

JUNE

6TH HRF EXPERTS MEETING

2026

# HOME AND ENGAGED FATHERHOOD

Bringing Engaged Fatherhood in from the Margins for  
Men, Families and Gender Equity

IESE BUSINESS SCHOOL - BARCELONA



fostering  
understanding



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# INTRODUCTION

*This Experts Meeting is co-organized by the Home Renaissance Foundation (HRF) and the Social Trends Institute. The event is held in partnership with Harvard University, the International Centre for Work and Family (ICWF-IESE), and the International University of Catalonia, with project funding jointly provided by the Social Trends Institute and Panamerican University, Mexico.*

## Home Renaissance Foundation (HRF)

About Home Renaissance Foundation (HRF) As a think tank, Home Renaissance Foundation's aim is to promote and develop greater recognition of the importance of the work required to create a home which meets the fundamental needs of individual and family and its crucial role in creating a more humane society. The Foundation believes that work in the home allows the individual to develop in his or her most intimate environment: the home and the relationships that flourish within it. Every individual needs this care whether they are children, elderly, adolescents or men and women with demanding and stressful professions.

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## Social Trends Institute (STI)

About Social Trends Institute (STI) is a research-driven institution that partners with universities and scholars to analyze emerging social trends and their impact on human communities. STI fosters a deeper understanding of these dynamics through scholarly conferences, cross-disciplinary events, and initiatives with a global perspective.

VISION

## Home and Engaged Fatherhood

*At Home and Work: Engaged Fatherhood for Men, Families, and Gender Equality*

The following proposal builds on expertise garnered and research published on the significant social trend recognizing the societal as well as personal need for, and benefit from, engaged fatherhood.

There is increased public commentary and political interest not only on the life-long consequences of absent fathers to their children but also on the physical and mental health of the men concerned. More widely, the generational shift in expectations of how men live, work and contribute to family and society has rendered male roles less clearly defined, and men, often unintentionally, less engaged. In simplest terms, the perception that these roles are eroded and devalued requires a strong positive revaluing of men's contribution to both the private and public sphere, for the mutual benefit of men and women.

Engaged fatherhood is a strong and positive model of how the role of men in family and home life retains crucial value within the current social context. Further, fatherhood is seen as enriched and enhanced by newer understandings of gender complementarity rather than diminished by them. Engaged fatherhood, or the lack of it, is experienced primarily in family relationships, which function in the context of home. For this reason the home should be understood as not just a beneficiary of engaged fatherhood but an essential contributor to its nurture and development.

In the depth and breadth of what follows, it is the positive evaluation of fatherhood and the centrality of the home context that offer relevant research bearings for Home Renaissance Foundation. As will be seen, the previous research and this proposed meeting take seriously the need for, and use of, multidisciplinary expertise.

This approach underpins the work of HRF over the last twenty years, and our previous fruitful collaborations with STI and ICWF-IESE.

## **Main questions to be addressed:**

What are the positive characteristics of engaged fatherhood in the current social context?

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How can these be supported in domestic, familial, social and work-based instruments and structures?

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Is the Care of the Home an essential contributor to Fatherhood?

# AGENDA

## MON 29 JUN

9:00 - 9:30

WELCOME

9:30 - 11:00

SESSION 1

**Milton Kotelchuck** — *“Nurturing Fatherhood for Men’s Health, Infant’s Health and Gender-Equality”*

**Richard Reeves** — *“Old myths and new realities: The real story of fatherhood”*

Discussant: **Marc Grau-Grau**

11:00-11:30

COFFEE BREAK

11:30 - 13:00

SESSION 2

**Margaret O’Brien** — *“Fathers-to-be and paternity leave: 5 things young men should know”*

**Alison Koslowski** — *“Developing the case for a national male carer strategy”*

Discussant: **Milton Kotelchuck**

13:00

LUNCH

14:15 - 15:45

SESSION 3

**Richard Petts** — *“The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Gender Equality within Households”*

**Edward Davies** — *“Absent Fathers: The Increase in paternal disengagement, and the impact on boys’ outcomes and identities”*

