

# Submission on the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Hours) Amendment Bill

12 July 2005

Submission of the New Zealand Father and Child Society  
28 St Vincent Street  
Nelson



## Background

The Father and Child Society was established in March 1998 and formally incorporated in November 1998. It was created to give local father groups / organisations support in setting up and running initiatives, as well as to improve access to information and improve communication between these groups. It was also formed to represent fathers on a national level through the government's ongoing consultation process with the community. For further information see our website (<http://www.fatherandchild.org.nz/>)

## Our view on this bill

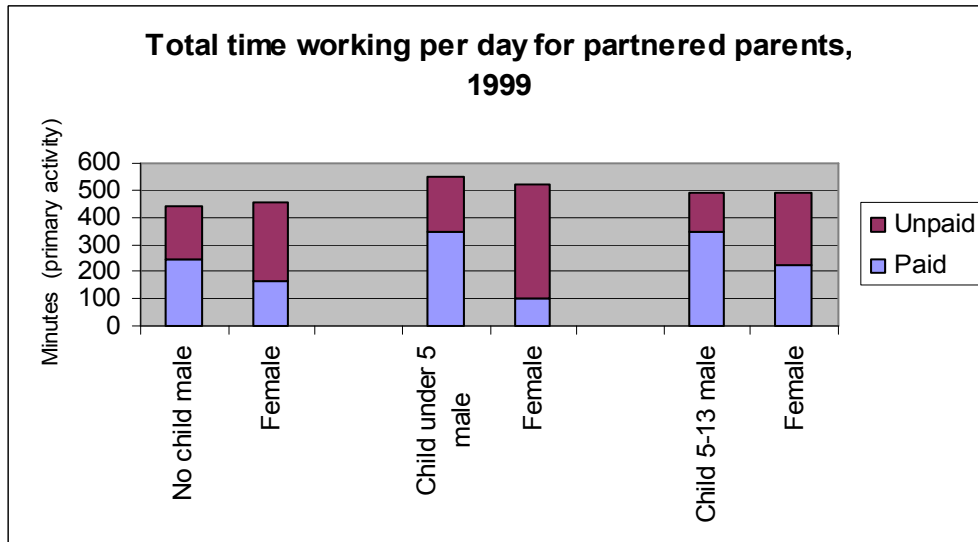
We support this bill that aims to give employees with young and dependent children the statutory right to request part-time and flexible hours. The legislation it is based on appears to be working relatively well in the UK (Callister 2004).

However, we would like to see the age of youngest child extended to 14 (a time that children can legally be left at home alone). We would also like a greater acknowledgement of the 'double burden' that fathers face in juggling paid and unpaid work. It is noted in the preamble to the bill that "women in particular who are often the main care givers of children are frequently burdened with the extra stress from having to do both paid work and domestic labour" (p. 1). It is also noted in the preamble that "greater opportunities for flexible working will enable some parents who would otherwise leave the labour market to remain in employment at the end of *maternity leave* (emphasis added p. 2). Such statements, particularly considering that in New Zealand it is actually technically parental leave not maternity leave, indicate that, like much family related policy in New Zealand, concerns about fathers are very much a secondary issue.

We would recommend that the select committee consider data from the time use survey carried out by Statistics New Zealand in 1999. Despite regular, misleading, headlines in newspaper such as "Why are women still doing almost all the work - in the fields, offices and home?" the reality is that New Zealand fathers are now under a double pressure to be good providers (often by working long hours) and also to be good fathers (Birks 2005, Callister 2005a). The New Zealand time use data show that across the total population men's and women's total hours of work are very similar, but that men undertake more paid work and women more unpaid work. When the sample is restricted to partnered men and woman with a child under five, Stevens (2002)

demonstrates that total hours of work are higher for parents of young children than for men and women without children. Stevens' data also show that, on average, partnered men with a child under five work longer total hours than partnered women (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**



Source: Stevens (2002)

This double burden for men is not unique to New Zealand. This double burden for men is not unique to New Zealand. In Norway, where men work shorter hours of paid work, on average fathers with a child under six work longer total hours (paid and unpaid combined) than mothers (Statistics Norway 2005).

The double burden for partnered fathers is also confirmed by research carried out in other countries where fathers work long hours of paid work. This research shows that fathers are spending more time with their children than in the past. For example, for dual-earner couples in the United States, since 1977 fathers have increased the time they spend on workdays doing household chores, including childcare, by approximately 42 minutes, while mothers have reduced their time by the same amount, although still doing more than fathers (Bond et al 2002). This long-term pattern of change is likely to have also taken place in New Zealand.

However, many New Zealand fathers face barriers to spending time with their children through working long hours of paid work. A comparison of the proportion of employees working 50 or more hours per week among a selection of OECD countries shows that New Zealand has one of the highest proportions of workers putting in long hours of paid work (Messenger 2004). Yet, while there are some women working long hours, it is mainly men.

Table 1 shows changes in working hours between 1986 and 2001 for women and men aged 25-54. It indicates that it is men who are the most likely to work long paid hours and that the proportion of both men and women working long paid hours increased between 1986 and 2001.

