Questions and Answers about FATHERS, CAREGIVING, AND WORK:  
A Sloan Work and Family Research Network Fact Sheet

Introduction

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared Fact Sheets that provide statistical answers to some important questions about work–family and work–life issues. This Fact Sheet includes statistics about Fathers, Caregiving, and Work. (Last updated: February 2010)

How involved are fathers in caregiving?

Fact 1  “[Between 1965 and 2003], unpaid work time among married, employed fathers . . . has increase[d] from approximately 100 to 150 minutes per day. This amounts to an increase of nearly six hours per week in core housework, non–routine housework, and child care time among married, employed fathers. Fathers’ time varies from a low of one hour per day in 1965 in Belgium to a high of three hours per day in 1998 in the United States” (Hook, 2006, p. 649).

Fact 2  “[A]nother indicator of fathers’ evolving role in caregiving is the increase in the average number of days they miss from work for personal or family responsibilities when preschool children are in the household—for example, up from 1.8 days in 1997 to 6.3 days in 2007 (Statistics Canada, 2008). The corresponding numbers for women were 4.1 and 4.8” (Marshall, 2008, p. 8).

Compared to women, how much time do fathers spend on child–related caregiving?

Fact 1  “[O]n average, mothers spend much longer than fathers in absolute time caring for children, whether that time is calculated as a primary activity, as either a primary or a secondary activity, or as all time in the company of children. [Mothers spend 2.5 hours in primary child care, compared with fathers’ 1.0 hour; 5.9 in primary and secondary child care compared with fathers’ 2.3; and about 12 hours in total time with children compared with fathers' nearly 8 hours]” (Craig, 2006, pp. 269–270).

Fact 2  “On average, 13 percent of men’s child care time is without their spouse present. In contrast, women average nearly a third [33%] of the time they care for children in sole charge. The discrepancy is present when not just active child care time but all time spent in the company of children is included in the count. Women average nearly a third [29%] of the time they are with their children in sole charge, while men average about 8 percent of the total time they spend with their children in sole charge” (Craig, 2006, pp. 271–272).

Fact 3  “Mothers perform more than four times as much child–related travel and communication as fathers [0.20 hours a day compared with fathers’ 0.01]” (Craig, 2006, p. 274).
Fact 4  “Mothers and fathers generally perform their parental activities without their partner, and joint parental time is very limited, representing only 8 min per day on average” (Pailhe & Solaz, 2006, pp. 222–223).

Fact 5  “Regardless of the partners’ employment status, mothers spend more time with their children than fathers. Thus, when both partners are employed, the mother accounts for 76% of parental time” (Pailhe & Solaz, 2006, p. 224).

How do fathers’ caregiving trends compare in different demographic groups?

Fact 1  “In comparison to Whites, African-American fathers are far more likely to monitor and supervise their children’s activities (cognitive domain) [coefficient 163 for African-American fathers as opposed to the reference group, White fathers]” (Toth & Xu, 1999, p. 89).

Fact 2  “On average, married men spend 24 minutes more per day on unpaid work than unmarried men (Hook, 2006, p. 651).

How does paternity leave participation compare in different countries?

Fact 1  “[In Sweden,] ninety per cent of fathers of children born in 1998 took parental leave, mainly when their children were 13 to 15 months of age” (Haas, Cronholm, & Hwang, 2008, p. 338).

Fact 2  “The proportion of Norwegian men taking some leave has increased from 4 per cent to 89 per cent since the introduction of the one month father’s quota” (Moss, 2008, p. 111).

Fact 3  “[In couples where the mother earned the same as or more than the father and received benefits, 37% of fathers claimed some of the parental leave benefits. After controlling for household income and level of education, fathers in these families were 2.5 times more likely to file for benefits than those in families where the mother received benefits but earned less than the father” (Marshall, 2008, p. 11).

Fact 4  “[In Sweden] in 2004, about 80 per cent of fathers took paternity leave, for an average of 9.7 days out of the 10 days available” (Haas et al., 2008, p. 337).

