

Shared conversations: Survey highlights need for honest conversations around Shared Parental Leave

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Fewer than half of expectant parents discuss sharing their parental leave

Take-up of Shared Parental Leave (SPL) remains very low, with the main reason given for not taking it being financial. However, a new survey shows that enhancing Shared Parental Pay would make no difference to the decision of over half of those who say finances are the main barrier.

The results suggests that other issues underlie parents' decisions, even if they are not overtly stated and highlight the importance of open, honest conversations around Shared Parental Leave*.

New figures from Workingmums.co.uk's annual survey

(<https://www.workingmums.co.uk/workingmums-annual-survey-2017/>), released today, show that 37% would consider taking Shared Parental Leave. Some 43% of those who wouldn't take it said it would not make sense financially. However, over half [66%] of these said enhancing Shared Parental Pay would not make a difference to their decision. In total 59% of all survey participants said enhancing SPP would not make a difference to their decision.

The figures come as Workingmums.co.uk (<https://www.workingmums.co.uk>) and DaddiLife (<https://daddilife.com/>) launch a set of videos of couples in conversation about SPL. The videos capture the kind of issues couples who have opted for the leave and those who haven't have wrestled with and give a flavour of some of the sometimes unspoken issues at play.

Other reasons given for not sharing leave were:

- mums didn't want to share their leave [17%]
- worries the dad's career would suffer [12%]
- didn't know enough about it [11%]
- the legislation is too complicated [5%].

The survey of over 2,300 working mums also shows that 83% of women say they would take more leave than their partner if they took SPL. Only 15% said they would share it evenly.

Another issue that emerged from the survey was that many expectant couples had not even discussed it. More than twice as many couples had not discussed it as had discussed it.

The Workingmums.co.uk/DaddiLife videos show how couples who have opted for SPL have negotiated the complex legislation and the kind of issues they have come up against. They suggest how employers could support employees better. They also show the emotional impact of their decision in terms of stronger family relations and how they have negotiated the pitfalls, such as concerns about any possible impact on the dad's career and guilt about taking several months off work.

One mum Eulalia Pereira said: "As a mother there is a sense you should be doing everything. I know [as a

result of taking SPL] that Martin on a day to day basis is there, that he is involved with the kids. I could not have hoped for more. Shared Parental Leave is an illustration that he is absolutely there; it is a level of commitment he is illustrating."

Dad Sam Russell said: "Having Rowan [and sharing parental leave] has given us a bit more rounded view on who we are as a family. It will take time for the culture and mindset to change. People of our age will be the next chief executives and MDs. We are the first generation to see the idea of taking extended time off as being a normal thing and not to be held against anyone."

Another couple speak about their decision not to take SPL and hint at some of the underlying reasons. They explain that flexible working has enabled greater involvement by the dad without the need for sharing care.

Dad Elliott Rae says: "I would have been open to taking Shared Parental Leave if my wife had been, but I was around enough. My most important thing was that my wife and daughter were okay...and what was best for the family unit."

Gillian Nissim, founder of Workingmums.co.uk, said: "It is disappointing to see how low the take-up of Shared Parental Leave has been. Part of the problem is no doubt the complexity of the legislation and lack of awareness. Finances clearly play a big role and generally there are concerns about the way the legislation is framed. At the moment this is what we have to work with though and at the heart of the legislation is open, honest conversations between parents about what is best for every member of the family and what impact any decisions they take in the first months of their baby's life might have in the future. We hope these videos will help to promote those conversations."

Han-Son Lee, founder of DaddiLife, said: "Though Shared Parental Leave has been a much welcomed policy that gives fathers and mothers the chance to have more balanced time with their newborns, it's clear from the latest research that there are still many barriers to overcome for more take up. Finances will always be a challenge for many, but what's more striking from these latest figures is the lack of real conversation that's happening around it. Though the policy won't always be right for everyone, what's been truly encouraging from our parents videos is how different types of discussions have lead to more quality time that parents often cry out for more of. Hopefully more can have the type of discussions about SPL that really get each other thinking about it fully."

*SPL was introduced in 2015 and allows parents to share the first year's leave after their baby is born. The videos can be found on the Workingmums Youtube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKJJodAzmoiC5NIq9bwEoZA>).

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