

From 1997 to 2007

Fewer Mothers Prefer Full-time Work

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A Social & Demographic Trends Report

From 1997 to 2007: Fewer Mothers Prefer Full-time Work

In the span of the past decade, full-time work outside the home has lost some of its appeal to mothers. This trend holds both for mothers who have such jobs and those who don't.

Among working mothers with minor children (ages 17 and under), just one-in-five (21%) say full-time work is the ideal situation for them, down from the 32% who said this back in 1997, according to a new Pew Research Center survey. Fully six-in-ten (up from 48% in 1997) of today's working mothers say part-time work would be their ideal, and another one-in-five (19%) say she would prefer not working at all outside the home.

There's been a similar shift in preferences among at-home mothers with minor children. Today just 16% of these mothers say their ideal situation would be to work full time outside the home, down from the 24% who felt that way in 1997. Nearly half (48%) of all at-home moms now say that not working at all outside the home is the ideal situation for them, up from the 39% who felt that way in 1997.

From 1997 to 2007: Full-Time Work Grows Less Attractive to Moms

Considering everything, what would be the ideal situation for you—working full-time, part-time, or not at all outside the home?

	---Working mothers---			---At-home mothers---		
	1997	2007	Change '97 to '07	1997	2007	Change '97 to '07
	%	%		%	%	
What's ideal for you?						
Full-time work	32	21	-11	24	16	-8
Part-time work	48	60	+12	37	33	-4
Not working	20	19	-1	39	48	+9
Don't know	*	*		*	3	
	100	100		100	100	
Number of respondents	317	259		140	153	

Note: Based on mothers with children under age 18.

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The lack of enthusiasm that mothers of all stripes have for full-time work outside the home isn't shared by fathers – more than seven-in-ten (72%) fathers say the ideal situation for them is a full-time job.

Meantime, even as mothers have grown less enamored with full-time work, a new division of opinion has opened up between working moms and at-home moms on the question of whether it's good or bad for society that more mothers are working outside the home.

A decade ago, nearly identical pluralities of both groups (38% among at-home moms; 39% among working moms) said this trend was bad for society. Since then, more working mothers have come to see this trend as good for society, while slightly more at-home moms have come to see it as bad.

There are also differences in the way working moms and at-home moms assess the job they're doing as parents. Mothers working full-time give themselves slightly lower ratings as parents, on average, than do at-home mothers or mothers employed part-time.

This self-rating question about parenting performance wasn't asked on the 1997 Pew survey, so there is no way to know whether these patterns have changed over time.

The parenting ratings also vary by level of education; mothers with more education tend to be harder on themselves than are mothers with less education.

As for the shifts in attitudes among mothers about full-time work, these come at a time when the labor force participation rate of all women ages 25 to 54, after rising sharply over the past half century, has been basically unchanged since the mid 1990s, plateauing at about 75%. Among mothers with very young children (under 3 years of age), there was a small decline in the labor force participation rate between the peak year of 1998 (62%) and the most recent year for which figures are available, 2005 (59%).¹

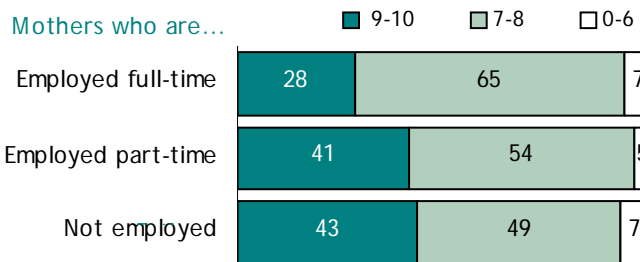
The survey did not probe the reasons women say one work situation or another would be ideal, so it can offer no details about the way mothers see the roles of working and childrearing in their lives.

The Pew survey was conducted by telephone from February 16 through March 14, 2007 among a randomly selected, nationally-representative sample of 2,020 adults. The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Many of the analyses presented in this report are based on responses among selected subgroups. Results based on working mothers (259 respondents to the survey) have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 8 percentage points. Results based on at-home mothers (153 respondents) have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 11 percentage points.

Whenever possible, these findings have been compared with a nationally-representative survey of 1,101 women conducted in 1997 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The subgroup of women in the 1997 survey who are working mothers (317 respondents) and at-home mothers (140 respondents) have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus six and nine percentage points, respectively.

