

Challenges of work, family and care.



The SDA commissioned research from the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW Sydney to explore the challenges our members experience when managing work and family, their care for children and others, and their employment needs.

It is the first ever study of its kind into work, family and care in retail. The national survey of 6469 SDA members, conducted in early 2021 explored workers' responsibilities to care for children and vulnerable adults; how workers arrange their care responsibilities while they are working; the challenges arising from employers' working time practices and Australia's childcare system.

Findings show that as well as making important economic and social contributions through their paid work, SDA members make valuable contributions through the unpaid labour they provide as parents, and as carers to children and adults in their families and communities. Yet these social and economic contributions are poorly recognised and accommodated in their working lives.

THREE KEY FINDINGS

- SDA members lack genuine choice about their working times and childcare arrangements and need better support structures, including access to responsive childcare services that recognise their needs, so they can shape their working and caring lives.
- Industrial relations settings and employer practices limit the choices and opportunities available to SDA members. Rostering and pay are shaped too strongly around employers' profitability and cost minimisation and result in unpredictability, variability and insecure rosters resulting in poor support for care responsibilities, underemployment, financial stress and poor mental health outcomes for workers and their families.
- The ways work is organised exacerbates difficulties faced by workers needing to organise their work and family lives and find time to care. This impacts on the children of retail workers, many of whom cannot access early education and have constrained opportunities to fully participate in other aspects of social and community life.

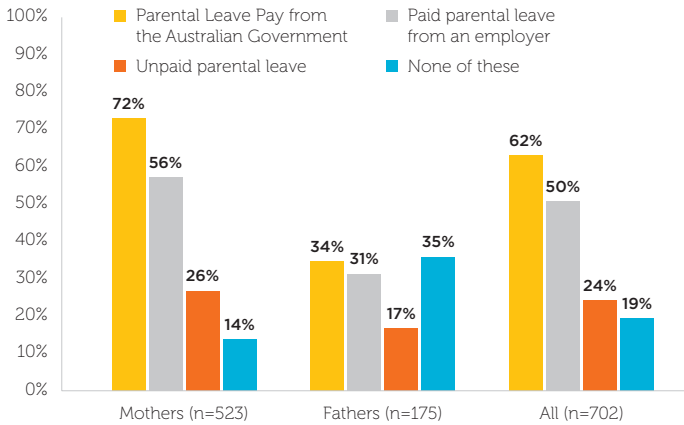
CHANGE IS REQUIRED

Changes are needed in the industrial relations system, and within employing organisations and local workplaces. Policy and regulatory changes must promote decent pay, job security, predictability of shifts, employees' control over work times, access to reasonable shift lengths, genuine choices about work days and times, and to ensure workers can make schedule adjustments without fear of repercussions. Changes are also needed in Australia's childcare system, to improve the affordability, accessibility and suitability of care for low-income workers.

Government and employer paid parental leave

- Only 72% of mothers and 34% of fathers have taken the governments Parental Leave Pay for the most recent birth or adoption of their child in last 5 years.

Figure 7.1 Proportion of parents with children aged 5 or under who took parental leave for their most recent birth (%)



- 19% had not accessed any paid or unpaid leave for their last birth (35% of mothers and 14% of fathers).
- Only half (50%) of parents of young children accessed paid parental leave from their employer, (56% of mothers and 31% of fathers).
- Among parents with a child under 5, 19% of mothers and 47% of fathers had not received any paid leave to support their most recent birth.

Figure 7.2 Use of paid parental leave for most recent birth, mothers with a child aged 5 or under (n=523)



Figure 7.3 Use of paid parental leave for most recent birth, fathers with a child aged 5 or under (n=175)



Returning to work

Mothers commonly found the return to work difficult and struggled to return to the same position or a position that accommodated their families' needs. Some expressed:

- Sense of precarity in transitioning back to work
- Difficulties returning while breastfeeding, with some explicitly told they could not express breastmilk at work
- Insufficient opportunity to change hours to accommodate breastfeeding or parenting

Fathers overwhelmingly wished for more time off and expressed that:

- Time was insufficient especially following a caesarean birth
- Some were pressured to work despite wanting time off

Time taken at time of birth

- On average, mothers took 42.2 weeks and fathers took 4.6 weeks when their youngest child was born. Casuals reported longer time away from work, 60 weeks on average compared with 39 weeks for permanent employees.
- 79% of mothers and 87% of fathers said they would have preferred more time away from work. The small minority of mothers who said they wouldn't prefer to have had more time off were away for a much longer period (average 75 weeks).

Figure 7.4 Time away from work for most recent birth, mothers with a child 0 to 5 (% n=523)

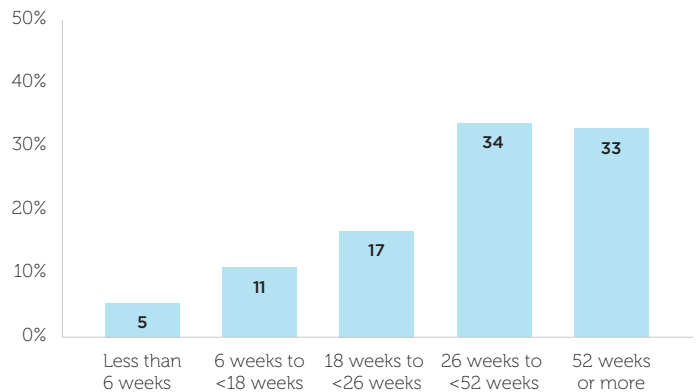


Figure 7.5 Time away from work for most recent birth, fathers with a child 0 to 5 (% n=175)

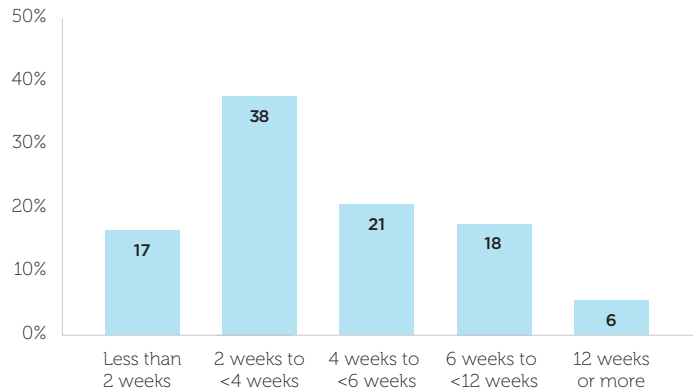


Figure 7.6 Whether parents would have preferred more time away from work when their youngest child was born, if they could afford it

	Would not have preferred more time			Would have preferred more time		
	n	%	Average weeks away	n	%	Average weeks away
Mothers	33	7%	74.7	382	79%	36.8
Fathers	7	4%	2.7	138	87%	4.9
All	40	6%	62.1	520	81%	28.2

	Not sure			All		
	n	%	Average weeks away	n	%	Average weeks away
Mothers	65	14%	57.7	482	100%	41.8
Fathers	14	9%	3.1	159	100%	4.7
All	79	12%	46.9	641	100%	32.7