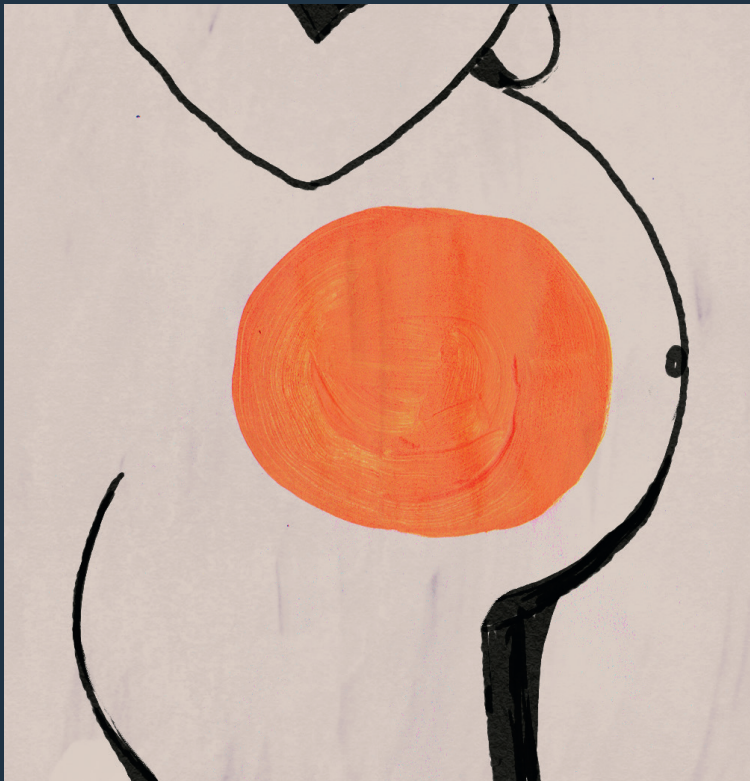




Motherhood, Inside Out: The Story in Numbers

Dr Madeleine Pennington and Dr Rhiannon McAleer





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REPORT

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Dr Madeleine Pennington and Dr Rhiannon McAleer
July 2026



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This report in
90 seconds

Motherhood is one of the most significant transitions a woman can experience. It can reshape identity, relationships, priorities and, for many women, how they see the world itself. Yet it remains surprisingly under-researched and is often undervalued in public life.

This report accompanies the *Motherhood, Inside Out* research project, unpacking its main quantitative findings. In Spring 2026, Theos and the Bible Society commissioned Ipsos to undertake a survey of women aged 18 to 75 across Great Britain. A representative sample of 4,458 women responded to the online survey and, of these, 3,606 women consented to proceed with the survey (having been notified that it contained questions about religion and health). The sample included 2,112 “Mothers”, who we have defined as those who identified themselves as biological mothers, adoptive mothers or step-mothers. Fieldwork took place between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

We asked women how they saw the value of, and economic and cultural support for, parenting, before asking the mothers specifically how their thinking and identity had shifted since having children.

The findings reveal that motherhood can transform women from the inside out.

— **Changing identity, relationships and community**

Over a quarter of mothers (27%) said they were (a lot or a little) less likely to feel valued by society since becoming a mother, while 36% were more likely to feel lonely. Yet the same proportion (36%) said they were more likely to feel authentic or true to themselves, and 34% were more likely to feel connected to their local community since becoming a mum.

- **A complex emotional picture was a feature running throughout the data.** Mothers associated childcare itself with a range of emotions. The top positive emotions were rewarding (64%), enjoyable (60%) and heartwarming (57%), and the top negative were challenging (59%), tiring (53%) and exhausting (50%). Other responses included overwhelming (40%), lonely (25%), thought-provoking (24%) and awe-inspiring (20%), reflecting the intensity of the experience for some women. (For the full list of emotional responses, see p. 34.) to the end of the “complex emotional picture”.

- **Navigating existential and spiritual shifts**
Alongside high proportions of mothers who said they thought (a lot or a little) more about family (76%), education (72%) and their local community (52%) since becoming a mother, 65% said they thought more about death, 44% thought more about politics, and 27% thought more about God or spirituality.

- **Facing life's biggest questions**
Some 56% of mothers agreed they had engaged in thought-provoking discussions about life's big questions with their children, rising to 67% among parents of secondary-school-aged children.

The findings also point to motherhood as a political issue, not simply a personal one.

- **The economic value of parenting**
Some 72% of women agreed that time spent looking after children at home is “as vital to the economy as time spent working in paid employment”. Agreement rose to 78% among mothers, compared with 64% among women who are not parents or guardians.

— **Who pays the cost?**

Some 76% of women (and 81% of women with a child under 18, compared to 71% of non-parent/guardians) agreed that being a mum can limit career opportunities for women, while only 11% said the same about dads.

— **Support for new parents**

Some 66% of women agreed that the UK government should do more to support new parents and guardians.

— **Motherhood as a politicising experience**

Women with children under the age of 18 were consistently more likely than those who are not a parent or legal guardian to feel that new mums do not receive enough in-person support from healthcare professional services (44% vs. 31%), local authorities (53% vs. 43%), and their local/wider community (51% vs. 41%).

— **Motherhood rituals**

When asked about interest in formal rituals or ceremonies to mark a woman's transition to motherhood (focusing on them as the mother), 29% were "very" or "fairly" interested. Interest was highest among mothers with a religion (37%), younger mothers aged 18-34 (41%) and mothers of children aged 0-3 (43%) – factors which may be interlinked to various extents.

Taken as a whole, the findings explored in this report speak to a potentially under-supported social role – but as explored further in our separate qualitative report, they also hint at an existential shift that is far more complex and wide-reaching than is acknowledged in ordinary depictions of motherhood, entailing social, political, and even spiritual impacts on the women who go through it.

6

Introduction



*‘My little folks are now pestering me [for] their Tea,
so shall conclude.’*

Letter from Bessy Ramsden, 1773.¹

What do you see when you look at a mum?

The realities of motherhood are often hidden in plain sight. Partly this is inevitable. What could be more personal than the relationship between a mother and her children? Yet the everyday nature of motherhood, much of it taking place behind the doors of ordinary homes, can also obscure the extraordinary skill, resilience and care it demands. It is work that is so constant and so familiar that it is easy to overlook.

As writer Mary Harrington observes,

...mothering happens in the world of patterns, of relationality, of normativity. And that’s already the opposite of the stuff we think of as meaningful “signal,” which concerns the individual, the exceptional, the unexpected.... When your whole purpose is enabling the normal healthy development of a baby, a good day is one in which nothing out of the ordinary happens.²

Perhaps it is for these reasons that motherhood can be characterised as niche, low status, or uninteresting. Mothers feel this: a previous and separate online survey from October 2023 found that nearly three quarters of mothers in the UK felt “invisible”, while 93% felt unappreciated, unacknowledged, or unseen once they’d had children.³ Recent decades have seen an explosion of maternal writing and advocacy, and social media has brought with it the rise of the

‘mumfluencer’.⁴ Nonetheless, for the most part, mothering remains a private affair, understood as ordinary, safe and predictable.

Yet matrescence – the process of becoming a mother – is none of these things. It can mark a complete shift in a woman’s social relationships, role, and identity; it transforms (several times) her body, sometimes with lasting scars and a radically altered body image; it reshapes her brain.⁵ Politically, as the mother gets used to her new role, she will be caring directly for the most vulnerable in society and providing society’s newest citizens with their first moral education. She may experience this role differently depending on her race, wealth, and relationship status – just as her decisions about when and whether to have children contribute to the birth rate (which, as we were drafting this report, dipped below the mortality rate in the UK for the first time in 50 years).⁶ Philosophically, her experience of motherhood shines light on the nature of care, embodiment, sacrifice, autonomy, sex, gender, fragility, interdependence, and love. And if all of these things can apply to parenthood more generally, motherhood is also the primary juncture that still takes modern women out of the workforce, keeping them at home.

In short, through both its impact on individual women and its function in society as a whole, this unseen art of ensuring that (so it seems) “nothing out of the ordinary happens” brings us face to face with how citizens are formed, made, brought together, and torn apart – and whether they participate at all. It is a critical arena for the negotiation of power across society, just as it raises (and, perhaps, answers) foundational questions about what it means to be human in a modern world. In an age of generative AI, its lessons are more urgent than ever. It warrants wide public attention.

So, what do you see when you look at a mum?

