



PUTTING FATHERS' CARE TO WORK

LANDSCAPE REPORT ON
WORKING FATHERS' UPTAKE
OF PARENTAL LEAVE



**PARENTAL
LEAVE**
corporate task force
Championing leave for dads and their families

A photograph of a man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark blue t-shirt, holding a baby. He is kissing the baby on the forehead. The baby is wearing a white onesie and blue socks. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

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What is the Parental Leave Corporate Task Force?

Established in June 2019, the Parental Leave Corporate Task Force champions access to parental leave for dads and all caregivers everywhere. Task Force members recognize that everyone wins when paternity leave becomes the norm. Comprising leading business and civil society organizations, the Task Force aims to accelerate solutions that improve access to and uptake of parental leave for dads—ultimately contributing to gender equality and aiding economic growth and development. Current members of the Task Force include Bank of America, Deloitte, Dove Men+Care, Facebook, Promundo, Twitter, UNICEF (Technical Advisor) and Women Deliver. Founders Unilever and Promundo co-chair as conveners of the Task Force.

Why a report on fathers' uptake of parental leave?

Globally, many countries still lag behind when it comes to guaranteeing paternity leave. While most countries now have some form of parental leave for mothers guaranteed in their national legislation, fewer countries have extended this right to fathers. According to the World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law report of 2020, 184 countries provide at least a day of guaranteed maternity leave, while the countries that guarantee at least a day of paternity leave add up to only 105. Further, the median length of days of parental leave offered to mothers is close to a hundred, while the median length of leave offered to fathers is five days across the globe. This reveals how, at a macro level, the task of caring for and raising children is still seen as predominantly the domain of female caregivers. The lack of leave for fathers and male caregivers is part of perpetuating this inequality.

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Introduction

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Many fathers do not take any leave at all, even when it is legally guaranteed—and nowhere in the world do men take an equal share of parental leave as do mothers, even when they can.

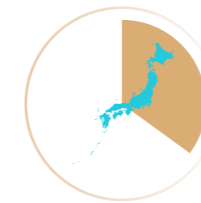
The Helping Dads Care Research Project, drawing on data from six countries, found that



fewer than 50 percent of fathers took the full amount of leave they were entitled to under their national policies, while many took no leave at all.



27%
in Brazil



35%
in Japan

For instance, in Brazil and Japan, only 32 and one percent of fathers took the full duration of leave that was available to them and up to 27 and 35 percent of fathers in Brazil and Japan, respectively, took no time off at all¹. In the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Argentina and Brazil, the percent of fathers who took no time off at all after the birth or adoption of their child ranged from 16 to 27 percent. The same study revealed that attitudes about parental leave continue to place the primary responsibility of taking leave to care for children on women. The Nordic region has been among the earliest and most consistent champions for equal leave for parents, starting with non-transferable leave for fathers in the early 2000s. Even with over 30 years of offering paternity leave and increasing non-transferable days for fathers, according to research led by Promundo in the region, men in Sweden and Iceland, where men take the most paternity leave globally, use only 30 percent of total leave days available to couples (Cederström, 2019).

While some employers have stepped forward to offer parental leave to all employees—men's uptake of leave remains low for many reasons. In Ghana, for instance, companies like Databank Financial Services, Nestle, and Barclays have implemented policies offering paid paternity leave even in the absence of national legislation mandating it. In the technology sector in particular, some employers have been celebrated for recent improvements to their paid paternity leave policies. Companies like Facebook (16 weeks for full-time employees), Twitter (20 weeks), and Spotify (6 months fully paid for full-time employees)², among others, offer generous paid paternity leave to their employees. Adding a comprehensive leave policy to the employee handbook is a vital first step.

But the reasons why more working fathers do not take the leave offered are multifaceted—ranging from



economic constraints



gender norms that imagine fathers as only financial providers



to concerns about career penalties and backlash at the workplace from taking leave.

Leave policies may reinforce income inequalities if they only cover some employees, and efforts must continue to ensure that progressive parental leave policies are offered to all employees, irrespective of tenure, seniority, role, or location, and that they are not used merely as an incentive to recruit qualified candidates into executive positions.

Addressing these barriers requires creative and equity-focused solutions and complementary policies that encourage more men to engage more fully in their child's lives.

