

***mother/untitled***

# American Mothers on Pause

*A study of stay-at-home motherhood in 2023*

Conducted by Proof Insights on behalf of *Mother Untitled*



# American Mothers on Pause

*What is life really like for a college educated woman who leaves or downshifts her paid job for a chapter as a stay-at-home mom (SAHM)? What motivates her choice? What worries her? What does she gain and what does she give up?*

At Mother Untitled, we wanted answers to these questions—not only through personal stories but also through data. Because media outlets and research organizations don't often focus on modern stay-at-home motherhood in America, we decided to step up to the challenge.

*American Mothers on Pause* (AMP) is our first-ever proprietary study, conducted on behalf of Mother Untitled by the independent research firm Proof Insights.

We are releasing the data in two parts. This report focuses on the day-to-day reality for women who have paused or downshifted (meaning, decreased their working hours) for motherhood, bringing the benefits and difficulties to the forefront.

As we embark on a new school year filled with unlimited possibilities for children and just-as-unlimited invisible labor for parents and guardians, it's time to put the needs, desires, and wellness of all mothers on the nation's to-do list—and to include stay-at-home mothers in the conversation. Mother Untitled is on a mission to recognize stay-at-home mothers as the creative, connected, relevant professionals they are. This report underscores that work.

*Neha Ruch*

Founder & CEO, Mother Untitled

## METHODOLOGY

The survey was fielded by the independent research firm Proof Insights from March 24 to April 3, 2023, to 1,000 members of the general population and to 1,200 mothers who considered themselves full-time or part-time stay-at-home mothers or were actively considering leaving their jobs for stay-at-home motherhood. All of the respondents in the mother sample were ages 25 to 54, had

earned bachelor's degrees, had children under 18 in the home, and had a household income of at least \$25,000 and at least \$35,000 for respondents over age 35. The data in the study aligns with the U.S. census across age, ethnicity, and income, and the mother sample reflects the natural demographic proportions of women who met the study's age, income, and education qualifications.

# 01/ The changing experience of *stay-at-home motherhood*

How do you define a stay-at-home mother in 2023? In a [2016 analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Data](#), the Pew Research Center described stay-at-home parents as those “not working outside the home.” At the time, 27 percent of mothers in America qualified for the title. But in the post-pandemic world of side hustles, remote work, and flex jobs, stay-at-home parents

defy this simple definition. They may work part-time or bring in some outside income, and over the years, their status is likely to shift. Though “stay-at-home” and “working” parent groups are often pitted against one another in pop culture and the media, many mothers float between these groups as their children grow.



“Most people don’t understand the work that goes into being a stay-at-home mom.”

**79 %**

of stay-at-home mothers agree or strongly agree with this statement.

**68 %**

of stay-at-home mothers say they feel underappreciated.

## 02/Deciding to *stay home* with the kids



Although the great resignation of the pandemic is officially over, the great contemplation continues for mothers. This study found that **one in three moms said they are somewhat, very, or extremely likely to leave their jobs for stay-at-home parenthood in the next two years, and that more than half of moms said they are extremely or very likely to reduce their hours or downshift to a less taxing job in the next two years.** But how does one make the transition from considering to actually quitting or downshifting? The AMP study suggests that a number of factors influence mothers, but none more so than craving more quality time with their children.

Do women *choose* stay-at-home motherhood or are they forced into it?

**7 in 10**

stay-at-home mothers said they chose to pause their careers for parenthood.

