

# THE NEW DAD:

A Work (and Life) in Progress

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*The authors would like to thank our families for their constant love and support.  
We want to convey our recognition and respect for the important roles that fathers play  
and acknowledge that their journey is a “Work (and Life) In Progress.”*

# INTRODUCTION

In homes across America, fathers are launching a quiet revolution. Catalyzed by the women's movement and women's steady and certain progress toward greater prominence in higher education and the fastest growing professions, men and women have come to understand that traditional gender roles only hinder today's fathers and mothers in their efforts to succeed at integrating their work and family endeavors.

While some of the changes that face today's fathers are the result of women's prospects and the shifting, uncertain economic fate of men, these changes are equally born of a new, growing spirit of determination among men to fully embrace their roles as fathers. They no longer want to be seen simply as economic providers operating at arms-length from their families. Fathers today seek roles that are much more integral to the lives of their families and require greater presence and engagement.

Four years ago, the Boston College Center for Work & Family decided to significantly increase our focus on men and work-family issues. At the time, the work-family field -- researchers, practitioners, and consumers -- was dominated by women and the overwhelming majority of discussion and debate emanating from the field was focused on women's struggles in relation to this balancing act. While this was appropriate given women's central role in the family and their on-going challenges to live up to their professional and personal commitments, it nonetheless kept our field in a box. That box suggested that family was women's domain and that men's work-family struggles were confined to the ups and downs of climbing the corporate ladder in their role as breadwinners. We felt strongly that it was time to break out of that box and explore more fully how men were handling their own balancing acts.

Since 2009, we have conducted research and published a series of annual reports on the changing roles of fathers titled "*The New Dad*." These reports have studied the transition to fatherhood, how men manage career and family priorities, how they share caregiving responsibilities with their spouses, and what supports fathers look for and, at times thankfully, receive in their workplaces. We also looked at the small but growing number of at-home dads who are blazing new trails and challenging outdated stereotypes that suggest full-time parenting is the exclusive domain of women. These men are demonstrating daily that effective parenting is about competencies and caring, not gender.

Over this time period we have interviewed or surveyed nearly 2,000 dads - mostly white collar fathers in professional and managerial positions - to learn about their joys, their struggles, their achievements and their setbacks. We believe that our work has helped to create a more complete, and hopefully accurate, portrait of today's fathers as men who care deeply about their work and their families, who strive to be active, engaged parents while at the same time investing significant energy in building successful careers.

The portrait we paint is encouraging and enigmatic, promising and problematic. At times it seems to be a glimpse into a future where men have fully embraced their roles as professionals and parents; at other times it can read more like a retrospective of days gone by with a clear delineation and separation of the roles of men and women. But even as the picture is at times mixed, the overwhelming feeling one gets in doing this work is that things are changing, and these changes are occurring with greater rapidity.

So just as it has been important to take stock of the challenges faced by working moms, it is important to see the challenges that confront working dads and reflect on the significant shifts in attitudes and expectations that have been taking place. Our research shows that the new dad increasingly runs

counter to the old stereotypes of a workaholic, absent father who focuses on career, views his contribution to his family as a paycheck, and defines success as simply moving up the corporate hierarchy.

While television shows and the media seem intent on casting fathers as inept, clueless caregivers, out of touch with the daily concerns of the family, our work suggests otherwise.

*Based on what fathers are telling us, it's clear that they carry an appreciation of the important role that fatherhood plays in their lives and the lives of their family members. From our research, we see American men who are striving to be good workers, good fathers, and good men.*

Based on what fathers are telling us, it is clear that they carry an appreciation of the important role that fatherhood plays in their own lives and the lives of their family members. Our work presents an image of male parents struggling with work-family conflict, but at the same time striving to be good workers, good fathers, and good men.

This report summarizes the work of our prior studies and takes stock of how far fathers have come in adopting this more active and engaged family role. It also examines our places of work – how they have supported these changes, and what is yet to be done. It concludes with recommendations for both employers and for fathers based on what we have

learned and a “call to action”, catalyzing a conversation amongst the half of parents who have too often been silent on how they are coping with integrating their work and family lives.

## THE CHANGING ROLE OF FATHERS

Several key changes have contributed to the evolving role of modern day fathers. The first is women’s educational and professional achievements, which have impacted family structures. Women now earn 57% of bachelor’s degrees, 60% of master’s degrees, and about 50% of professional degrees and PhD’s (Mason, 2009). Working mothers make up just under half of the U.S. workforce and 23% of mothers in dual-career couples earn more than their husbands. Including single mother-led families, women are now the primary breadwinners in 40% of U.S. households (Pew Research Center, 2013b). Furthermore, while women have traditionally placed their career aspirations second to their spouses’ careers, it appears that young women no longer differ from young men in their aspirations for high-responsibility jobs (Pew Research Center, 2012).

