



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

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***The Social Issues Research Centre
28 St Clements Street
Oxford OX4 1AB UK
+44 (0) 1865 262255
group@sirc.org***

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1.1 Norway

1.1.1 Introduction

Norway is ranked first in the Save the Children *State of the World's Mothers Report 2011*,¹ meaning that it is regarded as the best place on earth to be a mother, based on factors such as welfare support, maternity leave, childcare provision, and gender equality. This focus on improving conditions for mothers is not a particularly new development: in many ways Norway has led the drive for women's rights and for state provision for the family among European countries since its inception as a nation-state in 1905. The experience of Norwegian motherhood is, therefore, held up as something of an ideal to which other countries should aspire if they are to improve their own provision for mothers and families.

This does not mean, however, that Norway is completely free of issues and concerns when it comes to contemporary motherhood. There are those who argue that the experience of motherhood in Norway is significantly undermined by the fact that the welfare system is still based on an idea of mothers as 'care-givers' and of fathers as 'workers' or 'breadwinners'.² This basic distinction means that at a fundamental level, experiences of motherhood in Norway may not be all that different from those elsewhere in the European context. So perhaps for those who incorporate professional life into their definition of 'modern motherhood', Norway is less perfect than some statistics would have us believe. On the other hand, for most mothers it is the practicalities of managing day-to-day life that are of primary concern, and in this respect it is clear that Norway is outstripping many of its European counterparts in terms of state provision for mothers and families. It is these practical aspects of modern motherhood that must be balanced against other competing aspects of women's lives if we are to understand if Norwegian motherhood is, in fact, as ideal as the statistics suggest.

1.1.2 Historical perspectives

In Norway in the first half of the 19th century, women were considered to be incapable of making rational decisions in the spheres of economics, law or politics. By law they were effectively placed under the guardianship of either their fathers or their husbands. Since its emergence as an independent nation-state at the beginning of the 20th century, however, Norway has in many respects led the

way in terms of progressive policy-making and social reform related to motherhood and the lives of women.³ The women's liberation movement in Norway actually predates the birth of the Norwegian nation-state itself: in the 1880s and 1890s, women's organisations such as the *Norwegian Association for the Rights of Women* and the *Association for Women's Suffrage* were already well established as forces for social and political change.

In 1902 the first home for single mothers was established, and in 1909 the reform of the Marriage Act meant that mothers were given 'natural' custody over children. Under this act mothers were also given preference in terms of custody after divorce. In 1913 Norway was one of the first countries in the world to give women the right to vote. In the first two decades of the twentieth century women in Norway were already succeeding in establishing representation within major social and political organisations such as trade unions and political parties. In the 1910s two other major acts of social reform were put forward – in 1915 women were afforded six weeks of maternity leave and free assistance from midwives during childbirth. In the same year, the Children's Welfare Act gave equal paternal inheritance rights to children born in and out of wedlock. Single mothers also received a small amount of insurance through this act.

For their time, these reforms were revolutionary. While social and political reforms in the first decades of the twentieth century ushered in significant changes in the lives of women, men and women were by no means equal in social or economic terms. As the Norwegian economy fell into decline during the late 1920s an ideological movement emerged emphasising the importance of a return to traditional ideas of motherhood, and of the domestic sphere as the appropriate preserve of women. This movement, aimed primarily at the middle classes, was championed by the state church of Norway and by groups such as the *Organisation of Norwegian Housewives*. Interestingly, the movement's spokespeople did not promote a pro-natal, 'naturalised' vision of motherhood as was the case in Southern European countries during the first half of the twentieth century. Instead of seeing women as naturally well-equipped for the challenges of childcare and family life, in Norway motherhood was considered a skill to be *learned*. As such, schools and education programmes emerged in the late 1920s and 1930s dedicated to teaching young women how to be good mothers and housewives.

This perspective on the social role of women was supported by law in Norway at the time – until 1927 it was illegal for a married woman to seek work outside of the home. Despite early reforms, gender roles remained

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

² See Halryjno, S. & Lyng, T. (2009) Preferences, constraints or schemas of devotion? Exploring Norwegian mothers' withdrawals from high-commitment careers. *British Journal of Sociology*, 60(2), 323-341.

³ See Sainsbury, D. (2001) Gender and the Making of Welfare States: Norway and Sweden, *Social Politics*, 8(1), 113-143.

discrete in the first half of the twentieth century and women were still expected to adhere to a traditionalist vision of motherhood.

Changes in the nature of motherhood continued through the 1930s and into the 1940s. Within the Norwegian Labour party of the late 1930s a movement began to develop around the figure of Katti Anker Møller. Throughout the twentieth century she had campaigned for women's reproductive rights, for recognition of the unpaid work of mothers and for the decriminalisation of abortion. She also argued against a 'woman's wage' approach to family welfare. She considered 'women's wages' as a means to maintain the subordination of women by tying them to the domestic sphere as 'care-givers' rather than 'workers'. Indeed, it is arguable that some of the limitations of the modern Norwegian approach to welfare provision for mothers stem from this early framing of mothers as 'caregivers' above all else. Men retained the primary status of 'workers' who could *also* be 'care-givers' in the family, as we note later. Her campaign for 'voluntary motherhood' and the 'emancipation of motherhood' (*moderskapets frigørelse*) was generally met with popular derision at the time, and it was some fifty years before her calls for reforms to abortion laws were answered. Møller's high profile during this period was nevertheless an indication that a vein of progressive feminist activism was continuing to impact on motherhood in Norway in the years directly prior to World War II.⁴

After the turbulent years of occupation during the Second World War, Norway succeeded in quickly rebuilding its economy, achieving levels of economic productivity similar to pre-war outputs by 1948. Alongside this economic recovery came the introduction of 'universalist' welfare reforms that would have profound and lasting effects on the nature of Norwegian motherhood. Emerging in the late 1940s, the Norwegian welfare state promised to provide extensive state support for families, and for mothers in particular.⁵ Within the context of this broad movement towards comprehensive welfare provision, the second half of the twentieth century saw the enactment of a range of laws aimed both at improving family life and at establishing gender equality between men and women. In 1946 the Norwegian government legislated for universal child benefits, payable to the mother, for all children up to the age of 16. In 1966 the National Insurance Act guaranteed benefits for single parents and in 1967 birth control was made accessible on a massive scale. In 1978 abortion was made legal up until twelve weeks of pregnancy and today is paid for by the state.

The last two decades of the twentieth century in particular saw changes to welfare policy that focused on establishing

parity in the rights and responsibilities of parents. Over time, this has led to a normalisation of the idea, albeit not always the reality, of fathers actively participating in an equal share form of childcare and, to a lesser extent, domestic responsibilities. The year 1981 marked a watershed with Norway's first female Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, setting in motion a series of reforms aimed at improving gender equality in the family. Legislation introduced at this time recognised parents as equals in terms of custody, whereas previously the primacy of mothers had been the focus.

More than a decade later, in 1993, paternal leave was extended to four weeks – a policy that proved popular with the majority of Norwegian fathers. In 1994 this policy was augmented by the introduction of a time account scheme that made it easier to incorporate paternal leave into working schedules. It was also in 1993 that same-sex couples were recognised by law as having the right to registered cohabitation (i.e. legally recognised as a family unit). The 1990s saw the introduction of a 'cash for care' model of childcare provision, further diversifying the options available to Norwegian parents. By 2009 parental leave had extended to an unprecedented ten weeks of non-transferrable leave for fathers and a mammoth 46-56 weeks for mothers at 100%/80% of pay. In keeping with these trends, since 2009 Norway has implemented universal childcare provision for all children over the age of 1, although it has been argued that childcare is not yet quite fulfilling what families require from the state.

Now in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Norway has achieved many of the goals for gender equality imagined by early women reformers of the 19th century – and many more besides.⁶ And yet questions remain about the extent to which these reforms, while clearly facilitating the practical aspects of managing motherhood, have really addressed key issues to do with gender equality in the Norwegian context.

1.1.3 Demographics

According to the most recent Eurostat data, Norway has a birth rate of 12.7 per 1000 population, which is considerably higher than the EU27 average of 10.9, but a decrease on Norwegian figures for 1997 (13.2 per 1000 population). The fertility rate in Norway is 1.9, again placing Norway well above the EU27 average of 1.55, but some way below the natural replacement level of approximately 2.1. Interestingly, this is also an increase from 1.86 in 1997, indicating that unlike many other European countries Norway's fertility rate has actually risen slightly in recent years, even though the general trend has been towards lower fertility rates since the 1960s. As we shall see below, it has been argued that this

⁴ Mohr, T (1976) *Katti Anker Møller: en banebryter*. Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag.

⁵ O'Reilly, A. (2009) *Encyclopaedia of Motherhood*. London: Sage.

