What is family friendly about the workplace in the home? The case of self-employed parents and their children

Susan Baines and Ulrike Gelder

This article draws upon the narratives of self-employed parents, their partners and children in order to examine the ‘family friendliness’ of making the home a site of paid work. While not fitting narrow definitions of ‘teleworker’ the subjects daily confronted the use of space in their homes, and access to technologies there.

Introduction

The difficulties of reconciling paid employment and parenting are officially recognised by the UK Government in policies focused around the work/life balance. Work at home is widely cited as one of the ‘family friendly’ practices by which employers can help employees to balance their work and family lives. Its adoption, however, has been limited to date despite the many ways in which information and communication technologies may help to facilitate it. Most paid work in the home is undertaken not by employees but by the self-employed.

This article draws upon the narratives of self-employed parents, their partners and children in order to examine the ‘family friendliness’ of making the home a site of paid work. In contrast to most research and commentary on this subject, its concern is with relatively low value added work associated with the old rather than the ‘new’ economy. Sullivan (this volume) raises important issues about the value of the label ‘teleworker’. Use of technologies in the home/workplace, she argues, should be explored in all its variety and complexity rather than used as a filter to include certain home workers and exclude others. The people who participated in the study reported in this article rarely fit narrow definitions of ‘teleworker’. Yet in most cases the use of

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space in their homes, and access to technologies there, were issues they confronted daily as they attempted to combine income earning and family life.

After an overview of family friendly policy and practices in the context of self-employment in the UK the authors propose a four-fold typology as a tool for exploring how ‘family friendliness’ may be achieved—or bypassed—in the everyday lives of self-employed people and their families. The typology focuses on the use of time and space rather than technology and it encompasses businesses that are home based and those that are not. In this article it is used to think through how computers and telephones can be utilised to build or remove boundaries around home and work. Attention then turns to the work side of the work life balance from the perspective of spouses and children of the self-employed. Skills, responsibilities and restrictions associated with technologies in the home are important issues for children, who often take on a business role as the household experts on IT. This article raises unfamiliar questions about what ‘family friendliness’ means in the context of work in the home—and for whom?

**Family friendly work and self-employment**

With the change from a Conservative to a Labour Government in 1997 the reconciliation of productive and reproductive work ceased to be understood as a purely private matter for individuals and households (Dex and Joshi, 1999). The Government launched the Work-Life Balance Campaign in 2000 to encourage employers to become more ‘family-friendly’. Since April 2003, following recommendations of the Work and Parents Taskforce, employers have been obliged by law to give serious consideration to requests by parents to work flexibly. Yet nearly one in eight working adults in the UK is self-employed and cannot benefit from such practices or legislation.

It is intuitively plausible that the inability of self-employed people to benefit from family friendly measures delivered through employers is of little importance because self-employment is, *per se*, more family friendly than employment. Self-employed people, unlike most employees, are not tied to workplace routines and cultures. It is workplace cultures that often undermine work-life policies formally introduced by employers; the routine expectation of long hours as evidence of organisational commitment contributes to the difficulty employees, especially men, experience in meeting family needs (Lewis, 2001; Hatten *et al.*, 2002). Against this background there is evidence that some individuals adopt self-employment specifically to escape such cultures and humanise the balance between work and family life. Mauthner *et al.* (2001), for example, found from qualitative investigation of working families in rural Scotland and England that a few chose self-employment as a ‘family friendly’ strategy.

Many commentators associate self-employment with choice over when and where to work. The Women’s Unit (2000) has announced that in the new ‘knowledge based economy’ self-employment and enterprise offer women opportunities for income earning and achieving flexibility in their working lives. ‘Flexible’ and ‘flexibility’, however, are notoriously double-edged words in the world of work. When the Work and Parents Taskforce recommended that parents should have the opportunity to work ‘flexibly’ the intention was to promote more compatibility between workplace routines and domestic life. ‘Flexible’ and ‘flexibility’, far from being ‘family friendly’, such ‘flexibility’ can be seen as ‘a new form of time discipline’ (Fagan, 2001: 240).