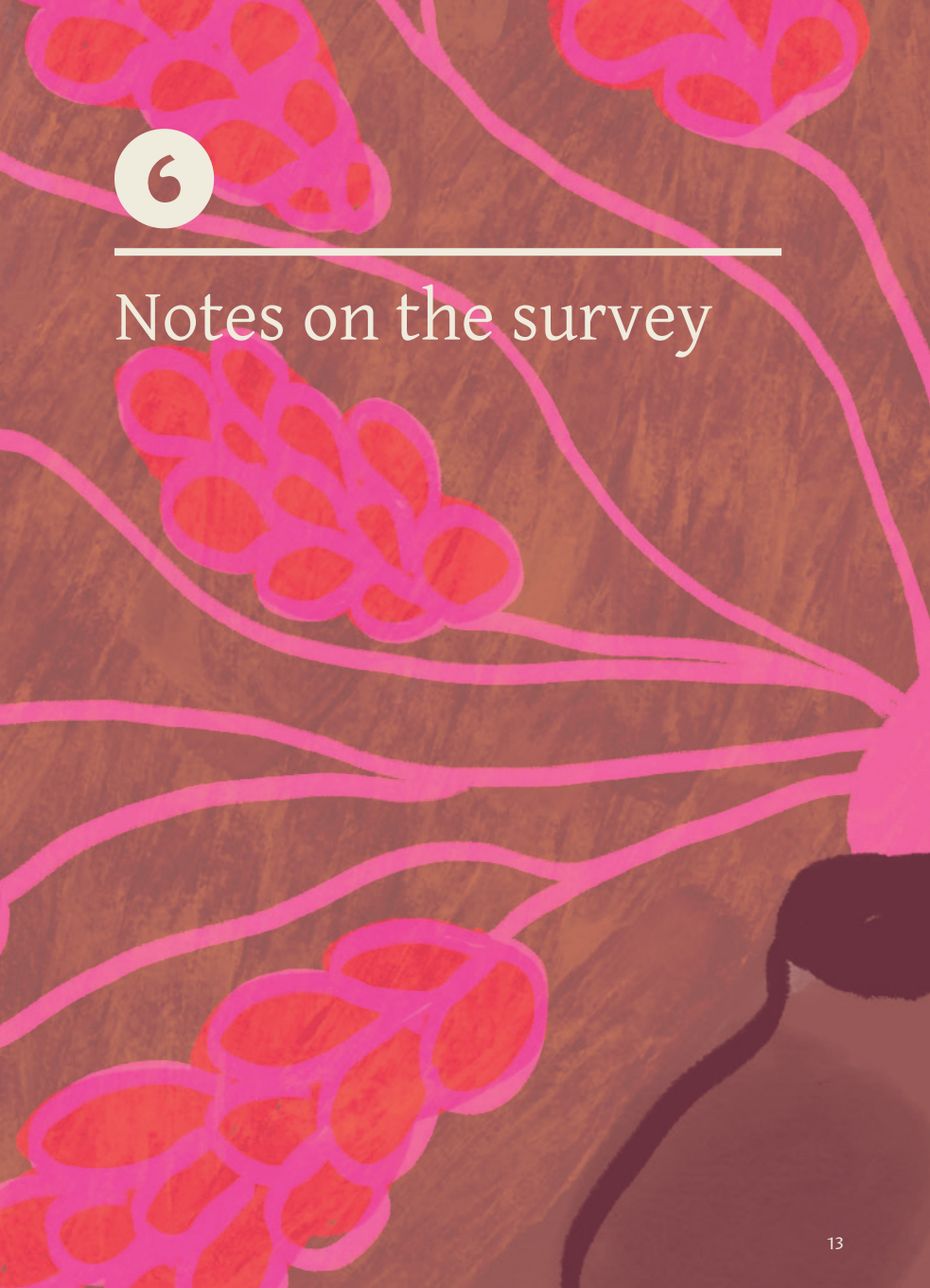
In late 2024, Theos and Bible Society embarked on a large mixed-methods study of motherhood, with a particular focus on new mothers. The project seeks to evidence:

- What shifts in the inner lives of (primarily new) mothers?
- How might these shifts of matrescence change how an individual navigates wider society, in ways that are both implicitly and explicitly political and even spiritual?
- What support is available – or still needed – for mothers to navigate these realms?

More information about this wider stream of work can be found in its primary report, *Motherhood, Inside Out*, and on the Theos website (www.theosthinktank.co.uk/motherhood).

The present report is a supplementary discussion unpacking the main quantitative findings from the wider project. These statistics speak to a sometimes under-supported social role – but they also hint at an existential shift that is far more wide-reaching than is often assumed, entailing social, political, and even spiritual impacts on the women who go through it.

Full datasets for this research can be found on the Ipsos website [here](#), and on the Theos website [here](#). Further research will be published later this year (autumn 2026), including a third report which compares maternal experiences around the world, and a dedicated website which will host all our work on this topic. We intend this research to be helpful and informative for all mothers, those involved in the care of mothers, community leaders, and all those interested in how mothers can be better supported across society.



6

Notes on the survey

This report presents findings from a survey of women aged 18 to 75 in Great Britain, some of whom are mothers. The survey sought to explore female perceptions of motherhood, and to dig into the identity, social, political, and spiritual shifts experienced by new mothers.

On behalf of Theos and Bible Society, Ipsos carried out the online survey between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

A representative sample of 4,458 women responded to the survey and, of these, 3,606 women consented to proceed with the survey (having been notified that it contained questions about religion and health). The sample included 2,112 “Mothers”, who we have defined as those who identified themselves as biological mothers, adoptive mothers or step-mothers. For the full sample of 4,458, a quota sample was recruited with quotas set on age, region and working status. This data set was then weighted to the known offline population of this audience by age within region, social grade, working status, education, ethnicity and religion.

Some questions were directed towards all 3,606 women who proceeded to take part in the survey, enabling exploration of all women’s views and a cross-comparison of views by parental status. Other questions were directed only towards those 2,112 women who identified themselves as a “mother” (as above, either biological, adoptive or step-mothers in the survey). Throughout this report, we refer to the views of “mothers” in reference to this category within the wider sample.

The intention of this research is to focus on the views of women (especially mothers). The report does not claim to provide insight into male perceptions of motherhood or women caring for children who

don't self-identify in the ways outlined above, or the average views of the UK population as a whole.

This report relies on a non-probability sample, with associated strengths and limitations. More detail on Ipsos' policies on data gathering, cleaning and quality assurance are available on the Ipsos website and the endnotes below.⁷

The questions we asked were informed by the findings of Theos and Bible Society's qualitative research on the same topic. Between March and September 2025, Theos and Bible Society researchers spoke to 91 mothers and 14 experts and professionals directly involved in maternal care, about the social, emotional, political and spiritual aspects of new motherhood. The results of that qualitative phase are presented in *Motherhood, Inside Out*, which is available on the Theos website [here](#).





6

Findings

1. How do women's identity and sense of purpose change when they have children?

At a glance

Over a quarter of mothers (27%) said they were less likely to feel valued by society since becoming a mother.

Over a third (36%) were more likely to feel lonely.

Some 36% of mothers were more likely to feel authentic or true to themselves since becoming a mother, while 34% were more likely to feel connected to their local community.

Mothers who were more likely to feel lonely since becoming a mother were broadly equally likely to express an otherwise positive or negative view of their experience.

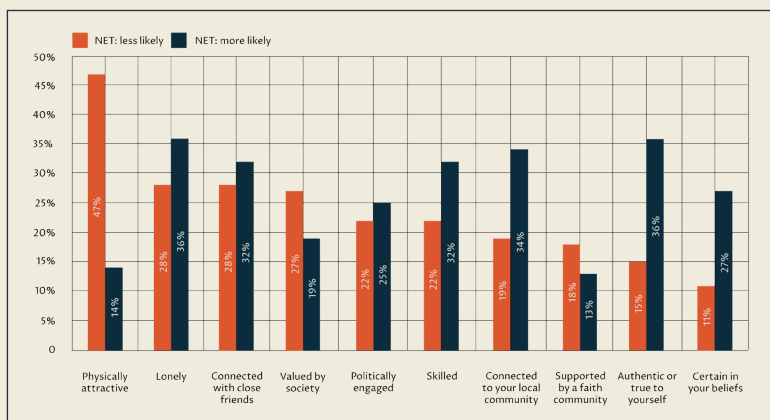
When interviewing mothers in the qualitative phase of this project, we found that:

Participants... differed in exactly how they articulated the impact of motherhood on their fundamental identity and sense of self – whether they felt more fully themselves, a transformed sense of self, or even a loss of self that longed for who they once were. Yet hardly any felt that their identity had been completely unchanged.⁸

To explore this in more detail, we asked mothers whether they were more or less likely to feel a range of attributes since becoming a mother, seeking to understand how (and how often) motherhood

might affect self-perception. In each of the ten categories tested, a significant minority of mothers (28%-43%) reported no change (equally as likely), which should caution us against exaggerating or generalising across maternal experience.⁹ Yet large cohorts in every category also *did* report changes (higher or lower). Together these responses, summarised in figure 1, offer a telling insight into the experience of becoming a mother in the UK.

