



UNLEASHING MEN'S POWER TO CARE THROUGH PATERNITY LEAVE

THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS,
AND WHY WE MUST EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES TO CARE





ABOUT THE RESEARCH

A partnership between Dove Men+Care¹ and Promundo, The Helping Dads Care Research Project (2017-2019) provides cross-sectional, survey data on men and women (ages 25-45) from seven countries on what factors drive men's use of parental leave.

This white paper informs and builds on the findings of the State of the World's Fathers report² – a biennial study, produced by Promundo on behalf of MenCare: A Global Fatherhood Campaign, examining global issues surrounding care work and gender equality.

The survey questioned 11,334 men and women in the US, UK, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Netherlands and Japan. The study included 6,800 men (71% of whom were fathers), and 4,331 women (58% of whom were mothers); more men were included to allow for in-depth analyses of their perceptions about caregiving while still providing reliable comparisons to women overall and mothers. The sample was proportional for all regions of the countries surveyed and for all major ethnic groups.³

¹ <https://www.dove.com/uk/men-care/more-from-dove-men-care/dove-men-care-paternity-leave-initiative/dove-men-care-championing-paternity-leave.html>

² <https://sowf.men-care.org/>

³ The multi-country averages in this white paper reflect calculations that give equal weight to each respondent in each subcategory (i.e. men, women, fathers, mothers), regardless of country.

LESS THAN HALF OF FATHERS TOOK AS MUCH TIME AS THEIR COUNTRY'S POLICY ALLOWED.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPANDING MEN'S OPPORTUNITY TO CARE

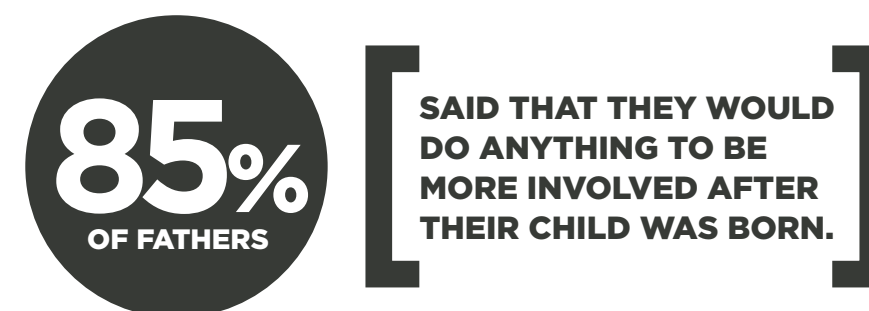
We often assume that men prioritise work over their children – an assumption that data examining the uptake of paternity leave appears to support. Even when paternity leave exists, research from Dove Men+Care and Promundo found that too few fathers take leave after the birth or adoption of a child. **Less than half of fathers – across the same countries surveyed – took as much time as their country's policy allowed.** As many as 35% of fathers in Japan and 40% of fathers in Canada report taking no time off at all after the birth or adoption of their most recent child.

It would be easy to dismiss this as the result of men simply not caring about child care as much as women, or a reflection of an inherent indifference among men to children. But underneath these figures lies a reality that mass media, national and workplace policy, and social norms routinely ignore.

The reality is that men care deeply about being involved care-givers and would go to great lengths to have the opportunity. **An average of 81% of fathers in the same 7 countries believe that fathers should be involved in the physical care of their children, and 83% said the same for emotional care. In fact, 85% of fathers said that they would do anything to be more involved after their child was born.**

Men want to be present and involved caregivers for their newborn children. **43% of men across the 7 countries surveyed admitted that they felt they had missed important events in their child's life due to work commitments** – more so than women did in many of the same countries.

When this is weighed against the comparatively low level of paternity leave uptake, there is a clear conflict between fathers' desire to care and the opportunities that they have to do so: namely, the lack of flexibility or ability to balance their working lives with their family lives.

