

## Employment and childbearing: women bear the burden of the work-family balance

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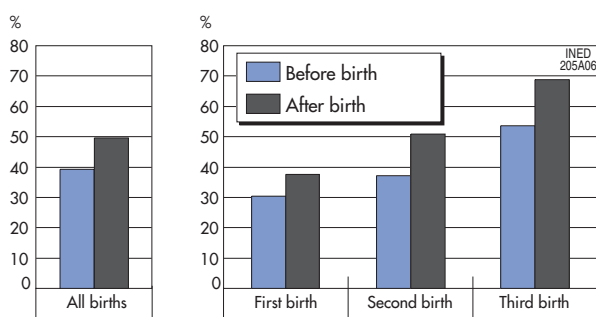
It is women who bear children, and therefore logical to expect their working careers to be more affected than those of men. But the gap between men's meagre involvement in childcare and the major adjustments made by women is a wide one: fathers cut back their working activity twenty times less often than mothers do.

In France, three-quarters of women aged 20-49 are in paid employment [1]. But this average figure varies according to the stage in their life-cycle. The employment rate is much lower once a child is born. The *Familles et employeurs* (families and employers) survey tracked parents' employment history after a birth (Box 1). From stopping work entirely, to working part-time or rescheduling working hours, the range of possible adjustments is very broad.

The survey shows that among women born in 1955-85 (1) who have at least one child, nearly four out

of ten did not work before a birth, and five out of ten in the year that followed (Figure 1). The number of non-working women, whether economically inactive, on maternity leave or unemployed, increases with the number of births. From 30% who do not work before the first birth, the proportion rises to 37% before the second and 54% before the third. In the following year, 38% are not in employment after the first birth, 51% after the second and 69% after the third. But the decision to stop work sometimes precedes the birth or even the pregnancy [2].

Figure 1 – Proportion of mothers not employed before birth and during the 12 months following a birth (%)



Population: all births to women born in 1955-85.

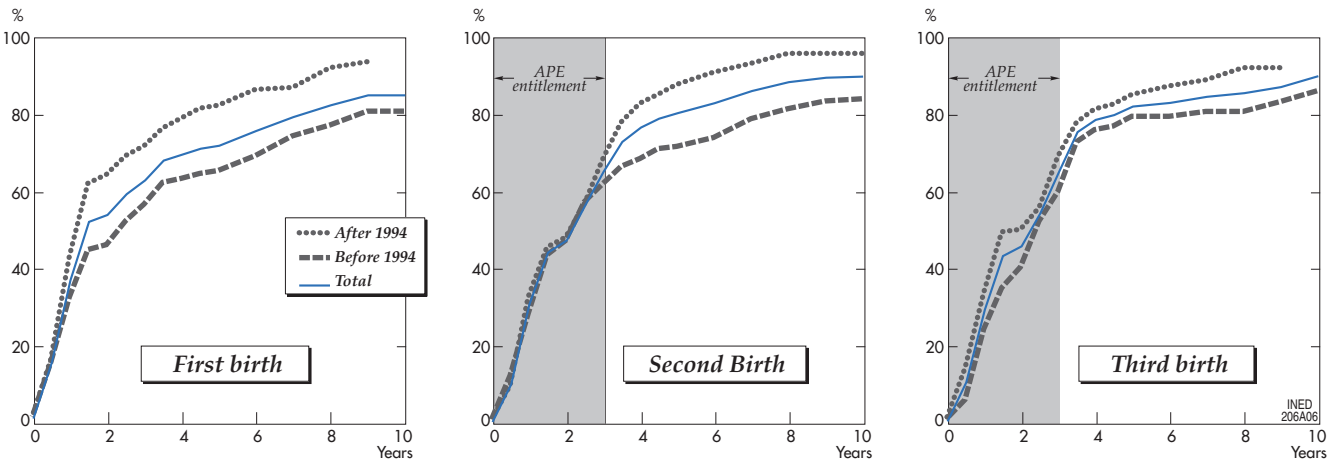
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(1) Aged 20-49 in 2004-2005 at date of survey.

