICY FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS, NO. 5, p.101.

<sup>40</sup> Eurostat, Youth in Europe, A statistical portrait, 53.

<sup>41</sup> Lifeline: Medicine in the Internet: Scherer Start ins Leben - Übergewicht bei Kindern (Difficult start into life: obesity and children, Author: Springer Medizin, [http://www.lifeline.de/special/familie\\_erziehung/freizeit\\_sport/content-129904.html](http://www.lifeline.de/special/familie_erziehung/freizeit_sport/content-129904.html)

<sup>42</sup> Frankfurter Rundschau online, Immer mehr fettleibige Kinder in Deutschland (Ever more obese children in Germany) <http://www.fr-online.de/sport/oecd-statistik-immer-mehr-fettleibige-kinder-in-deutschland,1472784,3066034.html>.

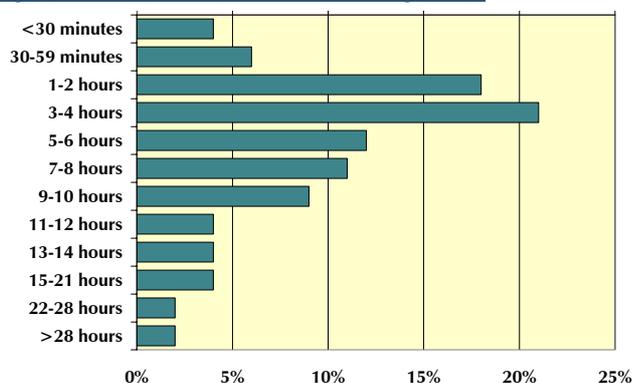
<sup>43</sup> *ibid*.

domestic work; the role of German fathers, partners and husbands; maternal support networks and sources of advice on motherhood; the impact of economic conditions on motherhood; maternal guilt and isolation; as well as the role of sport in childhood development. Some generational comparisons were explored and mothers were also asked to consider not only their own circumstances, but how these might compare with those of their own mothers and even grandmothers. The results of the survey are discussed in the following sections of the report.

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

The initial section of the survey sought to explore mothers' free time; how much time they genuinely had in an average week to themselves which was free of obligation to anyone else. The results from the survey show that mothers reported considerable variance in the amount of free time that they enjoyed (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Mothers' free time in the average week



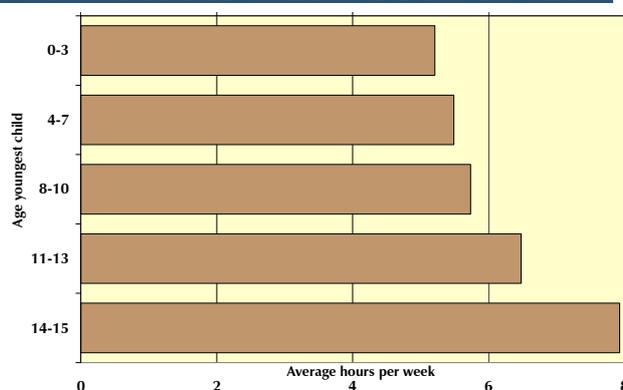
The most frequently cited duration of free time in the average week is 3-4 hours, reported by over one-fifth (21%) of all mothers, the equivalent of 51-69 minutes per day. Over one-quarter of mothers (28%), however, said they have less than three hours of free time per day, while a further third perceived their free time to be in the region of 5-10 hours. On average German mothers reported 6.25 hours per week of genuine time to themselves; the equivalent of 53.6 minutes per day. Free time for German mothers compares quite favourably with that reported by mothers from other countries in Europe, with only mothers from Finland, Norway and Austria declaring more 'me time'.

**German mothers have an average of 53.6 minutes per day of time to themselves.**

The amount of free time that mothers have is dependent, predictably, on the structure of the family and the age of its members. Mothers' free time, for example, is directly proportional to the age of the youngest child within the family (see Figure 2.). Mothers with youngest children are the busiest and the least likely to have time to themselves, reflecting the intensity of childrearing in the early years.

Those with a youngest child aged 0-3 years reported only 45.5 minutes per day of time which was not devoted to others compared with 68 minutes for mothers with children aged 14-15 years.

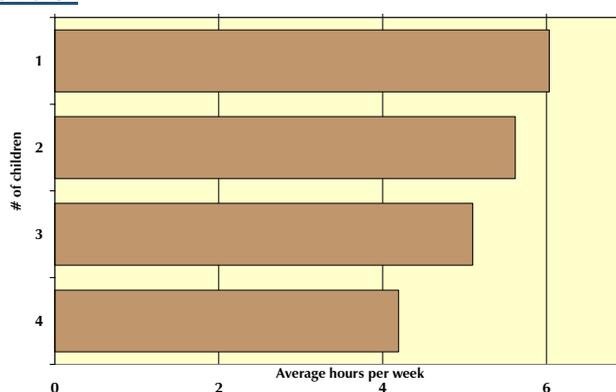
Figure 2. Mothers' average free time, by age of youngest child



**Mothers with the youngest children have the least free time: on average 45.5 minutes per day.**

The size of the household, as one might expect, also has a significant impact on the 'me time' available to mothers (see Figure 3). Mothers with a single child reported an average of nearly two hours more free time per week than those with four children; 6 hours and 4.2 hours respectively, expressed in minutes per day as 51.7 and 36.

Figure 3. Mothers' average free time, by number of dependent children

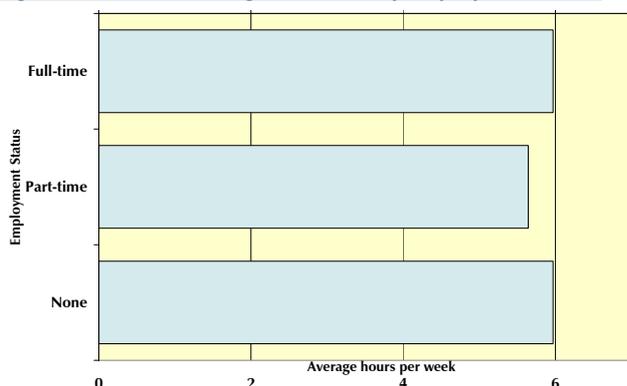


For German mothers any potential benefits that might arise from having larger families, such as siblings keeping themselves occupied or entertained, for example, are outweighed by the additional time required for the care of multiple children.

Analysing the reported levels of free time by employment status uncovers some rather, perhaps less predictable, results. These are illustrated in Figure 4. Mothers who work part-time said that they have less free time (5.6 hours per week) than those who work full-time or who are not currently in paid employment (6.0 hours per week). While the differences are relatively small (3 minutes per

day), this trend has also been reported in other countries (see Finland, for example). What it would appear to indicate is support for the notion that part-time working mothers are particularly pressured; having, as they do, to combine both paid and domestic work largely unaided. It may be the case that part-time working mums find it more difficult to justify, both from a social and an economic perspective, the need for professional support or substantive help from partners and other family members. Rather than liberating mothers from the home, part-time work may actually serve to increase mothers' burdens of responsibility; a situation which has been described by social commentators as the 'double burden' or the 'dual shift'.

Figure 4. Mothers' average free time, by employment status

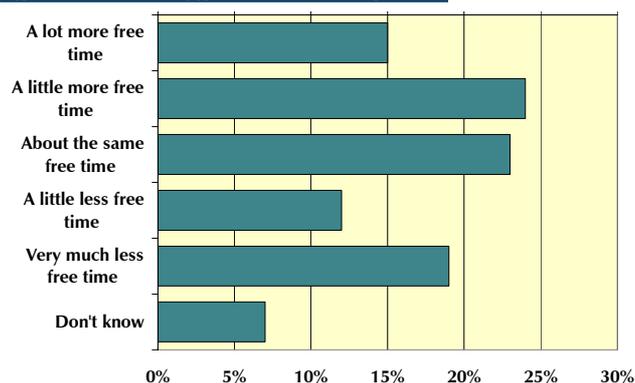


Mothers who work on a part-time basis have least time to themselves, an average of 5.6 hours per week.

