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Involved fatherhood is critical to gender equality and child development, reveals world's first global fatherhood report

Gender equality requires a revolution in the lives of men and boys, and achieving this requires urgent policy changes, MenCare-authored report argues in worldwide launch

Tuesday 16 June 2015 — Targeting fathers is the key to achieving gender equality. Fathers matter deeply to child development, and they are as biologically hard-wired to provide care as mothers are. Furthermore, fathers with close connections to their children live longer, have fewer health problems, and are more productive and generally happier: these are among the key findings of the first-ever *State of the World's Fathers* (SOWF) report, a landmark analysis of fatherhood that draws evidence from hundreds of studies covering all countries in the world with available data.

As much of the world turns to celebrate the role of fathers this month, with Father's Day falling on the 21st of June in many countries, the SOWF report reveals long-lasting disparities. Women continue to spend between 2 to 10 times longer than men caring for a child (or older person). These inequalities persist despite the fact that women today make up 40% of the formal global workforce and 50% of the world's food producers. While it is increasing, men's unpaid caregiving has not kept pace with women's participation in the labor force.

In fact, there is no country in the world where men and boys share the unpaid domestic and care work equally with women and girls. This imbalance has widespread negative effects. It hurts men, women, and children. Women lose opportunities for work and income, and girls are often held back from educational opportunities, which exacerbates gender inequality and gendered poverty. Boys and girls lose out on the benefits of having an involved father, and men miss out on the connections and closeness that fatherhood can offer. Even economies suffer. If women were able to participate in the labor market at the same rates as men do, the gross domestic product (GDP) would increase in the United States by as much as 5%, in Japan by 9%, in the United Arab Emirates by 12%, and in Egypt by 34%.

The report reveals that a lack of supportive policies, particularly paternity leave for new fathers, is part of the problem. Between 61 and 77% of fathers say they would work less if it meant that they could have more time with their children. However, although maternity leave is now offered in nearly all countries, only 92 countries offer leave that can be taken by new fathers; for half of these, the leave is less than three weeks. Iceland, which seems to be the world champion in men's use of paternity leave, sees men averaging 103 days of paid leave, but it is still only a third of what women take. Leave policies for fathers, when well designed, have the potential to transform gender relations at home, at work, and in society at large. In the United Kingdom, fathers who took leave after birth were 19% more likely to participate in feedings and to get up with the baby at night 8 to 12 months later, as compared with fathers who did not take leave. A study from Sweden showed that every

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month that fathers took paternity leave increased the mother's income by 6.7%, as measured 4 years later, which was more than she lost by taking parental leave herself. Indeed, no other policy change has proven as effective as paid, non-transferable leave for fathers in terms of increasing men's participation in caregiving.

The report argues that gender equality will not be achieved unless men are engaged in the care of their children and families, a subject "virtually invisible in public policies and in public discourse." According to the report, more information about the benefits of fatherhood for both men and their families – specifically, research on what children need to thrive – is urgently needed and could prove instrumental in guiding effective policy changes.

Around 80% of the world's men and boys will become fathers in their lifetime, and virtually all men have at least some connection to children in caregiving relationships. This may be in an extended family or a nuclear one, with parents living together or not, in a same sex relationship or a heterosexual one. Despite this, engaging men in caregiving is only just beginning to find its way onto the global gender equality agenda.

Published by MenCare, a global fatherhood campaign, the *State of the World's Fathers* report is intended to provide a periodic, data-driven snapshot of the state of men's contributions to parenting and caregiving globally by addressing four issues related to fatherhood: unpaid care work in the home; sexual and reproductive health and rights and maternal, newborn, and child health; men's caregiving and violence against children and women; and child development.

"When fathers take on their fair share of the unpaid care work, it can alter the nature of the relationships between men and women and children, as both fathers and mothers will have more time for their children, women are released from some of their 'double burden,' and fathers get to experience the joys, satisfactions, and stresses of caring for their children," says Nikki van der Gaag, feminist and SOWF report author. "Taking up roles as caregivers also offers men the opportunity to begin to break free from the narrow concepts of manhood and fatherhood, providing their sons and daughters with positive role models, improved health and development, and higher hopes for the future."

"This first *State of the World's Fathers* report reaffirms that fathers matter for children and that caregiving is good for fathers," says Gary Barker, SOWF report author and International Director, Promundo, "and with it we want to begin to lay the groundwork to influence future policy and programs around the world that address the current lack of men's and boys' equitable participation in caregiving, and that address rigid ideas about gender – and the harm that these issues bring to women, to children, and to men themselves. Gender equality requires a revolution in the lives of men and boys, including their full participation in domestic life."

MenCare is coordinated globally by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice and jointly steered by Save the Children, Rutgers, and the MenEngage Alliance.

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Download the full SOWF report here (June 16): **WWW.SOWF.MEN-CARE.ORG**

Notes to editors:

About the *State of the World's Fathers* Report | KEY FINDINGS

UNPAID CARE WORK IN THE HOME

While it is increasing, men's unpaid caregiving has not kept pace with women's participation in the labor force. The amount of care work done by men varies from country to country and family to family, but nowhere do men and boys contribute equally.