### ◆ After two years, more than half of women return to work

Mothers who had a job before a birth mostly stop for only a short time. Eighteen months after the birth of their first child, half of those who had stopped have already returned to work, and a similar proportion is reached just over two years after the second or third child (Figure 2). After the first birth, some mothers stop work for a long period however: one-quarter have not returned to work five years later. Meanwhile one or more further children may have been born. Women who work before the second or third birth do not stop work for as long, and many return to work around three years after the birth.

Figure 2 – Cumulative frequency of women's return to work after childbirth



Interpretation: four years after a first birth pre-1994, 61% of working women who had stopped work for the birth had subsequently returned to work.

The French parental leave allowance (APE, see Box 2) was extended to the second child in 1994. Examining the frequency of stopping and returning to work by birth cohort, we see the impact of this reform on women's return to work. Mothers who had their first child after 1994, who were not affected by the APE reform, tend to stop for shorter periods than older women (Figure 2). Those who had a third child after 1994, equally unaffected by the change, were more likely than preceding cohorts to return to work when the APE ceased, or even earlier. Conversely, among those who had their second child after 1994, the cohort trend of a rapid return to work was neutralized by the change in family policy. Some of these mothers now wait until the child is three (end of APE and enrolment in nursery school) before returning to work. After three years, they are now more likely to return than the preceding cohorts who, before the policy change, had no guarantee of recovering their former job after returning from parental leave.

with the number of births: three in ten mothers change their working activity after the first birth, and more than five in ten after the third. For men, on the other hand, birth order has little impact on their employment situation.

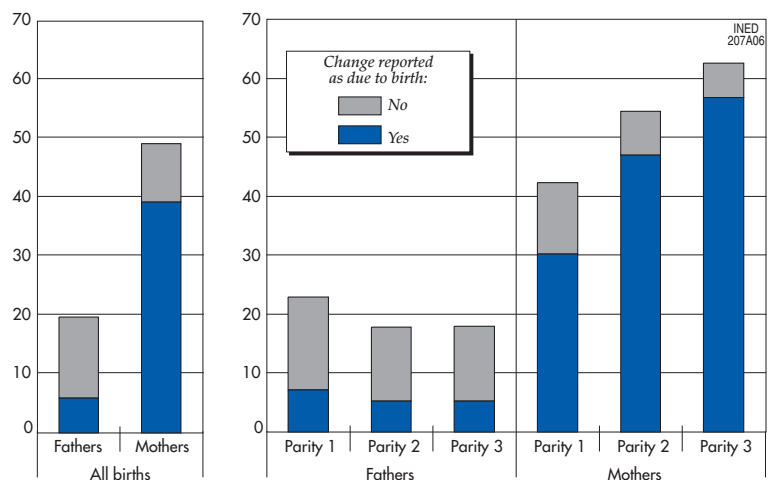
In addition, the changes due to a birth are not of the same type for men as for women: 54% of women give up their jobs compared with only 7% of men; shorter working hours are adopted by 22% of women and 6% of men. It is the mothers therefore who tend to cut back their working time. On the other hand, rescheduling the same number of hours is more frequent for fathers (30%) than for mothers (7%). And 23% of the men whose employment pattern changes increase their hours or responsibilities, compared with only 5% of women. The proportion of those who reduce their hours or responsibilities is the same for men and women, about 10%.

◆ Little change for fathers

What are the birth-related changes in the working patterns of employed parents in the twelve months following a birth? There is a large difference between fathers and mothers: 39% of working mothers state that their working activity changed after the birth, in terms of status, working hours, work intensity or withdrawal from the labour market. This is the case for only 6% of fathers (Figure 3).

The frequency of change increases

Figure 3 – Proportion of working fathers and mothers whose work changed in the year after childbirth, by parity



For women, the type of employment change depends on birth order. As their family size increases, mothers who change their working patterns are less likely to change job, employer or working hours. Fewer of them reduce their working hours for a third birth (18% of women who change their work patterns because of a birth) than for a second one (34%). However, stopping work becomes more frequent: 37% after the first birth, 47% after the second and 70% after the third. The proportion who take up full-time parental leave increases: 19% of mothers take leave for the first birth, 40% for the second and 62% for the third.

