

FATHERHOOD BULLETIN

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Australian Fatherhood
Research Consortium



PARENTAL LEAVE

Guest Editorial

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In recent years, we have seen a lot more discussion around fathers' use of Paid Parental Leave (PPL) in Australia. Fathers' use of and access to PPL is an important issue for Australian families and society more broadly. Fathers benefit immensely from taking parental leave, as during this period of leave they are able to spend time with their new babies, bond with them, learn to care for them in the short and longer term, and if their partner has given birth, to support them as they recover. PPL may also offer fathers the ability to spend time with and enjoy their families, and new babies specifically, without worrying about paid work and financial stress. Fathers have spoken of experiencing these benefits in research, and this is reflected in the fathers' stories included in this issue.

It also cannot be overlooked that fathers' use of and access to PPL is an issue of gender equality. Progression of gender equality relies

on a more equal share of care and work, and of gendered expectations being disrupted. When care is shared, women have more opportunity to enter back into, or remain, in the workforce and they are able to progress their careers through more availability at work and less responsibility at home. Father's ability to engage in parenting responsibilities also assists in them being seen as equal (and competent) parents, rather than as helpers or secondary carers. These shifts in parenting equality are crucial for progression to a more equitable Australian society.

Recent changes to Australia's PPL policy are a step in the right direction to achieve these social changes. The new PPL policy will eventually offer 26 weeks of paid leave which can be shared between parents. The change in policy offers more options for Australian families in who can take PPL, and for how long, and includes a 'use or lose' component of leave for both parents. It is hoped that this more flexible approach to PPL will improve fathers' uptake, which currently sits at only 3%.

However, there are a few factors to be considered: PPL will continue to be paid at minimum wage, and many families cannot afford fathers to be paid at this rate; fathers are not required to be on leave alone under this PPL policy, which has proven effective internationally in encouraging longer term father involvement; and, the 'use or lose' component for fathers is currently two weeks - it is likely that mothers will take most available PPL if this does not increase.



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Photo by Ketut Subiyanto on Pexels

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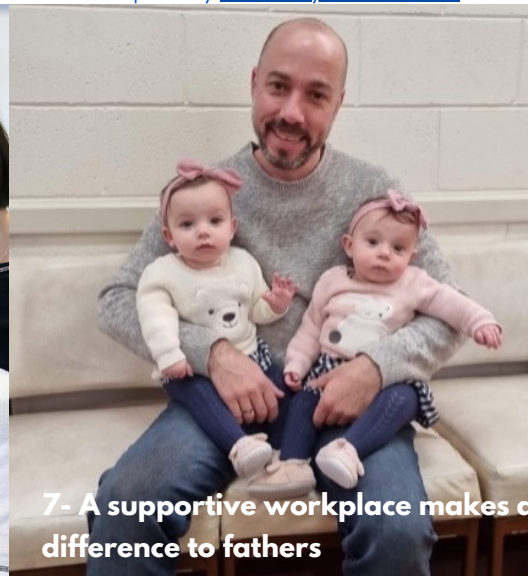
Cover photo by [Ketut Subiyanto on Pexels](#)



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The Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium is a collaboration of researchers, practitioners and policy makers. We exist to advance the science of fatherhood, inform practice and policy that supports men and their families, and promote healthy inclusion of fathers in family life.

If you wish to join the Fatherhood Bulletin mailing list, please email chris.may@newcastle.edu.au

THREE REASONS TO TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE

BY ALFIE

I've taken two periods of Paid Parental Leave from my employer, one with each of my children. I didn't feel like there was stigma for me taking time off, and my employer was mostly fine when I was organising leave. But when we were looking into it back in 2017 and we were looking at ways I could be at home as well they said that because my wife was on leave, I couldn't get any longer leave from my employer. I could only get the five days.

With one of the babies, she had to go back to work when the baby was four months and the other one was closer to six, but she had no option it was either that or no contract. So, me being able to have a longer period of time would have really helped take a bit of stress out of the situation. Parental leave policy in Australia is really, extremely behind compared to Europe.