The self-employed are statistically more likely than employed people to work long hours, including evenings and weekends (Bell and La Valle, forthcoming). Long working hours and Sunday work are particularly disruptive to family life according to recent research on atypical working hours (La Valle *et al.*, 2002). One characteristic of self-employment, on the other hand, appears *prime facie* overwhelmingly family friendly. Self-employed people are by a very long way more likely to work at home than their employed counterparts; more than half the self-employed work at home or use the home as a base (Labour Market Trends, 2000). Work at home is included in
lists of ‘family friendly’ practices that employers could adopt to help employees balance their work and family but in practice it is far from widespread. According to a recent survey of employers, fewer than one in ten reported that more than 5 per cent of their workforce worked at home on a regular basis during normal working hours (Labour Market Trends, 2001). Investigation of family friendly employment practices has found that staying at home to work is a privilege normally extended by organisations only to their most valued and trusted employees (Dex and Smith, 2002).

The idea of ‘teleworking’ from home has a long history and is usually associated with new opportunities and freedoms. Critical assessment of the considerable hype around teleworking has been published from time to time in this journal and elsewhere (Stanworth, 1998; Stanworth, 2000; Baruch, 2000). Of most relevance to this article is empirical evidence that moving the workplace into the home can involve new pressures on workers and their families, for example invasion of privacy and restrictions on use of space and resources in the home (Haddon, 1998; Sullivan and Lewis, 2001; Baines, 2002). There has been some research on how the presence of work in the home may affect opportunities for young people to learn about work, earn income, and gain new skills from the perspective of minority ethnic business ownership (Song, 1996), but this subject has not been included in discussion of teleworking or the work-life balance.

**Study methodology and sample**

The heart of this article lies in the narratives of self-employed people and members of their families. The data are the words in which people described and explained their actions and experiences. 30 households participated and the research team interviewed more than one person in each household wherever possible. Altogether 45 adults and 22 children and young people took part. Each study household had at least one self-employed parent. Definitions of ‘self-employment’ and ‘small business’ can be a minefield for researchers (Corden and Eardley, 1999). It is possible to be self-employed for taxation and national insurance purposes as an agency worker or a contractor hired by a large employer but such workers were not included in this research. At least one adult in each of the study households was the owner of an independent business and the terms ‘self-employed’ and ‘business owner’ are therefore used interchangeably in this article.

The businesses were located in County Durham and Teesside in the North East of England, in areas of economic decline where overall rates of business per head of population are known to be low and policies are directed at raising them (One NorthEast, 1999). 17 businesses owned by members of the study households were located in wards within the 10 per cent most deprived in the country. A further seven were in wards in the most deprived 20 per cent. The research team identified business households by the following routes: local business directories, referrals from enterprise agencies, respondents to a postal questionnaire conducted two years earlier, a childminders’ network and snowballing from other interviewees. 18 of the businesses were led by women, nine by men and three by a husband and wife team. (In most cases business owners and business leaders were the same but the term leader is used here because sometimes ownership did not reflect decision making responsibilities).

The businesses were in a variety of sectors; most typically low value added services (e.g. hairdressing, childcare, gardening), construction and manufacturing. A breakdown of the business activities, in broad categories, by business leadership is given in Table 1. ‘Other services’ were gardening, ironing, pet boarding, sports training and employee training. The ‘retail’ category consists of two conventional retailers (one of which also offered printing services) and a business marketing household goods from home by telephone and internet.

The majority of the businesses owned by members of the study households were solo enterprises in the sense that they had no employees or partners. Just over a third (12) of the businesses had at least one non-family employee at the time of the
The largest employed 18 and the next largest ten. Ten businesses employed between one and four people, most of them part-time.

Each household included at least one dependent child. Recognising the diversity of household forms, the research team did not set any selection criteria regarding numbers of adults and children, or their relationships. Most of the study households (20) consisted of two parents and their children. There were four lone mothers (one sharing a home with her elderly father) and four households with a mother, her children and a stepfather. There was a father who shared parenting of his four children with his ex-wife and one household containing grandparents, their adult son and his partner, and the young couple’s baby.

Fieldwork took place in summer 2002. The authors conducted all interviews. Parents were interviewed together and asked to reconstruct and reflect upon key events in their working and family lives before and after one (or both) of them became self-employed. There was a checklist of key points to cover but interviewees were encouraged to tell their stories in their own words and to bring issues and concerns to the interview if they wished. In most cases children were interviewed separately from adults but parents were present during two of the child interviews.

