

DECISIONS ABOUT CARING AND WORKING:

A qualitative study

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Report prepared for the Department of Labour &
the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women

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Executive summary

Purpose of research and research method

This research was undertaken to explore how and why people with caring responsibilities make decisions related to paid work. It also examined whether people use information on support available and longer term consequences in making their decisions.

This was a qualitative study drawing on 50 interviews with women and men who were the primary caregiver, or in a few cases, shared caring responsibility equally with their partner. The qualitative approach allowed in depth exploration of the research topics. Having a sample with a number of different characteristics provided breadth but the small sample size means that the findings cannot be generalised to the population as a whole e.g. not all men will feel the same way as the men in the sample. At the same time, the interviews did produce some consistent findings and highlighted areas for further research.

The population of interest was people with at least one child up to the age of eighteen years, including parents of children with special needs, and people who have caring responsibilities for another adult, including adults with disabilities and older adults. Researchers used the snowball technique to select 50 people with caring responsibilities from Wellington, Auckland, Nelson (and Motueka) and the Wairarapa. The data was transcribed and coded into an NVivo database and analysed thematically.

Characteristics of the sample

- Thirty-six participants were women; 14 were men
- They ranged in age from 26 to 64 years. Forty-one were aged between 31 and 50.
- The sample included 29 European, 12 Maori and nine Pacific participants.
- Thirty seven of the participants had a partner; 13 were single.
- Thirty-two participants had a post school qualification (either tertiary or trade/vocational). Eleven had school qualifications; seven had no school qualifications.
- Household income ranged from between \$10,000 and \$15,000 to over \$100,000 per year. Thirty five people had a household income over \$50,000 per year; 27 of them had a household income of \$70,000 per year or more. Thus the sample was better off on average than the population as a whole.
- Thirty two participants lived in urban areas; twelve lived in small towns or in rural areas.
- All but one participant had caring responsibilities for children, one person had the care of an adult only, and some people cared for both adults and children. Nine participants had children with special needs.
- The number of children each participant had ranged from one to five. The age of the children varied from pre-school, to primary and secondary school aged.
- Thirteen participants were not in paid work at the time of the study. Thirty-seven participants were undertaking paid work, 23 full time¹ and 14 part-time.

¹ The definition of full time work, as used by Statistics New Zealand, is 30 hours or more per week.

- The primary caregiver for children did most of the unpaid, domestic work in households regardless of whether they were in any paid work, and irrespective of gender. Domestic work tended to be shared in households with two working parents.

The sample had higher levels of education and income than in the population as a whole. This differs from earlier research which has tended to focus on low income or sole parent families.

Summary of main findings

Factors influencing decisions and patterns of participation in paid work

A number of interconnected factors influenced decisions about paid work. The key factors were:

- beliefs about parental and family care of children, and attitudes towards formal early childhood education services and informal childcare²
- paid work factors relating to money, personal satisfaction, intellectual stimulation and feeling valued.

When people had a child, one parent usually left paid work because of their commitment to parental care. This pattern occurred independent of ethnic group, marital status, income, occupation or type of caring responsibility. Which parent left paid work depended to some extent on income, but also on views or assumptions about gender roles. When children were very young, that is under one or two years old, many people assumed that the woman would stay at home. When making a decision, people took into account the importance of career, who coped best with being at home with a child, and commitment to breastfeeding.

Most parents believed that parental care for young children was important. Few used or wanted to use full-day or full-time formal early childhood education services for children under two. When children were three or four, participants used early childhood education services such as playcentre where they stayed with their children. Family members, such as parents and siblings who lived nearby, often offered childcare and other support to parents. European, Maori and Pacific participants had similar levels of family support. People who did not have family living nearby often arranged their own and/or their partners' schedules, so that they could look after pre-school children and were home for older children after school. When men were the primary caregiver, the major factors underpinning that decision were income and the relative importance of career to their partner. Other factors included single parenthood and wanting to minimise personal income to reduce child support obligations. Most of the 14 men adopted the caregiving role when their children were older.

A number of factors affected how long people stayed out of paid work. These included their views about formal early childhood education services and informal

² Formal early childhood education services include education and care centres, kohanga reo, aoga amata, kindergarten, playcentre, home-based services and play groups. Informal childcare refers to care provided by relatives and friends. It is notable, however that the participants did not use this terminology to distinguish between the two, and mostly used the term 'childcare'.

childcare, having another child, wanting satisfaction and an income from work, wanting some control over income, and a work opportunity arising.

People usually returned to work part time when their youngest child was more independent, often at primary school. Because of their beliefs around parental care, people often stayed in part time work for up to 10 years, depending on how many children they had. Most people in full time paid work had older children and a work history that included periods of no work and part time work. People who put a high value on work, and had another family member to care for their young children, were more likely to be in continuous full time paid work.

Decision making process

Decisions about participation in paid work evolved over time, and built on earlier decisions such as choice of occupation and where to live, and their experiences at home and school. Most people found the decision making process straightforward. They discussed their decisions with their partners if they had them, and less frequently with other family members. They did not seek information to make decisions about paid work, nor did they feel the need to look for information. They were aware of public debate over early childhood education and informal childcare, but did not seek information about this in order to make a decision.

Effects of decisions

Although most participants felt some negative effects from caring responsibilities on their paid work, income, and time for themselves, these did not outweigh the primacy of their caring responsibilities.

Some people not in paid work or working few hours thought they would not be able to return to highly paid and demanding jobs. Others took the opportunity to study, aiming for a better paid and more satisfying job when they returned to work. Although people clearly had less income when not in paid work or working less hours, this was not a significant issue, as they put more value on being home with young children. Having control of some income was more of an issue than the amount of income.

People working full time or near to it said that the effects of their family commitments on paid work were largely negative. Some were unable to attend professional development and networking opportunities. Others were not able to do extra tasks or take on additional responsibilities required to advance their careers, or felt that senior positions at work were incompatible with their domestic responsibilities.

People in full time paid work felt their increased income reduced financial stress, which had positive effects on family relationships. However, for many women, being in full time paid work or working longer part time hours meant that they had less time for their families and for themselves.

Other people's attitudes

Most other people had positive attitudes towards participants' decisions, with most support coming from partners, family, and friends who held similar beliefs. People in different situations or who had made different decisions, including work colleagues and acquaintances, were sometimes less supportive. Participants who were not in paid work agreed that government policy was not supportive of their position.

Some people working part time thought that others perceived this as an easy option, and did not take into account their relatively lower income.

Men who were partners and not in paid work or working very few hours, experienced some negative social attitudes, as well as social constraints on their behaviour. Single men received more approval and support. The Pacific men in the study felt the weight of expectations about traditional gender roles, but these views did not alter their decisions.

People with 'other' caring responsibilities

Having caring responsibilities for older adults had an impact on people's leisure time and time for themselves, but did not necessarily affect decisions about paid work. Responsibility for adults with disabilities had more impact on decisions about paid work, often leading to a reduction in working hours.

Caring for a child with special needs also had a profound effect on people's lives, but did not always affect decisions about paid work. People not in paid work or working part time found that having a child with special needs compounded the effect of other factors, such as living in a rural area or having three or four other children.

Satisfaction with decisions

Most people were satisfied that they had made the best decision they could given their circumstances, even if this put them in a situation which was not in itself completely satisfying. People not in paid work were dissatisfied with the lack of acknowledgment of the importance of parenting. Some found the lack of income and being a full time parent difficult. Elements of both caring and working were satisfying for people in part time work, but they found it hard juggling two roles and having to compromise both aspects of their lives. People in full time paid work were also satisfied with their decisions, but they too had to juggle two roles and had less time for parenting than they would like.

Where participants had high levels of flexibility within their employment, they were more satisfied and found it easier to manage their caring and paid work responsibilities. Some participants in paid work felt their lives would be easier if employers took a more active and lateral approach to workplace flexibility.

Conclusion

This study has shown that multiple factors influence people's choices about paid work, and that different situations suit different people. This reflects the findings of other studies.

Participants made decisions that, as far as possible, balanced their beliefs about caring with their commitment to work and their need for intellectual satisfaction, social contact and money. They based their decisions on personal preferences, rather than on information about financial benefits or services that might support them in their role.

The study has identified a number of areas for further research and policy development. These include exploring the experiences and views of a wider variety of people; understanding men's situations better; developing ways to support people's preferences to care for very young children (those under the age of two)

themselves; exploring ways to support people's preferences for family and other informal care for children; promoting flexible working; and exploring the relevance of the nature and quality of work in decision making.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the research

The Department of Labour and the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (NACEW) commissioned Kirsten Gendall and Louise Fawthorpe to conduct this research in order to identify the factors that influence people's decisions surrounding paid work, and to provide a better picture of the decision making process.

Although there have been many international and local studies related to combining paid work and parenting, there is limited qualitative research in New Zealand that looks specifically at factors influencing labour market decisions, and the decision making process for parents and people with other caring responsibilities.

An overview of international research on families and paid work shows that most studies about families and paid work centre on the circumstances and choices made by low income and sole parents, or on improving outcomes for children from low income families. An increasing amount of attention is being paid to the paid work/caring dynamic for people caring for adults, but there appears to be limited literature that refers to workforce participation decisions made by people in a range of circumstances.

2.1 Context

A full literature review was not within the scope of this research, however a number of recent New Zealand reports focusing on work-life balance provide some context. The reports concentrated on the experiences of parents of dependent children. In most cases, the parents were in paid work.

2.1.1 Participation in work

Stephens and Callister (2006) show that New Zealand has a different pattern of participation by mothers of young children compared to other OECD countries. For partnered mothers, the pattern features a high rate of withdrawal from the labour market when children are very young, but high participation rates when children are school age. New Zealand has relatively low employment rates for sole mothers compared with many other countries, both when children are young and when they are at school. The OECD report, *Babies and Bosses* (OECD 2004: 3) comments that:

Almost one in four children in New Zealand lives in a one-parent household. As only one in two sole mothers in New Zealand is in paid work, many children grow up in jobless families.

The report also notes that about one in three women in New Zealand works part-time, compared with one in two in Switzerland and less than one in eight in Portugal. Furthermore, once in part-time employment, Swiss women often keep that employment status. In contrast, mothers in New Zealand increase their participation in paid work as children grow up, both in terms of employment and hours worked. Hence, mothers of school-age children, more often than not, work full-time, and employment rates for mothers whose youngest child is in primary school are much higher than for mothers whose child is of kindergarten age (75% versus 58%).

2.1.2 Child care arrangements

The corollary of any focus on women's labour market participation is a discussion about childcare. A nationally representative study of Work, Family and Parenting carried out by the Ministry of Social Development (2006) found that the majority (81%) of working parents of pre-schoolers relied on some type of childcare (sic) in order to participate in the workforce. Informal arrangements with family, friends or neighbours were more common than formal arrangements with a paid childcare worker, or some type of early childhood education service. Seventy-four percent of people used some sort of informal care, while 31 percent had a formal arrangement. This figure was higher for households with children under five years, with 51 percent of such households relying on formal childcare. However 'use of childcare' does not reveal the significant variations in patterns of childcare use. More information is needed on care arrangements for pre-school aged children (Ministry of Social Development, 2006).

The 2004 Living Standards study (Ministry of Social Development, 2006a) noted that the lack of access to childcare can restrict the ability of families to engage in paid work. It can also restrict opportunities for education or occupational training. Not being able to use childcare because of cost was associated with lower living standards. Over two-thirds (69%) of families who identified cost as a reason for not using childcare were in some degree of hardship, and a quarter (24%) were in severe hardship. This compared with 28 percent and 9 percent for all other families with dependent children. The report concludes that an improvement in the accessibility of childcare would lead to increased workforce participation within some families, and thus to improved living standards for those families.

2.1.3 Decision making

The Work, Family and Parenting study (Ministry of Social Development, 2006) showed that 30 percent of two-parent households had made a conscious decision for one parent not to be in paid work in order to care for young children at home; while 40 percent of all parents said they chose to work shorter hours or fewer days because of family responsibilities (age and number of children not specified). Little is known about how people made these choices, what factors influenced their decisions, or what they aimed to achieve by making them.

In assessing respondents' preferences, the survey found no work/home-life preference was dominant. A small majority (59%) preferred both parents to be in paid work. Among these parents, opinion was evenly divided over whether both partners' jobs should be equally demanding or whether one should be less demanding to accommodate one partner taking on more household and childcare responsibilities. A minority (39%) preferred a family where only one partner has a job. Two-thirds (64%) would prefer to have a job, even if they had a reasonable living income without one. Preference for paid work was particularly high among sole parents (86%) and Pacific parents (81%).

The report also showed that, in two-parent families, the reality in terms of whether one or both parents were in paid work matched their preferences to a degree that:

- parents from households with only one partner in paid work were more likely to state a preference for a family in which only one partner has a job, than parents from households with both partners in paid work (51% compared with 35%)

- parents from households with both partners in paid work were more likely to state a preference for both partners to be in paid work, than parents from households with only one partner in paid work (64% compared with 46%).

The report gives some indication of the impact of views about partners' roles. Although a majority of parents disagreed with the view that it is better for everyone involved if the father earns the money and the mother takes care of the home and children (34% agreed and 53% disagreed), agreement was higher than average among:

- Pacific parents (48% agree compared with 34% among all parents)
- parents in households where only one of two parents was in paid work (23% agree strongly compared with 16% among all parents)
- parents who preferred that only one partner be in paid work (49% agree compared with 26% of parents with other work/home-life preferences).

In 2005, the Families Commission undertook 43 focus groups with a range of families as part of a larger project to improve understanding of successful outcomes for families with dependent children. The focus groups looked specifically at decision making among other topics, and found that while families recognised that poor decision making was detrimental to well being, few made an explicit link between decision making and successful outcomes. Families defined successful outcomes for children in terms of good relationships, personal qualities, values and morals, as well as having a good job. Most parents in the study did not see money or material wealth as a prerequisite of success (Families Commission, 2005).

2.1.4 Balancing work and family life

As might be expected, recent research has confirmed that as well as working for money, many people work for social and personal fulfillment, career development, and to be a good role model to their children (Equal Employment Opportunities Trust, 2005; Families Commission, 2005). It is also clear that some parents find it difficult to juggle paid work and parenting. The Department of Labour (2006) report Work-Life Balance in New Zealand found that employees with carer responsibilities were more likely to experience work-life conflict. The home-to-work 'spill-over' had a greater impact on home life than work life, but effects at work were still considerable. For example, carers were significantly more likely than others to report that life outside work sometimes had an impact on their ability to take up development and career opportunities, and to get to work on time. Those with pre-school children were more likely to say that life outside work affected their ability to concentrate when they are at work, and having enough energy to do the job.

The Ministry of Social Development Work, Family and Parenting study (2006) also looked at 'work to home spillover' effects. The vast majority of people surveyed agreed that a happy family life makes work more enjoyable (8%), but a quarter (28%) felt that, because of their family responsibilities, they were not as committed to their job as they would like to be. While most people agreed that job satisfaction results in an improved quality of home life (89%), the majority (61%) felt that they missed out on some of the rewarding aspects of being a parent because of work. Three quarters (74%) of the parents agreed that children learned some good values because of their parents' paid work; 55% agreed that working makes them a better parent.

The nature of people's caring responsibilities affected their overall satisfaction with the quality of their family life. The majority (79%) of parents rated their family life as either 'happy' or 'extremely happy'. Sole parents were significantly less happy with the quality of their family life than other parents (59% rated their family life as either 'happy' or 'extremely happy'). Parents in households with pre-school children tended to be happier with their family life, than parents in households with older children (84% and 76% respectively rated their family life as 'happy' or 'extremely happy').

