

A photograph of a man and a woman from the waist down, overlaid with a red tint. The man on the left is wearing jeans and holding a baby. The woman on the right is wearing a skirt suit and holding a briefcase.

# PIONEERING FATHERS: BEHIND EVERY GREAT WOMAN THERE IS A GREAT MAN

REVERSAL OF TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES FOR COUPLES AND **(R)**EVOLUTION OF SOCIETY

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Pioneering fathers: Once they make the leap, they often stay there. These fathers choose to take on domestic responsibilities long term, motivated by a desire to help their partners' careers. Despite the benefits and advantages, some obstacles remain, including a lack of support among family, friends and employers.

A STUDY LED BY JUMP IN COLLABORATION WITH BAIN & COMPANY

MARCH 2014

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JUMP offers women practical tools to help them achieve their professional and personal aspirations and supports organisations that want to promote better gender diversity within their management.

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The study report, the transcript of the 10 interviews and the press review  
are available for download on [www.jump.eu.com](http://www.jump.eu.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

According to a 2013 report published by Eurostat, the number of 30- to 34-year-old women in the European Union's 27 member states (EU27) who had completed higher education in 2012 was on average higher than that of men (40.0% as opposed to 31.6%). This marks a **considerable change** from the level of education women achieved some decades ago. Their increased **access to higher education** has also given these women **aspirations and ambitions** considerably different from those of their mothers and grandmothers.

While advanced degrees qualify these women as candidates for **executive and management positions**, every career opportunity offered also raises the question of how best to combine family life with a professional career. Traditionally, women have given up their careers to take care of their families. However, an increasing number of mothers want to pursue a career and therefore **need the support of their partners**. In these households the **traditional gender roles are reversed**, leaving the day-to-day household management up to the fathers and allowing their partners to pursue their careers.

A study of these gender-equality pioneers examines key aspects of the couples' perceptions and decision making:

**THE REASONS THAT MOTIVATED THESE  
FATHERS TO TAKE ON HOUSEHOLD TASKS  
AND CHILD CARE**

**THE LENGTH OF TIME THEY ARE WILLING  
TO TAKE ON THIS ROLE**

**THE DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD TASKS**

**THE PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES AND  
DIFFICULTIES**

**THE OPINIONS OF FRIENDS AND FAMILY**

**THE ASPIRATIONS OF THESE COUPLES VIS-À-  
VIS SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS**





## INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted by **JUMP in collaboration with Bain & Company**. JUMP offers women practical tools to help them achieve their professional and personal aspirations, and supports organisations seeking to promote better gender diversity within management. Bain & Company specialises in providing strategic advice. A previous Bain & Company study of gender equality was published in Belgium in November 2013.

The study's subjects are European men and women from the JUMP community, as well as members of the study's various networks and media partners—a total of **76 fathers and 163 mothers from 16 European countries**, mainly France and Belgium. All are members of families in which the father has taken on most of the household tasks and child-care responsibilities.

Subjects belong to the **middle- to high-income** bracket, which implies that their **choice was conscious and voluntary**. (The fewer financial resources a family has, the less likely it is that their choice is voluntary and not imposed by circumstances such as unemployment, illness and so on.)



THESE PIONEERING FATHERS MADE A CONSCIOUS CHOICE TO SUPPORT THEIR PARTNERS' CAREERS IN THE LONG TERM.

THEY ARE GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH THEIR CHOICE AND ARE AWARE OF THE ADVANTAGES FOR THEIR PARTNERS AND FAMILIES.

AMONG DISADVANTAGES, THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED IS THE LACK OF SUPPORT FROM FAMILY, FRIENDS AND EMPLOYERS.

TO ACHIEVE GREATER GENDER EQUALITY, SOCIETY IN GENERAL, GOVERNMENTS AND COMPANIES CAN NO LONGER CONSIDER IT SOLELY A "WOMEN'S" ISSUE. GENDER EQUALITY APPLIES EQUALLY TO MEN.

A photograph of a middle-aged couple standing close together and smiling. The man is on the left, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and dark jeans. The woman is on the right, wearing a light-colored cardigan over a striped top and dark jeans. Her hand is resting on the man's shoulder. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

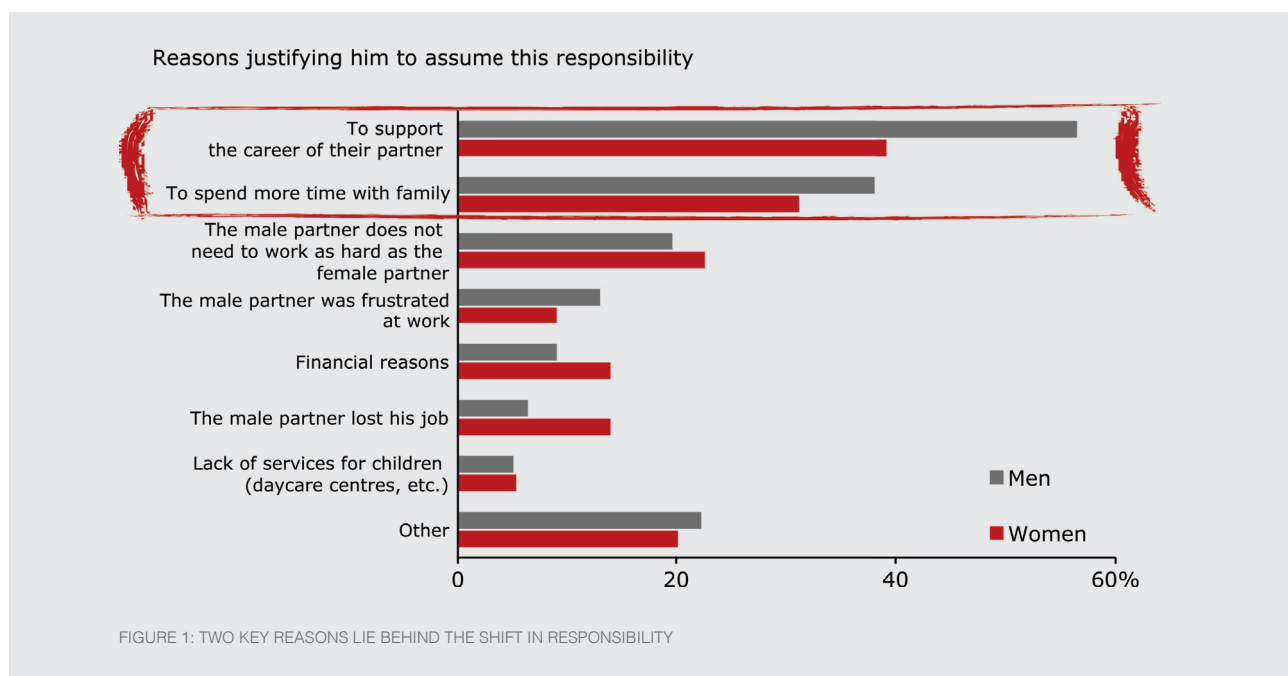
**“WITH THIS ARRANGEMENT, MY WIFE—WHO HAS BETTER UNIVERSITY QUALIFICATIONS THAN ME—HAS BEEN ABLE TO DEVELOP HER FULL POTENTIAL AND HER CAREER.”**

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## CHOOSING TO SUPPORT THEIR PARTNERS' CAREERS IN THE LONG TERM

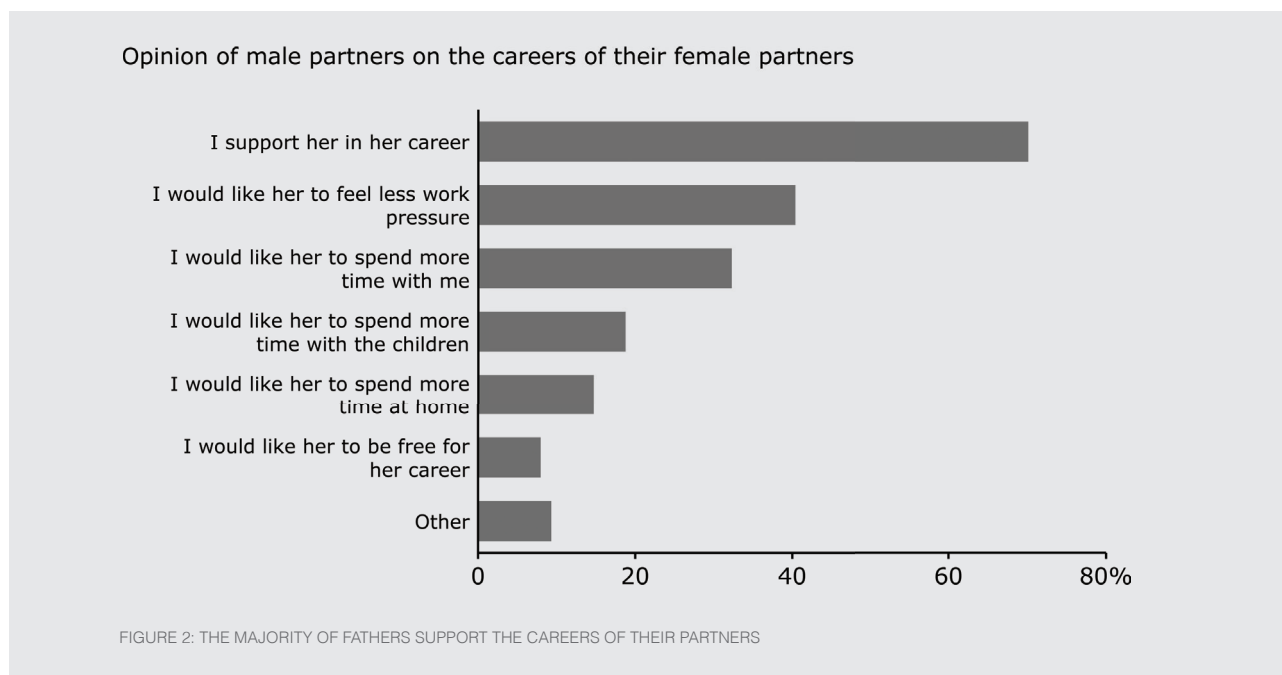
This break with the traditional distribution of household tasks is a **growing trend**. A 2010 Bain & Company study of gender equality in the workplace confirmed that men were increasingly willing to dedicate their time to their families in order to support their partners' careers. It is essential to understand the motivation for these decisions and to more fully comprehend the nature of this **new family model**, which may well become so common in the future it will seem unremarkable.

Based on survey responses, two main reasons seem to motivate men to carry out this change of gender roles (see Figure 1). First, they want to **support their partner's career**, and second, they want to **spend more time with their families**.



The fact that these key factors predominantly influence decision making is also confirmed by the opinion of the targeted fathers with respect to their partners' professional careers (see Figure 2). **Seven out of 10 men state that they support their partners' careers**. However, four out of 10 also state that they would like to see their partners feel **less work-related pressure** and free up **more time** both for them (32%) and for their children (19%).