The ages of the children and young people interviewed ranged from six to 19 years. Their wide age range and different life experiences meant that a considerable amount of flexibility was required in these interviews. Age can be used as some indicator of how to gear questions and which tools to use but there were immense differences in children’s ability to communicate with an adult and formulate their experiences and thoughts. Task-centred activities were used with younger children. For example they were asked to place one, two or three beans into pots with themes as a starting point to explore how happy they are with rules and customs in their household. All the interviews with parents and children were tape recorded with just one exception; an (adult) respondent became uncomfortable with the tape recorder after about ten minutes and asked us to turn it off. In this case it was necessary to rely on hand written notes. In all other cases the interviews were transcribed in full. Transcripts were indexed and managed with the aid of the software package QSR N6.

The use of information and communications technology in the home

Not all the business owners in the study had the home as their only workplace but some work in the home was the norm. So was the use for business purposes of telephones and computers in the home. Computers were adopted for a wide variety of business activities including record keeping, bookkeeping, designing and printing

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leaflets, downloading information from the internet, and sourcing supplies via the internet. Even businesses that may be seen as the antithesis of new, technologically mediated activities used computers. Some childminders, for example, computerised their daily attendance records, used spreadsheets for their accounts, created artwork for use with children and prepared and printed forms for parents to sign.

Most of the study businesses used computers or the internet to less than their full potential. Moreover, the machines they owned were likely to be outdated; some business owners said they had suffered bad experiences as a result of unreliable equipment which made them cynical about the value of IT in general:

- It [the computer] was always sort of breaking down (John, shopkeeper)
- It crashed and I lost all my information—I’ve never trusted one since (Mike, gardener)

Lack of money sometimes prevented business owners developing IT resources. Terry and Janice (husband and wife owners of a craft/manufacturing business), for example, wanted a website to attract new customers from outside the area but their plans had to be put on hold by more urgent calls on their limited funds:

- We have to think how can we afford to pay to get the car fixed—we need the car—so that’s the next thing that has to be paid for—so the internet thing has got pushed a bit further back now.

In two other cases business owners reported that they had a website that was not maintained. Only one business in the study used the internet as the main way of reaching customers.

The telephone was by a long way the most important business technology and also the most usual means by which the privacy of the home could be invaded. Only four respondents reported that they had a dedicated business line at home. The lack of need for a second telephone line was in part accounted for by the widespread possession of mobile telephones by adults and children. Business owners relied on the telephone (land line and mobile) for customer contact, and, as discussed in detail below, often expected to be telephoned at unsocial hours.

**Typology of family friendliness for self-employed households**

Survey based data on working arrangements for employed and self-employed parents suggest that while many self-employed mothers seem to have ‘family-friendly’ arrangements, self-employment is associated with family ‘unfriendly’ work patterns for most fathers and some mothers (Bell and La Valle, forthcoming). In-depth interviews conducted for this study similarly revealed many variations on the management of time, the use of the home as a workplace, and the ability to control the flow of work. A few self-employed people described working arrangements confined to a single location and quite standard working hours but in most cases work was ‘flexible’ in time, place or both. ‘Flexibility’ could involve work for a business conveniently arranged around family needs. Much more often it meant the opposite; the long hours many business owners worked restricted family time and made difficult demands on other members of their households. In order to plot a route through these variations the research team developed a four-fold typology with the shorthand labels ‘time greedy’, ‘flexibly scheduled’, ‘rigidly scheduled’ and ‘work-family inclusive’. The typology is drawn from the wealth of information interviewees supplied about their businesses and their work and family lives.

‘Time greedy’ denotes the relationship between work and private life for just over a third of the self-employed households in this study (11 cases). All but one of the male led businesses were in this group. There were also two women leaders and one husband/wife team. ‘Time greedy’ is a shorthand label. In many cases it was not only time but energy and emotion that were demanded by the businesses, often at the expense of the family. Most were in the stereotypically male sectors of manufacturing and construction but four provided services. Working hours of the business owners were long (sometimes 60–80 hours per week on a regular basis) with additional, irregular work in the evenings, weekends and/or early mornings. In addition,
owners’ spouses and, sometimes, children supplied labour to the businesses. Some owners of ‘time greedy’ businesses were painfully conscious of their lack of participation in family life and the strain on their partners. It was lack of predictability in working hours that had the most detrimental impact on family activities. Owners were willing to accede to all sorts of demands from clients, including apparently unreasonable ones. When they and their spouses talked about this aspect of work they usually stressed the importance of the business to the household livelihood. ‘You’ve got to be committed to try and oblige people’, explained one woman when she talked about an incident in which her husband was called out by a client on Saturday just as the family was about to go to a wedding.

