

# Rethinking Work-Life Balance and Well-Being: the perspectives of fathers

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## **Abstract**

When it comes to work-life balance and its impact on well-being, there have been increasing calls for research which looks at fathers. Until recently, the primary focus of most studies in this area was women and mothers, however changing attitudes towards fathers' involvement in family life and the introduction of paternity leave have brought men into the picture. This chapter draws together existing research on fathers' work-life balance and well-being in order to summarise what is currently known, and reveal where further investigation is needed.

We begin by looking at men's experiences of combining employment and family life, focusing in particular on fathers' preferences and how these compare to their current levels of work-life balance. We observe that attitudes towards work-life balance are complex and there is evidence of ambivalence from fathers about choosing between work and family roles.

We further note that a mismatch in desired and actual levels of work-life balance may be associated with emotional strain, stress and ill health. If this is the case, it is important to study fathers' work-life balance issues in order to safeguard their well-being. Increased understanding of fathers' needs is necessary to ensure they receive appropriate and adequate support. Furthermore, a better balance between employment and family for fathers is also likely to have a positive impact on the well-being of mothers and children, as well as improving gender equality in the labour market and at home.

Finally, we look at research investigating possible reasons for fathers' mismatches in desired and actual levels of work-life balance. Concepts of masculine identity and unsupportive organisational cultures are the constraints which are most apparent in the literature. Improving work-life balance can be threatening to traditional visions of fathers as providers. This is exacerbated by workplaces which fail to consider men as potential carers with family responsibilities and penalise those who strive for greater work-life balance.

## INTRODUCTION

*'Priscilla and I are starting to get ready for our daughter's arrival. We've been picking out our favorite childhood books and toys.*

*We've also been thinking about how we're going to take time off during the first months of her life. This is a very personal decision, and I've decided to take 2 months of paternity leave when our daughter arrives.*

*Studies show that when working parents take time to be with their newborns, outcomes are better for the children and families. At Facebook we offer our US employees up to 4 months of paid maternity or paternity leave which they can take throughout the year.'*

Mark Zuckerberg (posted on 20 November 2015)

At the end of 2015, celebrating the birth of his daughter Maxima, Mark Zuckerberg, Chief Executive of Facebook, announced that he was taking two months' paternity leave so that he could spend time with his new family. His post on Facebook indicated his view that engagement with new-born children has a positive effect on well-being, from the perspective of both parents and of children.

In the following chapter, we examine work-life balance and well-being from the perspective of fathers and fatherhood. In the twenty-first century, strong arguments have been made within the literature on work-life balance for more research specifically on fatherhood and well-being (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009; Friedman, 2015; Gatrell, Burnett, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2013; James, 2014). For example, Ranson (2012) claims that there has been too much focus on working mothers and not enough attention paid to what she terms 'working fathers'. The fact that such a term is not in common usage demonstrates the extent to which fathers have been omitted from discussions about balancing work and family life.

Explorations of work-life balance and well-being have tended to focus on how women interpret and prioritise their commitments to family and employment: what social economist Catherine Hakim terms maternal 'preference' (Hakim, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2003; see also Gatrell, 2005). Perhaps this focus on mothers has led to a relative lack of understanding regarding fathers' work-life balance, their work-family preferences and the impact this has on well-being, particularly with regard to their relationships and masculine identities (Holter, 2007). Where studies have focused on men and work-life balance, the majority have looked at their employment and the impact of long hours' cultures on men's well-being (Worrall & Cooper, 1999) with less focus on men's paternal roles (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2013). Conceivably, women have been the main focus of work-family research because they have been most affected by the issues of juggling the 'dual burden' of paid employment and childcare (Hochschild, 1989). Why should we now be turning our attention to fathers?

