



Beyond The Breadwinner:

Professional Dads Speak Out on Work and Family

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About A Better Balance: The Work & Family Legal Center

A Better Balance is a national legal advocacy organization dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace and helping workers meet the conflicting demands of work and family. Through legislative advocacy, litigation, research, public education and technical assistance to state and local campaigns, A Better Balance is committed to helping workers care for their families without risking their economic security.

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Juggling work and family is a well-documented challenge for many women. But American men are increasingly experiencing the struggle of succeeding at work while caring well for their children. Although low-income workers experience the most profound work-family conflicts, professional fathers, who face intense pressure to work long hours and put job responsibilities above all else, are struggling too.

To learn more, A Better Balance conducted an online survey of approximately 250 working fathers, largely white-collar professionals, living in 31 states and Washington D.C. We found that their biggest challenges as working fathers revolve around time—having enough time to care for their children and enough time to spend on their jobs. Given the high level of stress and conflict reported by professional dads, it is not surprising that they strongly support workplace and public policies that would give them more time and flexibility to care for their families.

Key Findings:

- A majority of professional fathers reported that balancing work and family causes conflicts, pressure and frequent stress. Nearly 85% of respondents feel under pressure to be both a provider and an engaged parent in their children's daily lives. Seventy-five percent of respondents worry that their jobs prevent them from having the time to be the kind of dads they want to be.
- Nearly 7 out of 10 respondents said they would personally benefit from flexible work arrangements, such as flexible hours and the ability to work from home. Respondents also indicated that government support would help them better meet the competing demands of work and family. Nearly 80% of respondents support laws requiring paid family leave (with 35% strongly supporting the policy and only 5% strongly opposing it). By a margin of two-to-one, they also favor laws requiring a minimum floor of paid sick days, rather than leaving the decision to provide paid sick time completely up to individual employers.
- Respondents made clear that supportive managers and workplace cultures play a critical role in encouraging them to take advantage of policies that would help them balance work and family responsibilities. Eighty-five percent of respondents indicated that they would be encouraged to take advantage of family-friendly workplace policies by seeing senior leaders set an example or by seeing that their male colleagues who use these practices still advance in their careers.
- While the majority of respondents have not experienced penalties on the job for being a parent, a significant minority reported negative treatment and disapproving comments at work due to their attempt to meet family responsibilities. Although these fathers represent a minority of all respondents, the existence of such negative treatment suggests a notable barrier to achieving a more family-friendly society.

Unlike a generation ago, most of today's professional dads no longer define themselves exclusively as the family breadwinner.² As evidenced by the results of our survey, professional dads desire a greater role in family caregiving and place a high priority on being engaged and present in their children's lives. As one respondent, a policy analyst, put it, “[my biggest challenge as a working father] is ensuring I spend time with the children during the work week in a positive, engaged manner. That time is limited, and I don't want my work stress, tiredness...to impact it.”

Professional fathers overwhelmingly said that flexible work arrangements, such as flexible hours and the ability to telecommute, would personally help them to better balance their work and family responsibilities. Moreover, many respondents said that government support, including paid family leave, subsidized child care and tax breaks, would make it easier for them to meet the conflicting demands of work and home. Unfortunately, outdated workplace norms and gender pressures still make it difficult for many professional men to take advantage of workplace flexibility, especially formal policies such as paternity leave.³ For example, numerous fathers in our study reported stigma and negative reactions at work after taking paternity leave, even if only for a short period of time. As one financial professional wrote, “I took a month of [partial] family leave for the birth of my son and this led to negative perception regarding my dedication. This is even though I continued to work about 30 to 35 hours per week (a typical week was about 60 hours).” In fact, only a slim minority of working fathers in our survey took 4 or more weeks of leave after their youngest child was born or adopted.

In addition, some working fathers in our survey described entrenched stereotypes within the workplace regarding male and female caregiving roles. According to one professional father, “I divide child care pick up/drop off with my wife, on a more or less 50/50 basis, and take a near-equal portion of unexpected daycare closures or sick days—but I have been asked (by my CEO and board of directors), ‘why doesn't your wife [a high-level, full-time professional] care for your son in these instances?’—as if 50/50 on my end is too high a ratio.”

