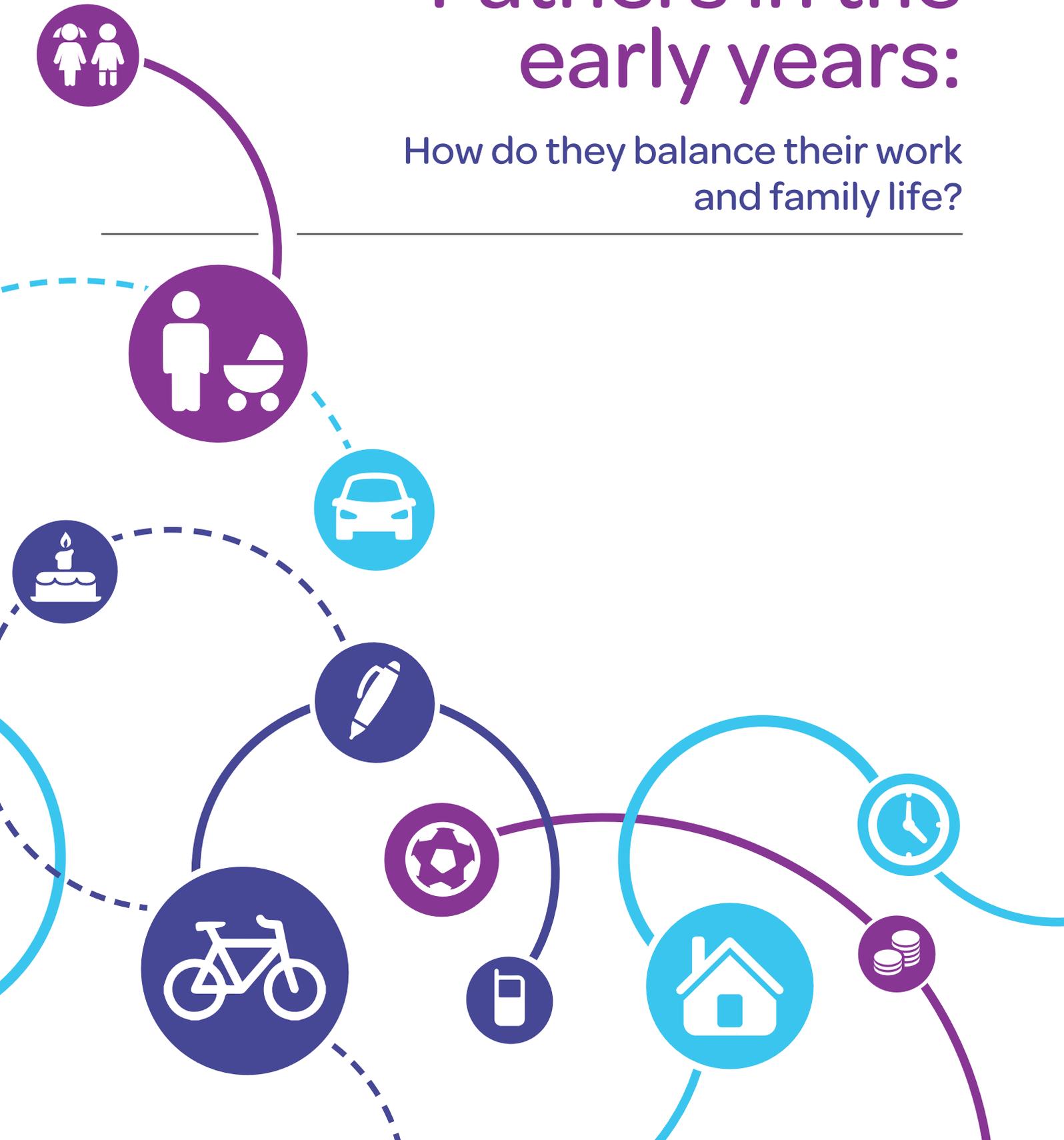
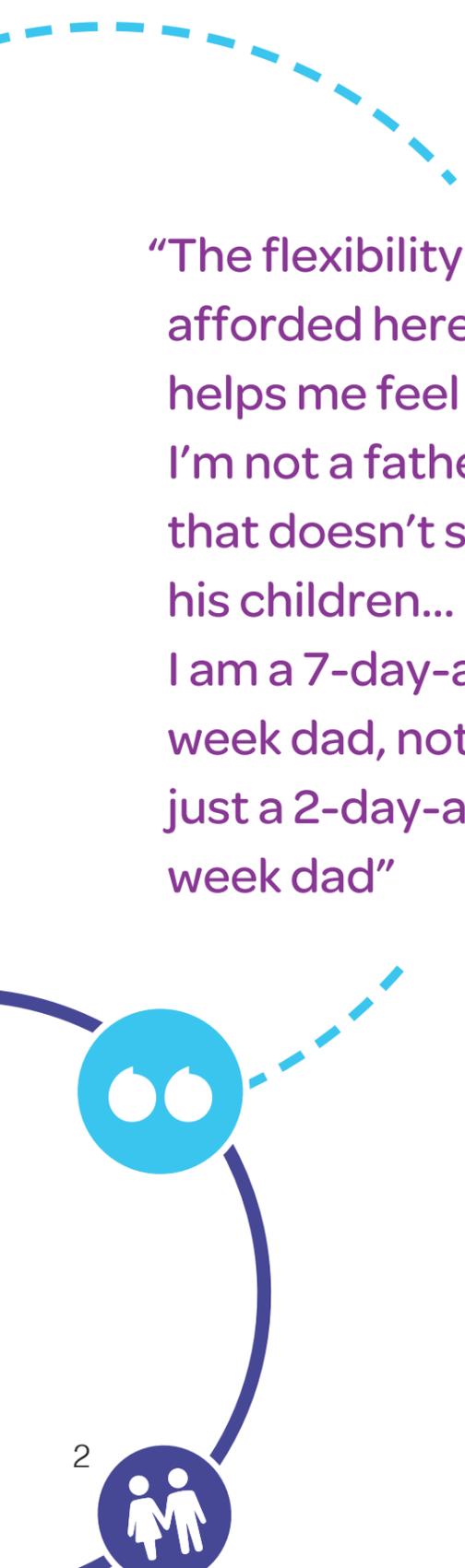