## CHOOSING TO SUPPORT THEIR PARTNERS' CAREERS IN THE LONG TERM



One of the fathers expressed his thoughts this way:

*“With this arrangement, my wife—who has better university qualifications than me—has been able to develop her full potential and her career. Thanks to our decision, I can support her and organise the tasks that she would not have had time to do if I had not taken on the management of our household.”*

The women in this study agree with the men on the two main reasons for their choice. However, they **put things in perspective regarding the perception of their partners** on the link between this decision and support to their career.

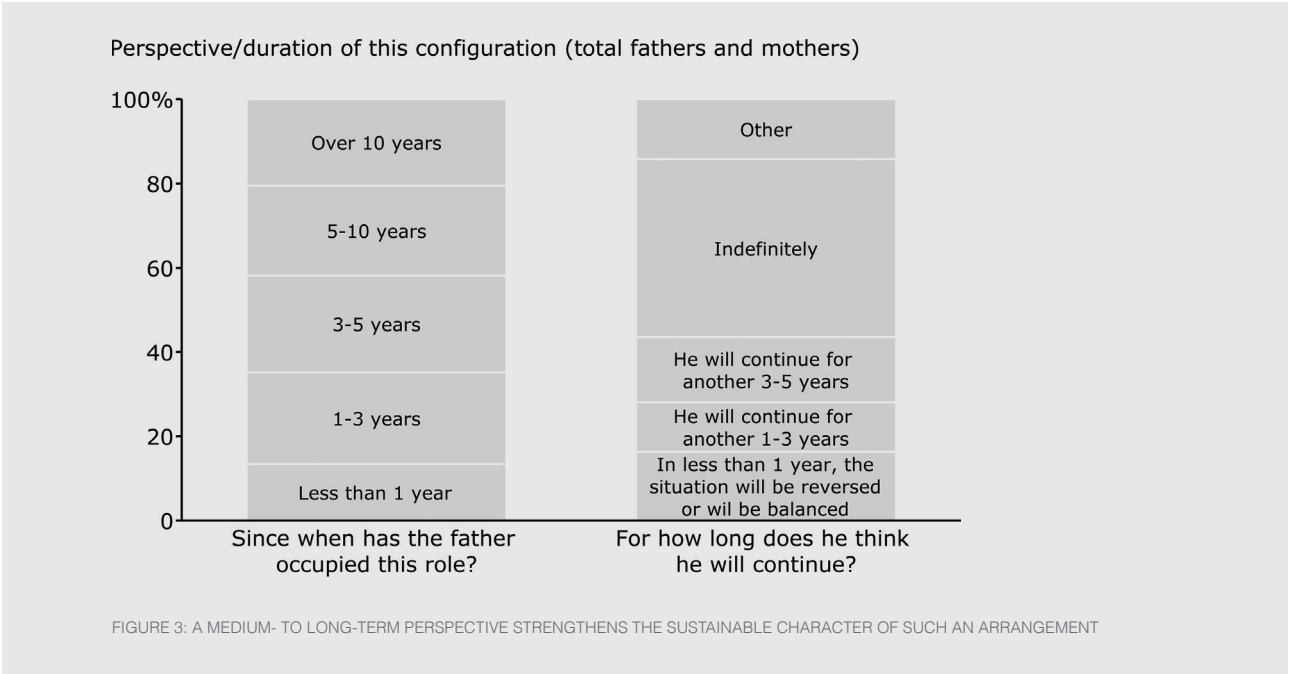
It should be noted that the above results confirm the fact that the couple's decision to assign the household tasks and the child care to the father is **a deliberate choice and not one that has been imposed on them**. In other words, economic factors, unemployment or the lack of affordable child care are not the primary reasons for their choice.

## SEVEN OUT OF 10 MEN STATE THAT THE MAIN REASON FOR CHANGING THE PATTERN INSIDE THE FAMILY IS TO SUPPORT THEIR PARTNERS' CAREERS

CHOOSING TO SUPPORT THEIR PARTNERS' CAREERS IN THE LONG TERM

The study also confirms that the majority of households do not consider this family arrangement a makeshift or quick-fix solution but a sustainable, **long-term solution for their families**.

Approximately 85% of households surveyed stated that fathers had been responsible for the household and child care for longer than a year, and nearly **40% stated they had been for more than five years** (see Figure 3). At the same time, 58% expressed their intention of continuing this family arrangement for the next three years, or indefinitely.

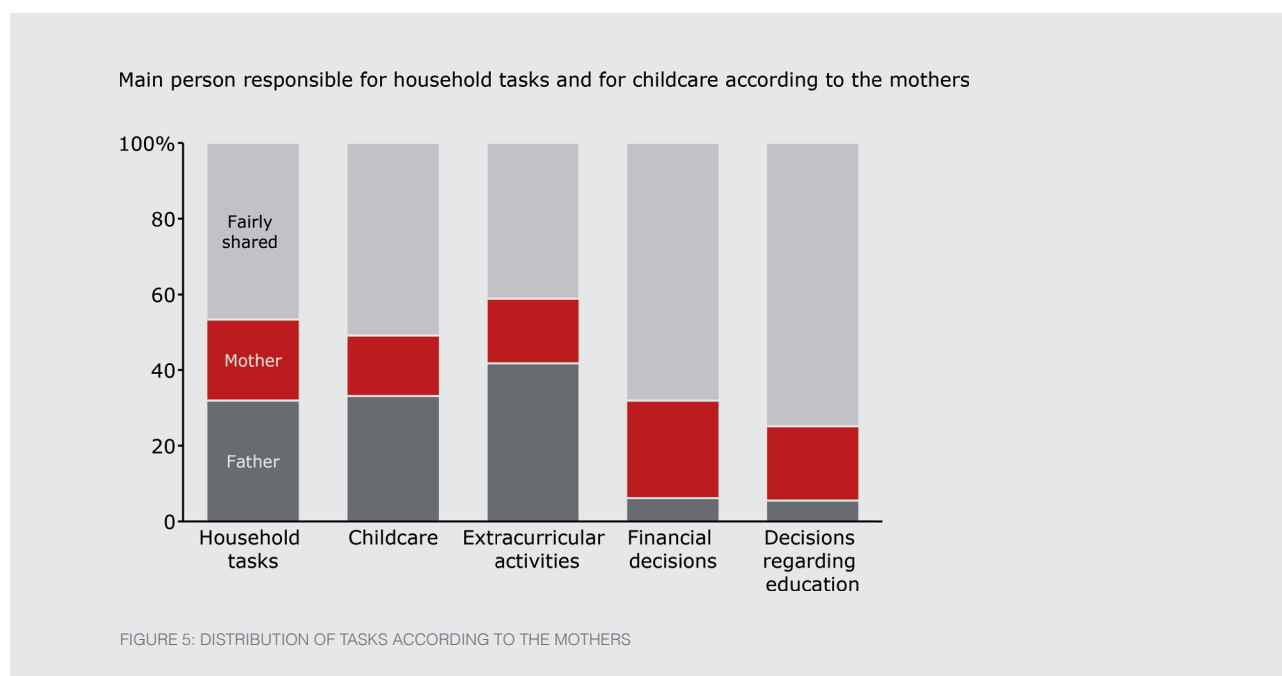
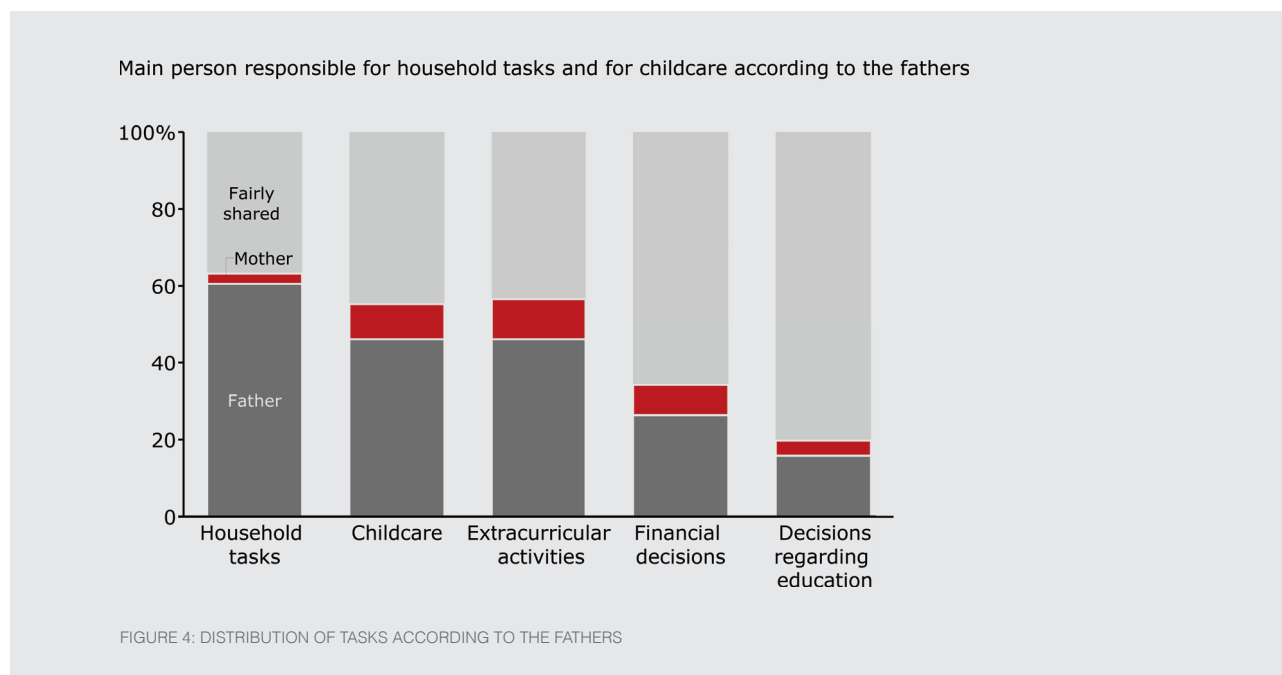


This long-term commitment is also reflected in the distribution of daily tasks (see Figures 4 and 5). **Nearly two out of three fathers consider themselves mainly responsible for household duties**. However, decision making about financial matters and their children's education are more often shared equally by the couple.

Interestingly, the women respondents tended to downplay the fathers' role in household tasks and claimed a greater degree of responsibility for decisions about the family's finances and their children's education. Responses also highlight that couples agree about who takes responsibility for extracurricular activities.

