

## The Upshot

FAMILY MAN

# Paternity Leave: The Rewards and the Remaining Stigma

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Five months after Todd Bedrick's daughter was born, he took some time off from his job as an accountant. The company he works for, Ernst & Young, offered paid paternity leave, and he decided to take six weeks — the maximum amount — when his wife, Sarah, went back to teaching. He learned how to lull the fitful baby to sleep on his chest and then to sit very still for an hour to avoid waking her. He developed an elaborate system for freezing and thawing his wife's pumped breast milk. And each day at lunchtime, he drove his daughter to the elementary school where Sarah teaches so she could nurse. When she came home at the end of the day, he handed over the baby and collapsed on the couch.

“The best part was just forming the bond with her,” said Mr. Bedrick, who lives in Portland, Ore., and went back to work in June. “Had I not had that time with her, I don't think I'd feel as close to her as I do today.”

Social scientists who study families and work say that men like Mr. Bedrick, who take an early hands-on role in their children's lives, are likely to be more involved for years to come and that their children will be healthier. Even their wives could benefit, as women whose husbands take paternity leave have increased career earnings and have a decreased chance of depression in the nine months after childbirth. But researchers also have a more ominous message. Taking time off for family obligations, including paternity leave, could have long-term negative effects on a man's career — like lower pay or being passed over for promotions.

In other words, Mr. Bedrick is facing the same calculus that women have for decades.

Women's role in society and the economy has been transformed over the last half-century. Today, 70 percent of women with children at home are in the labor force, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But only recently have men's roles begun to change in significant ways.

Paternity leave is perhaps the clearest example of how things are changing — and how they are not. Though the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 requires companies with more than 50 employees to provide 12 weeks of unpaid leave for new parents, it requires no paid leave. The 14 percent of companies that do offer pay, like Ernst & Young, do so by choice. Twenty percent of companies that are supposed to comply with the law, meanwhile, still don't offer paternity leave, according to the 2014 National Study of Employers by the Families and Work Institute. And almost half the workers in the United States work at smaller companies that are not required to offer any leave at all.

Even when there is a policy on the books, unwritten workplace norms can discourage men from taking leave. Whether or not they are eligible for paid leave, most men take only about a week, if they take any time at all. For working-class men, the chances of taking leave are even slimmer.

“There is still some stigma about men who say, ‘My kids are more important than my work,’ ” said Scott Coltrane, a sociologist studying fatherhood who is the interim president of the University of Oregon. “And basically that's the message when men take it. But the fact that women are now much more likely to be at least a principal breadwinner, if not the main breadwinner, really changes the dynamic.”

The evolving roles of men and women could eventually change workplace culture, he and other social scientists say. If more women play the breadwinner role and more men ask for family-friendly policies, it could become hard for employers to treat them differently on the basis of gender roles.

“If men are asking for more stuff, it can help make the workplace more kid-friendly,” Mr. Coltrane said.

The challenge, however, is not just persuading employers to offer paternity leave but also persuading men to take it.

## Unwritten Expectations

In certain corners of the economy, paternity leave, which is increasingly called partner or primary caregiver leave, is already the norm, partly because of some companies' efforts to accommodate same-sex and adoptive parents.

Silicon Valley, which has led the way with corporate benefits and employs a disproportionate number of people in childbearing years, has noteworthy partner benefits, including 17 weeks of paid time off at Facebook and eight at Yahoo. In 2004, Ernst & Young, where Mr. Bedrick works as an audit manager, increased its paid paternity leave to six weeks from two for fathers who are primary caregivers (including same-sex parents and, as in his case, after mothers return to work). Three states — California, New Jersey and Rhode Island — have started programs requiring employers to give both parents paid parental leave, financed by disability money that comes out of payroll taxes.

But over all, paternity leave has been declining. The share of companies that offer it dropped five percentage points from 2010 to 2014, according to the Society for Human Resource Management, highlighting the fact that employers — who have to patch together coverage — don't always see leave as beneficial to the company. Nearly a third of men report that they had no option to take leave, paid or not, for the birth of a child, according to the White House Council of Economic Advisers.

Eighty-nine percent of all fathers took some time off after their baby's birth, but almost two-thirds of them took one week or less, according to a study by two professors of social work, Lenna Nepomnyaschy of Rutgers and Jane Waldfogel of Columbia. Low-income and minority fathers are least likely to take leave, it found. And men often use sick or vacation days and cite work pressure and unwritten expectations as reasons for not taking longer leaves, according to a study published this year by the Boston College Center for Work & Family and sponsored by EY, the global parent company of Ernst & Young.

Cultural messages tend to reinforce the stigma. Last spring, Daniel Murphy, a second baseman for the New York Mets, was criticized when he took the three days of paternity leave allowed by Major League Baseball. “I would have said: ‘C-section before the season starts. I need to be at opening day,’ ” Boomer Esiason, a radio talk show host and former professional football player, said on his program. (He would later apologize for the remarks.) Mike Francesa, another radio talk show host, added: “You’re a Major League Baseball player; you can hire a nurse.” Men often receive subtle or not-so-subtle messages that leave is unacceptable, even if it’s in the employee handbook.

