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State of America's Fathers

Leading researchers partner to take a critical look at what fatherhood means for American families in 2016

Fathers in the United States are more involved than ever before, but gender equality, child development, and the wealth of the nation rely on advancing this movement, finds the first ever “State of America’s Fathers” report

There is a tale of two fatherhoods in the United States. High-income dads are championed for playing active roles in their children’s lives and they’re getting headlines, while low-income dads, many nonresident, are often either valued or stigmatized simply by their ability to pay their way. America is in urgent need of policies and support so that all fathers can realize their roles as fully engaged, fully equal caregivers, argues inaugural nationwide fatherhood report.

New York, Tuesday June 14, 2016 – There is a fatherhood revolution going on in the United States (U.S.). Men are doing – and are expected to do – more of the childcare and housework than ever before. This revolution of involved fatherhood has the power to advance gender equality, improve childhood development outcomes, and raise the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) by several hundred billion dollars, by enabling women to work outside the home at the same rate as men do. Despite this, the U.S. is not doing enough to support or advance the movement – in part because, until now, there has not been a clear or accurate national picture of the state of American fatherhood. This is revealed in the first ever *State of America’s Fathers* (SOAF) report, a landmark analysis of fatherhood unveiling preliminary, never-before-published data from the Families and Work Institute’s National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW).

As the U.S. turns to celebrate Father’s Day on Sunday, June 19, the SOAF report reveals that this fatherhood revolution is a highly unequal one. A tale of two fathers cuts down socioeconomic lines. At one end of the spectrum, society increasingly encourages upper-middle- and upper-income fathers to be highly engaged with their children – with many Fortune 500 companies offering the paid parental leave to back this up. On the other end, low-income dads have the least access to paid leave in the country: 95% of low-wage workers 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. New data from the report reveals that one aspect which unites across lines is the inability of parents to manage their work and family responsibilities: the majority of parents (63%) who work from 35 to 40 hours a week, and nearly three quarters (73%) of those who work over 40 hours a week (at all jobs) feel that they do not spend enough time with their children.

The unprecedented size of the U.S. prison system also causes undue financial difficulties for low-income families. Over 11% of U.S. men will go to prison at some point in their lives, and due to racial biases and other factors, today more than 60% of those who have been in prison

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are people of color. In total, 2.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent who is incarcerated, and 92% of incarcerated parents are fathers. As such, harsh sentencing laws (particularly for nonviolent offenses) are harmful for children, as well as being racially unjust.

In addition, SOAF finds that children in the U.S. are now more likely than ever to live outside of the traditional heterosexual, two-parent household. The decline of marriage, the rise of cohabitation, and the perception of divorce as a less stigmatized option mean that the “traditional” family is no longer a reality, with as many as 50% of children in the U.S. now spending some portion of their childhood years living in single-parent households.

Over the past 30 years, U.S. fathers have increased the time they spend with their children during the workday by nearly a third (65%). Both men and women are more interested in sharing childcare responsibilities than ever, and less than half of men (40%) agree that it is much better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children. In addition, despite a pervasive stigma of nonresident fathers as absent fathers or worse, deadbeat dads, research also shows that most nonresident fathers are consistently very active in the lives of their children.

The *State of America’s Fathers* report reveals that women and men alike are in need of policies and support so that fathers can realize their roles as fully engaged, fully equal caregivers. However, the U.S. is unique among high-income nations in its failure to guarantee paid leave to new parents, and 40% of American workers find themselves ineligible for the 12 weeks of unpaid leave offered under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). For those who are eligible, taking leave that isn’t paid often isn’t financially possible. Additionally, extreme rates of incarceration and high child-support demands on low-income fathers underscore a need to reframe the conversation on economically marginalized, nonresident fathers’ contributions to their children’s lives.

