

# NatCen

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## Time-use patterns and parental wellbeing: UK evidence

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# Outline

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- Motivation for the project
- Research questions
- Early findings

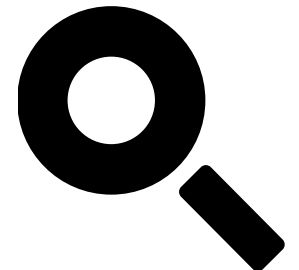
# Policy context and previous research



# Societal context

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- Increases in maternal labour market participation
- More egalitarian gender-role attitudes towards paid work and domestic work
- Cultural shift towards more time-intensive, child-centred parenting
- Normative expectations around ‘a participative father’



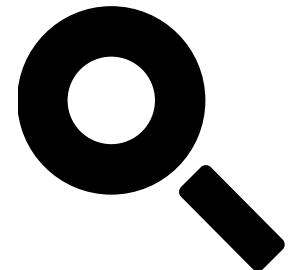
# Policy developments in UK

“Time to care”:

- Maternity leave, paternity leave, shared parental leave
- Flexible working

“Time to work”:

- Expansion of formal childcare
  - Free hours for 3-4 year olds and 2 year olds from lower income families
  - Support with childcare costs through tax credits



# Subjective wellbeing

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- Global wellbeing
  - *Evaluative*: life satisfaction, job satisfaction, satisfaction with work-life balance, happiness in general etc.
  - *Eudemonic*: e.g. feeling life is worthwhile
  - *Hedonic*: happiness, sadness, anxiety, anger, stress etc.
- (Momentary wellbeing)
  - Subjective wellbeing in a particular *moment*
    - Enjoyment, anxiety, stress etc.

# Parental wellbeing

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- Parents v non-parents: most studies suggest lower levels of subjective wellbeing for parents
  - Across different domains: happiness, life satisfaction, depression, anxiety, anger etc.
  - Both mothers and fathers
  - Mothers have lower levels of wellbeing than fathers

# Wellbeing gap

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- Theories of stress and mental health (Pearlin 1989)
- Parenthood provides parents with meaning, identity and social connections BUT
- Parenthood also increases exposure to stressors
  - Financial strain
  - Sleep deprivation
  - Work-family conflict
  - Increased demands on time and energy
- Institutional support for parenthood (subsidised childcare, paid time off) can reduce the happiness gap between parents and non-parents (Glass et al. 2016)



# Research questions and datasets



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# Research questions

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- What is the relationship between time-use patterns (amounts of time spent on different activities, fragmentation and multitasking) and parental wellbeing?
- What is the role of household composition (single v partnered, number of children, age of youngest child)?
- Does it matter what the other parent does with their time (contribution to paid work, housework and childcare)?

# Hypotheses

- Parents with higher demands on their time and energy (measured as time spent on paid work, housework and childcare) will have lower wellbeing
- Fragmentation of time and multitasking will have negative associations with wellbeing
- Parents with more/younger children and single parents will have lower wellbeing
- Partner's contribution to housework and childcare activities will be positively associated with parental wellbeing as it will alleviate time pressures

# Data: UK Time Use Survey 2014/15

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- 2,032 parents with a child aged 16 or younger in household
  - 1,191 mothers and 841 fathers
    - 788 partnered mothers with partner data
    - 794 partnered fathers with partner data
- Analysis at individual level or episode level
- Not all measures of wellbeing available for all parents

**Early findings**



**3.**

# Global measures of wellbeing

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## ■ Evaluative wellbeing

- How dissatisfied or satisfied would you say you are with your life overall? (7-point ordinal scale)
- How dissatisfied or satisfied would you say you are with your work-life/work-family balance? (7-point scale)
- How stressed do you normally feel? (always/sometimes/never)
- How rushed do you normally feel? (always/sometimes/never)

## ■ Eudemonic wellbeing

- To what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile? (0..10)

## ■ Hedonic wellbeing

- How happy did you feel yesterday? (0..10)
- How anxious did you feel yesterday? (0..10)

# Explanatory variables and covariates

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- Time-use patterns - respondent:
  - Paid work, sleep, leisure, housework (core / non-routine), childcare (physical / interactive / other)
  - Fragmentation and multitasking
- Household-level socio-demographics:
  - Couple v single, number of children, age of youngest child
- Time-use patterns – partner:
  - Paid work, housework, childcare
- Gender
- Controls: age, education, general health

# Life satisfaction

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- Slightly lower life satisfaction among mothers before controls:
  - 65% of mothers and 73% of fathers mostly/completely satisfied
- (*significant*)
  - Fragmentation, sleep
  - Living with a partner (mothers only), having 3 or more children
- (*non-significant*)
  - All other time-use variables, gender, age of children
- Partner's time allocations
  - Mothers: partner's time use n.s.
  - Fathers: positive effect from mothers doing more core housework



# Satisfaction with work-life balance (1)

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- Similar levels of satisfaction among mothers and fathers
  - 41% of mothers and 39% of fathers mostly/completely satisfied
  - 9% of both mostly/completely dissatisfied

