

A close-up photograph of a man with short dark hair, smiling warmly as he hugs a young girl from behind. The girl has long, dark, wavy hair tied in a ponytail with a pink hair tie. She is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt with a small floral pattern. The man is wearing a dark blue turtleneck sweater. The background is softly blurred, showing warm indoor lighting.

# HELPING DADS CARE

New U.S. National Survey Confirms Societal  
Expectations, Limited Paternity Leave and  
Insufficient Support Keep Fathers from Taking Leave





## WHY THIS STUDY

Over the past 30 years, U.S. fathers have increased the time they spend with their children by nearly a third.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly both men and women want to equally share the care of children than ever before. Still, men are doing less caregiving than women.

Why?

Fathers, like mothers and other caregivers, need support to care for their children, including time off from work after the birth of a child. The U.S. continues to be the only advanced economy in the world that does not provide nationally guaranteed paid parental leave. And even unpaid leave is hard to come by in the U.S. The latest figures show fewer than 40% (38% nationwide) of workers, men and women, are eligible for and can afford to use unpaid leave under the Federal Medical Leave Act.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of paid parental leave, access is lower still. According to national data, only 15% of male and female workers have access to paid leave through their employer.<sup>3</sup> This access varies tremendously by income: only 4% of the lowest wage workers have access to paid leave compared to 24% for the highest wage workers. And even when women and men have access to paid leave they often don't use it all, particularly fathers. What gives? How can we support fathers and mothers to give their all when it comes to caring for their children?<sup>4</sup>

To explore this critical issue impacting men, women and future generations, Dove Men+Care and Promundo partnered to carry out a pioneering study on what keeps fathers from taking parental leave and being the fully involved caregivers they want to be.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

Promundo and Dove Men+Care carried out an online survey of men and women ages 25-45. The study took place in April and May 2018 and included 1,088 men (83% of whom were fathers), and 626 women (64% of whom were mothers); more men were included to allow for in-depth analyses of their perceptions about caregiving while still providing reliable comparisons to women overall and mothers. The sample was proportional for all regions of the country and for all major ethnic groups. 96% of respondents defined themselves as heterosexual, with the rest affirming another sexual identity. In addition to caring for children, 17% of respondents cared for an adult family member who was elderly, ill or disabled.

<sup>1</sup>Source: Promundo, 2016 State of America's Fathers <https://men-care.org/soaf/>

<sup>2</sup>Source: DiversityDataKids.org: <http://www.diversitydatakids.org/data/ranking/529/working-adults-who-are-eligible-for-and-can-afford-fmla-unpaid-leave-share/#loct=2&cat=44,25&tf=17%3B>

<sup>3</sup>Bureau of Labor Statistics, Leave benefits: Access <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2017/ownership/civilian/table32a.htm>

<sup>4</sup>Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2017 <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2017/ebbl0061.pdf>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



### FATHERS WANT TO DO THEIR SHARE OF THE CAREGIVING, BUT LIMITING SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT HOLD THEM BACK.

The results confirm first and foremost that fathers want to be involved. 73% of dads agree there is little workplace support for fathers, and one in five men (21%) stated they were afraid of losing their job if they took the full amount of paternity leave offered. They would change jobs to spend more time with their children (69% of fathers). They want parental leave. They want to take parental leave. They want the best for their children. They are more satisfied with their lives (87% vs. 50%), including their sex lives (77% vs. 44%), when they can be the caregivers they want to be. What holds them back? They worry what others will think if they prioritize their children over work (76% of fathers say they would have to work at least a little during any parental leave). They worry that their income, and their family's income, will suffer if they take parental leave. In 2018, we're still held back by two traditional stereotypes: that men are the primary breadwinners and women are the primary caregivers for children. *Too few workplaces provide paid leave for fathers, and even when they do, too few fathers take their full leave because they worry about what the rest of us think about them, particularly at work.*



INSIGHT 1

+ WOMEN AND MEN SAY THAT CARING FOR THEIR CHILDREN MATTERS TO THEM EQUALLY AND THAT THEY WOULD GO TO THE SAME LENGTHS TO HAVE TIME WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