Fact 5  “[Countries with the highest paternal participation rates include those with non-transferable leave programs that also offer high wage replacement rates, mainly Nordic countries—Sweden (90% participation rate), Norway (89%), and Iceland (84%). Parental leave take-up rates are lower for fathers and mothers in countries where earnings replacement rate is low, regardless of the type of leave program—Belgium has a participation rate of under 7%, Austria, 2% and France, 1%” (Marshall, 2008, p. 6).

Fact 6  “Two-thirds (67 per cent) of Canadian men return to work less than one month after birth or adoption, compared with only 2 per cent of women; 17 per cent of fathers take 1 to 5 months of leave and 10
per cent 6 to 11 months compared with 12 and 33 per cent of women. While just over half of all mothers (51.5 per cent) take 12 months or more of leave, compared with only 4 per cent of fathers” (Doucet & Tremblay, 2008, pp. 160–161).

Fact 7 “In the whole of our sample of 67 work organizations, 667 men and 415 women had a child born [in Europe] in 2004. The study clearly shows that organizations accommodate institutional supports: 99 per cent of mothers take the whole maternity leave period to which they are entitled and more than 83 per cent of fathers used their statutory entitlement to ten days of paternity leave. But 59 fathers took no paternity leave, 34 in one company in the transport sector” (Fusulier, 2008, p. 67)

Does the workforce support paternity leave?

Fact 1 “Despite these vast improvements in the number of formal supports for fathers taking leave, results also suggest that there is still a long way to go before most companies in the private sector become strongly supportive of policy-makers’ goal of fathers taking half of available Parental leave. By 2006, well over half (59 per cent) of companies had not made a formal decision to support men taking Parental leave, which is surprising since legislation clearly indicates that all fathers have the right to such leave” (Haas & Hwang, 2008, pp. 52–53).

Fact 2 “The only formal measure reported by a majority of companies in 2006 was having a man in top management take leave. We asked how often men in top management took Parental leave in 2006 (but not in 1993), and only one-third (34 per cent) of companies reported this occurred ‘rather often’ or ‘very often’. Therefore, for most companies, top management is still sending the message that fathers at the top taking Parental leave is not everyday workplace practice” (Haas & Hwang, 2008, p. 53).

Fact 3 “[I]nformal support for fathers taking Parental leave was not widespread. By 2006, positive reactions to fathers taking Parental leave on the part of managers and co-workers were reported by less than half of companies, and only a quarter of companies (26 per cent) reported positive reactions to leave-taking fathers on all four measures of informal support” (Haas & Hwang, 2008, p. 53).

Why do fathers take or do not take paternal leave?

Fact 1 “Almost 70 percent [of fathers] state that the reason for their choice [to take paternity leave] is that this is a right they ought to avail themselves of, and that only 25 percent said an important ground was that the mother insisted they should use the paternity quota” (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p. 260).

Fact 2 “Getting paid leave [is] a key determinate of which fathers [take] leave [after the arrival of a new child]. Most fathers (74%) only [take] leave when it [is] paid” (Seward, Yeatts, Amin, & DeWitt, 2006, p. 418).

Fact 3 “When we asked [fathers] why they used the paternity quota, 97 percent replied it was because they themselves wanted to be at home. They wanted to stay home with their child, and be able to give priority to their family for a period of time” (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p. 259).
Fact 4  "Most fathers [do] not view . . . days taken off [after the arrival of a new child] as parental leave. Few (19%) fathers [say] their leave was taken under the auspices of the FMLA. The most common reasons that fathers [give] for either not taking leave or not taking all the leave available to them [are] the family’s income (39%) and their situation at work (39%)" (Seward et al., 2006, p. 418).

What are the benefits of parental leave?

Fact 1  "One half of . . . fathers [report] less stress at home after [taking] leave [following the arrival of a new child]" (Seward et al., 2006, p. 420).

How does parental leave affect fathers’ role in caregiving?

Fact 1  "Most of the fathers who [take] leave [following the arrival of a new child] (78%) [report] they [like] caring for the child and [wish] they . . . shared parental leave more equally with their spouse or partner” (Seward et al., 2006, p. 420).

