



WHY DADS NEED LONGER PARENTAL LEAVE: EVIDENCE FROM THE EQUAL PARENTING PROJECT

Background: What are the benefits of parents sharing care?

Parents sharing care and fathers taking longer leave to care for their children has long-lasting effects for families, businesses, the economy, and society. Longer leave has been linked to greater ongoing involvement of dads in childcare,¹ higher quality father-child relationships,² improved labour force participation of women after having children,³ and a reduction of the motherhood penalty by contributing to lower gender pay gaps within couples.⁴

This briefing presents findings from a recent Parental Leave survey carried out by the Equal Parenting Project. The survey focused on men who either have or do not have children but wish children/more children in future. It explored whether they want to share care, what prevents them from doing so, and what would encourage them to take on more care.

Why do dads want to share care?

The survey found that 71% of respondents believe parents should share parental leave equally. The most common reasons men gave for wanting to take leave and share care were: to spend quality time with their child (63%), to share care with their partner (55%), to enhance their relationship with their partner (45%), to better combine work and family life (41%), and to be a role model to their child (41%). About a third of respondents also said they wanted to share care to support their partner to return to work (35%) or to support their partner to breastfeed (35%).

65%

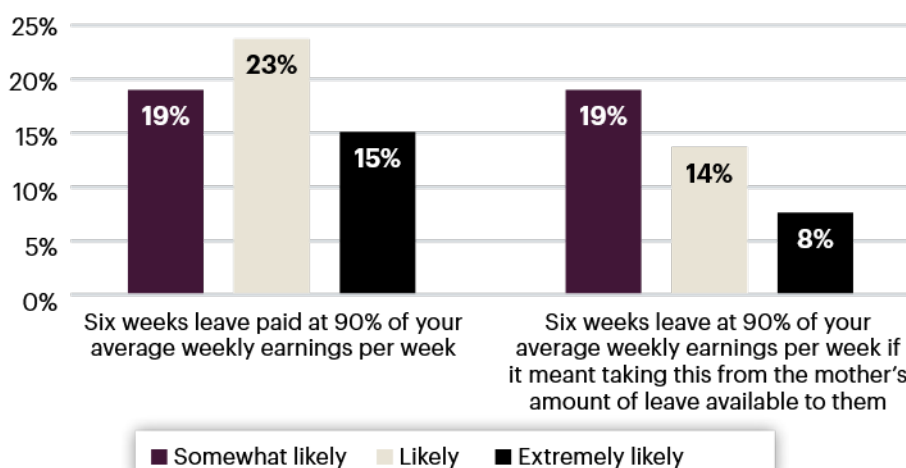
of men surveyed said families cannot afford for fathers to take leave

preventing fathers from taking parental leave, with 65% of men believing that families cannot afford for fathers to take leave. Related to this, 68% felt it was financially better for families to use Maternity Pay, which offers a higher rate of pay for the first six weeks (90% average weekly earnings) and is paid for 39 weeks (and may be enhanced), compared with just two weeks of Paternity Leave. In addition, 62% pointed to a lack of awareness of the leave available as preventing fathers from taking leave. Beyond these barriers, men also highlighted workplace consequences as preventing fathers from taking leave, including the belief that taking leave is frowned upon in the workplace (53%), fear of discrimination at work for using leave (48%), and concerns about the impact on a father's career (61%).

Men were particularly concerned about being perceived negatively at work if they took leave. When asked about what could happen if a male colleague in their organization took longer leave, 39% believed they would be offered decreased responsibility at work on return and 37% feared they would experience termination if the company was

What prevents dads from sharing care?

Financial pressures emerged as the most frequently cited barrier





downsized. This highlights the need to offer fathers and non-birthing parents discrimination protection when they take longer leave for any future leave offered at statutory and industry level.

Men responding to the survey felt that current policies make it relatively easy to use short periods of parental leave but much harder to use longer periods of leave. Only 17% of men reported that two weeks leave was difficult to use, while 31% perceived difficulty using one month leave, rising to 46% for three months.

