



TACKLING CHILDCARE: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare in Papua New Guinea

May 2024

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



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ABOUT THE BUSINESS COALITION FOR WOMEN (BCFW)

The BCFW is a non-profit organization and partner in this research. It was established in 2014 by IFC with seed funding from the Australian Government. The BCFW aims to help the private sector overcome challenges to women's participation in the Papua New Guinea (PNG) workforce by addressing violence, promoting women's leadership, implementing human resources policies and processes to help companies recruit, retain, and development their female staff, and by sharing knowledge with the private and public sector and community. At the time of writing, 81 major companies in the country have joined the BCFW.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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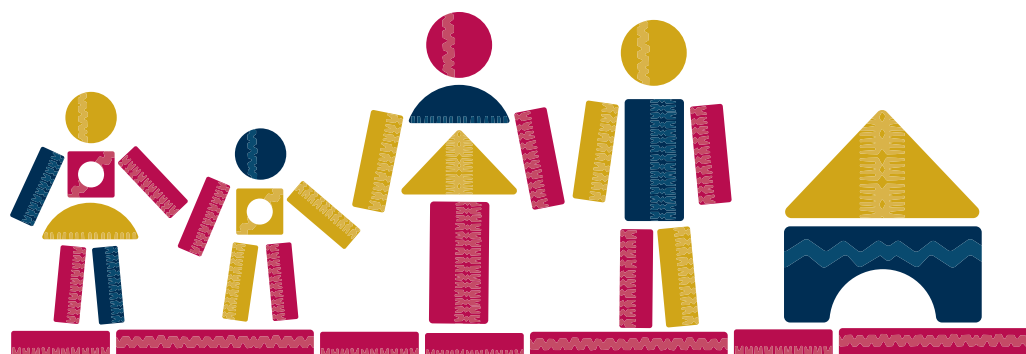


PARTICIPATING COMPANIES

This research was carried out across 29 private sector companies in Papua New Guinea. They represent businesses from across diverse sectors – communications, development, construction, extractives, hospitality, finance, legal, manufacturing, retail, and transportation. Collectively they employ 13,077 workers, 40% are women.

Our sincere thanks to the management and employees of these participating companies for their time and contributions.





Contents

Executive Summary	4
Key Findings	5
1. Options for Employer-Supported Childcare	7
2. Understanding Childcare Support in PNG	11
3. Research Findings	12
3.1. Profile of Research Participants	12
3.2. Current Childcare Arrangements	13
3.3. Impacts of Childcare Responsibilities	19
3.4. Career Impacts	21
3.5. Challenges for Parents of Children with Disabilities	22
3.6. Costs for Businesses	23
3.7. Current Childcare Support from Employers	24
3.8. Preferred Childcare Solutions	29
4. Recommendations	36
4.1. General Recommendations	36
4.2. PNG Specific Recommendations	37
4.3. Lack of Structured Company Policies or Support	40
4.4. Support from External Parties	42
Annex A: Research Methodology	44
Annex B: The Childcare Landscape in PNG	47
Annex C: Calculating Cost to Business	50
Endnotes	53

List of figures

Figure 1: Options for supporting employees with childcare needs	8
Figure 2: Understanding the demand for childcare – The four dimensions of childcare support	9
Figure 3: Usual carer	13
Figure 4: Comfort level with usual carer (preschool)	13
Figure 5: Childcare concerns (preschool)	14
Figure 6: Childcare concerns (school)	14
Figure 7: Childcare challenges (preschool)	17
Figure 8: Childcare challenges (school)	17
Figure 9: Impacts of childcare on daily work	19
Figure 10: In the past 4 weeks, number of times parents were impacted due to their childcare responsibilities	20
Figure 11: Career impacts for self	22
Figure 12: Career impacts for partner	22
Figure 13: Incidence of disability types among children with at least one disability	22
Figure 14: Average number of lost workdays per employee each year due to childcare responsibilities	24
Figure 15: Do you feel supported regarding your childcare responsibilities?	26
Figure 16: Average level of support by gender	27
Figure 17: Preferred childcare support solutions by gender (% of all respondents)	29

List of tables

Table 1: Estimated person days lost due to feeling distracted due to childcare responsibilities	50
Table 2: Estimated person days lost due to staff lateness associated with childcare responsibilities	51
Table 3: Estimated person days lost due to absenteeism associated with childcare responsibilities	51



Executive Summary

Access to childcare can have a profound and transformative impact on the lives of working parents and their children in Papua New Guinea (PNG), particularly for working mothers who face unique cultural, social, and geographic obstacles.

This study, the first of its kind in PNG, delves into childcare in PNG's private sector and sheds light on the hidden costs of inadequate access to quality and affordable childcare.

The findings reveal that childcare responsibilities significantly impact working parents' ability to consistently be present at work, perform well, and focus on their jobs. The benefits for businesses are clear from the research. By offering suitable childcare support options, businesses can address the productivity losses associated with childcare, which amount to an estimated 13.7 missed workdays per employee each year in PNG. The lack of access to childcare creates an especially large barrier to women's ability to work in PNG. Many employable women never have the opportunity to enter the workforce because they are often the primary caregivers for their children. Women are more likely than men to quit their jobs, decline promotions, or reject job offers due to the challenges of managing their workload with their childcare responsibilities.

According to the World Bank's March 2023 economic update on PNG, there are broader economic gains from improving childcare.¹ "Bridging the substantial difference between men and women's participation in better, more productive, paid employment could result in GDP per capita being 20.8 percent higher in the long run." The report calls for amendments to the country's Employment Act (1978) to mandate paid maternity leave.

Supporting women's ability to enter and remain in the workforce can also have lasting social and cultural benefits that will aid PNG's development.

Access to parental benefits and quality, affordable childcare allows parents to be gainfully employed which helps raise household incomes and decrease the risk of child malnutrition.

Investing in children, including providing them with better childcare, can help ensure the development of a healthy

workforce capable of meeting future labor demands.² Child malnutrition resulting from poverty and income inequality is a prevalent issue in PNG. It costs the national economy an estimated \$508 million (2.8 percent of GDP) annually through productivity losses, reduced labor force due to child mortality, decreased cognitive functioning, and increased healthcare costs. Modeling estimates in 2022 indicate that 51.2 percent of children suffer from stunted growth, making PNG the fourth-highest country in terms of stunting rates.³

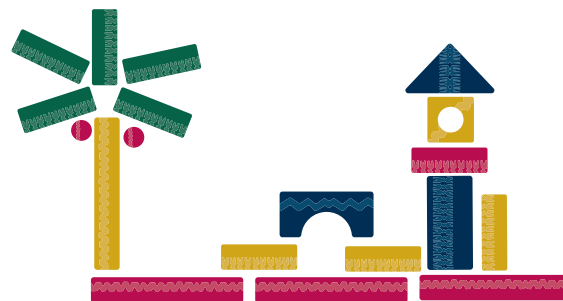
Improving the availability of quality and affordable childcare has the potential to reduce the prevalence of family violence in PNG, which has one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence globally, affecting over 80 percent of women.⁴ When asked about triggers for domestic violence, many women cite a failure to fulfill expected duties, such as childcare.⁵ A recent IFC study exploring how the impacts of family and sexual violence affect businesses in PNG shows that almost one in five women and three in ten men who have experienced family and sexual violence said they were late for work or unable to go to work because of safety concerns over how an abusive person is caring for their child.⁶ The workplace can also serve as a safe space for employees exposed to family violence. Employers that demonstrate understanding and support for their employees' families can foster higher commitment and loyalty among employees. A popular way for businesses to ensure parents can remain productive employees is by offering emergency childcare support.

Overcoming the challenges identified in this research and achieving a coordinated response to childcare for working parents may be challenging given PNG's low levels of education, security concerns, and limited availability of quality and regulated childcare services.

However, this study has revealed strong support from both employees and employers to advance the conversation on how employers can support their employees with childcare. It also highlights the need for innovative and culturally sensitive solutions that accommodate diverse family structures and respect PNG's cultural practices surrounding childcare.

Key Findings

- Families are key to childcare in PNG. 86 percent of parents rely on family members to care for their children while they work.
- While parents appreciate this support, most have concerns about how their child is being treated, their safety, what they are eating, and how their behaviors are being managed.
- Additionally, 78 percent of parents face difficulties finding childcare when their child is sick, or when they need care outside of school hours. This often leaves parents with no choice but to bring their child to work.
- Working mothers also face significant barriers in sustaining exclusive breastfeeding, which is their preferred practice.
- Although paid parental leave for workers in the private sector is not mandated under PNG law, some businesses offer either maternity and/or paternity leave and in some cases, this is paid.
- A lack of access to childcare has a significant impact on work productivity. More than half (61 percent) of working parents, both mothers and fathers, regularly arrive late or need to leave work early, while 47 percent have to take a full day off due to childcare responsibilities.
- The cost to participating companies due to lost staff time ranges from 13,714 kina to 11,981,540 kina annually, depending on average staff salaries and company size. On average, companies lose as much as 1,313,367 kina per year, or 3,102 kina per employee, due to childcare responsibilities.
- While working parents generally feel supported by their managers, supervisors, and colleagues, this support is often informal and dependent on individual goodwill. Most businesses have no formalized policies and protocols for childcare support, leaving parents to rely on the mood and empathy of their superiors and colleagues.
- Although there is a growing recognition of the important role that fathers play in contributing to the development and childcare needs of their children, working fathers are almost twice as likely as working mothers to say they receive no support from their managers or supervisors for childcare.
- Working parents seek childcare support that is tailored to their individual needs and respectful of their diverse family situations.



Based on these findings, this study highlights the urgent need to improve access to childcare for working parents in PNG and offers a range of actions that employers, the government, and other stakeholders can take to support working parents.

- Employers play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by working parents. They need to understand the impact of a lack of childcare on their business by strengthening human resources systems to track costs linked to absenteeism and turnover. By doing so, they can measure the positive changes that result from implementing childcare support initiatives.
- Employers can explore the possible options that their employees believe will best suit their needs. These can include educating parents and carers, flexible work options, making appropriate workplace adjustments, partnering with local childcare facilities for emergency care, through to an on-site childcare center.
- The government also has a vital role to play. It should update the Employment Act (1978) and consider mandating paid parental leave for employees in the private sector. At the least, it could adopt the International Labour Organisation's recommendation of 14 weeks of paid maternity leave, and explore ways to encourage working fathers to take time off work after the birth or adoption of a child. Furthermore, establishing a regulatory framework for childcare services for children under the age of four would enhance the quality of available childcare and contribute to PNG's overall development.
- Finally, external stakeholders are important advocates for working parents. They can support changes to legislation and provide valuable information to families and childcare workers on early childhood health and nutrition, as well as educate organizations about childcare center standards.

Given Papua New Guinea's cultural diversity and the numerous difficulties in providing accessible and affordable childcare in the country, a multi-stakeholder collaboration will be crucial in identifying the best solutions.



Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday

My State, State
I'm a Little Tinker
Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes
Sing, My Sing, Singsong

s a t i p n
c e h r m d
g o u l f b

Grid of fruit pictures: Pineapple, Watermelon, Strawberry, Orange, Lemon, Kiwi, Apple, Banana, Peach, Pear, Mango, Grape, Raisin, Fig, Plum, Cherry, Peach, Pear, Mango, Grape, Raisin, Fig, Plum, Cherry.

The snake is in the grass
The snake is in the grass
The snake is in the grass
The snake is in the grass

1. Options for Employer-Supported Childcare

IFC recognizes the benefits that employer-supported childcare can bring to working parents, their children, and businesses. In 2017, it published its foundational report, *Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare*.⁷ Since then, it has conducted research into this topic in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. This body of work shows how childcare support has multiple benefits for a business, including reduced absenteeism, higher productivity, and a more committed workforce; as well as an improved reputation among employees, investors, and customers.

A common lesson is that no single type of childcare support will suit every employer or every working parent. What works for one business may not for another. There are differences in location, operational requirements, and workforce to consider. A childcare option that works for one parent may not be the best solution for another parent, even in the same workplace. Differences in family structures and children's needs create diverse parental situations and challenges.

Employers can begin by engaging their employees on what childcare solutions will work for them, while also improving their understanding of the different options for employer-supported childcare. When it comes to making final decisions about what types of childcare solutions to offer, employers can confirm whether these solutions are appropriate and that they will have the greatest chance of being beneficial for working parents and business productivity.

Listen to employees

In this research to explore the impacts of childcare on working parents in PNG, the employees of the 29 participating companies were asked to share their ideas about the types of childcare support they would like to access. These companies are now equipped with the information they need to create childcare solutions that match their employees' preferences. This is a key first step when considering what childcare support options will be most suitable for a business. Working parents know the most about the challenges they face in managing childcare and their work life. They understand the gaps in their current arrangements and how much they can afford to pay for alternative childcare solutions. Making use of this knowledge is a must for any childcare support to be welcomed and impactful.

Understand the different options

For some parents, the ideal childcare option might be an onsite childcare center. In this research, when asked what kind of childcare support they would like their employer to consider, 33 percent of survey respondents selected onsite care as one of their preferences. However, this is not the only option open to employers. A majority of the survey respondents (57 percent) say they would like their employer to provide subsidies that parents can use to pay for other types of childcare.

Figure 1 shows a range of childcare options that employers can consider and discuss with their employees. Opening an onsite or near-site childcare center can be extremely beneficial to a business in terms of reduced staff turnover and absenteeism, and higher productivity. However, this solution is resource-intensive. It requires significant upfront investment as well as ongoing operational costs. It also assumes that employees can comfortably and safely travel with their children to the center, which is often not a realistic option for those who live long distances from work. At the other end of the scale are flexible working arrangements, including remote working, flexibility around start and finish times, job sharing, or even increasing the number of part-time jobs. These solutions are less costly to implement and can be equally beneficial.

IFC's global research into employer-supported childcare shows that this support is most beneficial when offered as part of a suite of family-friendly workplace policies. In any particular business, it is not a matter of one particular solution over another. A more impactful approach is to develop interventions that best support the diverse childcare needs of employees and the realities of a business' operations.

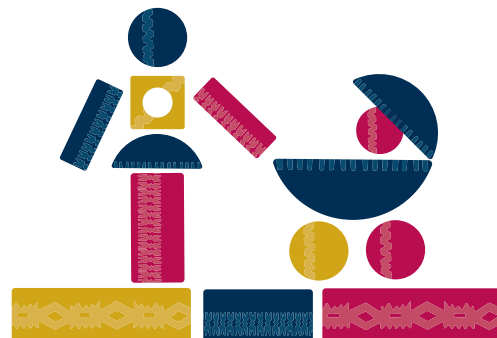


Figure 1: Options for supporting employees with childcare needs



Be culturally sensitive and realistic

Throughout this research working parents repeatedly pointed out two conditions they believe are necessary for any childcare support to be successful in PNG.

1. Childcare must meet the needs of their diverse family situations. For some working parents, their dependent child is not their birth child or is an adopted child (for example a niece or nephew) but they are still the child's primary carer. This is a common reality of family life and caring for children in PNG culture. Some employees are single parents or are looking after a child with a disability which can increase their need for support. Finally, it is not just female employees who are working parents – there are many working fathers too.
2. Childcare must give parents confidence that their children are safe. For example, while 38 percent of the survey respondents like the idea of their employer providing transportation for their children – either to and from school or for breastfeeding purposes – there are local security and safety issues relating to the standard of vehicles and the behaviors of drivers to consider. As another example, many parents would also like their employer to consider options that could increase their access to professional childcare outside their homes. However, they also recognize this may not always be the best option unless more can be done to improve the regulation of professional childcare service providers and the skills of their staff.