The stresses of caring for those with special needs affected people's perceptions of the quality of their family life:

- only 27% of parents in a household where someone was caring for an elderly relative (n=59) who was unable to properly care for themselves were 'extremely happy' with their family life, compared to 41% of all parents
- 66% of parents in a household where someone had a permanent disability or long-term illness rated their quality of life as 'happy' or 'extremely happy', compared to 79% of all parents (Ministry of Social Development, 2006).

Recent research has shown that balancing work and parenting or caring responsibilities means different things to different people (Department of Labour, 2003; Ministry of Social Development, 2006). However, most people can relate to the concept of work-life balance, identify an imbalance in their lives, and think of changes to the work environment that would improve that balance. Research also indicates that most people are satisfied with their working arrangements and the quality of their home life (Ministry of Social Development, 2006; Families Commission 2005). Department of Labour focus group research in 2003 found that most people would not look to address imbalances until a crisis, and were reluctant to approach employers to make requests. They saw responsibility for achieving work-life balance lying with individuals, while creating the environment for it lies with employers.

The research on work/life balance shows that achieving a balance is situation specific and affected by many factors, including individual choice or preference, employer/employee relationships and government policies. Therefore no single policy or support arrangement for achieving a balance will meet everyone's needs. Studies that look in depth at people's circumstances, and the factors influencing their decisions, will be an important source of information for the ongoing discussion about work-life balance.

2.2 Research questions

The research aimed to increase understanding about the decisions men and women who have caring responsibilities make about whether, how, when and why they participate in paid work. A secondary objective was to examine whether information on the consequences of decisions about paid work had an impact on these decisions. The specific research questions agreed with NACEW and the Department of Labour were:

- What kind of caring responsibilities do parents and other carers have?
- What is the pattern of participation in paid work prior to and after the onset of caring responsibilities?
- What influences the labour market participation of people with caring responsibilities, and what factors are taken into account?

- How do decisions about paid work change over time according to changes in caring responsibilities and other circumstances?
- Do caring responsibilities prevent people progressing in jobs or accessing training?
- How do decisions about participation in paid work translate into decisions about unpaid work within the family and vice versa?
- What processes do people use to make decisions about paid work (including the impact of any information sought)?
- How satisfied are people with caring responsibilities about their decisions relating to paid work?
- What could be done to make it easier or enhance decision making about paid work for those with caring responsibilities?

2.3 *Structure of this report*

This report has nine chapters. Chapters one and two, the introduction and methodology, provide an overview of the purpose of the study, and describe the research methods used. Chapter three presents participants' demographic characteristics, and a description of their caring responsibilities and involvement in paid work. Chapter four discusses factors that influenced participants' decisions. Decision making processes are covered in chapter five. Chapter six outlines the attitudes of other people towards participants' decisions. The effects of people's decisions and their satisfaction with them are discussed in chapters seven and eight. Chapter nine discusses the findings, forms some conclusions, and highlights areas for further work.

2 Research methods

2.1 Introduction

This was a qualitative study drawing on 50 interviews with women and men, all of whom were the primary caregiver, or in a few cases, shared caring responsibilities equally with their partner. Qualitative methodology is well suited to exploring the 'how' and 'why' questions that informed this study. Face to face interviewing enabled participants to reflect on their experiences of the decision making process and discuss them in depth. The semi-structured interview guide and open-ended questions enabled interviewers to explore themes and topics relevant to participants' individual circumstances.

Having a sample with a number of different characteristics provided breadth as well as depth, but the small sample size means that the findings are not necessarily representative e.g. not all men will feel the same way as the men in the sample. At the same time, the interviews did produce some consistent findings and highlight areas for further research.

2.2 The sample

The population of interest for this study was parents with at least one child up to the age of eighteen years (including parents of children with disabilities) and people who have caring responsibilities for another adult (including adults with disabilities, and older adults). The researchers chose a non-random sample of 50 people with caring responsibilities from four geographical locations: Wellington, Auckland, Nelson (and Motueka) and the Wairarapa. A detailed profile of the sample is in Appendix II; summary tables are included in the next chapter.

2.2.1 Sampling method

The researchers used the snowballing technique to obtain the sample. They identified a set of initial contacts, and asked them whether they knew other people who met the criteria and might be willing to participate in the research. The researchers then followed up on these contacts.

The researchers chose this technique because it can be an effective and efficient way to generate a sample of participants from a range of backgrounds. They successfully recruited participants who are often hard to reach through other means, such as through advertising, organisational databases or cold calling.

To enable them to answer the research questions adequately, the researchers developed a sampling matrix which included targets for minimum numbers within particular sub-sample groups, for example, people with children with special needs. In the few cases where couples shared caring responsibilities fairly evenly, the team interviewed the person with the demographic characteristics they needed for the sample.

The researchers also sought to include participants in different situations: people who were in paid work, both full time and part time, or not in paid work at the time of the study; men who had parenting and/or other caring responsibilities; participants who were Maori and Pacific people; and people living in urban and rural areas.

2.3 The interviews

2.3.1 Recruitment procedures

The researchers contacted potential participants by email or telephone to explain the research and determine their willingness to participate. Those who agreed to take part received a written information sheet and consent form (Appendix I)³. The information sheet discussed the purpose of the research, the areas the questions would cover, use and confidentiality of the information collected, and gave the researchers' contact details. A researcher then confirmed an interview time and place with the participant. All of the people contacted agreed to participate.

2.3.2 The interviews

The interviews took place during February and March 2006. Most were conducted in the participant's home. The researcher began the interview by going through the project again and giving the participant a copy of the consent form. If the participant had no questions and was happy to continue, s/he signed the form.

Many interviews were tape recorded and transcribed with the participant's permission. In some cases it was not practical to tape the interview, for example, due to background noise. In all cases researchers took detailed notes. The interviews took between one and one and three quarter hours.

Two researchers were present at all but three interviews, where it was impractical for two people to attend. One researcher asked the questions while the other took notes, and on occasion prompted for further responses or asked additional questions. This practice allowed the interviewers to probe areas in more depth and minimised the risk that they missed important points. It also enabled the researchers to take thorough notes without compromising their rapport with participants. A further benefit was that the researchers could discuss each interview after it was completed, and make sense of the data they collected.

The interviewing team comprised two Pakeha women, a Pakeha man, and for one interview, a Samoan woman.

At the completion of the interview, researchers gave participants a gratuity of \$50 cash in recognition of their time.

2.3.3 Interview guide

The researchers developed a semi-structured interview guide in conjunction with the project advisory group.⁴ The guide (Appendix I) was based on the research questions and covered the following areas:

- nature and extent of caring responsibilities
- paid work – current and historical
- decision making related to current situation – factors influencing decisions and decision making processes
- demographic information.

³ In a few cases the consent form was first given to the participants at the time of the interview.

⁴ Comprising representatives of the Department of Labour and the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (NACEW)

The interview guide ensured that researchers collected information pertinent to the research questions and asked key questions consistently. Using a guide, rather than a questionnaire, also allowed researchers to explore themes and issues that arose from a participant's circumstances and experiences, omit questions that were not appropriate, and modify the wording of questions to suit a participant's situation.

The researchers reviewed the interview guide after the first four interviews, and made some minor alterations including adding some new questions and prompts.

2.3.4 Data analysis

The team analysed the data in several stages, beginning by coding transcripts according to research questions, labelling each transcript with participants' personal characteristics, and entering the data onto an NVivo database.

Researchers then looked at each research question according to the 'paid work' category participants were in, and within that according to participants' personal characteristics. The researchers also paid attention to sub-groups of interest, such as men, and people with children with special needs.

For the third stage, the researchers reviewed the research questions for all the sub groups of interest, looking, for example, at ethnicity and type of caring responsibility. They examined data from all participants to capture the dynamic of people's patterns of participation in paid work.

Finally, the researchers amalgamated reports from these analyses and examined the commonalities and full range of exceptions. This allowed for consistent 'within case' and 'between case' analysis, and ensured validity and reliability in interpreting findings.

2.3.5 Limitations of the research

This study sought to answer a number of broad research questions. The report provides a picture of some of the factors that influence the decisions of people with caring responsibilities, but given the broad scope of the study, it was not possible to meet all of the objectives in great depth.

The snowballing technique used to recruit participants has a number of advantages and some limitations. It does not aim to provide a representative sample, and can be biased. There is also a risk that participants will be too similar to the people who selected them - that is, they will have the same or similar characteristics and beliefs as the researchers. This can mean that only a narrow range of perspectives and experiences is represented in the findings. The researchers sought to overcome this problem by drawing on their networks with people with a range of characteristics and beliefs, and by using a sampling matrix which identified particular groups they needed to recruit. Although they attempted to include a range of participants, it was not possible to include every variant on caring responsibilities or other circumstances. Some groups, such as single parents of children with special needs and ethnic groups other than European, Maori and Pacific people, could be included in further research.

With the snowball technique, participants' confidentiality is potentially more at risk. Some of the initial contact people will know others who took part in the study, and may be able to identify them through discussion of their circumstances in the report.

The researchers attempted to mitigate this risk by reducing references to specific characteristics of participants.

3 The participants

This chapter describes participants' demographic characteristics, caring responsibilities, and participation in paid work. Detailed tables are in Appendix III.

3.1 Demographics

The participants in the study included:

Thirty-six women and fourteen men, most of whom were aged between 31 and 50 years.

Table 1: Participants' age and gender

Age	Women	Men	Total
30 and under	3	1	4
31 – 40	17	7	24
41 - 50	11	6	17
51 – 60	4	-	4
61 +	1	-	1
Total	36	14	50

- Twenty nine European, twelve Maori and seven Samoan, one Samoan/Chinese and one Fijian participant.⁵
- Thirty two participants who lived in urban areas, twelve who lived in small towns, and six who lived in rural areas.
- Thirty-two participants with a post school qualification (either a degree or trade/vocational); eleven with a school qualification, and seven with no school qualifications. The proportion with a university qualification (44%) is twice as high as the proportion of the population as a whole (18%).⁶

Table 2: Highest educational qualification

	Degree qualification	Trade/vocational qualification	School qualification	No educational qualification
Number of participants	22	10	11	7

Twelve participants in households where the gross annual income was less than \$40,000 annually (defined as 'low' income). Eleven participants had an annual household income of between \$40,001 and \$70,000 ('medium' income), and seventeen had a household income of between \$70,001 and \$100,000 annually ('high' income). Ten participants had a household income of over \$100,000 annually ('very high' income).

The national average household income in 2003-04 was \$60,433.⁷ Seventy percent of the sample had a household income over \$50,000 per year, while over half (27 or 54%) had a household income of \$70,000 per year or more, which means that the sample was better off on average than the population as a whole.

Thirty-seven participants with a partner; in 34 families both partners were the parents of the children. Three participants were or had been in a family that included step-children.

⁵ Participants' ethnicity was self identified.

⁶ The Social Report 2006, MSD 2006

⁷ Statistics New Zealand: Household Economic Survey June 2004

Thirteen single people, one of whom was widowed. Three others had no support from the other parent because the parent was in prison, overseas, or the participant had had no contact with them since the child's birth.

Ten single parents had a range of day to day care arrangements – shared day to day care, stipulated weekends and time in the school holidays, and informal arrangements that were liable to change. Most single parents had been parenting alone for at least five years, generally since their youngest or only child was an infant or pre-schooler. One person who was single had had permanent care of her grandchild for the last ten years.

3.2 Caring responsibilities

All but one participant cared for children as the primary caregiver. One person had the care of an adult only, and thirteen had the care of both adults and children.

Table 3: Type of caring responsibilities

	Caring for children only	Caring for adults and children	Caring for adults only	Caring for child/ren with special needs	Caring for adults with disabilities
Number of participants	36	13	1	9	4

Thirty-seven people had one or two children, six participants had three children, and six had four or five children.

Table 4: Number of dependent children

	1 child	2 children	3 children	4 children	5 children
Number of participants	19	18	6	3	3

The majority of participants had a youngest child of pre-school or primary school age; eight had a youngest child at secondary school. The children covered within the study were aged from five months to eighteen years.

Table 5: Age of youngest child

	Pre-school	Primary school	Secondary school
Number of participants	19	22	8

Nine participants had children with special needs. These were related to children having one of the following conditions: cerebral palsy, downs syndrome, dyspraxia, cystic fibrosis, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), developmental delay and other physical conditions, and autism.

These conditions required a range of daily care, as the comments below show:

Both [my children] have cerebral palsy and epilepsy. One child is severely disabled and totally dependent. One child is semi mobile, can feed himself, is non verbal. Both require medication, both are incontinent. [My older child] has a gastro tube and is fed through that.

It's not that debilitating. He's a little slower and he will always be like that. Things take more time; we just have to go slower. I'm just more aware when he's there.

All of the school aged children with special needs were at school.

Most of the twenty participants caring for adults were caring for one or both of their parents or parents-in-law. Three people cared for adult children with disabilities, and one cared for a spouse with a disability. The extent of care ranged from regular phone calls and visits and occasionally doing other tasks, to more regular and intense support such as managing finances, providing meals, assisting with shopping, visiting doctors, and doing household chores. In a few cases, the adult being cared for lived with the participant and required constant supervision. In other instances the cared-for adult lived in a separate house on the same section or nearby. Some participants had caring responsibilities for their adult parents who lived in different towns, and spent a great deal of time travelling to provide support for them.

3.2.1 Support with caring responsibilities

Almost all participants who had family or friends living nearby regularly received support with caring for their child/ren. This care ranged from a few hours occasionally, to whole days or nights a week. The participants' mothers often provided it; so did sisters, family of ex partners, and for one single man, his 'mates' girlfriends'.

Most people with pre-school children looked after them themselves with support from family and/or friends. Some used formal early childhood education services where they left the child, although few used them full time. Some participants with school aged children did not want to use out of school and school holiday services. Participants or their partners were often able to adjust their schedules so they could pick children up after school, or wider family or friends picked them up.

Some participants with children with special needs received help from family, but others did not, even if family members lived nearby. This was not related to the severity of the disability or amount of care required. The option of reciprocated childcare – children being at friends' houses – was not available to participants with children with special needs, nor were their children able to play sport after school and on weekends, an activity which can provide a break for parents.

Most, but not all, of the participants with children with special needs received some disability related support, such as a disability allowance, respite care (for example, one weekend a month), taxis to and from school (but not in rural locations), or paid household support (a carer for a few hours a day, a cleaner once a week).

Most of the people caring for adults received emotional and practical support from family members, including participants' adolescent children, siblings, and partners. In addition, some received support from non-government organisations such as the Alzheimer's Society. Respite care of a few weeks a year was available for people looking after adults in their homes. The single person caring for her son who had a mental illness felt most unsupported in providing this care. She had had years of looking after him with almost no support from family, friends or health agencies. Recently he had gone into supported accommodation, although she felt the care he received was inadequate.

Family and friends living nearby were the main source of the support participants received with their caring responsibilities. Ethnicity made no apparent difference – some Maori, for example, had a lot of family support, as did some Europeans and Pacific participants; others had very little.

3.2.2 Domestic work

The primary caregiver did most of the domestic work in households regardless of whether they were in any paid work, and irrespective of gender. Domestic work tended to be shared in households of two working parents, or where one partner was in paid work but was home when chores were being done, such as shift workers.

3.3 Participation in paid work

Thirty-seven participants were in paid work at the time of the study – part and full time⁸; thirteen were not in any paid work. Paid work hours ranged from very irregular contract work averaging a few hours a week, to over 40 hours a week.