**58% EXPRESSED THEIR INTENTION OF CONTINUING THIS FAMILY ARRANGEMENT FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS, OR INDEFINITELY**

## CHOOSING TO SUPPORT THEIR PARTNERS' CAREERS IN THE LONG TERM



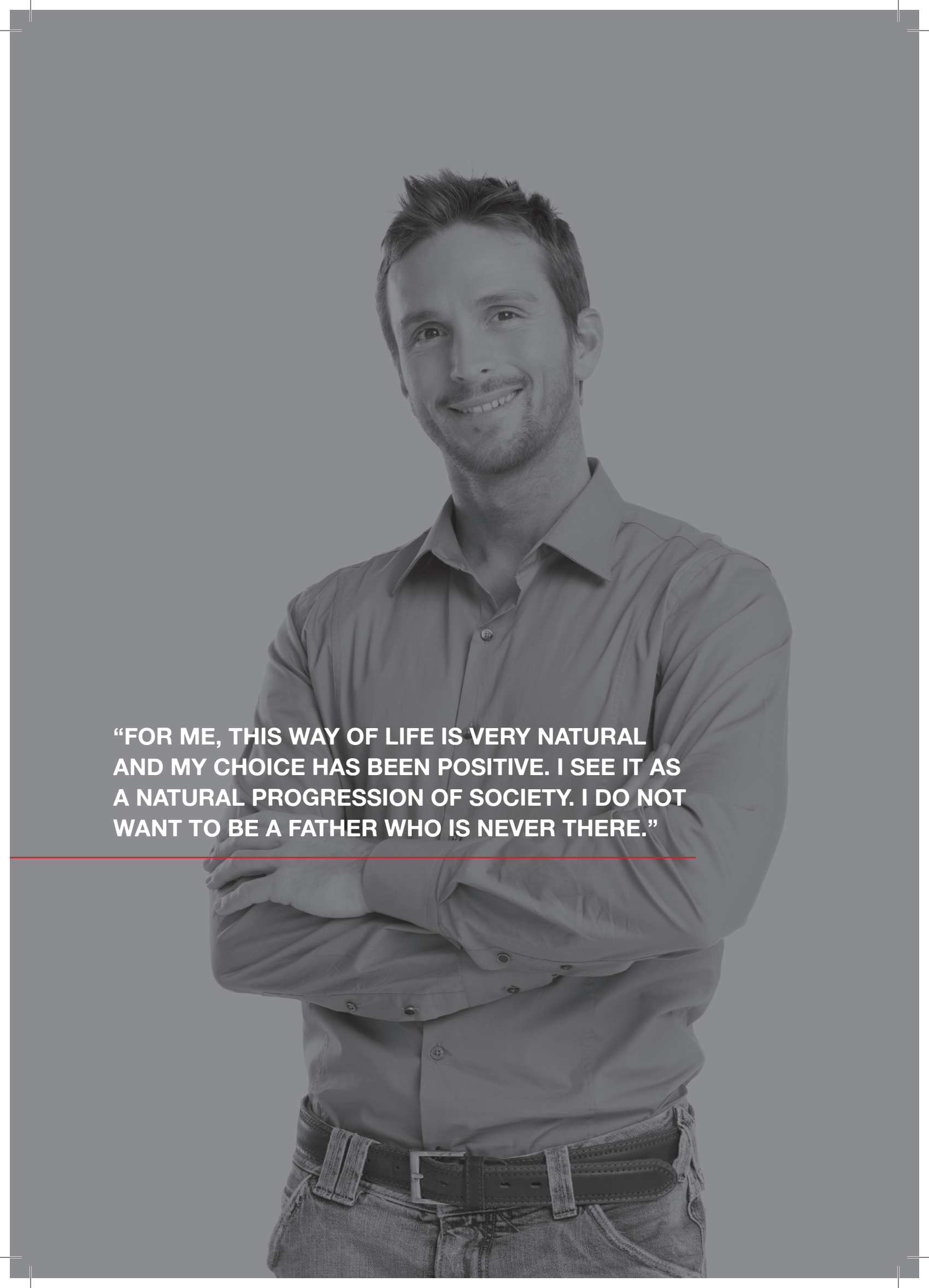
Based on the women's personal testimonies and responses—and perhaps contrary to expectations—they **did not feel guilty**. They did not feel they were shirking their responsibilities, and instead, remained **very much involved with the household and the children**. With their partners' cooperation, they have been able to carve out a genuine new model that moves beyond the traditional system in which a stay-at-home mother provided for the household and children in support of the father's career.





**“THANKS TO OUR DECISION, I CAN SUPPORT  
HER AND ORGANISE THE TASKS THAT SHE  
WOULD NOT HAVE HAD TIME TO DO IF I HAD  
NOT TAKEN ON THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR  
HOUSEHOLD.”**

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A grayscale photograph of a man with short, dark hair and a light beard, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved button-down shirt and jeans with a dark belt. His arms are crossed over his chest. The background is a solid, light gray.

**“FOR ME, THIS WAY OF LIFE IS VERY NATURAL  
AND MY CHOICE HAS BEEN POSITIVE. I SEE IT AS  
A NATURAL PROGRESSION OF SOCIETY. I DO NOT  
WANT TO BE A FATHER WHO IS NEVER THERE.”**

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## THIS NEW FAMILY SYSTEM YIELDS POSITIVE RESULTS

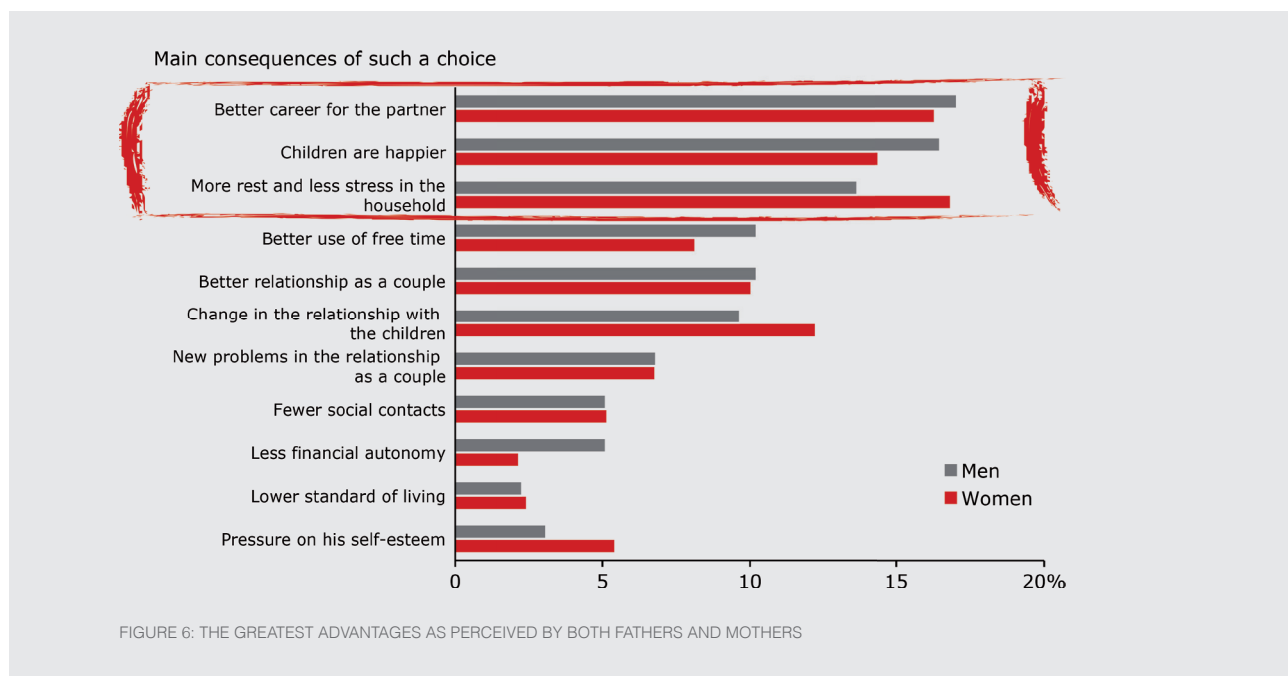
The pioneering fathers mostly **perceive their choice in a positive light**. Very few respondents expressed any negative opinions about their situation.

The three main advantages of this role-reversal are clearly highlighted in Figure 6. The first three consequences referred to by the respondents are also represented in Figure 6. According to respondents, the primary advantage is that **it gives their partners the opportunity to have better careers**. Children's happiness also rates high on the list of advantages. The study shows a direct correlation between the two main reasons cited by fathers for their choice (supporting their partners' careers and spending more time with their families) and the positive consequences of the role-reversal for their families. The opinion of the women is generally in agreement with that of the men.



One of them states:

*"My husband takes on the household tasks and his presence is important, whether it is a question of meals, accompanying the children and so on. Just knowing that he is there also makes me feel more at ease."*



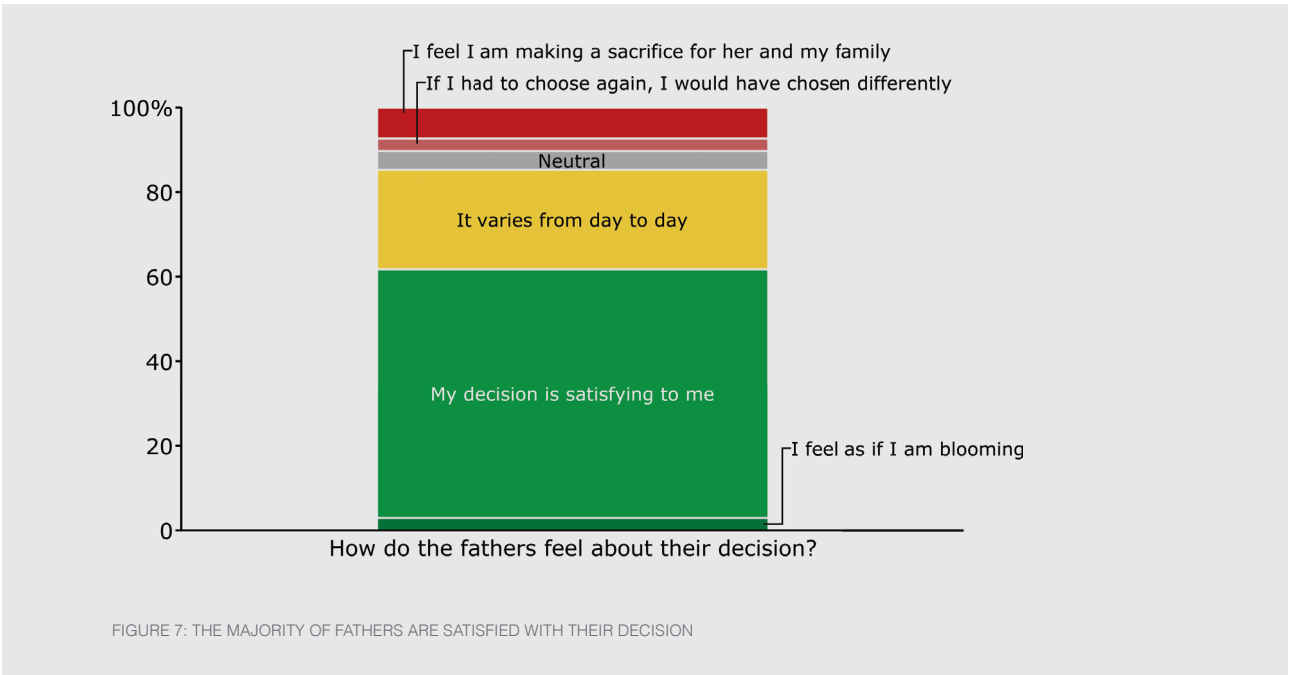
**Nearly 60% of the fathers in these non-traditional households are fully satisfied** with their situation. Among the others, 24% have mixed feelings regarding their choice. This suggests that although there are several advantages, these men often encounter certain disadvantages in their day-to-day lives (see Figure 7).