⁶ See, for example, Norway's ranking in the Global Economic Forum's *Gender Gap Report 2011*: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2011.pdf

higher fertility rate is connected to the level of state provision for childcare in Norway, which acts as a sort of incentive for fertility.

According to the latest Eurostat figures for 2011, the average age of mothers at first birth in Norway is 30.09, placing Norway just below the European averages as recorded in 2009. As in most other EU27 countries, the age at first birth in Norway has increased in the last ten years, from 29.25 in 1997.⁷ Women are also getting married later in life: the average age of first marriage in Norway is 33.6, compared with 37.2 years for men. This is a considerable increase from the average age of 24.5 for first marriage in the early 1960s.⁸ Along with countries such as Switzerland, this means that Norwegians are marrying latest among all women in the EU27. At the same time, the number of people getting married per 1000 population has also continued to decrease in Norway. Fluctuations in the number of people getting married mean that the rate of marriage was particularly high in the mid 2000s, but by 2010 the marriage rate was back below figures for 1999. While in 1999 there were approximately 5.3 marriages per 1000 population, this had decreased to 4.8 by 2010.

Cohabitation is also on the rise, with many couples (especially young couples) choosing this as the preferred alternative to marriage. This means that Norwegian motherhood is no longer tied in a significant way to marriage. Indeed, the majority (56%) of Norwegian children are now born outside of marriage, compared with just 3% in 1950. This is a trend that began in the 1970s, and can be linked to ongoing movements for women's rights and changing perceptions of gender and the family during this period. This statistic also goes some way to explain the distance between the age at first birth and the age at first marriage above, with some couples cohabiting at first, and getting married only after having their second child. Many women, however, do not get married at all, and remain in cohabiting households. Only 12% of children who are born outside of wed-lock are born into single parent families.⁹

Overall, however, the number of children living in single parent households has increased somewhat, and the vast majority of these households are headed by single mothers. In 1989 approximately 18% of children lived with only one biological or adoptive parent. By 2010, this had increased to 25% of children under the age of 18.¹⁰ These figures can be linked in part to divorce rates in Norway,

which are also increasing. The number of divorces per 1000 population has generally increased since the middle of the twentieth century, but recent figures only show a minor increase (relative to a similarly small change in figures for rates of marriage). In 1999 the number of divorces per 1000 population was 2.0; in 2010 the figure had risen fractionally to 2.1.¹¹ Again, however, we might link this trend to the level of state childcare provision in Norway and to the significant support available for single parents, which makes lone parenthood a much more practicable option.

As well as delaying (or avoiding) marriage, and delaying motherhood, women are spending more time than men in education during their early adult years. Six out of ten students in Higher Education in Norway are women, meaning that Norway is similar to other EU27 countries in terms of having a gender imbalance in universities that favours women. Finally, Norwegian mothers are experiencing motherhood for longer: life expectancy for women in Norway is 82.9 years, just above the EU27 average.

From the above demographic data, then, the following picture emerges: like many of their European counterparts, Norwegian mothers are staying in education for longer, and having children later in life. Unlike other European countries, in recent years Norwegian women have been having more children. If they marry, they are doing so quite a lot later in life than was the case fifty years ago. It is just as likely, however, that they will cohabit with their partner; or, if they do get married, that divorce will be a likely outcome. Mothers are now more likely to head single-parent families than they were twenty years ago, again suggesting a shift towards a greater diversity of experiences of motherhood in the contemporary Norwegian context.

1.1.4 Defining motherhood (*moderskrap*) in the Norwegian context

What then does this say about popular conceptions of motherhood in Norway? Is motherhood defined according to this shift towards more flexible family formations, and a decline in the traditional markers of family life, such as marriage? Do Norwegian mothers agree with the claim that their country is the best place in the world to be a mother?

On the whole it would seem that popular discourse in Norway highlights the fact that Norwegian mothers have it good: they enjoy extended maternity leave, comprehensive healthcare and childcare benefits, and their husbands are incentivised by the state to participate in the domestic sphere. As a result there is to a certain

⁷ Eurostat (2010) *Eurostat Statbook*.

⁸ Statistics Norway (2010) Average age at marriage 1961-2010: http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/02/30/ekteskap_en/tab-2011-08-25-06-en.html

⁹ Kari, O. (2010) *Men and Women in Norway: What the Figures Say*. Oslo: Statistics Norway.

¹⁰ Statistics Norway (2011) One out of four children live with only one parent: http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/01/20/barn_en/

¹¹ Eurostat (2011) Divorce rates <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00013>

extent a 'musn't grumble' attitude in popular discourse that discourages critical commentary about the state of motherhood in Norway. Recently, this has been connected to the enormous media impact of the Save The Children *State of the World's Mothers Report* and the claims that it makes about Norway as the prime example of effective support for motherhood. The image of Norway put forward in this report and in the subsequent media coverage fits into general discourse in Norwegian society about the success of the 'Nordic model' of the welfare state and of the significance of social and political progressiveness as an element of Norwegian national history and cultural identity.

An analysis of press/blog discussions of motherhood in Norway, however, also presents alternative perspectives of motherhood. There is some suggestion made from within the country that cultural attitudes are not quite keeping pace with the political will. Ingunn Yssen, head of the Norwegian Centre for Gender Equality, for example, sparked some controversy in 2010 when she suggested in the *Dagbladet* newspaper that Norwegian mothers were far from enjoying equal opportunities. She argued that it is when women decide to have children that inequalities within the society become most apparent. She cites a young female legal professional as an example of this:

"I'm very disappointed - I have always thought that I can do everything that men can, and suddenly I become just a mother in the eyes of others."

It is Yssen's contention that mothers were 'worse off' (in all statistical measures) of wealth, career, leisure and happiness that has proved particularly unpopular, as one might imagine, with blogging mums. These kinds of comments are representative, however, of a growing critical voice in Norway that questions the sanctity of the Nordic approach to welfare, and argues for changes that will see men more practically involved in balancing out gender roles in the family and in the workplace.

1.1.5 Motherhood and employment

These latter issues are of course inextricably tied to the question of how mothers balance domestic responsibilities with their professional lives. In comparison with other European countries, Norway presents an interesting case in relation to mothers' employment. For figures in 2008, two thirds (75.4%) of all women participated in the Norwegian workforce, compared with 80% of all men.¹² Another way of interpreting this data is that roughly 47% of the total working population are women.¹³ Among women of childbearing age the figure is slightly higher still, with 80% of women working outside of the home.¹⁴ This represents a high level of participation in the workforce

among women, and is one of the highest in Europe. Again this may be linked back to the high levels of childcare provision available in Norway, which may in turn encourage women to return to work.

The important question, however, is *what kind* of work women are returning to after becoming mothers. Unlike countries such as Portugal, where full-time work is a common experience among mothers of children under 6, in Norway a large proportion of mothers work part-time. In fact, almost half (43%) of women in Norway work part-time, compared with roughly 13% of men. Among these women there are mothers who do not so much conform to the 'opt-out' vision of modern motherhood (that is, women in positions of professional prestige who give it all up to become housewives) but rather *partially* opt out of work.¹⁵ While the figure for men working part-time has increased in comparison with previous years, these figures still suggest that women, much more than men, are sacrificing a return to full-time work in order to put family commitments first.

Unemployment remains low for both men and women in Norway, relative to European averages. Unemployment for women was at 2.3% in 2008, compared to 3.9% for men. This compares very favourably to the EU27 average figure of 7.5%, and is significantly lower than some EU countries, such as Spain (13% unemployment for women in 2008) and Greece (11.4%). Low levels of unemployment among women in Norway are connected in part to the fact that many women work in the public sector, and so have avoided the unemployment caused by successive periods of economic downturn over the past twenty years. Most affected by economic instability has been the manufacturing industry, which is a male-dominated sphere of the Norwegian economy.

This also reveals something interesting about the gendered nature of the workforce in Norway. Despite ongoing social and political reforms aimed at gender equality, in the economic sphere gender is still an important factor both in terms of salary and in terms of the division of labour. Traditionally 'female' roles such as being a teacher, a nurse, a secretary or a cleaner remain the preserve of women in Norway, while men fulfil stereotypically 'masculine' positions as drivers, caretakers and computer engineers.¹⁶ There also remains a considerable gender gap in pay in Norway. In 2009 the unadjusted gender pay gap between men and women was 16.7%, just under the EU27 average of 17.1%. Put another way, women earn just under 85% of men's salaries. This difference in pay is compounded further when taking into consideration the fact that men receive more pay for overtime and for bonuses. Women in the private sector also

¹² Eurostat (2010) *Eurostat Statbook 2010*. Eurostat.

¹³ Kari, O. (2010) *Men and Women in Norway: What the Figures Say*. Oslo: Statistics Norway.

¹⁴ Statistics Norway, 2010.

