



Lives Behind the Lens: The realities of working as a parent or carer in the screen industries

June 2024

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Lives Behind the Lens

Introduction

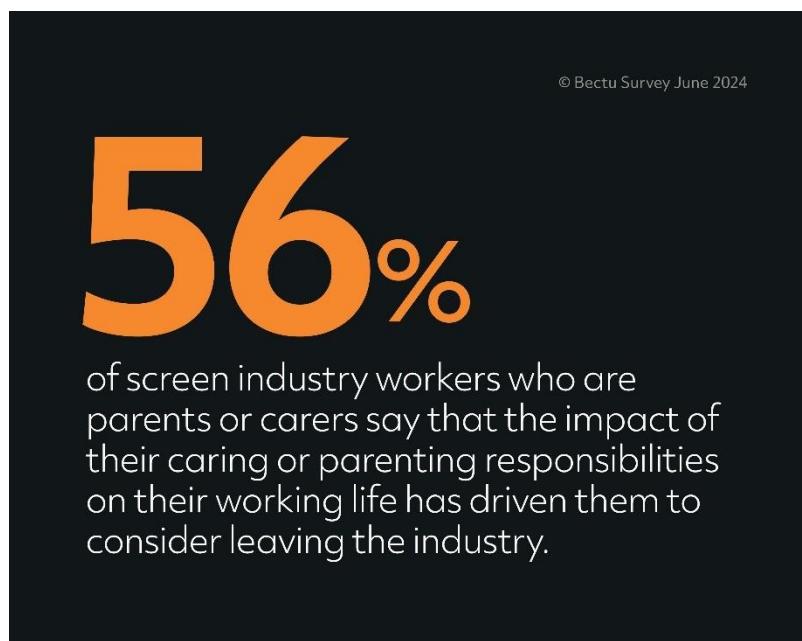
For freelance Bectu members, having fewer employment rights than employees, it is often challenging to juggle their career with parenthood and/or caring. A long hours culture, job to job freelancing, and pervasive gendered inequalities mean the screen industries remain largely incompatible for workers who have caring or parenting responsibilities. And a lack of support means they often leave the industry, taking their talent and experience with them.

Bectu's Lives behind the lens campaign is making the case for flexible working in the film and TV to support freelance families. To inform our campaign, Bectu surveyed 424 workers in the screen industries with parenting and caring responsibilities between 22nd April and 10th June 2024.

Our research highlights the vast scale of challenges faced by parents and carers, as more than half (56%) of respondents say the impact of their caring or parenting responsibilities on their working life has driven them to consider leaving the industry.

We are calling on employers to step up and better support freelance parents and carers through:

- Improved support and leave entitlements, including paid time off for anti-natal appointments, adoption visits and hospital appointments
- Increasing access to flexible working arrangements in the industry
- Working with Bectu to campaign for, investigate and trial flexible working
- Improving worker rights in collective agreements and campaigning for improvements to legislation



A culture of exclusion

The screen industries can be a challenging and unpredictable place to work, but many parents and carers told us how incompatible this was with family life and caring responsibilities. Respondents set out how a long hours, last-minute culture, as well as a general lack of stability made it difficult for parents and carers to balance work with caring responsibilities.

"There is no stability in this industry. Add in the parenting load / juggle and it's a very tough industry.



We are expected to be abundantly flexible by production companies and broadcasters but it certainly doesn't cut both ways. There is absolutely no provision for real life events if you're a freelancer."

Anonymous

"I can't work in HETV or movies because they are fundamentally incompatible with family life. Look at the number of divorced cameramen. So many people I meet in commercials used to work on those productions and then realised it wasn't tenable."

"As a single parent it's a huge jiggle but I can make plans to cover all angles. My biggest problem my is last minute schedule changes / working hours. I just don't have the help to be able to cover early mornings or late nights without it being planned in advance."