As one of the fathers explains:


*"For me, this way of life is very natural and my choice has been positive. I see it as a natural progression of society. I do not want to be a father who is never there."*

THIS NEW FAMILY SYSTEM YIELDS POSITIVE RESULTS



NEARLY 60% OF THE FATHERS IN THESE NON-TRADITIONAL HOUSEHOLDS ARE FULLY SATISFIED AND 24% HAVE MIXED FEELINGS REGARDING THEIR CHOICE



A black and white photograph of a man and a young boy standing together, smiling and looking at each other. The man, on the right, has curly hair and wears glasses, a dark sweater, and a long scarf. The boy, on the left, wears a dark zip-up hoodie and jeans. Both are holding large paper shopping bags. The man's arm is around the boy's shoulder. The background is a plain, light color.

**“MY HUSBAND TAKES ON THE HOUSEHOLD  
TASKS AND HIS PRESENCE IS IMPORTANT.  
JUST KNOWING THAT HE IS THERE ALSO MAKES  
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**“I NOTE THAT MY STATUS LIMITS MY SOCIAL  
INTERACTION AND REDUCES THE NUMBER  
OF INVITATIONS THAT I RECEIVE FROM THE  
OUTSIDE WORLD.”**

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## THERE ARE STILL SOME OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

Despite the many advantages for their families, the pioneering fathers also encounter difficulties (see Figure 8). To begin with, **financial constraints are an important issue**, as the couple must now rely on a single income, rather than two, to provide for their needs. The man may also experience **problems with accepting financial dependency**.



*One of the women expresses it this way:*

*"It is difficult for my husband to accept the idea that he is no longer the main breadwinner for our family."*

Also, the **father's exclusion from professional life** may be another disadvantage of this family model.



*One pioneering father confides:*

*"I note that my status limits my social interaction and reduces the number of invitations that I receive from the outside world."*

In addition, men continue to experience work pressures, particularly from employers, and they worry about the **impact of their choice on their careers**.



*As another respondent notes:*

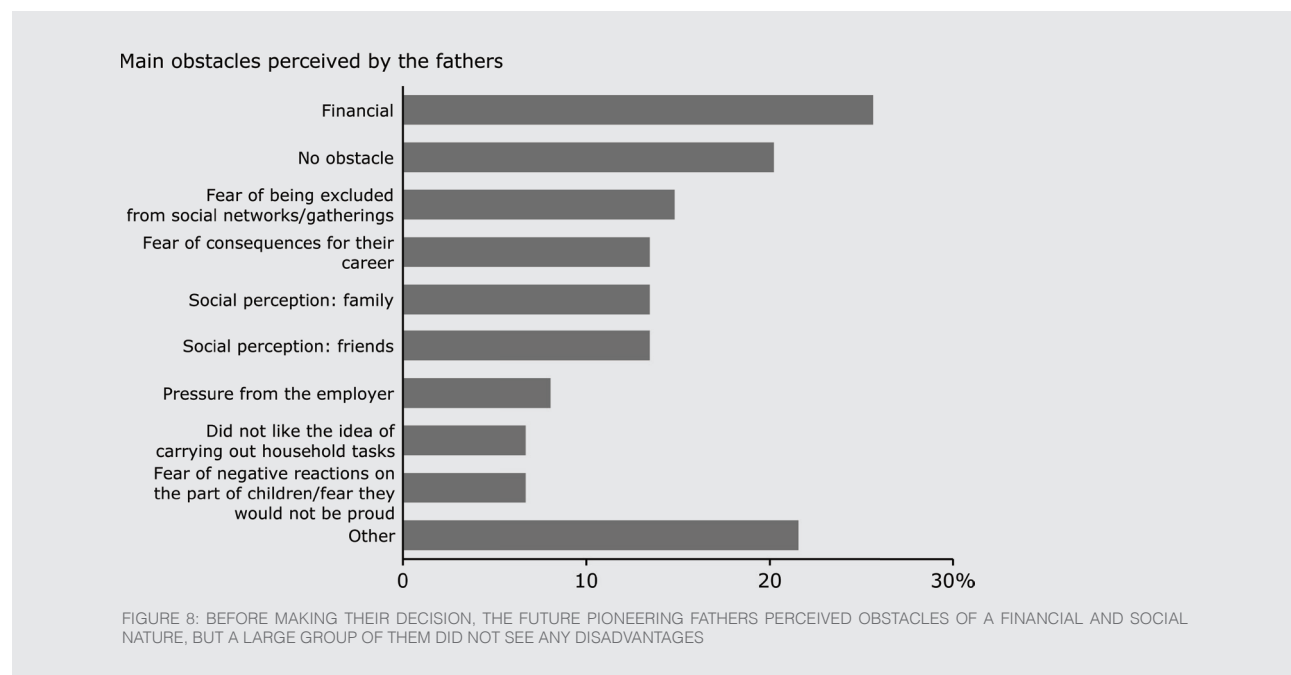
*"There are days when I miss the challenges of my work, and for example, my English is no longer as good as it was because I am no longer able to practise as often. But you can't have everything, and when I look back, it is still a good decision."*

Finally, some fathers feel the **negative perception of friends and family** is an obstacle that they have had to overcome. However, a significant number of those questioned did not see this as a major obstacle.

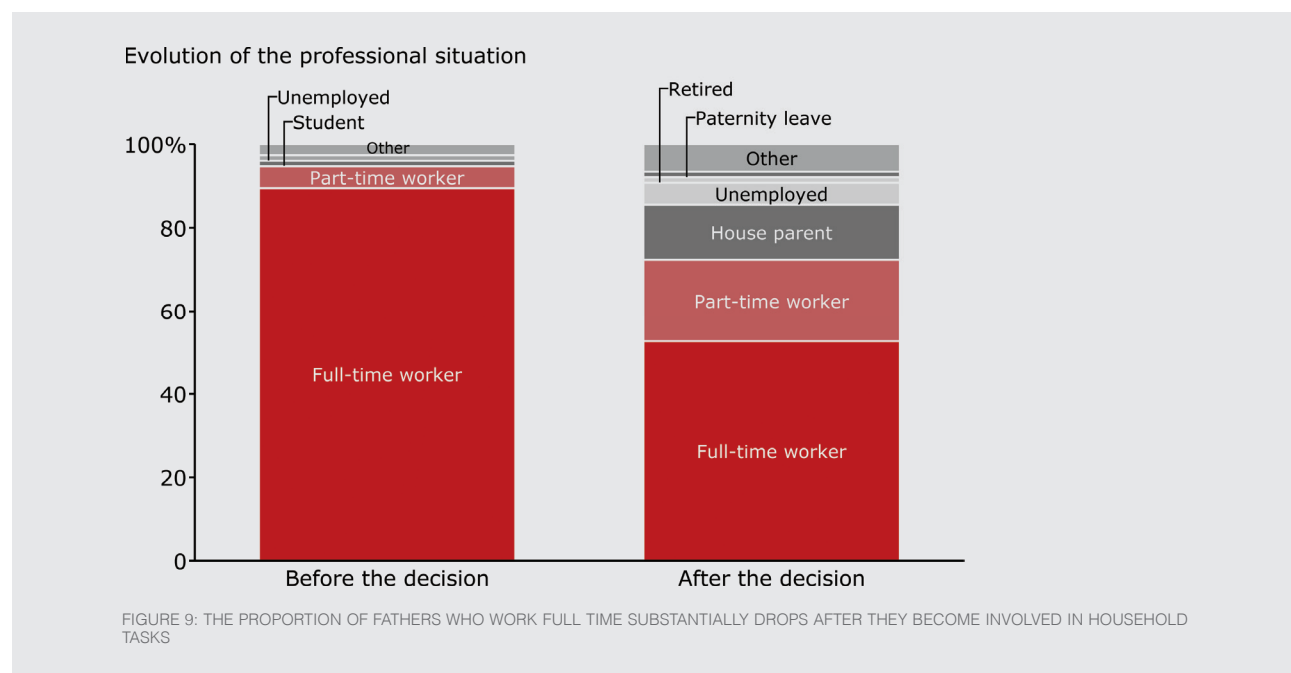
## THE FATHERS OF THE FAMILIES QUESTIONED FEEL THEY RECEIVE RELATIVELY LITTLE SUPPORT FROM THEIR FAMILIES, MALE FRIENDS AND WORK COLLEAGUES

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## THERE ARE STILL SOME OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME



The main obstacles identified by the fathers (the financial, social and professional aspects) are **directly linked to a reduction in their working hours**. This reduction can sometimes go hand in hand with a setback in their own careers. According to the responses received, nearly 90% of the fathers originally worked full time. After choosing to become fathers in non-traditional households, the proportion of those working full time dropped to 53%, which represents a reduction of 37%. At the opposite end of the scale, we note an **increase in the number of part-time workers and househusbands**, or “house fathers”, as well as an increase in the unemployed (see Figure 9).



## THERE ARE STILL SOME OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

Changing the perception of friends and family towards these pioneering households represents a substantial challenge. The fathers feel they receive **relatively little support from their families, male friends and work colleagues** (see Figure 10).



*As one pioneering father points out:*

*"Our environment was not particularly prepared for this transition when we decided on it."*



*Another adds:*

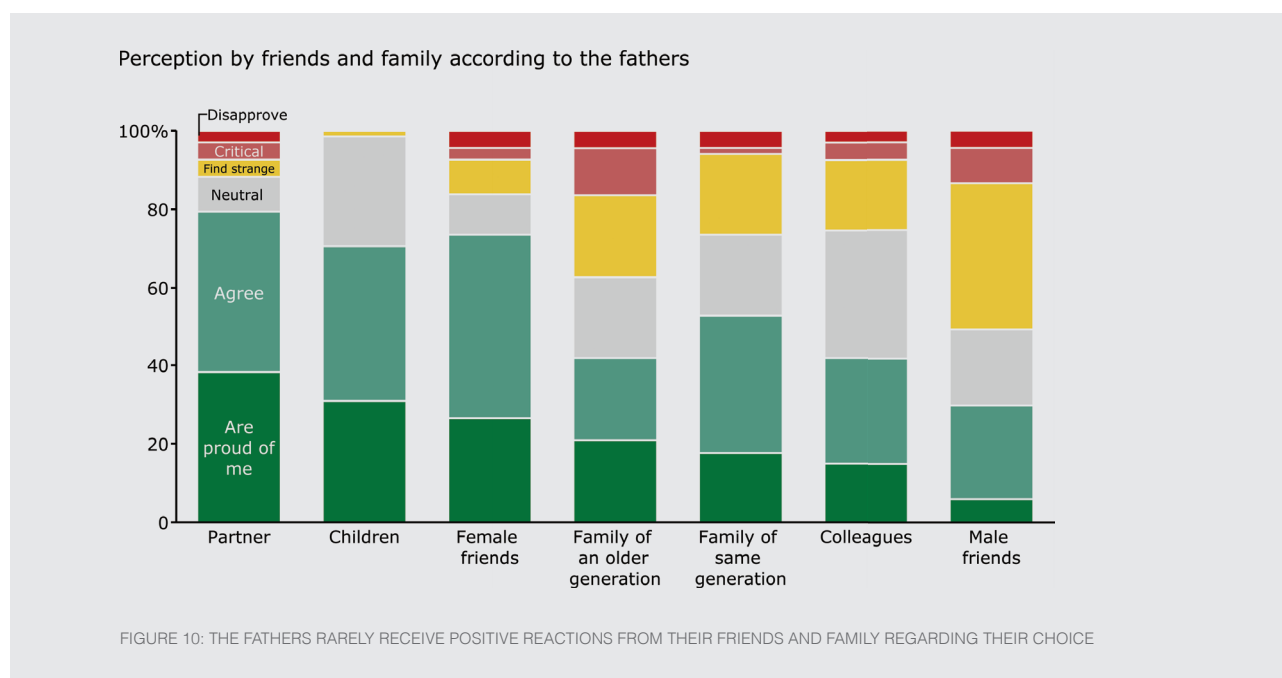
*"The disadvantages of this situation are the negative reactions. Although I see more and more couples in a similar situation, this is not always socially accepted."*

Although fathers receive strong support from their partners, children and female friends, **they rarely express a feeling of pride** in their role as pioneering fathers.



