

A big 'thank you' to all of the women who took part in the research!

We really enjoyed talking to you, and will use what you said to help businesses think more about how to support women who have caring responsibilities.

Further advice, guidance and support on work-life balance issues are available from the following organisations:

Working Families offers support to working parents and carers and also helps employers to create a working environment that encourages work-life balance for all. Its website includes a Family Zone, which provides information and practical guidance on the rights of working parents. **www.workingfamilies.org.uk**
Tel: 020 7253 7243

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers provides information, advice and support services to carers. **www.carers.org**
Tel: 0141 221 5066

Carers Scotland is the Scottish branch of Carers UK. It offers information and advice to carers, and campaigns to raise awareness of the role of carers and the contribution they make to their communities. **www.carerscotland.org**
Information and advice line: 0808 808 7777 (Wed & Thurs, 10am-12pm, 2-4pm)

This website has information on all employment rights, including those for parents and carers. **www.direct.gov.uk**

If you have any questions or queries about the study, you can contact **Maria Breslin, Research Administration Assistant** at:

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Working and Caring



A team of researchers from Glasgow Caledonian University, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Strathclyde recently asked women working in nine food retail businesses across Scotland about their experiences of combining paid work with looking after their children and/or other family members. This leaflet explains what we found out from this study.

- **Many women chose to work in food retail because it allowed them to combine work and caring responsibilities**
- **Most women who were combining work and caring responsibilities enjoyed their jobs and were committed to their employers**
- **Most women relied on relatives to look after their children while they worked. A smaller number used nurseries or childminders**
- **It could be stressful when caring emergencies arose, but shift swapping was one way of dealing with this**
- **Managers and supervisors said that they found it harder to balance work and caring responsibilities than shop assistants**
- **Most women said they didn't know about their employment rights relating to work and care**

COMBINING CARING AND WORKING: ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

75% of women were happy that they could balance their work and caring commitments. Shop assistants were happiest with their work-life balance

Who took part?

Just over 300 women either filled in a questionnaire or talked to a researcher. We also interviewed employers and HR staff in five of the nine businesses.

Why work in a food retail shop?

Most of the women spoke positively about working in the food retail sector – in particular, they enjoyed social contact with work-mates and members of the public.

Nearly all of the women said that the shift patterns made it easier for them to fit a job around their caring commitments. Many lived less than a mile from their work. The advantage of this, as one shop assistant explained, was that *'it is near my children so if something happens I can just go back'*.

Childcare arrangements

Just over half of the women had children under the age of 18 and most relied on family and friends to look after their children while they were at work. A typical comment came from a store manager who said *'I've got lots of aunts, uncles and everyone lives locally and both sides of the grandparents are there...so there's always somebody there to collect them'*.

Very few women used nurseries or childminders, partly because of the cost – those who did tended to be single parents without family living nearby. Also nurseries often were not open at the times when women were working their shifts.

Caring for older people

A third of the women who took part in the study told us that they were involved in looking after older people – elderly parents, in-laws, family friends or neighbours. Many of these women were also looking after their own children or grandchildren. The amount of time that women spent caring for older people varied widely – from one or two hours every week to several hours a day.

Caring for elderly dependants could be even more stressful than looking after children, because of their poor health. One woman described looking after her parents as *'worry, constant worry, all the time'*.

What happened when time off was needed?

Women were asked if they had ever needed to take time off work at short notice to deal with a family/caring emergency.

- Women were very committed to their jobs and wanted to be seen as reliable workers who only took time off when absolutely necessary
- Most women reported that they were not paid for time off for caring emergencies
- Women supported each other by swapping shifts to allow for caring responsibilities
- Other women worked extra hours to make up for time off

What about employment rights?

- Most women said they didn't know their rights as employees with caring responsibilities, or their general employment rights
- They were not sure if their place of work had any policies about taking time off for caring purposes

What about future prospects?

- A quarter of the women had skills or qualifications that they were unable to use in their current work
- Most women were unable or unwilling to progress their careers because of their caring responsibilities
- Employers valued their staff and wanted to retain them

What you can do to improve your work-life balance

- Ask your employer if there are any policies on taking time off for caring responsibilities – you might be entitled to some time off, especially in emergencies
- If your caring responsibilities change it may be worth asking your employer about altering your work patterns to help you combine working and caring
- Know your rights as an employee with caring responsibilities. On the back of this leaflet there is a list of organisations that offer information and guidance to employees

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For some juggling work and caring was hard, especially for those working full-time and for those looking after both children and elderly relatives. Supervisors and managers were the least happy and most stressed.