Assuming they would be comfortable with their ability to cover basic needs (like food and shelter), two thirds of parents (69% of fathers and 66% of mothers) and half of women (53%) and men (51%) without children are willing to change jobs if necessary to be very involved in the early weeks and/or months of caring for a newly born or adopted child. *While we often assume that men prioritize work over their children, the reality is that men care deeply about being involved caregivers and would go to great lengths to be involved. Companies seeking to retain talent must create work environments that support success for the whole person, as both an employee and parent.*

INSIGHT 2

+ FATHERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO TAKE PATERNITY LEAVE IF THEIR WORKPLACES OFFER FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS, IF THEIR OWN PARENTS SUPPORT THEM IN TAKING IT, AND IF THEY HAVE MORE CONTROL OVER THEIR OWN WORK LIVES.

Even though almost all mothers and fathers (>99%) took at least a few days of leave time, mostly unpaid, after the birth or adoption of their youngest child, only 60% of fathers and 69% of mothers had access to any parental leave that didn't require them to use up sick, vacation, or personal time. 95% of parents took 12 weeks or less of leave, with mothers taking an average of 7 weeks and fathers taking an average of only 2 weeks.

What factors determined how much leave men took? Men who manage others took less leave than other employees. Fathers with parents who encouraged them to do so took more leave. Men who say they have more control over their work schedules and whose workplaces had leave programs took longer leaves. *In sum, far from being just an individual father's choice, ensuring fathers can take the time they want and need to be with their families requires broader changes in our social norms and in our workplaces, including workplace policies, flexible working arrangements, and families to support fathers to take leave. Equally important are national and local laws that provide paid leave for fathers and mothers.*

PERCENTAGE WHO WOULD CHANGE JOBS TO BE MORE INVOLVED IN CARING FOR A NEWBORN



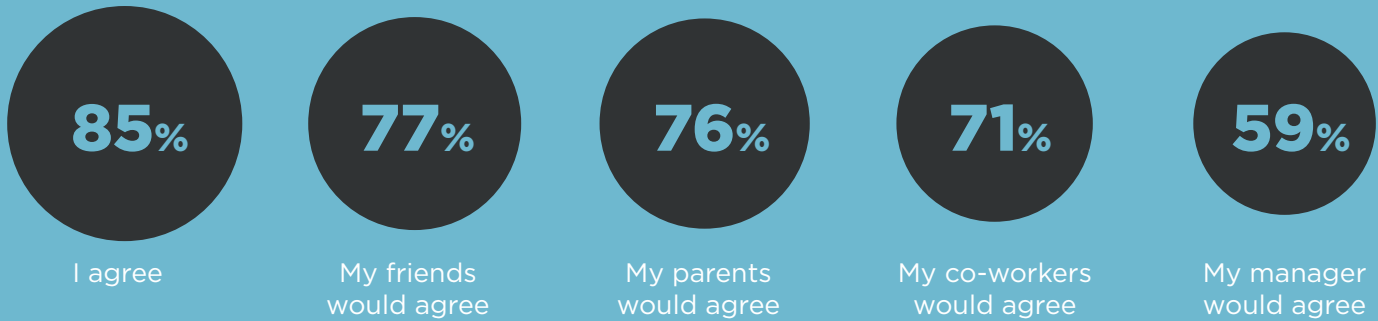
INSIGHT 3

+ MEN AND WOMEN UNDERESTIMATE THEIR MANAGERS' SUPPORT FOR PATERNITY LEAVE.

More than three quarters (85%) of men and women believe that fathers should make it a top priority to take any available parental leave, so they can bond with and learn to care for their newly born or adopted child. However, fewer men and women believed that their immediate managers (66%), coworkers (71%), parents (76%), and friends (77%) felt the same way. Despite doubts that immediate managers support paternity leave, the data suggests the opposite, with slightly more managers (87%) indicating they believe fathers should take any available parental leave than non-managers (82%).