"Even with the most understanding team around me and generous accommodations I have found it impossible to achieve any kind of work-life balance since having kids. Parents/ carers being given special treatment isn't enough, the industry needs to change for everyone... I think that the single most important thing we could do to help parents and carers would be to reduce working hours for everyone. Even if you can find an HOD willing to let you work a shorter day or less days per week (for less money!), there is so much pressure on time and budget that you end up choosing between doing a good (acceptable) job at work and taking the time you've agreed for your family... I've turned work down because it's all in the studios out west or north west and I live in south east London. if you're working 8am-6.30pm and have a commute it's fully impossible to see your child, which for me means that job is out of the question."

Just 7% of all respondents said that they have felt fully supported by their employer to balance work with caring or parenting responsibilities.

And of all survey respondents, 65% said they've had to turn down jobs, while 36% had reduced their work hours and 37% had taken jobs with less responsibility or seniority.

The gendered nature of caring and parenting responsibilities was clear in our survey. Female respondents were also more likely to have had to turn down jobs (m=61% f=67%) and to have taken jobs with less seniority or responsibility (m=27% f=39%). Male respondents were more likely to have increased their working hours as a result of their caring or parenting responsibilities (m=14% f=11%) while female respondents were more likely to have reduced their working hours (m=32% f=38%).

The majority of parents and carers (66% overall) said that they have felt at a disadvantage to colleagues who do not have caring or parenting responsibilities, with more than a third (37%) saying they have felt discriminated against. And this figure was even higher among parents. Three quarters (75%) of parents said they have felt at a disadvantage to colleagues who do not have caring or parenting responsibilities, with more than two in five (42%) saying they have felt discriminated against.

"I have been discriminated against by colleagues for having parental responsibilities. I have been passed over for pay rises and promotion. I have had to turn to the union to fight my corner in pay and contract negotiations."

"You get discriminated against the moment they know you are pregnant, sometimes openly"

"I was told I was an old mother when I was pregnant and not offered a job as the insurance wouldn't cover me. I've never had any support as a single mum as a director. I can never take time off. I even went into hospital poorly overnight when I was pregnant and went back to work the next day. No one cares. Ever."

Around a quarter of all survey respondents (23%) told us that they are a parent or carer to someone with a disability or special educational needs. Their responses highlighted the difficulty faced by these parents and carers, in balancing work with the additional or specialised needs of those they care for.

Over half (55%) of those who parent or care for someone with a disability or special educational needs said they have felt discriminated against, while more than three quarters of this group have had to turn down jobs (77%) and 75% feel at a disadvantage to colleagues who do not have caring or parenting responsibilities.

And only 3% of those parenting or caring for someone with a disability or special educational needs said they felt fully supported by their employer to balance work with their caring and parenting responsibilities, compared with 11% of those who did not care for someone with additional needs.

For some, this meant covering up their parenting or carer responsibilities, in order to avoid missing out on work or being unfairly treated:

"I tend not to admit to having a child in case I don't get a job"

"There's a culture of fear and being passed for jobs if there's a sense that caring responsibilities might get in the way. Often it means hiding needs from employers because there's a fear it means you're perceived as unreliable or a burden"



