

Fathers are happier when doing more housework, says study ^[1]

Report also found men who spend more time with their children and work similar hours to partners are less stressed

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EXCERPTS

It will be music to the ears of working mothers everywhere: fathers are happier when they do more of the housework themselves, spend longer with their children and have working partners who are in the office just as long as they are, a major new study has found.

The best way to de-stress a father is for his partner to share the weight of domestic burdens with him, rather than ironing his socks, making his breakfast and taking the lion's share of responsibility for the kids.

Researchers hope the interim findings from the study, called *Work Life Balance: Working for Fathers?*, will prompt employers to re-evaluate myths about work - so that women cease to have their careers blocked by bosses who assume they will be primary carers of children, and men are given more opportunity to change their work-life balance.

"The way we 'do' family has changed - not only because mothers are more likely to go out to work but also because today both mothers and fathers want close relationships with children as they are growing up," said Dr Caroline Gatrell of the Lancaster University management school, the lead researcher in the two-year project carried out for the charity Working Families.

Gatrell and her team spoke to more than 1,100 working fathers to find out how they combine work and family life. Their findings reveal that the desire for more "family time" is widespread, with 82% of full-time working men saying they would like this.

"It is becoming increasingly evident that the expectations that fathers have of the way and amount they are involved directly with their children is altering. Fathers want to spend more time with their children and are doing more of the direct care for them," said Gatrell.

The team also found evidence that social attitudes towards childcare are in a period of profound change: fewer fathers than mothers, for example, believe that it is a mother's job to look after children. "The problem is that although families are changing, this is - largely - being completely ignored by employers," added Gatrell.

"This is creating a massive problem for both men and women. Women are having their careers blocked by employers who assume that, once children come along, their commitment to the workplace will be severely compromised. But the same myth is also disadvantaging men who find themselves being their child's main or only carer, because employers aren't offering them work-life balance choices. It is time workplace attitudes changed to recognise the massive changes that have taken place in family practices in the 21st century."

The findings also include that men are very often "seriously stressed" and those who have one or three children are more stressed than those who have two; fathers who do more housework are less stressed than those who do a smaller amount; and fathers whose partners work full-time have a better sense of wellbeing than those whose partners work part-time.

"New fathers are likely to be completely unprepared for the impact a child has on their lives. When number two comes along, they know what to expect. But number three is another massive change, especially with the extra squeeze on income and costs," said Gatrell.

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