

Encouraging paternity leave leads men to take on more child care, study shows ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Newly released research shows that a small change in policy - making it "normal" and expected for fathers to take parental leave - led men not only to spend more time with their new babies but also to do more housework and pick up more child-care responsibilities down the road.

The study "Daddy's Home!" conducted by the U.S. Council on Contemporary Families examined what happened to families when Quebec introduced a paid, five-week "daddy-only" leave in 2006 and increased the province's parental-leave pay. The share of eligible fathers taking leave jumped from 21.3 per cent to 53 per cent, a 250 per cent increase. And the length of time fathers took off to care for infants rose from two weeks on average to five weeks.

But perhaps the most surprising, and powerful finding was this: by 2010, the men in Quebec who had taken "daddy-only" leave were spending 23 per cent more time doing housework and child care than were men in other parts of Canada without the quota.

"I was struck by the magnitude of the effect that this reform had, given how small and relatively cheap the change was," says study author Ankita Patnaik, a PhD candidate in economics at Cornell University. "And the persistence of the change over time was striking. If you intervene at this critical time, when parents are trying to assign household roles for the first time, you establish more gender-neutral habits. And they stick."

Researchers have long argued that giving only mothers time off after the birth, adoption or fostering of a child reinforces the cultural belief that "mother knows best" when it comes to kids, and contributes to men spending more time at work, earning more and getting promoted more often - and women doing the bulk of the housework and child care.

The study found that, just as fathers who had taken leave under the daddy quota were spending a half-hour a day more at home, mothers were spending a half-hour a day less at home, and had increased their time at work by 9 per cent. Still, Patna said, mothers reorganized their time at home, spending less time on housework and more time on child care.

Canada gives mothers up to one year of unpaid, job-protected leave; for fathers, it gives 37 weeks that can become paid leave through employment insurance. Under this system, fewer than 20 per cent of Canadian fathers take leave. In 2006, Quebec increased the paid leave benefit from 55 per cent of take-home pay to 70 per cent, up to a maximum of \$767 a week, and established the five-week "daddy quota."

Although surveys show that millennial-generation men, in particular, say they want to be more involved fathers than their own dads were, Patnaik said the size of the increase in those who took leave reflected more than a generational shift in fathers' attitudes.

"I identified an immediate jump between Jan. 1, 2005, and Jan. 1, 2006," she says. "It's incredibly unlikely that everyone all of a sudden had egalitarian beliefs. But I do think the 'papa quota' made a difference. It sends the message that this is what we, as a society, think dads should be doing. This is what's normal."

Some 95 countries offer some form of paid parental leave to fathers, Patnaik says. And those with some of the highest rates of fathers taking parental leave have the "daddy-only" quota that Quebec instituted or other policies aimed at men. Britain is instituting a new policy this month to promote more shared leave between mothers and fathers. In Sweden, where 45 per cent of fathers took paid parental leave in 2013, parents receive a financial bonus if they not only share the leave but also share the time equally.

When Iceland adopted a "daddy days" quota, giving mothers and fathers three months of paid leave each plus three months for the family to share, the country mandated that if fathers didn't use their three months, the family would lose the time. Now, 90 per cent of fathers take paid leave in Iceland. And three years after the birth of a child, 70 per cent of the parents who lived together equally shared child care.

Region: Quebec ^[3]

Tags: [gender equality](#) ^[4]

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