

Child  
Rights  
Perspective  
Report  
2015

*STATE  
OF THE  
WORLD'S  
FATHERS*



# *STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS*

Child Rights Perspective Report

A MenCare Advocacy Publication 2015

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Fathers and Fatherhood: A Summery

**T**his report based on the State of the World's Fathers (SOWF) report, which captures data policies, programmes, and research related to boys and men's participation in caregiving and fatherhood, maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH), and violence prevention, brings together the components related to or advancing child rights and gender equality. By doing so, this report defines a global advocacy agenda for child right and other organizations on engaging boys and men towards equal share in unpaid care-work throughout the life-cycle and promoting gender equality and other positive outcomes in the lives of girls, boys and young people, including fathers' themselves. This report is the first of its kind – a testimony to the lack of visibility of and priority given to men's caregiving and fatherhood, and the limited understanding of what this means for gender equality and children's well-being.

## MAIN FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

The main findings of the State of the World's Fathers 2015 report suggest that involved caring and non-violent fatherhood allows girls and women to achieve their full potential – now and in future generations, and that involved fatherhood makes men and families<sup>1</sup> happier and healthier. The report finds that fathers want to spend more time with their children. Engaging men – in ways that women want – early on in prenatal visits,

in childbirth, and immediately after the birth of a child can bring lasting benefits for children, and that promoting fathers' involvement must include efforts to prevent violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC) and interrupt the cycle of violence. It also suggests that children, women, and men benefit when fathers take parental leave, and that boys' and men's greater involvement in care work also brings economic benefits. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for this Report, it finds that involved fatherhood helps girls, boys and young people thrive. *Fathers matter for children.*

While there are many different types of families in different contexts, their functions with respect to nurturing, rearing and protecting children remain the same. Father-child<sup>2</sup> relationships, in all communities and at all stages of a child's life,

- 1 The word 'family' has different meanings to people around the world. Diverse family structures exist in various parts of the world, with the nature of relationships and the power dynamics between men and women, and adults and children, girls and boys varying across countries and cultures. In this report, family means "social groups connected by kinship, marriage, adoption or choice." (Save the Children, 2013).
- 2 Whether they are biological fathers, stepfathers, adoptive or foster fathers, or legal guardians; whether they are brothers, uncles, or grandfathers; whether they are in same-sex or opposite-sex relationships; and whether they live with their children or not.
- 3 Save the Children's Gender Equality Principle (2014), integral component of Program Quality Framework, has laid out "gender-sensitivity" as the essential standard and aspires to have gender transformative approach for all of its programing and advocacy works globally.



have profound and wide-ranging impacts on children that last a lifetime, whether these relationships are positive, negative, or lacking. Fathers and men matter to children not because they are men, and not because they have a unique contribution to child development and well-being, but because children need nurturing caregivers.

The SOWF report affirms that fathers' involvement affects children in similar ways to mothers' involvement. By engaging fathers at an early stage in children's lives, we can achieve better results for children. It is a key to supporting the wellbeing and rights of children. Engaging with fathers and/or father-figures offers us a positive approach to engage boys and men to bring about a more equitable world and foster the physical and emotional wellbeing of children, women and men themselves. As presented in the State of the World's Fathers report, the positive effects of men's caregiving on health and development outcomes for children can be tremendous.

Promoting fathers' involvement must also include efforts to interrupt the cycle of violence. Three-quarters of children between 2 and 14 years of age in low- and middle-income countries experience some form of violent discipline in the home. Research confirms that some forms of violence – particularly men's violence against their intimate partners – are often transmitted from one generation to the next. At the same time, research finds that a more equitable division of caregiving can contribute to lower rates of VAC: a nationally representative study in Norway found that rates of VAC – by mothers and fathers – were lower in households where men's and women's caregiving role were more equal.

Many fathers around the world say they want to be more involved in the lives of their children. Well-designed leave policies, when combined with free or affordable childcare, show the strongest potential for shifting the care burden. Leave for fathers is a vital step toward recognition of the importance of sharing caregiving for children, and is an important means of promoting the well-being of children and gender equality in the home, the workplace, and society as a whole.

We need a radical transformation in the distribution of care work through programs with men and boys, as well as with women and girls, that challenge social norms and promote men's positive involvement in the lives of children. Gender-transformative work should start early and continue throughout the life cycle<sup>3</sup>. Boys and girls must be prepared from early ages to be both future caregivers and future providers.





# INTRODUCTION: WHY A GLOBAL REPORT ON FATHERS AND FATHERHOOD

*“My father was the one who took us to the pediatrician, my father was the legal guardian, my father was the one who got scared when we were sick and took us to the emergency room. He was very, very present ... Much of what I do is a reflection of what I learned from my father.” – Gonzalo, Chile<sup>I</sup>*

## INVOLVED FATHERHOOD HELPS CHILDREN THRIVE

Research shows that when men are more involved fathers and caregivers, they can improve the lives of girls, boys and young people, as well as women and men themselves.<sup>II, III, IV</sup> As the UNCRC recognizes: “Parents or legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.” Fathers’ ongoing positive involvement in the lives of their sons and daughters enhances children’s physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development and can contribute to their wellbeing and happiness.<sup>V, VI, VII, VIII</sup> A healthy father-child relationship helps children develop to their full potential. When fathers engage in housework and childcare and spend time with their sons and daughters, this contributes to boys’ acceptance of

gender equality and to girls' sense of autonomy and empowerment.<sup>IX</sup> Involved fatherhood can help protect children from violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect, and it can help ensure their access to education and health. When daughters and sons see their fathers in respectful, non-violent, equitable relationships with their mothers and other women, they internalize this role modeling and the idea that men and women are equal and pass this on to their own children.<sup>X, XIXII.</sup>

This means that all men who are part of a child's life can play an important role in his or her development. Having a "good dad," whether biological or not, can be a powerful, positive force in children's lives.

