THEY feel shunned by organised playgroups and are disapproved of by their own fathers—but they’re excellent at doing the housework.

A peek inside the world of stay-at-home dads has revealed a huge generational change in attitudes to gender roles, child rearing and men’s perception of their own masculinity.

Research into “house husbands” has found men are still stigmatised for reversing roles but the majority cherish the time spent with their children.

Deborah Wilmore, from the University of Western Sydney, said the preliminary results of her study of 65 dads found the most stinging critics were their own “breadwinner” fathers.

“Mothers were much more supportive of men being at home. Fathers were generally a little more standoffish and couldn’t understand why,” Ms Wilmore said.

“Yet another study found in 84 per cent of couple families with one full-time job, the father was the breadwinner.

The role was reversed in only 7 per cent of families, the research carried out in 2010 by the Australian Institute of Family Studies showed.

The last official figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics measuring the increase in men responsible for the primary care role for children were taken in 2003.

That census found a rise from 27 per cent in 1983 to 6.6 per cent in 2003, but that figure is expected to have risen significantly since then.

Ms Wilmore said stay-at-home dads tended to have strong relationships with their partners, accepted caring for the home was part of the job, often considered retraining in a different career and hated being nagged about joining playgroups and having playdates.

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James Windsor, who stayed at home with his four children until the youngest turned four, set about building his own men’s group and career dads website after finding the infrastructure for toddler activities was aimed solely at women.

He collected 25 like-minded fathers while raising Zoë, now 4, Lucas, 5, Jack, 6, and Lily, 7.

The 44-year-old’s decision to take a break from work as a business consultant was prompted by an international move and the realisation that two high-powered careers left no time for their children.

Mr Windsor, who is now back running his company, said the experience made him better with his time and enabled him to “understand people a little bit better”.

“It was a hell of a lot of work and I realised all the things I had missed when I was at work when Lily was a baby,” he said.

“Little kids are a handful but after working 80 hours a week for 15 years in a row it was actually quite liberating.”
A Forgot of dads employed full time often or always feel rushed or pressed for time.

Dads spend an average of 3 HOURS with children on weekends. Paid work increased by 5.7 HOURS a week for fathers of preschool children from 1997 to 2006. 66% of employed dads miss out on home and family activities because of work.

James Windsor with his children Lily, Zoe and Luke, whom he stayed home to care for after taking a break from work as a business consultant. Picture: Craig Greenhill