

Men say they are spending more time on household chores, and would like to do more—survey of 17 countries

October 26 2023, by Wessel Van Den Berg



Credit: Yan Krukau from Pexels

Women perform between [three and seven times more caregiving tasks](#) than men in the global south. These include household domestic work

and largely focus on caring for children.

Hopefully this is changing. The [2023 State of the World's Fathers Report](#), themed "Centering Care in a World in Crisis", explored the experiences and involvement in caregiving among 12,000 men and [women](#), many of whom are parents, across 17 countries. The survey looked at who does the caregiving, how they care, for whom, and what men and women think about care.

I am one of five co-authors of the report, which unveiled a remarkable appreciation for care among respondents. In an [online survey](#) they overwhelmingly associated care with positive terms. "Love" was the most frequently mentioned word across all countries.

Other frequently mentioned words included "help", "protection", "attention", "responsibility", "health", "kindness" and "family".

Most of the men involved in the survey said they were doing care work, and they were willing to do more. But many barriers stood in their way, including [societal norms](#) and financial constraints. While the findings of the research point to changes, it also found that the pace of change is far too slow.

Growing pressure for greater equality

Earlier this year, United Nations member states unanimously designated [29 October as the International Day of Care and Support](#). This reflects a growing recognition of the value of care and care work, highlighting the urgent need to distribute caregiving responsibilities more equitably.

Providing care for another person can be a positive experience, fostering empathy and meaningful relationships. However the unequal allocation of [caregiving](#) between men and women has long hindered women's

participation in paid work.

In 2018, the International Labour Organization estimated 606 million working age women were not able to do so because of unpaid care work. And the heavy burden of care work has had [adverse consequences](#) on the physical and mental well-being of women.

Moving in the right direction

The State of the World's Fathers report found that mothers still bore a greater share of responsibilities in care work such as cleaning, physical and emotional childcare, cooking and partner care. Women reported performing 1.32 times more physical childcare and 1.36 times more house cleaning than men across all countries surveyed for the report.

But fathers in countries as diverse as Argentina, Ireland, China, Croatia and Rwanda also reported dedicating significant hours to various unpaid caregiving tasks within the household.

The State of the World's Fathers study attributed this shift to several factors, including the impact of [COVID-19](#), evolving gender norms related to caregiving, and structural factors such as care systems and parental leave policies.

In 15 countries, between 70% and 90% of men agreed with the statement, "I feel as responsible for care work as my partner."

Encouragingly, in some nations like [South Africa \(85%\) and Rwanda \(93%\)](#), men disagreed with the statement, "Boys should not be taught to sew, cook, clean, or take care of their siblings."

Men who were more emotionally aware and open to seeking [emotional support](#) were [two to eight times](#) more likely to provide care to a family

member than those who were not emotionally aware.

Men who spent more time caring for others experienced greater well-being. Respondents who expressed satisfaction with their involvement in raising their children were [1.5 times](#) more likely to agree with the statement, "I am the person I always wanted to be" and report a sense of gratitude in life than respondents who did not report satisfaction with childrearing.

Everybody needs to chip in

It's important to recognize that caregiving cannot be dependent solely on individual efforts. Men and women alike require the support of communities, care systems and policies to provide care effectively.

More than half of both mothers and fathers considered [political activism](#) for care leave policies a priority. This sentiment varied: 57% of fathers and 66% of mothers in India, and 92% of fathers and 94% of mothers in Rwanda supported this cause.

Women were more likely than men to [prioritize care policies](#) along with health care and gender equality policies. Concerns about the cost of living were prevalent among both genders, with slightly more women (58%) than men (53%) expressing this worry.

The study found a significant portion of individuals in all countries reported [taking action](#) to improve care policies. The majority (74%) discussed the issue with friends and family, while 39% of women and 36% of men signed or shared online petitions. Additionally, 27% of women and 33% of men attended events calling for improved care policies.

Policymakers have an important role to play in reforms for improved

parental leave. Better data enables better policies, so there also need to be more accurate statistics on, for example, how many fathers take parental leave, and how time spent on [care work](#) is distributed among men and women.

Making it easier for men to share duties in the house is essential if countries are to [thrive](#).

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