Occupations covered all major New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations groups, with 43 (86%) falling into the first four categories and seven (14%) into the second four categories.

The professional group included teachers, IT workers, policy analysts, a university lecturer, a veterinarian, project manager, accountant and an industrial chemist. The technician/associate professional group included office administrators or managers (10 out of the 22), social and community workers (6), teacher aides, a writer, a musician and a nurse. A full list of occupations is given in Appendix III.

Table 6: Former and current occupation

Occupation by major NZSCO group	Not in paid work	Working part time	Working full time	Total
Managers	-	-	6	6
Professionals	4	3	6	13
Technician, associate professionals	5	8	9	22
Clerks	-	1	1	2
Service & sales workers	2	1	1	4
Agriculture worker	1	-	-	1
Trades worker	-	1	-	1
Factory worker	1	-	-	1
Total	13	14	23	50

All participants were in paid work prior to having children, most of them full time. One partner usually stopped paid work on the birth of a first child, irrespective of personal characteristics, including occupation or income. People in highly paid professions were as likely to stop as those in lower paid work.

Which partner left paid work depended to some extent on income, although views on gender roles also influenced who stayed at home. Women usually stayed home when their children were younger. Most participants not in paid work were caring for pre-schoolers. Most participants with a youngest child at primary school were in some paid work, over half of them full time. Every participant with a youngest child

⁸ Full time work is defined by Statistics New Zealand as 30 hours or more per week.

at secondary school was in some paid work. Partners generally stayed in full time paid work throughout.

Table 7: Participation in paid work by age category of youngest child

Participants	Age category of participants' youngest child				Total
	Aged 2 and under	Age 3 or 4	Primary school	Secondary school	
Not in paid work	9	2	2	0	13
Working part time	1	2	8	3	14
Working full time	3	2	12	5	22
Total	13	6	22	8	49*

* One more participant working full time cared for an adult only.

The length of time people stayed out of paid work varied, and largely depended on their views about parental and family care for children, and family support available. A number did not return to any paid work until their children were school age, and not to full time paid work until children were in secondary school. Some did not return to work at all.

People who were in part time paid work fell roughly into three categories. Ten worked very few and irregular hours (up to 10 hours per week). Most were contractors who were either in the process of building up paid work, or had basically left paid work. Four people worked 16 to 29 hours a week. Three were employees; one was self-employed. They included professionals, trades people and clerical workers. People working part time had children of varying ages.

Twenty-two people in full time paid work were employees; one was a self employed hairdresser. Twenty-one of the 22 employees were managers, professionals or associate professionals, the other was a clerk.

This group included people who had always been in full time paid work apart from periods of parental leave, and people who had had periods of not working and/or working part time. Their partners were also in full time paid work. Most people in this group had a youngest child of school age. Most of those who had always worked full time had a lot of family support, and/or work that they could arrange around caring for children, for example, by one partner working an evening shift. Few couples had maintained the 'two parents in full time paid work' pattern throughout their children's lives.

3.3.1 Voluntary work

While the study did not directly address participants' involvement in voluntary work, a number of people from all paid work categories talked about the voluntary work they did in their communities. They often supported early childhood education activities and schools. A number were on committees or school boards of trustees, and contributed to running pre-school activity groups. Several mentioned going on school trips as parent help; one person worked voluntarily for a local community group.

3.4 Summary

The sample included a range of participants: people aged between 20 and 65; men and women; European, Maori and Pacific people; living rurally, in small towns and urban centres. It included a disproportionate number of participants with a tertiary

qualification and levels of income above the national average. Other studies have tended to focus on those with low income or sole parents; this study has a mix of income levels, particularly around those in the higher brackets who are often 'forgotten'.

All but one participant cared for children, and a quarter cared for children with special needs or an adult with a disability. One person cared for an adult only. Participants were in part time and full time paid work, or not in paid work. People usually stopped paid work upon the birth of a child, going back part or full time as their youngest child went to school. People who worked few or irregular hours were usually contractors; those who worked longer, more regular part time hours or full time were almost all employees.

4 Factors influencing people's decisions

This chapter looks at the factors people caring for others took into account when making decisions about participation in paid work. It looks first at participants who were not currently in paid work, then at people in part time work, and finally at people currently in full time paid work. The chapter refers to people's plans for future participation in paid work, as these plans influenced their decisions.

4.1 People not in paid work

Thirteen people in the study were not in any paid work. This group comprised:

- nine women and four men
- eight European, one Maori and four Pacific people
- twelve who were partnered, and one single person
- four who had been in professional occupations; five who were office administrators, teacher aides or social workers; two had been service workers; one had been a gardener, and one a factory worker
- six with annual household incomes of \$50,000 or less, and seven with annual household incomes over \$50,000.

Nine people in this group had children aged two or under; two had children aged three or four years. Only two had a youngest child who was school aged. Most had one or two children, although one woman had five. Three participants had children with special needs; two supported older adults.

4.1.1 Beliefs about caring for child/ren

All the people who were not in paid work said it was important to them to have a parent at home particularly with a pre-school child, and for some, with any dependent child. People spoke of the opportunity to make the most of this time with their children, and to develop strong relationships with them. Several felt it was their responsibility to care for the child/ren they had decided to have:

I'm doing the best for him. It's the one on one. I've got time to teach him things and let him experience things like going to the beach and the park. The most important factors are my philosophy and values. I always thought if I had children, I didn't want them to be in childcare.

Several referred to the way they had been brought up, particularly having a mother, or in one case a father, at home full time. They wanted their children to have the same experience:

My philosophy on family and children and my upbringing and my partner's – we both had a parent at home, someone after school – and we think that's important.

Both men and women not in paid work held this view. Some men had made the decision to stay home reluctantly, but had come to see it as an opportunity to build a good relationship with their child/ren:

As a father you're supposed to provide for your family but you have a partner who has a different story and wants me to be at home. You have to come to a

decision. Most children are not close to their fathers but you become close to them being at home. I have come to see it this way.

Participants' views about formal early childhood education services, particularly full day or full time services, were related to their beliefs about a parent being at home with young children. A number thought that centre-based early childhood education services did not provide sufficient care and attention for children under two years old as they required one on one care. One person felt that centre-based care was over stimulating for young children. Some thought that no-one could look after their child/ren as well as they could:

We're not into childcare - too many kids [at centres]. We wanted to have one parent at home. Maybe the kids get socialisation [at a centre] - I don't know but there's not enough one on one.

This group did not rigorously examine full day early childhood education services as an option for childcare. None thought that a place was difficult to find, although there might be a waiting list or hours that did not suit. One person looked at a centre her mother worked in. Another, aware of how dangerous her partner's occupation was and the possibility that she would need to financially support herself and her child, looked at a centre near where she used to work just to see what it was like. None tried to find formal early childhood education or informal childcare to enable them to participate in paid work.

Although they did not want their children to attend childcare centres, many in this group were involved in other forms of formal early childhood education such as kindergarten or playcentre. This was consistent with their belief that being with their child was important. One person had a pre-schooler at an Aoga Amata because he wanted his child to learn Samoan language and culture. Most people also took their child/ren to some type of pre-school activity such as swimming or music classes.

In considering possible future early childhood education and childcare arrangements, a few participants mentioned a nanny as an option. One felt that, while they preferred this arrangement because it offered one on one care in a home environment, they could not afford it. Another person's partner did not want someone else in their home.

4.1.2 Gender roles

Most participants not in paid work had had some discussion with their partner about who would be the primary caregiver. A few supported traditional gender roles, that is, they believed that women should be at home with their children, but most simply felt that the woman was more able to look after a child or that the man did not want to or 'could not' do it. For example:

Before the baby there was discussion of my partner staying at home but when [our child] was born, my partner was in shock by what was involved. We did discuss that maybe at six months we would swap, but then at six months it was decided the [child] needed me more.

One of the four men stayed at home because he and his partner felt that she was not managing being at home with a child:

Before [our child] was born we discussed what we would do and we thought I would work and she'd stay home, but then it went pear shaped. We always thought though that one of us would stay home. We wanted him looked after at home for the first two years, you should have parental leave for that amount of time. When we decided I would stay home, it was a decision we both made because she was just so stressed at home with [our child].

Two women whose partners were self employed thought that it would be difficult for their partners to do any other kind of work, so the partners were not available to do more or all of the care giving.

4.1.3 Financial factors

Participants not in paid work did not welcome giving up one pay packet, but all felt they could manage on one income, irrespective of what it was. The household income of this group ranged from \$15,000-\$20,000 per year for two households to over \$70,000 per year for six of the 13 households. The financial effects of giving up an income are discussed further in chapter seven.

When partners explicitly discussed which parent should stay at home with young children, they always discussed financial factors. An important reason for two of the men staying home was that their partner had a higher income. In most cases where couples felt that the woman should stay home, she had lower earnings. Where women earned as much as their partner, other factors such as who could cope best with looking after a child and children's health issues became more important.

Financial factors dominated the decision for only one person in this group – a man who had decided to stay at home full time with his young children primarily so that he would not have to pay child support for children from his previous marriage.

4.1.4 Paid work related factors

Almost all the people not in paid work had worked full time prior to having children or caring for an adult. Some identified factors associated with work in general, or with their specific work situation, that influenced their decision to stay at home full time. Both men and women said that they were not particularly interested in pursuing a career, or were less interested in doing so than their partner. A single woman with relatively low skills lacked confidence, and felt that her only job options were in low paid unskilled work and not worth pursuing.

A few people thought that it would be stressful to work and look after a child and a household, or that their previous work could only be done full time which would not leave enough time to be a parent:

We discussed giving this a couple of years and then reassessing whether I go back part time or full time – but going back to [my previous work] is questionable. My experience is that you have to give it your all... It would be too much having [child] as well, not having the time for him.

Two people were affected by restructuring at work while they were on parental leave, although were not sure they wanted to return anyway:

I went on parental leave and the business I worked for moved to [another city] while I was on parental leave. I was kind of planning to go back but not sure how long it would be. I initially took a year's parental leave. I was undecided about going back. I was initially thinking about full time study after parental leave, but carried on with part time study. I didn't look for another paid job. We were financially comfortable. I wanted to make the most of my time with [our child], be focused on [our child].

This group did not seriously explore flexibility options in their workplace because their primary reason for leaving paid work was to care for young children. Several had made assumptions about how flexible their workplace might be based on their observations of workplace culture. One woman thought that her previous workplace was inflexible, and this discouraged her return to work:

If [my former] workplace was more flexible, initially, before I left work I thought I might go back.

Almost all of this group had plans to return to work, not necessarily in their previous job, within the next two to five years, and some earlier than that if finances demanded. Options included entering part time work or running their own business.

4.1.5 Other factors

One man at home full time with his two children, one of whom had special needs, did not make a decision to be at home, but was forced to give up paid work after a serious accident. Prior to this accident, he had not considered being at home with children.

Other factors which contributed to people's decision to be at home full time were:

- wanting to breastfeed a child for two years
- having another baby
- having the opportunity to study
- being unable to drive, which made it easier to stay home – combined with a perceived lack of marketable skills.

4.2 People in part time paid work

Fourteen people were engaged in part time paid work (between 1 and 29 hours a week). This group comprised:

- five men and nine women
- six single and eight partnered people
- one Pacific person, four Maori and nine European people
- six people with one child, and eight people with two or more children
- three professionals, five office administrators, three people in technical occupations, one clerical worker, one service worker and one tradesperson
- six with an annual household income of \$50,000 or less; eight with an annual household income over \$50,000.

One person had a child under two, two had a youngest child aged three or four, eight had a youngest child at primary school, and three had a youngest child at secondary school. Three people had a child with special needs as well as other children to care for, and three people were looking after older adults as well as children.

Some of the people in this group had chosen to work part time because of their caring responsibilities, or because they only wanted part time work. Others were looking for more hours of work and would like to be working full time. Some worked on a contract basis, while others had permanent part time work.

4.2.1 Beliefs about caring responsibilities

Both men and women and people of all ethnic groups and income bands described how their beliefs about parental care of children affected their decisions about paid work. Eleven said that having to care for family members was the main reason they chose to work part time. Most had been out of paid work or in part time work for some years because of their views. Two of the five men in this group had become primary caregivers for their children after they and their partners decided the children needed one parent at home after a period of both parents working. People were able to manage their part time work by doing it at home, or when children were in school, or when their partner or another family member could care for the children.

None of the three people with pre-schoolers used formal early childhood education services where they left their child (although one intended to use kohanga reo). They thought that parental care of young children was important, which included for one person the commitment to breastfeeding her child. Another participant was with her child when he went to kindergarten, working as a teacher aide:

I haven't worked until the last year when he started kindergarten and I am there with him. All activities are around him – he is the primary factor [in relation to work situation]. I want to be there for him. A parent should be at home. I believe in parental care. When I work at the kindy, I am part of his life. I do it because he is there.

Eight participants who worked part time had primary school aged children and needed to arrange after school and holiday care. Most were able to provide this themselves; some had family support as well. Where out of school services were an option, some people chose not to use them, either because their children did not like it, or because the parents felt it was not the right option for their children. For example, one single father considered out of school services inappropriate because his primary school aged children had had a traumatic time recently:

My plan is to stay two years with them [before returning to work]. Get them centred and happy. A year is not long enough. The youngest one is very insecure, they hate me going out, [the children] think I won't come back because that is what their mother did.

Another partnered father with school age children made it a priority to be at home to provide after school and holiday care:

When we were both working, we had a house cleaner and experimented with nannies but it didn't really work. [More regular] part time work was an option, I did look at some part time jobs but this just works better. The children enjoy it – having one person who is dedicated – not all this other stuff [various carers] happening. We find at this stage, as they are getting older the [children] need just as much if not more involvement and guidance than they did when they were younger.

One person used out of school services as the most practical option for childcare. She was a single parent who was studying and working, and had few friends or family members living close by to help her.

Three participants had secondary school age children for whom out of school services were not an issue.

4.2.2 Financial factors

Financial factors influenced people's decisions about participating in paid work. With their carer responsibilities, some partnered people felt able to work only a few hours a week. They included people with relatively low household incomes, as well as those with household incomes over \$50,000 per year. For a few couples, financial factors influenced who would be the primary caregiver – two men in this group were the primary caregivers because their partners earned more.

A few of the people working part time were doing so for the extra money, as well as for personal satisfaction:

We made the decision for me to work one day per week jointly; it was me and my partner because we needed the money. I did enjoy being at home but I also can see that I did want to re-enter the adult world for myself... I guess it is also good to be in the outside world and be meeting people. I do like doing some paid work.

One person said that money was not a factor in the decision to work part time, but had become more important since starting work.

Money was not the primary factor in decision making for single people working part time. For those not on a benefit and working longer part time hours, money was a more important reason to be in paid work; for those on a benefit, money was not that important due to benefit abatement

I am still on the [Domestic Purposes Benefit]. I can earn \$80 per week extra. I am hoping to get off the benefit and would then get a supplement...money is not the biggest thing, I want to get out of house and to accomplish things.

[The part time work] causes benefit abatement that makes me worse off but I need the experience and a reference. If I work one day I'm worse off, if I had five days work I'd be better off. Strangely it also matters what day I report working – they have never been able to explain how this works.

4.2.3 Other paid work related factors

Two people said the decision to leave full time paid work was independent of their caring responsibilities - one did not want to work full time; and the other resigned from his job because of issues with management, but was looking for another full time job.

Others were ambivalent about their paid work and wanted to be at home for their children:

I most enjoyed work contact with people but was happy to leave, I didn't enjoy it that much.