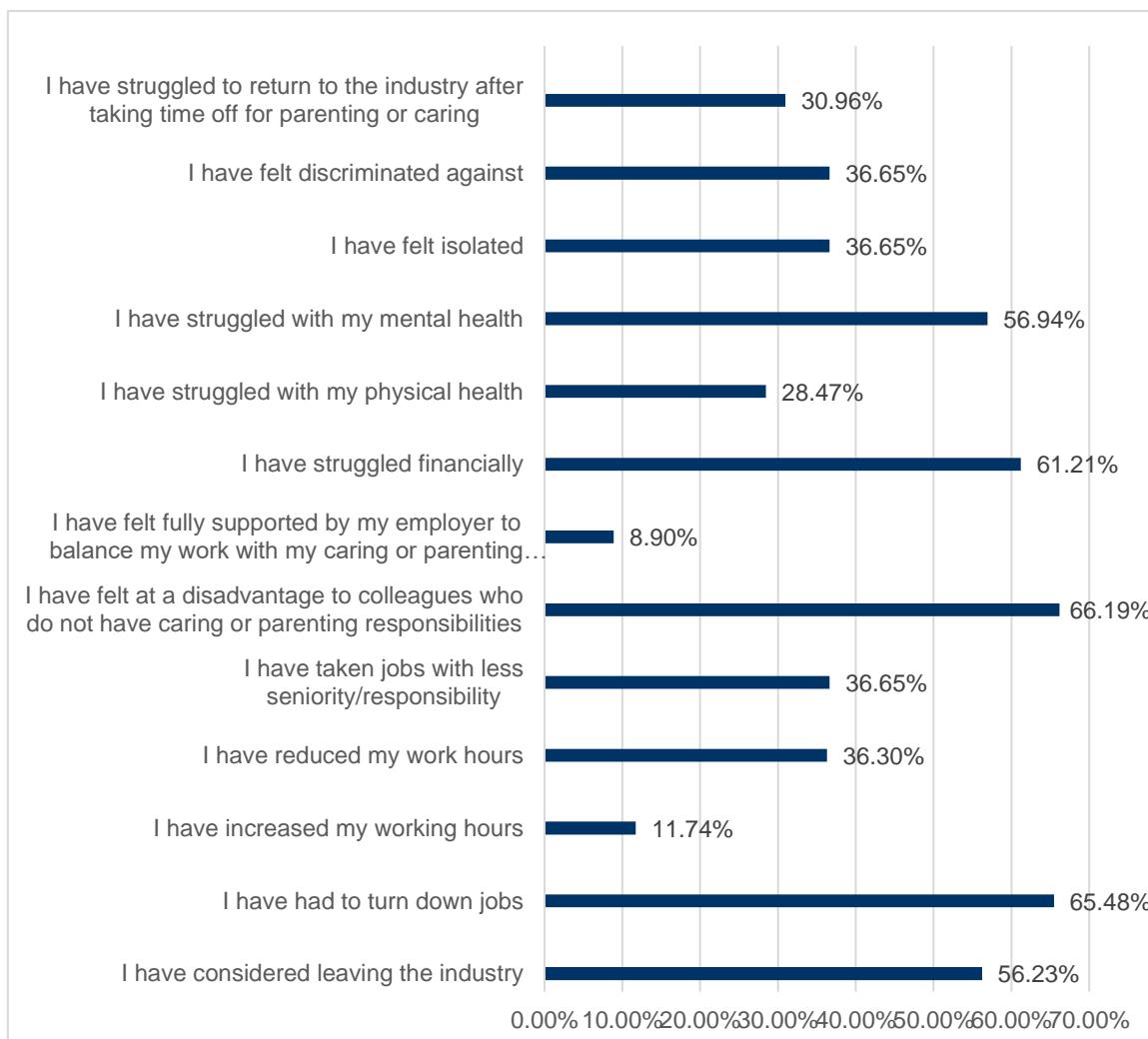
I tend not to admit to having a child in case I don't get a job."

Anonymous

And again, the gendered nature of caring often saw women reporting higher rates of discrimination; 71% of female respondents said they felt at a disadvantage to colleagues who do not have caring or parenting responsibilities, compared with 48% of male

respondents, and 40% of female respondents said they had felt discriminated against compared with 25% of male respondents.

Understandably, challenging working conditions are having a direct personal impact on those with parenting and caring responsibilities. Overall, 61% of respondents said that they had struggled financially, 57% have struggled with their mental health and 28% had struggled with their physical health. And 82% of respondents from single parent households had struggled financially, with 71% having had to turn down jobs. Among carers, half said they have felt isolated (50%) and 79% have struggled with their mental health.



Our research sets out how far the screen industries have to go in becoming compatible with the needs of parents and carers.

Most starkly, we find that this incompatibility is posing a direct threat to the industry. Overall, more than half (56%) of respondents say the impact of their caring or parenting responsibilities on their working life has driven them to considered leaving the industry. 62% of parents have considered leaving the industry, and 55% of respondents from single parent households have considered leaving the industry.

Accessing rights at work

Navigating rights for parents and carers in the screen industries is not always straight forward; many workers in the industry are self-employed or freelance, often working on short-term contracts, without the same rights as employees.