¹It is important to note here that the length of parental leave available to fathers in Japan is 12 months, while in Brazil, fathers are entitled only up to 5 days of paid parental leave, with an additional 15 days for select eligible employers (van der Gaag et al., 2019).

²Data on leave policies for Facebook are from van der Gaag et al., (2019), for Twitter from Business Insider (2016), and for Spotify from their HR blog (2017).

What does this report cover?

The report reviews current research on access to and uptake of parental leave by working fathers—and identifies barriers that keep fathers from taking more leave. The report summarizes the types of parental leave policies that governments around the world typically offer and rates of uptake by men and women globally. The report goes on to describe perceptions around parental and paternity leave among working men and women, including barriers to using more of this leave. Finally, the report includes recommendations for employers on designing and implementing workplace policies that encourage more fathers to use all the leave they are entitled to. The sources reviewed in the report include recent research from academia (Boston College Center for Work & Family [BCCWF]), civil society organizations (Promundo-US, Families and Work Institute), multilateral development institutions (UNICEF, OECD, World Bank, International Finance Corporation), and business and trade associations. The references section contains a full list of sources reviewed.

Although this report focuses on “white collar” jobs and employers—other categories of workers must also be extended paid leave. Currently available data on working fathers’ use of caregiving leave tend to focus on relatively high-income employees at multinational companies. However, this report advocates for extending the policy recommendations made here to other sectors and industries, especially to those with a workforce formed predominantly of low-income workers from minority and/or marginalized backgrounds. Ensuring that different categories of workers—including contractual, part-time or freelance workers—are also covered by employers’ leave policies is imperative for greater economic justice.

The disruption in the status quo due to the pandemic presents a unique opportunity.

The impact of COVID-19

While the question of encouraging uptake of parental leave by male caregivers transcends the present moment, the impact of near-universal COVID-19 social distancing measures cannot be ignored in this discussion. Emerging data worryingly indicates that the stay-at-home orders in some contexts may be exacerbating unequal gender relations in the home. Preliminary findings from surveys conducted by LeanIn.org and SurveyMonkey (2020) reveal that women are overwhelmed with increased workloads at home and limited support offered from their places of work.



Women with partners and children who work full-time and are on average spending 20 more hours a week on unpaid care work, like household labor, childcare and caring for other family members, than men in the same group. Women of color and single mothers are doing even more.

A survey conducted by Oxfam-US and Promundo-US in May–June 2020 found that more than half of men and women said they were doing more care work during lockdown, although women continued to do a greater share of the household care work. In short, during COVID, women and men in all household configurations are doing more care work, but the disproportionate share that women carry out does not seem to have changed, with the burden felt most acutely in low-income households.

Social norms that have remained relatively consistent over time and are often the reason for many indicators of women’s progress in the workforce stagnating, can potentially be transformed in such times of transition. A study by the Council on Contemporary Families (2020), confirmed findings from the Oxfam-Promundo study and found that even though women continue to do more than men at home during the lockdowns, men seem to be doing more work at home than they were before the pandemic. The forced transition to remote work has also rendered visible to employers the additional labor that working women perform in their homes, making a strong case for extending flexible work options beyond the pandemic (Alon et al., 2020). This flexibility benefits women, who at present bear a disproportionately large portion of the care workload, by allowing them greater autonomy in balancing their schedules with their partners and other caregivers for a more equitable sharing of care work. In order to enable teams to continue working from home, organizations have had to quickly adapt and implement policies and processes that make this possible. Such flexible work systems help parents share care work responsibilities amongst themselves in more equitable ways. Well-compensated, job-protected, and flexible leave policies that allow working men and women to be fully present for their families have always been essential, and the pandemic has been a stark reminder of this fact.

A message from the Task Force Co-Chairs

We know that there are many benefits when fathers are able to take time from work to spend with their families and that it can have transformational effects on children, families, fathers themselves, and society at large.

However, this can't happen if fathers continue to face social and cultural barriers to uptake - barriers that can keep them from being the fully involved caregivers they want to be and can be. Too often, even when the paid leave policies for dads are in place, men are not taking the leave they're entitled to.

This report is an important step in addressing the barriers and enablers to increasing uptake so that societies can truly start to see the benefits of fathers' care, and leave for dads as part of a full range of parental leave policies, as a complement to comprehensive maternity leave.

Carlos-Javier Gil, Global Brand Vice President, Dove Men+Care
Gary Barker, President & CEO, Promundo
Co-Chairs of the Parental Leave Corporate Task Force

For more information, please visit
www.leavefordads.com.