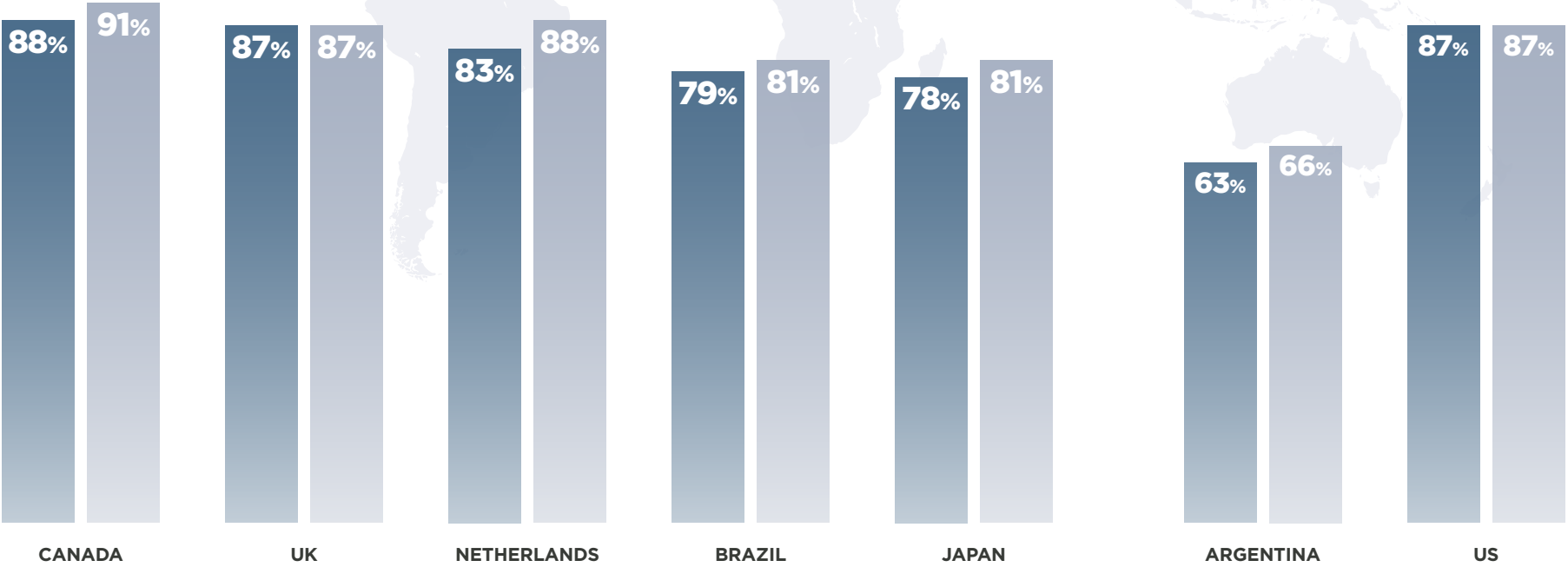


Globally, men face significant obstacles to enjoying more time with their children. From national and workplace policy, through to social expectations and restrictive male stereotypes, dads across the world come up against barriers to care in a number of ways. Whether due to an absence of policy, an insufficient length of paternity leave, or a financial, career or social disincentive for taking available leave, fathers are not being given the opportunities or support they need to spend quality time at home with their children.



SAID THAT THEY HAD BETTER MENTAL HEALTH WHEN THEY TOOK LONGER PATERNITY LEAVE.

GLOBAL DESIRE FOR GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN CAREGIVING
Agreement that fathers should be involved



THE MANY BENEFICIARIES OF PATERNITY LEAVE

Increasingly, research shows that with wide access to paternity leave comes a number of societal benefits enjoyed not only by fathers, but by children, women, employers and the economy. Put simply, when fathers are discouraged from childcare, we all suffer.

For fathers, greater access to care time with their children builds confidence and dispels tired notions of male incompetence as parents. More than this, time spent with children in the early stages of parenthood benefits the emotional development of children and can have a positive impact on a child's mental health. **68% of the men we surveyed said that they felt their child had better mental health when they took longer paternity leave, and 70% of mothers felt the same way.**

For women, an increase in availability and uptake of paternity leave leads to a host of benefits, including higher earnings, fewer instances of mental health issues and depression and a more equitable split of unpaid domestic work. Financially, the volume of unpaid domestic work carried out by women globally would contribute to over \$10 trillion a year towards the GDP.

Engaged fathers make for happier and more productive employees. In turn, this leads to a swifter and happier return to the workplace for mothers, whose partners are able to alleviate the pressure that can come with assuming sole responsibility for domestic care. Research has suggested that, when these factors are combined, companies can enjoy a higher rate of staff retention.⁴

⁴ [https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/making-use-of-workfamily-balance-entitlements\(fc6b4d8d-3afa-448e-85d9-54c66e121ca9\).html](https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/making-use-of-workfamily-balance-entitlements(fc6b4d8d-3afa-448e-85d9-54c66e121ca9).html)

CHAMPIONING THE GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY OF PATERNITY LEAVE

In acknowledgment of the huge opportunity that wider access to paternity leave represents, Dove Men+Care has partnered with Promundo to understand the perceptions of and challenges to male care through a global study of men and women (ages 25-45) on what factors drive the use of paternity leave.

Dove Men+Care is championing paternity leave for men globally. This commitment represents our continued belief that when men have an enhanced opportunity to care, there is a positive impact on them and on society.



