

Caring and flexible working

By Karen Elsmore

Introduction

A number of questions were placed on British Market Research Bureau's (BMRB's) Omnibus Survey on who should be responsible for caring for older people when they need care and awareness, availability and take-up of flexible working. This summary outlines the responses to those questions.

At the time of the survey, the 'right to request' flexible working was available to those who had been with their employer for 26 weeks, and:

- had a child under the age of six or a disabled child under the age of 18;
- were a carer who cares, or expects to be caring, for an adult who is a spouse, partner, civil partner or specified relative, or who although not related to them, lives at the same address as the person providing the care.

From 6 April 2009, the 'right to request' flexible working was extended to parents of children aged 16 and under.

Methodology

Just over 3,000 respondents, weighted to be representative of the GB population, were interviewed by telephone as part of the survey during a three week period between May and the beginning of June 2008.

Key findings

- Four in ten (41 per cent) people think that the whole family should have the main responsibility to look after older people when they need care. Women were more likely to think this than men. Men were more likely to say that the State should have the responsibility than women.

- Awareness of the 'right to request' flexible working was low, with half of respondents (50 per cent) saying that they did not know which employees had the 'right to request' flexible working. Where respondents did give an answer, half said that they thought all employees had the 'right to request', which is not correct. Only one in five respondents knew of one or more of the groups covered by the 'right to request', with few mentioning that they knew of more than one group.
- Those respondents entitled to the 'right to request' were no more likely than others to know which employees had the 'right to request' flexible working.
- The vast majority of respondents were not aware of the qualifying period for the 'right to request' flexible working, with most respondents who answered this question saying that they couldn't remember about the qualifying period or thinking that it was shorter than it is.
- Nine in ten employees (91 per cent) said that they had one or more flexible working arrangement available to them.
- Nearly seven in ten employees (69 per cent) currently work flexibly with the largest group of employees working flexi-time (32 per cent).
- Of those who had not made a request to work flexibly over the last two years, half (49 per cent) said that they were content with their current working arrangement.

Who should have the caring responsibility for older people?

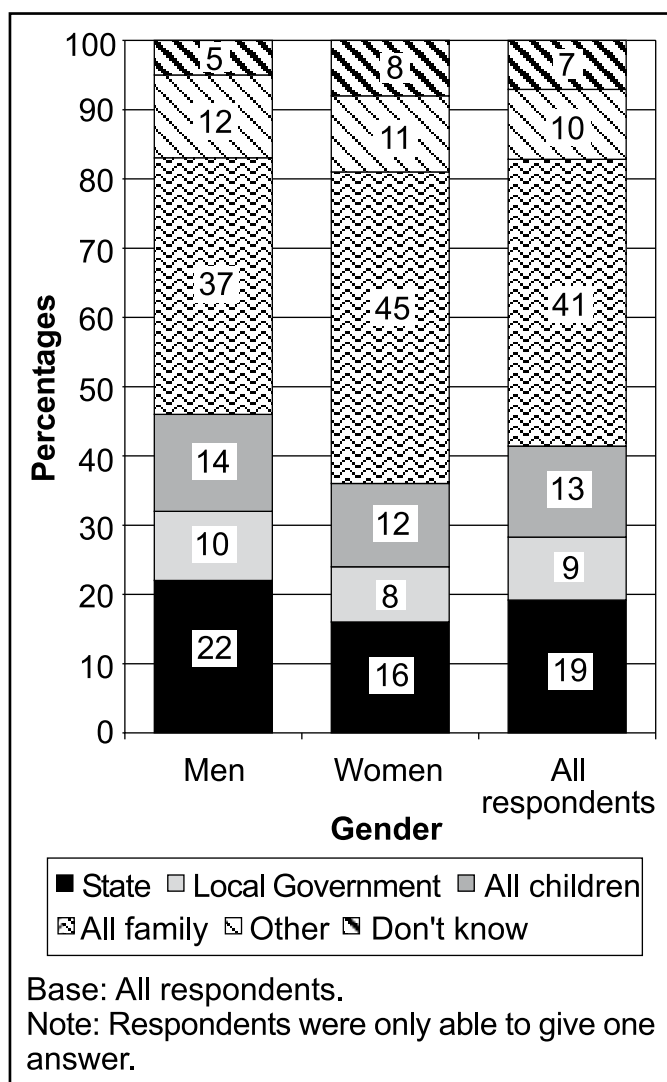
All respondents were asked an unprompted question about who should have the main

Download this and other research reports free from
http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/summ_index.asp

responsibility to look after older people when they need care.

