

**Pregnancy Discrimination and Returning to Work.  
Relevant material from two surveys of the architecture  
profession: ‘Where do all the women go?’ and ‘And what  
about the men?’**

*Equity and diversity in the Australian architecture profession:  
women, work and leadership  
Australian Research Council linkage project (2011–2014)*

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: women, equity, architecture.

## **Background, credits and acknowledgements**

The research project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: women, work and leadership' (2011–2014) is funded by the Australian Research Council through the Linkage Projects scheme.

The project has five industry partners: The Australian Institute of Architects; Architecture Media; BVN Architecture; Bates Smart; and PTW Architects. The research team comprises: Naomi Stead (UQ); Julie Willis (UMelb); Sandra Kaji-O'Grady (UQ); Gillian Whitehouse (UQ); Karen Burns (UMelb); Amanda Roan (UQ); and Justine Clark (UMelb). Gill Matthewson (UQ) is undertaking PhD study within the project.

The website *Parlour: women, equity, architecture* (<http://www.archiparlour.org/>) has been developed as part of the larger research project, and is edited by Justine Clark with assistance from the other research team members. The website publishes numerous outcomes and discussion papers from the research project, alongside reflections submitted by members of the architecture profession. The project has convened a number of public events and forums, notably *Transform: Altering the Future of Architecture*, held in Melbourne in May 2013. One of the main policy outcomes of the project is a series of *Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice*.

The project integrates other research elements including a literature review and survey of previous scholarly work in the field; ethnographic field work within the three case study architecture practices; visual sociology research in the three case study practices; a scan of gender equity policies and measures in comparable international institutes of architecture, plus institutional bodies in other comparable professions in Australia; a scan and summary of past research commissioned by the Australian Institute of Architects on issues of gender equity and diversity; an analysis of demographic data on Australian architects drawn from the 2011 Census; a consultation and report on priorities, perceptions and existing practices around equity policy in the architecture profession; a mapping of the involvement of women in the Australian architecture profession; and two major industry surveys 'Where do all the women go?' and '...and what about the men?', which are the subject of this report.

The survey 'Where do all the women go?' was written and administered by Justine Clark with input and feedback from the other research team members, particularly Gillian Whitehouse, Naomi Stead and Amanda Roan. It was administered in July and August 2012. The subsequent and complementary survey '...And what about the men?' examining the work lives of men in Australian architecture was undertaken in late 2012 and early 2013.

This collection of material from the discursive answers to the survey has been compiled by Susie Ashworth and Justine Clark

It should be read in association with the report "Preliminary analysis and comparison of findings from two surveys of the architecture profession" by Gill Matthewson – also included in this submission – and in association with the separate Technical Report and Preliminary Statistics document prepared for each survey and available on the Parlour website.

## **PREGNANCY & RETURNING TO WORK DISCRIMINATION**

Discrimination while pregnant has not emerged as a major issue in our research into women in architecture. However, discrimination on returning to work is a significant issue for many. Difficulties include managing a successful return to work after having children and obtaining meaningful part-time work. This relates to broader issues in the industry around workplace practices and cultures.

The results for the women's survey 'Where do all the Women Go?' clearly demonstrated an issue with work/life balance in the architectural industry. Many women complained that having children had not only affected their ability to work the huge amount of hours expected in architectural firms, but it had changed the way their employers perceived them. For many, having children was considered a career-killer, as employers and colleagues no longer saw them as committed, reliable workers. This perception seemed to be prevalent, whether the architect was returning to part-time or full-time work.

The following anecdotal evidence and opinion was provided by a sample of survey respondents.