Huffman, Olson, O'Gara Jr, and King (2014) argue that fathers' work-life balance needs to be studied because fathers tend to have the least balance between the two domains of work and home, as, on average, they spend longer hours in the workplace than mothers. Breadwinning continues to play an important part in constructing masculine identity and typically leads to employment being prioritised over family life (Collinson & Hearn, 2014). This is perpetuated by a growth in firms expecting a 'total commitment' working culture (Kvande, 2009) and the fact that men in Britain work some of the longest hours in Europe (Lewis & Lamb, 2007). Although research suggests that hours spent in paid employment are not in themselves associated with negative well-being or conflict between work and family roles (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010), there is evidence that many men are unhappy with their work-life balance and would like more involvement in childcare (Dermott, 2008; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000; Milkie, Mattingly, Nomaguchi, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). It is important to consider the negative impact this has on fathers' well-being. Unmet desires to spend time with children cause emotional strain and long working hours are associated with stress and health problems (Byrne, 2005).

Despite the persistence of the male breadwinning norm, there is increasing pressure to be an 'involved' father who not only cares *about* his children, but cares *for* them too (Eräranta & Moisander, 2011; Kimmel, 1993). Paternal time spent on childcare has increased (Dermott, 2008; Lewis & Lamb, 2007; O'Brien, 2005) and, thanks to the introduction of shared parental leave in 2015, fathers in Britain arguably have more opportunities than ever to balance family and paid work. Fathering practices are also being changed by the recession and technological advances. Rising unemployment and job insecurity have resulted in more fathers spending time at home (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003), while increases in flexible and home working blur the boundaries between work and domestic life (Halford, 2006). This trend of increased father involvement exposes men to the issue of work-life conflict and the associated risks of burnout and reduced well-being (Aycan & Eskin, 2005).

Gaining a greater understanding of fathers' work-life balance is particularly important because their needs are less understood and, as a consequence, they receive little support. Fathers' work-life conflict is exacerbated by the fact that workplaces do not appear to have adapted to the changing trends in fathering practices. Several studies have found that organisations restrict men from considering greater involvement in family life and are unsupportive if male employees do attempt to scale back their work hours for childcare (Burnett et al., 2013). Lack of support from organisations has been a consistent finding in the work-life balance literature focusing on women (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014). However, research suggests that men and women have very different experiences and needs regarding work-life balance policies in the workplace (Blithe, 2015).

There is a broad consensus that a well-balanced division between work and family is beneficial for well-being (see Graham & Dixon, 2014; James, 2014). Research focusing on men in particular has found that higher levels of work-life balance are associated with more positive attitudes and increased work performance (Perrone, Wright, & Jackson, 2009), while investing in family is

associated with a higher quality of life for fathers (Aumann, Galinsky, & Matos, 2011). However, work-life conflict and poor work-life balance have been found to have a negative impact on the well-being of both men and women cross-nationally (Graham & Dixon, 2014; Lunau, Bambra, Eikemo, van der Wel, & Dragano, 2014). The dimensions of well-being affected include mental health, marital satisfaction and parental role performance (Aycan & Eskin, 2005). In their summary of the literature, Allen, Herst, Bruck, and Sutton (2000) showed that conflict caused by work impacting on family life is linked to strain, depression, somatic problems and burnout.

Changes in fathers' work-family situation also have a knock-on effect on women and children's well-being. Research shows that children benefit from spending time with their parents and some studies point to particular benefits of fathering involvement (Lewis & Lamb, 2003). Understanding the work-life conflicts of both parents is important because research suggests there is an interaction between partners' levels of work-life balance and well-being. This can take the form of spillover, where moods originating in one domain spill over into another (Williams & Alliger, 1994), and crossover, where the emotions, mood and dispositions of one partner cross over to the other (Westman, Brough, & Kalliath, 2009). For example, fathers' stress at work can be passed on to mothers and cause them to feel greater work-life conflict (Bakker, Westman, & Schaufeli, 2007; Bakker, Westman, & van Emmerik, 2009). Partners can also have a positive effect on work-family issues. Work-life conflict can be improved by a partner providing support both practically (sharing childcare and housework) and emotionally (supporting career moves and showing interest in their work, for example) (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010).

