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A third of Australian kids say their dads work too much – new study

A third of Australian children aged 11–13 years say their fathers work too much, a new study led by The Australian National University (ANU) has found.

The study, which observed around 3,000 fathers and their children as part of the 'Growing Up in Australia' study, also found that one third of children did not always enjoy time with their dads.

Lead researcher Professor Lyndall Strazdins said fathers' long hours on the job, including regular night and weekend work and difficulties getting time off work, contributed to their children's perceptions.

"Australia's work culture and social norms are making it hard for dads to be the fathers they want to be," said Professor Strazdins from the ANU Research School of Population Health.

"More than half of fathers reported missing family events because of work, while a fifth described their family time as more pressured and less fun due to their jobs, and these were problems their children shared."

Research shows that, on average across the Australian population, fathers spend more time at paid work than mothers, who take on more care and domestic responsibilities.

Professor Strazdins said nearly half of fathers worked more than 44 hours a week.

"Fathers are more likely than mothers to report work-life challenges," she said.

"Our research has shown that people who work more than 39 hours per week are putting their health at risk, and we have also shown that expectations to work long hours are a problem for gender equality.

"Workplaces still assume men are more devoted to their jobs than women and so they expect men to work longer hours, but this creates dilemmas for fathers."

About 40 per cent of fathers regularly worked at night and on weekends, and felt they cannot easily change their work hours, Professor Strazdins said.

"Our research shows that although kids really value the work that their parents do, whether it's at home, in the office or elsewhere, they also have views about how long is too long to work," Professor Strazdins said.

"While nearly one in eight children wished their father did not work, most kids understand that dad needs to work."

Professor Strazdins said many children accommodated to their fathers' work hours.

"They try to be good and try to solve the time constraints of his work schedule to ensure they have a positive relationship with their dads," Professor Strazdins said.

"We delude ourselves that what happens in fathers' workplaces is somehow separate from children's lives. Time with their fathers is a problem for many children, it's not just an issue for adults and the economy."

ANU conducted the research with the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the WZB Social Science Institute in Berlin.

The research paper, 'Long Hours and Longings: Australian Children's Views of Fathers' Work and Family Time', is published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

This week is National Family Week.

FOR INTERVIEW:

Professor Lyndall Strazdins

ANU Research School of Population Health

M: +61 420 533 205

E: Lyndall.Strazdins@anu.edu.au

For media assistance, contact Will Wright from the ANU Media Team on +612 6125 7979, +61 478 337 740 or media@anu.edu.au