### **Women's Survey**

#### **Q96 – Do you have anything else you'd like to say?**

A large number of women (373) were keen to provide comments and opinions for this open-ended question at the end of the survey. The key theme that emerged – more than any other – was children and their effect on career (84 respondents). Many respondents did not anticipate the huge effect the arrival of children would have on their career trajectory. Many returned to offices after maternity leave to work part-time, and found their work and status was greatly compromised. Comments include the following:

- *Children and major corporations do not mix.*
- *I feel duped. As a teenager my generation was brought up to believe we could do anything, but in reality it is very hard to maintain a career in architecture when you have kids.*
- *Flatline to nosedive since first bub - desperately looking for alternatives and silver linings.*
- *Having children has affected my career trajectory. I was given opportunities prior to having children but I could not see myself taking them on when I wanted a family as well. Part-time work has not helped with moving my career forward although it has helped to keep me skilled. I feel that experience is not considered seriously if it is taken part time.*
- *I have gained a great deal of experience and depth in my post-university architectural education through working in a small studio-*

*based architectural practice with strong design principles and nice work colleagues. The practice's non-hierarchical design approach has enabled me to become accomplished in all aspects of architectural design, documentation and administration. However, my short time spent in a 'respected' commercial architecture practice when I finished university led me to believe that I could go nowhere in such a place. I was a single parent who could not work nights and weekends, got to work at 8.30am (after everyone else) and finished at 5pm (before everyone else). I was relegated to drawing slab edge details, furniture outlines and filing, got paid \$15 an hour and was laid off with no notice. I would like to work on multi-residential projects and other commercial projects. However, I am hesitant to enter such an inequitable work environment again.*

- I think architectural practice is an incredibly difficult field to be in as a female, let alone a part-time female architect. It can be incredibly intense and time consuming and also mundane as tasks that are achievable within a certain period of time is restricted. My career trajectory has taken a back seat as I have chosen to work part time to raise my kids but I refuse to lose my career over it so it means making compromises.*
- Constantly challenged by ability to 'do the hours' required to manage and produce commissions. The career has been shaky. Now the kids are at school my ability to commit to work/commissions is more secure (but still somewhat compromised by sick kids and holidays).*
- Returning to work from 12 months maternity leave has significantly changed my role in the office and slowed my professional development.*
- I think architecture is a field in which it is very difficult for a woman to rise to the top unless she remains single and childless, or happens to marry an architect and become a co-partner in practice with her husband (or happens to marry someone who is prepared to take on the majority of childcare and household responsibilities - which is rare). The reason for this is that it is such a boom-bust profession. You either have too much work or not enough. The busy times require you to work all hours, and you just can't do this if you are prime carer for children or the elderly, and women always seem to end up with these other roles. I would not want to hand over my caring roles (though I would be happy with a culture of more equal sharing), so moving out of mainstream architectural practice was a good move for me.*
- Having children comes at a difficult point in most female architect's careers. It is usually at the point where they feel they are starting to gain traction and be able to take the next step in their professional lives (going out on their own or moving up the corporate ladder.) It is a shame that so many women find it such a difficult profession to go back to once they have had children. In many ways we have a work culture*

*that does not make many allowances for family. This definitely interrupts and makes you re-evaluate your career trajectory.*

The logical solution for some (19 respondents) was to set up their own firm to ensure the flexibility they needed with their domestic responsibilities. Of course, the flipside to self-employment for many is insecurity and reduced financial reward. Comments include the following:

- *To continue practising in architecture after having children was only really possible by setting up our firm, as the pay I received working for somebody else wouldn't cover the childcare costs for two children in Sydney. Setting up our firm has been very rewarding and has given me greater success as an architect than staying employed by somebody else.*
- *I set up my own practice before having a family and currently work from home. Great flexibility.*
- *As I have worked for myself for the majority of my working life, I have had the ability to control my own career trajectory to a large extent. I am fortunate to work in a small practice that allows me (and my male business partner) to have a fair degree of flexibility with work hours/children etc. There are obviously issues with working for yourself that are not flexible (the work has to be done and someone has to do it!), but largely it provides a fairly flexible work/life balance.*
- *The practice of architecture is so difficult to master that any time off can be a hindrance to career progression. Being self-employed I am unable to specialise as might be possible in a larger practice. Covering all aspects of architectural practice is exhausting when combined with child-rearing. My partner focuses on projects. I have less projects but also manage administration and children. And overall the income generated in no way reflects the effort and stress involved. I love architecture but the practice at small business level is fast draining my enthusiasm.*
- *Working in my own practice has provided me with flexibility when I have needed it to manage children and practice - and has also permitted me my own design direction. If, however, I was to assess this option in terms of income it has probably not been as profitable as working for a more established practice. Family commitments have also limited the amount of time I can put into developing the practice...*