Fathers in the early years:

How do they balance their work
and family life?





“The flexibility afforded here helps me feel that I’m not a father that doesn’t see his children... I am a 7-day-a-week dad, not just a 2-day-a-week dad”

Research Design

The research project was conducted by the University Of Edinburgh and explored how working fathers in Scotland balance their work and family life. The focus was on fathers with children under the age of 5 years, who live in a two-parent dual-earner household wherein their partner is also in employment. The research investigated what support fathers might benefit from in the workplace in order to reach their full professional potential whilst also taking part in family life to the extent they want.

The project applied a mixed methods approach and analysed:

- a) Two large-scale longitudinal datasets, namely the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) and Growing Up in Scotland (GUS). These studies represent the population of all working fathers in Scotland.
- b) A set of 20 in-depth interviews specifically commissioned for this piece of research. All 20 fathers were working for the public sector in Scotland.

Introduction

The new shared parental leave scheme is amongst the latest additions to a growing inventory of work-related family friendly policies and flexible working arrangements, developed and introduced by the UK Government over the past two decades.

Research shows consistent links between high levels of work-family conflict and adverse work outcomes, including low productivity, decreased job satisfaction and high workforce turnover. However, studies also indicate that implementing family friendly practices within the workplace, and enabling access for employed parents to flexible working improves workers’ job-satisfaction, work engagement, absenteeism and productivity as well as work relationships and staff retention. Research also shows that using family friendly policies is linked to positive outcomes for families and children.

Taking paternity leave, for example, is related to higher levels of satisfaction with the couple’s relationship.