Four in ten (41 per cent) respondents said that the whole family should have the main responsibility to look after older people when they need care, with two in ten (19 per cent) mentioning the State and just over one in ten (13 per cent) saying that all children should share the responsibility.

Figure 1 Who should have the main responsibility to look after older people when they need care?

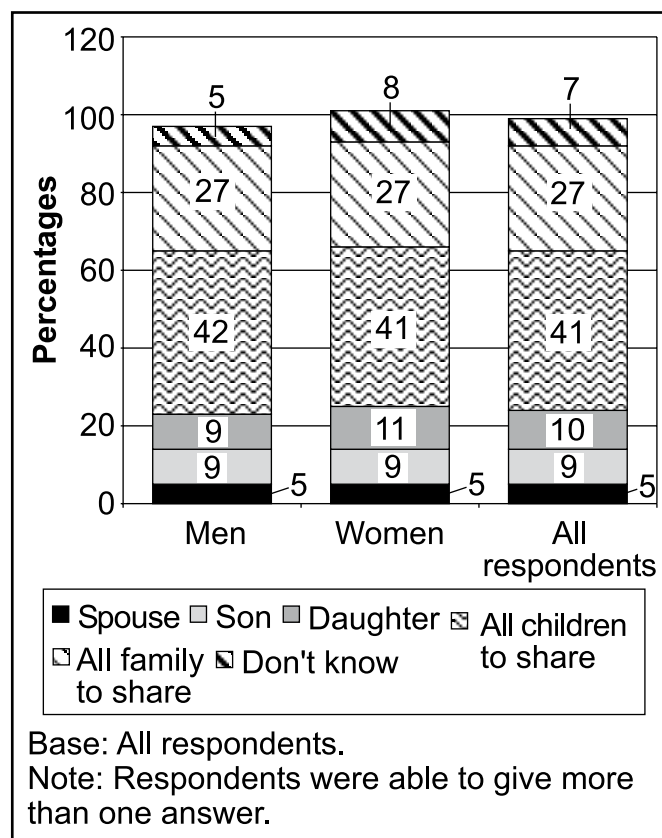


Men were more likely than women to say that the State should have the main responsibility (22 per cent compared to 16 per cent), whereas women were more likely than men to say the whole family should have the responsibility (45 per cent compared to 37 per cent).

Respondents were then asked whose responsibility, in general, within a family they

thought it should be to look after relatives when they need care. Respondents were able to give more than one answer to this question and Figure 2 shows that the largest groups of respondents said that it should be for all the children to share the responsibility (41 per cent) or all the family to share (27 per cent). There were no differences in responses between men and women.

Figure 2 Whose responsibility within a family is it to look after relatives when they need care?



Parents and carers

Just under one in six respondents (15 per cent) were parents who were entitled to the 'right to request' flexible working at the time of the survey. A similar proportion had a youngest child aged between six and 16.

Just over one in ten (12 per cent) respondents were working age carers who would be eligible for the 'right to request' flexible working, if they were in employment. Just over six in ten working age carers (61 per cent) worked either full-time, part-time or on a self-employed basis.

Awareness of right to request flexible working

All respondents were asked a series of unprompted questions about their awareness of the 'right to request' flexible working as it applied at the time of the survey in May/June 2008.

Half of respondents said that they did not know who had a legal 'right to request' flexible working from their employer. A quarter of respondents said that they thought all employees had the 'right to request' flexible working, so although they gave an answer to the question, they were

wrong in their understanding of the entitlement to flexible working at that time.

The next largest group (16 per cent) said that parents with children under six had the 'right to request', which is correct. Fewer (seven per cent) knew that certain groups of carers have the 'right to request' or that parents with a disabled child under 18 do (five per cent), which are again correct answers to the question asked.