## **WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO MEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN CAREGIVING?**

While the benefits of involved fatherhood and boys' and men's caregiving are clear, many obstacles stand in the way. Specifically, poverty and economic instability often mean that poor men need to spend more time and effort focusing on their roles as financial providers – a role that has traditionally always been designated as a man's. Migration for work takes many adolescent boys and men as well as girls and women away from their families, and displacement by conflict, humanitarian disasters, and political instability also separates boys and men from their families. Traditional gender norms also continue to stand in the way. Becoming an involved father means challenging attitudes, stereotypes, and behaviors that are deeply entrenched, and reinforced by both men and women. The institutions and structures that shape the lives of women and men continue to resist full equality in terms of care work. The deeply entrenched structures of the workplace and economy present persistent obstacles to parent- and child-friendly policies and to men's

caregiving, just as they fail to support or value women's caregiving. Restrictive agendas embraced by governments around the world are cutting ever deeper into a sense of collective responsibility for care.

## Obstacles To Men's Involvement In Caregiving?

Men and women feel pressure to adhere to social and cultural norms, which stand on the path to men's involvement in caregiving. Research with Rwandan men who participated in fathers' groups found that despite men's interest in caregiving, they were hesitant to take on tasks that ran counter to "everything they were taught a man should do". Men's participation in the domestic tasks is usually stigmatized by other men and by women, which also makes change challenging, and men acknowledged that they often hid their participation in household chores.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGING THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS

Although beyond the child-rights agenda, these recommendations are especially important because their implementation needs the participation of children to define and realize a new vision of fatherhood and caregiving.

This report sets out the following recommendations:

- Create national policies and actions plans to promote involved, non-violent fatherhood and men's and boys' equal sharing of unpaid work.
- Take action plans and policies on fatherhood and caregiving

into public systems and institutions to enable and promote men's equal participation in parenting and caregiving.

- Institute and implement equal, paid, and non-transferrable parental leave policies in both public and private sectors, as well as other policies, which allow women's equal participation in the labor force and men's equal participation in unpaid care work.
- Gather and analyze data on men's involvement as fathers and caregivers and generate new evidence from programs and policies that work to transform the distribution of unpaid care, prevent VAW and VAC, and improve health and development outcomes for women, children, and men.
- Achieve a radical transformation in the distribution of care work through programs with men and boys, as well as with women and girls, that challenge social norms and promote their positive involvement in the lives of children.
- Recognize the diversity of men's caregiving and support it in all of its forms.





# WALKING THE TALK: FATHERS AND UNPAID CARE WORK IN THE HOME

**W**hile we are advocating for equal share of all unpaid care-work by boys and men, caring for children is a major component of unpaid care work. The adequate care of a child involves the “ongoing care and support a child needs to survive and thrive.” Involved fatherhood means upholding children’s rights and meeting a child’s basic physical, emotional, intellectual, and social needs. It also means supporting gender equality across generations. As Alyssa Croft, co-author of a Canadian report on the relationship between fathers’ sharing of chores and children’s aspirations, observes, “‘Talking the talk’ about equality is important, but our findings suggest that it is crucial that dads ‘walk the walk.’”

The amount of unpaid domestic and care work done by boys and men varies considerably from country to country and family to family, but everywhere in the world girls and women consistently do much more unpaid care work than boys and men do. However, many fathers say they do want to perform the unpaid care work and be more involved in the lives of their children. The change is particularly evident among younger people.

## What influences men's involvement in caring for children?

Various factors support men's involvement in care work. Having been taught to care for children, having witnessed their father taking care of their siblings, and their own current attitudes about gender equality are all associated with men's greater involvement in caregiving of young children. Men who are engaged in caregiving often credit their fathers and other men who were their role models. , Conditions of employment and policies that allow men to take leave to care for children are also important. And, from the programmatic perspective, gender-transformative programs play an important role in drawing men and fathers more fully into caregiving.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DIVISION OF PAID AND UNPAID CARE WORK FOR CHILDREN

The division of care work matters for the economy, for women and girls and for men themselves, and importantly, it matters for children. A survey in 16 countries found that 10 percent of girls aged 5 to 14 perform household chores for 28 hours or more weekly, with a measurable impact on their school attendance. The burden of housework can also affect girls' academic achievement and learning outcomes.

Taking on roles as caregivers offers boys and men the opportunity to begin to break free from narrow constructs of manhood and fatherhood, and to provide their sons and daughters with positive role models, improved health and development, and greater hopes for the future. The involvement of fathers or father figures in violence free child rearing, and quality time spent by

both the parents, wherever possible, results in enhanced cognitive, emotional, and social development for both children and parents, as is explored in greater detail later in this publication. Mothers and fathers – and family dynamics – play a crucial role in shaping children’s attitudes, their behaviors, and their understanding of the world; the division of unpaid care work in the household therefore matters for children, too.

## **THE BENEFITS OF THE DIVISION OF PAID AND UNPAID CARE WORK**

Having a father or father-figure who is more involved in the home has many benefits for children. Boys benefit from having a positive role model in their caring fathers. Girls whose fathers were engaged at household and care works were more likely to aspire to less traditional, and potentially higher paying, jobs. Boys who have seen their own fathers engage in domestic duties are themselves more likely to be involved in housework. Indeed, this “intergenerational transmission of care” can be a powerful contributor to the transformation of gender relations and ending inequality, opening a wider range of future possibilities for both boys and girls.