Discussant: **Hannah Riley Bowles**

15:45 - 16:00

BREAK

16:00 - 17:30

**SESSION 4**

**Nikki van der Gaag** — *“The contradictory faces of fatherhood: from love and sacrifice to burnout and backsliding”*

**Waldo Johnson** — *“Beyond Gaining Cred: Advancing Social Work Practice to Strengthen Fatherhood Engagement”*

Discussant: **Maria Jose Bosch**

17:30

**CLOSING**

20.00

**DINNER**

*Círculo Ecuestre*

## TUE 30 JUN

9:30 - 11:00

### SESSION 5

**Marc Grau-Grau** — *“Negotiating Fatherhood at Work and Home: A Process Perspective on Fatherhood Enactment”*

**Carolina Garraio** — *“Can Fathers Have It All? Negotiating Work and Involved Fatherhood During the Transition to Parenthood”*

Discussant: **Mireia Las Heras**

11:00-11:30

### Coffee break

11:30 - 13:00

### SESSION 6 AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

**Maria Jose Bosch** — *“Decisión or Imposition? Engaged fatherhood against The breadwinner norm in a Non-WEIRD context (Chile)”*

Discussant: **Yasin Rofcanin**

13:00

### LUNCH

14:00

### NEXT STEPS

15:30

### CLOSING



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# SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE



## **Marc Grau-Grau**

Assistant Professor of Social and Family Policies, Vicedean of the Faculty of Education Sciences, Researcher of the Joaquim Molins Figueras Childcare and Family Policies Chair and Director of the Institute for Advanced Family Studies at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya.

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## **Dr Hannah Riley Bowles**

Roy E. Larsen Senior Lecturer in Public Policy and Management at the Harvard Kennedy School.

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## **Milton Kotelchuck**

Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and Senior Scientist in the Maternal Child Health Center in the Center for Child and Adolescent Health Policy at Massachusetts General Hospital.

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## **Mireia Las Heras**

Professor of Managing People in Organizations at IESE Business School, University of Navarra, Spain – where she is the Director of the International Center for Work and Family (ICWF).

# CONTRIBUTORS



## **María José Bosch**

*ESE Business School, Universidad de los Andes, Chile*

María José Bosch is Full Professor and Director of the Centro Trabajo y Familia (Work and Family Center) at ESE Business School, Universidad de los Andes, Chile.

She holds a Ph.D. in General Management and a Master of Research in Management from IESE Business School, University of Navarra. She is a member of the International Center for Work and Family (ICWF) at IESE and of the International Committee of the Work and Family Researchers Network (WFRN).

She also serves as a Councilor of SOFOFA, Chile's main industrial business federation. Her research addresses work–family integration, leadership and female leadership, cross-cultural differences, and organizational behavior, and has appeared in journals such as *Community, Work & Family*, *Applied Psychology* and the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, as well as in edited volumes published by Routledge and Springer.



## **Edward Davies**

*Centre for Social Justice*

Edward is the Director of Research at Westminster think tank the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and leads their “Lost Boys” and family programs of work. Before joining the CSJ in 2016 he spent 15 years in health policy as a journalist, editor, and policy work, including seven years as a senior editor at the British Medical Journal based in London and New York.

In 2021 he went into government as an expert advisor to several cabinet ministers, before returning to the CSJ in 2023.

Outside his professional life he has run community initiatives for men and boys for almost 20 years, including courses for new fathers, rugby coaching and men’s book groups.



## **Carolina Garraio**

*University of Porto*

PhD Candidate in Psychology at the University of Porto and licensed psychologist with expertise in fatherhood, co-parenting, and the transition to parenthood.

Experienced in qualitative and longitudinal research, psychological intervention, and gender equality initiatives, with participation in international research projects and collaborations across Europe and beyond. Author of peer-reviewed publications and presenter at international conferences, with a strong background in teaching, training, and developing evidence-based interventions that support families, parental wellbeing, and work-life balance.