Understanding fathers' constraints to achieving better work-life balance has positive repercussions not only at the level of individual households but for society in general, as men's involvement in childcare is believed to play a crucial role in combating the stalling of the gender revolution (Haas & O'Brien, 2010). To date, while women's labour market participation has increased, women (and

especially mothers) still undertake the lion's share of childcare and housework – a situation not assisted by the lack of access to paternity leave and the limited flexible working offered to fathers in Britain. Scholars argue that without symmetrical change, in which men also increase involvement in housework and childcare, equality between the sexes cannot be achieved (England, 2010; Friedman, 2015; Haas & O'Brien, 2010). When men share domestic work, they improve women's work-life balance and well-being by reducing the 'dual burden' phenomenon and allowing women to invest more in their careers. Furthermore, wider uptake of work-life balance provision by both genders may encourage organizations to take policies more seriously and reduce the negative connotations associated with working flexibly or taking leave (Blithe, 2015).

Although the work-life balance literature focusing on fathers is still in its infancy in comparison to that looking at mothers, the last decade has seen a dramatic increase in the amount of research explicitly investigating fathers' experiences. Despite this, even recent studies continue to claim that they are 'one of the first' looking at fathers in relation to work-life balance (for example, Huffman et al., 2014). The reason that the proliferation of work in this area has not been acknowledged could be due to a tendency for some work-life balance researchers to refer primarily to literature from within their own discipline (Gatrell et al., 2013). In this chapter we collate the growing body of cross-disciplinary research on fathers' work-life balance experiences and their impact on well-being in order to consolidate this knowledge and recognise the contributions that have been made. We begin by considering fathers' experiences of their work and family roles and go on to look at the difficulties they face with regards to achieving balance between the two domains.

# RESEARCH ON FATHERS' WORK-LIFE BALANCE & WELL-BEING

## **Fathers' experiences of work-life balance**

Although work-life balance has traditionally been considered a maternal issue, focus has turned increasingly to fathers' levels of balance and their attitudes, needs and desires regarding the division of paid work and family life. Research suggests that how men allocate their time, in practice, may not necessarily be a reflection of their preferences. Fathers' unmet desires have negative implications for well-being.

## ***Fathers' work-life balance preferences***

Much research on work-life balance preferences has only included fathers by implication. For example, Hakim's preference theory (1995, 1998, 2000, 2003) argues that women's lack of representation in the workplace can be explained by their desire to prioritise family life over work. However, although she claims her theory is applicable to both sexes, her data is focused primarily on women (see Hakim, 2003 for limited data on men). She works on the assumption that the persistence of the male breadwinner is due to men having a homogenous orientation towards work (Hakim, 2003), but is this the case? Research which has specifically studied male participants suggests that their work-life balance preferences may be more complex.

Kimmel's (1993) article, *What do men want?*, was one of the first in the work-family domain to focus exclusively on men and take their work-life preferences seriously. He outlines the change in male working identity from the dedicated breadwinner of the fifties, Whyte's (1956) 'Organization Man', who strove for a stable, suburban lifestyle, to the competitive and individualistic 'New Organisation Man' (Hanan, 1971) of the seventies and eighties and, finally, to recent shifts away from an identity based solely on work and providing, which Kimmel claims to have been brought about by economic decline and women's entrance into the work force. The 'New Man' of the nineties and beyond is

striving to combine both work and family demands, while also looking for personal meaning (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). This 'New Man' discourse problematizes the role of the father as breadwinner and Hakim's view of men as primarily work orientated. At the same time, it opens up the issues of work-life balance to men:

[the involved father] balances his career with home life in order to promote equal opportunities for his partner in the labour market and to form stronger, closer, and personally more rewarding relationships with his children. (Eräranta & Moisander, 2011:518)

Recent studies show that men, more often than women (Milkie et al., 2004), express preferences for spending more time with their family (Dermott, 2008; Kanji & Samuel, 2015; Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 2000; Merla, 2008). Although this is likely to be linked to gender differences in working hours, it reveals that fathers experience imbalance between their work and family roles and have an unmet desire for more time with their children. The proportion of men saying that work-life balance is important for them has also increased and over half of fathers state that opportunities for flexibility are important to them (Tipping, Chanfreau, Perry, & Tait, 2012). These findings question the idea that men have a homogenous preference for work.