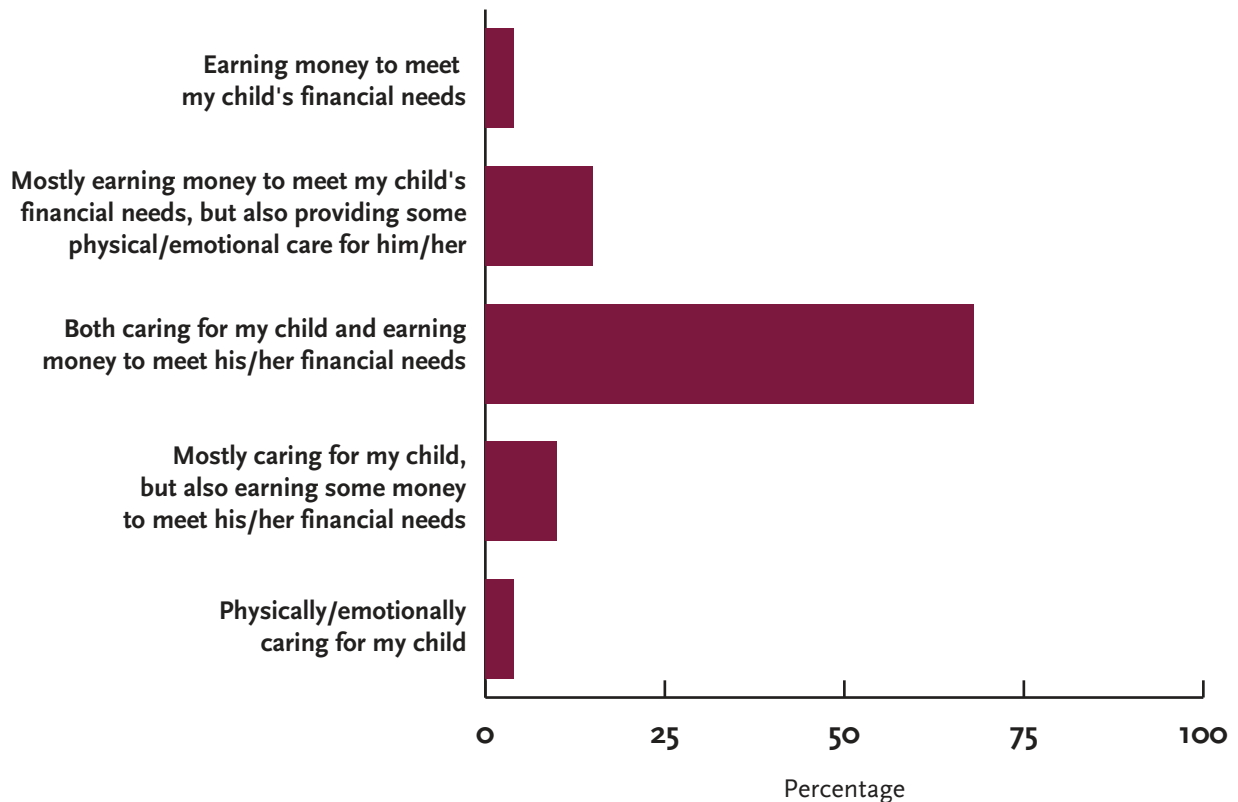
### Breadwinner AND Caregiver

Family structures have also changed significantly in the past 35 years. The number of “traditional families” (families where the father works and the mother stays home with the children), has decreased from 45% in 1975 to 31% today (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Single-parent households and dual-career couples have become more common. In 2012, 59% of two-parent households with children under 18 are dual-career earners (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Taken together, these changes have led to couples making different economic decisions for their households than in the past. The challenges of balancing work and family are no longer a women’s issue, as they have traditionally been seen, but an issue that both parents grapple with on a daily basis. *The New Dad* studies and other research show that men are clearly venturing to find their own work-family fit.

In the first phase of our work, we concluded that new fathers do not see their roles as fathers solely, or even primarily, about being the financial breadwinner (Harrington, Van Deusen, and Ladge, 2010).

While supporting their families financially was important, other caregiving responsibilities were seen as equally, if not more important in defining what it means to be a good father. To further explore this assertion with a larger sample of fathers, in our 2011 study we asked “Which of the following statements most accurately describes how you see your responsibility to your children?”

**Chart 1: How Fathers See Their Responsibilities to Their Children (2011)**



As Chart 1 shows, a significant majority of the fathers see their responsibilities to their children as both caring for them *and* earning money to support them, suggesting that traditional breadwinning responsibilities are combined with caregiving responsibilities in the images of what it means to be a father today. Analyzing these perceived responsibilities of fatherhood further, we found that:

- The further away fathers were from traditional breadwinning definitions of fatherhood (and thus closer to purely caregiving images of fatherhood), the greater confidence they have as parents and the more hours they report spending with their children on a typical working day.
- On average, fathers over the age of 40 were slightly more likely to see their responsibilities as fathers in a more traditional breadwinning sense than those under the age of 40.