### 1.2.3 Generational comparisons

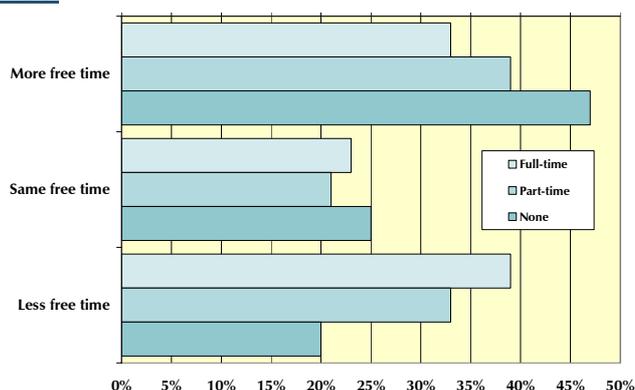
The idea that, as members of contemporary Western societies, people are 'busier' now than they were in the past is a perspective that has been discussed widely in academic literature and the popular press. So how then do mothers perceive their own levels of free time comparing with that of the own mothers? From Figure 5 it is clear that, on balance, contemporary mothers feel that they have more time to themselves than their own mothers did at the same life-stage. Approximately two-fifths (39%) of mothers in the sample were of this opinion, compared with 31% who felt that they had less free time. A significant proportion (23%) perceived there to have been little substantive change, reporting levels of genuine free time similar to those experienced by the previous generation of mothers.

Figure 5. Free time, generational comparison



Employment status has an impact on the ways in which mothers perceive generational differences in the availability of free time (see Figure 6). Experiencing more free time was a more common perception among mothers who are not currently in paid work (47%) or who work part-time (39%) than those in full-time employment (33%).

Figure 6. Free time, generational comparison, by employment status



Approximately two-fifths (39%) of mothers in full-time work considered their levels of free time to be less than that of their own mothers, possibly reflecting differences in employment status between them and their own mothers at the same life-stage; it was less common for mothers in previous generations to be in paid employment. Women's participation in the labour market in Germany has risen by 18% in the last two decades alone, from an employment rate of 55.9% in 1992 to 66.1% in 2010.<sup>44</sup>

Despite reporting that they have the least free time, mothers who work part-time were more likely than their full-time working peers to say they enjoy more free time than their mothers.

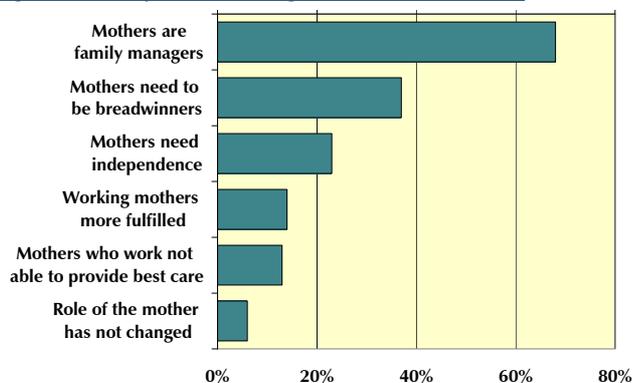
### 1.2.4 Perceptions of change

Respondents to the survey were asked to consider the ways in which the role of motherhood in Germany may have changed in the period that has elapsed since their

<sup>44</sup> <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>

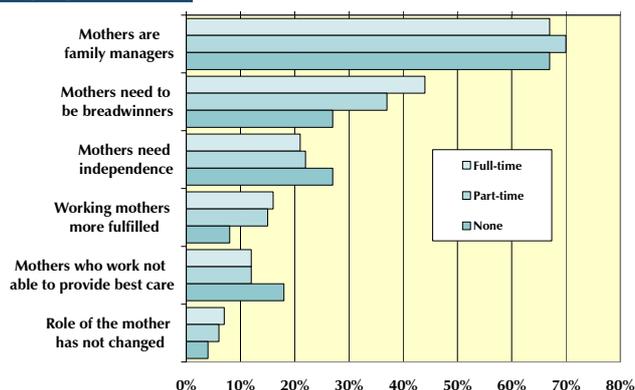
own mothers were raising children, the results of which are shown in Figure 7. There was a considerable level of agreement (68%) with the idea that the role of ‘mother’ in contemporary Germany involves a degree of ‘family management’; a more structured and active approach to the day-to-day complexities of ‘running’ a household which differs from the out-dated concept of the ‘housewife’. The belief that working mothers actually compromise the quality of care they provide to their children, however, is still one which carries some favour with 13% of the mothers polled. This sentiment was expressed more by those mothers who are not currently in paid employment (18%) than those who work (12%). What this does show, however, is more than one-tenth of working mums consider their employment ‘choice’ to be impacting on the quality of care that they provide for their children.

Figure 7. Perceptions of change in the role of mother



The need to bring in money into the household was recognised as a substantive difference between contemporary motherhood and the role of mother in previous generations; 37% of mothers were of the opinion that there is a pressure on modern mothers to fulfil a role as a ‘breadwinner’. Again differences in the levels of agreement with this notion vary according to employment status (see Figure 8.). Respondents in paid employment were more likely (full-time workers: 44%; part-time workers: 37%) than those who do not work (27%) to say that mothers in contemporary Germany need to generate income. Mothers who work also, perhaps rather predictably, perceived paid employment to be of greater value to their sense of personal fulfilment (full-time: 16%; part-time: 15%) than mothers who do not (8%). Non-working mothers are, however, more likely than their employed peers to be of the opinion that mothers today feel that they need the independence to pursue their own interests more than my own mother did.

Figure 8. Perceptions of change in the role of mother, by employment status

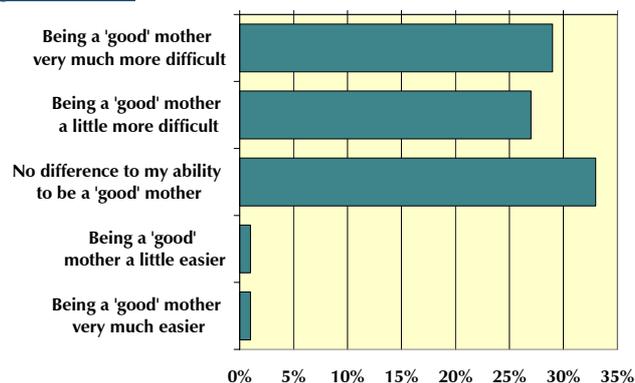


Today’s German mothers need to be both family managers and breadwinners.

### 1.2.5 Impact of economic downturn

The survey also sought mothers’ opinions on the impact of the current economic conditions on their ability to be a ‘good’ mother, the results of which are presented below in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Impact of the current economic climate on ‘being a good mother’

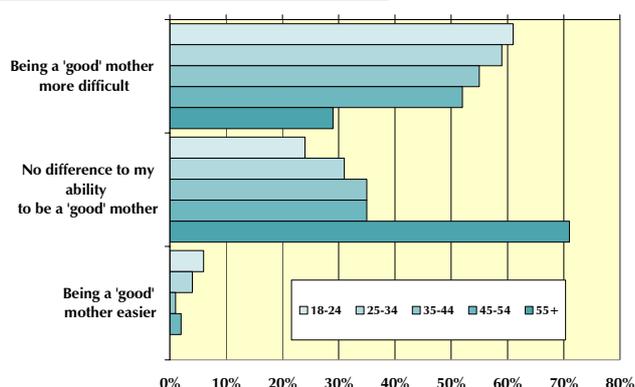


For over one-half (56%) of all German mothers the recent economic conditions have made being a ‘good’ mother either ‘very much more difficult’ (29%) or ‘a little more difficult’ (27%). Only 2% reported that the current economic climate was impacting positively on motherhood, while one-third of mothers were of the opinion that the economy has had no impact on their ability to be a ‘good’ mother.