Working Moms Give Themselves Lower Parenting Marks

How good a job do you feel you've done so far as a parent? (Self-ratings on a zero-to-ten scale)



Note: Based on women with minor age children. Don't know responses are not shown.

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¹ Mosisa, Abraham and Steven Hipple. October 2006. "Trends in labor force participation in the United States." *Monthly Labor Review*, pp35-57. The labor force participation rate refers to "the proportion of the working-age population either working or actively looking for work."

The Elusive Lure of Part-time Work

The mothers in the Pew survey who were most inclined to endorse their current situation as representing their ideal are those who work part-time. Among this group, fully eight-in-ten says that part-time work is their preferred option.

Part-time work is also the preferred option of about half (49%) of mothers who work full-time and a third (33%) of mothers who don't work outside the home. It is much less popular among fathers; about seven-in-ten (72%) men with minor age children say that full-time work is their ideal situation, while 12% say they would prefer to work part-time and 16% say they would prefer not working outside the home.

Among women with minor children, views on this question vary little by income or

education level. There are minor differences by race. Black mothers are more likely than whites to say full-time work is ideal; both groups are about equally likely to say no outside employment is ideal.²

Married mothers are somewhat more likely than unmarried mothers to consider no or part-time employment ideal; this pattern occurs in both the 1997 and 2007 Pew surveys. However, unmarried mothers are much less likely to prefer full-time work today (26%) than a decade ago (49%). A plurality of today's unmarried mothers now prefer part-time work (46%), while 26% prefer not working outside the home and 26% prefer full-time work.

Mothers with younger children (ages 0 to 4 years) also are less likely to prefer full-time work today (16%) than a decade ago (31%). A narrow plurality (37%) preferred part-time work in 1997; today 48% of mothers with younger children prefer part-time work, while 36% prefer not working outside the home and 16% prefer full-time work. The preferences of mothers with older children (ages 5 to 17) are about the same today as they were a decade ago.

The decline in mothers saying full-time work is ideal for them occurred about equally among mothers with higher and lower education levels.

What Working Situation Would Be Ideal for You?

Considering everything, what would be the ideal situation for you—working full-time, working part-time, or not working at all outside the home?

	-----Ideal Situation Would Be-----				N
	Not working	Part-time work	Full-time work	Don't know	
	%	%	%	%	
Have children under 18					
Fathers	16	12	72	*=100	343
Mothers	29	50	20	1=100	414
Mothers with children under 18					
Employed full-time	21	49	29	1=100	184
Employed part-time	15	80	5	*=100	75
Not employed	48	33	16	3=100	153

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² Throughout this report, the term blacks or whites refers to non-Hispanic blacks or whites, respectively. Hispanics are of any race. The survey included an oversample of blacks and Hispanics. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Among all working mothers, there's a strong disconnect between the kind of job they say would be ideal and the kind of job they actually have. Some 60% of working mothers say they'd prefer to work part-time, but -- according to figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics -- only about a quarter (24%) of all working mothers have a part-time job.³

How Mothers Assess Societal Impact of Working Moms

Working and at-home moms are divided in their judgments about the impact on society of working mothers.

A 44% plurality of at-home moms consider the increase in working mothers bad for society while about half as many (22%) say it is good for society and the remainder take a neutral position (31%). By contrast, working moms are split almost evenly between positive (34%), negative (34%), and neutral (31%) views of how this trend is affecting society.

As noted above, the opinion divide on this question between at-home and working moms has emerged over the past decade. In the 1997 Pew survey, about equal proportions of at-home moms (38%) and working moms (39%) said the increased number of mothers in the labor force was a bad thing for society.

Married mothers are more likely than their

unmarried counterparts to consider the growth of working mothers bad for society. Younger mothers (as well as younger women without children) are less negative about this societal trend.

Mothers with some college or more education have grown somewhat more positive than mothers with less education about the impact of working mothers on society. For example, 24% of mothers with a college degree say more working mothers is a good thing for society, up from 9% in 1997. Mothers with no more than a high school diploma are about equally likely to say this trend is a good thing for society now (32%) as did so a decade ago (27%).