What types of parental leave are typically offered?

Leave schemes offered to parents typically fall into categories of maternity, paternity, or shared parental leave—although these are not watertight distinctions.

Maternity leave is generally offered only to mothers, and is usually available for use just before, during, and after childbirth. Paternity leave is generally available only to fathers and usually available to be taken soon after childbirth. Shared parental leave is usually made available to all caregivers. It can be guaranteed in the form of individual entitlements to parents, either as non-transferable individual rights, or as an individual right that can be transferred to the other parent. Shared parental leave may also be guaranteed as a family right where parents choose between themselves how to divide the leave. It is usually only available to be taken after maternity leave. In some countries, parental leave is supplemented by additional days of childcare or homecare leave, usually available after parental leave is used up (Koslowski et al., 2019).

The importance of “daddy days” or non-transferable leave

More men tend to take up parental leave when it is well compensated and non-transferable. The mere provision of paternity leave is not enough to get more working fathers to use it. Non-transferable leave for fathers, or “daddy days” as this leave is sometimes called, is crucial to ensure that working men actually use the parental leave offered by their employers, and that the responsibility of utilizing the additional childcare leave does not simply get shifted to mothers. In 1974, Sweden became the first country in the world to offer parental leave for fathers, followed by the other Nordic countries—Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Finland—over the next few years. However, the effect of this policy on men’s uptake of leave only became significant once the leave was made non-transferable.

In 1992, when Norway introduced a “daddy quota,” or days of leave offered to fathers that they would lose if they did not

use them, the proportion of men taking leave skyrocketed from four to 70 percent (van der Gaag et al., 2019).



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What is the state of leave for fathers around the world?

With countries starting to introduce laws guaranteeing leave for new fathers, there appears to be some steady, if slow, progress. According to the World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law report of 2020, in the past year, 15 countries have joined the group of countries that guarantee at least a day of paternity leave. Among these new entrants, Canada introduced a new parental leave sharing benefit that reserves 35 days of paid parental leave for fathers. Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Fiji, Jordan, Nepal, and South Sudan, were also among those to introduce national legislation guaranteeing paid leave for fathers for the first time in 2019. In the past year in the Netherlands, paternity leave was extended from two to five days. Starting in mid-2020, partners will be entitled to five additional weeks of leave during the first six months following childbirth, paid at 70 percent of their salary. Leave for adoptive and foster parents too was increased from four to six weeks (van der Gaag et al., 2019). Several states and cities in the US have enacted their own family leave policies to offer fathers paid parental leave, but there is no such federal legislation at present (Bulger, 2020).

Countries that guarantee parental leave for working mothers continue to outnumber those that offer working fathers the same by over 80.

Clearly, there is much progress yet to be made, even when it comes to just the legal provision of leave for all working parents.

Women continue to be overrepresented among working parents who take leave to care for their children—but there have been some positive changes in recent years. On average, in middle- and upper-income countries, men's use of parental leave is increasing. According to data from the OECD, the male share of parental leave in Finland doubled between 2006 and 2013 and in Belgium, it increased by 10 percentage points over the same time period. However, in Austria and France, there hardly appears to have been any change in men's rates of using parental leave in the past decade, with men accounting for only four percent of parents who take parental leave. In Russia, fathers are only allowed five days of leave, and only seven percent of fathers took even this. About one in two fathers in Russia who did not take leave cited economic constraints as the main reason for not doing so. Even though the share of men among parental leave users approaches 30 to 40 percent in a few Nordic countries and in Portugal, it is as low as one in 50, in countries like Australia, the Czech Republic, and Poland.

Leading businesses in the United States have stepped forward to extend parental leave, even without legislation mandating this. Some progress has been visible in the past decade in the United States, with the percent of employees in the private sector who have access to paid family leave increasing from 10 to 18 percent between 2010 and 2019 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Netflix, for instance, now offers fathers unlimited leave during the first year after the birth or adoption of their child. The four large employers surveyed in the Boston College study, offer gender-neutral paid leave to most parents, ranging in length from 6 to 16 weeks. US businesses are likely doing this to attract and retain the talent pool of highly educated professionals they seek for their workforce—who are often in their childbearing years when they have finished their education and are entering the labor market. Additionally, as the US is the only wealthy nation without a national paid parental leave program, it has fallen on states or corporations to respond to the obvious need for paid leave and demand for it from employees.