Fathers' desires for greater involvement in the family role are more nuanced than some research suggests. Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) have challenged the tendency in the literature to view the balance of work and life in terms of having a preference for either one or the other. They found that fathers were more likely to have a 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' discourse when discussing their work-family preferences and priorities (see also Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014). In contrast with Hakim's (2003) assumption of men's homogenous work preference, they found evidence of 'family first' priorities held by all the fathers they interviewed. Richardson et al.'s (2012) study of the work-family issues encountered by gay fathers also suggests that men can have an orientation towards both family and work, and casts doubt on Hakim's assumption that work-family preferences are fixed.

Richardson et al. found that the fathers' work orientations were fluid: prior to having children many of the fathers described themselves as firmly work-oriented, however once they were responsible for childcare their priorities shifted dramatically.

There is therefore evidence that fathers have a preference for spending more time with family and that work-life balance is important to them. However, this reported preference has been challenged by some scholars. Kimmel points out that 'the desire to change is often more rhetorical than real' (1993:55) and argues that men recognise they 'need' to be more involved, but this does not necessarily mean they 'want' to. Furthermore, much research fails to problematize the concept of preference itself and regards stated preferences as stable and measurable. It is also important to consider the great variety within fathers' preferences and work-family experiences. Class, nationality, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual preference and occupation are related to considerable differences in the amount of time fathers can, and would like to, dedicate to paid work and family.

### ***How fathers experience work-life balance in practice***

While there is evidence of fathers wanting greater work-life balance and involvement in childcare, research shows that the degree to which this is being achieved is limited (Scott & Clery, 2013). The model of the full-time male breadwinner remains deeply ingrained in workplace cultures and this acts as a social constraint, preventing fathers from achieving work-life balance (Moen & Yu, 2000). Britons spend more hours at work than employees in any other European country and those who work the longest hours are most likely to be men (Byrne, 2005; Tipping et al., 2012). Even when men do take on flexible working this does not necessarily improve their work-life balance. Although most part-time workers are women, more men than women work from home. Unlike part-time work, home-working is actually associated with longer working hours and intrusion on family life, which leads to greater work-life conflict (Bell & Bryson, 2005; Russell, O'Connell, & McGinnity, 2009).

The nature of employment also has an important influence on levels of work-life balance. Paradoxically, when men are given greater control over their hours at work it does not necessarily increase family time and can have a negative impact on well-being (Kanji & Samuel, 2015). Despite enhancing flexibility and autonomy, being self-employed has been found to create more work-life conflict not less (Schieman, Whitestone, & Van Gundy, 2006). Meanwhile, Kvande (2009) studied the work-life balance of Norwegian fathers in knowledge industries and law firms, and found that their independence and freedom to take leave when they wished actually resulted in them 'choosing' to spend more time at work. The 'total commitment' culture in these workplaces, combined with the importance of team-work and exceeding client expectations, created pressure to work long hours and made it difficult to take time off. This conflicted with their desire, and that of the Norwegian government, for fathers' greater involvement in childcare. Those in demanding jobs or those who have high degrees of authority are most vulnerable to conflict, overload and stress (Moen & Yu, 2000; Schieman & Reid, 2009) despite having higher earnings and more non-routine work, which are two factors usually positively associated with health. Schieman and Reid (2009) argue that this is because the positive effects of authority are frequently offset by greater work-life conflict.

