

Are Fathers Pulling Their Weight at Home?

By: John Hoffman

California sociologist Arlie Hochschild coined the phrase The Second Shift* to describe the extra load of unpaid work women in dual career households were doing at home. Since then experts and commentators have scrutinized and debated whether or not fathers are doing their share of caring for children, cooking, cleaning and other domestic work.

* The Second Shift, Arlie Russell Hochschild, with Ann Machung, Penquin Books, 1989

It is not always easy to make definitive statements about the exact amounts of time parents devote to child care and other housework. Looking after children doesn't always take place in easy to measure chunks, parents often multi-task and children of different ages require varying amounts of direct care.

Most studies have shown that, on average, fathers spend less time than mothers on unpaid work including child care. These averages are affected by several factors. For example, employed fathers tend to work longer hours than employed mothers. Mothers are more likely than fathers to spend significant amounts of time out of the paid work force and at home caring for children.

The Parent Work Day

If we think of a father or mother's "work day" as paid and unpaid work combined, data from Statistics Canada's 2005 General Social Survey (GSS) show that in mother-father families where both parents are employed, the mother and father work days are virtually the same length. In fact, the work days of both mothers and fathers have increased length since 1986. The increase in fathers' work days is mostly due to more unpaid work, while the increase in women's work day is entirely due to more hours of paid work.

As Table 1 shows, the main difference between mother and father work days is that, on average, fathers spend 1.8 more hours on paid work and mothers devote 1.7 more hours to unpaid work.

Table 1. Average hours per day spent on paid and unpaid work by married and common-law fathers and mothers aged 25 -44 and employed full-time

	Paid work	Child Care*	Other Unpaid Work	Total (Paid and Unpaid work)
Fathers	7.4	1.0	2.1	10.6
Mothers	5.6	1.5	3.3	10.5

- The GSS, which records detailed time-use information from a large sample of Canadians, defines child care as activities which involve direct contact with the child. Clearly parents spend other time with children, which would not be recorded as child care in this table.

However, in certain other family structures and circumstances, father and mother work days are not quite the same length.

Table 2. Average hours per day spent on paid and unpaid work by lone parent fathers and mothers aged 25-44 and employed full-time

	Paid Work	Child Care	Other Unpaid Work	Total
Fathers	6.7	1.1	2.1	10.0
Mothers	6.6	1.1	3.1	10.8

Table 3, Average hours per day spent on child care and other unpaid work by unemployed fathers and mothers aged 25 - 44

	Paid Work	Child Care	Other Unpaid Work	Total
Fathers	1.1	1.9	4.1	7.1
Mothers	0.4	3.3	4.9	8.4

Tables constructed from the
2005 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada
<http://www.statcan.ca/english/Dli/Data/Ftp/gss.htm>

MORE FATHERS ARE TAKING LEAVE FOR FAMILY REASONS

- The rate of fathers taking paternity leave has risen dramatically. In 2007 27% of eligible men filed for parental leave benefits compared to only 3% in 2001. Much of the increase took place in Quebec where fathers can take five weeks of leave which cannot be transferred to the mother. In Quebec, 56% of fathers took paid parental leave in 2006. In the rest of Canada the rate was 10%.
- Other research shows that, overall 55% of fathers take time off from work around the time their children are born - 21% use vacation days and 11% take unpaid leave (Beaupré and Cloutier 2007).
- Canadian fathers of preschoolers missed an average of 6.3 work days for personal or family reasons in 2007, up from 1.8 days in 1997. The corresponding numbers for mothers were 4.1 days in 1997 and 4.8 days in 2007.

MORE INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT CANADIAN DADS.

- The number of fathers reporting daily participation in child care rose from 57% in 1986 to 73% in 2005. (90% of mothers reported daily participation in both 1986 and 2005.)
- In 1986, the average mother did 2.2 hours more housework per day than fathers (3.3 vs. 1.1 hours). By 2005 the difference had decreased to 1.3 hours (2.8 vs. 1.5 hours).
- The proportion of dual-earner families among husband/wife families with children under 16, was 36% in 1976 and 69% in 2005.
- Although mothers are still far more likely to be out of the workforce and at home caring for young children, the number of stay-home mothers is decreasing and the number of stay-home fathers is *increasing*.
- In 2009* 12% of families with a stay-home parent had a father at home, compared to 4% in 1986.
- The number of fathers who worked part-time while their spouse worked full-time increased from 6,555 in 1976 to 50,315, in 2009.

Source: FIRA Father Involvement Research Alliance