## **Caroline Gatrell**

*University of Liverpool. UK*

Professor Caroline Gatrell is based at University of Liverpool Management School.

Caroline's research centres on employment, health and personal lives, drawing upon the lenses of gender and embodiment to explore and envisage business and management futures in which employees' work-family lives are improved.

Caroline's research is published in world-leading management journals including: *Journal of Management Studies*, *Organization Studies*; *Academy of Management Perspectives*; *Human Relations*; *Organizational Research Methods*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *British Journal of Management* and *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

Caroline is Chair of the Chartered ABS Management Committee. Formerly she was General Editor for the *Journal of Management Studies* and was also, previously, Editor in Chief, *International Journal of Management Reviews*. She is Fellow of the British Academy of Management; Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Caroline holds the British Academy of Management research medal 2020 and was awarded in 2024 (with Dermot Breslin) AoM Best Qualitative Paper award (Research Methods Division).



## Marc Grau-Grau

*Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC)*

Marc Grau-Grau is the Director of the Institute for Advanced Family Studies (IESF) and Associate Professor of Social and Family Policies at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya (UIC Barcelona), where he served as Vice Dean of the Faculty of Education Sciences (2022–2025). He was a Research Fellow at the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard Kennedy School (2016–2022).

He has taught at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, and has held visiting positions at the College of Business and Law in Israel (2019), the University of Bologna in Italy (2022, 2025), and Universidad Austral in Argentina (2023).

His research focuses on four main areas: (1) work–family balance and fatherhood, (2) childhood and childcare, (3) family policies, and (4) education and family relationships. He is co-editor of four books: *The Work-Family Balance in Light of Globalization and Technology* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), *The New Ideal Worker* (Springer, 2019), *Engaged Fatherhood* (Springer, 2022), and *Human Flourishing* (Springer, 2023). His work has appeared in journals such as *Organization*, *Gender, Work & Organization*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Children & Society*, and *Revista Española de Sociología*, among others.

Marc holds a PhD in Social Policy from the University of Edinburgh, a Master’s in Political and Social Sciences from Universitat Pompeu Fabra, and a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration from ESADE Business School.



## Waldo Johnson

*University of Chicago*

Waldo E. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D. is Professor at the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice and serves as Vice Provost for Diversity + Inclusion of the University of Chicago.

He examines life course social roles of urban Black males focused on masculinity and health status effects on father involvement among urban nonresident Black fathers. His current research examines the relationship between food insecurity among Chicago nonresident Black fathers and their involvement with their children. He edited *Social Work with African American Males: Health, Mental Health and Social Policy* (Oxford, 2010).

His research affiliations include the Institute for Social Research and the Scholars Network on Masculinity among Black Males, both at the University of Michigan. He is a research consultant to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Framing Responsible Fatherhood group, the Urban Institute and Mathematica Policy Research. Johnson served as a research advisor to Temple University's Fatherhood Research Network. Johnson is an elected Fellow of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare.



## Milton Kotelchuck

*Harvard Medical School*

Milton Kotelchuck PhD MPH is currently Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, and Senior Scientist in Maternal and Child Health in the Division of General Academic Pediatrics, MassGeneral Hospital for Children, and the Research Director of the Fatherhood Project at Massachusetts General Hospital. He was formerly Chairman of the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Depts. at the UNC-Chapel Hill and Boston University Schools of Public Health; and had previously served as the Director of the Division of Health Statistics and Research and then as the Assistant Commissioner for Community Health Services in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. He received his PhD in Personality and Developmental Psychology and an MPH in Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and Epidemiology from Harvard University.

Dr. Kotelchuck began his own fatherhood research career with his 1972 doctoral thesis, “The Nature of the Child’s Tie to his Father” and has most recently been focused on men’s preconception and perinatal health; on paternal inclusive programs to reduce infant obesity and to encourage father’s participation in NICUs, and on paternal utilization of the MA Paid Family and Medical Leave Act.