The *State of America’s Fathers* outlines key recommendations for action. These include:

- The need for national legislation to provide for paid, equal, and non-transferable leave for mothers and fathers of newborns: noting that even as much as 12 or 16 weeks – can generally be paid for by both mothers and fathers through an estimated payroll tax of about 1%.
- It calls for the U.S. government to provide the poorest fathers and families with a living wage, to reform the justice system, and to provide additional services that encourage and support their caregiving – including an Earned Income Tax Credit for nonresident fathers who pay child support.
- It posits that joint physical custody of children after a relationship or marital breakdown should be pursued when it is in the best interest of the child, and in cases where there is no history or threat of violence.
- It notes that building on a foundation of reproductive justice, supportive programs and services – which include comprehensive sexuality education and quality reproductive health services – can support individuals to plan when and how they want to have children.

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- It calls for workplaces to value what parents do as caregivers as much as they value their professional achievements; for more men to join the HEAL (health, education, administration, and literacy) professions; and for children to learn the value of caregiving from young ages in order to help accelerate social shifts toward greater acceptance and valuing of caregiving qualities in all genders.

Gary Barker, President and CEO of Promundo, says: “What our report and our new data show is this: women and men want the policies and the support so that all parents can be full-on, fully engaged, fully equal caregivers. We also confirm that implementing paid leave is far less costly than often thought; and that when implemented alongside income support to low-income fathers and parents, these policies pay for themselves in increased productivity and happier, healthier families. What are we waiting for?”

State of America’s Fathers is coordinated by Promundo, as a MenCare advocacy publication. Its editorial board includes key researchers and influential non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on engaging fathers in the U.S., with representatives from: Families and Work Institute; the Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-Being at Columbia University; the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities at Stony Brook University; the National Partnership for Women & Families; and the University of Maryland.

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For more information, interviews, and report assets contact:

Alexa Hassink | a.hassink@promundoglobal.org | +1 302 229 8241

Rebecca Ladbury | rebecca@ladburypr.com | +44 (0) 7941 224 975

Notes to editors

About the *State of the America’s Fathers Report* | Background

Approximately 80% of American men will become biological fathers at some point in their lives, and virtually all men have some connection to children and others in caregiving relationships. Fatherhood today is at the center of a national conversation that also touches on gender equality, work-life balance, race, and the question of what it means to be a man. More men than ever are stay-at-home fathers and involved caregivers for their children and more women than ever are in the workplace, balancing caregiving and provider roles with their partners. Engaging men in caregiving and care work is key to achieving women’s empowerment and supporting the well-being and rights of children.

Building on the success of the first *State of the World’s Fathers* report in 2015, Promundo and Fatherly, with sponsorship from Johnson & Johnson are launching the first ever *State of America’s Fathers* (SOAF) report this year, June 14, 2016, ahead of Father’s Day (June 19). See more details about the *State of America’s Fathers* Summit here: <http://americasfathers.fatherly.com>

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For *State of America's Fathers*, the Families and Work Institute prepared preliminary, never-before-published data analyses of the 2016 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW). These analyses, which are found in Chapters 2 and 3 of the report, provide evidence of shifting trends in American workers' hopes for work-life fit as well as in their attitudes on gender roles and family values.

The Families and Work Institute's NSCW is the only ongoing study of its kind or scale, providing valuable, timely information on the work and personal/family lives of the U.S. workforce. Conducted approximately every five years, the NSCW provides trend data on Americans' lives on and off the job, dating from 1977. The study is widely used by policymakers, employers, the media, and others interested in the widespread impacts of the changing conditions of work and home life.

The sample consisted of 1,833 English-language and 124 Spanish-language interviews completed via online surveys. Respondents were, at the time of the survey, at least 18 years old and worked for pay or owned a business.

The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago was responsible for conducting the survey, drawing from their AmeriSpeak® Panel and Survey Sampling International for the sample sources. Kenneth Matos, PhD, at the time Senior Director of Research and James T. Bond, Senior Vice President of Research (now retired) at the Families and Work Institute conducted the bivariate and multivariate analyses of these data that appear in this report. This is a preview of a series of studies conducted on the NSCW. When FWI begins publishing these studies, information on the NSCW design, sampling, and analysis will be available at: www.familiesandwork.org.

