

More dads staying home with baby [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

More Canadian fathers are taking time off work following the birth or adoption of a child, but they return to work much sooner than mothers and find the transition easier, a Statistics Canada report released Wednesday has found.

The proportion of mothers taking leave after the arrival of a child remained stable at nearly 90 per cent between 2001 and 2006, but the share of fathers who stayed home rose to 55 per cent from 38 per cent during the same period. This might be due to extended leave benefits of up to 35 weeks, the report speculates, making mothers more inclined to "share" leave time with their spouse or partner.

While 62 per cent of mothers found the transition back to work to be stressful and one-fifth of them described it as very stressful, nearly two-thirds of fathers (65 per cent) said the return to work gave them little trouble.

"We have a bit of a double message going out to parents," says Donna Lero, Jarislowsky Chair in Families and Work at the University of Guelph. "We know and recognize that a father's involvement is very positive. But when it comes to parenting babies, there is a unique responsibility which is (thought to be) the mother's, and a lot of the debate about child care and staying at home is really about moms, not about dads."

Low fertility rates are a significant concern in Canada, she says, but government policies don't make it easy for anyone to juggle child care, career, finances and family life.

Eight in 10 parents admitted they would have stayed home longer with their children if finances had permitted. Reasons for returning to work were similar for men and women, except that more men (40 per cent) worried about losing their jobs, while more women (26 per cent) said they felt isolated at home.

Two-thirds of dads returned to work within a month of their child's arrival. One-third of mothers returned to work six to 11 months after their child's arrival, while half stayed home for one to four years.

In spite of the challenges, 86 per cent told Statistics Canada they were ultimately satisfied with their return to work.

Even so, nearly one-quarter of parents (23 per cent) didn't go back to work at all, with more than half of them citing a desire to raise their children themselves. Another 24 per cent did not return to the workforce because child care was too expensive, and eight per cent remained at home because they lost their job or their employer wasn't offering the position they wanted.

More than 3.2 million Canadians welcomed new children by birth or adoption between 2001 and 2006.

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