In total, four-fifths (80 per cent) of all respondents said that they did not know which employees had a legal 'right to request' flexible working or had an incorrect understanding of the right.

Table 1 Which employees have the 'right to request' flexible working, by gender and working status?

	All men %	All women %	All working %	All not working (excluding retired) %	All respondents %
Parents with children under six	13	19	19	13	16
Parents with disabled children under 18	4	6	6	3	5
Certain groups of carers	5	8	9	5	7
All employees	27	23	31	20	25
All female employees	2	3	3	2	2
No-one	4	2	2	2	3
Wasn't aware there was a legal right	2	1	2	3	2
Don't know	50	50	41	58	50
<i>Base (number)</i>	1,310	1,698	1,592	485	3,008

Base: All respondents. Note: Respondents were able to give more than one answer.

Women were more likely than men to know that parents with a child under the age of six have the 'right to request' flexible working (19 per cent compared to 13 per cent).

Respondents who were working were more likely to think that all employees had the 'right to request' flexible working (31 per cent) than other respondents, and those who were not working were more likely to say that they didn't know who had the 'right to request' flexible working (58 per cent).

Figure 3 looks at responses in terms of whether the respondent was themselves entitled to the

'right to request' flexible working at the time of the survey. Levels of awareness were again low amongst those with the 'right to request'. There was little difference between those entitled and not entitled to the 'right to request'.

Just under one in five (19 per cent) parents with the 'right to request' knew that parents in their situation (with children under six) were entitled to the 'right to request'. Similarly, only one in ten of carers who would be entitled to the 'right to request' flexible working knew that carers had that right.

Figure 3 Which employees have the 'right to request' flexible working, by entitlement to the 'right to request' and caring status?

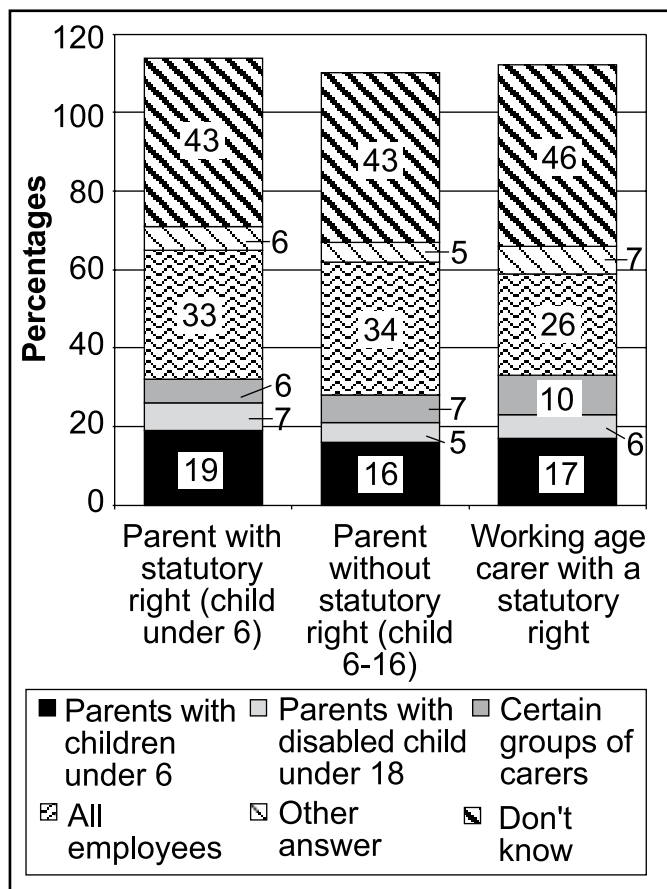
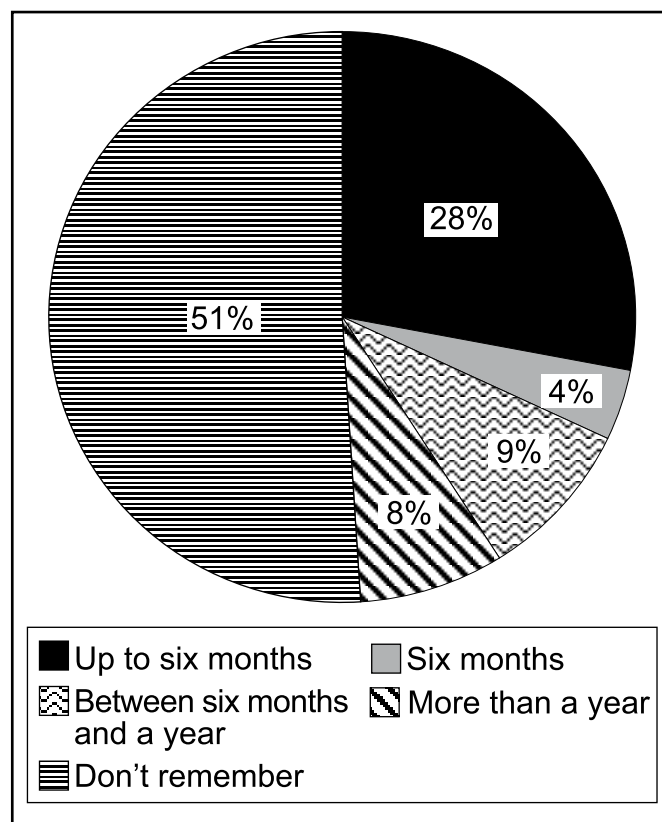