Fig. 1: “Since becoming a mother, are you more likely, less likely or equally as likely to feel the following?” (Percentages NET: A Lot More/Little More Likely vs. NET: A Lot Less/A Little Less Likely)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Biological mothers, Step-mothers or Adoptive mothers aged 18-75 in Great Britain (Unweighted n = 2,112). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

First, there are some negative signs. Nearly half of mothers (47%) reported that they were less likely to feel “physically attractive” since becoming a mother, while over a third (36%) were more likely to feel “lonely”, and just over a quarter (27%) were less likely to feel “valued

by society”. Some 18% of mothers were less likely to feel supported by a faith community, compared to 13% who felt more so (alongside a high proportion who ticked this was not applicable to them). Furthermore, while nearly a third (32%) of mothers were more likely to feel “skilled” since becoming a mother, a notable minority – nearly a quarter (22%) – were in fact less likely to feel this way since becoming a mother. Despite the many new skills demanded of new mothers, matrescence is not always accompanied with the confidence of new learning. On the contrary, these responses suggest that motherhood can be accompanied by (several interlocking) challenges of confidence for a sizeable cohort of UK mothers.

But the picture is complicated. The data also suggested that many women experience the transition to motherhood positively: over a third of mothers (36%) said they were more likely to feel “authentic or true to [myself]” since motherhood, 27% were more likely to feel certain in their beliefs, and the sample overall was more likely to feel connected with their local communities (34% more vs 19% less) and close friends (32% more vs 28% less) than less. In addition, a quarter (25%) of mothers felt more politically engaged since having children, indicating that motherhood affects relationships across wider society – not just within the nuclear family itself.

Ethnicity made a difference to responses here, with mothers from ethnic minorities generally seeming to reflect more positively on the transition than white mothers. For example, 30% of ethnic minority mothers said they were more likely to feel “valued by society” compared to 18% of white mothers; 29% of ethnic minority mothers were more likely to feel “physically attractive” compared to 11% of white mothers, and 45% of ethnic minority mothers felt more “skilled” compared to 29% of white mothers.



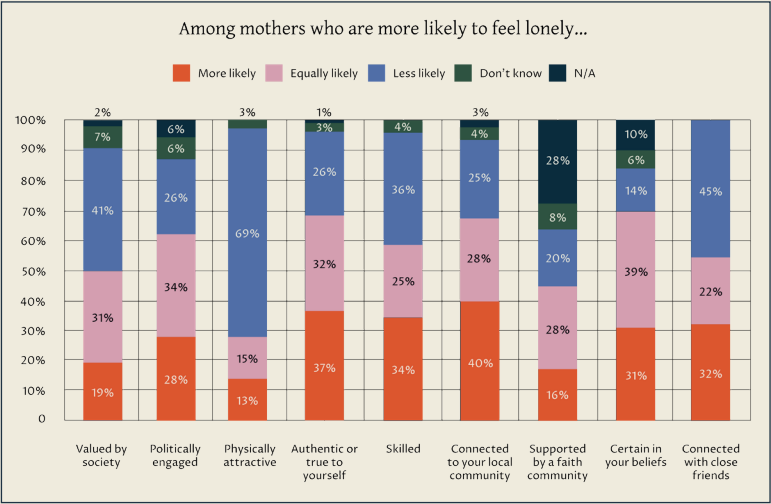
Economic circumstances were also correlated with certain responses on some, but not all, of these factors – and not in the extreme. For example, 33% of mothers in the lowest annual income bracket (with an income up to £19,999) said they were (a little or a lot) less likely to feel “valued by society” after children compared to 26% with an income of £20,000–34,999, 28% with an income of £35,000–54,999, and 25% with an income over £55,000. So too, some 16% of mothers in the lowest income bracket said they were (a little or lot) less likely to feel “certain in [their] beliefs” after children compared to an average of 11% across the whole sample. These are noteworthy differences, but income clearly doesn’t automatically ensure a sense of societal value or certainty. Working women were also slightly more likely than their non-working counterparts to feel “certain in my beliefs” both before (always or sometimes) and after having children (a lot or little more likely), and 39% of working mothers reported that they were more likely to feel “authentic or true to [themselves]” compared to 31%

of non-working mothers, since becoming a mother. However, working could correlate with negative responses too: 38% of working mothers were more likely to feel “lonely” after children compared to 32% of non-working mothers.

To this end, “loneliness” was unusual among the variables we tested insofar as it was not especially correlated positively or negatively with other qualities on the list, aside from likelihood to feel more physically attractive, where there was a moderate negative correlation (that is, women who said they were more likely to feel lonely were less likely to feel physically attractive). Other attributes in our list correlated more strongly with one another. For example, feelings of being “valued by society” were positively associated (to a moderate degree) with feelings of attractiveness, feeling skilled, and connected with their community. Loneliness didn’t work like this, with only very weak correlations to the other attributes observed. This suggests women whose wider responses suggested a clearly negative experience of matrescence, and those whose responses imply a positive one, could potentially both feel lonely.

Indeed, when we look only at mothers who reported being more likely to feel a little or a lot more lonely since becoming a mother (Figure 2), we can see that they were broadly as likely to report positive changes relating to feeling more politically engaged, authentic, skilled, and connected to friends and community, as they were negative changes (again, with physical attractiveness as an exception).

Fig. 2: “Since becoming a mother, are you more likely, less likely or equally as likely to feel the following?” (Percentages among mothers who were NET a little/lot more likely to feel LONELY.)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: NET more likely to feel lonely among biological mothers, Step-mothers or Adoptive mothers aged 18-75 in Great Britain (Unweighted n=766). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

One thing loneliness was especially associated with was age of children, where 53% of mothers of children aged 0-3 reported that they were more likely to feel “lonely” since becoming a mother, compared to 44% of mothers with children 4-11, 37% with children aged 12-17 and 30% of mothers of children over the age of 18. At the same time, age of children did not make a sizeable impact on responses in any other category. It appears, therefore, that loneliness is a particularly complex factor in the maternal experience – and one which seems especially acute in the early years, regardless of whether a woman’s experience is otherwise positive or negative.

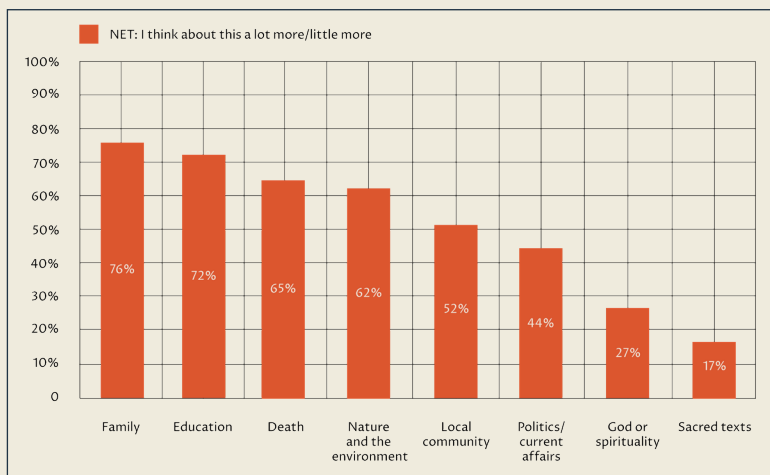
2. What are mothers thinking about?

At a glance

High proportions of mothers reported thinking more about family (76%), education (72%), death (65%), nature and the environment (62%), and local community (52%) since having becoming a mother.

Motherhood can not only change how mothers view themselves, but how they relate to the world around them. We asked mothers whether they thought more or less about a range of topics since becoming a mother. Some responses were unsurprising: for example, we might have guessed the high proportion of mothers who said they think more (a lot or a little) about family (76%) or education (72%) after becoming a mother. Perhaps more surprising is the comparable proportion (65%) who reported thinking about death more often since becoming a mother; or the 62% who think more about nature and the environment; or the half of all mothers (52%) who think more about local community. Might it be that the infamous ‘mental load’ that some women feel when having children is not only generated by the life admin and practical responsibility that they now take on, but all this “thinking more” about such a vast range of consequential topics?

Fig. 3. “Since becoming a mother do you think more or less about the following topics, or has becoming a mother made no difference?”
(Percentages NET: I think about this more)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Biological mothers, Step-mothers or Adoptive mothers aged 18–75 in Great Britain (Unweighted n = 2,112). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

At the very least, these responses indicate that, for many women, the impact of motherhood stretches far beyond their immediate relationship with their children and those children’s immediate needs. It might affect how a woman thinks about mortality, her relationship with the natural world, and (as in the previous section) her connectedness beyond her family too. We asked mothers in our qualitative study to share their feelings on these topics, and their responses, which can be found in the main *Motherhood, Inside Out* report, gave additional insight into the ways that motherhood can bring (some) women face to face with their own fragility, the fragility

of the climate, and fear for what would happen to vulnerable family members in their absence – as well as reiterating the need for “village” support close to them as they raise their families.¹⁰

We also found women in both quantitative and qualitative phases for whom these explicit links do not show up in their thinking. For example, a quarter of mothers (27%) in our survey thought no more or less about death, a third (33%) thought no more or less about nature, and 4 in 10 (41%) thought no more or less about local community. We cannot say, therefore, that every woman will experience every shift identified in this research. Not every woman has the same inner experience of motherhood. What we *can* say is that when a woman becomes a mother, it is quite *likely* that her thinking will be shifting in ways that reach beyond the immediate care of her children. Matrescence is, for many women, an existential transition, not just a purely physical or social one.