From 1997 to 2007:

Opinion Gap Emerges on What's Best for Society

Is the increase in working mothers with young children generally a good thing for society, a bad thing for society or doesn't it make much difference?

	---Working mothers---			---At-home mothers---		
	1997	2007	'97 to '07	1997	2007	'97 to '07
	%	%	Change	%	%	Change
More working mothers is...						
Good thing for society	19	34	+15	22	22	0
No difference	38	31	-7	37	31	-6
Bad thing for society	39	34	-5	38	44	+6
Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>		<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	
	100	100		100	100	
Number of respondents	317	259		140	153	

Note: Based on mothers with children under age 18.

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³See Table 5 "Employment status of the population by sex, marital status, and presence and age of own children under 18, 2005-06 annual averages." Bureau of Labor Statistics.

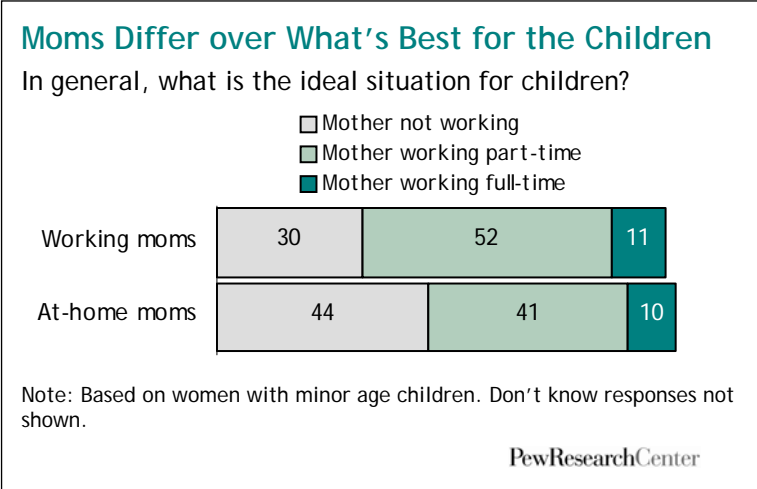
What’s Best for the Kids?

Judgments about the impact of working mothers on society are strongly related to beliefs about what is best for children. Here too, at-home moms and working moms have different views, although neither group sees a full-time working mother as ideal for children.

At-home mothers (44%) are more likely than employed mothers (30%) to say an at-home mom is the ideal situation for children. The at-home group is narrowly divided over whether part-time (41%) or no outside work (44%) is the ideal situation for children. Just one-in-ten says a full-time working mother is ideal for the children.

A majority of working mothers (52%) say that a mother working part-time is ideal for children. Three-in-ten say a mother who doesn’t work outside the home would be ideal for children and about one-in-ten (11%) say that a full-time working mother is ideal for children.

African-American mothers (83 respondents to this survey) are more likely than white or Hispanic mothers to consider employed moms – especially full-time working moms – ideal for children. Unmarried mothers are a bit more likely than married mothers to consider a mom working full-time ideal for children. Both black and unmarried mothers participate in the labor force at higher rates than their respective female counterparts. Mothers’ views on this question do not vary by education level.



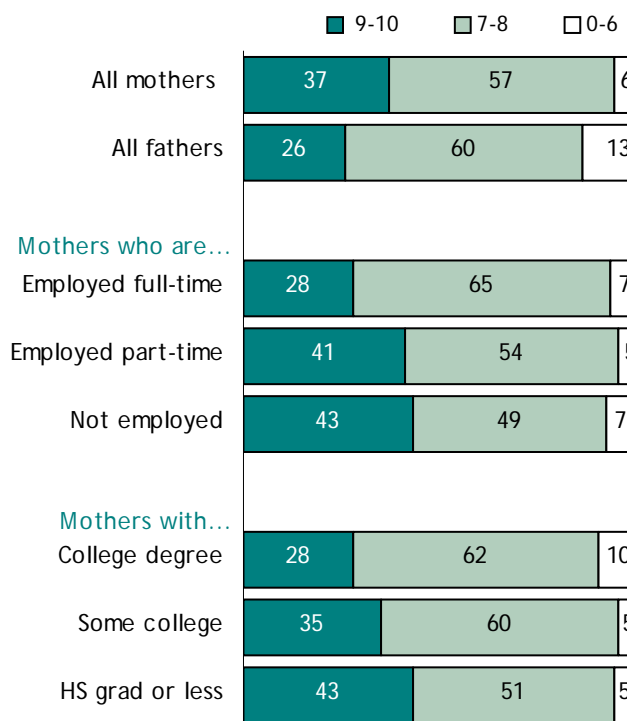
How's Your Parenting Going?