A lawyer in San Francisco worked at a large corporate law firm when his two children were born. Although the firm offered four weeks of paid leave to new fathers, a partner gave him a different message.

“One of the partners in particular made the comment: ‘How are you going to service your clients? What’s your level of commitment to the firm?’ ” said the lawyer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preserve professional relationships.

The lawyer did take the full leave, after discussing it with his clients. Another lawyer at the firm helped with immediate matters and the new father was available to clients by email when he was at home. That is common for men on partner leave. Half said they did some work and checked email while they were out, the Boston College study found.

Ultimately, the lawyer said, the only repercussion was that his bonus was smaller because he had four fewer weeks of billable hours. He has since left the firm for another job.

Researchers have described the “motherhood penalty” for women in the work force. The Journal of Social Issues last year published three studies on the so-called flexibility stigma for men, which together leave little doubt that there is reason for men to fear reducing hours or taking time off for family reasons.

One of the studies was by Mr. Coltrane of the University of Oregon. It used data from 6,403 men in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and was the first major longitudinal study — tracking the same group of people over time — to

show that taking time off for family reasons reduced men's earnings, just as it reduced women's earnings. When men reduced their hours for family reasons, they lost 15.5 percent in earnings over the course of their careers, on average, compared with a drop of 9.8 percent for women and 11.2 percent for men who reduced their hours for other reasons.

When men start diverging from the breadwinner role by taking time off or working fewer hours — or, as Mr. Coltrane puts it, “become active-enough parents and begin looking like what we think of as mothers” — they can be penalized.

Another study found that men who used flexible work arrangements, whether taking temporary family leave or working from home or part time, received worse job evaluations and lower hourly raises. The third found that men who requested family leave were at greater risk of being demoted or laid off because they were perceived to have negative traits that are used to stigmatize women, like weakness and uncertainty, not masculine ones like competitiveness and ambition.

“The implications are dire for gender equality in the workplace,” said Laurie A. Rudman, the lead author of the third study and a psychology professor at Rutgers. One solution, she said, is to recast family leave as a manly thing to do: “Change the conversation of what it means to be a 50-50 husband in order to underscore it takes amazing strength for men to do that — it's the opposite of weak.”

## Involved Earlier, and Later

On a recent Saturday afternoon, Mr. Bedrick answered the door at his home on a cul-de-sac, carrying his daughter in one arm and dragging their huge golden retriever, Koby, with the other. A giant stuffed giraffe stood sentry at the top of the stairs. The baby, who was 9 months old, had just learned to crawl, so the Bedricks were beginning to baby-proof.

“I would say she does a ton more than me, just with breast-feeding alone,” Mr. Bedrick said of his wife. Still, their division of labor is in many ways a modern one. Since Ms. Bedrick started teaching again this fall, he packs her breast pump bag in the morning and cleans the bottles and accessories in the evening. And recently, as they have been trying to wean the baby off nighttime feedings, he is the one to get

out of bed and comfort her when she cries.

“I had that experience of doing anything I needed to do to get her to sleep,” Mr. Bedrick said. “If I hadn’t had those six weeks, I wouldn’t have been able to do that.”

Soon after the Bedricks found out that Sarah was pregnant, Todd was offered a job on a larger team at work. The couple had already decided that he would take leave to delay day care as long as possible.

“I just told them flat out, ‘I’d love to be a part of the team, but I just want to make sure you are aware in advance that I had that planned,’ ” he said. “It wasn’t a heated discussion; it just got approved.”

Even at Ernst & Young, which encourages parental leave, it is unusual for men to take the full six weeks, as Mr. Bedrick did. His main concern was that he not lose any of his work responsibilities. He said that on the advice of an Ernst & Young coach, he discussed that fear with two of the partners on his new team. He came back to his same assignments.

Ms. Bedrick said her husband’s time as the primary caretaker was good for their relationship: “One day he was like: ‘You know when I used to come home from work and the laundry wasn’t done and dinner wasn’t done and I said I totally understand? I didn’t. I just said that. Now I really get it.’ ” She added: “It’s good for him to see it’s a lot of work. You’re not just relaxing.”

No matter how much a couple plans to share the workload, the first few weeks of a baby’s life reshape everything. If the mother is breast-feeding, she already has primary responsibility for the child, and months of solo diaper-changing and baby-soothing duty during maternity leave set lifelong patterns.

“Part of the rationale for paternity leave is if men are able to be very involved early on in the care of their children, they’re going to be more involved ever after, and it will translate to more equal sharing and equal roles,” said Ms. Waldfogel, the professor of social work. Though men who want to be more involved fathers are probably more likely to take leave in the first place, she found that even after controlling for fathers’ commitment levels, those who took significant leaves were more likely to do hands-on child care later.