And then as well as my employer paid leave I took the Dad and Partner Pay from the government, so I was off for about 3 weeks with each baby. With the second one it was quite different because you also had baby number one to manage! The big thing is, because I think women, obviously they get connected to the baby a lot quicker because they have had them inside her and stuff, so as a father getting used to the reality of another child being there and then the whole kind of connection takes a bit longer.

But obviously there was this trade off of only getting paid I think it was about \$700 a week for a



couple of weeks, but yeah, it was certainly a time that you need to connect.

For any fathers thinking about it, you have to take it. I think you have three points. First of all, you have to support your partner, especially if she's gone through a C section. You also have the opportunity to connect with the baby, and third is the practical things of DIY and sorting the house out. So, you have those things that you are enabled to do when you take parental leave. It is so important.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF PARENTAL LEAVE, CHECK OUT THE NEW RESEARCH ON PAGE 10.

SERVICES FOR FATHERS

IF YOU, OR ANY FATHER THAT YOU KNOW, IS IN NEED OF SUPPORT PLEASE CONTACT THE FOLLOWING SERVICES:

Lifeline

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

13 11 14

Mental health crisis support

Men's Line

<https://mensline.org.au/>

1300 78 99 78

Men's support, counselling, referral and information

SMS4Dads

<https://www.sms4dads.com.au/>

Free SMS-based information and advice for new and expectant fathers

Movember

<https://familyman.movember.com/en-us>

Family Man is a research-backed online parenting program designed with dads in mind.

Support for Fathers: Relationships Australia

<https://supportforfathers.com.au/>

1300 364 277

Free information/workshops for fathers and professionals working with fathers.

Stayin' On Track

<https://www.stayinontrack.com/>

Support and information for Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander dads

Australian Multiple Birth Association

<https://www.amba.org.au/>

A directory for information, finding local support, and tips for multiple births

Dads Group

<https://www.dadsgroup.org/>

We promote positive parenting for men and give new Dads the support and connection they need.



Photo supplied by author

NO EMPLOYER-PROVIDED PARENTAL LEAVE

BY KYLE

We had our daughter almost three years ago now. When we found out that we were having a C-section, I said I need to take six weeks off – that was the recovery period that the doctor gave. And I wanted to be home for it all, to help my partner out, but then spend time with my daughter as well. But my workplace doesn't offer any form of paid parental leave, and no paternity leave.

So, I used up all my sick leave as carers leave, and then I was going to take two weeks of annual leave. But we ended up using the government Dad and Partner Pay for two weeks and then I supplemented my savings to equal out my wage, because the Dad and Partner Pay is at minimum wage, nowhere near enough. That way all the bills and everything were still covered.

It was stressful having to think about and juggle all of that. But, unfortunately it had to be done as the government and private sector only does so much. I just took the maximum amount of time I could.

I was really excited to take leave when she was born, yeah, just being home with her. It was very tiring but it was good! To just be with her 24/7 you know, whatever she needed, and whatever my partner needed. When I had to go back to work I set up a wifi camera so I could watch her sleeping, which was great. And now it's just a shitload of pictures everywhere!

Paid Parental Leave in Australia really is not good enough for families, you know, two weeks isn't enough for fathers even if your partner has a vaginal birth. It really should be three months for fathers. And there might be a whole heap of mental trauma that happens during that time that you need to try to recover from before actually going back to work.

Fathers should definitely take the leave, take as much time as you can. You can afford to be with your kid at the start. Build that connection with your kid, build that bond. You need it. And then get used to drinking coffee. But it's worth it, all for that smile.