3. What about spiritual and religious change?

At a glance

Around half of our mothers (52%) said they were not more interested in religious questions since becoming a mother.

However, for a sizeable cohort of mothers, becoming a mother also brings spiritual and religious shifts. Nearly 1 in 5 mothers (19%) reported that they were more interested in religious questions, and even among non-religious mothers, 1 in 10 (11%) reported thinking about God/spirituality more since having children. Unsurprisingly, proportions were even higher among those with a religious affiliation. Religious differences were also stronger among mothers with younger children, and younger mums.

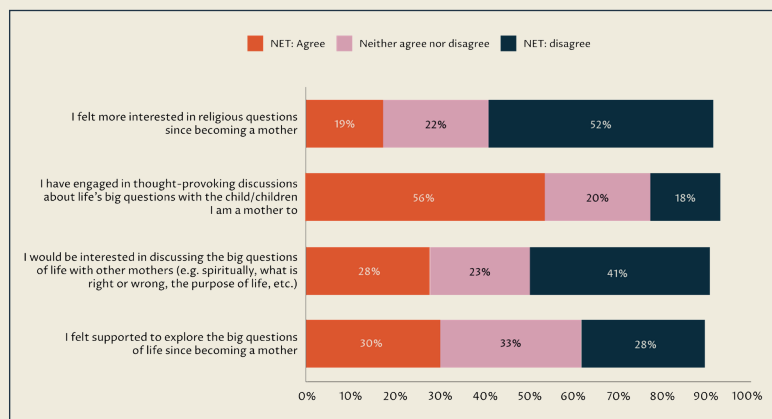
Some 56% of mothers report having engaged in thought-provoking conversations about “life’s big questions” with their children, rising to 67% among parents of secondary-school-aged children.

The “made no difference” responses to the “thinking about” question above were highest when it came to the religious categories – sacred texts (65%) and God/spirituality (59%). This rose higher still for non-religious mothers, among whom 76% reported no difference on sacred texts and 71% reported no difference on God/spirituality.

What can we conclude from this about the religious or spiritual impact of motherhood?

Relatedly, we also asked mothers their levels of agreement with a set of statements designed to dig deeper into people's interest in “the big questions” and found a high proportion of mothers who reported no greater interest in existential questions since having children. In figure 4, for example, we can see that half (52%) of mothers (“tended to” or “strongly”) disagreed that “I felt more interested in religious questions since becoming a mother”.

Fig. 4. “To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with the following statements?” (Percentages NET: Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, NET: Disagree)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Biological mothers, Step-mothers or Adoptive mothers aged 18-75 in Great Britain (Unweighted n= 2,112). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

However, this should not be taken as indication that religious, spiritual and existential issues are universally absent. On the contrary, nearly 1 in 5 (19%) agreed that they felt more interested in religious



questions since becoming a mother, and over a quarter (28%) agreed they would be interested in discussing the big questions of life with other mums (for example, spirituality, what is right or wrong, the purpose of life, etc.). Similarly, 1 in 10 (11%) mothers with no religion reported thinking about God/spirituality more since becoming a mother, demonstrating that this sometimes unnoticed theme can have relevance for a consequential minority, even beyond the actively religious.

Not unexpectedly, the proportion who thought about God or spirituality more was highest among those with a religion: 34% among Christian mothers, and 61% among mothers who affiliate to a religion other than Christianity (albeit the base for this group was small, and therefore should be treated with caution). Reflecting a similar pattern, just 4% of mothers who do not have a religion had thought more about sacred texts since becoming a mother, but this rose to 22% among Christian mothers and 45% among mothers who affiliate to a religion other than Christianity, as figure 5 illustrates.¹¹

Fig. 5. “Since becoming a mother do you think more or less about the following topics, or has becoming a mother made no difference? – “God/Spirituality” and “Sacred Texts (e.g. The Bible, The Quran, The Torah, etc.)” (Percentages NET: I think about this more, It has made no difference, and NET: I think about this less)

%	Non-religious		Christian		Non-Christian religious (Other)*	
	Sacred Text	God or spirituality	Sacred Text	God or spirituality	Sacred Text	God or spirituality
Base:	921	921	1,003	1,003	131*	131*
NET: I think about this a lot more/ little more	4%	11%	22%	34%	45%*	61%*
It has made no difference	76%	71%	63%	56%	34%*	24%*
NET: I think about this a little less/ a lot less	17%	16%	12%	7%	17%*	14%*

Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: Non-religious mothers (Unweighted n= 921), Christian religious mothers (Unweighted n= 1,003), Mothers who affiliate to a non-Christian religion (Unweighted n= 131). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

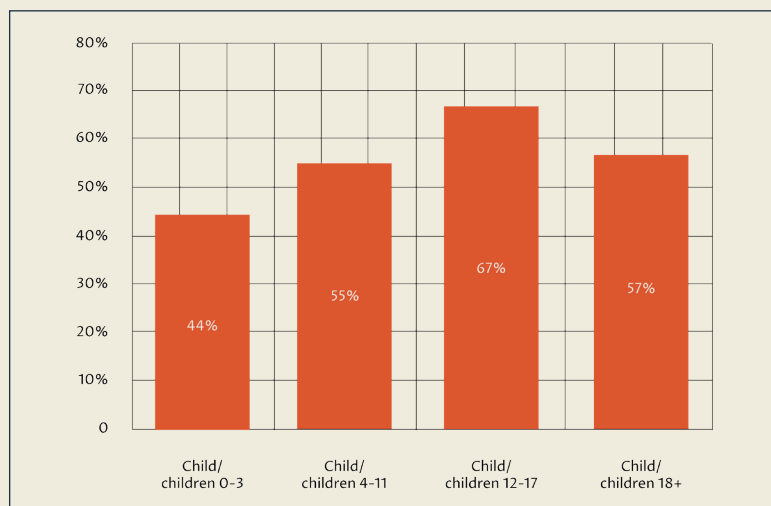
*Small base

The impact of motherhood on these religious questions was also reported to be highest among the youngest age categories. For example, among mothers aged 18-34, 37% reported that they had thought about God or spirituality more (and 30% had thought about sacred texts more) since becoming a mother, compared to 20% and 11% respectively in the 55-75 age category. Among *non-religious* mothers in the 18-34 age category taken in isolation, nearly 1 in 5 (19%) still said they had thought more about God since becoming a mother, compared to an average of 8% of non-religious mothers aged over 35. Half (50%) of 18-34-year-old mothers, including 38% of those with no religion, would be interested in discussing life's big questions with other mums.

The reason for this trend is not easy to discern. It may be connected to these mothers proximity to matrescence itself – that is, feeling more intensely the transition from ‘before to after’ because it is current – since younger mums are also likelier to have younger children – but the same trend is not so striking based on the age of mothers’ children alone. This may be because different shifts were stronger in different cohorts of mothers (those with children aged 0-3 and those with children aged 4-11) who may be spread across age categories, or it could also mean age or generation itself is having its own effect.

Perhaps most strikingly of all, for over half of mothers we surveyed (56%) interactions with children themselves seem to be a part of the picture (see above, figure 4). As figure 6 illustrates, even among mothers of 0-3-year-olds (where presumably these conversations can happen only at a very basic level) 44% of mothers still agreed (strongly or tend to) that they had these discussions – but this rose to a high of 67% among parents of secondary-school-age children:

Fig. 6. “I have engaged in thought-provoking discussions about life’s big questions with the child/children I am a mother to” (Percentages NET: Agree, by age of children)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Biological mothers, Step-mothers or Adoptive mothers aged 18-75 in Great Britain, Children aged 0-3 (Unweighted n= 333), Children aged 4-11 (Unweighted n= 571), Children aged 12-17 (Unweighted n= 503), Children aged 18+ (Unweighted n= 1,157). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

These statistics should serve to remind us of the elementary moral formation that mothers can oversee in their children – that is, the influence that primary caregivers (still, in the first instance, usually mothers) have upon the earliest social, political, and spiritual development of every new citizen – but they also give some insight into what this responsibility might spark in the mother’s own inner life. For both mother and child, raising children can also raise big questions about life, purpose, and ultimate meaning.

At the same time, among those who said they'd had these "thought-provoking discussions", only 41% agreed that they "feel supported to explore the big questions in life since becoming a mother" for these conversations. There is, then, significant room for greater support in how women are equipped to take on this instructive role.

In conclusion, it seems that motherhood is associated with a religious shift for some mothers who do not have a religion (with 7% agreeing they felt more interested in religious questions in life since becoming a mother), is significantly more likely to be so for Christian mothers (24%), and (albeit from a small base) much more likely for non-Christian religious mothers (46%). While over half of mothers (52%) reported that having children has made them no more interested in religious questions, the story is different for many other women – in ways that should raise pastoral questions for all those supporting mothers, in statutory services and faith communities alike. Spiritual disruption is one of the things that might be going on in a woman's transition to motherhood, as we unpack in far greater detail in our qualitative report.¹² And one of the places that women are having big conversations about life, meaning, and purpose, is with their own children.

4. How do mothers feel about looking after children?

At a glance

Some 64% describe childcare as rewarding and 60% describe it as enjoyable. One in five described it as “awe-inspiring”.