Why do employees think their supervisors are less supportive of fathers taking leave than they actually are? It is possible that managers unintentionally give employees the impression that the leave is a burden, especially if they never explicitly voice their support for male employees taking leave. *Managers and supervisors — all of us — need to be more vocal about their support for parental leave and emphasize that even if a man taking leave does create some challenges at work, they believe in the value of that leave to employees and their families. Managers should also consider how their personal parental leave choices influence employees' decisions around how to be a working parent in their teams and organizations.*

PERCENTAGE OF ALL RESPONDANTS AGREEING PEOPLE IN THEIR LIVES BELIEVE FATHERS SHOULD MAKE IT A TOP PRIORITY TO TAKE ANY AVAILABLE PARENTAL LEAVE

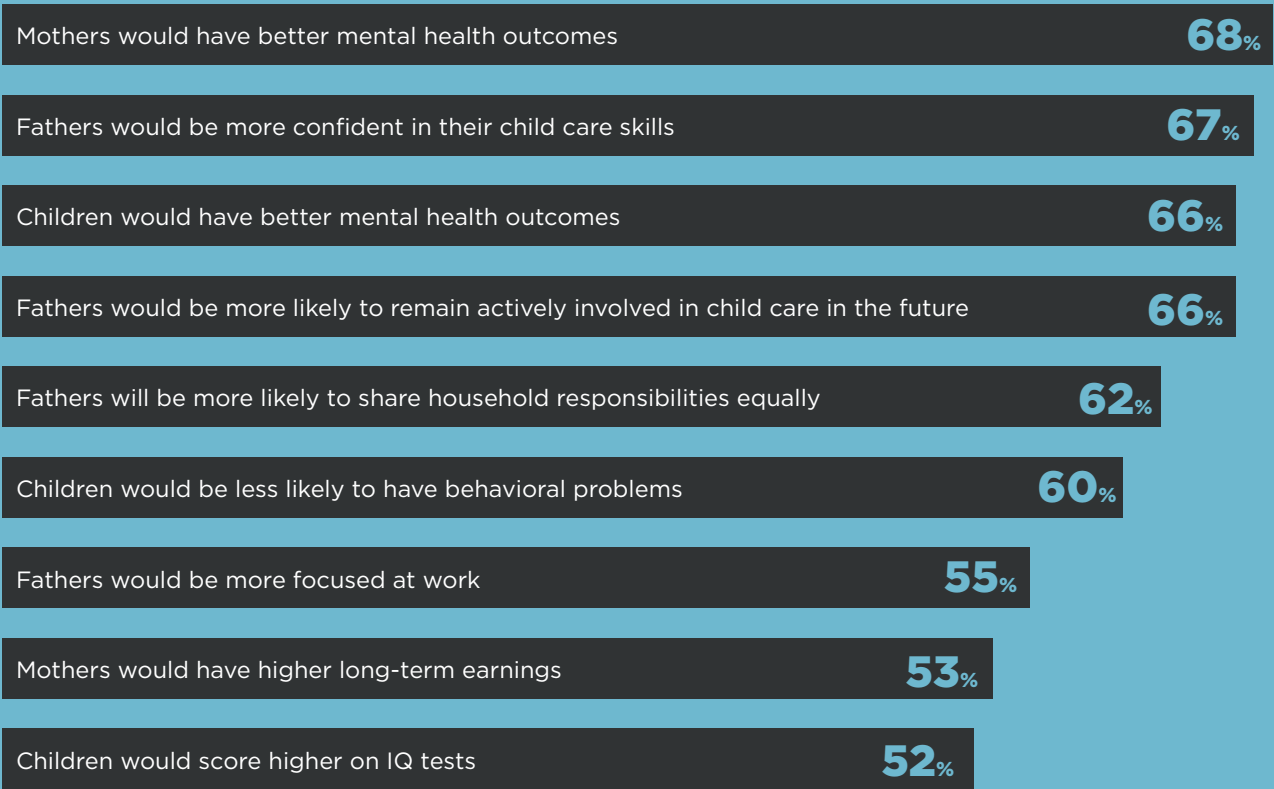


INSIGHT 4

**+ MEN AND WOMEN DOUBT THE BENEFITS OF EXTENDED PARENTAL LEAVE FOR FATHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE BENEFITS THAT ARE LESS INTUITIVE.**