A handful of respondents found that it was simply too difficult to break back in to the profession after taking a career break to look after young children. For example:

- *...it seems extremely difficult to get back in once you've had a break for children. This is particularly the case with me, where I have had a long break for study and having children, and now I'm virtually unemployable*

*as an architect because I don't have the right computer skills.*

- *Career trajectory was satisfactory until I took a break. It seems very difficult to break back in after any kind of break working independently (even though I've still been part-time self-employed without a break of more than four months at any given time).*
- *I probably should've taken less time out of the workforce when I had my children. I don't think I will be able to re-enter the workforce due to the extended period of being out of full-time employment.*

**Q 75. Traditional work hours are usually regarded as 9–5. However, many people need flexibility in their working hours. Do you currently work flexibly?**

Survey participants were invited to make further comment, and 364 chose to do so. Responses reflected a broad range of working conditions and circumstances, and fell into the following categories: some flexibility if needed (69); work fairly standard hours (62); work around kids, school drop-off and pick-up (55); self-employed so flexible (47); work long hours (32) – this does not pick up those that indicated long working days but managed their work time around kids; fairly flexible (25); flexible start and end times (24); work part-time (21); inflexibility of practice, not as flexible as I would like, impact on career (18); would like flexibility (10); and work up to 3/3.30pm (7).

Several themes emerged from the responses to this question.

- 1) Parents work early mornings and late nights to accommodate work around children. In this situation, flexibility is often equated to long days.
- 2) Parents opted for private practice and/or working for themselves to have flexibility.
- 3) Flexible work practices are often viewed as a non-standard work practice – available on a limited basis, or as an exception rather than the rule.
- 4) Many practices are inflexible because of the requirement of long work hours, or working to a project/client/boss's timeline.

Sample responses include the following:

- *When I was working within traditional architecture practices, I found it very difficult negotiating any sort of flexibility or part-time work. Even working four days a week in order to continue study was rejected outright by several practices despite the fact I wanted to spend the extra time towards further education in architecture. Now that I have a baby, there would have been very little chance of me finding work in practice because most practices do not want to offer part-time work. I understand that architectural practice is complex and requires full-time attention, however I wonder whether job-sharing might be a way forward. As an example, two employees wanting to work part-time might share a job and work on exactly the same jobs in a practice in*

*order to maintain consistency, etc.*

- One of my main reasons for working as a sole practitioner was for the flexibility. I have small children, and running my own practice has allowed me to juggle motherhood and my work (which I love). It's a far less stressful way. I did not want to continue to be faced with having to make a decision between work and kids, or working long hours and hardly seeing my kids except for weekends – now I can manage my hours to accommodate both.*
- No one in my office works flex hours.*
- Generally arrive about 9am, never leave by 5pm!*
- I have ticked yes but in reality this is not as flexible as I would like, or not what I would really regard as true flexibility.*
- I work 9-6 + overtime. I am in the process of drafting an overtime and flexible working hour policy for our office to help it become more accessible for those with greater family commitments.*
- I work 9am until whenever the job is done – which is unknown until lunchtime each day.*
- Our office hours are 8.30am to 5pm. I would like to work a shifted day in the future to accommodate child-care arrangements. However I see the people who do this are still working longer hours and yet are perceived to be 'bunging off early'; I am concerned that to work flexible hours in a larger office would be a career-limiting decision.*
- Generally work 9-5 but this is not rigid. Work at home, come in on weekends, do what it takes.*
- Yes, I start and finish when I like, but need to realistically average six hours of overlap time with other staff on a regular basis.*

**Q76. Flexible work comes in many different forms. Please tell us what strategies are being used in your workplace to accommodate flexible work.**

Survey participants were invited to make further comment, and 129 chose to do so. A common theme emerged that there are gendered or power differences in the type of arrangements available and to whom. Another common comment was the feeling that workload couldn't be controlled or was out of the architect's hands, because it was client- or project-driven.

