



This is the English summary of the Dutch research report 'Visies op vaderschap' (Nikkelen, de Blécourt, 2017), a research conducted by Rutgers in partnership with Promundo-US, as a part of MenCare: A Global Fatherhood Campaign, with financial support from the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

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## Images of fatherhood Summary

# Summary

## Introduction

Though a lot has changed in the past decades, men and women are still not equally sharing the care for children. Dutch men do 30% of the unpaid care work and women 70%, and this is a figure that has not changed during the past ten years (SCP, 2013). Gender inequality in care tasks<sup>1</sup> is also reflected in a relatively restricted policy regarding paid paternity leave in the Netherlands. Recently, a bill was put forward in Parliament to extend paternity leave from two days to five. Compared to other European countries this is a very short period (ILO, 2014; Mercer, 2016); fathers in Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Denmark and Spain have the right to at least 10 days leave. The current two days' paternity leave is being criticised for being too short for a father to be able to bond with his child. To have a good "care career" fathers need to start bonding with their children from the start. A Norwegian study showed that fathers who had taken a few weeks leave, were generally more involved in the care of their children in the following years (Kotsadam, 2011).

International studies showed that when men take on more care tasks, the entire family benefits (cf Rutgers Manifest Rutgers 'vooruit met vaderschapsverlof', 2016). Fathers who have been able to bond with their children report fewer health problems and better relations with their partners. Children of fathers who are involved in their upbringing have higher grades, are healthier and show fewer behavioural issues. Thus, women will also have more opportunities of professional development. Current interventions to improve the balance between work and care are promoting women to find and keep work outside the home. However, in order to make a real difference, we must actively involve men in care tasks as well.

We need to develop a strong policy in order to increase fathers' active involvement in care tasks. It is, therefore, crucial to assess the personal, environmental and relational elements related to the role of fathers in domestic and care work. On top of that it is important to know how fathers feel about policies that aim at improving their active involvement in care tasks, so that one is able to respond adequately. This survey aims at obtaining a better insight in this issue.

## Start-up of study

The study was carried out by means of an on-line survey among a representative group of Dutch fathers with children aged 0 - 13. Most questions were taken from the questionnaire of The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES<sup>2</sup>). IMAGES concern men's attitude and behaviour with respect to gender equality, care work and fatherhood. The questionnaire is being used in several countries and the results can be compared internationally. Therefore, we kept very close to the original IMAGES questionnaire. If necessary, the questionnaire was adapted to the Dutch context and completed with questions that were relevant for the Dutch context. Respondents were recruited through the on-line panel of GfK. Several mothers, partners to the interviewed fathers were also interviewed. A total of 1.788 fathers and 578 mothers filled out the on-line questionnaire.

## Results

### Unbalanced division of tasks, but high satisfaction

The study showed that mothers generally did more domestic care work than fathers. This especially goes for domestic chores and less so for care work. Though most fathers and mothers are aware that mothers do more domestic and care work, they often both are satisfied with this division of tasks. However, there are still things to be gained, since many fathers feel they spend too little time with their children due to work.

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<sup>1</sup> By care work we understand practical matters such as wiping bottoms and cooking as well as giving social support such as discussing personal problems and going out to have fun.

<sup>2</sup> <http://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/>

### **Learn young, learn fair**

The role that a father plays within his family (towards his wife and children) seems to have been influenced by what he himself has learnt at home when he was a child. Fathers tend to take up more domestic tasks when they were used to do domestic work or help at home as children. Equally, if their fathers used to do domestic chores, the present fathers are now more inclined to take up domestic work themselves. This is also the case if their fathers -in-law used to do more domestic work. Whether these fathers' mothers did domestic chores or not, does not seem to be of any significance to the present role division. Fathers in particular seem to serve as a good example to their children, both sons and daughters.

### **Few stereotypical gender norms, except for the role of women in the care for her children**

Most fathers and mothers have few stereotypical gender norms regarding their role in the house. Women, however, are allotted a bigger role than men in the care for their children. Twenty-five percent of men and almost 30% of women say that a woman should work part-time when becoming a mother and almost 50% of all fathers and mothers report that women start working longer hours outside the home when fathers take up more care work.

### **Great support for measures to allow men to take on more care tasks**

Fathers and mothers greatly support the measures to enable men to carry out more care tasks. For example, 68% of fathers and 78% of mothers are for extending paternity leave. Half of fathers are also of the opinion that the government should encourage fathers to take on more care tasks. In general, younger fathers (up to 39 years) are more positive about these kind of measures than older fathers. Attitude to the measures is apparently related to the amount of household and care tasks that fathers carry out: Fathers who play a larger part in household and care tasks are more positive towards measures to improve fatherhood and paternity leave than fathers who are less involved in the household.

### **Better relationship with partner and child when fathers care for children more**

Fathers who take on more care tasks for their youngest child reported having a better relationship with them: They were, for example, more aware of what was going on in the life of their youngest child and felt involved in bringing up the child. As well as this, partners indicated being happier about their relationship when fathers carried out more care tasks.

### **Fathers' great responsibility for the upkeep of the family**

There seems to be a financial barrier to father's taking on more care tasks. A quarter of the fathers who did not take unpaid leave after the birth of their youngest child indicated that it was not financially feasible. This was 32% among fathers of lower income level. Moreover, more than two thirds of all fathers indicated that they, in general, had the biggest responsibility for financially maintaining the family.

## **Recommendations**

Fathers and mothers greatly support measures aimed to allow men the opportunity to perform more care tasks, especially among young fathers. Fathers have an exemplary role. As they carry out more household and care tasks, this will in turn increase the chance of their daughters *and* sons sharing care tasks more equally later. Investing in more equal role division is therefore also an investment for the future.

### **1. Increase paternity leave for all fathers**

For many fathers, the current ruling on parental leave is a financial barrier to taking on the role of caring parent after the birth of their child. An extension of the legal possibilities would give all fathers the opportunity to divide the care of their child from birth more equally.

### **2. Support parents in equally dividing work and care**

Traditional gender roles still strongly influence the division between work and care. Fathers take the greatest responsibility for the upkeep of the family; mothers take on most of the care tasks. In order

to achieve an ideal division between work and care, parents have to know how to avoid the pitfalls of falling back into the traditional role patterns.

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### 3. Change in mentality

Images and expectations in relation to the role of men in the household are an important consideration in how men share the care tasks with their partner. Fathers who as a child were expected to contribute to work in the household, take a more active role in their own household. Fathers and mothers who have seen their own father carrying out care tasks also share the care tasks more equally.

Caring fathers should be a given, just like working mothers. This requires a change in mentality at different levels in the context of where children grow up: fathers and mothers, employers, care institutions, education, media and in the images reflecting men and women.