



STATE OF AMERICA'S FATHERS

2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Men Care

 PROMUNDO

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State of America's Fathers A MenCare Advocacy Publication

View the full report at: www.men-care.org/soaf

State of America's Fathers was produced by Promundo-US, as a MenCare advocacy publication. MenCare is a global fatherhood campaign active in over 35 countries on five continents. Its mission is to promote men's involvement as equitable, nonviolent fathers and caregivers in order to achieve family well-being, gender equality, and better health for mothers, fathers, and children.

MenCare partners work at multiple levels to engage men, women, institutions, and policymakers in achieving gender equality. Partners launch media campaigns; implement evidence-based programming; conduct training with healthcare and service providers; and execute targeted advocacy with health and social-service systems, governments, and the international community. Many partners have adapted MenCare's Program P, a program that engages men in active fatherhood from their partners' pregnancies through their children's early years. Qualitative results from Program P's implementation have shown positive changes in the lives of men and their families: in Sri Lanka, men decreased their use of alcohol, while in Nicaragua, they improved relationships with their children and partners and increased their participation in household work and childcare.

Around the world, MenCare partners are working to show how men's involvement in caregiving can help improve health and child development outcomes and decrease violence. From Guatemala to Indonesia, evidence from partners indicates that working with the health sector has led to positive policy changes that support men's involvement in prenatal and postnatal care. In South Africa, advocacy initiatives encourage policymakers to take a stand against corporal punishment and to legislate paid leave for new parents. In Armenia, work with youth and couples aims to transform norms that lead to prenatal sex selection, while in Portugal, materials in health centers inform patients about parental leave legislation and the benefits of involved fatherhood. To learn more about MenCare, visit: www.men-care.org.

MenCare and its partners launched the first-ever *State of the World's Fathers* report in June 2015, providing a global view of the state of men's contribution to parenting and caregiving. The report was unveiled at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and subsequently launched in ten other cities around the world. It has reached millions of individuals and informed new paternity leave bills and legislation in three countries, as well as regional and thematic summaries that have inspired further advocacy for men's involvement in equitable, nonviolent caregiving. Building on the momentum of *State of the World's Fathers* and partners' related reports around the world, MenCare has prepared this *State of America's Fathers* report – just in time for Father's Day, 2016.

MenCare is coordinated by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice in collaboration with its steering committee: the MenEngage Alliance, Save the Children, and Rutgers.

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Men **Care**



STATE OF AMERICA'S FATHERS 2016

A MENCARE ADVOCACY PUBLICATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Center for the Study of
Men and Masculinities

AT STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STATE OF AMERICA'S FATHERS AT A GLANCE

Fatherhood in America is changing – and changing fast.

We have come a long way toward achieving gender equality in parenting, but there are key areas where the United States (U.S.) is failing its parents and failing to achieve equality. National data show that women with children under the age of six spend just over an hour a day on hands-on care, while men only do about half that amount. Fathers are taking on more childcare and domestic work than ever before – and they say they want to do more – but we still have a long way to go.

The U.S. also fails to support its families – particularly those at the lowest income levels – with living wages, paid parental leave, and other programs and policies to ensure that children get the care they need. We are not yet a child-friendly and parent-supportive country. In this first-ever *State of America's Fathers* report, we present a plan for how to become one.

State of America's Fathers provides recommendations on what it will take to reach equality in caregiving, to achieve work-life balance for parents in all their diversity, and to support nonresident, low-income fathers. The report also presents new, nationally representative data on changes in work-life balance from the 2016 National Study of the Changing Workforce.

MEN'S ROLES AS CAREGIVERS: It's about (more than) time

While men's time spent on childcare and housework has increased, women continue to do more of both.

The last half-century has seen incredible progress when it comes to mothers and fathers proactively and equitably sharing household work and childcare responsibilities.

