Parents and time pressure: Evidence from time diaries

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Common messages about modern parenting

Do we have to choose between being a good parent and good at our job?

Matt Beard

New parents face up to six years of sleep deprivation, study says

Data from thousands of men and women shows rest is at its worst three months after birth

Work-life balance 'increasingly stressful for fathers'

By Tom Espiner
Business reporter, BBC News
‘How often do you normally feel rushed?’

- **No children age 16 or younger in the household**
  - Never: 64%
  - Sometimes: 16%
  - Always: 20%

- **Has a child 16 or younger in household**
  - Never: 30%
  - Sometimes: 61%
  - Always: 9%

UKTUS 2014/15; respondents aged 18-64; N = 4,640
Research questions

- How pervasive is time pressure among UK parents?
- How have these patterns changed over the past 15 years (or not)?
- Which types of parents are most likely to experience time pressure?
- Does time pressure vary by parents’ use of flexible working?
Subjective measures of time pressure

1. **Rushedness**: “In general, how rushed do you normally feel? Always, sometimes or never.”
   - Provides a subjective measure of time pressure, how parents feel about their time and general pace of life
   - But may also capture other social phenomena → busyness as a badge of honour (Gershuny 2005)
Objective measures of time pressure

2. **Multitasking**: amount of time and proportion of the day parents spend doing more than one thing at a time

3. **Time fragmentation**: how frequently parents switch between different (primary) activities
   - Provides a more objective measure of time pressure derived from time diaries
   - Note: because of limitations in how paid work activities are recorded, multitasking and time fragmentation are calculated for parents’ non-paid work, waking time.
1. Parental time pressure in 2015
Rushedness

Data source: United Kingdom Time Use Survey 2014-15
Multitasking

Data source: United Kingdom Time Use Survey 2014-15
Multitasking by primary activity

Average proportion of non-sleep, non-paid work episodes multitasked, by primary activity type and gender (%)

- All activities*: 27% (Father), 29% (Mother)
- Housework**: 27% (Father), 30% (Mother)
- Childcare**: 27% (Father), 29% (Mother)
- Personal care**: 37% (Father), 38% (Mother)
- Leisure**: 29% (Father), 31% (Mother)
- Travel**: 23% (Father), 26% (Mother)

Significance: \( p < 0.05 = * \), \( p < 0.01 = ** \) (Comparison of mothers and fathers)

Data source: United Kingdom Time Use Survey 2014-15
Multitasking: childcare and housework

When multitasking housework:
- Mothers were more likely to combine with other housework tasks or childcare
- Fathers were more likely to combine with leisure

When multitasking childcare:
- Mothers were more likely to combine with other childcare activities
- Fathers were more likely to combine with leisure
Fragmentation by activity

Average episode duration, by primary activity type and gender (minutes)

- **Father**
  - All activities**: 43 minutes
  - Housework: 30 minutes
  - Childcare*: 33 minutes
  - Personal care: 28 minutes
  - Leisure**: 71 minutes
  - Travel**: 41 minutes

- **Mother**
  - All activities**: 38 minutes
  - Housework: 32 minutes
  - Childcare*: 30 minutes
  - Personal care: 29 minutes
  - Leisure**: 59 minutes
  - Travel**: 30 minutes

Data source: United Kingdom Time Use Survey 2014-15
Significance: $p < 0.05 = *, p < 0.01 = **$ (Comparison of mothers and fathers)
2. Has parental time pressure changed over time?
Has parental time pressure increased?

