

Do US men value fatherhood over their careers?

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The classic figure of a distant, career-focused father who spends lots of time at the office and who has little time for his kids might be getting outdated, a new study shows.

In a nationwide survey that examined Americans' feelings on fatherhood, 77 percent of U.S. men rated being a good father as very important, while just 49 percent said the same about having a successful career.

Still, the study, which surveyed nearly 1,000 men across the United States who are in relationships with women, suggests that [fathers](#) and non-fathers alike see fatherhood as a "package deal" -- they consider things like work and leisure important, too. But those elements complement, not compete with, being a parent.

"There is an image for men that if they're into their career, then they're not into being fathers," said Julia McQuillan, professor of sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and co-author of the research.

"These results, however, show something quite different. Men don't have to be into one or the other. They can be into both."

The research surveyed both fathers and non-fathers who were either married or co-habiting, and was unique in that men were not asked to choose between things like work, [parenthood](#) or leisure and rank them against one another. Instead, researchers asked them to rate the importance of fatherhood alongside other interests in their lives.

By doing so, the study uncovered several insights into modern [attitudes](#) on fatherhood, both for men with children and those without. Notably, cultural and identity factors were more important than economic ones when considering men's [feelings](#) on fatherhood.

McQuillan said she was surprised that so many men agreed with concepts that were originally developed by researchers for another study that measured the importance of [motherhood](#) to women. The results are counter to conventional notions of fathers seeing themselves chiefly as economic providers.

Most of the men agreed or strongly agreed with statements such as "Having children is important to my feeling complete as a man"; "I always thought I would be a parent"; "I think my life will be or is more fulfilling with children"; and "It is important for me to have children," she said.

"There has been considerable focus on women's challenges combining motherhood and employment. Yet in this sample only half of the men considered their career very important," McQuillan said. "Perhaps recognizing that fatherhood is important to men could open employers up to creating flexibility for parenting among men as well as women, and to not assume anything about employees based on gender or parenthood status alone."

Also among the findings:

- Men who valued leisure and career, who espoused greater religiosity, who embraced non-egalitarian gender values, and who were already fathers tended to value fatherhood most.

- Fathers had lower education levels, were less likely to be in school, were more religious and were more likely to endorse non-egalitarian

gender attitudes.

-- About two-thirds of the [men](#) -- 65 percent -- endorsed egalitarian gender attitudes.

-- Importance of [fatherhood](#) declined with age among non-fathers.

More information: The study, to appear in the journal *Fathering*, was authored by Veronica Tichenor of the State University of New York-Institute of Technology; UNL's McQuillan; Arthur Griel of Alfred University; Raleigh Contreras of UNL; and Karina Shreffler of Oklahoma State University.

Provided by University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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