“

There is no time more critical for brain development than early childhood, and there's a growing body of evidence showing that fathers hold a huge stake in this process. Yet this evidence is not currently matched with investment to provide fathers with the support they need to play an active role in their children's development. **We have to ask more of governments and more of employers to give all caregivers the time and resources they need to nurture their children; society depends on it.**

DR. PIA REBELLO BRITTO,
UNICEF Global Chief of Early Childhood Development

01

NATIONAL AND WORKPLACE POLICY



NATIONAL POLICY

Less than half (48%) of the world's countries offer paid paternity leave. This leaves nearly all of the responsibility for paid leave to employers – many of whom may be financially unequipped or perceive themselves unable to provide paid leave. Furthermore, when we rely on employers to provide leave we create a two-tiered system that offers some fathers paid leave while others receive none.

Universal paid paternity leave, like paid maternity leave, is generally relatively easy to finance at the governmental level. More than this, a country's income does not appear to influence a state's ability to fund effective paternity leave policies. **In Bulgaria, mothers are able to pass the final six months of their 410 days of maternity leave on to the father of their child – at 90% of their gross salary. This compares with the US's zero days of paid paternal leave, despite Bulgaria's GDP per capita amounting to only 13% of the US's.**

While it's easy to focus only on the countries with no statutory paid leave for fathers, the fact remains that many countries that do offer paid leave rarely provide enough leave, or often do not provide it at a high enough level of wage replacement, to allow a father to have a material impact on the formative months of a child's life.

In the UK, fathers take only 1% of the shared parental leave available to them – often driven by existing gender norms which see fathers interpreting transferable leave as caregiving time taken away from a mother. The financial pressures that contribute to this are also clear: shared parental leave pays just over £145 a week in the UK – only a quarter of the average weekly wage in the UK. Unsurprisingly, with only 2 weeks of statutory and non-transferable paternity leave available, only 7% of UK fathers take over one month of leave after the birth of their first child.

This combination of social deterrents to transferrable shared leave, and financial deterrents to both shared and paternity leave, mean that many fathers feel disincentivised to take time off for caregiving – an issue that is not unique to the UK. In the Netherlands, fathers are entitled to only 5 days paid leave after a child is born. In the US, fathers are entitled to no paid paternity leave at all.

The paucity of available leave for fathers in many countries is not a reflection of a lack of desire for paternity leave on the part of families and fathers. In nearly all cases, when leave is available, adequately paid and non-transferable, fathers take it. In Iceland, uptake shot up to 95% when allowances were increased in 2000, and the average length of leave fathers took also increased when it was made non-transferable. And when new paternity measures were introduced in Germany in 2007, uptake grew from 3.3% of eligible fathers to 29.3% in 5 years.⁵

Generally speaking, with greater financial support or wage replacement for new fathers comes a greater uptake of paternity leave, and a resultant benefit for fathers, mothers and children alike. Over 43% of fathers in our study said that financial barriers were the single biggest reason they did not take all paternity leave available to them.

“I took few days of full time off. **I think it is important to bond with your child, but for me it was also extremely important for me to be there as support for my wife, so that she knew she could count on me.**