The Pew survey asked parents to rate how good a job they are doing as parents, on a scale from 0 to a high of 10. Regardless of their employment status, most mothers tend to give themselves relatively high marks on this scale. However, the women who are hardest on themselves are full-time working moms. Just 10% of mothers working full-time give themselves the highest rating (10) as a parent; another 18% place themselves at the next highest mark (9).

At-home moms give themselves more kudos as parents; nearly three-in-ten (28%) give themselves the highest mark (10) and another 15% put themselves at nine on this ten-point scale. Moms working part-time (just 75 respondents to this survey) give themselves similar marks; 24% of this group rates their job as a ten and another 17% rates themselves just one rung down at a nine.

Rate Your Own Parenting

How good a job do you feel you've done so far as a parent? (Self-ratings on a zero-to-ten scale)



Note: Mothers/fathers based on respondents with children under age 18. Don't know responses are not shown.

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Mothers see themselves in a better light, on average, than do fathers. Just 26% of dads give themselves one of the two highest marks; six-in-ten put themselves at a seven or eight on this scale and the remaining 13% rate themselves at six or below. (Most fathers of minor children in the Pew survey are full-time workers (85%); thus ratings among full-time working dads are virtually the same as those for all dads.)

Mothers with more education tend to be harder on themselves than are those with less education. By contrast, there is no clear relationship between father's parenting rating and education level.

Public Opinion about Working Mothers

On questions related to work and motherhood, the views of the full adult population are not much different from the views of mothers themselves. The public is broadly ambivalent – but tilts more negative than positive – about the phenomenon of mothers working outside the home.

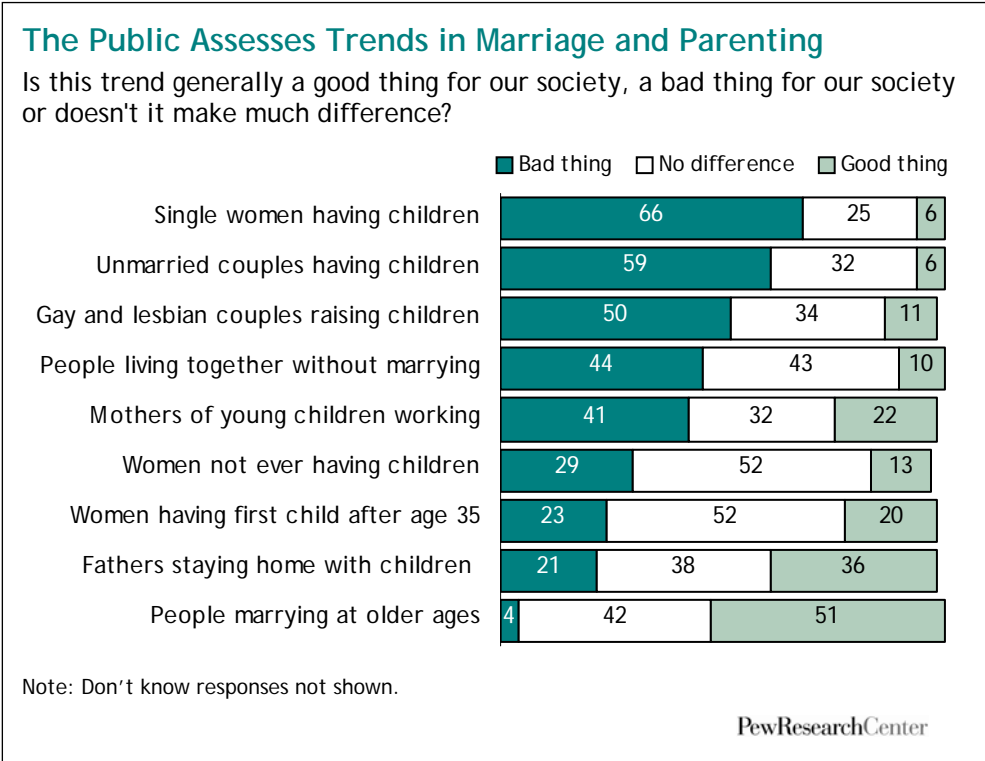
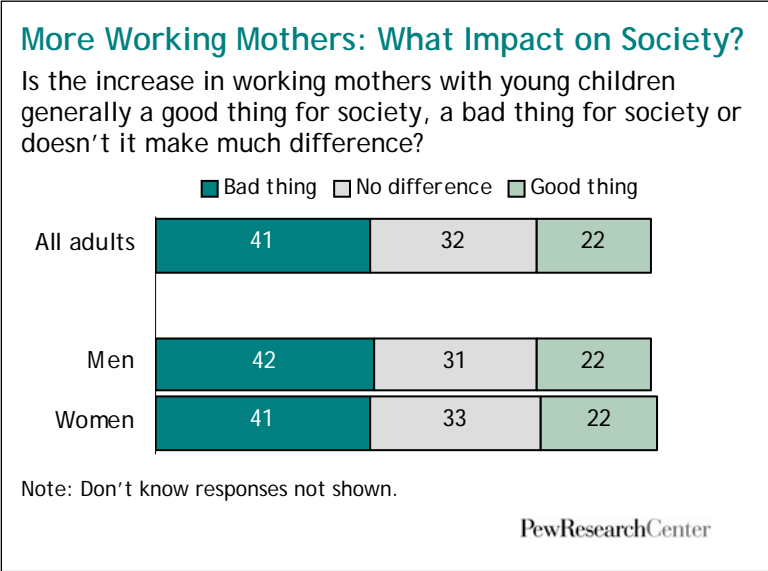
The Impact on Society of

