

Father-friendly workplaces make finer families

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Credit: Nate Edwards

Employers are in a unique situation where they can either support father involvement in the family, or they can be a barrier.

For many Americans, [work-life balance](#) is often a topic of discussion when assessing a job. This balance has never been more of a concern than in the 21st century. Today, the average father wants to not only provide for his family but also be connected and involved in his children's lives. In 2016, fathers reported spending an average of eight hours a week on childcare—about triple the time fathers provided in 1965, according to the Pew Research Center.

That growth in father-involved childcare led researchers at BYU to look at the impact a workplace can have on a father's ability to be warm and engaged with his children. Recently, researchers found evidence that family-supportive workplaces and greater flexibility in when and where fathers were able to work played a big role in that connectivity.

"Researchers know that quality father involvement has a meaningful impact on kids' social, emotional and [cognitive development](#), as well as their overall sense of well-being," said Erin Holmes, the lead researcher and a professor at BYU.

More than 1,000 employed U.S. fathers with children ages two to eight participated in the study. Each participant answered questions about engagement—how often they engaged in different activities with their child such as playing, telling stories, etc.—as well as questions about warmth, indicated by actions such as praising, hugging, kissing and using affectionate nicknames with their children.

"Surprisingly, we found that dads who are more traditional in their fatherhood role benefit the most from a flexible workplace—traditional fathers without a flexible workplace were only engaged with their kids a few times a month, while fathers with the same traditional beliefs who had a flexible workplace reported engagement with their kids almost every day," Holmes said. "Having a family supportive workplace also helped fathers be warmer toward their young children, with the strongest

effect on the most traditional fathers."

The researchers suggest that employers, supervisors and even coworkers have the unique opportunity to help [fathers](#) be more engaged with their young children. These [support systems](#) can create [workplace](#) environments that will help the more traditional father feel like he can and wants to be involved in his [children's](#) lives.

Suggestions on how workplaces can be more accommodating include being sympathetic to the effects that work demands have on family life, helping employees feel comfortable to bring up personal or family issues with their supervisor or being flexible when situations arise with [family](#) members that would require employees to adjust their work schedules.

The research from this study was published in the *Journal of Family Psychology*.

More information: Erin Kramer Holmes et al. Do workplace characteristics moderate the effects of attitudes on father warmth and engagement?, *Journal of Family Psychology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1037/fam0000672](#)

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