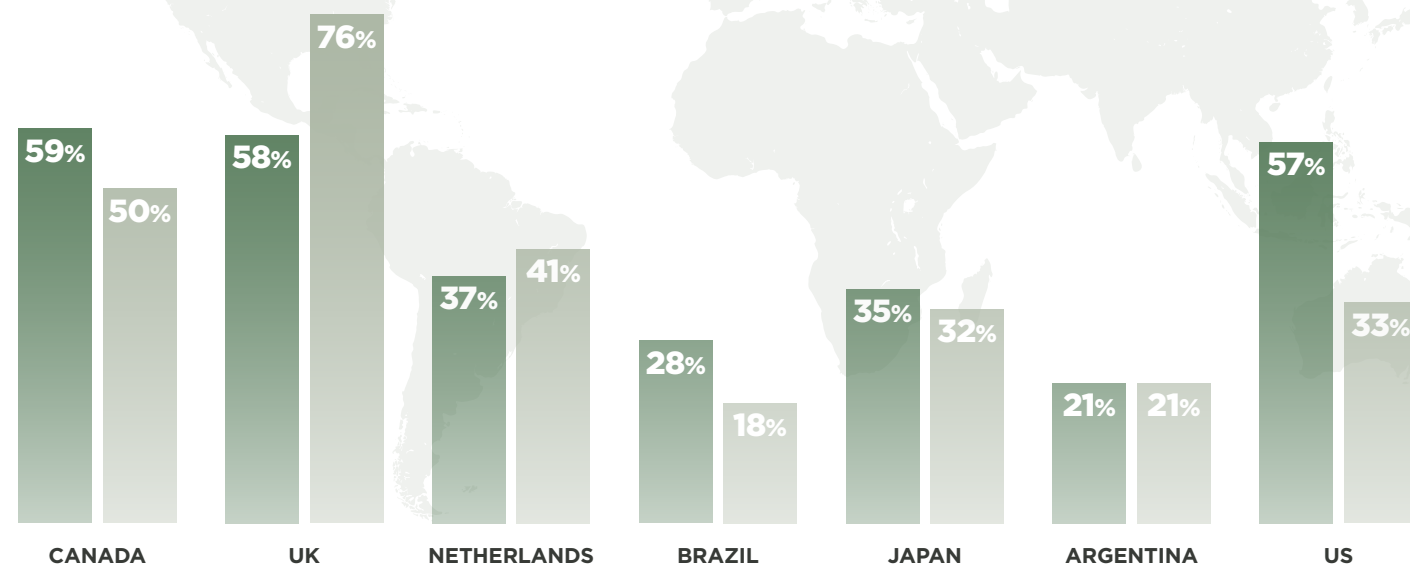
DANIEL, 36, FATHER OF TWO

⁵ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/women-and-equalities-committee/fathers-and-the-workplace/oral/49322.pdf>

FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO UPTAKE OF PATERNITY LEAVE

How many fathers and mothers agree that financial barrier is highest reason for not taking full paternity leave?

Fathers Mothers
♂ ♀



WORK PLACE POLICY

National policy is not the only driver of paternity leave uptake. In Japan, fathers are entitled to a full year of paid leave, yet only 1% actually take the full year allowance. Factors beyond national policy can impact a father's ability to take time off to care. Often, the core contributing factor to this phenomenon is workplace culture and policy.

Even in countries where paid paternity leave is nationally mandated, many fathers feel compelled to cut their leave short, or to not take any at all. Workplace pressures, expectations, and lack of policy or processes in place to deal with paternity absences all contribute to fewer fathers being able to spend time at home with their children.

Employers must realise that offering flexible and accommodating paternity leave is not only a social imperative, but also a business imperative. 77% of millennial men and 67% of all men surveyed in the US⁶ report that they have or would be willing to change jobs in order to better manage work and family responsibilities. Increasingly, men are demanding paternity leave, and will go to great lengths to ensure that it is available to them.

Engaged dads report fewer mental or physical health issues, work more productively in the office and report being happier. The more time fathers spend with their children on a typical day, the more satisfied they are with their jobs and the less likely they want to leave their organisations.⁷



⁶ Global generations: A global study on work-life challenges... (2015). Retrieved April 18, 2018, from [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-global-generations-a-global-study-on-work-life-challenges-across-generations/\\$FILE/EY-global-generations-a-global-study-on-work-life-challenges-across-generations.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/EY-global-generations-a-global-study-on-work-life-challenges-across-generations/$FILE/EY-global-generations-a-global-study-on-work-life-challenges-across-generations.pdf)

⁷ Ladage, J., Humberd, B. K., Harrington, B., & Watkins, M. B. (2015, January 8). The more time fathers spend with their children, the better they fare on the job, new research finds. Retrieved April 19, 2018, from <http://aom.org/News/Press-Releases/The-more-time-fathers-spend-with-their-children-the-better-they-fare-on-the-job-new-research-finds.aspx>

2

SOCIAL NORMS



**FELT THEY HAD TO DO AT
LEAST SOME WORK DURING
THEIR PATERNITY LEAVE.**

WORKPLACE EXPECTATIONS AND PRESSURES

On average, we spend 35% of all waking hours at work over the course of a 50-year career. The attitudes, expectations and social norms men experience at work are powerful and can impact their willingness to ask for or take available paternity leave.

Even when leave is offered, mothers and fathers feel the pull of work. **On average, 57% of fathers in our study felt they had to do at least some work during their paternity leave.** The research also revealed that only half of fathers felt that their managers saw providing employees with paternity leave as a priority.



My wife had a very difficult birth that ended in an emergency C section. Because of the paid time off, I was able to handle the bulk of responsibilities while she healed.