Working Mothers. A plurality of the general population (41%) says the trend toward more mothers working outside the home is a bad thing for society, while 22% say it is a good thing and 32% say this trend hasn't made much difference.

The Pew survey also asked respondents to assess the impact on society of eight other trends related to family life – including the increase in single women having children; the increase in people living together without marrying; and the increase in people marrying at

older ages. Of these nine, “more mothers of young children working outside the home” was in about the middle of the pack, reflecting the mixed views Americans hold about the impact of working mothers on society.

There is virtually no difference of opinion between men and women in assessments about the social impact of more mothers of young children working outside the home. Younger adults (especially those under age 30) are more positive, on average, than older adults about the impact of this trend. These age differences are more pronounced among women than among men, however.



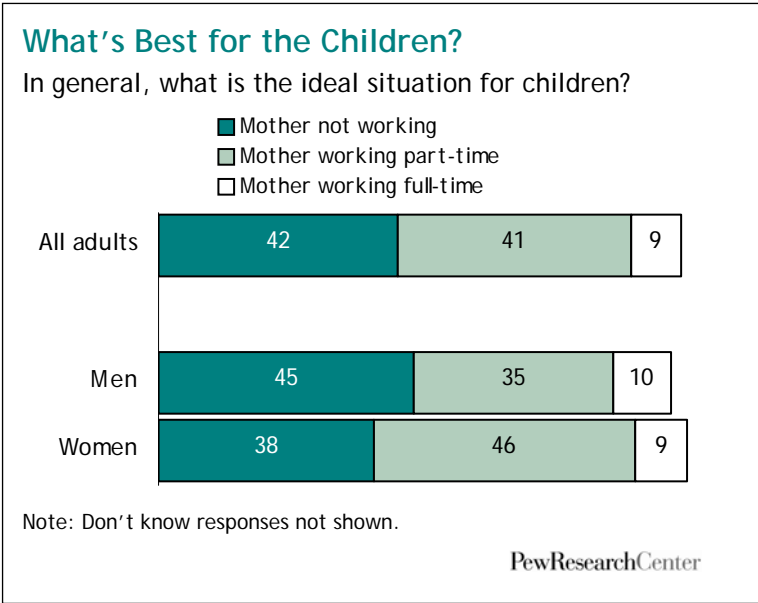
Respondents who grew up with a working mom are less negative about the impact of working mothers on society than are respondents whose own mother was not employed at the time they were growing up.