However, 59% of mothers describe it as “challenging”, 53% as “tiring”, and nearly half as “stressful” (48%), and four in ten describe it as “overwhelming”. A quarter describe it as “lonely”.

“Stress” and “overwhelm” peaked among parents of 4-11-year-olds: 67% and 59% of mothers in this group respectively associated looking after children with these emotions.

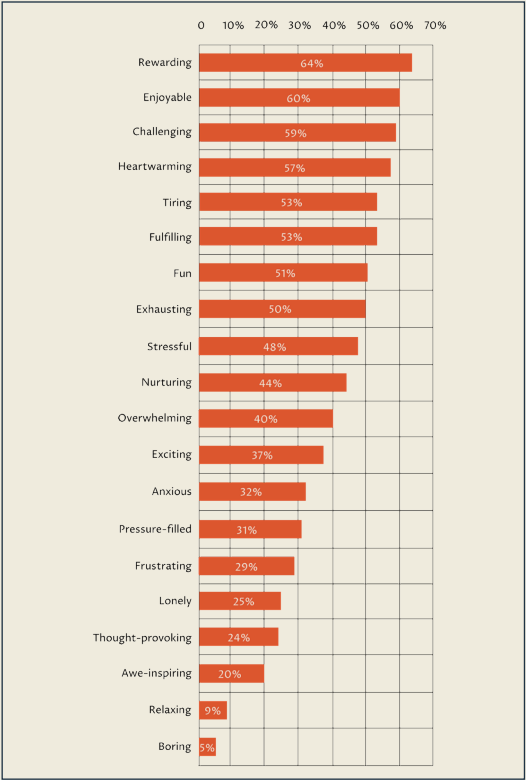
When biological mothers were spontaneously asked what emotions they felt when seeing their baby for the first time after childbirth, the range of common responses included love/protection, happiness, overwhelm, relief, fear/anxiety, awe, amazement, and tiredness/exhaustion.

Turning to childcare itself, then, what are mothers feeling during the task of mothering?

We explored this question by offering a long list of twenty emotions, and asking respondents to tick all those they associate with looking after their children. Eight of the twenty emotions were picked by one half or more mothers, perhaps confirming what many know:

that childcare can be many things at once. Moreover, as figure 7 shows, there was a strong mix of positive and negative responses:

Fig. 7. “In general, which, if any, of the following emotions do you associate with looking after the child/children you are a mother to?” (Percentages NET: Selected, Could tick as many as apply)



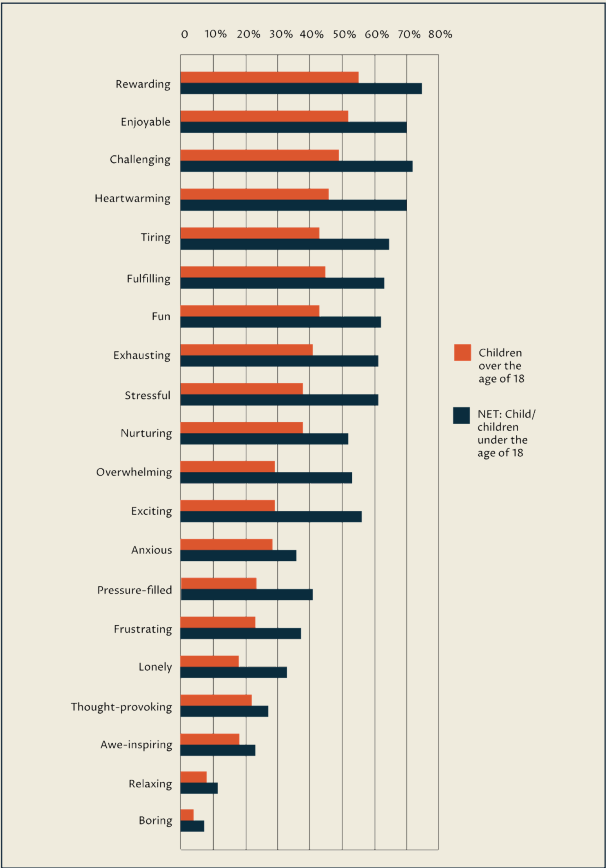
*Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Biological mothers, Step-mothers or Adoptive mothers aged 18-75 in Great Britain (Unweighted n= 2,112). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.*¹³

Focusing only on the most popular options – rewarding (64%), enjoyable (60%), challenging (59%) – would give an incomplete picture here. Considering the middle responses, too, the fact that nearly half of mothers describe childcare as “stressful” (48%), or four in ten describe it as “overwhelming”, or a quarter describe it as “lonely”, or one in five described it as “awe-inspiring”, each reveal something meaningful of the multi-faceted nature of raising children.

Responses varied somewhat (though not drastically) by age of children – with the biggest contrasts in response, unsurprisingly, between parents of children aged 0-17 and those aged 18+, as illustrated in figure 8 (p.36). Separately from the responses visualised in this graph, 27% of parents of children over the age of 18 instead indicated “I do not look after my child/children (anymore)” and so do not appear in these data.

A few emotions were also especially associated with middle childhood. For example, stress and overwhelm peaked among mothers of 4-11-year-olds (among whom 67% and 59% respectively selected these emotions, compared to 60% and 48% of mothers of 12-17-year-olds, 58% and 54% of mothers of 0-3-year-olds, and only 38% and 29% of parents of adult children). Similarly, some 43% of mothers with school-aged children described childcare as “pressure-filled” compared to 35% with younger children and 23% of mothers of adults – though these middle groups were also more likely to describe it as “thought-provoking”.

Fig. 8. “In general, which, if any, of the following emotions do you associate with looking after the child/children you are a mother to?” Mothers of children 0-17 vs 18+. (Percentages NET: Selected, Could tick as many as apply)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: Child/children over the age of 18 who selected emotions (Unweighted n= 811), Child/children 0-17 (Unweighted n= 1,116). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

Mothers are likely well-acquainted with the range of emotions that come with their role by this stage. Relatedly, we also asked the biological mothers in our sample what emotions they felt when they saw their baby for the first time after childbirth, in the form of an open text box so they could share whatever they liked in response. Happiness (often expressed using the evocative language of “joy”) and instant love were unsurprisingly the most frequently reported emotions. Other commonly reported positive emotions included fulfilment, contentment and pride; and more unusual emotions like awe, amazement, gratitude, or blessedness. Relief, including “relief that it was over”, was also mentioned specifically by roughly a quarter of respondents. Yet fear, anxiety, overwhelm, and exhaustion were also very common themes, as well as, in a small number of cases, more intensely negative emotions like terror, panic, trauma, or disappointment. For some the moment had a transcendental quality – the responses included 9 mentions of God, including one woman’s description of her emotion as “the miracle of God in my arms” – while others described a more grounded sense of “familiarity” or “belonging”. It was not uncommon to find many emotions listed together, including a mix of negative and positive, for example:

“Overwhelmed, loving, exhausted, scared.”

“Love Pride Terrified Anxious”

“Exhausted, elated, scared, in love.”

“Overwhelmed, scared, happy, joy.”

Other mothers – around 5% – described feeling numbness, lack of bond, or nothing at all. That women feel unprepared for the



emotional nuance of motherhood is encapsulated movingly in the words of one respondent:

I wanted to cry but didn't because I was scared/embarrassed of what people would think of me. I am unsure of why I wanted to cry - maybe relief that my baby was born and was healthy. I felt super protective, scared, lost, overwhelmed, like a child who knew nothing.

Again, the data paint a picture of a multi-faceted life stage, far more complex than characterisations of nappies, pram-pushing, discipline, or bedtimes alone. Taking all the results explored so far as a whole, it becomes clear how limited a view of motherhood primarily through the lens of 'tasks', or even 'relationship', actually is. It is a job, a relationship, and can be a complete personal transformation for the mother all at once – and reinvents itself again and again over time.

5. How important is looking after children, and who bears the cost?

At a glance

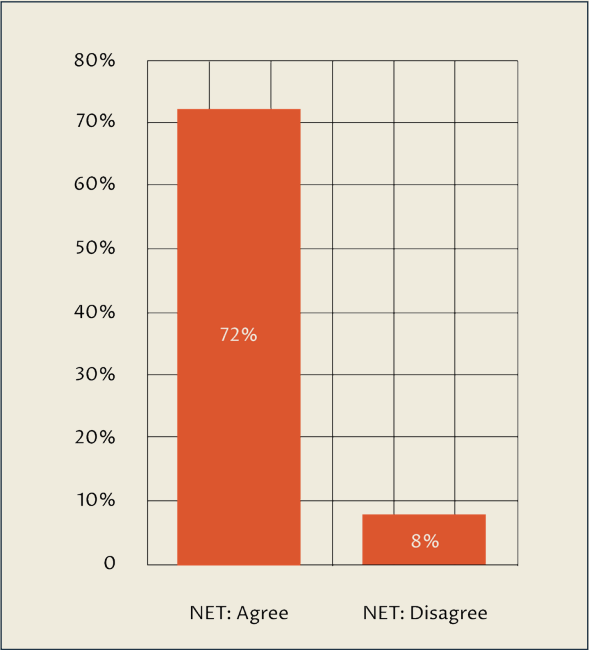
Some (72%) of women agreed that “time spent looking after children at home is as vital to the economy as time spent working in paid employment”. Agreement was highest among mothers (78%).