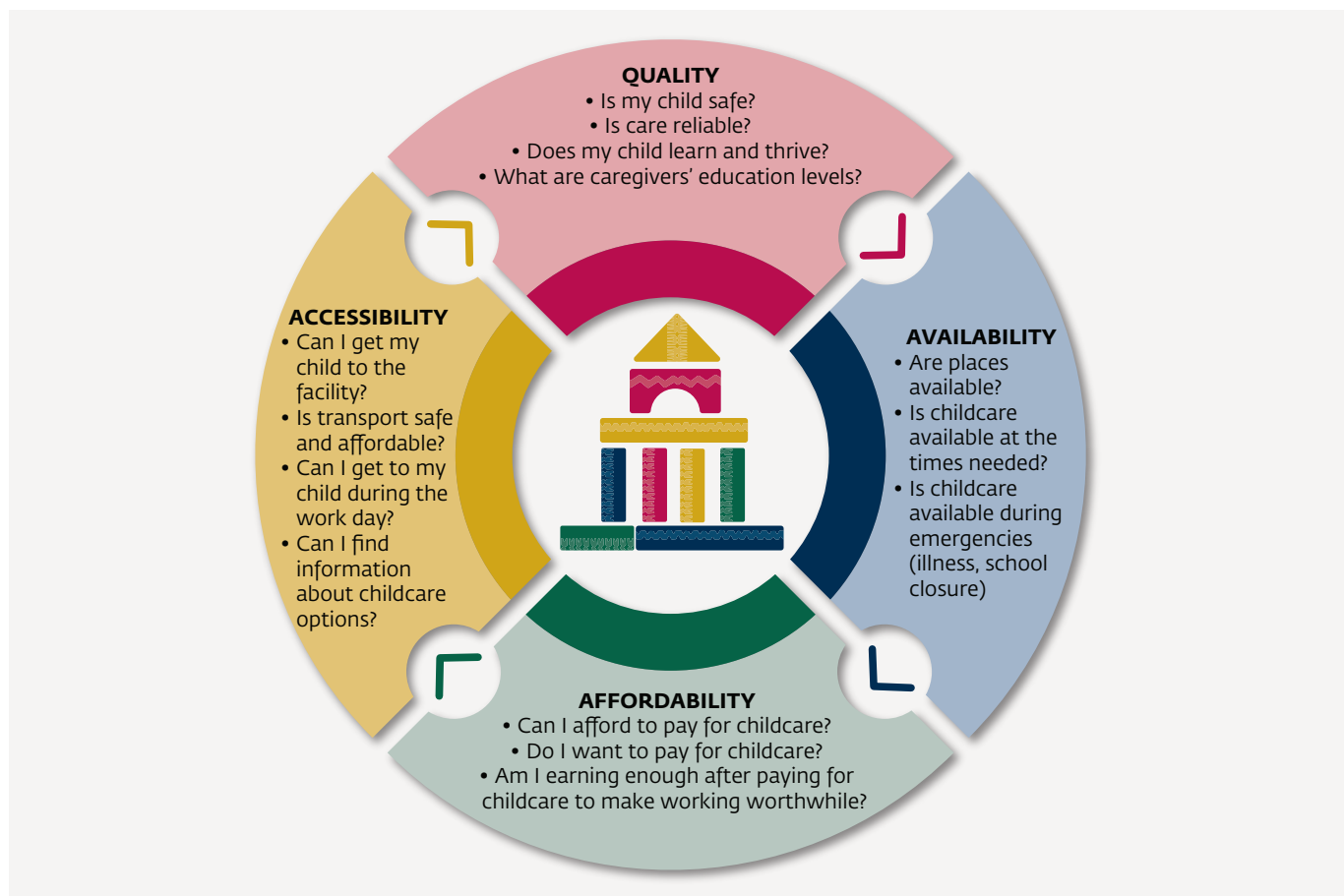
Maximize commitment and uptake

Working parents do not expect their employer to investigate the most appropriate childcare options alone and want to be consulted during the planning stage. When putting childcare solutions in place, employers can also consider asking working parents to contribute to the ongoing costs which may not result in an additional cost for parents. Many working parents in this research (57 percent) indicate they are already paying for their

current childcare arrangements. Given that 89 percent of the working parents also have some degree of concern about these arrangements, transferring the costs to more reliable and better quality childcare is likely to be welcomed.

In general, when assessing if a particular childcare support option is suitable for them, working parents will consider its availability, affordability, accessibility, and quality (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Understanding the demand for childcare – The four dimensions of childcare support





2. Understanding Childcare Support in PNG

Formal childcare options in PNG are limited. Government agencies at the provincial and local levels work in partnership with churches to deliver countrywide education, but this begins at primary education. There is currently no state-run early childhood care and education. Parents with children under the age of six must therefore find their own childcare solutions.⁸ The main options available are care of the child by a family or community member, placing the child in a care facility run by a church, private enterprise, or NGO, or employing a private nanny or *haus meri*.⁹

The PNG government has expressed a commitment to inclusive early childhood education (ECE) by signing UNICEF's Call to Action in Early Childhood Education and through statements that recognize how early childhood education can lead to social and economic benefits.

“Early childhood education is one of the best investments a country can make to prepare children for learning and to give them a chance to prosper later in life. Children who benefit from quality, equitable, and inclusive early education are better prepared for primary school and will reach better education outcomes. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is more than preparation for primary school. It aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.”

PNG Department of Education

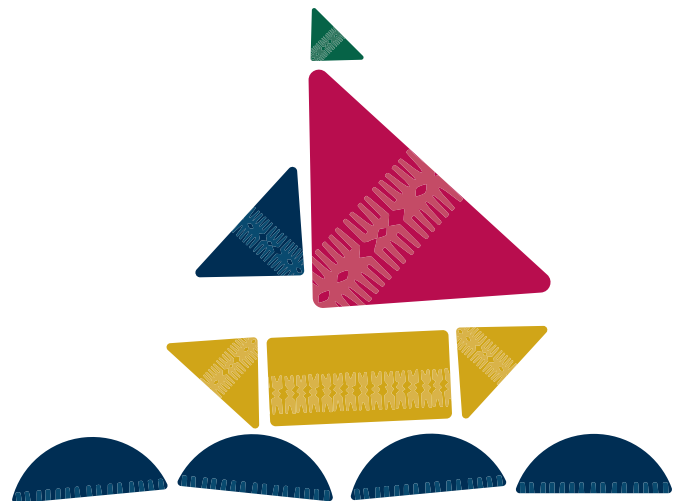
The PNG National Education Plan 2020-2029 proposes to formalize ECE by establishing Kindergarten levels 1 and 2 for children aged four to five. Under the responsibility of the Department of Education, there is a target enrollment of up to 15,413 children into Kindergarten 1 in 2023 and a proposed gradual increase in enrollment numbers each year until there are 228,885 and 258,012 children enrolled in Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2 respectively by 2029.¹⁰ Strengthening these commitments could result in fewer women stopping paid employment due to childcare responsibilities. Nevertheless, the

National Education Plan does not indicate how improvements will be made to the care of children aged three or younger. It is therefore assumed that parents who want or require childcare for younger children will be expected to continue to make their own arrangements for the care of children at home, at playgroups, or in daycare centers.

It is uncommon for businesses in PNG to offer childcare support. Only one of the businesses surveyed by the BCFW in 2016 offered childcare assistance of any kind to their staff.¹¹ There is still a widespread belief that strong extended family networks mean that someone will be available to watch the children. This belief does not account for PNG's increasing urbanization which means many families are no longer living close to their relatives.¹²

PNG currently provides up to six weeks of unpaid maternity leave for women working in the private sector, with the possibility of an additional four weeks of leave if the woman becomes ill as a result of the delivery. This is only available to women who are pregnant and does not extend to women who adopt children. There is no similar provision for unpaid paternity leave and there is no provision for paid parental leave. In comparison, through amendments to the Employment Relations Act of 2007, Fiji introduced paid maternity leave of 98 days and paternity leave of five days.¹³

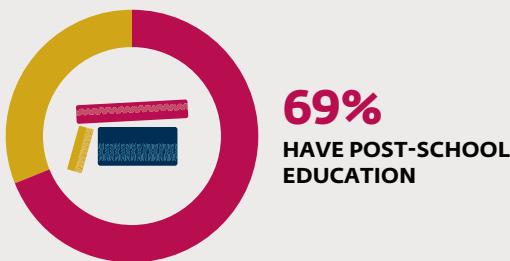
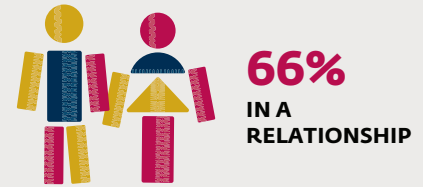
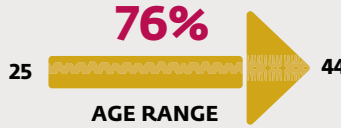
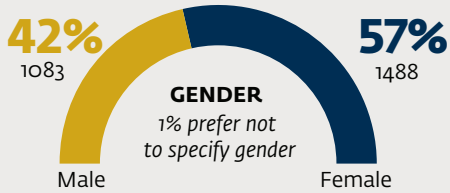
For more information on the childcare landscape in PNG, refer to Annex B.



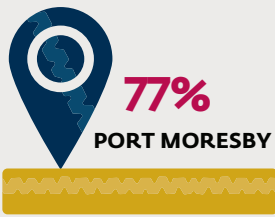
3. Research Findings

3.1. Profile of Research Participants

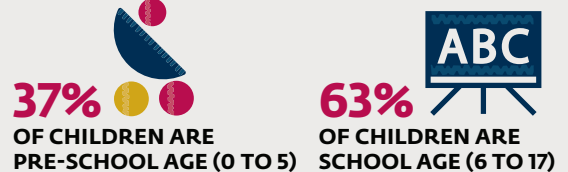
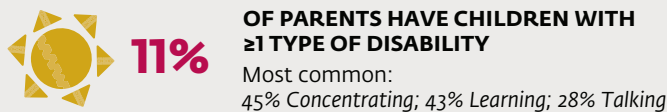
RESPONDENT'S DEMOGRAPHIC



THEIR WORK CONTEXT



AND THEIR CHILDCARE RESPONSIBILITIES



Definition of dependent child

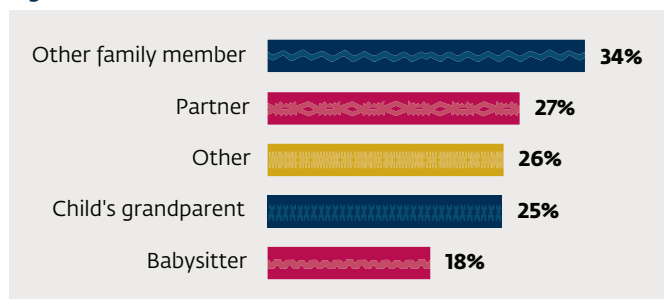
For this research, we used a broad definition of a dependent child. This includes biological children, adopted children, fostered children, and children a person might look after on behalf of a family member or friend. This definition was determined to reflect the reality of childcare arrangements in PNG society. The definition was explained to all the research participants at the beginning of the employee survey, focus group discussions, and interviews.

3.2. Current Childcare Arrangements

The usual carer is a child's mother or another female family member

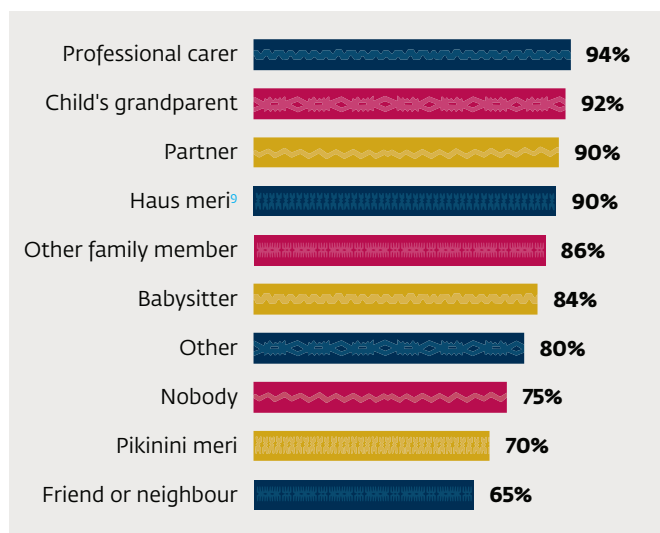
Among all working parents, 86 percent rely on a family member (partner, grandparent, or another family member) as the usual carer of their child while they are at work (Figure 3).¹⁴

Figure 3: Usual carer



Working parents with preschool children say they are comfortable with their current childcare arrangements (47 percent very comfortable and 41 percent somewhat comfortable). They are most likely to feel this way if the child's usual carer is a professional carer (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Comfort level with usual carer (preschool)¹⁵



Overall, parents are more likely to trust their child is being mostly well cared for if the carer is a family member – 53 percent compared with 44 percent who trust their child is being mostly well cared for when the usual carer is not a family member. In contrast, parents who rely on a friend or *pikinini meri*¹⁶ to care for their child while they are at work are more likely to say they are uncomfortable with their care arrangements. 35 percent of parents whose usual carer is a friend or neighbor said they feel very or somewhat uncomfortable with their usual care arrangements, and 30 percent of parents whose usual carer is a *pikini meri* said they feel very or somewhat uncomfortable with their usual care arrangements.

Among all working parents, there is a strong preference for the usual child carer to be female. They cite deeply embedded cultural beliefs about the inability of men to care for children and concerns about child sexual abuse as reasons for preferring not to entrust their children into the care of uncles or grandfathers. Many working mothers even say they do not feel comfortable leaving their children in the care of the child's father.

While 15 percent of working mothers say their partner is the usual child carer, for working fathers the comparable rate is 45 percent. This suggests women are three times more likely than men to be responsible for childcare while their partner is at work.¹⁷ Other family members identified as usual child carers include aunts, sisters, sisters-in-law, and nieces.

Working parents worry about the skills of carers

A majority of working parents (89 percent) express some concern about the quality of their current childcare arrangements. Understandably, many have concerns even when they have full confidence in the carer.

“Regardless of who the carer is or what childcare arrangement is in place, I think any mother would worry about their child while they are at work.”

Human resources manager and working mother

For 54 percent of working parents, there is concern about how the usual carer treats their child. Parents are more likely to have this concern if the usual child carer is a non-family member and are least likely to have this concern if the family member is their partner. However, working mothers are significantly more likely than working fathers (57 percent compared with 35 percent) to worry about the treatment of their child if their partner is the usual carer – a result that reflects a broader social concern in PNG about the ability of men to care for children.

Good practice example: Building Brains – Save the Children

The Building Brains program aims to transform the way that caregivers interact with children. Parents and carers can attend group sessions where they learn age-specific actions, games, and activities that help with children’s early learning and development. The program emphasizes play, communication, positive parenting, and responsive caregiving. The content covers issues of child safety and protection, father engagement, health and nutrition, strategies for reducing carers’ stress, and information on other social services. Save the Children currently runs this program for children between the ages of zero and five in the East Sepik province, and hopes to reach 1,500 parents through bi-weekly group sessions run at the community level. In other countries, the program has been delivered remotely using various tech apps.¹⁸

Safety is a top concern of working parents

Among all the concerns that working parents have about childcare, safety is the most common (Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Figure 5: Childcare concerns (preschool)

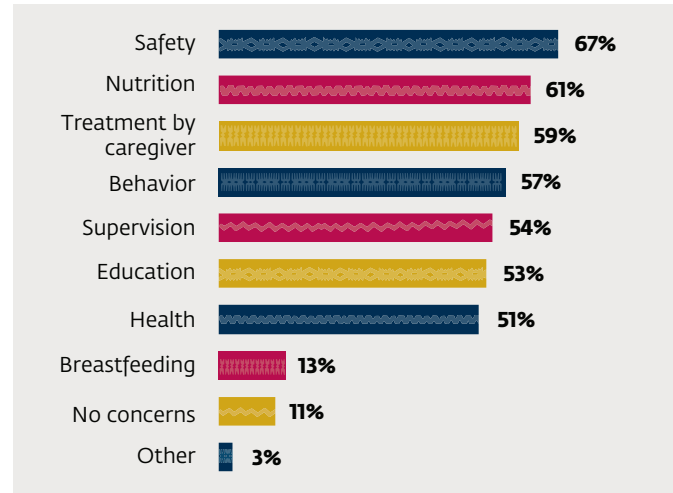
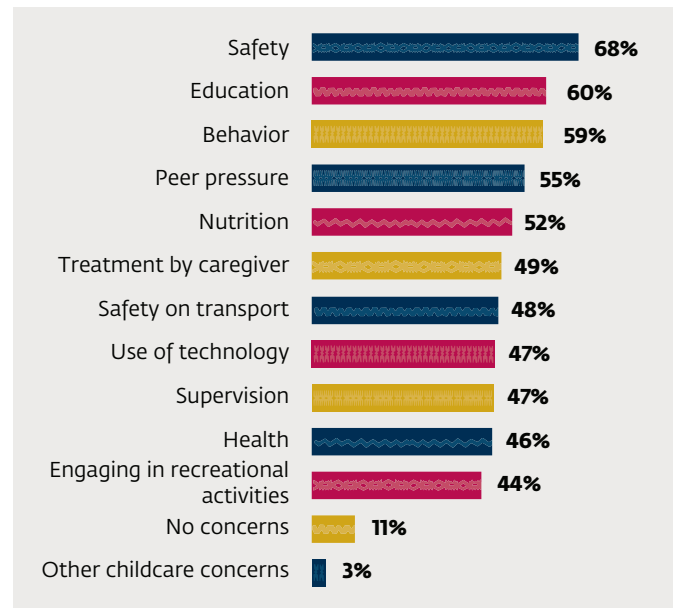


Figure 6: Childcare concerns (school)



Parents of preschool children worry about the physical safety of their child in the home, including the risk of injury to the child as they crawl or walk around or if they are left unattended.

“My babysitter took a phone call from her boyfriend while she was feeding my baby. He wanted her to meet him outside, so she put the bottle in the baby’s mouth, tried to support the baby’s head with a pillow, and left the house. The baby was crying and crying until the neighbors came. That’s why I worry about my child’s safety.”

Working mother

As the children get older, parents’ concerns shift. They worry more about how safe their children are when they are walking or taking the bus to and from school, the impacts of peer pressure, and bullying. Many are also concerned about their children’s use of technology and admit to not always knowing the best way to handle it as it is not something they are familiar with from their own childhood experiences.

“My kids ask me if they can use the internet to do school assignments. I don’t know if I should give them access or not. They may be doing school work, or they may just want to access all that unnecessary social information.”