Demographics & Methodology

A Better Balance conducted the survey between December 13, 2010 and February 16, 2011 through SurveyMonkey. During this period, the survey was publicized through A Better Balance's website and social media pages. Additionally, the survey was shared with numerous parenting groups, college alumni associations, professional organizations, and unions through social media and email lists. No incentives were offered for completing the survey. A Better Balance collected responses from 260 fathers with children under 16 years of age. This sample included fathers living in 31 states and Washington D.C. Approximately 250 of these fathers reported that they were employed, and their responses were used for the analysis in this report (although we highlight quotes at the end of the report from stay-at-home fathers, these dads are not included in the statistical data, due to their small sample size). While A Better Balance made every effort to reach a broad cross-section of fathers, the self-selected nature of the survey likely resulted in respondents who were more interested in work-family issues. For example, more than 81% of respondents had at least one very young child—age 5 or under—at home.

In addition, nearly 90% of working father respondents said they were employed full-time, and the majority of these fathers work in white-collar or professional positions in diverse fields. Approximately 76% of working father respondents reported total household incomes of \$100,000 or more, and our results largely represent the views of this group. A survey focusing on the views of blue-collar fathers and those in low paying jobs may have generated different findings. Furthermore, 95% of respondents are married or living with a partner. Of those respondents with a spouse or partner, 79% have spouses or partners who are also employed; 56% of all spouses/partners are employed full-time, while 23% of all spouses/partners are employed part-time. Approximately 17% of working father respondents identified as men of color.

Fortunately, a growing number of employers are recognizing that the development of effective, flexible work policies is a strategic business imperative.⁴ These employers recognize that workplace flexibility is a crucial tool, helping workers to succeed at work while allowing them to meet their personal and family caregiving responsibilities.⁵ In today's globally-competitive economy, flexibility is also a powerful tool to recruit and retain top talent, reduce turnover and enhance productivity.⁶

Progressive companies also recognize that to be effective, they must do more than develop good policies and programs. They must promote flexible work cultures, where workers on flexible schedules feel supported and rewarded by managers and senior leadership. In fact, the professional fathers in our survey were more than twice as likely to say that "having a supportive manager and work culture" was more important than having formal family-friendly policies. Respondents cited numerous ways their bosses have been supportive, from "standing in for me at meetings, allowing unlimited (but within reason) telecommuting so long as the work gets done" to "never, ever making me feel guilty about taking a few hours to care for my kids." The research is clear that employees who feel they can take advantage of flexible work options without penalty will be more loyal and productive workers.⁷

The working fathers surveyed in this report expressed a desire for change. These professional fathers are highly concerned about meeting the competing demands of work and home, and their worries represent more than a passing trend. Rather, the stress and concern of working fathers reflect a fundamental shift in the demographic realities and cultural values of today's professional workforce.⁸ It's time for employers and public officials to recognize that work-family challenges are not only a women's issue. Rather, flexible work arrangements and reasonable time off policies benefit male *and* female workers; family-friendly laws and policies are necessary for the health of American workers and their families, as well as businesses and the American economy.



Key Finding #1

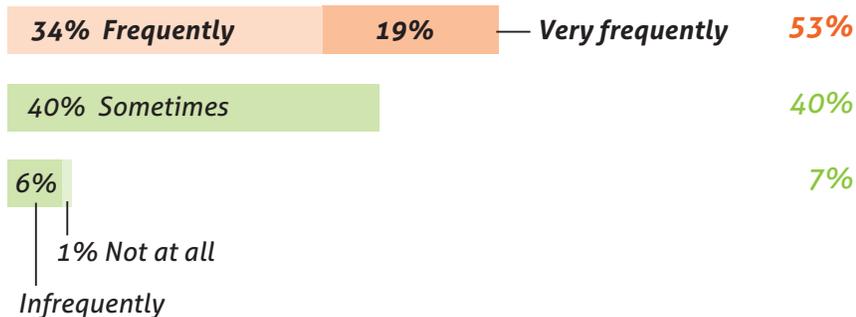


A majority of working fathers reported that balancing work and family causes conflicts, pressure, and frequent stress in their lives. Working fathers are especially worried that their jobs prevent them from having the time to be the kind of dads they want to be.

More than half of all respondents reported that balancing work and family causes frequent stress in their lives.

Q | Is balancing work and family an issue that personally causes stress in your life?

I personally experience stress about balancing work & family:



When working fathers were asked to name their biggest challenge regarding responsibilities at home and at work, their biggest challenges revolved around time — both having enough time to spend with their kids and enough time to spend on their jobs. In particular, many mentioned the challenges of job-related travel and the demands of handling daily routines that involve getting children to

school or child care and picking them up at the end of the day. Many fathers also mentioned the psychological challenges of being able to shift gears and focus on their families once they are home. Relatively few respondents cited the challenges of meeting their families' financial needs, perhaps because most respondents are employed and have a relatively high economic status.



If you are currently employed, thinking of your responsibilities both at home and for your job, what is your biggest challenge as a working father?

