

State of the world's fathers: Unlocking the power of men's care ^[1]

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has a big ambition: we are calling for nothing less than full equality between women and men, in the workplace and in the home. The third State of the World's Fathers is rooted firmly in a feminist analysis of care, and the belief that unpaid care work must be valued as much as paid work, and shared equally between men and women.

Globally, women spend significantly more time than men – sometimes up to ten times as much – on unpaid care and domestic work. If this is calculated on the basis of an hourly minimum wage, it could make up 9 to 11 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2018, 606 million women of working age around the world said that they were unable to take on paid work because of unpaid care responsibilities. In countries where women do twice as much unpaid care work as men, their average earnings are less than two-thirds of men's. This disparity lies at the heart of gender inequality; it keeps women, families, communities, countries, and the world poor.

This report focuses specifically, however, on men, and on men who are fathers and caregivers, because this is still an area where huge shifts are needed. While many men are becoming more engaged as fathers and hands-on caregiving partners, in 23 middle- and high-income countries, the unpaid care gap between men and women has decreased by only seven minutes a day across a 15 year time span. Fewer than half of the world's countries (48 percent) offer paid paternity leave on the birth of a child, and often this is less than three weeks – or sometimes only a few days. Even when paternity leave exists, too few fathers take leave after the birth or adoption of a child.

Worldwide, there remains a widespread expectation that caring is women's work, and men's role as breadwinners should largely exempt them from any household chores or work that includes providing care. Drawing on data from 23 countries across the world, significant proportions of both men and women agree that "changing diapers, giving baths to children, and feeding children should be the mother's/woman's responsibility."

Change in terms of who does the daily care work in our homes is needed, and urgently, if we want a significant shift in power relations between women and men and to bring about gender equality. The latest report from the World Economic Forum shows that it will take 202 years to close the economic gender gap between men and women. This is far too long.

But in the past few years, the world has begun to wake up to the importance of unpaid care work. While this report focuses on fathers, it would not exist without the decades of women's advocacy and the work of feminists who demanded action in this space. The inclusion of United Nations Sustainable Development Target 5.4 on unpaid work, the call to make visible the "unequal distribution of remunerated and unremunerated work between women and men" in the 1995 Beijing Declaration (and even further back), and the Wages for Housework campaign in 1972 were just some of the milestones along this road.

Greater involvement by men in daily care work brings benefits for everyone. Having involved fathers is good for gender equality. It is good for women's health. It leads to better relationships within couples and can be linked with a reduction in rates of men's violence against women. It is good for children, too. There is ample evidence from all over the world that engaged fatherhood has a positive impact on boys and girls – and the relationships they will have as adults. Girls are more empowered, and boys are more likely to believe in gender equality and to share the unpaid work if they saw their fathers do the same.

And shared caregiving is good for men. Research shows that men themselves benefit from greater engagement in caregiving, including improved physical, mental, and sexual health and reduced risk-taking. Fathers who are involved in the home and with their children say it's one of their most important sources of well-being and happiness. Not surprising then that the Helping Dads Care Research Project featured in this report, produced in conjunction with Unilever, Dove Men+Care, finds that on average, 85 percent of fathers in seven countries say they would be willing to do anything to be very involved in the early weeks and months of caring for their newly born or adopted child.

A New Plan: The MenCare Commitment 50 minutes, 50 percent

If governments want to care about care, they must have national goals of achieving equality in care work, measure who does the care, and measure progress toward equality in care work. Employers, civil society, and men themselves have a major role to play as well. Along with new data and analysis, this report calls for a bold commitment to unlock the power of care.

To reach 50 percent of the unpaid care work, time use data analysis finds that men would need to increase their time spent by a minimum of 50 minutes a day. This report urges governments, employers, and members of civil society around the world to take action to promote gender equality by supporting men to do their fair share of the unpaid care work by 2030. Learn more about the MenCare Commitment at: www.men-care.org/mencarecommitment ^[3]

We call on policy-makers and politicians, health workers and teachers, employers and media influencers, advocates and activists, to step up and end the inequality in unpaid care work. We call on men and boys – whether biological, non-resident, step or adoptive fathers, adolescent fathers, fathers of all sexual orientations and gender identities, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, or other male relatives – to be more than “helpers.” To take on an equal share of unpaid care and domestic work as an urgent matter of gender justice and women's rights.

Changes are needed across five key areas, as highlighted in this report: in laws and policies, in social and gender norms, with families, couples, and individual men themselves. The full recommendations can be found in each chapter.

1. Improve laws and policies

Governments must implement changes to include fathers in a wide range of sectors and policies – from health to education, childcare to social protection – to support the goal of equality in caregiving and broader gender justice. Equal, fully paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents is central to setting the foundation for fathers' involvement with their children from an early age. Governments must collect data on time use in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men and girls and boys, and use it to inform policy-making and budgeting decisions.

2. Transform social and gender norms

Even when supportive laws and policies exist, traditional ideas that women are the default caregivers persist. For this to change, governments must provide training to change attitudes of service providers such as teachers, child care workers and health care providers. Educational programs must ensure that boys and girls are taught to value care from an early age. Employers must create a workplace environment that fully supports the caregiving duties of women and men. Advertisers, media producers, and NGOs should implement media campaigns to inspire men, their families, and their communities to support men's caregiving.

3. Guarantee economic and physical security for vulnerable families

Programs and policies for marginalized families, including refugees and internally displaced persons, must have an awareness of the pressures that economic and political insecurity put on the household, and how this affects women and men differently. They must take into account the possible changes in gender roles that result from conflict, and their differentiated impact on women and men. And they must find ways to promote men's involvement in care work.

4. Help couples and co-parents thrive

Fathers' relationships with their intimate partners and co-parents are often where the balance or imbalance of care work has the most immediate effects. Father-specific parent training must be implemented and mandated nationally to build men's skills, confidence, and competence, and to promote shared decision-making and good communication.

5. Put individual fathers' care into action

Fathers need to step up – and in practice, this means individual men doing more each day. There must be a deliberate, collective effort to nudge men to do 50 percent of the care work. It's vital to challenge the notion that men are “helping” rather than sharing the care equally. This means encouraging and supporting fathers to participate in groups with their babies and children, to build their confidence and skills, and to commit to sharing the unpaid care and domestic work equally with their partners.

We are not just calling on fathers to make small gestures towards equality. We are after full equality, full stop. Men are shaped by society and they have an individual responsibility for achieving equality. We must change the world around men and women to believe that care matters, that it must be equal, and that it is as important as anything else we do.

Change is possible. Gender equality is possible. But it takes all of us to make the shift so that men take on 50 percent of the unpaid care and domestic work and women have the opportunity to participate equally in the workforce. Only then can we build a more equal world. It's time to step up. It's time to unlock – and multiply – the power of men's care.

Related link: Canadian men least likely to take paternity leave due to financial concerns: report ^[4]

Region: International ^[5]

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