Working long hours prevents fathers from spending time with their family and achieving balance. However, there is also evidence of fathers experiencing the conflict associated with combining work and family roles, and debate about the extent to which this impacts on their well-being. Although women have been found to experience greater work-life conflict, the gender difference tends to be small and a considerable number of working fathers struggle to manage work and family obligations (Leineweber, Baltzer, Hanson, & Westerlund, 2013; Parker & Wang, 2013). In the US, Hill (2005) found that men worked long hours, but also had significant involvement in household responsibilities. Despite this dual burden, fathers reported less work-life conflict and better well-being than mothers. In contrast, some studies have found that men actually experience greater work-life conflict and poorer work-life balance than women (Galinsky, Aumann, & Bond, 2011; Lunau et al., 2014;

Nomaguchi, Milkie, & Bianchi, 2005). Although Nomaguchi et al. (2005) found that men experienced greater work-life conflict, they concur with Hill (2005) that time deficits only appeared to be associated with lower well-being in women. They posit that this is due to women being under greater social pressure to be devoted to family. Keene and Reynolds (2005) suggest that men are less likely to experience conflict because their partners are taking on the majority of domestic duties. Although men's desire to be involved with raising their children and their hours of childcare have increased (Kan, Sullivan, & Gershuny, 2011), there has been little change in men's involvement in domestic chores. Women continue to take on the brunt of cooking, cleaning and laundry regardless of their hours in paid work (Gershuny, Bittman, & Brice, 2005).

There is also evidence to suggest that work-life conflict does have a negative impact on well-being for men. In a study revealing higher levels of psychological distress in single fathers compared to those who were partnered, Janzen and Kelly (2012) discovered that the greater level of work-life conflict experienced by single fathers was the most important factor in explaining the differences in mental well-being. Cooklin et al. (2015) also found that work-life conflict was associated with increased distress for fathers. Their nationally representative study of over 3000 fathers in Australia showed that men's tendency to stay in full-time work after the birth of a child had a negative impact on their mental health. According to Leineweber et al. (2013), work-life conflict has a negative effect on well-being for both men and women, but there are gender differences in how this is manifested. Both men and women have increased risk of emotional exhaustion, however men are more likely to experience problem drinking and women are more likely to report poor health.

To summarize, research shows that despite claiming a desire for greater work-life balance and involvement in childcare, employed fathers in developed economies are spending increasingly long hours in paid employment. There is a general consensus that fathers experience 'competing

devotions' between work and family roles (Halrynjo, 2009) and this has been shown to have a negative impact on their well-being.

### **What prevents fathers from achieving work-life balance?**

As we have seen, the gap between preferred hours and actual hours in paid work is greater for fathers than mothers and this is due to the fact that they appear less able or willing to cut back on paid work (Bianchi & Raley, 2005; Moen & Yu, 2000). However, Gregory and Milner (2009) remind us that preferences are shaped by perceived constraints as well as values and desires. We look at two constraints which affect fathers' ability to reduce their hours in paid work: pressure to conform to traditional conceptions of masculinity and organisational cultures which are unsupportive of men's family role.

### ***The importance of transitions in masculine identity***

The discrepancy between fathers' preferences regarding their allocation of time and their actual work-life balance appears to be closely linked to gender norms and notions of masculinity. Writing in the seventies, Pleck (1977) argued that reducing time at work is not enough to improve men's work-family balance, as ideology must first be challenged. He revealed the important place breadwinning holds in the male identity and the purpose employment gives to many men's lives. Pleck predicted that only once gender ideologies changed would men's time in employment become the more significant barrier to increased domestic involvement. To some extent gender segregation has decreased and ideologies have become more egalitarian (Scott & Clery, 2013), but the male breadwinning identity is still prevalent. More recently, Thomas and Linstead (2002) studied a large sample of middle managers and found that status and success at work were important for men's identity and self-worth. When interviewing men about their work-life balance, Blithe (2015) found that although they were anxious not to appear to support traditional gender roles, many saw being a family breadwinner as an important part of their identity 'as men'. Additionally, many mentioned that

their wife had 'natural' caring tendencies (Miller, 2011) and this gave her a greater right to time out of work, thereby framing a traditional approach in modern, benevolent terms (Gaunt, 2013).