Fact 2  "Many fathers (38%) [report] making . . . schedule changes [following the arrival of a new child]. Twenty three percent of . . . fathers [change] to a flexible work schedule in addition to, or instead of, taking leave, whereas 17% [reduce] their hours after the birth of a baby” (Seward, Yeatts, Amin, & DeWitt et al., 2006, p. 418).

The Network has additional resources related to this topic.


2. Visit our database of academic literature with citations and annotations of literature related to the issue of Fathers, Caregiving, and Work. You can connect to this database at: http://library.bc.edu/?func=find-b-0&local_base=BCL_WF

‘Almost 70 percent [of fathers] state that the reason for their choice [to take paternity leave] is that this is a right they ought to avail themselves of, and that only 25 percent said an important ground was that the mother insisted they should use the paternity quota’ (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p. 26). The data this paper is based on have been compiled from three different research projects. The first project concerned men who became fathers in 1987. The data consisted of two questionnaires: a national sample of men who shared the leave with the mother (this comprised 260 fathers, with a response rate of seventy five); a second local sample comprising all the men who became fathers in the municipality of Trondheim (1,600), with a response rate of sixty; and interviews with ten couples who had shared the parental leave (Brandth & Kvande, 1989, 1991, 1992). Results from this study are only used to a small extent in this article.

The second project was carried out at Allforsk/NTNU. The project design is similar to the previous one and concerns all men who became fathers in the period May 1994 to April 1995 in the municipalities of Trondheim and Orkdal, which are situated in the middle of Norway. Trondheim is the third-largest city in Norway. Orkdal is a smaller rural municipality. The data consisted of a questionnaire survey where 2,194 questionnaires were issued and 1,369 fathers replied, a response rate of 62 percent. Furthermore, interviews were carried out with ten couples who had shared the parental leave and twenty couples where the father had used the paternity quota [of four weeks leave].

A third research project we use for support in this article concerns the tune account scheme. In this project a questionnaire was sent to all parents in Norway who used parental leave as time account in 1997 (Holter and Brandth 1999). In addition, interviews were held with 18 parents of small children. The sample comprises nine mothers and six fathers who chose to organise their parental leave as time accounts, and three mothers who considered using time accounts but decided not to do so (Holter & Brandth 1998). Moreover, representatives of five companies have been interviewed (Gjerstad and Kvande, 1998).

Using data which can illuminate both change and the many different parts of the parental–leave scheme, our analysis here will concentrate on a comparison between the flexible and non-flexible parts of the scheme” (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, pp. 257–258).


“This study analyses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Time Use Survey (TUS) 1997. . . . The TUS randomly samples more than 4,000 households, requiring all household members older than 15 to complete a two–day time–diary. Under Australian law, cooperation with the ABS is compulsory, and rates for full response are greater than 70 percent and, for partial response (such as there being only one diary–day completed), greater than 84 percent. Time–diaries were collected on designated days from a random sample of households at four separate periods during the calendar year (with the aim of capturing seasonal variation). This study uses a sub–sample of the TUS data. Households with adults other than a marital or de facto couple were excluded, to eliminate the effect of other adults in the household possibly sharing child care. (This article treats cohabiting couples as de facto married, following the Australian government’s convention.) To exclude retirees and students, the age range was restricted to those between 25 and 54 years old. Also excluded were households in which there was no child younger than 12 years old, or in which only one parent was normally resident. This left 1,450 men’s and 1,476 women’s diary–days on which to base the analysis” (Craig, 2006, p. 266).


“This report is produced by an international network on leave policy and research, consisting of over 40 experts from 24 countries, mostly in Europe. The network covers policies for parents and others with care responsibilities, including for adult relatives, as well as policies available to the whole population such as life course career breaks and time accounts. But initially, priority is being given to leave policies focused on the care of children. Among the purposes of this network are: the exchange of information about policies, both in individual countries and by international organizations, and research on leave policies; the provision of a forum for the cross–national discussion of issues and trends in policy and research; and providing a source of regularly updated information on policies and research” (Moss & Korintus, 2008, p. 1).

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“A questionnaire was drawn up for a survey of organizations, covering entitlements, opinions about them, as well as details about the organizations” (Fusulier, 2008, p. 65).