"Ensuring I spend time with the children during the work week in a positive, engaged manner. That time is limited and I don't want my work stress, tiredness . . . to impact it."

— budget analyst and father of two children, ages 2 and 5

"Quality time with my kids."

— sales manager and father of three children, ages 2, 4, and 5

"I'm an attorney at a large firm, so the hours are sometimes very demanding. The biggest challenge is a simple one — being able to see my son every day either before or after work. There have been days where I left for work before he woke up and he was asleep before I got home."

— attorney and father of one child, age 1

"Being at the events that are important to my children e.g. performances, sports, parent teacher conferences."

— professional services provider and father of two children, ages 5 and 7

"Time — the needed time for work (being the bread winner) balanced with the needed time for family."

— marketing consultant and father of two children, ages 1 month and 2

"Giving enough time to my family and my job."

— business developer and father of two children, ages 5 and 6

"Finding the time to spend with my daughter, and to participate in school activities as much as I'd like to."

— software account manager and father of one child, age 4

"Work related travel, workloads and not having any time to spend with the kids."

— consultant and father of two children, ages 2 and 6

"Transitioning from work-mode into dad-mode and being able to make that transition given the 24 hr demands that jobs frequently put on us these days."

— technology consultant and father of two children, ages 1 and 3

"Finding time to spend with my child. Reducing work-related stress to increase enjoyment when I'm with my child."

— school psychologist and father of one child, age 4

"Not letting stress of work and financial matters overlap with stresses at home."

— hospital physician and father of two children, ages 1 and 10

The Family Case for Workplace Flexibility

Due to inflexible work schedules and insufficient time off, many working fathers find it difficult to have an engaged and meaningful presence in their children's lives. Flexible work arrangements can ease these time constraints and provide working fathers with more opportunities to support their children's educational and other needs.⁹ The benefits to children are clear, as greater parental involvement is associated with higher academic achievement and fewer disciplinary problems.¹⁰

Research has also shown that workplace flexibility improves health outcomes for workers and their families.¹¹ Flexible work arrangements benefit workers' health and the health of their families, by decreasing stress and encouraging healthier lifestyles. Moreover, research studies indicate that sick children have better vital signs, speedier recoveries and reduced hospital stays when their parents are able to care for them. When parents have flexible work arrangements, their children are also less likely to miss medical appointments. In addition to benefitting workers and their children, workplace flexibility allows more workers to care for elderly relatives, a service that improves the health of eldercare recipients and reduces health care costs.

An overwhelming majority (85%) of dads frequently or sometimes feel under pressure or experience conflicts about the need to be both a good provider and present and engaged in their children’s lives.

Q Some people say that the expectations for being a good father these days are to be **both** a good provider and be present and engaged in our children’s daily lives. Do you feel that these expectations are a source of pressure or conflict for you personally?

I feel under pressure or experience conflicts:



“On the one hand, I must win the bread — no mean feat for an architect during a severe economic recession, but on the other, I insist on being present in the daily life of my children.”

— architect and father of two children, ages 5 and 7

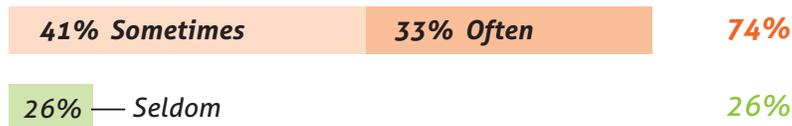
“It’s next to impossible to travel for work, exceed all of the expectations, and try to be there enough for my child.”

— consultant in the accounting industry and father of one child, age 1

Finally, three-fourths of all respondents expressed concern that their jobs prevent them from having as much time to parent as they would like.

Q | Do you personally worry that your job does not allow you to have enough time to be the kind of dad you want to be?

I worry about that:



"I want to be the dad who attends all the little league games and dance recitals, the dad who is there in the afternoon/evening to help with homework, the dad who sits down to dinner with his family every night. My current job does not allow for that to happen."

— media professional and father of two children, ages 2 and 5

"My twins are now the age where I feel my presence would make a real difference to them. However, most weekdays I'm lucky if I can have 30 minutes with them, due to my work schedule."

— management consultant and father of two children, both age 4

"It's . . . hard to work 60+ hours and play a meaningful role as a father."

— biotechnology professional and father of one child, age 2

"My son is on the autism spectrum, and I constantly worry that I am not giving him the attention he needs."

— information technology professional and father of one child, age 11

Key Finding #2

Working fathers believe that both flexible work arrangements and government support can help parents to better balance work and family responsibilities. They also support by wide margins laws requiring paid leave.