*Says one pioneering father:*

*"I think that we should give more value to the tasks that are done in the home. There is very little recognition from society for what we do. This is true for fathers, but also for mothers."*

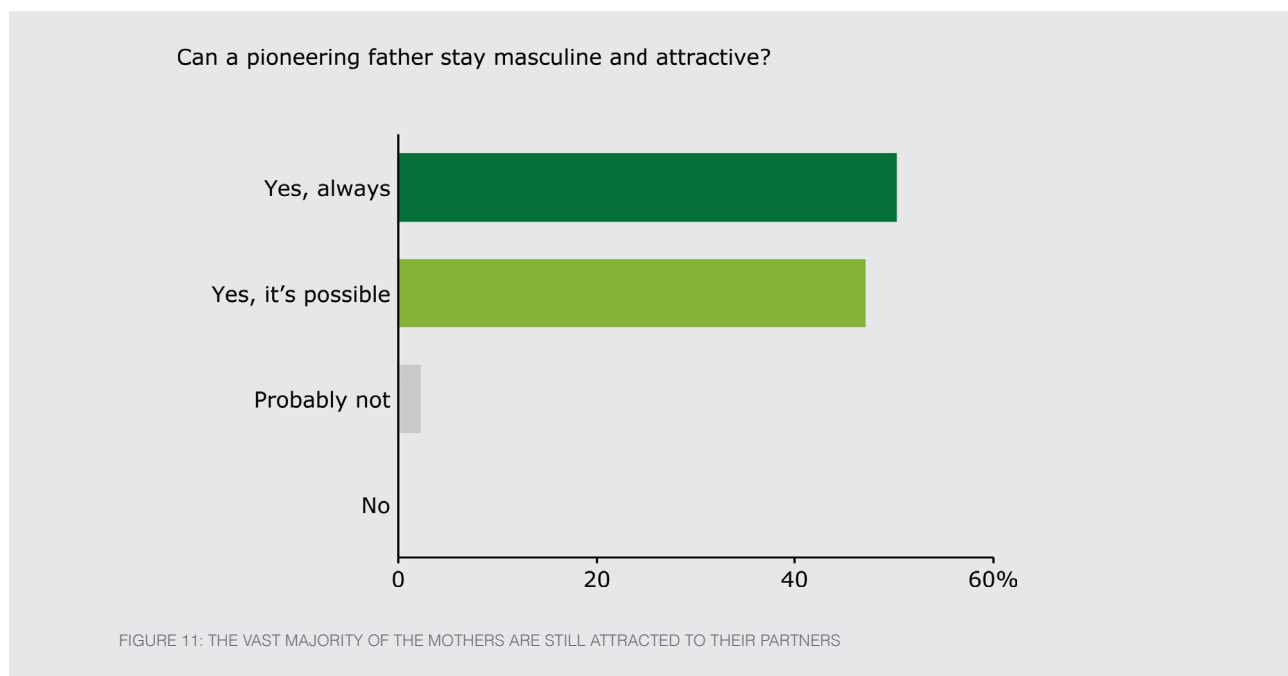


**ALTHOUGH FATHERS RECEIVE STRONG SUPPORT FROM THEIR PARTNERS, CHILDREN AND FEMALE FRIENDS, THEY RARELY EXPRESS A FEELING OF PRIDE IN THEIR ROLE AS PIONEERING FATHERS**

## THERE ARE STILL SOME OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

Based on these results, three observations can be made.

First, not all fathers who decide to take on household and child-care responsibilities feel that their partners are particularly proud of them. Indeed, 20% of fathers sense neutral or even negative opinions regarding their choice. This perception should be noted by career-track mothers who may need to show their appreciation for their partners' efforts. Nevertheless, these **fathers' decisions do not alter their attractiveness to their partners**, as 97% of the mothers questioned stated that a man can still be masculine and attractive while dedicating more time to his family (see Figure 11).



Second, pioneering fathers receive **little support from male friends and colleagues**. They experience a noticeable lack of support from society and employers. Whereas gender equality initiatives have historically focused on women, a **change in attitude** on the part of society and the corporate world must apply equally to these pioneering men.

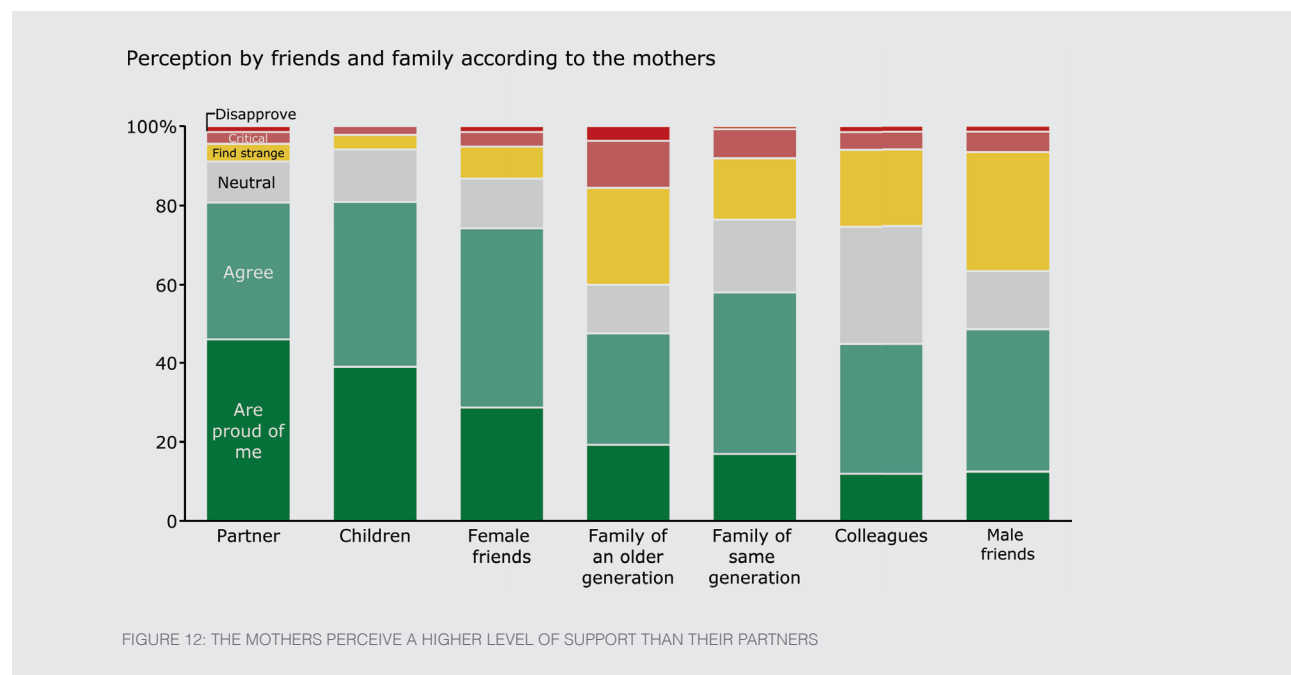
Third, career-track mothers perceive that their partners receive more support from family, male friends and colleagues than their partners themselves perceive (see Figure 12).



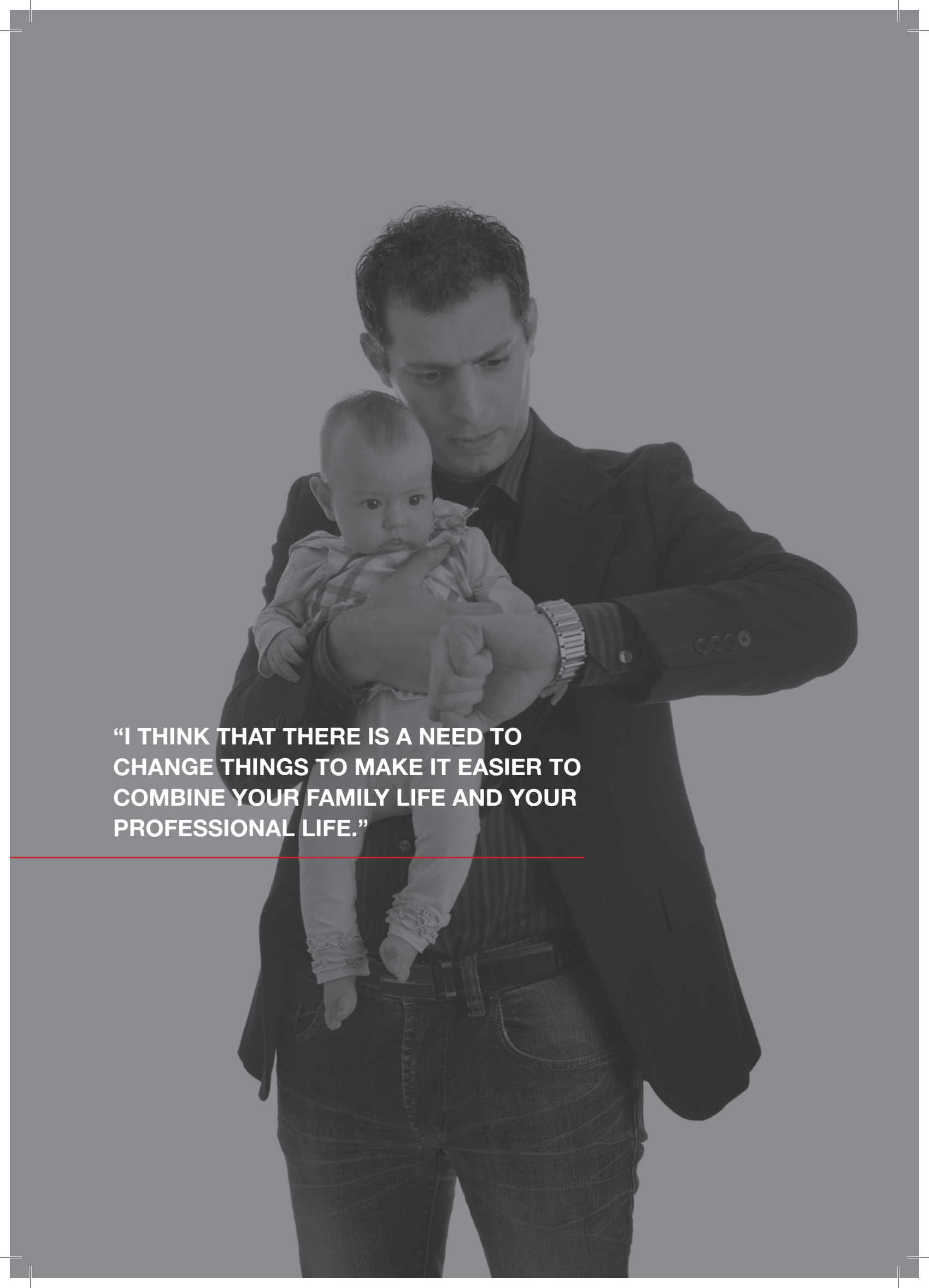
*One mother and wife of a househusband put it this way:*