Figure 4 gives the breakdown of responses to the question.

Figure 4 Awareness of time limit for the 'right to request' flexible working



Whether respondents knew about the six month rule

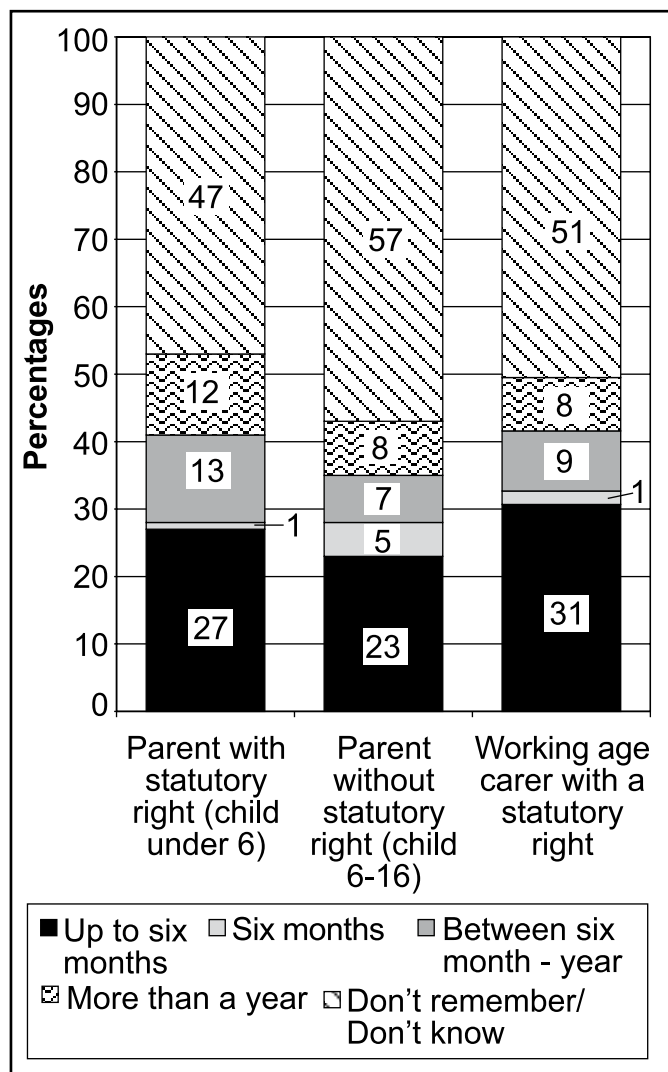
All respondents who said that they were aware of the 'right to request' flexible working were asked how long after starting a job can employees make a request to work flexibly.

The majority said that they couldn't remember, with over half saying this (51 per cent). Just over a quarter (28 per cent) thought that employees could ask to work flexibly from less than six months after starting a job. Few (four per cent) knew that the actual qualifying period is six months.

