

*STATE*



*OF THE*

*WORLD'S*

*FATHERS*

*COUNTRY REPORT: THE NETHERLANDS*

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## INTRODUCTION:

# State of the World's Fathers

Responding to the realization that father involvement is key not only to promoting women's participation in the work force but much more broadly to enhancing men's, women's and children's health and well-being, State of the World's Fathers (SOWF) is an internationally co-sponsored project assessing the state of men's involved parenthood around the world, and aiming to enhance it across its many dimensions. An eponymous report is being presented in June 2015.<sup>1</sup>

SOWF is an initiative of MenCare, a global fatherhood campaign launched in 2011 and coordinated by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice in collaboration with its steering committee: the MenEngage Alliance, Save the Children, and Rutgers. It is intended to provide a periodic, data-driven snapshot of the state of men's contributions to parenting and care giving globally by addressing four domains critically related to involved fathering: unpaid care work in the home; sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as maternal, newborn and child health; men's care giving and violence against children and women; and child development.<sup>2</sup>

Below we present a rapid assessment of literature and data concerning the state of fathers and of fathering in the Netherlands in order to:

- provide a general sketch of fathering in the Dutch context;
- raise the considerable diversity among fathers and challenges to fathering in the Netherlands;
- give pointers for understanding and measuring involved fatherhood within Dutch culture; and
- discuss key dimensions of involved fathering, including leave provisions for fathers, men's and fathers' role in promoting sexual and reproductive health, and violence in the domestic setting.

Where data are available we highlight how the Dutch case compares to that of other EU Member States.

## Involved Fatherhood in the Netherlands: Awaiting a Cultural Shift

In the Netherlands, as elsewhere, industrial models of men as sole breadwinners have long since made room, however slowly and still incompletely, for post-industrial ones. Although outside of the scope of this literature review, factors key to understanding the contemporary Dutch situation of fathers include waning but once authoritative religious takes, Catholic, Protestant, and Calvinist, on the differential role of mothers and fathers within the family; the rise of a service economy, especially toward the end of the 20th century; as well as feminist, anti-patriarchal and emancipatory developments from the 1960s onward.<sup>3</sup> The recent 'caring fatherhood' discourses resulting from this eventful history have been inspired by an amalgam of (sometimes competing) ideologies. These reflect, and respond to, ongoing processes of individualization and democratization within the private sphere.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, in the Netherlands, and in keeping with European and worldwide trends<sup>5</sup>, government interest in men as fathers has lagged behind the changing social realities of the last two decades. Like the research on Dutch fathering in general, policy reviews have been patchy and far from comprehensive, even though policy documents of the mid-1990s made explicit reference to the importance of rethinking the role of fathers in households and family life, specifically of imagining a model of the new, caring father (*zorgvader*).<sup>6</sup> For instance, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*, SZW) co-sponsored a notable project entitled Men Taking the Lead (*Mannen in de Hoofdroel*) in 2005. It was part of the 2000-2008 EQUAL Initiative financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and co-funded by EU Member States within the 2000-2006 programming period.<sup>7</sup> The initiative focused on supporting innovative, transnational projects aimed at tackling discrimination and disadvantage in the labour market, with specific attention on promoting gender equality and challenging the male breadwinner model.

However, subsequent studies could report few specific policies and targets for building a new model, as fewer than the necessary steps had been taken toward realizing one.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that major shifts have not been seen over the decades. Both mothers and fathers have been dedicating more and more time to children. Yet women's share of care time is still considerably larger than men's—almost double.<sup>9</sup> In 2007 one researcher concluded that, 'If there is a "new father", he is not to be found in the concrete realities of domestic life'.<sup>10</sup>

The most recent of annual reports on gender emancipation (2014) comes to the same conclusion. It characterizes the state of affairs as follows:

In 2011, men spent slightly more time than women on obligations (paid work, housework and child-care), while in 2006 men and women had spent about equal time on these activities. This is so primarily because women spend less time on household tasks. During this period nothing has changed in the distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women. In particular, men's sharing in care tasks at home has remained unchanged over the past fifteen years. In policy terms a cultural shift is deemed

necessary to achieve greater involvement of fathers. The planned extension of paternity leave [*kraamverlof* or *vaderschapsverlof*] for fathers [called partner leave, in effect since January 1, 2015], though a relatively small extension, may contribute something to this. Judging by developments with respect to the division of labour and care, we see no major changes so far.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from structural obstacles to changes in the division of labour, a cultural shift will indeed require a shift in cultural factors, including what has been called *motherhood ideology*. A Dutch study showed that less traditional ideas about motherhood, combined with a supportive work/home culture, have a positive correlation to parents' utilization of work/home arrangements, but on their own have a less clear impact on objective and subjective measures of career success.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, its authors recommended that future study of *fatherhood ideologies* might help explain the differentiated effects of both motherhood ideology and care-related policies on choices concerning work and care.

In tune with this recommendation, a growing need is felt nationally as well as internationally, to comprehensively study and rethink what are presumed to be men's, along with what are presumed to be women's, parenting roles.

Current projects devoted to rethinking fatherhood in the Netherlands include Vitamine V<sup>13</sup>, Trias Pedagogica<sup>14</sup>, and father centres (*vadercentra*) in various cities. The organisation eMANcipator, founded in April 2014, is stating an explicit and inclusive mission to engage boys and men in gender equality.<sup>15</sup> Dutch organisations receiving support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to address fatherhood globally include Rutgers.