Dr. Kotelchuck has extensive experience evaluating public health programs and policies to improve reproductive and child health outcomes and health equity, and serves on numerous MCH state, national and professional committees. He has published over 200 peer-reviewed articles and is the Senior and founding Editor of the Maternal and Child Health Journal.

In 2000, Dr. Kotelchuck was awarded the first National MCH Epidemiology Award for “Advancing Knowledge” from the Coalition for Excellence in MCH Epidemiology, and in 2010, he received the American Public Health Association’s (APHA’s) Martha May Eliot Award, its highest MCH Award, for “exceptional health services for mothers and children”.



## **Alison Koslowski**

*University College London*

Alison Koslowski is Pro Provost (Equity & Inclusion), Co-Director of the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) and Professor of Social Policy at University College London.

She is an academic with a track record of leading international research collaboration on parenting leave policies and advising on their implementation within organisations.

Her research focuses on policies and practices that can reduce gender inequalities, promote greater work-family balance, and improve family well-being. She is an editor of the open access Annual Review of the International Network on Leave Policies and Research and an elected Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences (FACSS).



## **Mireia Las Heras**

*IESE Business School*

Mireia Las Heras (<https://mireialasheras.com/>) is a Professor in the Managing People in Organizations Department at IESE Business School. She serves as the Director of the International Center for Work and Family (ICWF) and holds the Chair of the “Business Leadership and the Future of Work Chair – Joaquim Molins Figueras Foundation”. She is an Industrial Engineer by training, holds an MBA from IESE Business School, and a Doctorate in Business Administration from Boston University.

She has widely published in high impact journals such as Journal of Applied Psychology, Human Relations, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Human Resource Management Journal and Journal of Business Research among others. She has coedited seven research books.

She currently serves as the MBA Academic Director of IESE, ranked among the Top five in the world for the years 2023 to 2025.



## **Professor Margaret O'Brien**

*University College London (UCL)*

Margaret O'Brien is Emeritus Professor of Child and Family Policy at UCL's Social Research Institute. She is Co-Chair of the EU-funded COST research project Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (2022-2026) and was Director of UCL's Thomas Coram Research Unit between 2013-2021. She holds a PhD in Social Psychology from the LSE and is a trained Clinical Psychologist.

Professor O'Brien has published widely on fatherhood and child well-being was part of the first wave of fatherhood research in the 1980s (*The Father Figure*, 1982; *Reassessing Fatherhood*, 1987).

Professor O'Brien has served as a UK member of the International Network on Parental Leave Policy and Research since 2004, as well as participating in many other national and international advisory boards including the UN experts group preparing for International Year of the Family where she contributed to the first UN report *Men in Families and Family Policy in a Changing World Report*. She currently serves on the UK Government's Academic Advisory Group on its national Parental Leave & Pay Review.



## **Richard Petts**

*Ball State University*

Richard J. Petts is Associate Dean of the College of Sciences and Humanities and Professor of Sociology, Ball State University. His research focuses on the intersection of family, work, gender, and policy, with a specific emphasis on parental leave, father involvement, and workplace flexibility as policies and practices that can reduce gender inequality, promote greater work-family balance, and improve family well-being.

He serves on the Board of Directors of the Council on Contemporary Families, has published extensively in academic journals, is the author of *Father Involvement and Gender Equality in the United States: Contemporary Norms and Barriers*, and his work has been featured in numerous media outlets including *The New York Times*, *CNN*, *USA Today*, *Forbes*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.



## **Richard Reeves**

*American Institute for Boys and Men*

Richard V. Reeves is the founder and president of the American Institute for Boys and Men (AIBM). Before founding AIBM in 2023, Richard was a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. While at Brookings, he focused on policies related to economic inequality, racial justice, social mobility, and boys and men.