In the UK, there are very limited rights for unpaid carers in employment, beyond a legal right to the equivalent of one week's working time of unpaid carer's leave every 12 months.

For parents, the employment and welfare rights that apply in the months leading up to childbirth, and in the early years of a child's life, vary depending upon employment status. Some of them only apply to people with 'employee' status who meet certain eligibility criteria, such as having worked for their employer for a minimum period. You can find more detail in Prospect's guide to parental and family leave.

In the case of workers who are not in regular employment, or who have less than 26 weeks of continuous employment with their current employer, the entitlements may be significantly lower, and they may depend on the amount of National Insurance contributions (NICs) that the worker in question has made.

These complex rules are reflected in our survey, as just 21% overall (and 21% of parents) said that they feel confident about their rights at work as a parent or carer.

This is clear when it comes to looking at requests from parents and carers of their employer or engager. While all employees have the right to request flexible working, and many have made demands for flexible working or reduced hours, employers do not always grant these requests.

Just over a third of parents told us that they had never made a request for flexible working (34%), although of the 66% who have, 26% say they have received the full amount they asked for, 30% receiving some of what they asked for and 11% having their requests for flexible working rejected.

Overall, 32% have requested a reduction in their working hours – 37% of parents have asked for this, with 11% saying that they have asked for reduced hours but not received it, 16% receiving some reduction and 10% receiving what they had asked for.

Many survey respondents stressed that the ability to work flexibly in the industry differed job to job and was generally at the discretion of HODs, with some more flexible than others:

"I've found some production companies/broadcasters are very sympathetic to parents and try to make things work. Others are very set in their ways and don't care about making any adjustments."

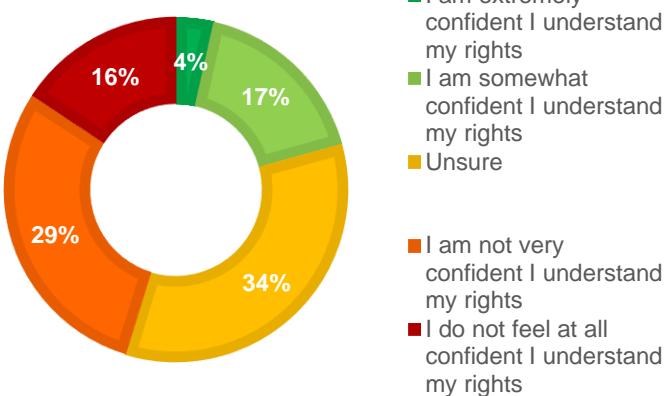
"Heads of department who are also mothers have been supportive and allowed flexible working and job sharing which helped me to get back into work."

"I have found shorter contracts (less the 10 weeks) it has been difficult getting the flexibility, compared to longer contracts."

Often, the inconsistency between flexibility on jobs posed childcare issues for screen industry workers, unable to keep to a consistent pattern of working. This was a particular problem for single parents, who already struggled with last minute changes to schedules or working hours:

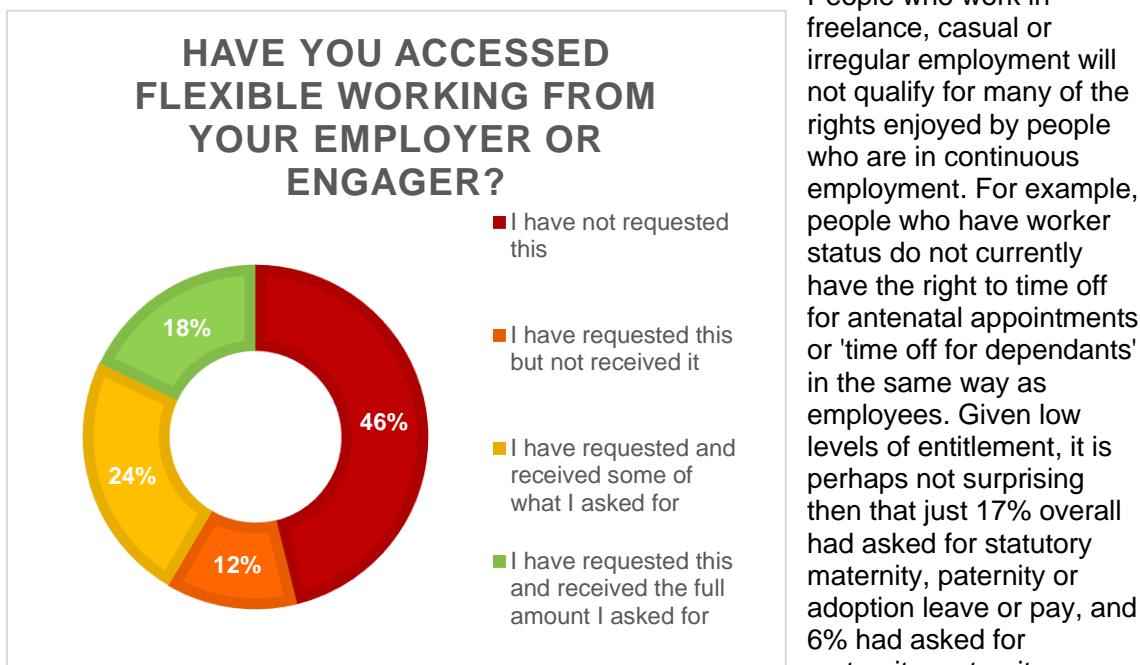
"As a single parent it's a huge jiggle but I can make plans to cover all angles. My biggest problem my is last minute schedule changes / working hours. I just don't

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK AS A PARENT OR CARER?



have the help to be able to cover early mornings or late nights without it being planned in advance."

"Last year I missed out on 3 jobs specifically because they wouldn't even consider a 3.5 day week... We are expected to be abundantly flexible by production companies and broadcasters but it certainly doesn't cut both ways. I understand why in some ways - deadlines and poor financing - but there is absolutely no provision for real life events if you're a freelancer."



adoption leave or pay above statutory. For parents, almost three quarters have not requested statutory maternity, paternity or adoption leave (74%), while 9% had requested it, but had these requests rejected. Nine in ten parents had not requested maternity, paternity or adoption leave above statutory. And only 3% of parents have made requests for shared parental leave.

The vast majority (77%) of parents had also not requested maternity allowance – despite this being one of the few forms of financial support available to those who are self-employed and pregnant or have recently given birth. Of those who had, many respondents expressed how insufficient this support was:

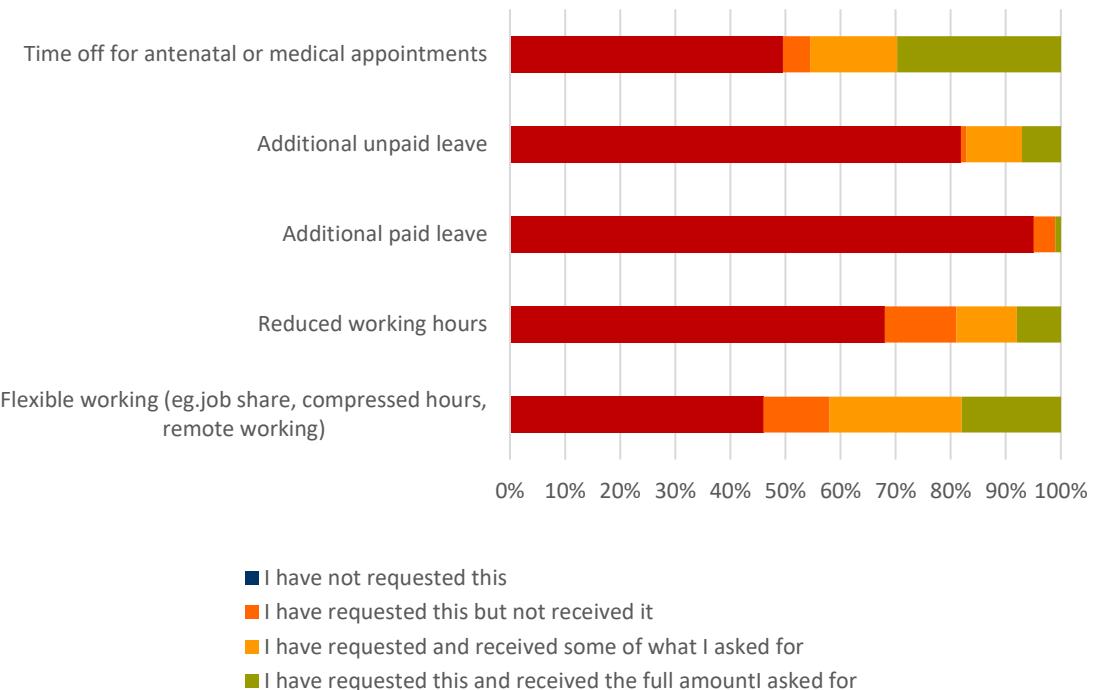
"My maternity allowance barely touched the surface, but I had no other options"