## CALL FOR RESEARCH

Solid research on fathers and fathering will be key to policy reviews and reform. *Opvoeden in Nederland*, a landmark and extensive study of child rearing published in 1996, was among the first to use Dutch data to support the idea of a unique and important role for fathers in parenting, distinct from that of mothers.<sup>16</sup> Several monographic studies on Dutch fathers (including immigrant fathers), fatherhood and father-absence have followed<sup>17</sup>, but no comprehensive studies or literature reviews have been written to date. Special fathering-dedicated issues of the Dutch journals *Kind & Adolescent* (in 1998) and *Pedagogiek* (in 2011) are among the few and widely spaced highlights of published academic attention.<sup>18</sup> A considerable amount of Dutch graduate and postgraduate work is being devoted to the effects and experience of fathering, however, and there has been a definite increase of attention to fathering issues across popular media.

Reflecting this trend, in September 2014 the University of Amsterdam instituted the country's first endowed chair dedicated to fatherhood and fathering issues. The part-time chair was co-sponsored by the Father Research Centre Foundation (*Stichting Vader Kennis Centrum*).<sup>19</sup> The Father Research Centre has developed from a work group on child visitation rights that had been operating since 1987. The Centre's current, wider interest in promoting involved fatherhood and father-inclusive policies through consultancy, mediation and research now seems to be shared by many stakeholders in Dutch society and well beyond the politics of visitation.

# Dutch Fathers

Today the ‘traditional’ (mother-father) nuclear family in the Netherlands is still very much alive.<sup>20</sup> Growing up in an ‘incomplete’ family has been the experience of a minority of children. Nevertheless, considerable diversity is seen in the experience of fathers across families in the Netherlands.

In 2013 the mean number of children per Dutch male was 1.638 (1.679 per female).<sup>21</sup>

## DEFINING FATHERS

Dutch family law observes an explicit distinction between mothers and fathers. It also observes clear distinctions between biological fatherhood, legal fatherhood, and parental responsibility. The main difference between legal mothers and fathers is predicated on Article 1: 198 paragraph 1 under (a) of the Civil Code which stipulates that the woman from whom a child is born is that child’s mother. Strictly speaking, the phrase has become obsolete since July 1, 2014, with the expiry of the so-called sterilization requirement for changes to gender in the birth certificate and in the light of Article 1: 28c paragraph 3<sup>(22)</sup> allowing that (trans)men may now bear a child.

Other ways of onset of parenthood remain connected to the legal sex of those involved. A man married to a woman at the moment of the birth of a child automatically becomes that child’s legal father. If unmarried, a biological father can become a legal father if he acknowledges the child and has maternal consent. Legal fatherhood may also come into effect through court-ordered determination of paternity or adoption. Ways toward non-maternal parenthood for women and men have grown closer together with the coming into force of the law of legal parenthood for the female partner of a mother (*Wet juridisch ouderschap voor de vrouwelijke partner van een moeder*) on April 1, 2014.<sup>23</sup>

## DIVERSE FATHERS

On January 1, 2014, over 1 in 9 inhabitants of the Netherlands had a non-Western origin.<sup>24</sup> In 2013, 42,913 “allochtonous” (non-native Dutch) children were born, of whom 28,921 “non-western”, as compared to 128,428 “autochtonous” (native Dutch) children.<sup>25</sup> In part by definition, a significant number of these will have fathers, and/or grandfathers, not originating from the Netherlands.

Although most studies of parenting in families with a migration background in the Netherlands focus on mothers’ parenting, studies have also mapped the substantial cultural diversity among fathers and variety of notions of fatherhood between and among groups of different ethnic background.<sup>26</sup> Many emancipation projects addressing non-native Dutchmen address their role as fathers.<sup>27</sup>

Compared to native families, families with a migration background are still often characterized by a less challenged ‘motherhood-ideology’ and a less pronounced participation by mothers on the labour market. As compared to native Dutch fathers, fathers with a migration background have been found to be traditionally less involved in childcare tasks<sup>28</sup>, may have a wider range of parenting styles, may be harder to reach for

native professionals, and may benefit most from approaches sensitive to language, culture, and etiquette, especially as these pertain to constructions of intergenerational and gender relations.<sup>29</sup>

Variable degrees of 'modernisation' of codes of masculinity and motherhood are seen across today's first, second and third generations of migrants. A single picture of fathers with ethnically diverse backgrounds does not emerge. Frequently cited critical factors of involved fatherhood and of mothers' integration are educational level, and in lower educational levels, the economic urgency of participating in the labour market. Although 'neighbourhood father' (*buurtvader*) and father centre initiatives are a notable innovation in the larger cities, involvement of fathers from diverse backgrounds in childcare and education is largely negotiated within homes and in the 'meso' context of informal social networks. Mothers are often the engine behind change, but may also struggle to share parental burdens. In older generations, and in some communities more than others, a 'culture of masculinity' may prove a restraining influence, echoing down from fathers to sons. Yet this may vary among fathers from ethnically diverse backgrounds as extensively as it does among native Dutch fathers.

**Infrequent but alarming cases of trans-border child abduction by parents (most often fathers), honour killings (most often men are perpetrators and victims<sup>30</sup>), arranged marriages, and 'family dramas' (often involving a father's suicide combined with nuclear family casualties) are often associated with cultural notions of paternal duty, honour or entitlement. However, current Dutch research on honour-based violence does well in highlighting the need for challenging frequently ethnocentric as well as simplistically gendered concepts of honour, and for listening to men's voices along with women's.<sup>31</sup>**

## MEN'S SAME-SEX PARENTING

In 2001, same-sex adoption was legalized alongside same-sex marriage in the Netherlands, which was a world first. Inter-country adoption became legal on January 1, 2009 but would have to chime with legislation abroad. In the Netherlands, an LGBT individual may petition to adopt; same-sex couples may jointly petition; a same-sex partner may petition to adopt a partner's child; and same-sex couples are allowed to foster or stepchild foster.