The report addresses the following issues related to fatherhood: *Men's Roles as Caregivers; Fatherhood and the Workplace; Fatherhood and Family Well-being; and Nonresident, Low-Income Fathers.*

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About the *State of the America's Fathers Report* | The Findings

Men's Roles as Caregivers

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

Most 21st-century Americans support gender equality when it comes to sharing household and caregiving work.

- American fathers have increased the time they spend with their children during the workday by 65% over the past 30 years.
- 50% of fathers of young children report diapering and feeding their children more than once a day.
- **NEW DATA:** Half (50%) of married/partnered American fathers self-identify as their children's primary caregiver or report sharing that responsibility equally with their partners. However, only 34% of married/partnered mothers report that this is the case.

The revolution isn't complete. Despite this shift in support for gender equality, women are still doing most of the household and caregiving work.

- Mothers still spend twice as much time on childcare as fathers do and nearly double the amount of time on housework.
- **NEW DATA:** Most mothers who are married/partnered report taking the primary responsibility for cooking (66%) and cleaning (68%).
- Women report spending an average of 66 minutes each day providing physical care for children in the household (feeding or bathing a child), as compared to men's 26 minutes, in households with children under the age of 6.

When fathers do more caregiving, there are significant benefits for children, women, and society at large.

- Fathers' involvement is associated with decreased behavioral problems for boys and decreased psychological problems for girls.
- Fathers who are involved in caregiving (and thus, have a less traditional gendered division of labor in their marriage) may raise girls who are less likely to pursue traditionally female jobs.
- When men are present in prenatal visits, women experience safer and less painful births, and decreased risk of postpartum depression.
- Gender equality in the home helps to amplify gender equality in the workplace and in the national economy: the GDP of the U.S. would increase by 5% (several hundred billion dollars) if women participated in the labor market at the same rate as men do.

Fatherhood and the Workplace

Paid family leave for both parents could make life substantially easier for many working Americans, but most fathers – and many mothers – don't have the workplace support to do so. Men are now facing the same work-life stress/conflict that women have for decades.

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Guaranteeing equal, non-transferable, paid parental leave for all parents is necessary for gender equality, and it supports positive child and family development. What's more, leave doesn't cost nearly as much as many employers believe it will.

Work-life balance is no longer just a women's issue.

- **NEW DATA:** The majority of parents (63%) who work full time (35-40 hours a week), and nearly three quarters (73%) of those who work more than 40 hours a week at all their jobs feel that they do not spend enough time with their children.
- In 2008, 60% of fathers in dual-earner families reported work-life conflict, up from just 35% in 1977.
- In 1977, far more men (74%) agreed that men should earn money and women should take care of the home and the family than in 2008 (40%).

Workplace culture has not caught up with social and family change.

- **NEW DATA:** Overall, 44% of employed parents feel that asking for flexibility to meet family needs would make it *less* likely for them to get ahead in their careers. There was no statistically significant difference between fathers and mothers.
- Corporate culture (in addition to the government) is failing to support involved fatherhood and motherhood, through leave policies and other measures, particularly for low-income families.
- Of companies surveyed after the implementation of California's Paid Family Leave program, 87% reported that there were no cost increases; 91% reported that there have been no instances of employees abusing the policy.
- Paid leave – even as much as 12 or 16 weeks – can generally be paid for by both mothers and fathers through an estimated payroll tax of about 1%.
- Evidence shows that where progressive, flexible policies have been implemented, they have worked.

The United States is unique among high-income nations in its failure to guarantee paid leave to new parents.

- According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), at least 49 countries around the world offer some kind of leave for fathers after the birth or adoption of a new child.
- 40% of American workers are ineligible under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA): an unpaid provision, offering 12 weeks of job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons, including becoming a parent.
- In 2014, 6% of companies required to comply with FMLA failed to offer 12 weeks of maternity leave and 11% failed to offer a full 12 weeks for adoption leave.
- Many Nordic countries today offer non-transferable leave – or “use it or lose it” policies - which encourages fathers to take time off and become active in caregiving; in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands, nearly 90% of fathers take leave.