Working father

Working mothers face systemic challenges to continue breastfeeding

Nutrition is the second highest concern for parents of preschool children (61 percent). Approximately 50 percent of children in PNG have stunted growth.¹⁹ The prevalence of stunting is significantly higher in rural locations than in urban PNG, nevertheless, one in every five children in the National Capital District is affected.²⁰

Working mothers feel conflicted about how to deal with this concern. On one hand, they have largely accepted the health recommendations around the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and are aware that malnutrition is a primary cause of stunting and that stopping breastfeeding too early can also contribute to stunting.²¹ Yet, working mothers find it difficult to continue breastfeeding a child after they return to work, especially in urban areas such as Port Moresby.

Under PNG’s Employment Act (1978), new mothers are eligible for up to six weeks of unpaid leave after birth. When asked to provide copies of childcare-related policies, including policies on parental leave, 15 of the 29 participating companies responded. Of these, 12 offer paid maternity leave ranging from four to 18 weeks, with the length of leave often linked to length of service. The remaining three offer unpaid maternity

leave or encourage the use of annual leave. Still, the chance of a working mother being able to continue exclusive breastfeeding beyond the first few months after their child’s birth is extremely low and not without added costs and lost wages.

“The first thing you think about after you return from maternity leave is breastfeeding. Parents start using bottle milk straight after birth because we only have two weeks off and maternity leave is not paid. The only thing you can do is to put the child on the bottle so you can go back to work.”

Working mother

The Act also stipulates that new mothers should be allowed to take two 30-minute breaks from work each day to breastfeed. This is paid time away from work and lasts for six months after birth. However, parents and human resources managers agree it is difficult for working mothers to take advantage of this entitlement. Many working mothers say they have tried, but soon learn that the allowed time of 30 minutes is not enough for them to travel to their baby, feed the child, and return to work. In Port Moresby, where there is a lack of safe transportation options, it is unsafe for a child’s carer to bring the baby to the mother’s place of work.

Some companies have tried to make breastfeeding facilities available onsite but have found it challenging to safely store breast milk and provide privacy for breastfeeding mothers.

“I had to prepare how I was going to express milk. I messaged my boss telling him this would be a challenge. So, I came back to work, and I was given a room. The first time I used it, somebody walked in. I was totally exposed. I flagged it to the OHS committee. They told me I had to make do. After that, I would lean up against the door while I was breastfeeding. It went on like that for two months.”

Working mother



Good practice example: Breastfeeding room – World Bank

A breastfeeding room was included in the original design for the World Bank’s new office in Port Moresby. While this room was initially used for storage, alterations have been completed to ensure it can be used for its intended purpose. These include upgrades to the air conditioning system and the installation of a door lock to ensure privacy for mothers while they use the space. The room is fitted with a wash basin, recliner chair, baby change table, and a minibar fridge for storing breast milk. Consumables such as antibacterial wipes, hand wash soap, and sanitizer are also provided in the room. The set-up of this room is part of the World Bank’s global intervention to support parents in the workplace, especially nursing mothers who must be away from their babies while they are at work.

“It is relieving to know there is a dedicated space in the office for nursing mothers. I am glad I can now use the room whenever I need to and not have to stress about rushing home to my baby. It makes me feel supported and valued by my employer.”

Melanie Waki- Kikman, Gender Project Coordinator, IFC

Good practice example: Breastfeeding support – DT Global

A female employee was promoted to a senior role which required her to travel to different sites. At the time, she was a young mother who was still nursing her baby. The company decided to cover travel costs for the employee’s baby and babysitter so she could continue breastfeeding her child and build a connection with her child while also completing her work.

“We were faced with a situation after this particular staff member had given birth and was returning to work, but she had also been promoted to a director-level position and that required more time traveling. This was going to be difficult while she’s still nursing the child. So, we just said, if she’s happy to bring a nanny and the baby with her, we’ll just pay the costs. This was a minimal cost to our company.”

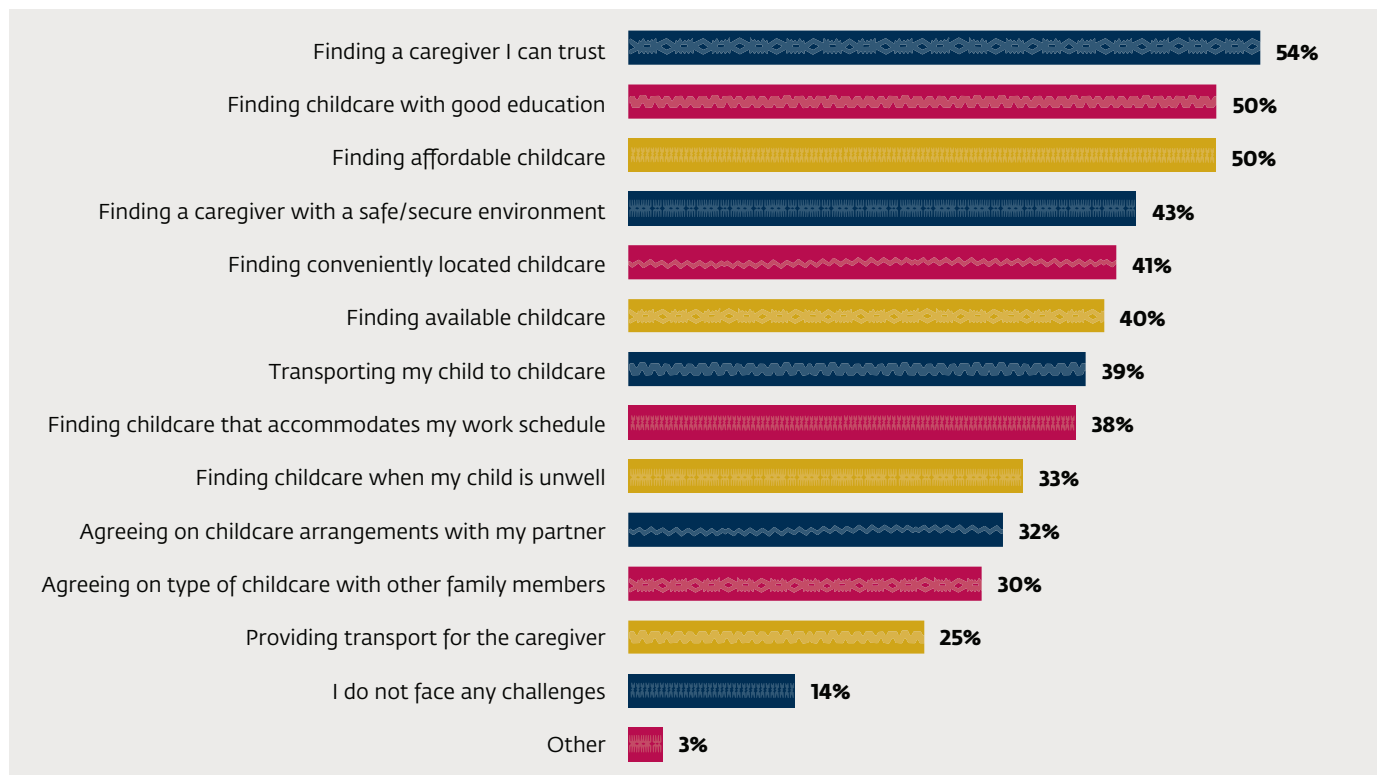
Shane Martin, Managing Director Economic & Social Infrastructure Program, DT Global

Many parents have no emergency backup for childcare

The working parents who participated in this research are extremely grateful for the support they receive from family members to help care for their children while they are at work. Many were hesitant to say anything about their arrangements that could make them appear ungrateful or offend their relatives. Many were also keen to emphasize that they would want to continue with this arrangement because of the important place that family has on a child’s development in PNG culture.

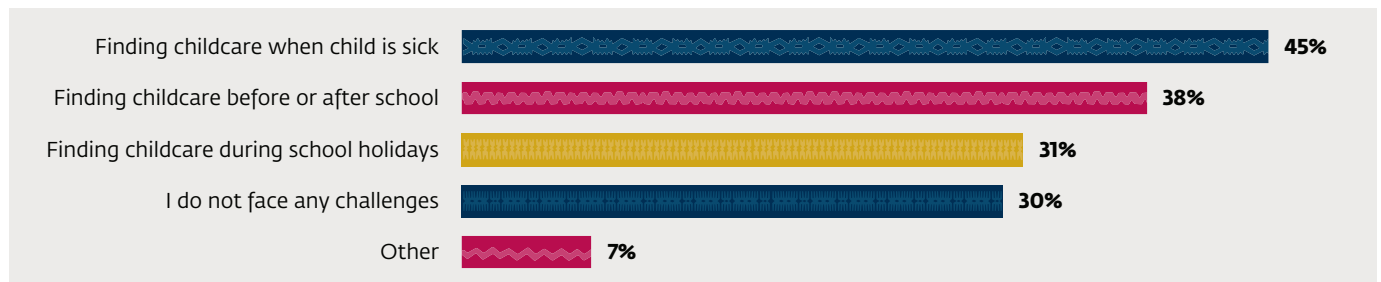
Despite this, a majority of parents (78 percent) also say they sometimes experience challenges organizing care for their children. Among parents with preschool children, the most common challenge is finding a carer they trust (Figure 7). More than a third also have difficulty finding affordable or conveniently located childcare, childcare for when their child is unwell, or childcare that aligns with their work schedule.

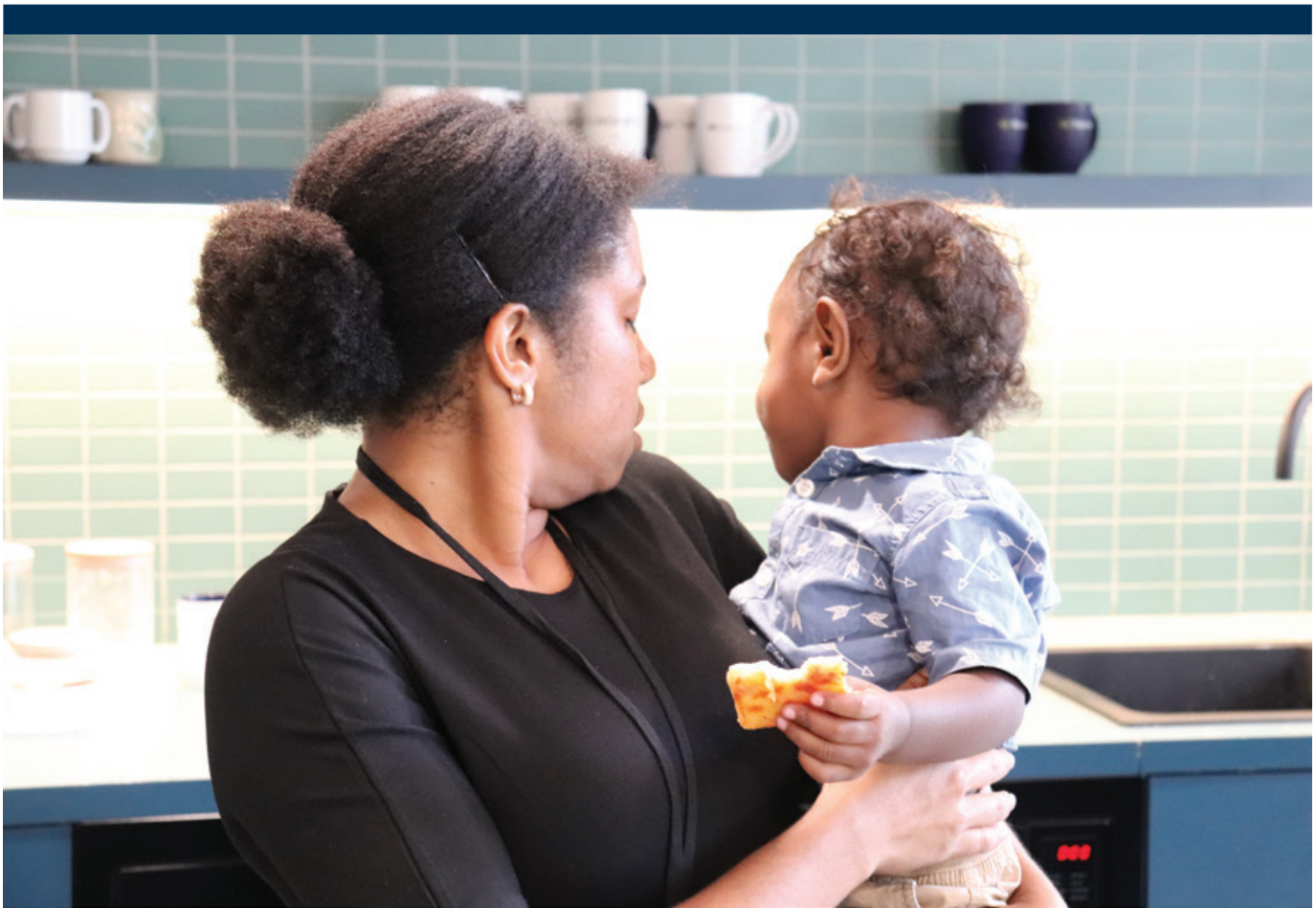
Figure 7: Childcare challenges (preschool)



For parents of school children, the most common challenge is finding childcare when their child is sick. More than a third also find it difficult to arrange childcare for before or after school (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Childcare challenges (school)





Almost a quarter (24 percent) of working parents have had to bring a child to work because they were unable to arrange childcare. For some, this may be a regular practice. Employees confirm they regularly see teenage children loitering around office buildings and suggested that employers could address this issue by allocating a dedicated space in which these children could study until their parents finish work. Preschool children are also sometimes left unsupervised in an empty office or the office canteen. Employees are less likely to approve of this arrangement, even if it is only occasional, as the presence of young children in the office can be distracting and disturbing.

“I see a lot of young mothers who bring their kids to work on the weekend. Sometimes they’ll be sitting on the floor. I feel sorry for them because it’s just not a healthy environment to be in.”

Working father

“Yesterday, I was typing an email when I heard crying. I got up from my desk, walked over, only to find three of the children quarrelling over a tablet. It’s good that we can bring them in. But then we have to pay attention to them. That’s distracting for me.”

Working mother

A UNICEF study in 2021 found that some parents in PNG will leave their children home alone when no one is available to look after them.²² Among the working parents who participated in this research, 1 percent with preschool children and 8 percent with school children say this is a common arrangement.

3.3. Impacts of Childcare Responsibilities

Among all parents, 75 percent say their childcare responsibilities impact their work in some way. The most common impact for 47 percent of working parents is missing part of the workday (Figure 9).

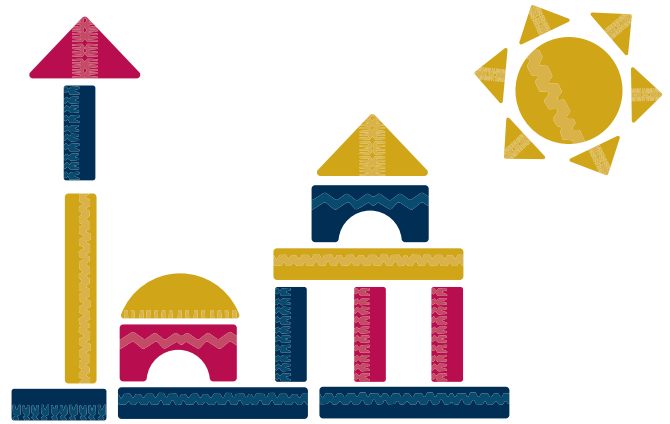
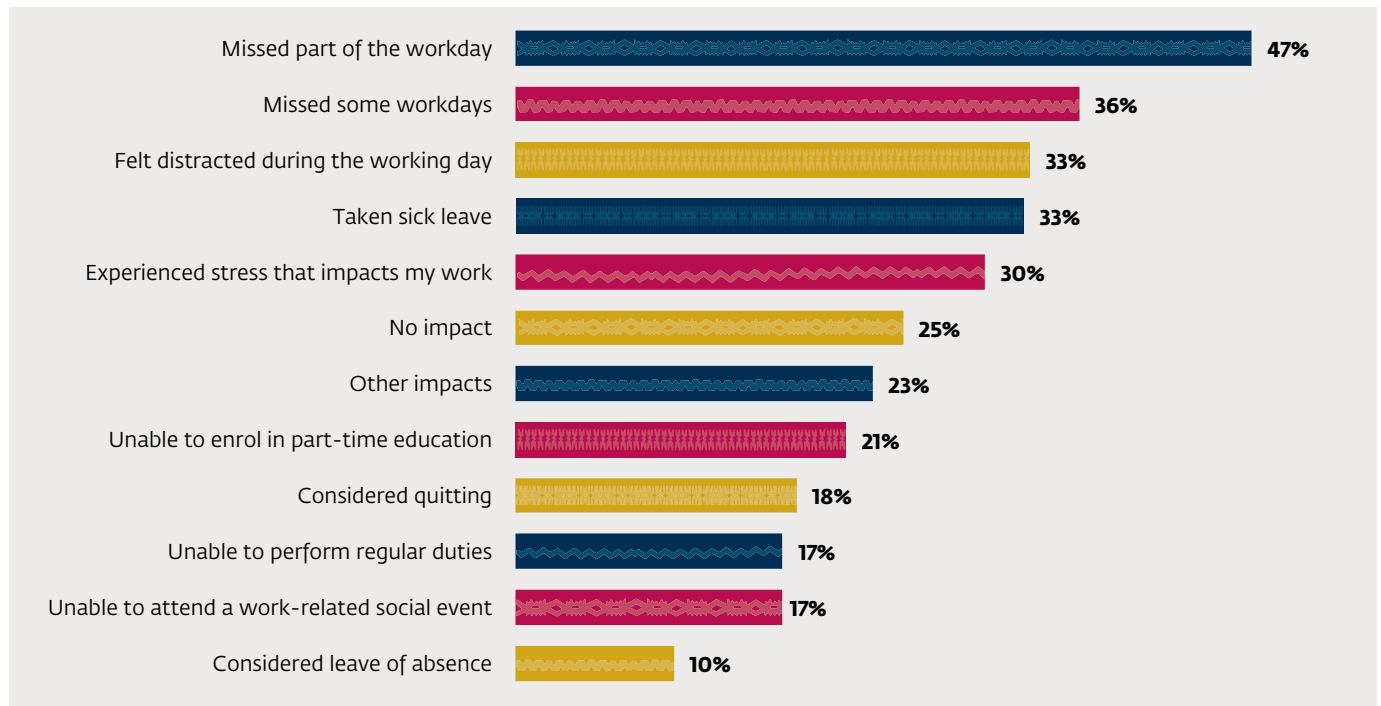