When presented with a list of public policies, working fathers overwhelmingly indicated that workplace flexibility, including flexible work hours and telecommuting, could help them to better juggle work and family. Furthermore, between 44% and 48% of working fathers said that they would personally benefit from government support through subsidized high-quality child care and tax breaks for parents.

Q Here are some workplace public policies that have been proposed to help parents juggling work and family. Can you check the *three* things that would be **most helpful to you personally?**

Flexible Work Arrangements (e.g., alternative start and end times, work from home)

69%

Subsidized high-quality child care

48%

Tax breaks for parents

44%

Paid family leave (to care for a newborn or seriously ill relative, such as an aging parent)

36%

More short-term paid time off to address ordinary, predictable, and unpredictable needs of life (e.g., sick child, school event)

35%

More control and predictability over work hours (e.g., scheduling, overtime, job-related travel)

33%

Reduced work hours (e.g., part-time, phased-down hours for retirement)

14%

Unpaid extended time off (leave of absence with return to your job guaranteed)

12%

"[It is a challenge] having to leave the office at a specific time. I feel like I cannot be as effective or involved at work without the flexibility . . ."

— computer programmer and father of one child, age 3

"[I would value] the ability to 'job share,' where responsibilities are shared across two employees, allowing for full coverage but also allowing for more use of personal time."

— technology professional and father of one child, age 4

"I really want a four day work week, so that we can cut costs on a nanny and I can have more time with my daughter . . . Being held arbitrarily to the 'standard' work week when my productivity is hindered both at home and at work as a result is short sighted."

— marketing professional and father of one child, age 3



The Business Case for Workplace Flexibility

Nearly 70% of working dad respondents said they would personally benefit from flexible work arrangements, such as flexible hours and the ability to work from home. By providing flexible work policies, businesses can satisfy employees' needs while also improving their bottom line. Workplace flexibility can be an effective approach to recruiting and retaining talented employees, increasing productivity and reducing absenteeism.

Many studies have shown that workplace flexibility can create tangible financial benefits.¹² For example, it has been estimated that telecommuting programs can save businesses as much as \$10,000 per employee each year.¹³ Flexible work policies have also been shown to decrease employee stress, a leading cause of absenteeism and turnover. Research suggests that employee stress costs U.S. employers as much as \$300 billion every year, or anywhere from \$496 to \$1,984 per employee each year.¹⁴

Because the majority of respondents are professional workers with household incomes of more than \$100,000, it is likely that many working fathers in our sample receive some employer-sponsored paid leave. **Nevertheless, more than a third of all working father respondents identified paid family leave or short-term paid time off as a public policy that would personally help them. Support for laws that provide paid sick leave and paid family leave was even higher.** By a margin of two-to-one, these professional fathers—most of whom likely have some paid sick time—believe there should be a law requiring a minimum floor of paid sick days for *all* workers.



Should providing paid sick days be up to employers or should there be a law requiring a minimum floor of paid sick days for all workers?

Should be a law

59%

Should be up to employers

29%

No opinion

12%

“Paid sick days [are a public policy that would be helpful to me].”

— carpenter and father of one child, age 4

“[My biggest challenge is] dealing with kids when they are sick/staying home with them. My wife works full time as well, so it’s extra tough.”

— fashion executive and father of two children, ages 1 and 3



Supporting Families Through State Paid Leave Programs

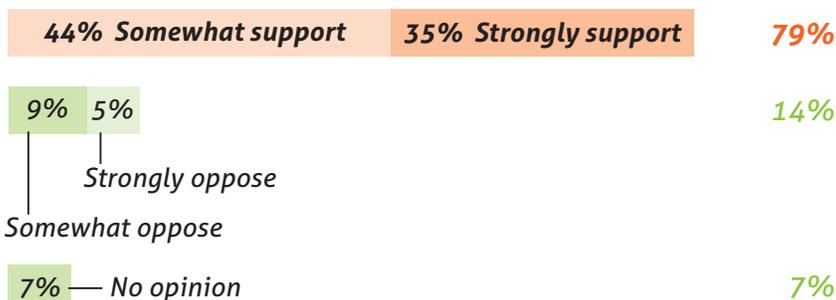
California and New Jersey are the first two states in the nation to pass paid family leave insurance laws. Through the California and New Jersey family leave programs, the vast majority of workers can receive up to six weeks of partial wage replacement to bond with a new child or to care for a seriously ill family member. The program benefits do not increase covered employers’ payroll costs, as the family leave is financed through small employee paycheck contributions. A recent study of the California law, which has been in operation for more than six years, demonstrates the law’s effectiveness and minimal impact on employers.¹⁵ For example, nearly 90% of employers in California believe the law has had either a positive effect or “no noticeable effect” on productivity.¹⁶ Moreover, more than 90% of employers report that the law has had a positive or neutral effect on profitability, performance, turnover, and employee morale.¹⁷ Lawmakers in New York are considering a similar law that would provide workers with paid family leave.