¹⁵ Gilbert, N. (2008) *A Mother's Work: How Feminism, the Market, and Policy Shape Family Life*. Yale University Press

¹⁶ Kari, O. (2010) *Op Cit*.

experience a wider gender pay gap than in the public sector. It is noteworthy that the gender pay gap also increases with age, suggesting a link between gender pay disparities and experiences and/or perceptions of motherhood. Norwegian women in their 20s receive 92% of men's salaries, but as they get older the gender pay gap begins to increase. As men move beyond 40 and into their 50s, their pay continues to increase; but for women, on average it is around the 40 mark that wages peak. This pay gap, which in many cases occurs alongside experiences of motherhood, has a significant role to play in terms of maintaining gender inequality in the workplace.¹⁷

These factors are compounded by the fact that in general women in Norway work in industries that pay less, particularly in relation to the level of education required to do certain jobs. For most women with a small level of higher education, there is no evidence to suggest that a university degree is a guarantee for either a well-paid job or a job that pays on a par with jobs normally occupied by men. This is partly related to subject choice in higher education, which is still quite strongly divided according to gender. While women are likely to train for jobs such as teaching, or to pursue education in the arts and humanities, men are much more likely to study technical and scientific subjects. This means that they are generally better equipped to go into higher-paid jobs when they leave university. On the other end of the educational scale, women who have only a basic level of education actually experience less of a gender gap in terms of pay.

Returning to the relationship between the age and the gender pay gap, there is evidence of an employment 'penalty' associated with the experience of becoming a mother in Norway. While childcare provision is extensive, as we will see below, it is argued that a motherhood wage penalty remains partly because women still spend more time than men on household chores and childcare. In some cases this might lead women to take up less demanding professional roles in order to give them sufficient time to complete domestic responsibilities as well, leading to lower levels of pay. There is also the argument that motherhood leads to a loss of human capital: because women lose out on experience in the work-place and on-the-job training when on maternity leave, they fall behind their contemporaries in terms of competitiveness and expertise. In both cases, it is partly the structure of the system of childcare that encourages a continued motherhood wage penalty. In terms of maternity and paternity leave, Norwegian parents receive a total of 308 days leave at fully pay. Mothers receive 63 days of exclusive leave, while fathers receive 42 days, with the remainder of the leave time being divided up between parents as they wish (although it is very unusual for men

to take the greater share)¹⁸. Each parent can also apply for a further year of leave directly after the initial parental leave, which is unpaid. Other considerations for parents include paid time during the working day for breastfeeding (approximately 80% of mothers in Norway breastfeed).¹⁹ While few mothers would deny the benefits of taking more time off work, at full pay, for mothering duties, the onus on women as 'care-givers' still means that they are economically and professionally disadvantaged more than men by the process of starting a family.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the high levels of state support for new mothers, the above issues seem to impact most on wellbeing during the first years of motherhood, when women are attempting to make the transition back into employment. According to qualitative research conducted by Altsveit et al., the relationship between work and childcare is for Norwegian mothers defined by 'tension', rather than symbiosis. Many participants in the research agreed that they had chosen new and less demanding jobs in order to account for new family responsibilities; and yet issues of guilt, low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy were still major issues. One participant summed this up by saying:

*"I have less time at work and no chance to be sociable. Somehow, I have to be more structured and precise, as I feel that everything is chaotic. I no longer feel in complete command [...]. I have to accept that right now, as I cannot manage everything the way I probably should. I sometimes put him (the child) out of my mind at work. But the moment I finish work, I cycle home as quickly as possible to get back to him."*²⁰

This is something that is also borne out in part by some of the statistical data. In the most recent European Quality of Life Survey, for example, 53% of Norwegian respondents agreed that they felt dissatisfaction about the amount of time spent with family, while a further 26% pointed to time conflicts between different responsibilities as a source of dissatisfaction.²¹ Others in Altsveit's study simply decided to conserve some of the energy that they would normally put into paid work because they knew that they had working lives to return to at home. Or, alternatively, mothers expressed that they had become even more efficient when at work because of home commitments –

¹⁷ Kari, O. (2010) Op Cit.

¹⁸ Brandth B. & Kvande E. (2005) Valgfri eller øremerket permisjon for fedre? [Option or earmarked leave for the fathers?]. In Valgfrihetens tid. Omsorgspolitik for barn møter det fleksible arbeidslivet [The time of option. The policy of childcare meeting the flexible working life][In Norwegian] (Brandt B., Bungum B. & Kvande E., eds), Gyldendal Akademiske, Oslo, pp. 44–61.

¹⁹ Norwegian National Health Insurance Organisation, 2009

²⁰ Altsveit, M., Severinsson, E. & Karlsen, B. (2011) Readjusting one's life in the tension inherent in work and motherhood, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 67(10), 2151–2160.

²¹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2010) *European Quality of Life Survey 2010*. European Commission.

and yet this efficiency was not necessarily recognised by co-workers because of engrained ideas about the ways in which motherhood might detract from paid work.

1.1.6 Childcare and time use

Why then, we might ask, are the lives of new Norwegian mothers defined by 'tension', given that levels of childcare support are so high? As suggested above, Norway has particularly comprehensive levels of childcare. As of 2009, the Norwegian state provided universal childcare for all children over the age of one.²² Levels of childcare are widely considered to be commensurate with demand, and the quality of state childcare is also considered to be of a high standard (Norway is ranked third in the OECD for child-to-staff ratios in childcare facilities)²³. The most recent data suggests that more than 50% of children aged 0-2 years in Norway are enrolled in some form of state childcare facility, placing Norway above the European Barcelona standard and OECD average (30%) for childcare provision.²⁴ This would seem to tally with the fact that 59% of all couples in Norway both have some form of employment, with mothers mainly working part-time. Figures for participation in this age range are also likely to be lower on average given that the Norwegian state does not provide universal childcare for children less than one year-old, instead focusing resources on parental leave and therefore encouraging parents to take primary responsibility for childcare in the early stages. For children aged 3-5 years-old, the level of participation in state childcare services rockets to more than 90%.

This apparent 'tension', then, does not seem to be caused by a lack of childcare provision, as is the case in other European countries such as Portugal. One aspect of current childcare provision that could augment this 'tension' is the 'cash for care' system, whereby mothers are able to claim money instead of putting their children in childcare. For economically disadvantaged mothers, the 'cash for care' system may be used to augment the family income, but without any impact on how much paid work mothers do alongside childcare.

An alternative cause could be the gender division of labour in the domestic sphere.²⁵ Despite state incentives for fathers to become more involved in childcare and domestic tasks, some evidence suggests that there remain gaps, both qualitative and quantitative, between the domestic and childcare responsibilities of men and women

in Norwegian families.²⁶ Overall, the amount of time spent on domestic tasks and on looking after children has reduced significantly for both men and women since the middle of the twentieth century. The reduction in time spent on these activities is, however, still smaller for women than for men. The most recent OECD statistics suggest that men aged 15 and over in Norway spend approximately 20% of their time on paid work or study, 9% on unpaid work, 1.8% of time on care work, and 42.1% of time on personal care (sleeping, eating, drinking, etc.). Norwegian women in the same age range, by contrast, spend 13% of their time on paid work, an almost equal amount on unpaid work, 3.2% on care work and 43% on personal care. According to this data, it is interesting to note that while personal care time is almost exactly the same for men and women, the time spent on care work is almost tripled for women compared with men. This discrepancy is also evident in figures focusing specifically on time spent on care relative to number of children and gender. For Norwegian men aged 25-44 with one child, the proportion of their time spent caring for children is roughly 5%, while for women the proportion of time spent increases to approximately 12%. Norwegian men are still involved in childcare more than fathers in other countries – Spain and France, for example – but these figures suggest a continued emphasis on the domestic role of the mother.²⁷

Recent research into the time-use practices of Norwegian fathers places further emphasis on this apparent imbalance in domestic work. Ragne Kitterød and Silje Vatne Pettersen make a number of interesting points on this subject.²⁸ To begin with, they recognise that Norwegian men are now much more involved in the domestic sphere than they have been in the past, and that this is primarily a result of progressive social policy. However, they then go on to question the notion that men's involvement in family life has the effect of facilitating women's participation in the workforce. On the contrary, they highlight that a large gap exists between the amount of time spent by fathers in the home and the amount of time spent by mothers at work. In particular, Kitterød and Pettersen suggest that while childcare has been incorporated into Norwegian constructions of masculinity,²⁹ domestic chores are still incompatible with

²² European Commission (2010) *The Provision of Childcare Services: a Comparative Review of 30 European Countries*. European Commission.

²³ OECD (2010) *OECD Family database* [available at www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database]

²⁴ OECD (2010) *OECD Family database* [available at www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database]

²⁵ See also Ellingsaeter, A. & Gulbrandsen, L. (2007) Closing the Childcare Gap: The Interaction of Childcare Provision and Mothers' Agency in Norway, *Journal of Social Policy* (2007), 36: 649-669.