However, these benefits do not extend equitably to all workers. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States reveal that only nine percent of private sector workers are employed in workplaces that offer paid paternity leave to all male workers (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2020). When Netflix originally announced its policy in 2015 of extending unlimited paternity leave to fathers during the first year after childbirth, it excluded non-salaried or hourly workers, thereby exacerbating inequities that rise from income inequality (JUST Capital, 2019). While Netflix went on to extend the policy to all its workers, this incident demonstrates the need for considering the question of equity while designing leave policies.

Indeed, it is often the lowest income workers who have the most acute need for paid leave because they lack the financial means to take unpaid leave available in the US under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Over 90% of men said they took parental leave because the leave was available to them
(BCCWF, 2019).

Why do working parents take leave?

“Wanting to be the best parent they could be” was among the top few reasons parents took the leave offered to them.


When asked about why parents who took childcare leave did so, the main reasons included wanting to be the best parent they could be to their children.

It is important to promote the individual and collective benefits of fathers taking parental leave to encourage its uptake.

Having more involved fathers is good for gender equality. Research from numerous settings finds that the wage gap between men and women reduces when men take parental leave. Children of fathers who take longer leave and spend more time caring for them tend to have better developmental outcomes.

Engaged fatherhood can improve relationships and women’s health among heterosexual couples. Men themselves benefit from greater engagement in caregiving including improved health outcomes and reduced negative impacts of risk-taking behaviors. Working parents usually understand some of these benefits of taking parental leave, but not all. The Helping Dads Care study (2018) found that respondents were able to guess the more intuitive benefits of fathers taking at least two weeks’ parental leave, including improvements to maternal and child health outcomes. However, only about half of all respondents were able to correctly identify other benefits of fathers taking paternity leave, such as

 **improved focus at work for fathers,**

 **higher lifetime earnings for mothers,**

 **and higher IQ scores for children.**

Employers can thus raise awareness of the wide-ranging benefits of fathers taking parental leave to encourage more to do.

The availability of paid leave is an important first step in encouraging working fathers to be more present in their children’s lives.

Perceptions around Parental Leave

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Children of fathers who take longer leave and spend more time caring for them tend to have better developmental outcomes.

What do parents feel about their employers' leave policies?

Unsurprisingly, parents value and appreciate employers that offer generous parental leave policies. According to a 2019 survey conducted by the Boston College Center for Work and Family,

3 in 4 respondents said they were more likely to continue with their current employer because the employer offers expanded parental leave.



Further, 30 percent of respondents reported an increase in loyalty to the employer as a result of these policies.³

Working parents are often not completely familiar with the specifics of how parental leave is administered at their organization.

Only 45 percent of respondents on the Boston College survey understood well the specifics of parental leave at their companies, including details on the length of leave available to them, when the leave needed to be utilized by, how leave could be taken, whether it could be combined with other forms of leave, and so on. Working women rated their understanding of these administrative specifics lower than did men. Employers can help address this knowledge gap by ensuring that up-to-date information on leave policies are made available to employees easily.

³ The study sample comprised about 1,400 employees from 4 large employers in the United States, each of whom offered 6 to 16 weeks of fully paid leave for most new parents.

How supported do parents feel at work in taking leave?

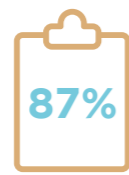
Far fewer men than women feel they would be supported in their decision to take parental leave at work. In the Boston College study, while 4 in 5 women felt extremely supported at work in their decision to take parental leave, much fewer men felt the same level of support. Around 55 percent of men responding to the survey felt extremely supported by senior managers in their organizations in their decision to take parental leave, and only around 49 percent of male respondents felt the same about their clients.

Many men and women potentially underestimate the support their managers would offer them in taking parental leave. According to the Helping Dads Care study of 2018,



85% percent of surveyed employees felt that fathers should make it a top priority to take any leave available to them, but many felt their managers would not feel the same way.

Only 2 in 3 men and women believed their managers would also say taking all leave available should be a top priority for fathers.



87% However, when managers themselves were surveyed, 87 percent reported that fathers should make it a top priority to take all leave available to them.

