

Workplace culture is preventing men from taking paternity leave

December 5 2023



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

In many countries, even those with paternity leave enshrined in law, workplace culture and gendered roles in childcare remain stubbornly regressive.

In a new study of [paternity](#) leave experiences in French accounting firms, researchers find male professionals would prefer to spend more time with their partners and newborn babies. However, many men are pressured to delay or forego paternity leave because of workplace obligations.

According to the article published in the journal [Accounting Horizons](#), a range of experiences is associated with fatherhood and paternity leave.

These experiences include frustration over low levels of moral and material support provided by their employers and difficulty reconciling fatherhood and their professional demands. The researchers also found a tendency for the [new fathers](#) to consider [parental leave](#) an extended vacation rather than a time to support and bond with their newborn child.

"Most men are reluctant to take their allotted leave simply because they understand how their professional world works," says the paper's co-author Claudine Mangen, a professor of accountancy at the John Molson School of Business.

"Parental leave is accepted for women. But men who take it are seen as violating the norm that they should focus on their profession. While we know women pay a professional price for focusing on raising children, men are very worried that they will pay an even higher one."

"The standards are different for men."

Legal but not encouraged

The researchers kept the sample size deliberately small for this exploratory study. They interviewed 13 men working in auditing firms in France. The sample included partners, [senior managers](#), managers, and a senior, and all but one had children. All worked at mid-tier firms or at

one of three Big Four (KPMG, PwC, Ernst & Young, Deloitte) firms.

The researchers identified five themes in their interviews:

1. Fathers are reluctant to take paternity leave. Those who did were likely to schedule their leaves around peaks and troughs of the work year, often in August.
2. Paternity leaves are incompatible with professional work. Many fathers delayed or forewent their leaves due to work constraints.
3. Firms accommodate mothers more than fathers. In France, women are entitled to 16 weeks of leave. Fathers are legally entitled to five weeks. Also, the researchers found that firms were eager to plan for and advertise maternity leaves in ways they did not for paternity leaves.
4. Paternity leaves are considered vacations. Both fathers and their colleagues often viewed time away from work as an opportunity to relax with their families and cut down on work, not to provide intense care for their newborns.
5. Fathers' emotional experiences vary. Some disliked care work or discussing personal affairs at work, while others were frustrated or stressed about requesting leave and having work intrude on it. Still others expressed regret at missing [paternity leave](#) or family life due to work.

"We wanted the study to provide a range of experiences because we did not know whether men were actually happy with the status quo. It turns out that many of them are not," says Mangen, who holds the RBC Professorship in Responsible Organizations.

"Men are worried about the pervasive culture of overwork in the workforce—and not only in professional service firms."

Mangen says organizations should be reassessing their efforts in

fostering equitable workplaces. Companies must rethink strategies around gender inequality if they are serious about their publicly stated goals.

"Firms need to take a long hard look at the unarticulated assumptions around work and hierarchy," she says.

"One assumption is that a senior leader is a man who does not engage with his children."

"Senior leaders are role models, so this has an effect across the company. Entry-level accountants who have children will understand the implicit message being sent by those at the top."

More information: Claire Garnier et al, Men's Experiences of Paternity Leaves in Accounting Firms, *Accounting Horizons* (2023).
[DOI: 10.2308/HORIZONS-2022-099](https://doi.org/10.2308/HORIZONS-2022-099)

Provided by Concordia University

Citation: Workplace culture is preventing men from taking paternity leave (2023, December 5) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-12-workplace-culture-men-paternity.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.