
What do kiwi fathers want?²⁵

Abstract

Work/ Life Balance research and practices have traditionally focused on the prime family carer, stereotypically the mother in most households. This summary of an extensive review from New Zealand introduces a survey that remembers families have fathers, too.

Eighty percent of fathers generally wish they could spend more time with their children according to the EEO Trust's²⁶ on-line survey on fathering and paid work. Nearly 1200 New Zealand fathers completed the survey.

EEO Trust Executive Director, Trudie McNaughton, says this is in line with international research which shows men want to spend more time with their children than their fathers spent with them.

She says this is an issue for workplaces which have tried to help women balance work and family but have sometimes left men out of the equation.

"Workplaces sometimes assumed that what would work for mothers would also work for fathers, and sometimes neglected to consider fathers at all," she says. "However men are saying they also need flexibility in order to be the kind of fathers they want to be. And women recognise that equity at work is more likely when men share caring responsibilities."

"We conducted this survey to find out how men feel about fathering and paid work and how they would like their workplaces to help."

Eighty two percent of respondents said their paid work negatively affects the amount of time they spend with their children while 52% said their paid work affects the quality of the time they spend with their children.

The survey asked respondents how their workplace currently helps them be the sort of father they want to be.

Having access to a phone so they can contact their family was the most common assistance. Trudie McNaughton says that while office workers take this for granted, it is a major issue for some workers in other sectors such as retail and manufacturing. "It is very difficult for parents who can't be contacted by their children, or their children's caregivers or teachers."

The following table shows the full results of this question. Respondents could tick as many options as they wanted.

²⁵ Kiwi – New Zealanders' fun name for themselves

²⁶ EEO Trust – Equal Employment Opportunities Trust.

The Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Trust is a not-for-profit organisation tasked with providing EEO information and tools to employers, and raising awareness of diversity issues in New Zealand workplaces. The EEO Trust is resourced by fees from member organisations and Government.

Ways workplaces help	Number of respondents
Access to phone for contact with your family	890
Flexible start and finish times	680
Flexibility to have time off during the day	630
Sometimes being able to work from home	444
Your senior managers supporting you as a father	285
Being able to work part time or less hours	176
Your senior managers modelling good fathering	127
School holiday programmes	110

Respondents were also asked how they wanted their workplace to help them be the sort of father they wanted to be.

Flexibility in terms of start and finish times, sometimes being able to work from home and sometimes being able to take time off during the day were the most popular options.

Trudie McNaughton says it's interesting that support to take parental leave entitlements was the next most popular option. "The latest data shows that of the 14,477 receiving the government's paid parental leave in its first year, only 94 (0.065%) of them were men. While it's more likely that women will take parental leave in the first few months to recover from birth and establish breastfeeding, men may be more willing to take up parental leave and share in the care of their babies if they felt supported by their workplaces."

The following table shows the full results of this question. Respondents could tick as many options as they wanted.

Ways workplaces could help	Number of respondents
Flexible start and finish times	602
Sometimes being able to work from home	566
Flexibility to have time off during the day	538
Support to take parental leave entitlements	473
Less work pressure	439
Giving you access to a phone so you can be in touch with your family	364
More support from senior management for you as a father	355
Providing a school holiday programme	310
Meetings in core work hours	292
Being able to work part time or less hours	288
Senior managers modelling good fathering	284
Less travelling for work	254
Fine as it is	175
Change of shift	58
None of these would help	25

While most of the men who completed the survey were fathers, 126 were not. Of these, 82% wanted to have children in the future. When asked if they thought

they could be sort of father they wanted to be if they stayed in their current job, 55% said no.

"Men who feel they can't be the sort of father they want to be in their current job, are likely to try and find a new employer who will give them more support," says Trudie McNaughton. "Workplaces which are serious about recruiting and retaining the best people need to take men's desire to be good fathers seriously."

Ms McNaughton says that although the EEO Trust survey focussed on the needs of working fathers, issues for mothers in the workplace have not necessarily been resolved.

She says that everyone will benefit if fathers have more flexibility. "They can share the responsibility for children's needs and enjoy the benefits of good relationships with their children.

"It is in the interests of fathers, mothers and children to have good work-life balance. And it will deliver business benefits to workplaces. Men who are content with how they balance paid work and parenting are likely to be more satisfied, committed and productive employees. Costs related to absenteeism and turnover will often decrease markedly."

The voices of some kiwi fathers

What do kiwi fathers really want? The survey invited fathers to email comments about fathering and paid work. Excerpts of some of them follow:

"My daughters play hockey which I get great delight in watching as a spectator. I'd like to do a bit more and become a referee or even a coach for one of the teams but I can't. Work commitments make it impossible to leave at 2.30 in the afternoon to make it to school to help coach the team etc."

"It is possible that I could squeeze the time out with unpaid work but to do this for 20 weeks or so does not go down well!"

"Fathers care. Fathers try and do the best they can (and sometimes get it hopelessly wrong) but what I want as a father is nothing material (though I do love our tradition of giving me a trout fishing license for father's day each year) but those times when they show that somehow they recognise the efforts made and my often clumsy attempts at being a father are done through love and wanting the best for them."

"Nothing is better than the 'Hey dad, let's ...'"

"I'm a father and have been for seven years, I had my child when I was 16 years old and I was still at school.

"I left school just to find a job.....I've grown into a young man early but still adapting. I wish I could spend more time with my girl but can't get out of work or not enough annual leave, or whatever leave there is."

"Reality is some kids don't know their daddy anymore coz he's always at work or trying to impress the boss!!!"

"To me time off is everything, and I think we are pushed more and more into losing our free time to spend with family. After all, we did have a family to enjoy their upbringing and to be part of their lives..."

References:

- Equal Employment Opportunities Trust website:

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- <http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/index.cfm>
 - Full survey results can be downloaded from:
 - <http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/content/docs/reports/Work-Life%20Survey%202006%20Report.pdf>