Of the written comments, 26 said that no strategies were being used in their workplace to accommodate flexible work, and another 18 said there was a limited arrangement. Flexible work hours or flexible start and finish times were

available to 25 respondents, while 14 said part-time hours were available. Other categories include: reduced hours, a nine-day fortnight or a reduced working week (9); working remotely or from home (7); flexi time (5); time in lieu (5); RDOs (3); and days off when required (2).

Sample responses include the following:

- *My workplace doesn't really have any practices in place currently to deal with flexible working hours. Would be beneficial to all if they did, but they don't.*
- *The practice discourages these practices, encouraging all people to work in-house 8.30am–5pm. Directors and managers are the only people given technical support to work from home and then it is 'hidden' and additional time, not in lieu. Time off in lieu only seems to happen when someone has been working excessive hours, not just a few and never it seems for people who consistently work five or eight hours extra every week. Flex-time is more common in our office. I would love to work a nine-day fortnight if I was full time.*
- *Generally there is not flexibility in work hours in this firm (nor the other two that I have worked in). We are expected to be at work a minimum of 9am–5.30pm. The only flexibility I do have is to come in early if I need to leave early to go to registration classes (as this is work related).*
- *I can only imagine that people's family life must be screwed if they don't have any flexibility. Thankfully I have some, and so does my husband (non-architectural work), so we can make things work. I think that younger staff members, with less experience and job confidence, aren't able to take advantage of the flexibility that is available because of fear of the perception that they aren't pulling their weight or aren't 'really committed' to their work.*
- *As a commuter I am permitted to use my travel time to work. This allows me to work a six-day fortnight in five days.*
- *I work school hours. I work two days across three.*
- *Not sure if I can control my workload – it feels like it controls me.*
- *I can't really control my workload – am either 'very busy' or busy. Not in a position where I can reject work.*
- *Associates and above can work remotely, but everyone else has to be in the office. Parents can work flex-time – mothers tend to work the exact hours, work through lunch etc. Fathers just leave early and don't seem to make up the time!*
- *Generally only directors and associates have flexible arrangements.*



## **Q 80 How satisfied are you with your career progression to date?**

Though the majority of survey participants (67%) were satisfied with their career progression, ranging from high to fair to mild satisfaction, the majority of those who chose to comment further (271 respondents) had complaints about their career progression. Themes that emerged include work/life balance, the competing demands of career and children, the glass ceiling and incorrect perceptions about women, the effects of recession on career, low financial rewards and the underutilisation of women in practice. Satisfied workers tended to have good workplace conditions or were self-employed.

### **Slow career progression & work/life balance**

Many respondents (38) described their career as a struggle and their progression as slow, while 29 respondents described the difficulty of achieving a work/life balance, with children, elderly parents and sometimes older husbands to care for. Another 25 respondents said they had a limited career progression (with children often the determining factor). For example:

- *No chance for progression when you work part-time. And when you work full-time (especially in private practice) those that can work unpaid overtime progress first even though I might be more experienced. I was once told not to apply for a local government manager position at my work because my boss wanted to employ a male who wouldn't go on maternity leave and would work full-time. I was also told that part-timers were not eligible for pay rises or for training courses/conferences.*
- *As a sole practitioner, I am trying to grow my business whilst juggling the family load, so am not really at a level either professionally or financially that I am completely satisfied with.*
- *However I do believe there should be more women (and more architects in general) in senior board positions. This is difficult to achieve due to several factors – one factor that is little talked about is the fact that women of 'seniority' are often in the position of having one or several other life situations happening concurrently, eg elderly parent(s) needing care, grandchildren needing care, (older) husbands needing care, young adult children needing assistance/direction etc.*
- *Working four days a week has meant I have taken a reduced responsibility in the workplace. This means my work is less satisfying. I am not as engaged, and not learning any more – probably deskilling a bit. On the upside, I never work overtime and always have dinner with my small children. I don't want to be stressed out and overtired and then not have good quality time with the kids. If I could work out a way to have the best of both worlds I would, but I don't know the answer yet. I am constantly looking for other women's experiences to try to find*