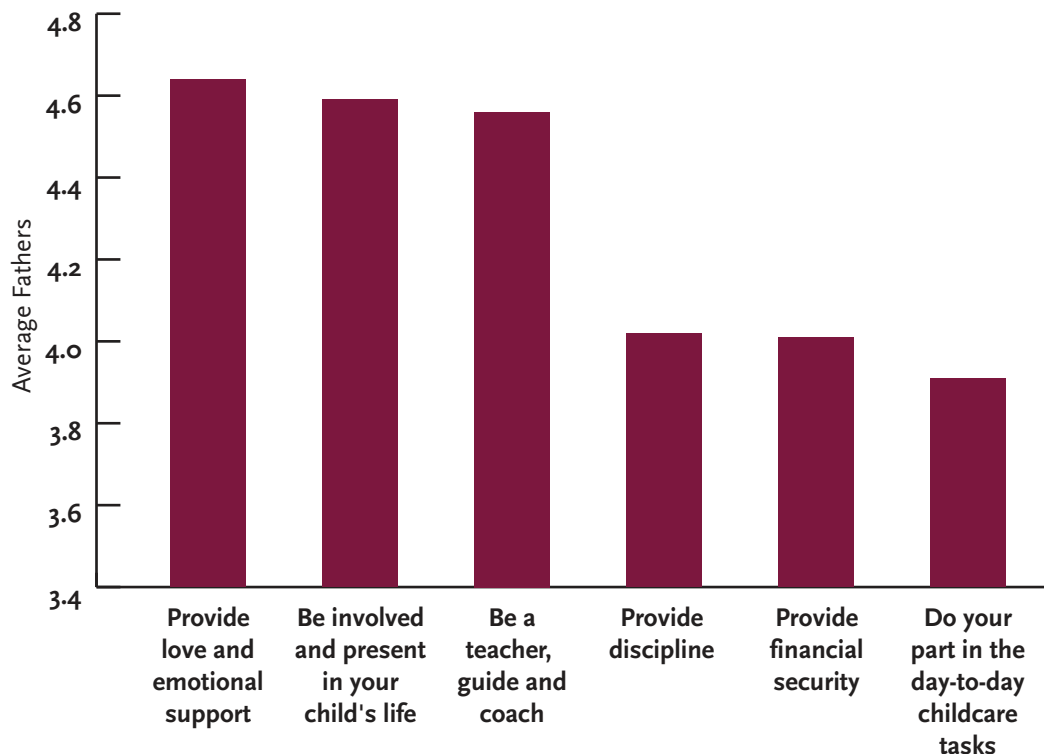
## Definition of a Good Father

The concept of what it means to be a good father was a salient theme throughout all of our studies. Many men held similar views in each study, noting that being a good father meant providing financial support, being available and present, spending time with children, and serving as an effective role model. One of the fathers in our 2010 study highlighted the emotional aspect noted by many participants:

*“I think [being a father] means a lot of things. It means love. It means demonstrating your love for someone and a commitment to them at all costs. So supporting them, nurturing them, being there, and I think not only as a father, but as a friend, as a guide, as a mentor.”*

In our 2011 study, participants were asked to rate the most important aspects of being a good father. Chart 2 summarizes the fathers' ratings. The top three selections involved the emotional, supportive, and teaching aspects of parenthood, and the lowest three involved discipline, financial support, and day-to-day childcare tasks. These findings reflect a shift in the images of fatherhood from the traditional breadwinning, disciplinarian role to one that emphasizes love, support, guiding, and being present in their children's lives.

Chart 2: Six Aspects of Being a Good Father (2011)



## Sharing Care Responsibilities

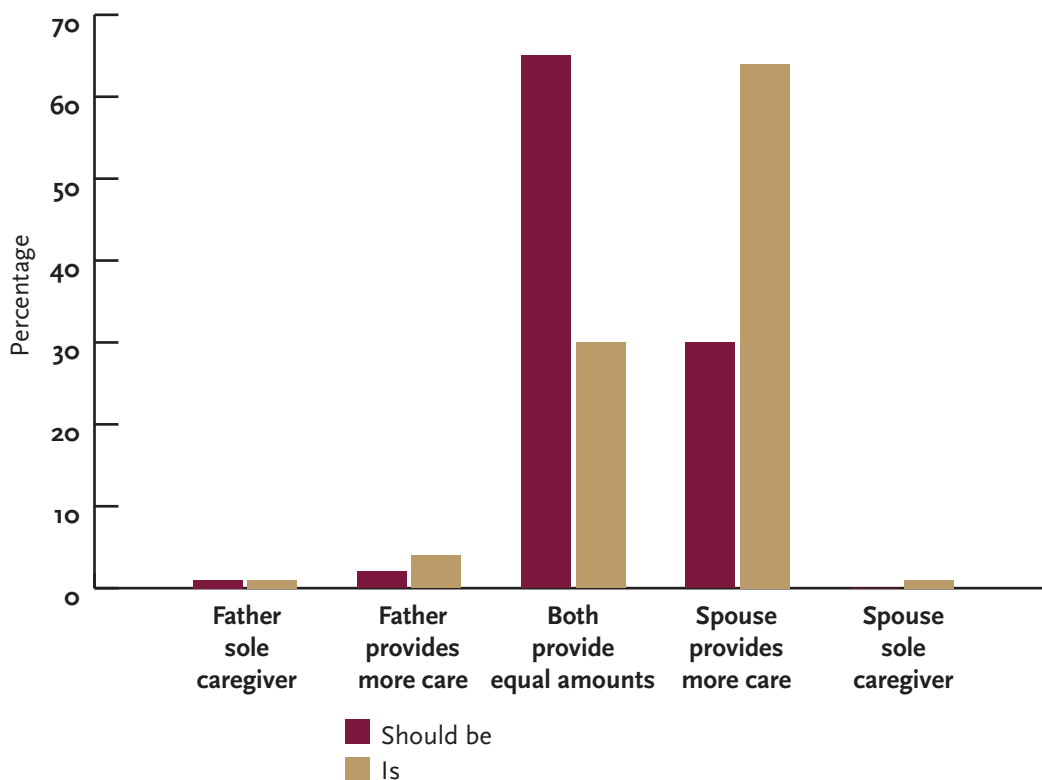
The 2011 study found that 77% of fathers wanted to spend more time with their children on an average workday. Their aspirations are clear, but the realities don't always live up to these aspirations.

Though a gender division generally persists in terms of household work and childcare, it does appear that fathers are becoming more involved in daily domestic responsibilities. This is partly due to the increasing number of dual-career couples, where working women expect their partners to help with household and childrearing duties.

However, a gap remains in terms of how many hours men and women spend with children altogether and alone (“solo” childcare). Fathers spend an average of 10.7 hours per week in solo childcare, while women spend 30.2 hours per week in solo childcare (Raley, Bianchi, and Wang, 2012). Men with at-home spouses spend about 8 hours per week in solo childcare compared to men in dual-earner couples, who provide 11-15 hours of solo childcare per week. Participants in our 2011 study spent an average of 2.65 hours per “typical working day” interacting with their children.