**1 in 10**

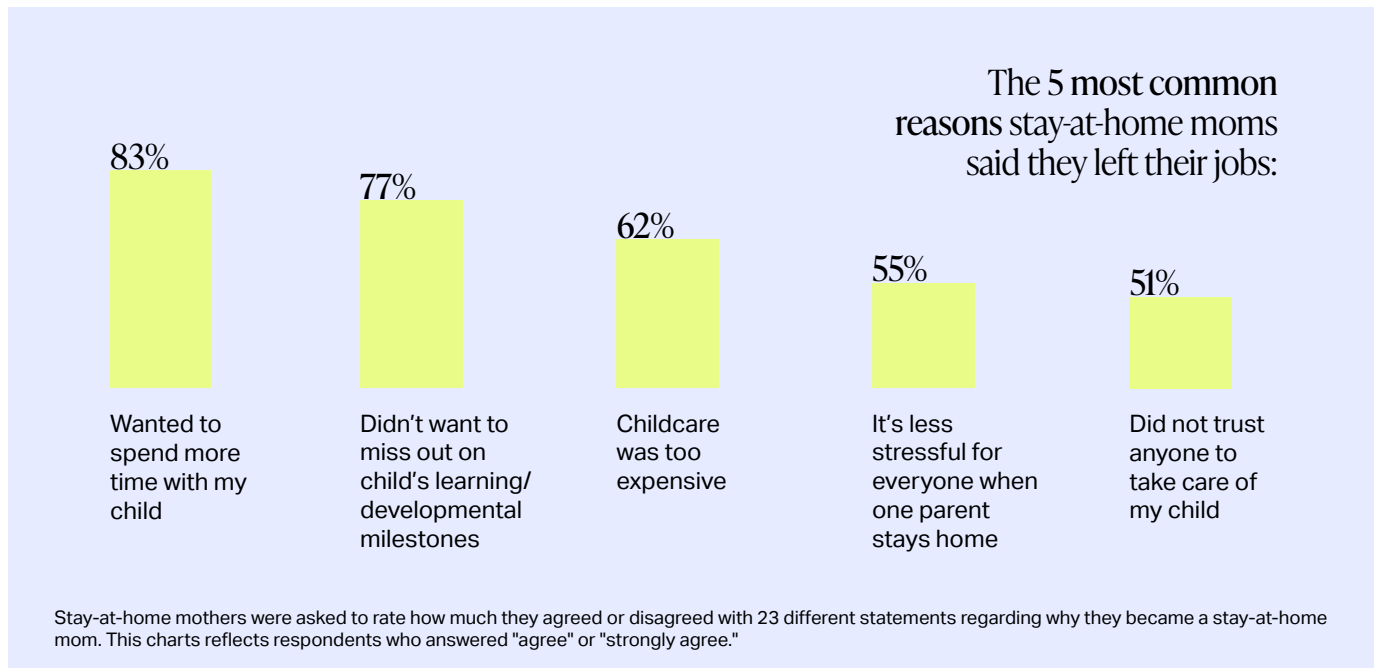
stay-at-home mother said they were forced to become stay-at-home mothers.

**2 in 10**

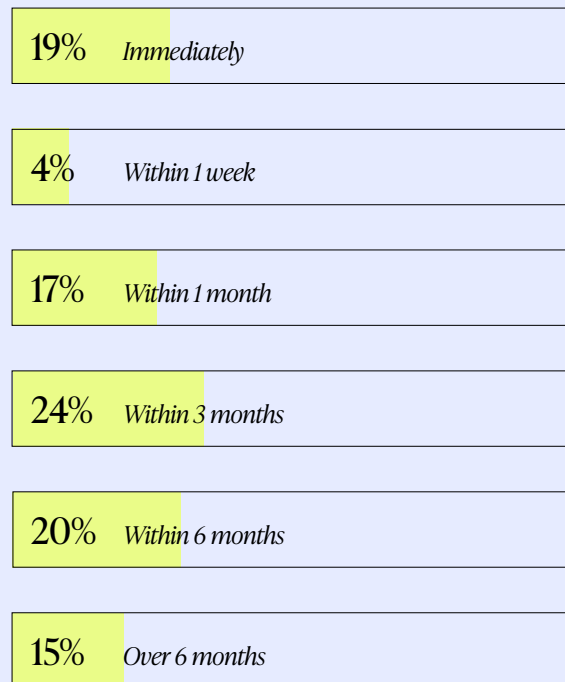
stay-at-home mothers said they chose it and also felt forced.