*another way.*

- *It is very difficult to make progress or work the number of hours needed to make progress and still maintain some sort of harmonious family.*
- *It is a balancing act. I have put my family ahead of ambition. This also makes me much more vulnerable as I get older, especially in the current climate.*
- *Difficult to be a mum and a professional architect.*
- *I have made the decision to spend the time with my young children as there aren't many options to work part-time with young kids. I do not regret the decision about spending time with my children, however I do worry about how I will get employment and in what form in the future. If I think about it too much I do get a little worried. My husband is also an architect and in the time I have had off his career has advanced. However, I would not have wanted my children to experience two parents stressed and working long hours! I really don't think the profession is family friendly.*
- *I didn't realise it would be so hard to get back into architecture after having kids. There are next to no family-friendly/part-time roles... I wish someone had told me before I did all that study...*

### **The glass ceiling & perceptions about women**

Twenty-nine respondents believe their career have been hindered by the glass ceiling, or that there are negative perceptions about women's abilities within practices and in the wider community. For example:

- *I think I would have progressed further had I not been a woman and had I not had children.*
- *I feel frustrated I am not always being given all-round experience, and a lot of my job is sitting on a computer. I think the women in the offices I have worked in are not seen equally to men in terms of promotions, salary and career progress.*
- *I don't know where I see myself advancing in the profession. The glass ceiling is evident in the architectural profession in Australia. I have started a side business and see myself running this full-time as there are more opportunities.*
- *I am happy to be running my own business and am satisfied in that, however I believe that the ability to grow the business is limited by clients' perceptions that young women (mid-30s) are less skilled in and committed to the building industry, i.e. women cannot possibly know as much as a man about designing and building or women may leave soon to have a baby and look after their young family. I also believe*

*that some men take advantage of, or reinforce this perception to progress above women.*

- *It is very difficult to break into senior management with the management cohort comprising 100% males over the age late 40s to 70+.*

### **Dissatisfaction**

Several dissatisfied architects (25) said they had limited chance to progress in their career now that they had children, while another 15 commented that they were underutilised, undervalued and under-recognised. Comments include the following:

- *When I worked in formal offices the glass ceiling was very apparent. Men would be fast tracked. Woman would be given the rubbish jobs. In the days of working for formal practices I thought that I needed to go and get a MArch to give me an upper edge. Thankfully I didn't because it would not have made any difference. I have heard of a Harvard female graduate who can't get work after years of children. It would have been throwing good money away. There would not have been the ability to re-coupe the amount spent. After children I tried to get employment in an office. I couldn't get a return phone call let alone an interview. I realized my days were over. This has happened to friends of mine too. I have also had friends who have worked continually after having children and hung in there and have been able to keep a career going. But as soon as you dive out of the industry for a short period of time, you can't get back in. I feel it is a very disappointing career for a woman. The low calibre males that I have seen do well in the profession is so disappointing.*
- *Really enjoyed current workplace while there full-time prior to children. After returning part time, I enjoyed the balance for about a year then for about eight months felt unfulfilled, like the employer didn't know how what to do with me. Felt underutilised and probably suffered a loss of confidence.*
- *Opportunities for career progressions seem to have greatly reduced since returning from my second maternity leave.*
- *Until I took maternity leave I was very happy. But part-time employment is very different and I need to manage my expectations, different role.*
- *I feel that even if I do well now it will fall a few levels down if I want a family as well.*
- *It has taken more time to achieve reasonable salary and status. After children I literally had to start again at graduate level. Employer's*