Over the past 30 years, American fathers have increased time spent with children during the workday by 65 percent.¹ In a 2007 survey, 50 percent of fathers with young children reported diapering and feeding their children more than once per day, 56 percent reported bathing their children a few times or more per week, and 39 percent reported getting up always or often with their children at night.²

Women, on the other hand, say that men are still not doing a fair share of the care

work. New data in this report show that, as of 2016, nearly half (48 percent) of currently partnered heterosexual American fathers self-identify as their children's primary caregiver or report sharing that responsibility equally with their partners. However, only 38 percent of mothers report that this is the case. Additionally, most mothers report taking the primary responsibility for cooking (63 percent) and cleaning (65 percent). And this is the case even though women, including mothers, are entering the workforce at a higher rate than ever before, while men's workforce participation has slightly declined.

Even in the workforce, men are not participating equally in caring. While women have made great strides into traditionally male professional spaces, men have not made similar moves into caring professions. Many female-dominated professions are still paid less than traditionally male-dominated professions, even if the job requires a similar level of education. As one example of how slow the change has been: the percentage of kindergarten or pre-kindergarten teaching jobs held by men in 1980 was 2 percent – and in 2014, it was still 2 percent.³

Despite these trends, new evidence shows that men are as hard-wired to take care of children as women are.

The neural-network and brain-hormone changes displayed by primary-caregiving fathers are similar to those found in primary-caregiving mothers.⁴ Multiple studies confirm that men who are in close physical contact with their infant children show changes in body chemistry similar to women's – hormonal changes that promote or facilitate adult-infant bonding. The bottom line is that, apart from breastfeeding, men can care for children in every way that women can.

FATHERHOOD AND THE WORKPLACE: Everybody wants to “have it all”

Men are now facing the same work-life stress that women have for decades. Paid leave for all parents, along with other supportive policies, would make life substantially easier for many working Americans. But as it stands, most fathers – and many mothers – do not have these options.

Parents of all genders want men to spend more time with their children, but the workplace still has not caught up. In 1977, 35 percent of fathers in dual-earner families reported work-life conflict. By 2008, that number had increased to 60 percent.⁵

One reason for this increase in work-life conflict is the lack of adequate leave policies; the U.S. is the only high-income nation that does not offer paid parental leave – for mothers or fathers. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 established unpaid leave for new parents, including adoptive and foster parents, but its restrictions mean that only about 40 percent of the workforce actually has access to it, with the least access among the poorest segment of the workforce.⁶ Fully 95 percent of low-wage workers in the U.S. do not have the option of taking paid family leave through their employers’ policies for the birth of a child or to care for a seriously ill family member.⁷

However, flexible policies that include paid time off for men are beneficial for women, children, and men alike. Longer leave for fathers is associated with reduced stress for mothers and fathers’ greater involvement in the long term. It is also a protective factor against postpartum depression.⁸ States like California that offer some paid leave provide additional evidence for its benefits: 91 percent of participants in California’s new Paid Family Leave program who had low-quality jobs reported that taking paid leave had a positive effect on their ability to care for a new child.⁹ Shorter leave allotments for fathers, on the other hand, are associated with increased marital dissatisfaction, depression, and anxiety.

States that offer up to 16 weeks of paid leave for both fathers and mothers have been able to achieve it via a payroll tax of about 1 percent. They have also seen multiple benefits for women’s wages, women’s participation in the paid work force, and increased equality in the share of caregiving across genders. States like California and New York are paving the way for the kinds of leave policies that other states, cities, and the federal government should emulate.

FATHERS, SEX, AND HEALTH: **Fathers' multiple roles in their families' well-being**

The healthiest families are those in which fathers are doing their part to support sexual health and healthy pregnancies, where all family members are seeking and receiving adequate healthcare, and where no one is using violence.

Raising men to be responsible partners as adults means talking to them from early on about healthy sexuality. Unfortunately, sexuality education remains a highly politicized issue in the United States, with great variability across states, school systems, and religious institutions. One study found that roughly half of the students surveyed in grades 7 through 12 reported needing more information regarding their sexual health.¹⁰ And as many as 30 percent of teenage boys report not receiving any sexuality education before first intercourse.