Additionally, there appears to be a gap between how fathers feel caregiving *should* be divided between spouses and how it actually is divided. In Chart 3 we see that 65% of fathers believe that both partners should provide equal amounts of care and 30% feel their spouse should provide more care. In reality, however, only 30% of fathers reported that caregiving actually is divided equally and 64% acknowledged that their spouse provides more care than they do.

**Chart 3: How Caregiving Should be Divided and Is Divided (2011)**



We wondered if the fathers were suffering somewhat from the “myth of having it all”. They undoubtedly desire to be involved at home and with their children, and 86% agreed/strongly agreed that “My children are the number one priority in my life”. However, 76% also wished to advance to a position

*Given the gap between how fathers believe caregiving should be divided and how it is divided, we wonder if the fathers are suffering a bit from the “myth of having it all.”*

with greater responsibility with their employers and 58% had a strong desire to reach senior management. The question remains, are they willing or able to shift priorities at work in order to give more to their children? Do fathers need to adjust their expectations? What supports are needed so families can make caregiving more equal?

### **At-Home Dads**

At-home fathers are an excellent group to study in order to better understand the dynamics of fathers and caregiving.

Although still a very small subset of the U.S. population,

at-home fathers are growing at a relatively rapid rate. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), the percentage of at-home fathers has doubled in the last decade, rising from 1.6% to 3.4% of all stay-at-home parents. Also, the number of fathers providing sole or primary care for their children has dramatically increased in recent years. In 2011, 32% of fathers with a working spouse served as a regular source of care for their children under age 15 and 20% of fathers with preschool aged children served as the primary caregiver. Approximately 2.5 million fathers headed single-parents households that included their own children age eighteen and younger (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

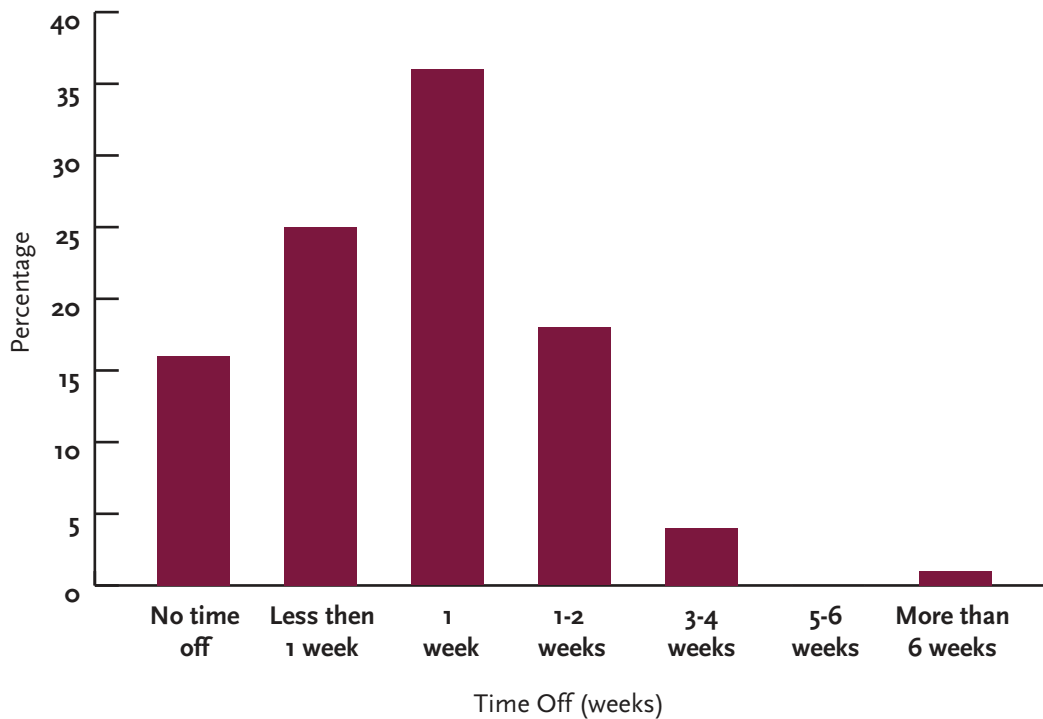
While most of the fathers interviewed in our 2012 study of at-home fathers felt comfortable in their role as a full-time parent, researchers who have studied at-home fathers indicate that social stigma (i.e. “real men work”) and social isolation are the two most significant concerns facing men who consider taking on this role. It was common, for example, for friends and family members of many of the fathers to regard their at-home role as temporary, wondering when they were going to get jobs. In addition, the small number of at-home fathers results in greater feelings of social isolation for this group. Many felt, either formally or informally, excluded from mother’s playgroups due to their gender, but did not know other at-home fathers with whom they could interact. Groups dedicated to the needs and social networking of at-home dads are cropping up across the country however, especially in major urban areas, and are facilitating much better connections among this small but growing demographic.

Perhaps just as significant, is what seems to be a changing attitude toward the idea of at-home parenting among many men. Fifty-three percent of the nearly 1,000 fathers we surveyed indicated that they would be comfortable with being an at-home father if their spouse’s earnings would allow for it (Harrington, Van Deusen, and Mazar, 2011). This statistic, and the attitudinal shift it implies, suggests the potential for further growth in the at-home father population in the future.