*"I think that what my husband does is of great value for our family. However, he does not consider it to be as important as a job."*

## THERE ARE STILL SOME OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME



**97% OF THE MOTHERS QUESTIONED STATED THAT A MAN CAN STILL BE MASCULINE AND ATTRACTIVE WHILE BEING THE FIRST CAREGIVER TO HIS FAMILY**

A black and white photograph of a man in a dark suit and striped shirt, holding a baby. The man is looking down at the baby with a serious expression. The baby is wearing a light-colored, patterned outfit. The background is a plain, light color. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image, and a red horizontal line is positioned below it.

**“I THINK THAT THERE IS A NEED TO  
CHANGE THINGS TO MAKE IT EASIER TO  
COMBINE YOUR FAMILY LIFE AND YOUR  
PROFESSIONAL LIFE.”**

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## DEMANDS VIS-À-VIS SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS

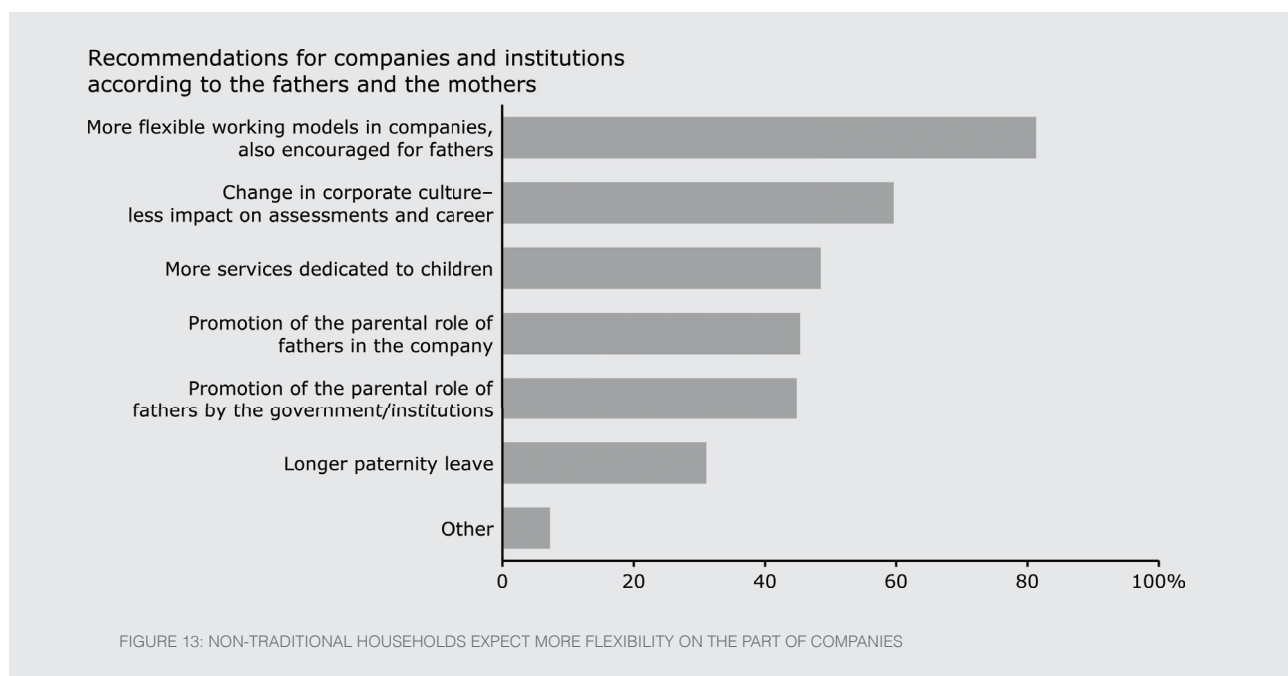
Those fathers who dedicate more time to their family would like **more flexibility at work**, as well as greater recognition and **promotion of the parental role** in society and in companies (see Figure 13). These observations are in line with the results of a study on gender equality and flexible work-hour programmes conducted by Bain & Company in the United Kingdom in 2013.



*One father explains:*

*"From the point of view of work, I think that there is a need to change things to make it easier to combine your family life and your professional life."*

**Improved child-care services** and child-care availability is also required for these families.



**THOSE FATHERS WHO DEDICATE MORE TIME TO THEIR FAMILY WOULD LIKE MORE FLEXIBILITY AT WORK, AS WELL AS GREATER PROMOTION OF THE PARENTAL ROLE**

## DEMANDS VIS-À-VIS SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS

Our study offers three important conclusions for companies.

First, companies need to offer **flexible working options**, not only to mothers but also to fathers. Indeed, the expectation and demand for these programmes has become so great—according to the 2013 Bain & Company study—that, when a company does *not* offer them to employees, it has a very negative impact on their satisfaction with their employer.

Second, companies that share the experiences of fathers who benefit from these programmes, while retaining them in positions of responsibility and supporting their career development, could help change the negative opinions held by some colleagues and male friends of the pioneering fathers. At the same time, **companies could enhance their programmes' visibility**, so that taking on greater responsibility for the household and child care is no longer perceived as limiting career development.

Third, for such a programme to work—i.e., for it to be available to and used by employees—it must be encouraged and promoted by the company. These programmes must become a **part of the corporate culture** and be supported through it, in particular by managers.

In conclusion, it is of paramount importance for companies to offer flexible working hours to support fathers and mothers and to make flex time an integral part of the corporate culture. At the same time, governments, and society at large, must offer improved, affordable child-care services and **promote the role of fathers as primary caregivers**.



*In the words of one pioneering father:*

*"Adjustments had to be made. Now it is me who the school calls when there is a problem and not my partner."*

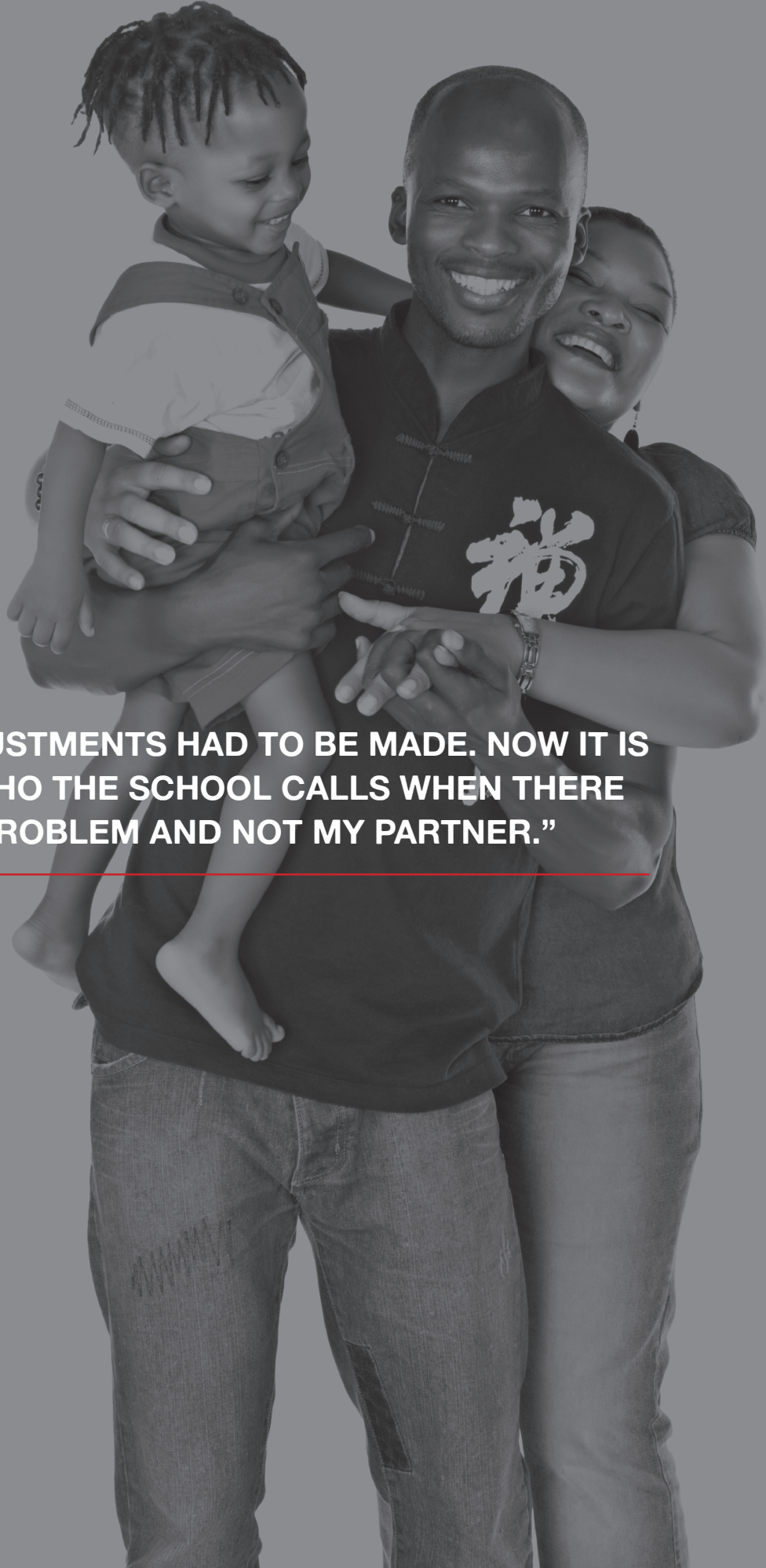


*Another adds:*

*"For me, this way of life is perfectly natural. It has been a genuine choice. The most positive consequence has been the contact with my children. Given the increasing number of women occupying senior posts in our companies, it is normal that society adapts and that an increasing number of fathers are taking on the household tasks."*