Our survey also highlighted that many screen industry workers are not accessing paid or unpaid time off to support their parenting or caring responsibilities. Only 5% overall had requested additional paid leave, while 19% have made requests for additional unpaid leave. Of that 19% of parents who had made a request for additional unpaid leave, most were granted all (6%) or some (11%) of what they had requested.

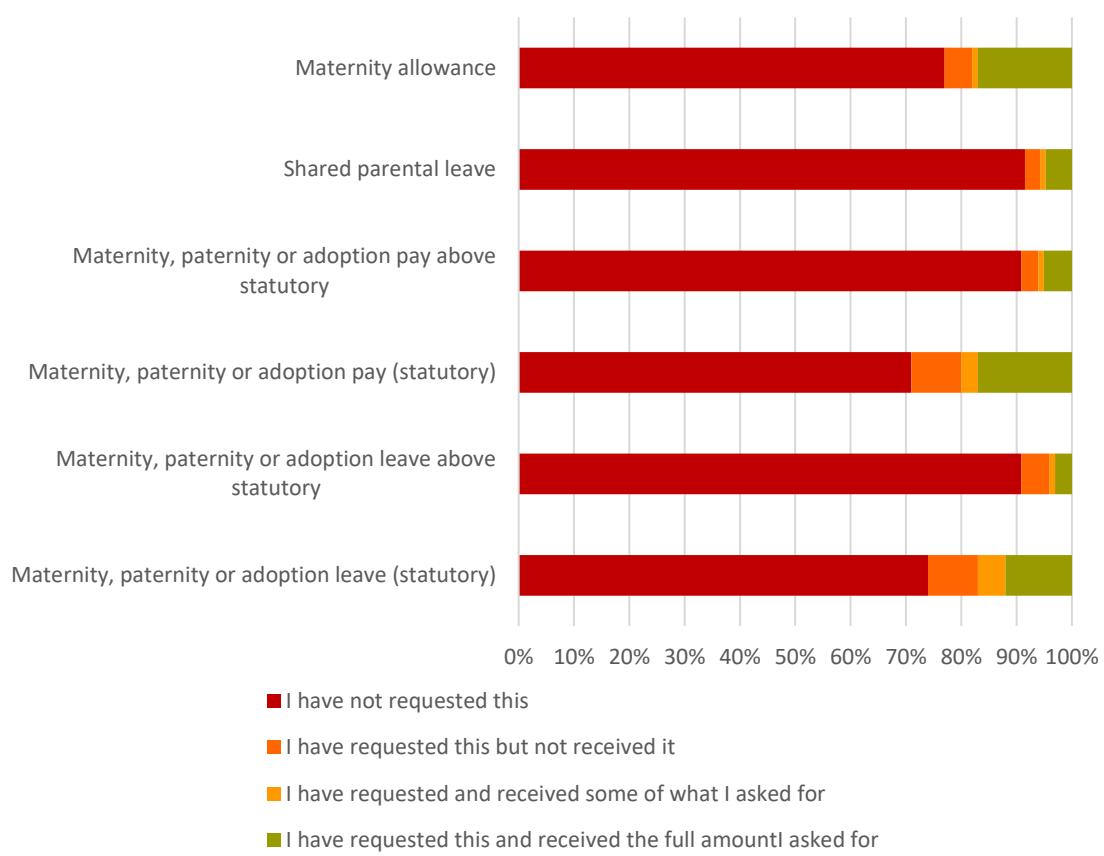
Respondents were also unlikely to claim time off for medical appointments and antenatal care. Half (50%) overall had asked for time off for antenatal or medical appointments, being granted all (30%) or some (16%) of what they asked for. Just over half (57%) of parents have asked for time off for antenatal or medical appointments – although 5% have had time off for medical or antenatal appointments rejected and 13% were only offered some of the time off they had requested.