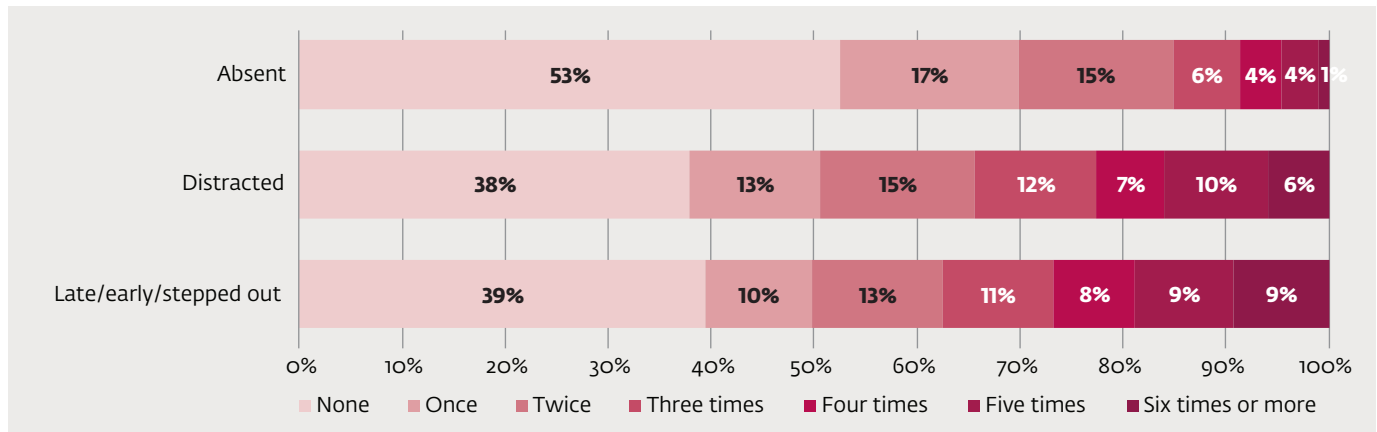
Figure 9: Impacts of childcare on daily work



Working fathers say the main reason they take time away from work is to transport their children to and from school. As the person who typically controls the use of the family vehicle, this responsibility often falls to fathers. All other childcare issues – such as sickness, school registration, and medical and vaccination appointments – are more likely to be assigned to mothers. Unsurprisingly, working mothers find that childcare responsibilities impact their work more than working fathers. Only 19 percent of working mothers say their childcare responsibilities have no impact on their work compared with 33 percent of working fathers.

In PNG, there is a cultural expectation that women should take responsibility for the care of their children. Working mothers tend to be comfortable being open about the challenges they face in balancing their workloads with their childcare responsibilities, and they expect to receive a more favorable response from colleagues, supervisors, or managers. Some working fathers know their childcare challenges are affecting their work performance but admit that they do not discuss the issue with their supervisor or manager.

Figure 10: In the past 4 weeks, number of times parents were impacted due to their childcare responsibilities



Absenteeism

Almost half (47 percent) of parents say they took at least one day off during the four weeks before the survey to manage their childcare responsibilities. For 15 percent of parents, the number of absent days during this period was three or more (Figure 10).

The main reasons given for absenteeism are looking after a sick child, taking a sick child to hospital, taking a child for a vaccination, or because there is nobody available to care for their child.

“If their babysitter doesn’t turn up, they don’t come to work. If they’re worried about their child getting to and from school, it causes stress and anxiety, so they don’t come to work. If they don’t have after-school care – this is another example of why they miss work. All this impacts on their performance. It’s a cost to the company in terms of time. But I think it is an unseen cost and may be not talked about.”

Team Leader

For working parents with children at school, absenteeism rates might be higher at certain times of the year given that 38 percent say they have difficulty finding childcare during school holidays. Among working parents with preschool children, 38 percent say they have no alternative arrangement if their usual care arrangement falls through.

Presenteeism

Presenteeism refers to lost productivity when employees are physically present in the workplace but are not fully functioning due to illness, stress, or another reason. These employees are trying to give their best but are physically or mentally unable to do so. Although not often tracked in the same way as absenteeism, the costs of presenteeism to a business can be larger.

In this research, almost two-thirds of the working parents report presenteeism due to childcare responsibilities at least once during the four weeks before the survey (Figure 10). Common issues on their minds are the health of a sick child, the reliability of the babysitter, or an issue with their child at school such as bullying, peer pressure, or an abusive teacher. For 6 percent of parents, the number of times they were distracted during this period is six times or more.

Time Away from Work

Among working parents, 61 percent say they arrived late or left work early to deal with a childcare issue at least once during the four weeks before the survey (Figure 10).

While this situation is common among the companies that participated in this research, none have a formal contingency plan in place. Often, this time away from work is unplanned, and supervisors and team members are left to manage the extra workload.

“For the staff member who is present at work and stepping in for the staff member who is absent because of childcare, this creates physical, emotional, and psychological stress due to a demanding workload.”

Human Resources Manager

People in management positions report a higher number of short periods of time away from work to manage childcare responsibilities. On average, they leave early, arrive late, or step out of the workplace 3.4 times in a month, compared with 2.5 times for other workers. It may be easier for managers to take time out to deal with unforeseen childcare situations because they are more likely to have access to a private vehicle, have greater flexibility around how they manage their time and work tasks, and are less likely to need permission to leave the workplace. Overall, managers may also feel more secure in their job to admit to taking time off work, whereas other less senior workers may be reluctant to disclose the full extent of their missed time for fear this could risk their employment status.

“It depends on the supervisor. When you’re dealing with a supervisor who’s not a parent, they may say they understand. They may say it’s okay to take some time off once or maybe twice. But the more often I have to tell them I need to run to pick up my daughter, I can see they get irritated. It makes me consider if I should tell my supervisor or just try to hide it. I don’t like being in this position. It can be really tough for some of us.”

Working father

Working non-parents feel the stress

Working non-parents say they too experience disruptions at work due to the childcare responsibilities of their colleagues. Whenever a colleague is absent, this causes stress, especially when there are deadlines to meet.

“There is an impact on the team if we lose one member who has to go out to attend to their child’s needs. It stresses the team out. It leads to burnout. If one member leaves, their workload is handed over to somebody else.”

Working non-parent

Some express frustration when their supervisor permits a working parent to step away from work to manage a childcare issue but doesn’t communicate this arrangement to them.

3.4. Career Impacts

Absenteeism, presenteeism, and time out of the workday are significant everyday work impacts related to the childcare responsibilities of employees, affecting three-quarters of working parents. If left unaddressed, these everyday impacts can lead working parents – and their partners – to make potentially life-changing decisions about their careers. Among parents, 43 percent say either they or their partner has made such a decision – be it leaving a job, turning down a promotion, or turning down a job offer. And it is working mothers who are more likely to experience these impacts on their careers.

“My son was two months old. I was supposed to be going into work, but I asked if I could work half the day because there was some issue. I wanted to spend just another few hours with him. I even said I would work later into the day to make up for the hours. But they said no, you have to work from nine until five. After that, for the good of my children, I decided to resign. They paid me big money, but I wasn’t concerned about the money. I was there for my son’s welfare.”

Working mother

Working mothers report experiencing long-term negative impacts on their careers due to childcare more often than working fathers (Figure 11). Working fathers confirm this when they report on the long-term career impacts that childcare has on their partners (Figure 12).²³

Figure 11: Career impacts for self

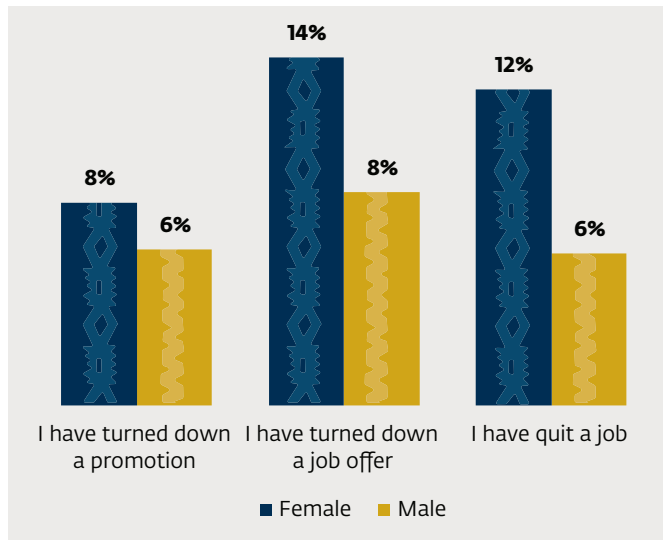
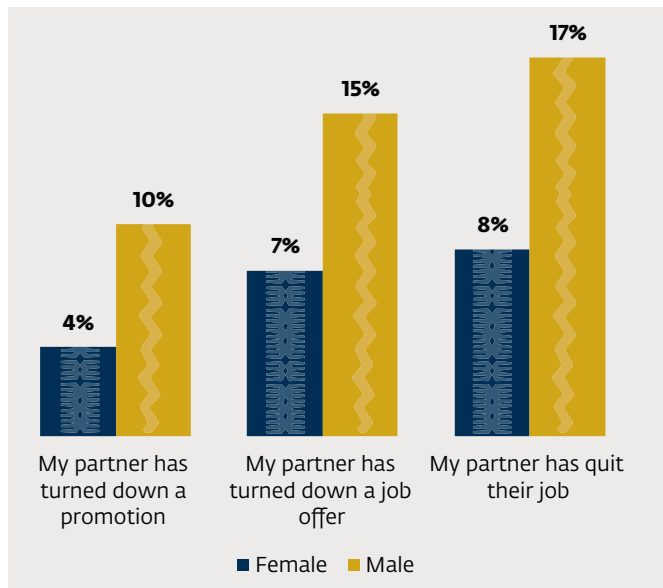


Figure 12: Career impacts for partner



Overall, the share of men reporting at least one impact on their career was lower than among women – 21 percent compared with 34 percent. As reported by both men and women, working mothers are around twice as likely than working fathers to resign from a job or turn down a job or promotion to care for children. No working fathers indicated they were thinking of leaving their current job because they are finding it challenging to manage childcare, but several working mothers did.

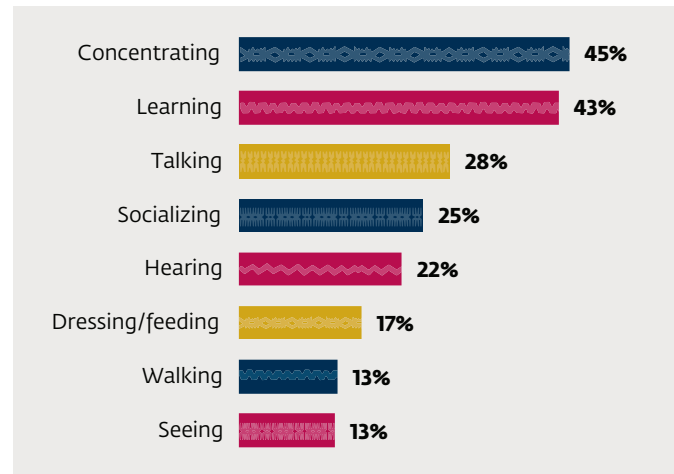
“I think about quitting all the time because I have problems with getting babysitters all the time.”

Working mother

3.5. Challenges for Parents of Children with Disabilities

The survey results show that 11 percent of all parents have at least one child whom they identify as having a disability linked to seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care, or communication.²⁴ This accounts for almost 8 percent of all the dependent children of working parents.²⁵ The most common disabilities are related to concentrating (45 percent) and learning (43 percent) (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Incidence of disability types among children with at least one disability



These parents are slightly more likely to rely on a family member to care for their child than parents of children without a disability – 78 percent compared with 75 percent. They are also less likely to say they have no concerns about their current childcare arrangements – only 5 percent of parents who have a child with a disability say they have no concerns, compared with 12 percent of parents whose children have no disabilities.

Additionally, parents who care for a child with a disability are more likely to experience everyday work and long-term career impacts. While 27 percent of working parents who do not have

a child with a disability say there are no every day impacts on their work caused by childcare demands, for working parents of children with a disability, this figure drops to 16 percent. Parents of children with a disability are more likely to have turned down a promotion (12 percent compared with 7 percent), or quit turned down a job offer (18 percent compared with 11 percent) or quit a job (14 percent compared with 9 percent).

“A former employee left. He had a child with a disability. It got a bit stressful for him. Usually, he would make requests for leave. He just had to be home to tend to the child or take the child to the hospital. And sometimes his requests would be questioned. Even though he provided the necessary documents as evidence, it was not always taken well.”

Male non-parent



3.6. Costs for Businesses

Unplanned employee absences and distraction at work have a cost implication for business.

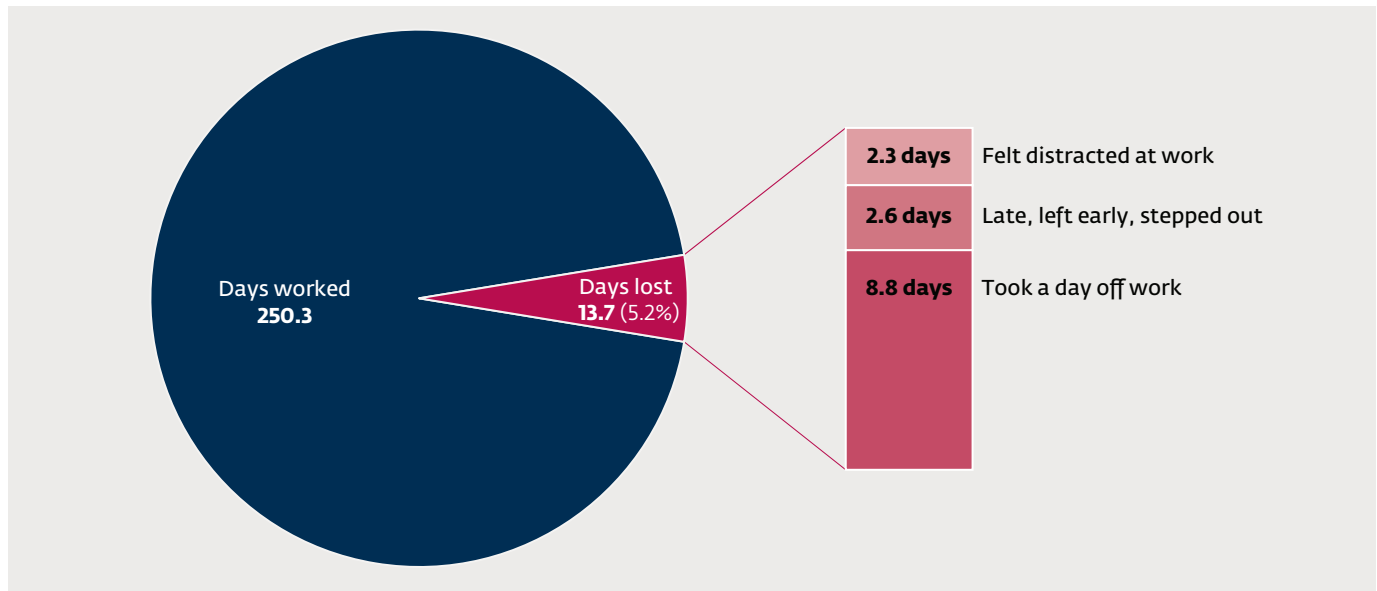
“A lack of quality childcare for working parents can translate into high rates of absenteeism and turnover, low productivity, and challenges in recruiting skilled employees for employers. This challenge has been recognized by PNG’s National Stock Exchange, which has recommended a new listing standard requiring its members to disclose childcare policies and supporting employees’ return to work from family duties.”