By an overwhelming margin, working fathers also support a paid family leave insurance law. Close to 80% of all respondents support a paid family leave insurance program that is funded through small employee paycheck contributions.

Although the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) guarantees workers job-protected, unpaid leave to care for a new child or a seriously ill relative, the law does not cover individuals unless they work for an employer who has at least 50 employees. For workers whose employers have fewer than 50 employees, there is no federal guarantee to unpaid family leave. Among respondents who were not covered by the FMLA when their youngest children were born, support was even stronger for a state paid family leave insurance program that covers the vast majority of workers:

Q Some states, like California and New Jersey, have enacted paid family leave insurance programs, funded by small employee payroll deductions to provide all workers with partial wage replacement for up to 6 weeks of paid leave to care for a new child or seriously ill relative. Do you favor or oppose such a paid family leave insurance program?

All respondents:



Fathers who could not take FMLA leave when their youngest child was born because they worked for employers with fewer than 50 employees:



“[I work] just on commission so have no paid leave.”

— financial adviser and father of one child, age 9

“[There’s] no leave available.”

— fund manager and father of two children, ages 1 and 3

Paid family leave insurance will also enable many working fathers to provide better care to elderly relatives. Approximately 17% of respondents helped to provide care for an aging family member in the previous year, and 63% anticipate needing to provide such elder care in the future.

Key Finding #3

To better meet the competing demands of work and home, family-friendly workplace laws and policies are just one part of the solution. Supportive managers and workplace cultures are also critical.

Respondents spoke in great detail about the importance of a flexible work culture. Specifically, both senior leaders and peers play an important role in encouraging working fathers to take advantage of family-friendly workplace policies. When asked what would most encourage them to take advantage of such policies, respondents were closely split between seeing senior leadership set an example and seeing male colleagues use family-friendly policies and advance at work.

Q What would most encourage you to take advantage of family-friendly workplace policies?

Seeing that other men in my workplace are using these practices and advancing on the job.

44%

Senior leadership setting an example

41%

Other

15%

Respondents were more than twice as likely to say that “having a supportive manager and workplace culture” is more important than having formal family-friendly policies. One potential reason for the heightened importance of managerial support and workplace culture is that the majority of respondents work in high-income, professional jobs where workplace arrangements are relatively informal. For example, when asked how they typically handle unexpected family responsibilities that conflict with their jobs, respondents were most likely to say they rely on informal understandings with their supervisors. It is possible that if we had surveyed primarily blue-collar and lower-wage workers, official policies would have been viewed as more important; in lower-wage positions, formal policies are more likely to govern an employee's benefit usage, and supervisors may be less inclined to respond to workers' family needs in an informal, ad hoc manner.¹⁸

“I feel like all the policy in the world won't help change others' expectations — there is still the mindset that ‘If I'm doing it, I expect everyone else to do it too.’ People look at you like you're crazy for leaving at 5 to pick up a child.”

— management consultant and father of one child, age 1

“My boss has a kid the same age as mine and so always encourages me to do what needs to be done to care for my children.”

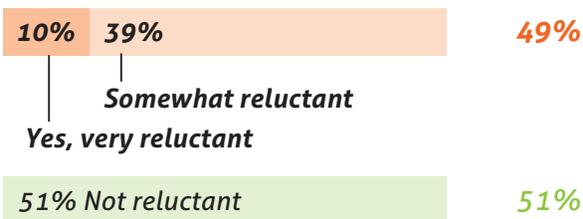
— attorney and father of two children, ages 2 and 5

“I think my role as a father is even more important than my career and I have co-workers and supervisors who agree with that and encourage me to put my family first.”

— nonprofit professional and father of two children, ages 9 months and 3

The importance of workplace culture was especially evident in respondents' views of flexible work arrangements. Although an overwhelming majority of fathers identified workplace flexibility as a benefit that would personally help them, almost half of all fathers surveyed said they would be somewhat or very reluctant to take advantage of flexible work opportunities. Many fathers said they would be reluctant due to supervisors' reactions and workplace stigma; based on these responses, it is clear that family-friendly bosses and workplace cultures are critical for making flexible work a viable option.

Q | Would you personally be reluctant to take advantage of flexible work policies offered by your employer (e.g. flexible work hours, telecommuting, job sharing, reduced work hours)?