FATHERHOOD NEWS

The latest need-to-know news on dads in one place

AUSSIE FATHER OF THE YEAR

[The Fathering Project](#)

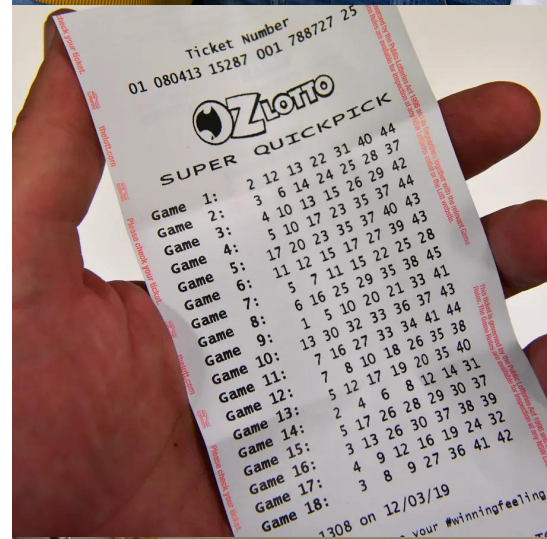
The Fathering Project revealed the winners of the Australian Fathering Awards 2022. Lismore's Craig Foster AM was awarded Australian Father of the Year for his work in protecting and mentoring youth, and his support for human right and refugee action. You can read about Craig and the other winners here: <https://australianfatheringawards.org.au/>



FATHER BECOMES MILLIONAIRE ON FATHERS DAY

[NEWS.com.au](#)

A Tasmanian father has won it big on Lotto, receiving a phone call to deliver the life-changing news on Fathers Day. He has been using the same numbers for decades and was thrilled that they had been successful. The father said that he would be spending the winnings on his children.



ARE YOU AN OLDER DAD?

[The Sydney Morning Herald](#)

Dugald Jellie tells his story of being an older, single father and being concerned that when his youngest finishes high school, Dugald will be eligible for a Seniors card. He is not alone though, as Australian Dads are among the oldest in the world. Find out more about his story of becoming a father at almost 40.



A SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR FATHERS

BY CON



We had twins in January this year. Luckily, last October at work this new agreement kicked in where we got more leave than before. They call it carers leave, which means that I'm not the full time carer but I'm providing support to my wife or partner. So, I took a four week paid period off so I could be there to support my wife and be with the girls. I also had Long Service Leave so I took another four weeks on top of that. And, you know, that's two months, there's a lot of things you learn in two months.

My workplace also offers Paid Parental Leave, but you have to be the primary carer – it specifically says primary carer. I spoke to HR myself just to get clarifications on that. So, when my wife goes back to work I'm going to be able to take that 12

weeks paid leave, but across 20 weeks part time. I'll work two days a week and then I'm having three days off as the primary carer with my girls.

I think they're just getting with the programme, you know, with more of the realistic sort of things that families need. And even when we were pregnant, work were very supportive. My supervisor has been very supportive throughout the process. Pretty much every time I asked for leave, he didn't question it. So I went to every single scan with the girls.

Having that flexibility, it made it a lot easier and to be more involved with the whole transition, which I was really excited to be involved in. And as a dad or a mum, you need to know you've got support with work. I'm one of two people within my close friends who took parental leave, but I have heard of other males in my team that have taken career breaks as well, 12 months career break to spend with the kids.

The generation we are now, things have changed so any business needs to look at having a policy in place, having something implemented for dads to be a full-time carer. There are other organisations that don't have that support or that carer's leave available and paid as well, not a lot of places have that. Which is really sad, isn't it? Because being a dad is fantastic.

And not just that, being paid to stay home too helps because you're not stressing about bills and things. You get to spend time with your kids. You get to pay your bills, pay your mortgage, others don't have that benefit, which is upsetting. I was excited I could spend the first few weeks with my



Photo supplied by author

girls getting to know them, helping my wife, and just bonding as a family. It's a magnificent feeling. You know, you have your days, you stress out to the max and then you get a smiley face and your hearts are so warm.

Any father definitely should take it if they're entitled to it. It is scary – I'm worried taking over the two girls when my wife goes back to work. But there's lots of support out there. I think a lot of fathers are scared but I'd just want to tell them, why not, it's fantastic. These are years that you will never get again, you know?