*perception not mine.*

- *My career in terms of progression stalled after I had children and went to four days a week (and moved cities).*
- *Every office where I have said I have children has had a major negative impact, even in interviews at 'progressive' offices that advertised flexible hours (translated to if you start at 9.30 that's ok, because we expect you to be here at 8pm!)*
- *I was progressing very well until I returned to Australia and had children. Having children has slowed me down for sure. I love my children to bits and am thrilled to be a mum. However a weekly day off for teaching or high competition sport is more acceptable than parenting responsibilities in architecture offices and in Australian architectural offices. It seems many owners of architect firms do not trust work-from-home arrangements. Or would not offer such positions to new employees.*
- *Severely affected once my employer found out I was doing IVF. For example, I was not involved as much in management and decision-making, and felt excluded.*
- *Career progression has gone backwards since having children.*

**Q 81 If you work part-time, or have done so in the past, how do you think this has affected your career?**

Of the 969 respondents who answered the question about part-time work, 299 chose to make additional comments. A high number (127) believe that working part-time has had a negative impact on their career, while 80 respondents believe the impact has been positive. Another 35 respondents said that part-time work has both negative and positive implications, often slowing the traditional career progression but also providing benefits such as flexibility, a better work/life balance, and time with children or other pursuits (such as academia or extracurricular activities).

**Part-time workers undervalued**

For the most part the respondents who moved to part-time work later in life (mostly due to having children and family responsibilities) viewed part-time work as having a negative impact on their career. Many (63 respondents) complained that when they moved to part-time hours, they were no longer taken seriously in the office. They were treated as an assistant on other architects' projects, given administration work or under-utilised. For example:

- *Part-time is widely regarded as a career killer in my experience.*

- *My previous employer once remarked, "I would have offered you a senior position but didn't think you wanted to because you're a mum".*
- *At current office, I'm simply not able to carry out my previous level of senior project architect responsibilities as the office sees part-time very differently to full-time – I simply wasn't given the same opportunities. This is ok, didn't really expect them. However, would have liked to be more challenged and utilised. I could have taken on more than I was given – repeatedly asked for more to do but the partners seemingly didn't know what to give me. Had discussed associate-ship with partners prior to announcing first pregnancy but this has never again been mentioned since having children. Very keen to continue part-time work while I'm having a family so starting to look at other options as the office has become quite anti-part-time now and want me back four days a week and have told other women there is 'no part time' after maternity leave. Full time or nothing!*
- *As soon as I started working part time my employers treated me differently and assumed I was less committed. I was overlooked for promotion twice when I was on maternity leave and not even informed that structural changes were being considered. Hence I now work for myself.*
- *If you aren't in the office every day for long hours, you are not considered to be that serious about architecture.*
- *Frustration voiced by other staff members when I am not at my desk every day.*
- *The previous firm I was working in struggled to juggle part-time staff and I was relegated to doing a lot of the administrative work as opposed to managing projects and detailing construction, things I needed to work on and further develop skills in. My learning in architectural practice halted and I was left assisting other architects, working on sporadic pieces of work, which didn't assist learning.*
- *Architectural practice is not somewhere you can work part-time unless you are happy to be the CAD lackey. I worked part-time after the birth of my daughter and found it difficult to run projects when you are not available five days a week to deal with issues in the office, with consultants and during construction.*

One respondent commented on a noticeable lack of working mothers in her workplace:

- *I think it's very difficult for a project architect to be 'part-time'. I personally have not worked in an office with any mothers, which is discouraging to say the least. I think it possible but it's not happening in the work culture, yet.*

### **Full-time hours and expectations, part-time pay**

Fourteen respondents complained that while their working arrangements were supposed to be part-time, they often worked full-time hours for their part-time pay. For example:

