

Family-Friendly Policies and Athena SWAN Video Transcript.

I'm Laura Radcliffe, a lecturer in organisational behaviour at the University of Liverpool Management School.

My research centres on how people manage and experience the work-family interface with a focus on the influence of gendered expectations. As part of this research, I also explore the impact of different organisational and governmental family friendly policies and initiatives on people's daily work-family experiences.

In recent years, the UK government has introduced a number of policies aimed at supporting people to manage work and non-work responsibilities, as well as to encourage gender equality. For example, in 2015 they introduced the right to request flexible working for everyone (regardless of specific childcare responsibilities) and the following year they introduced Shared Parental Leave, aimed at encouraging both parents to share a period of leave after the birth of a child, rather than always implying that it should solely be the woman that has this bonding time with their baby.

While far from perfect at this point, these policies are beginning to send a message that people have lives and responsibilities outside of work and, importantly, that this is not just the case for women.

However, these policies are still battling prevailing societal gender norms, which are slow to change and continue to place different expectations on men and women, particularly when it comes to family and caregiving. So, while women are more likely to be judged harshly by others for not being present for their children's school performance or for not bringing them effectively prepared and dressed appropriately, men are more likely to be judged for not financially providing for their family.

This is important because, when it is assumed that women are predominantly responsible for caring roles, not only are family friendly policies aimed at women, leaving men feeling unable to access them, but women are also discriminated against in the workplace. We know that this contributes greatly to the gender pay gap, which becomes a huge gulf at the point at which people begin having children. It also contributes to fewer women rising to the top of organisations.

My research highlights how these persistent gendered assumptions not only influence who takes up family-friendly policies, but also how they are used. Within this research, as well as my research on Shared Parental Leave, we see how women tend to almost automatically take the lead role in caregiving and domestic tasks, lessening the opportunity for male partners to be involved in already well-established routines. Long periods of maternity leave accompanied by short periods of paternity leave after the birth of children perpetuates this problem, as this leads to women establishing such routines without the involvement of male partners. Women and men therefore become accustomed to women being primarily responsible for household tasks.

In thinking about Athena Swan and what this research suggests in terms of what we can do to improve workplace equality, it is vital that we strive to make sure that these policies are available to everyone, avoiding aiming these predominantly at women and thinking of ways in which we can encourage more men to make use of these policies. If practices, such as flexible working, become the norm for everyone across the organisation, they are much

more likely to be viewed as a legitimate way of working, rather than being viewed as less than ideal and therefore leading to career and pay penalties.

We can do this by thinking carefully about how policies are worded, communicated and implemented. We need to focus on marketing these policies to men in particular, so considering the images we use on policy documents and making sure at least as many images focus on fathers and their children as those that show mothers.

Shared Parental Leave has been poorly taken up across the UK at a rate of only 2% so we need to consider how we can improve this by highlighting SPL at least as much as we discuss maternity leave. Are we highlighting SPL to expectant parents, men and women, as soon as we learn that they are expecting? Are we providing similar financial support for employees taking SPL as we are for employees taking maternity leave?

Further, we need to think about how we are supporting line managers in implementing these policies. Our policies are only as effective as the way in which they are implemented and the environment in which they are implemented. Unconscious bias and assumptions about the roles of men and women, about what is 'normal', need to be an important part of line manager training, as well as helping them to gain a good understanding of the different policies on offer, why they are important, and how to effectively implement them, encouraging their use by both men and women, without fearing a risk of exclusion or career penalties.

Only when we achieve gender equality at home will we be able to achieve gender equality at work. And organisations, such as ours, can have an important impact in helping people to achieve this.