### **Paternity Leave**

Most fathers do transition back into the workplace after the arrival of their child, and in fact take very little time off at all. One indicator of men’s involvement in parenting is the amount of leave that men take after the birth of a child. In the Center’s 2011 study, only 1 in 20 fathers took more than 2 weeks off after the birth of their most recent child, and only 1 in 100 took more than 4 weeks off. As Chart 4 shows, the time off men in the study took after the birth/adoption of their most recent child was very brief (generally one week or less) compared to the months that mothers typically spend at home with their newborns. The brief time fathers take to bond with their child and immerse themselves in caregiving immediately promotes the identification of the mother as the primary and “more competent” caregiver.



**Chart 4: Time Off After Most Recent Birth/Adoption (2011)**

Overall, these findings depict fathers today as caring and committed to being involved with their children, but struggling to be both engaged parents and advancing professionals. While men's views about the definition of being a good father appear to be changing, contradictions persist between men's intentions and their actions. For example, while fathers may care greatly about being present and emotionally supportive, this desire might not always translate into day-to-day childcare duties.

Taken together, these findings point to a notable difference between men's desires to be present, active parents, and the reality of how little they adjust their work schedule to accommodate the desire to be involved. As a whole, there has been an increase in working fathers' work-life conflict in the past 30 years, up from 34% in 1977 to 49% in 2008 (Galinsky, Aumann, and Bond, 2008). Men in dual-earner couples have felt this increasing conflict even more, with those reporting conflict rising from 35% to 60% over the same period.

## WORKPLACE RESPONSES TO FATHERHOOD

Our 2011 study participants overwhelmingly returned to the same jobs after the birth of their most recent child (98%). Ninety-six percent of the fathers said that their managers' expectations of them at work remained the same, and 3% said they had risen. Virtually none of the men reduced their hours and two-thirds felt their employer wouldn't be supportive of them doing so.

None of the men in the 2010 study were concerned that fatherhood would hamper their focus on work or reported that their new role resulted in negative perceptions by their employer.

*Most of the men felt that becoming a father positively impacted how others viewed them at their workplaces.*

Most felt that becoming a father positively impacted how others viewed them at their workplaces. These positive experiences included feeling they were now “members of the parenting club” and being seen as more credible, mature, responsible, and career-minded.

In the 2011 study, responses were also largely positive in terms of how supportive fathers found their workplace cultures, managers, and coworkers. More than nine-in-ten respondents agreed or strongly agreed when they returned to work they felt welcomed back by their peers; 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their manager accommodated them when family or personal business needed attention.

The sentiment that the overall workplace response to becoming a parent was very positive for the men is in stark contrast to many women, who are commonly perceived as less committed to their careers, less competent, and less promotable when they become mothers (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2008). The differences suggest that supervisors’ and colleagues’ expectations of men’s work performance remain unchanged when the men become fathers. This would also suggest that fatherhood is not recognized as a life transition that might have an impact on the amount of time or effort that a man is willing to commit to work.

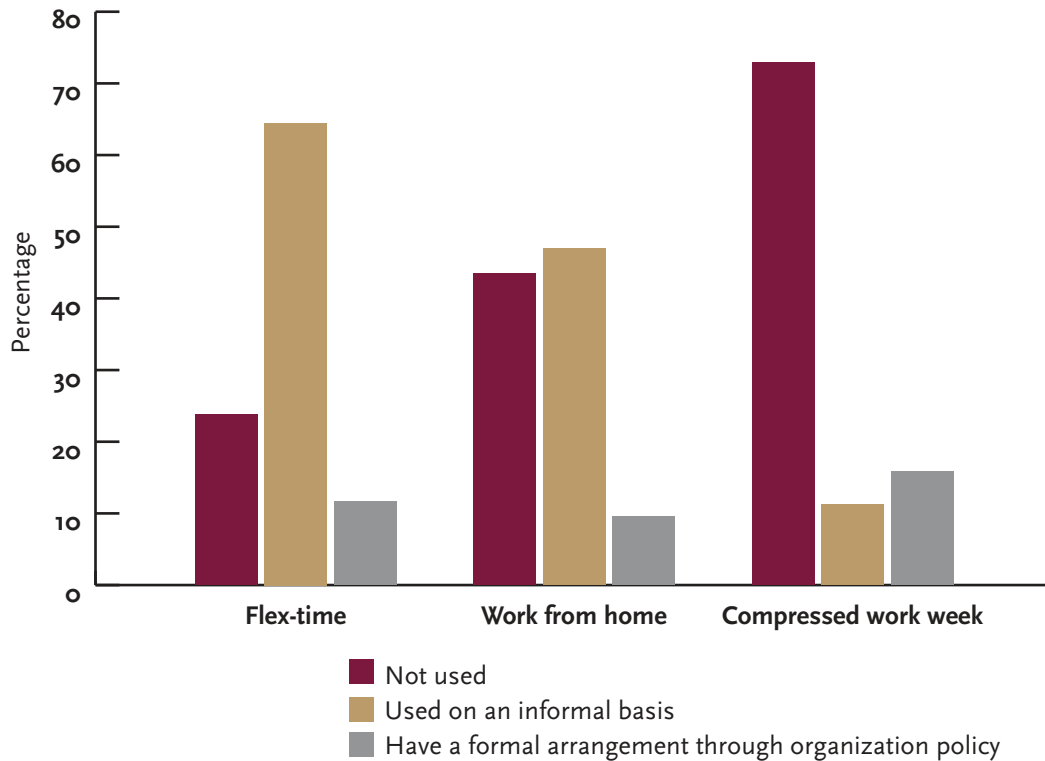
### **Flexible Work Arrangements**

Flexible work arrangements are one of the most important benefits a company can provide to enable its workers to better balance work and home life. The companies included in the 2011 study all had active flexible work arrangements programs. In this study more than three quarters of fathers reported

using flex-time on either a formal or informal basis, 57% worked from home at least some part of their time, and 27% utilized compressed workweeks. These numbers are encouraging in terms of fathers and the utilization of flexibility, but perhaps equally noteworthy is the percentage of those fathers that used flexibility on an informal rather than formal basis. It may be that men need flexibility on a less regular basis than women and are thus more likely to use it informally. Or that corporate cultures discourage men from utilizing formal flexible arrangements, so men use them in a more covert manner.