World Bank, Unlocking the Economic Benefits of Gender Equality, 2023

Working parents estimated how many times they had arrived late, left early, or taken part or all of a day off work to manage childcare responsibilities. They also estimated how many times they felt childcare issues had distracted them from doing their work.²⁶ The participating companies were then asked to provide additional data on their number of employees, annual salary bills, and total hours worked.²⁷ Using this information, we can estimate the number of days of work productivity that are lost due to working parents being distracted or absent from work due to childcare responsibilities.

Across the 29 companies, 10,568 workdays are lost every four weeks due to staff being late, absent or distracted due to childcare responsibilities. This equates to 5.2 percent of workdays lost every four weeks for each employee in a business, or the equivalent of 13.7 missed workdays per employee every year (Figure 14).²⁸

Figure 14: Average number of lost workdays per employee each year due to childcare responsibilities



The average cost to the participating companies associated with lost staff time due to childcare responsibilities ranges from 13,714 kina to 11,981,540 kina per year. On average, lost staff time due to childcare responsibilities costs companies 1,313,367 kina per year in total, or 3,102 kina per employee. This is equivalent to 5.2 percent of the wage bill for all the participating companies.

More detail on how these productivity losses were calculated is in Annex C.

3.7. Current Childcare Support from Employers

Parents working in the private sector miss out on parental leave

In PNG, the Public Services Management Act (1995) provides for up to 18 weeks of maternity leave for women working in the public sector. This includes six weeks of leave before birth taken as sick leave or unpaid, six weeks of leave after birth at full pay, and up to an additional six weeks of leave after birth if required for medical reasons (also covered by sick leave or unpaid).

There is no equivalent entitlement for women working in the private sector. Under the Employment Act (1978), there is no requirement for companies to offer maternity leave before birth and new mothers are entitled to six weeks after birth, but this is unpaid. There are no entitlements for women who adopt children. There are also no entitlements for working fathers either in the private or public sector.

In July 2023 the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission (CLRC) announced that it would embark on a review of maternity leave entitlements to identify discrepancies between the private and public sectors and make recommendations for changes to the law.²⁹ The CLRC consulted with the private sector, NGOs, and women's groups and it is expected the CLRC's recommendations will include amendments to the Employment Act (1978) to include paid maternity leave for women working in the private sector.³⁰

Some participating companies offer paid parental leave

Of the 15 companies that provided policy information on parental leave for this research, 12 offer paid maternity leave ranging from four weeks to 18 weeks. Three of the companies also offer paid paternity or secondary carer leave ranging from seven days to 15 days.³¹ In one case, paternity leave falls under the company's 'flexi leave' policy which new fathers can use after the birth of a child. Another company offers fathers flexibility around when they can take paternity leave, allowing them to do so in weekly blocks within the first three months after the birth.

One company offers parental leave for the birth parent and the non-birth parent without specifying the sex of the parent.

For eight of the 12 companies, the parental leave entitlements are only applicable to workers who have been in continuous employment for a minimum of 12 months and sometimes a minimum of three years. For nine of these companies, the entitlements are restricted to full-time or permanent employees. Three of the companies offer some parental leave entitlements in the case of a miscarriage or stillborn child. Ten companies apply equal entitlements to workers who legally adopt a child. In four of the policies, the company states that any parental leave is treated as unbroken service, and it is therefore paid at full salary inclusive of normal benefits and superannuation.

For the companies that do not have specific childcare policies, some human resources managers say they follow the guidelines on childcare entitlements covered in PNG's Employment Act. However, their descriptions of these guidelines were not always consistent or accurate. Employees who participated in the group discussions also expressed some uncertainty about the childcare policies their employer has in place and what parental leave they might be entitled to.

Four companies offer paid maternity leave longer than six weeks, which is the entitlement provided to working mothers in the public sector under the Public Services Management Act (1995).

Good practice example: Immediate parental leave allowance – Simberi Gold, St Barbara

At 18 weeks, Simberi Gold's parental leave allowance is the most generous of the 29 companies that participated in this research. It is also the only company to offer paid parental leave unconditionally from day one of employment. Working fathers are entitled to the same 18-week parental leave if they are the primary caregiver of the child. The company introduced this entitlement into its Leave Policy for National Employees in 2021. It is paid at the base normal salary and any absence during parental leave does not break the employee's continuity of service or impact their service milestones. The same leave entitlement is available to any female employee who miscarries after 28 weeks or if the baby dies within 28 days after birth. Employees can also request up to 52 weeks of unpaid leave. There is an additional provision for unpaid special parental leave in cases of early pregnancy loss and stillbirth.

Good practice example: Continuation of superannuation payments during maternity leave

The continuation of payment of superannuation for a new mother while she is on maternity leave is a practice that recognizes the importance of supporting women during this phase of their lives and acknowledges the value of their contributions to the workforce. Of the 29 participating companies, only three provided policy evidence of this practice. Nasfund – PNG's largest superannuation provider by membership base – formalized its policy on continuing superannuation payments during maternity leave in May 2023.

"Maternity leave is a crucial period for women to bond with their newborns and recover from childbirth, but it can also lead to financial stress due to the absence of paid leave and the lack of proper superannuation benefits. This initiative will ensure that female employees of Nasfund who take unpaid maternity leave will continue to receive their employer contributions during their absence from work, providing them with financial security during this crucial period in their lives and ensuring they don't miss out on the benefits of superannuation."

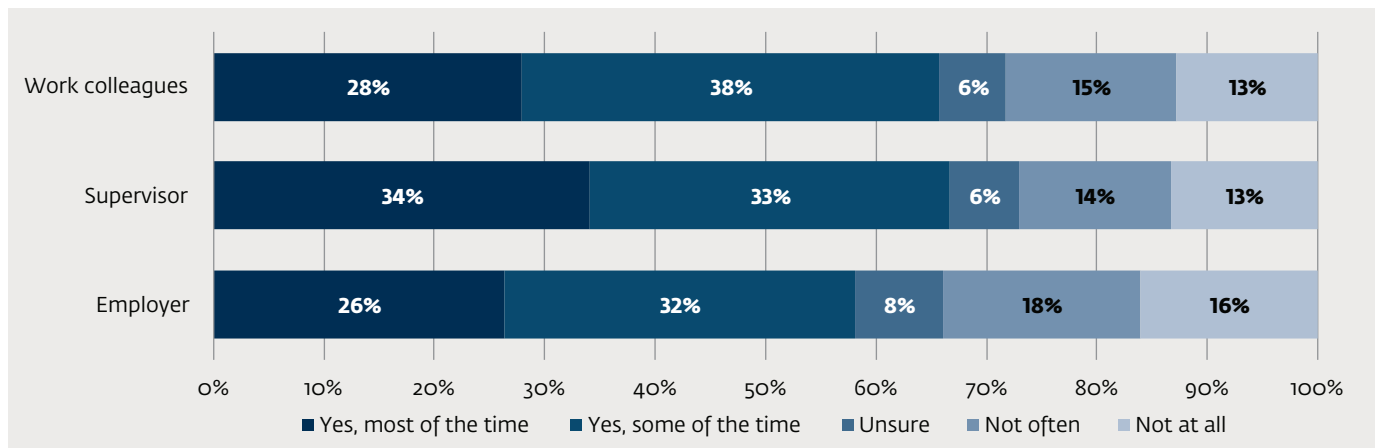
Rajeev Sharma, CEO, Nasfund

Flexible work is informally practiced

The majority of working parents feel they receive support at work to manage their childcare responsibilities and that it is most likely to come from their supervisor, with 67 percent

saying supervisor support is available most or some of the time (Figure 15). This is followed by support from colleagues (66 percent) and support from their employer through policies and practices (58 percent).

Figure 15: Do you feel supported regarding your childcare responsibilities?



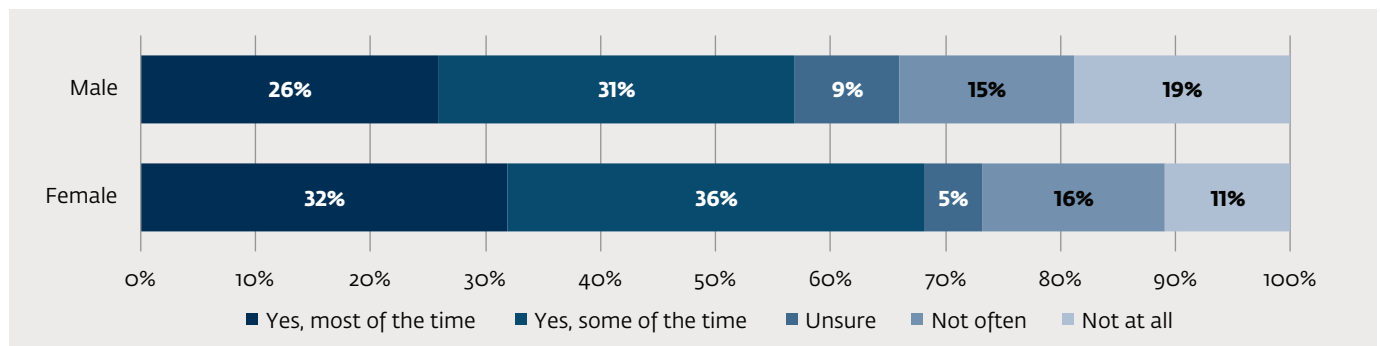
These results reflect an agreed understanding that caring for children is a necessary part of family life in PNG. While the fertility rate in PNG has halved over the past 50 years, the average number of children is 3.1 children per woman.³² Workers who currently do not have dependent children probably realize they are likely to have some involvement in the care of children at some point in their lives. They may themselves become parents or, as is common practice in PNG, they may care for the child of another family member. The working non-parents in this study generally express a high level of appreciation for how difficult it can be for their colleagues who are parents to juggle childcare with work demands. Working parents also feel there is a high level of tolerance among their colleagues and managers when they need to prioritize childcare over work.

“When I had a catch up, my boss asked – ‘How are you?’ I told him straight that I had a challenge this morning and that I feel like quitting my job and just being a stay-at-home mum. But he’s a father and I think he understands the stages that pregnant mums go through. He told me, if you need to take time off, just send me a quick message and let me know. You can work from home whenever you feel like. That really helped me.”

Working mother

Working fathers feel less supported by their manager, supervisor, or colleagues in terms of managing their childcare responsibilities than women do. They are almost twice as likely to say they feel no support at all compared with working mothers (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Average level of support by gender



The cultural norms around childcare in PNG may prevent working fathers from requesting support. They may feel they are less likely to receive support because looking after children is perceived to be the responsibility of women or that asking for it may signify their failure as a man who should be in control of the family.

“I feel like sometimes we don’t want to ask about sick leave for our kids because we will get a negative response.”

Working father

Among managers, 52 percent say they feel supported most of the time, compared with 25 percent of non-managers, regardless of whom they approach for support – employer, supervisor, or work colleagues. In all cases, managers are twice as likely to feel they get this support than working parents in non-managerial positions.

Although working parents may feel they receive a reasonable level of support to manage their childcare responsibilities, they recognize that this support is very much dependent on the goodwill of their bosses and colleagues. They cannot guarantee they will receive the same level of support or any support at all every time they need to take care of a child. Whether they receive any support and the extent of the support can depend on several changing factors, including the mood of individuals, the workload of the team, business deadlines, and absenteeism of other staff.

“This is an issue that’s affecting us. It can be peak period for the business. But the mother has to take care of her child. Sometimes, we’ll handle this. Sometimes everybody understands. But it depends on the day and the industry. It depends on the management. For someone like me, I’m a mother, so I have to support another mother when it comes to her child. But sometimes, you have to think about the situation from the perspective of the operations.”

Working mother

The more times a working parent needs to seek the approval and understanding of their manager, supervisor, and colleagues, the more likely it is that tolerance for their situation will wane.

“If it’s within their lunch hour, then fair enough. But when they just get up and leave... I’m an empathetic person. You can take the hours you need to attend to your child. Family is important. But when you come back, if it’s just one hour you’ve been away, just don’t take your lunch hour the next day. If it’s longer than that, then you have to apply for the necessary leave that’s available.”

Female non-parent

Working parents can feel guilty about leaving their colleagues to manage the workload.

“When you come in late, you tend to think you are not giving enough and so I have to work right through my lunch hour to make up for the time. Just the thought of walking in late and everyone looking at me and thinking, ‘Why is she late every day?’. Even though I have an arrangement with my boss, you just worry about what other people are thinking.”

Working mother

None of the participating companies has formalized protocols for managing situations when a working parent suddenly needs to leave the workplace or take a full day off to manage childcare. This is despite these situations being extremely common across companies, and in many cases, occurring daily.

For some working parents, there may be a genuine need for more time away from the workplace. Their child may have a serious illness or a disability, or they may not have a strong family support system. Human resources managers recognize that single parents tend to experience more difficulty managing their workload and that their support needs are often greater than parents with shared childcare responsibilities. These parents face a higher risk of being viewed as low performers, accused of taking advantage, and feeling guilty about being physically absent from the workplace.

“I’m grateful that I have a very understanding manager. She just tells me every few days to take time off. But when I return to work, my table is filled with documents. There are people calling me and asking where I was. It puts me under stress to meet deadlines and send in reports. It basically looks like poor performance because I haven’t met a deadline, but I have my reasons.”

Working mother

Some of the companies allow their employees to use other types of leave for parental leave and/or for looking after a sick child. These can be designated as caregiver’s leave, flexi leave, annual leave, family care leave, or wellness days. In two cases, the companies offer extended unpaid leave of up to one year for the primary caregiver to look after a child who has a prolonged illness.

A significant number of survey respondents (38 percent) would like to see more flexible working arrangements made available at a policy level. Currently, only one company has a formal policy on flexible working arrangements.

PNG businesses are encouraged to create return-to-work policies

In July 2023, the PNG National Stock Exchange (PNGX) adopted a new Corporate Governance Code for Listed Issuers. It recommends that in their company’s annual governance report, directors should disclose “the extent to which the company has policies for promoting and supporting the return to work of employees from family duties”. Such policies might include flexible working hours, supporting child-minding arrangements, or work from home arrangements.

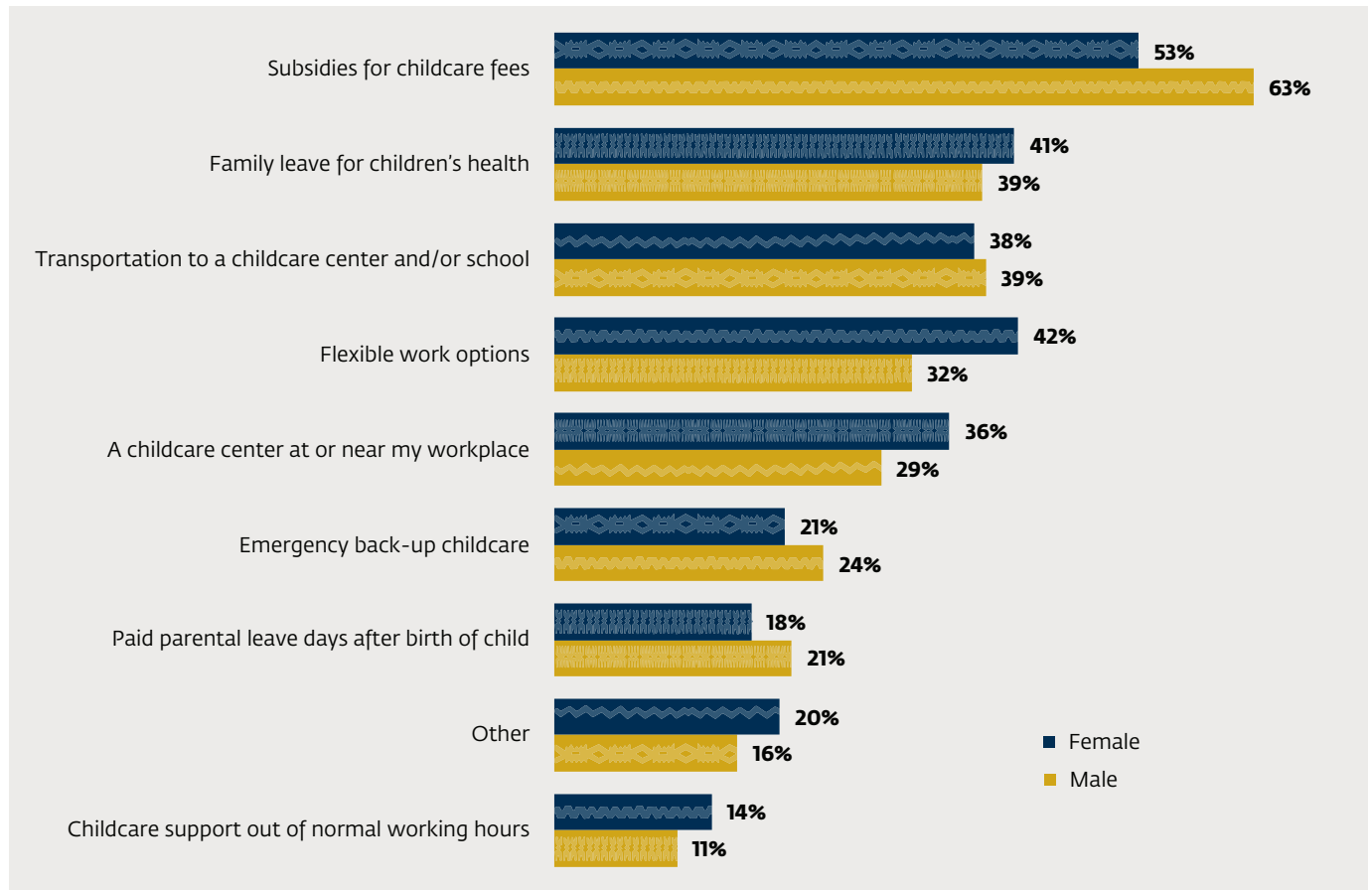


3.8. Preferred Childcare Solutions

Among the survey respondents, including both working parents and working non-parents, 93 percent selected at least one childcare support solution they would like their current employer to consider. The most commonly selected solution

asks employers to provide subsidies to help working parents cover the cost of formal childcare fees (daycare or after-school care). Men are somewhat more likely than women to request this – 63 percent compared with 53 percent – while women are more likely than men to opt for flexible working arrangements (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Preferred childcare support solutions by gender (% of all respondents)



Childcare subsidies are popular, but quality supply is lacking

Although 57 percent of respondents would like their employer to consider offering childcare subsidies, many of the research participants also think it would be difficult to make effective use of these subsidies due to a lack of available daycare centers and concerns about the quality of the existing options. Some managers express their concerns about how to monitor the use of these subsidies and ask whether they would be liable if anything happened to a child whose enrollment in daycare was being subsidized by the company.