People who work in freelance, casual or irregular employment will not qualify for many of the rights enjoyed by people who are in continuous employment. For example, people who have worker status do not currently have the right to time off for antenatal appointments or 'time off for dependants' in the same way as employees. Given low levels of entitlement, it is perhaps not surprising then that just 17% overall had asked for statutory maternity, paternity or adoption leave or pay, and 6% had asked for maternity, paternity or

Parents and carers: Have you ever requested and/or received any of the following in order to support you as a worker with caring or parenting responsibilities?



Parents: Have you ever requested and/or received any of the following in order to support you as a worker with caring or parenting responsibilities?



75%

of parents who took our survey said that they felt at a disadvantage to colleagues who do not have parenting or caring responsibilities.

Respondents also spoke about the difficulties they had faced in asking for time off for medical appointments, even where they were able to cover themselves. This was not only because of the pressures and demands of the job, but also because of having to share detailed personal information, or fearing repercussions if they did so:

“At my level, I can't take time off for appointments/ family emergencies or it's held against me”

“It always feels awkward having to take time off to help my mum. I feel like I have to explain a very private situation so people don't think I'm taking liberties, and so people feel 'sorry' for me. I hate it, I'd rather people didn't know this private info about my mum and her problems but it's the easiest way to be able to get the time I need to care for her.”

“I am out of work since December and the show I was working on for the past 2 years decided to crew up without me this year without telling me. I think it may be because I had to be absent when my kids were sick or when the school was on strike.”

“There basically is no support. If I have an appt or an emergency I cover myself and leave, but when I was heavily pregnant and needed to go part time I was paid as a daily and when I needed to leave my film to have my baby as it went on longer than it should have I lost 7 weeks pay”

There is clearly more that employers and contractors could be doing to support workers in accessing rights. But there is also a real need for policy change, to extend Government support to freelance and self-employed parents and carers.

Bectu are pushing the Government to bring leave and flexibility entitlements for self-employed new parents into line with those enjoyed by employees. In our manifesto for the

self-employed, published with the Fabian society and Community¹, we ask the government for the following changes:

- Extend shared parental leave to the self-employed by creating a new Parental Leave Allowance. This would be substituted for part of a partner's Maternity Allowance entitlement, or for a partner's statutory maternity or parental paid leave, at no additional cost to the exchequer. It should be available on the same terms as shared parental leave – i.e. available in flexible week-long blocks with the option of overlaps between parents.
- Equalise rights for self-employed fathers and partners of mothers by introducing two weeks' paternity allowance at the same rate as statutory paternity pay.
- Equalise rights for adoptive self-employed parents by creating entitlement to maternity allowance.
- Extend paid maternity and parental leave to 12 months for both the self-employed and employees. This would require revision of statutory pay schemes, maternity allowance and our proposed new parental leave allowance.
- Consult on increasing the number of 'keeping in touch days' self-employed people can spend working (especially if the maximum duration of maternity and parental leave increases). The current allowance of 10 days could be increased to 30 days for a mother and 20 days for a partner (replicating rules for shared parental leave).
- In the long-term, introduce earnings-related employment insurance for maternity, paternity, parental and adoption leave. As a first step, pay increased maternity allowance to at least 90 per cent of recent earnings for the first six weeks to match statutory maternity pay. Eventually, people should receive payments worth at least 50 per cent of their usual earnings for the whole of any baby-related leave.

Employer support

One strong theme that came through our research was that good employers can make a huge positive difference to the working lives of parents and carers in the industry.