For fathers to fully benefit from family friendly practices requires certain barriers to be addressed. First, fathers need to be aware of the policies available to them. They also need to be able to afford to take leave. Research indicates that fathers may refrain from using family practices due to economic constraints. Fathers may also experience difficulties in requesting or negotiating leave and flexible working arrangements with their employers.

Other key barriers to flexible working uptake include operational requirements, supervisors’ ability to manage flexible employees efficiently, and concerns that requesting flexible working might be interpreted as a sign of low commitment towards the job and adversely impact on the likelihood of being promoted.

Key Findings

Fathers' awareness of potential access to family friendly arrangements and flexible working options is often limited:

“The flexibility afforded here helps me feel that I'm not a father that doesn't see his children...I am a 7-day-a-week dad, not just a 2-day-a-week dad”

Many working fathers in Scotland either had not been offered family friendly arrangements and flexible working options, or were unaware of the availability of such options in their workplace. Many more mothers than fathers reported having access to part-time working as well as choosing to work part-time after the birth of their child. A similar pattern is seen in relation to job-sharing: fewer fathers than mothers reported having access to such arrangements or choosing to share their job after the arrival of their baby. In contrast, more fathers than mothers reported being offered the option to work from home.

Flexible working arrangements increase fathers' engagement at work:

“I'm able to take a bit of time off when I need it but the flipside of that is to cover colleagues when they are similarly not here...we still have to meet the same set of quality standards and deadlines, so it builds a collegiate, contributes to a collegiate atmosphere. I think in terms of kind of general loyalty to an employer, it's the kind of thing which generates good will...I would need a significant pay rise to go and do a similar job somewhere else that didn't have similarly flexible working.”

Fathers interviewed for this research believe that taking leave soon after the birth of a child, as well as working flexibly, particularly using flexi-time and compressed hours, enables them to be more engaged employees. Fathers stated that flexible working arrangements were an important part of the package offered to them by employers, to be favourably considered alongside salary and other occupational benefits.

Only 56% of fathers working for small employers took paternity leave.

Many fathers, in particular those on low incomes and those working for SMEs do not use family friendly work arrangements and flexible working options:

“I think what struck me...a big contrast between here and my immediately previous employer was just how enthusiastic everyone was that I took my full leave entitlement, there was no conversation about how I could minimise the inconvenience for month end”

Findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study suggest that, in 2011, fathers were much less likely to take paternity, parental and annual leave after the birth of their child if they work for a small employer. Similarly, fathers in Scotland were less likely to take parental and annual leave (but not paternity leave) if their household fell into the lowest income quintile. Income loss is a key barrier to taking leave as statutory paternity and shared parental leave pay is so low and parental leave remains unpaid.

Supportive and informed line-managers enable fathers to access family friendly practices:

“Everything boils down to people really. Relationships. I feel that I have got an open enough relationship with my line-manager to be able to ask these types of things”

These interviews with fathers highlight specific workplace characteristics that might help in breaking down awareness barriers and open communication channels around family friendly policies and flexible working arrangements. One such characteristic is having a supportive and informed line-manager and/or mentor. In addition, working alongside other fathers, including more senior colleagues who serve as role models by using such arrangements themselves, can encourage fathers' uptake of family friendly practices.

Recommendations

Implement a “family friendly” time management framework:

Generally, organisations should take into account employees’ family and caring responsibilities to address individuals’ needs and balance them with business needs.

HR delivery of awareness programmes:

Organisations should encourage their human resources departments to develop and deliver programmes to raise awareness towards fathers’ entitlements in the workplace as well as including information about father-friendly practices in training for line managers.

Train and inform line-managers:

Fathers could benefit from more guidance on how to best use the family friendly policies and flexible working arrangements available in their

workplace. An informed line-manager who is able and willing to communicate these policies and arrangements could break down barriers to awareness and access faced by fathers.

