



## Program on Gender, Work & Family

*"Reshaping the workplace  
around the values people hold  
in family life."*

### FATHERS DESERVE WORK-FAMILY BALANCE

**Fathers are caregivers, too.** Contrary to traditional views of gender roles, fathers are more than just the family breadwinners – they play an important role in caring for their children. Fathers not only want to spend more time with their children, but are also becoming more involved in taking on family responsibilities. Studies show that the amount of time fathers spend on caregiving and household chores has been increasing.

**Social norms and bias make work/family balance particularly difficult for fathers.** Social norms about the “male breadwinner” and the “ideal worker” make it extremely difficult for men to work less than full-time or take time off for family reasons. Social standards of domesticity still tie women to the family and men to the workplace. In a world where the ideal worker is defined by the number of hours worked, roughly one-third of fathers work 50 hours or more per week. Fathers who reduce their work hours or take time off for family obligations are perceived as “uncommitted” to their jobs, “wimpy,” and, worst of all, “feminine.”

**Workplace practices curtail fathers’ ability to take time off.** Social norms have shaped workplace attitudes and policies governing fathers’ access to family leave. When asked what is a reasonable amount of time for a father to take off from work after the birth or adoption of a child, 63 percent of 1,500 chief executive officers and human resource directors said “none.” One survey found that 53 percent of companies surveyed offered paid time off for maternity leave, but only 13 percent offered the same benefit for paternity leave. And while the Family and Medical Leave Act provides twelve weeks of unpaid leave for both mothers and fathers, many fathers do not exercise this right because they fear negative professional consequences.

**Policies for work-family balance will help both mothers and fathers.** Promoting public policies such as parity for part-time workers, minimum paid family and medical leave, unemployment insurance for part-time workers, and limits on mandatory overtime will allow both mothers and fathers to balance work and family obligations without penalizing their economic security and career advancement.

**THE PROGRAM ON GENDER, WORK & FAMILY** is a research and advocacy organization, based at American University, Washington College of Law, that seeks to restructure the workplace around the values held in family life. Please visit our website at <http://www.wcl.american.edu/gender/workfamily> for more information about the program.

---

<sup>1</sup>James T. Bond, Ellen Galinsky, and Jennifer E. Swanberg, “The 1997 National Survey of the Changing Workforce” (New York: Families and Work Institute, 1998).

<sup>2</sup>Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender: Why Work and Family Conflict and What To Do About It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Wade F. Horn, “Dad May Be Eligible for Leave at Baby’s Birth,” *Washington Times*, September 21, 1999, at E2.

<sup>5</sup>Ellen Galinsky and James T. Bond, “The 1998 Business Work-Life Study” (New York: Families and Work Institute, 1998).

<sup>6</sup>Keith Cunningham, “Father Time: Flexible Work Arrangements and the Law Firm’s Failure of the Family,” *Stanford Law Review* 53

