

Summary of the Future Foundation's report on 'The Changing Face of Parenting'

The Future Foundation, is an organization which aims, "...to understand what is really going on in the world, to provide order within the complexity, to present a clear sense of understanding and direction." They produce a number of reports, on different areas, to help inform businesses of current and future trends. The Changing Face of Parenting is one of these reports, which was done in conjunction with Calpol. For more information on them, and the other reports they have produced, visit their website: www.futurefoundation.net

For a full copy of The Changing Face of Parenting, email: sarahm@futurefoundation.net, putting "Parenting" as the subject.

The Future foundation's findings are from research done by ResearchNow, who conducted an Internet survey with 795 parents and non-parents, in April 2006.

The report suggests that there are various inhibitors to starting a family, with 50% of people feeling that they need to change their lifestyle before having children. Financial reasons are the greatest inhibitors to starting a family. The need to move to a saver neighbourhood is also seen as important (although, surprisingly, this is not related to class).

There is a general sense that parents spend less time with their children today, however this is not the case. Today's parents spend 99 minutes per day engaged in childcare, compared to 25 minutes in 1975.

Family structure is evolving as a result of larger socio-demographic changes. These include the postponement of parenthood, women's shifting role as earners, increasing longevity and an ageing population, as well as an increase in smaller family units. 'Traditional' family (e.g. parents with children) households will soon be outnumbered by others, most notably one-person and childless couple households. All of these household trends have contributed to a changing family structure, which has gone from a more 'horizontal' nature to a 'vertical family'.

As well as this, half of all mothers are over the age of 30. This has more widespread impact, namely that older mothers new mothers are more likely to be financially better off. Further, older parents may be more experienced in terms of researching information and generally more experienced with difficulties or crises.

55% of people feel that it is generally recognised that it is more important for a woman to have a successful career and 34% that it recognised that having children is more important, however, only about a fifth of people, both men and women, feel that the woman and family would be happier if she works. While it is generally regarded that a successful career is the main marker of success for a woman, this is viewed as generally concurrently being to the detriment of the family by both genders, thus resulting in maternal guilt.

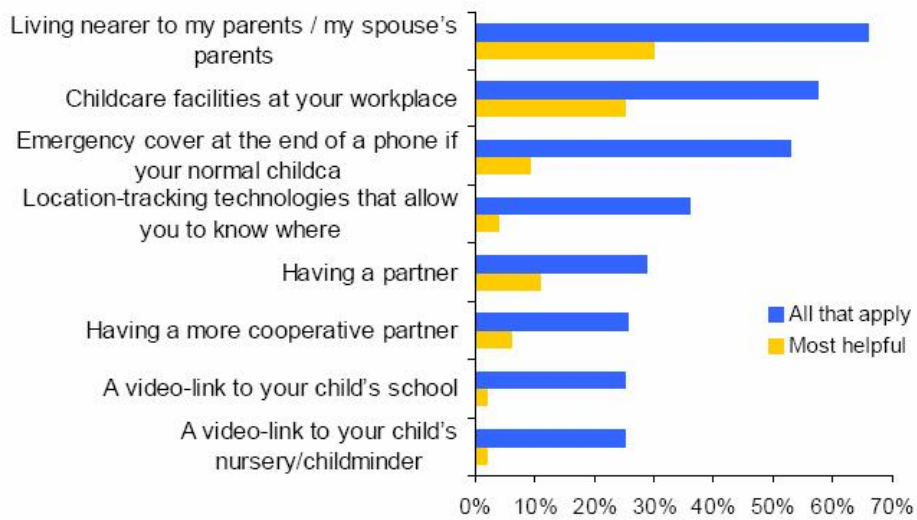
Aspirations have increased (since 1993) in almost every area of life, this increases worries (see graph), however it has been suggested by many sociologists such as Barry Glassner (2000) and Frank Furedi (2005) that it is the increasing 'culture of fear' in society which prompts many irrational anxieties.

There is also a suggested trend of “KGOY”(‘kids growing older younger’) as children became more formidable consumers at younger ages, with greater access to technology, money, and arguably the ‘ways of the world’. However, this is in contrast to survey responses, which suggest that children are often doing certain things later in life (compared to children of the 1960’s-70’s) (see graph).

The British public seem to be in support of a 'nanny state', if this means that their children are protected. Support for this includes; raising the legal age of smoking to 18 (80% of respondents), prosecuting parents of underage smokers (68% of respondents), and banning sweets at supermarket checkouts (60% of respondents). However, this is offset by the findings that, although there is support for government legislation, two- thirds of the public feel that parents should decide what is best for their children and the government should not intervene except to provide information and advice.

The nature of childcare is also changing. Trust, is the most important factor when choosing childcare. Once trust is discounted, convenience is considered more important than affordability. Childcare trends over the last ten years have reflected the increase in the number of dual-earning parents, with higher levels of use of day nurseries, for example, with a decrease in spouses/partners taking care of the children⁶, whereas a 'relative' is more frequently used. A change in usual work arrangements is most likely to disrupt childcare – even more likely than an illness of any sort, whether it be the child's or the carer themselves. It was found that usual arrangements were interrupted on average, once every six weeks, while one in ten parents found their arrangements interrupted on a weekly basis. Technology is also playing an increasingly important part in parenting. Parents are interested in using technology to manage their children, such as video links to a school or nursery (this are considered useful by one in three parents with children born in 2000 or after).

What would be of the most help / has been the most helpful in taking care of their child



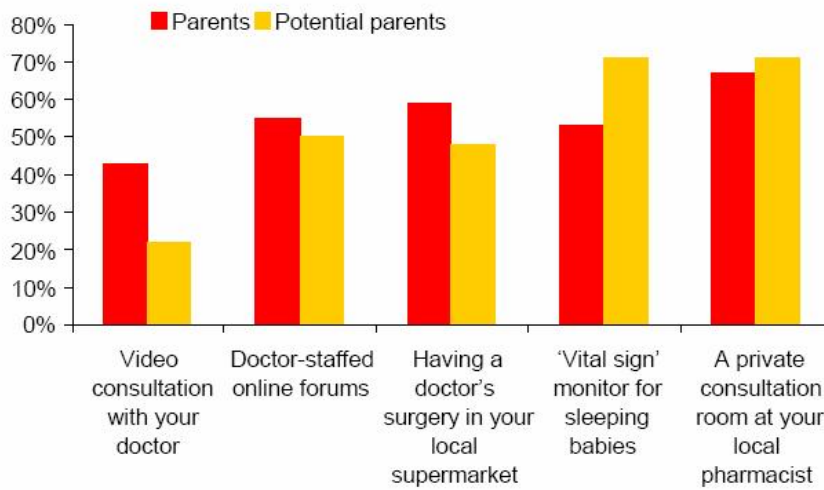
Source: Calpol / The Future Foundation, 2006

Base: 703 parents and potential parents

Below is a graph showing what parents and potential parents consider would help with childcare, which helps to determine where the future direction of childcare may be going.

Chart 28 Developments that could help with childcare, parents and potential parents

What people believe would be of the most help to today's parents and their child's healthcare needs



Source: Calpol / The Future Foundation, 2006

Base: 703 parents and potential parents