

21 Paternity leave practices never to ignore

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Paternity leave practice is starting to become increasingly popular across the world, though still stigmatised in some areas, more and more fathers are seeing the need to go on paternity leave. Paternity leave is not just about giving your spouse support, but also gives a father a chance to bond with their new baby whilst giving the mother the necessary support. *Paternity leave* is vital for early childhood development, says UNICEF. UNICEF urges greater investment in family-friendly policies including paid paternity and maternity leave, free pre-primary education, and paid breastfeeding breaks.

According to UNICEF, COVID 19 has proven that family-friendly policies are a must. UNICEF goes on to say that family-friendly business policies and practices in the workplace play a vital role in keeping children out of poverty. They support and enable working parents to reconcile family responsibilities and work demands so they can do the most important job of all: raising their children. Family-friendly policies (FFPs) include:

- paid parental leave (maternity and *paternity*)
- paid sick leave
- breastfeeding support at work
- accessible, affordable, quality child care
- decent wages
- other forms of child benefits provided by governments

Companies like Spotify, Netflix, American Express, Etsy, and Facebook have made headlines for their generous paid parental leave policies. Access to *paternity leave is important* because there have been changing expectations for fathers. Traditional expectations of fathers serving primarily as breadwinners have expanded to emphasize a new fatherhood ideal that also encourages fathers to be engaged in their children's lives (Marsiglio & Roy, 2012).

The Meaning of Paternity Leave

Paternity leave is one of the basic family-friendly rights that often crop up in the workplace. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) *Paternity leave* is defined as a leave period – paid or unpaid- reserved for fathers in relation to childbirth or leave that can be used exclusively by fathers as *paternity leave*. It does not include parental leave provisions that can be used by the father or mother or parts of maternity leave entitlements that the mother can transfer to the father. It includes “special leave” provisions in addition to annual leave that may be used by fathers at the time of birth, but which are not strictly “paternity leave”. It aims to enable fathers to assist the mother to recover from childbirth, which is also crucial in establishing breastfeeding, take care of the newborn as well as other children, attend to the registration of the birth, and other family-related responsibilities.

In Zimbabwe, no specific *paternity leave entitlements* are found in the labour act. However, special leave entitlements as identified under section 14B may be used. Employees may request for up to 12 calendar days special leave for personal reasons that affect their immediate family (death of a spouse, parent, child, legal dependent, or on any other justifiable compassionate ground). Whilst in South Africa, our neighbors, new parental leave laws have been signed into law by President Cyril Ramaphosa – taking effect from 1 January 2020. The new legislation means that all parents – including fathers, adopting parents, and surrogates – are now entitled to 10 days unpaid parental leave when their children are born.

Benefits of Paternity Leave

The *benefits of paternity leave* are substantial for dads, children, and marriages. Results from a five-country survey (Brazil, Chile, Croatia, India, and Mexico) show that the vast majority of men think that “it is important for them to play a role in their children’s lives” and that 20-65 percent of men reported having taken some leave when their last child was born, indicating the evolving role of men in family responsibilities. UNICEF is urging governments and employers to pay more

attention to the role of fathers in supporting the early development of their new-born and young children.

“Fathers can - and should - play a role in supporting their children's early development,” said UNICEF Representative to Azerbaijan Edward Carwardine. “Interaction with mothers and fathers from the very first moments of life help to shape children’s brain growth and development forever, making them healthier and happier, and increasing their ability to learn.” Evidence suggests that when fathers bond with their babies from the beginning of life, they are more likely to play a more active role in their child’s development. Research also suggests that when children positively interact with their fathers, they have better psychological health, self-esteem, and life-satisfaction in the long-term. Moreover, the increased participation of men in household activities benefits women by allowing women to balance professional priorities better. Offering paternity leave is good for the company too. It makes the company family-friendly and helps companies to close the gender wage gap by leveling the playing field between men and women and by decreasing discrimination related to maternity.