There is broad support for same-sex parenting in the Netherlands. Sixty percent of adults aged 18 and over agree with the statement that same-sex and heterosexual couples should enjoy equal rights in adopting children (22% disagreed). Data from 2006 showed that in a European comparison the Netherlands ranked highest on agreement with the statement that adoption of children by homosexual couples should be accepted across Europe.<sup>32</sup> Ethnic and religious groups lag behind, however, as a 2014 study indicated.<sup>33</sup>

In 2009, children were present in 3% of the households of an estimated 31,000 registered cohabiting male couples.<sup>34</sup> It is likely to have risen in the past years. As reported in the same study, 40% of gay or bisexual identified male youths aged 16 through 25 indicated having a wish to father; only 17% indicated not having such a wish.<sup>35</sup>

On the basis of studies comparing mother-father and two-mother households, the impact of a 'missing' father figure remains hard to define precisely.<sup>36</sup> Researchers indicate that many lesbian mothers approach men in their environment to serve as a male role model before the birth of a child, however.

No differences in fathering outcome indicators have been reported between non-heterosexual and heterosexual fathers. In a small 2010 study comparing 36 gay-identifying biological with 36 heterosexual-identifying fathers, no significant differences between the family types were found on emotional involvement and parental concern in the father-child relationship, parental burden (as an aspect of parental stress) or children's well-being.<sup>37</sup> Gay fathers did report feeling less competent in their child-rearing role than heterosexual fathers. For gay fathers especially, experiences of rejection and the feeling of having to defend their case in a heteronormative context were significantly related to children's well-being, father-child relationship, and parental stress.

## TEENAGE AND YOUNG FATHERS

Teenage pregnancy is comparatively rare in the Netherlands.<sup>38</sup> Teenage fathers may encounter specific challenges, however.<sup>39</sup> Teenage girls are often construed as victims, boys as offenders. Boys are more often barred from raising

their children by ex-girlfriends and in-laws. Having a teenage father or teenage mother has been cited as negatively impacting on educational opportunities of children. Teenage fathers rarely break off their own education, however, in contrast to teenage mothers.

The total estimated number of new teenage (<20y) fathers registered in 2010 was 657.<sup>40</sup> This number is cited to fluctuate around 700 per year. It depends somewhat on how it is calculated and it is only a rough estimate; many teenage fathers remain unregistered. The annual number of new teenage mothers is much higher, around 2,500. A 2005 survey among Dutch youth shows that 0.4% of 12-14 year old, 1.7% of 15-19 year old, and 1.4% of 20-24 year old boys and men had had experience of unplanned pregnancy in the past year.<sup>41</sup>

In a 2012 re-study, the figures for boys were 0.1 (ages 12-14), 2.8 (15-17), 2.4 (18-20), and 3.6 (21-24).<sup>42</sup> The 2012 total figures were as low as 1.4 for Moroccan boys and as high as 7.0 for Antillean boys (both figures apply to planned as well as unplanned pregnancies). In 2012, 3.2% of all boys indicated having caused a pregnancy (2.3% once, 0.8% more than once) within the past year. For boys pregnancy was considered planned in 26% of cases. In total, 2.3% of male youths aged 12 through 25 had been involved in an unplanned pregnancy during the past year.

A small 2010 qualitative study among teenage fathers showed that young parenthood had seldom been a topic of conversation between these boys and their parents.<sup>43</sup> Young fathers had very vague ideas of what the implications of parenthood could be. An initial negative response within the family soon turned more supportive. Ambivalent feelings toward young parenthood remained. For some young fathers, however, being a teenage parent seems preferable to the possibility of remaining childless in the long run.

## OLDER FATHERS AND GRANDFATHERING

The significance of father age in the Dutch context is as yet poorly understood but it likely reflects, and impacts on, choices in career planning—affecting work/care choices within the household. As that of mothers, the mean age of fathers at birth for all life births with the mother has been slowly rising, from 33.6 years in 2000 to 34.2 in 2006, but since then has stabilized around 34.0 (compared to mean age at first birth of mothers at 29.4). This is somewhat high in comparison to European countries. The average age of becoming a father for the first time was 32.4 years in 2010, or three years higher than first-time mothers. Already in 2006, 25,000 (14.8% of all) children were born to fathers aged 40 and over.<sup>44</sup>

Relatively little is known, too, about the contribution of grandfathers to childcare and about the experience of grandfatherhood in the Netherlands. Yet Dutch grandparents are among the most involved of Europe. According to 2004 data not only do 65% or more of Dutch grandmothers provide at least some childcare but so do about 60% of grandfathers.<sup>45</sup> The eligibility of grandparental care is evident in the light of rising costs of daycare. Data from the Netherlands' Kinship Panel Study suggests that grandparental childcare may be part of an 'emerging reproductive strategy'<sup>46</sup> given that although grandmothers were more likely to contribute to childcare than grandfathers, involvement of both maternal and paternal grandparents increase the likelihood of additional births.

Dutch research suggests contingencies such as divorce and implications for visitation may have a considerable impact on the emotional wellbeing of grandparents.<sup>47</sup> This may apply to grandchildren as well. To which factors, and constructions, of gender these and other problems may be related remains to be studied in detail.