Three-quarters of women (76%) felt that being a mum can limit career opportunities for women, compared to only 11% who felt being a dad limited career opportunities for men.

Moving away from questions directed specifically at mothers, we asked our wider sample of women aged 18-75 a series of questions concerning the politics and economics of parenting. First, we asked mothers how far they agreed with a series of statements about workplace flexibility, career impacts of parenting, and government support for new parents. Responses reflected the high value that women across the sample place on parenting, but also the high professional cost it can be seen to place on mothers in particular.

Strikingly, then, nearly three-quarters of women (72%) felt that “time spent looking after children at home was as vital to the economy as time spent working in paid employment”, compared to only 8% who disagreed with this statement.

Fig.9. “Time spent looking after children at home is as vital to the economy as time spent working in paid employment.” (Percentages NET: Agree and NET: Disagree)



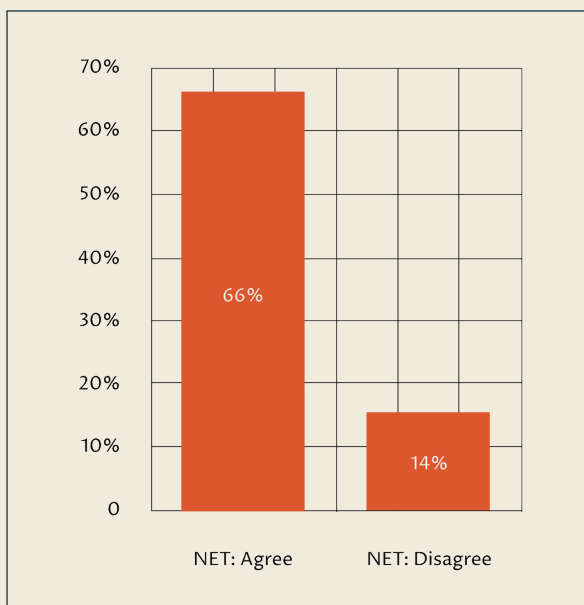
Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Women aged 18-75 in Great Britain who consented to being asked questions (Unweighted n=3,606). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

This marks a real contrast not only with how valued some mothers themselves feel in their role (p.18) but with the economic remuneration actually offered to new parents in the UK – particularly in the first year of a child’s life when the demands of parenting are most intense. UK mothers are entitled to 52 weeks of statutory maternity leave, but only 39 of those weeks are paid. Excluding the

first 6 of these weeks (during which pay is dependent on individual earnings) the *maximum* an individual would receive from the state across the full year of her maternity leave is £6,412.56 – far below the minimum wage as an equivalent salary. Motherhood is not a job in a conventional sense. Nonetheless, time spent looking after children is a necessary economic role during which the caregiving parent usually cannot earn in other ways (and without which other parents cannot always be economically active either), and it is recognised as such by a significant majority of women. Yet the policy landscape comes nowhere close to this recognition. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that we also found that two in three women (66%) agree that the UK government should give more support (e.g. greater financial support or different parental leave policies) to new parents and guardians (e.g. who have recently given birth, adopted a child, etc.).



Fig. 10. “The UK government should give more support (e.g. greater financial support or different parental leave policies) to new parents/guardians (e.g. who have recently given birth, adopted a child, etc.)” (Percentages NET: Agree and NET: Disagree)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Women aged 18-75 in Great Britain who consented to being asked questions (Unweighted n=3,606). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

There was a clear divergence by parental status on the perceived economic value of parenting. Some 64% of those who are not a parent or legal guardian agreed that time spent looking after children at home is as vital to the economy as time spent working in paid employment, compared to a 72% across all women and a high of 80% among parents of 0-3-year-olds and children over 18 respectively. Might it be

that the relationship between parenting and productive labour takes on new significance when we, and our peers, start actually to do it? We saw above (p.18) that 25% of mothers felt more “politically engaged” since becoming a mother (compared to 22% who felt less so) and these statistics add some meat onto the bones of some issues that may be at work here – though far more research is clearly needed.

Fig. 11. “Time spent looking after children at home is as vital to the economy as time spent working in paid employment.” (Percentages NET: Agree)

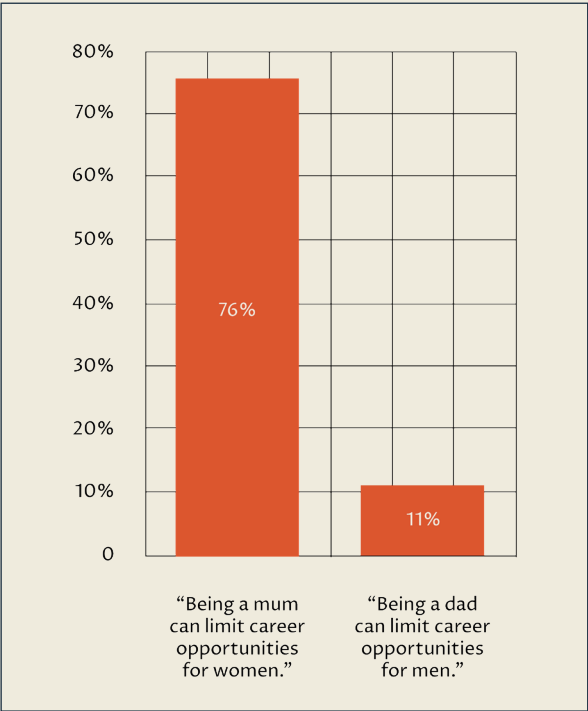
	Not a parent/ legal guardian	Child/ children aged 0-3	Child/ children aged 4-11	Child/ children aged 12-17	Child/ children over 18	Any child/ children
Unweighted base	1,402	345	591	522	1,166	2,162
Net: agree	64%	80%	78%	78%	80%	78%

Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Women aged 18-75 in Great Britain who consented to being asked questions (Unweighted n=3,606). Not a parent/ guardian (Unweighted n=1402), Children aged 0-3 (Unweighted n= 345), Children aged 4-11 (Unweighted n= 591), Children aged 12-17 (Unweighted n= 522), Children aged 18+ (Unweighted n= 1,166), Any child/children (Unweighted n=2,162). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

Our respondents also perceived striking gender imbalances in the way the professional costs of parenting are borne across society. Some 76% of women agreed that being a mum can limit career opportunities for women, compared to only 11% who felt being a dad limited career opportunities for men. Moreover, nearly half (46%) of all women agreed that parents/guardians who use flexible working arrangements

in their workplace to work around childcare commitments are perceived as less committed to their careers.”

Fig. 12. “To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with the following statements?” “Being a mum can limit career opportunities for women.” And “Being a dad can limit career opportunities for men.” (Percentages: NET Agree)

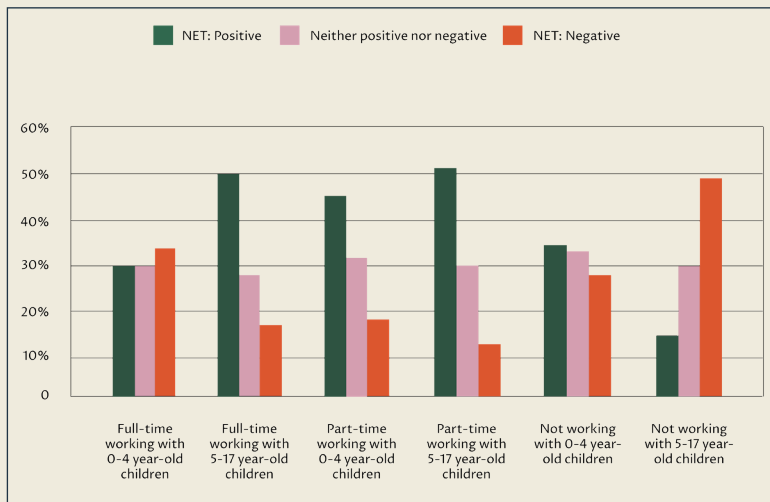


Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Women aged 18-75 in Great Britain who consented to being asked questions (Unweighted n=3,606). Online interviews, 24th April and 14th May 2026.

These findings were higher among those with children themselves – for example, 81% of women with a child under the age of 18 agreed that being a mum can limit career opportunities for women, compared to only 71% of those who are not a parent or legal guardian. Strikingly, those agreeing that parents/guardians who use flexible working arrangements in their workplace to work around childcare commitments are perceived as less committed to their careers rose to a high of 60% among parents of primary school age children compared to 39% of non-parent/guardians.