When men share in contraceptive decision-making, they are more likely to be involved fathers. Men who feel that a pregnancy is intended and well-timed tend to be more likely to attend childbirth classes, to be present at the child's birth, and to engage more fully after the child's birth.¹¹ The report authors firmly advocate for a woman's autonomy and right to choose to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. A supportive male partner can help to ensure her access to safe and legal abortion services, as well as provide emotional support as needed during the termination of a pregnancy.

If and when their partners become pregnant, fathers can provide crucial emotional and psychological support during the pregnancy. Fathers' attendance at breastfeeding classes is linked with increased uptake of healthy breastfeeding, and fathers' financial support to unmarried mothers during pregnancy is linked with decreased risk of low birth weight.^{12,13} Pregnant women with emotionally supportive male partners are more likely to maintain healthy pregnancy behaviors, to have deliveries without complications, and to exhibit better postpartum mental health.^{14,15,16}

The lifelong health prospects of men in the U.S. are significantly poorer than women's, stemming in part from men's poor health-seeking behaviors. Some research finds that men who are involved fathers are more likely to care for their own health. When men do not take care of their own health, their families – including their children – bear the burden. Research from the U.S. and around the world concludes that men who self-identify most strongly with a definition of manhood pegged to physical strength and self-reliance are less likely to seek adequate healthcare.^{17,18,19,20,21} In a recent study in the U.S., men aged 30 to 44 were three times less likely than women to have visited a physician in the prior year. In the same study, 24 percent of men said they would handle worries about health by waiting as long as possible before seeking help.²²

While most men, and most fathers, are not violent, we know that too many men still use violence against female partners and children. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that nearly 700,000 children in the U.S. were victims of abuse and/or neglect in fiscal year 2013.²³ Children in the first year of life were most at risk of one or more forms of violence or neglect, with more than 2 percent of children being victimized. Child maltreatment and abuse are complex issues, with multiple common perpetrators other than parents, but they are also preventable. Parent-training programs that include fathers have shown evidence of effectiveness in reducing rates of child maltreatment; these should be scaled up.

NONRESIDENT, LOW-INCOME FATHERS: Dismantling inequality

Marriage is not the defining feature of American families anymore, and against the cultural narrative or stereotype of absent fatherhood, the greatest proportion of nonresident fathers are consistently very active in the lives of their children.

More children are being born into cohabiting or unmarried families than ever before.

Census data from 2014 identify 7.9 million opposite-sex unmarried-couple households in the United States, up from 5.5 million in 2000 and close to zero in 1960.²⁴ Combined with high divorce rates, data confirm that as many as 50 percent of all children in the U.S. spend some portion of their childhood years living in single-parent households.²⁵

In the U.S. today, there are approximately eight to ten million nonresident fathers, including both divorced and never-married fathers – an unprecedented development in American family life.

²⁶ Men with lower incomes and less education are far more likely to become nonresident fathers; the majority of men of childbearing age who lack a four-year college degree either are or will eventually become nonresident fathers.²⁷

Due to the legacy of unjust sentencing policies in the U.S., incarceration is the cause for many fathers' nonresident status.

One study estimates that nearly 10 percent of children in the United States who are under the age of 18 have a parent who is either currently incarcerated or who has been incarcerated at some point.²⁸ In the U.S., 2.7 million children have an incarcerated parent,²⁹ and 92 percent of incarcerated parents are fathers.³⁰

Nonresident fathers' financial support – via court-ordered child-support payments or other informal contributions – does meaningfully benefit the health and development of children.

The provision of child support is associated with positive cognitive, academic, and behavioral outcomes for children; financial support from a nonresident father has also been shown to decrease childhood food insecurity.^{31,32} Research has further shown positive associations between economically disadvantaged fathers' *informal* child-support contributions and children's well-being.³³ Additional evidence shows more positive effects for families where child support was cooperative rather than court-ordered. Fathers who paid their child support were also more likely to be involved in other ways in their children's lives.

Even as nonresident fathers' financial contributions have been shown to be beneficial, seeking unrealistic financial contributions may do unintended harm to children, fathers, and families.