## DIVORCE AND FATHERING

In the Netherlands there are now about 33,000 divorces every year, slightly below the European mean. Divorces and de-cohabitations involve an estimated 70,000 co-resident children (55,000 minors) per year, or up to 1.65% of all co-resident children in the Netherlands.<sup>48</sup>

An increasingly robust maxim is that parents who separate as partners or cohabitants, do not do so as parents. This has been solidified in two major legal innovations in 1998 and 2009. Since 1998 amendments to the Civil Code, joint custody in principle continues to exist under law after divorce. The Continued Parenthood and Well-Planned Divorce Act (*Wet bevordering voortgezet ouderschap en zorgvuldige scheiding*), which became law on March 1,

2009, stipulates that parents with minor children write a parental care plan (*ouderschapsplan*) with the aim of promoting continuity of both mother's and father's care relations with their children.<sup>49</sup>

Both innovations seem to have had the intended impact on post-divorce contact with fathers. Retrospective data show that father involvement has become increasingly important in the post-divorce context.<sup>50</sup> According to Statistics Netherlands, joint custody continues to be maintained after more than 90% of divorces (most recent sources cite a percentage of 94). A 2013 study (N = 429) showed that 66%, or 2 in 3, of 9- to 16-year-old children assume residence with the mother after divorce (down from 75% in 2006), often with a stepfather. About 7% assume residence with the father (down from 9% in 2006). The remaining 27% lived in co-parent (*co-ouder*) arrangements (significantly up from 16% in 2006).<sup>51</sup> The number of children living in single-father households has risen from 27,000 in 2000 to 40,000 in 2010, however.<sup>52</sup> Slightly more boys than girls live in co-parent and single-father families. Whereas the percentage of children without contact with the nonresidential parent after 2009 has dropped to below 10%, about 15% of children living in mother-families have no contact with the father (the same figure applies vice versa).

**For children of divorce where at least one parent is not born in the Netherlands the picture is different. According to 2013 data they assume residence more often in mother families (80% compared to the indigenous 65%) and in father families (9% vs 6%), that is, much less often in a co-parent situation (11% vs 27%). Children from families where at least one parent is born outside the Netherlands live with stepfathers less often (about 33%, vs 55%, of mother families), and see their father less often (over 1 in 4 completely break off contact).<sup>53</sup>**

Factors that prove significant in courts' denials of visitation rights to fathers include residential distance between father and child, father's poor physical health, and father's non-Dutch background.<sup>54</sup> International research suggests that divorce mediation by a third party is important for father satisfaction (often more than mothers<sup>55</sup>); whether this is the case in the Netherlands merits researchers' attention.

Fathering after divorce seems to have definite but varied and gender-specific implications for children in the Dutch experience. Research shows that the quality of the child's relationship with the non-residing parent (most often the father), but not the frequency of contact, has protective effects on the child's functioning.<sup>56</sup> A key factor in post-divorce child outcomes, including contact with non-residing parents, is the quality of their pre-divorce relationship with both parents.

Nearly 60% of Dutch divorce children studied over an eight-year period encountered stepparents either part-time (in co-parent families) or full-time. In slightly over 80% of full-time stepfamilies these were stepfathers.

International research suggests that quality of relationship between children and residential stepfathers may be more decisive on average for child outcome indicators than that between children and non-residential fathers. After divorce, boys show more externalizing behavior problems than girls after divorce or boys from intact families.<sup>57</sup> This has been tentatively linked to fathering before and after, as well as with stepfathering after, the divorce. According to a Dutch study involving 37 children aged 8-12, in stepfather families boys' relationship with their non-resident father was experienced as warmer on average than the relationship with their stepfather.<sup>58</sup> For girls, no differences were found. For both boys and girls the quality of relationship with the one and that with the other father figure were positively correlated. Social competence of boys was linked to the relationship with the non-resident father, while for girls it was the relationship with the resident stepfather that proved most important for their self-confidence. Furthermore, girls do not seem to function better in mother families nor boys in father families.

In 16% of divorce cases in 2013 alimony was awarded to women, while in 1% of divorces alimony was awarded to men.<sup>59</sup> The slight decrease in the percentage of women being awarded alimony has been tentatively linked to the increasing financial independence of women. In 2013 the average monthly child support was 980 euro.

## Fathers and Unpaid Care Work in the Home

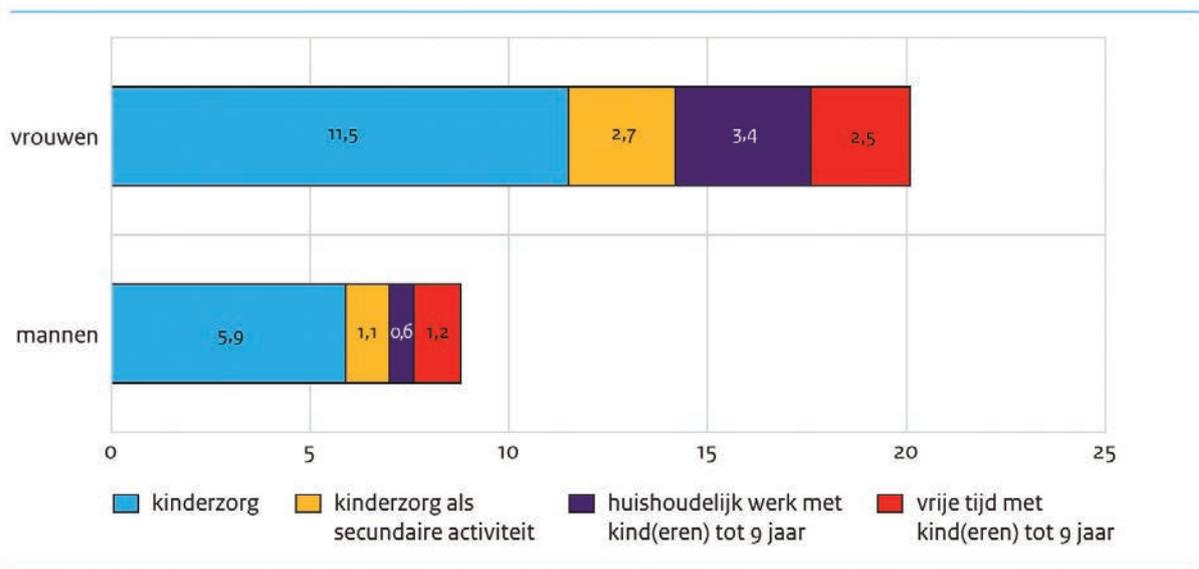
Internationally, the Netherlands rank high on employment among women with pre-school children, and most of it is part-time. In an internationally exceptional 59% of families, one parent is employed full-time and the other part-time. It is widely accepted that mothers work part-time and make part-time use of child-care facilities, while full-time use even for older children is still not accepted.<sup>60</sup> This culturally validated flexibility on the part of the mother may sustain the lack of change in men's strategies to reconcile their roles within and outside the home. It obeys an internationally seen pattern: on becoming parents men typically increase the time devoted to paid work whereas women decrease their working time or even exit the labour market.