There are no national regulations covering the operation of childcare centers in PNG. There is limited formal training for people who work as educators in these centers and no requirement that anybody who works in childcare centers acquires police clearance. Among existing childcare center operators, some say they prefer to continue to train their staff in-house as this provides them with more assurance that the training will meet their needs and standards.³³

Salary sacrificing guidance

The Internal Revenue Commission (IRC) of PNG provides the following guidance³⁴ on salary sacrificing for school fees:

- The employee can assign up to a maximum of 40 percent of their annual pre-tax salary to pay for school fees
- School fees can only be for the employee's legal dependents – biological or adopted children
- They must be paid by the employer directly to the educational institution and the receipt must be issued in the name of the employer
- Only school fees from prep to year 12 are covered
- The salary sacrifice arrangement must be shown in the contract of employment or a policy document
- Under these conditions, the school fees are exempt from tax under Section 29(1)(l) of the Income Tax Act

Good practice example: Salary sacrificing

Many of the participating companies allow their employees to salary sacrifice, although there is significant confusion among employees about the rules on this. In their policies, many of the companies explicitly restrict salary sacrificing for school fees only and do not allow employees to salary sacrifice for childcare fees. However, some employees believe they can use salary sacrifice to pay for childcare fees. Many companies place limitations on accessing this benefit, including an employee's length of time in their employment and whether the parents are biological or adoptive. Some employees say they are only allowed to salary sacrifice for one child, while others say they can do it to cover the school fees of multiple children. The most common employee complaints about this system are that it discriminates against working parents who have no biological connection to their dependent child and that it does not help working parents with younger children.

Good practice example: Financial support for childcare fees – Steamships Trading Company

Steamships allows its employees to request a salary advance to help cover the cost of childcare fees. Any advance is at the discretion of the General Manager in consultation with the employee's manager. This is to ensure the company has full oversight of who receives the advance and how much they receive. Preference is given to employees who show a commitment to the company. The employee must also have accrued enough leave to cover the advance payment.

Transportation support is popular, but there are logistical barriers

Transportation support was the third most popular support option, selected by 38 percent of the survey respondents. However, there are significant barriers to employers being able to safely provide this type of support. Although more than a third of the survey respondents from Port Moresby made this selection, many of the research participants believe that the security and traffic situation in the city makes implementing this solution almost impossible.

Working parents worry about who would be responsible for protecting their children while they are using the transport service. Human resource managers and other managers raise concerns about their company's legal responsibility in the event of an accident or injury to a child while they are being transported. Many of the research participants ask where companies would find suitable vehicles and qualified drivers they could trust with their children. Others point to the logistical difficulties of one or two company buses traveling to many schools to drop off and pick up children.

"Picking kids up all over the city – it's just not practical."

Working father

"You'd need to screen the drivers for past criminal charges and check their driving skills. You'd need to trust the drivers."

Working father

“It will be stressful for drivers to manage pick-ups and drop-offs from different homes to different schools. With the current city traffic congestion and consumption of fuel, this will all be very stressful.”

Supervisor

As shown in the next section, businesses suffer significant productivity losses because working parents are arriving late to work or leaving early to manage transportation for their children. Any workable solution that involves an employer supporting working parents with better transportation would require significant thought and advocacy around safety and regulations.

Good practice example: School bus runs – Hebou Construction

For more than five years, Hebou Construction has supported working parents with school transport. Any child of an employee, up to grade 12, can come with their parent to the workplace in the morning. There they board a company bus which takes them to their school gate. These school runs go all over Port Moresby. At the end of the school day, the bus collects them and brings them back to meet their parents at work.

“Most of our staff start work at 7.30 in the morning. Many of them were arriving late because they were busy taking their children to school. Or their children were not even going to school. We introduced this bus service to ensure our staff could get to work on time. It also saves our staff some money.”

Rebecca Luluaki, Group HR Manager, Hebou Construction

Flexible working arrangements are also popular, but there are logistical barriers

From the potential solutions that employers could consider introducing to help working parents better balance their work and childcare responsibilities, flexible working arrangements were a popular choice among employees. In total, 38 percent of the survey respondents selected this option. For some managers, this arrangement would help shift from a time-based approach to work to one that focuses on performance outputs.

“I’ve been a big supporter of flexible working hours. Organizations should be driven by output not locked into a mentality of how much time you spend. Maybe a single employee with no children can come in at seven in the morning and they can do that Monday to Friday every week. But the parent might have to wake up the kids, get them ready, make their lunches, take them to school. She may come in fifty minutes late. This becomes their daily routine. And what do we do? We cut their pay. But we could say, you’ll get the same pay, but you need to work at home. The objective might be that emails from today must be responded to today. That means this person can manage their work time around their children. That’s not a bad employee. The bad employee is the guy who comes in at 7:30 every morning and reads the newspaper for an hour. Whereas the mother rushes in sweating, soaked from the rain, her umbrella and slippers broken. She’s on the laptop non-stop. My thinking is, let’s make a deal here – you give them both flexible hours and both have to be objective driven.”

Male manager

Working from home is one way that flexibility can be introduced into a business. Based on discussions about flexible working arrangements, this is clearly the way that the majority of working parents understand this option. They say this should not be difficult to implement because many of their employers required them to work at home during COVID-19. However, they also point out that while this arrangement appears to offer flexibility, in practice it can add more stress because there are barriers to being as productive at home as they are in the workplace.

Many employees do not have a stable internet or power connection in their homes or do not have a designated space where they can concentrate on their work without distraction.

“Sure, if you have been given a laptop and a phone, then it’s easy for you to work from home. But if you don’t have those resources, which most of the workers don’t have, then it’s not going to work. It’s only usually at the manager level where they’re given a laptop to use and a smartphone so they can easily hotspot. But not general workers.”

Human Resources Manager

Some roles, such as those that require the worker to interact in person with customers or where the worker physically needs to be on a work site, are not suitable for working from home. High levels of domestic and family sexual violence in PNG also mean that for many, home is not a safe space. Being out of the home and at a workplace may be something they prefer as this gives them some downtime from violence and in some cases, a safe space outside the home.

More conversations are needed to address the concerns and barriers

Throughout the research, employees and managers expressed interest in identifying ways to provide additional support that is realistic and inclusive to help working parents balance work and childcare responsibilities. The key requests were:

- Childcare support options should recognize and uphold the diverse family structures in PNG
- When considering what support options will work, a business should not ignore safety (transportation and personal security) and infrastructure challenges, especially in urban areas
- It is important to include working fathers as beneficiaries of childcare support
- There is a need to consider how childcare support will impact all employees, including those who do not have children
- The availability and uptake of any childcare supports need to be clearly communicated so there are consistent responses to requests for support and a shared understanding throughout the workforce about how childcare support is accessed and managed

- Working parents should commit to not misusing childcare support. They should also expect to contribute to the costs.



Good practice example: Bring Your Child to Work Day – Steamships Trading Company corporate office

In October 2022, employees were invited to bring their children to the office for the last hour of the workday. This was an idea that came through Steamship’s social committee as part of the company’s push for greater family inclusion. The company allocated a room where they set up mats, gaming consoles, TVs, food, and drinks. Working parents were asked in advance about any food allergies and about what activities they wanted their kids to do while they were in the office. This was a new initiative, and some employees were shocked to see so many children around the workplace. However, there were three designated staff members to supervise the children. The children had an opportunity to walk around the office and see their parents’ work environment. This was the first event of its kind for the company, and it was held in its head office. Steamships is discussing plans to extend the social committees to its other operations and to have more of these family inclusion days.

“Last year we had a bring your child to work day. Kids from three years old and up to around 12. They are here saying, mom, dad, this is where you work! It’s like they get closer to understanding – oh, this is what mom and dad do all day! If we could have something like this every day, they can come here to play and learn, instead of watching TV. It helps the kids mentally. And we can get on with our work!”

Britney Aitsi, Acting Head of HR, Steamships Corporation



Good practice example: Tuhava International School – Rhodes PNG Limited

Rhodes PNG built the Tuhava International School as part of its Equity, Diversity and Gender Equality (EDGE) certification gender action plan. Based in Roku village in the Central Province of PNG, it operates Monday to Friday between 8:00 AM and 2:30 PM with five full-time staff. The company’s strategy was to commence with a few classrooms and to expand organically over time. There are currently three classrooms – one for a combined nursery and Kindergarten and two for school-aged children between two and Grade 6. The school also houses a small library and there are plans to build a computer lab.

All company employees as well as other parents in the local community can enroll their children in the school. Parents are required to pay a fee, while some subsidies are also available. Around 80 students currently attend and due to high demand, Rhodes PNG is looking to extend this to over 100 by 2025 by adding two more classrooms and accepting children up to Grade 8. For Kindergarten, playtime is mixed with activities for learning reading and writing, numbers, and colors. The other grades follow the national education curriculum.

“It’s a small school only in its second year of operation. The school is doing great. I have seen great improvements in my daughter after the first term. She’s only two and a half years old, but she is getting the hang of the school routine. She can recite her alphabet, count her numbers from one to 10, and recognize the alphabet, numbers, and colors confidently. She can also sound out the letters of the alphabet. The school is headed in the right direction and can do more with the right support given.”

Working mother at Rhodes PNG Limited

Collaboration with a business operator that is deeply rooted in the local community has allowed Rhodes PNG to take a hands-off approach to the school’s operation. The company funded the construction of the school, but the operator is responsible for its daily management.

Staff members with children at the school appreciate the reduced costs, convenience, and safety that the school provides. In the past, their children had to make daily treks, sometimes along poorly maintained and unsafe roads to travel to and from school in Port Moresby. Parents carried concerns for their children into the workplace. With the Tuhava International Primary School operating so close to their village in the Tuhava Town township, they no longer have these concerns. It also means parents and children no longer have to start their days very early to allow time to get to school and work.³⁵

Case study: EDAl childcare center

Edai Town is a mixed township development that includes residential, commercial, and light industrial buildings. It covers 155 hectares of land approximately 20 kilometers from Port Moresby. At the time of writing, around 400 homes have been completed, housing approximately 2,000 people in the first housing estate, Edai Centro. The full residential development will comprise three housing estates that will house up to 2,000 families, with a projected local population of 10,000 people.

In February 2020, Edai Christian School (ECS) was officially opened in the town. The following year, the affiliated Edai Christian School Early Learning Education Hub was also opened to support younger children as they transition into primary education. The Early Learning Education Hub can accommodate up to 20 students who are aged four or five. Its normal hours of operation are Monday to Friday between 8:00 AM and 2:30 PM.

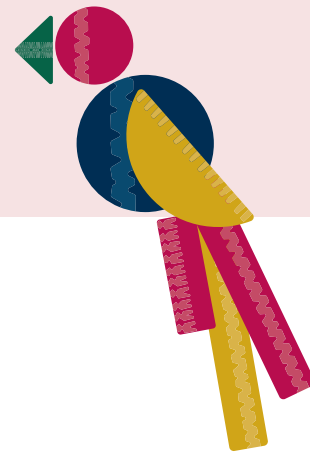
The majority of the current cohort of students are residents of Edai Town. The hub provides these children with a safe learning environment in which they can develop literacy and numeracy skills. For parents, there is peace of mind that their children do not have to travel long distances between their home and school.

"I am very proud of my son. He can count to 10 and back, and is able to identify sounds of letters. Compared to his previous school, he couldn't do this."

"My child's behavior has greatly improved and he's excited to go to school every day. When I asked him why, he answered 'Dad! Because I am learning new things through playing, singing, dancing, drawing, and coloring'."

"I was amazed when my 4-year-old daughter was able to recognize and pronounce some of the words. She's also beginning to read."

Quotes from parents of children who attend the Edai Christian School Early Learning Education Hub





4. Recommendations

4.1. General Recommendations

Since 2017, IFC's series of Tackling Childcare reports spanning more than 20 countries, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Jordan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam, shows that family-friendly workplace policies such as childcare, flexible work, and paid leave can enable firms to attract and retain talent, and boost productivity and profits. Such policies can also enable more working parents, particularly women, to realize their income-earning potential, and enable more children to be healthier and more productive as adults. Hence, childcare can result in a win-win-win for families, employers, and economies.³⁶

Through research and collaborations with companies worldwide, IFC has identified a range of childcare solutions that work for employers and employees. Many of these solutions could help address the childcare concerns and needs of working parents in PNG. In addition to specific recommendations that emerge from this research, and which are presented in the next few pages of this report, this section also includes some general good practice solutions that businesses operating in PNG can consider.

Flexible working arrangements

Flexible work arrangements give employees more options and more control concerning when and where they work. Examples of effective flexible arrangements include:

Allowing employees to change their start and finish times by up to one hour. There is no overall impact on the total number of hours worked each day. Working parents may find this helps them better manage school runs and care for their children depending on the availability of the primary carer.

After giving birth, working mothers can be offered a gradual return to work program that allows them to work shorter days for a limited period as they manage their infant's care and nutritional needs.

Job-sharing can appeal to working parents who want to spend more time with their children while also maintaining a role in the workforce where they can continue applying their professional skills and keep up to date with changes in work technologies and practices.

Parental leave entitlements

There is currently no legal requirement for private sector businesses to offer paid parental leave in PNG. Stakeholder consultations recently carried out by the PNG CLRC show there is overwhelming support for a change to the Employment Act (1978) to introduce paid maternity leave. Parental leave entitlements can help improve the health of children and the relationship between the children and their parents. They also allow businesses to maintain skilled workers.

Gender-neutral parental leave benefits allow parents to make decisions about who takes parental leave based on their family circumstances and preferences. It encourages shared parenting.

Businesses can increase the beneficial impacts of parental leave entitlements simply by making them more flexible. Parents may wish to take this leave intermittently during the first few months after the birth of a child rather than having to take it in one block. Allowing parents to access some of the leave prenatally can be useful when there are pregnancy complications or when parents need additional time to prepare for the arrival of their child.

Some of the businesses that participated in this research already offer paid parental leave. In its Maternity Protection Convention 2000 (No. 183), the International Labour Organization (ILO) recommends that maternity leave should be a minimum of 14 weeks.³⁷

Adapting to modern parenting and childhood

Around the world and in PNG, families and childhood experiences are changing. There is no single type of family. Technology is impacting children in ways that fundamentally alter how they develop. To meet these challenges, there is a need for diverse childcare solutions.

Employers should support the role of men as caregivers. This means ensuring they have parental leave entitlements, including paid time off after the birth of a child and additional flexibility to attend prenatal visits or look after sick children. Training can help working fathers understand the positive role they can play in the development of their children and create gender equality in their families. Creating a respectful workplace can also help eliminate any harassment that working fathers may face if they choose to take time off to be more involved in the care of their children.

Training sessions can help parents adapt to modern parenting. These sessions might cover topics such as positive parenting, good nutrition practices, effective ways to stimulate children outside the world of social media, and how to talk to older children about sensitive issues such as bullying and sexuality.

Filling unplanned gaps in childcare

Working parents cannot always plan their childcare needs. They may be faced with unexpected situations such as when their child's usual carer is sick or does not turn up. Their childcare needs are also not always the same every day. School holidays can be particularly challenging for parents because their children require supervision for much longer each day.

Introducing solutions for emergency childcare can help parents manage the unexpected. Employers may be able to secure a few spaces in a nearby childcare center that can be used by their employees for a limited time in emergencies. They can provide training to a small group of carers who can be on call to cover for absent carers. Providing a space for employees to work beside their children can mean parents can be productive at work instead of having to spend time searching for a backup carer. Emergency childcare is a popular option among the working parents who participated in this research.

