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*OF THE*

*WORLD'S*

*FATHERS*

*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*



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## *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

A MenCare Advocacy Publication  
2015

# State of the World's Fathers: Executive Summary

## A MenCare Advocacy Publication

View the report at [sowf.men-care.org](http://sowf.men-care.org)

**About MenCare:** This report was produced by MenCare, a global campaign to promote men and boys' involvement as equitable, non-violent caregivers. With activities in more than 30 countries, MenCare partners carry out joint advocacy initiatives, research, and programming to engage men in positive parenting, equitable caregiving, violence prevention and in maternal, newborn, and child health. The campaign is co-coordinated by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice, with Rutgers, Save the Children, and the MenEngage Alliance serving as Steering Committee members. For more information about the campaign and its partners, visit MenCare at [www.men-care.org](http://www.men-care.org).

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**Suggested citation:** Levtov R, van der Gaag N, Greene M, Kaufman M, and Barker G (2015). *State of the World's Fathers: Executive Summary: A MenCare Advocacy Publication*. Washington, DC: Promundo, Rutgers, Save the Children, Sonke Gender Justice, and the MenEngage Alliance.

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Version revised 23 June 2015.

# The State of the World's Fathers at a Glance: Summary and Recommendations

Fathers matter. Father–child relationships, in all communities and at all stages of a child’s life, have profound and wide-ranging impacts on children that last a lifetime, whether these relationships are positive, negative, or lacking. Men’s participation as fathers and as caregivers also matters tremendously for women’s lives. And, it positively affects the lives of men themselves.

Approximately 80 percent of men will become biological fathers at some point in their lives, and virtually all men have some connection to children – as relatives, as teachers, as coaches, or simply as community members. Whether they are biological fathers, stepfathers, adoptive or foster fathers, or legal guardians; whether they are brothers, uncles, or grandfathers; whether they are in same-sex or opposite-sex relationships; and whether they live with their children or not, men’s participation in the daily care of others has a lasting influence on the lives of children, women, and men, and an enduring impact on the world around them.

Massive changes in the workplace and in households are bringing changes to men’s participation as caregivers – that is, the state of the world’s fathers is changing. Yet, men’s involvement

in caregiving has too often been missing from public policies, from systematic data collection and research, and from efforts to promote women's empowerment.

This first ever *State of the World's Fathers* report brings together key international research findings along with program and policy examples related to men's participation in caregiving; in sexual and reproductive health and rights; in maternal, newborn, and child health; in violence and violence prevention; and in child development.

*State of the World's Fathers* has the potential to put some of the most exciting and farthest-reaching changes happening in the lives of men *and* women around the world into the public eye and onto the public agenda. The move toward more involved fatherhood and equitable caregiving must be supported as part of a wider agenda to challenge the structures and ideologies that restrict us all from developing as full human beings in a more just and equal society.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Involved fatherhood helps children thrive.** As men take on more caregiving, research increasingly confirms that fathers' involvement affects children in much the same ways that mothers' involvement does. Fathers' involvement has been linked to higher cognitive development and school achievement, better mental health for boys and girls, and lower rates of delinquency in sons. Studies in multiple countries have shown that fathers' interaction is important for the development of empathy and social skills in sons and daughters.

**Involved fatherhood allows women and girls to achieve their full potential – now and in future generations.** Globally,

women earn on average 24 percent less than men do, in large part due to their greater burden of care work. By sharing the caregiving and domestic work, men support women's participation in the workforce and women's equality overall. Involved fatherhood also carries forward across generations: it has been shown to contribute to boys' acceptance of gender equality and to girls' sense of autonomy and empowerment. Research finds that daughters with fathers who share domestic chores equally are more likely to aspire to less traditional and potentially higher-paying jobs. Data from multi-country studies find that men who have seen their own fathers engage in domestic work are themselves more likely to be involved in household work and caregiving as adults.

**Involved fatherhood makes men happier and healthier.** Men who are involved in meaningful ways with their children report this relationship to be one of their most important sources of well-being and happiness. Studies find that fathers who report close, non-violent connections with their children live longer, have fewer mental or physical health problems, are less likely to abuse drugs, are more productive at work, and report being happier than fathers who do not report this connection with their children.