Prior studies have demonstrated that substantive paternity leave results in both short and long term benefits for children, mothers, and fathers.<sup>3</sup> Between half and two-thirds of men and women believe that paternity leave longer than two weeks offers positive benefits. More respondents believed that intuitive outcomes are very or extremely likely to be true compared with less intuitive outcomes that have been demonstrated by research. For example, more people believe that paternity leave longer than two weeks is very or extremely likely to result in better mental health for mothers (68%) and children (66%) and greater feelings of child care competence for fathers (67%). However, fewer respondents believed the same about improved focus at work for fathers (55%), higher long-term earnings for mothers (53%) and higher IQ scores for children (52%). *Many women and men still doubt the value of parental leave for fathers, highlighting the need for more education about these benefits, especially those with less obvious relationships to longer paternity leave.*

BELIEFS ABOUT PATERNITY LEAVE BENEFITS FROM ALL RESPONDENTS



INSIGHT 5

**+ BOTH MEN AND WOMEN TEND TO BELIEVE THEY ARE BETTER AT THEIR TRADITIONAL ROLES THAN THE OTHER GENDER, BUT EQUAL TO THE OTHER GENDER IN NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES.**

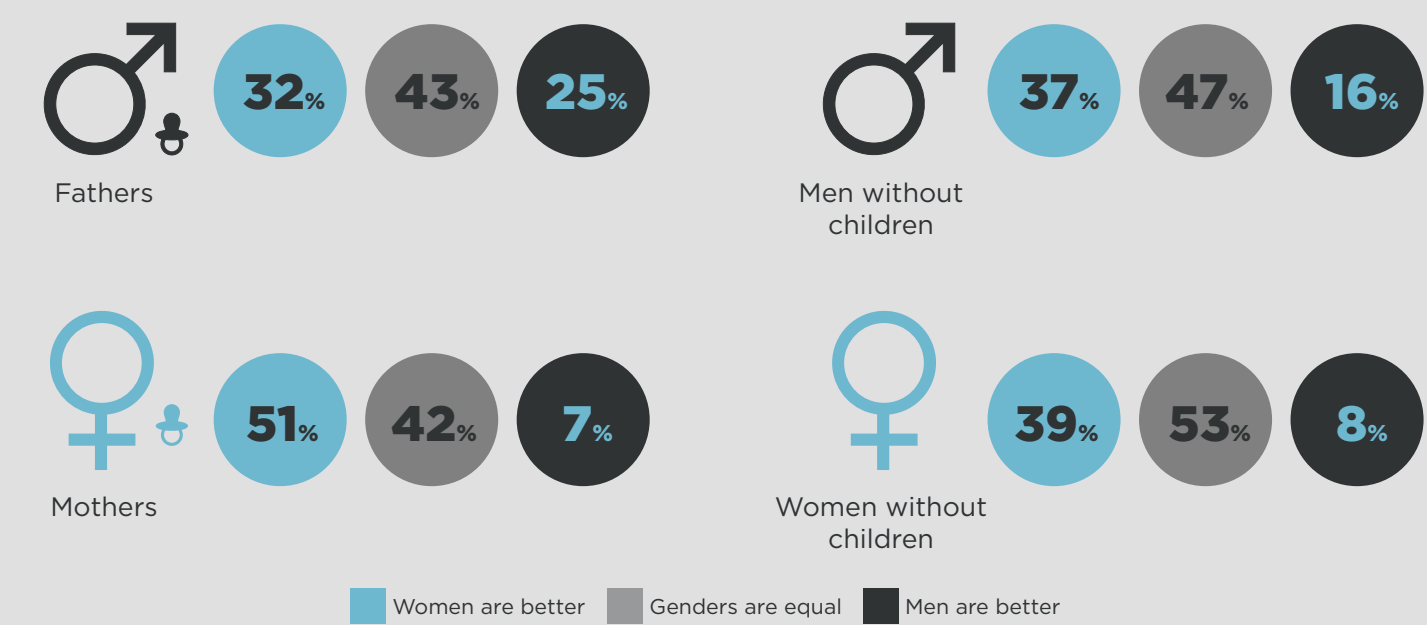
Despite reporting equal levels of care and concern for children, we still see both women and men holding onto traditional stereotypes that women are better caregivers and men are better earners. Mothers (60%) and women without children (44%) are more likely than fathers (31%) and men without children (33%) to believe that women are better at managing daily planning than men. Mothers (50%) are more likely than fathers (28%) and men and women without children (both 32%) to believe that women are better at providing physical care than men. Mothers (51%) are more likely than fathers (32%) and men (37%) and women without children (39%) to believe that women are better at providing emotional care than men. On the other hand, fathers (46%) and men without children (41%) are more likely than mothers (29%) and women without children (27%) to believe men are better at providing financial support. These gender stereotypes about caregiving and breadwinning are harmful for both men and women, impeding equality in the workplace and at home.