Too often, efforts to reduce the high poverty rates faced by children in female-headed families have attempted to induce noncustodial parents – mostly fathers – to provide more financial support.³⁴ One study found that overall government expenses to enforce child-support payments jumped from \$800 million in 1978 to \$5.2 billion in 2002, but that the majority of children eligible for this support still do not receive it.³⁵ High child-support obligations may therefore have the opposite of their intended effect. Rather than increasing children's well-being, evidence suggests that the imposition of higher and unrealistic obligations on low-income fathers increases their noncompliance.³⁶

High child-support obligations take a particular toll on men who lack a four-year college degree, most of whom have earnings in the bottom half of the earnings distribution. Many of these men have not completed secondary school, are chronically unemployed, and have criminal records. These characteristics increase their likelihood of being nonresident fathers in the first place. According to data from the National Survey of Family Growth, approximately 71 percent of the country's nonresident fathers earn no more than \$40,000 per year.³⁷

The key point is this: fathers' inability to pay is a paramount reason that these men do not provide child support; fathers with incomes under \$20,000 are those with the highest arrears.³⁸ Mothers of children with nonresident fathers acknowledge that financial and structural factors – far beyond the fathers' intransigence or unwillingness to pay – are the primary obstacles to their receiving full child support. Mothers list fathers' unemployment, incarceration, and economic disadvantage among the primary reasons that they do not expect to receive child-support payments.^{39,40,41,42} Many single mothers in low-income families *want* their children's nonresident fathers to be involved in their children's lives, as co-parents and caregivers, as well as financial providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In order to become a child-friendly, parent-supportive, and gender-equal country, we must:

1. Teach *all* of our children, from early on, about the value of – and their opportunity to be – both caregivers *and* professionals.

This education starts in childhood with a fundamental shift in how we treat boys and girls, the expectations and aspirations we set for them, and – importantly – the ways we teach them about caregiving. This education needs to take place at home, in schools, and in our communities. If we value the participation of *all* genders as equal caregivers, we must teach this at the youngest ages. This means scaling up youth programs and classroom activities that give boys and girls hands-on experiences with caregiving and break down traditional gender norms.

2. Improve services and education – related to sexuality, caregiving, violence, and parenting – for youth and adults.

Involved parenting is built on a foundation of reproductive justice and the ability of couples and individuals to plan when and how they want to have children. Supportive programs and services include comprehensive sexuality education (that is developmentally appropriate, that is biologically and anatomically accurate, and that includes discussions of contraception, abortion, and consent) and quality reproductive health services. This also means teaching both parenting and co-parenting skills to individuals of all genders, and regardless of their resident status, as well as investing in programs that prevent violence. Special efforts are needed to engage men and boys more fully in reproductive health and rights, and to help them see themselves as full reproductive partners.

3. Pass national paid, equal, and non-transferable leave for mothers and fathers.

A national policy guaranteeing *fully* paid, job-protected leave of equal length for mothers and fathers after a birth or adoption can and should be combined with other policies – subsidized childcare and early childhood education, among others – to fundamentally improve parents' and children's relationships, well-being, and opportunities to thrive. Families need it, want it, and will vote for it. Paid, equal, non-transferable parental leave can bring great social benefits for low implementation cost.

4. Push for supportive workplaces.

Workplace policies should value what our parents do as caregivers as much as they value their professional achievements. Such policies should include, in addition to parental leave: flexible work hours, sick leave, and a living wage, as well as others that allow parents to have greater work-life balance. These policies should be supported by workplace cultures that respect the caregiving responsibilities of all genders.

5. Encourage men to enter health, caregiving, and teaching professions.

Compared with the great strides women have made into traditionally male-dominated professions, including the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, men's movement into

traditionally female-dominated professions has been inadequate. Bringing more men into the HEAL (health, education, administration, and literacy) professions will accelerate social shifts toward greater acceptance and valuing of caregiving qualities in all genders. In addition to these steps, we can also implement national campaigns to eradicate outdated notions that men are inept – or worse, dangerous – when it comes to care of children.