Lowest income dads have the lowest access to paid leave in the country despite its positive benefits.

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- 95% of low-wage workers 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.
- 91% 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.

Fatherhood and Family 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 health care, and where no one is using intimate partner violence or violence against children.

Sexuality Education and Sexual Health; Healthy Pregnancy and Childbirth:

Men's active involvement as fathers to their children and promoters of family well-being starts before the birth of the child. Involved parenting is built on a foundation of reproductive justice and the ability of couples and individuals to plan if, when, and how they want to have children. Comprehensive sexuality education and access to quality sexual and reproductive health services are a necessary part of this.

- Roughly half of students in grades 7 through 12 report needing more information regarding their sexual health.
- As of March 1, 2016 only 24 states and the District of Columbia require public schools to teach sexuality education; only 20 states require that sexuality and/or HIV education be medically, factually, or technically accurate if provided.
- Men's opinions about whether a pregnancy was intended, mistimed, or unwanted tend to be closely related to their participation in the pregnancy, birth, and life of the child.
- Pregnant women with emotionally supportive male partners are more likely to: maintain healthy pregnancy behaviors, have deliveries without complications, and exhibit better mental health post-partum.
- Male partner support during pregnancy is linked with healthier maternal behaviors, including reduced cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption.
- Men can be key partners and players in supporting their partners and ensuring their access to services, including safe and legal abortion care.

One of the results of poor sexuality education in the U.S. is the rate of early childbearing for adolescents. Research shows particular difficulties for low-income, adolescent parents (with specific impacts on fathers), both in playing a meaningful role in their children's lives and also in meeting any state-mandated child support requirements.

- Adolescent fatherhood leads to fewer years of schooling and reduces the likelihood that a young man will receive a high school diploma, while increasing the chances he will earn a General Educational Diploma (GED).
- Fathering a child as an adolescent also increases early marriage and cohabitation (due to social pressure) and increases military employment (due to financial pressure).

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- Because adolescent dads do not qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, they are eligible for less cash assistance.

Child Development:

Fathers make a difference for child development. When fathers are involved in childcare, their children see significant, long-term benefits. While fathers are important, children benefit from having more than one, involved caregiver.

- Fathers' active involvement is associated with children's overall life satisfaction and mental health, including greater resilience, decreased reports of depression, less stress, and higher levels of self-reported happiness.
- Children with actively involved fathers are more confident in exploring their surroundings and have richer connections with their peers.
- Children of fathers who participate more fully in caregiving activities display higher cognitive scores in their first year of life, and continue to display cognitive advantages throughout their early childhood.
- Fathers' positive involvement is tied to *increased* health practice and *decreased* risk of health complications for youth.

Men's Own Health-Seeking Behavior:

Men in the U.S. demonstrate significantly worse lifelong health prospects than women do, stemming partly from men's poor health-seeking behaviors. There may be benefits to men's health, particularly their mental health, when they become involved fathers. Furthermore, engaging men as involved fathers encourage them to be allies for their families' health.

- Women live about 5 years longer than men do.
- Men who self-identify most strongly with a definition of manhood that is pegged to physical strength and self-reliance are less likely to seek adequate health care.
- Men (ages 30-44) are three times more likely than women *not* to have visited a physician in the prior year.
- 24% of men report that they would handle worries about health by waiting as long as possible before seeking help.

Intimate Partner Violence; and Violence Against Children:

While all men's caregiving should be free from violence, too many men still use violence against their partners and children. Violence is preventable. Nurturing, loving fathers and partners need to lead the way. A transformation in social norms and attitudes around gender, power, and violence must be part of the solution.

- Men who use violence are often those who subscribe to rigid, unequal notions about gender roles, which means that they are also less likely to be involved caregivers.
- Boys who see their fathers use violence against their mothers are more likely to use violence against their own partners later in life, as compared to the sons of nonviolent parents.

