



Is this the end of the „Stay-At-Home“-mother?

Tina Downham, a former headhunter, has been a full-time mum to Holli, 10, and Daisy, four, for the past six years. And she loves it. "To be in a situation where you can enjoy your children and not pay somebody else to look after them is great," she says. "Looking after children is the biggest job you will ever have. If you put them in nursery you get the worst of them - at the beginning and the end of the day. How do you ever do any bonding?"

But Downham, 37, has seen things from both sides. In her old company she managed a team of 10 people, working full-time while Holli was in nursery as a toddler. She was so stressed and harried that she remembers trailing an ambulance through rush hour traffic to get to work on time. One day she picked her daughter up from nursery at the 6.30pm cut-off time and Holli, then three, said, "Mummy, do I have to be the last one here?" She realised it was time to quit. "It makes me feel sick when I think about what I had to juggle."

She and husband Clive, a power tools executive, downsized to one salary and moved from Buckinghamshire to a cheaper village. She blames materialism for the fact that few women want to do what she has done. "I don't know why there aren't a few more mums going without a few things - because what you get back is so much more."

But Downham's views are increasingly rare - and she is one of a dying breed. Around seven out of eight mothers now work.

Pippa Menzies, 33, also embodies this new kind of working stay-at-home motherhood. She and her husband Rory, 37, do not have any childcare for Jake, three, Jamie, 16 months and Archie, five months. They look after the children themselves, but they also run Riverdale House, a Bed&Breakfast in Alfriston, East Sussex. She left her career running an MP's office to spend more time with the children. "Politics and family life do not mix. It's impossible - it's a 24-hour job," she says. "Then there's the money element. As soon as you have two children, it's not financially worthwhile and work becomes a luxury."