My experience of being home with the girls and spending that first few months with them and just building up a relationship, father daughter bond with them at an early age was such a positive experience. Having that time to get to know their personalities, the first few months are the most important months of a child's life. Having that benefit of being there with them and your wife is amazing.

FATHERS IN THE WORKPLACE

What's happening for father figures where they work?

KPMG WINS AWARD AS "AUSTRALIA'S BEST WORKPLACE FOR FATHERS"

We have all heard the old adage about the importance of a "work-life balance". However, for many parents, that balance is difficult in the period after the birth of a child

At the 2022 Australian Fathering Awards, KPMG was recognised for its pioneering approach to supporting equal parenting opportunities for its

employees, that reinforces the understanding that both men and women have critical parenting roles to play.

Read below to find out more about KPMG's workplace model. And find out more about their award:

<https://australianfatheringawards.org.au/kpmg-australia>

KPMG AND EQUAL PARENTING

KPMG is a founding Family Friendly Workplace (FFW) sponsor and a recognised Family Inclusive Workplace.

Our senior leaders are role models who actively demonstrate our FFW and share their own parental leave journeys and flexible working arrangements via our news channels.

Importantly, we model these behaviours for fathers from the top down to encourage men at all levels to take parental leave or work in a way that best suits their family needs. KPMG has one of the market leading gender-neutral parental leave policies, offering 26 weeks paid parental leave for all parents (inclusive of circumstances) and can be used flexibly within 24 months from the time a child joins their family.

KPMG's hybrid flexible working model allows all employees to work where it makes sense for them on that day, whether that is at home, the office or on client sites. This approach helps form a bridge between work and family life for employees.

KPMG offers a range of targeted support services

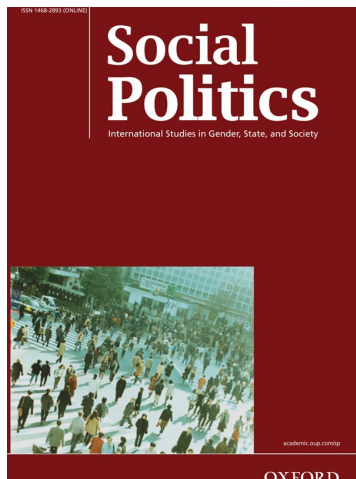
for working parents and carers, including a partnership with Parents at Work, which allows employees to have access to the Family&Caring@KPMG hub with resources including content specific to parenting, fathers, rainbow families, wellbeing, carers, and career needs.

In addition, the KPMG Father's Network is designed to support fathers at work and engage men in communication on flexibility and parental leave through shared personal experiences, including the benefits of fatherhood. The network continues to grow with more than 200 employees involved.

Ultimately, our commitment to build a family friendly workplace culture enables fathers to take more of an active parental role. Studies show when fathers take parental leave, wellbeing increases for both parents and there are better outcomes for relationships between parents and between fathers and their children. Building a family friendly culture with inclusive family policies, help families better balance the work and family divide, allowing our employees to thrive.



Gender and Citizenship in Australia: Government Approaches to Paid Parental Leave Policy 1996–2017



In Western welfare states women's citizenship rights are increasingly conferred on the basis of labor force participation rather than maternalism. This article examines the policy positions and discourse associated with paid parental leave of successive Australian governments from 1996 to 2017 to examine the extent to which this has occurred in the Australian context. It reveals a slow movement away from maternalism that has been constrained by path dependencies associated with the male breadwinner model and is shaped by philosophies of liberalism and small government.

Newsome, L. (2021). 'Gender and Citizenship in Australia: Government Approaches to Paid Parental Leave Policy 1996–2017', *Social Politics*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 477–500.

Gender equality and paid parental leave in Australia: A decade of giant leaps or baby steps?