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- More than 1 in 3 women (36%) and more than 1 in 4 men (29%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetimes.
- About 1 in 4 women (24%) and 1 in 7 men (14%) have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner (e.g., hit with a fist or something hard, beaten, slammed against something) at some point in their lifetimes.
- 1 in 9 children witnessed or were otherwise exposed to some form of family violence in the past year alone, including intimate partner violence against their mother.
- 68% of Americans say that spanking is okay in the home, and approximately 60% believe that corporal punishment is okay as long as it does not leave a mark.

Nonresident, Low-income Fathers

As many as 50% of all children in the U.S. now spend some portion of their childhood years living in single-parent households. It is time to end the stigmatization of unmarried parents and to focus on the well-being of children in all the varieties of their households.

Marriage is not the defining feature of American families anymore.

- There are approximately 8 to 10 million nonresident fathers – including both divorced and never-married fathers – living in the U.S., an unprecedented development in American family life.
- While nonresident fathers span the socioeconomic spectrum, men with lower income and lower educational levels – and especially those who have never been married – are more likely to become nonresident fathers at some point in their lives.

It is a mistake to presume that all nonresident fathers maintain the same types of relationships with their children – and there are some data that find patterns based on race and ethnicity.

- The largest proportion of nonresident fathers is consistently very active in the lives of their children.
- Nonresident white fathers are less involved with their children than African American and Latino fathers; this discrepancy cannot be explained by differences in these fathers' education nor level of resources.

Nonresident fathers are more than just a paycheck. When actively involved in their children's lives, children demonstrate meaningful cognitive, health, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

- Cooperative co-parenting has a positive influence on children.
- Nonresident fathers' financial support – via court-ordered child support payments or other informal contributions – *does* meaningfully benefit the health and development of children.
- Fathers who pay their child support are more likely to be involved in other ways in their children's lives.
- The *frequency* of nonresident fathers' contact with their children may be less important than the *quality* of that contact.

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The school-to-prison pipeline in the U.S. is not just about low-income men and men of color. It is also about the children born to incarcerated fathers.

- Nearly 7% of all Americans and over 11% of U.S. men are expected to go to prison at some point in their lives.
- Nearly 10% of children in the U.S. under the age of 18 have a parent who is either currently incarcerated or who has ever been incarcerated.
- Due to racial injustice, amongst other factors, today more than 60% of individuals who have been in prison are people of color; a black male born in the year 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison at some point.
- 2.7 million children in the U.S. have an incarcerated parent; 92% of incarcerated parents are fathers.
- Incarceration of *nonviolent* offenders has profound negative effects for both the offender and the family.
- Children with an incarcerated parent have also been shown to be more likely to use drugs, display emotional problems, become pregnant at young age, and/or drop out of school than their peers whose parents are not incarcerated.

While nonresident fathers' financial contributions have been shown to be beneficial, focusing on unrealistic financial contributions may be doing unintended harm to children, fathers, and families. This evidence underscores a need to reframe the conversation on economically vulnerable nonresident fathers' contributions to their children's lives.

- The real proportion of fathers who neglect to make child support payments they can actually afford is far lower than the public stereotype of the deadbeat dad suggests.
- Approximately 71% of the country's nonresident fathers earn no more than \$40,000 per year.
- Fathers with incomes under \$20,000 are those with the highest arrears.
- High child support obligations may have the opposite of their intended effect. Rather than increasing child well-being, evidence suggests that higher obligations increase fathers' noncompliance.
- The current policy emphasis on financial contributions fails to encourage or promote the development of father-child relationships in families with below average incomes.
- As American society increasingly encourages middle-class fathers to be highly engaged with their children, it seems also – at least in the case of nonresident fathers ordered to pay child support – to insist that below-average-income fathers contribute strictly as breadwinners.

Limitations in available, ongoing, and new research on nonresident fatherhood – particularly as manifest in economically marginalized communities and families – severely hamper our ability to understand all of the above dynamics. We need more research, but we also need a new mindset. It's time to cast off the idea of the deadbeat dad and focus on the system that hinders rather than helps them be the parents they want to be.