African-Americans and Hispanics are a bit more positive than whites about the impact of working mothers on society. Republicans, political conservatives and white evangelical Protestants are more negative than their respective counterparts about the impact of working mothers on society. There are no or minimal differences in opinion on this question by education or income.

Working Mothers and Children. About four-in-ten (42%) adults say an at-home mother is the ideal situation for children; a nearly identical proportion (41%) say a mother working part-time is ideal and just 9% say a mother working full-time is ideal for children.

Men are more likely than women to consider an at-home mother the ideal situation for children. The same gender difference is found between moms and dads with children under age 18; fathers of minor age children are more likely than mothers to consider an at-home mom the ideal situation for children.

There are no or minimal differences in judgments about the ideal situation for children by education or family income. Blacks are more likely than either whites or Hispanics to hold full-time working moms as the ideal for children, but a plurality of blacks holds the part-time working mother as ideal, not the full-time worker. Republicans, political conservatives and white evangelical Protestants are more likely than their respective counterparts to consider an at-home mom ideal for the children.



About the Pew Social and Demographic Trends Project

The Social and Demographic Trends Project explores the behaviors and attitudes of Americans in key realms of their lives – family, community, health, finance, work and leisure. Reports analyze changes over time in social behaviors and probe for differences and similarities among key sub-groups in the population.

The project is part of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Social and Demographic Trends staff:

Paul Taylor, Project Director
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About the Survey

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted with a nationally representative sample of adults, ages 18 years and older, living in continental U.S. telephone households. The sample design included an oversample of African-American and Hispanic respondents, as well as an oversample of 18 to 49 year olds. The oversample of African-American and Hispanic respondents was created by contacting a disproportionate number of area code-exchange combinations with higher than average densities of African-American and Hispanic households. The oversample of 18 to 49 year olds was achieved by screening additional replicates for age appropriate respondents. The data are weighted to produce a final sample that is representative of the general population of adults in the continental United States.

- Interviews conducted Feb. 16 – Mar. 14, 2007
- 2,020 interviews
- Margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on the total sample at the 95% confidence level. The margin of sampling error is higher for results based on subgroups of respondents.
- The margin of sampling error is higher for results based on subgroups of respondents. The margin of error for the following subgroups is:
 - Working mothers +/- 8 percentage points
 - At-home mothers +/- 11 percentage points

Survey interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias in the findings of opinion polls.

Related Reports from the Pew Research Center

As Marriage and Parenthood Drift Apart, Public Is Concerned about Social Impact. July 2007. Pew Research Center. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/526/marriage-parenthood>

Motherhood Today: Tougher Challenges, Less Success. May 2007. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/468/motherhood>

PEW SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS
 FINAL TOPLINE
 FEBRUARY 16 - MARCH 14, 2007
 N=2,020⁴

QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 3 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

ASK ALL:

Q.4 Next, please tell me if you think each of the following trends is generally a good thing for our society, a bad thing for our society, or doesn't make much difference? (First/Next) **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]**
READ IF NECESSARY: Is this generally a good thing for our society, a bad thing for our society, or doesn't it make much difference?

a. More mothers of young children working outside the home

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>		March 1997 ⁵
22	22	22	Good thing for society	<u>Women</u> 17
32	31	33	Doesn't make much difference	37
41	42	41	Bad thing for society	41
<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>5</u>
100	100	100		100
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)		(N=1101)

b. More women not ever having children

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>		March 1997
13	12	13	Good thing for society	<u>Women</u> 19
52	50	55	Doesn't make much difference	48
29	32	26	Bad thing for society	24
<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>9</u>
100	100	100		100
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)		(N=1101)

c. More women having their first child after age 35

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>		March 1997
20	17	23	Good thing for society	<u>Women</u> 29
52	52	51	Doesn't make much difference	45
23	25	21	Bad thing for society	22
<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>4</u>
100	100	100		100
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)		(N=1101)

⁴ The sample design included an oversample of blacks, Hispanics and adults ages 18-49. The data are weighted to produce results from a representative sample of the population.