## 02/Deciding to *stay home with the kids*



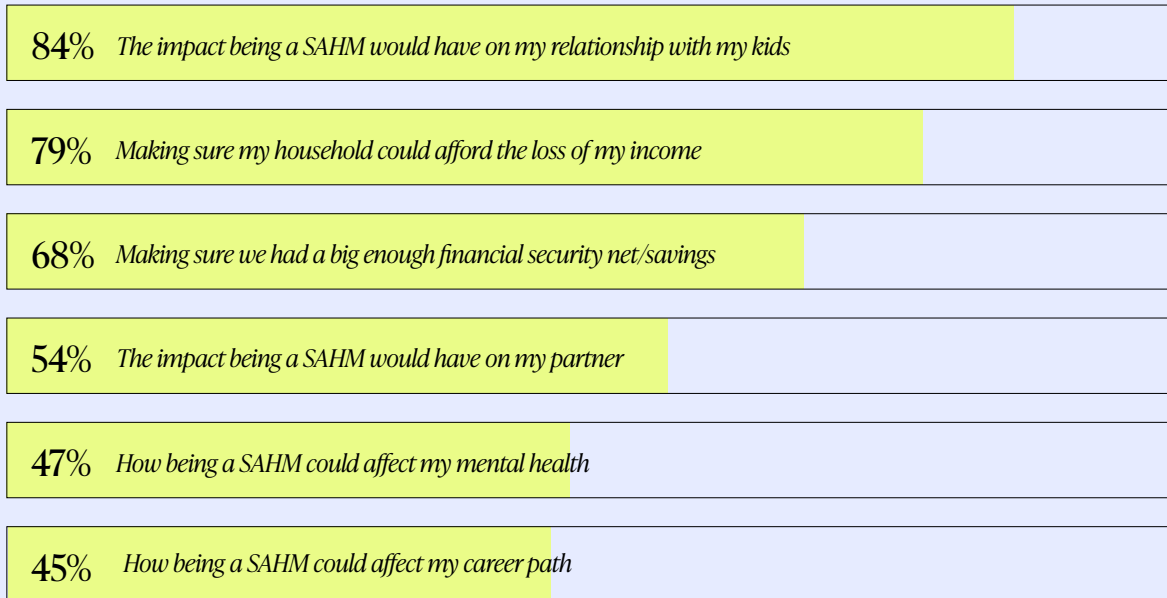
### *How long it took to leave* From first consideration to *leaving* / *downshifting* at job:



**18% of stay-at-home mothers say they struggled with the decision to downshift or pause their career.**

## 02/Deciding to *stay home with the kids*

The top 5 factors moms consider as they deliberate:



After becoming a SAHM, **68%** of mothers said they realized *being a mom is more important to them than having a career.*



“I have been able to watch my children grow and learn. We got to enjoy each other’s company without the pressure of having to be somewhere at a certain time. We live a much more relaxed lifestyle.”

(Age 52, Ready to go back to work)

## 03/ The trade-off is usually worth it, but *the financial stress can be overwhelming.*



*About half of stay-at-home mothers (55%) say they are content with their role as a stay-at-home mom, and 3 out of 4 (72%) say the trade-off in household income was worth it.* But giving up earned income to lean into motherhood can have far-reaching financial implications that aren't always easy to grasp at the time of the decision. When asked what worries them, stay-at-home mothers were most likely to cite money issues as their top concern.

“Time with my children is worth more than the money I was making. We can save later in life, but we can't get this time back with our littles.”