It was pretty obvious to me and my partner that I would stay at home. I wasn't particularly enjoying my job at that stage.

The nature of one person's previous profession influenced her to become the primary caregiver despite earning more than her partner:

Initially my career was the better one, now it is his. If I had gone back to work full time and [my partner] had stayed home I would have been working very long hours and on call, and I didn't want that.

An inability to work part time also contributed to some people's decision not to stay in full time paid work, but rather to work a few hours per week in a different job:

One of the main things was the stress we used to have about being able to pick up kids. I was on night shift one day 11pm – 7 am and dropping off kids and not getting much sleep. I had a car accident and I thought I can't do this, it's too hard ...I knew [my previous job] would not offer part time work.

Even when the workplace did offer part time work, this did not necessarily work well:

My work place was accommodating. I had tried working four days at one time but that was difficult and people wanted you to be there all the time.

The parent of a child with special needs doubted that a job existed that could cope with her unpredictable regime of hospital appointments:

[My child] has hospital appointments frequently and it is very difficult to predict how long they will be. They say come for one hour but we will be there for three or four. This would make it very difficult to work [in a more regular job with longer hours].

A number of men and women enjoyed the social contact at work and said their self esteem had improved. Others wanted to maintain skills or were offered work in 'a direction I wanted to head into'.

Most people working part time thought that their participation in paid work would change in the future. Some were actively looking for full time work. Others were thinking of retraining for personal satisfaction, or because their current profession was incompatible with family life. They thought this would happen in several years when their children were at a different stage. For some, this was when a child started school, for others it was when children were in secondary school or had left school.

4.3 People in full time paid work

The 23 people in full time work (30 hours or more a week) were the largest group. They were:

- five men and 18 women
- six single and 17 partnered people
- twelve European, seven Maori and four Pacific people
- twelve people in managerial or professional occupations; nine technicians or associate professionals; one clerk and one tradesperson.

People in full time paid work had a range of caring responsibilities:

- fourteen cared for children only; eight for children and adults, one for an adult only
- four cared for children with special needs and one for an adult with a disability.

The youngest child of three participants was two or younger; two had a youngest child aged three or four; seventeen had only school age children. The number of children ranged from one to five.

4.3.1 Beliefs about caring responsibilities

As with other groups, many participants in full time work were strongly influenced by their beliefs about parental or family care for children.

Half of the people in this group had not been in paid work at all, or had worked part time when their children were pre-schoolers, because they wanted to care for young children. Most had resumed full time paid work when their children were at school.

The other half had worked throughout their child/ren's lives, apart from periods of parental leave. Many still wanted their children to be in family care when they were under two years old. They either had family members care for their children, sometimes for pay, or took their young child/ren to work with them:

Having support from family enabled early return to full time work. I would not have gone back so early if my mother was not there.

Four of the five participants who had pre-school children and worked full time used early childhood education services, part or full time, to enable them to be in paid work. Three women were partnered and had high personal and household incomes; one was a single parent who took a job opportunity when her youngest child was six months old as she felt it would not come up again:

My child is in kohanga 9am-3pm, five days a week. It costs \$79 per week; I receive the childcare subsidy which covers the cost. She has been there since she was 18 months old. Prior to that, she was looked after by my neighbour from when she was six months old, then the neighbour got a job and I only had a week's notice to find somewhere. All [the crèches] were booked up but I found space in a good kohanga. Unfortunately it only goes until 3pm and I work until 5pm. After 3pm, my sister has [my child] until I finish work or my older children are home.

One woman who worked 30 hours a week used a formal education and care centre for three days a week to care for her 14 month old child. She had put much effort into finding a high quality service, and considered her child benefited from attending this centre:

I like the things [child] gets from crèche, the social interaction and activities, mental and physical stimulation. A nanny would be good with the one to one care but [child] really enjoys and benefits from lots of kids around.

She did, however, set limits round this to ensure that her child was not in a centre based service five days a week.

[If I work extra hours] more days at [the centre] are possible but I prefer my mum to do the extra days. I don't want the centre to be [my child's] sole

input.... [My workplace] have asked me [do extra hours] but I don't really want to have her in day care that long. I would prefer not to have her there longer hours.

Two people were using out of school services on some days, and another would like to but the school her child attended did not have this service.

Eighteen of the 23 people in full time paid work felt that their need to provide care had had some effect on their decision about paid work. Of the other five, four women had returned to full time work less than six months after their children were born. All said that caring for others had not affected this decision. One man who was the primary caregiver during the day and worked evening shifts had always worked in the evenings.

Many participants had either limited their hours of work, or changed the type of work they did in terms of level of seniority or amount of stress. One man who was the primary caregiver for his children said:

When one first starts work one has aspirations. But kids are first and foremost and career not that important. I'm not disappointed I didn't go further. We considered me working in Australia [better career development there] but my partner wants to work in [this city]. We talked about me commuting to Australia on a weekly basis. But family was the deciding factor. I need to be around my kids and my partner for the sake of our marriage.

4.3.2 Financial factors

Financial factors influenced many people's decisions to be in full time paid work, but were also strongly related to other aspects of paid work such as personal satisfaction. Fifteen of the 23 had personal incomes over \$40,000 a year, compared with the national average in June 2005 of just under \$31,000 a year for people in paid employment.⁹ Four had personal incomes between \$30,000 and \$40,000, while four had personal incomes below the national average.

A few people decided to start work some years ago because they needed the money for living costs, but found now that having the money made life more pleasant and provided options for the future, including being able to save for retirement:

The paid element [of work] is not so important but I don't want financial stress.

It's become financial – the more you have the more you have to work. When we came to New Zealand I worked because we needed the money. Now if I keep working hard I could retire early.

One woman described how having two working parents was part of their family vision of being in a better place, that is, working and saving. A parent of a child with special needs also felt it was important to save now for his child's future:

⁹ Statistics New Zealand

We know there will be benefits for [our child] in the future although we are busy now. The financial thing is more important for him. We want to be able to slow down later as we'll always have a dependent child.

Needing the income from full time paid work was an important factor in most single parents' decision making, but other aspects of paid work were important too. One single parent who had worked full time almost since her child's birth felt she had had a stark choice, but she also valued being in paid work for the contribution she made and for the intellectual stimulation:

[Work] is about stability and commitment and participation, contribution, giving back and remuneration... I have chosen to prioritise financial security as opposed to being an actively involved parent.

Income was also important for a woman in full time paid work who was caring for her disabled partner:

Our money situation halved overnight. He had been working full time so his salary disappeared after sick leave ran out. I suddenly had this mortgage and everything. I was planning to work until I was 65 and then retire; now I have to work until I pay off the house.

Even if income was not a factor driving the decision to be in paid work full time, having financial stability was important for some people:

We got into a financially secure place first. My partner earns more than me but our income is joint. I have earned more than her at times. Who cares who gets it as long as it comes in? We're financially secure, it's not a hassle. You can never earn enough money anyway.

Income from being in full time work was irrelevant to two participants, both of whom personally earned over \$70,000 per year and had partners earning over \$100,000 per year:

We're better off than most families and it didn't really matter if I was working. It's not really the money – it's not a major priority, we could manage with only his income.

Relative incomes were an important factor in deciding who would be the primary caregiver for children, but most men had other reasons for being in this role and in full time paid work. They included taking redundancy from a previous job, working evening shifts, being single, and having very flexible employment.

4.3.3 Other paid work related factors

People were also influenced by other aspects of paid work, including wanting to contribute and using their skills. Men and women caring for children or adults or both felt this way. Most women in full time paid work discussed the frustration of being at home caring for children. Some had actually experienced this frustration; others thought they would do so if they were at home.

People working full time did not explicitly say that having a career was central to their sense of identity, but they did feel paid work was important as it gave people value, acknowledged their efforts, and paid them:

Paid work is really important. I understand the value it gives to people, feelings of value and contribution – and food and being able to provide for the children.

All of the participants in the study who had a managerial job were working full time. People with such positions considered it would be difficult to have this role part time. Half of the participants in the professional category also worked full time, as did nine out of the 22 in the associate professionals and technicians group.

As for people working part time, work provided a break from caring:

I like working because of the social contact and also I like to get away. Also [partner with disabilities] does more when I'm not here but if I'm here he relies more on me.

Only two people wanted to reduce their hours of work or stop working. One was an older woman caring for an adolescent with special needs who wanted to retire:

Just recently I have weighed it all up and decided to retire. It's too hard to keep working and I'm tired of it all. I am going to go overseas and it will be a break. I am lucky that in that I have worked it out and I think financially I have enough money now. I am very lucky that I have this option now.

The other person had one child at primary school and another child soon to start school. She was finding the care of primary school children more difficult to fit in with full time paid work, than the care of pre-school age children:

What I would like to do is be at home more. Ideally I would like to find a job three days per week or only work school hours. Don't think I could do what I currently do in part time hours because responsibility comes with the role. The five year old is the 'stress' area [in terms of] childcare... We did want them to go to after school activities but can't really do that at the moment. My goal is to eventually be able to work school hours.

4.3.4 Other factors

An additional factor for one woman was her partner's opinion. He considered that she should be in full time paid work, and this had a strong influence on her decision:

If I did have my way I'd be home. Work would be secondary. My partner has an influence here. He wants me to work, so he's looking out for my best interests. He likes me being out there.

4.4 Changes in caring responsibilities

Changing caring responsibilities included having more children, children growing up, having responsibility or more responsibility for elderly parents, and having new day to day care arrangements for children after separation or divorce. Most participants in the study – except those with one very young child – could reflect on past changes to their circumstances.

These changes affected some people's decision about participation in paid work. For example, having more than one child made it too difficult logistically for one woman

to keep working three days a week. A number of participants increased their hours of paid work when their children went to school. One woman who had worked part time when her two children were younger found it easier to work full time as her children got older:

It's the [child's] emotional needs...as [child] got older he was more able to cope with me working full time.

Another woman reduced her hours of work when an older child did not want to go to out of school services. Other people with school age children reduced their hours of work because they felt it would improve their family life, because suitable work opportunities arose or because they wanted to study, not because of changes in their caring responsibilities.

When there was a change, people's decisions depended on how much support they had from other family members, and how important paid work was to them financially and for personal satisfaction.

Care requirements for children with special needs changed in some families, but this did not always lead to a change in work arrangements. In one family the children's needs became more demanding. This did not change the family's decision about paid work, but it did make their lives more difficult to manage:

It gets more and more complex...it gets worse because of his condition...physically it's harder because he can't move...we are continually having to learn new ways.

4.5 Overview of factors influencing decisions for particular groups of people

4.5.1 People caring for children with special needs

While having a child with special needs did not in itself appear to drive people's decisions about participating in paid work, it did add stress to their lives. For people not in paid work or working few hours, it combined with other factors to influence their decision. These other factors included the number of children people had, living rurally or in a small town, the support they had from family including their partner, and their level of marketable skills. One person with five children, including one with special needs, lived rurally and had to travel to work. She was ambivalent about working in her professional occupation and wanted to retrain. Although she wanted to work more hours, mainly for the additional income but also for personal satisfaction, the combination of all of these factors limited her ability to take on more paid work.

4.5.2 People caring for adults

People caring for older adults without specific disabilities said that these duties did not influence their decision about participating in paid work. They did most, but not all, of the care in the evenings and weekends, which had a much greater impact on their leisure time and time for themselves. Participants who were supporting and caring for older parents or parents in law gave examples of reciprocity, where their elderly parents, where they were able, provided care and support for the participant's children, particularly after school and in the school holidays.

The decisions of people caring for adults with disabilities were more influenced by these responsibilities, but other factors were also important. One person with an adult son with a mental illness lived in the country, had been out of the paid workforce for over a decade, was single, had health issues, and also had a child at secondary school. Another woman caring for her disabled spouse had reduced her hours of work because of her partner's disability, but also enjoyed her paid work as it provided some socialising, and a 'break' from her caring responsibilities.

4.5.3 Men

Men shared the view that parental care of children, particularly young children, was important. Financial factors also influenced men's decision making, for example in deciding to become the primary caregiver for children because their partner earned more. However, traditional gender roles were strong among the men, and not all of them came to the decision to be the primary caregiver positively. A number had come to it later in their children's lives. Some became the primary caregiver because their children's mother was not available, or for other reasons such as having an accident that meant they had to stop being in paid work.

4.5.4 Ethnic groups

Factors influencing decisions were similar for different ethnic groups in the study. People of Maori, Pacific and European ethnicity were in every category of paid work, and shared beliefs about caring for children, particularly when young. Traditional views about gender roles were also spread across all ethnic groups, although as described in the following chapter, Pacific men who were primary caregivers had a strong sense of their community's attitudes towards their decisions.

4.6 Summary

Participants' decisions about participating in paid work were based on a combination of factors. For almost all participants these included:

Beliefs about parental/family care for children: most participants, men and women, across all categories of involvement in paid work felt strongly that parents/family should provide all or most of the care for children, particularly those aged under two. Consequently they made limited use of full day formal early childhood education services.

Age of their youngest child: this had a strong effect on participants' participation in paid work.

Financial factors: all participants took their financial circumstances into account when making decisions. People working longer part time hours and full time believed they needed the income from work, but this was not a strong factor for people working very few hours. People's actual personal and household income appeared to have little relationship to whether they thought they needed to be in paid work, or could afford to have one parent work part time or not at all. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the study sample has a high proportion of well educated people with above average personal incomes. Men were particularly influenced in their decision making by financial factors, that is, being the primary caregiver for children because their partner earned more.

Other factors influencing some but not all participants were:

- Work related factors, such as personal satisfaction, intellectual stimulation, and feeling valued.
- Tacit or explicit acceptance of traditional gender roles.
- Workplace flexibility, employers' and colleagues' attitudes, and the ability to work part-time. These were relatively strong for people with older children and worked in combination with other factors such as the availability of family support in caring for children.

Factors influencing decisions were not markedly different for people of different age or ethnicity, although the small sample makes it difficult to draw any reliable conclusions. People with managerial occupations felt that such work could not be done on a part time basis. In other cases, the influence of occupation on people's decisions was less clear.

While caring for a child with special needs or an adult with disabilities did not, in itself, drive people's decisions about participation in paid work, it clearly added stress to people's lives and compounded other factors influencing their decisions.

5 Process of decision making

This chapter focuses on how people made decisions about participation in paid work. It explores the level of choice and control people felt they had, who they discussed their decision with, and the involvement of their partner, where they had one, in the decision.

5.1 Level of choice and control over decision

Most participants felt that they had control over the decision to be in paid work, although they did not always have control over the exact timing of the work opportunity. People interpreted the concepts of choice and control differently. Some participants interpreted choice as having two or more realistic options which they would consider; others thought they had a choice because options existed in absolute terms, even though they personally would never select any but one of those options.

Many participants not in paid work or working part time believed that they had primary responsibility for the care of their child/ren. Some thought that these beliefs offered them a choice; others did not. Those who had decided to leave paid work, or reduce their hours of paid work to be with their child, felt they had no choice because of their philosophical commitment to parenting in that way. Others felt there was a choice because, theoretically, they could have gone back to work and paid for early childhood education or childcare.

Participants who were in part time paid work experienced different degrees of control of their decisions. Those who had given up working longer hours because they did not want to work so long felt they had control; those who were finding it difficult to get a full time job did not.

People working full time felt they had choice and control over the decision to be in full time work. Some described a financial imperative, and it was impossible to determine how much this constrained their options. One woman felt her partner's views had overridden her own preferences.