<sup>3</sup>Paternity Brief: <https://www.dol.gov/asp/policy-development/PaternityBrief.pdf>

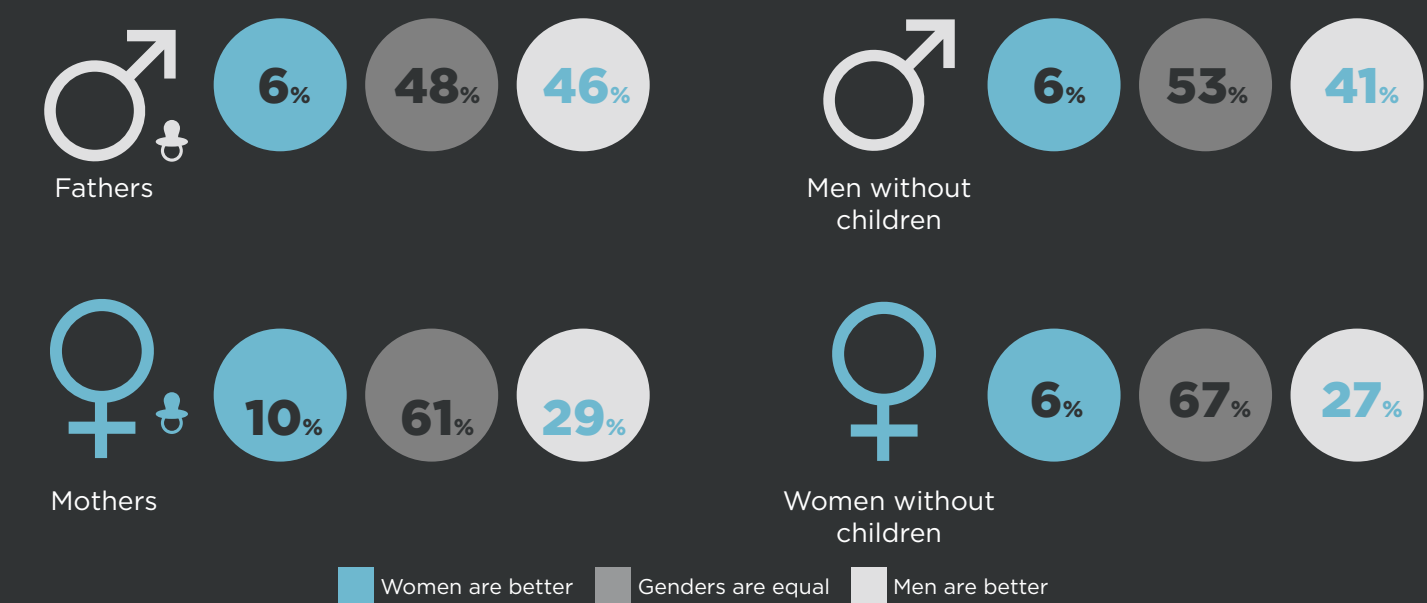


**BOTH MEN AND WOMEN TEND TO BELIEVE THEY ARE BETTER AT THEIR TRADITIONAL ROLES THAN THE OTHER GENDER, BUT EQUAL TO THE OTHER GENDER IN NON-TRADITIONAL ROLES.**

**GENDER ROLE BELIEFS: EMOTIONAL CARE**



**GENDER ROLE BELIEFS: FINANCIAL SUPPORT**



**INSIGHT 6**  
**BOTH FATHERS AND MOTHERS SAY THEY FACE CHALLENGES TO BEING FULLY INVOLVED PARENTS DUE TO PRESSURE AT WORK, BUT FATHERS PERCEIVE EVEN GREATER BARRIERS.**

