

# **The Hidden Cost of Parenthood: the impact of children on adult time**

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## **Abstract**

Raising children is not only costly in terms of money, but also places extremely heavy demands on parental time. While caring for children has historically been largely mothers' responsibility, women are increasingly allocating time to the paid work force. There has not been a corresponding change by men allocating equivalent time to caring duties. This has created a situation, signposted in contemporary issues including workfamily imbalance and lowered fertility rates, in which the time requirements of parenthood are becoming seriously problematic. The problem is exacerbated because it is not well defined or recognised. The amount and nature of parental time inputs to children is obscure.

In this thesis, I explore this hidden cost of parenthood, through a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the impact of children upon adult time. Using multivariate regression analysis of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) *Time Use Survey 1997* and the Multinational Time-Use Study (MTUS) *World Series 5.5* I reveal the magnitude, character and distribution of adult time devoted to children. I adapt a marginal costs approach to compare the welfare of parents (with varying numbers and ages of children) and people without children, using as a measure daily workload, including both paid and unpaid work (of which childcare is a subset). I examine how childcare time is divided by gender; in total, in the type of activities performed and in the quality of the experience. I look at whether the amount and intra-household distribution of workload and childcare varies with personal parental attributes including sole parenthood, childcare use and workforce participation, education, and nationality.

The results show that the time impact of becoming a parent in Australia is considerable, but very unevenly distributed by sex. The costs fall disproportionately upon mothers, which means having children markedly intensifies gender inequities in time allocation by increasing specialisation and/or women's overall workload. Mothering is qualitatively as well as quantitatively different to fathering. The gender disparity in the time cost of parenthood is not mitigated by variation in personal circumstances or characteristics, though a cross-national comparison shows that social policy has the potential to alleviate some of the effects.