*Fathers using flexible work arrangements, whether formally or informally, have higher job satisfaction and also higher career satisfaction than those that do not use flexible work arrangements. Men also tend to use informal rather than formal flexible work arrangements.*

Chart 5: Flexible Work Arrangement Usage (2011)



Fifty-seven percent of 2011 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their supervisor was supportive of employees using flexible work arrangements. However, of those who did not use flexible work arrangements, a high percentage believed that their employers would not support their doing so, in spite of the fact that many of their colleagues were using such arrangements. There could be many reasons for this, such as the nature of the job, fear of negative career implications, or the individual manager's stance toward flexible working.

### Supportive Work Environment

Through our research we hoped to better understand the impact that organizational environments have on fathers' work and family experiences. Therefore, we analyzed the relationships among the key variables of supportive environment (including family supportive culture, manager supportiveness and co-worker supportiveness); work-to-family alignment (including work-to-family conflict and work-to-family enrichment); and satisfied employees (including job satisfaction, career satisfaction and job withdrawal intentions). Figure 1 offers a high-level summary of the important relationships that we identified through our analyses.

**Figure 1: Relationships between Supportive Environment, Work-Family Alignment, and Employee Satisfaction**



Not surprisingly, we found that the more supportive fathers perceive their work environments to be overall, the lower the level of work-to-family conflict (work having a negative impact on family) and the higher the level of work-to-family enrichment (work having a positive impact on family) they report experiencing. In other words, a more supportive work culture has a positive effect on a father's home life. Success at work can lead to success at home, and the skills learned in managing relationships at work can be useful at home as well. Further, our analyses revealed that the more supportive managers and co-workers are of fathers as caregivers, the less work-to-family conflict experienced, and the more work-to-family enrichment there is for the fathers.

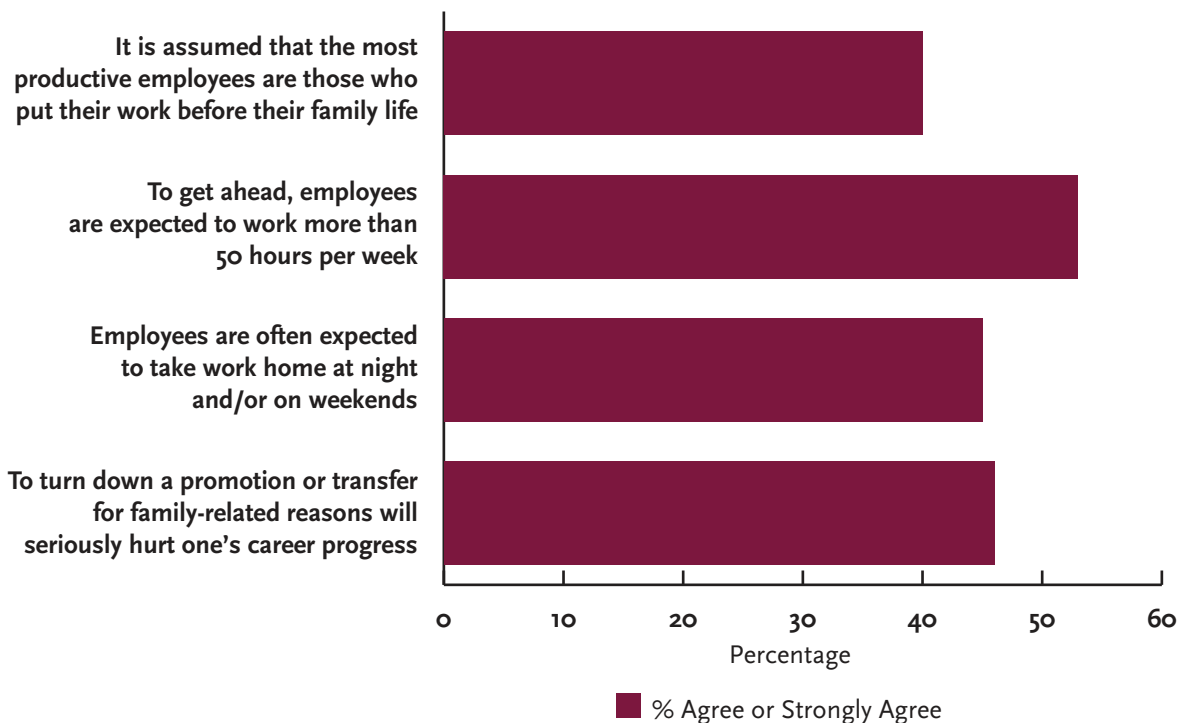
We also found that fathers who experience better alignment between work and family (less conflict, more enrichment) report being more satisfied overall with their jobs and with their careers, and are less likely to leave their jobs. Additionally, the family-supportiveness of the organizational environment also impacts fathers' job satisfaction and career satisfaction directly, such that the more family-supportive the environment is perceived to be, the more satisfied fathers are with both their jobs and their careers and the less likely they are to leave their organizations.