A 2007 literature review by academics at Uppsala University in Sweden looked at longitudinal data and found that “father engagement positively affects the social, behavioral, psychological and cognitive outcomes of children.” When men take paternity leave and are active parents, it can also decrease stress and rates of postpartum depression for women, according to a 2012 survey of French parents. “The findings from the present study showed the importance of paternal involvement in infant care during the first months postpartum. Indeed, the level of paternal involvement in childcare was linked to maternal well-being and maternal attitudes towards motherhood,” the researchers wrote.

Men who take paternity leave have more time to learn how to take care of the baby and are more likely to be an engaged parent even after they go back to work, according to a 2007 Columbia University study. The researchers surveyed fathers who took paternity leave and asked how involved they were nine months later. They found that fathers who took two or more weeks when the baby was born were significantly more involved in childcare activities when the baby was nine-months-old. When fathers

took less than two weeks off they were not more engaged than fathers who did not take any paternity leave. *Paternity leave* can enable fathers to adhere to the expectations of both traditional and new fatherhood by encouraging fathers to contribute both social and financial resources to their families (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2011; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012).

The World Economic Forum's 2018 Global Gender Gap Report notes that Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland are in the lead for closing the gender pay gap and all have generous parental leave policies. "Paternity leave benefits women in the workplace, not only by leading toward more equal divisions of labor at home — making it more likely that the mother will engage more fully in her career — but also in that it de-genders and destigmatizes the taking of leave during one's career," said Lori Mihalich-Levin, a partner at the law firm Dentons U.S. and founder of Mindful Return, a blog, and curriculum for parents reintegrating into the workplace after taking leave. According to Forbes Magazine, companies can better recruit and retain talent if they offer paid family leave and other policies that support working parents.

"Today, our male employees not only have the right to take paternity leave, but this practice is becoming accepted amongst their peers as well as in the organization. People are seeing that raising children is a responsibility that can be shared and it's not just the woman's job to stay home and bring up the children." *Michael Gollschewski, Managing Director, Pilbara Mines, Rio Tinto Iron Ore, Australia*

Involvement with children can also provide joy, encourage feelings of generativity, and help establish father identities that emphasize parent-child interactions (Lamb & Lewis, 2010; McKeering & Pakenham, 2000). To encourage employees to use their paternity leave, Germany amended its parental leave scheme in 2007 and adopted a "use it or lose it" approach, where a certain portion of family leave could be used only by the father. Within two years the take-up rates have shot up from 3 percent to over 20 percent. When more men take parental leave, it helps companies to treat women and men equally and makes the workplace more family-friendly.

Despite many fathers' desires to be actively engaged in their children's lives, they often experience challenges in fulfilling the competing demands associated with traditional and new fatherhood (Aumann et al., 2011; Doucet, 2013). *Paternity leave* may help to alleviate some of these competing demands, at least temporarily (Rehel, 2014; Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007).

Paternity Leave across the world

According to the ILO, Paternity leave entitlements can be found in the national legislation of at least 79 countries out of 167 for which data are available: 29 in Africa, seven in Asia, five in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 24 in the Developed Economies, 13 in Latin America and the Caribbean and two countries, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic, in the Middle East. Paternity leave provisions are most common throughout the Developed Economies, Africa, and Eastern European and Central Asian countries.

The length of paternity leave varies from country to country. Among those with national provisions, the duration ranges from one day in Tunisia to 90 days in Iceland, Slovenia, and Finland (54 working days). In 53 percent of the total (87 countries), statutory *paternity leave* is not provided. Some 36 countries

(21 percent) provide less than 1 week of leave (including Argentina, Kazakhstan, Greece, Morocco, and the United Republic of Tanzania), 25 countries (15 percent) grant between 7 and 10 days (including, Benin, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, Latvia, the Philippines, and Ecuador), 14 countries (8 percent) provide 11–15 days' leave (including Azerbaijan, France, Kenya and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). Only five countries, all among the Developed Economies (Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Portugal, and Slovenia) provide a paternity leave of more than two weeks.