Employees may thus be unduly pessimistic about the support they are likely to receive from their supervisors, or it may be that supervisors send mixed messages about how much they truly support their employees taking leave. In the Nordic region, an interesting finding from the 2019 State of Nordic Fathers study was that fathers who had taken longer periods of parental leave relative to other fathers, were less likely to view their workplaces and managers as unsupportive of their taking leave. To address this apprehension, managers and team leaders thus need to be explicit and vocal about their support and encouragement of their team members taking the leave necessary to attend to their care responsibilities.

What challenges do parents perceive in asking for leave?

Many more fathers than mothers perceived a conflict in the balancing work and childcare responsibilities, suggesting that mothers have had more practice doing both while men are still learning. The Helping Dads Care study found that 40 percent of fathers—as compared to 30 percent of mothers—said they stress about work when at home with their children. Further, 76 percent of fathers said they would have to work at least a little while they were on parental leave, where 55 percent of mothers said the same of themselves. Fulfilling the dual expectations of being a caregiver and an employee appears to be more challenging for fathers than for mothers. This may be because this is a relatively recent norm for fathers, while working mothers have had to balance these expectations for some time. The difference in men's and women's responses may also be because working mothers feel pressured to not report the challenge of balancing these responsibilities—since the dual role of parent and breadwinner is something women have done for decades or more in much of the world.

Many parents find the transition back to work difficult, returning to high expectations, reduced support, and fewer opportunities for professional growth. Compared to the support they received before they took leave, many parents participating in the Boston College study felt the support from their workplaces drop off on their return. About 2 in 5 women and 1 in 3 men experienced that their work responsibilities increased on their return from parental leave. Women's job satisfaction after returning to work also dropped significantly. Structured back-to-work transition systems or policies allowing workers to ramp up gradually can help working parents navigate this transition more easily.

Employed mothers and fathers perceive high professional opportunity costs for choosing to be more present with their families. In addition to feeling increased pressure and reduced support on returning to work after being on parental leave, 15 percent of men and 30 percent of women in the Boston College study also perceived that there were fewer promotion opportunities after their return. Women were more likely than men to worry that taking parental leave would stall their career progression—59 percent of women and 49 percent of men reported this concern. The 2016 State of America's Fathers study found that overall 44 percent of working parents believe asking for more flexibility at work to meet family needs would make it less likely for them to progress in their careers.

Many managers currently find it difficult to manage in the absence of their team members during their parental leave. While managers may be supportive of team members using more of their parental leave—and as discussed in the previous section, employees may in fact be underestimating this support—managers do find themselves under-resourced to cope during their team members' absence. The Boston College study found that 1 in 4 managers felt they did not have enough support or resources to manage when their reportees took parental leave. Being aware of this difficulty and not wanting to over-burden colleagues likely plays a role in discouraging employees from asking for longer periods of parental leave, even when it is available. Institutional processes that normalize and expect team members to take long parental leave can help working parents and their supervisors plan more effectively.

How should leave policies be designed?

In addition to being adequate, job-protected, well-compensated and non-transferable, leave policies should also offer the maximum flexibility possible to employees.

for national leave policies to ensure they promote gender equality. This includes offering leave that is a minimum of 16 weeks long, equal for men and women, non-transferable between parents, compensated adequately based on parents' incomes, inclusive for all kinds of workers, offered with job protection, and encouraged and incentivized. Employers putting in place policies should additionally also offer them with the maximum amount of flexibility possible. As the Helping Dads Care study found, working fathers who had more flexibility over their work schedules took longer periods of parental leave. Allowing more flexibility—for instance, increasing the time period within which parents can claim parental leave or allowing parents to take leave at the same time as their partners—gives parents control over their schedules and the ability to balance their different responsibilities between partners, without necessarily forcing employers to increase the length of the leave they offer employees. Having more control work schedules allows working fathers to plan around their own and their partners' schedules to take up more leave.

Employers must also consider equity and inclusion while designing and enacting their policies. Many working parents around the world are excluded from paid parental leave policies because of inequity in their design.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that only about 15 percent of working men and women in the United States have access to paid leave through their employers,

with only four percent of the lowest earners—against 24 percent of the highest earners—able to access this option.⁴ Even when leave is offered, if it is low-paid, it is not a real option for many working parents. In Canada, higher-income families are much more likely to avail of paid leave as they are able to afford the low compensation rates. In China, lost wages from low-paid parental leave make these policies an “embarrassing false reality” (van der Gaag et al., 2019, p. 36). Further, leave policies must also include parents of all gender identities and family configurations. Leave schemes that do not extend to adoptive parents or parents through surrogacy can by design exclude parents in same-sex relationships. In enacting leave policies, employers should be conscious of who they may inadvertently be excluding and ensure that they cover all working parents with comprehensive, well-compensated childcare leave.