All of these elements; family supportive culture, manager supportiveness, and co-worker supportiveness, create an environment that enables fathers to be more successful in performing their roles as caregiver and worker, as well as achieving greater alignment and integration between the two. Therefore, fostering an environment that is supportive of and recognizes the importance of fathers' dual roles as workers and parents is a major "win/win" for the organization and the employees.

## CONTINUING THE PROGRESS

The companies we studied have taken actions to create more family-friendly cultures and many fathers are making effective use of flexible work arrangements and other company supports. The question remains, is it enough? Our 2011 survey of fathers in four large companies contained a number of questions aimed at better understanding organization cultures and their level of supportiveness to families and fathers. While the majority of fathers felt supported by their own managers, they perceived more of a mixed level of support from their workplace cultures as a whole.

**Chart 6: Percent Agreement That These Statements Represent the Philosophy or Beliefs of Their Company (2011)**



It can be somewhat disheartening to note that a fairly large percentage of the 900+ fathers agreed that in order to get ahead they needed to

- Put their work life before their family life
- Work more than 50 hours/week
- Take work home at night and on weekends
- Not turn down a promotion or transfer due to family-related reasons

When the Pew Research Center asked working mothers and fathers to picture their ideal working situation, 37 percent of women would opt for full time; 50 percent part time; and 11 percent wouldn't have a job at all (Pew Research Center, 2013a). Of the fathers, 75 percent said full time, 15 percent said part time, and 10 percent wouldn't work at all. Yet in our 2011 study less than 1% of the fathers were working part-time and only 18% agreed that their employer would support them working a part-time schedule.

It is clear that these cultural issues and the lack of support for part-time work make for a less family-friendly environment despite efforts to improve work-life balance at these companies. We believe that the changes that are taking place with fathers have not been fully understood and embraced within organizations, and old paradigms persist. Work-life balance continues to be seen as mainly a woman's issue. Fathers are expected to work long hours and put their work lives ahead of their family lives. Perhaps the single greatest impediment to progress is the assumption that working more hours leads to higher productivity and more effective workers. This belief is deeply ingrained and often fails to consider the costs of added employee stress, lower morale, lower job satisfaction and lower employee engagement, not to mention the decrease in productivity in those extra hours.

*Companies need to find ways to support all types of family arrangements and provide the flexibility needed to make both the companies and the employees successful. Those that do this will have access to the best talent pool, and potentially a very productive and engaged workforce.*

Regardless of views on longer work hours and productivity, it is clear that roles of both men and women are changing. Women are taking a larger role at work and will continue to do so. Fathers are taking a larger role at home and that trend will also continue. All parties are searching for the elusive balance between work life and home life. Married couples search for this balance jointly and develop different approaches to this depending on their circumstances, skills and interests. For some this may mean a male breadwinner and a stay-at-home mom. For some it may mean two full-time careers and lots of supportive child care. For others it may mean a female breadwinner and a stay-at-home dad. Each of

the parents may decide that part-time work will be more effective at various life stages. Single parent households are becoming much more common. All points on this spectrum are possible, and companies need to find ways to support all types of family arrangements and provide the flexibility needed to make both the companies and the employees successful. Companies that can do this will have access to the best talent pool, and potentially a very productive and engaged workforce.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our research over the past four years has led us to clear conclusions about the changing state of fatherhood in America; at least for the population of fathers (mostly American, white-collar, college educated, etc.) we have mainly been studying. As evidenced by the reception to our research over the last few years and the tremendous growth in media attention to the work-life challenges of fathers, we believe that our society is poised to move ahead with a national conversation on this topic. We have outlined recommendations for the two major audiences for our work, employers and fathers, which we hope will propel this dialogue forward and promote a greater call to action.

### Recommendations for employers

Employers, and specifically organizational leaders, play a critical role in creating supportive or un-supportive workplace cultures. Today, our research and that of others in the field suggests there continues to be a significant lag in employers' understanding of the experiences, wants, and needs of contemporary fathers. There are a few key things that employers can do.

- **Get to know your fathers and their needs.** Too few researchers and employers have focused on today's fathers in order to understand their lives, their efforts and their struggles to achieve greater harmony between their work and parenting roles. Many assumptions about what fathers do or don't do in the home need to be updated in order to create workplace cultures that support all employees. Surveys, like those conducted by our Center, can provide a contemporary view of the lives and needs of today's working father.
- **Fully embrace flexible work arrangements including part-time work.** In spite of the recent media hype suggesting that workplace flexibility is under siege, progressive employers understand that flexible, highly agile workplaces are here to stay. Most employers who offer flexibility see this as a way to increase competitiveness, not simply as a worker friendly perk. They realize the many benefits that flexibility can produce. That said, in our 2011 study, when asked what one thing your employer can do to help you in your work-family struggles, the answer was clear and resounding. Provide flexibility. Offering fathers (and all employees) the time to attend to their personal needs does not offer employees permission to "slack off". What it does do is permit them to be more focused and energized when they are working.
- **Understand and create a family-friendly workplace for all employees.** Family-friendly workplace cultures which include effective policies, supportive managers, and supportive colleagues have positive benefits for the employee and for the employer. In these environments, employees have higher levels of engagement and satisfaction and the employers benefit from the resulting increase in productivity and lower turnover of key personnel.
- **Give dads a means and a place to talk about work-family issues.** Long-standing gender role stereotypes and organizational cultures may unintentionally create barriers to men discussing their caregiving roles. It is important that employers take proactive measures to encourage conversations among men about issues such as parenting and work-life balance. Career-life workshops can be tremendously beneficial as a means for men to better understand, articulate and work through the work-family challenges they face. This type of professional development could also serve as an excellent way for men to offer their employers a window into the challenges of today's working fathers. Establishing fathers' affinity groups or business resource groups and offering brown bag seminars targeted at men will also increase the level of conversation and acceptance for the dual roles of today's working dads.

