OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY LEADERSHIP ON FATHERS

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY LEADERSHIP ON FATHERS

Fatherhood as we know it is changing in many ways—from the evolution of masculinity to the level of involvement in day-to-day care of children. Modern fathers are increasingly aware of, and concerned about, how and what they do as fathers. There is much new research exploring these changing paradigms. However, from a policy perspective, what should be done to help modern fathers has not been deeply explored.

FATHERHOOD AND WORK AND FAMILY—POLICY FACTS

As has always been the case, time is the critical factor in most work-family issues relating to fathers. Fathers are pulled in opposite directions by work and family and must often choose to give time to one at the expense of the other. Meanwhile, children generally benefit from regular contact with their fathers.

The 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce revealed:

- Men’s reported level of work-life conflict has risen significantly over the past three decades, while the level of conflict reported by women has not changed significantly.
- Forty-five percent of men reported some or a lot of work-life conflict in 2008, up significantly from 34% in 1977.
- In dual-earner couples in 2008, 59% of the men reported experiencing work-life conflict, compared to 45% of the responding women.

One study found that fathers are more than twice as likely to report conflicts with their children on days they experienced stress due to work overload or home demands compared to days when they did not experience such stressors.

Still, studies consistently find that most children benefit from regular contact with their fathers. These benefits include:

- improved academic performance
- improved social and emotional functioning
- higher levels of well-being
- fewer externalizing behaviors (i.e., bullying, disobeying, temper tantrums, and acting impulsively)

“FATHERS FACE UNPRECEDENTED WORK AND FAMILY CHALLENGES. MEN HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO PROVIDE FOR THEIR FAMILIES, BUT INCREASINGLY THEY WANT AND NEED TO BE ENGAGED PARENTS. PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD SHOULD INCLUDE WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY. POLICY NEEDS TO KEEP UP WITH THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE MISMATCH BETWEEN THE STRUCTURE OF WORK AND THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES.”

— DAVID GRAY, DIRECTOR, WORKFORCE AND FAMILY PROGRAM, NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION, WASHINGTON, DC
The primary work-family issue relating to fathers is that of leave, whether in the form of father-specific paternity leave or the more general parental leave. Due to a lack of clear policies, working fathers do not get as much leave as they want, but, instead, cobble together as much time as they can through available means.

Almost half (45%) of employed fathers who work at least 20 hours per week report taking leave after the arrival of a new child. Leave-taking fathers take an average of 12 days off from work after the arrival of a new child. Fathers' average leave is less than one-fifth as long as mothers', whose average leave is 68 workdays.5

The availability of paid leave is a key determinant of which fathers take leave after the arrival of a new child. Most fathers (74%) only take leave when it is paid. Those that are paid usually are not paid from a source specifically set aside for parental leave; instead, the vast majority use vacation time (61%), personal days (17%), or sick leave (11%).5

The United States lags behind Europe and other countries in examining issues relating to fathers and in implementing policies that directly address those issues. While many of the “old world” attitudes remain regarding fatherhood in Europe and other countries, proactive policies have increased father participation in overall child care.

Sixty-six countries ensure that fathers either receive paid paternity leave or have a right to paid parental leave; thirty-one of these countries offer 14 or more weeks of paid leave. The United States, however, does not guarantee fathers paid paternity leave or paid parental leave.10

In Europe, “father-friendly” parental-leave policies support the idea that men and women should be able to engage in both employment and caregiving. Paternity leave and parental leave is generally a right rather than an obligation for fathers. Indeed, some policies have gone so far as to mandate a nontransferable leave for fathers. But even in Europe, many fathers still cited insufficient financial compensation as the main factor limiting their utilization of parental leave.11

Europe and other countries around the world have devoted significant resources to research of important issues relating to fathers. Here are some additional resources comparing current policies and legislation in different countries:

http://edit.equalityhumanrights.com/en/policyresearch/research/pages/flexibleworkingpoliciesacomparativereview.aspx (a detailed analysis of flexible working legislation in several European countries, Australia and New Zealand)

http://agingandwork.bc.edu/documents/GPS01_Alt_Work_Arrangements.pdf (Boston College Center on Aging & Work posts detailed work policy tables for 21 OECD countries)

http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/parental_2008_09.pdf (comparing the ‘gender impact’ - how far policies encourage/allow men and women to take leave in the US and 20 other OECD countries)
As noted, there is very little policy in the United States related specifically to fathers.

Five states (CA, HI, NJ, NY, RI) and Puerto Rico provide Temporary Disability Insurance, which provides workers partial compensation to replace loss of earnings caused by non-work-related short-term disability and childbirth. These programs cover 25% of the labor force.

Three states (MN, MT, NM) have active At-Home Infant-Care policies providing low-income working parents who choose to have one parent stay at home for the first year after birth or adoption of a child.

Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia (AK, AZ, CA, CT, DC, DE, FL, IL, MA, ME, MO, NC, NH, NJ, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, TX, VA, WA, WI) have passed statutes that address the availability of flexible work schedules.

In 2004, California was the first state to enact a comprehensive paid family leave law.

In 2007, Washington enacted a paid parental leave law, though implementation has been delayed until 2012.

All four branches of the U.S. military have some form of paid paternity leave.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

The Pew Research Center; fatherhood research at:
- The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take positions on policy issues.

Families and Work Institute: http://www.familiesandwork.org/
- Families and Work Institute is a nonprofit center dedicated to providing research for living in today’s changing workplace, changing family, and changing community.

National Fatherhood Initiative: http://www.fatherhood.org/
- The National Fatherhood Initiative website provides a range on information on fatherhood, including research, policy updates, and event listings.

Sources cited in this Policy Briefing Series


The Sloan Work and Family Research Network can provide you with additional research-based information about working families. VISIT WWW.BC.EDU/WFNNetwork, EMAIL WFNNetwork@BC.EDU, OR CALL 617.552.1708.