Finally on this topic, we also asked women to gauge how UK society perceives mothers when it comes to working status. Is mothers' employment perceived differently depending on the age of their children? On the whole, a higher proportion of women judged society's views to be positive than negative, with two exceptions. A higher proportion of women felt full-time workers with children aged 0-4 were perceived negatively than positively (30% positive vs 34% negative), along with non-workers with school age-children (15% positive vs 49% negative). Overall, it seems women sense that some segments of society expect mothers to be economically engaged, but the extent to which this is balanced with childcare at home changes as the child grows: non-workers are perceived to be seen more positively in the child's younger years than older, and vice versa for full time workers. We did not measure whether women agree with these expectations or not, but the extent of perceived social pressures which are difficult to meet is clear: an economic and practical necessity to work for many women, and yet, the difficulty of returning to a full career after a break. As above, this is in addition to professional and financial costs that are also perceived primarily to fall on mothers.

Fig. 13: “To what extent is UK society positive or negative towards the following groups or are they neither positive nor negative?”
(Percentages: NET Positive, Neither positive or negative, NET Negative)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Women aged 18–75 in Great Britain who consented to being asked questions (Unweighted n=3,606). Online interviews, 24th April and 14th May 2026.

In sum, many women generally value motherhood highly, and also generally perceive wider society as viewing mothers positively. These are encouraging findings. Yet we also found a widespread sense among women that they do (or will) disproportionately pay the costs of this highly valued role – a sense felt most acutely by those ‘on the job’.

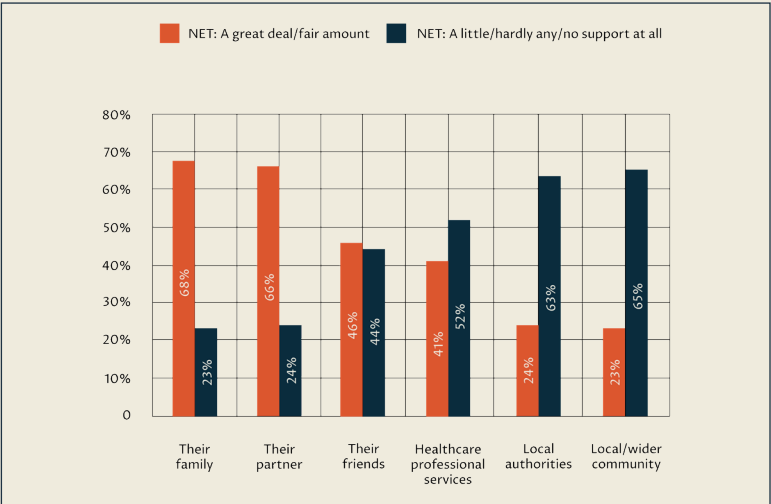
6. Who supports new mothers, and what more could be done?

At a glance

Some 37%, 45%, and 47% of women felt that new mums (probably or definitely) do not receive enough in-person support from healthcare, local or wider community, and local authorities respectively.

We asked our full sample of women how much in-person support they thought new mothers in the UK received across six different categories: family, partner, friends, healthcare professional services, local authorities, and local/wider community. In general, perception of support tended to be highest when it came to family (family and partner), but lower from other sources – and especially low when it came to local authority and local/wider community support (figure 14).¹⁴

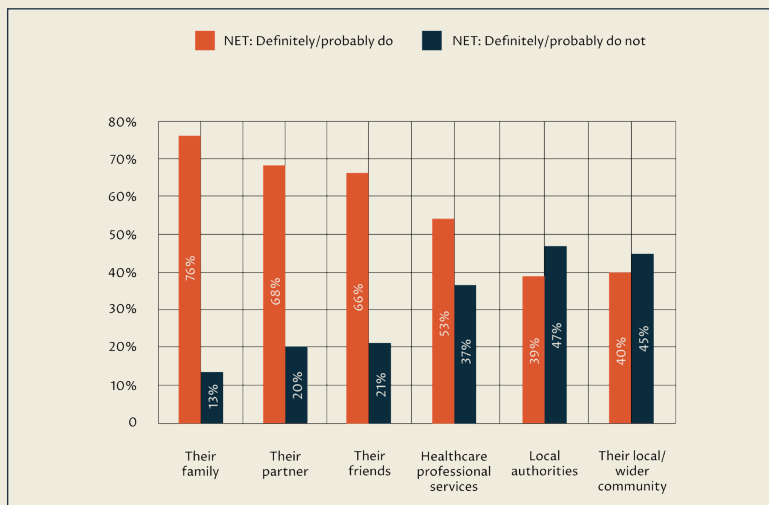
Fig. 14. “In general, how much in-person support, if any, do you think new mums in the UK receive from the following sources?”
(Percentages: NET: A great deal/ fair amount of support, and NET: A little/ hardly any/no support)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Women aged 18–75 in Great Britain who consented to being asked questions (Unweighted n=3,606). Online interviews, 24th April and 14th May 2026.

We then asked women if they thought new mums in the UK received “enough” in-person support from each of the same sources. Echoing responses above, the harshest judgement was reserved for healthcare professional services, local/wider community and local authorities (37%, 45%, and 47% “definitely do not/probably do not receive enough support” respectively), as figure 15 shows. It appears a significant proportion of women feel that the care of new mothers is held primarily in personal and informal networks, with less in person support from wider society and its institutions.

Fig. 15. “In general, do you think new mums in the UK receive enough in-person support from the following sources?” (Percentages: NET Definitely/probably do and NET: Definitely/probably do not)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Women aged 18-75 in Great Britain who consented to being asked questions (Unweighted n=3,606). Online interviews between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

Perception of a *lack* of in-person support from institutional sources was somewhat higher among mothers – though this difference was often caused by a higher proportion of respondents without children stating that they “don’t know” (rather than a necessarily more *positive* perception) than among our sample of mothers. For example, 43% of women with children aged 0-3, and 45% of women with children aged 4-11, felt that mothers do not receive “enough” in-person support from healthcare professional services, compared



to 31% of those without children. Meanwhile, 51% of respondents with children under 18 thought new mums do not receive enough in-person support from their local/wider community, compared to 41% of non-parent/guardians. These differences suggest a subtle hardening of opinion among those who have children, regarding the (in) adequacy of formal provision for new mothers – that is, a ‘small p’ political shift regarding support for this vital life stage.

7. Marking a new life stage?

In her 2023 book *Matrescence*, writer and journalist Lucy Jones reflects on the discontinuation of the Anglican “churcing of women” ceremony in the mid-twentieth century. This ceremony was unhelpfully associated with a perceived need for purification following childbirth but was also (perhaps uniquely among common Christian rituals in Western culture) focused explicitly on the new mother. Its discontinuation therefore means that women in the UK have no ritual like this marking their new life stage of motherhood, akin to baptism for the child or marriage for a wedded couple. This marks a difference from some cultures around the world, where motherhood is still marked in ceremonial and ritual ways. Regarding this contrast, Jones concludes, “As time passed after my daughter was born, I realised I was searching for, and trying to create my own matrescent rituals”.¹⁵

In our qualitative research we invited mothers to reflect on this topic, and heard mixed responses on whether they would find such a ritual (whether secular or religious) helpful or not.¹⁶

In the polling, we found similarly. The survey included a question designed to gauge mothers’ hypothetical interest in participating in a formal ritual or ceremony specifically to mark their transition when becoming a mother to their first child. Prior to answering the question, participants were informed that, “in various cultures around the world, there are formal rituals or ceremonies (similar to baptism or marriage) to mark a woman’s transition to becoming a mother”. They were asked to think back to when they became a mother to their first child and asked the extent to which they would be interested, or not, in participating in a ceremony that focussed on them as a mother. The majority of women did not respond with interest (41% of all mothers

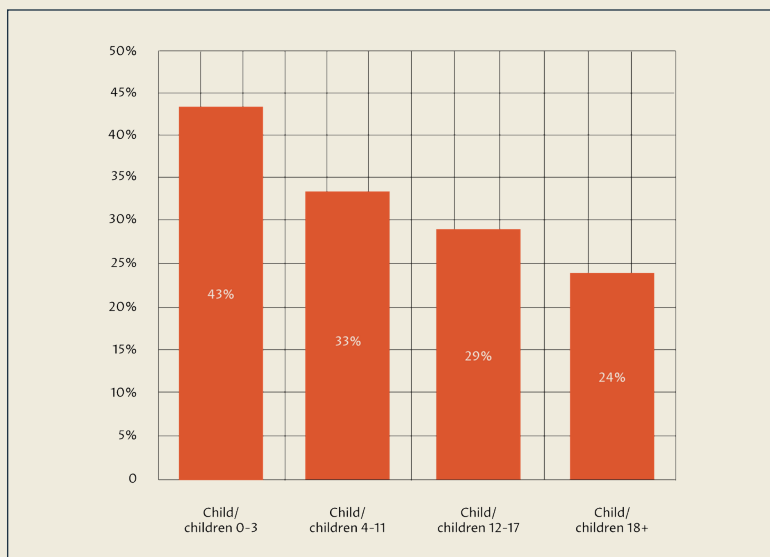


not at all interested and 23% not very interested). However, notable minorities would have been interested in such a ceremony: 9% were very interested, and 20% were fairly interested.