Richard is the author of several books, including “Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why it Matters, and What to do About It” and “Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Class Is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That is a Problem, and What to do About It.”

Inspired by his own experiences as a father and policy expert, Richard founded AIBM to bring awareness to the challenges facing boys and men today and to develop evidence-based solutions.



## Hannah Riley Bowles

*Harvard Kennedy School*

Hannah Riley Bowles is the Roy E. Larsen Senior Lecturer in Public Policy and Management at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS). Hannah chairs the HKS Management, Leadership, and Decision Sciences (MLD) Area and co-directs the HKS Women and Public Policy Program (WAPPP).

She is a leading expert on gender in negotiation. Hannah's research focuses on women's leadership advancement and the role of negotiation in educational and career advancement, including the management of work-family conflict. Her work has been featured in Harvard Business Review's "Definitive Management Ideas of the Year" and covered by major news media, such as ABC News, National Public Radio, the New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal. Hannah's academic studies are published in journals, such as the Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Organization Science, and Psychological Science.

She is the faculty co-director of Women and Power, the HKS executive program for women in senior leadership from the public, private and non-profit sectors. She won the HKS Manuel Carballo Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2003.

She has been actively involved in negotiation and conflict management training, practice, and research for over 25 years, including early career opportunities to work for the governments of Argentina, Costa Rica, and Germany. She has a DBA from the Harvard Business School, an MPP from HKS, and a BA from Smith College.

**Contact:** [Hannah\\_Bowles@hks.harvard.edu](mailto:Hannah_Bowles@hks.harvard.edu)



## Nikki van der Gaag

*Equimundo*

Nikki van der Gaag is an independent gender consultant; a writer, speaker, researcher, activist, facilitator, and mentor. She specialises in work on unpaid care, and in particular on masculinities and men's role in care. From 2016 to 2019 she was Director of Gender Justice and Women's Rights at Oxfam GB. She is a Senior Fellow at Equimundo.

From 2020-2024 she was a Steering Committee member of MenEngage Europe, part of the MenEngage Alliance, a global network working with men and boys in alliance with women's rights and feminist organisations around the world. She was also a Board member of Make Mothers Matter which advocates for recognition and support of mothers as changemakers in the world (2020-2024).

She has worked with a wide range of organisations; international non-governmental organisations, the corporate sector, small local NGOs, donor organisations and the media. She has authored six of Plan International State of the World's Girls reports, and has been co-author on six World's Fathers reports and lead author on the 2019 and 2023 editions.

She has written several books - *Feminism and Men* (2014 Bloomsbury), the *No-Nonsense guide to Feminism*, (Verso 2015) and co-edited *Patriarchy in Practice: Ethnographies of Everyday Masculinities* with Amir Massoumiam and Dan Nightingale (2023, Routledge).

PAPERS BRIEFS

## **Decisión or Imposition? Engaged fatherhood against The breadwinner norm in a Non-WEIRD context (Chile)**

*By María José Bosch - ESE Business School, Universidad de los Andes and Mireia Las Heras – IESE Business School, Universidad de Navarra And Yasin Rofcanin – School of Management, University of Bath*

Research on parenthood and careers heavily relies on "WEIRD" societies, where mothers face penalties and fathers gain premiums. Chile provides a distinct non-WEIRD context defined by a strong, historical breadwinner model.

Consequently, Chilean women face severe career limitations due to a major caregiving gap and restrictive labor participation. Meanwhile, fathers face a "latent penalty"—their career costs are invisible simply because cultural norms and a rigid, maternal-centric leave framework prevent them from taking caregiving roles. Ultimately, this rigid provider model has created severe work-family incompatibility, contributing to Chile's historically low fertility rate (0.99 children per woman).