‘Flexibly scheduled’ self-employment, as the name implies, has some characteristics of ‘family friendly’ employment. It was not typical in this study; there were only four cases. The group consists of three healing practitioners and an ironing service. The owners—all women—were able to schedule work for their businesses around the needs of children, young people and other adults in the household. For example, clients for healing therapies can be treated at home in the evening when children are in bed. It is possible to break off from ironing to make tea after school and resume it later in the evening. Organising care for young children, and being around for older children was easier than employment (or self-employment) with rigid hours. It does not provide a complete solution to problems of combining paid work and caring, and business owners used childcare, including nurseries, out of hours provision for school age children, and the help of friends and family. None of the ‘flexibly scheduled’ business activities could safely or reasonably be performed in the presence of young children.

All the businesses labelled ‘work-family inclusive’ were based inside or adjacent to the home. Unlike other home-based cases, however, the home and family were physically and emotionally incorporated into the business. The most characteristic businesses in this group were the providers of family childcare (five cases). Three other businesses shared ‘work-family inclusive’ characteristics: a home-based enterprise retailing household products by telephone and internet, a boarding kennels, and a village shop. In all these cases the home environment was actively promoted to clients as an asset. In contrast to the ‘work-family flexible’ group, it was possible to conduct the business in the presence of young children.

In ‘rigidly scheduled’ businesses (seven cases) working hours and practices had a structure similar to a standard 40-hour week. They provided personal services (hairdressing, catering) from separate premises and their opening hours were typical of their sector and location. Work and home were therefore much more separate than in the other businesses in this study.

Boundaries around the workplace and the home

The 30 households had a variety of locations for their businesses. There were ten home-based businesses, four adjacent to the home and 16 with separate premises. For most of the latter, however, the presence of some work in the home was the rule rather than the exception. Only the group labelled ‘rigidly scheduled’ made little use of the home for business activity.

Most owners of ‘time greedy’ businesses had premises or used the home as a base but mainly worked on clients’ sites. Nevertheless, the heavy demands of the business almost invariably affected the ways in which space and resources in the home could be enjoyed by all family members. Many families in this study lived in small homes and work related machines could impinge on household space in ways that seemed unreasonable to other household members. Debbie, for example, a lone parent, shared a house with her daughter and her elderly father. She recalled that when she started her training business she worked on a computer at the dining table and had to insist, to the old man’s annoyance, that he finished his breakfast quickly every morning so she could start work. Not all such conflicts were around computers. Indeed other business equipment was likely to intrude on the home more dramatically. For example
Mike (gardener) kept a lawnmower and a cement mixer in the kitchen which meant that the family could not sit around the kitchen table and his stepson Ben was embarrassed to let his friends see the kitchen. Mike’s partner Karen had just started her own business (not home based) and would have liked to learn to use a computer for it if space at home permitted:

I think it’s just because we don’t have the space and it [the computer] would be in our Ben’s room and you know what teenagers are like—get out of my room I want my music on kind of thing—and so it isn’t fair really on him, but I do think if we had a study I think I might, I would make more of an effort.

The most typical way in which work intruded into the home for the ‘time greedy’ group was by customers telephoning there. All members of the household, including, children, had to be ready to answer the telephone and be polite and helpful to customers. Phone calls could be invasive, especially at night:

It doesn’t happen as much now, but it can be quite startling. The phone is next to you, and just going—you don’t know if some part of your family has got something wrong or something, you know, health wise or something, when something has gone wrong. You don’t know what to think, you know, not until you answer the phone anyway (Roy, joiner).

In a few cases a business had been moved out of the home as a result of its growth. Debbie, for example, was extremely proud that after three years she had taken on separate business premises and saw this as evidence of her success as an entrepreneur. After nine years in business Lloyd had ten employees in his building business and was more confident of his ability to sustain a regular supply of work than most of the owners of ‘time greedy’ businesses. Both he and his wife Carla had become distressed by the intrusion of the business on the privacy of the family. For example, employees would call at their home in the morning to be given instructions for the day. For this reason Lloyd had recently taken on new premises about two miles away from home. His former home/office had now been reclaimed for domestic use as a utility room but Carla revealed later that he had installed a desk in their bedroom. Here the couple talk about the pressure to be constantly available to customers by telephone and how they had partially resolved it:

Carla: We had a little office out the back and the phone there [with a separate business telephone line] and it’s hard not to answer the phone if it was ringing—to try and ignore it.