There are some variations, by mothers’ age, in the extent to which they feel that the current economic climate is having an impact on their ability to be a ‘good’ mother; with younger mothers feeling the ‘pinch’ more than their elder counterparts. Mothers age 18-24 years, for example, were twice as likely (61%) to report that the economy was having a detrimental effect on their mothering abilities than those from the eldest cohort, those aged 55 years and above (29%). The perception that being a good mother was not affected by economic conditions is also

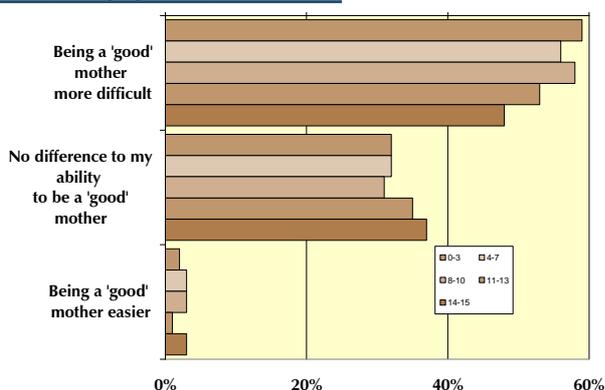
correlated with age; the youngest cohort subscribing to this opinion the least (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10. Impact of the current economic climate on 'being a good mother', by age of youngest child**



The fact that the youngest mothers appear to be feeling the negative impact of the economic conditions the most can be explained, in part, by the composition of the family. Mothers with younger children (0-10 years) reported feeling the impact of the economic downturn on their ability to be a good mother to a greater extent than those with older children (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11. Impact of the current economic climate on 'being a good mother', by number of children**



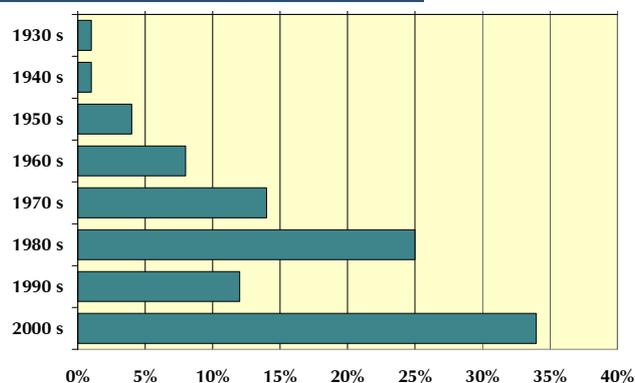
There are, however, no patterns in the data that indicate a direct correlation between number of children and the severity to which mothers feel that the current state of the economy has impacted on their ability to be a 'good' mother. Those with two or four children perceive the impact to be more negative than those with one or three children. It is safe to assume that the youngest cohort is likely to be the least economically secure. Mothers aged 18-24 are, for example, unlikely to be able to command salaries comparable with the older cohorts and also are perhaps less likely to have savings on which they can rely. It is perhaps also for these reasons that the youngest mothers feel most challenged by current economic circumstances.

**Over half of German mothers feel that current economic conditions are having a negative impact on their ability to be a good mother**

**1.2.6 Ideal decades**

The fragile state of the European economy in many ways has defined the early years of this decade. As we are only a few years into the 2010s it remains to be seen whether we will look back on this decade as one of austerity and hardship or whether in the latter years of the 2010s economic growth and prosperity will return and we will, as a result, look back on the period more fondly. As noted in the previous section, the majority of German mothers were of the opinion that the economic climate presents some particular challenges to contemporary motherhood. It has also been noted that in some respects the role of mother itself has also changed, the need to earn money and maintain one's independence, for example, and these too impact on mothers' quality of life. At the same time there is a realisation that, when compared with the experiences of previous generations, being a mother in the 2010s has some distinct advantages. So if mothers were able to return to a previous decade, a time in the past in which they considered to be a golden age for motherhood, which one would they choose? The responses are illustrated in Figure 12 below.

**Figure 12. The golden age of motherhood?**



For approximately one-third (34%) of the mothers polled the previous decade, the 2000s, is the one to which they would chose to return. Across Europe it is this decade that is favoured the most by mothers from 9 of the 13 countries surveyed. The 1970s and 1980s are also favoured by significant proportions of German mothers (14% and 25% respectively), perhaps reflecting a certain nostalgia for an era in which political will for addressing gender inequalities gathered pace. The popularity of the 1980s is greater among mothers from the *neue Länder* than it is among mothers residing in other regions. In Thüringen and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, for example, more mothers would choose to return to the 1980s (48% and 45% respectively) than they would the 2000s (29% and 34%). It may be the case that these mothers perceive

state family policies in the former German Democratic Republic as being somehow more favourable to mothers.

**The ideal decade would be, for one-third of German mothers, the 2000s, followed by one-quarter who would choose the 1980s.**

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

Data from the survey indicates that a large proportion of German mothers (39%) perceive themselves to have more free time available than their own mothers did at the same life-stage. The survey also sought to explore how, if at all, the increase prevalence of labour saving devices and products in the home may have influenced this state of affairs, and how these ‘domestic technologies’ may have impacted on mothers’ quality of life. If it proved to be the case that the ubiquity of items ranging from washing machines to disposal nappies has increased mothers’ available time, how then do mothers spend the time they have managed to claw back?

**Figure 13. Impact of labour-saving devices/products on mothers**

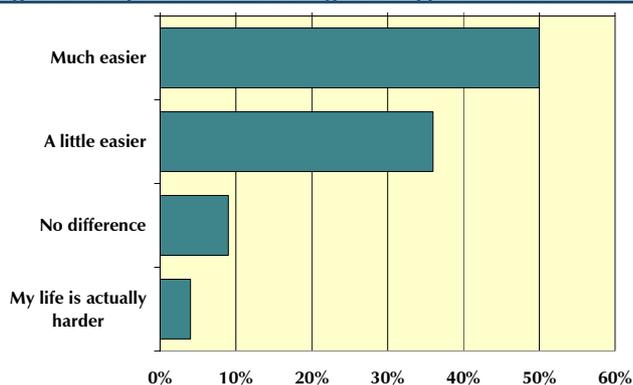
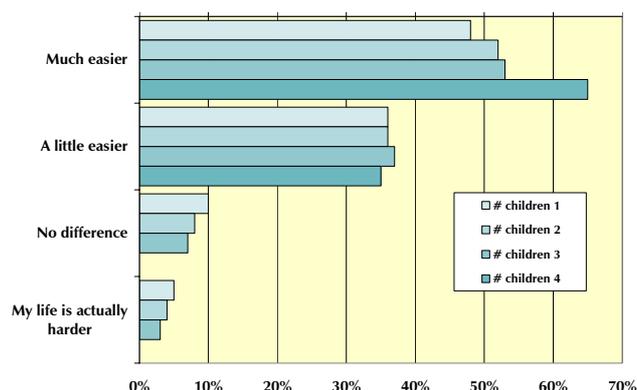


Figure 13 above shows that a substantial majority (88%) of mothers thought that their lives are now easier and/or richer because of labour saving devices and products that were not available to their own mothers or grandmothers. One-half said that their lives are now ‘much easier’ as a result. Only 9% perceived labour-saving devices and products to have made no difference to their quality of life, while a further 4% reported that they felt that their lives are actually harder.

Mothers with larger families, as one might expect, were more likely to report that the labour-saving devices and products have made their lives ‘much easier’. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of mothers with four children said this to be the case compared with 48% of those with only one child. No mothers with four children reported there to have been ‘no difference’ or that their lives are actually harder (see Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Impact of labour-saving devices/products on mothers, by number of children**



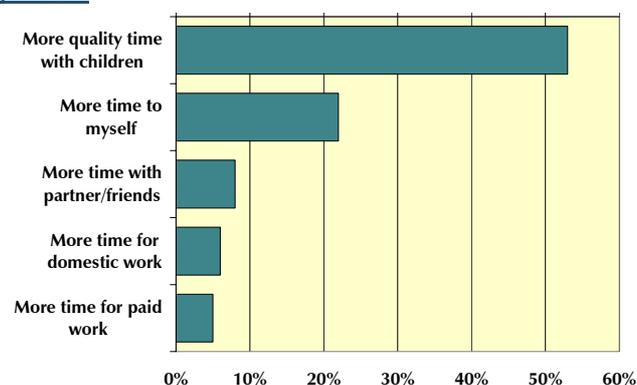
Mothers from the elder age cohorts reported the effect of labour-saving devices and products on their quality of life to be more profound; the elder cohorts, one would assume, being those whose parents or grandparents looked after children in an era when these products and devices were less prevalent. Over one-half (52%) of the 45-54 year-olds and 57% of those aged 55 years and over said that their lives are ‘much easier’, compared with just 43% of 18-24 year-olds.