In the period 1980 to 2005, the number of hours women spent per week on childcare rose from 9.1 to 13.9. In the same period the men's figure rose from 3.3 to 6.3.<sup>61</sup> By 2006 Dutch men spent an average of 49 minutes a day to the care or supervision of their minor child(ren), while Dutch women spent 1:18 hours.<sup>62</sup> While between 2006 and 2011 the number of hours per week primarily devoted to childcare by mothers remained steady at 11.5, for fathers it dropped slightly from 6.3 (2006) to 5.9 (2011).<sup>63</sup> Judging from this, men's care time remained about half of women's. When considering more inclusive measures of care tasks and time spent as a primary caretaker of children, the gender gap also becomes wider (see Figure 1). Work and care are distributed more evenly when parents have attained higher education levels, however.

FIGURE 1

### Time spent on caring for children.

As primary [blue] and secondary activity [yellow]; as household tasks [purple] and leisure time [red] spent with children (up to 9 years); by parent sex (upper bar: women; lower bar: men), of parents with residential children ages 0-17 years, 2011 (in hours per week).



Source: SCP/CBS (TBO'11), retrieved from <http://www.scp.nl>

Together with the Scandinavians, the Dutch spend the most time on childcare when compared to other European countries. The distribution between women and men in these countries was found to be the least, if still obviously, skewed. As in Scandinavia, mothers in the Netherlands assumed responsibility for 60% to 65% of child care, fathers for 35% to 40%.

In most families both parents work *and* perform care tasks.<sup>64</sup> However, the labour market participation of fathers correlates poorly with participation in care tasks. The Netherlands has a notably high proportion of male part-time workers (24.6%), and almost all employed mothers work part-time.<sup>65</sup> Experience of work-care conflicts is comparatively unproblematic in the Netherlands<sup>66</sup>; conflicts are more associated with men than with women. While mothers usually work part-time to balance work and care tasks, fathers often work part-time for reasons other than caring for children.<sup>67</sup> Of men indicating a wish to work less hours, only about one quarter to one third cite childcare as an important reason.<sup>68</sup> In clear contrast to Dutch mothers, Dutch fathers fall considerably behind their Swedish and UK counterparts in citing family commitments as a reason behind their working hour preferences.<sup>69</sup> While women have been adjusting their paid working hours after childbirth, fatherhood has had little to no impact on men's working hour preferences.

It may be ventured that reimagining Dutch fatherhood implies difficult choices between highlighting and exploiting gendered capacities on the one hand and aiming for gender-neutral opportunities for all on the other.<sup>70</sup> The Dutch case has been one in which flexibility in mothers' working careers has been valorized and consequently extensive. This seems to have allowed fathers' side of equation to be stalled on the arguable premise that to be a good father, one has to provide above all other things—and on the extended premise that to be a better father, becoming a better provider would be the thing to do.

For what it is worth, researchers have cause to pause at this point. In the Netherlands, as in most comparable countries, those fathers who spend the most time with their children also happen to experience the most favorable labour market outcomes.<sup>71</sup> Fathers who report spending a high or medium level of paternal time earn around 1% more than other fathers *while working slightly shorter hours*. The effect, called *father premium* (it is contrasted with the *mother penalty*), or *daddy bonus*, seems maximized (about 4%) when a father's biological ties, co-residence with the child, and marriage to the child's mother reinforce one another to produce high involvement on all fronts.<sup>72</sup> Men even seem to anticipate it: within a period of two years prior of becoming fathers men are found to exhibit more favorable labour market outcomes than other non-fathers. The daddy bonus is not for everyone (not for every nominal father, clearly). Still, instead of juxtaposing *good providers* and *active carers*, modern fatherhood may be better understood economically by placing it along a continuum of *more or less involvement*. The optimally involved father would be able to integrate the two roles in a way that they do not clash but add up: if not in cash, at least in a sense of fulfillment. This may not be incompatible with internationally seen differences in what a 'new man' looks like.<sup>73</sup> But it is clear that involved fatherhood would have to chime with the involvement aspirations of all co-parents.