Having to arrange childcare when children are not in school can be difficult and expensive. Here, employers can consider offering additional subsidies for parents to place their children in daycare centers. They can work with external providers to set up holiday activities where children can be occupied and supervised while their parents are at work. Flexible working arrangements can also be applied during these times to allow parents to reduce their work hours or telecommute.

4.2. PNG Specific Recommendations

FINDING 1: Most parents (88 percent) are comfortable with their current childcare arrangement. However, they recognize there is a lack of alternative options that are accessible, affordable, and safe.

► RECOMMENDATION 1

Explore options for different childcare arrangements that businesses can offer and that meet the needs of working parents.

- Conduct a business-wide childcare demand assessment by surveying employees on what alternative childcare arrangements and family-friendly workplace policies would best help them.
- Run workshops with working parents to determine the most appropriate childcare arrangements and family-friendly workplace policies for a particular workforce.
- Provide a facility such as a childcare center or after-school space, which is likely to be a welcome solution for many working parents. This could be an onsite facility or one near the workplace. It could be offered in partnership with other local businesses.
- Liaise with childcare service providers to discuss what arrangements would help to ensure employees have access to available spaces.

FINDING 2: Most parents (86 percent) rely on a family member to care for their children while they are at work. While parents appreciate this support, 89 percent of working parents also identified concerns about how their child is being treated, if they are safe, what they are eating, and how their behaviors are being managed.

► RECOMMENDATION 2

Run childcare information sessions for people who care for employees' children.

- Ask working parents what topics would best improve the knowledge and skills of the people who care for their children.
- Cover topics that have been identified as main concerns for working parents of preschool children – nutrition, child safety, discipline, and early learning.

- Cover topics that have been identified as main concerns for working parents of school children – managing bullying and peer pressure, social media, use of technology, and teenage behaviors.
- Include sessions that cover contractual arrangements between parents and carers to help strengthen expectations and commitments around caring for the child for both parties.
- Consider the best times to run these sessions to maximize attendance (for example, as part of a family fun day or a bring your children to work day).
- Consider offering transportation for caregivers to attend these sessions.
- Consider offering childcare support during the sessions so attendees can focus on learning.
- Provide working parents with access to counseling services so they can discuss individual concerns they have about their role as parents and how to care for their children (for example, postnatal stress or depression, financial stress, and a child's behaviors). These services may be available through the employer's existing employee assistance program or may need to be sourced via a specialist in the field of parenting.
- Consider offering these counseling services as part of the business' wider commitment to employee mental health and wellbeing.

FINDING 3: Many parents (78 percent) face challenges finding childcare especially when their child is sick or during work hours when their children are not attending school. For some, bringing their child to work is their only backup option.

► RECOMMENDATION 3

Explore options for emergency childcare support.

- Depending on the type of emergency and the age of the child, the following arrangements could be considered:
 - Agree with a local childcare provider for emergency care when needed.
 - Allocate a room inside the workplace where working parents can work while their children are with them or where their children can be supervised by a carer.
 - Make laptops and internet dongles available for parents to

work temporarily from home.

- In all scenarios, businesses may wish to place a limit on the amount of emergency care that is available and set the expectation that employees need to make alternative arrangements if their usual caregiver is expected to be unavailable for a long time.
- Offer school holiday programs for employees' children.

FINDING 4: Working mothers face significant barriers in sustaining what would otherwise be their preferred practice of exclusive breastfeeding.

► RECOMMENDATION 4

Engage external partners to help create a workable plan for mothers who are breastfeeding.

- The external partner can facilitate discussions with new mothers to identify what approach to breastfeeding will work for them.
- While breastfeeding rooms have not always been effective in PNG, some parents may want to try this option. To maximize the success of a breastfeeding room in the workplace, the location and set-up must be carefully considered, paying attention to security, cleanliness, the availability of facilities, the storage of the milk, and the transportation of the baby.
- A business' breastfeeding plan may need to offer different practical solutions, including transportation assistance and new or improved facilities in the workplace. Mothers may want or need different support for breastfeeding depending on the location and age of their child.
- Working mothers may also benefit from access to external experts who can offer onsite lactation consultations to provide advice on breastfeeding issues such as milk extraction and storage.

FINDING 5: Childcare responsibilities have a significant impact on work productivity, with working parents – mothers and fathers – regularly turning up for work late or needing to leave work early (61 percent) or taking a full day off (47 percent).

► **RECOMMENDATION 5**

Strengthen human resources systems to track the costs linked to absenteeism and turnover and to measure improvements resulting from childcare support initiatives.

- Conduct a business-wide childcare impact assessment by surveying employees on how much time they take off from work or how often they feel distracted while at work due to childcare responsibilities. Use the results as a baseline. It is important this assessment is anonymized so that individual employees do not fear the risk of retaliation for taking time off.
- Companies that participated in the research discussed in this report can use the individual results provided to them.
- Review the results at set intervals (for example, three, then six months after completing the baseline) to identify any improvements (such as reduced productivity losses).
- Provide regular analysis of the results to management.³⁸

FINDING 6: The impacts of a lack of childcare on work are higher for parents of children with disabilities and for single parents.

► **RECOMMENDATION 6**

Engage external partners to review and advise on how childcare policies and initiatives can be more inclusive.

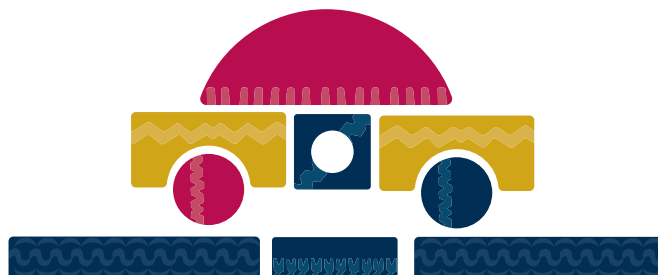
- Consider providing additional support for parents of children with disabilities and single parents.
- Subscribe to support services and organizations that can provide support to employees who are experiencing specific problems (such as Bel isi, BCFW, or local counseling services).

FINDING 7: Working mothers are more likely than working fathers to leave a job (12 percent compared with 6 percent), refuse a promotion (8 percent compared with 6 percent), or turn down a job offer (14 percent compared with 8 percent) because they are unable to balance the workload with their childcare responsibilities.

► **RECOMMENDATION 7**

Strengthen gender-sensitive support to help employees meet job expectations.

- Incorporate gender-sensitivity training into all supervisor and management training programs.
- Conduct gender-sensitive assessments of job roles to identify differences in the challenges that women and men might face in carrying out required tasks.
- Ensure all company events and training sessions factor in the needs of women and men so there is equity in the opportunity to attend.
- Where possible, consider alternatives to travel for parents of preschool children (such as online meetings or video conferencing) and offer support for these parents when travel is required (for example, by covering the costs of transport for the child or providing support to find temporary childcare).
- Introduce a return-to-work program that provides flexibility in work times and tasks for new parents.



4.3. Lack Of Structured Company Policies Or Support

FINDING 8: Working parents generally feel they are well supported by their managers, supervisors, and colleagues. However, this support is most often informal and depends on the goodwill and mood of individual managers and supervisors.

► RECOMMENDATION 8

Strengthen protocols on how to request and approve requests for time away from the workplace to deal with childcare matters.

- The protocols should provide clear and consistent guidance to supervisors and managers on what to do when an employee requests time off to fulfil childcare responsibilities. The protocols should:
 - Describe how the business expects to cover for absent employees, including when the absence is unexpected.
 - Provide guidance on how to communicate an employee's absence and coverage arrangements to the team.

FINDING 9: Most businesses lack formalized policies on childcare support and formalized protocols on how childcare support should be administered.

► RECOMMENDATION 9

Introduce, formalize, or strengthen family-friendly policies.

- Adopt a comprehensive, flexible work policy that promotes an output-based model of employment.
- Adopt a policy around absenteeism that covers employees' responsibilities to communicate reasons for time away from work and provides options for how employees can make up for this time or access leave benefits.
- Consider adopting other family-friendly policies that cover superannuation entitlements during parental leave and provide employees with access to savings and loan support.
- Find multiple ways to communicate family-friendly policies and benefits (for example, during onboarding, through notice boards, intranet, toolbox talks, and posters).
- Encourage managers to role model the uptake of entitlements in these policies, especially parental leave for male managers.

FINDING 10: When managers and supervisors agree to a parent's request for time off for childcare, this is often not communicated to their whole team. This makes it difficult to manage workloads and maintain team morale.

► RECOMMENDATION 10

Strengthen protocols on how to manage a situation when an employee is unexpectedly absent from the workplace to deal with a childcare matter.

- Have a display board or use an online team management tool to show who is temporarily absent and their expected time of return to provide team members with visibility of changing situations in workflow and resources.
- In busy workplaces, "roving workers" can be employed to cover for any unplanned and temporary absences.
- Aim to reduce some of the reasons for working parents to be absent by running family days for healthcare and immunizations.
- Explore transportation options to assist parents who need to take time away from the workplace during the day to attend to a childcare matter. This may help reduce the time they are away from the workplace.

FINDING 11: Paid parental leave for workers in the private sector is not mandated under PNG law, but some businesses offer either maternity and/or paternity leave. In some cases, this is paid leave.

► RECOMMENDATION 11

Enhance maternity, paternity, and parental leave.

- Consider offering the ILO recommended minimum entitlement of 14 weeks of paid maternity leave.³⁹ This should be a starting point, with the aim of increasing the length of paid maternity leave over time.
- Explore ways to encourage working fathers to take time off work after the birth of a child. This may include ensuring men can access any flexible work arrangements. It should include introducing some paid parental leave.
- Allow any primary carer, regardless of their gender, to access paid parental leave to avoid differentiating on eligibility due to gender.

- Allow employees to accumulate annual leave in anticipation of the birth or adoption of a child.
- Accommodate the diverse family structures in PNG, by discussing with employees how to best ensure there is some level of paid parental leave in the case of taking on responsibility for the care of non-biological children.

FINDING 12: There is increasing recognition of the important role that fathers have in contributing to the development and childcare needs of their children. However, compared with working mothers working fathers are almost twice as likely to say they get no support at all from their managers or supervisors.

► RECOMMENDATION 12

Enhance the inclusion of working fathers in family-friendly policies and activities.

- Consider using gender-neutral terms in policies (such as parent).
- Run training programs aimed at improving the childcare knowledge and practical skills of fathers.
- Create mentor programs for new fathers.
- Ensure new fathers have access to family-friendly policies and flexible working arrangements.

FINDING 13: Working parents worry that their employer will introduce restrictive childcare policies. They seek childcare support from their employers that is based on individual needs and respectful of their diverse family situations. This includes support for working parents whose dependent children are not their birth children.

► RECOMMENDATION 13

For any childcare support initiative under consideration, engage a diverse range of working parents to review and assess the likelihood that they will benefit from this support.

- For eligibility, consider the definition of “dependent child” to align with the one used in this research (see page 13).
- Engage external partners to provide guidance on how to support working parents who are responsible for children with disabilities.
- Create a parents’ association in the business that provides

opportunities for parents to discuss their experiences of balancing work with childcare, to work together on challenging issues, and to make recommendations for business initiatives to support working parents.

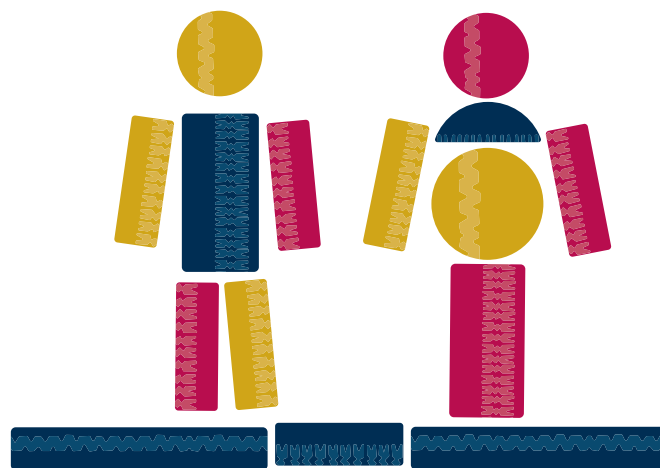
- Run family days and other family-oriented events that are inclusive of all family types.

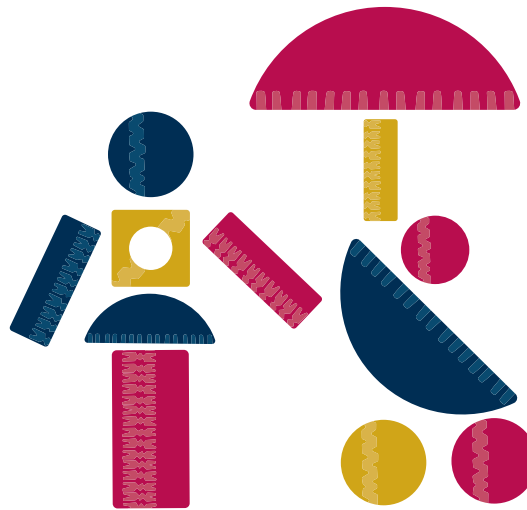
FINDING 14: Managers want to better understand how they can monitor any childcare support they offer to ensure it has real benefits for both working parents and business productivity.

► RECOMMENDATION 14

Strengthen human resources systems for monitoring and evaluating the impacts of childcare on workplace productivity and employee wellbeing.

- Add questions to employee surveys to monitor the needs, challenges, and effective solutions for working parents.
- Engage external organizations to provide information sessions and training to managers on understanding the business case for diversity and inclusion in the workforce.
- Include regular discussions on actions to improve childcare support for employees and the impacts of these actions in managers’ meetings.





4.4. Support From External Parties

FINDING 15: Given the numerous difficulties in providing accessible and affordable childcare, as well as Papua New Guinea’s cultural diversity, a multi-stakeholder collaboration will be crucial in identifying the best solutions.

► RECOMMENDATION 15

External organizations should strengthen the services they offer to employers that support employees with childcare responsibilities and advocate for changes to the legislation.

- Develop mental health awareness-raising and training for the private sector to improve employers’ understanding of the importance and benefits of creating mentally healthy workplaces.
- Expand the publication and dissemination of materials relating to health and early childhood education to the private sector.

- Offer a training module on managing the childcare needs of employees, targeting human resources personnel.
- Provide guidance to employers on the minimum standards for operating a childcare center and providing transportation for children.
- Review the Employment Act (1978) with the aim of introducing paid parental leave and workable breastfeeding entitlements.
- Establish a regulatory framework for childcare services for children under the age of four. (The new National Education Plan 2020-2029 only proposes to establish Kindergarten for children aged four and five.)
- Review tax laws with the aim of extending salary sacrificing to cover fees for the care of preschool children.
- Support research into opportunities for the private sector to enhance its contributions to improving child nutrition and education.



Annex A: Research Methodology

The research aimed to understand the childcare arrangements, needs, and preferences of employees working in the private sector in PNG. Through surveying and talking directly to a large sample size of working parents, we set about establishing a clear picture of the difficulties that working parents in PNG face as they try to balance their childcare responsibilities with their work commitments. By exploring the impacts of their childcare responsibilities on their time spent at work and their ability to concentrate while at work, the research sought to estimate the costs to businesses in PNG that are linked to lost productivity due to childcare, and to build the business case for better collaboration between employers and their workers on managing childcare, for the benefit of businesses, working parents and their colleagues, and children.

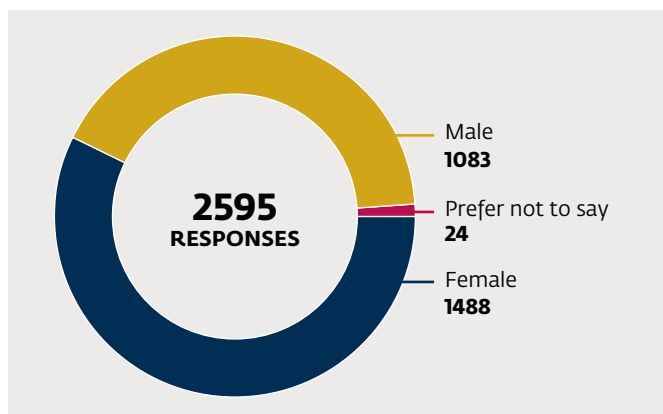
Key questions the research sought to answer:

- What are the current childcare arrangements, needs, and preferences for employees working in the private sector in PNG?
- What good practices do private sector employers in PNG currently have in place to support the childcare needs of their employees?
- What are the estimated costs to private sector employers in PNG due to the childcare responsibilities of their employees?
- What additional good practices could private sector employers in PNG adopt to better support the childcare needs of their employees?

Research methods

The research adopted a mixed-method assessment of the current childcare needs and practices of businesses and their employees.

EMPLOYEE SURVEY



The employee survey targeted all employees of the 29 participating companies. Each company was sent a unique link to share with all employees who could complete the survey online. The companies could offer their employees the option of completing a paper-based copy of the survey and completed surveys were then entered into the results database by the research team. In-person enumeration was also conducted in 15 of the companies. The survey asked questions about current childcare arrangements and concerns, the impacts of childcare on work performance, and preferred types of childcare support.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions were organized according to gender and the age of children (preschool and school).