In her study with Ms. Nepomnyaschy, which analyzed 10,000 children in the United States, they found that fathers who took two or more weeks of leave were significantly more likely to do tasks like diapering, feeding, dressing and bathing later on. Fathers who took less than two weeks, however, were often no more likely to be involved than those who took none at all.

The biggest beneficiaries of all this diaper-changing by fathers, perhaps, are mothers.

One of the clearest ways to bolster women's participation in the labor force, economists say, is to involve men more at home, for the simple reason that women are more able to work outside the home when they are not doing all the child care. The Institute for Labor Market Policy Evaluation in Sweden found that a mother's future earnings increased an average of 7 percent for every month of leave the father took.

“When men are committing to do tag-team parenting and they're willing to sacrifice some of their wage potential,” Mr. Coltrane said, “it's very helpful for the women and also for the long-term wages of the family.”

## The Four-Month Leave

Tom Stocky, vice president for search at Facebook, posted a long status update on Facebook on the last day of his four-month paternity leave last year.

“When I tell people I'm on a four-month leave, the initial response is typically surprise that my company offers such a generous benefit,” he wrote. “That's typically followed by surprise that I'm actually taking it — why would I want to subject myself to that torture (from parents), why would I want to sit around and do nothing for four months (from nonparents), or why would I want to do what is surely a career-limiting move.”

The post, meant for his friends, would soon circulate. He heard from people around the world, and he still hears about it from other men at Facebook.

“A lot of guys at the company reach out to me,” said Mr. Stocky, who manages 150 people. “I've kind of become a model or a template — like, ‘This is O.K.; taking

four months off is totally cool.’ ”

Most of them, he said, start by asking how they can make their leave the least disruptive at work. He tells them to prioritize what’s best for their families instead. “They’re so worried about the image it will have,” he said. “I’m like, ‘Unplug and don’t email anyone.’ ”

Now that he is back, Mr. Stocky, 36, and his wife, Avni Shah, a vice president at Google, divide day care drop-offs and pickups at the beginning of each week. She does the laundry and cooks for their daughter, who is now 2; he does baths, swim classes and “all the ordering on Amazon Mom, which I love the name of.”

Workplace culture may be both the most important and the hardest thing to change to encourage paternity leave. Facebook and other companies have pushed people to accept leave-taking. Senior management prominently taking leave — and talking about it, as Mr. Stocky has — is essential, people who study the issue say.

Lori Goler, Facebook’s vice president for human resources, said that when a parent-to-be comes by to discuss leave, she refers to it as “the four-month leave” as an encouragement to take all the time offered. Also, executives, including Mark Zuckerberg, the chief executive, deliberately say people are on parental leave as opposed to saying they are “out of the office.”

Even so, not all fathers at Facebook take the full four months allotted to them. Though the time has been increasing, they now take more than two months, on average. A majority of women take the full four months of maternity leave.

At Ernst & Young, about 95 percent of employees who have babies take some amount of time. But 90 percent of new fathers at the firm still take only two to three weeks, not six. Most mothers get three months, and nearly all take the entire time. Men have increased their amount of leave slightly over the last few years, but the company is trying to increase it even more, said Maryella Gockel, flexibility leader at EY.

Alison Hooker, chief talent development officer at EY, said: “We make sure anyone in a senior role makes sure they talk about their families. That tone really influences younger men to take a two-week or three-week paternity session and

gets people to six weeks over time.”

They tell a story about Mark Weinberger, the chief executive of EY, going to an important meeting in China. He was asked publicly whether he would be attending the official post-meeting dinner. He responded that he would miss it because he had to get back to the United States in time to take his daughter to her driving test.

Ernst & Young also started a confidential coaching program for parents in 2012. It was just for mothers until someone suggested that fathers be included, too. Though Mr. Bedrick has been back from leave since June, he still meets with his coach every couple of months. At a recent session, they talked about the challenges of managing home life now that Ms. Bedrick has returned to work after her school’s summer break.

Peer influence can change workplace culture, too, according to a study published in the American Economic Review in July. The study found that when a man’s co-workers took paternity leave, it increased the chance that he would take it by 11 percentage points — and that if his brother took it, by 15 points. Co-workers might share information about costs and benefits, like how their bosses reacted to paternity leave, and the effect snowballs over time as the information spreads.

Public policy can also shift cultural norms over time. Many European countries with generous policies on parental leave found that men weren’t taking it. Sweden, Norway, Germany, Portugal and Iceland all increased participation significantly by providing incentives, like paid leave that families lost if men didn’t use it.

“It’s workplace by workplace, and saying that we as a society think this is important,” said Christopher Ruhm, a professor of public policy and economics at the University of Virginia. “What we do in terms of the laws and the rights that we provide gradually changes cultural norms. They’re starting to say that taking leave around the time you have a new child is not a bad thing. It’s expected.”

Sarah Bedrick has begun teaching part time so she can spend more time with their daughter. Mr. Bedrick misses the baby during the day, she said, and tries to come home in time to play with her and give her a bath. “Their bond grew,” she said.

Mr. Bedrick added, “I definitely would not have done anything differently.”

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