Lloyd: When you think it’s work you are losing,

Carla: Even though the answer phone was on—like Lloyd says he thought he was losing work, you know, so it’s hard not to answer it. But it’s a lot better since we moved it [the office] down there.

Lloyd: I have a mobile which is on all the time, but if it rings it’s up to me whether I answer. I know all my customers phone numbers so if it’s one of them ringing I’ll answer it but if it’s a number I don’t recognise I won’t bother. You’ve got to switch off—if you don’t it’s just too much.

Conflict between business needs and domestic ones occurred around telephones in other ways. In this example the necessity for a business owner to be available to potential customers in the evening clashed with his teenage children’s use of the internet for their homework:

We went through a stage where there didn’t seem to be any customers phoning, and what was happening was they were phoning sort of between 6, 8 o’clock which was the time the girls were coming in from school they wanted to use the computer for homework or whatever they were using it for. With the result that people couldn’t get through and were just giving up, so the internet—unless it’s serious homework—is banned between 6 o’clock and 8 o’clock now. (Geoff, builder, two children 15 and 19).

Owners of flexibly scheduled businesses were better able to avoid intrusion on their families by the telephone. They made use of answering machines and refused to take work calls at mealtimes or late in the evening. Clients visiting the home, however, could be a source of conflict within the family. Laura (healing) worked mainly from rented town centre premises but had decided to offer clients the option of being treated
in her home. She had adapted the spare bedroom for that purpose. Her teenage sons, she said, hated the idea of ‘strangers’ coming into the house and resented any restrictions on their freedom to be noisy and untidy there:

I’ll have to put some sort of sign on my door, and explain to the lads if I say ‘occupied’ they don’t come in and put their music on.

The ‘flexibly scheduled’ businesses were not heavy users of IT but their ability to manage work around their caring roles echoes the experiences of highly skilled, self-scheduling portfolio workers such as the translators or new media specialists reported in recent studies (Fraser, 2001; Perrons, 2003).

For the businesses labelled ‘work-family inclusive’ income generating work was not arranged *around* the family but as part of it. Integration of business and family life, moreover, was represented as both a business asset and good way of working for the family. The archetypal ‘work family inclusive’ businesses are childminders whose homes and families are part of the family day care they offer. The daily work of a childminder has many features of her role as a mother. The family-like environment distinguishes the care she can offer from the services of a nursery. When she takes children into her home for payment a childminder and her family accept that their ‘private’ space has, to some extent, become public. The childminders’ husbands in this study sometimes, but not always, took an active interest in the minded children and played with them. They inevitably found aspects of childminding affected their day-to-day lives and they sometimes complained about minor inconveniences such as toys not put away when they came home from work. Nevertheless they strongly approved of their wives’ ability to earn income without ceasing to be full-time mothers. Children of childminders often appreciated that their mothers were at home but the presence of a child-minding business could not fail to impact upon their daily lives. For example, their activities and movement around the house were restricted when babies were sleeping. How to share toys and household technologies was particularly difficult for childminders’ children:

He [a minded child] always goes, ‘Oh well, I’m not letting you play with my stuff.’ Mum goes, ‘If you don’t let her play with it then you are not playing with Josh’s Playstation. Or you are not going on the computer. You can just sit there and do nothing’ If they bring toys then they have to share them. (Josh, 12)

Silvia and Graham (husband and wife owners), unlike most businesses in this study, conform to narrow definitions of ‘teleworkers’. They use the internet and telephone to sell household goods aimed at a specialist clientele. A family story that their product was devised for the children is part of its public image and displayed prominently on the business web site. The business is located in the home (a small ex-public sector rented house) and extremely invasive of the limited space—the ‘living room’ was unusable at the time of the interview because it was full of wrapping materials. Silvia, in common with the childminders in this study, stressed her desire to avoid working outside the home when her children were young. She worked for the business at home with her youngest child (aged 3) present, although this was not easy and could result in some fraught situations. For example, she related an anecdote about watching him open the fridge and empty its contents onto the floor while she took orders from a client over the telephone. Her oldest child (Shawn 13) was very positive about the business because he saw it as belonging to the whole family.