Continuing social expectations for fathers to be family providers shape their intentions and work-life balance decisions. There is a positive relationship between traditional gender role beliefs in fathers and the hours spent in work (Huffman et al., 2014). McLaughlin and Muldoon (2014) reveal that those men who are most comfortable with a breadwinning identity do not experience work-life conflict, as they feel they are sufficiently meeting their role as a father by providing. Building a fathering identity around a discourse of male breadwinning helps solve the dilemma of being invested in one's children while remaining a committed employee and may be used by employees to justify sacrifices at home (Thomas & Linstead, 2002). Indeed, many highly masculine workplace cultures (as well as sub-cultures and counter-cultures) emphasise and celebrate family breadwinner identities as a fundamental expression of what it means to be a 'real man' (Cockburn, 1983; Collinson, 1992). The importance of breadwinning in masculine identity and the social pressure for fathers to provide for their family may explain Kaufman and Uhlenberg's (2000) finding that fathers generally have a stronger work attachment than men without children. Traditional visions of masculinity are important throughout the life course and fathers' lack of work-life balance can be rooted in decisions made long before having children. Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, and Siddiqi (2013) found that, although men and women both value work-life balance at the beginning of their careers, men are less likely to seek or expect flexibility due to fears about being seen as less masculine. This sets the scene for reduced work-life balance for men later in life.

The continuing importance of breadwinning for fathering identity is in conflict with new expectations regarding involvement in childcare (Aumann et al., 2011; McLaughlin & Muldoon, 2014; Ranson, 2012). Pressure to provide for one's family and be successful at work is contrasted with fears of neglecting family responsibilities, missing out on children's formative years and damaging

relationships with partners. Although individually many women experience similar conflicts between work and family pressures, there is more cultural acceptance of women prioritising family over work. Involved fathering and better work-life balance can be threatening to men's identity, as they challenge traditional gender roles. Prentice and Carranza's study of gender stereotypes found that 'the incompatibility of new fatherhood ideals and traditional definitions of masculinity were readily apparent, as was a keen reluctance on the part of these fathers to behave contrary to traditional gender roles for fear of negative repercussions' (2002:446). Not fitting in with conventional masculine ideals and norms can have negative repercussions on emotional well-being, due to the impact on relationships with other men and subsequent damage to social networks.

The centrality of breadwinning to fathers' identities has been questioned, however. Kimmel (1993) states that during an economic downturn, involvement in childcare can provide fathers with the feelings of identity and fulfilment usually found at work. Buzzanell and Turner's (2003) research into men's identity and work-family management following job loss also found that emotion work was important for maintaining fathers' well-being. Spending time on childcare created positive feelings and gave a feeling of normalcy. However, somewhat in contrast to Kimmel, they found that sustaining a breadwinning identity while out of paid work was still important for asserting their masculinity and status, and childcare was not enough to replace these needs. We can also question whether a breadwinning identity still applies only to men. Reynolds and Aletraris (2007) found that only women wanted to reduce their hours when work impacted on family. However, contrary to the authors' expectations, conflict in the other direction (family interfering with work) made women want to increase their work hours. The researchers suggest that this negative reaction to family life encroaching on work is due to the fact that, as for men, work-commitment plays an important role in women's identity.

Regardless of these debates, breadwinning remains a powerful concept for fathers and encourages them to prioritise work over family life, thus causing imbalance. In this sense, new expectations of greater paternal involvement are at odds with traditional visions of masculinity and the importance of work to men's identity. These tensions in identity and issues of imbalance can have a negative impact on well-being.

### ***How organisations consider fathers' work-life balance***

The literature suggests that organisations also play a crucial role in preventing fathers from achieving their desired level of work-life balance, while Allard, Haas, and Hwang (2011) go so far as to claim that organisations are the *main* culprits for men's work-life conflict. Workplaces are frequently criticised for doing little to improve work-life balance, particularly in times of recession, however organisational support appears to be particularly lacking for fathers.

