

Women, work and family: Balancing responsibilities in the LIS field

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Background

As the library and information science (LIS) workforce ages, the retention of workers will be vital to resolving potential worker shortages. Understanding the demands of work and family of LIS professionals is important as employers develop strategies for recruitment and retention. The purpose of this research is to understand the work and family responsibilities of LIS professionals by gender and the impact of parenting roles on LIS careers. The results may provide useful guidance to both LIS employers and educators, in the areas of workforce planning, recruitment, retention staff development and career advisement.

Methods

The study analyzes a subset of the data collected for the Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS 1) project, a large-scale retrospective career survey of graduates of North Carolina LIS programs (1964-2007). The response rate for the full WILIS 1 survey was 35% (n=2648). The analysis includes a subset of respondents including LIS alumni that are currently employed (n=1946). Quantitative analyses of the survey data have been conducted.

Demographics of respondents

Gender: 80.7% female

Ethnicity: 10.9% non-white

Age: mean 47.1, sd. 10.6

Married or living with a partner: 69.3%

Parental responsibilities

•56.9% LIS professionals have one or more children

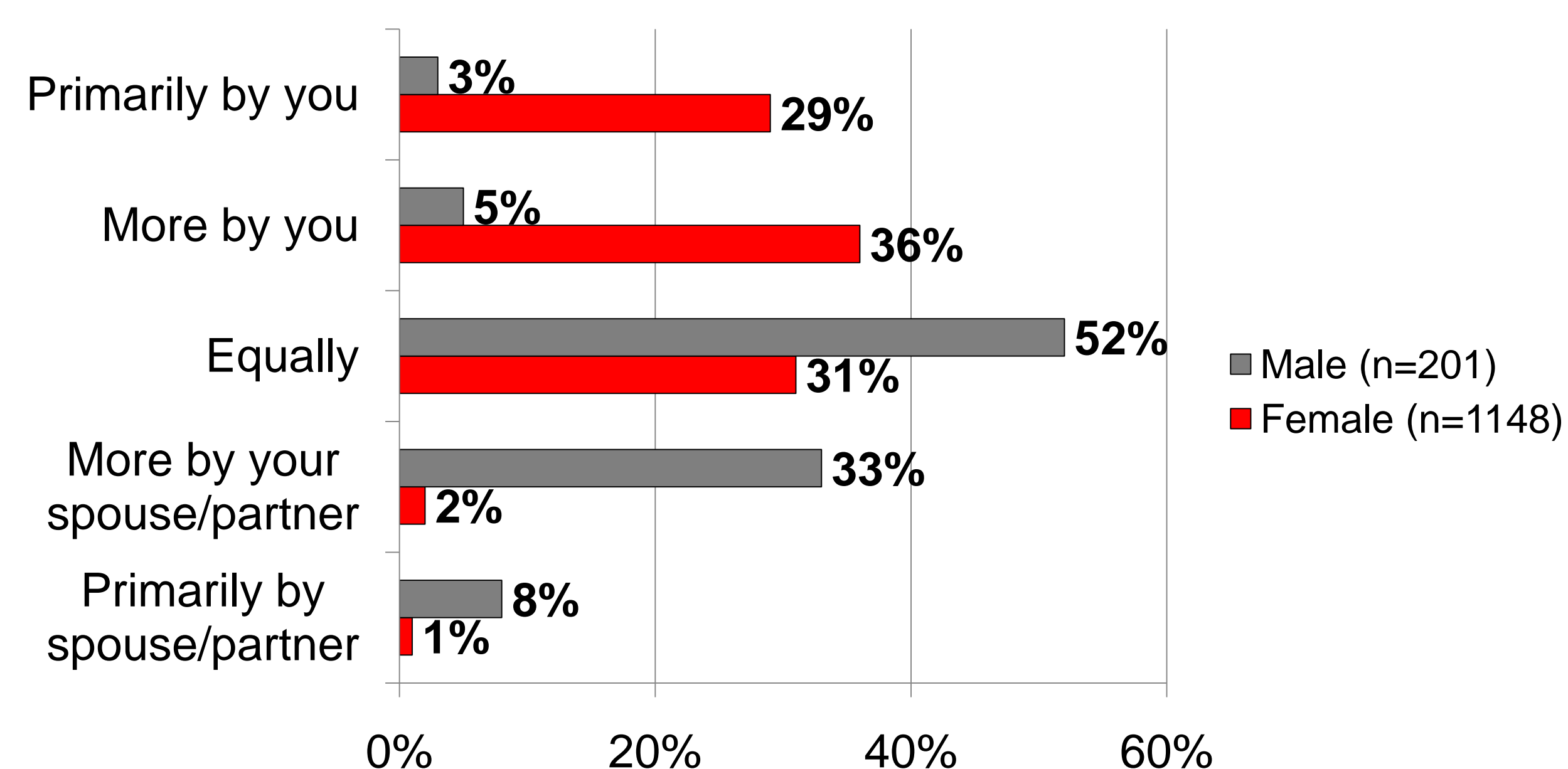
Number of children

	Mean (sd)
Mothers	1.14 (1.2)
Fathers	0.92 (1.1)

Age by parental status

	Mean (sd)
Mothers	50.6 (9.0)
Fathers	49.2 (9.2)
Non-mothers	43.1 (11.2)
Non-fathers	43.4 (11.0)

Thinking about parenting responsibilities, are they fulfilled:

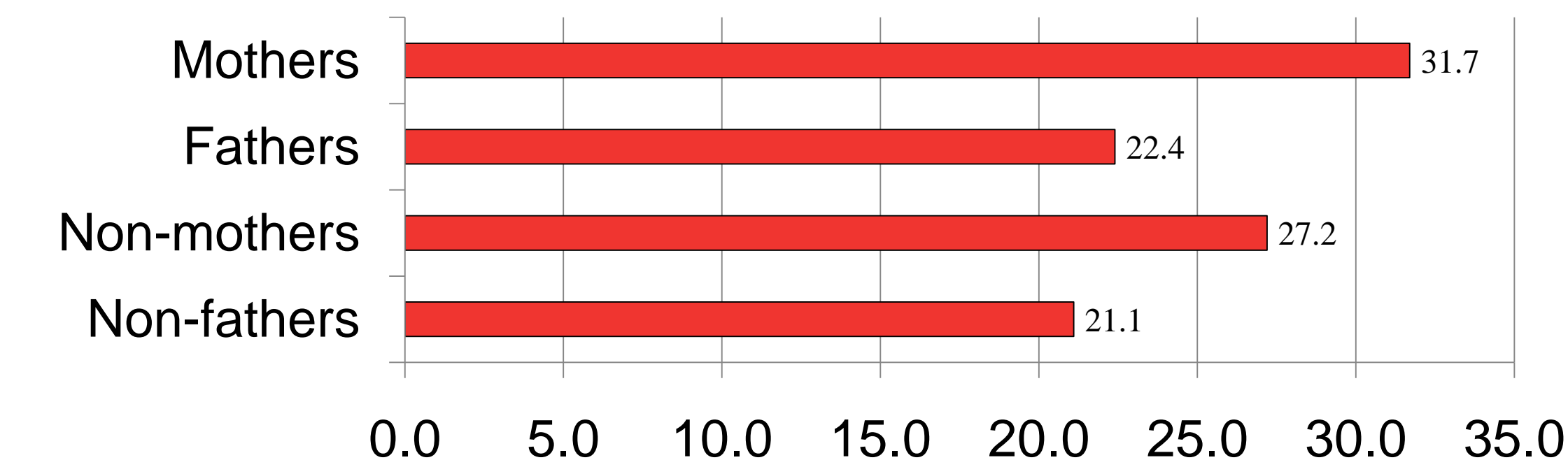


Results

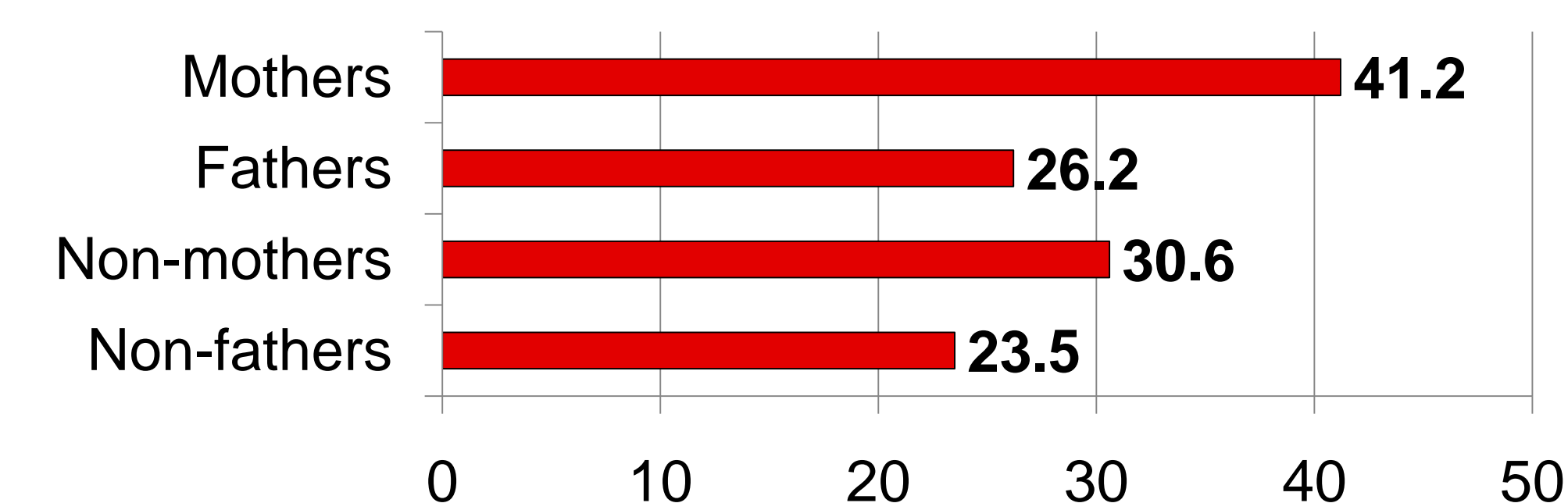
Employment patterns

- Average number of breaks for maternity/paternity leave:
 - Mothers: 0.78, sd. 1.4
 - Fathers: 0.10, sd. 0.3
- Percent who have taken extended employment breaks (>6 months) related to child care*:
 - Mothers: 38%
 - Fathers: 5.5%
- Average length of child care related breaks*:
 - Mothers: 62.5 months
 - Fathers: 14.2 months
- There were no differences between parents and non-parents in job satisfaction, hours worked, primary work location (e.g., home, office) and desire to adjust the number of hours worked.
- OLS regression analyses indicated that:
 - Being a parent and length of time in current job have no independent effects on salary.
 - Being female, taking at least one extended child care break and working in a library have an independent negative effects on salary.
 - Earnings tend to increase with age.

Percent who report its hard to take time off to care for personal or family matters*



Percent who reported not having opportunities for promotion in the LIS field.*



* Significance tests were performed and $p < 0.05$

LIS as a career

- Working mothers were more likely to have supervisory responsibilities and to have entered an LIS program because an LIS career fits with their family responsibilities.
- Despite perceptions of career opportunities (above), no differences were found between parents and non-parents in the number of positions held and the type of job movement experienced within their current employer.

Implications

- Overall, an LIS career appears to allow parents to take employment breaks with no effect on career advancement opportunities. Further analysis of the number of breaks and timing of break is warranted.
- There may be differences in the perception and reality of career opportunities. These findings may be of interest to LIS workforce and educational planners.