The village shop owned by John and Anna also had a family image. This was much appreciated in the community where people liked to see the younger generation in the shop. The family lived above the shop. The owners found it possible to serve cus-

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1 By law childminders are required to be registered with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which is a non-ministerial government department which inspects and regulates educational and childcare establishments. The premises of childminders are inspected at least every 24 months and all household members over 16 years old must be police checked.
tomers with their young grandchildren around, although not easy. John articulated a powerful ideal of a family business which was no longer a reality for him and Anna. Their son had recently rejected employment in the shop which meant that non-family staff had to be employed. John talked of these workers as ‘strangers’ who could not be trusted and he bitterly regretted that the business could not rely on family labour. Anna said that when she was not at work she constantly watched the CCTV in the dining room because she was worried about how the employees were behaving. This case suggests how the ‘work-family inclusive’ business can turn into something perhaps better described as ‘invasive’. There was intrusion on the home and inability to have a separate life without the compensatory pleasures of doing things together as a family.

The ‘work-family inclusive’ businesses may be described as ‘family friendly’ because income earning can be combined with caring. They certainly enable mothers and children to spend much more time together than in other forms of self-employment. Fathers’ involvement in the business and family is more varied although they cannot fail to be affected in some ways. However, these businesses make demands on family members and household space that are unlike most other forms of work.

Work in the home by family members

Although only three businesses in this study were family partnerships, sole owners often relied heavily on family members who had no formal business role. Over two thirds of the businesses (21) had some form of family participation, confirming the significance of this kind of contribution, as found in other studies (Baines and Wheelock, 1998; Corden and Eardley, 1999; Sanghera, 2002). In most cases it was co-resident spouses and older children who worked in the business. Sometimes this was in the form of occasional help but there were businesses that would not have been sustainable without hard work and commitment on the part of family members. Some owners’ children, including young teenagers, made an important contribution to the businesses because they were the only members of the household with computer skills.

It was the norm for wives of the male owners to supply their labour on a regular basis to the business. Of the eight women married to owners of time greedy businesses, only two (both with young babies and other children) were not working for the businesses at the time of the interview. Both women had worked for their husbands in the past and still made occasional contributions (e.g. looking after business guests in the home, banking money). The long and irregular hours men worked for their businesses could make holding any kind of job outside the business, even a part-time one, difficult for their wives. Elaine was the only woman in the study with a full-time job and a husband in a time greedy business. Despite her job and her responsibility for their three-year-old child, Elaine also worked for the business. She took a one-day ‘holiday’ every month from her job to help out with administrative tasks in the business premises and also took work home to complete on the computer in the evenings. As a result of these demands on her time she had given up her plans to take an evening class in IT to improve her career prospects. Far from being a ‘teleworker’ Elaine had an office based job. Yet her account of working on the computer at home for her husband’s business, while he worked late in the business premises, recalls the most negative image of teleworking for women as an ‘electronic cage’ (Baines, 1999).

Well you’ve got to try and do it while the little one is asleep, I mean don’t get us wrong he’s very good . . . but he wants your attention, he wants to sit on your knee, you know, wants to give you a cuddle, so you end up at the computer typing round him, you know.

The most typical tasks performed by wives of male business owners were bookkeeping, ordering, making out invoices and answering the telephone. Men’s attitude to these tasks could be ambivalent. They were essential for the viability of the business and men sometime commented that they lacked the time, the ability, or both to under-
take them. Yet, at the same time, they were not seen as productive like the physical labour involved in building, manufacturing etc. The implication was that such ‘unproductive’ labour lacked the status of ‘real’ work. Roy, for example, admitted that he could not do his own bookwork. Yet when his wife described their joint contribution to the business as ‘teamwork’ he responded facetiously:

There is a man there wants his house knocking down so you can go along if you want (laughs raucously). That would be teamwork wouldn’t it? (laughs).

In general women owners in this study who lived with men described their partners as helpful and encouraging. However, they received rather less practical support in business activities from their partners than was typical for male owners. An exceptional case was the partner of one of only two women with a time greedy business. He increased his working hours outside the business in order to sustain the family financially through the difficult start-up period and also worked in the business every week on his day off.