Recommendations

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⁴ According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics as presented in the Helping Dads Care study (2018).

Managers and senior executives should lead by example when it comes to changing workplace culture around leave.

What do parents say would encourage them to take leave?

When participants of the Boston College study were asked about what would help them feel more supported at work to use the entirety of their parental leave, many employees said seeing their supervisors and senior executives take extended parental leave themselves would be the most impactful. Having members of senior management model these behaviors may well be the most effective strategy in changing workplace norms and reassuring working parents that being fully present for their families does not need to be traded off against making progress in their careers.

Employers should acknowledge in the messaging and approach of their leave policies that all parents, regardless of their gender, have ambitious and well-deserved personal as well as professional goals. The Boston College study found that working women were more likely than working men to think of their work as enjoyable, fulfilling, bringing a sense of accomplishment, and as central to their identity. Men and women also overwhelmingly reported that their family needs were an important consideration while planning their careers—98 percent of women and 97 percent of men reported this. Companies thus must take these aspirations of their employees into account when framing leave policies, and make sure that parental leave is not targeted only to women or men, but to parents of all genders. Workplaces need to be part of speeding up the cultural shift that all of us—men and women—are both caregivers and workers

Which processes might be helpful to working parents?

Having formal transition processes can help new parents prepare for the fundamental changes that caring for a child will bring to their lives. Employees often feel overwhelmed with high expectations, increased responsibilities and perceived loss of opportunities when they return to work after being on extended parental leave. Formal back-to-work transition systems can help working parents navigate this tumultuous time. Mini orientations for employed parents before and after they go on leave can help them think through and plan for the changes to come. These orientations could, among other topics, review specifics of company policies on parental leave and work flexibility and inform employees about any childcare support and facilities offered by the employers.

In addition to orientations, mandated check-ins between working parents and their managers can help build clear plans. Regular check-in meetings with supervisors and Human Resources can help employees plan for the transition and allow managers to request for more resources if needed. While 88 percent of employees surveyed in the Boston College study said they had made an explicit plan with their manager about taking their parental leave, only about 73 percent of employees at these 4 leading companies agreed that their organization had an explicit process in place to plan this. Having clear processes in place can help take the guesswork out of preparing to take and returning from parental leave.

Sharing clear information through designated points-of-contact or online resources can help demystify leave policies. The Boston College study found that many women relied on word-of-mouth interactions with their colleagues for information on leave policies and were not able to identify the HR or third-party representative responsible for coordinating these policies. Employees said they did not feel informed about how parental leave interacted with other forms of leave and were unable to calculate how many exact days of leave they would be able to take. Having an online portal with resources on company leave policies and having clearly designated points-of-contact for different teams of employees can help working parents get the information they need in order to prepare to take leave. Employers can also do a lot better in disclosing details of their leave policies in a transparent way.

Only 28% of the 875 largest publicly-traded companies in the United States disclosed detailed parental leave policies.

(JUST Capital report (2019).

Raising awareness around the specifics of company policies and benefits of taking parental leave can be done in a variety of creative ways. Along with formal processes for transitioning out of and back to work from parental leave, employers can also consider creative ways of sharing information on their leave policies and encouraging parents to take longer parental leave. At KPMG, for instance, new parents receive a “baby basket” that includes, among other goodies, brochures with information on leave policies. Johnson & Johnson have set up a “one-stop” online resource where parents can find information on any aspect of taking parental leave that they might have questions on. Johnson & Johnson also have registered nurses and parent coordinators on staff who are assigned to expecting parents to guide them through the process (Weisberg & Galinsky, 2014). We know that only about half of all working parents knew about the full range of benefits from fathers taking longer parental leave. Such lesser-known benefits can be publicized through information portals or designated staff.

Consider programs that recognize the importance of parenting skills to workplace skills. For instance, the European Program Maternity as a Masters (MAAM) is an online training program that helps new parents see how the skills they acquire as new parents—such as time management, empathy, problem-solving and creativity—are precisely the kinds of skills that modern workplaces require (Forbes, 2019).