In total, four-fifths of respondents who answered this question couldn't remember about the qualifying period for making a request for flexible working or provided an incorrect answer by thinking that it was shorter than it is.

Figure 5 gives a breakdown between the different groups as to their awareness of the qualifying period for the 'right to request' flexible working. There is little difference between the groups in terms of their knowledge of the qualifying period. Parents with a statutory 'right to request' were less likely than parents without a statutory right to say that they couldn't remember or didn't know the qualifying period (47 per cent compared to 57 per cent), although this did not mean that they had a correct understanding of the qualifying period, as very few of them knew it was six months.

Figure 5 Awareness of the qualifying period for the 'right to request' flexible working



Employees and flexible working

All those who were employed either full-time or part-time were asked a further set of questions about the availability and take-up of flexible working.

The flexible working arrangements that employees were asked about included:

- part-time working;
- working term-time only;
- job sharing;
- flexi-time;
- working a compressed working week;
- to work annualised hours;
- to work from home on a regular basis;
- other flexible working arrangements.

Availability of flexible working

Ninety-one per cent of employees said that they had one or more flexible working arrangement available to them. Those with the right to request flexible working on the basis of being a parent (90 per cent) or carer (94 per cent) had a similar level of flexible working arrangements available to them as other employees.

Table 2 Available flexible working arrangements

Flexible working arrangement available to respondent	All employees %
Part-time working	73
Term time only working	38
Job-sharing	46
Flexi-time	51
Compressed hours	37
Annualised hours	34
Work from home	24
Other flexible working arrangements	39
<i>Base</i>	1,421

Base: All employees.

Table 2 shows that in terms of the availability of different types of flexible working arrangements, the most commonly available form of flexible working was part-time working, with 73 per cent of employees saying that this was available to them. The next most available form of flexible working was flexi-time, with just over half of employees saying that this was available to them (51 per cent).

Current working arrangements

Employees were asked whether they currently work flexibly and the flexible working arrangement that they undertook. The majority of employees said that they did currently work flexibly (69 per cent).

The largest group of employees said that they worked flexi-time with a third saying that they worked in this way (32 per cent). Nearly a third (29 per cent) said that they currently worked part-time.

Table 3 Whether respondent currently works flexibly

Working arrangement	Parent with statutory right %	Parent without statutory right %	Carers %	All employees %
Works flexibly	71	78	78	69
Type of flexible working arrangement				
Part-time working	33	32	45	29
Term time only working	14	23	24	16
Job-sharing	7	8	17	8
Flexi-time	30	33	33	32
Compressed hours	17	14	17	16
Annualised hours	19	16	17	20
Work from home	17	22	13	15
Other flexible working arrangements	28	26	28	23
<i>Base</i>	216	264	180	1,288

Base: All employees answering about their current working arrangements.

Carers were more likely to work flexibly, and more likely to work part-time than other employees working flexibly.

Reasons for not making a request to work flexibly

Those employees who had not made a request to change their working arrangements were asked the reason for this. Nearly a half (49 per cent) said that they were content with their current working arrangements and nearly a third mentioned that they were happy with their current work-life balance. There were no differences in the responses given by parents with a statutory 'right to request' flexible working and carers, than all employees.

Table 4 Reason for not requesting a change to working arrangements

Reason	All employees %
Content with current working arrangements	49
Job doesn't allow for it	6
Happy with current work life balance	31
Other – specified	10
Other – not specified	11
<i>Base (number)</i>	897

Base: All those who have not made a request to change their working pattern over the last two years. This is likely to include some who are already working flexibly, but in answer to this question less than 50 respondents in total said that they were already working flexibly.

These research findings are published by the Department for Work and Pensions. You can also download these findings free from: http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/summ_index.asp

Other report summaries in the research series are also available from the website above and from:

Paul Noakes,
Commercial Support and Knowledge Management Team,
3rd Floor, Caxton House,
Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA.
E-mail: Paul.Noakes@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

If you would like to subscribe to our email list to receive future summaries and alerts as reports are published please contact Paul Noakes at the address above.