54% of fathers compared to 47% of mothers say they don't have enough time to do everything they should do with regards to caring for their children. Half of fathers (47%) compared to one in three mothers (32%) say they have missed important events in their child's life due to their work. 40% of fathers compared to 30% of mothers say they stress about work when spending time with their children. And 76% of fathers compared to 55% of mothers say they would have to work at least a little during any parental leave. *Both fathers and mothers feel stressed with their work-life balance, but fathers consistently perceive even more pressure to prioritize work over their families, perhaps because outdated stereotypes that fathers are breadwinners but not caregivers remains pervasive. The bottom line is that our workplaces need to better support fathers to be fully involved parents. And if employers don't create enabling environments for all parents, they risk losing key talent: both men and women.*

To date there has been relatively limited discussion of enabling men to focus on childcare and being more engaged fathers.

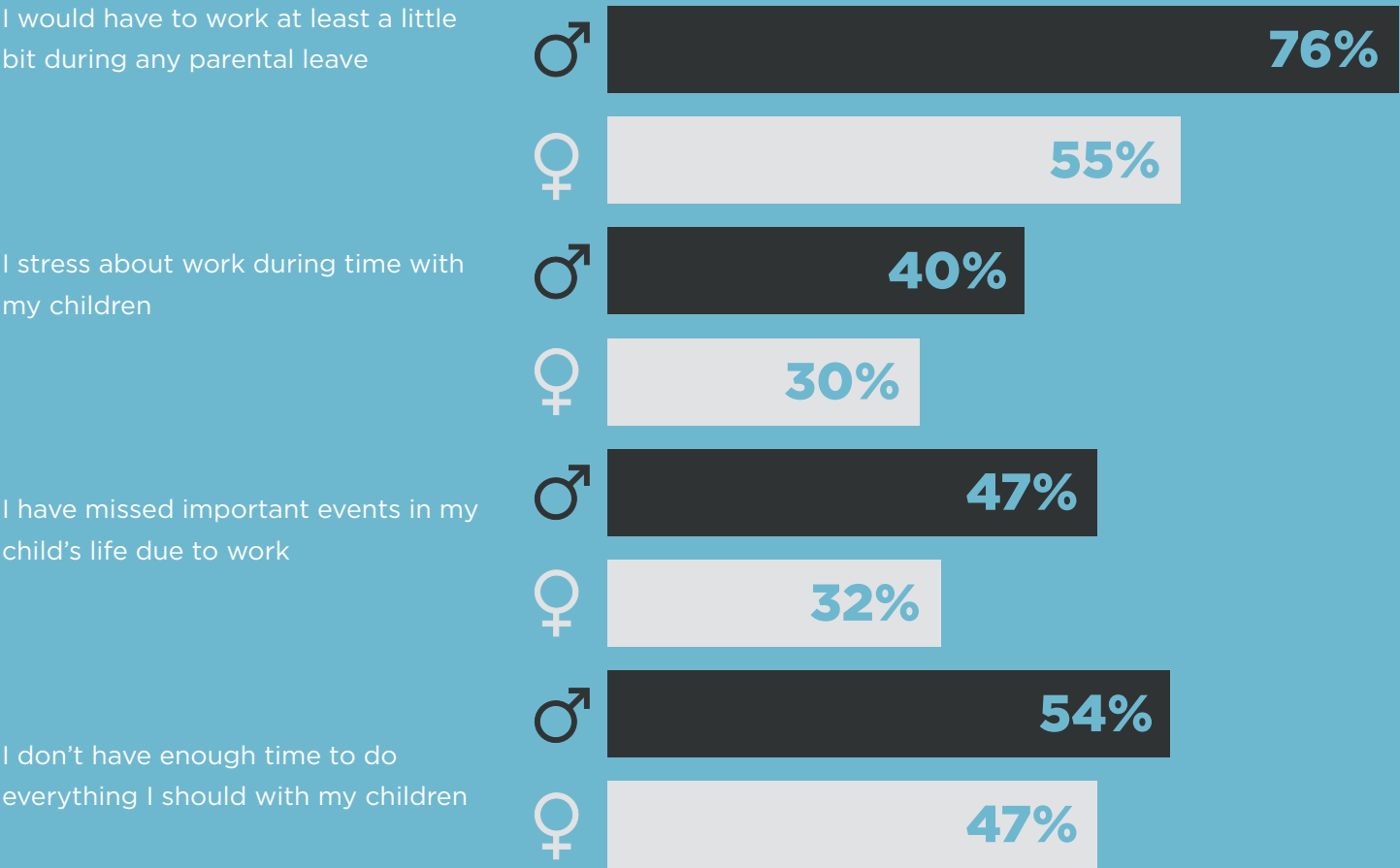
*Achieving equality in caring for children and in the workplace means we must question our assumptions about what women and men are capable of, and encourage men and women to reach their full potential both at home and work.*