**Men's involvement in caregiving is increasing in some parts of the world, but nowhere does it equal that of women.** Women now make up 40 percent of the global formal workforce, yet they also continue to perform two to 10 times more caregiving and domestic work than men do. Research on time use shows that, as women have taken on more responsibility outside of the home, particularly in the labor force, men's participation in care work and domestic work has for the most part not kept up. A study of trends in men's participation between

1965 and 2003 across 20 countries found an average increase of six hours per week in employed married men's contribution to housework and childcare. Still, men's contribution did not exceed 37 percent of women's contribution in any of these countries.

**Fathers want to spend more time with their children.** Many fathers around the world say they want to be more involved in the lives of their children. Data from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) show that most fathers (rang-

ing from 61 percent in Croatia to 77 percent in Chile) report that they would work less if it meant that they could spend more time with their children. In the United States, one survey found that 46 percent of fathers said they were not spending enough time with their children, compared with 23 percent of mothers.

**Men's participation and support are urgently needed to ensure that all children are wanted children.** More than 220 million

women lack access to or do not use safe and effective contraception, leaving them unable to delay childbearing or to space their pregnancies, which exposes them to greater risk of maternal and newborn death. Globally, about 85 million pregnancies were unintended in 2012, representing 40 percent of all pregnancies. Women's contraceptive use represents approximately three-quarters of total contraceptive use worldwide, a proportion that has changed little over the past 20 years. More needs to be done to engage men in contraceptive use and decision-making in ways that support women's reproductive choices, and to ensure that all pregnancies are wanted pregnancies. Apart from

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being a question of gender equality, studies around the world find that fathers tend to be more engaged in the lives of children whom they intended to have, with lasting benefits to those children.

**Engaging men – in ways that women want – early on in pre-natal visits, in childbirth, and immediately after the birth of a child can bring lasting benefits.** The involvement of fathers before, during, and after the birth of a child has been shown to have positive effects on maternal health behaviors,

women's use of maternal and newborn health services, and fathers' longer-term support and involvement in the lives of their children. In low- and middle-income countries, men's presence at pre-natal visits varies greatly – from only 18 percent in Burundi to 96 percent in the Maldives. Recent analyses of research from low- and middle-income countries found that male involvement was significantly associated with improved skilled birth attendance and utilization of post-natal care. In high-income countries, fathers' presence has been shown to be helpful in encouraging and supporting mothers to breastfeed. Fathers' support also influences women's decision to immunize their children and to seek care for childhood illnesses.

**Promoting fathers' involvement must include efforts to interrupt the cycle of violence.** Approximately one in three women experiences violence at the hands of a male partner in her lifetime. Three-quarters of children between two and 14 years of age in low- and middle-income countries experience some form of violent discipline in the home. These forms of violence often co-occur. Studies in high-income countries suggest that anywhere between 45 and 70 percent of children whose mothers are experiencing violence themselves experience physical abuse. Research confirms that some forms of violence – particularly men's violence against female partners – are often transmitted from one generation to the next. Data from eight countries found that men who, as children, witnessed their mother being beaten by a male partner were approximately two and a half times more likely to use violence against a female partner as adults. At the same time, research finds that a more equitable division of caregiving is associated with lower rates of violence against children: a nationally representative study in Norway found that rates of violence against children – by

mothers and fathers – were lower in households where men’s and women’s caregiving were more equal.

**Children, women, and men benefit when fathers take parental leave.** While maternity leave is now offered in nearly all countries, only 92 countries offer leave that can be taken by new fathers; in half of these countries, the leave is less than three weeks. Well-designed leave policies, when combined with free or affordable childcare, show the strongest potential for shifting the care burden. Leave for fathers is a vital step toward recognition of the importance of sharing caregiving for children, and it is an important means of promoting the well-being of children and gender equality in the home, the workplace, and society as a whole. In the United Kingdom, fathers who took leave after birth were 19 percent more likely to participate in feedings and to get up with the baby at night eight to 12 months later, as compared with fathers who did not take leave. Furthermore, leave for fathers also appears to lead to improved maternal health – including mental health – and reduced parenting stress.