(Age 29, Full-time SAHM)

The most-cited benefits of stay-at-home motherhood:

**83%** *I spend more time with my kids*

**60%** *My bond with my children has strengthened*

### 03/ The trade-off is usually worth it, but *the financial stress can be overwhelming*.

**Finances are the biggest concern** for stay-at-home mothers.

The top 3 worries:

56% Having to rely on my partner for income

52% Not having enough money for leisure activities

41% Not having enough money for emergencies

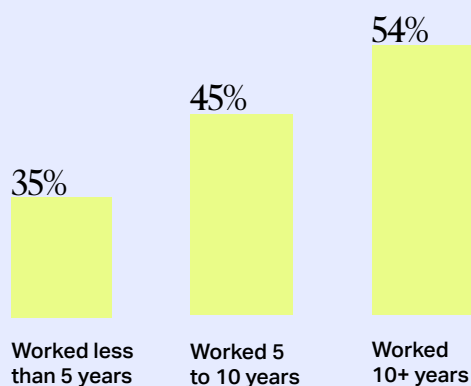
“I am now completely dependent on someone else for financial support.”

(Age 40, Ready to go back to work)

“As much as it has been a joy to see my children grow, the financial strain has been too much. With the cost of living so high, it is very hard to manage. We don’t have any financial security.”

(Age 50, Ready to go back to work)

Women who decided to stay home after establishing their careers have more financial concerns. Percentages of these women who agree with the statement: *I worry about money as a result of my decision:*





## 04/ Stay-at-home mothers prioritize their kids' mental health, *but not their own.*



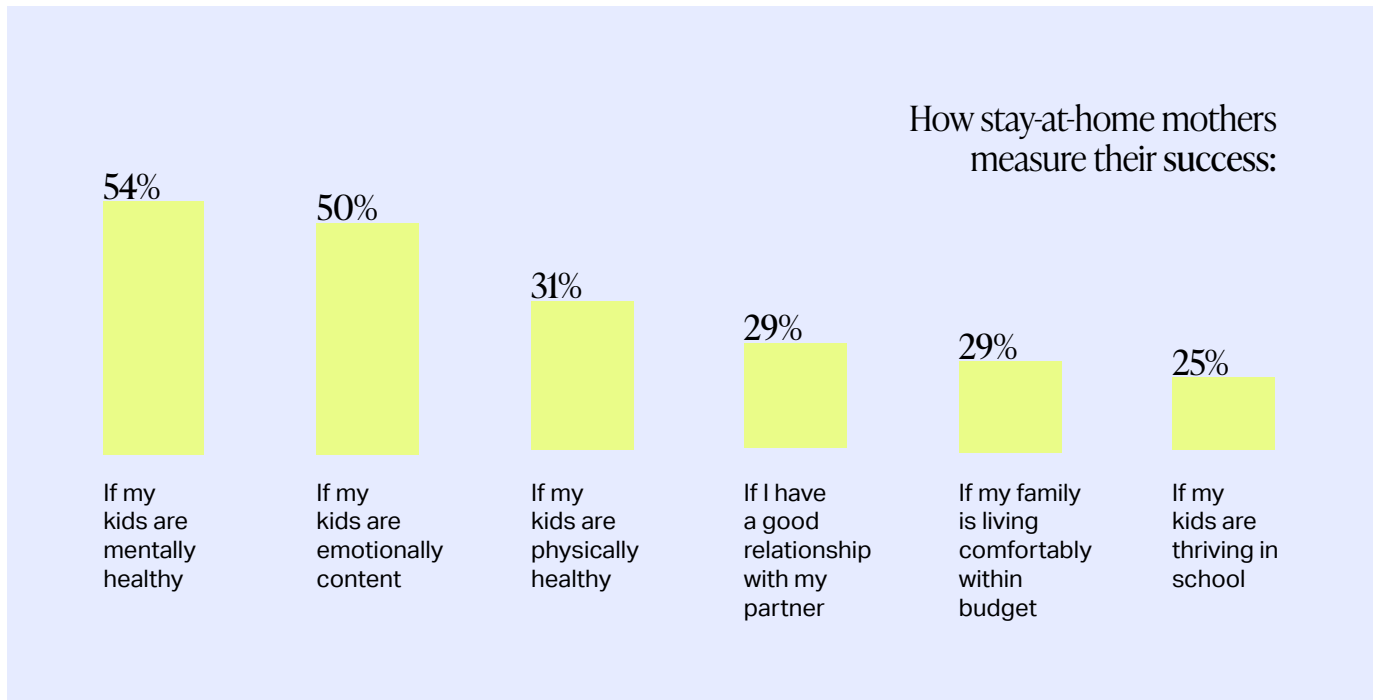
As parents across the nation reckon with a children's mental health crisis, their own wellbeing is falling off the to-do list.

