

1.2 Million Mums Stay At Home Due To High Childcare Costs

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As family budgets grow increasingly stretched, and dual incomes become ever more necessary, exclusive research by Mintel into lifestyles of mums in the UK finds today, more than six in ten (61%) mums return to work because they simply can not afford to stay at home after childbirth.

While financial needs topped the reason why mums went back to work, less than one in ten (9%) said they were able to return to work because they had found affordable childcare.

Aside from economic reasons, keeping the mind active (28%), being more independent (25%) and not wanting to give up a career (21%) were the other main reasons for returning to the workplace. Moreover, less than one in twenty (4%) mums said their partner wanted to stay at home with the baby.

The biggest share (20%) of mums returned to work when their baby was between seven and twelve months and almost one in five (17%) returned to work when their baby was less than six months old. By contrast, just 8% returned once the child was five or older.

But while lack of income forces many women to return to the workplace, this year more mothers chose not to return to work after having a baby compared with 2011. Indeed, in September 2012, nearly a quarter (24%) of mothers reported they did not return to work after giving birth, up from 18% in June 2011.

For those mums who chose to stay at home, high childcare costs were a key reason for not returning to work - some six in ten (59%) stay-at-home mothers (amounting to an estimated 1.2 million mothers in the UK) did not return to paid employment because of these costs. The issue of high childcare costs featured most prominently (72%) amongst mums aged between 16 and 34.

Ina Mitsuakavets, Senior Consumer and Lifestyles Analyst at Mintel said:

“Job security is highly prized in the current climate of uncertainty with many mothers returning to work within the 12 months that their job has to be legally held open for them. Affordability of childcare, or lack of, is keeping lower-income mums and those with more children at home. Lower salaries are frequently not covering childcare costs, which are rising more rapidly than the average salary.”

However, some six in ten (61%) stay at home mums said that raising a family was more important than a career outside the home, and over half (54%) said they loved being a homemaker. But, for four in ten (40%) mums, not working poses a difficult position socially, as they say “I find myself justifying to others why I don’t work”. Less than one in five (17%) said they felt less equal than their partner and around one in ten (8%) believed not working was harming their career. Overall, some 65% of mums said parents should equally share responsibility for raising children.

The research also highlighted the pressure today’s mums place upon themselves to “have it all” - indeed, over a third (36%) of mums believe that they are faced with greater expectations than their own parents were and a quarter (26%) said they are under a lot of pressure to be a good parent and have a successful career. This proportion rises to 32% of younger mums aged 16-34.

The importance of family time to today’s mums is clear, as over half (52%) of today’s working mums say they would like spend more time with their children, compared with 39% of mums working part-time and 32% amongst stay-at-home mums.

Painting a picture of today’s family life, some 76% of mums said they tend to eat as a family, meaning that as many as 70% of mums are able to make sure their family have a healthy diet. Almost two thirds of mums (64%) said they help their children with their homework, while 61% make sure their children get regular exercise. And in an effort to stay connected with their family - half (50%) of all mothers said they buy things to do as a family, such as video games or board games.

“Having quality family experiences remains important, even in the wake of continued inflationary pressures and curbed spending on non-essentials. Playing video games with their offspring doesn’t only make the families closer, but also lets parents forget about their daily responsibilities and experience their own carefree childhood again.” Ina concluded.

Proving life is not a bed of roses for the nation’s kids - almost half (47%) of Britain’s mums make sure their children help out with household chores (47%) and one in three (28%) admit to being strict parents. Around a third (36%) limit the amount of time children spend online and 34% restrict the time their children watch TV. By contrast, around a fifth (21%) of British parents say their children are free to do what they want most of the time.

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