Several scholars point a failure by organisations to adapt to changes in the work-family situations of their employees and to the rise of dual-earning households (Blithe, 2015; Coltrane, Miller, DeHaan, & Stewart, 2013). Currently, many workplace cultures remain rooted in the assumption that employees have someone (by implication, a woman) at home full-time to deal with family demands (Thomas & Linstead, 2002) and this results in conventions of long hours and presenteeism (Kvande, 2009). As a result of expectations of 'total commitment', there is a considerable long-term penalty to career progression and earnings for anyone who reduces their hours (Burnett et al., 2013; Holter, 2007; Kimmel, 1993), which has been referred to as a 'flexibility stigma' (Coltrane et al., 2013). Research focusing on male employees has found that those who take advantage of flexible working or leave for family reasons risk long-term wage penalties (Coltrane et al., 2013) and may be perceived as less committed, less serious about their work and less deserving of a raise (Vandello et al., 2013).

While organisational pressure on employees to be committed to work and the suppression of family and home life has been well documented in the literature on women's inequality in the workplace (Blair-Loy, 2006), research looking at perceptions of leave takers suggests that fathers who seek greater involvement in home-life may be particularly penalised at work. Allen and Russell (1999) found that male employees who took leave for family reasons were less likely to be perceived as committed to their work or deserving of reward than female employees, while the participants in Wayne and Cordeiro's (2003) study considered men to be less likely to be altruistic at work than women who took leave. This is likely to be due to the conflict with expectations of male-breadwinning (Burnett et al., 2013) and the fact that flexible working may be associated with being less masculine (Vandello et al., 2013), which makes men who use work-life balance provisions appear gender deviant. However, these assumptions have been challenged by longitudinal research on the actual outcomes of leave taking on long-term earnings, which suggests that 'the consequences of privileging family care over work obligations appear to carry similar penalties for men and women' (Coltrane et al., 2013:298). As a result of the lack of organisational support for men's work-life balance, fathers' needs are rarely considered (Burnett et al., 2013) and changes in men's work-family orientations often start at home and are brought to jobs rather than the other way round (Holter, 2007).

Even if fathers take the risk of sacrificing career progression and decide to increase their involvement in childcare, they are likely to find it difficult to negotiate a flexible working arrangement due to gender differences in the application of work-life balance policies. Burnett et al. (2013) found that fathers were aware of work-life balance initiatives, but were excluded or discouraged from using them by their employers who often considered these initiatives to be reserved exclusively for women. The gay fathers interviewed by Richardson et al. (2012) also struggled with workplaces which were unprepared for discussions regarding childcare needs that did not involve mothers. McDonald, Brown, and Bradley (2005) identify five reasons why men do not use work-life balance policies when they are available: lack of managerial support for work-life balance; perceptions of negative career

consequences; organisational time expectations; the gendered nature of policy utilisation; and negative reactions from colleagues without family responsibilities. Interestingly, Lunau et al. (2014) found that family policies were in fact more important to men's work-life balance than women's. They suggest that this is due to the fact that women are more likely to adjust their employment patterns to suit family responsibilities when reconciliation policies (such as childcare services, parental leave, support for single parents) are unavailable. The fact that fathers are less likely to take advantage of work-life balance policies may lead to them having greater issues with well-being. Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) found that well-being can be improved by work-life initiatives that allow employees to have greater involvement at home and Burke (2010) concludes that this is the case for both men and women.

Due to the problematic nature of organisational work-life balance policies for fathers, many resort to unofficial measures for fulfilling family responsibilities, such as using holiday allowance or sick leave. The individual characters of managers therefore have a considerable impact on men's ability to achieve work-life balance and well-being (Kvande, 2009), as a sympathetic supervisor is more likely to allow informal flexibility and leave arrangements. Unofficial leave taking and supportive colleagues have been found to be more effective than formal policies alone (Behson, 2005; Burnett et al., 2013; Lewis & Cooper, 2005; Richardson et al., 2012). Tracy and Rivera (2010) found that male executives' personal views regarding the gender division of labour and preferences for work-life balance (a large number were self-confessed workaholics) dictated the way they interpreted and reacted to employees' requests for leave. These executives were clear about their expectations for women to take on domestic responsibilities yet they were unlikely to support male employees who requested leave or flexibility for family demands, failing to recognise that father's well-being might be inextricably bound up in family, as well as employment demands.