When asked to list their top three measures of success in stay-at-home motherhood, *few considered their own contentment and wellness a priority.*

**38%** *of stay-at-home mothers said they worry about losing their sense of self.*

*1 in 5 (19%) stay-at-home mothers selected their mental health as a marker of success in life—it tied with “If my home is clean and organized.”*

## 04/ Stay-at-home mothers prioritize their kids' mental health, *but not their own.*



*A mother's physical health was the least popular response, with just 4% choosing it as a measure of success.*



“Work has always been an important part of my mental health. Staying at home has majorly increased my anxiety and depression. I do like that I don’t have to rely on others to get my children to all of their therapies, and I can actively participate in their day to day events.”

(Age 53, Living in downshift)

## 05/ Stay-at-home mothers *can be wary of childcare.*

Stay-at-home motherhood is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week job, yet few mothers regularly outsource the care of their children to anyone other than their partner. This study found that *half of the stay-at-home moms say they feel guilty for leaving their children with someone else, and 37 percent of SAHMs say they feel guilty for paying someone to watch their kids because they don't earn their own salary.*



“The income that I was making would have all gone to childcare in some form or another, so I wouldn’t have gained any income by not staying at home with my kids.”

(Age 43, Full-time SAHM)

**29%**

*of stay-at-home mothers have never used childcare, including family assistance.*

## 05/ Stay-at-home mothers *can be wary of childcare.*

The most popular forms of childcare for stay-at-home mothers:

**39%**

of stay-at-home mothers rely on grandparents or other relatives for childcare. This is the most common form of childcare.

**17%**

of stay-at-home moms use an *in-home babysitter*.

**16%**

use *daycare*.

**73%**

of stay-at-home moms say the most concerning aspect of childcare is *finding someone they trust to stay with their children*.

**59%**

cited *cost* as a concern.



Negative perceptions of childcare persist in this community:

**“I wouldn't trust daycares. I know people who have worked for them. No way, no thanks. Peace of mind can't get a price tag on it.”**

(Age 39, Living in a downshift)



## 06/ The notion of a *stay-at-home “mom squad”* is a myth.



Although stay-at-home motherhood is often portrayed in pop culture as a gateway to new friendships, this data suggests that friendships can be difficult to build and maintain in stay-at-home motherhood—and that women often aren’t prepared for that challenge. *Half of stay-at-home mothers say that leaving their job decreased the size of their mom friend circle. Only 16 percent say it increased. The rest say it stayed the same size.*

“[I wish other stay-at-home mothers knew...] how lonely that it can be, and how important it is to try to keep those friends that you’ve made or to make new ones.”

(Age 37, Ready to go back to work)

More than 1 in 10 stay-at-home mothers *said they don’t have any mom friends.*

## 06/ The notion of a *stay-at-home “mom squad”* is a myth.

How do stay-at-home moms *make their mom friends*?