I've found some production companies/broadcasters are very sympathetic to parents and try to make things work. Others are very set in their ways and don't care about making any adjustments."

Anonymous

¹ <https://fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Working-for-you-a-manifesto-for-the-self-employed-FINAL-17-Jul.pdf>

However, only 7% of all respondents said that they have felt fully supported by their employer to balance work with caring or parenting responsibilities. This sentiment was widely shared in relation not only to employers, but also co-workers, where many shared a sentiment that the industry needed a bigger culture shift to be fully inclusive of those with parenting and caring responsibilities:

"It's common for co-workers to balk at the fact I have children ' how do you manage?' like having children and working in TV don't mix."

"As a man, my parenting responsibilities are never considered by employers. I feel a strong duty to see my kids in the morning and evening but as a freelancing director, even on long contracts, it feels like they do not want you to have any kind of life outside work. During long edits especially I do not feel I need to be there in person for 10 hour days. We need to think much more holistically about freelance employees - treat them humanely and they will deliver"

"There is a culture (seemingly across all departments/sectors of TV & Film) that everyone is expected to always give 100% of their time and energy to working. Long hours, long travel, and trips away from home are the norm - and anyone who wants to limit that for themselves loses out on work to others who are either single, or happy to abandon their family for days or weeks at a time. Being female I am often asked by colleagues (many of whom are dads!) who is looking after my kids when I am at work. But equally I can often get a negative reaction from people if I turn down work, or question the hours, on the basis of childcare."

And for those who were returning to work after a period of time off for parenting or caring responsibilities, 31% overall, and 36% of parents, say that they have struggled to return to the industry.

However, many respondents named examples of good practice from industry and employers in supporting parents and carers at work:

"The current job I'm in we have a lot of Mum's and we cover each other amazingly. Nothing has gone wrong due to family commitments, we make it work"

"A lot of female led teams in particular were crucial to my ability to continue working in the industry. They provided the trust in my ability to do the job (as a freelancer with the perks that should involve) without requiring set desk hours. Offering the flex of remote work / control of hours (i.e. being able to do school drop / pick up in between hours worked) has enabled me to keep working."

7%

of creative industry workers in film and TV say that they have felt fully supported by their employer to balance work with caring or parenting responsibilities.

“I have worked with many costume professionals who job share and been on teams where job sharing is an option. I know this has greatly benefitted many people in our part of the industry and it is an option I would consider in the future”

There were also mentions of specific initiatives and schemes, including support from Share My Telly job and Raising Film, Screenskills shared handover day funding, as well as on-site child care as Leavesden and Warner Bros studios.

While job shares were seen as the best way to support flexible working, this was not always an option. Some stated that working on longer term contracts (over 10 weeks) was generally better for flexible working, while others stressed the need to change the long-hours industry culture for everyone.

A call for change

Our research makes very clear call to the screen industries, that if they are to retain talent, they must change to meet the needs of workers with parenting and caring responsibilities.

- Employers must become more flexible to accommodate the needs of parents and carers. This means not only encouraging, but allowing job shares and flexibility in terms of working arrangements (timings and locations)
- Employers must adopt more inclusive practices, which starts with moving away from a last-minute culture. Better planning, so that long days or days on location are planned long in advance, gives those with additional responsibilities more time to arrange alternative support.
- There is no space for discrimination, which is feeding a culture of fear among workers with parenting and caring responsibilities. Employers who discriminate on the grounds of parenting or caregiving responsibilities are in breach of the equality act. Discrimination from co-workers should not be tolerated by employers, who must adopt robust disciplinary procedures where this happens.
- A move away from a long-hours culture will benefit everyone in the industry, as well as parents and carers. Bectu Vision research provides a blueprint of how this can be achieved².
- Self-employed and freelance parents re being let-down by the government, with no access to the support they need. The Government needs to bring leave and flexibility entitlements for self-employed new parents into line with those enjoyed by employees.

² <https://bectu.org.uk/news/bectu-vision-teams-up-with-timewise-to-tackle-long-hours-in-film-and-tv>