The significant reluctance of working fathers to use flexible work arrangements, despite the widely-held belief that such policies will help them achieve greater work-life balance, underscores the importance of workplace culture. Many respondents expressed concern that they would suffer negative perceptions and consequences for utilizing flexible work policies. Among those respondents who would be reluctant to take advantage of flexible work policies, 50% expressed concern that they would be perceived as less committed to their job for using such policies, even if their level of effectiveness remained the same. Furthermore, nearly 40% of those who would be reluctant to take advantage of flexible work opportunities expressed concern about being marginalized or stigmatized by others for using these policies.

Overall, these findings clearly suggest that working fathers are more likely to utilize flexible work policies if their workplaces have supportive and family-friendly cultures. Although the implementation of family-friendly workplace policies is key to achieving greater workplace flexibility, creation of a supportive and flexible workplace culture is also necessary.

"[I'm concerned about] being seen as getting preferential treatment. The other managers in the system do not have families to tend to (they are younger or are not interested in starting a family). I'd be worried about how [taking advantage of flexible work policies] looked to the others and do worry about it, as I already have some work from home time . . ."

— hospitality manager and father of one child, age 2

"[My family responsibilities are a] constant source of friction with bosses . . . The long-term impact of that is hard to gauge, but it makes working less enjoyable, especially if your boss is not very supportive."

— fundraiser and father of two children, ages 16 and 20

"After receiving permission to take an important family trip (a long weekend), I was criticized by my boss for taking two and a half days off . . ."

— media professional and father of two children, ages 2 and 5

The Importance of a Supportive Boss in Establishing a Family-Friendly Workplace Culture

Respondents identified numerous ways in which their bosses have supported their family needs and caregiving responsibilities:

"He always approves sick leave to care for my child and asks how she's doing when I return to work." — computer technician and father of one child, age 2

"My boss always makes it clear that family responsibilities are important and should come first." — education professional and father of two children, ages 7 months and 3

"Standing in for me at meetings, allowing unlimited (but within reason) telecommuting so long as the work gets done." — information technology professional and father of one child, age 3

"Tells me to do whatever's necessary, as long as the work is getting done." — software engineer and father of one child, age 3

"He encouraged me to take time off after the birth of my second child; he has also delayed a requirement for me to travel shortly after my second child was born." — engineer and father of two children, ages 3 months and 2

"My child became ill with a stomach virus. My boss was supportive of me taking my child to the doctor and staying home for the day as my wife was unable to from her job." — securities trader and father of one child, age 1

"I work for a company that is supportive of flexible scheduling in general—not just for children or family issues—and this is by far the biggest factor in making it as easy as possible to attend child-related things during business hours." — communications professional and father of one child, age 2

"He has never, ever made me feel guilty about taking a personal day or a few hours to care for my kids. Never. He always says that I am doing what I ought to be doing in meeting their needs." — nonprofit professional and father of two children, ages 9 months and 3

Key Finding #4

Some working fathers reported negative treatment and disapproving comments at work about their family responsibilities. Although these fathers represent a minority of all respondents, the existence of such negative treatment suggests a notable barrier to achieving a more family-friendly society.

For the most part, the fathers in our study found becoming a father had a positive impact on them at work. Sixty-six percent of respondents believe either that they were viewed more positively at work as a stable, family man after having a child or that their change in status had no effect.

Yet, a sizable minority of men reported negative work-related consequences to becoming a father.



More than 12% of respondents said they have been penalized or had their commitment questioned due to their need to meet family responsibilities.

"I have been asked if I really wanted to keep the job."

— retail employee and father of one child, age 10

"I have been questioned about my priorities."

— attorney, father of two children, a newborn and age 2

"After [the] birth of my daughter, work kept harassing me to come back."

— teacher and father of one child, age 4

Many fathers described the negative ramifications of taking time off from work for a child's health needs.

"At my past job I was laid off because I was the one person with a child, therefore I called in sick more often and often needed to rearrange my schedule to pick up my child from daycare if she was sick."

— scientific researcher and father of one child, age 4

"My bosses' boss complained that I had been gone when my son was sick when I had actually been working 7 hour days starting at 5 am."

— information technology professional and father of one child, age 1

"I have worked in high pressure jobs and had a second child with serious medical issues. My spouse has a high-responsibility job as well. It was thus impossible to take adequate care of my second child and not feel like it threatened the perceptions of me in the workplace."

— marketing consultant and father of two children, ages 6 and 8

Some working fathers described facing stereotypes at work about male and female caregiving roles.

"[At work,] my wife [is] still being seen as the caretaker although we share parental responsibilities across gender lines."