²⁶ For the particular case of lone parents in this context, see Duncan, S. (2004) Combining Lone Motherhood and Paid Work: The Rationality Mistake and Norwegian Social Policy. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 14(1), 41-54.

²⁷ OECD (2010) *OECD Family database* <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/1/50/43199641.pdf>

²⁸ Kitterød, R. & Pettersen, S. (2006) Making up for mothers' employed working hours? Housework and childcare among Norwegian fathers, in *Work, Employment and Society*, 20(3), 473-492.

²⁹ See also Holter, Ø. G. (2003) Can men do it? Men and gender equality – the Nordic experience. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers/ Nordiska ministerrådet.

what it means to be a Norwegian 'man'.³⁰ These tasks therefore remain predominantly the responsibility of women, and mothers must incorporate these added responsibilities into the 'tense' mix of family and professional life that they maintain.³¹ At the same time, it must also be remembered that Norwegian men cannot facilitate the participation of women in the labour force by simple virtue of the fact that they are already working long hours and seldom take the opportunity to scale down their working commitments to a part-time arrangement. These points are represented in the Time Use Survey data presented in the research, which suggest that on average, fathers spend 6.69 hrs per week taking care of their children, compared with 14.87 hours for mothers. Fathers spend an additional 6.37 hrs per week on housework, while mothers spend an average of 14.63 hours per week.

In short, then, fathers make up for *some* of the time that mothers are in work, but only by engaging in *certain* domestic chores or aspects of childcare. This would seem to fit with the idea, mentioned above, that the Norwegian state presents great benefits to mothers, but that at the same time the nature of the provision means that Norwegian mothers continue to struggle with the same balancing act of reconciling paid work with family commitments. Fathers are increasingly supportive in helping to maintain this balance, and the situation for mothers in Norway is very good; but gender inequalities do persist.

1.1.7 Motherhood and Sport

In general, participation in sports is considered to be an important part of social and civic life in Norway. In Norway, the organisation of sports is highly centralised at the institutional level. In a population of approximately four million people, almost half are members of the Norwegian Sports Federation. Sports are organised at the state level by the Ministry of Culture, which in turn provides funding for a host of voluntary organizations and regional sports clubs. As with Norwegian welfare in general, the state adopts a 'universalist' approach to sports participation, attempting to encourage all Norwegians (and particularly children and young people) to become involved in physical activity. Sports make up an integral part of the Norwegian government's plan for creating a healthy society.³²

The umbrella organisation through which all national sporting activities are run is the *Idrettsforbundet*, also known as the *Norges Idrettsforbund og Olympiske Komité* (The Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of

Sports) or NIF. One of the main ways in which the government has attempted to achieve its policy of 'sports for all' is to sponsor the creation of sporting facilities wherever these are needed. While there has been some critique of the logic underpinning this policy,³³ the NIF has been very successful in reaching out to young people across Norway, at least in terms of sports membership. In 2007, 21% of the NIF's membership of two million people were children aged 6-12. A further 16% was made up of young people aged 13-19. Among children in general, figures for 2007 suggest that 86% of children and young people belong to some form of sports club (a considerable increase from approximately 40% in the 1970s).

While these figures are promising, other aspects of the NIF's approach to engaging children and young people in sport have been criticised. It has been suggested, for example, that the centralised approach to sports in Norway means some sport activities are marginalised. In turn, this could lead some children and young people to become disengaged with sport. Critiques have also been levied at the emphasis placed on elite sports in Norway. While the government is keen to emphasise its investment in 'mass' sporting activities, there is evidence that in reality more energy is focused on developing a smaller elite community of athletes capable of competing and representing Norway on the international stage. Some would suggest that elite sports encourage sports participation on a mass scale; but as Dag Vidar Hanstad (Norwegian School of Sport Sciences) suggests, there is not necessarily a direct relationship between these two aspects of Norwegian sport.³⁴ Other academics in the realm of Nordic sports studies have also pointed to the fact that participation in sports is highly gendered in Norway, with more boys enjoying sports participation than girls.³⁵

Recent WHO data provide some interesting insights into this latter issue. Among Norwegian children aged 11, 19% of girls and 16% of boys consider their level of health to be fair or poor. At age 15, this increases to 21% of girls and 15% of boys. When discussing levels of physical activity, 17% of 11 year-old boys and 27% of girls agreed that they did at least one hour of moderate to vigorous exercise daily. This decreases to 13% for boys and only 7% for girls at age 15. In terms of obesity, only 7% of girls and 10% of boys consider themselves obese according to BMI. At age 15, this increases slightly for girls (8%) but quite significantly for boys (16%). Interestingly, the figures are much higher for both genders in terms of perceived

³⁰ Brandth, B., & Kvande, E. (1997) *Masculinity and child care: The reconstruction of fathering*. Dragvoll: Senter for kvinneforskning, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet.

³¹ See also West, C. and Zimmerman, D.H. (1987) Doing gender, *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125-48

³² Norwegian Directorate for Health (2010) Health Promotion: Achieving good health for All.

³³ Nicholson, M., Hoye, R. & Houlihan, B. (Eds.) *Participation in sport: international policy perspectives*. Routledge

³⁴ Hanstad, D. & Skille, E. (2010) Does Elite Sport Develop Mass Sport? A Norwegian Case Study, *Scandinavian sport studies forum*, 1, 51-68.

³⁵ Bøhn, P.K. (2000) *Motivation in children: the effect of achievement goal values and the perception of parents' achievement goal values on the nature of boys and girls involvement in sport*. Oslo: Norges idrettshøgskole.

‘fatness’: 50% of girls and 23% of boys aged 15 agree that they are ‘fat’ in Norway. There is evidence, then, that both objective levels of health and perceptions of health and body image are perhaps lower than they could be in the Norwegian context, particularly for girls.³⁶

1.2 Norwegian national survey

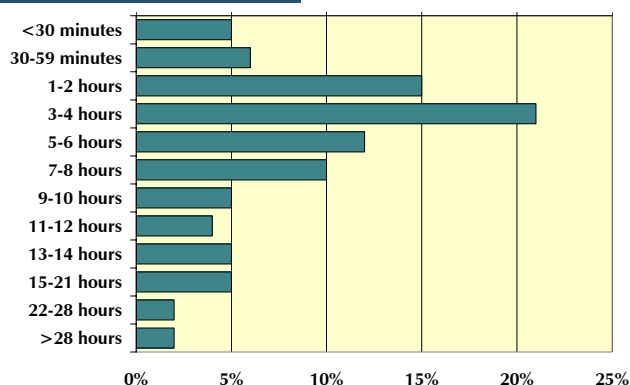
1.2.1 Introduction

Over 500 Norwegian mothers were surveyed – their distribution in terms of age, number of children, etc. being representative of the nation as a whole. The resulting data are summarised below.

1.2.2 Current free time

The amounts of time that Norwegian mothers have to themselves without obligations to do something for others are shown in Figure 1. We can see that the largest group (21%) has between 3 and 4 hours of free time per week – the average across the sample is 6.7 hours per week, the second highest found in Western Europe.

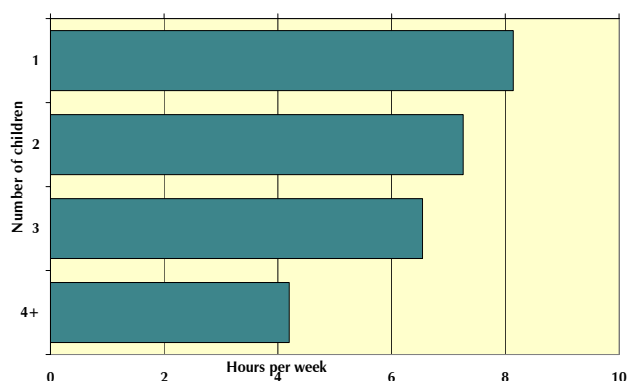
Figure 1. Amounts of free time



Norwegian mothers have almost an hour per day free to themselves.

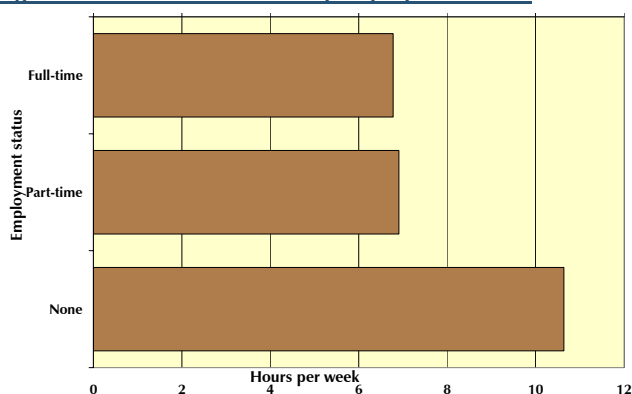
The amount of free time that a mother has varies, as we might expect, with the number of children in the family. We can see from Figure 2 that mothers with only one child have, on average, 8.13 hours of free time per week, compared with 4.2 hours for those with four children or more.

