

The changing roles of mothers and fathers

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Elvire Vaucher is a professor at the Université de Montréal School of Optometry. Her husband is an artist who works from home. Upon the birth of their second child in 2003, she took only three months maternity leave while her husband stayed at home, a situation that isn't that uncommon anymore.

"Professional pressure pushes young researchers to have a very productive lab," says Vaucher. "Seeing as my salary is greater than my husband's we wanted to limit our financial losses so he became the primary caregiver."

As a result, the couple emphasized her career rather than his. Although she would have liked to spend more time with her child, she says, "It isn't more acceptable for the woman instead of the man to sacrifice her career for the welfare of the family."

According to Statistics Canada, 60 percent of Quebecers agree with Vaucher's position. However, in the rest of Canada, 65 percent of people disagree and believe [mothers](#) should decrease their professional activities.

In Quebec, relationships between men and [women](#) are on more of an equal footing than anywhere else in North America, according to sociologist Germain Dulac. "Between 2001 and 2006, the number of [fathers](#) demanding paternity leave upon the birth or adoption of their child quadrupled."

There has been a serious change in attitudes in the past 15 years. "And it is an excellent change," says Dulac. "Yet there is still a lot of work to be done with the population and with employers so that men can fully take their place at home."

A case in point, Dulac says, is how women continue to be primary caretakers of familial needs. This means fathers change diapers and play with children, but mothers continue to do the majority of housework.

Thanks to contraception, Dulac stresses, women have gained control of maternity. What's more, affordable daycare encouraged women to find their place in the workplace.

Yet disparities remain. "Women continue to be paid less for equal work," says Dulac. "They are often assigned positions with less responsibility. And at home, the situation isn't much better - they continue to do the majority of the housework."

Source: University of Montreal

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