Given that work-life policies are difficult to implement without company support, Kvande (2009) concludes that fathers need legitimisation for leave taking and are unlikely to 'opt-in' to work-family policies, unless this is provided nationally by a welfare state and also supported at an organisational level. Burnett et al. (2013) also highlight the impact of organisational attitudes towards fathers, but argue that policies are not effective for changing social behaviour. They recommend that the work-life balance and well-being needs of fathers should receive greater recognition in the workplace and that employers should be more understanding of the needs of parents.

In summary, organisations influence preferences and provide structural constraints to greater work-life balance. Frequently, success is measured by the number of hours worked and employees are encouraged to prioritise work over family life. Those who wish to dedicate more time to family regardless of these pressures, face barriers in the form of unequal application of policy, reduced opportunities for career progression and unsupportive colleagues. Since many workplace cultures continue to assume a model of male breadwinning, fathers experience greater organisational constraints and lack of support for improving work-life balance<sup>1</sup>.

## **CONCLUSION**

Calls for more consideration of work-life balance from the perspective of fathers and their well-being have been a regular feature of research in the work-family domain (Burnett et al., 2013). This chapter has demonstrated that researchers have responded to these calls and their work reveals that fathers' experiences of work-life balance (and consequently paternal perspectives on well-being) are more complex than previously imagined. Studies which included fathers only by implication tended to

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<sup>1</sup> When considering work-family research which takes place in organisations, Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Collins (2001) remind us that it is important to consider the possibility of sampling bias, as those who experience too much work-life conflict are likely to leave the workforce.

assume that the integration of work and family was a concern unique to women, and that men had a homogenous preference for work. Instead, due to men's increasing involvement with childcare, growing numbers of fathers are experiencing the conflict associated with combining family responsibilities and work. However, such conflicts do not appear to be the primary cause of most fathers' work-life balance issues (or, arguably, the principle threat to paternal well-being). For the majority of fathers, work continues to take priority and imbalance comes from an unmet desire to spend more time with family.

While men show evidence of desire for greater work-life balance, this is problematized by the continuing importance of providing in masculine and fathering identities. The ideology of male breadwinning is also particularly strong in organisations, which appear outdated in their expectations that only women have childcare duties and that the ideal employee is one without domestic responsibilities. Structural constraints, in the form of requirements for total commitment and a lack of organisational support restrict fathers' ability to achieve work-life balance. Some researchers have also questioned the sincerity of men's stated desires for greater time with family and point to the conflict between modern expectations of increased paternal involvement and the central role work plays in societal notions of success.

Although studies on fathers, well-being and work-life balance have proliferated over the past decade, this remains an emerging field with gaps to fill and assumptions to be challenged. More qualitative research is needed, for example, to better understand fathers' work-life balance preferences and the causes of mismatches in desires and practice. Outside of academia, we need recognition at an organisational level that men's perspectives on fatherhood have changed and that many now have or want greater responsibility for childcare. A wholesale shift in employer support for fathers who seek access to family friendly policies is necessary, which will enable both men and women to better balance work and childcare.

If fathers are constrained from enacting preferences for greater work-life balance this has a negative effect on well-being through stress and mental health issues, as well as potentially impairing relationships with children and partners. The fact that fathers' work-life conflict tends to be centred around unmet desires for more time with family, rather than the dual burden more associated with working mothers, leads to gender differences in the outcomes of conflict on well-being (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). As Connell has so aptly observed:

'Dropping dead from career-driven stress, or shrivelling emotionally from never seeing one's children, is a different issue from exhaustion because of the double shift, or not getting promotion because of career interruptions.' (Connell, 2005:378)

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