Figure 2. Amounts of free time by number of children



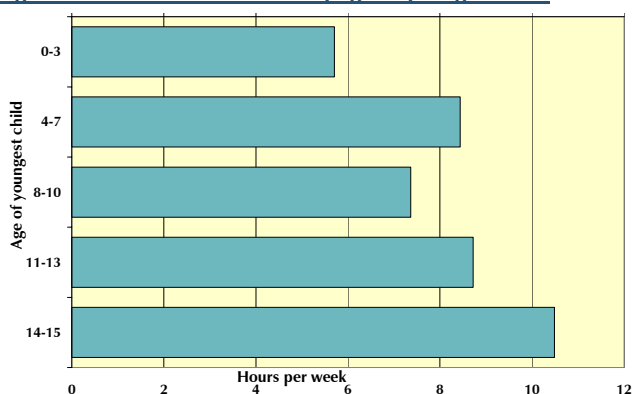
The amount of free time also varies quite considerably with the employment status of the mother, as shown in Figure 3. Mothers without paid employment outside the home had, on average, 10.6 hours of free time per week, compared with 6.8 and 6.9 hours per week for those in full-time and part-time work respectively.

Figure 3. Amounts of free time by employment status



Further variation is evident depending on the age of the youngest child, as shown in Figure 4

Figure 4. Amounts of free time by age of youngest child

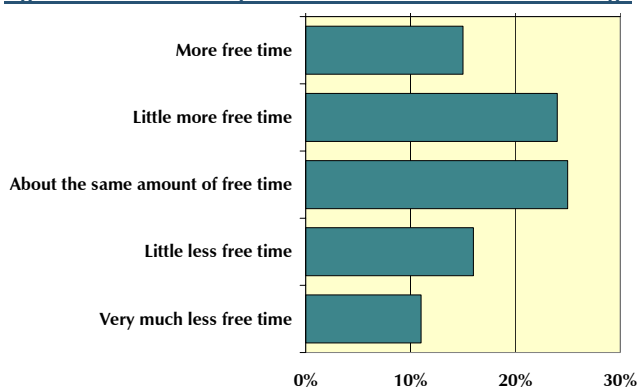


From Figure 4 we can see that mothers whose youngest child was age 3 years or younger had, on average, 5.7 hours of free time per week. This compares with 10.5 hours per week for mothers whose youngest child was aged 14 or 15.

³⁶ WHO (2010) *Health Policy for Children and Adolescents*. World Health Organization.

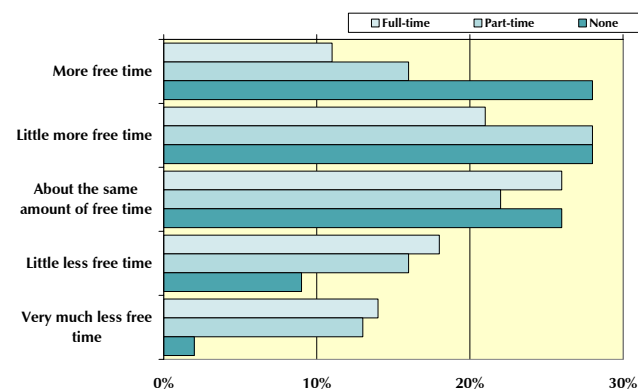
While the amount of free time available to Norwegian mothers varied according to their circumstances, they were divided on whether they more or less free time than did their own mothers at the same life stage. We can see from Figure 5 that slightly more (39%) mothers thought that they had greater amounts of free time than those who felt they had less – 27%. A quarter felt that the amount of free time had not changed since their mother’s day.

Figure 5. Free time compared to own mother at same life stage



Norwegian mothers who felt that they had more free time than their own mothers tended to be those without employment outside of the home, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Free time compared to own mother at same life stage by employment status

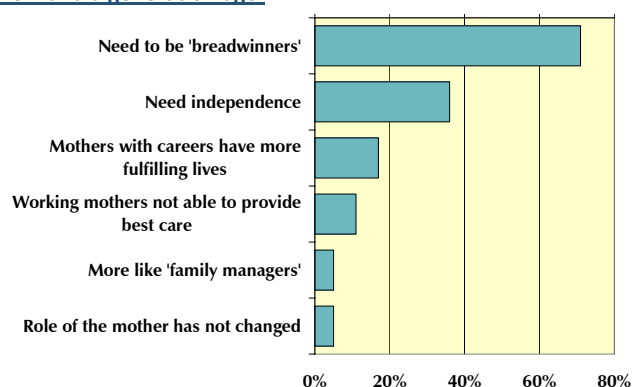


1.2.3 Perceptions of change

The major changes perceived by mothers to have occurred since the previous generation are summarised in Figure 7. Here we can see that the most popular feeling, by 71% of respondents, is that mothers now have increasingly to be ‘breadwinners’ and contribute to the family’s income. A further 36% of mothers identified the need for independence to pursue their own interests. Only 5% thought that the role of the mother had remained unchanged since the previous generation.

Mothers today have to be breadwinners, but need independence to pursue their own interests.

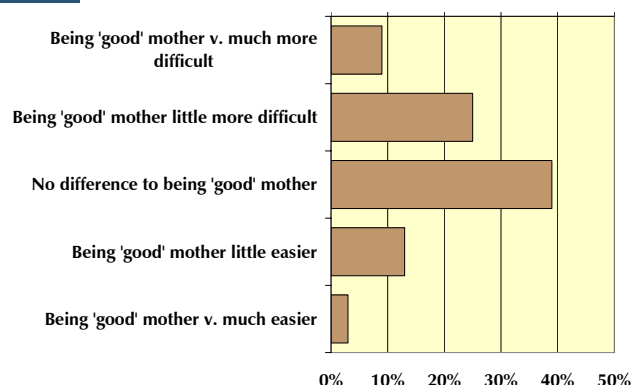
Figure 7. Perceptions of differences between being a mother now and a generation ago.



1.2.4 Impact of the recent economic conditions

The assessments on the extent to which the recent economic conditions have made it easier or harder to be a ‘good’ mother are shown in Figure 8. We can see here while 34% of Norwegian mothers think that the current economic conditions have made being a ‘good’ mother more difficult, 15% feel that they have made it easier.

Figure 8. Impact of economic conditions on ability to be a ‘good’ mother.



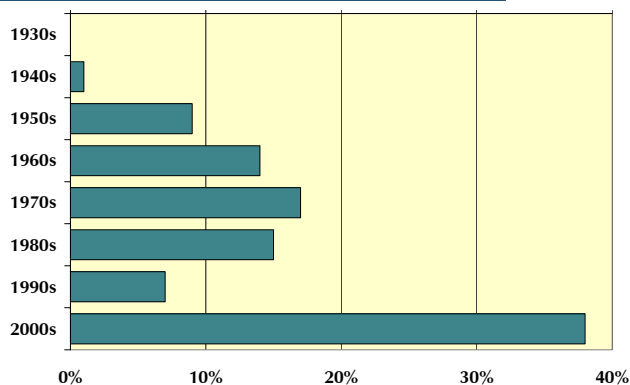
Norway, of course, has fared much better than many Western European countries in terms of recent changes in economic conditions. Nonetheless, the number of Norwegian mothers who are finding it harder to live up to the ideal of a ‘good’ mother still outweighs those who now find it less difficult.

1.2.5 The ‘ideal’ decade

Respondents to the survey were offered a hypothetical time machine in which they could return to a previous time in the past 80 years. Which decade would they select as being ‘ideal’ for motherhood?

The responses are summarised in Figure 9. Here we can see that relatively few Norwegian mothers are interested in travelling very far back in time – 38% would go no further back than the 2000s. The 1970s was the second-most popular decade, but not a single mother wanted to return to the 1930s – an age, perhaps, in which modern domestic conveniences that make their lives so much easier and richer were far less in evidence.

Figure 9. The ideal decade in which to be a mother.

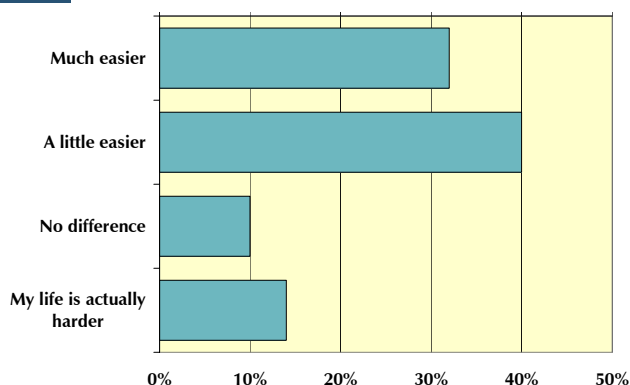


Most Norwegian mothers prefer to live in a 'modern' age – the 2000's being the favourite decade – and none would wish to be a mother in the 1930s.