**Table 1: Long hours of paid work per week (% working 50 or more hours per week), by sex and age, 1986 and 2001**

|                 | Men    |        |        | Women  |        |        |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                 | 25--34 | 35--44 | 45--54 | 25--34 | 35--44 | 45--54 |
| 1986            | 30.9   | 36.5   | 32.3   | 9.3    | 10.3   | 10.1   |
| 2001            | 33.8   | 40.6   | 43.0   | 13.5   | 13.5   | 17.0   |
| $\Delta$ 86--01 | 2.9    | 4.1    | 10.7   | 4.2    | 3.2    | 6.9    |

Source: Census data, in Callister (2005b)

In New Zealand, fathers of young children make up a significant proportion of those working long hours of paid work. As an example, in 1986, 34 percent of employed partnered fathers aged 25-34 with a preschool child worked 50 or more hours of paid work per week.<sup>1</sup> By 2001, this had risen to 39 percent. Older fathers tend to work even longer hours. In contrast, less than 10 percent of employed partnered mothers with a preschool child worked 50 or more hours per week.

**Table 2: % of employed partnered mothers and fathers working 50 or more hours of paid work per week, by age of parent with a child under 5 years, 1986 and 2001**

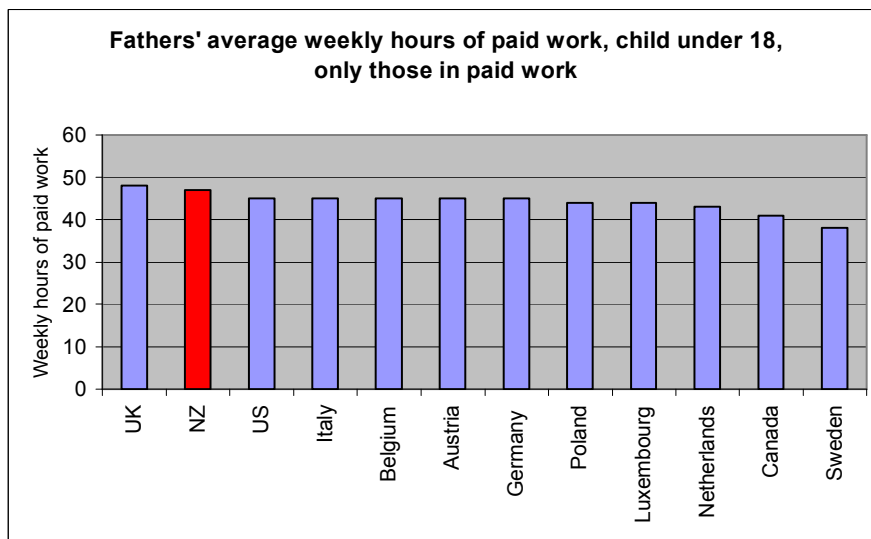
|                 | Mothers |        | Fathers |        |
|-----------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
|                 | 25--34  | 35--44 | 25--34  | 35--44 |
| 1986            | 9.0     | 10.2   | 34.3    | 37.0   |
| 2001            | 7.9     | 9.8    | 38.6    | 43.0   |
| $\Delta$ 86--01 | -1.1    | -0.4   | 4.3     | 6.0    |

Source: Census data, in Callister (2005b)

International comparative data, based on average hours worked per week, indicates that New Zealand fathers are at the upper end of hours worked (Figure 2).

<sup>1</sup> In terms of 'sole parents', there are far fewer 'sole fathers' than 'sole mothers'. However, 'sole fathers' are far more likely to be employed than 'sole mothers' and, if so, are much more likely to work long hours (Callister 2005a). However, it also needs to be noted that in most 'sole parent' families, the 'missing parent' is actually alive and still involved with their children (Birks 2000). The language commonly used to describe separated families is misleading.

**Figure 2**



Source: OECD data Gornick (2005), New Zealand data from the Census, Statistics New Zealand, in Callister (2005a)

Research carried out in Australia on the working preferences of partnered fathers suggests that, overall, fathers' satisfaction with their work hours decreased as the number of hours worked increased (Weston et al. 2004). In addition, the proportion of fathers who would prefer to work fewer hours of paid work (taking into account the impact this would have on their income) increases with the number of hours worked. In New Zealand, a non-random on-line survey of fathers indicated that 80% of them wished they could spend more time with their children (EEO Trust 2003).

However, while we are supportive of this bill given that it will potentially provide fathers with more opportunity to request hours of paid work that allow them to spend more time with their children, other legislation does not support the full involvement by fathers in the raising of their children. As examples we note:

- There has been not support within parliament for providing fathers having independent rights to paid parental leave. The Father and Child Society has taken a case to the Human Rights Commission arguing that the paid parental leave legislation discriminates against fathers (Father and Child Society 2004). New Zealand lags behind many countries, including the UK, in support for fathers being actively involved with their children from the time of birth
- There has been little support for shared parenting post separation.

We suggest that almost all attention in New Zealand continues to be placed on reducing barriers for women to fully participate in both paid work and family life. We suggest that more attention be given to ensuring that fathers, both in intact families and in separated families, can fully participate in family life. We would also like to note that in Sweden, where fathers are better supported in terms of equal rights and responsibilities within families, men, on average, work shorter hours than New Zealand men, yet overall incomes are considerably higher (Callister 2005, Johnston 2005). In part, this is due to higher rates of employment of both partnered and

sole mothers so the paid work load is more evenly spread across society. Cutting hours for mothers, but maintaining family income, can only occur if there are 1) financial transfers from other members of society 2) income support from fathers working longer hours to maintain total family working hours, and/or 3) increased productivity.

Finally, we do not wish to appear before the Select Committee in support of our submission.

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