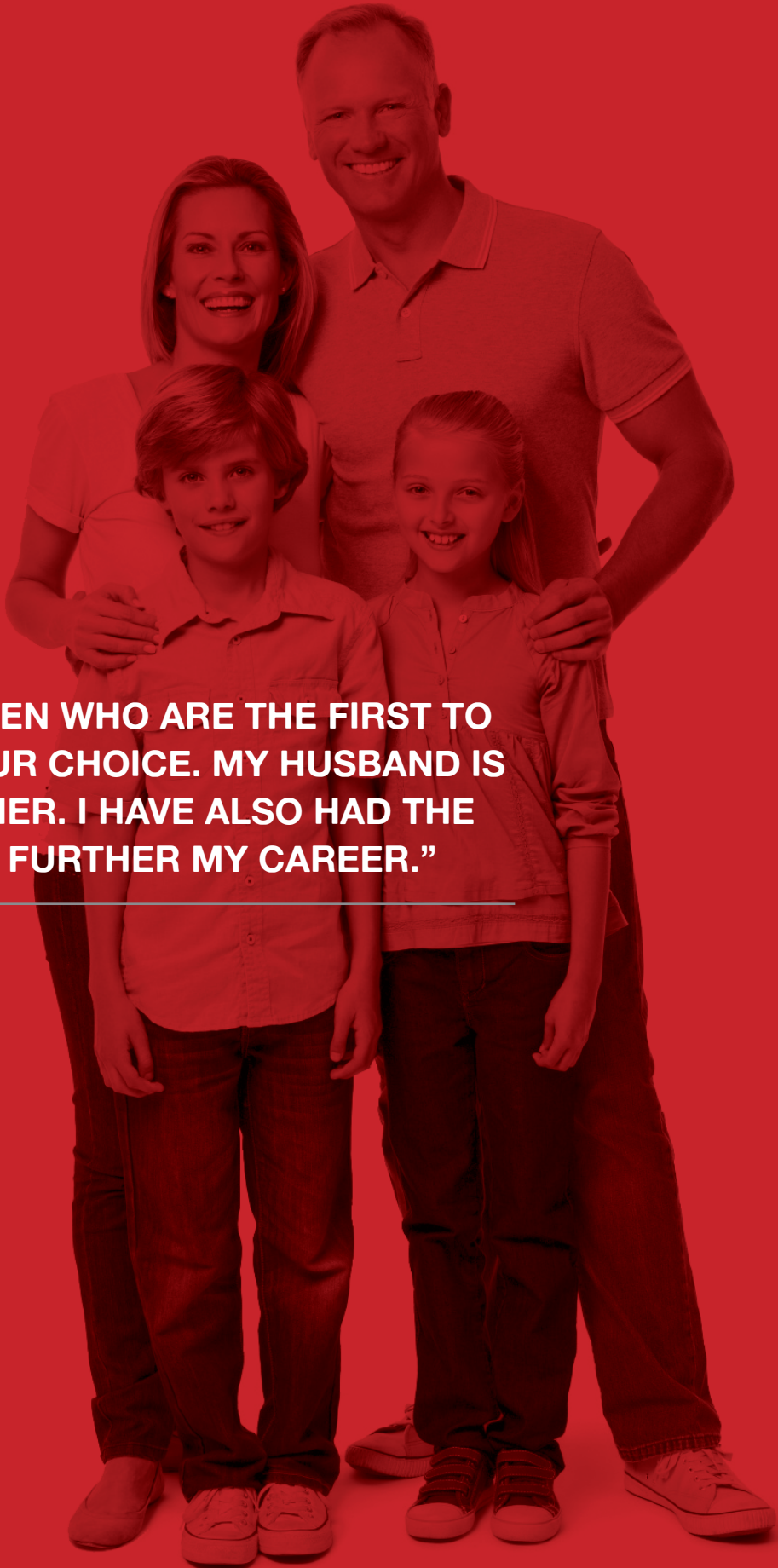
## GOVERNMENTS, AND SOCIETY AT LARGE, MUST OFFER IMPROVED, AFFORDABLE CHILD-CARE SERVICES AND PROMOTE THE ROLE OF FATHERS AS PRIMARY CAREGIVERS

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**“ADJUSTMENTS HAD TO BE MADE. NOW IT IS  
ME WHO THE SCHOOL CALLS WHEN THERE  
IS A PROBLEM AND NOT MY PARTNER.”**

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**“IT IS THE CHILDREN WHO ARE THE FIRST TO  
BENEFIT FROM OUR CHOICE. MY HUSBAND IS  
A FANTASTIC FATHER. I HAVE ALSO HAD THE  
OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER MY CAREER.”**

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## CONCLUSION



Male partners who take on the main responsibility for their households do so above all to **support their partners' careers**. The model also goes way beyond typical paternity leave: Families who choose this model are committed to it, which proves that this decision can be applied **continuously and for a long time**. More than 40% of the pioneering fathers questioned have been following this model for more than five years, and the majority expect that they will continue for at least three years or indefinitely.

### CHOOSING TO SUPPORT THEIR PARTNERS' CAREERS IN THE LONG TERM



Those families that have opted for this arrangement are satisfied with their choice. What's more, they mention its **positive consequences**, such as the **progress of the mother's career**, the reduction in stress in domestic activities and happier children and **family relationships**.

### THIS NEW FAMILY SYSTEM YIELDS POSITIVE RESULTS



Nevertheless, giving adequate recognition to the fathers who take on the main responsibilities within the home is essential. At present, the fathers questioned do **not feel sufficiently supported by their friends and family**, and only 40% of them think that their partners are proud of them. Outside the family circle, the fathers have a **great need for support from male friends**, who often disapprove of or criticise the life choice. This attitude could be a major obstacle to developing this model.

### THERE ARE STILL SOME OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME



Although the first signs of success are beginning to appear, questions remain on what else can be done to encourage more couples to adopt this family model. Households expect **changes in attitudes will make the model more accessible**, more socially accepted and better supported by the corporate world. In concrete terms, companies and governments could do more to **promote the role of fathers** and extend options for **flexible working hours** to fathers. Despite the fact that this new family system is only in its early stages, it represents a **first step towards greater gender equality** in daily and professional aspects of life and it needs to form the subject of a joint reflection between partners.

### DEMANDS VIS-À-VIS SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS

A STUDY LED BY JUMP IN COLLABORATION WITH BAIN & COMPANY



WITH THE SUPPORT OF  
THE MINISTER FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES



BAIN & COMPANY

The study report, the transcript of the 10 interviews and the press review  
are available for download on [www.jump.eu.com](http://www.jump.eu.com)



## APPENDICES

The sample of respondents is made up of:

- Heterosexual couples who are raising or have raised at least one child
- Seventy-six fathers taking on the majority of responsibility for household tasks
- One hundred sixty-three mothers whose husbands match this profile

The respondents are from European countries, mainly France and Belgium.

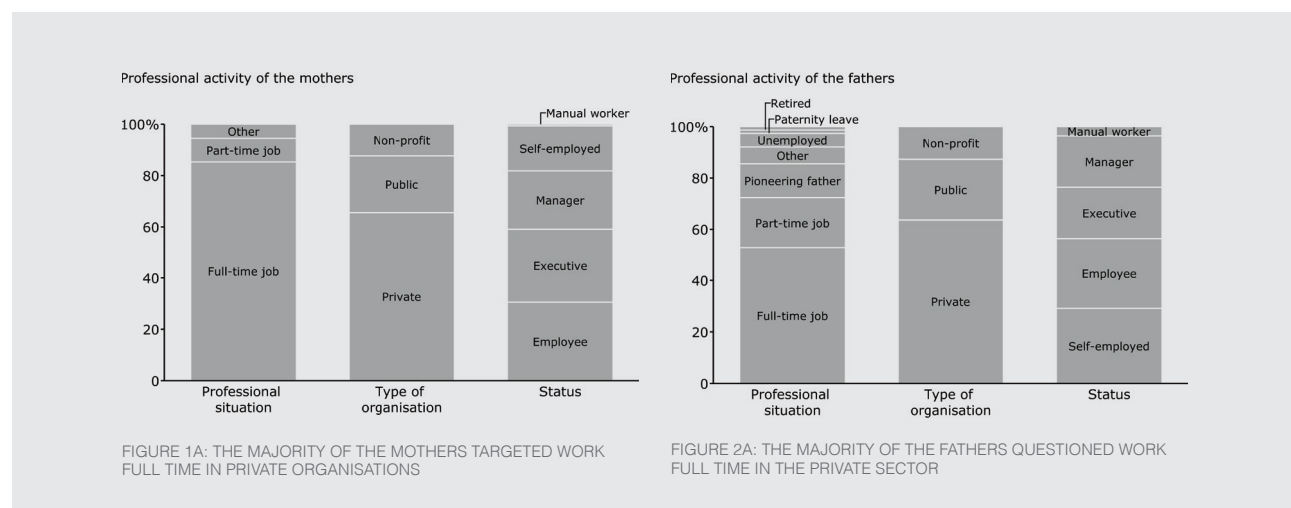
Respondents belong to the middle- to high-income bracket, which implies that their choice was made consciously and was not forced. The more limited a household's financial resources, the fewer options the families concerned have to make voluntary choices when faced with unemployment or illness, etc.

It should be noted that the results of this study are very similar to those of a previous study on the subject, conducted and published exclusively in Belgium in November 2013.

Figures 1A and 2A describe the current professional status of the respondents. The majority of the mothers (85%) work full time and 66% have a job in the private sector. About 51% of these women are in executive and/or managerial positions.

