

Working mothers up to 40% more stressed, study finds

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Biomarkers for chronic stress are 40% higher in women bringing up two children while working full-time, new research has found.

Working from home and flexitime have no effect on their level of chronic stress – only putting in fewer hours at work helps, says an article

in the journal *Sociology*.

Professor Tarani Chandola of The University of Manchester, and Dr. Cara Booker, Professor Meena Kumari and Professor Michaela Benzeval of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex analysed data on 6,025 participants in Understanding Society's UK Household Longitudinal Survey, which collects information on working life and readings of measures of stress response, including hormones levels and blood pressure.

They found that the overall level of 11 biomarkers related to chronic stress, including stress related hormones and blood pressure, was 40% higher if [women](#) were working full-time while bringing up two children than it was among women working full-time with no children. Women working full time and bringing up one child had 18% higher level.

They also found that women with two children who worked reduced hours through part-time work, job share and term-time flexible working arrangements had chronic stress levels 37% lower than those working in jobs where flexible work was not available. Those working flexitime or working from home, with no overall reduction in working hours, had no reduction in chronic stress.

The researchers found that men's chronic stress markers were also lower if they worked reduced hours, and the effect was about the same as for women.

The researchers adjusted the raw data to rule out other influences on their findings, such as the women's ages, ethnicity, education, occupation and income, so that the influence of working hours and family conditions could be studied in isolation.

"Work-family conflict is associated with increased psychological strain,

with higher levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing," the researchers say. "Parents of young [children](#) are at particular risk of work-family conflict. Working conditions that are not flexible to these family demands, such as long working hours, could adversely impact on a person's stress reactions.

"Repeated stressful events arising from combinations of social and environmental stressors and major traumatic life events result in chronic [stress](#), which in turn affects health."

"Flexible work practices are meant to enable employees to achieve a more satisfactory work-life balance which should reduce work-family conflict. The use of such reduced hours [flexible work](#) arrangements appeared to moderate some of the association of family and work stressors—but there was little evidence that flexplace or flextime working arrangements were associated with lower [chronic stress](#) responses," says Professor Tarani Chandola.

Provided by University of Manchester

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