Not according to the measures analysed here:

- Parents were less likely to report feeling “always rushed” in 2015
- Parents spent less time multitasking in 2015
- Parents switched between activities less frequently in 2015
Rushedness

Significance: Between Mothers and fathers: $p < 0.05 = \ast$, $p < 0.01 = \ast\ast$,
Between years: $p < 0.05 = \dagger$, $p < 0.01 = \dagger\dagger$
Multitasking

Average time spent multitasking by gender, 2001-2015

Significance: Between Mothers and fathers: $p < 0.05 = *, p < 0.01 = **,$
Between years: $p < 0.05 = †, p < 0.01 = † †$
Fragmentation

Average episode duration by gender, 2001-2015

Significance: Between Mothers and fathers: $p < 0.05 = *, p < 0.01 = **$,
Between years: $p < 0.05 = †, p < 0.01 = † †$
3. Which parents are most likely to experience time pressure?
Analysis

Number of children:

- **Rushed:** The odds of feeling “always rushed” were 1.21 times greater for each additional child in the household among mothers; no association among fathers.
- **Multitasking:** Proportion of time spent multitasking decreased for each additional child among mothers; no association among fathers.
- **Fragmentation:** No association among mothers or fathers.

Age of children:

- **Rushed:** No association among mothers or fathers.
- **Multitasking:** Mothers with young children multitasked a greater proportion of their day; no association among fathers.
- **Fragmentation:** Mothers and fathers with young children switched tasks more frequently.

Education:

- **Rushed:** No association for mothers or fathers.
- **Multitasking:** Mothers with a degree multitasked a greater proportion of their day; no association among fathers.
- **Fragmentation:** Mothers and fathers with a degree switched tasks more frequently.
Analysis

Household type:

- **Rushed:** Mothers in dual full-time earner households were more likely to feel “always rushed” compared to mothers in sole-male breadwinner households; no association among fathers.

- **Multitasking:** Proportion of time spent multitasking lower among mothers in sole-male breadwinner, other and single households; no association among fathers.

- **Fragmentation:** Average episode duration shorter for mothers in dual full-time earner households compared to mothers in sole-male breadwinner and single households; no association among fathers.

Gender:

- **Rushed:** Mothers more likely to be “always rushed” compared to fathers.

- **Multitasking:** Mothers multitask a higher proportion of their day than fathers.

- **Fragmentation:** Average episode duration shorter among mothers.
Analysis – Flexible working

Finally, we explored whether flexible working, a major work-family reconciliation policy development in recent decades, is associated with parental time pressure.

- Focus on schedule flexibility exclusively due to data constraints
- Analysis on working parents only

Despite the aims of schedule flexibility, we found no statistically significant association between use of schedule flexibility and time pressure on any indicators analysed.

- However, findings cannot be interpreted as causal evidence of the effects of flexible working.
Conclusions

- Our results suggest considerable levels of time pressure among UK parents
- Contrary to expectations and popular discourse, we found no increases in time pressure along measures analysed
- We find substantial inequalities in time pressure among parents
  - Mothers
  - Dual full-time earners
  - Those with young children
- These inequalities suggest where future work-family policies are most needed and where they may have the greatest impact in parents’ lives.
Contact

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Appendix slides
Data: UK Time Use Survey 2000/01 and 2014/15

- Nationally representative household survey

- Sample:
  - 2014/15: 2,032 parents with a child aged 16 or younger in the household; 1,191 mothers and 841 fathers
  - 2000/01: 2,693 parents with a child aged 16 or younger in the household; 1,556 mothers and 1,137 fathers
Methods: multivariate analysis

Outcome measures

- Likelihood of feeling “always rushed”
- Proportion of waking, non paid work time spent multitasking
- Log of average episode duration, excluding paid work and sleep

Independent variables

- Number of children and whether children under 5 in the household
- Household type: dual full-time earner, standard 1.5 earner, sole male breadwinner, single parent, other
- Educational attainment
- Sex
- Schedule flexibility (models with working parents only)
Policy developments in UK

“Time to care”:
- Maternity leave, paternity leave, shared parental leave
- Flexible working

“Time to work”:
- Expansion of formal childcare
  - 15 hours per week over 38 weeks for 3-4 year olds
  - 15 hours per week for 2 year olds from low income families
  - Additional 15 hours for working families (‘30 hours’)
  - Support with childcare costs through tax credits
## Analysis sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher degree (%)</strong></td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employed (%)</strong></td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupational class (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Married/ cohabitating</strong></td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children (mean)</strong></td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children under 5 in the hh (%)</strong></td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (mean)</strong></td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (%)</strong></td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>55.1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>1014</td>
<td>718</td>
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