5.1.1 Men

Several men who had reluctantly taken on the role of primary caregiver felt they had no choice. Although they shared their partner's commitment to their child having an at home parent, they did not necessarily want to be that parent. They were at home for financial reasons or because of the needs and preferences of their partner. One man noted:

The main factor in the decision was that one of us had to be at home... but I feel I had no choice, none at all... there's not much I can do now, I'm stuck with a situation and you just have to get on with it.

Other men were at home for similar reasons, but took a positive view of the decision.

5.2 Evolving or deliberate decisions

People had difficulty, both in identifying the point at which their decision making began, and in judging how deliberate their decisions about participation in paid work were. Before the interview, relatively few had reflected on the decision making process in any depth.

For many people, the process had its foundations in earlier circumstances and/or decisions, ranging from their behaviour in school, to their choice of partner and career, and where they lived.

When they were expecting their first child, a number of people were uncertain about when, and if, they would return to paid work. They felt that the decision evolved in the months after the child's birth, depending on how they were managing with a baby. One person at home with a 20 month old child had not yet decided when she would go back to work. Those with a commitment to parenting at home felt there was no single point when they made a decision – they were always going to stay home.

People with older children could also not recall how long decisions had taken, or a specific time when they made a decision.

With one exception, the single people had been single parents since their youngest or only child was a pre-schooler. Most said that their decisions about paid work had just evolved. Some put this in the context of the shock they felt on separation from their partner - other aspects of their life, including paid work, 'just happened'.

It was also difficult for people to pinpoint how long it took them to make a decision. Some had been thinking about getting a job for some time, but had to decide quickly when an opportunity arose. One person spent three years thinking about starting a business; another had spent six months deciding whether to study.

5.3 Discussion with others

Almost all people who had a partner discussed the decision with them. One person with an uncommunicative partner did not; neither did a woman caring for her partner with a disability. Some people also discussed their situation with older children and wider family, especially when the decision would have an impact on the family. Some people discussed their situation with friends. One person felt other women in her antenatal group would be judgemental, and deliberately did not discuss her decision to return to part time work with them. Others discussed their situation in general with people other than immediate family, as part of the decision making process.

Very few people mentioned talking to their colleagues or boss, although they may have done so in a general sense. One woman who did was considering increasing her hours in the same job.

A few women said there was no need for discussion as it was a 'given' that they would stay home with their children.

5.3.1 View of partner

Most women described their partners as supportive of whatever they wanted to do. Where people chose to be in part-time paid work, the extent of support from partners was often contingent on the work having no impact on them. They could be described as 'neutral' rather than supportive. On the whole, male partners accepted their partners working part time, although some expressed concern about the level of stress it might cause the family. Their ambivalence is illustrated in the following quote:

My partner knew I would look [for work] .. He wished me luck for the interview and was mildly congratulatory when I got the job. Once I said it would be good if he would help with household work [when I was working full time] and he said 'I didn't ask you to go back to work'. He's happy for me to work if it doesn't affect him.

People who had decided to stay at home with their children while they were young agreed with their partners in that decision. For example:

Partner was keen for me to stay at home but it was my choice. I made the choice he wanted... if I hadn't I'm not sure how it would have been. It was good that in the end we agreed.

Partners often felt someone should stay home with pre-schoolers, particularly first children, but not them. They cited their personality and 'ability' to be at home, rather than their partner's career prospects or earning power.

Women in full time work, mostly with older children, described their partners as supportive. Their partners' view did not have a great influence on their decision because the women felt in control of the process, or the partners agreed over the decision. One exception was a woman who was working full time because her partner wanted her to, when she would have preferred to work part time.

Men described their partners as supportive. Most said that they came to the decision to be at home full time after discussion with their partners, rather than through assuming they would do that. Two men were at home with a child from the child's birth. One of them had been at home with his partner for eight months after their child's birth before becoming the primary caregiver. In other cases, men became caregivers when the children were older. Women's keenness to be at work and their higher income were instrumental in these decisions.

5.3.2 Discussion of role changes

At some time, almost all participants with partners discussed the possibility of the man being the primary caregiver. Those who did not either wanted to give up work or had traditional views about gender roles. Most of the initial discussion happened before the child was born. In most cases, participants did not seriously consider the option because of the male partner's larger earnings, or the nature of the partner's self employment, or the option faded away when men saw what was involved in caring for a baby. Almost all men who actually took on the role of primary caregiver had more serious discussions about doing so after their child was born, or were in a situation where no other option was available (such as a man whose ex partner was in prison).

Some participants said that it was 'completely obvious' the man 'could not' be the primary caregiver because of 'his personality,' larger earnings, or self employment. One couple discussed a role change because the opportunity arose for the male partner to take redundancy. The man who had an accident that meant he had to leave work had not had any discussion about being the primary caregiver before this.

Two factors tended to go together in discussions - who earned the most and to whom work or career was most important. There were exceptions: one professional woman did not want to work long hours and be on call despite having a better paid

career than her partner; another woman with an income equivalent to her partner's discussed the idea, but abandoned it when their first child was diagnosed with an illness:

The initial plan when we had children was that he might take a year out. But by two months it was clear [the baby] was ill and she never stopped crying, no one wanted to look after because of that and the fear that something would happen to her and breastfeeding kept her happy so that was extended. We made the decision that I would be with her, it was all rather unknown. Then we had another child, lived very rurally and the pathway [of me being at home] evolved.

Most single parents had no opportunity to discuss role changes – they had fixed day to day care arrangements, or the children's other parent was not around.

5.4 Seeking information

Researchers asked participants whether they had any information that helped them make a decision. Few participants had sought information specifically to help them make a decision. Some people sought information about possible financial support or tax implications, but this information did not appear to have much effect on their decision. One single person quite deliberately did not seek information as she did not want to rely on state support.

A few participants who were not in paid work had looked at full day or full time early childhood education options for their children, even though they believed parental care was important for their children and this was their main reason for not being in paid work. Those who did look at these services were not especially serious about using them, but did so more out of interest (one looked at a centre her mother worked at). One woman who was in paid work three days a week, and whose child was at an early childhood education centre, had spent a great deal of time and energy finding the 'right place' as she wanted to make sure the service she used was of high quality.

5.5 Information about the longer term implications of decisions

Interviewers asked participants whether, since they made their decision, they were aware of any information about the possible longer term effects of working or not working on themselves and their family. While no one sought information relating to the longer term financial or career effects of not working or reducing hours in paid work, some were aware of financial issues. One person had cashed in her superannuation to fund her time off work while her partner still had his. Another acknowledged that having both partners in full time work, after many years of one being in part time work, gave them an opportunity to save for their old age.

Participants were aware of the public debate surrounding formal early childhood education and informal childcare and its effects on children, but they did not seek this information out in order to make a decision. Some had read books or seen television programmes or were aware of research, which they considered delivered ambiguous results. Many people had opinions or repeated anecdotes from family and friends about the importance of children having a parent at home:

Well, you read all the crap and it says that they are best at home with a parent at least until they can communicate. I've read all that stuff on the

internet, and the books, the raising boys stuff and that's what it says and boys are slower to communicate and use different methods to communicate so till he can communicate I want one of us to be at home with him.

People found decision making straightforward, and gave the strong impression that having information on the consequences of their decisions would have made little difference. The quote below was typical:

I haven't looked at longer term financial impacts – what will be, will be. Money is not the most important thing. I talked to my cousin who is a teacher about differences with kids who have a parent at home [in terms of] children's behaviour and attitudes and that has reinforced to me that long term I am doing the right thing with my son.

5.6 Ease of decision

In general, people did not find it hard to make decisions about participation in paid work. They were concerned that their children should get the best care and were reluctant to take decisions that would jeopardise that, even if it meant that they found themselves in situations they were not completely satisfied with or felt guilty about. People leaving paid work reported the most difficulty with making a decision. They included: a man deciding whether to take redundancy; a man who did not initially want to be the primary caregiver; a woman who had given up a well paid career to be at home with her child; and a woman deciding to give up a part time job to study full time.

5.7 Summary

Most people felt they had choice and control over their decision about paid work, and found decision making a straightforward, if imprecise process, influenced by their upbringing, beliefs and personal circumstances.

Men were divided into those felt they had little choice over the decision that they would be the primary caregiver and those who made a positive choice, often on the same grounds as the more reluctant caregivers.

People discussed their situation at a general level with friends and people in the wider community, but had more specific discussions with partners and immediate family. Participants did not specifically seek information about possible support or consequences before they made their decision.

6 Attitudes of others

Researchers asked participants what others felt about their decisions. They talked about the attitudes of their partners and children, wider family, friends and acquaintances, as well as society in general. The report presents their perceptions of other people's views and attitudes – partners, children, and others were not interviewed as part of this study.

6.1 Attitudes towards people's decision not to be in paid work

Most women, particularly those with young children, thought that other people's attitudes towards their decision to be at home full time were positive.

Because most partners were supportive of or encouraged their decision, women did not comment on how important their partner's support for their decision was.

Families were also supportive of people's decision to stop paid work, although one person noted that her sister constantly offered her work, while another said that her career-focused siblings felt she should not give up work entirely but should work part time. The only person who felt disapproval from his wider family and community was a Samoan man who had the primary caregiver role, although these attitudes did not affect his decision:

Family and friends gave me a hard time. They definitely think I should be out working. Especially in Samoan culture – it's embarrassing...I feel the community looks down on the situation but it doesn't bother me.

All but two of the people not in paid work had pre-school children, and therefore had not discussed their decisions with or sought opinions from them.

Those with friends who had also stayed at home to care for children felt they were positive. Friends from previous workplaces sometimes thought that the women should go back, or constantly asked when they were going back. One woman felt her colleagues from her previous work were scathing about her decision to leave paid work, but noted that her former manager had supported her decision and also encouraged her to study.

Despite participants' own strength of feeling about young children being in parental or family care and the support they felt from their family and friends for this approach, several commented that society generally and government policy in particular did not support this option.

6.2 Attitudes towards people's decision to be in paid work

Overall, family and friends supported the decisions of people in paid work. People in part time work discussed other people's attitudes to their not being at home full time as a carer, and not being in full time work.

6.2.1 Partners

Partners of people working few and/or irregular hours were generally supportive, encouraging participants to pursue interests and get out of the house, rather than putting pressure on them to be in paid work. Participants in paid work longer and/or more regular hours also described their partners as supportive, although for some, this support depended on the work having no or little impact on the partner.

People in full time work believed their partners agreed with their decision to work full time. Some felt their partner was supportive in a general 'do whatever you want' way, rather than specifically supporting the decision to be in paid work full time.

6.2.2 Children

Men and women in the study discussed their children's views about parents' paid work in different ways. Men had relatively little to say about how their children felt about their role as a father. They thought their children were fine with whatever they were doing ('she is used to it', 'they enjoy it'). Women spoke more extensively about how their children felt. Most women who were working part time thought their children were proud of them working, but did not like it having an impact on them. (Very few of the children were in out of school services, most had had a similar routine all their school lives and spent after school and school holidays with one of their parents and/or family or friends.)

Most women working full time thought their children were happy with the situation and appreciated the income:

Kids are proud of me. Fourteen year old tells me 'Handle the job, Mum, we need the money.'

One woman felt her children manipulated the situation:

My oldest makes me feel guilty he manipulates the situation... he doesn't tell me about stuff at school and then pretends I wouldn't have time for it when he knows I always make time.

6.2.3 Other people

Most friends were positive about people's decision to be in paid work. A few women who had been, or were now, working for minimal pay said their friends discouraged them from doing this as it was not worth the effort. Several people, men and women not in paid work or working few hours, noted that acquaintances were more likely to be negative than friends. People working longer hours or in full time paid work did not think that other people had negative attitudes towards this. Women who had always been in full time work felt that attitudes were more negative when they had young children and were working full time.

Only one parent, who had a pre-schooler and worked up to 10 hours a week in a situation where she could be with her child, felt a general social pressure to be in work. She thought that government policy was aimed at encouraging parents to work:

I wish it wasn't so acceptable [for parents] to go to work. I wish it was easier for people to stay home. Politicians encourage working parents, they subsidise childcare; why can't they pay me to stay at home?

Some people working part time discussed friends' and colleagues' perceptions of their 'easy' life:

Often people without children will comment and think I have a lot of extra time, but of course they don't take into account that I only get paid for what I do, and I don't get paid for a full time job.

I do a quarter of the time less than my colleagues but I do the same job. People don't realise, they say 'nice for some' when I leave early. It's seen as a perk but I get paid less.

6.2.4 People receiving a benefit

Two women on the Domestic Purposes Benefit, one not in paid work and one working very few hours, reported disapproval from acquaintances, and in one case from family members:

I don't advertise I'm on the [Domestic Purposes Benefit]. I pretend I'm self employed. My older child is embarrassed I'm on a benefit... I hear comments about how I should get a job, any job better than none.

Two men receiving the Domestic Purposes Benefit, one currently and one recently, did not feel pressure from friends or acquaintances to move off the benefit.

6.3 Men's attitudes

The men in this study described a range of attitudes to their role as primary carers for children and not being in paid work. Men in part time paid work reported attitudes of bemusement rather than negativity, although cultural expectations were still strong that women would be the primary caregiver and men would earn money.

The four men who were not in paid work thought that the attitudes of friends and acquaintances and/or their local community were negative. This included a man receiving accident compensation:

Some negativity – not to my face. Feel they are not positive. They feel I should be working – as a man. Playcentre crowd is good though, a couple of guys there.

Men caring for young children experienced social constraints. The other adults they saw during the day were usually women, and there were boundaries around those relationships. They also believed that they could not be as involved with other people's children as women were. This left several of the men feeling socially isolated:

I've got women friends here, the playcentre mothers and they're pretty good round here, and we have coffee you know, and they're very nice but there's very few men doing what I'm doing. Being a man you are treated differently, there are some things that just wouldn't happen, like they wouldn't leave their girl babies with me to look after. The other mothers leave their babies with the other women, but not me.

Some men missed having contact with other men. One in particular noted that his male friends did not want to have much to do with him now that he is at home with a young child.

One man living in a rural area experienced more marked negative attitudes from other men:

It is more difficult in a rural area, not many at home dads. And they are blokes here, staunch. And a lot of older people, you see them, men sit in their cars while their wives shop and the men look at me in disgust.

The four Samoan men in the study commented on their community's expectation that men would work and women would care for children. For example:

My mum would feel funny about me being at home because it's not like the norm, especially for a Samoan man to be at home... My mum wouldn't actually say anything about it but I think she does think it's strange.

The six Maori men did not report any particular cultural attitudes around whether or not they were involved in paid work.

While partnered men reported some negativity from other people towards their role as caregivers, single men generally received support and approval from friends, an attitude not reported by single women.

6.4 Summary

Participants felt that most other people's attitudes towards their decisions were positive, with most support coming from partners, family and friends who held similar beliefs. People in different situations or who had made different decisions, including work colleagues and acquaintances, were less supportive. Participants who were not in paid work agreed that government policy was not supportive of their position.

Some people working part time thought that others perceived this as an easy option, and did not take into account their relatively lower income.

Men who were partners and not in paid work or working very few hours experienced some negative social attitudes, and felt strong social constraints on their behaviour. Single men received more approval and support. Pacific men in the study felt the weight of expectations about traditional gender roles, but these views did not alter their decision.

7 Effects of decisions

This chapter discusses the effects of people's decisions on their careers, their income, their families, and themselves.

7.1 Effect of caring responsibilities on work and career

The effect of caring responsibilities on participants' paid work and career depended on, and interacted with, factors such as work history, how much practical support they had in caring for children, and attitudes to using formal early childhood education or informal childcare services.