Respondents’ perceptions that their lives are ‘much easier’ vary according to the hours they spend in paid employment. Those mothers who are not currently in paid employment appear to derive more benefit from labour-saving innovations (56% of whom said that their lives are ‘much easier’) than those who work part-(50%) or full-time (46%); possibly reflecting the amount of domestic work they undertake.

**Labour-saving devices and products have made life easier/richer for 88% of German mothers.**

The majority of German mothers (53%) said that they use the time ‘appropriated’ by the presence of labour-saving devices and products in the home to spend more quality time with their children (see Figure 15).

**Figure 15. Use of time saved by labour-saving devices and products**

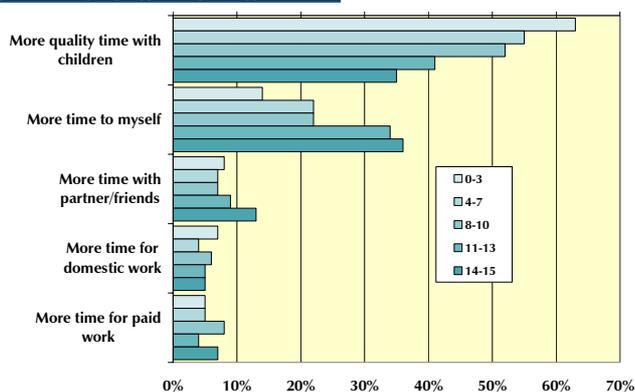


Spending this 'liberated' time on themselves is also reported by a significant proportion (22%) of German mothers. German mothers, along with those from Switzerland, are the most likely to use additional time for themselves; 5% points above the European average of 17% identified in the cross-cultural analysis.

Less than one-tenth (8%) of mothers suggested that they used the additional time gained from domestic 'innovations' to socialise with friends or spend with their partner. Fewer still employed this time to undertake more work; either domestic (6%) or paid work outside of the home (5%).

The tendency to spend this additional time with the children decreases, as one would predict, as children get older and become increasingly independent (see Figure 16). Mothers with older children then spend greater proportions of this extra time with friends and partners, as well as on themselves.

**Figure 16. Use of time saved by labour-saving devices and products, by age of youngest child**

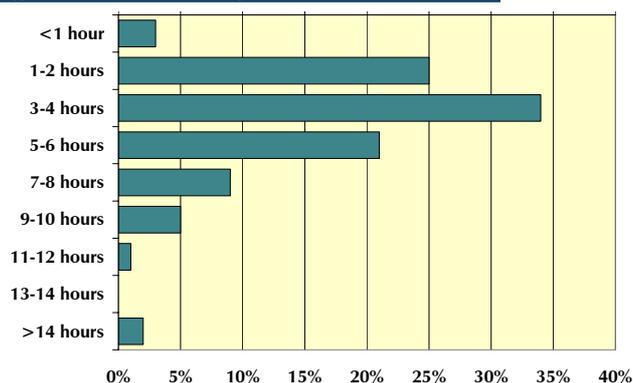


**Time recouped by labour-saving devices is mostly used to spend extra time with children. One-fifth, however, use this extra time for themselves.**

### 1.2.8 Time with children

Approximately three-fifths (62%) of German mothers reported spending up to four hours of active time per day with their children (see Figure 17). Active time in this context was defined as comprising activities such as reading, writing, playing, washing, dressing, etc. One-third of mothers said that they spend 3-4 hours per day, the most frequently cited response, actively engaging with their children. German mothers, on average, spend 4.42 hours of active time per day with their kids, the equivalent of 265 minutes daily.

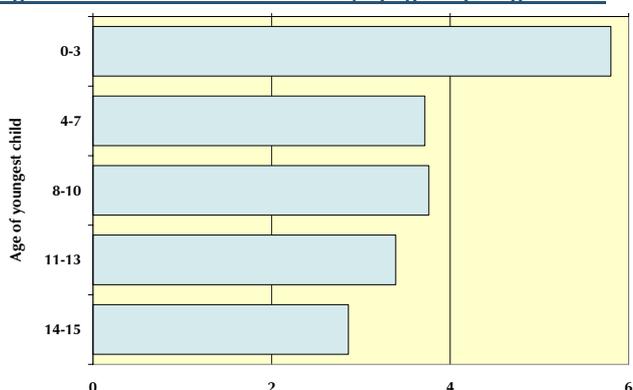
**Figure 17. Mothers' daily active time with children**



Mothers who are not currently in employment reported, predictably, spending more active time with their children (307 minutes per day) than those who are in paid work, both part-timers (266 minutes per day) and full-timers (238 minutes per day).

The highest levels of active time spent with children are reported by mothers with the youngest kids (see Figure 18.). Mothers of 0-3 year-olds said that they spend 5.8 hours per day on child-related reading, writing, playing, washing, and dressing. Mothers of children aged 14-15 years spend half this time on these activities (2.9 hours per day).

**Figure 18. Active time with children, by age of youngest child**



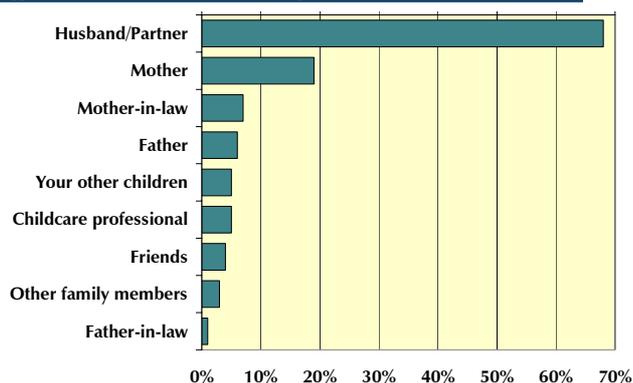
**German mothers spend an average of 4.5 hours per day on active time with their children.**

### 1.2.9 Help in the home

#### 1.2.9.1 Childcare

German mothers, as noted in the previous section, spend a considerable amount of time actively engaged with their children. So how much help do they receive with this and from whom are they likely to obtain the most support?

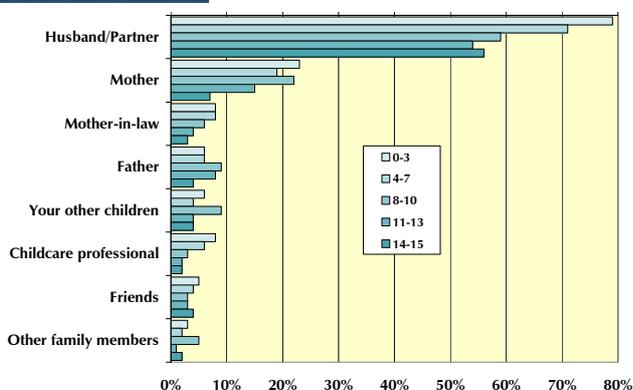
**Figure 19. Sources of most help with childcare in the home**



From Figure 19 above, it is clear that the majority of German mothers (68%) receive the most help with childcare from their partners, while mothers' own mothers are also a significant source of support for nearly one-fifth (19%). In addition to these main sources of help, mothers also reported assistance from their immediate family members including: mothers-in-law (7%); fathers (6%); other children (5%); and 'other family members' (3%).

Mothers with the youngest children report the widest network of support, relying more heavily on partners (79%), their mothers (23%), mother-in-laws (8%) and childcare professionals (8%) more than any other cohort (see Figure 20).