## **E**ngaging Boys and Young Men in Reflection about Gender Norms

“It was incredibly exciting when we [at the age of 16] started thinking about how we, as boys and young men, can play a role and stand up against the violence,” he says. “I think in a completely different way now. I have realized that my language may contribute to repression. I am aware of my body language and how I express my feelings. I will definitely behave differently with my life partner once I get married than I would have done if I had not participated in the group.” says Uttam Sharma from Nepal. Uttam Sharma, 24, is chairperson of the first boys’ group created under the project “Allies for Change: Together against Violence and Abuse.” The participants are now over 20 years old and are still working to challenge the existing gender-stereotypical norms and values.<sup>xxx</sup>

## **THE REASONS FOR FATHERS NOT CONTRIBUTING THEIR FAIR SHARE OF WORK IN THE HOME**

The stories of countless men around the world who are, or have become, involved fathers show clearly that change is possible.<sup>xxxI</sup> It is also increasingly common in many countries for both parents to be doing paid work outside the home. Despite the clear benefits of the division of paid and unpaid care work, including for children, some fathers do not contribute their fair share of working in the home, or cannot contribute as they are not present at home. Unpaid care work is given much less value than paid work outside the home, and even paid caring jobs like housecleaning, childcare, and elder care are usually paid at lower rates than other work is.<sup>xxxII</sup> Girls and boys learn from an early age that some types of work are valued while some are

not. The reasons for that often fall into one of the following three categories: 1) social norms and gender socialization that reinforce the idea that caregiving is “women’s work”; 2) economic and workplace realities and norms that drive household decision-making and maintain a traditional division of labor; and 3) policies that reinforce the unequal distribution of caregiving. Thus, as policies and programs attempt to address inequalities in unpaid care work, they must recognize the complex dynamics involved and work with both boys/men and girls/women to transform attitudes, behaviors, and structures.

## How to increase fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives and in unpaid care work at home?

In Nicaragua, the “Red de Masculinidades por la Igualdad de Género” (REDMAS) is working to engage health care professionals to actively include fathers in pre- and post-natal visits, as well as in labor and delivery. Men participating in program workshops reported greater participation and sharing of household duties, dedicating more time to their children and wives, and teaching their children values of respect and equality.<sup>xxxiii, xxxiv</sup> In Turkey, the Fatherhood Support Programme aims “to contribute towards the holistic development of children by addressing the parenting skills and attitudes of their fathers.” Program evaluation concluded that the participated fathers spent more time with their children, shouted less and used less harsh discipline, and, according to the mothers, became more involved in parenting and housework.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

## LEAVE FOR FATHERS

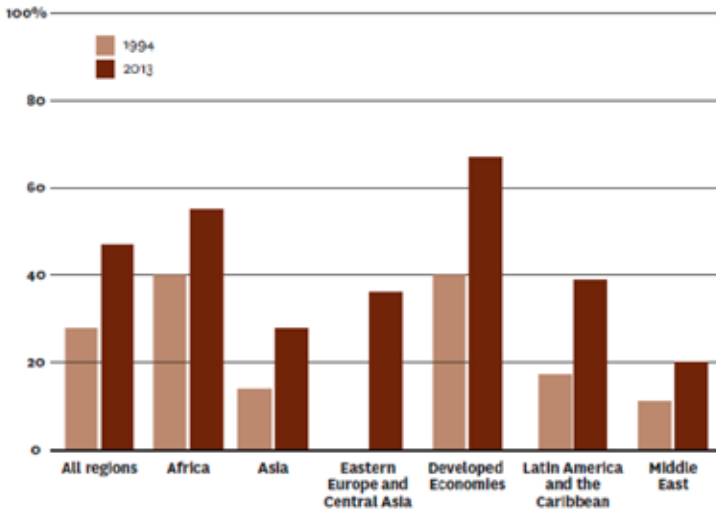
The evidence suggests that leave for fathers creates a structure that enables a more equitable division of unpaid care work and household tasks<sup>xxxvii</sup>, supports women's participation in the labor market, can increase their income and career outcomes, appears to lead to improved maternal health, including mental health, and reduced parenting stress<sup>xxxviii, xxxix</sup>. Longer periods of job protection via parental leave increases the probability that parents will stay at home during the first year of a child's life, as well as the chances that men and women will return to work.<sup>xl</sup> Men's caregiving – which is facilitated by leave policies – has important benefits for children and for men themselves. Since most of the above evidence on the benefits of providing paternity/parental leave come from high-income countries, research from low- and middle-income countries, and research focused on the benefits for children, for fathers, and for the economy, is urgently needed.