7.1.1 People not in paid work

Most people not in paid work expected that their caring responsibilities would have some impact on their paid work when, and if, they resumed it. People with a range of occupations and incomes anticipated effects such as not being able to carry on their previous type of work (for example, project management in a corporate environment), or not resuming it at the same level.

One person who had had a highly paid career was considering a less well paid career that fitted better with caring for her child:

Part of me thinks I don't want to go back [to previous career] but I put so much into it. The reality is that I can't go back. [Going back] would be a change a career direction. I'm looking at early childhood education papers that would fit more with what I'm doing now. I'm starting with playcentre training. If I enjoy it, I'll pursue it. So when I'm ready to let go of [my child] I may have a change of career. I'm trying not to limit myself to what I used to do.

A few people who were in low to medium paid jobs before they had children, such as teacher aide or personal assistant, were taking the opportunity to study to enhance their career prospects. For them, being at home had a positive effect.

People with children at school or who had a lot of family support were in a position to consider training, study or starting a business. Others were constrained by the demands of care they needed to provide, and lack of support. For example, a person who lived in the country and had five children wanted to start a business, but felt she had limited time to do so. She also found it difficult to undertake any training.

7.1.2 People in paid work

Some people working less than ten hours a week were in jobs they had worked in full time before they had children. A few who were qualified for a trade/profession were less concerned about the change, but one person felt she was less competent in her profession than she would be if she had remained in full time work. One did not want to return to her former profession, but found some local demand for her professional skills.

Working only a few hours a week provided some people with an opportunity to retrain. Others, including people living in rural areas or people caring for children with special needs, were not in a position to do this. Retraining could pose as many difficulties as working fulltime would have done. One woman said:

I thought about training to be a teacher because it would fit in so much better with the family, but with [daughter having special needs] I just couldn't have done the hours at training college, and also as a teacher the full time hours might be a bit much too. When I looked at the hours if I was to re-train I know I couldn't do it. It [retraining] is also partly that I don't want the extra stress of being [in my current profession], being on call 24 hours a day sometimes... There is a high fall out rate among [my current profession] anyway; a lot of people do give it up... If it was just me with no children I would be training to be a midwife by now, that's what I really want to do but it is just too hard, but I could train to be a teacher possibly... I may still retrain as a teacher when [daughter with special needs] goes to high school.

All but two people working more hours, but still part time, were in jobs that they used to do full time. Because they worked part time, they could not do the extra tasks required to advance their careers. Single and partnered people had the same experience:

Lots of times I would like to go on training but I don't because of having a child. Having a child has held me back because my first thought always has to be for home. There are lots of positions, extra responsibility that came up in my job but I can't... I did get [a promotion] but resigned because I realised before I even started that I couldn't do it with [my child] as this would take me away from being a mother.

For some, personality or career orientation had as much impact as caring responsibilities. Caring gave some people new opportunities because they became more motivated or had opportunities for different types of work.

In a way I'd like to have been fully trained at something and to have travelled [prior to having child] but having my [child] has motivated me to do better for myself, to achieve.

Many of those who had always worked full time, including single people, thought their family responsibilities had not affected their careers. They were usually in the same job they had before they needed to look after children or adults, and had a lot of family support and/or flexible employment. One, for example, was an academic.

The people who worked full time, and who felt their careers had been affected by their need to care for others, usually had 'broken' work histories, including spells out of the workforce and/or periods of part time work. One mentioned being 'locked in' to a particular employer because the employer was supportive. Other effects included lack of promotion, less income from years of working part time, and not being able to take up networking and training opportunities. Both single and partnered people felt this:

There's a huge amount of networking before 9am and after 5pm and I am not able to participate in that.

Caring responsibilities have stopped my progression 100 percent. Attending one conference is very important to me and I'm so exhausted by the complex planning [for the family] required before I can attend. I turn down a lot of work opportunities because of the family.

Because he had shared day to day care of his children, one man was unable to go overseas to work or return to work in his hometown where he had more whanau support. A couple was constrained by having a child with special needs:

[Child's needs] would limit us working overseas even for a short period, such as three months....What country would take him? We'd need reciprocal medical benefits... We could only live in a main centre. And we have [our caregiver here] who is so good and accommodating.

7.2 Financial effects

People who had reduced hours or left paid work felt the financial effects of their decision most strongly.

Almost all those not in paid work gave up a second income by choosing to stay home. They relinquished incomes ranging from \$25,000 - \$30,000 to \$70,000 – \$100,000 per year. A few people, including a gardener, and a beneficiary who had done some part time work, commented that their personal income had not been large anyway. Others had high earning partners, and felt well enough off with only the partner's income.

For participants, the importance of a parent being at home with the child/ren outweighed the negative financial effects:

Financially we struggle – our business has made a loss for the last two years, we don't own our house and we are really careful with money. Working for Families is not set up for the self employed... The drop in income has been hard. Before I was paying a lot of expenses and now it's all up to [my partner] – he does feel the pressure. When we discuss it he says he doesn't want our child in care and the pressure on him is a trade off.

Irrespective of their previous or current personal or household income, people not in paid work missed the money. While they talked about not buying what they wanted, and not being able to save for a house or progress other financial plans, they were uncomplaining about these effects:

It would be nice to have more money but we pay the bills. We've given up personal spending but it's not a problem, we have food and clothes.

We understood that with only one income we would struggle financially and not live as before. But what is important? Children or money?

Both men and women not in paid work felt the loss of financial control more deeply than the lesser income:

Losing financial independence is huge. I can't buy this or that, having to ask permission is not cool at all.

At the other end of the spectrum, women who started doing paid work after some years out of the workforce were pleased to have some income of their own:

Extra money means I don't feel guilty buying myself clothes or getting things for the kids. We don't have separate money as such but my pay goes into a

[separate] bank account and I feel I can spend it without feeling guilty. Nice to have money I have earned.

Single people felt the financial effects of their decision most intensely. After being out of the full time paid workforce for years because of her caring responsibilities, one woman found it demeaning to be offered less money per hour than she got 13 years ago. Another woman who had worked part time for years felt financially compromised by the priority she gave to caring for her family. She noted that her ex partner's income and potential earnings had grown while hers had not. Another commented on the difference in being a one, rather than two, income family:

It took me four years to get back to [our] previous two income salary level. Those years were very austere – we [child and I] got food parcels.

7.3 Effect on family relationships

7.3.1 People not in paid work or working few hours

Men who had stopped being in paid work or reduced their hours talked positively about the relationships that developed between themselves and their children as a result of their decision to be at home:

Most children are not close to their fathers but you become close to them being at home. I have come to see it this way... It's been going really well. There have been hiccups but it's really going strong. I get joy from seeing my children when they wake up. I ask myself, 'Where was I in the beginning of my boy's life?'

Some men also mentioned the importance of their relationship with their partner:

I didn't want to be selfish and really wanted to come to an agreement...It's worth it to really communicate, to be a team with my partner.

Most women not in paid work or working few hours talked about that being beneficial for children, rather than talking about their relationships with their children. One woman did discuss the strong bond she had with her child because she had spent so much time with him.

Both men and women who had reduced their hours of paid work felt the move was positive for family relationships, in that they had more time with their children.

7.3.2 People in full time paid work

Most parents working full time had older children. About half had not worked full time (or at all) when their children were younger, but felt that their children could now cope with both parents working. They talked about lacking time, for example, to go on school trips, but acknowledged the financial benefits for their children from the income. Some parents also mentioned the role modelling provided by parents' engagement in work:

I feel guilty occasionally; think about what other skills or experiences [the children] could have. But I think we are good role models, into education and working hard.

Deciding to be in full time paid work reduced financial stress for some single and partnered people, which could have a beneficial effect on relationships:

The financial pressure has come off. My sense is there is less stress. I feel less anxious, not looking at bills wondering how to pay them. That has impacted on relationships [positively].

7.4 Effect on individuals

While some men not in paid work felt cut off from their male friends, women not in paid work did not, on the whole, feel isolated as they had friends in the same position. Although they personally felt positive about their decision to be at home with their children when they were young, most did not feel that society valued their work as parents:

It is easier to go to work than stay home. I don't think you are appreciated for what you've put in at home. Now if I'm tired [working two days a week] people think it's fine.

The stress of 'doing everything' had an impact on women in full time paid work or working longer part time hours. They felt they had no time to themselves and were compromised in the care they gave their children, for example, when their children were sick:

At 2.30pm I'd feel the sweat run down my back about getting to school for 3pm.... If you don't feel that the parenting role is valued at work you feel constantly guilty [at work] and you feel guilty at home. I hate not being able to nurture my children when they are sick. They are aware of that pressure. They will hide sickness to try and help me and it breaks my heart.

Many women thought that they had most of the responsibility for domestic work; if they did not actually do it themselves, they had to see that it was done. This included organising children.

Women also took major responsibility for caring for adults. This had more impact on their leisure time and time for themselves than on their work, as they spent many weekends and evenings caring for their parents. When people cared for older adults with disabilities, their work was more likely to be affected:

My aged parents are not in [the city I live in]. My mother is in hospital with severe dementia. My father is at home ... his health is just deteriorating now. My weekends are spent up there helping him. I take time from work to do this, for example, I have taken my father to hospital for appointments four times in the last month. I get paid hourly so if I'm not there I don't get paid and that makes a difference.

7.5 Summary

Participants considered that their caring responsibilities had a significant effect on their work and careers. Some people not in paid work or working few hours thought they would not be able to return to highly paid and demanding jobs, others took the opportunity to study, aiming for a better paid and more satisfying job when they did return to work.

People working full time or near to it said that the effects of their family commitments on paid work were largely negative. Some were unable to attend professional development and networking opportunities. Others felt that senior positions at work were incompatible with their domestic responsibilities.

Although people clearly had less income when not in paid work or working less hours, this was not a significant issue, as they put more value on being home with young children. Having control of some income was more of an issue than the amount of income.

People in full time paid work felt their increased income reduced financial stress, which had positive effects on family relationships. However, for many women, being in full time paid work or working longer part time hours meant that they had less time for their families and for themselves.

8 Satisfaction with situation

This chapter looks at participants' overall satisfaction with their current situation.

8.1 People not in paid work

People not in paid work were satisfied that they had made the best decision for themselves, although the experience was not always satisfying. They had given up their income and missed the satisfaction that paid work can provide:

That's the reason I fill in the day with activities [with child] – to try and feel some achievement.

Although many people enjoyed being at home with their children, they felt they did not receive much acknowledgment for doing a good job. Some were concerned about the low value society placed on parents being at home, both in public discussion and through financial support.

All but one person expected to resume paid work at some point, so they knew they would not always be in their current position. A single parent who had not worked for a long time said she lacked confidence and was anxious about the future:

If I don't think about the future it's fine. I am in a rut, head in the sand a bit. I'm not that satisfied when I think about the future.

Some men in the study did not want to be the primary caregiver, and would have preferred to be in paid work. Some had become reconciled to their role and found satisfaction in it; others remained resistant, although they could see positive aspects to the role:

I would prefer to be working now, a nice cushie job doing 9-4pm, so that I could have a life, because I don't particularly like looking after babies. I miss the personal rewards. You don't get that from a baby.

Some men acknowledged that being the primary caregiver and looking after young children was hard work:

I do love [my child] but it's such a tax on your freedom. It's the hardest job I've ever done, it is rewarding in some sense, to see them growing up but I feel there's something else out there for me. There are just no breaks, it's so constant.

You have special moments with them. [Child is] very articulate because I taught her. I am her teacher. There's a lot of satisfaction but a lot of hard work.

8.2 People in paid work

Some participants were happy to be working only a few hours a week doing work that interested them or maintained their social contact.

Some weeks might be 5-6 hours on Saturday, other weeks might do a couple of hours per day ... Very variable hours – I love it, wouldn't want any more

Others in this situation were dissatisfied because they wanted more hours of work, or because other factors affected their ability to be in paid work. These included the lack of work opportunities in a rural location, lack of flexibility with carers to help with a child with special needs, lack of support with a mentally ill adult son, and, for one man, not being able to relocate to his home town and whanau support because he had shared day to day care of his children. One person commented:

The part time hours that I could get at the place I work are really all that was available to me... if I had the choice I would only work mornings and do them over more days during the week but then with living rurally the travel would be difficult...If more hours came up for me during school hours then I would work more than I am at the moment

Participants working more regular and longer, but still part time hours, were satisfied with their situation, and enjoyed being able to care for children and gain personal satisfaction and income from work. Self employed people had similar views. Some women in this group felt the stress of compromises made at home and work:

It's hard. I have thought about stopping but I want to prove myself. I can be a working mother and earn money. There's not a lot of time to myself. Never in bed before 11pm.

Most participants working full time were also satisfied with, or accepting of, their situation. Many had had years of not being in paid work or being in part time work, and enjoyed the opportunity to be in full time work. Others had always been in full time paid work because they wanted to. A few people working full time wanted to be working less – some wanted more time for themselves; others wanted more time with children, including time to be able to participate in school activities.

I would prefer part time hours - there were such half time positions elsewhere but I didn't want to uproot my family. In hindsight I should have tried to negotiate less hours but I was worried I wouldn't get the job if I tried to make it 32 or 35 hours.

I have occasional tinges of regret, maybe I could have sacrificed more [re having a career] but they are great kids and we've been successful in juggling. I'm happy.

8.3 What would make it easier for people

Given that most people found decision making straightforward, almost all reflected on what would make their lives easier, rather than on what would make decision making easier. Many people wanted a reordering of social values. The low value put on parenting by society in general was an issue for people in and out of paid work:

If we valued parenting and stay at home parents we would not have half the issues we do - if we enhanced and facilitated the role.

Some women, including those with and without partners, and in and out of paid work, wanted more domestic support. Those without family nearby felt that having family around would make their lives easier.

People also wanted to be able to ask for, or be offered, more options around working part-time and workplace flexibility:

It would have made a difference if the employer had said we're open to talking about the hours. If they had been active about the flexibility, and asked if I was interested in fewer hours. I didn't have the courage to ask in the beginning.

When I resigned last year [from part time job] I assumed it was my problem and had to resign. A lot of the reason I left was because the job was spreading beyond three days and I was working 60-70 hours a week – it wasn't do-able and no one offered me any other way of managing it.

If I had an employer who was fine with glide time [life would be easier]. I can't do my normal job from home.

One person had asked her employer to be more flexible about the childcare assistance they offered, but with little success:

It's a battle to get [employers] to think of different concepts about subsidies for childcare... they pay \$40 per week for formal childcare arrangements but do not give that to me because I fly [my child] to my mother in the school holidays and pay my mother for her keep – that's too much of a struggle for [tax accounting] apparently.

8.4 Summary

Most people were satisfied they had made the best decision they could given their circumstances, even if this put them in a situation which in itself was not completely satisfying. People not in paid work were dissatisfied with the lack of acknowledgment of the importance of parenting. Some found the lack of income and being a full time parent difficult. People in part time work found elements of both caring and working satisfying, but found it hard to juggle two roles, and having to compromise both aspects of their lives. People in full time paid work were also satisfied with their decisions, but they too had to juggle two roles and had less time for parenting than they would like.

Where participants had high levels of flexibility within their employment, they were more satisfied and found it easier to manage their caring and paid work responsibilities. Some participants in paid work felt their lives would be easier if employers took a more active and lateral approach to workplace flexibility.

9 Discussion & conclusions

This chapter discusses the findings with reference to other research. It suggests areas where further work could be done, and identifies the potential policy implications of these findings.