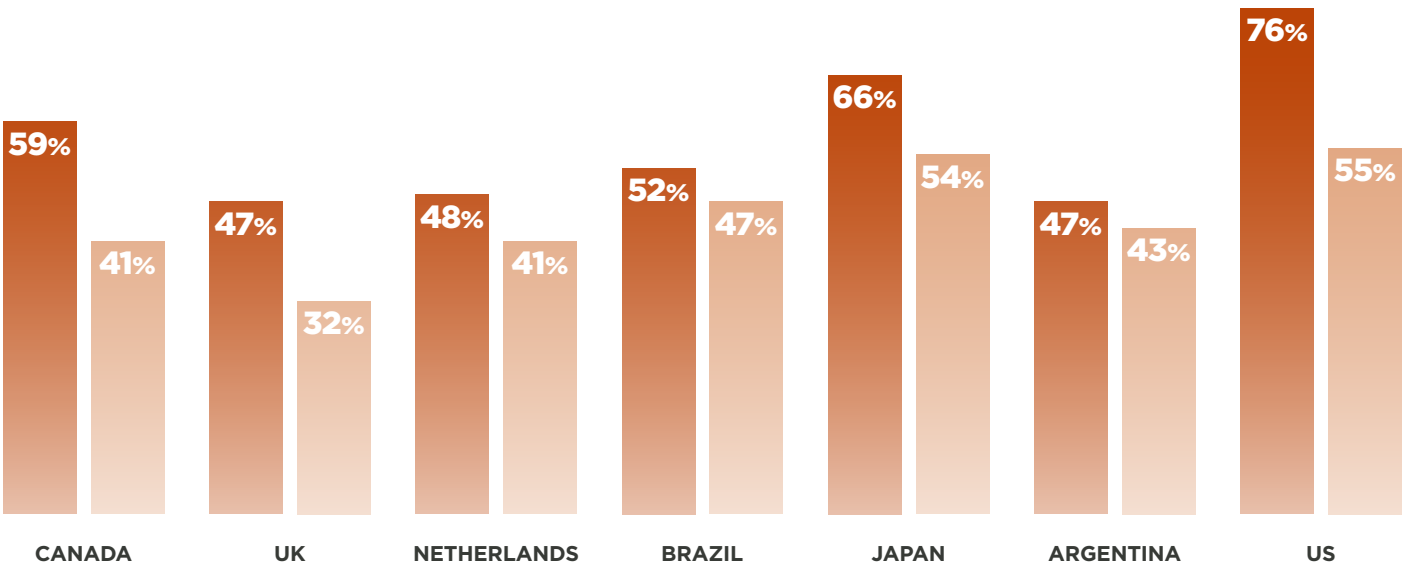
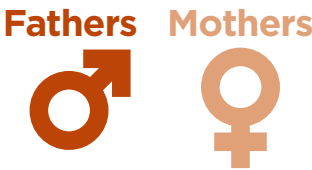
EDWIN, 39, FATHER OF ONE

In most of the world, families are having fewer children on average, and women’s entrance in the paid work force is increasing in most settings. Both of these trends are slowly nudging men to do a greater share of care work and increasing the demand for paid leave for mothers and fathers.

Unfortunately, while policy can be drawn up and ratified in a matter of weeks, social norms often take years or decades to change. But demographic shifts suggest that a groundswell of support for better paternity leave could emerge as younger people with more progressive outlooks grow into decision-making roles. Globally, 62% of millennials manage the work of others⁸ – a figure that will continue to grow, and potentially begin to move the needle in changing workplace attitudes to paternity leave.

PRESSURES AND EXPECTATIONS TO WORK DURING PARENTAL LEAVE

How many fathers and mothers have
to work a little during the leave?



⁸ Global generations: A global study on work-life challenges across generations

GENDER ROLES AT HOME: TACKLING STEREOTYPES EARLY ON

According to a United Nations study, fathers who take paternity leave are less likely to fall into gendered parenting roles, are more likely to raise daughters who have higher career aspirations, and sons who exhibit gender equal behaviors.⁹