# Leave for Fathers and Male Partners

## LEGISLATION

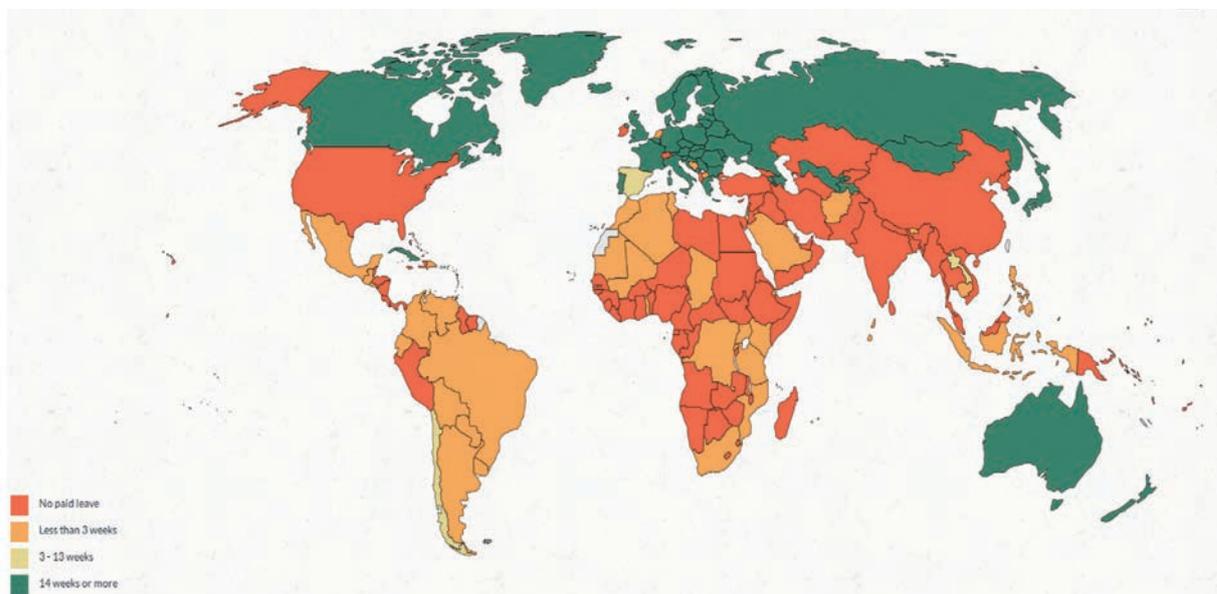
The statutory right to childcare leave for fathers is often considered a crucial step in advancing gender equality at work and at home. A lot of variation is seen worldwide (Figure 2). Dutch legislation scores poorly on statutory father's leave in international comparisons.<sup>74</sup> The Netherlands also score low on the percentage of men actually using statutory paternity leave.

Leave provisions for partners of mothers apply to male or female married or registered partners, unmarried cohabitants of mothers, and those recognizing the child as their own.<sup>75</sup> Several provisions apply to men as partners and as fathers, while extended provisions may be laid down in collective labour agreements.

FIGURE 2

### Is paid leave available for fathers of infants?

Note: Paid leave for fathers includes both paid paternity leave, which is leave reserved for fathers of infants, and paid parental leave, which is leave for either parent of an infant, that can be taken by men. Retrieved from <http://worldpolicyforum.org/policies/is-paid-leave-available-for-fathers-of-infants>



## PATERNITY LEAVE

After the delivery by a partner a (male or female) employee, whether full-time or part-time, is entitled to two days of paid (employer-funded) leave (*kraamverlof*), to be taken within four weeks of birth or the child's arrival home from hospital.

As of January 1, 2015, mother's (male or female) partner is entitled to three days of unpaid parental leave (*partnerverlof* or partner leave) per child born. Partner leave may be taken up immediately after *kraamverlof*, is to

be taken up within four weeks of birth or arrival home of the child from hospital, and (if mother's partner is also the child's parent) is subtracted from the partner's total amount of entitled unpaid parental leave. For five-day working weeks this ensures a consecutive period of at least seven days of optional leave after birth for fathers. Parental leave may be obtained for co-resident adoptive, foster and stepchildren.

## PARENTAL LEAVE

The right to unpaid parental leave (*ouderschapsverlof*: 26 times the number of working hours per week, per employer per child, to be taken up before the child's eighth birthday) applies to all (male or female) parents. As in 11 other EU Member States, it is an individual entitlement that cannot be shared, and as in seven other EU Member States, it is associated with no cash benefits. The Netherlands satisfy The Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU, a directive concerning the basic rights of all parents to leave in the European Union. UNICEF's OECD parental leave standard of 1 year at 50% of salary is not attained, however.<sup>76</sup>

**In comparison: The EU Member State average number of statutory working days for paternity leave is 12.5.<sup>77</sup> Dutch *kraamverlof* and *partnerverlof* combined makes only five statutory days, two of which paid. The EU Member State average number of weeks for parental leave is 86.9. In the Netherlands it is highly individualistic, as it depends on working hours per week per parent per child per employer.**

Partners are also entitled to indefinite but typically short paid leave at the event of labour and childbirth (*calamiteitverlof*). In unusual circumstances this may be extended in the form of care leave (*zorgverlof*) which, if short, is compensated at minimum wage.

## MEN'S TAKE-UP OF LEAVE

It is too soon to tell whether and how the limited 2015 gesture of three days of unpaid partner leave will have an impact on men's willingness to take up leave. Data from 2002 show that whereas 90% of eligible fathers took up some form of leave after the birth of a child, only 51% were taking the statutory paternity leave (*kraamverlof*); most took up holidays or leave accrued in lieu of pay.<sup>78</sup> Reasons provided by men (n = 12) prominently included work pressure, employer objections, and (contra statutory provisions) anticipated loss of pay.

In the Netherlands 74% of women and 84% of men participate in the labour force (ranking it 37th on the 2014 Global Gender Gap rank for this indicator).<sup>79</sup> In 2013, 124,000 men and 124,000 women working 12 hours or more per week were entitled to parental leave privileges.<sup>80</sup> Of these, 57% (up from 42% in 2003) of women took leave for averages of 12 months and 10 hours per week, while 23% (up from 15% in 2003) of men took leave for averages of 16 months and eight hours per week. During their period of leave, mothers worked on average 29 hours per week, fathers 39. For fathers the peak year was 2011, showing a 27% uptake rate. This is high: the average percentage of fathers who take up parental leave in the EU is cited to be 10.1%, with Sweden ranking on top at 44%.