— carpenter and father of one child, age 4

"I divide childcare pickup/dropoff with my wife, on a more or less 50/50 basis, and take a near-equal portion of unexpected daycare closures or sick days — but I have been asked (by my CEO and board of directors), 'why doesn't your wife [a high-level, full-time professional] care for your son in these instances?' — as if 50/50 on my end is too high a ratio."

— nonprofit professional and father of one child, age 2

Additionally, a notable minority of working fathers were threatened or discouraged from taking parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child. Nearly 11% of respondents reported that their managers directly or indirectly discouraged them from taking leave after their youngest child was born or adopted.

"My principal discouraged me from taking time off from work to help with our newborn."

— teacher and father of two children, newborn and age 4

"I was told I would be fired if I took off for my son's birth."

— information technology professional and father of one child, age 2

"[There was] too much to do at work, and pressure not to take extended amounts of time."

— attorney and father of one child, age 1

"When I first asked for the time off the CFO said, 'If we can do without someone for a whole month, I wonder if we need the position at all . . .'"

— nonprofit professional and father of one child, age 3

The survey responses also suggested that working fathers encounter a range of obstacles to taking parental leave, including concerns regarding job security, work-related interruptions, and financial strain caused by unpaid leave.

"Needed to keep money coming in."

— special education teacher and father of two children, ages 1 and 4, on why he did not take parental leave

"[The adoption of our youngest child] happened suddenly, and I couldn't defer all of my obligations."

— architect and father of two children, ages 2 and 5

"It was not practical to do so to maintain work responsibilities and job security."

— real estate professional and father of one child, age 2

"I took a week off. Work commitments prevented anything longer."

— engineer and father of two children, ages 4 and 7

"[I took] 10 days, but I had to come in to work anyway."

— armed forces officer and father of three children, ages 4 months, 5, and 6

Approximately 61% of working fathers reported that their employers did not provide paid parental leave at the time their youngest child was born or adopted.

"Not allowed [to take parental leave], because it did not exist."

— teacher and father of one child, age 4

"There was no leave time provided to fathers."

— researcher and father of two children, ages 1 and 9

"Such time is not available for faculty."

— professor at a public university and father of two children, ages 2 and 5

"There was no paid leave."

— software developer and father of two children, ages 6 and 10

"All family members [should be] treated equally in leave situations."

— government official and father of one child, age 4 months, who has no paid parental leave

Nevertheless, 81% of respondents took paid or unpaid leave after their youngest child was born or adopted, often by using sick days, vacation, or general paid time off. Among the fathers who reported taking unpaid or paid time off, 31% took off one week or less and 26% took between one and two weeks of leave. Only 15% of these fathers took four weeks or more of leave.

"If I could have afforded it, it would have been nice to take a full 3 months off to help my wife when my sons were born."

— designer and father of infant triplets

"They let me take a week off [after my child's birth] without pay."

— advertising professional and father of one child, age 1

"Couldn't afford to [take unpaid leave]."

— aerospace professional and father of one child, age 3

"I only had 4 days of vacation for the entire year. Went back to work the next day [after my youngest child's birth]."

— retail employee and father of three children, ages 8 months, 4, and 6

The majority of working fathers who took leave to help care for a new child (63%) reported that their colleagues had mostly positive responses to their leave. However, almost half of all working fathers (49%) believe that their coworkers would have a mostly negative reaction to paternity leave of 12 weeks or more. Numerous fathers reported stigma and negative reactions to even shorter periods of paternity leave.

"I also had to negotiate to take my own sick days for a month of paternity leave by my own design. This wasn't well received . . ."

— nonprofit professional and father of one child, age 3

"I received some negative comments from the business people I supported when I took 30 days paid paternity leave on the birth of my second child."

— in-house attorney and father of two children, ages 4 and 6

"I took a month of [partial] family leave for the birth of my son and this led to negative perception regarding my dedication. This is so even though I continued to work about 30 to 35 hours per week (a typical week was about 60 hours)."

— finance professional and father of one child, age 3

Overall, these findings suggest that many professional fathers who challenge the male norm of work devotion and take advantage of family leave and other flexible work policies experience a range of negative consequences.¹⁹ Although negative treatment at work due to family responsibilities was reported only by a minority of respondents, the responses from these fathers are concerning. Most children today are growing up in families that do not include a full-time, stay-at-home parent, so it is especially important for workplace cultures, policies, and laws to support the family responsibilities of both working mothers *and* fathers.²⁰ Additionally, as more families rely on the need for two salaries, paid leave and flexible work arrangements are especially critical to ensuring that workers can care for their families without risking their economic security.