While we did not specify that any such ceremony would be religious, interest was (perhaps unsurprisingly) higher among those who had a religion (37%). It was also higher among the youngest age categories and those with the youngest children.

So, for example, 43% of mothers with a child or children aged 0-3-years-old would have been (very or fairly) interested in such a ceremony, compared to just 24% of mothers of adult children. This might suggest greater interest in ceremony recognition of matrescence among those currently experiencing it (that is, who have become mothers most recently) as figure 16 illustrates:

Fig. 16. “In various cultures around the world there are formal rituals or ceremonies (similar to baptism or marriage) to mark a woman’s transition to becoming a mother. Thinking back to when you became a mother to your first child, to what extent would you have been interested, or not, in participating in a ceremony like this, focused on you as the mother?” (Percentages NET: Very/fairly interested by age of child/children)



Study on Women and Mothers (Ipsos, 2026). Base: All Biological mothers, Step-mothers or Adoptive mothers aged 18-75 in Great Britain. Children aged 0-3 (Unweighted n= 333), Children aged 4-11 (Unweighted n= 571), Children aged 12-17 (Unweighted n= 503), Children aged 18+ (Unweighted n= 1,157). Online interviews, between 24th April and 14th May 2026.

That said, notable differences also emerged by age of the mother herself, with 41% of young mothers aged 18-34 expressing that they would have been interested, compared to only 21% of those aged

55-75. More than one factor may be driving this apparent difference, including recency and/or generational effects, age, number of children the respondent has had since their first child, as well as someone's age at which they first became a mother. A further potential complicating factor might be the younger age profile of non-Christian religious groups (e.g. the younger profile of Muslims in the UK, who are noted in the 2021 census to be on average 27 years old compared to 51 years old for Christians or 32 years old for non-religious census respondents) meaning we should also consider religious identity when interpreting these results.¹⁷ Nonetheless, even taking 18-34-year-olds who do not affiliate to a religion in isolation, 28% would be very or fairly interested in a matrescent ritual, compared to 8% of 55-75-year-olds who do not affiliate to a religion.

Whatever the cause, it seems fair to say that interest in a matrescent ritual of some kind is likely to be highest among the women most likely to become parents in the next 5-10 years – a potential untapped pastoral opportunity that faith communities might consider addressing in future initiatives, especially among younger mothers.

6

Conclusion



Whether it is the 65% of mothers who think more about death since having children, the 27% who feel less valued by society, the 40% who find looking after their children “overwhelming”, or the 20% who find it “awe-inspiring”, the figures in this report speak to a human experience with endless depths and complexities – few of which are routinely conveyed in depictions of motherhood, or accounted for in the societal care and support that mothers receive.

Not every mother will experience every possible experience explored here, but enough will experience enough of them to justify re-evaluation. How can society better understand the full experience of becoming a mother, in all its dimensions? How can we better support women through this unique life stage – not only with better practical and financial support but with a richer cultural recognition of the many inner shifts that new mothers might be experiencing? How can we ‘see’ mothers more fully?

A deeper consideration of this vital question can be found in the main report of this research project, *Motherhood, Inside Out*, along with some simple recommendations for those directly involved in the support of new mothers. Here perhaps it suffices to give the final word to one of our participants in our qualitative project. Simply: “I’ve been surprised by how much it [motherhood] has changed everything”.¹⁸

6

Endnotes



Introduction

- 1 Cited in Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 115.
- 2 Mary Harrington, 'Thomophobia', *First Things*, 12 May 2026.
- 3 Peanut, cited in Lisa Salmon, 'Nearly three-quarters of mothers feel invisible, study suggests', *The Independent*, 25 October 2023.
- 4 Rozario, McAleer, Bell, and Pennington, *Motherhood, Inside Out* (Theos and Bible Society, 2026).
- 5 See, for example, the BeMother project led by Óscar Villaroya, at www.bemother.eu/en/ and Elseline Hoekzema, Erika Barba-Müller, Cristina Pozzobon, et al. 'Pregnancy leads to long-lasting changes in human brain structure', *Nature Neuroscience* 20, (2017) pp. 287–296.
- 6 Gabriella Swirling, 'Deaths begin to outnumber births for first time in 50 years', *The Telegraph*, 1 July 2026.
- 7 Whilst conducting this research for Theos and Bible Society, Ipsos has applied checks, processes and standards to ensure respondent validity – this are documented and summarised in Ipsos' answers to the "ESOMAR 37" framework questions (these are questions provided by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research for online market research suppliers to answer). Ipsos uses its proprietary online panel as well as other vetted panel partners which are ISO 20252 accredited. These processes include measures taken both during respondents' panel registration, and also processes relating to the survey-specific data collection. The full suite of measures taken are described in Ipsos's answers to ESOMAR questions – these include detection of mismatches between Geo-IP and device settings, "honey pot" or "trap" questions to detect anomalous answers, duplication checks, and straight-lining detection (i.e. checks for those taking the survey too rapidly). In terms of this research's topic, the self-completion paradigm used here (quantitative research conducted through an online, device-agnostic medium) is advantageous, in that it mitigates possible instances of interviewer presence causing "social acceptability bias". As with all survey research, claimed past behaviour and recalled behaviour, as well as stated likelihood or intention regarding future behaviour, may vary from actual past or future behaviours.
For more information about Ipsos' data validation processes and accreditation in this area, [click here](#).
Ipsos was responsible for the questionnaire design, fieldwork and the production of the excel tables only. The analysis of the open-ended question responses, analysis and interpretation of the data, along with the reporting was carried out by Theos and the Bible Society.

Findings: 1. How do women's identity and sense of purpose change when they have children?

- 8 Rozario, McAleer, Bell, and Pennington, *Motherhood, Inside Out*, p. 20.
- 9 For the full percentage breakdown, see the data tables on the Ipsos and Theos websites. Readers should note that the percentage who ticked a "more likely", "less likely" or "equally

likely” option does not add up to 100% because each question also includes a percentage of respondents who ticked “don’t know” or “not applicable”.

Findings: 2. What are mothers thinking about?

- 10 See Rozario, McAleer and Bell, *Motherhood, Inside Out*, pp.65-67.

Findings: 3. What about spiritual and religious change?

- 11 Methodological caution is necessary when considering results by religious affiliation. We cannot know for sure *when* any of these women started to affiliate with their current religion, and therefore whether they were religiously affiliated at the point they became mothers – whether their current religious affiliation was a primer for the impact of their motherhood, or a result of it – though 4% of those who ‘never’ thought about God before motherhood reported thinking more about it now. Moreover, in this particular sample, the non-Christian religious sample is only small – a weighted sample of 251 women, and an unweighted base of 131 responses.
- 12 Rozario, McAleer, Bell, and Pennington, *Motherhood, Inside Out*, pp. 48-64.

Findings: 4. How do mothers feel about looking after children?

- 13 Respondents could also select “I do not look after my child/children (anymore)”. Separately from the responses visualised in figure 7, 15% of all mothers ticked this option. All but 4 of these respondents were parents of children over the age of 18, among whom 27% selected this option.

Findings: 6. Who supports new mothers, and what more could be done?

- 14 The full response wordings were: “Healthcare professional services (e.g. medical care, health visiting team, etc.)”; “Their friends”; “Their family”; “Their local/ wider community (e.g. neighbours, community groups, other parents/ guardians)”; “Local authorities (e.g. Sure Start Children’s Centres, Services, Community Outreach Programs, etc.)”; “Their partner”

Findings: 7. Marking a new life stage?

- 15 Lucy Jones, *Matrescence*, p. 226.
- 16 Rozario, McAleer, Bell, and Pennington, *Motherhood, Inside Out*, pp. 87-92.

- 17 See for example, Indlieb Farazi Saber, “‘Half of British Muslims are under 25’: Report shows shifting demographics’, Al Jazeera, 15 May 2026. <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2026/5/15/young-and-educated-report-reveals-shifting-demographics-among-uk-muslims>
- “Religion by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021”, ONS, 30 January 2023. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religionbyageandsexenglandandwales/census2021#religion-by-age>
- 18 Rozario, McAleer, Bell, and Pennington, *Motherhood, Inside Out*, p. 25.



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Motherhood, Inside Out: The Story in Numbers

This report accompanies the *Motherhood, Inside Out* research project, unpacking its main quantitative findings. Based on an online survey of more than 3,600 women in Great Britain, including over 2,100 mothers, the report speaks to both the rewards and challenges of motherhood.

It finds that while many mothers reported feeling more authentic, connected to their communities, and engaged in meaningful conversations about life, they were also more likely to experience loneliness, feel less valued by society, and face a complex mix of emotions, from joy and fulfilment to exhaustion and overwhelm. Most women recognised the economic value of unpaid childcare, believed motherhood can limit women's career opportunities, and felt the government should provide greater support for parents. Motherhood prompted many women to think more deeply about family, mortality, politics and spirituality, including over a half of mothers discussing life's biggest questions with their children.

Overall, the report highlights motherhood as a social, political and spiritual issue, rather than simply a personal experience.

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Front cover image: Emily Ikoshi from the short animation *Making a Mother*

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