



POLICY BRIEFING



Reducing Fatherhood Forfeits: The importance of gender equality in parenting

21st-century fathers are more actively involved in the caregiving of their children than ever before, which has many benefits to both parents and the children. Especially for children, having an involved father can make for happier, healthier and ultimately more successful lives.

Policy makers and legislators should note this societal change and consider amendments to legislation (see below) to **enable fairer opportunities for caregiving fathers.**

Similarly, businesses should take action to **improve the experiences of caregiving fathers at work** to maximise the effectiveness of the labour market and reduce skills shortages, which have a significant impact upon the UK economy and the gender pay gap.¹

Supporting caregiving fathers is specifically pertinent in the post-covid context, in which fathers are 'voting with their feet' and leaving organisations if they are not able to reconcile work and family.²



Findings - Fathers and the Fatherhood Forfeit

Fathers encounter structural challenges when attempting to combine work and caregiving. My research has identified that caregiving fathers face specific 'fatherhood forfeits' in the workplace

- Fathers get less workplace support for caregiving than mothers.
- Fathers face social mistreatment within the workplace and socially – they are mocked, viewed as idle, struggle with friendships, face negative judgement and are viewed with suspicion when they attempt to combine work and caregiving.
- Fathers are less likely to obtain a role that allows them to combine caregiving and work (such as part-time employment).
- Fathers are considered as secondary parents within the workplace context, regardless of actual family set up.

My recent research has observed that these fatherhood forfeits continue to be evident notwithstanding the fact that work patterns changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



What can policy makers, businesses and legislators do to reduce the 'fatherhood forfeit'?

Revise the Equality Act (2010)

The addition of 'caring status' as a protected characteristic would ensure that fathers have protected legal rights when subjected to mistreatment, rather than facing variable levels of 'good practice'.

Amend the Employment Relations (Flexible Work) Act 2023 (within the Employment Rights Act, 1996)

Currently, employees have the right to request flexible working upon starting employment; however, their requests can be denied as long as they are considered in a 'reasonable' manner. This creates an additional obstacle for caregiving fathers, who are marginalised in this space. Making flexible working the default approach and leveraging the concept of 'genuine occupational requirements' from the Equality Act would shift the emphasis to organisations, who would have to explicitly state the reasons why flexible working was not feasible from the outset.⁴

Implement an Annual Flexibility Audit

Akin to Gender Pay Gap Reporting. This audit would involve reporting on the outcomes of flexible working requests and agreed arrangements within organisations, to shed light on the discrepancies and help to promote transparency and accountability, enabling and encouraging organisations to take measure to improve their flexibility policies.



Background

Workforce statistics reflect a more equal division of work and care between parents, with the most common arrangement post-covid being one where both parents are in full-time employment.⁵

The rate of stay-at-home dads has increased by one third⁶ and the number of hours of childcare undertaken by fathers per day also increasing during this period.⁷

However, UK society continues to place mothers in the role of primary carer, which can be seen to be stalling gender equality. This in turn plays a key role in the maintenance of the gender pay gap,⁸ which in the UK remains one of the largest internationally.⁹

In the workplace, maintenance of traditional gender norms has been found to have a negative impact on recruitment, retention, performance and work experience of caregiving fathers.



References

- 1 Office for National Statistics, 2023, [Gender Pay Gap in the UK](#).
- 2 Kelland, J. Rosier, C. and Deahan, D. (2023). Fatherhood Forfeits Post Covid-All Change or business as usual?. Available at fatherhoodforfeits.com (QR below).
- 3 For full details please see fatherhoodforfeits.com.
- 4 Kelland, J. Rosier, C. and Deahan, D. (2023)
- 5 Office for National Statistics. 2022. [Employee Earnings in the UK](#).
- 6 ONS, 2023. [Economic activity and employment type for men and women by age of the youngest dependent child living with them in the UK](#).
- 7 Fatherhood Institute, 2023. [Closing the Gap](#).
- 8 ONS, 2023, [Gender Pay Gap in the UK](#).
- 9 PWC, 2024. [Women in Work 2024](#).



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