- Women's time spent and responsibility for unpaid care remains disproportionate to men's: women spend 2 to 10 times longer, on average, caring for a child or older person than men do.
- Women spend more time on combined paid and unpaid work, including in developed economies: women in OECD countries spend 22 more minutes a day on paid and unpaid care work than men do. The largest disparities are in Latin America, where women spend 6 to 23 more hours a week than men do.
- Women, as compared to men, spend over 3 times as much time on unpaid care work in Mexico, New Zealand, and Japan; nearly 5 times as much in Korea; 8 times as much in South Africa; and nearly 10 times as much in India. Even in Europe, which as a region has achieved the greatest degree of equality, women do 26 hours of domestic and care work on average per week, as compared to 9 hours per week for men.
- The double burden carried by many women reduces their ability to contribute to the household economy, as well as to develop their own skills and talents outside the home. In a study in Latin America and the Caribbean, more than 50% of women aged 20 to 24 said that their unpaid responsibilities in the home were the main reason they could not look for paid work.
- Studies from India, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Malaysia have found that children's ages and fathers' marital satisfaction, as well as their relationships with their own fathers, are all important drivers of change.
- Between 61 and 77% of fathers report that they would work less if it meant that they could have more time with their children.
- While maternity leave is now offered in nearly all countries, only 92 offer paternity leave for fathers. Iceland seems to be the world champion in men's use of paternity leave: men there now average 103 days of paid leave. However, women in Iceland still take 3 times more than this. In other countries, fathers only take around 20% of the leave that mothers do.

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SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) AND MATERNAL, NEWBORN, AND CHILD HEALTH (MNCH)

The report provides evidence that even though unmet sexual and reproductive health needs continue to be the biggest threat to women's and girls' health worldwide, men have not been adequately engaged in the solution.

- In the Global South, men's presence at pre-natal care visits varies greatly, from 96% in the Maldives to only 18% in Burundi. However, fathers around the world are often not closely engaged during pregnancy and are absent at birth and in early infancy, despite evidence to suggest that engaging men and boys can have important benefits for the health of mothers and children.
- Contraception is still seen globally as primarily the responsibility of women. Women account for 75% of the world's contraceptive use, even though they are half of the population.
- One woman dies every 2 minutes from complications associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Across the globe, 34 of 1,000 babies alive at birth, die before the age of 1, and 46 of 1,000 die before the age of 5.
- The involvement of fathers before, during, and after the birth of a child has been shown to have positive effects on maternal health behaviors, women's use of maternal and newborn health services, and fathers' longer-term support and involvement in the lives of their children.
- A recent analysis of research from low- and middle-income countries found that male involvement was significantly associated with improved skilled birth attendance, utilization of post-natal care, and fewer women dying in childbirth.
- In high-income countries, 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.

MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The report reiterates that the majority of women who suffer violence do so at the hands of an intimate male partner. It examines how the gendered nature of parenting and experiences of violence as children can lead some men to use violence against women and against children in adulthood. The result is that only a minority of children make it to adulthood without experiencing or witnessing some kind of violence in their homes, schools, or communities – often at the hands of adults who are supposed to care for them.

- Approximately 1 in 3 women globally experiences violence at the hands of a male partner in her lifetime – a level that the World Health Organization has called an “epidemic.”
- Research from Norway found that the incidence of violence against women or children in father-dominated homes was 3 times higher than in more equitable homes.
- Gender-based violence (GBV) against pregnant women ranged from 2% in Australia, Cambodia, Denmark, and the Philippines to 14% in Uganda.
- Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence every year, and 60% of children between the ages of 2 and 4 around the world (nearly 1 billion children) are subjected to physical punishment by their caregivers on a regular basis.
- The most common form of violence by parents against children is corporal punishment, including physical and humiliating punishment, and it is widespread.

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- Approximately 75% of children between the ages of 2 and 14 experience violent discipline in the home in low- and middle-income countries.
- Studies in high-income countries suggest that anywhere between 45 and 70% of children whose mothers are experiencing violence themselves experience physical abuse.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The report finds that children need at least one deeply involved and dedicated caregiver to thrive, and that this can be a man or a woman. Children need care and the world needs men – as biological as well as social fathers – to be part of that care.

- Evolution has left men as deeply biologically wired for emotional connections to children as women are. In other words, children similarly affect the development of both mothers and fathers, just as fathers and mothers affect children.
- Fathers' involvement has been linked to lower rates of depression, fear, and self-doubt in their young adult children, and it may also protect sons from delinquency.
- Levels of fathers' involvement in children's educational activities vary greatly by country: between 10% of fathers in Swaziland and 79% of fathers in Montenegro report being involved in at least one learning activity with their children.
- However non-residence does not equal absence, as fathers often maintain varying degrees of involvement with their children. In the United Kingdom, 87% of non-resident fathers say they have contact with their children, and nearly 50% say that their children stay with them on a regular basis.

POLICY CALLS TO ACTION

- States should adopt and implement parental leave policies for both mothers and fathers that guarantee paid parental leave that is equitable and non-transferable between parents.
- States should adopt and implement policies in the public health sector that promote and support men's and boys' involvement, education, and awareness-raising in sexual and reproductive health and rights, men's involvement in maternal and child health, before and after the child's birth.
- States should pass and enforce laws to ban physical and humiliating punishment of children and implement the laws through policies that promote non-violent child rearing that involves fathers, mothers, educators, and social workers.
- States should adopt and implement policies that specifically encourage and support fathers' and caregivers' involvement in early childhood development, care, and education.

About MenCare

MenCare is a global fatherhood campaign active in approximately 30 countries on 5 continents. Through programming, media campaigns, and advocacy, MenCare partners work at multiple levels to engage individuals, communities, institutions, and policymakers. MenCare's mission is to promote men's involvement as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers in order to achieve family well-being, gender equality, and better health for mothers, fathers, and children. Visit www.men-care.org. MenCare is coordinated globally by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice and jointly steered by Save the Children, Rutgers, and the MenEngage Alliance.

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Promundo (www.promundoglobal.org)

Sonke Gender Justice (www.genderjustice.org.za)

Save the Children (www.savethechildren.net & www.raddabarnen.se)

Rutgers (www.rutgers.international)

MenEngage Alliance (www.menengage.org)