The presence of paid work in the home can make difficult demands on the children of the self-employed but it can also offer them opportunities to be involved in the world of work. Young people who had achieved IT skills at school became responsible for business tasks such as answering emails, word processing letters and accessing material from the internet. The school project ‘designing personal stationery’ turned out to be a real world exercise for Andrew and the resulting letterheads and business cards are used for his mother’s business. Other children are involved in the IT side of the business on a more frequent basis.

I had to do it for her, because she’s not very good at it, so I’d be on the internet and looking up things. And she’d come up and I’d have to shift over and do things. (Monica, 16)

Children sometimes tried to pass on IT skills to their parents but this task turned out to be more difficult than they anticipated:

I am really good with the computer. None of them is really very good on the computer. They are not really patient with it and I get quite annoyed because. So I don’t really have a choice. I always have to scan forms for them because they don’t know how to use it. (Annie, 14)

Whatever I want to do now my son has to guide me through—I can do my daily records but that’s about it. (Emily, childminder)

Children in self-employed households achieve knowledge of non IT skills specific to the businesses. For example, they may observe vehicle maintenance and repairs, learn about the healing power of oils and how to blend them, or how to handle animals. For some of the children their parents’ business allowed them to consolidate their skills with an apprenticeship, or access a work placement in connection of a college course. Skills acquired in their parents’ business may help to find other employment. One teenage girl claimed that her childhood experience in her mother’s shops helped her to find a Saturday job in retail. Older children of childminders may gain the opportunity to baby-sit the minded children in the evening. Observing her mother’s work with young children helped Tina (15) to develop personal skills. She learned ‘not to lose your temper, because I lose it very easily.’

Parents sometimes talked about their businesses as possible career opportunities for their children. In general the young people themselves were not positive about such hopes. Anna and John had provided a job in their shop for their son for four years and were bitterly disappointed when he left to work in a call centre. Karen hoped that her 17-year-old son would work for her partner Mike’s gardening business, but he had only done so as a one-off. According to Mike he was not committed enough to gardening. Janice and Terry paid their son Paul (17) to do occasional jobs and hoped that he would become more involved in the future, perhaps taking some of the physical strain off them as they got older. Although Paul appreciated the opportunity of earning in the short term he, in common with other young people, did not anticipate a future in his parents’ businesses. Even children who feel proud of their parents’ business had other plans for their own future working lives.
Conclusions

This study on which this article is based was unusual in taking a household approach to work and family life and including the perspectives of children and young people. While hard work was characteristic of nearly all the households their actual patterns of working arrangements were diverse. The various ways in which they structured their work and family lives in time and place can be summarised using a four-fold typology, denoted with the terms ‘time greedy’, ‘rigidly scheduled’, ‘flexibly scheduled’ and ‘work-family inclusive’. In describing this typology we used the language of debates around the work-family balance although interviewees rarely invoked this directly. The typology highlights the extreme difficulty of achieving family friendliness in the time greedy group, which accounted for almost all the businesses led by fathers and some by mothers. The experiences of the rigidly scheduled group show that, for some business owners, the dilemmas of income earning and caring are very similar to their employed counterparts; for this group work in the home was rare. The typology also differentiates the divergent ways in which an element of ‘family friendliness’ may be achieved for home based businesses. Incorporating a business into the family and home is not the same as arranging a business around family needs and routines.

This article confirms that, when home is the site of work, family members (spouses and children) are often incorporated into daily work routines in ways not found in most forms of employment. Technologies in the home/workplace can become scenes of conflict around rules and family practices about access and use by the younger generation. The claims of a business on time and space sometimes mean that family members have to make difficult compromises. Women who work in their husbands’ business may find themselves trapped in work for which they are not trained, and without the time to maintain or develop their own labour market skills outside the home. Young people, on the other hand, have opportunities to learn as well as contribute work to the ‘family’ business. Their contributions were particularly important to the businesses in IT related tasks for which their parents lacked skills. Being the child of a self-employed parent offers opportunities to observe paid work on a day to day basis and to participate in it in ways unlikely to be available to other children. This is an aspect of the work life balance that is rarely acknowledged or researched.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the support Joseph Rowntree Foundation who funded the research, and would like to thank the Advisory Group for their time and helpful suggestions. Professor Jane Wheelock was part of the research team and her comments and advice on this article are much appreciated.

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