Leave policies for fathers generally fall into two categories: 1) paternity leave, the opportunity given to a father to take time off from work after the birth or adoption of a child; and 2) parental leave, which refers to longer-term leave available to either or both parents, allowing them to take care of an infant or child, usually after the initial maternity or paternity leave period.<sup>xli</sup>

Sixty-six of the 169 countries for which the ILO has collected information have long-term parental leave provisions for mothers or fathers, though 10 of these reserve the leave for mothers only. Nearly all developed economies, and countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, provide parental leave. Only 54 countries globally provide parents with paid leave specifically to care for children's health; nearly all of these are high- or middle-income countries. Even where it exists for fathers, it is often only

a few days. But such leave – especially when it is paid – is less common in developing or middle-income countries. Only two countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, three in Asia, five in the Middle East and five in Africa provide leave that can also be used by fathers.<sup>XLII</sup>

**FIGURE 2.8**  
**Percent of countries providing statutory paternity leave**  
 By region, 1994 (141 countries total) and 2013 (167 countries total)



Source: International Labour Organisation, *Maternity and Paternity Leave at Work: Law and Practice across the World*, Geneva, Switzerland. ILO, 2014



## **Good Practices for Making Leave Available to all Fathers and Families**

To support men's caregiving and to ensure adequate care for children, leave provisions should be made universally available to men, regardless of employment conditions and family configuration. Leave policies must also contend with diverse family configurations, as mentioned earlier in this report. Paid, non-transferable leave for fathers has proven to be one of the most effective policies for promoting greater equality in caregiving and sending a clear societal signal of the importance of fathers' care and responsibility. Some of the good practices to support men's caregiving and to ensure adequate care for children include: generous non-transferable quotas, paid leave, universal coverage with few eligibility restrictions, collective financing mechanisms that pool risk (rather than employer-based liability), and scheduling flexibility that provides the option, for example, of part-time leave.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING A MORE CARING SOCIETY**

Fathers and father-figures face resistance from the outside world, and sometimes from their partners or family members, to be involved in care-work, and may also think that they are not competent as mothers are. However we see changes here and there, but at a small scale. If the small changes now happening are to become a fatherhood revolution, and if women and men are to redistribute unpaid care work more equally, support is needed at many levels: in government policies, in workplaces, in schools, and in families.

This report sets out the following recommendations:

- Make caregiving part of the formal education of boys and girls.
- Implement policies that support fathers and mothers in equal caregiving.
- Provide state- and/or workplace-supported childcare and family care that is universal, not-for-profit, high-quality, and low-cost or free, and that supports women's economic empowerment.
- Support employers in establishing and adhering to more humane and flexible practices that support caregiving by male and female employees.
- Provide training for service providers across sectors that promotes reflection about their own gender biases around who does care work and why it is important, and that instructs service providers in how best to support the combination of unpaid care work and participation in paid work, whether it is a man or woman doing it.
- Recruit more men to work in the caring professions, such as in schools and in childcare programs.
- Develop programs to teach and support parenting and parental caregiving.
- Transform gender stereotypes at the societal level, including through campaigns about caregiving and men's role in it.
- Gather more data on the inequitable care burden and use that data to advocate for men's greater participation.



# FATHERS' ROLES IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS AND MATERNAL, NEWBORN, AND CHILD HEALTH

**W**orking with men is crucial to support the health of children from infancy through adolescence and is an urgent public health and human rights priority. Men and fathers matter because their positive, non-violent presence and support contribute to positive health outcomes for children, and they can be – and sometimes already are – advocates and agents for change, together with women and girls. Men and fathers matter for child health from the very moment of their own sexual and reproductive education, through the times when they are sexually active, to taking part in family planning and in maternal health, and when they are fathers.

## **IN THE BEGINNING: LEARNING ABOUT SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTION**

*“[Sexuality education sessions] are good because they are useful. Because generally, at school, in life, no one talks about such things. No one takes it as an obligation to tell us about this world, to tell us about sex.” – Young man, Zagreb, Croatia<sup>XLV</sup>*

Too many girls, boys and young people around the world enter sexual relationships with little knowledge about the mechanics of sex, and how to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Fewer still learn about respectful, mutually pleasurable relationships, and the emotional side of having sex. Many are also embarrassed to talk about sex, and they are unable or unwilling to challenge stereotypical, gendered behavior that assumes that only men are interested in sex. This lack of information, skills, and critical reflection lays the foundation for unequal intimate relationships rooted in gendered power relations.

This is where comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), a rights-based and gender-focused approach to sexuality education, is needed. At the same time, CSE programs are a necessary, but not sufficient, factor in promoting the life-long SRHR of young people. Fathers, along with mothers and other adults, can play a role in supporting children’s healthy development, and attention to boys’ and men’s – in addition to girls’ and women’s – SRHR must continue throughout their lives.

## **FROM SEX TO REPRODUCTION: MEN TAKING PART IN PLANNING THEIR FAMILIES**

Becoming a father or a mother is a life-changing event that



should come about as the result of choice, not chance. The ability to exercise the decision to reproduce or adopt is critical for the well-being of the parents – knowing their child comes at a time when they are able to provide for him or her and be good parents – as well as for the well-being of the child. It is important that girls and boys are wanted; however, even when a pregnancy is wanted, a child may be unwanted if she is a girl – a son preference issue. According to UNFPA, more than 117 million girls and women across Asia are “missing”, and many others are missing in Eastern European and Caucasus countries as well – largely the result of gender-biased sex selection, a form of discrimination.<sup>XLVI, XLVII</sup>

The participation of fathers is also necessary to effectively address sexually transmitted infections, for their own health, the health of their sexual partners, and the health of their children. Further, men often have a strong influence on women’s decisions or ability to seek safe abortion services and post-abortion services.

## **THE BENEFITS OF BEING INVOLVED IN MATERNAL NEWBORN AND CHILD HEALTH (MNCH)**

*“We just leave it to the mother to breastfeed the baby. I would like to know what food the baby should first eat, and when is the right time to stop breastfeeding. What kind of signs do you see that it’s time to give food to the baby?”* – Expectant father, Papua New Guinea<sup>XLVIII</sup>

The involvement of fathers before, during and after the birth of a child has been shown to have positive effects on maternal health (including nutritious behaviors), women’s use of maternal and newborn health services—including adequate rest and

nutrition, and the father's longer-term support and involvement in the life of the child. When men participate in pre-natal visits and receive maternal health education, they can support their partners in ways that can be life-saving for both the child and mother. Men's presence during pre-natal care visits provides an opportunity to engage them in the care of their partner and child and providing psychological and emotional support during pregnancy.