- *I was often expected to work full-time hours total, but extra hours in my own time unpaid.*
- *Part-time work had all kinds of issues related to continuity of communication and project progress. Hours were part-time, but workload was not. I felt that I was 'under selling' my work.*
- *I found it difficult to 'get the work done' and felt I was selling myself short (by working more than the part-time hours I was being paid) so reverted back to full-time.*
- *It is very difficult to work part-time in architecture. I did this during the first six months of the birth of each of my children, but found that I worked almost full-time while only being paid for two or three days of work... very stressful!*
- *Employers also get more out of people working part-time. Although an employer may have to deal with some flexible hours, they generally in my opinion, from my experience and observation of others, get more out of part-time staffers. ESPECIALLY women, because they get the 'guilt factor' where women feel like they are not pulling their weight or doing enough and need to prove themselves to a far greater degree than men, so do extra hours. Declared or not declared hours. And the employer doesn't have to pay extra superannuation for this.*

### **Work/life balance**

Another group of respondents (34) admitted that their career progression had slowed or stopped after they moved to part-time hours, but they did not consider this a negative impact. They had moved to part-time hours to spend more time with children or to achieve a better work/life balance, and did not mind that their career had stalled as a result. It was an informed choice that they had made. Sample responses include the following:

- *I have made a conscious decision to not progress any higher up as I want a work life balance for my family. I am happy at the level I am right now.*
- *I have always thought that work/life balance and satisfaction in your work is more important than career progression.*
- *Part-time work for a range of organisations allows me to manage my workload and work entirely flexibly, but it was never going to be about career progression in the traditional sense! It's all a matter of what I value at this point in my life.*

- *Again, it's been my own choice to work part-time, so I don't see it as negative, although it has affected progression.*
- *Part-time work after the birth of my first child allowed me to set up my own practice, become involved in Architects for Peace, begin teaching.*
- *I have found it difficult to 'compete' in the practice of architecture with the grind of the long hours and weekend work. The expectations are very powerful. This has meant that I have preferred to work, at times, on a part-time basis, with more flexibility and better life balance.*

### **Self-employment**

A number of respondents (25) had set up their own business as a result of the family-unfriendly work culture in traditional architectural practice, or the lack of part-time jobs available. While some comments refer to insecurity and lack of financial reward, others speak glowingly of the flexibility and variety that comes with self-employment. Sample responses include the following

- *Flexible working hours are part of being a sole practitioner with a young family. I love being a sole practitioner but I recognise the flexible hours wouldn't be available in paid employment.*
- *It was impossible for me to work in a commercial architecture practice with two (let alone three!) young children and I could not return when they were school age. I could not work to short deadlines arbitrarily imposed by the principal, work part-time or attend mandatory breakfast meetings. They waste a lot of time and wouldn't allow me to work from home. That's why I am a sole practitioner. It doesn't pay well, but at least I can be with my family and have autonomy.*
- *I could not get part-time work after having a child. Being self-employed was the only option for me.*
- *My pregnancy and desire to work part-time was not welcome by the practice I was working with, so I started my own practice, which has less opportunity, but is very flexible.*

### **Q 82 If you have had a career break, how do you think this has affected your career progression?**

Of the 976 respondents who answered the question about the effects of career breaks, 213 chose to make additional comments. A high number (81) said that working part-time had had a negative impact on their career progression, while 45 said that it had a positive effect. Twenty respondents said there were both positive and negative effects, while another 21 people said they were in the middle of a career break, so didn't know the implications yet (though they were nervous).

## **Negative impact**

Of the 81 respondents who specified negative impacts on their career, 19 said that taking a break or working part-time to accommodate child-rearing slowed or halted the momentum of their career. Several of these respondents believe that it's impossible to progress if working part-time. Another 17 respondents said that it was difficult to regain employment after a career break, with some complaining of ageism and others blaming their inability to keep up-to-date with new regulations and technologies. Seven respondents said that working part-time had been disempowering and had affected their confidence. Sample responses include the following:

- *I had been with a firm for four years and after I had my first child they would not take me back under any circumstances.*
- *If you stopped to have children, employers have viewed this very negatively. I have been through interviews and not mentioned children and the second I do I have very negative feedback.*
- *Mainly working regularly on a casual basis is disempowering and can be quite solitary.*
- *Strong negative impact on my confidence.*
- *Told I could not stay as a manager unless I came back full-time.*
- *The negative effect has been more on my personal psyche and self-esteem and confidence, as I was not out of work long enough to have a detrimental career effect I believe.*
- *It is difficult to accurately answer this question as I'm still on a career break so whether the negative effect is real or perceived won't be known until I return to work. I do, however, feel that one of the reasons I have been unable to return to work is due to the fact I do not wish to return to work full-time. Having spoken to friends in the same position (female architects with young children) and to people in the recruitment industry, part-time work is not welcome. If you do not have a job when your child is born it seems to be incredibly difficult to find part-time work once you're ready to return.*

Seven respondents said they were keen to have a career break, but were worried about the repercussions for their career. For example:

- *I have only had a break for maternity leave. I was scared to disappear for longer - the industry is moving technologically so quickly!*
- *I am planning to have children and am concerned that the break will affect my career.*



## **Positive effects**

Many respondents (45) said that taking a career break or working part-time had brought positive developments to their career and life. Many of these worked part-time while studying, which gave them valuable experience in the industry. Some of these had used the opportunity to step back and reassess where they wanted their career and life to go, and a few had left the industry for a different career altogether. Others said they had gained enormous satisfaction from spending time with their children, and their improved work/life balance had offset any negative impact on career.

- *Travel breaks are positive, as are short-term breaks while having children.*
- *Breaks to deal with family issues have also given me a chance to recuperate from the gruelling regime of sometimes 60-hour weeks, which eventually take their toll.*
- *It made me re-evaluate my priorities and focus energies on a more autonomous path in the construction/design industry. I was made redundant in the GFC and told the ideal employee for my past organisation was “an unmarried man in his late 20s” - I was in my mid-30s at the time with one child!*
- *I've chosen to take breaks for children and to pursue other non-architectural projects. It's had a negative effect career-wise (eg. Ex-colleagues are now directors), however I am fairly happy with my work/life balance.*

One respondent commented that she wished she had been more discerning when initially choosing an employer. She had the following to say:

- *I know things are changing in the workplace, and changing for the better and I am a champion of the newly introduced paid maternity leave! I would have made a more informed choice about who I worked for and their attitude to paid maternity leave and part-time work. I have friends who work for enlightened, large corporate companies who have made it through the multiple maternity leave years to go on to greater career things. It's not easy, but they have managed. My advice would be to target good employers and limit the time off work completely and, if possible, continue with at least part-time work.*

## **Men's Survey**

The issue of work/life balance and discrimination against parents who seek more flexible working arrangements did not feature strongly in the responses of the men's survey, 'And What About the Men?'. The state of the architecture industry seemed to be the main issue on the minds of the male survey participants. However, the following comments were among the few who mentioned the juggle between work and family responsibilities.

**Q96 – Do you have anything else you'd like to say?**

The majority of men who answered this question commented on the state of the architecture industry in general rather than work/life balance. Just 4 respondents had additional comments to make about the challenges of work/life balance and raising children while maintaining a career. Comments include the following:

- *I am interested to see the comparative results of this survey. I respect the need to promote women in architecture and agree that there is an imbalance between men and women at the senior levels of the profession. At the same time my feeling is that the reason why this imbalance has occurred is that women don't want to work stupidly long hours for very little pay and they want a good work life balance and time to bring up a family. I also want this and I am hoping that this survey will evidence a changing culture in our profession away from needing to play the game to get to the top and towards a sustainable profession for all of us.*
- *It would be interesting to know how many male architects are actively involved in the day to day care of their children and to find out about male professional attitudes toward this.*
- *My wife and I are hoping to have some children in the next few years and are in the process of working through how we will make that work. Being self employed and flexible will help.*

One male survey participant complained about discrimination his wife had experienced in the workplace.

- *My wife worked part time whilst children were young and was victimised as a result...was made redundant by major architectural practice at time when she had ongoing work that she was best suited to do.*