**Figure 20. Sources of most help with childcare in the home, by age of youngest child**

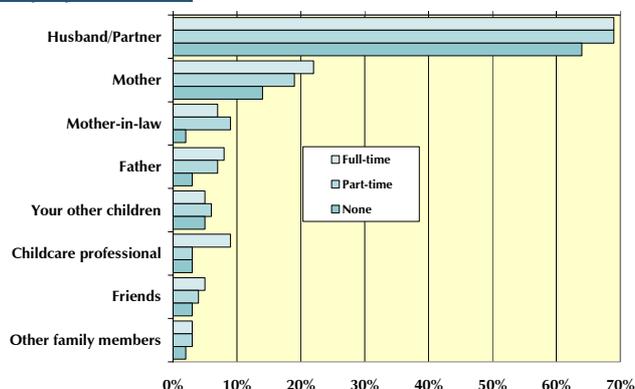


The involvement of husbands and partners in childcare, while consistently reported as the most significant source of support, declines with the increasing age of the youngest child. Nearly four-fifths (79%) of mothers with 0-3 year-olds said that husbands or partners provided the most help with childcare compared with only 54% of those whose youngest children are aged 11-13 years and 56% of mothers with 14-15 year-olds.

Mothers who work full-time also report more extensive support than those who work part-time or who are not currently in paid employment (see Figure 21.). While German mothers in full-time work also rely the most heavily for support on their husband or partner (69%) they are also more dependent on their own mothers (22%),

their fathers (8%), friends (5%) and childcare professionals such as childminders and nannies. Mothers who are not currently in paid employment are more self-reliant and than other employment-status groups.

**Figure 21. Sources of most help with childcare in the home, by employment status**

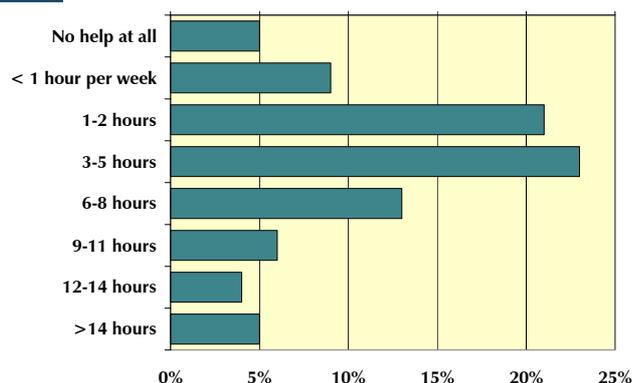


**The majority of German mothers (68%) receive the most help with childcare from their partners, while mothers' own mothers are also a significant source of support for nearly one-fifth (19%).**

### 1.2.9.2 Domestic work

Having established that partners or husbands are mothers' main source of help with childcare the survey sought to quantify their contribution, not only on this task, but also more generally with domestic chores. The results are displayed in Figure 22 below. The largest proportion of mothers (23%) reported that their partners provided 3-5 hours of help in the average week with household chores and childminding. Not all mothers, however, were as well supported. Almost one-third said that they received only 0-2 hours per week, the equivalent of a maximum of 17 minutes per day, while a further 5% reported receiving no help from their partners at all. At the other end of the scale other mothers said that they receive significantly greater levels of support from their partners or husbands with domestic chores. Thirteen percent, for example, said that their 'significant others' provide 6-8 hours of help per week and a further 5% reported levels of assistance in excess of 14 hours in the average week.

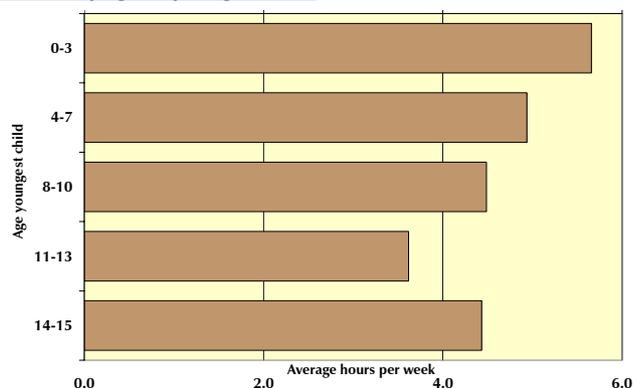
**Figure 22. Time spent by partner on childminding and domestic chores**



On average, German mothers reported that their partners provided 4.9 hours of help in a normal week, the equivalent of 42 minutes per day. When compared with the results from other European countries polled, however, the quantity of time proffered by partners and husbands for help in the home is relatively small. German mothers receive some of the lowest levels of assistance from their partners with only mothers from Italy and France reporting less help (4.1 hours and 4 hours per week respectively).

Further analysis of the average hours that partners help around the home shows that partners help most in homes with very young children aged 0-3 years; the early years requiring the greatest levels of parental input (see Figure 23.). On average mothers with infants and toddlers receive 5.7 hours per week (48 minutes per day) with domestic chores compared with just 3.6 hours (36 minutes per day) reported by mothers with children aged 11-13 years. The time that partners invest in domestic work, however, increases in households in which the youngest child is aged 14-15 years.

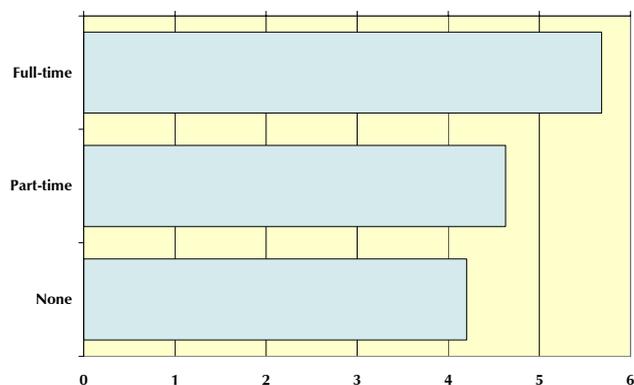
**Figure 23. Time spent by partner on childminding and domestic chores, by age of youngest child**



Full-time working mothers are the most reliant on their partners for help with domestic chores (see Figure 24.). The amount of time that partners invest in household chores is related to the number of hours mothers spend in paid employment. In households in which mothers work full-time there is a more equitable division of labour.

Partners of mothers who are in full-time work provide 5.7 hours per week (49 minutes per day) of help compared with the 4.6 hours (40 minutes per day) and the 4.2 hours (36 minutes per day) supplied by those with partners that work part-time or who are not currently in work.

**Figure 24. Time spent by partner on childminding and domestic chores, by employment status**



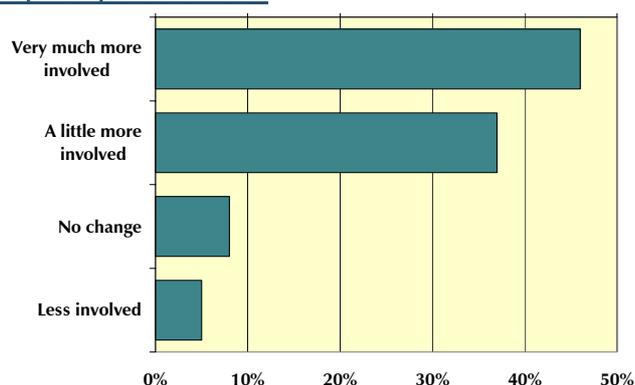
**Partners of German provide an average of 42 minutes per day of help with childcare and domestic chores; this is among the lowest reported levels in Europe. Five percent of German mothers receive no help at all from their partners.**

### 1.2.10 Role of the father

As noted in the previous section, there is some considerable variation in the amount of time that partners spend helping mothers with domestic work around the home; 5% provide no help at all while the same percentage spends in excess of 120 minutes per day. Focusing on one particular component of domestic work, the day-to-day care of children, mothers were asked whether they thought that fathers are now more or less directly involved in this activity they were in their own parent's or grandparent's day.

