

Paternal leave: it's okay to leave

Beena Kumari,¹ Areeba Memon,² Moniba Tehrim³

Madam, With the advent of a new era, fathers of the newer generation are increasingly becoming more invested in childcare than ever before. While historically stereotyped as breadwinners, globally, the narrative is slowly changing for the better.¹ Although studies have focussed much on maintaining a healthy work-family balance, paternity leave remains an overlooked subject in Pakistan, given the lack of a formal structure and policies to support this concept.

Infant care is laborious and meticulous leaving the caregiving mothers over-burdened and fatigued. Paternity leave serves to offload the arduous responsibilities affixed to mothers and promote an environment of gender equity to palliate work-family conflicts² while restoring maternal well-being,^{2,3} reducing infant mortality, and promoting active breastfeeding.³ With the growing need for dual-career couples in Pakistan, paternity leave not only serves to ease some of the burdens placed on new mothers,^{1,3} but also builds a nourishing father-child bond that positively impacts the educational and behavioural domains for child growth.⁴

Some of the recognized reasons preventing the use of such leaves include poor policies, an increased workload on the remaining coworkers,⁵ bullying from colleagues for going against gender stereotypes, the fear of being left behind in the professional race, and an economic burden discouraging fathers from taking paternity leave.⁴

These stressors reinforce the need for the implementation of a well-framed paternal leave policy in Pakistan that

.....
^{1,2}Dow Medical College, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan,
³Karachi Medical and Dental College, Karachi, Pakistan.

Correspondence: Beena Kumari. Email: tejanibeena29@gmail.com

ORCID ID. 0000-0002-2294-6046

DOI: 10.47391/JPMA.7564

allows a friendly work atmosphere, better childcare services, and communication campaigns that emphasize the pivotal role of fathers in a child's development, particularly by educating them during the perinatal visits.¹ However, it is essential to emphasize that such leaves be paid to ease the economic burden of fathers while they are actively engaged in childcare tasks.⁴ Also, ensure that such leaves are neither too long to face any negative career consequences nor too short of failing to acquire new parenting skills.⁴

Moreover, much work must be done to identify the practice and performance of such policies.

Submission completion date: 21-09-2022

Acceptance date: 05-01-2023

Disclaimer: None to declare.

Conflict of Interest: None to declare.

Funding Sources: None to declare.

References

1. Huerta MC, Adema W, Baxter J, Han WJ, Lausten M, Lee RH, et al. Fathers' Leave and Fathers' Involvement: Evidence from Four OECD Countries. *Eur J Soc Secur.* 2014; 16:308-46. doi:10.1177/138826271401600403.
2. Petts RJ, Knoester C, Li Q. Paid paternity leave-taking in the United States. *Community Work Fam.* 2020; 23:162-83. doi:10.1080/13668803.2018.1471589.
3. Zagorsky JL. Divergent Trends in US Maternity and Paternity Leave, 1994-2015. *Am J Public Health.* 2017; 107:460-5. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2016.303607.
4. Petts RJ, Knoester C. Paternity Leave-Taking and Father Engagement. *J Marriage Fam.* 2018; 80:1144-62. doi:10.1111/jomf.12494.
5. Angeles MC, Stucke RS, Rosenkranz KM, Smink DS, Rangel EL. Paternity Leave During Surgical Training: Perspectives of Male Residents. *J Surg Educ.* 2022; 79:e85-e91. doi: 10.1016/j.jsurg.2022.04.012.