402 participants (270 women and 132 men) across 77 groups

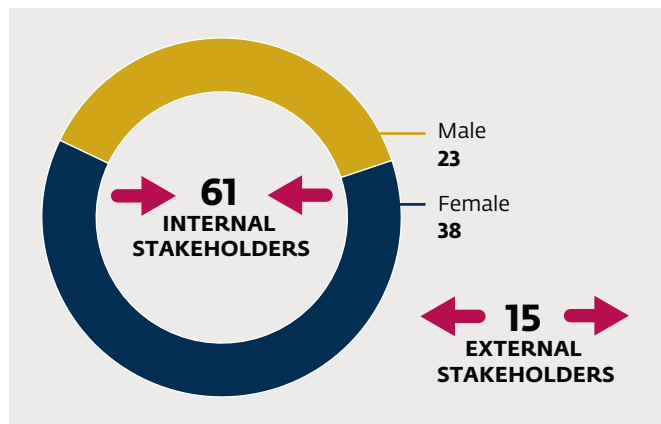
Gender	Count	Percentage
Working fathers - Preschool	12	15.6%
Working mothers - Preschool	23	29.9%
Working fathers - School	10	13%
Working mothers - School	17	22.1%

An additional 15 discussion groups were conducted with workers with no dependent children.

Through various group activities, working parents explored in more detail the concerns they have about their current childcare arrangements; how various types of employer-supported childcare solutions might benefit them, and how childcare responsibilities affect them both personally and professionally.

The purpose of holding discussions with non-parents was to explore how they are impacted by the childcare responsibilities of their colleagues.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS



Internal staff who were interviewed included company executive officers, senior managers, human resources personnel, diversity and inclusion officers, workplace clinic staff, and supervisors and team leaders. They were asked to share their ideas on good practices for supporting employees with childcare responsibilities; gaps in this kind of support from companies in PNG; known impacts of childcare on business performance; and attitudes towards implementing solutions to help employees manage their childcare responsibilities.

External stakeholders were targeted for an interview based on their interest and experience in working on childcare and gender issues in PNG to help gain a broader understanding of the childcare landscape.

BUSINESS COSTS SURVEY

Each company was asked to complete a business cost survey that provided additional data on the number of employees, their salaries, and their working hours. Of the 29 participating companies, 18 provided data that could be used to calculate the economic impact of childcare responsibilities of employees on business productivity.

VALIDATION WORKSHOPS

Towards the end of the research period, two validation workshops were held with external stakeholders and representatives of the participating companies. During these workshops, the research team presented the preliminary results of the research and facilitated some discussions and activities to explore the early findings in more detail.

Limitations

Despite initial attempts with some of the larger participating companies to apply statistical random sampling for the employee survey, logistically this was extremely difficult to achieve. Many of the companies have operations in remote locations and many of the employees in these locations do not have access to computers, email, cell phones, or a reliable internet connection. In the cases of randomly selected employees with low literacy levels, in-person enumeration would have been required. In addition, the companies could not guarantee the availability of randomly selected employees due to variances in work shifts and locations, and sometimes outdated employment records.

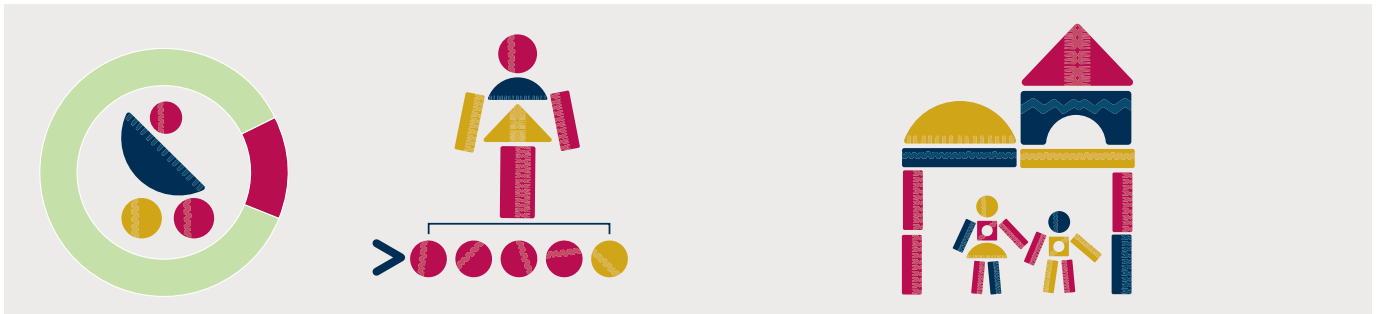
The survey was, therefore, issued to all employees of participating companies, or to at least as many employees as the enumeration team and business managers could reach within the survey period. This survey period was extended to allow time for the research team to work closely with each company's contact person to plan and implement an enumeration schedule and approach that would best suit their business model and employee availability.

A 20 percent survey participation rate was set as the minimum standard for a company to achieve for its data to be included in the research results. Of the 29 participating companies, 21 achieved this rate. For many of the companies, especially those with a large employee base, the participation rate was much larger than the proportion that would have been required for a random sample. We can reasonably expect this to mitigate some of the bias associated with non-random sampling.

While we would expect some degree of self-selection bias in any survey with voluntary participation, for this research we anticipate that employees in remote locations are likely to be somewhat under-represented in the data since they were difficult to reach.



Annex B: The Childcare Landscape in PNG



- Children under 5 make up approximately **12%** of the population in PNG.
- On average, women in PNG will have **3.1 children**. In the highlands, the average is more than five.⁴⁰
- There are at least **1,128 early childhood education centers** teaching 75,600 children.⁴¹
- The gross enrollment rate for early childhood education is 45.9%. 45.4% for girls and 46.2% for boys.⁴²

Accessibility

Most early childhood education centers are privately run. Many are expensive, and those that are free of charge have limited spaces.⁴³ Most centers are in urban areas. In rural areas, there is limited transportation, and some children must walk several hours each way to attend.⁴⁴ Childcare centers across PNG are often only open for part of the day, meaning that working parents need to make additional childcare arrangements for the hours when they are still at work.⁴⁵

Regulation

Under the Lukautim Pikinini Act (2015), there are some requirements for licensing of persons in charge of a crèche, day nursery, or baby/child minding center. However, there is no centralized system for the delivery of early childhood education. This results in the creation of very different curricula, varying levels of care, and inconsistent management across learning centers. Government and church education service providers appear to work in parallel rather than together and there is concern that this creates a missed opportunity to strengthen the sector.⁴⁶ Through a commitment to strengthen early childhood education, the PNG government has introduced standards for operating a learning center and training requirements for teachers. These standards do not apply to facilities that care for children under the age of three.

Quality

The quality of childcare is inconsistent and varies greatly across the different types of childcare options. Early childhood education and care centers often lack the resources, including electricity and internet access, they need to care adequately for

children or to teach them well.⁴⁷ While some early childhood teachers receive training, this is generally offered on an ad hoc basis by private organizations⁴⁸ and many may offer no training to their staff.⁴⁹ The International Education Agency College of TAFE offers two certificate courses in Early Childhood Education and Care. However, formal training linked to any certification is not required to work in an early childhood center. When community and family members are looking after children under informal arrangements, this responsibility often falls to young women. Many have low levels of education and lack experience in caring for children. One study found that women with university-level education had higher percentages of malnourished children than women who had only obtained primary school education. This is because more highly-educated mothers were more likely to be engaged in full-time employment and therefore often engage young and inexperienced women to take care of their children.⁵⁰

Values

As most childcare centers are affiliated with religious institutions, this leaves few options for parents who would prefer a secular early childhood education. Village life in PNG is conducive to a dynamic education. Children learn about their natural environment through playing outside. They learn social dynamics through their everyday interactions with relatives and extended family members. They learn about responsibility and discipline through helping with chores. They also learn about traditional customs and rituals by participating in village events. A Western-centric approach to childcare risks eroding the sense of community and strong traditional contexts of village life as it relies on outsourcing the care and education

of a child to somebody who may not know and who may not understand the culture of the child's family. This can result in unintentional undermining of traditional relationships and cultural norms. Parents and members of the child's extended family may feel they are playing an increasingly insignificant role in their development. Some may start to neglect core responsibilities such as feeding. While some early childhood education programs actively encourage parent involvement, few consider natural and cultural settings, and the traditional childrearing contexts of the communities they service.⁵¹

Challenges for Working Mothers

Women in PNG face societal and cultural pressure to bear children. They typically experience a heavy and unequal workload of domestic responsibilities, including being responsible for almost all childrearing activities.

“The majority of the childcare responsibilities – or almost all the childcare responsibilities – rest with the women. If you have both parents working, it's usually the wife who will go late to work. She will be the first one to wake up in the morning, trying to organize the kids if they're going to be dropped off at daycare. Even if children are going to be at home with relatives, she still needs to organise the breakfast and handing over to the caregiver before she walks out the door. If the child is sick, it's usually the mother who takes the child to the clinic and who end up missing a day or two of work and hence having her pay cut. All these responsibilities are seen as being for women. And unfortunately, women have to bear all the burden and suffer all the consequences.”

External stakeholder

At the same time, many women feel pressure to provide financially to ensure their family's day-to-day needs are met.⁵²

In general, men in PNG do not take part in childcare responsibilities or, at best, provide only limited help. However, there are some indicators that this situation may be changing. In this research, some working fathers give examples of the contributions they make to childcare, mostly relating to transporting children to and from school. Some fathers also express a wish to participate more in the raising of their children.

In cases where maternity leave is not available, women often return to work while their babies are still very young so they can earn enough money to provide for their families. Under PNG's Employment Act (1978), women who are still breastfeeding their child are allowed a paid absence of half an hour twice a day during working hours. However, a lack of childcare facilities on or near worksites means women can spend most of their allowed time traveling to and from the location of their baby. Often, a woman's employment responsibilities are incompatible with optimal mother-infant contact, and this can lead to issues such as inadequate food for the baby or difficulties adjusting the milk supply to the mother's working schedule.⁵³

The lack of formal childcare support is a significant barrier to women in PNG participating fully in the workplace. For women in employment, the lack of childcare can lead to high rates of absenteeism and low productivity. This can impact the earning capacity of women as time off from work is typically unpaid.⁵⁴



Annex C: Calculating Cost to Business

This section outlines the methodology used to calculate the business costs associated with childcare responsibilities. It provides a summary of the losses for each of the three categories of impact – absenteeism, lateness, and distraction.⁵⁵

Estimated losses

The productivity loss from feeling distracted was calculated using a multiplier of one hour. For example, if someone reported feeling distracted once in the past four weeks, they are assumed to have lost one hour of productivity at work. For someone who reported feeling distracted four times in the same period, they are assumed to have lost the equivalent of four hours of work over that period. On average each employee loses 0.18 days every four weeks due to being distracted. This is the equivalent of 1,516 lost workdays in a four-week period across the 18 companies that participated in the business costs component of the survey.

Staff who reported being late, having to step out, or having to leave early due to childcare responsibilities, are assumed to have lost one hour per reported incident. Using this assumption, if all staff across the 18 companies are affected the same way as the sample size, then each employee loses 0.21 workdays every four weeks, or the equivalent of 1,796 total workdays lost across all employees in a four-week period due to short absences associated with childcare.

The survey also asked parents about how often they were absent due to childcare responsibilities in the previous four weeks. This figure was substantially higher, with each employee missing 0.70 workdays every four weeks, with an estimated 6,093 days of work lost across the 18 companies.

Table 1: Estimated person days lost due to feeling distracted due to childcare responsibilities

	Once	Twice	Three	Four	Five	Six or more ⁵⁶	Total
Assuming 1 hour discount due to distraction (a1)	1	2	3	4	5	11.2	-
Number of survey participants reporting feeling distracted due to childcare issues (b1)	217	250	200	110	156	98	1,031
Number of days lost due to distraction = (a1 x b1)/8	27	63	75	55	98	138	455
Average number of days lost per employee in a four-week period due to being distracted (based on a survey sample of 2595)							0.18
Equates to 1,516 lost workdays in a four-week period							1,516

Table 2: Estimated person days lost due to staff lateness associated with childcare responsibilities

	Once	Twice	Three	Four	Five	Six or more	Total
Assuming 1 hour discount due to lateness (a2)	1	2	3	4	5	12.3	-
Number of times late due to childcare (b2)	177	208	178	126	159	158	1,006
Number of days lost due to lateness = (a2 x b2)/8	22	52	67	63	99	236	539
Average number of days lost due to lateness per employee in a four-week period (based on a survey sample of 2595)							0.21
Equates to 1,796 lost workdays in a four-week period							1,796

Table 3: Estimated person days lost due to absenteeism associated with childcare responsibilities

	Once	Twice	Three	Four	Five	Six or more	Total
Assuming 1 day discount due to absenteeism (a3)	1	2	3	4	5	9.4	-
Number of times absent due to childcare (b3)	291	250	99	70	60	17	787
Number of days lost due to staff absence = (a3 x b3)	291	500	297	280	300	160	1,828
Average number of days lost per employee in a four-week period due to absenteeism (based on a survey sample of 2595)							0.70
Equates to 6,093 lost workdays in a four-week period							6,093

The average cost to companies associated with lost work time due to childcare responsibilities was calculated by adding the total wage loss of participating companies in one year and dividing the total by the number of companies. Eighteen companies provided their average salary data and achieved a minimum of 20 percent participation rate in the employee survey. Depending on the workforce size, the total cost at each company ranges from 13,714 kina to 11,981,540 kina per year. On average, lost staff time due to childcare responsibilities costs companies 1,313,367 kina per year in total or 3,102 kina per employee.



Endnotes

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- 10 The National Education Plan 2020-2029 sets out the PNG government's plan to make ECE part of the formal education system by restructuring into a 1-6-6 structure – one year of preparatory education (preschool), six years of primary education (grades 1-6), and six years of secondary education (grades 7-12). The current education system in PNG is a 3-6-4 structure. See: Department of Education, (2020), National Education Plan 2020-2029. <http://education.gov.pg/documents/nep-final-2021-2029.pdf>, accessed October 9, 2023.
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- 14 Parents could select up to two usual caregivers. Total is therefore greater than 100 percent.
- 15 Data represented is combined to include parents that selected "very comfortable" and "somewhat comfortable".
- 16 A *pikinini meri* is similar to a babysitter. The main difference is that the former is often younger and a family's arrangement includes helping a *pikinini meri* carer to continue or return to school. There may also be a family connection – for example, she could be a niece. In both cases, a *pikinini meri* is usually expected to take on other household duties such as cooking and cleaning.
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- 23 In the context of PNG, an assumption can be made that the partner is most likely to be a person of the opposite sex.
- 24 This result is based on the parents' assessment of their child. Working parents were provided with categories of disability to select. These categories were based on questions about child disabilities endorsed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics. See <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/> for more information about the Washington Group; and Washington Group on Disability Statistics, (2016), Census Questions on Disability Endorsed by the Washington Group, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/washington_group/WG_Short_Measure_on_Disability.pdf, accessed August 21, 2023.
- 25 This excludes any children below the age of two. Parents were not requested to identify disabilities for younger children because many disabilities do not present until sufficient time has elapsed to observe and assess the child's development.
- 26 Of the 2,597 survey respondents, 70 percent answered these questions, equal to the proportion of respondents with children.
- 27 Of the participating 29 businesses in the research, 18 provided this information for the calendar year 2022. The total number of respondents from these 18 businesses is 2,383 employees, which represents 92 percent of all employees surveyed in the employee survey.
- 28 This figure calculated on a per employee (with or without children) basis and is higher if calculated on a per employee with children basis: 20.3 days lost per annum or 7.7% of working days.
- 29 The National, (July 27, 2023), "Maternity laws under review". <https://www.thenational.com.pg/maternity-laws-under-review/>, accessed October 9, 2023.
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- 31 Of the 29 businesses, 15 provided evidence of at least one policy relating to childcare, five said they did not have any such policy, and two said they did not wish to share due to confidentiality. The remaining seven did not respond to requests for copies of their childcare policies.
- 32 United Nations Population Fund, "World Population Dashboard – Papua New Guinea". <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/PNG>, accessed August 21, 2023.

- 33 For further information on the training of early childhood educators and the legal requirements for operating a childcare center in PNG, refer to the Annex B on the legal landscape for childcare in PNG.
- 34 Internal Revenue Commission, Salary Packaging. <https://irc.gov.pg/pages/taxes/businesses-and-employers/salary-packaging-guide>, accessed August 18, 2023.
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- 39 Under the Maternity Leave Convention 2000 (C183), the International Labour Organization mandates 14 weeks for working mothers with a minimum of six weeks after the birth of the child. PNG is not a signatory to this convention. The country did however ratify the previous version – Maternity Protection Convention 1952 (No. 103) – which mandated 12 weeks of paid maternity leave. See: ILO, (2000), C183 - Maternity Protection Convention, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C183, accessed August 18, 2023; and ILO, (1952), C103 - Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312248:NO, accessed August 18, 2023.
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- 56 Respondents who chose the 'six or more' response were asked to specify the exact number of times. The average of 'exact number of times' for this question was used as the multiplier to improve accuracy.





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