There is growing evidence that engaging fathers can have important benefits for the health of the child in the crucial weeks and months after birth – when the risk of dying is highest – and as the child grows older. Fathers' presence has been shown to be helpful in encouraging and supporting mothers to breastfeed. ., Fathers' support also influences women's decision to immunize their children and to seek care for childhood illnesses and prevent child mortality.<sup>LII, LIIILIV</sup>

## **BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO INVOLVING MEN IN SHRH AND MNCH**

The State of World's Fathers Report has identified two main challenges for involvement of fathers in their children's health: 1) social and cultural norms dictating men's and women's roles; and 2) the lack of appropriate and supportive health systems and policies. Social norms and systemic barriers to men's involvement are interlinked and mutually reinforcing: social norms shape the health system, including the services it offers, the groups it targets, and the attitudes of its healthcare providers. However, examples of programs exist, which have made a difference in involving fathers in their children's health.



## **Focusing on Public Health Service Providers to Engage Fathers in Newborn and Child Health**

Through the MenCare+ initiative, partners in Brazil, South Africa, Rwanda and Indonesia are training public health service providers to engage expectant fathers in gender-transformative group education around MNCH, and at the same time implementing comprehensive sexuality education for young women and men that includes reflection on childcare and caregiving. The initiative also includes the training of violence counselors, and the design of programs and protocols for those cases in which partner violence occurs, including during pregnancy.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE HEALTH AGENDA**

An inclusive health agenda that promotes engaging men in maternal, newborn, and child health is critical for achieving the health and well-being of children, as well as women and men themselves.

This report sets out the following recommendations:

- Start early and continue to educate young people and adults – within, outside, and beyond school – about relationships, sex, sexuality, reproductive health and planning to be a parent.
- Institute, monitor, and enforce national policies to encourage and support men’s involvement in SRHR – before, during, and after the birth of their babies – and in children’s health.

- Strengthen public and private health systems to promote and support men's involvement in quality SRH and MNCH services.
- Institute or expand pre-service training and on-going education for health care providers, including health facility staff and auxiliary workers, to support men's involvement.
- Collect data on men to better understand the factors that enable or undermine their engagement as contraceptive users and supporters of women's health.
- Develop and scale up programs to promote men's involvement in SRH and MNCH in ways that respect the rights and autonomy of women.
- Implement community and health sector campaigns to shift gender norms.