**This indicator of the gender gap has survived major legislative changes. Parental leave became a statutory right in 1991, and its scope was significantly extended, roughly to contemporary standards, only in 1997. In 1991 employers working more than 20 hours per week were eligible; this meant that 75% of women and 30% of men were not eligible. On July 1, 1997, the period of leave was extended from four to eight years after birth, uptake was made flexible, and people working less than 20 hours per week became eligible. But even before this extension, for the period 1995 to 1997, the cited total uptake rates pertaining to parental leave were 37% of eligible mothers and 13% of eligible fathers.<sup>81</sup>**

The current long periods of leave reflect the possibility of taking up part-time parental leave and to spread the leave over several months. Payment above the statutory minimum depends on collective agreements. Hence, take-up rates vary between sectors. Employees in the public and health care sectors have paid parental leave more often than employees in the private sector, and take-up is consequently higher. In fact, the International Labour

Office recently highlighted experience in the Netherlands as underscoring the importance of compensation for encouraging use of parental leave.<sup>82</sup>

Use of parental leave was found to be much lower among Turkish, Moroccan and Antillean workers than among Surinamese and native Dutch workers. Causes include unfamiliarity with the entitlement and the absence of a perceived need for use, given extant childcare arrangements.

Interestingly, men working part-time more often take up parental leave than men working full-time.<sup>83</sup> There is a significant group of men who indicate a need for leave but end up not using it. Work, with its financial, flexibility and reputational aspects, appears to be a more significant barrier for men to take up leave than it is for women. Working in managerial positions and doing frequent overtime work especially diminish the chances of men in care situations using leave.

In total, the number of months of parental leave being taken up on average has risen since the 1990s among both working mothers and fathers. Nevertheless, in most cases, it is women who take up parental leave, even when both parents work equal hours. Parental leave is mostly taken up by working mothers. Longitudinal research into fathers' and workplace attitudes and expectations concerning leave taking might bring to light to what extent these act as possible gender-specific causes of non-use. Longitudinal or cross-sectional study of possible relations between father's participation in household tasks and mother's participation of the labour market at the *household level* are needed too. A third, related research focus that might be worthwhile in mapping ideas of men's care are workplace attitudes to men's caring for ill relatives or family members, which is high in the Netherlands.<sup>84</sup>

# Fathers' Involvement in Sexual and Reproductive Health, and Maternal and Child Health

## MEN AND CONTRACEPTION

Little is known about Dutch men's sharing in responsibilities related to family planning. Men's condom use and testing for STDs has been mapped to some extent.<sup>85</sup> According to a large 2012 study, contraception is a largely female affair; 60% of women used contraception, 32% used oral contraceptives.<sup>86</sup> The 'double Dutch' (pill plus condom) option scored relatively high among youth (10.6% of female respondents aged 15-19), while partner's vasectomy scored relatively high among older adults (13% of female respondents aged 40-49). Some 29% of all women (34.4% of teenagers) indicated that their partner had a 'considerable influence' on contraceptive strategies. More research is needed to clarify men's and women's views on men's, and fathers', responsibilities for preventing and dealing with unwanted pregnancies.

## FATHERS AT BIRTH

Little is known, too, about the involvement of fathers in Dutch ante- and peri-natal care. A recent Dutch study was among the first to systematically explore fathers' experiences and representations of the unborn child during pregnancy.<sup>87</sup> Findings suggested that risk factors found to be predictive of parenting problems and maltreatment are also associated with the quality of both fathers' and mothers' representations of their infants, both prenatally and in the postpartum period. It might be inferred that quality of ante- and peri-natal involvement of fathers may either be indicative, or an integral part, of the constellation of factors that contribute to favourable parenting, including fathering, outcomes. More research is needed to confirm international, particularly Scandinavian, research suggesting that involvement in pregnancy of expectant fathers is an important first step toward involved fatherhood.

## FATHERS AND SEX EDUCATION

Reflecting international findings, Dutch fathers are infrequently cited by their children as go-to sources of sex education (13% cite fathers while 29% cite mothers; about 17% of boys and 9% of girls ages 12-24 cited fathers in a large 2012 study).<sup>88</sup>

A 2013 study among 789 fathers and 802 mothers (aged 20 to 68) of children aged 4 to 17 showed that fathers talk less often about sexuality with their children than mothers do ( $p < .001$ ). Mothers were also more likely to always provide answers to questions about relationships and sexuality ( $p = .002$ ) and indicate more often that they think they manage to provide their children the information they themselves find important ( $p < .001$ ).<sup>89</sup>

Preliminary results of a recent online questionnaire, completed by 208 fathers of young children, suggested that 90% of fathers of children ages 0 to 6 years willingly share the task of sex education with their partners.<sup>90</sup> However, in the 4 to 8 years range, many fathers consider it primarily the mother's task. A large proportion of fathers indicate an occasional need for support on how to deal with sex education. One in five fathers is reported to never talk about sexuality with their 8- to 13-year-old child. When they do, the initiative is usually taken by the child.