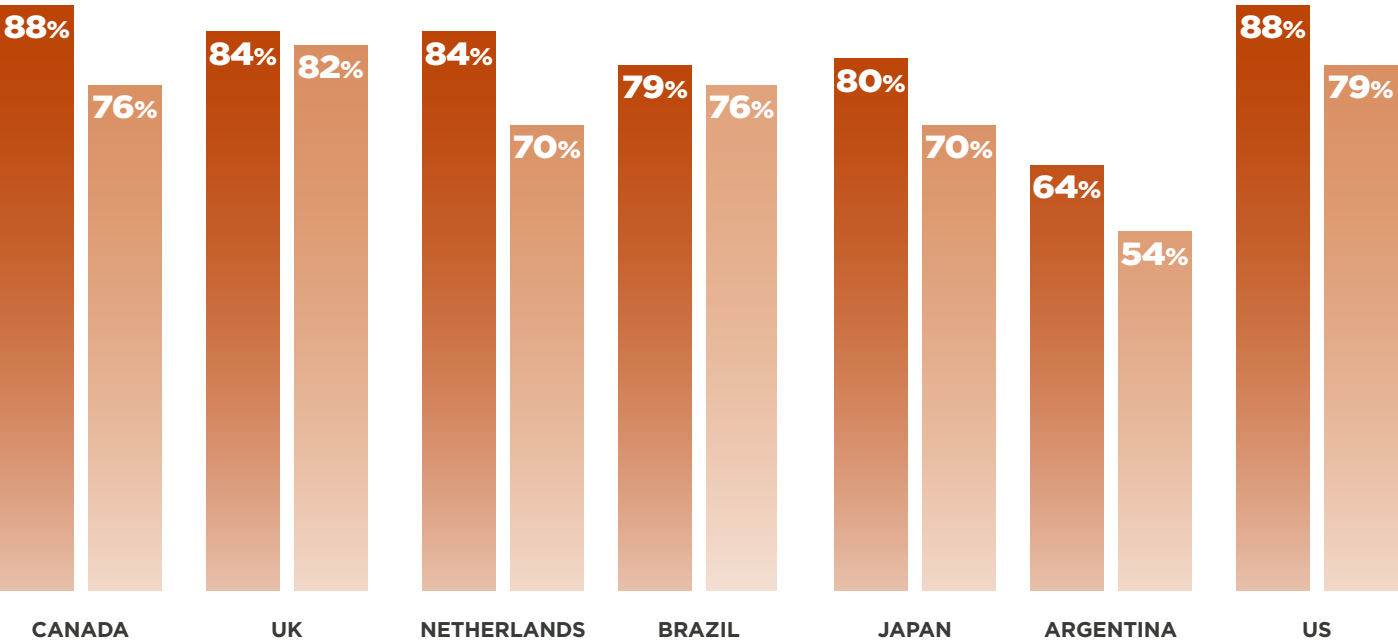
The expectations and norms men experience outside of the workplace can be as impactful on their perceptions of fatherhood and willingness to demand paternity leave as influences within the workplace. **Stereotypes that are established at home can not only damage men’s prospects of feeling empowered to push for paternity leave at work, but also dent men’s confidence in his ability as a caregiver.**

Even today, the men and women surveyed in our study generally believed that men are more responsible for the financial care of a child than women. The impact that these long-standing attitudes not only damage the prospects of fathers spending valuable time with their children, but also exacerbate existing gender inequalities. We too often continue to see men as providers and women as the default caregivers.

Globally, women spend significantly more time than men – sometimes up to 10 times as much – on unpaid care, volunteer, and domestic work (and spend more time on unpaid and paid work combined). Promoting and celebrating the diverse and inclusive role that fathers – and mothers – play in a family is a crucial first step in empowering and enabling parents to push for greater paternity leave at a professional and policy level.

GENDERED EXPECTATIONS OF
FINANCIAL PROVISION FOR CHILDREN

Fathers Mothers



⁹ <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/eqm16/BehsonRobbins.pdf>