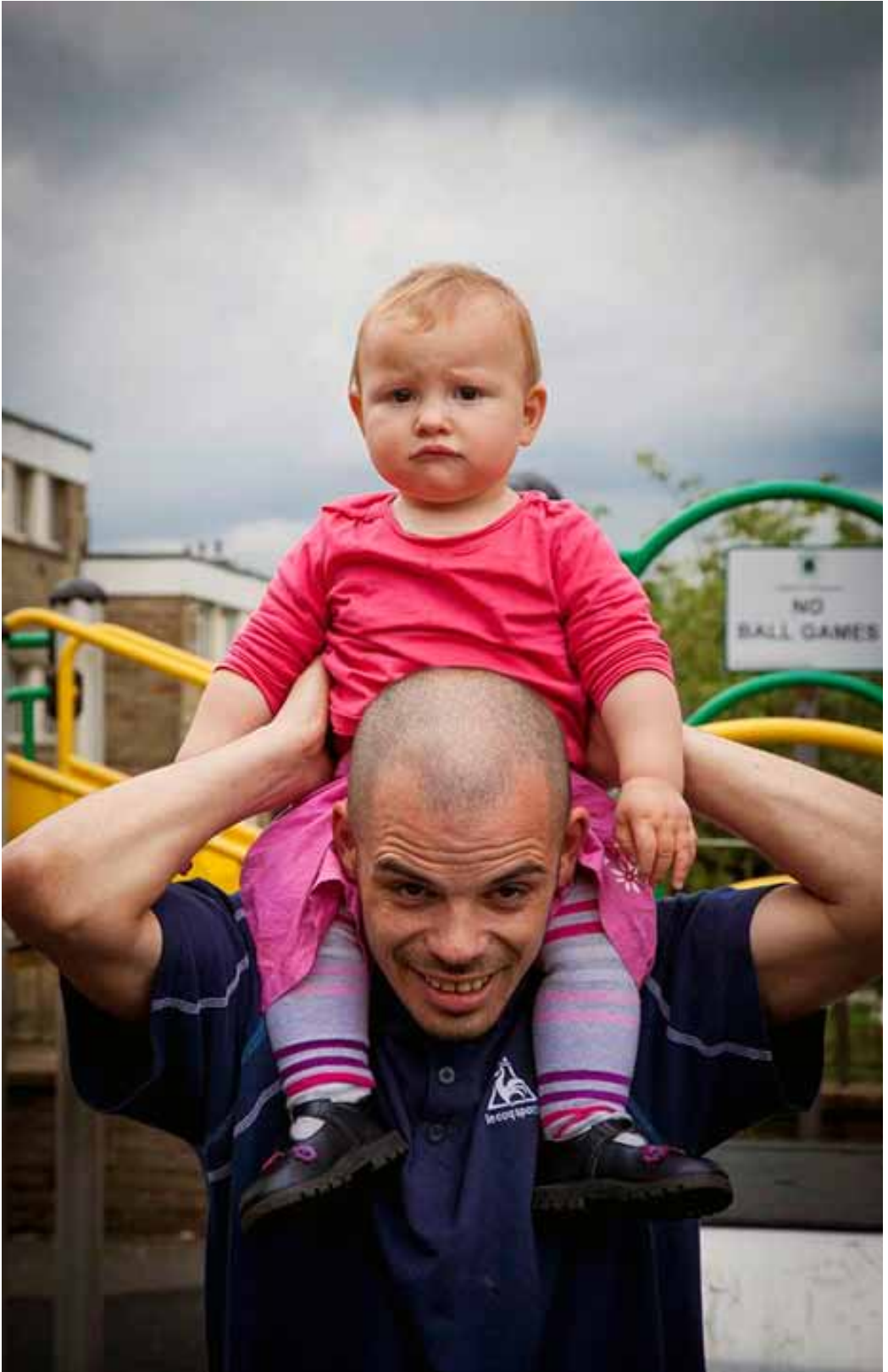


# FATHERHOOD AND VIOLENCE

## WORKING WITH FATHERS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN (VAC)

**V**iolence in families, against women and children, is one of the most challenging issues in promoting positive involvement by fathers. Globally, approximately one in three women experiences violence at the hands of a male partner in her lifetime. In addition, three-quarters of children between two and 14 years of age in low- and middle-income countries experience some form of violent discipline in the home. Most VAW in the home is committed by men, while VAC is perpetrated by mothers, fathers and other caregivers.

Working with boys and men/fathers to challenge harmful beliefs around men, masculinity and caregiving offers unique opportunities to concurrently address violence against children and violence against mothers, and to break the intergenerational cycle of violence. A transformation in social norms and attitudes around the social acceptance of corporal punishment, gender and, power, is needed. Skills around emotional competencies, empathy, communication, conflict resolution, non-violent disciplinary practices and anger management are also needed. Innovative, gender-transformative approaches such as parenting programs for fathers, can transform attitudes, improve relationships, and build skills, and provide promising examples for addressing violence against children and intimate partner violence.<sup>LVII</sup> Fathers can and do play important roles in protecting their children from violence and working as allies with women



towards a world free of violence. Violence against children is preventable.

The United Nations estimates that every year between 133 and 275 million children, worldwide, witness different forms of violence in their homes.<sup>LVIII</sup> Other data show that the country-specific proportion of men who, in childhood, saw or heard their mothers being physically abused ranged widely from about 10 percent in Bosnia to 44 percent in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>LIX</sup> In the Asia Pacific region overall, more than a quarter of men reported having witnessed the abuse of their mother, from eight percent in rural Indonesia to 56 percent in Papua New Guinea.

## The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence

Children's experiences of violence, both against them directly and against their mothers, have been found to be important predictors of men's use of – and women's experiences of – violence as adults. Collectively, data show clearly the long-term and intergenerational impact of witnessing or experiencing violence in childhood. Finally, in one study the incidence of VAW or VAC in father-dominated homes was three times higher than in more equitable homes. This in fact also results into boys more likely to become perpetrators and girls to be accepting the violent behaviors and getting into violent relationships. The authors of the study suggest that key features of more gender-equitable homes were more equal participation by fathers in childcare and domestic work, and shared decision-making.<sup>LXII</sup>

## Responsible Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers Initiative

The Responsible Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers Initiative in Uganda (led by the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University and Save the Children) aim to transform attitudes, improve relationships, and build skills, and provide promising examples of working with fathers.<sup>LXIII</sup> The project includes a mentoring program for young fathers to build relationship skills and positive parenting practices, and uses the concept of “positive masculinity”, which validates men’s caring nature and understanding how violence is caused both by male privilege and powerlessness.<sup>LXIV</sup>

## VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN BY FATHERS AND MOTHERS

*“My father beat me with a stick for fighting with my brother. I sat outside and thought about running away from home. I thought against my idea, as I didn’t know where I would get food to eat.”*  
Boy, Zambia<sup>LXV</sup>

The United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) enshrines the rights of children to be protected from “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”<sup>LXVI</sup> Research on the use of VAC in the home, especially corporal punishment, suggests that it is driven by multiple and interacting factors, including existing social norms and structural inequalities, which shape care settings and often affect whether parents, families,

and other caregivers have the means to adequately care for their children in non-violent and non-stressed ways.<sup>LXVII</sup> The use of corporal punishment and other forms of VAC are also driven by cultural and social norms related to child-rearing practices, including the acceptability of corporal punishment and other forms of violence as a way to discipline children. The percentage of mothers and fathers who think that physical punishment is necessary to raise/educate children varies by countries, but globally about 3 in 10 adults believe that physical punishment is necessary to properly raise and education a child.<sup>LXVIII</sup> Gender norms and dynamics are also a factor, particularly the view that boys need be raised to be physically tough while girls are fragile, compliant, and/or subordinate to boys and men.

## **WHO USES VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN?**

The research is clear that both mothers and fathers use violence against children and that there are gendered patterns to its use, meaning that boys and girls are often subject to different forms of violence, including physical and humiliating punishment, sexual abuse and exploitation, and involvement in armed groups. Both mothers and fathers use corporal punishment against children, though data from multiple settings find that mothers are more likely to use it, due to the fact that mothers usually have close and constant contact with children.<sup>LXIX</sup> While boys and girls may be punished for different reasons, often related to gendered expectations for children's behaviors, the prevalence of corporal punishment is similar for girls and boys in many countries, though in some countries, boys (especially at a younger age) are more likely to experience physical punishment in the home.





