

stumble into the job. Marius Malmro at the Stavanger University Hospital in Norway explains that after he failed to get into the police academy, a policeman offered friendly advice: nursing, he said, used the same "people skills". He decided to try it for a year before reapplying to the police, but loved nursing and stayed. He says he likes intensive care and operating theatres, because they are "where the action is".

Neither choice of field nor lack of ambition can explain why the share of women shrinks higher up the career ladder even in industries that women dominate. The proportion of business and management degrees earned by women has grown steadily, but that of women in managerial and senior jobs has not kept pace. In America about half of college degrees in business awarded since 2000 have gone to women, but the share of senior executives who are female has remained stuck at one in five.

Women used to be less likely to ask for promotion. No longer: a survey by McKinsey in 2016 found that women in corporate America asked at the same rate as men. It also found that women and men were promoted at similar rates, except at the lowest rungs of the career ladder, where women lagged behind. A possible reason is that managers are reluctant to promote women who are starting families, or are likely to do so soon.

It so happens that the opportunity for the critical first promotion often coincides with wanting to start a family. Data from Britain show that the age at which women's pay starts to fall behind men's tracks the age at which they typically have their first child (see chart on next page). Claudia Goldin of Harvard University has found a similar pattern for college-educated American women.

A survey earlier this year of America, Australia, Britain, France, Germany and Scandinavian countries by *The Economist* and YouGov, a pollster, gauged how children affected working hours. Of women with children at home, 44.75% had scaled back after becoming mothers, by working fewer hours or switching to a less demanding job, such as one requiring less travel or overtime. Only 13.37% of fathers said they had done so, of whom more than half said

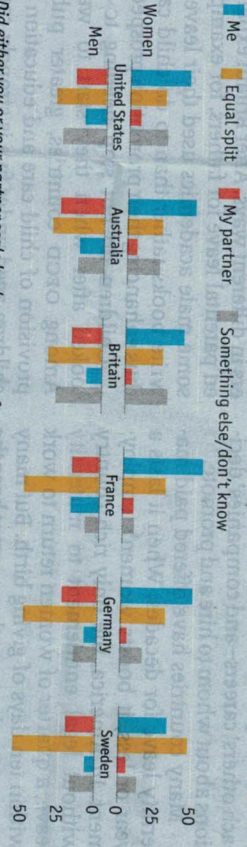
ship in engineering last year. She had been sure that a part-time or administrative job was her only possible route back to work.

Some new mothers leave their jobs because they prefer to be their children's main carers. But they are also influenced by censorious attitudes. In many countries the common opinion is that having a working mother is harmful for pre-school children. Germans call a working mother of small children a *Kabemutter* (raven-mother). When Anna, an academic in Berlin, returned to work full-time her nine-month-

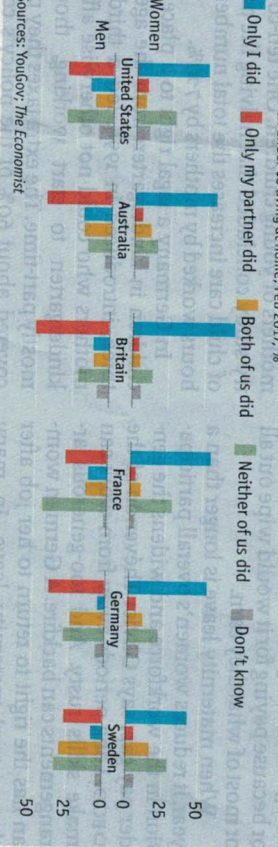
Houses divided

Earlier this year *The Economist* and YouGov, a pollster, asked people in eight countries how they balance career and family. Men were two to three times less likely than women to think that, in their family, the majority of household and child-care duties fell on the woman's shoulders. They were more likely to say that such tasks were split equally. When we asked which partner had scaled back at work when their first child arrived, we found another perception gap. Both men and women were less likely to say that their partner had made adjustments than members of the opposite sex were to say they had made adjustments themselves. Perceptions in France differed most: 55% of women said that only their partners did so. Though it is unclear who is more accurate, many people are clearly ignorant about the reality of their partners' lives. And even if men are open to doing more at home so their wives can do more at work, the necessity may not occur to them. Gender equality could be boosted by some frank kitchen-table conversations.

Between you and your partner, who is mostly responsible for household tasks and child care? Adults with spouses or partners, Feb 2017, %



Did either you or your partner scale back your career after you had your first child? For example, by reducing working hours or taking a less demanding job. Adults with children under 18 living at home, Feb 2017, %



Sources: YouGov; *The Economist*