Approximately 7% of all survey respondents were stay-at-home fathers with primary caregiving responsibilities. Due to the small size of this sample, stay-at-home fathers were not included in the statistical data used in this report. Nevertheless, the comments we received provide valuable insight into the evolving manner in which economic pressures, inflexible workplaces, and caregiving concerns have shaped the career decisions of stay-at-home fathers.

Q. If you're no longer in the paid workforce, what led you to leave your job? Please explain.

"Economy and the realization that two working parents was costing us more in childcare than I was earning."

— father of three children, ages 1, 2, and 6

"I left to become a stay at home parent as my wife had a much better job than I."

— father of two children, ages 4 and 7

"I wanted to be with my children more than I was able to. I was working later hours in the evenings so I could take care of them in the morning and take them to school. I didn't see them until the next morning. I needed more time with them while they still remembered me."

— father of two children, ages 6 and 8

"Cost and quality of child care, plus demands of work."

— father of an infant child

"I often had to work 60 to 100 hour weeks for months at a time, with little to no flexibility and the pay was not in line with the amount of work expected. It made sense for me to quit and raise the kids."

— father of two children, ages 2 and 6

Q. If you expect to return to your career, are you worried about your ability to return to the workforce? If yes, why are you worried?

"Yes. Time spent at home with children may be seen as a lack of recent experience."

— father of two children, ages 4 and 6

"Yes. I have been out of the workforce for over seven years and no longer have the skills to go back to my old job."

— father of two children, ages 4 and 7

"Would have difficulty competing for jobs with gap in employment history."

— father of two children, ages 4 and 8

"Travel, competition from younger workforce, time demands and pay."

— father of an infant child

Conclusion

Professional fathers view themselves as more than just the family breadwinner. Rather, fathers today are speaking out about broad work-family challenges and expressing a desire for change. The majority of professional fathers in our survey reported that balancing work and family causes conflict, pressure and frequent stress. In addition to expressing concern about having enough time to be the kind of dads they want to be, the overwhelming majority of respondents said they feel pressure to be both a provider and an engaged parent in their children's lives. Given the prevalence of these concerns, it is not surprising that respondents strongly support workplace and public policies that would give them more time and flexibility to care for their families.

When asked to select workplace and public policies that could personally help them juggle work and family, respondents' first choice—by a wide margin—was flexible work arrangements. Working father respondents also demonstrated broad support for several government policies, including subsidized, quality child care, tax breaks for parents, and paid family leave. All of these policies would ease financial pressures and enable working parents to experience less conflict about time. The professional fathers in our sample also emphasized the importance of supportive managers and workplace cultures, especially in encouraging them to take advantage of family-friendly policies. While the majority of respondents did not report job-related penalties due to fatherhood, a significant minority described negative treatment and disapproving comments, especially for taking parental leave after a child's birth or adoption. Although these fathers represent a minority of all respondents, the existence of such negative treatment suggests a notable barrier to achieving a more family-friendly society.

Family-friendly laws and policies are critical for *all* workers, as men and women alike struggle to meet the dual demands of work and life. Based on the responses in our survey, we offer several recommendations:

For employers. Following the lead of a growing number of progressive businesses, employers should recognize that flexibility is a powerful tool to recruit and retain top

talent, reduce turnover and enhance productivity. However, good workplace policies and programs are not enough—businesses should take proactive steps to ensure that employees who take advantage of flexible work arrangements and leave policies feel supported by managers and senior leadership. In addition, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued guidance describing “best practices” for workers with caregiving responsibilities.²¹ Employers should consult this guidance and consider implementing some or all of these recommendations. The EEOC guidance can be accessed at <http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/caregiver-best-practices.html>.

For policymakers. Policymakers should recognize that paid leave and other policies that support working families will benefit workers, families, businesses, and the health of the U.S. economy. Workplace flexibility is not just a perk for working mothers but a critical policy measure for all workers and their families. Specifically, federal, state, and local governments should support fair and flexible work policies, guarantee paid time off for illness and family care, and promote other policies that reduce the financial strain on working families.

For fathers. Continued research on the perspectives of fathers is important because it facilitates discussion and lets fathers know that they are not alone in their work-family concerns.²³ By speaking out, working together, and continuing to draw attention to work-family issues, fathers can successfully create change.



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¹⁷ Ibid. (stating that "[m]ost employers report that PFL had either a "positive effect" or "no noticeable effect" on productivity (89 percent), profitability/performance (91 percent), turnover (96 percent), and employee morale (99 percent).")

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²³ See, e.g., *The Evolution of Dad*, <http://www.evolutionofdad.com> (last visited May 28, 2011). The Evolution of Dad is a documentary that explores the evolving role of the contemporary American father.

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A Better Balance is a legal advocacy organization dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace and helping workers care for their families without risking their economic security.

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