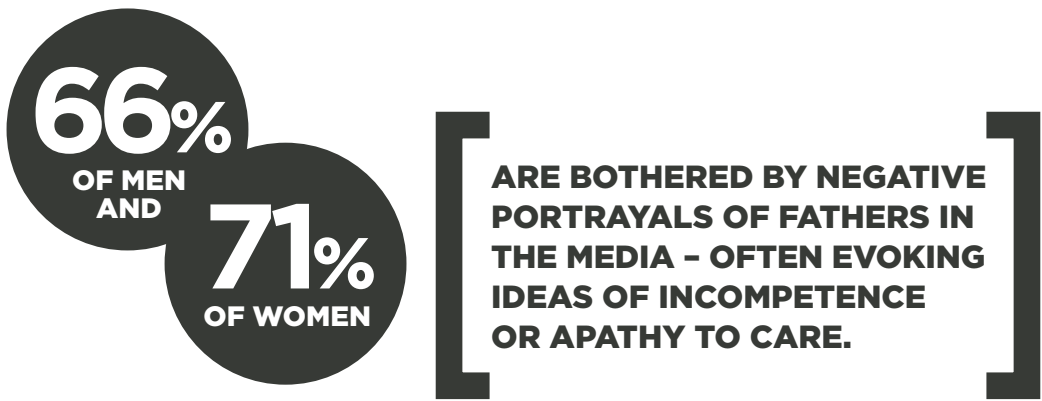
03

DEFINING FATHERHOOD



SOCIAL STEREOTYPES OF INCOMPETENT PROVIDERS

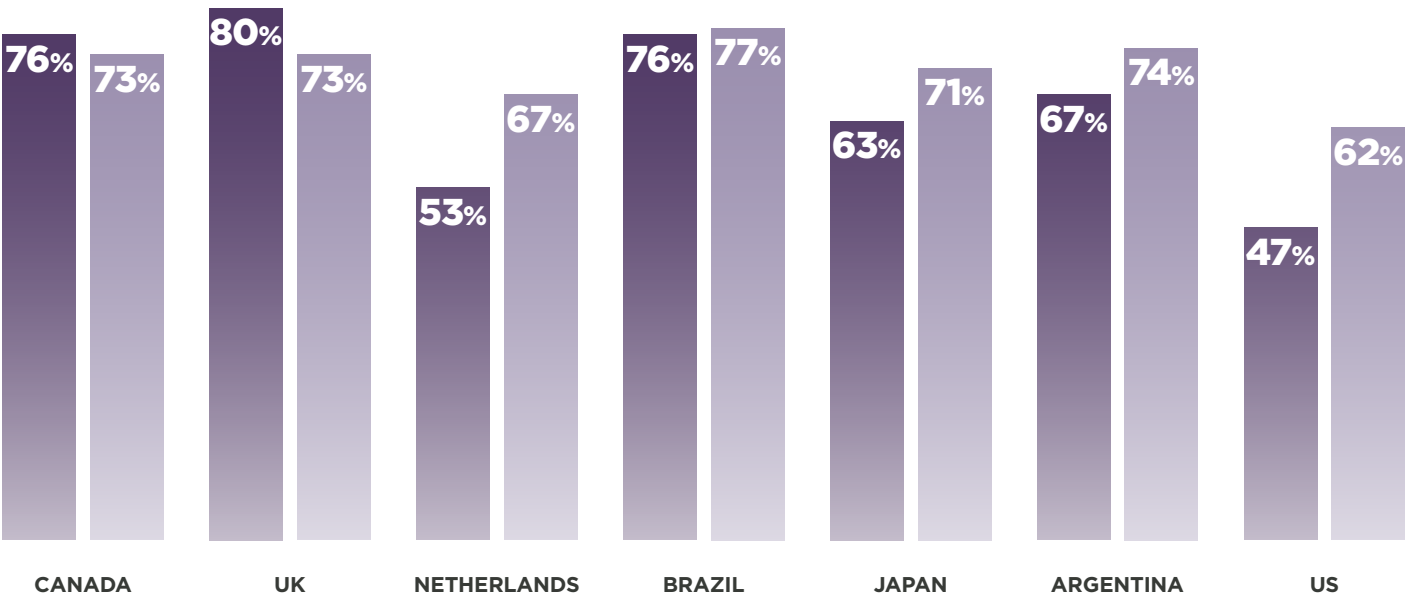
66% of men and 71% of women in our study are bothered by negative portrayals of fathers in the media – often evoking ideas of incompetence or apathy to care. The pervasive nature of these tropes can have a serious impact on fathers’ confidence in their competence as parents, undermining the inherent ability that they have to care. Being a man needn’t be seen as an unassailable disadvantage to caregiving.



Despite this, negative portrayals of fatherhood and men’s competency as caregivers are widespread. A study by a US advertising agency found that 74% of young fathers in the US believed that advertisers misrepresent modern family dynamics. On top of this, 85% said they felt that they are more able caregivers than people give them credit for.¹⁰ Globally, just 7% of men say they can relate to how the media depicts men today, according to a 2014 Dove Men+Care ‘Care Makes a Strong Man Stronger’ study¹¹ and 75% feel that the media’s portrayal of men is too narrow and unrealistic, often depicting them as foolish and aloof.

Beyond negative depictions of fathers in media, a general absence of fathers in care-focused or parenting media also perpetuates the stereotype of men as ineffective caregivers. For example, men are rarely featured in parenting magazines or TV advertisements for childcare products.

IMPACT OF NEGATIVE PORTRAYALS OF FATHERS IN MEDIA
How many feel bothered by incompetent portrayal of father in media?



¹⁰ <https://www.marketingdive.com/news/study-millennial-dads-think-family-messaging-misses-the-mark/448937/>
¹¹ Dove Men+Care ‘Care Makes a Strong Man Stronger’ Study (2014)

CONFIDENCE AND SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF FATHERHOOD

The prevalence of negative stereotypes of men as caregivers in media and in society can have a profound impact on men's notions of their roles as caregivers. Damaging tropes of men as indifferent or apathetic to children are still commonplace. **But with greater confidence in their ability to care come greater challenges to policy and social norms, and with it a greater likelihood of a shift in attitudes to and support of paternity leave.**

Biologically, men are able caregivers – contrary to the many depictions in general media and advertising. There is growing evidence that men's bodies react to physical connections with their children, disproving any misconception of an inherent inability to care.¹² Research confirms that men's bodies show hormonal changes that enhance attachment with young children when they are parenting.¹³

