

The belief that women do care work and men get paid does a great disservice to society

[theconversation.com /the-belief-that-women-do-care-work-and-men-get-paid-does-a-great-disservice-to-society-43204](https://theconversation.com/the-belief-that-women-do-care-work-and-men-get-paid-does-a-great-disservice-to-society-43204)

Gary Barker The historical production-reproduction divide held that mothers are the chief caregivers of children and men are providers. But this division has rapidly and rightfully fallen by the wayside in much of the world and in most households. Women now [make up more than 40%](#) of the paid workforce globally, though women's pay is still stubbornly lower than men's by [an average of 24%](#).

While the issues affecting mothers and children are ongoing but established, the modern role of men as fathers is less explored. To this end we've just launched the first ever [State of the World's Fathers](#), a report on what men are doing globally in terms of care work.

So where do men fit in? Yes, there are millions of stay-at-home fathers in North America, Europe and elsewhere – [2m in the US alone as of 2012](#). Some of these fathers combine part-time paid work from their homes, as women have done for centuries; others are full-time caregivers.



In countries like India women do up to ten times more care work. [Mother by Shutterstock](#)

But globally, studies have found that nowhere in the world are men doing fully half of the care work. In the poorest countries in the world, women and girls [do two to ten times the amount](#) of caregiving that men do. In the richest countries, men barely reach 40% of the share.

In the corporate world, women are enjoined to lean in to lead at work and for men to lean in to caregiving at home, but attention must also be given to the world's poorest households. [UN data shows](#) that half the world's working population works in informal or precarious employment. By most measures, absolute poverty in the world has

declined in the past 20 years but income inequality and instability have either worsened or remained the same.

We can't talk about engaging fathers without thinking about what children need to thrive in particular in the world's poorest households. Poverty and precarious work are the major sources of parental stress and major drivers of [violence against children](#). Families struggling to make ends meet pass that stress to their children. Single parents (usually mothers) and any caregiving arrangements can do a great job of raising healthy, thriving children. But more people also means more support – and the missing element in too many households has been men.

Start with boys

We launched the fatherhood report as a fundamental issue of fairness and equity. Men's limited participation in caregiving holds women and girls back in the workforce and in their education and is a driver of household-level poverty. Men tend to contribute less of their income when they are less involved or less connected to their children. And when men do more of the household work, women's time is freed up for paid work. It has been suggested that the US GDP [would be 9% larger](#), and India's GDP would be US\$1.2 trillion bigger if women worked outside the home at the rates that men did.

To make the shift from outdated divisions, we need to encourage boys to see themselves as co-caregivers just as we raise our daughters to be providers and achievers.

Start them early. [Dad by Shutterstock](#)

We need just work and just wages for the world's poorest along with universal access to subsidised, high-quality day care. We also need paid, non-transferable leave for fathers and mothers, flexible leave polices and income support for families with young children. Policies such as those taken up in Scandinavia, such as paid paternity leave arrangements [in Sweden](#), nudge us toward gender equality and social equality.



The change may happen more quickly than we might have thought.

Research shows that most fathers [want to be more involved](#) in their children's lives. Most men feel everyday that hands-on caregiving is one of their main sources of meaning in life. Men who do [more of the caregiving live longer](#), are healthier, and have better relationships, [including sexual relationships](#), with their partners.

We don't presume that change will be easy — particularly changing centuries of beliefs that women and girls are supposed to do the care work while men do the paid work. Add to this the employers and workplaces that put short-term efficiency and profit ahead of human capital. But we won't achieve a fair start for families around the world without just work, accessible childcare and full equality in caregiving.