Most common methods:

*Friends before motherhood* 38%

*Work* 34%

*Mutual friends* 30%

*Daycare/school* 30%

*Mom groups* 22%

*Playgroups* 20%

Least common methods:

*Park* 17%

*Social media* 14%

*Local events* 13%

*Parenting classes* 5%

*Baby classes* 5%

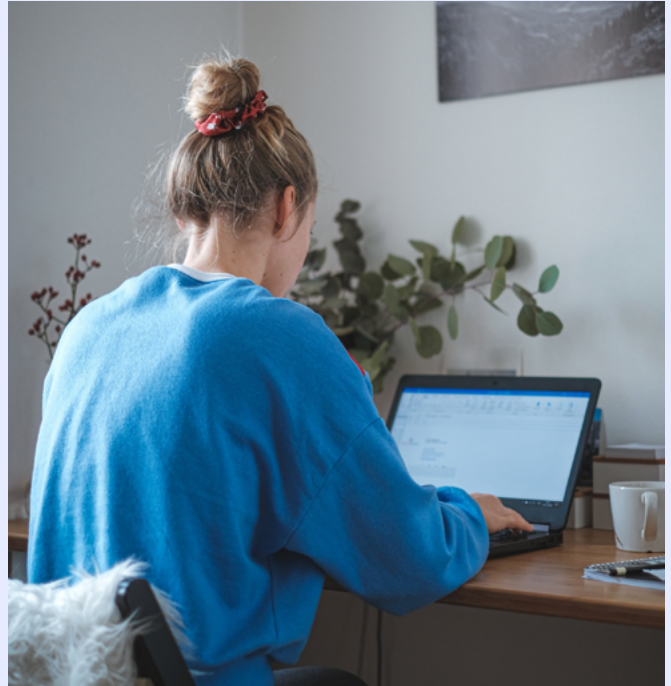
4 in 10 stay-at-home mothers participate in a regular activity (like volunteering) outside the home.

Of that group, 90 percent say it has positively impacted their mood.

44% of stay-at-home moms say it's hard to make friends as a stay-at-home mom.

## 07/ Stay-at-home motherhood impacts how women approach *looking for their next job.*

For the vast majority of educated women, stay-at-home motherhood is not an end game but rather a defined and limited period of life. Most stay-at-home mothers plan to ramp up their careers and return to the paid workforce, and their time at home helps to shape the type of job they will seek. While there is some awareness among stay-at-home mothers of the entrenched stigma they may face when they set out to look for a job, *many stay-at-home mothers seem to look toward the future with confidence.*



8 in 10 stay-at-home mothers *expect the same or a higher salary when they return to the workforce.*

“Having a flexible work schedule to effectively balance home and a career is extremely important. Having a fulfilling career is important, but being a parent is the most important thing you can ever do, and starting kids off with a good foundation comes first. I want to be able to participate in all of the things my kids do, and a normal 9-5 job just doesn’t allow that.”

(Age 38, Ready to go back to work)

## 07/ Stay-at-home motherhood impacts how women approach *looking for their next job.*

Top 3 factors stay-at-home moms will prioritize as they seek their next paid jobs:

85% *Flexibility*

74% *Stress level*

71% *Salary*

**1 in 3 stay-at-home mothers** worry about the gap in their resume.

**29%** are worried about diminishing work skills.



“I would like to go back to work full time when my first child is in college so that we can pay for college but I worry no one will hire me with a big resume gap.”

(Age 42, Ready to go back to work)



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the place for *ambitious women* leaning into *family life*

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## About Mother Untitled

Since 2017, Mother Untitled (MU) and its founder, Neha Ruch, have been on a mission to update the perception of stay-at-home motherhood in America, infusing it with ambition, dignity, growth, and potential. As an oasis and leading resource for women in the gray area between paid work and motherhood, MU amplifies stories of career pauses and downshifts and affirms stay-at-home mothers as an influential cohort in a vital life chapter. Through content on its website and elsewhere, MU strives to help the world see stay-at-home mothers as the dynamic and evolving professionals they are so that women can choose a chapter of family life with pride.

[motheruntitled.com](http://motheruntitled.com)  
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## About Proof Insights

PROOF Insights is a research and insights firm based in Frederick, MD since 1989. They design custom-crafted research solutions that help companies and organizations clarify their future. For over 30 years they have worked with some of the world's greatest brands to gather insights and provide strategic recommendations about their target markets and customers.

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