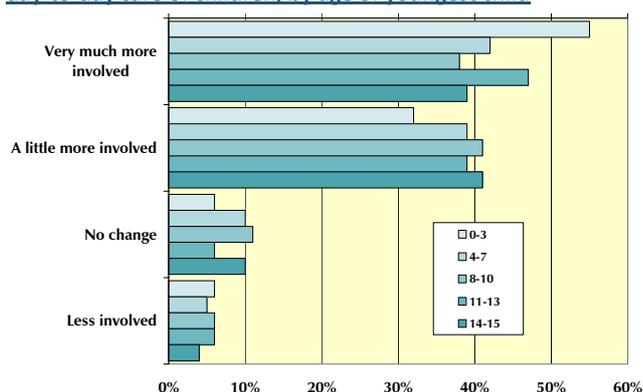
Figure 25 shows that a significant majority of mothers identified a generational change in the role of fathers in this context. Over four-fifths (83%) said that fathers are now more directly involved with the day-to-day care of children; 46% believed fathers to be 'very much more directly involved' and 37% felt they were 'a little more directly involved'. Eight percent of mothers were, however, of the opinion that little had changed in the preceding one or two generations, while five percent actually thought that fathers are now less directly involved in caring for their children.

**Figure 25. Generational changes in fathers' involvement in the day-to-day care of children**



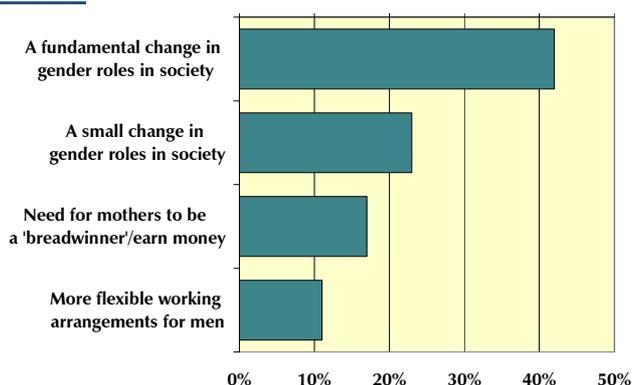
Mothers with the youngest children, who also reported that they receive the most help from their partners, were the most likely to feel that paternal involvement in childcare has increased in one or two generations (see Figure 26.). Over one-half (55%) of this group of mothers said that fathers are now 'very much more directly involved' with day-to-day care of children.

**Figure 26. Generational changes in fathers' involvement in the day-to-day care of children, by age of youngest child**



More than two-thirds of German mothers (67%) were of the opinion that fathers' greater involvement in the day-to-day care of children could, in part, be attributed to broad changes in gender roles in society (see Figure 27.). Over two-fifths (42%) viewed these changes as 'fundamental', while a further 23% preferred to define them as 'small'. There was also significant support (from 17% of mothers) for the notion that there is increasing pressure on mothers in contemporary German society to earn money, or adopt the role of 'breadwinner'. For approximately one-tenth of mothers (11%) flexible working arrangements for men had increased their ability to become more centrally involved in the day-to-day care of their children.

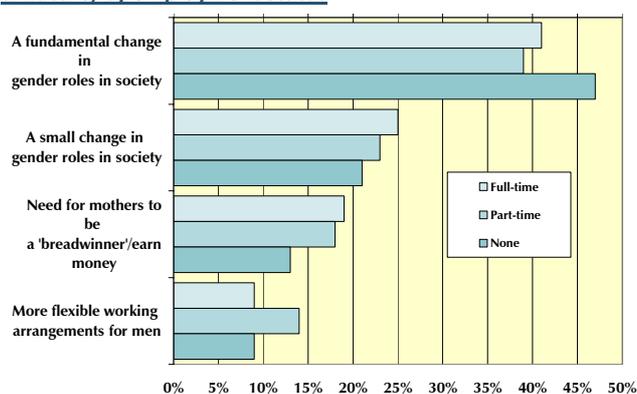
**Figure 27. Reasons for fathers' increased involvement in childcare**



Mothers who are currently in paid employment, as one might expect, placed more emphasis on the 'need for mothers to be a breadwinner' as a plausible explanation for fathers' greater involvement in childcare (see Figure 28.). This opinion was expressed by 19% of mothers who work full-time, 18% of those who work part-time and 13% of those who are not currently working.

The increasing availability of flexible working arrangements for men carried more favour with mothers who worked part-time than those in full-time employment and those not partaking in paid work. Across the European sample German mothers were the most likely to site partners' opportunities to secure flexible working arrangements as a significant contributor to partners' increasing direct involvement with childcare.

**Figure 28. Reasons for fathers' increased involvement in childcare, by employment status**



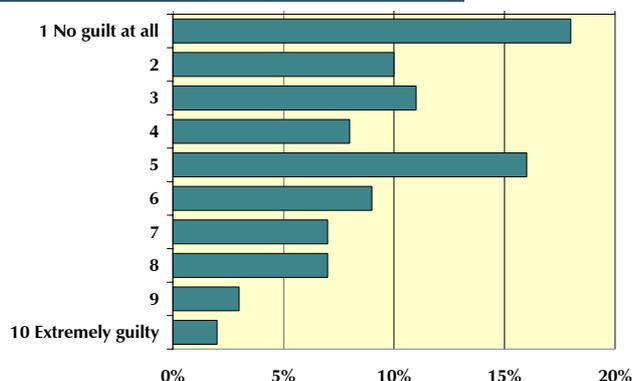
**A large majority of German mothers (83%) said that fathers are now more directly involved with the day-to-day care of children. Two-thirds of mothers (67%) attributed this to broad changes in gender roles in society.**

### 1.2.11 Maternal Guilt

The levels of guilt experienced by mothers as a result of the balance between their work and home life are illustrated in Figure 29. The largest proportion of mothers in Germany (18%) reported feeling no guilt at all and only

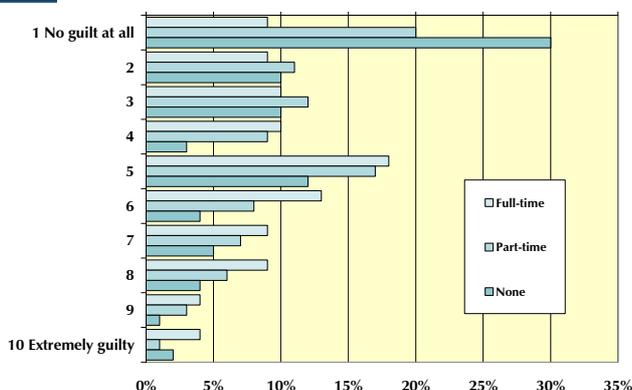
small proportions rate their feelings of guilt '9' (3%) or '10 – extremely guilty' (2%) on the ten-point scale. On average mothers in Germany reported their levels of guilt to be 4.25. In comparison with mothers from other European countries, German mothers are among the least likely to experience guilt regarding their work/life balance, ranking in 9<sup>th</sup> place from 13 countries.

Figure 29. Levels of guilt expressed by mothers



While guilt afflicts the majority of German mothers, to varying degrees, it is felt most strongly, as one might expect, by those who work full-time. On average full-time working mothers recorded a guilt 'rating' of 5.01 in comparison with that reported by mothers working part-time (4.05) and those who are not currently in paid employment (3.36). The distribution of mothers feelings of guilt by employment status are shown in Figure 30. below.

Figure 30. Levels of guilt expressed by mothers, by employment status

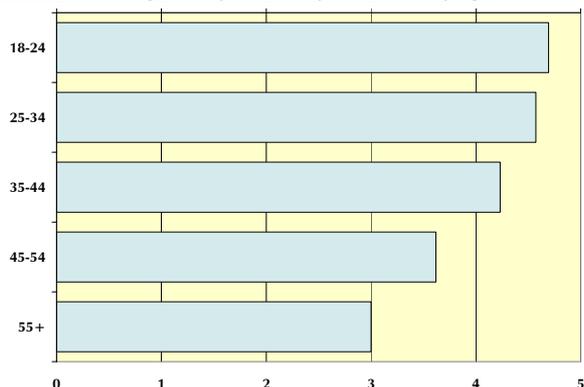


Only 9% of mothers working full-time reported feeling no guilt. This differs dramatically from the proportions of part-time working mothers who are 'guilt free' (20%) and those who are not currently in paid employment (30%). The scores towards the higher end of the scale (5-10) are also consistently headed by mothers who work full-time.