6. End the unnecessary battle of the sexes over fit parents' custody of children, in cases of divorce and separation, and enact legislation to promote shared custody, in the interest of gender equality and children's well-being.

The issue of custody in cases of divorce and separation has been a political fault line for families for too long. It is time to support common-sense reforms that move us toward equality. As men do a more equitable share of caregiving and become full co-parents, the time has come to support joint custody when it is in the best interest of the child. In situations where there is no history or threat of violence or abuse, the presumption of joint physical custody of children after a relationship or marital breakdown is the fairer, more gender-just approach. Contrary to the misguided notion that this debate is one of men versus women, legislation to encourage more equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities (in most, not all, cases) after divorce or separation will bring real benefits to mothers, fathers, and children alike. This step, which many states have already taken, will further erode the inequitable care burden placed on women, as it simultaneously encourages men to play their part not only as breadwinners but also as caregivers.

7. Support the poorest fathers and families with a living wage, a reformed justice system, and additional services that encourage and support their caregiving.

The challenges of fully involved fatherhood are amplified for America's lowest-income and nonresident fathers, a great majority of whom seek to play a positive role in their children's lives. Increasing the minimum wage to a *living* wage for low-income individuals would bring significant benefits to these parents and their families. The federal tax code must also be modified so that nonresident fathers who pay child support are eligible for an increased Earned Income Tax Credit in line with these contributions. Reforming the criminal justice system – which systematically and disproportionately incarcerates young, low-income men of color – will help more fathers to be involved with their children, and will substantially improve the employment and financial prospects of these young men. These policies should be combined with those mentioned above – such as universal, paid, non-transferable, job-protected family leave, and increased affordability and accessibility of childcare and healthcare for all fathers.

8. Count fathers and carry out more research on fathers.

We know that if we do not count fathers and what they do, then fathers will not count. More resources need to be invested in collection of time-use data to better understand who is responsible for the childcare and domestic work in our country and how this is changing. These investments should also include improved research on low-income families and effective methods of tracking nonresident fathers. The better we understand the attitudes and behaviors of all types of fathers, the better we can encourage and support them as involved caregivers.

THE FATHERS' INDEX

Cost of raising a child, born in 2013, until the age of 18: **\$245,340**

Full-time, full-year federal minimum wage income over the course of 18 years: **\$271,440**

Cost of childcare for an infant, as a share of full-time, full-year minimum wage income in Washington, DC: **103%**

Share of **stay-at-home fathers** who said that they are not working because they are caring for their home and family rather than because they are unable to find work, ill or disabled, in school, or retired,

in 1976-1979: **1 in 100**

In 1989: **1 in 20**

In 2012: **1 in 5**

Percentage of American working **men who agreed that it is better** for all involved if "the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children," in 1977: **74**

In 2008: **40**

Percentage of physician/surgeon **jobs held by women** in 1980: **14**

In 2014: **37**

Percentage of kindergarten or pre-kindergarten teaching **jobs held by men** in 1980: **2**

In 2014: **2**

Percentage of heterosexual couples with children under age 18 in the home who have an adopted child: **3**

Of **same-sex couples**: **13**

Minimum estimated number of U.S. children with at least one gay parent: **6,000,000**

Percentage of workers with low-quality jobs who took leave under California's new **Paid Family Leave** program and who reported that the leave had a positive effect on their ability to care for a new child: **91**

Percentage of low-wage workers nationwide who have access to paid family leave through their employer: **5**

Percentage increase in the **time U.S. fathers spend with their children** on workdays, over the past 30 years: **65**

Percentage of fathers in dual-earner families who reported work-life conflict in 1977: **35**

In 2008: **60**

Percentage of parents in 2015 who work 35 to 40 hours per week who feel they do not **spend enough time with their children: 59**

Of those who work 41 or more hours per week: **74**

Other than the United States, which does not guarantee nationwide **paid maternity leave**, percentage of remaining 33 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) who do: **100**

Year when Norway established one of the first maternity leave policies in Europe: **1909**