INSIGHT 7

**WHEN PARENTS HAVE MORE TIME TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILDREN, THEY REPORT BETTER SEX LIVES.**

In addition to being good for their children, having enough time to be involved caregivers is a key source of well-being and happiness. In fact, when men and women can be the parents they want to be, they are often able to have the lives they want. When satisfied with their involvement with their children, fathers report being more satisfied with their lives (87% vs. 50%), jobs (82% vs. 52%), and sex lives (77% vs. 44%) than when they are dissatisfied with child involvement. Similarly, more mothers satisfied with their level of child involvement report being more satisfied with their lives (80% vs. 59%), jobs (67% vs. 45%), and sex lives (59% vs. 32%) than when they are dissatisfied with their level of child involvement.

**MEN AND WOMEN EXPERIENCE WORK-RELATED OBSTACLES TO BEING FULLY INVOLVED PARENTS**



**MEN'S AND WOMEN'S SATISFACTION WITH LIFE, JOB, AND SEX LIFE BY SATISFACTION WITH CHILD INVOLVEMENT**



## IN SUMMARY: WHAT WE NEED TO SUPPORT FATHERS


Our survey confirms that men want to be involved caregivers. What holds them back are outdated societal expectations and whether they receive the support they need from their workplace, as well as other social touchpoints. By supporting fathers, we can enable them to be the best they can be at work and at home. In turn, paternity leave would help contribute to improving gender equality in society, further empowering women to be their best across the different domains in their lives. By supporting fathers, employers can improve their recruitment and retention of top talent: both men who might leave to be fully involved at home and women who can find the time to excel at work when their male partners are fully involved with child care.



## TO HELP FATHERS BE ALL THEY WANT TO BE, AND FOSTER A MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY, WE NEED:

- + GREATER AVAILABILITY TO SUBSTANTIVE, PAID PARENTAL LEAVE, FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, SUPPORTED BY LEGISLATION AND/OR SUPPORTIVE CORPORATE POLICES.**
- + WORKPLACES TO OFFER FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS, ACTIVELY ENCOURAGE MEN AND WOMEN TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SUCH POLICIES, AND COMMUNICATE THEY WILL NOT BE PENALIZED WHEN THEY TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE.**
- + CHANGES IN SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS: WE NEED TO SHOWCASE EXAMPLES OF FATHERS CARING FOR THEIR CHILDREN TO HELP CATALYZE NEW SOCIAL NORMS.**
- + CELEBRATE BOTH MEN'S AND WOMEN'S CAREGIVING, AND THEIR ROLES IN THE LIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN.**



A photograph of a man and a young boy sitting together. The man, who is bald and wearing a light grey sweater, is leaning forward and smiling at the boy. The boy, with dark hair and wearing a blue denim shirt, is also smiling and looking up at the man. They are sitting on a wooden bench or table. In the background, there is a brick wall and another person is partially visible, out of focus.

**MEN WANT TO CARE.  
THEY CAN CARE.  
IT'S UP TO ALL OF US  
TO ENABLE THEM  
TO CARE.**





For more information and resources for new and expectant dads, visit:  
**[dovemencare.com/paternityleave](https://dovemencare.com/paternityleave) &**  
**[promundoglobal.org/resources](https://promundoglobal.org/resources)**

