



## MEDIA RELEASE

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# CONFLICT BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY AFFECTS FATHERS' AND CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

The often incompatible demands of work and family life typically have been viewed as a burden for mothers. However new research shows it is also affecting fathers.

A [recent report](#) on employment trends by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that fathers' working hours do not change when children are born. And this disconnect between work and family life may help to explain why Australian fathers are reporting high degrees of stress, as found by further research just published by the Institute.

Fathers experiencing persistent or high levels of conflicting work and family demands reported a significant deterioration in their mental health. And the effects flow on to their children. These troubling findings were reported in two articles published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, drawn from research by La Trobe University and Australia National University researchers.

Institute Director Anne Hollonds said: "Balancing work and family demands affects fathers as well as mothers, with the potential also to impact on the wellbeing of children".

"Fathers today are often still expected to fulfil the traditional role of 'breadwinner', while also taking a more active role in child care. Fathers wanting to share family responsibilities can come into conflict with cultural norms and workplace expectations, creating stress and mental health concerns.

"When fathers are worried about their ability to balance work and family commitments, it places them and their families under strain, which can be a concern – especially if it continues for lengthy periods.

"This research underscores the importance of the availability and 'acceptability' of parental leave for fathers as well as flexible work practices, to ease the pressure on fathers and their families."

La Trobe University researcher Amanda Cooklin said that her study shows the increasing demands of work and family can lead to a deterioration in fathers' mental health.

"Our research found that fathers who reported high work–family conflict also reported high psychological distress. However, when fathers moved out of high work–family conflict, their mental health showed significant improvement," she said.

"Those most at risk of poor mental health were fathers who worked very long hours – more than 50 hours a week – had no access to flexible work arrangements, no job security, no control over their workload and no access to paid family-related leave.

"We know that work–family conflict is linked to lower productivity and higher burnout, stress and job turnover in employees. Therefore, it's important for fathers who do spend long hours at work that they have access to the conditions and workplace entitlements that help them to combine work and care."

The study involved 3,460 fathers from the Australian Institute of Family Studies' *Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*. The fathers were employed and living in a couple household, and included non-professionals, semi-skilled workers and professionals. Over half the sample reporting working more than 50 hours a week.

Reporting on related recent research on children's mental health, also published by the Institute, Australia National University researcher Liana Leach said an increase in fathers' work-family conflict can in turn affect the emotional development and wellbeing of the children.

"Our research shows that children's family environment and mental health are affected by their fathers' struggles to balance demands at work and at home," she said.

"When fathers moved into high and persistent work-family conflict, their mental health, relationship and parenting capabilities deteriorated. These issues flowed on to negatively affect the psychological wellbeing of their children.

"However, these effects were not permanent, and in cases where the work-family conflict were modified there were improvements for the whole family."

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To download a copy of the *Conflicts Between Work and Family and Fathers' Mental Health* by La Trobe University's Amanda Cooklin go to <https://aifs.gov.au/aifs-conference/conflicts-between-work-and-family-and-fathers-mental-health>

For *Fathers' Work and Family Conflicts and the Outcomes for Children's Mental Health* by the ANU's Liana Leach go to <https://aifs.gov.au/aifs-conference/fathers-work-and-family-conflicts-and-outcomes-childrens-mental-health>.

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