“We conducted mail surveys of large corporations in Sweden in 1993 and again in 2006. From the same information source, we obtained lists of companies to study that were the most profitable companies in Sweden during the year preceding each survey; we reduced this list further by including only companies that had 100 or more employees. A traditional mail survey design was carried out, which involved first mailing Swedish language surveys to personnel officers, then a reminder letter two weeks later, then another copy of the mail survey with a new cover letter, followed by a phone call to establish eligibility and urge response. In 1993 we received surveys back from 200 companies for an 80 per cent response rate. In 2006 we received surveys back (from a somewhat larger original list) from 244 companies, for a 71 per cent response rate” (Haas & Hwang, 2008, p. 50).


“I use data from the Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS; versions 5.0.1, 5.5.1, and 5.5.2), which is a collection of over 50 harmonized time–use datasets from over 20 countries providing background and time expenditures variables for individuals ages 20 to 59. Time expenditures are measured in a standardized 40–category typology (Gauthier, Gershuny, and Fisher 2002, 2003). I utilize 44 surveys, conducted between 1965 and 2003, from 20 countries. I include all men, not only married men or fathers, to assess variation in the effects of marriage and children and variation across single men. This yields 98,780 respondents. I lose 5.8 percent of the cases (n = 5,747) because of missing information. Comparisons of these cases to the full sample show no major distinctions between the omitted group and the rest of the sample. The resulting sample size is 93,033” (Hook, 2006, p. 644).

“This article uses the 2006 Employment Insurance Coverage Survey (EICS) to examine fathers’ use of paid parental leave in Quebec [Quebec Parental Insurance Plan] and other provinces [Parental Benefits Program]. Recent revisions to the questionnaire enable the assessment of how parental leave is shared by spouses, as well as the number of weeks of paid leave the father uses and reasons for not claiming parental leave benefits” (Marshall, 2008, p. 5).


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“Our sample is made up of exclusively married or cohabitating couples with at least one child under the age of 15, with both partners filling in the diary (1,810 couples or 3,620 parents). Sample characteristics are given in Table 1. As the parental links within the family are not sufficiently detailed to distinguish children from stepchildren, the term ‘parents’ refers to the partners within the household. Even if the degree of investment in one’s own children or one’s stepchildren may differ, it is likely that the parental burden weighs on all adult members of the household, whatever the family relationship be. Moreover, Rappoport and Le Bourdais (2001) show that parental time differs very little between intact and reconstituted families . . .

Parental time is the sum of maternal and paternal times. Maternal time (respectively paternal time) is the time the mother (father) devotes to activities with her (his) child. Joint parental time is the time spent by both parents together doing activities with their children” (Pailhe & Solaz, 2006, pp. 217–218).


“In 1998, one hundred parents in the Dallas and Fort Worth area of Texas completed a self-administered questionnaire. All parents had a child born or adopted after January 1, 1994, or one year after the passage of the FMLA. Each parent was asked about their work before a new baby arrived, changes in work schedules afterward, details on leave from work, reactions to taking leave, child care activities, shared activities and relations with partner, current job characteristics, attitudes, and demographic characteristics. Many of the questions were devised by Haas (1992) to study fathers’ employment leave and involvement with children in Sweden” (Seward, Yeatts, Amin, & DeWitt, 2006, p. 410).


“The data come from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988), a national probability sample of 13,017 adults interviewed in 1987 or 1988. For households with children under the age of 19, information was collected about a randomly selected child in the household (the focal child). Although data were gathered from a randomly selected adult (primary respondent) as well as from the spouses or cohabitating partners of primary respondents, we use only primary respondent data from male-present households with children. The only
exception is for employment and income information of spouses or partners, which were included as a control variable. Thus, the analyses here focus on 1,258 primary male respondents (fathers) with children aged 5 to 18 years who provided usable information to all fathering items under study, consisting of at least 915 Whites; 210 African Americans; 119 Hispanics (a combined group with Cuban, Mexican, and Puerto Rican Americans, and other Hispanics); and 14 others. (Note that sample size may vary across the dependent variables.)” (Toth & Xu, 1999, pp. 82–83).