

Why dads don't take parental leave ^[1]

Even when companies offer the time, there's one element missing.

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EXCERPTS

In 2019, we ran a piece about [why American men don't take paternity leave, even when it's on offer to them](#) ^[3]. While 90 percent of fathers take some time off after their children are born, the majority of them take less than 10 days away from the job. Nathaniel Popper, an NYT Parenting contributor, said one reason is that new dads fear they might be stigmatized by their employers and miss out on future opportunities.

Another reason: They're not taking leave because it's not fully paid.

According to a white paper from the Boston College Center for Work & Family, men who were given parental leave at their full salaries took a lot more of it. The study, which was not published in a peer-reviewed journal, surveyed more than 1,200 employees from four different companies that allowed parents of all genders to take between six and 16 weeks of fully paid leave after welcoming a new child into their families. It's worth noting that this sample is not nationally representative: Almost all of these workers are college educated, and more than half of them make over \$100,000 a year.

More than 60 percent of men surveyed took the full amount of available parental leave, and those who did not take the full amount took most of it. Men who were eligible for eight weeks of leave took an average of 7.2 weeks, while men who were eligible for 16 weeks took an average of 12.8 weeks.

Compare that with men in California, where a state policy provides paid leave for its citizens, but that leave is not fully paid. Depending on how much you earn, the payment is capped at 60 or 70 percent of one's wages for up to six weeks, with the maximum benefit topping out at \$1,300 a week. While the amount of leave women took increased by five weeks after California started providing paid family leave, the amount of leave men took increased by only a few days.

Brad Harrington, Ed.D., executive director of the Boston College Center for Work & Family and a co-author of the Boston College study, said that the men his team has surveyed in the past have generally said they need at least 70 percent of their uncapped salaries paid to take leave. "Virtually every man said 70 percent and many said 90 or higher," Harrington said.

"It's not that men are mercenary," he added. It's that there isn't fully paid parental leave available for most American women, either — the United States is one of the few countries without federal paid maternity leave. So in heterosexual couplings, if their wives need to take unpaid leave to physically recover from giving birth, men need to be highly compensated or "the financial hardship is really pronounced," Harrington said.

The benefits of paternity leave are substantial for dads, kids and marriages. And as we've noted previously, when dads take leave, it sets the stage for more egalitarian parenting arrangements long-term. A full 76 percent of men and 74 percent of women Harrington and his co-authors surveyed said that caregiving should be shared equally, but only about half of those men and women said they actually did share caregiving equally. If men and women begin taking the same amount of leave, they're at least getting started on the right foot.

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