

Supporting working parents with young children

Four key takeaways

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Pro Parents www.proparents.nl and TNO - www.tno.nl.
Authors: J. Knappe, N. van Kesteren, W. Hooftman, 2020.*

Four key takeaways to support the parents of today and tomorrow

1 Psychosocial workload is the #1 occupational illness in the NL.

- At crossroads in life, the 'psychosocial workload' ('PSA' in Dutch) increases.
- Young parents are indeed at a crossroad, in the rush hour of their professional and personal lives¹.
- The greatest risk of drop-out and absenteeism lies in the period right after the birth of a first child².
- Workplace cultures can be significant predictors of psychosocial risks and drop-out. This is especially true when pregnancy and parenthood are disregarded as private matters or worse, as a lack of ambition and motivation³.
- Almost 670,000 working parents with young children experience difficulties combining work and private life⁴.
- One in eight parents with a child under four regularly experiences challenges⁴. This applies to both women and men⁵ and may result in low self-esteem⁶, exhaustion⁷, role conflicts⁸ and an increase in depression, anxiety and stress disorders⁵.
- Stress can negatively impact parental wellbeing, which may result in poorer parent-child interactions and negatively impact the child's development⁵.

2 PSA costs billions to companies, to the government & society.

- The psychosocial workload is responsible for 11.4 million days of absence per year in the NL (57% of total work-related absenteeism)⁹.
- The direct costs of the continued payment of wages during PSA-induced sick leaves are at least €3.2 billion per year⁹.
- The long-term costs of incapacity benefits as a result of PSA are €1.3 billion per year¹⁰.
- In addition, there are also indirect costs for care, training of new employees, and loss of talent¹.

3 A new life at home turns the world upside down.

- The birth of a baby sets in motion major and irreversible changes on many levels: material, interpersonal, emotional, social and professional¹¹.
- Clinical and research literature describe the first 1,000 days (from conception up to two years postpartum) as an extremely vulnerable period. Properly integrating this new

task into the lives of parents is of utmost importance for the long-term mental health of mothers, fathers and children^{11, 12}.

- Absenteeism related to pregnancy is significantly high^{13, 14}.
- One in thirteen cases of absenteeism among women aged 25 to 35 is related to pregnancy¹³, with issues such as nausea, fatigue, pelvic pain and postpartum depression¹⁵.

Parenting facts & figures

- In the Netherlands there are 1.3 million households with children under the age of 12. In 96% of them, at least one parent is working. In 66% of them, both parents are working. 25% of households are single-parent families¹⁶.
- When a child is born, four in ten women (40%) reduce their working hours¹⁷ while only 6% of men start working less¹⁸.
- Parents ideally prefer to share childcare. In practice, this wish is fulfilled in one in eight cases¹⁷.
- 75% of women working part-time would like to work more hours if they could better adjust their work to fit their personal life¹⁷.
- 60% of men have an unfulfilled desire to work part-time¹⁹.

4 Guidelines for employers to prevent PSA and support young parents.

- The literature is unequivocal: the most effective policy is an integrated approach to promote work-life balance for working parents with young children^{20, 21}. In impact & innovation terms: opt for a mix of interventions.
- In practice: re-assess individual support, leave arrangements for parents and working conditions^{20, 21}.
- Investigate challenges and requirements: what are the challenges faced by young parents and what support do they need?
- Set up an action plan.
- Provide coaching and guidance to strengthen the emotional and mental resilience of young parents.
- Create a family-friendly workplace culture and embed it in business strategies, policies, and leadership.
- Adopt a life-course perspective: new stages in life come with other needs, other limitations but also other possibilities.
- Learn about existing solutions and best practices.

"Millennials with no partner or kid yet are already looking around to see how colleagues with children are being treated. If you do not address this matter as an employer, your talents will flee the company to join a rival that better tackles it."

Joyce Knappe, CEO Pro Parents

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"What we've learnt about employment practices through the corona pandemic is the following: we are all facing the same storm, but not everyone has the same boat. So the key lies in tailor-made solutions. Some parents working from home have sweat on their face, rocking their baby whilst explaining complex processes. But this is the best case scenario.

In less favorable cases, they are sick, have lost family or friends and worry about their income. Unique things have also happened during the pandemic. We had to undergo the largest working-from-home experiment to date.

Last but not least, many women are frontline workers, which means that many fathers have had to work from home and take on the caretaking responsibilities full time."

Joyce Knappe,
CEO Pro Parents



Pro Parents B.V.
Spaklerweg 50/52
1114 AE Amsterdam-Duivendrecht
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0) 20 214 11 31
info@proparents.nl
www.proparents.nl