What would inspire fathers to share more care?

The data shows that men would be much more likely to take longer leave and share more care if they had longer and better paid Paternity/ Parental Leave.

Men say they would be likely to take longer Paternity Leave if it was paid

at 90% of average weekly earnings. They also say they would be more likely to take longer Paternity Leave if it does not involve taking leave away from the mother which is the case under the current system of Shared Parental Leave policy.

68%

highlighted that it was financially better for families to use Maternity Pay

Fathers were significantly more likely to take longer leave if they worked in an organisation that enhanced (longer and better pay) parental leave. Specifically, 54% of new fathers working in an organisation that enhanced parental leave took more than two weeks, compared

to only 38% of new fathers in an organisation that did not enhance their leave offering.

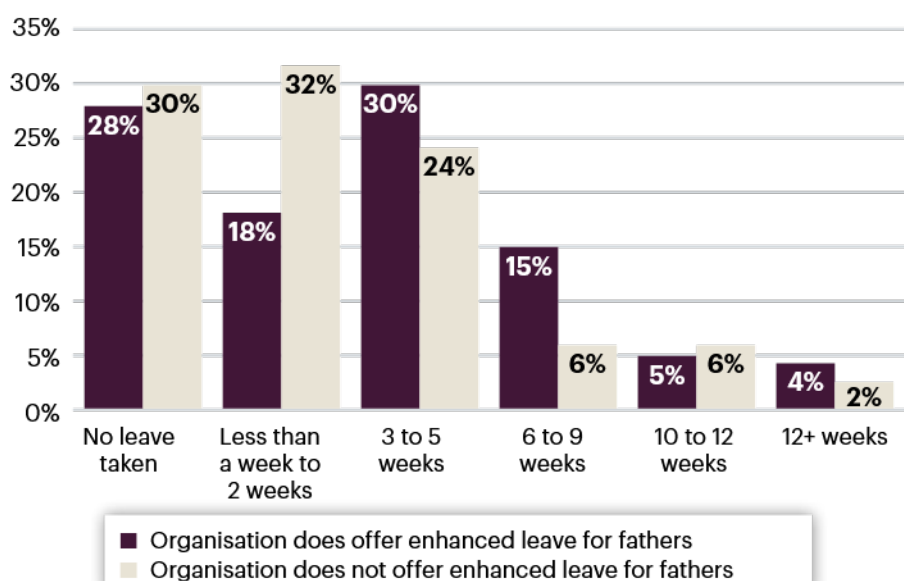
What can be done to help dads take more Paternity Leave and share care?

- 1 Increase the length and pay of Paternity Leave or other Parental Leave aimed at fathers and non-birthing parents to make it a financially viable option for families.
- 2 Make Paternity leave and Shared Parental Leave a day-one right.
- 3 Provide stronger protection against discrimination for those taking extended paternity leave or other forms of parental leave aimed at fathers or non-birthing parents.
- 4 Extend eligibility criteria for parental leave and pay to self-employed parents and workers so they can access Paternity and Shared Parental Leave.
- 5 Improve communications around all parental leave options so families can make informed decisions.
- 6 Encourage companies to monitor and analyse uptake of Paternity and Shared Parental Leave, disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and job level and consider including some of this data in gender pay gap reporting.
- 7 Encourage companies to publish parental leave policies externally to enhance transparency, attract talent and reinforce commitment to gender equality.

References

1. Meil, G., et al., The Impact of Paternity Leave Compared to Unemployment on Child Care and Housework Distribution in Spain. *Journal of Family Issues*, 2021. 44(3): p. 633-653.
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*The Equal Parenting Project's Parental Leave Survey was conducted between August and October 2024. It surveyed 706 men aged between 18 and 45 who either have or do not have children but wish children/ more children in future. Respondents were limited to those eligible for parental leave and who were in employment. The survey used quota sampling across age and income.



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