Corporal punishment is not only a violation of children’s rights, but is also ineffective as a form of discipline. Similar to witnessing violence between their parents, corporal punishment teaches children that violence is an acceptable or appropriate way to resolve conflict or get what they want, a lesson they may carry into their adult relationships.<sup>LXX</sup>

## Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting to Eliminate VAC

Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP)<sup>LXXI</sup> is a universal, primary prevention program to reduce physical and humiliating punishment of children. It is founded on children’s rights and gender equality frameworks. The program is designed to change parental attitudes and behavior, moving from external control strategies to mentorship and conflict resolution that supports the child’s learning. It aims to reorient parents from relationships with their children that are based on power and control to relationships based on cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual respect. A companion program, Positive Discipline in Everyday Teaching (PDET), follows the same approach and principles for teachers and educators.

## BUILDING FATHERS’ AND MOTHERS’ ABILITY TO NURTURE AND PROTECT CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE

*“I counsel him now, I don’t scold him anymore. On the contrary, I talk to him a lot, you can’t imagine how much. I’ve decided to give him more time, not yelling or hitting, because it never goes anywhere – rather talking to him, making him think, educating him so that he can be better and always trying to develop his mind, his intellect.”* – Gabriel, 29, father of one son, Nicaragua<sup>LXXII</sup>

Parenting interventions show promise for reducing VAC. Key lessons learned from such programs include:

- Build on the positive things that fathers and mothers already do for their children.

- Make specific efforts to recruit fathers.
- Provide training and raise awareness in the health sector and in the social-service institutions that support families about the positive role that men can play.
- Couple-focused programs show stronger results than programs that reach only mothers or only fathers.
- Work with boys and girls at an early age (e.g. program: Roots of Empathy).<sup>LXXIII</sup>

Another promising area for engaging fathers is via home visitation programs (e.g. the Nurse Family Partnership in the United States and the Family Nurse Partnership in the United Kingdom ; however, a follow up study of the Nurse Family Partnership found that the intervention was not effective in homes where domestic violence was present, highlighting the urgent need for interventions that address both VAW and VAC.<sup>LXXV</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING NON-VIOLENT FATHERING AND PARENTING**

The following recommendations are focused specifically on preventing and responding to violence in the context of fatherhood. These recommendations are crucial for the prevention of VAC as well as VAW.

This report sets out the following recommendations:

- Work with boys and girls from an early age to prevent violence of all kinds and to build the skills that support non-violent relationships and caregiving.

- Pass and enforce laws and policies to ban VAC and VAW, including the physical and humiliating punishment of children.
- Develop and strengthen national, integrated plans for the prevention of and response to VAC and VAW.
- Build capacity among all stakeholder to detect and respond to all forms of VAC and VAW, and to recognize and effectively respond to the intersections between these forms of violence.
- Recognize pregnancy and fatherhood as a key moment for violence prevention programming, and support programs to better prepare men for fatherhood within existing violence-prevention initiatives.
- Implement public education campaigns about violence and children's rights, gender equality, the negative effects of corporal punishment, and positive disciplinary approaches, including campaigns that target fathers.
- Recognize that public education will only be effective if it is part of thoughtful and adequately funded national prevention strategies.
- Work with fathers who have perpetrated violence in their families.



## CHAPTER 5

# WHY CHILDREN NEED FATHERS: THE ROLE OF FATHERS IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

*“Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her.”* – Urie Bronfenbrenner, developmental psychologist<sup>LXXVI</sup>

Research increasingly confirms that where the roles of men and women are converging, fathers’ involvement affects girls and boys (though fathers may matter differently for boys and girls) in the same ways as mothers’ involvement, in terms of children’s emotional, cognitive and social development.<sup>LXXVII</sup> Every father, like every mother or any other caregiver, matters uniquely to his child. The world needs men involved as caregivers not because fathers do uniquely “male” things, but because children are more likely to thrive with multiple, nurturing caregivers, *regardless of their sex*. Father’s or male caregiver’s positive involvement is associated with a child’s emotional and social development, including the development of empathy, cognitive and language development, positive outcomes in adolescence and adulthood and, growing to be gender-equitable men and empowered women.<sup>LXXVIII</sup>

Further, fathers matter not only in early childhood, but also in

adolescence and adulthood. Men, in comparison to women, are equally “wired for care”, and research shows that men have a similar proclivity to care for children.<sup>LXXIX, LXXXI, LXXXII, LXXXIII, LXXXIV</sup>

## UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF FATHERS TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT

In many nuclear-family arrangements, the father may make a unique and valuable contribution because in the absence of extended family, he is often the only caregiver other than the mother. When fathers build positive and healthy relationships, treat the mothers of their children with respect, and provide hands-on nurturing, their children are better off. The ways in which gender shapes men’s and women’s identities and practices plays an important role. However, the characteristics of the father as a parent rather than the characteristics of the father as a male adult appear to be most significant.<sup>LXXXV</sup>

### Fathers’ Absence

Many children grow up without the consistent presence of their fathers or father-figures. There are many reasons – often rooted in legacies of poverty, inequality, and discrimination – for fathers’ absence in the lives of their children. Absent fathers may have never formalized their relationship with the mother; they may have migrated for work or been displaced, incarcerated or dead. Sometimes, they must leave their homes and children out of obligation rather than out of choice, or in order to find economic opportunities. Some – not all – fathers are absent from the daily care of their children because they are seeking to provide for them financially. Many are absent because social norms dictate that their role in the family is not important.