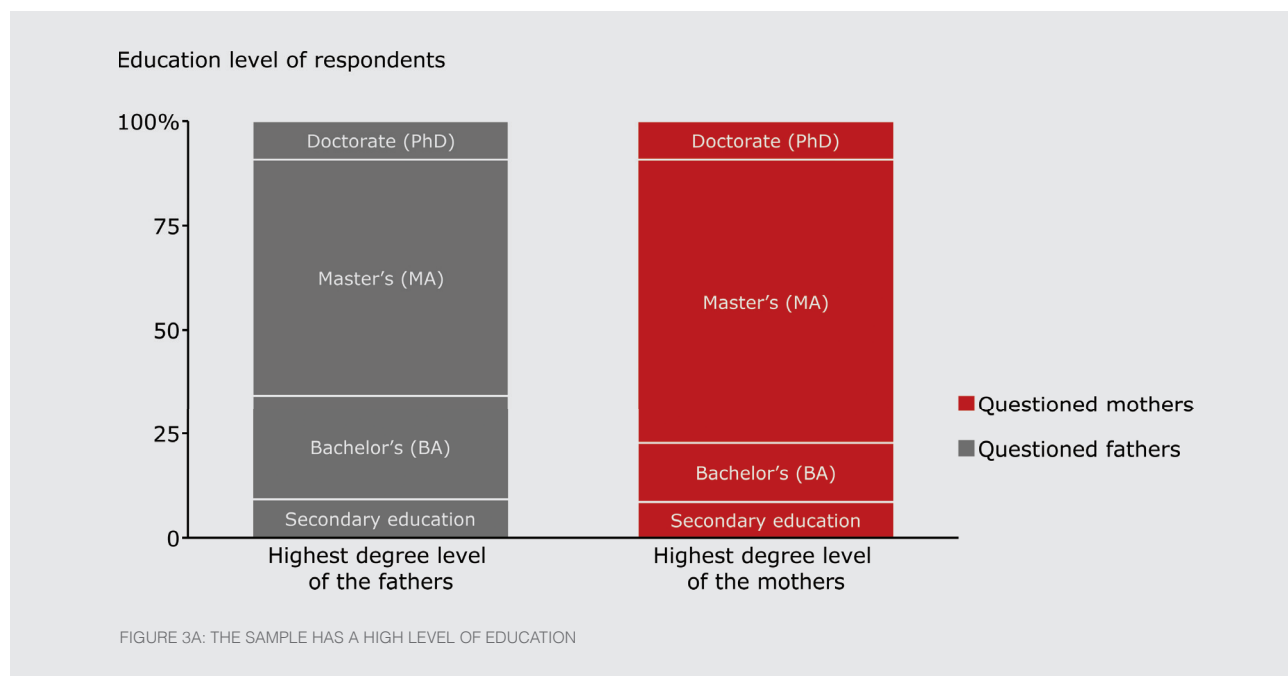
The fathers have a full-time job in more than half the cases and 64% of them work in the private sector.

The level of education of the fathers and mothers is high (see Figure 3A). About 91% of respondents have a higher education qualification. In addition, 77% of the mothers have a master or PhD, as opposed to 66% of the fathers.

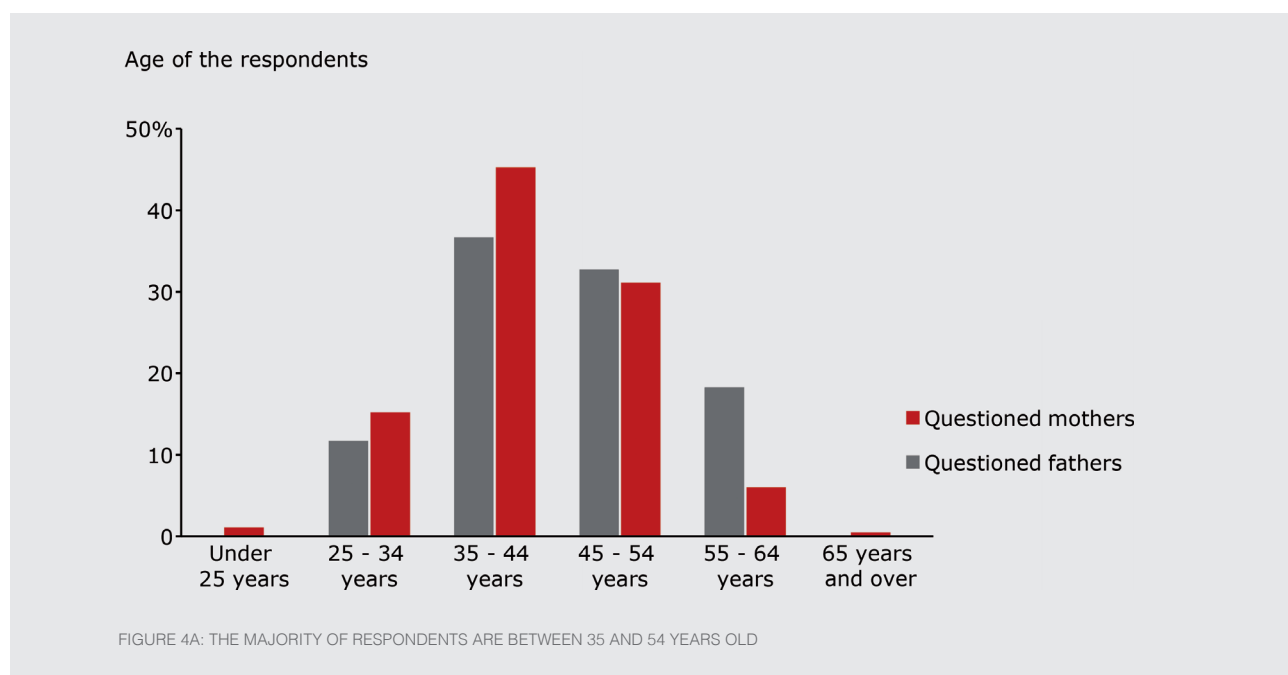




## APPENDICES

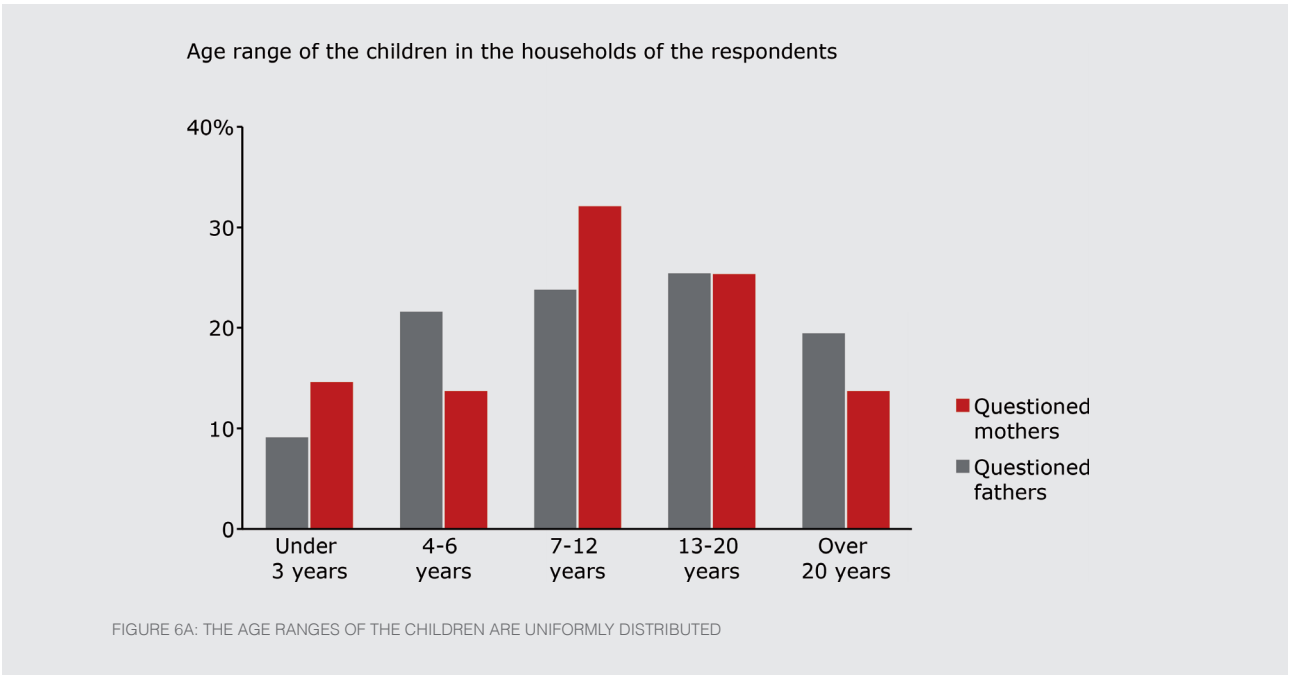
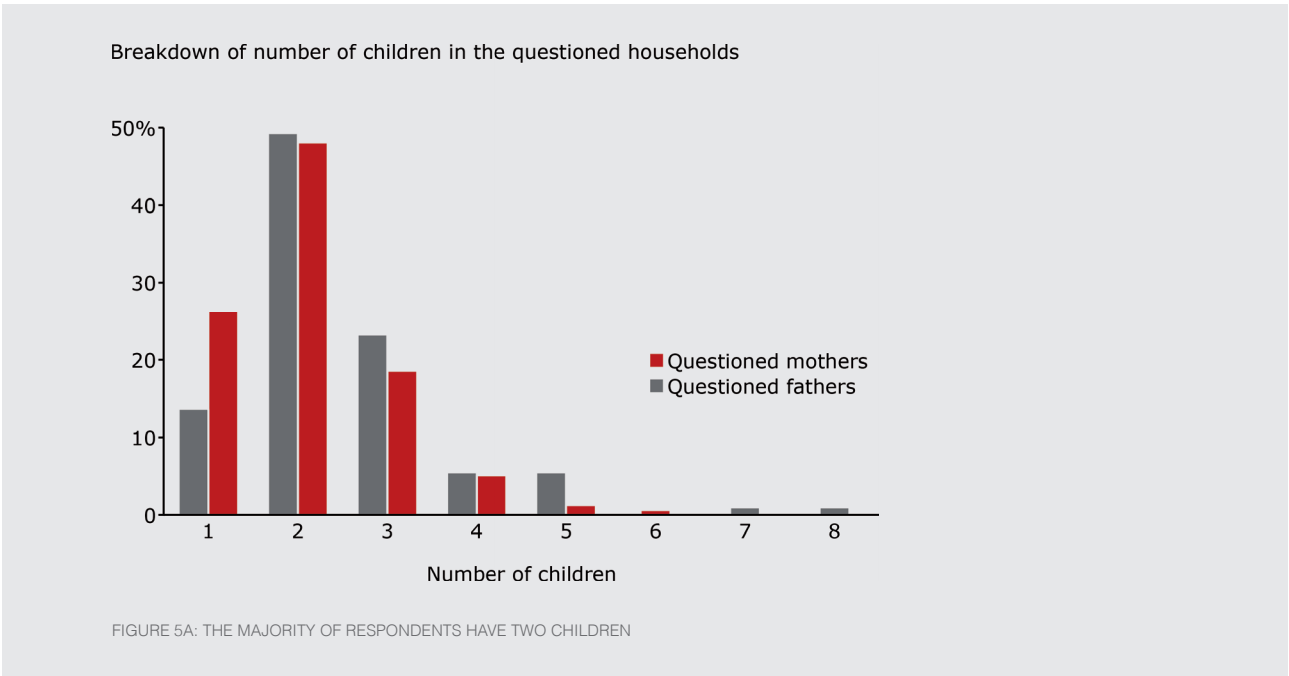


The majority of respondents are between the ages of 35 and 54 (see Figure 4A). About 43% are between 35 and 44 and 32% are between 45 and 54.



The majority of the families have two children, and about 20% have three children (see Figure 5A). The age ranges of the children are uniformly distributed (see Figure 6A).

APPENDICES





# **PIONEERING FATHERS: BEHIND EVERY GREAT WOMAN THERE IS A GREAT MAN**

**REVERSAL OF TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES FOR COUPLES  
AND (R)EVOLUTION OF SOCIETY**