⁵ Based on a survey of women conducted March 14-26, 1997 by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

Q.4 CONTINUED...

d. More single women deciding to have children without a male partner to help raise them

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>		March 1997 <u>Women</u>
6	4	8	Good thing for society	7
25	20	29	Doesn't make much difference	25
66	73	60	Bad thing for society	65
<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>3</u>
100	100	100		100
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)		(N=1101)

e. More UNmarried couples deciding to have children

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>		March 1997 <u>Women</u>
6	6	6	Good thing for society	9
32	30	33	Doesn't make much difference	26
59	61	58	Bad thing for society	62
<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>3</u>
100	100	100		100
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)		(N=1101)

f. More gay and lesbian couples raising children

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>		March 1997 <u>Women</u>
11	9	13	Good thing for society	6
34	28	39	Doesn't make much difference	31
50	59	42	Bad thing for society	56
<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>7</u>
100	100	100		100
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)		(N=1101)

g. More fathers staying home with children so their wives can work full-time

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>		March 1997 <u>Women</u>
36	32	39	Good thing for society	39
38	41	36	Doesn't make much difference	38
21	23	20	Bad thing for society	20
<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>3</u>
100	100	100		100
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)		(N=1101)

h. More people marrying for the first time at older ages

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	
51	51	52	Good thing for society
42	41	43	Doesn't make much difference
4	5	2	Bad thing for society
<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	100	100	
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)	

Q.4 CONTINUED...

i. More people living together without getting married

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	
10	11	9	Good thing for society
43	43	44	Doesn't make much difference
44	43	45	Bad thing for society
<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	100	100	
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)	

NO QUESTION 5

QUESTIONS 6 THROUGH 36 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

ASK IF HAVE CHILDREN OF ANY AGE (KIDS 2,3,4):

Thinking about your own parenting.

Q.37 How good a job do you feel you've done so far as a (IF SEX=2: mother/IF SEX=1: father) on a scale from 0 to 10 where 10 MEANS EXCELLENT and ZERO MEANS POOR.

RECORD NUMBER (Range 0-10)

BASED ON PARENTS WITH CHILDREN OF ANY AGE [N=1495]:

<u>All</u>	<u>Fathers</u>	<u>Mothers</u>		<i>Fathers with Children under 18</i>	<i>Fathers with All Children 18+</i>	<i>Mothers with Children under 18</i>	<i>Mothers with All Children 18+</i>
36	30	40	9-10	26	36	37	43
53	56	52	7-8	60	51	57	47
8	10	6	5-6	10	10	5	8
2	3	1	0-4	3	2	1	1
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	*	<u>1</u>
100	100	100		100	100	100	100
(N=1495)	(N=611)	(N=884)		(N=343)	(N=268)	(N=414)	(N=470)
8.1	7.8	8.3	Mean	7.7	8.0	8.2	8.3
8	8	8	Median	8	8	8	8

ASK ALL:

I have two questions about work and family.

Q.38 In general, what is the ideal situation for CHILDREN—mothers working full-time, mothers working part-time, or mothers not working at all outside the home?

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	
9	10	9	Mother working full-time
41	35	46	Mother working part-time
42	45	38	Mother not working at all outside the home
<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>7</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	100	100	

Q.39 In general, what is the ideal situation for WOMEN with children—working full-time, working part-time, or not working at all outside the home?

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	
12	14	11	Working full-time
47	41	52	Working part-time
33	36	31	Not working at all outside the home
<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	100	100	

QUESTIONS 40 THROUGH 47 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

IDEAL Considering everything, what would be the ideal situation for you -- working full-time, working part-time, or not working at all outside the home?

<u>All</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>		---Employed---	
				<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
40	56	25	Full-time	65	33
31	20	40	Part-time	19	49
28	23	33	Not at all	15	18
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>
100	100	100		100	100
(N=2020)	(N=892)	(N=1128)		(N=618)	(N=578)

BASED ON MOTHERS OF CHILDREN UNDER 18 [N=414]:

<u>Mothers of Children under 18</u>	<u>Working Mothers with Children under 18</u>		March 1997 ⁶	
			<u>Mothers of Children under 18</u>	<u>Working Mothers with Children under 18</u>
20	21	Full-time	30	32
50	60	Part-time	44	48
29	19	Not at all	26	20
<u>1</u>	<u>*</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>*</u>	<u>*</u>
100	100		100	100
(N=414)	(N=259)		(N=457)	(N=317)

⁶ Based on respondents with children under age 18 living in the household.