1.2.6 Labour-saving devices and impact on time use

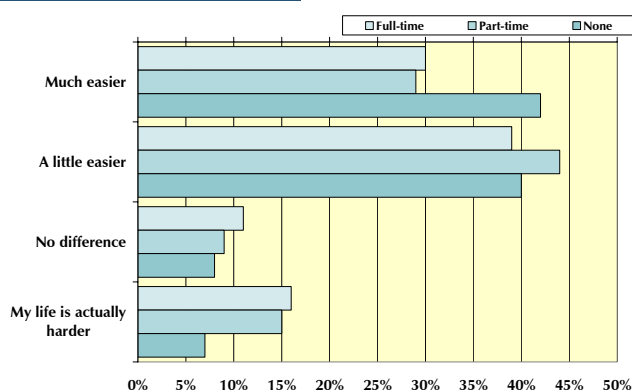
The extent to which Norwegian mothers feel that their lives have been made easier and richer because of labour-saving devices and products is illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Extent to which life is easier because of labour-saving devices



Here we can see that a large majority (72%) of Norwegian mothers feel that life is now much easier or a little easier than in their own mothers' day and only 14% think that it is actually harder. This was the case for mothers of all ages and independent of the number and ages of children in the family. There were, however, small differences according to employment status, as shown in Figure 11. Here we can see that mothers in full-time employment were slightly less willing to say that life was now easier because of labour-saving devices, and slightly more likely to say that it was harder, compared with mothers who were not in paid employment.

Figure 11. Extent to which life is easier because of labour-saving devices by employment status

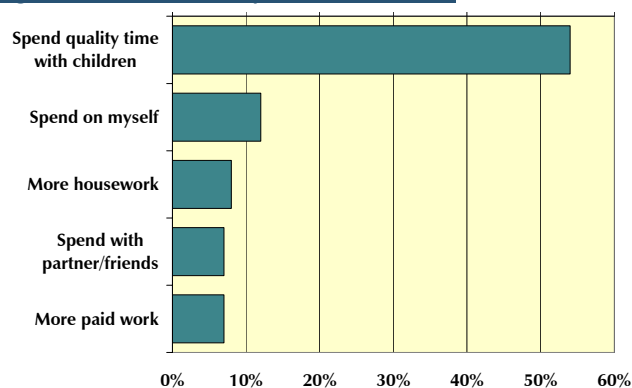


Nearly three quarters of Norwegian mothers feel that labour-saving devices and products have made their lives easier and richer compared with the lives of their own mothers.

Given that labour-saving devices and products have made life easier for the large majority of Norwegian mothers, what do they do with the time saved by such devices and products?

We can see from Figure 12 that a majority (54%) of Norwegian mothers say that they are able to spend more quality time with their child or children because of labour-saving devices. Only 12% spend the time saved on themselves.

Figure 12. How mothers spend the time saved

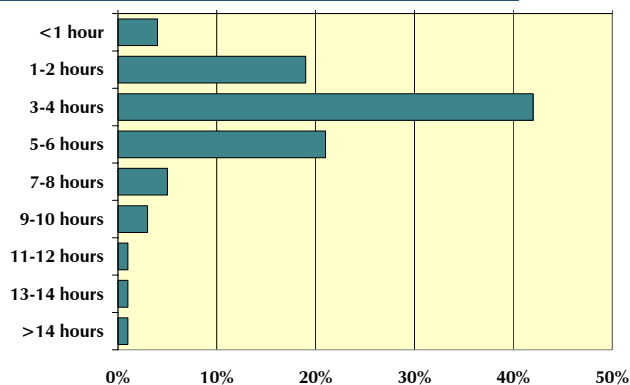


The time saved by modern appliances and products is mostly spent on quality time with children.

1.2.7 Active time with children

Given that most mothers recognise the advantages that labour- and time-saving devices and products bring, and spent the time saved mostly with their children, how much of the day do mothers actually spend in activities such as reading, playing, dressing etc. with their children? The responses to a question in the survey focusing on this issue are summarised in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Hours per day of active time with children

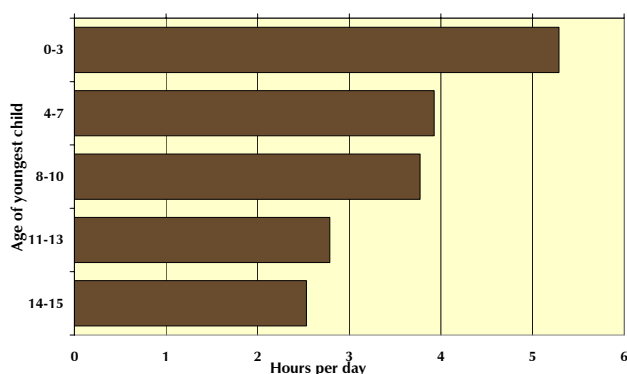


From Figure 13 we can see that the largest group of Norwegian mothers (42%) spend between 3 and 4 hours per day of active time with their children – the average is 4.2 hours per day.

Norwegian mothers spend over 4 hours per day of active time with their children.

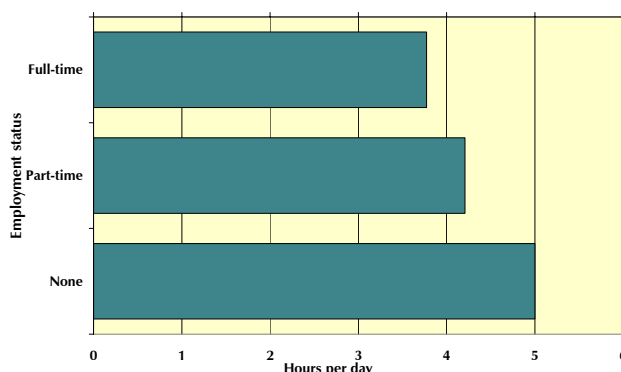
As we might expect, the amount of active time required of a mother varies according to the age of the youngest child, as shown in Figure 14. Here we can see that the average time spent by mother with a youngest child aged 3 years or less is 5.3 hours, compared with 2.5 hours for mothers whose young child is aged 14 to 15.

Figure 14. Hours per day of active time with children by age of youngest child.



There were also variations according to the employment status of the mother, as shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15. Hours per day of active time with children by employment status.



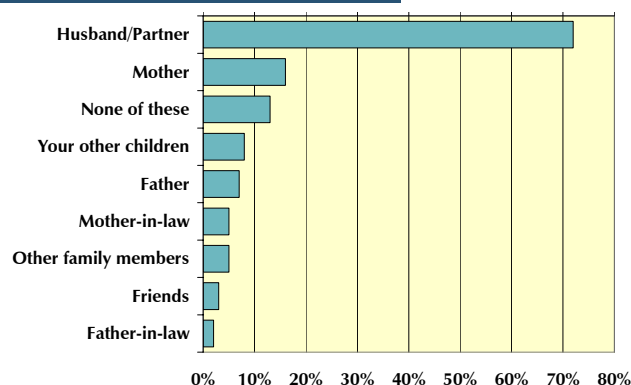
From Figure 15 we can see that mother in full-time employment spend, on average, 3.8 active hours per day with their children, compared with 5.0 hours for mothers who have no employment outside of the home.

Norwegian mothers who work full-time spend less active time with their children than non-working mothers.

1.2.8 Help in the home

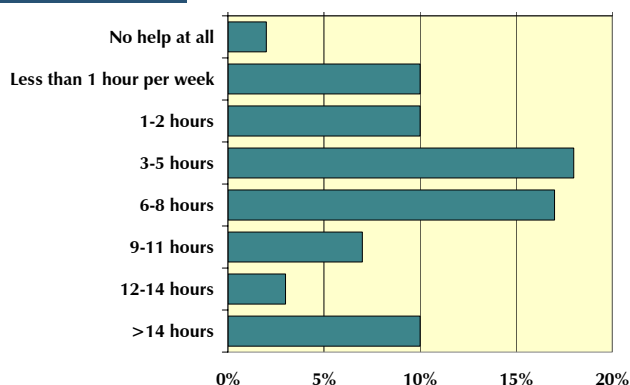
The sources of help with childcare for a Norwegian mother are summarised in Figure 16. Here we can see that the husband or partner is the biggest source of help, followed by the mother's own mother (16%). There is, however, a sizeable minority of mothers (13%) who appear to receive no help at all from others, or receive help from unconventional sources.