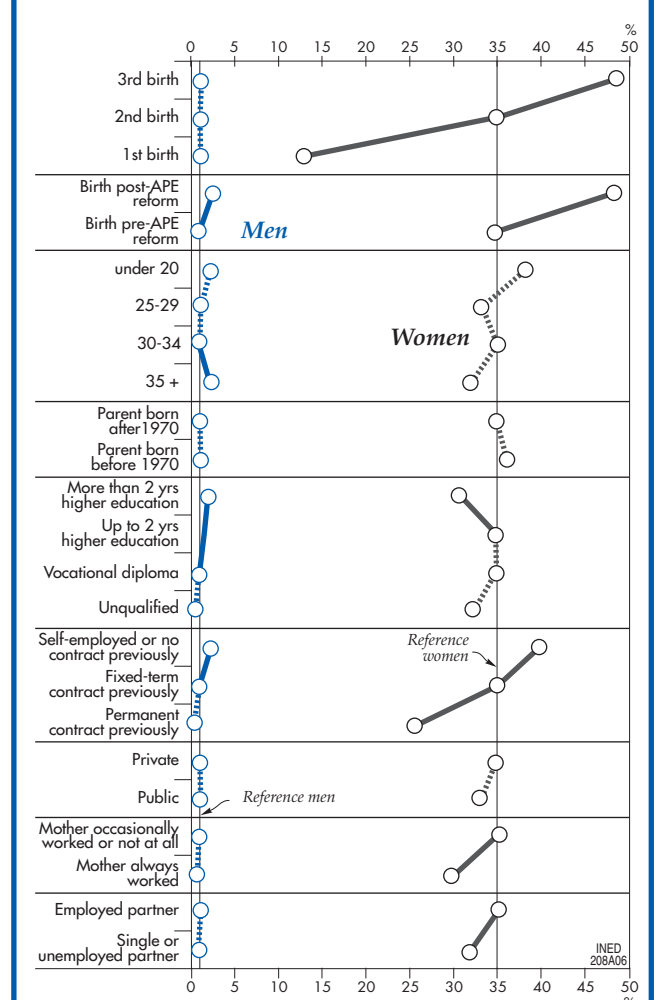
### ◆ Shorter hours or withdrawal from the labour market: choice or necessity

A number of factors affect the likelihood of a woman cutting back her working hours or stopping work altogether after a birth. They include demographic factors such as age, cohort or number of previous births, social factors such as educational level, type of employment and own mother's employment history, and the date of the birth, i.e. whether before or after the extension of the parental leave allowance to the second child in 1994. We attempted to distinguish between these factors and assess the influence of each one "all other things being equal". (Figure 4).

As expected, parity is the predominant factor, and the likelihood of reducing working hours or stopping work altogether increases at higher parities. More specifically, women are more likely to cut back their working hours after a second child, and more often stop work after the third. The extension of the APE was a clear incentive to leave the labour market [4]. Women who had their second child after 1994 were more likely to stop working or reduce their working hours than those who had their second child before 1994.

The nature of the position occupied before the birth is also a determining factor [2]. Women on fixed-term contracts are more likely to stop work than those on permanent contracts. Those who have no employment contract (self-employed or helping family members) are less likely to work fewer hours. Although the type of employer does not affect the reduction in working activity as a whole, mothers working in the public sector more often cut back their hours, while those in the private sector more often give up their job. How employment patterns change also depends on educational level. Less qualified women are more likely to leave the labour market than others, who tend to limit their responsibilities or work shorter hours.

Figure 4 – Likelihood of men and women stopping or reducing their working activity after a birth, by factor



Interpretation – The right-hand vertical line is the reference for a woman who had a second child before 1994, aged 30-34, etc. She has a 35% likelihood of stopping or reducing her working activity. At the third birth, all other things being equal, this figure rises to 49%.

Among men, the probability is very low (1.5% instead of 35%) and varies little.