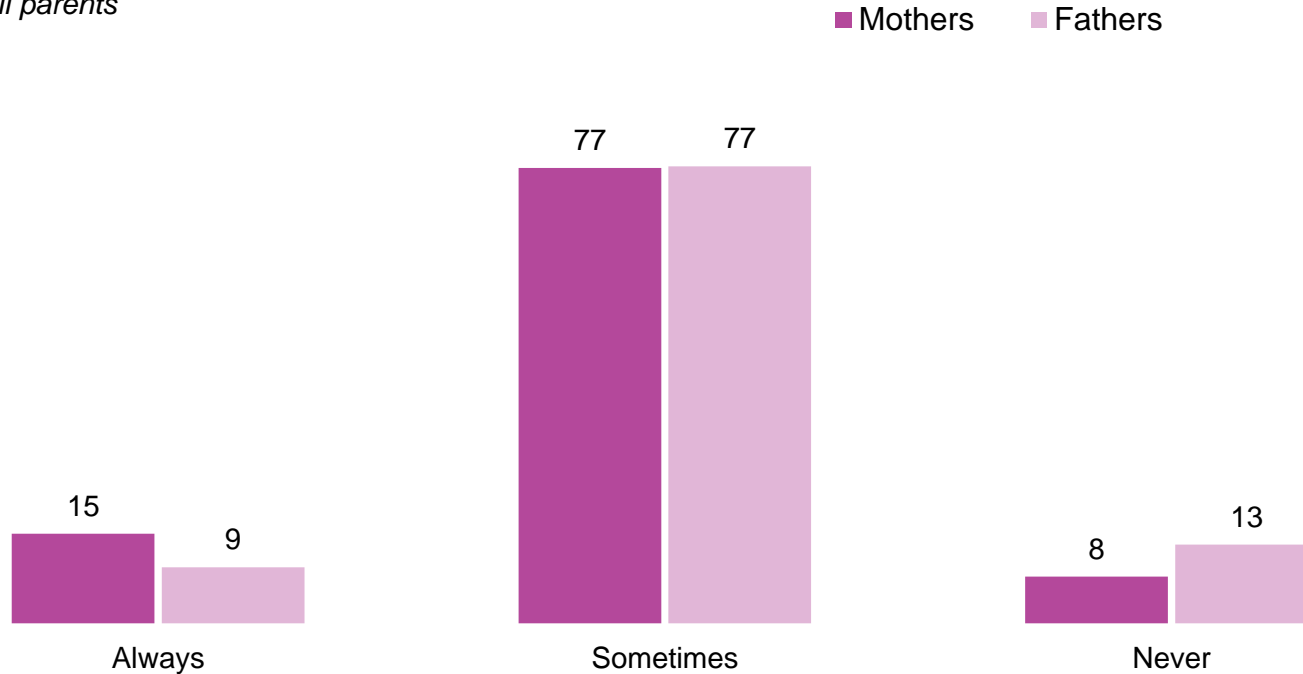
# Satisfaction with work-life balance (2)

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- *(significant)*
  - More sleep → more satisfied
  - More leisure, core housework and other childcare → more satisfied; more multitasking – less satisfied (marginally significant)
  - Paid work – increases satisfaction with WLB for fathers but not mothers
- *(non-significant)*
  - Gender, household composition, fragmentation of time
- Partner's time allocations
  - Mothers: positive effects from fathers doing more non-routine housework and interactive childcare
  - Fathers: negative effects from mothers doing more non-routine housework and more physical childcare (marginally significant)