In Germany there is also a linear relationship between the age of the mother and her reported level of guilt. Figure 31 shows that the youngest cohort experiences the greatest feelings of guilt (4.7) and to a significantly greater degree than those aged 55 years and above (3.0). Examining the data further there is little evidence to

suggest that guilt is related to interconnected factors such as the age of the youngest child or the number of children in the household. In early sections of the report, however, we noted that the youngest cohort reported feeling the impacts of the current economic climate to a greater extent than elder mothers. The youngest mothers, who are likely to have less established careers, less job security and less financial stability and perhaps particular susceptible to feelings of guilt and anxiety pertaining to their ability to provide for their children.

Figure 31. Levels of guilt expressed by mothers, by age

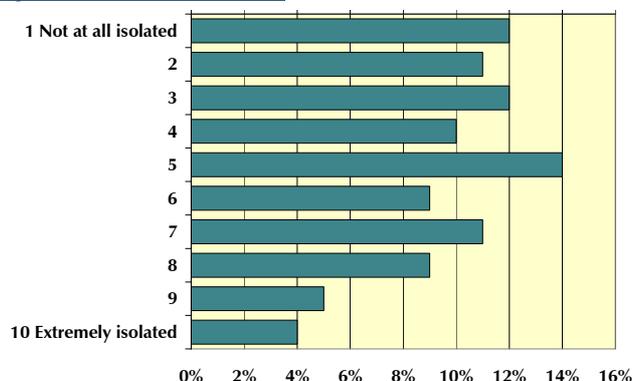


Most German mothers experience some guilt regarding their work/life balance, although on average their levels are relatively modest in comparison with much of Europe.

### 1.2.12 Maternal isolation

While most mothers feel supported and receive varying degrees of help, particularly from partners and other family members, many still experience feelings of isolation. As in the previous question, a ten-point scale was used to assess the extent to which mothers in Germany felt isolated or unsupported. Do they ever feel, for example, that they have to deal with the trials and tribulation of bringing up children all by themselves? The results are shown in Figure 32 below.

Figure 32. Maternal isolation



Twelve percent of German mothers reported feeling not at all isolated and/or totally supported. Similar proportions rated their levels of isolation as relatively low; 11% scoring

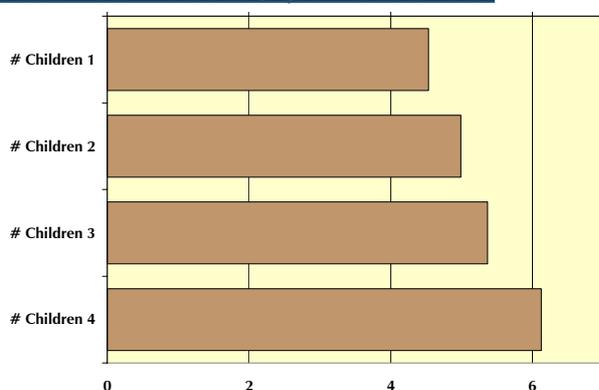
'2' and 12% scoring '3'. Feelings of extreme isolation, however, are still apparent among a small, but significant minority of German mothers; 4% said that they feel extremely isolated and/or totally unsupported, scoring '10'.

On average German mothers self-assessment of their level of isolation is 4.72. Compared with the mothers from other countries in the study, German mothers rank in fifth place towards the more isolated end of the scale.

Isolation is a feeling that is experienced by non-working mothers (average score: 5.06) more than it is by those who are in paid employment, both full-time (average score: 4.86) and part-time (average score: 4.57). As we have noted previously, mothers who do not work have a more limited 'pool' of people from which they draw support. Mothers in employment, conversely, are reliant on a broader social network with whom the burdens of motherhood can be shared. Part-time workers, the group who reported feeling the least isolated, would appear to have struck the most favourable balance.

Feelings of isolation, or being unsupported, increase with the number of children in the household (see Figure 33). While in a physical sense, one might expect the reverse to be true, there is clearly a tendency for mothers with the most children to feel the least supported. While they may receive help and support from a variety of sources, this assistance may not increase proportionally with the increased workload associated with each additional child.

Figure 33. Maternal isolation, by number of children

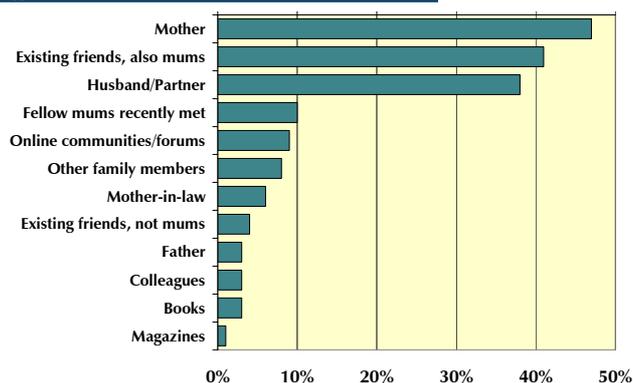


**Most mothers in Germany experience at least a degree of isolation**

### 1.2.13 Support and advice

As noted previously the majority of mothers reported being in receipt of help with domestic chores and childcare from a variety of different sources; rarely is being mother a solo activity, although some continue to feel a degree of isolation. 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?

Figure 34. Sources of advice on motherhood

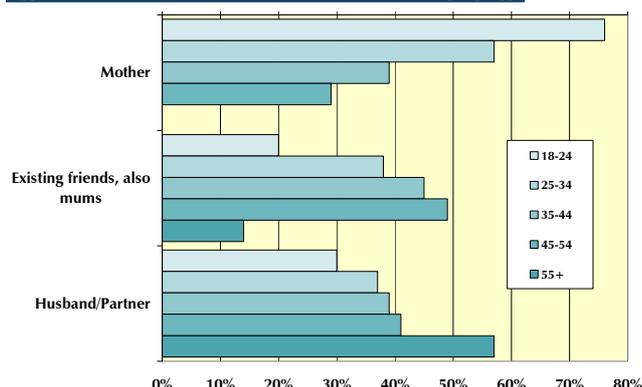


From Figure 34 it is clear that three sources of advice on being a mother are used regularly by German mothers. Maternal grandmothers are the most important source of advice for nearly half (47%) of all German mothers. Other mothers too feature highly on mothers preferred list of sources of advice; over two-fifths (41%) rely on their existing friends who are also mothers. A considerable proportion (38%) also reported turning to their husbands and partners.

Mothers do seek advice from other sources, though the use of these is reported by significantly fewer mothers. Friends who are also mothers, whom they had met since becoming a mother themselves, head the 'second tier' of mothers' support networks. While German mothers' emphasis is very much on seeking support in the 'real' world, almost one-tenth (9%) turn to mother-focused online communities for advice. Fewer, however, consult books (3%) or magazines (1%) for help with motherhood.

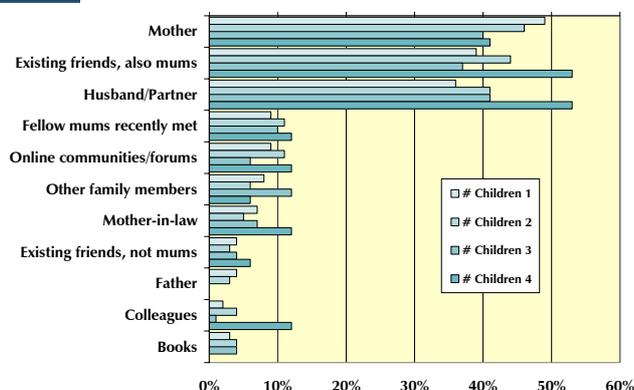
The way in which the use of these sources of advice changes with the age of the mother is illustrated in Figure 35. The role of, and reliance on maternal grandmothers decreases with the age of the mother. Mothers' own mothers are the primary source of support for over three-quarters of mothers aged 18-24 years. Mothers in the eldest cohort do not consult their mothers at all, but one would suspect that mothers from this group would have fewer opportunities to do so. Maternal grandmothers are gradually replaced as gurus on motherhood by an increasing dependence on partners and husbands. Less than one-third (30%) of mothers from the youngest cohort rely on partners, compared with 57% of those mothers aged 55+ years. Existing friends who are also mums become more important, for the most part, as mothers get older. Friends serve as a source of advice on motherhood to one-fifth of 18-24 year old mothers, but nearly one half (49%) of those aged 45-54 years.