Numerous studies also show the benefits to children of fathers' roles in early childhood. **An increase in father-infant care time in the first 13 months of life benefits a child's social and emotional development in later life.¹⁴ In addition, infants attained higher cognitive scores at age one if their fathers were involved in their lives when they were one month old.¹⁵**

WITHOUT PATERNITY LEAVE, IT'S UNLIKELY THE FATHER WILL EVER CONTRIBUTE EQUALLY IN CARING FOR THEIR NEW CHILD, AND THAT PATTERN HAS A REINFORCING EFFECT: THE MORE A MOTHER CARES FOR A KID, THE MORE SHE FEELS ABLE TO DO. THE LESS A FATHER FEELS ABLE, THE MORE HE STEPS BACK.¹⁶

I have doubts everyday about what I'm supposed to be doing as a father. I believe this is the one job where there isn't an instruction manual. I just do my best everyday... and everything else will fall into place.

I wasn't able to take paid time off. Because I'm self-employed I had to go back to work once my daughter was born.

DORSEA, 32, FATHER OF TWO



¹² Hrdy, S. B. (2011). Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding. Harvard University Press

¹³ Eyal Abraham, Talma Hendler, Irit Shapira-Lichter, Yaniv Kanat-Maymon, Orna Zagoory-Sharon, and Ruth Feldman (2014) <https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2014/05/22/1402569111.abstract?sid=e3887327-4793-48ef-9f22-7cb7d4c82a33>

¹⁴ Brown, G., Mangelsdorf, S. & Neff, C. 2012. Father involvement, paternal insensitivity, and father-child attachment security in the first 3 years. Journal of Family Psychology 26: 421-430.

¹⁵ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/352913>

¹⁶ The New Dad: Take Your Leave - Perspectives on paternity leave from fathers, leading organizations, and global policies

HOW WE CAN SUPPORT FATHERS

Our research confirms that men want to be involved caregivers, but that a host of barriers hold them back. National and workplace policy, societal and professional expectations, and pressure from friends and family to conform to restrictive gender roles all impact a father's confidence in his caregiving ability. More than this, the impact of these restrictive norms is also felt by women, employers and, crucially, children.

To overcome these challenges, we need institutional, societal and individual support and a collective effort to bring about the attitudinal and policy changes that are crucial to shifting the needle in this global challenge.

At Dove Men+Care, we firmly believe in the power of paternity leave to drive this positive impact. **When Dads take paternity leave, it unleashes the “father effect”,** enabling their children to do better cognitively and emotionally; their partner to have better health; both parents to do better as a couple; the family to enjoy better financial outcomes; and dads to feel more fulfilled.

Dove Men+Care encourages everyone to be an advocate for paternity leave. Whether you are a father, an employer or an ally, we invite men, women, colleagues, employers, friends and family **to support all dads having greater access to paternity leave, and the freedom to decide the best way to take care of themselves and those around them.**

**TOGETHER, WE CAN UNLOCK
THE POWER OF PATERNITY
LEAVE AND MAKE IT SOMETHING**
#DadsDo

“Rarely do we have a policy opportunity that pays forward in so many ways for so many people. Universally available, equitable, paid paternity leave – combined with support for fathers to take it – empowers women, helps children thrive, leads to a happier workforce and enhances the well-being of couples. The research, along with the stories of so many families and fathers, confirm again and again that paternity leave more than pays for itself in the benefits it generates.

GARY BARKER
CEO of Promundo

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our thanks to the following for leading and contributing to the Helping Dads Care Research Project.



GARY BARKER
President and CEO
Promundo

Gary Barker, PhD, is a leading global voice in engaging men and boys in advancing gender equality and positive masculinities and is an author of the State of the World's Fathers reports (2015, 2017, 2019)



BRIAN HEILMAN
Senior Research Officer
Promundo

Brian Heilman is a Senior Research Officer at Promundo, where his work focuses on eliminating harmful masculine norms, preventing all forms of gender-based violence, and achieving broader gender equality and social justice in the United States and around the world.



TAVEESHI GUPTA
Research Fellow
Promundo

Taveeshi Gupta is an independent consultant with expertise in gender norms and violence against women and children.



NIKKI VAN DER GAAG
Consultant, author and speaker

Nikki van der Gaag is an independent consultant and writer who works primarily on gender, with a particular focus on girls and on masculinities.

UNICEF generously provided imagery which helped bring this white paper to life and provided insight into the enormous global opportunity that access to paternity leave could unlock. The work UNICEF does as part of their Early Moments Matter campaign is vital in helping create a world where fathers are empowered to take paternity leave, and where the benefits are felt at home, at work and in society.



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THE STATE OF
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