## **Absent Fathers: The Increase in paternal disengagement, and the impact on boys' outcomes and identities**

*BY Edward Davies*

This paper examines the growth of male disengagement, tracing its origins to the systematic decline of paternal presence in family life over the past six decades. Drawing on longitudinal cohort studies, public health research, and cross-national comparative data, it establishes the breadth of evidence for paternal influence across the male life course — from prenatal outcomes and early cognitive development through adolescent mental health, educational

attainment, and adult wellbeing. It then situates this evidence against demographic data documenting the precipitous decline in residential fatherhood in the United Kingdom and comparable nations, identifying both structural and cultural drivers. The paper argues that there are measurable consequences across education, employment, criminal justice, and public health.

## **Can Fathers Have It All? Negotiating Work and Involved Fatherhood During the Transition to Parenthood**

*By Carolina Garraio*

This work explores how contemporary fathers negotiate the demands of paid work and involved fatherhood during the transition to parenthood in Portugal. Using a dyadic-longitudinal qualitative approach, it follows first-time parents from pregnancy to eighteen months after birth to examine how expectations and caregiving arrangements evolve. Findings reveal diverse pathways, ranging from traditional divisions of labour to more egalitarian parenting practices. Fathers' involvement is shaped not only by personal intentions but also by couple dynamics, workplace flexibility, financial stability, and broader social norms. The study argues that involved fatherhood emerges through ongoing negotiations between individual aspirations, relationships, and structural conditions.

## **Conditional fathering: the ideal worker, the paternal body and the embodied limits of engagement**

*By Caroline Gatrell*

Caroline Gatrell's chapter introduces "conditional fathering," a concept explaining how workplace cultures and socioeconomic conditions shape, constrain, or force men to conceal their active participation in childcare. Despite shifting cultural expectations and formal family policies encouraging emotional and practical paternal involvement, organizations continue to privilege the traditional "ideal worker" norm—expecting employees to remain unencumbered, continuously available, and physically resilient. Consequently, fathers encounter a "paternal body" dilemma, experiencing physical and emotional strain like fatigue and anxiety while actively caregiving. To maintain professional status, men often render their family lives invisible. Ultimately, the document argues that active fatherhood is not merely an individual choice, but an organizational, economic, and deeply embodied challenge that requires workplaces to fundamentally dismantle long-hours cultures.

## **Negotiating Fatherhood at Work and Home: A Process Perspective on Fatherhood**

*By Marc Grau-Grau and Hannah Riley Bowles*

Over the past two decades, fatherhood has undergone a social transformation, shifting from fixed typologies to active "fatherhood enactment". While traditional, transitional, engaged-breadwinner, and engaged-nurturer identities exist, a new qualitative study reveals how fathers negotiate work-family conflicts. Rather than static categories, these identities are continuously reproduced, protected, or transformed through daily interactions with partners and employers. These negotiation processes involve caregiving visibility, boundaries, and organizational legitimacy. Ultimately, this framework views fathers as active organizational actors capable of reinforcing or reshaping workplace norms regarding caregiving and the ideal worker.

## **Beyond Gaining Cred: Advancing Social Work Practice to Strengthen Fatherhood Engagement—Family, Community and Gender Perspectives**

*By Waldo E. Johnson, Jr., Ph.D.*

Waldo E. Johnson's chapter argues for a father-inclusive approach to social work that recognizes fathers as valuable caregivers, partners, and community assets rather than merely economic providers. Moving beyond traditional stereotypes, the chapter highlights how structural inequalities, institutional practices, and gender norms shape fathers' engagement with their children. Johnson advocates an ecological and family-centered framework that addresses barriers such as poverty, racial discrimination, incarceration, and restrictive policies. Emphasizing diverse fatherhood experiences, he calls for research and practice that integrate fathers into assessment, intervention, and service delivery to strengthen families, communities, and child well-being.

## **Nurturing Fatherhood for Men's Health, Infant's Health and Gender-Equality**

*By Milton Kotelchuck*

The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) field's traditional maternal focus restricts awareness of paternal health and hinders parenting gender equality. Applying the Kotelchuck framework, this presentation analyzes developments across three areas. The Knowledge Base has seen major scientific progress in epigenetic research, biological mechanisms, and fatherhood-specific databases. Conversely, Social Strategies show limited progress, with services remaining heavily maternally focused despite needs for father-inclusive health care and

paid leave. Lastly, Political Will faces mixed progress due to shifting masculinity identities and regressive funding cuts under the Trump administration that actively threaten gender equity and social justice initiatives.