# Fatherhood and Violence

In the Netherlands, as in most EU countries, several measures have been instituted to monitor and intervene in domestic violence and child abuse.<sup>91</sup>

## DOMESTIC AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Dutch governmental attention to domestic violence issues has been marked by an increasingly gender neutral perspective that stipulates looking at issues of intimate partner violence irrespective of questions of gender inequality.<sup>92</sup> Incidence figures very much depend on definitions and research methods. In one study, 41% of interviewed women indicated ever having been a victim of physical violence (versus a European mean of 31%). This would involve a staggering 2.4 million women. Of all women, 22%, or about 1.3 million Dutch women report physical violence perpetrated by a partner or ex-partner.<sup>93</sup> It is estimated that each year in the Netherlands at least 200,000 people suffer (obvious) domestic violence perpetrated by some 100,000 to 110,000 suspects. Of suspects, 87% are male and 13% female. Of victims of evident domestic violence, about 60% are female and 40% male.<sup>94</sup>

## VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

A 2010 study among youth (<18y) on lifetime prevalence of experience with violence found that 22% reported sexual abuse within the home (58% in total), 72% reported physical violence within the home, 85% parental psychological aggression, and 49% conflicts between parents.<sup>95</sup> For both physical and sexual child abuse, fathers rank high as perpetrators. Of 817 official reports of child abuse in the 2007 through mid-2008 period, in over half (53%) of cases the father was the suspect (versus 10% of mothers). In another 27% a partner of one of the parents was the suspect—almost always mother’s male partner. Fathers were further involved in another 5% where adoptive and foster parents, among others, were named suspects.<sup>96</sup> According to another study, of people having had experienced at least one physical, sexually transgressive experience, 2.6% of men and 7.7% of women indicated that the father was the offender at the last time this happened before age 16.<sup>97</sup> In keeping with international data, foster fathers<sup>98</sup> and stepfathers appear notable subgroups of sexually abusive parents.

# The Role of Fathers in Child Development

**T**hough fathers are on average less involved in caring tasks, or at least have less time to influence their child's behaviours and attitudes, they may have definite, and differentiated, effects on child outcomes.

## CONCEPTS OF FATHERHOOD

As documented for many parts of the global North, the Netherlands can look back on centuries of discussion about the importance of male role models and of fathers, especially for boys, and of perceived 'feminization' effects both in the home and schools.<sup>99</sup> There has been a limited but definite Dutch resonance as well with the recent Anglo-American concerns of male underachievement in education, variably escalated into 'boy crisis' discourses, which implicitly or explicitly focus on male role models and on the putative indispensability of masculine styles of, and men in, education.<sup>100</sup> Although most of these discussions have been focused on men as teachers and mentors, there would seem to be clear, yet often under-researched, implications for the putative role of men as fathers.

Data from the 1999/2000 European Values Study show that when confronted with the statement that 'In general, fathers are as well suited to look after their children as mothers', 54.0% of Dutch respondents agreed; another 22.4% strongly agreed.<sup>101</sup> Notably, in 2008 about 75% of Dutch respondents tended to agree with the statement that 'a child needs a home with both a father and a mother to grow up happily'.<sup>102</sup> Twenty-first century fathers, in other words, are thought to contribute equally, but also uniquely, to healthy and happy child development. Precisely how this somewhat paradoxical idea relates to the (on paper) broad acceptance of LGB marriage, parenthood and adoption in the Netherlands, remains to be studied in detail.

## HOW GENDER-SPECIFIC IS DUTCH FATHERING?

A recent Dutch study suggested that fathers', but not mothers', parenting practices (including physical behaviour regulation strategies) were associated with measures of boys' aggression one year later.<sup>103</sup> This would indicate that fathers have an impact not only on positive but also negative child rearing strategies. Data also showed that, though not very strong, mothers had stronger *implicit* gender stereotypes about adults and children than fathers (articulated in implicit messages about gender or appropriate behaviours for each gender). Fathers showed stronger *explicit* attitudes about gender than mothers (evidenced though gender-differentiated parenting or explicit talk about gender).<sup>104</sup> Fathers with same-gender children had stronger implicit gender stereotypes about adults than fathers of both boys and girls. Lastly, fathers seemed to tailor their gender talk to the gender composition of their children more than mothers did.

How to interpret these and comparable findings is notoriously difficult. Much more research is needed to specify exactly how fathers and mothers converge, or differ, across child rearing measures—and with

which long-term effects. Long-term longitudinal research is scarce and comparative research even scarcer, follow-up is often limited, direction of causality may be arguable, and even where effects are found, the differences between fathers and between mothers may be larger than between fathers and mothers. Practical significance is yet another problem.

However, selected studies including the one mentioned in the insert above do suggest that fathers in the Dutch context may have a measurable impact on their children; that this impact may be measurably sex-specific; that the impact may extend to gender stereotypes as well as sex-typed behavior in children; and lastly, that fathers may recursively be responsive in their fathering attitudes and behaviours to their children, indeed possibly in sex-specific ways.

These recursive influences between fathers and children may be trivial in some cases and relevant in others. Fatherhood has a moderating effect on criminality, for instance. According to Dutch research, criminal behaviour in men decreases after having a child, whereas motherhood does not affect the criminal behaviour of women.<sup>105</sup> Among married men, fathers present a lower risk of criminal behaviour. If men have their first child at a very young age, however, their likelihood of criminal behaviour increases.

# Conclusion

The Netherlands may be situated in the premier league of EU states when it comes to absolute measures of fathers' child involvement. Marked advances have been noted in fathers', but also mothers', time spent on childcare. As in other premier league countries, the gender gap remains conspicuously large, despite governmental realization of the need for more radical aims for gender equity across care-work related opportunities. On several vital dimensions of involved fathering, including statutory leave provisions, sexual and reproductive health, and violence, further and critical research is needed for a comprehensive evaluation of fathers' and mothers' needs, best practices, and leads for interpreting complex data. Above all, fundamental research on contemporary constructions of fatherhood, masculinity, and also of motherhood and child development, is needed to explore the contours of the cultural shift in gendered concepts of parenthood hinted at, but not yet within reach, in the Netherlands of the early 21st century.

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# Men Care

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