9.1 Participation in paid work

This study identified two broad patterns of decision making about parents' participation in paid work. In one pattern, a parent, usually but not always the mother, left paid work to care for a baby and resumed work when the child was older. This is in accord with the pattern described by Stephens and Callister (2006). The second, less common pattern was for both parents to remain in fulltime work, with a period of parental leave for one of them.

People with caring responsibilities for adults or for children with special needs had similar patterns of participation in paid work. This may be because all but one of the participants in this study had caring responsibilities for children. Given the nature of the sample, these results are not necessarily typical of the situation in New Zealand. Further research is needed into the participation in paid work of people who have caring responsibilities only for adults, particularly adults who live with the carer and adults with disabilities, and people who have caring responsibilities only for children with special needs.

9.2 Decision making

The participants in this study based their decisions about paid work on a combination of factors.

9.2.1 Parental/family care of children

Beliefs about parental/family care for children underpinned most participants' decisions. Men and women across all categories of involvement in paid work felt strongly that parents/family should provide all or most of the care for very young children, and for some parents, for dependent children of any age. The age of their youngest child had a strong influence on almost all participants' participation in paid work.

Regardless of their income, occupation, or level of education, participants did not want pre-school children, particularly those under two, in full day centre-based services. As children got older, parents were more willing to use part time centre-based services and other formal early childhood education such as playcentre, kohanga reo, and kindergarten, usually for the opportunity for their children to interact with other children. Only parents who had pre-school children and worked full time used these services to enable them to work.

Recent Ministry of Social Development research has confirmed that New Zealand parents make extensive use of informal childcare (Ministry of Social Development, 2006). The importance of wider family in providing care for children and general support for parents across all ethnic groups is a key finding of this and other recent studies.

The 1998 New Zealand Childcare Survey found that the type of early childhood education or informal childcare parents used varied by the age of the child. Unpaid

care by relatives was the most commonly used care for children under one year old (Department of Labour and NACEW, 1999).

The use of formal early childhood education and care services has also grown (Ministry of Education, 2006). The Ministry of Social Development research showed that about a third of parents used formal childcare services (Ministry of Social Development, 2006). New research providing information about why parents choose to use or not use formal child care services would help explain the relationship between this growth and parental, particularly mothers', participation in paid work.

9.2.2 Financial factors

All participants took their financial circumstances into account when making decisions. However, people's actual personal and household income appeared to have no relationship to their views about whether they needed to be in paid work for the income, or could afford to have one parent work part time or not at all. Income from work was an important factor in the decision for people working longer part time hours and full time.

For people with partners, and particularly for men, relative incomes were important in deciding who would be the primary caregiver. However, men who were in fulltime work and took on the primary caregiver role did so for other reasons as well, such as working evening shifts or having flexible employment.

9.2.3 Other factors

Work related factors such as personal satisfaction, intellectual stimulation, and feeling valued were also strong influences on people's decisions to be in paid work, both part and full time. Although they did not discuss the quality of their work in any depth, a majority of those in full-time work were in jobs that paid well above the national average. These are likely to be jobs that provide both intellectual stimulation and personal satisfaction. The findings align with recent research into balancing work and caring responsibilities, where a majority of respondents would prefer to have a job even if they had a reasonable living without one (Department of Labour 2003 and 2006; Families Commission 2005; Ministry of Social Development 2006).

Employers' and colleagues' attitudes, and workplace flexibility, such as glide time, working at home and an ability to work part time, were significant but not the strongest factors in people's decisions about participating in paid work. They were more important for people with older children who considered them in combination with other factors, such as family support for caring for children.

Acceptance of traditional gender roles was a decisive factor for some participants, and underpinned other participants' decisions. The latter group did not necessarily hold traditional views about gender roles, but slipped into these roles once a child was born. For example, they may have shared domestic work before they had a child but did not do so afterwards. A recent Ministry of Social Development study found that about a third of adults with families believe that the father should earn the family income and the mother should stay at home (Ministry of Social Development 2006).

A range of other factors working in combination had some influence on decisions. These included living in a rural area, having more than two children, being unable to drive, and having spent years out of the paid workforce. People also made decisions

to change their hours of paid work because they wanted to study, or because particular work opportunities arose.

People made their decisions for personal reasons. They did not consider the state of the labour market, or the effects of government policies such as tax credits for working families, or the availability or cost of childcare. The lack of discussion about the cost of childcare may reflect the relative affluence of the sample. It is interesting in the light of the 2004 Living Standards study, which found that families who identified cost as a reason for not using childcare were more likely to be in some degree of hardship than other families with dependent children.

It is unclear whether New Zealand's comparatively low rate of employment among mothers of pre-school children reflects active choices by parents or constraints on choices due to lack of support in areas such as childcare. This study suggests that, for this sample at least, the lower rate of employment largely reflects an active choice.

Similar factors influenced decisions of people from different ethnic, age, income and occupational groups, with the exception of managers who felt that they needed to work full time even if this was not their preference.

9.2.4 Factors for specific groups of people

Caring for a child with special needs or an adult with disabilities was an added stress in people's lives, but the type of caring responsibility did not, in itself, appear to drive their decisions about participation in paid work. People who cared for children with special needs or adults with disabilities made their decisions on similar grounds to those caring for children generally. Caring for older adults without disabilities did not influence people's decisions about participation in paid work, although it did affect the time they had for other activities.

Single people made decisions based on a similar range of factors as partnered parents. Some single people had high levels of family support, including from their ex partner and his or her family; others did not. Recent studies have found that the largest difference between single and partnered parents is the amount of money, and for some, the amount of time they have for themselves, rather than the factors that shape their decision to be in paid work (Ministry of Social Development, 2006; Families Commission, 2005).

A key finding from this and other recent research is that people are influenced in their choices by many factors, and that different situations suit different people.

9.2.5 Decision making processes

Most people felt they had choice and control over their decisions about paid work, although some felt obliged by circumstances such as a partner's inability to care for children, to be in their situation. This was particularly the case for men who were primary caregivers and not in any paid work. People discussed decisions with partners where they had them, and sometimes with immediate family. Other people were largely supportive of whatever decision people made. Negative attitudes had no material effect on decisions.

Most people found decision making straightforward. Decisions about participation in paid work evolved over time, and built on earlier decisions and experiences such as

choice of occupation and where to live, experiences at school, and family patterns in childhood.

The study explored whether people sought information to help them make decisions. No participant looked for information about what support was available, or the longer term financial or career effects of not working or reducing hours in paid work. Participants were aware of debate around longer term effects of formal early childhood education or informal childcare, although they did not seek this information out to help them decide whether or not to participate in paid work.

Because no participant had robust, or in most cases, any external information about the implications of their choice, it was impossible to assess the impact of information on decision making. Research carried out by the Families Commission in 2005 found that few families made explicit links between decision making and successful outcomes. The findings of this study suggest that people are obliged to respond to their immediate and short term needs, and cannot always take into account long term effects even if aware of them. Given that people do not have difficulty making decisions, it may be that having information about long term financial and other impacts would make little difference to their decisions.

9.2.6 Effects of decisions

Another issue is whether time out of the workforce has adverse effects on future employment or promotion prospects.

In this study, caring responsibilities had positive and negative effects on people in all paid work categories. Some people not in paid work or working few hours felt they would not be able to return to highly paid and demanding jobs, and still fulfill their caring responsibilities. They chose to leave work or consider retraining for a position they could do part time. Others took the opportunity while away from full time work to study, aiming for a better paid and more satisfying job when they returned to work.

People working full time were unable to attend professional development and networking opportunities; others were reluctant to leave employers who offered flexible arrangements to pursue career development.

This study shows that it is not so much that people cannot progress in jobs or access training when they have caring responsibilities, but that some choose to prioritise their caring responsibilities while others find it too hard to combine work and caregiving. They include people who are single, have a partner with an inflexible job or one that requires travel, live rurally, have more than two children, and have children with special needs that require varying and/or unpredictable levels of extra care.

Another issue is the effect of parents' decisions about participation in paid work on children. Stephens and Callister (2006) summarise the literature in relation to pre-schoolers as follows:

On the one hand, additional income from employment reduces the impact that poverty has on child attainments... On the other hand, maternal employment increases stress and reduces the availability of time for child-rearing, both of which can adversely affect child outcomes. However, the trade-off between these two varies by age group, with a general impression

that for the first year of life, the child is probably better at home with a parent, and between ages three and five some form of quality child interaction is desirable, with a grey area for children aged one and two.

This summary reflects the values and practice of almost all the people in this study.

Men and women in this study who had with school aged children and had reduced their hours of paid work felt this was positive for family relationships. They had more time with their children. People in full time work felt that, while they were role models for their children and the family had more money, they missed out on time with their children and participating in school activities. These findings are consistent with other research (Ministry of Social Development, 2006; Families Commission 2005). This study included only parents' views, but the Families Commission research included focus groups with children. Their views about parents working were similar to their parents: there was more financial freedom, but they spent less time together. For children, some of the additional benefits of parents working were more privacy to do what they wanted, having the house to themselves, and having more takeaway meals. Exploring optimal outcomes for children of all ages could feature more prominently in research into balancing work and caring responsibilities.

The study showed a relationship between being the primary caregiver and being responsible for all unpaid work in the household. The primary caregiver for the children did domestic work in the household regardless of whether they were in any paid work, and irrespective of gender. In households with two working parents, domestic work tended to be shared, although women took more responsibility for organising it. This finding diverges from other research showing that women do more domestic work than men, even when both partners in a household are in full time paid work (Ministry of Social Development, 2006). If there is interest in exploring the relationships between caring responsibilities, paid work and unpaid domestic work further, case study research gaining the views of different people in a household would be useful.

9.2.7 Satisfaction with decisions

Participants felt that society did not value their work as carers, even though they personally valued this role highly and were satisfied with their decisions. People not in paid work were most affected by this, as others derived social value from their paid work. All participants thought it was beneficial for parents to be with children, especially young children. Men in particular reflected on the value and importance of building strong relationships with their children.

While people in part time work found elements of both caring and working satisfying, they were not satisfied with having to juggle two roles and make compromises with both. People in full time paid work also had to juggle two roles and had less time for parenting and for themselves than they would like. This finding is supported by recent research, which shows that most people are satisfied with their work/home situation, even though it is not their ideal (Families Commission, 2005; Ministry of Social Development, 2006).

Most people found decision making straightforward. Their choices were clear cut and they could not identify ways to make decision making easier. However, they did discuss changes that might make their lives easier, for example, having more family close by who could provide support.

Participants who had high levels of flexibility within their employment were more satisfied, and found it easier to manage their caring and paid work responsibilities, than those who did not. Some participants in paid work felt their lives would be easier if employers took a more active and lateral approach to workplace flexibility.

On the whole, the study concurred with other recent research which shows that many people do have access to various types of flexible work options, but their ability to use them depends on a variety of factors, including workplace culture (Ministry of Social Development, 2006; Department of Labour, 2003, 2006). Some people in the study changed jobs to obtain flexible conditions.

This, and other recent research into work-life balance, suggests that individuals and families establish priorities, are able to arrange situations that more or less suit these priorities, and on the whole, are satisfied with their lives at work and home. In summary, this study is in accord with other research findings on:

- mothers' pattern of participation in paid work
- parents' extensive use of informal childcare, particularly for children under the age of two
- the influence of beliefs about traditional gender roles
- the importance of financial factors in making a decision about participating in paid work
- the importance of factors such as personal satisfaction, intellectual stimulation and feeling valued in making a decision
- the similarity of factors influencing single and partnered parents' decision making
- the lack of a longer term view in decision-making
- the benefits of flexible workplace conditions
- people's generally high levels of satisfaction with their decision.

This study showed that, when making a decision, participants did not actively seek information on services and financial benefits available to support them in their role as caregivers, nor did they specifically seek information on the long-term consequences of their decision.

9.3 Potential areas for further work

Areas for further research that would enhance understanding and inform policy work include:

- Quantitative research exploring the relationship between the provision and use of early childhood education and care services, and informal childcare and parental, particularly mothers', participation in paid work. Detailed information is needed about how many children of what age attend what type of early childhood education and care services, for how many hours and days per week – and for what reasons.
- Quantitative research to establish the extent to which the findings of this study are experienced by the wider population, and by different sub groups in New Zealand. This would be particularly beneficial for the groups about which relatively little is known, including people with children with special needs, and people who care for adults.
- Qualitative research focused on the participation in paid work of people who care only for adults, particularly adults with disabilities, or who care only for children with special needs.

- Case study research focused on specific families' experiences. This could include interviews with partners, children and other family members to investigate how families manage work and home responsibilities. It could also explore how families manage unpaid domestic work, and collect children's views and experiences of their parents' decisions.
- Research with groups of people who were not included in this study, for example, people from ethnic groups other than European, Maori and Pacific.

The study has a number of policy implications. They include:

- Exploring ways to value the work and contribution to society of people who are at home with children.
- Developing ways to support people's preferences to care for very young children (those under the age of two) themselves.
- Exploring ways to support people's preferences for family and other informal care for children.
- Recognising patterns of work and family life for men, including barriers to men's involvement with children; arrangements for separated parents; how to encourage men to take on more caring responsibilities where that is a viable option for them; how to mitigate their social isolation and make it more 'acceptable' for them to be at home
- Encouraging employers to actively offer flexible work opportunities for men and women.

This study has shown that multiple factors influence people's choices about paid work, and that different situations suit different people. This reflects the findings of recent studies.

Participants made decisions that, as far as possible, balanced their beliefs about caring with their commitment to work and their need for intellectual satisfaction, social contact and money. They based their decisions on personal preferences, rather than drawing on information about any financial benefits or services that might support them in their role.

The study has identified a number of areas for further research and policy development. These include exploring the experiences and views of a wider variety of people; understanding men's situations better; developing ways to support people's preference for informal childcare, especially for one on one care for young children; promoting flexible working; and exploring the relevance of the nature and quality of work in decision making.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Discussion guide & consent form

Explain research

This research is funded by the Department of Labour and the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women. The research is being carried out by independent researchers. It is about how and why people with caring responsibilities make decisions about whether or not they are in paid work. This research is intended to provide a better picture of how all of the various factors such as people's preferences, care available for children and availability of part time work, interact for people and how these factors influence their decision making.

Consent

Give participant consent form and ask them to sign it; leave them a copy of the form. Ask if they have any questions about participating in the research and discuss the confidentiality of their participation. Request that the interview be audio taped [explain why]. Discuss availability of a summary report.

Questions (note prompts in italics)

A. Nature and extent of caring responsibilities

I'd like to discuss what kind of caring responsibilities you have.

1. What are your current caring responsibilities?
Number and age of children or adults
Extent of care (e.g. number of days you have care for child/ren; frequency of care for elderly parent)
2. How long have you been caring for children/mother...etc?
E.g. birth of first child
3. Since your caring responsibilities started, how have they changed?
E.g. birth of another child

Those caring for children:

1. Do your children go to ECE/OSCAR or do you have childcare arrangements?
Details of these arrangements – type, hours, cost?

Those caring for adults:

1. Do you have other support to help you care for x?
Details?
2. Do you have any other caring responsibilities we haven't already discussed?
E.g. elderly person, child or other person with a disability
3. What sort of support do you have for the caring responsibilities you have
Do you have a partner?
How much of a role does your partner play with these responsibilities?
Do you have any [other] support [in-house or other] with these responsibilities?
Paid help vs. unpaid help?
4. How is the unpaid work managed in your household?
Household work? Partner's role?
5. Are there any other factors involved that relate to your caring responsibilities?
E.g. shared custody arrangements or partner's children?

B. Paid work history [prior to and after onset of caring responsibilities]

Now I'd like to discuss your involvement in paid work before and after your caring responsibilities started.