## **Developing the case for a national male carer strategy**

*By Alison Koslowski*

Our societies face a growing care crisis, yet a persistent gender care gap stalls true gender equality. While the concept of engaged fatherhood has evolved, men remain severely underrepresented as care providers both within families and across female-dominated care and education professions. This gap is sustained by deeply rooted gender norms, including social "trust issues" and safeguarding suspicions that deter men from entering care roles. To normalize male caregiving, the author proposes that governments implement "national male carer strategies". These strategies would integrate parental leave redesign with workforce interventions to dismantle occupational segregation and foster gender-equal, caring democracies.

## **Fathers-to-be and paternity leave: 5 things young men should know**

*By Margaret O'Brien*

This paper argues that well-paid, non-transferable paternity leave acts as a vital government signal supporting men amid a global low-fertility crisis. Driven by economic insecurity, younger generations increasingly forgo parenthood. Reviewing European policies, O'Brien notes that generous, dedicated "father quotas"—pioneered by Nordic nations and Spain—significantly increase paternal

leave uptake. Crucially, this early caregiving availability yields robust relational, developmental, and health benefits for children. It simultaneously enhances paternal mental health, provides essential postpartum maternal support, and mitigates long-term motherhood wage penalties.

## **The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Gender Equality within Households**

*By Richard J. Petts*

Based on the title, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Gender Equality within Households,” the chapter examines whether the pandemic hindered or advanced gender equality in domestic life. It argues that although mothers continued to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid work, the pandemic created opportunities for fathers to become more involved, particularly in childcare. Increased remote work and greater exposure to household needs encouraged more egalitarian practices, producing modest but lasting reductions in gender gaps. While progress was uneven and incomplete, the chapter concludes that supportive workplace arrangements and family policies can promote more equal divisions of care and domestic responsibilities.

## **Old Myths and New Realities: The Real Story of Fatherhood**

*By Richard V. Reeves*

There is an old idea that a father is simply what a man becomes once a child arrives. That is, after all, still the most common meaning of the phrase “to father a child” — whereas “to mother a child” connotes care and relationship. Biology does the work; the rest is detail. This is not only wrong, it is close to the

opposite of the truth. What makes a man a father is less straightforwardly a matter of biology than what makes a woman a mother. Mothers and babies are bound together by a few hundred million years of mammalian evolution. In evolutionary time, fathers are a more recent and more conditional invention — an arrangement our species had to talk itself into, and one it could just as easily talk itself out of. Fatherhood is made, not born.

Fatherhood is more of a cultural product than motherhood. This is not to say it is less valuable: that would be to fall into the naturalistic fallacy, the assumption that what is natural is necessarily good. But it is to say that, compared to motherhood, fatherhood is more narrated than natural. And this means that the stories we tell about fathers are not idle entertainment. They are the load-bearing walls of the institution itself. We will get, to a large extent, the fathers we describe.

## **The contradictory faces of fatherhood: from love and sacrifice to burnout and backsliding**

*By Nikki van der Gaag*

Background: Economic, digital, and political shifts are reshaping family dynamics and men’s caregiving, while backlash against gender equality may reinforce traditional roles. Methods: We analyzed data from 8,000 parents in 16 countries. Results: Economic precarity and mental distress strain families, yet caregiving remains highly rewarding and fathers report greater involvement. Equitable couple communication supports caregiving and well-being. However, gender equality is backsliding, with younger fathers more likely to endorse traditional norms and report distress. Conclusions: Fatherhood reflects both commitment and retrenchment, highlighting the need for paid leave, flexible work, mental health supports, and gender-equity policies.