Importance of having a Paternity Leave Policy

According to Workable, a leading hiring platform, the following are reasons why it is *important for organizations to have a paternity leave policy*:

1. **Work/life conflicts are a reality for men too-**The notion that only women care for children is outdated. As fathers' share of parenting increases, they experience similar difficulties to women: their job and family duties begin to clash. Naturally, fathers' productivity is influenced by their ability to care for and bond with their children — especially in those first months. A paternity policy is a conscious effort to alleviate the increasing struggles of working fathers.
1. **Be a more desirable place to work-** In a survey of about 1,000 working fathers, nine out of ten of them said that they would consider the existence of a paternity leave policy as an important reason to choose a new employer. This is especially important for small businesses that may not be able to offer the higher wages larger companies do. Shaping an official paternity leave policy can help you in recruiting and retaining top talent.
1. **Equality cuts both ways-**research has found that policies that support a diverse workforce may make members of some privileged groups feel threatened thus affecting their overall performance and productivity. This is a reason why a maternity leave policy should never stand alone in a business. A paternity leave policy is a necessary step to avoid male employees feeling excluded and is a definite step towards establishing equality in your company.
1. **Encourage more men to take paternity leave-**Taking unpaid paternity leave may easily bring financial difficulties to a family. Hence, it's not surprising that nine out of ten men are back to work in less than two weeks after the birth of their child. Even though this is when mother and baby begin to need help. Part of this is down to cultural bias with dads seeing themselves as breadwinners. But an official paternity leave policy and procedure, correctly communicated, can ensure your employees will take the leave.
1. **Remove the stigma for women-**A paternity leave policy can help remove the stigma from women. A study in Sweden showed that for every month the father took for paternity leave, the mother's earnings increased by 7%. A similar finding of research of Quebec's family leave program supported the importance of the "daddy quota" (leave that can't be transferred to the mother). Mothers were more likely to be employed full-time. Their earnings also increased by 25% when their partners utilized paternity leave. Helping to close the gender gap and promote equality in the workplace is a significant benefit of paternity policies.

1. **It's not as costly as you think**-Naturally employers worry about what such policies will cost. Employees who aren't working and are still getting paid may seem a burden to a business. Evidence proves that this is not the case. Findings of surveys in almost 250 firms in California showed that the policy of the state mandating paid leave "had a minimal impact" on business operations. Additionally, 9 out of 10 employers indicated that there was a neutral or positive impact on the profitability of businesses, as well as the productivity of employees.

Why Some Men Do Not Take Paternity Leave?

Consulting firm Deloitte surveyed more than 1,000 U.S. workers last year, more than half of the men felt that taking paternity leave would be perceived as not being committed to their jobs and one in three said they worried that taking it would jeopardize their careers. A 2013 University of Oregon study used data from 6,403 men in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to track the same individuals throughout their careers. The study found that men experience a "flexibility stigma" for working fewer hours or taking parental leave. "Previous research shows that men work longer hours and earn more after becoming fathers, but if men are unemployed or reduce work hours for family reasons, their earnings and future career opportunities are more limited. Men who reduced their hours for family reasons faced a 15.5% reduction in earnings throughout their careers. (Women experienced a 9.8% reduction.)

A 2013 Rutgers University study found that men who requested family leave were at greater risk for penalties like receiving a decreased salary, being demoted, getting passed over for a promotion, or being laid off or fired. They were also less likely to be recommended for rewards like being suggested for a leadership role, getting a raise or promotion, or receiving a high-profile project. The research showed that men also face a "femininity stigma" for taking leave. Men were seen as weak, uncertain, insecure, and emotional—traits that are used to stigmatize women.

Today, more and more companies across the world are implementing paternity leave policies. However, there is a considerable stigma attached to using paternity leave and take-up rates are low. Fear of discrimination at work and gender stereotypes such as 'men should be breadwinners and women should be caregivers' discourage men from using their paternity leave. To increase take-up rates for paternity leave, companies can actively encourage fathers to take time off to care for their children by creating a supportive workplace culture and ensuring fathers are not discriminated against for taking up caregiving activities.

Parental leave policies don't just sound good in theory. They make sense on a business level, a fact of which many companies, including your competitors, are becoming increasingly aware.

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