

Managerial Support for and the Career Impacts of the Use of Parental Leave by Male Employees.

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Summary

Introduction

Both mothers and fathers, in Canada, have access to 35 weeks of parental leave when becoming parents. However, mothers continue to be the parent who is most likely to take parental leave, especially in industries with a higher proportion of men, such as geosciences. Roughly 10 percent of leave-takers in Canada are fathers, who tend to take significantly shorter leaves than mothers. As a result of this trend parental leave continues to be viewed as maternal benefit and not one intended for use by fathers. This skewed perception has damaging consequences for both men and women in the workplace. In male dominated industries this perception can even appear to be exaggerated, because there is less likely to be a precedent set for leave use and there are often fewer flexible policies and family-friendly supports and policies in place. The low rate of leave use by male employees has a variety of potential explanations. Two primary organizational issues that emerge for fathers are the fear of managerial disapproval and that one's career will be negatively impacted by leave use. This fear may be rooted in the perception that for men, unlike women, the use of leave is seen as a choice and not a necessity.

Method

This research is part of a larger multi-level project conducted with seven large, Manitoba employers, which investigated attitudes toward the use of parental leave by male employees. This paper focuses on two parts of the data. First, we look at the self-reported support of leave use of 405 managers' using quantitative analysis. We then explore the responses of 268 managers and employees to one long answer question exploring the career impact of leave taking on male employees. Using qualitative theme analysis participants' responses were coded and several themes emerged.

Results

Overall, managers reported support for the use of leave by male employees, and female managers were significantly more supportive of leave use than male employees. In regards to impact, respondents felt that leave use was acceptable in their organization, but only by mothers. Many respondents felt their employers were fair and would support the use of leave, citing the legislated requirement to do so. Some participants cited that leave use by male employees did in fact have a negative impact on careers in their organization and provided stories, either personally experienced or witnessed within their organization, to back up their claims. Ten percent of the participants felt that could not state an opinion given that there had been no male employees who had taken leave and, therefore, did not have an informed opinion on the matter. In conclusion, those participants who reported negative impacts on career were in fact those with the most experience with leave, either taking it themselves or seeing a coworker do so. In addition, the participants from the organization with the highest reported leave use by male employees, also had

the greatest proportion of reports of negative career impact post leave use for men. These results indicate that managers and employees with more experience with or exposure to parental leave use offer a more informed and realistic view of the use of leave and its impact. Finally, the results exemplify the need for significant improvement within organizations on how leave use by male employees is managed and supported. Implications for organizational policies and managerial support will be discussed.