**Men’s greater involvement in care work also brings economic benefits.** If women participated in the labor market at the same rates as men do, it is estimated that the gross domestic product (GDP) could increase in the United States by five percent, in Japan by nine percent, in the United Arab Emirates by 12 percent, and in Egypt by 34 percent. There is increasing evidence that providing paid family leave is good for business: it improves employee retention and reduces turnover, it increases productivity and morale, and it reduces absenteeism and training costs. At the household level, leave for fathers supports women’s participation in the labor market and can increase their income and career outcomes. A study from Sweden showed that every month that fathers took paternity leave increased the mother’s

income by 6.7 percent, as measured four years later, which was more than she lost by taking parental leave herself.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGING THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS**

To achieve full gender equality and maximum well-being for children, we must move beyond rigid, limiting definitions of fatherhood and motherhood and move toward what children need most to thrive. This is not merely a question of encouraging men to be nurturing and caring. This is an issue of social and economic justice.

Changes are needed in policies, in systems and institutions, among service providers, within programming, and within data collection and analysis efforts. This report provides specific recommendations for change at each of these levels. These recommendations can be summarized as follows:

1

**Create national and international action plans to promote involved, non-violent fatherhood and men's and boys' equal sharing of unpaid care work.** Action plans on fatherhood and caregiving should span multiple sectors, including gender equality, children's rights, health, education, economic development, violence prevention and response, and labor rights. Actions must be matched with clear indicators and budgets in order to measure progress and make visible the need for men and boys to do a fair share of the care work.

2

**Take these action plans and policies into public systems and institutions to enable and promote men's equal participation in parenting and caregiving.** This will involve the transformation of policies, protocols, and curricula, as well as structures and spaces, in sectors as diverse as health, education, employment,

and social services. This is necessary to ensure that these institutions are able to play a role in challenging, rather than perpetuating, inequitable norms around men's caregiving.

3

**Institute and implement equal, paid, and non-transferrable parental leave policies in both public and private sectors, as well as other policies that allow women's equal participation in the labor force and men's equal participation in unpaid care work.** In settings where a large proportion of the population is not formally employed, different policies and strategies, such as conditional cash transfers and social insurance systems, are needed to promote men's caregiving.

4

**Gather and analyze data on men's involvement as fathers and caregivers and generate new evidence from programs and policies** that work to transform the distribution of unpaid care, prevent violence against women and against children, and improve health and development outcomes for women, children, and men.

5

**Achieve a radical transformation in the distribution of care work through programs with men and boys, as well as with women and girls, that challenge social norms and promote their positive involvement in the lives of children.** Gender-transformative work should start early and continue throughout life. Boys and girls must be prepared from early ages to be future caregivers *and* future providers. Programs can be embedded within institutions and existing structures, such as schools, early child development initiatives, health services and education, parenting programs, and violence prevention and response efforts, to enable their implementation at scale.

# 6

**Recognize the diversity of men's caregiving and support it in all of its forms.** Programs and policies need to be designed in ways that acknowledge and respond to the needs of diverse family configurations, including single parents, adoptive parents, non-resident fathers, gay fathers, adolescent fathers, and extended families.

When implementing all of these recommendations, the participation of children is needed to define and realize a new vision of fatherhood and caregiving.

Engaging men in caregiving is about helping men to have the deep, meaningful connections to others that are at the root of well-being and happiness – but even more than that, it is about enabling men's, women's, and children's full potential. It is also about achieving full equality for women and girls. *State of the World's Fathers 2015* argues that it is time to shift both the perception and the reality of the role that men can play in nurturing, and to bring in the social measures and economic, social, and political support that are necessary to make this transformation possible.



# Men Care

A GLOBAL FATHERHOOD CAMPAIGN



**Rutgers**

For sexual and  
reproductive health  
and rights



**Save the Children**



**MenEngage**  
Engage men for gender equality