Target fathers in information about policies and benefits:

Given the gender gap in access to, and usage of, family friendly policies and flexible working arrangements, it is important that organisations understand the particular needs of fathers and target them specifically and regularly. Increasing targeted internal communications of family policies and benefits could raise fathers’ awareness of their entitlements. Employers can usefully use key transition points such as return from paternity leave to proactively remind fathers of their rights and the organisation’s policies.

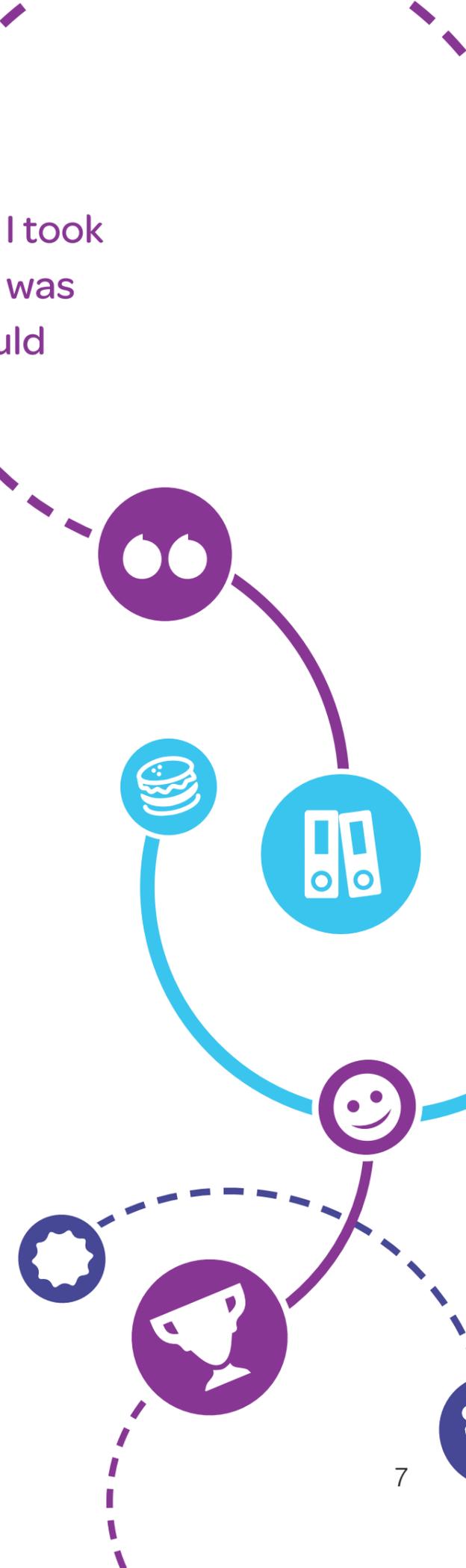
“I think what struck me, was how enthusiastic everyone was, that I took my full leave entitlement. There was no conversation about how I could minimise the inconvenience”

Create a learning culture beyond HR programmes:

Establishing a learning culture within the workplace, wherein fathers are informed routinely of their entitlements and career progression options, may increase access to, and usage of, family friendly policies and flexible working. There are many ways by which organisations can promote such a culture: e.g. drop-in sessions, seminars, and peer support groups.

Enhance technology usage to strengthen work engagement and increase productivity:

For some fathers, using technology to work flexibly can help them to remain connected at work whilst reducing work-family conflict.



Get Involved!

Employers can get involved in the Family Friendly Working Scotland programme in a number of ways. Events will run throughout the year bringing together employers of all sizes and sectors to share best practice, ideas and innovation in the field of family friendly and flexible working. Stakeholders will help drive the family friendly working agenda forward in Scotland and employer champions will help raise the profile of family friendly and flexible working.

Family Friendly Working Scotland can support employers to use the national 'Happy to Talk Flexible Working' recruitment strapline, to improve recruitment and position your organisation as an employer of choice.

This research was commissioned by Fathers Network Scotland and funded by Scottish Government on behalf of the Family Friendly Working Scotland Partnership. The FFWS programme promotes and supports the development of family friendly workplaces across Scotland.

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