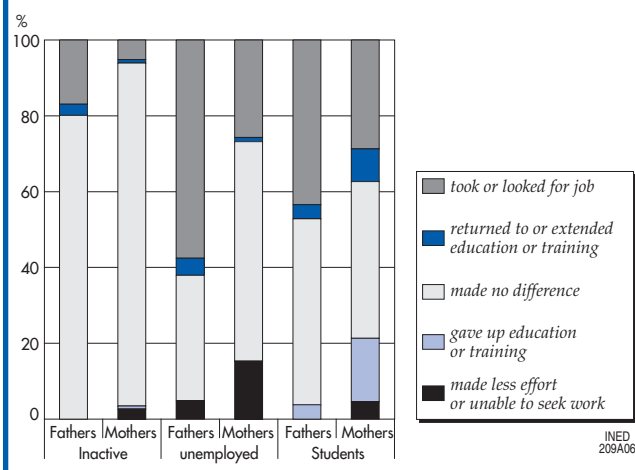
Significant coefficients are shown by solid lines.

For a given level of educational attainment and type of work, daughters tend to follow the employment pattern of their mother. After a birth, especially the first one, daughters whose mothers always worked are less likely to work less because of the child, or to leave the labour market, than those whose mothers stopped work or never worked.

Lastly, the financial situation also has an effect: single mothers or those with an unemployed partner less often cut back their working activity. Continuing to work the same number of hours is, in this case, a necessity.

Overall, it is the women most committed to their working careers who make the fewest cutbacks in their work. Where they change their working patterns, it is

Figure 5 – Changes in occupational status among the unemployed in the year after a birth



### Box 1

#### Familles et employeurs survey

The *Familles et employeurs* survey carried out by INED and INSEE in 2004-2005 examined the work-life balance. It involved 9,745 men and women aged 20-49 and their employers in metropolitan France. Only the data from the Families section are used here. Each parent was asked, for each birth:

- 1 – their employment status before the birth (employment, contract, type of employer);
- 2 – whether during the year after the birth they had changed status (left work permanently, took parental leave or became unemployed), job or employer, or working hours (part-time or rescheduling);
- 3 – whether they had reduced or increased their working hours or responsibilities, or rescheduled working hours without changing total hours worked;
- 4 – if so, whether the change was due to the birth of the child. Note that these statements may include post facto rationalizations by respondents, since the responses concerned previous births.

### Box 2

#### French parental leave allowance (APE)

The APE (*Allocation parentale d'éducation*) was created in 1985 for either parent of three or more children, at least one of whom was under three. It was extended in 1994 to families of two children. The allowance is paid to those who wish to devote themselves to childrearing. Totalling 496 euros at most (in 2003), it partly compensates for the loss of income due to stopping work. The beneficiary is also guaranteed to return to the same job after the three-year break. A total of 562,500 families received the benefit in 2003.

Since 1 January 2004, the APE has been renamed "free choice of activity supplement" as part of the young child care allowance (*Prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant - PAJE*). It can now be granted to part-time workers from the birth of the first child for a maximum of six months.

usually by working part-time or shorter hours rather than leaving the market, as is the practice among the least educated women and those in casual employment.

Among men, shorter hours usually concern less qualified or older men, and fathers who do not have stable jobs.

#### ◆ Unemployed men concentrate on finding a job; women give up trying

A birth also affects the unemployed (Figure 5). Here, occupational changes are more frequent among men than among women (56% as against 18%). Of men unemployed before the birth, 58% intensify their search for a job or return to employment the following year, compared with only 25% of women. Some 15% of unemployed women make less effort to find a job, compared with 5% of unemployed men. The women concentrate less on finding a job as parity increases. Similarly, those fathers who were at school or university before the birth more often enter the labour market than student mothers, who more often give up their courses or make less effort to find a job.

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#### ABSTRACT

Although the birth of a child hardly affects men's employment, 40% of women report that their working pattern is affected. Stopping work for a short time or reducing working hours occurs more frequently after second or third births than after the first. The women most committed to their working careers, single mothers and those with unemployed partners are the least likely to stop work or cut back their working hours. The least qualified, those with casual jobs or with an employed partner are most likely to leave the labour market.