Weeks of paid leave provided by California's Paid Family Leave program, the most generous in the nation, in 2016: **6**

To be provided starting in 2018 by New York's newly approved program: **8**

Starting in 2021: **12**

Number of U.S. states where **sexuality and/or HIV education** provided in public schools is required to be medically, factually, or technically accurate: **20**

Number of U.S. states where public schools are not required to provide any sexuality education: **26**

Percentage of American 18-year-olds who have had sex: **61**

Estimated annual cost to U.S. taxpayers resulting from teen childbearing: **\$9,400,000,000**

Proportion of U.S. resident men born in 2001 expected to go to prison during their lifetime, if current **incarceration rates** remain unchanged: **1 in 9**

Among white men: **1 in 17**

Among black men: **1 in 3**

Number of children in the U.S. with a **parent in prison** or jail: **2,700,000**

Percentage of parents in prison who are fathers: **92**

Percentage increase in the number of U.S. children with a parent in prison since 1991: **79**

Minimum estimated number of **nonresident fathers** in the United States: **8,000,000**

Percentage of children who will live in a household without their biological father at some point in their childhood: **50**

Percentage of nonresident fathers who earn less than \$40,000 annually: **71**

Number of unauthorized **immigrant parents** living with their U.S. citizen children under age 18, in 1995: **1,300,000**

In 2012: **3,300,000**

Total number of children of first-generation immigrants living in the U.S., in 2013: **17,600,000**

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"I am tremendously grateful to Promundo for continuing the work started through their 2011 Clinton Global Initiative commitment to engage men as fathers and caregivers and to promote research, practices and policies that are in the best interest of our families and gender equity."

Chelsea Clinton, Vice Chair of the Clinton Foundation

"State of America's Fathers is a welcome step in laying out a plan for how fathers can be positive role models for their children and equal partners in parenting."

Jessica Seinfeld, Founder & Board President of GOOD+ Foundation

"The state of America's fathers is every bit as important as the state of America's mothers for our collective health and wealth. It is as demeaning to me to see them only as helpers in the home as it is to see women only as helpers or secondary workers in the office. Bravo to Promundo for putting fathers forward!"

Anne-Marie Slaughter, President & CEO of New America and author of *Unfinished Business: Women, Men, Work, Family*

"At Planned Parenthood we know that every family is unique and deserves to be supported and valued. It's crucial that fathers are becoming more involved in parenting and sharing the responsibility of housework and childcare. All parents – fathers and mothers – need access to paid family leave, supportive workplaces, and affordable childcare. All parents should have the education, healthcare, and support they need to keep themselves and their families healthy and safe."

Cecile Richards, President of Planned Parenthood Federation of America

"More men than ever want to be actively involved in creating loving, healthy homes for their families. Unfortunately, as this report points out, our public policy is decades behind and even works against many parents – men and women. On this Father's Day, we honor the power of fathers in raising the next generation of boys to value safe, healthy families and futures without violence for all."

Esta Soler, President & Founder of Futures Without Violence

"Gender equality in caregiving has widespread benefits, from the health of our children all the way to a more robust U.S. economy. We must support all parents, so equality isn't just for a select few. It is high time for mothers and fathers to have access to paid family leave, to parent equally, and to model healthy behavior."

Jennifer Siebel Newsom, Founder & CEO of *The Representation Project* and filmmaker of *Miss Representation* and *The Mask You Live In*

"A CALL TO MEN supports the fatherhood revolution and its potential to advance gender equality. Breaking out of the Man Box will allow fathers to be fully engaged as partners and caregivers. These fathers are sure to be part of the Next Generation of Manhood."

Ted Bunch, Co-Founder of A CALL TO MEN

"After *State of the World's Fathers* broke so much important ground, it's great to see Promundo dive deeper, into the peculiar experience of dads in America. It's an equally fascinating read, because Promundo takes such a comprehensive, unflinching look at how American fatherhood stands apart, for better and for worse."

Doug French, Co-Founder of the Dad 2.0 Summit

Men Care



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