The year 2020 marks the 10th anniversary of the Australian Paid Parental Leave Act 2010. Using Baird's orientations typology and Brighthouse and Wright's equality framework, with evidence from the Workplace Agreements Database and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, this article assesses changes in policy, bargaining and company provisions over the decade. We find that policy changes may enable more fathers and partners to take leave, although the period is short and barriers to uptake exist. In bargaining and company policy, we find modest growth in the proportion of agreements with paid primary and paid secondary carer leave provisions, but no movement in the duration of the leaves, with secondary carer leave much shorter. We conclude that although these changes suggest growing attention to improving women's working conditions and fathers' access to parental leave, short secondary carer leaves set normative standards of fathers as 'supporters' rather than recognising substantive involvement in care. Consequently, the changes do not promote gender-egalitarian sharing of parental leave. While the introduction of the government scheme was a 'giant leap', the 10 years since have seen modest 'baby steps' towards greater gender equality in the availability and potential use of paid parental leave.



Baird, M, Hamilton, M & Constantin, A. (2021). 'Gender equality and paid parental leave in Australia: A decade of giant leaps or baby steps?', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 63, no. 4, pp. 546–567.

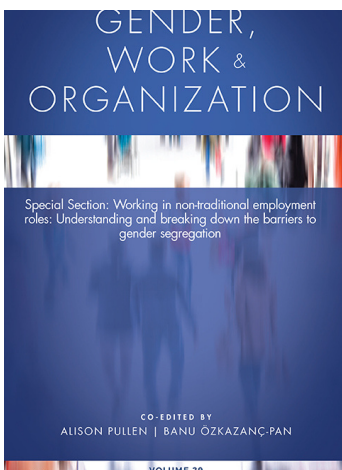
Increasing parental leave uptake: a systems social marketing approach

Ineffective paid paternity leave policies perpetuate gender inequality and have significant, long-lasting outcomes for families, organisations, and the economy. They maintain unequal divisions in child-rearing and household chores that restrict families' decisions about workforce participation and caring responsibilities. Low levels of uptake of paternity leave are caused by workplace practices, social norms, and economic factors that influence the choices fathers make when their children are born, and which become entrenched over time. Fathers' early involvement in children's lives is profoundly beneficial for families, therefore, we recommend to policy makers and organisations how they can change internal workplace cultures to allow for a more inclusive image of parenting and a more nuanced image of the ideal male worker. We outline a systems social marketing approach that addresses change at the macro, meso and micro levels through the three E's model (establish, explore, and enable), to help policy makers, organisations, and families consider the implications of meaningful parental leave and the importance of increasing fathers' uptake. Future research questions for increasing parental leave uptake are presented.

Duffy, S., Van Esch, P. and Yousef, M. (2020). 'Increasing parental leave uptake: a systems social marketing approach', *Australasian Marketing Journal*, vol 28, no 2 , pp 110 - 118.



Sexism in the silences at Australian Universities: Parental leave in name, but not in practice



Unequal distribution of child rearing and domestic responsibilities between parents contributes to gender inequity, a wicked problem in Australia. Inequitable parental leave policies at Australian public Universities place the burden of care squarely on the mother, diminishing or absenting the father. We examine how the gendered nature of the existing policies are constructed in ways that create inequities and discourage their uptake. A post-structural feminist lens provides us with a theoretical vantage point from which this wicked problem can be problematized. We present three recommendations for enabling more equitable outcomes for parents. The first is to eradicate the punitive approach and support flexibility; second, the policies must be parental leave in name, provision and practice; and finally we recommend a minimum parental leave standard for Australian universities nationally. These findings have policy-level significance for redressing parental leave inequity within the Australian university context. The paper concludes with theoretical contributions, practical implications, and suggestions for future research.

Duffy, S., O'Shea, M., Bowyer, D. & van Esch, P. (2022). 'Sexism in the silences at Australian Universities: Parental leave in name, but not in practice', *Gender, Work and Organization*, DOI: 10.1111/gwao.12880



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