Figure 35. Sources of advice on motherhood, by age



There is some variation in the use of sources of advice by number of children in the household. These are illustrated in Figure 36. Mothers with one and two children are most reliant on maternal grandmothers (49% and 46% respectively), while those with three children seek advice from most their partners (41%). Those mothers who have four children seek support equally from friends who are also mums and their partners (53%). What is also evident is that mothers with four children seek a lot of advice. Compared with the mothers who have fewer children this group consults the most with partners, friends (established friends with children, new friends with children and non-mothers alike), online communities, colleagues and their mothers-in-law.

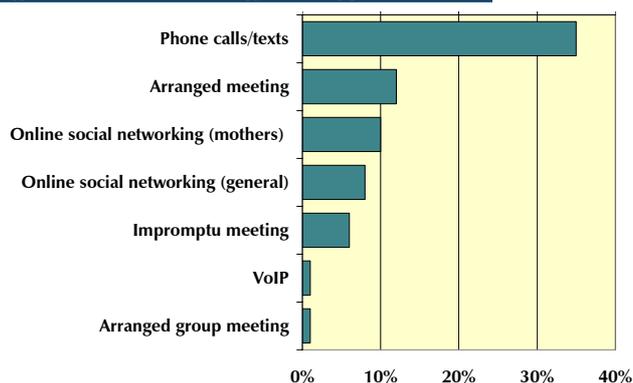
Figure 36. Sources of advice on motherhood, by number of children



**German mothers have three main sources of advice on motherhood. Maternal grandmothers are the most important source of advice for nearly half (47%) of all German mothers, followed by friends who are also mothers (41%) and also partners (38%)**

Having established who mothers turn to for advice on being a mother, how are they most likely to communicate with their support network as a mum? The results are presented in Figure 37 below.

Figure 37. Communicating with support networks

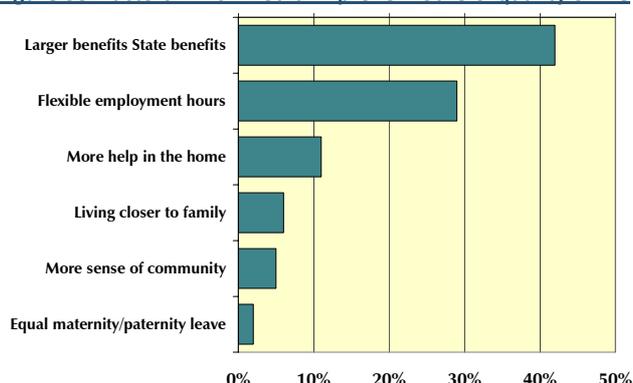


Mothers' preferred method of communicating with their support network is via phone or text, reported by over one-third (35%) of mothers. Face-to-face, one-on-one meetings either arranged (12%) or impromptu (6%) were preferred, or more frequent, than meetings which involved a group (1%). Significant proportions of mothers also reported using social networking sites, both mother-specific (10%) and more general (8%) (e.g. Facebook), with which to stay in touch with their sources of support.

### 1.2.14 Improving the quality of life

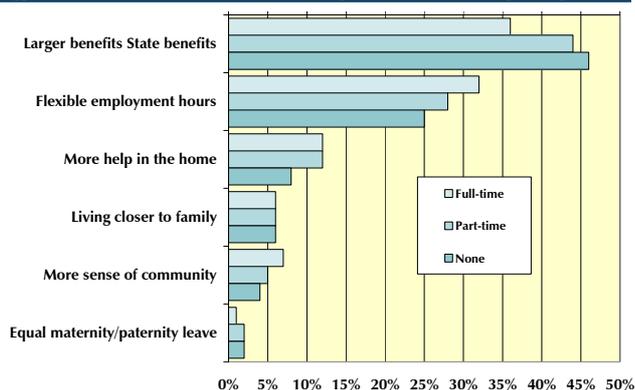
For German mothers the best way of improving their quality of life would be an increase in state benefits (see Figure 38.). Over four-fifths of the sample (42%) subscribed to this opinion. There was also considerable support for the notion that more flexible paid working arrangements would have a significant impact on the quality of life for mothers. Other, perhaps more modest changes to their daily lives were also thought to have the potential to impact positively on mothers' quality of life. Among these, living closer to family and a greater sense of community were mentioned, but only by a small proportion of the mothers polled (6% and 5% respectively).

Figure 38. Factors which would improve mothers' quality of life



Mothers who are not currently in employment, predictably, were the most likely to perceive that larger state benefits would improve their quality of life. Mothers working full-time perceived that flexible working hours would benefit them the most (see Figure 39).

Figure 39. Factors which would improve mothers' quality of life

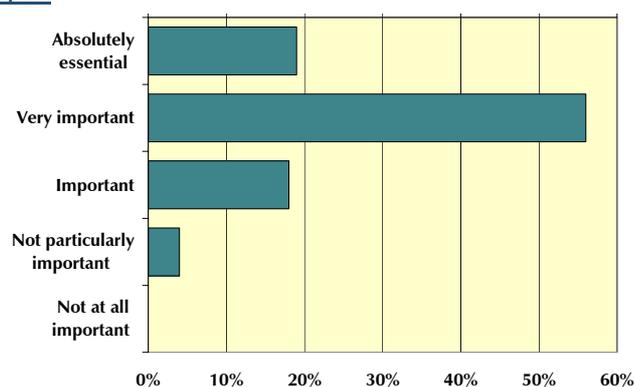


**German mothers perceived that greater state benefits and more flexible working hours would most improve the quality of their lives.**

### 1.2.15 Sport

The vast majority of German mothers (93%) are in favour of encouraging their children to participate in sport, appreciating that it has a significant impact on their development and well-being. From Figure 40 below, however, there is some variation in mothers' perceptions of exactly how important sport is in this context. While over one-half (56%) of mothers were of the opinion that encouraging their children's participation in sport is 'very important', fewer, but still a significant proportions (19%), viewed it as 'absolutely essential'. Only 4% regarded sport as 'not particularly important' and none of the mothers polled said that sport was 'not at all important'.

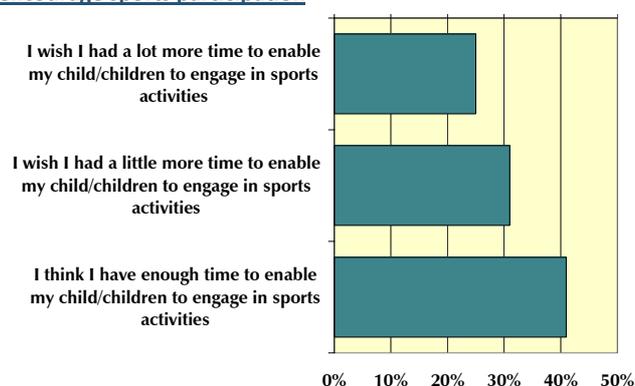
Figure 40. Importance of encouraging children's participation in sport



A follow up question, illustrated in Figure 41, was posed to mothers who recognised the value of sport to their children's development and well-being. This attempted to ascertain the extent to which time pressures might impact on mothers' abilities to support their children's participation in sport and physical activity. While over two-fifths (41%) were of the opinion that they had sufficient time to devote to the encouragement of the children's sporting activities, almost one-third (31%) said they wished they had a little more time and a further one-

quarter recognised that they need a lot more time to support their children's sporting aspirations.

Figure 41. Satisfaction with amount of time available to encourage sports participation



The consensus among German mothers regarding the importance of sport for the health and development of their children is so strong that a subsequent analysis of the opinions of the remaining mothers is of little statistical significance. That said, the reasons given by the minority of mothers who are broadly unconvinced by the value of sport to justify their position included: that there is too much emphasis on winning in children's sports; academic subjects are more of a priority; and that participating in sports takes up too much time for both children and parents alike.

A significant majority (93%) of German mothers appreciate the value of sport to their children's health, well-being and personal development