Figure 16. Sources of help with childcare



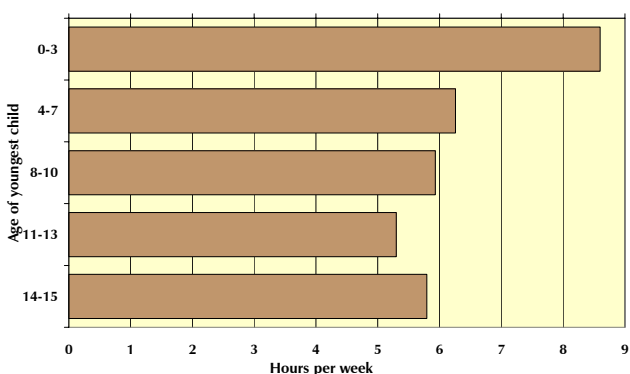
The actual amount of time that husbands or partners provide by way of help with childcare and domestic chores is illustrated in Figure 17. Here we can see that the largest groups of mothers receive between 3 and 8 hours per week of help – the average is 6.4 hours per week, or just under 1 hour per day.

Figure 17. Hours per week of help provided by husbands/partners



Mothers with very young children receive more help from their husbands or partners than those with older children, as shown in Figure 18. Here we can see that mothers with a youngest child aged 3 or under receive, on average, 8.6 hours per week of help, those with a youngest child aged between 11 and 13 receive only 5.3 hours of help.

Figure 18. Hours per week of help provided by husbands/partners by age of youngest child



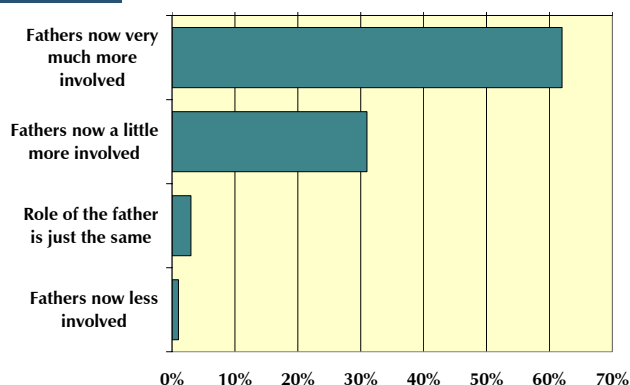
Norwegian husbands or partners provide an hour of help per day with childcare and domestic chores.

1.2.9 The role of the father.

There was an overwhelming majority (93%) of respondents in the Norwegian survey who felt that fathers were now more directly involved in childcare than in previous generation, as shown in Figure 19. Nearly two thirds (62%) felt that they were now *very much* more involved and only 1% thought that they were now less involved.

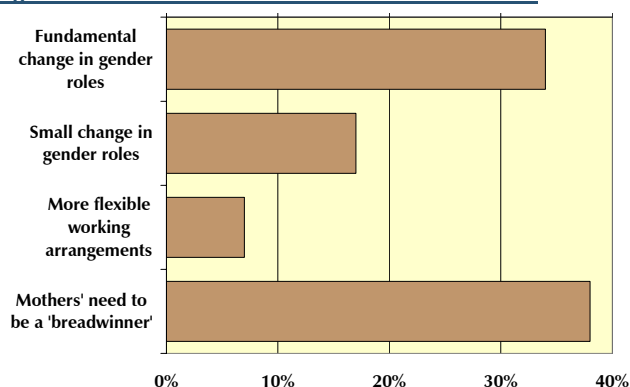
Fathers are now more involved in childcare in Norwegian families than in the past.

Figure 19. Involvement of fathers compared with previous generations.



The reasons given for this increase in fathers' involvement are summarised in Figure 20. Here we can see that while 34% of Norwegian mothers attribute the change to a fundamental shift in gender roles in society, and 17% to a small shift in gender roles, it is the need for mothers today to be a 'breadwinner' and contribute to the family's income that is the important factor (38%).

Figure 20. Reasons for fathers' increased involvement.

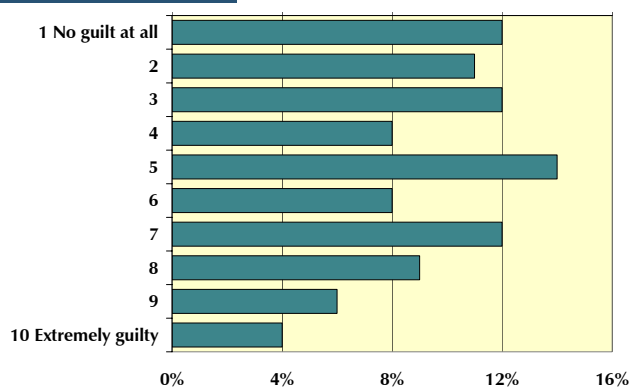


Fathers' increased involvement in childcare is due to changes in gender roles and to the fact that more Norwegian mothers now have to go out to work.

1.2.10 Maternal guilt

With more Norwegian mothers now seeing themselves as 'breadwinners', and increasing numbers in full- or part-time employment, the need to maintain a work/home life balance becomes an issue for many. One of the products of this may be a sense of guilt felt by mothers. We can see from Figure 21 that most mothers (78%) experience at least a degree of guilt, and 4% experience extreme feelings of guilt. The average level on a 10 point scale ranging from '1- no guilt at all' to '10 – Extremely guilty' is 4.9.

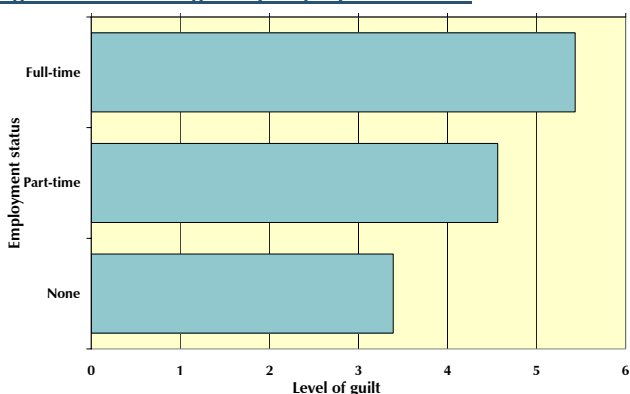
Figure 21. Levels of guilt



The majority of Norwegian mothers feel guilty about how they balance working and home life.

Mothers who work full-time experience the greatest levels of guilt (guilt score of 5.4), as shown in Figure 22. Mothers who are not employed outside of the home have the lowest guilt scores of 3.4.

Figure 22. Levels of guilt by employment status.



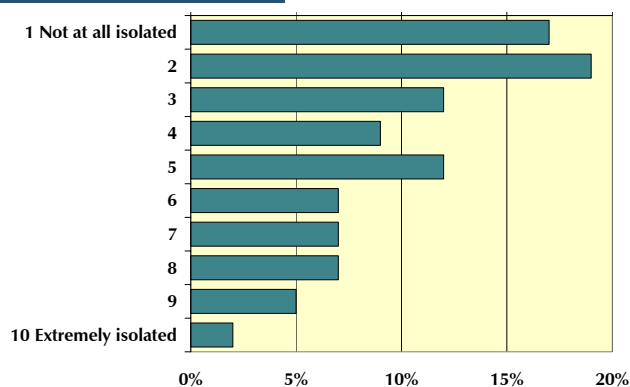
Norwegian mothers in full-time employment feel the most guilty.

1.2.11 Maternal isolation

In addition to feelings of guilt, the majority of Norwegian mothers (83%) also experience a degree of isolation, as shown in Figure 23. The average score on a scale ranging from '1 – Not at all isolated' to '10 – Extremely isolated' is 4.1.

Such isolation is experienced most by mothers who do not go out to work (average score of 4.5) and the least by mothers working full-time (average score of 3.9). There is, it seems, a dilemma for Norwegian mothers. If they go out to work they are likely to feel guilty about neglecting their children. If they stay at home they are likely to feel isolated and unsupported.

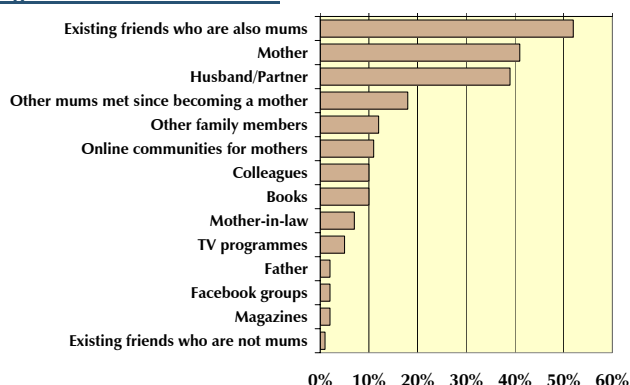
Figure 23. Levels of isolation.



Support and advice

Whether they go out to work or stay at home with their children, all mothers need people to whom they can turn for advice and support. But who? We can see from Figure 24 that a majority of mothers (52%) say that they turn mostly to existing friends who are also mothers for advice. The mother's own mother is a first choice for 41%. Husbands and partners rank third in this hierarchy while other family members, online communities and forums and work colleagues provide advice for only a minority of mothers.