# Feeling stressed

Base: All parents



■ Mothers are more stressed than fathers

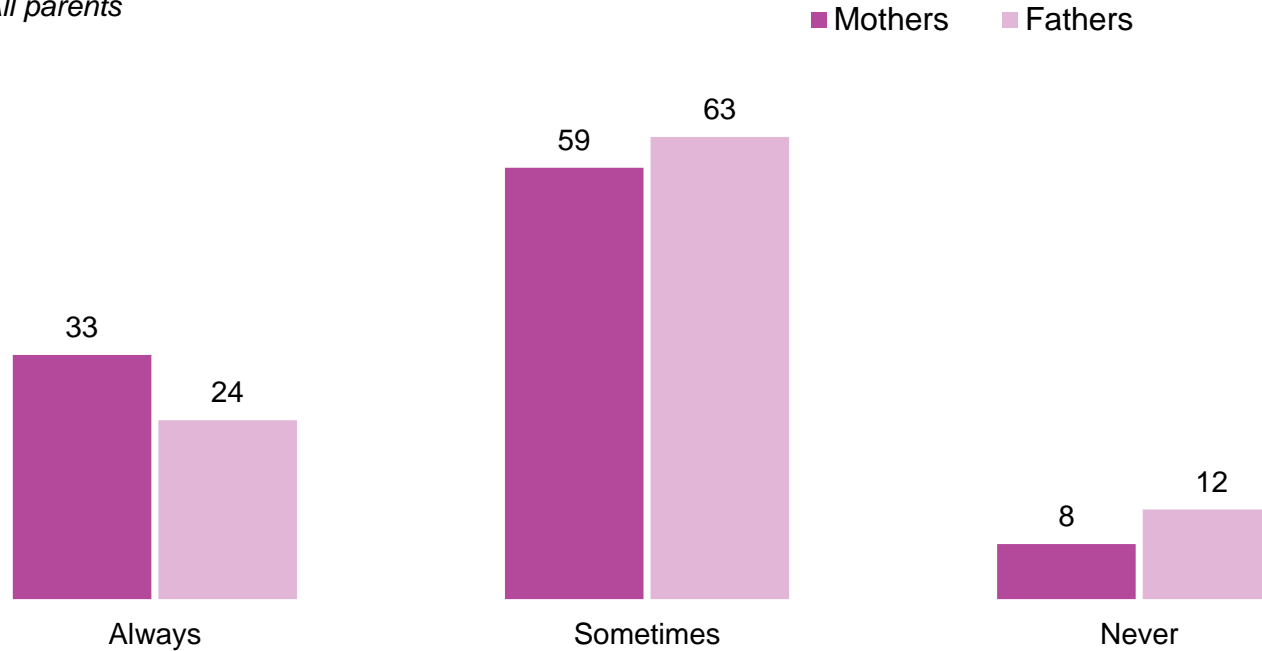
# Feeling stressed

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- (*significant*)
  - More non-routine housework → more stress (both parents)  
BUT (for fathers only) more core housework → less stress
  - (Mothers only) More other childcare → more stress
  - Gender
- (*non-significant*)
  - All other time-use variables, household composition
- Partner's time allocations
  - Mothers: fathers' time use n.s. but controlling for that, negative association between sleep and stress for coupled mothers
  - Fathers: mothers' time use n.s.

# Feeling rushed

Base: All parents



■ Mothers feel rushed more often than fathers

# Feeling rushed

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- (*significant*)
  - Sleep, leisure, other childcare
  - Gender
- (*non-significant*)
  - Paid work, housework, multitasking, fragmentation
  - Household composition
- Partner's time allocations
  - Mothers: fathers spending more time on paid work → mothers are more rushed; fathers spending more time on interactive childcare → mothers more rushed (puzzling?)
  - Fathers: those whose partners spend more time on non-routine housework more likely to feel rushed

# Things in life are worthwhile

- Mothers' and fathers' mean scores are the same (7.9)
- (*significant*)
  - Hours of core housework (for mothers only) (puzzling?)
- (*non-significant*)
  - All other time use variables, gender, household composition
- Partner's time allocations
  - Mothers: fathers doing more physical childcare and more paid work increases mothers' eudemonic wellbeing
  - Fathers: mothers' time-use patterns n.s.

# Feeling happy (yesterday)

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- Mothers and fathers report similar levels of happiness (7.3, 7.4)
- Mothers:
  - Those doing more core housework and more physical childcare feeling happier
  - No association with household composition or other time use indicators
- Fathers:
  - No associations with time use or household composition
- Mothers in couples: positive effect from fathers doing more other childcare
- Fathers in couples: negative effect from mothers doing more other childcare



# Feeling anxious (yesterday)

- Similar levels of anxiety among mothers and fathers (3.0, 3.1)
- Mothers:
  - Interactive childcare is associated with reduced anxiety
  - Other childcare is associated with increased anxiety
  - Having a child under 5 increases anxiety
- Fathers:
  - More hours of core housework – higher anxiety
  - Higher fragmentation of time – less anxiety
  - More multitasking – less anxiety
  - Living with a partner – increased anxiety
- Coupled mothers: fathers doing more interactive childcare → less anxiety in mothers
- Coupled fathers: mothers doing more other childcare → more anxiety

# Discussion



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# Reflections

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- No consistent evidence that additional time pressures necessarily reduce parental wellbeing
- Lack of associations between outcome and explanatory variables, some associations being in the opposite direction
- Inconsistent patterns across different measures of wellbeing
- Inconsistent patterns between mothers and fathers, for both own time use and that of the partner
- Mechanisms linking parental wellbeing and time use are likely to be more complex than hypothesised

# Thank you

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# Analysis sample

	2015	
	Fathers	Mothers
<b>Age (mean)</b>	40.9	38.2
<b>Number of children (mean)</b>	1.8	1.7
<b>Partnered status</b>		
Partnered (%)	96.8	80.5
Single (%)	3.2	19.5
<b>Employment status</b>		
Not working (%)	8.7	29.8
Part time (%)	5.8	31.5
Self employed (%)	19.5	7.7
Full time (%)	66.0	31.1
<b>Highest qualification</b>		
Degree or higher (%)	30.1	33.9
Higher education (%)	17.5	16.8
A level or equivalent (%)	18.0	23.1
Secondary or other (%)	34.4	26.2

# Appendix: Project details

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- National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)
  - Dr Svetlana Speight (PI), Allison Dunatchik (Co-I), Robert Wishart
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