



MEDIA RELEASE

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BRINGING UP BABY: FATHERS NOT ALWAYS ABLE TO SHARE THE LOAD

The birth of a child changes little for Australian fathers' working lives, according to an analysis of employment trends in the past few decades by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Institute Director Anne Hollonds said that while mothers' employment alters dramatically after having a child and for years to come, fathers' employment remains virtually unchanged.

'While fathers today may be more involved in child care, especially at weekends, the number of hours fathers spend in employment remains the same after the arrival of children,' Ms Hollonds said.

'Mothers, on the other hand, tend to be the primary carers of children under one and take years to gradually increase their time in paid employment.

'When it comes to "choices" about parenting responsibilities, the availability of parental leave for fathers and the gender pay gap are still barriers for couples who would otherwise choose to share family responsibilities more equally.'

Institute Senior Research Fellow Dr Jennifer Baxter said fathers do spend time on parenting and child care when they have young children, but they fit this in around their hours of employment.

'Fathers are more likely to choose flexible work or working from home arrangements, rather than reduce their overall work hours, to fit work around child care,' Dr Baxter said.

'For couple fathers, the vast majority are in full-time work. They rarely take up part-time hours as a flexible work option to assist in the care of children.

'Instead fathers continue to work full-time in the labour market where expectations about the need to work long hours tend to prevail.

'Single fathers have more diverse work patterns, with higher proportions in part-time work or unemployed, but these arrangements are not likely to always reflect active choices to spend fewer hours in employment.'

Dr Baxter said the most common arrangement fathers use to care for children is flexible work (30%), followed by working from home (15%), while a few fathers (5%) work part-time.

'While there was steady growth in the proportion of fathers taking up flexible work options to care for children between 1996 and 2008, this trend has since levelled off over the last decade.'

The CEO of Parents At Work, Emma Walsh, said fathers' reluctance to change their working lives or to take parental leave is based on continued adherence to traditional gender roles and the gender pay gap.

'For example, Australia does not have a nationally legislated approach to "shared parental leave" and as a result fathers are often labelled as secondary carers. Most employers provide limited parental leave for secondary carers, if any at all,' Ms Walsh said.

'Fathers are conscious of a stigma and bias around taking extended leave, especially when they are unable to see their male colleagues taking leave.

'The gender pay gap means that men traditionally earn more in the family and this too affects a father's decision to take extended leave or to consider changing their work arrangements.



'Parental leave for fathers needs be actively encouraged and incentivised. Companies need to develop an organisational culture that encourages men to take leave. Importantly, fathers in leadership positions should themselves take leave, leading by example and removing any bias within the workplace.

'Fathers would then have a better balance between work and family and spend more time with their children, while mothers would have the opportunity to pursue their employment with flexibility and purpose.

'By actively promoting men and women as equal carers through shared parental leave, we have the opportunity to narrow the gender pay gap, boost workplace productivity and champion Australian parents in both their family and work goals.'

To access a copy of the AIFS' *Fathers and Work – A Statistical Overview* by Dr Jennifer Baxter go to www3.aifs.gov.au/institute/media/docs/BbtSqQ4WSEseH2/4-Fathers-and-Work_1904.pdf

or CEO of Parents At Work Emma Walsh's article *Fathers and Parental Leave*, also published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, go to www3.aifs.gov.au/institute/media/docs/BbtSqQ4WSEseH2/7-Fathers-and-parental-leave_1904.pdf

Parents At Work is a social enterprise supporting parents and organisations to better manage the challenges that employees face when balancing work and family life.

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AIFS conducts original research to increase understanding of Australian families and the issues that affect them, see aifs.gov.au