- **Recognize that gender-neutral policies will not suffice.** While organizational policies are designed to be gender neutral, organizational cultures are not. There are still deeply embedded assumptions that when men become fathers, nothing will change on the work front. As fathers take on greater responsibility for caregiving and other family responsibilities, organizational cultures need to adjust to this new reality. Employers need to see fatherhood as an important and time consuming role and not assume that being a good father simply equates to being a financial provider.
- **Encourage men to utilize family leave policies.** Benefits such as paid paternity leave and child-care services, and the acceptance and encouragement to actually use them, help ease the conflicts experienced by fathers upon the arrival of their children. Even in organizations that do offer (paid and unpaid) leave, utilization is low because of fear of being perceived as a less committed worker. The unseen beneficiaries of men taking advantage of family leave are working women, who may feel more prepared to forge ahead in their careers with the support of prepared caregiving partners. Organizations who seek to retain and advance women must not marginalize the role men play in that process.

Engaging men in these conversations and implementing the outlined policies can benefit not only fathers, but all employees in the organization, by promoting the view of workers as “whole persons.” While fathers make up approximately half of the world’s parents, they comprise over 85% of Fortune 500 Executive Officers in the U.S. (Catalyst, 2013). Their role in the work-life conversation is critical to the work and life success of all employees.

### Recommendations for Fathers

- **Support your fellow fathers.** Organizational cultures need to change if men are truly to embrace their role as caregiving fathers. Because male leaders have created workplace cultures and norms, (over 96% of CEOs in the Fortune 1000 are men), men are extremely influential in terms of changing workplaces. Men, whether senior leaders, middle managers, or individual contributors need to create more supportive workplace cultures whether from their influential positions as organizational leaders or through grass-roots efforts. Men should challenge male stereotypes (e.g. only those who work excessive hours are truly committed) that make it difficult for women and men to be effective parents. Demonstrate respect for the work-life decisions of all fathers.
- **Examine your caregiving goals in light of your career goals.** While our research surfaced a clear desire of working fathers to be more involved in the care and raising of their children, it was also clear that the desire to “have it all” is not just a phenomenon that impacts mothers. As our 2011 study clearly demonstrated, while 77% of fathers said they wanted to spend more time with their children, at the same time 3-in-4 wanted a job with greater responsibility and nearly 3-in-5 wanted to attain a role in senior management at their very large companies. While seeking ongoing development and advancement is a perfectly reasonable goal, such an objective may need to be tempered by what’s best for the family and what is practical at any given point in time.
- **Consider taking more time off after the birth of your children.** The experience of fathers in countries that offer generous, extensive paternity leave suggests that those who take a more hands-on role early in their child’s life will have a higher likelihood of being engaged parents over their child’s lifespan. Women are immersed in caregiving from the moment their children are born. Fathers who take little or no time-off following the birth of a child are likely to feel less competent and be more hands-off with their children. While we recognize that many organizations do not offer paid paternity leave, evidence would suggest that fathers spending time “flying solo”



as caregivers will experience significant long-term benefits in their relationships with their children. Men can assist their fellow fathers by taking advantage of, and thereby normalizing, the parental leave that is offered by their organizations.

- **Be a true caregiving partner to your spouse.** Families today are far more complex than traditional family structures. Choices about career and caregiving present major stressors for many dual-career couples, and combined with our professional culture of overwork, often drive parents (predominantly women) out of the workforce. Viewing both breadwinning and caregiving as shared responsibilities of a family unit, and having direct conversations about how those will be achieved, can help both parents develop over the course of their child's early years. Outdated gender role assumptions often no longer apply. Either spouse can be a primary breadwinner or a primary caregiver, depending on the opportunities and the needs of each specific family. As our 2012 study *The New Dad: Right at Home* revealed, fathers can be excellent primary caregivers and through doing so can support the career progression and earning potential of their wives.

Our research has convinced us that men are on the threshold of embracing a new definition of fatherhood and stepping up to the challenges and the rewards of parenting in a much fuller sense than was the case in the past. As their female counterparts are encouraged to “lean in” at work, we believe it is time for fathers to “step up” to parenting proudly and without reservation. It's time to recognize that half of the world's parents have too long been ignored or silent on the most important issue in their lives, the well-being of their families and their relationships with them.

We believe fathers are poised for a breakthrough, one that brings a greater appreciation of the important role fatherhood plays in their own lives and that of their family members, and that workplaces should make every effort to support this important effort. Now is the time to move forward, to take action to continue this “Work (and Life) in Progress.” The Boston College Center for Work & Family is committed to taking a leadership role in actively promoting a dialogue and helping fathers, families, organizations, and society appreciate and encourage this evolving definition of fatherhood.

*Learn more and join our efforts at [TheNewDad.org](http://TheNewDad.org)*

# REFERENCES

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*I know that when I am on my deathbed someday, I will not be thinking about any particular legislation I passed; I will not be thinking about a policy I promoted; I will not be thinking about the speech I gave, I will not be thinking the Nobel Prize I received. I will be thinking about that walk I took with my daughters. I'll be thinking about a lazy afternoon with my wife. I'll be thinking about sitting around the dinner table and seeing them happy and healthy and knowing that they were loved. And I'll be thinking about whether I did right by all of them.*

- Barack Obama, 2013 commencement address at Morehouse College



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