

Paternity leave survey: 90% of French people support extending the policy

Press release

Paris, 28 November 2022 – Becoming a parent has very little influence on a man’s career but, for women, motherhood not only adds drag to professional momentum, it also drags down salary numbers. Paternity leave appears to be an important tool for equality between men and women. On a professional level, it equalises the length of leave for mothers and fathers and it shifts the weight of the “maternity risk” from the mother’s shoulders to a “parental risk” that both parents can carry. On a family level, paternity leave makes it easier to divide the couple’s tasks and responsibilities equally.

The EDHEC Diversity & Inclusion Chair conducted a survey in May 2022 on the obstacles and expectations the French encounter with paternity leave. They wanted to know, “20 years after it was created and one year after it was extended, where does paternity leave stand in France?”

Increasing use of paternity leave

Fathers seem to be taking paternity leave more often since it was extended in July 2021. In this study, 94% of fathers who had a child after 1 July 2021 took paternity leave, contrasted with only 70% of fathers who took paternity leave before this date. The study shows that the primary deciding factors for paternity leave use are age and income. The older and more highly paid the men were, the less likely they were to take leave.

Among the fathers who took paternity leave after 1 July 2021, 84% took the full 25 days. There were differences observed related to age: the younger the father, the longer his leave. However, though the length of leave has been extended, only 6% of fathers have changed their working hours or taken further parental leave after their paternity leave.

Hager Jamel, EDHEC’s Diversity & Inclusion Chair director, says, “Today’s men and women both are waiting for compulsory, longer, and better-compensated paternity leave so that being a parent can be a pleasant experience that does not impact their personal or professional aspirations. It’s time for parents to get out of the trap of societal expectations that impose gendered roles and tasks. Mothers and fathers should be able to unite parenthood and their careers”.

Lack of knowledge about the policy and ‘incompatible’ workloads

There are many reasons fathers choose not to use their paternity leave and most of those depend on their professional situation when their child is born.

The study found four main reasons:

- A lack of knowledge about their leave rights: 35% of fathers indicated that they did not know about this policy or did not have the right to use it, even if their child was born after paternity leave was established in France.
- Work: 28% of fathers that did not take paternity leave mentioned having too large a workload; 7% of respondents mentioned a precarious work situation.
- Potential loss of salary associated with paternity leave: 16% said they could not risk a salary reduction.
- The idea of the father’s role, one reminiscent of gender stereotypes: 10% thought that paternity leave was not necessary or that it is the mother’s responsibility to take care of a newborn.

The influence of social norms and the concept of the father’s role

The study revealed three main factors that influence the use of paternity leave: social norms, the concept of the father’s role, and how equality is perceived between men and women within a company.

Social norms have a significant impact. A man who thinks that his partner, his friend(s), or even his colleagues won’t approve of his decision to take paternity leave will be 20% less likely to use his leave than a man who thinks his circle will approve. The use of paternity leave is especially high among men who think that “the majority of their male friends with children take their paternity leave”.

The concept of family roles also has an influence. When men have a more traditional vision of the father’s role, they take less paternity leave. For example, fathers who think that “mothers are naturally more sensitive when taking care of babies than fathers” take less paternity leave than other men. Effectively, within the traditional concept, familial roles are gendered: the father takes care of the family’s financial needs and the mother takes care of the children.

The perception of equality between men and women in the workplace plays an important role. The more men believe that their company is egalitarian, the less they use their paternity leave – this may seem counter-intuitive at first glance. We can look at two possible explanations:

- Perceiving a company as egalitarian doesn’t necessarily mean that it is. Generally, men more than women tend to consider their company as being egalitarian. Some men don’t notice the inequalities that women experience either because they don’t live that same experience or because they deny it.
- Our study also revealed that the men who believe their company to be egalitarian are the same men who have traditional views of a father’s role. So, in addition to having lower standards for gender equality (which may lead them to overestimate it in their company), these men do not see their role as caring for a newborn.

9 out of 10 participants support strengthening paternity leave

For nearly 90% of participants, paternity leave needs to be strengthened. When asked which measures should be prioritized for implementation:

- 36% of participants support fully compulsory paternity leave.
- 33% are in favour of extending its duration.
- 16% prioritise better leave compensation. While these measures are mostly handled by the legislature, companies still have their role to play. When the participants were asked open-ended questions, they discussed concrete expectations of their employers:
 - Change the company culture so as to normalise paternity leave and fathers' engagement at home;
 - Put incentives in place such as salary preservation or additional paternity leave days;
 - Consider company organisation that anticipates and supports a father's absence.

80% of those who responded to the survey said that paternity leave contributes to professional equality between men and women. It impacts home and professional life as well as society as a whole.

Methodology

These results come from a survey conducted by the EDHEC Diversity & Inclusion Chair from 25 April to 31 May 2022, carried out on social networks and within partnered company networks. The study's objective was to measure the use of paternity leave and to understand the obstacles and expectations surrounding it in order to clarify decisions taken on this subject. The study collected 784 responses (535 women and 249 men).



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