

Taking Paternity Leave Makes Other Dads More Likely to Do the Same

Add what researchers call a social "snowball effect" to the already long list of reasons why dads should take time off.



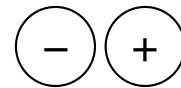
Robert Galbraith/Reuters

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JUL 7, 2014

BUSINESS

TEXT SIZE



The benefits of paternity leave are already known to be widespread (for fathers, for [their spouses](#), for [their children](#)), but now there's another: taking it might induce other dads to follow suit.

A [study](#) released in this month's issue of the *American Economic Review*

suggests a social snowball effect that might counteract the stigma that's attached to taking time off. It found that fathers who take paternity leave make their brothers 15 percent more likely to do the same. Similarly, dads who see their male coworkers take time off are 11 percent more likely to take leave themselves.

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The study goes on to suggest the enhanced influence of bosses: the effect is nearly three times larger when the leave-taking dad is a manager rather than a workplace equal. (While the researchers' data didn't specify who in the sample was a manager, they were able to predict these data points based on who was paid the most at each firm they studied.)

The researchers came upon these findings by analyzing the number of men taking paternity leave in Norway before and after a 1993 law that granted paid leave. Immediately after the reform, the percentage of fathers taking leave shot up from three percent to 35 percent. With this in mind, the researchers could isolate social influence as a reason for further leave-taking: what changed before and after the law wasn't a personal preference shared by family or the encouragement of a particular company, but was rather that those dads were more likely to have seen a peer take time off without repercussion.

As things stand now, the theory is that fathers tend to shy away from taking paternity leave because they think taking time off work might damage their professional lives. A [2012 article](#) in *Harvard Business Review* highlighted research that suggested that “fathers with even a short work absence because

of family obligations are recommended for fewer rewards and receive lower performance ratings,” and came to the conclusion that, just as women are being pressured away from prioritizing their professional lives, men are steered away from spending time with their families. Within this framework, the study's findings make sense: armed with information of how an employer reacts to a peer's paternity leave, a father will probably be a lot less worried about any unforeseen consequences at work.

The U.S. notably remains off the list of about 70 countries currently offering their fathers paid leave (also notable: even [Major League Baseball has a paternity-leave program in place](#)). While we wait for that to change, and for more companies to adopt these policies, we can at least take heart that the fathers taking time off today might just influence other dads to do the same tomorrow.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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