

Study: Paternity leave for disadvantaged father results in strong family relationships

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Enabling disadvantaged fathers to take time off from work via paternity leave may help these men become more engaged parents and improve relationships with mothers, says a new study from Ball State University.

"Are Parental Relationships Improved if Fathers Take Time Off of Work After the Birth of a Child?," suggests that initial relationship and parenting quality are better when a dad spends significant time at home with the newborn, and those [positive effects](#) continue for the child's first five years, said Richard J. Petts, a Ball State sociology professor who partnered on the study with Chris Knoester, a sociology professor at The Ohio State University.

"Fathers who take time off work may signal their intentions to not solely act as financial providers and their commitments to accept the consequences of taking time off work and expanding their roles in their families," Petts said. "Thus, taking time off work following a birth may increase the likelihood that mothers feel that the division of household labor is fair. It can also reduce the role conflicts and overloads mothers experience, resulting in higher [relationship](#) and parenting quality."

This study uses longitudinal data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCW), an urban sample of disproportionately disadvantaged families (i.e., high percentages of low income families, racial/ethnic minority families, and families that experience divorce, separation or breakups).

"Overall, results from this study suggest that taking time off [work](#) following the birth of a child may enable [fathers](#) to become more engaged parents," Petts said. "Most fathers are unable to take longer periods of time off—especially paid time off—because few employers provide paid leave, and the U.S. does not have a statutory paid leave policy."

Potential implications from this study include:

- Expanding access to paid leave may help families, especially as individuals increasingly endorse more egalitarian parenting

arrangements.

- Increased access to leave policies may be especially beneficial for economically disadvantaged families, who often face economic and social constraints that make it difficult to fulfill the dual responsibilities of breadwinning and caregiving.
- Adopting and encouraging the use of leave policies may improve [parental relationships](#) particularly among disadvantaged families who have a high likelihood of experiencing breakups.

The study was recently published by the academic journal Social Forces. Research was funded by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health. The study continues research by Petts on [parental leave](#) and parental responsibilities.

Provided by Ball State University

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