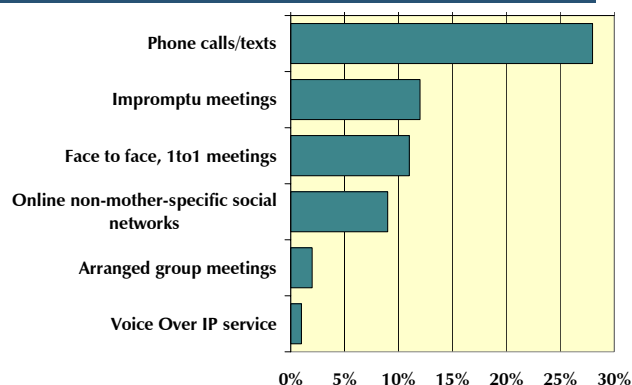
Figure 24. Sources of advice.



Norwegian mothers turn first to their friends who are also mothers and then to their own mothers for advice and support.

As well as needing support and advice, Norwegian mothers also need channels of communication through which they can stay in touch with their support networks. For the largest group of mothers (28%) this involves nothing more than phone calls or text messages, as shown in Figure 25. Impromptu meetings, such as bumping into people in the street, are the most common way of keeping in touch for 12% of mothers while 11% prefer arranged face-to-face, one-to-one meetings.

Figure 25. Means of keeping in touch with support network.

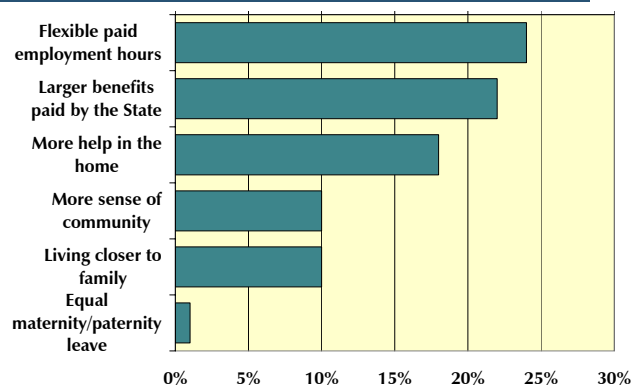


1.2.12 Improving the mother’s quality of life

Respondents in the Norwegian survey were asked to select ways in which their lives could most be improved. Their choices are summarised in Figure 26. Here we can see that the largest group (24%) felt that their lives would be improved if more in the way of flexible working hours were available, followed by 22% who thought that increased state benefits would be the way forward. More help in the home was the choice of the third largest group (18%).

The need for flexible working hours was most acutely felt by mothers in full-time employment (29%), compared with only 8% of those who were not currently working outside of the home.

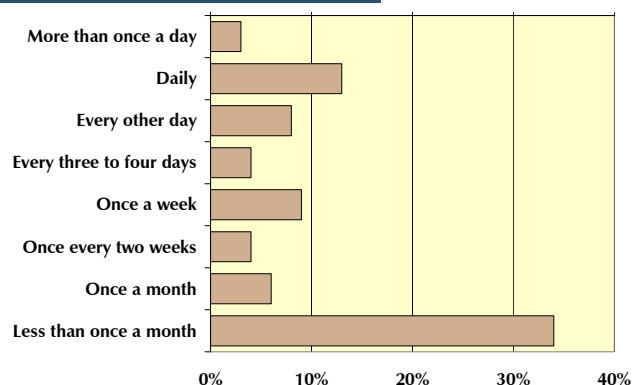
Figure 26. Ways in which mothers’ lives could be improved.



1.2.13 Attitude to gratitude

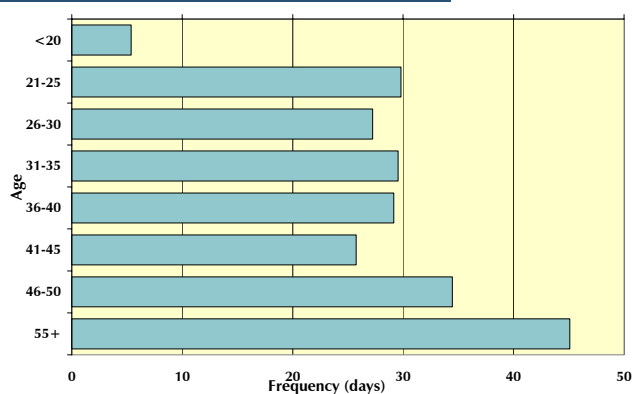
The frequency with which Norwegian mothers are actually thanked for what they do is shown in Figure 27. Here we can see that the largest group of mothers (34%) receives thanks less frequently than once every month. The average is once every 19 days.

Figure 27. Frequency of being thanked



Younger mothers tend to receive thanks rather more frequently than do older mothers, as shown in Figure 28. Mothers under the age of 20 years are thanked, on average, every 5.4 days while those aged over 55 have to wait, on average, for 45.1 days

Figure 28. Frequency of being thanked by age



There are also some variations according to the employment status of the mother. Those in full-time employment receive thanks every 27.9 days while those who do not work outside of the home are thanked less frequently – every 32.5 days.

The ways in which mothers prefer to be thanked are shown in

Here we can see that the largest group (45%) prefer to receive a hug while a simple ‘Thank you’ is the choice of the second largest group (12%). Help with child care or an evening off from childcare are also significant preferences, while gifts and flowers are not seen as welcome. Not a single Norwegian mother thought that a card constituted an appropriate way of being thanked.

Figure 29. Preferred ways of being thanked.

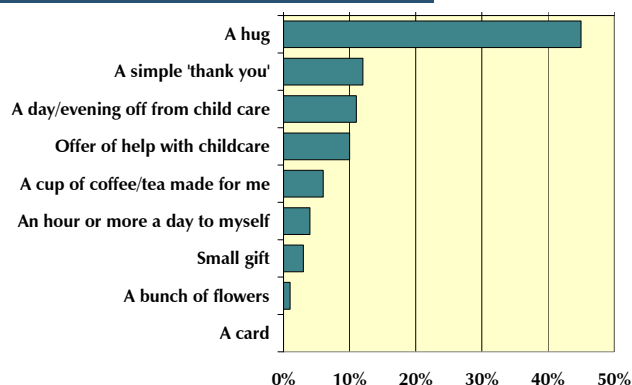
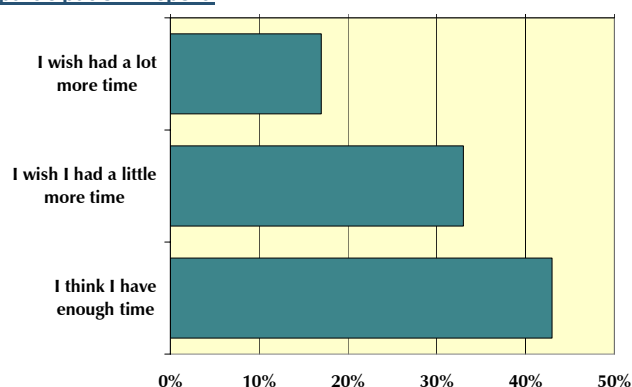


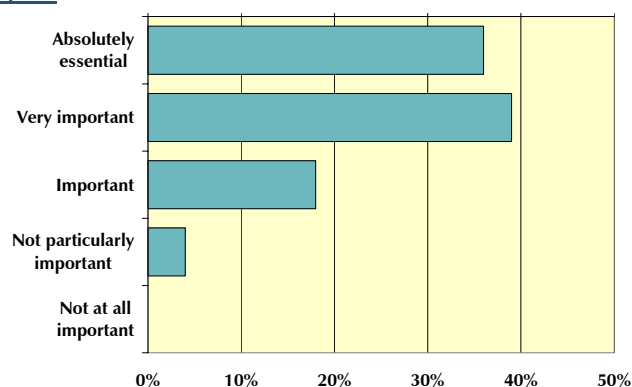
Figure 31. Satisfaction with time available to encourage participation in sport.



1.2.14 Sport

Mothers in the Norwegian survey were asked about the importance of encouraging participation in sports by their children to aid their development and well-being. We can see from Figure 30 that an overwhelming majority of mothers (93%) rated such encouragement as essential or important. Not a single Norwegian other rated such encouragement as not at all important.

Figure 30. Importance of encouraging children's participation in sport.



Such was the consensus on this issues that accurate analysis of the reasons given for not feeling the importance of encouraging children's participation in sports is impossible due to the small numbers. The reasons included, however, the feeling that there was too much emphasis on winning in children's sports and that participation would take up too much of a child's time at the expense of his or her pursuit of academic achievement.

While nearly all mothers agreed that encouraging their children to participate in sport was desirable, many wished that they had more time to do so, as shown in Figure 31. Here we can see that while 43% of mothers felt that they had sufficient time, 50% wished that they had more. The need for more time in this context was most acutely felt by mother working full-time (56%) compared with 37% of the non-working mothers.