

The Importance of Dads Taking Parental Leave in STEM Fields

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Summary

Canadian parental leave policy has evolved over the last 50 years to provide more flexibility and meet the changing needs of families (Campbell, 2006). In December of 2017, the federal government announced an extension of parental leave from a maximum length of 35 to 61 weeks and in 2019 add a Shared Parenting Benefit of 5-8 weeks for the second parent. This elongated leave gives parents more flexibility in adapting to the arrival of a child (Campbell, 2006). Employers are legally obligated to follow the legislation and support leave requests when employees meet the minimum qualifications for leave. Parents are guaranteed either their previous job or job of equivalent responsibility and pay upon their return (Government of Canada 2019). However, despite father's gaining access to parental leave in 1990 (Marshall, 2008) and new longer leaves available to be accessed by either parent less than 12% of leave takers are men, despite the significant benefits for fathers' early involvement with their children. The gendered use of leave presents key challenges for the workplace and for parents, which will be discussed in this presentation. Recommendations for fathers (and parents), employers, and employer policy will be provided in the talk.

The presentation will report on 2 major research projects. The first project used structured interviews with 46 Canadian employers to understand their perception of the parental leave extension, its impact on their employees and their organization, and to clarify how they have adapted their internal policies to the new legislation (Pettigrew, 2020; Pettigrew, 2022). The second project included a survey of 954 men and managers exploring the use of parental leave by male employees and the workplace barriers (e.g., managerial attitudes, organizational culture, and coworker behaviour) they face when taking leave (Pettigrew, 2014; Pettigrew & Duncan, 2021).

The presentation will review the legislated parental leave policies, review the common (or not so common) employer supplemental policies, and the benefits and challenges of parental leave use by

men emerging from these two research projects. Special context will be provided for use of leave within STEM industries, which often have a higher proportion of male employees and can be harder environments for men to take leave.

References

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