What longer term changes do employers need to invest in?

In addition to designing and implementing better parental leave policies, employers also need to work on changing the culture at their workplaces to incentivize greater uptake of parental leave by men and consequently more equitable sharing of care responsibilities.

As working parents shared in the Boston College study, having supervisors and senior executives take lengthy parental leaves themselves will be a major step in encouraging working parents to do the same. The perception of incurring a high opportunity cost to care for one’s children needs to be corrected by making it the norm for employees to prioritize family needs without facing a career penalty for doing so. Building and strengthening male allyship at the workplace is an especially important part of changing workplace norms. As the 2014 Families and Work Institute study noted, men who took long parental leave themselves often became strong advocates for women and role models for other men on their teams to take longer childcare leave, having experienced the joys and challenges of this process themselves firsthand.

Changing Workplace Norms beyond Taking Leave

Changes in workplace culture should go beyond encouraging fathers to take leave and support all parents in being more present for their families without fear of negative repercussions. Research suggests that even while some fathers face a “daddy stigma” from prioritizing childcare responsibilities over professional ones, overall at the population level, fathers may reap a financial benefit or “daddy bonus” because of their status as fathers (Heilman et al., 2016, p. 64). Employers may see fatherhood as markers of positive traits like loyalty and responsibility, even as the same status and responsibilities do not necessarily accrue any benefits to mothers.

This appreciation for “Superdads,” which often happens when fathers simply show what should be the normal engagement with their children, not only flows from a double standard for men, it may also disappear when fathers actually choose to engage more meaningfully in their children’s lives. Fathers who seek to be more involved in childcare on an ongoing basis—taking their kids to doctor visits or attending recitals and sports games—may find this bonus flip back to a stigma. Employers need to consciously work toward shifting norms to not just reward a superficial idea of fatherhood that ends after childbirth. The workplace culture should actively support fathers in participating fully in their children’s lives throughout. Further, employers must also be careful that any bonuses offered to fathers—intangible or material—are also offered to mothers and parents of all genders to avoid reinforcing lower expectations from fathers in terms of their care work. Simply put, we all are so accustomed to mothers and women doing the lion’s share of care work that when men begin to do a greater—but often still unequal share—they receive undue praise and the unequal status quo is maintained.

Employers should also look into providing complementary subsidized facilities such as on-site childcare. In addition to providing working parents with flexible work and parental leave policies, employers should consider looking into providing subsidized childcare facilities at or near the workplace. Even the best laid childcare plans can sometimes fall through and offering parents the option of bringing their child to care facilities at their workplace can help them and their colleagues proceed with minimal disruption from such unforeseen events. The International Finance Corporation recently released a report on employer-supported childcare facilities with hands-on tools to help employers assess needs across different contexts, calculate potential costs of offering such a service for their employees, and choose and adapt from various models and examples the best option for their situation (2019).



The Parental Leave Corporate Task Force faces a unique opportunity to make great strides in promoting gender equality at the workplace and in the home. Due to its membership of leading businesses and civil society organizations, the Task Force can help push forward the conversation on enacting family-friendly policies and make significant strides toward gender equality by encouraging and incentivizing ntal leave and be more present in their children's lives. Working fathers being more engaged and involved caregivers is not only good for their children and partners, but for their own health and happiness.



Well-designed policies must also be accompanied by information sharing, changes in workplace culture, and provision of complementary services, particularly paid childcare. Providing well-compensated, adequate, job-protected, equal and non-transferable leave to parents of all genders is a vital first step in promoting a more equitable distribution of care work. However, employees should also be fully informed of these policies, be free to use this leave without fear of consequences, and be able to fall back on support services, for uptake of such leave to actually improve.



While legislation can help set minimum standards, employers must recognize their own power to enact change for gender equality. Around the world, leading businesses have made strides in offering paid parental leave to their employees, irrespective of government mandates. Employers can help make it the norm for fathers to take long parental leave to equal that taken by mothers.



The current moment presents a unique opportunity for swift change. "Stay-at-home" measures brought on by a pandemic have forced a large portion of the workforce to work from home and rendered visible the unequal division of care work that women are responsible for on a daily basis. Men are already being nudged to do more care work, and employers should use this moment as an opportunity to swiftly enact better policies that offer employees maximum flexibility allowing them to design schedules that help equalize sharing of this workload between men and women.

Conclusion

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