Even if fathers don't live with their children, they often have close connections and participate in their lives.

There is a need for programs that enhance fathers' involvement with their children and that support the quality of the partners' relationship, as a couple and as co-parents. A recent review of nearly 200 parent interventions found that such programs seldom looked at the effects on fathers compared to mothers, and that most such parenting programs did little to engage or retain fathers.<sup>LXXXVI</sup> Indeed, most parent-training programs have long focused on mothers, but new studies and research find that parenting programs may work better when both parents, if relevant, are involved.<sup>LXXXVII</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING FATHERS' INFLUENCE IN THE LIVES OF THEIR CHILDREN**

The evidence clearly shows that children need multiple caregivers and that the world needs men – as both biological and social fathers – to be part of that care. To answer these needs, the following actions are necessary:

- Ensure that early child development policies and other social policies fostering children and adolescents' growth and development promote equitable involvement of men as fathers and caregivers.
- Strengthen the capacity of institutions that provide early childhood services to promote and support fathers' involvement.
- Improve the evidence on fathers' involvement in early child development by conducting more extensive research and

by collecting data on fathers' participation in policy and program evaluations.

- Extend parent-training programs to mothers and fathers across economic levels to encourage their involvement, to support positive parenting practices, and to strengthen co-parenting relationships.
- Increase public awareness of the role of fathers in child development and promote changes in social norms related to caregiving.

## CONCLUSION

The engagement of men to a greater extent in the daily care and nurturing of others – whether biological children or other children in their communities – must be an urgent global priority. When men and boys do an equal share of the care work, they can achieve richer, fuller, healthier, less violent lives – and women and girls can achieve their full potential in politics, in community life, and in the workplace. Far from a quaint idea, a “feel-good” moment on a greeting card around Father’s Day, or a touching TV commercial, men’s caregiving must be on the front line in the still-incomplete gender-equality revolution.

Most men in the world are or will become fathers, and virtually all have a connection to children in their lives. Yet, worldwide, the larger part of share of the care work is still carried out by women and girls – with profound and far-reaching consequences. Whether by individuals, by societies, in policies and laws, or in research, fatherhood and men’s involvement in children’s lives must be taken more seriously, or we will never achieve gender equality and equal rights for children, women, and men.

The State of the World's Fathers report argues for the greater involvement of men – as fathers and more broadly, in caregiving; child health; and in violence-prevention efforts. This does not mean focusing only on fathers. This means engaging men in partnership with women and families, and in all forms of family and partner relations, including same-sex couples and gay parents.

This report also makes reference to the involvement of men in contraceptive use, pregnancy, and childbirth, not only as key gender-equality issues, but also because shared planning of pregnancies is a gateway to greater equality in caregiving. Again, this point should not be seen as giving precedence to biological fatherhood. In fact, nothing could be more important than the connection that individual men – whatever their biological or social relationship to a given child – establish through their presence, love, and provision of essential support and care. So many men in so many parts of the world play important roles as “social fathers,” to children of all ages. This report deeply respects and argues for the importance of parents and caregivers and the difference they make in the lives of children.

This report concludes that it is urgently needed that boys and men build their parenting skills, collaborate with the mothers of their children in the accomplishment of the work that parenting requires, and make themselves available in the lives of their children. We talk about engaging men in general, and fathers in particular, in caregiving and as allies on behalf of children. We talk about the importance of doing this in ways that reflect an understanding of gender discrimination and stereotypes, and the ways in which these circumscribe the opportunities of women and men alike.

There is much that men can do to model engaged caregiving and fatherhood and to talk to other men about the joys, pleasures, and challenges of fatherhood. There is much that they can do to build the sense that men belong in the well-baby clinic, the preschool, the kitchen, the parent-teacher conference, and the playground, at least as much as they belong in an untold number of other, more stereotypically “manly” settings.

The State of the World’s Fathers report makes the case that engaging men and boys in care work contributes to gender equality, supports women’s and girls’ empowerment, enhances the well-being and rights of children, and improves the health and well-being of men themselves. This engagement provides us a means of preventing the transmission of violence from one generation to the next. It offers us a positive approach to fostering our physical and emotional well-being and building a fairer and more equal world for us all. The transformation of caregiving and fatherhood begins within individual families, but beyond that, it will take concerted social and political initiatives, changes in economic systems and the workplace, broad institutional reform, and widespread public education to come to full realization.

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# MenCare

A GLOBAL FATHERHOOD CAMPAIGN

## About Save the Children

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organization for children.

We work in around 120 countries. We save children's lives' we fight for their rights; we help them fulfill their potential.

We work to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. Across all of our work, we pursue several core values: accountability, ambition, collaboration, creativity and integrity.

In 2014, we reached over 55 million children directly through our and our partners' work. For more information please visit <http://www.raddabarnen.se> and <http://savethechildren.net>

## About MenCare

This report was produced by MenCare, a global campaign to promote men and boys' involvement as equitable, non-violent caregivers. With activities in more than 30 countries, MenCare partners carry out joint advocacy initiatives, research, and programming to engage men in positive parenting, equitable caregiving, violence prevention and in maternal, newborn, and child health. The campaign is co-coordinated by Promundo and SONKE Gender Justice, with Rutgers, Save the Children, and the MenEngage Alliance serving as Steering Committee members. For more information about the campaign and its partners, visit MenCare at: [www.men-care.org](http://www.men-care.org)



For sexual and reproductive health and rights



Save the Children



MenEngage  
Boys and men for gender equality