



Stay-at-home fathers do less childcare than working mothers, research shows

Australian Institute of Family Studies report finds men who look after children at home also barely do more housework than mothers doing 35 hours' paid work

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Stay-at-home fathers remain relatively rare in Australia, and even these men spend slightly less time on childcare than their working wives, research shows.

A report by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that stay-at-home fathers take on only slightly more housework than mothers working a 35-hour week.

The research found that stay-at-home father arrangements made up 4%, or 75,000, of the two-parent, heterosexual families in Australia, while stay-at-home mothers accounted for 31%.

Stay-at-home fathers and working mothers spent 19 and 21 hours a week on childcare, respectively. These fathers did 28 hours of housework and working mothers did 23.

“For many, becoming a stay-at-home dad is an economic decision, driven by unemployment, under-employment or disability and not a lifestyle choice to spend more time on parenting,” said the institute’s director, Anne Hollonds.

The figures are based on more 2,500 parents surveyed between 2002 and 2015 in the University of Melbourne-run Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia study.

An AIFS senior research fellow, Dr Jennifer Baxter, said financial pressure often stopped men from becoming the primary carer and they were more likely to take on the role when children were older.

“Childcare demands are much greater in families with young babies and young children, and that’s when mums are more likely to be at home,” she said.

But it remained unclear why stay-at-home fathers did not take over more of the housework, Baxter said. She said the fact that breadwinning mothers worked less than their male counterparts – an average of 35 and 51 hours a week, respectively – could help explain it.

“It’s whoever has the time available ... but perhaps in some families there are quite gendered roles about who does what,” she said. “There are unanswered things about what those [stay-at-home] dads are doing that’s not captured in our data.”

Baxter said the proportion of fathers who stayed at home was unlikely to increase significantly.

“We won’t see much change around stay-at-home dads ... because of the financial pressure on families and the need for them to have two parents in paid work,” she said.

“A more likely thing that we could see is that fathers may make more use of flexible work hours too, so they could take up more of the childcare and more of the housework.”

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