Before you had children/caring responsibilities started:

1. Were you in paid work? If no, move to Q4 below. If yes:
2. What kind of work did you do?
Occupation, work from home, shift work, weekend/night work?
Permanent/contract work?
Self employed?
3. How many hours did you usually work each week?
Hours per day
Days per week

Since the onset of your caring responsibilities

4. Have you been involved in any paid work since your caring responsibilities began. If no, move to Q10 below. If yes:
5. What kind of work?
Occupation, work from home, shift work, weekend/night work?
Permanent/contract work?
Self employed?
6. How many hours have you normally worked each week?

At the present time (check to see if different from situation described in questions 4, 5, 6)

7. Are you in paid work? If no, move to Q10 below. If yes:
8. What kind of work?
Occupation, work from home, shift work, weekend/night work?
Permanent/contract work?
Self employed?
9. How many hours do you normally work each week?

If have partner:

10. Is your partner in paid work? If yes:
Full time/part-time (hours per day & days per week)
Occupation, work from home, shift work, weekend/night work?
Permanent/contract work?
Self employed?

If not in paid work now...

11. Have you ever done any paid work? [Check any participation in paid work ever]
12. Would you like to be doing any paid work now? If yes:
What sort of work do you want? How many hours?
If no go to 'decision making' below.

Study/Training

13. Are you doing any study or training at the moment?

C. Decision making about participating in paid work in your current situation

Now I'd like to discuss your current situation and decision making about whether or not you are in paid work.

1. At the moment, you are (describe situation e.g. not working, doing part time work, etc), how have you come to be in the situation you are in now in relation to paid work?
2. What kinds of things have influenced why you are (describe their situation e.g. not working, working part-time etc) at the moment?
 - a) *[If not mentioned]* I'd like to discuss some of these other factors with you:
 - *Financial need or circumstances – ascertain income [personal/household, if not working check earning potential]*
 - *Attitudes, preferences and expectations [of the participant, their partner and family, their community and society generally] – towards caring responsibilities [e.g. desire to have time with children] and towards paid employment [e.g. career orientation]*
 - *Impact of media, church, community*
 - *Was there any information you had that helped you make your decision (what information, where from etc)?*
 - *Personal rewards and satisfaction gained from paid work e.g. social contact, time out from caring responsibilities, mental stimulation*
 - *Factors related to caring responsibilities e.g.*
 - *impact of decisions on children/other care respondents*
 - *availability and affordability of childcare, satisfaction with, and quality of childcare arrangements, availability and affordability of other caring support mechanisms, extended family, respite care, and satisfaction with these*
 - *Age of children – issues for those with teenagers vs. younger children*
 - *Extent of care required, level of dependency*
 - *Division of labour within family/household*
 - *Paid work related factors*
 - *Pay rates*
 - *availability of part time work, flexible work provisions*
 - *employer/colleagues attitudes*
 - *cost of working [including loss of income support entitlements]*
 - *transport issues*
 - *partners work situation and demands*
 - *stress levels*
 - *Maintenance of skills/work related experience*
 - *Stress of being in work or at home?*
 - *Any other factors?*
3. Can you talk a bit about the relative importance of these influences on your decision making?

Least important? Most important/? Inter-related factors?
4. How did you make the decision about your current situation and whether or not to do paid work?

Would you say you have made deliberate decision/s or did things just happen?

Did you look for information, if so about what?

Did you assess the different options? What did this assessment involve?
5. Who was involved in the decision making?

Role of your partner, other family members

How much control do you feel you had over the decision, i.e. do you feel there was a real choice involved?

If have partner

6. Did you ever consider your partner taking up the role of caring for the children/adult
7. How satisfied are you with your current situation in terms of the paid work you do/not?
*E.g. if working, do you want to be working or would you prefer more time with children or other caring responsibilities [why/why not]?
If not working do you want to be [why/why not]?
How happy are your partner/other family members (e.g. children) about you working/not working?
How satisfactory is the flexibility of your situation?*
8. Would anything have made it easier for you to make decisions about whether to be in paid work or not?
*For example:
More information [e.g. about childcare costs and subsidies, or effects of childcare]
Attitude and preference changes [societal and individual]
Financial pressures
Structural changes [including organisation of unpaid work, paid work]*
9. [If working:] Do you feel that having caring responsibilities has stopped you from progressing in your job, or from getting any training that you would have liked?
10. Has your experience or information since making the decision (to work or not) changed how you feel about the decision you made? i.e., would you do anything differently now?
11. Since you made the decision to (describe situation), have you been aware of any information about the longer term effects of working/not working – the effects on yourself, your family?
E.g. information about the financial effect, or the effect on your children?

D. Demographic information to be collected

Now I'd like to ask you for some basic demographic information:

1. How old are you?
2. What ethnicity are you?
3. What's your highest educational qualification?
4. Note geographical location [rural/urban/small town] of participant
5. [If not gathered previously] what is your income before tax, from all sources?
*(Annual income, but record whatever is easiest for them to specify e.g. if paid monthly)
Family income
Personal (now, or previously if not in paid work – how long ago was this)
1 – 5,000
5,001- 10000
10,001 – 15,000
15,001- 20,000
20,001 – 25,000
25,001 – 30,000
30,001 – 40,000
40,001 – 50,000*

50,001 – 70,000
70,001 – 100,000
100,001 +

E. Any further comments you would like to make about your work and caring responsibilities?

Thank participant, check whether they want a summary of the report. Give gratuity for participating.

completion of the interview in acknowledgement of the time spent participating in the research.

5. Risks or stress

It is not expected that participation in the research will cause participants any risk or stress.

6. Other information

Interview transcripts will be confidential (i.e., no one will be named in the report prepared for the Department). Access to identifiable data will be limited to the researchers and to selected personnel at the Department of Labour. Data will be used to produce a report as described. Data will be retained by the Department of Labour for one year and then all records, notes and transcripts will be destroyed. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent. You may withdraw from the study or refuse to participate in the study at any time without any penalty.

7. Contact information

If at any time you have questions regarding the research or your participation, you should contact the principal researcher, Kirsten Gendall, who will answer all questions. Her telephone number is x. If at any time you have comments regarding the conduct of this research or questions about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the research project manager, at the Department of Labour.

Participant's statement

I have read the above, and understand my role in participating in the research. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later, about the research, I can ask the researcher listed above. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. The researcher may withdraw me at his/her professional discretion. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call the research project manager, at the Department of Labour.

I certify that I am 18 years of age or older and freely give my consent to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of this document for my records.

Participant's signature/consent: _____

Date: _____

Print participant's name: _____

Researchers' statement

I have discussed the proposed research with this participant, and in my opinion, the participant understands the benefits, risks and alternatives (i.e. non-participation) and is capable of freely consenting to participate in the research.

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Print name: _____

Appendix II: Profile of participants

Participant	Children (age/s)	Other caring responsibilities	Employment status	Highest educational qualification	Gender	Ethnicity	Marital status	Age	Location
1	4 children (21, 16, 10, 8)		Full time	Trade/vocational	M	Maori	Partnered	39	Urban
2	4 children (12, 10, 5, 1)		Full time	Trade/vocational	M	Maori	Partnered	40	Urban
3	3 children (14, 13, 11)	1 child with special needs	Part time	Trade/vocational	F	European	Partnered	40	Urban
4	3 children (7, 9, 10)	Supports older adult	Full time	Degree	F	European	Partnered	46	Urban
5	4 children – 3 adult children and one aged 18 years		Full time	School	F	European	Single	57	Urban
6	1 child (15 months)		Not in paid work	School	F	Fijian	Partnered	39	Urban
7	2 adult children	Caring for adult	Full time	Trade/vocational	F	European	Partnered	64	Urban
8	2 adult children, 1 grandchild (14)	Caring for adult, and child with special needs	Full time	Trade/vocational	F	European	Widowed	58	Urban
9	2 children (12, 14)		Part time	Degree	M	European	Partnered	42	Urban
10	1 child (6)		Part time	Trade/vocational	M	European	Single	31	Urban
11	1 child (15)	Supports older adults	Part time	School	F	European	Single	43	Urban
12	5 children (18, 13, 12, 10, 9)		Full time	None	F	Maori	Partnered	40	Urban
13	2 children (4,5)		Part time	Degree	M	Maori	Single	31	Urban
14	3 children (15, 13) and 18yr old not living at home	Supports older adult	Full time	Degree	M	Samoan	Partnered	42	Urban
15	2 children (16, 18)	Supports older adults	Part time	None	F	European	Partnered	55	Urban
16	2 children (17, 10)	Support for adult with special needs	Full time	School	F	European	Partnered	46	Urban
17	1 child (2)		Not in paid work	School	F	European	Partnered	38	Small town
18	3 children (14, 24, 26)	Caring for an adult	Part time	None	F	European	Single	53	Rural
19	1 child (10 months)		Not in paid work	School	F	European	Partnered	28	Urban
20	2 children (12 and 9)		Full time	Trade/vocation	F	European	Partnered	37	Rural
21	3 children (9 and 5 (twins))	1 child with special needs	Part time	School	F	Maori	Partnered	35	Small town
22	1 child (10)		Full time	Degree	F	European	Single	41	Small town
23	1 child (19 months)		Not in paid work	Degree	M	European	Partnered	44	Urban
24	3 children (19, 9, 2)		Not in paid work	School	F	European	Single	38	Urban

Participant	Children (age/s)	Other caring responsibilities	Employment status	Highest educational qualification	Gender	Ethnicity	Marital status	Age	Location
25	1 child (2)	Supports older adults	Not in paid work	Degree	F	Samoan	Partnered	39	Urban
26	1 child (10)		Full time	Degree	F	Maori	Single	37	Urban
27	1 child (2)		Not in paid work	Degree	F	European	Partnered	35	Urban
28	2 children (5 and 4)		Full time	School	F	Samoan	Partnered	39	Urban
29	1 child (5 months)		Part time	Degree	F	European	Partnered	37	Urban
30	5 children (14, 13, 11, 8, 7)	1 child with special needs	Part time	Degree	F	European	Partnered	43	Rural
31	2 children (20, 15)	1 child with special needs and support for older adults	Full time	Degree	M	European	Partnered	50	Urban
32	2 children (2, 9 months)		Not in paid work	None	M	Samoan	Partnered	26	Urban
33	2 children (6, 8)		Part time	School	M	Samoan	Partnered	35	Urban
34	2 children (5, 7)	1 child with special needs	Not in paid work	School	F	European	Partnered	38	Urban
35	3 children (19, 17, 10)		Not in paid work	None	F	Samoan	Partnered	38	Urban
36	3 children (8, 14, 15)		Full time	Degree	F	Samoan	Partnered	44	Urban
37	1 child (15 months)		Full time	Degree	F	European	Partnered	27	Urban
38	2 children (11, 2)	2 children with special needs	Full time	Degree	F	Maori	Partnered	36	Urban
39	2 children (10, 14)		Full time	Degree	M	European	Single	47	Urban
40	2 children (7, 10)		Part time	Trade/vocational	M	European	Single	37	Urban
41	4 children (14, 13, 6, 3)		Full time	Degree	F	Maori	Partnered	33	Urban
42	1 child aged 4 years		Part time	Degree	F	European	Partnered	38	Small town
43	2 children (2, 9 months)	Supports older adult	Not in paid work	None	M	Maori	Partnered	38	Small town
44	2 children (6 and 3)	1 child with special needs	Not in paid work	Trade	M	European	Partnered	46	Small town
45	4 children (20, 18, 14, 10)	Support for young sole parent	Full time	Degree	F	Maori/Fijian	Partnered	42	Rural
46	5 children (14, 13, 6, 3 (twins))	1 child has special needs	Not in paid work	Degree	M	European	Partnered	43	Rural
47	1 child (6)		Part time	None	F	Maori	Single	26	Small town
48	2 children (13, 17)	Support for older adult	Full time	Degree	F	European	Partnered	47	Rural
49	4 children (16, 14, 10, 2)		Full time	Trade/vocational	F	European	Single	42	Small town
50	3 children (21, 20, 5)	Support for older adult	Full time	Degree	F	Samoan/ Chinese	Partnered	43	Urban

Appendix III: Demographic tables

The following tables show the number of participants by various demographic characteristics.

Table 8: Gender

	Female	Male
Number of participants	36	14

Table 9: Age

	21-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	61-65 years
Number of participants	4	24	17	4	1

Table 10: Ethnicity

	European	Maori	Pacific
Number of participants	29	12	9

Table 11: Highest educational qualification

	Degree qualification	Trade/vocational qualification	School qualification	No educational qualification
Number of participants	22	10	11	7

Table 12: Relationship status

	Partnered	Single
Number of participants	37	13

Table 13: Type of caring responsibilities

	Caring for children only	Caring for adults and children	Caring for adults only	Caring for child/ren with special needs	Caring for adults with disabilities
Number of participants	36	13	1	9	4

Table 14: Number of dependent children

	1 child	2 children	3 children	4 children	5 children
Number of participants	19	18	6	3	3

Table 15: Age of youngest child

	Pre-school	Primary school	Secondary school
Number of participants	19	22	8

Table 16: Participation in paid work

	Not in paid work	Working part time	Full time work
Number of participants	13	14	23

Table 17: Occupation by hours in paid work

Occupation (sorted by major NZSCO groups)	Not in paid work – former occupation	Working part time – current occupation*	Working full time- current occupation	Total
Legislators, administrators and managers				
Manager (corporation, NGO or govt.)	-		6	6
Professionals				
Teacher	1	1	2	4
IT workers	1	-	1	2
Chemist (industrial)	1	-	-	1
Policy analyst	-	-	2	2
Veterinarian	-	1	-	1
University lecturer	-	-	1	1
Project manager (bank)	1	-	-	1
Accountant	-	1	-	1
Technicians & associate professionals				
Community worker (civil servants)	-	-	2	2
Social worker	1	-	3	4
Teacher aide	1	1	1	3
Food writer	-	1	-	1
Musician (self employed)	-	1	-	1
Nurse	-	-	1	1
Office administrator/Personal assistant	3	5	1	9
Office manager	-	-	1	1
Clerks				
Postal worker	-	-	1	1
Bank teller	-	1	-	1
Service & sales workers				
Hairdresser (self employed)	-	-	1	1
Retail/Hospitality worker	1	1	-	2
Prison officer	1	-	-	1
Agriculture & fisheries workers				
Gardener	1	-	-	1
Trades workers				
Electrician	-	1	-	1
Plant & machine operators & assemblers				
Factory worker	1	-	-	1
Total	13	14	23	50

* Three people had changed their occupational group: one from retail/hospitality to clerical; one from agricultural to clerical; and one moved from unemployment to retail/hospitality

Table 18: Current personal income by hours in paid work

Annual gross personal income	Number of participants		
	Not in paid work	Working part time	Working full time
Nil personal income	11	-	-
\$1,001-10,000	-	4	-
\$10,001-20,000	1	8	1
\$20,001-30,000	1	1	3
\$30,001-40,000	-	1	4
\$40,001-50,000	-	-	2
\$50,001-70,000	-	-	8
\$70,001-100,000	-	-	5
Total	13	14	23

Table 19: Current household income by hours in paid work

Annual gross household income	Number of participants		
	Not in paid work	Working part time	Working full time
\$10,001-20,000	2	3	-
\$20,001-30,000	1	2	-
\$30,001-40,000	1	1	2
\$40,001-50,000	2	-	1
\$50,001-70,000	1	2	5
\$70,001-100,000	4	3	10
\$100,001+	2	3	5
Total	13	14	23